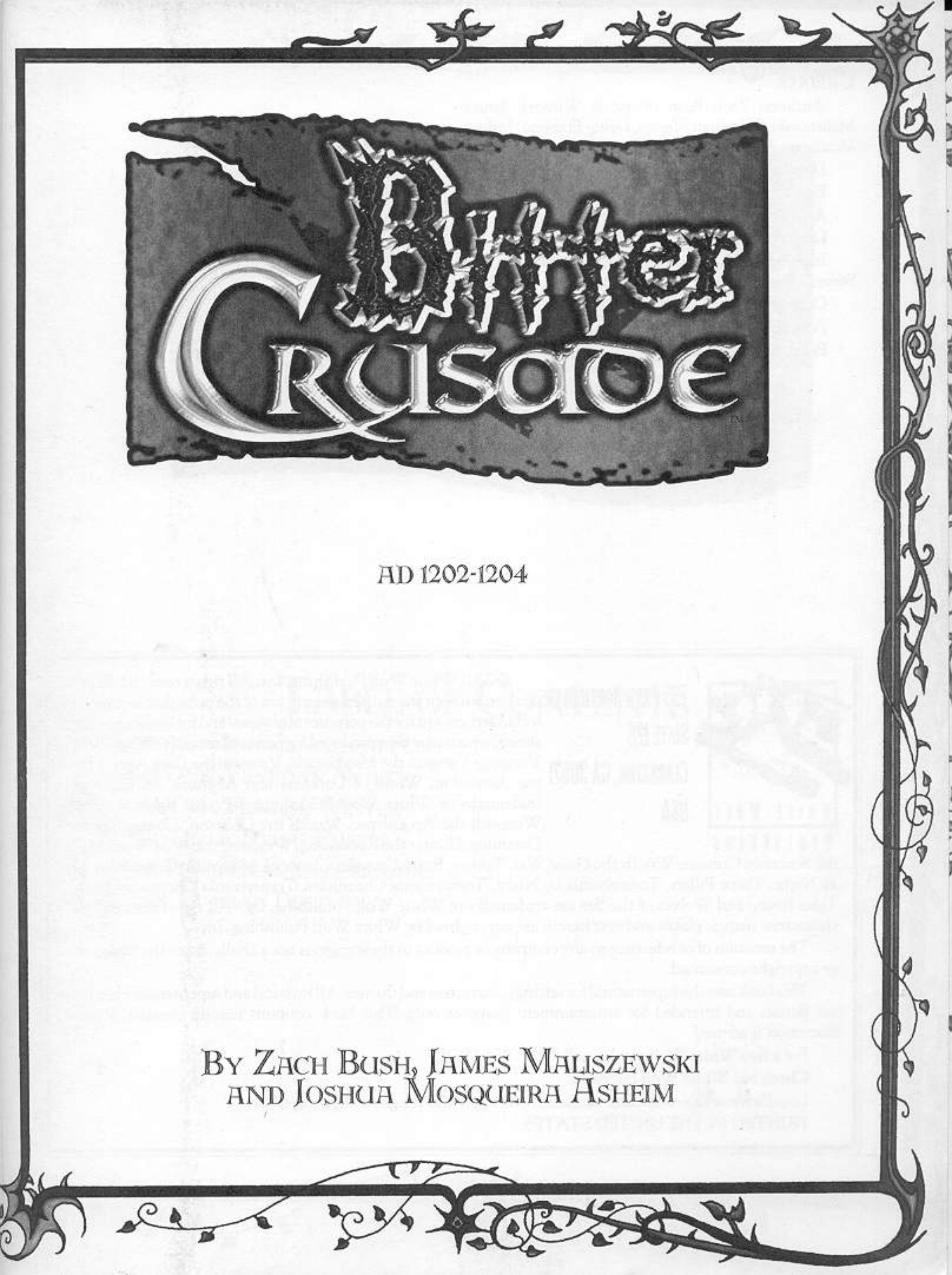


Winter Crisade



A CHRONICLE FOR
VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES[®]



Winter Crisade

AD 1202-1204

By ZACH BUSH, JAMES MALISZEWSKI
AND JOSHUA MOSQUEIRA ASHEIM

CREDITS

Authors: Zach Bush (Fiendish Winter); James Maliszewski (Venetian Nights, Dying Embers), Joshua Mosqueira Asheim (Come to Dust)

Developer: Philippe R. Boulle

Editor: Carl Bowen

Art Director: Becky Jollensten

Layout & Typesetting: Becky Jollensten

Interior Art: John Cobb, Eric Hotz, Rik Martin and Steve Prescott

Cartography: Conan Venus

Front Cover Art: Brian LeBlanc

Front & Back Cover Design: Becky Jollensten

Scanned by Otha.
Edited by Ivan Krenyenko.
Released for rpgbookz'n'scans.
Join us at rpgbookz.dyndns.org



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

© 2001 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Hunter the Reckoning, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, Bitter Crusade, Clanbook Nosferatu, Constantinople by Night, Three Pillars, Transylvania by Night, Transylvania Chronicles, Transylvania Chronicles I Dark Tides Rising and Wolves of the Sea are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

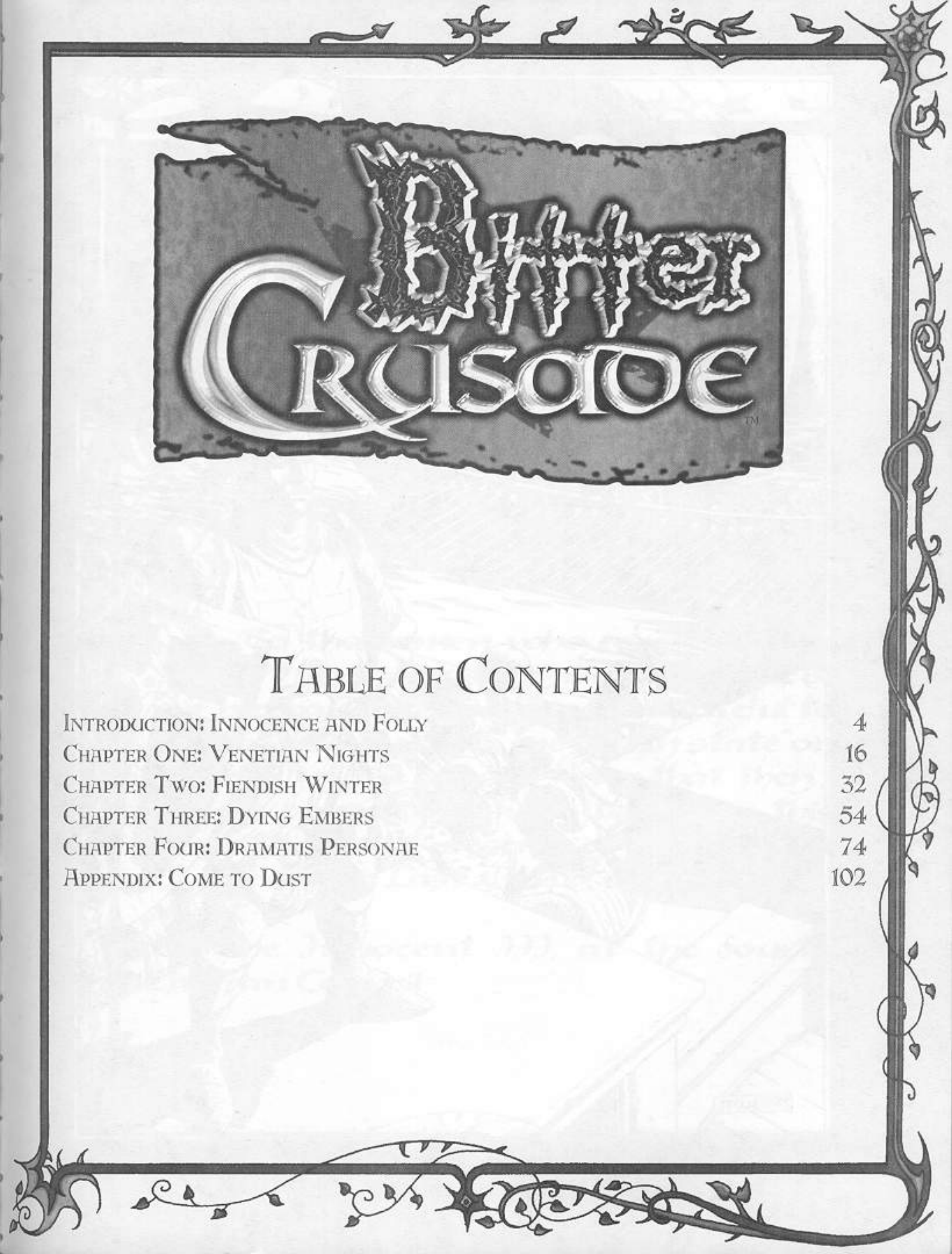
This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES.



Winter Crisade™

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: INNOCENCE AND FOLLY	4
CHAPTER ONE: VENETIAN NIGHTS	16
CHAPTER TWO: FIENDISH WINTER	32
CHAPTER THREE: DYING EMBERS	54
CHAPTER FOUR: DRAMATIS PERSONAE	74
APPENDIX: COME TO DUST	102





Introduction: Innocence and Folly

To those men who refuse to take part [in the crusade] if indeed there be perchance any man so ungrateful to the lord our God, we firmly state on behalf of the apostle Peter that they... will have to answer to us on this matter in the presence of the Dreadful Judge on the Last Day of severe Judgment.

-Pope Innocent III, at the fourth Lateran Council

WHAT IS BITTER CRUSADE?

Bitter Crusade is a chronicle that details one of the great transforming moments for the supposed lords of the Long Night. It sees the end of that time of unchallenged rule and sets the stage for a more violent and uncertain time. For centuries, vampires have clutched to their prince-doms and played petty games. Hidden elders have fought the War of Ages in agonizingly slow moves and counter-moves, and the young have chafed under their rule. It has been a long and stifling night.

Now, that night is about to end. As mortals continue to stir themselves to new heights of violence and ambition, the children of the night have to pay attention. The fact that they do not costs them all greatly as the furies of crusade and religious hatred set Constantinople alight. That queen of cities — where Cainites were said to rule uncontested, and the Toreador Methuselah Michael has ruled for nigh on a millennium — comes crashing down, and even the greatest vampiric lords suffer for it.

The message is clear: A time of reckoning is coming, and even the most powerful are vulnerable. **Bitter Crusade** gives you the chance to be center stage for it all and shape the course of the Dark Medieval world itself.

THEMES AND MOOD

Each story in **Bitter Crusade** highlights its own themes and uses its own mood, but the chronicle as a whole is about ambition and chaos. The mortal crusade is all about unfettered ambitions — those of the pope to do what his predecessors could not and supplant the power of kings; those of the Venetians to become the greatest power in the Mediterranean; those of a Byzantine imperial nephew to gain the purple mantle of emperor — and the terrible cost each must pay for those ambitions. If anything, vampires are more ambitious and blind to the costs of those ambitions. In **Bitter Crusade** we see a Methuselah's ambition to be a god, the ambitions of Christian vampires to exterminate their Muslim brothers, the ambitions of the Venetian Narses to avenge long-ago Byzantine slights and many more.

All this hunger for power and glory comes together in unprecedented chaos. Crusaders sack Christian cities. Vampires thought to be immortal meet their Final Deaths. Dreams of greatness turn to ashes. Every time vampires think that they've gained control over the mortals and their holy war, they lose it again.

OUTLINE

Bitter Crusade comprises three key stories that follow the major events of the Fourth Crusade. If you plan to use this book as the backbone for a full chronicle, you can add your own stories between and around these key points. The

BITTER CRUSADE

Appendix provides ways to do just that. If you want to use **Bitter Crusade** as a mini-chronicle or a new chapter in your ongoing chronicle, then you can run the stories basically as they are.

Chapter One: Venetian Nights finds mortal crusaders and vampiric envoys gathering in Venice in 1202 to decide on the course of the Fourth Crusade. The coterie becomes involved in a series of intrigues that reveals that many agendas have come together to influence the crusade. The characters become the (possibly unwilling) allies of Narses, the local prince and head of the Cainite Heresy, but the army of Christ heads off on its own.

Chapter Two: Fiendish Winter sees the crusade — and the coterie — arrive in the Dalmatian city of Zara. Having come to put this rival of Venice in its place, things get out of hand rapidly, and the crusaders must winter there before heading on in 1203. The coterie becomes involved in the conflicts between Tzimisce, and it serves as the envoy of the Zarayan prince to a Transylvanian land hold. In performing this duty, they receive the dubious aid of a Byzantine vampire named Myca Vykos.

Chapter Three: Dying Embers sees the crusade at Constantinople in 1204. Having agreed to set up a pretender on the Byzantine throne, the Franks have become restless. As promises are broken and insults are made, things become violent, and soon the crusaders are sacking one of the jewels of Christendom. For the coterie and the assembled vampires, a time of apocalypse has come. Fires lick havens, and the great are brought low. In the middle of all this chaos, the characters become involved in the final nights of the Methuselah Michael.

Chapter Four: Dramatis Personae details the various characters who are involved in **Bitter Crusade**. It provides game statistics for those whom the players' characters will interact with most closely.

Appendix: Come to Dust provides storytelling advice and options for the entire chronicle, from ways to introduce characters to the crusade to possible stories to tell between the major chapters. It also looks at the after-effects of the **Bitter Crusade** on the vampiric world and possible ways to continue the chronicle.

FAMOUS AND INFAMOUS

Bitter Crusade brings together many of the movers and shakers of the Long Night. Powerful vampires clash in this cataclysmic battle, and several young but key Cainites have roles to play. The players' characters are the most important of these Cainites, but some of the others include:

- **Fatima al-Faqadi:** A skilled Assamite assassin, she heads to Venice to counter several hidden agendas. The coterie may or may not get in her way.
- **Lucita of Aragon:** This Lasombra neonate is in Venice as part of the *Amici Noctis* delegation that is arguing

for the crusade to hit the Holy Land. She becomes a quiet ally of the characters.

- **Michael the Patriarch:** The mad, glorious Methuselah who shepherds Constantinople seeks to ascend to the godhood that he decided long ago was his due. The fact that a chaos of flames will result bothers him not in the least.

- **Narses of Venice:** The Archbishop of Nod seeks to destroy the Dream of Michael the Patriarch, and he is ready to usurp the Fourth Crusade to do so. The coterie may even help him do so.

- **Myca Vykos:** This Byzantine vampire seeks to save his sire, Symeon, from the madness of the Obertus leader, Gesu; he uses the players' characters to help him.

THE FOURTH CRUSADE

Bitter Crusade is all about the interplay between a major mortal event (the Fourth Crusade) and the agendas of various Cainite factions. But even without the intervention of the Damned and their War of Ages, the Fourth Crusade is a tangled skein of conflicting ambitions, commercial interests and religious fervor. The following chapters unveil the vampiric events occurring behind the scenes, but it's critical to understand the mortal events as well. In fact, much of the chaos of **Bitter Crusade** occurs because Cainites do not pay enough attention to the actions and desires of the kine.

SOURCES

Medieval history is a broad topic, and there is hardly a dearth of literature on the subject. Storytellers of any experience level can benefit from doing some "extra-credit" reading, and the few sources below can get you started. They all served in the development of **Bitter Crusade**.

Norwich, John Julius, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall* (Viking).

Queller, Donald E. and Thomas F. Madden. *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople, Second Edition*. (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Riley-Smith, Jonathan, *The Crusades: A Short History* (Yale University Press).

Stephenson, Carl. *Medieval History, Third Edition* (Harper & Brothers).

Villehardouin, Geoffrey of, *Chronicle of the Fourth Crusade and the Conquest of Constantinople*, trans. Sir Frank T. Marzials (E.P. Dutton).

ORIGINS

The Fourth Crusade was ultimately an utter debacle in terms of advancing the Christian cause in the Holy Land. It became an exercise in Venetian and Frankish political and economic expansion, draped in the crusader's cross. The fact that it did so is a testament to the contradictions and travails of the previous crusades and the complex politics of the beginning of the 13th century. Greed, desperation and cold-hearted political savvy combined with crusading fervor to make for a war for Christ that never left Christian lands.

HATTIN AND THE THIRD CRUSADE

The Kingdom of Jerusalem fell to Salah al-Din in 1187 after he defeated the Christian forces at Hattin. This loss was a disaster as far as the crusading cause was concerned, for it was a reversal of all the hard-won victories of the First Crusade. A new and massive effort was called to retake the Holy Sepulcher and restore the Kingdom as was proper. Of course, from a Muslim perspective, Salah al-Din's victory was altogether proper, since it restored Palestine to Islam and avenged the unspeakable slaughter that accompanied the Frank capture of Jerusalem in 1098.

The Third Crusade was an effort of great kings, such as Frederick Barbarossa, German King and Holy Roman Emperor; Phillip Augustus of France and Richard the Lion-Hearted of England. Although Frederick died before his forces could make it to the Holy Land, Phillip and Richard — who were rivals in Europe — became supposed allies in the holy cause. Facing them was Salah al-Din (Saladin to European ears), the greatest Muslim leader in many a generation. This crusade had all the elements of a truly great battle, one that could change the course of history.

It did nothing of the sort, however. Although the figures of Richard and Saladin became larger than life in the European consciousness (and they remain so even today), the crusade accomplished next to nothing. The Christians regained Acre, and Richard and Saladin agreed to a truce that allowed Christian pilgrims back into Jerusalem. Those gains were something, it is sure, but they hardly amounted to the restoration of the kingdom that had been hoped for. Sadly, they were nothing that negotiation might not have gained at less expense.

When first Phillip and then Richard returned west to resume their feud, it seemed clear to many that a new crusade was only a matter of time. Indeed, in 1197, Frederick's son Henry VI of Germany attempted just such an enterprise without accomplishing much except further alarming the few Christian principalities that remained in the East.

INNOCENT III

In 1198, after the death of the aged Celestine III, Lothario dei Conti di Segni was elected to the papacy, and he took the name Innocent III. A vigorous man of 38 years, Innocent was a dynamic pontiff who saw the papacy rising to uncontested leadership of Christendom, both spiritually and temporally. He would become a major actor on the political scene, intervening in the battle to succeed Emperor Henry VI of Germany and in the Angevin-Capetian rivalry of Richard and Phillip and their successors. But he also had an eye for crusade.

In August of 1198, he issued a new call for a crusade to recapture the Holy Sepulcher, and he made clear that the great kings of the day would not be entrusted with the endeavors organization and exclusive leadership, although they were expected to participate. He needn't have worried. With Richard's death, hostilities had renewed between Angevin England and Capetian France, and neither side was willing to set aside its battles for another costly trip to Outremer. The various contenders for the German throne were even less ready to do so.

COUNTS, NOT KINGS

It took until late in 1199 for lesser nobles to step forward to assume leadership of the crusade without the financial backing of the great kings. Those who did were an energetic bunch who seem to have decided to take the cross after gathering at a tournament in Écry. The most famous were Counts Thibald of Champagne and Louis of Blois. A few months later, three other powerful nobles joined them: Count Baldwin of Flanders along with his brothers Henry and Eustace. All three counts hailed from crusading families, and they shared the leadership and organization of the crusade. After taking time to raise further recruits, they decided that a sea route would be wise for the crusade. They may also have agreed to take Richard the Lion-Hearted's advice (given after his return from Palestine) that any new crusade should aim at the center of Muslim power and wealth: Egypt.

COMPLICATIONS

By the end of 1200, the crusade was gathering steam in Europe without drawing in the great kings. Energetic counts were heading the effort, and their enterprise seemed to be well on the way toward success. Much was as Innocent had hoped it to be, but not for long.

THE VENETIAN DEAL

In February of 1201, six delegates from the crusader counts arrived in Venice to negotiate transport to the East. Enrico Dandolo, the aged, blind and extremely skilled doge of the city received them and struck an excellent deal. He would not only prepare transport for the crusaders at a fair price (to be paid

upon their arrival in Venice), he would also dedicate 50 armed galleys to the cause in exchange for half the bounty of the crusade. Perhaps caught up in the good fortune of this deal, perhaps needing to inflate their own importance and perhaps manipulated by ambitious Venetians, the crusader delegates made the mistake of vastly over-representing the number of crusaders they had recruited to the cause. This misstep would change the whole course of the crusade. The pope could not know this yet, so he sanctified the arrangement. The crusade seemed to be moving for a departure in the summer of 1202.

ALEXIUS ANGELUS

Another factor at work was the dynastic chaos in Constantinople. In 1195, Emperor Isaac II was deposed, blinded and imprisoned by his own brother, who became Alexius III. Isaac's son — also called Alexius — was also imprisoned, but he escaped his uncle's watch eventually and made his way to the West to seek aid in liberating his father.

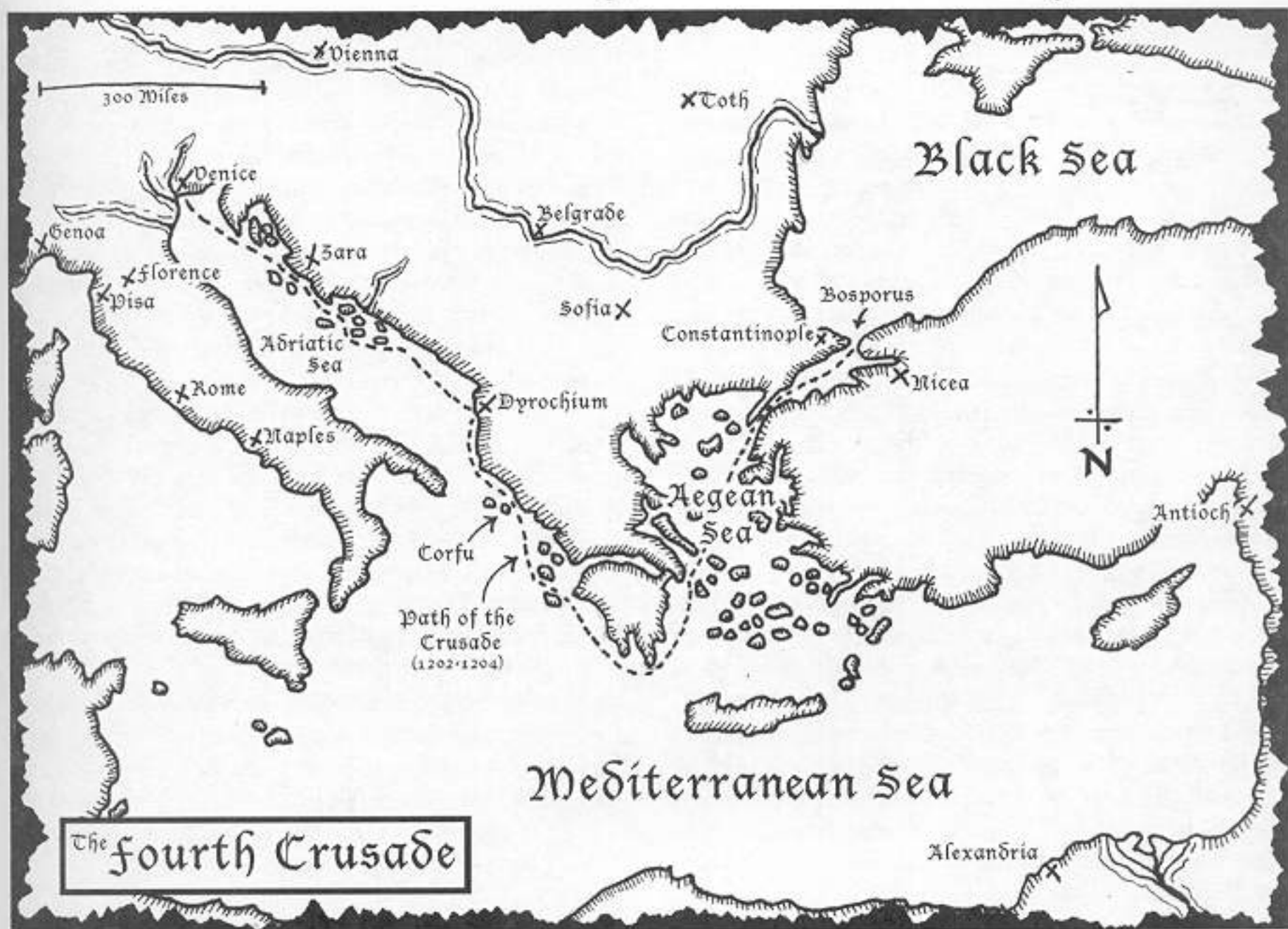
Alexius might well have hoped to gain a receptive ear in Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, who became overall leader of the crusade in the summer of 1201 after Thibald of Champagne died. Although Boniface had not crusaded before, he had an impressive Eastern pedigree, including a brother who had married into Byzantine nobility before being assassinated in 1183. Although it's unclear whether they talked at the time or not, both Alexius and Boniface were at the Christmas court of Phillip of Swabia at the end of 1201. At the very least, Alexius would have heard of an ambitious army of European knights and Venetian sailors heading east the next summer.

THE CRUSADE

When that summer came and the crusaders arrived in Venice, the problem of numbers reared its ugly head. The required number of crusaders was not available, and Boniface's men did not have all the moneys that had been promised to the Venetians. The doge had seen his city invest a great deal of time, effort and money into the construction of ships for the crusade, and he was hardly in a mood to simply forgive the debt.

A NEW ARRANGEMENT

The doge did see an opportunity, however. With the crusaders desperate to carry on their enterprise and locked into an agreement they could not honor, the Venetians were in a position to dictate terms. They proposed to delay repayment of the debt until it could be taken from plunder, but they asked that the crusaders help them with the small problem of the city of Zara in return. Zara had been a



nominal vassal of Venice, but it was now under the control of the King of Hungary, and it threatened the Venetian position of maritime supremacy.

DALMATIA

In October of 1202, the crusaders and many new Venetian recruits, set sail down the Dalmatian coast for Zara. They took their time in a show of force that was designed to keep other Venetian vassal cities in line, and they arrived in the first half of November. They besieged the city, eventually took it for Venice and set themselves up to winter there before moving on to the East proper.

The pope was hardly pleased, especially given that King Bela had taken the cross as well. Threats of excommunication followed, and promises to return plundered goods were the result, but that never happened. Riots broke out in the spring, and the city was seriously ransacked.

Alexius' envoys also came to Zara, and they reached an agreement with Boniface and the other crusaders. In exchange for help in putting his father back on the imperial throne, Alexius promised the crusaders a plethora of benefits. Not only would he use Byzantine wealth to pay off their debt to the Venetians, he would support the crusade further, finance the presence of knights in re-conquered Syria for his entire life and submit the Orthodox Church to

papal authority, unifying Christianity once and for all. Desperate to get out from under the Venetians and seeing Alexius' promises as a guarantee of further glory, the crusaders agreed. Although he warned against further attacks on fellow Christians, the pope could not stop them.

CONSTANTINOPLE

At first, everything went according to plan. The crusade arrived at Constantinople in July, and Alexius III fled after some fighting — and the noted success of Venetian naval maneuvering. Isaac II was liberated and reinstated as emperor, now sharing the title with his son, who became Alexius IV. Isaac agreed reluctantly to the terms that his son had negotiated, so the crusade seemed to be finally readying to go on to Muslim lands by August.

Alexius, however, asked the crusaders to stay until the following spring. He offered to pay their expenses until then, hoping that their presence would prop up his regime and give him time to be secure on the throne. Boniface and the other leaders agreed. They wrote to the pope to communicate as much and pass on Alexius' assurance that the Greek Church would submit to Rome. The pope was not pleased by the further delay or the violence in Christian lands. However, the unity of the Church was a great prize,

INNOCENCE AND FOLLY

so his reprimand was slight and it took until February of 1204 to arrive.

By that time, things had taken a disastrous turn for the crusaders. Alexius had come under pressure from the Byzantine population and clergy to denounce the Catholic invaders, and his payments to his one-time patrons dried up. The crusaders and the Venetians presented him with an ultimatum, but doing so only led to open violence and rioting. Then in January of 1204, an anti-Catholic coup swept Alexius and Isaac from power and placed yet another namesake (Alexius V) on the imperial throne.

The crusaders were trapped in hostile territory without the resources to go home or to the Holy Land. What's more, they were outside the walls of the wealthiest city in Christendom, home to countless holy relics, and whose citizens (it seemed to the crusaders) were spitting on the righteous endeavor of a crusade. Indignation, desperation, anti-Greek hatred and sheer greed combined to inspire the crusaders to attack the city outright in April of 1204. The emperor fled once fire caught in the city on the 12th, and the city lay open to the crusaders. For three full days, Constantinople burned as the crusaders looted her.

The crusade came to an end without ever reaching Muslim lands. The Byzantine Empire was divvied up among the crusaders and Venetians, and Baldwin of Flanders became the first Latin Emperor. The glory of the New Rome was eaten away, and its treasures were taken west to feed Venice.

SETTINGS

Bitter Crusade follows the so-called army of Christ from Venice to Constantinople, taking the coterie along for the ride. The following section provides you with an oversight of the major settings for the chronicle. You may want to supplement it with your own research or by consulting **Three Pillars** (for Venice) and **Constantinople by Night**.

VENICE

Called "the Most Serene Commune of Venice" (or *La Serenissima*), Venice is the second-largest city in Italy, with upward of 120,000 inhabitants. It is also a hotbed of Cainite intrigue. Catholic Lasombra struggle with their Heretical brethren, and the bustling port brings Cainites from across the Mediterranean, all under the watchful eye of Narses, Prince of Venice and Archbishop of Nod. Therefore, Venice is in the unique position of being a crossroads used by Cainite and kine alike. It is a neutral meeting ground where East meets West and anything can be purchased for a price. Those new to the city may find Venice unsettling, even disturbing.

HISTORY

The beginnings of Venice itself go back to the flight of refugees to the islands of the lagoon between Chioggia and Grado, when Attila the Hun devastated northern Italy in AD 452. The islands themselves have been inhabited even longer, since Roman times. And it was during that era that Clan Lasombra first gained a foothold in the region. Refugees from the mainland in the fifth and sixth centuries greatly augmented this original population, attracting other Cainites along with them, including some Nosferatu.

After the conquests of the Byzantine general Belisarius, Venice fell under the rule of the exarchate of Ravenna, a military outpost of the empire. The exarch, Narses, allowed a great measure of autonomy to the Venetians. Narses fell from grace upon the coronation of a new emperor, but he remained in Italy rather than return to Constantinople. Embittered, he worked to undermine Byzantine authority in the region by giving aid to the Lombards — with the support of a Roman Lasombra named Galerius. Galerius would reward Narses with the Embrace and be rewarded in turn with the Amaranth.

Meanwhile, the Venetians elected a doge (war leader) to provide a more efficacious defense against the Lombards and other barbarians. Narses then took up residence in Venice, where he cultivated the Cainite Heresy, while other Lasombra foolishly worked toward gaining control of Venice through the doge. Because the title often fell to the old or ill, this effort proved fruitless in the long run. By focusing on the Heresy rather than the doge, Narses gained sufficient influence to become the prince of Venice.

By the ninth century, Venetian commerce was very extensive. Even the Saracens respected the Venetian flag, and Venetian factors sprang up in all the ports of the East. They traded with the Christian Slavs of the Balkans, as well as the Muslims of Spain and Africa. Popes Zacharias and Adrian tried to prevent trade with the infidels, while Charlemagne excluded them from the markets of his empire. As a sop to such feelings, Venice prohibited the sale of slaves to the Saracens and of any merchandise that could be used in war against Christendom.

As the commercial power of Venice increased, the state became increasingly involved in Byzantine politics. Several doges married into the imperial family, while others suffered because of imperial displeasure. In 1084, Emperor Alexius Comnenus needed Venetian support against the Norman Robert Guiscard, and he offered Venice a position of preeminence in exchange for its naval power. He granted the Venetians freedom from tributes and imposts, full liberty of commerce, exemption from Byzantine jurisdiction, an appropriation for the church of St. Mark and an income for the doge, along with the title of *protosebastos*.

A TIMELINE OF THE FOURTH CRUSADE

Date	Event
1186	Popular revolt in the city of Zara ends Venetian control of the city, which places itself under Hungarian protection.
1187	Battle of Hattin, Fall of Jerusalem to Saladin
1191-1192	Third Crusade; Christians retake Acre but fail to retake Jerusalem
1193	Death of Saladin
1195	Alexius III becomes Byzantine Emperor by deposing and blinding his brother, Isaac II.
1197	Crusade of Henry VI of Germany ends with his death on September 28.
8 January, 1198	Innocent III becomes pope.
August 1198	The pope calls for a new crusade.
6 April, 1199	Death of Richard the Lion-Hearted, renewal of the conflict between France and England
28 November, 1199	At a tournament in Écry, French Counts Thibald of Champagne and Louis of Blois take the cross.
23 February, 1200	Count Baldwin of Flanders agrees to take the cross. Later that year, the three counts agree to a sea route and send envoys to Venice.
February 1201	The six crusader envoys negotiate a deal with the Venetians for transport and naval support of the crusade and a departure in June of 1202. In so doing, they grossly overestimate the number of crusaders and so the cost of the deal.
June 1201	Marquis Boniface of Montferrat takes the cross to lead the crusade after the death of Count Thibald of Champagne.
Winter 1201	Boniface winters in Germany with Phillip of Swabia, as does Alexius Angelus, son of the deposed Isaac II.
Summer 1202	The crusaders arrive in Venice to find that they cannot pay the agreed price to the Venetians. Doge Enrico Dandolo agrees to put off payment of the debt until plunder is gathered in exchange for crusader aid in retaking Zara from the King of Hungary. The crusaders agree, and Dandolo and other Venetians take the cross.
Autumn 1202	Boniface travels to Rome to consult with the pope.
Oct.-Nov. 1202	The crusaders sail for Zara and take the city from the Hungarians. They winter there.
December 1202	Boniface rejoins the crusade and tries to make restitution to Rome. Alexius' envoys arrive to offer Byzantine support if the crusaders will restore him to the imperial throne.
April 1203	The crusade accepts Alexius' terms and sails for Constantinople.
May 1203	Alexius joins the crusade in Corfu.
July 1203	The crusade arrives at Constantinople. After an assault on July 17, Alexius III flees Constantinople.
Summer 1203	Isaac is freed, and he becomes co-emperor with his son, now Alexius IV. Alexius arranges for the crusaders to remain near Constantinople to prop up his new regime.
November 1203	After rioting by the Greek populace, Isaac and Alexius stop paying the crusaders the money Isaac agreed to. Open hostilities break out.
January 1204	Isaac II and Alexius IV are deposed in an anti-Latin coup that puts Alexius V on the throne.
March 1204	The crusaders decide that they must take Constantinople. They reach an agreement with the Venetians for a division of the spoils and the new Latin Empire that they are to establish.
9 April 1204	The crusaders attack Constantinople.
12 April 1204	The crusaders breach the city's defenses and set a fire. Alexius V flees.
12-14 April 1204	The crusaders take the city, loot and burn her.

The Venetians participated in the First Crusade only when they saw the Genoese and Pisans returning from Outremer with the spoils of war. The Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus considered their actions illicit, and he impounded Venetian galleys docked at Byzantine ports. The Venetians, however, defeated the Saracens near Jaffa in 1123 and turned against the Byzantines, ending the nominal overlordship of Constantinople. Venice then took an active interest in the Crusades. For example, Venetian aid enabled the crusaders to seize Tyre in 1124, resulting in one-third of the city being assigned to them. Similarly lucrative arrangements prevailed throughout the Middle East, making Venice one of Christendom's richest states.

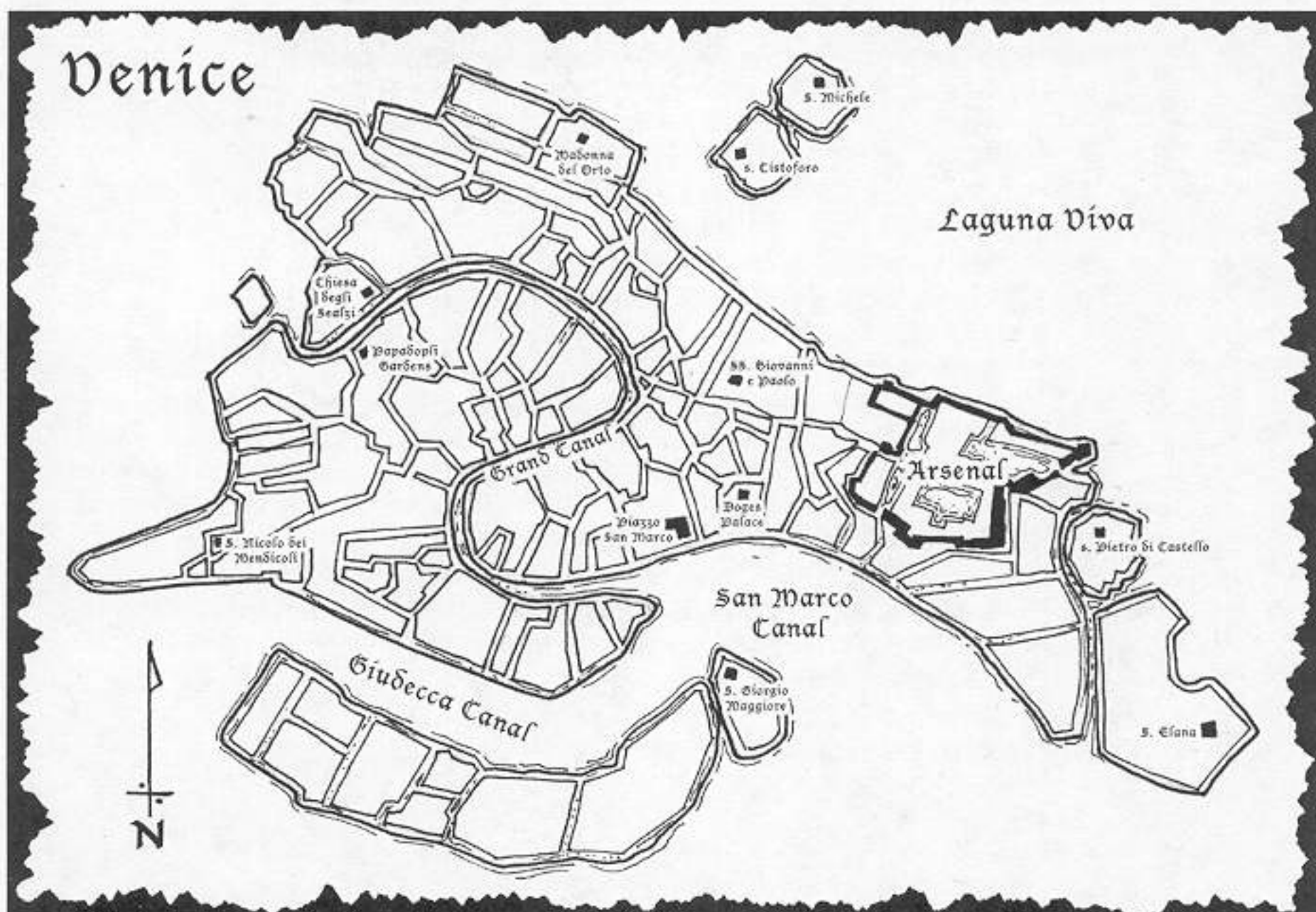
GEOGRAPHY

Venice is an amalgamation of 117 small islands joined by 378 bridges, mostly of stone. Some of these islands are natural, while others are artificial, constructed by means of piles driven into the bottom of the shallow sea. All the houses of the city are built thus upon a network of piles. The islands are separated by a number of canals, three of which are larger than others. These are the Grand Canal, which traverses the city in the shape of the letter S, the Giudecca and the San Marco, which is the widest. Gondolas provide transport along the canals.

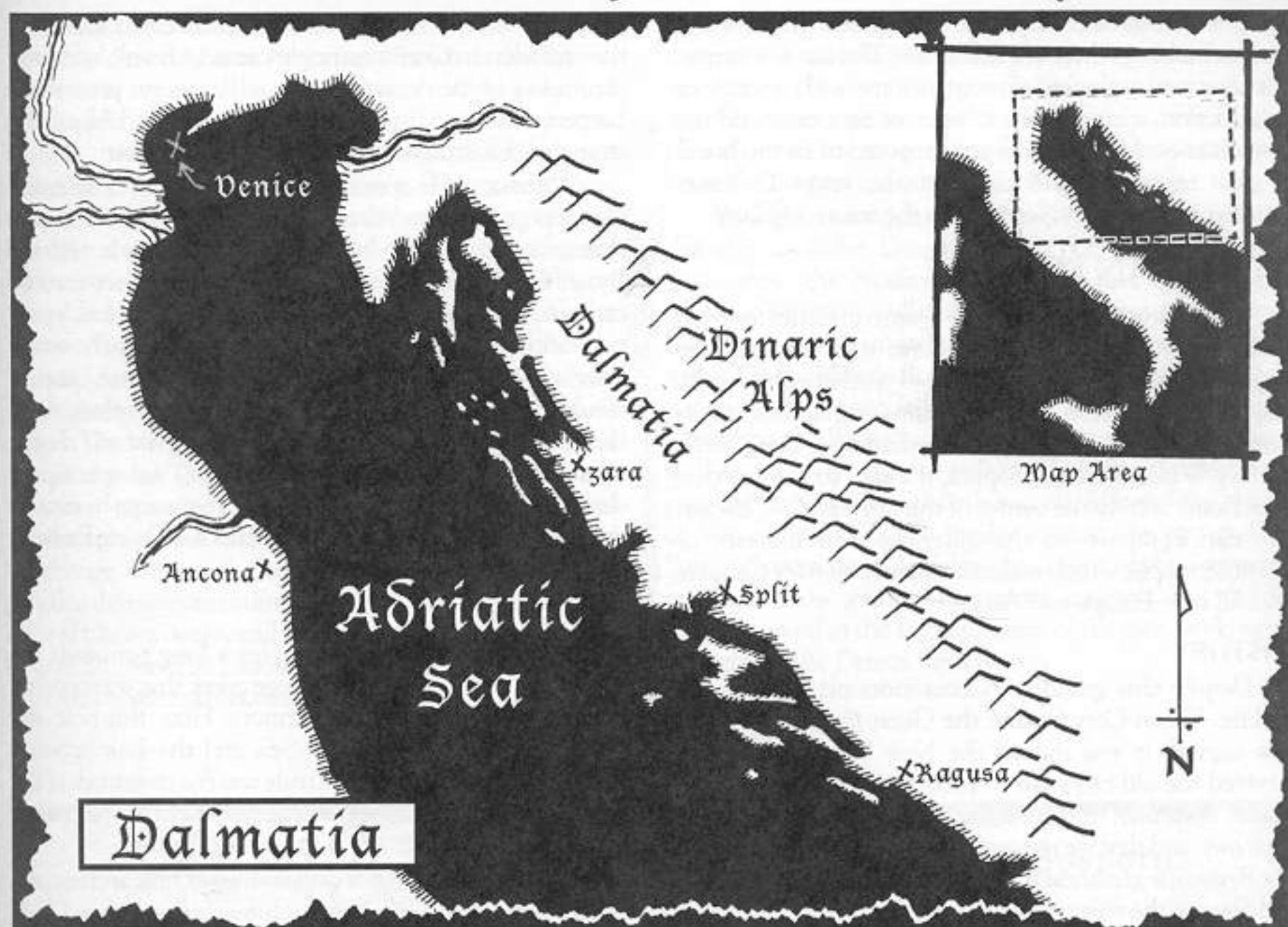
The lagoon of Venice is divided into the "dead" and the "living." The former (*Laguna Morta*) is a system of small salt lakes and marshes formed by the sedimentary deposits of the streams flowing from the Alps. The latter (*Laguna Viva*) is a shallow body of salt water out of which rise a few small islands, among them the group forming the city itself. The *Laguna Viva* is separated from the Adriatic Sea by a narrow strip of land (the *Lido*) that extends from Chioggia to Cortellazzo at the mouth of the River Piave. The strip of land is reinforced at many points with marble, and it has numerous openings for the passage of ships. Therefore, there are several *Lidi*. The tide in the "live" lagoon sometimes rises to a height of between nine and 10 feet, when it floods the streets. Six forts distributed about the *Laguna Viva* girdle the city.

ZARA AND DALMATIA

Zara is the major city of Dalmatia, a region of the Adriatic coast of the Balkans and several islands along it. It is basically a thin strip of land squeezed between the sea and the Dinaric Alps, tall mountains that cut it off from the rest of the Balkans. Dalmatia's clement weather and many natural ports make it an important part of any effort to control shipping access in the Adriatic. This importance



BITTER CRUSADE



makes it a strategic region for several Italian cities, most importantly Venice at the north of the sea.

HISTORY

Zara dates back to the 9th century BC, when it was a Liburnian settlement called Jadera. Parts of the old city still date from those times. It has remained an important Adriatic port since then, changing hands between Greeks, Romans, Goths and Byzantines. The people of the city itself have balked at their Venetian overlords, in recent generations at least. A popular revolt in 1186 swept the Venetians from the city. The locals quickly sought a more beneficial arrangement, and they reached it with King Bela III of Hungary, who could benefit from such an access to the Adriatic.

The time since the revolt has been one of cautious optimism as Bela and the populace await the reaction from Venice. For 15 years, a sort of stalemate has been the order of the day, with Venetian ships mostly unwelcome in Zara but hardly cut off from their home city or the other great ports. With the gathering of a new crusade in Venice, some citizens in the city are rightly nervous, but their protector Bela has committed himself to the crusade as well. That should provide for the city's protection as a feudal possession of a crusader, protected from seizure by papal edict.

The vampiric populace of Zara has always been relatively small, and such is even more the case at the beginning of the 13th century. Dalmatia's ports have made for tempting domains for those vampires who like to feed off sea trade — and seamen — and various members of both Clans Lasombra and Nosferatu have been here since antiquity. However, the mortal population is not large enough to support a large number of vampires easily, so whenever a Zarayan lord becomes powerful, he draws attention from other Balkan and Italian lords with greater resources. For several centuries, Dalmatian Lasombra existed as part of the Venetian wing of the clan, along with some Cappadocians who were said to have established hidden havens on some islands. Such remains the case in certain areas, but the revolt of 1186 saw the destruction of Cosimo Lucretia (the Lasombra prince) and the ascension of Gari (an unaligned Malkavian) to take his place. Narses and several other Venetian vampires are anxious to reestablish domain over the city, but Gari has been unresponsive to offers of feudal protection.

GEOGRAPHY

Zara sits on a peninsula arcing from the Balkan mainland into the Adriatic, creating a well-sheltered port. The

city is a warren of cobblestone streets, and many of the Roman buildings there are still in use. The last few centuries have seen commercial prosperity and with it religious construction, including the Church of St. Donat and the Church of St. Mary. The latter is reputed to be the home of great relics, and the Cainites who know Dalmatia consider it unwelcome territory to the scions of Caine.

CONSTANTINOPLE

Constantinople is called the Queen of Cities for good reason. Home to 1,000,000 citizens, it is certainly the largest and richest city in Europe — perhaps the world. Magnificent churches, palaces, forums and bazaars line its immaculate streets. Walking in the shadow of the Church of Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, it's easy to believe that New Rome is truly the center of the universe. No known city can compare to the splendor and majesty of Constantinople, which makes it a destination for Cainites from all over Europe and Asia.

HISTORY

Despite this grandeur, Constantinople is a city in decline. When Constantine the Great founded it as his new capital, it was indeed the New Rome. In fact, it survived the old city's fall to become the head of a great empire in its own right, one the current emperors still call their own and that we remember as the Byzantine Empire. But Byzantine greatness has faded. Pressure from Normans and Slavs to the west and Arabs and Turks to the east have whittled it away. Italy and much of the Balkans are no longer under Constantinople's sway, and Egypt and the Holy Land are long gone into Muslim hands. Even much of Asia Minor has fallen to the Turks.

Glimmers of greatness remain, however. In the 11th century, Emperor Alexius I retook much of Asia Minor and restored the empire to a solid footing. But he also invited the crusaders and Venetians in, something that would eventually crush Byzantium. That fateful moment is almost at hand as dynastic chaos grips the city.

These events found a locus in young Alexius Angelus, son of the deposed emperor, Isaac II. Imprisoned in 1195 with his father, who had also been blinded by Alexius III, he escaped in 1201 and joined his sister and her husband, Philip of Swabia, in Germany. Promising funds, supplies and troops to conquer Egypt; the maintenance of 500 Western knights in the Holy Land; and submission of the Byzantine church to Rome, Alexius convinced Philip, Boniface of Montferrat and the Venetian to divert the crusade to Constantinople to reinstate him and his father as co-emperors.

With crusader help, the plan succeeded in 1203. The new emperors, however, were unable to make good on their promises to the crusaders or to unite the Byzantine and

Roman churches. Heavy taxation and the recklessness of the crusaders in Constantinople caused a revolt led by the son-in-law of the deposed Alexius III. He was proclaimed Emperor Alexius V in January 1204, and he had Alexius IV strangled. Isaac died in prison shortly thereafter.

Without their sponsor and set upon by a resentful Greek populace, the Venetians and crusaders took it upon themselves to seize control of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire. When Alexius V fled rather than be captured, the victors decided that 12 electors (six Venetians and six Franks) would choose an emperor, who would have one-quarter of the empire. The other three-quarters would be divided. The clergy of the party not belonging to the new emperor would receive Hagia Sophia and choose a patriarch. A small amount of property was specifically designated to support the clergy. The rest was to be considered booty and divided. This is the chaos of **Dying Embers**, the end of **Bitter Crusade**.

GEOGRAPHY

The Queen of Cities occupies a long peninsula between the Golden Horn — a huge creek that serves as her harbor — and the Sea of Marmora. From this post, she controls access to the Black Sea and the link between Greece and Asia Minor. She truly was the crossroads of the classical world, and the crusading movement has placed her on the path of armies again in the last century.

The city itself spreads over a series of hills and features broad avenues and stunning architectural wonders. Great walls, built by Emperor Theodosius II protect the peninsula from land attack and mark the limit of the city's districts. At the tip of the peninsula is the old city of Byzantium, now home to the greatest wonders of the New Rome. These include the Great Palace complex, the Church of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) and the Hippodrome. The Mese, the city's main boulevard, runs from this area through the great forum of Theodosius before splitting in twain, one branch heading roughly east along the Marmora toward the Golden Gate, the other following the Golden Horn toward the Gate of Polyandron. The Mese is one of the great boulevards in all Christendom, with arches, squares and monuments to astound even the most seasoned traveler. The Golden Horn itself features the many ports of the great city, and it is guarded by a great chain strung along its mouth. The port areas are now largely the domain of the Venetians and other Latin traders and delegates.

CAINITES OF THE NEW ROME

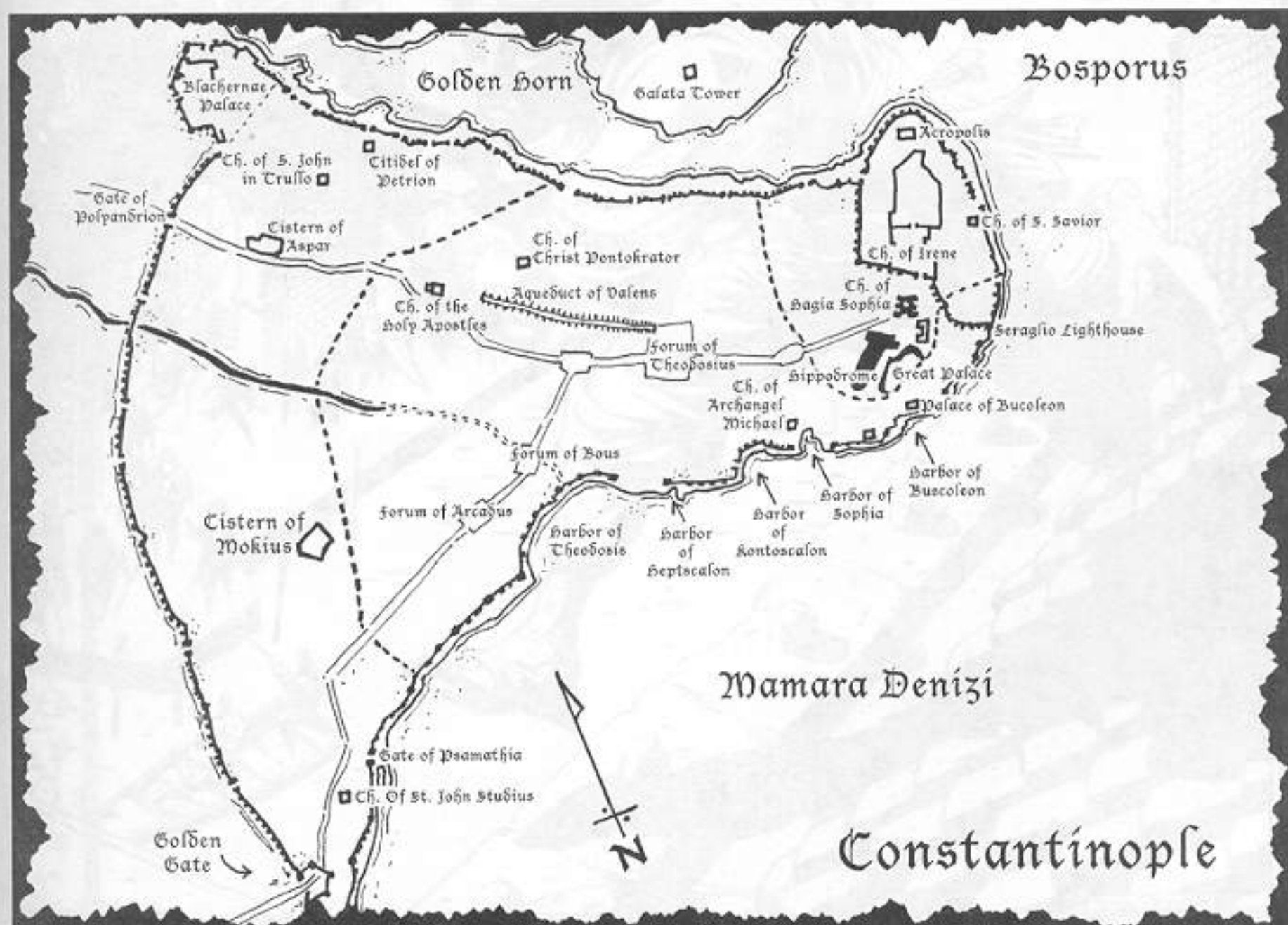
As a great capital and a city teeming with mortals, Constantinople is a magnet to the Damned. But even more so, it is a city that owes some of its greatness and some of its fall to the dreams of powerful Cainites. Michael, a Toreador Methuselah once a powerful vampire of Rome, moved to Byzantium in emulation of the mortal Constantine the

Great and took with him his two lovers, the Tzimisce Dracon and the Ventrue Antonius. Known as the Triumvirate, these ancient vampires set about creating a new and great empire of the night. While Constantine and Justinian built the New Rome among mortals, the Triumvirate built their Dream among the unliving. They created systems of vampiric families, refining the system of *gentes* that had existed in Rome. They divided power along religious lines, creating a system known as the Trinity. The Dream was guided by the Toreador Father, implemented by the Ventrue Son and inspired by the Tzimisce Holy Ghost.

Michael and his Toreador fostered the cult of Michael the Archangel and the greatness of imperial architecture and art. The Ventrue used the power of the imperial throne to expand order. The Tzimisce became the Obertus monastic order, rejecting the "spiritual void" of traditional Metamorphist ways and creating a new Christian cult of the change. Ultimately, however, these three tendencies pulled in different directions. Antonius became a fanatical critic of Obertus ways, and he ultimately fell to betrayal by his own childer. The Dracon, disgusted or simply bored by what the Dream had become, left the city to his successors.

Only Michael remains of the original Triumvirate, and the departure of his companions has plunged him into madness and torpor. He now truly believes himself to be the Archangel Michael, and he feels that it is perhaps time for the physical manifestation of his Dream — Constantinople herself — to pass into the ashes of history.

Younger, more dynamic vampires do struggle to keep the city and the Dream going. The Brujah Natalya Svyatoslav, the Nosferatu Malachite and the Gangrel Thomas Feroux — all aids and lieutenants to the great families — have founded the so-called Covenant of Three: a new Triumvirate dedicated to preserving the city through concrete, pragmatic steps. Ventrue reformers like Anna Comnena and Belisarius (both Byzantines of note in life as well as unlife) struggle to redirect the dynastic mess gripping the empire, but with little success. Meanwhile, Narses of Venice, who holds a grudge against the city and its Patriarch from his mortal days, has negotiated concessions to match those granted his mortal catspaws. His childer, Alfonzo, nests in the Latin Quarter of the city, working to undermine the Dream from within.







Chapter One: Venetian Nights

*"I will weave her such a skein that she
will not unravel in her lifetime"
- Narses to the Empress Sophia, in
Procopius' History of the Wars.*

INTRODUCTION

Venetian Nights highlights the capacity for the best intentions — be they Cainite or mortal — to fall victim to betrayal. Set in Venice in 1202, during preparations for the Fourth Crusade, the story sees the players' coterie become embroiled in the efforts of several groups to derail or hijack the crusade for their own ends.

In Venice, the characters find themselves blamed for the murder of a secret agent of the Followers of Set. Given limited time to clear their names, the characters soon discover that many of the Cainites in Venice have secret agendas. Unfortunately for them, some of those agendas run counter to their quest to clear their names. To succeed, they must rely on their wits and on unexpected allies to reveal the true murderer.

HOW TO USE THIS STORY

Venetian Nights is an important story in its own right, as well as the beginning of a larger tale. Therefore, the coterie's actions take on a significance whose full implications only become apparent later. The characters are witnesses to history in the making, the ultimate consequences of which will echo until the Final Nights.

THEMES

Venetian Nights emphasizes three themes: hidden agendas, revenge and the importance of mortals. Cainites are social predators, but predators nonetheless. Lust for power overtakes many of them, who pursue their own agendas at the expense of friends and allies. Of course, these Cainites keep their schemes secret, lest they find themselves betrayed. Hidden agendas drive the plot of *Venetian Nights*, from the murder of the Setite agent to Narses' interest in the characters.

Likewise, revenge plays a role in this story. Being immortal creatures of great passion and vanity, Cainites do not forget slights or insults easily. They can spend centuries nursing old hatreds and plotting the downfall of their foes. This thirst for vengeance motivates Prince Narses of Venice, whose actions in *Venetian Nights* lead not only to his enemies' downfall, but ultimately to his own.

Despite the centrality of vampiric affairs, mortals are very significant in *Venetian Nights*. Many Cainites refer to humans scornfully as "kine" and consider them beneath notice, but the Children of Seth are not as helpless as they appear. Some have begun to pierce the veil in which Cainites cloak themselves, and vampiric hubris makes their investigations easier. More importantly, mortals control the course of history. Cainites must adapt to the choices mortals make or be swept away. The Fourth Crusade is a perfect example of that dynamic.

MOOD

Venetian Nights is draped in paranoia and intrigue. The conflict of agendas, Narses' desire for revenge and the unleashed power of mortals lead to an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. The characters should not know whom to

trust, especially after the murder of the Setite agent and their indictment for the deed.

Likewise, the tension of mortal negotiations about the crusade spills over into Cainite society. The presence of so many religious leaders and warriors inspired by their faith adds to the uneasiness in Venice. Impress upon the characters a sense of the powerlessness of even Cainites in the face of so overwhelming a mortal event as the crusade. That their elders do not recognize this fact — and even stubbornly deny it — only adds to their paranoia and apprehension.

THE PLOT

Venetian Nights is a murder mystery. The structure of its plot is loose, directed more by character actions than by events.

Act one brings the characters to Venice to attend the Cainite discussions about the upcoming crusade. During the discussions, they meet many important figures, including Prince Narses, the *Amici Noctis* delegation and (most importantly) Roland du Rocher. As the discussions begin, rifts appear between Cainites who favor an attack on Egypt and those who favor the Holy Land as a target for the crusade. These rifts flare up into overt animosity and recriminations just as Roland is found murdered by an unusual poison. Act one concludes as circumstantial evidence makes the characters prime suspects in his murder.

In act two, the characters find themselves accused of murder and threatened with execution. However, Narses intervenes on their behalf. The prince grants the characters three nights in which to prove their innocence or face the consequences. The characters contend not only with finding the real culprits, but with Cainites hoping to conceal the truth. They must likewise avoid mortals, some of whom have decided to take action against the "night devils" in Venice.

Act three sees a confrontation with Roland's true murderer and an explanation for his actions. The consequences of this revelation throw the Cainite council into further chaos. However, the deliberations prove moot when mortals take charge of the situation, forcing the Cainites to follow in their wake.

INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

This story is suitable for coterie of varied backgrounds. As written, the story assumes that the characters have come to Venice to take part in the council before the crusade (whether or not they ultimately intend to join it). Nevertheless, other options exist as well, including the following:

- **Ashirra:** Some Ashirra (Muslim Cainites) hope to dissuade their Christian brethren from launching yet another invasion of Palestine. The characters could serve as Muslim agents in Venice, possibly working under the Lasombra Khadijah Saadeh (see p. 86). As non-Christians, it's easy to see how they become suspects after Roland is murdered.

- **Byzantines:** Similarly, the characters could be Greek vampires, working to preserve the Patriarch Michael's Dream.

They might well be agents of Baron Thomas Feroux (see *Constantinople by Night*), working with Anna Sgorina (p. 82). While not as suspect as Muslims, Byzantine Cainites nevertheless encounter prejudice enough to warrant their being cast as scapegoats.

- **Cainite Heretics:** Venice is the capital of the Cainite Heresy, making it easy for Heretics to become involved in the local intrigue. The characters may either be allies of Narses—who is also Archbishop of Nod—who support his agenda, or they could be enemies who believe that his obsession with revenge is detrimental to the Heresy.

- **Independents:** Since it is such a major port, Venice sees a great deal of traffic. Cainites from both Western and Eastern Europe could have many reasons for journeying to the city and becoming entangled in the negotiations before the Fourth Crusade.

Of course, the story works best if the characters come to Venice for their own reasons. *Venetian Nights* is the story of good intentions gone awry. The tale becomes more powerful if the characters find themselves buffeted by the same forces that turn the crusade into an instrument of evil.

MAJOR PLAYERS

Behind the scenes of *Venetian Nights* are three factions: the Setites, the Assamites and Prince Narses. Understanding the goals and activities of each one is vital to the successful use of this story.

THE FOLLOWERS OF SET

For millennia, Egypt was the domain of the Followers of Set. Since the coming of Islam, their position has weakened considerably. Now, they see the Crusades as a possible means of advancing their own agenda. By focusing Christian attention to Egypt, they hope to deal a mortal blow to Islam—and the Muslim Cainites—in their homeland, thereby laying the groundwork for their eventual resurgence.

To that end, they have infiltrated the courts of some of the Ventrue princes profiting from and supporting the Crusades. These Patricians also believe that Egypt is the best destination for the next crusade, although for entirely different reasons. The Setite agents in Venice are Roland du Rocher and Aimery de Versey, both members of the Ventrue entourage. They work to bring others to their cause, but they prefer subtlety to open conflict. Therefore, they act violently only if faced with no other options. With the murder of Roland, their plan to use Christian Cainites against the Muslims who control Egypt is in jeopardy. Through Aimery, the Setites turn the Ventrue against the characters to ensure that their original plan is carried out.

THE ASSAMITES

The Saracens know of the Setite plan. Realizing that a successful attack on Egypt could set back Muslim plans, they arrive in Venice to stop the plan before it can be enacted. The Assamites murder Roland du Rocher with bloodroot poison, hoping that doing so will reveal the Setite's identity



VENETIAN NIGHTS

and throw the Christian Cainites into disarray. To ensure this possibility, they lure Roland into a warehouse connected to Anna Sgorina, while framing the coterie for the deed at the same time. They believe that the combination of these factors is bound to unmask the Setites' plan and thus counter it.

Represented by Fatima al-Faqadi and Ziyad al-Djahiz, the Assamites believe that Christian Cainites will not act in a way beneficial to the hated Setites, and they are sure to divert the crusade from weak Egypt toward better-defended Palestine. Fatima al-Faqadi is the true mastermind behind the Assamite plan. She is here in Venice to oversee the training of Ziyad al-Djahiz, a neonate who shows great promise. Consequently, Fatima rarely acts directly; but then, neither does Ziyad. She cautions him against revealing himself to the Christians. Instead, the Assamites work in the shadows, appearing only when necessary.

NARSES

The prince of Venice also has plans of his own. He sees in the Fourth Crusade a potent instrument to be wielded against the Byzantine Cainites who dishonored him so long ago. He seeks to divert the crusade and warp its ideals. Although he's a master manipulator, Narses soon discovers that it's easier to do so than he had ever imagined. Mortals can be such treacherous creatures if given the opportunity, and Narses does all he can to provide them with it.

The prince also knows the secret of the Setites. When the characters are accused of Roland's murder, he uses his position to give them the time they need to reveal that secret. He knows that the revelation will not only paralyze the Cainite council, but also give the mortals the chance to seize the initiative.

The prince of Venice has only one goal: to avenge himself upon Michael of Constantinople and the Byzantine Cainites. He is willing to risk everything — including his position as Archbishop of Nod — to achieve this goal. Narses knows the truth behind Roland's murder, and he hopes to use this knowledge to manipulate the characters into becoming his agents.

Through his lieutenant, Guilelmo Aliprando, Narses aids the characters whenever possible. He hopes to turn them to his side just as he hopes to do with the crusade. However, Narses never acts in any way that would jeopardize his official neutrality. His patience and ability to think in the long term make him a deadly opponent — and an even deadlier ally.

MINOR PLAYERS

In addition to the three major players, several smaller factions are also at work. The following are short descriptions of each faction, its agenda and what knowledge (if any) it possesses about the murder of Roland du Rocher.

AMICI NOCTIS

Once the effective leaders of all of Clan Lasombra, the Friends of the Night have become aligned with the Chris-

BITTER CRUSADE

BLOODROOT

Bloodroot is a perennial plant that flowers in springtime. It exists in several varieties, all of which are poisonous. However, one rare variety, found only in Iberia and North Africa, produces a poison that is fatal even to Cainites. This variety is noteworthy for its large white flowers, which are veined with red.

The toxin extracted from bloodroot makes a potent contact poison. Weapons coated with it inflict two health levels of aggravated damage per hit, unless the character's player makes a successful Stamina + Fortitude roll (difficulty 5). The poison attacks vampiric vitae, turning it to a fine black dust, similar in appearance to volcanic ash.

The process of extracting the toxin is both difficult and dangerous. Even handling it requires a great deal of skill. The extraction process requires an Intelligence + Herbalism roll against a difficulty of 9. This act is an extended test with each roll representing an hour's work. The work ends when the player gets 10 successes. Only master herbalists (Herbalism 5) can prepare the toxin and handle it in absolute safety. If the character has fewer dots, the player must make a Wits + Herbalism (difficulty 5) for the preparation process and for every scene in which the character handles the toxin. Failure leaves the character infected, and he suffers the damage indicated previously.

tian majority of the clan against the Muslim minority. Tommaso Brexiano and Lucita of Aragon represent the Friends, and they press for a direct attack on the Holy Land, believing that such an attack will "teach the Saracens a lesson." They oppose the Ventrue plans to attack Egypt as a sideshow "unworthy of true crusaders" (and likely to bring the Patricians undue power). Tommaso knows nothing of Roland's murder, but Lucita sees the hand of the Assamites at work. Should the characters befriend her, she shares this opinion with them (although she has no proof).

The existence of a secretive council of Lasombra leaders is not something the Magisters like to share with the other clans, or even their less trustworthy neonates. The fact that the Friends have become aligned with the Christian cause and have largely abandoned the Muslim position in Spain is all the more secret. Consequently, Tommaso and Lucita will not say to outsiders that they speak for the *Amici*, just that they represent elders of the clan. Note also that only Tommaso is actually a Friend with the right to sit in judgment in a court of blood. Lucita is still too young to be elevated to that rank, although she hopes that service in Venice may change all that.

BYZANTINE CAINITES

Byzantium's few representatives (such as Anna Sgorina) seek to preserve Michael's Dream in any way possible. Some naively believe that Latin Christianity may defend them against

Islam, but most are less sanguine. They point out that past crusades have been disruptive to Byzantium. Their delegation is in Venice to make sure that—if nothing else—Michael's status is respected. The Byzantines know nothing of Roland's murder, and they are suspicious of Narses.

THE CAINITE HERESY

Narses may be Archbishop of Nod, but he lacks the complete support of his fellow Heretics. Some suspect that he cares less for the Heresy than he does for revenge against Byzantium. They point to his cooperation with proponents of the crusade as proof that he no longer seeks to undermine the Roman Church as he once did. Although they do not know the identity of Roland's murderer, they could contact the characters in an attempt to understand Narses' true intentions—and test the depth of his loyalty to the Heresy.

MUSLIM LASOMBRA

A clan divided, the Lasombra have Muslim representatives in Venice, Khadijah Saadeh among them. They seek a peaceful solution that is equitable to both sides. The Muslims know that Assamites are active in Venice, a fact that they reveal only with great reluctance. They rightly fear that this knowledge will further poison relations with Christendom. Nevertheless, the desire to avoid further conflict may push them to reveal this knowledge to the characters.

If the subject of the internal policies of Clan Lasombra somehow come up, Khadijah can explain that there remain Muslim Friends of the Night—called *Asdiqa' al-Lail* in Arabic—but that they have been rebuffed on matters of crusade and the *Reconquista* in Iberia. She is in Venice despite warnings from Christian Magisters that doing so only erodes her faith's position in the eyes of the Methuselah Montano.

RODRIGUE DE NAVARRE

Rodrigue is the single most dangerous mortal in Venice—at least from the Cainite perspective. He has tracked evidence of the Heresy to the city and become the only witness to Roland's murder in the process. He has information vital to the characters, but obtaining it from him is a dangerous venture indeed. Rodrigue plans to use his information to destroy the “darkness” he sees engulfing the crusade.

VENTRUE

If any faction in Venice is the victim of its own pride and shortsightedness, it is the Ventrue delegation. Led by Lanzo von Sachsen, the Ventrue wish to turn the crusade to Egypt, which they rightly believe is a weak link in the Muslim line of defense. Unfortunately, the serpent that Lanzo nurses at his bosom—the Setite Aimery de Versey—supports this wish.

ACT ONE: THE DEVIL'S COUNCIL

Act one begins in early August 1202 with the arrival of the coterie to Venice. By this time, the preparations for

the crusade are in chaos. Many crusaders have been in Venice for over a year, awaiting word of both the date of departure and destination. The crusade's original leader, Count Thibald of Champagne, died before he could take command, and his successor, Count Boniface of Montferrat, has not yet arrived. Add to this confusing time the uncertainty of the crusaders' ability to pay for services they've already contracted from the Venetians, and you have a disaster waiting to happen.

The Cainites in Venice are likewise in disarray. They are torn between directing the crusade to Egypt (favored by the Ventrue) or to Palestine (favored by the Christian Lasombra). Storytellers should emphasize the confusion and indecision that characterizes this time. There is also genuine fear that the crusade will collapse before it can even leave Venice, thereby playing into the hands of the Muslim Lasombra, who counsel an end to the fighting in the Holy Land.

SCENE ONE: ARRIVAL IN VENICE

Scene one introduces Venice and gives the characters an opportunity to become familiar with the setting of *Venetian Nights*. This scene is tense because of growing concern among the crusaders, some of whom fear they'll never fulfill their vows, and among the Venetians, who worry that the thousands of foreign knights will eat them out of house and home. Fortunately for Cainites, the sheer number of strangers in Venice at this time makes it very easy to feed—as well as impossible to distinguish between vampires who are here for legitimate purposes and those who are not.

POINTS OF ENTRY

Characters can enter Venice by land or by sea. There are many land routes to Venice, since the city maintains commercial relationships with locales throughout Italy, France, Eastern Europe and the Holy Roman Empire. Characters from any of those regions have no trouble finding transportation amid the merchant caravans heading to Venice. They likely enter the city by crossing one of several bridges across the canals. Despite Venice's wealth, many bridges are poorly maintained, threatening to collapse under the weight of the heavy caravan traffic.

Similarly, Venice has large and open ports. Ships from all across the eastern Mediterranean (and occasionally elsewhere) make regular visits to *La Serenissima*. Although many Cainites do not favor travel by sea, it is the best option for characters coming from places for which easy overland routes do not exist. This method of entry is also the most spectacular by far, showing Venice at its most impressive. Docks and landings line the city's shores. On the south side of the Grand Canal, characters may see the magnificent Palazzo di San Marco, a shipping center, as well as the doge's palace. Located in the east end is a massive shipyard, a testament to Venice's maritime strength.



FLOWERS OF EVIL

The situation in Venice is unusual for the coterie. Despite the characters' best efforts, it is almost impossible to go completely unnoticed. Yet, paradoxically, their presence does not truly attract attention either. The Storyteller can emphasize this fact by having others (mortals or Cainites) acknowledge the characters silently without approaching them or otherwise engaging them in conversation. The city has taken on the quality of the calm before a storm — a portent of things to come.

The only person to meet their eyes is an attractive young mortal woman, who blocks their path. Dressed in the simple clothes of a peasant, she smiles and offers them a bouquet of flowers with large white petals veined with red. If asked, she explains that it is a Venetian tradition to give these flowers to newcomers in the city. Then, as quickly as she came, she vanishes from sight. Players who wish to find her must make successful Wits + Alertness rolls (difficulty 7), in which case they realize the woman was actually a Cainite employing Obfuscate to hide her features. The woman is the Assamite Fatima al-Faqadi, setting up the characters for the murder to come. Seeing through her ruse before she vanishes is also possible with the judicious use of Auspex or other Disciplines. If thus discovered, Fatima attempts to flee, but she will fight — with considerable skill — if cornered.

BITTER CRUSADE

If players succeed on an Intelligence + Herbalism (or Science) roll (difficulty 6), their characters realize that these flowers cannot be native to Venice or the surrounding countryside. (The soil is too wet for a plant of this kind.) However, they do not recognize the flower unless the players succeed at another Intelligence + Herbalism test against a difficulty of 9. Soon thereafter, they encounter Anna Sgorina, who introduces herself and leads them to the council. She comments on the unusual flowers they carry, but likewise has no knowledge of them. She does express some surprise upon hearing of this "Venetian tradition," since she has never heard of it before.

SCENE TWO: THE COUNCIL SESSION

Mortals dither about the crusade's direction and objectives, and their actions are mirrored in Cainite society. Hidden from prying eyes, representatives of various Cainite factions debate similar topics. The characters find themselves drawn into this debate, and they gain an understanding of the fault lines that divide their kind.

This scene highlights the divisions rending Cainite society. Although every faction nominally supports the crusade, few do so selflessly. Indeed, the characters may soon

realize that no one in Venice acts without an ulterior motive. The question becomes which of these motives most closely coincides with their own, whatever those may be. The scene should exemplify the fact that even a joint undertaking can be an occasion for intrigue and self-aggrandizement when Cainites are involved.

NARSES' CHAMBERS

Although he is the prince of Venice, Narses feigns disinterest in the preparations for the crusade, except to the extent that they affect his city's wellbeing. Nevertheless, he has offered the use of chambers within his private apartments to his fellow Cainites. Because Venice is built upon lagoons, there are few underground locales suitable for havens. Therefore, Narses has taken up residence in a series of rooms located near St. Mark's Basilica.

These rooms are beautifully appointed. Their floors are covered with mosaics, containing gold, bronze and the greatest variety of stones. The walls are likewise decorated with mosaics, Byzantine sculptures, and statues of various saints and martyrs. All the artwork bears the subtle perversions of traditional Christian iconography one would expect in the chambers of the Archbishop of Nod, head of the Cainite Heresy. The irony of debates about a holy crusade against the infidels taking place in such a locale is not lost on Narses, who is mildly contemptuous of Cainites who truly believe in anything other than the power of their own wills.

DELIBERATE ACTION

The deliberations begin every night shortly after sundown, and they continue long into the early morning. Although many Cainites refer to the deliberations as a "council," the term is misleading. Narses' lieutenant, Guilermo Aliprando, acts as an impartial moderator (as does the prince, on the rare occasions he appears), recognizing speakers and settling disputes. Beyond that, there are no clear rules of order. The deliberations have a wild, unrestrained quality to them, as passions flare and old rivalries manifest.

Because of the open-ended nature of the proceedings, Cainites come and go. No one (except perhaps some Ventrue) expects anyone to sit in rapt silence as any delegate presents his position to the assembly. Cainites from northern Europe may find this unsettling, even infuriating, but it is very Venetian, as any Lasombra present explains proudly.

The characters are not expected to take part in the deliberations (although they are welcome to do so), but courtesy and the all-important Tradition of Domain demands that they make an appearance — however brief — in Narses' chambers. If the coterie has come to Venice as the agents of a particular clan or faction, the characters' path is clear. If they came of their accord, they may act as they wish. At minimum, the characters should arrive at the chambers, introduce themselves and make their intentions known. Beyond that, they may do as they please.

CALL TO ORDER

The council proceedings last from sundown until approximately three in the morning. During that time, the characters hear impassioned orations, lively debates and the occasional rude argument, as the assembled Cainites argue about the crusade and its goals. Ironically, the free-for-all nature of the deliberations may come as a comfort. They seem the exact opposite of the pall that draped Venice upon the characters' arrival. They also offer the coterie an opportunity to meet representatives of the various clans and factions.

The following are some of the encounters that the coterie may have upon attending a council meeting:

- **Christian Lasombra:** This powerful faction commands much respect, if only because of the influence Clan Lasombra has in Venice. Its most frequent speaker is Tommaso Brexiano, a devout Cainite with a fiery personality. He speaks eloquently of the Saracen threat to Christendom, citing numerous examples of what he calls "infidel perfidy." He likewise uses his own experiences in the Holy Land and Egypt as "proof" of his position. Tommaso argues that sending the crusade to Palestine would not only buttress the Crusader States already there, but would strike a powerful blow against vital Muslim strongholds.

Serving as Tommaso's aide is the Spanish neonate Lucita of Aragon. Tommaso does not allow her to speak in council, because he believes that she will learn more by watching. A keen judge of others, as well as a skilled diplomat, Lucita observes the reactions of others to Tommaso's orations, noting them carefully. Should she notice obvious signs of agreement with the Lasombra's position, she seeks out such Cainites to gauge the sincerity of their support.

- **Clan Ventrue:** The second most powerful faction is a delegation of German Ventrue. Its spokesman is Lanzo von Sachsen, a Cainite given to hyperbole and bluster, but widely seen to be a vassal of the Patrician Methuselah Hardestadt. Lanzo concedes the value of showing strength to the Saracens, but he believes that the ultimate success of the crusade requires strategy as well. Consequently, he argues for an attack against Egypt, which he considers a weak link in Muslim defenses. Moreover, an attack against Egypt would split Islam in half, making it an easier target for subsequent crusades.

Lanzo has two aides, Aimery de Versey and Roland du Rocher, both French veterans of previous crusades. Lanzo allows each to speak for him on occasion, and to good effect. They are finer orators than Lanzo, using subtle arguments and debating with skills that put their master to shame. In addition, Aimery and Roland spend a great deal of time speaking one-on-one with their fellow Cainites, in the hopes of converting them to their cause.

- **Muslim Lasombra:** A few of the *Qabilat al-Khayal* — the Muslim wing of Clan Lasombra — have come to Venice. Led by Khadijah Saadeh, the Muslims have an almost impossible task: prevent the crusade from taking place at all. Khadijah is thoughtful and intelligent. She argues forcefully

that nothing is gained by religious strife among Caine's childer. She believes that a cease-fire serves all parties better.

Unfortunately, few Cainites are willing to give serious consideration to Khadijah's position. Naturally suspicious because she serves non-Christians (even though she herself is not a Muslim, but a Christian Arab), some suspect that she is somehow behind the delays and logistical problems that have plagued the crusade from the beginning. Nevertheless, she does her best to gain a fair hearing from any Cainite who will listen.

- **Byzantine Cainites:** If possible, Byzantium's delegates are treated worse than the Muslims. Whereas the Muslims are ignored but respected (albeit grudgingly), the Byzantines are acknowledged and dismissed in the same breath. Most Cainites view the Byzantines with pity, if not disdain, seeing them as representatives of a failed past and agents of a mad and weakened elder. While both Lasombra and Ventrue mouth support for the ailing Byzantine Empire, neither faction offers more than words.

Anna Sgorina speaks for the Byzantines. She is an exceptionally gifted speaker, but her frequent allusions to classical literature and evocation of Michael's Dream fall upon deaf ears. Most Western Cainites covet Byzantium's riches, but show little regard for its place in history. Therefore, Anna takes great interest in any Cainite who shows the slightest sympathy for her cause.

- **Guilelmo Aliprando:** Narses' lieutenant — like the prince himself — is officially neutral. Most of the time, he sits silently upon a Byzantine-style cathedra, content to watch the evening's proceedings. He interjects only when he feels that one party or another has acted beyond the bounds of decency, such as when Lanzo von Sachsen rudely interrupts Tommaso Brexiano (a frequent occurrence). He plays the part of impartial referee to the utmost.

Guilelmo is quite personable. He is glad to speak with anyone who expresses an interest in Prince Narses or Venice. If permitted, he can drone on at great length about the illustrious history of the city, as well as Narses' prominent place within it. Otherwise, he rarely offers anything approximating an opinion on any matter of importance. The characters find him an affable, if vapid, conversationalist.

SCENE THREE: THE VENTRUE SERPENT

While attending council, the characters hear a debate between the Ventrue Roland du Rocher and the Lasombra Tommaso Brexiano. Naturally, the debate centers on the wisdom of attacking Palestine rather than Egypt. If the characters have already heard an oration by Lanzo von Sachsen, they find Roland's approach very different. Rather than bully his opponent, Roland uses logic to make his point, arguing that an attack against the Holy Land might rally the infidels against the crusaders. However, an attack against Egypt is not only tactically sound, but also less likely to arouse Muslim solidarity.

BITTER CRUSADE

Roland does not belittle Tommaso. Instead, he attempts to bring him around to his point of view by asking questions in an almost Socratic manner. He even asks questions of others, in an effort to use their responses to further his own cause. If the characters take any interest in this debate, Roland draws them in as well — whether they wish it or not. Storytellers should allow the characters to answer Roland's leading questions (such as, "Do you not think it better for this crusade to end in victory than in failure?" etc.) as they wish. Whatever their response is, he uses it to support his position.

Once the debate has ended (without having swayed Tommaso, of course), Roland approaches the characters and thanks them for participating in the debate. He compliments their intellectual acuity and then asks their true opinions regarding the crusade. Roland pays careful attention to every word they say, nodding and smiling when appropriate. If they agree with him, he compliments them once more for their sagacity. If they do not, he debates with them further, but never raises his voice or resorts to personal attacks. After this exchange, Roland excuses himself and returns to his seat near Lanzo and Aimery.

While the characters are engaged in this conversation with Roland, have the players make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). If the players succeed, the characters realize that they are being watched. Tommaso Brexiano eyes them contemptuously, clearly disturbed that they have taken to consorting with his opponent. However, Tommaso makes no hostile moves toward the characters — although he points them out to his assistant, Lucita, who will nod and leave the chamber. Tommaso follows shortly thereafter.

SCENE FOUR: NICOLO

This optional scene needs not occur unless the coterie spends time wandering about in Venice at night. Because Venice is built over water, there are no underground sewers, basements or crypts. Consequently, the city is very inhospitable for Nosferatu. Nevertheless, Venice does boast a small number of the Lepers, many of whom dwell in abandoned buildings and other forgotten structures. A popular meeting place for the Nosferatu is the small island of San Michele. The island is used as a cemetery, and it is packed with tombs and mausoleums. If the characters travel near the water's edge, they may catch sight of a coterie of Nosferatu in a small boat punting back to Venice.

The Nosferatu, led by a Cainite called Nicolo, are wary of outsiders, but they are not hostile. They know little about the crusade, except that they have seen more Saracens in the city than those in Khadijah's entourage. If treated well, they may be willing to act as the characters' spies — for appropriate compensation, of course.

SCENE FIVE: SCAPEGOATS

Early at the next council meeting, Lanzo von Sachsen addresses the assembled Cainites. He does so with an obvious sense of urgency. The Ventrue delegate announces that his

aide, Roland du Rocher, has been found murdered and that the victim's vitae has turned to dust! Naturally, his announcement causes a stir among the Cainites, several of whom begin to point fingers at one another for the crime. Tommaso Brexiano is a frequent target of such accusations, which he denies vigorously.

Guilelmo asks for calm, and he orders an immediate inquest into the matter. He requests that Roland's desiccated body be brought to Narses' chambers immediately for investigation. He also asks that no one make any effort to leave Venice until the inquest is over, lest they incriminate themselves. Compared to Lanzo, Guilelmo behaves in a calm and reasonable fashion.

THE INQUEST

To avoid any suggestion of impropriety, Guilelmo conducts the inquest in public, under the watchful eyes of representatives from every major faction, as well as a few specially chosen outsiders. Lanzo represents the Ventrue, while Lucita represents the Christian Lasombra. (Tommaso has other matters to attend to.) The Muslim Lasombra and the Byzantines also send their leaders as representatives. If the characters are not associated with a faction, at least a couple of them are chosen to attend as observers. If they are associated with a faction, they may attend as aides.

Roland's body is a frightful sight. His skin is gray and ashen, unusual even for a Cainite. His features are sunken and skeletal. He hardly looks like the vigorous man he appeared to be in council. More disturbing still, his mouth, nose and ears are filled with fine black dust, like volcanic ash but without any sulfurous odor. He is also missing two fingers on his right hand. They appear to have been snapped off rather than cut.

Guilelmo employs *Auspex* to examine the body, and he invites others to do so as well. He stresses, though, that only his findings carry any weight. Players whose characters employ *Auspex* level 3 (The Spirit's Touch) roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6). Success means that the characters recognize upon the body the telltale emotional echoes of murder. Roland suffered greatly as he met Final Death, but there is no evidence of strong emotions on the part of his killer. Characters with Heightened Senses (*Auspex* 1) recognize a tiny incision in Roland's neck, possibly the entry point for a thin dagger.

Guilelmo also notices the incision. His Heightened Senses reveal a reddish, sticky residue that is likely a poison of some kind. Guilelmo takes great care to avoid touching the poison, using a metal instrument to collect a small sample. After doing so, he takes only a few moments to pronounce his findings: Roland du Rocher was killed by bloodroot poison.

Most of the Cainites present (with the notable exception of Lucita of Aragon) look on Guilelmo in ignorance. They are unfamiliar with bloodroot. Narses' lieutenant explains that bloodroot, also called *sanguinaria*, can be used to create a toxin that is deadly to vampires. It originates in

North Africa and Iberia. In its natural state, it's a pale white flower whose large petals are veined with red.

Anna Sgorina faces the characters. She says that she saw them earlier carrying a small bouquet of white flowers like those Guilelmo described. Upon hearing this, Lanzo charges the characters with Roland's murder. He orders them taken into custody. Anna concurs reluctantly, as does Lucita. However, Khadijah argues against wild accusations on such minimal proof.

Guilelmo brings the chaotic scene to order. He indeed calls guards to take the characters into custody, arguing that it is for their own safety as much as any evidence against them. He asks that they not struggle or attempt to escape, for that will only harden opinions against them. He promises that the matter will be dealt with fairly by Prince Narses. With that, they are escorted out of the chamber and into another room where they are kept under guard.

Should the coterie resist, they must contend with Narses' ghoulish guards, as well as Cainites like Lanzo and Tommaso. These opponents prove determined, especially now that the characters have confirmed their guilt by resisting. Should the characters nevertheless escape, Narses pronounces them unwelcome in Venice ever again. Their suspected role in the unlawful death of another Cainite makes them pariahs in some places — especially anywhere that Lanzo von Sachsen has influence. If needs be, use the crusader template on page 101 for Narses' guards. Each also has Potence 1.

ACT TWO: INQUISITION

Act two consists of two set scenes and two optional scenes. Add or drop scenes based on the characters' actions. Scenes six and seven are essential, but use the others any way you see fit, including merging them into a single scene.

SCENE SIX: THE WISDOM OF NARSES

The characters begin this scene under lock and key. They are not mistreated, but they are not allowed any contact with the outside world. Likewise, the guards have taken their possessions (other than clothing). After several hours, Guilelmo Aliprando appears, and he greets them more warmly than seems reasonable given the situation. He explains that Lanzo has charged them with a violation of the Traditions of Caine and used the circumstantial evidence of the characters' possession of bloodroot flowers against them. This proof has swayed several prominent Cainites, including Tommaso, to his cause.

Before the coterie can react, Guilelmo tells them not to worry. Lanzo's case is a weak one, and it is unlikely to succeed. As outsiders, the characters are convenient scapegoats for a most heinous crime. Nevertheless, Prince Narses cannot let any such charge — no matter how frivolous — go unheard.

Narses has agreed to hear the case against the coterie, if only to maintain the peace. Guilelmo adds that this solution is the only equitable one, given the tense situation in Venice. He then escorts the characters out and into the prince's audience chamber.

THE PRINCE'S COURT

If anything, Narses' audience chamber is even more opulent than those he has lent to the council. The mosaics covering the walls and floors are flecked with gold, and porphyry statues stand in alcoves. Narses himself sits upon an ornate episcopal throne made of walnut wood and decorated with inlays of ivory, mother-of-pearl, colored wood and precious stones. The prince dresses in red robes that look like those of a Byzantine patriarch, including a gold crosier that rests by his side.

Speaking in his high, lilting voice, Narses asks that the characters be brought before him. As they stand there, they can feel the eyes of the assembled Cainites upon them. Guilelmo moves to the center of the chamber and asks that those who accuse the characters come forward. Lanzo does so, along with Tommaso. There is a murmur in the chamber as the two long-time sparring partners both state that the characters had in their possession bloodroot flowers — the very same plants from which the poison that killed Roland was made.

From his throne, Narses asks the accusers if either saw the characters in possession of these flowers. Unless the characters brought them to the council chambers on the first day, neither answers in the affirmative. The prince then asks on what basis they make such a charge against fellow Cainites. Lanzo then turns to Anna Sgorina, and she steps forward reluctantly. When questioned, she admits to having seen the flowers in the characters' possession, but she does not believe that they are guilty. Lanzo requests that this comment not be taken into consideration, but Narses disagrees. The prince asks if any more substantial evidence can be brought forward.

Formulate a case against the characters based on whatever has transpired between them and other Cainites during the council meetings. The case needs not be a good one. Indeed, the insubstantiality of Lanzo's charge should become apparent. However, you should take care to emphasize two points: first, the oddity that Lanzo and Tommaso both support such a weak case against the characters, and second, Lucita clearly does not share her master's views on the matter. She frequently looks disgusted at the posturing of Tommaso — not to mention his unexpected alliance with Lanzo.

After several minutes of arguments, Narses rises from his throne and addresses the chamber. He explains that, as the prince of Venice, he must remain objective in matters such as this. He concedes that the murder of a Cainite without sanction is a grave matter. He likewise admits that the perpetrators must be found and punished. Above all, though, justice must be done. Now is not the time for easy answers or quick solutions.

BITTER CRUSADE



At these words, the chamber erupts into argument. Lanzo shouts at the prince, imploring him not to let the murderers of his clanmate escape unscathed. Guilelmo silences the chamber and Narses speaks again. He has no intention of letting the characters go, he says — at least not yet. Although the evidence against them is circumstantial at best, it is the only evidence available, and it does implicate them. However, he is a just prince, and he offers the characters an opportunity to prove their innocence.

Narses gives the coterie three nights in which to uncover evidence that exonerates them. This evidence must be clear and unequivocal. He does not require that they find the true murderer, but he suggests that that would indeed constitute unequivocal evidence of their innocence. Narses explains that they may have total freedom to act as they wish during these three nights. However, any attempt to leave the city amounts to an admission of guilt. Assuming that they escape his agents (which he assures them is unlikely), a blood hunt will be declared against them, as required by tradition. Narses emphasizes that he will tolerate no further deaths in his domain, be they mortal or Cainite. To disobey will likewise incur his wrath.

Lanzo howls in protest, but Narses ignores him. Guilelmo stresses that the prince has spoken, and that the decision has been made. Perceptive characters may notice that Tommaso does not seem at all displeased by this turn of events. Players should roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6) to pick up on this. Narses then bids the characters farewell and reminds them of the strictures of his judgment. They have three nights; no more, no less.

SCENE SEVEN: THE INVESTIGATION

This is an open-ended scene. In the course of the three nights that it has, the coterie can act in a wide variety of ways. As Storyteller, you must not only be prepared for many possibilities, but you must also keep track of the amount of time that the characters spend on the investigation. The following text deals with the most common avenues of investigation.

THE BODY

The coterie may wish to reexamine Roland's remains. To do so, the characters must get permission from Guilelmo, who gives it willingly on the condition that they examine the corpse under guard. He dispatches one ghoul for every member of the coterie who takes part in this action.

Roland's body has degenerated further since the earlier viewing. His flesh has taken on a dark brown color, while the underlying muscle has withered, leaving him almost mummified in appearance. There are still large quantities of black dust in his mouth and other orifices. As noted earlier, he is missing two fingers on his right hand.

The characters of players who succeed on a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 7) notice two details: First, there

are no signs of struggle, which suggests that Roland was surprised. Second, his body is missing his leather belt and scabbard, items that he always wore in the characters' presence.

Attempts to use Disciplines yields varying results. Bear in mind that Roland's murderer was a skilled assassin who bore no ill will toward his target. Rather, he acted with cold precision, according to the orders he received from his superiors. Therefore, the Spirit's Touch and similar Disciplines reveal only that the murderer was a male Cainite.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

The coterie may also wish to examine the crime scene. Again, Guilelmo is happy to provide them with the locale. This time, he does not put them under guard. Instead, he simply directs them to a small warehouse (which merchants use to store their goods) near the water's edge. This particular warehouse belongs to a family of Byzantine expatriates by the name of Mouzakios.

Entering the warehouse is not difficult, since the Mouzakios do not keep it under guard. The structure contains mostly wood (especially cedar) and other building materials. According to Guilelmo, Roland was found by several of Narses' ghouls while making their usual rounds on the docks. If they wish, they may speak with the ghouls. The ghouls provide little additional insight, except to say that their master has kept the warehouse under surveillance because he believed it was being used as a meeting place by Cainites. They have no idea which Cainites, and they refer the characters to Narses if their questions become too probing.

The body was found in a pile of sawdust toward the back of the warehouse. The pile is still mixed with some of the black dust that poured out of Roland's body. Looking carefully on the floor reveals several sets of footprints in the sawdust. Some clearly belong to the ghouls. Another set belongs to Roland. However, there is another set visible as well. This set leads to a window, suggesting that someone entered the warehouse by that method. A successful Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 6) reveals that light traveling boots made the third set of footprints.

INTERVIEWS

The coterie may desire to speak with other Cainites to gather further clues. If they do so, the Storyteller should use the following notes to aid in roleplaying the interviews. They are nonlinear, and they may be used in any order.

The Ventrue

Lanzo von Sachsen does not speak with the characters. He is convinced that they are Roland's murderers, and he does not assist them in their investigation. However, Aimery de Versey speaks with them, provided he can do so out of Lanzo's earshot. Unlike his master, Aimery does not dislike the characters. He emphasizes that he wishes to see Roland's murderers brought to justice.

Aimery says he hadn't seen Roland after the council meeting the night of his death. They were supposed to meet later to discuss strategy, but they never did. He grew con-

cerned, but Lanzo told him not to worry. When he did not return to his resting place, Aimery knew that something had happened. Beyond that, he knows little. He suggests, however, that they speak with Anna Sgorina. After all, Roland was found murdered in a Byzantine warehouse. Moreover, she was the one who connected the bloodroot flower with them. Perhaps she has some insight into this matter.

The Lasombra

Tommaso Brexiano speaks with the characters gladly, as does Lucita of Aragon. This should strike them as odd, considering the fact that he sponsored the accusations against them. When asked about this, Tommaso smiles insouciantly and explains that *something* had to distract Lanzo. He admits that he doesn't believe the charges against them and that he agreed to speak against them only to keep his opponent off-balance. Tommaso offers no apologies for this strategy, adding that it has worked brilliantly thus far. The Ventrue are clearly distracted; he expects the council to support his own position in the end. Tommaso has no further information that he shares with the coterie.

Like Aimery, Lucita agrees to speak with the characters — alone. She cannot help them directly, and she would never act against her clan, but she tells them that bloodroot poison is very rare indeed. It's deadly to handle, and only a skilled assassin would dare use it. She suggests that the true murderers are not simple thugs, but trained killers with remarkable abilities, possibly Assamites. She's seen their handiwork in Spain, and she suggests that they may be at work in Venice as well.

Khadijah Saadeh

The Muslim delegate sympathizes greatly with the coterie's plight. She explains that she attempted to intercede on their behalf, but Lanzo is adamant in his position. Khadijah knows little of obvious interest to the characters. If asked about Assamites, she shudders and admits, albeit reluctantly, that a murder of this sort could be theirs. Unfortunately, Khadijah has no evidence of any Assamites in Venice.

Anna Sgorina

Anna sees the characters willingly. She apologizes profusely for having inadvertently fingered them for Roland's murder. That was not her intention. Like Khadijah, she claims to have asked Lanzo to withdraw the charges, but to no avail.

If asked about the Mouzakios family and their warehouse, she becomes obviously uncomfortable. Her demeanor darkens, and she answers questions evasively. If pressed, she admits that several members of the Mouzakios family are her ghouls. She admits that sharing blood with mortals without the prince's permission is a breach of tradition, but she defends her actions as a necessity. At this point, Anna explains her quest to find lost books of the Library of the Forgotten in Venice, if the coterie seems interested in such matters. However, she denies that either she or her secret

ghouls had anything to do with Roland's murder. Should the characters pursue this point, Anna asks the characters to leave her chambers immediately. She answers no further questions from them.

Nicolo and the Nosferatu

If the coterie encountered the Nosferatu in act one, they may consider asking them about Roland's murder. If they have not, the Storyteller should introduce them at some point in the investigation. Nicolo has several valuable pieces of information. He can confirm that Narses' ghouls make regular sweeps through the city. They are relentless in their pursuit of anyone or anything out of the ordinary, ensuring that the prince is always well informed about happenings in his city.

Although he did not see Roland killed, Nicolo did see something unusual at the Mouzakios warehouse: A mortal entered and left the building. Nicolo doesn't know who the mortal is, although he has seen him on several occasions wandering the streets at night.

The mortal he saw was Rodrigue de Navarre on a late-night reconnaissance mission. Nicolo can describe Rodrigue's physical appearance for the characters, should they wish to find him. He explains that Rodrigue doesn't seem to be a crusader. He is apparently in Venice for other reasons. Nicolo believes him to be seeking Cainites, but he cannot prove it.

If asked about Assamites, Nicolo is more uncertain. As he stated before, he's seen at least one Saracen Cainite beside those in Khadijah's entourage. (This is Ziyad al-Djahiz, although Nicolo has no way of knowing that.) He's seen the Saracen in several locales — all of them near the water.

Narses

Speaking with Narses proves difficult, since he wishes to remain aloof from the investigation. However, he does grant a short audience. The prince admits that he believes that the characters are innocent. He feels that an outside agency — perhaps from North Africa, he suggests — is responsible for Roland's death. He points to the bloodroot as proof of his contention.

Narses also admits that he uses ghouls to keep abreast of happenings in Venice. As prince, he needs to remain informed. He bristles at any suggestion that this is somehow unusual, saying that it is practices such as this that have convinced him of the characters' innocence. After all, what sort of prince would he be without ghoul spies?

Other Interviews

The coterie may wish to interview other Cainites and the servants. Allow the characters to do so, but keep a few facts in mind. First, no one saw Roland after he left the council chambers on the night he was murdered — except Rodrigue and Ziyad. Second, every Cainite has a good alibi for her whereabouts that night, for which others vouch. Third, there is a general consensus that it is very unusual to see Lanzo and Tommaso cooperate in anything.

SCENE EIGHT: RODRIGUE DE NAVARRE

To run this scene, the characters must learn that a mortal entered the Mouzakios warehouse on the night of Roland's murder. This person is Rodrigue de Navarre. Using Nicolo's description and a successful Manipulation + Investigation roll (difficulty 7), they should have no trouble locating him.

Rodrigue is unknown to most Cainites in Venice. Only Cainite Heretics from France or Iberia might have some inkling of his identity. He rents a small series of rooms in a boarding house, which he shares with two other mortals: Aignen le Libraire and Jean de Chanevière. Like himself, they have followed the trail of the Cainite Heresy to Venice, hoping to strike a blow against "the darkness."

EYEWITNESS

Rodrigue has information about Roland's death that no one else possesses. Consequently, the characters need to acquire it. Arranging to meet Rodrigue requires finesse and careful preparation. Although he has not yet encountered a genuine Cainite, he has gathered enough information that he could prove dangerous.

The most obvious solutions are the use of Disciplines (such as Auspex, Dominate or even Presence) to wrest information from him. Other options include disguises (or Obfuscate) to mask the characters' true identities. Storytellers should remember that Rodrigue, though mortal, has a strong will. He is not fooled easily — especially by strangers asking probing questions about his nocturnal activities.

Nevertheless, it is possible to glean information about Roland's Final Death. Rodrigue explains that he came to Venice to gain entrance to the Monastery of St. Pantaleimon. He believes that dark forces are at work there, forces that seek to turn the crusade to their evil will. He explores the city by night, sometimes with his companions, sometimes alone.

On the night of Roland's death, he heard an unusual sound — a dull thud — coming from the Mouzakios warehouse. He entered through a window and saw a man doubled over in pain. He also saw what he thought was another figure moving away quickly in the shadows. Rodrigue could not pursue the other figure, because he was concerned about the wounded man. That man was Roland.

What Rodrigue saw horrified and amazed him. The man in pain was no man at all but a creature of night. Rodrigue says that he knows this because black ash poured of the creature's orifices. Once the creature was dead, he approached it and examined the body.



VENETIAN NIGHTS

On the body, he found an ornate leather belt and scabbard, which he removed. Sheathed in the scabbard was a strangely curved dagger, which he shows to the characters if they ask. The dagger bears unusual markings on the blade. A successful Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7) roll allows the characters to recognize it as a ritual dagger honoring Set. If no characters possess sufficient skills to recognize it, there are numerous local Cainites to whom they could turn for assistance, including Guilelmo—who'll be more than happy to reveal this information. Rodrigue also took two tokens of his discovery—fingers he snapped from the monster's brittle corpse. He shows those to the characters as well.

Beyond this, Rodrigue knows nothing else. If he remains convinced of the characters' sincerity (that is, if their ruse continues to work), he offers to share his knowledge of the creatures of the night with them. He needs additional help if the battle against the darkness is to be successful. At present, Rodrigue knows only snippets about Cainites. He is not currently a genuine threat to them, but that will change.

SCENE NINE: THE MADNESS OF GAUTHIER DE DAMPIERE

This optional scene may be inserted whenever the Storyteller deems it appropriate. Whether the scene is used or not, the characters should learn of Gauthier's existence—if only to lay the groundwork for his reappearance later in *Bitter Crusade*.

MOB RULE

The coterie encounters a large crowd of mortals encircling a wild-eyed knight. The knight is Gauthier, and he exhorts the crowd (in broken Italian) to "recognize the evil in your midst." His tirade lasts several minutes, during which time he tells the crowd, "The enemies of God must be brought low, just as Judas Machabeus did to the Greeks." If the characters have already met Rodrigue, they notice him observing Gauthier from a discreet distance.

Gauthier mesmerizes the crowd. He urges the crowd to "go forth and destroy evil wherever you find it." The mob does so immediately in whatever fashion the Storyteller sees fit. The people may turn on innocent foreigners in Venice, an unfortunate Cainite or even the coterie. Whatever the case, this scene should drive home the potential power—and madness—of faith (and True Faith) unleashed.

ACT THREE: YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

This act concludes the story, as the characters piece together the information that they have gathered and come face to face with their enemies. This act represents a true climax. The tension and paranoia that have been building

since the coterie arrived in Venice finally explodes into violence—with repercussions that last for years to come.

SCENE TEN: TWO-HEADED SERPENT

Once the characters have obtained the Setite dagger from Rodrigue (or at least learned of its existence), they will likely wish to confront either Lanzo or Aimery with this information. Lanzo still does not wish to speak with them. If they go to Aimery's resting place to speak with him, they'll be startled by the sounds of combat from within.

Entering, the coterie catches a fleeting glimpse of Aimery jumping out a window, followed by a dark-robed figure armed with a sword. The dark-robed figure is Ziyad al-Djahiz who has come to eliminate the other Setite agent in Venice. The room itself is a shambles, filled with broken furniture and shattered masonry. If the characters look out the window, they'll see Aimery disappear down the city's cobblestone streets. His mysterious pursuer is right behind him.

TO CATCH A SNAKE

More than likely, the characters wish to follow Aimery and his assailant. In that case, the Storyteller should prepare a rollicking chase through the streets of Venice at night. This sequence is extremely cinematic in nature. Consequently, use the environment to the fullest. Dark alleyways, narrow streets, vertiginous rooftops and canals—you can't forget the canals—all form the landscape with which the coterie must contend as they follow these two Cainites.

As the chase continues through the city, allow players occasional Perception + Alertness rolls. If successful, their characters catch a glimpse of someone paralleling their movements. They eventually recognize that this person is neither Aimery nor Ziyad, but someone entirely different. In fact, it is Fatima al-Faqadi, who has decided to observe her partner from a distance as he attempts to eliminate Aimery once and for all.

MY ENEMY, MY ALLY

In time, the coterie catches up with Aimery, in which case he has no choice but to face them. He does not surrender to them. Instead, he asks them to help him against Ziyad. Aimery explains that his attacker is an Assamite, possibly the same one who killed Roland. He appeals to the characters' Christian solidarity (if appropriate) to defend him against the "Saracen killer."

Shortly thereafter, Ziyad appears. He uses his abilities to the utmost as he attempt to kill Aimery. The Storyteller should use Ziyad wisely. Emphasize his frightening Assamite fighting abilities, but do not overshadow the coterie. This fight should not degenerate into a set piece between two Storyteller characters, with the coterie watching on the sidelines. This is the climax of *Venetian Nights* and they should take part in it. Remember to make the most of Disciplines like Celerity, Fortitude, and Potence, which

have immediate uses in combat. Both Aimery and Ziyad are tough opponents, and the characters should recognize that.

This scene can unfold in several ways. If the characters join Aimery and defeat Ziyad, the Setite thanks them profusely for their aid. If confronted with evidence that Roland was a Setite, Aimery feigns surprise, hoping to fool the coterie. Should this tactic succeed, he vows to return to Lanzo and clear their good names. Aimery then continues his work for the Followers of Set, despite the failure of his schemes in Venice. If the characters don't fall for his ruse, he attempts to escape rather than fight. However, if faced with no other option, Aimery fights fiercely — and to the death.

On the other hand, if the coterie joins Ziyad and defeats Aimery, the Assamite acknowledges the characters' abilities, praising them as worthy opponents. He then draws his weapons and attacks them as well — for his mission requires that there be no witnesses. Like Aimery, Ziyad fights fiercely and to the death. He uses both his natural abilities and Disciplines to best the characters. Ziyad's blades are coated with bloodroot poison. Players of characters wounded by the blades must make a Stamina + Fortitude roll (difficulty 5) or the vampires suffer two points of aggravated damage per hit.

Any character who takes the time to look (and whose player makes a successful Perception + Alertness roll) notices that the melee is watched from the rooftop by the same shadowy figure they may have seen before — Fatima al-Faqadi. She does not enter the combat, even should Ziyad fall before the characters. If he is defeated, Fatima simply shakes her head in sadness and disappears into the night.

SCENE ELEVEN: AND THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

This scene wraps up *Venetian Nights*, as the characters present evidence of their innocence to Narses. If both Aimery and Ziyad have been defeated, the coterie has more than enough proof that it was an Assamite who murdered Roland. Moreover, they can show that the Setites had infiltrated Clan Ventrue in an attempt to better their own position in Egypt. This evidence throws the Cainites into uproar, but Guilelmo silences the assembly, as Narses pronounces the characters innocent of the charges against them. They are now free to go.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

After Narses pronounces his verdict, Lanzo von Sachsen approaches the characters. As a man of honor, he apologizes for his error in judgment. He hopes that, despite everything that has transpired, they will still support the Ventrue's position to attack Egypt. Tommaso Brexiano overhears this apology and mocks Lanzo. He asks how anyone could still

consider Egypt a fitting destination for the crusade. To do so plays into the hands of the Setites. Hasn't Lanzo learned anything? The bickering of previous nights begins anew, with every faction assuming its pre-murder footing.

As the characters ponder this situation, Guilelmo Aliprando approaches them and asks if they would come with him. He ushers them into a small side room, where Narses sits in a simple wooden chair. He smiles at the characters while Guilelmo closes the door on the chaotic assembly.

Narses explains that the arguments outside do not matter. The mortals have already decided the crusade's destination: Dalmatia. The crusaders cannot pay their debt to the Venetians, so they have agreed to settle "a small problem" for them, as a way to set matters right. If the Cainites wish to have any influence in this crusade, they must follow in the mortals' wake, not the other way around.

Smiling eerily again, the prince explains that these times are troubled. The old ways are crumbling, and a new world is waiting to be born. If Cainites are not to be swept away by it, they must be prepared. To that end, he asks the characters if they would serve as his eyes and ears on the crusade. He needs self-reliant, clever agents — people like the characters. They need not do anything more than provide information to him: letters and other messages. If he requires more, he will ask for it when the time comes.

Narses is prepared to offer the coterie whatever assistance he can. He has some influence among the Heretics of Eastern Europe. If they need it, he can send letters of introduction to smooth their passage through the region. He may offer other incentives as well, at your leisure. Whatever these incentives are, emphasize that dealing with Narses is a bargain with the Devil. There will be a price to pay — if not now, then later.

EPILOGUE

The crusading host sets sail in late August 1202 for the Dalmatian coast to do the bidding of the Venetians. Among them are many Cainites, most in a state of disbelief at their impotence. Mortals set the agenda for this crusade, and all the weeks of Cainite arguing were for naught. Perhaps Narses is right. Perhaps this is the beginning of a new age in which Cainites no longer control the destiny of Europe.

Most of the delegates return home to their clans. Only Lanzo von Sachsen accompanies the crusaders, feeling that he cannot abandon them, even if he believes their destination to be foolish. Khadijah Saadeh returns to Muslim lands, hoping that she has had some positive impact upon the Christians. Lucita makes her way back to Spain where Fatima also journeys. Their role in this drama is done, but the coterie's is just beginning.





Chapter Two: Fiendish Winter

None of you will bid the winter come
To thrust his icy fingers in my marrow
Nor let my kingdom's rivers take the
course

Through my burned bosom; nor
entreat the north

To make his bleak winds kiss my
parched lips

And comfort me with cold

—William Shakespeare, *King John*

INTRODUCTION

You can choose your friends, but you're stuck with your family for the rest of your life. If you're especially unlucky, you're stuck for the rest of your unlife.

The shackles of familial relations carry with them the tenets of loyalty, obligation and duty. **Fiendish Winter** tests the strength of these shackles, examining just how far they can be stretched before snapping. The story starts during the winter of 1202 in the city of Zara, which is occupied by the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade. There the coterie discovers a Tzimisce attempting to sabotage the crusade at the behest of her sire and father, using methods that threaten to expose the existence of Cainites to a large assembly of Christian holy warriors.

Charged with stopping these machinations before the crusaders recognize the darkness amongst them, the coterie travels to the sire's land hold in Transylvania to either reason with or destroy him. They soon become embroiled in Transylvanian politics, learning that a Carpathian Fiend plans to obliterate the land hold and all within. The lord offers to rescind his campaign of terror in Zara if they help him hold out against the *voivode*. They must use their wits to ensure that the crusaders don't turn their wrath upon all of Cainite society.

THEME

Fiendish Winter weaves together three central themes: family, destruction and rebirth. The ties of family are those that bind, often directing our lives in ways that we would never have imagined. This assertion is no less valid among vampires, for the notion of generation, the importance of blood and the relationship of the sire and childe are bound to the concept. The clan itself is more of an extended family to a Cainite than a fraternal order. Family drives the intrigues of the Transylvanian lord at the center of this tale.

Destruction is also key to this story. Cainites are inherently creatures of death, for they must feed upon human blood to survive. Yet they fear the Final Death, the abject obliteration of their very existence, nearly as much as they fear the utter consumption of their personalities by the Beast. Destruction serves as a bookend to **Fiendish Winter**, from the Cainite devastation of the Transylvanian land hold to the mortals' eventual annihilation of Zara. The capacity for destruction rests within everyone, be they alive or undead.

Rebirth is familiar to all who have undergone the Embrace. Thrust from the predictable comforts and fears of mortal life into the harsh, predatory darkness of the night, Cainites are well aware of what they leave behind. Birth is painful, messy and frightening; rebirth is no easier, as one can never forget the past now lost. The dealings of Myca Vykos, while presently innocuous, lay the groundwork for Michael of Constantinople's Dream to continue and the subsequent creation of the Sabbat. The survivors of the attacks on the land hold and Zara serve as an epilogue to the destruction of those cities.

MOOD

Fiendish Winter's mood foreshadows inevitable destruction on a massive scale. The characters should always have the BITTER CRUSADE

sense of impending, inexorable conflict. While in Zara, they have the constant sensation that their immediate surroundings could explode into horrific violence at any moment. The kettle is frothing, and any variety of catalysts could set it to boil over. From the righteous frustration of the crusaders to the impotent anger of the local population, Zara is a bonfire looking for a torch.

Once in the land hold of Toth, the situation remains tense. Initial dealings with the *boyar* are strained and confusing, leading to the sudden appearance of a great enemy promising their destruction. After brokering a hasty truce with the *boyar*, the characters see just what the angry *voivode* can provide to fulfill his promise. Horrific violence is all around, and the coterie must do what it can to survive. The characters' return to find Zara ransacked echoes the conflict they've left in Toth on a much larger scale. This reminder of the crusaders' unpredictable and uncontrollable nature serves as somber foreshadowing for the events of **Dying Embers**.

BACKGROUND

As is often the case with family dramas, the events in **Fiendish Winter** stem from a rich wellspring of hatreds and affections. The stories of the Tzimisce clan and the mortal Toth family intertwine like poisoned vines, each trying to choke the other. In the end, the coterie must know which weed to cut.

STORM FRONT

Zubor, childe of Gesu, known and respected amongst Constantinople's Obertus Tzimisce, returned to his homeland of Transylvania in 1147, charged by Gesu himself with the construction of an Obertus monastery on Transylvanian soil. The bulk of the Second Crusade's arrival in Constantinople served as instigation, reinforcing Gesu's desire to strengthen his ties with the old country should mortals turn their attention upon Cainite matters. Zubor seemed the perfect candidate, for his knowledge of the land from his mortal life would serve him well, while his skills in diplomacy were hoped to win over the Old Country Tzimisce.

Voivode Koban, childe of Noritz, known and feared by mortal and Cainite Transylvanians alike, began his feud with Zubor in the winter of 1149. Zubor sent his own childe to speak with Koban, whose lands existed a handful of miles to the east of the newly built monastery. A package arrived at the steps of the monastery one week later, containing the pressed and cleaned flesh of his childe with writing upon the skin. The courteous letter asserted Koban's domain over the region and asked Zubor to travel to Koban's land within one month for his rightful execution, or else consider the missive a formal declaration of war. For the next decade Koban toyed with Zubor, sending a trivial amount of revenants and *szlachta* war ghouls to make things difficult for his hapless neighbor.

Zubor's constant requests for reinforcements from Byzantium eventually grew wearying to his fellow Obertus. His peers considered the endeavor a failure, and Gesu authorized his ally Baron Thomas Feroux in the fall of 1162 to send out a pack of Gangrel to destroy Koban and Zubor, in that order. The pack wounded Koban severely, killing many revenants and childer before it was stopped. Shocked and incensed to discover that the

Obertus mouse had grown fangs, Koban sent a large force to burn the monastery to the ground.

Zubor flew west at the first sign of trouble. Fearing that his return to Constantinople would lead to severe censure or Final Death, he sought sanctuary where he could regroup and plan his next move. His prayers were answered when he stumbled across the lands of Bodor Toth, a noble with a minor holding in the western fringes of the Transylvanian Alps. Through guile, he secured a private audience with Bodor where he Embraced the hapless boyar.

Even as Zubor's blood began its flow through Bodor's veins, a guard rapped at the door, shouting that a dozen armed riders were approaching the town of Toth. Zubor rushed to the window and recognized the approaching riders as Koban's men. His plans of using the boyar as a puppet shattered. He panicked and fled; the newly Embraced Bodor Toth was no longer part of his plans. Zubor managed to evade Koban's men for another week before they captured him and brought him back to Koban.

The Transylvanian voivode did his best to show Zubor exactly why the rage of elder Fiends is so feared among Cainites. After a full month of perpetual torture, Koban informed Zubor that it was time to experience the Final Death. Zubor's response was to curse Koban elaborately, prophesizing that the Transylvanian Fiend would die by Zubor's own blood. Although he was rattled, Koban ritually slaughtered Zubor and burned his remains to ashes. Regardless, the seeds of fear were planted, and Zubor's final prophecy weighed heavily on Koban's mind.

ORPHANED

Unbeknownst to Koban, Zubor's progeny was just beginning to comprehend his new existence. He picked up the basics of vampirism quickly, feigning illness to his family and advisors until he knew what had happened. Although he was initially horrified, his affliction soon became fascinating. Nevertheless, his love for his family led Bodor to call his children before him and explain his situation. He thought he was stricken with some sort of curse, and he feared that he would not last much longer.

Although his eldest daughter Remenyke was unable to contain her horror, the rest of his children were affected in their own ways. His eldest son, Dévald, sought what was best for Toth,

offering to bear the burden of leadership until his father was no longer afflicted. Middle son, Kilián, offered to scour the ends of the earth for knowledge of what had befallen his father, while daughter Angyalka wished to consult with a wise woman in Toth to find a cure. The young twins, son Farkas and daughter Erzebet, swore to remain by their father's side. As they wished, so it was.

Time passed, and the peasantry of Toth grew concerned for their lord, for it seemed that Dévald had taken on much of the responsibility of rulership while Bodor remained confined to his sickbed. This misperception suited Bodor fine and allowed him to experiment with his new body and discover the secrets buried within his blood. Devoid of a sire to watch over him, he fell into a terrible frenzy twice before recognizing the limitation of his new existence. The servants' bodies were buried far from the land hold, and those who pondered their fate were led to believe that they had fled for greener lands.

FAMILY MATTERS

Kilián returned in 1165 with a woman named Lempi Mannisenmaki, an opportunistic Tremere who had taken him as a ghoul. Hearing tales of a lord with a small keep, she thought it simple to waltz into Toth and capture it single-handedly. Unfortunately, she underestimated Bodor's strength and was overpowered. Bodor proceeded to interrogate her about the secrets of blood, the workings of Cainite society and the limits of the Cainite form. Although Bodor thought it best to kill her when he had learned all he could, he feared that Kilián's addiction to the taste of her blood could no longer be sated if she died. Kilián initially sought to free the Tremere and attack his father, so Bodor had him chained up in the dungeon. Once Bodor discovered the secrets of the blood oath, he bound and unchained his son, confident that the conflicting passions would keep Kilián from making trouble. Convinced of his son's docility, he explored the secrets

of crafting flesh using Lempi as a living canvas and keeping her alive with the occasional trickle of his own blood.

The Curse of Caine slowly but surely perverted Bodor's love for his children, for his affections grew cloying and overprotective with the passage of time. Through the cracked lens of immortality, his feelings for them distorted, magnifying in some instances and diminishing in others. He offered the gift of the Embrace to each of them so that they, too, could live forever. Only the twins accepted his offer, and Remenyke's terror caused her to flee Toth and the creature that her father had become. Although Bodor

FIENDISH WINTER



mourned her departure, he consoled himself with the Embrace of Farkas and Erzebet. Farkas set out at the behest of his father to locate more of their kind. His travels took him through Zara where he fell in with the Obertus Tzimisce and committed to his studies, sending information to his father secretly in Transylvania. He never realized his familial connection to these Byzantine vampires. Erzebet remained in Toth, hoping to learn from her father.

Bodor's interest in mortal affairs dwindled with time, and he conspired to fake his own death so that Dévald could control the land hold. All of Toth mourned the passing of their boyar in late 1171, and Dévald publicly accepted the mantle last worn by his father. Meanwhile Bodor crafted his body into that of a Moor, and he was introduced a few weeks later as "Magib," an alchemist with whom the elder Toth had held a long correspondence. Dévald worried that his father would try to rule through him, but he found that Magib wished only to lock himself in his tower and experiment.

A CHILDE'S DEMISE

The Fourth Crusade arrives in Zara three decades later. Gauthier de Dampiere and his men stumble upon the Obertus monastery during the crusaders' sack of the city. They destroy the monastery and all within, burning mortal and Cainite alike.

Bodor feels his son and childe Farkas die as the blood oath severs. In his anger, he blames Gauthier (his men by extension) and, ultimately, the entirety of the *militia Christi* for the death of his son. Under Erzebet's direction, he organizes a small force of men under her command and sends them to Zara to implement a campaign of terror and revenge. Dévald's previously unfounded fears surface once again. He worries that Bodor will attempt to regain control of Toth and turn him into a puppet. However, he accedes to Bodor's wishes out of love for his father and sorrow over Farkas' death.

Erzebet and her men rush to Zara before the onset of winter can delay their journey. After assessing the attitudes of the crusaders and the townsfolk, she sets her plans in motion by hitting the pilgrims where they hurt most: their stomachs. They work quickly to poison wells and destroy stores of food.

The prospect of rationed food through the winter was a sore subject before Erzebet arrived, and now it threatens to cause Zara to boil over. The local vampiric prince, a Malkavian named Gari, is terrified. He fears that the arrival of the crusade and the recent attacks are messages directed at him, and he would not be surprised to find Cainite involvement in the matter. He sees enemies wherever he looks, but he also keeps an eye out for potential allies.

Meanwhile, trouble brews in Transylvania. Remenyke spent most of 20 years running from the evil that befell her father. Unfortunately, she knew just enough about vampirism to get into trouble. Making the wrong comments in the wrong place was enough to drop her into Koban's lap. Her story came to light, along with Zubor's Embrace of her father. Koban drew as much information out of her as he could about her father, his holding and his defenses before she slipped away. Even now, he commits forces to the destruction of Zubor's progeny, preparing to wage a war of attrition against the Transylvanian lord.

THE PLOT

Fiendish Winter comprises two acts and takes the characters from Dalmatia to Transylvania through the course of both.

Act One: Frost on the Vine introduces the characters to the trouble stirring in Zara and has Prince Gari entreat them to put an end to the attacks on the city's food stores. After examining the scene of a fresh attack, they determine that the culprit is a Cainite. Following various leads exposes a Tzimisce whom the characters capture and bring before Gari. They learn that she's trying to avenge her brother's death at the hands of the crusaders, and that she heads the first force of many to arrive from the Transylvanian land hold of Toth. Gari implores the coterie to travel to Toth and negotiate for peace before the crusaders tear Zara to pieces. The Byzantine Fiend Myca Vykos accompanies them to help their negotiations.

Act Two: Frostbite follows the coterie's travels to Toth and its dealings with the populace and Koban. The characters meet the mortal boyar of Toth and begin negotiations for the cessation of attacks on Zara. While they await the decision of the boyar, a minion of rival Voivode Koban delivers his proclamation of a trial by war. The coterie uncovers Bodor Toth's disguise as Magib and that he is responsible for the attempted retribution on the crusaders in Zara. A hasty deal is brokered in which Bodor agrees to suspend his campaign of terror if the characters assist in defending Toth from Koban's onslaught. They participate in a

WE DON'T LIKE YOUR KINE AROUND HERE

Although much of the plot centers on the Transylvanian Tzimisce, it's entirely possible to include Tremere characters in **Fiendish Winter**. The Toth family is aware of many of the preconceptions that litter Cainite society, yet only in the most detached of manners. Bodor's connection to vampirism is through his own self-discovery. With no tutor to reinforce age-old traditions and the inherent stereotypes that follow, he can acknowledge that Tzimisce hate Tremere without following through himself. He may have some concerns regarding members of Lempi's clan snooping about his home and discovering her, but he won't go out of his way to dislike such characters any more than he already does.

Even Myca Vykos' presence doesn't present much of an obstacle. Although he is Tzimisce, he's smart enough to recognize that the characters are more useful to him as pawns than as rivals. The Tzimisce-Tremere war doesn't rage as strongly among the Obertus as among the Carpathian Fiends, so Vykos is far less homicidal toward Usurpers than some players might expect. That doesn't mean he would trust a Tremere — but there are few people Vykos *does* trust.

Voivode Koban may have a different view on Tremere characters, but since he is the villain of the story, such is to be expected.

war council before Koban's force arrives, helping plan the land hold's defense. Characters so inclined can become a part of the physical preparations for Koban's arrival. Soon, the force makes camp and tests the land hold's defenses in minor raids. Koban then authorizes the full onslaught of his forces. The survival of Toth remains dependent on the coterie's wits and actions.

SETTING

From the Dalmatian coast to the Transylvanian Alps, **Fiendish Winter** covers much ground. The climate only emphasizes the importance of these travels. The story begins amidst civilization and one of Zara's famously mild winters. The characters leave these conditions behind them in their trek to Toth and face the harsh onset of winter. The further they travel, the worse the weather becomes. Their arrival in the small pocket of civilization that is Toth finds them amidst daily blizzards.

For more information on these towns, see Zara's description in the introduction (p. 12) and Toth's synopsis at the beginning of act two (p. 44).

HOW TO INCLUDE THE CHARACTERS

Fiendish Winter assumes that the characters are trailing the crusade and have followed it to Zara. Characters can come into the

picture just as easily before **Fiendish Winter** begins if the Storyteller wants them to experience the siege of Zara. Simply date their arrival to early November instead of the latter half of December as written. If they travel with the crusaders, allow them to settle into Zarayan life before Gari begins his search for Cainites.

It is also possible to run **Fiendish Winter** as a stand-alone story. Perhaps some business requires the coterie's presence in Zara at the most unfortunate of times, allowing them to experience the crusade from the opposite side in the fall of 1202. They must endure the two-week siege and sack of the city, the rioting of the crusaders, and then learn how to survive under Venetian authority.

AGENDAS

Nearly everybody in **Fiendish Winter** has his own plans, and with a little work, you can ensure that each one goes awry. The following are short summaries of groups the coterie can encounter and a brief description of their goals.

- **Crusaders:** The majority of the crusaders merely want to get through this winter at Zara so they can proceed on to the Holy Land. Many of the Venetian leaders are concerned that Zara will rebel immediately when they leave, and they are instituting various measures to keep the city beneath their thumb after their planned spring departure. If Rodrigue and Gauthier survived **Venetian Nights**, they continue their search for evil and form a tentative alliance to share their individual findings.



J. Cobb '01

FIENDISH WINTER

• **Dalmatians:** Gari wants the crusaders' heads mounted on pikes atop Zara's walls and the Venetians' mouths stuffed with their own severed genitalia. Recognizing this outcome as unlikely, he settles for working toward their departure in the spring with as little damage to Zara as possible. He sees the recent attacks on the food stores as a deliberate attempt to stir up trouble and incite further violence. His immediate goal is to find whoever is doing this and stop them before the events of early November are reprised. He has no aspiration to be a prince over rubble.

• **The Toth Brood:** Bodor desires vengeance for the death of his youngest son. His skewed rage causes him to blame the entire crusading host. Dévald wishes to honor his father's requests, but he fears that he will see them through at the expense of Toth itself. He tries to temper his father's zeal with practicality, but he is having a harder and harder time restraining Bodor's desire for revenge. Kilián searches for a way to end his reliance upon Lempi so that he can flee Toth. After nearly four decades in Toth, he'll do just about anything to escape. Erzebet wants nothing more than her father's love and attention. The direction she adds to her family's revenge would come apart in an instant if she felt that Bodor didn't want it.

• **Carpathian Fiends:** Voivode Koban wants nothing less than the utter destruction of Zubor's progeny. In order to make this desire a reality, he plans to slay Bodor, Bodor's offspring and everything in Toth that lives. He refuses to allow the Obertus upstart to divert him from his path to further power and enlightenment.

• **Obertus Fiends:** Myca Vykos is weary of his sire Symeon's restrained feud with his brother, Gesu. For nearly a decade, he has watched his master descend into a dark depression notable only for long periods of inaction. Because Symeon is Gesu's child, Vykos has rationalized that the artificial pull of the blood oath prevents Symeon from doing what he wishes to do: betray his brother. Therefore, Vykos has resolved to do what his master cannot, and he is currently searching for a way to destroy Gesu. However, he cannot let Symeon know of his plans. He currently seeks the support of the Carpathian Fiends before he makes his next move.

ACT ONE: FROST ON THE VINE

The Fourth Crusade is finally underway, and the seams are already beginning to show. The *militia Christi* isn't exactly the well-oiled machine that its leaders hoped it would be, for an undisciplined army with little central control proves itself difficult to manage. General animosity between the Venetians and the Franks had already sparked a riot in the final week of November that led to open fighting in the streets. It took most of the evening for the barons to calm their troops, and although the casualties were few, the damage was already done.

Zara remains in a state of restrained dread. The citizenry is passing from the state of shock that came with the fall of the city to the sullen acceptance of a conquered people. Knowledge that the Venetians bested them fills them with rage, which is held in

check solely by the preemptive brutality of their captors. How did the crusaders, charged by the pope himself with furthering the reach of Christendom, come to assault a Christian city, they wonder. Why did these crusaders raid the holy places, taking the most valuable of the ornaments as trophies? What caused them to burn the Byzantine brothers' monastery to ash and powder, putting all within to the torch? These questions linger in the air like a shriek in the dead of night, yet for all their questions, many Zarayans remain incapable of doing anything more than pulling the sheets over their heads and praying that it's all a terrible dream.

Zarayan frustration does nothing to set the crusaders at ease. Although the Venetian leadership is pleased with the emasculation of their rivals, many who took the cross now question the past month's events. Innocent III's condemnation of their attack leads many to believe that they are excommunicated and that the entire purpose of their journey is for naught. The Venetians refuse to accept this fate without a formal papal bull, but the Franks fear for their souls. Compounding this unease is the Frankish debt still unpaid to Venice and the sight of Zara's spoils loaded onto Venetian ships, which leaves many Crusaders with the sense that they have been used and swindled. The riots of late November still linger in recent memory.

The doubling of the city's population at the onset of the winter months is deleterious to everyone's morale. The rationing of stored goods affects the Zarayans more than the crusaders, for the best food first goes to the invaders before trickling down to the town's own citizens. This arrangement would not be so problematic if the year's crops hadn't come up so short, but even the normally abundant fish aren't biting as much as they usually do. The recent attacks on the food stores have thrown this delicate balance into disarray. With the threat of riots becoming very real, the fragile peace brokered by the crusade's leadership could shatter at any moment.

SCENE ONE: STREET EMPLOYMENT

Gari, the Mad Prince of Zara, leaves standing orders with his small gang of street urchins to seek out any Cainites in the city. He remains less than impressed with the crusaders' response to the events surrounding the attacks on the food. Rather than have their incompetence spawn further destruction to his city, he plans to take matters into his own hands. He wants to send those of his kind to find out who is frightening the mortals so that he can put a stop to it. Unfortunately, the handful of Gari's Cainite subjects fled before the crusade's arrival, and the only other Cainites in the city he knew of were the ones residing within the Obertus monastery. Now that all are dead, Gari is a prince with only a few ghoul subjects.

Rightly assuming that Cainites have followed the crusade much in the same way that carrion crows trail any army, he assigns his street urchins to look for signs of Cainites — drained corpses, supernatural occurrences and suspiciously nocturnal out-of-towners within general proximity of one another. He also uses ghoul dogs to seek out any vampires in the city directly. Rather than rolling dice to see whether or not the coterie is found,

simply assume that they are discovered within a day of their arrival. Should any one of the characters venture out, offhandedly mention a lone dog amidst a group of Zarayans as foreshadowing.

Later that night, they are approached by four of Gari's gang who bring a warning: The prince of Zara has requested their presence within two night's time. Should they decline his invitation, they are not welcome to stay in his domain. The characters receive directions to a small tavern in the harbor district, and they are told to go there within two nights. The goons refuse to say anything more, divulging only the message that they were entrusted to deliver.

Should they follow through and meet Gari's men in the tavern, the characters are led to the prince. Their arrival finds Gari brooding in his "throne room" (i.e., the basement of a butchery near the port). The stench of innards and muscle is omnipresent until they reach the storage area, where the smell of salted meat is nearly overpowering. Carcasses dangle from a network of wooden slats overhead. Only careful scrutiny reveals that none of them are human. Toward the rear of the large room is an area that serves as Gari's court; no corpses dangle there. Gari sits on a large wooden chair flanked by four armed ghouls. Pushed back against the walls are small stumps for his gang to sit on when observing an audience.

Gari initially questions the coterie's business in Zara, their intentions toward the city, their thoughts on the invaders, their origins and their history of working together, among other things. He asks one or two questions of each character, preferring not to focus on one central spokesperson. All the while, he observes them with both mortal and vampiric senses. If he notices a lie, he does not give any indication of it.

After Gari is satisfied that he understands their dynamic, he tells them of the recent attacks on the mortal's food supply and of the feargripping the city. He speaks of the Obertus monastery's destruction at the hands of Gauthier de Dampiere and the French knight's ongoing search for Cainites. Finally, he brings up the thousands of wintering crusaders, the hundreds of siege weapons still present in the harbor, the Venetians' dislike of the local populace and the destruction they've already caused.

That said, Gari asks for their help in discovering who is behind the destruction of the food stores. He maintains that with the crusaders looking for a culprit, it's only a matter of time before they begin a witch-hunt and stumble across evidence of Cainite existence. Should this army of Christ — sanctioned by the pope himself — find actual evidence of Cainites, the predator is entirely too likely to become prey.

This is mostly rhetoric that Gari expounds in order to prey upon their fears. He simply wants to keep his city from being torn to pieces before the crusaders depart. Should the coterie be less than impressed with his exhortations, he tries to ascertain if their interests coincide with that of the crusade. If he thinks they are in Zara to see the crusade through, he points out how the destruction of foodstuff threatens their own agenda. After all, an underfed army is a weakened army, and a weakened army is easily broken.

Failing this, he is willing to bargain. He considers the satisfactory completion of this task as a personal favor to be

repaid. If they press for more corporeal rewards, he offers to pay them a significant amount of money by July of 1203 (allowing him time to profit from smuggling efforts in the spring). He's willing to offer any other number of reasonable deals, but if he and the coterie can't reconcile then he asks that the characters depart the city within one week.

SCENE TWO: DEVILISH PLOT

Once the characters accept his proposal, Gari agrees to provide a reasonable amount of assistance in helping them find the unknown assailants. For the duration of their search, the coterie has access to his network of thieves and monetary backing, but he must authorize all reimbursement of funds. He's not going to let the players abuse his coin. The characters effectively have Contacts 3 and Resources 3 through the end of the act or until Gari sees fit to revoke them.

The search for the group behind these acts of terror should initially seem quite daunting. The characters must discover an unknown culprit within an unfamiliar city, taking care to avoid the attentions of a conquering army that takes its frustrations out on the local populace. They need to take care in their search, but it is entirely possible to fulfill their goals through discretion and persistence.

The most obvious route is to look into the previous attacks. Although most of what they hear is opinion and ill-informed speculation, asking around reveals the following information:

- Two buildings used as grain stores just outside the city were set aflame. The first person to arrive was a farmer's daughter who swears that she saw at least five figures running away from the fire.
- Three wells generally used to provide water for livestock were deemed poisoned when the animals that drank from them died overnight without any obvious marks on their bodies. Successful Intelligence + Herbalism, Survival, Medicine or Science rolls show that the wells are not, in fact, poisoned. Although most of the affected corpses have been burned, one particularly lazy farmer hasn't gotten around to destroying his dead animals. Successful Intelligence + Medicine or Science rolls show, upon dissection, that a wall of flesh has closed off the breathing passages of each animal near the base of its throat.
- A merchant in the southern end of the city bought eggs from a farmer, only to discover that some contained dead chicks with scaly skin and blood-red eyes. A mob formed and descended upon the farmer's lands, burning his property, killing his livestock, butchering his family and crucifying him. The merchant still has one of the eggs. Examination reveals more indications of the unnatural: the chick has three hearts and no stomach, among other abnormalities.

Feel free to invent additional attacks if it helps speed the investigation. Note that deformations of the livestock could easily seem like the byproduct of a curse or an infernal manifestation, even to a character with Vicissitude. Firsthand, fairly extensive experience with fleshcrafting is required to recognize these strange happenings as the consequence of Vicissitude, as the manipulations to the animals are quite subtle.

As to who is behind the attacks, opinions vary wildly. Some suspect a faction of crusaders, while others suspect rebel forces backed by the Hungarian king. Many are quick to blame the Bogomil Heresy, the perpetual scapegoats of the region. Among the rumors, the coterie can find the occasional lead:

- Three days ago, a local man named Gast was bragging drunkenly in a bar near the harbor that he was "really sticking it to the Franks" and that "the witch will starve 'em out." The next morning, he was found dead in the harbor, his heart removed from this chest and stuffed into his mouth. The wounds indicate that it was torn from his chest with bare hands rather than cut with a blade. Asking around reveals Gast to be a tough-for-hire, known more for his bad attitude than his discretion. Further inquiry reveals that he often worked with a fellow mercenary named Eduard. The latter has not been seen for the past two weeks.

- A pale woman with dark hair was assaulted in an alley near the harbor by two Zarayan cutpurses. The observer fled to alert the watch, but when they arrived, both of the men were dead, their hearts missing. The woman was not found. Unfortunately, the observer didn't get a good enough look at her to provide a perfect description. Although this tale sounds initially like bogus information that has nothing to do with destruction of food stores, the characters are likely to suspect (correctly) that the woman from this account and the "witch" from the tale of Gast are the same person.

Feel free to invent more clues that give the characters a better idea of who they're facing, as well as a few red herrings. Although they still don't know exactly what they're dealing with, sharing what they've found with Gari allows him to pass information along to his gang so that they can narrow their search. Although it's not necessary to use Viktor Supek as one of Gari's contacts in the constabulary, contact with him now can serve to foreshadow his involvement in the following scene.

SCENE THREE: A SAVAGE DEED

Once the characters begin their search, it is vital to toss them a lead. The meat of this scene occurs within a few days of the characters' initial meeting with Gari. Use its introduction to break up a slow moment and thrust them into action. If possible, try to make their stumbling upon this scene seem coincidental. If they are traveling through the streets at night, they hear screaming a few blocks away. If they are indoors, perhaps one of Gari's youths arrives and informs them of another attack.

However they become aware of a commotion, the coterie arrives in the harbor district to find a distressed merchant arguing in front of a small barn with two Zarayan constables who are now working for the Venetians. A dozen bystanders linger about. Eavesdropping lets them hear the merchant babble on about "demon swine" and "devil fowl." Viktor Supek, the lead constable, seems less than impressed with the man, then he notices people assembling and barks out at everybody to return to their homes.

It's then that Gauthier de Dampiere rides up with eight of his men. All wear mail shirts that appear hastily thrown on over

mussed clothing, with the crusader's cross featured prominently on their persons. None have helmets, but they are all armed. Gauthier leaps from his horse and draws his sword, demanding to be led to the demons. He goes on about how it is his right to destroy that which is an abomination in the eyes of God.

Viktor assumes he's talking about the deformed livestock within the barn. However, he knows that the Franks have no right to demand anything in the Venetian quarter, and he sends the other constable to bring more of the watch as reinforcements should things begin to get nasty. He attempts to stall Gauthier by engaging him into a discussion about "proper jurisdiction." He speaks slowly and with great volume, attempting to attract more onlookers. He hopes that a greater number of Zarayan witnesses will discourage the knights from trying anything stupid.

The heated argument provides a perfect distraction for the coterie's investigation. With all attention on the exchange between constable and knight, only a botched Stealth roll draws the attention of either Viktor or Gauthier. You can use the crusader and Byzantine ghoul templates (without Disciplines) on page XX to represent the knights and mob if need be.

TWISTED BEASTS

Characters who enter the barn walk in upon an abattoir. A single lantern provides enough flickering light to make out that the hay on the floor is soaked and sticky with blood. The dank smell of animals couples with a scent reminiscent of Gari's headquarters: entrails and offal. A sound of guttural oinking, angry clucking and earthy chewing emerges from the rear of the barn.

Exploration reveals two pigs with the snouts and teeth of wolves tearing into the corpse of a third, unaltered pig. They pause to stare at the characters with angry eyes, blood drooling from their maws, before baring their teeth and emitting bizarre oink-growls. Also to the rear of the barn are creatures that were once hens, although their severed heads are now attached at the center of their backs. One leg is removed and the other shifted to the center of their undersides, forcing them to hop about to move. A clutching claw made of their missing leg is attached

HOPPING CHICKENS, LAUGH RIOTS

This is an absurd situation in which the players might laugh. That's fine. These games are about having fun, after all. But, although some elements of this scene might seem humorous, don't play them up for comedy. Let the players chuckle, but present things as seriously as you can. If you meet their laughter with a stoic face and stern manner, they should start to grow uneasy, wondering why you aren't amused.

Deformed livestock is funny. The ease with which a single Tzimisce can use seven chickens and two pigs to start a riot is chilling. Likewise, the act of secreting a fleshcrafted hen under a greatcoat is comical. Getting caught with it and being torn limb from limb by a panicked populace isn't. Always keep the consequences in mind, and do your best to keep a straight face.



V. 1066 . 01

where their heads once were. Their necks whip about spasmodically, claws snapping, as they hop ominously closer.

It is possible to calm the animals. Two successes on a Charisma + Animal Ken roll (difficulty 8) gets the livestock to stand down, although they remain wary of the characters. Otherwise, they attack. Although this attack may initially seem terrifying, remember that the attackers are simply livestock with superficial modifications. The hens have problems balancing with only one leg, while the pigs are just as slow and cumbersome as they've always been. It's possible for one of them in to get in a lucky shot for two or three dice of damage, but even a character with no combat skills should have no problem with them.

Characters knowledgeable in Animalism can attempt to communicate with the altered livestock. Each of the animals is incredibly angry and frightened. The carnivorous pigs don't understand their sudden compulsion to eat the flesh of their brethren, while the hens decry their inability to lay eggs. All attribute their misfortune to a human who smells much like the characters. Each animal is certain it would recognize the human's scent.

This revelation may give some characters the idea that they should use the livestock as surrogate bloodhounds. While the pigs have a much better sense of smell, it is quite difficult to conceal them in public. A single hen can be hidden within a

large coat or inside a sack, although the player must roll Animalism or Animal Ken occasionally to keep it calm. The hens detect Erzebet if she is within 10 feet, while the pigs notice her if she is within 25 feet. The heads of the animals should not be covered, or their range of smell is cut in half.

A further search of the barn reveals a torn piece of dark fabric with intricate patterning on velvet caught on a nail by an empty stall — the hem of Erzebet's skirt was ripped in her hurry to leave the barn. This clue can provide enough information for a character with three levels of Auspex (The Spirit's Touch). It is also enough for dogs or other animals to catch Erzebet's scent.

RIOTOUS WELCOME

Outside the barn, things quickly go from bad to worse when 12 more constables arrive. Viktor and Gauthier remain embroiled in a shouting match. Things escalate when the Frankish knight accuses the constable of protecting the unholy. Viktor draws his sword and tells the knight and his fellows to leave immediately or be taken captive under the authority of Venetian law.

Unfortunately for Viktor, this is the worst thing he could say. Gauthier's men dismount and draw their swords, and the watchmen draw theirs. The crowd, almost entirely composed of Zarayans, has now grown to a few hundred people. None of them care for the Venetians or the Franks, and they encourage each

group to fight the other. This encouragement soon devolves into jeering and shouting from the crowd. Viktor can't back down without losing face, and Gauthier won't back down on a matter of faith. Nearly anything could set events in motion.

It does when Eduard, one of Erzebet's hired men, throws a rock into the flank of Gauthier's mount from amidst the crowd. The horse rears up and runs forward, nearly trampling Gauthier and Viktor in the process. The other riderless horses spook, following the first. In the confusion, one of Gauthier's men strikes a constable and the fighting begins. The crowd pushes forward, hurling rocks and detritus, preventing any escape. The knights and the watchmen battle until they realize that the crowd is now a full-scale riot, howling for their blood. The knights try to hack their way through the crowd, enraging the mob even further. Soon two knights and three constables are torn limb from limb by the townspeople. Gauthier's skill and resolve allow him to escape the crowd and evade followers. Viktor's fate is unwritten.

Note that all of these events don't happen at once, forcing the coterie to watch a delicately constructed passion play. This is what occurs should the characters remain entirely uninvolved. If they so desire, allow them to interact with Gauthier and Viktor, either defusing the situation or redirecting the crowd's ire. Give them a chance to spot Eduard before he spooks Gauthier's horse. Their interactions with Gauthier should be tense, for his True Faith might allow him to recognize what they are. Regardless of what happens, try to keep him alive if you plan on running **Dying Embers**, for he has a significant part in that story.

Should the characters remain amidst the crowd when the fighting starts, don't bother running combat turns. Mobs are ugly, unruly things that can't be punched or kicked into submission. Describe the roiling mass of people tugging and pushing on all sides, then ask the players involved to have their vampires soak a couple of levels of damage. After two or three turns amidst the mob, permit the characters to break through after successful Strength + Brawl or Wits + Dodge rolls. (When pressed on all sides by a grasping and shoving mass of humanity, Dexterity doesn't come into play all that much.)

If the deformed animals flee from the barn, the crowd riots prematurely. In this case, people try to flee the area rather than stick around and trounce the authority figures. A few unlucky people are in danger of being trampled, but the crowd disperses from around the barn in two turns. Gauthier and his men work to slay the animals, then search the area for any more. Viktor and the constabulary all flee in the initial panic.

If the characters manage to stop Eduard from setting off Gauthier's horse, the riot never starts. More harsh words are exchanged between Gauthier and Viktor, but eventually Viktor backs down and allows the crusaders to explore the barn. Meanwhile, Eduard attempts to flee. Characters who pursue Eduard can catch him after a short chase. His involvement with Erzebet isn't immediately apparent, but characters who heard the rumor about Gast in scene two might realize that this man is the same Eduard. If questioned about the rock throwing, he initially says he hates crusaders and was going to take one of them out before the characters spotted him. This is an obvious lie. The

information about Erzebet can be interrogated or Dominated out of him, and the characters can follow him to the inn at which he's staying with Erzebet and her party.

SCENE FOUR: ON THE RUN

At some point, the characters catch up with Erzebet. The specifics of where and when are unimportant, but it likely occurs outdoors. Perhaps rumors lead them to guess her next target accurately. If they give enough information about the mysterious woman to Gari, one of the boys informs them that he has discovered where she stays. If the coterie captured Eduard in the previous scene, they can bribe or force the information from him.

If the players are entirely uninterested in an ongoing investigation, a quick way to speed things up is to place Erzebet and her bodyguards at the edge of the crowd in the preceding scene, using Animalism to cause the horses' stampede. Give the characters a chance to spot her and tail her for a few blocks before she realizes that she's being followed.

Erzebet is rarely away from three ghouls from Toth, all of whom are capable swordsmen. They serve as bodyguards and lovers, and they fight to the death to protect her. She has also hired four Zarayan thugs to serve as muscle — one of them Eduard — and to carry out some of the more mundane tasks. She hasn't paid them near enough coin to die defending her, but they fight until they are moderately injured before surrendering or fleeing. Use the crusader template on page XX if you need quick traits for these mercenaries, although they use axes and not knight's armor.

Once Erzebet feels that her plans are discovered, whether indicated through conversation or melee, she runs. Her bodyguards and hirelings do their best to delay the characters by any means possible, trying to embroil them in a fight while she makes her escape. An experienced coterie shouldn't have trouble dispatching them, but she should have enough of a head start by then for her capture to be a challenge.

Don't make it impossible to catch her, but try not to make it too easy. She heads for public areas, crying out for help and shouting for the constabulary to stop the "thieves" chasing her. Try to give the chase the frenetic feel of a pursuit through crowded streets, ducking through taverns and dark alleys, overturning vegetable carts, dodging runaway wagons, and avoiding patrols of armed men. Don't make every roll of the dice Dexterity + Athletics. You can spice things up with Stealth to avoid patrols of watchmen, Dodge to avoid two oblivious workmen carrying a large box of delicate and very breakable religious artifacts and Leadership to make bystanders follow the order, "Stop that woman!"

Keep things fast and fun, and don't let the dice dictate the scene. Remember that in a chase, people catch up and break away gradually. Only Celerity allows miraculous gains of ground, and using that Discipline with too many mortal eyes around could be disastrous.

If you would rather Erzebet escape, be sure to invent some excuse to have a pouch with letters from her father fall to the ground. Stumbling into a random passerby, getting the strap caught on something or slipping in a patch of mud and falling down briefly are all good excuses for her to drop the pouch. If the characters attempt to fire arrows at her, have an arrow snap the strap, dropping it to the ground. Otherwise Erzebet fights to escape

when the characters finally catch up to her, but not to the death. If she is convinced she is trapped and outnumbered, she surrenders.

Once the coterie regroups, the characters can begin to piece together the cause of the attacks. They can determine the following from Bodor's letters to Erzebet:

- Erzebet's actions were performed at the behest of a man named Bodor Toth.
- Bodor blames all crusaders for the death of his son, Farkas.
- Toth is also the name of a town or village somewhere in Transylvania.
- Bodor is sending more forces to step up the campaign of terror in Zara.

If the characters catch Erzebet, questioning her provides more information: Bodor is her father, Farkas was her brother who died in the Obertus monastery's destruction, and Toth is her home. She knows nothing about anyone else her father plans to send, and she grows petulant and hurt if the coterie pursues the topic.

SCENE FIVE: JUST DESERTS

Whether the coterie brings Erzebet to Gari or not, they now have an idea of who is behind the attacks and a general conception of why they're occurring. Upon returning, Gari questions them regarding their investigation and their impressions regarding the entire series of events. Once again, Gari asks a few questions of each coterie member, weighing the consistency of responses to determine the truthfulness of the accounts.

Finally, he asks for their recommendation as to what should be done to conclude this matter, informing them that it will weigh upon his decision. This is a half-truth, of course. Gari already knows exactly what his decision will be, but he is more interested in feeling out whether or not he can use the coterie to tie up some loose ends. He gives them a few moments to themselves to confer, if they so desire, then he listens thoughtfully to what they say. Once they finish, he informs them that he must deliberate on the matter and asks them to wait until he is finished.

Gari returns shortly with a person whom he introduces as Myca Vykos, an Obertus monk. The prince informs the characters that Vykos arrived recently from Constantinople to examine the fate of the Obertus monastery. When Gari explained the coterie's capture of the culprit, the Tzimisce asked to speak with them about the matter. Vykos suggests that an expedition sent to Erzebet's family could negotiate for a cessation of the hostilities directed at the crusaders. He also says that he has heard of Toth and knows how to get there, and that personal business in Transylvania would otherwise have him heading in that direction within a fortnight, meaning that such travels won't be out of his way. Gari suggests that the coterie and Vykos combine their forces in a trip to Transylvania, to which the Obertus monk agrees readily.

Should the characters balk at the thought of what is certainly a venture of many months, Gari first appeals to the necessity of all Cainites to conceal their existence, invoking the rhetoric of the Sixth Tradition if need be. He plays to their self-interest, suggesting that a derailed crusade isn't something they want to see. He hints that merely providing an escort to the Obertus could gain

SO, MR. VYKOS, WE MEET AGAIN

It's altogether possible that the characters have encountered Myca Vykos earlier, either in *Transylvania Chronicles I: Dark Tides Rising* or in stories derived from *Constantinople by Night* or *Transylvania by Night*. This isn't necessarily a bad thing if they departed on good or neutral terms. However, if the last encounter ended with one member of the coterie screaming for Vykos' blood to be commingled with sewage and forced down the gullets of 30 wild dogs, including Vykos as written will likely detract from the story.

One way to get around the problem is to have Vykos travel undercover as an Obertus monk with another name and face (although "Sascha" is perhaps a bit too obvious). He does not reveal his deception until after he has made his deal with Koban (see p. 51), at which point it is too late for retribution. Of course, characters with a decent level of *Auspex* could discover his secret in the months they spend together, so this might prove problematic.

Another option is to replace Vykos entirely with another Obertus monk, most likely Vykos' childe, who is under full authority to further the goals of her sire. Since Vykos' plans to free Symeon from his brother are quite secret, this monk won't mention her sire throughout the course of the story.

them the gratitude of the Byzantine Fiends, perhaps in the form of favors or access to stores of knowledge. Consulting with Vykos provides his half-hearted agreement.

Failing in this tactic, Gari tries to bribe them. He promises that upon their return they shall receive deeds to land and positions of preeminence within Zara's social structure. He argues that the bulk of the crusade is scheduled to depart in early April, and that things will return to normal once the wintering army is outside of the city's walls. He needs the characters' assistance to ensure that the crusaders leave Zara in one piece, and he is willing to sweeten the deal, to a point. If the characters are still highly resistant, he thanks them for their assistance and informs them that they may remain in Zara for four weeks before they are no longer welcome.

Erzebet's final fate is unwritten. Her involvement in the story is over if she died in the previous scene. If she escaped, Gari now knows whom he needs to look for and emphasizes that he can take care of the matter himself. It is only if she was captured and brought before Gari that the characters have a tough choice to make, for there are an equal number of reasons to bring her with them as there are to leave her in Zara.

The simplest solution is to leave her under Gari's guard, holding her hostage until her family ceases its attacks. However, doing so could provoke a poor reception upon the characters' arrival in Toth and potentially sour the negotiations up front. The more complicated option is to bring her along and turn her

FIENDISH WINTER

over to her family as proof of their noble intentions. However, doing so might simply make the characters seem weak. They would also need to keep her both guarded and fed for the duration of the long trip, which could easily make this option more trouble than it's worth. Whatever they conclude, the decision is the coterie's choice and Gari stands by it.

ACT TWO: FROSTBITE

The journey east is a harsh one. The coterie trades a city of splendor and pleasant temperatures for a Transylvanian backwater set amidst the howling hell of a cruel winter. When the weather isn't crushing their spirits, the difficult terrain of the snow-laden mountains seems to want nothing more than to toss them from great heights and dash them upon the rocks below.

Within this harsh climate lies the entirety of Toth, consisting of a small village and nearby castle in the northwestern fringes of Transylvania. The town is located along the western edge of the small valley that opens up at the midway point of the Bostral Pass. Hemmed in on all sides by the Transylvanian Alps, the only exit is the Bostral's northeast and southern entrances. The farms are quite prosperous, and mountain springs provide fresh water. The village and all outlying farms account for nearly 650 people living in the valley.

Seemingly built out of the western mountain wall a quarter mile to the village's west, "Castle Toth" used to be a simple keep built by Bodor's eccentric great-grandfather, a minor noble who remained (wrongly) convinced that the Bostral would become an important route for trade. Bodor's father added the curtain wall and the large, onion-domed tower in the courtyard. The castle is protected by 25 guards and staffed by more than 30 servants. All are aware of the family's vampiric secret, to some degree. The servants are Moorish slaves who also serve as a herd for the Cainites. None understand the local tongue, save basic commands that relate to household work.

The villagers are unaware of the Toth family's vampiric secret at the beginning of this story. Some may suspect, but the only one who is certain is Angyalka's husband Oszlár, who feels it best to keep quiet on the matter.

HACK FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS LATER

Should the coterie opt to dump negotiations in favor of slaying the leadership of Toth, the rest of **Fiendish Winter** takes a decidedly different turn. Allow them to go through with their plans for an evening or two and then simply skip ahead to Koban's arrival in scene ten. Give them a chance to ally with Toth before the fighting really picks up, but keep relations between the coterie and the Toth family tense and layered with mistrust.

BITTER CRUSADE

SCENE SIX: OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Rather than play out each day of travel to the Transylvanian land hold, you can speed things along by telling the players that they arrive in the middle of February in 1203. Stating that the journey took so long because of harsh weather and treacherous passages avoids tedious micro-management of the journey.

Alternatively, the long periods of travel serve as perfect opportunities in which to intersperse unrelated encounters along the way. As the coterie travels farther and farther east, the weather grows harsher and colder. Here are some suggestions for encounters, with the first few intended for use closer to Zara:

- Twenty to thirty Zarayan rebels clash in battle with a similar-sized group of crusaders sent to hunt them down. Unfortunately they're doing so in the middle of the road. Whether the characters wait it out, attempt to detour, join in the skirmish or are drawn into the fighting against their will is up to you.

- A handful of crusaders who left the host after the siege of Zara have invaded a village by a small river and set themselves up as its new leaders, becoming little more than brigands. They demand a high tribute to cross at their bridge. If the coterie appears to be weak, the crusaders might attempt to rob them.

- A man on horseback approaches swiftly, asking to parley. He claims that he is a Hungarian noble pursued by mercenaries hired by a rival noble. He begs assistance and promises a monetary award if he can travel east under the coterie's guard for one week, since his lands are in that direction. Within the week, the coterie encounters the mercenaries, who claim that the noble is wanted for high treason and that they have been charged by the king of Hungary to bring him to justice. They offer to purchase the noble from the coterie. The question of who is telling the truth — the noble, the mercenaries or neither — is up to you.

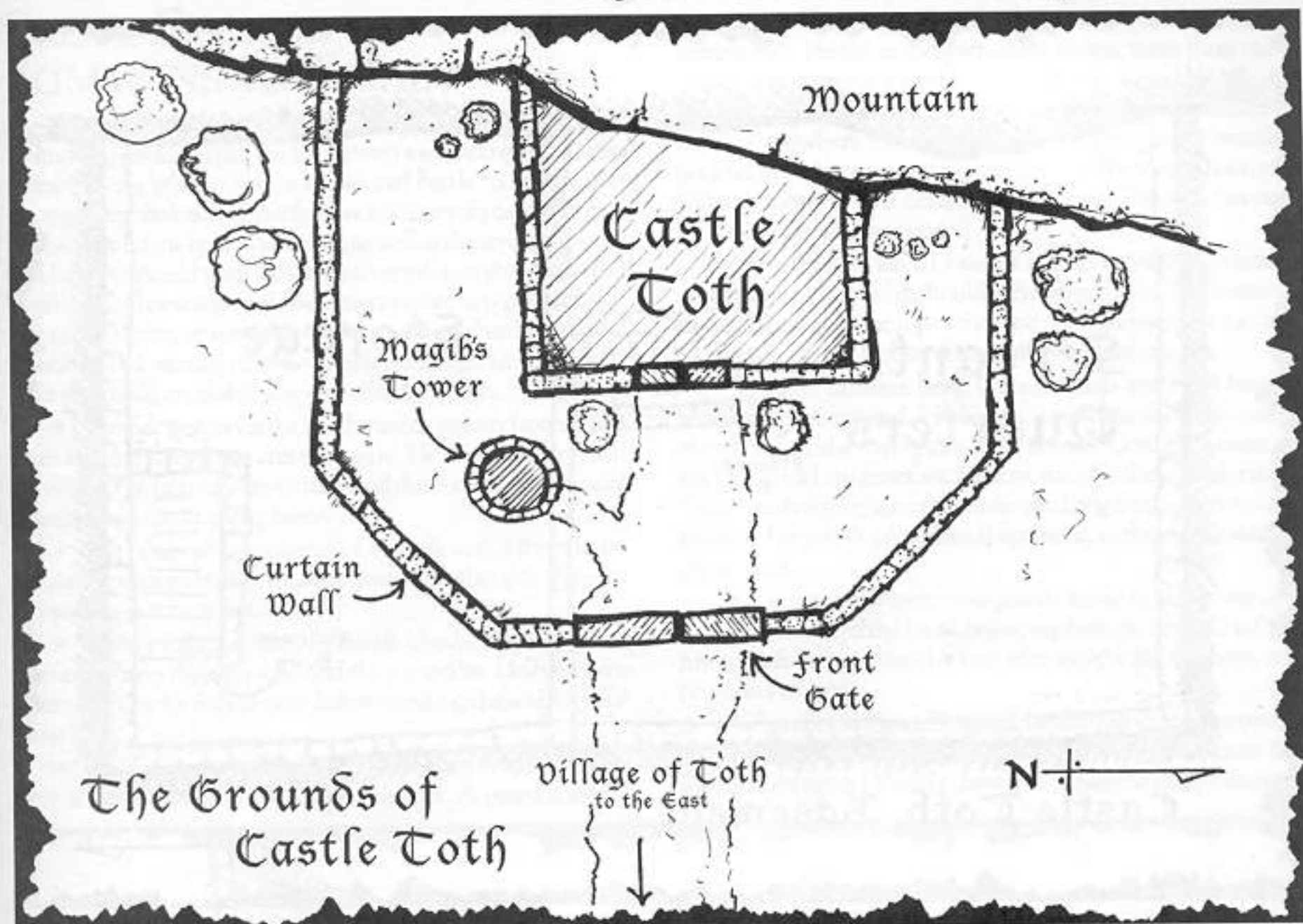
- A Tremere has succumbed permanently to the Beast and is causing no end of troubles to villages and travelers in the foothills of the Transylvanian Alps. The characters discover the difficulties of dealing with a mad thaumaturge amidst a blizzard.

- While camping along a trail, the characters awake to find themselves buried in the snow. Digging themselves and their equipment out becomes of prime importance. This is a simple way to get rid of an excess of retainers and hirelings whose presence could make the confrontation at the end of the act too easy.

The coterie's arrival in Toth coincides with the cessation of a snowstorm. The abrupt change in the harsh weather they've encountered along the way should serve as a brief respite. Allow them to explore the village if they so desire. Although visitors are relatively uncommon to the land hold, the townsfolk exhibit more curiosity than fear, and they are eager for news of the outside world.

SCENE SEVEN: HEAVY MEAL

Arranging an audience with the *boyar* of Toth is surprisingly easy. Petre Carp, the majordomo of Castle Toth, handles all of Dévald's schedules, and he can be found in the audience chamber until the late evening. This pleasant and courteous fellow makes polite small talk with the characters about their travels while he



check on his lord's availability. When conversation dwindles, he informs them that the lord of Toth would be honored to entertain their party in his dining chambers this evening.

Savvy players might rightly guess that they're expected. Indeed, Bodor spent much of act one observing Erzebet remotely, bearing witness to their interactions with her. Since their departure from Zara, he has spent much of the last two months watching the coterie and getting a feel for their plans, their motivations and their personalities.

The coterie enters the dining room to find the *boyar* already in attendance. Dévald sits at the head of the table. To his left is Kilián, with Magib to his right. Petre is seated behind Dévald, his simple chair against the rear wall. Four servants scurry about, seating the characters and distributing tableware quickly and efficiently. The distinct scents of freshly baked bread, warm blood and cooked meat waft from a covered table in a corner of the room. A surprising number of armed guards are present — one dozen in all, formed up in pairs and standing with their backs to the walls. A successful use of *Auspex* level 2 (*Soulsight*) shows Magib to be a Cainite. The others are all mortals, although Petre and Kilián are ghouls (which *Auspex* won't reveal).

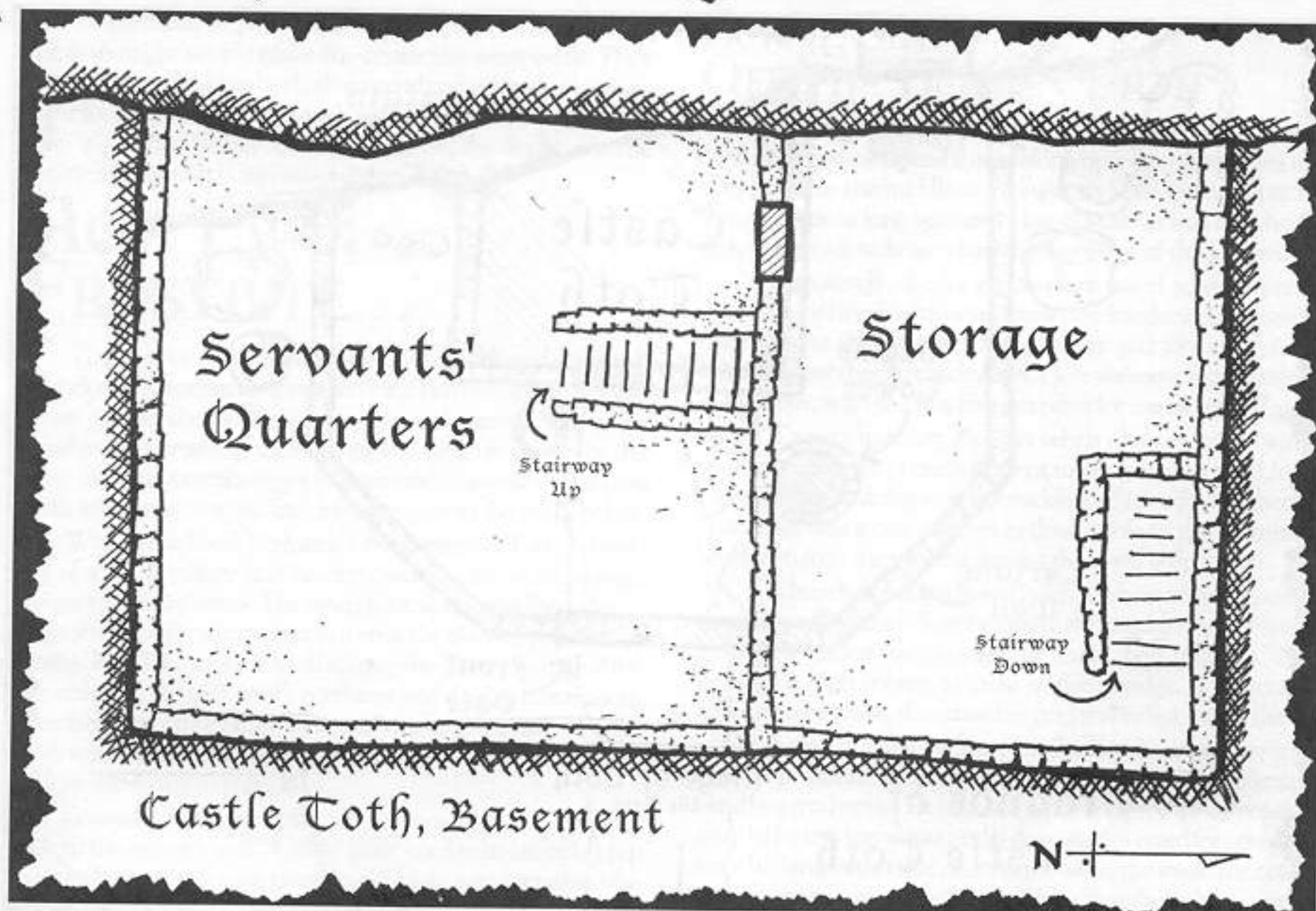
Upon the characters' arrival, the guards lock the doors to the room and give the key to Magib. Petre apologizes for the necessity, but he informs them that the matters they wish to discuss is private in nature. He provides introductions of both

parties before returning to his seat. Dévald states that he will hear what they have to say, but he first requests they share sup with him. The servants pour cups of heated blood from pitchers for Cainites. Each cup restores one blood point, and there are 16 total blood points between both pitchers. Characters paranoid of attempts to form a blood oath can examine it to reveal that it is mortal vitae. Dévald and Kilián are served water and plates of food by the servants, as are any other mortals in attendance. Magib partakes of nothing.

Throughout the meal, Kilián asks them to share tales of places they've been. He seems genuinely interested in their stories, if they elect to share them. He doesn't necessarily press them for information on what they did while in those places — he is simply curious as to what those places are like. Dévald remains content to observe their interactions with his brother, although he does answer direct questions. He warms to speaking of Toth and its history, if asked. Magib remains silent.

As supper ends and conversation dwindles, Dévald asks the characters why they traveled so far to speak with him. When they bring up the trouble in Zara, he informs them that the murder of his brother Farkas gives his family every right to seek revenge against the crusaders. Although he realizes that this vendetta could end in Zara's destruction, he's more concerned with avenging his brother's death than the lives of those in a foreign city hundreds of miles away. Yet to turn visitors away after a lengthy journey would be a discourtesy that would sully the reputation of

FIENDISH WINTER



OH YEAH - WE KILLED YOUR SISTER

If the players' characters slew Erzebet, it is wise of them to conceal that fact. Blaming Gari or even another example of crusader madness might be in order, and Vykos might well suggest that. If, for some reason, the Toth family uncovers the truth, things could get hairy for the characters. Dévald is angered by such news, but he keeps his emotions enough in check not to take any rash action before consulting with his family. Behind closed doors, Bodor advises not taking much action. His feelings for Erzebet dried up long ago, and although Farkas' death was enough cause to start a war, her passing is hardly worth mentioning as far as he is concerned. Dévald has much stronger feelings for his sister, but he takes at least some of his father's rationalizations to heart and delays any final judgment for several days, until the matter of the crusade and its repercussions on the land hold can be worked out. In the meantime, Koban's assault begins. Dévald's final feelings about the coterie will have much to do with whether or not they act to defend his family in the subsequent nights.

BITTER CRUSADE

Toth itself, so he allows the characters a chance to convince him to cease the attacks. He grants them a few minutes to confer privately at the opposite end of the room should they desire.

Dévald pays close attention to what they say, and he interjects his own questions occasionally. He challenges their personal definitions of vengeance, retribution and justice, attempting to determine whether the characters practice what they preach. Note that although Myca Vykos is here to assist in negotiations, he should come nowhere close to overshadowing the coterie. Use Vykos as oversight to bring up relevant points once the characters run out of their own, but let them elaborate upon his points rather than use him as a Storyteller mouthpiece. Also note that Vykos holds little actual interest in this affair, so he is more than willing to let the characters take the reins of the negotiations, reducing his involvement to that of an advisor, or even an observer.

When the characters have finished making their plea, Dévald says that they've presented many things that will weigh heavily upon his decision. He requests that they meet for dinner at the same time the following night, where his final decision will be made. They are welcome to spend the day sleeping in the castle, or to stay in Toth if they desire, but Dévald tells them that they are forbidden to feed upon the local populace. Should they desire blood, he provides it from the staff in the castle. Petre retrieves the keys from Magib and unlocks the doors, escorting the characters either to their new basement quarters or outside of the castle.

SCENE EIGHT: SUMMONS TO TRIAL

While the coterie dines with the *boyar*, Koban's childe Dominik approaches the land hold with a mission from his sire: to initiate the trial by war, a traditional battle to destruction among vampiric lords. What follows is a series of possible points at which he might be encountered, as well as the series of events that happen should there be no intervention on the part of the coterie. The characters could be in any one of many places at this point of the story, so you might want to select what best fits the situation. The starting time is variable, although he should not enter the castle until after the end of scene seven.

- Dominik arrives via the northeastern pass and spends two hours circling the village and the castle. He does not approach the village, but he might be seen around the outskirts or detected by animals in the outlying farms.

- Two hours after his arrival, Dominik scales the curtain wall, but he slips and falls on his way down the other side. A guard investigates but finds nothing.

- Twenty minutes later, Dominik climbs the side of the keep and enters through a second-floor window. He hides in a recessed alcove for a short time before scouting the second floor of the keep.

- Five minutes later, Dominik determines where Dévald's room is located, and he knocks on the door. A guard answers.

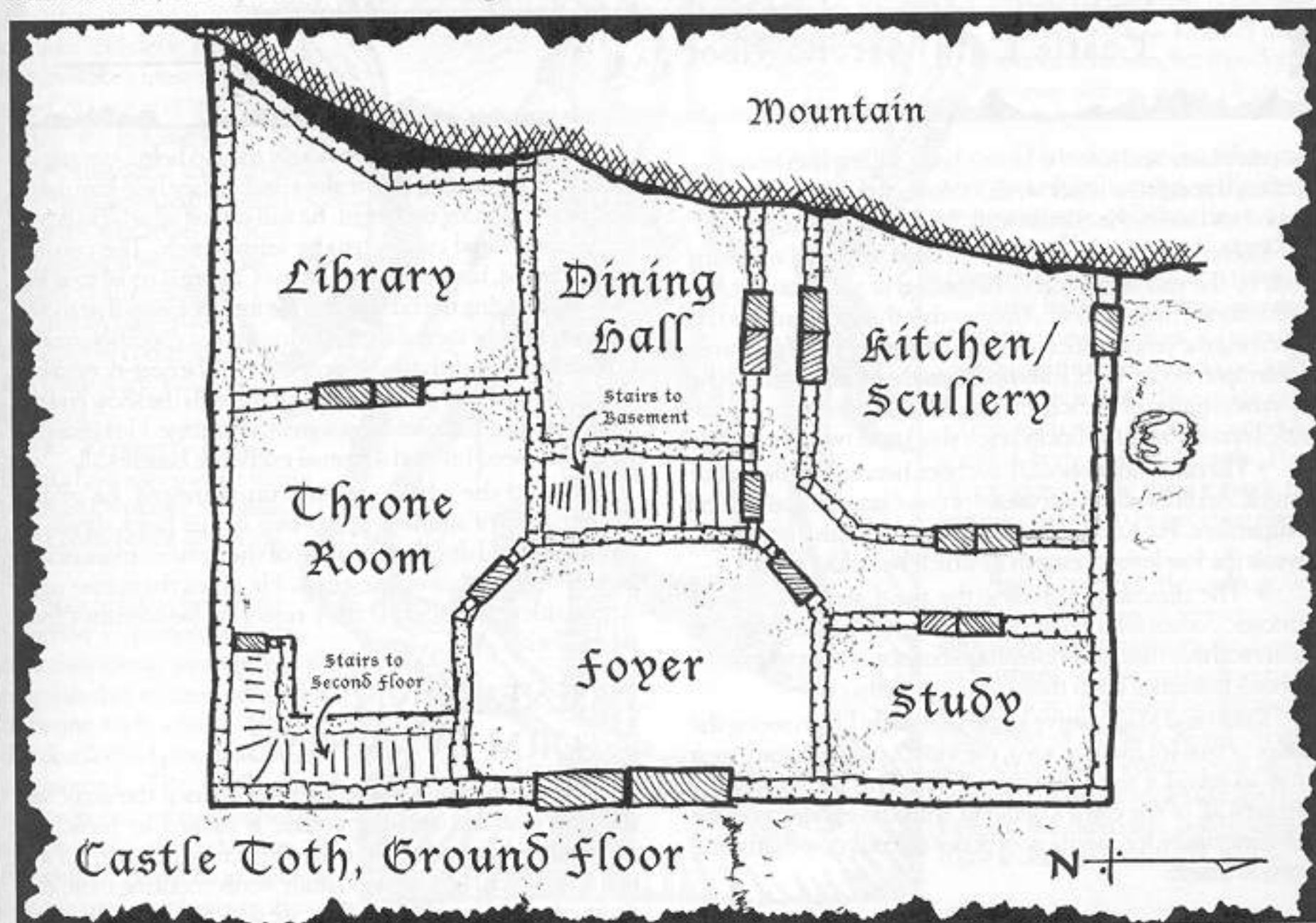
Dominik breaks the guard's neck, slips inside and closes the door behind him. He fights and eventually incapacitates three more guards who defend Dévald. The fighting is audible to any character on the second floor, or with some form of supernatural hearing anywhere else in the castle. Otherwise, he remains undetected, for no servants are currently on the second floor, and Kilián is meeting with Lempi. At this point, Dominik has only six blood points remaining.

- Five minutes later, Dominik knocks Dévald unconscious and throws him over his shoulder, heading for the keep's central tower. He reaches the top of the tower and prepares to enact the ritual murder that Koban charged him to perform.

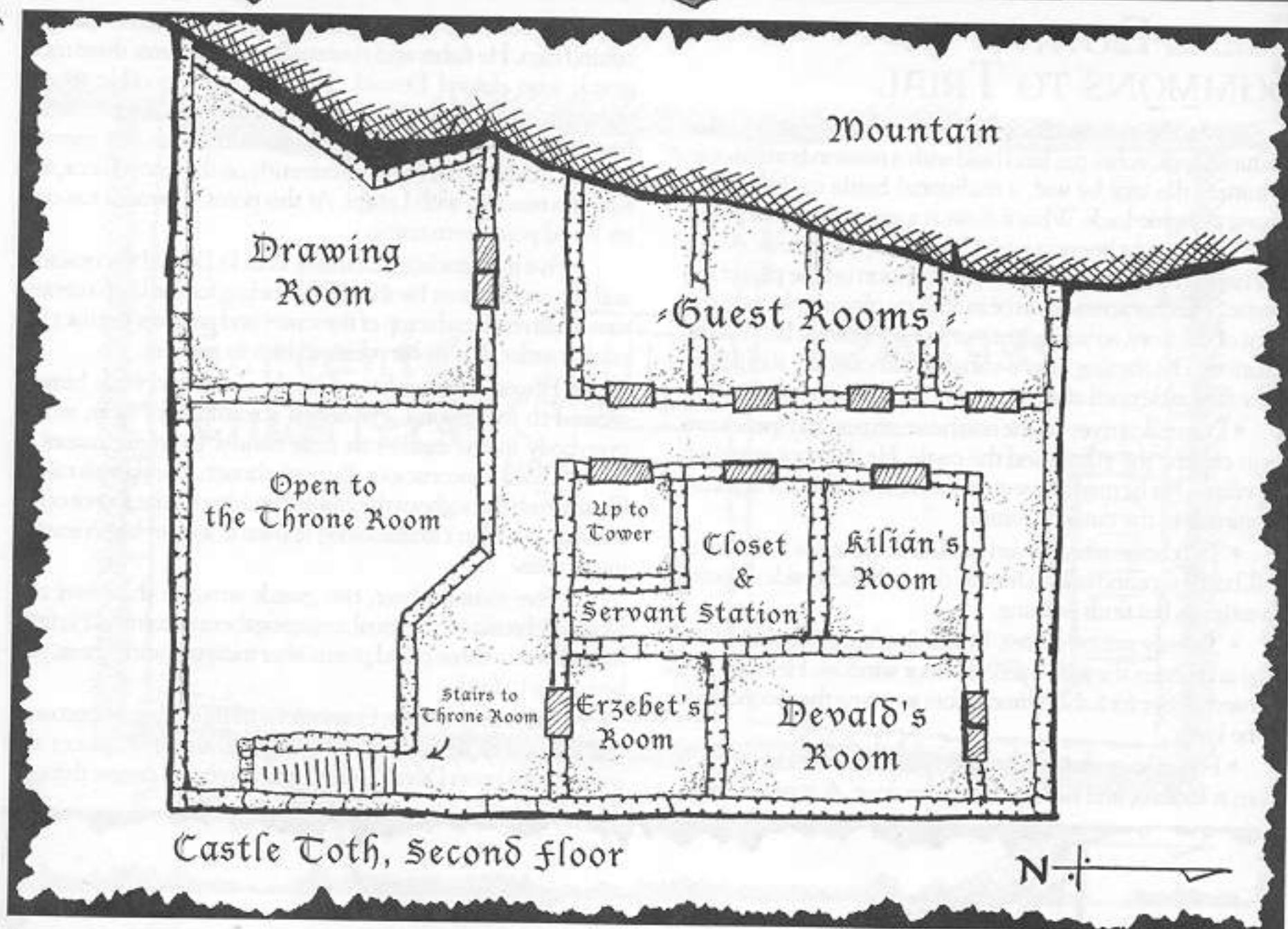
- Fifteen minutes later, Dévald wakes and finds himself secured to the ground. He begins screaming for help, which everybody in the castle can hear faintly. Dominik pauses to knock Dévald unconscious. By now, though, the alarm is raised. Guards rush throughout the castle searching for the source of the screams, but it isn't immediately apparent, so they begin searching in pairs.

- Five minutes later, two guards arrive in the tower and Dominik breaks off the ritual, engaging them in combat. He finds himself left at three blood points after incapacitating them, and he pauses to feed.

- Ten minutes later, Dominik hears more guards approaching the tower. Frustrated, he pulls out a dagger, places the instructions upon Dévald's chest and drives the dagger through



FIENDISH WINTER



the parchment and into the boyar's heart, killing him instantly. He flees through the window, slides down the roof, leaps to the ground and scales the curtain wall, fleeing into the night.

Koban's childe should either be dead, captured or fleeing Toth by the end of the scene. Regardless of the outcome, the instructions remain behind. Among other things it contains text indicating the proclamation of a trial by war declared by Voivode Koban upon Bodor Toth. It also indicates the projected time of his arrival and his forces (see scene ten, p. 49). Any characters familiar with Tzimisce tradition (including Vykos) note two peculiarities:

- The declaration should have been handled by the voivode himself. Additionally, it is unheard of to declare one's arrival and complement. For Koban to send another with this information reveals the low level of esteem in which he holds Bodor.

- The directions regarding the ritual slaying are quite intricate. Successful Intelligence + Hearth Wisdom or Occult rolls reveal that they carry no real significance, or mystical power. Koban's insistence upon their inclusion seems odd.

Kilián and Magib arrive in the aftermath. Upon seeing the notice of trial (or his dead son), the vizier's placid features melt away to reveal a seething Bodor Toth. This metamorphosis frightens all of the castle's denizens with the exception of his surviving family, for only those of Bodor's blood know that he still exists as Magib.

Unless the characters obviously tried to help Dominik slay Dévald, Bodor attempts to make a deal: If they help him defend against the coming onslaught, he will call off all attacks against the crusaders and end his grudge immediately. The coterie is likely to resist, but he argues that one Cainite is equal to at least 20 men, bringing the odds to 3:1. He further insists that most of the forces will be mortal men fighting in poor conditions and on unfamiliar ground, that siege weaponry will be near-nonexistent due to the difficulty of transporting it through the snow and that Toth's existing defenses allow a great advantage. He needs their help, they need his, and a mutual exchange benefits all.

Should the coterie remain uninterested, he offers a decent sum of money, up to two of his herd slaves per character, and duplicate copies of the various manuscripts he has acquired over the years. He gives them one night to consider this offer. If they reject it, he banishes them from Toth.

SCENE NINE: STORM WARNING

The Toth family convenes a war council the night after Dominik's attack, and the coterie is invited to participate. Matters are discussed in a roughly democratic manner, but with opinions voiced openly and family votes counting more than those of outsiders. What follow are actions that each person

would propose and what happens without the coterie's intervention. Mix up the order rather than simply reading each listing one by one. Note that the coterie is encouraged to come up with its own proposals for defense. After each proposal, have the players roleplay their characters' response.

Although the characters vote for each proposal, they can affect each proposal only if it is deadlocked. In a clear-cut case of the Toth family agreeing or disagreeing, the characters' minor votes don't affect the outcome.

- **Bodor:** Embrace some of his herd or townsfolk to use as shock troops (deadlock); prepare defenses specifically tailored to defeat Cainites (yes)

- **Dévald:** Train all able-bodied villagers in siege tactics and use them as castle defense (deadlock); beef up castle defenses with construction of makeshift siege weaponry (yes)

- **Kilián:** prepare traps along the northeastern trail to injure and delay Koban's host (deadlock); restore Lempi to her old self and incorporate her into the defense (no)

- **Angyalka:** send the majority of the villagers to the south to seek refuge in the town of Rolt (no); failing that, move the entirety of the villagers within the curtain wall of the castle, constructing temporary housing (deadlock)

- **Erzebet:** harass Koban's host with guerilla tactics (deadlock); attempt to assassinate Koban before his arrival (no)

Should your players prefer action to planning, simply have their characters carry out the proposals that succeed rather than bothering with voting. (Assume that deadlocked proposals eventually succeed.) The fulfillment of each proposal can be expanded into its own scene, dependent on the Storyteller's preparation and the coterie's interests. However, if you'd

rather simply advance to the end of the scene, offer a quick description of their plans coming to fruition over two weeks' span and skip directly to scene ten.

SCENE TEN: AVALANCHE

Unless delayed by the coterie's actions, Koban and his force arrives on schedule, entering through the northeastern pass at the end of February. The force occupies the village itself, converting existing buildings into housing and bases of operations, and collecting all supplies that remain outside the castle. They capture any villagers outside the castle walls and place them in a makeshift pen to be used as food for Koban's vampiric forces through the duration.

Although a direct assault on Koban's men is suicide, an enterprising coterie may plan an initial ambush attack during the camp's assembly. Isolated pockets of men are surprised and fight poorly, but large groups band together quickly to drive off attacks. Koban's men pursue attackers, but they don't pursue within arrow range of the castle.

The entirety of the following day and night consists of Koban's men enacting an elaborate ritual of his own design. They chant odd, singsong phrases and use long wooden poles to carve intricate patterns into the thick snow. Nine of these poles are driven into the ground in a rough semi-circle around the castle, and on each one a naked corpse is impaled from groin to mouth. The temperatures cause their innards to freeze to the wood, supporting their weight.

Any character with academic or working knowledge of sorcery picks out *koldunic* elements among the chants and patterns, but not in a manner that has any sort of mystical significance. Regardless of efficacy, to see an assembled fighting force carry this out is terrifying. It serves to demoralize and frighten the defenders, unless something is done to counteract it.



J. 666 : 02 -

CAN WE TRUST HIM?

Whether or not Bodor is telling the truth depends on the coterie's actions. Actions in their favor include returning Erzebet, killing or capturing Dominik and saving Dévald from Dominik. Actions that work against them could include the accidental or intentional death of Erzebet, hostile action taken upon Toth's denizens and the death of Kilián or Dévald at the hands of the coterie.

Should the coterie prove itself beyond all doubt, Bodor intends to honor his word. Less clear-cut intentions cause him to reserve judgment until the end of the act. Should the characters seem more a detriment than a boon, he plans to use them as pawns as long as he can do so and slay each of them when they no longer serve his purposes.

Requests to parley with Koban are granted, should the characters desire to speak with him. A heavy guard leads them into the building he has taken as headquarters, and they find him sitting atop a palanquin of carved bone inlaid with elaborate patterns of gold filigree. The heads of fine Arabian horses serve as armrests. It is only when they whicker quietly and the palanquin stands of its own accord that the characters realize it is actually a *vozhd* war-ghoul composed entirely of beasts of burden.

When speaking with Koban, the characters should never feel as though he is paying them his absolute attention. His many mouths quirk in what could be either a sneer or genial bemusement, and his eyes stare through them. In one breath, he happily informs them that they will not survive the week; in the next, he invites them to join him in drinking virgin's blood from the carved skull of a Moor.

Koban is generally free with his topics of conversation, although nearly all of his actions and words seem to be a part of some great sacrament of which only he is aware. He does not discuss specific plans of attack nor his reason for doing so. If pressed, he grows frustrated, informing them that they should already know everything he plans, gesturing vaguely outside. Perceptive characters might think he refers to the markings in the snow, and they are mostly right.

Characters who make the mistake of attacking Koban aren't likely to survive the scene. Surrounded by guards both vampiric and mortal, any attempts on his life — while not impossible to carry through — should be insanely difficult. If they are foolish enough to try, his palanquin rears up to its full height of eight feet and attempts to trample them while his guards rush in to attack. Unless the Storyteller is feeling particularly surly, leave an avenue of escape open for the coterie. Pursuit breaks off within 50 yards of the castle, but characters involved in such an attempt are singled out during Koban's actual assaults.

THE FIRST WAVE

Koban sends one half of his mortal forces in a direct assault on the castle the day after he completes his rituals. Three of his revenants command the men in an attempt to scale the castle's

BITTER CRUSADE

MIGHT AGAINST MIGHT

If you're the sort to enjoy knowing exactly what kind of force is facing an opposing force and how these forces compare on the battlefield, the following should help illustrate how much greater of a chance Koban stands in the siege of Toth. If this type of thing bores you to tears, let your players know that Koban's force outclasses the entirety of Toth, and ignore the rest of this sidebar. If not, read on. (The notes in parentheses refer to the generic templates on page 101, which you can use for quick traits.)

The Carpathian Fiend has a decent-sized force of fighting men at his disposal:

- 240 trained fighting men (crusader template, light armor)
- 40 trained archers (crusader template, Archery 3, light armor)
- 60 untrained men and women (Byzantine ghouls template, no Disciplines)
- 20 trained *szlachta* war-ghouls
- 10 skilled revenants (crusader template, Potence 1, Fortitude 1)
- 2 skilled Cainites (Koban's childer; use Dominik's statistics)
- 2 *vozhd* war-ghouls (Koban rides a third *vozhd* uninvolved in the fighting)

Toth has comparatively fewer (plus the coterie, of course):

- 25 skilled castle guardsmen (crusader template)
- 20 trained town watchmen (crusader template, lighter weapons)
- 60 untrained villagers (ghoul template without Disciplines, few skills)
- 1 skilled commander (Dévald)
- 1 skilled ghoul (Kilián)
- 2 skilled Cainites (Erzebet and Bodor)

Associated skill levels are intended as a benchmark. You can use them to figure out the outcome of a battle based on these guidelines. In a stand-up fight, one skilled unit is equivalent to two trained or four untrained. Units with more training are also less likely to rout. Units fighting from hardened defenses, such as the top of the curtain wall or interior of the keep, effectively increase their skill level until an attacker breaches the defense.

walls, commencing their attack half an hour before sunset. Unless they are already conscious, characters wake to the sounds of battle.

This first attack is a feint, designed to test the strength and capability of Toth's resistance. The commanders hope to provoke the defenders into exhausting a fair number of arrows, pitch and other limited supplies, revealing both the specific defenses at

hand and the discipline of the units. A light snow falls, affecting visibility and footing slightly.

Have the characters awake and in a position to affect things when the defenses are actually breached, preferably when they are near the curtain wall. A handful of men make it atop the wall and try to slay the defenders, allowing yet more men to follow. One option is to have two or three of these breaches occur in separate areas at more or less the same time. Allow the characters to repel the nearest breach while the villagers handle the others, preventing things from turning into a string of similar, drawn out encounters. Once the breaches are sealed, the host retreats. There are no more attacks until the following evening.

THE SECOND WAVE

The next assault occurs after midnight of the second night during a heavy snowfall. Koban's two children respectively approach the northern and southern portions of the wall, while the main host assembles to the east, just outside of arrow range. The poor visibility makes it nearly impossible to detect the Cainites until they scale the curtain wall, and even then, they're hard to spot. Watchmen suffer a +3 difficulty penalty to detect them.

Once inside, they try to sneak to the gates, slay anybody nearby and throw the gates open. If specific timing concerns you, they take five full turns to do so once they have reached the gates, or three if both arrive simultaneously. If they manage to open the gate, the host rushes toward the castle. It takes eight full turns for the front of the host to reach the main gates. Closing the gates takes two turns, and latching it takes one, but Koban's children do everything in their power to prevent this from happening. If the coterie manages to close the gates, the host retreats to the village. Should the host break through, simply phase directly into the heart of the action described in the third wave.

For a rather creepy twist, have a *vozh* lead the charge. Doing so is an easy way to add a more cinematic twist to the scene, as the coterie's rush to close the doors becomes that much more important. A giant mass of howling flesh barreling toward the open gates of Toth while the characters try to get the gates closed and barred could easily serve as the high point of the evening. Even if the gates are barred, the *vozh* could act as a living battering ram, calling for character cleverness to drive the frustrated beast away before it smashes the gates down. This also serves to weaken the gate, foreshadowing the events of the following evening.

THE THIRD WAVE

This final, brutal attack on the castle happens on the third night, during a fierce blizzard. One of the *vozh* is sent to hammer down the gates. Although the defenders may manage to injure it severely, the gates burst open before they can kill the monster. A majority of the remaining forces rush in, and the battle is met. The characters should get the impression that they could easily lose everything here.

Try to keep things fast, frenetic and confusing rather than running a series of combat encounters. Resort more to description than to dice rolling. Don't be afraid to skip forward by an hour or two to advance to the next major point of conflict, and use the pounding, hellish blizzard to help keep things confusing and off-kilter. This section of the *Dark Ages Companion* entitled "Cainites and Open Warfare" (p. 41) provides plenty of good suggestions on how to do just that, but its use is not required to run this scene.

A QUIET BETRAYAL

Vykos disappears during the third wave. A letter is found penned in his hand, indicating that he believes that he's discovered a method to halt Koban's attack, but he must approach the *voivode* alone in order for his plan to be convincing. Whether the letter was written in earnest or out of duplicity is for the Storyteller to decide.

Regardless of intent, Vykos is already parleying with Koban by the time anybody notices his absence. Over the past few days,



WINTER

Vykos has pieced together the reason for Koban's attack. The *koldunic* script etched into the snow and his knowledge of Zubor's task years ago clued him in. He confronts Koban with this knowledge, eventually drawing the specifics of Zubor's curse from the *voivode*.

Vykos manages to convince Koban that the curse does not literally mean "Zubor's blood," or figuratively "the blood of Zubor's childer," but is a sophisticated Obertus curse that indicates his wasting death by the thinning of blood within one century's time. Although this statement is by no means the truth, there is enough circumstantial evidence that the *voivode* is much more willing to believe it. Vykos offers to trade the knowledge that Koban needs to defeat this curse — a portion of which he knows, the rest of which is known by Symeon — if the *voivode* takes the Obertus and his sire as apprentices.

Koban suspects that Vykos is trying to trick him into halting his attack, and he says that he still plans to fashion the intestines of all within into necklaces. Vykos truthfully states that he could care less about any of their fates. Koban calls his bluff and presses forth with the attack, mounting his *vozhd* and involving himself at the fringes of the battle. This should occur at the climax of the third wave.

If the Storyteller wants the coterie to witness this exchange, some or all of the characters can do so through a variety of means. A high enough *Auspex* or *Obfuscate* can easily make a character a figurative fly on the wall. *Animalism* can make that prospect more literal. Regardless of how they see or hear the conversation, play it up for melodrama if you wish to include it. Rather than break the mood of the battle, this event should happen at a low point amidst the third wave, preferably while Koban's forces have pulled back for a short time to regroup. Rather than have the characters linger on this exchange, break it off with another frenzied assault on the castle.

BLIZZARD'S END

Unless Koban destroys all semblance of Toth's defense and clearly takes the castle, he pulls his forces back two hours before sunrise. Toth's defenders see and hear him berating his troops, going so far as to execute a few of them. He finishes his mad exhortations an hour later, storming off to his tent. Half of his remaining force splits off to guard the camp, while the other forms up for a last-ditch, desperate assault on the castle. They know that if they don't take the castle by sunrise, Koban plans to add their hearts, livers and genitals to his collection. Although they fight to the death, these men are bone-tired and desperate, and they make many mistakes in their fighting. The attackers won't be driven away before sunrise, but the coterie can go to sleep knowing that the defenses should hold.

If the characters remain awake and they keep abreast of the latest developments past sunrise, they hear the fighting continue for another 15 minutes before breaking off. Reports indicate that the last-ditch assault force routs and many of the men flee. Riders from the rest of Koban's force hunt the scattered forces down and slay them. Some plead amnesty to the defenders of Toth, begging for sanctuary. The riders make no attempt to approach Toth's walls. They attempt to dispatch the fleeing men with arrows if

Toth's defenders don't cut them down. The retrieved bodies are dragged toward Koban's tent.

There is no further activity until the following evening, just after sunset. Koban rides outside of arrow-range of the castle on his *vozhd* palanquin, chanting loudly. One by one, he sets the nine poles with impaled corpses aflame until all burn eerily in the darkness. He rides before the castle and shouts that he will return for the child of Zubor and his progeny upon the next "proper alignment of the heavens and hells," and he offers a curse for the disruption of his ritual. He names each surviving Cainite member of the Toth family (and any of the coterie he is aware of) as his enemy. Then he wheels his *vozhd* around and returns to the camp to lead his men from the valley. He departs with all of his forces save a handful of *szlachta* and revenants whom he leaves behind to discourage pursuit and to serve as a nuisance. He orders the village burned to the ground and slays most captives, bringing the rest with him to add to his herd.

KEEPING THINGS INTERESTING

This scene is fairly long, and it involves a lot of fighting. Remember that in any such situation, it's more important to have *action* than *combat*. Here are a few ideas on how to inject some variety into the scene. Feel free to add any that you feel are appropriate.

- Erzebet stages a daring raid on Koban's camp, but she's caught up in fighting as dawn approaches. She needs some kind of assistance, or a distraction of some kind, if she's to return before daybreak.

- One of the *vozhd* clearly has the body of Remenyke Toth grafted to it. Half of her family wants it destroyed, while the other half wants to save her. Each side tries to draft the characters into helping them out.

- The villagers realize that some members of the Toth family are the same kind of monsters they're facing outside the walls, and a mob forms. Angyalka is unable to calm them, for they fear her to be a monster herself. Preventing things from turning into a full-scale riot becomes a top priority.

- Dévald is injured severely during one of the assaults. Someone with leadership experience needs to take his place, and one of the characters might be the most appropriate to take charge.

- Kilián sneaks into Bodor's tower and finally manages to get Lempi to Embrace him, then commits diablerie upon her helpless form. The trauma breaks his blood oath to his natural father. No longer tied to Toth, Kilián becomes a wild card. Does he turn on his family? As a last act of family loyalty, does he provide much-needed assistance in driving off one of Koban's assaults? Does he simply flee?

- Koban and his childer Embrace a dozen injured soldiers before the final assault, intending to use them as expendable shock troops. Treat each unit as a fresh Tzimisce with *Auspex*, *Animalism* and *Vicissitude* 1.

Myca Vykos departs Toth soon after Koban's eventual retreat. He says that he is bound for Constantinople. Unless the characters make an issue of his actions, he does not seem to bear them any ill will. Vykos is perceptive enough to know that this is a time in which he has no need to make additional enemies, and indeed, he will have reason to turn to the characters again in *Dying Embers*.

AFTERMATH

Unless Bodor died during the assault, he holds to the decision that he made in scene eight, and he either seeks to dispatch the characters quickly or he sends a carrier pigeon to Zara with a message for the second group to call off all attacks. If he was undecided in scene eight, the quality of effort that the characters put toward the defense of Toth can sway his decision either way.

Even if the characters "win," the village lies in smoking ruins and the castle has sustained great damage. Toth lies broken. Its citizens encounter great difficulty simply getting through to the spring. Should the castle fall entirely, give the characters a chance to escape, but have Koban's men chase them for a few days before pursuit breaks off and they return to Toth.

EPILOGUE

The return to Zara is a weary one. Once again, use inclement weather and environmental elements to delay their arrival until

the middle of April. If you'd rather skip all indication of travel, multiple weeks can be summed up in a few sentences of exposition. Otherwise, this period is a good time to run any of the encounters from scene six that you didn't use during the coterie's trip east.

When the characters are within a few days ride of Zara, they encounter refugees traveling east — first a trickle, then greater and greater numbers. Many are shaken, and most carry their possessions on their backs. Few wish to speak of what has happened.

The coterie arrives at Zara to find much of the city destroyed and the crusaders gone. Most of the harbor district has been leveled by fire and siege weaponry. The rest of the city has fared little better. Gari's warehouse is now rubble, and even a thorough search turns up neither the prince nor any of his gang. Whether they escaped Zara or were killed in the initial onslaught is up to you.

The coterie will wish to know what happened, and after all their questioning, they can determine that the destruction of Zara occurred at the behest of mortal men following the orders of other mortal men. Although Cainite involvement helped steer the direction of the crusade, Zara's smoldering remains serve as testament that the contents of Pandora's box, once opened, won't ever return. Even now, the *militia Christi* sails for Constantinople, and the bones of Zara are merely a shadow for what is soon to come.



FIENDISH WINTER





Chapter Three: Dying Embers

O Byzantium, now your
luxurious garments and elegant
royal veils are rent and torn;
your flashing eye has grown
dark, and you are like an aged
furnace room all covered with
soot...

—Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*

INTRODUCTION

On April 15, 1204, a dream ends, a city suffocates in flames and an empire passes into the shadows of history. Sublime basilicas are plundered for their gold, and blood stains the cobblestones and mosaics of the Queen of Cities. From the ashes of the Fourth Crusade, the future takes hold.

When the fires finally die, darkness descends on the Dark Medieval world from which even Cainites cannot escape. The Long Night crawls to an end, and a new age prepares to be born, resplendent in the fires of the coming Inquisition. The darkness that once protected Cainites in their manors and castles becomes instead their prison. Although the destruction of Constantinople is not the catalyst for these changes, it is the first of many warning signs that the supposed lords of the night ignore at their peril.

HOW TO USE THIS STORY

Dying Embers describes the murderous climax of the Fourth Crusade—the destruction of Constantinople. The hubris that drove the Toredor Patriarch, Michael, and his allies to build this heaven on Earth ultimately dooms the city, as its enemies ride the waves of the cataclysmic, misguided crusade. In the concluding story of **Bitter Crusade**, the players' characters have the opportunity to decide where they stand: with the doomed Byzantine Cainites attempting to salvage what they can, or with the ravenous Latin Cainites seeking power and revenge. Yet, their greatest struggle is simply surviving the three nightmarish nights while Constantinople burns. If they are fortunate, the characters not only escape with their unlives, but they help preserve an aspect of the Dream that made Constantinople great.

This story includes information on the Cainite factions of Constantinople, a brief description of the city as it was in April 1204 and information on the aftermath of its events. You have all you need to bring **Bitter Crusade** to a conclusion and usher in a new era in the Dark Medieval world.

THEME

Three themes dominate **Dying Embers**: betrayal, mortality and hope. Betrayal comes naturally to Cainites, descended as they are from the first murderer. Although Constantinople's fate is sealed by the actions of misguided mortals, vampiric betrayals add to its woes. Wherever the characters stand, they should realize that Cainites are as guilty of Constantinople's destruction as the mortals—maybe more so, given their ability to view history from an immortal perspective.

THE DREAM

Frequent references to “the Dream” or “Michael's Dream” crop up throughout this story. For the benefit of those without access to **Constantinople by Night**, the Dream is the belief that Cainites can build something grand and of lasting virtue. In essence, it is the city of Constantinople itself. Palaces, churches and aqueducts; the beauty of the sunset over the Golden Horn; rich, glorious history—these are what the Dream is all about. Through its sheer power to awe and enrapture, the Dream is one of the last things that still unites the Cainites of Constantinople.

It's also one of the things that enrages Michael's many enemies, particularly Prince Narses of Venice. A testament to the Toredor Methuselah's ambition and egotism, the Dream inspires as much hatred and covetousness as it does serenity and awe. This dichotomy is the basis for the events of **Dying Embers**.

Despite their pretensions to the contrary, Cainites must ultimately come face to face with mortality. While vampires are above simple death, they are cursed to see everything that they hold dear die, including entire cultures and societies. Cainites may be immortal, but death still holds power over them. It follows their every footstep, tainting and corrupting everything they touch. This is the true Curse of Caine: to watch as the world withers and dies. The greatest foe of any vampire is time. It is a weight that dwarfs and eventually crushes Cainites, leaving them hollow and dead in spirit. In **Dying Embers**, the characters come face to face with mortality and realize that nothing lasts forever, even for Cainites.

Even amidst the chaos and destruction of the Fourth Crusade, a glimmer of hope and a chance to take hold of the future remains. Although Michael's Dream dies in Constantinople, the characters can become its inheritors. Whether by carrying on Michael's goals elsewhere, protecting the Library of the Forgotten or through some other activity, the coterie has many opportunities to find hope in the wreckage of the Dream. Which the characters choose and how they undertake it can form the basis of many chronicles in the Dark Medieval age.

MOOD

Dying Embers is a tale of chaos and cataclysm, both somber and frantic. Death brings the best and worst emotions out in people. This story is a tableau of human and Cainite violence, grief and hope. For the Cainites

caught in the destruction of Constantinople, the three nights between April 12 and April 15, 1204 are the end of the world.

THE PLOT

Dying Embers revolves around the three nights during which the victorious crusaders sack Constantinople. Each act represents a single night. Act one begins as the crusaders prepare to breach the walls and capture the city, the proverbial calm before the storm. The mood in Constantinople is surprisingly hopeful, leading to a false sense of security. The Tzimisce Myca Vykos has stoked the flames of the feud between his sire and grand-sire, Symeon and Gesu, in the hope of freeing Symeon from his bond to Gesu.

Act two begins as the crusaders have breached the walls. The city's mortals are panicking, and the Cainites are in disarray. Michael is missing, the Obertus monastery has been sacked, and the Ventrue are fighting one another instead of the crusaders. The apocalyptic Cainite cult known as the Children of Calomena starts its pogrom, adding to the misery created by mortals.

Act three brings the characters as close to experiencing Gehenna as any Cainite ever has. Constantinople burns, blood runs in the streets, and ashes hang like snowflakes in the air. Mortal and Cainite alike struggle to survive. The characters become aware of the multiple levels of treachery that resulted in the fall of the Queen of Cities. They must then decide whether to save only themselves or a part of the Dream that created Constantinople.

INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

Dying Embers is suitable for coterie of varied backgrounds. As written, the story assumes that the characters are members of one of four groups:

- **Agents of Narses:** At the end of *Venetian Nights*, Prince Narses asks the characters to work as his

eyes and ears along the crusade route in exchange for assistance where he can provide it. Once the crusade reaches Constantinople, Narses senses that the conclusion of his centuries-long vendetta against the Byzantines is finally within his grasp. In such a case, he forces the coterie either to continue as his agents or to reject him, as they become aware of his desire to see Constantinople destroyed.

- **Byzantine Cainites:** Whether traveling with the crusade or not, Byzantine Cainites have an obvious interest in the events of this story. Although they can do nothing to prevent the mortals from destroying their beloved capital, they can act to preserve portions of Michael's Dream. Byzantine vampires likewise have a clear connection to the Cainite machinations within the city that contribute to its final fall.

- **Agents of Vykos:** During the events of *Fiendish Winter*, the coterie members may have become the lasting allies of Myca Vykos. The Tzimisce scholar has need of agents in Constantinople to further his own agenda against Gesu and the Obertus. The characters would fill this role very nicely.

- **Crusading Cainites:** Over 20,000 crusaders find themselves trapped in Constantinople without the ability to travel to the Holy Land as intended. Among them are many Cainites. When events get out of hand in April 1204, they are right in the thick of things and in a position either to add to the destruction or fight against it.

These options are not the only ones, however. Players could also take on the roles of Tzimisce knights, Arab or Genoese Cainites "trapped" in Constantinople or even *einherjar* members of the emperor's Varangian guard (see *Wolves of the Sea*), just to name a few.

MAJOR PLAYERS

The events of **Dying Embers** are the direct result of the actions (both overt and covert) of four players: Michael, Narses, Myca Vykos and mortals. Understanding the goals of each faction is essential to the proper execution of this story.

MICHAEL

Although he is not a faction as such, the Toreador Methuselah Michael influences almost everything in Constantinople. Driven slowly insane by events (and helped along by the manipulations of the Malkavian Gregorius), Michael has plunged into fits of melancholy and torpor. He now fully believes that he's the Archangel Michael, a belief also held by his followers, who have a blood oath to him. As the crusaders begin their siege, Michael's madness deprives Constantinople of his leadership. Therefore, the city's Cainites must chart their own destinies, lest they be swept away by the mortals that swarm Byzantium with fire and sword.

STORYTELLING DYING EMBERS

Dying Embers is a complicated story. As the culmination of both **Bitter Crusade** and centuries of Cainite conflict, it's impossible to describe every element of that story in detail. The destruction of Constantinople is a pivotal event in the Dark Medieval world, one that not only lays the groundwork for many future events, but which also has a profound impact on the unlives of many Storyteller characters. **Dying Embers** focuses on just a few of the many tales that can be told during Constantinople's fall. Add to and embellish these tales according to the needs of your ongoing chronicle.

NARSES

Narses' hatred of Byzantium is old and powerful. Believing that he has been treated unjustly by Michael and his allies, the prince of Venice has spent most of his undead existence plotting against Constantinople. Although it is unexpected, Narses sees the presence of the crusaders in New Rome as the perfect opportunity to have his revenge.

Narses' primary agent in Constantinople is Bishop Alfonzo. However, the Archbishop of Nod doesn't completely trust his childe, believing rightly that Alfonzo has learned the art of treachery too well. Consequently, Narses hopes to use other instruments within the crusade to further his plans. Depending on how events unfolded in *Venetian Nights*, the coterie may be such instruments.

MYCA VYKOS

Taken from his native Transylvania as a youth by the Byzantine Cainite Symeon, Vykos spent centuries learning from him. Because of the genuine respect in which he holds his sire, Vykos has grown increasingly frustrated that Symeon is unwilling to confront his brother and sire Gesu, who is lost in a fanatical pursuit of divinity. Vykos' secret hatred for Gesu has increased to include the entire Obertus sect, which he sees as having abandoned its original quest for knowledge for the sake of Gesu's deluded plans.

Vykos plans to leave the Obertus, taking his sire with him, before Constantinople finally falls. However, he doubts that Symeon will ever leave Byzantium as long as Gesu lives. Consequently, Vykos plans to use the chaos of the crusaders' attack on the city as an opportunity to destroy Gesu, preferably with the assistance of outsiders, although he will do the deed himself if necessary.

MORTALS

Cainites consider themselves lords of the night, but mortals hold the day. The Fourth Crusade makes that fact painfully obvious, as mortal crusaders bring about the destruction of both Constantinople and Michael's Dream. Unlike either Narses or Vykos, the crusaders do not act deliberately or as a group. Within the crusader camp, there are many factions and many agendas. The Venetians seek mercantile concessions, the Franks want their promised payment, and churchmen seek the obeisance of the Orthodox Church. All these desires collide to bring about the tragedy of *Dying Embers*.

The disparate nature of mortal interests makes mortals perhaps the most dangerous faction in Constantinople — at least from the Cainite point of view. After all, there is no guarantee that control of the Venetians, for example, is sufficient to bend the crusade to one's will. As several vampires learn, assuming such

a thing is as likely to lead to one's own destruction as that of one's enemies.

MINOR PLAYERS

Even before the crusade, Constantinople was a city of intrigues. There is a large number of minor factions, each of which has a role to play in the story of the city's fall. Because not all of them have a direct bearing on the events of *Dying Embers*, you are encouraged to use only those that contribute to the story you wish to tell.

- **The Chosen of Calomena:** As the Dream ends, some Cainites turn to this religious sect for shelter from the coming storm. Led by the charismatic Stanislav, the Chosen believe that Caine was the child of the devil and therefore that vampires are manifestations of evil. Only Caine's twin sister, Calomena, can bring salvation to Cainites. As the Chosen await the end of the world, they attack vampires throughout Constantinople and add to the chaos wrought by the crusaders.

- **The Covenant of Three:** Formed by Natalya Svyatoslav, Baron Thomas Feroux and Malachite (along with other Nosferatu), this group is an informal but strong alliance to protect the Dream. Its members recognize that Michael's madness and the designs of other Cainites threaten Constantinople's future. Thus far, they have taken little direct action toward saving the city beyond concealing books from the Tzimisce Library of the Forgotten in cisterns throughout the city. They are caught largely off guard by the invasion of the crusaders.

- **The Inconnu:** These shadowy Cainites, mostly Roman in origin, are the great unknown of this story. Like Narses, they resent the Dream and work to bring it down from within. Because of their secretive nature, they prefer to use a variety of instruments and agents rather than move openly. In the end, even they realize the loss that the world suffers when Constantinople is sacked, and they retreat once more into the darkness, leaving their agents without support.

- **The Latins:** Western European Cainites do not comprise a unified group, but they are a significant presence in the city. Their chief representative is Bishop Alfonzo, the agent and childe of Narses, who has worked to undermine Constantinople by giving succor to destabilizing elements, like the Chosen of Calomena — even at the expense of Latin lives. However, as Constantinople's end nears, some Latins, like Gabriella of Genoa, act to prevent the loss of all of Byzantium's treasures.

- **The Nosferatu:** The Nosferatu of Constantinople, led by the elder Malachite, realize that the city's end is near. Nevertheless, they work to save New Rome despite itself. Working with others who are sympathetic to their cause (such as the Baron

and Natalya), they scramble to uncover and destroy those who would undermine the Dream.

- **Obertus Tzimisce:** Founded by the Methuselah known as the Dracon, and now headed by his child Gesu, the Obertus seek to find the divinity within each person — mortal and Cainite alike. Over the centuries, this Tzimisce sect has become increasingly isolated and inward-looking. This trend has angered Myca Vykos, who places greater stock in maintaining the Library of the Forgotten than in an introspective quest for the divine essence within. Likewise, the rift between Gesu and his brother Symeon is a dark undercurrent that threatens to destroy the Obertus. Nevertheless, they continue their rituals and meditations, seemingly oblivious to the dangers around them.

ACT ONE: DARKNESS FALLS

Act one begins on the night of Sunday, April 11, 1204, as the crusaders are on the verge of entering the city. Baron Thomas Feroux and his allies have helped repel a previous attack on the city, leading many Cainites to believe that the worst is over. However, this calm only masks the tensions boiling beneath the surface, which are ready to erupt at any moment.

This act focuses on the rift between Gesu and Symeon and its consequences for the fate of Constantinople. As the coterie enters the city, the characters become enmeshed in this feud and witness the destruction of the Obertus monastery that results. More importantly, they recognize their own place within the greater scheme of things thanks to an enigmatic meeting with Michael himself.

PROLOGUE: QUEEN OF CITIES

The action of *Dying Embers* requires the coterie to be within Constantinople's walls before the crusaders enter the city. There are numerous ways in which they might get there. You can determine which is the case depending on the needs of your chronicle.

- **Designated Agents:** If the characters are in the employ of Narses or Vykos (or others), gaining entry into city is a simple matter, as both have sufficient pull to do so. In the case of Narses, the characters find themselves in the Latin Quarter as a guest of Bishop Alfonzo, who treats them politely if coldly. In the case of Vykos, the characters find their way to the monastery of Christ Pantokrator, where they are kept out of sight until Vykos can meet with them in scene one.

- **Acquaintances:** It's also possible that the characters know someone within Constantinople. After all, Byzantium is a huge metropolis with trading contacts

throughout Europe and Asia. In this instance, the coterie arrives in whichever part of the city their contact resides. Almost any character (Storyteller or otherwise) could serve this purpose, but the Genoese Lasombra Bishop Gabriella is a good candidate.

- **Forced Entry:** As vampires, the characters have many ways to enter places where they are unwanted. The judicious use of skills or Disciplines certainly aids in entering the city. Likewise, Constantinople's guard posts are not always held by the most virtuous of men, especially in times of turmoil such as these. A well-placed bribe can often do easily what more violent methods cannot.

- **Surreptitious Entry:** As impervious to outside attack as the city is, Constantinople still has secret, hidden or otherwise forgotten entrances, any one of which would serve to bring the characters into the city. Many of these entrances may bring the coterie to the attention of Nosferatu such as Malachite, who can then become an ally or enemy depending on how he and his brethren are treated.

As always, the foregoing is only a small sampling of possibilities. You are invited to be creative in dealing with the characters' entry into the city. Whatever method you choose, you should stress both Byzantium's immensity and its beauty, as these elements are important to setting the mood of this story. In the end, the purpose of this prologue is served if the coterie is now within the walls and has some sense of the grandeur of Constantinople.

SCENE ONE: TREPIDATION

The characters now find themselves within Constantinople just hours before the crusaders come pouring into the city. As in the prologue, scene one plays out in several ways depending on the characters' reasons for being in the city in the first place. Again, for the purposes of simplicity, only four options are addressed explicitly. Using these options as guidelines, you can easily create additional ways to include coterie with other backgrounds and agendas.

INSTRUMENTS OF NARSES

If the characters are agents of Narses, they soon find themselves in the presence of Alfonzo. As noted previously, he treats them politely but without any affection. He clearly finds the presence of other Narsene agents in Constantinople to be a personal insult — especially on the eve of the city's fall — and he makes no effort to hide his disdain. Characters whose players make a successful Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 7) recognize that Alfonzo is also frightened. Although the characters won't know it, the bishop worries that Narses knows of his secret alliance with the Inconnu or that he plans to replace him — or both.

DYING EMBERS

In any event, Alfonzo spends some time speaking with the characters, exchanging information. He then briefs them on the current situation in Constantinople. During these exchanges, Alfonzo tries to feel out the characters' loyalties and intentions. He continues to fear that they have been sent to spy on him and his activities. He intends to find a way to destroy them without having to do the deed himself.

Consequently, he strongly suggests that the characters would further Narses' agenda by eliminating Gesu, the leader of an important Byzantine sect. If the characters are unfamiliar with Gesu or the Obertus, Alfonzo provides them with the details, all the while emphasizing how much Narses — and they — would benefit from Gesu's destruction. If the characters are skeptical or otherwise unconvinced, the Bishop uses every tool at his disposal to sway them to his plan, including hints about books contained in the Library of the Forgotten.

Should the characters show interest in his suggestion, Alfonzo gives them the location of the Obertus monastery, as well as information on possible methods of proceeding. You should feel free to improvise details as required. After all, Alfonzo knows much about the Obertus, but not everything. Some of his information may indeed be incorrect.

However, if the coterie does not show any interest in eliminating Gesu, Alfonzo smiles knowingly and explains that he understands their reluctance. After all, it would be a difficult undertaking — one probably beyond their abilities. He then suggests that there are other important endeavors to be completed, such as preventing the Chosen of Calomena from wreaking any more destruction on the Latin Quarter. Alfonzo then provides them with details of this troublesome group and their current activities (further described in scene two).

ALLIES OF VYKOS

If the characters are allies of Vykos, the Fiend approaches them in a secluded chamber of the Christ Pantokrator monastery. His manner is friendly but concerned. He openly admits that he sees no future for Constantinople. Vykos fears that the crusaders will destroy everything of value in the city, including many Cainites, if something is not done to stop them.

He then explains that he fears that his sire, Symeon, will be among the Cainites destroyed — a great loss not only to himself but to the future. Vykos describes the story of Symeon and Gesu's past and how even now Symeon loves and defends his brother. The Fiend states that the Obertus monastery is sure to be a target of the crusaders. Because of Gesu's obsession with the Divinity Within, he will never leave, leading to Symeon's inevitable efforts to save him. In the end, both brothers will be destroyed, including the much more worthy Symeon.

BITTER CRUSADE

GESU, SYMEON AND VYKOS

The unusual relationship between these three Cainites stems from Michael's desire to end the feud between the Ventrue Antonius and the Tzimisce Dracon, his two partners in building Constantinople and also his lovers. Michael believed that he'd found a way to heal the rift and restore unity in the persons of two boys. These brothers, Symeon and Gesu, exemplified the best qualities of his lovers. In addition, the pair was united on a deeply spiritual level. Each depended on and supported the other, as if each was half of a greater whole. Michael presented the boys to Antonius and the Dracon, asking that the boys be raised as a symbol of unity that would ensure the success of the Dream. Michael's plan seemed to have succeeded at first, and peace reigned in Constantinople.

When the Dracon Embraced Gesu as planned, the youth fell into a deep torpor. Symeon refused to leave his brother's side, despite warnings from Antonius of the danger involved. Two years later, Gesu awoke after receiving an angelic vision and Embraced his brother — stripping Antonius of Michael's gift. Antonius became so enraged that he proved a threat to Constantinople. Reluctantly, both Michael and the Dracon allowed him to be destroyed by his own clan.

A semblance of peace was thus restored, during which time Symeon Embraced the Carpathian Myca Vykos. However, the Latin riots of 1185 shattered the peace for mortals and Cainites alike. The Genoese Lasombra Gabriella and her mortal protégé Lillian petitioned Symeon to protect them from anti-Latin mobs, which he did. Lillian then went on to become Symeon's lover. Before Symeon could Embrace her himself, Gesu decided to do the same — but with a difference. As he drained Lillian of her blood, Gesu used Vicissitude to meld her to him. This so-called "Immaculate Union" is Gesu's attempt to reunite the male and the female in order to achieve transcendence.

Symeon is enraged by Gesu's actions, but, because of his genuine love for him, he has done nothing to express his anger. Instead, he broods, unsure whether his love will ultimately be enough to keep him from destroying Gesu. In this, he is subtly encouraged by Vykos, who is disdainful of Gesu's solipsistic preoccupations. As *Dying Embers* begins, the simmering resentment between the two brothers finally boils over — with possibly disastrous results.

Consequently, Vykos argues forcefully that Gesu must be destroyed before the crusaders arrive. Doing so will enable Symeon to let go and escape Constantinople before he suffers Final Death at the hands of the crusaders. He also recounts the story of Lillian, the mortal whom Symeon had protected and whom Gesu not only Embraced but subsumed into his very flesh in a twisted Obertus ritual. Stress the sincerity of Vykos' arguments; as twisted as they are, the Fiend genuinely believes them. He feels that Symeon has no future as long as he remains devoted to his brother — a misplaced devotion if there ever was one. Moreover, Vykos believes that the greatness of Constantinople transcends the city itself and that it can be transplanted elsewhere, but only if Cainites like Symeon survive the coming tumult.

Like Alfonzo, Vykos provides the coterie with enough information to help them enter the monastery and destroy Gesu. If asked why he will not participate in this action, Vykos confesses that he wishes to remain by his sire's side while the deed is done. His direct involvement in Gesu's destruction would only impede its ultimate success, by further conflicting Symeon.

LATIN CAINITES AND OTHERS

If the characters have entered Constantinople as the vanguard of crusading Cainites, their involvement in the Tzimisce feud is simple. Through one of their contacts in the city, they learn that the Obertus monastery is both rich with books and home to a vampire who is essential to the survival of Michael's Dream: Gesu. Therefore, pillaging the monastery and destroying Gesu should seem natural goals for Latin Cainites intent on sowing chaos within the Queen of Cities. You need only direct such characters subtly to involve them in the plot.

Of course, not every Latin Cainite is a slaving hater of Byzantium. Allies of Gabriella of Genoa, for example, might be sympathetic to the survival of Constantinople and its vampires. As an opponent of Alfonzo, Gabriella might approach the coterie to prevent Gesu's destruction at the hands of Narsene agents. Although she is no longer an avowed ally of Symeon, Gabriella still retains enough residual sympathy for him to spare the Cainite the trauma of his brother's loss. She is, therefore, an ideal instrument with which to involve Latin characters in Tzimisce affairs.

THE GUILT OF SYMEON

Finally, characters could be approached by Symeon himself. He is aware of Vykos' plot against Gesu and, although he is conflicted in his feelings for his brother, he cannot allow his childe to carry out such an act. Interestingly, Symeon bears no ill will toward Vykos, claiming to understand why Vykos decided to act as he did. The irony, of course, is that Symeon's trust of Vykos will one day be his undoing. (In several centuries, Vykos is destined to diablerize his sire in the chaos of the

Anarch Revolt, an event that you may wish to foreshadow if your players keep track of such things.)

Symeon might approach the characters for many possible reasons. Symeon has a small network of contacts in the city who might tell him that the characters are trustworthy. If they are Latins not in the employ of Narses or intent on destroying Constantinople, he considers them reasonable enough to hear him out. If they are Byzantines, he appeals to their interest in preserving the Dream — and Gesu's important role in it. Alternatively, the characters may seek out Symeon at the direction of Gabriella or someone else who knows him well.

Emphasize the tragic nature of Symeon. He both genuinely loves and hates his brother, ever aware of how much he owes to Gesu — as well as how much Gesu has taken from him. When placed in contrast to the centuries-old grudges held by other Cainites against one another, Symeon's willingness to save his brother takes on an even more powerful cast, one that reflects the melancholy ambiguity of *Dying Embers*.

SCENE TWO: PROPHECIES

This scene occurs as the characters make their way to the Obertus monastery, for whatever reason. Alternatively, the scene may be used as another way to involve coterie members with no connection to the Tzimisce feud in the events of act one. You can place it any time during the first night in Constantinople. Its exact placement depends only on the demands of your chronicle.

THE CHOSEN

The characters encounter a group of six ghouls, all of whom carry swords and clubs. They stride down the city street with an arrogant air, giving unpleasant looks to the few passersby they encounter. When their leader — a broad-shouldered young man — sees the coterie, he immediately stops the group dead in its tracks. He shouts, "Only the Chosen will be saved!" and leads the group into an attack against the characters.

The six ghouls are members of the Chosen of Calomena cult. Stanislav, their leader, has prophesied that the end of the world is at hand. To prove their devotion, he has sent cultists throughout Constantinople to attack any Cainites they encounter — all for the glory of Calomena, of course. Believing fully that the end is nigh, the ghouls fight with apocalyptic fervor, and they will not surrender. Some may flee, however, perhaps to attack again.

Use the ghoul template on page 101 for those in the service of the Chosen. Feel free to modify them according to the strength of the coterie and the needs of your chronicle.

PRINCE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST

Shortly after defeating the Chosen, the characters are startled by a bright light, so bright they may believe

a nearby building is on fire. Whirling around, they will see what few in Constantinople have ever glimpsed: Michael in all his glory. Looking like nothing less than a stained glass angel come to life, the brilliant, coruscating form of the Toreador Methuselah appears before them. His face is impassive, yet he somehow radiates discernible benevolence. It almost hurts to gaze upon him, but the characters feel no fear, only an indescribable tranquility that will haunt them for years to come.

Surveying the characters with his expressionless face, Michael speaks to them in a mellifluous voice that somehow reveals both gentleness and strength all at once. "My children," he begins, "there is not much time. One dream is about to end, but another is yet to begin. You must see that it is not stillborn." If the characters attempt to question him or otherwise interrupt, Michael ignores them, speaking as if he hadn't heard their objections at all. He continues, "Do not be afraid. Do not worry. But most of all, do not be deceived. Even in beauty, there can be deception — and madness. The Dream has need of midwives and it is you who will serve." He places great emphasis on the last sentence before opening his arms and saying, "Remember that this is but one form. Dreams can have as many as there are dreamers to imagine them." With those words, there is another blinding flash and Michael is gone, leaving the characters in a darkness that seems all the more oppressive after the radiance they've just experienced.

On one level, Michael's words represent a brief moment of lucidity in the midst of his interminable madness. They entrust the Dream to the characters, to take it beyond the confines of Byzantium. Yet, you should never admit to such a simple explanation. Given Michael's insanity, it's just as possible that his words mean nothing and that his appearance to the coterie had no significance. This scene is meant to be profoundly ambiguous. Although it propels the story forward, its ultimate meaning (if any) is left to you and what you have in mind for your chronicle.

SCENE THREE: SILENT MONASTERY

Gesu and his monks make their home in the Monastery of St. John Studius in the region known as Exokionion. A huge complex of buildings including even the University of Constantinople, the monastery is off limits to anyone not expressly admitted by Gesu. Therefore, getting in is the first order of business for the characters.

ENTERING THE MONASTERY

To enter, the coterie must use a combination of ingenuity and guile. Some Disciplines, such as Obfuscate, might enable characters to enter without drawing the attention of either the Obertus or their ghoul monks. Similarly, use of Dominate or Presence might

BITTER CRUSADE

allow a character to convince someone to allow him into the monastery. There are also many secret passages and tunnels from other parts of the city. If the characters have become friendly with the Nosferatu — and they have come to save Gesu — they may use one of these hidden entrances.

Because there are so many possible methods of entry, they cannot be enumerated here. As long as you force the players to think creatively to overcome this genuine challenge, you're doing fine. The goal here is tension, the sense that the characters could be discovered by Gesudian monks or Tzimisce vampires and turned away — or worse. This scene is the climax of act one and you should always bear that fact in mind.

INSIDE THE MONASTERY

The monastery itself is a testament to Gesu's unusual approach to spiritual development. Combining Orthodox Christian iconography with vampiric motifs, the interior rooms come as a shock to all but the most jaded Cainites. In addition to inhuman Tzimisce monks going about their devotions, there are others suspended in iron cages, deprived of blood to aid in their unique meditations. Compared to the subtler warping of Christianity among Cainite Heretics, the monastery is a genuine oddity.

The monks carry out various duties: praying, reading and tending to the Library of the Forgotten, among other things. While most are Obertus ghouls, some are true vampires. All take notice of and investigate anything (or anyone) unusual. Consequently, it's imperative that the characters make every effort to hide and move silently, lest their presence raise an alarm against them. Although the

THE LIBRARY OF THE FORGOTTEN

The library is the greatest accomplishment of the Obertus. During the seventh and eighth centuries, the Dracon and his ghoul monks began collecting knowledge and information, and they assembled one of the finest libraries in the world. In the years before the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, the Dracon sent his monks to transcribe some of the most precious scrolls, saving a number of tomes and books that were thought to be lost forever.

Anything from the complete *Protrepticus* (Aristotle's lost exhortation to philosophy) to unknown fragments of the *Book of Nod* could be found within its stacks. Take care with what you allow your players access to, but the final decision is yours, based on both interest and the demands of your chronicle.



monks are not violent by nature, there are enough monks to make the characters' lives difficult should they be discovered. If needs be, use the templates on page 101 for the ghou and Cainite monks.

CONFRONTING GESU

Gesu spends a great deal of time within the inner chapel of the monastery, which is where the characters ultimately find him. How their meeting with him unfolds depends on their reasons for coming to the monastery. If they have come to destroy him, Gesu offers only token resistance. He is not a warrior, and he abhors violence. However, he attempts to determine why it is the characters seek to destroy him. Even as he faces the prospect of his Final Death, Gesu is curious. Should they claim that Symeon has sent them, Gesu does not accept it, believing (quite rightly) that his brother does not have sufficient hate within him to have commanded such an action.

Although Gesu abhors violence, his monks do not. Many of them will defend their spiritual master, even at the cost of their own lives. You should be prepared to handle melees between the coterie and Gesu's monastic defenders, who arm themselves with improvised weapons. In the end, though, Gesu orders the monks to cease their defense of him and tries to dissuade the characters from their course. He speaks with the eloquence of a preacher about the loss of the Dream and the search for the Divinity Within. He asks the characters to join him in this search by adding, "Dreams can have as many forms as there are dreamers to imagine them."

DIABLERIZING GESU

Since Gesu submits so willingly to his own destruction, some players will wish to take advantage of this fact by diablerizing him. Although Gesu is a powerful vampire, there's no reason you should discourage this course of action. In fact, committing Amaranth upon Gesu could add further pathos to the story of *Dying Embers*, as the diablerist suffers either derangement or the slow alteration of his virtues toward those of Gesu. In both cases, the diablerist is forever affected by his actions, ensuring that the fall of Constantinople has personal as well as historical consequences in many chronicles.

Vampires on the Roads of Heaven or Humanity lose one point from their rating should they diablerize Gesu. Likewise, the Storyteller may rule that the strength of Gesu's blood slowly increases the diablerist's Conscience and Self-Control by one dot (or reduces their Instinct and Conviction). Even the very act of diablerie can thus transform a character, bringing him closer to the divinity that Gesu saw within all Cainites.

DYING EMBERS

This echo of Michael's words from scene two should serve to underscore Gesu's words. However, if his attackers remain unmoved, he submits to his own destruction without further comment. Some of the remaining monks attempt to kill the coterie upon seeing their master destroyed, while others flee into the monastery's bowels.

On the other hand, if the coterie has come to save Gesu, they arrive well in advance of his would-be assassins. Gesu greets them without once questioning who they are or how they entered his abode. He then implores them, "Do not be afraid. Do not worry," echoing Michael's words from the previous scene. Gesu tells the characters that he is safe within the monastery and that he shall remain here as long as he is needed, but he does not elaborate upon his statement. He is unmoved by any attempts to convince him to leave, even when presented with strong evidence that his existence is in danger. Instead, Gesu tells the characters that it is their existence — and the Dream they must protect — that is endangered by staying. He encourages them to leave the monastery at once.

SCENE FOUR: INTO THE FLAMES

This scene follows immediately on the previous one, whether the characters have destroyed Gesu or have tried in vain to get him to leave. In either case, they hear a loud boom, as the crusaders breach the walls of Constantinople and enter the city. If Gesu is still alive, he again encourages them to flee at once. The more fanatical or depraved among the crusaders have already begun to pillage and destroy at will. If Gauthier de Dampiere has survived the events of both **Venetian Nights** and **Fiendish Winter**, he leads a large band of zealous crusaders to the Obertus monastery, which they set ablaze — with the characters still inside! Otherwise, it is another fanatical crusader who leads the band.

The fire moves quickly through the wooden interiors of the monastery, scorching the stones as it rises upward. Any monks who remain in the building scurry about, attempting to extinguish the fire and protect the Library of the Forgotten. As they do so, mortal crusaders enter the building and put them to the sword. The characters may wish to join in the defense of the monastery, in which case they must contend not only with the crusaders but also the flames.

If he is still alive, Gesu continues to plead for the characters to leave him and the monastery behind. He suggests that the characters have another destiny beyond Constantinople and that it will not be served by their dying here. You should feel free to allude to Michael's prophetic words, if that will encourage the characters to flee the monastery. Gesu tells the characters of tunnels beneath the monastery that could enable

THE DANGERS OF FIRE

Consult the **Vampire: The Dark Ages** rulebook for complete rules on fire. The fire in the monastery grows more intense the longer the characters stay. Initially, the difficulty of resisting flame damage is 5. As the fire becomes stronger, the difficulty reaches 7. You should make every effort to emphasize the danger of the situation to the players, since lingering in the monastery too long could well spell the end of their characters.

In addition, you should remember that being trapped in a burning building is sufficient to trigger **Rötschreck** in most vampires — including the coterie. The players should make appropriate rolls during this time so that their characters remain in control as the fire rages through the monastery.

them to escape the crusaders' notice. Indeed, the coterie may already know of such tunnels if they're allied to the Nosferatu or entered the monastery through them already. However, if Gesu is destroyed and the characters have no knowledge of the tunnels, a successful Perception + Investigation roll reveals an entry to these tunnels exposed by the crusaders' pillaging, which the characters can then use to escape.

SCENE FIVE: NEW ALLIANCES

This is an optional scene that can be omitted safely if you do not wish to deal with the added complications it introduces. The tunnels the characters enter are part of a network of sewers and other underground passageways used by the Nosferatu and other renegade groups. When the characters enter them to escape the conflagration above, they find themselves alone and without any sense of direction. Successful uses of Perception + Investigation, Intelligence + Science, Auspex or other Disciplines might enable the characters to navigate the tunnels to safety.

However, at the discretion of the Storyteller, a successful Perception + Alertness roll reveals the sound of frantic whispered conversation. Following the voices leads the characters into an open area beneath a cistern. In this area are several Cainites, as well as crates and makeshift shelves on which can be seen many books and scrolls. Unless the characters announce themselves, they remain unseen.

The Cainites are Malachite, Natalya and Thomas Feroux. They are overseeing a frenzied attempt to box and move some of the books they've been secreting in cisterns throughout the city. Realizing that the Library

of the Forgotten was too tempting a target for any would-be conqueror (quite rightly, it seems), these three Cainite took precautions. Now that crusaders are running rampant throughout the city, this Covenant of Three is making good on its plans.

If the characters announce themselves, the three react with surprise. Although they are suspicious of Latin Cainites — especially now — they do not require unreasonable proof of good intentions. With a few questions, they can determine if the coterie is worthy of their trust. If so, they ask for their assistance. If not, they use their considerable abilities (and those of their ghoul allies) to beat them back, aiming to buy their fellows more time.

If the characters aid the three, they are treated to another perspective on the death of Michael's Dream. Unlike many Cainites, the Covenant of Three sees the Dream as a reality and not an unattainable goal. They hope to preserve it elsewhere beyond the walls of Constantinople. Their attempt to save some of the Library's contents is but one physical example of how they intend to do that. Malachite, for example, is ordering other Nosferatu to leave the city for greener pastures, where they will bring the Dream. Natalya hopes to return to her native Russia to do the same, while the Baron vows to fight on in Byzantium as long as there is some hope that it can be saved.

Besides carting crates of books to be transported out of the city, the Covenant asks the characters how they intend to preserve the Dream. There is no correct answer to this query. It's an opportunity for the characters to reflect on their experiences during this first night of the sack of Constantinople. It's a fitting way for them to place events within a larger context in an attempt to see beyond the destruction that will soon be even more horrific.

ACT TWO: MIDNIGHT SUNS

Act two consists of four optional and two mandatory scenes. Unlike the previous act, no single plot dominates act two. Instead, it's intended to highlight Constantinople's destruction — as well as the Dream's — by showing a wide variety of events. Each event illustrates the themes of betrayal, mortality and hope that are the hallmarks of **Dying Embers**. Together these scenes paint an image of the city as it is pillaged.

Throughout this act, the characters find Constantinople an odd mix of the panicked and the calm. While crusaders run about looting the city, many of its inhabitants show no signs of concern. Byzantine citizens are used to coups and rebellions, having seen dozens of them in the last few decades. To them, the

crusaders are just the latest in a long line of strong men seizing the capital in order to take the empire. If the coterie is obviously Latin in appearance, they may encounter Greek citizens who greet them with the words "*Hagios basileus marchios*," meaning "Holy emperor the Marquis," referring to their expectation that Marquis Boniface of Montferrat will seize the throne after the sack. Little do they — or the characters — realize what fate has in store for the Queen of Cities.

SCENE SIX: SACRILEGE

The characters find themselves near Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom. Although it is late at night, they can hear the sounds of echoing activity within its cavernous interior. They can also see lights brighter than would be typical at this hour. After spending a minute or two pondering these facts, they see a group of five rough-looking crusaders push an Orthodox priest outside the building and begin to beat him. He holds a book, possibly a sacramentary, with a gem-encrusted cover in his hands, as if he is defending it. He sees the coterie and begs them in Greek to assist him.

How the characters react is up to the players. The crusaders aren't knights but common men armed with clubs. They aren't especially skilled in the use of their chosen weapons, but if the characters do nothing, they beat the priest to death and take the book from his body. If the characters confront the crusaders, they find them poor opponents, easily frightened by displays of superior skill. Characters on the Roads of Heaven and Humanity should feel themselves particularly drawn to the priest's plight.

If the coterie drives off the ruffians, the priest, named Father Demetrios, thanks and blesses his benefactors. He then begs them to come to his aid once more. Crusaders have entered Hagia Sophia and have desecrated it with their actions. They have stripped the altars of precious furnishings, smashed icons and defiled the Eucharist and Precious Blood. They use patens as bread dishes and chalices as drinking cups — and other even worse sacrileges. Father Demetrios asks that the characters do something to stop them. If they are Latins, he asks them to use their "influence" over them. If they are not, he appeals to their solidarity with the Byzantines.

Fulfilling this request is difficult. For one, the crusaders within outnumber the coterie significantly. Over two dozen crusaders are present, some of them knights with armor and swords. Moreover, Hagia Sophia is holy ground, which causes Cainites great discomfort. Although none of the crusaders within possess True Faith, the holiness of Hagia Sophia itself at least distracts the vampires. The Church of Holy Wisdom has an ambient Faith rating of only 5 or 6 given its desecration, but some areas of the building still have ratings as high as 8. Players of vampires who try to enter holy ground must

DYING EMBERS

roll Willpower against its Faith rating to do so. Mortals with True Faith gain an additional point on holy ground.

If the coterie takes on the sacrilegious crusaders, make the fight a desperate one, with odds strongly favoring the crusaders. One option might be to raise an alarm and alert other, more devout crusaders, reminding them of their vows never to pillage churches or harm fellow Christians. Doing so requires solid roleplaying, but it is a definite solution to this moral quandary. If the characters leave without stopping the crusaders, Father Demetrios beseeches them further but does nothing else to persuade them.

SCENE SEVEN: PATRICIAN INFIGHTING

This optional scene highlights the self-destruction of the Byzantine Ventrue. Instead of rallying to the defense of the city over which they claim to watch, they have turned on one another, fighting to determine who will reign over the ashes that the crusaders leave behind. This scene can occur almost anywhere in the city, although it's most appropriate near centers of power such as the various palaces, basilicas and forums.

As the coterie moves about the city, the characters encounter a pair of Cainites arguing with one another, each backed up by several ghouls. They are both Ventrue, but each supports a different faction within the clan. Feel free to decide which faction each supports based on the needs of your chronicle. The default assumption is that one Cainite (Alexander) supports *Basileus Caius*, the Ventrue elder of the city, while the other (Theodorus) supports Anna Comnena, a strident anti-Latin and Caius' main rival. Their dispute centers on the charge that Caius is responsible for having precipitated the sack of the city by granting the Latins sole rule over their quarter.

Unless the characters avoid being seen, they will be drawn into this argument. If they are Latins, Theodorus points to their presence as proof of his charges against Caius. He even begins to mock and taunt them, asking if they've "come to steal yet more from our city." If they are Byzantines, Theodorus questions them on the matter of the Latin "infestation" of Constantinople and whether or not Caius is an unworthy leader for the clan because of his involvement in it.

The characters should react according to their consciences, allegiances and Roads. You should encourage them to become involved in this dispute, if only to show the depths to which the Ventrue have fallen. The sight of their arguing with — even threatening — one another while the city burns around them would be comical if it weren't so tragic. Both Theodorus and Alexander are Cainites of some power and ability. Were they to work together, they might be able to salvage something

of the city that they both claim to hold dear. Emphasize this fact, especially if the coterie is acting to do just that.

This scene is open-ended, and it can conclude in any number of ways. However, unless the characters do something to prevent it, the most likely outcome is violence between the two Cainites and their ghoul attendants — and possibly the characters. Convincing them not to fight requires careful diplomacy and perhaps even subtle intimidation. Even then, the characters have not changed any minds; they'll only have postponed the dispute to a later time.

In the end, almost any action is futile. The Ventrue seem determined to destroy themselves, and this scene should make that sad fact very clear. Use it as an opportunity to point out that Cainites are as guilty of the destruction of Byzantium as are the mortals, perhaps even more so, for they have memories long enough to realize what has been lost when the city is finally sacked.

SCENE EIGHT: THE CHOSEN RETURN

Fires have started throughout the city, begun by careless looters and amplified by the Chosen of Calomena. Stanislav, their leader, believes that the end times are upon the world and that Caine's twin sister shall return imminently. Consequently, he and his fellow cultists act with even more wild abandon, setting fires and killing mortals and Cainites alike. In this scene, the coterie finds itself attacked by several ghouls led by Stanislav himself.

There should be one ghoul per member of the coterie, plus Stanislav. Being a crafty opponent, he waits until the characters are especially vulnerable then uses surprise. As the characters are kept busy dealing with the ghouls, Stanislav sets more fires, attempting to trap the coterie and prevent their escape. Stanislav fully expects Calomena to reward him for his destruction of the "devilish Cainites," and he acts appropriately.

Stanislav does not survive the sack of Constantinople, and the characters may well be the instruments of his destruction. The Chosen do not last long after his Final Death, fading into the mists of history. This scene is another opportunity for the characters to participate in an important — if minor — event of the Dark Medieval age.

SCENE NINE: LOOK TO THE FUTURE

The characters encounter a small train of Nosferatu, led by Malachite, exiting the city's sewer system. If the characters have met Malachite in act one, he acknowledges their presence but is otherwise curt. As he explains, he and his followers are leaving Constantinople forever.

There is no future here. Michael's Dream is dead in this location, but perhaps it can be transplanted elsewhere as a seed of the future. If the characters have not yet met Malachite, he is reluctant to speak with them, especially if they appear to be Latins.

If pressed, Malachite adds that there are reports that Michael has disappeared from his resting place beneath Hagia Sophia. Of course, Malachite doesn't blame him: He's seen hordes of crusaders looting the place — hardly a fit resting place for the elder of Constantinople! The Nosferatu then wonders aloud where the patriarch has gone in the midst of so much chaos. Should the coterie pursue this matter, Malachite suggests that Michael may have gone to the Palace of the Mangana, where he spent many months after the death of the Ventrue Antonius centuries ago.

If the characters have already told him of their encounter with Michael, Malachite then asks them what it is that the Patriarch said to them. He has great interest in it, since he fears that they may be the last words heard from the Methuselah in some time — if ever. He tells the characters to consider themselves fortunate to have received such a boon and to take Michael's words seriously. Malachite reacts similarly if the characters only now reveal their experiences to him, except with more surprise, particularly given Michael's recent disappearance.

Beyond that, Malachite has little else to offer the coterie. He bids them success in whatever endeavors they undertake, and he expresses the hope that they will meet again under better circumstances. Before disappearing into the night with his fellow Nosferatu, he says,

A DOSE OF DESTINY

Malachite and his Nosferatu have actually been dominated by Michael into leaving the city to spare them the fires to come and to spread fragments of the Dream. The Patriarch's programming of the Lepers occurred over the last year, and there's little the coterie can do to counter it in the short term. Convincing arguments may inspire Malachite to delay his departure a few more nights, but that is the best they can hope for.

Players who devour the various World of Darkness supplements may know that Malachite eventually returns to Constantinople, however, and sees it fall to the Turks in centuries to come (as described in *Clanbook Nosferatu*). His reasons for returning are many, but if the players' coterie shows itself willing to risk the fires of the crusade, that surely inspires him in years to come. Malachite would make an interesting hidden patron for such a coterie in the years after *Bitter Crusade*.

"If the Dream is worthwhile, it will outlast even Constantinople. It possesses an immortality even Cainites should envy."

SCENE TEN: THE HOUSE OF LAMPS

This scene introduces the characters to the enigmatic Mary the Black, who plays a key role at the climax of *Dying Embers*. In addition, it establishes that there are forces at work in Constantinople far darker than either human zeal or Cainite treachery.

The House of Lamps is a one-story building near the Grand Bazaar between the Second and Third Hills of the city. As its name suggests, it is a business specializing in the sale of lamps of various materials, shapes and sizes. The house has an evil reputation among Cainites, renowned for the number of vampires who've entered its walls and never returned to tell the tale. This reputation is well deserved, as the house is the secret home of a demon-witch named Layla Madeer.

Of course, only characters native to Constantinople or very familiar with the city would be aware of this reputation. If the characters are new to Byzantium, you should exploit their naïveté in getting them to enter the house. If they do know of it, convincing them to enter requires both cleverness and a compelling reason to do so. Suggestions suitable for both types of coterie are described here:

- Characters seeking to preserve the Library of the Forgotten hear that the house's operator, a certain Layla Madeer, possesses several valuable tomes that she might be willing to part with — for the right price.
- Characters in need of esoteric knowledge, be it a translation or information about Constantinople's early history, hear that Layla Madeer knows of such matters and might be convinced to aid them.
- Characters looking for a particular Cainite, such as Nerea of Spain, Gabriella of Genoa or someone else, hear that she's holed herself up in the house, relying on its unsavory reputation as a shield against being found.
- The characters themselves may need to hide from their enemies. The House of Lamps has such an air of evil about it that even Narsene agents avoid it, making it the perfect sanctuary.
- Curious characters may notice that, despite the general slaughter of the city, the house miraculously escapes unscathed. Indeed, crusaders seem to avoid it outright. Such a mystery may prove too difficult to pass up for some Cainites.

Naturally, these suggestions are not exhaustive. In the end, you should find reasons for the coterie to enter the House of Lamps that fit the needs of both your

chronicle and the characters. Pay special attention to characters' Roads and Demeanors, as these traits may provide additional hooks to draw them into this scene.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

The interior of the house is unsettling. Lamps of every conceivable type burn within, illuminating the building. Yet — almost contrary to reason — the place remains cloaked in shadows, a fact made all the more eerie by the billows of smoke that waft through the air and the indescribable scents that they carry with them.

Upon entering, the characters are greeted by a woman of indeterminate age, who introduces herself as Layla Madeer, the house's proprietor. Polite and well-spoken, Madeer nevertheless makes little effort to hide that she knows who — and what — the characters are. Characters with *Auspex* level 2 (*Soulsight*) may be able to recognize that Madeer is a witch of great power and age.

Nonetheless, Madeer welcomes the coterie to the house, saying that she knew that they'd come. If asked what she means, she is evasive and she questions the characters about what they seek. It's at this point that the reason that brought them here comes into play. Decide how true that reason is, and play out the scene accordingly. Whether or not Madeer truly has what the characters seek, she makes no threatening moves unless she is threatened. Indeed, she is never anything but polite, even respectful. Use this fact to place the characters on edge, particularly those who have some inkling of Madeer's true nature.

MARY THE BLACK

The coterie's edginess should increase when the characters suddenly realize that a second person is in the room with them. Seated quietly in a dark corner is a small figure, hooded and obscured by shadows and smoke. Even so, they can feel the figure's red-rimmed eyes upon them, watching from the distance. Then, without warning, the figure stands and walks toward them with purpose.

As the figure gets closer, she pulls back her hood, revealing the face of a beautiful young woman, wise beyond her years but hardened and cruel. In addition to her burning eyes, her pitch-black skin marks her as a creature of evil. This is Mary the Black.

She makes no especially aggressive moves, but an aura of threat should surround her. She is an ancient and powerful creature, bearing the marks of hatred and the infernal. Characters with any sort of instinct for these things (those with ratings in *Occult*, *Auspex* or *Thaumaturgy* would certainly qualify) get a very bad feeling about Mary.

Mary locks gazes with one member of the coterie and says, "You have seen him, haven't you? He finally

BITTER CRUSADE



stirs. I knew even he could not be so self-absorbed as to do nothing while his Dream dies."

Mary refers, of course, to Michael, whom she intends to find and destroy. Should the coterie ask Mary what she's talking about, she will be cryptic in her responses. She is too consumed with anger and a lust for revenge to be coherent. Nevertheless, you should impart some of the information contained in the histories of Michael and herself (see pp. 88 and 77). Knowing even small amounts of this information will make the climax of *Dying Embers* more meaningful.

During this time, characters whose players make a successful roll of Perception + Empathy (difficulty 7) notice that Layla Madeer looks uncomfortable, almost frightened by the presence of Mary. Clearly, there are things that unnerve even a powerful mage.

After a few minutes of ranting against Michael, in which she becomes increasingly lost in her own inner dialogue, Mary allows the coterie to leave the House of Lamps. If they seem reluctant to do so, Madeer encourages them. As the exit the building, Mary says to them, "He made me believe I was special once — and that foolish belief made me what I am today. Do not be deceived."

SCENE ELEVEN: BLOOD FEAST

Amidst the destruction of Constantinople, Bishop Alfonzo of Venice has decided to celebrate. He sees his elevation to princedom as imminent. Consequently, he has called for a blood feast the likes of which hasn't been seen in Constantinople in years. With so many new kine in the Queen of Cities, Alfonzo believes that he can offer his guests a more varied and enjoyable selection than usual. Therefore, each of his usual guests receives an invitation, as do any Cainites who have accompanied the crusade.

It's important that the coterie finds its way to Alfonzo's compound to attend — if not participate — in his debauched celebration. Because Alfonzo intends for the

blood feast to be a preliminary to his eventual assumption of control over Constantinople, the festivities are well announced among the local Cainites. If the characters are already acquainted with Alfonzo, their presence is easy to justify. If they are not, a sympathetic Storyteller character, such as Nerea of Spain, could draw them to Alfonzo. Recognizing the dawn of a new order, even some Byzantine vampires are attending, which provides a good excuse for characters allied with the Greeks to come as well. Those characters who are committed to protecting Byzantium or preserving parts of the Dream can attend with an eye toward finding out their enemies' plans.

BE MY GUEST

Alfonzo is nothing if not an amiable host. Characters who have met him previously find his demeanor greatly changed. He is now almost ebullient in his temperament, greeting his guests warmly and without bitterness. If asked about this change, Alfonzo simply replies, "How can I be displeased with the latest events in my city?" He places great emphasis on his possession of Constantinople, as if his accession to its princedom were a *fait accompli*.

The blood feast itself is a lavish affair. Many Cainites dress in their finest attire; others adopt costumes of past ages. Younger Cainites may find it all unsettling to see their elders dressed as Roman senators or Carolingian nobles. Indeed, the entire affair has a surreal quality to it, one that contrasts sharply with the carnage being wrought outside. You would do well to emphasize this dichotomy, as it reveals not only the callous narcissism of Alfonzo, but also the quickness with which many Cainites have decided to throw in with the perceived "new masters" of Constantinople.

In form, the blood feast apes both courtly ceremony and religious ritual, with particular stress on the former. Although he is a member of the Cainite Heresy, Alfonzo shares his master's self-serving attitude toward it. Moreover, Alfonzo fully believes that he shall soon be made ruler of Byzantium. Therefore, the feast inaugurates a new age for the city — and for him. After the initial proceedings, several mortals are brought forth as nourishment. As further reinforcement of the Latin ascendancy, all the mortals are well-born Byzantines: courtiers, nobles and other similar dignitaries. Alfonzo takes great pleasure in watching even Byzantine Cainites feed upon these scions of Constantinople. In his mind, his own pre-eminence has now been established. Characters with high rating in Roads that value human life should have a hard time with this feast.

IDLE CONVERSATION

During the course of the blood feast, the characters may engage various Cainites in conversation. Most vampires — both Latin and Greek — fixate on the city's destruction.

DYING EMBERS

DESTROYING MARY

It's possible the coterie may decide to attack Mary. If so, you should use all her abilities to their utmost. She is a very powerful vampire, and her skills and Disciplines should be more than a match for most coterie. She'll do whatever is necessary to preserve her own existence — including destroy a character or two.

However, it's also possible the characters may destroy Mary. There's no reason to prevent this occurrence. The climax of *Dying Embers* does not require Mary's presence. Information on handling this possibility can be found in scene fourteen (see p. 72).

Although many Latins express pleasure at the destruction of the city, a hint of sadness creeps into even their spiteful voices. There is a creeping sense that something beautiful is being lost, something irreplaceable. In addition, many are concerned with the fact that the mortals now determine the fate of Constantinople. More than one Cainite says, "Had we been in charge, the city could've been taken without such slaughter." This resentment toward mortal "interference" is a common refrain.

Michael's disappearance is another topic of interest. The Patriarch has been such a fixture of the city for so long that even his enemies cannot imagine he would abandon it in its time of greatest need. Some Cainites suggest that this mysterious fact is proof of Constantinople's imminent end. Others admit to some disappointment that the self-appointed archangel is not here to see his final defeat.

You should use this scene as an occasion to provide the coterie members with any information that they may have missed elsewhere in the act. Because act two is so open-ended, you should feel free to use this scene to provide whatever details or emphasize whatever themes you feel are appropriate to your chronicle.

MUSE OF PERFORMANCE

As dawn approaches and the blood feast reaches the level of frenzy, Alfonzo announces that he has a special treat in store for his guests, one that further points out the dawn of a new era. The bishop explains that he has obtained the services of Gregorius Dimities, Michael's celebrated Muse of Performance. He adds that Gregorius is to share some of his dreams with the assembled Cainites, a dramatic performance they shall not soon forget. This announcement draws the attention of many Cainites, distracting them from their feast momentarily.

Shortly after making the announcement, a ghoul servant approaches Alfonzo and pulls him aside. Alfonzo lets out a cry of exasperation: Gregorius has left his compound, fleeing into the night. The bishop's exasperation turns quickly to anger, as he pummels his servant as a bearer of bad news. Interestingly, few of the assembled Cainites take much notice of this unfortunate turn of events; they are far more interested in the blood feast itself. However, Alfonzo sees it as a serious affront to his newfound stature.

If the characters know Alfonzo or are his allies, he calls them to him. He asks them to find Gregorius and bring him to his compound. No one, he declares, will defy him on the eve of his ultimate victory. He suggests that they go quickly, as it's more likely they'll find him if they do. Gregorius maintains no fixed haven, but Alfonzo recommends the Kynegion Amphitheater or the Great Palace.

If the characters are not known to Alfonzo or are unfriendly toward him, two options exist to involve them. In one, Alfonzo asks publicly for someone to "find that madman Gregorius and bring him to me." He offers to reward them once he becomes prince of Constantinople. In the other, an ally of the characters, perhaps Gabriella of Genoa or Nerea of Spain, leans over to the characters and suggests that someone should warn Gregorius before he suffers at Alfonzo's hands. In either case, the bishop sends out his ghouls to find the Malkavian muse, as well as any other Cainite who wishes to join the hunt.

The disappearance of Gregorius so enrages Alfonzo that he storms out of the blood feast to brood, leaving behind the frenzied mass of guests who hardly notice his absence or the destruction that has engulfed Constantinople. Characters who venture outside can see bright flames that illuminate the entire city rising outside the Latin Quarter. The sun will soon join that illumination, as dawn breaks over New Rome. The characters must therefore delay their pursuit of Gregorius until the next climactic night, as detailed in act three.

ACT THREE: SINS OF THE FATHER

This act sees the ultimate capture of the city, as well as the Final Death of Michael. More so than the previous acts, act three is filled with melancholy and sadness. The loss of the Dream should be palpable. As the coterie moves about the city, describe the burning buildings, the destruction of property that overwhelms many portions of Constantinople.

The eeriness of seeing the greatest city in Christendom fall before mere mortals cannot be stressed enough. Characters who have played through both *Venetian Nights* and *Fiendish Winter* beforehand will now sense that history belongs to mortals, that the Long Night is at an end. Although he didn't realize it, Alfonzo is right: The city's fall does mark the beginning of a new age, an age in which Cainites no longer rule as they once did. This fact should haunt the coterie as much as the end of the Dream.

This act admits new scenes easily. Indeed, you are encouraged to add scenes that reflect the coterie's particular interests in Constantinople. *Dying Embers* is the conclusion of so many different plot lines that it is impossible to do justice to any but a handful. The insertion of additional scenes for the benefit of an ongoing chronicle is one easy way to add meat to the skeleton of a story offered here.

SCENE TWELVE: EMPEROR OF THE NIGHT

This scene occurs only if the characters seek out Gregorius in the Great Palace, which is now occupied by crusaders in the service of Boniface of Montferrat. Therefore, entering it requires stealth and skill. You should refer to scene three for a discussion of how to handle covert entry into an occupied locale. In many ways, entering the palace is easier than the Obertus Monastery simply because it is bigger, offering greater opportunities for Cainites to hide within its walls. Nevertheless, there are enough mortals within to require serious effort to succeed. A few sample encounters and complications include:

- a band of riotous crusaders fighting over possession of one of the palace's many works of art
- an outraged Byzantine courtier seeking an audience with Boniface to demand his departure from the palace
- Venetian emissaries on their way to confer with leaders of the crusade
- the barring of doors and passageways as Boniface attempts to prevent both Byzantine citizens and other crusaders from entering the palace

The coterie will not find Gregorius within. Indeed, the characters find only one Cainite, the Ventrue Caius. Slumped upon his golden throne in the Sacred Palace within the Great Palace complex, he greets the characters' arrival with scarcely a notice. His followers have taken to fighting amongst themselves.

His city is falling before hordes of Latin barbarians, and his beloved Michael is missing, possibly gone forever.

The *basileus* of the Ventrue speaks with the characters after a time. If they are Latins, he first mocks them, asking if they've come to pillage his haven as well. If his mockery is returned, he attacks the coterie, enraged at their impudence. However, his current mental state is a shambles. He would just as soon sulk within his haven, railing at his inability to do anything to save Constantinople — or win Michael's affection.

Indeed, any overt discussion of the Patriarch sparks Caius' interest. If the characters give the impression that they know the current whereabouts of Michael, Caius

begs them to share the information. Characters whose players make a

successful Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 7) realize that Caius' interest isn't motivated by love, but by hatred. In his depressed state, the Ventrue blames Michael for the fall of the city, as well as his own unhappiness.

If the characters give Caius any information about Michael, even mere rumors or hearsay, he picks himself up and heads off into the night. He intends to find the Patriarch and "deal with him." Unless the coterie chooses to interfere, he leaves his haven without further comment. He is never seen again, as he falls before

mortal opponents, possibly Gauthier de Dampiere, if he is still alive. If they follow him, they may well witness this ignoble end. If they try to stop him, he fights back with the intensity of a man possessed. Nothing must



DYING EMBERS

stand between him and his destiny with Michael — whatever that may be.

SCENE THIRTEEN: REPENTANT MUSE

The characters' search for Gregorius eventually leads them to Kynegion Amphitheater. They head there after they catch word of a crusader being struck mad there and ranting about the devil. The characters see this madman as he runs through the streets — he is a knight named Christian of Sicily — ranting about the glory of heaven burning. Just what the coterie does with this fool is up to them, but if they release him, word of his fate spreads to the other crusaders. Doing so may bring Gauthier de Dampiere to the amphitheater at the end of the scene if you wish to stage another confrontation with him.

At the amphitheater, the coterie finds the Malkavian kneeling in the center of the theater, his head bowed as if in acknowledgment of applause. Gregorius lifts his head as the characters approach him. The characters can see blood streaming down his face, his eyes reddened with its color. He then smiles at the characters and asks if they've come to end his suffering.

How this scene proceeds depends greatly on why the characters have sought out Gregorius. In short, the Malkavian explains that he could not entertain Alfonzo guests after what he has done. To do so would have validated his actions, something even God cannot do, for he has committed a crime so great that it defies repentance. Gregorius confesses to having driven Michael mad with his dramas, having contributed to the inaction that now dooms Constantinople.

If asked why he did this, Gregorius cries harder, as he does not truly have an answer. He says only that he has hated Michael for so long that it no longer matters. What does matter is that Michael — and Constantinople — are doomed because of him. If asked where Michael has gone, Gregorius says, "To his temple — to ascend." He means the Church of the Archangel Michael. If asked about the ascension, Gregorius laughs bitterly, adding that the Methuselah only believes it because he was tricked into doing so. That's why he's doomed; that's why he shall soon die and the Dream along with him.

He says that he doesn't deserve to exist, and he asks the characters to destroy him. Whether the characters choose to do so is their choice. If they do not, Gregorius will meet his fate at the hands of the Inconnu, who decide that they no longer need his services. Killing Gregorius might be considered an act of mercy, as he is in genuine torment over his actions. Convincing him otherwise is almost impossible. He does not believe that he can be absolved of his actions. Although there is no right solution to this moral

quandary, resolving it should be a difficult — and memorable — element of *Dying Embers*.

SCENE FOURTEEN: DEATH OF A DREAM

This scene brings the story to a close, as the characters enter the Church of the Archangel Michael to seek out the Toreador Methuselah. In vampiric terms, Michael is the embodiment of all that is Constantinople and the Dream, and so, as the Fourth Crusade comes to a climax with the rape of the city, *Bitter Crusade* peaks with his destruction. Michael is reaping what he has sown, for his pride and madness sowed the seeds for the destruction that is coming down upon him. Moreover, he submits to diablerie. He believes that, by doing so, he takes on the role of Christ, offering his life for the good of the world. Having thus fulfilled the roles of both the Father and the Son, he is freed to complete his Trinitarian journey as the Holy Spirit as well.

Symbolism is a critical thing for Michael, and his death is no different. As his city burns, he brings together the symbols of his own failings both to witness and execute his final ascension. In Mary the Black, he has his oldest failing — his inability to protect Ebla and those who worshipped him there. In Peter the Humble, a Lasombra who becomes Mary's servant and guides her to Michael, he has a symbol of the weakness he fostered in the midst of his Dream. By playing his lovers against one another and never allowing others to be as great as he, he created sycophants like Peter. And in the coterie, he has agents of Narses' hatred, a symbol of his failure to foster talent and dedication. (Even if the players aren't active agents of the Narses, Michael sees them as his catspaws, rightly or not.) Together, these three failings — yet another trinity — are to destroy him and help him ascend to spiritual perfection.

Just what happens is very much up to the players. The most obvious (and the canonical one) is that Mary diablerizes Michael in revenge for his long-ago betrayal. She then flees into the night, more potent and dangerous than ever, but struggling with the memories of Michael swimming through her head. But just what occurs before the diablerie is up to the players, and it is even possible to prevent it altogether.

Indeed, the coterie arrives in the church where Michael awaits before Peter and Mary. With the destruction of Gregorius, Michael (who still looks like an angel from a stained glass window) is far more lucid. He is strangely calm, and he greets the coterie without any obvious concern or malice. He commends them on being the "first pillar" to arrive at this key time, and he discusses the matter of Narses with them. He expresses his regret that so driven a man had to be made into such

a monster, but he does express admiration for the extent of the Archbishop of Nod's monstrosity. Depending on how you want your players to perceive Narses, this may be a time to describe some of his more heinous crimes.

Michael is very open to answering questions, and he looks on the coterie as children whom it amuses him to enlighten. The least prodding gets him to explain his plan and Mary's role in diablerizing and elevating him. He responds graciously to any who express admiration for the architecture of his plan and with slight, but kind, disappointment for those who seem outraged or disgusted. Throughout, you should portray Michael as supremely calm, confident and utterly convinced of his own righteousness. He is a monster of legendary proportions, but his monstrosity should come across in his sureness of purpose. That others don't understand the morality and holiness of his acts is sad to him, not infuriating.

Peter and Mary arrive sometime during Michael's discussions. Mary is full of hatred, and she rages against the Patriarch. He responds that he did not wish to hurt her so long ago. Yet, he offers no apology, claiming that his actions were "necessary to secure the future that now lies before me." In short, Michael suggests that Mary's consumption by hatred for him has laid the groundwork for the completion of his apotheosis. Had there not been someone willing to destroy him, he could not ascend. Therefore, Mary's transformation into a being of evil serves a greater good that is apparent only now. Mary is only further infuriated by this attitude.

Mary turns toward the coterie and looks at them in a new light. "You are part of all this, somehow..." she says with threat in her voice. Use this to prompt the players to act, perhaps having Peter try something foolish like attacking one off the ancients or proclaiming his own guilt. The key is to get the coterie to do something other than watch.

Now, both Mary and Michael are ancient and potent vampires so combat is pretty much a moot point for the characters. But conversation is not. Mary still wants to diablerize Michael but she is hesitating. If the coterie can make her see that this is what Michael wants, she might well back off. It is up to you whether or not she does. Use your players' roleplaying as a guide. If she does back off, she screams in frustration and flees into the night.

Michael is gravely disappointed in Mary if she does not destroy him, but he is impressed by the coterie. The characters are obviously worthy to be the instrument of his apotheosis. He asks the characters to fulfill Mary's destiny and diablerize him as she would have done. Naturally, some coterie members may be unwilling to destroy the Methuselah. Yet, Michael believes that it's the only way

his Dream can live on. With the destruction of its physical embodiment — Constantinople — the Dream can only survive *through the characters*. Therefore, he urges them to reconsider. He would much rather they benefit from the destruction of his body than that he simply walk out into the morning light (which is what he does if they refuse). Michael believes that he must "die" in order to ascend. He hopes that even that act can aid those left behind.

In the end, Michael passes from the world, either at the hands of a younger vampire or by greeting the sun rising outside the church. An era is over. Because the final scene of this act may be somewhat subdued in its action, it's incumbent upon you to imbue it with feeling. The death of Michael is a traumatic event whose consequences will be felt for centuries to come. Moreover, the characters — whether they realize it or not — are among the last beings to have spoken with Michael in existence. His words to them, even if spoken in madness, are a legacy that few have been given. This places a special burden upon them: to carry the Dream to other lands, other times, to see that it does not become ashes like the body of its originator.

DIABLERIZING MICHAEL

Yes, it's possible that one of the players' vampire gets to diablerize a Methuselah. This is what we in the business call a Big Deal. It properly comes at the climactic moment of a chronicle, and it marks the end of a vampiric era. If you wish to end the chronicle here, the details of the diablerie aren't critical. But if you want to keep playing, you'll need to decide just what happens to the character who does the dirty deed, beyond simply dropping a generation. Do so based on the needs of the chronicle. Here are some options, to be used in addition to those described on page 63 in the sidebar on diablerizing Gesu:

- The character integrates Michael's memories and relives many of them when he sleeps, which can lead to flashbacks and odd insights on ancient events.
- The character gains some of the Methuselah's power, but not much control. Every once in a while, his form flickers into a stained-glass form reminiscent of Michael's.
- The character begins to believe that he is Michael.
- Byzantine refugees find the vampire and start to worship him as Michael the Son



PRESCOTT



Chapter Four: Dramatis Personae

We... grant to all those submitting to the labor of this journey personally and at their expense full forgiveness of their sins, of which they have been moved to penitence in voice and heart, and as reward of the just we promise them a greater share of eternal salvation.

—Pope Innocent III granting indulgence to the crusaders

THE DAMNED

This chapter provides profiles — and game statistics in many cases — for the characters (mostly Cainites) who appear in the three chapters of **Bitter Crusade**. Those characters with full templates are the ones who are most likely to be in prolonged and close contact with the players' coterie, but feel free to flesh out the others as the need arises. Certain very powerful characters — like the Methuselah Michael — don't have full traits either. These characters are so potent that rolling dice is not really useful. The players' characters have the chance to interact with these luminaries, and roleplaying should determine what happens, not dice rolls. (In a few cases, profiles have been corrected or updated from previous appearances in other supplements.)

ASSAMITES

FATIMA AL-FAQADI, THE EYES OF ALAMUT

(appears in **Venetian Nights**)

6th generation, childe of Thetmes

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 1102

Apparent Age: mid-20s



BITTER CRUSADE

Fatima al-Faqadi was born into a family of devoted Almohad Moorish warriors. When the barbaric Christians invaded her homeland, she struck back the only way she could. First, in the guise of a young camp girl, she assassinated drunken knights. Later, as the First Crusade drew to a close, she fought openly alongside the defenders of Allah.

Her passion and skill drew the attention of the Assamites. The warrior caste Embraced her, but not without debate — in recent centuries, the caste has shied away from Embracing women. Brought to Alamut, she trained to become a silent killer, using her gender as cover if her enemies were foolish enough to dismiss a woman. The clan's trust was not misplaced: Fatima became one of the Saracens' star operatives quickly. After a century of duty, she is now responsible for overseeing several other warriors.

Sent by her superiors to mastermind the assassination of the Setite agent in Venice, Fatima remains in the shadows during the events of **Venetian Nights**, entrusting much of the mission to Ziyad al-Djahiz. Nevertheless, she is well aware of what transpires among the Christian Cainites — including the actions of the young Lasombra diplomat Lucita.

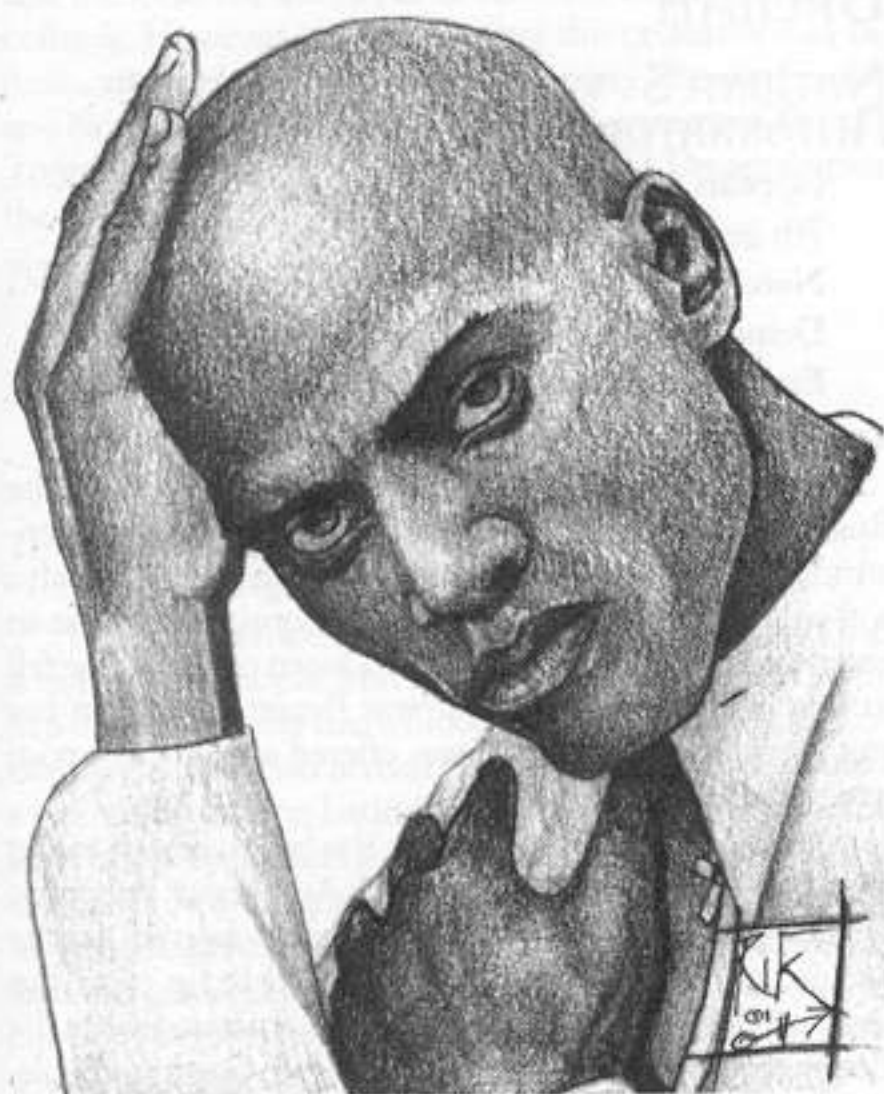
ZIYAD AL-DJAHIZ, THE BLADE

(appears in **Venetian Nights**)

Background: Angry young men are not usually the stuff from which successful Assamite warriors are made. However, Ziyad's ability to contain his anger and hone it into a weapon of unmatched keenness drew the clan's attention. Born into a family of Muslim scholars in Antioch, Ziyad never accepted the city's Byzantine overlords as its rightful rulers. Therefore, he welcomed the arrival of the Seljuk Turks in 1084 as a sign that God had at last heard the cries of his people.

The siege by the crusaders in 1098 ended Turkish rule and ushered in a massacre of the city's Muslim population. By that time, Ziyad had already been Embraced by his sire, a wily old warrior named Hamid al-Samh. When his childe sought to fight the crusaders, Hamid reminded him of the need for caution and planning. Ziyad accepted his sire's admonition and waited. Working together, the two Saracens sowed dissension among the crusaders, murdering those they could not manipulate.

These successes brought Ziyad to the attention of elders within the clan. They sent him throughout the Levant — and into the West — on numerous missions, all of which required stealth and careful planning. When the opportunity to derail another Christian crusade arose, the elders again turned to Ziyad. Placed under the watchful eye of Fatima al-Faqadi, Ziyad's traditional Muslim upbringing has become a problem. Ziyad does not completely believe in Fatima, and he feels that the mission in Venice cannot be trusted to a woman. In addition, he bristles at being



assigned to work under a vampire who's actually younger than himself — even one as skilled as she.

Image: Ziyad is a short, dark-complexioned man with a friendly, open face. His outward appearance belies the burning rage he contains within. Only on rare occasions does he allow his righteous fury to mar his typically calm exterior. When it does, his dark eyes flash and his wide mouth twists into a scowl. Ziyad dresses in whatever fashion is appropriate to his current mission. While in Venice, he assumes the dress of a merchant sailor.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a man in conflict. You want nothing more than to expel the Christian invaders from your homeland, yet you know that direct confrontation will achieve nothing. Your sire taught that patience is a virtue; the best way to strike back is to wait and attack at the right time, not a moment before. Now, that time has come, and you intend to take full advantage of it.

Haven: Ziyad currently maintains an abode in an uninhabited section of a building used by a Persian merchant named Jamsheed.

Secrets: Ziyad knows the identity of the Ventrue traitor, of course, but he also knows the identities of several Cainite Heretics within the Venetian church, knowledge he hopes to exploit in the future.

Influence: Certain members of Venice's small Muslim community know Ziyad. His true nature is a secret, of course, but he can call upon his coreligionists to perform small favors for him should the need arise.

Destiny: Ziyad's future is not a bright one. Unless events take an unusual turn, he will meet Final Death at the hands of the coterie at the conclusion of *Venetian Nights*.

Clan: Assamite (warrior caste)

Sire: Hamid al-Samh

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1097

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Herbalism 5, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 3, Obfuscate 3, Potence 1, Quietus 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 3, Influence 1

Virtues: Conviction 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

Road: Blood 7

Willpower: 6

BAALI

MARY THE BLACK, VENGEANCE MADE FLESH

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

7th generation, childe of Anaduk

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 18th century BC

Apparent Age: 15

Mary the Black began life as the mortal Ma-ri, daughter of a ward boss in the ancient city of Ebla. A beautiful young woman by the time the Toreador Methuselah Mi-ka-il was Embraced, Ma-ri became one of his first adherents and worshippers, truly believing that he was the god that he claimed to be. In return, he rewarded her with his blood, preserving her beauty as his ghoul. He also taught her how to read and write Eblaite script and made her his foremost concubine. However, this was not enough to save her.

When the Akkadians besieged Ebla, Mi-ka-il vanished. Trapped in the city, Ma-ri spent her last days inscribing her history, knowledge and newfound hatred of her false benefactor on clay tablets. When the invaders finally breached the walls of Ebla, Ma-ri gutted herself with Mi-ka-il's sword, spilling her blood on the tablets.



BRUJAH

NATALYA SVYATOSLAV, BYZANTINE AUTOKRATOR

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

7th generation, childe of Tribonius

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1002

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Natalya was born to a noble family just before the Russian prince Vladimir converted to Christianity. Benefiting from Vladimir's appreciation for education, Natalya was sent to study at the University of Constantinople at an early age. Once she arrived in the Queen of Cities, she fell in love with everything that was Byzantine. When her studies were complete, she was offered a magistrate post, which she accepted eagerly.

Natalya rose rapidly through the bureaucracy's ranks, attracting the attention of the Brujah Autokrator Tribonius. He saw in Natalya the passion he once possessed, and he decided to Embrace her, which she accepted as eagerly as she had her magistracy. She became enthused with the Brujah dream of building a new Carthage in Constantinople.

Since the destruction of her sire after the Latin Riots of 1184, Natalya has assumed control of Byzantium's bureaucracy. By influencing key mortals in the imperial court

The tablets later fell into the hands of the Baali priest Anaduk. He discovered that they contained more just Ma-ri's memories; they held her emotions as well. Enthralled by what he felt, he sought a way to bring her back to life. Anaduk offered himself to his demonic master, Anoster, selling what remained of his soul in return for her restoration to life. Anoster responded by sending a succubus who subsumed the tablets and became the product of whatever was contained within.

Because the tablets were incomplete, Ma-ri was only partially recreated. Although beautiful, she was as black as the fire-scorched tablets, full of partial memories and corrupted by hate. She slew Anaduk upon awakening and gorged on his blood, becoming Baali with the vitae she took. Down the centuries, Ma-ri has searched for the pieces of her identity with remarkable success: all the tablets were recovered and subsumed. Mary the Black now wields the very same sword with which she committed suicide. She has also discovered the whereabouts of Mi-ka-il — or Michael the Patriarch, as he is now known. She has found a foolish ally in Peter the Humble, and she can call upon the help of Layla Madeer, a witch who worships Anoster. Madeer also runs the House of Lamps in Constantinople, where Mary nests.

Mary seems a young woman of 15, but her eyes are rimmed with red, and her skin is black as pitch. Although she appears burnt, her visage betrays no blemish or damage. She conceals her sinister appearance beneath a black hood.



BITTER CRUSADE

and the Church, she hopes to stave off Constantinople's collapse. However, she realizes that this endeavor may be futile, and she has joined with the Gangrel Thomas Feroux and Nosferatu Malachite to form the "Covenant of Three." Together, they hope to preserve some of the Dream despite the coming storm.

NEREA OF SPAIN

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

10th generation, childe of Gusman Bravo

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Lone

Embrace: 1167

Apparent Age: early 20s

Nerea wants nothing but atonement, which is why she is in Constantinople. Having destroyed her sire and lover in a fit of anger, she fled a blood hunt in her native city of Barcelona. Since her arrival in New Rome, she has gained a reputation among Latin Cainites, becoming known for keen observations and a quiet, contemplative nature. She attends Bishop Alfonzo's blood feasts frequently. A pall of sadness hangs over Nerea. She knows that Constantinople's days are numbered, and she is waiting for the flames to envelop her. She hopes that through her sacrifice, her sire will forgive her.

Nerea may play an important role in *Dying Embers*, being a guide or contact for Latin Cainites in Constantinople. Her knowledge of Alfonzo, as well as her



expectation of Final Death, make her an important — if tragic — figure in the story.

CAITIFF

STANISLAV, PROPHET OF CALOMENA

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

Background: Stanislav is one of the most dangerous Cainites in Constantinople, at least to its other vampires, whether they know it or not. The prophet was a mortal follower of the Bogomil heresy that even now plagues the Orthodox Church. According to the heretics, the world is the construct of Satan, and Caine was the child of the Devil. Bogomils also maintain that Caine had a twin sister named Calomena.

Embraced by an unknown sire in the Balkans, Stanislav made his way to Constantinople in the late 1180s. There he gathered mortal and unliving followers and shared his visions of Calomena. She supposedly informed him that the Childer of Caine were personifications of material evil and must be destroyed. However, the clanless were the "Chosen of Calomena," heralds of the Apocalypse and Calomena's imminent return.

Taking refuge in the Latin quarter, the Chosen instruct their fanatical followers that the demonic vampires in their midst must be destroyed. They identify Hagia Sophia as the principal dwelling place of evil. During the events of *Dying Embers*, the cult launches a direct attack on Michael and his brood — but all Cainites are legitimate targets.

Image: Dressing in simple robes and rejecting all physical adornments, Stanislav is a classic Slavic beauty. His shoulder-length black hair frames a round face that features full rich lips and a strong chin. His deep black eyes often gleam with tears of blood, shed at the thought of the evil surrounding him.

Roleplaying Hints: It is your holy duty to convert those about you to the cause, and no price is too high to pay to achieve this goal. You speak with a simple passion that infects your followers and frightens your enemies.

Haven: The Chosen maintain a haven in the Monastery of St. Luke, amid the ruins of Arcadius.

Secrets: Stanislav knows little of Constantinople's Cainite society. He has spent time with the Nosferatu, but they rejected his tenets.

Influence: Stanislav's teachings have won him the enmity of the Cainite masters of Constantinople. His teachings have nevertheless inspired some Toreador who views the Bogomils' beliefs as a justification for hedonism and violence.

Destiny: Stanislav's dream of cleansing fire comes true in the sack of Constantinople. However, he, too, perishes in the cleansing flame.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



Clan: Caitiff
Sire: Unknown
Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Fanatic
Generation: 11th
Embrace: 1132
Apparent Age: mid-30s
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 2, Empathy 5, Intimidation 3, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 5
Skills: Stealth 4, Survival 4
Knowledges: Hearth Wisdom 3, Linguistics 3, Occult 3, Theology 2
Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dementation 4, Presence 4
Backgrounds: Allies (Chosen of Calomena) 3, Herd (Cultists) 3, Influence (Cultists) 2
Virtues: Conscience 1, Self-Control 5, Courage 5
Road: Heaven 9
Willpower: 9

FOLLOWERS OF SET

AIMERY DE VERSEY, THE HIDDEN VIPER
 (appears in *Venetian Nights*)

BITTER CRUSADE

Background: Aimery was born to a French noble family of wealth and influence. As a youth, he trained hard to become a knight. When Pope Urban II called for a crusade to liberate the Holy Land, he joined willingly—to see a wider world as much as for the love of Christ.

His entry into Jerusalem with the triumphant armies in 1099 opened his eyes. Witness to so many atrocities, Aimery decided eventually that Christianity was a sham, a mask used to hide man's true nature as a ravening beast. He reached this conclusion under the tutelage of a mysterious woman named Kadjadja, whom he had met in the Holy City. Kadjadja was a Follower of Set sent to procure agents among the crusaders. The Setite found the disillusioned Aimery a perfect candidate for conversion.

As a Setite, Aimery has proven enthusiastic and skilled in showing others the true nature of mankind. He infiltrated Clan Ventrue in Europe, becoming an aide to Lanzo von Sachsen. Sent back to the Holy Land on Ventrue business, he converted Roland du Rocher, adding him to the servants of the dark god. His presence in *Venetian Nights* is an indication of his fellow Serpents' faith in his abilities.

Image: Aimery wears his dark brown hair longer than one would expect for a soldier. His brown eyes reveal a keen intellect and great perception. He dresses in simple clothing, disdaining the elaborate shows of pomp favored by some of the clan he has infiltrated. He rarely carries any weapon except a short, curved dagger, which he keeps hidden beneath his shirt.



Roleplaying Hints: You are a servant of the dark god among the pitiful Childer of Caine. You pride yourself on your subtlety and skill at finding others' weakness. You take special pleasure in having turned Roland du Rocher — not to mention deceiving the old fool Lanzo von Sachsen.

Haven: Aimery has a makeshift tomb in a warehouse near the Venetian docks.

Secrets: Aimery is the only Cainite in Venice who knows of Roland du Rocher's worship of Set. At least that's what Aimery believed before the Assamites acted.

Influence: Aimery has influence among a small number of Egyptian merchants in Venice. They are secret worshipers of the dark god whom he can use as tools if the need arises.

Destiny: Aimery is a devoted Follower of Set. Although he is distraught over the destruction of Roland, he does his best to stay hidden among the Ventrue. To be revealed would mean his own destruction.

Clan: Follower of Set

Sire: Kadjadja

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Gallant

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1100

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 3, Alertness 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Larceny 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Linguistics 2, Occult 2, Politics 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 3, Fortitude 1, Obfuscate 1, Serpents 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Resources 2

Virtues: Conviction 3, Instinct 3, Courage 4

Road: Typhon 6

Willpower: 7

GANGREL

BARON THOMAS FEROUX

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

7th generation, childe of Marie Ferox

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1076

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Born in northern France as the only son of a minor nobleman, Thomas was raised in relative comfort until his



parents were killed by a pack of wolves. Fostered to his dour and cynical uncle, Thomas took refuge in hunting, finding the dark woods of his family estate a strange comfort. When his uncle died, he took up the cross as a crusader, but he found no peace in it. Soon, he became as dour and cynical as his uncle.

While traveling through the Balkans, Thomas killed a young Slavic woman when she refused his advances. Moments later, a wolf set upon him and took his life. Unknown to Thomas, the wolf was his mother, who had been Embraced years before by a starving Gangrel. She had followed her son throughout his travels, hoping that he would realize his true potential. His murder of the young woman loosed the Beast within her, but she regained enough sanity to save him the only way she could — by Embracing him.

Thomas's transition into unlife was difficult. He gave in to his Beast frequently. Only a chance encounter with a Gesudian monk saved his soul. The monk, Theoleon, took Thomas to Constantinople where he blossomed under the tutelage of the Obertus Tzimisce. Now, Thomas serves as the guardian of both the Obertus and Constantinople. In *Dying Embers*, he fights valiantly to save his adopted city, fulfilling the faith placed in him both by his patrons and his mother.

ANNA SGORINA, BYZANTINE ENVOY

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

8th generation, childe of Thomas Feroux

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Child

Embrace: 1109

Apparent Age: late teens

Anna Sgorina grew up in a minor merchant family from Constantinople. As the youngest child of six — and a girl — she received relatively little attention from her parents or siblings. Nevertheless, she was well tutored in the Greek and Roman classics, making her an enjoyable conversationalist for the few people who bothered to speak with her. She spent much of her time reading and learning, grateful to have been born into a society where learning was still valued.

Her Embrace by Baron Thomas Feroux was a fortuitous accident. One night, overcome by the Beast, he attacked Anna, only to regain control in time to save her the way his mother had saved him — by making her his childe. As the Baron tutored her in Cainite ways, she became enamored of the idea of protecting the Library of the Forgotten, making it her personal mission, not merely one adopted at the behest of her sire.

Rumors that books missing from the Library have turned up in Venice have drawn Anna to Italy. There, she has become an unofficial spokesperson for Byzantine Cainites. She worries that both the encroachments of Islam and the greed of Latin Christendom will prove the undoing of her beloved Constantinople and the Library it houses. By the beginning of *Venetian Nights*, she has formed a covert alliance with a Byzantine family in Venice, several members of which are her secret ghouls.

As the new crusade gains momentum — and crusaders arrive in Venice — Anna does her best to influence some of its leaders to consider Byzantium's plight. Unfortunately, by stressing its riches and unstable situation, she may inadvertently encourage precisely the Latin vices that she has decried for so long.

LASOMBRA

BISHOP ALFONZO OF VENICE

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

7th generation, childe of Narses

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Survivor

Embrace: AD 895

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Overlord of Constantinople's Latin quarter, Alfonzo is one of the city's greatest enemies. A pawn of Narses, he works to undermine New Rome and seize its wealth for Venice. Unbeknownst to his master, Alfonzo has contacted the shadowy Inconnu, hoping that they will give him power apart from that granted him as Narses' instru-

BITTER CRUSADE



ment. Likewise, he has opened the Latin quarter to all manner of anti-Byzantine elements, including the Chosen of Calomena. Alfonzo hopes that doing so will enable him to achieve his plans for domination.

Alfonzo is a true childe of his sire, for power is his only religion, self-aggrandizement his only faith. Alfonzo enjoys the trappings of power as much as actual authority, and he hosts extravagant blood feasts. Alfonzo likewise prefers to wear elaborate garb that emphasizes his position as a bishop of the Cainite Heresy. Nevertheless, it would be an error to mistake his vanity for weakness. Alfonzo is a powerful Cainite, and he will grow even more powerful after the events of *Dying Embers*.

GIUELMO ALIPRANDO, THE PRINCE'S VOICE

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

7th generation, childe of Narses

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 1049

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Narses Embraced Guielmo, the scion of a noble Venetian family, shortly after the assassination of his previous majordomo, Blasio Cancharello, in a dispute with Genoese Lasombra. Narses chose Guielmo for his obvious skills as a diplomat and negotiator. Like Narses, he maintains a studied air of objectivity and detachment. Unlike



his master, Guilelmo has the ability to put anyone — even opponents — at ease. Consequently, he is the “public face” for the prince of Venice during *Venetian Nights*.

Since coming under Narses’ wing, Guilelmo has become well versed in the teachings of the Cainite Heresy. Unlike his master, he has the beginnings of what might be called genuine belief in its teachings. Narses finds the “conversion” of his lieutenant to be endlessly amusing — a testament to his skills as a deceiver.

Unfortunately for the prince of Venice, Guilelmo isn’t as naïve as he appears. He maintains regular contact with the Tzimisce Nikita of Sredetz, a true believer in the Heresy, who doubts Narses’ sincerity. In the end, Guilelmo’s devotion to the Heresy may prove greater than his loyalty to its archbishop.

TOMMASO BREXIANO, *AMICUS NOCTIS*

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

8th generation, childe of Jermanos

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1009

Apparent Age: early 30s

Tommaso began his mortal existence in Venice, the son of a prominent merchant. He spent much of his youth traveling the Mediterranean with his father and uncles. These travels took him to the Byzantine Empire, the caliphate of Egypt and the holy city of Jerusalem. He soon

acquired fluency in Arabic and Greek, as well as a keen business sense. Despite the protests of churchmen, Tommaso saw nothing immoral about trading with the infidels. Although a Christian, he was never especially devoted to his faith. He found fulfillment in mercantile endeavors rather than matters of religion.

All that changed when Al-Hakim, the Fatimid caliph, ordered the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher and all Christian sites in Jerusalem in 1009. Tommaso and his family had the misfortune of being in Jerusalem at that time. Caught by soldiers under orders from the mad Al-Hakim, Tommaso’s family was killed. The young man escaped — for a time. He hid in the streets of the Old City for days, avoiding the wave of anti-Christian zeal fostered by the caliph. For the first time since his childhood, Tommaso prayed for God to deliver him.

Unfortunately, his deliverance came in the form of a soldier’s sword. Discovered in his hiding place, Tommaso was attacked and left for dead. As life fled his body, he heard an unfamiliar voice ask him if he wished to avenge his family. With his last ounce of breath, Tommaso agreed, accepting the Embrace of Jermanos, a Lebanese Christian Lasombra.

Jermanos tutored the neonate in the realities of Cainite existence, including the strife within Clan Lasombra. Jermanos suggested that Al-Hakim’s attack on the Christians in Jerusalem had been at the instigation of Muslim Lasombra. He then assured his charge that the time would



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

come to strike back against those who had destroyed his mortal existence. He need only learn, wait and hone his hatred of the infidels.

Over the course of nearly two centuries, Tommaso has served the Christian Lasombra well as a messenger and diplomat. His facility with languages and knowledge of commerce has proven an invaluable tool. Therefore, it was almost inevitable that he would be recruited by the Christian *Amici Noctis* to serve as their representative in Venice. He has the skills and — more importantly — the personal vendetta against his clan's Muslim branch to make him a very effective agent. In *Venetian Nights*, his goal is to turn the crusade toward the Holy Land, dealing a deadly blow against Islam, regardless of the cost.

GABRIELLA OF GENOA, THE LATIN DISSENTER

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

8th generation, childe of Isabelle

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 936

Apparent Age: late 30s

The only Latin vampire to survive the deadly Byzantine riots of 1185, Gabriella is distrusted by her fellows. In turn, she has very little faith in Alfonzo of Venice, who sits above her only because of politics. Ambitious and driven like most of her clan, Gabriella sees Constantinople as a rich but fractured resource. She believes that her clan should be assisting in its reconstruction rather than robbing it of its wealth. A newly resurgent Byzantium — with Genoese allies, of course — could prove a source of infinite riches. Gabriella has tried to establish good relations with Byzantine Cainites, and grew particularly close to the Tzimisce Symeon, with whom she and her mortal favorite Lillian found sanctuary during the Latin massacre. However, the death of Lillian at the hands of Symeon's brother Gesu dealt a blow to the alliance.

For a time, Gabriella found herself held captive by an Assamite agent at the behest of the Ventrue Helena the Armenian. However, the Assamite proved reluctant to kill Gabriella, a fact of which she took advantage. The crafty Lasombra provided information about Alfonzo to the Assamite to gain her trust. Over the course of several months, her plan worked. Gabriella regained her freedom at the expense of both Alfonzo, who suffered from Assamite attacks, and Helena, who met Final Death at her own hands. By the beginning of *Dying Embers*, Gabriella is seeking allies in her futile quest to save Constantinople from the destruction she sees in its future.

LUCITA OF ARAGON

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

7th generation, childe of Ambrosio Luis Monçada

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: AD 1190

Apparent Age: late teens

The daughter of Alfonzo II of Aragon, Lucita grew up in privilege, but she chafed under her responsibility to her father and family. She thought of patricide many times, and she ran away often, only to be caught by the Aragonese guards and returned to her father's custody. Rather than bother with discipline himself (asking, he had better things to do), Alfonzo shuffled her off to confession each time, trusting that God and the Church would engender penitence in his daughter. The fact that her confessor was the vampire Ambrosio Luis Monçada made this assumption patently untrue. The bloated unliving churchman recognized an indomitable will and fierce independence in Lucita. These, combined with his unholy lust for her, conspired to convince the bishop to Embrace her.

Although she continues to chafe under Monçada's suffocating leadership, she has proven herself capable enough to be granted true responsibility. The neonate serves her clan dutifully as a diplomat. In *Venetian Nights*, she has come to *La Serenissima* under orders from Monçada, who fears — rightly, in fact — that Narses may attempt to use the Fourth Crusade for his own ends. She is on the lookout for any sign that the prince of Venice or his Cainite Heresy is undermining its holy mission. Therefore, Lucita is a potential ally to Cainites with similar concerns.



NARSES, PRINCE OF VENICE AND ARCHBISHOP OF NOD

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

6th generation, childe of Galerius

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: AD 576

Apparent Age: late 90s

A eunuch, Narses began his mortal career as commander of Justinian I's bodyguards. In time, he became Justinian's chamberlain and treasurer. On numerous occasions, Narses saved Justinian's throne both with timely military action or political bribes. So useful was he that Justinian eventually sent Narses to Italy not only to assist Belisarius, commander of the Byzantine forces there, but also to spy on him.

The two men disliked one another from the first. Their rivalry paralyzed military operations in Italy and led to the recapture of Milan by the Ostrogoths. Consequently, Justinian recalled Narses to Constantinople, lest the situation worsen. Nevertheless, Justinian soon placed Narses in command of operations against barbarians in the Balkans, and he won many victories there and in Italy.

Narses became exarch of Italy, serving until the death of Justinian I. However, Justinian's successor, Justin II, removed him from the exarchate. Embittered, Narses retired to a villa near Naples. There, he came to the attention of a Roman Lasombra named Galerius, who saw in him a perfect tool for his clan's ambitions. Galerius spent nearly a decade cultivating Narses before finally Embracing him. During that time, they worked together to undermine Byzantine authority in Italy, even to the point of providing the Lombards with military "advice" on how best to invade the peninsula. In the end, the old man welcomed the Embrace, as it gave him the opportunity to sate his voracious ambition and thirst for revenge—as well as to continue his rivalry with Belisarius, whom the Byzantine Ventrue had Embraced a decade before.

Narses later returned to Constantinople to claim the charter for the portion of Byzantine Italy that had withstood the barbarian invasions, including Venice, where Narses ensconced himself as prince. He likewise took great interest in the still nascent Cainite Heresy, rising eventually to its head. His interest stemmed not from genuine faith in the Heresy's beliefs but from the realization that it could be a valuable tool for gaining yet more power. The twin desires to avenge himself upon Byzantium and acquire yet more power drive the entire course of his vampiric existence.

Narses has used his position both as prince of Venice and Archbishop of Nod to lay the groundwork for another crusade, one that might somehow further his revenge against Constantinople. Although obsessed, Narses is methodical and patient. He takes the long view of things,



having spent almost 600 years establishing himself in Venice and within the Heresy. Consequently, he does not act rashly or without purpose. Neither does he operate openly, preferring to use agents and dupes and maintain an air of aloofness. He hopes to suggest that he is a fair judge and an honest broker.

PETER THE HUMBLE, DARK ACOLYTE

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

9th generation, childe of Magnus

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 407

Apparent Age: late 30s

Never certain of his place, Peter spent his mortal life vacillating between religious vocations. The Lasombra elder Magnus mistook Peter for someone well versed in a variety of fields and Embraced him on this false assumption. He has since proved a great disappointment.

Peter has spent his centuries of unlife falling under the influence of one demagogue after another. Magnus, his sire and elder, has tried to replace him at times, but he's come to the conclusion that Peter is a useful barometer of the religious currents at work among Byzantine vampires. He became aware of the Cainite Heresy, for example, once Peter began following its tenets.

In the last few decades, Peter has fallen into the madness of the Toreador Michael, and he worships him as an archangel. He seeks to confront the Patriarch with an

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

adversary worthy of his ascension. Peter knows of the Baali Mary the Black, and he awaits the moment when he can lead her to Michael.

KHADIJAH SAADEH, ASHIRRA ENVOY

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

7th generation, childe of Hisham

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: AD 991

Apparent Age: late 20s

Khadijah Saadeh is an anomaly. Not only is she an influential woman from a culture that does not always recognize their value, but she is also a Christian Arab. Nevertheless, Khadijah believes that the Crusades have only brought more suffering to the region and its inhabitants—including her own persecuted people. In her mind, it would be better if European Christians would cede overlordship to the Muslims and cease their incessant invasions of Palestine.

In *Venetian Nights*, Khadijah serves as the voice of the Muslim Lasombra and the Ashirra (the sect of Muslim Cainites) as a whole. She uses the oddity of her nature—especially her Christian faith—to disarm European and Greek Cainites. She argues that Muslim rulership of the Holy Land brings much-needed stability. Moreover, she believes that access to important pilgrimage sites, as well as lucrative trading ventures, could be guaranteed in return for the end of the crusades. Thus far, Khadijah has received only polite disinterest from her European counterparts, including other Lasombra. Nevertheless, she presses on with her negotiations.

MALKAVIAN

GARI, MAD PRINCE OF ZARA

(appears in *Fiendish Winter*)

Background: Gari isn't entirely aware of his past. His first memory is the diablerie of a Frankish Cainite in the fall of 1162. Terrified and confused, he fled before he could discover the circumstances of this act. A letter sewn into his cloak addressed to "Gari" made him assume that the name was his own. He appropriated this aspect of his past and rid himself of the rest, traveling in an easterly direction to fly far from the site of his blood crime.

To his surprise, he discovered that he was often fluent in the local languages of the regions through which he traveled. He also found it easy to impersonate a traveling noble. Within a few years, he had cobbled together enough trappings of the idle rich that he could manage prolonged stays with both Cainite and mortal royalty. He lived off the courtesy of various benefactors for over a decade, but he cultivated the suspicion that this lifestyle came easily to him because he had done it so often before. He was unsure why, but this unnerved

him enough to one day take his portable earnings and travel in search of a change of setting and way of life.

He arrived in Zara in 1180 and found the prince of the time to be slow of wit and fast of temper. It was a trivial matter to depose and dispatch him during the anti-Venetian revolt a few years later, and in due time, Gari became a subtle economic force in the Zarayan black market. As the years passed, he found himself more involved in mortal politics than Cainite troubles. The Venetian invasion of "his city" has infuriated him to no end.

Image: Gari's skin has a dark enough cast to it that he could be of Grecian or Moorish descent. His dark hair is short, and his thin beard groomed passably. His face wears a permanent scowl, and his eyes dart from thing to thing without end. He keeps up with local fashions, managing to look stylish rather than foppish. His quickness of step belies his slight paunch.

Roleplaying Hints: You're sitting on a ripe plum in Zara, and you're not going to let the thrice-damned crusaders take it away from you. Your voice takes on an angry cadence when speaking of external situations or those not present; it fills with honey and calm when you are addressing anyone to whom etiquette deems it proper to show respect. By displaying your rage to your peers, you imply that you can turn it upon them should they displease you.

Haven: Gari maintains several havens, the most important one being a butcher shop near the port of Zara. In the basement of this building is where he holds his court.



BITTER CRUSADE

Secrets: Gari's amnesia means he has not gathered the plethora of secrets that most Cainites do. He does know that the Obertus monastery — now destroyed — had links to Byzantium and Transylvania. His ghoul spies reported crates of books and other items arriving from Constantinople in the last few years, but he fears that they were lost in the conflagration.

Influence: As prince, Gari claims domain over Zara and some of the Dalmatian coast. He has few actual subjects, however, although he uses an effective network of ghouls in the city proper. The crusade threatens his position.

Destiny: Gari cannot hold on to his domain for long, not with the crusade and its predators wintering in his city and enforcing Venetian control. Gari falls to Gauthier de Dampiere's hunt for the darkness in February of 1203. Soon enough, Venetian Lasombra come to reassert domain in Dalmatia.

Clan: Malkavian

Sire: unknown

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Tyrant

Generation: 7th

Embrace: unknown

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 4, Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3,

Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Ride 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Law 3, Linguistics 5, Politics 4, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Dementation 4, Obfuscate 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Resources 3, Herd 5,

Influence 1, Retainers 5

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

Road: Humanity 5

Derangements: Amnesia (minor if he drinks vampiric blood, loses his entire memory if he commits diablerie), Paranoia

Willpower: 5

GREGORIUS DIMITIES

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

6th generation, childe of Demtius

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Celebrant

Embrace: AD 467

Apparent Age: late 40s

Gregorius was Embraced by one of the Inconnu in the late fifth century, as Rome fell. After he was taken, he escaped from his sire and wandered the dark streets of the Eternal City. Amidst the winding, crooked paths, Gregorius' sanity fragmented and finally shattered.

In a frenzy, he stumbled into Michael's shrine in the catacombs of Rome. Feeling the presence of Michael in the shrine, Gregorius regained his sanity. For a fleeting moment, his world became whole, and he understood the nature of God, knowing complete and absolute peace. When the moment finally passed, the young Malkavian was tormented by a peace that he would never know again. This torment turned to hatred of Michael, whom he blamed for having "stolen" peace from him.

With the blessing of the Inconnu, Gregorius traveled to Constantinople to strike against Michael and his Dream. He impressed the Toreador Methuselah with his talent for performing tragedy, slowing ensnaring Michael in a web of madness. He worked to twist the Patriarch's perceptions until the city and Dream were as fragmented and ruined as his own sanity. *Dying Embers* sees that plan come to its final, apocalyptic fruition — an outcome Gregorius comes to regret.

NOSFERATU

MALACHITE, ROCK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

7th generation, childe of Vasilli

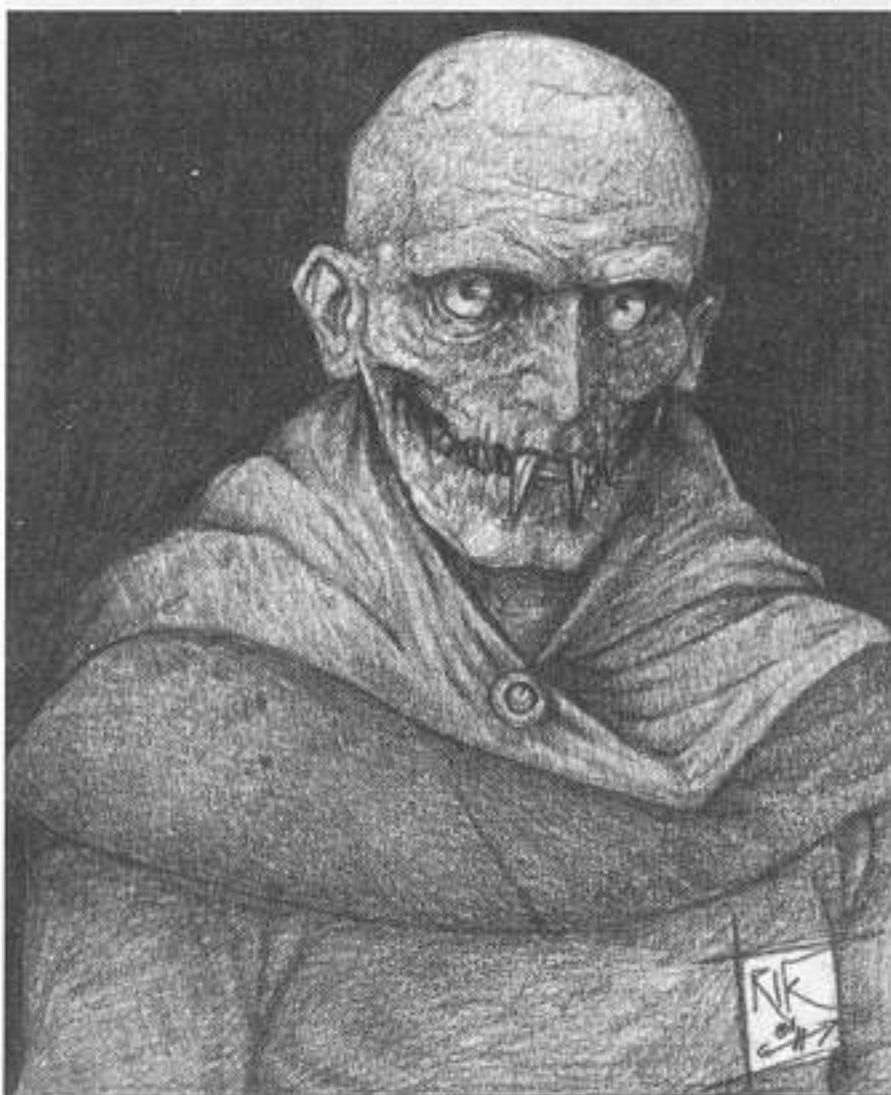
Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: AD 842

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Malachite is the chosen name of Maleki, a former prelate in the Orthodox Church. Bound by a blood oath to an Orthodox Lasombra, Maleki made the grave error of contradicting his sponsor, a deed that could not go unpun-



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ished. Rather than kill Maleki, the Lasombra had him Embraced by a Nosferatu named Vasilli the Penitent Dog. Patriarch Michael was outraged by the act, and he took Maleki under his wing, trying to undo the psychological damage done by the Lasombra. Maleki, renamed Malachite, has been an enemy of the Lasombra ever since.

Malachite is trying to save Constantinople, and he instigated the so-called Covenant of Three with the Brujah Natalya and the Gangrel Thomas Feroux. In the end, though, he decides that the city cannot be saved. He leaves, along with his Nosferatu, to bring a part of Michael's Dream to some other city.

NICOLO, WRETCH OF VENICE

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

8th generation, childe of Maria

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: 1002

Apparent Age: mid-40s

The hideous Nicolo is the leader of Venice's beleaguered Nosferatu. His clan numbers only a handful of Cainites, and it suffers because of the city's lack of catacombs, sewers or other underground locales. Instead, Nicolo's Nosferatu must make do with abandoned buildings and other forgotten structures. The Nosferatu are in constant danger of discovery (especially now, with so many crusaders in Venice), but they are also



BITTER CRUSADE

keen observers of the city and its inhabitants. Nicolo and his fellow Lepers are excellent sources of information about activities in the city.

TOREADOR

MICHAEL THE PATRIARCH, FATHER OF CONSTANTINOPLE

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

4th generation, childe of Toreador

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 22nd century BC

Apparent Age: early 20s

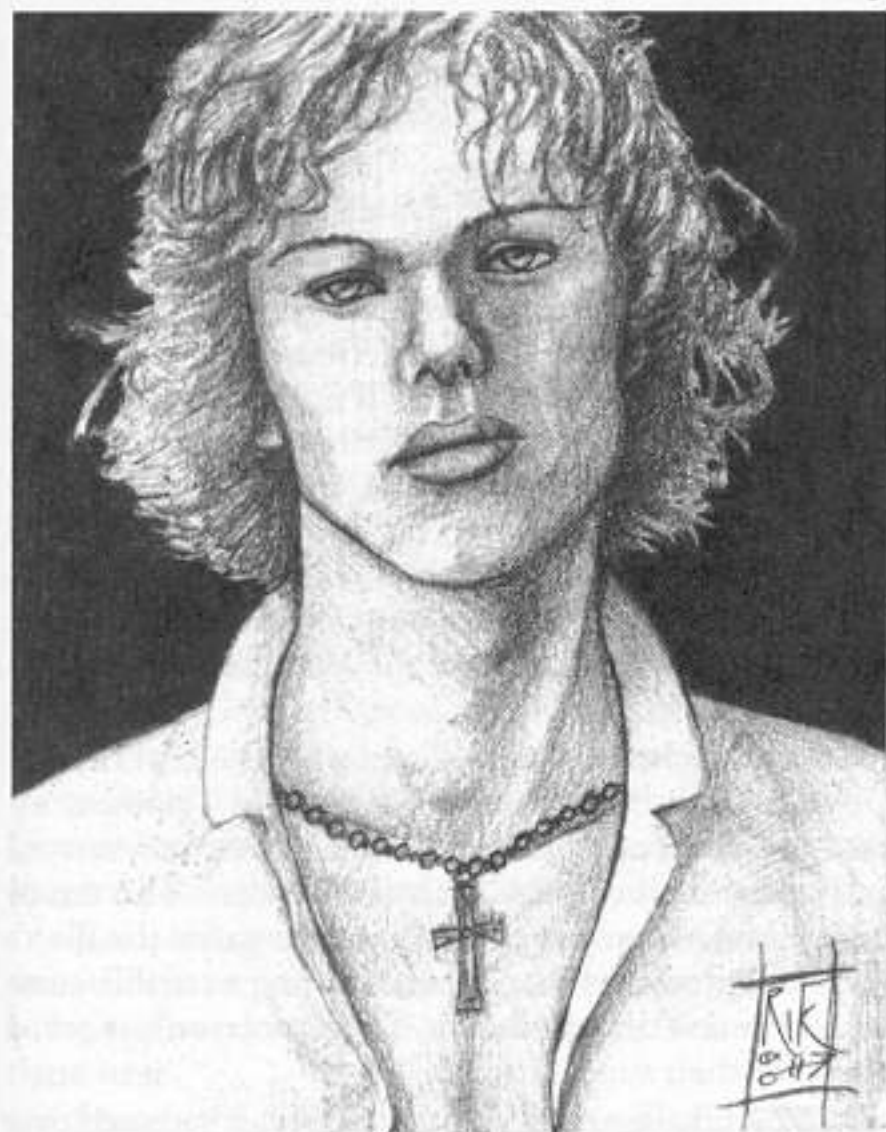
Born Mi-ka-il in the 22nd century before the birth of Christ, the future Patriarch of Constantinople spent his mortal life in the Mesopotamian city of Ebla, a city of a quarter-million people that was the Rome of its era. Skilled in words in a world where words were power, Mi-ka-il eventually became the king's scribe. This elevation brought him to the attention of the Toreador Antediluvian who Embraced him as one thrice removed from Caine. Mi-ka-il spent the remaining 50 years of Ebla enjoying the fortunes of godhood and the adulation bestowed upon him by his lover, Ma-ri.

When Ebla fell to the Akkadians, Mi-ka-il was secreted out the city during the day and taken to Kish, on the Euphrates. By the time he awakened, it was too late to save Ma-ri, who had been left behind. It was a loss from which Mi-ka-il never fully recovered. Mi-ka-il changed his name to Beshter after discovering that Akkadian vampires were hunting him, but he continued to establish mortal cults to his own supposed divinity. He eventually made his way to the Seven Hills of Rome, where he chose to settle. Beshter became one of the city's leading Cainites and a patron of its artists.

Whenever Beshter left Rome to wander — as he often did — his allies Antonius the Ventrue and the Tzimisce Dracon guarded his childer and his assets. He returned the favor by supporting their endeavors in the city. The Triumvirate, as they were later called, were steadfast friends and lovers.

Still striving to fill a void in his life, Beshter converted to Christianity and took the name Michael, after the religion's premier and most potent angel. In truth, his "conversion" was made partially out of hubris; he saw himself as the protector and savior of the oppressed faith. Mi-ka-il's ancient vice was surfacing again.

As Rome deteriorated, Michael and his two lovers left for Constantinople, the new capital of the empire. There they worked together to make Michael's Dream of creating a heaven on earth a reality. As the present state of Constantinople shows, that Dream has yet to be



realized fully. Over the years, Michael lost both his lovers and gave in to the manipulations of the Malkavian Gregorius. He has regressed to the old ways of his character, only with even greater conviction. Michael no longer wishes to be regarded as an angel; he actually considers himself one. By the beginning of **Dying Embers**, he plans to make Constantinople his chariot as he makes his ascension to divinity.

TREMERE

LEMPI MANNISENMAKI

(appears in **Fiendish Winter**)

7th generation, childe of Canticus

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: 1120

Apparent Age: indeterminate

That there was once a person amidst the amalgam of flesh, bone, and muscle currently serving as Bodor Toth's writing desk is evident only from the large, blinking eye worked into its top. Lempi's abortive attempt to capture Toth still weighs heavily on her mind, although Bodor's tortures have served to curb the pride synonymous with her past. She once had plans to rise swiftly within the ranks of her clan. Now, the flesh of what used to be her back functions as the surface upon which a Tzimisce composes his letters.

Lempi's very existence is agonizing. Bodor has crafted her fangs to rest at the edge of her own heart so that they extend and pierce it whenever she feeds. He has given her an eye, a hole that serves as an ear, and an orifice that serves as a mouth, with flesh fashioned into simulacra of tongue, lips and teeth. When he isn't present, he covers her mouth with a thin barrier of flesh, allowing her to speak only in faint mumbles.

Bodor keeps Lempi alive only to keep his son Kilián going, and the one secret she has been able to keep from him is that her death would release him from the servitude of blood. Although she has grown to hate her existence, she clings to it with the last shreds of her will. Kilián's recent visits allow hope to burn once more, although she fears that Bodor is merely testing her. Imbibing his vitae nightly creates an imperishable blood oath that precludes thoughts of direct vengeance, although she has no such compunction against directing her hatred at his friends and family.

TZIMISCE

DOMINIK, FIENDISH MESSENGER

(appears in **Fiendish Winter**)

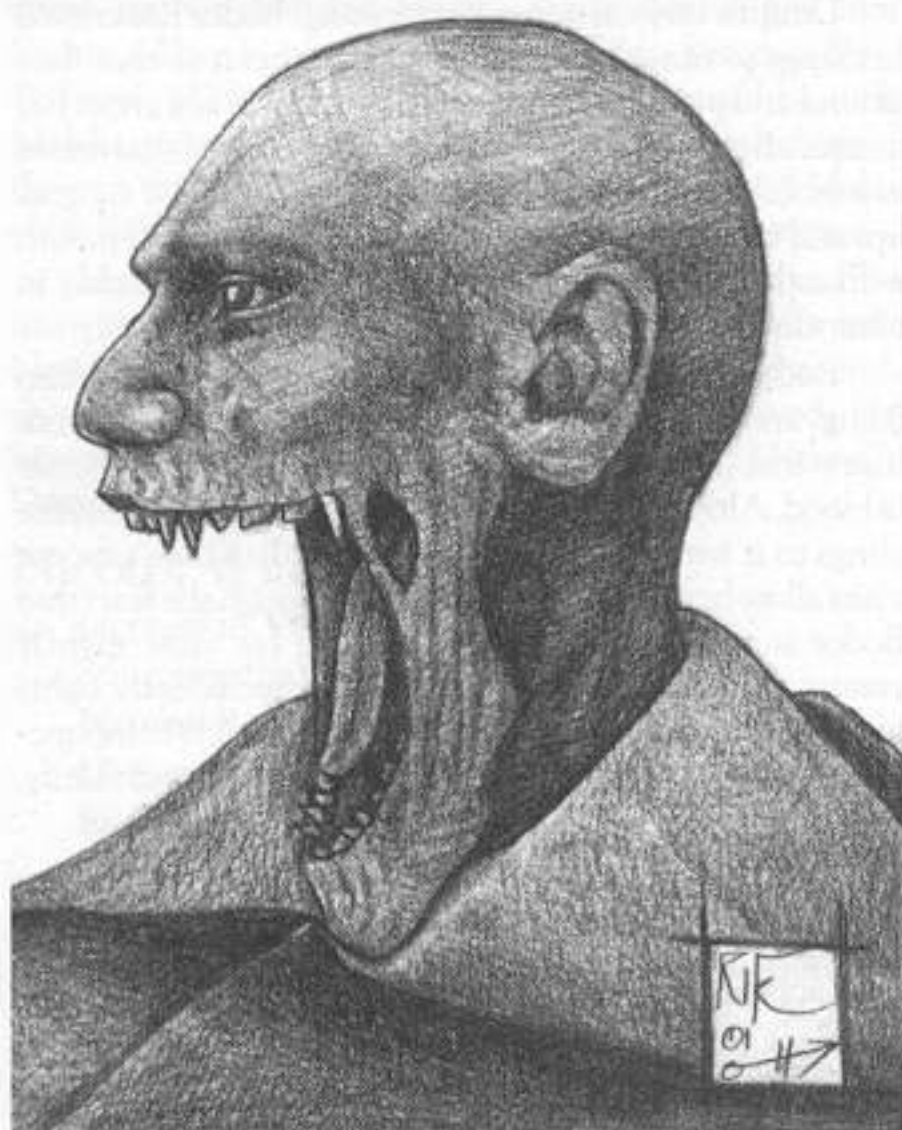
Background: With little exception, Koban selects hotheaded peasants for his childer. He sees this as a direct correlation to his own Embrace, but they are also easier to control. Dominik is one of these angry youths plucked from a long-destroyed Carpathian village. Although he is by no means bright, the lad's capacity for letting the Beast take control is unmatched in Koban's experience. He hopes to use the boy's capacity for focused frenzy until it burns out, at which point Dominik will serve as the basis for a new creation of flesh.

Image: Dominik's body is entirely hairless. Prior to Dominik's Embrace, Koban broke the boy's jaw in five places and removed much of the flesh along his cheeks, allowing it to heal in a manner that produced a flapping, distended maw. This alteration allows Dominik's chin to touch his own collarbone when his head is completely upright. Koban has removed Dominik's vocal cords and sealed his nostrils with flesh for the duration of his mission.

Roleplaying Notes: Perform for your sire in return for your voice. Do not forget his instructions. Do not let anything stop you.

Haven: Dominik's haven is far removed from Toth, but he has set up a shelter in the mountains overlooking the land hold. In a small cave, he has sprinkled the ground with his native soil.

Secrets: Dominik is not privy to a great many secrets, although he knows of his sire's *koldunic* learning. If interrogated, he can shed some light on the ritual nature of Koban's attack.



Influence: Dominik has not garnered much power beyond that granted to him by his sire. He chafes under Koban's bonds, but he foolishly expects release after his mission to Toth.

Destiny: Unless something unexpected occurs, Dominik never escapes his sire's slave-like grip. Once Koban tires of him, he discards Dominik like so much waste, using his distended form as an inhuman halberd for a few years before leaving him for the sun.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Koban

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Monster

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1163

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Intimidation 1, Larceny 1

Skills: Melee 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Knowledges: Hearth Wisdom 3, Linguistics 2

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 3, Potence 2

Backgrounds: Resources 1

BITTER CRUSADE

Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 4, Courage 5

Road: Beast 8

Willpower: 5

GESU, SAINT OF THE DIVINITY WITHIN

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

Background: Hoping to end the long feud between his lovers, Michael presented Gesu and Gesu's brother, Symeon, to the heads of the Ventrue and Tzimisce families, to be Embraced upon the boys' 21st birthdays. Although they were separated by two full years, they appeared nearly identical. Gesu was only seven, but his countenance showed a blossoming intellect, while his brother's childlike innocence could not hide the ambition and pride that exuded from him. For over a decade, the Ventrue and Tzimisce families knew peace.

A few nights before the Dracon planned to Embrace Gesu, a small delegation of Carpathian Tzimisce, including an envoy from the Antediluvian itself, arrived and demanded to speak with the Dracon. The envoy urged the Dracon not to Embrace Gesu, for the clan's seers had predicted that he would bring a terrible curse on his sire and the whole clan. The Dracon only mocked them for their superstitions.

When the Embrace came, dark clouds gathered over Constantinople and the Obertus monastery. As Gesu's life slipped away and the ancient Tzimisce's blood flowed through his veins, a terrible change gripped the vampire-to-be. His skin became yellow and taut, and his bones



contorted into impossible shapes. Gesu then slipped into torpor and his body withered. His mind was plagued by dreams in which he prayed to God for salvation, only to be given a dark vitae that flowed from a crucifix to drink. These dreams eventually awakened him from torpor. Finding Symeon holding vigil, Gesu Embraced his brother so that they would never be parted again. The loss of Symeon angered Antonius beyond all bounds. He vowed revenge on the Tzimisce and fought them until his eventual demise at the hands of his own clan. The Dracon knew that Michael's Dream was now doomed, and he left Constantinople forever.

In time, even Gesu and Symeon's relationship has become strained. Gesu's twisted joining with Symeon's concubine Lillian shattered the link of love between the two.

Image: Gesu still bears the mark of his childhood fevers. His form, though tall (measuring over seven feet), is emaciated. His features are exceedingly beautiful, giving Gesu an ephemeral and haunting appearance. He wears long red habits that conceal the face of Lillian on his chest.

Roleplaying Hints: Divine peace exists in all creatures. Christ sacrificed himself for humanity, but mortals, being weak and imperfect, did not listen. You will make them hear.

Haven: Gesu rests in the inner chapel of the Monastery St. John Studius.

Secrets: Gesu, the head of the Obertus order, keeps many secrets, including the confessions of many of his Tzimisce brethren, the contents of the Library of the Forgotten and the fate of Achmet the Dreamer—a Salubri sheltered in his monastery.

Influence: Gesu's influence over the monastic orders gives him considerable power over the city.

Destiny: Under the influence of Myca Vykos, the rift between Gesu and his brother deepens and consumes them both. **Dying Embers** tells the tale of how that rift concludes.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: The Dracon

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 5th

Embrace: AD 701

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 6, Appearance 8

Mental: Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 7, Intimidation 6, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Animal Ken 3, Body Crafts (icons) 5, Crafts 3, Etiquette 3, Painting (icons) 6, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Academics 5, Hearth Wisdom 3, Linguistics 4, Occult 3, Theology 5

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 6, Dominate 3, Obfuscate 2, Obtenebration 2, Presence 5, Vicissitude 6

Backgrounds: Allies (Gesudian family members in other monasteries) 5, Herd 5, Resources 4, Status 6

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Road: Heaven 9

Willpower: 9

VOIVODE KOBAN, FIEND AMONG FIENDS

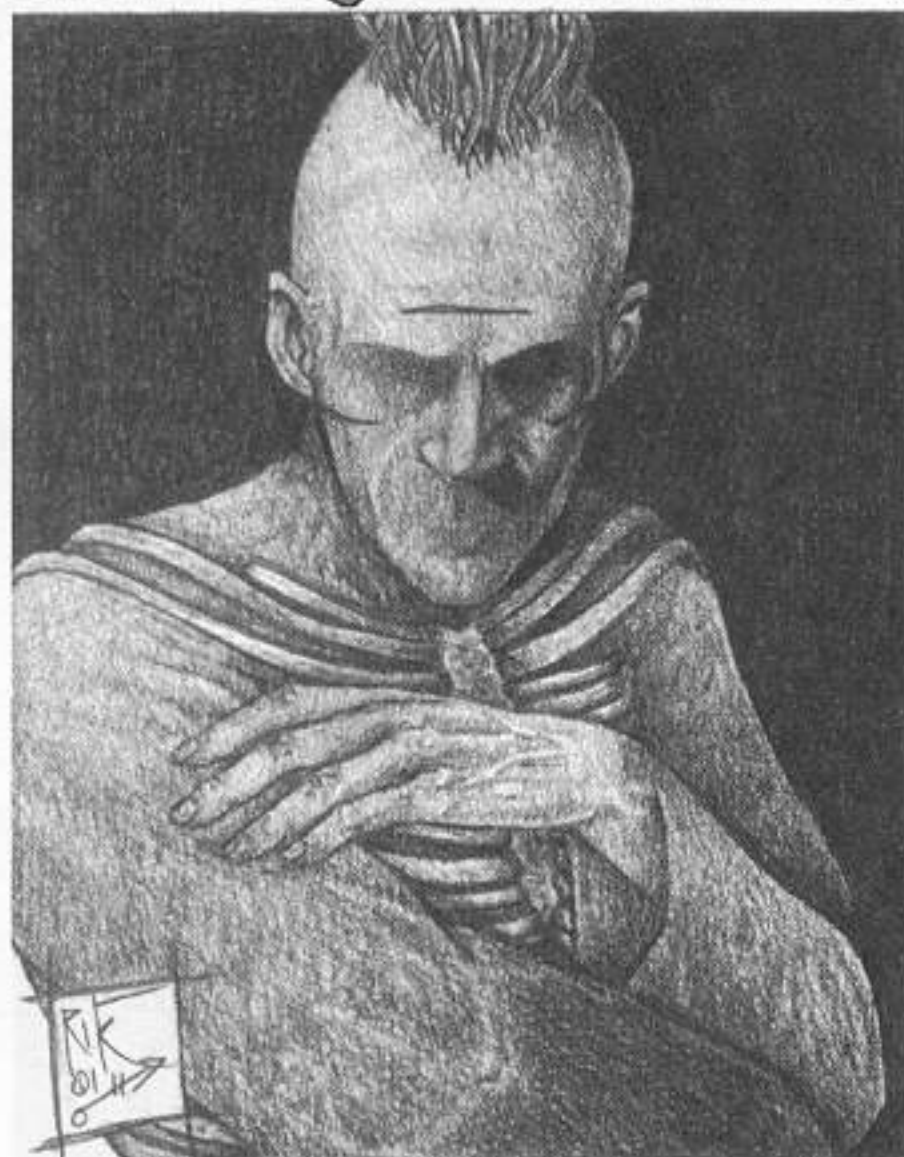
(appears in **Fiendish Winter**)

Background: The Carpathian Fiend Noritz swept through Koban's village like a scourge, using the mortals he didn't initially kill as his playthings. When he tired of these games, he forced them to fight one another to the death, pitting neighbor against neighbor, grandfather against granddaughter and parent against child. The last to remain was the augur's son Koban. Noritz approached him with the intention of draining his blood, informing the youth that he would soon suffer the tortures of all eternity for his actions. The boy spat in Noritz' face and told him that after being forced to slaughter 33 of his fellows, no torture could break him. Amused, Noritz Embraced the lad and left him to gain a sense of irony.

Koban took to the Cainite ways quickly, applying the knowledge passed down from his mother to his new state of being. He soon became involved in Fiendish society, clawing his way into power and trading what remained of his humanity for land and influence. Now, nearly three centuries later, even Noritz is careful to keep a wary eye on his childe.

Although Koban is quite capable as both a ruler and a warlord, every action he takes is based on obscure mystical perceptions known only to him, rather than any personal desire for advancement. Everything he does takes on an aspect of ritual, although this is not always blatant. Some might mistake this behavior as peasant superstition, but his outlook has nevertheless carved him a kingdom and earned the well-deserved fear of mortal and Cainite alike.

Image: Koban is nightmare given form. Although he would be seven feet tall were he to stand at full height, he typically hunches forward with hands clasped, his posture similar to that of a praying mantis. Whisper-thin stalks of flesh sprout from atop his smooth head, fluttering like submerged reeds. He has five orifices that double as both mouths and eyes: two on each cheek, one centered in his forehead, and one on the palm of each hand. Each contains an array of fangs and a tongue-like mass of overlapping, hollowed muscle that unfolds like a tulip to reveal an eyeball on a stalk. He wears Zubor's reinforced ribcage and spinal column as another man would a breastplate. Al-



though he often seems clothed, this appearance is typically nothing more than a manipulation of his body.

Roleplaying Notes: Everything has meaning, from the positioning of the moon during the New Year to the breathing pattern of a mortal child's sobs as its mother is bifurcated before its eyes. Every being is connected and woven into the world. The difference is that most creatures are flies trapped in the world's web, while you are the spider that moves about freely.

Haven: Koban nests in a labyrinthine hive carved in the rocky face of his Carpathian home.

Secrets: Koban's research into Koldunic Sorcery has revealed to him many esoteric secrets about the nature of vampirism. He keeps his findings recorded on pages of pressed flesh deep in his haven.

Influence: A powerful Tzimisce lord, Koban has a great deal of influence in Transylvania and parts of the Balkans. Compared to the Toth family, he is a great lord. On a larger scale, however, he has many rivals.

Destiny: Koban becomes one of Vykos' mentors in the aftermath of the Bitter Crusade. He eventually destroys his sire Noritz during the Anarch Revolt, but is himself killed by one of his own childer.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Noritz

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Monster

BITTER CRUSADE

Generation: 6th

Embrace: AD 812

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 5, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Body Crafts 4, Etiquette 2, Herbalism 1, Melee 1, Ride 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Koldunism 6, Hearth Wisdom 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Occult 4, Politics 3

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 3, Dominate 1, Fortitude 4, Koldunic Sorcery 6, Vicissitude 6

Koldunic Paths: Spirit Ways 3, The Way of Earth 4

Backgrounds: Herd 4, Influence 3, Resources 4, Retainers 3, Status 3

Virtues: Conviction 5, Instinct 4, Courage 3

Road: Devil 7

Willpower: 8

SYMEON, HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER

(appears in *Dying Embers*)

6th generation, childe of Gesu

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Autocrat

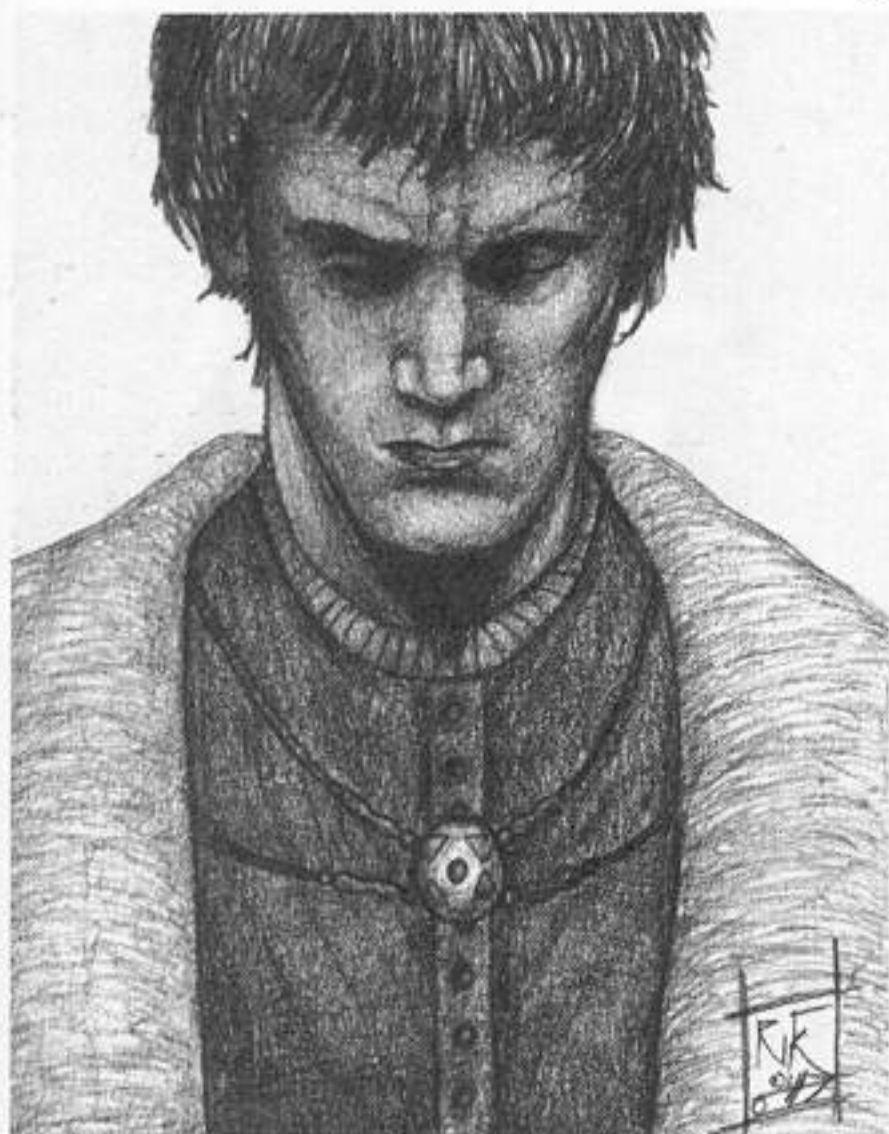
Embrace: AD 703

Apparent Age: early 20s

Symeon was born to be the perfect ruler. He had all the necessary characteristics: a strong will, ambition and determination. His one weakness was his love for his brother. Although he was two years younger than Gesu, he acted as Gesu's protector and devoted his time to his brother unselfishly. Michael saw this devotion as symbolic of the future: Tzimisce and Ventrue working together to maintain his Dream.

Unfortunately, Gesu's Embrace of Symeon cost him his destiny. Cast out by the Ventrue and disturbed by the internecine squabbles of that clan, Symeon devoted his energies to helping his brother and seeing the Tzimisce prosper. He traveled frequently, even into the Carpathian homeland of his clan. On one such trip, he returned with a new disciple, Myca Vykos. At Myca's subtle urging, he has become more like his Balkan brethren, even going so far as to conduct experiments on the insane and the sick.

Recently, his relationship with Gesu has become strained. During the Latin riots of 1185, the Genoese Lasombra Gabriella gave a child named Lillian to Symeon as a gift for sheltering her. Symeon raised the child and became entranced with her as she entered adulthood. He presented her to Gesu with the intention of Embracing her,



but Gesu saw other potential in her. Lillian allowed herself to be Embraced by Gesu after he told her of a vision of the Archangel Gabriel announcing their union. During the "Immaculate Union," Lillian was Embraced and bound into Gesu's torso, her soul joining his and forming, Gesu believed, the perfect union between man and woman.

Symeon was outraged. Gesu had taken everything from him: his clan, his future glory and now his love. With each passing night, as Symeon sees the face of Lillian upon Gesu's chest, his love for his brother fades. By the time of **Dying Embers**, that love may not be enough to stop Symeon from destroying his sibling.

BODOR TOOTH, FATHER OF THE BROOD (ALIAS MAGIB)

(appears in **Fiendish Winter**)

Background: Bodor's father died of pneumonia, leaving him to rule Toth at the age of 16. He took to his duties with passion, expanding trade and clearing bandits from the Bostral. He single-handedly rescued a Hungarian nobleman and his personal guard from a small group of brigands. One year later, the man returned with his third daughter and a dowry, offering Bodor her hand. After their marriage, they even fell in love. Mihne bore him six children, but she passed on when delivering the twins. He mourned her death, but he continued his life in Toth until the vampire Zubor's fateful arrival.

After his Embrace, Bodor grew fascinated with his newfound abilities and began to experiment with abandon. He threw himself into his studies with more zeal than he'd shown for leadership of Toth, and he made significant leaps of knowledge as the years passed. Although he was mostly self-taught, he has benefited from knowledge extracted from the Tremere Lempi and his son Farkas' discoveries among the Obertus.

More than anything, Zubor's gift has caused Bodor's love for his children to fracture. The private thoughts he held for his children at the time of his Embrace have amplified with the passage of time, warping into smothering passions and cold hatreds.

Image: Bodor rarely shows his true form anymore, but he reverts reflexively if he grows enraged. When wearing Magib's face, Bodor has a dark complexion, piercing eyes and gray hair, and he clothes himself in Persian dress. His own form is pale with long dark hair and a wispy moustache. As Magib, he never allows himself any emotional displays.

Roleplaying Notes: You return transgressions against the ones you love a hundredfold — the only problem is that you're not quite sure what love feels like anymore. You've grown to appreciate this slow detachment from the world in a way you could never have in your mortal life. You often have the thought that you simply exist amongst memories, the lives of all around you a foregone conclusion. Then you torture Lempi until the feeling passes.



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Haven: As Magib, Bodor maintains a private tower outside Toth castle where he performs his experiments on vampirism and tortures the Tremere Lempi.

Secrets: Although he is relatively young and unschooled in vampirism, Bodor has accumulated his fair share of secrets, including the fate of the Tremere Lempi, his own identity as Magib and the nature of his curse.

Influence: Bodor thought he was being genuine when he left the land hold to his son Dévald, but now that a threat has arisen, he is less sure. Using the power of his blood and his paternity, he exerts power over his family.

Destiny: After escaping three of Koban's assaults, Bodor falls at the hands of his son Kilián in 1238. He dies unaware of his son's betrayal.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Zubor

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1162

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Body Crafts 4, Etiquette 2, Melee 1

Knowledges: Hearth Wisdom 2, Law 1, Linguistics 3, Medicine 1, Occult 3, Politics 3, Science 2

Disciplines: Auspex 6, Vicissitude 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Herd 4, Resources 3

Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 3, Courage 4

Road: Humanity 3

Willpower: 6

ERZEBET TOTH, THE LESSER CHILD

(appears in **Fiendish Winter**)

Background: Erzebet continues to live in her twin brother Farkas' shadow—even after his death. She always followed him in life, from birth to Embrace. It would have been easy to despise Farkas had he not recognized her position early on and gone out of his way to protect and support her. Now he is gone, along with his words of encouragement. He is no longer around to temper their father and sire's distaste for her, and the increased friction begins to wear at her patience.

Still, Erzebet is capable of growing beyond the persona that she feels defines her. Technically over 50, she still feels stuck as the "little one" of the family, as though her personality froze with her body. Should the right circumstances present themselves, Erzebet could snap out of the



last vestiges of childhood. Perhaps the realization that she's directing the raw anger of her father into coordinated efforts of revenge can show her that she's central to the campaign for vengeance. With a little polish, she could easily grow into a keen strategist. An opportunity for just such an evolution presents itself in act two, if she travels to Toth with the coterie. The two-month journey is long enough for the requisite self-reflection.

Image: Black hair, alabaster skin and a shapely figure would make Erzebet the darling of Toth, were it not for her inability to hide her contempt for nearly everybody who surrounds her. Although she is by no means unappealing, the ugliness of her thoughts and distaste for her peers is readily apparent in her facial expressions and manners.

Roleplaying Notes: You always strive for, and rarely receive, your father's love. You endeavor constantly to prove yourself to him, yet you fail repeatedly to do so. He has warmed to you slightly since you presented your plan to avenge Farkas' death, and you have a feeling that he approves of your attempt to honor your brother's memory. You also feel that should you fail, you will be dead to Bodor's eyes once and for all.

Haven: Erzebet has set up a haven a few miles from Zara in a farmstead along the road toward the nearest pass across the mountains. She slaughtered the unfortunates who lived at the farm.

Secrets: Other than the story of her family, Erzebet has few secrets.

BITTER CRUSADE

Influence: Erzebet wishes to serve at her father and brother's side, and she is glad to serve as their wrath in this instance. Deep down, however, she knows that Bodor doesn't truly care for her.

Destiny: Erzebet's destiny is in the coterie's hands.

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Bodor Toth

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Rebel

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1167

Apparent Age: late teens

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4

Skills: Animal Ken 4, Body Crafts 2, Etiquette 1,

Melee 2, Music 2, Ride 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Linguistics 2, Occult 3

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Celerity 1, Vicissitude 3

Backgrounds: Resources 3, Retainers 3

Virtues: Conviction 3, Instinct 3, Courage 3

Road: Beast 5

Willpower: 6

MYCA VYKOS

(appears in **Fiendish Winter** and **Dying Embers**)

7th generation, childe of Symeon

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Architect

Embrace: 1002

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Taken from Transylvania as a youth by the Obertus Fiend Symeon, Vykos spent two centuries playing the part of the loyal and trusted childe. Vykos genuinely respects his sire, and he has grown quite frustrated that Symeon is unwilling to confront Gesu regarding the killing of Lillian (Symeon's mortal favorite). Vykos' quiet hatred for Gesu has expanded by association to include much of the Obertus sect, for nearly everywhere he sees Gesu's mad, vacuous influence turning the Obertus into little more than eccentrics.

Although Vykos can't betray his sire, he has no such loyalties to the rest of his clan. His current plans involve his outright secession from the Obertus and Symeon's removal from Constantinople. He uses the destruction of the Obertus monastery in Zara as an excuse to leave the city, although he intends to abandon his duties from there and head east. He has arranged to meet with Velya and Lugo, two



Carpathian Fiends with whom he has kept a surreptitious correspondence. They have agreed to provide sanctuary for Vykos and his sire in return for their services and some Obertus secrets. Once the arrangements are finalized, he returns to Constantinople for his sire — in time to see the city's fall.

VENTRUE

CAIUS, EMPEROR OF THE NIGHT

(appears in **Dying Embers**)

5th generation, childe of Antonius

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 325

Apparent Age: mid 60s

Caius, who was a lieutenant to Constantine the Great, backed his leader's bid to become Emperor of Rome. A man of faith and profoundly dark moods, Constantine turned to Caius in times of hatred and predatory rage. Assuming responsibility for his mentor's murderous moods, Caius carried out the dark and bloody orders that paved the way for the would-be emperor's rise. He even carried out the execution of Constantine's firstborn when the boy became a threat.

Constantine fascinated the Triumvirate, and, under Antonius, the Ventrue helped Caius carry out his gruesome orders. Once Constantine was secure in his power, Antonius

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



took Caius as his own. Little did he realize that he had Embraced the instrument of his own destruction.

Learning from Antonius, Caius saw Michael as the immortal epitome of Constantine's holy wisdom. He served Antonius for centuries, all the while hoping to replace him at Michael's side. He confided his love for Michael only to the Cappadocian Alexia Theusa, who understood his longings. When Antonius became obsessed with destroying the Dracon because of the Embrace of Symeon, Caius had his chance. Together with Septima Dominica, Antonius' estranged childe, he presented a plan to eliminate the Ventrue Methuselah. Michael agreed reluctantly for the good of the Dream. In the aftermath, Michael withdrew from Cainite society and began his fall into madness.

Caius took Antonius' place as *basileus* of the Ventrue, but that was all. Whatever affection the Patriarch felt for Caius was overcome by the horror of their mutual crime. Caius never recovered from this rejection. Throughout the centuries, he has carried out his duties and maintained his power by playing rivals against each other, all the while yearning for the favor of the Patriarch.

LANZO VON SACHSEN

(appears in *Venetian Nights*)

8th generation, childe of Guntramus

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Gallant

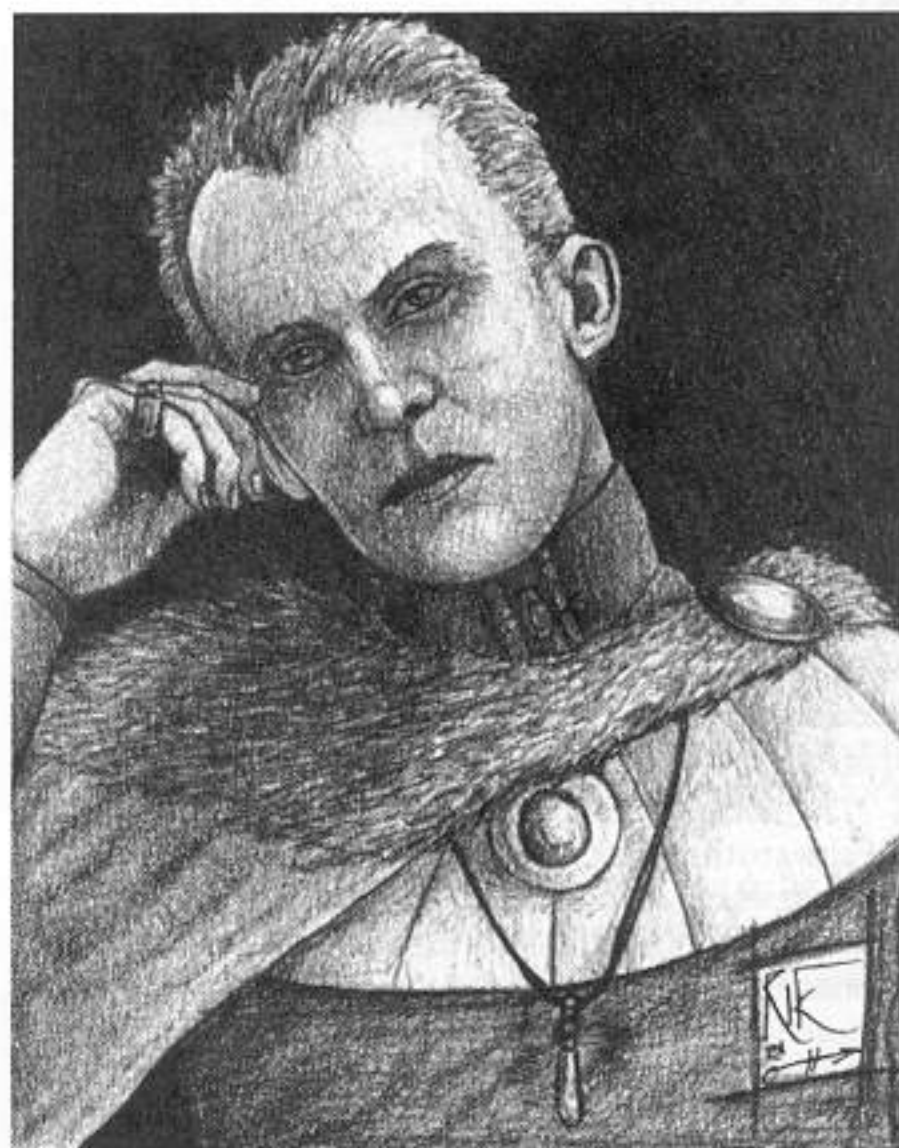
BITTER CRUSADE

Embrace: AD 943

Apparent Age: late 40s

Background: Lanzo was born into a powerful noble family charged with bringing both German law and Christianity to the pagans of the unruly eastern marches. Lanzo's prominence brought him to the attention of the brood of the Ventrue Methuselah Hardestadt, who had need of an instrument in the nascent empire that King Otto I was just beginning to build. As a trusted nobleman with the king's ear, as well as significant lands away from prying eyes, Lanzo was a perfect candidate for the Embrace. While Lanzo was at first repulsed by his new state, he learned, in time, to accept it as a blessing. Immortal, he could guarantee that the new Holy Roman Empire would assume its proper place in Christendom — with the Ventrue as its guardians.

Since then, Lanzo has protected his native lands and fought against any who would undermine the military Christianity he imbibed as a mortal. He considers the Crusades an important strike against the Assamites and Setites, both of whom he sees as insidious enemies of Christian civilization. To that end, he supports the Byzantines as a bulwark against Islam. He hopes that wrangling over matters of religious authority will not interfere with the goal of beating back common enemies. Lanzo's single-minded devotion to this goal is what blinds him to the truth during *Venetian Nights*.



OTHERS

Bitter Crusade is not only the story of the scions of Caine. Indeed, it is the dawn of a new and deadly time when mortals do not cower so blindly before the Damned. Mortals and ghouls play a critical role in this tale.

GAUTHIER DE DAMPIERE, HOUND OF THE LORD

(appears throughout **Bitter Crusade**)

Background: Gauthier was born the third son of the Count of Dampiere, a vassal of the king of France. Consequently, there was never any doubt he would take up arms and serve his family as a knight. Gauthier proved a capable warrior, excelling in both mounted and personal combat. Therefore, it was with some surprise that his family greeted the news that he had heard the call of God. Gauthier believed that God had spoken to him through a dream, enjoining him to seek the holy places and free them from the infidels. Gauthier's family could accept his desire to fight in the Holy Land; that was a viable option for landless younger sons. What they found difficult to understand was his sincerity and his need to divest himself of his worldly possessions for the love of Christ.

Gauthier then joined the Third Crusade and expected to battle against the Saracens. Instead, the same call that had commanded him to take up the cross commanded him to fight "the true enemy." The realization that creatures of the night stalked the holy places and feasted on human

blood nearly drove Gauthier insane. Yet, somehow, he pulled himself together and continued his fight. He spent the next few years seeking out and destroying the fiends he found. He also pushed himself to his limits, engaging in strenuous exercise and penitential practices.

In time, Gauthier returned to France where he continues his battles against the forces of the night. With each year, his skills and abilities grow, as does his detachment from his fellow man. Gauthier is a man obsessed with the corruption he sees around him. It is this obsession that draws him to the Fourth Crusade, during which he believes it may be possible to strike a serious blow against the darkness.

Image: Gauthier is a nondescript man of medium height and athletic build. He has a high forehead, and his dark hair is cut in a functional, military style. His eyes are likewise dark, but they possess a lively quality that belies the madness that eats slowly at his mind. He dresses simply, as befits a poor knight in the service of Christ. However, Gauthier is never without his Damascene sword, a memento of his destruction of a Saracen monster during the Third Crusade.

Roleplaying Hints: You abandoned your former life when you heard the call of God in a dream. You took up the cross to fight the Saracen in the Holy Land, but what you found was something far worse — monsters that preyed on men like cattle. You believe that God has granted you the vision to see these fiends at work. Now, you see the corruption they have wrought everywhere — even within the Holy Church! You cannot rest until they have been defeated, regardless of the cost to your body, your mind or your sanity.

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Penitent

Age: early 40s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Leadership 3

Skills: Melee 4, Ride 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Investigation 3, Law 1, Occult 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 2

Willpower: 9

Merits/Flaws: True Faith 2

RODRIGUE DE NAVARRE

(appears throughout **Bitter Crusade**)

Background: Rodrigue grew up as the second son of a minor noble from Navarre. He showed no inclination to become a priest or enough skill at arms to become a knight. The best his family had hoped for was a political marriage that might secure them a better place among the aristoc-



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

racy of southern Europe. Rodrigue did just that, marrying a wealthy woman from Toulouse.

Rodrigue traveled frequently between his native land and France on business for his family. It was in doing so that he first caught fleeting glimpses of what he called "the darkness." He was already familiar with the dualist heretics of the region — Cathari, Waldenses, Albigensians and others. Although they were clearly evil, the heretics were banal in comparison to an elusive *something* that he sensed behind them all.

Therefore, it was no surprise to Rodrigue when he obtained a partial Latin translation of the *Book of the Shining Blood*, the central text of the Cainite Heresy, after a raid against an isolated community of heretics on his wife's lands. He read the book with both disgust and exhilaration, for he now had the proof he needed that a great evil was at work in Europe. Rodrigue spent the next few years gathering information and recruiting others to serve as his agents. If what he read were true, he would need all the strength and learning he could muster to succeed.

As of the beginning of *Bitter Crusade*, Rodrigue has neither infiltrated the Cainite Heresy nor encountered a genuine Cainite, although he and his men have come close on numerous occasions. His research has convinced him that the St. Pantaleimon Monastery in Venice is somehow connected with the darkness he struggles against. With the arrival of the crusaders in that city, he is more determined than ever to uncover the truth, making him a potentially dangerous opponent.



BITTER CRUSADE

Image: Rodrigue remains a vigorous man despite his advancing years. He wears fine clothes as suits his station, but it is his piercing gaze that most notice. His dark eyes seem to burn in the middle of his fine Spanish face. The wisps of gray that fleck his short hair and beard only add to the effect.

Roleplaying Hints: You are neither a learned priest nor a skilled warrior, but you can see the darkness that lurks just beneath the surface of Europe. While clerics and nobleman fight isolated pockets of heresy, you alone see a disturbing pattern. You alone recognize that there is some maleficent intelligence behind it all. You believe that the abode of this intelligence is in Venice, and you have decided to journey there before it can hijack the crusade.

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Defender

Age: early 40s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Empathy 3, Leadership 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Herbalism 1, Melee 1, Ride 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 4, Law 2, Linguistics 2, Occult 2, Politics 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Influence 2

Willpower: 5

ANGYALKA PECELY, LAST DAUGHTER OF TOTH

(appears in *Fiendish Winter*)

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Caretaker

Age: early 50s

Angyalka expected her father Bodor to marry her off to another *boyar's* son before her 16th birthday. The sudden revelation of his condition and his subsequent disinterest with mortal matters relaxed her fear, allowing her to carry on her clandestine romance with Oszlár, the blacksmith's son. Eventually, she gained enough courage to inform her father that she intended to marry him, and she was surprised to receive his blessing. She eschewed a life of royalty for one with her true love, continuing her existence as a blacksmith's wife rather than a *boyar's* daughter. The townsfolk were initially wary of her intentions, but they soon grew to appreciate her when it became apparent that she had their best interests at heart. Rather than bring up problems with a very ill Bodor, they spoke with her and resolved the issues. She passed the more complicated matters along to her father.

This arrangement continues with her brother Dévald, the new *boyar*. To ensure he is aware of what is occurring within his demesne, Dévald meets with Angyalka every

week to discuss matters both grave and blithe. The two have always held a robust bond that has strengthened through the years, and although Dévald is the *boyar*, he still makes time to visit his nieces and nephews. Angyalka does not regret her decision, for her heart remains with the people of Toth.

VIKTOR SUPEK, CONSTABLE OF ZARA

(appears in *Fiendish Winter*)

Background: When the Venetians endeavored to impose their own brand of order in Zara, one of the first things they did was to round up the local constabulary, decapitate those in charge and replace them with their own men. Those in the lower ranks were given the choice of continuing their work under the Venetians or following their former masters to Hell. The intention was to clean out the extensive Zarayan black market, long known to work hand in hand with the city's constabulary. This purge occurred in order to quell the possibility of organized rebellion and to force the smuggling element to trade with the Venetians instead.

Viktor Supek is, ironically, exactly the type of person they were trying to expunge. His low rank kept him safe from the initial purges, and his apparent stupidity kept his Venetian masters from suspecting his connections to Zara's trade in contraband. His long history with the constabulary left him one of the oldest remaining members. This fact, coupled with his knowledge of internal procedures and the various quarters of Zara, led his Venetian masters to

increase his rank. He knows he's out of his depth, but he's more than willing to ride these unexpected windfalls for as long as he can.

Image: A barrel-chested Dalmatian, Viktor is the type of man whose very presence intimidates others. His bullish face and permanent scowl only make his violent nature more clear.

Roleplaying Hints: You're not that bright, and you know it. You think that just about everybody tries to take advantage of you, and you're usually right. You make up for this by exaggerating the stupidity everybody expects, because people are much more willing to talk openly around someone they consider harmless. When you're on the job, you're a coarse bullyboy who uses intimidating glares and harsh language to keep people in line.

Destiny: Viktor perishes during the Venetian razing of Zara in April of 1203, trapped in a burning building.

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Defender

Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Larceny 2, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Archery 1, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Knowledges: Investigation 3, Law 1, Hearth Wisdom 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Influence 1, Resources 2

Willpower: 5

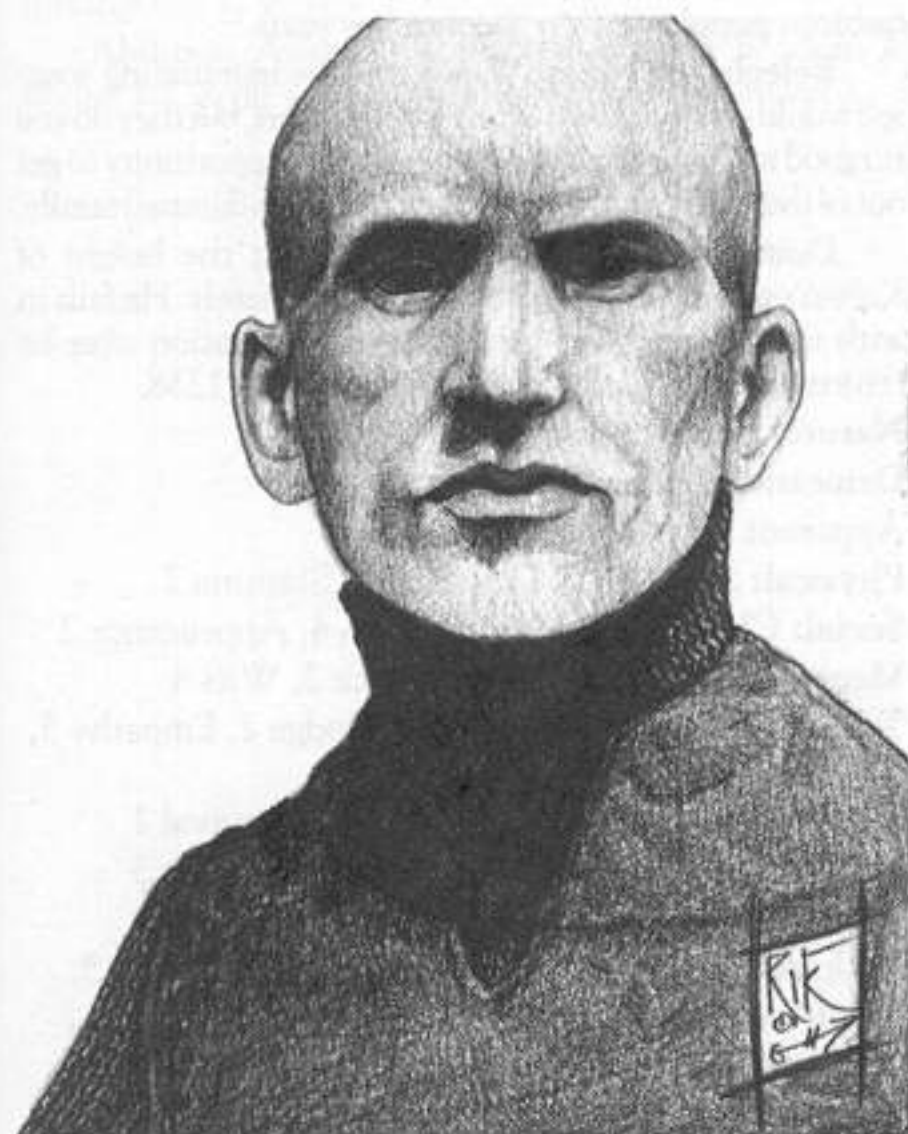
DEVALD TOTH, BOYAR

(appears in *Fiendish Winter*)

Background: Dévald Toth is his father's son. His shrewdness is matched only by his loyalty to his family and the people of Toth. Although he is comparatively softer than other *boyars*, he is nonetheless capable of doing what must be done with little hesitation and no regrets. He is fond of the tales of Greek heroes that his father used to read to him in his youth, and he continues to share this joy with Angyalka's children. He knows that they humor him, but he slyly suggests that they have children of their own so they won't need to listen to his prattling.

Dévald approaches his elder years without an heir, but he is only mildly concerned. He hopes to find some minor Transylvanian noble eager to marry a younger daughter away and forget about her, as it would not do for doting relatives to uncover the group of Cainites present in Toth.

Image: Short in stature and stern of chin, Dévald has a personal magnetism that draws attention and respect. A slight paunch and graying hair are the only signs of encroaching age, and his manner is both lively and animated.





KILIÁN TOTH, USURPER SLAVE

(appears in *Fiendish Winter*)

Background: If he had been allowed to choose, Kilián never would have asked to be trapped in a tiny Carpathian holding, the second son of a vampire, doomed to live the rest of his life serving his father's eccentric whims. Even if he dared risking his father's retribution by conspiring to depose his elder brother, he had no desire to be called *boyar* by 700 backward peasants on the fringes of Transylvania. His fantasies involved him traveling to the great southern cities of which he read and partaking of their many splendors. After all, he felt it better to be a man among wealth than a king among filth.

When Bodor asked his children to help him discover a cure for his curse, he leapt at the chance to travel. He rode from Toth on his faithful steed, never intending to return. His attempts to impress by proclaiming himself to be of eastern royalty drew the wrong kind of attention in the form of the Tremere Lempi Mannisenmaki. He has supplemented his diet with a draught from her veins ever since, and three decades of doing so wears his patience raw. He rides his horse as far from Toth as he can before the blood hunger sets in, but he grows disheartened as the distance becomes less and less with the passing months. He manages the occasional secret visits with Lempi, trying to learn what he can about the Tremere.

Image: Kilián is rarely seen without a smile on his face. His light brown hair and thin build contrast sharply with his brother Dévald's, and he typically dresses in Byzantine fashions popular within the past few years.

Roleplaying Notes: Your talents for ingratiating yourself would serve you well in any foreign court, but they do you no good in Toth. You're desperate for any opportunity to get out of this prison and away from your thrice-damned family.

Destiny: Lempi Embraces Kilián at the height of Koban's assault, and he flees Toth immediately. He falls in with the Tremere and gains a strong reputation after he returns to Toth to slay his father, Bodor, in 1238.

Nature: Curmudgeon

Demeanor: Gallant

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 2, Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 3, Melee 3, Ride 4, Survival 1

Knowledges: Linguistics 2, Occult 1, Politics 3

Disciplines: Dominate 1, Potence 1

Backgrounds: Influence 1, Mentor 1, Resources 3, Retainers 1

Willpower: 6

Roleplaying Notes: You're perfectly content living as a minor lord of a small land hold. Although you are not without ambition, your family comes before your personal gain. You know that you're a calming influence upon your father, but you fear that he will one day become more of a monster than you can contain. He has offered to make you as he is on many occasions, but you have refused, still convinced that his "gift" is a terrible curse. You pray for his soul thrice daily, but deep down you fear that redemption isn't possible. You would leave your father's side only if you became completely convinced of this.

Destiny: Dévald dies in bed of pneumonia in 1207.

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Defender

Age: late 50s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Archery 3, Etiquette 2, Melee 2, Ride 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Law 1, Linguistics 2, Politics 2

Backgrounds: Resources 4, Retainers 4

Willpower: 5

GENERIC TEMPLATES

Roleplaying and characterization are obviously more important than specific game statistics in a storytelling game, but some hard numbers can make your job easier when the coterie enters combat or goes off in a direction you didn't expect. The following templates should help with those moments. Use them to represent minor characters whom the players' coterie meets during **Bitter Crusade** or to quickly flesh out the preceding character descriptions. Keep in mind that these profiles are not complete. They include only the statistics you are likely to need in a hurry, so feel free to expand and revise them as the need arises. If a minor character starts to take on a greater importance in your chronicle don't hesitate to take time between sessions to work up full profiles.

MARTIAL NEONATE

Venice and Constantinople have a great many resident vampires, and the Fourth Crusade draws others from across Europe and beyond. Use this template to represent young vampiric knights on crusade or martially inclined Byzantines or Transylvanians. Feel free to adjust traits — especially Disciplines — to reflect specifics like clan and culture.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 1, Hearth Wisdom 2, Melee 3, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Fortitude 1, Potence 2

Equipment: broadsword, Light Armor

BYZANTINE GHOUL

Constantinople is rife with mortal blood drinkers. The Obertus order has many ghoulish monks and the Latin Quarter features many blood cults, including the apocalyptic Children of Calomena. Use this template for those who show up in **Dying Embers**. It serves just as well for other ghoulish servitors, such as Prince Gari's retainers in Zara.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Melee 2, Occult 1, Subterfuge 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Disciplines: Potence 1

Gear: knife or club

CRUSADER

The crusade gathers a huge number of European warriors to free the Holy Sepulcher and ultimately to sack Constantinople. This template works for these mortals, but also for other human warriors whom the characters may encounter. By adding a dot of Potence (and perhaps Fortitude) this template can also serve for warrior ghouls.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Hearth Wisdom 1, Melee 2, Survival 2

Gear: broadsword, heavy or knight's armor



PRESCOTT



Appendix: Come to Dust

The scepter, learning, physic, must
All follow this and come to dust
— William Shakespeare, Cymbeline

AFTERMATH

When the ashes settle and the Fourth Crusade scatters into the pages of history, an uncertain future dawns with the 13th century. For the Childer of Caine it is a time of upheaval and conflict. The inability of the assembled vampiric delegates in Venice to do so much as manipulate the crusade and the destruction of the Methuselah Michael and his great metropolis send two powerful messages to vampires of Europe. First, the mortal herd grows restless and dangerous. Second, even the mightiest of Cainites is vulnerable. In other words, the stalemate of the Long Night is over.

The new era that dawns after the Bitter Crusade is one of conflict and chaos. The princes and lords who have been waiting for decades to make their moves do so now. The ancient lords who know that they'll soon need to retreat deeper into the shadows rush to secure their positions and destroy enemies before it's too late. Neonates and ancillae move to get some of the vanishing bounty of the Long Night and use the mental flexibility that is their greatest advantage over the torpid ancients. The time for reflection has passed. War is the order of the night.

Beyond this generalized conflict — called by some the War of Princes — the events of the Fourth Crusade have some more specific effects on those who participated. If you continue your chronicle after the events of *Dying Embers* (and we certainly hope you do) you can use further stories to serve as epilogues to the main acts. What follows are overviews of the repercussions of the Bitter Crusade on some of the important Cainites whom the coterie encountered in the previous stories. Feel free to alter these events to reflect more closely the specific actions that the coterie took in your chronicle. Doing so will only make the epilogue more powerful when you use it.

VYKOS, SYMEON AND THE OBERTUS LEGACY

Following Gesu's destruction — whether it comes at the characters' hands or not — Symeon and his childer are able to leave Constantinople for Transylvania and points beyond. They spend time in the domains of Voivode Koban, and they may also visit the land hold of Toth, but they remain largely free agents until they each can establish their own bases of power.

From this point on, Vykos makes a name for himself as a scholar and negotiator, becoming involved in intrigue after intrigue. Symeon remains a pragmatist, and although he mourns Gesu, he integrates himself into the changing vampiric landscape. In fact, he is able to gather the scattered Obertus monasteries and outposts into a significant power base once he reaches an understanding with some of the more powerful voivodes. In the increasingly rancorous battles between princes and elders, Symeon becomes aligned with his grand-sire, the Dracon.

The Obertus order and its belief in the Divinity Within continues, but it makes many concessions to the practicalities of existence after the fall of Constantinople. Some monks

continue their ascetic ways, but others spend more time seeing to the order's alliances and domain than to their own spiritual evolution. Doing so allows the order to survive the hard times and spread some of its beliefs. Indeed, the quest for the Divinity Within through blood fasts and other means — which comes to be called Gesudianism — becomes an important expression of the Road of Heaven.

MICHAEL ARCHANGEL

Michael's destruction reverberates throughout Europe. Among the Toreador the disappearance of the Methuselah leaves a power vacuum above the various Artisan broods, and many elders engage in bloody battles to take over the mantle of preeminence. More broadly, however, vampires fleeing Constantinople or returning from the crusade bring with them word of the Patriarch's glory. The characters, who actually witnessed his last moments and saw him several times, can be important vehicles for this message, but it is carried on other lips as well. The association of the Patriarch with the figure of the archangel who bears his name only becomes stronger with his Final Death. The story of Michael seeking to ascend to pure spirituality spreads like wildfire, and some believe that the Methuselah found a path to Golconda in the ashes of the Dream. Others see in his sacrifice the ultimate struggle against the barbaric material world. His passing becomes a seminal event for Cainites because, unlike the passing of other ancients, it occurred in the middle of a very public mortal display.

Michael's legacy is felt most especially among the followers of the Roads of Heaven and Chivalry. Various Cainite priests and clerics use Michael as a saint and martyr, an icon of the virtues of divinity and purity that they preach. Among those who believe in not only seeking a place under Heaven but in being worshipped as well, Michael is the great example to follow. Among the vampiric knights and ladies on the Road of Chivalry, the mortal image of the Archangel Michael merges with the vampiric stories of the Patriarch. Stories circulate about his nobility and honor, his chivalric virtue and ultimate sacrifice. Whether or not a vampire made in Ebla and shaped in Rome could ever have actually been a paragon of something so new as European chivalry is a question that most young adherents simply ignore.

Although he is not an Antediluvian, Michael assumes a place something like Saulot's in the general Cainite psyche. No longer a threat, he becomes — retroactively — a figure of unparalleled virtue, glory and honor. Vampires who conspired to counter and destroy his power proclaim their grief at his passing. His madness and vanity, his narcissistic jealousies and petty passions are all forgotten or glossed over.

NARSES AND THE CAINITE HERESY

One of the starkest examples of the hypocrisies of Michael's posthumous canonization occurs in the Cainite Heresy. Narses, Archbishop of Nod, has achieved his long-delayed vengeance against the Patriarch. Venice, the city

over which he claims domain, helped tear Constantinople's walls down and burn her for days. The Byzantine Empire is all but destroyed, and the vampires of the Queen of Cities are either destroyed or made refugees. In the aftermath, Narses basks in his glory and sheds no tears for his vanquished enemy.

But Narses is hardly the only powerful vampire in the Heresy. Many in the Crimson Curia, the order's ruling body, question Narses' dedication to the faith and his worthiness to lead it in the crusade's aftermath. Indeed, they were happy to let him pursue his vendetta when Michael was a figure of some scorn in much of Europe, but the political landscape has changed. With Michael becoming a martyr of sorts to many vampires, the Curia worries that the Heresy is being blamed for the "tragedy" of the Patriarch's destruction. Narses' vaunted political skills seem to fail him as he does little to dissuade this perception.

After centuries of waiting, this moment of weakness is not something that Narses' rivals can pass up. Various members of the Curia, Lasombra from Genoa and even Venetian Cappadocians form an alliance of convenience and spread word that Michael's destruction was the result of an arrangement between Narses and a Baali witch. Several princes and other lords call blood hunts against this Baali — thought to be named Mary — and voice their displeasure with Narses.

In 1212, the Tzimisce Nikita of Sredetz turns the Crimson Curia against the archbishop and has him divested of his mantle. A call for blood hunt follows, and Narses must leave Venice. He finds few lords willing or able to shelter him, and he remains on the run. In 1213, his own lieutenant Guilelmo Aliprando calls a court of blood and obtains from the Amici Noctis the right to diablerize him. By 1215, Guilelmo tracks Narses down, commits the Amaranth and takes his place as the prince of Venice.

ALFONZO AND THE LATIN EMPIRE

The mortal crusaders and Venetians carve up the New Rome and create the Latin Empire of Byzantium, which rules Constantinople and much of its territories for 70 years. Alfonzo, Narses' child and representative in Constantinople, becomes prince of the new city and extends his domain over much of the Latin Empire. In the early years of his rule, he receives support from the shadowy Roman elders known as the Inconnu and from Narses and the Cainite Heresy, which allows him to manage the departure of most Greek Cainites and the arrival of many newcomers.

Unlike Narses, Alfonzo recognizes the change in perceptions about Michael and takes it upon himself to call a blood hunt against Mary the Black. In 1210, he goes so far as to send a missive of reprimand to Narses, implicitly cutting his feudal relationship with his sire. At least one assassination attempt follows, but before more can follow, Narses falls victim to the maneuvering within the Crimson Curia. After his sire's destruction, Alfonzo reaffirms his support of the Heresy itself and his desire to work "as

brothers" with the new lords of Venice. Still benefiting from some support from the Inconnu, Alfonzo's daring bid for roughly equal status with Venice works. To the astonishment of many, Alfonzo proves to be a skilled (if ruthless) leader, and he attracts many young and ambitious vampires to his court.

The support of the Inconnu is fleeting, however, and without them, Alfonzo is largely on his own. For the time being, this arrangement suits him just fine, but the Bitter Crusade is not forgotten. Mortal Greeks have set up several empires in exile, and Byzantine vampires have domain over them. The Ventrue Anna Comnena nests in Nicea and the Brujah Natalya Svyatoslav in Epirus. Neither is likely to rest before Alfonzo and all others pay for their crimes

MANAGING THE CHRONICLE

Venetian Nights, *Fiendish Winter* and *Dying Embers* can be played individually, but the true scope and tragedy of the Fourth Crusade comes to the surface only when all three stories occur as part of a larger chronicle. Staging the *Bitter Crusade* chronicle requires a little more than simply running all three stories one after the other without pause. Each story focuses on a key event of the doomed Fourth Crusade, and the chronicle benefits greatly if the players and their characters have time to feel the impact of each major event. As Storyteller, it's best to view the three detailed stories as markers or bookends, framing the events of the crusade so that you can weave your own tales with it as a backdrop.

The material in the introduction and the advice in this chapter make the task of running a *Bitter Crusade* chronicle simple. This chapter isn't here to dictate how you should run your chronicle, however, but to give you a variety of tools with which to build tales that suit your players. It builds on the themes of the three main stories, providing you with an overall structure upon which you can build your own chronicle.

Along with telling an exciting story, *Bitter Crusade* provides you with an excellent opportunity to showcase events that have far-reaching impact on the Dark Medieval world. This does not mean that a *Bitter Crusade* chronicle should play out like a documentary with you narrating history to the players. On the contrary, it is a chance for the characters to become a part of history, to take center stage at a transformative moment. Changing the history books radically — say by stopping Constantinople from burning or diverting the whole crusade to Egypt — shouldn't be in the cards unless you're willing to invest a great deal of time into theorizing on alternate histories. However, characters can and should affect just how history unfolds as they become caught up in events.

SETTING THE STAGE

The first task in running *Bitter Crusade* is to decide how the characters become involved. How to do so depends

COME TO DUST

DREAM'S END

Although it focuses on the Fourth Crusade, **Bitter Crusade** is also the final chapter of **Constantinople by Night**. When the ashes cool, the Dream becomes a myth, a legend like the fabled city of Enoch. Following the crusade, a great Cainite exodus leaves Constantinople a virtual ghost town, ripe for enterprising characters. Those who stay, find a city in the throes of trying to resurrect itself from the fires of the Fourth Crusade.

Narses' vendetta against Michael comes full circle, not only helping to precipitate events, but ultimately consuming the archbishop as well. Myca Vykos' betrayal spells the doom of the Obertus and their leader Gesu, leaving Symeon alone, a relic that Myca will sacrifice in time to birth the Sabbat. The Inconnu watch in horror as their jealousy contributes to the burning of Constantinople. Bishop Alfonzo becomes the first "prince" of Constantinople to feed from the Latin Kingdom of Byzantium — a pale shadow of the empire's past grandeur.

Cainites such as the Baron Feroux, Malachite and Natalya Svyatoslav try to rebuild Constantinople, but they leave eventually and become elders guiding their own dreams. Of the three, Natalya is destined to become Matriarch of Constantinople after Alfonso vanishes, and for a few years, the Queen of Cities recaptures some of its former glory. She personally leads a small "crusade" to recover many of the artifacts stolen during the Fourth Crusade — especially those belonging to the tree founders of Constantinople: Michael, the Dragon and Antonius. However, her reign is short-lived, and Constantinople finally fades forever when the Ottoman Turks ride into the city.

By this time, many of the Byzantine Cainites have either left the city or simply vanished, and only Anna Comnena remains from the Trinity families. She watches her beloved city become Istanbul, and she eventually sinks into torpor, dreaming of the night she will awake and finally rule the city many centuries from now.

All the while, rumors of a stranger will surface from time to time. Cainites will speak of a cloaked figure walking through the city, bringing with him a pall of sorrow. He will wander the old streets, visiting ruins long forgotten in the hills of Exokionion and look out to the Golden Horn from the city's walls. It will be said that the stranger comes to remember the glory of the past and the Dream, and he will continue coming until Gehenna when he will join his lovers in Final Death.

in part on whether **Bitter Crusade** is a new chronicle or the continuation of an existing one. Both options are feasible, but the latter one allows you to foreshadow the crusade easily as far back as 1198, the year in which Pope Innocent III first called for a crusade. While the crusade only gets underway in 1202, there is nothing prevent you from setting it up years in advance, building up to the preparations in Venice. The timeline on page 11 provides you with some of the events that lead up to the crusaders gathering in Venice and the events of **Venetian Nights**.

Even if you are going to use **Bitter Crusade** as a new chronicle, you can set one or two prologue stories between 1198 and 1202. Similar to character preludes, these stories exist to steer the characters toward Venice, while establishing the theme and mood of the chronicle at the same time. Like preludes, these prologues can be full-fledged stories or looser narratives designed to introduce a few elements so that the players can have some context to the action. If you stage **Bitter Crusade** within an existing chronicle, you can still use such quick prologues if you want to ramp up events quickly.

Different types of characters also require different approaches. Europeans, Byzantines and Muslims are all likely to experience the crusade in very different ways.

EUROPEANS

Due to the crusade's origin, European Cainites require little, if any, work to integrate into **Bitter Crusade**. The mortal preparations and vampiric negotiations in Venice make for excellent excuses to get characters involved. By 1202, various clerics and nobles have been preaching the crusade for two full years. Having one such recruiter come through the coterie's domain — especially if he is shadowed by Cainites who are interested in the crusade — is a simple way to get the characters involved.

Another interesting option is to get them to Venice on unrelated business and have the crusade drag them into its intrigues. Doing so foreshadows the loss of control that eventually leads to the burning of Constantinople. You can use countless alternatives to bring European characters to Venice — perhaps one of the characters' sires has gone missing, but he was last seen in Venice. The Cainite Heresy makes for another convenient motivation for European Cainites to travel to the Italian city-state. In a twist, Bishop Alfonso of Constantinople could send the characters to Venice to represent him at the council, helping to set up the growing antagonism between Narses and his child.

Once events get underway, it is more likely that European characters will side with Narses and then tag along with the crusade as his agents. The horror of the crusade lies in the characters' lack of control over it. The characters witness firsthand how fickle Cainite dominance is in the Long Night, and the threat that organized mortals pose to all of Caine's childer.

RUMORS AND MISSIVES

If you don't plan to run the full **Bitter Crusade** chronicle, plenty of options still exist to let you integrate the Fourth Crusade into your game. It is entirely possible that the characters hear of events through secondary sources, in which case **Bitter Crusade** helps you bring the Dark Medieval world to life. However, merely presenting events in this manner excludes the characters (and players) from the action, lessening its impact. Even if you decide not to use the Fourth Crusade directly, it's best to have it affect the characters indirectly.

Perhaps one of the characters hears of the crusade's preparations in Venice because her sire participates in them, leaving the character in charge of her domain for the duration. Once events gather steam, the sack of Zara and the destruction of Prince Gari could lead Malkavians across Europe to fear that the crusade is becoming a pogrom against their clan. Finally, when Constantinople burns, waves of refugees, both Cainite and mortal, flood both eastern and western cities. This migration leads to Cainite overpopulation, disputes over domain and run-ins with mortal witch-hunters. Storytellers could use the destruction of the Library of the Forgotten (the Tzimisce treasure in Constantinople) to flood Europe with damnable and bizarre books, causing an outbreak in witch-hunts and heresies.

BYZANTINES

Because of the connection between Venice and Constantinople, Byzantine Cainites are well suited to **Bitter Crusade**. Introducing Byzantine characters is almost as simple as integrating Europeans. Making the characters Byzantine ambassadors is the easiest way to get them to Venice, and you can add countless twists and turns to make things interesting. The characters could be members of the Antonian Venture family, sent to Venice in an attempt to finally make peace with Narses — only to get caught up in the intrigue that surrounds Rolland du Rocher's destruction. As knights under the Gangrel Baron Feroux or as Obertus monks, the characters could be transporting books from the Library of the Forgotten, only to arrive in Venice at the worst possible moment. The Follower of Set Khay'tall (see **Constantinople by Night**) could also be involved in the Setite machinations in Venice, using the characters to keep an eye on his clanmates and ensure that the crusade does not disrupt his plans in Constantinople.

If you wish to use Byzantine characters it may be best to use **Bitter Crusade** as a sequel to the stories started in

Constantinople by Night. After playing in that city for a while, the characters can become involved in the great tragedy of the Dream's end. Such a chronicle is a potent, and tragic conclusion to **Constantinople by Night**.

ISLAMIC (AND OTHER) CAINITES

Non-European or Byzantine Cainites are outsiders to the Fourth Crusade, but they are not excluded. Therefore, they have a unique perspective. Ashirra (Islamic Cainites), who may have witnessed the ravages of past crusades, understand better than anyone the true threat that they pose. Because of this, they could find themselves in Venice with a vested interest in diverting the crusade. Beset on all sides by the antagonism and prejudice of European and Byzantine Cainites, Ashirra may have a hard time until things get under way. However, as outsiders, such characters have significantly more room to maneuver, perhaps allowing them a better chance to act as peacemakers.

Islamic characters need not be ambassadors. They could easily find themselves in Venice as slaves, captured during one of the previous crusades and sold to Narses or another Cainite. Full of resentment, such characters could delight in seeing the crusade burn Constantinople without realizing that they've succumbed to the same viciousness that plagues the Christian cause.

PACING AND PLOT

In **Bitter Crusade**, the Fourth Crusade provides both dramatic tension and the foundation for the chronicle. It structures the stories in such a way that they reinforce the historical events and keep things moving along. The players can choose just how their characters interact with the mortal crusade, but they must also deal with its constantly evolving mission.

Only **Dying Embers** revolves explicitly around an actual historical event. In **Venetian Nights** and **Fiendish Winter**, the characters' attentions are focused elsewhere. Mortal history is a pending threat that serves as a catalyst for the action, but it doesn't dictate how the stories unfold. Only when the Fourth Crusade reaches its murderous climax do the characters actually cross paths with history in a direct and bloody manner.

The crusade functions as a storytelling device, unifying the stories and providing structure. However, you need to determine the detailed plot of your own chronicle, to find a way to include the characters' motivations and make **Bitter Crusade** about them. Are the characters just witnesses to history, becoming the first Cainites to realize that the Long Night is over? Are they up-and-coming ancillae ready to step into the void left with the passing of Michael? Are they saviors of Constantinople and inheritors of the Dream? Are they its destroyers?

Regardless of how intricate you want to be, the single most basic question to ask, is what side the characters will stand on. Will they watch Constantinople (and Zara) burn so that they can plunder the ashes? Will they try to fight

COME TO DUST

tides of mortal folly and Cainite vanity? Only the players can actually answer these questions (through their characters' actions) but you need to keep them in mind so that you can be ready with consequences when they do act.

STRUCTURE

Each of the three detailed stories in **Bitter Crusade** is the focal point for one of the chronicle's chapters, and a prologue and epilogue can further expand its scope. These stories should ideally not be the entirety of the chapters, but their high points. Other stories, related to the events of the crusade and the characters' specific agendas, should lead to the dramatic events of the previous chapters. The best way to pace **Bitter Crusade** is to stage a linking story between each of the three chapters. These linking stories serve either to set-up events to come, or to provide characters with a break in pace. They don't have to be intricate, and they can be nothing more than downtime narratives, but they go a long way in making the chronicle engrossing.

PROLOGUES

The prologue to **Bitter Crusade** can span any number of years, going as far back as 1198. The point is to highlight how things are before the traumatic events of the crusade. You need to show how Cainites ruled the night with near impunity, treating mortals as playthings and food stocks. Misplaced assumptions such as these, while not wholly responsible for the Bitter Crusade, allow the crusade to run its devastating course.

News of the crusade should start filtering down to the characters, first as rumors, but then as reports of French priests rallying the populace and knights making their way to Venice. Isolated, these events are not ominous, but when combined, they point to the great upheaval to come. Possible prologue stories include:

- **Words of Faith:** The characters come across a crowd gathered outside a small parish church. In the center, a priest is trying to rally the men in the crowd to enlist in the "glorious host to reclaim the Holy Sepulcher from the infidel." As the priest continues, the crowd becomes visibly excited and anxious, enough so that the coterie should start feeling uncomfortable. Depending on the characters' action, the priest may single them out as volunteers or see them for what they are. This foreshadows the mortal involvement in the crusade.

- **Ashen Portents:** For a span of a week, nightmares plague one of the characters. The nightmares have the same recurring image. The character finds herself walking down a street coated in ashes. Occasionally the character sees a charred limb or skull protruding from the field of ash that covers everything. The whole scene is eerily silent.

As the character walks down the street, she comes across footprints in the ash. On the first day, the nightmare



BITTER CRUSADE

ends there. When the character next slumbers, the dream continues. This time, a cloaked figure appears in the distance, but no matter how fast the character chases, the cloaked figure is always out of reach. Every day, the dream returns and the character follows the figure, but she always wakes when she gets within arm's reach.

When the character dreams on the sixth day, the figure is standing in the remains of a burnt church. If the character enters the church, the figure turns and faces her, pulling back his cloak slowly. As the stranger lifts the cowl over his head, light as bright as the sun drowns the ashes in splendor giving the character a view of how things were before. In the place of a burnt-out city is a thriving metropolis of gold and mosaics. The figure then places a hand on the character's shoulder and says, "Remember... we are nothing but shadows and dust." He then fades into the light.

CHAPTER ONE: VENETIAN NIGHTS

Venetian Nights is really the culmination of events, both mortal and Cainite, rooted as far back as 1198 and Innocent III's call for a new crusade. **Venetian Nights'** intrigue-laden plot is an excellent vehicle for ensnaring the characters in the schemes of both Narses and the mortal crusaders. While the prelude should lead the characters to Venice, there is no need to leave the city immediately once the events in **Venetian Nights** are concluded. The crusade does not leave for Zara until late in 1202, giving the characters ample opportunity to experience the decadence and mystery of Venice.

Regardless of what faction the characters find themselves allied with, there is no end to the number of one-session stories and vignettes you can run. A number of suggestions follow, but you should let how events unfold in **Venetian Nights** dictate future stories in Venice.

- **Shadow Games:** Narses may be the prince, but more occurs in Venice's dark canals than he would like to admit to. The looming crusade and its possible re-direction toward Constantinople have caused a number of ancient Cainites to stir. From the shadows, the Inconnu, jealous of Michael's Dream, watch events with both dread and anticipation. They know that the New Rome will soon be nothing more than a fading memory, just like the old capital.

This provides plenty of opportunity for the characters to meet these secretive Cainites. Some want nothing more than to converse with the coterie, but others want to use it as a tool to hasten the destruction of Constantinople — or perhaps to atone for it.

- **Dark Courts:** Venice is the home of the Cainite Heresy. Although it is not connected directly with events in **Bitter Crusade**, the hubris that birthed the Heresy is the same that prompted Michael to dream Constantinople. Deep within the bowels of Venice, the Heresy festers with Narses at its helm, yet all is not well for the Crimson Curia. Many are rumbling about Narses' failing devotion, fearing that he'll drag the Heresy into the fires of the crusade to exact his revenge on Constantinople.

If the coterie allies with Narses, he (or another member of the Curia) tries to convert the characters. His motives may seem suspect, but his promises of power could lure characters into joining. For others who are truly seeking religious guidance in their unlives, the offer may appear wholly genuine.

Other members of the Curia might well recruit vampires who reject Narses' offer of alliance. Backed by a rival of the prince, they could pretend to accept Narses' offer and continue on with the crusade, serving his enemies secretly within the Heresy.

- **The Folly of Faith:** As the crusade gathers steam, the faithful flock to Venice and make the city unfriendly to Cainites. Not all crusaders are exceptionally pious, but most are anxious and boiling with nervous energy after months of waiting. All it takes is for a charismatic orator such as Rodrigue de Navarre or Gauthier de Dampiere, and the mobs become volatile, targeting whomever they fear or do not understand.

One evening, the coterie stumbles across a crusader dressed in bloody rags, his eyes darting madly about until they focus on the characters. It takes a moment, but the characters should soon feel the power of True Faith emanating from the crusader. Without saying a word, the crusader sees them for what they are, but does not do anything except whisper, "Forgive me." A mob can be heard approaching, calling for the death of the "mad one," and it rounds the corner a few seconds later. The enraged mass attacks, not the characters, but the crusader whom they believe is possessed.

The characters have a choice: Will they try to save the crusader from the mob or simply stand back. If they stay to help, they must deal with the painful aura of the madman. If they do nothing, the image of the crusader haunts them for the rest of their unlives.

CHAPTER TWO: FIENDISH WINTER

The transition to the second chapter is relatively short. The crusade sets sail from Venice in October of 1202 and lands in Zara in early November. At this point, most Cainites who traveled with the crusade (including the characters) are still under the assumption that they are in control. Events in Zara begin to hint at how misplaced this assumption is.

Where **Venetian Nights** culminates the first chapter, **Fiendish Winter** occurs across much of the second. Indeed, the story's first act covers the early nights in Zara while its second act takes the characters to Transylvania. The long journey to and back from the Toth land hold covers much of the rest of the chapter, before the crusade takes off for Constantinople and chapter three.

Linking the two chapters requires little work, especially if the characters decide to follow the crusade (either as Narses' agents or on their own initiative). There is little time between the characters' arrival in Zara and the audience with Prince Gari to stage side-stories. However, the

overseas trip between Venice and Zara, and the aftermath of capitulation of Zara are rich in possibilities.

Finding passage to Zara could result in a story or two, as the characters find a ship that will take them across the Adriatic safely. There are plenty of options, including traveling overland around the coast and down through Dalmatia. If the characters are under the aegis of Narses, getting transport should not be difficult, provided that they agree to his price. Possible tales include:

- **Dark Waters:** The characters are aboard a small ship, and they have been careful not to arouse the crew's superstitions. One night they rise to find one of the crew members dead, his blood drained. The crew grows nervous, and more crewmembers start disappearing over the next few nights. Running out of options, the characters must find who is responsible — a task which is complicated because, as far as they know, they are the only Cainites on the ship.

- **Traveling Within:** On route to Toth, the coterie comes across a secluded monastery shortly before dawn. A monk appears, welcomes them and makes clear that he knows their nature. He introduces himself as Abbot Heroch and explains that his monastery belongs to the Obertus order of Constantinople who honor the Sanguine Saint Gesu. The monk invites the characters to slumber within the monastery's catacombs.

If they accept, they are led up a small incline and into a humble stone monastery. Immediately, the characters notice that everyone — monks and farmhands — are ghouls, even the children. When asked about the children, the Abbot explains that they are a miracle, gifted since birth with "the blood." As the characters are led to the catacombs, all eyes follow them in reverence. When they reach the catacombs, the abbot offers some of his monks so the characters can feed.

The following night, the characters wake to find themselves in iron cages suspended a few feet about the ground. In front of the characters is the abbot and many of the monastery's children. Muttering a prayer, of which the characters hear only "of the Within," the Abbot spears each of the characters in turn, causing their vitae to flow the ground below where the children lap it up. Characters who frenzy can do nothing since the cages are built especially to house enraged vampires. If any of the characters try to heal the wounds, the abbot spears them again and again. Eventually, the characters should fall into torpor, where haunting images flood them, possibly foreshadowing events to come.

When the characters next wake, they are miles away from the monastery. They soon find the road to Toth anew, but they must decide whether or not to return to the monastery. Vykos, who suffers as they do, can only point to this incident as evidence that the Obertus order has become corrupt.

CHAPTER THREE: DYING EMBERS

Carried away by the crusade as it leaves for Constantinople, the characters are caught in the tide of

BITTER CRUSADE



1066-01

history. Fueled by the capture of Zara, the Fourth Crusade is now about to reach its devastating climax. The burning of Constantinople is essentially unavoidable, but how the coterie copes with this devastation and what the characters take away from it — hope for a reborn Dream, secrets of the Obertus or even the blood of the Patriarch — is up to them.

The crusade sets sail from the ruins of Zara in April of 1203, and it enters the Bosphorus in June of the same year, almost 10 months before conquest of Constantinople. Between June of 1203 and April of the 1204, the coterie has a number of options. It could opt to travel by foot from Zara to Constantinople, traversing the Balkans before arriving in the Byzantine Empire. An epic journey in its own right, the characters would travel to such cities as Ragusa, Sofia, Thessalonica, Belgrade and Buda-Pest before reaching the jewel that is Constantinople. Along the route, they could encounter Transylvanian Cainites, possibly becoming involved in some of the intrigues of the **Transylvania Chronicles**. Coterie who prefer to travel by sea are greeted by wondrous sites — and terrible atrocities — as they follow the crusade toward Constantinople.

Chapter three spans over a year of game time. If the characters arrive with the crusade in June 1203, or at any point before April of 1204, they will have plenty of opportunity to interact with the Cainites of Byzantium. There is nothing stopping you from running a series of Constantinople-based stories to introduce the city to the characters properly. **Constantinople by Night** would allow you to bring this magnificent city to life, but if not, the following story seeds should keep the characters busy until the crusade's fateful end.

- **Emperors of Dust:** While looking for a haven in the city, the coterie discovers an abandoned cistern. Following its winding passageways, they eventually find themselves lost. Heading deeper and deeper into the bowels of Constantinople, the characters come across a huge mausoleum, lined with sarcophagi decked with imperial motifs. The mausoleum belongs to the Cappadocian Alexia who has been protecting a number of her clanmates in torpor.

When the characters arrive, they hear one of the sarcophagi being pushed open. If the characters investigate, they arrive in time to see a Cainite committing diablerie on one of the torpid Cainites within. (The characters should notice that a number of the sarcophagi have been opened and their occupants reduced to ash.) The Cainite in question is Markus Musa Giovanni, an Italian Cappadocian. Near him lies the staked body of Alexia, watching in horror but unable to do anything. The characters can try to interfere, but they have a fight on their hands since Musa has spent the better part of the evening gorging on Cainite vitae. If the characters defeat Musa and save Alexia, they

earn a potent ally in Constantinople. If they do nothing, or even commit diablerie themselves, they become accomplices to the eventual destruction of Clan Cappadocian.

- **Sins of the Past:** Characters arriving in Constantinople before April of 1204 have an opportunity to meet the Patriarch Michael even before the conflagration of **Dying Embers**. Whether they plan to present themselves or not, Michael calls to them, reaching to them through their dreams. Meeting the Patriarch should be a momentous occasion — few Cainites command the sheer awe that Michael's stained-glass form does. To many Cainites, Michael is the closest they will ever get to seeing the sun again.

Strangely, when the coterie arrives, Michael looks at them but says nothing, as if a great sadness has suddenly overcome him — one of the characters reminds him of Antonius, his one-time lover and the co-founder of the Dream. Over the next few nights, Michael is strangely lucid. He calls for the character nightly, spending hours talking with him and generally showing the character a side of himself that few ever glimpse. This favoritism earns the jealousy of the Ventrue leader Caius, who has been trying to win Michael's attention for ages to no avail. Petronius, Michael's right-hand man, is more than happy to use the character as a cure for the Patriarch's madness, renewing hostilities between the Toreador and Venture families of Constantinople.

However, Michael's madness eventually returns, dooming him to repeat the past by trying to destroy "Antonius" to save Constantinople from in-fighting. The only hope is for the character to convince the Patriarch that he is not his ancient lover.

- **Nocturnes:** Toward dawn one night, the coterie explores the Harbor of Theodosius on Constantinople's western shore. The characters catch sight of a ship preparing to set sail in a hurry. Monks help the sailors load the ship with large crates and a sarcophagus, rushing to get out to sea before dawn. If the characters look into one of the crates, they find it packed with books, including a partial transcription of the Book of Nod. Suddenly, screams come from the ship. One of the monks has inadvertently knocked over an oil lamp sending flames dancing across the deck.

The characters have a choice, sink back into the darkness as the monks and sailors try to save the crates of books and the sarcophagus from the flames, or help. If the characters help the monks, the task is not an easy one. The ship has been cut from its moorings and cast adrift; the fire has spread to the sails and, in the distance, the sky signals dawn's arrival. However, the characters' efforts could be well rewarded; the Obertus would be grateful for having saved so many priceless books. If the coterie rescues the sarcophagus, they find none other than one of the few remaining Salubri, Achmet the Dreamer.

BITTER CRUSADE AND VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE

Although **Bitter Crusade** is a **Dark Ages** supplement, there is no reason it can't be adapted as a historical element of your modern chronicle. You can use any of the **Bitter Crusade**'s stories as staged flashbacks, either fleshing out one of the coterie member's background, or giving players insight to an elder whom their characters encounter.

STAGING THE FLASHBACK

Introduce the flashback by bringing something with a connection to the crusade into your modern game. Perhaps the characters come across a relic from Constantinople (say an icon of Michael or a text from the Library of the Forgotten) in the Final Nights. Instead of resorting to Academics or Occult rolls to explain what they found, you can set-up a scene or two during the Fourth Crusade showing the relic fall into crusader hands.

Likewise, a fair number of elders and signature characters have ties to either Constantinople or the Crusades. You can use **Bitter Crusade** flashbacks to flesh out and give players insight into the pasts of these mysterious Cainites. You can stage scenes from **Fiendish Winter** and **Dying Embers** that feature Vykos to allow the players to see the Fiend before its inhuman transformation in the Sabbat, and perhaps gain some understanding of its ineffable motivations.

Although countless options exist for staging the flashback, the key is to provide an identifiable link. Sharp cuts only confuse players. Just like in the movies, cutting to a flashback should be precipitated by an obvious cue. Stumbling across the icon in the prince's chamber or spying Vykos as he meditates are natural opportunities to make the switch. The key is to stick to a theme. Don't cut to the flashback at random, instead give the players enough warning so that they can adjust. Using tricks like music or associating a color with the flashback, all help the players make the switch in their minds.

FLASHBACK CHARACTERS

You can have the players design their own characters for the flashbacks, but it will probably serve your chronicle best to assign them roles you determine. You can create full-fledged characters with full traits or just provide the players with a few sentences of description and some relevant traits. Just make sure that the character sketches have a hook that's easy for the players to grab onto. This can be as simple as "you're playing a Tzimisce knight" to "you are playing Grekov Kheil, a Tzimisce knight Embraced for both your martial prowess and your cruel nature." Let the players flesh out their characters — in terms of background, emotions and other traits — before play begins. That way, you make sure that everything is in place for the flashback to serve the main chronicle, but the players have some freedom as well.

RUNNING FLASHBACKS

When storytelling historical flashbacks, it's best to limit them to three scenes at the most, which can be played sequentially or interspersed throughout a session, story or chronicle. Although flashbacks can be played like regular scenes, it is better if you focus their action to one key event or element. Set up the situation and give the players a few options. Doing so allows them to play without your having to run two full chronicles at the same time. For example, instead of running the battle scene in **Fiendish Winter**, you could focus on one encounter or skirmish, giving the characters a chance to get their hands dirty without having to pull out the **Dark Ages** rulebook.



Bitter Crusade

WARRIORS OF CHRIST

Pope Innocent has called for a Fourth Crusade against the Saracen, and knights from across Europe gather to respond. Cainites and mortals alike taint the enterprise with their own ambitions. In Venice, Cainites gather to decide on the crusade's course, only to watch it spiral out of control and head toward Constantinople and its powerful masters. Blood calls to blood, and the flames of mortal hatred burn brightly.

MONSTERS OF THE FAITH

Bitter Crusade is a chronicle detailing the Fourth Crusade, the latest Christian adventure toward the Holy Land. Over the course of three stories, set in Venice, Zara (on the Dalmatian coast) and Constantinople itself, it shows how mortal and immortal agendas conspire to turn a holy war into a mockery and set Christian against Christian. In the fires that end it all, the Long Night itself comes to an end.



BITTER CRUSADE INCLUDES:

- A way to bring your Dark Ages game forward from 1197 to 1204;
- Details on Venice and Constantinople, updating previous material;
- The chance to put your players' coterie center stage for the transformation of the Dark Ages setting.

www.white-wolf.com

ISBN 1-58846-214-5
WW2833 \$15.95 U.S.



VAMPIRE
THE DARK AGES

