

# BOOK OF STORYTELLER SECRETS



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BY WADE RACINE, MATT BURKE AND J.D. WIKER

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# Introduction

Many secrets, splendors and horrors await discovery amid the reaches of Dark Medieval Europe. Even for the virtually omnipotent undead, some things remain hidden - and in many cases it is best that they remain so. Though vampires are powerful and pervasive, there are denizens of the world even older and deadlier than they, and places as yet unspoiled by their depredations - for now. Thus, even vampires' extensive knowledge contains minute omissions and ineliminable gaps. In short, even the children of Caine can be surprised - perhaps even awed - by what they find as they wander through the Long Night.

*Vampires: The Dark Ages Book of Storyteller Secrets* is designed as a companion volume and appendix to *Vampires: The Dark Ages*. In this book you will find many heretofore undetailed aspects of the world of Dark Medieval Europe, from the lands encompassed in its boundaries to the creatures lurking in its wilds.





BOOK OF STORYTELLER SECRETS

This book is very specifically designed for Storytellers; players, particularly those running vampires of few years and minor power, should know little of the lore contained herein. This ignorance is quite in keeping with the medieval milieu; after all, in the Middle Ages, the average peasant was born, lived and died in the same hamlet, never seeing aught of the world beyond the horizon he gazed at for all of his days. Should the characters survive and prosper, they will have centuries aplenty to grow old and jaded and weary; as Storyteller, try to maintain a sense of wonder and mystery, at least at first.

**Chapter One: Geography and History** provides an atlas of Dark Medieval Europe, detailing the character and composition of Europe's mortal institutions and vampiric parasites. This information is designed to be specific enough that Storytellers can follow their players' whims anywhere, yet nebulous enough to allow storytelling unrestricted by "graven-in-stone" facts. Want Tremere in Ireland or Gangrel in Paris? Go for it; it's your game.

**Chapter Two: Life and Death in the Dark Ages** details the salient features of day-to-day (and night-to-night) life in the Middle Ages. A variety of topics, from attire to foodstuffs to the multitudinous plagues and pestilences decimating Europe's inhabitants, are presented herein. Now you too can enjoy the uplifting storytelling experience of transmitting scabies to your victims.

**Chapter Three: Storytelling for the Dark Ages** delineates tips for beginning and experienced Storytellers. Some of this advice is applicable to Storytellers of any sort; other tips are specifically designed to enhance Dark Medieval chronicles.

**Chapter Four: Friends, Enemies and Miscellany** provides bells and whistles to flesh out and flavor Dark Medieval chronicles. The beleaguered Tremere finally get some help in the form of their Gargoyle servitors — if they can withstand their Tzimisce enemies' *vozh*d war ghouls. For more "traditional" dark fantasy, a bestiary of creatures from basilisks to unicorns is presented — including the salient side effects of drinking their blood. And, as if vampires weren't powerful enough, a variety of legendary and mythical items — from Celtic prophecy talismans to enchanted blades — make their appearance.

# How to Use This Book

Much of the information contained herein is "authentic": details of life as it actually was in the 12th century. Clothing styles, salient battles and even ailments have been researched to paint an accurate picture of medieval existence.

That having been stated, feel free to ignore any and all of this information in favor of more fantastic elements. Even a liberal dose of "high fantasy" remains true to the spirit of the medieval mindset. Most medieval folk were convinced that wondrous lands and beings lay just over the horizon. Medieval legends are rife with depictions of witches and wizards, elf-queens and troll-kings, vampires and werewolves and dragons, glass towers and cities of gold — and in the time of their origin, such legends were considered irrefutable fact.

Also, remember that in this time, vampires were far more open about their presence. It is not unreasonable to postulate the existence of entire enclaves of mortals under the open rule of vampires. A vampire-tainted heretic cult or depraved noble line may clandestinely or blatantly lord it over the countryside, heedless of the mortal authorities 10 long leagues thence. The real world gave us Sawney Beane and Elizabeth Bathory — any fiefdom or demesne, no matter how bizarre, is credible.

In summary, this book is designed to enhance your storytelling, not limit it. Use what information embellishes your game and feel free to change, ignore or throw out what you don't like. Let your imagination run free.



INTRODUCTION







# Chapter One: Geography and History

*Qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum* (Let him who desires peace prepare for war.)

- Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De Rei Militari*, A.D. 375

The information presented in this chapter is intended to give the Storyteller and players an overview of the history, culture and political disputes of Dark Ages Europe in A.D. 1197. To help Storytellers set their chronicles in other eras, past and "future" history have also been included. Additionally, Cairite involvement (as well as other supernatural phenomena of note) in each of these lands has been included separately. The Storyteller should feel free to change, alter or ignore any of this information as she chooses.



# WESTERN EUROPE

## THE BRITISH ISLES

### ENGLAND

By 1197, the Normans have largely settled into Britain for good, although there are still disputes with the remaining Saxon nobility. This is an age of expansion for England, as the Normans have imposed a thorough bureaucracy encompassing the nobility, the peasantry and the Church. The Norman-Angevin royal household supports itself and maintains its power through an elaborately organized central administration. This administration is paid for by taxes levied on the trade of merchants and the wealth of landowners. Angevin interests for now, however, are centered on their territories in France. The Angevins will lose these territories (except Gascony) slowly but surely in the early 13th century, and this will make them turn their attentions more firmly north, to Scotland, and west, to Wales.

England is a fair land and is quickly becoming settled. Increasing numbers of people have required more and more land to be cleared for agriculture, and England's cities are growing at an astounding rate. Villages, monasteries and abbeys dot the landscape, and even the smallest village has a church, usually built from stone. This has prompted many Lupines and faeries to flee the island, most of them heading for the greener, less-populated hills and forests of Ireland.

London, England's capital, is a bustling center for trade. The Normans have taken to building fortifications and castles not only in and about London, but all throughout England. The Tower of London was built by William the Conqueror not only as a means of fortifying the town, but also as a way of keeping an eye on his potentially rebellious new subjects. London is also the headquarters of the vastly influential English Church. The Normans use the Church to help them rule the country, and many of the government's administrators and bureaucrats are monks and priests.

King Richard the Lionhearted rules England, but he has rarely been in his kingdom. For most of his reign, he has fought the Saracens in the Holy Lands, and his battles with the Saracen king, Saladin, are quickly becoming legendary. Richard's brother, John, rules in his absence, and John has ambitions of becoming king himself.

#### LOCAL CAINITES

Ventruie firmly control the Norman nobility of England and are attempting to use England as a power base for the creation of a patrician, unified nation-state, not unlike what the Ventruie had originally helped create in Rome. They are not the only clan in England, of course. Toreador have been emigrating in greater numbers, gaining a firm foothold in the English Church and overseeing the construction of great cathedrals, especially in York and Lincoln. Even a few Tremere can be found exploring England's quickly dwindling numbers

of magical and mystical sites. Some Nosferatu dwell in England, living in barrows and mounds, but they are oddities among their kind, preferring to live in utter solitude.

Some very notable Cainites dwell in England at this time. The most powerful is undoubtedly Mithras, the Prince of London, a fourth-generation Ventruie who has been a power behind the English throne for a few years now. Mithras is also the power behind the ambitions of King Richard's brother, John, and is secretly working to make John the king. (He attempted to Dominate Richard, but found that, for some reason, Richard was immune to the effects.) Mithras harbors immense distrust for the Tremere, and is also not fond of the Toreador; he considers the recent actions against the Norman holdings in France to be the work of the Toreador through their agent, the King of France.

Near the town of Nottingham lives a group of bandits and robbers under the leadership of a Cainite named Robin Leeland, a Brujah through and through, who has allied himself with the Saxon outlaw nobility against the excesses of "King" John. Robin has a great respect for Richard, considering him to be a man of honor and a benevolent ruler. Aided by his progeny, Patricia of Bollingbroke (allegedly the murderer of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury), Robin will attempt to Dominate Richard upon his return, which would be a strike at the Ventruie who rule behind the might of the Normans.

#### WALES

Wales is a land both independent from and subservient to Norman-dominated England. An amalgam of small independent kingdoms, Wales manages to maintain a distinct culture, helped no doubt by the hills and forests that make invading those kingdoms more trouble than they are worth.

Three kingdoms dominate Wales: Deheubarth, Gwynedd and Powys. Gwynedd is the strongest of the three, but Deheubarth has the support of the Normans, due to a treaty signed in 1171 by King Henry II of England and King Rhys ap Gruffydd of Deheubarth.

The kingdoms and principalities of Wales will not long remain independent. Continuing wars between them will eventually (by 1284) lead to full English rule under King Edward I. The Welsh Church, formerly a very independent organization, will be brought firmly under the heel of the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

#### LOCAL CAINITES

The Cainites of Wales are few and far between. The lack of any large cities keeps most of the clans away, and is part of the reason that the Ventruie have not influenced the Normans to conquer Wales. The Gangrel view Wales as something of a haven in the British Isles, it being the last place that is truly isolated and not overly civilized. They freely roam the countryside, but even that is becoming difficult as demand for Welsh wood and the need for more land on which to plant crops becomes apparent. Lupines are also known to haunt the



forests and hills, and Wales is one of the last strongholds of British faeries, though they are not so numerous here as in Ireland.

## SCOTLAND

Scotland, also known as Alban or Caledonia, has not yet fallen under the Norman yoke, and her people are fiercely independent, preferring warfare to submission. Scotland is ruled by King William the Lion. William was defeated by the English at the Battle of Alnwick in 1174 and was forced by King Henry II to sign a treaty whereby all of Scotland paid homage to the English king. In years to come, this will be the basis for the claims of English kings on the lands of Scotland, and will lead to the eventual downfall of the Kingdom of Scotland.

Scotland is really three different lands united by a common language and culture. The Dales are the farthest south, comprising hills and valleys. They bleed into the heather- and moor-filled Lowlands, which in turn lead up to the hills and mountains of the Highlands. The people of the Dales tend to be a bit more interested in trading with the English to the south. The Lowlanders congregate mainly around Edinburgh and along the rivers. The Highlands are ruled by the various clans, alternately warring with each other, warring on the Lowlanders or warring on the English.

Scotland's freedom will not last forever. In the late 13th century, King Alexander III will die without heirs, setting off

a struggle among the Scottish nobility for the throne. Eventually, John Balliol will be crowned in 1292, due to the support of King Edward I of England. Much to the dismay of the Scottish nobility, John swears allegiance to King Edward. King John's reign will not last, however, when he listens to the other Scottish nobles and not only refuses to accompany King Edward to war in France, but allies with King Philip the Fair of France. King Edward then marches north, defeats John and makes him hand over the Scottish crown. For good measure, King Edward even carts away the Stone of Scone, which is traditionally used in the coronation of the Scottish kings. William Wallace, a commoner with brilliant tactical insight and tremendous leadership ability, rallies the Scots and defeats the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, besieging and taking Stirling Castle. King Edward hurries back to Scotland, however, and defeats the rebel Scots at the Battle of Falkirk in 1298.

## LOCAL CAINITES

Gangrel rule the Highlands and are quite at home among the foggy lochs and the Grampian Mountains in the west. The Gangrel have been facing fierce competition from the Toreador, however, who have scored several coups of late. Toreador claim that an important victory occurred in 1192, when the Toreador allegedly manipulated Pope Celestine III into separating the Scottish Church from the Ventruie-controlled Archdiocese of York (the Ventruie, of course, counter that this was nothing more than mortal politics). The Toreador have

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY



started to establish themselves in Edinburgh, letting the Gangrel rule the countryside for the time being.

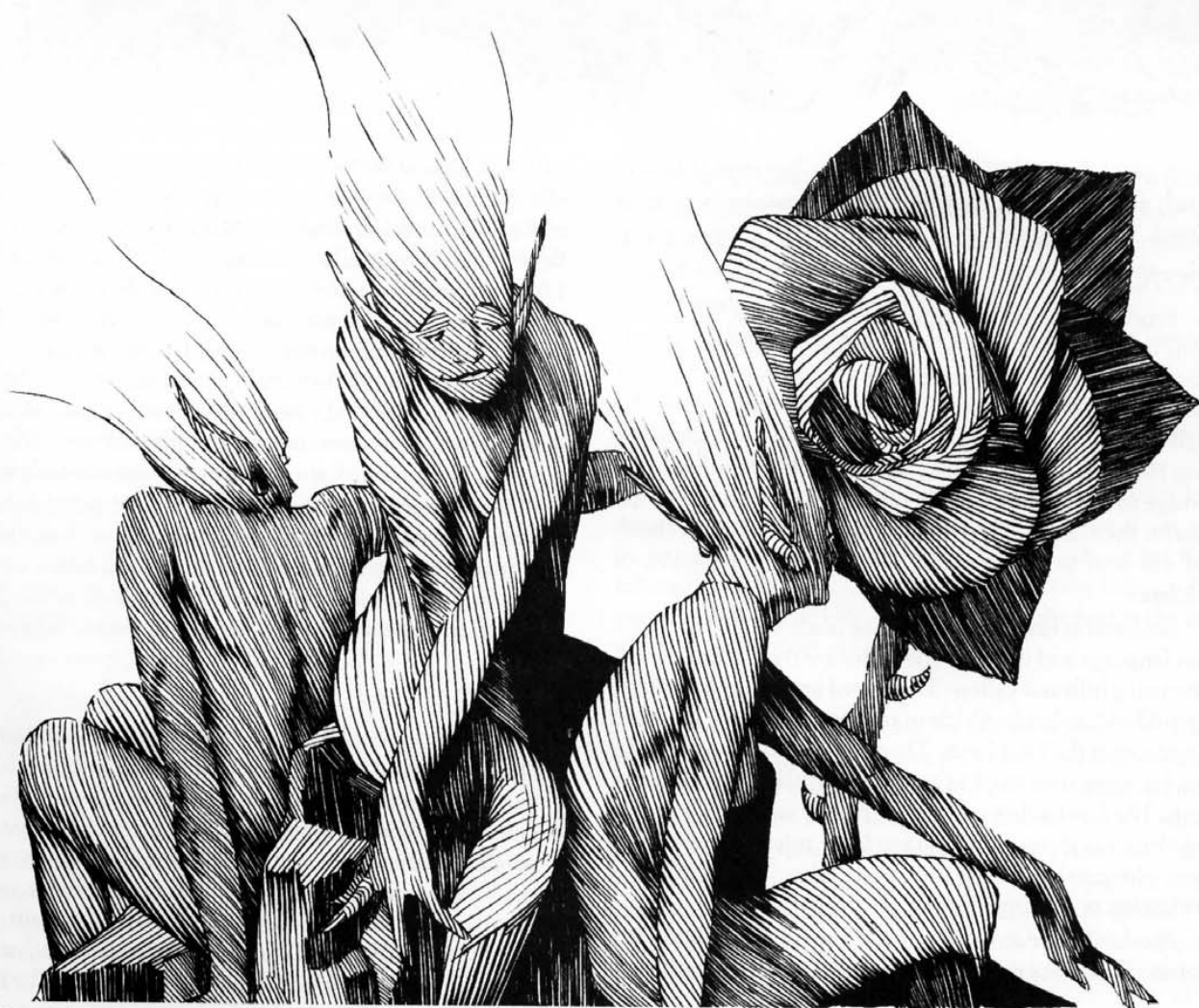
A few scattered packs of Lupines roam the Highlands, and both Gangrel and Lupine tell tales of wyrms dwelling in Scotland's caves and tarns. The most dire legends speak of a slimy serpentine horror in the vicinity of Loch Ness, and even the Gangrel fear to roam there on moonless nights.

## IRELAND

The island of Eire has the unique history of being the only Celtic land not invaded by the Romans, and as such has maintained more of the Celtic culture than any other country. Ireland, however, is not a unified kingdom, but rather four smaller kingdoms ruled over, in theory, by a High King, the Ard-ri. The four kingdoms are Connaught in the northwest, Leinster in the southeast, Munster in the southwest, and Ulster in the northeast. Despite being a bastion of Celtic culture, Ireland was converted to Christianity in the early fifth century by the miracles and pious lifestyle of St. Patrick. Irish monks are widely known for their knowledge of Classical culture, as well as for their beautiful works of art and jewelry.

Ireland is bracketed by mountains to the north and the south, with the low-lying Irish plains in between them. The land is cool and wet, and the common folk barely manage to grow enough food to feed themselves, being hard hit by any harsh weather.

Ireland's recent history has been — to put it mildly — active and interesting. In 1166, High King Rory O'Connor exiled Dermot MacMurrough, the King of Leinster. Dermot sought aid from King Henry II of England, and King Henry sent the Earl of Pembroke, Richard Strongbow, to his aid. Dermot didn't want just the throne of Leinster, though. He desired the position of High King for himself. Strongbow, now married to Dermot's daughter, continued his conquest, and when Dermot died in 1171, he declared himself King of Leinster. Rory O'Connor came to the aid of the people of Leinster in their revolt against "King" Strongbow. King Henry II was suspicious of Strongbow's motives, and went to Waterford to check on his subject. This led O'Connor and the other Irish kings to acknowledge Henry as their lord, and with Henry came greater Papal control over the Irish Church.



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Henry, however, wasted no time consolidating his newly acquired lands, cementing their fealty by giving large swaths of lands to his oath-bound Norman lords. This was backed by the construction of several castles and forts, and soon the English Pale, as it came to be called, encompassed the southern half of the east coast of Ireland, from Dublin to Cork. In fact, Dublin, Waterford and Cork are all "royal cities," answering only to the King of England, and not to the local Norman barons or Irish kings.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Ireland is a haven for supernatural creatures being pushed out of the rest of Europe. Only the Gangrel find Ireland beyond the Pale hospitable, and even they have to compete with the Fianna and the faeries. Ireland is the last stronghold of immense faerie power in Europe; the struggles between Ventrué-dominated Norman barons and Irish "wild men" often spill over into battles between Cainites and the Seelie and Unseelie Courts, aided by the Fianna. The Toreador have been making headway, but have also clashed with the Ventrué, as exemplified by the odd situation in Dublin. There, Strongbow began construction of Christ Church Cathedral, but in 1191 the Toreador-backed Archbishop of Dublin began constructing St. Patrick's Cathedral outside Dublin's city walls. The Archbishop had to build separate walls to protect St. Patrick's against Irish raiders, but construction continues apace.

## IBERIA

### CHRISTIAN STATES

The northern half of the country that will eventually become Spain is a collection of small kingdoms bent on the conquest of the Moorish-dominated south. This *Reconquista*, as it is known, is the driving force behind the politics of this region.

The most powerful of the northern Christian kingdoms is actually two kingdoms now united. The Kingdom of Castile and Leon is bent on the annexation of Moorish lands, and continues to fight a seemingly endless war in the south. Entire cities, such as Avila, have been made fortresses against the raids of the Moors (in Avila, even the cathedral is fortified, having been made a part of the city walls). Castile occupies the western half of the Christian lands (except for Portugal). This kingdom has a reputation as the most fearsome of the Christian kingdoms, upholding this by continual strikes into Moorish territory from the vanguard city of Toledo. The city of Santiago harbors one of the greatest pilgrimage sites in all Christendom, the Cathedral of St. James Campostela. Castile was also the home of the legendary knight El Cid, greatest hero of the *Reconquista*.

Second in power is the Kingdom of Aragon. Situated in eastern Iberia, it is more allied with southern France than the rest of Spain; indeed, Count Raymond of Toulouse is wed to the infant Princess Petronilla, only child of Aragon's King Ramiro. Aragon is somewhat limited in the *Reconquista*,

having a very short frontier against the Moors due to the western conquests by Castile. Aragon retains its importance (and wealth) by having Spain's only Christian port on the Mediterranean — the city of Barcelona.

Next among the Christian kingdoms is Portugal. Only recently declared independent from Leon in 1139, Portugal has joined the *Reconquista* with gusto. Its capital, Lisbon, is a fine port, protected by the natural harbor formed by the Tagus River. The Portuguese navy is an important military force, enabling Portuguese forces in the south to be easily resupplied. Portugal relies not only on its own soldiers, but also on the military order of the Brethren of Santa Maria, as well as German and English crusaders, to wage war against the Moors.

Finally there is Navarre, the poorest of the Christian kingdoms. Due to its position — bordered by Aragon to the east and south and by Castile to the west — Navarre does not participate in the *Reconquista*. Navarre pays extensive tribute to both Castile and Aragon and is essentially a nonentity in Spanish politics.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Spain's Cainites firmly support the *Reconquista*, using it as a way of striking at the Assamites in the south. Castile is predominately Lasombra, and the Magisters are by far the most important clan in Spain. Aragon, while led by Lasombra, harbors a sizable community of Toreador, who use the *Reconquista* as a method of pillaging captured Moorish art and literature. During the sack of Saragossa, the remnants of the once-great libraries were taken to Paris by the Toreador. Portugal is primarily influenced by the more sober elements of Clan Brujah. The capital of Navarre, Pamplona, is ruled by a Malkavian, who continues to encourage the yearly Fiera de San Fermin, when bulls are let loose to run through the city streets, chasing great crowds of people. Nosferatu have also been known to inhabit the underground catacombs of former Moorish cities like Toledo.

## THE ALMOHAD EMPIRE IN IBERIA

The once-mighty Almohad Empire is steadily falling to the forces of the *Reconquista* in Iberia (although their strongholds in the Sahara remain secure). Due largely to lack of unity between the Taifa kingdoms (small fiefs of one or two towns each), southern Spain is still a land of beauty. Its cities defy the imagination, filled with art, knowledge and the best that all of Islamic culture has to offer.

In sharp contrast to the Crusades in the Holy Land, a great deal of intermingling of Christian, Moorish and Jewish cultures takes place in the Empire, and tolerance is the law. The majority of people in the Empire are of mixed blood, and pure-blooded Moors become rarer with each passing year. The Moors are not harsh rulers, and tolerate Christian churches and Jewish synagogues alongside the mosques (the Moors simply require Christians and Jews to pay a small tax for the right to worship).



The Almohad Empire is the most civilized culture in the world. Great cities contain universities and buildings like no other. Seville is the capital of the Empire and is considered a city of wondrous beauty and fine art. Towers soar in brilliant colors and fruit trees line the avenues, filling the air with a fragrant aroma. Seville is also a fantastically rich city; ships from all over the world dock at its port to trade goods from far-off lands. Seville falls to the Castillians in 1248.

Cordova is another of the great cities, a center for science and medicine. It also houses the Mosque of Cordova, which contains the remains of the prophet Mohammed. The mosque is an immense structure, with 800 pillars supporting the roof and 4000 oil lamps providing light. Cordova also houses the largest library in the world, with over 400,000 volumes. The city is famous for its public works, including over 700 churches and mosques, and 900 public baths. Cordova falls to the *Reconquista* in 1236, captured by Castile, and her libraries and buildings are sacked.

Granada will be the last city to fall to the *Reconquista*. Granada is arguably the most beautiful city in all of Spain, dominated by the massive castle of Alhambra, a fantastic palace for the Almohad rulers. This city, already rich with libraries that attract doctors and scientists from around the world, will gain even more intellectual wealth as the *Reconquista* continues. Granada becomes the haven for refugees from the other Taifa kingdoms, and doesn't fall until the late 15th century, when it is finally taken by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, rulers of a united Spain.

## LOCAL CAINITES

The Assamites use the Empire as a base for operations throughout Western Europe, and fight hard to keep it from falling to the barbaric Christians in the north. The Assamites, however, are more adept at war from the shadows than open war, and have thus been losing to the Lasombra-led forces of the north. Many Toreador (even a few from Aragon) flock to the Empire to partake of its beauty and culture. Several times the Toreador have given aid to Almohad's Assamites, but the Assamites distrust the Toreador, wondering if the sober and serious artists are actually more interested in cataloging and tracking works they hope to take back to France. Some of the more rebellious Brujah can also be found supporting the Almohad cause, and Nosferatu are especially present in the Empire, taking refuge in the well-developed sewers beneath the cities.

## FRANCE

### THE NORTH AND THE WEST

When William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066, he did it of his own free will, without the consent of the Capetian King of France, Philip I. So, while William, Duke of Normandy, was a sworn vassal of the King of France, he was a sovereign in his own right as William, King of England. This

inherent contradiction has led to many problems between the Norman lords and the king.

Most recently, the problem was compounded by the acquisition of much of eastern France by King Henry II of England. When French King Louis VII divorced his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in 1152, he left the door wide open for then-Duke Henry of Normandy. Eleanor was the unmarried Duchess of Aquitaine, one of France's largest western provinces. Through his marriage to Eleanor, Henry not only acquired the Duchy of Aquitaine, but also the Duchy of Gascony and the Counties of Poitou and Auvergne. Upon Henry's ascension to the throne of England, he also inherited his father's lands, the Counties of Anjou, Maine and Touraine. Finally, in 1171, Henry's son Geoffrey married Constance of Brittany, bringing the Duchy of Brittany also under the control of the English crown. These lands, when combined with England, collectively became known as the Plantaganet Empire.

This left the French king with fewer lands in France belonging to him than belonging to the Norman English nobility. Complicating the problem is the County of Toulouse in the south, most of which — by marriage — is now owned by the King of Aragon. In 1180, however, a new French king was crowned, determined to regain the lands that rightfully belong to him. He is King Philip I Augustus. Eventually, he will win back the northern half of the lands by taking advantage of the various squabbles among the children of Henry II. In 1202, King Philip I Augustus will declare forfeit all the lands in France belonging to King John of England, and will defeat a group of English and Germans at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214 to seal the decree. Although this regains much of the northern lands of the Plantaganet Empire, the English will remain a force on the continent for many years, and this dispute will be the cause of the Hundred Years War.

Despite the epic struggles between the French and the English, the French nobility and people have found the time to build cities and a culture that is rich and beautiful. Paris, the capital of France, is quickly becoming the most renowned city in Western Europe. The Cathedral School is educating people from all over Europe, and in 1200 will be named a university by the king. Philip Augustus is also completing or starting several major projects, including Notre Dame Cathedral, the Louvre and the paving of most of the streets. Other notable cities in France include Orleans, which has been continuously rocked by heresies and allegations of demon worship; Rouen, the capital of Normandy and the favorite city of King Richard of England; and Dijon, where the city's bishop maintains a 60-year-old ban prohibiting Jews from entering the city (the Jews were accused of witchcraft in 1137, and the week-long riot that ensued ended in the burning of most of Dijon).

## LOCAL CAINITES

France is, without a doubt, Toreador country. Toreador strongly support the building of France's great cathedrals and



palaces, and look forward to the completion of the Louvre, which they intend to fill with art from all over the world. The primary powers behind the French throne, the Toreador have recently begun to chafe under the Ventrue-backed Norman ownership of the Plantaganet lands. The Toreador claim that these lands are due them because the Toreador helped the Ventrue in their conquest of England, while the Ventrue say that nothing is due the Toreador, who are unfit to rule. The Toreador are out to prove otherwise.

Not all the cities have a Toreador (in France) or Ventrue (in the Plantaganet Empire) prince. In Brussels, a Brujah became prince and convinced the city's leaders to rebel against its lord, the Duke of Brabant. In addition, the werewolf Silver Fangs tribe has many Lupines and Kinfolk throughout the French nobility, and the Toreador must work very covertly to avoid arousing their suspicions. Other Cainites have been known to travel to France to study at the universities and take in the fine works of art that abound throughout the land. Still, with a stranglehold on the French Church, and solid inroads and contacts throughout the nobility, France remains the center of power for the Clan of the Rose.

## THE SOUTH

Southern France differs a bit from the north, due in large part to the geography that separates the two, but also to political divisions. Just as Toulouse is firmly allied with Aragon,

Provence is a part of the Holy Roman Empire. Because of these geographical and cultural differences from the north, southern France has a slightly different society, with unique works of art and poetry and a different way of looking at the world.

The two most important cities in southern France are Marseilles and Tours. Marseilles is a fantastic seaport town, full of rough-and-tumble sailors and wily merchants from all over the Mediterranean. The infamy of Marseilles will reach new heights in 1212, when bands of merchants promise passage to the Holy Land to the throngs of young people taking part in the Children's Crusade. Instead of taking them to the Holy Land, the unscrupulous merchants take them to Alexandria and sell them in the slave markets. This results in more honest merchants and shipowners shunning Marseilles for years to come.

Tours, on the other hand, is the center of the French Church. The Archbishop of Tours is the primate of all of France. It is in Tours that the body of St. Martin (patron of France) rests, and as such it is a popular spot for pilgrims. In 1197, Tours, part of the County of Touraine, belongs to the throne of England, but in 1204 the Archbishop will incite the people to throw off the English yoke and deliver themselves to the King of France. After overrunning the English garrison, they send a message to King Philip, who arrives just in time to defeat the English barons outside of town and then celebrates mass in the cathedral (the first French king to do so in over 50 years).



One of the largest concerns in southern France is a group of heretics calling themselves Cathars. They believe that man should give up all trappings of wealth and live a life of pious poverty, like Christ. The Catholic Church has declared this belief heresy, and calls have been made for a crusade against the Cathar heretics. In 1205, three Papal legates place the entire County of Toulouse under interdict (meaning that none in the lands may receive any of the sacraments of the Church), and in 1208 one of the count's knights murders one of the legates. This sparks a war, and in 1209 Simon de Montfort leads several hundred land-hungry lords and knights south. King Peter II of Aragon sends his own army north to protect his lands in Toulouse, and in 1213 the French defeat the Aragonese at the Battle of Muret, which also results in Peter's death. The Albigensian Crusade, as it becomes known, drags on until 1244, and results in the complete destruction of the unique cultures of Provence and Aquitaine.

### LOCAL CAINITES

The Cainites of southern France are again largely Toreador, but have a more relaxed style than their clanmates to the north. They are more interested in poetry, song and literature than in building great monuments, palaces and cathedrals. One notable city, Marseilles, has no prince at all, instead being ruled by a group of Cainites representing the trading interests of several clans, including the Ventrue, Lasombra, Cappadocians and even (it is rumored) a Follower of Set.

## CENTRAL EUROPE

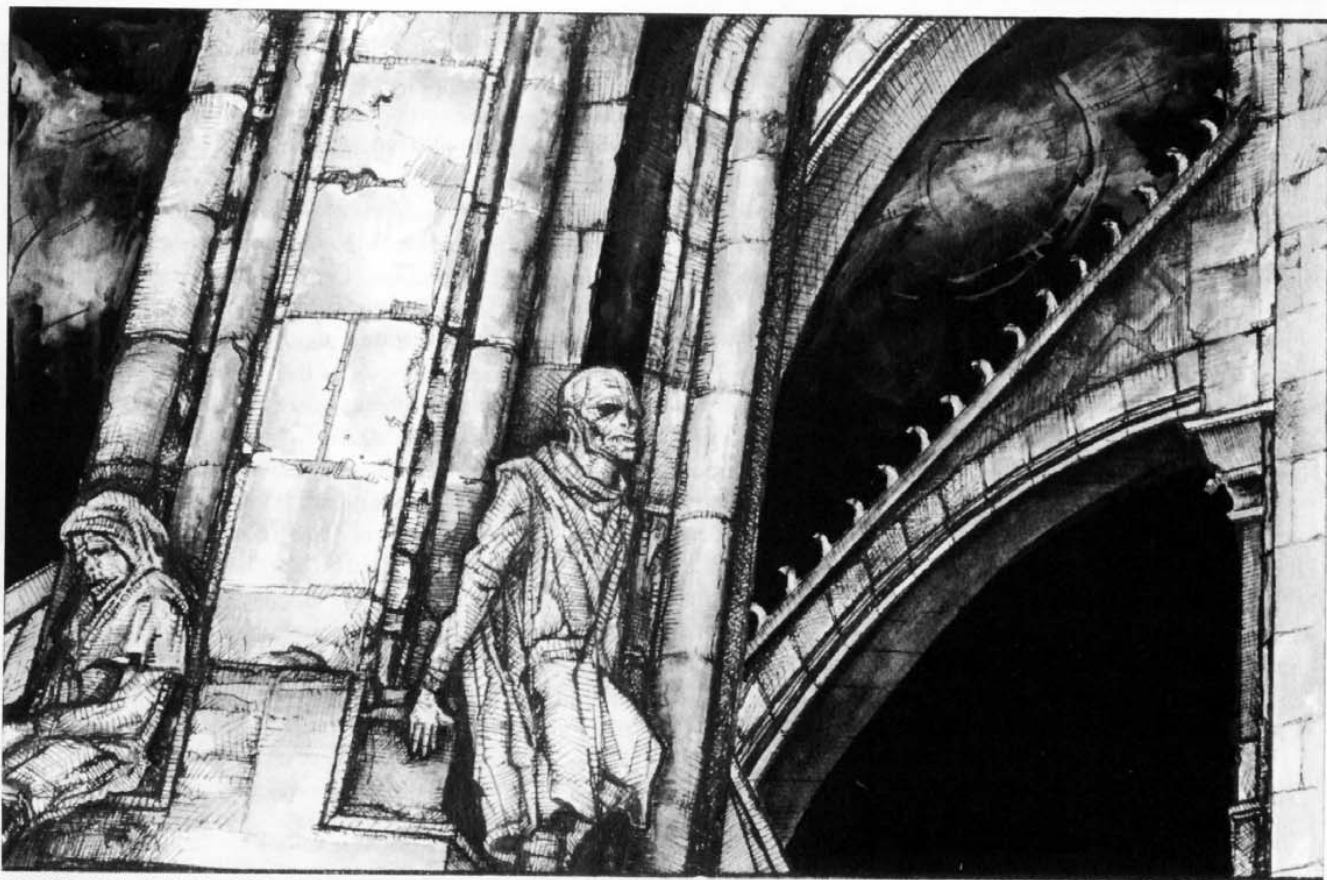
### THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

As has been observed before, the name "Holy Roman Empire" does not at all accurately describe the situation in this land. The rulers of these lands are increasingly challenging the power of the Catholic Church in the south, they are German and Bohemian (not Roman), and are actually a collection of petty principalities and duchies only nominally ruled by a single emperor. The Holy Roman Empire formally consists of the Kingdoms of Germany, Bohemia, Burgundy and Italy.

### THE KINGDOM OF GERMANY

Germany comprises the majority of the Holy Roman Empire, stretching from the North and Baltic Seas (and the border with Denmark) to the Alps in the south. Nearly every type of terrain imaginable exists here, from vast sweeping plains, to dark forbidding forests, to snow-capped jagged mountain peaks. The Kingdom of Germany itself comprises the Duchies of Lower Lorraine, Upper Lorraine, Saxony, Pomerania, Silesia, Franconia, Swabia, Bavaria, Styria and Austria; the Landgravate of Thuringia; and the Marches of Brandenburg, Meissen and Carniola.

The land is currently in a state of civil war, brought on by the death of Henry the Lion. Two men, Otto of Brunswick and Philip of Swabia, battle for the crown. When Innocent III



becomes Pope in 1198, he supports Otto, crowning him Emperor Otto IV. In exchange, Otto gives some imperial lands to the Pope and signs a document that strictly defines not only the Papal lands, but also the imperial authority within those lands. However, Otto is only the Holy Roman Emperor, not the King of Germany. This is because, while the Pope decides who is the emperor, the King of Germany is elected by the representatives of the various German dukes and barons. Otto will remain emperor even through the crowning of Frederick II as King of Germany (Frederick is a descendant of Henry the Lion). Frederick is finally also crowned as emperor in 1220, after the death of Otto.

The Empire has annexed many new lands in the last four decades. The first was the Duchy of Austria, which in 1156 was declared an imperial fief. The Kingdom of Bohemia joined the Empire in 1158, along with the March of Moravia and the March of Lausitz. The Duchy of Silesia became an imperial fief in 1163, as did Opol and Ratibor. The most recent addition is the Duchy of Pomerania, which was made an imperial fief in 1181. Further expansion will come in 1231, when the Teutonic Knights conquer Prussia, seizing it from Poland.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Cainite relations and activities in Germany are largely caught up in the civil war. Many Ventrue back Otto, while most Lasombra support Philip. The Toreador, through the Church, are actually helping both sides for now, keeping the war from coming to a speedy conclusion. This will change with Innocent III, who avoids Toreador influence and gives the imperial crown to Otto. The Toreador are quick to claim credit for it, however. Many other Cainites can be found throughout Germany, especially in the Black Forest, where Gangrel and Nosferatu rule the dark, primeval wilderness. The Get of Fenris Lupines are also active throughout Germany, but are being slowly driven into smaller and smaller enclaves as cities and settled lands continue to expand. One of the most notable new arrivals is a group of powerful Cainites from a new clan, the Tremere. They have set up residence in Vienna, seemingly with Ventrue aid, and use the city as a base to attack the few remaining Tzimisce enclaves in Bohemia.

### THE KINGDOM OF BOHEMIA

A recent addition to the Empire, Bohemia has enough wealth and fine trading routes to attract the attention of German merchants to the east. The land is largely composed of forested hills and even some majestic mountains. This makes for good mining, and Bohemia is awash in a variety of metals both common and precious; it is from Bohemia that much of Europe's silver and gold will come. Bohemia is seen as something of an outsider in the politics of the Empire, and many Germans in particular resent the Bohemians for the Slavic roots of their culture.

The capital of Bohemia is Prague, a growing city centered on the sprawling, fabulously ornate castle built by the Przemysl family in the ninth century. In the last century, Prague was

occupied by the Poles for one year and repelled two Hungarian invasions. Many German merchants have come to Prague since it became part of the Empire. Prague is particularly known for its fine beer, iron and cheap (but low-quality) glassware. Brunn is the second-most-powerful city, and is the center of gold and silver mining.

### LOCAL CAINITES

In years past, Bohemia was one of the westernmost holdings of the Tzimisce. When the Ventrue and Lasombra succeeded in getting Bohemia into the Empire, they broke the Tzimisce grip on this region. Now the Ventrue invite the Tremere into neighboring Austria, goading the vampiric mages into attacking the remaining Tzimisce holdings in Bohemia while the Ventrue turn to deal with the Lasombra in the German civil war. The Tremere are only too happy to do this, enjoying a chance not only to strike out against the hated Fiends, but also to establish their own toehold in a new land. Cappadocians and Brujah are also found in Bohemia, come to study and trade, while Nosferatu lurk in Prague's alleys and ghettos. It is also said that Prague's rabbis are magical Kabbalists, with the ability to create golems (living but mindless servants capable of great feats of strength).

### THE KINGDOM OF BURGUNDY

Comprising the western half of what will eventually become Switzerland, and the largely French region known as Provence, Burgundy is the weakest and least politically involved of all the Holy Roman Empire's component kingdoms. This is due largely to the fact that there are no direct roads from the Rhine river valley to the Rhone river valley. One road is currently being constructed, and has a bridge nicknamed the Devil's Bridge for all the workers who have died building it. It will not be completed for another few years, but when it is, it will link Basle to Milan, and from Milan it is easy to get to Nice or Marseilles.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Burgundy is actually something of a mystery to the Cainites. Once one travels out of the coastal cities of Marseilles and Nice, Cainites seem not to exist at all, and lone Cainites wandering into the mountainous north are never seen or heard from again. Some Cainites have begun speculating that perhaps a powerful group of Lupines, or even a group of mages, may be keeping this area as its own.

### THE KINGDOM OF ITALY

In the late 12th century, the Kingdom of Italy is a divided land, comprising only the northern half of the Italian peninsula. It is controlled in different regions by the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, the various city-states, and local petty lords and bishops. The land is mountainous in the north, then abruptly descends into fertile plains and plateaus as the land approaches the sea. Northern Italy is blessed with many good harbors, bountiful fishing and rich soil. The Kingdom of Italy consists of the Duchies of Lombardy and Spoleto; the Marches



of Ancona and Verona; and the provinces of Savoy, Emilia and Tuscany.

The most important political entities in Northern Italy are the growing merchant city-states. Chief among these is Venice, the second-largest city in all of Italy. Venice is not actually a part of the Empire, instead being ruled by the various merchant houses and the Doge of Venice. Although the Doge is getting on in years, he is a keen politician, and many a bishop or noble has found himself on the short end of a seemingly good bargain with the Doge. The power of Venice is directly related to the wealth it brings in, and to its stranglehold on a large portion of trade throughout not only the Mediterranean, but in lands beyond central Europe. Venice trades where the money is, and as such has no compunctions against buying and selling goods to Christian and Moor alike.

Great rivalries are the rule among the various merchant cities. Some of these nascent states even maintain independent armies (or hire large bands of mercenaries), and all have ships that can be outfitted for battle. These rivalries exist for trade reasons as well as political ones. The rivalry between Genoa and Pisa, for example, is driven by Pisa's support of imperial control and Genoa's rejection of it. The other two principal trading cities of the north are Milan (an anti-imperial city) and Pavia (the chief rival of Milan).

### LOCAL CAINITES

Northern Italy is a melting pot for Cainites, who flock to the merchant cities for goods and entertainment found nowhere else. Cainites have encouraged a thriving night life in these cities, which enables them better access to feeding grounds and, in some cases, mortal company. The Lasombra is the most powerful clan in the area, and the Lasombra Prince of Venice is one of the most powerful of Europe's Cainite rulers. Brujah also haunt the area, and may be behind much of the anti-imperial sentiment pervading cities like Milan and Genoa. Nosferatu are quite numerous in Italy, taking advantage of the centuries-old Roman-built catacombs and waterways underneath the cities. In short, these cities are places of riotous decadence and complex intrigue, and many would claim they are the current center of the Cainite world.

## SOUTHERN ITALY

### THE PAPAL LANDS

Occupying the middle of the Italian peninsula, the Patrimony of St. Peter belongs exclusively to the Pope, Celestine III. These lands have grown steadily over the years, and currently consist of the Archdioceses of Rome and Ravenna and the provinces of Romagna, Pentapolis, Ancona and Sebina. Over the next few years, with the ascension of Pope Innocent III in 1198, the Patrimony will expand even further. Innocent will "recuparate" lands donated to the Church in ancient times, and eventually this will lead to the entire Duchy of Spoleto being brought under Papal control.



The heart of the Patrimony is, of course, Rome. Long ago the capital of the Roman Empire, this ancient city is now the capital of the Roman Church. Ruled from St. Peter's Basilica and the Lateran, this city is a magnet for Christian pilgrims from all over the world. The city reaps an incredible harvest of profits from these pilgrims, especially during Easter and Christmas, when thousands flock to hear the masses said by the Pope and to see the holy sites and relics. Despite the holy nature of the city, the streets abound with con artists and unscrupulous merchants, willing to sell a piece of the True Cross or the knucklebone of a saint to anyone gullible enough to buy these fakes.

Rome is also a very political city. Everyone in Rome, it is said, belongs to a faction, and these factions are important not only in the politics of Rome, but also in the politics of the Church and the Holy Roman Empire. The emperor is sworn to protect the city from harm, so when the Pope and the emperor start feuding, the people start getting nervous. These factions heavily influence the various Church officials and can even influence who is elected as Pope. Their struggles often erupt into violent and bloody street battles, and more than once riots have swept through the city, destroying vast amounts of property and leaving hundreds dead or wounded.

#### LOCAL CAINITES

Rome is an uncomfortable city for the Cainites. While many of the Church officials are corrupt, there are just too many who do have True Faith to make being a Cainite in the holy city very safe. The Toreador attempt to influence their various Church contacts from afar, sending properly prepared bishops and other clergy in from out of town to lobby for their cause. Celestine III is very much in the pocket of the Toreador, but this will change in 1198, when Celestine dies and Innocent III becomes Pope. The Toreador do not have a good handle on him, and he frequently does things contrary to their wishes. The only other clan to have a significant presence in Rome is the Nosferatu. They take advantage of the catacombs and sewers, some of which are as much as a millennium old. Nobody can say with certainty how many Nosferatu are lurking beneath Rome, but many suspect that, due to the fact that few people go poking around the catacombs, Rome could contain the single-largest pesthole of Nosferatu on the continent.

#### THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES AND SICILY

Originally two different kingdoms, Naples and Sicily were both conquered by the Normans in the late 11th century. In contrast to northern Italy, the south of Italy is the key to power in the peninsula. Both Naples and Sicily have incredible wealth, and their people are more likely to rebel against the Church due to their recent past of being conquered by the Normans. Although Norman influence is now being eclipsed

by the reemerging power of the Holy Roman Emperor, the region is still a hotbed of intrigue.

Under the shadow of the volcano, Mt. Vesuvius, sits the bustling seaport of Naples. Although Naples does not have the strong trade ties that the merchant cities of the north enjoy, many goods flow into and out of Naples, and it is another crossroads of the Mediterranean world. Furthermore, the power of the local nobles and the government in general makes sure that Naples remains safe from overt attack.

Another important city is Salerno, south of Naples on the coast. Salerno is home to the oldest known university in Europe. The specialty of the university is medicine, but this causes a problem with Church doctrine. The Church considers the act of dissection on the human body a sin, even if done in pursuit of medical science. This has led to more than one accusation of graverobbing against the scholars, students and teachers at the university. Nevertheless, the university has a fantastic scholastic atmosphere, combining the best of European, Arabic, Jewish and Classical culture and science.

The capital of the joint kingdom is Palermo, on the northern coast of the island of Sicily. The court at Palermo is one of the most beautiful and learned in all of Europe, displaying a combination of architectural styles ranging from early Roman to Norman and Saracen. Here, scholars from Byzantium, Central and Western Europe and the Arabian world gather to exchange ideas. This is encouraged by the king, who has amassed huge libraries full of this collective knowledge.

Other prominent cities in the joint kingdoms include the cosmopolitan trading city of Syracuse (Palermo's rival to Sicily), the fishing port of Taranto, the port of Brindisi (departure point for the Holy Land) and the Venetian-allied city of Vieste.

#### LOCAL CAINITES

Southern Italy is more calm than northern Italy and attracts Cainites from all over the world. Cappadocians in particular are found lurking in the libraries and university hallways of Salerno. The Lasombra is the most powerful clan, but this is changing slowly through the Toreador influence of the Church and the Ventrue influence of imperial government.

One interesting point is Vieste. The viscount there is rumored to be a worshiper of Satan, and Cainites suspect the influence of the Baali. The knights of the castle kill any priest who ventures to the town, and the Toreador and Ventrue are considering a raid on the castle under the cover of an assault by the Knights Templar.

It might be noted that Lasombra are predominant in Syracuse. Some of Europe's most powerful Lasombra either reside in or periodically visit Syracuse, and no other Cainites are allowed within the city's boundaries.



# EASTERN EUROPE

## MOTHER RUSSIA AND THE KINGDOM OF POLAND

### RUSSIA

The sweeping plains of Russia are sparsely populated, and the population there is barely more advanced than it was 500 years ago. Cruel tyrants rule the land with an iron fist, crushing the peasants beneath the hooves of their horses and their spurred boots. Boiling-hot summers and freezing-cold winters do little to enhance the image of this forsaken land.

Despite this, the people of Russia have great heart. To them, suffering is a way of life, and one that forges the character of the peasants into a combination of fatalism and grim resolve. The people have been oppressed for so long that they do not know any other way of life, and they have simply accepted it as God's will.

Russia has approximately 64 principalities centered around two cities: Kiev and Novgorod. They were founded by the original explorations and settlement of Vikings from the north, who set up numerous trading posts that grew into villages. Russia's princes jockey for position in a strange hierarchy established by Grand Prince Yaroslav of Kiev before his death in 1054. Each of the principalities is set in a ranking system, and a prince may move up from a junior principality to a more senior principality upon the death of a senior prince (this system came about due to the division of the various principalities among Yaroslav's sons). The Prince of Kiev is the highest of these petty monarchs and is recognized as "first among equals."

This system fosters tremendous internal conflicts, and civil wars (several at a time) constantly rage across the steppes. This weakness also leads to several invasions from outside forces, and in less than 200 years Russia has suffered over a dozen invasions (the Mongols will be the last major invasion in 1224, as they will succeed and stay for many years to come).

The Church is responsible for education, governmental administration and interpretation of the law. Churchmen are also responsible for overseeing the keeping of slaves, which is permitted in Russia (as if the *narod*, loosely interpreted as the "great unwashed masses," weren't enough). Russia used to be a center for trade, with merchants plying the many rivers that flow across the steppes to ports near and far. The rise of the Italian city-states, however, has cut off a great deal of the trade the Russians hold so dear, especially along the Black Sea coast and in Constantinople.

### LOCAL CAINITES

A wide variety of Tzimisce lords openly terrorize the population of Russia, having come to this land out of the Balkans in the last few centuries. Still, they whisper with fear about the Old Crone, the former protector of Russia, rumored



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BOOK OF STORYTELLER SECRETS

to be a Nosferatu Methuselah. Ravnos are also prevalent in Russia, and a powerful one named Durga Syn has quietly begun to challenge the grip of the Tzimisce. Russia is also a great haven for Lupines, with the Get of Fenris in the north and the Silver Fangs throughout the principalities (several Silver Fangs and Silver Fang Kinfolk are Russian nobility, and a few are princes as well).

## GOLDEN KIEV

Formerly the jewel of Russia, Kiev is recovering from being sacked in 1169 by the Prince of Suzdalia. Most of the population was sold into slavery, and the city was heavily damaged. Still, she is considered by many to be the Mother of Russian Cities, and her natural position along the Dnieper River, which flows into the Black Sea, is once again reviving trade into and out of the city. Kiev is also one of the departure points for the east, including the fabled lands of Cathay.

Kiev will not survive the coming of the Mongols in 1238. Even as Kiev finally recovers from the 1169 sacking, the Mongols sweep down out of the steppes and utterly destroy Kiev, enslaving everyone they can catch. The slaughter is great, almost unimaginable. In 1244, monk Giavanno de Piano Carpini, on a mission for the Church, describes the once-mighty city of Kiev as "200 cottages surrounded by fields of skulls."

## LOCAL CAINITES

Kiev suffers so much because, in their own perverse way, the Tzimisce enjoy raiding it so much. Kiev has no prince of any kind, and the Tzimisce like it that way; to them, Kiev is a plaything, something to help them pass the years. The Fiends heap scorn upon her and her people for trying to join the West.

## POLAND

Poland is one vast plain, bracketed by the Oder River to the west and the Vistula River to the east. The name itself comes from the Slavonic word "pole," meaning a field or plain. Poland's people don't have good ways of defining their territory (rivers aren't the deterrents to invaders that mountains or oceans are). The title of king is not even used in Poland anymore, the lands having been split up after the death of Boleslav III in 1138. Now Poland consists of small, competing principalities and duchies. These are the Principalities of Greater Poland and Lesser Poland; the Duchies of East Pomerania, Kujawia, Swidnica, Silesia, Wlodzimierz, Chelm & Belz, Ruthenia and Podolia; and the Royal Province of Masovia.

Poland's people are drawn in all directions and, like the old saying goes, find themselves to be jacks-of-all-trades, but masters of none. In the west, the Poles must guard against the expansion of the Holy Roman Empire. In the north, a wide swath of territory from the east bank of the Vistula all the way up the Baltic coast is inhabited by pagans who resist conversion to Christianity, and many a Polish prince has invaded the area out of pious duty. To the east, the many principalities of

Russia pose a challenge to Polish expansion. To the south, the direction in which the Poles have been most successful, they have come into conflict with Hungary.

The capital of Lesser Poland, Krakow, is the most important city in the land. It is a central trading location, and many German merchants travel into the city to sell their wares, especially cloth, weapons and armor. Krakow is famous for her fall fair, where almost anything from Germany, Italy, Byzantium or Russia may be bought along the cool waters of the Vistula River.

## LOCAL CAINITES

As with much of Eastern Europe, the Tzimisce control many of the nobles of Poland and enjoy playing the games of war and intrigue with their brothers in the Russian principalities. Poland's Tzimisce have been the ones largely behind the push to conquer the pagan tribes of the Baltic coasts (who are themselves led by older, still-pagan *voivodes*), but have had little success, as most of the Polish "Christian" soldiers are themselves still pagans at heart.

Other Cainites dwell in Poland, much to the Fiends' disgust. Ventrue have arrived with the German merchants and have been slowly expanding their influence out from the Holy Roman Empire, annexing or simply taking over some of Poland's eastern territories. Gangrel practically own the enchanted Bialoweza Forest, and scattered woods of the plains are prime spots for packs of Red Talon Lupines. The powers of Faerie have not yet abandoned Poland, and still enjoy the reverence of the pagans in the region.

## THE BALKANS

### HUNGARY

The plains of the Danube stretch wide, making Hungary a crossroads for trade and travel. Unfortunately, these plains and the various mountain passes through the Carpathians also make Hungary a prime route for invasion, and Hungary has involuntarily hosted many a would-be world conqueror (and a few who actually made it, like Attila the Hun). To the north and east are the Carpathian Mountains, forested peaks whose many passes make travel through them possible in all but deepest winter. To the south are the Transylvanian Alps, which have sharp peaks contrasting with plateaus, with little forest and very high winds.

Hungary is ruled by the Magyars, a fierce people descended from hardy mountain folk. They are renowned for their riding abilities, and are characteristically strong, stocky and short. The Magyars have no love for the Holy Roman Empire, and their rivalry with the Empire is long-standing. Even though the Magyars have converted to Christianity, many Westerners still see them as barbarians due to their customs. The Magyars are more than willing to play the part if necessary. An ambassador from the Holy Roman Empire once refused to remove his hat when greeting a Hungarian



lord. The Hungarians sent him back home...with his hat nailed to his head.

By far the largest city is Buda, separated from her sister city of Pest across the Danube. The city is a hotbed of underground pagan worship and has been the focus of many uprisings and violent reprisals. Things get so bad that in 1265, the King of Hungary will invite the Inquisition into the city to roust the heathens out.

Other important cities in Hungary include Belgrade, an important crossing point on the Danube; Bratislava, a major center for the trade of horses and cattle; and Zara, the bustling trade city on the Adriatic. Zara has the Doge of Venice worried, though. The city is cutting into Venetian trading profits, and it is for this reason that the Doge will convince the crusaders in 1204 to sack Zara in order to delay the over 80,000 marks demanded by the Doge for the army's passage to the Holy Land. Zara is the first Christian city taken by crusaders, a practice which directly leads to the sacking of Constantinople later that same year.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Hungary is the main focus of the war between the Tzimisce and the Tremere. The Tremere main chantry is located high in the Transylvanian Alps, and from there they strike out against the Tzimisce. The Tzimisce have managed to recruit some allies, the Nosferatu and the Gangrel, but even the combined strength of those clans is slowly withering before the spells of the Tremere and their hideous creations, the Gargoyles. For now, the Tzimisce are holding their own on the plains, but yet another threat has arisen: the Shadow Lord Lupines. The Shadow Lords have stepped up their attacks against the Tzimisce, sensing the Fiends' weakness as losses to the Tremere mount. The Nosferatu have suggested that the Tzimisce contact the other houses of the Order of Hermes, in hopes of gaining more allies against the Tremere (who are still a part of the Order), but the Tzimisce have rejected this idea, claiming it would violate the Traditions. To complicate things even further, the Ventrue, through their minions in the Holy Roman Empire, have begun to aid the Tremere with troops, money and political favors.

### BULGARIA

Mild weather is a blessing for the plains of Wallachia, and the soil is rich and well watered by the Danube. The Transylvanian Alps in the north mark the border, and Bulgaria stretches southward into the rising foothills beyond the plain, toward Greece. Despite these blessings, the Bulgars are seen by many as a threat. Descended from steppe nomads, the Bulgars have gained a reputation as ferocious warriors. It is from the word "Bulgar" that "bogey man" comes. Even the Bulgars' own name for their people, the Ugri, will be corrupted in the West to mean "ogre."

The Bulgars, however, are not overly concerned with their reputation at the moment. In 1186, two brothers, Peter and Ivan Asen, started a revolt against over 170 years of



Byzantine rule. Their struggles are paying off. After 11 years of war, they are ready to make their final push to drive the Byzantines out of Bulgaria once and for all. In Constantinople, Emperor Alexius III is so concerned with the dispositions of the crusaders in the Holy Land and the Seljuk Turks to the east that he has paid scant attention to the troubles in Bulgaria.

Peter and Ivan will succeed, and in 1201 gain Alexius' recognition that Bulgaria is a nation independent from Byzantium. King Ivan will then begin a war of expansion, taking the cities of Nish and Belgrade from Hungary, as well as further territory from Serbia and Byzantium. In 1204, Ivan is crowned by a legate of Pope Innocent III, and will conquer more lands to the south, defeating the Latin Empire in 1205 at the Battle of Adrianople. The Bulgarian Empire is to be short-lived, however, with the death of Ivan II in 1241, when it fragments into smaller parts under local nobility.

Sofia is the largest city of Bulgaria and will be the capital of the Empire. The local economy is based on trade between the Byzantine Empire to the south and the Kingdom of Hungary to the north. The city boasts large stockyards, and the fall cattle drives swell the population of the city.

### LOCAL CAINITES

As if the troubles of the Tzimisce in Hungary weren't enough, they are fighting each other in Bulgaria. Some *voivodes* support the nobles who remain loyal to Constantinople, while the rest support Peter and Ivan. The Tremere have been more than happy to let the Bulgarian Tzimisce fight among themselves, but nonetheless maintain a vigorous defense over their chantries in the Transylvanian Alps. Again, the Shadow Lords are also a force to be reckoned with in this land, and they have taken glee in the infighting among the Leeches. Gangrel are content to wander the mountains, hills and plains, and the Tzimisce let them pass unhindered through their lines, especially as the Gangrel often bring valuable information with them from other lands. Many other Cainites have traveled through here, it being unavoidable if one wants to go from Constantinople to Germany by land. Although the Tzimisce occasionally harass these travelers, they don't stop them, knowing that they could instantly create enemies of other clans were they to do so.

## THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

### HISTORY

The jewel of eastern Christendom, the Byzantine Empire is all that remains of the once-mighty Roman Empire. Created after Germanic tribes conquered the western half of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the Eastern Roman Empire slowly but surely asserted itself as the inheritor of Roman law, custom and power. The name of the Empire comes from Byzantium, the original and "official" name for Constantinople (the city became known as Constantinople by common popular usage, in honor of the city's founder, Emperor Constantine). Although it reconquered the western

portions of the Empire, the concept of the Empire being based in Rome had long since passed. With the ascension of Emperor Justinian I in 527, the separation was made complete. During his reign, the laws were published in Greek instead of Latin, acknowledged the spiritual leadership of the Pope in Rome (but, unlike the Holy Roman Empire, stressed the supremacy of the state over the Church), and codified Orthodox Christianity as the legal faith. The laws were also clarified and made more encompassing.

Still, the Empire was not without its own long slide down from past glories. The new faith of Islam led to the loss of Syria and Egypt, and even to a siege of Constantinople itself in 673. Several peasant revolts rocked the Empire from time to time, and the Orthodox Church chafed under the control of the emperor. Countless battles were fought against the Saracens in the south, the Seljuk Turks in the east, the Bulgarians in the north and even fellow Christians coming across the Mediterranean from the west.

### THE CRUSADES

In the late 11th century, Emperor Alexius I sent a fateful letter to Pope Urban II, requesting some small military aid and money to be used against the Seljuk Turks in the south and east. What Alexius got in reply was the declaration of the First Crusade in 1096, a completely unexpected (and, to many, unwelcome) event. The leaders of the Western armies marched to Constantinople to stage the invasion, and while there swore allegiance to Emperor Alexius, promising to return any formerly Byzantine lands to the Empire. The crusaders were joined by the Byzantine army, and marched south, capturing Nicaea in 1097. As the crusaders captured large towns, the emperor secured villages and lands in Asia Minor. After a misunderstanding following the crusader capture of Antioch, where Alexius held his army back due to rumors of a huge Saracen invasion, the crusaders declared that Alexius had abandoned them. From then on, the crusaders kept conquered towns in their own name, sowing the seeds of a long and stormy relationship between the Byzantines and the Western crusader lords.

### CONSTANTINOPLE: JEWEL OF BYZANTIUM

In 1197, the Byzantine Empire itself can be split up into east and west, much like the Roman Empire of old. In the west, Greece is firmly in the hands of the Empire and is the source of much of its culture and inspiration. The Byzantine Empire is truly a Greek nation, not a Latin one, although it has its roots firmly in Roman history. To the east, the hills and mountains of Asia Minor prove largely inhospitable, not just because of the terrain, but also because of the constant raiding of the Seljuk Turks.

Constantinople's position at the center of the Empire, and the great metal chains that prohibit trade between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean except by the emperor's will, make her a very rich city. Goods from all over the world find their way here, and merchants and traders abound. The city is

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a holy place, with many artifacts and beautiful churches marking the home city of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church (who does not necessarily recognize the rule of the Pope of the Roman Church). Broad avenues cut through the city, and aqueducts carry fresh water throughout. Bath houses abound, and the city has many comforts and diversions for people of all tastes.

There are other major cities in the Byzantine Empire as well. Athens is well known for her monuments, and some people there still secretly worship the old Greek gods. Thessalonica is an important link in the trade routes between Constantinople and Greece. Nicaea is a rich trading city that deals in rugs and spices from the Orient, while Sinope on the Black Sea trades with the Russians and even Norse merchants from as far away as Denmark and Sweden by way of the Dniepr River.

## A DARK FUTURE: THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The various political schemes and plots of the late 12th and early 13th centuries are one of the reasons that the word "byzantine" is used to describe complex structures, organizations and plans. Problems between the emperor and the West will continue until 1204, when Emperor Isaac II is blinded and deposed by his brother, who becomes Alexius III. Isaac's son escapes to the West and promises to pay the passage for crusaders

to go to the Holy Lands, if they will just pass through Constantinople and help him restore his father to the throne. He even promises to unify the Roman and Orthodox Churches under the Pope. The Doge of Venice agrees to delay the payment for the passage of the crusaders until after they reach Constantinople, if they will also sack the Hungarian port of Zara.

The crusaders agree, and Zara is sacked. They then proceed to Constantinople, where Isaac II is put back on his throne with his son, Alexius IV, ruling as co-emperor. Alexius IV, however, cannot deliver what he promised. The Venetians and the crusaders then place Alexius V on the throne (who throws Isaac and Alexius IV into jail), but he doesn't even have time to consolidate his power before the Venetians and crusaders decide they have had enough. Thus, in 1204, Constantinople, eastern jewel of Christianity, is sacked by Christian crusaders. For three days the Venetians loot the fine works of art, and the crusaders rape, pillage and burn. When all is said and done, Venice owns one-sixth of the city and all the ports of the former Empire; a Latin emperor, Baldwin, sits on the throne; and the Byzantine nobles flee to Nicaea to form an empire in exile.

## LOCAL CAINITES

Constantinople is filled with kine, tightly packed into its walls, and thus is a natural magnet for Cainites from all over the world. More so than anywhere else in Europe or the rest of the world, the Byzantine Empire is home to members of

virtually any clan and faction. The Toreador have worked long and hard to make Constantinople into the wondrously beautiful city it is today, and maintain a stranglehold on the Orthodox Church. The Toreador of Byzantium are at odds with their western clanmates, and the disputes threaten to flare into open clan civil war every few decades. The Church is a prime key to power and wealth, and is therefore subject to the attention of other clans. The Lasombra, Tzimisce and Cappadocians are the prime antagonists in this respect, constantly doing their best to slip infiltrators and spies into the Church. Ventrue and Brujah struggle over the secular powerbase, and large broods of Nosferatu are rumored to haunt the many ancient catacombs and sewers that lie beneath the Empire's ancient cities.

Recently, Followers of Set have become more prominent, especially in the eastern empire, where some fear they are inciting the Seljuk Turks into action against the Byzantines. Black Fury Lupines are especially prominent in Greece, and cause the Cainites no small amount of trouble there. Mages also frequent the universities and libraries, and more than one Cainite has bumped elbows with them while perusing dusty tomes. For more information on Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire, see **Constantinople by Night**.

## CROSS AND CRESCENT

### THE LEVANT (THE HOLY LAND)

#### CRUSADER STATES

Quickly finding an excuse to break his oath to Emperor Alexis I of Byzantium, Baldwin of Normandy struck out on his own away from the main army during the First Crusade and captured the city of Edessa. Other major victories followed, the crusaders successfully taking Edessa, Antioch, and finally, in 1099, Jerusalem itself. The crusaders, claiming that Alexis had abandoned them after their victories, founded the three Crusader States: the County of Edessa, ruled by Baldwin of Normandy; the Principality of Antioch, ruled by Bohemund of Taranto; and the County of Tripolis, ruled by Raymond of Toulouse. Baldwin's brother, Godfrey of Boullion, was elected Protector of the Holy See of Jerusalem, but died in 1100. After his death, Baldwin took over the duties of Protector and soon proclaimed himself King of Jerusalem, taking oaths of fealty from the crusader lords of the other three states. The port of Acre, the largest in all of Palestine, was given to Venice as payment for the crusaders' passage.

When the Saracens attacked in 1144, they quickly conquered the County of Edessa, causing the remaining crusader lords to send out a call for help and thereby precipitating the disastrous Second Crusade. Slowly but surely, the Saracens whittled away at the peripheries of the Crusader States until, in 1187, King Guy de Lusignan of Jerusalem, leading a powerful army of western soldiers strengthened by the knightly orders of the Templars and Hospitallers, was defeated by

Saladin's Saracens at the Battle of Hattin. The Saracens quickly capitalized on the victory and marched onto Jerusalem, seizing it after a brief siege. King Guy quickly retreated from the city and ruled in exile over the remaining states of Antioch and Tripolis.

The lands of the Crusader States are harsh and dry. Although local farmers manage to eke out a living, the Crusader States are forever in need of food from the West, and the Venetians and other Italian merchants make them pay dearly for it. This is part of what drives the crusaders' constant skirmishing and raiding, as they search for bounty on the bodies of their dead foes. The coastal cities are cooler than the interior, and many pilgrims make it no farther than Antioch, not bothering to travel the hazardous and inhospitable road to Jerusalem. Dotting the interior are many castles and fortresses used by crusaders and Saracens alike to guard roads and other strategic sites. The most impressive of these fortresses is Krak des Chevaliers, the headquarters of the Knights of St. John's Hospital, also known as the Hospitallers. In addition to being every bit as fierce as the Templars on the battlefield, the Hospitallers also have established hospitals and hospices for weary pilgrims.

The Holy Land is also the site of notable relics. The Holy Lance, the weapon that pierced the crucified body of Christ, is used as a standard bearer for the crusaders when they enter into a major battle. The True Cross is said to rest in Acre, which fell into the hands of the Saracens after the Battle of Hattin. Jerusalem itself is said to hold many relics in its mosques, temples and churches.

#### LOCAL CAINITES

Cainite politics abound as usual in the Holy Land. Ventrue and Toreador are the main supporters of the Norman and Byzantine crusaders, but have had difficulty bringing their full support to bear, as they are also very actively engaged elsewhere in Europe. The Assamites, striking from their hidden fortress of Alamut, openly support the Saracens, and have been joined by the Followers of Set, Malkavians, Nosferatu and some Tzimisce. While it is logical for the Assamites and Followers of Set to support the Saracens, the motives of the other three clans are less clear. The Malkavians seem to believe that Malkav himself is buried somewhere in the Holy Land, and many who venture there are struck with a madness of such clarity that they immediately do everything they can to take up arms against the Western invaders. The Tzimisce are those who have been displaced by the various wars in Russia and the Balkans, and now seek to strike back against the Ventrue as retaliation for the support given the Tremere. The Nosferatu take advantage of the ancient underground catacombs of the Holy Land (where cities are often rebuilt on top of the ruins of their predecessors, creating vast labyrinths of tunnels and chambers), and gain a great deal of information about the locations of holy relics and other treasures, which they eagerly sell to both sides.



Some extremely powerful Cainites participate in the Crusades. The most notable (and brutal) are Methuselahs, who fight to recover holy relics and to discover the resting places of those Antediluvians rumored to be in the Holy Land. Andrew of Normandy is one such Cainite, a Toreador warrior operating behind the veil of the Knights Hospitaller. Donning his armor and riding his ghoulish destrier into battle, he has been a devastating force on the nocturnal battlefield. His Ventrue counterpart is Fabrizio Ulfila, who manipulates the forces of the Church, especially the Templars, in the ongoing struggle. Opposing them are Khalid of the Nosferatu and Yasmin of the Malkavians, both of whom have been known to lead small but extremely effective contingents of Cainites onto the battlefield, into a siege against a crusader fortress, or on daring raids. It is rumored that Andrew and Yasmin were once lovers and Blood Bound to each other, and this makes their ferocious combats all the more brutal. The Old Man of Alamut constantly sends his Assamites out as spies and assassins (the name of the Assamite clan actually is derived from the word "assassin").

Other forces also roam the Holy Lands, including many mages from Arabia who are said to have mastery over jinn, ifrit and the powers of Heaven and Hell. The Lupines known as the Silent Striders also travel constantly through this land, but have deigned to remain neutral in the conflict.

The two mortal leaders, King Richard the Lionhearted and Saladin of Egypt, will never be killed, though many attempts will be made. King Richard will not be saved through Cainite might alone, but also, it is rumored, through the magic of some members of the Order of Hermes. Saladin is currently guarded by mortal assassins in the daytime and Assamite *rafiq* at night, and some say that the Old Man is considering Saladin for the Embrace.

One particular place of note to all Cainites is Antioch. No Cainite may enter into the city of Acre, and word has quickly spread throughout vampiric society that any who try to do so will instantly burst into flame. Acre is said to be the resting place of the True Cross, upon which Jesus Christ was crucified. The effects upon Cainites who enter there are said to be proof of the power of the True Cross. Many Cainites sires tell this tale to pound the power of Faith and the Church (and the truth of the origins of the Damned) into the heads of unruly childer. Indeed, one of the most dire punishments a prince or sire can threaten a Cainite with is to have the offender staked, packed into a box and shipped to Acre, where she will die writhing in pure-white flames as she crosses the boundary of the city.

## JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is the most important city in the history of Judaism and Christianity, and third most important in Islam, behind Mecca and Medina. It is the home of the Dome of the Rock, which is the spot where Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac to God. This is also the site where Moses received

the Ark of the Covenant and where Solomon built the Temple of Jerusalem. During the time the crusaders held the city, they also rebuilt the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Christ's body lay for three days after his crucifixion. Finally, Jerusalem is the place where the Prophet Mohammed ascended to Heaven, and the faithful are said to be able to see his last footprints on the ground.

Despite being a holy city, Jerusalem has seen much bloodshed. After a siege lasting 40 days and 40 nights (which some say was God's prophecy coming true yet again, in reference to the Great Flood), the crusaders captured the city in 1099. Following the capture was a three-week-long festival of burning, looting, rape and outright slaughter. Jews were herded into their synagogues, and the synagogues were burned. Muslims were slaughtered in courtyards by archers on the walls. When the crusaders began to run out of arrows, they started simply pushing people off the walls. Even native Christians were slaughtered by the crusaders, who could neither understand their pleas nor recognize them as being any different from the other inhabitants. It is said that the blood ran knee-deep in many of the most holy places. In the end, over 120,000 inhabitants died, with nearly equal parts being Muslim and Jewish.

When Saladin recaptured the city from the crusaders in 1187, he remembered the stories of 1099 and treated the inhabitants mercifully. All soldiers and commoners were permitted to leave provided they paid a ransom. Those who could not pay the ransom were to be sold into slavery. The Templars and Hospitallers refused to pay for many of Jerusalem's citizens, and soon slave caravans began carrying human cargo toward Alexandria.

## LOCAL CAINITES

The Weeks of Blood, as the Cainites call the massacre of 1099, remain something of a legendary mystery. The Cainite leaders of the assault on Jerusalem were surprised when they encountered no resistance by Cainites supporting the Saracens. They concluded the siege and entered the city, confident of the future they would build here. Before they had gone 10 steps into Jerusalem, all Cainites were struck by a madness that released their Beasts. They began to tear into the citizens of the city, slaughtering them indiscriminately. The same madness also seemed to strike their soldiers, and they joined in the carnage. In the end, every single Cainite lord who entered Jerusalem on that first night went completely insane and bestial, and not one was ever seen again. Some say they ran off into the hills and now live there like wild beasts. Others say they were lured somewhere under the city for even darker purposes. Whatever their fate, no trace of them has ever been found. Cainites are free to enter Jerusalem now, but those more sensitive to the emotions of the kine are plagued by nightmares of blood and carnage. Only the Malkavians seem to be free of this curse.

## CYPRUS AND RHODES

This island off the coast of Palestine was captured in 1191 by Richard the Lionhearted and given to King Guy of Jerusalem (so that Guy would not be a king without a kingdom). The island is relatively fertile and blessed with gentle weather. The port of Famagusta bustles with trade, acting as a central supply depot for all the crusader settlements on the Palestinian coast.

Rhodes once housed one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Colossus. The Colossus of Rhodes stood 120 feet high and straddled the entrance to the harbor. It was destroyed in an earthquake, and now only the feet mark where the statue of Apollo once stood. Many pieces of the statue still survive, however, as adornments and entire walls for some of the major buildings of the town.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Some Cainites have become suspicious of King Richard's motives in giving the island to King Guy after it was conquered. They note that the defenses of the island are being strengthened, and there is a rumor that Andrew of Normandy and Fabrizio Ulfila have clandestinely met several times in Famagusta. This has led to some speculation that, if the need arises, the Templars and Hospitallers will abandon the Holy Land and fall back to Rhodes, and from there build a fleet to launch another attack.

## MUSLIM STATES

### DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

Two of the most important cities in the Holy Land are Damascus and Baghdad. These centers of Muslim culture and learning attract scholars from both East and West. The cities are also both centers of Islamic religion; Damascus is the home of over 500 mosques, including the Great Mosque. Christian pilgrims have also been known to travel to Damascus, as the Great Mosque is built on the foundation of the Church of St. John the Baptist. The head of the saint, originally cut off by order of Herod's wife and presented on a silver platter, is still kept there, and the Damascenes welcome the pilgrims into the city so long as they come in peace.

Baghdad is the seat of the religious leader of Islam, known as the Caliph. As such, it is the fourth-most-important city in all Islam (behind Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, respectively). Baghdad is also an important agricultural center, occupying the lush valley and plains between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It is not to last, however, for Baghdad will fall to the Mongols in 1238, and they will raze the city to the ground, destroying all its libraries, universities, architecture and precious works of art beneath the hooves of their steppe-bred horses.

Both cities are well known for their trade with East and West, and the road between them is well traveled. Baghdad is the gateway to Persia and, if one travels far enough, Cathay (China), while Damascus is the gateway to the Mediterranean



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from the east. Damascus is famous for its fine silks, which are coveted by all the nobility of Europe, and the artisans of Baghdad are known for their ornate works of jewelry.

### LOCAL CAINITES

A surprising number of Cappadocians dwell in the Muslim lands outside the Crusader States, taking advantage of the libraries and universities there. Cappadocian practices of examining the dead are linked with the use of cadavers by the Muslims for medical experimentation and learning. Some Followers of Set have also been known to roam through these lands and, of course, there are the ever-present Assamites. Relations between these three groups are amazingly calm and civilized, and vampires from western Europe would be astounded by the levels of cooperation in evidence here with a minimum of backstabbing and infighting.

### EGYPT

More than any other Muslim state, Egypt is at the forefront of the *jihad* against the Latin invaders of the Holy Lands. Ruled by Saladin, Egypt is a fantastically wealthy land, a major center of trade and learning. Egypt is also dotted with ancient monuments and structures from her own days of empire and conquest, including huge statues and the ancient pyramids.

While the Egyptians take pride in their imperial past, they are now firmly committed to Islam. The armies employed by Saladin are largely composed of professional soldiers (unlike the levies of the Western crusaders) and mercenaries. The most elite of these are the Mamelukes, a caste of slave warriors totally dedicated to the preservation of the state, the *jihad* against the crusaders, and the defense of Islam.

Cairo is the capital of Egypt and is an amazing city by any standards. Lamps light the streets at night, and canopies protect the population from the harsh glare of the hot sun during the day. All subjects are taught in the schools of Cairo, including alchemy, and over 200 mosques help keep the people faithful to the will of Allah.

Alexandria is the major trading city for Egypt, and draws people from all over. The Venetians, in particular, have vast trading interests in the city, and the slave market draws unfortunate pilgrims into its clutches at every opportunity. The city was once the home of the famous Library of Alexandria, said to contain all the knowledge and history of mankind, but it was burned to the ground in 642 by Islamic purists. Damietta is another nearby port, and is the home of the Egyptian fleet.

### LOCAL CAINITES

The Followers of Set rule Egypt with a subtle but firm hand, and little transpiring here escapes their notice. They are able to feed and kill freely through the slave pens of Alexandria, and they slither through the ancient monuments and pyramids like a plague. The advances in Cairo, where the streets are lit at night, please the Setites greatly; they enhance the night life much as in the Italian merchant cities north

across the Mediterranean. Ravnos are also present in Egypt, and have recently begun to associate with wandering peoples from the East, said to have their origins in India. These people will eventually become known as the Rom, and they become more and more intertwined with the Ravnos.

Still, all is not as it seems in Egypt. The Setites are fighting a war with the Silent Strider Lupines, who also originate in this land. The roots of their conflict are ancient, and it is a bitter feud. Other Cainites have been known to travel to Egypt, searching for fragments of the *Book of Nod* in the scattered remnants of the Library of Alexandria.

### ARABIA

South of the Holy Land, and east across the Red Sea from Egypt, lies the Arabian Peninsula. These sandy wastes are inhabited by fierce Bedouin tribesmen, but two cities are the main foci of this dry and dusty land: Mecca and Medina.

Mecca is the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed, who began preaching there in 613. Forced to flee to Medina in 622, he returned in 630 with an army of 10,000 soldiers and conquered the city. In 1197, the city is ruled by the Carmathians and is off limits to all but Muslims. Muslims are expected, at least once in their lifetime, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. There they pray at the Great Mosque, in which rests the Kaaba, which contains the sacred Black Stone and the Well of Zamzam.

Medina is the second-most-holy city of Islam and is the site of the Tomb of Mohammed. It also contains several important mosques, including the Mosque of Quba, the first mosque in Islamic history; the Prophet's Mosque, which Mohammed helped build; and the Mosque of Two Quiblahs, which commemorates Mohammed's decision to pray while facing the direction of Mecca rather than Jerusalem. Medina is, like Mecca, closed to non-Muslims.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Some Cainites may wonder if the power of Islam is as strong as that of Christianity. Those Cainites who have tried to get near either Mecca or Medina have proof that Islam is just as powerful. Cainites attempting to enter Mecca or Medina feel as if they have walked into the fires of Hell itself, and are driven back as they imagine their skin peeling away and burning. Although no marks are ever present afterward, no Cainite has actually been able to make it into either city.

### THE ALMOHAD EMPIRE OUTSIDE IBERIA

Stretching along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the Almohad Empire holds sway over the many ports that dot this once-fertile land. From Tripoli in the east to Marrakesh and Valencia in the west, the Almohads are conquerors sprung from Berber tribesmen. After taking all the territory of the Almoravids (fellow Berber tribesmen who had grown soft through their conquests in Spain), the Almohad Empire became another center for Islamic learning, culture and art. The Empire is very large and is in danger of faltering because

of its inability to deal with social and cultural differences, as well as its inflexible religious conservatism (which was why the Almohads conquered the Almoravids in the first place).

One of the most interesting locales in the vicinity of the Almohad Empire is the Island of Cossura. The Pirates of Cossura are a scourge to much of the merchant shipping of the Western Mediterranean, and their black sails strike fear into the hearts of many sailors. The Cossurans are allied with the corsairs of Fraxinetum and between them they gather a great deal of stolen goods and slaves, which are then sold in ports from Alexandria to Tangier.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Gangrel and Ravnos wander through and around the many small towns and villages that dot the Mediterranean coastline, and the Followers of Set have begun to extend their grasp eastward from Egypt. The Assamites have the most control over the Almohad rulers, though, and are fighting a shadow war against the wily Setites. The most important feature of the Almohad Empire for the Cainites, however, is the ruined city of Carthage. Not far from Tunis, and just beyond the city of New Carthage, the once-great city of the Brujah is nothing more than a pile of rubble. Many Brujah have been known to make pilgrimages here, seeking answers to the problems besetting their clan. Some of these Brujah have returned claiming to have communicated with the tormented spirits of both Cainites and kine who died under the swords of the Romans. A few elder Brujah whisper that Troile even may rest beneath the city, but none yet have found his tomb.

## HERE THERE BE DRAGONS

### THE FROZEN LANDS

#### DENMARK

Although it shares a land border with the Holy Roman Empire, few Europeans consider Denmark part of Europe. The Danes have a shared history, culture and society with their Scandinavian brethren to the north, and were some of the fiercest of the Viking raiders that plied the seas of Northern Europe. The raids led to Dane settlements in northern France and England, with a great deal of Danish culture being absorbed in those countries.

Denmark is finally gaining some headway on her larger neighbor to the south. Trade between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe thrives, and Copenhagen was founded in 1167 by Archbishop Absalon of Lund, the chief minister to the king. The various islands around the Jutland peninsula are being settled, and the forests are being cleared both for lumber and for arable land. Denmark is now firmly committed to Christianity and is settling into a very refined state of feudal-

ism. Peasants are becoming tenant farmers, and the nobility is well trained in martial and political affairs. Instead of conscripting the commoners for their armies, the Danes tax their people and use the revenues to pay for mercenaries. Still, few Danes turn away from an honest fight, especially when there is treasure to be had. King Canute IV is considering a campaign to the south to seize more land for his kingdom, ready to take advantage of internecine strife and civil war in Germany.

### LOCAL CAINITES

The Cainites of Denmark are largely Gangrel, and are troubled by the rapid settlement of the few areas of virgin wilderness left in the country. They blame the Ventrue and Lasombra of the south for this "progress," and have been grumbling that they will take action soon.

### SCANDINAVIA AND POINTS NORTH

To the north of mainland Europe, separated by the Baltic and North seas, lies Scandinavia. Long the home of fierce Viking warriors and raiders, the land has become nominally Christian, although many of the old ways are still followed. There are no large cities, but the craggy coastline is dotted with a variety of villages and towns. The largest of these is Bergen, on the southwest coast of Norway. The city is an important center for trade, shipping raw goods to the south in exchange for finished tools and other products.

Further north, the country becomes less and less populated, and some claim the lands are magical. In the summer, in the far north, the sun stays in the sky 24 hours a day, and it is beyond this Land of the Midnight Sun that the edge of the world is supposed to lie.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Very few Cainites can say with certainty what lies to the north in Scandinavia. Gangrel are known to wander these untouched wildernesses, but other Cainites rarely return if they foray too far beyond the coast. Just as the sun stays in the sky all day during the summer, so does it remain set in winter, providing darkness throughout almost the entire day.

Several groups of Lupines make Scandinavia their home, most notably the Get of Fenris. One unusual group of Setites made its way north several centuries ago, and now lives hidden in the mountains and hills. Its members identify as the Followers of Jormungandr, the Midgard Serpent. They have adapted their own legends and beliefs to fit the Norse cosmology, and are long-standing enemies of the Get of Fenris.

### GIANTS AND OTHER LEGENDS

While most of Europe is largely settled, Scandinavia remains a vast and untamed wilderness, the source of many legends and tales concerning creatures that inhabit the forests, hills and mountains. Most of these legends stem from Norse mythology. The pagan Norsemen believed that Yggdrasil, the World Tree, touched all planes of existence, and linked the Aesir gods, led by Odin, to the mortal realm, as well as to





Jotunheim, the home of the giants. They prophesied that a final battle, Ragnarok, would be fought by the Aesir and their Vanir allies on one side against Loki and the giants on the other. Nearly all the gods would be killed in wiping out the giants, and the few remaining would rule the world anew.

If giants are to be found (at the Storyteller's discretion), they inhabit the highest mountain peaks and the deepest forests. They are fearsome to behold, standing anywhere from 10 to 30 feet tall, and their voices boom when they speak. Some Cainites seek these giants, remembering the biblical passage from the book of Genesis which says that Caine also fathered the race of these creatures. These Cainites believe that by finding the giants, they may find some of the Progenitor's wisdom, or perhaps even Caine himself.

Two other legends of Scandinavia have grabbed the interest of curious (some would say foolish) Cainites. The first concerns the dwarves, a race of diminutive people who live in vast caverns under the mountains and hills, and who are said to be weaponsmiths and craftsmen of unmatched skill. The second tells of the Valkyries, the servants of Odin and the other Aesir, who bring the souls of fallen warriors to Valhalla. There, the warriors feast and practice their martial skills until Ragnarok, when they will serve as the Aesir army. Some Gangrel have reported seeing the shapes of women riding

winged steeds over battlefields, but few have believed them. If Valkyries do indeed exist, the secrets they could impart may bring great power to the Cainite wise enough to learn them.

## AFRICA

### ETHIOPIA

This Christian kingdom lies to the south of Egypt and is as cultured and civilized as any European nation (and in many cases more so). Ethiopians have long been trading with the Muslims to the north and west. Although Ethiopia's interior is somewhat hilly, the Ethiopians have developed sophisticated methods of terrace farming, and their harvests are bountiful. They have also mastered the methods of building huge structures of stone without the benefit of mortar, and they decorate their buildings with beautiful paintings and sculptures. Many Europeans, ignorant of the truth, believe Ethiopia is the magical land of Prester John, a legendary Christian king who will rise up to assist in the conquest of the Holy Land.

Ethiopia is a deeply religious country, having fully adopted Christianity shortly after the death of Christ. Churches abound throughout the kingdom, and so do several mosques (Islam is accepted, but has also been the cause of no small strife between the two factions).

Ethiopia contains a wondrous series of edifices: the recently completed Eleven Churches of Lalibela. Four of the Churches are built into natural grottoes in a hillside, with the other seven being freestanding structures. When viewed from the right place, the Churches form a cross on the side of the mountain. The roofs of the seven external Church buildings are painted with scenes from the life of Christ, and the Eleven Churches are quickly becoming a center of Christian spiritual faith in the country.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Cappadocians often travel through the Muslim lands to the north to experience the different cultures and wisdom found in Ethiopia, and a number of Ravnos have also found their way here. This would be a peaceful land for the Cainites were it not for the Followers of Set, who have encouraged Muslim settlers from the north to live in Ethiopia, hopefully to extend Setite influence. The architecture of Ethiopia has begun to draw a small number of Toreador southward, and they can be seen seriously contemplating the different styles and openly admiring the beautiful handiwork.

### AFRICAN EMPIRES

Europeans would be surprised were they to learn the true extent of civilization in sub-Saharan Africa, where fully developed kingdoms and empires sport populous, modern cities and bustling trade. The most powerful of these nations is Ghana, a very rich kingdom where gold and iron are mined

in plentiful amounts. It is said that the King of Ghana can field an army of over 200,000 warriors, armed with iron swords and lances comparable to anything of Norman manufacture, and that 40,000 of those warriors are armed with bows every bit as good as any European ones. Ghana alternately trades and wars with the Almohad Empire to the north. Ruled by the Sosso people, Ghana is Muslim, having been converted during an occupation by the Almoravids a century before.

Other important African nations at this time are the city-state of Timbuktu, and the growing empires of Mali and Gao, all of which are Muslim.

Europeans or Muslims know little about what lies further south in Africa. The few brave souls who have ventured there have reported coastlines with short stretches of beach that quickly turns into densely forested jungle, where the trees are so thick it seems like twilight even when the sun is high in the sky.

### LOCAL CAINITES

Ravnos and Gangrel freely travel the lands of Ghana, Mali and Gao, but very few travel too deeply into the wilderness. Unknown dangers of all kinds lurk there, many of them quite normal and not supernatural. While the Ravnos and Gangrel are aware of the existence of Lupines, they have also discovered that other werereatures apparently exist, but only a few have returned bearing such tales from the jungles to the south, and most of their claims are dismissed.







FELIX  
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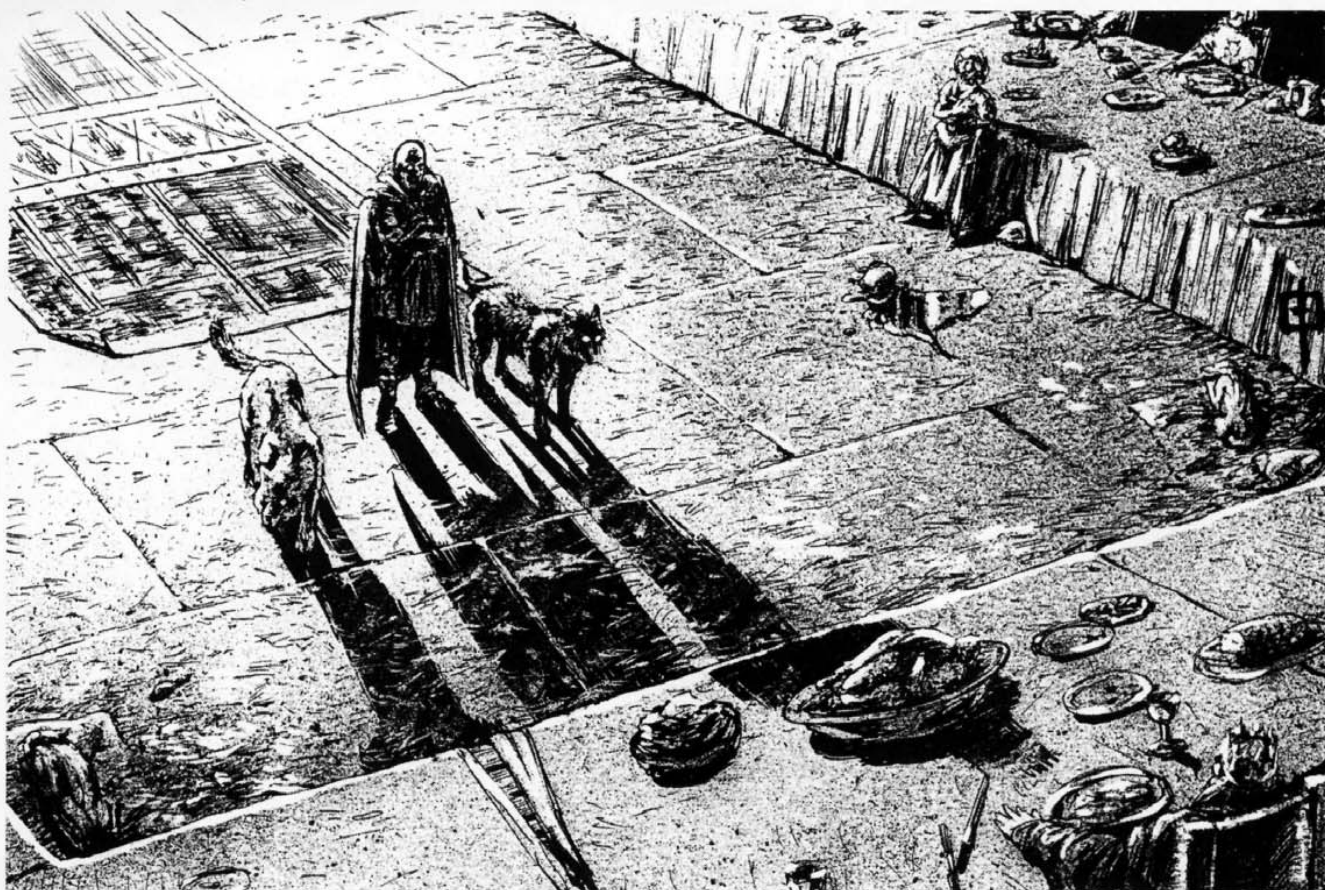


# Chapter Two: Life and Death in the Dark Ages

A Storyteller has her work cut out for her when she begins to design a Dark Ages chronicle, not to mention executing it effectively when the time comes to play. The Storyteller's challenge when running *Vampires: The Dark Ages* is to evoke the sights, smells, sounds, tastes and textures of a medieval world: not an easy task when compared to running a chronicle in *Vampires: The Masquerade* or any of the Storyteller games set in the modern era.

Thus, the first temptation of a Dark Ages Storyteller might be to refer to other popular fantasy games for substance. This does not lend itself to realistic chronicles, as none of those games accurately reflects the ambience of the period. Instead, they tend to take on the unrealistic character of their namesake: fantasy.





## REALISM VS. FANTASY

**Vampire: The Dark Ages** is designed to be played in a “realistic” medieval world. Regional boundaries more or less reflect those of the real Middle Ages, and brigands and Moors, not ogres and demons, are the most common threats to life and limb. Rulers and clergy are generally neither paragons of virtue nor cackling tyrants, but normal, flawed human beings getting by as circumstances dictate.

That having been said, there’s nothing wrong with running a more “fantastic” game, one bearing similarities to classic fantasy games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*. Once one accepts the idea that bloodsucking corpses are running around the streets of Paris, it’s not a drastic leap to throw in magic swords, dragons and quests. This ambience works well in games involving the Methuselahs, who are rather godlike anyway.

A third (and often the most fun) alternative is to mingle the two. Make little changes to the world — changes likely to have been implemented in a world of vampires. Perhaps the largest cities are large indeed, resembling grandiose fantasy cities such as Lankmar. Perhaps curfews in such cities are not levied, and moneyed mortals freely cavort through the nocturnal streets, bouncing from tavern to tavern in the manner of their 20th-century nightclubbing counterparts. Perhaps orders of truly chivalrous “paladins” exist and hunt down the

creatures of the night. Perhaps forbidden volumes of occult lore really do contain forgotten, pre-Christian secrets. The medieval world as popularly imagined is often more entertaining than the actual Middle Ages.

Your next inclination may be to go to the library and check out every medieval history book you can find, absorbing every fact and figure of the age. While this is quite admirable, it is by no means necessary. If you must accompany your copy of **Vampire: The Dark Ages** with a tome on medieval history, then by all means do. We recommend *The Middle Ages* by Morris Bishop. It is an excellent read, free of the boring methodical phrasing found in so many history texts. Whatever book you choose, use it sparingly during game sessions, thus avoiding it becoming a replacement of the main rulebook. Making judgments based on what a history book tells you will bore your players to death. They want to be entertained, not sit in a history class.

By far the best approach to the subject matter is to strive for color, not dead-on accuracy. The players aren’t as interested in Saladin’s date of birth or family life as they are in seeing the glorious *paynim* monarch astride his Arabian courser, scarlet cloak billowing in the sirocco and Damascene scimitar blazing as he roars for the Moorish charge into Jerusalem. (Are these details accurate? Probably not. But the Christian folk of medieval Europe *believed* they were, and they make for a more colorful game.)

# THE CITY OF THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

Picture a dark and imposing wall of cold, roughly hewn stone reaching 50 feet high, circling around acres and acres of land, with guard towers dividing each of its curves. Now imagine the space within the walls to be filled, to the point of bursting, with hundreds of low and terribly cramped buildings, the tallest having two stories and smothering all light. Only the thin, foreboding and uneven cobbled streets stand out against the seemingly endless ranks of dull wooden homes, guild shops, taverns and inns. Even then, the streets are unpredictable, twisting and turning without any coherent pattern. Now picture a human population of 10,000, impatiently bustling their way past each other on these discombobulated lanes and avenues and crowding the booths of the market square, yelling at and bartering with its many merchants. The rotting remains of criminals can be seen hanging over the square in rusted cages, the unlucky prey of feudal law. To this picture add the pervasive smells of overly burned animal flesh, human waste, horse dung, smoke and blood. Lastly, conceive of a large and ominous castle and keep, standing tall in the wake of the desperate city constructs. The

rounded tower battlements are ablaze with torches lining its circumference, and armored soldiers can be seen walking the tower's battlements.

This is life in a city in the Dark Medieval world — the world the Cainites call home.

As Cainites are creatures of civilization, most of your stories will take place within city walls, so it is important that you flesh out your fief with as much detail and color as possible. On the other hand, you may decide just to wing it, and develop the city as the characters walk down its deserted streets at night. Whatever your pleasure, it is essential that you at least capture some of the mood and ambience of the medieval city if your chronicle revolves around it.

The following questions will help you design the area in which your chronicle takes place. These aren't hard-and-fast rules, merely guidelines to make fief creation a little easier.

- In what city or town is your chronicle set?

Cities and towns in the Dark Medieval world are veritable fortresses. High stone walls protect the inhabitants from invaders. The results of enclosing the populace, however, are crowded streets and cramped, low buildings — except, of course, for the castle and keep of the residing noble lord or lady. Dark streets, poor or nonexistent sewage systems, ghastly stench, fire and contagion are, in turn, the bedfellows of city folk.



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The main gate reaches the height of the walls and is complemented by a number of armed guards 24 hours a day. These soldiers monitor the arrival of merchants seeking to sell their wares at the market square, taxing them for any wagons they pull into the city. Such heavy loads wreak havoc on the streets, so the taxes go toward a fund to maintain and repair them. In times when disease sweeps through the fief, the guards are ordered to close the gates, preventing anyone from entrance or departure.

For a truly unique chronicle, consider setting your scene in a rural or wilderness area, such as the Black Forest or Scottish Highlands. This generally works only with characters partial to the travails of the wilderness (Gangrel, Nosferatu, Ravnos), and the characters must constantly beware marauding Lupines and faeries; however, such a setting can make for fascinating stories.

• **Who is the ruling lord of the fief? What noble families reside in or near the city?**

Is the ruling noble a mortal (most common), vampire, or perhaps even another type of creature (imagine a Shadow Lord werewolf as the magnate!)? This character will personify the force of authority in the city, passing laws and judgments upon its citizens and maintaining the peace. If you decide to make the ruling noble a mortal, a number of other questions must be answered: How old is she? Is she the puppet of the fief's Cainite prince or another vampire? Is a vampire grooming her for the Embrace? Is she married or single? Does she have any children and if so, who are they, and how old are they?

Other nobles who live in or near the fief will visit the ruling lord from time to time, especially if they are family or allies. Go through the list of questions above and answer them as fully as you see fit.

Fleshing out these luminaries will provide countless story hooks, especially if any of the characters are also of the noble class. They will undoubtedly seek, or be invited, to interact with them.

• **Who is the Cainite prince of the fief?**

As the ruling noble is the most influential mortal, so is the Cainite prince the most influential vampire. Many princes exert at least some amount of influence over the guilds, the mayor (if one exists), the city's guards (including the night watch) and the ruling nobles themselves. Most princes worthy of the name have subjugated or destroyed the Furores and Autarkis and created a brood by which to protect themselves from antagonists. The prince is almost always the most powerful vampire in the city and is feared and respected accordingly.

Though a medieval Cainite prince is usually quite personally powerful, her office should never be impregnable. For example, the prince may secretly keep a mortal lover and seek to become mortal once again in order to be with him. Perhaps the prince is indebted to the Setites or is a devil-worshipper.

Steep the prince in juicy secrets, ones that, if revealed, could shatter the peace of the city. An air of tension should be a pervasive element in your chronicles.

A prince most commonly descends from the Ventrue, Lasombra or (in the east) Tzimisce clan, but this does not have to be the case in your fief; you can give your chronicle an interesting twist by placing a Cappadocian or a Brujah in such an exalted position. Above all else, make the prince interesting and unusual, even by vampiric standards; after all, no other Cainite will play such an instrumental role in the players' dark endeavors.

Alternatively, a chronicle can feature a weak prince or even no prince at all. In the largest cities and most expansive holdings, even a strong prince cannot keep track of all her subjects' doings and is forced to delegate duties and to ignore minor transgressions. A few of the most progressive cities feature "councils" or "parliaments" of elder vampires, who periodically meet to enact edicts and take care of the cities' business.

- **Who are the fief's major enemies?**

Part of the hazard of being a ruler, whether mortal or Cainite, is that there's always someone waiting to knock you off and take your place. Is the ruler surrounded by superficially loyal but secretly scheming courtiers and vassals? Does a blatant threat (Moors, a rival noble or Cainite) lurk beyond the walls? Are the peasants growing restless enough to revolt? A fief devoid of tension does not provide a compelling atmosphere for the telling of stories; even the most iron-fisted prince faces some threat to her rule.

- **What guilds reside in the fief?**

Guilds are the lifeblood of a fief's prosperity. Most trades in the Dark Medieval world are propagated by a union of merchants devoted to their research and development. The number of guilds in a fief will, of course, depend upon the size of the population. The characters will doubtless seek to purchase goods or commission work from merchants and artisans sometime during your chronicle, so having a list of what is and is not available in the city can be extremely beneficial.

The market square, the perennial heart of the city, is the location where the merchants gather to sell and display their wares to the public. But the market square serves as far more than an arcade. Here can be found the fief's church, market cross (a reminder that God is watching) and various gruesome sights, including the gallows, a cucking stool for browbeating unsavory women and a gibbet (a cage where executed criminals are placed to rot and have their corpses derided and defiled). The square is also the place where actors perform their passion plays and comedies and where the city guard practices soldiery.

Guilds run shops near the square; some even have streets named after their professions or the products they produce (e.g., Armor Street, Baker Street, etc.). Shops don't bear



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names (in other words, no "William's Bar & Grill"), but employ an image of their trade as the shop's standard. Examples are a loaf of bread for a baker and a shoe for a cobbler. Taverns use a sheaf of wheat as their symbol.

The following is a list of guilds commonly found in cities and villages. Note that not every guild furnished goods for the public. The armorers guild, for instance, usually served only nobles, as they were the only people who could afford their merchandise.

Armorers, Bakers, Blacksmiths, Bowyers, Brewers, Butchers, Carpenters, Chaundlers (candle makers), Curriers (leather workers), Cooks, Fletchers, Grocers, Lorimers, Scribes, Stonemasons, Tailors, Weavers (wool workers)

### ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Land is the ultimate form of currency in the Dark Medieval world. No amount of gold or silver can equal the value of the almighty acre; it is the bounty of that acre, not shiny metal in a purse, that clothes, feeds and shelters those who own it. Though ownership of land is the surest measure of wealth, land is not bought or sold by conventional means as it is in the 20th century. Conquest and marriage are the only methods by which a noble may acquire more land.

Nonetheless, legal tender is not worthless in feudal society. National currencies, vanished since Rome's fall, are just beginning to reappear in Europe. The most common and widely accepted coin is the Venetian ducat, but the kingdoms of England, France, Byzantium and Flanders produce coins of their own, as do some nobles and clergymen. Like the system of exchange rates we have today, the value of coinage in the Dark Medieval world varies not only from country to country, but from city to city and, in some cases, person to person.

A coin's caliber depends on three factors: whom it is being bartered to, what it is being bartered for and who minted the coin. After all, merchants are more willing to take coin minted by the King of France than the Duke of Burgundy. The most valuable coins of all are those that were minted by the sixth-century magnate Constantine I. They are exceedingly rare, but their value is the most stable of all currencies. It is not unheard of for vampires to possess these precious coins, especially those elders who were Embraced centuries ago.

But money is not a necessity in feudal society, only a precious luxury. The majority of small villages and hamlets continue to use a bartering system to purchase goods and services. In fact, most peasants and some tradesmen never hold a shiny gold coin between their callused fingertips. Common barter goods include livestock, vegetables, fabrics, bread, fowl and meats.

### • Who is the parish priest?

Creating the area's priest requires just as much thought as creating the prince, and a similar series of questions should be asked: Is the priest mortal or another creature altogether? Does the priest believe in vampires? If so, is he aware that they walk the streets of the fief? Is he a puppet of the Cainite prince? Is he an inquisitor? What amount of influence does he hold over the ruling lord of the city?

Superstition is a perpetual bedfellow of mortals in the Dark Medieval world. Nearly every ill occurrence in one's life is dismissed as being the Devil's work, though some blunders like tripping on the street or missing a stitch while seaming are jokingly referred to as the work of pixies and imps. At times, however, superstition and fear grip the populace with such ferocity, usually from the onset of contagion or supposed proof of witchery, that the town vicar must sequester the Holy Inquisition to investigate the matter.

In the late 12th century, the Inquisition is minute in comparison to its 13th-century counterpart. Inquisitors root out heresy, dispel witchcraft and counter sin by guiding, teaching and performing holy ceremonies. Torture and execution were not techniques used during this period (although, by all means, include them if you wish).

Aside from the castle and keep, the church is the largest building in the city. Every Sunday the devout come to worship the Lord and tithe. As described earlier, churches are normally found in the city square. The parish priest does far more than merely conduct mass every Sunday. He is also responsible for instructing the city's youth on how to read, the Holy Bible being the instrument from which the children learn.

### • What festivals are celebrated in the fief?

In order to bring some merriment to their otherwise dull and dismal lives, mortals have created some 126 holidays, ostensibly with religious connotations, but actually excuses to drown themselves in a sea of feasting and gaiety. Little do mortals realize, however, that these jolly saint-praising binges in gluttony are, at times, the merest veils hiding far darker purposes. European Cainites are responsible for some of the grandest holy celebrations in Christendom, sometimes using the rituals of pagan holidays as the cornerstone for the day's entertainment. Vampires created these holidays for four primary reasons: to feed freely upon legions of drunken revelers, to gather new vessels to join their herds, to review possible candidates to receive the Embrace and to meet to discuss various affairs. Larger gatherings, like 12th Night and Mayday, have a special purpose in addition to the normal pleasantries bestowed to their immortal guests.

Other vampire festivals exist that have no religious significance. Rather, they are diabolic gatherings, outlets for libidinous acts of wanton debauchery toward mortals. At these throngs, mortals play no games or perform tomfoolery with one another. Instead, they serve as the game, bounty and feast. Those vampires on the Roads of Heaven and Humanity tend

to enact Dionysian festivals, ones enjoyable and rarely fatal to the mortal guests. Those vampires on other Roads may stage very different festivals indeed....

Festivals can serve your chronicle in a number of useful ways, the least of which is the setting for the evening's session of play. A few suggestions are:

- A jumping-off point for the introduction of new a coterie member.
- A plot twist wherein the characters suddenly discover that a common antagonist is attending the festival.
- An event wherein the characters can seek an audience with the prince or perhaps noble dignitaries.

Some examples of popular festivals Cainites regularly attend are below. Note that each city has a patron saint and the holiday designated as belonging to the saint is always celebrated by the city.

• **July 15, St. Swithin's Day:** Mortals recognize this holiday as a celebration of the bounty of the earth brought about by the birth of summer. Cainites, on the other hand, gather at the fair after dark to lament the death of winter and its long, inviting nights. Mortals celebrate St. Swithin's Day by cutting apples into pieces and sharing them with each other.

Vampires also celebrate St. Swithin's Day, but with a much darker ritual born out of contempt for the Canaille. In a mockery of the mortal ritual, the vampires attending kidnap a noble virgin, tear out his heart, cut it in half and share its pure vitae among themselves. Some Cainite princes condemn this vulgar act, and a few have even gone so far as pronounce it anathema.

• **October 31, All Hallows Eve:** Called Samhain (pronounced "Sá wan") by pagans, the recognition of All Hallows Eve as a Christian holiday is nonetheless heavily tainted with paganism and diabolism. The largest celebration is said to take place in Madrid. It is rumored that vampires on the Via Diabolis attempt to meet in a predetermined location (usually a small village) each year. Once there, they host a spectacular feast for unsuspecting mortal guests. Frightful plays are performed which retell the story of Lucifer's exile into the infernal realms and prophesy his earthly rebirth and reascendancy to rule. Finally at the end of the night's festivities, the true purpose of the celebration is revealed: The town inhabitants are murdered as sacrifices to the infernal lords.

• **December 24, Christmas Eve:** Attending midnight mass at Villars Abbey in Belgium has become a popular affair for the local Cainites. The "festival" began in 1188, the brainchild of the Toreador coterie that oversaw the construction of the abbey to its completion. At the conclusion of the midnight worship, the doors to the church are barred, the attending mortals are assailed, and a great orgy of blood commences into the wee hours of the morning.

Other popular holy days and festivals: Mayday (May 1st), Midsummer Eve (June 21st), Lammas (August 1st), St. Crispin's Day (October 25th), All Soul's Day (November 2nd), Michaelmas (September 29th) and St. Valentine's Day (February 14th).

#### • What interesting locations exist in the city?

Which are the most popular taverns of the fief? Vampires may wish to frequent these locales; like the nightclubs of the modern era, taverns are excellent sources of both information and vitae. Feel free to make each tavern unique from the others, with its own ambience and clientele. Perhaps the troupe will decide to use one of the fief's taverns as a base, meeting there to discuss plans and share newly discovered secrets? If so, it should be noted that in most cities, the city curfew begins at 9:00 in the evening, and all businesses are required to close at that time. Should the characters use the location after closing, having Dominated its employees, they may receive an unwelcome visit from the night watch. Of course, if the characters are smart, they will snuff out the candles first so as not to attract attention.

Are there any buildings or places that cause such fear in mortals as to bring a shiver down their spines when they hear or talk of it? Commoners often claim that certain buildings or areas in the city are haunted by evil spirits or cursed with witchery. Adding two or three such locations to your city makes for excellent subplots, allowing you to hook the characters into the unknown.

## THIS WASTED LAND

If there is one thing vampires loathe more than each other, it is the open country. Europe's heaths, glades, valleys and hinterlands are *terra incognita* to Cainites, save those of Clans Gangrel, Nosferatu and Ravnos, and even those clans find survival there difficult. Nonetheless, characters may voluntarily or, more likely, involuntarily decide to move to a rural locale for whatever strange reason (aside from owning land with a castle or manor). In fact, positioning your chronicle in a provincial castle (owned by the characters, of course, who are disguised as a noble family) far from civilization may prove to be a welcome change.

## CAST OUT OF EDEN

If you find that the characters are reluctant to travel when your story depends on it, you can, of course, take the initiative and cast them out. A surefire way to do this swiftly, efficiently and, best of all, unexpectedly, is to throw a siege against the city. The enemy force can be an army of Moors, Northern barbarians or troops from a rival noble.

Don't allow the characters to stop the siege from happening; simply summarize that battle was joined, the city's soldiers were massacred by their superior adversary, and now the city is being sacked. Sure, this may well clash with a strict historical backdrop for your chronicle, but it will definitely force the vampires into the unknown wild.



If this is the direction in which you decide to take your chronicle, or if your story demands that the characters traverse the wilds, here are a few elements you can add to make the characters' sojourn more eventful:

- **Nobles:** The moment a person steps off a country road, chances are she is trespassing on some noble's land. Of course, this should become obvious to characters, as they take notice of the endless low walls that stitch the fields, denoting the breadth of a duke or baron's domain. While nobles do not have the means to patrol every square mile of their property, those who are caught are taxed by the landowner's regulators, thrown in prison or executed, especially if the malcontents are caught hunting game.

Nobles travel sparingly, using messengers to communicate with others. The only instances in which they may be forced to trek long distances are in times of war. If, for whatever reason, a noble must travel to a nearby city, he will always be under heavy guard.

- **Peasants:** The majority of people in the Dark Medieval world do not live within cities. Instead, the country houses most of the mortals of Europe and the Eastern provinces, and the peasant class comprises its primary inhabitants. Vampires will never see these poor, dejected souls tilling the fields during the night, but they can be found huddled around the firepits of their cold and miserable shacks, or snuggled tightly together for warmth as they sleep. As country peasants are a

plentiful lot, they make ideal prey for traveling Cainites. But only the foolish blithely enter into the homes of peasants. These mortals are all too aware of the existence of supernatural creatures and are prepared to defend themselves with a number of wards and banes — such as crucifixes — should the need arise. Of course, these talismans rarely work, but all it takes is one commoner to raise a hue and cry before the full serf contingent is upon the unsuspecting vampire, who may well be staked and decapitated.

With this in mind, spring a surprise on the characters after they have become accustomed to feeding off the peasantry. This surprise may come in the form of an armed peasant (one with high True Faith) or another vampire living among the characters' would-be prey.

- **Werewolves:** While city folk pray to God for deliverance from ghosts and the walking dead, the "salt of the earth" pray to the Almighty for protection from the evil that haunts their forests and fields: the Lupines. These hateful shapeshifters abound in the wild — and make for excellent antagonists against traveling vampires or coterie that reside in rural strongholds.

But avoid the pitfall of using a savage werewolf attack to fill one of your plotheoles or as an excuse to spice up the action in an otherwise dull evening of gaming. Doing so dilutes your **Dark Ages** sessions into nothing more than "hack-n-slash" romps into predictability. It is better to use Lupines sparingly, though it is useful to create tension in the characters by



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suggesting the *possibility* that the Lupines are always nearby. When you decide the time is right to bring Lupines to the fore, shine them in a crafty, intelligent light: beings capable of complex intrigues and masterful strategies, not the stereotypical red-eyed, blood-lusting berserkers. This is doubly so if your chronicle is set in Eastern Europe. The contemptuous Shadow Lord tribe is strong in this part of Christendom, for its members belong to the noble class or, more correctly, the warrior class. They are among the bravest of the Garou and harbor more hatred for the Tzimisce than for that clan's Tremere adversaries. Indeed, introducing a calculating Shadow Lord antagonist in your chronicle can make for some fascinating roleplaying.

### A VILLAGE OF WOLVES

During their travels, the troupe enters a small hamlet with a population of 15 people. The citizens warmly welcome the newcomers, regardless of their class standing, and offer them food and lodging for the night. Play up the kindness, generosity and humility of the villagers, so that the characters believe they are an ignorant lot, practically incapable of hurting a fly. Once you've created the appropriate air of complacency in the troupe, reveal who the villagers really are — a pack of werewolves. Let the battle begin....

- **Highwaymen:** A hated foe of peddlers, highwaymen plague the main thoroughfares of Europe, though some nobles have begun a campaign to rout these footpads from their lands. They steal even from the poorest serf and murder without the slightest provocation. Highwaymen are generally cretins of the first water, having little or no skill in the weapons they carry. Generally none poses any real threat to a vampire, but there are exceptions. Perhaps a band of these thugs are, in truth, members of the fae Unseelie Court looking for unwary mortals to harass and affront.

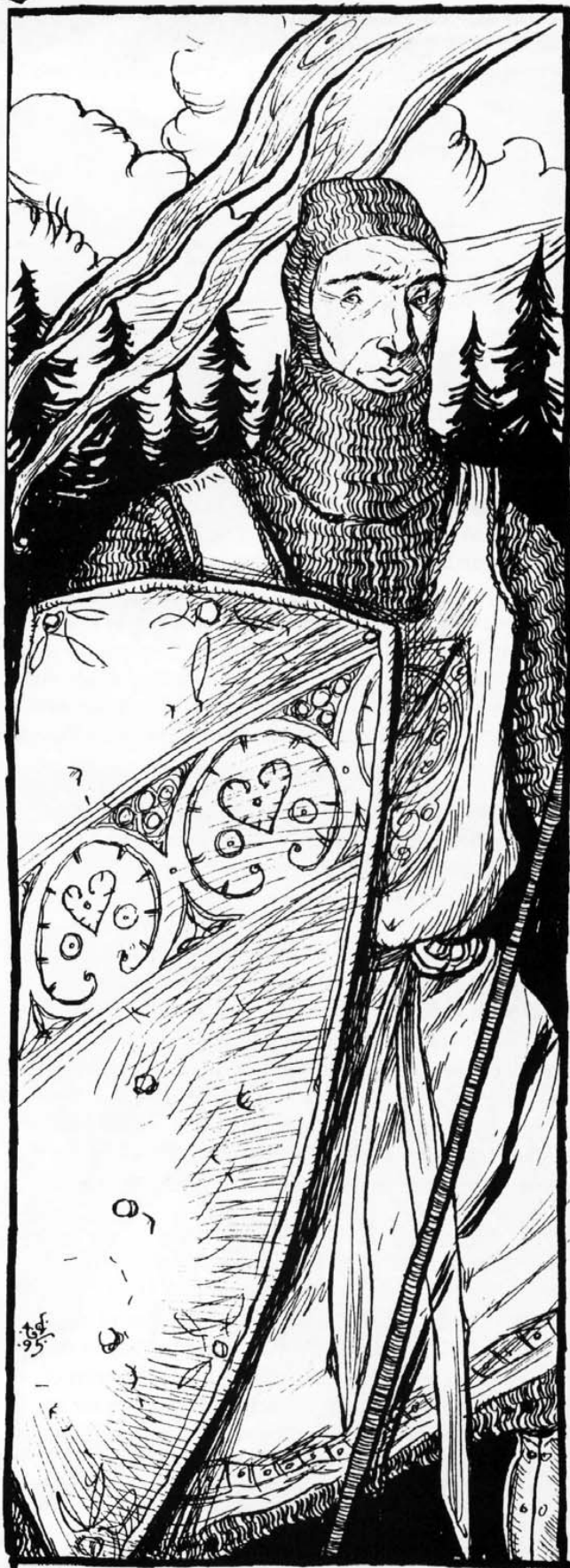
- **Monks and Clergymen:** Abbeys and cisterns can be found in remote locations throughout Western Europe. Monks and nuns keep to themselves, rarely inviting guests other than those of the papacy. Vampires who reside near these penitent souls will likely receive little or no trouble from them, but should curb the desire to drink their vitae, for some monks have True Faith. Of course, should the abbey inhabitants begin to notice anemia, pallor and lassitude among the inhabitants of the nearby village, some suspicions may be raised.



## THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SABLE ROSE

A coterie of Toreador calling itself the Brotherhood of the Sable Rose, or simply the Sable Rose, resides in a remote abbey in Flanders. Those few Cainites who have encountered members of the brotherhood remark upon their demeanor as being characteristic of others of their clan: great patrons of the arts and lovers of all objects and creatures of beauty, but with a religious perspective, as all are staunch followers of the Road of Heaven. Yet this is only a shroud to hide their true purpose. Brothers are far from the pious, peace-loving Cainites they appear to be. In truth, they are a cadre of warriors, mastered in the ways of sword and siege, that has unleashed its own private war against those Cainites who beseech the blessings of the Devil. Its task arduous, its motive simple, the Sable Rose works to eradicate from God's creation all members of the vile Baali clan and those who walk the Devil's Road. Members of the Sable Rose believe that the day draws nigh when Man will rise up against the children of Caine and exorcise them from the Earth; those who walk the Road of the Devil will be the harbingers of this destruction.

Few princes are aware of the existence of this secret sect of vampires, and fewer still know of their pogrom. Nonetheless, the Brotherhood is actively recruiting vampires from other clans and Embracing new conscripts in its war against the Devil's kin.



## THE MEDIEVAL AESTHETIC

### COMESTIBLES

*As I sauntered into the duke's great hall, my nostrils instantly picked up the succulent scent of roasted cormorant, the sharp odor of aged, curdled cheese and the robust fragrance of spiced wine. Indeed, the mortal had prepared a sumptuous meal for me. And, for but a moment, did thoughts of my departed mortality strike me, and I snickered within my person as I bowed before the man. For my meal this night would not be the roasted bird at the table, but the noble quarry who stood before me. O! What a culinary masterpiece is man!*

— Philip de Valois, Clan Malkavian

Though Cainites may no longer consume it, food can serve as a useful prop in creating an authentic Dark Medieval setting and in evoking many sights and smells that characters will encounter.

The first thing one must realize is that the victuals that tickle the palette of noblewoman, clergyman and serf are foul compared to 20th-century standards. Food is hardly fresh. As

there is no method of preserving meat, fish, bread or beverages, people are forced to coat their food with liberal helpings of salt, spices and garlic to hide the taste of mold and rot.

Peasants eat whatever vegetables can grow from their petty stretches of land, supplemented with dark bread and porridge. Nobles feast on meats and cheeses (vegetables are considered food fit only for the lower class), coupled with cakes and wafers, while clergymen dine on all types of food depending upon what positions they hold in the papacy: A cardinal will never consume vegetables, while a parish priest in a remote village might.

Below is a list of foods common to medieval society:

**Vegetables:** beans, cabbage, carrots, parsley, onions and shallots.

**Meats:** capons, chicken, pork, venison, mutton, swans, vultures, herons and many other types of birds.

**Seafood:** cod, salmon, dogfish, seals, dolphin, whales and sardines.

**Desserts:** Cakes, cookies and jelly wafers.

## HUNTING IN THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

Hunting is not as simple in the 12th century as it is in the 20th. There are no "cities that never sleep," no faceless masses to pluck from the sidewalk for a quick sip in the adjoining cobblestone alley, no dimly lit goth clubs. When the last rays of the sun fall from the horizon, the city streets become black as pitch, devoid of human life (save the night watch and the insane). Doors and windows are barred from the inside to keep out thieves and night-fiends. In a few of the largest cities, inns and taverns stay open into the night hours, but even they are small establishments; strangers are noted and disappearances remembered.

Such paranoia can make hunting difficult. Cainites with Presence or Dominate will have a much greater chance of inducing mortals to exit their quarters or at least unbar their doors — otherwise, a vampire may have to resort to breaking and entering. In many cities, violent execution of this act (such as breaking down a door or shattering a window) is not only cause for a hue and cry, but is considered a breach of the Sixth Tradition and will result in a Blood Hunt.

## THE DANGERS OF THE HERD

Not every player in your group will take the Herd Background when developing a character, but for those players who do, kindly remind them that the more vampires in a city who possess herds, the greater the possibility of being discovered by its populace. Mortals will only be dumbfounded for so long by the rise in the number of sick people exhibiting anemia, pallid skin and fever. This is doubly so if your chronicle takes place in a city with fewer than 10,000 people. But if all players steadfastly insist on their characters possessing some level of the Herd Background, then by all means let them do it. This just invites you to turn up the heat!

Cause the characters to become paranoid of "withdrawing from their account." This subplot can be played out in a number of different ways. Here are two examples:

- **Affliction:** Draining blood from mortals increases the chance of disease, especially pneumonia and typhoid, as their immune systems are taxed. Let a nasty disease strike one of the characters' herd, but do not make it readily apparent to the Cainite. Make her become confused as each member of her flock slowly becomes afflicted with the disease: a twisted version of the Midas Touch, until the vampire realizes that she is carrying the disease and spreading it to the rest of her herd.

- **The Sweetest Nectar:** This angle works particularly well for Ventrue, but can be used against any Cainite. A member of a vampire's herd, the son of a noble family, has the sweetest vitae his immortal benefactor has ever drunk, a fact that is slowly but surely becoming known to other Cainites in the town. Soon, the vampire cannot abide the taste of any other mortal's vitae except for the young man's, lusting for it night after night. The jealousy of others (perhaps members of the vampire's coterie!) comes to the fore and a rivalry for ownership of the mortal erupts, only to reveal that the young man is the mortal cousin of a powerful vampire prince, being groomed for immortality when he reaches his 18th birthday. Let the prince catch wind of what vile occurrences have surrounded his precious relative, and make sure the characters know it. This should terrify them.

## DRESSING THE CAST

Becoming familiar with the styles of clothing and types of fabric worn during the Dark Ages can be an important asset to storytelling. That extra bit of detail will help to enliven your scheming seneschal, diabolic Baali elder or elegant Toreador artisan. This section is included to help you learn enough about the fashion of the age to describe or choose what a character is wearing. Some players may be particularly interested in the clothes their vampires will adorn themselves with, especially if their characters come from a noble upbringing, and they may look to you for information on this subject.

The types of fabric, and thereby the styles of clothing, worn by mortals depend entirely upon which class they fall into. Peasants and serfs, having little or no money or goods to barter with, wear rough, generally unwashed, often parasite-infested wool and russet which at times gives rise to scabies and impetigo. The people of the late 12th century know little of the value of clean clothes. Peasants who work to keep the manor of their liege, or who serve the meals during breakfast or supper, sometimes wear finer wool or even linen, particularly when their master is hosting guests.

The clergy wear simple clothing, usually some form of robe or gown; the color, fabric and style depend on a cleric's order or station in the priesthood. Cardinals and bishops wear a variety of different outfits, each designated for a different purpose. Scarlet tunics made of silk or wool, scapulars (a sleeveless outer garment falling from the shoulders) and ankle-





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high or knee-high boots pointed at the toe are worn during official papal councils. When conducting mass, clergy members wear tall, embroidered mitres (pointed hats) on their heads, a wool undergarment, a tunic and, over all, an oval robe, usually made of wool, but sometimes linen. Colors of these garments tend to be white, the hems and cuffs decorated with scarlet or gold and sometimes inset with gems, though this is not a rule.

Lay clergy wear long gowns, usually brown with flared cuffs, and soft leather shoes. The primary clothes of monks are black or brown robes or gowns, and sandals.

Linens, silks, and embroidered cloth are the most popular fabrics among the noble class. Noblewomen are well known for their adherence to elaborate fashions. A new fashion enjoying much popularity with noblewomen is the wimple, a headdress that covers the head, chin, necks and sides of the face. Others prefer a barrette, a simple band to hold the hair in place. A cap, short veil, or hat with an upturned brim is worn to cover the part of the barrette that is tied.

Women's hair is often braided, or *plaited* as it is called, but in the present day this style is becoming less popular in favor of simply wrapping the hair around the head. Of course, hairstyles mean little since women's heads are concealed by hats with barbettes or wimples.

An undergarment (*chemise*) is always worn beneath the dress, or *kirtle*, where it can be seen if the kirtle's hem is cut short. Kirtles come in a variety of styles and fabrics, but those made of silk, linen, scarlet, or those bearing heavy embroidery are preferred. Master weavers are highly sought after for their ability to create elaborate embroidery, and for a noble to have such a person available in the local village is a luxury. Embroidery is preferably woven with gold, though it is a rarity reserved for the extremely wealthy members of the noble class. Hose cover the legs though they are concealed by the undergarment. Shoes are ankle high and are made of soft leather.

Ironically, noblemen are slaves to fashion; they make it a point to dress more fashionably than women and even compete with one another regularly to see who can don the most opulent tunics, girdles and breeches. Again, having a master seamstress on retainer is an immense luxury.

In the late 12th century, men's hair is typically cut short. A full beard has become less fashionable than a small, pointed beard coupled with a mustache. The clean-shaven "Roman Face" is still acceptable. Men wear many styles of hats, but the most popular are small skullcaps or hats with upturned brims.

Gloves are a relatively new invention and are very fashionable. Embroidery decorates the hems and, if the noble fancies, the backs as well.

Long hose are the norm during this time period and are fixed onto the waistband of the breeches, or pants. Breeches are worn to the knee, accompanied by thin crossbands that span the length of the leg.

## VENTRUE AND FASHION

The Toreador may be the perennial masters of the arts, but it is the Ventrue who are the greatest enthusiasts and patrons of fashion. Indeed, the Ventrue often put the Clan of the Rose to shame when they flaunt their latest outfits and dresses during large Cainite gatherings, much to the amusement of the other clans. Be that as it may, jealousy and competition are rife among certain Ventrue circles when it comes to fashion. Ventrue firmly believe one's bearing, composure and dress are instrumental when engaged with others in matters of negotiation, diplomacy or outright warfare; a regal yet powerful air about them must be maintained. This is a doctrine that is taken as seriously as affairs of the state.

Tunics are granted the greatest attention in the design of an outfit. The more opulent the embroidery and fabric (save for the cuffs: only tight-fitting ones were acceptable), the more famous (or infamous) the nobleman will become in matters of fashion. Tunics can be seamed in an endless variety of styles. High collars and dagged hemlines are common, as are square necklines and slits down the center of the chest. The man's undergarment usually matches the patterns and colors of the tunic.

Men's footwear takes on three primary guises in the late 12th century: leather boots that stretch to the knee; the typical ankle-high shoes; and an unusual, yet functional invention that combines hose with a leather sole, discarding the need for shoes altogether. Long, pointed toes are a common characteristic of medieval footwear.

Colors popular in late 12th-century clothing are tawny, yellow, red, cinnamon, black, green, scarlet and watchet.

## NAMES

As the players create their characters they may ask you for appropriate "period" names. Indeed, the same goes as you create the cast of supporting characters: the friends, antagonists and "extras" with whom the coterie will interact. Choosing characters' names may be a bit more difficult in **Vampire: The Dark Ages** than in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, but it is well worth taking the time to use authentic medieval names in order to make the chronicle seem more true to life.

First names in Western Europe are often similar to their 20th-century counterparts, but vary from region to region (the English Peter becomes the French Pierre becomes the Italian Pietro becomes the Dutch Piter, etc.). Some truly fanciful names exist as well; consult fairy tales and histories for inspiration. ("Rumpelstiltskin" had to come from some-

where!) Names in Eastern Europe are often unlike any in the West (Borivoj, Vaclav, Boleslav, Drahomira, etc.); even a cursory reading of Eastern European history will provide plenty of colorful examples.

A person's last name in the Dark Medieval world, be he mortal or Cainite, is usually a reflection of his profession or the village of his birth (Andrew Taylor and Philip of Burgundy are just two examples). If you or one of your players choose to name a character after his birthplace, the preposition "of" ("de" if the character is French or Spanish, "di" if Italian and "von" if the character is German) is placed before the name of the city or village. The special case for French characters is when a vowel begins the name of the city or village. In this case, the "de" preposition is apostrophized, becoming a part of the last name (example: Augustine d'Agde).

## TRAVEL

One might think that the hundreds of villages and towns dotting Western Europe facilitate easy and frequent travel. On the contrary, even a five-mile journey to the next village is a rare event. People fear the bands of highwaymen who plague the countryside, many of the roads themselves are nearly impassable (though this is beginning to change in the late 12th century) and poor weather conditions commonly prohibit passage. Only nobles and clergymen have the means to travel with some measure of safety, having armed escorts, wagons or carriages.

Traveling is particularly hazardous to vampires, as shelter from the dawn can often be hard to obtain. Wealthy Cainites commonly own property near frequently traveled roads, having small cottages nearby for the sole purpose of protecting themselves from the sun. Less prosperous vampires must resort to finding refuge in peasant huts (often Dominating or killing the inhabitants), roadside shacks, stables or within the earth (if they possess the Protean Discipline).

## THE CRYPTS OF CAEN

Deep in the forest off the Caen road to Paris, set at 10-mile intervals, lies a peculiar row of small, moss-covered stone crypts. The crypts were built by the Prince of Paris, to facilitate easier journeys by Cainites traveling across the Channel to his city and vice versa. Each contains three stone sarcophagi. Princes from other cities and towns are duly impressed with the efficiency of these crypts and hope to offer such services to Cainites in the future.



## TRAVELING BY FOOT

Peasants and some orders of monks (such as the Franciscans) must travel the land by foot. On a good, flat road under ideal weather conditions, one can travel up to 25 miles per day. Such roads and conditions, of course, are extraordinarily rare. The average rate of travel per day is 10 to 12 miles.

## TRAVELING BY MOUNT

Owning a mount is a Cainite's ticket to exploring and traveling the world. On a good road, a horse and rider can travel up to 30 miles per day. On an average road the rate is 15 to 20 miles. Of course, Cainites must bear in mind that darkness will slow their rate of travel.

Some clever Cainites mix their own blood with their horses' feed, thereby turning the animals into ghouls. This has several advantages: The horse grows somewhat more accustomed to darkness; it can sustain a tremendous amount of torture from harsh road and travel conditions; and, if the mount possesses Celerity, it can double its top galloping speed. The downside of this process is the fact that ghoul steeds require a tremendous amount of sustenance (some have even been known to develop a taste for meat of various sorts). Ghoul steeds are believed to have birthed the myth of the Nightmare, a demonic stallion capable of running at an unearthly rate.

## DISEASE IN THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

Nothing harrows the medieval populace like disease, and your **Dark Ages** chronicle should reflect this. Ailments and plagues routinely sweep across Europe, decimating entire cities and duchies. Indeed, the sudden appearance of disease can provoke some exciting and unexpected events in your chronicle. What will the characters do as they watch their herd die of typhoid, only to realize that they themselves are the carriers of the disease?

Contagion smites every level of European society, though it is particularly virulent among the peasant class. Only nobles have the resources to receive anything approximating scientific medical treatment. Even among this privileged class, physicians are rare, competent physicians rarer still and, alas, true cures rarest of all.

What few doctors reside within Europe normally live within the cities and are commonly on retainer from a noble family or royal court. Jewish doctors are considered the most capable physicians, having studied and practiced many of the Arab and Greek medical procedures and remedies (which are frowned upon by the Church), though even these practices are intertwined with ritual, astrology and magic. Despite the





Church's censure, such practitioners are actively sought by the noble class and to have access to such quality of care is highly regarded among a noble's peers.

Peasants and merchants, unable to afford physicians, instead seek women wise in the ways of herbalism, crystals and mystic rituals. As with the medical practices of Jewish doctors, the Church frowns upon this supposed use of witchcraft.

But it is the Church that holds the real power in matters of health and medicine. The clergy believes that afflictions and diseases are clearly the wrath of God manifested upon evildoers. To be cured of ailments, afflicted Christians commonly undertake pilgrimages to seek absolution from those they have wronged (conveniently enough, the process of absolution may entail sizable tithings to the Church). Only then, the Church proclaims, will disease be cleansed from sufferers' bodies. Of course, this pious remedy does not always work.

Vampires' rather unsanitary feeding practices certainly contribute to the spread of plague. Indeed, some Ventrue posit that Tzimisce, Nosferatu and Ravnos may be far more than simply carriers, but the true culprits behind some of the more vile diseases. As such, these Ventrue have begun to forbid members of said clans entrance to their domains.

Some common diseases are listed below:

- **Impetigo:** Any kind of skin disease causing pustules to erupt on the epidermis. The Arab practice for remedying this disease is to lance the boils. The Church instead bleeds the patient (which only weakens him).

- **Leprosy:** A horrid disease that corrodes the epidermis of the body. Medieval mortals fear this disease like no other. Accordingly, lepers are the subjects of strict laws passed by the clergy in an effort to prevent the disease's spread. Lepers are required to wear identifying clothing: a tall scarlet hat and a black robe embroidered with white patches. Additionally, lepers must signal their approach by clicking a pair of castanets.

Though lepers are ostracized by society, leper colonies do exist, the greatest of which is the Leproserie des Deux Eaux near Troyes, France. Some mortals show compassion for these poor souls, clothing and feeding them when the opportunity arises. Other towns, however, have hanged or burned lepers, even those found miles outside the town gates.

Some Cainites believe the Nosferatu to be the cause of this malady. It comes as little surprise that the clan has been known to Embrace those afflicted with leprosy.

- **Pneumonia:** This disease takes its highest toll during the winter. The symptoms of pneumonia are fever and difficulty in breathing.



• **Scabies:** A parasitic mite is the cause of this contagious disease. The mite burrows into the skin of its victim, where it lays eggs. The result is a terrible itching sensation.

• **Scurvy:** Fresh fruits are scarce in Europe. What little can be harvested rests in the hands of the nobles and clergy, so most people are restricted to a diet of meats, breads and vegetables, which are usually rank or stale. The result of this scorbutic eating habit is scurvy. Bleeding from mucous membranes, weakness, and enlarged gums are some of the symptoms of this disease.

• **Smallpox:** A great killer on all levels of feudal society. Smallpox is a highly contagious viral disease that sweeps through entire families and small villages, killing all within months of its onset. Smallpox victims suffer from prolonged vomiting and fever. Additionally, red, fluid-filled pustules appear on the surface of the skin. These pustules often burst, leaving the sufferer prone to infection with additional diseases.

• **St. Anthony's Fire:** This is the name given for any skin disease that causes fever and skin inflammation. The ailment stems from the consumption of bread and grains tainted with a poisonous fungus.

• **St. Vitus' Dance:** This colorful title denotes a peculiar collective mental disorder. Those stricken with this disease dance hand-in-hand, foaming at the mouth, until they fall unconscious from exhaustion. St. Vitus sufferers are treated with relative care and compassion, but are forbidden treatment from doctors or hospitals unless they are potentially dangerous to others. At times they are bound to the rood screen in a church, the idea being that by attending mass, their affliction might, by the grace of God, be absolved. Exorcism is believed to be the only cure for the Dance, as the clergy believes victims of this malady to be possessed. The sign of the cross is commonly shaved into sufferers' hair. St. Vitus' Dance is not contagious.

Malkavians have the pick of the crop when they choose to Embrace new members into their flocks, as those stricken with St. Vitus' Dance or any other form of insanity are normally allowed to roam the streets as they please, even at night if they aren't taken to almshouses. Additionally, they prove to make excellent members of herds.

### ST. VITUS' HEEL

In life St. Vitus was best known for his ability at dance. In death, he is known as the patron saint of nervous disorders. As such, his heel is revered as a holy relic of the clergy. Certain Cappadocians speculate that placing this relic in the hands of a Malkavian will cure her of her insanity. The theory has yet to be tested, but the Graverobbers are curious about what repercussions might occur if suddenly the Malkavian clan was to hold within its ranks a perfectly sane Cainite, capable of reason and insight. What would become of the jester clan?

• **Typhoid:** This deadly disease stems from the consumption of food or water contaminated with fecal matter. This contagion is customarily suffered by those who live within city walls, and is swiftly spread by the poor sewer systems and general unsanitary conditions endemic to 12th-century cities. Symptoms of typhoid include fever, intestinal disorders and dysentery.

## LEXICON OF MEDIEVAL TERMS

**Alderman:** Member of a council.

**Anon:** Presently or very soon.

**Aquamanile:** A bowl used for washing hands.

**Bailiff:** A servant who manages the maintenance of a manor or donjon.

**Bailey:** A castle courtyard.

**Banneret:** Knights who bore heraldic standards on the battlefield.

**Benedictines:** An order of monks who believed in the poverty of the Church.

**Bezant:** A gold coin from Byzantium.

**Buisine:** A horn with a raised bell.

**Chamberlain:** A valet who maintains his or her private chambers.

**Chambermaid:** A lady who serves a noblewoman in her bedchamber.

**Chevauchee:** Service owed to a noble to serve as an attendant.

**Cor:** A hunting horn.

**Cornettes:** A two-pointed headdress. (See the illustration on page 111 of *Vampire: The Dark Ages*.)

**Coz:** Short for a cousin, slang for a friend.

**Curia Regis:** The court of justice in a city.

**Craft:** A proficiency at a particular type of labor.

**Demesne:** Another term for land owned by a lord.

**Donjon:** Medieval term for a keep.

**Drum Tower:** A tower that is constructed into the wall. Normally round.

**Fortnight:** A period of two weeks.

**Frankpledge:** An oath taken by a city's citizens to be responsible for each other's sins.

**Gallery:** A balcony that overlooks the great hall in a castle.

**Gill:** A liquid measurement denoting one-fourth of a pint. Also called a noggin.

**Hallmote:** A palatial court.

**Heriot:** A tax paid by a murderer to the family of the deceased.

**Jester:** A comedian or prankster of a court. Some magnates allowed the jester to assume her title on April Fool's Day.

**Kirtle:** A woman's dress.

**Knave:** A deceitful person. Used as an insult.



**Lute:** A medieval guitar.

**Oubliette:** A cramped dungeon with a trap door in the ceiling as its only opening.

**Outremer:** Alternate term used to describe the Holy Land.

**Rummer:** A large drinking container.

**Sennight:** A period of one week.

**Solar:** The private rooms in a castle.

**Stew:** A house of ill repute.

**Tallow:** A candle.

**Vassel:** A noble lord's serf or servant.

## WORDS USED FOR ADDRESSING OTHERS

**Thee:** You. The objective case of *thou*, normally used when addressing friends and relatives.

**Thine:** Yours. Used with friends, relatives and those of the same feudal class.

**Thither:** There. That place.

**Thou:** You. Used when addressing equals.

**Thy:** Your.







JASON  
FELIX 96



# Chapter Three: Storytelling for the Dark Ages

One must put in order what is not yet confused.

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

The secret of telling a good story lies in knowing your audience. While some stories manage to appeal to everyone, most tend to have a somewhat tighter focus, concentrating on action or romance or mystery, for example. Both approaches are completely valid, although a story with broad audience appeal is somewhat more difficult to craft.

Deciding what sort of story you would like to tell is the first step in the process, and to do that you must examine your audience. But how? A writer would consider the genre, the publisher, even the specific demographic group for whom she is writing. The Storyteller of a Vampires The Dark Ages chronicle would consult her players.



With the help of your players, you can determine what appeals to them about various kinds of stories. While some may prefer action and physical conflict to romance and mystery, the players should be able to agree on an acceptable middle ground that includes elements that they all enjoy, or can at least tolerate. And your input at this stage is equally important. After all, this is your story too, and you should enjoy it just as much as they do.

Arrange a time with your players to get together and talk about the chronicle before you start to play. The best time to discuss these elements with your players is before they begin to create their characters, although strictly speaking, you can do it afterward. Setting the theme of the chronicle before character creation will give the players a guideline for what sort of characters they can play, and it might even suggest character ideas to them.

**Storyteller's Tip:** During this process, you will want to take notes on suggestions for characters and settings, because each of these ideas is something one or more players find intriguing — which means that they might like to see them show up in the chronicle later on. Make notes about their suggestions for the chronicle in general, because even if the group discards someone's idea, you can always use that idea as a plot thread for the players later on.

Certainly, some of the choices your players make will limit your creativity as a Storyteller, and you should be prepared for that. Your interests and your players' are liable to differ a bit, and you may find yourself telling stories about the Venetian nobles they find so fascinating, rather than the desert tribesmen about whom you know so much. But remember that the process of choosing the theme is consensual, and your input is just as important as theirs. The point is for you and your players to decide what makes a good chronicle — one that everyone can enjoy.

## ELEMENTS OF A CHRONICLE

Before your group can begin a *Dark Ages* chronicle, you must consider several elements. With each element, you must not only bear in mind how it will fit into the overall story, but how it will limit the possibilities of the story. If you decide to tell the story of English peasants-*cum*-vampires, the characters are somewhat unlikely to see the inside of an Egyptian tomb, especially if the chronicle does not involve a great deal of travel. On the other hand, travel-oriented chronicles will have fewer opportunities for lengthy stories in specific locales. You and your players should decide on a specific balance for each element before you begin to play.

The elements with which you will be most concerned are Atmosphere, Setting, Goals, Obstacles and Cast. These five considerations will determine the theme of the chronicle, and the theme will tell you, the Storyteller, the sorts of stories in which your players would like to participate. The sooner you can determine these, the happier your players will be with the chronicle. And any experienced Storyteller will agree that happy players generally mean less work for the Storyteller.

## ATMOSPHERE

The atmosphere of the chronicle is as important as the content. The atmosphere of a story can be anything from high comedy to dark tragedy, with plenty of options in between. Imagine two writers both telling the story of the Third Crusade. A thrilling tale of King Richard's harrowing exploits in combat differs greatly from a personal narrative of Richard's odd relationship with his enemy Saladin, the Emir of Egypt. And both are certainly more interesting than a historical account of troop movements and battle casualties. This is what atmosphere is all about: the tone of the story.

The chronicle's "flavor" is almost entirely in your players' hands. You may be prepared to present a rollicking comedy of errors, only to discover that they are dead-set on an epic saga of desire, betrayal and revenge. It is in everyone's best interest to agree on a particular tone before the first game even begins. You should note the important distinction between "theme" and "atmosphere," however: The former is what the story is made of; the latter is how it is told.

What sort of flavor should the chronicle have? Ask the players how seriously they intend to take the elements of the chronicle, especially their own characters, because a happy-go-lucky cast traipsing through a tale of a plague-ridden city is going to seem like a round peg in a square hole.

Also, how often should the flavor change? Changing the tone in midsession can be somewhat jarring to the players, particularly if it changes for more than a scene or two. While the occasional jolt of reality — or dose of absurdity — can be a wonderful tool for the Storyteller, too many changes in quick succession can be akin to an emotional roller-coaster ride. This might actually be acceptable to your players, though, so be sure to discuss just how regularly the atmosphere should vary.

## SETTING

The setting is probably the most important component of the chronicle, because it forms the backdrop for most of the stories you and your players will tell. As a result, setting deserves the most consideration and consensus. Will your players prowl the streets of Constantinople, scant days before the armies of the Fourth Crusade attack? Or will they stalk the shadowed bowers of the Black Forest, or rub elbows with England's Prince John? Perhaps they will wander throughout



Dark Medieval Europe, sampling all places, but settling in none.

In fact, the setting will have some kind of effect on every aspect of the characters. How likely are there to be Gangrel walking the streets of Paris? Would there be sixth-generation vampires from four different clans on a sparsely populated island in the middle of the Mediterranean? This is when some of the prelude questions from the character-generation process will require discussion, and other questions will arise as well, the nature of which will require the participation of all the players.

When will the chronicle take place? The specific period of time is as important as the locale. Although **Vampire: The Dark Ages** is set in the late 12th century, you and your players are free to adjust this date as you please. Your players might be interested in assisting (or hindering) Hugh de Payans in the foundation of the Templars in 1115, or repelling the Mongol invasion of Belgrade in 1241. You and your players might enjoy a chronicle spanning over 100 years, in which they find their characters in the right place (or the wrong place, depending on their perspective) during each of the Crusades.

Where is the chronicle set? You will probably find it easiest to work from the general to the specific when deciding this, especially if none of you are history students. Choose a basic geographic area with which you and your players are at least familiar, then consult an encyclopedia or similar refer-

ence to locate places that are particularly interesting in the Dark Medieval time frame. For example, the English river Exe is dammed in 1198, preventing all passage by ship to the city of Exeter. So, a chronicle set in Exeter could turn even darker as the vampires cope with a population that is itself coping with its changing status as a port city. Or perhaps the players might wish to play wealthy merchants in Cherson, on the north coast of the Black Sea (rumored to be the source of the mythical Golden Fleece).

Will the characters have any parts to play in historical events? Many players find history exciting, and involvement in it even more so. A well-told historical story can be somewhat limiting, but also quite rewarding. Imagine telling the story of how a handful of vampires participate in Francis of Assisi's first miracle, or how a coterie of vampire nobles engages in a moonlit horse-race through the streets of La Rochelle. Or you and your players both might want to avoid references to medieval history altogether and set the focus of the chronicle in a small town where nothing of significance has occurred, or will occur, for quite some time, if ever. This particular approach has the advantage of focusing on the characters' effect on the world, as opposed to the world's effect on the characters.

Will the characters have any relationship to historical persons? Whether Kindred or kine, the travels of medieval figures are fairly well documented, and chronicles that directly





involve them should ideally be set somewhere along those travels. Otherwise, players should be prepared to explain how they managed to meet Richard Lionheart while living in Kiev.

Finally, remember that the setting of the chronicle is essentially the Storyteller's "character": You take the responsibility of creating and maintaining it, and the other players can only alter it with your approval. How the setting interacts with the players' characters is up to you, just as their interaction with each other is up to them. And although the players will help you create it, how it develops is almost entirely in your hands.

## GOALS

Important and often-neglected elements of chronicles are the "victory conditions." How will you know when the chronicle is complete? Determining goals for the characters to accomplish is every bit as vital to the success of the chronicle as an interesting setting, because it tells you, the Storyteller, how to plan the culmination of the story. Without that climax, the chronicle will eventually grow stale and the players will lose interest. Note, however, that goals of the chronicle merely define when it is time to set new goals. Reaching the destination does not necessarily signal the end of the journey.

Setting these goals can be especially important if actual playing time is a consideration, because a grand and sweeping epic of mythic proportions will certainly take many sessions to tell, and your players may only be available for a few. Plan the chronicle goals with playing time in mind, and you are much more likely to achieve them.

Before your group suggests various goals, you should set the ground rules for them. Goals should be realistic if you expect to reach them. For example, freeing the characters' home city from the rule of a sadistic Tzimisce *voivode* is somewhat more attainable than driving the Assamites completely out of the Holy Land.

Likewise, the effects should be determinable, in that the players should know when they have "won." In the example above, the players could define success by ousting or killing the *voivode*, or perhaps putting her into torpor, but they could only calculate their victory over the Assamites if they knew how many there were in the first place.

Finally, the players should be certain that the goal is actually something that can be achieved in the context of the chronicle (and the game, for that matter). Discovering a way to blot out the sun might sound suitably grand, but without assistance from the Storyteller, it would be impossible, no matter how many dots the characters have in Obtenebration.

(Persuading a Lasombra Methuselah to plunge an entire city into darkness is another story altogether, though.)

Again, ask the players some questions about goals for the chronicle, and discuss the answers with them. Even if you answer only one or two of them, you should still have plenty of material with which to work.

What common goals do the characters have, if any? An easy way to unite the characters from the beginning is to set them on the same agenda. In some games, this is as easy as telling them that they have all answered the same call for adventure, but **Vampire: The Dark Ages** should provide characters with more depth than that. Work with the players to decide what end is the most interesting to pursue.

How will the characters pursue their goals? Every destination should have several roads leading to it, and the goals of the chronicle should be the same. If the characters want to build their small coastal village into a thriving merchant port, they can use a variety of Abilities and Disciplines. Knowing what those will be in advance will not only tell the players how to create their characters, but ensures that the goal is attainable, given their abilities.

Will their goals require the characters to travel, or to possess specific tools? If so, you must provide the means for them to get from place to place, or to realize the lesser goal of acquiring the tools they need. Greek mythology, for example, is full of astounding epics in which heroes venture far from

home to collect fantastic items, only to turn around and go back, where they put those items to good use.

What happens if the characters fail to achieve their goals? You and your players must consider the consequences of the characters failing. Will they have another chance to try again? And if so, will they be at a severe handicap the next time? Work out a contingency plan in advance with the players, and be prepared to enact it. Defeat might lead to much more rewarding success later, or perhaps it will spark another undertaking entirely.

## OBSTACLES

Once you have a goal firmly in mind, you must develop obstacles for the players to overcome, or the story is going to be fairly boring. Imagine how much less interesting *Star Wars* would be without Darth Vader — or worse yet, the Empire. Without opposition to hinder the heroes, their exploits seem hardly worth mentioning, much less telling a story about. The challenges in your chronicle must force the characters to push the limits of their Attributes and Abilities as much as it forces the players to push the limits of their creativity.

The largest part of your job as Storyteller will be presenting the players with such challenges for their characters. And the toughest part of that will be knowing when to confront them with those challenges. Moderation is the key; obstacles of quality are better than a quantity of obstacles any day.



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For example, a classic sort of challenge is the recurring villain, someone whose plans directly oppose the characters', and whom they grow to hate because she refuses to be brushed aside. Again, a powerful antagonist is best used sparingly, and thus is better suited to lengthy chronicles than brief ones. The archetypal mastermind makes an excellent villain, one who is involved on a regular basis, albeit through the use of henchmen and third parties — essentially, lesser obstacles.

As with the other elements of the chronicle, you should work with your players to decide the general shape that the major challenges should take. But of course you must be careful to leave a significant mystery to them; your players should recognize the obstacles without being privy to all the particulars. So only a few of the necessary questions can involve input from your players.

Is the obstacle even sentient? An atypical chronicle could be the tale of a handful of vampires striving to overcome an ancient curse or — somewhat more mundanely — a plague or drought. Such a chronicle would feature a host of minor villains in the form of unsympathetic and uncooperative characters, human and Cainite, who either refuse to believe the threat exists or feel no compunction to help. A short-term chronicle could even revolve around an impending natural disaster, such as a flood, famine or — in a city, especially — a fire. Without the modern-day convenience of fire departments, entire cities were often decimated by a carelessly handled torch or candle, which, considering the technology of illumination, was quite a common occurrence. Given the propensity of vampires to try to burn one another, the characters could even be directly responsible for the raging inferno.

Is the challenge specifically geared to the characters? An "incidental obstacle" can still be quite effective in making it difficult for the characters to reach their goal. For example, if the players' coterie needs to find a specific person in Nice, a wave of "treasure hysteria" might be sweeping the town, as was common after the Franks took the city from the Cossuran pirates; the person in question may be caught up in looking for lost loot walled up in some building or buried beneath a statue. Something like this is probably best used as a lesser obstacle interfering with the characters, but it could lead to a completely separate plot, in which the characters just happen to get involved because it concerns someone or something they are seeking. The "treasure-hunt" in Nice, for example, could draw the characters into a struggle between two merchant houses to own a particular building where it is suspected a trove of pirate gold lies, even though the players really only want to find a Cappadocian who disappeared near the building in question. The deal-making and backstabbing they encounter could fuel an entire chronicle.

How intelligent is the antagonist? While a recurring villain mastermind is a likely choice, someone less cunning could also pose a significant threat. For example, an exceedingly lucky hunter would certainly keep the characters on their toes, and the Middle Ages are full of suitable candidates,

from God-fearing crusaders to determined nobles. Or the foe could be someone who is irretrievably stupid, but also exasperatingly tough. A Gangrel elder with five dots in Fortitude is going to be a thorn in the characters' sides merely by virtue of how hard it is to defeat him, even if he has only one dot in each of his Mental Attributes. What if the antagonist is a pack of feral dogs that were made into ghouls by an enterprising Nosferatu, but which turned on her and have now developed a taste for vampiric blood?

Certain questions on the nature of the obstacle can only be answered by the Storyteller alone, without the players' knowledge. Of course, you can always reveal this information to the players if you desire, but letting them discover it themselves during the chronicle is usually much more satisfying.

Is the obstacle tied to the characters somehow? Perhaps the archnemesis is closely related to one or more of the characters. Alternatively, the threat is a result of something the characters did early on in the chronicle, and which then either follows them or grows stronger — or both — throughout the story; for example, the fire chronicle mentioned above would fit this category. Another idea is to pit the characters against their sires, who of course know far more about the characters than the players would like, although this particular kind of chronicle requires that you craft an explanation for why their sires created them and then let them run free. Usually the best way to handle this gap in logic is to play a session early on in which the characters are moved to flee their sires, and spend the remainder of the chronicle evading them. The story could include several encounters with their erstwhile masters, until the final confrontation with the fiendish villain who masterminded the entire affair takes place. Or perhaps more directly, the mortal families of the vampires, suspecting something of what has happened to their loved ones, chase them all over Europe in an attempt to lay their tortured spirits to rest.

How can obstacles be overcome? Although you must be certain the challenge can be met, you must also provide for the players devising other solutions. Storytelling games are different from computer games, requiring something more than a command on the keyboard or a movement of the joystick to win. The players will seldom finish a story the way you envision it, but you must have at least one solution ready in case they need a hint, so you can push them in the proper direction. A fire could be defeated by learning that a river that runs near the town could be diverted into the town; a group of hunters could be dissuaded by the characters faking their deaths, making use of an abandoned farmhouse; a marauding elder diabolist could be exposed to the prince — something the characters can discover if they manage to gain the prince's trust. Take some time to consider several ways you would go about dealing with the obstacle, and you will better be able to anticipate the players' strategies.



Is the obstacle merely the “tip of the iceberg”? An easy way to extend a chronicle further is to provide evidence that the villain whom the players just defeated or the flood they just averted or the army they just stopped is merely an indication of a deeper threat. But consider that idea another way: The chronicle is actually about a great challenge, which only becomes apparent when the characters surmount a lesser challenge. If you plan for this sort of revelation from the onset, you can sprinkle little clues about the nature of the true danger throughout the story, thus adding a little mystery. This particular idea is usually best kept a secret by the Storyteller, to preserve that sense of surprise when you finally do tell the players what is in store — and it is best employed with long-term chronicles.

## CAST

Creating the characters to play always seems like it should be the first step in telling a story, but in fact, it should be the last. It is much easier to insert characters into an existing story than it is to build a story around existing characters. Players tend to have vastly different ideas of the kinds of situations their characters will experience, and so create vastly different characters. But if they know the setting, goal and obstacles in advance — especially if they helped decide those elements — they will be much more inclined to play characters who will have some concrete role in the chronicle.

Aside from the obvious considerations — such as characters who will get along with one another without quarreling — what other aspects of their characters should you discuss with the players? This is your chance to make suggestions, so you should make it a point to get involved in the process, if only to make sure the players keep the other elements of the chronicle in mind. Again, keep a notepad handy; the players are going to come up with some good ideas, only a few of which they will actually use. What they discard, however, is certainly fair game for you, because sooner or later you will need to create Storyteller characters with whom the players’ characters will interact.

The majority of the questions about the characters will be answered during this step, and can actually be done while the players create the characters. This also makes a nice segue into their preludes, and it will certainly suggest what sort of Attributes, Abilities and Advantages should be important to the characters.

How old can the characters be? Playing tastes vary, and some players will want their characters to be considerably older than others. Even provided that you start the chronicle with the characters’ Embraces, their ages could be radically different. And given the nature of medieval “medicine,” extremely old characters are generally only found among wealthy nobles; most ordinary people are lucky to live until age 40.

Are the characters from the area in which the chronicle is set? A common but useful storytelling device for explaining

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why characters are ignorant of local customs and politics (both mortal and Kindred) is that they have only just arrived from elsewhere. This also means you that you only need a rudimentary setting for the first few sessions, as the characters themselves discover their new surroundings. On the other hand, if you and the players are familiar with the setting, then you should be able to jump right in without too much descriptive preamble. The characters can also be returning from an extended journey elsewhere, in which case they are mostly familiar with the setting, but some things might have changed while they were away.

Do the characters know each other? The players may wish to assume that their characters at least know of each other, to facilitate interaction without the usual "you-meet-in-a-tavern" scene. But if the characters are meeting for the first time during their prelude or shortly after, you may want to ask how they wish to be introduced — and how soon — then plan on a specific time during the prelude when they can come together. Preferably, this should happen early on; sitting around waiting for your character to be introduced can be quite boring.

Are their preludes connected? This is a quick and dirty way of introducing the characters, although it requires some amount of contrivance, especially if the characters are strangers to one another. But if you need to get them involved immediately, you can always throw them together with little

or no explanation, then let subsequent events explain why they were all Embraced on the same night. Perhaps you could even tie their preludes to the goal or obstacle of the chronicle, such as with the "sires-as-villains" idea. The answer to this question can especially benefit from player feedback, because players often already have ideas in mind for how their characters are introduced to other characters.

How much will the characters interact with mortals? It is entirely possible that your players will want to play in a world where they are the top of the food chain, with little connection to the Cainite population. Their stories are likely to revolve around their affairs with mortals, and they might even be posing as mortals. If so, they will want to purchase Backgrounds more closely related to humanity, such as Herd and Influence. But if the chronicle focuses more on the characters' place in Kindred society, stories will have an entirely different feel, calling for more dots in Status or Generation. Or will they interact with Kindred and kine in roughly equal measure? Characters in this sort of chronicle will want a fairly good mix of both Allies and Status.

And if they do decide to interact a great deal with mortals, what relationship do they have with them? Are they nobles, feeding on their subjects in undeath as they did figuratively in life? Or are they downtrodden peasants, using their new power to exact revenge on those who once oppressed them? For a more Machiavellian chronicle, the characters could be vam-



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pire nobles picking out their prey from among the ruling class. For a grittier tale, they could have been at the bottom of the social ladder while still breathing, and the Embrace did little to change their lowly social status.

How important are the characters? The player characters might be the most important entities for miles around, but this will seem pretty mild a distinction if they have set the chronicle on the northern coast of Iberia (Spain) between Santiago and Pamplona. Such characters will hardly need much in the way of Status, but Resources could be useful. On the other hand, the most important people in Venice are going to be quite important indeed, whether Kindred or kine. If your players choose to play distinguished personages in a major city, they should be prepared to create their characters accordingly, with a generous helping of Politics, Influence or Resources — perhaps even all three.

Indeed, your players might be interested in playing the vassals of a prince, or perhaps even the princes of nearby cities, cooperating against some common threat. Depending on the size of the cities, the characters might be powerful Cainites indeed, in which case you might need to bend the character-creation rules a bit to allow for more dots in Backgrounds — especially Status and Influence.

**Storyteller's Tip:** You should encourage your players to create characters who are all on the same end of the undead social scale. The kinds of stories that involve neonates and Autarkis are vastly different from the kind that princes and elders pursue, and so would practically necessitate splitting up the group on regular occasions. Splitting up the playing group tends to leave some players acting as spectators while the others get to do the "interesting stuff."

## PLAYING

Now that you and your players have laid the groundwork for the chronicle and they have created their characters, the story can begin.

But there are still elements of the chronicle that have yet to be determined, because they only occur during the course of play. Most of these elements are "flavor" for the game, and have every bit as much to do with the players' enjoyment of the chronicle as a writer's style has to do with the readers' enjoyment of a story.

The elements you and your players must finalize include Setting the Mood, Style, Group Dynamics, Nonplayer Characters and Advancement. Each of these is essentially a tool for producing a very specific effect in the course of the story.

## SETTING THE MOOD

Why do people tell ghost stories around campfires? The glib answer would be because telling them over ice cream

sundaes in crowded restaurants destroys the mood. The point is that a well-lit room filled with the sounds of Top 40 music does little to enhance the telling of a Dark Medieval story. To be sure, a talented Storyteller can pull it off, but the purpose of this book is to make your job easier, after all. This section includes suggestions for doing just that.

Lighting is integral to the playing environment, because lighting has an effect on a person's mood and energy. A brightly lit room will be conducive to lively games, full of adventure and excitement, whereas a dimly lit room will convey a sense of gloom and oppression. You will want to modify your playing environment to suit the atmosphere of the chronicle (as you determined before you began playing), but be aware that you can go too far. Many people are photosensitive and will react negatively to extremes of illumination. Since your players already know the atmosphere of the game, work with them to determine a comfortable level of lighting for the playing area — but remember, you still need to be able to read!

Music is also a vital consideration. Loud music will make roleplaying a bit difficult, and background music is generally best when it is played quietly — certainly no louder than the spoken word. But what kind of music should you play? Again, it depends on the flavor of the chronicle. Cheerful music will reinforce a light-hearted session, while somber music will cast a pall over the players.

Because **Vampire: The Dark Ages** is set in the Dark Medieval world, you might consider seeking out music that conveys the feel of a preindustrial time: madrigal pieces and Gregorian chants, for example. You could also play appropriate "nature-sounds" recordings, particularly those that contain the sounds associated with unusual weather conditions (storms, high winds and so forth).

Perhaps your best recourse for assembling the proper collection of ambient music is to consult with a well-stocked music store, especially one with a large catalog of orchestral and choral selections. The clerks tend to be well-informed when it comes to period music, as many of them are music students. Ask them for suggestions, and find out if they will let you listen to samples. If you can bring them an example of the kind of music you want, they will most likely be able to help you find more in the same style.

The following is a partial list of music you might try:

The Tallis Scholars: various compositions.

The King's Singers: various madrigal pieces.

Arvo Part: *Te Deum*.

Tomas Luis De Victoria: *Requiem Mass* — *Officium defunctorum* ("Office of the Dead").

Mannheim Steamroller: various compositions, many of which are good mood music. Especially appropriate is *Fresh Aire VI*, which is based on Greek myths.



## STYLE

Whereas mood can be largely variable as befits the need, playing style — and storytelling style — is part of your own personality, and is much harder to change. Some players enjoy a more relaxed, “go-with-the-flow” method, while others prefer to be completely in control. By the same token, many Storytellers adopt a plot-driven approach and usher the characters through the story; others let the players set the pace, always ready to supply a bit of narrative in the form of an encounter or an event.

So which is the correct way? Deciding will require familiarity with your players, which goes back to the first statement in the storytelling introduction: Know your audience. And again, the best method of learning their expectations is asking them. The problem with this is that players, like their characters, will have experiences and desires different from even their closest friends', and their expectations will vary drastically. If you tailor your style to one player, the others will be uncomfortable. Unless the players are extremely compatible with one another, this is almost unavoidable.

The answer, then, lies in adjusting your own style as required, which may mean that you lead one player through the story by his nose, while with another you merely have to get out of her way. Until you know which is which, though, you should be prepared to sit back and watch. Present the situation to the players and observe. In short order, you will know who is “dynamic” and who is “static,” which will give you a good idea how to handle them during the chronicle. The important thing to remember is to give each individual player exactly as much freedom as she wants to make decisions that affect her character.

## GROUP DYNAMICS

Over the years the definition of “good roleplaying” has undergone many changes. Since they first appeared, roleplaying games have evolved from first-person wargaming to studies in interpersonal relations. Players have advanced from imaginative self-indulgence through creative problem-solving to what most closely resembles impromptu drama, and the journey is not over yet. This same progression occurs with individual players. Whatever aspect of roleplaying originally appeals to them, most players will eventually sample all of them.

All of your players are most likely going to have different reasons for roleplaying. Some will want the ego boost of playing a powerful, independent character; others will delight in pitting their intellects against fiendish puzzles; and still others will join the game merely to be social. Perhaps a few will even play for the sheer escapist pleasure of temporarily adopting a different persona. Whatever the case, each player is going to expect you to entertain him in the manner he most enjoys. How are you going to cope with this diversity of interests? You keep everyone happy by providing something for everyone to do.



A common mistake of novice Storytellers is “spotlighting”: concentrating the action on one specific character. Meanwhile the other players grow bored and may send their own characters looking for something more interesting to do — generally something disruptive to everyone else. But, by presenting every player with a challenge designed to fit the character, you can ensure that all the players participate in the same story, instead of growing impatient enough to try to create their own. So while the Tremere wizard performs his ritual, the Brujah powerhouse fends off the duke’s ghouls and the Ravnos vagabonds lead the castle guards on a merry chase. Shift regularly and frequently between the action, and the players will be too busy to look for something else to do. Change players just when each is at a crucial point, and you can keep the players on the edge of their seats.

Another error Storytellers sometimes make is “favoritism.” A player will create a character who perfectly matches the Storyteller’s goals, and the Storyteller will focus most of the plot on that one character. Scene after scene will center on her, and the other players may start to get the feeling that their characters are actually only secondary. If this is carried too far, players will probably prefer just to stay home. Since you want everyone to play, you need to ensure that all of the players get “equal time.”

You can avoid favoritism by making a list of all the characters and keeping it close at hand while you write up the outline for the session. Be sure that each character has some kind of event or encounter planned. If you are careful, you can even give players more than one “segment,” depending on the magnitude of the event and the style of the player. For longer sessions, you might even want to prepare two or three medium-length segments for each character. And as always, when a player looks like he wants time to think, switch to another player.

Bear in mind also that many scenes require very little of your attention — particularly if a scene involves several players. Whenever you plan to focus on one character temporarily, try to give the other players something to discuss until you are ready to get back to them.

## NONPLAYER CHARACTERS

The players in your **Vampire: The Dark Ages** chronicles are only one small part of the cast, and very soon you will find yourself playing pretty much every other character they ever encounter. To make the nonplayer characters seem as real as possible, you will want to ask yourself a number of questions when creating them — even those you create on the spur of the moment during a session. This process is similar to what the players do when they create their characters, and when you both plan the details of the chronicle.

The questions below are in order of importance. That is, you will need answers for the first few, but the more you answer, the more “fleshed-out” a character will be. Obviously, if you are creating a character on the spot, you will need to

answer fewer questions, but if you are designing the player characters’ archnemesis, you should be prepared to answer every last one.

How is your character different from others? Speech patterns and mannerisms will be the first thing the players notice about characters they meet in the chronicle, and if all the NPCs sound and act alike, the players will probably find them uninteresting and tend to forget their names. But by varying the tone, accent and even volume of your voice, and adopting a distinctive mannerism (such as tugging on your ear while listening to others speak), you can quickly assign a “personality” to even the most incidental character.

If this sounds difficult, practice outside the game. Rent a movie and mimic a character from every scene — the more distinctive the better. Copy the actor’s way of speaking, facial expressions and hand gestures. Notice the use of catch phrases, nonverbal sounds (coughing, laughing and so forth), even the way the character sits or stands. Very good actors can play several diverse roles in many different ways, and each role will differ markedly from the last. This is because the actor makes it a point for the character to seem like someone else altogether. Actors who are unable to do this are easy to spot, and they are a perfect illustration of the need for individualized NPCs.

What are the NPC’s motivations, as far as the player characters are concerned? Sometimes these are extremely simple, such as “Sell the nice people this lovely chamberpot” or “Keep the scum away from Her Ladyship.” Occasionally they are more complex, such as “Bring these odd strangers to the inn on the road to Prague, where the Viscount has promised a reward for the delivery of pale-skinned people.” Everyone has motivations, and the more immediate ones are fairly easy to pick out. Think again about movies: How many times have you seen a character introduced and within a minute his or her personality, motivations and relationship to the other characters were established? Movies have only a short time to show you all the elements of the story, and your game sessions will be much the same. The less you expect to use a character later on, the more you need to establish her personality from the beginning.

What does this NPC look like? Many Storytellers find this aspect of NPCs the most difficult to convey, because of the nearly infinite amount of options open to them. Although the clothing section in Chapter Two will help you decide what a character is wearing, there is a lot more to consider, and every piece of information tells a little story about the NPC. If the character is filthy, he is probably poor. If he has bulging biceps, he is probably a workman of some kind. If she wears jewelry, she is wealthy. Obviously, the more you want to spell out who the character is, the more detail you will have to provide.

The trick here is to work from a general description, which is most likely all your players will be interested in anyway. If you describe the character as “poor,” your players will mentally fill in the shabby clothes, the coating of dirt and



greasy hair, the haggard expression and the nagging cough. Knowing this, you can feel free to label someone as "wealthy," then ask your players to describe how they think the person would look, with you supplying certain specifics (hairstyle, clothing color, general physical condition, etc.) as befits your particular mental image of the NPC. Try some other examples. What do you think of when someone says "monk" or "priest"? What about "sailor" or "soldier"? It should take only five or six adjectives before you have a fairly complete "picture" of any given NPC.

What is this NPC's name? Even if they never expect to meet this NPC again, your players will want to know what his name is, and it is often the last thing they ask before moving on with the story. Lack of preparation for this can lead to a "Hans, the Cheese Merchant," "Hans, the Gatekeeper" or even a small army of people named "Hans," no two of whom are related, let alone the same person. And while some names are extremely common, there is such a thing as going too far.

The players can help you with names by suggesting some, but you might also want to pick up one of the numerous "baby-name" books available. Many are geared toward specific nationalities and so will provide you with names typical of the region where your chronicle takes place. Bear in mind the differences between modern names and medieval names, though; refer to Chapter Two for some naming practices standard in the Middle Ages.

How does this NPC feel about the players' characters? Even if the characters have not previously interacted with the NPC, she might know them, or at least know of them. If so, how does she feel about them? For most purposes you only need to be as specific as "friendly," "hostile," or more likely "neutral," but the more detail you invest in this NPC, the more real she will seem. For more variation — and plot complication — she could be well disposed toward one of the characters, but afraid of another. Making use of the mannerisms and speech patterns mentioned previously is an excellent way of conveying the NPC's reaction to the characters.

Does this NPC have any ulterior motives? Most of the people the player characters meet will be fairly straightforward folk with clear intentions. But occasionally you will want to include NPCs — even if the characters will only ever see them once — who say one thing and want another. Because they are playing vampires in a Dark Medieval setting, your players will probably treat most NPCs as potential threats anyway, but you should have a clear picture in mind as to which of the NPCs actually are. Then, feel free to drop subtle — or sometimes blatant — hints that an NPC has a hidden agenda. Perhaps the rat-catcher who bought the last round of drinks was only a few minutes earlier complaining about how bad business has been lately, or the silk merchant who was haggling so fervently over a bolt of material suddenly lowers his prices when the characters mention they have been to the Far East. With the addition of an ulterior motive, even a fairly innocent one, the personality of an NPC is firmly cemented.



How are the characters liable to meet this NPC again? All encounters eventually come to an end, and once the characters have parted company with the NPC, will they ever see her again? If so, under what circumstances? If she is someone who commonly visits the area in which they found her, the answer is easy, but perhaps she was only passing through — or the characters are. Encountering the same character again — especially a completely innocuous one — reminds the players that life is full of coincidences, only some of which bode something sinister. But aside from this, a recurring NPC — whether villain, ally or something in between — can be a useful tool for you, the Storyteller, to use in order to revive old plot threads.

**Storyteller's Tip:** If you at all expect an NPC to return later in the story, jot down the answers to all of these questions, perhaps on an index card. Keeping this information handy will enable you to quickly reestablish the NPC's personality, recalling mannerisms and details of her dealings with the characters. You can "pick up where you left off," and the players will almost immediately recognize the character's distinctive description. Doing this also serves as a reminder to their players that their characters' actions have an effect on the world and this allows them to form lasting relationships with someone other than the other characters.

## ADVANCEMENT

Maintaining a proper balance of character advancement and learning is crucial to any ongoing chronicle. But handling the expenditure of experience points is almost an art. If you force the players to play out each new point of an Attribute or Discipline, they will soon grow frustrated with the slow progression. But if you simply let them spend experience, their characters will too quickly advance to the point where your NPC villains are no match for them. The key to moderating their development is to create a system for explaining every increase in capabilities.

This "system" is less rigid than it sounds. Essentially, you decide the process of when you award experience, and when and how the players can actually spend it. Prerequisites for spending experience should vary depending on exactly what players want to do with their experience. Increasing a Talent might involve merely pushing one's limits, while increasing a Skill would require practice, and increasing a Knowledge would require study. In most cases, characters can train and study during their free time, which means that unless they are constantly busy, they will always have time to raise their scores in their Abilities.

Advantages are something else altogether. Increasing the score in a Virtue could require the player to explain exactly what led to the gain. A similar method could work for raising

a character's Willpower score. Moderate this carefully, because some players will want to take advantage of this system, claiming that each resistance of a minor temptation is a major exercise in determination.

Disciplines and Backgrounds should probably be developed with the Storyteller's cooperation. One suggestion is to have players inform you when they wish to increase specific Disciplines or Backgrounds, and let you write it into the story as an event or encounter. Increasing a Background Trait is usually a simple matter of explaining how a character came to possess something previously unavailable. You should probably write down some ideas beforehand, based on what Backgrounds the characters initially purchase and whatever else in which they express interest. Suppose a player wishes to increase her character's score in Mentor from 2 to 3. During the course of a session she learns that the elder who favors her has just achieved a major victory over a political opponent and is now one of the prince's advisors.

Increases in Disciplines are actually easier to explain than increases in Backgrounds. Look back to the character's prelude and remember how he first learned that he had the particular Discipline at all. Usually, you demonstrated this by surprising the Nosferatu with his ability to speak with animals, or the Ravnos with a visible image of something she had imagined. Now that the player is starting to use experience, simply note the effects of the character's next level of the Discipline and wait for an opportune moment to surprise the character with it — or actually write it into the session.

For example, a player character with the Discipline of Presence wants to raise his score from two dots (Dread Gaze) to three (Entrancement). At some point during the next session, he attempts to use Awe to persuade some thugs in an alley to let him pass, but instead they fall all over themselves trying to help him get safely to his destination.

Increasing Generation is much more difficult to explain through this sort of happy coincidence. Unless you wish to allow characters to "realize" they are actually closer to Caine than they guessed, you are best advised to have advancement in Generation be something gained only through roleplaying. This means, of course, that characters will only be able to lower their Generations through diablerie. Since this invariably results in the destruction of the elder vampire who acts as the "steppingstone" to Caine, anyone who participates in diablerie automatically violates the Second Tradition. If your players are willing to take this risk with their characters, let them — but be prepared to include an extra plot thread should the Kindred community become aware of what the player character has done....

Grander changes in the character will require more extensive roleplaying. While a character's Demeanor might shift fairly frequently, an alteration in Nature is a fundamental alteration of the character, and the player should explain why she feels her character has (or will) come around to a new archetype. Similarly, choosing to follow a different Road



reflects a momentous departure from an established and ingrained moral code, something to which most ordinary people cling steadfastly all their lives; though admittedly, a vampire would have considerably more opportunities to undergo such a drastic change. If the player feels strongly about her character following a new moral path, she should arrange with the Storyteller to undergo some epiphany of spirit leading to the new Road.

## THE LEARNING PROCESS

Just as characters learn and grow during the course of a chronicle, so should the Storyteller. The process for that, however, is a bit more difficult than the process for characters improving themselves. You must constantly rate your performance as a Storyteller, make adjustments and try again — then examine your performance once more. Effectively, this self-examination can go on for as long as you continue to tell stories.

The first thing you need to do is get used to the idea that you are going to make mistakes. Everybody does, even veteran Storytellers, but the reason they are veterans is that they learned from their previous errors and improved as a result. A hallmark of less successful Storytellers is that they fail to recognize when they have slipped up — or they refuse to admit it. But storytelling is just like any other natural talent: It grows by being stretched to the limit. So, if you want to improve your performance, acknowledge your mistakes and learn from them. This section is designed to teach you how to analyze your storytelling skills and make improvements on them.

You should always keep a notepad handy during each session. This is a useful tool in any event, as it allows you to record important points of the chronicle, such as new NPCs, but it also gives you a place to jot down reminders for things to do between sessions. You might think of it as a combination to-do list and memo pad, but the notepad's primary purpose is as a sort of "report card" for your sessions.

Start to keep track of everything that occurs during each session, whether it is planned or spontaneous. (You can also use this later on as a reference for the chronicle — sort of like a synopsis.) You can be as general or specific as you like, but make sure you jot down anything that could have gone better (as well as things that went extremely well). For example, the player characters react suspiciously to a completely innocent encounter with an NPC scullery maid, perhaps denying you the opportunity to introduce a carefully planned plot thread. Or they encounter a pack of werewolves who nearly wipe them out, leading to a lull in the chronicle while they recover.

The primary thing to remember is that situations such as these merely demonstrate that something went wrong. Rather than placing blame on your players or doubting your abilities as a Storyteller, you should concentrate on identifying exactly where things went awry. Once you have isolated the problem, you can take steps to repair it and prevent something similar from happening again.

You might have an immediate emotional reaction to the situation, so you should take some time before you jump right into correcting it, thus avoiding the peril of overcorrecting. Discuss the session with your players. Think of their opinions as a sort of "vote" on whether the game went well. Do they think it went as badly as it seemed to you? Perhaps they felt silly overreacting to the scullery maid, or they agree that attacking the werewolves was a bad idea. Regardless, ask them for suggestions on how they think similar situations could be avoided in the future, and remember: This is meant to be constructive criticism. Avoid personal attacks at all costs. Use your notepad to write down the players' comments during this discussion.

Then, shortly before the next session, sit down with your notes and go over the situations one by one. If you are new to storytelling, there might be several situations to analyze, but just take them one at a time. In each case, see if you can determine where the problem lies. Was it in your presentation? Were the players distracted by something outside the game? Did you miscalculate an NPC's scores in comparison to the player characters'?

Whatever the cause, give some thought to how you can correct the problem next time. Were they suspicious of the innocent NPC? Let them catch the next one doing something completely innocuous — perhaps even embarrassing — or present the poor, unsuspecting NPC in circumstances where he is completely at the player characters' mercies. The players were distracted? Avert the distraction by either taking time to let them get it out of their system (if it is some kind of discussion) or asking the players to put it aside (if it is a tangible object, such as a book or a video game). You made the NPC too tough or too weak? Make photocopies of the players' character sheets and use their scores as guidelines for creating challenging opponents.

Then prepare the next session's outline. As you sit down to begin playing, go over your list again, discussing with the players any ideas you have for improving the game. Ask them for their feedback. Do your solutions seem reasonable? Do they even feel that a given solution is necessary? Remember, they too have had time to consider their performance at the last game, and they may feel that the situation you thought was so awful might have more to do with the random whim of Lady Luck than with any particular failing on your part as Storyteller.



Once you actually start playing, take a moment now and again to refer to your list and to check your progress. Have you handled similar situations better this time? If you have, cross them off the list. Or do you need to try a different solution? Regardless of your outcome, repeat the process, again keeping track of situations that still need improvement.

It may take a few sessions worth of trial-and-error, but eventually you will finish each session with fewer and fewer notes in your pad. When your players are happy enough with your storytelling that you have altogether stopped making notes for improvement, pat yourself on the back: You are a veteran Storyteller now.







# Chapter Four: Friends, Enemies and Miscellany

*From this arises the question whether it is better to be loved rather than feared, or feared rather than loved. It might perhaps be answered that we should wish to be both; but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved.*

*- Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe**



# GHOULS

The Cainites, despite their vast powers of manipulation, are unable to rule their fiefs alone. In the Dark Medieval world, only a few cities have anything approaching a lively night life, and most commerce takes place during the daytime. In order to obtain even the simplest of items, a Cainite must have someone who can go out in the daytime, barter in the market or square, and return, all the while careful not to reveal the exact location of the haven. Thus, in order to manipulate the world in which they live, and to live as they desire, the Cainites of the Dark Ages rely heavily upon ghouls.

Each clan creates ghouls who will meet the clan's particular needs and who generally mesh with clan interests. Princes and other Cainite lords depend heavily on their ghouls to watch over their domains during the daytime, so they tend to choose kine who are highly skilled in particular areas. This is especially so for Cainites who rule a castle or other large haven, for it takes a large staff to maintain such properties.

Since the kine of the Dark Medieval world tend to live in closely knit family groups, many Cainites have taken to adopting entire families and making them all ghouls. It isn't even necessary for them to be a family in the strictest sense. A vampire who lives in a monastery, for example, may have turned all the brothers into ghouls, thus creating a stable and loyal ghoul "family."

Ghouls are often created as a sort of intermediary step to the Embrace. Although most Cainite lords require that a vampire request permission to make a ghoul, such permission is easier to obtain than for making a childe. This is how many Cainites, realizing that they do not yet have the clout or the favor to ask the prince for permission to sire, preserve those whom they deem worthy of the Embrace. Since ghouls do not age, they can be kept almost indefinitely, so long as they periodically ingest the vitae of their sponsor.

## WHAT IS A GHOUL?

Ghouls differ physiologically from mortals in several respects. Through the periodic ingestion of vampire vitae, the natural bodily processes and humors become twisted to the service of their Cainite lords. First and foremost, ghouls grow infernally strong, and all ghouls gain a point of the vampire Discipline Potence. Furthermore, the processes of aging and death which God has levied upon all creatures are suspended through this black sorcery; a ghoul ceases to age as long as she continues to ingest vampire blood periodically. God's tax is only suspended — not canceled — and lies poised to smite the unnatural creature. The longer a ghoul cheats death, the more often she must drink at the vampiric fount, and should such a ghoul fail to partake of the unholy nectar, all the years she has evaded will fall upon her at once.

The balance of the ghoul's humors tilts toward the sanguine, and the ghoul thus becomes able to metabolize ingested

vampire vitae in a manner similar to a Cainite. Thus, ghouls who have gorged on their master's blood are able to shrug off mortal wounds and call upon supernatural strength and vitality. Ghouls may store up to 10 Blood Points in their bodies and may spend one point per turn. Ghouls are unable to produce more blood, however, and must refresh themselves from the master's veins if they wish to make use of such unholy power again.

Ghouls often display profound psychological differences from humans as well, particularly those ghouls who are of great age or who are from the hereditary "ghoul families" of Eastern Europe. Ruled as they are by a quasi-vampiric Beast and netted in an eternal web of blood and thralldom, many ghouls display bizarre cravings and obsessions. Additionally, ghouls' imperfect understanding of both their powers and vampire society sometimes leads them to commit strange acts.

Ghouls make acceptable characters in a **Vampire: The Dark Ages** chronicle, and they offer several advantages when vampire characters must deal with mortals. Keep in mind, however, that ghouls are designed to be supporting cast. A player who chooses to run a ghoul character should accept the fact that his character will be weaker than — and subservient to — the vampires in the troupe.

## GHOULS OF THE CLANS

Below are some guidelines to help the Storyteller determine the types of ghouls likely to be found with certain clans. A few clans have specific groups of ghouls associated with them, and these are delineated below.

### ASSAMITES

By tradition, most Assamite ghouls are from the Holy Land, Egypt and the Almohad Empire. The Assamites are very fond of mercenaries or proven warriors and will supplement their training until they have a small but fiercely loyal bodyguard. Only the highest-ranking Assamites, or those who generally maintain a single residence, keep ghouls. Assamites who travel a great deal on clan business are unlikely to have a ghoul at all, or if they do, it is more likely to be a manservant of some kind.

### BRUJAH

Brujah choose their ghouls based on their own particular brand of rebellion, anarchy or political thought. They prefer kine who respect strong leadership but despise corrupt leaders. Brujah ghouls tend to be rebellious peasants and minor nobility, but courtiers and diplomats are also chosen by the clan. Additionally, the Brujah have taken an interest in ghouling servants and trusted assistants to the highest of mortal councils. They use these ghouls to gain information about the plans of the kine (and their Cainite backers, if any) and to persuade noble lords and Church officials to commit acts that will enrage the populace.

## CAPPADOCIANS

For a clan so interested in death, the Cappadocians have an amazing number of ghouls in their service. Most of these ghouls find their niche as servants, but some of them are researchers, scholars and doctors. The Cappadocians have recently taken a greater interest in furthering the financial resources of their clan and have started to transform small families of merchants and other traders into ghouls. The money earned by these ghouls is then used to pay for research, to buy ancient books and manuscripts and to pay off local officials who ask awkward questions about nighttime visits to the graveyard.

The most prominent Cappadocian ghoul family is the Giovanni family of Venice. Several Giovanni have been Embraced, but more are kept as ghouls by their now-Cainite relatives and other Cappadocians. The Giovanni are reputed to be necromancers of the highest order and are rumored to be developing a unique branch of sorcery that utilizes their particular talents and knowledge concerning the spirits of the dead and, some say, the living. For now, they are content to rummage around in musty catacombs and to manage their merchant interests on behalf of the Cappadocians.

### A DARK FUTURE FOR THE CLAN OF DEATH

Of course, the Giovanni will eventually become much more than just a family of ghouls. In 1444, the head of the family, Augustus Giovanni, will commit Amaranth on the Antediluvian Cappadocius, thereby taking over the entire bloodline. The Giovanni will then abandon the pursuit of Mortis and ruthlessly purge the remaining Cappadocians. In time the Giovanni will be recognized as a major clan, and the Cappadocians will fade into the pages of Cainite history. For more information on the eventual fall of the Cappadocians at the hands of the Giovanni, Storytellers should read **The Last Supper**.

Also, if a Storyteller wishes, she may allow Giovanni ghouls to use the Necromancy Discipline from **The Vampire Players Guide** instead of Mortis. If the Storyteller does decide to allow Necromancy, it is recommended that only the first three levels be used, and that all difficulties for using it be increased by one. This reflects the newness and incomplete nature of the Discipline, which the Giovanni have not yet fully developed or mastered.



FRIENDS, ENEMIES AND MISCELLANY





## FOLLOWERS OF SET

Setites are very particular as to whom they choose to be their ghouls, and, as with their choices of persons to Embrace, they tend to pick those of Egyptian descent. The Followers of Set lure people who thirst for power and pleasure, and often hold out the promise of the Embrace to their ghouls as motivation to remain loyal. Those whose service proves exceptional are sometimes rewarded with the Embrace, but most are killed serving as guardians, messengers, simple entertainment or as food sources for their sponsors. The Setites do, however, rely heavily upon their ghouls for daytime commerce, especially considering the Setites' extreme sensitivity to sunlight.

The Priests of Set are the only large, organized group of ghouls for the Setites. They employ a variety of dark rites and practices to keep the worship of Set alive in the largely Muslim lands of Egypt. Each priest reports, of course, to a Follower of Set, who often heads the temple to which the priests belong. The priests not only serve as sources of ready vitae for the Setites, but are also cunning manipulators of mortal desires, just as their sponsors are. The Priests of Set are one of the prime forces behind the slave markets of Alexandria, acquiring those poor souls and offering them as specially trained slaves to Arab lords throughout the Holy Lands and the Almohad Empire.

## GANGREL

The Gangrel don't usually create ghouls. Their solitary nature and lack of a permanent haven make ghouls more of a burden than a bargain. On occasion, though, Gangrel have been known to transform a deserving mortal who fights for some cause with which the Gangrel are strongly aligned. Those who fight to free the forests from tyrannical overlords or who fight to protect and preserve wildlife from overhunting and extinction are some examples of ghouls that a Gangrel may help for a time. Once the goal is achieved, however, the Gangrel will more than likely move on and leave the ghoul to suffer the withdrawal symptoms that always accompany a lack of ready vitae. Regardless, on the rare occasion when a Gangrel does decide to settle down, she tends to choose ghouls from the ranks of people who live on the fringes of civilization — survivors who can take care of themselves.

## LASOMBRA

Ghouls of the Lasombra tend to be people involved in commerce or politics. Ever the powers behind the throne, Lasombra choose to insulate themselves with several layers of agents and spies, and the most trusted and talented of these are often turned into ghouls. Lasombra will also ghoul persons whom they particularly hope will remain loyal to their cause, as the ghouls are inevitably Blood Oath-bound to their spon-

sor. Ghouls play a key role for Lasombra all throughout Dark Medieval Europe, but especially so in the Holy Roman Empire, where they are involved in the civil war. Lasombra ghouls are liberally scattered throughout the court of Philip of Swabia, and some ghoul spies occupy the court of Philip's rival, Otto of Brunswick. The Lasombra have been alarmed lately at the Ventrue's success in ferreting out the Lasombra ghouls in Otto's court, and they have been trying to figure out a way to keep the ghouls from being discovered so easily.

## MALKAVIANS

Madness comes in many shapes and forms, and the Malkavians do not generally discriminate in their choice of ghouls except that they must be mad. Those Malkavians who hold fiefs will generally surround themselves with ghouls who can only politely be titled "foole." They keep them for entertainment and for their own strange purposes. Do not believe, however, that these ghouls are harmless. More than one mass murderer and demented, twisted soul has been made into a ghoul by a shrewd Malkavian, in order to utilize their special talents. While Malkavians may be seen as quirky jesters by many Cainites, the ghouls of other clans are all too familiar with the devil-tainted madness of the Malkavian ghouls.

## NOSFERATU

One would think that a clan as secretive as the Nosferatu would have little or no need for ghouls, and that ghouls might

even be a liability for them. This is not so. The Nosferatu, as gatherers and purveyors of information, need ghouls almost more than any other clan. Ghouls are some of the few people whom the Nosferatu can trust to give accurate accounts of what they have seen and heard. Nosferatu take their ghouls from among the outcast and downtrodden, of which there is a surplus in Dark Medieval Europe. Some Nosferatu have also chosen to transform miners and architects, who are working to shore up and carve out new catacombs beneath the cities of Europe. All Nosferatu ghouls, regardless of their initial appearance, tend to take on a few of the less severe physical deviations of their sponsors, due to the warping nature of Nosferatu vitae.

The city of Rome is off limits to all but the most brave or foolhardy Cainites. The seat of western Christendom, while not holy in and of itself, attracts enough persons who have True Faith that it is dangerous for a Cainite to easily walk the streets. This holds true for even the Nosferatu, as True Faith can cut through Obfuscate like a sharp knife through silk. Thus, the Nosferatu stick to the extensive and ancient Roman sewers and catacombs that lie beneath the metropolis. In order to garner valuable information throughout the city, the Nosferatu have recruited a group known simply as the Beggars. The Beggars are drawn from the ranks of the poor, diseased and lame who live in the corners and cracks of the city. Some are old men who lost their legs fighting the Crusades, while others are children who have either run away from home or who have



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somehow lost their parents. The Beggars watch nearly everything that transpires in the city, including who comes and goes, who is part of which political faction and what is going on in the Church. Most people consider the urban poor to be of such little consequence that they hardly notice them. This can lead to many slips of the tongue and revelations of issues that should have only been brought up in private. The Beggars are highly prized by the Nosferatu of Rome, and the Lepers do not countenance anyone — Cainite or kine — harming them without right or reason.

## RAVNOS

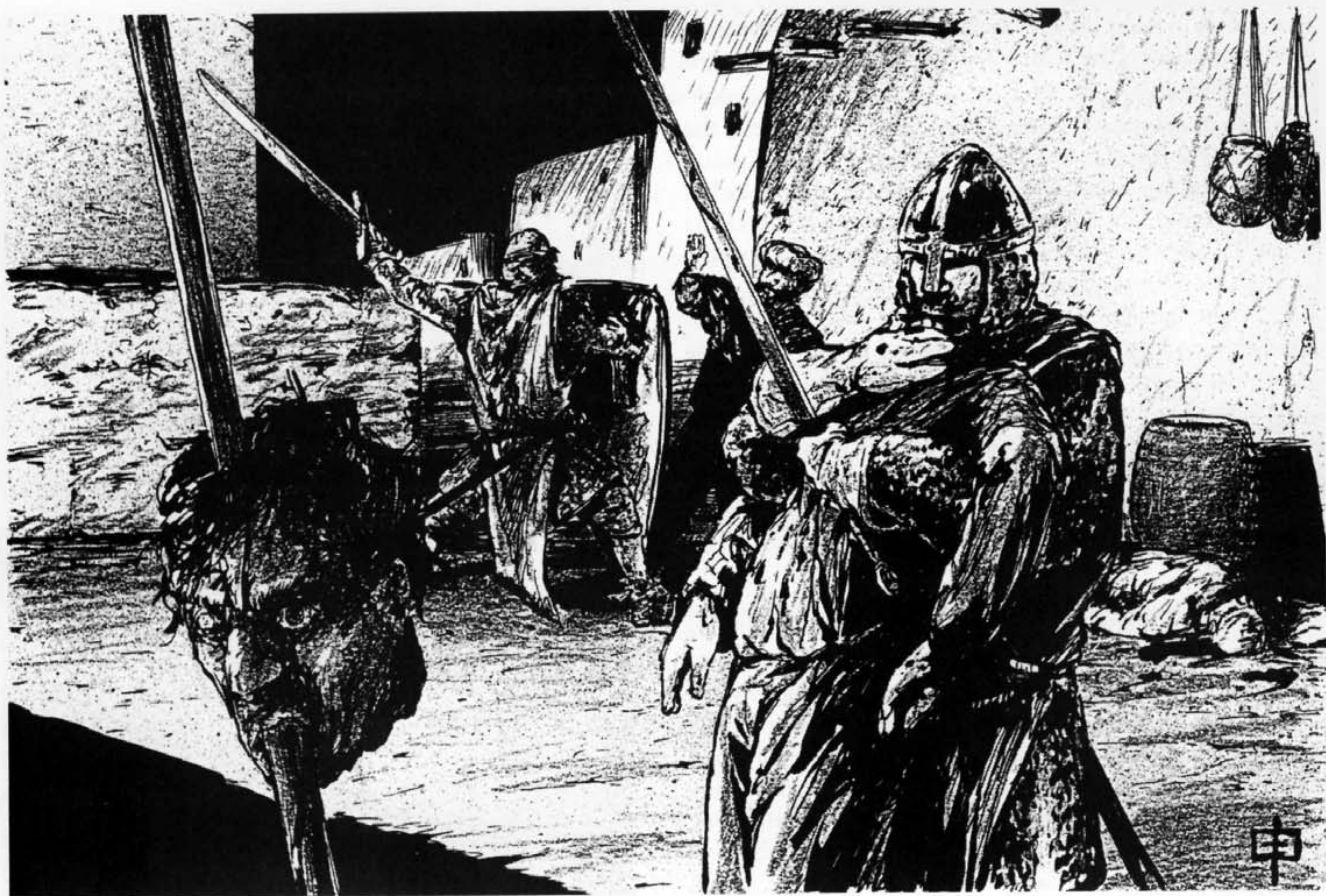
Ravnos tend to wander a great deal, and therefore they encounter many of the same problems in keeping ghouls as the Gangrel. Some Ravnos, however, have recently been utilizing a unique solution to this problem; they join up with bands of traveling merchants or entertainers, making their permanent havens in fully covered wagons that join the caravans. This has provided these Ravnos with an opportunity to create ghouls, and they have taken advantage of it. Those Ravnos who do settle in an immobile haven are likely to pick tricksters from among the mortal populace. Some Ravnos have also ghouled judges and lawyers (yes, they existed even in the late 12th century), using them to gain favors and to avoid the trouble that inevitably follows the typical outrageous exploits of the clan.

## TOREADOR

During Rome's glory days, the Toreador reveled in debauchery and freely shared their vitae, creating ghouls who were beautiful, artistic or both. Since the fall of Rome, most Toreador have turned to more serious and sober artistic pursuits, and have gained a great deal of influence in the Church. It is not uncommon for well-placed or important Toreador to have a veritable army of ghouls placed throughout the Church hierarchy, reporting, spying and controlling in the name of the Clan of the Rose. Most of these people are artisans of some sort, illuminating books, singing, painting and so on, but the Toreador have also been transforming architects and masons as they begin the centuries-long task of building great, brooding cathedrals. Other kine are also desired, including some bodyguards, as most Toreador are not known for their martial abilities.

Some Toreador, however, are very martial, and they create ghouls to pursue the recovery of holy relics and ancient works of art from the Saracens. One such group of ghouls is the Knights of the Sable Rose. The Sable Rose is a secret order within the Hospitallers, and its members roam through the Holy Land in search of saints' relics and other items of historical or artistic value. The Knights work for a group of martial and politically minded Toreador led by a Methuselah, Andrew of Normandy. They take their draught of vitae as the Blood of Christ during the sacrament. Many believe the causes





they pursue and the creatures they serve to be holy and righteous in God's eyes. In addition to being a skilled warrior of noble birth, each ghoul knight is also an artisan of some sort, though more effete Toreador would not call the ability to create the finest arms and armor "art." Still, these ghouls are well known among the Cainites of the Holy Land, and are mortal enemies of the Assamites' ghouls. It is rumored that some of their steeds may also be ghouls.

## TREMERE

Although some Tremere have made ghouls out of lab assistants and trusted bodyguards, they have avoided making large numbers of ghouls, seeing them as a threat to their own inherent power structure. Besides, with such splendid and talented servants as the Gargoyles — who are much more powerful and respected than ghouls but much less powerful and respected than full Cainites in the eyes of the Tremere and most other vampires — the Tremere find they have little need for ghouls. Some Tremere are beginning to experiment with animals by having their Gargoyles Embrace them to see how well they can be trained to act as guardians and "beasts of burden." See below for more information on Gargoyles and Gargoyle creatures.

## TZIMISCE

Of all the clans that utilize ghouls, the Tzimisce is perhaps the most prolific. Since Tzimisce rule — often openly — over their kine with a mailed fist, they need many more enforcers and administrators than other clans do. It is not unheard of for the entire mortal population of a castle to be the ghouls of a Tzimisce and his brood, and for those ghouls to administer the surrounding peasants, farms and villages. Since the onset of the war with the Tremere, the Fiends have also been creating a great number of ghoulish mercenaries and knights to fight against the vampiric wizards and their monstrous creations, the Gargoyles. Due to the inherent difficulties of supplying so many ghouls with Cainite vitae, the Tzimisce have been even more indiscriminate than usual in killing the poor peasant men and women brought to them for sustenance. As more and more people disappear, and the blood flows in rivers through the halls of Tzimisce fortresses in the Balkans, the common folk have become paranoid, and even the Church has become suspicious.

Tzimisce have utilized ghouls for so long that they have actually discovered methods by which ghoulhood can be made hereditary. The Fiends have used this power to breed "ghoul families" of various sorts, whose members serve diverse purposes. Over the centuries these ghoulish families have insinuated



themselves in many lines of Eastern European and Byzantine nobility, providing the Tzimisce with vast influence over their ancestral lands.

The most important of the Tzimisce ghoule families is the Zantosa. The Zantosa is a line of Eastern European minor nobility, and from the Zantos many a Tzimisce vampire has been Embraced. The Zantosa not only act as the eyes and ears of the Tzimisce throughout the courts of Eastern Europe, but also act as administrators for many Tzimisce estates. The Zantosa are proud of their noble lineage and they are also somewhat decadent, enjoying the mortal pleasures and the powers that vampiric vitae gives them to relish these pleasures even more. They are cruel to those they rule over, including another Tzimisce ghoule family, the Bratovich (who act primarily as bodyguards and foot soldiers for the Tzimisce). For more information on the Zantosa, Bratovich and other ghoule families, see *The Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat*.

## VENTRUE

Unlike the Lasombra, the Ventrue prefer to work directly with mortal families of power, influence and nobility. They would much rather have a ghoule noble wearing a ducal crown than to simply have the duke's advisors in their pocket. As the Ventrue also tend to live in large castles surrounded by their kine retainers and allies, they tend to transform a great many servants and others necessary to the running of a castle. One person who is almost always ghouled by any Ventrue who lives in a castle is the chamberlain, the person responsible for the day-to-day operations and decisions. Other ghoules popular among the Patricians are exchequers in various noble courts, as well as a variety of powerful merchants. As minted money grows in importance throughout Dark Medieval Europe, the Ventrue are beginning to recognize that those who hold more of it have more political clout, as money can be used for bribes as well as for hiring mercenaries or outfitting soldiers.

## BAALI

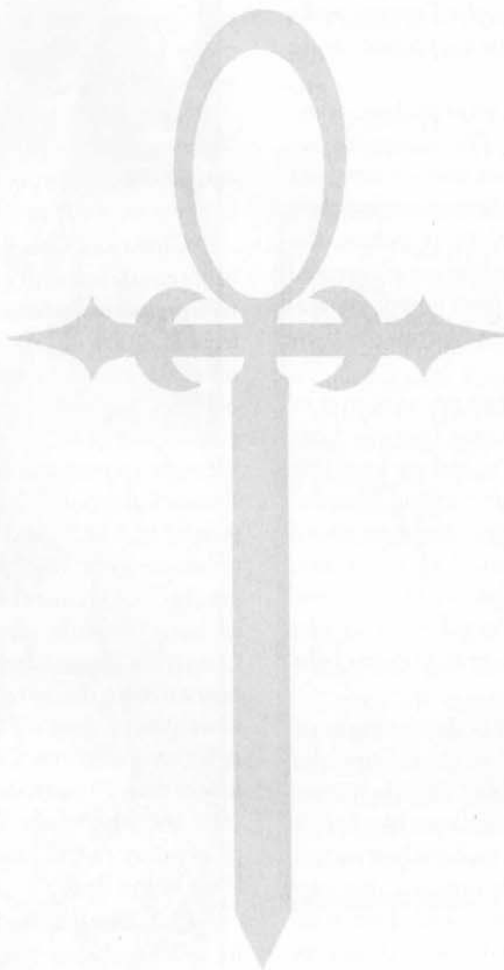
Ghouldom is seen by the Baali as a way of rewarding mortals who have committed despicable and vile acts against God and humanity. Baali almost always choose their ghoules from the ranks of the most evil and depraved humans available, although a few humans are left as they are, to see how far they will go without Baali assistance. Baali ghoules are always divided into covens, and when they meet it is usually to worship Lucifer and his minions, of which the Baali are considered the greatest. Baali ghoules believe that their Cainite sponsors are demons incarnate on earth, and the Baali make pacts with them, using their immortal souls as bargaining chips to gain even greater power.



## MORE FEARSOME GHOULS

Although rules for ghouls are presented herein and in *The Storytellers Handbook*, some Storytellers may find these rules too restrictive. If you wish a chronicle wherein ghouls are a legitimate threat to the Cainites, you might consider allowing ghouls to have higher-level Disciplines than would normally be allowed by the generation of their sponsor. Below is a chart showing the more restrictive standard rule, and a suggested rule to give the ghouls greater ability and power.

Sponsor's Generation	Normal Maximum Discipline Levels	Suggested Maximum Discipline Levels
12 - 11	1	1
10 - 9	1	2
8	1	3
7	2	3
6	3	4
5	4	4
4	5	5





# GARGOYLES

When Tremere committed Amaranth upon Saulot, he instantly made enemies of many Cainites. Although these early assaults were fended off, the cost was great, and many newly created Tremere vampires perished at the hands of the Inconnu and others. With tensions growing between the Tremere and the neighboring Tzimisce in the Balkans, the Circle of Seven decided they needed a strong supernatural army to match the Tzimisce ghouls and enslaved kine.

In 1167, deep in the Transylvanian Alps, at their chantry of Coeris, the Tremere used a variation of the ritual that had transformed them into Cainites. Using a captured Nosferatu and Gangrel, they enacted the ritual, adding quantities of magical earth to lend strength and endurance to their creation. From the boiling cauldron came forth a hideous creature seemingly made of rock, powerful muscles rippling beneath its dark gray skin. So was the first Gargoyle created. Two more were also made, one from a combination of a Tzimisce and a Gangrel, and the last from a combination of a Tzimisce and a Nosferatu.

Since then, the Gargoyles have served as soldiers, bodyguards and servants for the Tremere. The Gargoyles are capable of Embracing on their own, but are often ordered not to do so, as the Tremere have no wish to alienate the few clans who aid them (especially the Ventrue) by breaching the Traditions. The Tremere still create Gargoyles out of captured Gangrel, Nosferatu and Tzimisce of the most potent generations when they can, and they keep careful control over their slaves.

The life of a Gargoyle is hard. They are expected to unflinchingly carry out orders given by any Tremere. Gargoyles recognize the ranks of the Tremere, and are loyal first and foremost to their master, then to higher-ranking Tremere. Because of this, the Tremere have been careful to award Gargoyles only to the most loyal of Tremere. Still, a few times, strife within the clan has caused Gargoyles to come to blows with each other, and some Tremere have taken to settling bouts of *certámen* by having their Gargoyle champions fight with other Gargoyles in the ring.

Some Gargoyles have begun to chafe under their eternal servitude, especially those who are descended from Gargoyles that were Embraced instead of created. No Gargoyle has yet openly revolted, but some small acts of rebellion, like failing to do a task as well as it could have been done, have been noted with concern by the Tremere. It is even rumored that one Gargoyle, known simply as the Rock Lord, escaped when its master was killed in a Tzimisce attack, and now lives deep in the Carpathians, where it breeds its own brood of independent childer.

## **Sobriquet:** Slaves

**Appearance:** Gargoyles are hideous in appearance; the creatures that adorn the various cathedrals and castles of Europe would be considered beautiful when compared to the real things. Many kine who see Gargoyles mistake them for demons, with their batlike wings and skin covered with stone carbuncles and protrusions.

**Haven:** Gargoyles live wherever their master or mistress lives, but are most comfortable in dark, abandoned buildings and caves. The Tremere are notoriously inconsiderate to their servants, often providing little more than a bare stone cell for the Gargoyle to sleep in during the day.

**Background:** Due to the magical nature of their creation, Gargoyles remember nothing of their life before the Embrace (or creation, for those who were previously vampires of another clan). They still remember some mortal skills, however, and Gargoyles that have been granted permission to Embrace prefer to Embrace soldiers. Gargoyles come in three types: warriors, of Gangrel-Tzimisce stock; sentinels, of Nosferatu-Tzimisce stock; and scouts, of Gangrel-Nosferatu stock. Warriors focus on Potence and combat Abilities; sentinels concentrate on Fortitude, Alertness and other such Traits; and scouts commonly practice Stealth, Survival, etc.

**Character Creation:** Gargoyles are created just as any other character, with a few exceptions. First, all player character Gargoyles must have been Embraced rather than transformed from Cainites of other clans (unless the Storyteller decides otherwise). Each Gargoyle must take a new Ability, the Skill of Flight, and automatically starts with one dot in it (Flight is paid for like a Discipline, however; see below for details). This is taught to neonates by the Gargoyle that was permitted to Embrace them. Finally, a Gargoyle may purchase the Background trait of Mentor to have a more potent master. If no points are spent, the Gargoyle's master is a Tremere of the 11th generation (Tremere of the 12th generation are not permitted to have Gargoyle servants). For each dot in Mentor, the Gargoyle's master's generation is reduced by one. The only restriction on this is that the Gargoyle's generation may not be more potent than its master's generation, unless the Storyteller says otherwise. Gargoyles may not have lived unlives of longer than 29 years, since they were only created 30 years ago (and the only three Gargoyles created in 1167 were the progenitors of the bloodline). Gargoyles always follow the Road of the Beast.

**Clan Disciplines:** Fortitude and Potence (with the Ability of Flight being treated as a Discipline for the purposes of character creation and experience-point expenditure).



**Weaknesses:** Due to their hideous appearance, all Gargoyles automatically have a zero Appearance. Also, Gargoyles have been bred and trained to follow the orders of their masters, and this leaves them vulnerable to Dominate or other forms of mind control. A Gargoyle is considered to have two fewer Willpower points when resisting such control.

**Organization:** While they follow their masters, they also have a certain structure when gathered in groups. To determine the "status" of one Gargoyle when compared to another, simply add the Gargoyle's generation to its master's generation. The Gargoyle with the lowest number is considered to be the leader, unless the Tremere say otherwise.

**Quote:** Yes, my Lord Pontifex, it will be as you command.

## STEREOTYPES:

**Gangrel** — Fierce warriors. Their claws bite, but their skin is soft.

**Nosferatu** — Miserable cowards. They hide from us, but we can sense them if they enter the havens of our masters.

**Tremere** — We obey them without question and are ready to sacrifice our very lives for them. We owe them everything.

**Tzimisce** — They command armies of ghouls, but cower before us when they have to fight on their own. We will crush them all.

**All Others** — They do not concern us. If they do, our masters will tell us of it.

A Tremere player character can have a Gargoyle servant by spending Background dots on it. A special Background, Gargoyle Retainer, is used for this purpose. A Tremere player character may only start with one Gargoyle Retainer, unless the Storyteller permits otherwise. The Gargoyle's generation is determined by the number of dots in the Gargoyle Retainer Background. Subtract the number of dots in Gargoyle Retainer from 13 to determine the Gargoyle's generation. Gargoyle Retainer is more expensive than other Backgrounds, costing two points per dot desired. A Gargoyle Retainer may not be of a lower generation than the Tremere. If another player wishes to play the Gargoyle, the Tremere need not spend the points on Gargoyle Retainer, and the Gargoyle may be of a more potent generation than the Tremere (perhaps the Tremere's superiors have given the Gargoyle to the Tremere as a gift for excellent service to the clan, or perhaps they wish to keep an eye on the Tremere, using the Gargoyle as a spy).





## GARGOYLE CREATURES

Some Tremere have used their knowledge of Gargoyle creation to experiment on animals. Although the Tremere do not create these creatures themselves, they have successfully induced their own Gargoyle servants to Embrace animals. These creatures are most frequently used as guardians to supplement the Gargoyles, as well as vampiric versions of mastiffs and other creatures of war. More than a few Tzimisce have been surprised at the sight of a stone dog leaping from the shadows of the *voivode's* castle, and they are quickly learning to fear these horrendous beasts.

### CREATING GARGOYLE CREATURES

The creation of a Gargoyle creature is very simple. A Tremere simply has her own Gargoyle Embrace a beast previously prepared by a single one-hour ritual. The ritual helps to ensure the survival of the creature; even then, however, many beasts fail to survive the process intact, either becoming physically crippled, mentally damaged, or dying outright. Those that survive are kept for a time after the Embrace and are always Blood Bound to the Gargoyle sire's Tremere master. During this time, the newly made vampiric creature grows noticeably, becoming stronger and more agile than its mortal cousins. Tremere do need permission from their Tremere superiors to create a new Gargoyle creature.

Unlike other animals who are Embraced, Gargoyle creatures seem to know instinctively that sunlight and fire are anathema to their kind, and they are not prone to dying from stupidity. Some Gargoyle creatures have even displayed signs of increased intelligence after the Embrace.

Gargoyle creatures retain their memories of any tricks and skills they knew while mortal, and do not forget who their owners were. The Tremere have ascribed this to the fact that the animals do not have souls; in medieval times, only people were thought to have souls, thus explaining their unique position of supremacy over the Earth and in the eyes of God.

Only those Gargoyle creatures that knew how to fly in life have the Flight Ability (see below). Others eventually learn it or develop it on their own, most frequently by continuously being dropped and then caught by the Gargoyle creature's sire. The sheer terror of falling forces the creature to develop wings, but once they begin, they take to the air readily. Gargoyle creatures also have some other powers of their own, springing from their innate animalistic abilities.

Gargoyle creatures may receive various Tremere rituals to boost their powers, but are subject to the same restrictions that regular Gargoyles are. A Gargoyle creature's stock is that of the Gargoyle that sired it.

## GARGOYLE CREATURE BESTIARY

At present, only three types of creatures have successfully been turned into Gargoyles. Wolves have been captured for the purpose of Gargoyle creation, but this stopped after the second attempt, when a pair of "wolves" changed into "wolfman" form and completely destroyed the hapless Tremere experimenter, her Gargoyle servants and their haven. Since then, the Lupines known as the Shadow Lords have made it painfully clear to the Tremere that if they continue to take wolves, the Shadow Lords will come after Coeris in full force. Wisely, the Tremere have not touched a wolf since. The Tremere are working on creating a breed of Gargoyle bears next.

### RAZOR BAT

Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Willpower 2, Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -5

**Attacks:** Claws/2 dice; Bite/1 die; Wing Strike/3 dice (the bat must perform a full swoop, which takes three turns, and the bat rolls Dexterity + Flight)

**Disciplines:** Potence 1

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Flight 4

**Special Powers:** Exceptional Hearing (treat as the Auspex Discipline Heightened Senses, with the Razor Bat rolling Wits + Alertness)

**Weight:** 1 - 3 lbs.

These creatures are used as miniature spies and alarms. They can be trained to shriek and chitter whenever someone they don't recognize approaches a certain area, and a flock of them can be deadly in an attack. Although having very poor eyesight, razor bats are able to "hear" their surroundings by listening to their own clicks and squeaks and how they echo off solid objects. Razor bats can fly very quickly, up to 20 miles per hour.

### ROCK CAT

Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Willpower 4, Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, -5

**Attacks:** Claws/5 dice; Bite/6 dice

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Stealth 3

**Disciplines:** Potence 1

**Special Powers:** Paralyzing Roar (treat as the Presence Discipline Dread Gaze, with the Rock Cat rolling its Willpower instead of Charisma + Intimidation), See in the Dark (treat as the Protean Discipline Witness of Darkness)

**Weight:** 400 - 500 lbs.

Embraced from the various mountain lions that inhabit the Carpathians and Transylvanian Alps, rock cats are the most powerful and lethal Gargoyle creature created to date. Despite their size, they are extremely agile creatures and are adept at moving stealthily before deciding to attack. No rock cat has yet learned to fly, although some of them do have vestigial wings. It is thought they may be too heavy to get airborne, but they are still

highly valued as sentinels, and Coeris is guarded by over a dozen of them. The eyes of a rock cat glow red, and its roar not only acts as an alarm, but can paralyze and frighten its victims.

### STONE DOG

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Willpower 3, Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5

**Attacks:** Bite/5 dice; Claw/4 dice

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Smell 3

**Disciplines:** Fortitude 1, Potence 1

**Special Powers:** See in the Dark (treat as the Protean Discipline Witness of Darkness)

**Weight:** 100+ lbs.

These are the most numerous of the Gargoyle creatures, and they are created from the hunting dogs and war mastiffs that the Tremere have bred, bought or stolen. Stone dogs are incredibly tough (starting out with one dot in Fortitude as well as the obligatory Potence), and many of them are able to learn to fly in a very short time. As with rock cats, they too have glowing red eyes and the ability to see in total darkness. Those that can fly are often sent on "hunting" expeditions with their Gargoyle master. The pack flies to a Tzimisce castle or a stronghold of Tzimisce ghouls, and the stone dogs are turned loose over the compound. They attack anyone or anything in sight, and if nobody is about, they hide in the shadows of the battlements and towers. When it is time to leave (usually just about the time that they must return to their haven to beat the dawn), the Gargoyle collects what remains of the pack and flies into the night.

A Tremere character may have a Gargoyle creature only if she also has a Gargoyle servant. Just as with Gargoyle servants, a Gargoyle creature must be paid for with the Gargoyle Retainer Background. This is done by spending points in another Background, Gargoyle Creature. Gargoyle Creature costs the same as other Backgrounds (one dot per point). One dot allows the Tremere to have a trio of razor bats, two dots allow a stone dog, and three dots a rock cat. The generation of the Gargoyle creature is one higher than the Gargoyle Retainer the Tremere possesses.

## GARGOYLE POWERS AND ABILITIES

### FLIGHT

Gargoyles are able to fly naturally, and each Gargoyle gains the ability upon its Embrace. Gargoyles have a unique Ability, Flight, which they use to perform aerial combat maneuvers and tricky moves when flying through mountain passes.

Flight, however, is not purchased like a regular Ability. Instead, it costs the same as a Discipline for the Gargoyles. For

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each dot of Flight, a Gargoyle may fly at five miles per hour, and its wings grow larger. Gargoyles are unable to hover and must remain in motion at all times while in the air.

A Gargoyle is capable of carrying things in its arms or grasping them with its taloned feet, but at a penalty to its speed and stamina. For each 25 pounds a Gargoyle carries during flight, it operates as if it had one fewer dot in the Flight Ability (Gargoyles with only one dot in Flight may carry only a maximum of 10 pounds and may not perform any complicated maneuvers when they do so). It is theoretically possible for a very potent Gargoyle to grab a person and hoist her into the air, but this is risky, and more than one Gargoyle has been lost due to crashing after attempting such a maneuver (see below for aerial combat maneuvers).

## TREMERE GARGOYLE RITUALS

The Tremere have devised several rituals not only to create Gargoyles from captured Gangrel, Nosferatu and Tzimisce, but also to strengthen their innate abilities. These rituals are not without cost to the Tremere, however, and they use them only on those Gargoyles that have already distinguished themselves in battle, thus proving they will survive long enough to gain some benefit from the rituals.

These rituals are not permanent and have to be periodically renewed by the Tremere to whom the Gargoyle owes its service. (Eventually, the Gargoyles will internalize these rituals, and they will become the Discipline of Visceratika.)

### SOUL OF THE EARTH (LEVEL ONE RITUAL)

The powder of an uncut piece of granite is mixed with the vitae of a Gargoyle and then sprinkled liberally on a normal animal. The process is very exacting and takes one hour. Upon completion of this ritual, the animal is prepared to be Embraced by the Gargoyle whose vitae was used in the mixture.

**System:** When the Gargoyle Embraces the creature, the ritual takes effect, cushioning the animal's body and mind from the shock of the Embrace. The Storyteller rolls the creature's Stamina + the Tremere's Occult against a difficulty of 8. Success means the creature is successfully Embraced. Failure or botch means that the Embrace fails, and the creature dies.

### SKIN OF THE CHAMELEON (LEVEL TWO RITUAL)

The Tremere caster first creates an alchemical mixture distilled from a variety of color-changing lizards and flowers. This compound is then mixed with the vitae of the Gargoyle. When this mixture is rubbed into the Gargoyle's skin, the Gargoyle gains the ability to blend in with its surroundings.

**System:** This ritual can be used on a Gargoyle of 11th generation or lower, and requires a point of the Tremere's blood to be added to the mixture. After rubbing the elixir into the skin of the Gargoyle for one hour, the Gargoyle gains the power to change color to match its surroundings. This gives the Gargoyle five extra Stealth dice, so long as it moves slowly

(at half speed). The effects of this ritual last until the next full moon, at which time it can be repeated.

### DEFENDER OF THE HAVEN (LEVEL THREE RITUAL)

Many Tremere rely upon Gargoyles to defend their havens while they work other rituals or plot and scheme against the Tzimisce. So, while they are engrossed in their research, they need their Gargoyle guardians to be extra alert, and thus this ritual was devised. With it, the Gargoyle becomes linked with the haven (up to the size of a small castle) and may detect intruders of any sort, even if they are out of sight or under the veil of Obfuscate.

**System:** This ritual can only be used on Gargoyles of 10th generation or lower. The ritual takes an entire night to complete and involves taking the Gargoyle to the various cardinal boundaries of the haven, where a point of the Gargoyle's vitae is infused into the structure. The Tremere also expends a point of Willpower to activate the ritual. When completed, the Gargoyle may detect anyone within the structure on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6). If the intruder is attempting to hide, he makes an opposed roll Self-Control + Stealth roll (or other appropriate roll), also against difficulty 6. This ritual must be cast during the full moon and works for the Gargoyle only in the structure in which the ritual was cast.

### INFUSION OF EARTH (LEVEL FOUR RITUAL)

Gargoyles are inherently connected to the earth, and the Tremere have taken advantage of this. This ritual requires the Gargoyle to ingest powdered mortar mixed with the Tremere's vitae. The ritual is somewhat unpredictable and can take several hours of continuous chanting and concentration by the Tremere.

**System:** A Gargoyle must be of at least ninth generation to absorb the effects of this ritual successfully. The Tremere must roll Stamina + Occult once per hour of the ritual. The Tremere must accumulate a total of 10 successes without botching (a roll with no successes but no botches does not end the ritual) and before sunrise for the ritual to succeed. If successful, the Gargoyle may meld with the earth (per the Protean Discipline Interred in the Earth) by the simple expenditure of a Blood Point. The Gargoyle may also meld into stone or rock with equal ease. Anybody who searches the place where a Gargoyle has melded with the earth may, on a roll of Perception + Alertness versus difficulty 8, notice the vague outline of the Gargoyle, as the creature does not completely merge with the stone or dirt. This ritual lasts until the next solstice or equinox.

### TRANSFORM THE SKIN TO STONE (LEVEL FIVE RITUAL)

The resiliency of the Gargoyles is quickly becoming legendary among Cainites. In addition to their already formidable Fortitude, some Gargoyles have been granted an even greater ability to shrug off not only damage from mortal weapons, but damage from fire as well.

**System:** A Gargoyle must be of at least eighth generation to benefit from this ritual. The Gargoyle must drink the carefully prepared vitae of several Gangrel (at least three different Gangrel from which a combined total of 10 Blood Points must be consumed) during the ritual, and the Tremere must expend a point of Willpower. At the end of the night, the Gargoyle will henceforth be able to add one to his Stamina for resisting wounds, take one fewer point of wound penalties, and halve all damage received from fire. This ritual is not without risk to the Tremere, though. The Tremere must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 10). If even one success is gained, the ritual is permanent. If no successes or botches are rolled, the ritual lasts until the next equinox or solstice. If the end result is a botch, the Tremere loses one point of Willpower permanently (although the Gargoyle still benefits from the ritual, as if no successes or botches had been rolled).

### HEART OF STONE (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

Gargoyles must often face stinging hails of arrows and sharp, piercing blades in their battles against the Tzimisce *voivodes* and their armies. This ritual was devised by the Tremere to protect their strongest and most valuable Gargoyle servants and warriors, and makes them devastating opponents on the battlefield. The skin of the Gargoyle takes on a decidedly more rocklike appearance after this ritual.

**System:** Effective only on Gargoyles of seventh generation or lower, this ritual must be enacted on seven successive nights. On each night the Tremere must expend one Blood Point, which is mixed with mortar and mercury and then ingested by the Gargoyle. Each night, the Tremere must roll Stamina + Occult (difficulty 6), although a point of Willpower may be spent to gain an automatic success. If the ritual succeeds on all seven nights, the Gargoyle's internal organs (or what remain of them) become hard as stone. Any piercing weapons used against the Gargoyle have their Dice Pools halved, and it is impossible even to attempt to stake the Gargoyle without a combined Strength + Potence of 7 or better. This ritual lasts until the next summer solstice, but the Tremere may, at the end of the ritual, exert extreme concentration and expend a permanent point of Willpower to make the ritual permanent.

### GIFT OF THE IMMOBILE FORM (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

The Tremere have found it useful for Gargoyles to be able to take shelter even in the open, and came up with the concept for this ritual from the grotesque adornments with which the Toreador have been decorating the cathedrals of Europe. A Gargoyle protected by this ritual may withstand even direct sunlight, and can see and hear everything transpiring around it. The drawback is that the Gargoyle cannot move a single muscle, or the sunlight will begin to burn at full force. Gargoyles with this ritual are highly prized as spies, able to become part of the decorations in many churches and castles and spy on what goes on inside and outside.



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**System:** This ritual may be used on a Gargoyle of seventh generation or lower, so long as the Gargoyle has at least one dot of Fortitude. This ritual takes only a night to complete and lasts until the next new moon. After being cast, the ritual enables the Gargoyle, by remaining stock still, to avoid damage from the sun. The Gargoyle must roll Stamina + Fortitude (difficulty 9) in order to remain motionless throughout the day. In addition, this ritual does not make the Gargoyle's Beast react more calmly to sunlight, and the Gargoyle must still roll to avoid frenzying at the first sight of the sun.

## AERIAL COMBAT

Flying into combat is the chief weapon of the Gargoyles against the ghoul soldiers and Cainites arrayed against Clan Tremere. A significant number of battles actually happen at night, as the Tzimisce do not trust their retainers to handle battles on their own during the daytime (they have learned this through hard experience and no few dead vassals). Unfortunately for the Tzimisce and their allies, this allows the Gargoyles to bring their full might to bear.

Four basic maneuvers are available to a Gargoyle attacking a ground target from the air: the Pounce, the Swoop, the Flying Thrust and the Rake. Just as in regular combat, the Gargoyle uses either Brawl or Melee — as appropriate — but aerial combat levies an additional restriction. If the Gargoyle's Flight Ability is lower than his Brawl or Melee (depending on which is being used), the score for Flight is used instead. Although this often makes it more difficult for the Gargoyle to hit an opponent, the sheer force of the blows that do land more than compensates for this lack of accuracy.

### POUNCE

The Gargoyle starts on the ground and leaps at its opponent, using its wings for a higher jump and thus coming down with more force. This is much like a Body Slam, but more forceful, as the Gargoyle uses its wings to propel its body into the opponent. If the attack succeeds, treat as a Body Slam (**Vampire: The Dark Ages**, page 194), but the Gargoyle rolls Strength + Flight for damage.

**Roll:** Dexterity + lower of Brawl or Flight

**Difficulty:** 7

**Damage:** Special

**Actions:** 1

### SWOOP

Diving out of the air, the Gargoyle swoops past its opponent, slashing with a weapon or simply striking with a fist. The point is simply to add the force of the dive to the blow and then to climb for another strike.

**Roll:** Dexterity + lower of Brawl/Melee or Flight

**Difficulty:** 6

**Damage:** Strength + Flight (if using Brawl) or Weapon Damage + Flight (if using Melee)

**Actions:** 1

## FLYING THRUST

This is a very special maneuver, used only when the Gargoyle has a long weapon, such as a lance or a spear, in its hands. The point is to impale the target with the weapon and leave it imbedded within, severely hampering the opponent's ability to continue fighting. If the Gargoyle succeeds, the impaling weapon is driven through the target's body. If the target does not die, he takes an automatic -2 penalty to all Dice Pools (in addition to wound penalties) until the weapon is broken off. Removing the shaft instead of breaking it off automatically causes another Health Level of damage to the target.

**Roll:** Dexterity + lower of Melee or Flight

**Difficulty:** 8

**Damage:** Weapon Damage + Flight

**Actions:** 1

## RAKE

Gargoyles do have claws on their feet, but these talons do not inflict aggravated damage like the claws of other Cainites. Still, they are a fearsome natural weapon for the Gargoyle, and they use them to great advantage when flying low and fast over a battlefield. Unlike other maneuvers, this one is based on Flight alone, as the Gargoyle is basically just aiming the path of its flight to intersect the opponent's head with the talons. If used against a mounted opponent, the target must roll a Dexterity + Ride (difficulty 6) to stay on the horse, obtaining equal or greater successes than the Gargoyle did in hitting.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Flight

**Difficulty:** 6

**Damage:** Strength + Flight

**Actions:** 1

Although rare, combat against other flying creatures may occur, as sometimes is the case when two Tremere decide to settle a dispute via Gargoyle champions. Two major differences mark combat between aerial opponents. First, as long as the two combatants are aware of each other, they roll Wits + Flight for initiative instead of Wits + Alertness. This represents the various turns, climbs and dives that the opponents use to gain the advantage for the attack. Second, a Pounce may not be used in midair. Otherwise, all combat is the same, but Storytellers are advised to use a healthy dose of common sense when running an aerial combat.

Those Tzimisce who have mastered the Chiropteran Marauder man-bat form (Vicissitude Level Six) may also learn aerial moves, but few do; Tzimisce use the Marauder form more for movement and intimidation than for aerial battle. In any event, Gargoyles tend to outclass Tzimisce in the sky.



# LEGENDARY CREATURES

Depending on the type of chronicle you wish to run, the characters may occasionally encounter magical and rare creatures. If you are running a chronicle with a high-fantasy flavor, these creatures can exist naturally. Otherwise, they are most likely the creations of mages, faeries or infernal powers.

Some of these creatures are intelligent — reasoning, thinking and acting like humans. Sentient creatures have the Social Attributes listed in their statistics. Creatures that do not have Social Attributes are considered to be animalistic in actions and nature. These creatures are provided as examples, and Storytellers who wish to include other legendary creatures in their chronicles are encouraged to consult mythology books for inspiration.

## HIGH FANTASY VS. “REALISTIC MEDIEVAL”

Obviously, the Dark Medieval world is not an exact replica of the real medieval Europe, if for no other reason than that bloodsucking corpses did not really haunt the roads and courts of Europe. Still, the existence of vampires accepted, there are various levels of realism that can be ascribed to Dark Medieval chronicles. Dragons, sphinxes, flocks of razor-winged Gargoyle bats, and stone dogs strafed atop *voivodes'* castles tend to vault the game into a more heroic, “high-fantasy” level.

If such an approach is unsuitable for your chronicle, then by all means **do not use these creatures!** They are there to provide an element of drama and to inject a little fantasy into the “authentic” European milieu. They are not “official” — in fact, anything can be changed or omitted from your chronicles when you play any game in the Storyteller System — and if you don't want rock cats and dragons and *vozhd* (oh my!) in your game, feel free to ignore the critters.



## BASILISK

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2  
Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3  
Willpower 2, Health Levels: OK, -1, -5

**Attacks:** None

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Dodge 4

**Weight:** 1 - 5 lbs.

**Blood Pool:** 0 (venom inflicts aggravated damage if drunk)

Small and quick, the basilisk is a creature with the body of a snake and the head of a rooster. Basilisks live in any of the usual places where normal snakes can be found. A basilisk does not have any means of physical attack, but makes up for it with powerful magic abilities: It can slay with a glance, and it is extremely poisonous.

**Deadly Gaze:** If the basilisk is angered or attacked, it can choose to make its glance deadly to anything it can see. This power does not require the basilisk to make eye contact. If it can see its target, it can try to kill it. Any mortal who falls under the Deadly Gaze must immediately make a Stamina roll (difficulty 8). Failure causes the mortal to keel over, irrevocably dead. Mortals who make a successful Stamina roll still take two Health Levels of damage. Vampires who fall under the Deadly Gaze may add Fortitude to their roll, and fall into torpor if unsuccessful. Vampires who succeed in their Stamina rolls against the Deadly Gaze may attempt to soak the two Health Levels of damage. The basilisk may only use its Deadly Gaze on a single target per round.

**Creeping Poison:** The skin of the basilisk is deadly poison to all who touch it. Any mortal who touches or is touched by the basilisk must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 10). Success leaves the victim disoriented and dazed, unable to act for three rounds, and also delivers three Health Levels of damage. Failure of any kind results in death. Cainites are only mildly affected by this poison, which causes them to feel a burning sensation in the area touched by the basilisk. The burning ceases after a moment, and the vampire loses a single Blood Point as her body immediately heals itself.

The poison of a basilisk is so insidious that it will actually spread over an item that touches the basilisk, quickly coating metal and soaking into cloth or leather. As such, any weapon that touches a basilisk must be dropped, or at the beginning of the next turn the wielder will suffer the full effects as if he had touched the basilisk with bare skin.

Followers of Set are immune to the basilisk's poison.



## BLOOD ROSE

Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2  
Perception 5, Intelligence 0, Wits 2  
Willpower 10, Health Levels: OK, -1, -3, -5

**Attacks:** Thorns attack for two dice and also may entangle creatures passing through.

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Brawl 2

**Weight:** negligible

**Blood Pool:** varies

Believed to be a faerie's gift to a Toreador, these hedges of barbed-wire vines are as deadly as they are beautiful. The fist-sized vermilion blooms seem to sense when mortal blood is near, and a living creature attempting to pass through them will be stabbed by the wickedly sharp thorns, which will absorb blood as long as they are able. A creature who becomes tangled and unable to escape will be drained dry. The blood nourishes the plant, and collects in berry-red, grapelike fruit. This fruit is a delicacy indeed to Cainites, for it liquefies in the mouth and equals one Blood Point if consumed.

## DRAGON

Strength 12, Dexterity 6, Stamina 8  
Charisma 7, Manipulation 8, Appearance N/A  
Perception 6+, Intelligence 6+, Wits 6+  
Willpower 10, Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -3, -3, -5, -5, -5

**Attacks:** Bite/7 dice; Claw/6 dice; Tail/3 dice (teeth and claws inflict aggravated damage)

**Talents:** Alertness 5, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Flight 5, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 4



**Knowledges:** Hearth Wisdom 4, Linguistics 5 (any five languages), Occult 7

**Armor Protection:** 4 (some areas, such as the eyes, or the mouth when it is open, may be considered unarmored)

**Weight:** several tons

**Blood Pool:** 30 (inflicts aggravated damage if drunk)

Ancient creatures said to predate Adam's exile from the Garden of Eden, dragons are fearsome to behold, and few have lived to tell the tale of encountering one. Dragons spend most of their time sleeping, but legend says that they always sleep with one eye open to guard their hoard against intruders and thieves. Dragons prefer to make their lairs in deep caves high in the mountains. When not encountered in their lair, they are usually flying, stopping only to feed on cattle (which usually only takes a couple of bites). Dragons are able to carry an object up to the size of a cow and could easily grab a horse and rider (if the Storyteller desires, dragons may use the Flight maneuvers listed for Gargoyles, above, when flying into combat). They are said to crave books and items of magical power just as much as they crave wealth, and it may even be possible to trade with one if the trader is wily enough (assuming the dragon just doesn't take what it wants in the first place). They have the ability to speak in the vernacular of the mortals dwelling near their abode, but prefer ancient languages and languages of the educated, like Greek and Latin. Dragons are not all alike. Some can't fly, some are smaller, some prefer to live in the snowy wastes beyond the edge of the world, and some are even said to live under the oceans. Typical dragons, however, have the following powers:

**Acidic Bite:** If a dragon successfully bites a target, the saliva acts as an acid, having the potential to corrode the victim and his equipment. First, the victim must make a Stamina roll (Fortitude may be added to this roll) against a difficulty of 8. Failure results in the victim taking an additional two Health Levels of damage.

Any armor the character is wearing will also lose one level of Protection, and all weapons will do one fewer die of damage (the weapon is considered destroyed when it no longer adds a bonus to the character's strength for damage).

**Breathe Fire:** This is the single most legendary power of dragons. By expending a Willpower point, the dragon may engulf a 30-foot-square area in blazing fire. Anyone hit by this flame takes five Health Levels of damage, and all combustible materials on the victim's body are set aflame (for each round that clothing, etc. is aflame, the target takes one additional Health Level of damage). Cainites may not attempt to soak this damage unless they have Fortitude. The dragon is, of course, immune to all flames, including its own.

**Dread Gaze:** This power is exactly like the Presence Discipline of the same name.

**Indomitable Will:** Dragons are immune to the powers of Chimerstry, Dementation, Dominate, Presence, and all manner of supernatural mind control or illusion.

**Majesty:** This power is exactly like the Presence Discipline of the same name.

**Regeneration:** The dragon may heal up to three levels of damage each round at will.

## FAE CATTLE

Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6

Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Willpower 3, Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, -3, -5

**Attacks:** Gore (if bull)/8 dice; Bite/3 dice

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Stealth 2

**Weight:** 500 lbs.

**Blood Pool:** 10

These creatures are known for joining a herd and then leading away the best cattle under cover of dark.



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## GIANT BOAR

Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6  
 Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3  
 Willpower 8, Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5  
**Attacks:** Bite/3 dice; Gore/8 dice  
**Talents:** Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 2  
**Weight:** 1000 lbs.  
**Blood Pool:** 8

These creatures differ little from their smaller cousins other than that they seem to have an unnatural desire to gore any hunter unfortunate enough to encounter one.



BOOK OF STORYTELLER SECRETS

## GRYPHON

Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6  
 Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4  
 Willpower 5, Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5  
**Attacks:** Claws/4 dice; Beak/5 dice  
**Talents:** Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Flight 5, Smell 4  
**Weight:** 600 lbs.  
**Blood Pool:** 10

Gryphons prefer to make their homes high in the mountains or in vast wastelands, and are equally at home in snow or desert. Gryphons have the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. They are fond of horseflesh and often swoop down unnoticed on travelers in the mountain passes, knocking a horse or donkey off the trail, then following it down the slope or cliff to feed. Gryphons are solitary creatures, and the only time when two are seen together is when they are mating or tending their young.

## SPHINX

Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5  
 Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3 (head only)  
 Perception 5, Intelligence 7, Wits 7  
 Willpower 7, Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5  
**Attacks:** Claws/6 dice  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 2  
**Skills:** Etiquette 3, Stealth 4  
**Knowledges:** All at 6+  
**Weight:** 400 lbs.  
**Blood Pool:** 12

It is said that a sphinx knows the secrets of the universe, spending its every waking moment contemplating the mysteries of heaven and earth. In legend, a sphinx asked Oedipus the riddle, "What goes on four legs, then two, and finally three?" Oedipus correctly answered, "Man," causing the sphinx to throw itself to its death in a tantrum of rage and defeat.

It is said that, if a clever soul can answer a riddle posed by the sphinx, the creature will answer any one question, and that the answer is always correct. The danger, of course, is that if the wrong answer is given, the seeker may find himself the slave or, worse, the meal of the sphinx.

Sphinxes may be found anywhere in the world, except when a person wants to find one, and then they are found only at the end of a long and perilous quest. A character who finds a sphinx may attempt to answer a riddle in order to learn the true answer to a single question. The sphinx will require the character to ask the question first, and will judge the importance of the knowledge in the cosmic scheme of things. If the knowledge is particularly obscure, arcane or will give the questioner great power, the sphinx will make the riddle a hard one. Before the riddle is given, however, the sphinx will also require that the questioner agree to whatever terms the sphinx desires should the

questioner lose. This can be anything from the retrieval of a book or powerful magical item, to servitude for a year and a day, to death, or anything else the sphinx desires. If the questioner wins, the sphinx answers the question. If the questioner loses, the questioner must fulfill his end of the bargain. If he does not, he immediately loses one Willpower point and may not regain Willpower by any means until he fulfills his part of the bargain. If the sphinx is killed before the questioner fulfills his part of the bargain, the questioner permanently loses half his Willpower.

All sphinxes have the ability to travel instantaneously from place to place, seemingly disappearing before an observer's eyes and reappearing very far away after a very short period of time (for Storytellers using *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, the sphinx may step sideways and travel quickly through the Umbra). It is said that sphinxes sometimes freely share their information with the Lupines known as Silent Striders, and the Striders offer tribute and thanks in return.

## UNICORN

Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6

Charisma 8, Manipulation 3, Appearance 8

Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Willpower 10, Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5

**Attacks:** Horn/3 dice (aggravated damage), Kick/6 dice

**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Brawl 3, Dodge 3

**Weight:** 300 lbs.

**Blood Pool:** 8 (unicorn blood often provides magical properties, but drinking it can carry a great curse)

Unicorns are extremely magical and beautiful creatures, and come either from the powers of Faerie or, some say, from the hand of God. They may appear to help protect people of incredible purity and innocence, but this is rare, and the person to be guarded must be truly worthy of such protection (Road of

Humanity 10). Unicorns are intelligent, but do not speak. A unicorn has the following powers:

**Cure:** The touch of a unicorn's horn is said to be able to purify anything that is diseased, poisoned or corrupted. By expending a single Willpower point, a unicorn may cure a person of any ailment or disease (and, at the Storyteller's discretion, may be able to return a vampire to her mortal state). The unicorn will only use this power on those who are truly deserving. By expending more Willpower points, a unicorn may purify large bodies of water, forests, glades or fields (the amount of Willpower depends on the size of the area to be cleansed).

**Purity of Spirit:** A unicorn is so pure of spirit that it has the equivalent of True Faith 5, with the horn acting as its holy symbol. This makes the unicorn immune to all effects of Chimerstry, Dementation, Dominate, Presence and all manner of supernatural mind control or illusion. A unicorn's True Faith will affect a vampire just as any mortal's True Faith would, causing most to flee in fear, loathing and pain (for the effects of True Faith, see *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, pages 236-237).

## VOZHD (TZIMISCE WAR GHOUL)

Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Willpower 10, Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, -5

**Attacks:** Strike/8 dice + Potence; Constrict/6 dice + Potence; Bite/8 dice (automatic on the turn after prey is grappled)

**Talents:** Alertness 5, Brawl 2, Intimidation 6, Multiple Attack 10 (*vozhd* receive 10 extra dice to divide among their attack Dice Pools, though no individual attack may exceed the *vozhd*'s normal maximum Dexterity + Brawl Dice Pool)

**Disciplines:** Potence 6; Fortitude 4; *immune* to Dominate, Presence and Animalism

**Weight:** variable — sometimes up to five tons

**Blood Pool:** 20/2 (*vozhd*, being ghouls, may spend Blood Points)

These loathsome Tzimisce servitors primarily stalk the wilds of Eastern Europe, though a few have escaped their masters' control and roamed elsewhere. *Vozhd* are composite monstrosities formed when Tzimisce fuse together several normal ghouls through Vicissitude and Thaumaturgy (the Tzimisce must have Vicissitude 6+, Body Crafts 6+ and must know a special Level Six Thaumaturgical ritual). The resulting horror is a multilimbed, armored tower of tissue and bone, primarily used by its Tzimisce "master" during sieges or when attacking many Cainites simultaneously.

*Vozhd* are omnivorous, but prefer meat, particularly vampire flesh. Most are mindless, though a few have retained some semblance of sentience (such wretched creatures are all quite insane). *Vozhd* are notoriously intractable, and more than one ambitious *voivode* has disappeared into the maw of his erstwhile servitor.







## WHITE HART

Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5  
 Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4  
 Willpower 6, Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5  
**Attacks:** Gore/7 dice; Kick/5 dice  
**Talents:** Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 5, Empathy 3  
**Skills:** Stealth 3  
**Weight:** 300 lbs.  
**Blood Pool:** 9

Often bedecked in silver bells, these beasts usually herald the beginning of a great quest. Sometimes they will make their presence known to those on a quest as a measure of giving their approval. To chase a white hart is said to be a most glorious sport, though he of untrue heart who brings one down is sure to suffer a most dire fate.

## ZEPHYR

Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6  
 Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2  
 Willpower 5, Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5  
**Attacks:** Kick/6 dice  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Brawl 3, Dodge 3  
**Weight:** 300 lbs.  
**Blood Pool:** 6

Native to southern Iberia and Arabia, the wind foals, or zephyrs, are horses of magnificent beauty and great speed. They are said to have been conceived by the strong blowing of the west wind. Aside from being faster and more agile than the best of normal horses, a zephyr can also exert itself in short bursts of uncanny speed, traveling faster than any mortal creature. When a zephyr wills it, a Willpower point may be expended, and the zephyr may travel at five times its normal

speed for a single turn. Many Arabian and Valencian lords promise great wealth to any who can bring them a zephyr for a steed, but none have yet succeeded. Zephyrs live their lives just as fast as they run, and they are said to die of old age after only three years of life.

## DIVINATION

Medieval diviners use a variety of means to gather information. These include casting pebbles or leaves; throwing runestones; watching smoke rise from a fire; gazing into a flame, pool or uneven mirror; inspecting the marks on the bones or organs of a sacrificial victim; watching the flights of birds; etc. Tarot cards do not yet exist, but educated diviners have created a complex astrological system.

The great thing about divination, from the Storyteller's perspective, is that she can use such an ability to feed the characters whatever clues or misinformation she wishes. Most readings should reveal nothing or give generalizations, but readings may occasionally reveal something really valuable (or seemingly valuable).

Characters should not get insights from divination often. Feed them information to keep the story moving, but certainly not every time they miss a clue (you don't want them thinking "We messed that up, but never mind, we'll just use our divination abilities."). Also, reward them with useful information if they use divination in a dramatically satisfying manner, but not if they just repeatedly roll the dice to squeeze hints from you.

You might be able to use divination to mislead the characters — not maliciously, but as a part of your stories. For example, if a powerful demon or spirit loitered nearby, it might influence the readings, giving the characters apparently useful (but quite misleading) information, in order to manipulate them.

As the Storyteller, you must decide how to best represent divination in game terms. The most obvious method is calling for an Intelligence or Perception + Occult roll, at a difficulty of 9 or higher to gain any true insight. General patterns would be slightly easier to define, and of course, the proper specialties are invaluable.

## HERBS

In medieval Europe, herbs are used for cooking, healing, poisoning vermin and for curing livestock. Whereas a modern doctor uses drugs, a medieval healer often uses herbs. Whereas a modern cook buys flavorings in plastic packets, a medieval cook picks them from her garden or from the woods.

Finding herbs is not difficult. They grow prolifically in the summer and spring. They are found in woods and wilds, in hedgerows and fields, or they are grown in specially established herb gardens. The exact difficulty of finding herbs is left to the Storyteller. Storytellers should have players roll Perception +

an appropriate Ability to find certain herbs. Survival or Herbalism is usual, but the Storyteller might allow others in certain circumstances. For example, Medicine is appropriate for healing herbs and poisons. Crafts (Farming, for example) might be used to find plants to cure animals' ailments; Occult could be used to find "magical" herbs.

Simple herbs (for cooking, curing headaches, etc.) are easy to find; it should only take a few minutes and one success to find some herbs to flavor a meal. Poisons and more impressive healing herbs should be rarer — typically a day's search (difficulty 6) nets one dose of such an herb per success rolled. Magical herbs and really nasty poisons may only be found in secluded forest groves, often in areas where Lupines or faeries prowl.

## POISONS

Characters with Herbalism may make poisons, and many poisonous herbs are easily passed off as healing herbs; the plants used to heal are often, in larger doses, very dangerous.

A standard poison is not obviously harmful, but has a strange taste, color and scent. If added to food or drink, it may be detected with an Intelligence + Alertness roll (difficulty 6), although especially strong foods might mask the flavor (difficulty 7, 8 or even 9). Only one success is required.

The strength of the poison depends on the number of successes scored on an Intelligence + Herbalism roll. Don't actually make the roll until the poison is administered. That way the poisoner can't know exactly how effective the poison is until the victim drinks it. The poison inflicts one Health Level per success.

The damage takes effect over a period of one to 12 hours, depending on the herbs chosen by the character who concocted the poison. During this period any character may make an Intelligence + Medicine roll to purge the poison, each success countering one Health Level of damage from the poison.

Note that characters are free to make variants on this basic poison. One variant (exactly as above, but with a difficulty of 9) does no real damage, but renders the victim unconscious. The victim is rendered unconscious for one hour per "Health Level" of damage inflicted. This is particularly handy for vampires who wish to render a mortal helpless and oblivious in order to feed (although they must also resist the poison if they feed on the tainted blood).

Potions that are harder to detect, or that have delayed or slower effects, may also be created, although the Storyteller should increase the difficulty level of the Intelligence + Medicine roll accordingly. Obvious poisons (with foul flavors or rank odors) are similarly easier to create.

Also remember that as vampires no longer digest normal food, such potions cannot harm them. However, if a vampire feeds on poisoned blood, she can fall ill (if the poison affected the nervous system) or even take damage (if the poison affected the blood or blood vessels themselves). The exact rules for this are left to the Storyteller's discretion.

# ALCHEMY

Alchemy is the "science" of transmutation, of turning one thing into another, the base into the pure and, most profitably, lead into gold.

It requires a large workshop, servants, ritual fasts and vigils, weird chemicals and dubious chants. Many would-be alchemists have squandered fortunes trying to turn lead into gold, without any success. Establishing a laboratory requires Resources of at least 4, and a location for it. Remember that the smell is appalling, and secrecy is advantageous.

Churchmen might accuse alchemists of heresy or blasphemy (those chants do sound kind of diabolical, you know), and others may be jealous of their secrets. To hide their knowledge, alchemists learn special alchemical scripts which allow them to record their experiments with signs and symbols that only another alchemist can understand. To understand another's alchemical notes, a character must roll Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8).

Alchemy can be represented as an Occult specialty or as a separate Knowledge, at the Storyteller's option. Basically, there is no way anyone will be turning lead into gold unless they have a rating of 5 in Alchemy — and even then the process might be so expensive or tortuous that it just isn't worth the bother. That is up to each Storyteller to decide.

Although the basic purpose of Alchemy is to transmute base into pure things, alchemists can also use their skills to create various potions. Poisons are easily created, using the same mechanics as for herbal poisons above. Other potions may be created at the Storyteller's discretion.

Alchemists' potions are always mundane, chemical creations. They cannot have magical effects, like making the subject invisible or bestowing supernatural powers. Such creations are the province of mages. Some may, however, dampen or suppress magical powers, make a person a "neutral," or heal a mortal's or a vampire's wounds.

Alchemists might also create processes by which metals are treated to give them special powers (for example, an iron sword might be treated so that it inflicts aggravated damage for a few turns). They might also create powders which burn to create clouds of thick smoke (useful as a smoke screen or signal), a bright flash or a repulsive smell.

It is up to the Storyteller to decide what exactly can and cannot be done. Most Alchemy requires an Intelligence + Occult roll, but each Storyteller must set the difficulty and decide how many successes are required. And just to keep the players guessing, here's a suggestion: Roll for success only when the potion is used, not when it is created; in this way neither the alchemist nor anyone else knows whether a potion has been successfully created until it is actually used....

Ultimately, alchemy should not play a tremendous part in the Dark Medieval world — such showy effects are best left in more fantastic games. But a strong alchemical background might just raise a minor antagonist into the role of a vivid adversary. Let your common sense and the tone of your chronicle be your guides.

FRIENDS, ENEMIES AND MISCELLANY



# TALISMANS, RELICS AND BLADES

*Not the least of these powerful accessories was what Unferth, the king's orator, lent to Beowulf in his need: the sword Hrunting, pre-eminent among ancestral treasures, whose patterned blade was tempered in blood.*

— David Wright trans., *Beowulf*

## BLADES

Among the most valued objects in Dark Ages society are weapons, and blades that offer supernatural advantages to their owners are prized above all else. Known vulgarly as “magic swords,” the blades that have been imbued with more than just a smith's care are few and far between. Most have names and legends attached to them; some even sing or speak. All are coveted by every fighting man and woman in Europe, and anyone possessing one had best be skilled in its use or risk losing it — and his head — posthaste.

There are two main sources of dweomered blades: Damascus and the trackless forests of northern Germany. The Moslem smiths of Damascus have long held the secret of creating superior steel, and some have achieved a proficiency in their craft that borders on the magical. The Teuton forests, however, are home to the legendary Wayland Smith, a masterforger whose work is so distinctive that in East Anglian, the term for “magical sword” is literally *Weyland's wyrcan* (Wayland's work).

## DAMASCENE BLADES

The smiths of Damascus already forge steel superior to that of the finest European smiths, save one. A few blademakers, however, have learned secrets supposedly brought to earth by djinn, and can make blades that seem to harness the wind itself. Primarily scimitars or otherwise curved blades, a dweomered Damascene blade can be distinguished from its more pedestrian cousins only by drawing it. Such blades cannot be returned to their sheaths without having first tasted blood, and the wise owner will draw blood from his own hand rather than let his sword return to its sheath still thirsty. It is said to be bad luck to do so, and no warrior in his right mind courts bad luck.

All swords of this type are forged from steel that falls to earth from the heavens; it is called “star-steel,” and it makes superior weaponry. Certain rituals must also be performed during the forging of the blade, and it is necessary to cool the steel in the entrails of an unbeliever, else the sword's power will be lost. It is rare for a magical scimitar to be forged for one not of noble birth, and so most have hilts that are adorned with gold, gems and silver. The blades themselves, however, are plain to the point of utilitarian.

**System:** Damascene blades imbued with magic are potent primarily because of their swiftness; their strength is not that



much greater than that of regular Damascus steel. A magical Damascene scimitar allows for an extra attack automatically in each round of combat, and when used with Celerity such a blade can be devastating.

Additionally, these swords are so lightning-fast that they may actually knock arrows out of the air. Instead of rolling Dexterity + Dodge, the wielder of a Damascene blade rolls Dexterity + Melee; each success made subtracts one from the arrow's successes. Furthermore, the blades are somehow aware of such cowardly attacks and will spring into their wielders' hands by themselves, so that a missile attack never surprises one blessed enough to hold a magicked Damascene sword.

### WEYLAND'S WYRCAN

Blades from the forge of Wayland Smith tend to resemble the traditional one-handed straight longsword, descended from the Saxon *scramasax* or stabbing blade. Most have basic crossguards; the style echoes both the Teutonic and the Celtic. Often Wayland worked jewels beyond price into his hilts: rubies for the red of blood, sapphires for the blue of faith and emeralds for the green of life. The real beauty of a weapon from Wayland's forge is in the inlay work; patterns and pictures as detailed as the finest tapestry are hammered into the very metal of each blade. Whole stories wend their way from quillons to tip, most dealing with the deaths of monsters or giants.

Every sword from Wayland's smithy has its own name, given at the time of the blade's initial tempering (in the bodies of war prisoners, the whispers run) and in the native tongue of the intended wielder. The name given shapes the blade's destiny. For example, the sword *Ecghete* (pronounced EDGE-hayteh, and translated as "blade hate") was forged and plunged into two centuries of bloody civil wars among the tribes of Denmark and Sweden.

Wayland's career has spanned over three centuries; there are references to his work in the Eddas of the Norsemen and the poems of the Saxons. None claim to have seen him in the past century or so, but those who did commission work from him in times past described him as a massively strong man, clad only in a Roman tunic and sandals even in the coldest of winters. It has been speculated that Wayland is either a Cainite or one of the fae, though the latter seems more likely. Some go so far as to claim that Wayland is a manifestation of the Great Smith of the Dead, but this is scoffed at. Even as the debate concerning Wayland swirls, though, so does the mad scramble to obtain one of the blades he forged.

**System:** A Wayland-forged blade is, first and foremost, indestructible by anything short of the blood of dragons or other similarly potent monsters. The blade will never notch or break, even when crossed with another of the same lineage. The gems set into the hilt cannot be pried loose, and any gold worked into the inlay cannot be melted out or otherwise extracted.



FRIENDS, ENEMIES AND MISCELLANY



These weapons were made for skilled swordsmen and they will not suffer themselves to be wielded by unworthy masters. If grasped by a character without at least two dots in Melee, steel thorns will sprout from the grip of the blade, piercing the offending hand and causing two levels of aggravated damage. Two points' worth of blood will also be absorbed into the blade at this time; if a Cainite is pierced thus and attempts to heal himself while still impaled on the thorns, any blood directed toward healing will instead be drunk by the thirsty blade.

In the hands of a worthy swordsman, however, a blade from Wayland's forge is little short of miraculous. It adds two to Dice Pools for both attack and damage, and can break blades that cross it (the wielder rolls Strength + Melee vs. a difficulty of 6; two or more successes shatter the opposing blade). Furthermore, many of these blades sing or chant in battle, and the knowledge that a Wayland-forged sword is on the field has broken several armies' ranks.

Wayland's swords, by drinking from the hands that wield them, have limited Blood Pools (five points) and access to something that effectively mimics one level of Celerity. At Storyteller discretion, the sword will use its Blood Pool and take extra attacks of its own initiative. When a sword's Blood Pool reaches zero, it immediately sprouts thorns and begins to drink. Swords that drink thrice from the same Cainite can develop a Blood Oath for that vampire, and legends speak of bereaved swords that seek lost masters across Europe.

It is worth noting that none of Wayland's swords has ever been proved to be truly aware. They have hungers and a certain sort of instinct, but nothing more. By way of an explanation for this phenomenon, certain Cappadocians claim that Wayland has hammered souls into each of his pieces. This lends credence to the idea that Wayland and the Great Smith of the Dead are the same. Other scholars scoff at this, but mumble of fae magics and their ilk.

## VATHI

Originally possessed by the legendary druid Cathbad, the *vathi* are among the most grotesque methods of divination available. Consisting of over two dozen perfectly preserved severed heads, the *vathi* are usually arranged in a circle, either on stakes or in a cool grotto, with a cauldron of blood in the center of the ring. While no blood drips from the stumps of the severed heads, their flesh is as firm and warm as they were the day each was taken from its previous owner.

When called upon to prophesy, the *vathi* tend to speak in a series of short phrases, with various heads taking turns in speaking. While the original spirits of the heads' owners are gone, traces of their personalities remain and as such, the *vathi* can be snide, sarcastic or even flatly uncooperative. On the other hand, they can also be cajoled into revealing more than they would have normally.

Since the fall of Conchovor of Ulster, the *vathi* have been scattered far and wide across Europe. 13 can be found in the possession of the ancient Cappadocian Kylon, while the rest

are merely the subject of rumor and conjecture. As each head has certain protections laid on it by Cathbad, it is unlikely that many have been destroyed. They are merely lost, awaiting discovery and use.

**System:** The prophetic powers of the *vathi* are conjured forth in a ritual called the *tarbfeis* (pronounced TAUR-vesh), or "bull dream." The cauldron of blood in the center of the ring of heads is stirred counterclockwise and a ritual chant is intoned; when the rhythm of the spinning blood and the rhythm of the chant are in sync the heads will begin to prophesy. Common subjects for prophecy include approaching enemies, plans being made against the supplicant and the doings of the local fae.

To activate a *tarbfeis*, the player must roll Wits + Occult against a variable difficulty. The cauldron in the center of the ring must contain some bull's blood, but the rest can be the blood of beasts, men or Cainites. If the cauldron contains entirely animal blood, the difficulty for the roll is 7. If there is human blood mixed in, the difficulty is 6. If Cainite blood is included, the difficulty is 5. The number of successes indicates the duration of the *vathi*'s prophetic ramblings; a botch produces malicious inaccuracies.

## ASHES

Various of Caine's childer and grandchilder have met Final Death over the millennia. The names ascribed to these fallen titans vary, depending upon which fragments of the *Book of Nod* one reads, but all agree that even in death there is a power to these beings that years or even centuries cannot wash away completely.

Just as a relic of a saint holds certain of that saint's holiness, so too do relics of elder Cainites hold something of their blood-born power. While it is impossible to obtain the knucklebone of an Antediluvian in the way one can obtain the knucklebone of a saint, there are still earthly remains that an enterprising Cainite can find. Even a thousand miles from the First City, one can still obtain ashes.

Most of the ashes that charlatans and Ravnos sell as they traipse across the continent are exactly that: ashes. The true relics of the Ancients are exceedingly rare and can be detected only by the fact that they still radiate something of an aura. The stronger the aura, the more potent the Cainite reduced to ash.

**System:** Ashes of the Ancients are useless in and of themselves, unless one seeks to melt the snow on one's walk. To use the ashes, the Cainite possessing them must anoint his body with the ashes. Anointing the appropriate body part with the ash increases one Attribute by two for so long as the ash remains unblemished. For example, placing ash on one's eyelids would increase Perception by two, while marking one's feet would increase Dexterity.

Rarely are more than a few pinches of ash available at any given time, and these relics are also much in demand for purposes of alchemical research. Vampires who waste them



may find themselves regretting their prodigality when it becomes apparent that no replacements are available.

## GRAILS

Chalices and blood have long been linked. The most famous, the *San Grail*, or Holy Grail, supposedly caught the blood of Christ when he was crucified. The Grail itself has appeared over the centuries, often in visions to saints and mystics, but has rarely manifested itself physically. It is believed that the Knights Templar hold it for safekeeping beneath their great temple in Paris, but none can attest to the truth of that rumor. The powers ascribed to the Holy Grail are great indeed: healing the sick, raising the dead, bringing life to parched lands and even allowing one who drinks from it to speak with God. For this reason, many scholars, monks and even Cainites seek the Grail with a passion beyond mortal comprehension.

For this reason also, a few talented goldsmiths have created false Grails, ones that mimic the powers of the True Cup, albeit in lesser fashion. Some were crafted in the belief that God had inspired their making; others were the masterworks of talented artisans who reached magic once in their lives. The prevailing belief is that divine inspiration was responsible for infusing artisans with the energies to make these false Grails as reflections and reminders of the True

Grail's splendor. As such, they echo the Holy Grail's powers, reminding the congregation of Europe that the Grail does exist. More cynical scholars point to the disillusioning effect that the unmasking of each false Grail has, and mutter to themselves of other, darker powers behind this "divine" inspiration.

What is known, though, is that as the centuries have gone by, such creations have gotten more and more ornate even as the idea of the Grail has changed. A false Grail from the sixth century is likely to be far simpler in line and form than one from the mid-12th century.

**Systems:** Depending upon whether the original smith was human or Cainite, false Grails are ever-full of either wine or blood, and a single sip of either is enough to cure even the most grievous of wounds. (The character drinking rolls Stamina against a difficulty of 6; each success indicates a Health Level, aggravated or normal, healed). Even Cainites can drink the wine contained in these Grails, and even mortals can drink the blood that some hold.

However, there is a price for healing, in this case devotion to a cause not necessarily one's own. Each sip taken from a Grail (even a false one) steers the drinker closer to the Path of Heaven. A Cainite possessing a Grail will find the notion of killing or even feeding from humans increasingly repugnant,





and will begin to actively advocate such concepts as true Christian charity and the "turning of the other cheek."

### SPLINTERS OF THE BLACK STAKE

If one were to assemble all the splinters of the True Cross drifting across Europe and the Holy Land, one could build a dozen True Crosses, each tall enough to bear a giant. Still, the legend persists, and so do the eager seekers of such relics.

The Cainites have a similar legend, concerning the stake which Troile used to hold Brujah at the last. Called, among other things, the Black Stake, this piece of ironwood is supposed to have withstood even the thrashings of one of the third generation, though after Brujah's ash settled the stake itself began to shake to splinters.

Today, those splinters are highly sought after by Cainites with an eye on removing others of their breed. Imbued with the blood of an Antediluvian, each splinter is potent enough to serve as a stake in its own right. As soon as a splinter draws blood, the Cainite whose flesh has been pierced is considered to be staked, and will remain so until the splinter is removed.

There are many, many false splinters in the hands of many, many Cainites who prey upon the gullible of their own kind. True splinters are few and far between, and can only be detected as such through use.



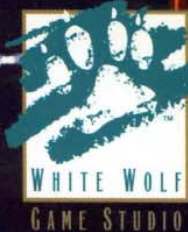
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