

House of TREMERE



YEAR OF
REDEMPTION

A SOURCEBOOK FOR
VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®

House of TREMERE



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To Chad "Vodka Silverpants" Brown for being the one,
true Patsy Cline fan;
To Astrid "My Favorite German" Mosler for too many
things to name here. We miss ya, kiddo.



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An Intruder's Progress

As the secret door sealed shut behind him, Bogdan found that he could not move forward. His body would not obey him. He watched his fingers curl, felt the unmoving blood within him turn gelid. After an instant, Bogdan knew what he felt, as improbable as it seemed: This was terror. This was not to be expected. Bogdan knew himself, as his brethren knew him, as the fearless one. He was the one who'd astonished all by wading into a bonfire to retrieve his sire's battlehelm. Bogdan was the one who'd defied the Tzimisce when they tried to break him. Nothing they'd done to his body could induce him to betray his brothers' secrets. Bogdan was the one who could not be broken. Only he could be trusted, if captured, to reveal nothing. He was the one who'd stood alone in the snow before the lupine prince and demanded of him his meat charm. Bogdan hefted the leather bag containing the charm; it had worked, neutralizing wards and opening locks. It was the accursed Tremere who should feel fear - of him. Bogdan waited, and his blood lost its chill. He tried to move his fingers and saw that he could. He closed his eyes for a moment, and then went forward into the secret chamber's depths.

If Colga were anywhere in this cold, wind-rattled edifice, it would be here, in the hidden chambers where only the Cainite Tremere ventured. Colga had not been heard from in months and had surely been found out by the clan whose allegiance he'd for so long feigned. Bogdan did not like many Cainites, his clanmates included, but felt affection for noble, nature-loving Colga.

Bogdan had spent many weeks in Ceoris in this guise as retainer to one of the mortal mages. As was his wont, he'd made himself unnoticeable. He'd listened to the servants gossip. He'd ingratiated himself with the mortal apprentices. He'd sniffed out the Cainites among them. His own supposed master knew naught of the Cainite world. It amused Bogdan. For hundreds of years he'd heard of the these wizards' might. They could make forests walk or cause castles to crumble with the merest gesture. Yet they couldn't see that Usurpers walked among them.

A clattering sound echoed up the stairs towards him. He brought himself short. He shrank back against the stone wall, feeling its dampness through his wool tunic. If someone was coming up the stairs, he had no hope of escape.

He stood still for a while, but heard no further noise. He quickly made his way down the rest of the steps to the corridor below. It was no grander than the ones above. Several doors waited before him. Although he'd well acquainted himself with the chantry's public areas, he'd never been through the hidden door before and had no idea of the extent of these unseen chambers. He had no choice but to open doors at whim till he found the cells where the prisoners were kept. They had to be in the secret part, for the mortal mages swore Ceoris held no captives.

Bogdan froze again as he heard sounds from the nearest of the doors. The door was thick, and cast in iron. He was confident that he could carefully creep along the corridor's length without raising an alarm with whoever clattered inside. Surely the cells would not be among the first rooms an intruder would encounter. He moved carefully along the stone flooring, making not a sound. Finally he turned a corner and found himself in a second corridor, also lined with metal doors. He heard no sound, and braved himself so far as to test a door. His creepings would come to nothing if all the doors here were well locked. But the door groaned slightly as he shouldered it, and opened. He lifted his lamp to illuminate the darkened room. Inside were Gargoyles. He braced himself for dire combat.

But — he let loose a foreshortened gasp of relief, his first in decades — the Gargoyles were not moving. They were dead, stuffed and mounted like hunter's trophies. Each bore a puzzling malformation separating them from the animated specimens Bogdan knew from the guardhouses outside the chantry. Then Bogdan heard scratchings and skitterings from elsewhere in the room. Along two walls of the room were stacked cages, most too small to hold a doe. Bogdan peered into the cages, and saw beasts whose parts did not belong together. A rat with the filmy wings of a dragonfly. A surging maggot-thing, bigger than a cat, propelling itself along the floor of its cage on several pairs of human tongues. A mourning dove whose breast suppurated with the slow pulsings of what could only be a woman's privates. Bogdan had seen many awful sights among the fleshcrafted victims of the Trimisce, which these creatures at first sight



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resembled. The creatures in the cages were different in some way Bogdan didn't have the words for. They were ill-fitted patch-works, born out of a colder kind of madness than the Tzimisce's. Colga could explain it. He would find Colga and all would be right. He should be leaving this room to find Colga — there would be no cell keys here — but he could not stop himself from peering into the cages. He told himself that his brothers would want to know the secrets of this room.

One cage was obscured by a rust-stained cloth. Bogdan moved it aside, then cursed himself for his lack of caution. The beast inside was formed from the hindquarters of two wolves, so that each set of legs faced the other and met in the middle to make a bucking, headless beast. Dozens of sharp spines rose up through its naked, pinkish hide. Then the spines opened and Bogdan saw that they were in fact the beaks of countless birds. The birds began to chirp. Bogdan wanted to rush to the door, make sure that no one could hear the eruption of squawking. But something about the noise bound him to the spot. Among their screeching, cacophonous song he soon heard words. Words in his home dialect. Then he heard the names of his mother, his father, his long-dead children. He found himself shaking. Then the words changed. They named all of the times Bogdan had been threatened, mauled, tortured. They gave words to the terror he'd told himself he'd never felt. They put the lie to his fearlessness, screamed of the terrors he'd pushed down inside himself. The creature's squalling pulled these terrors from deep inside him, and wrapped him up in them, so that the Beast took him.

Bogdan awoke and thought it natural that he would be bound to a stool in an ill-lit cell. His arms were tied behind him, and his legs to those of the stool. He tested his bonds but was teasingly scolded by the insinuating voice of a woman who stepped, on soft-shod feet, into the chamber.

She came closer.

Bogdan saw her beauty: an absolute teardrop of a face, skin that drank of the lamplight. The cut of her bleach-white robes reminded Bogdan vaguely of a nun's habit. She fixed him in a hungry gaze he'd seen before in other captors. They all thought that with a few crazed looks and some eloquent threats they could frighten him into betraying his brothers.

"I am Mendacamina. I will learn who sent you and why."

They were always confident, at first.

"I won't promise you your life," she continued. "We both know such a promise would be an absurd lie. But you can spare yourself pain."

Bogdan resolved to stay silent. It was the best way to frustrate them, he'd discovered.

"You've learned to close your mind somewhat to thought-stealers," she croaked, her eyes sparkling in the lamplight as she leaned towards him. "But I know that your name is Bogdan, that you've come to rescue someone, and that you believe yourself immune from my blandishments. But that is because you are an unimaginative man. Your mind cannot begin to encompass the agonies I wield. The Tzimisce and what they did to you — I could by comparison make that a pinprick."

Bogdan was surprised at how deeply she'd been able to cleave into his mind. But the things she wanted to know were well protected, hidden beneath layers of willfulness and concentration.

She caressed his face with dry-skinned fingers. "You pride yourself on your fearlessness. Yet the chitterer broke down the walls of your courage as sure as Hebrew trumpets felled Jericho."

Bogdan decided that it would be right to ask questions. Even though he had failed to find Colga, he might glean useful knowledge to take back to his brothers, after his inevitable escape. "What was that beast?" he asked.

Mendacamina smiled and leaned back from him. "A trifle served up by one of my colleagues. Her perpetual experiments with nature always amuse and sometimes prove useful. I've found her chitterer a fine thing to soften an over-proud mind."

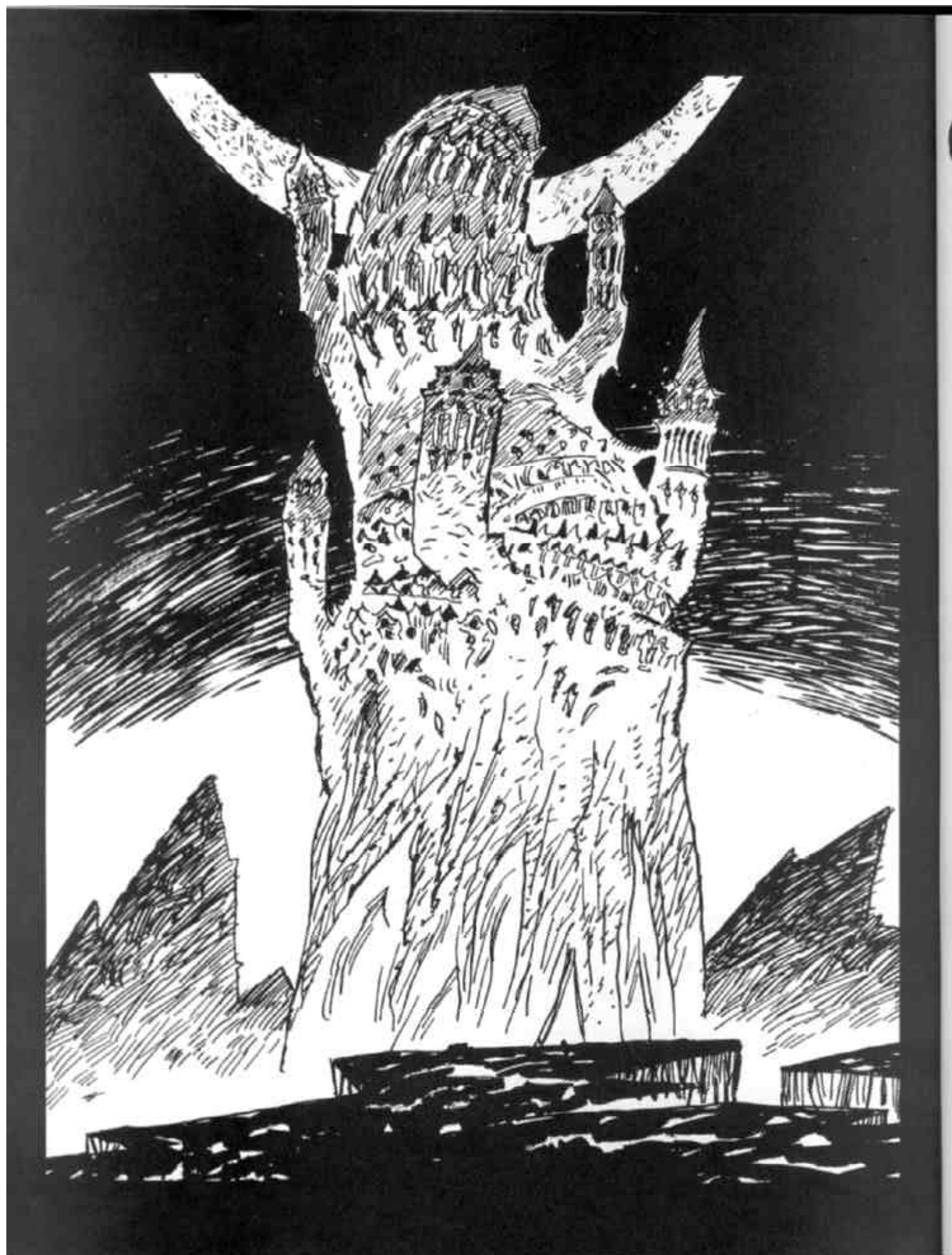
Bogdan heard objects being moved behind him. He strained to turn his head to see, but could not. He heard perhaps four people. They grunted, as if lifting a heavy object. Then there was a scraping noise — something large and metallic being pushed across the cell's stone floor.

"It drove me to blood-rage, it is true. But now I am not frenzied, and whatever torture device you ready, I tell you it cannot force me to speak."

Mendacamina's retainers wheeled the apparatus into sight. It was a large box, cast in bronze, inscribed with sorcerer's symbols. Jutting a few inches out from the box was a wheel the size of a footman's shield. Mendacamina strode over to the box and withdrew from it a long tube, also of bronze, made of many articulated parts, each nested in the other. Bogdan felt rough hands on his face. They twisted his neck to one side. He heard chanting; there were others in the room, beyond the lamp's circle of illumination. They were making magic. Bogdan felt something moist being applied to his temple. His eyes watered as pain radiated from the spot. He thought he could smell his flesh melting.

"You desire information to take back to your brothers. Though you will never again see them, I shall nonetheless tutor you. The tube I hold is a *cannula*. And this—" She revealed to him a sharp, triangular blade affixed to the end of the tube. "—this is called a *trocar*. Together they allow me to aspirate fluid from a subject. The larger device—" she indicated the box itself "—makes of your mind a pasty sort of fluid." She signaled for the lighting of other lamps, a task her minions immediately performed. The new light revealed a table, upon which sat a globe-shaped thing, hidden beneath a length of dyed linen. "As you can see, a second tube travels from the apparatus, where it feeds someone I wish you to meet, Bogdan." She pulled the cloth quickly away from the object, revealing it as a three-foot bronze head, with hinged jaws and bobbling eyes of ivory encased in liquid-filled glass globes. The face seemed to grin at him. "This is Paracelsus. He is eager to taste the pulped contents of your brain. You said, Bogdan, that I cannot force you to speak, and that is true. But Paracelsus, he shall speak for you."

And she advanced, trocar in hand, ready to plunge it into Bogdan's temple.





Introduction: 21 House in Spite of Itself

*And the rain descended, and the
floods came, and the winds blew,
and beat upon that house; and it fell;
and great was the fall of it.*

- Matthew 7:27

A CHANTRY BESIEGED

Ceoris stands as the ultimate symbol of House and Clan Tremere, the brash conspirators of the mortal wizards of Europe and the brazen Usurpers of the Cainite darkness. Its magic-hewn walls, soaring towers and impregnable foundations seem to represent all the power of the blood magicians within. But it is a and perches in the most inaccessible part of Transylvania. Dark things creep about it at night, stony monstrosities flit from its towers and screams echo in its halls. Ceoris is a testament to the Tremere's efforts to keep the world's predators out and their own evils tightly locked within.

And predators and evils there are aplenty.

ENEMIES WITHOUT

Newcomers on the Cainite scene, the Tremere have made enemies with blinding speed. Their "theft" of vampirism and their founder's diablerie of Saulot have cast them as Usurpers, powerful and dangerous. Some try to destroy them outright while others wish to profit from the newcomers.

THE FIENDS OF CARPATHIA

Ceoris's most implacable foes are the Tzimisce *voivodes* who rule much of the Transylvanian night. These inhuman ancients bear a terrible grudge against the Usurpers for it is from them that the Tremere stole the secrets of unlife. But that disgrace only fanned the flames of an already brewing hatred bred in pride and territory. The Tzimisce were loathe to share their domains with prancing mortal hedge wizards and the move to vampirism has only made the conflict greater. The Tzimisce know that Ceoris stands as an affront to them, proof that they are not as dominant and superior as they claim. Destruction is the only solution.

THE CLANS OF CAINE

The other Cainites, both in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, are slightly less vengeful. Gangrel and Nosferatu have suffered in Ceoris's dungeons, and many do wish to avenge Saulot, but vampires are a pragmatic lot. The Tremere show a few signs of fitting in just fine — their lust for power and brash actions have echoes in all clans — and many princes and elders are willing to accommodate them. If they weaken and embarrass the Fiends, so much the better.

More importantly, the Tremere have their uses. They wield a potent new kind of blood magic and

seem willing to use it in exchange for some petty considerations. They are also neophytes in Cainite ways, and so more easily manipulated. Far better to establish a few links to the Usurpers, use them as best one can and then destroy them from within. Outright warfare is a last result.

Anyway, Saulot and his brood really were prigs...

THE DREAD KUPALA

The very air of Transylvania seems to bear ill omens like dry leaves in the wind. The nights are deeper, the storms fiercer and the winters colder than they should be. Friends turn to enemies and insults to violence in a heartbeat. The grace of God seems very far away, indeed. While Tzimisce lords and simple human hatreds have their share of the blame for this dark atmosphere, a good deal of it comes from an infernal influence. Kupala, a devil of ancient origin, has suffused the lands of Transylvania and surrounding countries with its dark aura. It feeds on pride and lust for power, encouraging dark magical workings and other dread deeds and slowly turning practitioners to its ways. The magi of House Tremere, so full of pride and hunger, are ideal candidates.

THE ORDER OF HERMES

House Tremere, before its fall to vampirism, was a founding member in an association of mortal

ROOT OF ALL AND STARS ABOVE

Throughout House of Tremere there is mention of two powerful and enigmatic spiritual beings: Root of All and Stars Above. They are invoked at the foundation of Ceoris. They contact various magi throughout the centuries, encouraging betrayal and lust for power. An image emerges of these beings manipulating the proud magi toward their damnation.

The nature of these entities is purposefully left ambiguous. The easiest and most canonical answer is that Root of All is the demon Kupala and that Stars Above is the Antediluvian Saulot, each pushing the Tremere toward vampirism and the world toward Gehenna for their own reasons. The full details on these plans appear in the epic *Transylvania Chronicles*. But there are other possibilities that you can pursue for your chronicles. They may simply be distant spirits invoked for power; they may both be Kupala or Saulot; Tremere himself (or another vampire) may have assumed their mantle to better control his brood.

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wizards known as the Order of Hermes. The Tremere now stand precariously balanced between the worlds of night and day, moving into Cainite affairs while maintaining the pretense of humanity before their hermetic colleagues. For the time being, the deception holds, but suspicions are growing and the Usurpers know full well that they do not need another powerful enemy marching against them at this juncture. For now, caution rules the clan, but only for so long.

RIVALS WITHIN

If the walls of Ceoris resonate with the attacks of enemies, it is perhaps only that force that keeps the chantry together. A willful, ambitious and egocentric band even in their mortal days, the magi of House Tremere have only become worse as the Curse of Caine has shaped them. Personal rivalries are still the order of the day, forgotten when the Tzimisce attack and resumed in moments of peace. Nevertheless, some factions are growing within the chantry and the house as a whole.

CONSERVATIVES

Led by Etrius, the current master of Ceoris, the so-called conservatives are those Tremere Cainites who advocate a slow conversion of the rest of the house. They fear raising the ire of the Order of Hermes with blatant displays of vampirism and favor caution in most things. Although the conservatives are the most powerful faction in Ceoris, they are hardly organized in any ideological sense. Personal loyalty to Etrius and dislike of his rival Goratrix are the only threads that truly bind them together.

CONSPIRATORS

The conspirators are the flip-side of the conservatives. Goratrix, who designed Ceoris, leads them from far Paris where he has been sent by Tremere. In Transylvania, his childe and apprentice Malgorzata is his stand-in. Conspirators advocate rapidly Embracing the rest of the mortal magi of House Tremere and moving straight into the realm of Cainite affairs, mortals and their immortal souls be damned. Even more so than the conservatives, the conspirators are a faction built on charisma. Goratrix is the active, ambitious foil to Etrius's caution, and many Cainites see his way as the future. Only the slumbering Tremere's order for caution forces Goratrix's allies to conspire instead of acting openly.

A HOUSE IN SPITE OF ITSELF

INDEPENDENTS

Not a faction per se, independent magi still account for most of the Cainite and mortals warlocks in Ceoris. It is the head chantry of the house and the center of its power, so most see working there as a validation of their own superiority. Partaking in Etrius's and Goratrix's feud is a waste of time when there is a war to be fought and great new magical vistas to be opened. Every magus feels hers is the most vital field of research, the most enlightened view and the best way forward. So most hunker down in their laboratories and strike at rivals for personal slights more than any real sense of ideology.

MORTALS

Little do they know it, but the mortal magi of Ceoris — and of House Tremere as a whole — are a shrinking minority. Many in Ceoris stick to their labs and libraries and ignore the nightly skulking of their betters. An instinctive recognition of the predatory nature of the Cainites cows some into not asking too many questions. Some of the mortals are not so easily dismissed, however. In particular, Tosia, a powerful sorceress burning with a Christian belief, sees evidence of the infernal in the nighttime activities of her fellows. She is preparing to move against them.

SERVANTS AND SLAVES

The vast majority of Ceoris's inhabitants are no magi at all. They are soldiers and mercenaries, Gargoyle beasts of war, servants and apprentices. They are beneath notice as far as their betters are concerned, but they see and sense a great deal about the place. The Gargoyles are a new bloodline taking its first steps toward some form of freedom. The mortal servants are free enough, until they accept special blood potions from certain magi....

How to Use This Book

House of Tremere is your guide to one of the most secret and hidden place in the Dark Medieval world: Ceoris, the head chantry of Clan Tremere. Behind its dark walls and in its serpentine catacombs, Tremere took the step toward vampirism and shared his crime of diablerie. Cainite captives screamed and were forged into Gargoyles. From this place, the vampiric world has been shaken to its foundations. Now its secrets are laid bare for you.

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House of Tremere is mostly intended for Storytellers, providing them with a complete setting ready to welcome enterprising Tremere neonates or other Cainites. The material here can stand on its own, but additional context appears in *Transylvania by Night* (which covers the entire region around Ceoris and the other clans' doings), the *Transylvania Chronicles* (which tell of Ceoris's fate) and *Libellus Sanguinis 2: Keepers of the Word* (which reveals other Tremere secrets). The profiles of various mortal magi also use the hedge magic paths found in *Liege, Lord & Lackey*.

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

Ceoris and House of Tremere pose a conundrum to a Storyteller. Much of the place's mystique exists precisely because it is inaccessible. But if the players' characters never get to Ceoris, then this book is hardly that useful, now is it? Several options exist to actually get characters into Ceoris. The easiest, of course, is to play a coterie of Usurpers. They may arrive in Ceoris for training and research, to help in the war with the Tzimisce or even to gain the Embrace in its dark halls.

In most cases, players will want to play a variety of clans, however. Getting them to Ceoris then depends on when the coterie coalesces. If the Storyteller wants to use Ceoris as the center of the chronicle, then those with non-Tremere characters can portray envoys from the other clans seeking information and possible alliance with the Usurpers. The characters can then come together with a few Tremere neonates for their own reasons (possibly to forge just such an alliance). If Ceoris is to be only one stop (or the final stop) in a more varied chronicle, then the characters should come together elsewhere. With even one Tremere in their midst they could garner an invitation to Ceoris after proving their willingness to stand together.

CONTENTS

Chapter One: An Ancient Rot chronicles the history of Ceoris and through it the fall of House Tremere to its own pride and desperation. Hatred, jealousy and bile have tainted efforts in Transylvania from the very beginning and the magi's damnation is only the culmination of their self-made fate.

Chapter Two: A Faraway Citadel reveals the hard road to Ceoris. In the words of one of the

chantry's enemies, this chapter shows just how difficult it is to get to the Usurpers' home.

Chapter Three: A House Divided chronicles the nightly affairs of the chantry. The castellan reports on the various rivalries and petty hatreds that tear apart his house.

Chapter Four: The Belly of the Beast reveals the rooms and halls of the chantry. From the lowly serving quarters to the resting place of Tremere himself, it is all exposed for enterprising Storytellers.

Chapter Five: Those Damned and Soon to Be details the prominent inhabitants of Ceoris. Most are

Cainites of Clan Tremere, but envoys from other clans, mortal magi, ghoulservants and Gargoyles also lurk in the dark halls.

Chapter Six: Secrets of the Workshops provides a variety of new game systems for use with the inhabitants of Ceoris. This includes notes on mortal magi, new paths and rituals of Thaumaturgy and the twisted beasts from the chantry's laboratories.

Chapter Seven: Shadows of Ceoris examines the other prominent Tremere chantries in Europe. Paris, Vienna and Durham are home to power centers in the house that will outlive Ceoris itself.







Chapter One: An Ancient Rot

*Cut is the branch that might have
grown full straight,*

And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,

*That sometime grew within this
learned man*

*-Christopher Marlowe, Doctor
Faustus*

REVELATIONS

The Posthumous Testament of Ponticulus, Former Mage of Ceoris

Bitiurges,

How strange it is to have flesh again... to feel a pen in my hands, a chair beneath me... to run my hands over the surface of this desk. I feel a sense of joy, of intoxication. But this is at odds with the reason I have taken your body, why I hold your pen in your borrowed hand. I already feel your will fighting with me, and I have much to write.

Though I died long before your birth, Bitiurges, I know you well. I have watched you. Do not be surprised. Know that Ceoris is full of eyes, no two pairs working towards the same precise end. My eyes are those of a wretched and helpless shade. I see all that transpires in this cesspit of blind and murderous ambition. I have seen enough of you to know that cloaked beneath your strutting airs and peacock's garb is a sharp mind, hungry for the truth. I will write until your arm is sore. Feed you more truth than your stomach can take. It may give you pause, Bitiurges. But do not let fear or caution deter you from doing the things that are necessary. You, of all the still-living magi, offers me my best hope. I know you to be more worldly than that stupid, cross-kissing Tosia. You surely see that the missive I compose in your own hand is more than just the sending of some interfering imp or devil. Investigate the facts I lay before you, Bitiurges. Know their truth. Act, I implore you. The monsters can still be destroyed, before all is lost.

Your hand did not slip when it wrote "still-living," Bitiurges. Read on, and I shall explain.

THE CONSECRATION: ANNO DOMINI 980

Twenty years before the turn of the millennium, seven men and women gathered in the mountainous wilderness of central Transylvania. They stood together on a rocky outcrop near a rough trail. I was one of the seven. I remember how the dusk welled up in the sky, driving off the swollen sun, swallowing its last orange-lit clouds. Though the beauty of the moment had a strangeness about it, it was beauty nonetheless. It was the last pleasing sight my living eyes would ever drink in.

Our guardsmen, guides and servants kept their distance, watching the horses. There were two dozen of them, I suppose. I was not in the habit of paying attention to our retainers. At the time, I would not have noted their fear. Now that I spend hour after hour watching the human servants of Ceoris, observing

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them in their passions and in their drudgeries, I can better guess. They'd have been wisely frightened. They'd seen and heard many unsettling things during their years of service to us. Like the women who scrub your pots and the men who guard your walls, they saw us as eccentric and forbidding masters. Few of them were born Transylvanians, but by now they knew the place well enough to fear a night in its wilds. Various vile and dangerous creatures, sent by Satan, haunted the hills and valleys. They knew they could not depend on us to use our power to protect them if the creatures came. It would be they, the servants, who would be expected to stand fast, axes raised high.

And why should we, the robed figures on the outcrop, care for the fate of mere expendable men? We had already lived for hundreds of years, our vigor maintained and extended by mystical rites and alchemical extracts. We were magi, wonder workers whose mastery of sorcery's secrets allowed us transcendence over the laws of nature, including the aging of our own bodies. Leading us was a tall man with coal-black eyes: Tremere, head of our house, who once nearly became absolute ruler of all Europe's magi. To each side of him were his closest aides, fervid Goratrix and cautious Etrius. Across from him stood placid, consoling Meerlinda. Completing the circle of seven were Arundinis, whose doom would come before the next century; Anguisa, who would not survive another spring; and Ponticulus, who had but minutes to live.

That is my name — Ponticulus. The day Ceoris was born was the day I died. And I have been sealed in its cage ever since.

THE RITUAL

Goratrix had surveyed the location, devised the ritual and chosen the autumnal equinox as the auspicious moment for the inauguration. On this site we would erect Ceoris, the crowning jewel in the string of chantries Goratrix had placed throughout Transylvania. The entire territory was rich in *vis*, the raw material we use to power our workings. (Forgive me, Bitiurges, if I write what you already know. Perhaps you will need to press these leaves of parchment into the hands of one unfamiliar with our practices.) This spot, Goratrix's painstaking calculations had told him, would reveal the most abundant vein of all. When he passed his agate pendulum over a mere map of the region, it quivered and stopped above this spot.

Attacks against the villages that supported our other chantries had increased over the past months. There was no question that the hellspawn were behind them. This spot would require extraordinary defenses, in keeping with the great power it offered. It would be less a tower of learning than a fortress of might, a



strongpoint from which we could dominate the supernatural landscape for hundreds of leagues in every direction. Such a construct well-suited our leader Tremere's disposition, and our own.

But first it had to be consecrated. The last rays of light leeches from the sky. Goratrix began the rite. He withdrew the miter of gold from his sack and unscrewed its seven pieces. He handed one to each participant, giving the head of the staff to Tremere, his master. Goratrix revealed the chalice of the spheres, poured into it the ancient wine they'd found at Runcu, adulterating that with the salt of Thoth. He passed it first to Tremere, who drank of it and gave it back. Goratrix gulped it, too, and passed the vessel to Etrius. Goratrix waited until all seven of us had taken the potion. He signaled to his manservant, who was ready and blew a hunting horn to warn the other retainers to turn their backs. They did so at once. We stepped out of our robes, exposing our sun-starved, flaccid selves to the cold winds. Goratrix asked if any present wished to make a greater sacrifice than his. We knew not to gainsay him; it was all part of the ritual. He would provide the roots, the seed, the trunk of the great tree that was to be Ceoris. He would invoke the power of the *axis mundi*, the mythic world tree that is the center of all existence. Tremere handed him the sickle. He took it in his right

hand, reaching between his legs with the left. Evidently he thought it would require only a single slashing arc of the sickle to sever his phallus. But it took more than that. The flesh does not always yield, even to the blade. Goratrix had to saw away at it. Where he had wounded it, the blood gushed like a fountain. It splattered Meerlinda, and Etrius, and Tremere and the rest of us. I still remember the warm wet feel of his gore splattering against the naked skin of my belly. None of us flinched. We knew Goratrix had the magic to eventually grow his phallus back. And I confess that we had of late become inured to dark ritual doings, having developed a taste for the grimmer pages of our tomes. Most importantly, we knew that any outburst, any failure to maintain the chant, would be fatal to the magic. Goratrix grimaced, steeled himself, tore at what was left, and held it up for us to see. Staggering, he placed it upon the desired spot.

Then my shame. Perhaps a shame that saved my soul. Certainly one to grant me one monstrous existence instead of another.

I did what I should not have done. I failed to control myself. I remember the feeling rising up in me, the desire to suppress it, my attempt to constrict my throat. My eyes filling with water. Then my knees betraying me, falling beneath me. Finally, the purging of my stomach. The bile

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came up in me and out of my mouth. I knew even then what they would have to do to prevent my weakness from forever spoiling this perfect site. Not for an instant did I think they'd spare me.

Tremere must have nodded to Goratrix, sanctioning the inevitable. Despite his injury, Goratrix found the strength to step forward and, using the same blade with which he'd maimed himself, cut my throat. I brought my hands to the wound. I must have withdrawn one of them in my last moments, for the final image of my living days is of my palm, red and slick.

Though I hate them, I will not claim that my murder played easily on their souls. They were not as yet accustomed to slaying their own. Arundinis and Anguisa wordlessly withdrew knives from the pockets of their discarded robes and got to work on my unworthy corpse. The knives, meant for ritual display, proved ill-suited to the task. I saw the rest as if from on high. I watched them cut my flesh and saw my bones.

Etrius took the lead for the remainder of the ritual. He produced a sack of Cretan earth and emptied it in the middle of the circle. He waited for Arundinis and Anguisa to finish, then took my severed head by the hair. He planted it in the mound of earth.

Now a question danced across Etrius' face. Where to put Goratrix's severed phallus, now that my head had to be buried in the mound too? Etrius studied Goratrix's face; neither was permitted to speak. Etrius would have to decide.

Why did Etrius make the choice he did? I have never been privy to anyone's thoughts. All I can say for certain is that, with his fingers, Etrius pinched my dead mouth open. The soul-rotted son of a Viking bastard put Goratrix's member inside my mouth, which he then closed. He spaded the earth over my head. The six remaining magi completed the chant. They put their robes back on. Etrius cleared his throat, loudly. Goratrix' servant heard, and blew the horn. Arundinis and Anguisa bore Goratrix to a tent, where Meerlinda performed the spells to stop the bleeding and commence the regrowth.

That I remained there, an invisible shade with the consistency of smoke, is surely no coincidence, however. The order's tomes had said it was common for our ilk to lurk in the realm of living a few moments, but that I have remained all these centuries testifies to the power afoot that accursed night. By placing Goratrix's member in my severed head, Etrius bound me to the spot. That bookish devil will claim innocence in any such endeavor, but do not trust him Bitiurges. He rose to Tremere's right hand through guile and betrayal just like the rest of us. He meant for me to linger and grow, perhaps as his spy or slave, perhaps for his own pleasure. Trust him not.

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CONSTRUCTION

Construction would begin in earnest in the spring. In the meantime, my murdered soul watched teams of retainers comb the mountainside, exploring and mapping its many natural caverns. Builders and miners consulted with Goratrix, more sullen than usual in his winter of second puberty, working out the details of the grandest engineering project since the fall of Rome. Goratrix wanted hard things, mundane things, to make his bulwark against the creatures: battle-toughened fighting men, reinforced walls, murder holes, a portcullis, traps.

I found a home for myself in a tiny seed beneath the earth. Spring came. The seed began to grow. I had a form again, though not a human body.

One day, Goratrix came, with Arundinis and Anguisa, to ascertain that the sign was present. If the omen was right, the hundreds of workers they'd readied could be brought to the site. There was supposed to be a fresh sapling growing on the spot where they'd buried my head. I surprised them. I savored the looks of shock and anger on their faces. I was a great, oak-like thing with writhing, oily leaves. They drew closer and saw that etched in its bark my mocking features. I opened my newly-grown mouth, drooling sap, and warned them that they did the bidding of a thing none of them knew. I felt the beings Stars Above and Root of All clawing through my dark roots. I was about to name them when Goratrix set the tree alight with a spell. I fought back. My branches punctured Anguisa's chest before Goratrix and Arundinis killed me for the second time. Again I was reduced to the status of pitiful shade. I heard Goratrix swear Arundinis to silence. He looked about for another sapling, pulled it from the ground, and replanted it where my tree had been.

THE CONSTRUCTION: 981 - 985

For nearly five years I watched them complete the structure. Ant-like, a small corps of masons, carvers, miners, hewers, smiths, carters and laborers toiled under the supervision of Goratrix's chief engineer. Again, these were all ordinary men, beneath the notice of prideful mages.

As dedication time drew close, Etrius came to survey the site, and to oh-so-dispassionately questioned the efficiency of his rival's building methods. I saw Goratrix bristle. Did Etrius? He was always cold as an eel, even when the blood that pumped in his veins was his own. I could not read his intentions. Etrius asked for, and received, Tremere's authority to magically enhance Ceoris' fortifications. He created a massive fissure in the earth, cutting a miles-deep trench around

Goratrix's mountain chantry, always the little acolyte, displaying his capabilities before the master.

When the building was complete, Goratrix and Etrius examined the list of hirelings who'd worked on the construction. They selected the men who knew more than was convenient about their new fortress. They told the more sensitive magi of the house that the builders' memories would be magically erased. They'd be borne to their various homelands. They'd awaken from their walking slumber with gold in their purses, and would forever wonder how it got there.

Goratrix and Etrius had these builders killed. The others were permitted to settle in the villages around Ceoris. The magi promised them fertile land to farm and the protection of their mighty castle. Those who did not see the attraction of this offer were also murdered. Some of their fates were delayed: They died many years later on the tables of Tremere or Goratrix. I believe they were trying to construct homunculi from human tissue. One laboratory subject in particular screamed in a singular way, like a cat being played alive, and his cries still ring in my ears.

(There is something that creeps among the pines outside Ceoris to this day. I can glimpse it only faintly, for it is too far from the foundation to which I am bound. Its howls remind me of those ancient screams. You should find this thing, Bitiurges. It might be an escaped homunculus, eager to balance accounts. It could confirm this tale, or tell you secrets to which even I am not privy.)

THE EARLY YEARS: 980 - 999

Tremere did not move into this new chantry. As was his custom, he kept moving from one enclave to another. He made Goratrix lord of Ceoris, but also installed Etrius to work at his elbow. The rivalry between the two men turned gangrenous. Goratrix, who previously exercised an interest in matters carnal unusual for a magus, now slept in an unshared bed. I will tell you that his regrowth left something to be desired. He muttered ceaselessly about it in his private moments. He blamed Etrius for his sorry condition; if Etrius hadn't put the member in my mouth, all would have been well. Etrius did little to ease Goratrix' turbulent mind, continually chiding him for his supposed rashness. That conniving lickspittle cast me as a shade and Goratrix as a eunuch in one fell swoop. Other magi from the House of Tremere moved in. Some tried to remain on good terms with both men; others enthusiastically sided with one or the other of the rivals.

Over the next decade and a half, Ceoris repelled the occasional nighttime raid launched by forces we at the time called night creatures. There were bandit attacks, too, surely motivated by the region's fiendish rulers. Although the raiders slew many in the surrounding villages, Ceoris itself proved impregnable to them. At first, the attacks greatly concerned the magi. The other Transylvanian chantries suffered more seriously from enemy assaults, but the raiders always failed to press their advantage after successful strikes. Goratrix and Etrius became equally complacent. The haphazard timing and half-hearted execution of the attacks led them to surmise that the night creatures were a disorganized, barely intelligent lot.

A DISQUIETING MYSTERY

During this time, the magicians of Ceoris faced increasing frustration in their researches. Fruitful-seeming avenues of magical inquiry began, one after the other, to disappoint. Rediscovered spells found in mildewed texts wouldn't work as described. New incantations took longer to formulate. Each sequestered behind his own stack of arcane tomes, none of the mages at first noticed that their colleagues shared their creeping sense of having reached an abrupt limit. In France, LeDuc's Grand Emanation of the Emerald Knives collapsed without warning, slaying both of his apprentices. Some found that their philters of immortality did less to lift sagging muscle or invigorate tired bones. Only in 995 did the magi of Ceoris discuss their mutual dilemma and resolve to inquire into its causes. I saw their fear and took pleasure in it. They were supposed to be masters of all! Their occult knowledge gave them surpassing understanding of all the forces at work in the world. Yet now they were proven to be fools. Some force they did not understand was slowly stripping from them their sense of control over existence. My laughter became audible then, echoing through my corridors and up to the cupola of the Grand Library.

In 996, Etrius proved that the potency of the chantry's *vis* was slowly but measurably diminishing. In 997, Ceoris hosted a grand conclave of Tremere magi who came from as far away as England and Jerusalem. The house now realized that they faced a universal diminishment of their powers. Their scholars extended various hypotheses to account for it. The approaching millennium had changed the numerical basis for magic, one popular theory claimed. Others said the stars were shifting. Demons were winning the war in Heaven, still others said. The conclave concluded in an orgy of wishful thinking; only a few dissenters were willing to even entertain the possibility that the power they'd worked so long

for, that in many cases maintained their immortality, could snuff itself out like a spent candle. Whatever the problem was, it was surely cyclical.

Tremere himself had decided otherwise. When the conclave members left, he gathered the magicians of Ceoris together and proposed that they proceed as if the worst were about to happen. He put Goratrix in charge of a grand investigation into the failure of their workings. From 998 to 1000, Goratrix cajoled and coerced the other resident scholars of these halls to bend their researches as he wished. Through augury, visionary meditation, astrological calculation, and alchemical analysis, they eventually uncovered that their workings were beginning to fade. The hermetic path was fading for good. Both Goratrix and Etrius contributed to the project great leaps of understanding.

Etrius wished to share their results with mages of other houses. He argued that if Ceoris' researchers could come so far in so short a time, the combined efforts of Europe's best minds would certainly find an even quicker solution to the encroaching mystery. (Biturges, if you pass this letter to an uninitiated reader, you will certainly explain that the magi of House Tremere are but one of many groups who make up the Order of Hermes.)

Tremere enjoined Etrius, and all the others, to silence. They obeyed him, of course, but whispered behind his back. Why would he withhold the knowledge they'd gleaned? Goratrix guessed that Tremere meant them to find new means of achieving immortality to eclipse the known method, the future of which now seemed in doubt. With so great a new secret in hand, their House would finally rule the others. Tremere would reverse his earlier failure to take over the Order of Hermes.

It was at about this time that Arundinis vanished while on a journey south to Athens, along with a quartet of the House's stoutest bodyguards. A search party followed Arundinis' trail to the Danube's banks, where they found nothing but a destroyed encampment and oddly tangled vegetation.

THE QUESTING YEARS 1000 - 1021

Tremere ordered his followers to investigate every possible substitute for their immortality workings. Ceoris split into rival groups, each certain of its methods and anxious to prove the others wrong. Nuntius oversaw a project to distill potent herbs into a new immortality drug; it would not require magic to brew, he claimed. Paul Cordwood researched ways of measuring and then distilling the human soul. Epistatia pursued a discipline she called spiritual migration, by

which magi could abandon aging bodies in favor of healthy ones. The alchemist Therimna sent parties out to the farthest corners of the world to capture some of the monsters of legend, whose parts were then admixed into a variety of foul-tasting and utterly inefficacious potions.

ETRIUS'S HELL-MOUTH

Hypocritical Etrius delved into diabolism, seeking to duplicate the effects of that forbidden field's rituals without actually making direct contact with demons. How typical of him to make such a meaningless distinction! Tremere himself had dabbled in diabolism after his failed attempt, centuries past, to take over the Order of Hermes, but had abandoned it after pinpointing its central paradox. Demons weak enough to be dominated by a mortal mage are never powerful enough to perform workings worthy of the trouble involved. Demons mighty enough to grant great boons cannot be dominated; they always cheat the magus in some way. Tremere forbade his followers from engaging in infernal dabbings not out of moral or spiritual qualms, but because the spells weren't effective enough. Etrius now reasoned that the power of diabolic worship might lie (or be made to lie) not in the demons' power but in the repetition of ritual demands. He won Tremere's approval to embark on a careful course of research into this proposition. After seeing poor results from the sacrifice of pigs and chickens, he sent retainers out into the countryside to seize the virginal daughters of farmers and foresters. He sacrificed over two dozen young women over his two decades of research. Etrius repeated his experiments with newborn babes as sacrificial subjects, to no better effect. Sometimes he summoned demons unintentionally, sometimes he got nothing but a few foul smells for his trouble.

His most spectacular failure, though, came on the autumnal equinox of 1003. The stars were right for appeals to Hell, he had discovered, and a grand ritual was in order. He had the secret names of three princes of Dis, or so he thought, and was ready to make demands backed by the blood of eight new victims. He succeeded far beyond any hopes, and opened a doorway to Hell, allowing demons to take over an entire floor in the chantry's dungeons! I feel no shame at the queasy delight that shook me as the creatures poured up from the infernal depths, searing flesh and cutting bone. Two magi, four apprentices and a half-dozen retainers were consumed by hellfire or torn asunder by demonic claw before Etrius found a way to partially reverse the ritual, closing a door and sealing Hell behind it.

When the crisis had passed, recriminations commenced. Naturally, the others wished Tremere's favorite

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humbled, expelled, even slain, for the danger in which he had placed them all. They dragged him before the conclave and demanded that he justify himself. His sputterings and twistings in defense of his actions were delicious to behold. First, he argued that he had done everything correctly, that another had surely sabotaged him. How Goratrix's eyes bulged when he saw that Etrius sought to shift the blame to him! I could not contain my laughter; the magi did not hear it, but saw the flames of their candles gutter. At Tremere's command, Etrius withdrew the accusation and then claimed that demons had addled his senses. Surely, he said, they would be compelled by his devout faith to strike at him. The disclaimer of fault was ludicrous, and one by one the others spoke for his destruction. Yet at conclave's end, Tremere held up his hand and took on himself the responsibility for Etrius' failure. He had advised Etrius, guided his theory, sanctioned his experiment. If Etrius was to face expulsion, so should he. Did any wish to stand for his destruction? The conclave fell silent. Etrius' wet eyes, aimed adoringly at Tremere, were those of a lap dog.

THE SOLUTION OF GORATRIX

It was Goratrix who arrived at the fruitful theory. Noting that the night woods supposedly crawled with reputed immortals, he resolved to investigate the creatures. He spent several years combing hermetic texts for vampiric lore, finding little of use.

Then someone left Arundinis' head at Ceoris' threshold. Servants crossing the drawbridge found its desiccated remains one damp November morning. Individuals unknown had placed it just on the other side of the chasm separating the fortress from the terrain around it. Goratrix claimed the head, wishing to test a spell he'd found in the necromantic texts he'd been consulting. Performing a ritual which involved powdering and ingesting the skull, Goratrix relived crucial moments from Arundinis' last days alive. His party had been set upon during the night by creatures he soon came to know as vampires. He was kept alive for months and tortured to the breaking point. He'd revealed many of the House's secrets to his chief torturer, a sneering beast named Roland. However, in moments of self-control he'd supplied much false information as well, greatly exaggerating the power of the Ceoris mages. Goratrix dictated the contents of his visions to an apprentice, and later sifted them for clues to the creatures' whereabouts. He sent parties out to find landmarks he'd seen.

In 1005, Goratrix sought Tremere's blessing for a daring raid. He personally led a war party to Roland's haven. His most ferociously loyal fighting men hacked their way through the Tzimisce elder's own corps of retainers. Dozens were slain on both sides of the

battle, but the assembled mages ultimately bound Roland in sigil-inscribed chains and scorched him with fire. Goratrix promised him his freedom in exchange for answers. From Roland, he gained his first inklings of the breadth of vampire history and power. He learned that the vampires belonged to factions, called clans. Roland, for example, was of the Tzimisce, a family of decaying aristocrats who mold flesh like clay. He also learned that these beast reproduced by draining the blood of mortals, hence transforming them in a process called the Embrace. I cannot in the short time I control your hand convey all Goratrix learned about the night creatures, Bitiurges; I must continue my narrative.

When his head reeled with answers and further questions eluded him, Goratrix commanded Roland to Embrace two shocked and unsuspecting apprentices, Stephen and Pharus. Upon his return to Ceoris, Goratrix bade Stephen and Pharus follow him down into his private suite of workshops. He secluded himself for years without boasting of any progress at all. Ceoris' inhabitants soon came to speak of Stephen and Pharus in the past tense.

DESPERATION SETTLES IN

As the years ground on, and one group after another saw promising queries sputter and fail, an atmosphere of desperation descended upon the chantry. When experiments went awry, magi cast bitter looks at their rivals, certain they'd been sabotaged. Vincius, apprentice to Paul Cordwood, was found strangled in his bed in 1011. This happened not long after Epistatia humiliated herself in front of the assembled magi by failing to project her consciousness into the mind of a captured hunter. She'd accused Vincius of putting the evil eye on her during her demonstration. She denied involvement in Vincius' death. Nothing was proven against her.

Goratrix came to her defense, but at a price: He insisted she abandon her researches and assist him with his. Epistatia was recruited to assist him in casting his consciousness about the world, or perhaps through the ghostly realms of the underworld, in search of further information about vampires. Epistatia's aid allowed Goratrix a series of breakthroughs. So much so that one might be forgiven for suspecting him of murdering Vincius in order to lure her under his sway. (I did not see it happen, but think it more likely than not.) He contacted at least two different entities who provided him with crucial instructions. Having been the world tree of Ceoris, I recognized them as Root Of All and Stars Beyond, the beings who had filled my roots with hate. Goratrix's inquiries continued for another eleven years.

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Bitiurges, you must learn who these beings really are and what they want with us. Without them, the damned chantry would never have been built and our house would not stand divided and damned. Perhaps, armed with that knowledge, you and trustworthy others might begin to undo what pride and willfulness have done to us.

THE BECOMING: 1022

In 1022, Goratrix announced to a select few that they were needed to aid him in his final experiment. Invited to join him were Tremere, Etrius, Meerlinda, and four other of our founder's closest associates. For seven days and seven nights the participants went without sleep, engaging in a series of rituals so complex that the instructions covered one thousand leaves of parchment. These were burnt in the course of the ritual. At the ceremony's climax, the participants fell upon the Embraced apprentices, Stephen and Pharus, tore them apart bare-handed and ate of their flesh and blood, like crazed maenads of ancient days. From violent delirium they fell into a state of ecstatic agony, and then into unconsciousness. When they awakened, hours later, they were unliving. Vampires.

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None but Goratrix expected this result. The Spaniard Calderon lunged at his throat, swearing to kill him for misleading him as to the ritual's purpose. Etrius, appalled, accused Goratrix of diabolic meddling of the first order and predicted that this day would seal their doom. Tremere, however, immediately sensed the efficacy of Goratrix's magic. He spoke in that damnably commanding voice of his, the one that makes you forget all sense and decency, and ordered them to halt. He kept them close at hand, ordering that castellans govern their chantries in their stead. They stayed in Ceoris over the next seven years, struggling to learn and master the new laws that ruled their bodies. Each became a night-dwelling recluse, worried that their chantry-mates would see through the ruse. But none did; typically, their fellow magicians were too preoccupied with their private researches to notice the changes in their fellows' routines. I tried screaming into their ears, but, as in a child's dream, could not make myself heard.

FAILED GAMBITS: 1024 - 1026

For decades I had tried to master my own new condition, to exercise some kind of power over events in

Ceoris. One night, in 1024 I think it was, I watched Etrius feed upon a once-innocent girl stolen from a nearby village. I wept at my helplessness, as I had so many times previously, weeping tears as insubstantial as the rest of me. But this time the tears fell upon Etrius' brow. He looked up, startled, and ceased his feeding. Etrius could see me.

I hated him, and yet here I had an opportunity to speak. Was there still enough rationality left in him to make him see the slope on which he and the others slid? If I could have seized him by the throat and shook him to his senses, I would have. But I had words as my only weapon. I told him I had observed the exploratory rituals of Goratrix and Epistatia. They'd sensed my presence and tried several times to drive me off, but each time I'd found a crack through which to slip. When humans drink the blood of vampires, I'd learned, it is far from usual for them to become vampires themselves. They become ghouls, half-mortal slaves to those whose blood they consume. But Goratrix and Epistatia's otherworldly patrons had provided the means to ignore this law of vampirism. They'd also supplied power to the ritual. Etrius shook his head, rejecting my words. I demanded that he think back to the ritual, remember the forces invoked. I had smelled All-Root and Stars Beyond, knew one of them as a sort of demon, the second as something other. The greatest of the Tremere, who'd always considered themselves the masters of all, had made themselves mere puppets. And for what? For what? *Mere life*, I fairly shrieked, *mere life*! There was only way to reverse the slide, to honor whatever greatness they once had. The eight would have to take the ultimate control over their own existences, and end them. Suicide would be the only way.

Etrius nodded and agreed to kill himself. He sought out Goratrix, and told him of his encounter with me. Joined by Epistatia, the two came to me, mouths full of lies, and attempted to bind me forever into an astral cage. Do not think me stupid. I was prepared for possible betrayal, and had readied a ghostly trick of my own — for in Ceoris my power is great. In a way, I am Ceoris. At least, I am as much a part of it as its stones and its mortar.

Destroy me, Bitiurges. Destroy Ceoris.

HOW THE TZIMISCE LEARNED OF US

If the Tremere vampires would not kill themselves, I realized that I would have to motivate their enemies to do the deed instead. I waited for a Tzimisce spy to appear among our retainers, and sure enough, one did. I took over his hand as I now take yours, and wrote

letters to his master, a vampire called Rustovitch. The letters repeated Goratrix's account of the capture and slaying of his child, Roland, the Embrace of Stephen and Pharus and the ritual of usurpation. The letters found their mark, and soon Rustovitch's armies were besieging our chantries.

A WAR IN EARNEST

Vampire-led ghoulish armies swept through the other Tremere chantries of Transylvania, destroying most of them over the course of a mere two years. I have since learned about the other vampire clans who joined Rustovitch's war: the barbaric Gangrel and hideous Nosferatu. Even magicians fell as wave upon wave of shrieking, hissing soldiers swarmed past their defenses. Survivors hid in the woods and then straggled to Ceoris. Ceoris itself suffered a number of feints, intended by Rustovitch more to demoralize the Tremere than to deliver a death-blow. He and his allies were winning, but still had no real means of breaking through these walls.

Like a naïf, I had hoped Rustovitch would have a way to slay only the eight. I did not mean for him to make all mages his foe. I never wanted a war. I ceased my letters, and despaired at the failure of my gambit. I beseeched fate to let madness seize me, so that I might forget my errors. But it would not do so. It haunts me still that I managed only to accelerate our damnation in trying to halt it.

CRISIS WITHIN: 1026 - 1036

The escalation of the war against the night creatures made these walls into a cage of terror. The mortal magi smelled dread in the air. The more perceptive of them noted that something was gravely awry within the ranks. Both Goratrix and Etrius had withdrawn from day-to-day activities. Others close to them were becoming equally reclusive. They restricted access to many of the experimental chambers. Strange noises emanated from the dungeon, now also forbidden to all but a few. I admit I played a small role in opening eyes. Opening a doorway. Leaving a book open to a crucial page. Yet I feared to intervene too closely, having behaved so stupidly before.

I took what petty pleasure I could in watching hostilities break out among the usurpers. Goratrix argued that only the immediate Embrace of all house members would give them the strength they needed to fight back on an equal footing against their vampire attackers. Etrius proved an equally passionate advocate of caution. The Embrace of unprepared magi

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would bring nothing but confusion and betrayal. Their colleagues had to be carefully, methodically prepared to abandon their illusions of morality. Tremere agreed with Etrius but played the two men against one another, stoking the long-simmering hatred between them. On several occasions, Etrius found himself warding off exploratory magical attacks against him. He blamed Goratrix and petitioned Tremere for relief. Tremere placated him but did little to check Goratrix's rage. The two rivals concluded that their master was testing them. They would fight, and the winner would earn Tremere's favor. Each recruited allies among the other Cainite magi. Calderon and the Frenchman LeDuc took Etrius' part, others supported Goratrix, and skilled Meerlinda sought an end to the dispute. Despite her efforts, the two sides periodically struck at one another over the course of the next decade.

THE INCIDENT AT THESSALONICA

This crucial tale I know only second-hand, for it happened far from my gates and towers. In 1036, Etrius visited the chantry of another hermetic order, the Bonisagi, in Thessalonica. There he sought books of lore concerning the vampires. While there, he faced assault from an army of tiny, hissing homunculi with teeth of fire. They were born of a spell cast by Vitorio, a mortal magus under Goratrix's sway, which misfired in a bloody manner I am cruel enough to find amusing. Whether it failed because he too rashly tried an ill-formed ritual, or due to the ongoing volatility affecting our magic, I do not know. The spell drew the material essence for the doll-like automatons not from the brick and mortar of the chantry, as was intended, but from the flesh and blood of other magi sleeping near Etrius' chamber. None of the magi of Thessalonica were slain, but several were crippled: One had his eyes punctured, and another lost the flesh from both of his legs. Furious Bonisagi traced the fell magic back to its source. They concluded that not only was Ceoris in the midst of a civil war, but its mages were surely drawing upon infernal powers. Within months, this tale spread, with the virulence of a disease, through Europe's chantries. Tremere spent five years visiting one mighty peer after another, persuading each that the Thessalonica Incident had been grossly misunderstood. Vitorio was murdered and held up as the sole guilty party. How I wish I could have traveled at Tremere's shoulder, to see him dissemble, beg, wheedle, and grovel before those he regarded as his lessers! Alas, his accursed powers of persuasion, no doubt taking clever advantage of the others' fear and narrow perceptions, won out. The

others agreed not to pursue any action against his house. I fear he even recruited some of them without telling any of his followers that he'd Embraced prominent magi of other houses.

CORNERSTONES OF THE PYRAMID: 1037

Tremere then committed an act which has become the most open secret in clan lore. Using the Thessalonica incident as a pretext, he summoned the seven to his chambers, where he forced them all into the blood oath with him. By commanding the mystical loyalty of each, he would end the civil war. Thus only Tremere gained from the struggle between Goratrix and Etrius. Did he deliberately stoke the flames of their rivalry, hoping one of them would precipitate an action justifying the blood oath? Of course he did.

Tremere told the seven that the blood oaths were only the first step in the renewal of the House. Survival depended on the exercise of a single determined will. He would institute an iron-clad hierarchy through which each newly Embraced Tremere Cainite would ultimately obey his orders. He unfurled a scroll upon which he laid out a diagram mapping a pyramid of loyalties. Tremere stood at the top of the pyramid. The Inner Council of Seven, as he now called his confederates, lay immediately beneath him. When the Embracing of the house was complete, each would command a number of lords, who in turn would oversee large areas, or realms, containing many chantries. The regents, each head of a minor chantry, would command the magi and apprentices who lived there. The blood oath would secure the vows each Cainite made to his superiors within the hierarchy. Upon initiation, apprentices would drink the blood of their masters, admixed with that of Tremere and the councilors. Magi would sup of their regent's vitae; regents, of their lords, and so on. This tight control over the actions of underlings would prove an even greater weapon against the other Cainites than the Tremere mastery of magic, he told his council. Chaos was sweeping Europe and those who could stand firm would triumph.

Before dismissing the Council of Seven, Tremere informed them that Etrius would be accompanying him on a trek across Europe and the Holy Land in search of Cainite secrets. Goratrix would finally rule Ceoris alone. A smile crept across each man's lips — until he saw the other. Then the rival's faces mirrored one another in wary displeasure.

THE REIGN OF GORATRIX: 1037 - 1133

I saw Goratrix swallow his misgivings as Tremere and the other councilors departed. Now he exulted in his sole dominion over Ceoris. He had always intended to rule it single-handedly. Why else would he have bound so much of his personal magic up in it? As long as Etrius, or any other participant in the original ritual, occupied it, the center of his power would be obscured. I occupied it, too, of course, in my way, but evidently dead old Ponticulus did not enter into his calculations.

He turned his fury to the war against the Tzimisce, whose ghoul armies once again stepped up their attacks. These assaults waxed and waned over the ensuing decades. The night creatures would ravage the outlying chantries, come howling to the very gate of Ceoris, and lay siege to it. Then the desperate magi would marshal their dwindling power, blast the creatures with a terrible working, and send them yelping back to their havens in northern Transylvania. At first I had hopes that the war would change things, but as the cycle repeated, I saw in it only tedium and perhaps a cryptic joke of destiny. Perhaps you are fond of dates, Bitiurges, so I will list the years of the worst fighting: 1040, 1046, 1062, 1066, 1086, and 1105. I do not entirely understand the long pauses between assaults, for I claim no insight into the Tzimisce mind. At any rate, the magi, during the periods from 1047 to 1061 and from 1067 to 1085, were able to erect wards to keep night creatures from even approaching our holdings. They rebuilt the outlying chantries during these times, frantically stockpiling vis for future use. Then the wards failed, the enemy armies once more descended, and the magi fled back to their chantry of chantries.

Many who dwell within these walls were Embraced during this time. You know blade-tongued Malgorzata. Did you know she is not a noble, but a young local Goratrix purchased from field-worker parents? He made her his apprentice, sheltering her from his rivals. As is so often the case with apprentices, she became a coarser, less subtle version of her master, emulating and exaggerating his most blatant traits. Her boldness and quick rise won few friends but won the admiration of other apprentices. Five years after her own Embrace, she brought her most wet-lipped admirer, Jervais, into the Cainite fold.

A great Tzimisce offensive came in 1105. It crushed all of the Transylvanian chantries outside Ceoris. Goratrix struggled against the call of the blood oath,

wishing to Embrace all of Ceoris' magi at once to better enlist them in the war. Although he Embraced a few individuals then, he could not break with Tremere's hold on him so soon after the blood oath ceremony.

THE MAKING OF GARGOYLES

Needing a weapon with which to fend off the Tzimisce and their allies, Goratrix turned once more to his research libraries. With Malgorzata and Epistatia at his elbow, he Embraced captured peasants in order to study the changes wrought on their anatomy by the progress of vampirism. He gleaned much from his program of live dissections, but by 1109 found that the study of newly Embraced Cainites had attained its limit. Epistatia, her mind swimming with otherworldly insight, advised Goratrix to seek experimental subjects even older than himself. He would have to capture some genuine Cainites.

Goratrix began to Embrace not the magi of Ceoris, but their retainers, especially fighting men. This did not directly contravene the letter of Tremere's orders, you see. He sent his neonates on suicide missions to capture seasoned Cainites. Five or six dozen of them died working to fulfill his commands. A few parties succeeded, dragging back furious Tzimisce, Gangrel and Nosferatu to face their master's scalpels. From 1110 to 1120, the dungeons of Ceoris reverberated with the cries of mutilated Cainites. A new name enters the tale here, one you will recognize: the newly Embraced mage Virstania, who even then was three-quarters mad. It was her twisted love for the creatures they were making that rendered them malleable, and infused them with hatred for their former brethren. Goratrix's most loyal apprentice, Malgorzata, kept the participants from indulging theoretical flights of fancy, chiding them when they forgot that their lives depended on the project's success.

In 1121, Goratrix unveiled the first of this remade race. The first Gargoyle was named Chaundice. It was to become typical of its kind, with a demonic visage, stony skin, fearsome claws and bat-like wings. But Goratrix, Malgorzata and Virstania spawned many other types of Gargoyles, ultimately less successful in design, during these years.

By 1125, they'd created enough of these fearsome servants to turn them loose on their foes. The Gargoyles turned the tide of war against the Tzimisce. They flew out over the battlefield, homing in on the few vampires among the throng of blood-crazed ghouls and terrified mortal warriors. They swooped down and plucked them up, bearing them to Ceoris, where they too would become raw material for new Gargoyles.

In 1126, Chaundice was sent out on such a mission and did not come back. I presume the Tzimisce

AN ANCIENT ROT

found him, tore him apart, and learned what he was made of. They attacked us with renewed ferocity soon after we lost Chaundice, allowing us to presume that they reacted with horror and hate. (I have heard Virstania whispering to her Gargoyle disciples about one of their number who has escaped and created his own colony beyond Tremere control. They call him the Rock Lord. From what they say, I do not think this is Chaundice, but it might be.)

THE RESEARCHES OF TREMERE AND ETRUIS: 1037 - 1133

Tremere and Etrius were not idle during this near-century of bloodshed. From 1037 to 1121, they traveled from one chantry to the next, conducting the secret experiments that spawned their vampiric art of Thaumaturgy. They had begun such work in Ceoris and now continued it abroad. It converted the spells and incantations of hermetic magic to a system of power dependent not on *vis*, but on the supernatural potency of blood as converted and stored by the vampire's body. The two appeared at Ceoris only to exchange their resulting insights with those pearled from Goratrix's Gargoyle project. Much of the first seven decades of their inquiries consisted of theoretical work. Practical breakthroughs were apparently slow in coming and I watched Goratrix use the addictive properties of his blood to enslave several magi to serve as his proxy in the Gargoyle project and other matters.

Tremere and Etrius expended the final twenty years finding specific hermetic spells and rituals amenable to blood magic conversion and translating them into thaumaturgic formulae. Perhaps, Bitiurges, you might in conversation raise the names of the mages Gyrus, Tabellarius, Decorar and Cautus. See what reaction their names provoke. They were enslaved by your supposed betters, used as magical workhorses, then slain, their brains and hearts dissected for the insights Tremere thought might be found within them — to no useful purpose, as best I could tell.

THE HUNT

By 1121, knowing Goratrix's success in creating the Gargoyles, they felt ready to pursue various hints and references in the literature of vampirism. Accompanied by a few early Gargoyles, they traipsed through the dark corners of Europe, sometimes posing as vampires of other clans. (Here I rely again on conversations overheard in Ceoris, whose boundaries I may not cross.) They pieced together more basic facts of vampiric

existence. They discovered that they could increase their power by drinking blood closer to that of Caine, the first vampire. (Yes, Caine, the first murderer.) Tremere immediately tested this theory, slaying an older vampire in Rome and consuming his vitae. As soon as he knew that a hierarchy existed, Tremere feverishly worked to find its apex and topple whoever occupied it. From 1126 to 1132, he and Etrius tracked down the ancient vampires known as Methuselahs. Whenever they found one, they carefully planned an assault, summoning the other Councilors from their posts to join in the kill. Through this means they increased the power of their own blood, in turn bolstering the strength of their Thaumaturgy.

THE NEXT DEPRAVITY

In the sorry state Etrius and the others condemned me to, my awareness goes no further than my own walls, Bitiurges. I do not know what the monsters I once called colleagues do when away from me, so the next chapter in this sorry tale is only conjecture. From what I have gathered, the hunt for the various elder vampires led Tremere to wish to find a creature he called an Antediluvian. This thing was a father of vampires, founder of one of the great lines of the hellspawn. Tremere wanted its power for himself, I can only presume so that he could establish his claim to vampiric superiority.

Etrius and Tremere journeyed far and wide and I have surmised that their journeys bore fruit in the lands now controlled by Moslems. I have heard whispered that they were seeking the resting place of Set himself, vile god of ancient Egypt and a father of vampires. Even if this were true, they didn't find him. Instead, in 1133, Tremere summoned the Council of Seven to him and I spied Goratrix report that his master had uncovered the tomb of a creature called Saulot. Bearing the third eye of wisdom, this ancient vampire was father of a line of creatures called Salubri. Goratrix left with hopes of new power. He did not return empty-handed, or alone. The entire council arrived, with the prostrate body of Tremere in tow. Some were flush with new power, others raged against the folly of hubris. Goratrix remained silent, but walked with a new hate in his step.

I do not know exactly what happened, Bitiurges. It seems that Tremere drank the blood of Saulot and slew him. He now has the power of the ancients, but has been prone to deep sleeps and mysterious shifts of personality and even physical shape. Tremere was once a man, once a vampire. Now he is a monster out of legend. No one seemed ready for this result and I have heard some whisper that they foresaw House Tremere's downfall when Tremere committed this new crime.

Find out the truth if you can Bitiurges, but beware.

SINCE 1133

During a period of wakefulness in Ceoris, Tremere laid out the future development of his self-named clan. LeDuc, master of the burgeoning Paris chantry, was to travel to the Levant to pursue further clues as to the events that had unfolded. He would hunt Salubri and their secrets, apparently. Goratrix would step down as Lord of Ceoris and head to France to take over the Parisian hall. Steadfast Etrius would take over at Ceoris, seeing to it that Tremere's rest was undisturbed.

THE FURY OF GORATRIX

Goratrix contained his apoplectic rage until he reached his chambers, where I saw him vent it in the presence of Malgorzata and Jervais. It was he, Goratrix, who had saved the house by creating the Gargoyles and driving back the night creatures! It was he who had sacrificed his mystical essence to build Ceoris. It was always supposed to be his! His strength would be forever rent asunder if he did not occupy it! The craven Etrius had out-smarted him after all. That lackey knew that the real seat of power was right at Tremere's side. What contribution had he made? He'd surely coaxed Tremere into taking Ceoris from him. What a slap that was! What a renunciation of all Goratrix had done! Etrius had merely been there to flatter Tremere, to attend to his comforts. Etrius had done nothing, but won all!

Goratrix seized a sword from the wall and said he would walk down the corridor to the chamber where Tremere lay and take his life as Tremere had taken Saulot's. But then a change of expression fell upon his face; I am sure it was more than just a trick of flickering candlelight. Sometimes, as I bring the moment back to recollection, I think he must have been overcome with love for Tremere, as the blood oath demands. But then it is just as likely that he was loath to call whatever curse had faced Tremere in Saulot's tomb directly upon himself. So instead he told Malgorzata that he would go to France and find a way to make of the Paris chantry what Ceoris should have been. Etrius would rule in name only, he said. She would have to rule covertly, conspiratorially. Although it was true that they wished to move at speed, and that Etrius was timid and overcautious, she must never forget the true matter of the struggle. It was about two men, Goratrix and Etrius, and about the loathing between them. Goratrix felt a hatred so great that any number of others might take shelter beneath it and draw strength from it. To grant one's loyalty to a man, that is a mistake, Goratrix said, because men fail you. They surprise you. They waver. But give your soul to hate, and you will grow and gain strength. He

was really quite stirring. I might myself have fallen in line with him, had my own being not already been long ago consigned to hatred — a hatred which included him as one of its foremost objects.

AN OLD RIVALRY REKINDLED

Goratrix decamped to the Paris chantry, from which he launched a distant chess game to thwart Etrius. Both men used thaumaturgic means of communication to recruit allies in the struggle. Malgorzata kept Goratrix informed of events transpiring within these walls. Unknowingly, her reports kept me well-apprised, as well; I listened to them with the mordant detachment time has taught me to cultivate.

I watched as Malgorzata, more charming than Etrius, swayed the sympathies of many neorates to Goratrix's conspirator faction. Goratrix moved carefully, for Tremere now showed little tolerance for the continued prosecution of the feud. In 1140, one of Goratrix's most effective new pawns, Misia Gies, attracted Tremere's attention; I am still not sure what she did. He summoned her here. Months later, he finished with her and sent her back to Paris, her consciousness utterly expunged. Goratrix, I would imagine, saw this as a warning from his master and ceded the battleground to Etrius.

The way Goratrix thinks is so well known to me that sometimes I believe I hear him whispering in my ear. Until a more propitious time for confrontation arises, he will wait, building his power. I do know that he has Embraced, or perhaps made ghouls, courtiers to King Louis VII of France. He tells Malgorzata he finds mortal politicking intriguing. At first, it seemed refreshing: After all, mortals could act quickly because their life spans were short. Then he discovered that other courtiers were playthings of vampire clans only vaguely familiar to him. He entered that world, and there forged links to vampire clans. He found particular success with clans called Lasombra and Cappadocian. You rub shoulders with their spawn, Bitiurges: Giacomo Guicciardini and Margaret Vasa, frequent guests of House Tremere, are in fact vampiric envoys to Clan Tremere. They first started coming here in the early 1150s.

Etrius could not allow Goratrix to outdo him as a schemer. In 1155, he proved his mettle at intrigue by recruiting the first defector from another vampire clan: Dauud the Copt, formerly a follower of the Egyptian snake god, Set. Etrius also aggressively rebuilt and defended the outlying chantries. The mortal mages clamored for him to reclaim the chantries richest in *vis*. Although he assured them he would do so, he instead built chantries at strategic locations. They were fortresses in all but name. He hired mercenaries and bandits who used the chantries to harry the

AN ANCIENT ROT



populations of Tzimisce villages. They were also used as bases for hunting expeditions when the vampires needed fresh prey.

THE ENDLESS WAR CONTINUES

The tedious seesaw fight with Transylvania's other vampire clans grinds on. 1169 was an especially bad year for Tzimisce assaults, and 1176 was worse. That was when a new Tzimisce champion, Ioan, took command of their armies. I have learned little of this Ioan except that he is a skilled general. During his first campaign, he smashed many of the outlying chantries and rooted out infiltrators and spies.

Now he continues to make slow, steady advances against the Tremere. It is worse than they tell you. You know that the outlying chantries once more lie in rubble. You do not know that the original wards have failed. It is the blood magic of the vampires, not the Hermetic rituals of your fellows, that keep the enemy from swarming through my front gate.

Far below you, where he much of the time suffers the tormented half-sleep the vampires call torpor,

Tremere dreams and prophesies. I spend much of my time perched near his frothing lips, attempting to find the sense in his mutterings. He declares that his clan will one day look back on this desperate time from a position of unimaginable strength, that the entire world will pay unknowing homage to him. I can see the doubt in the eyes of even the bootlick Etrius. When Ioan retreats, Tremere's vampires resume their intriguing against one another. They're rats trapped together in a cage.

You too are in this cage, Bitiurges. Now that you see that, you must act. It is very late, but perhaps not too much so. Your hand grows tired, and I feel you fighting my control. I have overstayed my welcome. Perhaps tomorrow night, I will come back, and tell you more. Of course you should not let anyone see this until we have decided what you shall do with this knowledge.

— *Ponticulus*

THE DESTINY OF CEORIS

Born in murder and betrayal, Ceoris is a tainted house heading toward an ignoble end. But it is far-off still and many tribulations face the residents before they leave her behind once and for all.

It is but a few years off that the Order of Hennes uncovers the Tremere secret and marches against Ceoris. This witch war, called *Massasa* by the hermetic magi, is a terrible battle fought in desperate circumstances. Neither side has the resources it once did and both face other, oft-times more pressing enemies. The Trimisce do not step aside simply because more prancing wizards want to strike at the Usurpers. Ceoris faces devastating assaults, but traditional hermetic magics are failing and the mortal wizards eventually vanish.

The war with the wizards settles once and for all the issue of Embracing the mortal members of House Tremere. The Cainites fall on their mortal fellows like hungry wolves and most of the new childer end up glad for their immortality, others are simply murdered. This quiets the rivalries within the clan for a few decades, but the hatred and jealousy between Etrius and Goratrix refuses to fade. They find other issues to fight about, Etrius arguing for caution and Goratrix for action. The torpid Tremere ultimately sides with Etrius if only by his inaction. After a final reprimand in 1314, Goratrix turns his back on the man he once loved and builds a rebellious faction of Usurpers, which eventually becomes the Tremere *antitribu* within the emerging Sabbat. (The details of Goratrix's final reprimand appear in *Transylvania Chronicles I: Dark Tides Rising*.)

In the late 15th century, while the Tremere are helping to found the Camarilla and end the Anarch Revolt, Ceoris has its own unrest. Goratrix's faction makes itself known among the anarchs and Virstania joins her beloved Gargoyles in revolt. While some of the bloodline remain loyal, many flee into the mountains and set up their own fiefdoms. The Trimisce do not hesitate to strike at the hated Usurpers in their moments of weakness.

Both Goratrix and Virstania were privy to Ceoris' secrets before their betrayal, making the chantry less than secure. Armed with this argument, Etrius finally convinces the Inner Council to sanction moving Tremere and the mantle of power to Vienna. He leaves Ardan of Golden Lane to oversee Ceoris. A few decades later, the two cooperate in finally abandoning Ceoris once and for all. Goratrix's prize creation lies in ruins by 1600.





Chapter Two: 21 Saraway Citadel

*Bella, horrida bella,
Et Thybrim multo spumantem
sanguine cerno.*

*(I see wars, horrible wars, and the
Tiber foaming with much blood.)*

- Virgil, The Aeneid

TO THE FIENDS

The report of Alexandru Basarab, Servant of the Voivodes
My blessed liege,

You know that I am not a man of words. I ask the scribe you sent me to write with flowery words, so my poor way of speaking will not offend you. You want me to tell you how others may get inside the keep of the damned magickers. I speak honestly and say all that I know and hope that you do not mistake my forester's blunt speech for disrespect.

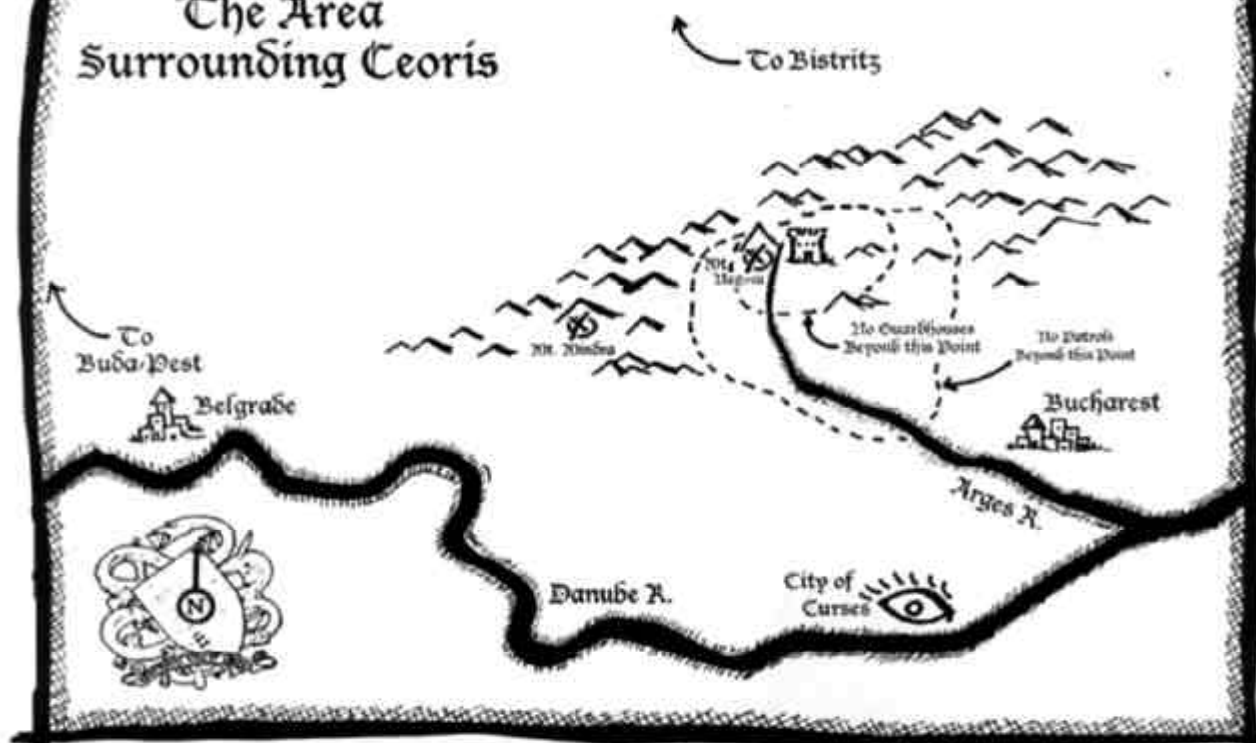
I have no doubt that there are ways to get inside those gates, political ways, ways of honeyed words of which the book-educated may drip into each other's ears. There be ways of deception, no doubt, of taking on other guises so that the cursed witch-men let down their drawbridge and welcome you in with arms outstretched. I know nothing of those ways. I am a man of the woods and of the mountain and the rivers, and know only how you might approach Castle Ceoris by means simple and material. So these I will now lay down to your scribe here.

GETTING THERE

Along with the words he writes I will send this map. I mark now where Ceoris is, in relation to the rest of our land. It lies within the bosom of the mountains which your servants might know as the Transylvanian Alps. It stands roughly

eight leagues east of the source of the River Arges, high in those same mountains. This puts it also east of the tall mountains Mindra and Negoitu. It is, say, 70 leagues, as the crow flies, from Bucharest, which is to the south and east of it. Buda-Pest lies 240 leagues to the north and east of it, also as the crow flies. Your servants mayhap need me to say travel times instead of leagues. Now this is where the calculation becomes difficult, for the terrain is rough and laden with difficulties. Let us reckon, though, on a small party traveling with horses and weighed down with the general equipment needed for safety and survival in a place so inhospitable to life and limb. Were you to go overland from Bucharest, naturally not able to go as the crow flies, but avoiding the most hilly and or worst-forested lands, you would spend 11 days in journeying time. Were you to come from Buda-Pest, you should take a water journey on the Dunav River, which your servants may know as the Danube. You should expect a two-day journey until you reach the village where the women cannot speak except to utter curses. The village has no name which the people there will share with outsiders, but on the map I have marked it with an evil eye. Do not drink any of the ale or water they give you there, but you may safely sup from the dinners they cook in their large pots in the village circle. From there you begin a land journey of four score leagues. It will rob you of 17 days of traveling time if you are lucky, more if you are not. The trek is all uphill, from the lowlands of the Dunav to the mountains where Ceoris waits. One of your servants once

The Area Surrounding Ceoris



HOUSE OF TREMERE

told me Ceoris was nearly 6,000 feet up from the level of the sea, though I do not know how he arrived at that figure. Were it possible to travel up the River Arges, the journeying time would be shortened to less than a day. Alas, the river is nigh impassable in its upper reaches and heavily patrolled by Gargoyles lower down.

(Should your servants be traveling in winter, which I say they should do only in circumstances dire, they should double the times for travel overland. Water travel be the same as I said just now, and safer to boot, for it is accomplished by sleds on the frozen rivers.)

GUARDHOUSES

The accursed wizards keep many guardhouses through the area. They construct them of pine wood. They are made to be put up quickly and then abandoned or turned to firewood. By my reckoning, it takes them but half a day, what with two dozen or so of their mortal workmen laboring away to erect one of these posts. Thus they may continually move their posts about in an effort to confuse us. I could mark the locations where guardhouses have in the past been, but to what end? By the time you gaze upon this map, they will be in different places. So instead I make a dotted line, a limiting point. I have never seen a guardhouse outside the limiting line that I now draw.

I can but guess at the force you should expect when stumbling across these temporary guardhouses. Thirteen is, however, a witcher's number and the magickers seem to use it in the organization of their servants. You should probably expect at least one complement of minimum 13 war-hardened axmen, half as many steel-eyed archers (with eyes as night-adept as owls) and a brood of Gargoyles which may number as few as three or as many as 13. (You do not need me to remind you that there will be no Gargoyles by day.) How many of the axmen and archers are still pure mortal in stock and how many have supped of the blood of the wizards, I cannot say. Only rarely have I found the demon-couplers themselves at these posts, and never at one more than a league distant from Ceoris itself. When they are present, one must fear the fire they cast from their fingers, the earth they move beneath your feet, the wind that cuts flesh like an oft-blooded blade and the water that rises up in the back of your throat, drowning you from within. Though in truth I must say that the appearances of magickers themselves have been less frequent of late than in decades past, and that their fury abates quickly after one or perhaps two shows of their fearsome magic. On two occasions, when stumbling upon the guardhouses, I saw creatures pour from within that were so awful in aspect I swore they must be demons from the blackest pits of Hell. Yet your servant, she with the laugh that turned wine to vinegar, said them to be Gargoyles still, though they had neither skins of stone nor a wyrm's wings.

We have from time to time overrun the guardhouses, and I have studied them closely. Their floors measure ten feet across and eight feet deep, the walls perhaps half a hand in thickness. They are but simple constructions, granting those within the advantage of height over their attackers. They stand three stories in height, I'd say forty hands high withal. The top story sits unroofed, so that Gargoyles might easily fly from their perches atop it. Battlements hide the archers, whose murder holes give them ample room to fire at any who try to storm the guardhouse.

The second story provides shelter and warmth to them among the watchers that need it.

The ground level is given over to the storage of weapons and provisions. There is no need for flooring there, and the witch-men do not provide for it. Never have I found anything worth looting in these places. They are not prizes to be taken, but places of trouble, to be shunned.

The keenness with which the guards watch is as reliable as a woman's virtue, which is to say one night is very different from the next. Should the magickers be alarmed, or otherwise have reason to be wary of assault, it is most difficult for a party of any size to creep past one without notice. I have done it, but would not trust any to creep at my side, for they have not my experience in the exercise. Also it is difficult to pass by them in times when game is scarce, for in hungry seasons the Gargoyles are eager to nose out the faintest scent of prey. And make no mistake, we are but drink to those beasts, whether we be of mortal flesh, of the secret nobility or lie somewhere in between. But when the Gargoyles are fat and the sorcerers occupied with other matters, the fighting men may pay better attention to their dice games and japes than to the snapping of twigs in the forests surrounding them. With a skilled man's furtiveness you may creep past one, two or even three such guardhouses in the course of a day's journey.

I cannot say how many guardhouses the enchanters keep on any single day. There is no way to know, until the day we overrun the place entire. I can attest that I have never seen more than three guardhouses over the course of an entire trek from the Dunav's banks to Ceoris's brink.

AMBUSHERS

Guards may wait in ambush, secreting themselves behind boulders, in gullies or up in trees. Rarely do they do this unless you have made your presence known to them by dint of some unnatural commotion. The patience to establish ambush without the reliable hope of a party to fall upon exceeds what these foresters can muster.

PATROLS

Your servants must also be wary for the patrols that beat the brush around the castle. I will mark on the map a second line showing the line of safety. North of this line, one must listen alertly for the presence of patrols. South of

A FARAWAY CITADEL

it, they only rarely go. The patrols themselves offer little threat to our best parties: The patrollers are always mortal, save perhaps for a leader who has drank the dark wine. Never have I seen a patrol number greater than four — though I do not count the times when the hag men beat the hills in search of an escapee or other quarry. Then one can see just how many slaves the magic men command, and quail at the sight of their massed power.

More vexing than the mortal patrollers are the Gargoyles who freely range there in search of food. Wishing to see the monsters feed on nature's provender and not upon their own limited stores, the hag-men loose them in the woods around the castle to hunt. Some hunt alone, but I have more often seen them in packs of five or six. If caught, you should adopt the manner of a lackwitted villager strayed too far from safe hunting grounds. The Gargoyles stand commanded to convey interesting prisoners to the castle for inquisition, a fate offering dangers far greater than a monster's hunger. You have a chance of escaping a Gargoyle's teeth, but not the grim mercies of Ceoris.

BYPASSING PATROLS

Your servants might wish to pass through the patrols not by fighting or hiding from them, but through deception. The magickers themselves, or those bidden to come to their castle, must be able to pass through these lands unmolested. They do so by presenting a token, most often

an amulet inlaid with a symbol of arcane portent, but other times gain safe passage merely with the utterance of a watchword. On more than one occasion have I followed a party journeying openly towards the castle, and through stealthier means have secured the token needed for passage. A single token grants safety to an entire party, for few come to the castle unattended by servants and squires.

The patrollers themselves offer an even better ploy to them willing to sustain a ruse for longer. The mortal fighters come and go, arrive and die, with the frequency of springtime flies. Their numbers are great enough that not all know one another on sight. You thus may fall upon a small party of patrollers, seize their armor and insignia, and attempt to pass as newly recruited minions. Through such deception one can learn much of doings in the castle, for, with tongues slowed by ale, the common fighters speak too freely for their own good. You must be prepared to execute witchman orders, and are thus at risk of being dragged into doings most unmanly. You might also find yourself fighting against others who seek to intrude into the magickers' domain. So thus you may find it safer merely to use stolen armor and insignia to move about within the environs without seeking entry to the castle. When we loosed that thing you sent us, the thing which flowed upon the ground and scorched it and made the sound that made our ears bleed, we did so by means of this ruse. We crept up merely to the lip of the chasm that surrounds the castle, with no intention of going further.



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Though I have succeeded with this trick on occasions various, you must use it but sparingly. None prove more suspicious than minions recently fooled. Even harder to deceive are Gargoyles or the sorcerers themselves.

TRAPS

Where the witchers cannot patrol, their living minions lay traps. You should watch hawkishly for trip-wires, which may bring blades or cascades of rock from the trees, or send a spearhead into your heart muscle. The blanket of needles and leaves which that the forest floor during all the seasons may also conceal weakened planks atop yawning pits. The unfortunate who falls into such a pit may land upon a row of sharpened stakes or flooring of rocks.

HAUNTS

Gargoyles are not the only strange beasts to haunt the woods around Ceoris. I have heard with my own ears the groans of soldiers long dead in those dark woods. Our own men becomes the allies of the enemy in death, awaking great fear in those they have left behind in the living world.

Then there are creatures even stranger. Beasts which are half one thing and half another. I have seen a many-legged insect as large as a bear, with scything limbs, which had fallen on one of my men and was feeding upon the opened guts. Others of us have seen creatures like sheets of skin shaped like men, or a towering beast which looked as if it had been made from the guts and gore of a hundred victims.

Once a woodsman of stout demeanor fell into a wizard's pit, where he encountered a creature he described as a deer's head propelled by the legs of a silverfish. It sucked the juices from his eyes and fouled him mightily with some kind of ichor. Three days after I rescued him, I did him the favor of sinking a knife into his kidneys, for he had gone mad.

HERE MY MISSIVE ENDS

My liege, this is all I know of the pathways to Ceoris and their dangers. I have served you loyally here for nearly five years. I now humbly ask you to let me return to my home and my kinfolk. Please send another man you can trust as you have done me so I may show him how my tasks are done. My bones grow weary, and at night my dreams are thick with blood.

Your unquestioned servant,

— ARLANDRIJ

Transcribed by Miles Breckish



A FARAWAY CITADEL





Chapter Three: A House Divided

O Conspiracy!
Shamst thou to show thy dan-
gerous brow by night,
When evils are most free?
— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

REPORT OF THE CASTELLAN

Master Etrius—

I know you have no need of the flattery a lesser lord would expect from his loyal factotum. You have always been a man to demand the facts, to value clarity over frippery, and to see in brevity the wisdom of the ages. I shall therefore do as you have charged me, and answer your questions with all due frankness. But because the words I put down on this parchment are laid out with a comrade's forthrightness, I must bid you to take great care in the disposition of this document after you have read it. It is not to be dreamt of that I would think of you as irresponsible, or thoughtless as to the dangers that might result if some of those described herein were to lay hands upon it. You know that is not so! It is merely that there are some within the walls of this hallowed center of learning who might fairly be described as vipers stirring in their nests, restlessly seeking a foe to strike at. Knowledge is at its sharpest as a weapon when kept well-scabbarded. Our knowledge as to the truth of their motives must be withheld from them until the night comes when we are best prepared to seize them from behind the head, pinching the hinge of the jaws as one must do to catch a viper while staying unbit. The writhing of these snakes reminds us that treachery springs from newly-gained power as naturally as oaks from acorns grow.

Herein I shall say how Ceoris works, and what must be done to improve upon its perfection. You have charged me with making craft of your art, of taking your principles of understanding and applying them to the nightly direction of this chantry. In this report you shall judge if I have succeeded and whether I am worthy of reward for my efforts.

HOW WE SHALL PROSPER AGAINST THE ANCIENT FIENDS

Surely the greatest advantage we enjoy over the creatures from whom we have liberated the secret of life eternal is our new thinking on the hierarchy as the natural expression of all order. While verily our Tzimisce foes love to strut and swagger as they profess to lord it over all creation, they are too ancient of mind to have applied the new science of reason to the relationship between mastery and servitude. They perceive rulership over others as their birthright, as a thing that will naturally accrue to them because it has always been so. They do not stop to consider the constituent elements of

rulership, to determine how the means of rule might be extended and bettered. No god or authority determines our destiny. We rule because we must; were we deprived of power over others, too many would seek our destruction. Only through sharpness of mind, through a profound unlocking of the hidden methods and structures of the world around us, can we do what is necessary and impose our will on those who would otherwise bring us down. The moment that our understanding and diligence fails us will mark the beginning of our downfall. It is said that the Cainite mind ossifies over time, that its patterns become set. If this is so, we must make the future now so that the world will be ours even a thousand years hence when the veil of dotage shrouds our thoughts.

What Ceoris is today, the rest of the world will become in days ahead. All shall be sorted by their worth and categorized by their duties as they are here.

LORD OF THE CHANTRY

Tremere, he who is master of us all, has in his wisdom chosen as the guiding symbol of our quest the pyramid, redolent of the esoteric mysteries of ancient Egypt. As the Egyptians placed their pharaohs, who they thought were manifestations of the godhead, at the top of their pyramid, we place a single Lord and master at the head of each chantry. At this chantry of chantries, you are that master, sagacious Etrius. Answerable only to Tremere himself, whose slumbers have, alack, grown too long of late, you sit wisely atop our pyramid, looking down on the rest of us. When a post here becomes vacant, it is you who reaches down and selects a successor. Though we below you may take apprentices, perhaps grooming them to perform our roles, the final decision lies in your hands.

THE CASTELLAN

From your lips to my ears, milord Etrius. It is I, as castellan of the chantry, who enforces your edicts and attends to niggling, nightly matters. You are thus free to pursue your researches and further the goals of the House in this troubling time. I do not see much of you of late, milord, and thus I dare to believe that I have ably discharged my duties.

I shall now list the many tasks I must commonly fulfill, so that — should some terrible fate befall me — you might appropriately tutor my successor. At least, I trust that is why you ask me to list them. It is I who supervises Ceoris's defense. Each evening when I arise, Esoara, who captains our guard forces, comes to my side to give me his report. If either Ceoris or our villages have been attacked during the day, he tells me what has happened. We may have lost peasants, soldiers, ghouls, Gargoyles or magi. Buildings in the village may have been burned down. Supplies may have been looted from our village storehouses. If any of these have happened, he

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tells me what he will do to carve regret into the hides of those impudent enough to wrong us. I hasten to specify that on most nights, none of these things have occurred. The day has passed without moment. Perhaps there is a minor problem of discipline: A soldier needs flogging, or a Gargoyle has become too mad to be trusted with further guard duty. Esoara knows I take great interest in matters of obedience. Our thralls must fear us, and I am the face of that fear. When there is a beating to deliver, I stand to watch as whip hits flesh. Esoara's sergeants wield the lash so adeptly; it would be a shame not to study their art.

COMMANDING THE SLAVES

Should Esoara report difficulty with the Gargoyles, it is Virstania I seek out. Many times have I insisted to her that my role as castellan demands respect, and that she should seek me out to present a nightly narrative of her activities and those of her Gargoyles. Perhaps if you spoke to her, milord, she would accept the necessity of obedience. The pyramid cannot stand if its foundation blocks caper about to their own tunes. I must confess that as of now I must go to her each night in her damp and tunneled catacomb. If Esoara has told me of some problem with one of our slaves, I must repeat the charge to her. (I formerly bade Esoara to accompany me on these vexing treks, but 'twas clear her capriciousness angered him, and I did not wish to force our ferocious champion

to stoop to base and fawning diplomacy.) Virstania's disposition towards her creations is, if you will forgive my troubling you with such petty complaints, most irksome. These creatures are our best weapons against the foes that so sorely beset us, I will freely admit. Yet she clucks and coos over them in a manner I would call maternal were the very idea not wholly absurd. Woe betide me if I should have to tell her that one of her charges has acted disobediently! She accuses Esoara of exaggerating or not understanding or... Not all of her creations are as well made as she believes. They are quite mad, some of them, and incapable of obedience for more than a few months. I have taken to ordering Esoara to slay the worst of them. Then I tell Virstania they were felled in the fight with the Tzimisce. Matters are intolerable as they stand, milord. I beg you to help her again rightly see the pyramid's light.

THE RECRUITMENT OF MERCENARIES

It is often my task to approve the hiring of new men-at-arms. Before our present troubles, I grant that I never considered how hard it is to find a steady stream of doughty mortals to fight and die for one. It is especially hard in this forgotten corner of the world. Our villages throw up perhaps one young man per season with the strength and temperament to risk life and limb in our defense. Yet we lose dozens of men per year. Clearly, we must attract mercenaries from elsewhere. Much of my



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communication with other chantries concerns this vexing question. In any city boasting a Tremere chantry, certain rumors float. One might hear the word in the worst taverns, in the slums and bawdy houses — wherever vermin swarm. Only the roughest, most despised, most hopeless hear in these rumors a siren's call. The tales say that there is a place far away, nestled 'gainst the Transylvanian Alps, where gold flows like water for those desperate enough to come and serve its terrible masters. From Paris, Madrid, Byzantium and even Cairo they come. They mutter and scrape and say they've heard tell of a fortress full of gold and silver and of hard barons who need it protected. Cutthroats, madmen, rapists and berserkers, most of them. Without our arcane gifts, these men could not be safely herded into a cage. Many of my hours are given over to the workings required to strengthen their obedience and temper their bloodlust. They must strike as savage beasts, but only when we ordain it and only against our chosen targets. A very few of them are truly cunning and well-favored by fate, as well as brutal and desperate. These we ghoul or propose for the Embrace. Esoara, of course, was one such.

Esoara's scouts comb the land for chances to strike against our foes. We need more Gargoyles. We need fewer Tzimisce, Nosferatu and Gangrel. When they see a likely chance, Esoara comes to me with maps he has drawn. He tells me how many men he will need, how long they will be gone, and what supplies they will require. I decide if the reward is worth the risk. I say yea or nay to any assault.

FOOD AND SUPPLIES

Yet the management of war is but one of my chores. I must see that Ceoris is amply supplied with food for the mortal and blood for the immortal. The villages we control provide for Ceoris's simplest needs. From them, we get meat and bread and ale. The village women weave the cloth upon our backs and spin the thread with which it is sewn. The men hew our wood and take the odd bit of game with which to spice our mortals' tables. They catch fish in the rivers and pick berries in the forest. These delicacies fall first to our unaware fellows, then as special rewards for warriors who fight well for us. Other goods come from afar. Ghoul-run caravans bring parchment, inks, arcane essences, alchemical supplies and rare tomes from other chantries. They (and a few mortal merchants, well-rewarded for their necessary courage) drop these shipments at the villages, then turn around for the dangerous journey back out of enemy territory. Our own servants take a cart every month or so to the villages, gathering up what they've stored for us. If a mage, breathing or not, wishes to have an ingredient essential to his workings, he asks me to secure it. If he does not get it in the time he deems agreeable, I suffer his reproaches. A magus's capacity to ignore the practicalities surround-

ing his existence seems nowhere more evident than in the attitude of certain of our fellows. She seems to know we're at war only when battle rages at our very gates. When the enemy temporarily withdraws, the threat vanishes from her awareness. She once more thinks herself master of a world in which the difficulties of moving goods across the continent are but someone else's concern. When I tell such haughty scholars about enemy patrols, difficult terrain, weather conditions and the limits of communication, I see their attention depart from me. I suggest that perhaps their next researches ought to figure ways to instantly transport goods from thousands of miles away to one's doorstep. But such comments naturally fall on ears by indifference deafened.

I oversee our mortal servants, so that our day-waking fellows need not worry their heads with the warmth of their blankets, the flavor of their meals, or the timely emptying of their chamberpots. Thankfully, those taken into the blood appear less concerned with material comforts. They can find their own way to the feeding chamber, at least.

BLOOD MASTERS

Those of our mages initiated into the blood mystery — the term *Camite*, I avow, still writes itself only reluctantly upon this page — make up the next level of the pyramid. This is not, alack, to say that they acknowledge the rank I hold over them. I fear that you have not made it fittingly perceptible to them that, as castellan, I am more than their dogsbody. Each places herself on a pedestal only slightly less elevated than yours, milord. They do not shy from making requests — nay, demands — of me, but do not obey orders, even those I pass on directly from your lips. When I require them to participate in the chantry's defense, I must argue and explain and justify and wheedle. If we are to win this war, I must be able to command certain basic obediences without taking the time to coax our arrogant peers. As it stands, they accept orders only from Tremere, whom they fear without boundary, and you, whom they still believe to have your master's ear. Yet it pains me to point out that there are some here — Malgorzata and Jervais, to put names to the matter — who obey you only so far as appearance demands or vigilance ensures. Aye, if they know you watch them, they do as you ask. But what they can cook up behind your back, milord... Let us only say that their hearts are still with Goratrix. They mean to dagger you down the instant they can do so safe from Tremere's reproach. And as far as obeying my ordinances... they do not fear me enough to wait until my back is turned before they begin to mock me. We will never have a true pyramid of authority until you make them either love or fear you. I intend no offense when I say that the former is already impossible; they are incapable of it. They must be brought to heel, milord, and a true hierarchy made.

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If there is comfort to take from this unhappy circumstance, it is that our blood-made fellows show as little love for one another as for you. They intrigue as if it is a substitute for breathing. The librarian Celestyn, perhaps your most reliable inferior save for myself, found a month's worth of notes burned. What crime led to this punishment? Why, the night before, he'd refused to intervene in an argument between Epistatia and Mendacamina on the probable arrangement and nature of the celestial domes. Both became more offended at goodly, unintriguing Celestyn than they'd been with one another. Either of them could have destroyed his work with no motive better than simple spite.

Two months back, Therimna tried to poison Paul Cordwood with an alchemical draught, I am sure of it. What the potion was meant to do, I cannot guess. Therimna's apprentice lay open-throated at the end of it. Yet the two reached some sort of accord and neither will now say a word against the other, at least not to me.

I know I belabor the point, but our fellows seem determined to slay one another before the enemy can do them the pleasure. We need to rally together every night, not just when we face attack. Who knows what aid Celestyn's destroyed research might have done us? He smiles, shrugs and says it was of little consequence, but he is too anxious to avoid conflict. Sometimes one must precipitate it in order to end it.

Scholars easily make rivals of one another, but the blood mystery seems to have sharpened this proclivity, transmuting it from nuisance to threat. This gaping hole in our pyramid must be filled with discipline from above and obedience from below. Milord, you must act.

MORTAL MAGI

The blood-made mages' humor cannot be improved by the need to treat mortal mages as their equals. Do not mistake me for a member of Goratrix's faction. I do not claim that they should all be Embraced forthwith. And I avow that I have no easy deception with which to convince the unaware mortals to accept the sudden elevation of the blooded above them. Still, everything about our former peers grates upon my senses, though I be but the most mild of our hidden cabal. The longer they accept our deception, the more foolish they seem and the more trying it becomes to countenance their blind arrogance. We never appear by day. Our pallor exceeds even that of the typical scholar, for whom sunlight is but a reminder that he's strayed too far from his library carrel. We speak in a code in front of them, exchanging meaningful glances and furtive gestures. Indeed, we did have to behead Jacobus last year when he stumbled upon a feeding. But the others—they were too occupied trying to wring the last drams of *vis* from the land to take notice of the flaws in our hastily-constructed

tale of his demise. I should not be infuriated that our plan effects itself so well upon them, but by the tears of Croesus, I am! I once thought these fools to be my peers in learning, cunning and ambition! Magi of House Tremere, masters in the making of the Order of Hermes! That they be fooled so easily galls me. And as I said, I am the mildest among us.

The paradox doubles in upon itself when you consider that the mortal mages are infinitely more pliant and obedient than their secret masters. They greatly fear the vampires hammering at our gates, especially as the power of *vis* drains away from them. We blooded are nothing if not cocksure, and they instinctively defer to our sense of assurance. They accept me as castellan, as your eyes and ears, and follow my commands with as little argument as can be expected. Malgorzata awakens in them their primal instincts to submit, as if they see in her the incarnation of some primordial and capricious bog-goddess. They see Virstania as their savior for making the Gargoyles. They do not ask themselves how she came upon the vampiric secrets needed to construct them.

Therein lies the truth, I judge. It is not so much that we are fooling them as they are allowing themselves to be fooled. They smell the coppery tang of blood in the air. They see what drips from the walls when the moon is wrong. The screams from below do not escape their ears. But they fear to broach the subject, comprehending that their fate is entirely in our hands.

MENDACAMINA'S SUSPICIONS

For the sake of completeness, I shall here repeat the opinions of Mendacamina, mistress of our torture chambers. I urged her to speak her own mind directly to you, which she resisted for reasons she said that you would know.

Mendacamina warns me not to overestimate the mortal mages' credulity. The avowedly Christian mages who came here from the ruined chantry of Umor Mons, led by Tosia and Omnifer, cleave closely to one another. Mendacamina claims that they are better-informed than they seem. All around them, she says, are signs of what they would see as our corruption. She points to the low moaning sound which issues periodically from the sealed doors to the abandoned laboratories far below us. The blood which flows like tears from the statues of the great philosophers in our disused foyer. Mendacamina says that they ask too many questions regarding the Gargoyles' provenance.

We must tread carefully around Tosia's cabal, it is true. Even with diminished supplies of *vis*, they can do us great harm should we antagonize them. In particular, Omnifer's mastery of *creo ignem* gives one pause. But we must take care that we do not, by obvious and excessive vigilance, foster suspicions which do not now presently exist.

THE TRUE APPRENTICES

Between the true pyramid and the false one, it is hard to know where to place the true apprentices, those recently taken into our blooded fold. I refer to them here as "true apprentices" to mark the difference between them and the mortal apprentice magi. (It would be better, perhaps, to coin a new appellation for the freshly blooded to lessen confusion. I have suggested to several of the others that we call them "fledglings." Yet the rejoinders to this humble suggestion have been derisive, so it is foolish to hope that my words might be heeded.)

I shall now reiterate the edicts you have handed down to us on the gaining of new apprentices, the better to judge how well they have been followed, and who has been flouting them. You have told us, most of all, to tread slowly in embracing the magi of House Tremere. If they harbor religious qualms, or uphold the ethics of the ancient Greeks, they must carefully be stripped of these restraining beliefs before we can safely reveal to them the true future of the House. Each must be subjected to a slow campaign which whittles away his sense of naive righteousness in favor of true perception. The war here at Ceoris serves as a most admirable tool in this undertaking. The need to fight for survival dashes away a man's beliefs as a fast-flowing river cuts its banks to widen them. It is a long and difficult road you have laid out for

us, milord, for your way requires in profusion both time and silver-tongued insight into the foolish beliefs that separate men from true comprehension. Yet its wisdom is manifest. None of the apprentices gained in this way have turned on us. None has sired a child who has betrayed us. None have needed to be slain.

DISPOSING OF FAILURES

Alas, those of Goratrix's faction employ no such art. Despite your orders, they embrace casually, without preparation. They ask themselves only if the child is likely to serve them and will sympathize with Goratrix' cause. It is almost exclusively magi they embrace, seeking to remake the House in a matter of decades rather than the century or so that is your plan. A full half of these have betrayed us in one way or another. Many have purposefully turned against their sires, promising to inform our mortal fellows. The shock of sudden fledging is too great for their minds. They do not yet perceive themselves as beyond redemption.

We have not yet failed to slay one of these before he could wreak his mischief. Therimna sacrifices time she'd otherwise devote to alchemical researches as our chief slayer of wayward apprentices. She undertakes the task with cold determination. Therimna is a huntress I would not care to cross. She must on occasion also snuff out those apprentices who show great loyalty but little wisdom. Failures which



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threaten superiors, arouse suspicion in the mortal magi or allow the Tzimisce to learn about us are too grave to indulge. One error is misfortune. A second warrants castigation. The third means death at Therimna's hands.

WHO WE FLEDGE

Once we fledged none but magi, but now we more greatly need keen warriors, stealthy foresters, and men well-placed to spy upon our foes. The first two sorts prove easiest to find. Esoara, captain of our guard, keeps open his falcon eyes. He picks favorites, charging them with plum tasks. Those who please him greatly he submits to me as practicable apprentices. In these he looks not only for proven successes against our foes, but quick and ingenious minds. They must be clever enough to devise sudden solutions when faced with trials unanticipated by the orders they've been given. When an aspirant earns Esoara's trust, I bid him to visit me in my chambers. I ask him questions to test whether his cleverness is in nature subservient or rebellious. I ask him if he has given any thought to the true nature of his masters. If he bows and scrapes and clucks his tongue and claims to have allowed his head to remain untroubled by such things, I dismiss him as a clot-head or base dissembler. He may instead say that he knew that this day would come, hinting that he knows of us. His breast pumps with fear but he wishes to join our ranks withal, he says. I know the one who speaks such words as an over-clever schemer, possibly sent by the foe. I seek the middle ground, the one who shows he has thought but not too much, that he is cunning but not against those above him.

We also Embrace those who nest in the bosom of our foe, or can inveigle their way to it. These dwell not within Ceoris; they nest themselves behind Tzimisce walls. It is Paul Cordwood, our master of spies, who chooses which of these to fledge. How he chooses them is a matter he does not share with me. His childer are made away from here, on his long travels through the north, in the cities of the foe. When Cordwood is here, he receives many messages. He reports to you; you know what is in them. I do not. It seems to me that I, as castellan, should know their contents, for they may tell of likely dangers to this chantry. Cordwood hints to me, when he must, but treats me not as friend but rival. On several occasions his warnings of the enemy's approach have come too late. With greater preparation, we could have dispatched scores more of the foeman's vassals. Yet he intrigues against me, accusing me of trying to amass more power here than is my due. He is a Tremere magus, sworn to reason. I beg you, milord, to make him see it.

MORTAL APPRENTICES

The still-breathing apprentices of the mortal mages are the most questionable stones in our great pyramid. It is still left to each mortal mage to select his apprentices.

Few come from hereabouts. Our former fellows tend, as we did, to pick apprentices met on travels. They look for initiative, imagination and a thirst for knowledge: all things most deadly to our deception. Not yet learned in the techniques of ignoring all but their researches, often flush with lusts and other curiosities of the flesh, they are too likely to probe where they should not as they blunder about in search of experience. We have had to see to the sudden disappearances of eleven apprentices in the last five years alone. In making war against us, the Tzimisce do us one service: They provide an ever-credible explanation for anyone's sudden demise. If we merely suspect trouble from a mortal apprentice, we wait until his master sends him beyond the fortress walls to complete some errand. If the need for haste is greater, I demand the apprentice's attendance in a war party. Their masters inevitably come to quibble and entreat with me. All must be ready to venture beyond the walls in waging this war, I tell them. However we design to separate apprentices from their masters, Therimna waits for them.

It is the mortal apprentices who offer the foe his best chance of breaching our walls by deception. We do not know the extent of the Tzimisce's knowledge of us. How difficult would it be to plant a pleasing servant in one of our naïve fellow's path? They would train him in the right words to say, the correct prostrations to adopt. They will one day try, you can be certain of that, milord.

I propose that you instruct the mortals in new rules governing the bringing of apprentices to Ceoris. No apprentice may come beyond the furthest watchtower without first answering questions posed by Esoara and myself. The Tzimisce have surely prepared their cuckoos with false tales of their lives and of how they came to meet our mages. We shall look deep into these neophytes' eyes, to see the souls within. We shall ferret out the intriguers and make of them fountains to slake our thirst. Until this rule is done, milord, it is as if we have flung our gates open for the foe to enter. Even Paul Cordwood agrees with me on this; he says it is the first stratagem he would use against us, were he the enemy's master of spies.

SERVANTS AND OTHERS

Five score servants attend us in Ceoris. Though once I thought such lowly creatures unworthy of attention, now that I am castellan of a fortress at war, I look upon each with withering scrutiny. Our servants largely hail from the surrounding villages and serve with little enthusiasm. Perhaps one in six came here as bride or child to a foreign mercenary. These former campfollowers, most of them now widowed or orphaned, prove both more sensible and more loyal to us. A small few Paul Cordwood has Embraced; their talents lay in realms greater than the emptying of chamber pots and the peeling of parsnips. The mortal servants of course provide us a reliable font of fresh, vigorous blood, to

supplement the wasted vessels languishing in our feeding chambers. I must aver, however, that we feed upon them too readily. When at our most improvident, we leave them too weak to perform their duties. Beneath day's searing light, a surprising number come to actually resent their status as our blood stock despite the pleasures our touch causes them. I can only attribute their sullenness to ancestral recollection of their centuries under cruel Tzimisce overlords. More than one resentful servant has cultivated an attachment to a mortal mage in order to confess of our doings. In such cases, we must dispose of servant and mage alike. The servants appear dispensable, but cannot be as readily replaced as one might suppose. We need peasants in the village to till soil for us and to guard our stored goods. We cannot take many more farmers, then. And the camp followers do not come to us frequently enough. I urge you, milord, to issue edicts to the others restricting unchecked feeding upon the servants. General ill-treatment must also be forbidden. Last month Mendacamina disemboweled a serving wench merely for disturbing her during an experiment. Such behavior is wasteful and reduces the eagerness of our other servants.

Each of us has taken the liberty of making ghouls of one or two of the more bright-eyed or fair-haired of the servants, in accordance with our own proclivities. I myself am served by a quintet of wise-eyed old thralls. My ghouls are the head cook, lead washer, mistress of linens, the master repairer, and a fifth, whose quiet omnipresence nearly led me to omit him here: Hadu, our steward. Though none are salubrious to look upon, they know better than any of us what transpires between these walls. I speak to each more than once a night, and it is from them that I know much of what I here report. The old men and women are cunning and wise and have provided me with much good counsel on local ways. From their tutelage I can now predict the actions of villagers and Tzimisce alike. One day I shall be forced to fully blood them, but it would be a loss to raise them from their lowly vantage points from which they see so much.

PRISONERS

Then there are the prisoners in the dungeons. They are of course not of our pyramid at all. Some are human, others of the Cainite fold. It is Mendacamina who attends to them, drawing from them what we wish to know. Some we keep as hostages. They do not fully feel the thorns Mendacamina hides within her Kiss, for when we someday return them to those who want them, they must still be in good repair. Most are used in other ways after their secrets stand revealed. If they are vampires, they are given to Virstania to transmute into Gargoyles. Mortals feed us. Alas, many of the prisoners are fellow mages, and the blood of such is like a rudely fermented wine, too heady a draught for the likes of us. We must keep our senses clear to see the dangers all about us.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

OBTAINING BLOOD

Our need for blood is great. We need it to live, and it powers our workings both major and minor. I wonder if the ancient Fiends use even a tenth as much of this life-liquid as we must do. It is Epistatia who organizes our hunts for mortals on which to safely feed. Having wrested a number of Gargoyles from Virstania's too-loving bosom, she makes of them her forward forces in her searches, which must roam ever farther afield so as to escape the notice of our enemies. They have fallen upon our hunting parties more than once in the past decade, and each time we have lost many precious Gargoyles and well-heeled men-at-arms. Last year Epistatia's child, Roman, was lost, and she wept for consolation for many months after. (She received it ill when I suggested that the incident showed the danger of caring too greatly for those beneath us on the pyramid.)

Epistatia's method is to take many mortals at once, most often a dozen or so. This tactic lessens the chance of discovery by the foe and eases the suspicion of our unblooded mages. The ruckus raised by the hauling of prisoners into the chantry always arouses questions from our fellows, so 'tis better to do it rarely. We keep them in the dungeon till they grow sick and die. I do my best to keep the wretches alive, their hearts pumping. Epistatia wishes to control the schedule of feeding, but I say that is better left to the castellan. Others, especially Malgorzata's faction, say they should be free to feed at will. This matter threatens to dominate the intriguing amongst us, for control of the food supply is power at its basest level. You must grant it to me, milord, so you know the blood will be fairly dispensed with no favor to any faction. As it stands, the vessels waste away too soon, forcing Epistatia to once again risk the wilds to find another dozen.

ENVOYS AND VISITORS

Despite the risks to our safety, we must occasionally welcome outsiders into our chantry, the better to forge links to the pre-existing vampire world. Their minds clouded by coffin-dust, our new peers see us as callow interlopers who regard their vaunted traditions with both ignorance and contempt. We cannot make them love us, but we can make some of them see how we might all prosper by pursuing mutual interests. We cannot expect to ever make amends with the clan Tzimisce or to soon befriend the Gangrel or Nosferatu. But the others might be brought to understanding eventually.

The envoys of two clans, Giacomo Guicciardini of the Lasombra and the Cappadocian Margaret Vasa, spend much time here, and are treated as visiting scholars by the mortal mages. Of course there is no way to make them submit to the pyramid, though the unpredictability they imply sometimes troubles me.

We have received visitors from most other clans not named above. Most are of low rank; evidently a mission to Ceoris is assigned only to the dispensable. The Ventrue have agreed to send us a warrior retainer in exchange for certain information provided to their leaders in France. I now negotiate an arrangement to send one of our apprentices to advise a worthy Toreador in Florence. In return, he will send one of his fledglings, pledged to obey us. These arrangements are not without risk — these are strangers to us — but I agree with your wise judgment that our House's future depends on forging new alliances.

OTHER CHANTRIES

It is also my duty as castellan to oversee relations with other chantries throughout Europe and the Near East. I communicate with the chantries using rituals of my own devising, which permit me to commune with other castellans who have undergone a ritual upon visiting Ceoris. Once that bond is made, distance matters little.

My goal, as you have instructed, is to slowly transform each Tremere chantry, so that it mirrors Ceoris. Though, fate willing, they will not need the defenses we have constructed here, they will each conceal the same hidden pyramid of authority. Accordingly, I use your name to summon mages from other chantries to come here. I see if they have in them sufficient pride to overcome the morality that keeps them weak — if they can be remolded so that they lose their qualms without noticing the deficit. If their moral defenses need further erosion, I do not move. The coming years will bring much opportunity to wring conversions from our former fellows. During these visits, I must carefully watch Malgorzata and Jervais, who like scavenging dogs circle my prey, hoping to Embrace before I do. I have already alluded to the disastrous consequences of this. Many mages who would in time have properly succumbed to me rebelled when surprised by Malgorzata's bite, and thus made themselves fit for nothing but destruction.

When I succeed, as I did with Probitas of Vienna, I allow the fledgling to accept his condition. Then I have him send others to Ceoris to also meet the Embrace. When more than four blooded mages safely head an outer chantry, I permit them to begin embracing. Yet vipers vex me here, for Goratrix's whelps already fan out across the land, secretly making their own pyramids of authority within each chantry. Alas, the continual power struggle here is yet one more thing mirrored from Ceoris. If only you could persuade Master Tremere to intervene and put a stop to this unreasoned self-slaughter! Only his word will unite us to fight our foes and not one another.

The others spread the Embrace at a rate that will surely appall Tremere when you make him aware of the circumstance. Once I arranged to meet a promising can-

didate, a certain Cuculus at Perugia, only to find that he had already been taken by one of Goratrix's persuasion! Were our pyramid pure, its authority would move in only one predictable direction. I know that you will see that this state of affairs stands revealed to the proper eyes, milord.

IN PARTING, A PROPOSAL

As I complete this missive, it occurs to me to mention an undertaking which has grown in my mind of late. With each passing year, it becomes more greatly difficult to conceal from visitors and mortal magi the atmosphere of dread which permeates our walls. The hallways too often echo with whispers and scratching noises, the source of which can never be pinpointed. Droplets of what seems to be blood materialize on the walls, or ooze up between the flooring stones — yet the substance is not nourishing, but nauseating. Chill breezes waft even through sealed rooms. Along with them come odd moods: One might suddenly be seized by melancholy, or rage, or giddy laughter, as if some intoxicating elixir has seeped through one's skin.

We explain these manifestations to the mortal mages by naming them the night creatures' malign sendings. (In like manner, we have explained the sealing of the windows and the shutting out of all sunlight, saying that this is the only way to ward Ceoris from night-creature magic.) These things happen most at night, but, from what the ghouls say, have now begun to strike even at the height of noon. There is perhaps one major manifestation every four weeks or so, but the minor ill-omens become all too frequent. The ghouls say that a mood of panic has slowly crept up on Ceoris's mortal minds. The living leave their chambers only when they must, and travel swiftly down the hallways, heads bowed.

Celestyn has told me of the ritual that consecrated Ceoris. Surely the cause of these manifestations lies in the unfortunate errors that marred it. Perhaps we should investigate ways in which our foundations might be reconsecrated. Though such a ritual would be complex and difficult, I submit that it would more than repay its cost in time and resources. Otherwise, the strangeness of our abode will become so obvious as to threaten our entire pyramid.

I shall think on this more, and detail my proposal at a later date. I include it here merely as a parting thought.

I trust that this report has been all that you wished. Naturally I shall make myself available to respond to any queries that might arise from it.

Your most faithful of servants,

— *Enraferrum*

Castellan of Chantry Ceoris

A HOUSE DIVIDED





Chapter Four: The Belly of the Beast

*Per me si va nella città dolente,
Per me si va nell' eterno dolore,
Per me si va tra la perduta gente..
Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate!
(Through me is the way to the
sorrowful city. Through me is the
way to eternal suffering. Through me
is the way to join lost people... Aban-
don all hope, you who enter!)*

*-Dante Alighieri, "Divina
Commedia, Inferno"*

THE APPROACH

Visitors or attackers must approach Ceoris from the treacherous, heavily forested foothills to its south. As noted below, unnatural winds, rain, and fog shield the valley from the sun's rays most of the time. Guardsmen patrol the entire valley. Groups of three to six mercenaries challenge any visitor openly traveling through the valley and demand to see the party leader's token of passage. Any traveler with legitimate business in Ceoris receives a token from the Tremere who invited him there. Knowing that the token-holders can be powerful, haughty and quick to take offense, the patrollers make their demands firmly but without belligerence. If observed unawares, they are equally likely to be vigilantly beating the underbrush for intruders or slouching lazily against one of the many boulders around which the trail to Ceoris winds. They are more wary by night, when hunched, hulking Gargoyles stride amongst them, snorting threateningly at any mortals who dare to meet their gaze. (For a detailed description of the valley and its defenses, see Chapter Two.)

The trail leads through the valley and up a steep incline to the gates of Ceoris. It is sufficiently rocky and winding to prevent all but the most determined enemies from hauling siege weapons within range of the chantry walls. At many points, troops must dismount and walk single-file around huge boulders Gargoyles have rolled onto the roadway. The huge rocks provide ideal ambush points for Ceoris' defenders.

GUARDHOUSES

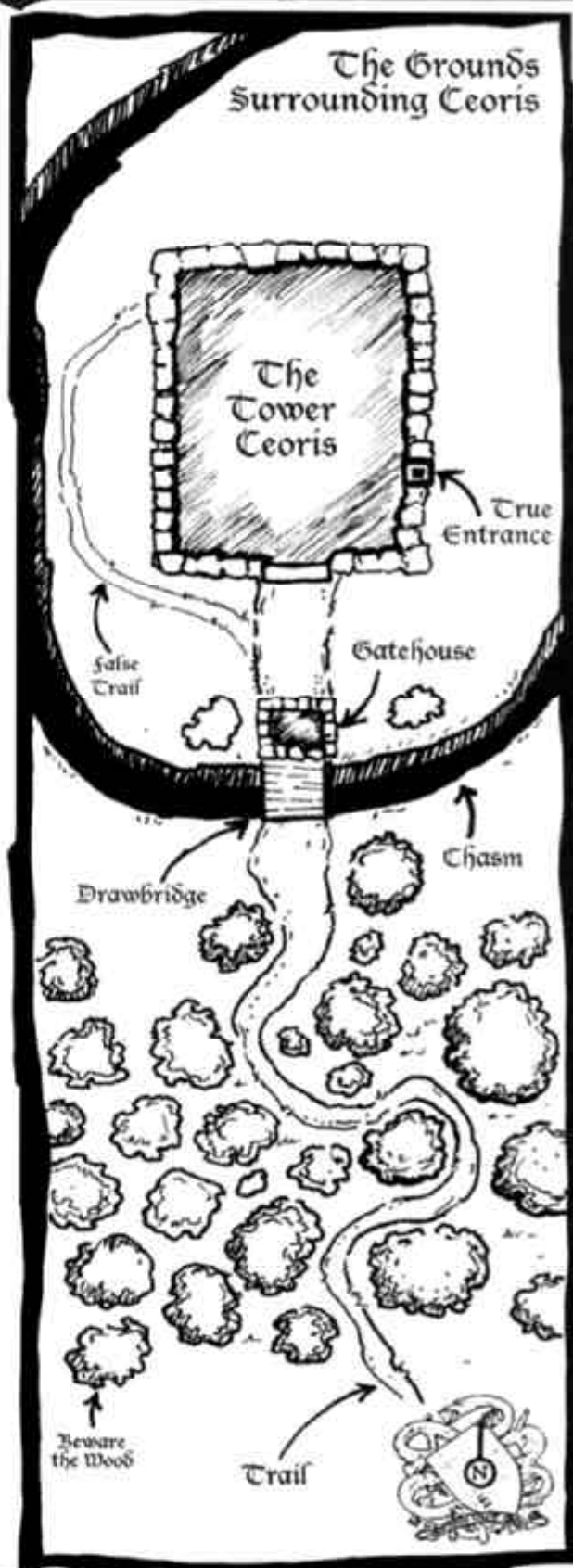
As described in Chapter Two, the Tremere maintain a number of temporary guardhouses throughout their perimeter. Soldiers stationed at the guardhouses mount regular patrols, watch for signs of movement, play at dice and drink to drown their fears.

At any given time, there are nine guardhouses, more or less evenly distributed throughout the surrounding area. Manning each are ten to fifteen axmen, five to ten archers and two to six Gargoyles. Lower numbers of guards are posted at times of low alarm; higher ones, when hostilities are imminently expected. Esoara, the captain of Ceoris' guard, may be forced to assign lower numbers of guards if recent enemy assaults have depleted his forces.

CEORIS FROM A DISTANCE

The vast tower-like structure that is Ceoris, bristling with towers and turrets, juts up from the rain-lashed stone of the surrounding Transylvanian Alps. Great gobbets of unnaturally cohesive fog veil the chantry from the world, concealing its outer face. Four days out of five, the ap-

HOUSE OF TREMERE



proaching visitor sees nothing but a thick mantle of gray mist that occasionally breaks to reveal a fragment of mountain cliff or crag. Rain-laden, howling wind lashes it, but, in defiance of logic, does not dispel the fog. Instead the mist billows and courses about the structure like an unholy spirit. Visitors who well know the nature of Ceoris' inhabitants might correctly speculate that the concealing weather is the result of a great ritual working. Originally conjured by Etrius and other of Tremere's inner circle during their mortal days, it is now kept active through blood magic.

CEORIS BY DAY

Even the mightiest of rituals can't constantly ward off the sun's rays. One day in five, daylight struggles through the perpetual cloud cover to drive off the rain and fog. On those days, Ceoris stands revealed in all of its intimidating glory. It is a vast shaft of black rock jutting up from a manmade plateau. Its surface, still bearing the pickax marks left by the hundreds of laborers who slaved to hew it from the mountain, is unmarred by decoration. Only dozens of long, narrow windows, now bricked up and sealed over with lead sheeting, interrupt the perfect sheerness of its vertical surfaces. Visitors who choose to stare for long periods at its surface sometimes begin to see shapes, such as enormous skulls or mocking Gargoyle grimaces, forming in the patterns of pickax marks. This may be one of the ill omens that periodically manifest themselves in and around Ceoris or simply a vivid imagining on the part of the viewer.

TOWERS AND TURRETS

Like spears in a rack, eight turrets and towers rise up unevenly from the structure's bulk. Although originally as straight and direct as Goratrix's determination to rule, they have begun to list slightly, each in a different direction. One in particular, the tallest on its eastern face, seems especially precarious, as if readying itself to plunge to its death into the chasm below.

The towers and turrets exist merely to tempt airborne foes to their dooms. None provide entry to the castle. Most are built to break away, crumbling to their constituent stones when forced to bear the weight of a party of men. A couple of them burst spectacularly into consuming flames when weight is placed on them. Despite their desire to keep a low profile, the Tremere can't entirely restrain their theatrical impulses, despite the fact that the winds have weakened these once-great architectural traps.

ETRIUS' CHASM

A great chasm, torn into the mountainside by Etrius's earth-moving magic, rings the chantry. Fifteen feet across at its narrowest point and twenty at the widest, it represents a serious obstacle to intruders. Guards stationed at the gatehouse command the lowering of a drawbridge to bridge the gap. The heavy drawbridge is sturdy enough to support several tons of weight.

GATEHOUSE

Over the drawbridge, on the chantry side, sits a stone gatehouse that controls access to the structure. Soldiers stationed behind a battlement atop the gatehouse watch anyone approaching the chasm. They challenge visitors with the traditional "Halt! Who goes there?" Even the chantry's most powerful must stop and identify themselves. The soldiers fear to cross traveling magi but know the castellan Curaferum will see them flayed if caught failing to challenge.

If the guards decide that would-be entrants are hostile, the senior officer makes a quiet calculation: Should they try to capture them or simply refuse them? If he thinks they can safely capture these possible enemies, he invites them to come forward. Then, when they stand under the gatehouse archway, the guards release a pulley-wheel that causes portcullises on both sides to slam down, trapping the suspicious ones inside. If they're equipped with some extraordinary means of fighting back, like magical spells, the guards can open a trap door and dump a cauldron of caustic liquid down on their attackers.

After capturing the entrants, the guards clang a bell in warning. If available, Esoara comes to personally determine the disposition of the captives. If he decides that the guards have acted wrongly in detaining the entrants, he frees them and ushers them to their proper destinations within the chantry. Although he may promise to discipline the guards, he will in fact reward them for vigilance — better to momentarily discomfit an honest entrant than admit a dangerous intruder. If Esoara is not available (during daylight, for example), a dozen or so guardsmen, led by a ghoulish sergeant, arrive to haul the captives to the dungeons. There they wait until Esoara, Curaferum or another of the chantry's ruling circle finds the time to interview them. They release innocent entrants with profound apologies, false promises to punish those responsible and reminders of the extreme vigilance the denizens of Ceoris must maintain.

The four to six men posted at the guardhouse are all seasoned archers. During hostilities, they're reinforced threefold, and supplemented with a force of up to six Gargoyles. At night, they see by lamplight. If attacked, they douse the lights. The ordinary archers have no way of seeing targets at night and so fire at positions on the drawbridge's lip.

Welcome entrants are quickly bidden to enter. The guardsmen clang a great bell to alert the pulley operators on the other side of the chantry wall in the Grand Foyer. The drawbridge takes about five minutes to raise and, thanks to gravity, one to lower. If objects exceeding two thousand pounds sit on the bridge, it may be impossible to raise.

COURTYARD

The space between the gatehouse and chantry is just a small field of rocks dotted by the occasional sprig of

wolfsbane, but the Tremere are grandiose enough to refer to it as a courtyard. Keen eyes might notice an ill-defined trail leading off to the left. The real entranceway is to the right, but spells prevent the many feet that tread upon it from forming any kind of visible trail.

FALSE TRAIL

The courtyard trail curves around the mountain to a precarious shelf of rock about a foot wide. An intruder can carefully eke her way up this trail until she reaches a 60-foot gap where the rocky shelf has crumbled away. The trail continues after the gap. Should the intruder manage to struggle her way past the gap, the shelf continues to a small, barely detectable door ingeniously crafted to look like the rock around it.

It's a trap. The door doesn't open. The door and trail exist merely to coax enemies to risk their necks seeking a non-existent back door to the chantry.

FALSE ENTRANCEWAY

A graveled path, about thirty feet in length, extends past the gatehouse, through the courtyard, to Ceoris proper. It terminates at a fifteen-foot high set of double doors, banded in iron. These are carved with arcane symbols; they throw off a wan, yellow-green light. A third portcullis stands between the visitor and these doors. It makes an eerie sound when the winds blow through it, causing each bar to vibrate like the string of a lute or harp. Those foolish enough to stand and listen may become convinced that they hear barely perceptible moaning voices. Listeners become convinced over time that the portcullis voices say discernable things. Unfortunately, those things can drive an unprepared mind mad.

The doors have been permanently shut from within, sealed by molten lead. A war party with a battering ram could get through both portcullis and double doors. This would lead them to the disused Grand Foyer and to another trap. See p. 53 for more.

TRUE ENTRANCEWAY

The small rear gate through which the chantry's friends enter it can't be seen head-on. It's around the corner, to the right. At the secret door, would-be entrants must speak a password. Guests are given different passwords than residents. The guards here must be literate in order to correlate a long list of passwords to their rightful owners. They consult lists created by the castellan, Curaferum, which include questions to ask guests. The questions ask for information which should be known only to the true password holder. The category of one's password reflects the pyramidal hierarchy of House Tremere. The list, if liberated from its owner, could yield a great deal of information about Ceoris's organization. The list is kept in a rather complex code, but Curaferum has had to teach it to the guards stationed at the entrance.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

The four axmen on duty bow awkwardly to greet superiors and grunt in acknowledgement to fellow soldiers. Unaccompanied guests are asked to seat themselves in a small antechamber. The senior guardsman rings a chime to attract a serving boy who then runs to fetch the chantry resident who will serve as the visitor's host.

If the guards hear the gatehouse bell rung in its distinctive warning pattern, they in turn bang a big gong that hangs on the eastern wall. Guards at other stations also ring their own bells and gongs (including several placed in strategic parts of the chantry) and rouse the house to the danger. Gongs in the barracks and in Virstania's Gargoyle pens tell the chantry's defenders to go out and engage the foe. Several ingenious systems of ropes and bells allow a few guards to raise the alarm throughout the great house without relying on magical workings.

INSIDE CEORIS

Although those who know the name Ceoris shudder at its utterance, and it is certainly a place to inspire nightmarish visions, the chantry also serves as a home to hundreds, from Cainite thaumaturses to humble servants. Newcomers soon make general observations about the mood of the place and the interactions between its inhabitants.

GOVERNED BY FEAR

The governing emotion of Ceoris is fear. It hangs in the air like a contagion. The vampires fear the machinations of the Tzimisce, attacks by Gangrel and Nosferatu and, when external threats recede, one another. Cainite anxieties in turn infect their ghouls, who dread the day when they can no longer nourish themselves on their masters' intoxicating blood. Lowly servants fear the rulers of Ceoris even more than outside attackers. Mercenaries dread the next battle. Still-living mages fear destruction at the hands of the night creatures. Those who suspect Ceoris's leaders of diabolic activities worry that their suspicions might be exposed before they discover the secrets at the matter's heart.

These apprehensions permeate the behavior of Ceoris residents. Its inhabitants tend to speak in whispers as if concerned that someone might overhear them. Tempers flare easily; even a small misunderstanding between soldiers or servants can explode into a vicious brawl. Sudden noises, such as the dropping of a fork in a dining hall, jolt startled people from their seats.

Fear heightens other emotions, especially among the chantry's human inhabitants. The everyday presence of imminent death prompts them to extremes of desire, anger, sorrow and joy. Many periodically find themselves, for no apparent reason, breaking down into racking sobs. A mildly amusing jest may provoke uncontrollable howls of teary-eyed belly-laughter. A momentary flicker of attraction between a male and female servant may prompt

them to leap upon one another for a bout of furious rutting — despite Curaferum's violent prohibitions against such disorder. Ceoris's residents, including the Cainite magicians, believe that this heightening of passions is supernatural in nature. They theorize that stray emotions, perhaps sent by enemy magic, waft through the halls to tear at the resolve of the mentally weak. This opinion reflects their bias towards esoteric explanations and their tenuous understanding of mere human nature. The mortal population is under great pressure and about to crack.

The chantry's perpetual lack of sunlight reinforces this sense of dread, at least for its mortal inhabitants. Its outer surface was originally covered in long, narrow windows, but these were all bricked up long ago. (Goratrix took the precaution of sealing out the sun's rays in the 1080s, justifying it as a protective measure to strengthen the chantry's wards.) The chantry's ordinary folk yearn for daylight and feel themselves withering under Ceoris' eternal night. Soldiers covet daytime guard duty. Servants contrive reasons to go outside during the day, or even abandon their posts to feel the sun on their skins. Most mortal mages, bookish sorts indifferent to the benefits of the outdoor life, dismiss the possibility that the absence of sunlight could in any way alter their moods. They do not see that it renders them snappish, perpetually tired and highly suggestible.

AMIDST ILL OMENS

Ceoris was born under an ill star. Even had its consecration gone perfectly, it would have been a dark place. With the bungled ritual that required the murder of Ponticulus, one of its participants, it has become a gloomy abode indeed. The ritual actions of the chantry founders trapped their peer's spirit in the building. The passage of time has amplified his anguish, self-loathing, despair, bitterness and mordant humor, so that they now physically manifest themselves in a variety of ways. These include sudden chills in the air, bleeding corridors and flooring stones (though the blood provides no nourishment or thaumaturgic power), whispering, laughter or moaning with no known source, a pervading dampness, nightmarish images (often of decapitation) that bubble up into the dreams of sleepers, similar images that momentarily appear in mirrors and other reflective surfaces, and the disappearance, materialization, or movement of objects when no one is present. These are not so much the willful acts of Ponticulus' shade as the echoes of his anguish and anger.

The gloom and foreboding that wafts through Ceoris is evident to visitors, but those who end up dwelling here for prolonged periods become inured to these feelings. The place insidiously erodes residents' judgment so that they come to casually accept its many signs of impending doom. Victims of the effect still perceive the ill omens but lose sight of the fact that it is unnatural to live in a place where they are commonplace.

CONSTANT ACTIVITY

Ceoris is home to well over a thousand individuals and hums with activity day and night. Its halls are full of furtive-eyed servants moving quickly about their tasks, silently praying that they will neither attract the attention of the masters nor witness any of the eerie manifestations that plague the place. Any of them carrying an item too heavy or bulky to be held in one hand must travel with a second servant to carry a lamp. (Ceoris's wall sconces, which once held burning torches, have been plastered over to accommodate the unreasoning vampiric fear of fire.) The lamps throw long shadows along the corridor floors and send new layers of soot to join the black encrustation that cakes each ceiling.

Soldiers, their boots slathered with muck as they return from guard duty, tramp down the halls, trading the crude jests that form the common currency of warriors everywhere. Others of their number, assigned to roving guard duty, do their best to appear menacing and vigilant as they stalk down the corridors, hands on sword-hilts. Those ordered to stand before doorways slouch against walls, keeping a keen ear out for the confident tread of sergeants and masters. When a superior approaches, they quickly adopt a posture of stolid attentiveness.

Now and then, a magician (Cainite or mortal) comes sweeping through the hallways, attended by an entourage consisting of one or two servants, an apprentice, and perhaps others. The often unsociable masters acknowledge only their equals (or betters) when they pass others in the halls, and even then with the merest of grunts or slightest of nods.

CHAMBERS OF THE HOUSE

The following chambers are devoted to the business of House Tremere. Here visitors find mages, blooded and mortal, as well as their apprentices and the most trusted of the chantry's servants. High-ranking mages walk proudly through them, drinking in the admiration of their inferiors. When before their betters, apprentices bob their heads with appropriate deference. When not, they stare wide-eyed and drink in the chambers' sights and smells, dreaming of the time when they, too, will march through them, puffed with a sense of ownership and entitlement. The Chamber of the Blooded on the fourth floor (see p. 56) is the grand exception, reserved for and known to the Tremere Cainites alone. Of all the chambers of the house, it is the most important.

COUNCIL CHAMBER

The mages of Ceoris conduct their official business in this large, ostentatious chamber. When the chantry meets in

council, Etrius and his trusted lieutenants of the moment sit at the head table. Tremere spends most of his time in torpor, so the chair reserved for him is almost invariably empty. The castellan, Curaferum, conducts the business of the meeting. When a speaker addresses the council, he leaves his seat at either the officers' table or in the spectators' court and walks the long floor area as he speaks. It is bad form to look directly at the officers' table while addressing the council, although the people sitting there make all the decisions.

Tremere rarely appears these days; when he does show up, a hush falls on the participants — a matter of the gravest importance is about to be mooted. Seating arrangements betray the current progress of power struggles within the chantry. Those invited to sit with Etrius are on the rise. Someone who recently sat at the head table but now haunts the risers has clearly suffered a setback. As it stands, the officers of the council are the castellan, Curaferum; Virstania, mistress of Gargoyles; Esoara, captain of the guard; Jervais, gatherer of vis; Paul Cordwood, master of spies; and Mendacamina, keeper of the dungeons. Malgorzata rounds out the group, as a nod to Goratrix's faction, even though she at present fulfills no official function in the house.

Mortal mages and their apprentices attend council meetings, as do some of the chantry's guests. Accordingly, no real business is conducted there. The council is now a sham meant to convince mortal mages and outsiders that the business of the chantry goes on as usual. The officers

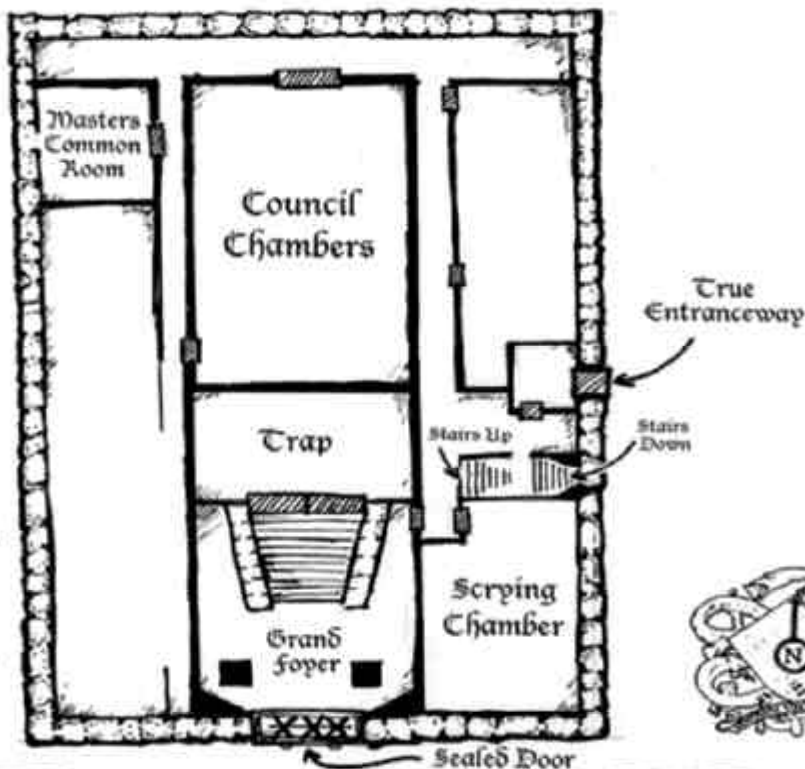
discuss the progress of the war against the Tzimisce and announce new policies affecting the rights or conduct of mortal magi and their entourages. Any house member or chantry resident may bring up matters of concern. The amount of discussion Etrius allows on a given matter shows how important it is; on trivial matters, everyone is permitted ample time to fulminate. Truly important decisions are made by the chantry's leading officers (i.e. the Cainites) and announced to the assembled mages as *faits accomplis*.

Still, the ceremony that rings in council meetings may seem most impressive to visitors. It reaffirms chantry residents' sense that they belong to a group with a grand history, one which surely offers them the strength to survive their current crisis. Each conclave opens with a procession. The council officers' apprentices enter first, swinging smoking censers and chanting an invocation to protect the participants from magical attack. They take up a standing position behind the head table as their masters proceed into the room, decked out in full ceremonial garb. Each officer wears an ermine-trimmed red velvet robe and a golden helm. Stag horns top the helms; each boasts a full face-plate depicting a different allegorical figure: War (worn by Esoara), Benevolence (Curaferum), Art (Virstania), Mercy (Mendacamina), Plenty (Jervais), Vision (Paul Cordwood), Fealty (Malgorzata), Wisdom (Etrius) and Mastery (Tremere, if he happens to show up.) Still masked, the officers take

Ground floor

Sire, forgive me. These maps you requested have been created solely from memory. Hence, you will find some areas left blank as I can not recall or never visited these areas during my brief stay at Ceoris.

C.



HOUSE OF TREMERE

their seats. The castellan then reads a stirring passage from the *Tremere Chronicles*, a grandiose and wildly slanted history of the house's early days. He rings a bell three times, cueing the others to remove their masks. Then the business of the meeting commences.

When council is not in session, the chamber remains empty, except for the debates held there perhaps once or twice a week. Two mages with differing opinions on some matter, usually concerning an abstruse principle of arcane theory, argue it out in front of their peers. At the end of the formal argument, onlookers pepper the debaters with questions. Each debater usually brings with him a few partisans to ask vexing questions of his opponent. Eventually the supposedly neutral arbiter appointed to oversee the debate calls it to a close. Spectators then mark pot shards with the name of their chosen victor. An attendant collects them in a cloth-lined hamper. The arbiter's apprentices go through the shards and count out the vote tally in front of all concerned. Listening to debaters is the chantry's most popular social activity. It is not unknown for sore losers to magically strike out against their opponents — or audience members who asked embarrassing questions — after an especially humiliating defeat. In the old days, debates often prefigured power struggles within the house. An ambitious mage could measure his support by challenging his chief rival. Victory by a wide margin showed him he could move against his enemy without fear of reprisal. A loss warned him to pull back. These days, the importance of debates has receded as the Cainite mages grow increasingly disinterested in them. Support from the mortal mages means nothing to their power struggles. They never seek debates now, though they may feel the need to maintain the pretence of normalcy when challenged by a high-ranking mortal mage. They do, however, attend the matches of others, especially when they wish to assess visiting mages they don't yet know well. Curaferum and Malgorzata are the most frequent attendees; each looks for prospects worthy of the Embrace.

The room, long and rectangular, serves as the keep's official meeting place. The walls are lined in oak, save for the southern wall, which has been covered over with masonry. (This is the wall abutting the shaft trap, laid in after the construction of the council chambers.) This unsightly wall has been covered with a tapestry depicting Tremere and Etrius standing before the Great Pyramids at Giza in Egypt. Close examination of the tapestry reveals that Etrius' face has been sewn into the tapestry, to replace someone else who's been cut out. (The face on the tapestry used to be Goratrix's.)

Two sets of tiered risers run along the east and west walls. Each riser contains three tiers of seating. The chairs are made of oak, with staghorn armrests. Stag's hooves adorn the chairs' feet. Sigils and other arcane marks have been idly scratched into many of the seatbacks over the years. An observer might assume that these are mighty

protective magics. They in fact owe their existence to the bored indifference of attendees who'd rather have been making calculations for their latest experiment than listening to the petty details of chantry business.

At the south wall, in front of the tapestry, sits a head table of polished walnut. It has not been defaced by any idle mages. Before official business is conducted, attendants lay a velvet cloth upon the table so that Tremere's crest, embroidered in gold, faces the attendees.

Three candle-laden chandeliers overhang the chamber, keeping it well-lit when in session. Curaferum has recently ordered that only one chandelier be used at any given time to decrease the unease of his fellow vampires.

GRAND FOYER

Before Etrius instructed the servants to seal the main doors (see p. 50), this chamber provided the visitor his first awe-inspiring glimpse of Ceorin's wonders. Now it is occupied only by servants stationed here to operate the drawbridge pulleys.

A gigantic staircase dominates the room, leading up to a pair of brass-bound oak doors. A brass frame around the doors is styled in the shape of a bearded man's head, so people passing through the doorway must travel into his mouth. The figure is meant to be an allegorical representation of wisdom, but the play of flickering torchlight on the face lends it a sinister aspect. Mounted on the massive staircase's marble banisters are two rows of busts depicting the great sages of ancient times. Among those represented are Aristotle, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Simon Magus, Anaximander and Anaxagoras. They're carved in stone in the distorted, highly stylized manner of the 10th century. During the day, these busts show a multitude of tiny cracks, unusual because they were recently made. At night, the busts of Aristotle and Pythagoras weep tears of blood. The amount of blood is too small to provide nourishment, but it carries the heady tang of magus blood. This is the most consistent of the ill omens described above.

Two massive pulleys, one on each side of the sealed main doors, allow for the operation of the drawbridge. Four guardsmen are always on duty here. When the gatehouse guards clang a big bell, the men at the drawbridge pulleys know to raise or lower the drawbridge.

The chamber is kept unlit now, though an iron chandelier with prongs for two dozen candles still hangs up above the staircase. Its lowering rope is still intact, should anyone wish to put candles on it and raise it up.

ARCANE TRAP

This trap leads from the grand foyer (see above). Its doorway, framed by the head of Wisdom, once led directly to the council chambers. A false room has been partitioned off from the chambers to serve as a trap for invaders. To make the trap seem more credible, the door is bolted from the inside. Any group succeeding in battering it down and charging inside finds

itself trapped. A second metal door, hidden in the wall above the entrance, slams into place behind them. As the intruders struggle to find the non-existent exit, a crimson mist appears as if from nowhere and begins to strip them of flesh.

MASTERS' COMMON ROOM

This chamber provides an informal meeting place for the chantry's full-fledged mages. These masters come here to hobnob with their brethren. However, they're a fairly anti-social lot. The room is rarely populated by more than a trio of mages. Some take their meals here, but the vast majority of magi order servants or apprentices to bring food to them while they work. Those who do gather here sit apart from one another. Although they sometimes discuss their work or occult theory, the main topic of conversation is the complaint. Mages gripe about wrongs done them by absent colleagues and speculate on the doomed progress of their current work. Although circumspect for a few minutes around mages visiting from elsewhere, the freedom to backbite is well ingrained in chantry residents and they soon forget themselves. Guests can therefore gather considerable gossip by sitting circumspectly in the masters' common room. They won't, however, get a true picture of goings-on in Ceoris because the Cainite mages almost never come here.

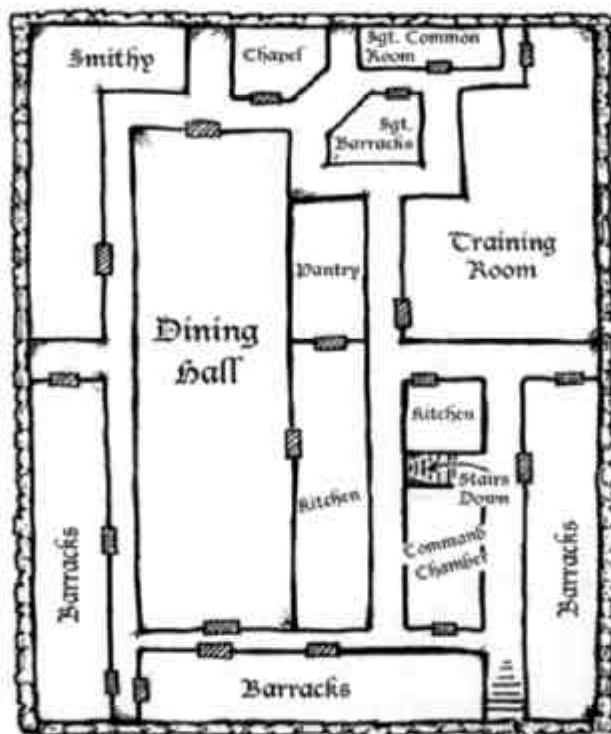
Well-made but long-mistreated tables and chairs lie about the room in a state of perpetual disarrangement. Six-foot candelabras stand equally haphazardly throughout the

room; the mages drag them wherever they want the best light. The furniture, floors and even walls are bespattered with decades worth of stray candle wax. A series of friezes in ivory depicting a variety of saints and allegorical figures decorate the walls. The delicate figures have suffered over the years, as irreligious mages have repeatedly covered them in wax, and devout ones have angrily picked it off, lopping off many canonized noses and fingers in the process.

CHAPEL

After her escape from the war-ravaged Tremere chantry of Umor Mons elsewhere in Transylvania, the pious mortal mage Tosia insisted that a chapel be installed in her new haven of Ceoris. Although Malgorzata and others opposed the measure, citing the House's traditional distance from the Church, Tosia appealed to Etrius, who, still seeing himself as a faithful if somewhat tarnished servant of Christ, could scarcely turn her down.

The result is this small chamber, dominated by a painted icon of the Christ child and Virgin Mary scavenged from the ruins of Umor Mons. It sits atop a small altar, behind which rises a large brass rood (free-standing crucifix). Four benches face the altar. They offer only enough seating for sixteen people, but the chapel is never this full, even during Tosia's Sunday services. Ceoris has no priest, so the worship services (also held each evening) consist merely of group contemplation before the altar.



Second
floor

HOUSE OF TREMERE

Of the Cainites, only Etrius makes a point of attending the services, doing so once a week, at most. Mendacamina may be seen hovering outside in the hallway, as if on the verge of entering the chapel. She always stops herself, though, and then strides briskly away.

Because the conspirators they fear avoid the chapel, it provides a natural meeting place for Tosia, Omnifer and other mortal mages who suspect diabolism among the chantry's night-dwellers. They may be found here, whispering together, after their daily shift on watch duty ends. When they hear outsiders approaching, they quickly change the subject of their conversations to theological matters.

LIBRARY

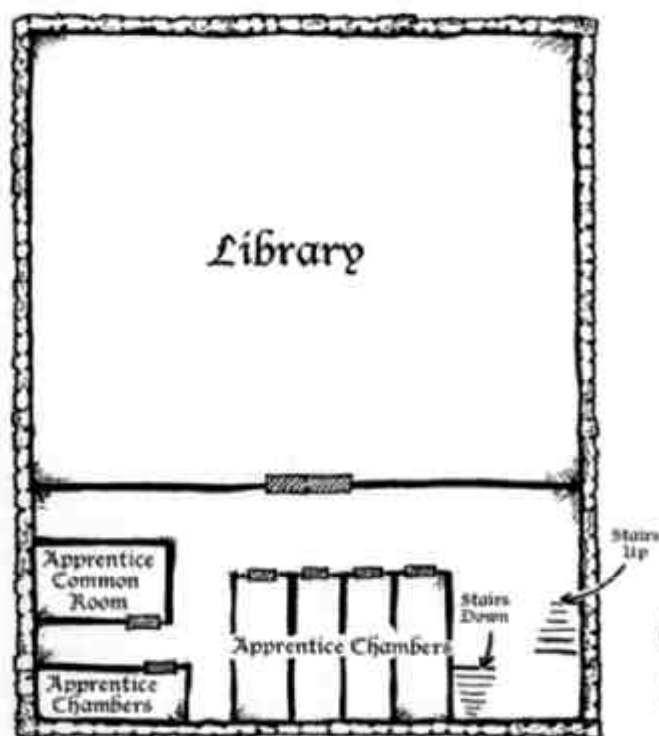
The heart of any chantry is its library, and this massive chamber on the chantry's third floor is designed not just to impress visitors, but to overawe them. Although all of Ceoris' magi could easily use the stacks and carrels at once, no self-respecting mage allows himself to be seen studying in public. Instead, he takes the materials he's using back to his laboratory or private chambers for uninterrupted, unobserved study. Tremere mages have always been highly proprietary about their researches. They've been known to squirrel away important works for years, if not decades, sometimes just to deprive their rivals.

Celestyn, the curiously affable Cainite in charge of Ceoris' library, wages a losing battle against the residents'

efforts to denude his collection. His apprentices, who man a long, heavily-scarred desk separating the rotunda from the stacks, try to get users to sign a log book whenever they take an item. The withdrawing mage is supposed to list her name, the name of the item, Celestyn's catalogue number and an estimated time by which the item will be returned. Because magi never like others to know what they're working on, they almost invariably supply false information if they deign to sign the register at all. Library assistants are much more frightened of most of the users than they are of Celestyn and aren't about to confront their seniors. If a new assistant seems too zealous, his fellows tell him about poor old Sedulus, who disappeared a decade ago after demanding that Paul Cordwood account for the many items he'd taken without signing the register. Sometimes, late at night, the library air seems to fill with the distinctive smell of acrid sweat and fried onions, which in life followed Sedulus wherever he went.

Celestyn himself is absent during the day, and often gone from Ceoris altogether in search of new materials for the library. He is thus unable to discipline his apprentices for allowing themselves to be cowed by the others. His complex cataloguing system, its principles known only to himself, falls to pieces whenever he is gone. He seems to enjoy putting the pieces back together again each time he returns. It is like playing at puzzles, he says. He spends many a night going from laboratory to laboratory in the chantry's lower levels, knocking on doors and politely requesting the return

Third
floor



THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

of vanished materials. Celestyn, unusually diplomatic and a known neutral in most power struggles, manages to do so without arousing the ire of his colleagues. Even the most belligerent of them is loath to harm him because he's a font of knowledge on all subjects arcane and has helped each and every one of them advance her research.

Over a thousand tomes, scrolls, loose documents, journals, maps, clay tablets, chunks of hieroglyph-inscribed rock and fragments of papyrus await the occult researcher on the high wooden shelves that line the south and east walls of the massive library chamber and on stand-alone shelves filling its southern annex. The study area is topped by a rotunda forty feet high. A mosaic, depicting a complex dance of demons, angels and elementals through the celestial spheres, adorns the rotunda. Many of the tiles are covered in gold leaf or have been silvered. Beneath the rotunda are three rows of wooden study carrels, each line accompanied by a long, communal bench. The carrels are mostly deserted.

APPRENTICES' COMMON ROOM

This chamber serves the dozens of mortal apprentices who live in Ceoris. In contrast to the masters' room, this chamber is usually filled to capacity. Apprentices drink ale, heap contempt on their masters, lament their general mistreatment and even engage in the occasional rapt discussion of their fields of study. Masters aren't barred from coming here, but rarely appear. If they do darken its doors, the room plunges into immediate silence. Normally, if a master wants an apprentice, he sends a servant to fetch him. A personal appearance can mean only that the mage is furious with the apprentice and wishes to deliver an immediate tongue-lashing, or worse. An infiltrator who's established herself as a full mage wouldn't, then, be able to spend time here and gather useful information. In the guise of an apprentice, though, she could quickly learn Ceoris' ins and outs. The apprentices don't know that they serve in a nest of vampires, but they're more attentive than their mortal masters to the fact that something is severely amiss at Ceoris. Their noses aren't buried so deep in study that they're divorced from common sense. They notice things like the bleeding busts in the Grand Foyer (see p. 53) and the wailing from below. They know that their fellows disappear at a high rate.

This chamber is smaller and humbler than the masters' room. Its walls are of bare stone and its furniture is of barely-finished pine. Though more modest in every way than the master's room, it is better maintained. The apprentices take care to clean up wax spills from their mismatched candelabra. They've decorated the walls with maps and occult diagrams raided from the library.

CHAMBER OF THE BLOODED

This dark and unadorned secret chamber serves as Ceoris' true council chambers. No particular ceremony

attends the opening of a meeting of the blooded magi. Castellan Curaferum runs the meeting, though it is Etrius who wields the authority. Tensions at true council meetings are often palpable. Malgorzata sometimes uses the meetings to test Etrius, directing her barbs at his man Curaferum.

Topics for discussion generally include the state of Ceoris's defenses, the status of outlying chantries, the conversion of such chantries' leaders and diplomatic overtures to other Cainite clans. The magi chart the progress of attempts to infiltrate the enemy, and share information on Tzimisce forces and movements. After discussing urgent business, the backbiting begins. Participants propose pet projects which typically bring the responsibilities of others under their control. For example, Paul Cordwood might demand that Esoara cede him a number of his best mercenaries for a journey to Tzimisce territory without explaining how he will make use of them. Or Curaferum might complain that Epistatia has been lax in capturing new mortals to feed from and must be urged to organize a hunting party forthwith. When the chantry is hard-pressed by enemy attacks, the formal part of a true council meeting takes up the bulk of its time, and the competing Cainites postpone the prosecution of grievances. When they feel safe, the bulk of a council may be given over to wrangling.

Visiting members of Tremere's fold are often taken aback by the open calumny that fills the air. No one is made to feel more welcome at Ceoris than a visitor with no declared alliances. Everyone wishes to befriend her in hopes of using her to further personal ends. If the visitor has no clear allegiance to a faction, both sides attempt to ensnare her in their stratagems. Even if avowedly a conspirator or conservative, she may be drawn into pettier disputes. It is at the true council that the visitor is expected to choose sides and join the fray. Doing so is dangerous; Ceoris's Cainites feel safer attacking guests than long-time residents.

Cainite councils are held only on the first and third Thursdays of each month. Etrius calls emergency sessions after assaults on the chantry before anticipated attacks and when significant new information on enemy activities presents itself. He has also been forced to call a number of emergency meetings to attempt to enforce peace on feuding Cainites. Because he leads one of the factions, he is successful in these mediations only when the fight does not revolve around conflict between conservatives and conspirators. All Tremere Cainites currently present at Ceoris are required to attend any meeting of the true council, even if they're visiting from elsewhere. Tremere himself almost never appears, however. If he is there, it is because he has urgent business and wishes to issue direct orders to see that it is taken care of.

The chamber's tables and chairs are blocky and utilitarian. The walls and floors are of unfinished stone, hewn directly from the rock by Etrius' magic. The door is indistinguishable from the stonework of the surround-

HOUSE OF TREMERE

ing corridor and thanks to a powerful ward is part of that stonework for all intents and purposes. Temporarily dispelling the ward, allowing the door to swing open, requires a simple Thaumaturgic ritual that involves carving a triangle in the palm of one's hand. Vampiric blood is a necessary component of this rite (although blood loss is negligible). Any of Ceoris's Cainites would view the presence of an intruder with great alarm and would go to great lengths to dispatch her.

BARRACKS AND ARMORIES

These chambers are dedicated to the chantry's defense and belong to the soldiers and their commanders. When conscious and off-duty, the soldiers rough house, engage in rude banter, drink, eat and otherwise attempt to distract themselves from the probability that they will soon be dead. The rooms reek of curdled sweat. The soldiers are careless of their surroundings; generations of them have carved ribald designs into the stout furnishings or scratched them onto the stone walls. Only the rooms managed directly by Esoara truly reflect the commander's Spartan ways.

SCRYING CHAMBER

Paul Cordwood, master of Ceoris's spies, maintains this chamber on the ground floor of the chantry. Esoara is also a regular visitor, along with a few of his trusted ghouls. This chamber is dominated by a precise (by the standards of the day) map of the region around Ceoris, upon which Cordwood and Esoara have marked the placement of various scrying devices. These gruesome talismans, forged with the eyes of innocent victims, allow certain Tremere to see through them from within the chamber. The other walls of the chamber are lined with lead coffers containing vials of prepared vitae. These humors are the result of the same ritual that creates the scrying eyes. By quaffing the right one, the Tremere can see through the talisman even if it is leagues away.

Drinking from these unique blood preparations is necessary for the use of a scrying eye, but presence in the chamber is not. Cordwood uses the scrying devices planted by his spies from the privacy of his own chambers, for example. It is helpful, however, to be in the scrying chamber as the geometry of the stones of the floor create a circle of power, augmenting the Thaumaturgy that links potion and eye. See p. 110 for more information on *Now Its Sight Is Ours*, the ritual that creates the scrying eyes and accompanying concoctions.

COMMAND CHAMBER

From this small office, Esoara manages his soldiers. He meets with his sergeants to get nightly reports regarding the discipline of the men and their progress in his training regimen. Sergeants also pass on any reports of suspicious

activity. A smaller version of the area map from the scrying chamber (above) is carved into the east wall. Esoara paints the current locations of guardhouses onto the map. The room is spare and functional, in accordance with his respect for all things Spartan. His table and chair are well made and sturdy but of unvarnished pine. The walls are adorned with weapons and armor pieces taken from enemies Esoara has himself dispatched. Esoara securely locks his door whenever he leaves the chamber.

BARRACKS

Soldiers don't get beds to call their own. The darkened barracks are always full of sleeping men. When the force is larger than usual, men must sleep in bedrolls on the floor. Some prefer bedrolls anyway; the beds aren't much more comfortable and their straw mattresses are invariably infested with fleas, lice and bedbugs. The chamber occasionally flies into a commotion as a sleeping soldier bursts out of bed, having been awakened by a rat moving about inside his mattress. The soldiers keep their meager personal possessions in sacks beside their beds. They also keep weapons and armor heaped nearby should a general alarm be sounded, calling them to battle.

Ceoris's guard captain, Esoara, tries to maintain a force of five hundred and fifty fighting men to protect the chantry. His preferred balance of forces is as follows: 330 axmen, 160 archers and 10 woodsmen to act as scouts and patrollers. After a prolonged series of battles, his forces may be reduced by as much as half. Poor recruiting success could also reduce numbers. The applicants tend to appear in waves. Often, at the end of a war somewhere else in Europe, rumors spread through the ranks of idle mercenaries that there is great wealth to be had in working for the sorcerers. When large numbers come at once, Esoara has been known to hire on more mercenaries than he can comfortably house, knowing that the next resumption of hostilities will quickly whittle his forces down to a manageable level. So at any given time, the entire roster of fighting men housed in the barracks can range from 200 to 600. Combined, the various barracks provide beds for 160 men. The soldiers serve in eight-hour shifts, manning the guardhouses outside the chantry. Assuming that Esoara has about as many men as he wants at his disposal, he'll have 130 stationed at the guardhouses at any given time. Another 170 will be sleeping. Forty stand guard at various points throughout the chantry. The remaining 170 are off-duty. While off-duty, they're expected to devote at least half of their time to training.

SERGEANTS' BARRACKS

Esoara has chosen about twenty-five soldiers to serve as sergeants. A couple of them are recently-Embraced Cainites, but most are ghouls. Esoara begins the process under the guise of magical elixirs, and only reveals all the details of the Cainite conspiracy in time. He does not fully trust the power

of the blood oath. The ghouls who are in the know all wish to become Cainites. The Cainites look forward to promotion as guard captains of other chantries. All of them regard the mortal mages as prize fools and have difficulty concealing their amused contempt when ordered about by them.

The sergeants sleep in this gloomy chamber. Each has a bed to call his own and a locked wooden chest in which to store his personal possessions. The walls are unadorned and the torches in the sconces unused. As status-conscious fiends on their way up the pyramid, the sergeants are fiercely territorial. Anyone without proper authority who ventures into the barracks (or the sergeants' common room, below) faces angry interrogation.

SERGEANTS' COMMON ROOM

This small chamber allows the sergeants a place to congregate when off-duty. They play dice games, throw darts, sharpen their blades, repair their armor and drink. Mostly they speculate on events within the chantry and hatch schemes to propel themselves up into its hierarchy. An odd few of them may be, with varying degrees of success, teaching themselves to read or even to learn the ways of magic. They're better informed on the true nature of events here than anyone outside the inner circle of Cainites who run the place. The sergeants react bitterly when intruded upon by anyone other than their rightful commanders. Esoara they respect or revere, for he is either their sire, sire's sire or regnant. Most regard Curaferum, to whom they must also answer, as an annoying fusspot. Although they'd surely fall on their knees in sincere prostration if Tremere or Erris ever deigned to speak with them, the respect they show to the chantry's other leading Cainites is determined solely by the fear they inspire. They regard visitors with hostility and suspicion, reckoning that they're either spies or rivals who stand between them and advancement up the pyramid. The way to win a sergeant's favor is to credibly promise him faster advancement than he'll win without the alliance.

The walls of the room are adorned with dart targets, mounted stag horns and small tokens looted from the bodies of especially hard-fighting enemies. The well-beaten, haphazardly constructed furniture is of ragged pine. The servants don't like to come here and the sergeants don't seem to care when their room goes without cleaning for weeks at a time.

TRAINING ROOM

This large chamber serves as a gymnasium for combat training. Day or night, it is filled with men wrestling, sparring at swords, running or firing practice arrows at the targets in the archery annex. Medieval Europe is not known for the rigor of its combat training methods, but Esoara knows about the ancient Spartans and the lengths to which they went to transform themselves into ideal warriors. Through his sergeants, he tries to instill Spartan virtues — or at least Spartan ferocity and readiness to die — in his

corps of otherwise lazy, drunken mercenaries. About a quarter of the men-at-arms enthusiastically embrace the training program, reasoning that it might mean the difference between life and death in a battle against a foe with abilities beyond their ken. The rest engage in the program only half-heartedly, putting full effort in only when barked at by one of the sergeants. Assuming ideal force strength, between 80 and 100 men, plus a couple of sergeants, sweat and strain here at any given time. The room's walls and flooring are primitively padded with straw-stuffed burlap. Rough training dummies and poles stand throughout the chamber. Piles of blunted practice weapons lay haphazardly about, the racks where they are supposed to be stored when not in use almost invariably bare. The room smells like several generations of unventilated man-sweat. The soldiers scarcely seem to notice its reek.

ARMORY

This room houses spare weapons. Wooden racks hold about a hundred axes and fifty bows. Archers skilled as fletchers spend their off-hours here, making arrows. There are usually no more than four of them.

THE MAGI'S SUITES

Every senior magician, blooded or not, claims a suite of rooms. They sleep, conduct their research and socialize behind closed doors. Despite this, the floors devoted to mages' suites are hardly quiet. A constant stream of servants and apprentices flows through the corridors, doing their masters' bidding. Each mage keeps a servant or two at his elbow, ready to execute errands on command — a mage who wishes to speak to an inferior sends his dogsbody to find him. For hours on end these servants, whom the magi would never dream of admitting to their laboratories, are sentenced to wait outside the doorway to their masters' suites. A very few kindly magi, like Celestyn and Omnifer, might allow their servants to squat on tiny stools or benches by their doors. Most expect their servants to show proper deference to their majesty by standing until called upon.

Room assignments separate the Cainites from the mortals. This arrangement came about gradually over the decades as individuals moved in and out of the chantry. Although it was natural for the vampires to wish to be close to one another, Curaferum has become concerned that the arrangement may too closely mirror the chantry's secret power structure. He would like to reassign the chambers, again mixing mortals and vampires, but knows that their occupants are creatures of habit fiercely attached to their present rooms and laboratories. They'd fight any forced rearrangement, so any change will have to come about as gradually as did the current situation.

The suites themselves are generally similar. The bedchamber is small, and usually piled high with books

HOUSE OF TREMERE

and scrolls. It typically contains a writing table, which may or may not have a few square inches of bare surface showing, and a locked wardrobe for clothing, boots and other personal effects. A washing table holds a basin and a pitcher; the more fastidious mages may actually make regular use of them. A receiving room contains several chairs, comfortable by medieval standards, and perhaps a small side table. The bulk of floor space is given over to the mage's laboratory. Each laboratory contains one or more long work tables, their surfaces scorched by countless alchemical spills. Magical equipment, from strange contraptions of copper tubing to crystal skulls, may be carefully arranged or strewn chaotically about the tables. They compete for table space with scrolls and books. Shelves filled with jars, each containing a chemical, perfume or other magical ingredient, line the walls. Some labs contain cages containing live specimens ranging from snakes to songbirds to chickens.

Each suite has a sigil of power on its door that bars entry to all but a select few. Although no one is supposed to create a sigil which bars Curaferum or Etrius, many dare to set them so that only they and their apprentices can enter without triggering a magical attack. Some are so protective of their research projects that they place sigils (or other booby traps) throughout their laboratories.

Common features aside, each suite reflects the personality and activities of its occupant.

CELESTYN'S CHAMBERS

Celestyn's rooms are unusual in that they contain no books on permanent loan for the library. It would be hypocritical of him, he feels, to ask others not to squirrel materials away if he did so himself. He keeps detailed journals of his travels under lock and key, written in a complex numbered code. The journals fully describe his transformation into a vampire in detached, clinical terms. They do not provide much of interest on Ceoris's politics, a matter of profound disinterest to their author. Instead, the uninvited reader will find page after page of nature description, historical speculation and diagrams of dig sites where Celestyn expects to find ancient relics.

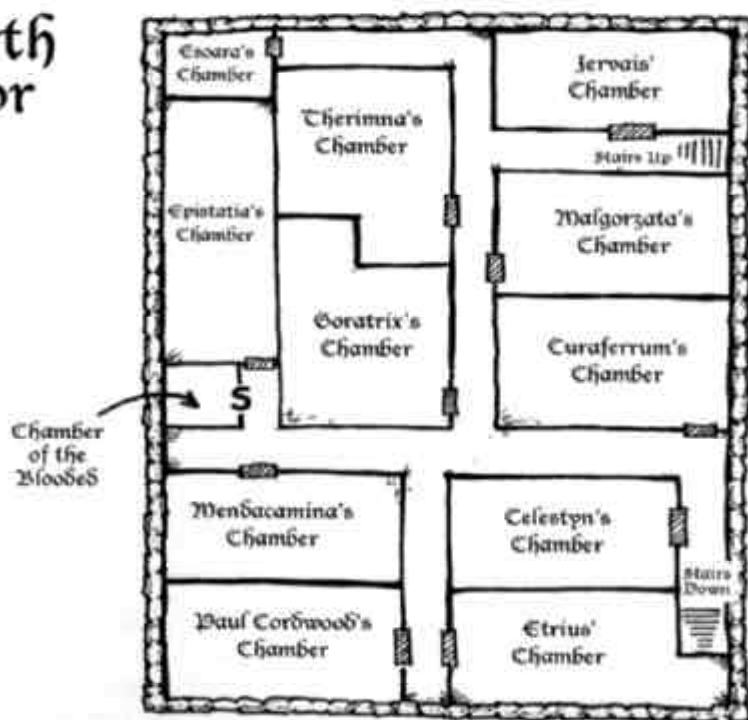
CURAFERRUM'S CHAMBERS

The castellan's rooms show that his laboratory has fallen into disuse. Too occupied by the running of Ceoris, he no longer practices his craft. Wrapped in cloth and hidden in the false bottom of his wardrobe is a desiccated human toe. He believes that this once juttied from the haughty foot of Malgorzata. He thinks he can use it to curse, control or even destroy her should Ceoris' power struggles demand it.

EPISTATIA'S CHAMBERS

Epistatia's rooms are decorated with maps she's made of the surrounding territory. The maps are amazingly accurate for the 12th century; they cover all of Transylvania and large tracts of Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland. She's marked over two dozen

Fourth floor



locations with red Maltese crosses. These indicate villages she deems vulnerable to raids, in her capacity as mistress of the food hunt. She always keeps at least three human prisoners in her laboratory. Imprisoned in modified barrels, they wear the blank, shocked faces of absolute despair. Even though they're usually children, the barrels are too small even for them, and they spend their hours in a perpetual, painful hunch. Epistatia releases them only to feed upon or for use in her experiments in soul migration. Every so often she kills a prisoner and tries to capture its soul. She thinks that the spirits of the dead can be turned into a source of power greater even than blood magic. When in conversation with an ally or apprentice, she may idly stride over to a barrel and jab a sharp stick into its small opening, just for the pleasure of hearing its occupant yelp.

ESOARA'S CHAMBERS

The war leader's chambers lack a laboratory, writing desk, books or any other accoutrements of the mage's profession. He is a soldier, not a sorcerer. The pitted surface of the wood paneling is an artifact of his incessant knife-throwing practice. He pursues this activity obsessively while thinking about Ceoris' defensive position, or even while entertaining another chantry resident. Like his office (see p. 57), the walls of his suite are decorated with trophies taken from slain enemies.

ETRIUS' CHAMBERS

Etrius' chambers reveal a compulsion towards order. Every item is neatly arranged in its proper place. A light smell of perfume hangs in the air. Over his bed hangs a symbol at odds with the arcane and allegorical imagery favored throughout Ceoris: a painted icon of the Virgin Mary, her serene face surrounded by a gilt halo.

GORATRIX'S CHAMBERS

The rooms of Goratrix stand disused since his exile to the Paris chantry, but he still keeps chambers here for his occasional visits. Blankets drape his lab table, with magical equipment still in place beneath them. Servants continue to dust the room and clear out cobwebs.

JERVAIS' CHAMBERS

The items in Jervais' chambers are imposing and outsized. Where his fellows sleep in simple beds, Jervais' thick mattress lies upon a vast oak pallet with elaborately carved posts and headboard. His wardrobe is eight feet high, its doors inlaid with a grim-visaged allegorical figure representing Might. Locked in a large chest in the laboratory is his personal cache of *vis*, which he keeps on hand for the bribery of mortal mages. Stored in vials and jars, it is in the form of *vis vaccuus*, a colorless, odorless liquid which is costly to refine but pleasing to the widest variety of mages (see p. 129 for more on *vis*).

MALGORZATA'S CHAMBERS

These rooms betray their occupant's love of luxury. She sleeps under velvet-lined blankets; her basin and

pitcher are made of silver; her candlesticks are gold. Tapestries, the booty from raids against Tzimisce strongholds, cover every wall, save for those in her laboratory. They depict the processions and pastimes of kings. The most impressive of them hangs beside her bed. It shows a ferocious king on rearing horse, spearing a gigantic, vicious-looking boar, as his slaving hunting dogs ring around it.

DAUID'S CHAMBERS

Only the occasional bauble dug from ancient Egypt's sands distinguishes Dauud's suite. Several faience necklaces, with scarabs or hippos, hang on a peg in his locked wardrobe. A small obelisk, graven with hieroglyphs, decorates his wash-stand.

MENDACAMINA'S CHAMBERS

Mendacamina's chambers give off the lush reek of decaying vegetable matter. Her laboratory overflows with potted plants. Racks along the laboratory ceiling hold hundreds of drying sprigs, branches and leaves from over six dozen plant types. She has decorated her walls with hundreds of small pieces of parchment, each inscribed with one of her own sketches of plant anatomy.

PAUL CORDWOOD'S CHAMBERS

Paul Cordwood's rooms contain a number of ancient Greek plates and pots depicting either erotic scenes or well-muscled men locked in battle. Laid out on his worktable are texts documenting various conceptions of the afterlife, from the Egyptian *Book of Traveling Forth By Day* to various Greek works. In a locked and heavily warded cabinet are written reports from his various spies throughout Transylvania. They contain a great deal of useful information about the Tzimisce, Nosferatu and Gangrel clans in the province, hidden within an even greater array of false suppositions, crazed rumors and outright lies.

THERIMNA'S CHAMBERS

Therimna's suite smells like sulfur. Having already filled her laboratory to bursting with all manner of alchemical equipment, she's crowded her own bedchamber with additional tables to house her ever-growing collection. Items include scales, burners of unquenchable fire, cauldrons, mortars of all sizes and as many pestles. Miles of copper tubing twist and turn through the chambers like an encircling snake, wrapping around bedposts, across shelves and up onto racks hanging from the ceiling. Therimna can navigate through this vast copper web of hers, but anyone else attempting to move around in her chambers is bound to trip and run into things.

APPELLO'S CHAMBERS

These chambers look as though a wild boar ran through them. Appello's periodic rages move him to upend his laboratory table every month or so, throwing books and equipment every which way. He picks up a few

HOUSE OF TREMERE

things, but always leaves items lying about. Shamed by his increasing lack of self-control, he goes to great lengths to avoid inviting anyone inside his rooms.

BITIURGES' CHAMBERS

Bitiurges' rooms make this mortal mage's academic interest in earth sciences obvious. Samples of rocks, precious metals and gems lay strewn across his lab table. A panoply of colorful cloth skull-caps, each encrusted with a series of valuable gems, lies heaped atop his wardrobe. The robes inside are peacock-like in their color and ornamentation.

OMNIFER'S CHAMBERS

The most notable feature of Omnifer's chambers is the half-dozen prototypical artificial arms that lie, in various states of completion, on his laboratory table. Each is made of a different substance, including clay, marble and lead. Although Omnifer never speaks about it, reluctant to make claims until success is certain, it is clear to anyone taking a look around that he intends to make a replacement for his slowly petrifying arm.

TOSIA'S CHAMBERS

These rooms are second in tidiness only to Etrius'. Tosia has woven a chain of wildflowers into an adornment for the head of her bed. She's painted her walls in a soothing shade of light blue. A colorful tapestry over her bed depicts the re-emergence of Persephone from the Underworld, as spring flowers blossom up around her feet.

GUEST CHAMBERS

Several suites and smaller chambers on the fifth floor are set aside for Ceoris' guests. Some of these are naught but bed chambers and other rooms, while others have full labs and are intended for visiting magi of House Tremere. That Dauud the Copt occupies one of the latter "guest chambers" (see p. 60), speaks of his tenuous place in the chantry. Currently, envoys from Cainite clans occupy two of the simple chambers (see below). Storytellers may need more guest chambers to accommodate player characters; they can place them on the sixth floor, which we have left undefined.

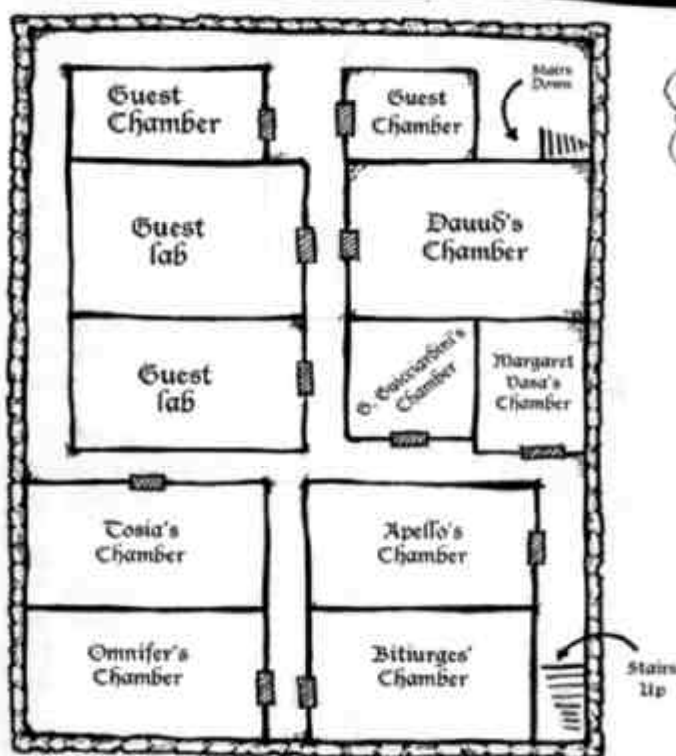
GIACOMO GUICCIARDINI'S CHAMBERS

These guest rooms are heavily decorated, suggesting that Guicciardini, an envoy of the Lasombra, means to stay for an extended period. He's covered his walls with tapestries and silver plates taken on raids against the Trimisce. (He undertook these in partnership with Paul Cordwood.) If entertaining in his chambers, he eloquently discourses on the quality of these plundered items.

MARGARET VASA'S CHAMBERS

The Cappadocian envoy's rooms are, by contrast, unadorned. Aside from a second raiment hanging in her wardrobe, not a single object in her room so much as hints as to her personality or interests.

fifth
floor



THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

APPRENTICE QUARTERS

Apprentices live communally, eight to a room. The cramped, anonymously appointed chambers remind their residents of their lowly status. Apprentices therefore avoid spending time in their rooms, except to sleep in.

Apprentice quarters smell of sweat and spoiled food—many apprentices sneak bits of meals out of the common room to munch on at odd hours. Each apprentice claims a humble bed and a chest to hold personal possessions. Most lock their chests, but know that their masters can demand to search them at any time. They don't adorn the walls with maps and charts stolen from the library as they have done with their common room. It's too easy for Celestyn to spot the culprit if she hangs something above her own bed.

Etrius has winnowed the unturned apprentices from the Cainites. The Cainites dwell in the rooms nearest the stairs. Vampires' chambers are empty during the night, as are the mortals' by day; when awake, apprentices prefer to congregate in their common room (see p. 56). Occasionally an apprentice might come here for privacy when he expects his room to be abandoned. Any single, awake apprentice encountered here is likely to resent anyone of equal or lower status intruding on his bubble of quiet. However, if a master enters, any stray apprentices must leap to their feet, eager to serve.

THE BACK STAIRS

Though the masters of Ceoris may have divorced themselves from many mortal needs, their chantry must still bring in food, feed its human population and dispose of its waste. A veritable hive of servants works tirelessly to keep the chantry running, in ways most of the place's mages and Cainites are only dimly aware of.

In these areas the lowly inhabitants of Ceoris try to escape their fear of the masters and enjoy simple human pleasures. These are the only rooms in the chantry that occasionally echo with laughter. Their inhabitants group together whenever they can, to jest and gossip and feel a sense of safety in numbers. Whenever a figure of authority intrudes into their island of ordinary humanity, they freeze and silence themselves, reminded once again that no place in their world is truly a refuge.

SMITHY

This smithy manufactures and repairs weapons and items of armor for the guards. It makes shoes for their horses and other metal items for general use in the chantry. Pots, pans, forks prongs and other kitchen appurtenances are another of the smithy's specialties. It also manufactures jewelry and similarly delicate items of precious metal, many of which are used or consumed in the course of magical rituals. For example, the delicate gold settings for Paul Cordwood's scrying devices (see p. 110) are made here by the chantry's goldsmith, Ziphias Ash. Ash is a doddering mortal

who can't see a foot in front of his face, but can perfectly see the tiniest details on the head of a pin. He is utterly oblivious to the goings-on at Ceoris. Paul Cordwood toys with the idea of making him a ghoul or even a Cainite, simply to keep him alive so he can continue his excellent work. The grosser work with swords or horseshoes is done by a recent mortal recruit named Tesco. He's big, burly, hairy, sweaty and extremely territorial about his tools and work space.

DINING HALL

In this large hall, furnished with long tables and benches, mortal apprentices, servants and soldiers eat. The dining hall must serve the 560 soldiers and 150 servants who live in Ceoris two meals each per day. Given the shifts in which both servants and soldiers work, the dining-hall is in near constant use. This is the loudest room in Ceoris. It is one of the few places where the servants and soldiers are permitted to act like ordinary people. They tell stories, joke with one another, trade insults and occasionally start brawls. Although perpetually crowded, they treat the hall as their refuge against the hushed madness of the rest of the chantry. The susurrus of its dozens of conversations reverberates through the entire floor.

Mages eat in their personal suites, their food delivered by serving girls. (Cainites pretend to have food brought to them when the mages grow over-watchful.) Occasionally one comes down to this floor in a rage, his concentration interrupted by the muffled sound of dining hall conversations as they echo up through the structure. The sudden appearance of a master is cause for fear and shame. Suddenly the place falls into absolute silence, and the diners fix their gazes down to their feet. Apprentices may be slightly less fearful, but still know that it is always a bad thing for a master to arrive. Any visiting dignitary entering the hall will elicit a similar state of alarm. Attempts to converse as equals with the people here are doomed to fail. The servants and guardsmen know their place, and understand that familiarity with masters always redounds to their misfortune sooner or later. The odd guardsman or serving boy may hope to be elevated to apprentice status and taught the ways of magic. Although he might speak up in answer to a query, he too will keep a safe social distance from any potential patron.

KITCHEN

The kitchen fires burn nearly constantly, as dozens of serving women toil to feed the chantry's inhabitants. They knead dough, boil soup, baste spitted boars or calves, chop vegetables and stir great, gluey pots of gruel. The chief cook, Zuha, serves as Curaferum's watchful eyes here. She reports to him any untoward activities she happens to observe. The appearance of any high-ranking personage in her domain would definitely be cause for suspicion. Surely they would do so only with poisoning in mind. Food not yet prepared is stored in the pantry, a room perpetually dusted in flour. The chantry's needs for fresh water are served by an artesian well.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

Knowing that the well is crucial to Ceoris' survival, Curaferum assigns a large guard complement to thwart saboteurs.

STEWARD'S QUARTERS

Hadu, a gray-haired, skeletally-thin ghou, heads Ceoris' corps of servants. Answering directly to Curaferum (both his superior and his regnant), he assigns duties to each servant, metes out iron-handed discipline and gathers information on backstairs doings for his master. He dwells in this small, musty cubbyhole. His prize possession is his oversized bed. Compulsively obedient even for a ghou, he devotes his every waking hour to his duties, and is thus rarely found here except when sleeping.

SERVANTS' QUARTERS

Servants live in large communal areas not unlike the guardsmen's barracks. The quarters are segregated by sex. The Tremere make no concessions for the fleshly desires of their servants. Those who wish to couple with spouses or lovers must do so furtively. Hadu punishes only those whose assignations attract the attentions of the masters. He is, however, under strict instructions to report any guardsmen dallying with serving girls to Esoara. Esoara prescribes lashings for those of his men unable to contain their lusts.

Ceoris' strict prohibitions against sexual conduct were instituted by Goratrix and are enthusiastically con-

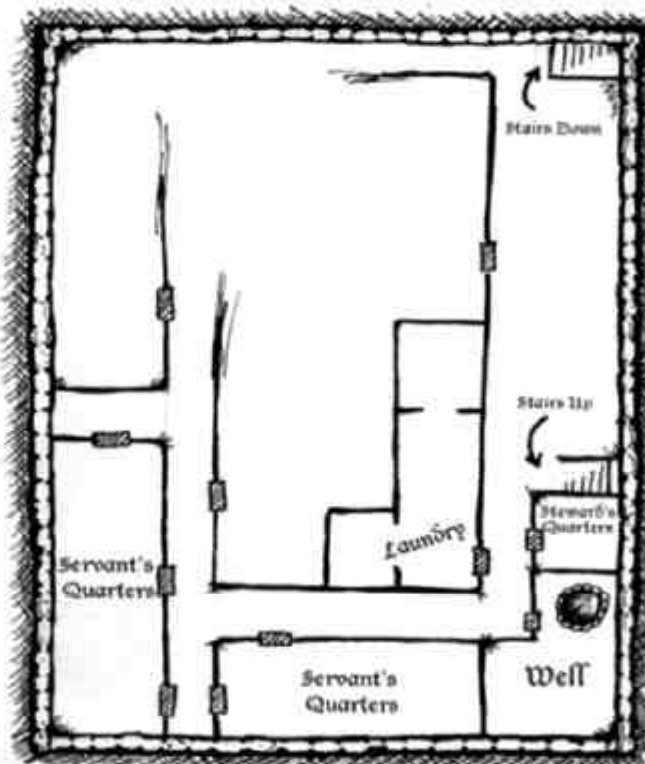
tinued by Curaferum, who sees lustful behavior as an affront to good order. Of all of the masters' rules, this is the one the servants and soldiers are most apt to violate. Even soldiers who otherwise admire Esoara bitterly resent his rigid enforcement of this cold and impossible rule. Servants and soldiers alike devote considerable ingenuity to making their assignations without getting caught.

Each room contains around eighteen beds. Servants keep what few personal items they own in rough sacks stored under their beds. The beds are used throughout the day as servants sleep in shifts. Like those in the barracks, the rough straw mattresses are infested with lice, ticks, fleas and the occasional rat.

LAUNDRY

Scrubbing women wash clothes and sheets in the laundry room. (The average garment in Ceoris gets washed perhaps once every three months.) Seamstresses repair the masters' damaged robes in a small alcove in that room. Cleaned clothing and sheets are stored in the annex to the north. Clothing in need of cleaning is stored in its twin to the east. The women who labor here would be surprised and alarmed to see any of the masters or their visitors enter these rooms. The most common interlopers here are the apprentices of Malgorzata and Tosia, who are periodically dispatched to berate and threaten the laundresses when a delicate piece of fine clothing is damaged in the wash.

Lower Level One



WASTE COLLECTION AREAS

The dozen or so Cainites at the pyramid's apex may no longer eat or eliminate, but the hundreds of servants and soldiers who serve them still produce sizeable quantities of piss and shit. The lowliest servants in the complex are those who collect the chamber pots and wheel their contents on primitive gurneys down to a storage room. The wastes are then collected in large barrels, which when full are piled onto a cart. The muck-carriers then pull the cart down the long corridor to the alcove they've dubbed the "Arse of Ceoris." This is a hole in the chasm wall, disguised from outside observers by the thick coat of magically-enhanced fog that shrouds the outer face. A heavy portcullis provides additional protection against any intruders capable of making their way down there. The ordure-haulers must raise the portcullis before dropping their load. If they happen to be obeying instructions, they pause to listen for any sign of watchers up on the lip of the chasm. Then they unlatch the back of their cart, sending the barrels rolling out the hole and down hundreds of feet to the chasm's bottom. The shit-haulers are neither bright nor attentive, and are certainly not armed. Although no one has yet done so, the Arse of Ceoris remains perhaps the best (if most undignified) way to sneak into the castle. Those willing to stomach further indignity might don the servants' crap-spattered vestments after overcoming them. Even other servants treat the shit-carriers as invisible. Nobody bothers to learn

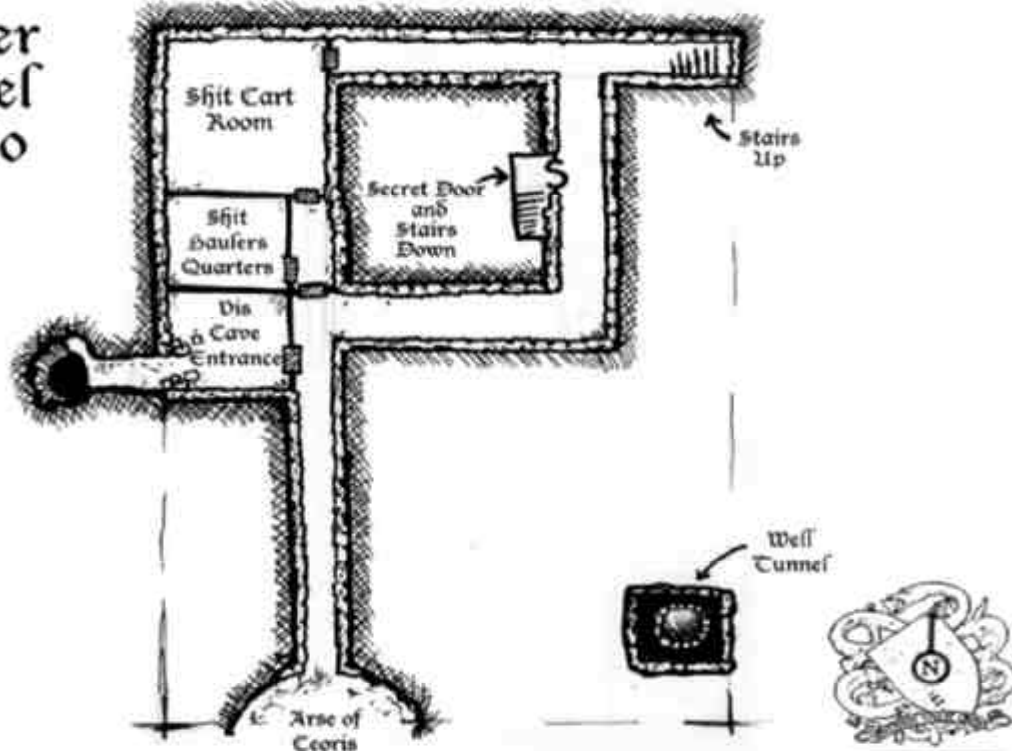
their names or memorize faces. They live in their own set of quarters and eat at a separate table in the dining hall. They enjoy access to all of the castle's living quarters, but have been told never to bother cleaning chamberpots out of the rooms of certain mages. These are, of course, the Cainites, who no longer defecate. Thus, an intruder (or mortal Tremere) wanting a complete list of Ceoris' vampires could get it by asking the shit-men which private suites they've been told to avoid.

THE THINGS BENEATH

Ceoris' lower levels hide its secrets. Some lower chambers are hewn from the mountain rock, just like those on the upper floors. Others are enlarged versions of the original caverns that first inspired Goratrix and Etrius to build their keep here. They did so because the largest of the caves was rich in vis.

Curaferrum keeps this area off-limits to all but the most trusted guests and discourages the mortal mages from entering it. The magi know that the laboratories which spawned the Gargoyles are here, along with other unsavory locations such as a torture chamber and dungeon. Aside from Tosia's group of Christian magi, they are quite content to put the upsetting realities of these places out of their minds. Naturally, they are central to the Tosia's suspicions; she imagines an enormous demonic cathedral complete with bloodstained altar. Unbeknownst to her,

Lower Level Two



HOUSE OF TREMERE

Omnifer and his retainers have made several trips to this forbidden area, penetrating many of Virstania's laboratories. They even heard the moans of the prisoners in the feeding chamber (see below), but assumed them to be future sacrificial victims, not sources of blood.

The air here is damp, and projects a chill into the most vigorous bones. In the corridors, one might encounter vampires such as Virstania, Malgorzata, Etrius, Paul Cordwood or Mendacamina, along with their retainers. The former two would be most likely heading to or from an experiment. Etrius will be heading towards, or leaving, an audience with Tremere. The business of the latter two takes place in the cells and torture chamber. All are especially on their guard down here and any of them would be quick to interrogate those without rightful business in these forbidden hallways.

VIRSTANIA'S CHAMBERS

Virstania's chambers are drab and undecorated: she's too obsessed with her Gargoyle project to concern herself with petty matters of appearance. Servants don't come down here, so the corners of her chamber are draped with cobwebs. The naked stone flooring holds decades worth of dirt and grit. The sheets and blankets on her shabby bed haven't been laundered in years. The thin layer of slime at the bottom of her wash-basin betrays her increasing disinterest in personal hygiene. Her sitting room is used only for storage, its chairs piled high with books. None of

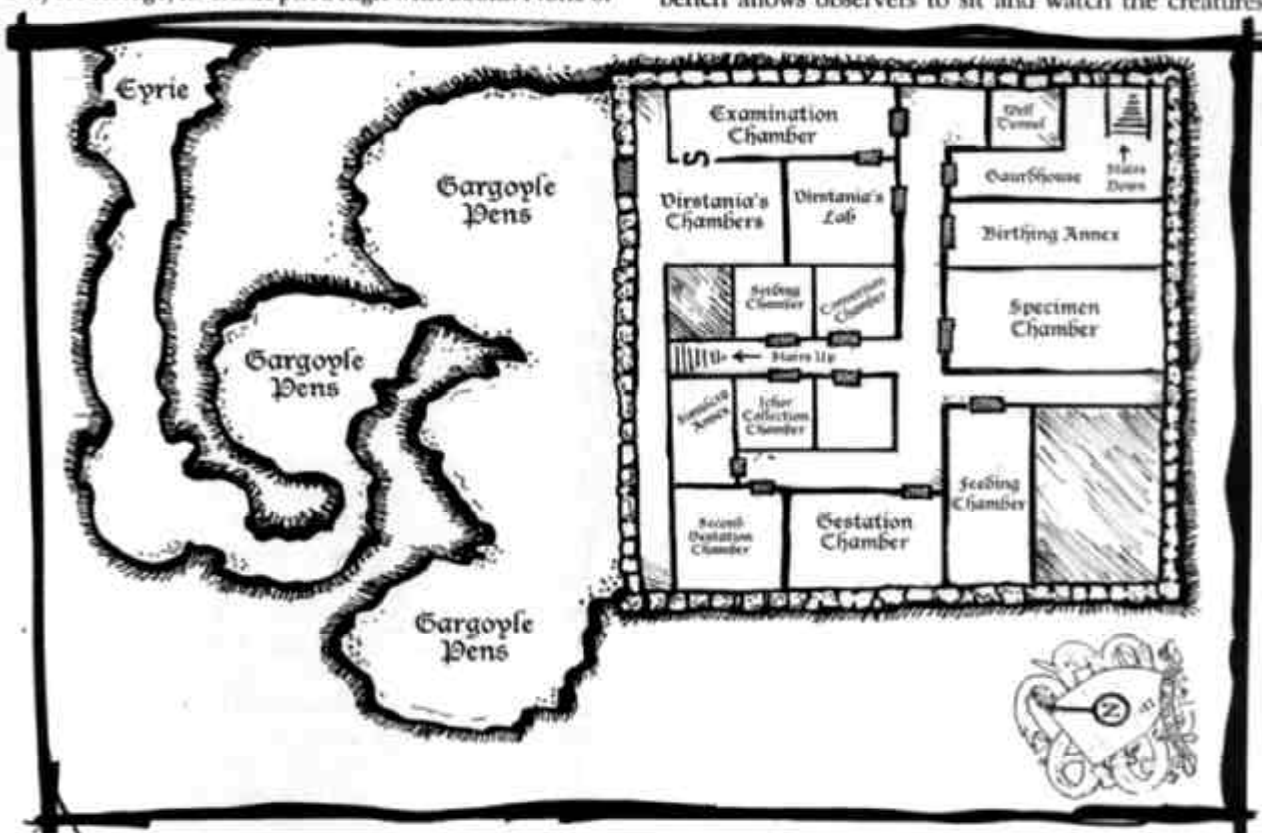
MYSTERY OF THE CAVERNS

The caves aren't natural. They look like caverns created by water erosion through limestone, but occur in the volcanic rock from which the region's mountains are made. No one in Ceoris is equipped to make this distinction. It will be many centuries before geological knowledge advances to the point where even an educated person would raise an eyebrow at extensive cavern networks in volcanic rock.

A long time from now, Tremere and Etrius will understand this basic geological principle and begin to wonder what force made the caverns of Ceoris. They will hesitantly guess that it was Kupala, a vastly powerful local demon indirectly responsible for many of the region's horrors. Even then, they will not fully piece together the demon's complete involvement in their transformation from magi to Cainites. For more on Kupala and its possible role in Tremere activities, see *Transylvania By Night*, p. 78 and 126.

her peers enjoys visiting with Virstania; if business forces them to endure her presence, they arrange to meet in the Chamber of the Blooded (see p. 56).

The most notable feature of her chambers is the long corridor abutting the Gargoyle pens. A series of seven peepholes punctuates its wall and a long, leather-padded bench allows observers to sit and watch the creatures'



THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

behavior. Virstania does so for hours each day, marking her observations down in a series of blank-paged, bound books which she leaves in heaps on the benches. When she sees them doing something worthy of note, she reaches for the nearest book and begins to scribble. Thus, the observations of any given day could be scattered across as many as half a dozen of her notebooks. A wooden shelf hangs beneath the peepholes. Virstania has placed an inkwell and quill pen under each peephole.

GARGOYLE PENS

This series of connected caverns, enlarged by earth-moving magic, provides a home to Ceoris' Gargoyle complement. Their number now stands at three hundred battle-ready beasts, plus about seventy-five malformed individuals. Virstania feels too great a sense of affection for them to do anything but let them perish on their own. Healthy Gargoyles show a surprising solicitude for their weaker kin, bringing them captured animals — or sometimes enemy soldiers — to feed upon. Strong Gargoyles fight amongst themselves on occasion, but never attack the crippled ones. About a third of Ceoris' Gargoyles gather here at any one time.

The chambers themselves are rough-hewn and adorned only by piles of bones. Although you can find the odd human skull or bone among the piles, most are cattle bones, stripped clean and cracked open for the marrow. Every so often the Gargoyles clean up the bones, bringing the piles to Virstania's Gargoyle apprentices. They then sort the bones by type of creature and powder them with mortar and pestle. Bone powder is a useful alchemical ingredient, which Ceoris exports to other chantries in exchange for salts and essences harvested elsewhere.

Aside from fighting, Gargoyle activities in the pens are largely confined to eating and sleeping. Now and then they'll capture a large animal, enemy soldier or hapless villager to chase, torture and ultimately kill. They do this for the sport of it, and to teach the newly-made Gargoyles, who are awkward when first spawned, how to hunt and slay. Virstania does not like to watch them when they do this. She once forbade these torture sessions, but saw morale suffer when the Gargoyles tried to obey her. She now unhappily accepts the games.

Ceoris can't supply the Gargoyles' vast appetite for blood. Each adult Gargoyle is allowed to spend about a third of its time hunting. (Another third is spent on duty.) At first, the creatures consistently raided the herds of nearby farmers and took deer and other game animals from the surrounding forest. They soon depleted the forests of game and drove the farmers they preyed on to leave the region. Virstania taught them to cast a wider net, and now some of the stronger specimens fly hundreds of miles a night to bring back meat for the community.

The Gargoyles sleep in large piles, as if comforted by physical proximity to others of their kind. They sleep

soundly but not quietly, emitting a cacophony of snores, wheezes, shrieks and grunts that waking Gargoyles seem to find comforting but other observers (Virstania excepted) are apt to find ear-rending.

The Gargoyles react poorly to unfamiliar faces in their lair. They bow down before Virstania and shirk in fear from Esoara. Ceoris's other Cainites give this place a wide berth. Anyone else entering without Virstania or Esoara would be immediately confronted. At first, the Gargoyles warn intruders by hissing, flapping their wings and baring their teeth. Interlopers who fail to slowly back out of the lair face immediate attack by as many Gargoyles as can physically lay hands on them.

EYRIE

This exit allows Gargoyles to fly in and out of Ceoris without walking up through the castle. It is a long chamber opening up into the chasm separating the chantry from the surrounding mountainside. Its length allows the Gargoyles to get a running start as they work to take flight.

Here the Gargoyles display their trophy bones: the skulls of slain enemies arranged on poles. The exit is currently lined with six poles, each displaying upwards of twenty skulls. Many of the skulls show completely-smashed in craniums or large puncture wounds from tusk-like Gargoyle teeth. Piles of finger bones lie at the bottom of each pole. Virstania aids their trophy collection. She uses a minor ritual of her invention to reconstitute slain Cainites' skulls from the dust they immediately disintegrate into.

The eyrie is seventy feet down the cliff face. Six Gargoyles always stand guard here. Their orders are to destroy any mortal or vampire who attempts to come into Ceoris through the eyrie, even if they look and smell like Virstania or Esoara. If attacked, the guards immediately shriek for help, alerting the approximately one hundred adult Gargoyles likely to be elsewhere in the lair complex.

During the day, the eyrie is guarded by about a dozen ghouls. These are crazed individuals who have been made ghouls by the Gargoyles themselves. To qualify for this dubious distinction, a mercenary must display low intelligence and a rabid bloodlust. Curaferum sputtered apoplectically when he learned that Virstania had permitted her Gargoyles to take ghouls. He petitioned Etrius for the ghouls' immediate destruction, reasoning that the slavish beasts could not be trusted with the right to initiate blood oaths. Malgorzata, seeing an opportunity to mend relations with Virstania and vex Curaferum, stood up to argue that the strength of the pyramid could not be threatened by a handful of drooling guards in a forgotten corner of the chantry. Etrius infuriated Curaferum by merely taking the matter under advisement and then doing nothing. Curaferum would still like to see the ghouls here destroyed and not replaced, and may seek junior allies to further this goal.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

SIMULACRA ANNEX

This small, unadorned chamber contains four beds, a washstand with basin and a wardrobe. This room provides a home to Ceoris' simulacra—Gargoyles created in the image of Cainites (see p. 126). These forlorn, doom-wracked creatures can't mix with the other Gargoyles. They register to the creatures' senses as either Gangrel, Tzimisce or Nosferatu. Most Gargoyles feel an instinctive, violent loathing of at least one, if not all, of those three clans. Although they yearn to join the others in the Gargoyle pens, they know they'd be set upon and torn apart. So they while away their time here, waiting to be given a dangerous mission by Paul Cordwood. Pastimes which might alleviate the boredom of a genuine Cainite, like reading, are of no interest to the simulacra. They just sit, staring at the wall, their faces contorted in misery. Virstania takes pity on these creatures and used to come and visit them. However, she expected them to be able to respond to her as peers and was distressed when they could not. Her misshapen Gargoyle apprentice, Fidus, has overcome his primal dislike of simulacra and does his best to provide them comfort during their short stays in this chamber. Since he is only a halfway-acceptable Gargoyle himself, the simulacra find his company encouraging, but still somewhat wanting.

Although there are four beds here, Ceoris rarely houses that many simulacra at once. There may be none at all. Simulacra are generally created for specific missions and immediately sent out to perform them. Often they are caught and killed. So there is a good chance that this room will be empty. If so, only a strange air of unquenchable sadness will greet the Cainite who ventures into this chamber.

EXAMINATION CHAMBER

Virstania examines captured Cainites in this long, damp chamber with walls of rough-hewn rock. Her objective is to measure their potential as raw materials for new Gargoyles. Ghoulish guardsmen run the victim, blindfolded, chained and hobbled, from his cell, through the guardhouse and down the corridor. They then slam him backwards onto Virstania's examination table and buckle restraining straps around his wrists, ankles and neck. The leather straps are reinforced with steel wire. Virstania, assisted by her quartet of Gargoyle apprentices, then performs a series of measurements. She repeatedly pierces the victim's body cavity to draw fluids for analysis in her lab. Finally she places a number of artificial gemstones on the victim's skin to measure the flow of magical energy through the body. The gems turn various colors, depending on the degree of energy detected. As they do so, they burn and scorch the victim's flesh. As intrusive as this examination is, it draws little blood.

VIRSTANIA'S STUDY CHAMBER

This room looks like a smaller version of laboratories connected to the other mages' private apartments. A shelf

full of books fills the eastern wall. Shelves on the other walls contain tubs and jars full of various alchemical powders, pastes and solutions. In this chamber, Virstania measures and tests the fluids gathered during an examination. She mixes them with various alchemical powders, puts them in solution to see what salts crystallize out of them and then burns the salts. She catches the smoke on parchment, then divines from the pattern the powers she might impart to a Gargoyle using the subject's dismembered remains. The room smells like burnt meat.

CONVERSION CHAMBER

Virstania and her apprentices dismember their Cainite prisoners in this chamber before turning them into Gargoyles. Each victim must be dismembered according to a separate exacting procedure, the details of which Virstania has already determined during the prisoner's stint in the examination chamber. To remind herself of the precise incisions required, she makes a life-size diagram of the victim with dotted lines marked on it. The blood spatters so freely in this room that she usually slaps this vellum chart onto the wall, where the sticky gore of past dismemberments holds it fast.

This floor of this round room is permanently coated in tacky, mostly dried blood and is dotted with small knots of desiccated viscera, some as big as thumbs. Hair and clotted blood clogs a drain in the middle of the floor. Wooden pegs jammed into holes in the stone walls hold a succession of axes, saws, razors, pins, scalpels, scissors, pincers, pliers and clamps.

Torn scraps of old charts still stick to the wall in various places. If a character happens to have infiltrated Ceoris looking for a kidnapped comrade, it is not inconceivable that he might find a chart fragment bearing the lost one's name still blood-pasted to these walls.

SEEDING CHAMBER

In this small room, its dimensions mathematically determined to be ideal for the task, Virstania and her apprentices take the "converted" victims, now reduced to chunks of meat and bone, and begin to treat them. Some parts are soaked in chemical solutions. Others are tanned. Still other parts are left to dry out, or preserved in salt. When all are ready, Virstania takes them and sews them together. She then places them inside a fresh, untreated cow's hide, sewing the whole thing up into a sac meant to mimic a uterus. Then her assistants haul the sac into the gestation chamber.

GESTATION CHAMBER

The walls and door of this room are heavily padded in an attempt to muffle the non-stop screaming of the creature that dwells inside. Dubbed Alvusia by its creator and tormentor, this twenty-foot long, twelve-ton creature is the spawner of Gargoyles. (Virstania prefers to think of herself as their mother.) Its most notable feature is its distended, dome-like belly, its taut surface woven with pulsing veins



and capillaries. A raw, reddened scar, threaded shut with twine, runs the length of the belly, perspiring dots of green-white pus. Where one might expect clawed hands and feet, there are only stumps, their surfaces cauterized and puckered. Metal bands, sunk deep into the stone flooring, keep Alvusia trapped on her back. Although she can't move more than a few inches, she nonetheless constantly writhes. Her head, a six-foot globe improbably plopped onto a spindly neck incapable of supporting its weight, is thrown back in agony. Her yard-long, toothless mouth alternately gasps slurpingly for air or emits an ear-shattering wail. Virstania plugs her ears against Alvusia's screams; her Gargoyle apprentices profess to find the sound soothing. It is the sound they associate with their months in the womb, their mother's song.

When Virstania has created a seed — the sac full of body parts, dismembered then sewn together in a new arrangement — she brings it to the gestation chamber. With a freshly sharpened knife, she once again slices open the scar on Alvusia's belly, then bids her Gargoyles to drop the corpse-sized sac into the gaping belly. She resews the wound as Alvusia's screaming reaches a crescendo. Over the next few months, she regularly returns to the chamber to perform various rituals necessary to the birthing process. Finally, at a time Virstania can predict with mathematical certainty, Alvusia shudders, screams even

louder and begins to give birth. Other Gargoyles gather, pushing their way into the chamber to witness the miracle. They keen in nerve-jangling, high-pitched harmony to welcome their new sibling into the world. It pushes its own way down her massive birth canal, parting the walls of flesh to emerge, coated in greenish blood. The witnessing Gargoyles nearest the front rush forward to fall upon him, ecstatically licking up the birth juices. This action bonds the Gargoyle to the rest of the pack. Later they will teach him to worship Virstania as mother, creator and goddess. The Gargoyles take their new brother to their holding pen, as Virstania beams in satisfaction at her new creation.

SECONDARY GESTATION CHAMBER

Four rows of man-sized casks dominate this room. At any given time, about a third of the casks have lids on them. These are sealed with copious quantities of wax. Each cask has a series of arcane sigils carved on it, as well as less permanent markings in chalk. The chalk markings are mostly dates; in Virstania's hand, these remind her when the fetal Gargoyles inside were first installed, and when they were last checked.

Births using Alvusia result in better-quality Gargoyles, and provide the rest of the Gargoyle colony with a much more pleasing communal experience when a Gargoyle is born than do these casks. As much as Virstania might like to lovingly prepare each Gargoyle the ritually perfect way, her colleagues call on her to produce many more than the

few per year that would allow. So the bulk of the Gargoyles are gestated in casks, their sacs attached to the undersides of the lids, suspended in nourishing alchemical fluid.

Virstania might invite a trusted ally to follow her on her rounds as she carefully opens a cask or two and takes a sample of fluid. She won't allow anyone to tear open the sacs to see the developing Gargoyles within. Fetal Gargoyles can sicken and die if exposed to the air's "ill humors."

To deal with possible intruders who wish to tamper with the Gargoyles, Virstania places destructive wards on the tops of each active cask's lid. Only she wears the counter-amulet that prevents them from going off. Because she wears a large number of similar-looking amulets, even when sleeping, it is very hard to get the counter-amulet from an unknowing Virstania.

In addition to Virstania, Malgorzata keeps a key to this chamber. However, she rarely comes here these days, having long ago lost interest in Gargoyle making.

SPECIMEN CHAMBER

Virstania forbids her creations to come to this room, a repository both for preserved, dead Gargoyles and living examples of her other experiments in sorcerous hybridization. Stacked from floor to ceiling along the east and north walls are dozens of wire cages, each containing a hideous animal spawned from Virstania's experiments. They include fist-sized spiders with agonized human faces on the tops of their abdomens, disembodied stag's heads rendered mobile by hundreds of millipede-like legs and a clump of squamous, grayish tissue that can envelop and devour a rat in less than a minute. The caged creatures chirp, whistle, hum, cluck and hoot when anyone enters the room. Virstania lovingly feeds them by hand. Few of these creatures are capable of breeding or surviving on their own for any length of time. Some of them are very dangerous predators, though. On several past occasions, when enemy armies forced the abandonment of all watch posts and withdrawal into the chantry, Virstania released hordes of these bizarre creatures to harass besieging forces. A small number of them still survive in the woods. Ceoris's own guards and Gargoyles kill the things whenever they catch them in the wild or place them at the bottom of pit traps to await unlucky intruders.

Deep shelves along the south wall contain the salt-preserved bodies of dead Gargoyles. Some have been thoroughly vivisectioned, while others are still intact. Virstania studies these in her efforts to perfect the Gargoyle form. Many were stillborn, and appear grossly deformed. Some specimens display malformed claws, multiple faces, strange worm-like appendages or bifurcated limbs.

Its door is of solid iron. Only Virstania has a key, but she is sometimes forgetful about locking it. She thinks her Gargoyle apprentices remain ignorant of its con-

tents, but the boldest of them, Luma, once ventured inside and carefully examined its contents.

BIRTHING ANNEX

In this annex of the Specimen Chamber, a very large, barely alive doe of the red deer lies, tied down on its back, its belly sliced open and restitched like the *Alvusia*, the spawner of Gargoyles. This unfortunate creature is to the specimen chamber's altered animals what *Alvusia* is to the Gargoyles: a living incubation chamber.

ICHOR COLLECTION CHAMBER

This is another chamber the Gargoyles know nothing about. In the center of the room is a gigantic, manually operated vise-like press. The device is big enough to crush a man-sized object. Between the two sides of the press is a section of meshed flooring. Beneath the mesh is a large trough used to catch the bodily fluids squeezed from the creatures crushed by the vise. A channel in the trough leads to a spout. If the vise is in use, a silver bucket is placed under the spout. Otherwise, careful inspection might reveal a ring of a red sticky substance on the floor beneath the spout: This residue is spillover from a now-absent bucket. Leaning up against a wall are a series of heavy planks. A perceptive investigator might note that the planks are just the right size to place on top of the press to prevent the escape of any unlucky soul facing the vise.

An observer sneaking into this room might well be puzzled by its purpose. It seems an inefficient means of blood collection. In fact, it's used in the bizarre ritual to extract a useful juices from an even more bizarre creature, the Gargoyle offshoot called the hexaped. See p. 113 for a description of the ritual and 124 for the hexaped itself.

PRISONERS' CELLS

The Tremere occasionally keep certain prisoners in reasonably good condition, to ransom them for the freedom of their own captured clanmates. At present, though, the Tremere are so hated and feared by their enemies that the opportunity to swap prisoners rarely presents itself. They keep prisoners primarily to extract information from them. They may offer freedom to those who talk but are not in the habit of keeping their word in such matters. Captured Cainites, as vital ingredients in the Gargoyle transformation, are a resource not to be squandered. Mortal mages who suspect the Tremere's transformation are too dangerous to be allowed to tell their tale.

The Tremere keep their important prisoners in small, damp cells. Each is magically hewn from solid stone: There are no loose stones to hide objects behind, and no chance of digging one's way out. Designed to break their inhabitants' minds, they lack windows or sources of light. Food for the mortal captives is thrown into the cells through small slits in their iron doors. Prisoners are not provided with plates or bowls and must pick their filthy food off the floor, morsel by morsel. Drinking water is ladled to them through the slit; they

THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

must sit beneath the ladles like dogs to lap the water up. Guards are not permitted to speak to prisoners, even to shout abuse at them. The doors cannot be unlocked from the inside. The only way out of the cell is to do what the Tremere demand. Naturally, even the most intransigent prisoner is taken from cell to torture chamber every so often.

Current prisoners are described in Chapter Five.

FEEDING CHAMBER

In this much larger cell, from one hundred and fifty to three hundred frightened peasants huddle in chains. These are the victims of Epistatia's latest food raid. Ceoris's demands for blood are inordinate even for a large nest of vampires because the practice of thaumaturgy requires enormous quantities of vitae. Although Ceoris's Cainites try to feed upon them in moderation, sometimes they grow overhungry and drain a victim dry. The prisoners also tend to die from malnutrition or sickness. Sometimes they try to kill each other in order to end their misery. When the number of prisoners dips below sixty, Epistatia organizes another hunt. The captives have seen little of Ceoris, knowing only that they were captured by fiends and are now fed upon by them. However, because the feedings arouse feelings of ecstasy in the victims, they offer the only moments of relief from misery these wretches ever experience. Whenever anyone enters their prison, the vessels surge forward heedlessly until brought short by their chains, each begging to be

sucked from. The pale, scrofulous prisoners often seek their own deaths by putting themselves forward even near to fainting from blood loss. Whether they knowingly seek suicide or have simply lost their reason is a question Ceoris' vampires regard with studied incuriosity.

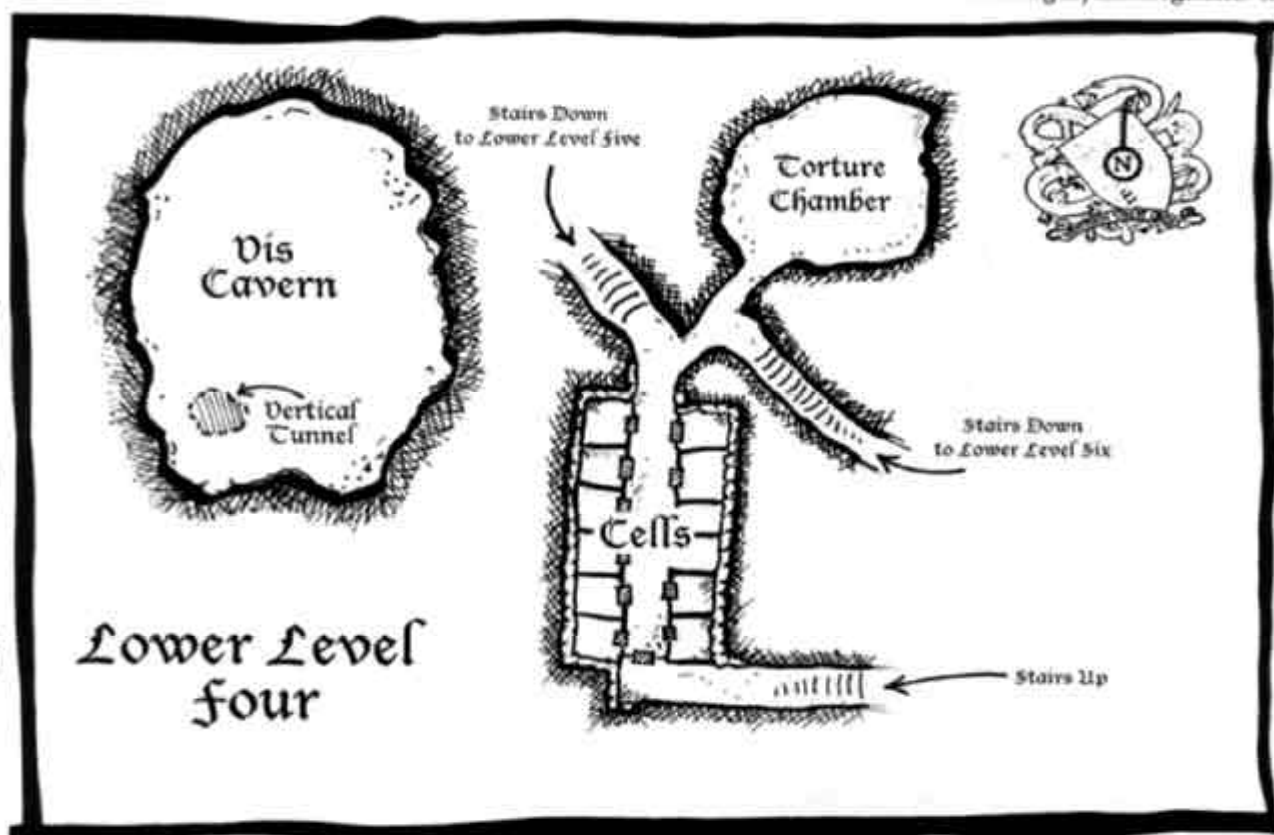
GUARDHOUSE

Six guards are always stationed here: one ghoul, one Gargoyle and four mortal soldiers. Despite the bone-rotting dampness of the area and the disquieting screams of tortured prisoners, this is considered a plum task. It's neither significantly dangerous nor especially strenuous. The guards station the Gargoyle at the bottom of the stairs, nearer the cells. With him out of the way, they can play dice, eat, throw darts at a makeshift board and generally loaf about. Until, that is, they hear approaching footsteps coming down the corridor, at which point they snap to attention and hide the evidence of their shirking. The ghoul, of course, reports all to Cordwood, who is secretly content to allow the men to enjoy their task.

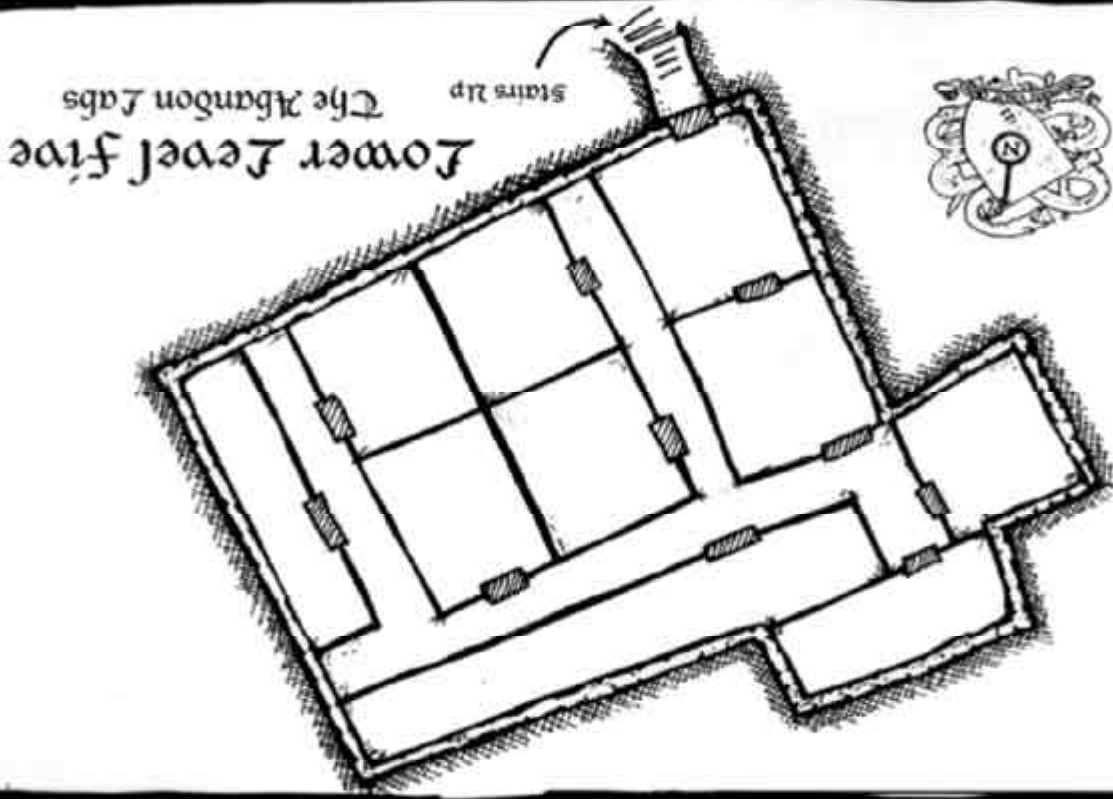
The guardhouse contains a bench, some darts, a removable target and a few plates liberated from the dining hall. Former guards painted a lascivious picture on the wall; it shows a woman in congress with a boar. The paint is now peeling off.

TORTURE CHAMBER

This large and well-equipped torture chamber provides a site for Paul Cordwood's lengthy interrogations. It



HOUSE OF TREMERE



imbedded by Calinates and mortals alike. Some Gargoyles have learned of its intoxicating effects and occasionally try to sneak in here to lap up the water. The pool used to yield dozens of crystals per month. Now a dozen in a year is remarkably high. Most of the charity's *vis* now comes from other charities.

Access to the *vis* cave comes through a thirty-foot vertical tunnel leading from the charity's sub-basement. Metal rungs spaced along its height allow people to climb up and down the access-way. Jervais controls access to the *vis*. The guards here are always led by at least one of his ghoulis and he has barred other mages from coming here. Those who try to barge in face quite insolent comments from the guards, which further enrage them. Although any high *magus* mocked by a mere mortal might expect a powerful urge to obliterate the insolent monkey with conjured fire, *Cecoris*' residents know that Jervais was appointed to the post by Tremere. They thus restrain themselves when confronting his impudent guards. Jervais, like the other Calinates, has no use for *vis* himself but keeps a close eye on stocks. He uses his *vis* to buy the loyalty of mortal mages. He tests them by offering them *vis* in exchange for performing petty but unsavory tasks, like spying on troublemakers or stealing experimental notes. The most pliable of them become targets for Maligornata's embrace. Jervais often brings them here to make his proposals; the sight of budding *vis* stokes their greed.

Although rarely visited now, this gigantic underground chamber provided the original motivation for *Cecoris*' location. This cavern once housed one of Europe's richest sources of *vis*, the supernatural substance mortal mages use to power their magic. *Vis* can appear in any number of forms — in mineral form, as magical fruit, or within the organs of magical beasts. In the *vis* cave, it appears as crystalline deposits on the bed of an underground pool. The water in the pool contains magical power in low concentration. Although not useful to

VIS CAVE

the victim could survive another session the next night. thoroughness, he never ends an interrogation if he thinks the room about once every other night. A believer in scrub up or to splash into eyes and open wounds. He uses water and lye sit near the door where they may be used to silver and see regular polishing from the guards. Buckets of cleanliness in here; many of the torture implements are of above for the brazier. Cordwood insists on sparkling from the room's center, matched by a small chimney heavy wooden chairs. A drain for blood gleams cruelly restrained by the leather straps on one of the chamber's and clamps. Victims not placed on the rack may be brazier full of coals, as well as a variety of pokers, knives features a rack, an iron lady, a variety of face cages, a

Guard duty at the *vis* pool is another coveted assignment. The guards here get to loaf, sitting on improvised couches they've made from stolen sheets and old crates. They hop to when they hear someone coming, though. They're usually bolstered by a Gargoyle of the fearsome *iecur* variety, a sub-type uninterested in drinking the waters.

The waters faintly luminesce, casting an eerie ripple pattern along the domed roof and across the faces of all who gaze on it. A thick, colorless mat of fungus creeps up the sides of the cavern from the pool. It smells like good red wine but is highly poisonous to those foolish enough to taste it. Jervais sometimes harvests it to slip into the drinks of his faction's breathing enemies.

ABANDONED LABS

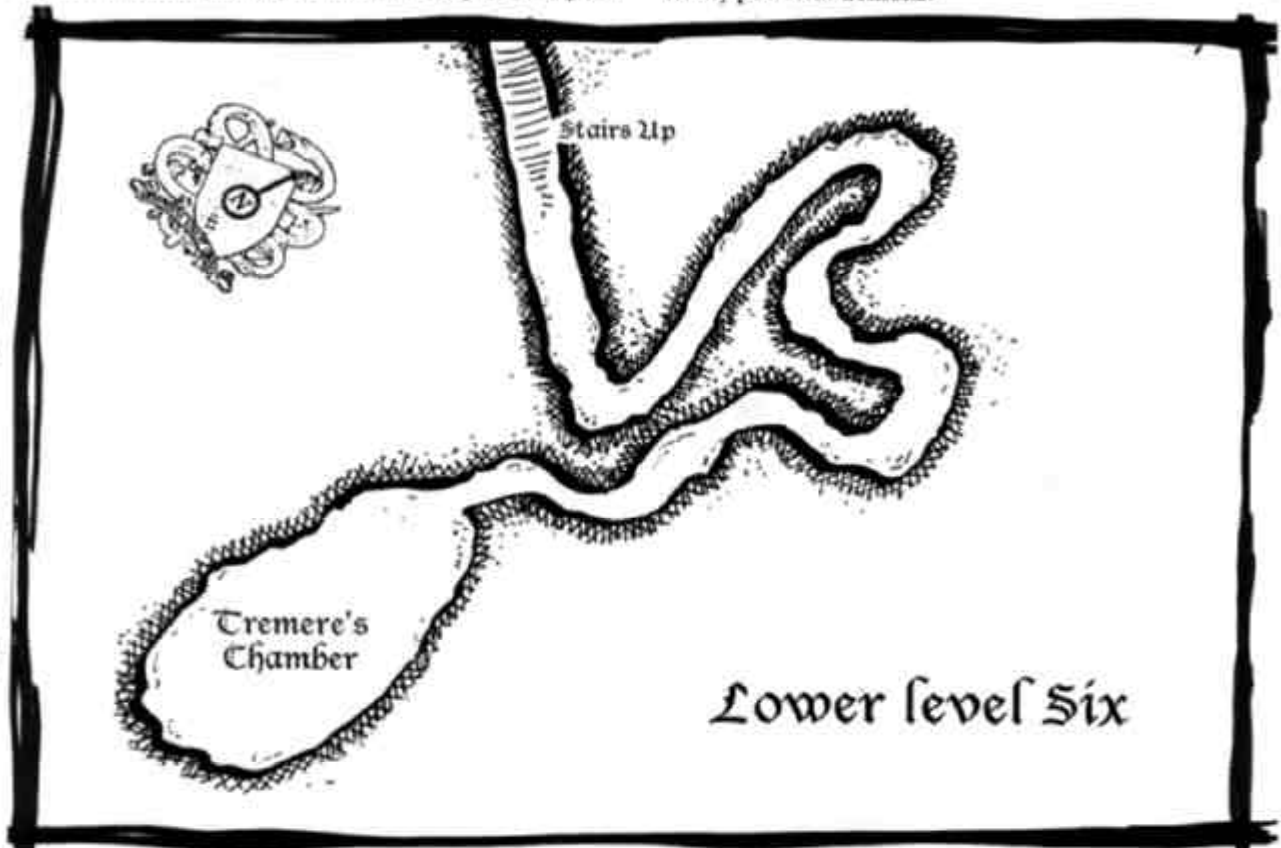
During Etrius' early-11th century inquiries into diabolism, he made a dreadful mistake, loosing a host of demons into the level of the chantry which at that time housed the laboratories of a dozen mages. Seven apprentices, two mages and sixteen servants were devoured by the invading devils. Etrius and colleagues rallied to drive the fiends back and cast spells of warding to seal the door.

The demons presumably lurk there still. Etrius and Malgorzata join forces every few years to strengthen the sigils of warding which prevent their escape. Perhaps to

taunt him, Malgorzata has openly speculated that Etrius opened a doorway to Hell. As the demons have never made it past the wards, Ceoris' leaders are content to let the matter lie. The entrance to the abandoned labs is heavily guarded. Mages and apprentices are warned not to even approach the area. Ghoul or Gargoyle guards stand skittishly at their disquieting post, under orders to attack and kill anyone trying to meddle with the wards, after sounding an alarm by banging a large gong that hangs by their post. Even if the door is opened, wards along the hallway are strong enough to keep the demons from pouring past the doorway. The sigils scream when interfered with.

The inhabitants of the other side are quiet unless a person comes within a foot or so of the sealed door. The door begins to shake and rattle in its hinges, droplets of slime condense on its surface, a sulphurous stench fills the air and billows of acrid smoke rise up from the flooring. The guards' orders instruct them to stop anyone from getting close enough to the door to provoke this reaction.

The labs take up all of the fifth underground level of Ceoris. Note that the map represents the lab complex as built by Etrius and Goratrix. For all anyone at Ceoris knows, its new residents may have since altered the floor's dimensions. Anyone somehow making it inside the abandoned lab is immediately set upon by extraordinarily powerful demons.



HOUSE OF TREMERE



TREMERE'S LAIR

Here lies Tremere, who rarely emerges from a form of torpor with symptoms that, to the consternation of his clan, seem unlike anything else in their study of Cainite lore. Although unconscious and insensate, he thrashes about on his elaborately carved oaken bed. He is always attended by at least two Cainite apprentices, who see to it that he does not injure himself in his tremors. The apprentices view this duty with intense trepidation. Sometimes Tremere, infused with unearthly strength, lashes out at them, cursing them as agents of Saulot. One apprentice was driven into torpor by one of Tremere's attacks; a second was torn to pieces by a mere glance of her master's glassy eyes.

The apprentices are not permitted to speak of Tremere's condition; over the years Therimna has killed several for breaking this admonition. Thus no one save Etrius knows that Tremere frequently breaks from his torpor to speak, that he does so in two distinct voices, and that one of the voices speaks in a tongue none of them recognize. Nor are they anxious to describe his periodic changes in appearance. Sometimes his arms recede into his torso and his legs fuse together. His already-pale skin sometimes becomes glossy and grub-white. New eyes bubble up like buboes on his forehead, only to pop in an eruption of pus and caustic vapors.

Etrius spends much of his time here, studying Tremere's condition. He demands that the attendants write down any of Tremere's intelligible utterances. Periodically he conducts a cautious experiment to restore Tremere's consciousness and volition — he may apply a poultice or speak an incantation. Visitors with possible insight into Tremere's condition may be ushered into his chamber to observe it for themselves, but only if they enjoy Etrius' absolute trust.

Etrius believes that he has successfully concealed the full details of Tremere's tribulations from Malgorzata and her faction of Goratrix loyalists. He is mistaken: she bullies one of the attendants into reporting to her, and she passes the gist of his testimony to Goratrix in Paris. She is willing to take the risk that one of her missives to Goratrix might be intercepted. She couches them in euphemistic terms likely to confuse a reader not already familiar with Tremere and his condition.

The chamber's single entrance is sealed with an iron door. Gargoyles, selected for their incuriosity, guard the door. The walls of the chamber drip with rivulets of water seem to spring directly from the rock. Sometimes the water runs red. The chamber is in no way decorated. On those rare occasions where Tremere recovers his volition and wishes to converse with someone other than Etrius, he uses the Chamber of the Blooded (see p. 56).





Chapter Five: Those Damned and Soon to Be

*...Crimine ab uno
Disce omnis.
(from the one crime recognize them
all as culprits.)
- Virgil, The Aeneid*

Atop Ceoris' ever-bloody pyramid of ambition sits an elite circle of Cainites, most of whom were Embraced during the 11th century. They are the chantry's survivors. Apprentices and guests prove less durable, dying in the place of the masters who manipulate them. Mortal magi either obliviously pursue their own narrow goals, or, with frightened caution, seek to find proof to bolster their suspicions about Etrius and his circle. Beneath the notice of the schemers, ghouls go about their duties and Gargoyles unknowingly construct a society of their own.

A WEB OF AMBITION AND HATE

Although the two factions that drive power struggles within Clan Tremere certainly make their presence known, politics inside Ceoris consists, above all else, of a web of temporary alliances between isolated players pursuing plans driven chiefly by bitterness and spite. Even before the Council of Seven undertook the arrogant and reckless bargain that made them vampires, the leading magi of House Tremere were as noted for pursuing vicious internal rivalries as for scheming for power within the greater Order of Hermes. From its inception, House Tremere always exemplified the worst traits of the scholarly mind, from a lofty disdain for the ordinary man to a green-eyed loathing for colleagues whose achievements outshone their own. For most vampiric magi, the transformation has only intensified those flaws. Some, regretting their irreversible error, fall into the depths of self-hatred and learn to turn their spite outwards. Others take greedily to vampiric existence, finding in the indulgence of cruelty a sense of power purer and more primal than any they'd gained from the working of magic. As if this were not enough to ensure that the high chantry would become a cage full of rats battling one another for dominance, the siege against Ceoris by enemy clans makes each of these ferociously self-willed individuals dependent on one another for survival — and for them there is no condition more hateful than being beholden to another. Their accursed interdependence brings further heat to their festering grudges and jealousies.

VAMPIRIC FACTIONS

The two coherent factions at Ceoris are the conspirators and conservatives. Conspirators argue for the immediate Embrace of all mortal Tremere. Conservatives espouse a slow approach that ensures that no individual is taken into the fold before her acceptance of it is certain. This difference in strategy seems a flimsy peg on which to hang a deadly, centuries-old conflict, and must be understood as a battle of personalities between two men who despise one another with undimmed fervor. They are, of course, Etrius and Goratrix.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

Etrius heads the conservative faction at Ceoris, as he does within the clan as a whole. His most loyal factotum is his castellan, Curaferum, who makes of sycophancy a personal creed.

The conspirators would rather be open and frank about their wish to Embrace, but must use guile to get around Etrius's power and Tremere's interdicts. The leading conspirator is Malgorzata, protégé and thrall of Goratrix. She has sworn to keep his chantry ready for the inevitable day when he will once again rule over it. She can count on the absolute devotion of Jervais, the chantry's master of *vis*. Through his access to that substance, Jervais enjoys leverage over the chantry's mortal magi.

The rest of the Cainites occupying senior posts include Esoara the war master, Paul Cordwood the master of *spies*, Epistatia the huntress, Celestyn the librarian and Mendacamina the torturer. They obey Etrius's orders (which are generally conveyed by Curaferum) without considering themselves members of the conservative faction. They follow Etrius because he is Ceoris's current lord. They would likely obey his successor just as readily. Most safeguard their futures by occasionally siding with Malgorzata, just in case she topples Etrius. Only Celestyn is frankly more interested in his own research (learning Tzimisce secrets) than in contending against fellow Tremere. The rest determinedly encroach on one another's responsibilities, sabotage experiments and attempt to suborn others' apprentices. For most, chantry politics is a question of achieving petty but pointed vengeance against whichever colleague has most recently offended them.

AMONG THE MAGI

Many of the mortal magi, especially visitors from other chantries, join in the internal rivalries without knowing they intrigue with or against vampires. For example, the deceptively clever Bitiurges recently joined with Mendacamina to turn a would-be protégé of Curaferum against him. He was pleased to earn a future favor from the fearsome Mendacamina and acted without knowing that the chantry interrogator went on to Embrace the apprentice, whom Curaferum had earmarked as his own.

A relatively new faction among the mortal magi, unique to Ceoris, is that of the Christian sorcerers. They take their lead from Tosia, a venerable mage who rediscovered her religious faith after a humiliation at the hands of Tremere. At her now-destroyed chantry of Umor Mons, she surrounded herself with like-minded magi. The younger members of her faction increasingly worry about her fitness to lead them, and turn quietly to her former apprentice, the cursed but vigorous Omnifer. The Christian magi know that something is hideously awry at Ceoris, and, in secret conclaves, point to Etrius as its author. However, they think that he leads a cabal of diabolists and do not suspect vampirism.

VISITORS

Despite Ceoris's reputation as an impregnable fortress, Etrius is in fact strongly motivated to open its gates to useful outsiders. He is especially concerned with cultivating possible allies within other clans. Goratrix, he knows, is doing the same, and he does not want to see his faction eclipsed through his rival's superior diplomacy.

EXPENDABLE ENVOYS

High-ranking Cainites from other clans are reluctant to enter Ceoris themselves (the Usurpers' magics are still ill-understood), but send their more expendable inferiors as permanent or temporary envoys. Some send trusted agents, but others select fledglings, too-ambitious rivals and violators of clan discipline. Sometimes a Cainite who wishes to indirectly dispose of an inferior assigns him to Ceoris, knowing that the chances of his meeting his Final Death there are excellent. In extreme cases, the envoy arrives complete with a letter transferring his feudal allegiance to the Tremere, who are only too happy to exploit pledges of unconditional loyalty.

Vulnerable and uneasy envoys can find common interests and may even coalesce into an informal coterie within the chantry. One recent group of envoys included a French knight from the Ventrue clan, an Italian Lasombra exiled by his hostile sire and a Cappadocian researcher seeking to extend her knowledge of death magic. The group disappeared during a trek north to the hold of Tzimisce overlord Ioan. Curaferrum recently sent out a brace of letters casting for a new set of envoys to replace them.

MAGI OF OTHER HOUSES

Although visiting vampires are coveted, Etrius discourages the arrival of magi from other hermetic houses as much as possible, fearful that they might uncover the conspiracy. For their part, most non-Tremere magi prefer to avoid Ceoris. When business must take them to a Tremere chantry, they prefer a less forbidding one, such as sleepy Lion's Gate in England or the sunny villas of Perugia (both described in Chapter Seven).

Still, the occasional mage concludes that research demands that rooting through Ceoris' famous library. Tosia takes care to warmly receive such visitors and to see to their needs as guests. Those she deems trustworthy may be permitted to share in her suspicions of Etrius and his followers.

THE DAMNED TREMERE CAINITES

CELESTYN, MASTER LIBRARIAN

Background: Celestyn began his journey through a world of curiosities in 971. Under the name of Calnor, he was born near London to an eccentric lord's seneschal. The connection permitted him an aristocratic education. His love of learning encompassed all fields of knowledge,



including the occult. Calnor's attentive ears picked up rumors of nearby magi; these led him to a chantry near the boundaries of his lord's holdings. He marched right up to their doorway and asked to be apprenticed. Unable to turn down the silver-tongued lad or deny his thirst for esoteric knowledge, a mage named Persigno took him in and gave him the name Celestyn in recognition of his interest in celestial bodies. Celestyn progressed rapidly and, by 995, was engaged in a peripatetic existence, traveling through Europe in search of ancient relics, lost books, and near-forgotten myths. In 999, Etrius, hearing of Celestyn's skill in managing the London library, summoned him to Ceoris. The magi, about to embark on their quest to find an alternative to hermetic immortality philters, had amassed a vast but completely unorganized trove of texts from the other Tremere libraries. Etrius ordered Celestyn to assemble it into an approachable whole. Celestyn joined in the research and also impressed his masters with his brave (or mad) forays into Tzimisce-held districts in search of information. Etrius Embraced him in 1039.

Unusually open for a Tremere, Celestyn is always looking for allies in his quest for knowledge. He may meet up with clan outsiders during his exploits and then invite them to become guests at Ceoris.

Image: Celestyn presents the same hearty, fit appearance he displayed when Embraced. His hair is dark and blond, his eyes brown. His features are friendly if not devastatingly handsome. In Ceoris, he wears scholarly

THOSE DAMNED AND SOON TO BE

robes; these are well cared for and even a little ostentatious. Outside, he adopts simple, rugged clothing that allows him to clamber through ruins or make hasty escapes.

Roleplaying Hints: You can't decide what excites you more: finding an obscure but illuminating passage buried in a dusty old text or fighting off screaming wolfmen as you flee from an ancient mound you've just excavated. Your Cainite transformation does not particularly burden you; it gave you the chance to explore vampiric lore and will allow you to survive for centuries of exploration and scholarship. Your current inquiries take you into the heart of Tzimisce territory. Learning their secrets has become your chief obsession, one which you hope will lead to the war's end. Perhaps if there are no longer enemies at Ceoris' gate, the slide into madness you see all around you will reverse itself. The only thing that utterly bores you is chantry politics, which you see as an utter waste of time.

Secrets: Celestyn has concealed from the others the extent to which his adventures have brought him into contact with Cainites of other clans. He doesn't want to be thought of as a possible traitor. Nor does he wish to be pressed to squeeze secrets of Cainite wars and politics from his partners in scholarship. The French Gargel Aristotle de Laurent is a particular friend; the Byzantine Tzimisce Myca Vykos (see *Constantinople by Night*), a dire foe.

Influence: Celestyn is valued and liked by both factions within Ceoris. If he tried to mediate between them, or involve himself in their affairs, he'd soon lose this status. His recent inquiries (and battles) against the Tzimisce are winning him a reputation even outside the clan.

Destiny: Celestyn leaves Ceoris for the last time in 1313 and vanishes. His colleagues assume he's been slain by the Tzimisce. In fact, he has chosen to explore the esoteric secrets of other lands in pursuit of lore concerning Gehenna. He resurfaces in the late 20th century, having educated himself in the Chinese art of geomancy, which he hopes to use to influence the events leading up to Gehenna (as detailed in *Transylvania Chronicles IV: The Dragon Ascendant*).

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Etrius

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1039

Apparent Age: late 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4.

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Larceny 3, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Archery 1, Etiquette 3, Herbalism 2, Melee 3, Ride 3, Stealth 2, Survival 4

Knowledges: Academics (Metaphysics) 5, Astrology 1, Cartography 2, Hearth Wisdom 3, History 3, Investiga-

tion 3, Law 1, Linguistics (Arabic, French, Greek, Hungarian) 4, Navigation 2, Occult 3, Science 2

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 2, Dominate 1, Fortitude 1, Thaumaturgy 4

Thaumaturgic Paths: Rego Aquam 2, Rego Motus 3, Rego Vitae 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Influence 2, Resources 2, Retainers 1, Status 3 (among Tremere)

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

Road: Humanity 7

Willpower: 7

PAUL CORDWOOD, MASTER OF SPIES

Background: Paul Cordwood grew up as Harald the Thin, the youngest and scrawniest of five brothers. His father was a notorious thane who fought alongside Eric Bloodaxe, Norse occupier of 10th century Yorkshire. His brothers sharpened their martial valor by abusing Harald with both tongue and fist. Harald learned to make himself small, to avoid the notice of others. He spent much of his time wandering the forests in the company of an uncle thought to be slow. The uncle harbored secrets. He initiated the young man into the secrets of folk magic (which Harald liked) and those of the flesh (which he did not). Used to being put upon by those bigger than himself, he hid his loathing for the man who abused him. The uncle introduced him to other magicians who made his modest scryings pale by comparison. These were the Diedne, a



HOUSE OF TREMERE

house of nature magicians. They recognized talent, and inducted Herald into their ranks. To show his disdain for his kinfolk, he changed his name to Paul Cordwood.

Even among his new associates, he enjoyed lesser status. The women he longed for treated him as a talented pet. The men ordered him about. His power had grown, but he was still surrounded by others greater than himself, who saw him as little more than a lackey.

In 1003, Epistatia, a mage from another tradition, came to live among the Diedne. They didn't like or trust her, but needed her to assist in some great ritual Paul wasn't privy to. The young magus liked Epistatia, who treated him with respect and even asked his opinions about things. Epistatia asked him all about the Diedne: who was cruel, who was just, who was clever, and who was foolish. Paul eagerly shared the secrets he'd learned while making himself an unobtrusive observer. Little did he know that Epistatia would use this information to touch off a witch-war that ultimately destroyed the Diedne.

Epistatia took Cordwood with her, inducting him into House Tremere. Cordwood became a minor figure within the house, more interested in his research than the intrigues that occupied Tremere and the Inner Council. His main interest became the projection of the astral consciousness from the physical form. His fellow magi came to think of him as a harmless, even slightly absurd fellow who could always be relied upon for answers to esoteric questions. Some of them openly mocked him, but compared to what he'd endured in the past, this scarcely registered to him as mistreatment.

He came to Ceoris in 1004. Both Etrius and Goratrix saw him as a neutral non-entity who might aid more influential magi in their research as he puttered away in his own lab. As the magi sought a means of bolstering their failing arts, he fruitlessly investigated soul migration as a means of harvesting a more potent equivalent of *vis* from other celestial spheres.

In 1023, he became one of the first Tremere outside the Inner Council to be Embraced. Again, neither Etrius nor Goratrix could think of sufficient reason to discount him when his name was mooted. When approached by Tremere, Cordwood agreed, with some trepidation, to enter the fold. His inquiries into astral travel had stalled. Perhaps a perpetual existence on the threshold between life and death might bring him new illumination.

The transformation changed him more than he'd anticipated. The physical power of the blood, the raging hungers of the Beast, all these brought him a fire he had never known. He abandoned his habitual slouch, and walked with the deadly grace of a born predator. Colleagues unaware of the Cainite conspiracy could not help but sense the change; he exuded a quality of menace that forced them to pay him heed. He began to speak up at council, swatting down foolish proposals by the mortal magi. He parceled out special contempt for those who wanted to send a peace

delegation to end the war with the night creatures. There was only one thing to do with enemies: Exterminate them.

Over the following decades, his attention increasingly turned to the war against the Tzimisce. He argued that the Tremere had no choice but learn more about the enemy. They would do so by infiltrating their camp. With a quiet confidence that surprised both Goratrix and Etrius, Cordwood took control of the effort and remains Ceoris' master of spies to this day. Although willing to explain his efforts to Tremere or Etrius, he pursues his mission without supervision or second-guessing. As he builds his network of operatives throughout the province, he Embraces non-magi with abandon. If it weren't for the fact that most of his childer are quickly found out and slain by the Tzimisce, he'd have long ago single-handedly exceeded the area's capacity to support Cainites.

Cordwood is always looking for new recruits to join his network of spies. He or his agents might contact other Cainites to this end, drawing them to Ceoris.

Image: Cordwood stands just over six feet tall. The crown of his head is bare; a silvery mane of hair remains. His eyes are a steely blue, his cheekbones high and bony. His shoulders are broad and his arms well-muscled. He dresses in black; when outdoors, he wears a long, inky cloak that seems to move quietly about of its own accord.

Roleplaying Hints: Before you became a vampire, you were weak and stupid. Everyone was right to mistreat you. You enjoy your new sense of personal power. Now it feels good when you use your body. Although you no longer feel the desire to possess women sexually, you like the fact that you can turn their heads. Nothing gives you greater pleasure than knowing that other people fear you. You also enjoy the challenge of infiltrating Tzimisce havens. Your old obsessions seem airy and useless compared to this new, dangerous task upon which your fellows depend. Finally you have become the man you always should have been.

Secrets: Only Cordwood knows the identities of every Tremere spy in Transylvania. He also knows a great deal about the Tzimisce, Gangrel and Nosferatu, much of which he holds back from his fellows. He hides the full extent of his disrespect for the fussy, interfering Curaferrum. One day he may need to eliminate the fool. His agents tell him that one of the Cainites at Ceoris has made a secret arrangement with the Tzimisce. Every few days, he changes his guess as to who this might be.

Influence: His minions include half a dozen Cainites, two dozen ghouls, and about sixty mortal operatives. Perhaps a third of the mortals know the true nature of their master and his enemies.

Destiny: Cordwood extends his influence as the centuries grind on, slowly taking the lead of all House Tremere spying activities. He seemingly disappears from Ceoris in the late 15th century, soon after many of chantry's Gargoyles break with the clan. The general consensus is that he is killed in the fighting or the ongoing Sabbat struggles, but

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rumors persist that he has either joined with Goratrix's rogue Tremere or simply gone underground. Some believe he still leads Tremere spies from a secret chantry.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Epistatia

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1023

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 2, Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1,

Dodge 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Melee 4, Ride 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 5, Linguistics (English, Norse) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 5

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 3, Thaumaturgy 5

Thaumaturgical Paths: Creo Ignem 4, Perdo Magica 2,

Rego Tempestas 2, Rego Vitae 4, Way of Passage 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 5, Retainers 5, Status 3 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 5, Instinct 2, Courage 3

Road: Devil 7

Willpower: 7

CURAFERRUM, CASTELLAN AND PYRAMID CLIMBER

Background: Curaferum is a relative newcomer to the ranks of both magi and Cainites. With sterling political instincts and unwavering energy, he has pursued power within Ceoris.

He was born near Minsk in 1098, as Yan, son of Symon. His father was a farmer, but his much older brother, Frantsyk, had become an itinerant merchant. Yan's brother traveled throughout Eastern Europe selling holy relics (a small fraction of them authentic) to wealthy noblemen. Viewing with horror a future life among pigs and chickens, Yan decided to follow in his brother's apparently glamorous footsteps. As they built their list of patrons, they discovered that a certain number of individuals interested in saint's bones and pieces of the True Cross were also prepared to buy other exotic items: cockatrice eggs, unicorn horns, and certain naturally-occurring crystals. After Frantsyk died in 1125 at the hands of the guardsmen of a client he'd cheated, Yan put aside fakery and exploited his natural talent for locating items imbued with what his clients called *vis*. In 1128, a client traded information for a handful of Yan's *vis*-laden pears. The client told him about a chantry in Transylvania, one ruled by an honest mage-woman named Tosia. That chantry, Umor Mons, would take all of the *vis* Yan could find, and would reward him handsomely for it. Yan went to Tosia's chantry.



By 1130, he'd convinced one of its magi, Iusta, to accept him as an apprentice. He dubbed himself Curaferum.

In 1135, the Tzimisce overran Umor Mons. The survivors trekked to Ceoris. There, the ambitious Curaferum, newly elevated as a full-fledged mage, abandoned Iusta as his patron and began to cultivate the friendship of Etrius. Etrius had only recently been installed as Ceoris' helmsman, and had few allies to rely on. Curaferum presumed to advise the sometimes-inattentive Etrius on the finer points of running a chantry. He found himself answering a series of subtly odd questions posed to him by the chantry lord over the course of many months. Finally Etrius, apparently satisfied by his answers, broached the secret of the Tremere Cainites. Curaferum swallowed hard when he learned the truth, but, seeing that it was the only path to further power within the house, chose immediately to assent to the Embrace. Etrius selected as the fledgling's sire a now-missing thaumaturge named Pervicax. He appointed Curaferum castellan six years later, in 1146. Malgorzata objected strenuously to the appointment, but had no way of blocking it.

In the five decades since, Curaferum has become increasingly insistent on his privileges as castellan and somewhat less savvy in maintaining and expanding his power. The conspirator faction flouts him as much as it can without provoking Etrius to personally intervene. Tosia regards him as a thoughtless climber and regrets having allowed him through the gates of Umor Mons. Other mortal magi see him as an arrogant newcomer elevated beyond his station. Mortal apprentices make him a figure of jest, aping his haughty demeanor and fussy devotion to petty rules. His arrogance and unquenchable self-confidence prevent him

from seeing just how little his fellow residents of Ceoris think of him. He's too cautious to conspire single-handedly against his foes within the house; he'll only move against Malgorzata and Jervais if Etrius or Tremere sanction it.

He wants to establish himself as more than Ceoris's castellan, and hopes to prove his broader political acuity by attracting a prestigious envoy from another clan to Ceoris.

Image: Curaferum wears a humble brown robe like Etrius's, but adorns it with jewels and fur trim. He adds an elaborate fur hat embroidered with mystical symbols. Though still young-looking, he maintains a long, full beard, meant to indicate his wisdom and stature.

Roleplaying Hints: Order is your watchword. You believe in the pyramid of authority Tremere has decreed. Your duty is to impose restraint on the unruly, willful denizens of Ceoris, who would be lost without it. They are fools who would be dead without your enforcement of Etrius' wise policies. Someday they will all see what you have done for them, and will fall all over themselves thanking you. Etrius is a most admirable master. You do not care when you yourself are mocked, but become furious when he isn't shown due respect. Or so you tell yourself. You would never consider betraying Etrius or Tremere; to do so would be gross hypocrisy.

Secrets: A network of ghoul servants report to Curaferum. Through them, he has learned a number of interesting things about the mortal magi. He knows that Tosia and the other Christian magi have been meeting secretly and whispering together with apprehensive looks on their faces. He also knows that Bitiurges keeps a letter of some kind hidden on his person, and is curious to scan its contents.

Influence: Curaferum manages the night-by-night activities of Ceoris. In this capacity, he wields considerable influence. Yet he depends entirely on Etrius for his power, having failed to cultivate inferiors whose loyalty belongs to him alone.

Destiny: Curaferum is removed as castellan in 1250, when Goratrix and Malgorzata frame him and one of his apprentices. Accused of complicity in an incident in which a Gangrel warrior not only penetrates Ceoris but nearly gets into the chamber of Tremere himself, Curaferum spends half a decade in the dungeons, undergoing periodic torture. However, Ceoris falls into malaise and confusion without him, and Tremere officially forgives his non-existent betrayal in 1255. Curaferum remains castellan until 1476, when Virstania leads her beloved Gargoyles into his chamber. They pin him down and she drinks his heart-blood as a final statement of her disdain for the clan hierarchy. Ardan of the Golden Lane, former master of the small Prague chantry, takes Curaferum's place in aftermath of the Gargoyle revolt.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Pervicax

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 8th

Embrace: 1140

Apparent Age: late 50s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Talents: Dodge 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Herbalism 4, Melee 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Linguistics (Greek, Romanian)

2, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Politics 2, Science 2, Seneschal 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 2, Thaumaturgy 4

Thaumaturgical Paths: Path of Warding 4, Rego Magica

3, Rego Motus 2, Rego Tempestas 2

Backgrounds: Mentor 4, Retainers 5, Status 4 (among Tremere)

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

Road: Chivalry 6

Willpower: 7

ESOARA, WAR LEADER OF CEORIS

Background: Esoara was born in a village outside Bistritz in 1116. His mother was a fourteen-year-old rape victim, the daughter of a miller. She died in childbirth and Esoara's grandparents treated him as if he were somehow responsible for their daughter's rape and death. They never tired of cursing the grim-visaged, ax-wielding mercenary who one night burst into the mill and took their daughter from them. This mysterious figure, his hair wild and his armor blackened by fire, grew in young Esoara's imagination. He decided that he would become a mercenary warrior, in order to one day find and fight alongside his fierce father. As soon as he was old enough to lift a battle-axe he left home in search of wars to wage. He asked fellow soldiers if they'd seen his father. Each shrugged and gave him vague clues that led him to wars even further afield. By 1137, he was far from home and had become an experienced mercenary. He fought with the Pisans at the sack of Amalfi in that year. In 1144, he fought for Alfonso of Portugal, who took Lisbon from the Muslims. In 1160, he swung his ax for Frederick Barbarossa, and helped to raze Milan.

A few months later, in a Spanish tavern, he overheard a group of palsied and toothless men boasting of their past evils. One man, the feeblest of the lot, listed each of his rapes. Among them, described in unquestionable detail, was the attack on Esoara's mother. The young man was shocked. This was no mighty horseman on an infernal, black steed. Even in his prime, he would not have been such. By the man's accounts, he'd been a cowardly and opportunistic looter, bandit, and scavenger. Esoara thought about killing the man for disappointing him, but couldn't bring himself to do even that. He resolved to return home.

His route back to Transylvania took him into the thick of a midnight battle between strange, bloody-faced

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warriors. Some of them attacked him, assuming him an enemy. He defended himself, and, without realizing he was doing so, rallied the beleaguered forces of the other side. As Esoara reared back on his horse, about to decapitate a mounted foe, lightning flashed. He caught a momentary glimpse of himself reflected in a muddy pool. He had become the terrible figure he had always pictured when he thought of his father. He struck off the foe's head and held his ax high, bellowing in a mixture of despair and exultation.

The Cainite leading the Tremere forces, for whom Esoara had unknowingly battled, had been slain before his arrival. The now-ranking leader of the Tremere party, one of Curaferum's ghouls, thanked Esoara and told him that his masters would surely reward him with a position. Reckoning that fate had brought him to this pass, Esoara agreed. He followed the troops back to Ceoris, where he met with the castellan and was made a sergeant. He quickly proved his initiative and skill. Curaferum made him a ghoul half a year later, and gifted him with the Embrace in 1167.

As captain of the guards, Esoara has made himself an indispensable element of Ceoris' defense. He brings firsthand experience of war-making to a group dominated by mystics and academics. Although loyal to Curaferum and Etrius, he has begun to chafe at the limited role he enjoys at Ceoris. He wants to personally Embrace more warriors, and wage an all-out assault against Tzimisce strongholds.

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To Esoara's mind, his masters see the war as an intermittent nuisance worth bothering about only when it reaches their gates. He knows that the way to deal with an enemy is to destroy him utterly, and to take the initiative against him. Jervais has taken to spending time in Esoara's presence, listening to these complaints. Esoara is suspicious of the man, but hopes to use the threat of his conspiracy to prod his masters into more decisive action.

Image: Esoara is a gigantic man with bear-like shoulders and a massive, curled mop of greasy black hair. A weedy, gnarled beard spider-webs its way across his jaw and covers his neck. A great throbbing vein coils down his forehead, pointing to his beak-like nose. His dark eyes sit in his skull like coals. He wears heavy armor, his breastplate embossed with an elaborate design of a snake weaving its way through a human skull and ribcage. He carries his massive ax with him everywhere he goes, often seeming to forget that he even holds it.

Roleplaying Hints: Brooding on the past impairs a man's confidence. You are not one to lament the path you have taken or consider the ironies of your life. Fate brought you to Ceoris and made you a vampire. Fate is not a thing to be trifled with. It made you into a mighty warrior. You were made to fight and to lead men. This is what you do; in battle you fulfill your destiny. Your only problem is your masters' inability to see what must be done to defeat their enemies. You will do what you must to convince them. Then you will show them what a true warrior can do.

Secrets: Esoara was quite taken with Meerlinda, Inner Council member and head of the London chantry, when he first met her. She flattered him by seeking his counsel on military matters. Soon he found himself agreeing to keep an eye on Etrius for her and to report any signs that he might be moving against Goratrix without Tremere's approval. She presented the proposition to him so that it didn't seem that it would be the least bit disloyal of him to cooperate. After all, she has Etrius' best interests at heart and seeks only to protect him from himself. Meerlinda gave Esoara a silver sea-shell into which he can whisper any revelations he might care to share with her.

Influence: Esoara runs Ceoris' military operation but takes little interest in its politics. He answers to Curaferum now, but would switch loyalties to another duly appointed castellan without so much as a grunt of disapproval. The castellan has not renewed the blood oath between them and it has faded to a respect of the position rather than the man.

Destiny: Esoara becomes overall military adviser for the Tremere during their battle against the hermetic magi, which commences in a few years. Although he often leaves Ceoris to oversee sieges against rival chantries, it remains his primary haunt. He fights valiantly when the Gargoyles rebel and the Anarch Revolt sweeps the Cainite world. He never becomes a thaumaturge, however, and

finds his status slowly eroding. In 1720, he leaves the Vienna chantry and joins Goratrix's Tremere *antitribu*.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Curaferrum

Nature: Barbarian

Demeanor: Defender

Generation: 9th

Embrace: 1167

Apparent Age: mid 40s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2,

Intimidation 3, Leadership 2

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Archery 2, Melee 3, Ride 3,

Stealth 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Investigation 1, Linguistics (Spanish, French, Italian) 3, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Dominate 2, Fortitude 2, Potence 2

Backgrounds: Mentor 3, Retainers 3, Status 2 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Road: Humanity 4

Willpower: 10

EPISTATIA, USURPER HUNTRESS

Background: Epistatia's magical researches have left her with only shadowy memories of her early life, a fact that scarcely troubles her. Sometimes peculiar images come to her in dreams, which might be drawn from her vanished memories. Perhaps she was a senator's daughter during the late days of the Roman Empire. Or perhaps an oracle tending an ancient temple. No matter. She knows she has been a Tremere magician for a very long time, which is all that matters to her.

For as long as she can remember, she has been obsessed by the idea that weak souls can be temporarily displaced from their bodies, which might then be operated from a distance by a magician's superior mind. She thinks perhaps she used to choose only criminals as subjects for her experiments. Unfortunately, rebels and outlaws tended to manifest strong, independent wills, which made their souls difficult to dislodge. About two hundred years ago, she decided that the interests of knowledge demanded her use of weaker-willed peasants and other supposed innocents of little value to God or man. Concealing her machinations from the master of her chantry, she paid ruffians to capture victims for her experimental use. She continued this habit after moving to Etrius' Vienna chantry in the mid-10th century. Her notes tell her that Etrius discovered her activities in 990. He banished her from his chantry; she went to Ceoris to seek Goratrix's protection. Goratrix involved her in the war against the magi of House Diedne, rewarding her successes with peasants on



which to experiment. She bent her soul migration research towards the effort to counter the decline in effective Tremere magics. In 1011, she accused Paul Cordwood's apprentice, Vincius, of putting the evil eye on her, ruining a demonstration she'd staged before Ceoris' assembled magi. He was soon found strangled in his bed. Though suspected of the murder, no proof was ever brought against her. Goratrix thwarted attempts to investigate further, demanding that she abandon her researches to assist him in his. He made her assist him in casting his consciousness out into astral space. It was during these experiments that she contacted the two entities who taught Goratrix key parts of the ritual of transformation—or so she maintains.

Epistatia did not enjoy sufficient rank in the house to warrant her participation in the ceremony of becoming. But, immediately afterwards, she became the first outside the Inner Council to be Embraced when Goratrix blooded her without Tremere's permission. Since she knew about the ritual, his only other choice would have been to murder her, and she'd proven herself too useful for that. Epistatia does not remember objecting to her new condition.

For several years, the Cainites of Ceoris feasted indiscriminately. But soon they realized why there were so few vampires in the world; victims became scarce when hunted openly. Then the Tzimisce came hammering on Ceoris' doors. Epistatia volunteered to become mistress of the hunt, organizing raiding parties to capture large numbers of victims in single hunts. They would then be borne back to Ceoris and kept in chains, providing blood for the rest of their lives.

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Since becoming mistress of the hunt, Epistatia has continued her inquiries into soul migration. If, in the course of her hunts, she encounters vampires she thinks might be useful to Ceoris—or provide insights into the mechanics of the soul—she might bring them to the chantry, willingly or otherwise.

Image: Epistatia is a short, ungainly woman with a doughy, almost featureless face. Her nose is thin and straight, her eyes slightly too far apart, and her mouth soft and undefined. Long yellow-white hair dribbles from her head in long, uncombed skeins. She wears loose, formless dresses of light brown fabric. Her features remain placid and unperturbed even as she commits terrible cruelties.

Roleplaying Hints: The only important thing is your research. Anything done to further it is justified. Becoming a vampire kept you alive in order to continue it, and may yield important insights into the physical nature of the soul. You take on the huntress's duties because they are necessary. They keep you fed, and stop the other magi, who are as a type jealous and interfering, from disrupting your work. The lives of the people you capture are scarcely worth thinking about. You must not form attachments to your colleagues; loyalty leads to entanglements. Keep them at a distance, and always look to the strength of your position.

Secrets: Although Epistatia admits to a faulty memory, she conceals the full extent of her amnesia from her fellows. Another fact she conceals is that she was first contacted by the entity Stars Beyond in 1007, five years before the experiments that led to the becoming. It came to her while she was attempting to remove and contain a captured subject's soul, and offered her knowledge in exchange for her silence. It provided some new avenues of research, some of which were linked to the ancient vampires Tremere and Etrius hunted at the time.

Influence: Even with the departure of her patron, Goratrix, Epistatia retains an unassailable position within the chantry. The Cainites of Ceoris might enjoy the benefits of their new existence, but do not like to dwell upon its costs. They are grateful that Epistatia relieves them of the vexation, danger, and distress that human-hunting entails. She claims disinterest in the house's wider affairs, professing neutrality in the struggle between conservatives and conspirators. In fact, she often does covert favors for both sides in order to protect her position. In this, she emulates Tremere's way of playing both factions against one another.

Destiny: Epistatia disappears in 1282, and is presumed to have been taken by the mortal magi, who are by that time waging war against the Tremere. In fact, Epistatia has fully succumbed to the effects of her amnesia, and has forgotten her entire existence as a member of the house. She wanders from town to town, periodically settling down, adopting various roles allowing her to maintain a night-time existence and feed without being noticed. In 1932, she becomes the proprietor of a dusty five and dime store in Baltimore, Maryland. She runs her convenience store to this day, capturing the occasional homeless person or shoplifter to

feed upon. Occasionally, curious images of a terrible mountainside castle appear in her dreams.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Goratrix

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Innovator

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1022

Apparent Age: early 60s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3,

Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Archery 2, Herbalism 1, Melee 4, Ride 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Linguistics (Greek, Aramaic) 2, Medicine 2, Occult 5, Politics 2, Science 2, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Dominate 4, Thaumaturgy 6

Thaumaturgical Paths: Creo Ignem 3, Perdo Magica 2, Prey on the Soul's Fear 2, Rego Elementum 2, Rego Motus 2, Rego Tempestas 3, Rego Vitae 5, Way of Passage 4

Backgrounds: Status 3 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 2, Courage 3

Road: Devil 6

Willpower: 7

ETRIUS, LORD OF CEORIS

4th generation, nominal child of Tremere

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Conformist

Embrace: 1022

Apparent Age: early 30s

Born outside Gothenborg, Sweden in 850, Etrius was the studious, withdrawn child of a roughhewn Viking who became one of the first Christian converts in that land. Etrius' father served as protector and patron to Ansgar, the German bishop who made the first official mission to Sweden in 869. Ansgar made a great impression on the malleable young Etrius, who found himself strongly drawn to Christian doctrine. Even from the beginning, his faith was idiosyncratic: His foremost belief was in his own essential holiness. As a saint in the making, he often forgave himself transgressions he would condemn in others. Reasoning that the first step to canonization was to don the robes of the cleric, he resolved to become a priest. This would be a difficult task in the still-pagan Sweden. His father sent him on a pilgrimage to Rome. Mere days into their journey, the pilgrims were attacked by enemies of Etrius' father. Etrius was taken as a slave, and eventually sold in far-off Constantinople. Etrius knew that it was all part of God's great plan for him. His purchaser was Tremere, who immediately saw in him both a raw talent for magic and an aptitude for following orders. Tremere

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made Etrius his apprentice, the first since the stinging failure of his attempt to take over the Order of Hermes.

Etrius remained at Tremere's side long after he'd proven himself as a mighty magus. Tremere tolerated his Christian rhetoric, occasionally needling him by reminding him of the Church's antagonism towards wizards. Etrius did not see fit to explain that the Lord had surely wanted him to become a magus. Why else would He have arranged Etrius' destiny as He had?

Etrius' arrogance grew as he magically halted his own aging and outlived his contemporaries. He put the idea of imminent beatification out of his mind, having concluded God had a purpose for him greater than that of a mere saint. By the mid-900s, he'd begun to act as if any action he undertook by definition enjoyed God's sanction. In 962, he reduced to dust an informer who sought to reveal a minor Tremere plot to rival magi. He justified it by saying that if the disciples had been willing to kill for him, Christ need never have been crucified. Tremere smiled when he heard this.

When Etrius first met Goratrix, while still an apprentice, the two loathed one another on sight. Tremere had prepared him to dislike his predecessor. Etrius saw in Goratrix all of the evil he believed himself immune from. Goratrix considered him a hypocrite of Biblical proportions. The more skillfully Goratrix pointed out the flaws in Etrius' self-serving theology, the more stubbornly Etrius clung to them. Etrius, seeing that Goratrix wished to eclipse Tremere, began to conceive of loyalty to his master as the greatest virtue of all.

Etrius built the small Vienna chantry in 920, and was its oft-absent but nominal master until 1022. During his

tenure he quietly broke the tacit hermetic ban against involvement in mortal political affairs by helping German king (and later Holy Roman Emperor) Otto the Great against the Magyar hordes at the Battle of Lechfeld in 955. He did so as part of his program of cultivating contacts within Austria's church and ruling classes. Although the Magyars were even in 955 open to Christian conversion, Etrius saw them as damnable pagans much like his own countrymen. Also during his Vienna years, Etrius met Mendacamina, becoming entwined with her in a doomed and unrealized mutual passion.

In 980, he took second lead in Goratrix's ritual to consecrate Ceoris. He chose to place Goratrix's severed member, humiliatingly, inside the mouth of the mage Ponticulus, who had to be beheaded after making a ritual error. Later, he questioned Goratrix's building methods, and created the chasm that separates chantry from mountain. He spent much time at Ceoris during its early days, to the consternation of his rival, Goratrix. In 996, he upstaged Goratrix by definitively proving that magic was diminishing. The two then competed furiously to find a way to counter the phenomenon. His zeal to win drove Etrius to abandon his master's proscriptions against diabolism. He attempted to duplicate the forms of devil-conjuring magic without actually contacting demons. His experiments went disastrously awry in 1014, when he attracted a veritable horde of devils (and may even have opened a doorway to the infernal spheres), forcing the abandonment of an entire suite of laboratories to a demonic host. Goratrix overleapt him in 1022, working the magic that turned Tremere and seven of his house, including both Etrius and Goratrix, into vampires. Etrius was appalled, and dared voice concern for his immortal soul. His fellows exchanged knowing glances and Etrius fell silent. (His moral objections had no longevity. In later nights, with Goratrix gone and vampirism the center of Tremere existence, Etrius would go so far as to claim it was he who formulated the great ritual.)

In 1024, the ghost of Ponticulus appeared before Etrius, warning him that Goratrix had conspired with otherworldly entities to bring about the ceremony of transformation. Ponticulus urged Etrius to lead the other ritual participants to suicide, lest magic be destroyed throughout the world. Etrius had long expected Ponticulus' appearance and acted to enslave the ghost, but failed. Ponticulus escaped and went on to reveal the Tremere secret to the Tzimisce.

Etrius returned to his struggle against Goratrix, urging caution as they moved to Embrace new members. Those taken without consent could not be trusted, Etrius argued. He obscured the strategic wisdom of this plan by couching his objections in religious terms. As Tremere stood back, the two waged internecine war against one another. In 1036, when the struggle threatened to expose them all, Tremere stepped in and used it as the pretence to submit all seven of his Inner Council to the blood oath. Etrius saw this as a good result.

Tremere took Etrius with him on his epic trek to learn more about vampires and their ways. By 1126, the

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two were actively tracking down and capturing Methuselahs, so that the Council of Seven could then join in diablerizing them. Etrius' pleas to exclude Goratrix from the benefits of their quest fell on deaf ears.

In 1133, Etrius assisted Tremere in finding and slaying Saulot. Some long buried conscience told him this was the gravest crime yet, that he should stop. Yet, Tremere was anxious to move forward and surely Goratrix would help him if Etrius did not. He held down the dormant ancient while Tremere drank its blood. Any lingering doubts vanished when Tremere awarded him Ceoris and sent Goratrix off to Paris.

Yet as he took the chantry's reins, he saw that Goratrix's forces were still in place. Especially vexing was Malgorzata, a scheming child of the exiled master who was insatiably hungry for rank. The conspirator faction continued to ignore his orders to go slow and Embrace only willing magi. The struggle continues to this night.

JERVAIS, HARVESTER OF *Vis*

Background: Jervais' father served as a scribe in the household of a minor French noble. Jervais was born in 1070 and educated to follow his father's career. His father's master enjoyed some exotic connections and in 1085, arranged for Jervais to be placed as a scrivener in the Paris Tremere chantry. The librarian there assigned him to copy various texts. Jervais found the occult manuscripts he copied difficult but interesting. The magi there saw a spark of magical talent in Jervais, though not enough to bother cultivating. Some liked him and showed him some kindness; most looked down on him in the haughty way of lofty magicians.

In 1088, Malgorzata visited the Paris chantry with Goratrix. Jervais swooned when he saw her, his knees buckling as he drank in her beauty and terrible authority. He approached her and told her he would like nothing more than to put himself fully at her disposal. Malgorzata, enjoying his servility, saw in him what the others had not. Jervais did have talent, but it could only blossom under the hand of a firm and unyielding master. Malgorzata knew all about this; at the time she was a ghoul of Goratrix. She took Jervais back to Ceoris to become her apprentice. Jervais' captivation with his new mistress gave him the necessary motivation to advanced in the hermetic arts. Soon he proved his Parisian employers wrong to have passed him over. He showed a special talent for esoteric calculations and made important strides in techniques to uncover the magical substance known as *vis*. At the very time when this precious "fuel" was become rarer, he found new stores. He also studied ways to collect these delicate fruits, pearls and other forms of *vis*. His ready access to supplies of the rapidly-disappearing material made the other magi beholden to him — and, through him, to Malgorzata and Goratrix. In 1102, five years after her own Embrace, Malgorzata blooded him, with Goratrix's approval. A visiting Etrius gave Jervais personal reason to dislike him. Etrius questioned Goratrix's decision to Embrace Jervais because it hadn't been approved by Tremere. Although



Jervais was present, Etrius wouldn't acknowledge him or address him directly. Jervais still nurses this slight.

Since his Embrace, Jervais has continued to nose out *vis*. As he doles it out to the mortal magi, he works to win their confidence. His mistress allows her pleasure in terrifying mortals to take free reign over her need to win them to her side. Jervais presents the faction's friendlier face. He hints to the unturned magi that there are secrets which, when revealed, will show her to be a benevolent authority with their true interests always uppermost in mind. It is Etrius, he explains, they should truly fear. His inaction will doom them as magic slips out of the world. Jervais carefully gauges his listeners' reactions to his suggestions. Magi who seem especially contemptuous of Etrius become candidates for the conspirators' Embrace.

Image: Jervais, of medium height and build, squints out at the world with short-sighted eyes. His squarish head and jaw are framed by a fringe of brown hair and a closely-trimmed beard. Although he will acquire an aura of menace as the centuries wear on, he at present projects the slightly inept air of a kindly but put-upon man. This completely belies his true nature as an accomplished political seducer.

Roleplaying Hints: Although Malgorzata remains your goddess (you are still her thrall), your years as a Cainite have given you increased confidence. You now know that there are certain things, like persuading mortal magi, that you do better than she. This pleases you, and gives you hope for the future. The biggest threat to that future is Etrius, who opposed your Embrace after the fact. It gives you great satisfaction to undermine him.

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Your most fervent hope is that one day Malgorzata and Goratrix will give you the chance to destroy him.

Secrets: Jervais keeps some information in reserve, even from Malgorzata. He knows of at least four caches of vis within a day's travel of Ceoris, which he can mine should some emergency require him to quickly bribe a mortal magus. He also understands the ambitions and fears of the mortal magi better than any other Cainite at Ceoris. He even knows that Tosia and Omnifer suspect Etrius of diabolism, but has yet to share this fact with Malgorzata. He fears that his beloved mistress might act rashly in encouraging Tosia; after all, if the Hermetic Order discovers them, their inquisitorial wrath will spare neither faction.

Influence: Jervais is well-liked by the mortal magi and has significant power over them because of his access to vis. (He has ready access to the equivalent of about 40 stored points and can harvest more.) Ceoris' Cainites regard him as merely the dogbody of his mistress, but Malgorzata confides him with important tasks beyond the harvesting of vis. Several times he has traveled as her messenger to the various towns of Hungary and Transylvania.

Destiny: Jervais is severely injured during the 1476 Gargoyle revolt and goes into torpor for many years thereafter. In 1653, he resurfaces, apparently having made his peace with Etrius with the disappearance of his regnant Malgorzata. He advances Tremere interests by shadowing France's first minister, Cardinal Mazarin. He meets his Final Death in 1931, set ablaze by Spanish Republicans apparently acting at Goratrix's behest.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Malgorzata

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Tyrant

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1102

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Archery 1, Etiquette 2, Herbalism 1, Melee 2, Ride 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Occult (vis) 4, Politics 2, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Thaumaturgy 5

Thaumaturgical Paths: Perdo Magica 4, Rego Aquam 3, Rego Vitae 3, Way of the Levinbolt 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Mentor 2, Status 2 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 3, Instinct 3, Courage 3

Road: Devil 6

Willpower: 5

MALGORZATA, THE CONSPIRATOR

Background: Malgorzata, under her given name of Malana, spent her early life toiling as a serf for the Magyar occupiers who invaded Romania and stripped her family of its noble rank. Her parents might have retained their status had they been willing to convert from Orthodox worship to the Western faith of the Magyars. Even though she, as their sixth child, would have enjoyed only marginal status had the Magyars not invaded, Malgorzata's parents fostered in her a deep sense of grievance. They taught her that her true destiny had been stolen from her, and that the priests of the Catholic Church were part and parcel in the theft.

However, when her parents sold her to a cloaked foreigner who carried himself with a sense of innate power, Malgorzata felt not betrayal but vindication. She knew that this man, Goratrix, held the keys for her to reclaim the status and authority her hapless parents had lost. For his part, Goratrix saw power in the girl; her magical potential was so great he could smell it scorch the air around her. She learned quickly, surprising Goratrix with her hungry demands for his attention. By the age of thirteen, she was a full mage. She combined her own name, her masters', and that of a local goddess of evil magic to give herself the mage name of Malgorzata.

When he became a Cainite in 1022, Goratrix could not conceal his transformation from her. She begged for his gift of immortality. Though Goratrix did not immediately give in to her fervent entreaties, he did risk Tremere's wrath by making her his ghou, violating an edict laid down by the elder sorcerer. For decades she



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begged him to win Tremere over to her cause, finally gaining the Embrace a tortuous seventy-five years later. Although the blood oath made her unfailingly loyal to Goratrix, waiting stoked her bitterness towards Tremere. She also learned to hate the founder's lickspittle, Etrius, on whom Goratrix blamed his master's cautiousness in Embracing magi outside the Council of Seven.

Three years later, Goratrix sought her help in creating the Gargoyles. She worked alongside Vinstania and Epistatia, but found them too willing to pursue scholarly tangents and insufficiently aware of the immediate need for the weapons they worked to create. Malgorzata hectored them, at times even gently chiding Goratrix himself, so that they kept their eyes on the true goal. She also supervised efforts to trap Ceoris' false towers, using her fire magic to create an explosive surprise for any foe foolish enough to land there.

Her master's 1133 exile to Paris enraged Malgorzata, reminding her of the way her parents were stripped of their birthright. She wanted to go with him, but he insisted she stay in Ceoris as his emissary. Reluctantly agreeing, she swore an oath to hasten the Embrace of the house's magi. Goratrix has assured her that this is what Tremere really wants, and that for her efforts she'll win Etrius' position as chantry master. Her loyalty to Goratrix prevents her from questioning the accuracy of this statement.

Etrius's distance from the night-to-night affairs of Ceoris provide Malgorzata much space in which to work. She treats his castellan, Curaferum, with open contempt, obeying his edicts only when they suit her. Unfortunately, her plan suffers from a major drawback: The magi she Embraces without prior warning often scorn her and threaten to reveal the Cainite conspiracy to other mortals. Therimna must then capture them for conversion into Gargoyles. The huntress makes her pleasure in this too obvious for Malgorzata's tastes.

Malgorzata takes a special interest in any wayward envoys who might come to Ceoris from other clans. She attempts to draw them into her circle, hoping to thwart Etrius' attempts to outshine her master's diplomatic efforts.

Image: Malgorzata presents an image of cold and commanding beauty. Her eyes are the color of a clear and wintry sky. Her deep brown hair is often decorated with glittering gold jewelry set with gemstones. Within Ceoris, she wears sumptuous magician's robes. On journeys, she dresses as a Hungarian noblewoman.

Roleplaying Hints: Goratrix is your only equal. Tremere is a distant, capricious figure to be feared. Everyone else you've ever met, from your wretched parents to the weak-livered Etrius, is a fool to be crushed beneath your feet. Power is the only goal worth pursuing, and others' fear of you is more intoxicating than any wine. Show your love for Goratrix by Embracing as many magi as you can. When they are Cainites, they will love you for the way you rule them.

Secrets: Malgorzata is fully privy to Ceoris' secrets, including those of Vinstania's Gargoyle pens. She also keeps a secret for Goratrix: He says he's found a way to

greater power, which he will naturally share with her when the time is right. She has taken to organizing her own secret food raids, so that Etrius can't use Curaferum's control of the chantry herd to starve her faction into submission. She keeps them imprisoned in a mountain cave half a day's journey from Ceoris' gates.

Influence: Malgorzata evokes fear in mortal magi and Cainite colleagues alike. Although other ambitious vampires, like Therimna, Epistatia and Paul Cordwood, sometimes subject her to verbal jabs or intrigue to embarrass her, none dare attack her outright. She has a staunch ally in Jervais, and enjoys the support of Goratrix who, while distant, can never be underestimated.

Destiny: After his departure from the clan's good graces in 1314, Goratrix remains in occasional contact with Malgorzata. She remains his eyes and ears in Ceoris until the 1570s, when Tzimisce anarchs capture her during a raid on the now fading chantry. Taken prisoner and tortured, she reveals all she knows about Ceoris defenses and Tremere plans. Goratrix himself, now leader of the Sabbat's Tremere *antitribu* finds her several torturous decades later. She looks to him for rescue, but he turns his back on her and leaves her to linger. Quite possibly, she lingers still, deformed and forgotten.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Goratrix

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1097

Apparent Age: early 20s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 2, Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3,

Dodge 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Etiquette 2, Gargoyle Ken 3, Herbalism 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Greek) 1, Occult 4, Politics 3, Science 1, Seneschal 1

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Dominate 4, Fortitude 1, Potence 2, Thaumaturgy 6

Thaumaturgical Paths: Creo Ignem 5, Perdo Magica 3, Rego Vitae 4

Backgrounds: Mentor 4, Resources 1, Retainers 2, Status 3 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 4, Instinct 3, Courage 3

Road: Devil 6

Willpower: 7

MENDACAMINA, THE IRON MAIDEN

Background: Mendacamina was known as Sister Agnes when, as a young resident of a convent outside Vienna, she first discovered her interest in plant life. She built a large garden and began to collect varieties of healing herbs.

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Although some in the convent saw her interest as directing her eyes away from God, the Mother Superior encouraged Sister Agnes' interests. Sister Agnes thought that this was because the potions and poultices she made from her herbs eased a number of ailments suffered by various sisters. In fact, the Mother Superior, once a worldly woman, was a confidant of the magus Etrius, whom she considered a holy man despite his occult knowledge. In 945, Etrius heard her descriptions of Sister Agnes and thought that the young woman might possess magical talent. He arranged to send her copies of ancient books about plants and gardening. In the margins he inscribed notes explaining their mystical significance. Intrigued, Sister Agnes asked after her mysterious benefactor. The Abbess reluctantly allowed her to exchange letters with Etrius.

This correspondence between two lonely believers and scholars led to a burgeoning love, expressed in exclamations of religious fervor and excited botanical descriptions. A disapproving senior sister found Agnes' cache of letters, saw in them the emotions both writers refused to recognize, and took them to the Mother Superior, who read the letters and expelled Agnes from the convent. She thought she would go to Etrius, which she did. She also thought the two would admit their love for one another and marry. They did not. Etrius, torn by shame for separating Agnes from God, suppressed his longing for her. Agnes, certain that Etrius disapproved of her base and carnal impulses, dared not declare herself.

With no living kinfolk, Agnes had no way of supporting herself. Etrius found a motherly fellow magician at the

Vienna chantry to make Agnes her apprentice. Agnes took the name Mendacamina, and pursued her fascination with herbal magic. She and Etrius circled one another from a distance, each afraid of being overcome by passion. Over the decades, their ardor seemed to cool.

However, as the century turned, Etrius found himself spending much of his time at Ceoris, despite his nominal leadership of the Vienna chantry. Emboldened by distance, Mendacamina once more began to correspond with him. The passion between them blossomed again. In 1022, they met in Vienna and nearly consummated their love, drawing back at the last moment. Etrius promised her that they would marry first. Then he went to Ceoris, to participate in a certain ritual.

Mendacamina received a letter from Etrius, saying that he could not marry her. He would not explain why. She went to Ceoris to confront him. She wept as he turned away from her. She sensed that something had gone hideously awry during the ritual. She continued to seek his company. Finally, a year later, he relented. He took her into his arms and embraced her. When she rose from death, her feelings for Etrius had been destroyed. Hate consumed her as she realized that he had slain her capacity for true love. She became the bitterest and most vicious of Ceoris' Cainites. She spurned Etrius. She joined with Goratrix, helping him in his efforts to kill the man she'd once loved. When Tremere forced Goratrix and the other councilors into blood oath, Goratrix found it difficult to convince her to give up her quest for vengeance. Seeing that the time to strike had passed, but reckoning that it would one day come again, Mendacamina promised to stay her hand. She made Goratrix suffer first, though, rubbing in the full irony of his having to plead for Etrius's life.

Goratrix soured on her as an ally but could not deny the power of her inexhaustible wrath. In 1042, he made her the mistress of Ceoris' dungeons, and chief interrogator of its prisoners. When Goratrix was sent to France in 1133, she retained her post. To this day, Etrius is afraid to speak with her alone. Although troubled by the capricious violence she occasionally wreaks against servants who displease her, he joins with the other Cainites in concealing her crimes from mortal magi.

Mendacamina wants allies to aid her in her pursuit of vengeance against Etrius but has yet to find any she can completely trust. She might befriend junior visitors to Ceoris and use them to further her ends without apprising them of her true motives.

Image: Mendacamina's skin glows with a radiance that belies the dark fury at play behind her olive eyes. Her face is shaped like a perfect teardrop. She dresses all in white, in a gown cut to remind the viewer of a nun's habit.

Roleplaying Hints: The person you once loved betrayed and damned you. Now you see Etrius in all of his hypocrisy. He loved neither you nor God, only himself. You will have your vengeance against him. But that means waiting, biding your time, pretending that you have some



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other reason for living. You pose as just another lore-obsessed, scheming magus. You pretend that you care about the fate of the house, your research, and the tide of the war. All of this you do simply to keep the object of your hatred within reach. Every time you kill an annoying servant or drive a red-hot poker into a prisoner's yielding flesh, you see Etrius' agonized features in place of your victim's.

Secrets: Only Goratrix knows how hard she tried to kill Etrius. No one knows that she merely bides her time before trying it again.

Influence: Through her skilled interrogations, Mendacamina has proven her usefulness to the other Cainites. Even though she has no true allies in the chantry, she's so patently vengeful and fuelled by hatred that they're all afraid to cross her. She has developed a distant fascination for the former Setite, Daoud the Copt. It is not love, she tells herself, for her capacity for that emotion has forever been eradicated. Still, perhaps after many years of careful observation, he might prove himself trustworthy enough to become a friend.

Destiny: Tremere makes her head of the Vienna chantry in 1232, when her predecessor is slain by the Order of Hermes. Mendacamina accepts the mortal magi as substitute enemies and becomes their most terrible pursuer. In 1240, she resigns her post to pursue magi as a solitary huntress. She takes special pleasure in destroying those who cloak themselves in a mantle of purity. In 1284, she unexpectedly encounters Etrius in the Beauvais Cathedral. She tries to kill him, and their battle brings the structure crashing down around them. Etrius escapes, but she is destroyed.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Etrius

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Monster

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1023

Apparent Age: late teens

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 5, Dodge 5, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Herbalism 5, Melee 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Occult 3

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Dominate 3, Thaumaturgy 6

Thaumaturgical Paths: Creo Ignem 3, Path of Warding 2,

Prey on the Soul's Fear 5, Rego Motus 3, Rego Tempestas 2,

Rego Vitae 5

Backgrounds: Status 2 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 5, Instinct 3, Courage 3

Road: Devil 7

Willpower: 10

THERIMNA, THE EXECUTIONER

Background: Therimna, born in Flanders in 882, never expected to become a sorceress, let alone a vampire. She did what was necessary to survive, and those actions together brought her to her present state. She does not know what the next centuries will bring, but she is certain that she will survive them.

Her name was Irene, and she started life as the daughter of a prostitute. Although she did not wish to be groped and pawed as her mother had been, she was given little choice in the matter. A retainer at the court of Flanders' ruler, Baldwin II, purchased her virginity when she was 12. Though young, Irene saw an opportunity and inveigled her way into his heart. She induced him to establish her as a courtesan, in a luxurious manor, attended by servants. By her twentieth birthday, she had bedded many of Flanders' elite, and was well on the way to becoming a secret power behind its affairs. Then she happened to meet and bed Goratrix, who was hunting *vis* in the French province. Irene correctly guessed that Goratrix was an ancient magus, and he correctly guessed that she would be an eager and talented apprentice. He took her with him when he left Flanders, giving her the name Therimna.

By the time she'd become a full-fledged mage, Therimna had also bedded Tremere to show Goratrix she could easily switch patrons. Once she'd gained effective immortality through hermetic magic, she curtailed her sexual activities, however. She'd gotten what she wanted out of sex and found a better way of making her



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colleagues need her: She became the House's foremost practitioner of alchemy. She traveled from chantry to chantry throughout the 10th century, honing her knowledge. When Ceoris was built, she set up a laboratory there, and has rarely ventured beyond its walls since.

When, in 996, Etrius demonstrated the imminent decline of hermetic magic, Therimna was seized with fear for the first time in many years. She worked without surcease to find an alchemical means of maintaining her youth but failed. In 1026, she began to age rapidly. By that time, she'd guessed that something strange had happened to Goratrix, Tremere, and others. They no longer seemed concerned with the secrets of immortality. She confronted her old lover, Goratrix, and begged that he share whatever he'd found. She didn't like the way he reveled in her weakness; not since she'd been a courtesan in Flanders had he mustered this degree of power over her. After making her suffer and grovel, he told her that Ceoris could scarcely do without its best alchemist and Embraced her.

Therimna felt relief, not horror or guilt, upon her transformation. Her survival seemed assured, but when the Tzimisce war worsened, she realized that her continued existence was still in doubt. She worried also about the discovery of the vampire conspiracy by mortal magi. She began to keep a close eye on her unturned colleagues at Ceoris. Although she occasionally assisted Goratrix in his power struggles against Etrius early in the 11th century, she did so with an eye to secrecy. In 1042, she smothered a mortal apprentice who'd startled Mendacamina and seen her fangs. After she'd slain several others who'd proven too curious for her liking, Goratrix made official her position as executioner. Over the past 150 years, she's killed nearly two dozen magi and apprentices for getting too close to the truth. The first full mage she dispatched was a herbalist named Nuntius, once a student of hers. He succumbed to her lethal mercies in 1049.

In 1176, after advances made against the Tremere by the Tzimisce general Ioan, Therimna began to fret that the Tremere cause might be doomed. Between the Order of Hermes, the church and the various Cainite clans, the enemies they faced were too strong. It was time once again to switch patrons. She suborned Neru, one of Paul Cordwood's best mortal spies, making him her ghoul. She sent him to the Tzimisce to open negotiations. In 1178, after the exchange of many messages, Therimna left Ceoris, supposedly hunting an escaped apprentice. (She'd arranged for the innocent fellow's disappearance herself, to shroud the true nature of her journey.) She rendezvoused with Ioan and promised to act as his eyes and ears within Ceoris. Since then, she's sent him hundreds of messages. She provides him only with enough information to guarantee her safety if Ceoris is ever overrun. She pretends to have little influence over, or knowledge of, chantry affairs. Whenever she can credibly do so, she misleads him. When she does gift him, she makes her betrayals suit her own purposes. A decade ago, a mage Embraced by Curniferrum intercepted one of her messages to

Ioan. This mage, called Gravis, began to blackmail her, demanding her services as an alchemist in exchange for his silence. When he took a trip to the Vienna chantry, she made sure that Ioan knew the route and schedule of his caravan.

Just a few months ago, Paul Cordwood began to suspect Therimna's role in the 1185 disappearance of his man, Neru. In a gesture of retaliation, he killed her unturned apprentice, Pugio. They then reached a tentative truce. She convinced Cordwood that she'd slain Neru because he'd been about to betray them to Ioan.

Therimna recently took on the role of envoy to the Ventrue in Buda-Pest. (The previous diplomat, Contionari, was captured and slain by the Tzimisce during a return journey.) She makes semi-annual forays there to demand supplies from its prince, the Ventrue Vencel Rikard (see *Transylvania By Night*, p. 105). She also badgers Rikard to supply Ceoris with Cainite envoys, either from his own clan or from others who owe him favors. Etrius sent Therimna's childe, Locus, to Rikard's court. A studious thaumaturge but diffident politician, he frequently reminds her of his desire to be replaced by a more suitable candidate.

In terms of her magical research, Therimna has found her vampiric condition to be real boon. No longer concerned with her own mortality, she has opened up new avenues with her alchemy. Thaumaturgic alchemy (see *Dark Ages Companion*, p. 92) is her creation, assuring her further status within the clan.

Image: Therimna's hair is patchy and discolored from dozens of chemical accidents suffered over the years. The skin of her hands is perpetually raw and flaky. She shows little concern for dress. Her robes are both tatty from overuse and stained from the laboratory.

Roleplaying Hints: During the night, you are confident in your manipulative prowess, and proud of the way you've kept yourself alive for over three hundred years. But when the baleful light of dawn comes and you must creep into your cold bed, fear seizes you. You can think only of the countless enemies arrayed against you, of the threat of exposure, and of the fact that in joining all sides, you've only made yourself more alone.

Secrets: Aside from her alliance with Ioan, Therimna now attempts to make herself useful to both the Lasombra and Ventrue. She supplies information on Tremere power struggles to Giacomo Guicciardini, hinting that she may require Lasombra protection if the Tzimisce destroy her clan. She has also indicated to Prince Rikard of Buda-Pest that she might be willing to alter her allegiance, given sufficient motivation. Both men have been cautiously receptive, knowing she'll be of greater use to them in Ceoris than as a fugitive from Tremere vengeance.

Therimna's thaumaturgic research has also led her in unique directions. Combining her alchemy as mastery over Cainite blood, she has found ways to break the blood oath that ties her to the Tremere pyramid. Her secret alliances are a testament to her free will.

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Influence: Therimna is respected, perhaps even feared, but also disliked by her peers. Her duties as executioner and envoy provide her with ample opportunity to move outside the chantry, but give her little influence within it.

Destiny: In 1327, a scrying eye placed in Prince Rikard's chambers by Paul Cordwood shows Therimna betraying Tremere secrets to the Ventrue. He attempts to capture her upon her return but fails. She seeks refuge in Buda-Pest but is cast out by Rikard a decade later on suspicion that she spies against him for the Tzimisce. She becomes a wanderer, assisting various Cainite overlords in overseeing their domains. By the 20th century, she works under the name of Uta Kovacs, travelling from city to city as a consultant and assassin. Uta Kovacs presents herself as an ancient outcast of the Tzimisce.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Goratrix

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1023

Apparent Age: varies

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

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

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Archery 2, Herbalism 1, Melee 2, Ride 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 4, Linguistics (French, Flemish) 2, Occult 5

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 5, Serpents 1, Thaumaturgy 6

Thaumaturgical Paths: Perdo Magica 4, Rego Elementum 2, Rego Magica 4, Rego Vitae 5, Thaumaturgical Alchemy 5

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Status 3 (among Tremere)

Virtues: Conviction 3, Instinct 3, Courage 5

Road: Devil 6

Willpower: 10

VIRSTANIA, MOTHER OF GARGOYLES

8th generation, child of Brunavog

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 1111

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Virstania was born in 1060, several hundred miles southeast of Ceoris, at House Tremere's Cepheis chantry. Her father was a warrior retainer of the Tremere; her mother, the chantry's head cook. Virstania has never known any form of society outside the world of Tremere magi. She grew up speaking Latin as her first language, and used discarded alchemical equipment as her play-

toys. Virstania showed early aptitude for magic, and was apprenticed to the chantry's head, Iubara, at the age of thirteen. Her natural understanding of esoteric principles and eagerness to please allowed her to eclipse older apprentices, whose envy she quickly earned. Rather than try to win their friendship, she determined to avenge their taunts by becoming the chantry's youngest-ever full mage. She earned this honor in 1080. Her career at the chantry soon stagnated, however. The older magi treated her as a curiosity, not a colleague. She was still younger than many apprentices. She found it impossible to form friendships, or to shield herself from the petty infighting of chantry politics. So she decided to make some companions. She animated clay figures and hybridized animals, hiding the oft-gruesome living results of her experiments from the other magi. By 1105, she was a graying, friendless mage with a laboratory full of strange, secret animals. In that same year, a Tzimisce assault leveled Cepheis and sent its surviving inhabitants running for Ceoris. As she fled her rooms, Virstania clasped her favorite hybridized beast, a yellow mink with the head of a sturgeon, to her bosom. However, upon arrival in Ceoris, the thing escaped, slithering through guardsmen's legs and finally causing fits of hysteria in the serving girl's quarters. Goratrix entered their chamber and cornered the thing, only to have it die at his feet.

He did not scold Virstania. Instead, he pronounced her ripe for an undertaking: the creation of Gargoyles. He



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allowed one of his allies, Brunavog, to Embrace her in 1111. Goratrix then sent him away and took over her tutelage himself. By the next year, he had her working at his side on the project. Virstania scarcely concerned herself with the spiritual burdens of vampirism; instead, she blossomed again, excited to finally enjoy the approbation of a fellow magus. She put her hybridization techniques to the test, and in 1121, helped Goratrix to create the first Gargoyles. She bathed them in the same unwavering love she'd given her freakish constructs back in Cephesis. They responded to her as baby chicks to their mother, and their filial instincts made them easy to control.

When Goratrix was exiled to Paris in 1133, Virstania thought she'd lost her only friend among man or Cainite. (That Goratrix returned her feelings of friendship is open to doubt.) Virstania retreated to the lower chambers, continuing her effort to perfect her Gargoyle race. She brings them into the world, assigns them to their tasks, and officiates at their mourning ceremonies. She encourages them to think of her as their Great Mother.

As the years creep on, Virstania has come to care more for the Gargoyles than her fellow Cainites. Her children still need the protection of Ceoris, she reasons, and will for many more years to come. But someday they'll be an independent race all their own, one that both magi and Cainites must fear. Luma, the most ambitious of Virstania's Gargoyle apprentices, has convinced her that both Esoara and Paul Cordwood stand in the way of this hope and must be undermined if not eliminated. Although Virstania herself has no appetite for infighting, she has extended permission to Luma to watch the guard captain and master of spies in search of weaknesses to exploit.

CAINITES GUESTS AND ALLIES

DAUUD THE COPT

8th generation, childe of Umar

Clan: Followers of Set (rogue)

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 902

Apparent Age: mid 40s

Dauud was born in Fustat, Egypt, in 877. For centuries, his family had been stalwarts of the Egyptian Coptic Church. They led their communities and served various Islamic dynasties as senior bureaucrats. Dauud, a stolid fellow accustomed to obeying the expectations of his family and community, took his expected position in the bureaucracy. At the time, it was riddled with agents of a Setite named Umar, who sought to crumble the regime from within. Umar liked Dauud's instinctive obedience and made him his ghoul. His will dulled by the blood oath, Dauud unthinkingly followed Umar's instructions for many years. Finally, Umar Embraced him and began to instruct him in the ways of Setite blood magic. Unfortunately, Umar met Final Death a few years later at the hands of a

Salubri warrior. The loss of his master left Dauud without plans or volition. The worship of Set meant little to him; it was the dynamic, driven Umar he'd been glad to follow. He could not conjure up a plan for himself; he looked back to the days before he drank Umar's blood but could not recall any hopes or dreams. Even before his Embrace, he concluded, he'd only been a shadow of a man.

He wandered out of the Egyptian capital towards the desert, looking for something to arouse his stillborn passions. He founded several local cults of Set in small villages, but inevitably grew bored. Periodically he encountered Salubri, and did his best to kill them, to avenge Umar. But this also felt empty to him. He considered slipping into voluntary torpor, but thought this a surrender to his flawed character. He continued to wander through Egypt, sometimes joining mixed coteries, helping them to find whatever it was they sought. From time to time he thought he'd found a new mentor among them, but in the end, they always disappointed him, and he moved on to yet another cycle of pointless experiences.

This changed in 1132, when, near the small town of Dara, he found himself again half-heartedly commanding a bandit gang who preyed on travelers. Dauud's cultists alerted him to the presence in Dara of a pair of Europeans. With the aid of an interpreter, they'd been seeking information on the god Set. Dauud found and befriended one of the men: Etrius. Although Etrius did not reveal his Cainite nature, Dauud understood what he was. More



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importantly, he was captivated by the ambition that burned in Etrius' eyes. Etrius could be his new Umar, giving him strength and purpose! He wanted to throw himself at the man's feet and beg for acceptance, but kept his composure. A man as great as Etrius would not value a spineless bootlick. Etrius was investigating something in Dara, and would be back. Dauud waited for his chance.

Etrius returned to Dara several times over the next decades. Each time he paid a call on Dauud. In 1153, Dauud told Etrius he was a Setite. Two years later, Etrius suggested that he join the Tremere cause and relocate to Ceoris. Still desperate to impress Etrius as a useful minion, Dauud concealed the true extent of his inward elation. Since then he has added his knowledge of Setite mysteries to the grand project of turning hermetic rituals to blood magic.

Dauud took a role in the targeting of Saulot, which he has yet to admit to Etrius. During his periodic attacks on Egyptian Salubri, he slowly assembled a collection of Salubri documents, elements of which corresponded to things he'd read in old Setite inscriptions. He did further research, and was rewarded with a possible resting place of the Salubri Antediluvian, Saulot. In 1128, his cultists at Dara infiltrated a cell of Osiris priests hunting Set's tomb. Dauud fed them false information, pointing them instead to Saulot. He believes they in turn unwittingly led Tremere to the Salubri progenitor. Dauud only realized the connection between this stratagem and his beloved Etrius in 1153. He has not told Etrius about this, because he has recently begun to review the incidents which won him the documents in question. In retrospect, too many coincidences bind them together. Dauud now fears that some force greater than himself — Set, surely — made a pawn of him.

GIACOMO GUICCIARDINI, MAGISTER ENVOY

10th generation, childe of Enrico Guicciardini

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Survivor

Embrace: 1147

Apparent Age: early 20s

Giacomo Guicciardini's Lasombra fellows would blanch to know his true origins. He began his life as the son of a rat catcher, beggar and all-around ne'er-do-well. Giacomo (then bearing a different surname) followed in his father's footsteps, keeping himself barely clothed and fed on Naples' streets. Forced during a dry spell to resort to prostitution, he was one day hired by one Beniamino Guicciardini, son of a prominent banker with ties to Naples' republican government. He contrived to make the young man fall in love with him so that he might be showered with costly gifts. A few years into their relationship, Beniamino caught him sporting with a mistress. A violent argument followed. Enraged by Beniamino's blows, Giacomo killed his lover. He had the sense to flee Naples but was nonetheless captured by agents of Beniamino's father, who seemed peculiarly adept at tracking his movements. Giacomo was taken before Enrico Guicciardini, Beniamino's

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father. The towering, self-possessed man seemed murderously angry at first, but, as he interrogated Giacomo, surveyed the murderer with an increasingly wolfish eye.

Enrico, it transpired, was a vampire who had long since given up on the hope of introducing his foolish wastrel of a son into the fold. This young, daring upstart on the other hand — his actions showed true promise! Enrico demanded that Giacomo present himself as a newly revealed bastard son. His ghoulish servants secretly tutored Giacomo in the ways of the moneyed elite. After several years proving himself worthy of the privilege, Giacomo won Enrico's Embrace, and then learned the ways of the Lasombra. He sent his "new, true son" to Paris, for further study under the wing of a higher-ranking mentor, Raymond the Lesser, one of the powers behind Louis VII's throne. In 1152, when intermediaries of Goratrix approached Raymond to make overtures of alliance, Giacomo was dispatched to the Paris chantry to test the possibilities. He cleverly managed his relationship with Goratrix, telling his fellow Lasombra that the Tremere trusted only him. Otherwise, his duties as envoy to the Tremere would have been turned over to a more senior Lasombra.

Giacomo continues to trade on his Tremere connections to enhance his position within his clan. He gets magical treasures and secrets from the Tremere, doling them out to his sire's allies. In return, he filters information on Cainite politics to the Tremere, both in Paris and Ceoris. He spends perhaps three months a year at Ceoris, wondering how to harness the potential of blood magic and Gargoyle armies to speed his own ascension through Magister ranks.



Lately it has occurred to him that it might be a clever thing to help arrange for the installation in Ceoris of some low-ranking envoys from other clans — provided that he can secure their true loyalty beforehand.

MARGARET VASA, GRAVEROBBER ENVOY

11th Generation, childe of Wechsel

Clan: Cappadocian

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 1145

Apparent Age: late teens

Margaret Vasa, a native of Hungary, merited the Embrace after surviving a plague that wiped out her entire village. Walking amidst the pox-ridden corpses of her friends and family, she sought the ill humor that would take her life too. It came in the desiccated form of Wechsel, a Graverobber fascinated by plagues. She asked for death and he gave her unlife.

In the 50 years since, Margaret has grown into a promising scholar of the clan. Wechsel's obsessions with pestilence aside, he was a good teacher and prepared her well for the world. For herself, Margaret has taken her new existence in stride. She was ready for painful death and has found immortality and a new world of possibilities instead. She has begun a study of the animation of corpses and the *zombu* creatures empowered by some of her clan. She has heard that the Italian Giovanni have much to teach her in this regard.

A decade ago, Wechsel announced to Margaret that he had taught her all he could and sent her to find her

own course. She traveled to the temple at Erciyes, where the elder Constancia agreed to become her new teacher in exchange for service to the temple and clan. Margaret agreed without hesitation; the chance to study with so learned a thanatologist as the matron of the clan's greatest temple was impossible to pass up.

Constancia sent Margaret first to Paris to become envoy to Goratrix and now to Ceoris itself. Her duty is to learn the secrets of the Usurpers and evaluate their threat. The Clan of Death distrusts the newcomers, but the potential of Thaumaturgy is great indeed. Margaret's reports may well determine whether Constancia seeks an alliance with Tremere in the nights to come.

Margaret spends about a third of her time at Ceoris now, assisting Paul Cordwood and Epistatia in their experiments. She would like to help Virstania, but has been barred by Curaferrum from detailed knowledge of the Gargoyles.

MORTAL MAGI

APPELLO, THE HIDDEN DARKNESS

Background: For generations, Appello's family has sent one of its non-inheriting sons to join the Tremere chantry on Crete. The tradition began in the 9th century, after Tremere saved the family's head, then a humble fisherman, from a witch's curse. In 1130, the fisherman's ranking descendant, now a well-heeled merchant, sent his second-youngest son, Philip, to become a magician. Philip wanted a position in the family trading concern. Renamed Appello, he became an unruly apprentice who passed from master to master. His violent temper and stubborn refusal to accept their authority made him nearly impossible to train. The chantry master, Clementia, asked Tremere for permission to expel Appello altogether, but was refused on the grounds that breaking an ancient tradition could bring bad fortune to the chantry or to Tremere himself. A displeased Clementia, with beatings and the occasional imprisonment, worked to tamp down Appello's temper. Eventually Appello conceded that his spirit had been broken, and settled down to his studies. He became a mage of reliable if not extraordinary skill. However, his temper still flashed from time to time, and Appello made himself unpopular with each and every one of his Cretan colleagues. In 1190, perhaps out of pique, Clementia contrived a justification for Appello's transfer to Ceoris. Since then, he's continued to work on his personal research endeavor — an obscure technique he calls "measuring absence." No one else understands what he means by this. Ceoris' magi and Cainites are united in regarding him as a vexing eccentric who must be tolerated for the sake of peace and quiet.

Image: The tall and muscular Appello looks youthful despite his approaching dotage. A cleft parts the promi-



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ment chin of his handsome face. When perturbed, his voice drops in register and develops a strangled quality.

Roleplaying Hints: You didn't want to be a mage. They think you've forgotten what they did to you, beating you black and blue, but you haven't. Still, you'll show them all. Because you're not soft-headed like they are, you can see what others can't. Once you've proven your theory of Cosmic Absence, you'll destroy them all.

Secrets: Appello has been in contact with a celestial entity which identifies itself as All-Root. It has been providing him insight in exchange for certain small favors, the import of which is lost on Appello. He may be asked to place a crow's skull behind a drape or to lick the pages of an ancient text and then transfer the dust and ink to a cloth. It has warned him to keep these communications secret, especially from Etrius and Curaferum.

Recently he was instructed to make a trip to Lion's Gate, the Tremere chantry in the English town of Durham. There he met the magus Erro, who had herself been contacted by All-Root during a sojourn at Ceoris. She identified All-Root as the demon Kupala and revealed that she had been promulgating his worship in England. She predicted a great destiny for Appello, promising him that he would one day vent his anger on the entire world, making it a fit place for the worshippers of Kupala. For now, his duty would be to find other likely cultists. Kupala now wanted to extend his reach beyond the Tremere. He should look to new arrivals to Ceoris, examining them for their suitability. He should with

chalk make a certain mark on the doors to their rooms, marking them for Kupala's touch.

Influence: Appello has little influence — yet.

Destiny: Appello remains at Ceoris until 1329, when Tectusa, an especially rash member of the conspirator's faction, decides on a whim to Embrace him. By this time, Appello has already transformed into a demonic servitor of Kupala's, albeit one capable of maintaining human-like form. The attempted Embrace slays Tectusa, melting her into corrosive slime, and reveals Appello's true nature to the others. He narrowly escapes from Ceoris and heads west to England. He resurfaces as the abbot of a wealthy monastery, as a financier of exploration during the Renaissance and, in the early 21st century, as a major stakeholder in a number of top communications firms.

House: Tremere

Actual Age: 82

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3

Skills: Archery 1, Herbalism 1, Melee 2, Ride 2

Knowledges: Academics 2, Linguistics (Greek, Hebrew) 2, Medicine 2, Occult 3

Paths: Creo Ignem 1, Infliction 3, Path of Warding 3, Summoning 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 1

Vis supply: equivalent of 15 Willpower points

Willpower: 5

BITIURGES, A FOOL FOR ALL TO SEE

Background: The strutting, foppish Bitiurges comes from a long line of Tremere magi. He grew up in a chantry, speaks Latin as his first language, and knows little of the mundane world that he hasn't read in a book. He changes havens every five years or so, and has lived in every Tremere chantry at one time or another. He's also lived as a guest in several chantries belonging to rival houses. This makes him a splendid source of gossip, a pastime in which he indulges with naughty delight. Although he plays the fool and is uninterested in laborious research, he enjoys a reputation for working magic skillfully.

Image: Bitiurges wears ornate tunics, colorful leggings, and elaborate hats. He feels undressed unless he has at least three feathers pinned to his tunic or sticking out of his hat. He punctuates his small, round face with a large moustache and small goatee.

Roleplaying Hints: The wise man knows when to play the fool. You know when to blabber out what you know and when to hold your tongue. You know that something is amiss at Ceoris, and you intend to learn what it is without being slain.

Secrets: The shade of Ponticulus recently took control of Bitiurges's body long enough to dictate to him



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a detailed missive detailing the history of Ceoris' vampiric conspiracy. (Its text appears as Chapter One of this book.) Although Ponticulus meant him to take action against Tremere and his allies, Bitiurges has drawn his own conclusions. He keeps the letter on his person at all times so it will not be discovered as he patiently awaits his own opportunity to be Embraced.

Influence: Bitiurges exercises surprising influence. He has guessed the secrets of many Ceoris residents. He knows who despises whom, and, should someone take a dislike to him, can covertly engineer a plot against his rival simply by dropping discreet hints into the appropriate ears.

Destiny: In 1202, when the Order of Hermes discovers the Tremere secret, it is Bitiurges who brings advance warning to Etrius. In exchange for his service, he wins the Embrace he has hoped for. In 1707 he apparently defects to the *antitribu*, but by 1917 is back among the Tremere. He apparently dies in 1977 during an assault by West German police on a terrorist hideout serving as his haven.

House: Tremere

Actual Age: 40

Apparent Age: 40

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

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

Skills: Etiquette 1, Herbalism 1, Music 1, Ride 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Old Akkadian, Babylonian, Arabic, Ugaritic) 4, Occult 4
Paths: Divination 2, Enchantment 3, Ephemera 5, Path of Warding 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Resources 3, Retainers 1

Vis supply: equivalent of 17 Willpower points

Willpower: 7

OMNIFER, THE STRONG

Background: Omnifer was born in Swabia in 936, the son of an armorer. Under his given name, Reinhard, he fought in King Henry the Fowler's Saxon Army. In 956, he was assigned to guard a woman granted free passage through Saxony. That woman was Tosia, still stinging from the defection of Canalista, an apprentice she'd felt great affection for. Tosia resolved to find a man to be her next apprentice, reasoning that she could better see through him if he began to scheme against her. Brusque and naïve, Reinhard was taken with his charismatic charge, and confessed to her his dislike of the soldier's life. She saw only middling talent but great forthrightness in the young man, and offered him a new life as her apprentice. He struggled with religious qualms throughout the journey, but continued on with Tosia after reaching the king's border.

Though not a clever student, he showed perseverance; he finally became a full mage in 980 and adopted the name Omnifer. He stayed by Tosia's side at the Transylvanian chantry of Umor Mons until its final destruction in 1176. Shortly before the exodus, he experienced a vision of the Virgin in the woods. She told him that she was granting him a terrible boon that would test his strength. It would cause him great suffering, but would allow him to know a truth that must be revealed. If he endured, he would be absolved of the sin of witchcraft. Before Omnifer could ask any questions, the vision disappeared. The incident troubled him for many years, but nothing came of it, and gradually he put it out of his mind. It came back to him two years ago, when his right arm became increasingly stiff and actually began to turn to stone. Its ossification began at the fingertips and has now worked its way up to his shoulder. He can't feel the petrified portions, but the skin and muscle directly abutting them are perpetually inflamed and radiate pain through his body. Although the part of him that is a dispassionate magus thinks that this may be a symptom of his immortality magic slowly going awry, his faithful soul tells him that this is a religious tribulation.

The pain is so great as to prevent him from sleeping more than a few hours each night. He has taken to wandering the chantry halls when he cannot sleep. Having seen the nighttime activities of Ceoris firsthand, he has concluded that something is terribly wrong. Tremere, Etrius, Curaferum and perhaps others are surely engaged in diabolic worship. This must be the truth the Blessed Virgin wanted him to see. He has been afflicted in order that they might be revealed.

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Omnifer told Tosia, who had suspicions of her own. Together they lead a group of mortal magi secretly concerned with the night doings of Ceoris. Tosia has warned them to step carefully. Omnifer has sworn to do so, but finds it difficult not to share his darkest speculations with others, to lighten the burden he labors under. His judgment is clouded both by constant pain and the inability to sleep.

Image: Omnifer's rectangular, flat-planed face and strongly-set features present an image of stony determination. Beads of sweat gather constantly on his furrowed brow, hinting at the pain he so resolutely conceals. Except at ceremonial occasions, he wears a soldier's simple off-duty outfit. A dagger at his belt also suggests his soldierly past.

Roleplaying Hints: You mustn't allow anyone to know the extent of your suffering. You were raised as a man, and men conceal their weaknesses. You worry that Tosia is too cautious; when she's ready to act, you might be a man entirely made of stone. A worse fear is that you'll fail the Virgin's test, and suffer damnation.

Secrets: Anxious to bring the mystery of Ceoris to a head Omnifer recently sent a message to the Archbishop of Vienna, a church official known for his permissive view of the Hermetic Order. In it, he strongly hints of diabolism at Ceoris, but does not spell out his accusations.

Influence: Without Omnifer, many of the mortal magi would be afraid to follow Tosia. They don't trust her to make practical decisions or keep her head in a crisis.

Omnifer's forthrightness, courage and military bearing calm their fears. Although she is the senior mage of the group of concerned mortals, it is Omnifer they turn to for guidance.

Destiny: In 1202, when the Hermetic Order casts out House Tremere and brands them as anathema, Omnifer helps many mortal magi, including Tosia, escape Ceoris' Gargoyles. He makes his way north and joins a small cabal of mortal Tremere refugees who eventually take the name House Liban. Several decades later, his health failing and his curse of ossification creeping into his chest, he travels south to attempt to find Tosia. He falls before the Inquisition instead and feeds a pyre in France. (For more on House Liban, see *Sorcerer*, Revised Edition for *Mage: The Ascension*.)

House: Tremere

Actual Age: 261

Apparent Age: early 50s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Leadership 4

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

Knowledges: Academics 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Norse, Arabic, Gaelic, Burgundian, Frisian) 5, Occult 5, Politics 3, Science 2

Paths: Creo Ignem 5, Enchantment 3, Perdo Magica 3, Way of the Levinbolt 4

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Retainers 3

Vis supply: equivalent of 30 Willpower points

Willpower: 8

TOSIA, THE HOLY MOTHER

Background: Born over six hundred years ago into a scholarly Athenian family, Tosia is the longest-serving Tremere mage outside the circle of Cainites. In the early days of the house, she stood alongside Goratrix as one of Tremere's closest advisors, and she helped him in his attempt to take over the Order of Hermes after its creation.

Tosia was taught by her skeptical parents to disbelieve in gods of all kinds. They were merely representations of human hopes and fears, her father told her. She brought this attitude with her into her life as a mage. But in 869, she experienced a religious conversion. While investigating a crypt near Jerusalem, she was seized by a vision. She saw the dead Christ rise and ascend from the tomb. The more she tried to forget the experience or dismiss it as the result of malfunctioning magic, the more it took hold on her mind. She wrestled with the significance of the vision for decades before finally seeking out a priest and submitting to baptism. During her years of spiritual crisis, she distanced herself from Tremere and his schemes. Tosia didn't confront him; she simply retreated into her research and made herself unavailable when he prosecuted his vendettas against various rival magi. Although Christian magi weren't unknown in the House, Tosia kept her beliefs to herself for over thirty years.

after her baptism. She quietly built relationships with other Christian Tremere. In 928, she supervised construction of the chantry at Umor Mons, which harvested its from a magical stream high in the Transylvanian Alps. She encouraged other devout Tremere to join her there, and by 950 the majority of the house's Christians called it home. Etrius, too interested in currying favor with Tremere to accept the almost monastic existence at Umor Mons magi, proved a notable exception.

In 954, her apprentice, Canalista, betrayed her. Tosia had kept an encoded journal of her spiritual reflections, which included many unfavorable descriptions of Tremere's actions over the centuries. Canalista stole the journal, decoded it, and passed her notes along to Etrius. He in turn gave them to Tremere, who challenged Tosia to *certamen*, a magical duel. Tosia knew that Tremere, the originator of this form of sorcerous combat, was bound to win. She declined the duel, losing the respect of her Christian followers. Although she remained the chantry's titular leader, its magi began to treat her as a figurehead, instead deferring to the orders of its castellan. Canalista accepted a prestigious posting to Etrius' Vienna chantry.

In 956, Tosia took Omnifer as her apprentice. She'd always taught women before, but had now decided they couldn't be trusted. As the 11th century dawned, she'd surrounded herself with a new, younger group of loyalists, and was again in command at Umor Mons. Then the Tzimisce attacks began. Three times she had to flee the

chantry as enemies approached its gates. A horde of screaming bat-men (that is, fleshcrafted Tzimisce war-ghouls) razed Umor Mons for good in 1176. Several of Tosia's young allies died to permit her escape to Ceoris.

Tosia sensed the curse hanging over Ceoris at once, but for many years thought it the result of malign sendings from the night creatures. Only in the last few years has the insomniac Omnifer convinced her that Ceoris' evil lies within. Neither suspects a vampiric transformation; instead, they have uncovered evidence of Etrius' failed researches at the turn of the century and smell the spoor of devil-worship. Tosia resists Omnifer's demands for a quick confrontation. If Tremere and Etrius are in a demon's grip, their power might be incalculable. She was humiliated by Tremere once before and knows the setback she'll face if she lunges at him and misses. She wants to be sure of victory before she strikes.

Image: The sin that most challenges Tosia is pride, as her appearance shows. She's kept herself youthful, if not young and nubile. Her warm, attractive features are framed by a wreath of golden hair. Colorful velvet robes display her plump figure. On ceremonial occasions, she permits herself a display of cleavage, offset by a silver crucifix worn around her neck. As hermetic methods of immortality become more difficult to work, Tosia must devote increasing time and energy to her rituals of rejuvenation. If encountered at a time of anxiety or preoccupation, she may suddenly appear much older than is her norm.

Roleplaying Hints: Christ expects much of you. It is not enough merely to be virtuous; you must be successful in smiting his enemies. All depends on you. If you are embarrassed or shown to be weak, then the cause of Christ among the Tremere is damaged. You must therefore act cautiously and within the bounds of Christian morality. If Tremere's power were to tempt you to sacrifice your soul's purity in your attempt to bring him down, he would enjoy the greatest victory of all.

Secrets: Tosia has begun to see diabolism everywhere. Etrius, whom she once thought pure, is clearly leader of some Satanic undertaking. Her closest aid Omnifer, apparently loyal, still suffers from a curse of ossification she can't help but believe is derived from some mark on his soul. Magic, it seems, is inherently unholy. Seeking guidance, Tosia has begun a correspondence with some scholars within the Church.

Influence: Tosia is respected by the mortal magi who suspect diabolism at Ceoris — but in the way one might respect a battle-scarred old veteran who is no longer up to the fight. They trust her spiritual guidance, but look to Omnifer for plans of action. Ceoris' Cainites underestimate her as a threat, having dismissed her as a force in Tremere affairs ever since her refusal of *certamen* against Tremere.

Destiny: In 1202, in large part because of reports from Tosia, the Order discovers the truth about Tremere and declares war on his House. Unfortunately for Tosia, Tremere spies know about the decision as soon as it is



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made and she must flee into the night. She joins with the other hermetic houses, but sees evil in them as well. By 1225, she has fled to the church and joined the emergent Inquisition, ready to redeem herself. Soon thereafter she hears word of Omnifer. Knowing him to be devil-spawn, she gladly sends him to the pyre.

House: Tremere

Actual Age: 630

Apparent Age: mid-50s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Talents: Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2

Skills: Etiquette 3, Herbalism 5, Ride 1

Knowledges: Academics 5, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, ancient Egyptian, French) 5, Medicine 1, Occult 5, Science 2

Paths: Divination 4, Ephemerata 5, Healing 4, Herbal Ways 4, Perdo Magica 2, Summoning 4

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Influence 3, Resources 3, Retainers 3

Viz supply: equivalent of 30 Willpower points

Willpower: 10

SERVANTS AND SLAVES

GHOULS

HADU, STEWARD OF CEORIS

Ghoul of Curoferrum

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Caretaker

Actual Age: 50

Apparent Age: 90

Hadu was born in a nearby village. He grew up hearing tales of the mage-men in the black castle on the mountain. He'd seen their servants come to town. Dressed in fine clothes, well-fed, armed and assured, they were everything he wanted to be. He looked at his grandfather, who'd raised him alone after sickness came and took the rest of his family from him. His grandfather, also called Hadu, was stooped and dirty. His cattle were dying. A cough rattled around in his chest, sure to claim him soon. Hadu loved his grandfather but did not want to end up as he had. He wanted to be a mage-man's servant. The next time the men from the castle came to leave packages in the storehouse, he begged to join them. They gruffly poked at him, pinching him to see how much meat he had on him, and lifting his upper lip to inspect his gums. They left, making no promises. Weeks later, they came for him, and took him to the terrible castle. There he trembled alone in a dark room until a forbidding old man entered and gave him his orders. He would start by swabbing floors. If he did well, perhaps one day he would get a better

task. The mean man listed the many rules he'd have to live by. It was easy for a servant to be killed here, he said.

Hadu learned the rules. In the eating hall, he sat with the youngest of the other servants. He was not bad looking, and found a serving girl who would talk to him. Her name was Zuha. He came to love her, and soon they were stealing time together. She told him one of the visiting witch-men had ordered her to clean out his room. Then he'd made her do other things. She'd found some parchments he'd hidden under his wardrobe. Hadu asked to see them. If the visitor was hiding the parchments, they had to be interesting. Hadu took the papers to the new castellan, Curoferrum. He said the parchments weren't important, but that Hadu's decision to bring them showed intelligence unusual in a mere serving boy. He made Hadu assistant to the steward, an old, stooped man like his grandfather. Hadu did his job well. One day the old steward was gone from his bed. Hadu didn't know why. He sought out Curoferrum and argued that he could do all the things the vanished man had done had, faster and better. Curoferrum made him steward. But he also made him drink a potion in an opaque flask. He warned Hadu that he'd be changed. He would live forever, Curoferrum promised. He would have to take three doses of the philter, spaced out over as many nights.

When Hadu drank the last dose, he fainted. When he awoke, he looked at himself in the mirror. He was old and



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stooped, like the man before him. "I had to make you look old, so the others wouldn't be jealous," Curaferum told him. They'll think you infirm and stupid, and loosen their tongues in your presence. You'll take what they say and report it to me.

Hadu thought he should be angry, but wasn't. He loved Curaferum now. When Zuha saw him wrinkled and rheumy-eyed, she cried, but Hadu cared not. He warned Curaferum that he might have to get rid of her. Curaferum decided otherwise. He wanted his ghouls to get along. He needed a new head cook. Other servants had told him the girl was as clever as he. He'd feed her his potion, too. Hadu felt jealous. He didn't want Zuha to share in this beautiful thing. But she did. She came to him, her skin like a dried river bed and her breasts like a cow's saggy teats. She told him she'd been pregnant with his son when she drank the potion. Now it would not be born right, but it no longer seemed to matter. Hadu thought upon this, and realized he did not care either. He asked Zuha how she knew it was a son, and she said, "Because I feel him inside me, more than ever." Hadu shrugged. Something about it troubled him, but he would not let it affect his love for Curaferum.

Later Hadu realized that there were other ghouls of Curaferum's on the servants' rolls. He didn't like this. He would have to get rid of them if he could do so without disappointing the master he so loved. This all happened over fifty years ago. No one seems to have noticed that Hadu hasn't gotten any older, or died, in the interim. No one notices him. He is like the tapestries, the furniture, the very stone from which Ceoris is carved: He is always present but scarcely noticed.

ZUHA, MISTRESS OF THE KITCHENS

Ghoul of Curaferum

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Child

Actual Age: 60

Apparent Age: 60

Much of Zuha's story is told above, as part of Hadu's. She was born to a serving girl in the castle, raised in a neighboring village, then recruited to serve as her mother had. She fell in love with the bright-eyed and ambitious Hadu. She was pregnant with his child when Curaferum made her his ghoul, as he had done with Hadu. Zuha forgot to love Hadu and started loving Curaferum instead. He made her head of the kitchen staff.

Fifty years after her first taste of Curaferum's vitae, the fetus still gurgles and kicks inside her womb. This is not supposed to happen when pregnant women become ghouls, but Ceoris is a place where strange things happen. Zuha long ago grew inured to the discomfort.

Zuha spies on the other servants and makes sure they obey Curaferum's commands. She is especially vigilant with new servants, who might be infiltrators from outside.



GARGOYLES

FIDUS, THE SHRUNKEN BEAST

10th generation Gargoyle

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Loner

Manufacture: 1187

Fidus is ten years old. He's the youngest of the four apprentices, having impressed Vinstania with his eagerness and



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intelligence. Unless he can possibly help it, he never leaves her side. Too weak and deformed to act as a guard or take part in raids, he makes himself useful in other ways. Of the four, he's the only one who has any actual insight into magic. He can read and has even given Virstania useful magical advice on a few occasions. Looking at Virstania's rituals, Fidus sees some ways to change them so that Gargoyles might be more independent-minded. However, he sees no use for this knowledge because he thinks they're not loyal enough now.

A mere four feet tall, Fidus has a perpetually bowed neck, attached to which is a long head dominated by a curved beak. His eyes look like tiny, sparkling black beads. Fidus' wings are small, twisted and useless. He drools uncontrollably and speaks with a lisp others may find comical.

LUMA, STONE BEAUTY

9th generation Gargoyle

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Tyrant

Manufacture: 1183

Luma was born fourteen years ago. Virstania wishes she could precisely duplicate the conditions of her manufacture to get more like her. Luma is not only one of the most aggressive Gargoyles, but also the most charismatic. Other Gargoyles instinctively heed her commands. The males all wish to copulate with her but are too frightened to approach without permission.

Luma has, without Virstania's knowledge, inveigled two recently-spawned Gargoyles, Crystallus and Ampulla, into blood oath with her. Each was created using the same ritual methods as Luma, and is a spitting image her. Luma now serves as one of Virstania's assistants. Of the four, she is the least interested in performing menial

tasks for Virstania. She submits to the indignity to learn more about her mistress and the secrets of her race.

Luma is a slender creature with the serene, lovely face of an ancient Greek statue. Her long, sensuously curving claws and razor-tipped wings somehow add to her unearthly beauty. Her alabaster-like skin glows a faint yellow; the effect is only visible in the dark.

SAXUM, MASTER OF SLAVES

8th generation Gargoyle

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Defender

Manufactured 1123

Saxum is the quietly dominating leader of Virstania's Gargoyle apprentices. (There are three of them, in addition to himself.) He is the oldest surviving Gargoyle, having been created in 1123. (The original, Chaundice, went missing in 1127 and is presumed destroyed.) As well as assisting Virstania in her experiments, Saxum acts as Gargoyle leader, passing her instructions to the others. He breaks up fights, parcels out food and conveys complaints to the Great Mother. His loyalty is to her, not the Tremere.

Saxum is an exemplary specimen of the basic Gargoyle type. His facial features are strongly chiseled, almost heroic. His stony skin is smooth, like marble and his musculature impressive. His wingspan is longer than many of his type, at



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ten feet from one fully outstretched tip to the other. He proudly wears a gold-trimmed robe given to him by Virstania.

PRISONERS

The following poor souls languish in the prisons of Ceoris as of 1197.

ITERA, WRETCHED USURPER

7th generation Tremere, childe of Malgorzata

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1197

Apparent Age: late 30s

Itera is a visiting mage recently embraced by Malgorzata. She wrote a letter to Probitas, head of House Tremere's Perugia chantry, warning him of a vampiric plot at Ceoris. She did not suspect that Probitas had already been turned or that the conspiracy extended beyond Ceoris. Etrius wants Itera kept alive as a reminder of Malgorzata's folly. Malgorzata wants her dead. Craferrum has removed Malgorzata's ghoulish guardsmen from the dungeons to prevent her from having Itera killed. This infuriates Malgorzata and may provoke a new spate of factional intrigue in Ceoris.

MARTA, CHARLATAN SPY

9th generation Ravnos, childe of Vassily Taltos

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Rogue

Embrace: 1175

Apparent Age: early 20s

The Ravnos who calls herself Marta was caught after infiltrating Ceoris in the guise of a serving girl. Craferrum found her lying wounded in front of his door, injured by the sigil of warding he'd placed on it. Marta was blinded by the blast. Cordwood now feeds her enough blood to regenerate her eyes. Then, as soon as she's recovered dim glimpses of sight, he coolly blinds her with a hot poker. He's done this three times now, and Marta is almost ready to talk. She's claimed so far that she wanted to penetrate Ceoris merely for the tricksterish joy of it because she'd been told it was impregnable. But in fact the Tzimisce warlord Vladimir Rustovitch (see *Transylvania By Night*, p. 117) secured her services in exchange for the freedom of her mortal brother, whom he holds prisoner. Marta has already decided to admit she works for Rustovitch, but not the part about her brother. She hopes to trick Cordwood by offering to spy on Rustovitch for him.

PULSATIO, LOST APPRENTICE

Mortal apprentice of House Tremere

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Defender

Actual Age: 35

Apparent Age: mid-30s

The brawny mortal Pulsatio served as both bodyguard and apprentice to Tosia, the most influential of Ceoris' unturned mages. He was taken prisoner very recently, after asking too many questions at a council meeting. He didn't know what was going on before, but since his imprisonment has assembled the clues. Pulsatio thinks he can escape by overpowering the guards on the way to the torture chamber. Thus, he has to give Cordwood a reason to torture him. He's made up a story in which he's been sent by a rival Hermetic House to uncover the mystery of the Tremere. He intends to tell his story a little bit at a time, enduring torture sessions until he gets a chance to make a run for it. Then he'll try to find Tosia and rally the mortal mages against Ceoris' night-creatures. His great confidence prevents him from seeing the sheer folly of seeking out torture.

VILICH, LEPER MARTYR

12th generation Nosferatu, childe of Tybald

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: 1193

Apparent Age: unknown

Vilich is a Nosferatu neonate opportunistically captured by Gargoyles during a cattle raid. His sire leads a hermit's existence, embracing only the occasional village outcast so he can have someone to talk to and play chess with. Vilich's sire taught him to be wary of involvement in Cainite wars, especially the battle against the strange new witch-clan. Vilich laments his capture as a terrible and unfair twist of fate. He begs for his survival to anyone who will listen. Although he's been truthful when he says he knows nothing about Nosferatu efforts against the Tremere, Paul Cordwood doesn't believe him. Cordwood subjects him to regular torture sessions, marveling at the young Cainite's ability to keep his secrets while suffering unimaginably. If freed, Vilich would want only to escape Ceoris as quickly and safely as possible.





Chapter Six: Secrets of the Workshops

*Ye shall be as gods, knowing good
and evil.*

—Genesis, 3:5

THAUMATURGIC DEVELOPMENTS

In the two centuries or so since Tremere and his fellows became vampires, much of their efforts have been dedicated to finding ways to preserve and recover their abilities at magical arts. The new blood magic they call Thaumaturgy is the product of that research, which is still ongoing. In the overall scheme of things, Tremere and the other thaumaturges are still in the early phase of their work. They have established the basic workings of Thaumaturgy and are busy adapting hermetic arts and rituals to its demands (using the Rego Magica path detailed below). Relatively little innovation has taken place, with the notable exception of the blood-centered Rego Vitae path. In a few decades, House Tremere breaks once and for all with the mortal Order of Hermes. This marks the end of the "conversion" phase of thaumaturgic development, both because Tremere and Etrius have exhausted the most viable arts and rituals and because they are banned from the great hermetic libraries. From the middle of the 13th century onward, Thaumaturgy takes its own course separate from that of hermetic lore.

Readers interested in the development of Thaumaturgy and other forms of blood magic may wish to consult **Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy**. Those who wish to see the gulf that comes to separate Tremere and hermetic magi in the subsequent centuries can consult **Blood Treachery**, a supplement for **Mage: The Ascension**. Neither book is necessary to enjoy **House of Tremere** or use the systems below, however.

The following two thaumaturgic paths are available only at the Storyteller's discretion. Rego Magica is especially rare and appears here mostly to give Storytellers a glimpse at the process of magical conversion underway. Perdo Magica is somewhat more widely known.

REGO MAGICA (NEW PATH)

Tremere, Goratrix and Etrius devised this path to allow them to convert Hermetic techniques to blood magic. Tremere has ordered that knowledge of this path be tightly controlled. He doesn't want his juniors devising paths he doesn't himself know. That could be disastrous in the event of a rebellion. The path also offers a formidable array of techniques to use against enemy magi. Therimna and Curaferum have been trained in the path: the former to better ply them; the latter to more efficiently slay them. The Inner Circle knows of its existence, though not all of them can use the path. At present, no one else walks it.

CREATING NEW PATHS

After a suitable period of research into equivalent Hermetic magics, the thaumaturge can create a new path which he, and thaumaturges after him, may use. The path must revolve around the creation (Creo), control (Rego), perception (Intellego), transformation (Muto) or de-

struction (Perdo) of a single category of force or object. Common categories include animals, each of the four classical elements, the mind or plants. The Latin term for the force or object appears as the second word of the path's name. For example, a path permitting the thaumaturge to create illnesses would be called *Creo Malum*.

The process of research involves years of effort poring over dusty tomes, making calculations and performing alchemical tests. The key is uncovering the various ways in which to mimic hermetic effects through the powers of Cainite blood. The thaumaturge begins by creating the first power in the path, and then creates successively more mighty magics, until he has created at least five powers. Thaumaturges who gain a rating of 6 in the created path may improvise additionally powerful effects. The vampire may make extensive notes allowing others to learn the path or commit the secrets to memory so he can keep them to himself. If he fails to take notes during the process of creation, however, he'll find it very difficult to teach it to another thaumaturge later.

System: The player creates a power by writing it up in the format given here, with descriptive information on its capabilities listed in a paragraph or two followed by specific information on game mechanics in a paragraph labeled "System." The Storyteller has final say over the path and the individual power; it should meet the following criteria:

- It must match the desired dot rating. If the character is creating his first power in the path, it must be a one-dot power. After that, he must create a two-dot power, and so on.
- The vampire's rating in Rego Magica must exceed the power's desired dot rating by at least 2.
- It must be roughly as effective as powers from other Tremere paths which share its dot rating. Level 1 powers have no greater effect on a story than the movement of an object weighing a pound, the summoning of fog or a candle-sized flame, viewing past events in a specific location or the increase of Attributes by spending Willpower. Level 2 powers are about as effective as forcing another vampire to involuntarily spend blood points, the movement of 20 pounds, the summoning of rain or the chance to converse with an inanimate object. Level 3 powers do things like allow the vampire to temporarily decrease his effective generation, create a campfire-sized flame, move 200 pounds, remove 1 health level per success scored over the victim's opposing roll or cause a chair to grab its occupant. Level 4 powers are of sufficient magnitude to steal blood points from a distance, summon a bonfire or storm, move 500 pounds or create a watery wall through which supernatural beings can't pass. Level 5 should be no less powerful than those which remove both health levels and blood points per success, call down lightning, move 1000 pounds or summon a mighty entity from another realm of being.

The Storyteller may modify the system paragraph to bring it more in line with other comparable powers. She

may permit the power's victim a roll to resist, making it less effective for each success scored, scale the effect to the number of successes scored, increase or decrease the effect's size or impose requirements on the user, such as his physical proximity to the effect or an expenditure of extra blood points in addition to the usual 1 per power use.

- It must fit the overall theme of the path. For example, if the player is creating the *Creo Malum* path, the power must create a disease.

- It may not duplicate the effect of another path or Discipline power. (It may, however, offer a broader version of an effect conferred by an existing ritual.) Storytellers needn't worry about powers listed in books to which they don't have access. Extremely common effects — such as the dealing of damage — may be accepted if they propose a unique twist on the basic formula or simply seem too entertaining to reject.

Once player and Storyteller have arrived at a final write-up for the power, the character embarks on a period of extensive research, looking for ways to turn theory into practice. He must spend one year for each of the power's dots, assuming that the thaumaturge can devote at least thirty hours per week to his efforts. Having spent that time, the vampire rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6); he must score a number of successes equal to or greater than the power's dot rating. Failure requires a return to the library and laboratory, spending at least six months for

each of the power's dots before a new attempt can be made.

If a power proves unsatisfactory in play, Storytellers should reserve the right to revise its system details. They should introduce additional limitations to scale back powers too useful for their dot-ratings, while being just as quick to boost the effectiveness of powers that turn out to be lackluster.

CREATING NEW RITUALS

Rego Magica also allows the creation of new blood rituals. The thaumaturge wishing to do so must first conduct extensive research into existing hermetic rituals. She endeavors to find those which most closely duplicate the desired effect and must then select and purify ritual items which correspond to the forces she wishes to control. The ritual actions she performs with these items serves as a visual metaphor for the magic she wishes to create. For example, if she wishes to create a ritual which binds an unsuspecting victim to her will, she might select a king's scepter (representing command) and a marionette (to stand for the target). In the course of the ritual, she might attach the marionette's strings to the control stick and then wave the scepter over the completed puppet. The act of stringing the marionette represents her desired dominance over the subject, as does the waving of the scepter.

She must go to her laboratory and formulate salts, humors or salves. These might fortify the caster during



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the ritual, effect necessary transformations in the ritual items (including their destruction) or work directly upon the target item or individual. She must devise the chants and incantations used to unleash the ritual's innate power. For this purpose, she must employ a manual of calculations, established by Goratrix, which adjust hermetic formulae for the use of blood magi. This manual is still very much a work in progress and provides only rough equivalencies useful for experimentation; the thaumaturge must still make adjustments in her lab.

Once she's devised her ritual, she rehearses it extensively, practicing its movements and incantations and repeatedly testing any required alchemical reactions. She inserts harmless mock chants and movements at pivotal moments, so as not to draw down powerful magic before she is sure of the means to harness it. During this time she must remain wary of lurking impish spirits or other forces drawn by the potential for malign mischief. They may attempt to confuse her mind, so that she practices movements and invocations bound to rain disaster down on her.

Finally she attempts the ritual, knowing that she may get one of three results. She may succeed in establishing it as a permanent, reasonably reliable method of evoking the desired effect. She may fail in such a way as to allow her to retrace her steps and re-attempt the ritual later. Or she may suffer a catastrophe which carries various immediate consequences, but also prevents her from ever successfully establishing the ritual or passing along her notes to another for completion.

Assuming the first result, the final step in finalizing a successful new ritual is to give it a suitably poetic name. The brief phrase is written on a piece of parchment and burned, so that all of creation's elementals and demons may know and fear it.

System: The player creates a ritual write-up following the format seen here or other products. The first section describes, without rules mechanics, the effect of the ritual and provides a brief description of the means required to evoke it.

Storytellers first check to see if the effect is similar to that of another Discipline or ritual. They need only worry about those listed in books to which they have access. If the effect is already known, the caster discovers this during the early stages of research and can't go forward. If the effect is not known, the Storyteller then asks himself if it conforms to the themes associated with Tremere magic. The details of the ritual should evoke the rationalistic, callous and semi-scientific Tremere

ethos. The effects to which Tremere rituals are best suited are as follows:

- The effect interferes with the natural composition of living or unliving beings, such as the Gargoyle and hybrid creature rituals listed later in this chapter.
- It offers protection from the Tremere's many enemies.
- It alters the laws of vampirism to assist in their survival.

However, the Tremere are still in their early, creative stage, and may be able to branch out into new areas if Storytellers so decide.

If the Storyteller accepts the effect, she must then assign a ritual level to it by comparing the new ritual to existing ones in terms of its usefulness to the caster and the degree of change it exerts on its target. Effects that will have only a small impact on the course of a story merit low ritual levels. Ones with the potential to abruptly change the direction of a storyline demand high levels. Similarly, effects that bring about widespread or obvious change require high ritual levels.

Although the level determines the standard difficulty of a ritual, the Storyteller can always add additional requirements to limit the use of a mighty effect. The most reliable of these is a blood point cost. Start with a cost of 1 Blood point per ritual level and adjust as needed. A Storyteller may also require the expenditure of rare or valuable items in the execution of a ritual, stipulate that it requires the help of assistants or other thaumaturges, extend the time required to cast the ritual or limit the duration of its effect. Never use the exact results of a botch as a limiting factor, even if they're especially nasty. Botches should never be predictable so that Storytellers can enjoy free rein in deviously fitting them to the circumstances at hand.

(Players can always build limitations into their description in advance, hoping to sway a Storyteller to their cause. Some Storytellers may wish to evoke the rigors of the research process by refusing to suggest limitations themselves. Instead, they'll simply reject the ritual as written and send the player back to the drawing board without specific guidance as to how to improve it.)

Once player and Storyteller have by whatever means arrived at an acceptable ritual, the character may attempt to make the ritual part of the Tremere canon, and to learn it herself. The amount of time she must expend in researching and rehearsing the ritual is as follows:

The times listed here assume that the thaumaturge spends the vast bulk of her research time on this single ritual and that her other obligations do not prevent her

Level	Time for Original Research	Time Before Another Try
One	1 Month	1 Week
Two	3 Months	1 Month
Three	1 Year	3 Months
Four	3 Years	1 Year
Five	10 Years	5 Years

Research	Successes	Performance Successes Result
0	0	The ritual has not been created. Any further attempts the thaumaturge makes to create it (or something very similar) are doomed to fail.
1+	0	The ritual has not been created. The thaumaturge can try again by spending the time listed above under "Time Before Another Try."
2+	0	The thaumaturge has successfully created a ritual she does not herself yet fully understand. After devoting the retry period to additional research, she learns the new ritual, with no further rolls required.
0	1+	The ritual has not been created. The thaumaturge can try again by spending the time listed above under "Time Before Another Try."
0	2+	The effect manifests itself, but the thaumaturge can't repeat the ritual or teach it to others. She can try again by spending the time listed above under "Time Before Another Try."
1+	1+	The ritual has been created; its effects manifest themselves.

from devoting at least 30 hours a week to research. At the end of this time, she makes two rolls. Normally the vampire may proceed with these rolls only if her dots in Rego Magica exceed the level of the ritual by at least 2. The first is an Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 5) roll; this measures her success in researching the ritual. She must then actually perform the ritual successfully; the second roll is therefore that of the ritual she wishes to create. Results vary depending on the successes scored in each roll, as per the following chart.

After successfully creating a ritual, the thaumaturge is the only one who knows it. If she wishes to share it with others, she can teach them directly, or write down detailed instructions in a book or on a scroll. Writing the ritual down makes it easier for far-distant colleagues to learn, but also creates an opportunity for rivals to pilfer a copy and wield the effect without permission. Ceoris's researchers are highly jealous of one another and never casually share the fruits of their research. They loosen their grips on their magical secrets when they wish to cement alliances, settle grievances or provide compensation for services rendered.

COMBINING EFFORTS

Thaumaturges can overcome limitations on the creation of paths or rituals by working in concert. To find the single effective Rego Magica rating of a group of researchers, subtract 1 from the Rego Magica score of each participating individual, and then add them together. Only one of the researchers may make the rolls necessary for success.

The ability to combine research efforts exerts a great influence over Ceoris politics. The research assistance of other blood magicians is a highly coveted commodity. The offer of assistance is a powerful inducement, and is often used to settle feuds or bartered for other potent favors. For example, Mendacamina once persuaded Epistatia to bring a mage she hunted back to Ceoris as a prisoner instead of killing him on the spot. She did this by promising to aid her with her latest soul migration ritual. (Mendacamina wanted to slay the fellow herself — slowly.)

CIRCUMVENTING RITUAL LEVEL LIMITATIONS

Thaumaturges can create rituals of levels higher than their Rego Magica would normally allow ratings by first researching similar but less effective rituals. In doing so, they build up to a major discovery via a process of gradual development. They may act as if their Rego Magica dots have increased by 1 for each lower-level, related ritual they have created in the past (up to a maximum number of bonus dots equal to her true Rego Magica rating).

Developmental rituals often fall into disuse after their researcher makes the desired breakthrough. For an example of a developmental ritual, see "Populating Night's Garden" (on p. 114). Goratrix, Malgorzata and Virstania developed that ritual as a step towards "At Our Command It Breathes" (see p. 116). Today only Virstania retains any interest in performing the lesser ritual.

Another example of a developmental ritual is Epistatia's "Displacement of the Pneuma" (p. 113). For years she sweated over rituals to cause a soul to migrate from its body. She has yet to achieve her ultimate end; she is now studying the Displacement of the Pneuma's effects with an eye towards the creation of a more effective fourth-level ritual.

A chantry lord has the right to order one practitioner of Rego Magica to assist another. Thaumaturges bitterly resent being forced to abandon their own projects to serve a colleague's interests, so a wise lord uses this rule sparingly.

PERDO MAGICA

Cainite Tremere continue to exist cheek-by-jowl with untamed magi, and wisely fear their abilities. They adapted the following path from Hermetic practice in order to defend themselves against mortal colleagues. When performing counter magic, the thaumaturge makes a dismissive

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gesture, as if swatting away gnats, and speaks a brief incantation. The path offers several dozen of these incantations, each of them corresponding to a force or element commonly present in magical workings. The incantation to dispel fire magic includes a reference to water, for example.

The path partially counters other types of sorcery, including necromancy and the Setite, Assamite and Koldunic practices. *Perdo Magica* does not counter non-sorcerous Disciplines, however.

Perdo Magica will prove its usefulness soon, when House Tremere is banned by the Order of Hermes, ushering in an eighty-year war against their former fellows. When the war ends, the Tremere leadership discourages the use of this path because it is also effective against Thaumaturgy. The clan's most powerful thaumaturges do not want others to know how to swat away their deadliest workings. By the time of the modern nights, the Order of Hermes will have altered its practices enough to make *Perdo Magica* ineffective, while the Tremere concentrate on undoing their internal enemies' workings. In the modern nights, it becomes Thaumaturgical Countermagic (see *Guide to the Camarilla*, p. 108).

System: The vampire may nullify the effect of any Thaumaturgic or Hermetic path or ritual, provided that his rating in *Perdo Magica* equals or exceeds the dots of the path power or the level of the ritual. The player spends one blood point and rolls a number of dice equal to twice the character's *Perdo Magica* rating (difficulty equal to that of the effect being nullified). Each success he rolls cancels out a success scored by the opposing magician. When countering paths and rituals which are neither Thaumaturgic nor Hermetic, the vampire's *Perdo Magica* die pool is halved.

THAUMATURGIC RITUALS

Ceoris is currently the center of Tremere learning. In the emerging art of thaumaturgic blood magic, it is the first university. As such, it is home to a variety of unique and new rituals, many of which are unknown beyond its walls. Unless otherwise indicated, all rituals require the standard Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 4 + level of the ritual) roll. The default time to cast a ritual is five minutes per level.

LEVEL ONE RITUALS THE CARRION FLY DELAYED

This ritual allows for the preservation of body parts from living (or unliving) beings so that they can be used in rituals demanding fresh fleshy components long after being hewn from their original owners. The caster must make a series of incantations before vivisectioning the living victim. He conducts the vivisection and then passes the desired parts through smoke from a censer burning alchemical salts.

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Creative vampires may devise other uses for the ritual. For example, it is more disheartening to the kin of one's enemy to drop a fresh-looking head in his lap than to deliver a mere skull. It is also useful in the formation of alibis; by the time discoverers find a body treated in this way, the caster may have traveled many leagues away, leaving a corpse that looks fresh-killed. This ritual can also preserve blood for later consumption.

System: Simple success preserves five blood points or 100 pounds of meat from a single specimen for up to a week. Players can spend additional successes to extend the preservation time (one week per success) or the amount preserved (five blood point/100 pounds per success).

Historical Note: The advent of refrigeration makes this ritual a relic of the past.

NOW ITS SIGHT IS OURS

This ritual creates a scrying device which can be used to observe enemies and events from safety; Paul Cordwood devised it for his use and that of his spies. The ritual requires a three-inch, golden pin, a length of wire, a small golden claw cast in the shape of a rooster's foot, some of the caster's vitae, and a human victim with at least one healthy eye. As the ritual begins, the victim is on her knees, bound, gagged and blindfolded. The ritualist (or an assistant; usually two helpers are required to restrain the victim during the stage to follow) removes the victim's blindfold and shines a bright light into his face. Using a caliper, the vampire plucks out the desired eye, taking care not to unduly damage it. While assistants remove the victim, the ritualist speaks a series of incantations and pierces the eye with the pin. He attaches the pin to the wire and the wire to the claw, draws the eye through the smoke of several censers as a preservative measure and then dips it in a pool of his own vitae that rests in a golden bowl inscribed with the image of Thoth, Egyptian god of knowledge. The vitae is then drawn off, placed in a solution of preservative salts and essences and saved.

The device can now be placed in any location the vampire wishes to survey from a distance. The claw is used to secure it to a surface. Needless to say, it must be well-hidden from observant targets.

To see through the eye of the device, the user (who must be a vampire, but needn't be the original ritualist) ingests the vitae potion. The device takes over his visual perceptions; instead of what stands before him, he sees what the device sees.

System: The ritualist must spend at least 3 blood points in making the vitae potion but is not limited to that quantity. Each point yields four doses of the potion.

Using the device requires no roll, unless the user is fed the prepared blood unwillingly. In that case she may roll Willpower against a difficulty of 9 to resist the vision. The image flooding the user's vision is flat; a single eye yields no perception of depth. It is purely visual, conveying no sounds, smells or other sensory information. The user may vary the duration of the vision by altering the quantity of

the vitae potion she drinks. It lasts for ten minutes for every dose consumed. The potion does not also nourish the drinker; it can't be used to increase her blood pool.

The eye remains potent until destroyed but is useless without the correct potion of blood. The original thaumaturge, and only the original thaumaturge, can perform a new ritual using an existing eye (and no new victims) to gain further doses of blood. Each time this is done to a single eye, the ritual difficulty rises by 2.

LEVEL TWO RITUALS

DUST OF REMEMBRANCE

Curaferum devised this ritual to alert him to signs of disorder in his chantry. To perform it, the thaumaturge severs one of her fingers, allowing it to crumble to corpse-dust as he grows a new one. She combines the dust with myrrh, wine dregs, silver powder and salt extracted from the tears of a child, allows the mixture to dry and then performs a series of incantations. The result is several drams of whitish powder. The thaumaturge sprinkles the powder on an object of interest to her. If the object is moved while she is not in its presence, the thaumaturge feels a sharp pain in her regrown finger.

The castellan uses this strategically by placing dust on certain doors to know when unwanted intrusions occur. He also sometimes makes petty use of it. He might place the dust in linen closets to catch out the mortal servants, or on a tapestry depicting Etrius, to see who has been splattering it with paint.

System: The ritualist may sprinkle the dust on up to twenty objects during the ritual. She can tell which of them is being interfered if the player passes an Intelligence + Occult roll. The connection with prepared objects lasts for one lunar month per success on the ritual roll.

MEMBRANOUS APPROPRIATION

The raw material for this ritual is the reconstituted skin that appears in the ritualist's alchemical apparatus after a Cainite is attacked by skin eaters (see p. 123). Unlike other rituals using this material, the thaumaturge must take care that the skin derives only from a single individual. The ritualist kneads the skin like bread dough, then cooks it in an oven heated not by flame, but by distillate of *vis* (see p. 129). She removes it from the alchemical oven partway through the cooking process and then sculpts it into either a right hand or a mask-like visage. She returns it to the oven, periodically basting it with alum, pine resin and powdered serpent scales.

System: When the ritual is complete, the thaumaturge possesses an object with a link to the individual whose skin she used. It may be a disembodied hand or a mask. If the victim is conscious, either item will begin to pulse and twitch and within moments begin to reproduce the subject's movements as he makes them. Distance between victim and item proves no impediment.

The item must be properly displayed to allow the movements of the hand or face to be clearly seen. A hand is placed on the end of a series of copper rods, constructed to provide an arm's range of movement, a mask in a rounded metal frame. The viewer may then deduce the current activities of the victim from the articulations of the hand or the expressions of the face. If the victim writes something, a pen may be placed in the hand to provide an indistinguishable facsimile of the document. The mask boasts a well-formed mouth, lips and tongue, and reproduces all sounds made by the victim. (A touch of an agate-tipped wand induces it to silence, if the user so desires. Two quick touches gets it talking again.) Once created, the ritualist may give it to someone else with instructions for care.

The ritualist may at any time sever the connection between victim and item. In the case of the mask it is sometimes useful to do this. The mask retains its articulation, and can be worn on the face to disguise oneself as the victim. When used in this way, the mask moves to conform to the wearer's facial manipulations. Although the false face seems real and is difficult to distinguish from that of the victim, it confers to the user no additional ability to mimic his characteristic expressions. The ritualist cannot reestablish a severed connection.

The skin that makes up the item is in some sense alive and must be kept that way. The user nourishes the hand by bathing it in a blood and water solution once a week. The solution requires 3 blood points to make.

IT STEALS YOUR WHISPERS

The ritualist creates a device with which he can hear sounds over a great distance. Also designed by Paul Cordwood, it is similar to the ritual *Now Its Sight Is Ours* (p. 110), with the following exceptions: The body part taken from the human victim is an ear; the ritualist must saw it off with a small, silver saw, on the handle of which appears an image of Hades, Greek god of the underworld. The ear is dipped in the vampire's vitae, which is then drawn off into an elixir. The ritualist coats the surface of a copper horn with the vapor.

System: Assuming a successful ritual, the vampire has created an item which can then be secretly placed in a location of interest. It captures any sound within human earshot of it, sending it to the copper horn. Anyone drinking a portion of the elixir hears the captured sounds. The ritualist player must spend at least three blood points, but may spend more. For every point spent, the ritual creates one dose of elixir.

The duration of the remote hearing depends on the amount of elixir the user takes: the effect spans 10 minutes for every dose consumed. During this time he is unable to hear sounds emanating from the area around him. The elixir is not nourishing; the drinker's blood pool does not increase. The magic disregards distance or obstacles between ear and horn. The device does not clarify muffled sounds or translate languages unknown to the listener.

Like an eye in Cordwood's other ritual, the ear remains potent until destroyed, but is useless without the

correct potion of blood. The original thaumaturge, and only the original thaumaturge, can perform a new ritual using an existing ear (and no new victims) to gain further does of blood. Each time this is done with a single ear raises the ritual difficulty by 2.

YOUR FATE SHALL BE KNOWN

The thaumaturge exchanges blood with a willing participant who may be either a Cainite or ghoul. The thaumaturge then uses a small golden needle to penetrate one of the subject's eyes and withdraw a small amount of vitreous humor, the jelly-like substance that fills the eyeball. She takes an agate or other semi-precious stone and rubs the humor onto it. Over the course of a week, the gem is passed through a series of alchemical vapors. A human-like skin forms around the gem during this process. When it is complete, the skin splits in two, revealing that the gem has become an eye.

Paul Cordwood designed the ritual to keep track of his spy network. He keeps the eyes on a pendant which he wears beneath his tunic. Virstania also uses the ritual to know the fates of favored Gargoyles. She's attached the eyes to a silver crown, which she sometimes wears in her laboratories.

System: Performing the ritual (whether successful or not) causes one level of lethal damage to the concerned vampire or ghoul. A botch may result in additional levels of damage or blindness at the Storyteller's discretion,

although the regenerative abilities of vampires mean such an affliction is often temporary.

Assuming a successful ritual, the eye stays open so long as the subject avoids Final Death. If the subject goes into torpor, the lids of the eyes close shut. They open again when he awakens. If the subject meets Final Death, the eye crumbles into dust. The eye therefore serves as an indicator of the user's general fate.

LEVEL THREE RITUALS

CRUCIBLE OF SYMPATHETIC AGONY

Mendacamina, Ceoris's chief torturer, performs much of her ministrations using perfectly mundane and effective techniques. She has, however, bent her thaumaturgic talents to pushing back the frontiers of pain and persuasion. Crucible of Sympathetic Agony disassociates the torture victim's body from his pain, hence getting around many mental strongholds. It is ideally suited to creating obedience but does have other uses.

Two victims are placed together on a long iron-shod bed so that their feet touch. The ritualist sews the soles of their feet together. If the victims are capable of orgasm, assistants work to stimulate each, with the object of bringing them to ecstasy at the same moment. If the ritualist has a Cainite collaborator, the two of them simultaneously feed from the subjects when climax comes, so as to intensify the effect. Then the thaumaturge begins



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to torture one subject with implements that have been bathed in alchemical salts and vapors.

The second subject feels all of the agony suffered by the first, but remains physically unharmed. The suffering of the first subject batters down any resistance he could otherwise muster against cracking under torture. If the first victim is slain, the second feels what it is like to die.

System: If the thaumaturge is using the ritual as a simple aid to torture, successes on the player's ritual roll add to his dice pool for a subsequent torture or interrogation roll. If the ritual is used to create simple obedience, however, the ritual roll itself is opposed by a Willpower roll from the victim's player. If the ritualist obtains any net successes, the victim agrees to carry out whatever instructions the thaumaturge issues to him, short of killing himself outright. If the thaumaturge's successes exceed the victim's by two or more, she can, at will, re-evolve the pain experienced by the victim during the height of the ritual, provided she can make eye contact with him.

If the thaumaturge's orders place the victim in immediate mortal danger, the Storyteller may allow a second Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to resist the commands until the danger passes. A victim under orders has a broken will and although not in a trance per se, appears listless and spent.

DISPLACEMENT OF THE PNECIMA

A prisoner is suspended inside a frame of copper tubing, secured to it by an elaborate system of leather belts and iron chains. Clamps are placed on the victim's eyelids, forcing them open. Copper clips are clamped onto incisions in the victim's neck, over his heart, kidney and stomach, on his genitals and inside his rectum. Alchemical vapors are wafted onto him, with the aid of a bellows. If the victim passes out from pain or terror, the ritual must be suspended until he recovers consciousness.

An animal, such as a goat or ewe, is led into the room. It is placed in a cage and also incised at various critical points of its anatomy, and clips attached. The clips connect to cat-gut strings, which all lead to a simmering vat. The thaumaturge performs incantations to draw the energies of extra-worldly beings into the vat. She ritually "slays" the prisoner by drawing a dull blade across his throat. The blade is hollow and contains a quantity of her own blood; a lever on the trick blade releases the blood, which gushes down onto the victim's chest. The ritual works best if the victim is unaware of the trickery and momentarily believes he's seeing his own throat being slashed.

At this moment, the thaumaturge shouts a word of power into the victim's ear, as loudly as she can. If successful, she shocks the victim's soul out of his body. It travels through the clips, along the cat-gut, into the vat and then out into the body of the animal.

System: One success means that the victim's soul has been separated from the body, but has not traveled into the animal. The victim might as well have been murdered by mundane means. There is no known way to

return the soul to the body, although it may linger as a ghost at the Storyteller's discretion.

Two successes indicate that the soul has indeed traveled into the animal, but cannot be returned. The victim lives the rest of the animal's lifespan trapped in its body. It lacks the animal's instincts and may be ill-equipped to survive. A semblance of the victim's intellect, shorn of memory, desire or willpower, remains in the human body. The soulless being is suggestible and follows instructions given by the thaumaturge, but only if they do not require interpretation. It continues to follow the instructions when out of the ritualist's presence, but only for a few minutes. After it realizes that the thaumaturge is no longer present, it simply stops. It either remains standing or curls up on the ground in the fetal position. Without volition, it doesn't even seek its own basic survival and will die of thirst if not ordered to drink.

Three successes allows the thaumaturge to return the victim's soul to his body at the ritual's conclusion. The victim retains no memory of the time his soul spent outside his body. Four successes not only allow the soul's return to its body, but permit the victim to report sensations he experienced both in the animal's body and during the transmigration. In each of the latter two cases, the soul remains transgressed for approximately two hours, less ten minutes for each point of the victim's Willpower. The victim's player can nullify the effect entirely by spending Willpower points in excess of the ritualist's dots in Thaumaturgy.

Note: This ritual is a work in progress, the most coherent expression so far of Epistatia's researches into soul migration. She considers it successful if she is able to glean memories and impressions from the victim afterward. She keeps careful notes of these extra-bodily sensations, hoping she will one day be able to use them to design a more complete ritual. Her ultimate aim is to be able to possess a victim's body at will, with no permanent harm to either soul. She continues these investigations out of curiosity, even though the house has found a different replacement for Hermetic immortality. She does not know where they will lead, but is sure that there is power in them.

ICHOR OF THE HEXAPED

The hexaped is an unusual form of Gargoyle that tracks its victims and, when it confronts them, coats them in a substance establishing a psychic link between victim and hexaped (see p. 124). In order to make use of the link, the vampire uses this ritual to crush the juice from the hexaped's body for distillation. The hexaped, which must be conscious during the ritual, is lowered into a gigantic, man-sized press. Although less intelligent than other Gargoyles, the hexaped generally realizes what is about to happen and fights to free itself from whatever restraints its captors have put on it. If it does escape, it certainly attacks its tormentors. If it does not, the bearers lower it into the press and then struggle to place heavy planks over its top, preventing the hexaped from springing out. Then, as the vampire chants and draws a series of arcane sigils in the air, the assistants begin to turn

the large wheel that controls the vise-like press. The hexaped squirms on the wire mesh flooring of the press. As the two halves of the vise squeeze the life out of it, its blood and other juices drip down through the mesh and collect in a copper trough below. The sludgy mass drips from there into a silver bucket. When no more ichor can be pressed from the beast, the vampire takes the full pail back to his laboratory, where he mixes it with myrrh, copper powder, wine dregs and some of his own vitae. He then pours it into a shallow silver bowl about three feet in diameter. After another round of chanting, accompanied by the burning of six kinds of incense, an image appears in the greenish-red liquid in the bowl. When looking into the bowl, the thaumaturge can now see a blurry representation of what the hexaped's victim sees. If he leans forward and concentrates a bit, he can hear the victim's surface thoughts like a quiet voice in the back of his own head.

Epistatia is responsible for the creation of the hexaped. She made it for Paul Cordwood, to show the inefficacy of his own petty rituals. Though at first both annoyed and appalled by her gesture, he has since had occasion to usefully employ them. Like the simulacra (see p. 126), he finds them as useful for their demoralizing effect on those unlucky enough to behold them as for any information they might gather for him.

System: One success allows watchers to see what the victim sees; two are required to hear his thoughts. Unless the vampire got three or more successes, the victim experiences a haunting sense of surveillance whenever the thaumaturge looks into the bowl. The liquid must be refreshed with a point of the thaumaturge's blood every week. If not, it congeals into a clotted mass and no longer receives images.

Historical Note: The Tremere's use of hexapeds largely comes to an end when they join the Camarilla and accept the terms of the Masquerade.

POPULATE NIGHT'S GARDENS

With this ritual, the vampire creates a hybrid creature from animals of two or more different types. Virstania, Malgorzata and Goratrix established it as a prelude to the Gargoyle project with some assistance supplied by Epistatia. Only Virstania continues as an enthusiastic user of the ritual, the results of which she seems to enjoy for their own sake. The others find her obsession with the hybrids gratuitously morbid and are glad to put behind them their memories of its creation.

System: The ritual takes place in stages. The vampire can leave as much time as she wishes between stages. The player must succeed at each stage before the vampire can proceed to the next; failure at any stage does not invalidate previous successes, however.

• **Stage One: Vivisection.** The vampire vivisects at least three living specimens of each animal type to be hybridized. She draws exacting diagrams of the creatures' anatomies, naming the parts. The process takes two full nights of work, after which the player rolls Dexterity + Medicine (difficulty 5).

• **Stage Two: Finding of Correspondences.** The vampire identifies the qualities she wishes to invest into the new creature. She consults scholarly texts concerning the natural world. She takes preserved parts of the creatures vivisectioned during the first stage and bathes them in alchemical substances. Through these means, she determines which parts of the creature house the qualities she seeks. For example, she may wish to create a centipede with the tracking instincts of a bloodhound. She may surmise that the instincts are resident in the bloodhound's snout, but must confirm this by subjecting a snout to alchemical testing. When she is satisfied that she has located the correct body parts, she proceeds. This process takes roughly two nights of research after which the thaumaturge rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6).

• **Stage Three: Constructing the Fetal Entity.** She then takes a living specimen of each creature to be used and vivisectioned it. She puts aside the vivisectioned parts identified during the finding of correspondences, as well as any required to give the animal its desired anatomy. (If she wants a centipede with the head of an owl, she must have an owl's head and centipede's body.) She places these in a sac made from the uterus of a cow, sheep or other large animal. She then places them in a gestation chamber. This may be a barrel filled with a uterine solution created by alchemy. More powerfully, it might be the womb of a creature created by a previous casting of this ritual to serve as a birthing device for further horrors. (The creature in Virstania's Birthing Annex, p. 67, provides an example of this technique.) This takes a few hours of work, after which the player rolls Dexterity + Medicine (difficulty 6).

• **Stage Four: Donning the Creator's Mantle.** Using an astrological ephemeris, the vampire calculates the amount of time required for gestation. When the creature is ready to be born, she opens the gestation barrel or makes an incision in the birthing beast's belly. She pulls the newborn creature loose and breathes the smoke of burned blood salts on it with a bellows. The vampire must now exercise great caution, as the new creature may immediately attack, especially if it was bred for viciousness. The minimum duration of gestation is at the Storyteller's discretion, and the player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7). The use of a living womb during stage three lowers the difficulty of stage four to 5.

The amount of blood used during the final stage depends on the new creature's desired game statistics. The player must spend 3 blood points for each dot of Strength, Dexterity, Stamina or Perception and 9 blood points for each dot of Charisma, Manipulation, Intelligence or Wits, which animals generally do not possess. Alertness, Brawl, Dodge, Intimidation, Stealth and Survival also cost 3 points per dot. Animals imbued with Intelligence may, at the Storyteller's discretion, use other Abilities, at a cost of 5 per point. Every point of damage done by creature when it attacks costs 1 blood point. Infrequently-used attacks may cost only half a blood point per point of damage. The Storyteller may levy additional blood costs for special

attacks or abilities, such as poisonous bites, petrifying gazes, unusual senses or exotic methods of locomotion.

The final stage of the ritual may take place over a long period of time, allowing the ritualist to store up the needed blood. It is also possible to collaborate with others, drawing blood from apprentices. Virstania's Gargoyles are worshipfully ready to assist her whenever she calls on them for blood.

The ritual creates short-lived creatures; they die after a number of days equal to the blood spent on the final stage. Neither does the ritual grant the caster any control over the creature. However, both problems can be solved if the vampire chooses to ghoull its creation, which grants the standard advantages of longevity and obedience.

The creatures are infertile, but the caster can attempt an additional Intellect + Occult roll (difficulty 8) at the conclusion of Donning the Creator's Mantle. If successful, the creature is fertile and may be bred with another specimen of its exact type. (Ghoul creatures lose whatever fertility they once had.) Breeding the creatures requires an Intelligence + Animal Ken (difficulty 7) roll. It takes up to five days before the success of the attempt is determined. One specimen is born for each success. Bred specimens are of a random sex, usually fertile and enjoy lifespans about thirty times longer than their created parents. Subsequent generations maintain the fertility and longevity of their parents.

Historical Note: When Virstania leaves the Tremere, the ritual is forgotten. Although copies of it still exist in Vienna chantry and a few other chantries, modern Cainites would hesitate before risking the Masquerade with large-scale production of hideous hybrid beasts.

QUICKSILVER EEL

By mixing various alchemical substances in his laboratory, the thaumaturge creates a device which can burrow into the flesh of a mage and steal his will. The ritual produces a writhing ball of quicksilver about the size of a man's fist. It must be placed in a non-porous container for transport. A glass flask with a stopper works best.

When the user (who need not be its creator) finds himself in the presence of a mortal mage, he releases the device from its container. (In a combat situation, he might lob the glass flask to smash at his enemy's feet.) When released, the device comes to a semblance of life, resembling a silvery liquid tadpole with a face full of dagger-like teeth. The device launches itself at the closest magician, burrowing through clothes or shoe leather into his flesh. It then works its way up the victim's skeletal structure from within, riding up the spinal column into the brain. From there it begins to devour the victim's will and with it his ability to wield magic.

This ritual was devised by Epistatia for use in weakening or even destroying the mortal mages she must sometimes hunt down. She finds this manifestation of her creativity endlessly fascinating. She sometimes sits by a victim's side as the device takes its toll on him, verbally taunting him as his willpower flickers away like the wick of a dying candle.

System: If there are no magicians (characters with dots in any path of hedge wizardry or other supernatural powers) within a hundred feet of the quicksilver eel when freed, it beelines in a random direction until it finds one or loses its potency. The device remains potent for a number of days equal to twice the successes of the player's role to invoke the ritual. The eel harms the magician by devouring his individual will, thought by hermetic magi to be the seat of all magical power. The victim suffers no wounds when the eel burrows into him, although he can certainly feel it swimming up through his flesh and sinew. For each day it remains installed in the target's brain, it permanently lowers the magician's Willpower by one. Any path, numina or other mortal supernatural Trait rated equal or higher than the character's Willpower is also reduced by one at the time.

If the victim's Willpower drops to 0 while the quicksilver eel is still active, he rolls Stamina. Failure means instantaneous death, as the tissues of his brain dry up and crumble to dust. One or more success allows him to linger as a mindless, drooling husk of his former self.

If the eel survives its victim, it may be extracted from the body. If distilled down, it provides 2 points of vis for every point of Willpower it devoured. The type of vis matches that most often used by the victim.

LEVEL FOUR RITUALS

THE BRONZE HEAD SPEAKS

Mendacamina devised this ritual to counteract a vexing limitation of the Auspex Discipline. While the Steal Secrets power makes it possible to experience the surface thoughts of a victim, the results are often a series of annoying visual images. When seeking the plans and secrets of the enemy, the Tremere require precision. When they ask a prisoner where the nearest Tzimisce haven is, they want an exact description, not a cloudy vision of a babbling brook and a moonlit bridge. This ritual permits the desired exactitude, at least when the subject is a bound and helpless prisoner headed for vivisection on Virstania's lab tables.

As assistants chant an elegy to lost souls, warning them that another doomed one is about to join them, the ritualist rubs the victim's head in an alchemical salve that saps the will, melts off interfering hair, and softens the skull. She then takes a flexible bronze tube (a cannula) with a sharpened end (a trocar) and jabs it through the prisoner's right temple and on into his brain. The tube is attached to a manually-operated pump. Assistants turn the pump's crank wheel throughout the rest of the process, drawing the victim's pulped brain matter through the tubing to a large bronze head. The head is expensive to produce and must be made by master craftsmen. It stands about two feet high and has an articulated jaw for speech. Its eyes are balls of ivory suspended in small, liquid-filled crystals; these bobble around whenever the victim suffers a jolt of pain or pang of regret from the secrets it hears revealed.

Once the head sputters to its semblance of life, the ritualist may ask it questions. The head's knowledge is restricted to the memories of the victim, but the unwillingness or failing memory of the prisoner poses no impediment to the head. The head can dredge down into his mind to free up long-buried remembrances of his pre-Cainite life or even memories suppressed by magical means. The further a memory from the victim's conscious understanding, the longer the head must take to scoop it out.

The head does not speak with the voice of the victim; instead it has a rudimentary persona of its own. The head at Ceoris, dubbed Paracelsus, behaves obsequiously, asking after Mendacamina's health and taking every opportunity to praise the perspicacity that led her to construct him. He may also make grim jokes at the victim's expense or volunteer humiliating information about him. ("This one was very sinful with his sister when he was ordinary flesh. I'm sad to say.") When having a hard time finding an answer to a question, it might exhort the assistants to pump harder or warn Mendacamina that the victim's now-spongy brain is unlikely to hold out much longer. Mendacamina is not always amused by his banter and may order him to silence himself, which he does.

No two heads have exactly the same personality, though all are in some way chillingly disregarding of the victim's suffering.

System: The thaumaturge's player rolls Intelligence + Occult (as normal), opposed by the victim's Stamina + Fortitude (difficulty 9). Each net success provides the thaumaturge with one immediately useful piece of information. The exact content is up to the Storyteller.

A mortal, or a ghoul without Fortitude, cannot survive the process of having her brain pulped. Vampires, especially those with Fortitude (and ghouls with that Discipline), have a chance of surviving because of their inhuman regenerative abilities. The player rolls Stamina + Fortitude (difficulty 9) and requires three successes for the character to survive and end the torture session in torpor. Five successes leave the character incapacitated instead. Ghouls cannot enter torpor and so need five successes even to survive.

A vampire killed by the ritual can be vivisected for the purpose of using him as raw material for a Gargoyle, provided that his pieces can be used right away or magically preserved.

Historical Note: Although Paracelsus is destroyed with Ceoris in 1476, the ritual survived, and several major Tremere chantries built new bronze heads when they found themselves at war with enemies. The ritual is still in use today, its intrusive capabilities hardly eclipsed by lie detectors or truth serums.

FURTIVE INTEGUMENT

The thaumaturge creates one specimen of a quasi-Gargoyle called a velluma (see p. 127). The ritual takes place in two steps. First, the magician consecrates a series of glass flasks and beakers by seeking the blessing of a flesh

elemental. Then she sends a swarm of the tiny, manufactured insects called skin eaters (see p. 127) out to dine on a victim. When they do, much of the victim's skin appears in the glass apparatus. The thaumaturge now has the raw materials to create a velluma. She flattens the skin with a hot iron, taking care not to scorch it. Then she stretches it out onto a wire frame whose shape mimics the outline of the human body. She summons spirits of illusion called phantasms and induces one to enter the flattened sheet of skin, which it then animates.

This ritual was devised by Virstania in a convoluted attempt to make further use of a previous creation, the skin eaters. She presented the first velluma as a gift to Paul Cordwood in a gesture of peace required when one of her favored Gargoyles broke the neck of one of his apprentices. Though at first skeptical of the things' utility, Cordwood now encourages her to create them for him. She doles them out generously, hoping to secure Cordwood's support when she one day petitions Etrius and Tremere to extend greater rights to her Gargoyles.

System: The player rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 6) for the ritualist to make a form suitable for animation, and then Charisma + Occult (difficulty 6) for her to lure a phantasm. The velluma lives for six months per success in the latter roll. Because much blood is spilled by the victim of the skin eaters, the ritualist need not supply any of her own.

Historical Note: Virstania takes her notes on the manufacture of vellumae with her when she leaves Ceoris. Modern Tremere do not know the ritual.

LEVEL FIVE RITUALS

AT OUR COMMAND IT BREATHES

This ritual permits the creation of a Gargoyle from the dismembered parts of slain Cainites and is the process through which the first of that line came into being. The vampire (with assistants, if desired) takes fresh-cut portions from the bodies of various victims and sews them together into a single humanoid form. She then sews a sac made from an animal's womb (usually from a cow but sometimes sheep or deer) around her creation. The sac is then suspended in a cask containing an alchemical equivalent of the womb's waters or placed inside an oversized, specially prepared female Gargoyle for gestation. During a period ranging from one to three months, the thaumaturge must periodically visit the gestating Gargoyle and perform various incantations and blessings. If she is away from the gestation chamber for more than a week at a time, the fetal Gargoyle dies and cannot be revived. Finally the Gargoyle either forces its way down the living mother's birth canal or bursts forth from its cask. The ritualist must be present to waft purifying smoke onto the newborn Gargoyle. Any other Gargoyles within half a mile instinctively sense the impending birth of a new brother. They feel a powerful urge to flock to its side when it is born and lick the bodily fluids off its skin. Although this custom helps bond the

HOUSE OF TREMERE

Gargoyle to its new community, it is not a requisite of the ritual. A Gargoyle can be born in isolation.

System: The thaumaturge sews together pieces of Cainites in order to form a full humanoid shape and to grant various capabilities to the new Gargoyle. The correspondence of parts to capabilities is laid out in a variety of ancient and arcane medical texts (for example, the heart provides courage and resolve, the eyes perception and wisdom) but also depends on specific alchemical preparations. Physical beauty is beyond the ritual's capabilities, though. All Gargoyles appear stony and twisted.

The thaumaturge makes the ritual roll as the fetal sac is put into gestation. The roll is Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 9 + one for each donor after the first). An unliving womb (such as that of Alvusia, see p. 67) reduces the difficulty by 4. A single success allows the creation of a Gargoyle character built according to the standard character creation rules (see *Book of Storyteller Secrets*). The basic blood cost of the ritual is 5 points for each Cainite used in the Gargoyle's manufacture. Add an extra 5 points if the caster wants the Gargoyle to be fertile.

By devoting further years of research to the Gargoyle arts, the thaumaturge may devise and construct variant types like the hexaped, iecur or womb-bearers like Alvusia (see pages 124, 125 and 67 for descriptions).

Historical Note: The Tremere cease making Gargoyles after the Slaves revolt, and, as part of the Camarilla negotiations, promise never to revive the technique. The instructions for the ritual have been hidden, but not destroyed. Some suspect that the Gargoyle Fidus occasionally makes use of them.

MALIGN HUMORS

Over the years, Virstania, Malgorzata and Goratrix have devised a series of rituals allowing them to formulate magical humors. All of these temporarily enhance the capabilities of Gargoyles, but exact a toll later on.

Because these rather workaday rituals are low on drama and visual interest, Storytellers should gloss over the actual process of manufacture. Each ritual requires its own list of exotic ingredients, the exact nature of which is left up to the Storyteller. The ingredients correspond with the nature of the humor. For example, Serpent's Cruel Milk, a humor that grants the user a poisonous bite, might require a live, poisonous snake, along with other toxins.

The user can't just quaff a humor as he would a tankard of ale. He must submit to a transfusion procedure in which considerable quantities of his vitae are drained out with the aid of a large mechanical device. The vitae is admixed with the humor, then transfused back into a captive victim, who may be a human, Cainite or large animal. (Humors using the blood of Lupines or magi, whose blood has unusual qualities, are likely to carry side-effects both unexpected and unpleasant.) The Gargoyle then feeds on this temporary receptacle, drinking his own lost blood, some of the

victim's and the humor. The entire process takes at least six hours. Receptacles lose three health levels. They may also suffer other ill-effects related to the nature of the humor, especially if used repeatedly for this purpose. (Those who serve as a receptacle for three times are subject to the blood oath.) The substance remains dormant in the user's system until he wishes to make use of its power. Then he speaks a brief incantation which activates its inherent magic.

Unless otherwise noted, only the player of the ritualist who created the humor need make a roll. He makes the standard Intelligence + Occult roll against a difficulty equal to 4 + level. A single success indicates that the vampire has successfully prepared the humor and infused it into the Gargoyle through the receptacle. The Gargoyle's player need not make a roll; unless otherwise noted, activation is automatic as long as the Gargoyle can speak the proper incantation.

Humors exist in what Malgorzata euphemistically calls "a stage prior to perfection." In other words, their often impressive effects come at a great risk of serious harm to their users. These drawbacks were built into the rituals in accordance to the Law of Equilibrium, a Hermetic principle which holds that any magical action is somewhere opposed by a counter-action. By accepting the ill-effects of the countervailing force, one can work stronger magic. Humors are typically used only on Gargoyles, however, and Virstania wants to make them safer to protect her charges. This would entail creating new, more advanced rituals of formulation based on the current ones. The other thaumaturges, indifferent to Gargoyle suffering, have moved on to other concerns.

Although the Gargoyle creators have gone to no great effort to hide the existence of the humors, not all of Ceoris's residents know of their existence. Those who do believe that they work only on Gargoyles. In fact, they'd work perfectly well for other Cainites, too. However, Goratrix decided to shield other Tremere from the temptation of using the dangerous substances—for the moment, at least. No doubt there are circumstances sufficiently alarming to prompt him, Malgorzata or Virstania to set aside any scruples they harbor, especially if the recipient is a neonate, clan outsider or other low-ranking dupe.

LEVEL ONE HUMORS

ADMIXTURE OF JUST ACQUIESCENCE

This is not a humor unto itself, but a substance mixed into another humor to ensure that the recipient follows the commands of the ritualist supplying him. The ritualist instructs the recipient in the details of his mission as he feeds on the receptacle. If, at any point during the admixture's duration, the Gargoyle wishes to directly contravene the ritualist's commands, the player must make a Self-Control or Instinct roll against a difficulty equal to the ritualist's Willpower. If he fails, the Gargoyle loses 1 blood point per turn until he once again acts in accordance with his instructions. Nothing prevents the user from acting against the spirit of the instructions. As long as he can make a

reasonable, literal interpretation that suits his purposes, he remains safe from its punishing effects.

Duration: One night per point in ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: In some cases, the need to obey the letter of the ritualist's instructions may prevent the user from taking a necessary course of action, either to save his life or successfully complete his task. The admixture's creators eliminated any risks the Law of Equilibrium might have posed to themselves as beneficiaries of this magic.

Note: The Admixture of Just Acquiescence was devised by Goratrix and is sometimes used by Malgorzata. Virstania considers herself sufficiently well-loved by her brood as to render unnecessary such coarse coercion.

LEVEL TWO HUMORS

ALE OF TRUE REMEMBRANCE

By activating this humor as she commences to devour the brain of a Cainite victim, the user gains his memories. Upon completing her feast, she must roll Willpower (difficulty 6); for each success she gains one decade's worth of memories, starting at the present and moving backwards in time. She cannot gain memories lost to the victim himself. She can recall to mind what the victim was seeing, hearing, feeling and thinking at a specific time. The memories most accessible to her are those of dramatic events causing an emotional response in the victim. Moments of calm contemplation, such as the memorization of a book, are harder to reach. Conjuring up a specific memory requires the player to make an Intelligence roll against a difficulty set by the Storyteller. Dramatic events impose a difficulty of 4 or even lower, while precise academic details impose a difficulty of 8 or higher.

Duration: Access to the memories lasts for one hour for each point of the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: The memories of another are not a simple thing to meddle with; they can root themselves in the user's consciousness, taking on a life of their own. When the duration expires, the Storyteller makes a secret Road roll (difficulty 8) on the player's behalf. If she fails, the victim's memories arise to the Gargoyle's mind unbidden. These overwhelmingly emotional memories occur when the user can least afford disquieting distractions, and may increase the difficulties of a wide variety of rolls. They might even provoke frenzy or Röttschreck. The Gargoyle suffers a number of separate flashbacks equal to the victim's Willpower.

DRAUGHT OF MOLTEN FURY

The user not only ignores the debilitating effects of wounds during the heat of combat, but uses his pain to fuel mighty blows against his attackers. After the Gargoyle activates the humor's power, his player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) each time he loses a health level in combat. If successful, the player ignores any new dice pool penalty and instead gains that same number of dice for the purpose of his damage rolls. For example, if a

Gargoyle goes from Mauled to Crippled, the player would normally lose three dice, taking him from -2 dice to -5. If he succeeds at his roll, he ignores the loss, and instead may apply an additional three damage dice. This pertains even if he already succeeded at his previous Willpower rolls and does not suffer an actual penalty. He may apply his dice bonuses from Draught of Molten Fury regardless of any other limitations on the number of dice he may roll. If the Gargoyle reaches Incapacitated or below he still falls unconscious, enters torpor or is destroyed, as appropriate.

Duration: A number of turns equal to the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: The humor only defers the effects of injuries, which the exertions of the user worsen. When the humor's duration expires, all accumulated penalties apply. The player must also soak against a number of dice equal to the total damage bonus he enjoyed thanks to the humor.

POTIO MARTYRIUM

The user may cause his own body to explode in a terrible eruption of flaming flesh. He is immediately destroyed and anyone within three feet of him suffers as if exposed to an intense bonfire. Witnesses further away may be hit by chunks of the user's burning meat, propelled as far as thirty feet away. (The bystanders' players should roll Wits + Dodge against a difficulty of 6 to avoid the chunks.) Thus, the Potio Martyrium provides an ideal weapon for use in suicide attacks. Although it is possible to force a victim to drink the potion, or trick him into doing so, it is the user who must activate its power by wishing for death. It remains in the user's system for an indefinite time. Thus it is possible to unknowingly drink of it and, decades later, explode after feeling a momentary urge towards suicide.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Dire Consequences: As noted above.

Note: The Potio Martyrium was devised by Malgorzata. Virstania fights against its use whenever the other Tremere propose it, but is sometimes overruled.

THE SERPENT'S CRUEL MILK

As the user feeds, he replaces the blood he takes with a corrosive poison which takes a lethal toll on his victim. The victim's player rolls Stamina (or Stamina + Fortitude, if available) against a difficulty equal to the original ritualist's Willpower. Victims who fail suffer one non-aggravated wound per night until they die or go into torpor, or the poison loses its effectiveness. A mortal victim who becomes incapacitated by the poison may be kept from slipping over the brink of death by a daily Medicine roll (difficulty 8, two successes required.) The user's player can spend a point of Willpower to prevent the victim from suffering that night's wound, provided the Gargoyle is in the victim's presence. (This makes the poison an ideal means by which to threaten a victim into obeying the user.) One victim may be poisoned multiple times by the same (or separate) users, and suffer multiple wounds per night.



Duration: The user's bite is poisonous for one turn per point of the ritualist's Willpower. After the victim suffers its effect, the poison lingers for three times that number of nights.

Dire Consequences: One of the ingredients in the humor is a bit of stolen mental energy from an imp or other minor, malign entity. Sometimes this energy retains some of the malignity of its unwilling donor, and works spitefully to balance the usefulness of the effect with an unwanted result. The Storyteller makes a secret Stamina roll (difficulty equals the original ritualist's Willpower) on the user's behalf. If the roll fails, he poisons the victim of a subsequent feeding whether he wishes to do so or not. The Storyteller determines randomly which subsequent feeding goes wrong. The poison in such a feeding only lasts for one third the normal number of nights, though.

LEVEL THREE HUMORS

CAUSTIC BILE

The user causes the skin of his hands (or another body part, if desired) to ooze a toxic substance which, if transferred to the exposed skin of a victim, exerts a slowly debilitating effect. Other than its method of application, its effects are the same as The Serpent's Cruel Milk. The player must achieve at least one Brawl success to apply the poison.

Duration: The user secretes the toxic substance for one turn per point of the ritualist's Willpower. Once applied, the poison lasts for three times that number of nights.

Dire Consequences: The Law of Equilibrium acts cruelly in this instance. When the duration ends, the Gargoyle's player rolls Stamina (difficulty 6). Failure means that he also suffers the bile's poisoning effect.

MEDICAMENT OF RESISTING FLESH

Invoking this humor imparts resistance against the dread Tzimisce ability to craft a victim's flesh like a clay. The humor reduces a Fiend player's dice pool for uses against the Gargoyle by half the original ritualist's Willpower. If used by a Gargoyle formed at least in part from the body of a Tzimisce, it reduces the Tzimisce dice pool by the ritualist's full Willpower.

Duration: One hour per point of the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: In formulating this ritual, Vinstania obeyed the Law of Equilibrium by making the user becomes more vulnerable to Thaumaturgy. If a user becomes the victim of an undesirable Thaumaturgic effect within one month of having consumed the medicament, the thaumaturge's player adds half the humor's creator's Willpower to his dice pool for that effect alone.

THE TEARS OF PHOEBUS

The user resists the destructive effects of sunlight. For every four full points in the ritualist's Willpower, the difficulty of resisting damage from sunlight is reduced by 1, down to a minimum of 2. (See the chart on p. 200 of *Vampire: The Dark Ages*.)

Duration: Two turns for each point of the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: The humor increases the user's resistance to sunlight by stealing some of his future ability to withstand it. The user's player must make a Road roll (difficulty 7) when the duration ends. If she fails, the difficulty of her resistance during the Gargoyle's next exposure to sunlight increases by the same amount it was reduced on this occasion.

LEVEL FIVE HUMORS

SERUM OF PERPETUATING VITAE

Whenever the user's player would otherwise spend a blood point, he makes a Willpower roll (Difficulty 8). If successful, the humor causes the Gargoyle's bones to generate a compensating quantity of blood, so that his blood pool remains unaltered.

Duration: One night for each point of the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: The Law of Equilibrium exacts its toll in blood when the serum's duration ends. Thereafter, the user gains only 1 blood point for every two points of blood he drains from those he feeds on. The ill consequence lasts for the same duration as the original humor. It may be staved off by taking another dose of the Serum. When the duration of any dose of the serum ends, the vampire also suffers a raging hunger for blood as the Beast rises in him. The player must roll to avoid frenzy (difficulty 10) the next time he is before a source of mortal blood. Gargoyle keepers get around this problem by making sure to have a victim around to sate the creature.

SERUM OF VAUNTED EXHORTATION

Effect: The user more easily resists Röttschreck. The difficulty of any Courage rolls is reduced by 1 for every success scored by the ritualist's player when formulating the humor.

Duration: Two turns for each point of the ritualist's Willpower.

Dire Consequences: In accordance with the Law of Equilibrium, the serum creates a magical deficit that the user must eventually repay. It provides him courage in the present by stealing it from his future self. The user loses 1 die when he next rolls Courage without the humor's aid. The penalty remains until he fails a Courage roll.

VARIABLE LEVEL HUMORS

ICHOR OF OCCULT TRANSMISSION

Effect: The user may make one use of an individual power from a Thaumaturgic path known to the formulating ritualist. The ritualist must be able to use that power herself. The player makes a Thaumaturgy roll when the vampire creates the ichor, as if actually unleashing the power. (At

her discretion, the Storyteller may make a secret roll on the player's behalf.) This roll is applied against the relevant difficulty when the user activates the humor.

To get the level of this ritual, add 2 to the level of the path power it duplicates.

Duration: As per the power in question.

Dire Consequences: The blind use of magical powers often causes a build-up of arcane energy around their ill-trained user. These energies sometimes dissipate on their own, but may discharge all at once in a manner that reverses the user's original success. The Storyteller makes a secret Wits + Occult roll (difficulty 6) on the Gargoyle's player's behalf. Failure means that he will suffer a botch result for the power in question before the end of the current story. The Storyteller times the botch for maximum dramatic effect—that is, to create the greatest possible woe for the user.

SPAWN OF THE WORKSHOPS

The Gargoyle bloodline is one of the great testaments to Tremere power and Tremere folly. This slave race is born of the thaumaturgic melding of several Cainite lines (Trismec, Gangrel and Nosferatu). It has turned the tide of the war against the Fiends, but also fuels their hatred of the Usurpers.

The nature of Gargoyles is, much like House Tremere itself, still in flux. They are Cainites, but imperfect ones as yet not fully self-aware. Psychologically they experience a very powerful, animalistic pack instinct. They protect each other, bow before the Tremere they consider their masters, and even partake in sexual mating. These couplings cannot produce offspring, of course, and seem to be more about dominance and bonding within the pack than any pleasure.

The stony faced, bat-winged humanoid Gargoyle is the culmination of a large amount of research and experimentation. These peak specimens account for about one third of all Gargoyles. The others are lesser forms, deformed or deficient in one way or another. Most of the peak Gargoyles can Embrace progeny and most of the others cannot. The Tremere are still unsure about how viable even the best Gargoyle's progeny is, and Virstania has noted that childer are not as readily accepted into the pack as those emerging from the artificial wombs in the labs. Because of this, she uses most childer as shock troops and prefers to pursue her artificial creation process, which not coincidentally, ensures her position as the bloodline's creator and mother.

THE ROAD OF SERVICE

Gargoyles are thought by many Tremere to lack free will. Accordingly, or so they think, the Gargoyles follow them because the magic of the rituals that created them leaves them no other choice. In fact, the Gargoyles follow a Road of their own, the Road of Service, which

happens to coincide with the interests of their creators. Later they will abandon it and seek independence from the Tremere — if not from their Great Mother, Virstania.

The Road of Service, or Via Servilis, proclaims that only actions which please and venerate the creators of Gargoyle-kind are worthy of admiration. The Great Mother, Virstania, is the kindest and most loving of the creators, and she must be hailed above all. But the distant Goratrix and the intimidating Malgorzata must be paid homage as well. Both the Great Mother and the other creators decree that the purpose of the Gargoyles is to follow the edicts of the Tremere clan. If they say it, it must be so. If the creators ever altered their intentions and commanded the Gargoyles to serve another clan, they would then do that. But until that day comes, glory and honor redounds to those who carry out Tremere orders with the greatest courage and exactitude. The Tremere are the masters. To question them is to spit in the faces of the Great Mother and the Creators.

Gargoyles are ruled by powerful passions. Unlike other vampires, they still feel sexual lust, the desire to copulate with one another. They rage against their infertility and plead with Virstania to give them the means to breed other Gargoyles. They treat those they Embrace as wolves do their cubs, feeling a mighty instinct to protect their fledglings from the wrath of the world. They seek one another's company, feeling comfort or even ecstasy in the presence of large numbers of their brethren. Strong Gargoyles feel a great urge to dominate weaker ones. The weak defer instinctively to the strong. When an ambitious young Gargoyle sees the dominant leader weakening, her greatest urge is to fall upon him, rend his wings, bloody his face and seize the mantle of leadership. Most especially, though, Gargoyles feel an irrepressible, violent loathing for members of the vampire clans from which their bodies were made.

Though their masters' orders in many ways permit the Gargoyles to give free rein to these passions, they must sometimes put service above instinct. This is where the Road becomes difficult to follow. A master may order a Gargoyle to spare the life of a Tzimisce, even as hatred for that clan afflicts him like a fever. Masters may order one's beloved whelps into danger, forbidding the Gargoyle to protect them. They may designate as leader a Gargoyle considered weak by the rest of the eyrie. All of these orders must be obeyed. To give in to these instincts is to become a beast, a thing.

One day the Gargoyles will completely prove themselves to the Masters, who will see that they have conquered their passions and are worthy of full status as equals. Then they will make their own, new Road, or choose the Roads true Cainites now walk. Or so the Great Mother says. This day will only come if Gargoyles master the Road of Service. Any Gargoyle who strays from it betrays not only herself, but the others of her eyrie. She deserves nothing but shame and death.

The Road of Service relies on the Virtues of Conviction and Instinct.

GRUESOME HYBRIDS

Virstania has also on occasion released hybridized animals into the foothills surrounding Ceoris. She claims to do so to bolster the chantry's defenses. The savage creatures might attack intruders, she says, alerting guardsmen and Gargoyles. Esoara vehemently objects to her efforts to stock the woods with freakish beasts; he argues that they're more likely to attack his forces, who must patrol the woods every night, than the occasional invader. Whenever Esoara presses his complaints, Curaferum relays them to Etrius, who may or may not rouse himself to come down to Virstania's lair.

GARGOYLE KEN (NEW SKILL)

Gargoyles are like self-willed, intelligent beings in some ways, and like pack animals in others. They instinctively hate Cainites belonging to the clans their constituent parts were harvested from and revere their creators as near-divine entities. To avoid accidentally provoking them to frenzy, those who deal with them must understand their primal customs. Gargoyles obey Tremere other than Virstania only to the extent that they believe their orders to be in keeping with the desires of their Great Mother. Although less rebellious now than they will later become, Gargoyles may still balk at instructions given them by superiors ignorant of their animalistic hierarchy or their aspirations to greater things. Those most adept at dealing with Gargoyles supplement their instructions with the wordless signals, from snarls to teeth-baring, that the creatures use to settle matters of precedence between themselves.

- Novice: You can converse with a Gargoyle without making it want to kill you.
- Practiced: If authorized by Virstania to give orders to Gargoyles, they will warily follow sensible-seeming instructions.
- Competent: If you've been authorized by Virstania, Gargoyles will follow even your unusual orders.
- Expert: Gargoyles assume simply from your bearing that you have been given Virstania's blessing to order them about.
- Master: Gargoyles will risk their lives for you.
- Legend: Gargoyles recognize you as their creator and goddess.

Possessed by: Ceoris's leading Cainites; its captain and sergeants

Specialties: Guard Duty, Lab Assistance, Patrols, Raids

and gently ask her to desist. When chided, Virstania stops releasing her creatures — for a time.

Esoara has, on the other hand, considered releasing these creatures into enemy territory to harry opposing soldiers. He has yet to implement this plan for lack of suitably robust henchmen to perform it. The more usefully dangerous a creature would be to the enemy, the more risks a war party would face in transporting it northwards. A coterie assigned to serve the masters of Ceoris might face this task as a test of its skill and loyalty.

Although the ritual that led to their creation was a forerunner of *At Our Command It Breathes*, hybrids are not Gargoyles. Neither are they any other kind of vampire. They are strange animals produced by magical means. As such, they can't Embrace and do not suffer the Curse of Caine. Neither can they be Embraced.

CHITTERER

The chitterer is made up of the hindquarters of two wolves; they face together and meet in the middle. The surface of its hairless, pinkish body is covered in dozens of squawking bird beaks. The thing feeds by pecking seeds and grains with the more accessible of these haphazardly-placed mouths. Singly, the cheeps made by each beak are only moderately shrill and hair-raising. But something about the cacophony of combined shrieks can prey on the mind. Listeners can't help but hear patterns in the squawking. If they listen for even a few seconds, they begin to hear the odd, random word in their mother tongue. Before much longer they are hearing complete sentences, mockingly enumerating their sins and crimes. The knowledge they draw on does not seem to come only from the victim's thoughts. Somehow the chittering voices seem to know

credible facts previously unknown to the hearer. A vampire exposed to a chitterer must resist frenzy (difficulty 7).

Chitterers use their beaks to feed, pecking for seeds, roots and edible shoots. However, they can't feed fast enough to nourish themselves and thus also sustain their bodies by absorbing the stray magical energies permeating the area around Ceoris.

Mendacamina, ever the wrathful punisher of sins, sometimes uses chitterers to soften up prisoners for interrogation. She looses one into a prisoner's cell, after making sure that her subject is restrained and unable to slay the creature. Paul Cordwood took a couple with him on a mission into Tzimisce territory, but they escaped on the way home and still lurk in the foothills of Ceoris. They reproduce by laying eggs; each hindquarter can fertilize the eggs of the other.

Malgorzata once conducted an experiment in which a vampire prisoner was forced to drink a chitterer's blood. The Gangrel victim turned into an imitation Malkavian.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Perception 1, Wits 1

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

Attack: None, but forces roll against frenzy for every two turns of exposure to it

Abilities: Dodge 5, Stealth 2

Blood Pool: 3, **Willpower:** 2

Historical Note: Chitterers die out a few hundred years after Ceoris's destruction. By that time, the strange magical aura of the place has dissipated. Without it, they starve to death.

HIERARCHY OF SINS

Road Rating	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conscience roll	Rationale
10	Disobeying the direct order of the Great Mother	Virstania is your goddess; to defy her is the grossest of sacrileges.
9	Disobeying the direct order of another Creator	We owe honor to those who assisted the Great Mother in our creation.
8	Disobeying a direct order of a Tremere master given authority over Gargoyles by a Creator	The masters know better than we, and may choose our commanders.
7	Thwarting the intent of an order given by the Great Mother	It is craven to disappoint the Great Mother; doubly so to sift her words for excuses to fail her.
6	Disobeying any master	Without the masters and their pyramid of authority, we would not exist.
5	Failing to punish an insult against the masters	To allow disrespect of the masters is to agree with it.
4	Failing to avenge a crime against the masters	If foes do not fear us, we are worthless.
3	Remarking on the fallibility of the masters	It is not our place to question those greater than ourselves.
2	Shirking an opportunity to suffer injury in battle with the masters' foes	To shed blood on the battlefield is to show the depth of your devotion.
1	Shirking an opportunity to die gloriously while following orders	The masters gave us our lives; it is fitting that we should someday give them back.

HOUSE OF TREMERE

REAPER

The Reaper, named for two large, scything forelimbs perfectly engineered for decapitation, is a man-sized beetle with a concatenation of feuding, hissing rat heads where its face should be. Withered, flightless wings fold beneath its soot-black carapace. It hunts at night, preying on creatures as small as foxes and as large as bears. Reapers live in cramped burrows that they dig in loose earth. If threatened with serious injury, a reaper can squish itself down and disappear into a burrow, should one be nearby. It can quickly collapse its exoskeleton so that its body becomes no thicker than two feet at its widest point. They're afraid of fire, arrows and the clang of metal swords.

The reaper is a prime example of Virstania's misguided attempt to defend the chantry by releasing uncontrolled, dangerous creatures into the wilds. Although the things are difficult to exterminate, they seem little interested in expanding their range. Perhaps they can only survive with the aid of the stray magical energies that surround the chantry. Occasionally Escara discovers a nest of them and sends a troop of soldiers and Gargoyles to exterminate them. One time he found a burrow containing over a dozen of the things. Should he happen to find himself in command of, say, a group of young vampires sent to Ceoris to serve its masters, he might well send them on an extermination mission as a preliminary test of their mettle. If they prove themselves against the reapers, they might indeed be ready for the terrors of the Tremere-Tzimisce War.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Wits 2

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



Attack: scythe-like forelimbs, 8 dice of damage

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 2, Stealth 3

Blood Pool: 10. **Willpower:** 5

Historical Note: The Tremere's former mortal vassals in the nearby villages wait a suitable interval after the destruction of Ceoris and then systematically hunt these dangerous creatures out of existence. None survive to the modern day.

SKIN EATERS

To create the skin eaters, Virstania used the Populating Night's Garden ritual to create tiny flea-like insects with gluttonous appetites. She gestated them in casks filled with the blood of her Gargoyle assistants. They thereby became ghoulies to the Gargoyles in whose blood they'd grown. Under Virstania's watchful eyes, the Gargoyles trained the creatures to obey simple commands, creating a voracious flea circus with a hunger for skin instead of the usual blood.

A skin eater is almost too small to be seen with the naked eye; it looks like a speck of red pepper. Under magnifying lenses, an observer can see that they are red mites with oddly outsized jaws. Unlike some of her other laboratory creations, Virstania keeps the skin eaters well controlled. A sealed jar full of skin eaters makes a fearsome weapon. Therimna and Paul Cordwood use them against enemies when they wish to spare their minions the risk or inconvenience of a direct assault. Skin eaters also provide a splendid means of smoking an enemy out of a bolthole. The user need merely sneak up to the building, cave or trench in which the enemy is ensconced. He lobes in the jar of skin eaters and runs for his life, hoping that none of the tiny creatures get a whiff of his own flesh.

Skin eaters navigate almost entirely by smell; they can sniff out mammals, mortals and Cainites from as far away as fifty yards. They swarm towards the nearest source of flesh. If they succeed in contacting bare flesh, they rapidly course their way across the victim's body, stripping it of its outer layers of skin in a matter of moments.

Neither Brawl nor Melee skills are of use when skin eaters attack. Sometimes it is possible to outrun a swarm. A swarm travels at a speed of about 26 yards a minute. Skin eaters don't fly while attacking or otherwise feeding, but quickly skitter up, down and across any surface. The more complex the terrain, the slower they move in absolute terms. A table turned on its side might delay them long enough for a potential victim to get a several-turn head start, for example. Naturally, if the fleeing prey is stopped by obstacles of his own, the skin eaters can catch up to him.

Water or other liquids slow them down. Direct contact with acid, flame, boiling oil or extreme cold kills them immediately. It is difficult but possible to crush an entire swarm at once, by dropping a large object such as a large slab of flooring marble down on them. Other exotic methods of killing skin eaters no doubt exist.

Contact with the swarm results in the loss of 1 health level per turn until the victim is Mauled, at which point the

SECRETS OF THE WORKSHOPS



skin eaters cease feeding because the victim is stripped raw. However, without any skin, the victim will soon bleed to death, continuing to lose 1 health level per turn until dying or falling into torpor. Vampires forced to regenerate all of their skin never look quite right again. Skin grown all at once seems too smooth and unformed, giving the sufferer a waxy, undifferentiated appearance. Such survivors of skin eater attacks lose 1 point of Appearance.

The creatures are able to eat an amount of flesh hundreds of times their combined body weight. The creatures end their attack after consuming the skin, at which point they unfold tiny wings and fly back to Ceoris. They return to special ceramic collectors mounted inside the great chasm. When they reach it, they drop from exhaustion. They bloat up with their meals and burst open, one by one. The sound of these hundreds of tiny pops is somewhat like a handful of sand being dropped onto a marble surface. The death of a swarm of skin eaters looks like an explosion of chalky white dust. Left behind in the collector is an undifferentiated glob of skin tissue, which the Gargoyles retrieve for Virstania. She uses it as the raw material in Membranous Appropriation (p. 111), and the ritual to create the Gargoyles called vellumae (p. 127).

STRANGE GARGOYLES

The following creatures are rare forms of Gargoyles. As such, they are vampires and do suffer the Curse of HOUSE OF TREMERE

Caine. The rituals used to create them, however, make them mules, unable to Embrace.

HEXAPED

Rarely made because construction requires six good vampire arms, the Hexaped permits the Tremere long-lasting knowledge of an enemy's thoughts and perceptions.

The hexaped orients itself horizontally, like an insect, with the back of its torso pointed upwards. Its head juts out from between the torso's shoulders. Affixed to the torso's underside are two sets of three arms. The elbows rest on the ground, acting as feet. The forearms and hands extend up past the torso's back. Its fingers are covered in a gummy, adhesive substance with which it can stick, like a fly, to ceilings or walls. Its locomotion is much faster when moving via fingertip than when skittering on its elbows. The hexaped uses no actual legs in its construction; the torso ends at the buttocks. Its head lacks a face; instead it is a mass of scar tissue. An angry, reddened, perpendicular incision runs from its crown to chin. Leather thongs crisscross through the incision to hold it tightly together. Though fresh when applied, these thick laces quickly become ingrained with blood, pus and dirt.

Possessed of dog-like intelligence but powerful instincts, the hexaped relentlessly tracks a victim once acquainted with its psychic scent. The Gargoyle's creator need only wave an object recently worn or extensively

handled by the target under the hexaped's chest. Soon a puckered sphincter in the chest winks open, disgorging a worm-shaped appendage protected by a sharp, chitinous carapace. The appendage is equipped with sensory organs that look like nostrils but in fact read the victim's aura, the residue of which still lingers on the proffered object. After getting a good whiff, the hexaped skitters away. Instinctively able to open doors, worry away at locks and skitter past guards, it overcomes whatever obstacles lie between it and the intended victim. Its tracking powers, though not infallible, far exceed that of any normal creature. By constantly sniffing the air for traces of its quarry's aura, it can zero in on her from hundreds of miles away. By preference, it travels along ceilings while indoors. Outdoors it prefers treetops, high cliffs and mountainsides.

When threatened, its overwhelming instinct is to flee. If it escapes pursuers, it hides for a while and then resumes its hunt. If given no choice but to fight, it launches itself belly-first at its enemy. Its only weapon is its chest appendage, which is hard enough to punch through medium armor. It tries to burrow its sharp appendage into the victim's chest, from which it sucks blood.

When it finally confronts its quarry, it reaches up with one of its forward hands and rips out the leather thong holding the two halves of its head together. The face opens up as if hinged. The hexaped then ejaculates a foamy mass of tissue from its exposed brain onto the victim. Having forged a powerful psychic link with the victim, it then retreats. With an indomitable homing instinct, it heads back to the point at which was first acquainted with its quarry's scent. Its progress home is only slightly hampered by the periodic clapping together of its skull halves. A layer of leaves, soil, pine needles and other detritus may gather on its exposed brain, but this doesn't pose a serious impediment, either.

Like a delighted dog returning a stick to its master, the hexaped seeks out its creator. Instead of a reward, it faces a terrible betrayal. The thaumaturge orders reluctant henchmen to grapple with and immobilize the hexaped, and then to bear it to a specially-equipped chamber for the Ichor of the Hexaped ritual (see p. 113).

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Wits 2.

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated.

Attack: Hand-to-hand attacks do normal damage. Head appendage does 8 dice but stops attacking after a successful hit, instead draining 3 blood per turn.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Stealth 7.

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Potence 2, Fortitude 3.

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 5.

Historical Note: The Tremere create few hexapedes after the Camarilla forms but keep records of the rituals required to create them in several of their older chantries, including Vienna.

IECUR

The good thing about iecur is that they can be made from the scraps left over from regular Gargoyle construction. The bad thing is that the result is so utterly loathsome that even other Gargoyles can't look at them without a sense of nausea. An iecur is a six-foot tall, shambling pile of innards, organs and viscera. Vaguely shaped like a cone sitting on its base, the surface of an iecur is festooned with dozens of wet, flapping livers and bladders. The iecur grows extra livers and bladders during the gestation process; though only six or so of each might be sewn into the fetal sac, dozens appear by the time the creatures are full-grown. Iecur (the term is both plural and singular) don't speak but show signs of intelligence, such as the ability to respond to complex orders. They can even reinterpret their instructions when confronted with new circumstances. However, they are chiefly governed by an overwhelming instinct to devour the flesh of vampires, and will act on it unless given ironclad instructions to the contrary. Given a choice of victims, they prefer Cainites of the clans from which their parts came. They'll digest ghouls, mortals or other Gargoyles if threatened by them, but initiate attacks against these less appetizing beings only on orders or when ravenously hungry.

The iecur eats by pushing up against the victim and enveloping her. When possible, it traps its victim up against a wall or other hard surface and then pushes itself onto and around her. If no suitable surface presents itself, the iecur attempts to snag one of its victim's limbs with aropy loop of intestine, and then pull the victim up to it. It then draws the victim inside its body, for maximum contact with its hundreds of bile ducts. Each duct releases large quantities of a powerful digestive acid which immediately begins to reduce the victim's body into a mushy paste. Hundreds of intestinal loops then absorb the paste. The digestive fluid blinds if it gets into the eyes. Its powerful smell often triggers a primordial sense of terror, as victims instinctively realize they're being digested. In Cainites, this terror triggers Röttschreck.

Fortunately for Tremere foes, iecur move slowly except on flat surfaces. Fallen branches, rocks, slopes and other common features of outdoor terrain put them at a near standstill. Virstania keeps them inside Ceoris. They don't patrol outside or go on raids. On rare occasions the clan has shipped iecur to other chantries to perform guard duties in their forbidden basements. To transport an iecur, one must put it in a lead-lined coffin and bear it to its destination as freight. (The lead lining stops the iecur's digestive acids from leaking through the casket and destroying it.) Iecur die if not fed 10 pounds of fresh meat per day. They become alternately listless and volatile unless a quarter of that meat comes from a Cainite. Fortunately, they can store up whatever magical substances they derive from devouring Cainite meat. Each blood point possessed by a vampire victim allows the iecur to go for one day without further Cainite flesh.



Virstania occasionally Embraces a mortal from the feeding chamber simply to make food for her iecur. She knows that Etrius would disapprove of this and therefore keeps it a secret from her fellows. She occasionally experiments on the iecur in hopes of finding a way to reduce their onerous food requirements, but has made no progress.

Though bizarre, the iecur are, like standard Gargoyles, a form of Cainite. They are as vulnerable to fire and sunlight as any other vampire.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 10, Perception 1, Wits 1.

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated.

Attack: Must make a successful Body Slam or Grapple before beginning to digest its victim. Having done so, it then strips its victim of one health level and one blood point per subsequent turn, no further rolls required. For a victim to release herself from enveloping iecur, the player must roll Strength + Brawl. If trapped up against a wall, a victim has no way out of its grip, and must hope she (or her allies) can kill it before it reduces her entirely to paste.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 8.

Blood Pool: 10, Willpower: 5.

Historical Note: The iecur remain at Ceoris after the other Gargoyles decamp and continue to serve as guardians of its darkest corners. All of Ceoris's iecur are destroyed along with the chantry itself in 1476.

SIMULACRUM

Virstania occasionally creates a Gargoyle in the image of one of the vampires from which its body is made. The resulting creature looks like a rough, unfinished version of the original Cainite, but thinks and acts like a Gargoyle. A simulacrum won't pass close inspection by the original's intimates, but may successfully carry on an imposture with those who knew the Cainite in passing or by reputation only. Simulacra are sometimes provided by Paul Cordwood with false identities and used in his plots. He might, for example, send a Nosferatu simulacrum to infiltrate a parley between members of that clan. Cordwood's false backgrounds usually claim that the simulacrum was Embraced in a far-distant land by a since-dead sire. Simulacra, whose thoughts can be slow, aren't well suited to complex, lengthy deceptions. Cordwood's plans for them assume that they'll be quickly found out. Often he expects them merely to get inside an enemy haven, take quick action and then flee. They may be assigned to plant scrying devices, steal documents or make rash assassination attempts. Sometimes Cordwood uses them purely to demoralize his enemies, most often by having Virstania convert a special foe's captured protégé to a simulacra and then sending her back to her mentor. He does this simply to exact an emotional toll from his enemy, forcing him to kill his beloved ally. Simulacra are tough, and this horrific act can take a while.

Simulacra are the most sorrowful and lonely of Gargoyles. They're lucky if the common Gargoyles merely shun them. To a Gargoyle, they look and smell like Gangrel, Nosferatu or Trimisce. Simulacra, wishing nothing more than to be with the rest of the pack, feel scourged by this rejection. As they wait for instructions, they sit in their dim chamber, forlornly listening to the excited yelps and growls of the nearby Gargoyle pen. Occasionally an acidic tear drops from an eye, to stain the rough sheets that cover their beds.

Cordwood and Virstania work to conceal from the simulacra the degree to which they're considered expendable. The lonely creatures are told that they've been created to perform a great and noble sacrifice for their creators. The simulacra look forward to these assignments with a mixture of dread and anticipation. They hope that they will be destroyed and freed from their miserable half-existence, but are possessed of an accursedly strong instinct for survival, which prevents them from performing their duties with suicidal intent. When first injured, they discover to their chagrin that they are all too difficult to slay.

Cordwood has no way of knowing for sure that every simulacra he's sent off to its doom has in fact died. It is



entirely possible that a few of them have chosen not to return to Ceoris after successfully completing their tasks for him. If these individuals exist, they're likely seeking some kind of solace or meaningful existence.

Simulacra look like grotesque exaggerations of their former selves. Facial features are coarse and swollen. All body hair bleaches out and must be crudely dyed to approximate the original's appearance. Large scars run like a halo along the crowns of their skulls, showing where their brains were cut out and tampered with. Scars also zigzag their torsos. The simulacra's skin is white and chalky, no matter how robust the original's complexion might have seemed. The creature's flesh either puffs out or develops sagging sheets of skin which hang limply off the body. Joints swell, gums recede from teeth and eyelids shrink, leaving the simulacra with a pop-eyed look.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2.

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated.

Abilities: Acting 1, Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Subterfuge 1, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2.

Blood Pool: 10, **Willpower:** 3.

If you already know the statistics of the original Cainite, reduce all Social Attributes to 1. Subtract 3 from Intelligence

and all Knowledges. Subtract 2 from all other Abilities and Disciplines. (1 remains the minimum.) Halve Willpower; reduce blood pool to 10.

VELLUMA

Virstania and Fidus engage in long semantic debates as to whether the vellumae are Gargoyles or hybrid monsters. A velluma is made from stolen tissues, but it isn't formed through the usual ritual. Nor need its donors be Cainites. On the other hand, they are harmed by sunlight and flee from fire, like any Gargoyle or vampire.

A velluma is made from flesh devoured by skin eaters (see p. 123), which is harvested into a set of flasks in Virstania's labs whenever they strip a victim. It is man-shaped, but entirely flat, consisting of a sheet of skin no thicker than a piece of parchment. Strong light shines through it. It can stretch or contract its form. By expanding its arms into wing-like structures, it can become a kite of skin, to soar on the winds. Most vellumae lack any sign of facial features on their flat, round heads; a few display squished, grinning features frozen in an eternal rictus.

The Tremere value their ability to penetrate otherwise impregnable places. A velluma can fold itself up into a square a few inches across and a quarter-inch thick. It can flow under a doorway or between the planks that make up a floor. Almost any room offers a velluma a plethora of hiding places: it can flatten itself against a curtain, fold into a drawer, even hide among someone's personal effects. They therefore serve as ideal spies. Vellumae are often equipped with scrying devices and sent out to follow Tremere enemies.

Although incapable of speech, vellumae are intelligent. If formed from the skin of a literate person, they can write. Thus it is possible to send one out to spy without a scrying device. It can instead write a report of its activities. Most often the velluma will do this upon its return to Ceoris. In some circumstances, Paul Cordwood has made arrangements for a velluma to stay within enemy territory, occasionally leaving its reports at a predetermined site. Other members of his network of watchers then retrieve the document and arrange for it to be conveyed to Ceoris.

Vellumae are easily damaged and ordinarily possess no means of harming those who attack them. This deficiency can be remedied with a humor, particularly Caustic Bile (see p. 119). The Serpent's Cruel Milk is sometimes used, but is rarely useful in combat because the vellumae find it difficult to bite opponents in the midst of battle before being torn to shreds. When discovered, they typically flee, rising up with surprising speed to lope off into the night in a series of long, springing strides.

A velluma feeds by laying itself up against its victim's bare skin. It draws blood through the victim's pores and into its own. The velluma reddens and swells slightly immediately after a feeding. They contain only small quantities of blood and must feed regularly or die.

Because vellumae are uncommunicative, it is difficult to know what they think about or which emotions they feel. Their reports don't reveal much about this topic, though if one reads between the lines, a sinister glee in their ability to move unseen through the Cainite world seems apparent. They may feel a sort of contempt for those they spy upon, especially those from whose skins they are made. A velluma formed from Tzimisce skin seems to show a special enthusiasm for spying on Tzimisce, for example. A few have escaped from the Tremere but still haunt their assigned targets. They may be aware of how disturbing their presence is, and take delight in appearing at inopportune times.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Health Levels: OK, -2, -5, Incapacitated.

Abilities: Academics 1 (occasionally), Alertness 4, Dodge 4, Melee 1, Stealth 4, Survival 2

Blood Pool: 3, **Willpower:** 3

MORTAL MAGICS

Even in Ceorin, mortal magi still walk the halls. These sorcerers are past their prime and see many of their workings starting to fail, but they are not without their resources. The following section provides some ways to portray mortal magics of the Tremere in a *Vampire: The Dark Ages* chronicle.

TREMERE MAGIC

Tremere magic is a subset of hermetic magic as practiced by the diverse and fractious Order of the Hermes. The order exists because it allows its members to (imperfectly) share their understanding and learn from one another. The order in general, and the Tremere more specifically, rely on formulae and complex incantations to accomplish workings. They follow instructions in tomes; they prepare alchemical salves; they inscribe ancient symbols in circles of power. The Tremere are notoriously pragmatic in their outlook and their sorcery is systematic and almost scientific in character. Spirits are still summoned and chants chanted, but it is with the attitude of an engineer working a grand machine.

Tremere and many other hermetic follow a dizzying array of paths with Latin names. These names generally combine what sorts of things they do (techniques) and what they do it to (forms). The most common techniques are control (Rego), creation (Creo), destruction (Perdo), perception (Intellego) and transformation (Muto.) Forms are far more varied and often vary from magus to magus; common ones include the body (Corporem), earth (Terram) and the senses (Imaginem). It is from these arts that the paths of Thaumaturgy derive and get their names.

Mortal Tremere also use a dizzying array of rituals, which function largely like Thaumaturgy rituals — although they are not so absolutely reliant on blood.

BY ANY OTHER NAME

True Mage, magus, hedge wizard, sorcerer, witch. The names are endless and the distinctions largely meaningless. Despite assertions of a hierarchy of worth among those capable of supernatural workings, from a vampire's perspective (and from *Vampire: The Dark Ages*' perspective), they are all wizards. Some are powerful, others aren't, but there is no grand cosmological difference between them all.

Of course, a magus of House Tremere is not indistinguishable from a village wise-woman, but what makes House Tremere special as a whole is its organization and systematic teachings, not some inherent status as "true mages." The Tremere participate in the larger Order of Hermes; they have chuntries and libraries; they teach apprentices and record their findings. They select only the most gifted to be in their number. That is what makes them special.

Okay, for those with an interest in the whole meta-game perspective of the World of Darkness, the fact is that in the 12th century the system of magical spheres, which is the basis of a "true mage's" power, hasn't been developed. Such distinctions only occur later and even then they are somewhat tenuous — and totally irrelevant to a game about vampires.

SYSTEMS

Players in *Vampire: The Dark Ages* portray vampires, not mages, so Storytellers can use a loose structure to adjudicate the effects of mortal magic. Nevertheless, those who want to roleplay the time before a Tremere's Embrace or wish to be consistent with mortal Storyteller characters can use the following options to represent the arcane magics of the Tremere. Those who wish to use more elaborate systems designed with players' characters in mind can consult *Mage: The Ascension*, the *Mage* supplement *Sorcerer, Revised Edition* or *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*.

Note that in all cases, the ability to use these various magical powers vanishes with the Embrace, although the underlying knowledge does not.

USING HEDGE MAGIC

Liege, Lord and Lackey details rules for so-called hedge magic used by mortals. While that supplement implies that those paths are somehow inferior to the arts of "true mages," that distinction is largely meaningless. The Tremere simply have access to multiple paths and at fairly high levels. While the correlation between the established hedge magic paths and Tremere combinations of techniques and functions is not quite perfect, it is hardly an insurmountable hurdle. Storytellers should feel free to adjust the paths to better suit the Tremere

style and give them suitably Latin names (Perdo Corporem for Infliction, for example).

USING THAUMATURGY

The various paths of Thaumaturgy almost all derive from older hermetic arts and paths, converted and transformed to blood magic by the Cainites among House Tremere. As such, it's perfectly viable to use these paths with mortal Tremere magi, with a few modifications.

The basic system for use of the paths is the same as for vampires, save that a mortal magus' player spends a point of Willpower instead of a blood point. She still rolls Willpower against a difficulty of power level +3. Some paths concerned with the vampiric condition, such as Rego Vitae and Rego Magica, are unavailable to mortals. Most thaumaturgy rituals are also available in slightly less gruesome forms (and at the Storyteller's discretion).

Vis

Another reason magi of House Tremere (and other hermetic orders) achieve more than those they denigrate as hedge wizards is a consistent access to the rare substance (or substances) called *vis*. The true nature of *vis* is the subject of much debate, but it seems to be the potential for power made tangible. Much like lowly timber and charcoal is capable of fueling great fires, *vis* appears rather mundane to the untrained eye but can power magnificent magical workings. It magnifies and accentuates the sorcerer's will in the same way that a lever accentuates a workman's strength.

Vis appears in a variety of forms, most often tied to one of the classical elements. Precious gems may be *vis* of the earth, rarefied mists *vis* of the air, and so on. The organs of exotic creatures and the fruits of nearly extinct trees can also provide forms of *vis*. In days past, *vis* was plentiful. Now it is rarer and rarer and mortal magi fight over dwindling supplies. Most importantly, *vis* is the key ingredient in the various immortality potions and rites that keep hermetic magi young. It is their increasing failure that has sent the house to vampirism.

In game terms, *vis* serves a mortal magus as a store of Willpower that can be spent on magical effects. This Willpower can be spent to power the effect as need be and to purchase automatic successes in those effects. It cannot be used to power non-magical feats and does not effect the magus' actual Willpower rating.

QUICK AND DIRTY MAGI

If you wish to use mortal magi as Storyteller characters beyond those provided in Chapter Five, you can use the following guidelines to give them game statistics depending on their status. Knowledges are almost always the primary Abilities and older magi rarely have high Physical Attributes, especially with the increasing failure of her-

metic youth potions. The first two templates are appropriate options for player character before their Embrace.

Apprentice (Age 20): Attributes (6/4/3 dots); Abilities (11/7/4 dots); Backgrounds (5 dots); Paths (1 dot); Virtues (7 dots); Freebies (21); Vis 0

Young Magus (Age 35): Attributes (7/5/3 dots); Abilities (13/9/5 dots); Backgrounds (5 dots); Paths (5 dots); Virtues (7 dots); Freebies (15); Vis 10

Accomplished Magus (Age 60): Attributes (8/5/3 dots); Abilities (21/12/7 dots); Backgrounds (10 dots); Paths (10 dots); Virtues (7 dots); Freebies (15); Vis 20

Aging Master (Age 100): Attributes (8/5/3 dots); Abilities (25/15/10 dots); Backgrounds (10 dots); Paths (20 dots); Virtues (7 dots); Freebies (15); Vis 30

THE DEATH OF MAGIC AND OTHER FALLACIES

The Tremere went searching for another route to power and immortality after they discovered that magic was dying. *Vis* was becoming less plentiful, their workings and wards were beginning to fail, and most of all they were starting to age anew. It's a great testament to Tremere hubris that they would ever think that magic was dying. Magic is not a quantifiable property that can vanish or grow—it is a conception of some of the larger and changing forces of creation. Nothing was (or is) dying; the world was simply changing as it always had.

But the Tremere could not see that then, and can't see it now. The same systematic, dogmatic approach to magic that enabled them to grow and prosper as a grand house also prevents them from understanding that a change is afoot. It can't be that the ways to access magic are just shifting. No, it has to be all or nothing. Only something drastic can replace the "dying" magic. Something like vampirism.

Tremere Cainites look on human magi as fools doomed to extinction. Those worth it are to be Embraced and the rest left to wither and die. The irony is that although many hermetic magi do vanish in the continuing universal shifts, others survive. They manage to lay aside some of their dogmatism to cooperate with other traditions and formulate the system to nine spheres of magic. They manage to grow.

In the modern nights, the Order of Hermes and Clan Tremere are still around. But any common ground they might have shared has long since eroded away.





Chapter Seven: Shadows of Georis

*To sit in darkness here
hatching vain empires.*
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Although southern Transylvania has for several centuries been a locus of Tremere activities, the House's influence extends throughout Europe. More than most Hermetic factions, the Tremere have always been drawn to worldly affairs. Disdaining the sylvan glades and hidden valleys favored by their rivals, they often place chantries in or near cities. Their two most important Western European chantries are those at Paris and Vienna. The former serves as the primary haunt of the conspirator faction, the latter as an outpost for the conservatives. The Durham chantry is worthy of note due to the recent influence exerted over it by a mysterious entity somehow tied to the Transylvanian arch-demon Kupala. Italy's Perugia chantry provides an example of a smaller, sleepier Tremere meeting place, one in which neonates might test the waters before being fully drawn into clan power struggles.

PARIS THE NEST OF VIPERS

In 1133, Tremere cast Goratrix from his creation, Ceoris, and sent him here to head the Paris chantry. At the time, Goratrix saw this as a terrible defeat, not to mention a humiliating betrayal on the part of the master he'd so fiercely served. He vowed revenge on both

Tremere and his lapdog, Etrius. After several years in Paris, however, he came to see the method in Tremere's madness. France presented Goratrix with a fascinating view of mortal politics. Kings contested against their noble relations for territory—and the revenue that arose from it. Churchmen intrigued for gold and advantage. Goratrix could not resist involving himself in this ferment; he could play others as Tremere had played him. The discovery that older Cainite clans had long ago entered the game merely whetted his sense of challenge. Although he has supervised at least one great, secret magical experiment since his arrival in Paris, Goratrix's attentions in recent years fix themselves on the pursuit of temporal power. Eventually he will overstep himself, bringing the wrath of the Inquisition down on all Cainites and provoking his final break with Tremere. But for now, his influence and sense of confidence are ever-rising.

A MIGHTY KING, A BURGEONING CITY

The Paris of 1197 is an energetic, growing city. Although Cainites cannot hear the constant sounds of construction that ring out by day, they can see the resulting improvements and expansions of the city's buildings, port facilities and roadways. In the sumptuous garments and sparkling jewels affected by its prosperous



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merchant class, they can see the city's wealth. Merchant's gold draws people to the city from all over Europe, filling Paris with prey. Goratrix's underlings have Embraced a pair of prominent members of the *marchandisé de l'eau*, the mercantile guild that owns the city's main port. Given considerable autonomy by the king, they take proud credit for the city's good fortunes.

Goratrix has himself made ghouls of several influential courtiers to King Philip II (also known as Philippe Auguste), one of the more redoubtable men to wear the French crown. Joining a Cainite alliance favorable to the king, he helped Philip bring rival nobles to heel, freeing him to fight the English kings Henry II and then Richard the Lion-Hearted for control of Normandy. Using his church connections, Goratrix recently agitated for Philip's participation in the Third Crusade. Goratrix sent retainers to the war in hopes of uncovering secret lore concerning Saulot and the Salubri. Although Philip returned to France after a year of uneasy alliance with his rival, King Richard, Goratrix learned the names of many surviving Salubri and their hiding places throughout the Mediterranean region. He now intends to track them down in hopes of extracting information useful to Tremere. Depending on the nature of these hypothetical secrets, he will either use them to win back Tremere's favor or to blackmail him into handing over Etrius to face final comeuppance.

MINIONS OF GORATRIX

The only mortal magi left in the Paris chantry are those who come for brief visits. Even they should guard their necks at night because Goratrix continues to Embrace, or allow others to do so, at a pace that would shock most other Cainites. His castellan, Lucubratio, enthusiastically furthers Goratrix's political intrigues and has himself Embraced half a dozen prominent Parisians. A gourmand in mortal life, this moist-lipped former mage now indulges his connoisseurship with human blood, which he analyzes with the same rigor he once applied to fine wines. He neglects the night-to-night operations of the chantry, leaving them to his ghoul, Isabella, who produces what Lucubratio claims to be the finest-tasting blood in all of France. Isabella's contributions to the chantry's success should have earned her an Embrace by now, but Lucubratio resists, and has so far convinced Goratrix to heed his wishes. He jests that he doesn't want to lose her fine blood (since, as a full Cainite, she will no longer produce any) but really worries that her blood oath to the Tremere pyramid would overpower the one he holds over her. In that case, he can imagine her quickly eclipsing him if elevated to full status. Lucubratio takes a special interest in church affairs and is Goratrix's primary expert on them.

Goratrix must order the killing of many magi who react unfavorably to the Embrace. His lieutenant in this

matter is the icy-voiced Frondator. A tall, thin-boned woman, the casually sadistic Frondator became entirely hairless after her Embrace. She uses a large collection of wigs to regularly change her appearance. Though useful in hunting escaped neonates, she adopts the hairpieces mostly for fashion's sake.

Goratrix leaves alchemical research to the scholarly, socially-backwards Lectora, whose chronic lack of tact would have gotten her slain long ago were it not for her master's protection and her blindness to chantry intrigues. She even-handedly dispenses supplies and laboratory time to those chantry residents still interested in magical inquiry.

Orlando Oriundus is a moon-faced, elderly former mage known for his outrageous claims. For example, he says he once developed a ritual to travel backwards in time and spent time as factotum to Alexander the Great. Goratrix Embraced him despite his obvious charlatanry. As a Cainite, he showed acumen he'd never displayed in life. He became Goratrix's closest adviser on mortal politics. He says that as an accomplished liar, he can unerringly nose out the deceptions of others. Orlando has adopted a false identity as the Burgundian monk Brother Osvaldus. In this guise, he accompanies wealthy pilgrims, accumulating gossip useful to Goratrix's schemes. As Osvaldus, he went with King Philip to the Holy Land, where he discovered the list of Salubri names. Goratrix has come to greatly value Orlando's counsel, but also wants to install him as at least a frequent visitor to Ceoris. If anything ever happens to his protégé, Malgorzata, Goratrix will certainly try to send Orlando to replace her as his agent in Etrius's midst.

Marcel of Dreux, a battle-hungry knight, went with Orlando on the Third Crusade. En route, he protected the king during a bandit attack, earning a land grant that he turned over to the chantry. Originally Embraced as a dispensable minion, Goratrix now regrets having fed him too much artificial vitae (see p. 134). The potion has eaten away at Marcel's reason, and he finds himself perpetually on the verge of uncontrollable rage. Even with this drawback, Goratrix highly values both his ability in melee and his acute sense of danger. He recently saved Goratrix's life from a pack of ghouled war dogs, single-handedly downing a dozen of them. Goratrix has ordered Lectora to find a way to reverse the maddening effect of artificial vitae on him. Meanwhile, Marcel grows increasingly restless, slipping out of the chantry at night in search of simple, physical trouble to distract him from his accelerating lunacy.

The Moorish wizard Remugio joined the house of Tremere a decade ago after being exiled from his homeland. (He adopted his Latin mage name after that time although he'd been schooled by Arabic magicians.) He speaks with a deep, bellowing voice which, when allowed its full volume, intimidates even Goratrix. Remugio

bitterly resented his surprise Embrace when it first came but kept his anger wisely to himself. He continued his researches and kept his eyes open. Although he isn't part of Goratrix's circle, neither is he seen as a threat. Remugio travels to Vienna every other year or so, and has made quiet contacts with members of the conservative faction there. He secretly sends letters to Vienna reporting on Goratrix's activities. These are then passed along to Etrius at Ceoris. Although his allies within the clan make him feel more secure, Remugio has grown disenchanted with the Tremere in general and now contemplates defection to another clan. He has made discreet approaches to a Ventrue courtier loyal to Philip's rivals. However, he won't leave the Paris chantry unless he can strike decisively at Goratrix in the process. Revenge interests him more than survival, though he has no special desire to meet his Final Death. He makes a policy of befriending Tremere neonates assigned to Paris by masters unconnected to Goratrix, and may try to make himself a mentor to a promising arrival.

The maternal but hot-tempered Lignupeda recently arrived from the Durham chantry, certain she'd been wise in fleeing that chantry's oppressive gloom. Two nights later, she'd been pounced upon by one of Goratrix' minions, the foul-breathed Culmen, and Embraced. Shocked and angered, she unleashed a spell reducing Culmen to a pile of damp sawdust. Shackled in the dungeon, she allowed Goratrix to think that he'd seduced her into accepting her new status. Having won her release, she now wonders what to do next. Remugio considers approaching her but wishes to be sure he can trust her before revealing his intentions. She might instead turn to other newcomers for advice and assistance. Her eventual loyalties remain to be determined.

The manic, compulsively talkative Manicae hides in the chantry after murdering one of King Philip's scribes in full view of a dozen witnesses. A mage of little accomplishment before his Embrace, he was sent, after his blooding, to pose as one of the king's scribes. He made himself useful by copying vital messages and sending them to Goratrix. Unfortunately, he too was given alchemical vitae so he wouldn't need to risk hunting at court. Its effect drove him to the murder. Frondator wants to kill him immediately, a fact she has not bothered to conceal from a terrified Manicae. Goratrix instead contemplates sending him to Ceoris to kill Etrius.

Goratrix has yet to realize the full extent to which the burgeoning size of his vampire stable has aroused the fury of the city's long-established Cainites. Paris' Cainite rulers, most notably the Ventrue Alexander, weigh a number of creative punishments for Goratrix' effrontery, but have yet to move against him.

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ON (AND BENEATH) THE LEFT BANK

The chantry is located in the city's academic quarter. The University of Paris exists as a tutor's guild but has not yet been formally recognized by the King. When, in a few years, he does so, he will name this area the Left Bank. Dozens of freelance tutors compete for the patronage of well-heeled students, operating out of buildings ranging from the grand to the ramshackle. The students, who are generally aristocratic, hotheaded and drunk, often clash violently with other citizens.

The chantry disguises itself as just another private institution of learning, avoiding the attention of inquisitorial clergy. It doesn't recruit students; only those already in the know understand its true nature and seek apprenticeship. To further misdirect the authorities, Goratrix has ordered that the once-opulent exterior be allowed to lapse into disrepair. Crumbling statuary figures decorate its pitted stone face. Their hands, feet and faces have fallen away, though an astute viewer can still tell that they represent allegorical figures of learning and spiritual development.

By hiding in the open, the chantry avoids the need for the stringent defensive measures of Ceoris. Ghoulish attendants scrutinize all would-be entrants through a peephole, barring the door against those who fail to pass inspection. Wards against unwanted intruders appear on the front doors and in a few sensitive locations throughout the chantry. The guards are not often troubled. The Tzimisce are not a presence in France. Gangrel won't come into the city except in the direst emergency. Parisian Nosferatu are surely aware of their brothers' struggle against the Tremere of Transylvania but, without allies, seem in no hurry to open a front here. They do not wish to be turned into Gargoyles. (Goratrix has periodically toyed with the idea of sending Frondator to hunt Nosferatu for this purpose; he has always concluded that it wouldn't be worth the risk. Instead he imports Gargoyle retainers from Ceoris when any of his small complement of the creatures must be replaced.)

Laboratories, quarters and common areas are mostly above ground, on one of the building's five floors. Dungeons, Gargoyle pens and the secret laboratory (see below) are found deep below an ancient catacomb underlying the chantry. Despite its now-humble exterior, the chantry is well appointed and fairly spacious.

ALCHEMICAL VITAE

In 1135, shortly after Goratrix's assumption of the reins in Paris, several of his neonates were hunted

down and staked after feeding indiscreetly. A joint Lasombra-Ventrue delegation intercepted Goratrix during carnival and warned him to better heed the correct proportion of predator to prey. Goratrix feared to cross Paris' established Cainites but didn't want to slow his Embraces. So he began to work on a new project, using knowledge of vampiric anatomy garnered during his Gargoyle researches of the previous century. As he became increasingly mesmerized by political gamesmanship, he ceded the actual work to Lectora, who in 1141 devised an alchemical method to manufacture adequately nourishing blood. A living (or Cainite) prisoner is still required to catalyze the process. Extraction tubes draw blood from the victim, circulating it into a series of vats and pans, where it is admixed with various trace metals, organs of exotic creatures and a small quantity of *vis*. The resulting concoction turns one pint of the victim's blood into 10. The vitae can be stored for up to a month, and resists the degrading effects of heat and cold. It tastes foul in its natural state, but Lectora is able to disguise the taste and texture of small quantities of the liquid if need be. Artificial vitae cannot be used to power blood magic.

Goratrix feeds this blood to his expendable neonates but neither consumes it himself, nor distributes it to his trusted allies at the chantry. Although it keeps its users alive and can be spent as per normal blood points (save for Thaumaturgy), long-term reliance on alchemical vitae has corrosive effect on the soul. After a vampire has consumed 50 points of artificial vitae, the player must make a Self-Control/Instinct roll (difficulty 4) or lose 1 dot from the vampire's Self-Control/Instinct rating. For every 10 points of the stuff the vampire subsequently consumes, the player must make another roll, the difficulty increasing by 1 each time. (Storytellers should slightly randomize the thresholds at which player characters should make rolls so that the precise danger points can't be exactly predicted.)

Artificial vitae only partially solves Goratrix's problem. Neonates who drink it become increasingly unstable and sometimes call spectacular attention to themselves when they are finally driven into frenzy. After a close shave involving a disemboweled abbot, Goratrix has learned to look for the signs and act preemptively. He assigns Frondator to quietly arrange for the permanent disappearance of any minion who shows the signs — popping eyes, dry lips, bulging veins — of having supped too much false vitae.

Goratrix hoped that artificial vitae alone would alleviate other Cainites' fear and hostility towards his chantry. It did not. Now he warns neonates to mask their true nature from the city's other vampires.

VIENNA, THE HOUSE THAT ETRIUS BUILT

Little do most of its inhabitants know, but the Vienna chantry has only emerged from a quarantine of over a century. After the becoming, Etrius expressed serious concerns about spreading vampirism through the house. Tremere eventually supported his caution and ordered a slow conversion. Etrius took this authority to ban all Embraces in Vienna, claiming that he would be responsible for the small number of magi there. From 1030 to 1185, he and Tremere were the only vampires to enter the Austrian chantry. While Goratrix Embraced magi as fast as Tremere's orders would allow, Etrius bided his time and slowly wore away at the morals of his potential candidates. In 1185, he invited a cabal of Vienna's magi to Ceoris and took the final step. They returned as his firm allies and agents. Etrius proudly announced Vienna open to the rest of the clan.

All this careful planning has paid off. Vienna is the safest haunt for the clan's conservative faction. Its master, Filaereus, is as staunch a supporter of Etrius in unlife as he was in life. Visitors to his chantry known to be allied with Goratrix are put under a close watch meant to make them feel unwelcome. Filaereus greets others with a speech inveighing against the rashness and turpitude of the "Paris faction," as he sniffingly calls the conspirators. Even mortal magi are warned against Goratrix's perfidy. Naturally, a chantry ruled by conservatives hosts an unusually large proportion of mortal magi. Only four of its ten senior magi have been Embraced.

UNACCUSTOMED INFLUENCE

The Vienna chantry, which dates back to 920, was built according to Etrius's specifications. He served as its master from its founding until 1022, although he was often absent from the turn of the century on, leaving its administration in the hands of its then-castellan, Filaereus. During his time at Vienna, Etrius flouted the Order of Hermes' ban on involvement in worldly affairs to curry favor with local rulers. He established friendly ties with church leaders, his fervent expressions of piety disarming any fears the clergy might otherwise have had about sorcerers. He took pains to downplay both the size of House Tremere and the true extent of his supernatural abilities. When he did lend magical aid to his temporal allies, he shunned credit for his actions. In 955, he subtly employed his earth magic to help the German king Otto the Great repulse Magyar invaders. He'd helped strike down the Magyars because they were pagans, and therefore enemies to all God-fearing men. He made the

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ground muddy under Magyar feet, and solid beneath Otto's forces. The chaos of the battlefield concealed the role of Etrius's magic in the victory. Etrius also kept his intervention secret from his fellow magi, including Tremere. He thought Tremere would mock his altruism. At the time, he had no idea that the Magyars had vampires in their midst. Nor did he spot the telltale signs of vampiric involvement at Otto's court.

As Etrius's appearances in Vienna grew scarcer, Filaereus sought introductions to his leader's friends at court and in the church hierarchy. In the mid-11th century, he became an occasional adviser to Austria's ruler, Duke Leopold III, then-head of the region's powerful ruling family, the Babenbergs. Filaereus didn't help the Babenbergs by cutting vast chasms in the earth or sending forests of walking trees to beset their enemies on the battlefield. Instead, he presented himself as a scholar capable of a few diverting parlor tricks. Much of the advice he dispensed drew more from his innate sense of caution than any arcane insights. Filaereus, too, failed to see Cainite machinations behind certain strange decisions made by various Babenbergs over the years. Nor did he connect several attempts on his life to the "night creatures" who by that time also vexed Ceoris. The beings who stood in the Babenberg's shadows eventually accommodated themselves to Filaereus' presence, or so it seems — he hasn't been attacked in decades.

1197 is the last of a four-year period in which the four sons of the deceased Leopold V divide the rule of Austrian territories between them. Filaereus has taken a liking to Leopold VI, obviously the brightest and most charismatic of the four. Although his interest in temporal politics has waned, he occasionally visits Leopold VI, supplying him with auguries and wise counsel free of occult overtones.

The confusion that now reigns in Austria retards Vienna's prosperity. Filaereus, now a vampire, has realized that Cainites manipulate mortal politics here, as they do throughout Europe. Various clans support each of the four contesting brothers. Nighttime disappearances grow ever more frequent as the hidden Cainite struggle increases in ferocity. Despite a sense of foreboding, Filaereus has begun to learn the names and plans of the city's secret hierarchy. Although he would like to see Leopold VI triumph, that goal is secondary to the continued protection of the chantry. To this end, he's forged an alliance with Leopold's Ventrue backers, and reached an understanding with Viennese Lasombra, who support Frederick Babenberg. The latter non-aggression agreement was brokered with the aid of Giacomo Guicciardini, Lasombra envoy to Ceoris. If either of the other brothers should win, Filaereus fears an attack by enemy clans against his peaceful chantry. Although he'd like to withdraw from the power struggle, the Ventrue are drawing him further into it, happy to befuddle their foes with the unfamiliar powers Filaereus

and his followers wield. Filaereus has even taken to Embracing outside the chantry in order to provide the Ventrue with the agents they demand.

Although Etrius is vaguely aware of Guicciardini having had some business in Vienna with Filaereus, he has no concept of the depth of his protégé's involvement in the political crisis there. Filaereus has hidden it from him, just as Etrius hid from Tremere his participation in Otto's battles. Filaereus dreads Etrius's disapproval, and is certain that his increasingly obvious role as a Ventrue pawn would earn just that.

AGAINST GORATRIX ARRAYED

Filaereus is a craggy-faced man who forgets his usual taciturnity whenever he thinks of Goratrix. He has long since given up any attempt at concealing his hatred for Ceoris's founder. Filaereus was brought into House Tremere by Etrius after being treacherously expelled from another hermetic house. Although he regards Etrius with gratitude for having given him shelter, his hatred for Goratrix is no mere shadow of his friend's. Ninety years ago, Goratrix humiliated Filaereus during a magical demonstration at Ceoris. Filaereus had slaved for months over an effect with which he intended to impress Tremere himself: He would materialize diamonds from the air, which would fall on the council chambers like a gentle rain. Instead the convened great magi of Tremere were pelted with coal dust. Goratrix subjected Filaereus to his barbed wit, and Tremere joined in the general laughter. Although never able to prove it, Filaereus suspects that Goratrix had interfered with his casting. Even his allies in Vienna know this story and impute Filaereus' hatred of Goratrix to it — though they'd never be so impolitic as to say so to his face. In his darkest moments, Filaereus is prepared to admit to himself that his efforts to expunge his humiliation simply make himself look more ridiculous. But the more he broods on this long-ago incident, the greater his hate grows. He'd now suffer Final Death, even send his soul to eternal torment, if it meant taking Goratrix with him.

Flaxen-haired, voluptuous Ala loved Filaereus from afar for many years before being taken into his Embrace. In life, her strong, quietly-expressed Christian faith sealed a friendship with Tosia, now the moral leader of Ceoris's living magi. Ala knew her at Umor Mons, her Transylvanian chantry. However, because she harbored wild and lustful urges she could never quite suppress, Ala secretly thought herself unworthy of Tosia's admiration. When she fled to Vienna, her devil-sent fantasies began to center around the chantry master, Filaereus. Although his weather-beaten features and barrel chest made him an attractive man, her lust for him seemed utterly irrational to her. Even his friends saw him as a slightly absurd figure. He seemed to sense how she felt about him, which drove her to further torment. When she finally relented and threw herself into his arms,

he Embraced her. The discovery of his vampirism proved a great relief to her: Clearly, he'd ensorcelled her with his supernatural powers. She was so relieved to find an explanation for her lusts that she scarcely bothered to mourn her stolen innocence. Instead, she reveled in her new clarity. She has become Filaereus' most vociferous supporter at Vienna. While some of its other Cainites mock Filaereus behind his back, they fear and respect Ala. If she is still willing to support Filaereus, so are they. If something were to happen to her, however, he might find his leadership under challenge by a colleague whose dedication to the conservative cause grows more from judicious conviction than the prosecution of a ludicrous grudge.

That challenge might well come from the unnaturally youthful Audax, who is the victim of a demon's curse. At the age of fourteen, he used his innate magical talent to drive a devil, who'd taken human form, from his home village. It enchanted him so that his appearance would never change. Throughout his career, from his apprenticeship to a Tremere magus to his present state as a Cainite at Vienna, he's suffered others' inevitable tendency to treat him as a callow youth. Even those who know of his great accomplishments as a mage and scholar can't help regarding him as a fresh-faced young pup. Audax regards the world with great seriousness, determined to overcome this deficiency without bitterness towards those who fall prey to perceptions. He seldom strays from the Vienna chantry, where others know and respect him. He made an ideally accepting Cainite; now he operates in a world where one's apparent age is discounted. He has become the most dedicated participant in the politics of the Austrian night. He enjoys meeting other Cainites; even the enemies he must try to destroy fascinate him. One day he may stop and realize that this might have been the entire objective of the demon's curse — to prepare him for a day when he would discard his soul to blithely embrace a vampiric existence.

Partnering with Audax in the covert battle on Leopold VI's behalf is Peter Schloss, a former mercenary whose blood ran to ice even before his Embrace. Schloss' forte is death from a distance. He delivers his adversaries to Final Death by building elaborate booby-traps, dosing victims with alchemical poisons or manipulating foes into turning on one another. Schloss has bitterly feared death ever since his first foray onto the battlefield as a young man. He is grateful to the Tremere, and Filaereus in particular, for offering him the possibility of eternal existence. But he would never allow his sense of loyalty to them to force him into action that might genuinely threaten his own survival. He enjoys Audax's company and has taken on the task of encouraging the serious fellow to enjoy the world's fleeting pleasures.

Among the mortal magi, perhaps the chief threat to Filaereus' authority is the Teutonic rigorist Lucidus. Bald,

vain and imperious, he is only grudgingly tolerated by his chantry-mates. He has memorized entire occult texts and shows an annoying ability to quickly answer almost any question of arcane methodology put before him, no matter how obscure. His abilities as a magician are legendary — he once defeated Tremere himself in *certamen*, the magical duel invented by the latter wizard. However, Lucidus is reluctant to use his powers without a full examination of any and all possible consequences. He'd sooner second-guess others than take actions which might arouse the scorn or scrutiny of others. Filaereus knows Lucidus too well to mistake his unpopularity for foolishness, and worries that he will soon discover the truth. Lucidus holds him in open contempt, and Filaereus has assigned lovely Ala the task of preparing him for the Embrace. She fears that he's too stubborn to ever voluntarily join the ranks of the blooded and too magically adept to easily dispose of.

STOUT TIMBERS

Perched on a jagged promontory several miles to the north of the city, the Vienna chantry looks like a large and imposing hunting lodge. Its walls are composed of massive chunks of gray stone, hewn from the earth by Etrius's magic. Massive timbers act as pillars and cross-beams throughout the structure. Every chamber is grand and oversized.

An extensive network of disused chambers crisscrosses the hill on which the building stands. Etrius built these to allow room for future expansion without arousing unwanted attention. The chantry has never required the space, and the chambers have been sealed off for centuries. Intruders into the chantry might be tempted by the lead seals on the doors leading to the underground chambers, and expend considerable effort to break into an area not used even for storage.

Vienna's laboratories are larger and better-stocked than Ceoris's. It is much easier to ship the exotic ingredients alchemists require to Vienna than to the Transylvanian Alps. Laboratories are not attached to individual living quarters. Each mage may select a lab for his own use, and enforces his privacy with locks, wards, and alarms.

The library is the best the Tremere have at their disposal, aside from that at Ceoris. When Goratrix first created the library at Ceoris, he raided the collections of other chantries. Etrius shielded his chantry's library by successfully appealing to Tremere for relief. Vienna's library is smaller than Ceoris's but kept in better order. Its librarian, the mortal mage Farica, rigidly polices her colleagues, hectoring them for the return of missing materials. Although the chantry residents — Cainites especially — bristle at her scoldings, they recognize that her rude passion for order benefits them in the end. Farica ensures that documents are available and easily located. Viennese Tremere returning from Ceoris, with its chaotically controlled collection, find reason to ap-

preciate Farica for her tireless, if annoying, determination. Ceoris's own magi sometimes come to Vienna to find tomes that ought to be readily accessible in their own chantry but have been purloined by a rival.

Common areas are at the same time sumptuous and forbidding. Heavy wooden furniture is padded in gold-embroidered velvet. Incense of overpowering sweetness, favored by Ala, wafts from numerous copper censers. Tapestries depict Tremere, Goratrix, Etrius and several long-dead founders of the Hermetic tradition; all seem to stare disapprovingly down at the room's occupants. Massive stag's horns, boar's heads and other game trophies appear throughout the building.

The Vienna chantry lacks the elaborate protective measures of oft-attacked Ceoris, but Filaereus has added a few features as the Tremere become increasingly visible in the city's Cainite circles. Audax and Peter Schloss have joined together to lard the grounds with ingenious traps; Schloss designs them and Audax creates them with Thaumaturgic Alchemy.

A CONSERVATIVE STRONGHOLD

Vienna is well known in conspiratorial circles as enemy territory. They call it "Etrius's chantry"—a double insult that questions both Etrius's right to rule Ceoris and Filaereus' status as anything other than his mentor's bootlick. Goratrix hasn't set foot in Vienna since the becoming. Malgorzata has never been here, though she's sent Jervais to use its library on several occasions since the reopening. Aside from its role as the conservative bastion, Vienna's primary claim to eminence is the well-ordered library. When Goratrix wishes to place a pair of ears inside Vienna's walls, he sends a low-status ally to comb through its stacks. Filaereus would like to bar Goratrix's proxies from entry, but has been counseled otherwise by Etrius. Etrius knows that such a move would be seen as a provocation by the conspirators, who would likely appeal to Tremere and possibly secure Filaereus' ouster. Instead, Filaereus makes conspiratorial visitors feel uneasy by keeping obvious watch on them. An unobtrusive player, he never thinks to entice or persuade them into betraying their leader. Audax, on the other hand, sees that Goratrix' pride and taste for ridicule make him a hard master to serve. He makes a point of sounding out Goratrix's minions when they visit and has earmarked several as potential defectors. He thinks that Frondator, Goratrix's Parisian huntress, might be made to turn against him if promised a small chantry of her own. Audax has even tried to lure Jervais onto the straight and narrow path. Though Jervais has no intention of betraying Malgorzata, he enjoys the verbal sparring with Audax and has even conceived a grudging affection for him. Each hopes he won't have to destroy the other should open warfare split the clan.

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DURHAM, THE SLEEPING LION

The Durham chantry is also known as Lion's Green. Meerlinda, the most seemingly benevolent of the Council of Seven, administers it wisely. She devotes her considerable diplomatic talents to reconciling the conspirator and conservative factions. A strange conspiracy arising within the ranks of the mortal magi has so far concealed itself from her attention.

OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Like France, England is prosperous, building new port facilities and enjoying the fruits of trade. Richard has decamped to France to protect his territory in Normandy from Philip II, who is equally determined to drive him out. In his stead, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, administers the country. In 1197, his title is Justiciar; by 1199 he'll be Chancellor.

Chantry residents care little about affairs outside their walls. Their interests are already well served without their having to meddle in politics. England's prosperity makes it a simple matter to get supplies. Travels through the countryside are fairly safe from bandits, because local lords can well afford to equip patrols. Churchmen, fat from generous tithes and preoccupied with governance, are too complacent to beat the bushes for sorcerers.

If Durham's Cainites were more attentive to external politics, they'd see that the apparent placidity of their surroundings conceals simmering resentments bound to disrupt their peace. Nobles and city fathers alike complain bitterly of the heavy taxation they endured to raise the ransom to free Richard from Leopold. Next in line to the throne is John, who, when he ascends in a few years, will make himself a notoriously unpopular monarch. He'll prompt a revolt of the nobility eventually forcing him to sign the Magna Carta. Many of England's more experienced Cainites already see this chain of events; in fact, some are actively conniving to bring it about. Tremere who establish connections among other clans may find themselves drawn into the ferment. Most, however, keep to their own affairs. They know that London's Prince is named Mithras and fear his power. Their chantry is far from London in order to avoid his grasp. Another reason for building Lion's Green at Durham can be found in the area's magical resonance. Said to house the bones of St. Cuthbert and the Lindisfarne gospels, as well as housing a network of pagan ley lines, the immediate region's innate magic rivals that of Transylvania.

MEERLINDA'S DOMAIN

Meerlinda presents herself as an attractive, serene woman in her late thirties. She governs the Durham chantry with soft-spoken assurance. She relies on her

extraordinary persuasive powers to secure the cooperation of those under her command. She hates discord and works to smooth it over at its first eruption. She seeks out the parties to any dispute and takes them aside separately. Allowing them to gaze deeply into her limpid eyes, she assures them of her sympathy for their position, if not their tactics. Meerlinda assures them that they will eventually realize their goals if only they heed her advice for the moment. Then she secures promises of peace and cooperation, in the process brokering a deal between the disputants. She may not be able to inspire love between antagonists who bitterly loathe one another, but she can usually persuade them to conduct their dispute in a way that doesn't threaten the broader interests of the chantry.

Meerlinda serves the same role in the Inner Council. She maintains the respect of both Goratrix and Etrius, and has often acted to decrease the heat between them. Meerlinda has instructed informants in both Ceoris and the Paris chantry to discreetly inform her should they come across evidence that one of the two faction leaders plans to act dramatically against the other. Although Lion's Green includes members of both factions, they know better than to clash under her watchful eye. They confine their rivalry to debates, barbed witticisms and the occasional act of petty sabotage. She hints to members of each side that she is open to be persuaded to their cause; in order to win her over, they become her half-witting informants.

Meerlinda's castellan, the blandly self-possessed, bald-headed Dulcis, occupies a position which is almost entirely ceremonial. Meerlinda can't help involving herself in the smallest details of chantry operations, from the exact quantities of grain it purchases to the hiring of stable hands. Dulcis tells himself that he could probably perform many of these tasks more ably than his mistress, and makes the occasional teasing comment to this effect. He knows that she would not be the person she is if she didn't continually interfere in his duties. He loved her fiercely and secretly even before his Embrace and blood oath, and would die with a smile on his face if he could sacrifice himself for her safety. Other inhabitants of Lion's Green impotently despise him for his snooping ways; they know he diligently reports to his mistress the least infraction of chantry procedures. Meerlinda knows he loves her, and values his loyalty, but does not remotely return his feelings. Dulcis could become rebellious, even murderously so, were he ever to face definite proof that his love is a hopeless one.

Sleepy-eyed and fussy, Virfortis was an old man when Embraced, and has not invigorated himself, thinking it unseemly. Despite his sometimes-petulant insistence on his rights as an elder of the House, several of the chantry's Cainites still look to him for leadership, remembering his great past deeds. Once a warrior-mage of considerable valor and ferocity, he fought like an

enraged wolfhound during the so-called Witch War against House Diedne. Although he adores telling stories of his long-ago exploits, he hates to see his former youthful heedlessness in others. It is more out of temperament and prejudice rather than rational agreement with Etrius's position that has prompted Virfortis to become the chantry's staunchest defender of the conservative cause. That the chantry's chief conspirator personifies all that Virfortis now loathes adds fire to his fist-shaking denunciations.

The young and fecklessly handsome Oblatam heads Lion's Green's conspirator faction. Blond, square-jawed and possessed of blindingly perfect teeth (a rare thing in the Dark Medieval era), Oblatam learned long ago to think of himself as God's gift to the 12th century. He sees power as his natural birthright, and threw in his lot with Goratrix because he thought the elder Cainite likely to win out over Etrius. An enthusiastic religious hypocrite, he believes in God because God surely believes in him. He is disinclined to examine the contradiction between his supposed faith and his present activities as a Cainite. Although he'd like to impress Goratrix by, say, shipping him Virfortis' severed and lime-caked head, he's too wary of Meerlinda to act that boldly. Instead, he regularly sends information to Goratrix and bides his time, waiting for the opportunity that will catapult him into his pre-ordained place as a top member of the clan.

Meerlinda's chief Cainite rival shares her neutrality in the eternal sparring between conservative and conspirator. When Embraced thirty years ago by Brunavog, Domina was shocked—not by the transformation but by the fact she'd not been taken into the fold years before. She blamed this on Meerlinda, who she has for years seen as the object eclipsing her true worth in Tremere's eyes. Centuries ago, Domina engaged in a one-sided romantic dalliance with him. She thinks that Meerlinda enjoyed his bed prior to the transformation of 1023 and kept Domina from her rightful place in the Inner Circle. Her hatred of Meerlinda has festered beyond any rational bounds. She has constructed an elaborate fantasy in which she captures Meerlinda, keeping her imprisoned for years if not decades. Domina spends much of her time refining the elaborate schedules of torture that would ensue from this. Having grown increasingly unhinged since her descent into vampirism, she may take rash action soon. She hopes to find impressionable allies who might join her in hating the damnably charismatic Meerlinda among newcomers to Lion's Green. Domina would without qualm betray Lion's Green to another clan if she thought they could help her capture her foe.

Like Paris, Lion's Gate is home to enough vampires to disturb the thoughts of its region's long-established Cainites. Unlike Goratrix, the silky-voiced Meerlinda has tackled the problem with skillful diplomacy, promis-

ing would-be enemies to keep her activities within strict bounds. She's shown the local hierarchy how useful blood magic can be when turned to their ends.

KUPALA'S REACH

Able to observe the daytime activities of the mortal magi only through the reports of her ghoulish servitors, Meerlinda has so far missed a burgeoning cabal of diabolists among them. This group of six magi is led by the stiff-lipped, officious Erro, a stork-thin woman cloaked in an air of rectitude that belies her true actions. Erro returned to her home chantry last year after an extended stay at Ceoris. While there, she researched magic concerning the human soul, in the process arousing the jealousy and distrust of Epistatia, who resented the intrusion into her field of study. As the months wore on, her nights were increasingly troubled by gore-soaked visions of a hellish battlefield. The visions began to intrude into her waking hours, and eventually drove her to the brink of madness. An entity began to manifest itself to her during her experiments. At first, it identified itself as Stars Beyond, but eventually encouraged her to call it Kupala. It told her that it had worked a transformation on the leaders of her house, hoping to bring about some kind of final battle which would allow it to roam free across the face of the earth. But Tremere had

failed him; his mind was bound by his narrow concept of personal power. Kupala had spoken to Tremere only through intermediaries but had now found someone worthy of becoming his consort and sitting on his throne of skulls. He'd made Tremere and his followers into mere bloodlings, but Erro would be something much greater than that. But in order to bring about her transformation, she would need to destroy those Kupala had erroneously invested with his magic. Erro had hoped to form a cabal of magi at Ceoris and work to undermine its Cainites from their very bosom. She found it difficult to inveigle colleagues with righteous Tosia in the way. Finally Epistatia succeeded in having her ejected from Ceoris.

Never possessed of an easy manner, Erro found herself gifted in Lion's Green with powers of persuasion nearly rivaling Meerlinda's. Quietly, always with an eye out for spies, Erro gathered together the chantry's most independent magi. One by one, she powdered their drinks, transmitting to them the same madness-inducing visions she'd suffered at Ceoris. One of the magi had to be smothered in his bed, but the others took readily to Kupala's service.

Erro hails from a noble family owning heavily forested land a few day's ride from Durham. She maintains a modest shrine to Kupala in a seldom-visited corner of her father's holdings. The small patch of forest surrounding



HOUSE OF TREMERE

the shrine has become increasingly bleak and oddly reminiscent of the Transylvanian landscape. Four times a year, Erro and her cabal secretly travel there to make offerings to Kupala. He has recently begun to demand human sacrifices. Erro satisfies him by hiring thieves to kidnap street urchins for her. The need to transport the captive children with them on their trek to the shrine makes it harder to avoid attention. Although they've been accosted on several occasions, Erro has always succeeded in persuading curious travelers that nothing is awry.

Other members of Erro's cabal include the battle-scarred Fascinare, flirtatious Singula and voluble Numen. All have submerged their previous personalities to the dimly-felt but irresistible calling imposed upon them by Kupala.

Erro's first goal is to destroy Meerlinda and then the other members of Tremere's Inner Circle. Only then will they be able to slay Tremere himself. Erro wishes to return to Ceoris, but Kupala now forbids it. He does, however, encourage her to send other members of her cabal to breathe Transylvania's dread-laced air.

A MANSE MOST MODEST

Lion's Green is a tall stone tower. Most locals assume it to be a secondary manse belonging to a noble with a taste for city life.

Unwilling to attract attention by expanding the structure, Meerlinda forces its inhabitants to live at close quarters. Lodgings are cramped. The least drafty of them were claimed long ago by high-ranking members of the chantry. Quarters for visitors and newcomers are extremely chilly. Although cold enough to remind a Cainite of his vulnerability to freezing, the guest quarters won't actually harm their inhabitants.

The once-grand library has fallen into disrepair since its former administrator, Celestyn, was called to Ceoris. It occupies almost an entire floor. Its huge wooden shelves, invaded by damp, have warped. They loom threateningly over library visitors, perpetually on the verge of toppling. Books and scrolls are no longer well-ordered, so it is nearly impossible to quickly find documents, or even know what the collection contains. A search for references to diabolism yields nothing; Erro and her cabal have systematically stolen away all useful texts, hiding them in a shed near their shrine to Kupala.

Magi must share one of four communal laboratories. This arrangement is rife with potential conflict. Researchers must proceed under the jealous eyes of their colleagues. Delicate experiments often come to naught thanks to the accidental intervention of other magi or, when rivalries heat up, deliberate sabotage. Sometimes simultaneous experiments react badly together, to disastrous effect. Several years before he pledged his soul to Kupala, the mage Fascinare lost the hearing in his right ear when a cloud of gas from a colleague's alchemical vats

confused his senses during a summoning ritual. Imps appeared and stole his eardrum. The chantry's Cainites have largely conceded the laboratories to the mortal magi, relying on Ceoris for innovations in Thaumaturgy.

Lion's Green lacks cells or torture chambers. Meerlinda rarely needs to confine or interrogate enemies. Captured foes are dealt with in one of the Cainites' personal chambers, then quickly dispatched. This has happened only twice in the last three decades. Those who search Lion's Green for secret chambers will hunt in vain. Powerful wards prevent unwanted guests from entering Cainite quarters during the day. These caused curious comment from mortal magi when first installed, but the magi then inscribed similar sigils on their own doors, regarding them as a show of status. Now they're so much a part of the chantry that forgetful magi occasionally neglect to read-just them to admit newly hired servants.

Perhaps the most notable feature of Lion's Green is its sumptuous gardens, designed by Meerlinda herself. Her delicately confusing hedge maze provokes subtle epiphanies in those who traverse them by moonlight. More than one apprentice has learned that the quickest way to burst Meerlinda's air of placidity is to pluck a rose or accidentally trample through a bed of young plants.

PERUGIA, FAR FROM THE STORM

Nestled in the ragged hills of this small city north of Rome in central Italy, the Perugia chantry is an example of a modest Tremere stronghold. Its head, Probitas, was only recently brought into the ranks of the unliving. Although situated near a rich source of vis, most Tremere know it as a sort of resort spot, where magi can gather informally and enjoy a change of scenery.

EASE ECLIPSED BY TURMOIL

Italy is no freer than any other part of Europe from interesting turmoil, stirred behind the scenes by competing Cainite factions. It is dominated by afar from the German king (and Holy Roman Emperor) Henry IV. He elbows aside the temporal power of the elderly pope, Celestine III. Revolt stirs to the south in Sicily, prompting brutal repression by Henry's forces. But as of yet the Tremere have paid no heed to Italian politics, the complexities of which dwarf even their own internal struggles.

In the past, Perugia was a haven of rest from Hermetic intrigue. The House of Tremere let their internal conflicts soften under a haze of relaxation and fellowship. However, neither Perugia's wine cellars nor its sun-drenched patios offer any sort of pleasure to its Cainite members. Although Perugia is still treated as a place of leisure by mortal magi, who gather here by the

SHADOWS OF CEORIS

dozen to flee the winters of more northern chantries, the vampires mostly shun it. When they come here it means instead that factional rivalries have reached a boiling point, forcing a confrontation on neutral ground.

A CHANTRY RUN BY FLEDGLINGS

Chantry head Probitas has been a Cainite for only two years. One year ago he was given authorization by Etrius to Embrace others, provided that they were well prepared for the transformation. When one of his neonates rebelled and threatened to reveal the Cainite plot to other magi, Etrius sent a more experienced Cainite from Ceoris to aid him. Goratrix, anxious to keep Perugia from becoming another Vienna, sent several minions as well. However, the agents of both Inner Councilors are of lesser stature. Perugia is but a pawn on the Tremere chessboard.

Before his Embrace, Probitas felt his Christian faith with a vehemence bordering on the self-righteous. Ceoris's castellan, Curaferum, played brilliantly on his pride and insecurity and over the course of several years convinced Probitas to commit terrible atrocities in the name of occult research, and then to gladly accept Caine's mantle. Unlike Etrius, Probitas has now rejected his former faith. On good nights, he tells himself that he has discarded a foolish way of

seeing the world, one which prevented him from acting as a true mage should. When darker moods seize him, he admits to himself that he has damned himself beyond redemption. His main goal as chantry head is to delay the inevitable discovery of the Cainite conspiracy by the house's mortal magi. Of all the Cainite Tremere, Probitas shows the greatest foresight as to the devastating consequences of a split with the unturned wizards. Both Etrius and Goratrix, he believes, are already too preoccupied with the threats posed by other Cainites to recognize the grave danger in their own organization. As a recent convert to vampirism, he understands all too well the gulf that separates a mighty mage, well-supplied with *vis*, from a practitioner of mere Thaumaturgy. Probitas, too lowly to warrant Tremere's attention, hasn't yet been granted the Thaumaturgic secrets meant to counter Hermetic magic, so he doesn't see the root of his masters' confidence. He sees almost all of the house's remaining mortals over the course of a year. (Tosia and her cohort are an exception. They remain in Ceoris to better monitor the "diabolical" goings-on there.) Every day he must size up a visiting mage. He knows who is suspicious, and can also spot likely candidates for the Embrace. He despises the conflict between Goratrix and Etrius, fearing that it will lead one side or the other to make a mistake which will reveal all. Unfortunately, Probitas lacks both the



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stature and persuasive talents of a Meerlinda. It taxes him just to keep the local partisans of both factions safely separated.

His childe, Sodalís, devoted his life to the recruitment and seduction of lubricious young apprentices. While his raffishly disheveled appearance and droll wit might not have earned him much romantic success outside the confines of a chantry, it did, over the centuries, appeal to a surprising number of budding enchantresses. His roster of former conquests includes Farica, now librarian at Vienna, and Lignupeda, who now sits in the dungeons of the Paris chantry. Though startled by the Embrace, Sodalís took to it quickly. For him, the weeks and months of seduction were always more satisfying than the mere act of consummation. He doesn't regret the diminishment of his sexual capacity, and relishes his powers of mental domination. He follows Probitas' orders merely to buy himself time to indulge these delightful new abilities. Sodalís, never one to worry about tomorrow, can't imagine that anything truly bad will come of the house's Cainite transformation. Although he wouldn't object to Embracing every mage in the house immediately, he sees the struggle between conspirator and conservative as pure folly. Despite his complete lack of sympathy for Probitas, his neutrality and cleverness make him the chantry leader's most dependable ally.

Sodalís in turn Embraced his latest willing apprentice, the long-tressed Merusa, without waiting for permission from Ceoris. Probitas retroactively secured Transylvania's consent, without informing Curaferum that the deed had already been done. Merusa, the daughter of a wealthy courtesan raised in a splendor many local nobles would envy, was well tutored from a young age in the art of befuddling lustful men. Only months after her Embrace, she reckons she's derived all available benefits from her association with Sodalís. She sees vampirism as the gateway to undreamt-of power. She wants to go to Ceoris, where true advancement lies. Having been an apprentice of a few months standing upon her Embrace, she has no real respect for house tradition. She despises the mortal magi and wonders why the Cainites wish to Embrace them at all. They should all be slain so that young, vibrant recruits like herself can provide the clan with the strength it needs. Merusa takes slights poorly. She has already killed two magi on their way back to their home chantries. No one knows she's responsible for the attacks, which she arranged to look like the work of bandits.

Etrius's representative at Perugia is square-shouldered Jean Entende, a warrior who won distinction in the Crusades and gradually drifted to Ceoris as a mercenary. Esoara admired his valor against the Tzimisce, even when outnumbered, and put his name forward for the Embrace. Etrius was later forced to send him away from Ceoris when Tosia learned he was a former priest who'd renounced his vows for a swordsman's life. Tosia

took an unreasoning dislike to Jean and began to suspect him as a central player in the supposed diabolism at Ceoris. She thought him connected to the Knights Templar, about whom she's heard rumors of black magic. Her vision of him as a paragon of evil is ironically out of step with his placid, plodding character. Jean abandoned the priesthood because it was too mentally taxing for him. He's good at fighting but out of his depth as an intriguer, at Perugia or anywhere else. He has learned to hate and fear Merusa and the chantry's friends of Goratrix. Assuming he can get away with it, he wants to do something simple to them — kill them, probably.

Goratrix's men are the identical twins Michel and Martial Culrier. Tall, loose-limbed and equipped with bulging lower lips, both are grinningly rapacious ex-ruffians Embraced by Frondator for their mastery of violence. Each pretends to be smarter and more refined than the other, but both are lazy, sadistic thugs. Goratrix soon tired of their presence, but wanted to keep them alive for possible later use. He packed Michel and Martial off to Perugia with orders to keep the conservatives from taking over the place. They've occupied their time mostly by threatening Jean in none-too-veiled ways, and in feeding indiscriminately on city residents. A bored Merusa toys with them, setting them against one another by pretending a romantic interest in them. Probitas regards them as the foulest scum ever to seep up through the cracks of the earth, and has instructed Sodalís to do away with them at the earliest opportunity. Sodalís hopes to do this through trickery, perhaps by leading them to antagonize a Cainite outside the clan.

Few mortal magi make Perugia a permanent home. Most prominent among them is Cultor, a hard-drinking fellow whose earthy ways contrast sharply with the scholarly bent usual among Tremere. His mastery of the various plant magics is unparalleled among the Tremere. Probitas fears his abilities. He might be able to mobilize entire forests to attack Cainite strongholds, making him a threat even to Ceoris itself. Cultor, who spends much of his time hand-tending the vast olive grove that surrounds the chantry, seems especially resistant to the Embrace. He speaks frequently of his love for life as manifested in nature. Oddly enough, he gets on well with the thuggish Culrier twins. Their complete lack of social graces provokes him to quivering belly-laughter. Many bookish magi feel intimidated by Cultor's self-confidence and full-throated zest for life. If he survives the next few years, they may look to him as a leader in their imminent battle against the Tremere vampires.

Blond-haired, arrogant Aculeus mans the tower which harvests *amen* *vis*. The chantry is situated to catch the gusts of a magical wind current. Aculeus' carefully-tended nets draw the residue from these winds. A formidable practitioner of air magic, he uses much of the *vis* himself.

What he does not use, he passes along to other magi, making sure they know how great a favor they owe him in return. His aloof conviction in the superiority of his talent makes him difficult to like. Probitas thinks him selfish enough to welcome the Embrace but worries he would not accept his subordination to seniors of the clan. Aculeus brandishes his contempt for Probitas at every opportunity but tolerates the company of Sodalis. Sodalis isn't sure that Aculeus will ever be ready to be turned, but continues to subtly test him.

MARBLE HALLS

The Perugia chantry is a sprawling complex of one-story villas. The tallest structure in the compound is Aculeus' tower, a spidery structure of whitewashed pine. A system of wooden struts supports a pentagonal net of fine fabric. Rungs along the tower allow Aculeus to climb up and harvest the collected *vis*. Apart from this, the structures at Perugia are all low-slung marble buildings. Most are private quarters, with a bedchamber, servants' rooms, a small and ill-equipped laboratory and space to entertain a few guests. A large central structure provides a common area for gatherings, along with a large kitchen and pantry. Much of the chantry's social interaction takes place on large patios attached to this central hall. An east-facing patio catches the morning sun; visitors shift to its westward partner in the afternoon. Cainites of course decline to expose themselves to sunlight, but their avoidance isn't as obvious as it might be among other company. Magi are accustomed to burning the midnight oil in their labs, and activity on the patios often continues long into the night. Large lanterns hang from the patio's high rails, bobbing gently in the side-draft of the magical winds. Although discussion of occult minutiae is always the main activity, the assembled magi always drink wine, often declaim poetry and sometimes play elaborate games of chance. One popular game involves the animation of small beads of quicksilver, which the magi then race about the patio's tiles. Any one of these activities can quickly turn sour, as banter becomes sharper and the participants grow drunker. Rivalries are never far below the surface among prideful magi. Wine drinking is impossible for vampires; Sodalis nearly exposed his new nature when a former partner in

insobriety all but forced some down his gullet during an especially wild debauch. Sodalis let his old friend, Praedurus of Flanders, live, but now wishes he hadn't. Word from Flanders has it that Praedurus plans a visit to Tosia at Ceoris.

The chantry generates a surprising amount of revenue. Visiting magi are expected to pay a generous stipend keyed to the length of their stays. Probitas has for years falsely maintained that these fees barely cover his simple expenses, from upkeep on the buildings to the cost of food. In fact, he was overcharging shamelessly. He used to donate the money to Perugia's poor as an act of contrition. Since his transformation he's had to divert the extra fees to support an increasingly large community of guards, servants and their dependents. Visiting magi enjoy being waited upon extravagantly by Perugia's over-large staff. They have no idea that the entourage exists as a herd for Perugia's resident and visiting Cainites.

The area's other Cainites are only dimly aware of the Tremere presence here, leaving the chantry free from attack for the time being. In preparation for inevitable conflict, Probitas has allowed the Culrier brothers to train the most able-bodied herd members as guards. He has also begun construction of a low marble fence around the chantry perimeter. It's not tall enough to impede invaders, but allows for the placement of magical wards. At present, the fence is only half-complete.

NEUTRAL GROUND

Perugia sometimes becomes a tense meeting place for delegations representing Etrius and Goratrix. Before Probitas was turned, he mistook these diplomatic parleys as convocations of diabolists. Now he knows why parties of scowling magi suddenly appear, retire to villas for private conference and abruptly leave, often bearing even sourer expressions. He takes care to shield the parleying Cainites from the snooping of mortal magi. To both factions he makes clear the dangers of indiscretion, and to date they have respected the boundaries he lays down. In an early meeting at Perugia, the two factions agreed not to attempt physical harm to other Cainites at the chantry, nor subject rivals to thaumaturgic workings. Probitas has equipped several of the villas with enchanted tapestries whose figures begin to caper and wail when magic takes effect in the room.

House of Tremere

THROW OPEN THE GATES OF CEORIS

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