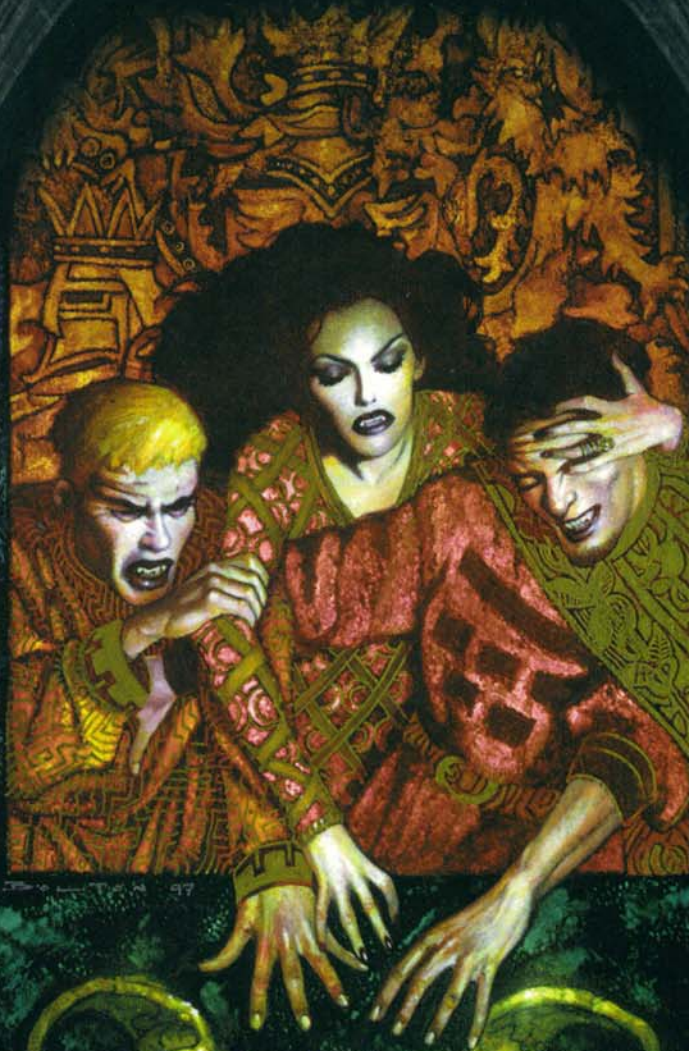


LIBELLUS SANGUINIS



MASTERS OF THE STATE

A SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®

LIBELLUS SANGUINIS



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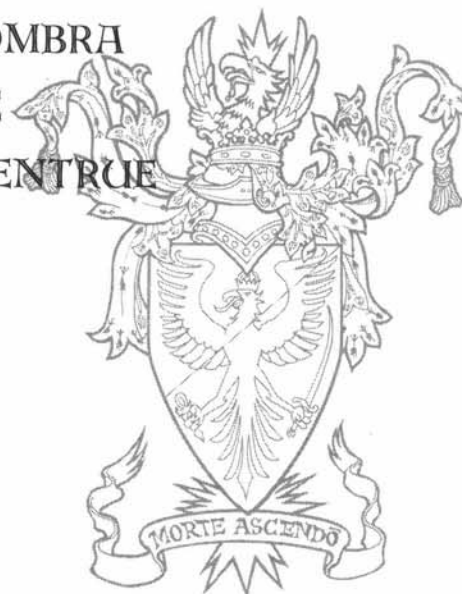
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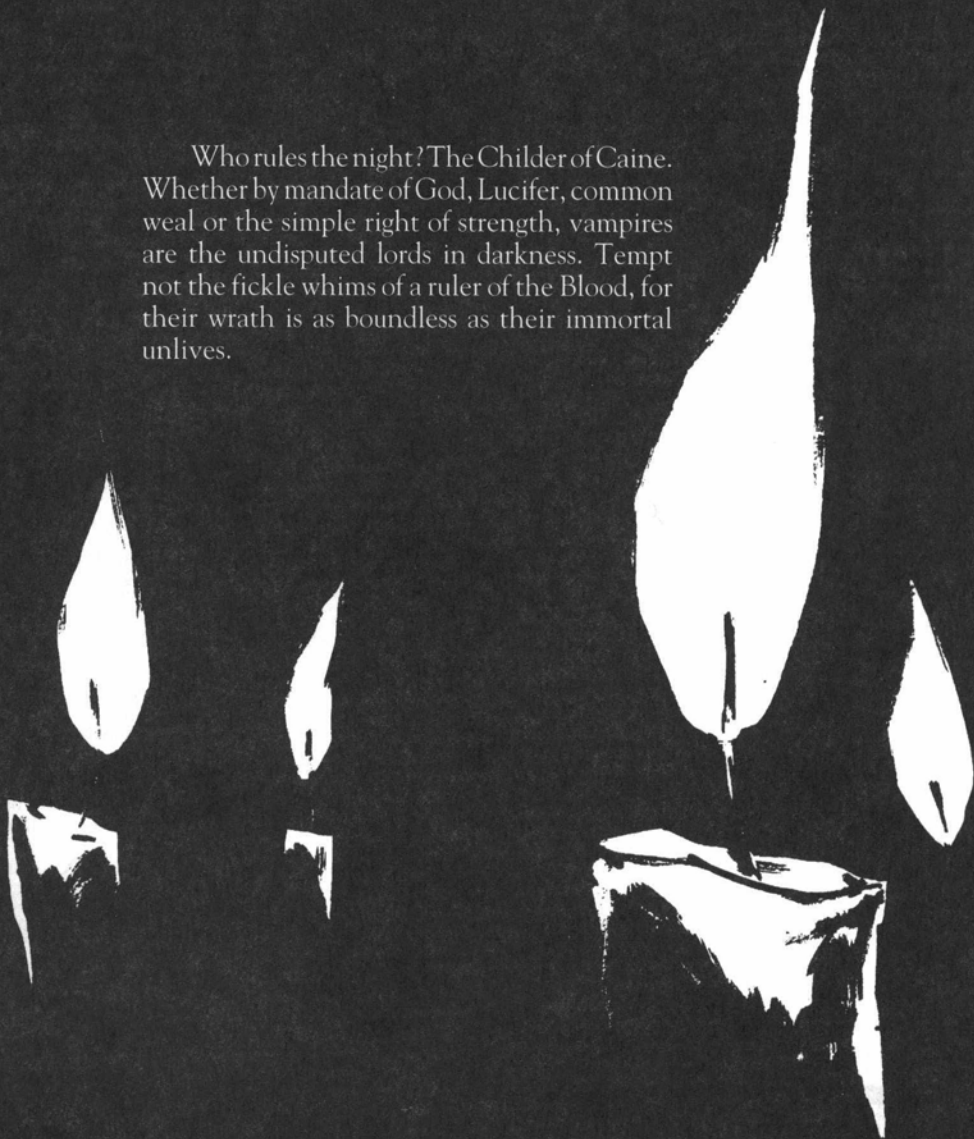
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*Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is
seated on the throne...*

— Revelation 6:16

Who rules the night? The Childer of Caine.
Whether by mandate of God, Lucifer, common
weal or the simple right of strength, vampires
are the undisputed lords in darkness. Tempt
not the fickle whims of a ruler of the Blood, for
their wrath is as boundless as their immortal
unlives.







Introduction:

How to Use This Book

What you hold in your hands is the first book of the **Libellus Sanguinis** series. In each of these "Blood Diaries," we plan to examine three clans united by a common theme. The theme of **Masters of the State** is, obviously, the ruling class of Cainites as embodied by those three clans that most often involve themselves in the affairs of nations.

The Lasombra, Magisters and lurkers in darkness, differ from their modern counterparts in their (albeit underhanded) nobility. As there is not yet a Sabbat in existence, the Lasombra instead devote their efforts to controlling lands on both sides of the Crusades.

Likewise, the Tzimisce are a fractious and territorial lot. Less related to freakishness and counterculture at this time, the Fiends are more ancestral terrors, tied to the sickness and magical fertility of their vaunted hereditary lands.

Finally, the Ventrue are perhaps the most different and simultaneously the most similar to their modern namesake. How did this clan of noble lineage become intertwined with the more "common" business of trade and commerce? And how do the Ventrue still manage to maintain their virtual stranglehold on political power?

All these issues and more are discussed within. Take care, though, gentle reader; do not become embroiled in these Cainites' plots and machinations. Vampires are eternal creatures, remember, and you are but a mote in the wind to their whims.

Format

The arrangement of the topics in this book closely resembles that of the Clanbooks. Imagine this tome as a collection of three small Clanbooks and you will know precisely where to find the information you seek.

Part One — Each clan bears its own introduction, designed to give you a sense of what the clan's beliefs and outlooks are.

Part Two — The clans are very active in the Dark Medieval world. This section discusses what affairs they conduct and where their interests lie.

Part Three — All of the "gamespeak" is presented in this section, along with details on the clan in question's nightly unlife.

Part Four — Character templates, for the use of Storytellers, players, or both, are collected here. Use these as you will, but don't expect them to be flat, stereotypical members of their respective clans.

Part Five — Despite all pretenses to the contrary, no Cainite clan is as infallible as they would have you believe. What grave mistakes have the clans made in the past? What dark secrets do they hide? Look here to find out.

A Word on New Traits

This book includes many new Traits for use in your stories and chronicles. Remember, however, that **Vampire: The Dark Ages** is a game of horror and mystery. If you, as a player, know about the secrets that a clan possesses or the powers it wields, a good bit of the inherent, unknown sense of horror disappears.

For this reason, talk to your Storyteller before assigning your characters any Traits contained within this book. She may prefer that you be unable to use a certain ability or command a certain Discipline.

By the same token, Storytellers, feel free to adjust, modify, treat as dictum or altogether throw out any of the ideas herein. It's your chronicle, and who knows better than you what would create goosebumps on your troupe's flesh?





B

ook One: Magisters

"I understand," Ibrahim said with deliberate slowness, "that Boukephos has not yet finished his business in the land of the English." The Moor's hand drifted lazily in time with the faint music that poured forth from the house as he leaned over the railing and gazed south over the sea.

"He has finished his business, good Ibrahim," the Moor's companion replied. "It is his pleasure that he follows now, with his childe and the training thereof." Seated and holding a goblet of what might have passed at a distance for wine, Yusuf followed his friend's gaze over the waters. "Are you really that anxious for his return?"

Ibrahim's handsome features twisted into a frown. "Not for his sake, no, but to see an end to this bickering. Montano, the others — even our father — the old ones can't be bothered with resolving this. They just laugh and compare the whole matter to something they saw among the Romans, and then they go back to their dances and schemes for a hundred years hence. Boukephos is the only one with his feet in this century."

The other vampire idly stirred his drink with a long, thin finger. "And are you so anxious to accept the Greek's ruling, just for the sake of having matters over and done with? There's more to you than that, my friend." He took his finger from the drink and sucked on it blissfully for a moment, then returned to his idle stirring.

The Moor shrugged eloquently. "What else is there? Discover what the graybeards would have of us do, then dance their steps to the best of our abilities. To act otherwise is to invite the longest sleep, is it not? I just wish an end to this bickering between we "children." By the dozens we claw each others' eyes out, and for nothing! All our plans will be for naught as soon as Boukephos — or one of the other withered blossoms masquerading as our elders — deigns to tell us what to do."

"And what," said the seated man, leaning forward with a terrible light in his eyes, "if you could change that?"

Ibrahim snorted in disbelief. "You've been alone with your poems too long, Yusuf. What could I do?"

"Make the decision for them. Unify the younger ones under your banner. Present Boukephos, when he finishes his sojourn, with a deed already done. And if the old ones care so little for our al-Andalus as to ignore its disposition, then you have nothing to fear from them."

"But to act would be to usurp their privilege!"

"Or perhaps they have deliberately left this opportunity available, to see who will be so bold as to seize it," Yusuf said.

"It could be." The Moor turned back to the sea, looking at the distant silhouette of a ship making for the African shore. "It could well be. But," and he turned once again, "why do you tell me this, old friend? We're of an age in the blood. Why pass the cup on to me, instead of taking it for yourself?"

Yusuf shrugged. "Would you believe that it is because you're better suited for it? I miss al-Mutamid's gardens and musics, the poets he'd invite to read to us — that was my age, Ibrahim. I'm not a soldier or a king, I'm a courtier from a court long gone."

"Patience, Yusuf. There will be other poet-kings for you to grace with your presence."

"But none like Seville's was, a bird escaped from Allah's garden for an evening's sojourn on earth. Those eyes, that mouth..."

"And he ended that night driving the donkeys of his conquerors. Ah, well, perhaps not." Ibrahim frowned. "But you still haven't answered my question."

Yusuf regarded his friend for a long moment. "You truly wish to know? Very well, then. I believe this inaction on the part of our elders to be deliberate. They are *testing* us, Ibrahim, looking to see who among us will seize the moment. They want to see who is worthy of survival. Those who fail will be culled, like stallions incapable of speed when the wolf draws near."

"Or perhaps," Ibrahim said softly, "they wish to see which of us might eventually prove a threat."

There was silence for a long moment. Yusuf put his goblet on the polished wood of the tabletop and stood.

"Perhaps," he said. "I had not thought of that."

"You hadn't?" Ibrahim quirked an eyebrow. "Prophet's beard, Yusuf, you're a better liar than that."

Yusuf blushed — a very human action — to which Ibrahim only laughed. "Oh, don't be so serious, little courtier. I can see now what you intended — that I should work to unify our squabbling siblings, and that in gratitude for your suggestion I would keep you close to me. Then, when Delgado and Tariq and the rest of the old ones plucked my flower for fear of finding it a bitter weed, *you* would be there, my humble vizier, the *safe* choice to assume my position. Is this what you had intended?"

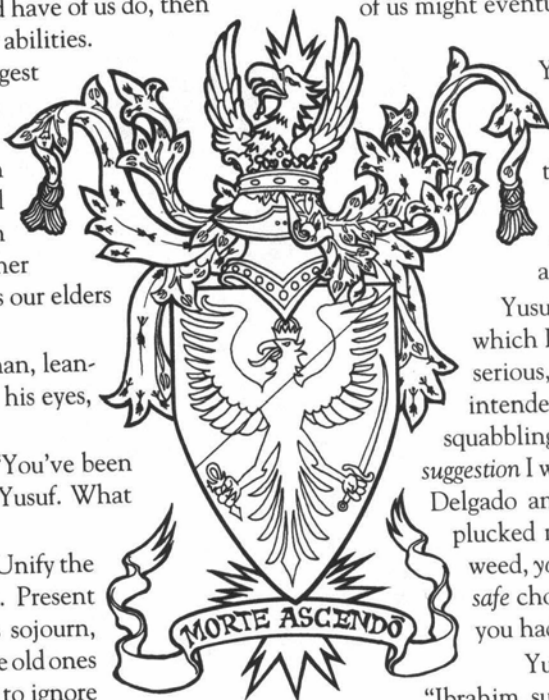
Yusuf stammered and took a step back.

"Ibrahim, surely you cannot suspect me of this! Two hundred years we have spent as friends — all of al-Andalus would not tempt me to betray that!"

"Probably for the best then, poet," the tall Moor said as he turned back to the sea, "for I don't think that any of us will have al-Andalus to offer you." A chill breeze whistled in off the water, and far below spray danced at the top of the waves. "An interesting effort, Yusuf, but you had more subtlety a hundred years ago. You're getting old."

"As are you, Ibrahim. A hundred years ago you'd have killed me on the mere suspicion." Yusuf picked up his goblet and contemplated the workmanship. "Perhaps it is for the best."

Ibrahim drummed his fingers on the railing. "Perhaps it is. So, Yusuf, when do you think Boukephos will return?"



From Darkness Spawned

One does not necessarily control a kingdom by controlling a king. After all, if the king has an advisor whose word he trusts and whose advice he follows, control of the advisor grants influence over his liege. And if that advisor has a mistress, well, then controlling that mistress grants power over the advisor, and surely a doxy is easier to subvert than a powerful minister or a king. So, the Lasombra reason, why struggle to command a king when the same results can be obtained with much less effort and fuss?

For the Lasombra don't wish to control kings *per se*, or even kingdoms. They wish to control for its own sake, and to do so efficiently. To a Magister, the flawless exercise of power is all, and an all-consuming passion it is. While most Lasombra choose to play upon the stage of state — it is, after all, where the stakes of the game are highest — others prefer to duel on points ecclesiastical, or to tame beasts and horses. The details are, in the abstract, unimportant. What matters in the end is the imposition of Lasombra will and control, and the demonstration that both are ineluctably superior to anything others might contrive for themselves.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The epithet by which others know the Lasombra is Magisters, the Latin term for either teacher or master. The Lasombra themselves refuse to comment on which interpretation they prefer, though there is no doubt in the minds of other Cainites.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Romans called the ring of lands around the Mediterranean the *Orbis Terrarum*. Here is where the empire's secret masters may be found, even to the present night. With the exception of Egypt, the entire region is encircled by lands the Lasombra call home. While they are more common in Italy and the Iberian peninsula, there is no shortage of Lasombra among the Crusader kingdoms or in France. North Africa is

more of a haven to the Lasombra than to many clans, but the religious asceticism of the Almoravids of the desert is always the most welcoming.

Northern Europe is relatively free of Lasombra, save in great cities and strongholds of the Church. Normandy holds few Lasombra, but Paris and Cluny have both known their share. Scandinavia is free of the clan's shadowy touch, though some Lasombra have been known to spend a year or three "vacationing" in new-born København to revel in the long nights that northern winter brings.

England has perhaps more than its share of Lasombra, particularly near the Channel. With the hostilities between Plantagenet and Capet, there has been more than enough movement back and forth between the sceptered island and the continent, and enough warfare and diplomacy to sate the greediest Magister's palate. With that in mind, many Lasombra flock to London, Calais, the Cinque Ports and other locales where the powers that be congregate. Others find Canterbury a significant lure, and there have been mentions made of some sort of link between the clan and the untimely demise of Thomas Becket. Certainly a man who played the games of church and state with such consummate skill would have been of interest to the Lasombra....

THE RANKS

The Lasombra are almost overwhelmingly male in the elder generations. It is said that Lasombra himself will not Embrace a woman, for reasons he has never elucidated, and so it falls to his childer, and their childer in turn, to produce *Magistrae* as well as *Magistri*.

The Lasombra look for three things in their childer. The first, and most important, is excellence. They search for the very best, whether in the council chamber or the cloister. However, as very few peasants have the chance to demonstrate even their most sterling qualities in a place where a Lasombra is likely to notice, the second criterion for the Magisters is nobility. Obviously, there is some disagreement over what

constitutes nobility; is it breeding, bearing, mien, wealth? When in doubt, however, the Lasombra tend to test the oldest Cainite axiom: Blood will tell.

The third qualification for consideration is the telling one, however: ambition. Talents without the will to put them to use are worthless. Noble breeding and the allegiance of thousands are useless without the desire to rule more. Diplomatic brilliance without the desire to use it to seize advantage is a waste. This, at least, is the Lasombra position on the matter.

And so, the ranks of the Lasombra are filled with priests who would be Popes and counselors who steer the fates of nations. Noble bastards and unmarriageable daughters, driven by resentment of legitimate brothers who have stolen their inheritances, make perfect fodder for the Lasombra. So do second and third sons, raised to noble expectations with paupers' purses, and able men of undistinguished lineage, who find their ambitions to be greater than any reasonable expectations.

ITALIA

The estimable Boukephos claims that the Lasombra came to Italy with Æneas' crew, abandoning the supposedly idyllic Carthage. Such a romantic origin would certainly help ex-

plain Lasombra-heavy Rome's antipathy toward Carthage. However, factual evidence to support the notion is lacking — other than the elder's word, of course.

What is indisputable, however, is that the Lasombra have been in Italy since time immemorial. Their presence in Republican and Imperial Rome has been carefully documented, and even in the Mother of Cities' darkest hour they did not abandon her completely. While the year A.D. 69 saw the beginning of the exodus of the Magistri from Rome to her colonies, a core group of Lasombra elders and their loyal childer remained in the city through thick and thin. Even the sack of Rome in 476 was not enough to drive them off; they stayed to rebuild with the Emperor Flavius Zeno and the Church.

For the Church was the great magnet that attracted new Magisters to the city after centuries of long, slow decline. With clergy Embraced and the faithful ghouléd, not to mention the stealthy growth of the Cainite heresy, there were more and more places for Lasombra in Rome. Most historians mark the Benedictine expansion that began in the late fifth century as the moment when the Lasombra intertwined their destiny inextricably with that of the Church; it was at this point that more and more land began to fall into the hands of the clergy as the secular power of the empire moved east.

WHO GOES?

A common practice, particularly on the Iberian peninsula, is the disposal of unwanted potential heirs by means of the Church. With high child mortality rates, disease, warfare and the dangerous "sports" of the nobility (not to mention the odd poisoning, assassination or duel), nobles who wish to be assured of their lines' survival are well advised to have multiple children. However, this strategy predicated upon having only one survive to inherit (or at least on making suitable matches for the excess) and doesn't always work out as planned. Having too many heirs can lead to sibling rivalries of deadly intensity; extra sons of royal houses can be (and often are) propped up to lead rebellions. Nor is divvying up inheritances always feasible; wealth is not necessarily mobile, and it does a younger son no good to inherit a dozen suits of armor — with nowhere to store them and no way to transport them.

Furthermore, out of wedlock dalliances produce more than their share of noble (and royal) by-blows, any of whom can at least make matters sticky for a so-called "legitimate" heir. The presentation of a bastard can also be used by a noble's enemies to discomfit or humiliate him at a critical juncture. An unacknowledged wearer of the bend sinister is a disaster waiting to happen.

The solution that many despairing fathers seize upon is the Church. Excess children, bastards, daughters past marriageable age or lacking suitable dowries — all are given to the Church. There they are cared for, allowed to fill a useful role — and kept out of the political arena.

Very few of those thus inured in cloister walls go willingly, and from their ranks, the Lasombra recruit heavily. After all, these bastards and second sons have blood as noble as any, and many have been trained in the arts of governance and war. In addition, though, these shut-aways also share an ambition fueled by hatred and an undying anger at being excluded from their birthrights.

Such vengeful almost-nobles make excellent Magisters indeed.

ROME HERSELF

Considering the bond between the Magisters and the Church, it is a surprise to find relatively few Lasombra in the Eternal City itself. Only those elders who have dwelt there since pagan days, and some of their less adventurous childer, still maintain residence in Rome proper. There are many *servants* of the Lasombra — ghouléd devotees of the Cainite heresy and suchlike — in the city, working the Magisters' will, but few actual Lasombra.

It is the surrounding papal states, not to mention Sicily to the south and the Kingdom of Italy to the north, that are Lasombra strongholds. Rome is perceived as more of an icon, an altar on which Magisters the world over can lay their ambition as offering.

To the Lasombra, Italy fairly bubbles with activity. In the north, debates over the nature of government and mastery are put to the test as empires invade, kingdoms tumble, opportunistic merchants rise and the free communes of the Lombard League join with the Pope against an emperor.

Northern Italy also offers the best opportunities for those rare Lasombra with mercantile ambition. The most powerful trading houses reside in the Italian city-states, and their reach extends from the Holy Land up to England. For some Magisters, the thrill of controlling a trade route is as visceral as manipulating the destiny of a kingdom might be to another; plus, working the merchantman's game allows the Lasombra to indulge in one of their great passions.

THE SEA

There has always been a strong love of the sea inherent in the Lasombra character. This seafaring streak finds expression in the mercantile wars of the Italian city-states. Genoa, Pisa, Byzantine-backed Venice and others all took to the waves, defending (and seizing) trade rights by force of arms.

Many Lasombra dabble in these conflicts, though perhaps not for the reasons one would expect. While the Lasombra political interest in Italy is strong, Magisters are not behind the trade wars. Rather, they're in the middle of them — sailing with war galleys, leading raids and thoroughly enjoying the whole experience. In just this one instance, the spirit of the moment is more important than the political repercussions of later days, and even many of the most reserved Lasombra give in to abandon when the sea calls and the promise of spilled blood beckons.

In this one instance, and for this one reason, lapses in dedication to greater plans by Lasombra are sometimes forgiven.



BOOK ONE: LASOMBRA

Many Lasombra have taken to piracy, often preying on the ships backed by the Genoese, Ventrue and other groups. Such affairs are swept under the table by the *Amici*, who see the matter as an expression of healthy competition.

SICILY

Nowhere is the shadow deeper in Europe than on the island of Sicily. Held by Moors and Genoese, invaded by Pisa and conquered by the Angevins, Sicily is where all the disparate strains of Lasombra are on equal footing. Any Magister can find his own kind here, and indeed, the island is the closest thing to a home the Lasombra have. Many Lasombra pirates base their operations here, and Syracuse sees a constant traffic of black-sailed ships under the moon.

THE FATHER AND THE SON

There is a city on the island of Sicily that Cicero defended from its rapacious governor centuries ago. Outside of that city is a castle, built by a long-dead Moorish engineer for an unliving master. The castle is, by all accounts, impregnable; as a reward for his pains, the architect was killed and his fleeing soul imprisoned so that he could never reveal the secrets of his construction to an enemy.

This is the castle of Lasombra himself. It has no name, though the local peasantry calls it Castel d'Ombro — the Castle of Shadow. There are many servants in the castle, but they never speak. To do so might wake Lasombra from his fitful slumbers and that would mean death.

For Lasombra spends most of his nights sleeping, wandering the Earth in dreams. He still awakens occasionally, sometimes to feed, sometimes merely to go where his wanderlust takes him. These sojourns can extend for years; while they last, the main gates of the castle remain open to await his return. Just because the gates are open does not mean that they are unguarded, though, and no uninvited guest has walked through the portal and survived. Indeed, no Cainite has even dared to attempt entrance in centuries.

Lasombra is not the only Cainite in residence, though. Generations of his childer, grand-childer and so on cluster under the Antediluvian's roof. There they spend their nights politicking, debating, playing chess and otherwise whiling away the years awaiting Lasombra's commands. Many of the oldest Lasombra dwell here, close to the heart of the clan's power. Magisters newer to the blood flock around them, anxious to emulate the manners and intrigues of their betters. Even notorious wanderers like Boukephos occasionally sojourn to Sicily to pay their respects and indulge in the latest gossip among their brethren.



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

Amici Noctis

The Friends of the Night are those Lasombra decreed by a council of their peers as being worthy of setting policy for the rest of the clan — at least on matters that Lasombra himself takes no interest in. Membership among the *Amici* is an honor and a privilege, and the responsibilities that come with membership are taken very seriously indeed.

There are no limits on the number of Lasombra who can belong to the Friends at any given time; there is room for all those who have demonstrated their worthiness. However, gaining admission is neither quick nor easy. Prospective candidates must be sponsored by a current member and observed by other *Amici* over a period of years. The would-be *Amicus* is judged by her ingenuity, capability, honor and most importantly, strength of will.

INDUCTION

Once a Lasombra (as, obviously, only Lasombra are eligible) has been deemed worthy of admission to the *Amici*, she is summarily abducted by her sponsor and certain other Friends who serve as witnesses. The candidate is then sealed in a room (usually below ground; great monasteries are often used for this purpose) that has been prepared so that no light may enter, and she is left there for a period of up to a fortnight. During that time, the Magistra is expected to come to terms with Darkness, both internal and external. There are no distractions in the sealed chamber, nothing save the Cainite and the dark.

Most times, the *Amici* pick their candidates well, and the new Friend of the Night comes forth with a better understanding of both the darkness and herself. Other times, mistakes have been made. Such errors are disposed of. Rapidly.

A new *Amicus* is informed of her few duties as a member of the Friends. These include, but are not limited to, settling matters of local policy in debate with other *Amici*, sitting on Courts of Blood and rendering judgment, enforcing dictates of the *Amici* and disciplining Lasombra who act contrary to the clan's best interests.

It must be noted that most meetings of the *Amici* are informal affairs; they take place after a midnight mass or a masque. Only in moments of crisis are all of the Friends summoned together and then, usually, just to hear Lasombra's — or Montano's — will. These grave gatherings inevitably take place in the darkened halls of Castel d'Ombro. Regional gatherings of *Amici* are more common, particularly in al-Andalus. Still, there is no set schedule or format to these meetings unless a Court of Blood has been called. In that case, however, things become excruciatingly formal.

THE COURTS OF BLOOD

A Lasombra is not truly a Friend of the Night until the first time he has sat in judgment on the worthiness of a fellow Magister to exist. It is the ultimate affirmation of one's own value in the clan when one's peers have willingly handed over

matters of life and death. Indeed, the matter is so exhilarating that most Lasombra voluntarily restrict themselves to only two or three turns on a court per century. Those who take too many additional trips behind the bench are themselves watched carefully....

Most courts have three to five judges, though when the matter of an elder's possible Amaranth is brought up, as many as 13 Lasombra have sat in judgment. It matters not how long a Lasombra has been an *Amicus*; when a court is called (and they seem to simply coalesce when the time is right, often when a sufficient number of petitions have built up to remind the *Amici* of the need), all *Amici* are eligible to be judges. A Lasombra not 10 years under the shadow can be called to judge a Cainite Embraced when Brutus' wife complained of the sheeted dead walking the streets of Rome; an elder of 15 centuries' vintage heeds the word of a Magister 50 years undead. There are no exceptions.

Debate in the courts is open, and often the petitioner is privy to it. On rarer occasions, the defendant is brought in as well. The decisions of the court are always final, and any attempts to tamper with the process are dealt with harshly.

THE BINDING NATURE OF THE VERDICT

All Lasombra, from the rankest neonate to the most august childe of Montano recognize the infallible and indisputable nature of a decision made by a court. Whether or not they agree with it is another matter, but a decree issued by the *Amici* might as well be an 11th Commandment.

Perhaps the gravest damage done by a Court of Blood's damning verdict is not in the approval of the Amaranth but in the reasoning behind it. A Magister on the receiving end of an Amaranth approval has obviously incurred such wrath and disfavor among her fellows that they deem death the only amenable solution to the problem she presents. Rather than dispute it (as the court's word is law), some disaffected condemned actually end their own unives when they hear of the verdict rather than wait for the inevitable night-shrouded execution at the hands of their killers.

BEYOND THE FRIENDS

Most Lasombra will never join the Friends. Such Lasombra, while they have recourse to the Courts of Blood, have no voice in matters decided by the *Amici*. When a decision comes down from the Friends, a "lesser" Lasombra has two choices: Obey or risk the wrath of the Friends. Most choose to obey.

Young Lasombra often seek to join the *Amici* and, as such, are usually punctual with their compliance to the wishes of their betters. Older Magisters, particularly those who have seen a few centuries and have no prospects of elevation, are less willing to submit to the Friends' will. Some few of these have gone so far as to plot rebellion, though no real threat has ever emerged from these cabals of the disaffected.



When Lasombra is in residence and awake, he is the undisputed master of his castle. Even in his sleep, he often makes his presence known to his guests and servants. Shadowy figures with Lasombra's features patrol the halls; beasts made entirely of blackness squat on the battlements to stand silent guard.

However, when Lasombra wanders or slips into deeper slumber, it is Montano who reigns in his stead. Montano is the only childe to whom Lasombra speaks regularly, discussing future nights, the war with the Germans encroaching on the north of Italy, and other such inconsequentialities. In his sire's absence, Montano is the sovereign of the Castle of Shadow. His word is law, and he administers honorable and fair justice to his siblings, nieces, childer and less identifiable blood relations. For this fairness, of course, he is hated by most, but respected and feared by all. In the centuries of Castel d'Ombro's existence, not one attempt has been made to diablerize either the sleeping Lasombra or his favorite childe.

Montano rarely stirs from the castle these nights, content to stare over the ocean from the towers of his sire's manor. As of late he has been increasingly concerned with the matter of the *Reconquista*, as both Moorish and Christian Lasombra have petitioned him for a ruling as to which side of the conflict the clan supports.

LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

There are many members of *Amici Noctis* in the castle, but Montano has decreed that any affairs of the Courts of Blood are to be resolved off of the island of Sicily. He has also sworn to punish any transgressors personally, a threat that carries enough weight to keep violations of his decree to a minimum.

DIVIDED LOYALTIES

The *Reconquista* is probably the most important issue before the clan today, even more so than the perpetually unstable disposition of Italy. In Italy, the enemy is plain to see: the Germans and their Ventrue backers. Internecine squabbles mean nothing when the chance to demonstrate superiority over the self-styled Patricians arises. When the Hohenstaufens come calling, there is no question of the appropriate Lasombra response.

However, things become a trifle more difficult when there are Lasombra on both sides of the issue. And so, from Granada to the heart of the Castle of Shadow, the debate rages: Who do we support? Almohad and other Moorish Lasombra call for a halt to the *Reconquista*, while the scions of the Church demand that the Saracens be expelled from Europe. (Removing them from the Holy Land is, at this point, too much to hope for.)

Lasombra himself has evinced not a whit of interest on this issue. When pressed by his childer, he likens the situation to the wars of Pompey, or perhaps Alexander's "Battle of Rats," and assures the petitioner that the worthier side will inevitably reveal itself. Montano is not much better, admitting a preference for the *taifas* but softened enough by centuries among the Romans to see merit in the Spaniards as well.

Among the newer generations, though, the battle for Iberia is a much more personal thing. As many of these Lasombra have been taken from the ranks of the noble families leading the war, the *Reconquista* matters in a way that abstract manipulation never could. It is their family estates and tombs, their heritage and wealth, that are being contested by armies and, as such, they often come to blows on the issue. A great many ride forth with the armies whose religion they share; the most zealous have taken to ghouling troops regardless of personal or clan consequence.

The situation has gotten so bad that the *Amici Noctis* have declared a unilateral ban on petitions based on one's political preference in the matter of Iberia. While most of those Cainites involved in the war are too young — or too feckless — to belong to the Friends of the Night, the debate among even the *Amici* is heated. Debate, however, is what it remains among the friends. Even those of the *Amici* who have friends, family or lands in the contested kingdoms know that in the end, this, too, will be another footnote in history. What matters less than how al-Andalus is governed is by what methods that governance is enforced, by whom and how skillfully.

THE KNIGHT'S VIGIL

Perhaps the most famous Christian hero of the *Reconquista* is Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar, also known as El Cid. While popular vampiric rumor painted de Bivar as a Cainite, or at least as a ghoul, there was no evidence that the captain was ever anything more than human (though a superb example of the species).

De Bivar's bones lie, untroubled, in the Cathedral at Burgos, across the peninsula from his beloved Valencia. The cathedral itself sits at one of the more important stops on the Pilgrim's Road to Santiago, and more than one Lasombra has journeyed there.

It has become something of a ritual of passage among young Christian Lasombra of Spanish heritage to spend a night in silent vigil before the tomb of El Cid. As there is a strong undercurrent of faith that permeates the very floors of the Burgos Cathedral, this task is more difficult than one might imagine. To win the adulation of his peers and the (imagined) blessing of the departed de Bivar, the Magister must endure the unceasing pressure of faith instilled by all of the pilgrims and holy men who have passed some time in the cathedral, all without uttering a single sound. Furthermore, he must remain at the bones of the hero until sunrise and do so in perfect solitude. This puts the onus of honesty upon the vampiric squire, though lying about one's vigil comes with disastrous consequences. The members of *Amici Noctis* always seem to know, somehow, when a postulant has not spent the entire night in the cathedral, failed in his pledge of silence, or worst of all, profaned the hero's bones with the drinking of blood. They take appropriate action to punish such transgressions. On the other hand, those who admit failure, while duly noted as weak-willed, are not usually punished.

The true hazard of the vigil, apart from the failure of will, comes from Moorish Lasombra who see the practice as insulting. Should a Magister of Islamic blood hear of a vigil in progress, he may attempt to disrupt it by any means necessary. By tradition, a Lasombra keeping vigil by El Cid's grave is permitted to defend himself, and many epic duels between Cainites have been fought with only the bones of El Cid to witness them.

THE SPANISH ORDERS

The Spanish knightly orders consist of:

- **Alcantra**, founded in 1156. The Order of San Julian del Pereiro is the original name of this order, but the name of the group changes in 1213.
- **Calatrava**, founded in 1158 by Sancho III of Castile to hold the recently taken city of Calatrava. Both the order of Alcantra and that of Calatrava are Cisterian orders.
- **Santiago**, supposedly founded in the 10th century but not confirmed by a pope until 1175.

These three orders function primarily in al-Andalus, crusading to expel the Saracen invader from the Iberian peninsula. As one might expect, certain Christian Lasombra with a political agenda have a vested interest in supporting these very effective military forces against the Almohads. While these *padrones* never actually Embrace members of the orders — to do so would have been, in some strange sense, dishonorable — there is no hesitation about supporting them with money or grants of land.

The Workings of Dark Souls

THE MASTER'S HOUSE

There are very few dwellings that Lasombra consider to be suitable for long-term occupation. While traveling, of course, they make do, but when it comes time to return home, Lasombra are very selective about their circumstances.

There is a significant minority among the Magisters in the holy orders. These vampires dwell within fortress-like monasteries and abbeys, often in monastic asceticism. However, ascetic does not mean foolish — these monasteries and nunneries are as grim as prisons and twice as defensible. Thick, brooding walls and heavy gates, not to mention full complements of truly faithful clergy and servants, serve as more than adequate protection. As the concentration of faith in such defenses provides a potentially fatal threat to the guarded Lasombra as well, these Magisters must burrow themselves into the heart of their labyrinthine homes. A delicate balance must be maintained between piety and avoidance of the truly pious, otherwise the Lasombra may find himself destroyed by his own protections.

Some holy ground contains such a concentration of faith that it causes agony for a Cainite to stand upon it. Such places are well known among Caine's children and are avoided for that reason. Not surprisingly, certain Lasombra have made a practice of desecrating such sites and then usurping them, trusting residual faith and long-standing reputations to keep intruders out.

Monasteries such as this also squat atop massive underground complexes of monks' cells, confessionals, storerooms, and other, less identifiable chambers. If the resident Lasombra are at all involved with the Cainite heresy, it is in these tunnels that the devotees of this deviant faith meet, far from light and life. Here is also where less savory members of the clergy come for their illicit trysts, and where recalcitrant initiates are "disciplined." What other uses these chambers see can only be

imagined, though innumerable stories have been whispered of torture and murder, even those of prisoners locked away and forgotten until their very bones crumbled to dust.

There is usually some form of subterranean path out of the monastery that can be reached through the underground complex. Many monasteries resemble fortresses in other ways as well, having large supplies of food secreted away, independent water sources and smithies that can easily be turned to armory work.

On a less martial note, monasteries also house vast stores of knowledge in the form of books and scrolls. These manuscripts, both ancient and modern, are a powerful resource, and may well be one of the reasons the Lasombra originally moved into the Church. After all, a scroll rescued from the wreck of one of the Greek colonies in Asia Minor just might contain information about a Cainite who dwelt there — or at the very least, insight into her background and deeds. Any of these might be key in understanding (or eradicating) the Cainite in question; it is a truism among the Magisters that one can never have too much information on an opponent.

Access to Lasombra-held libraries is tightly restricted as the Magisters have no wish to share their treasures with competitors. It is a signal honor for a non-Lasombra to be granted access to one of the Magisters' libraries. Furthermore, any vampire to whom this gift is granted incurs a weighty debt to the Lasombra that will undoubtedly someday be called upon. As an added matter, any and all visitors are chaperoned, usually by both Cainite and mortal guardians to make sure no materials go out on unauthorized, extended loans.

Part and parcel with libraries, however, are librarians — monks who are literate. With literacy at a premium outside of monastery walls, the advantage inherent in potential control of the largest demographic of those who can read is incalculable. (Consider this: The laws of the land are, of course, written. The only ones who know what they actually say are those who can read. Literacy by no means has honesty as a prerequisite. The rest is left as an exercise for the student.)

THE LOST VISAGE

It is well known that Lasombra Cainites cannot see their own reflections in a mirror. Some stories say that the clan was punished thus by Caine for some unknown transgression, others claim that the Devil took their reflections when they dared to call upon darkness greater than his own. (The latter explanation, while popular, is technically heresy and will greatly upset any Lasombra with religious leanings who hears it.) The theories are numberless, but there is no explanation that fits the facts.

Regardless of cause, no Lasombra owns a reflection. Once Embraced, a Lasombra's face cannot be seen in a mirror, a pool of water, a puddle of quicksilver or any other reflective surface. As a result, certain other Cainites have taken to placing mirrors strategically in havens and palaces, for the sake of identifying any Magisters present. However, the Lasombra have taken advantage of this quirk as well (see below).

Without the benefits of reflections, Lasombra tend to obsess about their appearances. Many will have manservants or ghouls whose sole function is to dress and groom them and state repeatedly how superb they look. The position of "body ghoul" to a Lasombra is one calling for much discretion, as the ghoul is the Magister's almost constant companion. A few Magisters, perhaps focused a tad too thoroughly on their images, pay Tzimisce vampires outrageous sums to alter the features of their body ghouls to mirror their own. The body ghoul then becomes a walking, talking, faux-mirror for the vampire, fussed and fidgeted over to a disturbing degree.

Even the most sensible Lasombra, however, are partial to seeing their own image, and most sit for at least one portrait every year. This practice is most common among Magisters between one and three centuries of age, who often fill entire galleries with portraits of their own image. More than one visitor has remarked upon the unnerving sensation of walking corridors lined entirely with variations upon the same face and features.

Of course, woe betide any mortal painter who is so foolish as to render a portrait of a *young* Magister that is less than flattering. While many of the clan's more practical elder members appreciate an accurate recording of their appearance, younger ones just coming to grips with the loss of their reflections often have somewhat...idealized memories of what they actually look like. When a portrait fails to live up to their euphemistic expectations, these young Magisters can get upset — with unfortunate consequences for the artist.

Islamic Lasombra scrupulously avoid this sort of portraiture and, indeed, most forms of representative art.



BOOK ONE: LASOMBRA

My Dearest Lucita:

Beloved childe, you were right about the level of degradation to which *Amicus Noster* Omar has sunk. He attended the revel last evening and was permitted, in accordance with his station, one attendant. Said manservant was a ghoul, and indeed we expected no less. After all, Omar was not required to provide us with refreshment, as our goodly host had prepared a feast indeed. I wish you had been with us to share it. No, it was the visage of this attendant that causes dismay in me to this very hour and which can even replace the image of your loveliness before my eyes.

Vanity, childe — he has fallen to that deadly sin and refuses even to own his transgression in the confessional.

For, as you undoubtedly know by now, the ghoul wore Omar's own face. He boasted — the fool boasted — as to how much he'd paid a Bulgar Tzimisce to do the work for him. The ghoul was even dressed in the same raiment, down to jewelry and blade.

Omar positively cackled about the entire unseemly display and showed off his toy in obvious hopes of soliciting compliments on its appearance. The rest of those assembled, to their credit, maintained their composure until Omar left. As all of those remaining were of the *Amici*, I took that opportunity to bring forward your petition, so superbly phrased.

And so, my darling Lucita, my shining light, I have the pleasure of informing you that your petition has been granted, with one condition.

You may, at your leisure, hunt down Omar y Sion Cedeño and commit Amaranth upon him. He will not be informed of this decision by the *Amici*, and we expect your hunt will be swift. However, ere you lay talon or blade on Cedeño, you must first destroy the ghoul with his face, and in such a manner that Omar understands the message perfectly. You may, of course, do with the corpse as you wish afterwards, but first you must lay utter ruin to that mockery of a face. Our reflections have been taken from us for a reason and to attempt to recapture them is to thwart God's will. You will be the instrument of holy vengeance for that presumption, beloved childe.

My faith in you, as is my faith in all things, is absolute. I look forward to hearing successful tidings of your hunt, my darling daughter.

Your Loving Father

Ambrosio Luis Moncada

MIRRORS

Lasombra, of course, cannot be seen in mirrors. On the other hand, this enables the Magisters to make certain unique defensive arrangements to their havens. Any Lasombra dwelling has approximately a coinflip's chance of being positively bespangled in silvered glass, with the front vestibule looking like a veritable hall of mirrors.

The advantage of this arrangement is purely strategic. While the Lasombra lord of the manor has no reflection, the same can't be said of his visitors — friendly or otherwise. Indeed, any Lasombra worth his salt will have arranged his mirrors so that he has reflective lines of sight all through his haven. An intruder to a Lasombra haven, thus, has all of his actions observed from the instant he steps through the door until such time as the master of the house decides how to dispose of him.

Of course, this tactical consideration has been completely misunderstood by members of the other clans. Instead of pondering just why the Lasombra, *sans* reflection, insist on bedecking their homes with mirrors, the members of the other clans just mutter about Lasombra vanity and an unseemly idolatry. This misunderstanding serves the clan's purposes even as it slanders its reputation, a tradeoff which the prideful Magisters will accept without taking bloody offense — for now.

HOUSES, MANORS AND CASTLES

Much of European castle-building technique was taken from firsthand experience with Islamic fortifications in the Holy Land. The Lasombra, with tacticians and observers on both sides of the line (that line was never drawn as clearly among mortals as some depressingly literal propagandists and Ventrue would like it to have been), were in perfect position to take advantage of this information before anyone else.

Naturally, they did so.

And so, castles in regions where Lasombra hold sway often have all of the advances Islamic science can offer: curved towers to reduce the effects of battering rams, concentric constructions with lines of inner defense, projecting towers that flank exposed walls and all of the other latest innovations for defense and murder. While it is unlikely that a Lasombra owns such a castle, it is probable that any Magister dabbling in politics will make certain that one is constructed near his haven. Truth be told, however, very few mortal lords need much manipulating to see to their own defenses. It's just that the Lasombra prefer those defenses to be convenient.

VIAE

It is not surprising that a clan that ties itself to the Church has many members who walk the Road of Heaven. Indeed, Via Caeli is by far the most popular Road among the Magisters,

THE ROAD OF CHIVALRY

The modified version of the Road of Chivalry espoused by Islamic Lasombra focuses more on duty to Allah and one's superiors than on one's duties to mortals (who, after all, are one's inferiors and thus owe respect). While this modified Via still sees the mistreatment of mortals as a sin, it does so more out of *noblesse oblige* than out of concern *per se*. Hospitality should be provided to other Cainites, yes, but out of respect for station — they are peers, or at least the closest one has to peers.

particularly those of devout Catholic faith (in life or death). As the stresses of unliving existence mount, however, this Road sometimes becomes harder and harder to follow, at least in its original form. As a result, there have been any number of "branchings" from the Road of Heaven. Some of these side paths seem to have great potential; others appear to be dead ends.

That is not to say, however, that all Lasombra seek Heaven. Those of Moorish or Berber origin generally start on the Road of Chivalry, though a somewhat modified version thereof, to bring the Road in line with Islamic principles of honor and faith. Other Lasombra, having fallen off the Road of Heaven, take up the Road of Humanity, at least temporarily. Such "wayward" Cainites often drift from Via to Via, trying on philosophies and discarding them with equal rapidity.

FAITH AND THE LASOMBRA

The Lasombra are remarkable among the clans for the sheer number of their ranks who honestly, devotedly believe in the teachings of the Church. The Magisters have a higher proportion of Cainites with True Faith than any other clan, and many of those Lasombra who serve in the Church have not let their unliving state alter their belief.

This would seem a paradox, and for many, the conundrum remains insoluble. A good many Magisters fall away from faith, embracing the secular exclusively. After all, even the most devout sometimes have trouble reconciling the acts of a vampire with the demands of their Savior. These Cainites rarely stay on one Via and often find themselves bouncing from Via Caeli to Via Humanitatis, and then, perhaps, further on. Such Cainites are sometimes prone to fits of self-loathing over their perceived failures, and at such times, they are watched carefully by their fellow clan members. More than one, in a haze of religious depression, has attempted to go to Church authorities to confess the horror of his existence. Fortunately, there is usually enough advance warning for this type of maneuver to be subverted, with the receiving confessor being a member of the Cainite heresy, or otherwise disinclined to report what he has been told.

On the other hand, there are many Catholic Lasombra who cling to their faith after death, and the rituals of the Church are still vital to these clan members. Outsiders see the adoption of a church-like structure by the Magisters as mockery, but in truth, it is a gesture of reverence for many. Furthermore, many Lasombra bishops, archbishops and other clergy held those positions in life. Unfortunately, others see their new state as a chance to reject the trappings of the Church in their entirety. Such Lasombra are responsible for the poor reputation Magister religious practices have among others; they are the ones who hold the rites and rituals up for derision by imitating or twisting them.

Confession, in particular, is one of the ritual holdovers from life that is held in high esteem. This is not, as one might expect, done for the sake of information gathering or blackmail. Rather, there is a genuine respect for the notions of sin, penance and absolution with which few dare meddle. Furthermore, just as in mortal society, there are "fashionable" confessors and "unfashionable" ones, and being invited to confession at the haven of a notable Magister is both an honor and a privilege.

Then there are those Lasombra who come from the ranks of the clergy — a fair number, if rumor is to be believed. While some of these drop from the ranks of the faithful and a great many more were of a secular mind to begin with, there remain those who took their mission seriously in life and continue to do so in death. These Magister clerics tend to fall into two categories.

Most associate themselves with the so-called Cainite heresy, which subverts the notion of transubstantiation with a Lollard-like logic, offering the body and blood of Cainites for communion. This is a relatively easy path to follow, heretical though it may be. While not a true version of the faith, it offers enough familiar rites and rituals to be comforting, and the danger of being discovered or surprised by a holy man is minimal.

Some, however, take the harder road. They continue in practice and observance, even to the point of maintaining their positions in the actual Church as long as they can. These Lasombra are not only religious, they are actively faithful — and that makes all the difference to them. Mind you, such vampires do not have easy consciences, but they do have



callings that they cannot deny. In the words of Archbishop Monçada of Madrid, "I believe, with a perfect faith, in the Church and in all of its teachings. By those teachings, I am damned; this, too, I believe. Yet if my damnation be the price of others' salvation, I shall accept it even as Our Lord accepted his suffering as the price for the salvation of mankind."

As one might expect, Monçada has never had the opportunity to take this notion up in ecclesiastic debate. Many Lasombra are fond of arguing theology, though, and will spend nights debating similar issues. Novice Magisters are warned with the apocryphal tale of the Lasombra who were so thoroughly absorbed by their debate on the nature of Cainite damnation that they were taken by surprise by the rising sun and found the opportunity to test their theories immediately.

THE ANGELLIS ATER

Archbishop Monçada's attitude is one that is shared by other Lasombra, but there are some who take his point a trifle too literally. Seeking redemption by plumbing the depths of damnation, or possibly seeing further sin as a form of self-flagellation, they delve deep into depravity. Not content with simply mocking Church rites, these walkers on the road of damnation have begun to create their own rituals involving sacrifice, baths of blood, the sharing of blood from chalices and other acts of foulness.

Decried as heretics by those who fear the wrath of the Church, these Satanic Lasombra practice a deviant path of the Via Diabolis (which actually shares a great deal with the Via Caeli, interpreting the Cainite as the minion of the Devil instead of God). Whereas most Dark Medieval conceptions of infernalism are solitary pursuits, the *angellis ater*, or black angels, work with unprecedented cooperation in the interests of serving their unholy lord. Many *angellis ater* organize themselves in covens of five to 13 members. These covens actively encourage infernalism and blasphemy, and it is not unknown for particularly efficient *angellis* to turn entire villages to Satan's bidding through subtle coercion and blatant, sacrilegious displays of vampiric power. *Angellis ater* are arguably the most vocal proselytizers of the Lasombra, entreating more potential converts than the Church itself.

Obtenebration is the ultimate manifestation of Satan's will on Earth through the vessel of the Cainite, according to the doctrine of the *angellis*. The shadows conjured through its practice are not woe-begotten "inner darkness," as so many Lasombra believe (to the ridicule of many *angellis*), but rather, black shades brought forth from Hell itself. Other Cainite Disciplines are extensions of Lucifer's blessing by the same token. Thus, the vampire exists solely to spread the Devil's work in the physical world.

THE FATE OF THE BLACK ANGELS

Surprisingly, the *angellis ater* survive the purge of the Inquisition in the years to come. This is quite ironic, as the Inquisition holds the destruction of this type of Satanic coven dear to their purpose. Nonetheless, the black angels escape the wrath of the Church by possessing an uncanny degree of insight as to the comings and goings of the Society of Leopold. One might even believe that they had contacts on the inside....

The *angellis ater* mesh seamlessly with the Sabbat's formation after the Anarch Revolt. The nihilistic, evil vulgarity of the faction contributes a great deal to the sect's destructive bent, and many Lasombra neonates (as well as those easy "converts" from other clans) uphold the tenets of the Black Angels. Elder Lasombra, particularly those who pre-date the Sabbat's formation, regard this philosophy as a "passing phase," much like mortal adolescence; but nevertheless, the numbers of Devil-worshipping Lasombra remain prodigious in the 20th-century World of Darkness.

And this they do with abandon. The *angellis ater* are a stain on the countenances of other Lasombra, actively corrupting the dogma of the Catholic Church into a twisted, black parody of grandiose scale.

OTHER FAITHS

Few, if any, Islamic or Jewish clergy have taken the opportunity to join the Lasombra. If nothing else, the faiths' dietary strictures (see below) make the idea of becoming a vampire problematic.

This has not prevented *followers* of these faiths from becoming Lasombra, though the number of Jews Embraced into the clan has been tiny thus far, even in comparison to the number of Muslims. The exclusion of Jews from most social and political discourse in the Dark Medieval world makes them unattractive candidates for Lasombra Embrace. Those few Jews who are brought under the shadow are often those connected financially to local power structures, though certain Lasombra elders have a soft spot for the occasional false Messiahs who rise from the ranks of Europe's Jewry.

Elders of the clan want perspectives from both sides of the *Reconquista*, as they have not yet decided which side to support. North African and Moorish Lasombra tend to Embrace from among their own, as Christian Lasombra do the same. This regrettable parochialism has led to more than a bit of intra-clan squabbling as to what the "true" direction of the Lasombra is to be; however, the example of Montano is usually sufficient to quiet even the most rabid advocate of a purely Christian — or European — clan.

THE EMBRACE

Lasombra do not bring newcomers into the clan randomly, hastily or clumsily. They study their potential childer carefully, often for years at a time. Many Lasombra deliberately maneuver hardships into the paths of those they would recruit to gauge their reactions and test their mettle. Others insert themselves into would-be childer's lives so as to better gain an estimation of their capabilities and will.

However, there is one constant in all Lasombra Embraces. In all cases, the sire-to-be must ask the one she would grant the Kiss if he truly desires it. To Embrace without permission, freely granted, is the worst offense a Lasombra can commit. In those cases when the Embrace is given involuntarily, unless the circumstances are extenuating to an unbelievable degree, the misguided sire is routinely punished. Torpor is the least one can expect in this situation; most offenders of this ilk are summarily destroyed. The wrongly created Cainite is sometimes destroyed; other times he is given the choice he was denied before. Such Lasombra rarely rise to join the ranks of *Amici Noctis*. Their origins are seen as tainted, and as such, they themselves are seen as not quite being up to standard. Not surprisingly, involuntary Lasombra resent this treatment and tend to keep to themselves. Indeed, many have an adversarial attitude toward the more mainstream members of the clan, adopting an "us-against-them" pose that masks some very real hostility.

The reasoning for this seemingly odd policy has its origins in the Lasombra's estimation of themselves. After all, the Magisters view themselves as the *creme de la creme* of the vampiric population, taking only the noblest and most capable mortals to swell their ranks. A young Lasombra should not have to be coerced. Lasombra heritage should not be forced on anyone — it must be offered as a precious gift. The potential Lasombra should be made aware of what he is being offered and what an honor it is and then allowed to choose freely.

If the candidate chooses to accept, the Embrace occurs without further delay. If the candidate refuses, he is given one night to reconsider his decision and warned not to discuss the matter. It goes without saying that during that time, he will be under surveillance, and should he prove himself indiscreet, he is considered to have rejected the offer. What follows is brief and bloody but not unpredictable.

If at the end of the 24 hours, the candidate has proved his discretion and still refuses, he is usually sorrowfully killed. Very few have refused the Embrace and been permitted to live, if the thwarted sire has tremendous respect for his victim's nobility

or talents. However, the rumors about El Cid notwithstanding, no one is ever offered a second chance at immortality — at least not by the Lasombra.

AMARANTH

It has been said that murder, like love, should have no witnesses. Among the Lasombra, however, this is most emphatically not the case. In cases of the younger generation devouring the elder, the more witnesses to the deed, the better — within certain parameters, of course.

To prevent excessive Amaranth and, more importantly, to keep clan members from wasting too much energy worrying about which of their progeny had patricidal intentions, in recent centuries the Lasombra have formalized a practice more or less in effect since Roman times, if not before. The idea behind this codification of Amaranth is as old as the concept of parents and children: By controlling the process by which a child commits Amaranth, you control the frequency of Amaranth as well. There's more to the matter than that, of course, but that simple principle lies at the heart of the Courts of Blood and saves the Lasombra from the internecine strife that afflicts so many other clans.

THE PROCESS

Any Lasombra may petition for permission to commit Amaranth. It is simply a matter of giving a member of *Amici Noctis* a written request for the Friends of the Night's sanction for the deed. Ideally, the petition should also contain the reasons that Amaranth is necessary, when there are equally permanent but less radical options available. Evidence of gross misconduct, incompetence, derangement and so on are all considered suitable additions to a petition for Amaranth. On occasion, an accuser is called before the court to add substance to the weight of her petition, but if sufficient evidence is not presented properly, trial never reaches this stage.

The Courts of Blood themselves meet irregularly, usually when a crowd of *Amici* have gathered and one or more has been presented with a petition recently. There is no statute of limitations on this process. Some verdicts have been handed down in hours, others in decades. More than once a young Lasombra who has pestered *Amici* for swift resolution has found that resolution not at all to his liking. In this, the courts are teaching tools, imbuing those new to the blood with patience. (And if a Lasombra cannot control himself to wait for the answer to the question he has asked, that demonstrates quite well that the petitioner most clearly does not deserve to have his request granted.) There is method to the agenda of the Courts of Blood, and any who fail to see it will most likely find their dealings with the courts to be less than pleasant.

On average, one petition in ten is granted. However, there are always terms and conditions set upon court-sanctioned hunts. These range from a demand that the hunter inform the prey of his intention, to barring the use of Disciplines in the hunt, to a mandate for the slaughter all of a

LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

THE ROAD TO AMARANTH: A YOUNG MAGISTER'S PRIMER

1 - Decide on a target. Collect evidence of his incompetence. Forging evidence is excusable: getting caught doing so is not.

2 - Draw up a petition outlining the offenses of the elder you wish to commit Amaranth upon. Take pains to point out how the elder's actions are damaging to the clan as a whole. Provide, if possible, suggestions as to how another might handle the situation better - never mentioning yourself by name, of course.

3 - Locate a friendly member of *Amici Noctis* and formally present him with the petition. Make certain to express the depth of your gratitude.

4 - Mention your petition casually to any and all *Amici* you know but without being pushy. If they are unaware of the specifics of the matter, do your duty to your clan elders and enlighten them.

5 - If called before the Courts of Blood to testify, be respectful. All other affairs pale in significance to this one. Show proper deference to your elders at all times, and pay very careful attention to which of your judges seem to favor your suit. The others are the ones you have to watch out for.

6 - If given specific instructions by *Amici*, follow them to the letter - and obtain proof that you have done so.

7 - Demonstrate planning and patience in your hunt. Haste makes waste, particularly when you are hunting a Magister more powerful than yourself.

8 - Don't petition for permission too often. Ambition must be tempered with respect. Too many appearances before the courts and someone else just might ask the *Amici* about you.

target's ghouls before moving in for the kill. There is only one condition that remains the same from hunt to hunt, though. No matter what, the end of the chase must be witnessed. The Amaranth cannot be performed in solitude. At least one Magister who sat on the sanctioning court must be present to witness the act of diablerie, to verify that all conditions have been met and that the act of Amaranth is completed. Should all of the conditions not be met, the courts' representative will prevent Amaranth from taking place. One does not ask permission and then flout the will that grants it.

Of course, most Amaranth hunts are unsuccessful. While youthful strength of purpose can take a Cainite far, the powers of age are not so easy to defeat. Thus, wiser petitioners wait years or even decades before beginning their hunt. Lasombra who take too direct an approach almost always fail.

Thus, the Lasombra cull their own ranks, neatly and with discipline. Overly greedy childer are spotted early and addressed; at the same time, those young vampires with potential can be spotted easily in the petition process. And, if an elder falls to an ambitious and properly respectful youngster, so much the better for the clan. Obviously, the elder did not deserve his position; it is far better that his strength flow to one with greater capabilities.

Those who commit Amaranth without court sanction are hunted down and destroyed as quickly as possible, with news of their fate spread far and wide. This is the stick to the courts' carrot. The combination works most effectively.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE

Lasombra have no equals among the Cainites. Ask any Lasombra and he'll gladly tell you so. This is not to say that Lasombra don't have respect for Cainites of other clans; they don't often see those others as equals. Naturally, other vampires notice (and do not appreciate) this condescension, but unfortunately, the Lasombra hold a position of strength. With arguably the strongest Church ties of any clan, a deep-rooted presence in the corridors of power and a loyal contingent of Cainites on the Saracen side of the Crusades, the Lasombra are entrenched so thoroughly that taking offense at Magister attitude is not always a healthy thing to do.

Still, if Lasombra were to deal only with Lasombra, it would be a dull world indeed for them. The Magisters do have dealings — many of them even friendly — with the other clans. It's just that the Lasombra prefer those dealings to be, universally, on Lasombra terms.

ASSAMITE

The Lasombra share a unique bond with the assassins; they are the only two clans in which Muslims make up even a sizable percentage of the ranks. While the Assamites are strong in the Levant, as compared to the Lasombra concentration in the lands of the Almohad Empire, the helpful presence of other areas of Cainite influence (particularly the infidel



BOOK ONE: LASOMBRA

Setites in Egypt) provides for a comfortable buffer between the two groups. This allows them to respect one another's faith without encouraging the messy details of Almohad decadence in Iberia or Alamut's split with mainstream Islam to cause any sort of schism. Islamic Lasombra have reasonably friendly relations with the Assamites and have even cooperated with them on several ventures aimed at reducing the Setite stranglehold on Egypt and the surrounding lands.

Christian Lasombra, on the other hand, are perceived as being the shadowy hand behind the Crusades and, as such, have the Saracens' undying enmity. There is, of course, enough truth to this rumor to make it difficult for Christian Lasombra to deny it, and so when Assamites strike at Cainites in the Holy Land, Lasombra are often their first targets. Unconfirmed, but eminently believable, is the whispered news that Assamites have agreed to help sway the Lasombra to the defense of Islam in the matter of the *Reconquista*, primarily by assassinating proponents of Christian annexation within the clan.

BRUJAH

The Brujah control the beginning of the Road to Santiago while the Lasombra hold the rest of its length; this is perhaps the only thing these two clans can actively share. While the Ventruue claim the successes of the Punic Wars as theirs and theirs alone, both the Brujah and the Lasombra know better. The Rome of Publius Africanus Scipio was controlled from the shadows, not the council room. For that truth, the Brujah hate the Lasombra almost as much as they hate the Ventruue, which actually concerns the Magisters a bit.

For now, the Brujah are in al-Andalus. The fledgling kingdom of Portugal is there, and it is in that kingdom that the Brujah have decided to make their new Carthage. While the Lasombra don't see the Brujah as much of a threat (numbers and resources both work against them), a policy of containment has been instituted. The Brujah can have Portugal if they want it; through the royal confessor, the Lasombra have a port of entry any time they wish it. In the meantime, the Magisters have their own concerns. Let the Brujah try to rebuild a city that's been lost too many times; that way they're not disturbing anyone else.

On the other hand, the Magisters make every effort to eradicate the few Brujah who ensconce themselves in the independent commune-states of central Italy. Zealots who can be isolated and controlled are a nuisance. Zealots in the heart of Lasombra power, dangerously near zones of conflict, must be destroyed.

And thus, whenever possible, they are.

CAPPADOCIANS

The Lasombra have no use for the Graverobbers. While the Cappadocian devotion to study and faith is admirable, the fact remains that with the Cappadocians, *there is never any end result*. There is no way to measure success or failure of any

given endeavor; there's just one field of study after another. The Lasombra find this maddening. Regardless of whether a Magister is trying to tame a horse, maneuver the destiny of a kingdom or reduce a single soul to ruin, there is always a moment a Lasombra can point to at which there is success or failure. Not having that moment of closure drives Lasombra absolutely mad.

Ergo, Magisters cannot comprehend the Cappadocian character in the slightest. Seeing as the Graverobbers have little interest in politics and little use for the Church, except as part of an empirical experiment on religion, the Lasombra do their best to ignore the Cappadocians. For the most part, this makes both clans quite happy.

FOLLOWERS OF SET

As one might expect, there is no love lost between the Serpents and the Magisters, though the antipathy is mostly on the Lasombra side. As the Setites predicate their actions on subverting the wills of others, it is not hard to understand why the Lasombra loathe them. There are Lasombra fingerprints all over the Crusader incursions into Egypt, while the Setites seemingly have set their sights on converting the Magisters, *en masse*, to their viewpoint.

The Setites have had just enough success in this endeavor to make the Magisters extremely wary. Not surprisingly, Lasombra work hard to neutralize and destroy any Serpents they come across, particularly in sensitive locales such as Sicily.

Furthermore, the brazenly pagan stance of the Serpents offends the devout among the Lasombra to no end. While the other clans have mostly made some adaptation to the Church (or to the diametrically opposed Islam), the Setites' debased worship is an insult to all faithful Lasombra. Even if there were no other reason for the Lasombra to hate the Serpents, for Cainites such as Archbishop Ambrosio Luis Monçada and his ilk, the Setites' faith in their "dark god" would be sufficient.

GANGREL

Formal Lasombra contact with the Animals is so infrequent that it may be considered nonexistent. The Gangrel haunt the wild places of the north and east; the Lasombra prefer the civilized south and west. While Gangrel going a'viking are always a concern, the Lasombra prefer to leave the Animals to their own devices. Simply put, the Gangrel have nothing the Lasombra want, and neither they nor their mortal pawns are enough of a threat to anything the Lasombra hold dear to provoke a response from the clan as a whole.

Young Lasombra who run afoul of Gangrel — even fatally so — are looked upon with derision by their peers and elders. It is a truism among the Magisters that Gangrel are generally so simpleminded and unsophisticated that any Lasombra worthy of the name should be able to tie one in knots.

MALKAVIANS

Insanity is an illness, and those tainted with it are best kept locked away — or carefully controlled. It is not a coincidence that seers and madmen are often linked, for they are commonly one and the same. The challenge for the Lasombra, then, is to cultivate the one without being misled by the other.

Coloring the feelings the Lasombra have for the Madmen is, inevitably, Rome. To this night, many Lasombra hold the Malkavians and Ventrue equally responsible for the ruin of the Republic, never mind the empire. Lasombra who have seen at least seven centuries have no love for the Madmen, and in many instances, demand a reckoning for the blood of centuries ago. Fortunately for the Malkavians, such Lasombra are fewer these nights and often occupied with matters on Sicily or in al-Andalus. Magisters of newer vintage sometimes, cautiously, seek Malkavian counsel, anonymously if possible.

NOSFERATU

There are some flavors of fervor that make even the most devout Lasombra uneasy. The energy with which the Lepers hurl themselves into acts of self-flagellation and penance is nothing even those Lasombra who are overtly Christian can countenance. To these Lasombra, Nosferatu are anathema, no matter how valuable their information might be. Less scrupulous Magisters have used their position in the Church, however, to play upon Nosferatu religious devotion, extracting far more from the Lepers than a secular bargain might have yielded.

For good or ill, the sharper-eyed among the Lasombra have also noticed the resonance between the appearance of Nosferatu and outbreaks of plague and other diseases that fester in the blood. Drawing the right conclusions for all the wrong reasons, these Lasombra have decided to protect their flocks by barring Nosferatu from their demesnes. The Nosferatu find their way in regardless, of course, but such Lepers tend to be a bit more circumspect about trips to plague pits and the like, which cut down on the incidence of the illnesses they might otherwise bring.

RAVNOS

Lasombra don't like Ravnos. Ravnos are bringers of disorder, arguably more so than the Malkavians, and can introduce destructive chaos into a Magister's most carefully laid plans. However, bitter centuries of experience with the Charlatans has demonstrated the folly in attempting to deal with them directly; let the Ventrue announce their bans and decrees, then suffer the consequences. Instead, Lasombra do their best to encourage Ravnos to move through their lands to the domains of others. In Italy, for example, many Lasombra do their best to help passing Ravnos migrate — due north.

TOREADOR

There are several things the Artisans and the Magisters share: an interest in the Church (though for different reasons), an elevated estimate of their own worth and a concern for

beautiful things. As such, while the Lasombra still regard the Toreador as feckless and the Toreador see the Lasombra as soulless, members of the two clans still come to frequent accommodations.

Rome, in particular, is an area of confluence for the two clans. Many Toreador seek patrons within the Church, while Lasombra princes of the church are more than happy to sponsor those artists who will proclaim God's glory and their own. The art of the *taifas* is another magnet to Artisans of more artistic taste, and traveling to Grenada, for example, requires obtaining permission from those Lasombra whose domains the traveler would cross. Of course, the Lasombra are only too happy to grant this permission, in part to demonstrate to the rest of the world the quality of their possessions, and also, in part to remind the curious Toreador of the favor for ever after.

TREMERE

Among the Lasombra, there is a grudging respect for the way in which the Tremere seized immortality for themselves. On the other hand, admiration for the performance of a difficult feat does not mandate an admiration for the ones who performed it, and few Lasombra see anything worthwhile in the Tremere. In fact, the Tremere are viewed almost as a more dangerous version of the Cappadocians, less learned but with a will to put their knowledge to practical use.

The war raging between the Tremere and Tzimisce suits the wishes of the lord of Castel d'Ombro and his childer. With luck, the Usurpers and Fiends will eliminate each other without ever stirring from their Godforsaken corner of the world to trouble the night in better places.

TZIMISCE

The alliances one makes are sometimes curious. To the Lasombra, rulership is all, while to the Tzimisce it is merely a means to an end. Dealing with a Tzimisce is often an exercise in futility for a Magister, for the Fiends rarely have use for what the Lasombra offer.

Still, there is an undeniable nobility to the Tzimisce, alien though it might be. Like the Lasombra, the Fiends understand their place in the world to be above the ruck and run of mortals — and other Cainites — and from that shared elevation, something of an understanding has grown up. The Lasombra and Tzimisce may not like each other, but they understand each other on a certain level and that makes for a degree of acceptance, if not trust.

VENTRUE

If the Lasombra see themselves as those who control events and master policy, then they perceive the Ventrue as petty nobles fresh in from the hinterlands, too stupid to use anything but the sword to get their way and holding to no civilized standard of honor. The conflict raging in northern Italy — particularly with the imposition of Frederick II as emperor and later the Hohenstaufens, has only exacerbated this disdain. "Who are these Ventrue," the Lasombra ask, "to



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use brute force to steal what we have labored to create?" The Concordat of Worms, which reinforced papal independence, the victory of the Church-backed Lombard League of free cities over Emperor Frederick Barbarossa I at Legnano, the passage of Sicily to the Angevins and thence to the house of Aragon — all have the hallmarks of Lasombra disdain for the Ventrue.

Matters are not quite so bad in the Holy Land, although Islamic Lasombra do make it a point of picking off Ventrue whenever they can. However, the Lasombra-backed Spanish knightly orders work well with those that have links to the Ventrue. The common enemy takes precedence there, though a Lasombra still hates to see a victory or even credit given to a Ventrue.

In the end, though, the Ventrue are just a pale imitation of the Lasombra, mistaking rulership for dominion, mandates of behavior for honor, and the occasional triumph of brute force for skill.

OTHERS

BAALI

To a true Lasombra, any Cainite who exchanges his freedom of will for power, even if that power is enough to crack Heaven itself, is a fool. To make a master of a devil is the act of a coward who fears his own mind; should Satan step forth on Earth, many Lasombra will greet him with respect but without subservience.

For according to the Lasombra mindset, the Baali have no power. Whatever they know is borrowed, and they made a poor trade to get it. And, while the effects of Daimonion are certainly deserving of fear, the wielders of that power are empty shells, not even worthy of pity. To a Magister's way of thinking, a Baali should be treated exactly for what he is: dangerous vermin.

SALUBRI

The clan is split on the matter of Saulot's childer, primarily because of Saulot himself. The rumors that swirled around the father of this bloodline when he returned from his sojourn east — talk of deals struck with beings who drank not just blood, but also life itself, stories of shambling corpses containing souls escaped from Hell, and monstrosities that dripped green worms, all bent to Saulot's will — were disquieting. On the other hand, the hatred the Tremere hold for the Salubri makes it worthwhile to support the Healers, if for no other reason than to watch the Usurpers' impotent rage.

THE KIASYD

Meddle not in the affairs of wizards, some say, for they are tricky bastards with the moral sense of a worn-out boot. Such was the lesson certain Lasombra delving haphazardly into the roots of Obtenebration learned during the reign of Julian the Apostate.

The historical accounts of the occasion, lovingly kept by the prime participant in the drama, indicate that the researches of a trio of Lasombra led them to create a potion of the blood of Unseelie fae whom the vampires had captured, as well as certain herbal essences and other, less identifiable, things. The final ingredient, however, came when the three trafficked with a wizard or shaman from one of the countless Teutonic tribes to obtain something the sorcerer labeled the "blood of Zeernebooch, god of the underworld."

What was actually in the potion the wizard sold was something a good deal more interesting — what, exactly, no one knows — but not quite what the hapless Lasombra Marconius and his sponsors were aiming for. As all of their dosages and "calculations" were based on the supposition that they had been sold the real goods by the mysterious wizard (who, of course, was never heard from again), it was not a surprise that the experiment went horribly wrong.

Marconius was rapidly changed by the substance he ingested: growing taller, thinner and even paler. His eyes changed to orbs of inky black, his skin acquired a sheen that was almost a glow and his features took on a pronounced fae cast.

Needless to say, other Lasombra noticed.

Furthermore, the clan elders were displeased, not with the excessively impressionable Marconius (who had not been long under the shadow and, in all probability, had been tricked into drinking the tainted blood) and certainly not with his sponsors in this new state. Interestingly, the two Cainites who had induced the changes in Marconius did their best to disown responsibility for their handiwork, but to no avail. Innocent to the enormity of his mistake, Marconius identified them without hesitation.

Those elders in the vicinity were livid with the whole situation. Unauthorized blood experimentation? Trafficking with a magus (and then not even discovering the wizard's name)? The risk of offending the fae? All of these were considerations that the noble experimenters had neglected to take into account. For their carelessness, they were destroyed. Marconius himself was exiled from Lasombra company and forbidden to create childer. However, most Magisters held the opinion that the strange-looking vampire would not be long for this world, even if he did (as they expected) attempt to Embrace. One elder even mentioned privately that he'd moved to let Marconius go because he'd received word from local fae lords that they were interested in punishing the unfortunate test subject.

This was, perhaps, a mistake; the Unseelie fae apparently did not hold up their end of the bargain. Instead, as rumor has it, the cagey fae actually *aided* Marconius with his studies of Obtenebration, and even bestowed some of their magical powers upon him. Those who deal with the Kiasyd have learned that these enigmatic vampires call their fae (or perhaps

fey?) powers "Mytherceria," though they are known to still practice the Lasombra Disciplines of Potence and Obtenebration as well.

Marconius and his line were not heard from by the other Lasombra until late in the 12th century, when they resurfaced in Strasbourg. Many members of *Amici Noctis* recognized Marconius from the panicked Ventrue reports of the "strange creatures" who had driven them forth. There followed a brief and hurried consultation of the Friends of the Night, at which point it was decided to do...

...nothing. After all, Marconius was bothering the Ventrue, and Strasbourg was hundreds of miles from areas of Lasombra strength.

These days the only point of contact that the Kiasyd and Lasombra have is at the library. As research seems to be the primary focus of Kiasyd existence, and as they have shown remarkable persistence in going after materials they desire (to the point of walking through walls to get them), *Amici Noctis* have decided to humor those few Kiasyd and allow them reasonable access to Lasombra-held libraries. The Kiasyd seem to hold no residual grudges over the ill treatment of their progenitor, and Marconius himself has stated that he is "past the need for vengeance." While this is something of a small relief to those Lasombra actually involved in Marconius' banishment, the fact remains that the Kiasyd are so few that even if they did hold a grudge, they possess neither the strength nor the numbers to do anything about it.

NEW TRAITS

MERITS AND FLAWS

RELIGIOUS PROHIBITION: (2-4 PT FLAW)

Taken from Hebrew or Islamic stock, you grew up strongly religious. Part of that religion, however, is a dietary restriction forbidding you to taste blood. Even animal blood is forbidden to you by law, and you find yourself racked by pangs of conscience every time you feed.

This is a variable-point Flaw. At 2 points, you simply restrict yourself to feeding on animals or blood that has been drained by a ritual butcher. At 4 points you abstain from feeding unless it is absolutely necessary (3 Blood Points or less), and even then you may well fall into pits of self-flagellating despair.

CLOAKED IN SHADOW: (4 PT FLAW)

The shadows come to you even when you do not call them, wrapping themselves around you like a cloak in constant motion. This makes you stand out in any crowd, and you can no longer pass for "normal" even when you so wish. Other Cainites may well avoid your company, being discomfited by your strange affliction. Lasombra in particular find you un-



pleasant company (+2 difficulty on all Social rolls) because your inability to master your shadows demonstrates a failure of will on your part.

MARKED FOR DEATH: (2-5 PT FLAW)

The Courts of Blood have found against you and at least one fledgling is now hot after your blood. While you probably can defeat this threat on your own, the wait is maddening. Furthermore, there is the implied insult bound up in the court's decision — your peers obviously feel that you are incompetent and need to be replaced. After all, even if you defeat one would-be diablerist, there is no guarantee you won't be hunted by a second, or a third.

The point cost of this Flaw varies, depending upon the strength of the Cainite who has been granted permission to hunt you, the conditions laid upon the hunt and whether or not the court has seen fit to inform you of your current status. Consult with your Storyteller to see what the details of your situation are — and how many she'll share with you.

PRESTIGIOUS CONFESSOR: (1 PT MERIT)

You have been granted the favor of confession with one of the ranking priests among the Lasombra. This provides you with access to one of the "powers that be" in the clan, as well as providing you with a certain prestige among your equals. After all, it was you who was called to the cathedral, not they.

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Of course, given time and the appropriate background, you may become a confessor of this sort, granting you access to all sorts of interesting information — subject to the sanctity of the confessional booth, of course.

DISCIPLINES

DARK HUNTER (OBTENEBRATION LEVEL EIGHT)

A Dark Hunter is a shadowy duplicate of the summoning vampire himself. A simulacrum made entirely of shadow, the Dark Hunter appears as a shadowy silhouette of the vampire, right down to the weapons, clothes and so forth. (Unique items will be duplicated in form, though they do not function.) Indeed, at a distance, the Dark Hunter may well be mistaken for its master.

A summoned Dark Hunter will do nothing until given a quarry. Once the target has been assigned, however, the Dark Hunter is relentless in stalking him, never resting (except during hours of daylight) until the chase is finished. However, that doesn't mean that the Hunter is stupid or self-destructive; single-minded does not necessarily mean simpleminded.

Depending upon instruction, a Dark Hunter can seek either to subdue or slay its target; in the former case, it will automatically bring the victim back to its master by whatever

means available. Contrary to rumor, the Hunter cannot vanish into shadow and transport itself "home"; it must cover every foot of ground between it and its master. Once the Hunter's mission is accomplished, however, it vanishes instantly, returning to whatever dark realm from which it came.

System: To summon a Dark Hunter, the player rolls Stamina + Leadership (difficulty 8), "feeds" the newly summoned shadow 5 Blood Points and invests a point of Willpower to give the creature some permanence. However, the creature will not act until given a target and instructions. To fix a target within a Dark Hunter's mind, the summoning vampire must give something of the quarry's to the Hunter so that it can gain the "spiritual signature" of the one being hunted. Once that is done, the Hunter sets off at once.

A Dark Hunter possesses the same Attributes as the vampire who created it, down to Willpower. However, the Hunter's use of Disciplines is limited to Unseen Presence only. Still, in most cases that is more than enough.

Like Night Shades (from the *Dark Ages Companion*), Dark Hunters take damage normally, as well as from fire and sunlight. A Dark Hunter supposedly can speak (in the voice of its vampiric creator), but there are none alive today who can testify to that fact.

TCHERNABOG (OBTENEBRATION LEVEL NINE)

Far more showy than necessary, this power's name derives from a Slavic word meaning "black god." It is a fitting title, as this art grants its wielder the ability to literally *block out the sun*.

By invoking this power, a Lasombra blots out the sky with darkness. The moon, the stars, even the sun — all are covered by an inky black shroud that stretches from horizon to horizon.

There are precisely three Lasombra who have demonstrated mastery of this power: Lasombra himself, Montano and a Magister of Greek heritage formerly known as Boukephos. These three steadfastly refuse to teach this art to any others, and those who press too hard for this knowledge run the risk of incurring the displeasure of these three elders.

System: The player spends two Willpower points for the Cainite. The effects of this power last precisely one hour, at which point the darkness fades away. The powers of this veil of blackness are such that while it is in effect, a vampire can walk about at midday and not feel any ill effects from the sun. The darkness of Tchernabog is complete, and under its shadow even lanterns and torches seem dim and weak. Otherwise the darkness conforms to that summoned forth by the Obtenebration power Nocturne.



USES, ABUSES AND RUMORS

There are some Lasombra who reputedly can see through the eyes of their Dark Hunters, sometimes even extending their perceptions across multiple shadowy surrogates. Theoretically, if one wounds a Dark Hunter that a Lasombra is "listening in" on, one might wound the vampire as well, but this has never been proven.

It is rumored that Lasombra himself once sent a pack of Dark Hunters after Caine himself, but the shadow creatures were unable to discover his whereabouts. Supposedly, these Hunters still wander the Earth, searching for Caine with an devotion long since fractured into madness.

The use of a Dark Hunter to assault a rival is considered to be a grave breach of etiquette among the Lasombra, equivalent to a thrown gauntlet at the beginning of a duel. After all, no Lasombra capable of summoning a Dark Hunter should be in the least bit threatened by one. On the other hand, there's nothing in Magister protocol forbidding the sending of a Dark Hunter after one's inferiors — and different Lasombra define their inferiors in different ways.



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SMOTHERING DARKNESS

Obtenebration 2, Obfuscate 1

A Magister may use Smothering Darkness to summon fluttering shadows that immediately flock to the nearest light sources (torches, candles, oil lamps and the like) and douse them. The behavior of these shadows is akin to that of moths; they find the brightest light source and then dive into it in hopes of being consumed. By using this power a Lasombra can plunge an entire area into darkness almost immediately, rendering those unprepared for it completely helpless.

System: Each success on a Wits + Occult roll (difficulty 6) produces a fluttering shadow which then proceeds immediately to the nearest light source in an attempt to douse it. These shadows can cause no damage but may well collide with other characters in their flight, producing confusion and fear. The shadows can smother any fire up to the size of a torch; anything larger requires the attention of multiple shadows. As soon as a shadow douses a flame, that shadow vanishes. If there are more shadows than there are fires to extinguish, the excess number will flap around in the dark, likely causing more confusion, before finally vanishing into whatever dark place they originated. This power costs 9 experience points.

SHADOWED EYES

Obtenebration 3, Auspex 3

This particular skill is a matter of control and delicacy, not raw power. The wielder summons forth small patches of blackness which cover the eyes of the target, rendering him effectively blind and giving him a demonic appearance. Those thus afflicted may find themselves in more than a little trouble with their neighbors who have little tolerance for the blind, and less for those who appear unnatural.

System: The player rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 7). If he succeeds, he summons the darkness successfully and blinds his target. The number of successes determines the duration of the shadows.

Successes	Duration
1	one turn
2	one minute
3	five minutes
4	30 minutes
5	one hour

Additional successes produce longer effects. The enveloping shadow cannot be removed by anything short of plucking out the eye thus covered—a somewhat drastic remedy.

Note: This power affects all of the eyes of the victim, whether he be a one-eyed beggar, a “normal” vampire, a Salubri or the mythical Argus.

Certain Lasombra have been able to create a purely cosmetic variation on this power, covering their own eyes with shadows while still maintaining the ability to see clearly. Using this power has the same difficulty as a regular use of Shadowed Eyes but can impose terror on any beholding it (Willpower roll, difficulty 5 to avoid fleeing in fear). Learning this power costs 12 experience points.

DARK STEEL

Obtenebration 3, Potence 3

Where Arms of Ahriman normally allows a Lasombra to summon forth tentacles of pure shadow to assault his foes, this bastardized power grants those pseudopods of darkness greater strength and endurance. Cainites used to dealing with the normal manifestation of this power may find themselves fatally surprised by the use of Dark Steel instead.

System: Using Dark Steel requires a Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 7) and the expenditure of 2 Blood Points. Each success summons forth one tentacle, which then appears from a nearby shadow (under a piece of furniture, from within the summoning vampire's cloak, etc.). The tentacles are all eight feet long and have Strength and Dexterity ratings equivalent to *twice* the vampire's Obtenebration rating. Furthermore, the vampire can expend a Blood Point, “feeding” it to the tentacles; for each point thus spent, the tentacles' ratings increase by one. A Dark Steel tentacle does Strength + 2 crushing damage, has six Health Levels, and takes damage from fire and sunlight in addition to normal attacks. It costs 18 experience points to learn this power.

CANNOT BE SEEN IN MIRRORS OR OTHER
REFLECTIVE SURFACES

PRINCE OF THE TAIFA

Quote: And Seville wishes our help against the Christian armies? Fascinating. It would seem that they are unaware of our other arrangements, no?

Prelude: Born into the nobility of a small city-state in the Iberian peninsula, you spent your formative years learning government, soldiering and diplomacy. All three were necessary, with the Christians steadily marching closer and the Berber religious fanatics in North Africa making noises about cleansing the land of *all* unbelievers. Neither side promised to be terribly sympathetic to the city of poets and philosophers your family had built, so you watched your father play one side against the other. He directed the Christian armies against

made all of the pious noises the imams needed to hear and kept the dream alive.

But he died, as kings are wont to do, and the responsibilities of the throne descended upon you.

You had not learned the dance well enough before he died, however, and slowly but surely, your enemies drew closer.

All seemed lost the night the tall stranger entered your bedchamber. He commanded you to listen to him, and you found yourself unable to move. He recited your litany of woes and offered solutions to each. Fascinated, you listened, and he vanished

before dawn.

You implemented the stranger's suggestions and lo! your troubles lessened. A year to the night later, he returned and noted how well you had learned your lessons. He then offered you a place in the greatest academy of caliphs and kings, the clan of Montano. Eagerly, you accepted, and you have ruled from the shadows ever since. Soon, you suppose, you shall have to "die" and give the throne over to another, but the power will always be yours, now and forever.

Concept: With one eye on the Berbers across the sea and the other on the encroaching Christians, you are a player in the great political game of the *Reconquista*. Keeping your own *taifa* safe from the fanatics on either side is your goal, and to accomplish it you'll gladly sacrifice whatever is necessary. It's all politics, nothing personal.

Roleplaying Hints: The safety of your *taifa* comes first and foremost. You will deal with Ahriman himself — in fact, you suspect you already have — in order to keep the walls unbreached. While you are still uncomfortable with some of the details of your new existence, as the Qu'ran forbids the drinking of blood, you find that what you have learned more than makes up for your discomfort. And, if tonight you can do this for one city, what will tomorrow night hold? Or the night after....

Equipment: Robes of state, scimitar, attendants, jewelry, access to the scrolls of the Qu'ran

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME:	NATURE: SURVIVOR	GENERATION: 4th
PLAYER:	DEMANOR: DEFENDER	HAVEN:
CHRONICLE:	CLAN: LASOMBRA	CONCEPT: PRINCE OF THE TAIFA
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Hearth Wisdom: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Seneschal: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	GENERATION: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●
POTENCE: ●●●●●	HERD: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Restraint: ●●●●●
●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	
OTHER TRAITS		
●●●●●	ROAD: ●●●●●	HEALTH:
●●●●●	CHIVALRY: ●●●●●	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●	Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●	Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	WILLPOWER: ●●●●●	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●	Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●	Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	BLOOD POOL: ●●●●●	WEAKNESS:
●●●●●	●●●●●	CANNOT BE SEEN IN MIRRORS OR OTHER REFLECTIVE SURFACES
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	

BOOK ONE: LASOMBRA

MASTER BELOW THE STAIRS

Equipment: Fine servant's livery, thin-bladed dagger, abacus

Quote: *I am quite aware of what the master thinks he requires. He is, of course, wrong. Follow these instructions instead, and remember whose displeasure you're more likely to incur by disobeying.*

Prelude: You were born to service, but never did anyone dream that you would rise as high as you did. Anyone but you, that is — you knew early on that you would rather die than continue to be *common*. Let your dullard brothers and sisters toil as serfs and eke out survival from the soil. You saw the splendor and the gold that the wealthy possessed, and you wanted it.

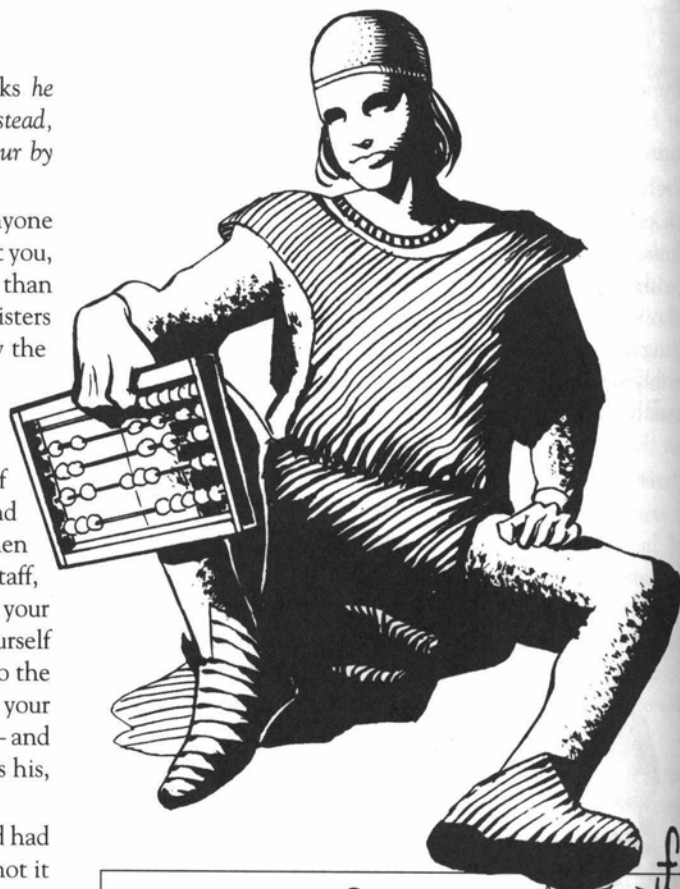
So you took service in a noble house at an early age, the age at which a young boy is likely to catch the eye of a great lord with tastes the Church might frown upon. And while your duties as a catamite ended after a while, by then you had made yourself indispensable to the household staff, who were as nobility to the rest of the servants. Even with your bedchamber service at an end, you found a position for yourself among the hierarchy of servants and worked your way to the top of it. Before long, all of the household affairs were in your hands — the wine cellars, the kitchen, the privy purse — and while your master may have claimed that the house was his, you knew better. It was yours.

The local Magister agreed. He visited one night and had a long discussion with you, primarily about whether or not it was appropriate for a servant to usurp his master's place. Your argument was that it was entirely correct to do so, presuming the servant knew his business better than the master did.

He laughed and offered you the opportunity to put your theory to the test. You accepted, sensing an opportunity for even further advancement. The rest has been, if nothing else, a learning experience.

Concept: You are absolute master of your world, regardless of what the lord you serve thinks. The servants are yours to command, the estate's moneys yours to plunder. The house and all decisions made regarding it are under your control, and so is your master. While to the outside world you appear as simply the estate's reeve, the more sinister truth is known to a few. However, those who plotted against your master have found you a far more challenging opponent than he could ever be.

Roleplaying Hints: Follow form and procedure exactly. You know who is to sit where at the table, which wine is to be served to each guest, and how much the stableboy thinks he's getting away with stealing. Of course, you are beyond dealing with such petty concerns yourself, and so you have one of the other servants handle everything that needs doing. Without pretensions or excessive show, leave no doubt that you are in command at all times.



VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME:	NATURE: MAINT	GENERATION: 12th
PLAYER:	DEMEANOR: INNOVATOR	HAVEN:
CHRONICLE:	CLAN: LASOMERA	CONCEPT: MASTER BELOW THE STAIRS
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Hearth Wisdom: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Seneschal: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
OBTEGENERATION: ●●●●●	CONTACTS: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●
POTENCE: ●●●●●	HERD: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Insight: ●●●●●
●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●
●●●●●	RETAINERS: ●●●●●	
●●●●●		
OTHER TRAITS		
●●●●●	ROAD	HEALTH
●●●●●	HUMANITY	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●		Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	WILLPOWER	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	□□□□□□□□□□	Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●		Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	BLOOD POOL	WEAKNESS
●●●●●	□□□□□□□□□□	CANNOT BE SEEN IN MIRRORS OR OTHER REFLECTIVE SURFACES
●●●●●	□□□□□□□□□□	
●●●●●		

LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

DAUGHTER OF THE MANOR

Quote: *If you ever try to cloister me again, I'll cut out your heart with the sword you gave me. Have I made myself clear, father?*

Prelude: The only child of your father's first wife, it looked for years as if you would be his heir as well. As such, he was perhaps a bit more liberal with you than he should have been: teaching you riding, fencing, falconry and other "men's" pursuits. Even though it was your future husband who stood to inherit everything (and the attempts to marry you off grew more and more frequent as you grew older), Papa had enough of a soft spot for you that he gave you some leeway in your studies. "Willful" and "unladylike" is what the others called you, but who cared for their opinions?

Your father also gave you unheard-of latitude in allowing you to refuse potential suitors. After all, he didn't want his greatest treasure in hands that were unworthy to hold it, or so he told you. This proved to be your undoing in the end, however. Late in life, your father remarried and his cow of a second wife gave birth to a child.

A son.

Suddenly, you went from only child to extra one, and without the prospects of inheritance, your flow of suitors dried up. Left with an unmarriageable daughter and a young wife to placate, your father did the only thing he could: He tried to hand you off to the Church, as a novice.

Oh, how you raged! To give up riding for the cloister? Inconceivable! They literally had to drag you by your hair to the steps of the nunnery,



and you were the terror of your cloister until you came to the attention of a Magistra. She had no patience for your impieties or selfish fits but liked what she saw of your independent streak and unexpected skills. Having said you'd rather die than become a nun, you made good on your word and resurfaced in the outside world as a member of the Lasombra.

Concept: Accustomed to certain freedoms, you reacted poorly to having them taken away from you. Currently you dwell as a scandal and a thorn in your stepmother's side — she takes your reappearance and shocking behavior as dagger thrusts at the "family honor" she seeks to co-opt for the sake of her brat. While none are certain of how you maintain your extravagant "lifestyle," rumors flow fast and furious. You select the most outrageous and fan them — it helps you pass the time.

Roleplaying Hints: You are not now, nor have you ever been, "just a woman." You can run, ride, fight and do just about anything else as well as a man (if not better), and you aren't shy about proving it. As an only child (as far as you're concerned, your half-brother is a bastard), you are used to receiving a great deal of attention, and should others not grant you your due, you are easily angered.

Equipment: Man's riding outfit, short sword, falconer's glove, rosary

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES			
NAME: REBEL		GENERATION: 10th	
PLAYER: ROGUE		HAVING: DAUGHTER OF THE MANOR	
CHRONICLE: LASOMBRA		CONCEPT: DAUGHTER OF THE MANOR	
ATTRIBUTES		ATTRIBUTES	
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL	
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●	
ABILITIES		ABILITIES	
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES	
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●	
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Hearth Wisdom: ●●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●	
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●	
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Seneschal: ●●●●●	
ADVANTAGES		ADVANTAGES	
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES	
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	GENERATION: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●	
DISMEMBERMENT: ●●●●●	MENTOR: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●	
POTENCE: ●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●		
●●●●●	●●●●●		
OTHER TRAITS		OTHER TRAITS	
●●●●●	ROAD	HEALTH	
●●●●●	HUMANITY	Bruised	□
●●●●●	●●●●●	Hurt	-1 □
●●●●●	●●●●●	Injured	-1 □
●●●●●	●●●●●	Wounded	-2 □
●●●●●	●●●●●	Mauled	-2 □
●●●●●	●●●●●	Crippled	-5 □
●●●●●	●●●●●	Incapacitated	□
●●●●●	●●●●●	WEAKNESS	
●●●●●	●●●●●	CANNOT BE SEEN IN MIRRORS OR OTHER REFLECTIVE SURFACES	
●●●●●	●●●●●		
●●●●●	●●●●●		

Of Historical Note = What Gave Shadows Brought?

Lasombra do not enjoy changing the course of history. Instead, they prefer to make subtle alterations to the eddying stream of events, delicately convincing posterity through a series of feather-light touches. A garrison weakened dangerously here, a land tax hiked up to a point where it crosses from oppressive to intolerable there, and before long, events work out exactly as the Lasombra would have it.

Crude and overt gestures are regarded as unworthy of the Magisters. A Lasombra should not need to set off his work with an exclamation point when a subtle flourish will suffice. As the various clans work their wills on each other and mortal society, it has become a point of pride among the Magisters to exert as little control as possible to achieve their ends. It is the lesser clans, they feel, who need to ghoul a king's entire court to keep him in line; to win applause from his peers a Magister would simply enthrall the king's mistress and control him thus. Additional "points" in the estimation of other Lasombra (the only ones who matter) would come from controlling the mistress without use of the Blood, and so on. The more subtle and delicate the manipulation, the more the Lasombra like it and the more praise and respect is bestowed upon the manipulator.

At this point, these subtle games of mortal statesmanship have become tradition among the Magisters. Many Lasombra of recent Becoming have no thought to question this policy. After all, it is all they have known in their unlives and is as natural to them as breathing once was. Older Lasombra, however, recall a time when even their political manipulations — or at least those of vanished peers — were cruder. More vicious. Less subtle. And, perhaps, too disastrous to contemplate.

For, while the clan has made excellent use of the sprawling Church, and while many Lasombra are devout in their faith, it remains indisputable that the marriage of Christian missionary zeal to the still-formidable structure of Constantine's Roman Empire was a disaster for the Cainites of Europe, as well as for the Middle East and northern

Africa. And for eight centuries, certain *Magistri* have had their suspicions as to how precisely those two august bodies — church and state — were joined.

The story currently enjoying vogue among those of the clan inclined to gossip goes something like this: Montano, *who has never denied doing so*, coerced a *Ravnos* to create the image of the *chi rho* — the sign of Christ — in the sky outside of Rome on the evening of the 27th of October, 312. The audience for this illusion was one man: the Emperor Constantine, soon to take the field against his rival Maxenius. It is this vision, the historians of the clan say, that drove the nominally sympathetic Constantine into a whole-hearted embrace of Christianity. Ergo, Montano, and hence the Lasombra bear the responsibility for making the empire a Christian one.

Critics of this theory — and there are many, not including those Lasombra who simply dissolve into incredulous laughter when the matter comes up — can poke numerous holes in it. The notion of a Lasombra relying on a *Ravnos* for anything rings false in most ears. The sheer illogic of Constantine's vision — why did no one else in Rome see this sign from above? — rings contrary to all that is known about the way the *Ravnos'* power of illusion works. Why would Montano, ever a man of direct action and uncompromising honor, stoop to such a trick? The idea defies what all who know the Cainite expect from him.

Finally, there is the question of why exactly Montano would even want the crumbling empire to become Christian. While it is true that official acceptance of Christianity as the state religion provided a stabilizing influence on the empire and that Rome had once been a Lasombra playground, there remains the ineluctable fact that Montano himself had not the slightest Christian leanings. If Lasombra's child wished to strengthen Constantine's martial spirit, a manifestation of the competing Mithraic faith might well have served better. Turning the other cheek is an admirable doctrine, but it doesn't lend itself well to small-unit tactics. This argument sets the conspiracy theorists off again, wild with speculation that perhaps Montano chose the relatively pacifistic Christian belief deliberately in hopes of *calming* the mutinous Empire....

So the rumors swirl, each more nonsensical than the last. And yet...perhaps Montano *saw* no other way to save the empire, and perhaps a *Ravnos* *could* be coerced to do Montano's will, and perhaps a trusted ghoul *could* deliver a message detailing when the emperor would be alone and outside of the city, and perhaps...and so on. For every logical refutation of the argument that level-headed Magisters provide, the theory's proponents come up with another explanation.

And, as the idea's supporters continuously point out, Montano himself has never denied it. After all, he is the only one who really knows.





B

ook Two: Siends

Ah the honored guest awakens!

Look at him, sweetlings, dearest beloveds! He moans in his stupor, as though night-shades assail him! Poor, poor visitant! Would that I could have welcomed him to Castle Volhyny with a panoply, music, viands, for we receive so few callers!

Hist! His eyes open!

Welcome, traveler! A thousand welcomes! I am Boleslav Volhyny, *voivode* of...all you survey. Allow me to introduce my scions and delights. This is Borivoj, tall and sinewed like a lion, pride of his sire. Next is Oleg, master of the hunt, the one who escorted you beneath my eaves. (Nay, Oleg, put that down; you alarm our guest! All in due time....) Gentle Ludmilla is so shy she stands away in shadow; it is she who toys with the straps — ah! You must forgive Drahomira; she can be regrettably forward. For so long as you sojourn beneath my roof, we stand ready to offer you all the hospitality of the East.

Speakest thou Slavonic? No? Well, then, I shall discourse with you in your argot. You will forgive my poor diction — the legions never penetrated this far into our lands, and so my Latin comes from the books dearest Myca sends me as curios.... My pardon; of course you know nothing of such matters.

What is your name, honored guest? Eh? Beg pardon, gentle sir, I did not understand. Ah...Stephen. A Christian name. He was a saint, was he not? You Christians have so many saints...but then, I suppose, Christians have a regrettable predilection for dying in one form of agony or another. Pity.

You will be so kind as to forgive the somewhat...Procrustean accommodations. Here across the Elbe we are not so civilized as your fine masters...yet what we lack in niceties, I assure you, we make up for in meticulous attentiveness. But then, that is why your Teuton wolfings hurl themselves on us like overeager lovers...the *Drang nach Osten*, I believe a few of your chantry-wags prophetically dub it.

Nay — don't bother to deny, good Stephen. It is true what they whisper. The Blood calls to us, yes indeed. I am old, but I yet know the scent of a Tremere consor, one all batted on Usurper vitae. We Tzimisce can smell it. Not surprising, really — it smells similar to our own. Remarkably similar. Almost identical, if truth be known.

But enough of that. We are curious, Stephen. If nothing else, we in the East are known for our cordial hospitality. Why, then, on a night like this, when the fog creeps low through the vales and the hills shiver with the howls of wolves, did you think to lurk outside our fortress walls?

What is that? You meant no offense? My dear boy, none taken! Your wizardly masters may cloister themselves in their towers, glowering balefully on strangers, but we Tzimisce are an open and trusting folk. Indeed, our reputation for receptiveness is matched only by our reputation for mercy. Would you not agree, Stephen? What is it your masters call us, as they fearfully scan the night from their battlements?

Why, Stephen, you are pale and shaking! Did I not say that the night air might prove bad for your health? I had thought to let you pass the night and leave come the morn, but you seem gripped with illness! That settles it, then — you shall stay with us indefinitely, and we shall work our arts of physick upon you, that you might be made...well. What — oh, do not think to thank us! It is the smallest task, and one to which we shall set with alacrity! After all, save for the stimulating diversion your Tremere masters have recently seen fit to offer, there is little to occupy us in the Old Country. No, we stand ready to provide our fullest attention to you tonight...and the night after...and the night after...and for—

Ahh — devils take that noise! Oleg, send some *szlachta* to quiet that infernal shrieking! Yes, go, go!

Now, then — why, dearest Stephen, once more you are rattling in your irons! What discommodates you so? Truly you seem beset with the liveliest illness — it is well that you rest here, and enjoy the benefices of our ministrations. But my question remains unanswered, Stephen. Why, rather than simply requesting admittance, did you endanger your health by snuffling about our fortifications in the chill night?

Oh, my dear Stephen, no need for such histrionics! I understand. You were ignorant of our customs. Eminently reasonable. Your sorcerous employers are learned and wise, but they have grown distant from the Folk, and are occasionally remiss in matters

of proto-

col. It is well, perhaps, that we Tzimisce are such a forgiving people; in some quarters, such ignorance could go so far as to provoke unpleasantries intended as...let us say, "retributive." But such intolerance is for werewolves, or bloody-handed usurpers. Since you obviously came to my fiefdom with only the best of intentions, seeking erudition with only the greatest good will, we would be honored to speak with you concerning the ways of our kind. Even more, we insist that you reciprocate by telling us of yourself, and your masters, and the errand on which you came...and should your memory fail, or illness still your tongue, rest assured that we have countless means of igniting the mind and spirit.

And so now we shall speak of many things — of the Old Country, and our line, and our ways, and most especially of you, dearest Stephen. Such leisurely discourse is, after all, an old Carpathian custom. We are a tradition-bound folk, you see, and abide by many such conventions. We wish you the best of health, that you may stay long with us and partake of them all.



Tyrants of the Old Country

BEING A DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE FIENDS OF THE EAST

By Celestyn, Childe of Etrius, Childe of Tremere

The Damned Children of Caine are many; peasants whisper frightfully of monstrous corpses tearing themselves from churchyards and crossroads to stalk darkened village lanes, and yet there are more among the *vampyr's* kind than the ignorant are aware. Mayhap it is best that mankind remain ignorant. Through the halls of the lords the monsters creep; through the villas of the merchants they steal; yea, even amid the apses of the Church they stalk, that they might partake in their own unholy communion; and now, through the ingenuousness of Goratrix and our Master, we walk among them.

We of House Tremere are little loved, even among the Damned; the society of the unhallowed yet has its protocol, and it is not meet that any common villain should join their ranks. By our Master's will, we alone wrested our dark gift from its rightful or wrongful bearers; and though all the manifold lines of the undead bear malice and rancor toward us, our deed inflicted particular injury upon two of their ancestral strains. The one is of little consequence, its children scattered and sire murdered; alas, we were not so thorough with the other, and for that oversight we and the world shall be forever plagued.

The learned reader must forgive the dire and doleful tone of this work. I would wonder little if he should judge me ridden by the superstitions of the ignorant, with their talk of elves and goblins and demons; and yet I have walked among the shadows of the vales beyond the Elbe, in Sclavia, and I have met the veriest incarnate devils.

They call themselves the Tzimisce.

Like bloated spiders, the Tzimisce have laired in the East since the nights following the Flood. The earth groans beneath their tread, and their subjects cower in terror from their evil stare. They are wicked and wise; their memory is long, and I think they will hate us forever. They are feared even among the Damned, and it is with these monsters, the embodiments of the word "*vampyr*," that we must contend with if we wish to assert our place in the hierarchy of Hell. Verily, mighty Goratrix has set before us a task indeed; I am honored that he deems us so worthy of its execution.

THE OLD COUNTRY

It is sensible, methinks, to begin any dialogue concerning the Tzimisce with an overview of their land — their "Old Country" — which we have invaded and violated and ravaged, and in deference to which they will not cease their aggressions until all bearing the sobriquet "*Tremere*" lie bloodless and broken beneath the ancestral soil. They are nothing if not territorial, these so-named "Fiends"; no slight angers them so much as the violation of Domain if the Tzimisce are indeed vampires at all, or rather dark genii of the soil, for they seem the veriest icons of this malignant land into which we have cast ourselves.

The learned reader may scoff at that last supposition: No material boundary separates one side of the Elbe from the other; no wall kept the Magyars from their devil's errands; Teutons cross freely on this mission and that, and Rome of old marched into the dark forests bordering the Danube. But I remember when I walked, for the first time, into Transylvania and, though I was yet mortal, I felt overwhelmed with a palpable malaise. I felt as though, with my every breath, a miasma akin to the black fetor of the marshes entered my lungs. And now, though I breathe no more, I yet feel that the land reaches out invisibly to constrict me, like the wyrms that lair in the Scottish lochs.

BOOK TWO: TZIMISCE

The soil is old here, and spiteful, and saturated with the blood of eons. It was here, amid the crags and vales where drakes coil and *rusalka* beckon invitingly with dead hands, that House Tremere came, in defiance of the short-sighted among the Order. It was House Tremere who alone realized that the magic of the West was ebbing, quenched in the Blood of Christ; that only in the lands of the East would Hermetic masters have a chance to unearth that greatest of secrets, the philosopher's stone of life eternal.

The Tzimisce unearthed that secret long ago, it seems. Their dead flesh is a veritable repository of *vis*; their blood, an elixir of blasphemous life. Indeed, such is the Fiends' connection to their ancestral holdings that they grow profoundly discomfited should they be forced to rest without immersing themselves in its soil. A Tzimisce can know peace only when lying deep in a grave, surrounded by the earth of the ancient homeland. I have watched captive Fiends writhe and moan in the night, their very bodies contorting as their unholy need consumed them.

MASTERS OF THE LAND

I am oft consulted for my knowledge regarding our foes, for I have had the privilege and horror of serving the House as an infiltrator and spy. Blessed as I am with certain aptitudes related to the channeling of blood-sorcery within my own body, I have developed rituals enabling me to exacerbate the

THE REAL WORLD

Certain historical liberties have been taken for the sake of drama. The real *Drang nach Osten* was as much a commercial and cultural exchange as an expansionist migration; indeed, the notion of a polarized German-Slav struggle was the fiction of such propagandists as the Pan-Slavic movement (and, later, the Nazis). Remember, too, that Ventrue and the like often use peaceable migrations as pretexts for nocturnal invasions of their own.

As well, the Teutonic Knights did not start actively campaigning in Prussia until the 13th century. However, the idea of savage religious strife between brutal Christian crusaders and brutal pagan *voivodes* is too cinematic to leave out of this book. Our recommendation is that Storytellers playing in this area "move back the timeline" for the foundation of the Teutonic Knights by a few years, allowing the Prussian Conquest to begin around 1195 or so.

peculiar pungency unique to Tzimisce vitae. In this fashion I can occlude my lineage and thereby walk among the Fiends as one of them. Such a subterfuge would quickly prove transparent in more peaceable times, but recent upheavals have disrupted the age-old "families" and territories, and so all manner of rootless nomads walk the nights of the Old Country. Questions remain unasked, suspicions stay unvoiced, and it is by such fortune that I have been able to observe the Fiends from a peripheral (albeit too close for my own liking!) vantage point.

My firsthand experiences have been much augmented by the testimonies of those Fiends whom we have had the fortune of taking captive and putting to the question. In particular, Ceoris' dungeons imprison two, Yaroslav and Devana, a pair of "mates," or those who participate in the obscene blood-commingling rituals ubiquitous among the Fiends. They despise us, of course, and their "courtship" seems to have rendered them proof against the Blood Oath, but we have gleaned many nuggets of useful lore among the vitriol that they hiss and spit at us.

I shamefully confess that I have stolen into their oubliettes at night, bearing small vials of blood, and fed it to the starving wretches, that they might be disposed to impart secrets to me. They will never trust me, of course, and will love me even less, but they seem to recognize my sympathetic stance and desire for peace between our two lines...or, at least, they are disposed to humor the bearer of food. Through my kindness I have established a rapport of sorts with the creatures, and have learned much...though methinks I would sleep better of days had they told me less!

CONCERNING THE FIENDS

They make no pretense of humanity, these night-things; in their veins, they say, human blood is transmuted to the mystic "dead water" of regional folk tales. This "dead water" makes them one with the gods and forever divorced from mortal cares.

This attitude manifests itself in the Tzimisce disposition toward those who provide them with food and fodder. They display little humility, the Tzimisce; not for them my own diurnal moans of guilt and horror over what I have become. The passage into undeath is no curse, no damnation, but an initiation into an ancient and terrible nobility. Of all the monsters haunting Sclavia's nights, the Tzimisce are the masters; those who displease them, or trespass on the Domain, or cross their paths at inopportune times, seldom repeat their error. It is the noble's right to exert authority over his lessers; such is God's plan. Yet in the running of their estates and the dire punishments they devise for the mortal wretches who err ever so slightly, I can see only the hand of Satan.

Tzimisce landholders call themselves many things, though the term "voivode" seems to be most common. Typically, *voivodes* make their lairs in great fortresses overlaying mystic

sites of *vis*: These locales must be close enough to the holdings of men that food is plentiful, yet far enough to shroud their deeds in a cloak of superstition.

As I have mentioned, *voivodes* are profoundly territorial. The Tzimisce maintain elaborate and time-honored greeting customs, such that one who enters an estate with the *voivode's* permission is lauded as if he were the *voivode's* own child, while one who dares to breach hospitality is mercilessly hunted, though the vengeance may take centuries.

I myself was entertained by one such potentate, Raiszko by name, in the early nights, when there was yet hope for a peace. At the bridge leading to the *voivode's* domain, I was met by a troop of shuddersome things seemingly conjured from the lowest levels of Hell; the nightmare horde was led by Szercka, the *voivode's* child. This worthy greeted me most politely, intoning: "Welcome, honored guest! A thousand welcomes! Come in peace and go in tranquillity; neither imp nor devil shall assail thee while the House of Raiszko watches! On the soil, on the blood, on the dead water, this I swear!" I responded in something approximating kind, which seemed to please the envoy, at least insofar as one can discern aught from those cold masks the Fiends call faces.

In the construction of their castles, the Tzimisce are as advanced as anyone in the West; I care not what the empire's envoys say of barbarous Sclavia. I have seen the great turrets towering against the night sky, until it seemed as though they would pierce the heavens; I have crawled amid mazes of dank catacombs expansive enough to swallow entire cities of men. Raiszko's abode was no exception. Upon arrival at the manse, I was ushered over the bridge and into the presence of the great *voivode* himself. A full seven feet he stood, all garbed in finery of scarlet and ebon, surrounded by his childer, who were many (I later learned that this is a symbol of stature among the clan, for it means that prey is plentiful and easily obtained). The dining hall was lit by torches, and these were held in sconces crafted from curiously shaped skulls: Werewolves, the *voivode* somewhat proudly informed me, though I would wonder little if they were but the remains of murdered travelers, cunningly worked by the Tzimisce's osseous arts.

A sound from above caught my notice; and there, suspended above the dining table by hooks pressed through their flesh, a dozen or so naked wretches writhed like worms on the line. Futilely they screamed for salvation — or they would have, had not their lips been stopped and shaped into minuscule orifices resembling small pores. Like the holes of a flute, these organs transmuted the victims' screams into soft piping, and thus was a melody of sorts played for us while we dined. During the course of the banquet, the *vampyrs* would silently indicate from which part of which victim they desired their next course, and servitors walking amid the gathering would deftly press goads into the flesh indicated, then just as adroitly catch the shower of blood in a skull-crafted goblet.



BOOK TWO: TZIMISCE

We face formidable foes, of that make no mistake. Their powers are manifold, their existence one of constant horror and struggle (for which House Tremere bears no small amount of blame), and most Fiends who survive to take the mantle of *voivode* have mastered a fair measure of Caine's gifts. Most share with us the beneficence of Second Sight (this bears out my theory that the eldest among the line may have been taken from heathen shamans in the first nights of the world). As well, Tzimisce commonly display mastery over the beasts of fen and forest — again, a useful art, considering their choice of abodes and servitors.

OF THE FIENDS' MIGHT

I grunted noncommittally, then bowed and thanked my host for the evening's sport. The *voivode* caught my gaze and held it, and then he said unto me: "I respect you, honorable Erasmus, for you are not so restless as others of your ilk; your roots run deep, and you know who you were, and are, and are not. I think you would have been loath to come so rudely against us. The ballads speak overmuch of quests and deeds; sometimes the greater part of wisdom lies in temperance and stability. A mouse is a mouse; there is no dishonor in being a mouse, nor even in flight from the cat. And so, because you have incurred my respect, know that I shall not temper my vengeance with aught of pity the next time we meet."

I left Castle Raiszko well before sunrise, flanked by an honor guard of nightmares. The *voivode* himself accompanied me to the edge of the domain. "Methinks," quoth the *voivode*, "that our parley, however pleasant, was of little use, and that one night we will face each other across a field of blood."

I might add that, in the viewing and the hearing of the spectacles, the Fiends sipped from twitching, stuporous vessels and had been forced to ingest all manner of curious fungi gathered (so my host told me) from deep in the wilds, beside the banks of certain dark streams that fountained intermittently from beneath the soil. Of these vessels I declined to partake and was rewarded by a chorus of gently mocking chuckles from the monsters surrounding me.

Anon we retired to a lower hall, there to enjoy those pastimes with which the Fiends amuse themselves. And here... I can write little of what I witnessed; I fear it shall forever stain my soul, though I live a thousand lifetimes of murder. There was torture, yes, and debauchery; but to call what I witnessed by any word that men use is to simultaneously elevate and debase their practices. What few understand about the Fiends is that their sports and arts are undertaken not merely to satisfy human needs for vengeance or cruelty, but rather to inculcate passions and excite sensations transcending the sort that living beings comprehend. The plunging of the soul into abysses of pain and horror is done not for its own sake, but as a means to "awaken the vampire in the corpse."

BLOOD MUSIC

revealed.

Tzimisce are in fact gods one and all?

But, of course, it is for their last and most unique gift that the Fiends are most feared. This art, that of shaping mortal clay as though it were its viscid namesake, has no analog among other vampiric strains. Devana (having learned through wicked subterfuge of my upbringing in the Church) has mockingly blasphemed that, as our Bible states that God molded Adam from clay and Eve from his rib, can it not be concluded that the Tzimisce do with abandon, and thus is their true nature works and shape and distort them for his own purposes. That Satan cannot create of his own but must take the Lord's that works and shape and distort them for his own purposes. The Tzimisce do with abandon, and thus is their true nature revealed.

We would often leave the company of the pack and seek tangled groves in which we could attain that privacy so highly valued among Tzimisce. There, using a variety of highly specialized implements crafted from the cartilage of infants, Ajinav instructed me in the commingling arts of its sire's line. I was taught the Kiss of Introduction and the Chalice of Osseous Delights, and I remember screaming uncontrollably in silver arrows of moonlight as Ajinav performed upon me the Conjunction of the Effervescent Pulse.

It was then, of course, that Ajinav knew: of my lineage and of my proximity to the Master and thereby to dread Caine. My senses returned to me, and so I drained Ajinav then, under a pallid moon, and scattered the ashes among the mushrooms and nightshade of the soil the Fiends love so.

At times, I fear Ajinav smiles within me still.

TRIALS BY WAR

We are House Tremere, mightiest of magi. Alone among mortals have we wrested eternity's elixir from its guardians. No man can withstand our Master; kings and bishops dance at our bidding. And yet, I say that were all the Fiends in the Old Country to rise against us as one, we would swiftly greet the dawn on impaling stakes.

Happily for us, that night shall never come. Clan Tzimisce is as fractious as it is frightful; our trespass is but the latest in a litany of grievances and vendettas which the rulers of the Old Country bear one against the other. For every Tzimisce who strikes against us, another uses the opportunity to wound his "clan-brother," while the former's attention lies with us.

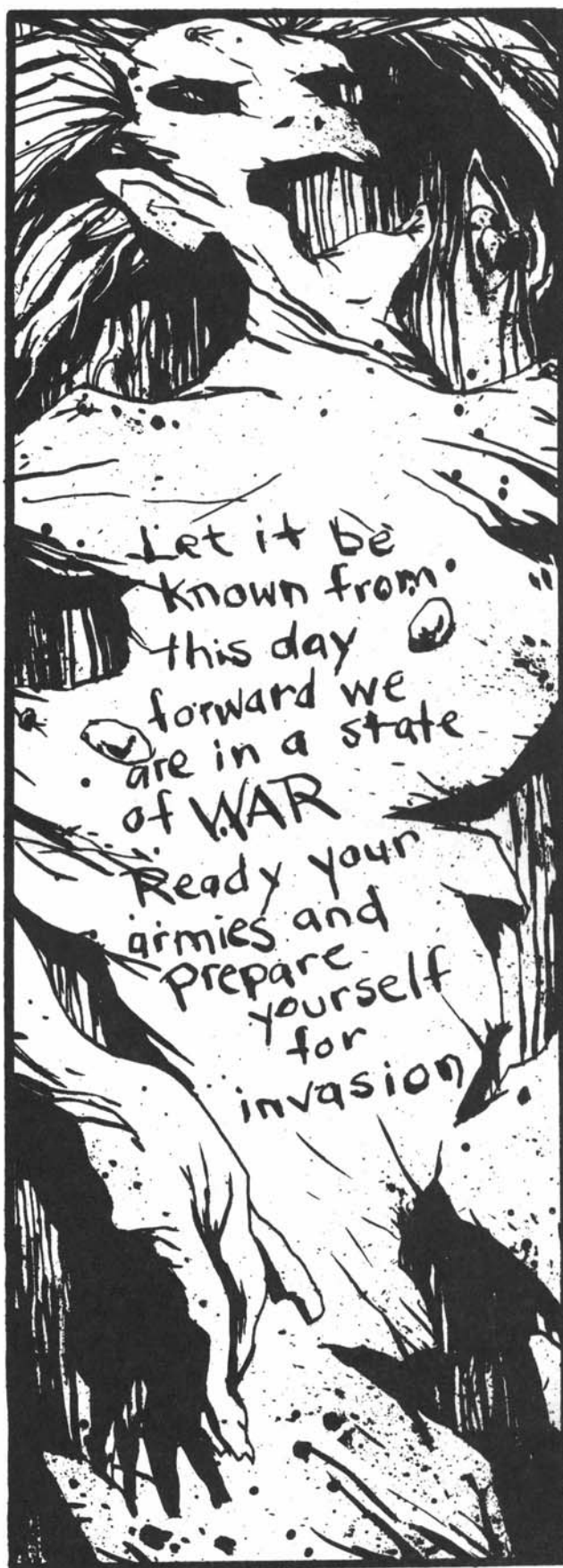
War among Tzimisce is yet another of their ancient and self-ennobled customs, and so, naturally, customs have arisen concerning it. Among the Fiends, Trials by War — armed aggression by one *voivode* against another — are events of great ritual and circumstance.

To declare war, the aggressor must surreptitiously stalk and slay one among the rival's herd or servitors, on the rival's land. (The rival is within her rights to destroy the trespasser at this time, should he be caught.) The aggressor must bear the body to his own fiefdom, whereupon he must flay the skin from the victim. On this hide he must formally inscribe his declaration of war, giving the rival time to prepare for the invasion.

Of course, the Tzimisce are not much more prone to follow their own customs than are most Children of Caine (or of Seth, for that matter!). I have personally borne witness to sudden upheavals of one *voivode* against another, with little concern for protocol. Such tactics may prove effective, but *voivodes* who routinely flout the time-honored customs commonly incur the wrath of the clan as a whole. (Gorynich Myesats — the elder whom Goratrix slew to brew the potion that catapulted us into undeath over a century ago — was widely known for such treacherous practices, and it is for this reason that his neighbors did not immediately throw their wrath against our House.)

Following a successful Trial by War, the victor assumes governance of the loser's demesne, along with all herds and estates. Defeated *voivodes* generally receive the Amaranth, and Yaroslav's hints bear out my observation that many such *voivodes* submit to this willingly, not wishing to bear the shame of landlessness. (Additionally, the defeated often levies a heavy curse as he gives up his vitae, enjoining all manner of frightful maledictions in hopes that the drinker will ever suffer ill luck, the land will "turn against him," his blood will grow thin and prone to plague, *et cetera*.)

Most of the childer, of course, being under the yoke of the Oath as they are, perish during the Trial by War. Captives are commonly given to the victor's childer, but it is not entirely unknown for survivors to escape into the wilds, there to lead treacherous, hardscrabble existences.



In my wanderings, I have observed another custom, one stemming from the need to establish oneself while simultaneously replenishing oneself after battle. It seems that when one *voivode* defeats another and thereby acquires the vanquished's land, mortals residing on the land likewise become the victor's property. This being the case, the victorious *voivode*, and his childer and armies, often descend on the newly acquired herds. There they enact a celebratory orgy of sorts, openly flaunting their nature before the terrified prey and laying waste to entire communities. This "blood feast" commonly lasts for an entire night, as whole villages of mortals are reduced to graveyards of bloodless corpses. A few mortals, though, are left alive, so that word of the new master might spread to all within the demesne.

THE PACKS

Certain Tzimisce have escaped our House's retribution to take up fugitive unlives in the wilds. Obeying their communal instincts even as they rue their exile, such outcasts band together in "packs" of various numbers and organization. Feral and masterless, these outlaw bands roam the Old Country, pledging service to one *voivode* or another in exchange for food and shelter. When they cannot find service, of course, packs must make do in the werewolf-haunted wilds. Few stay together, or survive, for long; those that do are dangerous companies indeed.

The peasants are terrified of such gatherings; should a village's wisewomen inform the inhabitants of a pack's proximity, those worthies will frantically bar their doors, hang all manner of religious paraphernalia and incant rituals both Christian and pagan in hopes that they will be spared.

Alas, such measures generally prove as futile as they do sincere. This I know well; I have "run with" various packs during my sojourn in the Old Country, and I have feasted with them as well, God help my soul.

Packs commonly indulge in the drinking of each other's blood. This gesture is largely symbolic, reaffirming unity in the face of adversity and whatnot. But, as my own experience proves, it grows lonely in the wilds at night....

KOLDUN

The Fiends are wise in the ways of magic. There are sorcerers among them whose mastery of the magic arts rivals our own. Tzimisce speak respectfully of these magic-workers, calling them *koldun*; at one time there were more of them, but few exist now. Most, I suspect, were consumed by the foul entities with whom they trafficked.

Koldun occasionally hold fiefdoms, but many more retreat to isolated towers and ruins in the wilds. There they practice their arts and occasionally tutor worthy neonates. A few have even been known to wander into the West in search of lore,



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

though I know little enough of their doings; we are not yet so friendly with the other Children of Caine that we may ask of strangers among them!

Not surprisingly, the sorcery of the *koldun* makes use of all manner of rituals for conjuring and binding demons, practices long forbidden in our own Order. Over the centuries, they have become intimately familiar with all the thousands of horrid devils haunting this land and invoke them against their foes on moonless nights.

I myself did battle with a mighty *koldun* in the first nights of the war. Her magic was strong, but undisciplined: My superior skill proved her undoing, and she was borne away shrieking by the very entities she had summoned to aid her.

METAMORPHOSISTS

The Fiends are nothing if not profane; most, and especially those of elder blood, scoff at the idea of divine salvation. And yet even among the Fiends there are priests of a sort. The word used to describe them is a vulgar Eastern polyglot, and so I translate it as "Metamorphosist."

These "Metamorphosists," based on my observations and the descriptions of my unwilling guest, are an itinerant order of mendicants. They keep no fiefs, but wander from demesne to demesne as they please. Other Tzimisce treat Metamorphosists with the utmost hospitality, for the Metamorphosists are the masters of the clan's dark erudition and forbidden lore.

Their philosophy is their own and oblique to the point of indecipherability, yet it bears parallels to the more abstruse Classical and Gnostic works. Metamorphosists evidently consider the vampiric state itself a sort of ephemeral purgatory between the "base state" of human existence (which in Metamorphosists' eyes is the gravest Hell) and an unimaginable "higher" state. They spend their existences performing various revolting and highly painful rituals (of which I received a sample at Raiszko's abode) or questing the world, seeking to understand their nature and, thereby, transcend it. So then, it is not enough for a Metamorphosist to have a Beast; she must disport with it, nourish it and fan it greater still.

Devana often speaks of Metamorphosists paying homage to "demons" or "entities"; this, however, would seem to contradict the conceit that Metamorphosists seek to shape themselves into their own inner divinity, not merely to worship already established powers. In truth, I know not; even Ajinav would tell me little of what transpired in the Metamorphosists' subterranean vaults.

Certain tales depict a sort of ancestor-worship, in which certain legendary ancients among the line (who seem to be the subjects of awestruck dread by other Fiends) are upheld as pioneers along the path to "enlightenment." Obviously, those Cainites who fear the wrath of their elders would do well to scrutinize the practices of the Metamorphosists; taken to its logical conclusion, such a philosophy would involve supplanting the Antediluvians themselves.

The Metamorphosists, so I am told, flock to certain unholy sites deep in the wilds on moonless nights. On many of the most ancient sites, the Fiends have built curious temples, of a style predating even the earliest tribal structures. Local villagers call these spots "Black Churches," and they scrupulously avoid them.

As I have implied, secular Fiends know little of the Metamorphosists' ways, treating them as a sort of adjunct to the *koldun*. Still, they are ubiquitous in the Old Country, acting as a sort of cultural glue among the fractious clan.

THE GREAT WAR

For every Tzimisce bent on some mysterious end or other, of course, there are three whose aims are all too clear: the utter annihilation of House Tremere. They come by night, mustered from all sides like great swarms of bats, and the villagers in these parts know well to bar their doors.

They have enlisted (or more likely, cowed) Transylvania's other *vampyrs* to assist them, so that oft one may hear the eerie hunting call of the Gangrel or discover a loathsome Nosferatu ensconced amid one's defenses.

The majority of their soldiers, though, are abominations constructed from human wretches. Tzimisce at war have been known to depopulate entire villages, taking the inhabitants into their dungeons and twisting them into hideous monsters, shapeless lumps of fang, talon and gristle. And once the humans' bodies are no more, the Fiends likewise destroy their creations' souls, inflaming their blood against us and sending them to besiege our chantries in noxious waves.

Occasionally, in the darkest hours, one hears a distant crack as trees splinter like kindling. One sees dread descend on even the ghoul-soldiers' nigh-unrecognizable countenances. And then that thing which Devana fearfully refers to as "vozhd" roars gargantuan and ravenous from the deep forests, often towering above the trees themselves, flailing this way and that with fists the size of millstones, greedily shoving enemy and ally alike into any of a dozen befanged maws.

THE REVENANTS

The Fiends grip the noble houses with a clutch akin to that of a great octopus, and in this endeavor they make great use of certain servitor creatures, which they dub "revenants."

These revenants are curious creatures. Originally human, they have been transformed through blasphemous rituals and blood-mingling into creatures akin to our own ghouls. Although wholly evil and given to many of the practices of the vampire, revenants may yet go abroad by day, and they may even breed with humans and their own kind; this last noxious act has left vast numbers of them bearing peculiar disfigurements, a sure sign of God's wrath.

Over the centuries, the creatures have burrowed themselves deep into the lines of the nobles, shrouding themselves in the annals of war and marriage and flesh and generations. Families as far afield as Constantinople and Kiev bear the

creatures' taint, and I would be little surprised if they had not already worked their way into the heart of the empire. Goratrix elicited the information that one strain has even infiltrated the Byzantine Church, though of these, Devana and Yaroslav claim little knowledge, as the family in question serves the Draconian Tzimisce.

In any event, once ensconced within a line, revenants make all manner of mischief, subverting the rest of the family into abhorrent practices pleasing to themselves and their masters. They snare the ruling families in chains of vice and fear, and in so doing enslave them vicariously to the Fiends, who are the revenants' own masters. Because they do not fear the sun, they act as the Fiends' eyes and fists in the daylight world, enforcing Tzimisce edicts through their own supernatural arts — which, though lesser than those of their masters', more than suffice to inspire fear in the kine. Then, too, because many Tzimisce are themselves taken from the revenant families, they often bear a familial resemblance to their slaves, and this (so says Devana) makes it easier for a Fiend to substitute himself through the use of flesh-shaping arts.

Goratrix and the Master seem much intrigued by these creatures of late; I have seen them in the laboratories during the gray hours before the dawn, examining revenant captives with fire and blade. Goratrix has even slyly hinted that perhaps our House could breed revenant strains of our own, fighting blood with blood, so to speak, and thereby gain for ourselves a race of diurnal proxies.

BOHEMIA AND THE PREMYSLS

Prague, the Magic City: Well I remember my apprenticeship there, in days less dreadful, when I could yet feel the sun's kiss. To walk amid its towers and mazy lanes is to feel the whispered passage of potent forces unseen yet tangible.

And yet even here, in one of the Order's great strongholds, the Fiends lurk. For the Tzimisce, Prague serves as their frontier against the encroaching West; here the Metamorphosists walk, that they might remain vigilant against the arrival of marauding Cainites from the empire.

Devana even hints, slyly and mockingly, that certain members among that great Bohemian dynasty named Premysl have fallen under the night's influence. I had oft heard lurid tales of strange rituals and orgies among the Premysl line, but I had largely dismissed them as imperialist propaganda meant to counter the influence of a growing power. Could there indeed be truth to the tales?

Rumors abound that Bohemia may gain autonomy within the year; truly, the empire's eastern flank has established no small amount of influence for itself. Should a faction among

the Fiends take Prague, the invaders might well find themselves the victims ere long, and the Old Country's bloody nights might extend to the lands of the French....

LITHUANIA

To the east, pagan Lithuania defies the Teutons' hordes. Here many Fiends yet follow the ancient ways of the clan. These hoary vampires, so Yaroslav implies, scorn their southern brethren, for the mist-shrouded pines and marshes in which they dwell never knew the yoke of Rome.

The Balts are most fearful of them; they worship the Fiends as gods, or more likely, demons, plying them with all manner of tribute and sacrifice. Great temples they build for them in the forests, or on lone isles in the midst of bogs and rivers. Sacrifices are driven into the temple gates, and then the Balts leave in haste, for the sounds said to emanate from the darkened edifices are enough to blanch the face of the fiercest warrior.

These Fiends wish no great cities, no advancements of learning; they are content to exist as they have for millennia. Each Fiend establishes a wilderness domain, dominating the local settlements and tribes, who speak grimly of the "Blood-Gods of the Forest" or other such superstition. They bide their time in accordance with the rhythms of the night and the eternal seasons; the rise and fall of tribes, domains and kingdoms are of niggling import to them.

The Fiends of Lithuania are renowned for their wisdom; other Tzimisce often send their childer into the northlands in search of some bit of forgotten lore. These childer are often asked to prove their worth as Tzimisce by undertaking a series of grueling tests and "games." Yaroslav speaks little of what happens to neonates who fail to please the ancients, though I can guess. Thus has it been since the dawn of time.

But even these ancients may soon learn the ways of change. The Knights Teuton have undertaken crusades into these lands, which will doubtless learn the ways of fire and fear. Already I hear tell of struggles between advance scouts and "dreadful corpse-demons"; methinks the pagan lands will fall and their guardians with them.

BYZANTIUM

Yea, even in mighty Constantinople the Fiends walk, though they are of a different breed than their cousins to the north. They are most civilized, these Tzimisce; they name themselves Draconians, after their alleged founder. They are a taciturn sort, but I have heard tell of the occasional Draconian wandering into the West, on some nameless errand or other.

But, the New Rome and its armies have ever been the Carpathian Fiends' nemesis, and ever have they longed to see the city in flames. This has in turn led to great strife between the two lines: the one whose existence depends on the city, the other who seeks only to destroy it.

BYELOBOG: WHITE GOD OF THE NORTH

Whether this hoary old Fiend is in truth the source of the surrounding peoples' "White God" myths, or whether he opportunistically seized the mythological name, is unknown. The latter seems more likely, given that the legendary god is allegedly of a benevolent disposition; on the other hand, it is possible that this ancient Tzimisce's terrified subjects sang false praises to their "god" out of sheer terror.

In any event, the Fiend Byelobog clutches the Balt-lands still. He is old now, and rarely seen; other *voivodes* have come to the swamps over the millennia. Even now, though, they do so at his sufferance, and tales of Byelobog still circulate around the Fiends' gatherings.

According to Tzimisce legend, Byelobog dwells in the swamps between the Baltic Sea and the Pripet Marshes, sailing from place to place on a magical skiff. He has great mastery over the waters, and the swamp-things, and the fogs, and above all, the howling snows that grip the land in winter. He is aptly named the "White God," for his flesh is clammy and corpse-like, resembling a Cappadocian's pallor, yet more terrible still. For Byelobog resembles nothing so much as a cadaver in the grip of plague, and it is said that he can shed flakes of his scaly skin like a dormant reptile and send the still-animate pieces flapping on the northern winds to undertake errands of evil. Indeed, other Fiends whisper that during the harsh northern winters, Byelobog conceals flakes of his skin in the whiteness of the snows, sending the stuff adrift over villages. The skin coats everything in his domain — sinking into the soil, entering into the mouths and lungs of the unwitting mortal inhabitants, catching itself in the fur and fangs of animals and rooting into the bark of trees. In this manner does the White God "mark" his territory and, in so doing, establishes a mystical connection to everything in it.

In A.D. 1269, Byelobog will make his last stand atop an ancient worship site deep in the Lithuanian forests. A troop of Teutonic Knights, bearing fire and cross, will ride at him. Although the Methuselah will survive their assault, they will leave him sufficiently weakened for the anarch Lugo Blood-breaker to slay him and steal his power.

Whether the schism has existed since time's beginning or happened after the Draconians' migration, I do not know. Whatever the answer, the Fiends of the Carpathians hate their southern kin with a virulence normally reserved for us. I suspect that the violence which has gripped several Orthodox monasteries in Macedonia may well have deeper, darker roots. I care little, so long as it diverts our enemies' eyes from us.

FINIS

And that thought is perhaps the proper one on which to end this missive. Verily, we are lost children in a strange realm. Our foes loom on all sides, in a thousand frightful shapes;

perilous the road ahead, yet through the will of our Master we are committed, and there is no road back, save only darkest perdition.

We are in the monster's lair, and though we have bearded him, the battle has only begun. The Tzimisce is a thousand-headed hydra: Although the beast itself writhes and coils in blind, idiot spasms, it is huge, and monstrous, and full of baleful venom. The path to power will be a hard and treacherous one. Remember you always that the mightiest torrent will break and flow around a rock. Stand firm: Heed your elders and your regents, and above all, the will of the Master, that one night we supplant the Tzimisce as lords of the Damned.

Yours in the Blood of the Murderer,

Celestyn,

House Tremere

Hospitality

Tzimisce have few friends. The newly spawned Tremere thirst to destroy them; Shadow Lords battle them viciously for territory. They even feud incessantly with each other. This tumultuous existence, coupled with the clan's long-standing occupation of its ancestral soil, has fostered many unique customs. Although currently at a disadvantage, the Fiends are still the masters of the East.

THE EMBRACE

Fiends frequently plan their Embraces meticulously. Tzimisce prefer to Embrace from their stock of revenant families — each family having been selected for “desirable” qualities and carefully tended over the intervening centuries. Creating childer from revenants offers a number of advantages: The ghouls are already inured to long life and supernatural power, and those who survived childhood have grown most accustomed to obedience, cruelty and loyalty.

The clan's internecine and external struggles demand immediate retaliation, however. Although most Fiends would prefer simply to deploy legions of ghouls, sometimes a situation calls for the more diverse talents available only to *vampyrs*. In such cases, the sire, not wanting to endure the childer's pathetic human sentiments, “gifts” the childer with a grisly rite of passage. The childer is Embraced, then buried “alive” in the earth of a graveyard or barrow (to which the childer often mystically bonds). To emerge as *vampyr*, the childer must dig her way up and out, through a stew of earth, worms and corpses. Some weaker childer do not manage to dig their way back out; these weaklings are contemptuously left to rot in eternal torpor. Those childer who do worm their way from the earth generally undergo profound emotional trauma — having “died” and returned from the “afterworld,” the childer are prepared to assume the mindset of undead predators. This can prove profoundly distressing to childer who belonged to the Church in life, but as far as the Fiends are concerned, such a shattering of faith is all the better.

VOIVODES

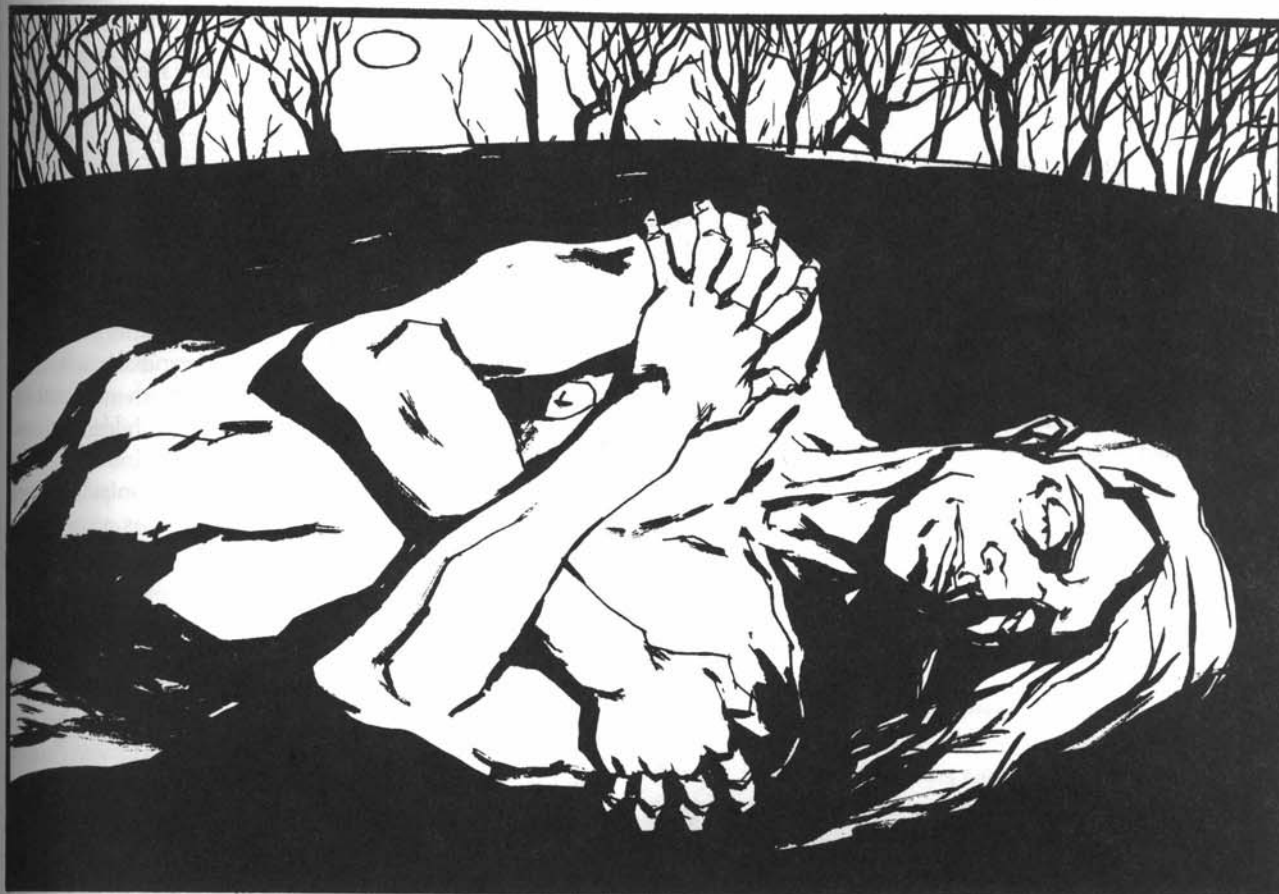
The Old Country is regrettably prone to invasions and upheavals of various sorts. Romans, Huns, Avars, Magyars and other barbarians have appeared to trouble the inhabitants. Shadow Lords prowl the mountains and vales, and the untracked forests are home to things stranger still. And so, since time immemorial, the test of a Fiend's mettle has been her ability to seize and hold land.

Landholding Tzimisce commonly take the title “voivode,” though other regional titles (*zhupan*, *margrave*) are used in appropriate areas. In many ways, a *voivode* acts as any other vampiric ruler does: He dictates hunting grounds, arbitrates disputes, and otherwise oversees the affairs of the dark. In practice, though, *voivodes* are much more exclusive about their domains, and suffer few Cainites other than their own childer to dwell within.

Also, while the establishment of a power base is a long-standing Tzimisce custom, the base itself is merely a means to the ends of personal security and supernatural might. Regrettably, the *voivode* gives little thought to his subjects' welfare, save that they are sufficiently nourished and populous to be fed from at will.

On the other hand, even the cruelest *voivode* must mitigate his pleasure with an iota of pragmatism. Stories have wafted from the East — tales of fire-eyed *voivodes* angrily defending their subjects from werewolves or Teuton Ventrué. This is done not out of concern for the subjects' welfare, but as a matter of pride: The subjects are the *voivode's* to abuse, and he shall suffer no others to do likewise.

The first step in becoming a *voivode* is the construction of an impregnable fortress. Other Cainites whisper fearfully of the vast Tzimisce manses, spiring above the darksome forests and crags like stone dragons. Some *voivodes* take pride in



constructing just such obvious, menacing citadels. Others prefer to use magic or simple topography to construct hidden lairs — labyrinths and the like — so that the peasants know the master of the domain only as an evil, invisible malignancy.

The first century of dominion is commonly spent in the cultivation of terror. Children are taken from their parents' cottages and returned as bloodless corpses or gibbering freaks; a rebellious headman goes to sleep and at cockcrow wakes up next to the empty skin of his wife; an overly intrepid forester disappears, and the villagers discover...traces at various sites and intervals over the next year. However, a Fiend must be careful not to overdo things; constant massacres lead the inhabitants to leave, and not even a Tzimisce and all her retainers can stop an entire village's wholesale migration.

Once the mortals have been pacified and bullied, the next step is to mold the domain into whatever will best serve the *voivode's* interest. *Koldun* and other sorcerous types seek merely to establish a secure herd, while Fiends of more political inclination take a more active hand — or talon, as the case may be — in the governance of their fiefdom. In many cases, this involves indoctrinating the mortal populace into serving as weapons against the *voivode's* rivals.

The most effective form of rule is to insinuate one's minions into the mortal power structure. Revenant families are the most advanced products of this tactic, but many mortal

families have also fallen under the intoxicating spell of Tzimisce vitae. Over the centuries, these families — influenced by the nocturnal visitations of the *vampyrs* — become more and more depraved, more and more tyrannical, more and more twisted. As decade blends into decade, individual incidents are woven into the cloth of legend, and it becomes impossible to distinguish the atrocities of the *vampyr* from those of his servitors. Some Tzimisce exacerbate this process, fleshcrafting themselves to resemble the mortal lord — or fleshcrafting the lord to resemble the vampire. Tales of "devil twins" haunting crossroads have survived in the Old Country to this night. This, of course, serves to direct priestly aggression against the mortal pawns, leaving the vampire unscathed.

In certain sheltered areas (Lithuania, isolated mountain tracts), Tzimisce rule overtly. The *vampyr* who utilizes this tactic must be strong indeed, fearful of neither Shadow Lords nor rival *voivodes* and sufficiently dreaded that his flock would sooner stay and suffer than risk the reprisal of a failed escape. He may use fleshcrafted doubles when necessary (dealing with mortal rulers, misleading clergy, etc.), but the peasants are well aware to whom they answer. In such places, the subjects often deliberately offer up sacrifices during appropriate holidays, preferring to lose a few loved ones per season than suffer the vampire's greater wrath.

TRESPASSERS

As much as they might wish otherwise, the Tzimisce are not the only *vampyrs* native to their ancestral soil. The Old Country supports sizable populations of Gangrel and Nosferatu, and a few lines of Malkavians have wandered into the East during the past centuries. Surprisingly, Tzimisce sometimes tolerate such lessers in their domains but require them to pledge direct service. For example, a *voivode* might "employ" a Gangrel as his Master of the Hunt and a Nosferatu as his Master of Spies, but he would never suffer these *vampyrs* to exist independently in his fiefdom. Most non-Tzimisce *vampyrs* are required to swear a Blood Oath to the *voivode*, and those who do not had best prove themselves exceedingly loyal and even more competent.

A few Tzimisce, seeking advantage over their rapacious clanmates, have even allied themselves with invading Ventrue, Toreador, Cappadocians and Brujah. Such alliances tend to take the form of agreements between equals, rather than lord/vassal relationships. Naturally, the proud *voivodes* in question prefer to manipulate their Cainite partners into performing useful and lethal services against common foes, that they may rid themselves of the humiliating "arrangement" and of their problems in one fell swoop.

CHILDER

Tzimisce are familial creatures. Many spent their breathing years as scions of the revenant families, and Tzimisce tradition holds the creation and maintenance of a family in high regard. Indeed, the greatest work of Tzimisce art, the fleshcraft sculpture/play *Octavo* of the mad *voivode* Czernisko depicts its characters as collectives, using a highly disturbing point of view to do so.

Tzimisce create childer for the same reasons that other Cainites do: on whims, as useful extensions of the sire, to satisfy eruptions of atavistic lust. Childer are organized into families, with the sire as the patriarch/matriarch on whom everything centers. To enforce this filial devotion, most childer are forced to take the Blood Oath. Using the ritual *The Inmost Tug* (see p. 62), certain powerful *voivodes* can even manipulate Blood Oaths, shaping them into desired emotions according to whim.

Competition among childer is understandably rife. Tzimisce neonates, all bound to the sire through the Blood Oath, struggle ceaselessly among themselves for the *voivode's* favor. The Blood Oath has also led to one troublesome sociological phenomenon among the Fiends, one that currently cripples them in their war against the Tremere. Because Tzimisce childer are sworn to their sires, any slight or injury inflicted on the sire, no matter how deserved, pains the childer



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

just as greatly as if they were mortal. The childer swear vengeance on the transgressor and his entire brood, and these feuds commonly continue even after one instigator or the other meets Final Death. And thus, the Old Country is wracked with ancient vendettas, as Fiends vie against each other based on an injustice one *vampyr*'s sire's sire's sire is reputed to have inflicted on an enemy *vampyr*'s sire's sire's sire millennia ago.

THE RITE OF RELEASE

Although Tzimisce are hierarchical creatures, they are proud creatures as well. A Fiend who serves her *voivode* for centuries in a military, scholarly or otherwise functional capacity may develop an uncomfortable measure of self-esteem. The wise *voivode*, recognizing this trait, uses it to her advantage.

Such worthy childer may, at the ruling *voivode*'s whim, be subjected to the Rite of Release. This ritual frees the childe from the *voivode*'s rule, allowing her to establish a fiefdom and childer of her own. Such an act serves three functions: It enables a *voivode* to establish a proxy fiefdom in a nearby realm, reduces competition for food and affection within her own fiefdom, and eliminates a potential impediment before resentment can gnaw away at the emotions engendered by the Oath.

The childe is called before the *voivode*, her accomplishments and character are praised, and she is asked if she would have her freedom. If, despite the pull of the Blood Oath, she answers affirmatively (succeeds in a Willpower roll, difficulty 9), the *voivode* pronounces a mystic blessing over her: "Then go, and may Moist Mother Earth mark the new dragon's passage." Naturally, a celebratory feast follows the climax of the ritual.

At this point, the childe may leave the company of the *voivode* and make her own way in the world. The Blood Oath is not broken, but the acquiescence of the *voivode* enables the childe to leave his side and establish her own domain. Generally, the childe is sent to establish a fiefdom in an area the *voivode* would like to see subjugated or pacified. In such a way does the wise Fiend establish a dynasty of loyal vassals guarding key positions, like a barbed spiderweb throughout the Old Country.

RULE BY FEAR

The Ventrue and Lasombra, it would seem, are reborn to rule. Both clans have potent Disciplines enabling influence over or direct control of mortals. By contrast, the Tzimisce lack such straightforward methods of manipulation. Although many *voivodes* gain skill in Dominate and Presence over the centuries, the clan as a whole lacks such aptitudes. One might thus surmise that the *voivodes* are correspondingly less capable of governing their fiefdoms or ensuring their puppets' subservience than are their southern and western cousins.

Such a supposition would be a grievous and potentially lethal error. If anything, Fiends are among the most territorial and possessive of all Cainites, and nothing matters more to them than security of the home. Over the centuries, Fiends have developed many techniques for ensuring the stability of their rule. Tzimisce do not need artificial means of turning their subjects into quivering wrecks, and when they command, they do not depend on mystical reinforcement to ensure obedience.

Some might call the Fiends' methods of negative reinforcement monstrous; Tzimisce would counter that they live in an untamed and violent frontier, and harsh means are necessary to guard their domains against marauding Lupines, mortals and their own kind.

Many Tzimisce terror tactics are ubiquitous among mortals, having been employed since the nights of biblical tyrants. Certainly, such brutalities as collective punishment and public torture are as effective in the hands of the living as they are in the talons of the undead. But Tzimisce have developed cunning methods of using their vampiric arts to guard against insurrection — or at least to punish it.

Tzimisce are masters of Auspex, and this Discipline they use to terrifying effect. *Voivodes* routinely stand atop the battlements of their fortresses, listening to the words the night wind brings as it wafts up from the villages below. The faintest mutters of rebellion can reach the ears of a Fiend using Heightened Senses, who thereupon devises a poetic and hideous end for the would-be rebel. Obviously, the higher powers such as Soulsight, Steal Secrets and Anima Walk also prove useful in exposing recalcitrant subjects, until finally, those governed grow too terror-dulled to even think of treason.

Generally speaking, however, a *voivode* would not lower herself to walk among mortal villagers, save as a predator. But *voivodes* routinely create childer whose duties include precisely such Auspex-enhanced surveillance. These canny spies slip from the dom by night, creep into the mortals' lairs and employ Auspex powers to evaluate the prey's moods. As mortals' deepest resentments are "magically" unearthed and punished before they can even be acted on, the populace grows too fearful even to think of revolt.

Other Tzimisce Disciplines likewise serve useful functions in maintaining rulership. Besides its obvious value as a punitive measure, Vicissitude allows the *voivode* or her childer to walk among the mortals in any number of guises. Even if a practitioner is not sufficiently skilled to duplicate another, he may still change himself into someone other than the dread *vampyr* on the hill. Mortals are wise to distrust strangers in the East.

Provided a Tzimisce has a high Via score and can afford to miss a day or two of rest, Animalism allows auxiliary espionage capabilities. Through the eyes of a cat, hound or cock, the Fiend can spy on a village without leaving his lair — though certain wisewomen have grown uncomfortably adept at

discerning if a beast possesses "the evil eye." On a baser level, Cowing the Beast proves exceedingly useful at numbing unruly mortals, stripping them of courage and filling them with apprehension.

Then, too, Tzimisce tend to be more openly predatory than many other vampires. In practical terms, this means they replenish their Blood Pools more often, which in turn gives them fewer qualms about spending Blood Points to enhance Physical Attributes. Although Fiends may not specialize in Physical Disciplines *per se*, a Tzimisce who has spent 10 or more Blood Points to raise Attributes is capable of doing all manner of gruesome things to a victim — and then replenishing herself from the victim's family.

The greatest weapon, though, is the Tzimisce power over the Blood Oath. *Voivodes* who have studied alchemy or Koldunic Sorcery often find ways of extending the chains of mystic servitude through entire family lines. Generation after generation of peasants, lords, and even clergy dutifully serve the *voivode* on the hill. The greatest and most useful of these families are the revenant lines — but there are many, many others, sprouting through the Old Country like poisonous weeds. Provided the proper pawns are in place, a Fiend may instigate a violent purge of her fiefdom without ever stirring from her crypt.

Skeptics, noting the Old Country's predilection for invasion, might scoff at the Fiends' vaunted might. Such doubters should remember that Tzimisce are primarily concerned with the supernal, and that the human spark burns much dimmer in them than in most other vampires. What difference, Tzimisce reckon, whether the ants scurrying through a lion's den are red or black? Secure in her dwelling, a Fiend views "conquerors" with a jaded eye, scrutinizing who among the invaders may prove useful in future struggles with rival *voivodes* or werewolves. As the conquerors levy tribute and solidify their power, the Tzimisce stealthily deploys her minions among their ranks, snatching a few key victims and substituting fleshcrafted doppelgangers. And should any among the newcomers actually ignore their victims' "superstitions" and turn an avaricious gaze toward the old castle on the hill — well, a few well-chosen, well-placed examples quickly hammer the lesson home to even the most impolite intruder. And so, the miasma of fear envelops the invaders; within a few short generations the conquerors and the conquered wear the same invisible yoke and so are indistinguishable.

METAMORPHOSISTS

Outside the system of *voivodes* and vassals, the arcane Metamorphosist sect walks the wilds in search of its abstract goals. Although those unfamiliar with Tzimisce culture often think of Metamorphosists as the clan's priests, the sect has little use for either the God of Christendom or the antiquated deities worshipped by many Tzimisce elders. Metamorphosists, instead, seek to make themselves into godlike beings, or to attune themselves to universal forces.

Metamorphosists' theories bear similarities to Gnostic thought: Through knowledge — of oneself, of one's capabilities, and above all of one's Blood — one sloughs off the fleshly chains of life and the spiritual shackles of death, transcending both states. Cainites, as undead, have already taken the first step of balancing themselves between these polar extremes of existence. It now remains for Metamorphosists to refine the vampiric state to its utmost potential, and in so doing become divine. Many Metamorphosists even scoff at the entire notion of a vampiric "father" and "mother" (Caine and Lilith), considering it superstitious pabulum.

Metamorphosists prefer to congregate on sites of strong *vis*; here they let the arcane energies permeate their bodies as they send themselves into various trance states, as well as into extremes of starvation and satiation. Some Metamorphosists find revelation in the act of wandering; these vagabonds often find themselves drawn into the West and the company of other Children of Caine. Such coteries are typically short-lived — the abstract goals of Metamorphosists hold little interest for their rapacious brethren.

THE PACKS

Not all Tzimisce are so fortunate as to have holdings. There is only so much land to go around; then, too, increasing numbers of Fiends have lost ancestral holdings to the depredations of the Shadow Lords and the usurpation of the Tremere.

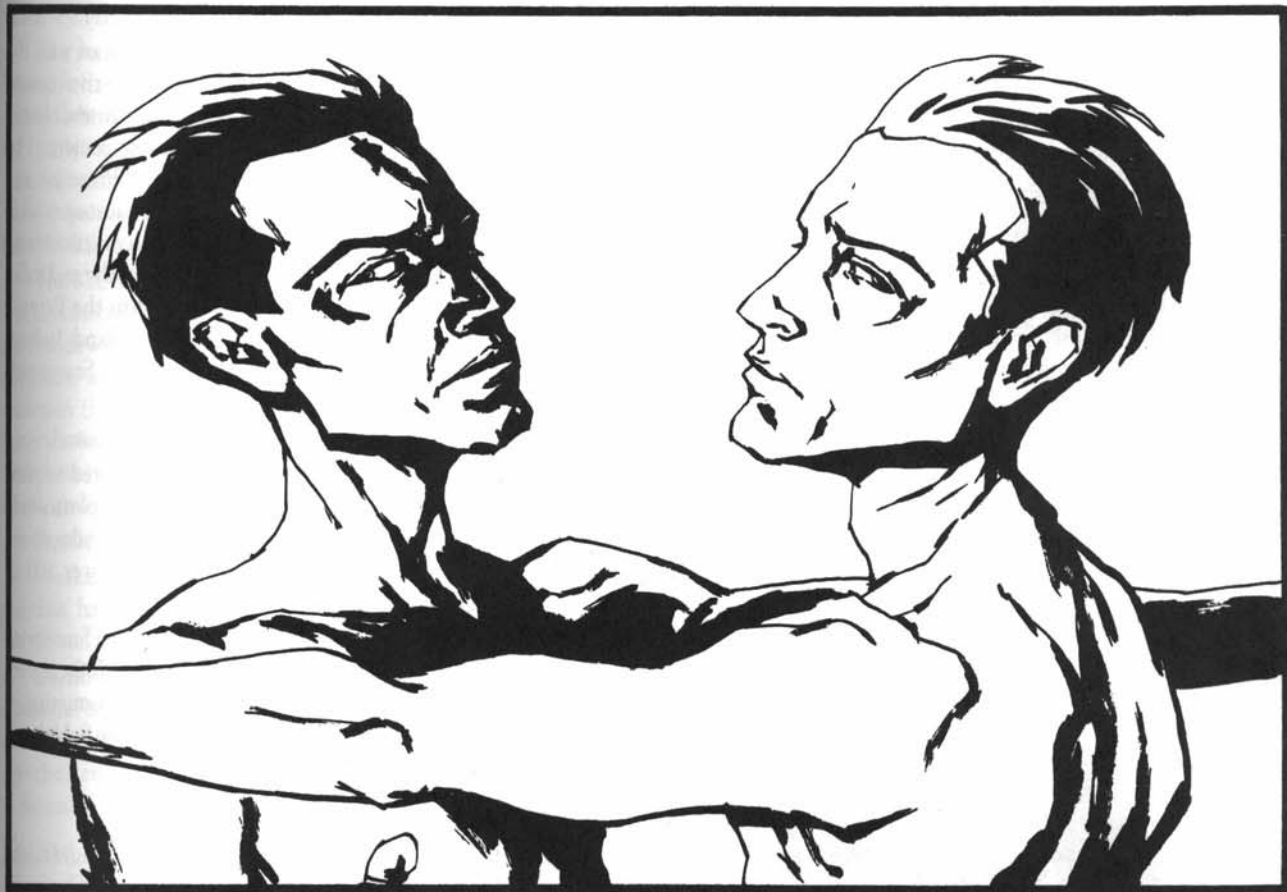
Seeking protection from the night's other denizens, displaced Tzimisce band together in units called packs. Hunting together, feeding together and even (in opposition to normal custom) resting together, a pack of Fiends is a cohesive and dangerous unit. Packs commonly follow the strongest leader with little quarrel, though there is a custom whereby rivals may duel for leadership.

These packs live as bandits and predators in the wilds, doing what they must to survive. Although the struggle for food consumes much of these wretches' existence, the mightiest of these packs hire themselves out as mercenaries and artisans. Certain packs have left the Old Country, selling their services in the West; Cainite powers, having long heard tales of the flesh-shapers' erudition and arcane skills, eagerly seek their services, though in many cases the Tzimisce find ways to take advantage of the "bargain."

KOLDUN

In the old nights, the term "koldun" referred exclusively to those Fiends who practiced the Discipline of Koldunic Sorcery. These nights, however, the term has taken on a new meaning. Certain Fiends, displaced from their ancestral lands, have traveled into the West, selling their skills as advisors and magicians to those Cainites likewise distrustful of the Tremere.

Such "kolduns" do not necessarily practice Koldunic Sorcery; the Vicissitude Discipline is exotic enough to vampires of the West, and Tzimisce have long held a reputation of (albeit vicious) wisdom. More than one Western prince has



gained victory through the stratagems of a cunning and ruthless Tzimisce vizier. The Lasombra, in particular, find the Fiends' tactical minds to their liking, and certain elders among the Magisters have thought about approaching the Tzimisce as a whole, with the aim of cultivating a longer-term relationship....

SLAVES OF THE VOIVODES

Even the mightiest *vampyr* must retreat to her haven come cockcrow, but Tzimisce care little for such trifling setbacks. The wise *voivode* maintains her domain with legions of servitors, many of whom are shaped through Vicissitude into the embodiments of their master's desires — or her subjects' nightmares.

REVENANTS

Other clans use ghouls as daylight servitors and minions. The Tzimisce, however, have refined this practice to its highest form, creating "families" of ghouls whose powers are hereditary. These ghouls, known as "revenants," are used as infiltrators, warriors, and breeding stock for new *vampyrs*. Many Tzimisce spent their childhoods among these freakish

families, whose practices include blasphemy, perversion and cannibalism. Such experiences prepare a *childe* well for existence among the undead.

Revenants differ from normal ghouls in two respects. First, each revenant's body manufactures a weaker vintage of vampire vitae, effectively giving the revenant 10 Blood Points. Second, each revenant clan possesses hereditary Disciplines, which are learned and used as though the revenants were vampires of an appropriate clan.

There are several major strains of revenants (presented below), as well as a host of minor lines, such as the Rustovitches and Ruthvenski. For more information on revenants, see the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat and Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

BRATOVITCH

The bestial Bratovitch are the Tzimisce's shock troops. They breed and keep the Fiends' hellhounds, and there is little difference between them and their charges. Bratovitches tend to live in isolated compounds, emerging only to make war or capture mates.

Bratovitch-run fiefdoms tend to be miserable, even by the standards of the Tzimisce. Constantly at war with their neighbors, Bratovitch lords quickly grow infamous for their sadistic rages and even more sadistic lusts.

BOOK TWO: TZIMISCE

Family Disciplines: Animalism, Potence, Vicissitude

Weakness: Bratovitches are infamous for savagery. They frenzy as if they possessed the Brujah clan weakness.

Destiny: The Bratovitch family survives into the modern era. For more information on the Bratovitch, see the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat and Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

GRIMALDI

The family Grimaldi is the least populated and most recently created revenant family—but this is acceptable to its members, who are used to this position in the scheme of things. Never able to compete directly with such luminaries as the di Medici or Giovanni families, the Grimaldi has cultivated instead a remarkable adaptability, shifting allegiances wherever it is most advantageous. Serving first one major merchant house, then another, the Grimaldis were wealthy enough to be comfortable, yet never so successful that others viewed them as a threat.

This adaptability proved to be crucial to the family's survival. Sent to Bohemia to open relations in the growing city of Prague, certain Grimaldi merchants instead found themselves in a devil's bargain with Bohemian *voivodes*. Seeking pawns to deploy within the Holy Roman Empire, these *voivodes* transformed a few Grimaldi patriarchs into revenants, who quickly and bloodily took over the family, spreading their seed through the surviving members. Now the Grimaldis serve as the Fiends' distant hands—and, when necessary, fists.

Family Disciplines: Celerity, Dominate, Fortitude

Weakness: The Grimaldi is a recently created family, and Grimaldi vitae is tepid in comparison to that of other revenants. Grimaldis have only eight Blood Points rather than the usual 10.

Destiny: During the Renaissance, the Grimaldis insinuate themselves into the growing bourgeois class. Becoming the Sabbat's "deep cover" agents, the Grimaldis survive to this night as they always have—unobtrusively. For more information on the Grimaldis, see the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat and Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

THE OBERTUS (THE HIDDEN)

This mysterious sect of revenants serves the Draconian Tzimisce of Byzantium, serving as clerics and researchers for that religion-obsessed line. Obertus commonly work in monasteries and libraries, unearthing and cataloging all manner of blasphemous secrets.

Family Disciplines: Auspex, Obfuscate, Vicissitude

Weakness: Members of the Obertus become obsessed with secrets easily. This Obsession is treated as a Derangement, with a focus on one particular sort of knowledge.

Destiny: The Obertus join the Sabbat as scholars and researchers; they survive to the modern era. For more information on the Obertus, see the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat and Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

SZANTOVICH

If the Bratovitches are the Tzimisce's dogs of war, the Szantovichs are the clan's feline infiltrators into rival courts. This depraved family breeds its members for allure and charm, then sets them loose into unsuspecting noble society. The ghouls' unearthly attractiveness (courtesy of Presence and Vicissitude) quickly wins them mates, who are just as quickly disposed of and their estates appropriated. Such practices have already made the Szantovichs exceedingly wealthy and influential; Szantovich revenants have married into the Premysl dynasty in Bohemia and the Piast dynasty in Poland. Indeed, certain Fiends have begun to wonder whether the Szantovich has exceeded its desired scope....

Family Disciplines: Auspex, Presence, Vicissitude

Weakness: The Szantovich are easily addicted to pleasure. After undergoing a pleasurable experience (a particularly satisfying sexual encounter, a well-cooked and tender young babe, etc.), the revenant must make a Willpower roll or become addicted to the vice.

Destiny: During the tumult of the sect wars, the Szantovich are forced underground. They resurface in the 1700s, having Anglicized their surname to Zantosa. For more information on the Zantosa, see the **Storytellers Handbook to the Sabbat and Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

VLASZY

Bred from a hardy mixture of Slavs and Magyars, the Vlaszy are the Tzimisce's cavaliers and kingmakers. The family is centered in Hungary but has spread through the Old Country, dwelling in border fortresses along the most turbulent frontiers. Vlaszy are skilled horsemen, mighty in war and adept in statesmanship; many Fiends prefer them to the Bratovitches, though Vlaszy often display an uncomfortable measure of independence.

As the story goes, the Vlaszy willingly entered into the Fiends' service in order to repay a great favor which the clan performed for the family. The nature of the debt is unknown, except to the eldest revenants, but it is reputedly this obligation, rather than fear or submissiveness, that keeps the Vlaszy in service. This is borne out by the Vlaszy's behavior; they are an honorable line, having little love for their condition or the acts they must perform to sustain it.

Family Disciplines: Animalism, Potence, Presence

Weakness: The Vlaszy do not like the Tzimisce but have taken an ancestral oath to serve. All Vlaszy willingly undertake a Blood Oath to a Fiend upon their passage to adolescence.

Destiny: After the collapse of the Tzimisce clan during the Anarch Revolt, the Vlaszy have the misfortune to end up on the side of the elders. With their characteristic honor, the Vlaszy battle Velya, Lugo, Vykos and the rest of the clan's rebellious childer, dying to a man in the process.

KREVCHESKI

Like a maggot, the Krevcheski family has wormed its way through the noble houses of Eastern Europe. They are a scholarly line, little interested in politics except to advance the family's access to the learning of the ancients. Krevcheski maintain small, but heavily fortified, manses; these estates house expansive libraries containing Classical works and the Krevcheski's own innovations.

The Krevcheski have a fascination with clockworks and mechanisms of various sorts. Krevcheski artifice has provided the Fiends with elaborate siege engines to resist their enemies' advances, as well as even more elaborate mechanisms to entertain those enemies following their capture. It is these latter devices that are the Krevcheski's particular joy, and Krevcheski commonly impose harsh sentences on subjects merely to have fodder for some new invention.

Family Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate

Weakness: Krevcheski are distrusted by the Tzimisce, and thus, have only learned two family Disciplines instead of the normal three.

Destiny: Later in the war, the Krevcheski will break their Oaths and betray their masters, joining the side of the Tremere and changing their name to Ducheski. What becomes of them after the Renaissance is unknown, save perhaps to the Council of Seven.

KHAVI

Even Tzimisce grow apprehensive at the mention of the Khavi. This revenant line was bred by Byelobog and serves him only. The Khavi squat amid the marshes of the northlands, poling their skiffs along the Baltic rivers and coasts. They do not move among mortals, save when they run low on food or breeding stock.

The Khavi are a secretive line, existing only to advance Byelobog's goals. Exactly how he bred them is unknown, but the Khavi are a strange family, even by revenant standards. Khavi revenants emulate their master's pallor; most are albinos and their skin constantly peels away in flakes. The most ancient Khavi, those who advise the White God directly, often appear as though they are rotting or suffering from plague.

Family Disciplines: Animalism, Obfuscate, Vicissitude

Weakness: The Khavi's skin constantly flakes and peels, particularly in direct sunlight. Khavi exposed to direct sunlight develop painful rashes and suffer -1 to Dice Pools until the rash heals (healing normally takes [6 - Stamina] days, during which the Khavi must avoid direct sunlight).

Destiny: The Khavi are exterminated by the Teutonic Knights; the last one is slain in the 14th century.



BOOK TWO: TZIMISCE



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

GUARDIANS

These loathsome creatures are known by a variety of names (the term “szlachta,” an ironic usage of the Polish Slavonic dialect’s word for “aristocrat,” is becoming prominent). In any event, guardians are ghouls shaped by Vicissitude into horrendous monsters. The process likewise affects guardian ghouls’ minds; most are mad and murderous creatures fit only to kill.

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Attack: Bonecrafted weapon for Str +2 dice; bite for 4 dice

Disciplines: Potence 1

Willpower: 4

Notes: Armor plating gives +1 die to soak rolls

HELLHOUNDS

This template refers to any of several sorts of Vicissitude-altered canines. Tzimisce most commonly make use of wolfhounds, though mastiffs and Great Danes are also used as “raw material.”

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Not likely

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Attack: Claw for 3 dice; bite for 5 dice

Disciplines: Potence 1

Willpower: 4

Notes: Armor plating gives +1 die to soak rolls

VOZHD

These mammoth composites are used as living siege engines by *voivodes* at war. A *vozhd* consists of multiple ghouls fused together through magic and Vicissitude into one composite behemoth.

Statistics for *vozhd* are found in **The Book of Storyteller Secrets**; more detailed rules to distinguish individual *vozhd* are provided below.

Attacks: A *vozhd* has multiple limbs, enabling it to make multiple attacks. It gains additional dice, which may only be used to split Dice Pools. The number of extra dice it receives is $(5 + \lceil \text{the number of ghouls used in construction} / 3 \rceil)$.

The *vozhd* has a number of Health Levels equal to the number of ghouls used in its construction. The first third of the Health Levels use the “OK” wound penalty, the next third use the “-1” penalty, and the last third (before Incapacitated) use the “-3” wound penalty.

NEW TRAITS

At the foot of one of these gibbets, covered with flowers like the column of a terrace, an executioner was seated...his gown was all covered with splattered blood and his hands seemed gloved in red.... "I rebuilt a man from head to foot, after removing his entire skin. He was so badly built! Ha! ha!"

— Octave Mirbeau, *The Torture Garden*

Tzimisce have developed many unique and secret arts in their distant solitudes. Many of these arts are practiced only in the Old Country; few Cainites experience them and live to tell their clanmates.

SKILLS

CRAFTS (BODY)

This is not a new Skill, but a refinement of the Crafts Skill presented in **Vampire: The Dark Ages** on page 172. With this Skill, a Fiend can control her use of Vicissitude. Each level of the Body Crafts Skill enables its practitioner to refine her technique and undertake more difficult "sculptures"; the levels below should give an idea of what a Fiend is capable of under ideal conditions (ample time, victim properly restrained, etc.).

- Novice: Yank and tuck
- Practiced: All your *szlachta* have "signature" deformities.
- Competent: You can make a poetic example of a transgressor.
- Expert: You can make...things God never intended.
- Master: You can create an exact duplicate of someone.
- Legend: You can make an insightful and exact duplicate of someone who exists only in ideal.

Possessed by: Tzimisce, Revenants

Specialties: Improving Appearance, Combat Use, Noses, Skulls, Beaks

TORTURE

Anyone can hurt a helpless victim; this Skill covers the ability to do so in a planned fashion, for a specific end. A skilled torturer can use torture devices to damage a victim's Willpower (by rolling Manipulation + Torture, difficulty equal to the victim's Stamina or Courage [whichever is higher] + 4, the torturer can strip away one point of temporary Willpower per success). When Willpower is reduced to zero, the victim confesses to whatever the torturer desires (even falsely admitting guilt if necessary).

- Novice: Older brother
- Practiced: Town guard
- Competent: Magistrate's man
- Expert: King's torturer

••••• Master: Voivode

•••••• Legend: Torquemada

Possessed by: Fiends, Inquisitors, Constabulary

Specialties: Psychological, Digits, Hot Irons, Confessions

MERITS AND FLAWS

VINDICTIVE: (3 PT. MERIT)

Your personal honor is your life, and you will go to the ends of the earth to settle a score or avenge a slight. When directly opposing someone who has insulted, shamed or harmed you, you gain an additional die to all combat Dice Pools.

This bonus does not apply toward casual foes, only blood enemies. For example, a Tzimisce would not get this bonus against the bandit who ambushes her on the road but would receive the bonus against the Shadow Lord who slew her sire and drove her from her ancestral fief.

The down side of this Merit is that you must do everything in your power to avenge such deeds or insults. Should you refrain from action, the Storyteller is within his rights to deduct temporary Willpower from your character until such time as you pursue your vengeance once more.

NATURALLY SUPPLE: (3 PT. MERIT)

You are attuned to Vicissitude like a fish in water (or blood, or pus...). Your difficulties are reduced by two when using Vicissitude on yourself (copying someone exactly, bonecrafting someone into an elaborate shape, etc.).

SECULAR: (4 PT. MERIT)

You have begun to explore the first glimmers of what awaits mankind after the Renaissance. You have a dim understanding of the scientific method, and while such concepts as evolution and entropy are still beyond you, you have begun to suspect that the world is much more complex than the Christian and pagan fools imagine. The difficulty to affect you with any Faith-based power (including Infernal magic!) is raised by one. Once per story, you may automatically regain a single Willpower point (you do not live with the same dread of damnation that many other Cainites do). Moreover, by spending a Willpower point and making an appropriate Intelligence + Science roll, you may formulate concepts and invent machines unknown in your time (higher mathematics, elaborate torture devices, etc.). The Storyteller must use prudence in adjudicating this; a da Vinci-esque flying machine is remotely conceivable, while an A-bomb (fun as the thought might be) is impossible.

You may not follow the Road of Heaven or the Road of the Devil. Moreover, the difficulties of all Conscience/Conviction rolls are increased by one (you are too existential to be overly concerned with your actions).

UNIQUE DISCIPLINE: KOLDUNIC SORCERY

Tzimisce have long been renowned (or feared) as master sorcerers, though their preeminence has been eclipsed by the rise of the Tremere. Most Fiends have forgotten the elder magic of long-ago nights, and few who remember teach it to their childer. Nonetheless, there are a few ancients who still practice the magical Discipline of Koldunic Sorcery.

System: Koldunic Sorcery resembles Thaumaturgy (and is cast in the same manner), though it has no connection to the Hermetic practices of the Tremere. It has its own paths and rituals, which are incompatible with the magic of the Tremere, though recent cooperation with House Tytalus has allowed certain Fiends to develop Koldunic equivalents of the Paths of Blood, Spirit and Flames.

This power is not considered a clan Discipline, though Tzimisce with an appropriate mentor may learn the power using the experience point costs for an outside-of-clan Discipline. No Fiend would ever instruct a non-Tzimisce in the Discipline.

Koldunism survives into the modern age, but is exceedingly rare. The Fiends of the Oradea League are known to practice the Discipline, as are certain Sabbat elders and their childer.

KOLDUNIC PATHS

Koldun learn a path equivalent to Spirit Thaumaturgy (see **The Vampire Players Guide**), known as Spirit Ways, as their first Path. Other Paths practiced by *koldun* include Koldunic equivalents of Creo Ignem (Fire Ways), Rego Elementum (Natural Ways), and Rego Aquam (Water Ways). See **Vampire: The Dark Ages** for details on these Paths.

KOLDUNIC RITUALS

Like Thaumaturgy, Koldunic Sorcery grants its wielder access to rituals of various sorts. These rituals, though magical, are not Hermetic, having no connection to the Egyptian/Latin tradition. Many rituals (not surprisingly) require blood to be spilled (a Blood Point's worth per level of the ritual, from either the caster or a sentient sacrifice); some also require clumps of sacred earth (from a caern, node, barrow, graveyard or similar site). Koldunic rituals are rarely written down; practitioners rely on mnemonic cues.

System: Unless described differently below, these rituals are invoked in a manner similar to Thaumaturgical rituals. In order to cast a ritual successfully, the caster must make a successful Intelligence + Hearth Wisdom roll (difficulty 4 + the level of the ritual). Typically, only one success is needed for the ritual to be successful.

HOSPITALITY (LEVEL ONE RITUAL)

This is a simple Koldunic ritual, but an important one. This ritual, enacted nightly, allows the Tzimisce to "awaken" the spirits in his haven. These spirits "manifest" themselves in objects, which assume sentience and individualism, often displaying unique personalities in the process. Thus, a Fiend's gate might speak to the vampire in a dull, grating voice, complaining about the weight of the castle on its keystones; a mirror might slyly praise the vampire, while a knout might cackle with glee and beg to be laid across a victim's back.

The Tzimisce may command any such house-spirit to silence, and the spirits generally display servility and obsequiousness. However, if ill treated (or if treated politely by an intruder), the spirits may fail to warn the Fiend of intruders in his domain (which is the primary function of the spell).

CONJURE LESSER DEMON (LEVEL THREE RITUAL)

Simply put, this ritual allows the sorcerer to evoke one of the lesser demons that haunt the Slavic lands. These "demons" have no connection to infernal beings; they are most similar to the spirits revered by werewolves. Nor do the demons attempt to make a pact; the relation between sorcerer and demon resembles that between a master and vassal (albeit a highly malicious, intractable vassal). All Slavic demons have names, which must be learned by the sorcerer, and all must be "sworn" to the sorcerer by accepting a point of her blood. A *koldun* may "retain" a number of demons equal to her Charisma or Intimidation score (whichever is higher). Demons are not "bound" to the sorcerer; she must coax or (more likely) cow them into performing services.

A lesser Slavic demon can appear in virtually any shape; many take the shape of normal animals, though some appear freakish indeed. Use the stats for a demonhound or incubus from Chapter Nine of the **Vampire: The Dark Ages** rulebook. Storytellers owning **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** may also, at their discretion, assign Slavic demons any of the various spirit powers from that book.

THE INMOST TUG (LEVEL FIVE RITUAL)

Unlike most Koldunic rituals, this requires no blood sacrifice or other dross; it can be activated with a single word and a gesture. This ritual allows a *voivode*, by making a Manipulation + Empathy roll (difficulty of the victim's Willpower), to manipulate the emotions of a being bound in the Blood Oath. For example, the love instilled by a Blood Oath could be debased to lust, or refined to fraternal devotion. This ritual can even be used to warp a Blood Oath into fear, hate, or other negative emotions.

CONJURE GREATER DEMON (LEVEL FIVE RITUAL)

This ritual is similar to Conjure Lesser Demon, except a mighty entity of the Old Country appears. Such a being is not generally subject to intimidation; it must be coaxed to serve, and has no qualms about destroying the sorcerer should the offer not be to its liking. For this reason, *koldun* rarely use this ritual.

Like lesser demons, greater demons have individual names and can appear in any shape. Storytellers should use the template for a warrior servitor or tempter on pp. 268-269 of *Vampire: The Dark Ages* and assign additional powers as they desire.

CREATE VOZHD (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

This ritual, combined with Vicissitude, enables its practitioner to create a *vozhd* war ghoul (see *Book of Storyteller Secrets* for the creature's statistics). The Tzimisce must gather a sizable number of ghouls—at least 15, though 20 or more are commonly employed. The ghouls may be human or animal, and all must be force-fed a concoction of each other's blood (a Blood Point of the mixture will suffice). Once this is done, the ritual begins.

The ritual consists of a continuous chant, which the Fiend must utter while using Vicissitude to mold the ghouls into a composite creature. The casting Tzimisce does not have

to be the "sculptor" of the *vozhd*, though most prefer at least to participate in the flesh-shaping. The ritual takes (the number of ghouls used - 7) hours to cast, and the caster must maintain the chant without interruption for the duration of the casting. If this requires the caster to remain awake after daylight, he must make *Via* rolls to stay awake.

DRACUL (LEVEL NINE RITUAL)

Besides the obvious prerequisite (Koldunic Sorcery 9+), the caster must have a Vicissitude score of 6+ to employ this ritual; only two Tzimisce, including the Dracon of Byzantium, are known to have used it. This ritual imbues the Fiend with the primordial energies of the Old Country, transforming the vampire into a hideous dragon.

System: The Fiend's Strength rating triples, his Stamina rating doubles, and he sprouts a scaly hide equal to Class 4 Armor. The dragon may drink blood normally, and may also choose to consume the flesh of slain foes; an entire human corpse (12 Health Levels) may be chewed up and eaten per turn, provided the dragon does nothing but eat. For each Health Level of flesh "digested," the Fiend may regurgitate a fiery acid inflicting one Health Level of aggravated damage per "point" invested in it (maximum of six Health Levels vomited per shot). The Fiend gains an additional five "Bruised" Health Levels, but all difficulties to hit him are reduced by one (he's enormous).



BOOK TWO: TZIMISCE

NEW DISCIPLINE POWERS

VRYKOLAS (ANIMALISM LEVEL SIX)

Drawing on his unholy connection to the beasts of the wilds, the Fiend drinks the blood of a ferocious animal — a wolf, bear, boar, or what have you. Immediately after the draining, a metamorphosis occurs: The Tzimisce takes on some of the features of the beast, becoming a hybrid monster. Fiends often use this power in combination with Assume the Zulo Shape and Chiropteran Marauder, especially when making war on Lupines.

System: The Tzimisce drains all the blood from an animal. Over the next three turns, the Tzimisce sprouts fur, tusks, claws, horns, and other assorted weaponry (the precise accouterments depend on the animal killed). Generally speaking, the Fiend gains +1 to soak dice, claws inflicting Str +2 aggravated damage, and a bite inflicting Str +1 to Str +3 aggravated damage (again, depending on the creature killed). All Social Traits drop to zero.

This power costs two Blood Points to activate. The Tzimisce must have a Vicissitude score of 3 or greater to use this power.

THE FLAYING (AUSPEX LEVEL SIX)

This power has helped many a Fiend hold onto his domain. Normally, it is very difficult to effect precise duplication of a specific person through Vicissitude. With this grisly power, however, a Tzimisce may “graft” the skin of a flayed victim to his own, enabling the Fiend to pose as the skinned person. In this manner may Tzimisce infiltrate the halls of the mighty.

System: The Tzimisce first uses Vicissitude (and perhaps a sharp knife or two) to flay the victim, then evokes this power while naked and wrapped in the victim’s bloody skin. The skin “grafts” onto the Fiend’s own, thus granting an automatic Vicissitude duplication (no roll required). The Fiend may maintain the stolen shape as long as he likes.

Once a shape is discarded, the victim’s skin peels away and the power ends. However, the Tzimisce can maintain a mental “catalog” of “imprinted” shapes (a number equal to Intelligence, or an infinite number if the Tzimisce has the Merit of Eidetic Memory). An “imprinted” shape may be assumed with five minutes’ effort and a simple Dexterity + Crafts (Body) roll (difficulty 6).

MASTER OF THE DOM (AUSPEX LEVEL NINE)

This mighty power is available to only a few ancient Fiends. The Tzimisce mystically taps into the spirits of the land, effectively becoming one with the realm. Essentially, the Tzimisce metamorphoses into something less like a vampire and more like a guardian spirit; she knows most of what transpires in the realm and gains a measure of control over the land itself.



System: Once acquired, this power is always on. The Tzimisce picks a "fiefdom" on which the power centers (this should always include the dom, and the area should be relatively small — no more than a 10-mile radius). Within this area, the Tzimisce is lord and master. All difficulties of Dominate, Presence, Animalism and Koldunic Sorcery powers used by the Tzimisce against natives of the fiefdom are reduced by one; the Fiend may control weather and climatic effects in the realm (Intelligence + Hearth Wisdom, difficulty 6 to 10 depending on what the vampire wants to do); the vampire may subtly shift landmarks, causing a traveler to become lost, stumble into a pit, overlook a haven, etc. (again, difficulty 6 to 10, depending on what the vampire wants to accomplish); and she may pinpoint intruders' locations within the fiefdom (generally, difficulty 7).

This power has a drawback: The Tzimisce is effectively "bound" to the fiefdom; she will never leave it willingly, and if forced out, she will suffer as though she were cut off from her special soil. If she drops to below one die in all Dice Pools, she withers and dies.

ENTRAIL SARABAND (VICISSITUDE LEVEL SIX)

The vampire with this power may animate his bowels, imbuing them with manipulative and even combat potential. The writhing entrails may be used as crude whips, extra limbs or snares, though they lack the strength to constrict foes.

System: The vampire must spend a Blood Point. The action is automatic, though the vampire takes one Health Level of normal damage as his bowels burst out through his abdomen. For each dot of Stamina the vampire possesses, he gains one additional die to perform actions such as grappling, striking, etc. However, these dice can only be used to perform extra actions, not to add to existing Dice Pools.

LIVING TESTUDO (VICISSITUDE LEVEL SIX)

The Fiends well remember the effectiveness of the large shields used by the Roman invaders of their lands. Accordingly, Tzimisce at war occasionally make use of a similar, though ghastlier, substitute. Grasping a victim, the vampire uses flesh- and bonecrafting arts to lay open the victim's back in such a manner that her vertebrae are exposed. The vampire then grasps the glistening spinal cord in the manner of a doughty warrior hefting a shield, and hoists the victim bodily by this makeshift "handle." Not only does the victim provide

protection against attacks, but — for so long as the victim lives — the Fiend can manipulate the flesh and bone of the "shield" to provide an arsenal of offensive weaponry.

System: The Fiend must have a Strength of 5 — through any combination of nature, vitae and/or Potence — to use this power. The testudo-to-be must be immobilized and her back bared. The Tzimisce then makes a Dexterity + Crafts (Body) roll (difficulty 8) to lay open the victim's back. If successful, the victim loses only one Health Level; if the roll fails, the victim dies hideously and a new shield must be sought.

The Fiend then lifts the screaming, twitching victim into the air, using her to block attacks as he would a normal shield. Attacks blocked in this manner inflict damage on the victim, who remains intact until she has suffered five Health Levels beyond the point of her death (at this point, the victim is too mangled and tattered to provide further protection). Furthermore, while the victim lives, the Tzimisce can make a Dexterity + Crafts (Body) roll (difficulty 7) to form the "shield" into an offensive weapon — for example, forming spikes from the victim's rib cage, making a whip or noose from the victim's skin, etc. Each weapon formed inflicts one Health Level of damage on the victim and creates an appropriate weapon (i.e., rib cage spikes might inflict Str + 1 normal damage, while a skinwhip would inflict Str - 1 normal damage and possibly entangle an opponent, etc.).

IMPALER'S FENCE (VICISSITUDE LEVEL SEVEN)

Some powerful Tzimisce use this power to mark the edges of their demesnes. To activate this power, the Fiend must grasp a victim, holding them for a full turn. The victim's spinal cord springs through the crown of his skull and his anus, generally causing the victim's death. Furthermore, the rigid spine-shaft uncoils to a length of 10 feet and (if the victim stands on soil, earth or other soft material) affixes the victim to the ground, thereby forming a "stake" or "signpost" of sorts.

System: The vampire grasps her victim and rolls Strength + Medicine (difficulty 8); this roll is resisted by the victim's Stamina (difficulty 8). If the vampire succeeds, the victim takes (10 - Stamina) Health Levels of damage; Fortitude does not help to resist this damage. Furthermore, the victim is considered horribly encumbered (minus three to Dexterity).

It can be assumed that mortals who suffer this self-impalement die shortly even if the initial damage does not kill them.

21 Cavalcade of Fiends

THE HELLHOUND

Quote: *Do not trouble me with trifles — I care naught for this "famine" nonsense. I shall ask again — are you sure this is all the tribute you can spare the Sovereign One this harvest? Perhaps, then, the Sovereign One should plant a new sort of crop. Yesss... Gather every man, woman and child in the square at dawn. Separate them by twos, and erect one sharpened stake for every pair; have it done by sundown on the morrow, or the Sovereign One will grow truly displeased....*

Prelude: You grew up in the kennels of the Bratovitches. From your earliest nights, your allegiance lay with the Master's hounds — after all, you were whelped at the same bitch's teat, housed in the same pen, fed with the same scraps, and beaten with the same strap. You sported and hunted with the litters — strangling any rivals who thought to challenge you, of course — and by adolescence had swelled into a hulking mastiff of a revenant.

One night you were unchained and sent to make war on other dogs. You led your pack howling under the full moon to the village your Master had designated to die. Despite your savagery, however, you were unprepared when the villagers began howling back.

You engaged the leader, a 10-foot tower of black fur and red fangs. His claws laid open your flanks, but you would not suffer another rival for leadership of your pack, even one who reminded you of family. Dropping in under the splayed talons, you grasped the champing muzzle and squeezed with all your might.

The rest of the werewolves looked on, eyes widening in uncharacteristic horror, as you yanked the man-wolf's head from its torso. You hurled the trophy in challenge at your foes, and your own pack followed. The rest of the wolves fought well, but their leader's death had unnerved them, and so, one by one, they fell under the gleaming moon.

LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1



You dragged yourself back to the Master's tower before dawn, where you eagerly (if monosyllabically) grunted your report. The *voivode's* eyes flickered when you reported the village's destruction — he had expected you merely to whittle a few of the wolves down, and he certainly had not anticipated your survival. Hmmm...there would be other villages to pacify, he reasoned, and if you tasted as foul as you smelled, you might be of further use....

Concept: You are the *voivode's* first man — and all had best remember it. You are just canny enough to know that the *voivode* despises you, so you make yourself indispensable. Your Physical Attributes and Abilities reflect the violence you have dispensed and endured all of your life.

Roleplaying Hints: At the *voivode's* behest, you have cultivated the thinnest veneer of civility — now, for example, you ask for tribute first instead of simply beating the villagers without explanation. Although you have little learning and less desire for any, you display abundant amounts of low cunning. Your first interactions with other beings are crude attempts at intimidation; should this fail, toady to any in power while you devise more subtly violent schemes.

Equipment: Hellhounds, mace, scale hauberk, writ of authority

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: ROGUE	
PLAYER: _____		DEMEANOR: BARBARIAN	
CHRONICLE: _____		CLAN: TZIMISCE	
		GENERATION: 11th	
		HAVEN: _____	
		CONCEPT: HELLHOUND	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength.....●●●●●	Charisma.....●●●●●	Perception.....●●●●●	
Dexterity.....●●●●●	Manipulation.....●●●●●	Intelligence.....●●●●●	
Stamina.....●●●●●	Appearance.....●●●●●	Wits.....●●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Acting.....●●●●●	Animal Ken.....●●●●●	Academics.....●●●●●	
Alertness.....●●●●●	Archery.....●●●●●	Hearth/Wisdom.....●●●●●	
Athletics.....●●●●●	Crafts.....●●●●●	Investigation.....●●●●●	
Brawl.....●●●●●	Etiquette.....●●●●●	Law.....●●●●●	
Dodge.....●●●●●	Herbalism.....●●●●●	Linguistics.....●●●●●	
Empathy.....●●●●●	Melee.....●●●●●	Medicine.....●●●●●	
Intimidation.....●●●●●	Music.....●●●●●	Occult.....●●●●●	
Larceny.....●●●●●	Ride.....●●●●●	Politics.....●●●●●	
Leadership.....●●●●●	Stealth.....●●●●●	Science.....●●●●●	
Subterfuge.....●●●●●	Survival.....●●●●●	Senseshal.....●●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
DISCIPLINES		BACKGROUNDS	
ANIMALISM.....●●●●●	GENERATION.....●●●●●	VIRTUES	
VICISSITUDE.....●●●●●	HERD.....●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction.....●●●●●	
POTENCE.....●●●●●	MENTOR.....●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct.....●●●●●	
.....●●●●●	RESOURCES.....●●●●●	Courage.....●●●●●	
.....●●●●●	RETAINERS.....●●●●●		
OTHER TRAITS		ROAD	
.....●●●●●	BEAST.....●●●●●●●●●●	HEALTH	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Bruised..... <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Hurt.....-1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Injured.....-1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Wounded.....-2 <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Mauled.....-2 <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●	.....●●●●●●●●●●	Crippled.....-5 <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	Incapacitated..... <input type="checkbox"/>	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	WEAKNESS	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●	MUST SLEEP IN AT LEAST TWO HANDFULS OF NATIVE SOIL	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●		
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●		

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THE DARK KNIGHT

Quote: *The conscripts are doing the best that humans can do, my liege, and the szlachta do the fiefdom proud, but we have the Teutons on our right and the Shadow Lords at our heels and we are dying out there, Your Excellency, and.... Yes. Yes, milord. Punish the village for its failure. Every soul sent screaming to Hell. I hear and obey.*

Prelude: You were a seventh son of a seventh son, heir to nothing save a brigandine hauberk and a German sword. You put both to good use, serving in the Byzantine army and later in the Third Crusade. You participated in some few deeds of valor and many, many atrocities; when the wars were over and Jerusalem lay under the crescent, you left a land and a faith that meant nothing to you.

A voivode mistook your resignation for callousness. Although nominally Christian, you knew enough about the ancient traditions to bear your fate stoically. If the Fiend was no better than your old leaders, at least she was more honest about it. You were placed in charge of the voivode's armies, leading her szlachta and Bratovitch dog-soldiers against Tremere, Ventrue and Lupines.

You broke the advance of Goratrix's elite Gargoyle flocks during your first campaign, and you hold off the Usurpers to this night.

What you see sickens you. It isn't the atrocities ubiquitous to the

Tzimisce — you saw similar horrors at Acre, and one must be aggressive in defending one's land. No, it is your liege lady's indifference toward those who fight and die in her service. The things you command may not look like the sainted icons in the Church, but they are yet men, and your sympathies lie more with them than with your lady high in the tower.

Concept: It is rumored that deep amid the Balkans dwell roosters with plumes of fire and fanged beaks, and perhaps this is true, for you are a specimen rarer than hen's teeth — a compassionate Fiend. You are a skilled leader, ably balancing pragmatism and sympathy; this has earned you more loyalty than any Blood Oath could. Your Physical Attributes and combat Abilities are high, courtesy of a lifetime of war.

Roleplaying Hints: You were weary before you took up eternal arms and your service to the voivode has granted you little respite. In battle, you are an efficient engine of war; in service, you are meticulous enough to win the Fiends' respect. Alas, they are beginning to lose yours, and some nights you gaze toward the horizon's pyres and yearn for the liberating flames.

Equipment: Chainmail hauberk, broadsword, destrier, banner with voivode's standard



LIBELLUS SAN

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME:	NATURE: DEFENDER	GENERATION: 12th
PLAYER:	DEMEANOR: LONER	HAVEN:
CHRONICLE:	CLAN: TZIMISCE	CONCEPT: DARK KNIGHT
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Heath Wisdom: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Senschal: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
ANIMALISM: ●●●●●	HERD: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●
AUSPEX: ●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●
VIOSITUDE: ●●●●●	STATUS: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
OTHER TRAITS		
●●●●●	ROAD CHIVALRY: ●●●●●●●●●●	HEALTH
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Hurt: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Injured: -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Wounded: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Mauled: -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Crippled: -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Incapacitated: <input type="checkbox"/>
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	WEAKNESS
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	MUST SLEEP IN AT LEAST TWO HOURS OF NATIVE SOL
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	

THE JADED ARISTOCRAT

Quote: A traveler seeks shelter from the storm? Oh, I smell she is no more than 14 winters...and a virgin! Marvelous!

Prelude: You were groomed for nobility amid the catacombs of the Szantoviches. As a ghoul, you were trained in all the gentle and womanly arts common to Szantovich daughters and were later given in marriage to a count along the Bohemian marches. (He died dishonorably in his conjugal bed, hair turned white and face swollen with terror, no doubt from the untimely illness that laid him low.)



Of course, there was a small impasse concerning the inheritance, but after you had discoursed privately and at length with your stepchildren and the local magistrate, everyone was all too happy to cede the estate to you. Your demesne thus established, you set about civilizing your barbaric fief with all that Classical and Byzantine culture had to offer. Your court attracted no few visitors along with its infamy—though a few honeyed words and bloody examples sufficed to quiet your subjects' worst rumormongering.

Still, when strange shadows were seen flitting to your battlements against the moon, the villagers whispered. When children began disappearing from the nearby hamlets, the villagers hissed. And when pale riders swept out of the East to sojourn at your estate, the villagers' suspicions were confirmed in gruesome fashion. By then, of course, it was too late. The masters had deemed you worthy, and you were vampyr.

Your retainers inform you that the peasants mutter of the Deathless Hell-Countess, but what is that to you? The kine are yours to do with as you will and you owe them no explanation. Recently, you have begun cultivating pawns in high places and low, and your estate has begun entertaining visitors from a mighty court indeed.

Concept: You were Szantovich in life and in some ways embody what the Toreador will later become. No, that is not so—you are a hundred times worse. You are adept in all courtly arts, leaving overt violence to your retainers and demonic emissaries.

Roleplaying Hints: You are as sweet and inescapable as a quagmire of honey. You never appear imperious at first, treating churchmen and magistrates with courtly hospitality. You slyly cultivate a compassionate, aristocratic façade, particularly toward young girls, whom you adore. Erzsebet Bathory and the White Witch of Narnia have nothing on you, my pretty....

Equipment: Castle, levies, *szlachta*, implements of torture worthy of a Renaissance dungeon, several beautiful pages, several hideous ex-pages, several cysts that were ex-pages, hellhounds, library of blasphemous and prurient tomes.

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME: PLAYER: CHRONICLE:	NATURE: MONSTER DEMEANOR: TYRANT CLAN: TZIMISCE	GENERATION: 2nd HIVEN: CONCEPT: JADED ARISTOCRAT
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength.....●●●●●●	Charisma.....●●●●●●	Perception.....●●●●●●
Dexterity.....●●●●●●	Manipulation.....●●●●●●	Intelligence.....●●●●●●
Stamina.....●●●●●●	Appearance.....●●●●●●	Wits.....●●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting.....●●●●●●	Animal Ken.....●●●●●●	Academics.....●●●●●●
Alertness.....●●●●●●	Archery.....●●●●●●	Hearth Wisdom.....●●●●●●
Athletics.....●●●●●●	Crafts.....●●●●●●	Investigation.....●●●●●●
Brawl.....●●●●●●	Etiquette.....●●●●●●	Law.....●●●●●●
Dodge.....●●●●●●	Herbalism.....●●●●●●	Linguistics.....●●●●●●
Empathy.....●●●●●●	Melee.....●●●●●●	Medicine.....●●●●●●
Intimidation.....●●●●●●	Music.....●●●●●●	Occult.....●●●●●●
Larceny.....●●●●●●	Ride.....●●●●●●	Politics.....●●●●●●
Leadership.....●●●●●●	Stealth.....●●●●●●	Science.....●●●●●●
Subterfuge.....●●●●●●	Survival.....●●●●●●	Senseshal.....●●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
AUSPEX.....●●●●●●	GENERATION.....●●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction.....●●●●●●
VICISSITUDE.....●●●●●●	RESOURCES.....●●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct.....●●●●●●
.....●●●●●●	STATUS.....●●●●●●	Courage.....●●●●●●
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	
OTHER TRAITS		
TORTURE.....●●●●●●	ROAD DEVIL.....●●●●●●	HEALTH
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Bruised.....□
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Hurt.....-1 □
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Injured.....-1 □
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Wounded.....-2 □
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Mauled.....-2 □
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Crippled.....-5 □
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	Incapacitated.....□
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	WEAKNESS
.....●●●●●●	.....●●●●●●	MUST SLEEP IN AT LEAST TWO HANDFULS OF NATIVE SOIL
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	
.....●●●●●●●●●●●●	

Appendix: From the Diary of Lambach Ruthven

12/24/97

Christmas Eve.

A fitting time for ghosts to walk, yes? I write this to you, my beloved Klara, though you have lain in that tiny churchyard in Silesia for nearly 700 years. I always did love you. Thoughts of you comfort me in the still hours, when in my inner eye rears laughing Tepes, or that ineffable Other of whom Tepes is but the merest silhouette.

Tonight they will make their sojourn: Vykos, Chorbry, Devin and the rest. They will stalk Greenwich Village, Harlem, the Upper West Side. They will celebrate the solstice Ritae in the old fashion, just as they did among nameless village crossroads not so very long ago. They will celebrate what it means to be Tzimisce, to be Sabbat.

To be free.

I am very drunk. Do you know what I do now, Klara? I go amid the rotting lanes of the Bowery, and there I feed from rancid derelicts. I do believe I carry AIDS, Klara. So the whispered legends of our kind are true - a virus runs through my cold, dead corpse. My apologies for the strange juxtapositions and...stream-of-consciousness, yes, that is the term...nature of this missive. Since you are dead, I think you will care little, but Genevra tells me there is order even among the shades. Such a pity.

They will throw their heads to the stagnant sky and howl in the old tongues. They will gorge themselves on the terror-laced vitae of dozens of "suicides" and "domestic disputes" and "missing persons." Above all, they will reenact that most hallowed of nights, when mighty Lugo j stood alone and rampant in that crumbling church. When he ripped aside the flagstones, to reveal...I cannot even write of it, Klara. Not in my little brick cocoon, miles and

oceans parted from bloody old Europe. I am a coward and a weakling. I am a lord of the Sabbat. Above all, Klara, I am a good lad.

I was at a Zantosa fete over a month ago. The subject of Lugo's Night arose again. One would think that after 550 years, beings so brilliant as we Tzimisce would have something more entertaining to talk about. I felt I should go as mad as one of Malkav's get! And I wanted to stand up, to scream at them all, to speak of what I saw that night. Could they not see the webs of blood binding them like scarlet grave-shrouds?

The eldest of the host family, hoary old Istvan Zantosa, took me aside. He leered at me then, and though I was in the grip of powerful hallucinogens manufactured by our Nosferatu allies below, I heard his whisper like a scream reverberating through subterranean caverns.

Be a good lad.

And then, still grinning, he tapped his cane, once, twice, thrice, on the brownstone floor.

There are catacombs beneath the Zantosa home, and these connect to the subways and the sewer systems of the Nosferatu, and where those lead, even I know not. All I know is that the tunnels wind gaping and forgotten, like a black maw waiting to swallow the surface world. The Sewer Rats, it seems, have outsmarted themselves; no one, even the eldest among the Nosferatu, knows the chambers and corridors in their entirety. Anything - anyone - could be down there, safe and amniotic in the dark.

New York is our stronghold, the soul of the sect. There are close to 10 million kine in the metropolitan area. Our Seraphs meet here, and our voivode often calls the clan to gather among the skyscrapers. Truly, on any given night, one could not find a more concentrated registry of luminaries among the Damned.

On any given night, so much blood. So much blood. A scarlet web of blood. Enough to sate....

I grow weary of this subject, Klara. I shall write of it no more, and instead shall lose myself among the currents of shoppers and celebrants, like Jacob Marley's wailing ghost. Let the others snare themselves more tightly in their blood rites and savage games. Let them take pride in what it is to be Tzimisce.

I already know what I am, far better than any of them, I think.

I am a good lad.





Book Three: Patricians

Here I sit within my crumbling walls, writing these words while the cries of dying men surround me in the darkness and great fires - the funeral pyres of a bygone age - burn in the distance. I do not know that you will find this last testament, for the destruction that comes for me may be too complete, but there are things that I cannot leave unsaid. Perhaps you, to whom I was closest among all my childer, can achieve some measure of understanding from these last words and will not be left to venture forth into the darkness entirely unguided.

When I was but a childe, I did not see in myself the seeds of the tyrant I would become; they lay dormant, deep within my breast, waiting only for the stimuli of blood and war to grow into full bloom. I desired not to rule, but merely to chronicle the events of the kingdom in which I dwelt, and perhaps, to play a small role in the clan's efforts to guide it to a better future. A dark fate awaited that fair kingdom, however, and with its unwelcome arrival came the first stirrings of change in my lifeless heart.

Savage barbarians swept in from the north, bringing death and despair with them. Our people were helpless, unable to predict the timing of their raids and incapable of resisting their might without preparation. As the raids worsened, food and other resources grew short. Civil war arose within the kingdom itself. Our once-proud land split into warring factions, each tearing at the others with vulpine single-mindedness, while around the periphery, the wolves gathered.

It was a long, dark time for our folk, and many elders whom I had thought invincible perished in the innumerable sieges, battles and raids that punctuated those grim decades. Most of us withdrew from the coast and its vulnerability, trying to preserve a tiny domain for ourselves. It was the brutal, interminable, exhausting defense of that first fief, I think, that infected me with the incurable hunger that drives me to this very night. Again and again my opponents, both mortal and immortal, tried to take what was mine, but to no avail. I learned this lesson first and best: Defend what is yours, let no other take it from you, for that dishonor is worse than Final Death itself. It is with such thoughts in mind that I gird myself for what comes.

To ensure the safety of that first fief, I had to expand my power base — no one who stands alone is truly secure. In this I learned a second lesson: The acquisition of power only whets the appetite for more. It was during those first nights while I painstakingly constructed the core of my empire that I was truly happiest. Most believed that I had little chance to succeed, but I triumphed anyway, uniting my vassals, Cainite and kine, in the alliance that drove the invaders from our lands.

My victory was complete, and with it came the spoils I wanted so dearly. The kingdom was mine. As prince, I established tight control over my subjects, and for this some labeled me a tyrant, but the memory of the fragmented fief that had been an easy victim for its enemies was always in my mind. I became obsessed with ensuring that such events would never happen again. I hunted down and destroyed my foes throughout the land and I sired childer, such as yourself, to rule in their stead. Even my most vehement detractors cannot deny that I brought order where there had been chaos, plenty where there had been want, and strength where there had been weakness.

My reign passed quickly to my eyes, although it consumed the better part of centuries, a time in which I ruled unchallenged. Success, however, sometimes harbors costs that are dire indeed, and this is perhaps the most ironic of all lessons. Overwhelming victory is sweet, but it makes enemies out of those who fear strength and unites opponents who would have otherwise remained divided. It breeds jealousy in those lesser beings who would claim all credit for themselves and for whom no reward is great enough. All around me, dark forces more inexorable than fate itself toiled ceaselessly. I saw my closest friends become the bitterest of my enemies, despite decades of unquestioning loyalty. Without warning, ancient foes whom I believed long dead rose again, their powers increased tenfold, and their minds focused solely upon vengeance, and rivals whom I had unwisely counted upon to continue fighting amongst themselves made peace, joining forces against me. Success had brought me ruin, but my downfall was shaped by more than the blind workings of destiny.

This, then, is the last of my lessons to you, childer, and be certain you learn it well. There are powers abroad in this world that manipulate the affairs of the most powerful Cainites as if we were but children. We refer to these beings as the Daeva, and it is they who are our greatest and most mysterious foes. Among their ranks are the Antediluvians, those most ancient and monstrous representatives of our kind, but they comprise only an incomprehensible element of the awful whole. Unimaginably powerful spirits, nigh-omniscient magi and terrifyingly beautiful lords of the fae also occupy the ranks of these secret masters. Each Daeva fears and distrusts the others, resulting in an endless hidden war that can lead only to ruin. The Dark Father, Caine himself, saw that the Daeva bring only pain and sorrow to his children and he bid our founder to oppose the Secret Masters' works wherever he could. That, too, is our task; we are soldiers of the night who follow in the footsteps of our fallen lord. We must oppose the Daeva wherever we encounter their work, and, perhaps most importantly, we must combine the strengths of the Children of Seth and of Caine into a union that is strong enough to resist their manipulation.

By bringing strength, unity and prosperity to these lands I have entered unwittingly into the war of the Daeva. Their unspeakable hand is evident in the forces that even now move against me. Who knows? — perhaps my rise was part of their plan as well — but my downfall assuredly is. The sounds of battle grow louder as my enemies pour through the breach and flood the killing ground beneath the keep. I go now to join the final battle.

May your will never falter,

Friederich von Taunenberg,



The Year of Our Lord 1197

The Affairs of Our Noble Lineage

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLAN VENTRUE

I greet you childe, in the name of Clan Ventrue. With these few pages I hope to introduce you to the history of the clan to which you now belong. Additionally, I wish to impart to you some of the wisdom that has been passed down to us from Ventrue, who was our father. Read closely, and take these lessons to heart, for you cannot hope to rule — let alone survive — without understanding the origins of the shadowy world that surrounds you.

We of Clan Ventrue are the purebred aristocracy of the night, the direct descendants of Caine, through the blood of his most beloved childe, Ventrue himself. The vitae that flows through your veins is the noblest in the world. Do not dishonor it, for with this heritage comes an awesome responsibility.

It is our duty, as the true inheritors of the mantle of Caine, to rule in his stead, preserving the most ancient of our kind's traditions. We are the kings of this world and its generals, the soldiers of Caine carrying his banner against a time when it will be desperately needed. It is not out of arrogance that we assume this role; rather, it is because we know the awful truth against which we must vanguard.

Ventrue studied at the knee of the Dark Father during the early nights of the First City, learning from him terrible secrets that our clan still guards. The most crucial fragment of knowledge that we have preserved concerns the existence of unimaginably powerful entities known as the *daevas*. Ventrue learned of these beings from Caine, who revealed to him that the world is secretly manipulated by powers far beyond the perceptions of common beings. These creatures, or *daevas*, seek to shape the very nature of existence to their own unknowable ends, manipulating even the most powerful Cainites with alarming ease.

Caine recognized the threat these beings posed and foresaw a day of Armageddon in the far future when the world lay in ruins. We, his beloved children, would survive but only as hunted remnants of our once-proud clan. Those humans, lupines and mages who remained alive would place the blame

for the catastrophe upon the Children of Caine and hound us across the blasted landscape. The chief pawns in this battle for the future of our kind are the Children of Seth, for it is mortal society that most truly defines the shape of the world. Ventrue, in his wisdom, recognized that our clan is in the best position to influence society and steer it away from the coming apocalypse.

Thus, in keeping with the stern duty that Caine originally placed upon our founder, Clan Ventrue has sworn to prevent this dark future from coming to pass. We have quietly assumed the terrible burden of responsibility. Someone must take charge, uniting Cainites and kine together into a force that can combat the sinister efforts of the *daevas*. Granted, this role places us in terrible danger — we have become the beacons of opposition to the secret powers that vie to guide the world — but we do what we must regardless of the consequences.

ON THE MATTER OF *DAEVA*

The *daevas* include the Antediluvians, but they are only the most familiar horrors amongst a far greater whole. Immensely powerful mages, lupines, demons and spirits are also active in the world, twisting reality to fit their own inscrutable desires. These incomprehensibly powerful beings fear and hate one another, dragging the world into their ancient and endless secret war.

Some young Ventrue disbelieve the entire concept of the *daevas*, believing them to be a contrivance of elders in the interests of maintaining discipline. Likewise, those few outside the clan who know of the theory consider it gibberish — the product of centuries of paranoid Ventrue minds given free reign.

This view of the world has had a strong effect upon our clan, creating the qualities of arrogance, isolation, social bigotry and paranoia that are, to most, the defining characteristics of the stereotypical Ventrue. What they do not understand is that it is our destiny to lead the other clans, rebuild the Second City and oppose the *daeva*. It is obvious that we are the only ones fit for the job, thus, it is understandable if we grow irritated when some fool questions this fact. Our confidence and selflessness in this role leads others to mislabel us as arrogant, mistaking pride-of-place for conceit and martyrdom for vanity.

Additionally, this confidence occasionally blinds us to new and changing conditions, and — as much as we would like to deny it — even Ventrue elders recognize that our clan's traditional ways can sometimes lead to stagnation. Certain of their own wisdom, some Ventrue elders withdraw from the world and lose touch with those they govern. Our clan's pragmatic respect for success, however, saves it from stasis. Despite the ingrained Ventrue tendency to respect tradition and age, we value accomplishment most highly, regardless of means — a fact that has allowed many young Ventrue to gain status quickly after particularly successful coups.

Since matters of precedence are so important, however, clan members jealously guard what honors they possess and obsess over attaining and protecting their status. The constant conflict over position, which results whenever large groups of Ventrue gather, severely handicaps our attempts to accomplish anything and leaves the clan divided against itself. Some of the fiercest battles of the Dark Medieval world are wars of Ventrue against Ventrue. Although the members of our clan share the same traditions, those traditions teach that power goes to the strongest and most ruthless. Thus, wars among Ventrue are usually fought over fitness to rule, leaving individual clan members strong, but isolated.

Fear of the *daeva* and the ambition of fellow clan members has also bred paranoia among our clan as a whole. The typical Patrician views even the most common event with suspicion, fearing unseen manipulation. Dramatic occurrences such as war, plague or famine are even more likely to be seen as the deliberate result of external manipulation. Responsibility for many events can be laid at the feet of the other clans, but truly mysterious or traumatic happenstances are generally believed to be the work of the *daeva*. For many of our clan, the stereotypical Ventrue thirst for power has a deeper meaning. The only decisions that we can be sure are not the result of manipulation by the *daeva* are the decisions we make ourselves — and even then we cannot be truly certain.

Convinced of its own rightness, consumed with status and propriety and seeing enemies around every corner, Clan Ventrue has carved out a position of leadership within the rigid social structure of Europe, but clan elders see dangerous times ahead. Clan Ventrue is now stronger than it has ever

been since the death of Charlemagne, but it is also divided. Once proud and united, we have fragmented into warring factions, separated by geography, kinship and patronage.

Each faction regards itself as independent and safeguards its own interests at the expense of the clan as a whole. Long-standing feuds that extend for generations have developed between factions. Many of these groups have drastically different ideas on how the clan should direct its activities. Some factions concentrate their influence among the clergy or local nobility, while others work to strengthen the monarchy against its rivals. A growing minority has even begun to pursue mercantile interests, a decision seemingly at odds with the very concept of Ventrue nobility.

A few wise clan members now see how dangerous this divisive situation truly is. Fractious and warring amongst itself, Clan Ventrue is easy prey for its many enemies and the perfect tool of the *daeva*. We fear that without internal order, the clan cannot hope to combat its many enemies. Other clans circle like vultures over Ventrue holdings in France and the Holy Roman Empire, while strange tremors shake our tenuous grip on the Church hierarchy. Across Europe, the elders of Clan Ventrue gather their forces for the coming struggle.

THE RISE OF THE WEST: CLAN VENTRUE AND THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

It is impossible to fully understand our clan's role in the world without an appreciation of how it has evolved since the tragic fall of Rome. In most respects, this story is one of internal division and of lost chances, but throughout the dark times, our clan has maintained its grip upon the fabric of western society, ever working to repair the damage caused by the empire's collapse.

THE FALL OF ROME AND THE EARLY FEUDAL PERIOD

The Roman Empire was a bastion of Ventrue power. In the early nights, our clan was united and claimed sole control over the empire; however, the alliances necessary to defeat Carthage required us to share power with other clans, primarily the Toreador and Malkavians. With these other clans came the weaknesses inherent to each, diluting Ventrue strength when it was needed most. They challenged us for control of the senate and the emperor and were joined in this struggle by other, non-Cainite forces including mages, powerful demons and the Children of Seth. Soon the emperors were swayed by so many different influences that no one could predict, let alone control, their actions. With most of our energies turned toward survival, the empire was bereft of leadership and began its tragic decline. Even before the death of its last ruler in A.D. 476, the empire was a moldering corpse, and it was time for the chief parasites to seek other hosts.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Clan Ventruë fragmented into four main factions: the Byzantines, the Inconnu, the Nobles and the Ecclesiasticals. Two of these factions, the Inconnu and the Byzantines, withdrew from the mainstream of clan politics. Instead, they remained obsessed with the fall of Rome, each seeking to preserve the Eternal City's traditions in its own way. The Nobles and Ecclesiasticals, on the other hand, sought shelter among particular groups of kine, using them to extend their power into the new barbarian age.

Those Ventruë who were too cowardly to remain and defend their ancestral lands shifted their power base from West to East, relocating to Byzantium. Many tradition-bound Patricians settled in Constantinople, the Capital of the Eastern Empire, hoping to continue on as they had in Rome. These Ventruë formed an alliance with the Toreador and Tzimisce geared toward restoring the glory of Rome in the East. They assumed a position of influence in the Byzantine aristocracy and Church but have been forced to share power with the other clans. Although they remain influential within the empire, the Byzantines have distanced themselves from their

fellow clan members and exert virtually no influence over clan policy as a whole. Nevertheless, in their own way, they have kept the traditions of Imperial Rome alive for over 700 years.

The Inconnu, on the other hand, seem less interested in preserving the empire's traditions than in avenging its fall. These inscrutable elders reacted to the sack of Rome by withdrawing from the world and enticing powerful members of many clans into their ranks. Little is known about the Inconnu or their goals other than their passion to avenge or counteract the destruction of the Roman Empire. Some of the oldest Roman Ventruë are believed to have assumed key roles within this mysterious sect.

For the majority of Ventruë, however, things were much less settled. As the Western Empire declined, it was overrun by hordes of Germanic barbarians, who migrated west and south under pressure from the even more savage Huns. The Germanic tribes, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Vandals conquered the West and settled among the Roman population. They interbred with the dwindling Roman aristocracy and superseded them in many locales. Western Ventruë were left with little choice but to exert their influence over this new Germanic nobility. They used two main methods: direct control over selected noble families and indirect manipulation through the powerful Christian Church.



The Nobles scattered away from Rome and the Mediterranean Coast, infiltrating the barbarian aristocracy as the invaders squabbled among themselves and quickly fell into almost constant warfare. The perpetual threat of siege and battle made survival difficult for the clan. Many Ventrue met their Final Death during this period, including some of the most powerful figures of the Roman Era. Others slipped into torpor, hoping to wake in a more settled time. Those of us who survived became masters of the arts of warfare and politics, but we also became isolated by internal schisms. As our fate grew more and more entwined with the families we controlled, Ventrue often found themselves at odds with other Ventrue. Intra-clan warfare, both open and covert, was the result. Out of this fierce competition, skilled leaders emerged and forged small estates by establishing control over a few strategic families.

Those clan members who remained in the Mediterranean area and assumed positions of leadership within the Church became known as the Ecclesiastics. At first, they concentrated solely upon the Church's administrative apparatus, but later, after the Rule of Saint Benedict ensured the success of the monastic way of life, they became involved with wealthy monasteries. Clan members in the Church initially sought refuge from waves of barbarian assault but quickly realized that the route to eventual control was through conversion. During the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries, Christianity played a key role in the survival of western thought, Roman tradition and Clan Ventrue. By converting powerful barbarian monarchs, the Church absorbed the invaders into the mainstream of western culture, turning them from outside threats into Christendom's staunchest defenders. The clan Disciplines of Presence and Dominate proved extremely useful in this process, allowing valiant Patricians to exert necessary influence over the often strong-willed barbarian leaders.

Some Ecclesiastics concentrated upon the preservation of ancient wisdom — both Roman and older Cainite lore — passed down since the time of the Second City. These clan members found allies among the growing monastic movement of the 6th century. Monks withdrew from the world, forming self-sufficient communities (often in isolated locales), which were perfect hiding places for Ventrue with too many enemies. They were good places to conceal both valuable clan records and artifacts from the chaos of the outside world.

Additionally, influence within monasteries provided our clan with access to the only centers of knowledge and learning still viable in the chaos of Europe. Monks were practically the only mortals capable of reading, writing or performing even simple mathematics and, therefore, were the primary source of the few administrative clerks employed by early feudal monarchs. Controlling the monks meant establishing a foothold in what little bureaucracy still existed, and it also provided an opportunity to rebuild.

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE SECOND DARK AGE

By the time that the Frankish Kingdom rose to power during the latter half of the 8th century, we were ready to reassert ourselves as the true rulers of the West. With Ventrue backing, a succession of skilled monarchs guided the rise of the Frankish state, culminating in the reign of Charlemagne. By the time he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo on Christmas Day A.D. 800, Charlemagne ruled the greatest empire since the fall of Rome, including most of Europe from the Pyrenees to Saxony. Throughout the continent, powerful Ventrue assumed key roles in the feudal infrastructure that formed the backbone of the Frankish Kingdom.

Support from the papacy was key to the Frankish success. Encouraged by members of our clan, the Pope confirmed the election of Charlemagne's father as King of the Franks and personally crowned Charlemagne as emperor. Additionally, Church-trained monks became the clerks who managed the mundane administrative affairs of the state. Our presence within the ranks of those monks provided us with a prime opportunity to infiltrate the new state's bureaucratic machinery.

The cooperation between Church and state, which made the Frankish Kingdom so successful, was encouraged by an alliance between the Nobles and Ecclesiastics. Members of both factions set aside their petty differences and joined together to promote the interests of the new kingdom. For the first time since the fall of Rome, we had found unity.

Additionally, the leaders of this Frankish resurgence formed a tentative alliance with Clan Toreador, laying the groundwork for the celebrated Grand Court. The court became the focal point of Cainite politics in the West and its smooth governance appeared to ensure the continued success of Charlemagne's new state, the Holy Roman Empire. In the end, however, Ventrue success was too bitter a pill for our jealous enemies to swallow. The clan's accomplishments attracted the attention of our many adversaries, uniting them against us and engendering savage attacks against Ventrue holdings throughout the Frankish Kingdom and the Church.

Our alliance with the Toreador suffered initial stresses soon after Charlemagne established the empire. Many Ventrue believe that the disasters that overtook us occurred at the express command of the *daeva*. Certainly, other clans felt threatened by Charlemagne's conquest of Western Europe and desired to strike at the immortal heart of Frankish power.

Worse still, Prince Alexander lost control of the Frankish royal family after the death of Charlemagne, and the Grand Court disintegrated into open conflict. Once again — as in Rome 400 years earlier — savagely competitive factions struggled over the reins of power. It took less time for Charlemagne's empire to collapse than it did for Rome, however. Fratricidal warfare broke out almost as soon as

Charlemagne's corpse cooled. His sons fought over the scraps of the empire while smaller nobles seized the opportunity to grab regional power for themselves.

Meanwhile, our hold on the Church weakened. Lasombra, Toreador, mages and even mortals struggled actively for control of the Church's administration. Many Ventrue believed that our overwhelming success had arrayed an unlikely coalition of forces against us, or that the others were merely tools of the enigmatic *daeva*. Wiser heads, however, observed that each of these forces was involved in the Church from its inception, and argued that the Ecclesiastics merely overestimated their own control over Church administration at the time. Regardless of the origin of our opposition, this period marked the last time that we possessed firm control over the Church. Since the fall of the Ecclesiastics, the clan continues to influence Church policy, but never to the extent that it had previously.

This chaotic situation worsened as another series of barbarian invasions, as fully devastating as those that brought Rome to its knees, plagued the Holy Roman Empire. From the north, Viking warships raided coastal towns and burned monasteries to the ground. From the east, the Magyars rolled into Central Europe, seizing northern Italy and plundering its rich towns. In the south, Saracens struck along the Mediterranean basin, conquering Iberia in the 9th century and sacking Rome in 846.

Many Ventrue saw the sinister hand of the *daeva* in these ill-timed invasions. Members of clans Brujah and Gangrel mixed freely with the barbarians, while Assamites abetted the Muslim raids openly, cementing the lasting hostility between our clans. At that time, however, we could do little but fall back and lick our wounds as European society collapsed around us.

THE REINS OF POWER

During the invasions of the 9th and 10th centuries, the administrative and political structure of the empire collapsed, leaving each area to deal with its own problems. Survival, and therefore military might, became the sole focus of society. As a result, social organization became highly stratified and power concentrated further in the hands of the military elite. These developments could not have worked out more perfectly for our clan.

Clan Ventrue survived the hard times by fostering a strong nobility. We now find ourselves in control of that nobility and in an excellent position to influence the development of the society that is even now emerging from that long, dark age. Our clan's energies are currently focused on five main regions of interest: the infant nation-states of France, England and the Holy Roman Empire, the Church and the growing money economy typified by the independent trading cities and their merchant guilds.



FRANCE

French Ventrue are numerous and possess potent ties to local noble families, but their influence has been frustrated constantly by a strong Toreador presence in the country. The alliance between the Ventrue and Toreador, which supported Charlemagne, was observed only cursorily during the 9th and 10th centuries. In the chaotic dynastic wars that raged across France after the empire's collapse, Ventrue and Toreador fought fiercely with each other. Peace was maintained only in the Grand Court where elders of both clans came to negotiate, socialize and plot.

The Grand Court was created by the Ventrue elder Alexander in cooperation with several Toreador elders. In the early nights, before the death of Charlemagne, Alexander ruled the court like a true Cainite prince, dispensing fear and justice in equal portions. But the events of the time left him a shattered brooding wreck, unable to govern effectively. The Toreador made a vain attempt to assume leadership but were handicapped by their political ineptness and by the paranoid suspicion that ran rampant throughout the Grand Court during the chaos of the Carolingian Empire's disintegration.

The court remained ineffective and divided until the arrival of Saviarre in the early 11th century. She somehow won Alexander's trust and, following her advice, he reinvigorated the Grand Court. Many courtiers recognize that Saviarre is the true power behind the throne but do not care, since the revival of the court has brought increased communication and, therefore, peace among the warring clans.

Tonight, France remains a divided, war-torn stretch of territory — more a collection of independent principalities than a unified kingdom. The royal domain, a small cluster of territories centered on Paris called the Ile-de-France, is the only land directly under the French king's control. The Grand Court, although closely tied to the French monarchy, possesses influence in most of the independent territories. Some independent Ventrue, however, challenge the authority of the court constantly and work to keep the country divided. Most of these Patricians resent the heavy Toreador influence in the court and are suspicious of its motives.

The Duchy of Normandy has been the most successful of the independent French territories, and a bastion of Patrician resistance to the court. The duchy was settled by the descendants of Viking raiders, but under the leadership of a series of wise dukes, it quickly became one of the strongest territories in Western Europe, conquering England in 1066 and extending its influence over most of northern and western France.

Our clan was quick to realize the duchy's potential and began its infiltration of the Norman noble families soon after Duke Rollo's title was confirmed by the Frankish king. The experienced leaders of Clan Ventrue taught the Norman lords how to rule their fiefs properly, helping to transform Normandy into one of the wealthiest duchies of the West. With Ventrue aid, the Dukes of Normandy held their vassals under firm

control. Simultaneously, the Normans made certain the territory's Cainite population was equally unified under their command. Small groups of Patricians within Norman territory were either absorbed or destroyed. The feudal infighting that continues to plague most French Ventrue has been almost entirely eliminated in Normandy.

As Norman Ventrue grow increasingly more powerful, the delicate balance between Ventrue and Toreador interests in France becomes disrupted. Other clans fear a resurgent Norman/Frankish empire under Ventrue control, and they work subtly against our interests, sowing discord among the Grand Court. Developments in England have enhanced these fears greatly and may lead directly to the final days of the Grand Court.

ENGLAND

Before the Norman Conquest, the Cainites of England were a varied lot. A few Roman Ventrue survived the collapse of the empire, but most were destroyed or fell into torpor. Those who remained shared the island with remnants of the other clans, mostly Toreador, Lasombra and Malkavians as well as a large population of Scottish Gangrel. These Cainites had plenty of competition, as well, from England's other supernatural inhabitants, lupines, mages and the fae. This situation changed drastically, however, with the arrival of the Normans.

The Ventrue who accompanied William the Conqueror spread across England like an aristocratic plague after 1066. They quickly assumed positions of authority over the island's surviving Cainite population, eliminating or forcing underground all who would not accept their rule. Members of our proud clan also reestablished themselves in the English Church (much to Clan Toreador's chagrin), concentrating their efforts on London. Like the Norman barons who assumed control over the Saxon peasantry, Clan Ventrue secured its domination of England's nobility and administrative machinery for the foreseeable future.

IN THE GRASP OF A DARK GOD

By the death of Henry II in 1189, the Methuselah's control over southern England and London, in particular, was firm, but the outlying fiefs remained only nominally loyal; in practice, they retain a great deal of independence to this night.

Outside of London, Mithras' rise to power has caused turbulence throughout Cainite political structures. Most of those who survived have either made peace with Mithras or fled havens in Scotland, Wales and France. Few openly oppose him and choose to remain in Britain.

Unbeknownst to the majority of Ventrue, however, there was one survivor of the Roman era who was powerful enough to oppose, and eventually subvert, our rule. The Methuselah Mithras had voluntarily dropped into a torpor along the Scottish border during the final days of Roman Britain. Although dimly aware of what occurred around him, Mithras did not fully reawaken until after the Norman invasion. Rumors abounded, claiming that one or more Norman Ventrue were unwitting pawns of the sleeping, but not entirely dormant, Methuselah, and that these Ventrue took part in the conquest with the express aim of waking him from torpor.

Certainly the vast majority of our clan remained unaware of Mithras' awakening until he surfaced in London, attempting to reactivate an ancient temple dedicated to the Greco-Persian god whose name he had assumed. Local Church officials reacted quickly, burning the structure to the ground and killing any worshippers they found. Those Ventrue within the Church were unpleasantly surprised, however, to find an active Methuselah behind this pagan resurgence and were unprepared for the savagery of his counterattack. While Norman forces reacted with fear and confusion, Mithras descended upon London, destroying several powerful Norman Cainites.

Over the next century, Mithras divided and destroyed his enemies in a masterfully orchestrated series of battles, sieges and betrayals. Rather than seize the reins of power prematurely, the Methuselah concentrated on the elimination of all possible rivals. He sowed seeds of treachery, inflamed old feuds and encouraged a vicious struggle among the Ventrue and Toreador lords of England. The two clans grew increasingly suspicious of one another, each convinced that the other was Mithras' pawn.

THE GRAND COURT

The Grand Court of Paris is the truest expression of the Ventrue/Toreador alliance and has been the center of Cainite culture in the West since the fall of Rome. The court is grand in more than name; it remains the home of all the pomp and pageantry that is the heart of monarchy. Ventrue and Toreador elders attend the court attired in their finest robes, surrounded by their loyal retainers. The court itself is held in different locations in and around Paris at the whim of its ruler, the ancient Ventrue Alexander.

Alexander was the architect of the alliance, and the impetus behind the establishment of the court. His role before this period remains shrouded in mystery, although it is certain that he emerged from the East and that he knows far more about ritual magic than is commonplace for a Ventrue lord. In cooperation with the Toreador, he guided the Frankish Kingdom to preeminence among the territories of Western Europe, culminating with the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne. This relationship between Ventrue and Toreador was cemented by a fateful gesture of trust between our two clans.



BOOK THREE: VENTRUE

Alexander was a brooding, obsessive ruler, his interests focused entirely on the burdens of leadership, at least until he encountered Lorraine. Lorraine was a Toreador neonate introduced into the decadent social circle of the Grand Court shortly after its inception. Her beauty and innocence entranced many, but none more than Alexander, who determined that he must possess her. As the negotiations over the court's final structure neared their end, only a final gesture of trust and camaraderie was needed to provide closure. The Toreador elders were quick to note Alexander's overpowering desire for Lorraine and took advantage of this opportunity. In return for several important concessions from the overeager Patrician, the Toreador presented Alexander with Lorraine.

He devoted every moment to her, struggling desperately to win her affections. She, however, remained friendly, but distant. No matter how close they grew together she never admitted to having any feelings for him. Alexander was torn by his passions, alternately overjoyed that she was with him and infuriated that he would never win her love. Finally, one night he returned to his haven to find her gone. Another Toreador, one of her broodmates, had become as obsessed with her as Alexander himself. He had waited until the prince was gone and then spirited her away.

Alexander's rage was boundless. The prince used his formidable skills to track the fleeing couple to the outskirts of Paris. He destroyed the abductor utterly, while the faithless girl was brought back to his haven. She died over the period of a week in exquisite agony as he drained her soul and vitae onto the petals of a pristine white rose. The rose then contained the essence of her soul, which he could possess forever. On the seventh night, she reached the end of her strength. As the ritual reached its terrible finalé, Alexander leaned close to catch Lorraine's final words. She managed only three: "I love you." She whispered this as the last drops of blood left her body forever and stained the rose a deep scarlet. Alexander went mad with grief, and to this night, remains absolutely inconsolable. The rose itself disappeared during Alexander's period of madness. Its whereabouts remain a mystery, but rumors abound concerning the powers it grants its owner.

The Grand Court viewed Alexander's tragic affair with fascination. The Toreador, in particular, became almost as obsessed with the story as Alexander did with Lorraine, recounting it across Europe and expending vast resources in fruitless attempts to locate and acquire the rose for themselves. The delicate balance between the Toreador and Ventrue of the court was upset permanently. Alexander, who had been the strong hand that guided the court, could no longer be relied upon to keep the balance. Infighting became commonplace. Ventrue and Toreador struggled for mastery of the court while Alexander writhed in the grip of his madness. Without the court's effective functioning, the gains made by Charlemagne were lost quickly and France slid back into a period of darkness.

Although Alexander continued to rule the court in name, his leadership was sporadic at best until the 11th century upon the arrival of the beautiful Countess Saviarre. This mysterious Ventrue rose to a position of power with shocking speed. She was Alexander's personal confidante within a year, and the ruler of the court in all but name shortly thereafter. Alexander had been unwilling to put faith in any of his advisors (particularly Toreador) since Lorraine met her awful fate. Saviarre, however, possessed some quality that caused Alexander to trust her implicitly, almost right from the start. Although many Cainites were jealous of her quick rise to power, most recognized the need for strength in the court, regardless of its origin. Those who desired unity fell in line behind Saviarre rapidly and reestablished the Grand Court as the fulcrum of Cainite activities in the West.

Saviarre governed the court wisely in Alexander's name since the early 11th century. At first, the newly repaired alliance worked well, and both clans made considerable headway, accompanying the expanding French nobility across the breadth of Europe. The awakening of Mithras and his rise to power in England, however, have once again disrupted the fragile balance between our clan and the Toreador. Suspicion runs rampant throughout the court as each side tries to saddle the other with blame for Mithras' rise. Additionally, divisive rumors have begun to poison the courtiers against Saviarre's rule. Both the Toreador and Ventrue have spread the rumor that Saviarre's influence over Alexander is somehow unnatural. Some whisper that she had managed to bind the Methuselah to herself through the Blood Oath, while others suggest an even more sinister means of control. A few members of the Grand Court suspect that Saviarre has acquired Lorraine's rose and is using it to manipulate the prince. Regardless of the cause, many within the court now seek to end Saviarre's domination of it as factions form and infighting among members increases. Many Cainites feel that the final days of the Grand Court are upon them.

THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Our clan's fate has always been closely tied with that of the empire. Its rise under Charlemagne played a key role in spreading Ventrue influence across Central Europe. Patricians long ago established themselves as princes, and the power behind princes, throughout the lands of the empire. The sheer number of tiny states contained within it provided many opportunities for members of our clan to assume direct control of their own principalities. They fought amongst themselves and against the Lasombra, who also saw great opportunities in the divided empire.

Our clan made a serious attempt to reestablish centralized control over the empire during the reign of Frederick Barbarossa. Frederick made alliances with many powerful independent princes who, under Ventrue pressure, acknowledged that they held their lands as fiefs given to them by the emperor. He forbade private wars and began to assimilate Church lands into

the royal domain. These sweeping reforms were echoed by similar consolidation among imperial Ventrue, which eventually brought us into conflict with the papacy and the powerful forces behind it.

The emperor was drawn into a fruitless war with the city-states of northern Italy, while the princes within the empire worked to undo his efforts at consolidation. The alliance of Ventrue who backed the emperor was not strong enough to face the independent German princes led by the Brujah, the Italian Lasombra and the Church. As the emperor fought a series of wars in northern Italy, the Cainite power behind him disintegrated. Princes of the empire regained the right to private warfare in 1187 and, by the time of Frederick's death in 1190, they once again had almost complete independence.

Germany's Ventrue remain as divided as the empire itself. Ventrue princes make war upon one another freely once again and forge alliances against members of their own clan frequently. The only general principle that unites them is opposition to their chief rivals, the Lasombra.

The Ventrue and Lasombra recently entered into a struggle to determine the next emperor. A civil war rages through the empire as Philip of Swabia and Otto of Brunswick battle for the crown. The majority of Ventrue support Otto while the Lasombra largely support Philip. The war effort of both clans is hampered, however, by constant infighting and treachery. A group of bold Patricians has rallied around a common cause along the eastern border of the empire.

EASTERN EUROPE

The Holy Roman Empire pushed its border to the east steadily throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, settling new lands and displacing the indigenous pagans who lived there. This expansion quickly brought the Ventrue into conflict with Clan Tzimisce, the ancient rulers of Eastern Europe. Despite the technological and organizational advantages of the Western nobles, we experienced little success at first. The sorcerous powers of the Fiends, combined with their knowledge and wicked ties to the land, gave them distinct advantages. Unlike our brethren to the west, however, the Eastern Ventrue did not long remain divided. Instead, we united against our Tzimisce rivals, turning ignominious defeat into nominal victory. The Alliance of Eastern Lords and its mortal allies is an almost irresistible force, grinding laboriously eastward over the last century. Our successes continue apace, but Tzimisce resistance remains stubborn and casualties mount. In response, the Eastern Lords have set two distinct plans in motion, each aimed at overwhelming Tzimisce opposition.

First, the Eastern Lords have secretly decided to actively support Clan Tremere in its war against the Tzimisce. Other members of Clan Ventrue regard this aid as a betrayal of our most basic traditions, claiming that they would never support the Usurpers against one of the ancient clans. The Eastern

Lords, however, remain far more concerned with their short-term success against the Tzimisce and show no remorse for their support.

Second, the Eastern Lords have forged an alliance with certain Ventrue, notably Fabrizio Ulfila, who have power in the Church hierarchy. Through these allies, they have drawn the Church's attention to the struggle the empire is waging against the pagans of Pomerania, Prussia, Lithuania and the Baltic Coast. Ulfila and the Eastern Lords are making the arrangements necessary to bring the Teutonic Order from the Holy Land to Eastern Europe to lead the fight against the Fiends. The Eastern Lords are currently using their considerable influence in an effort to convince secular leaders of several eastern realms, including Greece, Hungary and Prussia, to invite the order into their lands. Ulfila has made sure that when official requests for aid come, the Church will approve expansion of the Teutonic Knights to the East.

THE CHURCH

Despite losing considerable Church influence in the 9th century, our clan continues to build favor within its ever growing bureaucracy, sharing control with Toreador, Cappadocians, Lasombra and powerful mortals. The member of our clan who has experienced the most success infiltrating Church politics is Fabrizio Ulfila, an Italian Ventrue who has been involved in the Church since its inception. He managed to survive the attacks on Ventrue influence that followed the death of Charlemagne, achieving a reputation as a supreme manipulator of churchmen. Most of Ulfila's work is accomplished through the use of ghouls since operating directly within the Church dramatically increases the ever-present threat of encounters with True Faith.

Ulfila played a major role in establishing the early Church and in forging the alliance between it and the western nobility. He was primarily responsible for the Church's cooperation with the Carolingian Dynasty, culminating with the crowning of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. However, his opponents among the other clans gained the upper hand shortly afterward and forced Ulfila into torpor for most of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries.

When he emerged, the Church had fallen largely under Toreador control and had become embroiled in an ongoing conflict with the Holy Roman Emperor over the practice of lay investiture. Ulfila did his best to diffuse the situation, laying the groundwork for Frederick Barbarossa's attempt to unify the empire in the 12th century, and countering the sinister influence of the Artisans. Additionally, he forged strong ties between the Church and the Ventrue lords of France and Eastern Europe, creating the strongest alliance of Ventrue since the death of Charlemagne.

Ulfila has maintained cordial relations with the Grand Court of Paris and with Mithras' emerging court in London, but his closest ties have been with independent Ventrue and

the aristocratic families that are their power base. In alliance with them, he was able to influence two of the most important developments of the period: the creation of the fighting orders and the Crusades—both of which were to play key roles in the growth of Ventrue power.

Cainite involvement in the Crusades remains shrouded in mystery. It appears that two main groups of Cainites cooperated in support of the Crusaders. The first was led by Fabrizio Ulfila and was assembled from the finest Ventrue forces, including many Knights of the Blood. The other faction was led by the little-known Toreador elder, Andrew of Normandy, who apparently assisted Ulfila in coordinating the activities of western Cainites throughout the Holy Land. Despite our clan's best efforts, however, the Crusader States were doomed. The manorial system proved ineffective in the arid conditions of Palestine, and regular support was never forthcoming from the nations of Europe. Additionally, the Ventrue and Toreador forces that could be transported to the Holy Land were only a small fraction of either clans' power, while the Assamites could throw their entire might behind their effort to expel the crusaders.

TOWNS AND GUILDS

The 11th and 12th centuries saw a remarkable revival of commerce throughout Western Europe, going hand in hand with the growth of urban life. The relaxation of pressure that followed the end of the barbarian invasions of the 10th century—in combination with the administrative efforts of Clan Ventrue—led to increased agricultural output, a rising population and relative stability across Europe. In this less-dangerous atmosphere, long-distance trade reemerged and

cities became the centers of a reinvigorated commercial economy. In towns, merchants and craftsmen have organized themselves into local guilds and continually lobby for increased independence.

The rebirth of cities in the West has meant a great deal to Clan Ventrue. Many Patricians have given up the rural life and flocked to the new cities. To an urban vampire, control over the guilds rather than the local lords is of primary importance. A few Ventrue, popularly known as the Merchant Princes, are at the forefront of this new movement, sinking their teeth into the rapidly growing merchant guilds and, thereby, involving themselves in the burgeoning world of trade. The wealth available through trade has attracted a fair number of Patricians, but a mass movement has been precluded by the widespread feeling of distaste for financial matters that the clan has acquired through centuries of close association with the noble class. Most Ventrue have been Embraced since the fall of Rome and feel that a lord's honor would be irretrievably stained by grubbing for wealth among the lower classes.

This difference has created a division within the clan which is likely to shape the political struggles to come. The Merchant Princes were weak and kept their heads low initially, but they have grown in power quickly and have recently become strong enough to play a role in the larger venue of clan politics. The faction's growth has been abetted by a feeling of unity among Merchant Princes that is uncommon among purely aristocratic Ventrue. Most members of the clan involved in trade have developed close contacts with others of the same opinion. These contacts, initially side effects of trade relations, have grown quickly into staunch political alliances. In many ways, the future of the Ventrue clan might be shaped by the rise of these Merchant Princes.



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

The Practices of Patricians

FACTIONS

Clan Ventrue is currently divided into five major factions: the Eastern Lords, the Merchant Princes, the Knights of the Blood, the Normans and the Grand Court. Each faction seeks to unify the rest of the clan behind itself and each possesses a very different set of goals. Only the Normans and the Grand Court are actively hostile to each other, although most factions have occasionally come into direct conflict with others. Besides these five, many smaller factions exist which are not powerful enough to influence overall clan policy. Large numbers of Ventrue lords still claim independence from any faction, making and breaking alliances as they see fit. Additionally, a strong contingent of Patricians remains active in the Church, although it is neither strong nor unified enough to constitute a major faction.

THE EASTERN LORDS

A powerful alliance has risen along the treacherous eastern border of the Holy Roman Empire. The Ventrue lords of the empire have banded together in an endless war against the hated Tzimisce. They push the border eastward continually at the expense of the Tzimisce-dominated Slavic and pagan kingdoms. As Eastern Lords expand their domains, their power and influence within the empire grows and the first tiny fault lines appear in their previously monolithic nation.

The Alliance of Eastern Lords was forged from the blood and iron of incessant battle with the Tzimisce, and its strength derives from the savagery of that conflict. The eastern Ventrue found themselves engaged in a war of such lethality that they could survive only in unity. Tzimisce *vozh*d and the Fiends' intimate knowledge of their ancestral lands gave them huge initial advantages, but the Eastern Lords soon learned to counter them.

The strength of the Eastern Lords lies not in supernatural allies or infernal powers, but instead, it lies in their unshakeable grip on the militaristic feudal structure of the eastern empire. Most of the Eastern Lords rule their lands openly, not advertising their vampiric natures, but not striving to conceal them,

either. Even those who do not publicly proclaim their Cainite natures concentrate their influence on the control of military power. The Eastern Lords foster expansion, encourage immigration and recruit young, landless sons with the lure of the frontier. In coordination with each other, the Eastern Lords are capable of mustering large armies of mortals that lack the restrictions of the Tzimisce's more horrific servants. The Eastern Lords are most dangerous during daylight hours and through the actions of their mortal servants.

The Eastern Lords have remained a surprisingly united force over the last century, but recent events may soon divide them. The very nature of the conflict with the Tzimisce has changed since the rise of the Tremere. The Lords have decided to support the Usurpers in their mutual war with the Fiends, at least initially. A few among the Lords, however, feel that this is a grave error. They believe that supporting the Tremere signifies tacit approval of their diablerie. Additionally, many Ventrue, particularly the oldest and most traditional among the alliance, feel that the recent expansion into the realm of imperial politics is unwise. They allied with the Tremere to make war upon their enemies, the Tzimisce, and to expand their power to the east, not to engage in endless struggles for control of the emperor nor support a clan of Amaranth-mad magi. Most disturbingly, some Ventrue members of the alliance realize that their traditions are in some ways more compatible with the philosophies of their Tzimisce enemies than they are in keeping with the idealistic plans of the new leaders of the empire.

The Eastern Lords are currently Embracing large numbers of neonates in an effort to replace casualties of the war and to expand their power base. Young Ventrue are welcomed and often enticed into the new lands being settled beyond the Elbe. They are front-line troops in the war against the Tzimisce, playing key roles in the triumphant push eastward. Many such recruits, however, find that local conditions are not as favorable as they were led to believe. The tyrannical elders of the alliance control their childer with strict discipline and send them into battle without concern for losses, while Tzimisce

vozhd wreak terrible havoc upon raw Ventrue troops. The young Patricians' dreams of new lands to the east are often drowned in the harsh realities of service to the Eastern Lords.

MERCHANT PRINCES

The Merchant Princes are the newest, most innovative and, therefore, most distrusted faction within the clan. Coming to power only with the recent growth in long-distance commerce, they have soared quickly to a position of some influence. Unlike other factions, the Merchants are not tied to any single locale, although they are particularly strong in the commercial centers of northern Italy, central France and southern England. The faction's main strength lies in its intricate web of trading contacts and the Merchant Princes' success is fed by the tremendous wealth its members generate.

The Merchant Princes are organized into small trading guilds based on geographic location and prevalent trading patterns. These guilds meet regularly to determine local policy, and each sends at least a single representative to each of Europe's great fairs. There, they work out cooperative schemes to maximize profit for the group and to increase the faction's influence within the clan. Formulating such mutually profitable ventures has become the main focus of these meetings recently since the great bulk of the work of organizing trade patterns is done on the local level.

The Merchant Princes feel that the time has come for the clan to unite again as it once was in the glory days of Rome. Rather than place their fate in the hands of a single empire, however, Merchant Princes believe that clan unity should

follow the organizational pattern that they themselves have used to great effect. The Merchant Princes plan to back a few factions with their enormous wealth. These factions will, as a result, gain access to far greater resources than their rivals and should inevitably emerge triumphant, concentrating the diffuse power of the clan into a few core groups. The Merchants curry influence within each of these groups by funding them and may, by means of this influence, coerce each group into participating in regular intraclan operations. As the organizers of these endeavors and the sole group possessing leverage over all others, the Merchants expect to assume leadership over the clan as a whole. The exact details of the plan are still debated, but the Merchants have already extended funding in the form of loans and gifts to several factions, most notably the Norman Ventrue in England and those supporting the Grand Court in France.

Additionally, the Merchant Princes have begun a systematic program of expansion, embracing or undercutting the most successful European merchants. Thus, they welcome young Ventrue (particularly wealthy ones) with open arms. New members of the faction can rise to power rapidly on the local level by promoting successful trading ventures, although much of their wealth is often commandeered for "official clan business." The Merchant Princes hire mercenaries, pay enormous bribes and fund the further expansion of the faction's influence with these moneys. The actions undertaken with the Merchant Princes' money have brought the faction into conflict with the Lasombra in northern Italy, where the Magisters are loath to share power with petty shopkeepers and traders.



KNIGHTS OF THE BLOOD

The Knights of the Blood formed during the darkest days of the barbarian invasions, when the countryside was nothing but ravaged wasteland and those few Ventrue who survived barricaded themselves within smoke-charred walls. Some young members of the clan rejected many of the clan's traditions and instead pursued military might as the sole focus of their unlives. These Ventrue gave up their Disciplines of Dominate and Presence to concentrate purely upon physical prowess. They teach only the Disciplines of Potence, Fortitude and Celerity, despite the penalties involved. The knights train ceaselessly for war in hidden fortresses across Europe, learning the arts, both physical and mental, that lead to victory.

Players whose characters accept the Knight's training still pay "out of clan" costs for Potence and Celerity, as the order simply eschews Dominate and Presence.

The knights exercise caution when selecting new recruits, usually choosing fighting men who have shown both skill and loyalty to their lords. They demand unquestioning obedience and follow a strict hierarchy of authority from the lowest squire to the grandmaster of the order himself. Young knights are subjected to a grueling apprenticeship during which they learn the order's exacting code. Many do not survive the experience, but those who do are fiercely loyal and are as hard as stone.

The knights' training and sacrifices are directed toward the construction of a fighting force second to none — an elite corps of warriors whose sole reason for being is to combat the clan's mortal enemies, the *daeva*. Each knight's training includes a long period of training during which he learns about these secret enemies and how to recognize and combat their servants, including Lupines, mages, spirits and, of course, other Cainites. In addition to battle tactics, the knights are taught to investigate strange occurrences and to uncover the hidden agenda of the *daeva* in even the most commonplace of events.

Some critics suggest that the Knights of the Blood are consumed with paranoia and that they see the hand of the *daeva* everywhere, using the clan's ancient enemies as an excuse for casual brutality. The knights are often summoned to locations where infighting and treachery has left Ventrue forces in chaos. They restore order quickly, often by brutal means, running roughshod over local clan members and paying no heed to long-established social hierarchies. These tendencies provoke resentment toward the Knights of the Blood among a large portion of the clan. Many powerful Ventrue feel that the knights who were so necessary during times of trouble have now outgrown their usefulness.

THE NORMANS

Ventrue of Norman descent comprise the strongest and best-organized faction in the clan of the last two centuries, but they have recently fallen upon hard times. After the conquest of England and large sections of France, they appeared to be in a position to unite the rest of the clan, as had the Frankish Ventrue during the nights of Charlemagne's reign. Such success encouraged the Normans' enemies to join against them, however, effectively curtailing their expansion. Additionally, the conquest of England awoke the Methuselah Mithras, who has largely supplanted the former leaders of the faction and reshaped it in his own image.

The original Ventrue who participated in the conquest were united behind a triumvirate of powerful leaders: Baron Geoffrey of Calais, the Countess Liseult de Taine and Roald Snakeyes. Both Geoffrey and Liseult deferred to Snakeyes, a bold Viking adventurer who once advised Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy. Snakeyes helped arrange the initial treaty between the northmen and the Frankish king which led to the duchy's formation in 911. The ancient warrior stayed in the background as Normandy grew powerful, encouraging other Ventrue such as Geoffrey and Liseult to settle in the duchy. Eventually, all Norman Ventrue were connected to one of these three by an intricate web of feudal relationships. This organization commanded great loyalty from its members and united them with the common goal of bringing all Cainites under its aegis. Independence was not tolerated; any who refused to swear allegiance to the Norman court were staked and left for the sun.

The rigid social structure of the Norman Ventrue was instrumental in their rise to power but ultimately proved to be their undoing after Mithras' awakening. The Methuselah used his formidable powers to create a rift between the lords of the Norman Ventrue, beginning a struggle for mastery that destroyed all three in the end. The lesser members of the faction marched into war obediently against their erstwhile allies, never questioning the motives behind the change of heart. With the Normans' vaunted unity in shambles, Mithras was easily able to arrange the destruction of all potential rivals and to occupy the empty niche in the clan's power structure.

The Norman Ventrue now largely support the shadowy figure of Mithras. Many young Ventrue have sworn fealty to him, but some elders remember the times when Norman Ventrue controlled their own destiny. These elders resent Mithras' arrogance and monopoly of power, but lack the strength to oppose him. Mithras is firmly in control of southern England, particularly the area surrounding London. The outlying fiefs, however, still retain a measure of independence, although few Norman Ventrue would openly refuse a request from the Prince of London.

Young Patricians tend to be loyal to Mithras. This is in part because it is best to have a powerful patron while establishing oneself within Norman lands. Additionally, the Methuselah is actively trying to foster a generation of vassals

loyal to him alone. Many new clan members swear loyalty to Mithras or one of his direct subordinates and are rewarded with fiefs that are far richer than those they would normally acquire. Such gifts usually come at a price, however, and Mithras is not shy about collecting. The Methuselah places young Ventruie in direct conflict with older clan members whom he distrusts.

THE GRAND COURT

The Ventruie of the Grand Court are in a very difficult position, caught between the French Toreador on one side and Norman Ventruie on the other. Norman expansion into France has strained the alliance at the heart of the Grand Court to its limits. Since the rise of Mithras, the loyalty of all French Ventruie to the court has come into question and divisiveness runs rampant.

Some Ventruie, popularly known as the Courtiers, continue with the age-old political games of the court, attempting to strengthen their position at the expense of the Toreador. They try to maintain the delicate balance that is key to the court's functioning, but they fight a losing battle. Toreador suspicions grow, Alexander's leadership is more uncertain than ever and the Courtiers become ever more desperate in their attempts to preserve Ventruie power in the court.

Others, unflatteringly labeled the Traitors (though they refer to themselves as Normans), have thrown their support behind the Normans and Mithras. They call for French members of the clan to unite with their English brethren in a cross-channel alliance that would surely dominate clan politics. These Ventruie believe that surrendering leadership to Mithras is a small price to pay for unity and strength. The Traitors are strongest in the north and west of France, areas long influenced by Norman culture.

Finally, some Ventruie have decided to remain unaligned, declaring a pox upon both houses. They seek to remain wholly independent, free to make war upon whomever they wish, and swearing fealty to none. These Ventruie tend to concentrate in isolated, rural areas where suspicion of outsiders, regardless of clan, remains high. The Independents form the smallest faction within the Grand Court, and it grows smaller with every passing night as the French Ventruie polarize into the two main rival camps.

While the court is open to well-connected neonates' attendance, it is very difficult for young Ventruie to achieve status within the Grand Court; age and lineage play important roles in determining status. Thus, social advancement is very slow, though having a strong patron helps. Young Ventruie often seek such patrons, indenturing themselves for decades in exchange for tutoring in the complex political arena of the Grand Court.



RELATIONS WITH OTHER CLANS

ASSAMITES

The Saracens are among the fiercest of our enemies. They are fanatical killers who follow their own dubious code of honor. They are not true warriors, however, preferring assassination to the duel, sneak attacks to open battle and cowardly retreat to a noble death. Throughout Araby, and wherever the foul standard of Islam is raised, the Saracens lurk, always ready to turn their knives upon us, the true leaders of the West.

Our clan has come into conflict with the Assamites most recently through the Crusades and the conquest of Sicily. In both cases, war to the tooth was the result, as Ventrue-backed aristocrats seized these valuable lands from the Muslims and their Assamite allies. Ventrue forces were successful in open battle, but Assamite assassins eliminated our key leaders one by one. Sicily fell to the Ventrue, the first step toward a powerful Patrician-backed central monarchy in southern Italy, but initial victories in Palestine were reversed. Now only Antioch, Cyprus and Tripoli remain, clinging stubbornly to the harsh soil of the Levant. Here, a few Ventrue fight a valiant rearguard action against the Saracens while plans for further crusades hatch nightly in Europe. The war between Assamite and Ventrue shows no signs of letting up.

BRUJAH

Ancient enemies, they have thirsted for our blood since the destruction of Carthage. The Brujah are a clan of foolish dreamers, obsessed with recreating an Eden that never truly existed. Carthage was a place of blood and sacrifice, not the unblemished utopia that the Zealots have invented in the years since its passing. Still, they blame us for the city's fall, never once questioning the actions of their elders — actions that unified *all* of Rome's Cainite population against them. Toreador, Malkavians, Cappadocians and even the Lasombra put aside their petty jealousies and joined us in our efforts to cleanse the taint of Carthage from North African soil. Still, it is we who bear the brunt of Brujah ire. They love nothing more than a lost cause and have made our destruction their primary reason for being.

Under the guise of promoting outmoded moral concepts such as "freedom" and "equality," the Zealots work tirelessly to undermine our rule wherever they encounter it. Some backed the barbarian raids that devastated our lands, others seized fiefs of their own and forged alliances against us. Many Brujah lords reside in the Holy Roman Empire and take childish pleasure in keeping it divided and weak. They are among the chief backers of the "independent" princes within the empire and are second only to the Lasombra in opposing our rightful rule. Brujah and Ventrue princes engage in endless feuds, weakening both clans and preventing any stable political

structure from being established. The story is the same in other lands. Brujah lords encourage opposition to our rule among noble courts, while Brujah demagogues foment rebellion in the countryside. Their actions invariably bring misery and privation to the same "poor and downtrodden" they claim to be fighting for, but such knowledge does nothing to stay their hand.

The Zealots' constant, unreasoning hostility toward the Ventrue has raised suspicions within the clan that the Brujah may have fallen to the *daeva*. The Brujah role in the destruction of the Second City has always been suspect, and they have been nothing but a disruptive element within Cainite society since the fall of Carthage. Some ancient Ventrue believe that the Brujah are now nothing but pawns in a war that they refuse to comprehend.

CAPPADOCIANS

The Graverobbers are too preoccupied with their interminable study of death to present any real challenge to us. Instead they are among the few clans wise enough to recognize Ventrue power and to accept our rightful leadership. The knowledge and the intellectual distance that their philosophical natures allow them make them valuable and reasonably trustworthy advisors. In return, we provide the security they need to continue their studies. Cappadocians rarely socialize to any great degree and, as a result, seem incapable of organizing themselves effectively even on a local scale. Thus they need our strength to hide behind, a valuable step toward ensuring their loyalty.

Cappadocians possess some small influence within the Church hierarchy and monasteries, concentrating chiefly on the most intellectual clergy. Their cooperation has been essential in preserving Ventrue influence within the Church against inroads made by the Lasombra and Toreador. Ventrue leaders often count upon their Cappadocian allies more surely than they do upon members of their own clan. This is due in part to the Graverobbers' incomprehensible distaste for political intrigue. The average Cappadocian would rather study his caché of moldering corpses than involve himself in Church policy. It is precisely their knowledge of ancient secrets, however, that gives rise to the only serious conflict between our two clans.

Certain Ventrue elders have long suspected that the Cappadocians possess secret knowledge hoarded since the final nights of the Second City. The Clan of Death is most likely among all Cainites to have retained records concerning the fall of the city and the eventual fate of the Antediluvians. Such knowledge would be of invaluable aid to our clan in its endless war with the *daeva*. The Graverobbers have provided nothing but a series of tantalizing hints, however, leading some Ventrue to propose direct action against our allies. The Merchant Princes have recently made tentative contact with a small group of Venetian merchants and necromancers that the Cappadocians have into their clan of late. The Merchant

Princes hope that these "Giovanni" will provide a new source of information within the secretive Clan of Death in return for Ventrue financial support.

FOLLOWERS OF SET

The Serpents are the most despicable of all clans, representing all that is foul among the Children of Caine. Vulgar creatures lacking even the most rudimentary elements of honor, nobility and worth, they must be eliminated, root and branch. Most other clans, even our ancient Brujah enemies, are worthy of some element of respect, but the Followers of Set deserve only annihilation. With this in mind, certain Ventrue are already at work, trying to encourage a Fourth Crusade directed at the heart of Setite power, Egypt.

Although most Serpents seem to hail from the Lands Afric, they appear throughout Europe with disturbing regularity, often targeting Ventrue for their diabolical schemes. They concentrate on our clan primarily because of our vices and desires, which are fed by wealth and power. Many a Patrician has defeated every outward enemy only to find himself at the mercy of a Serpent found close to home. Using our own clan's strengths against us, the Followers of Set are one of the greatest threats to Ventrue power, and are one of the most obvious tools of our true enemies. Certainly, Set is the Antediluvian most likely to be a member of the *daeva*, or is at least one of their primary servants.

Recent evidence suggests that a powerful Follower of Set may have established herself within the fief of London as an advisor to Mithras. Some whisper that Mithras' rise took place too quickly to have occurred unaided, and that assistance from the Setites was the secret key to his success. Now the grim price for this aid is being paid by the island's unfortunate population. Huge tax burdens imposed by Richard the Lion-hearted and his brother John Lackland have reduced many peasants to meager subsistence. Cruel and arrogant Norman barons impose their will upon the hapless Saxons while bands of outlaws take to the forests in protest. The island has become naught but a source of income for ruthless Norman lords intent upon expanding their French holdings at any cost. It seems likely that Followers of Set have established themselves a secure nest in such an environment.

GANGREL

The Animals' bestial nature marks them as failed beings, incapable of controlling even their own behavior. They lack the most basic understanding of the will. Instead of fighting the Beast Within, they surrender to it, losing the battle before it has even begun. Strangely, there are some rudimentary elements of honor within the typical Gangrel, but they are usually drowned in torrents of animalistic passion.

The Gangrel have aligned themselves with the enemies of Clan Ventrue on the periphery of Europe by default. The Animals accompanied the barbarian raiders who ravaged Europe during the long, chaotic period following the fall of

Rome. Now they ignorantly oppose us still, supporting the doomed pagan cultures of Eastern and northern Europe and fighting to preserve untamed lands from the steady expansion of civilization. Gangrel "efforts" appear doomed to failure, however, since their formidable individual fighting skills are counteracted by an almost total lack of organization. Outmatched on the field of battle, they retreat to the remote areas where they lurk, waiting to savage anyone foolish enough to trespass.

The Gangrel have formed a rough alliance with the Tzimisce, resisting the steady eastern advance of the Holy Roman Empire's border. Although the alliance was originally directed toward the destruction of the Tremere, it has expanded into cooperation against Clan Ventrue as well. Initially, both Gangrel and Ventrue hoped to avoid this confrontation, but recent cooperation between the Eastern Lords and the Tremere has made it inevitable. Striking from the shadows, the Animals have wreaked havoc upon Ventrue forces and the Eastern Lords of the empire are quick to call for Lextalionis against unfortunate Gangrel found within their domain. The Gangrel, in turn, typically assail Patricians they encounter and use their formidable abilities to harass our troops constantly. They declare themselves as our enemies and fools — destined to perish along with the outmoded way of life they follow — with these actions.

LASOMBRA

The Magisters understand political power, but not honor. Thus they are ever doomed to be our inferiors. They lack the courage and commitment to be true rulers, preferring to manipulate from the shadows rather than lead from the front. Treacherous, envious and vindictive, these vipers lurk around the edges of every court in Europe, always waiting for an opportunity to strike.

The Lasombra are locked in a struggle with Clan Ventrue over control of the Holy Roman Empire and with Clan Toreador for the Church. We are strongest in Germany while Lasombra power is supreme in the rich lands of northern Italy. Were it not for our association with the Cappadocians and the long-standing Toreador dominance of the papacy, it is likely that they would own the Church as well. We have each fostered attempts to unify the empire behind a leader of our choice, but neither of us has had the power or internal unity necessary to succeed. So the battle continues to rage as the vendetta between Ventrue and Lasombra fuels the endless civil wars that keep the scattered lands of the empire divided.

Despite our best efforts, the Magisters have managed to worm their way deep into the heart of Church bureaucracy. In fact, they have become so entangled with it that they use religious titles to confer status within their own clan. Lasombra bishops and even cardinals have become expert in manipulating Church policy for their own benefit, expanding their control slowly at our expense.

Surprisingly, the Magisters have been remarkably cooperative in the latest effort to encourage a Fourth Crusade against the Saracens. Ventrue leaders have been trying to instigate a crusade against the Setite stronghold of Egypt for several years now, and with the blessings of the Lasombra, finally appear to be near success. We hope that a crusade will be proclaimed against Egypt within the next year, and that Venetian ships will carry the crusaders to the East. Such cooperation between Ventrue and Lasombra is virtually unheard of and, as a result, some Ventrue have grown reluctant in their support of the crusade, suspecting that the Magisters are following a hidden agenda.

The Lasombra have long possessed influence within the Iberian kingdoms of Leon, Castile and Aragon, but the ongoing war with the Moors has provided an opportunity for a few Ventrue to infiltrate the peninsula. Portugal, one of the weakest of the Christian kingdoms, invited a large number of English and German crusaders to join the *Reconquista*, and with the mortals came their Ventrue masters. Several ambitious Patricians, led by the ruthless mercenary Friedrich von Koln, have seized this opportunity to carve new fiefdoms from the carcass of the Almohad Empire. These brave Ventrue raise the standard of our clan against the enemy deep within the Magisters' own homelands.

MALKAVIANS

The Madmen have fallen far from what they once were, although their madness sometimes allows them insight beyond that of sane beings. Their birthright makes them both too dangerous and too unstable to be fit long-term allies, although they can be used briefly if one is cautious. The advice of Madmen, however, is best taken with care since half of what they speak is fiction, calculated purely to disturb the listener. In addition, they possess the insipid tendency to play embarrassing, and occasionally fatal, jokes on their unwitting allies. So be warned.

The once-proud childer of Malkav dueled with us for control over the Roman Emperor and the fate of the world, but they appear to have given up their pursuit of political power in these dark times. Instead, they play the role of inconsequential jesters and fools, deceiving others with their games; but we remember the nights of Rome. It is when the Madmen appear harmless that they are most dangerous. Malkavians use their eccentricities to conceal sinister and devious plans. They wander the continent, spreading stories, encouraging odd cults and subtly redirecting European culture. Toward what ultimate goal we are not certain but there are a few clues if one looks closely enough.

The Madmen possess great influence among mystics, heretics and the remnants of pagan cultures. They explore the extreme ranges of both Cainite and kine existence within these groups, probing at the bounds of reality. They claim that what we view as reality is somehow lacking, and that by means of these strange cults, they gain access to a wider realm that



exists beyond our perceptions. In actuality, they use mortal cults to fracture the social and cultural structures that bind our world together. The Malkavians would splinter the Church, destroy the feudal order and tear down the social hierarchy upon which the well-being of our clan rests. Without the wide acceptance of the established social order, our power would fade quickly. Kings and princes would be unable to rule effectively if the social rules that give them authority were undermined, and this is just what the Malkavians seek to do. They promote heresies that strike at the unity of the Church, hold drunken revels that encourage peasants to look beyond their narrow fields, and spread infectious liberal ideals that foster resistance to authority throughout the land. Beware the children of Malkav for they gnaw at the very roots of our dominion.

NOSFERATU

Unquestionably disgusting, these wretches appear to be the very antitheses of nobility unless one looks beyond the foulness that cloaks them. The Lepers tend to be surprisingly honorable, although often fixated upon obscure moral codes that limit their usefulness in many matters. Nosferatu are often desperate for any sign of respect or affection, providing a sure, if rather revolting, means of influencing them.

The Nosferatu are perhaps the most unified of all the clans, and this makes them dangerous. They tend to band together quite closely and communicate more openly with one another moreso than other Cainites, possibly because they are so unpopular with others. Thus, the Lepers are an essential source of information for any enterprising leader. They are particularly valuable since their information typically comes from sources unavailable to the average Ventrue lord.

The Merchant Princes recently opened negotiations with the Lepers, seeking to establish regular exchanges of information for financial aid. Several such exchanges have already taken place and the relationship between the two groups is considerably warmer than is normal for the children of Ventrue and Nosferatu. The Merchant Princes have benefited greatly from this secret connection. In fact, it is largely through information provided by these Nosferatu contacts that the Merchant Princes have established themselves as a power within the clan.

Many Patricians, understandably, cannot stomach the Lepers' foulness, and drive them from their fiefs as hunted beasts. This behavior has led to a certain degree of mistrust between the clans, which lingers to this day. There is little love lost between Patrician and Leper. Provide them with respect and a safe haven, however, and one will make valuable allies; despise them and one risks making terrible enemies.

RAVNOS

The Charlatans are the trash of Cainite society — parasites, thieves and scum, without exception. They claim to possess honor, yet they violate their word openly whenever an occasion presents itself. They have no respect for our traditions and laws, mocking them at every turn and thereby earning our undying enmity.

The Ravnos are a clan in name only; they have no organization and rarely act cooperatively. They do, however, join together to despoil the populace of any city from which they have been banned, making such a sanction a most ineffective tactic. Instead, it is best to work quickly and quietly against members of this clan. If you find a Charlatan within your lands, it is better not to wait for him to violate your laws: Strike first and eliminate the problem permanently. Take care, however, that your involvement is well-concealed or you may face a deluge of unwanted guests. When in doubt, remember: Dead Ravnos tell no tales.

Currently, there are few Ravnos within our lands. They are more numerous however, to the East, and groups of them were encountered by crusaders in the Levant. Since then, single Ravnos have been spotted with increasing frequency throughout Europe. Disturbing rumors have spread concerning these solitary Ravnos, suggesting that they are advance scouts for a large group. A few Ventrue, particularly among the Eastern Lords, fear that a wave of Charlatans may soon flood into their lands from Asia. These rumors also speak of a vast army of barbarian horsemen that has formed far to the east. These barbarians have supposedly begun to expand and are forcing the wandering people with whom Ravnos are allied to the west as their conquests spread. Most Patricians dismiss these rumors as pure fantasy and consider the Charlatans no more than itinerant, disposable rogues.

TOREADOR

Genteel, aristocratic and cultured, the Artisans are among the most noble of Cainites, but they are not without their flaws. Weak-willed, ambivalent and consumed with luxury, the Toreador are rarely capable of decisive action. They link themselves to artists, poets and musicians — the least productive members of society — and waste their wealth and influence promoting ephemeral works of "art." Their preoccupation with such matters, though, provides an obvious and useful handle by which they can be manipulated.

The Toreador have been Clan Ventrue's staunchest allies since the fall of Rome, cooperating with us in our attempt to preserve the culture and civilization of the West against barbarian depredations. This alliance was never firm enough to prevent fighting between the two clans, however, and has been under severe strain recently. Toreador and Ventrue lords increasingly find themselves at odds with one another. The Grand Court, the surest indicator of the state of the alliance, has fallen upon hard times and appears to be crumbling due to internal tensions. Powerful Toreador lords are poised to strike



against Alexander, the court's ancient prince. In addition, the rise of Mithras in England and the collapse of the cooperative effort in the court has left the future of the entire alliance in doubt. Only in the Crusader States, where both clans are surrounded by common enemies, is the alliance holding up well. Many Ventrue feel that the situation may soon erupt into open war, and members of both clans throughout the West brace themselves for the coming storm.

TREMERE

The Tremere are newcomers to the world of Cainite politics and are resented by most Ventrue as upstarts. Our clan's traditional views have reinforced these feelings and led to widespread condemnation of Tremere amaranth. The Usurpers' thirst for power and rigid mode of organization has also set off warning bells throughout Clan Ventrue, since the last thing we desire is another rival in the already crowded political arena. The vast majority of Patricians feel that the Tremere may pose a significant threat to our clan in the near future and that they should be eliminated before they have had time to multiply.

Throughout most of Europe, the Tremere are still scattered and weak, and Clan Ventrue is doing its best to keep them that way. They have just begun infiltrating the West, concentrating mostly in university towns and in the Church. The powerful Tremere witch, Meerlinda, recently established herself in the British Isles, much to the irritation of Mithras. She has chosen the fief of Glastonbury as her center of power and is gradually extending her influence through the island. The normally formidable Mithras seems to be having difficulty ousting her from what he considers his domain.

The generally held view that the Tremere are dangerous has not prevented the powerful Eastern Lords from forging an alliance with the Usurpers (whose power waxes with each passing night in the East) against their mutual foe, the Tzimisce. The rest of the Ventrue are revolted by the alliance but are prevented from doing anything about it by the lack of any real internal clan organization. Meanwhile, the Eastern Lords quietly funnel supplies to the Tremere and cooperate with them in joint actions against the Fiends and their monstrous ghoulish allies.

TZIMISCE

The Fiends combine all the worst qualities of a ruler into a flawed and twisted whole that they mistakenly consider noble. They consider the right to rule as the right to despoil and ravage their own lands. The tendency toward mindless cruelty, which runs rampant throughout the clan, encourages it to misuse valuable resources. The Tzimisce undercut their own power bases by turning them into haunted wastelands, inhabited only by the most wretched and oppressed of serfs. They have no grasp of the responsibilities of leadership, losing themselves in excesses and falling victim to their own vices. The Fiends are the dark reflection of our clan, reminders of what we could become if we surrender to the Beast.



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

The Tzimisce was among the first clans to gain influence among the barbarian cultures that destroyed the Roman Empire. It therefore remained strong while most other clans were ravaged by the invasions. For centuries, the Tzimisce's Eastern realms provided them with a power base that made them the most powerful of the 13 clans, but recent changes have left them vulnerable. Local *voivodes* now wage petty feuds amongst themselves while their enemies gather all around.

The Tremere have arisen within the heart of the Fiends' domain, threatening Clan Tzimisce's very survival. Meanwhile, expansionistic Ventrue from the Holy Roman Empire push eastward continuously in an unofficial alliance with the Tremere, seizing more territory from the hard-pressed Fiends each year. The Tzimisce, in turn, grow more vicious and desperate with each passing night, using their mastery of Vicissitude to sculpt even more horrific defenders. Despite the fearful havoc wrought by their *vozhd*, however, the Fiends sacrifice increasingly large numbers of mortals, draining them to fuel their dwindling strength or warping them into terrible weapons of war. Although it appears that they are doomed, the Tzimisce fight on stubbornly, slowly turning the lands beyond the Elbe into a charnel house.

NEW TRAITS

ARCHETYPE

MERCENARY

You are driven by your need to make the best possible deal, to acquire goods or services that add to your own personal wealth at the least possible cost to yourself. You avoid quick sales in order to experience the simple joy of bargaining. The contest itself is often more pleasurable than your inevitable victory. You enjoy the daily challenges of commerce and watch the fluctuations of your coffers with fascination.

This mercantile attitude influences more than your finances. In fact, it carries over into every aspect of your unlfe. You hunt for victims with the same eye for efficiency that you turn toward purchasing a new wagon. You avoid waste whenever possible, taking only what you need and nothing more, unless it can be stored safely or sold. Arguments and bargaining are, in your opinion, the only way for individuals to resolve their differences and still maintain respect for one another.

— Regain Willpower whenever you use your bargaining skills to acquire something for much less than it is worth, or whenever a clever investment turns a substantial profit.

AURA OF INESCAPEABLE TRUTH (DOMINATE 4, PRESENCE 4)

A vampire with this power can ensure that only truth is spoken in his presence. All beings who speak within earshot of the Cainite are incapable of telling a deliberate untruth while this power is active. Those who attempt to lie will choke on their own words, unable to speak. Those affected by this power *may* impart mistaken information if they are not aware that they are not telling the truth.

Use of this power is obvious to all whom it affects, and it in no way restricts them from leaving the area of effect. Once a target is no longer in the presence of the vampire, she is no longer affected.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Leadership with the difficulty equal to the highest Willpower score among all the targets being affected. Compare the results with the table, below. The player must also expend one point of Willpower for every three, or fraction of three, targets. If Aura of Inescapeable Truth is used on Cainites, it affects only those of lesser generation than its user, as with other uses of Dominate.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1 success | The next statement made by those affected must be truthful. |
| 2 successes | Those affected must speak the truth for the next full minute. |
| 3 successes | Those affected must speak the truth for the next 10 minutes. |
| 4 successes | Those affected must speak the truth for the remainder of the scene. |
| 5 successes | Those affected must speak the truth for as long as they stay in the user's presence. |
- Learning this power costs 21 experience points.

ABILITIES

HERALDRY

You have studied the art and language of heraldry, and you can interpret heraldic devices (such as a knight's coat of arms). You can also design a new device that follows the commonly accepted rules of heraldry. Successful recognition of a heraldic device automatically confers a small amount of information about the family or organization to which it belongs.

- Novice: You have a casual acquaintance with local devices.
- Practiced: You know your Sinister from your Dexter.
- Competent: You can recognize most common devices.
- Expert: Few coats of arms are beyond your knowledge.
- Master: You are intimately familiar with virtually all Dark Medieval European devices.
- Legend: You know more about coats of arms than the families who possess them do.

STRATEGY

You have acquired a solid grasp of military science, whether through direct experience or extensive training. You are familiar with the techniques involved in training, equipping and leading groups of armed men. Your knowledge includes both small-unit tactics and the grand strategy used in commanding a full-scale battle. You know how to best deploy your forces, cut off supply lines and capture vital territory.

- Novice: You know in which direction to charge.
- Practiced: You could hold a battle line.
- Competent: You could direct a small battle effectively.
- Expert: You possess a deep understanding of both siegecraft and open battle.
- Master: Warriors flock to your banner.
- Legend: You are one of the great generals of the age.

Character Templates

THE RELUCTANT KNIGHT

Quote: *Have at thee!*

Prelude: You've been trained for battle from the moment you could hold a sword — your family's traditions demanded it. You learned to control a warhorse, bear the weight of armor and hold a lance before you were 12. The armsmasters saw great potential in you and made certain that you worked hard enough to fulfill it. Soon it was your trainers, rather than you, who lied groaning on the ground after a bout. You were ready.

Battle brought the euphoria you always knew it would, and victory was even sweeter. Whenever you heard the clash of arms, a red haze descended before your eyes and you became lost in the dance of steel.

You attached yourself to the retinue of a mysterious nobleman who offered great rewards in return for appropriately dangerous service. He showed himself only rarely, but he was an unstoppable force in battle, shearing through heavy armor as if it were cloth and shrugging off wounds that would have felled a normal man instantly.

It was not long before your new lord recognized your combat skills and you learned the secrets of his powers. He was



LIBELLUS SANGUINIS 1

an undead warrior of consummate skill and power, and he chose you as his child. Now your talents serve a greater cause, that of Clan Ventrue.

Concept: Your new masters use you for only the most dangerous and difficult of tasks. At first, you were honored that they relied on you for such jobs, but exposure to the manipulatory ways of your fellow clan members has made you realize that you are nothing more than a tool. Worse still, you are the tool of weaklings incapable of wielding a sword in their own defense. You must endure your situation for now, but you have recently heard rumors of a group of Ventrue knights sworn to a pact of blood and honor. You seek any information concerning these "Knights of the Blood."

Roleplaying Hints: You are used to dealing with problems in a direct and forthright manner, which occasionally disturbs other, more genteel members of your clan. They are uncomfortable with your directness and intensity. All obstacles have fallen before you so far, but you shall encounter a problem that cannot be solved by direct assault sooner or later. It is then that you will be truly tested.

Equipment: Sword, heavy armor, warhorse, shield

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: LONER	
PLAYER: _____		DEMEANOR: CARETAKER	
CHRONICLE: _____		CLAN: VENTRUE	
		GENERATION: 11th	
		HAVEN: _____	
		CONCEPT: RELUCTANT KNIGHT	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●	
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Hearth Wisdom: ●●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●	
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●	
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Senschal: ●●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
DISCIPLINES		BACKGROUNDS	
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	GENERATION: ●●●●●	VIRTUES	
PRESENCE: ●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●	
FORTITUDE: ●●●●●	RETAINERS: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●		
OTHER TRAITS		ROAD	
HERALDRY: ●●●●●	CHIVALRY: ●●●●●	HEALTH	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Bruised: □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Hurt: -1 □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Injured: -1 □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Wounded: -2 □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Mauled: -2 □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Crippled: -5 □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	Incapacitated: □	
●●●●●	●●●●●	WEAKNESS	
●●●●●	●●●●●	PREY EXCLUSION	
●●●●●	●●●●●		
●●●●●	●●●●●		

THE CRAFTY MERCHANT

Quote: Fifteen! It's worth fifty if it's worth a copper...look at that craftsmanship!

Prelude: While most commoners grub for sustenance in the mud, you've always sought the gold that lines other men's pockets. When you were young, you obtained it through begging and outright theft, but a tough old merchant saw more in you and taught you another way. You served him well and quickly became his heir in all but name. When he died, you were wealthy, but unlike most who came into wealth, you were not satisfied with the status quo — you wanted more.

You improved upon the methods of your predecessor, investing in trading expeditions to distant lands and multiplying your fortune several times over. In addition to increasing your wealth, your involvement in commerce brought you contacts across Europe. Through these contacts, you became aware of a mysterious trading network made up of only the

wealthiest and most successful merchants. You resolved to join them and quickly found that they were only too willing to welcome you into their ranks.

Now you manage your business through agents whom you instruct during midnight meetings. In some ways, things are more difficult than before, but there are many rewards. Your previously formidable bargaining skills are nearly irresistible now, and few are strong-willed enough to refuse even your simplest requests. The challenges of adding to your fortune had previously been enough, but your new allies have taught you that wealth is only a means to the true end: power. Your money is now put to use funding Ventrue armies across the continent and exerting influence in the shadowy realm of Cainite politics.

Much to your frustration, you have been ordered to fund several questionable trading ventures that you would not normally involve yourself in, and ordered to discontinue some avenues of business that had previously proven quite profitable. You do not mind the clan putting your

money to use, but deliberately making poor business decisions because you have been directed to violate everything you have ever believed in. With this in mind, you have examined the exact circumstances surrounding each of these orders and have detected a subtle pattern. The mysterious merchant network you joined has been using your wealth to fund conflicts between other members of Clan Ventrue. These manipulators are not the true leaders of the clan. In fact, you suspect that the clan has no centralized leadership at all. The vampire who Embraced you is merely a member of one of many fractious Ventrue factions, each of which desires to unite the remainder of the clan under its own banner.

Concept: You could sell a silken dressing gown to the most beastly of Gangrel. Few can resist your persuasive abilities, and you never turn down a chance to use them. Although you have joined the clan only recently, you know that you are destined for great things. The instincts that served you so well before shall surely win you a place of honor in this endless night in which you now dwell. For now, however, you must bide your time as a junior member of the ancient and powerful Clan Ventrue.

Roleplaying Hints: Unlike most Ventrue, you are not caught up in the rigid social hierarchy of the feudal system. You make your own way instead, tied only to your merchant contacts in the clan. You are still driven by the need to succeed, to add to your wealth and to achieve real power.

Equipment: Costly clothing, expensive jewelry, ledger of accounts



VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: MERCENARY	
PLAYER: _____		DEMEANOR: TYRANT	
CHRONICLE: _____		CLAN: VENTRUE	
		GENERATION: 12th	
		HAVEN: _____	
		CONCEPT: CRAFTY MERCHANT	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●	
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Heath Wisdom: ●●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●	
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●	
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Senseschal: ●●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
DISCIPLINES		BACKGROUNDS	
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	CONTACTS: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●	
PRESENCE: ●●●●●	INFLUENCE: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●	
●●●●●	RESOURCES: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●		
●●●●●	●●●●●		
OTHER TRAITS			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
●●●●●			
ROAD			
HUMANITY			
●●●●●●●●●●			
WILLPOWER			
●●●●●●●●●●			
□□□□□□□□□□			
BLOOD POOL			
□□□□□□□□□□			
□□□□□□□□□□			
HEALTH			
Bruised: -1 □			
Hurt: -1 □			
Injured: -2 □			
Mauled: -2 □			
Crippled: -5 □			
Incapacitated: □			
WEAKNESS			
Pain Exclusion: □			

THE SHAMED MONK

Quote: Put your trust in God and his servants, my son.

Prelude: You were the third son of a minor noble family and were never allowed to forget that your mother died giving birth to you. The eldest son was trained to rule, while you and your brother were also trained in the ways of war and leadership, ensuring that there would be other heirs should the eldest die young. Fate intervened, however, and your life was forever changed. While involved in a minor skirmish with nearby rivals, you froze in momentary fear and allowed your enemies to break through the line of battle. In the confusion that followed, your father and many other men were slain. Afterward you joined a monastery rather than face life among your family and the constant reminders of your fatal cowardice.

Life in the monastery was simple: Work, prayer and study took up all of your time. Your academic skills were good, but you really impressed the senior monks with your unquestioning obedience. They brought you to the abbot, who made you his personal clerk and secretary. He was an elderly man, too weakened by age to shoulder all of the mundane burdens of leadership, so you took care of the administrative details for him, keeping accounts, overseeing labor and dispensing discipline. You served



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him for over a year before you found out how old he truly was.

At first you were his ghou, continuing the same role you had filled before, but the abbot had greater plans for you. You gladly accepted his Embrace, considering damnation a fitting punishment for the death that your birth and cowardice had brought to your family. Since that time, he has worked with you constantly, trying to instill forgiveness for yourself within your breast and to teach you the ways of the childer of Caine.

Concept: The abbot assures you that you bear no responsibility for your parents' death but you know he is wrong. You have destroyed those who loved you in the past, but you are determined to not see it happen again. All of your considerable will and talent go toward strengthening the monastery and protecting your brothers, particularly the abbot.

Roleplaying Hints: Although you know that the abbot is not a good man by the standards of most, you are nevertheless devoted to him. All of your guilt about the deaths of your parents has transmogrified into commitment to his cause. You are generally polite, gentle and calm, but any threat to the monastery brings out the Beast in you.

Equipment: Simple robe, sandals, prayerbook

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME:	NATURE: CHILD	GENERATION: 10TH
PLAYER:	DEMEANOR: PENITENT	HAVEN:
CHRONICLE:	CLAN: VENTRIUE	CONCEPT: SHAMED MONK
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Heath Wisdom: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Seneschal: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	GENERATION: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●
PRESENCE: ●●●●●	HERD: ●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●
AUSPEX: ●●●●●	MENTOR: ●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	
OTHER TRAITS		
●●●●●	ROAD	HEALTH
●●●●●	HUMANITY	Bruised
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Hurt -1
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Injured -1
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Wounded -2
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Mauled -2
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Crippled -5
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Incapacitated
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	WEAKNESS
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	PREY EXCLUSION
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	

THE DAEVA HUNTER

Quote: *Back into your Hell-tainted abyss, vile revenant!*

Prelude: As a child, you had a precocious sense of the supernatural. On those wicked nights when the moon hung low and the mists crept through the valleys, you saw devils dancing through your village and faeries poisoning the grain. You had no choice but to watch in horror as these nefarious shades went about their business. As you grew older and bolder, however, you found the courage to confront these spirits. Not too long after your 16th birthday, you slew a beastie with your shovel under the light of a bloody, bloated moon.

Word spread quickly that you were a hunter of demons and a slayer of devils. People feared and mistrusted you, yet begged for your help in ridding them of the spirits that plagued them. You traveled from village to village, killing your foes and sleeping in stables — until the night you met your sire, that is.



Impressed by your persistence and selflessness, she Embraced you, bringing you into an eternal world of cold night. And in this world, monsters both subtle and overt plied their infernal trades. These were the *daeva*, your sire explained — the secret masters of the world beyond the ken of humanity who wished to corrupt it to their own foul ends. You nodded in comprehension, took up your sire's sword and fled into the night with a fervent sense of your new purpose.

Concept: You are a hunter and tracker on a mission from God, though you do not understand why He has cursed you with undeath. Perhaps so that you may better know the workings of the Devil's mind. Whatever the case, you are brave and sacrificial, throwing yourself at your secret foes with an indomitable will and a zeal matched by none you've ever known. After all, this world must be safe for the kine — it is not the plaything of the *daeva*.

Roleplaying Hints: Suspicion, though it condemns you to loneliness, is the safest recourse. The *daeva* can be subtle, and only by watching the most minute of details can you perceive them for their true nature. You are ever alert and vigilant. True friends are rare and, therefore, valuable — an immense boon to your fearful quest. Treat them with respect, and treat the *daeva* with righteous wrath.

Equipment: Ancient sword, battered pieces of mismatched armor (salvaged from fallen opponents as trophies), traveler's cloak and hat

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES		
NAME:	NATURE: SURVIVOR	GENERATION: 7TH
PLAYER:	DEMONOR: DEFENDER	HAVEN:
CHRONICLE:	CLAN: VENTRUE	CONCEPT: DAEVA HUNTER
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Acting: ●●●●●	Animal Ken: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Alertness: ●●●●●	Archery: ●●●●●	Hearth/Wisdom: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Herbalism: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Empathy: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Music: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Larceny: ●●●●●	Ride: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Sensual: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
DISCIPLINES	BACKGROUNDS	VIRTUES
DOMINATE: ●●●●●	GENERATION: ●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction: ●●●●●
FORTITUDE: ●●●●●	●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct: ●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	Courage: ●●●●●
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	
OTHER TRAITS		
●●●●●	ROAD	HEALTH
●●●●●	HEAVEN	Bruised: -1
●●●●●	●●●●●	Hurt: -1
●●●●●	●●●●●	Injured: -1
●●●●●	WILLPOWER	Wounded: -2
●●●●●	●●●●●	Mauled: -2
●●●●●	●●●●●	Crippled: -5
●●●●●	●●●●●	Incapacitated: -5
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	BLOOD POOL	WEAKNESS
●●●●●	●●●●●	Pain Exclusion
●●●●●	●●●●●	
●●●●●	●●●●●	

Of Historical Note = Patrician Power Bone Dry

As tensions between Ventrue and Toreador grow and the Grand Court's light gutters, desperate Patricians seek advantages wherever they may lay. In this spirit, the French Ventrue have enlisted the aid of Fabrizio Ulfila to combat the incipient Toreador threat. Ulfila plans to use the Church to strike at the heart of Toreador strength — the south of France, where the Artisans have established themselves firmly within the culture of courtly love that pervades the area.

With this end in mind, Ulfila has subtly encouraged the growth of a fanatical organization within the heart of the Church. This group of dedicated clerics is convinced that the Church is itself manipulated by hidden supernatural forces. They strongly suspect that vampires are the source of this manipulation and plan to use the full powers of the Church to combat them. Ominously, they have taken their name from the *inquisitio*, an extremely thorough and often painful method of interrogation, used to expose and destroy opponents of the Church. Even now, the Inquisition, as they now call themselves, is working to uncover evidence that confirms the existence of the Children of Caine.

Ulfila plays his fateful game in this turbulent atmosphere, directing the Inquisition's attention toward the Albigensians, a heretical sect that has risen in southern France. With the Inquisition's aid, he plans to unleash a crusade against these peaceful heretics. The widespread chaos and horror that is certain to accompany such a crusade will provide suitable impetus for a series of devastating attacks against strongholds in southern France, which just *happen* to be the havens of powerful Lasombra and Toreador. French Ventrue, meanwhile, use their influence to increase tensions between Catholics and Albigensians throughout France and organize themselves in anticipation of this opportunity to cripple their Toreador rivals.

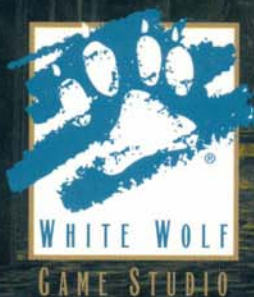
In what he believes is a coup de grâce, Ulfila has instructed his ghouls to lay a trail of false clues leading directly to several of France's most influential Toreador. This will provide his pawns with the evidence they require and, by doing so, neutralize the leaders of Clan Toreador. Ulfila is certain that with the Inquisition hot on their heels, the Toreador will be in no shape to organize a counterattack. What he does not know, however, is that the Toreador are not the only Cainites who will soon fear the fires of the Inquisition....



These lands are mine, childer; mine for as far as your Cainite eyes can see. Who defended them when the barbarian hordes clamored to the north? Who fought off the howling infidels to the east? Who put down countless insurrections, both of Cainite and kine contrivance? It was I, my sons and daughters. I, who gave myself wholly unto my lands and their people; for their people are my people. My service is both a privilege and a responsibility, childer - as I am a master of the state.

Libellus Sanguinis I: Masters of the State includes:

- Vital information on the three clans of nobility - the Lasombra, Tzimisce and Ventrue;
- Expanded Discipline powers, new Abilities and details on clan activities in Dark Medieval Europe and beyond;
- Hints and secrets of the clans lost to the passage of time between the Dark Medieval world and the modern World of Darkness.



VAMPIRE

THE DARK AGES

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