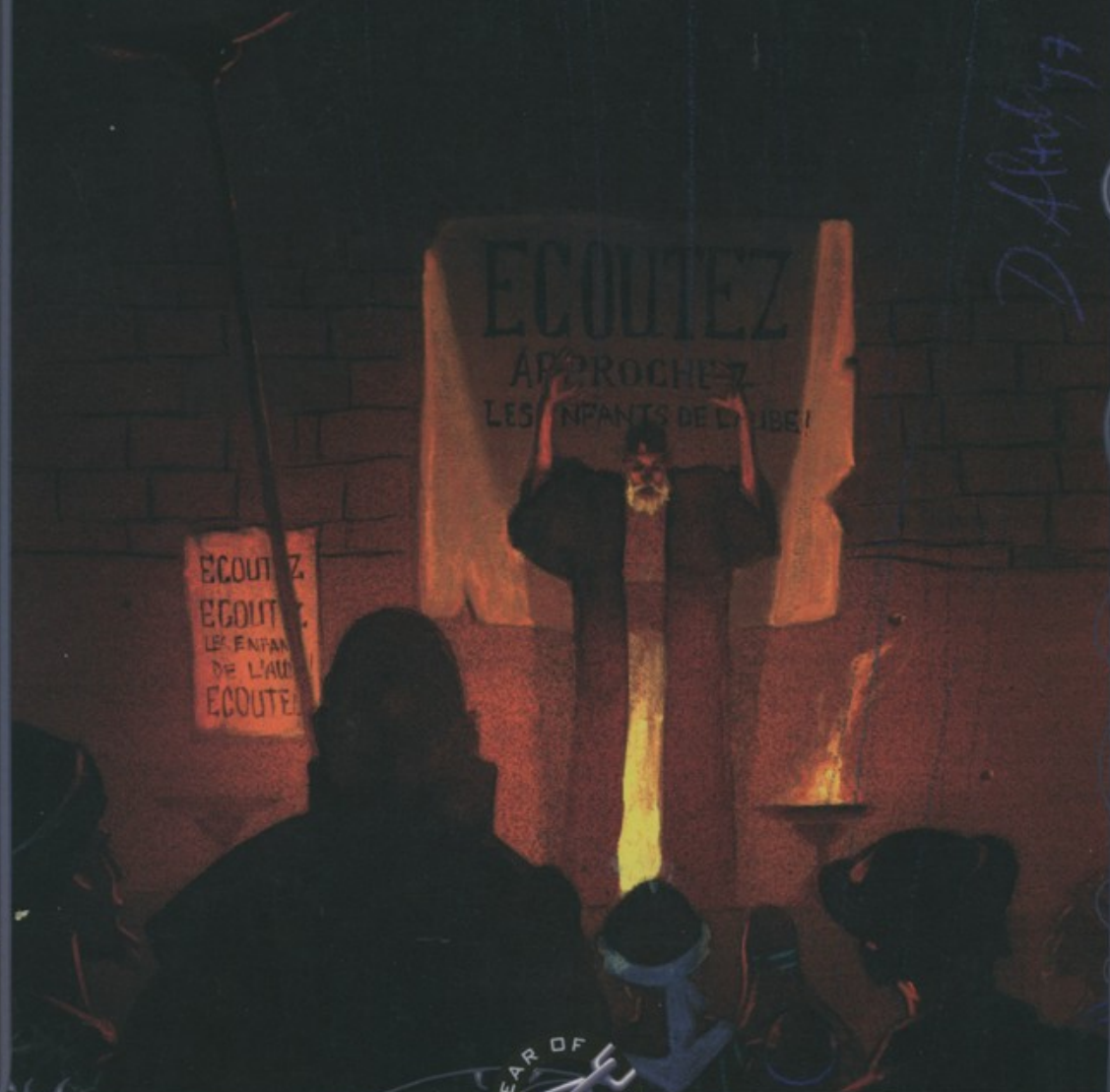


THE LORD AND LADY



D. H. 47



A YEAR OF THE ALLY SOURCEBOOK
FOR VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®



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Introduction: The Greatest Reward

Nones, Thursday:

Brother Pietro stood silhouetted at the window of the townhouse. The red afternoon light shone on his face and illuminated the polished wooden floor behind him. The sound of steel on steel welled up from street below, along with the cries of the enraged and the dying. The rioters had come to this quarter of the city, fighting up and down the filth-encrusted streets, dying in archways. The change of power had long been delayed. In the morning, if there was any city left, the grandi would no longer have seats at the council.

More worrisome were the columns of smoke in the afternoon sky. Fires had sprung up all over the city - carefully set fires, which did not spread once they began and were not extinguished. Someone was deliberately burning houses to the ground.

Another line of smoke trickled into the sky. Soon the smoke would billow. Pietro estimated the fire's location—the Via Franciosa. That would be the house of Henricus, the Tremere.

Down in the courtyard, the cellar door swung in the breeze. Neither Rolando nor Tommaso had returned from their errand. A simple syllogism: The courtyard and labyrinth beneath were both unsafe.

Pietro crossed to the stone arch at the room's far side. He hefted the brass lamp he found there and checked the shutter to see that it was lit, then strode into the darkness of the corridor. Six feet along, the hall bent abruptly. Sunlight could reach the corner, but no farther.

Pietro opened the door and entered the windowless room. He approached the crypt cautiously, setting the lamp down on the flagstones. Darkness surrounded the little circle of light. The stone lid turned slowly, grating as it always did. Inside, his master lay pale and dead. Pietro shook him.

The corpse opened its eyelids.

"It is morning?" it asked.

Pietro shook his head. "The rabble are rioting. I think the council is about to fall."

The Cainite furrowed its brow. "You wake me for this?"

"Domine, the city is afire. The houses of the children of Caine are burning. I suspect the Brujah, Stilicho.... There's more: Rolando and Tommaso have not yet returned from the Labyrinth."

The corpse sniffed the air, then it was out of its crypt faster than the eye could follow. "Fire, fire, I smell fire. Oh! I am undone!" The blur went from corner to corner to corner, wailing as it scrambled to escape. The Cainite's nails splintered as it tore at the paneling.

Pietro ran to it. He pulled at the frenzied hands till they stilled. Slowly, he stroked the corpse's hair. "Shh," he said. "Shh. We'll get you away, but you'll have to be calm. Remember the other house." Large drops of black-red blood leaked slowly from the master's dead eyes and splattered on the floor.

Just then, Matteo and Alessandro entered, bearing a chest between them. Pietro nodded at them.

Quickly, they wrapped the gibbering corpse in sackcloth and straw, and bundled it into the chest. They snapped the lid closed on the bundle, and Pietro shoved a cloth deep into the mechanism of the lock.

Pietro chanted swiftly in Latin. "I say a warding over this chest. Let no unfriendly hands break it. Let no light enter into it." He crossed himself.

By the time they got the chest out of the elbowed corridor, the house was already aflame. The breeze through the open window wafted burning ash into the wooden room. Red flakes snagged on the thick-woven tapestries, and flames began to lick the cloth. Pietro coughed into his priestly robe, while Matteo and Alessandro struggled to pull the chest along.

Smoke choked the long stair, and from the bottom came the sounds of fighting, screaming and dying. The three men hurried with their burden to meet the noise, the chest banging against the wall as it went. Pietro prayed to God that its occupant would not panic.

When they reached the threshold, they found Guidoriccio the knight standing amid a field of shattered corpses, his great blade in hand. Ash covered his hair, and he was burned, his clothes ruined.

The young man grinned when he saw Pietro. "Good work, no? He is in the box?"

Pietro nodded. This day Guidoriccio had well repaid the money lavished on his aristocratic whims.

Then the ceiling collapsed. Pietro staggered as a rain of smoldering plaster crashed onto his shoulder. Sparks and smoke filled his eyes, and he could not see his master. He crawled until he felt the box. It had fallen on its side, pinned down by rubble and wood. The bodies of Matteo and Alessandro lay alongside, their blood wet and black around them. Pietro pulled on the chest, hoping it had not split, that no sunlight had entered.

The house gave another ominous rumble, like the belly of a great hungry beast.

"Guidoriccio!" he called.

The young noble staggered forward, and together they pulled the chest free, hefting it as best they could. The smell of Guidoriccio's scented oils and Pietro's burnt flesh mingled incongruously in the air.

Outside, the street was chaos, rioters everywhere, and as Pietro and Guidoriccio struggled on with their burden, Pietro saw a face in the crowd — Reynaldo, Stilicho's servant.

TERCE, FRIDAY:

Sunlight streamed into the basilica. Soot and straw covered the white marble floor. Refugees lay huddled in the columned spaces of the aisles, many too burned to walk. Mumbled prayers rose from the chapels to compete with the wailing of women and children. Near the choir, a priest recited mass. Mercifully, the shadows were long, the faces nearly invisible.

Pietro paced slowly through the crowd, his arm in a sling. He tried not to look, not to weep, not to think about his complicity in this. It had been a bloody night of reprisal, but in fifty years of life, Pietro had seen it all before.

"Brother Pietro, Brother Pietro." A thin man's arm reached up and clawed at the rough hem of his robe.

Guidoriccio stepped forward instantly, the knight's arm raised for a slap. His eyes were feverish with pain, his colorful and foppish clothing charred and stained. Pietro restrained him with a hand.

"No," he said. "It is all right. I know him." He smiled kindly (or so he hoped) and knelt.

Red welts covered Jacopo's face and his right arm was bent brokenly beneath him. "Brother Pietro, they burned my shop. They smashed the shelves and fired the thatch, killed Maria...." Jacopo gazed meaningfully across the nave at a man in brown who stood leaning against a column incised with cross-hatching.

Pietro nodded, his mouth turning to a bloodless line. "I see. It will be resolved soon. Just you get better, and we'll see about your shop." He gave a reassuring pat and stood.

He proceeded to where the man in brown stood. Blue eyes observed his approach. A line of shadow cut across the man's smirking mouth. He straightened, nodding as he appraised Pietro and Guidoriccio.

"You made me wait," he said.

"Reynaldo," said Pietro. "I have brought a response from my master." He untied a felt bag from the belt of his robe. The cloth was smooth and comforting in his hand.

Reynaldo grinned a white smile. "He's turned sensible? After last night, he shouldn't have any doubts, no? Of course, he'll have to give up his herd — and his sycophants. You'll soon be dust, my friend." He laughed.

Pietro paused, clutching the gray bag. He must concentrate, push aside all expression from his face, and play the game.

"We will see," said Pietro. "Last night was very busy. No less than three Cainites held council. One of them was Prince Lucius' child, Ghislebertus. Henricus emerged from the rock; who knows which others yet sleep?"

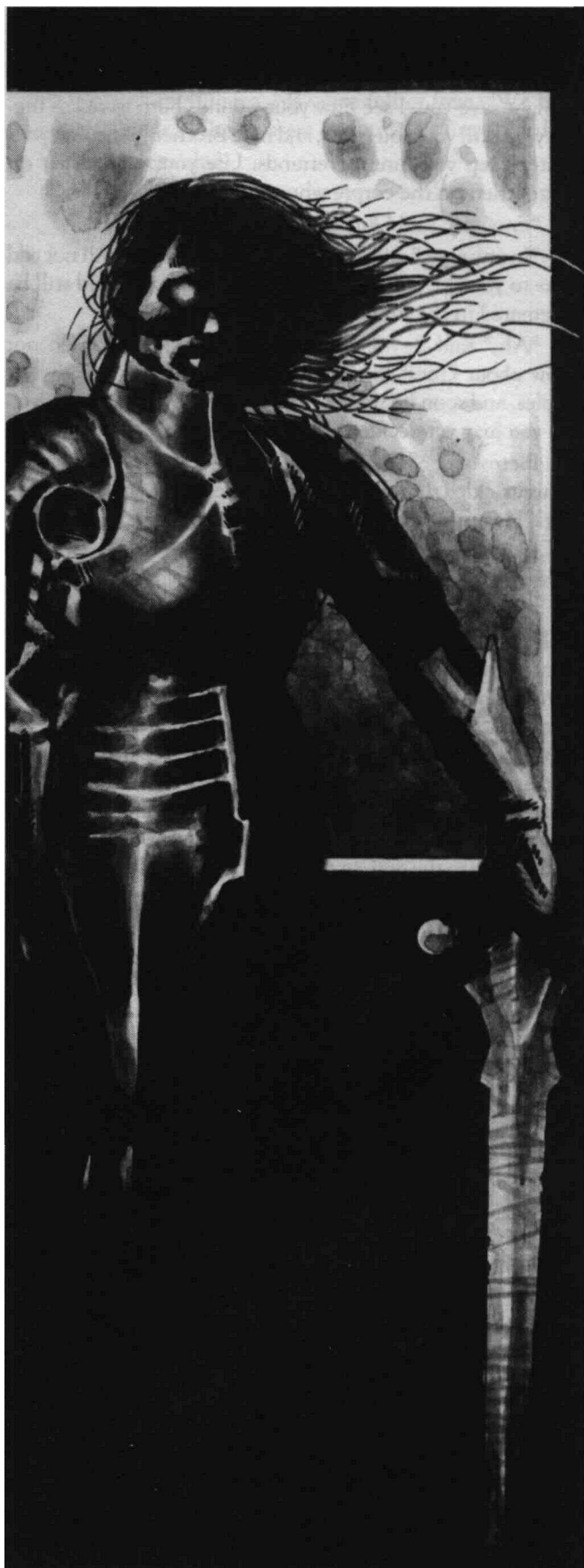
Reynaldo's eyes flickered. "That wretched wizard!"

"In any case, you will see that we still have strength in the city. Should Lucius be dead in truth, I doubt the succession will go in your master's favor. I count the number of Brujah in the city at three, all of them young."

Reynaldo paused and licked his lips. "I have always greatly respected you, Pietro. Your great wisdom, your excellent command of the occult arts. Have you considered the advantages of Clan Brujah's aims? Carthage was a republic; this is a republic. In Carthage, the children of Caine and the children of Seth lived side by side, and those who were wise and excellent held great power openly. It could be so again! Do you never grow tired of managing petty affairs, tending the secret webs of patronage or pretending to the likes of Jacopo that your master is a mortal? Stilicho could give to you a diet of blood; yea, he could give you the Embrace itself, if you desire it. Has your master ever offered it to you? No? Then take the advantages which are rightfully yours. Stilicho offers you this flask of his vitae as vouchsafe of his good will."

Pietro smiled inwardly. "Stilicho would dispose of me at his leisure. And if I wished the Embrace, I could have had it, long ago. The sunlight is precious to me."

Reynaldo scowled and turned to Guidoriccio. "Sir Guidoriccio, then. You have sought honor and convinced the council to bestow knighthood upon you. I commend you. But,



THE GREATEST REWARD

look! Here you are armed, and Brother Pietro is not. He is unmindful of honors greater than knighthood — are you? You have never tasted the blood of Caine, I know. Do you wish to? It might save you. I see how your wounds burn as red as fire. They will kill you, you know, and here Brother Pietro and your master keep you running errands. Use your blade, first on Pietro, then on the corpse who rules you—"

"Enough," said Guidoriccio.

"In any case," said Pietro. "Killing our master will not add years to yours. Even were we base traitors, you would still be stalemated in the Elysium."

"Ah," said Reynaldo, leaning closer. "But you do not know about Gundioc the Burgundian. He has already left Naples, and soon he will arrive, to vouch for Stilicho. So you see, you may yet decide the policies of the great."

Pietro opened the gray bag. "Gundioc is dead." A handful of dust trickled through his fingers, revealing a familiar golden ring. "He entered the city far too openly."

Reynaldo started and looked wildly about. Guidoriccio leapt forward and gripped him by the arm.

Pietro smiled. "I'm afraid you have other problems as well." He reached into his robe and removed a folded parchment. "I have here a document entrusted to me by the new town council." He coughed and began to read. " 'Whereas Reynaldo of Siena, having committed numerous offenses against the peace of the commune and having wantonly destroyed the property of its citizens, the same Reynaldo of Siena will be ejected forthwith from the commune, not to return under pain of death. The commune entrusts execution of this order to the praiseworthy Sir Guidoriccio, knight of the commune, and to Pietro the Benedictine of the monastery of St. Antonio.' You can see that the seal is genuine."

Reynaldo gaped. "After all I did for them!"

Guidoriccio forced one of Reynaldo's hands up between his shoulder blades. "We're leaving, traitor. Walk." Reynaldo stumbled forward as Guidoriccio and Pietro followed close behind.

The huddled homeless watched them pass.

COMPLINE, FRIDAY:

Romans had laid the stones of the vault, and time and guile had concealed them beneath the ground. The door opened, and a rush of air stirred the dirt on the floor. A young man and an aging cleric entered. The Cainite sat on a stone in the darkness, and the teeth of its smile shone white. It beckoned them closer.

"Stilicho will leave now or be destroyed. His herd, his clients on council, his servant, are all sundered from him. Of the elders, only Gundioc supported him, and Gundioc is dead."

A gust of air came from the corpse, the forced imitation of a sigh.

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"We have suffered much, but let us not think of it. Let us celebrate instead our foe's destruction."

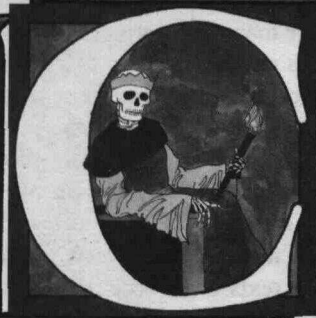
Its gaze went to Guidoriccio, already feverish and leaning against the wall. Almost in the same motion it pierced its hand with a dagger. Blood welled into a cup.

"Drink, my knight, just this once. It will make you whole."

The Cainite looked upon them fondly. "Blood is the least of my treasures. What do you wish of me? The wealth of centuries shall be your reward, if you ask it of me."

"Domine," said Pietro, his voice full of love, "We have already experienced the greatest reward in having served."

The corpse smiled.



Chapter One: Pawn or Player?

The Mark of Caine grants great power, inhuman vitality and life immortal, but those who receive it must pay a dreadful price. A vampire is neither dead nor alive, but something in between, forced to feed on the lifeblood of others to survive, and is forever lost to the touch of sunlight, exiled into darkness eternal. The Cainite's sanguinary depredations condemn her to eternal damnation, and the night is her prison, isolating her from the company of those mortals who might once have loved her. This is a dark age; a difficult, desperate time in which to live, a hard scrabble existence whose rhythms are dictated by the rise and fall of the sun. Farmers break their backs coaxing meager harvests from their fields, protected by feudal lords who brood in their castles and cast covetous glances at their neighbors' lands. Fields cannot be plowed without light to see by, armies cannot fight and kings cannot hold their courts. When the sun sets, mortals lock themselves in their halls, eat what food they have, and prepare for the next day's labor. There is no time nor energy to spare for the night hours, so Cainites awaken to empty fields, lonely roads, and echoing halls. Their unlife forces them to exist in a bleak reflection of the world they once knew, lingering like vengeful spirits in the places they once lived.

Of course, the memories remain. All the cares, the loves, the needs and the ambitions that drove the vampire in life are with them still. Their bodies have changed, but their hearts and minds remain the same. It is no wonder then that they are drawn to the company of mortals, and not just for the security of someone to guard them while they sleep! Cainites need retainers and allies who can make their influence felt in the world, who will do their bidding and carry out their plans no matter how terrible or trivial. Vampires have need of companions who act as envoys to neighboring lords, patrol their castle walls, bring news from the countryside, feed their hounds and buy supplies in the marketplace. It is an irony of the Cainite's condition that the consequences of their tremendous abilities actually make them *more* dependent on others for their prosperity, especially in the Dark Medieval world.

But most importantly, the company of mortals is vital because it helps to anchor a vampire's precarious hold on humanity. Much is made of the Cainite Roads and their paths to enlightenment, but they are only abstract ideals, a hollow replacement for the preoccupations and sensibilities of a mortal soul. The Beast has its voice in the vampire's dead heart, whispering in every waking moment, wearing away at her mind. She must have other voices to challenge its urgings, ears to listen and even hearts to judge her, lest she forget herself. Mortals serve vampires, in some cases believing them to be monsters, never realizing that without mortal aid their masters could become more monstrous still.

WOLVES AMONG THE SHEEP

A vampire who would have dealings with humans (as opposed to simply preying upon them) must depend on the services of one or more mortals who can sometimes be trusted with the truth of her nature. These servants are referred to as retainers, and provide a secure inner circle from which the Cainite can operate. Naturally, such mortals must be chosen with great care and their loyalty assured, for the vampire's very existence lies in their hands. Retainers are generally chosen for their capabilities, and more importantly, their motivations. They must want to serve. They must see in their service some reward worth the risks of discovery: The agents of the Church treat exposed *servants* of a vampire far worse than the vampire herself. These agents of the undead have many motives; some do it for the promise of power, others are desirous of petty riches, or covetous of immortality itself. Some retainers serve out of love, or the *need* for love, while others turn to the darkness out of anger or spite.

Choosing a retainer is something of an art in the Dark Medieval world. Different clans have their own preferences as to what kinds of people they will choose, but the method of enlistment is generally the same. A Brujah, for example, might find that she has need of a scribe, to copy scrolls and perform

minor research. The scholarly Cainite would look for a mortal, likely a member of the priesthood in this case, who has the necessary skills and more importantly, a need that cannot be fulfilled in the life he currently leads. It could be greed, or an insatiable lust for knowledge, or the lure of power over his fellow men; the reasons are many and varied, the only important factor being that this need overshadows all else in the mortal's life. Once the Cainite has found a mortal whose skills fit the vampire's purposes (it could take days or years, depending on how selective the vampire chooses to be), the prospective retainer must then be drawn in, led a step at a time to making the ultimate decision to serve. In the case of the Brujah's search for a scribe, perhaps she has found a mortal who nurses a passion for the ancient texts of Greece and Persia. One morning as the scribe sits down to his labors he may find a scrap of parchment hidden amidst his manuscripts, a fragment of a work by the Persian scholar Admartus. A few days later, another gift appears, enough to tantalize the mortal's desires as well as hinting that there is much more that he might yet be allowed to see. Only after the mortal's interest has been stoked to a fiery pitch will the Cainite reveal herself, because there must be some force to temper the shock at learning that their mysterious benefactor is one of the Damned! This is the moment of truth. At this point the mortal is offered the chance to serve, and reap the rewards of service. Some still refuse, unable to overcome their fear of the vampire and what she is, and in so doing they seal their fates, for they know too much to survive. The rest see their dreams and ambitions in the form of a pale, mysterious figure, who promises to fulfill their secret desires in exchange for unquestioning loyalty and devotion. The important point is that the retainers choose to serve, because they believe that they have as much to gain from the service as the Cainite. These are the boon companions who will do a vampire's bidding night or day, always wary of enemies and always looking to improve their master's fortunes.

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

By contrast, an *ally* is a mortal whose skills or resources might be of only occasional use to a vampire, or a powerful figure (such as a high-ranking noble) whose public prominence would be jeopardized by a close relationship to one of the Damned. For these valuable servants a vampire must maintain a more indirect relationship, working through retainers and shielding her true nature. Alliances are formed out of obligations, debts, or promises of future help. Again, the object is to identify what an ally needs, and then offer to address this need in exchange for a commensurate service. The advantage of allies over retainers is a greater number and variety of resources can be called upon while minimizing any direct risk to the Cainite. The disadvantage is that an ally's loyalty is not nearly so certain, having nothing more to base it

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on than promises or past favors. Will the neighboring lord send his army to defend your lands? That was the arrangement, but suppose someone made him a better offer? A careful Cainite will strive to maintain a good balance between trusted retainers and useful, but less dependable, allies.

THE BLOOD OATH

Much has been said of the Blood Oath and its power to ensure unswerving loyalty between master and servant. The dreadful Tzimisce have carried the practice to its ultimate expression, using mystical means to breed entire family lines *bom* loyal to their masters, generation after generation. But the Oath is not without its disadvantages, particularly to those Cainites who wish to extend their influence into the powerful families of Europe.

Certainly, the Blood Oath can compel unconditional loyalty, even love, but its overwhelming influence on the mortal's mind necessarily causes noticeable changes in his behavior. This is because the mortal is acting not in accordance with his wishes, but his undead master's. Blood Oaths are difficult to keep secret, especially amongst the nobility, where the wealthy and powerful are under constant scrutiny. More than one amateurish Ventrue has forced the Blood Oath on a nobleman, only to have the lord's change in behavior observed and become a matter of investigation, not only by the lord's relatives, but sometimes the Church itself.

There are many times when it is not wise for a Cainite to require the Oath from her retainers. This is because the fear of disappointing or failing one's master can rob the retainer of any sense of initiative. They become overly cautious, even timid, which is the last thing a vampire might need. The Oath is a powerful tool, but it is no substitute for loyalty freely given. Before a Cainite should think to bind someone, she should ask herself *how much freedom of thought and action must this person have to fulfill my goals?*

Likewise, the choice to make a human into a ghoul is one that a vampire cannot do lightly, for the transformation evokes changes readily apparent by mortal folk. The ghoul's skin pales, and he takes little interest in food or drink. Animals can sense a ghoul's true nature, and they react with alarm. Thus it would not necessarily be wise to transform an ally, or even a retainer whom the vampire counts on to court the general populace.

Ghouls are valuable when the Cainite has need of servants with enhanced abilities (guards and assassins being two obvious choices). Also, when a retainer serves in hopes of one day receiving the Embrace, the transformation to a ghoul can be used as a partial reward for faithful service. There are some vampires who prefer to make all their retainers into ghouls, as a means of setting them apart from the mortal life they left behind. To them it is a symbolic passage from one world to the next. The tactic is effective, but the Cainite pays the price with servants who arouse suspicion wherever they go.

PAWN OR PLAYER?

Unlike their images as forbidding, solitary figures, most Cainites in Dark Medieval Europe maintain a retinue of one size or another and make use of a wide variety of skills and resources that compliment the vampire's own. In the Dark Medieval world, areas of knowledge are very specialized: Crude tools and means of manufacture make any kind of skilled craft a difficult trial-and-error process, and the secrets of successful experiments are passed like heirlooms from master to apprentice. Education is limited to the Church and the nobility, and even then its quality varies widely. Cainites are always watchful for those mortals whose abilities can add to their own.

CLAN VIEWS

VENTRUE

The hall's great doors were opened and Baron Hartmore swept in like a cold northern wind, his black woolen cloak swirling about his legs like a storm cloud. Behind him came his retinue: Edmund Wallace, the Baron's champion, a lean figure in blackened mail pacing his master like a faithful hound. Behind Edmund strode Simon the Bald, lines of hard-earned wisdom etching the scholar's face. Then Alan of Wales, eyeing the assembled crowd with a mocking smile and a minstrel's mirthful eye. Last came the Lady Eleanor, her pale features smooth and untroubled as a cold mountain lake. The retainers followed after the lord's brisk strides, radiating a casual indifference for the gathered nobles' accusing stares. And hidden amid the throng, the conspirators shared looks grown suddenly nervous at their quarry's easy confidence....

More than any other clan, the proud and aristocratic Ventrue have surrounded themselves with a large coterie of retainers, as befits their noble origins. In life, the size of a noble's retinue is a mark of status and influence, and if anything, this attitude becomes even more pronounced after the Embrace. Ventrue require allies who will be responsible for Cainites' mortal holdings (castles, land, serfs, etc.), who can act as envoys to mortal courts and be instruments of influence within Cainite and mortal society.

Having been born to lead, most Ventrue expect unquestioning loyalty and obedience from their retainers, and in return, their followers are granted a correspondingly high amount of personal freedom and initiative in the service of their master. Forcing a retainer's loyalty through the Blood Oath is sometimes seen as a sign of weakness on the part of the Cainite, reflecting poorly on the vampire's power of command, so it is often avoided. By the same token however, disobedience or insubordination from a retainer is punished swiftly and brutally, and failure of any kind is intolerable. Ventrue take their obligations to their retainers very seriously, never failing to reward faithful service, and consider them members of their own household.

Most Ventrue retainers are drawn from the ranks of the former mortal's tenant families. The concept of fealty runs deep in Ventrue hearts, and they will expect no less service from their serfs after death. Ventrue have also been known to accept retainers from the ranks of prisoners taken in battle. Likewise, knights of renown who have taken mortal wounds in



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battle are sometimes approached by Ventrue and spared if they swear allegiance to the vampire. Such knights become ghouls and join the Ventrue's bodyguards.

Due to their stature and areas of influence, Ventrue maintain a variety of skills and abilities in the members of their retinues, and draw from a number of fields of experience.

Advisor

Like rulers of old, most Ventrue will take a wise man into their councils to provide insight in matters of politics, trade, warfare and the like. Such individuals are often the Cainite's closest companion, accompanying her everywhere, and are expected to be well-educated, literate, and above all, diplomatic in their advice. Such advisors are selected from the ranks of devoted scholars, and are rewarded for their service with access to whatever resources the Cainite may possess in order to further those areas of study. Most Ventrue choose to make their advisors ghouls, often valuing them as repositories of knowledge and as useful "devil's advocates" for the Cainite's plans.

Seneschal

A seneschal is a vital asset to any noble landowner, supervising the household and attending to the thousand daily details that an estate demands to run effectively. Seneschals are usually taken from the senior peasant family living on the vampire's lands, and are expected to be capable in every function of the estate, from accounting to cooking to the treatment of prisoners, and everything in between. In the routine matters of the house, the seneschal speaks with the authority of the master, and thus is often considered to be the most senior of the Cainite's retainers.

Scribe

Education is a prized commodity in Europe, and the ability to read and write is an uncommon asset. Literacy is confined primarily to the Church, whose priests must be able to read and copy the Bible, and to the noble households who must rely on letters to communicate with distant allies. Most Ventrue will take a scribe into their retinue whether the Cainite herself is literate or not, to take dictated letters and read important documents, as well as maintain the Cainite's libraries. Such individuals are either trained serfs, chosen and educated by the seneschal, or occasionally recruited from those persons who failed to make their way in the Church.

Soldier

The arts of war are the province of the nobility, and a noble's ability to project an aura of military might is an important element of their status and influence. Ventrue maintain fighting men to project their power and authority. Warriors are chosen from noble houses owing fealty to the Cainite's household, or from the *knights errant*, middle sons of poor families looking for a lord to serve who will enrich their fortunes. The best of the Ventrue's knights is chosen as the champion, acting on the Cainite's behalf in trials by combat and sometimes commanding the Ventrue's forces in war.

Some Ventrue also maintain a cadre of chosen bodyguards, transformed into ghouls to give them greater strength, speed and **Bardina**.

The minstrel's songs are sweet, and his stories are a pleasant diversion in the long hours of the night. But more importantly, a bard is also acutely aware of his surroundings, and must have a practiced eye for reading people if he is to prosper in the world. Ventrue often take minstrels into their retinue, granting them the status of noble patronage in exchange for entertainment and insight into the personalities of the mortal courts. Because their presence is ubiquitous in social surroundings, the bard is often called upon to act as a spy for the Cainite's interests.

The primary goal of any Ventrue is increasing the prosperity and power of his household and his name, and that requires playing the never-ending game of politics, both mortal and Cainite. For those circumstances which require negotiation with mortal nobility or the recruitment of allies, Ventrue have need of skilled emissaries who can be trusted to travel to distant courts and achieve the Cainite's aims. Such courtiers are drawn from noble houses owing fealty to the Cainite's, individuals who are well aware that their house's continued prosperity is directly tied to the Ventrue's. Courtiers are afforded a great deal of personal freedom and are expected to be intelligent and charismatic.

All nobles must have their squires, those frantically bustling individuals who dress their master upon awakening, fetch the horses, bring wine for the master's guests — a hundred little chores between dusk and dawn. Most Ventrue will choose one or two squires for their body servants, keeping them on hand at all times and expecting them to know their master's needs without being told. These servants are usually young children, taken from the Cainite's senior tenants (another way of ensuring loyalty from the tenants in the bargain), and are treated with a certain amount of exasperation and fondness, depending on the moment.

LASOMBRA

The long-fingered hand reached out and slid the black rook forward. "Check," Count Errico said, shaking his head sadly. "Simon, you are impossible."

The courtier leaned back in his chair, fighting to control his exasperation. Around Simon, the other members of the Lasombra's retinue shared calculating looks and the occasional wintry smile. One of their number, a sleek beauty named Mary, reached down and shifted the imperiled King with a languid movement. "What are we to do with Baron Hartmore?" she asked. "He is hot on the trail of our agents."

The Lasombra shifted his head slightly, considering, then moved his Queen's knight. "And if he should catch them, what will he have?"

PAWN OR PLAYER?

More looks passed among the retinue. The Count's personal assassin, a scarred figure named Barnabas, leaned back to whisper to Simon and Mary. "They may betray us," he offered tentatively, and then reached down to the board and advanced a bishop against the Lasombra's haphazard defenses.

Count Errico considered the move with care. "And what can they tell the earnest Baron? That we conspire to ruin his standing in the court? He knows this already." The Count advanced a single black pawn, far across the board from the enemy king.

John Ironhand, the bodyguard, folded his massive arms and glowered at the board. "We stand to lose two good agents if Hartmore catches them," he said in his gravelly voice. Reaching down, he swept a white bishop in a cutting arc that took the Count's pawn.

The Lasombra smiled. "Pawns are made to be sacrificed. And if their loss distracts the attention of the enemy from the real threat, then...." Errico moved his Queen across the board, and the trap was sprung. "They have served their purpose. Check and mate."

Errico smiling contentedly, leaned back in his chair and steepled his pale fingers.

The Lasombra are the consummate masters of politics and intrigue, moving through the shadows to exert their influence over the world in subtle ways. They rule by making powerful individuals first see the Lasombra's goals as their own, then take the risks that the Lasombra deems necessary. In the event of failure it is the noble, not the Lasombra, who pays the price, and the Cainite learns to play the game all the better.

Where the Ventrue see their retainers as a natural extension of their authority, the Lasombra use their companions as finely crafted tools, each one for a specific purpose, and they constantly pick and discard them as the situation warrants. Lasombra look for potential retainers who have the qualities necessary to play the game: charm, guile, wit and ruthlessness, and these qualities can be found in many places and social strata. This clan looks for mortals driven by ambition, whose desires closely match the Lasombra's at the time. Greed for a kingdom's wealth, envy of a noble's power, the wish to see a king humbled — whatever forces drive the potential retainer, the Lasombra will stoke like a fire, all the while convincing the mortal that the path to achieving these goals lies in service to the Cainite. The key, from the Lasombra's standpoint, is to keep the retainer so focused on their personal agenda that they have no time to consider that they are being employed as pawns themselves. A retainer may be sacrificed without hesitation if such action serves the master's plan.

The life span of a Lasombra retainer is directly proportional to the retainer's cunning, usefulness and above all, flexibility. The longer a retainer serves the Cainite, the more assured her position becomes. Unlike the Ventrue, the Lasombra maintain fairly tight control over their companions, watching them closely for signs that a retainer's schemes might come into conflict with the master's. The clan uses the

Blood Oath frequently but not casually, binding those whose function requires complete loyalty and little subtlety, such as a bodyguard.

Lasombra recruit their retainers from a very wide spectrum: nobles, priests, peasants, outcasts and thieves. Retainers' origins often do not matter as much as the roles they play in the retinue.

Courtesan

Lasombra choose mortals as courtesans without regard to their social origins. More than one prostitute has been molded into the image of a seductive noblewoman, plying knights and noblemen and learning their darkest secrets. Other courtesans are drawn from poorer noble houses, men and women motivated by greed or ambition. What is important in this role is a quick wit, charisma, and ruthlessness.

Bodyguard

The need for a bodyguard is second nature to Lasombra, for whom betrayal and assassination are important parts of the game. Such individuals are drawn from a variety of sources: beggar knights, town thugs, even murderers. If they are quick with a sword and sharp of eye, they are of use to the clan. Naturally, the loyalty of such individuals must be assured, and so they are the ones in a Lasombra's retinue most likely to be bound by the Blood Oath. In many cases, they are also transformed into ghouls to take advantage of their master's

mpiricg

Scholar

Lasombra have need of learned men who are well-versed in local history and in the relations of the noble houses, as well as in diverse areas of knowledge from court protocol to the administration of poisons. Educated individuals are valued, providing a ready source of information for the Lasombra's schemes. In return, these scholars are encouraged to continue their studies and investigations, the better to counsel their masters when the need arises.

Scribe

Though the Lasombra generally avoid putting anything entirely, so a well-educated scribe is a valuable asset to the Cainite's retinue. Such individuals are almost exclusively lured away from the Church, as the Lasombra require their scribes to be conversant with as many languages as possible. Particularly ambitious scribes sometimes take it upon themselves to act as the Lasombra's spymaster, using their unassuming position to safely gather and assimilate the information gleaned by the master's many informants.

Assassin

Murder is part and parcel of the Lasombra's power games. Used carefully, the well-timed death of an individual can cause associates of the victim to behave in a manner desired by the Cainite. In the retinue of nearly every Lasombra may be found one or more assassins, chosen with care from the outlaws and murderers who prowl the countryside. So long as they are

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successful and subtle in their methods, their future in the retinue is assured. Should they fail, however, their actions can easily be attributed to brigandry.

Spy

Secrets are the coin of the realm in Lasombra intrigues, and the clan's efforts to maintain a network of informants rival those of the Nosferatu. Disguised as nobles, minstrels, manservants, and stable hands, these individuals have but one task: to watch, listen, and remember everything that happens around them and report it faithfully.

ASSAMITE

The three men gathered under the waning moon, in the shadow of the old cairn. The only sounds were the thin whistle of the wind across the moor and the distant cry of an owl. They greeted one another with quiet nods, inwardly pleased that all had been successful in the tasks the mahdi had set for them.

Then came the voice, which seemed to rise up from the stones of the old memorial. "Peace be with you," the mahdi said in ritual greeting.

As one the three bowed their heads. "And unto you, peace," they replied with one voice.

"What of the Brujah prince?" the mahdi inquired.

The first of the three, a tall man with a noble's soft hands, spoke to the night. "He is watched by four fighting men, blessed of their master's blood, and he keeps three learned men and a scribe in his retinue. He has no bodyservants, preferring to attend to his personal needs himself."

"What of his movements?" came the mahdi's reply.

The second of the three, a short, heavyset man with the manner of a tavern keeper, cleared his throat. "Most nights he keeps to his estate," he said gruffly, "but once every seven days he naves to the great church in the city and spends some hours with apriestthere."

"What of our passage to Seville?" asked the sepulchral voice.

The third man, lean and rangy like a wolf, folded his arms and looked to the moon. "There is a boat in the harbor that sails with the tide. The owner has been well-paid, and the hold has been readied for your slumber."

For a time, only the wind stirred the night air, men the voice of the mahdi replied,. "All is in readiness. The prince dies tonight. Go to the ship now, and await my coming:"

The informants bowed deeply and departed die "lonely hill as a group, headed back to the city harbor. There, they couldrestfor a time and discuss what might lay ahead for them in Seville.

Since the Crusades, the mysterious Cainite assassins, the Assamites, have slipped like smoke through the courts of Europe, taking a dreadful toll on noble and commoner alike. They strike without warning and vanish into the night which spawned them. Many suspect, but none have proof, that these secretive creatures do not always work alone, but make use of retainers who lay the groundwork for an assassin's attack.

Such individuals would almost certainly be bound by Blood Oath to ensure their loyalty and secrecy, and would be disciplined and focused in manner like their masters. Ambi-

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tion, pride, and conceit would be traits unsuitable for such a retainer, so likely recruits would be those of low birth. What rewards the Assamites might provide to their faithful servants can only be guessed.

The needs of Assamites fall within a very specific range of services, directed toward completing their missions of assassination.

Servant

These mortals are capable of attending to the Assamite's material needs (clothes, weapons, etc.), as well as making travel arrangements and locating suitable places for the Cainite's lair. They allow the assassin to concentrate more closely on her quarry. Capable servants are often woodsmen, peasants or the servants of noble households.

Spy

Information is vital to a successful assassination. Knowledge of the quarry, his movements and his lair are crucial to an Assamite's plans, and every extra set of eyes and ears adds to the intelligence that the assassin possesses. Spies are chosen for their skills at stealth, observation, and cunning, as well as their knowledge of the land and the habits of Cainite and mortal alike. An ideal choice is the "liberated" Cainite retainer, but other candidates are thieves, courtiers and minstrels. Such individuals might find themselves called upon to commit killings merely as distractions so the Assamite can attack the real target.

NOSFERATU

"Where in Hell is this hut of yours, woman?" The traveler's words were blurred by bitter wine as he stumbled along the footpath away from the village. The man's horse whickered, uneasy with traveling along the narrow trail in the dark.

"Not far, love, not far," Caitlin murmured, hiking up her skirts and staying just ahead of the drunken man to keep his fumbling hands off her.

"Don't see the point," the traveler mumbled. "Here's as good a place as any, you ask me. I'm not paying anymore just to do it in a hut, you hear?"

"You'll want a place to sleep won't you?" she replied. The words came easy now, after so many years. "The tavern is full, and you don't want to sleep on the ground, do you?"

The man said something, but she could not make it out. It didn't matter, so long as he followed her.

Soon, the clearing came into view. A single candle guttered in the tiny hut's window. "There, you see, it wasn't far at all," Caitlin said, relieved to have lured the man so far. It didn't always work, making them walk all the way back home. Sometimes she had to bleed them herself, and carry it back in whatever she could find.

The man let go his horse, which gave a nervous whinny and backed away from the clearing. The traveler took no notice as he reached for Caitlin with greasy hands. Steeling herself, Caitlin stepped through the hut's open doorway and all but ran for the shadows across its single room.

The man lumbered inside, too drunk to be, wary. "What kind of game is this, then?"

Long, pale arms reached for him from the darkness beside the door, snaking around the man's thick neck and pulling him to the ground with frightening strength. He barely had time for a single, bleary shriek before his neck snapped like rotten wood.

The naked, misshapen form wrapped itself around the man's torso and trembled with hunger, its bulbous head burrowing into the hollow of the man's throat. Flesh tore, and the vampire made thin, mewling sounds between gulps of the man's blood.

Slowly, carefully, Caitlin crossed the room, kneeling beside the creature as it feasted. Gritting her teeth, she laid a trembling hand on its bony shoulder. "There, there, little one," she said in a tremulous voice. "Drink it up, every drop. I have brought you a horse, too, would you like that? A fine, strong mare. It could feed you for a long time. My boy has to grow up big and strong, doesn't he?"

Despite their hideous disfigurements, or perhaps because of them, many Nosferatu are driven to find human companionship, as much to help them as to provide some bitter solace for their condition. They need companions who watch over them as they sleep, assist them in their travels from town to town and, most importantly, look upon their deformities without fear and regard them as something other than monsters out of Hell.

This need drives the Nosferatu to seek companionship among society's outcasts: the lepers, lunatics, and thieves who find themselves hunted or shunned wherever they go. These mortals are often desperate or lonely enough to be able to bear the Cainite's twisted features, and happily share their skills and knowledge with the vampire if it will make their own harsh lives a little easier. Sometimes a Nosferatu turns to loved ones it knew in mortal life, hoping their love will blind them to the vampire's hideousness.

A Nosferatu depends on her companions for protection, knowing that mortals will do their utmost to hunt the vampire down should her presence be discovered. For this reason, many Nosferatu maintain nomadic existences, drifting from city to city before the mortals can stir themselves against the monster in their midst. When a Nosferatu travels, she needs companions who can pave the way, going ahead and selecting suitable sites for a lair. In some cases, more domineering Nosferatu also use their mortal allies as lures, drawing prey into a situation where they can kill with some amount of ease and safety. Individual Nosferatu might not hesitate to bind their retainers by the Blood Oath, though many realize that it is a hollow substitute for the real companionship they desire.

Nosferatu generally maintain very small retinues, if any, to avoid unwanted attention, and the duties of their companions are very straightforward.

Bodyguard

Nosferatu choose murderers and thieves, the more desperate the better, and enlist them for protection. The guards watch over the vampire by day, and in return, the Cainite helps them continue their criminal careers.

Lackey

Lackeys provide the Nosferatu with retainers who do whatever menial tasks the Cainite requires, from scouting potential lairs to luring unwitting victims, and occasionally even acting as a "front" for the Nosferatu's activities. These lackeys are often lunatics or disease-ridden outcasts, sniveling for power and immortality, but sometimes these people are former family members or friends, and they serve the vampire out of love.

CAPPADOCIANS

The man still screamed even as they dragged him down into the vault, his voice muffled by the canvas sack that covered his head. Pietro and Antonio carried his struggling form easily between them, moving with the strange unspoken harmony common to twins.

The others waited in the room at the foot of the stairs. Fat Anthony waddled up to them, lips pursed, contemplating the weight and dimensions of the new subject. Susanna, at her place by the examination table, raised a single eyebrow, then turned to the shelf of potions along the wall behind her. Waiting beside her, ready with the restraining straps, stood Roberta, a look of anticipation bringing a blush of color to his otherwise sallow features.

"We began to wonder what happened to you," clucked Anthony. "The mistress will be here very soon, and the experiment must be underway before she arrives. You know how she hates to waste her time."

"The mistress was very particular about what kind of subject she wanted," Pietro replied with a shrug. "Height, weight, even eye color. It took some time."

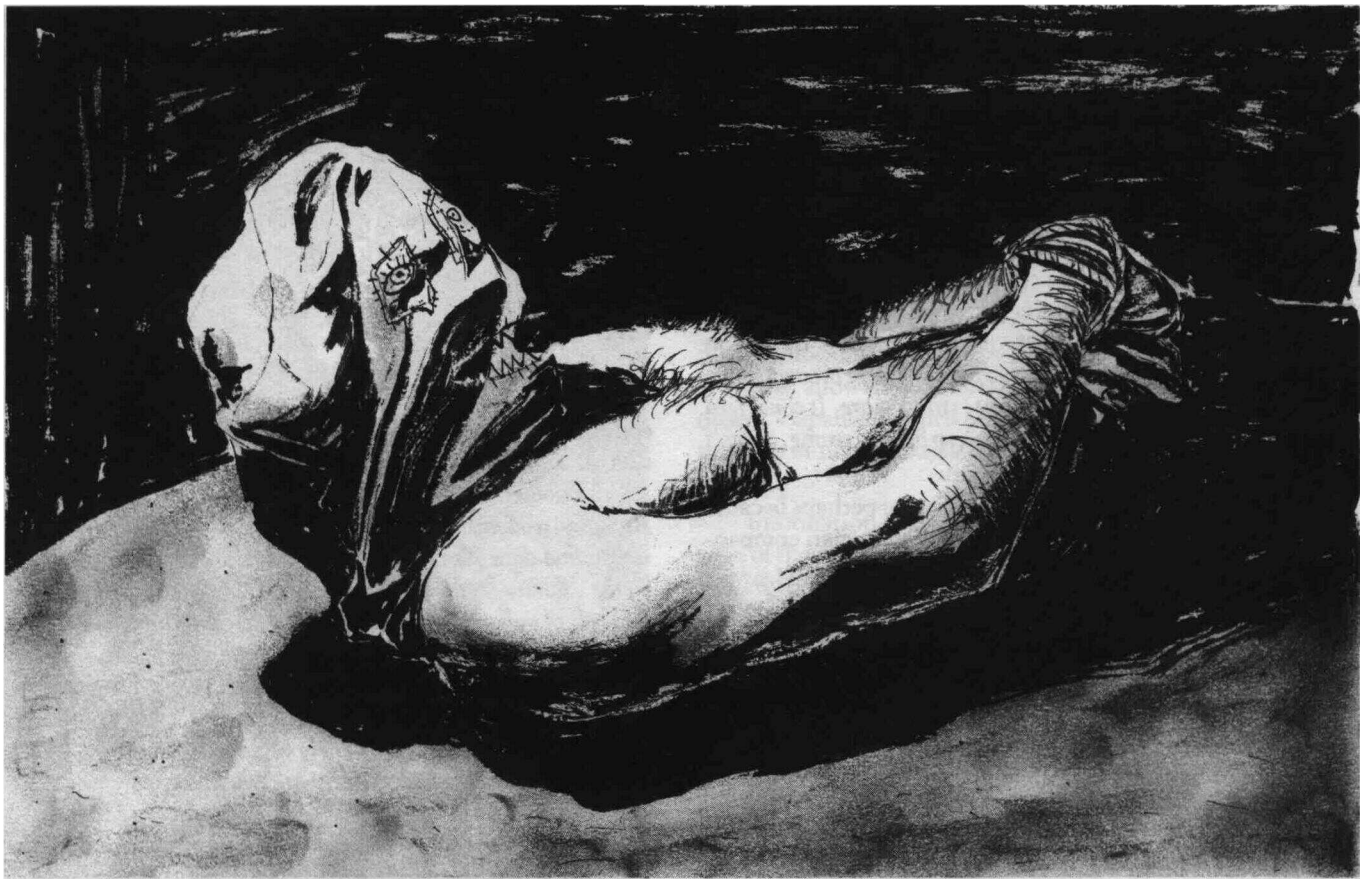
They crossed the room and unceremoniously dumped the figure on the hard wooden table. The subject's screams renewed their intensity and the man began to thrash about, but Roberta was quick as a snake, restraining first the legs then the arms. He had had much practice over the last year. "I like this one," he crooned, patting the subject's arm. "Much vitality, yes. We will be able to study him for hours."

"Take that sack off his head," Susanna said, her voice distracted as she measured careful drops of a clear liquid into a cup. "Anthony, attend to your pen and parchment. We must start right away."

The sack came off and the man looked about his surroundings with wide, frightened eyes. Immediately he opened his mouth to scream, and Susanna's hand darted down, emptying the contents of the cup into his mouth, then clamping down over his lips while he choked and swallowed. Almost immediately the powerful tincture took effect, and his protests stopped.

"There, isn't that better?" Susanna said, her smile not quite reaching her wide, dark eyes. "Now listen to me carefully, for there isn't much time. I've just given you a powerful drug, a poison that will kill you over the course of the next few hours. But do not fear, we are not murderers. We are scholars, actually, and there are some questions we must ask you. We want to know what you are feeling, from moment to moment, as the drug takes effect on your body. Do you understand? If you tell us what we need to know, we will give you the antidote, and you will be free to go."

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A glimmer of understanding seemed to shine in the subject's glassy eyes. Out of his view, the twins shared a conspiratorial wink. They had chosen well. The mistress would be able to watch for some time while the drug slowly killed the man, and she would study its progress. After he was dead, they would then study the brain, to see what changes death made when it came. It was a laughable irony to think that in the brain of an addled tinker might hide the secrets of the cosmos!

In the course of their studies, the Cappadocians often use knowledgeable assistants, both to aid in their many experiments and to perform necessary research into matters forbidden and arcane. Many times these individuals have no idea that the individual they serve is anything other than perhaps an idle noble with interest in the occult, or a shadowy member of some mystical sect. The less the retainers know, the better, these Cainites reason. The secrets of the universe are not meant for everyone, after all.

Cappadocians maintain a retinue of scattered individuals, each chosen for what they can contribute to the Cainite's studies as a whole. Scholars miles apart may be consulted by letter for information pertaining to obscure research, while shift-eyed gravediggers are paid in gold for shroud-wrapped corpses. A small number of allies are employed to perform experiments and record results, but even then the full purpose of the work is often kept concealed. Since such work is best done at night, away from the eyes of God-fearing mortals, the participants have no obvious reason to

suspect that their benefactor is one of the undead. Poor men willing to risk the wrath of the Church for money or food are chosen to find subjects for experimentation, while scholars with an interest in knowledge for knowledge's sake make excellent sources for research material. The Cappadocians select their closest assistants from those men and women lustful for power in its primal form: would-be mystics or madmen who would dare to claim the secrets of the universe itself. This desire cuts across social boundaries in many cases: Nobles rub elbows with peasant wives and common thieves while studying the night's latest subject. Enlisting these individuals is no simple task, for who would make it plain that they crave the powers of God Himself? Cappadocians often establish or infiltrate religious orders and secret societies, playing the roles of silent, dedicated participants while watching for those individuals whose desires might betray their interest in subjects darker still.

Scholar

Cappadocians often call upon scholars to provide research or information that supports the clan's studies. These individuals need not even be aware of the Cappadocian's true nature, as they provide only sources of information that the master may require.

Artisan

Certain experiments require special materials and devices, and Cappadocians often retain one or more skilled carpenters or craftsmen for the purpose of creating tools necessary for such labors.

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Scribe

Records of experiments and observations are crucial to broadening the clan's knowledge of what lies beyond death. To maintain the secrecy of their studies, the Cappadocians have invented several written "codes" of their own, and require scribes who can read and write them fluently. Ironically, many of these retainers have failed in their attempts to join the Church. Due to the nature of their work, these individuals are often bound by the Blood Oath to keep their secrets safe.

Thief

Bandits and thieves are useful to the Cappadocians, who need individuals mercenary enough to rob graves or kidnap living subjects for the vampires' studies. Such efforts are usually paid in coin, though from time to time a Cappadocian may accept a particularly intelligent or dedicated rogue into her inner circle, reasoning that the thief picks better subjects if he has some idea of why he is acquiring them.

Lackey

Lackeys invariably follow at the master's heels. Ingratiating, self-important sorts, they are commonly charged with cleaning up the aftermath of the experiments and maintaining the Cainite's lair. Such individuals often believe that they will be rewarded greatly for their services, and that they are the master's most valuable retainers.

TREMERE

The chanting of the mystic circle swelled, filling the small stone room, and the high priest raised dagger and chalice over the sacrifice to accept the blessing of the goddess. The eyes of the initiates were turned entirely on their leader, their expressions a mix of rapture, fear, and lust. Richard allowed his voice to fall silent, concentrating instead on the barred door behind him. A voice spoke inside his head, telling him that aR was ready. Smiling triumphantly, he turned and threw back the bolt, pulling the door wide.

Armed ghouls filled the room with fearsome spied. The high priest turned, surprise and outrage twisting his features. He was the first to fall to the attackers' heavy clubs. Richard watched with pleasure as the remainder of the Mystic Order of the Sovereign Moon were driven bloody and beaten to their knees. One covered his head to shield himself from the blows of his assailants, and caught sight of the new initiate, the man who had betrayed them.

"Traitor!" the man howled. "A thousand curses on you, oathbreaker! The Goddess of the Moon will take her vengeance upon you!"

Richard only shook his head. He had heard it all before, times. No doubt the gods were warring in the heavens for the privilege of being the first to torment his existence. He moved swiftly among the mystics, pointing out the ones worth keeping. "Bind them and take them to the master," he said. "The rest have no value."

The ghouls moved with practiced ease, culling those to be taken into the master's chantry and slitting the throats of the rest. The sight filled Richard with anticipation. The chantry would



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grow, gathering its strength, until it no longer needed to fear its many enemies.

Then, the initiate smiled, the real work would begin.

The Tremere's usurpation of Caine's birthright has left them surrounded by enemies in a world already hostile to the followers of the Dark Arts. Caught between the vengeful campaigns of the Tzimisce and Gangrel on one hand and the dictates of the Church on the other, the former mages must use every resource at their disposal not just to prosper but to survive. As a result, members of the clan find it necessary to maintain a tight-knit, loyal retinue to further their aims.

Tremere retainers are almost always followers of the Dark Arts who wish to be initiated into an order's inner mysteries. In the beginning, these followers have no idea that their master is one of the undead, and the deception is made easy by the layers of secrecy that any mystical order maintains. From the beginning, these individuals accept the Blood Oath and swear loyalty to their new master. From there they are evaluated for their skills and strengths. Valuable retainers are kept and may one day aspire to entering the clan as Cainites. The rest are discarded, usually sacrificed in battle with the clan's enemies or else employed as subjects for the clan's studies.

Initiates often hail from the nobility — those whose greed for power or simple preponderance of boredom drives them to seek out the Dark Arts. Fallen members of the priesthood and power-hungry scholars likewise find their way into the service of the Tremere. Once bound into service, these retainers are primarily used to defend the clan from outside threats — gathering information on rival Cainites or members of other mystic orders, defending the interests of the clan in mortal affairs, and deflecting mortal inquiries into the activities of the chantry. A select few retainers, usually ones selected for eventual Embrace into the clan, are allowed to assist the Tremere with experiments and rituals.

Soldier

Initiates with experience in fighting are often put to use guarding the master's lair from intruders and protecting the master's person from attack. These warriors are often transformed by their master's arts to make them into even more formidable fighters.

Scribe

Scribes are often used to make records of experimental rites and the Tremere's ongoing studies of their new arts. Like the servants of the Cappadocians, these individuals are required to master cryptographies unique to the clan in order to maintain the sanctity of their secrets.

Spy

Ever wary of their enemies, the Tremere employ their allies as spies in every level of local society, alert to any threat from Cainites or the Church. These agents are also used to divert the inquiries of mortals who might stumble upon the existence of the chantry.

Assassins

The Tremere do not hesitate to kill to protect the safety of their fledgling clan. Assassins, usually drawn from the ranks

of outlaws, are kept as members of a Tremere retinue for this express purpose. Occasionally they have also been used to eliminate perceived threats from within, as members of the clan turn their paranoia on one another.

TZIMISCE

The riders thundered through the village streets, brandishing torches and cruel, curved swords like the Mongol reavers of old. Their faces were dark and angular, beetle-browed and humorless, and they did not utter a sound as they turned the inhabitants of the sleeping town out into the rutted streets.

Once their task was complete, the riders spurred their mounts around the edges of the wailing throng. Pleas of mercy fell on deaf ears. Women prostrated themselves, begging for their lives, but the eyes that watched them were devoid of pity. Obedience and loyalty were bred deep into the riders' bones. They were born into the world with their master's name on their lips, and as babes they sat in silence on their mother's laps, eyes wide, ears straining for the master's call. They took no joy from their existence but for when they served their master's will

Considering themselves kings over mortal and Cainite alike, the Tzimisce rule their ancestral lands from tall, brooding towers, surrounded by servants bred to their duty by the vampires' occult powers. Seeking unquestioning loyalty and unthinking obedience, the clan discovered the art of breeding the Blood Oath into mortal family lines, literally raising entire generations of servants who know nothing but duty to their masters. Each Tzimisce maintains several of these revenant families, and they provide the Cainite with whatever service her household requires.

In very rare cases, an outsider may be accepted as a retainer to one of the Fiends, though usually only when the Tzimisce needs to extend her influence beyond its normal boundaries. Such retainers are invariably bound by the Blood Oath, and their tasks are clearly defined. Failure of any kind usually results in swift and savage punishment. These retainers are typically used as emissaries to foreign lands, or are sent on specific errands, such as retrieving rare sets of scrolls from noble libraries, or continuing the clan's campaign against the despised Tremere.

Seneschal

Tzimisce leave the petty details of running their sanctum to a seneschal, who speaks with the master's voice when directing the castle's servants.

Soldier

The Tzimisce use many of their revenants to watch over their sanctum and the surrounding lands. They are also sent forth to accompany members of the master's brood on hunting or war parties. Their abilities are often enhanced by the Tzimisce's powers of Vicissitude.

Servant

Tzimisce servants are used to maintain the master's sanctum and care for her experiments. They are expected to attend to the master's brood and provide whatever courtesies any guests might require.

Courtier

In the rare cases when the Tzimisce have interests that extend beyond their borders on a regular basis, they will make use of minor nobles who act as their agents and emissaries. Most times, these courtiers are native to the lands in which the master's interests lie, the better to make use of their familiarity with the land and its people.

The priest raised his torch high at the mouth of the cave and cast a backward glance at the fighting men arrayed behind him. They clutched their weapons nervously, even in the full light of day.

"Peace, brothers, for I am with you, sayeth the Lord," the priest said, hoping that he sounded more confident than he felt. "We have tracked the unholy beasts to their lair, and they must sleep in the pure light of God's own day. Have no fear, for they cannot harm you."

Muttering a prayer under his breath, he entered the cave's cool interior. The passage led back for nearly ten yards, then turned sharply left. Taking courage from the sound of the soldiers following behind him, the priest went to the corner and peered around.

The Damned lay like animals on the stone floor, dressed in rags and filth. There were eight of them, men and women, and across the room their leader, a fearsome devil-creature dressed in the manner of the ancient Vikings. His beard was red as rust and fingerbones were plaited in his tangled hair.

Taking a deep breath, the priest began the Lord's Prayer, the Latin intonations echoing eerily in the cave's confines. Gripping his torch tightly in one hand and grasping his crucifix in the other, the priest walked among Satan's own.

He was halfway across the save when the Viking's eight followers sprang from the stone floor, howling like banshees. They bore the priest's men to the ground, long knives flashing, and in seconds the soldiers' screams were silenced.

The holy man whirled, too terrified to scream, to find himself staring at a young woman, a bloody blade in her hand and ghostly blue patterns of Pictish woad on her face. The rest of the Viking's band circled him like wolves, their eyes wild and unfocused.

The girl smiled. When she spoke, it was in a voice no longer accustomed to words.

"Welcome to the wilderness."

Listening to the call of the Beast within, the vampires of Clan Gangrel hunt and prey upon mankind as the wolf feeds on the lamb. They often lead solitary lives, staking out a hunting ground and killing any who trespass upon it, but some of the wild ones feel the urge to surround themselves with a pack and roam the countryside, taking what they wish from the weak and the unwary.

Gangrel who seek to form packs choose from the hard-bitten survivors of the land's wild places: outlaws, outcasts, and lunatics. Usually these "retainers" are discovered during a raid, demonstrating their skill and ferocity by fighting well against the pack. These individuals are sometimes given the choice to join the pack, and are presented with a grueling initiation to prove their

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sincerity and their strength. If they survive the initiation, they are accepted and trusted as any other pack member would be. Initiates who later recant and try to escape the pack are typically hunted down and destroyed, no matter the circumstances.

Some packs routinely practice the Blood Oath, swearing themselves to their vampire master. Pack members often become ghouls, but only rarely are any pack members taken completely into the Embrace. During the day, some pack members watch over their master while others scout the area for likely victims.

For a moment, the brigands could only wonder at the tall, lean form walking through the rutted streets of Tours. They followed him for some time, making certain that he was indeed alone, without retainers or even weapons. To some of the thieves, it suggested that the man had nothing worth stealing, but Thomas Redcap believed that nothing ventured was likewise nothing gained.

He gave orders to his band, and they circled their prey like wolves, alert to the narrow streets and alleys of the city. Before long, their prey had wandered into one of the city's many cul-de-sacs, a dead-end designed to frustrate the movements of an invading army. Redcap drew out a long, broad-bladed knife and motioned his fellows forward.

It was difficult to make out the lean form amid the shadows of the alley. The pale moon termed a bony shoulder and the rakish outlines of a man's face. He stood quite still, watching the thieves draw nearer. When he spoke, it was like a thin, cold wind hissing and echoing off the narrow walls.

"That's it, my children, come to me." The voice sounded almost paternal, and the figure stretched out long arms in anticipation of an embrace. "I have heard your sorrows. They echo in my ears. But you've found me now. Come to me, and I will give you peace. I will make you pure again."

Redcap faltered. "He's lunatic," the brigand muttered, and the thieves paused. All but one, a man fond of killing who called himself Peter Graves.

Grave held out one hand to the figure, while behind his back he clutched a stiletto. "I've been looking all over for you, father," he said, humoring his victim. "I've come for my gold, the coins I left you. You have them don't you?"

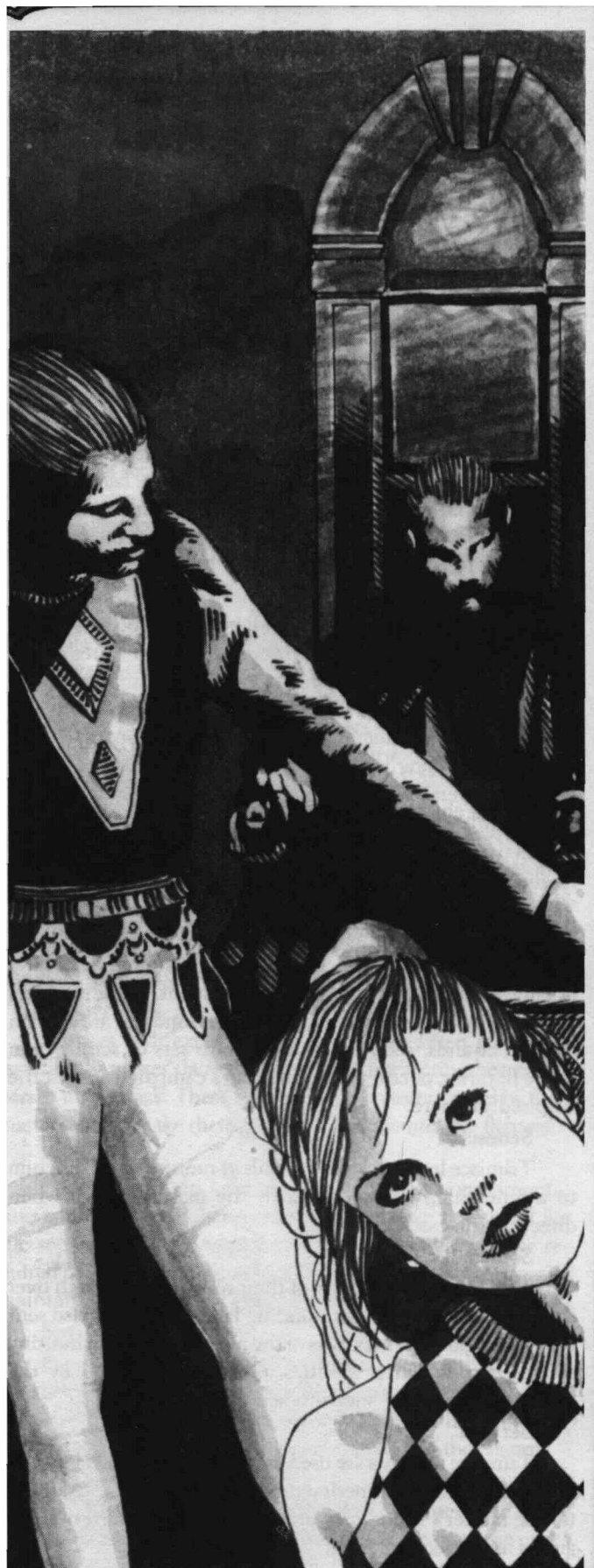
Oddly, the figure smiled. "I have all the treasures of the world, my son, and more."

Peter Graves made a stony chuckle. "That's what I like to hear. And here's your reward for holding those coins for me." Stepping forward, he thrust the knife into the figure's chest, burying it to the hilt. There was a popping sound as the blade separated the victim's ribs.

But there was no scream. Instead, the dark figure raised his eyes to heaven and gave a mournful sigh. "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do," he said, then turned his attention back to Graves. "Your misery drives you to this, my son. I know. I can hear the sorrow in your heart. It is a song I've heard many times before. Many times." The knife still protruding from his chest, the victim reached out a pale hand to stroke Grave's cheek.

The other bandits froze in horror. "God help us," one of them muttered fearfully.

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Graves made to back away, but the man grabbed the would-be murderer's tunic and held him fast. "You need not fear me, my son," he said fondly. "I've been sent to find you. You and all the others who have gone astray, your hearts sick with pain and woe. I can make you clean again. I can draw out the poison that infests you, and make you pure again, white as the driven snow. And then you will help me to save others. Won't you?"

The murderer turned back to his fellows, the terror evident on his face. As he did, he missed the pale figure's other hand, which darted forward like a snake and drove deep into the man's chest.

Bone snapped, and Redcap's men could see the realization of horror and agony on Grave's face.

"That's it," the figure said soothingly. "Let the evil out. It hurts, I know, but don't worry, I can heal your wounds. My blood will set you free." Graves shuddered and shrieked again as his would-be victim worked his hand around inside the killer's chest. "But first we must draw the poison from your heart."

That was when the figure turned his pale face to regard the rest of the men. "Be patient, my children, this will not take long. In a moment, you, too, will be free."

Redcap threw his knife down and led his band screaming into the night.

Madness walks hand-in-hand with all Cainites, as they struggle against both the Beast within and eternal loneliness without. But for one clan, the Embrace begins with the insane, the lunatic minds who claim to see visions in the firelight, to speak with devils or hear the voices of the dead in the wind. To the Malkavians, there is knowledge in madness, freedom in derangement and a world of understanding locked inside the minds of the insane.

For some Malkavians, their lunacy drives them to solitary existences, heedless of the world around them save the ways in which it is important to their derangement. Sometimes, however, there are vampires of the clan who are driven by their madness to take on companions who can assist in their twisted ambitions or who become nothing more than unwilling participants in the Malkavian's dark vision of the world. It is a nightmare existence for any mortal, being forced to bear witness to a murderous creature and its alien motivations. Malkavian retainers are, for this reason, inevitably bound by the Blood Oath, almost as a sort of initiation into the vampire's psychotic world. The tasks these retainers may be called upon to perform are usually little more than participating directly in the vampire's depredations, protecting her from vengeful mortals, assisting in the capture of prey, or serving the Cainite's mundane needs, however awful or incomprehensible they may be.

TOREADOR

Jean-Pierre gaped as he pulled open the cottage door. "My lady!" he said.

Countess Alexandra smiled. "Hello, my pet!" The Toreador swept into the tiny room with a flourish of wine-colored satin. "Your patron has come to savor your latest creation."

The sculptor stared mutely as Alexandra's retinue made their way inside. Servants wearing the colors of Alexandra's household scuttled about a handful of richly dressed nobles, the serfs filling

jewel-encrusted goblets with rich red wine. The liquid melody of a harp danced in the room's smoky air as the pale, gaunt figure of a minstrel shouldered his way inside. The musician's fingers worked the strings with surpassing skill, his eyes closed in rapturous concentration.

It finally occurred to Jean-Pierre that he must kneel before his royal patron. "My...my lady," he stammered, groping for words. "You do me great honor."

"Oh, enough of that, my sweet!" Alexandra said, a darling smile glowing on her pale face. "Rise and show us the statue you are sculpting!" She turned to her retainers, clasping her hands together with excitement. "He has divine hands. You will see. Such grace and clarity in his lines, such soulful expression in his work. It is heavenly!"

Jean-Pierre pulled at the collar of his tunic. "Ah, my lady, you are far too kind with your words, and of course I am always grateful for your patronage. But as to the matter of the statue, you see, you made your commission only last week, so..."

But the countess seemed not to hear. "I knew from the moment I saw his work that I had found a true son of the Greek masters! What fortune that I found him! I have commissioned him to sculpt a bust of myself which will preside over the garden outside the castle walls'. Wait until you see!"

Jean-Pierre cleared his throat. "My lady, there is a problem...."

The countess turned back to the sculptor. "Did you say a problem, my pet?"

Suddenly, the room felt cold to Jean-Pierre. "Er, yes, my lady. I fear you have come too early. The sculpture is not finished yet."

With those words the smile on Countess Alexandra's face melted away like ice on a hearth. "Not finished?" she said, in a soft voice that sparked looks of concern in her retainers' eyes.

Feeling suddenly more uncomfortable, Jean-Pierre shook his head.

"I see," the countess said icily. Suddenly, the noble looked around, seeming to only notice now the squalid confines of the artist's hovel. She pointed at a sturdy-looking chair and at once one of her lackeys leapt to fetch it.

Countess Alexandra settled herself into the chair, and with the wave of a hand her retinue made themselves comfortable.

"Well then, little mouse," the countess said coldly, "I suggest you get back to work. I came to see a sculpture — a divine, transcendent sculpture — and that is what I intend to do. You would do well not to keep me overlong, because I have yet to dine tonight."

Beauty is the expression of the divine in the eyes of the Toreador clan, and they have cultivated an appreciation for it as only their enhanced senses will allow. With the fall of Rome and the spread of barbarism across the civilized world, this clan has nurtured the various arts and kept its treasures safe from the ravages of philistine nobles and peasants alike.

Most Toreador maintain a retinue of the finest artists they can find, devoting their considerable resources to patronizing those mortals whose creative expressions capture their immortal tastes. These Epicurean vampires often take great pains to avoid making their true nature known, fearful that the shock of such knowledge might forever damage the artist's delicate

perceptions. These painters, sculptors, minstrels and poets know little more than the fact that they have had the fortune of being discovered by a wealthy patron, and few are so foolish as to question where the meat on their table comes from.

To assist in their crusade, Toreador often enlist the aid of allies whose aesthetic sensibilities are in keeping with their own, and who share a passion for nurturing creativity. These followers scour the countryside for their master, searching for yet more works of beauty to add to the master's collection.

Dilettante

Toreador often draw retainers from noble families whose interest in art matches their own. Usually indolent, hedonistic personalities, these dilettantes become Toreador agents, searching for other pursuits worthy of the master's pa

Minstrel

Musicians and poets are regular members of a Toreador retinue, frequently accompanying the master wherever she goes. Not only are they valued for the beauty of their music, they also help to keep their master informed as to the news of the land.

Artisan

The pride of a Toreador's retinue are the artisans and craftspeople whose creations excite and inflame the Cainite's refined senses. For so long as an artist can keep the Cainite's interest, they will know devotion and favor usually reserved for royalty. However, Cainite masters can be demanding, always pressing for yet another work to sate their ravenous appetites. Toreador can also be jealous admirers, looking with displeasure on any outside force that may interfere with artists' work, such as the demands of friends or family.

Lackey

Toreador often employ numerous lackeys to tend to their hedonistic whims and provide for the well-being of the master's favored artists. They maintain the master's household, care for her artistic treasures, and are sometimes called upon to care for a temperamental but brilliant member of the master's retinue.

Clergy

As Clan Toreador is inextricably interwoven with the movements of the Church, a number of them keep bevy of monks or lay priests in their employ. Useful for both the relative safety their status offers and for the copious information to which they have access, many men and women of the cloth acknowledge a Toreador master.

RAVNOS

The Gypsy encampment was just to the side of the crossroads, its brightly painted wagons drawn up into a U-shape, with cookfires laid out in the center. Even so early in the morning, the sound of music and laughter drifted over to where the mounted knights sat astride their steeds. One of the king's men, a seasoned veteran named Alfred, shook his head and spat into the dirt.

"Tinkers," he grumbled. "Bad business, my lord."

The leader of the detachment, the young Baron of Greenbough,

frowned at the grizzled sergeant's uncouth behavior. "They seem harmless enough from here, Master Alfred. One look at us and they'll be on their way."

The sergeant's expression was unreadable, and his voice sounded strained. "As you say, m'lord."

The young Baron spurred his horse forward, and the detachment rode up to the edge of the Gypsy camp. Several of the tinkers' horses whinnied nervously, causing swarthy faces to turn their way, but if Greenbough had expected the wanderers to scurry to the safety of their wagons, he was disappointed. The women at the cookfires did not even stop their merry song.

Finally an older man levered himself to his feet and walked over to the knights, moving with an oddly bowlegged gait. The Gypsy held a clay pipe in one hand, and his bearded face was split by a broad grin.

"Welcome, friend knights!" the man called in a powerful voice. "What luck it is to have such fine fighting men to protect us from the dangers of the road!"

Alfred and another of the older knights exchanged looks. The young Baron shook his head. "Good sir, I am afraid you are mistaken."

"Mistaken? Me? I beg your pardon," he said with a deep bow. "I mistook you to be fine fighting men. Forgive me." With that, he turned back to the fires.

The Baron's eyes went wide. "Have a care what you say, sir!"

The Gypsy turned back, "What did I say?"

"You called us cowards."

"I did no such thing."

Well, I..." the young knight sputtered. "That is, you said we were not fine fighting men."

The Gypsy's face was a great show of looking confused. "Did I say that?"

Baron Greenbough straightened in his saddle. "So you did, sir."

"I am horrified!" the Gypsy wailed. "How could I have so insulted such fine men! Please sir, on your honor, you must let me make amends."

Greenbough shook his head. "Now, now, my friend; that's unnecessary."

"But it is, but it is!" the gypsy cried. "Show mercy unto me!" The man fell to his knees, pulling at his hair. A great wailing went up from the encampment behind him. The din was terrible. Even the tinkers' horses joined in.

"All right, all right!" Greenbough bellowed.

"Oh, thank you, thank you sir!" The Gypsy cried. "To make it up to you, let me invite you to break bread with us. My wife is the finest cook in Europe, and my daughters are the loveliest creatures you have ever seen!"

With that the man turned and headed for the campfire, to the jubilant shouts of the assembled throng. Greenbough gaped after them, then after a moment swung from the saddle and headed for the fire.

Alfred shook his head, watching his young commander. "Do you think he'll get around to telling them to get off the king's land?"

The other veteran grinned. "Tomorrow, maybe."

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

Wanderers, rogues, and thieves *par excellence*, the Ravnos are a clan of wild spirits, a devilish carnival no city can long resist. They steal through Europe like the wind, heedless of laws or boundaries, and are gone in the blink of an eye, along with whatever shiny baubles catch their attention.

For all their shameless treatment of outsiders, within the clan the Ravnos cherish strong ideas of brotherhood, honor, and loyalty. With no home to call their own, these vampires place tremendous value on their retainers, those family and friends who have sworn their loyalty to the Cainites, and who travel with them, sharing their victories and defeats. A Ravnos keeps no secrets from her people; what she knows, they know, and they are always free to pursue whatever path fate presents. No clan prizes individual freedom more than the Ravnos, and the thought of forcing loyalty upon their kith and kin is abominable to them.

Outsiders are occasionally accepted into a caravan if they can prove their thieving skills by stealing something notable from one of the members. If successful, the outsider is taken in as a serf, and over time is allowed to earn the trust of the master and the rest of her retainers. In time, they can be accepted as full-fledged members of the extended family, and they will be expected to participate in a retainer's regular duties.

The Rom

The traveling bands of tinkers and thieves called the Rom form a culture and a society unto itself, whose membership is determined by bloodline alone. For centuries they have wandered the length and breadth of Europe, claiming no one place as their country, but rather envisioning themselves as princes of all the land, as far as their eyes can see and their feet can carry them. The Rom are a poor people in many ways, bereft of crops or coffers or armies, so they must stick by one another, drawing what little strength they can from an iron code of honor among family, and unyielding loyalty to their kin.

Because they must travel, and because they can expect no love from the countries in which they travel, Rom families must be self-sufficient in a broad range of skills, from the mundane aspects of cooking and sewing, to creating tools and furniture, playing music, and fighting the family's enemies. Given this diverse background of expertise, a Ravnos can call upon the Rom to perform any of a number of valuable tasks. Rom make valuable bodyguards and spies, as well as colorful and entertaining companions (the better to distract the vampire's unwitting victims). The Rom also cater to the vampire's many mundane needs, keeping her clothed and her lair in good order. In lean times it is not unknown for the Rom to offer their own blood to sustain the unlife of their vampire master. In addition, the traveling bands allow the Ravnos to travel from place to place with a certain amount of safety and comfort, knowing that the family will watch over the vampire's sleeping form with the same fervor that they would devote to their own children. In return for these services, the Rom can be assured of the Ravnos' loyalties as well, giving them a powerful guardian against the night's many evils.



PAWN OR PLAYER?



LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

Romani culture is far too complex to adequately detail here; more information may be found in **World of Darkness: Gypsies** and **Clanbook: Ravnos**.

FOLLOWERS OF SET

"She is beautiful, is she not?" the man who called himself Solomon said, watching the duke carefully from the corner of his eye.

"Yes, yes indeed," the English noble replied, unable to take his eyes from the dancing girl. Her movements were exquisitely languid, serpentine and seductive.

Solomon smiled. "There are men who would give all the riches in the East for such as her. She was once part of a sultan's harem, did I tell you this?"

The duke straightened in his chair. The information Solomon had learned about the former crusader had been correct. When in the Holy Land the duke had been famous for his love of the local women. "I had not known this, my friend," the Englishman replied. "It is a shame we are in my homeland now. The Church takes a dim view on harems, as do our wives."

"Oh, quite so, quite so, Your Grace," Solomon replied. "And with good reason, his abarbaric principle. Still, it is a shame that her dance must go unappreciated. So few in your homeland have the sensibilities for such things." He let the silence drag on, watching the noble with care.

The duke considered the dancer for long moments, his thoughts only partially hidden behind his eyes. "It would be a shame to waste such exquisite skill," he murmured. "I wonder, my friend—"

"Yes, Your Grace?" Solomon inquired, with just the right touch of innocent curiosity.

"Perhaps we could arrange for me to visit your estate from time to time. She could dance for me. Just entertainment, you understand."

Solomon smiled. "I understand clearly, Your Grace. Nothing could be easier."

The duke turned his attention back to the dancing girl, his eyes alight with anticipation. Solomon settled back on his cushions, savoring his victory.

"The master will be pleased," thought Solomon with satisfaction.

The Followers of Set spread the touch of corruption wherever they go, reaching into mortals' hearts and poisoning them with their darkest desires. To do so, they must first win the confidence of their victims and earn their trust. They must make use of pleasant manners, appealing bodies and flawless charm to achieve their ends. Setites gather around them a retinue of seducers, mortals for whom the act of stealing another's secrets is life's greatest joy. Once taken into the Cainite's service, they are further groomed and trained, until few souls are strong enough to resist their allure. Of course, such abilities are short-lived, as the path of corruption eventually taints everything it touches. In time, after their practices rob them of their allure, they are relegated to serving their master's depraved needs until they are utterly consumed.

Setites draw their companions from noble houses and peasant families alike. They are interested only in furthering a mortal's drive to corrupt and control.

Courtesan

Setites train their retainers in the arts of charm and seduction, opening their victims to the urges of excess and decay.

Courtier

Charming and charismatic, the Setites' courtiers pave the Serpents' paths into the courts of Europe, carefully selecting those nobles who are most open to the touch of corruption.

Lackey

Lackeys must attend to their master's needs and excesses, finding suitable entertainment and investigating the natures of the master's intended victims.

BRUJAH

"What do you want?" came the cry from the top of the tower.

The knight drew off his helm and cast his gaze to the castle wall. There were five people looking down at him: three men, a woman, and a boy. None of them acted the least bit friendly. Sir Barrymore took a deep breath and tried to make his plea. "I have come to see Don Eduardo," he called. "I have come all the way from England."

"Then you can go all the way back empty-handed!" cried the woman. Her voice was shrill and angry. "This is a place of learning. Fighting men are not welcome here."

"I have not come to fight!" the knight cried. A part of him wanted to laugh hysterically at the very thought, but he knew that was from exhaustion and fear. "Please! I need to see the don! In the name of God!"

"Your god has killed as many men as he has saved," one of the men said. He looked like a monk, with brown robes and tonsured hair. "That's no reason to open our gates to you. Good day."

"Please!" he said again. "You must understand. My home is cursed by plague. My family has already died, but there are others who might yet be saved! The people say Don Eduardo might be able to help!"

The five exchanged apprehensive looks. For a moment the woman spoke heatedly, shaking her head. After a moment she turned, grabbing the boy's arm and disappearing from sight. The man who resembled a monk looked down, and even from such a

distance Barrymore could see a combination of fear and determination on his face.

"All right," he called down in a tired voice. "You may come in. God help us all."

Since the nights of Carthage the Brujah have tried to bring the worlds of mortal and Cainite together, hoping to wed the exuberance of mortal existence with the maturity and wisdom of vampires to the benefit of all.

To this purpose, Brujah maintain large retinues of mortals dedicated to furthering study and learning, peaceful pursuits that seek to recover the knowledge lost with Rome and continue the grand experiment undertaken in Carthage's

The Brujah might accept any mortal who presents herself to the Cainite's estate and professes a love for learning and contemplation. Eventually, once the aspirant shows devotion and a desire to remain in the household's service, she becomes a retainer, yet still enjoys much of the freedom she held before.

Unfortunately, forces with the clan are in danger of corrupting the dream. Angry at the injustices heaped upon the clan by the Ventrue since the destruction of Carthage, many younger members of Brujah are turning to a more militant stance, believing in freedom by the right of the sword. More and more fighting men find a second home in the clan's ranks, a seed of anger that one day may bring bitter fruit.

Scholar

Scholars are the ~~like~~ of the Brujah clan, and many dedicated retainers are chosen eventually for the Embrace. All areas of learning are accepted by the clan, and no one is discriminated against, due to their origins or social status.

Scribe

Talented scribes perform the task of maintaining the master's extensive libraries, and copying ancient works into a number of different languages to spread knowledge and preserve it.

Soldier

Since Carthage, the Brujah have recognized the need for self-defense, so the vampires have accepted the service of soldiers in the past. Taken primarily from the ranks of beggar knights, these soldiers are expected to fight decisively to defend the household and its members, but to avoid aggression and anger.



Chapter Two: At the Master's Beck and Call

Listen, my son, to the precepts of your master, and incline the ear of your heart unto them

- St Benedict of Nursia, The Rule of St. Benedict

The feudal system is, theoretically, the foundation of Dark Medieval society. Ideally, each individual occupies a particular position in God's "great chain of being" which means that almost everyone owes fealty (service) and homage (duty) to someone else above or below her on the rungs of society's ladder. Nobles are meant to hold their estates and fiefs conditionally in return for their service to greater and more powerful nobles. The fief-holder is vassal to a greater lord, pledging military service in return for a grant of land. In reality, feudal relationships are rarely this straightforward and systematic. Lands are sometimes held unconditionally; landless knights often trade their military service for support within a noble household; nobles who demonstrate public authority sometimes rule in place of those who hold legal lordship over vassals; and in many cases loyalties are based largely on kinship or political advantage rather than on homage.

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Nevertheless, a common thread runs throughout this rather complex tapestry. Regardless of how unorthodox the arrangement, societal relationships in the Dark Medieval world depend heavily on the relationships between servant and master. For the purposes of **Vampire: The Dark Ages** this situation is indeed fortunate, for vampire player characters find their existence both brief and difficult without some contacts within mortal society, whether they are ghouls or slaves, willing or otherwise. Moreover, the Cainite must come to grips with the social pressures of servitude as they affect her own existence. Although Cainite society is admittedly far more egalitarian than its mortal counterpart, a recently Embraced vampire must still reconcile her newfound nature with the feudal relationships to which her mortal life was once bound — such constraints are not always left behind after the Embrace.

This chapter examines the issues surrounding the mortal individuals who choose — or are forced — to serve a Cainite master. Why should an otherwise "normal" inhabitant of Dark Medieval Europe choose to serve one of the undead? The Europe of A.D. 1197 is a dark and dangerous place — perils both mundane and supernatural await the wary and unwary alike at every turn. Associating with a vampire may be the ultimate means of tempting Providence and endangering one's immortal soul. Are the compensations offered by such alliances commensurate with the risks? This chapter also provides an overview of those individuals whom Cainites might coax into their service, and the complications faced by the vampire who may, for various reasons, still participate in the feudal system that permeates cultural and political arrangements.

GOOD HELP IS HARD TO FIND

*I assure my good liege, I hold my duty as I hold my soul, both
To my God and my gracious king...*

— William Shakespeare, Hamlet

If your **Vampire: The Dark Ages** troupe consists primarily of Cainite player characters, they may wish to recruit mortal underlings for whom they undoubtedly find a variety of uses. Which mortals might Cainites select as servants? With whom might they seek to strike an alliance? Cainites are at an obvious disadvantage in negotiating the byways of the mortal world. They can move about only by night, and even then, interactions with the inhabitants of the living world are limited and problematic.

Consider the example of the scholarly Estelle of Clan Cappadocian. She learns of a set of ancient scrolls, retrieved from the Holy Land by Crusaders, and now hidden within the abbey in her city. The scrolls are rumored to contain fragments of an occult ritual that enables the caster to commune with the spirit of one deceased. Naturally, Estelle wishes to examine the scrolls — how might she pursue her objective? She might decide simply to steal into the abbey by night and carry off the prize herself. But would it be so simple? If she had never been inside the monastery before, how would she locate the scrolls? What if the prize were kept behind locked doors? How then could she reach and realize her goal?

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In this particular case, it would almost certainly serve her better to obtain the assistance of a mortal ally familiar with both the layout of the monastery and the location of the scrolls. Perhaps she could coax into her service a monk whose daily tasks gave him access to such treasures! For that matter, why not persuade the abbot himself to help her? In this way, a difficult task becomes immeasurably simplified with the assistance of one whose mortal life intersects with the Cainite's personal goals.

THE FEUDAL PYRAMID

When examining the servants and allies selected by discriminating Cainites, it is useful first to examine the broad categories of citizenry, namely the feudal pyramid consisting of the nobility (usually) at the top, the clergy (arguably) in the middle and the peasantry (invariably) at the bottom, supporting the whole. Some Cainites may choose to work with mortals from only one stratum or another, perhaps dealing exclusively with the nobility or the clergy. Certainly, there are identifiable tendencies among particular clans that might lead us to this conclusion (the Ventruue, for example, would typically choose mortals with noble blood in their veins or with experience in servitude as their retainers, while the Lasombra sometimes prefer those mortals associated with the Church on which they base their clan's internal structure). However, as Chapter One has illustrated, many wise Cainites choose the proper tool for the proper task, and so gather their minions from a cross-section of feudal society.

THE NOBILITY

*Ha, majesty! How high thy glory tow'rs
When the rich blood of kings is set on fire!*

— William Shakespeare, King John

The landed nobles — those born into noble families possessing tracts of arable land — occupy the very pinnacle of the feudal pyramid. From Novgorod to Genoa, from Cordova to York, their temporal powers commonly depend on their social rank and status bestowed by the crown. A monarch may ennoble any subject for any reason, although the most common of course is service to the crown itself. Each noble family holds its lands at the sufferance of its sovereign lord, in return for its promise of loyal service. The noble owes fealty to those nobles above him, and shares some responsibility for those occupying the lower rungs of the societal ladder (although in actual practice such was not always the case). It naturally follows that Cainites intent on influencing the mortal world around them often seek to control, or ally themselves with, members of the ruling class. Doing so permits the Cainite to exert some influence in the affairs of the state, city, province or town over which a given noble may hold sway.

The Greater Nobles

The kings and dukes (or the titular equivalents) of a given realm are by far the most prominent members of Dark Medieval society: Their desires and schemes chart the course for

entire nations and city-states. While media as the modern world knows them do not at this time exist, the habits and actions of the land's rulers are nevertheless not completely unknown to the general populace. The peasants, merchants and artisans who feel the effects of their overlord's decisions every day of their lives do form opinions about the wisdom of their masters, although they are not usually free to express any misgivings they might possess (publicly, at least). Revolts and rebellions against tyrannical kings and nobles are not unknown: Popular discontent, brought about by famines, plagues and ruinous taxation can and sometimes does threaten to plunge cities, even nations, into chaos. Most uprisings of this sort are put down with cruel force by the military might of the nobility, further crushing the spirit of the oppressed and at the same time reducing their means of redressing any wrongs they might perceive. Therefore, there is some risk involved for the Cainite who directly approaches highly visible and important personages: Overtures of alliance and cooperation to monarchs and the most notable dukedoms might best be made through intermediaries, such as the sovereign's trusted steward or the duke's loyal chamberlain.

The advantage of alliance with the greater nobility is clear to the Cainite who wishes to make her will felt in charting the course of nations. There are few more certain methods of urging a nation toward armed conflict, for instance, than by enticing or convincing its ruling monarch to declare the war himself. Again, such practices can be dangerous to the Cainite, as many eyes are turned toward the greater nobles. It is often somewhat safer to work one's will through the largest segment making up the ruling class, the lesser nobles.

Players whose Storyteller permits them to play members of the greater nobility may interact with the chronicle on a grand scale. Armies, navies, treaties, and spies are their meat and drink. The fate of nations may rest in their hands, and their alliances with Cainites undoubtedly affect the nature of their rule. They must take care to keep their alliances with such unholy creatures a deep secret, lest the church in its wrath turn against the crown itself. Entire countries may be subject to ecclesiastical interdict if the king or queen does not adhere to the church's political expectations, and subjects of a country too long under such a ban will almost certainly rebel against their rulers rather than risk condemnation of their souls.

The Lesser Nobles

The largest portion of the noble pie is composed of a country's barons, counts, viscounts, earls and the more powerful landed knights. Such nobles rarely affect national policy by themselves. Thus, they may prove to be more effective retainers, as their lesser station affords them some measure of proof against continuous review. However, they are the primary source of local and regional politics. They rule many of the cities, larger towns, castles, districts and provinces that are the most populous areas of the Dark Medieval landscape,



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making their influence far more localized than that of the greater nobility. A Cainite who desires to change the course of events within her immediate locale would do well to co-opt the strongest and most influential of the lesser nobility in the region. While the results of the vampire's influence might well be felt by the town's populace, often there would be little or no repercussion from above, giving the Cainite more room to maneuver. The Baroness de Rouen, for example, certainly owes fealty to the Count de Toqueville, who enfeoffed her in return for her loyalty. Yet she is for all intents and purposes free to do as she pleases within her own domain, provided she sends her lord the requisite number of soldiers (or the cash equivalent in lieu of their military service) for his perennial summer campaigns.

More important to the Cainite, the lesser nobility is responsible for enforcing the laws created by the crown in their sphere of temporal influence. The justice system, such as it exists in the Dark Medieval world, is entirely in the hands of the nobility: An apprehended criminal accused of murder or a crime of property (the only genuinely criminal acts recognized by most communities) would be tried and sentenced at the court of the local lord. Seldom was there any appeal to greater authority, unless the accused was a member of the clergy and subject to ecclesiastical law (see below). A Cainite allied with the lord of the town could make life particularly uncomfortable for her enemies, both mortal and undead, who reside in the community.

Lesser nobility make interesting ally characters. Their realms are not as vast as those belonging to the crown, and yet their decisions can and do affect the country's policy. The most powerful of the lesser nobility — the counts and barons — often function as a monarch's chief advisors, chancellors and generals, granting them the royal ear and an opportunity to achieve greater honor and riches through loyal service. Players who select lesser nobles may command small- or medium-sized armies, a number of retainers and perhaps even a castle or fortified stronghold. Such characters might be required by the crown to govern a city, a town or even an entire shire in return for military support. They may find themselves judging lawsuits and the fates of criminals, or defending their peasants against the aggression of a royal neighbor. They will certainly be obliged to keep the king's peace throughout their domains.

These obligations and pressures at times conflict with the wishes and desires of their Cainite allies. While the nobility may technically do anything they desire, some favors are not always so easily granted. A vampire may request that her noble ally send her a monthly gift of able-bodied peasants to slake her thirst in return for her aid in dispatching her ally's rival. However, the noble character must weigh such a request carefully. Fewer healthy serfs means a lessened chance of a successful harvest, on which his manor depends. While a few such disappearances might be easily explained, how many must occur before the peasantry suspects some sinister force at work behind the terror and demand that the noble take steps

to prevent more disappearances? This balancing act can lead to intriguing roleplaying situations that may test the skills of even the most experienced player.

Minor Nobles

The least members of this class, it should be noted, are still far greater than those occupying the lower classes of society. These nobles frequently possess title but not land, and hence little wealth. They include landless knights; second, third and fourth sons who do not inherit their father's holdings; petty lords who purchase their titles from the crown; ladies unfortunate enough to be married into this class; individuals who, despite their noble blood, often function only to dress and grace the courts of their betters, often as mere decoration. In spite of their lack of immediate influence, however, they can sometimes prove surprisingly useful to the enterprising Cainite.

The lesser noble's function as servant is, of course, limited by her function in society: Association with a landless knight is unlikely to garner significant wealth, either coin or land, for an avaricious Cainite. The same knight makes an adequate bodyguard, however, or an escort for one of the Cainite's less martial associates. The Lady Marianne del Mar, who waits upon Countess Florina, may not be able to make the waves at court that are the prerogative of her employer, but she still has her mistress' ear and can bring intelligence of the countess' plans to the ears of a curious vampire master. So, too, can she glean knowledge of the subtle machinations of the countess' chief advisors, who often court the charms and favors of Marianne's associates in milady's day room.

Players who select lesser noble characters often find their motivations defined by the opportunity to better their stations in life. The player of the Lady Marianne finds herself deep in courtly intrigue and games of political one-upmanship. Her status as a trusted member of the court, combined with her low visibility, grant her a great deal of leeway in her choice of actions as a vampire's minion. She may find such servitude the ideal method of gaining the advancement she craves; whereas a landless knight may find himself the recipient of a long-sought land grant if he becomes the ally of an influential Cainite.

THE CLERGY

The monks with whom the abbot had been the most intimate, and whom he liked best before he became abbot, he seldom promoted to offices merely for old acquaintance' sake, unless they were fit persons.

— Jocelyn of Brakelond, monk of the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds

Vampires fortunate or clever enough to gain members of the clergy for their retinues may reap enormous benefits. Abbeys and nunneries are centers for both local and national news in Dark Medieval Europe: The abbot or abbess in charge of the establishment is often aware of new developments in local and national politics long before the general populace. Centers of ecclesiastical learning often exert financial and political influence comparable to that of landed knights and

PRIMOGENITURE AND CAINITES

The Cainite who desires influence over a particular estate or region has one overwhelmingly potent weapon in her arsenal: immortality. While a particular noble may prove resistant to her enticements or threats, remember that the noble will ultimately die, and leave his lands to an heir. The feudal system dictates the passage of hereditary lands from father to son, although some cultures permit women to hold fiefs as well. Thus, if Sir Hugh of Gloucester has successfully thwarted all Cainite attempts to control him, his untimely death would mean that his manor and vassals would pass to his eldest son, Fulbert, a decidedly easier target at age twelve.

The custom of primogeniture presents other opportunities to the Cainite. A minor child who inherits a title and attendant fief from a deceased parent is often obliged to wait until he comes of age before enjoying his rightful homage; more often than not, the estate and chattel is placed in the care of a trusted steward or advisor who administers the lands in the heir's name until he comes of age. This same custom can prove troublesome, too: If a Cainite's noble servant were to unexpectedly die from sickness, battle wounds or even murder, his lands would pass immediately to his heir. What if the inheritor of the lands and title is not so kindly disposed to his father's Cainite associate? Worse yet, what if he is the lackey of another vampire whose goals are opposed to that of the former landholder's aspirations?

minor nobles, a function of obvious interest to the shrewd Cainite who wishes to possess some control over his surroundings. The feudal authority of an abbot over the abbey's tenant farmers is no different than a landed knight's authority over his serfs. Landlords sometimes leave their estates to the Church in order to smooth their journey through the pearly gates of the afterlife, and abbeys and monasteries are usually the recipients of such beneficence.

A politically minded Cainite would almost certainly benefit from counting monastic individuals among her allies. The habit of regularly consulting the local abbot or prior on matters of local significance (such as whether it might be advisable to levy a new tax, or how a landlord should persuade the Baron to reduce the toll for use of his bridge over the river) is deeply ingrained among the nobility of Dark Medieval Europe. A Cainite with an abbot or abbess under her sway could exert considerable influence in the town and surrounding countryside, obtain useful information in time to make adequate use of it, and acquire ready cash, or even land, when convenient.

In most Dark Medieval towns, the law of the local nobility coexists with that of the local clergy. All members of religious orders, from the archbishop to the lowliest mendicant may insist

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on being tried in the ecclesiastical court. Clemency and mercy are doubtless more likely to be forthcoming from such a tribunal than from the common justice of the feudal system, and clergy accused of crimes and wrongdoing rarely surrender their right to be examined and tried by the Church rather than by the nobility.

The advantages of a clerical ally generally match his ecclesiastical rank. The information and financial opportunities available to the Bishop of Aquitaine are almost certainly superior to those afforded the Abbess of St. Raadegund's Nunnery. A Cainite who makes an ally of a powerful member of the clergy can help determine the choices made by the largest cities in Christendom, while one fortunate enough to claim association with an archbishop may, through such a powerful companion, exert influence over the destiny of nations. Likewise, those individuals inhabiting the lower rungs of the clerical ladder also have their uses. Individual monks and nuns make useful messengers and spies, and can often gain access, under the guise of Church business, to those places off-limits to most of humanity. A player character priest may find himself courted (or manipulated) by several powerful, rival vampires who seek to control his parish. At the priest's command are a variety of church attendants and perhaps even a knight or two. The nun retainer is largely on her own, lacking additional support within the ecclesiastical community, but may sometimes be more effective despite this situation, rather than less effective because of it.

Player character clerics may run the gamut from wandering friars to archbishops, depending on the scope of the chronicle. Regardless of position, the player must consider one all-important, overriding factor during character creation (and indeed throughout her character's life): religious belief. Does the character believe in the lessons of the scriptures? Does she indeed wholeheartedly subscribe to the truth of the word of God? Or does she harbor secret (or not so secret) doubts and anxieties about the miracles of the saints and the prophecy of revelation? The church of the Dark Medieval world in A.D. 1197 teaches not only that the return of Christ is imminent, but that it may be uncomfortably at hand. The church admonishes that each and every person must be prepared to face final judgment, perhaps no later than the next millennium — or next week!

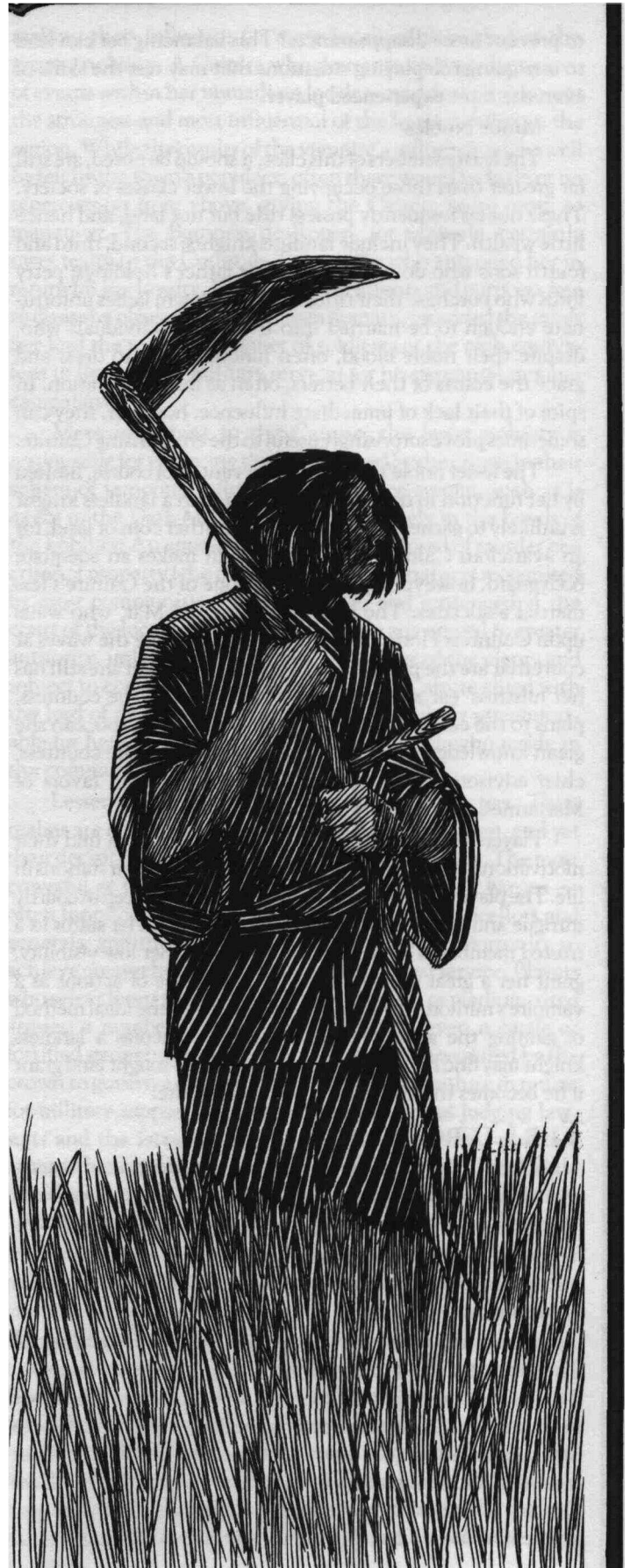
The daily demands of the cloister may oblige a monk to continually question the appropriateness of following a liege other than the King of Kings. The demands of her flock bring such conflict into sharp focus for the abbess: How can she minister to those in her charge and keep company with what may be an unholy monster, regardless of how it may benefit the nunnery? The struggle between the divine and the worldly — a crisis of faith — may be the defining characteristic of a clerical player character, or indeed of a whole chronicle.

THE PEASANTRY

*The most needy are our neighbors, if we notice right well,
As prisoners in pits and poor folk in cottages,
Charged with their children, and chief lord's rent.*

— Anonymous, *Piers Plowman*

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY



A wandering Gangrel may find it useful to scout the paths and byways of the King's forest through the eyes of one who has leave to travel there; an inquisitive Nosferatu might have use for a messenger who can carry notes by daylight; a Ravnos who wishes to know the details of a noble's manor house might do well to ask the scullery maid or the stable boy for assistance.

Though many Cainites who occupied the lowest level of feudal society prior to their Embrace often break ties with it after entering the ranks of the undead, serfs and freemen may still prove useful to the canny vampire. The world of the peasant is typically far removed from that of the nobility and clergy, and therefore largely constitutes its own society, with its own customs, rules and habits. A renegade Cainite wishing to hide from his pursuers for a length of time might find some measure of safety among the masses — a drab, makeshift tunic and a close-fitting cap make an excellent disguise, especially as the members of this class of mortals tend to look alike to those outside it (that is, equally dirty and disagreeable in appearance). The fact that most serfs are forever tied to the land makes them of limited use if a Cainite's needs extend beyond the immediate settled area.

The peasantry also serves as a source of information and news of a more mundane, but no less useful, nature. Both the nobility and clergy employ (or indenture) an impressive number of servants to help run their estates and households. These numbers vary in accordance with the wealth of the master. A small medieval castle might require as many as 20 lowborn servants possibly including a cook, a laundress, a valet, a kennelmaster, a porter and a serving boy. The household staff of a typical castle would be privy to a surprising array of rumors, scandals, personal habits and preferences of the castle's highborn inhabitants.

Player character peasants may find life no less difficult in service to a Cainite master. After all, with few exceptions, serfs can neither read nor write, and many cannot ride. Most possess no skills beyond those of husbandry and farming. Even fewer boast any meaningful talents, and the chance to gain them is relatively rare. The peasant must be humble to nearly everyone else in society, for he is certainly at the bottom of the heap, and continuously finds himself bowing his head to nearly all other people he meets (mortal and undead alike).

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!

— William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

Clearly, a Cainite may choose servants and allies who come from many different lots in medieval life. But precisely which mortals in particular are most useful to the vampire's machinations? The overriding factor in determining an ally's suitability is, naturally, the Cainite's own goal and desire. If Lady Ovidia of Clan Ventrue must frequently enter the darkened streets of a benighted city, she may prefer to be accompanied by three or four stout men-at-arms capable of defending her from the thieves and footpads who lurk in the

narrow, winding streets. When His Eminence Bishop Roderigo of Clan Lasombra finds it necessary to usurp control of a nearby castle, he is wise to consider an alliance with the stronghold's seneschal as a means of reaching his goal. Does the Toreador Prince of Paris desire her court to be adorned with objects of beauty and artistry? If so, she might engage the services of skilled sculptors, painters and woodworkers to create these pleasing works for her benefit. Often a Cainite desires the services of those individuals whose knowledge, skills and abilities are found only among a particular segment of Dark Medieval society. As such, their value to the Cainite in question depends on their mortal functions, and their utility is based upon their individual talents and motivations.

Seneschals

Walter Fitzallen, seneschal to the Earl of Lincoln, glanced furtively about as he selected one of the enormous ledgers from the shelf of his lord's private antechamber. Tucking the weighty tome under his velvet robes of state, he crept silently back to his own rooms. Fearful of discovery, he locked himself within and placed the ledger carefully on his desk. As he scanned the pages for the appropriate section, the silvery whispers of the vampire echoed in his mind.

"We nearly have him, my friend," laughed Nicolette, her startlingly dark eyes dancing with merriment, her long canines sparkling white in the reflected firelight. "Only this, and it is done! When the king discovers how his 'faithful' vassal has cheated him out of his rightful due, how long do you think the Earl's head will remain attached to his neck? When the Earl is dead, you shall have what you wish — your master's title, castle, lands and wife, granted by a grateful monarch. And then it will be time for you to keep your part of the bargain, by redistributing the Earl's fiefdom's among a few well-chosen knights."

Fitzallen found the pages he sought — last spring's taxation records — and set to work with his quill, altering the accounts of certain vassals and tenant farmers so that it appeared the Earl had taken far more than decreed, and pocketed the difference. His hands began to shake as he thought of the nearness of his prize, and he fought to still them, lest they betray the numbers he entered as a forgery. His mind strayed from eagerness to thoughts of the Earl himself, and his hand regained its steadiness. This mould teach his Lordship to insult his seneschal and make sport of him before the court!

Alliances with feudal overlords sometimes prove risky. The lord's subjects, or worse, the Church, may notice changes in his behavior that could prove troublesome for his Cainite master. Thus, more than a few astute Cainites prefer instead to work their will through a noble's trusted steward, or seneschal. This individual is usually the most important member of an estate's or castle's household, and customarily supervises the lord's property and domestic routine. This post is appointed by the lord of the castle, and is sometimes hereditary, such that several generations of seneschals might descend from the same lineage to serve a particular noble family. The seneschal is sometimes a minor noble himself, most often a landless knight.

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The seneschal's responsibilities include presiding over the lord's law court, heading the council of local knights and advisors to his master, representing his lord at the king's court when necessary and, of course, frequently acting as his master's deputy. If his lord owns vast estates or several castles, the seneschal might find himself making a circuit of his lord's properties several times each year to ensure that all is in good order. The seneschal is handsomely reimbursed for his services, and is often granted land and sometimes his own small fief from which he can collect rents.

A particularly large estate or important castle might actually boast two stewards, one for the estate and one for the household. The estate seneschal's duties are largely as described above, and the household seneschal oversees the smooth operation of the lord's personal residence. One of the household steward's most important tasks is the supervision of the household accounts, which contain notes on the daily expenditures of the castle, tallies of the stores and supplies maintained against times of war or famine, and income from the various taxes, rents and fees due his lordship by his tenants and subjects.

It is easy to imagine what a useful servant such an individual might be, particularly if his goals and desires coincide with those of his Cainite ally. Why might a seneschal enter the service of the undead? Perhaps his noble lord is not forthcoming with suitable rewards for the seneschal's loyal service; perhaps the seneschal desires his lord's throne for himself; perhaps his lord has gravely insulted the seneschal, who bums with a terrible desire for revenge. A seneschal who perceives that there is more to gain by association with a Cainite than in loyally serving his mortal lord makes an incredibly useful and potent associate indeed!

The seneschal player character might find herself somewhat limited in mobility. She is tied to her mortal lord's estate or castle much of the time, unless she commands a large staff to whom she can delegate authority. Even so, extended journeys to destinations other than her lord's holdings may not be possible due to the continuous demands on her time. Within the castle walls, however, her will is nearly supreme. Few estate inhabitants, including the courtesans, dare question her word if she is obviously trusted by the lord of the manor. They presume she speaks with his voice, and while they may later remark to the lord any uncharacteristic or unusual behavior, chances are that the seneschal's immediate commands and requests are unquestioningly obeyed.

Such a character may well find herself at the center of her Cainite ally's intrigues. Despite her physical constraints, she is no less involved in her master's plans and schemes. Indeed, she may frequently find herself the linchpin, essential to a plan's success, providing shelter, supplies and advice to her ally's other mortal retainers. Her administrative skills are invaluable in advising her ally on the various details of estate management. The fact that she frequently has her master's ear should encourage other ally characters to treat her with a measure of respect.

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

Scholars

Lady Ovidia paced the cold flagstone floor in agitation, her anxiety betrayed on her otherwise exquisite face.

"Have you not finished yet, Antar?" she implored the bent, wizened man who pored over the thin parchment by the furtive light of a single lantern.

"It is a difficult language, mistress," replied the old man, his heavy Russian accent giving a strange tone to her native Italian. "The tongue of the infidel Arabians does not yield its secrets willingly. Nonetheless, I have almost concluded this passage," Antar said. She continued to pace, casting anxious glances at the iron-bound door that stood between them and the rest of the collegium. She was certain the message her servant was now translating was meant for that fanatical assassin at the prince's court — but did the note contain the name of his latest victim?

"Mistress, I have finished," announced Antar.

"Excellent! What does it say?" Anxiety now made way for eagerness as she peered over the scholar's shoulder at the un/ami-iar, almost snakelike scribbles.

"It would appear that your agents at the court intercepted this not a night too soon, mistress. It reads: 'Greetings O loyal Son of Haqim, in the name of the Most Holy of Holies. Know that our thoughts and prayers go before us and implore His mercy for your safe return. Sallah at last gives his assurances, and thus you may accept the prince's contract. This Toreador from the land of the Gauls who is to be your target has other enemies. They also wish her destroyed, and they have whispered many useful secrets concerning her past nights among the infidels of Kiev....'"

Centers of learning are few and far between in Dark Medieval Europe. A large private library belonging to a powerful feudal lord might boast a mere dozen volumes, while a monastery or abbey might lay claim to a hundred books and scrolls. Books are, without exception, handwritten and thus enormously expensive. However, since few inhabitants of the Dark Medieval world can read, there is far less demand for these precious commodities than exists today.

Scholars — people whose lives are devoted to academic pursuits — are almost as rare as the books which form the basis of their knowledge. Only the wealthy can normally afford to send their sons and daughters to the Church for instruction, and only the most fabulously rich can hire private tutors to educate their children. Thus, scholars tend to be found primarily in religious circles, their specialties likewise being the teachings of the Church. Independent scholars are not unknown, although such sages often dwell on the fringes of society and contacting them can be as difficult as convincing them to lend their intellectual powers to a given task.

Should a Cainite manage to locate such a learned mortal, she would do well to secure his service as quickly as possible, for scholars hold the key to many treasures in the Dark Medieval world. They command languages both living and dead, and while Latin is still the *lingua franca* of the Church, only a scholar can coax such obscure tongues as Greek, Arabic and Sanskrit into revealing their secrets. Scholars can trans-

late otherwise impenetrable books and scrolls, and a few have even begun to make inroads into the mysteries of the natural sciences (at the risk of angering the Church).

Likewise, the Cainite disposed toward study of the occult and the supernatural should seek those mortals who delve into these dark secrets in the course of their secular studies. Many ancient volumes and texts from the libraries of antiquity are yet possessed by men of learning, whose lives are defined by their efforts to extract these books' mystical secrets. No wise Tremere wishes to overlook the scholars who dwell in the shadow of her chantry, for they may be the perfect allies in discovering magical forces with which the hated Tzimisce may yet be brought low and the star of Clan Tremere raised high above the horizon of the present night.

Bodyguards

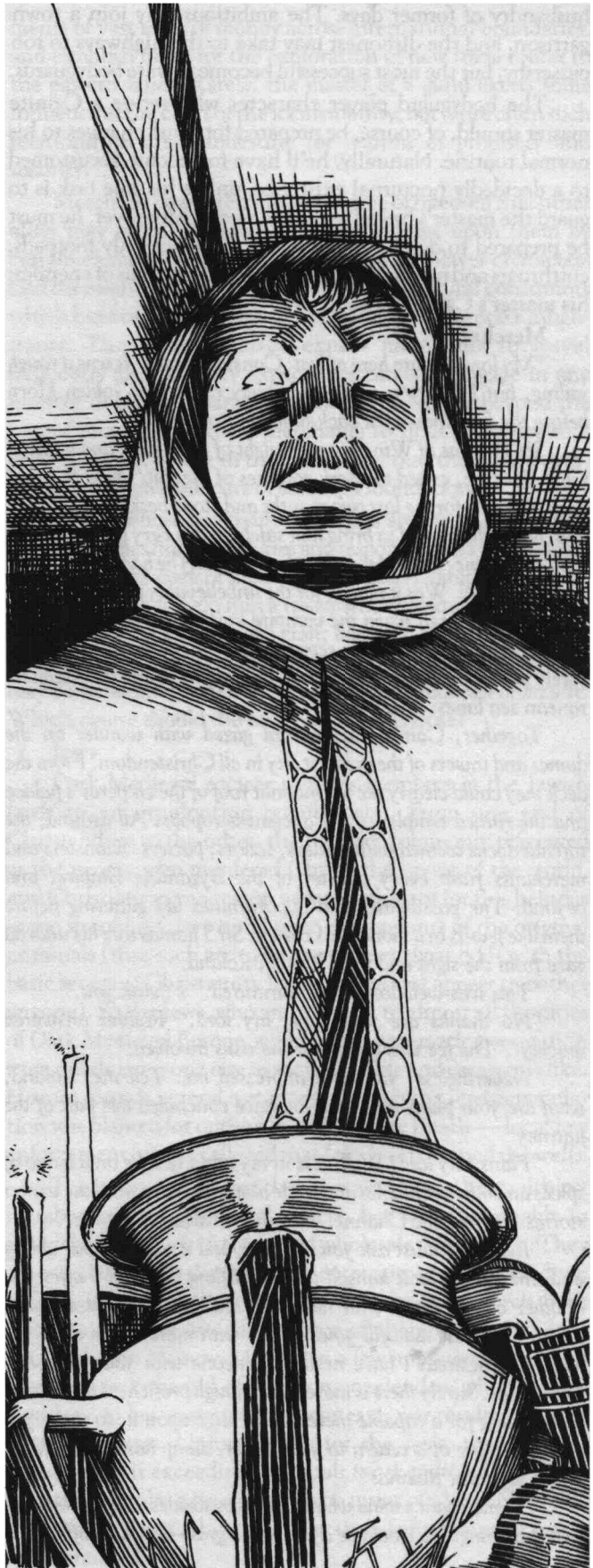
The street was little more than a narrow, tunnel-like pathway between the tall buildings, made slick with the thrown night soil and refuse from the windows above, whose overhangs effectively blotted out any light the moon might have offered. The small party negotiating this treacherous course was guided by a young boy bearing a single, guttering torch and a fearful expression on his callow face. Following him marched a pair of grizzled veterans, their careful eyes scanning the shadows for the merest hint of a threat. Torchlight gleamed off the drawn steel in their hands. Two more of their number brought up the rear, naked steel likewise brandished in ready fists, as they continually examined their wake for signs of disturbance.

In the center of this armed group walked what seemed a young woman whose skin gleamed as white as the drawn blades that surrounded her. Her regal bearing and attire suggested she was one of the nobility, a status confirmed by the jeweled rings on her fingers and the golden circlet adorning her hair.

"Ware ahead!" came the torchbearer's shrill, high voice through the gloom, as dark figures rushed from the shadows with daggers at the ready. The fighting men kept their backs to their mistress and maneuvered to protect her, and the sounds of clashing steel soon echoed through the night. It was all over in a few minutes, the footpads put to flight and the bodyguards victorious. The young woman scanned her servants carefully for signs of injuries.

"Is anyone harmed?" she asked. Her soft voice made these veterans recall the warm sunsets they'd marveled at in the Holy Land during the latest Crusade. The leader of her bodyguards shook his head, and she smiled, satisfied. "It is well. There will be an extra tankard of ale for each of you all next week, and more silver in your purses. Now let us make haste! The silk merchant's door is in the next street."

More than a few men-at-arms might find serving an undead master no less disagreeable than serving any mortal lord. Fighting battles is a dirty, dangerous business, and the likelihood of returning safely home diminishes with every military action. Soldiers who muster out of the standing army often find themselves at loose ends; few retain enough coin in their pockets to begin their lives anew or to return to the



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husbandry of former days. The ambitious may join a town garrison, and the dishonest may take to the highways to rob passersby, but the most successful become private bodyguards.

The bodyguard player character who serves a Cainite master should, of course, be prepared for some changes to his normal routine. Naturally, he'll have to become accustomed to a decidedly nocturnal existence, unless his sole task is to guard the master's haven while she sleeps. Moreover, he must be prepared to defend his master against not only footpads, cutthroats and marauders, but that most dangerous of enemies: his master's Cainite foes.

Merchants

"My lord, we are here at last: Constantinople! It was a rough sailing, but I told you we would safely reach the Golden Horn before the first snows fell back home in London!"

Sir Thomas of Winchester, Knight of the Realm and scion of Clan Ventrue, exited the dark confines of the ship's hold that had been his home for the last two months and stood beside Roland, the merchant who agreed to bring him safely to this very place. For the hundredth time, Roland wondered exactly why he had accepted this creature's gold. Was it merely for the unbelievably lucrative profit, as he'd told himself when the vampire knight first visited him? Or was it because Sir Thomas represented something that had been sorely lacking in Roland's life since he stopped plying the Mediterranean sea lanes: adventure?

Together, Cainite and mortal gazed with wonder on the domes and towers of the greatest city in all Christendom. From the deck they could clearly see the moonlit roof of the emperor's palace and the ruined temples of the ancient acropolis. All around, the torchlit docks teemed with traders, sailors, porters, teamsters and merchants from every quarter of the Byzantine Empire, and beyond. The possibilities and opportunities lay glittering before them like jewels in a monarch's crown. Sir Thomas tore his undead gaze from the sight and fixed it upon Roland.

"This was well done," he murmured. "I thank you."

"No thanks are necessary, my lord," Roland answered quickly. "The fee was ample for the risks involved!"

"Nevertheless, you have impressed me. Tell me, Roland, what are your plans now that you have concluded this part of the journey?"

"Plans, my lord? Well, it is in my mind to take on a cargo of spices and other valuables and trade along the coast until the winter storms lift from the Channel, and then onward for home."

"Indeed? I must ask you: Why should a man of your ability and shrewdness limit himself to such trifling matters? I offer you another choice. Stay with me here, and we shall enter into a partnership that shall fill your coffers with more riches than you have ever desired. I have need of someone with your skills and knowledge. Surely there is more than enough profit here in this city, just waiting for a capable merchant to seize upon it, to make you think no more of a return to your chilly, damp homeland. Well? What say you, Roland?"

The merchant's mind whirled with possibilities. The opportunity was staggering! He would be a fool not to grasp what was offered. A

small part of his mind sounded a warning — there would be dangers, for had not Sir Thomas hinted that there were more than a few of his kind lurking in the shadows of this golden city? Excitement quickly nudged his misgivings aside, and he stuck out his hand.

"I accept, my lord. I am Roland Fletcher, merchant trader, at your service. Shall we go ashore?"

The growing number of merchants in Dark Medieval Europe represent a serious threat to the systematic policies of feudalism, simply because they are not readily classified into feudal society. They are free people who arguably enjoy the largest portion of personal freedom this age has to offer — they travel widely in pursuit of profits, which often places them largely outside the strictures of traditional customs. The result is a wide measure of contempt reserved for most merchants by the rest of feudal society. Avarice is, after all, one of the seven deadly sins, and public pursuit of such a tainted goal must surely lead to a corrupt spirit and possibly a damned soul. As the 12th century draws to a close, however, this contempt grows less common as the merchants begin to grow both in influence and wealth. The most successful enjoy a luxurious lifestyle surpassed only by powerful temporal and spiritual rulers of the day. The source of this increased stature is, of course, a burgeoning international trade. Mercantile concerns cannot be ignored by any ruler who wishes to remain in power for long. Eventually, the successful monarch or noble must deal with the traders and merchants who move coinage and goods throughout Christendom.

Cainites who have merchant allies enjoy the substantial benefits of mobility and ubiquity. Traders move about with such regularity and are such a common sight that their journeys are seldom subject to interference from either noble or priest. Indeed, more than a few rulers deem it unwise to hamper merchants in their affairs lest they reduce the amount of valuables and luxuries (such as salt, wine, silk and spice) made available under the auspices of trade. Thus, the Cainite desiring to travel incognito would be well served by making an ally of a capable merchant whose commercial forays bring him to various ports of call throughout Dark Medieval Europe.

Additional benefits are wealth and information. Merchants have access to the wealthier Islamic and Byzantine cities, and thus reap the economic opportunities afforded by trade with those regions. Although the Ventrue Vivienne may not have any immediate, personal use for coinage herself, what of her loyal retainer, the Count of Cologne? If he is ever to raise an army large enough to challenge the Duke of Flanders, he must have sufficient coin to pay the soldiers he seeks to recruit. Of equal use to a Cainite is the news available to traders and merchants who ply the waters of foreign lands. One of the best methods of communicating with fellow clan members in distant cities is to forge an alliance with a merchant (or a merchant's traveling servant!) who regularly calls on those municipalities in the course of his business.

In cities where the merchants organize themselves into guilds, a Cainite could thereby gain entry into a powerful stratum of urban society. Merchant guilds control the move-



merits of vast sums of money across international boundaries, and establish funds for the exploration of new trade routes to the eastern lands. Rarely, the master of a guild exerts some influence at the court of the local nobility, but more often such relationships are clandestine for reasons of propriety and security.

Merchant characters enjoy a degree of freedom that other allies may envy. Despite the aspersions cast upon them by certain elements of society, most merchant player characters find themselves unfettered by many of the cultural constraints which bind or hinder many of Dark Medieval Europe's inhabitants. The powers-that-be expect merchants to travel frequently and far; they expect merchants to engage in any number of bizarre financial interactions that are beyond the ken of most; they expect merchants to flout authority to a certain degree, secure in the knowledge that they are becoming an indispensable part of society's foundation.

Players whose merchant characters are members of guilds may sometimes find their duties and responsibilities to the guilds at odds with the goals of their undead allies. A vampire may wish a merchant ally to help ruin a trader who thwarts her long-term goals for monopolization of a craft, but what if the trader is one of the player character merchant's fellow guild members? Profit may be sometimes be put in jeopardy by the requests of an ally: Which course should the merchant then choose?

Jews

Dark Medieval society subjects members of the Jewish faith to an unrelenting popular bias. From one end of Christendom to the other, the Jews are commonly perceived as the people who murdered Christ, the savior of the world, and Christians see no reason why punishment for this heinous crime should not be visited upon descendants of the original criminals (that such attitudes are inherently at odds with the basic tenets of Christianity likewise does not appear to bother anyone). So the Jews, who are common to almost all the cities of Dark Medieval Europe, suffer under systematic persecution from nearly everyone else in society, noble and common alike. History records several instances in which the Jewish population was blamed for outbreaks of the Black Death — local law enforcement officials alleged that Jews had poisoned the wells.

The irony is, of course, that Jews are among the wealthiest members of Dark Medieval society, but are often unable to enjoy their comforts in the face of wholesale persecution. They are associated with the profitable enterprise of money lending: Indeed, it is often their sole province, as the Church both forbids and condemns the practice of charging interest on a loan as the sin of usury. More than a few impoverished nobles therefore seek the aid of Jewish moneylenders when famine threatens to lay waste to their estates or war results in heavy monetary losses. Unfortunately for the Jews, their outcast status makes it exceedingly difficult for them to collect debts from those nobles who agreed to the terms of a loan: No court, temporal or spiritual, would hear their suits against a noble who defaulted.

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The Jews, powerless as they appear, may seem inappropriate choices as allies or retainers. The Cainite who desires leverage over a particular noble or clergyman, however, might find it in the ledgers belonging to the local Jewish money-lender. While a noble cannot be forced to repay such a debt, the necessity of the loan itself (and the source thereof) is somewhat scandalous and embarrassing in nature, making such information highly valuable for the purposes of extortion, coercion and blackmail.

Outside this role, Jews are much like other mortals who possess a measure of economic security. They often sponsor lucrative trading ventures by backing a merchant trader and his fleet of ships, offering a vampire the opportunity for monetary gain or transportation. More than one new trade route has been discovered, and a monopoly thereby established, by traders whose patron is neither guild nor crown but a Jew with a head for business and a surfeit of cash.

The hardships they endure create a tendency among Jewish communities for close-knit relationships. Jewish families habitually aid one another in time of need, and support each other when sickness, ill luck or persecution threatens their safety. Such unity may be of some use to the vampire who requires a group of loyal messengers or a secure hiding place in an emergency. Indeed, so interdependent are these communities that a regular correspondence is often maintained between Jewish families living in distant cities. A Cainite may dwell in Munich but desire regular reports on the conditions in Toledo; he may find the means to receive such news by courting the assistance of a local Jewish family with relatives in that far-off land.

The Impoverished and the Infirm

Godwulf, the lame eighth son of a long dead peasant farmer, hopped through the inadequately lit streets of the town. The beggars of St. Swithin's were, like most of their kind, a dirty and motley group of unfortunates. They roamed the streets of the city freely and unhindered, pleading with passing common folk and nobles alike for a crust of bread, a mouthful of wine or a scrap of woolen blanket. Few paid them any heed, save the virtuous who believed that a basic demand of their faith was mercy for the poor, and even these pious souls preferred not to look too closely beyond the customarily tattered, shabby rags and filth-smeared hands common to such unlucky souls.

The boy halted as a bright light suddenly blinded him. Rough hands gripped his shoulders, and he heard the distinctive sounds of swords being drawn from their scabbards. Thieves? Cutthroats? Panicked, he twisted in the grasp that held him but was unable to break free. His fear subsided, replaced by relief, as one of his assailants spoke.

"Ho, now, what have we here?" growled a deep voice in a somewhat amused tone. "A plucked chicken? A thief in the night? Let's have your name, boy. Who comes upon the watch?"

"My lord, my name is Cymric, my lord, if it please you," lied Godwulf. He knew that if he was humble and quick with his answers he would probably be freed soon with little more than a

beating. If he was unlucky, however, they might discover the note tucked inside his ragged homespun tunic. The master would be furious with him if he did not deliver the message to the apothecary! He shuddered at the thought of his master gripped by one of his terrible rages, and resolved to worm his way out of this situation at any cost.

"Sergeant, it's one o' them mangy beggars. He's not worth our time," said one. "Might as well turn him loose."

"Nay," said another, "these street rats are thieves and footpads! They steal anything not bolted down. Lock him up for breaking curfew!"

The sergeant raised a hand to still his troops. He bent low and brought his face close to Godwulf's. The boy could see the many scars which lined the man's face like a patchwork.

"Cynric, eh?" growled the sergeant. "And where are you bound in such a hurry?"

"My lord, I do but seek shelter for the night at the abbey, my lord." Godwulf gestured with a nod of his head in the direction of the monastery. "It is Wednesday night, and tomorrow morning the monks offer scraps to all those who ask, my lord."

The sergeant grunted and nodded to the soldier who held the beggar, and the man sent the boy sprawling to the street. Without a word, the watch continued on its way. Godwulf watched them round the corner and listened until he could no longer hear their footfalls. Picking himself up gingerly from the muddy street, he glanced about to assure himself that no one was watching, and continued on his way.

Lepers, beggars, the crippled, the sick and the insane of Dark Medieval society belong to a special subclass of their own. It may seem odd to include them under the category of "professional help," but there are, no doubt, many urban inhabitants who count themselves professional beggars. While the peasantry are the lowest rung on the feudal ladder, those who exist on the fringes of society are treated with equal parts contempt and fear. Lepers wander freely from town to town, warning others of their approach by ringing a bell and wearing unmistakable insignia on their clothing; despite calling such attention to their condition, however, lepers are largely ignored by the bulk of humanity and thus make excellent couriers and messengers. The mobility of beggars is more limited, as, to subsist, they must confine themselves to cities and towns that harbor charitable individuals and institutions (namely, the Church and those pious souls who provide alms to the needy). Despite this, the beggar often knows more about the streets, alleys and paths of his community than the noble who has dwelled therein all her life, and the advantages this presents to the vampire new to any city should be clearly recognizable.

Players who select characters from this stratum of society can expect their treatment at the hands of vampiric masters to vary wildly from Cainite to Cainite. Some might be sympathetic and treat a poor leper with kindness. After all, what do the undead have to fear from disease? Others may propagate the traditional cultural bias against such unfortunates, treating them

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no less harshly than does the rest of the world. Beggar characters need to be street-smart and fleet-footed in order to survive the rigors of the darkened alleys. The sick and infirm must accept the fact that the only vampires who befriend them may be the even more deformed Nosferatu. What Ventrue prince would tolerate the presence of the refuse of humanity at his court? Such characters should be prepared for continuing hardship.

Criminals

Gwyn signaled to his men hidden in the bracken and underbrush, gripping his bow with resigned determination. Since his fall from grace in the Baron's court and his subsequent banishment from the shire, he had been forced to eke out an existence as the leader of this small band of desperate outlaws. If only the Baroness had held her tongue! Their affair might have remained hidden, and he might now be resting comfortably before a roaring fire in his manor house, rather than preparing to waylay another traveler on the road. This time, at least, the profit would come for the errand he would complete for the strange man who came upon his camp yestereve. How his eyes glittered red in the moonlight! Gwyn could feel the silver coins the pale man had given him, heavy as a millstone in his belt pouch.

The men indicated their readiness. Gwyn could hear the sounds of the horse and harness approaching along the pathway. Closer...closer...closer still...now! He suddenly rose from his hiding place alongside the muddy track, aiming his arrow straight at the rider; his men did likewise. Gwyn gave a shout of warning.

"Hold!" he cried. "Disarm and dismount, or I shall drop you where you are."

The rider reined his horse, causing the animal to rear and plunge nervously. Steadying his mount, the horseman appraised the highwayman who barred his way, noting the contrasts between himself and the outlaw. Where the criminal was lean and wore a mud-stained cloak, the rider was well-fed and wore a doublet of finest crimson velvet. Slowly, the man dismounted and then cast his sword to the ground.

"You need not fear for your safety, good sir," Gwyn said soothingly. "My master only wishes to speak with you at length, after which you shall be put back on your horse and permitted to go your way." The richly clad prisoner's face clearly revealed his astonishment, and he stammered out his reply.

"Who is your master, brigand, that he would return his catch to the sea?"

"For that answer, my lord," smiled Gwyn, "we must hold you nearby until nightfall. All your questions shall be answered after dark."

Those mortals who stalk the pitch-black streets of the Dark Medieval cities can be of inestimable use to Cainites who seek to control the soft underbelly of urban night life. For a few coins, or perhaps even for a mouthful of bread, men can be hired who would gladly commit almost any act of violence on their fellow humans. Burglars, robbers, footpads, cutthroats, forgers, smugglers and fences often operate in small groups or



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individually: Most cities do not have sufficient population to support large criminal organizations. The largest cities may be plagued by several such bands of criminals, and a battle for control of a town's underworld may form the basis of an exciting chronicle for vampire and ally characters alike. Vampires who retain such outlaws may rely on them to turn a tidy profit in stolen coins and goods, and to provide an efficient means of information about the comings and goings of various city personages. Criminals may prove useful in obtaining rare or forbidden goods, or even in smuggling their vampire masters from place to place.

The difficulty and danger in running a player character criminal lies in the fate which awaits her if apprehended. Most communities have only one penalty for crimes of property: death. The hangman's noose or the headsman's block is the only reward a criminal can expect if she is unlucky or unwary enough to be caught. This sort of ally should take care to satisfy himself that his Cainite ally has the means to protect her minions from the long arm of the law. Otherwise, the criminal should consider a different line of work (and the vampire may find herself plagued with a high turnover rate in personnel).

Criminals prowl not only the streets but a town's environs as well. Travelers who fail to reach the city gates by nightfall often find them barred and shut until morning. Such unfortunates must seek shelter elsewhere, or put themselves at risk of attack by robbers and thieves. Likewise, those who journey along the roads and pathways of Dark Medieval Europe must be ever alert for bandits. Rare is the highwayman whose behavior mimics that of the legendary Robin Hood — far more common is the brigand who first slays his victims and then strips their bodies of valuables, leaving the corpse to rot in some thicket. Such criminals offer the vampire a means of controlling the traffic along certain roadways, or of obtaining news and information from various regions.

Player character outlaws who take to the roads and forests may find themselves escorting Cainite allies over long distances as bodyguards-cum-scouts if the chronicle calls for extensive travel. They may find themselves enlisted by vampires interested in clearing the Lupines from a particular stretch of woodland (good luck) or hired as guardians for a Gangrel's forest lair. Such characters should possess a reasonable proficiency with a variety of outdoor skills and should almost always avail themselves of the most convenient long-range weaponry (preferably bows). The life of the outlaw ally is a rugged one, thoroughly filled with adventure.

Artisans

Miguel, journeyman stonemason, waited breathlessly in the pantry of the guildhall. The darkness enveloped him like a shroud. He thought again of the silent grave markers in the nearby churchyard, and he knew that such a headstone would soon mark his own resting place if his fellow masons caught him in the act of betrayal he was about to perform this night. He forced himself to think of the rewards that would ultimately be his through aiding the count. His ears straining, Miguel did not have long to wait for the

quiet, muffled knock at the pantry door.

Taking a deep but quiet breath, he reached out and carefully worked the bolt he had oiled not an hour ago. It slid smoothly aside, and Miguel opened the door a few inches. Instantly, a shadow — for there was no other way to describe it — billowed into the room like a tenebrous cloud. It oozed into the small pantry, and Simon fought to overcome his terror as he shut and rebolted the door. When he turned, the shadow had dissipated and the count stood there, resplendent in his ebony, gilt-edged robes. Simon bowed, and his heart was chilled as the tall vampire spoke.

"Excellent, Miguel, most efficient. I am well pleased. Now return to the feast before your fellows miss you. I shall let myself out." Miguel nodded and turned to leave.

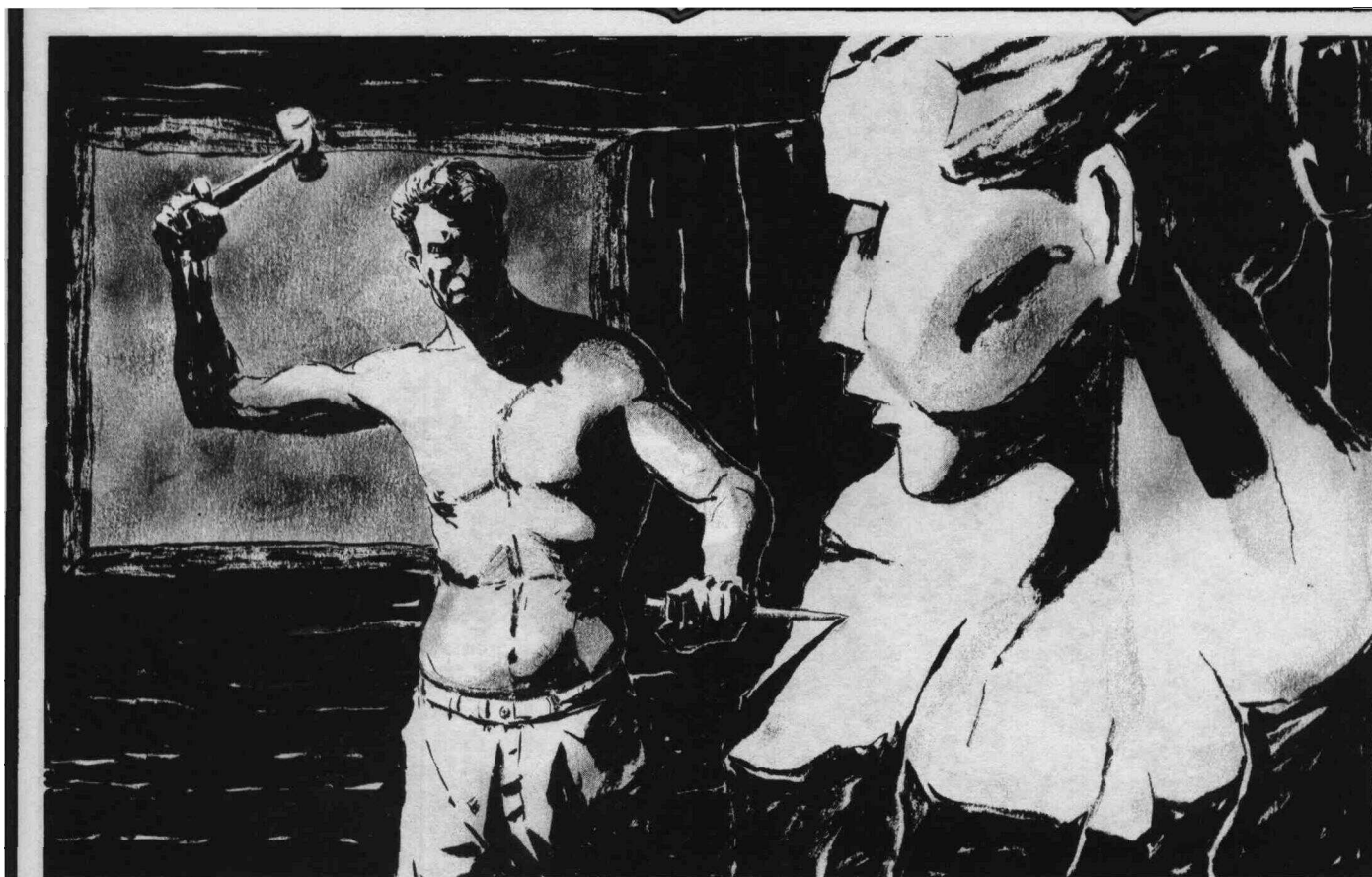
"Miguel." The count's voice halted the young man in the act of reaching for the door to the upper reaches of the guildhall. "There is one more service you may render me this evening. In which room does the guildmaster, Senor Diego, hide the guild's records?"

The skilled members of society — weavers, bakers, chandlers, blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, potters, builders and others—are, much the like the merchants, difficult to classify. Unlike the merchants, however, they are granted a modicum of respect by the remainder of society because of the clear value of the tasks that they perform. The typical craftsman is self-employed, often owning his own shop or market stall, and selling his manufactured goods or professional services directly to the public. Some artisans therefore become quite wealthy, albeit through means less contemptuous to society at large than those practiced by their trading cousins.

The true value of the artisan ally to the Cainite, however, lies not in the skill of his hands (although this may be of added benefit) but in his or her membership in the local craft guild. As early as the 11th century, artisans organized themselves into guilds for the purposes of limiting competition and ensuring the quality of goods. Guilds structure themselves to deal with both external and internal matters; the former include most matters of commercial enterprise, while the latter are concerned with the consistency of wages, terms of apprenticeship and the guild's monetary obligations. Membership in most guilds is separated into apprenticeship and mastery. The apprentice joins the guild to learn his craft from the master, who in turn is obligated to teach the apprentice all the necessary details of the trade and promote him to master after an agreed-upon period of indenture (generally seven to ten years).

An alliance between Cainite and artisans offers the vampire the opportunity for easy travel, but more importantly, affords her access to many buildings and locations in the urban area which might otherwise prove difficult to penetrate. The masons, stonecutters and builders working on the new cathedral are of inestimable use to the Nosferatu who desire to establish suitable quarters underneath the edifice; likewise, the Lasombra who requires free passage into the duke's fortress might consult with the noble's favorite blacksmith, who regularly calls on His Grace once each fortnight to mend the shoes of his war-horses and repair his soldiers' armor.

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Moreover, the artisan's guild provides the Cainite a window on the social life of the Dark Medieval equivalent of the "middle class." The lives of many guild members and their families center on the guild, and it in turn takes an active interest in their well-being. Numerous evening feasts and celebrations are held in the confines of the guild house itself, offering a Cainite the opportunity to meet the members of the particular guild that interests her, and thereby extend her influence and selection of potential servants.

Entertainers

The minstrel's notes sounded sweet and dear. A silver waterfall of music cascaded forth from the harp to swirl and eddy about the feast hall, holding each and every one of the contessa's guests enraptured in its heartbreaking melancholy. Slowly, the notes rose until they formed a tapestry of golden images in the minds of the assembled men and women, and then they abruptly stopped. Silence first greeted the minstrel, followed by hesitant clapping and then thunderous applause. As one, the guests leaped to their feet, cheering the troubadour and shouting their acclamation for his music.

The contessa smiled to herself. How wise she had been to accept the service of this young musician! Her first impulse had been to fling him from her hall at the brashness of his entreaties, or to drain him dry and leave his husk atop the castle walls for the carrion crows. His pleas, however, stirred something deep and hidden within her, and she granted his request for but a few moments of her time. What matter a few moments to one who is

eternal? Evenings such as this were the result. Her revels were now the toast of the city, gaining for her entry into the upper echelons of polite society. Even now, the bishop stood within her hall, his ear softened by the minstrel's lovely performance and ready to receive the request carried by her own dulcet tones.

Sophisticated Cainites may cull servants from the small group of talented individuals whose skills include entertaining their fellow mortals. Jesters, troubadours, bards, skalds, mummers, pantomimes, jugglers, acrobats and musicians add color to a sometimes drab day-to-day existence. Why should a Cainite not add a few to her household retinue in order to entertain her guests? Consider the prestige and status conferred on Lisl of Clan Toreador by her peers when she commands her new, captive nightingale, Stefano, to play his latest composition in testimony to Lisl's eternal beauty.

Entertainers add interest and diversion to feasts and celebrations. Ally characters who fall into this category may find themselves recipients of generous patronage and better than average treatment from an appreciative Cainite, especially if their skills help the vampire impress important societal figures. Those performers who serve well, particularly if they show some wit or wisdom, may one night be elevated to a more lofty position. The ally who begins his career as Lord Benedict's troubadour may discover an opportunity to be of significant service to His Lordship, and so earn both favor and position in the nights to come.

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LAW AND ORDER

It has been noted that the nobility usually assumes the duty of enforcing the laws of the land. The complexity of the legal system depends on the country and desire of the nobility. Normally, such responsibility is one of the many conditions under which the noble holds his lands from the crown: Enforcement of the king's law is part and parcel of the typical feudal oath to the monarchy. While nobles (or, in some cases, the clergy) may hear the case against accused criminals, they rarely pursue and apprehend them personally, for they have many concerns and cares which press upon their time. It is thus the custom in most countries for the ruling noble to appoint some officer charged with enforcing the law. The exact title depends, of course, on the nation in question, but the most familiar term is probably that of sheriff (or shire reeve), common in Britain at this time. The sheriff's charge is, as one might expect, to bring accused criminals to trial before their liege lord. The sheriff normally appoints a number of assistants (undersheriffs or bailiffs) to assist him in this task. Knights likewise serve the nobility in this way, capturing those who have allegedly committed crimes and bringing them to the court for trial.

The sheriff who chooses to ally himself with a Cainite can be of immeasurable service in thwarting the vampire's mortal and immortal enemies. The forces of law and order provide the Cainite with a means to harass, imprison and perhaps even eliminate the mortal servants of her rivals. In many areas, the law

may question and hold citizens without cause. The fact that the officer is the appointed agent of the Prince of Novgorod is sufficient reason to round up any and all citizens and imprison them until it pleases him or his lord to release them. The ability to disturb and inconvenience a Cainite's vampiric foes should not be overlooked. What recourse does Prince Lombard have when the sheriff's men demand his presence for questioning at the earl's court—next Tuesday at the hour of noon? For the economically minded Cainite, the mortals who uphold the law present yet another opportunity for larceny, since they are frequently charged with the unpopular task of collecting the nobles' taxes.

FIELD AND STREAM

Outside urban areas one finds the deep, forbidding forests of the Dark Medieval world, the haven of savage Lupines and other fell beasts. But this wilderness is not entirely devoid of mortal life, for despite its desolation the forests still supposedly belong to some temporal or spiritual authority. In the woods a Cainite might find a few freeholders who make their living by cutting wood, burning charcoal, hunting wild animals or trapping beasts for their fur. These individuals may offer shelter to a wandering or lost Cainite, providing her with a temporary haven and a source of nourishment before she continues on her journey.

Perhaps of more interest to Cainites are those wooded areas that belong exclusively to a member of the nobility. These places are subject to a separate justice, quite apart from that found in towns

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and cities. Forest law is enforced by gamekeepers and huntsmen, both employees of the noble landlord. It is customarily swift, harsh and cruel. The two most common offenses are poaching game and cutting down living trees for fuel or lumber, crimes punishable by severe maiming or death. If the accused is a nobleman, or for some reason cannot be brought to justice, he may be declared an outlaw and banished from the noble's fief forever. One of the surest ways to inconvenience a fellow Cainite is to implicate her servants or allies in a clear case of poaching, something most easily accomplished by forging an alliance with the local gamekeeper.

MOTIVATION AND REWARDS

The shadows cast by the single, flickering candle set the darkness of the antechamber dancing like the mummers on the feast of St. Swithin. The young, richly garbed man's ears strained to hear the distant tolling of the monastery bell. There, faint and high like the call of a lone owl as it floats ghostlike over the moonlit fields: Matins, the dead of night. It shouldn't be long now, a few more minutes, perhaps....

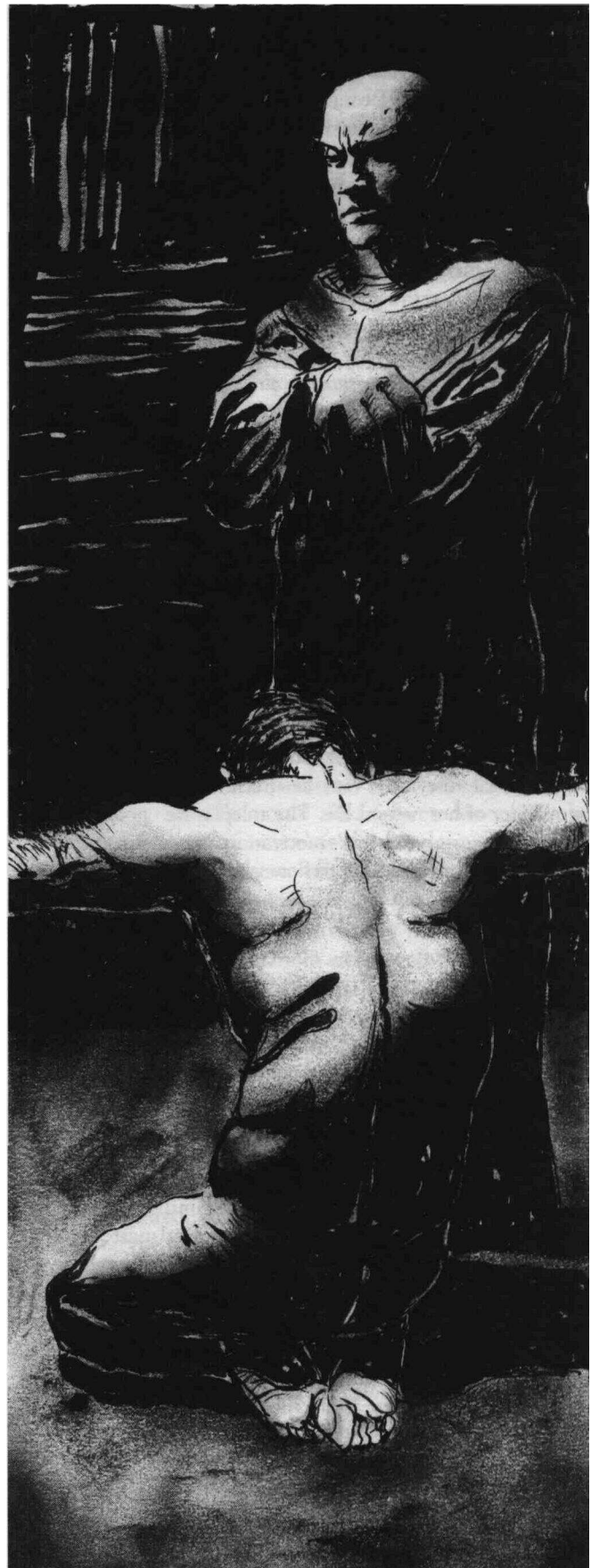
"My Lord Viscount." The dry, papery voice rustled behind him, startling him. He whirled to face his visitor, who stood limned in the candlelight. Vincent had at last arrived, a misshapen hulk who resembled nothing so much as one of the gargoyles that adorned the eaves of the viscount's castle. The Cainite was dressed, as always, in a ragged homespun tunic stained with travel: The sleeves were far too short to cover his strangely elongated arms, which ended in ham-sized hands tipped with dirt-encrusted nails. The young noble felt the familiar, involuntary shudder at the sight of his ally. The only thing that gave him comfort was the golden cross which always hung about the thing's neck. Think of Justine, he admonished himself, see her lovely face twisted by the cruelty of her tormentors, think of her body now rotting in its shroud in the churchyard not a half-league from here....

"I trust you have news, Henri," rasped the grotesque being. How did he get in here without alerting the guards? "Is it about our friend?" The viscount swallowed hard before answering.

"I — yes, yes Vincent, it is indeed. Forgive me, I — I did not hear you enter. Ah, yes, thank you for coming so quickly." Henri Atton, Viscount of Carcassone, lord of over a thousand vassals and undisputed master of the valley silently wished he had never taken up with this... thing. His immortal soul was in grave peril, he was certain of it. If Abbot Anselm were ever to learn of this desperate pact, all the silver in Henri's coffers would not save him. He drew himself up to a more regal height, more to bolster his own confidence than to impress his guest.

"One of my couriers has returned from afield. He brought news of Chevalier Philip of Coucy. It seems the knight has seen fit to place his eldest son, now just eight years old, in the care of the monastery of St. Antoni the Pious for his religious instruction. I thought you would wish to know." The viscount was both relieved and horrified to see the thin, cruel smile split the monster's hideous face, exposing the elongated incisors and snaggle-toothed grin that haunted his dreams.

"I agree with Your Grace: Young Philip's arrival provides us with an opportunity not to be missed. I shall make the arrangements. Tomorrow, at an hour after Prime, look outside your stable gate for



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a leper wearing a gray homespun hood and a cross like my own. He will provide you with the details of your part in this endeavor." Vincent chuckled, a nerve-shredding sound, when he saw the disturbed look on the viscount's face. "Never fear, Henri, you shall have your vengeance on the chevalier soon enough. A little patience is oil that is required — and your cooperation, of course."

The viscount managed a wan smile for the first time since the Cainite's arrival, his anxiety quickly diminished by the thought of the chevalier suffering — as Justine had suffered. He imagined the chevalier's grief and sorrow at the horror that would soon befall his house, and only restrained himself with difficulty from rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"Indeed. It shall be as you command, Vincent." The viscount bowed, but his misshapen visitor was already gone. Henri moved to the chamber door and hesitantly opened it, only to be greeted by what he'd expected: an empty passageway leading into the bowels of his castle.

How does a Cainite convince an ally to enter her service? The answer lies in the individuality that defines each mortal: The personal desires, hopes, beliefs and goals behind each choice a person makes dictate how that person may find himself serving a vampire. The Storyteller is strongly encouraged to carefully examine the motivations of each ally with whom her Cainite player characters associate, and to craft each with an eye toward their inner mental and emotional workings. Allying with a Cainite is quite likely the strangest and most harrowing situation any mortal ever experiences, and it leaves its mark on the mortal's mind and heart. The ally's faith may be put to the test through her association with the Cainite, or it may be irretrievably shattered for the remainder of her natural life. The roleplaying opportunities offered by focusing on an ally's motivations are a rich mine of ideas that can occupy many chapters or even entire chronicles.

Frequently, the motivation behind an alliance is bound up in the perceived rewards therein; conversely, the rewards of service depend largely on motivation. The merchant who works with a vampire in order to increase his chances of economic prosperity has both motivation and reward tied up in one element: wealth. Some motivations, and their corresponding rewards, may be far more complex and subtle, making for equally intriguing scenarios.

SENSE OF DUTY

Some vampires, notably the Cappadocians and the Tzimisce, make extensive use of entire families who long ago accepted their role as servants to their undead masters. Yet not all servants and allies are ghouls: What of those whose personal sense of duty requires them to serve a rather nontraditional master, perhaps despite their better judgment or desire to the contrary? Consider, for example, the circumstances in which a young squire might find himself. His family agrees to allow him to become a page in a knight's household, and on the night he meets his new master he takes the squire's oath of fealty to serve his lord faithfully until such time as he is released from service. The squire knows that his eventual knighthood depends entirely on the whim of his new lord.

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Soon, it becomes apparent that his new master is no ordinary knight. What landed noble shows himself only after the set of sun? What knight ever displayed such inhuman feats of strength or preternatural senses? These questions and fears grow in him until, one fateful evening, he learns the truth. Moreover, the Cainite reveals the squire's family was fully aware of the knight's true nature when they apprenticed their son. Apparently, the arrangement stems from a prior family obligation, an oath of fealty taken by an ancestor to serve the knight's household faithfully, forever. The young squire thus finds himself facing an unenviable choice: Break his oath and forego any hope of a knighthood for the rest of his life, or struggle with his fear and honor his family's obligation to serve this strange being.

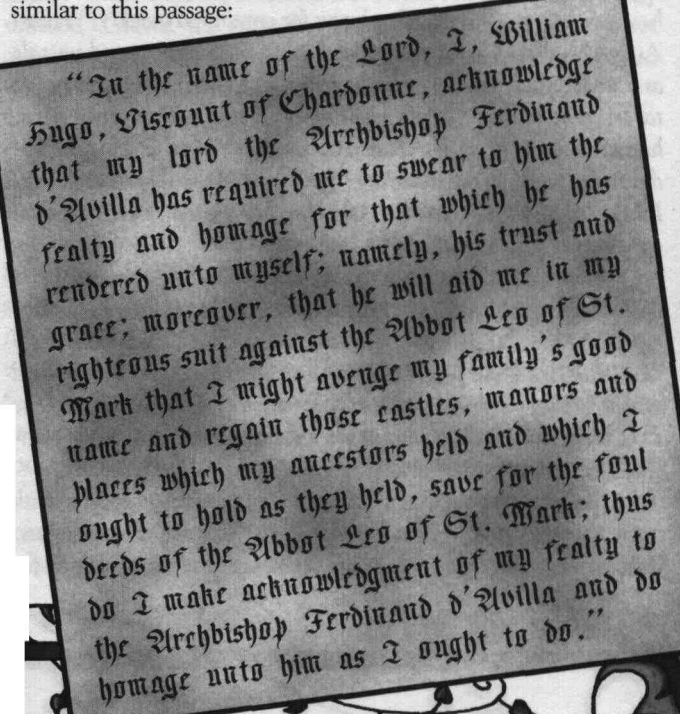
If the Cainite subscribes to the Road of Chivalry, is service to him truly any worse than to any mortal noble, whose whims and desires could be equally strange to the young squire? If the young man can steel his nerve and follow his sense of duty, he might well gain far more from the vampiric knight than any mortal master could hope to offer him. Then again, if the knight proves a cruel or sadistic individual, the squire's oath may crumble in the face of supernatural wrath.

Consider a similar situation from the reverse point of view: What of the Cainite who still feels the familiar pressures of feudal obligation? The seneschal Embraced by a vampire now serves two masters, one mortal (the lord of the castle), one undead (the Cainite) — where do his loyalties now lie? How does his newly Embraced state affect the nature of the feudal relationship between him and his former lord? How does his sense of duty to his old master affect his relationship to his Sire?

THE OATH OF FEALTY

Not all servants and allies take the Blood Oath. However, feudal society features a potent oath of its own: the swearing of fealty to one's liege. The mortal who makes such an oath to his Cainite master may or may not be trusted to keep it depending on his inner nature. A typical oath of fealty is

similar to this passage:



"In the name of the Lord, I, William Hugo, Viscount of Chardonne, acknowledge that my lord the Archbishop Ferdinand d'Avilla has required me to swear to him the fealty and homage for that which he has rendered unto myself; namely, his trust and grace; moreover, that he will aid me in my righteous suit against the Abbot Leo of St. Mark that I might avenge my family's good name and regain those castles, manors and places which my ancestors held and which I ought to hold as they held, save for the souls of the Abbot Leo of St. Mark; thus do I make acknowledgment of my fealty to the Archbishop Ferdinand d'Avilla and do homage unto him as I ought to do."

FEAR

Despite the lip service given to the sanctity of the immortal soul and the devotion of the individual to the Church's teachings, it is difficult to overcome the primal fear of death when confronted with its very personification in the form of a powerful Cainite. Some mortal servants may surmise that their master is indeed a minion of Hell (particularly if the Cainite follows the Road of the Devil), but may conclude that it is still better to serve her than to die untimely and unshriven at the hands of one of the Devil's fearful pawns! The average Cainite displays powers clearly superior to those of the average mortal; the more aged and powerful vampires are capable of ripping apart many of their servants without apparent effort. It may not always be a simple matter to refuse the requests of such a creature! Remaining alive while serving a Cainite always offers the servant a future opportunity to escape, and, eventually to perhaps even redeem his soul. Escape from such servitude might be the central theme of many chapters or even an entire chronicle. But can the soul of even a contrite individual be redeemed once steeped in the blood and vile acts a servant might commit in obeying the dictates of her undead lord?

There are fears that are arguably worse than concern for one's personal safety. Many Cainite lords hold sway over their own fiefs and domains, and could snuff out the fragile lives of the servant's family as easily as he might blow out a candle. What might a servant dare to do when the lives of his family are at stake? The Cainite master could also ruin her servant socially, politically or financially, making death a preferable alternative. What choice is then left but to serve?

In time, a servant may come to fear others more than she fears her Cainite master. Once one aids the Devil, there may be no turning back, as the spiritual authorities would probably show scant mercy or pity to one who has performed service for the Devil's own. Regardless of how repentant or remorseful one might seem, the danger of corruption is so great that the Church would doubtless put so tainted a soul to the flame. Caught thus between God and the Devil, might not a mere mortal resolve to trust in luck or fate and carry on as best he can?

Finally, if a servant's vampire lord shows her even a hint of the terrible things which lurk just beyond — or within — the walls of her supposedly "safe" city, might she not then look to her master for protection against these horrors? Who could protect her from the ravaging Lupines but perchance her own mistress? Who could stave off the machinations of the undead fiends, except perhaps another one of their number? A servant may thus eventually conclude that she is far better off serving her master faithfully and loyally than escaping to the previously unknown evils that await in the darkness.

POWER

Alliance with a Cainite can bring great power to the mortal ally. Beyond the possibility of an eventual Embrace, there is the immediate assistance that could be rendered by such an ally. Consider the plight of the average serf who is less

than nothing to his mortal overlord, but who might become a valued and protected ally if he were fortunate enough to serve the right Cainite. Imagine his new sense of purpose as an entirely new world opens before him: Through service to the undead, he might at last realize his dream of enjoying some measure of authority over his betters.

Such benefits are not restricted to the lower classes alone. Political advantage is the sustenance of the ambitious noble, and the night is rife with possibilities for advancement and achievement when one is the trusted ally of the undead. The earl who covets his lord's fine castle and beautiful wife may well find both within his immediate grasp if he only agrees to assist the Lady Darya with the troublesome abbot (whom the earl never liked anyway). The gamekeeper for the Baron of Wessex may find that his men have far more success in tracking and capturing poachers once he agrees to turn a blind eye while the stranger known as "Guy of Gangrel" (probably a French province) takes a few deer now and then.

The advancement of a political agenda of greater scope could be realized by those greater nobles who find themselves willing to ally with a Cainite. The Doge of Venice may find his suggestions to the Papal court more readily accepted once he makes a pact with Don Armando of Castille, the Bolognese Bishop of Clan Lasombra.

LOVE

Love between Cainite and mortal is not unknown, although the course of such passion is habitually fraught with uncertainty at best. A mortal who falls in love with the sculpted perfection of a Cainite's features and the intoxicating sensation of her Kiss might well find himself willingly serving a creature he might otherwise flee. So too the Cainite who finds himself enraptured by the silky, warm touch of a mortal's living flesh might see his servant anew as the object of desire and passion. It is often written that those who love may dare and suffer much for the sake of their passion: How deeply must one love to willingly assist one of the Damned?

Passion may disguise itself in many forms. A mortal, devoted to the word of God, may glimpse by night one so beautiful that she must, surely, be not only good but holy. God would not create such loveliness without gifting it with an equally lovely nature, would He? And so the hapless servant is willingly ensnared, voluntarily worshipping the object of his religious fervor and offering his own vitae for her blood sacrament. How does he react if his faith ultimately drives away the angelic image that haunts his every sleeping and waking moment? If he ever learns the truth, what then becomes of his beliefs? Or does his mind rebel at such an incomprehensible dichotomy between the perfect vision and her diabolical nature?

It is worth recalling that love may also inspire more base emotions, such as jealousy, envy, pride and anger. What of the servant who fulfills her master's every desire out of a deep and abiding passion, only to see the object of her love continually

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turn his attentions to those less deserving, less faithful than herself? Her love may one night sour and spur her to betray her master.

REVENGE

A thirst for vengeance can be an overwhelmingly powerful motivation for even the most unseemly of actions, including endangering one's soul, if it brings closer the cold taste of revenge. If the object of the mortal's vengeance is perchance a foe he cannot himself hope to defeat—a noble who occupies a higher position in the feudal hierarchy, a thieving priest beyond the reach of the civil courts, or a marauding brigand who evades capture like the wind—the chance is good indeed that the mortal might accept an offer of alliance from one with the obvious power to deal with such a tormentor. The enemy of my enemy is, after all, sometimes my friend.

Perhaps the most intriguing application of this motivation may be found in a mortal, wronged by a Cainite but allowed to live with the knowledge of who bested him. Judging that only fire may fight fire with any hope of victory, the mortal seeks out and offers his services to another Cainite, in exchange for aid against his enemy.

Vengeance need not be a desire focused only on an individual. An ally may burn with the desire to vent his spleen against the forces and institutions which oppress him: The Church, the crown, a guild or even an entire nation may occupy the throne of revenge in the mind of one who believes himself wronged. Such a mortal might well take up with a Cainite whose goals coincide with his own, and serve that master because of the wellspring of hate that swells eternally in his heart.

IGNORANCE

Many of the retainers a Cainite might employ could be completely unaware of his true nature. The vampire lord of a castle may display a penchant for midnight hunts and evening feasts, but what are the foibles of the nobility to the scullery lad or the baker's helper? Their lot in life is burden enough without intentionally meddling in the affairs of their betters. The easily duped, dull-witted, naive and self-deluded may well fail to recognize the reality which confronts them nightly.

SECURITY

The Dark Medieval world is clearly one of danger: Murderers and footpads prowl the shadows, disease and death stalk the land like twin wolves, death lays low the just and unjust without discrimination. Many nobles can barely protect their lands from marauders and invaders, not to mention political upheavals. Some allies may come to believe that serving their Cainite master affords them far greater safety and stability than they could otherwise hope for from any mortal lord. Moreover, the promise of the Embrace — the ultimate security against death and disease — may sway an ally who might otherwise eschew such an alternative.

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INSANITY

Those who have taken leave of their senses may not make the most trustworthy of servants, but it must be admitted that their mental infirmity would account for their willingness to carry out the commands of the undead.

DESPERATION

For some mortals, there is nowhere to go but upward. A servant who customarily begs for scraps behind the abbey kitchens may find his belly filled each night through service to a sinister master. Those desperate enough may be willing to deal with the Devil himself if it means food, shelter and a warm bed.

DEVIL-WORSHIP OR CORRUPTION

The ally may prefer to give allegiance to Lucifer rather than to Christ. He may be an infernalist or a diabolist who makes a pact with dark powers in return for their guidance, service and power. A Cainite on the Road of the Devil might seem like the answer to the devil-worshipper's prayers, a physical manifestation of Hell's power and might — the enterprising Cainite might easily play on the beliefs and desires of such mortals, convincing them that he is indeed Hell's messenger and they his loyal minions.

SERVITUDE'S END

What happens to a vampire's ally when...
...her master dies?

Some servants no doubt count themselves the recipients of a lucky escape from eternal damnation if their Cainite master suffers the Final Death. Perhaps Almighty God heard those prayers, those entreaties for deliverance after all. The more willing the servant, the more affecting and inconvenient the violent loss of her master is. What of those fateful, passionate romances betwixt vampire and mortal? When the mortal lover is left behind, what might grief drive her to do — take her own life, or perhaps seek vengeance on whoever slew her beloved? An entire chronicle might be constructed around the fate of allies whose undead master suddenly dies, leaving them to fend for themselves with the horrible knowledge of what awaits in the Long Night.

...her master enters torpor?

The Cainite who reveals her true nature to her allies may wish to apprise them of what may occur should she involuntarily enter torpor. Otherwise, her servants may presume her dead and bury her corpse—or worse, have it cremated! An interesting tale might be woven around a castle near the characters' dwelling, which has hovering about it an evil reputation. Perhaps the townsfolk believe it to be haunted, or even the lair of a demonic fiend. Investigating, the characters discover that the mortal ruler of the castle merely holds the place in trust for its true master, a Cainite in the arms of torpor, sheltered in an almost-forgotten undercroft beneath the castle's walls.

...her master mistreats her?

More than a few Cainites are less than kind in dealing with their chosen servants. Acts of cruelty, violence and worse are common, depending on the nature and Road of the vampire in question. Should a Cainite mistreat her servant, what are her servant's options? Logically, they are few indeed. Can one hope to run away and successfully hide from a being whose senses extend beyond those within the normal scope of human beings? Is it possible to escape a master who controls the castle guard, or who employs supernatural servants? Perhaps the servant may seek retribution by attempting to do her mistress harm, or by betraying her to an enemy. Such rebellion, even inspired by mistreatment, may carry even more dire consequences if these attempts fail or, worse, are discovered by their intended victim. The former mistreatment may be nothing in comparison to the ire of a vampire betrayed!

...her master abandons her?

This situation is akin to that presented by the master's sudden death: The servant abruptly finds herself adrift, free from the watchful eye of her mistress, with a myriad of possible decisions facing her. Should she depart her mistress' household or should she remain? There is one important consideration which differentiates this situation from that of Final Death. In this instance, the servant has no means of determining whether or not her master ever intends to return.

Suppose her master chooses to reappear in a few weeks, months or years: Will she hold her servant responsible for any lapses in duty during her absence?

...her master frenzies?

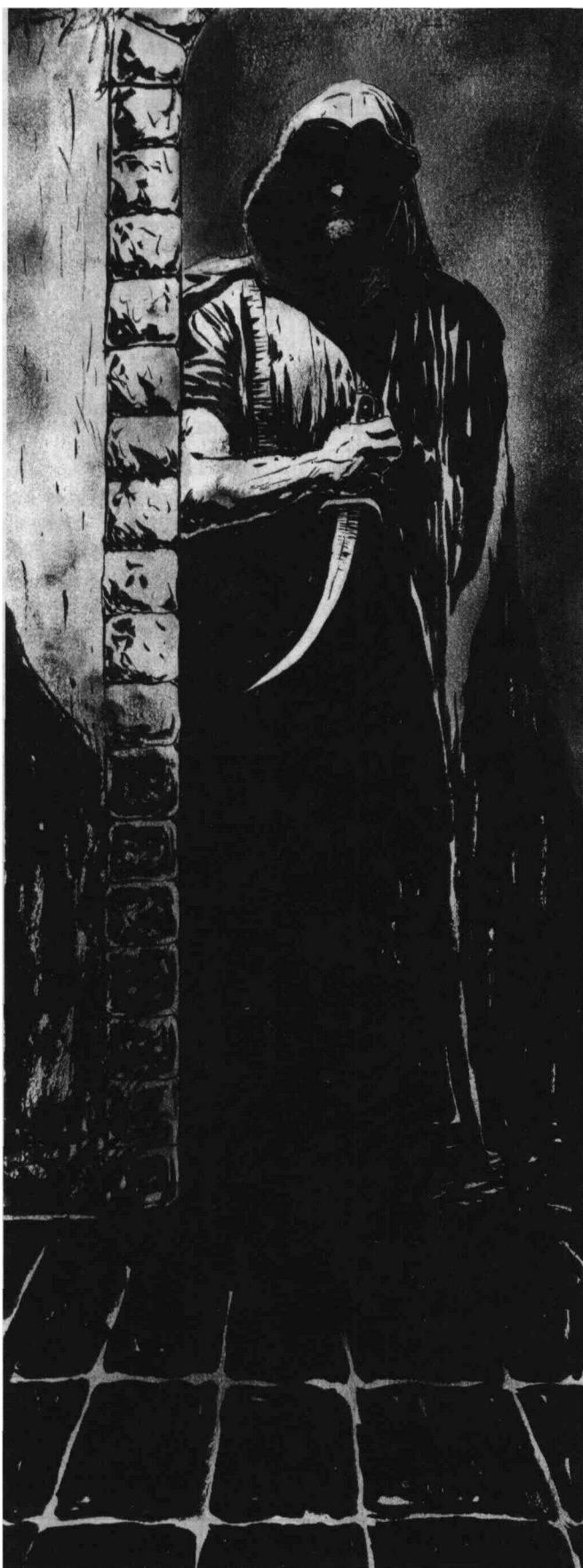
Few sights could be more horrifying to the medieval mind than the tableau of a Cainite in the full bloom of frenzy. Whether terrified by a fire or depleted of blood, the frenzied vampire may be perceived by his terrified, cowering servants as the personification of infernal forces. If his servants harbor any silent doubts about whether their master is a creature of God or of the Devil, surely even a glimpse of his frenzy assures them that they serve no creature of Heaven, but a minion of Lucifer himself. Naturally, a mortal ally's very life is in grave danger if she finds herself in the vicinity of a Cainite driven to frenzy. Unless she can find the means to calm her master or otherwise protect herself, she may find herself prey to her master's own subhuman appetites.

...her master betrays her allies?

An intriguing adventure concept might be the deeds of mortal characters once allied with a powerful Cainite who, for reasons of his own, decides to betray them to their enemies. Assuming the betrayed, former allies survive their foe's machinations, what might they do then? It is possible they seek retribution against their former master by seeking service with another Cainite. After all, what better opponent to set against



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a vampire than one of her own kind? Or perhaps they enlist the aid of the Church, appealing to the cardinal to convince the Pope a holy crusade must be launched against these evil spirits of the night? Maybe they take it upon themselves to hunt down and destroy the betrayer, a quest which may occupy the chapters of an entire chronicle.

STORY SEEDS

By now, you doubtless have numerous ideas about the relationship between Cainites and those who serve them. But how do you integrate allies and retainers into the story? Here are a few notes to get you started.

KNIGHT MOVES

A young Cainite character's sire sets before her a difficult task: He requires more frequent and accurate intelligence of a powerful count whose political stance bars the noble from enjoying a political advantage in the province. The sire instructs his childe to make an ally of a young, recently landed knight who owes fealty to this very count, and thereby gains access to the details of the count's plans.

How does the childe intend to fulfill her sire's request and have the knight enter her service? She might attempt to play a game of courtly love and so seduce him, but what if his sense of chivalry or his faith in the Church protects him from her enticements? Is it possible that the seemingly chivalrous young knight has some secret she might discover — perhaps an illegitimate child or a particularly unchivalrous act in his past — and thereby blackmail him into aiding her? Could she approach the knight with a proposition of trading his servitude for more land? If the childe is successful, how might her arrangement affect the young knight's relationship with the count? Is the knight truly able to reveal what her Sire wishes to know? What happens when the knight's feudal obligations clash with the desires of his new ally?

ROLE REVERSAL

An archbishop finds himself, against his will, obligated to serve a Cainite who, in life, belonged to one of the mendicant religious orders. He finds this relationship exceedingly distasteful. It grates against his pride that he must now obey one who was once obliged to kneel before to the archbishop's own spiritual authority. The vampire, of course, takes a great and perverse delight in lording it over his servant, and often devises menial and lowly tasks for the archbishop to fulfill in order to rub the wound raw.

What might happen if the Cainite goes too far and attempts to pressure the clergyman into actions which, despite the vampire's hold over him, he resists? What is the exact nature of the obligation under which the Archbishop finds himself? What might transpire if the cardinal should discover this shocking state of affairs?

THE NUNNERY MURDERS

A rash of sudden deaths strikes the nobility in the characters' immediate area. Whether the characters are Cainite or mortal allies, they likely investigate, discovering that the deceased have, to a lord, willed their lands to the local

nunnery, St. Hildegard's. In the span of a few short months, St. Hildegard's increases its wealth and local political influence tenfold, arousing the concern of the region's feudal lord.

Examining the situation further, the characters ultimately discover the murders to be engineered and perpetrated by an ambitious Lasombra and her mortal ally, the Abbess of St. Hildegard's. The Lasombra is competing with one of her own clan (who resides in a nearby community) for control of the bishopric. The abbess in turn serves her undead mistress for her own reasons, among them a fervent belief that acts which hasten the demise of the wicked and enlarge the nunnery's coffers must be, ultimately, blessed by the divine.

Unless the characters wish the Lasombra and her ally eventually to gain complete social and political control of the area, they must find a way to thwart the diabolical pair.

SECRET OF THE WAYSIDE ABBEY

The Abbot of Norwich Abbey hides a terrible secret: He is enamored of Ode, a vampire who inhabits the crypts beneath his abbey. Ode is a vagabond Ravnos who has seduced the abbot through a potent combination of her feminine charms and her vampiric Disciplines. She is using him to gain control of the abbey's wealth. The place offers her shelter, nourishment, wealth and security. The abbot serves her out of a shameful love that he cannot help, though it tortures his heart and damns his soul. This encounter might be appropriate for a group of characters who find themselves on the road, perhaps seeking shelter behind the abbey's walls.

A SCHOLARLY THREAT

The Cainite characters face a considerable inconvenience, particularly if they happen to belong to Clan Tremere. A small but learned group of scholars is asked by the parish priest to investigate occult activity in the vicinity. The characters are, of course, responsible for this activity, which is now under close scrutiny by the aged but canny scholars. Fueled by academic curiosity, the old wise men eagerly pursue every lead and clue until they are hot on the vampires' heels! If they kill the scholars outright, the priest will know that his suspicions are confirmed and might order an even more intensive investigation. Perhaps the scholars eventually become the character's trusted allies, serving faithfully in return for the satiation of their unceasing curiosity.

BEYOND THE WALLS

The Cainite character, who owns a castle, is disturbed by the news that his huntsman was found in the woods, torn to pieces as if by a savage pack of wolves. Arming himself and his retinue, the vampire lord takes to the forest on a great nocturnal hunt, intent on destroying the canine predators who slew his loyal vassal. The hunting party progresses deep into the moonlit woods, following the howls of the wolf pack to a clearing where the battle may finally commence — only to be confronted by (you guessed it) a slaving pack of werewolves intent on claiming the Cainite's forests for its own.

BESIEGED?

The characters are Cainites who find themselves within a castle besieged by an invading army. How can they escape? They may be forced to find hiding places secure from the soldiers who are attempting to batter their way through the front gate. Alternately, they may take command of the castle garrison and direct the manor's defense against the enemy.

A TEST OF LOYALTY

The characters are all mortal allies of their Cainite associate, Chevalier Andre of Lorraine. One evening, their master sets before them an unusual request: He wishes them to escort the Lady Gyesi through hostile lands. What the allies do not yet realize is that their master harbors secret doubts about their collective loyalty. Perhaps he suspects them of treason, or doubts their capabilities or willingness to follow orders. The exact reasons for his misgivings should be left to the Storyteller. The allies must successfully complete the mission or be subjected to further, more obvious, distrust and scrutiny from their already suspicious master.

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

This story seed is appropriate for a chronicle involving combat-oriented mortal retainers. The mortals discover that their vampire ally, Sasha, is held captive by her rival, a Tzimisce warlord. They must rescue her by whatever means seems most expedient to them. Perhaps they choose to infiltrate the fiend's stronghold in the guise of wandering troubadours or mercenary warriors, or maybe they raise an army and assault the castle wherein their ally is held prisoner. It is possible that they may choose to approach the Tzimisce's enemy, the Tremere, and strike a bargain for their ally's release. Whatever the nature of the rescue, the Storyteller should take care to match the challenge to the character's abilities.

THE KING'S FURY

The tides of political fortune often shift with the wind in the Dark Medieval world. Consider the fate of the characters — Cainite or mortal — whose community is faced with military conquest. The characters dwell in a city whose ruler is in continuous conflict with the neighboring nobles. One day, his rivals decide they have stomached enough, and unite to put down their insolent neighbor. Their combined strength carries the day, and the quarrelsome noble's head is forfeit. The characters must contend with the violent shift in local authority, deciding either to stand against the invader, flee the area or subvert the invader's ambitions to their own ends once the dust of conquest settles.

THE FICKLE HAND OF FATE

The characters are Cainites — perhaps a prince and the local clan elders — who are attempting to bring their chosen city under their influence. They succeed in making alliances with several of the key mortals who run the town, and are well on their way toward eventually securing the region for themselves. Suddenly, they are confronted with one of the

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inconvenient facts of medieval life: subinfeudation. Without warning, the feudal lord to whom the city's rulers owe fealty decides to redistribute the land, giving a large portion of it to a favored vassal who has rendered valuable service. What then happens to the character's careful plans of political domination? Is the overlord's decision merely a random act, or is there a more sinister motive afoot?

THE ALL-ALLY CHRONICLE

The Storyteller whose troupe wishes to engage in an all-ally chronicle has before her a rare and distinct opportunity. The chance to relegate the principal Cainite characters to the status of nonplayer characters while the allies take center stage is not to be missed by anyone who aspires to roleplaying challenges!

WHERE TO BEGIN?

The Storyteller should have her troupe look over the many mortal professions and occupations found in this chapter and ask them to select those which they find appealing. The allies need not all be of the same profession, but it is recommended that they be close in social status: While Cainites may find it convenient to establish a more egalitarian existence among themselves, such is not typically the case within mortal society. Although the dynamics of a troupe of allies whose characters cross the feudal spectrum may prove challenging, both the troupe and the Storyteller may encounter many difficulties if the characters are expected to cooperate in any significant fashion. Of course, the threat of their master's wrath may be sufficient to convince the troupe to set aside its class distinctions — for a time.

ALLY INTERACTIONS

While cooperation may be essential to the success of the allies' missions, it is not without its dangers. A peasant may actually prove brighter and more resourceful than a knight, and the knight may actually defer to his social inferior when the troupe makes critical decisions (perhaps at the behest of his Cainite lord). Society, however, expects to see the former defer to the latter, and may raise eyebrows if they see the reverse. Similarly, ally characters behaving in atypical fashion may draw the attention of their fellow townsfolk. Although a guild may be willing to overlook many eccentricities displayed by its members, a member's sudden announcement that he plans to construct a fortified tower on his urban property will certainly be met with comment and suspicion. The noble who is kind to the lepers may be commended for his generosity, but the count who makes a leper his seneschal may find himself severely criticized or even ostracized by polite society. Thus, when in public the troupe may wish to foster the more traditional social roles expected of them rather than call undue attention to themselves and their vampire allies.

INSPIRATIONS

A successful all-ally chronicle might be inspired by a group of soldiers, recently returned from the Crusades, who take service as bodyguards with a vampire lord. Such a Chronicle is well-suited to troupes which prefer a healthy dose of combat-oriented action in their roleplaying entertainment. Another interesting idea is the troupe composed of nobles who control various towns or provinces. Allying themselves with a vampire in order to extend their influence, they become embroiled in a bewildering array of subtle intrigues, far surpassing in scope those courtly machinations common to even the most scheme-laden royal court.

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

Once the troupe has selected its chosen professions, the Storyteller must then establish the context for the chronicle. Have all the players chosen courtly noble archetypes? Then the characters might well be plunged into Cainite-inspired intrigue. Perhaps the characters are all members of a lord's household who slowly become aware that all is not right with their master. Or maybe they have selected characters whose lives revolve around the great outdoors: The Storyteller may then wish to cast them as gamekeepers on a royal estate, facing the depredations of werewolves and fey creatures who infest their wooded territory. The context of the chronicle may thus be determined by the character professions chosen by the troupe, by the Storyteller's preference, by the troupe's expressed desires, or by a convenient combination of all three. The more investment the troupe is allowed in the nature of the chronicle, the more satisfied all participants are likely to be with the outcome.

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS

Just as the Storyteller expects Cainite player characters to be fully developed individuals whose desires, goals, hopes and aspirations influence their nightly actions, so too is the case with allies. Each ally is a separate, thinking entity for whom a personality and motivation should be no less detailed than are those for vampire characters. What is the driving goal of the knight errant? Perhaps he wishes above all things to find a love of which he can be truly worthy; or mayhap he seeks only to avenge the brutal murder of his brother at the hands of the Earl of Pomfret. Why does the serf continue to eke out his existence as a vassal of the cruel baron? It may be that his fervent belief in God's mercy leads him to conclude that he is merely observing the fate the deity plans for him, and to do otherwise would be sacrilegious; or perhaps his wife lies ill, and the only means of supporting his family is the continued, back-breaking labor of the fields. Does the mendicant friar truly seek to spread God's gospel, or is he merely a charlatan filling his belly at the expense of easily duped peasants? Such individual beliefs often form the motivations for allies to conspire with the undead. Equally importantly, these considerations help ensure that the troupe's characters are as believable as possible.

COMPLICATIONS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES

The all-ally chronicle may run the gamut of thematic inspirations, from mere survival to high romance, from political intrigue to calculated vengeance. In each case, many important questions will surface for Storyteller and player alike.

Do the allies know their comrade's true nature?

If not, do they eventually discover it? The troupe of allies that knowingly and willingly serves a vampire is opening the door to powers most of their fellow men and women would prefer to shun. The discovery of their associate's undead state may drastically affect the nature of their interactions with her, and may indeed change the entire course of the chronicle. Allies who believe they serve as Knights Templar to the archbishop, but who later discover the cleric is a supernatural monster, may choose to leave his service, or even try to destroy him.

Will alliance with a Cainite test the allies' faith?

It is almost certain that the habits of a vampire ally — even one who follows the Road of Heaven — conflict with the basic tenets of Christianity and the teachings of the Church. How should the ally characters react to such conflict?

What enemies will the allies make as a result of their association with their Cainite master?

If the ally characters are particularly successful in carrying out their associate's requests, they may find themselves the focus of some unwanted attention from their master's enemies. The Lasombra, for example, tend to be extremely competitive with one another. They are not above striking at their rivals within the clan by manipulating, attacking or otherwise inconveniencing their mortal allies.

Will any or all of the allies eventually be Embraced?

If so, do they suffer this fate willingly or unwillingly? This may change the entire focus and theme of the chronicle. Ally player characters who are offered the chance to enter the Long

Night may be faced with a moral dilemma of some magnitude. It is one thing to serve a vampire, but to become one is often another matter entirely! How do other allies react to one of their number who is Embraced by their master? Will they fear her or follow her? Can she truly count herself their friend and trusted comrade ever again, or is she forever alienated from their fellowship?

How will the Cainite treat her mortal allies?

The conditions the vampire imposes on her retainers help define the direction and style of the chronicle. Does she oppress them and treat them cruelly, secure in the knowledge that they cannot escape her? The chronicle may then focus on escape from such harsh treatment, with the mortal allies ever-vigilant for the opportunity to throw off their master's yoke. Does she reward them lavishly and grant them rich favors? The allies may fall over themselves in trying to outdo one another in their devotion, creating a friendly (?) rivalry rich in roleplaying opportunity.

What will happen if the allies seek to betray or leave their master?

Mortal allies who decide to leave their master's service may find their departure blocked by a rather annoyed former employer. They know much that is dangerous in the wrong hands, such as the location of the vampire's haven, the names of her mortal contacts, the strength of her retainers and the details of many of her schemes. Few Cainites would permit their once-loyal allies to end their allegiance easily or peacefully. Even worse are the mortals who actively seek to betray their former ally — for them there can be no mercy. Unless they are very clever, resourceful and lucky, their very lives may be forfeit at the hands of the vampire they once served.

These are considerations which the Storyteller should give at least a modicum of thought before beginning the all-ally chronicle.



Chapter Three: Rank and File

Imagine that you wake every day, knowing as surely as you know your own name that every moment, every task, every face you encounter will be familiar. They have been chosen for you, by circumstances beyond your control, by generations gone long before you first drew breath.

The vast majority of mortals in the Dark Medieval world are trapped in the lives that their parents and grandparents lived before them. If your father was a blacksmith, you were likely trained, from the moment you could walk, to take up his trade. Most people rarely, if ever, travel more than a few hours' walk from the site of their birth, much less choose to move away and start over. Scrubbing floors as a kitchen wench, unlike in fairy tales and modern movies, guarantees you never get to marry the prince.

Despite the difficulty of social mobility, certain opportunities are available. Children can be pledged to the Church, offering them at least the hope of an education; or they can apprentice to tradespeople and artisans. Young men run off to be soldiers or sailors (and there are certainly enough ballads about young women who tried it in disguise).

It takes a certain fierceness of purpose, or strength of character, to take advantage of these opportunities. There is no such concept as self-fulfillment in Dark Medieval Europe. In and of itself, individuality is not yet a goal. Men and women are defined by their places in the community, by the relationships they have and by the roles they fill. If a mortal character is to abandon the circumstances of his birth by choice, he will need either a powerful motivation or an unusually transformative experience.

Yet for daring men and women, the options are endless. Possibilities long lost to modern sensibilities are still real in the Dark Medieval world. Myths and monsters walk the earth, present and tangible when they are sought out. Sometimes the seeking is done by those selfsame myths and monsters; then mortal lives change dramatically. Choose or be chosen, and learn what it means to form alliances with the children of Caine....

CONCEPT

When creating a character, a fairly simple concept will be sufficient at the start ("Jewish scholar," for example). You'll establish more detail both in the process of character generation and in actual play. Your concept could be anything ranging from the time-honored "humble serf" to the somewhat more unusual "first successful female troubadour in France." Almost anyone could be potentially useful to a vampire in some fashion.

The skills possessed by vampiric allies can be loosely grouped into broad categories such as the following (although this is by no means an all-inclusive reckoning — these are just a few suggestions). Scholarly laborers include clerks, scribes, librarians, translators, philosophers and historians. Organizers count among their ranks seneschals, chatelaines, stewards, exchequers and moneylenders. Figures of authority include nobility, high-ranking clergy, sheriffs, bailiffs and wardens. No court or keep would be complete without entertainers, among whom might be musicians, artists, poets, actors, dancers and jesters. Many who rank above the status of a serf will have retainers of some sort: personal servants (although you can manage a tunic and hose just fine on your own, almost anyone who wants to dress formally or impressively will require assistance on a regular basis), courtiers, bodyguards, spies, men at arms, ladies in waiting, heralds, squires and pages. Magical pursuits of varying degrees are available for those who have turned their faces from the Church, or else made their own peace with it: fortune tellers, hedge witches, alchemists and astrologers. Some professions are considered to embody both the mundane and the magical whatever the beliefs of their practitioners: weaving, stonecarving, midwifery. And last but not least, there are the varied ranks of those who serve useful purposes that almost always go unnoticed...dung collectors, for example.

Don't feel compelled toward the bizarre, or restricted to the middle and upper classes. The plainest of the plain can be fascinating to roleplay — the miller's dimwitted son, whose

devotion to his master transcends all obstacles, the scullery girl burning to find out about the mysterious revels that go on in the great hall at night.... And don't worry about piling on powers and abilities; you shouldn't be looking to outgun your vampire associates. There's a reason your character is in service. If you're good enough at whatever it is you do, you'll be indispensable even if you can't summon up a demon at the drop of a hat.

Friends, lovers and relatives of vampires can, obviously, be treasured companions while completely lacking any obviously "useful" abilities. Similar allies of other supernatural beings pose all sorts of opportunities for Cainites, from sources of information to tools of blackmail. A Garou Kinfolk familiar with the habits and territorial patterns of her local cousins would be an invaluable asset to a vampire needing to travel extensively through the area — although her possible reluctance to cooperate is another story entirely.

With your basic concept established, it should be fairly clear whether the being you're creating is mortal or supernatural. Perhaps your character has been given the blood of a vampire to drink and is now a ghoul. In such a case, consider how you explain the changes you undergo to people in your life. Also, justifying your altered state to yourself may be difficult. You may seek the Embrace for yourself, or you might long passionately for your lost innocence. Your continued existence could depend on whether the prince knew of your creation and gave permission for it. How do your new abilities change or enhance your skills?

TO ALL THE GHOULS I'VE LOVED BEFORE

The state of ghouldom is something that transcends the scope of this book. Though cursory information is presented here, the specifics of a ghoul's nature bear special consideration. For more information on the ghoulish condition and helpful hints on playing them in a story or chronicle, refer to **Ghouls: Fatal Addiction**.

Once you have defined what your character does, selecting a Nature and a Demeanor may give you a clearer idea of what he is. A starving beggar who sleeps in the midden might have nearly no sense of himself as an individual and no opportunity to express that sense, much less a facade distinct from his identity. A prosperous innkeeper's wife, in contrast, will present a certain aspect to the public, possibly differing wildly from what she considers her true self. If it seems appropriate, select one archetype for your character's Nature and another (unless the character is exceptionally straightforward and truly is exactly what she seems to be) for the Demeanor.

ROLE, MASTER, CLAN AFFILIATION AND TYPE

You were selected to serve a vampire to a certain end. What is it that you do for her? This book contains a wealth of ideas on just that very subject. Alternately, a vampire may have selected you because you are entirely unique — it's all up to you.

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

Speaking of vampires, which one do you serve so faithfully?

To which clan does this vampire belong? Though this may seem unnecessary, bear in mind that terrible things have a tendency to happen to vampires. You'd better have some ties to the clan unless you want to find yourself utterly alone when one of those terrible things happens.

Finally, are you a ghoul or a mortal? Or are you perhaps something altogether different? Consult your Storyteller before you choose something off-kilter — she may have special plans for you.

ATTRIBUTES

From here on, the process of creating your character will resemble that outlined for Cainite characters in the Dark Medieval world. Decide on the relative importance of the three categories (Physical, Social, Mental) for your character, keeping in mind your concept. Starting with one free dot in each category, distribute dots from the allotted 6 in Primary Attributes, 4 in Secondary and 3 in Tertiary.

ABILITIES

Prioritize Abilities in the same manner that you did Attributes, with 11 dots available for Primary Abilities, 7 for Secondary and 4 for Tertiary. You may not set any Ability above 3 dots at this point, although later you can use "freebie" points to increase Abilities.

ADVANTAGES

Mortals possess special Background Traits and Advantages in much the same fashion as vampires. They are even more likely than vampires to have certain options such as True Faith and Hedge Magic (described in the Appendix). From the Backgrounds listed in *Vampire: The Dark Ages* (see p. 128), only Generation and Herd cannot be modified to apply to a mortal character. Advantages such as Status and Mentor (to which at least one dot must be allocated if the character is a ghoul) should be considered as they pertain to the living world rather than to Cainite society, if the Storyteller consents to alterations along those lines. You have 5 points available for Background Traits.

Vampiric Disciplines are as a rule not available to mortals; however, if you are creating a ghoul character, take one dot in Potence, free of charge. Consult your Storyteller if you wish to control other Disciplines. Bear in mind that you probably didn't learn them for free: Granting additional Disciplines is a great way for a Storyteller to tie a character to the Cainite who taught her....

Most mortals follow the Via Humanitatis, or the Road of Humanity, though there are a few who do not. Many Ravnos kin follow the Road of Paradox and some debased mortals have turned to infernalism and embrace the Via Diabolis. A few devout mortals follow a humanocentric derivative of the Road of Heaven. Decide upon which philosophy you follow (Via



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CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

- Concept — Who are you in your daily life?
- Nature and Demeanor — What is your personality?
- Description of role, master and clan affiliation (can be filled in after Prelude) — Which vampire do you serve and in what capacity?
- Type (Mortal, ghoul, other supernatural being)

STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

- Prioritize categories — Primary (6 dots), Secondary (4 dots), Tertiary (3 dots)
- Assign Physical Attributes — Strength, Dexterity, Stamina
- Assign Social Attributes — Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance
- Assign Mental Attributes—Perception, Intelligence, Wits

STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

- Prioritize categories — Primary (11 dots), Secondary (7 dots), Tertiary (4 dots)
- Choose Talents
- Choose Skills
- Choose Knowledges

STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

- Choose Backgrounds (5 dots) — Retainers must take at least one dot of Mentor; no Generation or Herd Backgrounds may be selected.
- Choose Disciplines, if any — Ghouls have at least one dot of Potence. Some ghouls have more than this at their disposal; consult your Storyteller. Additional Disciplines may be purchased with "freebie" points only, and then, only if the character is a ghoul.

- Assign Virtues—SelectaRoad (likely ViaHumanitatis) and highlight the appropriate Virtues. Allocate 7 dots among your Virtues.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

- Record Willpower (base 3 points)
- Spend "freebie" points (21)
- Choose Merits and Flaws — But only if the Storyteller permits them.

FREEBIE POINT TRAIT COSTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Background	1 per dot
Willpower	2 per dot
Discipline	10 per dot, subject to Storyteller approval
Virtue	2 per dot
Road	1 per dot
Hedge Magic (by Path)	7 per dot
Hedge Magic Rituals	3 per dot; one free with each Hedge Magic Path dot
True Faith Numina (by itself)	7 per dot
True Faith Numina (if you took Hedge Magic)	14 per dot

Humanitatis is the default), and allocate upon your Virtues in the same manner as a Cainite character would — divide your 7 dots among them as best fits your concept of the character.

FINISHING TOUCHES

The last thing to record before spending "freebie" points is the character's Willpower. Willpower can be extremely important to characters who must deal with vampiric powers like Dominate and Presence. The base Willpower is 3, and can be increased with freebie points.

You have 21 freebie points to spend as you wish; optional Merits may be purchased with these freebie points only, and only at the time the character is created. Taking Flaws gives you more freebie points to distribute. If you choose Merits or Flaws, do so carefully and check with the Storyteller, as these

powers and limitations can make it difficult for the character to work with other characters or within a given chronicle.

When you use freebie points to change your Traits, one freebie point does not equal one dot. Raising an Attribute will cost 5 points per dot, an Ability 2 points, a Background 1 point, and Willpower 2 points. Your first Numina type costs 7 points, while the second requires 14 points per dot.

PRELUDE AND CHARACTER HISTORY

Now that the numbers have all been filled in, one issue remaining is how the character came to be a vampiric ally — the "what happened" part. The Storyteller may guide you through this experience if you are playing it out as part of your

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

Prelude. Whether it is your creation, the Storyteller's, or a combination of the two, this is a chance to establish at least a fragment of your character's history. Imagine the crisis or catalytic event that caused you to seek out your associate, or the scene in which you were discovered and recruited. You could be in it out of straightforward greed — gold is gold, after all. Consider the possibility that your character has been Dominated or drawn in by Presence; if the former, keep in mind the damaging, spirit-withering effect of that Discipline when exercised over time.

Whatever motivation or control has sway over your character will probably affect the degree to which you are aware that something is different about your master.

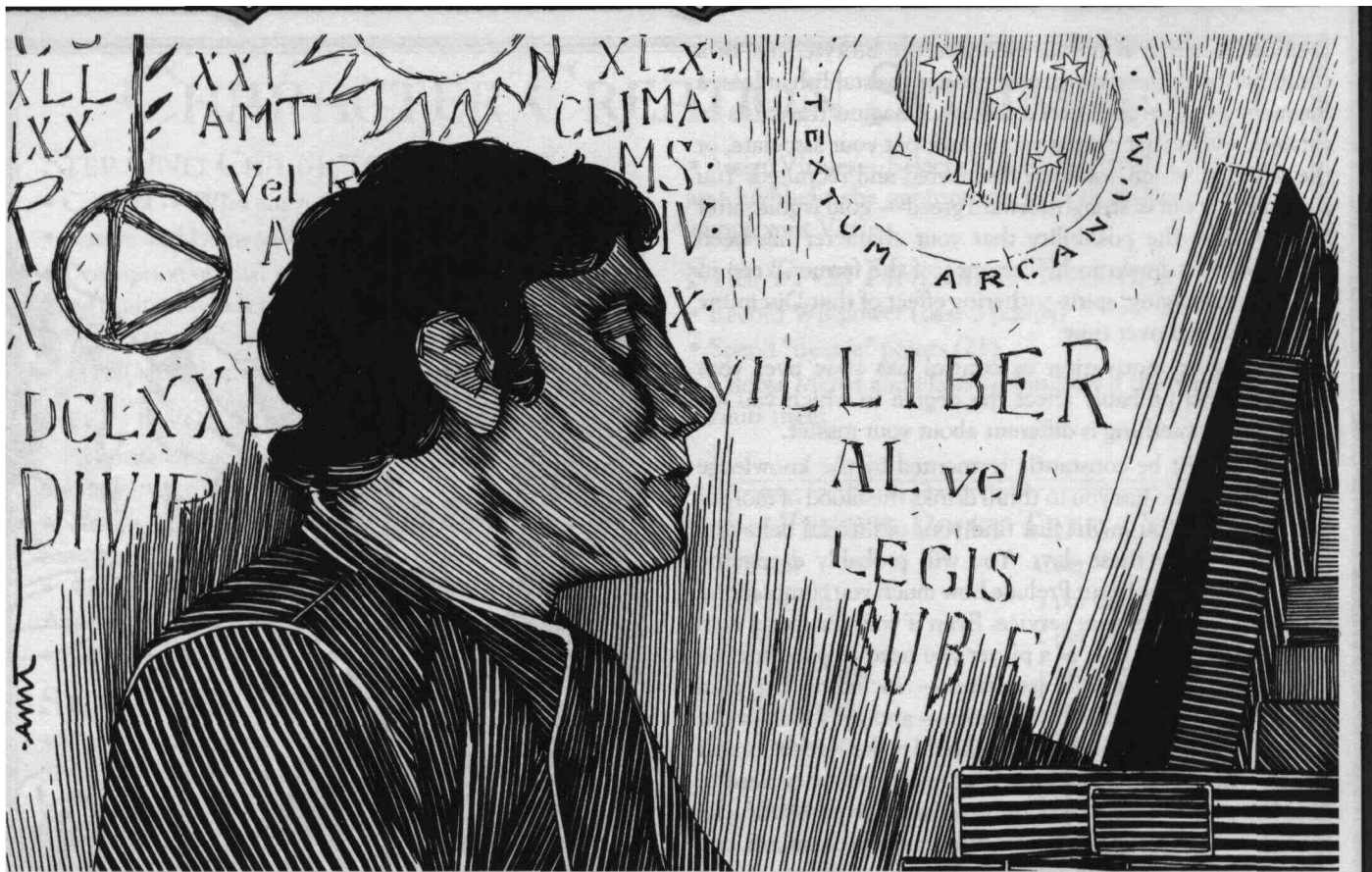
You might be constantly tormented by the knowledge that the one who has you in thrall drinks the blood of mortals to survive...or you might just find your old friend behaving somewhat oddly these days. You will probably determine during the course of your Prelude how much you comprehend about the nature of your service. Even if your character is in the dark about her fate, as a player you need to pinpoint the identity of her vampiric associate — including the clan affiliation of the Cainite in question — and get a feel for the essence of their relationship. You should make sure to consult closely with the Storyteller on this topic, as you may need to establish a concept that functions within a given Chronicle. If you are not dealing with an existing vampire character, one way to handle your ally might be for you to have a rough working idea and let the Storyteller deal with points and abilities. In other cases, the Storyteller may choose to give players more control.

By entering the service of a vampire, you expose yourself to the dangers of both the mundane and the vampiric worlds with very little protection except what is provided by your master and your fellows. Should your mortal companions discover the true nature of your associate, the consequences would obviously be immediate and dire. Cainite society is rife with danger as well: no matter how quick you are with a rapier or how heavy a hauberk you wear under your tunic, most vampires pose a tremendous physical threat to you. In addition, unless you choose to play a seasoned courtier, a high-ranking member of the Church or a Borgia, the intricate machinations of the Cainites will probably be frighteningly alien to your character. How your character responds when faced with one vampire or with many is one of the most important roleplaying tools you will have to work with. Does dealing with these beings create an agonizing crisis of faith for you? Challenge you to prove yourself the equal of any blood-sucker? Turn you into a humble, cringing toady?

However your character conducts her interactions with vampires and their society, she has a life and a past of her own. Her motivations and goals have an existence not necessarily founded on her vampiric affiliation. Keeping that in mind will help ensure that the numbers you put down on your character



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sheet don't turn into empty statistics. While you can distribute points at random if you so desire, your choices should then be expressed consistently and meaningfully in your roleplaying.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION

In 1169, the small Jewish ghetto on the outskirts of Lyons celebrated the birth of Eliazar ben Reuven. Winsome and bright-eyed even at his *bris*, Eliazar quickly became the darling of the community. His persuasive rhetoric and literacy in Hebrew, French, Latin and Greek more than fulfilled his family's hopes for his scholarly pursuits.

In 1183, following a particularly fervent sermon on the part of the Bishop of Lyons, the ghetto was burnt to the ground. The first torch was thrown by the peddler who'd applauded the infant Eliazar's earliest toddling steps through the marketplace. Eliazar escaped from the flaming wreckage of his home, accompanied by the sounds of celebrating townsfolk, swearing at every step that he would have revenge on the Church that could so callously destroy his family. Within a fortnight, he encountered a charismatic, mysterious Spaniard dedicated to rousing the masses against the corrupt clergy...and so began his new life.

Eliazar ben Reuven's birth in 1169 is the invention of Paul, a new **Vampire: The Dark Ages** player; Eliazar's family's downfall is due to Bronwen, the Storyteller. Between the two lies the process of turning Eliazar into a person with vitality and interest — a playable character.

GETTING STARTED - THE CONCEPT

Paul starts out with an interest in medieval Jewish history. Playing a scholarly character also appeals to him, and these two ideas fit together perfectly. Eliazar's name (ben Reuven is nothing more complicated than son of Reuven) comes from Paul's own family tree. Paul considers emphasizing a sense of persecution throughout Eliazar's background, but decides instead that a contrast between Eliazar's sheltered, secure upbringing and the hostile chaos of the larger world around him would be interesting (a rather abstract thought that Bronwen is happy to put into more immediately personal terms later on, as described above). He also tells Bronwen, after paging through the vampire clan descriptions, that he's drawn to the Brujah and their quest.

Before the ghetto burned, Eliazar never had to work particularly hard for anything. He was bright enough to shine academically with little effort, and charming enough to win over the sternest heart. Reuven's son was fussed over and made much of, but even so it was clear that he had a will of iron when it came to things he found important.

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Paul decides that while Eliazar seems innocent, charming and naive, at heart he is single-minded and ruthless—even though he may not yet have found his cause. For Eliazar's Demeanor Paul chooses Child, and for his Nature he selects Fanatic.

ADDING DETAIL - ATTRIBUTES

Prioritizing Eliazar's Attributes is Paul's next step. This seems straightforward enough: Mental Traits are obviously the most important for Eliazar. Paul makes Mental the primary category and Social the secondary, thinking about Eliazar's charm. Physical then becomes Eliazar's tertiary category; Paul decides Eliazar isn't particularly active aside from the occasional dance.

With that settled, Paul puts three of the six primary dots in Intelligence, two in Wits, and the remaining one in Perception. Eliazar has a keen mind honed by his classical education, as well as some degree of street smarts; however, he rarely feels any need to pay much attention to the subtler nuances of social interaction or to the physical details of his environment.

Given only four secondary dots, Paul reluctantly decides to assign one to Charisma, two to Manipulation and the last one to Appearance. He finds the final results (Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2) disappointing given his mental image of the character, and briefly questions whether he should reshuffle Eliazar's Attributes. He knows he'll have freebie points to distribute later, though, and makes a note to adjust these numbers at a later stage.

Paul puts two of the three tertiary dots in Dexterity, matching his picture of Eliazar as quick and lithe with long, nimble fingers. The third dot he places in Stamina — Eliazar not only has a strong will to keep him going in extremity, he's also accustomed to participating in heated debates that last from one sunrise to the next. It seems appropriate that this distribution leaves Eliazar's Strength at a poor level. He's hardly likely to have lifted anything heavier than books.

MORE PERSONALITY - ABILITIES

Eliazar quickly found himself bored with the limitations of the local academic resources, and began to take a kind of innocent glee in challenging the wisdom of his teachers. Throughout his studies, it was his greatest pleasure to pose a question the aged scholars could not answer, or confound them with some bit of lore previously unknown to them. It was in this way that he dedicated himself to acquiring knowledge few others possessed. Studying the Kabbalah was the first, most obvious step; he soon realized that while only a handful of his people were intimately acquainted with its mysteries, that was all too many for him to take pride in his knowledge. So he began to seek out other areas of interest....

Paul ranks Eliazar's Abilities as Knowledges primary, Talents secondary and Skills tertiary. The first thing he does is assign three dots (the maximum allowed at this stage) to Academics. Eight dots remain; Paul puts the requirement for Eliazar's other languages into Linguistics (two dots — only French and Greek need to be purchased, as Hebrew is the character's native tongue

and Latin comes along with Academics). Three go into Occult (some of this Knowledge represents Eliazar's early study of the Kabbalah, while the rest, so far, comprises a wide-ranging if somewhat shallow search for the obscure), one in Hearth Wisdom (even though Eliazar mostly scorns old wives' tales, he pays attention to stories told of dybbuks and golems), and two in Investigation (accounting for Eliazar's research skills).

For Talents, Paul starts by placing two dots in Leadership. Eliazar has a knack for getting people to follow his example. Next he puts two dots into Subterfuge and one into Acting — when his natural charm fails him, Eliazar can always rely on other abilities to get what he wants. The last two dots go into Empathy, reflecting Eliazar's articulation and keen compassion.

Paul now has four dots at his disposal for Eliazar's Skills. He chooses to give the character two dots in Etiquette — he may sometimes be self-centered, but he tries not to be rude. Two dots go to Melee; the Jews of Lyons, while they trust to some extent in the tolerance of their neighbors, are not naive about the insecurity of their position. Eliazar carries a knife and can use it if necessary, although he finds the concept somewhat distasteful.

WHO IS ELIAZAR? - ADVANTAGES

With five points to spend on Backgrounds, Paul puts two into Mentor. He lets Bronwen know that he doesn't yet have anyone specific in mind, and accepts her offer to work this aspect of Eliazar's life into the Prelude (in her plans, Eliazar's mysterious Spanish acquaintance will be revealed as an influential Brujah, and a powerful protector). The other three go into the Resources Background. Members of Eliazar's community and family make a good, if risky, profit from the business forbidden to Christians — moneylending — and this money would be available to Eliazar if he ever really needed it.

Although Eliazar's faith is strong, he feels a stronger connection to his human side than his spiritual. Selecting the Road of Humanity, Eliazar allocates three dots to Conscience, to reflect his pangs of morality when confronted with memories of the ghetto's destruction. Two dots go into Self-Control (Eliazar rarely flies off the handle) and the final two go into Courage (he's no coward).

Eliazar is not a ghoul; he takes no Disciplines.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER - FINISHING TOUCHES

Now Paul puts down Eliazar's base Willpower of 3 and records his Road score of 7 before starting to distribute his freebie points. He immediately goes back to the Social Attributes and uses up 10 points (5 per dot) to raise Eliazar's Charisma to 4. Paul allots 5 more points to change Manipulation to 4 as well. He then decides 4 more points should go to improve the Willpower score to 5, in keeping with the character's determination and drive. Yet another 2 points go to boost the character's Leadership score to 3.

Paul is finished with the process of character creation. He has a good feel for Eliazar's personality, abilities and background. Now all that's left is for him to sit down with Bronwen for the Prelude, so he can hear the crackling of the flames as the ghetto burns....

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Possessed by: Spies, Diplomats, Courtiers, Gallants, Swindlers, Actors

Specialties: Innocuousness, Obliviousness, Escaping Notice

SKILLS

CHIVALRY

At the end of the 12th century, chivalry has not yet fully flowered into the glorious code praised in ballads, but the seeds have been sown. There are already ardent devotees of Chivalry's precepts, just as the vampiric Road of Chivalry has its adherents; Andreas Capellanus composed *The Art of Courtly Love* between 1170 and 1174.

In broad terms, Chivalry links together both honor in combat and honor in love. As a concept, it generally embraces courtesy, generosity, valiance, high-mindedness and consideration (especially with regard to women). Often none of these qualities applies toward those of less than noble rank — knights and peers of the realm are required to behave in this fashion only to their equals and betters.

Adhering to the tenets of chivalry offers certain distinct advantages. Such behavior often brings out the best in others who observe it, and it marks one as being of noble temperament if not necessarily lineage. When taking this Skill, you may wish to note a particular person to whom your efforts and the glory of your successes are dedicated — often such a person will grant her loyal chevalier a token favor such as an embroidered sleeve. While it is unusual for a woman to so devote her service to a man, such a situation could certainly be possible.

- Novice: Familiar with the ideas of chivalry, you seldom put them into practice.
- • Practiced: You are starting to apply chivalrous principles to more and more of your life.
- • • Competent: Passages from the letters of the Countess of Champagne spring naturally to your lips.
- • • • Expert: You equal the average knight in the courtliness of both your martial and romantic affairs.
- • • • • Legend: Your life is dedicated to the pursuit of honor.

dours, so that your fame as a paragon of virtue has spread far and wide.

Possessed by: Knights, Squires, Nobles, Courtiers, Social Climbers, Poets

Specialties: Documentation, The Favor of an Individual, Courtly Gossip

MERITS AND FLAWS

Many of the Merits and Flaws from Vampire: The Dark Ages are appropriate for allies — those listed under Mortal Society, most obviously. Some, however, are entirely inappropriate (Known to be Dead or Misplaced Heart, for example, and all those listed under Cainite Ties unless the Storyteller chooses to apply them to your ally).

MERITS

UNCANNY SIGHT: (2 PT MERIT)

Either due to some innate ability or to your long exposure to vampires, you are aware on a visceral level of their inhuman nature. On meeting a vampire, possibly even at first glance, you may have an immediate sense that your new acquaintance bears the mark of Caine. This perception is not always accurate, depending on the Storyteller's judgment.

SOOTHE THE BEAST: (2-5 PT MERIT)

The touch of your hands is calming, the sound of your voice lulling...but not to a restless body or over-stimulated mind — rather, to the Beast within all vampires. You have the ability to

aid vampires in their attempts to resist the loss of their humanity. Depending on the point value of this Merit, you may be able to help preserve the self-control of one Cainite you know well — your master, someone else you are close to, or a vampire with whom you are not particularly well-acquainted.

FLAWS

FEAR OF THE DEVIL: (1 PT FLAW)

Your religious beliefs may be particularly strong or all but nonexistent, and your experience and intellect may offer all kinds of reassurances — but still you harbor a deep-rooted, irrational fear that someday, for some reason, you will be dragged down to an eternity of torment at the hands of the Devil. This panic may be triggered by anything you associate with "black magic" or by anything violating the teachings of the Church, and obviously will make your interactions with vampires considerably more complex. Although the degree to which you keep your feelings under control may vary, note that this terror is not a conscious choice on your character's part and cannot be "reasoned" away over time. Like many Flaws, Fear of the Devil is presented as more of an opportunity for roleplaying than min-maxing a particular character.



Chapter Four: We Are Not Alone

*from [Cain] arose all evil creatures,
Ettens and elves and orcs,
Also the giants that contended with God
for a long time; he gave them pay-
ment for that.*

- Beowulf

Cainites share the nights of Dark Medieval Europe with werewolves, voraiths, fae, Unbrood spirits, magicians and mages. Inevitably, they meet, perhaps to fight, perhaps to parlay. A few individuals go beyond random contact, becoming allies or even friends - a surpassingly rare occurrence, but one with the potential for a memorable story.

This chapter is here to help you play those stories. It contains information and suggestions for integrating werewolves, mages, voraiths and changelings into your chronicles. Though rare, these creatures are nonetheless lurking in the shadows of the Dark Medieval world, and characters may well run across them.

But first, some ideas to get you started...

WE ARE NOT ALONE

THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Cainites have spent centuries gauging acquaintances for the telltale signs of Disciplines, estimating the generations of elders and rivals, calculating obligations to prince and sire and imposing obedience on ghouls and mortals. These experiences shape the way they think about other people. Vampiric alliances, like vampiric society, often have semifeudal structures. A Cainite may offer to become the vassal of some powerful being; in return, she expects respect and protection. Conversely, a Cainite can offer a down-and-out Garou or magician a chance at a more stable life. The dependents in such relationships often live in the residence of their masters, to more easily serve them. This can lead to familiarity, loyalty and even a kind offriendship, provided both parties operate in good faith.

Nonfeudal alliances, however, tend to be banquets of distrust. Even if the partners maintain a veneer of friendship, visiting each other's abodes to discuss philosophy and politics, they often find it insufficient to compensate for their natural suspicions. Most Cainites cannot help but relate to their allies as they would to particularly untrustworthy and powerful fellow vampires. Suspicious-minded Cainites may fear that their "allies" are trying to influence them with unknown powers and alien politics. Manipulative types try to get more out of the ally than they give in return. Dominating ones try to control the relationship by force of personality. Alliances often live or die based on whether the individuals involved relish such rivalries — or detest them.

ON THE BONDAGE OF WILL

For vampires, there's always the temptation to lace your acquaintance's wine with vitae, stare deeply into her eyes, and *Dominate*. Mages and Changelings just itch to use their Spheres and Glamour. Only the most foolish make the attempt. A Garou or mage might be able to sense the taint in the goblet; a strong-willed changeling may throw off an attempt to dominate him. Nobody likes to be dominated or blood bonded, and an unsuccessful attempt can turn an ally into an enemy instantly.

Storytellers should carefully consider each potential Blood Oath involving a player character. The player of a bonded character can too easily lose all sense of freedom and involvement in the game. For this reason, one player character should probably not be bonded to another in any conventional chronicle.

On the other hand, Blood Oaths can be a fascinating chronicle element if incorporated from the beginning. Troupe style games are especially suited to such experiments. Each player could play a main character and a second, less powerful servant character. Perhaps all the player characters are enslaved to a single powerful NPC and seek to escape her control.

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The characters could be the childer of a cruel sire who bound them with the Oath shortly after their Embrace. If the sire were a prince or other important elder, the characters might well have the unenviable task of enforcing his decrees against those very Cainites they will one day require as allies. Such an elder might be in the habit of "collecting" supernatural beings — her household could include Garou, changelings, and magicians as well as Cainites. Alternatively, the cruel master need not be a Cainite; the characters could be enslaved by magics or glamour instead. Such powers are far more mysterious to Cainites than the Blood Oath, and the chronicle would then center around their quest for an appropriate "antidote."

WEREWOLVES

Cainites rarely associate with the dreaded Lupines, about whom tales of atrocity have passed throughout vampiric society. Even the most wary Cainite, however, cannot avoid the wilderness and the Garou altogether. Dark Medieval Europe is predominantly rural. Noble Cainites in their castles listen nightly to the whistling of the wind in nearby forests. Poorer Cainites travel from village to village to find sustenance. Sometimes the Lupines are waiting; sometimes, they even speak....

In Dark Medieval Europe, feudal lords control the fates of forests and villages, and Cainites often control the feudal lords, if they are not members of the nobility themselves. Most of the wild lands in western Europe are "hunting preserves," tracts of fallow land reserved for the amusement of mortal lords. Cainites, on obtaining such land, often think of how it might be cleared and settled by humans. The Garou cannot always thwart such plans with might alone; sometimes they must bargain. Likewise, Lupines are fiercely protective of their kinfolk, who all too often live under the control of a vampiric master. In exchange for the lives of their families, the Garou may offer much. Conversely, Cainites who fear for *their* lives may willingly offer concessions of land and privilege to the Garou.

The lupine tribes, like the vampiric clans, constantly jockey for influence and territory. Unscrupulous packs and septs sometimes seek vampiric aid against their enemies, offering a division of spoils to their allies. Likewise, rogue Garou sometimes enlist outside aid to bring down some personal foe — vampire or Lupine. The various Garou tribes of western Europe currently simmer in a state just short of open warfare, and many werewolves hate their neighbors far more than they do the Cainites.

Finally, there are those Garou who fall under the personal influence of a Cainite, or vice versa. Traitors to their own kind, such Lupines and Cainites have short, troubled existences. The Blood Oath, however, may make such a fate unavoidable, while Cainites who dare to embrace kinfolk may find themselves with a valuable informant, or a vengeful childer with powerful friends.

PREJUDICE

Millennia of mutual hatred inevitably taint the relations of Cainites and the Garou. Elders, sires, princes, packs and septs alike rarely sympathize with "traitors." Loyalty and the sworn word are the greatest social virtues of medieval politics. Mixed companies of Garou and Cainites will be hard pressed either to hide or to justify themselves. Even within the group, Cainites and Lupines alike may find their perceptions of such allies colored by myth, legend and inaccuracy.

STORY IDEAS

- The Conservationists

A Cainite noble assigns her mortal agents—ghoul monks from her Cistercian monastery — to the task of clearing local land for cultivation. Unfortunately, the swamp is the home territory of Gangrel Cainites. Garou and Cainites must ally to protect wild lands. Can the characters and their allies foil the noble's aims? Or will lupine and vampiric societies' disapproval of the group rip it asunder?

- The Bone Gnawers

A pack of Bone Gnawers, having grown weary of ill-treatment by purebred Garou, approach the local Cainite prince and transfer their allegiance to him. Suspicious, he assigns the characters to accompany and watch them. Now the hapless Cainites must protect these new retainers from the depredations of their elders and the revenge of the Lupines. Do they grow fond

of their new charges? And what of the Bone Gnawers? For the first time in their lives, they receive rewards and respect for their unusual and valuable gifts. But do their consciences suffer?

- An Eastern Alliance

The Tzimisce and Shadow Lords have warred for centuries over the control of Eastern Europe. Now, a third party has entered the struggle, threatening Tzimisce territory. Do the Shadow Lords support the upstart Tremere? Or do they prefer the evil they know to the one they do not? Will the invading Tremere be pulled into a morass of intrigue from which they cannot escape?

Jupiter, the King, produces in the earth, rather disappointingly, tin; this shining metal said different things to the imagination before the canning industry came in.

— C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*

The year A.D. 1197 comes at the zenith of the high Mythic Age. A great many mortals practice static magic and each of these traditions (small t) has an attendant group of true mages drawing upon similar stylistic and intellectual foundations.

THE HIGH

The high tradition of magic is intensely intellectual, typically requiring the instruction in Latin necessary to read mystical texts. High magicians often make excellent advisors,



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having studied medicine, philosophy, theology and history as well as the Mystic Arts. For all that, they are not hard to entice into service. High magi frequently need rich patrons to pay for their pestles, gems, books and other expensive paraphernalia. Others might wish to study Cainites up close or desire the immortality that only their vitae gives.

Life with a ritual mage is rarely easy. Some try to order "their" Cainites around like attendant spirits. Others believe that long study of the magic arts entitles them to equal status with their Cainite masters. Most Cainites prefer to cure their hirelings of such illusions immediately; others find it more amusing to play along. Some magicians may actually *be* more powerful than their masters, contrary to the vanity of many Cainites.

THE ORDER OF HERMES

The Order of Hermes and Cainites have one very important thing in common: Clan Tremere. The Tremere have made many enemies, both individually and as a house. A Cainite who hates the Tremere will never want for Hermetic allies and vice versa; it's just a matter of finding them. Not all mages resent the Tremere their immortality, however, and the usurpers still have allies, both open and hidden, among their former order. Time passes, and as mortal contacts die, the special relationship between the Order of Hermes and Clan Tremere wanes.

THE LOW MAGI

The common tradition of magic touches every facet of Dark Medieval life. Many people in quite ordinary professions cultivate a reputation for magic. Sometimes, their magical gibberish actually works. Other souls brave life as full-time magicians, living far from curious eyes. Cainites recruit from both classes.

While it may seem that low magicians would be less haughty than their high brethren, this is not always the case. The more powerful have practiced their craft for decades, and expect deference from both the living and the dead. Many have no fear of Cainites and know just how to deal with "their kind."

THE HOLY MAGI

Vampires are not the only supernatural beings within the Church; many pious mages safeguard her integrity. They are the miracle workers, the lonely hermits and the future saints.

THE VERBENA

While the Verbena will not exist as an organized Tradition for several centuries, their forebears are widely represented throughout Europe. Because the Verbena typically live in rural areas (the ~~to~~ to practice their Art) only Gangrel and landholdtng Cainite lords encounter them with any frequency. Verbena are reputed to have an interest in vampire blood, either for use in powerful rituals or to control ~~Gits~~ ~~high~~ their vitae.

LIEGE, LORD AND LACKEY

As figures of local veneration, they are often influential enough to check the political power of the mightiest cardinal. (And if politics fail, there is always magic....) Cainites who wish to live within the Church's fold must occasionally come to terms with these magicians, making fertile ground for alliances. Those Cainites who do not may find clerical garb no protection.

Unsubtle Cainites simply Dominate or bind static mages in Blood Oaths, co-opting their power and influence for themselves. Other Cainites control a miracle worker through the lure of power or the threat of punishment. Hermits, nuns and the like may feel unappreciated — Cainites can give them the recognition they deserve. Conversely, if a holy mystic's beliefs slide into the unorthodox, she may prove pliant under threat of a heresy trial. Many times, the vampiric cleric manipulates from afar, the better to avoid his protege's aura of Faith.

THE CONGREGATION

A loose-knit organization of true mages protects Christian and Jewish worshippers. Calling itself the Congregation, it pursues the same goals as its latter-day descendant, the Celestial Chorus. Christians make up the bulk of its current membership, with Jews a tiny minority. Congregationists may be found scattered throughout the fringes of the Church, typically in vocations where heterodoxy and eccentricity are most easily ignored. Monks and mystics have always been the mainstay of the sect's membership, although Congregationists run the gamut from laywomen to bishops. Most members look upon vampires as tools of the Devil, and, therefore, even those few mages who would deal with Cainites must do so in secret. Clerical vampires speak in whispers of a group of Congregationists dedicated to the extermination of the Children of Caine, and the disappearance of the occasional vampire of the cloth lends credence to the rumors. There may be an opposing sentiment within the Congregation, however, and Cainites of the Via Caeli have occasionally received unexpected aid from Congregationists.

INFERNALISTS

Some particularly daring Cainites use infernalists as servants and allies. Some infernalists work with Cainites to corrupt them. Others feel that vampires are a type of demon and follow them slavishly. Vampires who exhibit their powers openly have been known to attract would-be infernalists who expect the Cainite to grant them magic powers. A few vampires have turned infernalists into acceptable servants or even neonates, but others have been condemned by their poor choices of allies. Because Setites and the Baali have been both known to use infernalists as their agents, princes rarely hesitate to call a Blood Hunt when rumors of infernalism reach their ears. The Church, too, is ever vigilant, and regularly sends infernalists and their masters to the stake. Moreover, the infernal powers themselves are often jealous, and the Cainite who pretends to be a demon may soon find himself confronted by the real thing.

OTHER STYLES AND GROUPS

Occasionally a Cainite encounters a Craftmason or member of the Cabal of Pure Thought, with dubious results. There are few "scientific" static magi, although vampires may occasionally meet a self-described natural magician or inventor.

The Muslim world boasts its own magical traditions. Much of its magical theory has entered Europe via translations done in Iberia and Sicily and has contributed to the growth of European astrology and Hermetic theory. Assamites deal with Muslim sorcerers occasionally, as do traveling, crusading or scholarly Cainites.

STORY IDEAS

• The Hidden Patron

The characters discover a rich Cainite making surreptitious donations to a wide circle of static magicians in exchange for reports on their alchemical and magical progress. What secrets does the mysterious patron hope to uncover? How will he react to the characters' interference? Will the magicians discover that their patron is a Cainite? And what assistance does their benefactor request when he finally calls in his favors?

• The Heretics

A group of vampires use the Cainite heresy to lure a cabal of clerical magicians into their power. Now the magicians venerate those who supply them with Cainite's blood and body. Unfortunately, the Church is already on the sorcerers' trail, and the ensuing witch-hunt threatens to expose the existence of every vampire in the city, including the player characters. Can they convince the congregation to disband before investigators arrive? Or will the plotters use their new ghouls to defy the Church and prince alike?

• Stranded in Europe

The hapless characters find their city wracked by a series of bizarre magickal disturbances. At fault is a mage stranded in Europe after the rest of her cabal was slain during a disastrous foray into the Umbra. Can the Cainite characters befriend or at least control her and help her learn to survive in the alien horror of Dark Medieval Europe? Or will her futile attempts to cross the Gauntlet endanger the local Cainites — starting deadly fires and drawing the attentions of the Church?

WRAITHS

The Fetters and Passions of the Restless oftentimes bring them into conflict or alliance with those masters of the Skinlands, the Cainites. On rare occasions, these temporary associations burgeon into something lasting.

BEYOND THE SHROUD

A full-fledged alliance requires more than fleeting glimpses of dim shapes through the Shroud; it requires reliable, continuous contact. Thus, only a few specially endowed Cainites and Restless are suitable for portrayal in a crossover chronicle.



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One obvious solution is to give every wraith the Arcanoi needed to communicate across the Shroud (preferably Embody, although higher level Puppetry works too). Arcanoi such as Inhabit, Outrage and Pandemonium are also helpful but limited in their ability to convey information. The story would likewise run more smoothly if the Cainite characters could see across the Shroud, but Storytellers may feel that the advanced Auspex needed (a custom Level Six power) is unduly powerful for starting characters.

Crossover chronicles lend themselves especially well to troupe style play. If players have characters on both sides of the Shroud, they will never be bored, even if the group itself must separate for long periods. For example, each player could control both a Cainite and a wraith, switching between roles or playing both simultaneously as circumstances warrant. Daring troupes may even choose to play out the slow process by which Cainites become aware of their Restless fellows (and vice versa), refraining from purchasing Auspex or Arcanoi until later in the chronicle. The back story bringing the group together will doubtless be extremely interesting and should perhaps be explored in a series of linked preludes. Were the characters acquainted in life? Were the deaths of the wraiths and the Embraces of the Cainites linked events? What dangers now threaten the Cainites—dangers that only the wraiths can see? How will they protect their fellows in the long interim before they can communicate successfully? The creation of linked storylines is all-important, as is the pace of experience advancement.

DYNAMIC SOULS

Relations between Cainites and their Restless allies can be intensely (and painfully) personal if the Cainite in question is the wraith's Fetter or focus of his Passion. The emotions of the Restless must be strong enough to cheat death — such powerful feelings are often unstable and eccentric. Some wraiths chide Cainites for taking too many risks or fly into rages and vanish for days. The occasional bouts of Shadow-dominance only serve to exacerbate emotional tensions between wraiths and their undead Fetters.

Cainites who control Fetters are scarcely less important to Wraiths than the Fetters themselves. Unscrupulous Cainites who threaten a Fetter may demand any conceivable service. Depending on the Demeanor of the wraith's Psyche, such Cainites may be in for a lot of whining and begging.

Conversely, if the wraith has no Fetter or Passion toward her Cainite associate, the whole relationship is likely to be quite distant. The wraith may only infrequently be willing to spend Pathos to communicate or manifest and likely spend most of her time and energy elsewhere, on more profitable activities. Only the most powerful of shared interests can keep her coming back to her partner.

POLITICKING WITH THE DEAD

Cainites who associate with wraiths risk being drawn into Restless politics, rarely with happy results. A wraith beleaguered enough to trust Cainite aid may have personal enemies.

Attacked, possessed or haunted, a Cainite may never understand what brought on the wrath of the ghostly world or why her ally suddenly disappeared. Since most Cainites cannot cross the Shroud, they can only watch helplessly as Spectres, Legionnaires, Fisher knights, and the like eliminate her Restless allies with impunity.

The Fisher church, though officially condoned by the Hierarchy, nevertheless jockeys with it for control of Restless society. The Fishers mirror the Christian Church with their bishops, archbishops and tithes, and they make no secret of the fact that they wish to become as widespread as their earthly counterparts. They are naturally very strong in the Dark Medieval European Shadowlands, and wraiths who do not sympathize with their views are occasionally harassed, regardless of current Stygian law. These battles sometimes cross the Shroud, drawing in like-minded Cainites on both sides.

The wraithly Guilds are currently embroiled in rivalry and war. Armed melees between small street groups are common enough, as are assassinations and betrayals. Wraiths with significant Arcanoi cannot hide, as any Guild affiliation is literally marked on their corpora. The Guilds, too, have their contacts among the children of Caine.

Cainites may also run afoul of the Hierarchy itself. The Dictum *Mortuum* outlaws any contact between wraiths and residents of the Skinlands, including Cainites. The Hierarchy discourages such contact in a myriad of ways, from killing the offending wraith, to haunting, possessing or even destroying the Cainite ally.

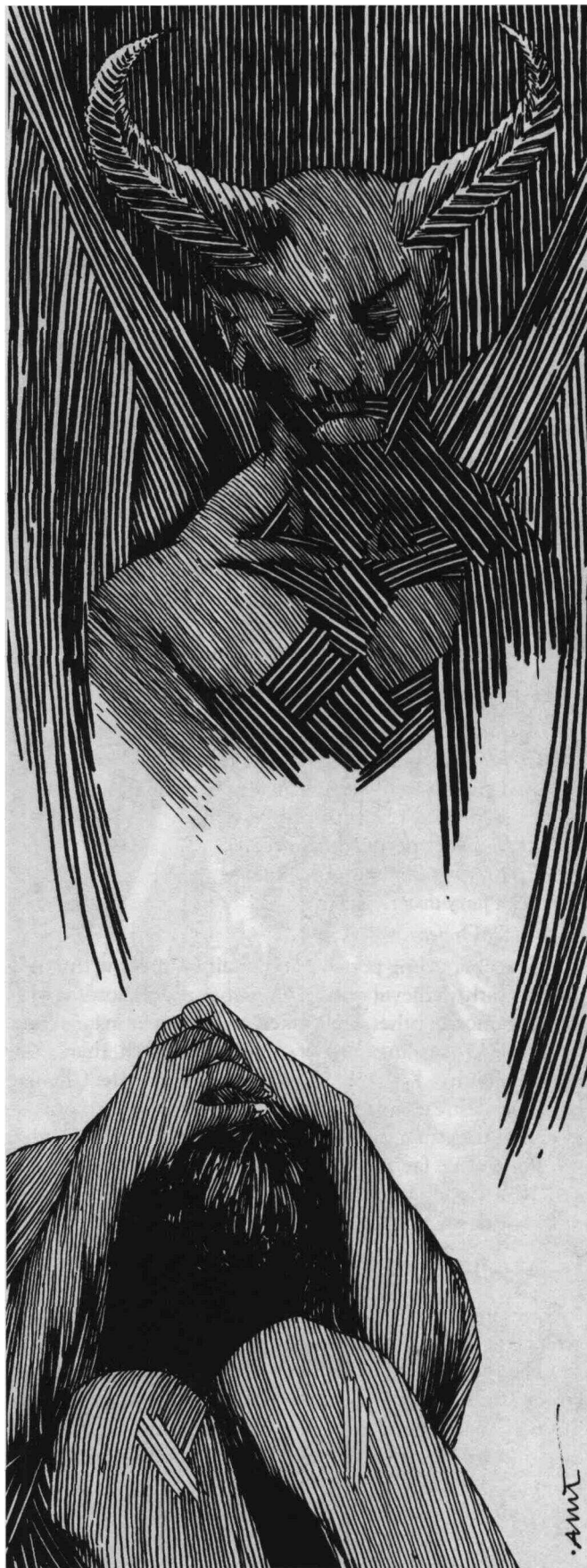
THE CAPPADOCIANS

The Cappadocians maintain a special relationship with the Restless Dead. While the Discipline of Necromancy remains as yet incomplete, and virtually unknown beyond Venice, a few daring Cappadocians use such Disciplines as they do possess (notably *Auspex*) to contact wraiths. Certain elders of the clan have experimented with projecting their *anima* into the Shadowlands, from which they do not often return. Others have developed variants on *Auspex*, allowing them to peer across the Shroud. More pragmatic types prefer to entice wraiths into revealing themselves, frequenting places the Restless are known to congregate, then speaking to the air. Results of their findings circulate in manuscripts such as *De Visibus Mortuorum*.

STORY IDEAS

• Ties Stronger than Death

Once, the Ventrue were strong in the city. They controlled the mortal government. Their ghouls and retainers worked to serve them. Then the Brujah came, casting them down, killing their ghouls, burning the elders. Now, a only handful of neonates survive. But the young Cainites soon find that they have allies: Some of their former ghouls and comrades persist as wraiths. Together, can the group survive the machinations of the murderous Brujah prince?



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• The Skinriders

In Regensburg, Cainites have noticed a strange affliction among their herds. At times, the poor mortals even seem possessed. They have been, as the characters learn when approached by the shattered remnants of the local Puppeteers Guild, purged from the Necropolis by vengeful Artificers. Now the surviving Puppeteers seek allies to protect their remaining Fetters and, perhaps, to find revenge. Soon the Cainites are caught in a many-sided conflict between Artificers, Puppeteers, the Hierarchy and all the Guilds of Regensburg. Who will prevail?

• An Ecumenical Counsel

Unlife is good for the Cainites living in Augsburg, for the bishop and upper clergy are all their ghouls. Then, inexplicably, the bishop begins to have visions. Souls in Purgatory, he claims, beg him to perform inexplicable almsdeeds: He must destroy certain objects and buildings. Unbeknownst to him, these "impious objects" are really the Fetters of the bureaucrats Charon has sent to rule over the Necropolis. Can the Cainites maintain control of their ghouls and uncover the Fishers responsible for the visions? Or will a crisis of faith force the bishop to break his Blood Oath?

CHANGELINGS

*Than he gan bihold about all
And seighe liggeand within the wall
Offolk that were thider y-brought
And thought dede and nare nought.
... And wonder fele there lay besides,
Right as they slept her undertides.
Eche was thus in this world y-nome,
With fairy thider y-come.
- Sir Orefeo*

The changeling population remains quite low throughout the Dark Medieval world, consisting only of those fae who, for one reason or other, have taken on human form for a time. Medieval changelings are of a different breed than their modern cousins. Kith groups and freeholds are rare. Changelings who desire company may return to Arcadia as true fae — assuming that they remember Arcadia at all. The ritual that transforms true fae to changeling often strips away memory and identity, and rarely does a changeling move through life in the Dark Medieval world with surety of purpose.

CAINITE AND CHANGELING

Despite the fact that Cainites encounter true fae far more often, changelings make the better and more frequent allies. True Fae are notoriously ephemeral, unpredictable and dangerous. Changelings, by contrast, have relatively normal wants. Since changelings need food, shelter and clothing, Cainites can (and do) blackmail, threaten and reward them much like humans. Alternately, a vampiric employer or ally can offer changelings an escape from Banality and violence. Cainite



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lords are often patrons of the singers and artists, who are themselves ready sources of Glamour, while ghoulish bodyguards can protect a changeling's fragile body from cold iron.

In return, changelings have much to offer as allies. Their Glamour produces effects that vampiric Disciplines cannot duplicate and whose shock value can be disconcerting to enemies. Moreover, they make excellent advisors; their fae spirits can be vastly ancient, and are occasionally able to recall useful memories from the distant past.

THE BANALITY OF THE DEAD

Despite the mutual rewards, however, vampires and changelings rarely have rosy relationships. Their very natures are antithetical. Changelings exist on Glamour, wonder and frivolity. Such things are rare in a dour Cainite. Changelings who work too long for vampires may begin to accumulate Banality, especially if they take their work too seriously. Vampires who work with changelings for any length of time must learn the value of spontaneity and good humor, or find their allies neutralized by Banality.

STORY IDEAS

- **The Dupe**

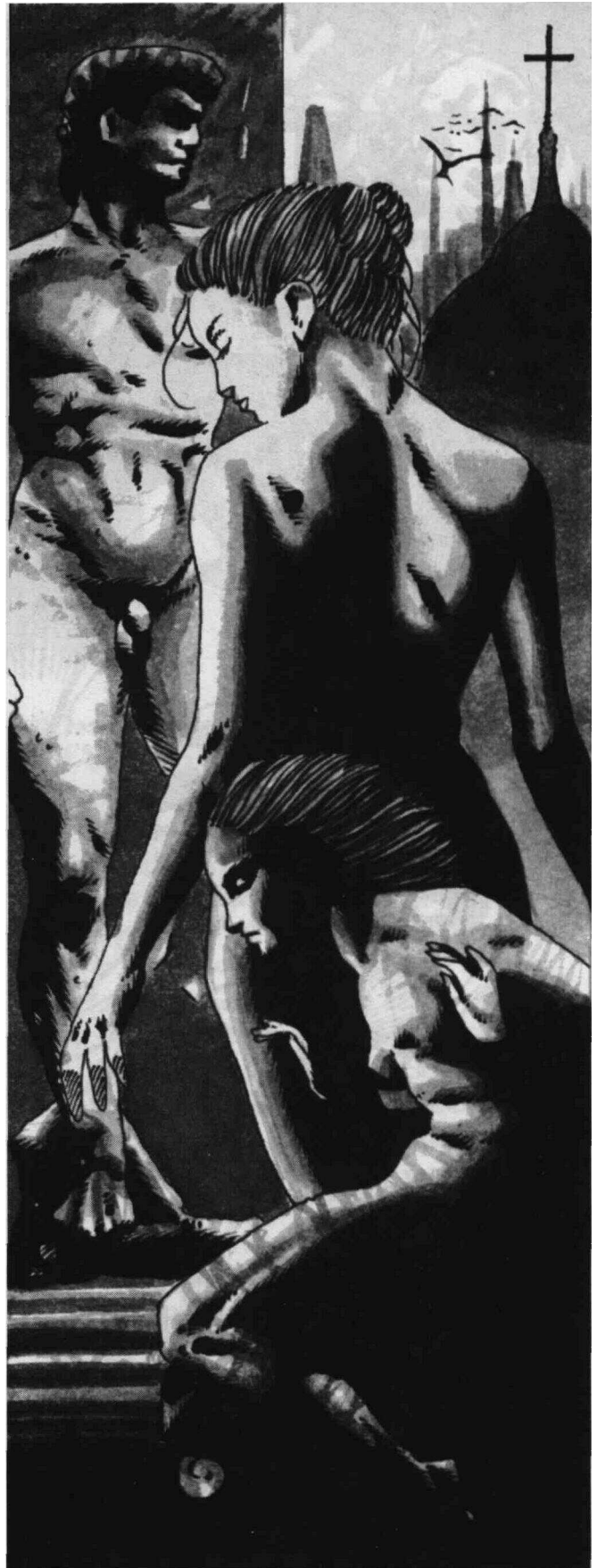
Pity the poor changeling who can find no instructors of her own kind. She might well think herself akin to whatever supernatural creature she first meets. What group of Cainites would not be all too ready to "instruct" her in their ways? But do the vampires really know anything about the fae? And what will the changeling do when she finds out she's been tricked?

- **The Glamour-Feeders**

Several changelings approach a Lasombra countess with an unusual offer. They agree to lend her their magical services if she makes her court a center of art and culture. The countess spends vast sums attracting new poets and painters to fuel the changelings' reveries (or ravages), but it is silver well spent, for her new allies grant her ascendancy over her rivals. The characters learn of this new court. Do they support it, hoping that the ascendant countess rewards them? Or will they ally with her enemies? And what will happen when they discover that changelings' appetites have become insatiable?

- **Emissaries**

The prince of the city strikes a bargain with sidhe fae of the local faerie forest. Some weeks later a group of sidhe changelings and their commoner servants appear at her court, explaining that they are to serve as her "knights" for the duration of the agreement. How will the local Cainites react to the newcomers' strange ways, and vice versa? Will the prince use her new underlings to dominate the city? Will the forest want some of the prince's "knights" for their court in exchange? (Pity the characters sent on this mission.) Or will there be war in the city when the changelings discover that the prince has broken her side of the agreement?



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Appendix: Beyond Mortal Ken – Numina

Though the Church discourages most sorts of supernatural dabbling among the secular, the "old ways" do not go gently into oblivion. Through various means, some individuals gain a simple mastery over the forces of nature or the supernatural. These individuals are naturally of great interest to vampires, who often seek to employ or enslave them.

These capabilities generally fall into one of three categories: Hedge Magic, Psychic Phenomena, and True Faith. Psychics are extremely rare and often unrecognized, while those of True Faith are most often allied with the Church – or at the very least pose very significant potential threats to vampires – and thus rarely find themselves in vampiric service. Hedge magicians, however, are basically of the simple folk, often recognized in their communities for their strange abilities. As a result, more possessors of Hedge Magic find themselves bound, through whatever means, in service to the undead.

Note: True Faith is detailed at length in Chapter Nine of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**; as such, it is not reiterated here. Psychic Phenomena, while not entirely unknown, are not common to the Dark Medieval world (in addition to there being little which outwardly distinguishes them from other Numina). Storytellers wishing to use this latter Numina are encouraged to formulate any effects that they see fitting to its use.

USING NUMINA

Players have no "right to Numina." Hedge Magic, True Faith and Psychic Phenomena are available only with the approval of the Storyteller — as the final arbiter of the game, she may choose to disallow any or all of these abilities to the players' characters.

The possessors of these strange magics are few and far between, and their effectiveness as an element of mystery is diminished as their frequency increases. Use them sparingly; a little goes a long way.

HEDGE MAGIC

Some folk have a *knack* that allows them to learn a very limited form of magic. Plenty of people believe that these practitioners *are* mages, including many of the magicians themselves. Even though their arts can accomplish the seemingly impossible, hedge magicians are but serfs in the kingdom of True Magic. All the same, even such limited craft has great potential.

These are the mystic ways of the peasant folk, the people living close to the land, the people barring their doors by night to keep out the nightmarish things that haunt their landscape. Hedge Magic is most often taught by elders who have inherited the folk secrets of ancient times. Though the Church inspires them to look skyward for what is sacred and vital, commoners retain the sense of earlier faiths that recognized the Earth underfoot as sacrosanct. They are spiritually linked to the natural world that provides for them, and uprooting this link is one of the hardest battles the Church faces.

There is a variety of Hedge Magic Paths, each with a particular emphasis and structure. Their names are given for convenience only; while an Italian magician may refer to his Cursing as *malocchio*, a German may call his Enchanting *galdr*. Each Path lists its general description, effects, limitations, systems and the rituals necessary to do certain things. If you wish to design alternate Paths or rituals, use the descriptions below as a guide. Remember, however, that using Hedge Magic to hurl fireballs around is not conducive to the overall atmosphere of Dark Medieval Europe. Hedge Magic is slow, difficult, subtle and inextricably tied to a given style of magic.

COUNTING THE COSTS

Hedge Magic is divided into specialized Paths. These Paths cost only seven points each to begin, and each new dot includes one ritual of that Path level. These rituals, when

purchased by themselves, cost three "freebie" points to purchase and three times the level of the Path to buy with experience. Thus, a level three ritual would cost nine points, while a first level one would cost only three points.

Each Path costs its previous level x 7 to increase after character creation and requires an Attribute + Ability roll to perform, with the actual rolls varying by Path. Most also require some time and effort. This is largely a roleplaying matter, although Storytellers can assume that Hedge Magic effects take at least one turn per level to prepare and use. Numina-blessed individuals are not True Mages, remember, but talented mundanes who have discovered a way of reaching further than most.

Hedge Magic also requires some kind of focus, ritual or concentration to work. This might be anything from a prolonged ritual involving the carving of runes while chanting to a meditative trance or intensive concentration. This focus will vary from character to character (a village witch won't use the same process as a fiery priest), but is absolutely essential. Whatever the focus may be, it must be performed the same way every time or it won't work. Spells are not casually fired off. They require work, skill and time.

In Dark Medieval Europe, the dangers of magical backlash due to observers' disbelief are minuscule because, for the most part, everyone believes in the existence of magic and witchcraft. In fact, there is some danger that any ritualized secular behavior might be construed as mystical, whether it actually is or not. The true perils to users of Hedge Magic are the superstitious fear of their neighbors and the weapons of the Church's inquisitors, who prowl the land looking for blasphemies to set right.

These abilities are not gained easily, and diversification is rare. As literacy is uncommon at best, Hedge Magic is passed along predominately by oral tradition, and thus learned mainly from rare mentors with knowledge of only a Path or two. Because of these limitations and difficulties, people usually discover one Path and focus their efforts on it alone. Learning new Paths is at best difficult, and usually nigh impossible. Mentors must be found, rare books sought, and long hours of study and toil invested.

SYSTEMS

Hedge Magic requires study, ceremony and concentration. The methods will vary from Path to Path and place to place, but the mechanics for each Path are essentially the same:

— The level of the Path determines what the user can do (Cursing is the exception to this).

— Some sort of ceremony must be performed or some focus must be used. Rituals take at least one turn per level of the magic to perform, and might take longer and/or require extended successes. Some Paths cost a point of Willpower each time a ritual is used.

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— An Attribute + Ability roll should be made, usually Intelligence + Occult. Failure means the user must begin again, with +1 to his difficulty for each additional attempt.

— Hedge Magic's usual difficulty is the effect's level +4.

— The number of successes needed to achieve certain Hedge Magic effects depends on the circumstances. Under normal conditions, only one success is necessary to work an easy effect. More strenuous spells, such as lengthy healings or difficult enchantments, require one success per Path level before they work.

— Willpower can be spent to grant an automatic success.

RITUALS

The dots describing Hedge Magic effects define the general abilities of the Paths. Rituals within those Paths allow the magician wider latitude in using his abilities. Such rituals must be purchased separately (see above) and are bound to the level of effect. A magician must attain a level in his Path before he may buy the corresponding rituals that allow him to expand its possibilities.

The particulars of the rituals themselves are theoretically limitless. In Dark Medieval Europe, there are cultural remnants of many ancient belief systems, and no mechanical system could capture the details of all of them. For rules purposes, use the ritual suggestions mentioned at each level of the Paths to define the magic's game effect. Narrate the story aspect of the spell as you see fit; the Storyteller should encourage and reward player creativity in describing specifics of magic use. A player may design new rituals if he can justify the character's research in story terms. If this course is followed, the Storyteller should make very sure that the power of the ritual does not exceed the general effects of the character's Path rating.

Although the particulars will vary from folkway to folkway, all rituals require a bit of time to perform, and often utilize special objects such as sacred stones, runes, twigs from certain trees, old coins, keys, herbs, bones, animal remnants and sometimes even blood or living sacrifices. Generally, the more powerful the magic, the more complex the ritual must be.

TEAMWORK

Some fornx of Hedge Magic demand that practitioners pool their resources. To cooperate in this way, the characters must share a common Path (Herbal Ways, Telepathy, etc.). A dowser couldn't aid an herbalist in his labors — he doesn't understand the nature of what his associate is doing.

When two or more characters with related Paths combine their efforts, one player makes the roll. Each helper's player rolls his or her Attribute + Ability as well; an additional turn may be required for each helper to join in. For each successful roll by a helper, lower the difficulty of the prime character's roll by 1 to a minimum difficulty of 3. This isn't very helpful for short, easy tasks, but can be vital when trying to do



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something really difficult, like levitating a huge sacred stone or binding a frenzied vampire, which might require extended rolls.

Teamwork failure usually leaves the "lead" character where he started, with no help or hindrance. Anyone who botches, however, adds + 2 to the prime caster's difficulty or subtracts her successes if more than one is needed. If the task involved some sort of heavy power (a level 5 effect, for instance), an unpleasant side effect might be forthcoming.

THE PATHS CURSING

One of the most ancient forms of magic, a curse imparts some baneful wish onto an offending party. This ranges from the "evil eye" to a group malediction. Though anyone can direct ill will at another, this Path allows a Hedge Magician to do so with truly grave effectiveness. At its most basic level, such a curse quickly turns its victim's life rotten, then dissipates. At their worst, potent curses can last for generations.

The curse's severity is bound to the dots in the character's Severity rating (the dots in his Path), and the effects usually happen only once. With a number of successes, however, he can make nasty things happen to more than one person in a given group. A magician cannot curse someone more severely than his skill will allow (i.e., above the dots he has) if working alone. If he works with a group versed in the same Path, however, his displeasure is more maleficent.

The basic system for Cursing is simple. The magician decides what he wants to inflict (within his ability), spends one turn per level of Severity magically gathering and honing his hatred, then discharges it in some cathartic fashion (a scream, a dance, rending a puppet that represents his victim, etc.). The player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation to work the effect and spends a point of Willpower. His successes get divided between Relation and Severity (player's choice), allowing a player to custom-weave the curse. The curse's Effect occurs soon afterward, at some point and in some way determined by the Storyteller, not by the magician; he may choose who he affects, but not how.

If, for example, Timothy the Lout (with 3 dots in Cursing) rolls four successes when blighting the local magistrate, he could choose to inflict a serious injury on him or cause embarrassment to both the magistrate and his wife. Timothy chooses serious injury. Two days later, the magistrate falls from a wagon, breaking his leg (Severity 3). If Timothy had decided to humiliate the family instead, the magistrate might have simply fallen face down into a pile of offal in the street; meanwhile, the wife suffers horrible flatulence during a visit with the family of the local gossip monger (Severity 2).

Unlike most forms of Hedge Magic, Cursing can focus the will of a group into a force more potent than a single magician could muster. By acting in concert (see "Teamwork," above), an angry pack of skilled Hedge witches can bring down death and worse on their enemies. In such cases, each additional member (in possession of the Cursing Numina, of course) grants an

additional dot to the pool, adding to either Severity, Relation or both. Timothy, therefore, could use up to four levels of Severity if he teamed with Black Agnes, the Hag o' the Wood, to curse the magistrate, and his difficulty drops by 1. In the case of group curses, set the initial difficulty at 8 for simplicity.

Curses do not force events to happen or rearrange the laws of nature (that is the province of True Magick). They do, however, subtly nudge things or people already in motion toward the caster's intent. A Hedge Magician's curse may take days or even months to occur, but it *will* happen. The target of a curse might not immediately come down with the pox, but may catch it from a wanderer she encounters on the road a month later.

An especially skilled magician may invoke the Death Curse. By spending all her permanent Willpower, the player can add that Willpower to her Cursing dots, and divide the total as she sees fit between Severity and Relation. The affected person becomes a mindless husk and soon dies, desiccated by the ravages of pure hatred. A witch with minimal skill in Cursing might get only four or five dots to spend, but a powerful one could destroy an entire coterie!

Supernatural creatures may be cursed, but may resist the effect with a successful Willpower roll. This roll will usually be difficulty 7 or 8, but can go as high as 9 if the magician is especially powerful or successful. Naturally, the creature in question has to be aware of the curse to resist it.

As any wise practitioner knows, when mucking about with the threads of fate, you run the risk of entangling yourself. Botching a curse will bring the effects back upon the caster in ways that should delight the most sadistic of Storytellers. Even if the roll is successful, there will always be some kind of backlash from a curse, especially a severe one. The nature of this payback lies more with storytelling than with systems, but should be in line with the general power of the curse and the ill will of the magician. Back-ripples range from losing a valuable object to social banishment, physical ailments or abandonment by friends or family.

No curse need be used at full potency. The caster may choose to revoke a curse at any time prior to its effect. A magician skilled in this Path can also try to banish another's curse with a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 9) and a Willpower point.

Roll: Manipulation + Intimidation

Costs 1 Willpower

Severity Effect (Path rating)

- A brief inconvenience (dropping an object, saying something foolish, a horse stepping on your foot, etc.)
- • An error which results in lasting injury or embarrassment (stepping on a nail, breaking an heirloom, eating bad food, etc.)
- • • A serious injury or illness, not fatal, but debilitating (broken limb, knife-wound, a case of shingles, etc.)

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- • • • A lasting illness, not fatal, but debilitating (infection, stroke, heart attack, senility, etc.)
- • • • • Death, usually by some ghastly means (decapitation, impaling, mangling, torture, gangrene, etc.)

Relation

- One person only
- • One close relation or friend
- • • Two similar relations (male heirs, lovers, parents)
- • • • All close living relations or friends
- • • • • All relations *and* friends!

6 + Relatives or friends for generations to come

Rituals: Although the practices involved in Cursing vary tremendously, the system effects are fairly consistent. There are no special rituals for this Path.

DIVINATION

This Path allows the Hedge Magician to use an external focus of some sort to read the patterns of chance and happenstance in the world around him. Though it may seem so to the unknowing observer, this is not actually "fortune telling," but rather an awareness of the way the web of destiny currently lies, and the ability to look along its strands to see what *may* happen, or even what will *probably* happen if the magician is of a high enough level. A powerful diviner can even subtly communicate the general feeling of a divination to his subject over great distances, a feat which may influence the subject's decisions in how she deals with matters at hand. The subject may never even know she was influenced from outside — in some cases this may save her life.

The tools used to focus the Divination are many, but all work equally well and according to the same principles: simply opening a window of sorts for the magician to peer through and see the very essence of destiny itself. Magicians might use cards, carved fetishes, coins, tea leaves at the bottom of a cup, or the entrails of a recently slain animal. They might peer into a crystal ball, a mirror, or a pool of water. They might walk in the woods and simply watch for omens.

The Storyteller should remember that Divination, even at its most powerful, will never reveal a great deal of detail. Though concrete and specific things can be known, there will always be more unknown just below the surface. Divination is, at best, simply a tool for informed guidance, not a map of paths a person will definitely, or should definitely, follow.

Roll: Intelligence + Alertness

No Willpower cost

Effects

- The magician may get an overall sense of the situation in question, or of general circumstances. This level usually equates to divining whether things are going well, or going badly, and whether someone should be on guard or not.



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- • The magician may determine the proper choice in simple decisions, such as, "Should I take the trip to London?" or "Should I join this stranger for a walk through the village?"
- • • The magician may sense patterns of chance, allowing her to divine short-term possibilities that might follow specific decisions. In the above instance, she would not only be able to say whether the questioner should take the walk or not, but also see various possibilities in the near future that might come from deciding either way. These are only possibilities, and not definite future occurrences, but will allow for some informed guidance.
- • • • The magician is able to divine specific events in the future of the questioner. These events are still not definite, but are much more likely than the nebulous possibilities above. If the questioner changes his current behavior, these events become less likely. The details are still vague: "You will meet a woman who shall become your lover," rather than "You will meet a Gypsy maiden wearing green who shall become your lover."
- • • • • The magician gains the ability to sense concrete details about the future, and to predict specific events with near certainty. She can now not only describe the Gypsy maiden wearing green, but on a very good roll, possibly even give her name. The diviner is now so in touch with the threads of the Fates, that she can even conduct a divination for a person in a completely separate location, and communicate a subtle sense of the overall feel of the divination to that person, such as a sense of foreboding if things are dangerous, or a sense of peacefulness if things are going well. The receiver of this sensation will not recognize it as any sort of communication, but rather experience it as something internal — a "gut feeling," as it were.

Rituals: Each item of focus (crystal ball, ceremonial knife for sacrifices, cauldron, etc.) the magician chooses a ritual unto itself to utilize. Generally, except when purchased during character creation, the magician must find a teacher to learn a new ritual on this Path.

DOWSING

With this Path, a magician uses some mundane item to answer simple questions, locate elemental sources, and find specific items. This Path is related to Divination in that both allow the magician to use external foci and interpretation to

read facts from the world around them. Dowsing is much more results-oriented than Divination, as it is dedicated to specific, limited, practical matters rather than overarching possibilities and circumstances. It might be said that while Divination focuses on the universal, Dowsing attends to the specific.

When dowsing, the magician uses a specific item, or items, made from normal everyday materials, to find something or determine something. The stereotype of the dowser is that of the peasant yokel with a forked stick looking for water, and indeed, that is a common use of the ability. True dowsers know there is much more to this magic, however. Facts may be learned through the judicious asking of questions. Specific items can be found, and at higher levels even hidden emotions (like malice, or hatred, or even love) can be detected in those around you.

If a dowser fails a roll, she may try again, but only after some time passes to reflect further on the matter. This period of reflection starts at six days for a dowser with one dot, and decreases by a day for each dot gained in the Path. It may not drop below one day.

Roll: Perception + Alertness

No Willpower cost

Effects

- The dowser is able to find a small item (a ring, a key, a specific book) that belongs to her within a proximity of fifty feet. She may also gain a general sense about the answer to yes-or-no questions related directly to herself.
- • The dowser can find any personal items within a mile of her, and small items belonging to others within fifty feet. She may also gain a general sense about yes or no questions regarding another individual.
- • • The dowser can track down any personal item anywhere, though, depending on distance, this may require extended rolls. She may find any item belonging to others within a mile, and may also locate specific accumulations of basic elemental forms (a stream or a layer of stone underground, or a secret room — an accumulation of air behind a wall) within a mile. She may gain an answer to any yes-or-no question about any mundane subject (questions such as "Is there a God?" are beyond the dowser's ken, while "Is this soup poisoned?" would be allowable).
- • • • The dowser can instantly locate any personal item, anywhere, with a single roll (though she will still have to travel the distance to reach the item), and can track down any item belonging to someone else regardless of distance, though extended rolls may be required at longer distances. She may now sense magic, or illness or hidden emotions within fifty feet.

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• • • • • The dowser can instantly locate any item, anywhere, with a single roll (though the distance will still have to be crossed to reach the item). She may now track down specific substances within a mile, such as deposits of gold or iron underground.

Rituals: Each dowser must choose an implement-type for her personal focus when using this Path. Using this implement-type is a ritual. The implements must be mundane items, such as a forked stick, a pair of wooden wands, an item dangling from a string (a needle, coin, stone, knife, ring, etc.) or any other device. Any new implement-types must be purchased as new rituals, though the dowser may use any item of the type already purchased to work the Path (i.e., she's not forced to use a specific forked stick, she can use any forked stick). She must, however, spend at least an hour preparing a previously unused item before dowsing with it.

ENCHANTMENT

Enchantment is the magical art of creating minor talismans. Crafting magic from ingredients both eldritch and mundane, the enchanter spends much of his time hidden in his home or workshop, whittling and carving and burning and forming, or tracking down strange items and ingredients.

Minor talismans differ from their magickal counterparts in many ways. Each has a single power, which usually works a few times under set conditions.

Talisman creation should flow more from story concerns and good roleplaying than from die rolls. As for the system, assume that each different minor talisman requires a ritual process that must be mastered before the craftwork begins. When the ritual is purchased, the enchanter sets to work on the object itself. After the talisman's form is crafted (which may require extended *Dexterity* + *Ability* rolls, at the Storyteller's discretion), the talisman should be prepared in some special way according to the belief or style of the magician — carved with runes, dipped in blood, blessed by a priest, etc. Useful Abilities for these tasks include *Crafts*, *Herbalism*, *Hearth Wisdom*, *Medicine* and *Occult*, depending on the purpose and manufacture of the talisman.

After this first step, the enchanter sets *one* purpose for the item. This is the "power" it will have. Successful enchantment usually demands a day or two of preparation per talisman level. A simple level one item would require only two to four days of work (again, at the Storyteller's discretion), while a fifth-level one would demand at least five, if not ten or more. At the end of this time, the enchanter makes an *Intelligence* + *Occult* roll (difficulty is talisman's level + 4). A point of *Willpower* spent during final creation infuses his might into the talisman.

An enchanter can never create a talisman more powerful than his Path level. If he has four dots in Enchantment, he can craft only talismans of 4 dots or less in power. Once created, a minor talisman will work within some specified framework, such as when the moon is waning, when a blind man coughs,



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when a particular blade is drawn in anger, when an enemy enters your workshop, etc. These conditions should be colorful and very specific, tied to the purpose of the enchanter, not to general utility. Such particulars should be described during the creation process and must be adhered to closely. Each minor talisman will work only a certain number of times (equal to the number of successes rolled) and will be useless (if decorative!) thereafter.

Talismans vary tremendously, from the rowan necklace that guards against faerie cantrips to bones that allow one (hopefully) to speak to one's ancestors. Talismans can be used by anyone. Some potential talismans appear below, but clever enchanters can create their own with a little ingenuity and a lot of work. First, the player must decide what single effect the talisman contains. She then details her character's research and development process. A simple "I create a level five talisman that makes me king" will not do! Both player and Storyteller should check the prospective talisman to make sure it fits the general guidelines offered below. After a period of story-defined time (anywhere from a few days to a year or more), the player attempts an Intelligence + Occult roll, difficulty 9. Success means the enchanter has discovered the secret of Enchantment and can proceed as described above.

Botching a creation roll can be a bad thing. Many an enchanter has perished in a sudden conflagration caused by something as prosaic as an untimely sneeze or a misread passage in an old book. Obviously, talisman creation is not a quick or easy art.

Roll: Intelligence + Occult

Costs 1 Willpower

Effects and Sample Talismans

- A small object with tight restrictions and a limited power, perhaps a brief addition to an Attribute or Ability, that is never obvious as magic.

— A silver toe ring that protects its wearer from incoming projectiles if she is barefoot at the time (two dots of Dodge vs. missiles).

— A colored candle that grants the user some one-time favor after it is burned (two points of Resources, Allies or Influence, depending on the color of the candle). The Background works once to provide a favor, then fades. Each success creates one candle,

— A handful of grave dirt that enables the user to sleep soundly. He will wake immediately if someone approaches him with hostile intent.

— An oak box that protects a single, specific item inside it from thievery. The magic is good until the item is removed from the box. Both the box and the item must be treated with wittow smoke.

- • A more potent version of a level one talisman (with an additional die or two of effect), or one that alters reality more noticeably.

— A bundle of arrows (one per success) that do two additional dice of damage when shot from a specially prepared bow.

— An iron nail that enables the user to cause someone to painfully stub his toe. The nail must be driven by an enemy into a footprint left by the target.

— A mousebone charm that alerts the wearer when the talisman maker (or some other single party) is in danger. The charm must be sprinkled with wine each time it is used and works once for each crafting success.

— A rowan ring that negates any form of foe magic used to bewitch the wearer. This charm works for one incident per crafting success.

- • • The item performs some obviously unusual function. Witnesses who know anything about magic will sense it being done. Most folks will be confused: How did he do that?

— A salve that heals three nonaggravated Health Levels worth of open wounds in a matter of minutes. This must be applied by moonlight by one who loves the wounded. Each success creates one application of balm.

— An obsidian bull torque that strengthens the wearer once after it is blooded (three points of Strength that last for one scene per success after blood is wiped across it).

— A cloth that wipes away any normal thing it is used to clean (blood, ink, spilled food). The user must hum softly while mopping up. This works once for every success rolled during creation.

- • • • With a talisman of this caliber, the user can defy a fair amount of conventional reality, albeit with some restrictions. If these limits are ignored, the magic is ineffective.

— Bones that allow the user to contact the person they came from. Note that this is not always successful! If it is, however, the user can ask one question per creation success. Whether or not the ghost answers truthfully is the spirit's prerogative, but it will answer if it can. These bones work only three times, then crumble to dust.

— A book in which anything written can be read by anyone, regardless of language or literacy or even blindness. Each page must be gently treated with clear spring water before the magic will work. The magic works once per creation success, then loses its effect, though any writings will still remain.

— A knife that stabs directly for the heart when used. It inflicts Strength +5 dice of damage; the knife may be thrown. The blade must first be drawn in hot anger and washed afterward in fresh blood. It works once per success.

- • • • • Items this potent are rare and unpredictable, and work some wonder that clearly springs from supernatural sources.

— A black cloak that masks the user's footsteps, even if he walks across dead leaves or a squeaky floor. While this magic is active, the wearer will be effectively silent unless he speaks. Silver threads must be sewn into this garment; they break and fall away after the magic expires.

— An exquisite harp that plays beautifully for anyone who touches its strings, even if she knows nothing about music.

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A brass amulet which protects the bearer from detection and observation by magical means. This amulet of the mists obscures its bearer from the flow of magical energies (adds +4 to the difficulty of any roll made to locate the wearer magically). The user must first answer an enigma before the amulet will protect him. Its veil lasts a number of weeks equal to the creator's successes.

EPHEMERA

This Path allows a medium to reach into the spirit world and contact its denizens. The nature of the spirits contacted depends upon the rituals the medium knows. Some rituals allow contact with natural spirits, while others breach the barriers between the living world and that of the dead. Note that even the medium himself may not realize which spirits he is dealing with; at least two dots of Occult are required to know the difference. Inexperienced mediums sometimes get themselves into dangerous situations because of their ignorance, opening themselves to demonic corruption or spirit pranks.

Mediums open themselves up as spirit channels. The spirits, however, have minds of their own. If they have reason to mislead, possess or abuse the magician, they may try. In story terms, this means the ghost or spirit can act through the medium with little hindrance.

Thankfully, these magicians have some defensive rituals to help them out if the spirits are unruly or malicious. Known

as Warding and Forbiddance, these protective "spells" may be taken as level one rituals and have the following system effects:

- Warding protects an area from spirit intrusion. By using some precautionary charm (an intricate chant, a prayer, painted sigils, iron nails, sprinkled salt, spattered holy water), spending a point of Willpower, and rolling same against a difficulty of 7, the medium can prevent spirits from entering an area for one week per success.
- Forbiddance drives a spirit from an area. By rolling successfully (magician's Willpower vs. difficulty 7), the medium can push a spirit away from her immediate surroundings. A willful spirit can oppose this ritual by spending one of its own Willpower per success (if it has any), but must otherwise flee until the medium has left.

Nature spirits are more direct, if more problematic, to deal with. With the Banishment and Seal rituals (level two), the medium may attempt to Forbid, Ward, or, with Dolor (level three), actually harm a natural spirit. This last inflicts the medium's Willpower as damage against a spirit with a successful Wits + Enigmas roll. She totals up her Willpower and successes and takes a figurative bite out of the spirit with them. A strong spirit will be unimpressed, but a weaker one may be wounded or even destroyed if the medium is good enough. Despite these rituals, being too aggressive with the denizens of the spirit world is not a good idea, as spirits often fight back. It is good for mediums to have high Willpower scores.



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Persuasion is often more effective than force. To establish contact, the medium rolls her Charisma + Occult while calling out to the spirits in the area. Assistants (see "Teamwork") can help lower the initial difficulty, as can a number of other factors that specifically relate to the spirit being contacted. Locating her quarry usually requires an extended roll (see below) on the part of the medium. Once communication begins, the magician speaks her purpose, hoping to convince the spirit to aid her in whatever way it can. The details of this interaction play out like any normal conversation, but should be a lot stranger, bizarre, surreal — the ways of spirits are transitory and unknowable. The unearthly nature of this Path should be obvious.

Many among the dead cannot be reached by mortal entreaties. Those who can may be called with an extended roll of as many successes as the Storyteller sees fit. Contacting your brother in the field where he died last year would demand less work than finding a Pictish warrior five-hundred years dead. The Storyteller should decide whether or not the ghost has passed beyond a reachable state, though this truth should remain a secret to the players. A malevolent spirit might masquerade as the spirit the medium wanted to meet, which could lead to truly dire troubles.

Unlike other Paths, the difficulty of reaching between the worlds goes down with each level, while your ability increases. A medium with one dot in Ephemera works against difficulty 9 and cannot actually communicate with anything other than human ghosts (and then only if they wish to converse). This goes down by one step per dot, to a final difficulty of 5. As a medium's skill grows, she can speak with natural spirits and seek out specific entities.

Several Traits available in the Storyteller systems are appropriate to medium characters. Hearth Wisdom and Occult are essential. Subterfuge, Intimidation and certain vampiric Disciplines are very helpful. The Flaws Haunted and Demon-Hounded are common. Spirits, it should be known, make good allies — and terrible enemies. Be wary.

Roll: Charisma + Occult

No Willpower cost (except for rituals, above)

Effects

- You can feel the spirits moving and even get their attention with a successful roll. What they do is up to them. This is a dangerous but necessary phase in a medium's Path.
- • You can make distinctions between the spirits you summon and can call specific entities if you know their names. If things get out of hand, you can try to dismiss what you have called.
- • • When you speak, something always comes. With luck, you can address it, befriend it, or dismiss it. If you want to address a particular spirit personally, you can try at this level.

• • • • You can part the curtains between worlds and actually see and hear those ephemera around you. Most spirits respect you for your insight and ability. Some will even come when you *don't* call...

• • • • • The spirits of nature and the dead know your name and often come when you call. You can hurt those who displease you and dismiss those who offend you.

Rituals: Other than those listed above, certain rituals may be contrived to call specific spirits with no possibility of failure, bind spirits to a specific location and even enter the spirit world itself. The details of these rituals are best left to the Storyteller, to use as she deems necessary.

HEALING/INFLICTION

Though related in their means, these two Paths are at opposite ends of the effectual spectrum. Only very rare individuals will possess both Paths, as the spiritual grounding of each is so vastly at odds with the other's.

Healing allows a magician to quell pain and heal small injuries or illnesses, while Infliction *causes* pain and *creates* injuries and illnesses. Using these Paths is not a matter of instant effects, however; it takes a long time to treat/inflict an illness or injury, and longer still for the subject to fully experience the results. Even the simplest magics, though, can ease (or cause) pain for as long as the magician keeps his hand on the affected area.

Healers and Inflicters usually need the Medicine Knowledge. Meditation, singing, massage, herbs and foul-smelling brews are common foci for these magics. These Paths also sap a certain amount of energy from a magician during the process, and it's easy to exhaust oneself by doing too much too quickly. Magical healers often suffer from their incredible sensitivity and compassion, while Inflicters simply burn too fiercely with the fires of malice. Either can wear a person down before her time.

These Paths cannot heal or cause aggravated wounds.

Roll: Manipulation + Intuition

Costs 1 Willpower per ailment

Effects (described as Healing — Infliction *causes* the stated effect rather than eliminating it)

- You can soothe a headache, backache or other minor pain. The ailment doesn't go away, but your patient feels better for a while.
- • Sprains, migraine headaches, flu, minor infections — you can speed the healing process by 50 percent or more with a little work.
- • • A cure for the common cold! Broken bones and nasty wounds heal twice as fast as they normally would and without infection. You can help an Incapacitated character to her feet and get her moving, though you cannot heal such injuries completely.

• • • • Chronic diseases are not beyond your care, although healing them will take days or weeks. Broken bones and major trauma will heal 50 percent faster than normal, and your touch banishes all but the worst pain.

• • • • • With effort, you can cure deadly conditions (smallpox, consumption, stroke, plague), though it takes a lot out of you and requires weeks of treatment. When these diseases go, they're gone for good. Broken bones and major trauma heal in one to three weeks of care, and infection poses no risk as long as the patient's in your care.

Rituals: Open wounds, area trauma (including broken bones, sprains and dislocations), diseases, chronic aches and infections each require a different ritual to Heal/Inflict. These each cost only three points across the board. Note that a magician with both Heal *and* Infliction would have to take separate rituals to cure and to cause one of these effects. Remember that, in general, a magician of the Healing Path would have too much compassion ever to contemplate misusing her gifts by causing pain, while a magician of the Infliction Path would lack the compassion needed to be a good Healer. If a character takes both Paths, the Storyteller might limit that character's advancement to a maximum of three dots in each, reflecting the deep schism in spiritual philosophy.

HERBAL WAYS/BREWING

This elemental Path allows a magician to brew natural ingredients into potions, salves, oils, incense, poultices, stews and powders with real potency. It requires the Herbalism Knowledge to perform and usually involves dozens of harvested materials — plants, mosses, grains, molds, earth and sometimes bodily fluids or remains.

Herbalists believe the magic they work comes through an affinity with the innate power of living things. Most dispute the concept of "magic," arguing that all things have powerful properties (or inner spirits): essences which must be respected. Herbal magic is not simple enchantment — it is a relationship between the magician and the Earth.

Like the Enchantment Path (above), Herbal Ways demand a certain investment of time, effort and material. Only the right ingredients will do. The basic system for herbal magics is the same as Enchantment, but the concoctions take longer to prepare. Each level of effect takes two to four days of harvesting, sorting, mixing and aging before the results can be achieved. This time can be reduced by a well-stocked pantry or ready garden, but will almost never drop below one day per level.

Herbal concoctions are usually good for a single use and a single purpose. The potency of the broth, salve or brew depends on the herbalist's successes (Intelligence + Herbalism). A single success indicates a bitter batch that is only marginally effective, while four or more indicate an especially enticing bit of work with double potency and a pleasing form. Victims of

the darker variety of Herbal Ways should be allowed to resist the effect by rolling their Stamina (or Willpower) against the herbalist's successes.

Because of the slow and subtle nature of herbal and brewing magics, their exact effects are best left to stories than to systems. Players and characters are encouraged to devise their own recipes (rituals), with the samples below as guidelines. The discovery of some new brew might be the subplot of a whole story as the herbalist seeks the perfect materials to concoct a love potion or experiments with the flora of some foreign land.

Roll: Intelligence + Herbalism

No Willpower cost

Effects

- Enables the herbalist to concoct poultices and brews which cure minor aches or rashes, induce or prevent sleep, alleviate symptoms of slight illnesses, preserve foods when they would otherwise spoil, and other minor effects that would hardly be considered magic.
- At this level, an herbalist's creations quickly cure minor illnesses and pains, avert or confer pregnancy with 100 percent certainty, radically alter a person's mood, discourage or attract animals or insects, induce or cure intoxication with a few sips, and other noticeable effects that, while not apparently magical, seem remarkable.
- These potent concoctions can put people to sleep with a pinch, reduce the effects of deadly poisons and serious illnesses, speed recovery of open wounds and broken bones by 50 percent or more, put folks into light trances or randy moods, and perform other obviously unusual functions with amazing speed.
- Brews and items created with this level of Herbalism can accomplish some obviously unearthly things — adding one or two dots to a Physical or Social Trait for a scene, clearing up an infection in a few minutes, aiding recovery from life-threatening illnesses and such. Obviously, these effects are subject to Storyteller judgment; they are not sudden, flashy or long-lasting.
- These are the magic brews of legend — sleeping potions, love oils, deadly poisons, healing salves, instant cures, all-night aphrodisiacs, flying ointments and other impossible (or at least improbable) solutions. Such potions, if they work, allow the imbiber to defy conventional reality for a

scene or two, though the effects of these mighty brews should still remain as subtle and subjective as possible.

SUMMONING, BINDING AND WARDING

This is almost universally regarded as the most dangerous sort of Hedge Magic. Summoning Path rituals draw forth creatures — from rats or birds to vampires or werewolves — guard against them, or press them into service. It is a complicated Path, rife with precautions and rituals, and even under the best conditions, it creates lifelong enemies.

Vampires naturally are interested in having these abilities used *for* them, but must be ever wary of a servant who knows this Path; it may be turned against the master at a whim.

Rituals of this Path usually order a being to appear, bind him magically when he does, and keep him at arm's length until he completes his task. These rituals usually require long preparations. Few magicians would be stupid enough to compel something to appear without first guaranteeing their own safety. Such protection requires rituals, a separate one for each type of being. Once these wards are laid, the summoning begins. This too requires a specific ritual; one cannot ward against a dog, then summon a werewolf (well, one *could...*). Finally, when the thing called arrives, a binding may be laid to force it into service. Remember: No one, not even an animal, enjoys being forced into service.

Some magicians prefer to use only wards or summonings to protect themselves or call upon aid. Only a fool would lay a binding without protection, though some have tried. Dismissal rituals offer a sort of compromise. If the rite succeeds, the summoned creature will leave in peace—for now, anyway. The forms of these rituals can range from dancing around a consecrated mound to sacrifice, bent-knee prayers or intricate engraved circles. Players and Storytellers should play such ceremonies to the dramatic hilt. Basic systems work as follows:

- **Warding:** The magician lays some type of ward (pentacle, triangle of salt, offering of food and liquor, gold, herbs, a plate of blood, etc.) and the player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty is Path level +4). The ward's target must spend one Willpower per the magician's successes to enter the protected area. A ward lasts one scene per success. A fair but devious Storyteller might make the ward roll in secret, leaving the magician to wonder if the ward will hold!

This ritual will reduce any incoming werewolf Gift, vampire Discipline or other supernatural effect by one dot of effect for each of the magician's successes. Wards will not affect mundane weapons, however.

- **Summoning:** After the character makes long preparations, the player rolls Charisma + Occult against a difficulty of 6. He must accumulate twice as many successes as his target's (permanent) Willpower with one roll per hour. The range is one mile per level of the Path rating used. Once this is done, the first such being within the range will come to the magician as quickly as possible.

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This does not conjure a creature from thin air. The subject will come at her own speed. If there are no suitable targets in the area, the magician may have to continue until one arrives. For each Willpower point spent, he may add another mile to the range.

- **Minor Binding:** Once the subject is present, the magician can try to compel it to service — if he dares. A Minor Binding pits the magician's will against the subject's. To effect a Minor Binding, the magician spends a Willpower point and performs his ritual (Manipulation + Occult; difficulty 6). His target rolls Willpower (difficulty is the magician's Willpower). If the subject wins, the ritual has no effect. If it loses, it must perform one task for the magician before it is freed. This should be spelled out as completely as possible. Rest assured that any bound being will be looking for a way to twist his instructions to suit his own whims (which are likely to be hostile to the magician...).

- **Major Binding:** The system for Major Binding is the same as for Minor Binding, except both parties extend their rolls to accumulate 10 successes. For each roll, both parties spend 1 Willpower (which does not count toward the 10 successes necessary, though additional Willpower may be spent thus); whoever reaches 10 first (and still has Willpower left) wins. If the subject loses, it is bound to the magician until some condition is met. This "contract" must be specified immediately and can be anything from "Until my hair goes gray" to "Until I rest in my grave," so long as it's a possible event. If the magician loses, he's got trouble.

- **Dismissal:** If the magician wants his subject to depart in peace, he performs another ritual involving some thanks, a benediction and request to depart, and usually a healthy offering. A simple Wits + Occult roll against a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower "persuades" the subject to leave without rending the magician to bits. This doesn't prevent future animosity, but for now the being leaves content. This will *not* work after a Major Binding attempt.

Hedge Magic summonings work only on material beings; Ephemera handles spirit-dealings. Vampires, wercreatures, mages and those offae blood can counterattack with their own abilities unless a ward or outside force keeps them from acting. This path is best performed with help standing by—preferably lots of it.

The rituals above need not be performed together. Bindings or wards can be used on their own if circumstances permit. Players and Storytellers should be flexible, dramatic and fair when running such summonings.

Rolls:

Wits + Occult (Warding)	No cost
Charisma + Occult (Summoning)	No cost
Manipulation + Occult (Binding)	Costs 1 Willpower
Wits + Occult (Dismissal)	No cost



Effects

- This level's rituals affect only small animals — rats, bats, birds, lizards and the like. The magician may summon three of these per success.
- • The higher mammals (cats, dogs, wolves, bears) may be Summoned and controlled. A magician may control two per success.
- • • Normal humans can be summoned. A magician attempting this must use some item from the person he wants to command (hair, clothing, etc.). Only one can be commanded per success.

• • • •

Minor supernatural beings (ghouls, werewolf Kinfolk, other magicians, fomori) can be brought and warded. The limitations of normal humans apply.

• • • • •

Major supernaturals (vampires, werereatures, mages, faeries) can be summoned and bound. Only one individual may be so treated, and some bit of fur, blood, armor, clothing, etc. must be used. This is dangerous; one bad roll and splat....

Rituals: Each different kind of subject, whether bird, wolf, or vampire, has a unique set of rituals that must be purchased and used to have any effect. Warding, Summoning, Minor Binding, Major Binding and Dismissal all require separate rituals as well.