

Right of Princes™



A SOURCEBOOK FOR THE DARK MEDIEVAL™

Right of Princes™



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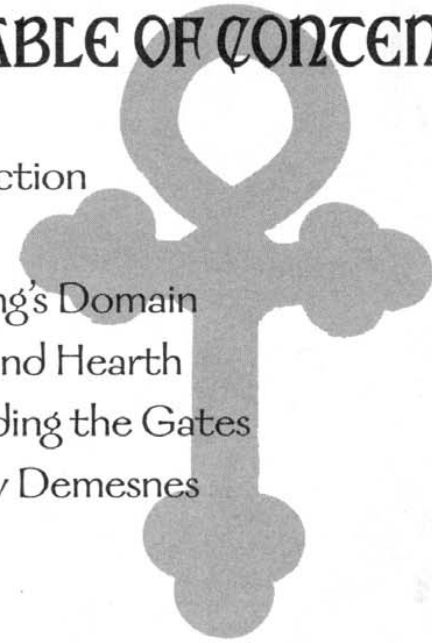
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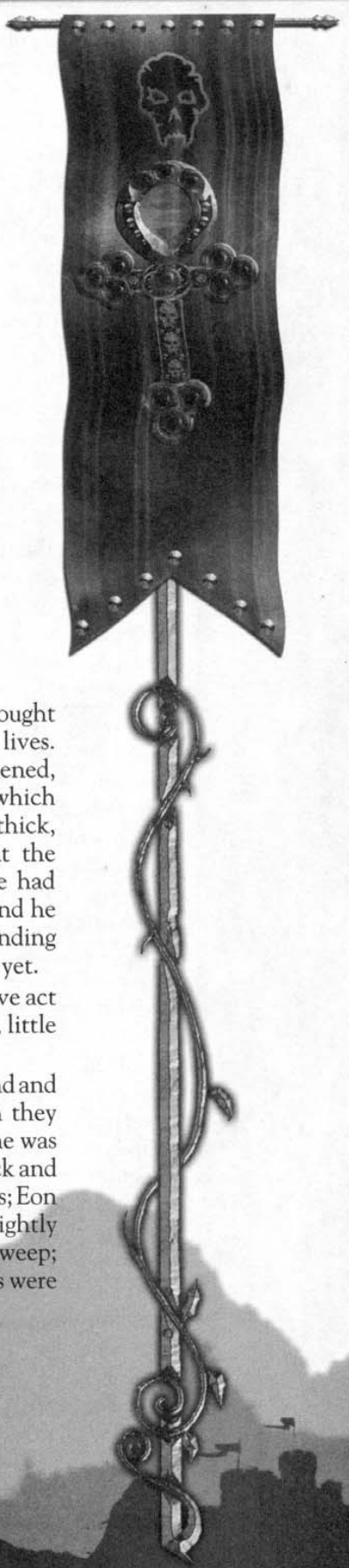
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PRELUDE: DIPLOMATIC ACTION

Four of the six prisoners gurgled and swayed, legs kicking frantically as they sought purchase four feet above solid ground, thickly knotted ropes strangling out their lives. Eon de l'Etoile watched silently as their struggles gradually slowed, their faces darkened, then slackened. The bodies, once they were cut down from the gallows pole on which they hung, would be shipped overland to Narbonne, carefully preserved in a thick, vaguely briny solution provided for just that purpose. He had no idea what the Narbonnais Tremere would *want* with them, and he didn't quite dare ask. He had purchased their sorceries with mutually beneficial acts of violence in the past, and he probably would in the future. Still, part of him still squirmed at the thought of handing the corpses of even Cathar knights over to sorcerers who seemed more heretical yet.

He turned away before the momentary pang could become any sort of impulsive act of conscience, reminding himself firmly that these men were barely knights at all, little better than bandits, and death was the just reward for their depredations.

On the far side of the penitential court, the remaining two prisoners stood bound and gagged among a fairly substantial guard, three Cainites and six ghouls, though they clearly didn't appreciate the honor. Eon approached, considering as he came. One was visibly younger than any of the others, sixteen, seventeen at most, white with shock and tearful with grief. He kept looking at his dangling comrades with wide, horrified eyes; Eon suspected that one of them might be his brother or his father. The other was only slightly older, Eon guessed around twenty, but of considerably stronger mettle. He didn't weep; he had made no sound while watching the deaths of his companions; his blue eyes were

hot with hate and contempt. If they took the gag out, he'd no doubt manage to spit in someone's face before they got it back in again.

Eon looked away from him and caught the eye of Isarn de Voisins, his lieutenant and cousin-in-Caine, through their sires. Isarn was among the most enormous men that Eon had ever seen, tall, wide across the shoulders, and even stronger than he looked. His face had probably never been pretty, and it was further misshapen by a mass of scar tissue that pulled one side of his mouth into a constant snarl. Likewise, he had probably always enjoyed breaking his opponents' skulls at the slightest provocation, and death had not improved his temper even slightly. Dumb as a statue, too, as the Mouse was fond of pointing out — along with the story that Isarn had been Embraced from gratitude and his sire had been looking to take the gesture back ever since. It wasn't far from the truth.

"Bring them." Eon nodded in the direction of the remaining captives, then turned and led the way out of the courtyard. The two remaining members of his coterie detached themselves from escort duty and drifted forward to join him as he made his way through the lower floor of their haven.

"You're resolved to do this, then?" The Mouse whispered. She always whispered; she couldn't speak any louder, apparently.

Before Eon could reply, Crepin growled, "I still say we should just lop the cat-buggering bastard's head off and send it to the bitch-Queen as a token of our esteem. See how willing to negotiate she is after she loses one of her precious chevaliers."

The Mouse snorted audibly from behind several layers of woolen scarves. Eon moved to cut off what would assuredly turn into a full-blown snarling match if he allowed the two to butt heads. "Yes, Mouse, I am resolved." He raised a hand to cut them off again. "I know that neither of you likes the prospect. I am not overly fond of it myself, but we have a resource in our hands that we cannot afford to squander, either on gestures of strictly limited effectiveness," he glared pointedly at Crepin, who had the grace to look embarrassed, "or attempting to extract information that he may not possess at all. He is more useful to us undead and sane."

The Mouse's hood nodded once, acknowledging the validity of the point. She was a creature of practicality, not passion, and his most sweetly accommodating comrade, not given to arguing a point past common sense, particularly once he'd clearly made up his mind. She crafted her schemes and strategies to fit his desires, no matter how much she might personally disagree with some of them. Crepin

glowered at her thickly draped back and then nodded himself, still looking none too pleased. Not as thick between the ears as Isarn nor as mentally agile as the Mouse, he was nonetheless solid, competent, and capable — a man more comfortable taking some action, any action, than endlessly debating long-term strategies and short-term tactics.

One of those long-term strategies awaited them downstairs, in the parts of the haven dedicated to the repose of Cainite prisoners of war.

†††

Eon handed Mouse the lamp he carried, and she slipped further down the hall, lighting another bolted to the wall next to the door they sought. The door itself was eight inches thick, solid oak bound in iron, secured into the milled stone walls by two iron bolts, each a large man's hand-span wide and a good two fingers thick. Crepin shot the bolts, and Mouse preceded them both into the room beyond, stationing herself and the lamp close to the door.

The room itself was small, more or less square, floored in packed earth strewn with sand and rushes to absorb the damp, and walled in unadorned stone. It contained only two things: a rough wooden table and, on the table, a body.

The body belonged to Sir Aimery de Cabaret, and Eon was rather gratified to be in possession of him, unwilling guest or not. Pure fortune had put him in their hands. The rumor had passed through the Mouse's considerable web of contacts among the local *credentes* who didn't know of her change in mortal state or religious affiliation that a band of Cathar knights was on the move, a raiding party from the Pyrenean high country. Eon, Crepin and a band of ghoul and mortal knights had ridden out to set a trap of their own, and the yield had been better than he had ever hoped it might be. No raiding party, but a diplomatic mission, traveling lightly armed and armored to make the best speed they could, swinging dangerously close to Béziers on their way back home. A diplomatic mission led by no less a person than a near relation of Esclarmonde the Black herself, her grandchilde and personal envoy.

Even heavily outnumbered, Aimery and his companions had put up an unexpectedly fierce fight. Even Crepin couldn't deny their valor or their skill, as much as he might wish to. They gave a good accounting of themselves, costing Eon a double handful of mortal men-at-arms and half that many ghouls. Aimery le Chansonneur himself accounted for the only Cainite casualty, Crepin's hotheaded youngest childe. Aimery had fallen not long after that, and it had taken all of Eon's efforts to keep Crepin from destroying him then and there.

Aimery lay on the table, immobilized by a snapped-off length of pennon staff, naked but for a length of woolen cloth wrapped around his loins for the sake of modesty. His eyes were frozen half-closed, his face locked in a mask of pain and frustration, and the Mouse had informed Eon two nights previously that his temper was growing fouler with each passing hour. That, more than any other consideration, had made his decision for him. He wanted Esclarmonde's grandchilde with his faculties intact, and leaving him stewing indefinitely in torpid imprisonment, while the Mouse argued the advantages of subterfuge and Crepin argued the advantages of killing him as publicly as could be arranged, wouldn't achieve that goal.

The ghouls positioned themselves as they'd been instructed, two to each arm and each leg, holding tightly to the seemingly flaccid, powerless limbs and bracing themselves carefully. Crepin went next, taking his place at the head of the table, taking a handful of Aimery's hair in preparation. Isarn herded the prisoners in after them and prodded them toward the far end of the room, and Eon followed him, slipping in between the men holding down the left arm and leg. Gingerly, he reached out and took hold of the pennon shaft.

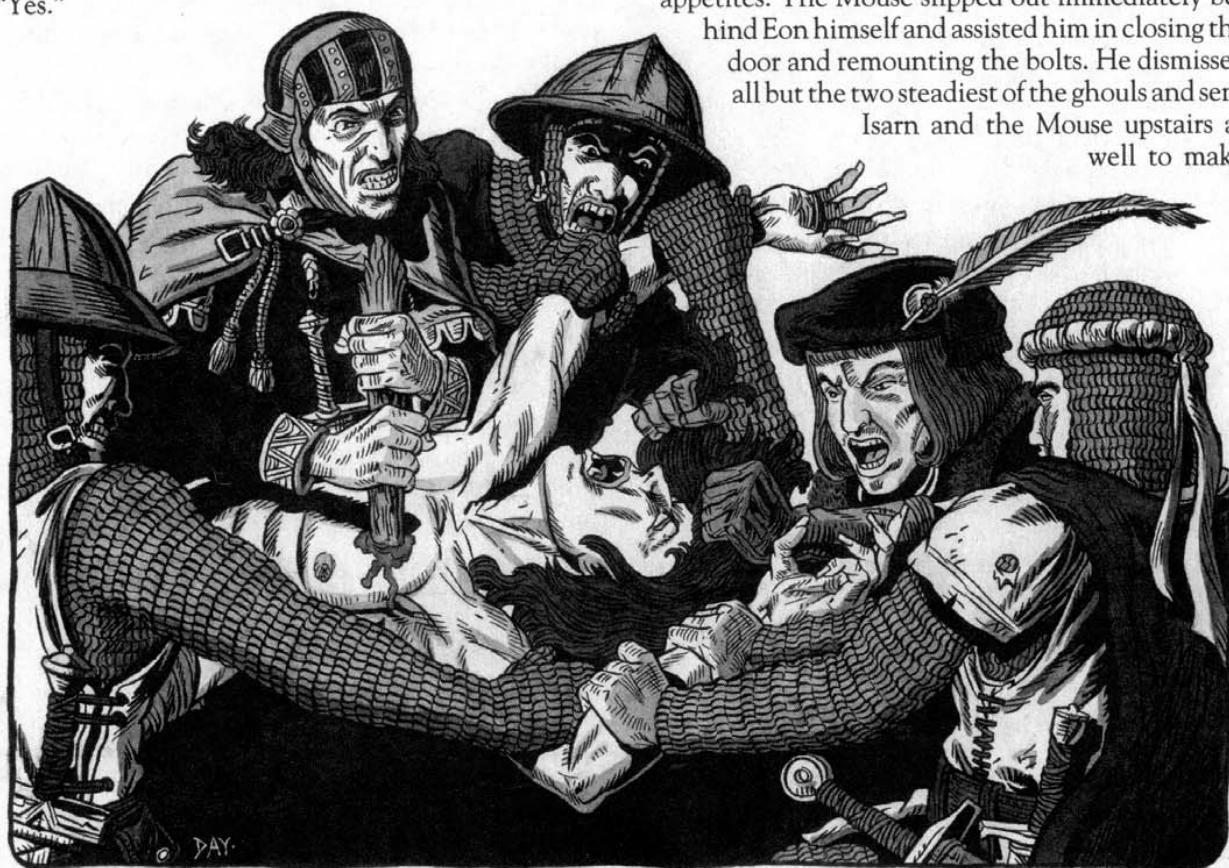
"Ready?"

Crepin nodded, the men muttered a rough affirmation, Isarn grunted, and the Mouse whispered, "Yes."

Eon tightened his grip on the shaft and nodded to Isarn. In one smooth motion, Isarn drew the poignard hanging at his hip, caught the older of the two prisoners by his hair, and slit his throat in a clean, quick slice. Blood spurted in a bright arc, splattering one of the men holding Aimery down, and then Isarn had the choking, struggling boy over the Cainite's face. Eon twisted to free the pennon from the grip of the constricted muscle holding it, then yanked it out.

Aimery de Cabaret released the last breath he had taken in a shriek that fell somewhat short of musical. His body twitched uncontrollably for several seconds as strength returned to his limbs, and then convulsed as pain and fury and hunger coursed through him as well. One arm, despite the two men hanging on it, lashed out, heaving them away and clawing desperately for purchase on something, anything, and finding the still-warm body of the mortal boy being offered for his sustenance. Crepin didn't have to guide him to feed as they had feared might be necessary; he lunged upward, following the source of the hot, sweet blood pouring out over his face.

"Out!" Eon barked, and no one felt the need to argue. The battle-hardened ghouls nearly fell over themselves in their haste to escape; Isarn shoved the last of his horror-struck charges into the corner to await his turn slaking the freshly wakened Cainite's appetites. The Mouse slipped out immediately behind Eon himself and assisted him in closing the door and remounting the bolts. He dismissed all but the two steadiest of the ghouls and sent Isarn and the Mouse upstairs as well to make



certain that the rest of preparations were in order. Crepin remained with him, blood-splashed himself and holding the stake that had held Aimery. Eon had dropped it at some point during the confusion.

Very little sound came through the thick wood of the door. None of the normal feeding sounds were clearly audible, though they did catch the hint of a high-pitched cry of fear-mingled pain and then, later, a low moan. Complete silence fell after that, and they exchanged a glance.

Crepin opened the top bolt; Eon took the bottom and the lead. He held the lit lamp in one hand, prepared to throw it if necessary, as he opened the door.

It wasn't necessary.

Aimery de Cabaret sat on the end of the table, the bloody remains of his woolen wrap draped across his lap, single-mindedly licking the last drops from his fingers. He ignored both Crepin and Eon but for a single, pale-eyed glance that took them both in and dismissed them from immediate consideration. The remains of the two prisoners lay sprawled across each other, surrounded by surprisingly little blood. Eon let his vision slip across the boundary between physical and spiritual sight and scrutinized their guest carefully. His halo was vibrating with a tightly contained cycle of fury-fear-frustration, the emotions strong but well under control.

He let his vision slip back just as Aimery finished licking his hands clean and looked up.

"I trust that the meal was to your satisfaction, Ambassador?" Eon asked, formally, choosing to ignore the fact that they were standing in the middle of a reeking abattoir and that the ambassador in question was hardly dressed in accord with his office.

Aimery tilted his head and regarded him steadily; for a moment, Eon was reminded of a great stalking cat. Then, "I would have enjoyed it more had I not been subjected to the indignities it took to acquire it. You seem to have me at a disadvantage, my lord."

"I am Eon de l'Etoile. This is my companion, Crepin de Beaumont." Crepin managed a passably civil bow from the neck, and Aimery inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment. "I regret the circumstances that forced us to bring you here by such means, but I doubted that you would respond favorably to a request for parley. I ask that you accept both my apologies and my hospitality."

Aimery had a near-perfect diplomatic mask, but, even so, the surprise at this registered in his expression before it was smoothed carefully away. "The Prince of Béziers. I will admit my astonishment now. You are... not quite what I imagined you to be."

"Nor are you, Ambassador."

He was silent for a moment, than nodded slightly. "I would avail myself of your hospitality, as you offer it freely. A bath would not be unwelcome. Nor," he wrinkled his nose slightly, "would something a bit more... substantial... to wear."

"I am certain that all of your needs can be met." Eon fought hard to keep his tone from turning wry, and mostly succeeded. "Philippe, Simon," he gestured the ghouls forward, "please attend our honored guest."

†††

Aimery de Cabaret had been considered many things during his illustrious career as an Ambassador of the Rose, but a fool had never been one of them. During its many years of peace, the court of Queen Esclarmonde the Black had never been the hothouse of intrigue the Lasombra courts of Iberia or Italy exemplified, but it had suffered its problems. If the mortal lords of the Languedoc were truculently independent and incapable of working together if it meant their lives, then the Cainite lords were worse, even in the face of armed invasion. Building coalition among them was often an exercise in futility. Alliances were made and broken with the passing breeze, pledges of fealty were barely worth the air it took to speak them, and it often behooved even the most skilled diplomat to speak softly and travel with a fairly substantial bodyguard. During the course of his career, Aimery had learned when to push in an effort to better his position and when to cut his losses and accept things as they stood.

Sitting naked and defenseless in the hands of his enemies, he decided that the situation could hardly be worse and that it wasn't likely to improve through continued resistance. Momentary submission to circumstances beyond his control could yield better results than pointlessly breaking himself against them. He told himself firmly, repeatedly, that it wasn't cowardice to know when to fight and when to lay down one's weapons.

The bath made him feel more human, after several nights, at least, of squalid captivity. Perhaps longer; he couldn't be certain. Torpor did strange things to his awareness of time, though he doubted that it had been longer than a week; he had woken ravenously hungry but not as emaciated as he could have been. He forced himself not to linger on the faces of the boys whose lives had quenched the agony of his hunger-frenzy; there was nothing he could do to atone for their deaths, not now.

The clothes that were laid out for him were cut to his size, plain and serviceable but of good quality. He was, naturally, not accorded the advantage of a weapon—he wondered what had happened to his sword.

He wondered also why he hadn't simply been killed while he was staked and helpless. Eon de l'Etoile had surprised him... more than surprised him, really. He had expected a Montfortian example of northern "chivalry" from the appointed Prince of Béziers. Eon de l'Etoile had a reputation among Esclarmonde's partisans as both a grasping liege and a religious fanatic who had torn up and subjugated half the county in a relentless quest for both wealth and heretics to burn. Aimery allowed that he might very well still be somewhat addled in the head from his recent ordeal, but Eon de l'Etoile had actually seemed almost *polite*. He could not afford, though, to presuppose or prejudge — something was going on here, and he would need all his wits and clear-headed judgment to navigate the situation successfully.

†††

Aimery presented himself in a gratifyingly short period of time, arriving in the solar still slightly damp from the bath and looking substantially more alert and more wary. His gaze flicked around the room, taking in everyone and their positions, lingering longest on the Mouse, who stood half-obscured in the darkest corner and whom his roving glance located last. Eon rose to greet him, as was proper, offered an abbreviated bow and gestured for Aimery to take one of the several seats scattered about the large central table that was, along with the map spread across it, the room's main feature. "Please be welcome, Ambassador. If there is anything you desire, you have but to ask it."

He looked decidedly skeptical about that and didn't trouble to soften or conceal the expression in any way. Nor did he sit, remaining standing, well muscled arms crossed loosely over his chest. "If I desired my liberty, would you grant me that, Prince of Béziers?"

Eon felt a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth and a brief flash of admiration; something could be said, after all, for cutting directly to the heart of the matter. "I fear, Ambassador, that I cannot grant that request, at this moment, for your protection as well as my own." He gestured to the chair directly across from his own. "Please, sit. We have much to discuss and little time in which to do so. The summer nights are short."

"And the current crusading season no doubt requires your fullest attention." Aimery glanced pointedly down at the map spread between them, held down at the corners by carved stone weights in the shape of rearing horses and scattered with more than a dozen wooden counters, carved with the arms of the Cainites they represented. But he did seat himself, not quite relaxing his spine enough to touch the low, unpadded back of the chair.

"In more ways than one, I assure you. I wish to be honest with you, Ambassador. If I could take back the

events that brought you here and seek a better way to accomplish that task, I would in a moment. I cannot, the deed is done." He hoped that the diplomat was taking him seriously; it was difficult to tell, now that he was on his guard, his face as still as a millpond. "I will admit in all frankness that the perception that you are my prisoner is one of the reasons you are still with us tonight."

The corner of Aimery's mouth quirked slightly, the expression not quite evolving into a true smile. "The perception of imprisonment isn't all that much different from the reality, Prince, though I can appreciate the distinction when the other option is no doubt the stake. I'm certain that some of your more... bloodthirsty colleagues called for just that."

"They did. You can be certain that there was some grumbling when I denied the request. Your name is not unknown among the more militant members of your clan. They seem to consider your existence somewhat offensive." Eon gestured the Mouse forward and she emerged from her corner, carrying a heavy satchel, good-quality leather tooled with the white rose that designated its owner a diplomatic agent. She set it on the table in front of him, and he accepted it, gravely, courteously, paying no untoward attention to the misshapen hands that performed the deed. Eon was silently proud. The Mouse was as rigorously cleanly as the limitations of her form allowed. She took no special delight in wallowing in filth and degradation as so many of her clanmates did, and always worried that her presence at the meeting table might poison the opinions of those who equated form with virtue.

Aimery opened the courier's satchel, examined its contents briefly, then set it aside. "You've displayed good sense and good honor in the few hours that I've been awake to know you, Prince. If you display good faith as well, I might be forced to sharply revise the opinion my lady Queen holds of you. Perhaps we should discuss why you considered keeping me undead against the whims of your own people to be a good bargain?"

"Indeed. You observed, I think ironically, that the current crusading season requires much of my attention. You are, unfortunately, correct, though not in the way I believe you meant." Eon rose and gestured at the map. "You see before you the nights as I see them. There, in Foix, is the Court of Queen Esclarmonde, surrounded by her partisans, protected and unassailable in her mountain fastness. There, in Carcassonne, is the wealthiest city in the old Trencavel territories, and around it half a dozen would-be princes squabbling for the leverage that will allow them to dispose of their rivals. There, in Narbonne, the Tremere squat while they and their supporters dig God alone knows what out of the mountains. My sources tell me they're

at war with another band of heathen sorcerers. And here I sit in Béziers, rebuilding the city, while every summer a new crop of land-hungry young idiots descends from the north in the hope of carving out a domain for themselves, from the lands of whoever happens to be there first when they arrive, heretic or clansman alike."

"Not a particularly comfortable position to be in, I'll allow." His tone clearly stated, *Get to the point, Prince.*

"I will be honest. I'm weary of it. We," Eon glanced around the room, at Isarn, stolidly standing guard at the door, at Crepin, cleaning his nails by the fireplace with the point of one of his shorter knives, at the Mouse, adjusting the drape of her sleeves to hide her hands more completely, "are weary of it. I was made Prince of Béziers when the smoke was still rising, barely a month after every living thing inside its walls was butchered and the city put to the torch. It was not because I was deemed the most worthy of my companions, or even the most capable, but because *it would keep me out of the way.* They set me to the task of rebuilding a city from the ashes our ambitions had made of it, while the older, more *worthy* members of our crusade went on to try to claim the richer prizes — Carcassonne and Toulouse and Narbonne. But I have done what they still have not. Béziers rises again but Toulouse bows to no northern Prince, nor does Carcassonne. They look upon what we have achieved with our efforts, our sweat and our blood, and they do not seek to emulate it. They seek to undo it. To take it for themselves."

"My pity would be greater if you hadn't done what they seek to do, only earlier."

"Your bitterness and anger are understandable too, Ambassador. By right, this city is a subject of Queen Esclarmonde, but by war and by politics it has been alienated utterly from her. I tell you now that I have no intention of bending knee to her and suing meekly for her permission to rule what I have claimed here. Neither will I permit everything that we have accomplished to be undone by the short-sighted power-mongering and crude manipulations of our northern kin." Eon took his seat again and watched Aimery's face closely as he prepared his next salvo. "I do not propose anything so grandiose as an alliance — but I do acknowledge, as one ruler to another, that Queen Esclarmonde and I have more in common with each other than with the current crop of opportunists threatening to burn down all that we've built up. I would seek, through you, an arrangement of mutual benefit for us all."

Aimery's courtly mask slipped, for just a moment, and beneath it was frank amazement. He recovered himself quickly enough when he realized that Eon was

in deadly earnest. "I... fear that I am not empowered to negotiate on my Queen's behalf without first consulting her, Prince of Béziers."

"And I do not propose that you try. Rather, I propose that you remain here, in Béziers, as my honored guest," he stressed the words carefully, "where I may personally see to your security. The roads are not safe for one of your reputation, as both a Cathar sympathizer and a partisan of Queen Esclarmonde. Your presence here tonight is proof enough of that. I will place my diplomatic resources, such as they are, at your disposal, to arrange secure communications with the Queen's Court, that you may consult with her and negotiate on my behalf, in good faith."

"Just say 'honored hostage' and get it over with, Prince." Aimery replied, dryly. He reached out and plucked the wooden marker that sat atop Foix from the map, turning it in his fingers as he considered, the black rose of Queen Esclarmonde disappearing and reappearing a dozen times before he finally spoke. "For what it's worth, Eon de l'Etoile, I think that you're in earnest, and mean it when you say you desire an end to the wanton destruction that bleeds my — our — land dry. I also think that by taking this action, you're choosing a harder road than you know... not everyone appreciates the finer points of warfare conducted with words. Your more hotheaded kinsmen, to choose an object example." He looked up, and carefully replaced Queen Esclarmonde's marker. "But I will also say that nothing has ever been gained by refusing even to try, and if by some means I may serve my Queen and my people by making peace between them and you, I shall do it."

†††

The summer passed quickly, spurred on by the sudden flurry of diplomatic activity traveling the roads between Béziers and Foix.

Aimery, almost despite himself, was not entirely displeased with his current position as most favored hostage of the illustrious Prince of Béziers. Loath as he normally was to admit the good qualities of northern interlopers in general, and overbearing northern Ventrue interlopers in particular, he was forced to acknowledge that while Eon de l'Etoile might be many things, a weak-livered politician wasn't one of them. If he'd managed to fall anywhere but at the bottom of an overpopulated Ventrue dynastic line, he might very well have been the prince of some affluent and influential northern city long since. His intelligence and wit alone should have been enough to win him a crown, but coupled with good sense and a willingness to actually listen to and implement the advice his counselors gave, they marked him as a rare Cainite indeed, northern or southern. It made work-

ing closely with him as they hammered out the details of proposal and counterproposal, offer and demand, and the polite rejection of the same, more than merely tolerable. He caught himself enjoying his work more than he had in decades and wondered if that rendered him disloyal to the Queen he had sworn to serve, and if so how.

He also found himself getting along passably well with the Prince's small circle of advisors. Isarn de Voisins was a political nonentity as far as the court of Béziers was concerned. Theoretically, cultivating him could potentially yield access to the Prince's ear. Practically, Aimery suspected that Eon kept him in Béziers on the principle that every good prince needed at least one vassal who would show all the moral reluctance of a wolf if he pointed and shouted, "Kill!" Any more refined considerations were strictly outside of Isarn's purview and everyone endeavored to keep it that way.

The Mouse, as she was called, was a far subtler sort of operator, and he found himself liking her against his better judgment. For one thing, she was Occitanian herself and practical to the core; she had seen which way the wind was blowing and had decided to bend with it when the chance arrived. He didn't suppose he could blame her, having witnessed first-hand the results of conspicuous defiance. In any other court, her status as a Low Clan guttersnipe would have earned her contempt and a place lurking in the sewers when her prince had no use for her, but in the patchwork social structure of Béziers, she was accorded respect second only to the prince himself. Aimery recognized in her the sort of methodical intellect that led to careful, detailed planning and decisions made in blood far colder than any Eon de l'Etoile himself usually mustered. She wasn't hobbled, in any way, by the slightest chivalrous impulse. He also recognized between them a surprising amount of common ground; they both loathed the Cainite Heresy to the core of their beings, she with a venom that melted all of her customary cool logic.

Of all of the Prince's advisors, only Crepin de Beaumont remained deliberately standoffish, having as little to do with him as possible; Aimery supposed he wasn't entirely surprised by that. Crepin soundly disapproved of the current round of diplomatic sorties, preferring results of the more tangible variety, ones that dulled the edge of his sword in the implementation stage. At the moment, he was a fighter without a

fight, except for the regular, somewhat less than conclusive skirmishes that regularly broke out between the partisans of various belligerent Languedocien lords, Cainite and otherwise, and other northerners.

Aimery privately hoped that he'd have the chance to keep Crepin frustrated for a good length of time.

†††

Eon was sitting in the haven's small, enclosed garden when Aimery found him, carrying a courier's satchel and flushed with something resembling triumph. Eon put down the yellowed leaf he was holding and rose to meet the ambassador. "Good news, I take it?"

"See for yourself." Aimery handed him a letter, its wax seal already broken; Eon raised a brow and accepted it, scanning its contents quickly by the light of the single lamp he had brought with him.

A slow, satisfied smile spread across his face. "This is... excellent. Far better than I had hoped."

"I can only agree with that. I had genuinely thought that the exchange of artifacts pertaining to the Heresy would be a much more significant sticking point... it simply goes to show, even I can be surprised." Aimery's diplomatic face dissolved in a brief, almost impish grin before settling into lines of deep satisfaction.

"Will you assist in the formal wording of the agreement? You've put as much work into this as anyone, I would hate to have it all usurped by some clerk with a gift for pithy diplomatic phrasing."

"I have a gift for pithy diplomatic phrasing, Prince Eon, so, yes, I would be pleased to assist in that as well." Dryly. "Fortunately for you, my Queen Esclarmonde has formally requested of me that I remain at your court to act as liaison between Béziers and Foix."

Eon looked up from the folio and blinked, surprised. "Should I offer my congratulations at the promotion or my condolences at the exile?"

"Congratulations, if you will. You have no idea how *boring* Foix is in the winter. Béziers may be many things, but boring hasn't yet been one of them." He paused momentarily, then soldiered on. "There is but one thing I would ask of you, as I appear to be remaining here for the foreseeable future."

"What might that be?" Eon asked, somewhat warily.

"My name is *Aimeric*, not *Aimery*. I'm going to teach you how to pronounce it correctly if it's the last thing that I do."

Eon couldn't help but laugh.





INTRODUCTION

"Union gives strength."

— Aesop

The Dark Medieval is by no means an easy time in which to live. A war between neighboring lords or a passing Crusade can wipe out one's livelihood. A plague or famine can decimate a Cainite's herd or fell the hardiest of a werewolf's Kinfolk. Soldiers of the Holy Mother Church seek out what they consider demons and, ironically, sometimes find and destroy well-meaning night folk and miss the true monsters altogether. Dangers, mundane and supernatural, lurk in the European landscape, and no being, no matter the occult power at his fingertips, can escape them forever.

This, above any desire for community or fellowship, is why the members of the Clans of Caine bond together into coteries. An individual vampire is easy prey for the Inquisition or a more powerful Cainite, but a group of vampires, even neonates, can claim Domain over a village and eke out a comfortable existence.

Likewise, the mages profit by association. The “pagan” Fellowships, while not organized in any real sense, form cabals for sheer survival. The Order of Hermes and Ahl-i-Batin band together to share ideas and sometimes simply out of lust for power, and the Messianic Voices ride the coattails of the Church to glory. Mages of any stripe, however, discover the same thing: Alone, they have weaknesses. In company, they have allies.

Of course, Gaia’s defenders know this only too well. They have for centuries formed packs like their lupine brethren and bonded together spiritually by following a particular totem spirit. Beyond this connection, however, a pack of Garou can wield subtle (or brazen) influence over a stretch of land, either overtly or through Kinfolk. The Garou see themselves as the soldiers and defenders of the Earth itself; surely they have the right to claim the land?

Finally, the shadow Inquisition rises to combat the forces of Hell. The forces of the Adversary thrive wherever humans live and breathe, feeding on their sin and sometimes their very flesh and blood. Therefore, the Most Holy Inquisition *Contra Diabolum enim et alii Daemones* must likewise make its strongholds in and near the cities and towns of Christendom. If, along the way, it winds up accruing a bit of temporal power, surely that power is used in the Glory of God?

Strength in Numbers

Dark Ages: Vampire introduced the notion of “pooling” Backgrounds. The basic idea behind this is for players to merge their characters’ interests and wind up with a substantial power base, rife with story possibilities. Space restrictions prevented us from expounding on those possibilities too much in the core book. Likewise, **Dark Ages: Mage**, **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** and **Dark Ages: Werewolf** have all included brief notes on how the Background pooling process functions for those particular characters. Again, the potential inherent in this deserves more attention. It also lends itself to certain abuses — a troupe of five players could conceivably create a Background pool of 100 dots (if they used all available Background points and bonus points). The Storyteller probably requires some assistance in adjudicating Background pools.

Likewise, what if a troupe playing under **Vampire: The Dark Ages** rules wishes to form a Background pool? What if the troupe did not pool Backgrounds at the outset but wishes to form a pool later?

Departing from mechanics for a moment, when discussing power bases, it behooves us to know the attitudes of both common man and supernatural be-

ing in the Dark Medieval. How do the Tzimisce view their twisted fiefdoms? What is it like to live in a Garou sept? What kind of place would a Hermetic mage choose to build his sanctum, given the choice?

Defense of the home is also a consideration. **Dark Ages: Vampire** did not include rules for making (or suffering the effects of) traps, nor did it give anything but the most cursory attention to defending a haven from attackers. When building a Domain, however (or a chantry, or a chapter-house), this information becomes critical. This, in turn, requires the Storyteller to have some knowledge of what houses were made of in AD 1230.

Right of Princes covers all of these topics, and more besides.

Demesne

Throughout this book, the reader will find references to “demesne” and “demesne Backgrounds.” This refers to the physical area, be it a building, a stretch of land or a village, that a Background pool covers. A demesne Background is one of the four Background Traits (namely Domain, Chantry, Chapter-House, and Hunting Grounds) that a demesne might comprise. These Backgrounds, while probably the most logical and common Anchor Backgrounds for Background pools, are not required to be Anchors by any means. A pack of Garou might dwell in a city and have no Hunting Grounds to its name, but still build up a Background pool based on Kinfolk or Contacts. A coterie might command only a small tract of road, but feed freely on the travelers along that tract (resulting in a Background pool with Herd as the Anchor).

How to Use This Book

Right of Princes is meant as a resource for Storytellers and players alike. Players can use it as inspiration for their own characters’ views of land, demesne, rulership and distribution of resources. When creating

DARK MEDIEVAL

Dark Ages: Right of Princes is the first book of its type: a sourcebook dedicated not just to Cainites, but to all four of the major “races” of supernatural beings in the **Dark Ages** line. That does not mean, however, that you need **Dark Ages: Mage**, **Inquisitor** and **Werewolf** to understand and use this book. **Right of Princes** is equally useful for any one of the **Dark Ages** games. This will also be the case for future Dark Medieval products, including this book’s forthcoming sister title, **Spoils of War**.

characters, and especially when combining Backgrounds, consider how your character looks at land. Is land a birthright, something the character has been promised since childhood? Is it something she works but can never truly own? Or is the land steeped in mystical power, creating a bond between the land and those who live off it? Storytellers can use **Right of Princes** for story seeds, for aid in wrangling a troupe's demesne and, of course, for designing opponents' strongholds and power bases.

Chapter by Chapter

Prelude: Diplomatic Action shows the aftermath of ambition and how one Cainite works within a difficult situation.

Introduction: The part you're reading now.

Chapter One: The King's Domain. This chapter explains what the various inhabitants of the Dark Medieval search for in a demesne, how they use the

resources they can gather to empower themselves, and how the all of the Backgrounds might be useful as Anchors.

Chapter Two: Home and Hearth explores the mystical connection between ruler and land and the concept of home, even as it applies to otherwise monstrous beings. This chapter includes a thorough discussion of Holy Ground and what it means to defend — and defile — such sacred places.

Chapter Three: Guarding the Gates. Every demesne comes under attack eventually. This chapter discusses how best to defend one's home, both by setting traps and by strengthening the walls. It also discusses hiring and using guards and how to maintain and establish Background pools.

Chapter Four: Shadow Demesnes describes four "sample" Background pools, complete with fleshed-out characters, for use as simple inspiration or ready-to-use locales.







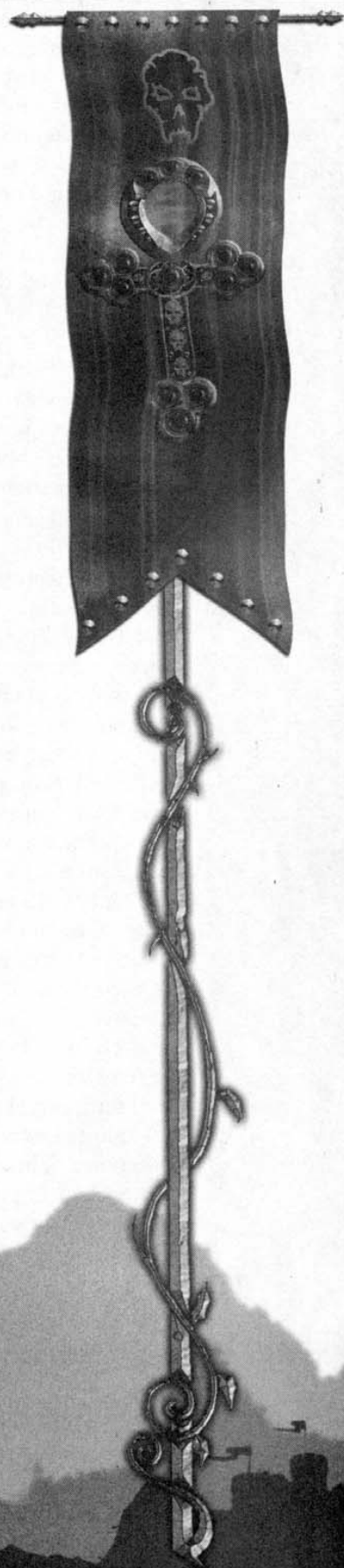
CHAPTER ONE: THE KING'S DOMAIN

Princes are like heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration but no rest.

— Sir Francis Bacon, "Of Empire"

Power.

The very sound of the word conjures images into the minds of those who hear it — the ruler enthroned in wealth and security, minions scraping to make real her every whim; the scholar bent over his books, laboring to bring his vision to light and shape the minds of the next generation; the general on the battlefield, forging victory out of bloodshed; the priest before his altar, dispensing the benefices and condemnations of divinity itself. Power is one of the most ephemeral and amorphous concepts ever to influence the circus of mortal endeavor, as well as one of the most hungrily sought after. To each individual who answers its siren call, it means different things. To some, power is the freedom to do as one wills. To others, power is control, the unassailable right to command others to do one's will and expect it to be done. To still others, power is money, the wealth to purchase both freedom and control, and to the Devil with such trifles as rights and will.



In the Dark Medieval, many paths lead to the halls of power, and many hopeful souls walk those paths. Cainite manipulators skulk in the shadows of the great cities and the modest country towns, their ambitions tied to the actions of bishops and princes, *jongleurs* and moneylenders, the local shire reeve and the castellan of the King. Sorcerers and philosophers lurk in the libraries of the rising universities and the secretive trade guilds, profiting both from the flow of increasing commerce and the free exchange of ideas, debating everything from the market price of an ounce of saffron to the inevitable perfection of the world. Warriors in the battle for the soul of mankind travel both the roads few others would dare walk and the halls of the house of God, shining the light of their faith into dark corners, bringing judgment to the things they find lurking there.

All seekers of power in the Dark Medieval era work within the same social, political and economic structures, manipulating those structures to cause resources to flow in their direction. Politically and socially speaking, feudalism remains the predominant governing force in most of Western Europe, and the one that all would-be secular princes must navigate successfully. A highly codependent mode of governance, feudalism relies on webs of theoretically reciprocal relationships to achieve its ends: the exploitation of natural resources, the administration of secular law and the maintenance of a civil society. Politically, feudalism is all about resource management, exercising control through the very basic mechanism that whoever owns the land also owns the power. Most of Europe is carved up into political units in this fashion. In theory, *all* of the land belongs to the reigning monarch, who graciously parcels it out to the nobility for their support and exploitation and from whom he receives service and revenue in return. The nobles, in their turn, parcel it out to the humbler folk to actually *be* exploited in return for their own subsistence and protection. This system, naturally, works better in theory than in practice, and there are multitudes of both exceptions and proofs to the general rule.

Socially, feudalism has had the effect of producing a society of stratified layers in which everyone theoretically knows his place and keeps to it, from the highest crowned heads to the meanest villeins. In practice, the feudal class system is a good deal less rigid than it appears on the surface due to a number of factors, not the least of which is a decidedly muddled legal system that's still working out the kinks of what it means to be "free" and what it means to be "bound," what sort of property may be legitimately owned by

each "class" of free and bound individuals, and what sorts of rights citizens at all levels actually possess. Upward and downward mobility can, indeed, occur within all "classes" and even *between* most "classes"—even the highest nobles can find themselves reduced to outlawry and penury in the shifting winds of feudal social and political changes, and a lucky peasant can find himself living the sort of life his father never dreamed of, should his ambition and his circumstances happily collide.

Naturally, it is a good deal easier for a privileged individual to fall from a position of wealth and power than it is for a humble individual to rise to occupy one. A manor-bound villein is liable to remain a manor-bound villein for life, though a sufficiently ambitious individual may acquire a position of considerable responsibility in his community, with all the attendant rights and privileges, opportunities and duties, attached thereto. The "third estate" of the common folk is, nonetheless, the most widely varied of the three pillars of Dark Medieval society. A noble is a noble and a churchman is a churchman, but a commoner may be a free landowning villein, a humble crofter, an urban working man, a banker, a prosperous merchant, an engineer, a craftsman or an influential city councilor.

Standing slightly outside, and yet intrinsically connected to, this basic political/social structure is the Church. The Church is actually the second-largest landholding entity in the medieval body politic, which, from a feudal standpoint, grants it enormous clout in terms of pure wealth derived from direct resource exploitation. Whole regions provide substantial portions of their produce to the maintenance of abbeys and nunneries, great monasteries and the local village parish. All levels of society pour wealth into the Church's coffers in terms of obligatory offerings of land, money and even mortal resources, in the hopes of obtaining favors both secular and sacred as well as from genuine displays of piety. Until recently, the Church also more or less directly controlled most sources of education; it remains the most literate segment of a society where literacy is only slowly expanding to include more than the monied elite. In addition to great temporal power, the Church is also the main font of spiritual power in the medieval era, guiding as it does the hearts and minds of all Christendom, from the ruler on the throne to the serf laboring in the fields. As the representatives of God on Earth, the princes of the Church exert the sort of influence that many secular heads of state can only dream of.

In the Country

In the medieval era, the vast majority of the mortal populace dwells not in the city, but in the country. The village is the primary mode of communal organization and is devoted almost exclusively to organized agricultural production — open-field farming, the lifeblood of the peasant economy since the Iron Age. Villages sprout up anywhere with enough arable land to make a go of farming, meadowland for the pasturage of livestock, forest for forage, and water to power a mill, to irrigate the fields and to drink. This is not to say that villages are the same all over Europe. In the Mediterranean areas of Europe, the village typically clusters around a castle or fortified villa, on a hilltop, surrounded by its own wall, with the fields, vineyards, animal enclosures and pasturage areas located on the plains below the hill. In the northwestern areas of Europe, the village tends to center around either the church or the local manor house, with the dwellings of the inhabitants occupying the center of the village and the cultivated fields, pasturage meadows, marshes and forests surrounding it for some distance. An average-sized village tends to number about 100 residents; a large and prosperous village can contain as many as 300 residents.

The one thing the vast bulk of villages and their inhabitants have in common is their place in the greater body of feudal society. The feudal system of governance essentially unites the highest levels of European society (i.e., the nobility) in a series of codependent relationships. A lord grants land to a vassal in return for military and other services; lord and vassal swear reciprocal oaths of protection and loyalty; the vassal receives his fief to hold in trust for his lord and to draw revenue from for his own support. The same holds true at the level of the fief itself. Most fiefs are divided up into land-management units known as “manors,” with villages considered to be part of the manor and the residents of the village being the individuals most directly responsible for cultivating and exploiting the land for their own benefit and that of their lord.

Every village has a lord either secular or ecclesiastical, but only rarely is the lord an actual resident of the manor from which he draws his livelihood. Resident lords are usually petty knights who hold only the one manor or middling lords who hold several manors and travel among them throughout the year. Greater lords (earls, counts, abbots, bishops) can hold scores of manors which they never see, administering them solely through proxies. Greater or lesser, the lord of

the demesne occupies several essential economic roles. He is the estate manager, as only the lord has the power to license village markets and fairs, thus giving the resident villeins a place both to sell their own goods and/or agricultural surplus, and to purchase goods they can't produce themselves. He is the chief consumer of the manor's surplus (if any) and the landlord to whom the resident villeins owe work service (a set number of days per week that the villagers work the lord's fields rather than their own), harvest service or rent in either money or goods. Finally, he wields judicial authority through the administration of the manorial court, the primary means of addressing most low-level civil and criminal cases, and from which he derives another source of income in the form of fines, fees and confiscations of property.

Most resident landlords oversee the management of their own fiefs with the service of a steward or seneschal and a support staff of lesser assistants. These servants aid in the keeping of the manorial accounts and the collection of the various rents, fines, fees and duties a tenant is required to pay. Numerous instructional tracts written by successful landlords exist for the benefit of others in their class to refer to for advice and instruction on everything from dealing with tenants whose rents are perpetually in arrears to the standards that should be adhered to when selecting assistants.

Most absentee landlords supervise their manors through appointed officials. These officials — generally the seneschal, the bailiff and the reeve — are not only his material presence in any given manor, they are also the key executives of the entire manorial system of governance.

The estate seneschal is the lord's chief deputy, the manager for the entire complex of lands and mortal resources. The seneschal's primary duty is to guard and increase his lord's properties and to defend his rights and franchises, generally through periodic visitation of his lord's manors, supervision of their activities, the auditing of their accounts and representation of his lord's interests in court both on and off the estate. Secular lords generally employ knights as their seneschals; ecclesiastical lords tend to call upon other clerics. Knight-seneschals are generally compensated for this service through land grants of their own, while cleric-seneschals are generally remunerated with the proceeds derived from a parish church.

The bailiff combines two major responsibilities in the manor — chief law enforcement officer and manorial business manager. The bailiff, more than even the seneschal, acts as the village's link to its lord, as he

represents the needs of the lord to the villeins and vice versa. He also acts as the physical protector of the village under his jurisdiction, warding it from violence and theft committed by outsiders as well as the resident villagers. Most importantly, however, he directly oversees the day-to-day management of the manor, making certain that crops and livestock are properly looked after, not too much is stolen or damaged, and that the village has everything it needs in terms of supplies purchased from outside. Many medieval treatises on land management enjoin lords from selecting family or friends to occupy the position of bailiff, advising that the post be filled solely on the basis of personal merit and good character. The bailiff enjoys one of the finest medieval compensation packages of any manorial official. He is generally entitled to dwell in the local manor house (often, the bailiff and his family are the sole residents of the manor house), draws a cash salary plus perquisites such as clothing and oblation, and has access to a fairly substantial manorial expense account.

Serving under the bailiff is a full staff of subordinate officials, generally elected by the villagers themselves, with the most prominent such office being the reeve. The reeve is always a villein and, usually, the most prosperous individual in a given village: the best husbandman or the free owner of the largest amount of the village's own land. His main duty is the direct oversight of his fellow villagers' work obligations, making certain that those who owe labor service either attend promptly or provide an adequate substitute, supervising the plowing of the fields and the penning and folding of the livestock, and other such tasks. In some villages, the reeve also oversees the sale of agricultural produce and the collection of rents. In most, he is the person responsible for maintaining and reporting the village's annual account of works performed by the tenant villeins. This record includes the amounts of rents collected or in arrears, the receipts of sales, the outlay for manorial expenses and deliveries of produce, payments remitted to individuals for services rendered to the demesne and the "issue of the grange" (the total yearly accounting of the grain harvest yield and the produce of livestock). For his services, the reeve receives no cash compensation but is instead exempted from the normal villein labor obligations and generally receives at least some of his meals at the manor house table, along with concessions such as grazing rights or oblation money at major Christian holidays.

The vast majority of most of the villagers themselves are, technically, free men — and, in the Dark Medieval

era, that distinction is extremely technical. Being a villein is not the same as being a slave, though it no doubt feels that way at times. Tenant villeins usually own their own land, but in return for their right to hold it, they owe their lords substantial labor services, are subject to the justice, fines and fees of the manorial courts (having no access to the royal courts of law that govern the nobility) and generally also owe rent in cash or goods. Nonetheless, villeins can and do prosper, and some fortunate individuals even become quite wealthy in terms of both money and land ownership, though never quite as comfortable as their lords.

In the City

For centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire, there was nothing that resembled a city to be found in most of western Europe. The Roman model of the city as a central hub of cultural, legal, economic and religious activities for any given region was abandoned. The ever-present risk of military invasion and the utter collapse of commerce in the face of widespread, catastrophic agricultural failures made the support of such a grand social institution impossible. Eventually, towns and cities began to re-emerge from the ashes of the Empire, only now they orbited a different nucleus. Whereas the Romans tended to build cities around legionary military encampments, the people of the Dark Medieval era tend to build them around churches.

Legally, in the Middle Ages a "city" is the seat of a bishop and comprises a cathedral and its dependent population of farmers, craftsmen and merchants. An urban center without an ecclesiastical authority at its center is a "town." The Dark Medieval era is currently witnessing a nearly unprecedented explosion in the size and importance of both sorts of urban centers. The 10th and 11th centuries saw vast improvements in agricultural technology, the end result of which was a dramatic surge in both available food supply and population. The 12th century saw a sudden jump in commerce — the excess supplies of food needed an outlet, the ancient art of mining (for silver, iron and tin) was rediscovered and widely disseminated, woolen cloth manufactured in northern Europe found an outlet in the Mediterranean, and everyone wanted access to the luxury goods that the Mediterranean nations could bring to market. This same trend continues well into the 13th century.

At the core of the new movement of urban expansion lies the concept of the commune, an idea imported from the almost fantastically wealthy and powerful

Italian city-states of Venice, Milan, Genoa and Florence. The commune is a sworn association of all the businessmen in a given town, who are almost invariably of commoner stock. In Italy, where the nobility never shed the old Roman habit of living in towns, many nobles went into business and helped found and refine the nature of the commune. In northern Europe, nobles and clergy are both specifically excluded from membership in commune councils. The upshot of this was an alliance of all the local merchants — cloth merchants, silver- and goldsmiths, produce merchants, wine sellers, armorers and any other skilled craftsmen — who closed ranks to assert and defend their rights against their feudal and ecclesiastical overlords. The simple act of settling in a town or city, rather than in the manor-bound countryside, essentially provided a complete escape from the feudal duties normally imposed on the average medieval individual.

Naturally, this development was not greeted with cheers of glee from all quarters. The commune movement is particularly opposed by ecclesiastical authorities, who correctly assessed the danger the growing cities pose to the sessile social order from which the Church benefits. Commune-cities are regularly accused of promoting heresy, declaring war on the clergy, encouraging skepticism and sundry other offenses against the clergy, such as refusing to pay feudal labor obligations to ecclesiastical overlords. Secular lords tend to take a much more pragmatic view of the situation, reckoning the commune movement as beneficial to the successful development of towns and, thus, to the enhancement of their own revenues. Taxes, tithes and fees paid by busy prosperous merchants are just as good as the same paid by poor villeins and much more likely to come in the form of cold, hard cash or useful goods.

Towns, cities and even rural villages have purchased their collective freedoms from the old feudal order. Precisely which freedoms are carefully codified in the form of the town's charter. This document is jealously guarded against all attempts to water it down, take it back or otherwise curtail any of the liberties it granted. City- and town-dwelling commoners have ceased to be known as villeins, serfs or any other sort of servile name and have become known, for the most part, as burghers.

Almost every burgher is also, simultaneously, either a craftsman or a merchant. His house usually doubles not only as the dwelling place for his entire family and of his servants, but also as his workshop and the showroom for his wares. Related crafts tend to

congregate on city streets, which thereafter usually carry the name of the trade being conducted on them. The use of surnames, also generally related to craft affiliation, is also on the rise in order to facilitate accurate taxation.

Guilds are prominent and prevalent in most major towns and almost all cities, and a good number of a city's burghers usually belong to one, particularly if they're engaged in an important trade. Guilds regulate both external, commercial affairs and internal affairs. Internal guild issues generally revolve around the codification of wages, the duration and condition of apprenticeships, the welfare of the guild members and their families, and the obligations and dues each member owes to the guild as a whole. Every guild stringently regulates commercial interaction with the buying public since, as the major restriction of competition, the guild is also obliged to maintain and guarantee standards of quality in its merchandise. Guild legislation on this matter is exhaustive and painstakingly detailed, specifying precise types and quality of raw materials that may be used in construction of any given product, the amount of supervision that must occur during the manufacturing process itself and how the resultant goods may be displayed for sale. Guild inspections are random and no mere formality; scales are checked, goods minutely inspected for flaws of other signs of substandard quality, and any offending items immediately confiscated either for destruction or for distribution to the poor on alms-days. Members found to be in contravention of guild regulations are fined up to the true market value of any substandard goods.

The biggest businesses for most prosperous burghers are the cloth trade (generally wool, the most widely traded textile in the 13th century, but occasionally branching into linen, silk and cotton) and banking. The cloth trade is a multifaceted enterprise that, after agriculture, is one of the major driving forces of the 13th-century economy, and also one of the most volatile. When the textile market is strong and stable, as it generally is, enterprising cloth barons can not only rake in the profit for themselves, they can support their own cottage industry of weavers, fullers, finishers and dyers, all of whom can make a surprisingly tidy sum for their efforts. When the textile market is weak, as it sometimes is when war cuts the lines of communication and trade, the entire enterprise from top to bottom suffers, though the cloth merchant himself is the one who usually suffers least. He can, after all, always warehouse his goods and wait the instability out; the lesser partners in the enterprise — the afore-

mentioned weavers, fullers and dyers — are often reduced to penury and begging in the church square in order to feed their families.

With the profits from a successful textile venture, a medieval entrepreneur has many avenues open to him. Sometimes he remains in commerce, expanding from his original textile base into more exotic realms such as the spice, wine and metal trades. In all likelihood, he will invest part of his profits in real estate, such as purchasing a block of tenement houses in the city to rent or forest land outside the city that can be farmed for timber or cleared for rented pasturage. Almost inevitably, a truly prosperous merchant will fall into banking — which is to say, money-lending or money-changing.

Money is a chancy thing in the Dark Medieval era, principally because so many people enjoy the right to strike coins. Mints are expensive to maintain and carry with them the expectation of a good profit margin for whoever owns them; many produce debased coinage as part of the effort to stretch that margin as far as it can go. Gold is not, at this time, used in the production of coins; silver, on the other hand, usually is. The most common form of coinage is the denier (also called the penny), comprised of a copper-zinc-silver alloy of wildly variable quality. The most reliable denier, minted in Provins, is of thirty-three percent fine silver; more debased coinages, with a higher concentration of copper in their make-up, circulate widely as well. Obols and half-obols, comprised entirely of copper, also circulate and constitute the medieval equivalent of small change.

Medieval merchants and moneylenders have also struck upon an advance that vastly improves the free flow of commerce — paper money. The two largest cash denominations in the medieval marketplace exist solely on paper, the *livre* (pound) and *sou* (shilling) not yet having any coinage attached to them that circulates regularly. (The Italian city-states have minted a high-quality silver coin called the *grosso* which constitutes the first real shilling coin, but it rarely circulates outside of Italy.) Many business and money-lending transactions do not involve the exchange of silver, but rather the exchange of paper. These letters of credit pledge that the holder is good for a stipulated amount of hard currency, to be paid by the issuer of the letter, who then collects from the debtor in either cash or goods at a later date. An even more sophisticated method of purchase and exchange has developed in the great fair towns, where hard currency is slowly but surely being phased out in favor of a system that employs the widespread use of credit

negotiations that take place solely on paper and which terminate in the delivery of verifiable-quality goods, rather than potentially debased coinage.

Similarly, money-changing is a profession that usually revolves around the towns and cities that host trade fairs. Technically, these individuals are not only entrepreneurs in their own right, they are also licensed officials of the fair and town in which they do business. Money-changing is among the most strictly regulated professions, subject to a host of ironclad rules governing cash and credit exchange. One such rule is that all money-changers are enjoined to remove from circulation all debased or false coinage; another is that they're obligated to apply exchange rates uniformly and fairly, whether the exchange is made for hard or paper currency. Another sideline of the money-changing business is pawn brokering. Prosperous bankers deal with all classes, not only other merchants; often members of the nobility will take out loans, for which they will supply some item of commensurate value to the banker as surety for their ability to repay the loans. When a noble defaults on a loan, as many do given the average nobleman's passion for living somewhat outside of his means, the banker then unloads the "pawn" the noble patron left in his possession in order to recoup the loss. If the proceeds of this are insufficient to cover the debt, the banker is well within his rights to sue a man his social superior by several orders of magnitude for restitution, and he's liable to win any such suit, as well. It bears noting that usury — charging interest on lent money — is considered a sin by the Catholic Church. As a result, many moneylenders are Jews, since they don't consider usury sinful.

More than any other place in the Dark Medieval realm, the growing cities and towns have the whiff of the future about them, showing the face of things to come.

On the Rights of Women

Being a woman in the 13th century is much the same as being a woman in any age. Women are a little oppressed and a little suppressed, more than a little exploited and quite a lot undervalued. Social status is the most important modifying factor in the lives of medieval women.

A female serf or villein is not considered a "lesser" person, though her efforts are exploited in different ways. Most of the time, in peasant households, the labor of men and women is differentiated along the traditional indoor/outdoor divide — men work in the fields, and women work in the home. Practically, this

is only sometimes the case. A humble medieval woman's work does include spinning, weaving, sewing, cheese-making, cooking and cleaning, all professions that are generally associated with the home. She also does the bulk of any foraging for supplemental food supplies, gardening, weeding, hay-making, carrying and animal tending, including the feeding, milking, washing and shearing tasks. She takes part in the autumn harvest of her lord's fields, unless specifically excused, and helps with the harvest of her family's own crops. Often, women serve as itinerant paid labor at harvest time, earning as much as their male counterparts for identical work, though, in general, wage inequities heavily favor men.

Unmarried women can own property and in the absence of suitable male heirs can also inherit. Women of all social classes have rights to personal property dedicated to their support by law and custom. Women can sue and be sued, make wills, make contracts and plead their own cases before manorial and royal courts. Married women of all classes are "under the rod" of their husbands and cannot legally gainsay any actions that their husbands might take with their property, even if the husband should sell it against the wife's will. A married woman also cannot plead in court without her husband nor write a will without explicit consent. A woman recovers many of the rights that are allocated to her husband's judgment when and if he dies, as well as taking possession of one third of his property and chattels as her legal dowry. Widows can be forced to remarry by their liege lords; they can also choose their own remarriage partners

provided they are willing to pay a large fine for the privilege.

Well-to-do women occupy a slightly higher stratum of status in the Dark Medieval era than their more humble sisters. The wife of a prosperous burgher is no serf and cannot be treated as such; she is a person of dignity and worth, an important and

respected figure in her community. Highborn women and women of the rapidly expanding urban "middle class" are typically better educated than other women, and even than some men of the same social class. Girls often receive instruction from private tutors or board in convents that contain schools for girls; at least one such convent girl's school has been in existence since the sixth century. Well educated women typically know how to read and write (sometimes in the vernacular, sometimes in Latin), are taught sufficient mathematics to manage household accounts and are polished with ladylike graces such as embroidery, singing, poetry composition and music.

Highborn women occupy an important place in the rural manorial society of the nobility, often taking a leading role in the life of manor. When her husband is away from home, the woman is the head of the household, running her husband's estate, managing the staff and making all legal and financial decisions. Women have also been known to defend their lands and those of their husbands by force of arms in



times of war and to conduct aggressive military actions in retaliation for actions taken against them.

Women of the urban classes work outside the home at a wide variety of crafts and professions. They may be teachers, midwives, laundresses, lace-makers, and seamstresses, and even hold places in normally male-dominated professions — weavers, fullers, barbers, carpenters, saddlers and numerous others. Wives typically work at their husbands' crafts, and when a man dies his widow will often continue in his trade, teaching it to her daughters as well as her sons. Women may not hold officer-level positions in guilds, but they may hold guild membership, which can be inherited by her children, male and female alike.

Politically, women have virtually no voice. Noble-born women enjoy a slightly better standard of access to the realms of power, where as heiresses, wards and peers in their own right they have some readily apparent value and, thus, influence. Women in high holy orders can also exert considerable influence by virtue of their positions as feudal landholders; the abbess of a sufficiently sizeable convent can wield the sort of authority in local politics than even an archbishop would envy. Women of the commoner classes are more thoroughly disenfranchised, as they are not permitted to sit on town councils or to serve as provosts or in other official capacities.

A VILLAGE, A MANOR HOUSE, AND THE SERVICE OF 2.5 KNIGHTS

Dark Ages: Vampire permits players the option of pooling Backgrounds in order to create a greater Domain than any one character might be able to achieve alone, the better to simulate genuine coterie power dynamics. Storytellers should exercise a certain degree of common sense when adjudicating what can be accomplished by doing this, however. Just because Roderick the Ventrue, Genevieve the Toreador, and Benvolio the Nosferatu between them have eight dots of Domain doesn't mean they can purchase half of Kent and subsist comfortably off the proceeds for the rest of their unives. Landholding may equal power in the Dark Medieval age, but it also entails the enormous amount of effort that must go into making the land profitable. Encourage your players to make certain their combined resources are diversified, flexible and secure — and that they don't take it into their heads to create a Domain that consists of six hundred acres of rural farmland intended for cash-cropping or strategic renting, with nothing around but each other and a flock of sheep to subsist on come winter.

Vampire Domains

A prince being thus obliged to know well how to act the beast must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.

— Niccolo Machiavelli, *Il Principe*

Vampires are creatures of ultimate pragmatism when it comes to the pursuit of power. A collection of very basic concerns lie behind all their scheming, conniving and manipulating: safety, relative wealth and/or comfort and, most importantly, *food supply*. Vampires are the only creatures in the Dark Medieval world that can be said to actually prey upon humanity at all levels from the monetary to the physical, batten- ing on both the economies of regions they dwell in as well as the blood of their Herds. For this reason, vampires tend to make both their demesnes and their havens in areas of relatively high mortal population — not always in the midst of the Dark Medieval equivalent of a major metropolitan area, but anywhere that can support the appetites of one or more Cainites, even allowing for the occasional accident.

Dwelling in a city offers several immediate advantages to the enterprising Cainite, young or old, in terms of easily accessible food supply, a wide latitude of options when it comes to scraping together influence on mortal political and religious edifices and access to opportunities to generate liquid wealth. Urban domains, however, are also the ones most likely to end up being hotly contested from multiple different angles. After all, only so many places actually *qualify* for the grandiose designation of "city" in the Dark Medieval era. Personal domain space and safe feeding grounds are limited, and access to these resources is most assuredly not parceled out on a first-come, first-served basis. Moreover, the best pickings of urban Domains are usually already claimed, generally by elders who have held those rights since the city itself was little more than a Roman trading post with pretensions.

For young Cainites with their hearts set on the establishment of an urban demesne, this leaves only a few options. One currently popular option is the path of the storm crow, resulting in whole coterie of young Cainites following the sweep of mortal violence into the realms of power. The various Crusades to the Holy Land and Eastern Europe, the sack of Constantinople, the wars of the *Reconquista*, and the wholesale slaughter of the Albigensian Crusade have torn gaping holes in entrenched mortal and Cainite power structures,

HAVENS OF THE DAMNED

Almost as much as food and power, haven space is generally at a premium for Cainites. Their most basic needs in terms of shelter are relatively easily met, but most Cainites aren't content to dwell in a windowless hovel or root cellar longer than they absolutely have to, and generally crave a haven that doesn't insult their dignity. Similarly, most Cainites tend to observe the notion of not feeding where they sleep — which generally necessitates locating haven space in one place, feeding grounds in another, and any other form of demesne or power base in still another. It often serves a coterie well to develop a solid concept of how to manage potentially widespread real-estate concerns. Moreover, Cainite havens tend to be selected with more than just material concerns in mind; often, the road which an individual Cainite follows has just as much influence on where she chooses to sleep as any other factor.

- **Road of the Beast:** Walkers of the *Via Bestiae* are among the most primal of all Cainites, deliberately shunning all but the most primitive vestiges of civilization out of contempt for the moral weakness they induce rather than any exigency of politics. They generally tend to make their havens at the fringes of civilization, where they follow their moral imperative to prey on humanity like the wild things they are. While they tend to prefer either natural havens such as caves or relatively simple built structures, they also tend to employ traps around their havens more often than most other Cainites, finding much to admire in the transposition of natural simplicity and the cleverness of a wise hunter.

- **Road of Heaven:** Followers of the *Via Caeli* are defined by the extremity of their piety, taking upon themselves a harder moral stance than even most apparently devout mortals. Often, their havens are defined by the lack of accouterments of power and status that other vampires consider their due; rather, they embrace simplicity and humility in the size and decor of their havens, to go bareheaded and humble before the Lord

of Hosts, as it were. Sometimes, but not always, they will attempt to dwell close to holy places such as cathedrals, mosques, synagogues, saint-shrines or monasteries in order to soak up the aura of sanctity such places impart as well as to enjoy the rites of their particular religious affiliation.

- **Road of Kings:** Adherents to the *Via Regalis* take the feudal ethic that the world was made with a place for everything and that each thing should occupy that place to its extreme. Obviously, the Scions were meant by nature to sit in the thrones of the world, and their havens reflect this fact in tasteful or excessive displays of wealth and status, depending on the individual involved. Even the most down-at-the-heels or ascetic Scion will generally attempt to measure up to the truism that a real noble always lives just a trifle beyond his means in terms of personal deportment and the contents of his home.

- **Road of Sin:** Followers of the *Via Peccati* tend to be a good deal subtler than they're usually given credit for. Only rarely does one find a Sinner's haven to be an abattoir of demonic horrors — their windows are not often shielded by the tanned skin of slaughtered innocents. Even they consider bed hangings woven from pulsing entrails to be somewhat tacky, and whips and chains are regarded as instruments of enlightenment, not conversation pieces to be left lying around the solar. If anything, Sinner havens will be functionally indistinguishable from Scion havens, though often leaning a bit more heavily in the direction of maximum creature comfort, particularly if the Sinner's path lends itself to sensuous excess.

- **Road of Humanity:** Walkers of the *Via Humanitatis* stand the best chance, all told, of possessing havens that blend in with the common run of mankind, extolling as they do the virtues of the mortal condition. One particular quirk that the Prodigals have developed in their living arrangements is the communal haven, a more or less dormitory or commune-style arrangement for those who stress the importance of social support and interaction in their morality.

allowing the enterprising members of both species nearly unparalleled opportunities for personal advancement. Power, like nature, despises a vacuum, and the clash of would-be princes rushing in to fill that void has resulted in some of the most vicious power politicking that European Cainites have seen since the fall of Rome. Another approach is taking a previously established demesne by force, through the judicious application of both intrigue and violence, sometimes up to and including diablerie. Established Cainite elders, however, usually view such an approach as a manifestation of overweening, as opposed to merely natural, ambition. A pack of young upstarts might claim and hold a demesne through such tactics, but it also tends to end up earning them the enmity of their elders along with a notation for "crush at earliest convenience" (particularly if the upstarts belong to the Low Clans).

Most young Cainites almost invariably end up pushed to the fringes of urban areas, and forced to make their way by somewhat lesser means. For these Cainites, it often behooves them to exploit options overlooked by their grasping elders and make the most they can of what they claim. Here is where interest in and influence over rural resources can yield dividends. Cainites can make *excellent* absentee landlords. A coterie can make its haven (or havens) at the fringes of an urban area and use that area for feeding purposes, while its Domain actually lies some leagues away, administrated by ghoulish minions and worked by villeins who almost never see the lords for whom they labor. Another option is to invest in a somewhat less dignified (and safe) mode of existence and claim Domain over the roads. Cainites are as capable as mortals when it comes to the life of brigandry and outlawry, and even somewhat more honest about their parasitism than those who suffer delusions of contributing something to the stability of society. Roads are the lifelines of commerce; exploiting them directly can yield the sort of short-term dividends that allow for the establishment of a more secure power base later, once the furor has died down and, possibly, in a region where the coterie isn't wanted by the local authorities.

Pooling Backgrounds

Nearly any Background can become the Anchor for a Cainite coterie's power-building endeavors. Each has its individual advantages and disadvantages in terms of utility, both standing alone and in concert with other, lesser Background choices.

Allies

An Anchor Background of Allies indicates, in general terms, that a coterie has potentially widespread influence at the local or regional levels, or within a particularly prominent religious or secular institution. The benefits of such an arrangement tend to be subtle but pervasive, and permit a coterie to manipulate a resource base through a second party that is neither a blood-bound slave nor noticeably unnatural, though he may be considered morally corrupt by other observers. The trade-off is, of course, that the availability of one's allies can be spotty at important times and allies cannot be treated as expendable flunkies, or else the friendship rapidly dries up. Relationships with allies tend to be arrangements of mutual benefit that both parties must make efforts to maintain, or else all benefits of association are lost. Additionally, a Storyteller may rule that Allies include fellow Cainites or other supernatural beings, with the cost of purchasing such an alliance being somewhat higher than the normal expenditure for the Background. Such alliances carry their own risks, as they tend to attract a bit more attention than average. In many cases, particularly in the case of Cainites associating with other supernatural entities, this attention tends to be uniformly negative.

ALLIES EXAMPLE

Cardinal Alphonso de Marcho Galeotto
(Allies 6, Contacts 2, Resources 2)

A newly formed coterie chooses Allies as its Anchor Background, with three of the five members providing two dots each to the Anchor, totaling six, one providing two dots of Contacts, and one two points of Resources. Since the game is set in Rome, a hotbed of Lasombra and Toreador clan politicking, the Storyteller constructs the coterie's main ally as an influential Prince of the Church, Cardinal Alphonso de Marcho Galeotto. Since the coterie's Resources rating indicates they aren't exactly rolling in bribe money, the Cardinal has a personal reason for lending the coterie his influence — one of the characters is his bastard son by the mistress he loved all his life and, despite his son's horrifying new state as one of the undead, he continues to support his offspring as best he may. From the Cardinal, the web of influential Allies and Contacts spreads out, including numerous minor religious officials and other relatively reliable sources of both information and influence on local secular and sacred politics.

Contacts

Contacts is the Anchor Background for a Cainite coterie interested in going into the information brokerage business, an approach to unlife not without its rewards. The more dots devoted to the Background, the larger any given information/spying/blackmail ring will be and the more likely a coterie is to obtain potentially useful pieces of information, or to obtain information on a wide variety of topics. On the down side, information brokerage and blackmail are risky propositions if used ham-handedly; most elder Cainites respond quite poorly to threats, and attempted blackmail by a band of disrespectful young idiots is just the sort of thing to rile even the most sessile elder to a violent display of displeasure. Most powerful and influential mortals who might be targeted for similar attentions don't respond much better. Information resale tends to be a great deal safer and more immediately remunerative, and to come attached to the potentially great rewards of prepayment debts owed by those whom a coterie's little birds have chosen to help.

CONTACTS EXAMPLE

The Scriptorium (Contacts 5, Resources 2)

The coterie is a young band of urban Cainites searching for the lever that will allow them to rise from mere sufficiency to genuine comfort and eventual significance in the city in which they dwell. When they pool their Backgrounds, they decide to invest heavily in Contacts in an effort to obtain through subtlety what they couldn't possibly obtain through force: a renewable information resource. As one of the coterie members was a clerk in minor orders before his Embrace, the troupe consults with their Storyteller and decides that the coterie cultivates the document clerks and copyists of the *scriptorium* attached to the local cathedral as their primary Contacts. The former clerk still has some friends among these learned men, and they represent a significant portion of the city's literate population; they normally end up scribing everything from wills to public charters to private correspondence. Many would undoubtedly pay heavily to have access to such documents, particularly if the services rendered can come to include subtle changes in wording or the "misplacing" of inconvenient pieces of parchment.

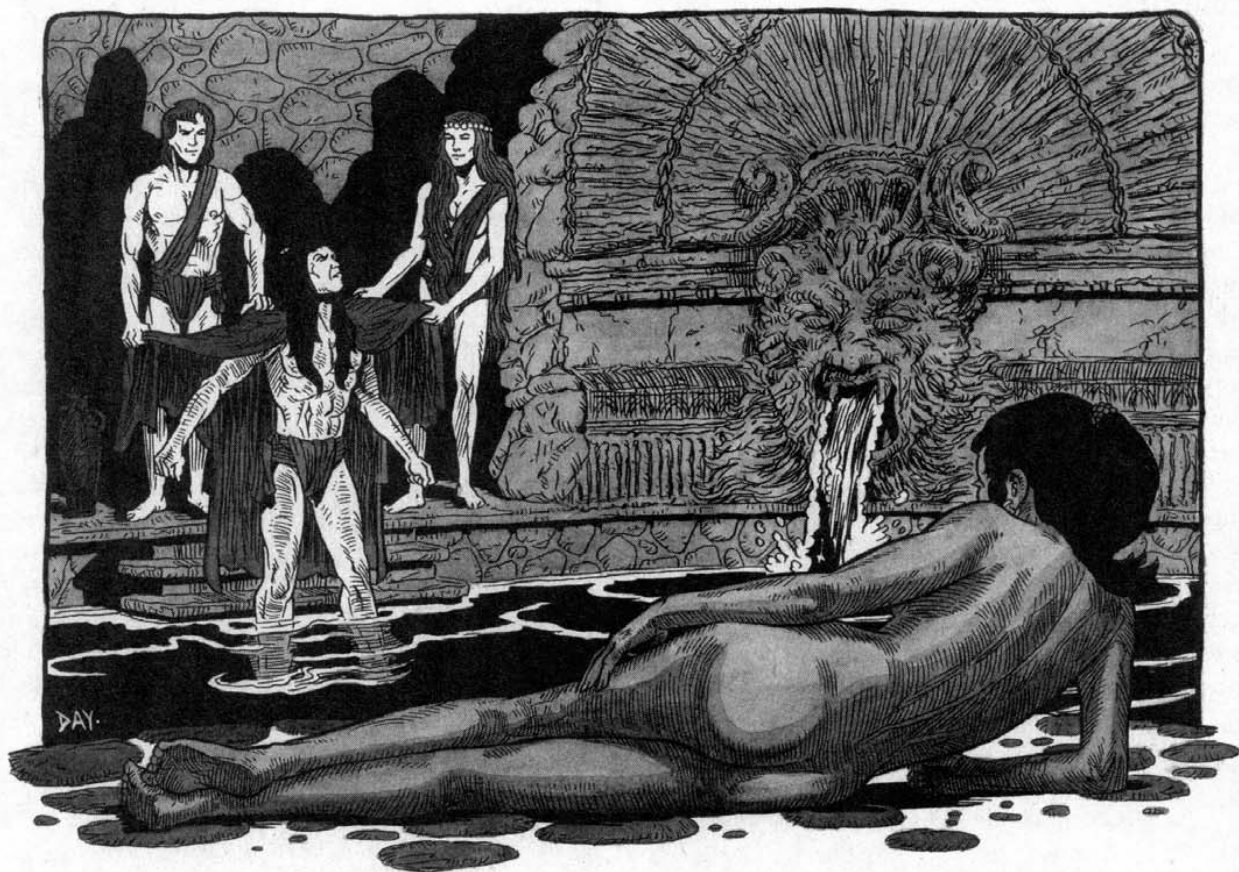
Domain

Domain is probably the best Anchor Background in terms of utility to Cainites — it indicates how much physical territory a given coterie claims access to for the purposes of feeding and how secure they have chosen to make that territory. Within both Cainite and mortal society, land is considered power, a source of exploitable resources and, if well managed, potentially great material wealth. On the down side, possession is only nine tenths of the law, and in that remaining one tenth lie all those, mortal and otherwise, who would dearly like to separate the coterie from its Domain and claim that place for themselves. In a crowded enough urban environment, possession of even a small Domain can become a nightly struggle to the death to maintain control of it; rural Domains carry additional difficulties in procuring an adequate food supply for the coterie and adequate haven space. The life (or unlife) of a rural landlord tends to be seminomadic, and each place a coterie travels to in its Domain must be equipped to survive a potentially extended visit. Even so, the vast bulk of Cainites would prefer to possess a Domain of their own rather than dwell in another's Domain at another's sufferance.

DOMAIN EXAMPLE

Castellar, a neighborhood of Carcassonne (Domain 7, Herd 4)

The coterie consists of an ambitious band of Cainites who accompanied mortal Crusader forces south to the Languedoc, hoping to carve a Domain for themselves out of the soft, rich, heresy-ridden lands of the south before anyone else beat them to it. As luck (and their Background expenditures) would have it, they managed to gain a foothold in Castellar, a fortified neighbor of the Languedocien city of Carcassonne, capital of the old Trencavel lands and an important social, political and economic center. Castellar represents a combined total of seven dots in Domain, four devoted to size and three devoted to security, indicating the coterie's vigilance over most of the city center, its wells and market district, and the attention the town's new masters give to maintaining that vigilance in the face of rebellious and embittered native Cainites.



Herd

Domain is a pleasant thing for an enterprising and ambitious Cainite to have. Herd is something every Cainite sleeps better for having regular, unimpeded, and undisputed access to, since, while vampires can profit from the produce of the land they own, they can no longer derive sustenance from it. Herd is the sort of Background that pools best with Domain expenditures; it's somewhat difficult, logically speaking, to have one without the other unless the local Prince is exceedingly generous when it comes to parceling out hunting grounds, though it's not impossible. Perhaps the coterie is simply very good at seducing mortals to their wills, but doesn't wish to come to anyone's attention by claiming Domain.

Influence

Influence is the Background most likely to be cultivated by a tightly knit coterie of urban Cainites with very clear goals in mind, and the intellectual and moral wherewithal to follow through on them. Influence, more than Allies and even Contacts, represents the choice of goal-oriented coteries devoted to manipulating the world for their own ends. That being said, an

HERD EXAMPLE

The House of the Perfumed Waters (Herd 4, Domain 2, Resources 3)

The coterie dwells in a major pilgrimage city and has decided to take advantage of that fact in several practical ways. After pooling Backgrounds, the troupe consults with the Storyteller and decides that one of the characters was a reasonably prosperous merchant who, after years of trekking all over Europe, decided to settle down and purchase property, which turned out to be yet another business — a bathhouse for weary pilgrims longing to shed the dust of the road. The bathhouse doubles as a whorehouse, which is where the Herd rating comes in; the employees and the guests both serve as a regularly available herd, with the employees (water carriers, bath attendants/working girls and boys, a masseur or two, sundry servants) providing a base of seven to ten regularly available "meals," and the clients (locals and pilgrims alike) providing a base that fluctuates from fifteen to fifty available vessels depending on the vagaries of the pilgrimage season and the discretion of the Storyteller.

Influence-driven coterie is in a position to reap enormous rewards should it choose to stay the course, or lose it all in a poorly enacted scheme. This method of operation requires close personal contact with the mortal world at numerous levels — at any of those levels a mistake could occur, the coterie could seriously overextend itself, and the entire edifice of persuasion, manipulation and outright skullduggery could come crashing down, not only around them but around any other Cainites that have regular contact with them. Patience and the willingness to invest time and effort into making everything work is a must for coterie that Anchor their existence in Influence; the rash and immediate-gratification hungry need not apply.

INFLUENCE EXAMPLE

The Masters of the Guild of Blood (Influence 6, Allies 4, Resources 4, Contacts 3)

The coterie is made up of vampires who were, in their breathing days, all members in good standing of several different craft and merchant guilds. When they pool their Backgrounds, the players discover that this gives their characters a naturally widespread degree of influence in the community in which they currently dwell, which happens to be one of the larger and more important fair towns of the era. After consulting with the Storyteller, the troupe decides to embark on an epic quest to financially dominate the fairs through the coterie's cumulative web of personal connections. Soon, the coterie is sinking its talons into the workings of the fairs themselves, the cities in which the fairs take place, the guilds which govern trade and financial interactions at the fairs, moving slowly and carefully... but not carefully enough to avoid the attention of an equally canny elder, who is watching their progress with a great deal of interest. In terms of mechanics, the character's Contacts and Allies represent various members of the guilds and the fairs' personnel with whom the Cainites maintain a working rapport. Their Influence stems from continued membership in the guilds, which will almost assuredly wane as the characters' mortal identities disappear from the public eye (as they eventually must). Finally, the vampires' station affords them a great deal of material wealth (in the form of the Resources Background).

Mentor

Unlike Domain and Herd, Mentors tend to be something of a luxury item for most Cainite coterie. While the pursuit of patronage is common in mortal society, that same pursuit in Cainite social circles carries with it dual disadvantages: the perception among one's peers that a Mentor-shopping coterie can't make it on its own and needs to ride the coattails of someone older and more powerful, and the serious and potentially unending prestation entanglements that can result from deliberately indebting oneself to another vampire. On the other hand, the beneficent attentions of an influential Mentor can drastically increase a given coterie's status, either in the vampires' individual clans (or, more likely, roads) or within the general run of Cainite society. Others might carp and snigger about the coterie's naked bootlicking behind the members' backs, but they cannot ignore the status, influence or capabilities of the person those boots are attached to. After all, if a

MENTOR EXAMPLE

The Flayer's Left Hand (Mentor 5, Retainers 2, Resources 1)

The coterie is a small band of Tzimisce, recently left at loose ends by the destruction of their various sires during the ongoing hostilities of the Tremere-Tzimisce bloodwar and by the somewhat newer hostilities opening with the Fiefs of the Black Cross. Rather than abandoning their homeland and heading west, as so many young Tzimisce are forced to these nights, this band chooses to stay and fight for what they consider theirs by right of blood. Realizing that attempting to carve out a Domain in a land of fratricidal and territorial elders without assistance is sheerest folly, the players pool their Backgrounds into five dots of Mentor, two dots of Retainers, and a single dot of Resources, representing the coterie's current semidisfranchised state. The Mentor their Storyteller selects for them is no less an individual than Velya the Flayer, an elder Metamorphosist who holds notable sympathies with regard to the younger members of his clan reduced to hard-scrabble survival by the current upheavals and with a number of schemes cooking that require potentially expendable young pawns who will nonetheless be grateful for his compassionate patronage of their own efforts.

potent Mentor is choosing to dispense his precious time and wisdom to the coterie, more likely than not there's something there worth nourishing.

Note: According to **Dark Ages: Vampire**, Mentor is not a pooled Background. It is being presented here as an optional rule for vampires, as Mentor is a pooled Background for both **Dark Ages: Mage** and **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**.

Resources

Resources is, like Herd, a Background that generally works best in conjunction with Domain. Though it is not impossible, Resources are difficult to obtain without some sort of Domain to exploit, which is to say, possession of land that can be sold or rented for grazing or cropping rights, real estate that can be rented for cash revenue, livestock that can be sold for slaughter or rented for breeding rights, the proceeds of a money-lending or money-changing enterprise, fine revenues from a manorial court, or the like. Resources may also derive from inheritance or, possibly, from a stipend paid by a noble father to his bastard offspring

RESOURCES EXAMPLE

The Marketplace (Resources 5, Domain 4, Allies 3)

The coterie members are the offspring of several powerful elder vampires, all of whom are either in torpor, jaded beyond the capacity to interact comfortably with the mortal world any longer or just bored with doing their own finances. As a consequence, the maintenance of their sires' greater, overarching power structure has fallen into the characters' hands, and they have decided to use this providential opportunity to skim some off the top. The coterie members pool their assets and decide to invest in their city's marketplace, its native vendors, its traveling merchants, its guards, its tolls, taxes, fines and general income. They have managed to obtain Allies in the forms of several stall-holding landlords and other market officials, with whom they share the profits of their endeavors, and dwell in a townhouse convenient to the "action" of their moneymaking scheme. Originally, a bit timid about the amount of money they could successfully embezzle, they've become a bit bolder as their sires persist in not noticing their activities (or, if they do notice, simply choosing not to take their offspring over their collective knee) and are considering expanding further into land holdings.

in order to convince them to stay away and not clutter up an already complicated line of succession. In this era, it should also be kept in mind that "rent" is not *always* paid in cash. It can be, but a Cainite landlord is just as likely to receive rents in goods that can't be immediately used but need to be resold or traded in order to turn a genuine profit. Keep in mind, however, that possession of material wealth without any visible form of support is just as suspicious in the Dark Medieval age as it is in the modern era, and can produce just as much unpleasant attention.

Retainers

Unlike Mentor, Retainers are often something of a necessity for even modestly sized Cainite coterie. Since

RETAINERS EXAMPLE

The Undolfini Family (Retainers 6, Domain 4, Resources 3)

The coterie is a group of semiprivileged young Cainites, most of them of at least middling noble birth, and none of them has actually passed one day or night of existence without the attendance of at least one servant. Their Storyteller permits their combined Background pool to purchase them a fairly extensive farming estate in the *contada* outside the city mostly dominated by the interests of their sires and a collection of Retainers to help them manage it, the Undolfini family, a hearty clan that has lived in the area and worked the farm for several generations now. The Undolfini family, as it turns out, consists of a number of highly competent individuals (Messer and Madonna Undolfini, the parents of the brood, as well as their oldest son and middle daughter, all possess a remarkably well developed grasp of manorial business management), several capable cousins and, well, there are always two or three that are sharp as boiled bread, but you have that in every family. Sometimes the coterie isn't entirely certain who the masters and who the servants are. Madonna Undolfini seems to think that they've joined her family and should be treated as such; her husband and sons do such fine work that the Cainites almost feel guilty about living off the sweat of so many good-hearted brows. The coterie members haven't pressed the blood oath on anyone yet, and they're not entirely sure they ought to; something can be said for actually earning the loyalty of your servants over binding their wills in blood.

most Cainites take the very reasonable line of hiding themselves from the vast bulk of humanity, someone needs to be available to do most of the legwork, the traveling from town to town looking after a coterie's interests, to represent the coterie during the vulnerable daylight hours, and generally to be the hands, eyes and fists of the group. Ideally, Retainers represent mortals with whom the coterie has a well developed relationship of mutual trust, coincident interests or genuine emotional attachment. Retainers can also be little more than blood-bound patsies, emotionally or physically warped minions groomed from birth to submit to every vampiric whim thrown at them, or individuals who are enormously loyal but otherwise utterly mediocre when it comes to getting things done. Anchoring with this Background indicates that a coterie places a high premium on interaction with humanity as a means of accomplishing its goals and cultivates friendships either with a broad cross-section of humanity or with a handful of extraordinary mortal examples, with whom they share a mutual commitment to success.

The Fellowships of the Magi

Persistence in one opinion has never been considered a merit in leaders.

—Marcus Tullius Cicero, "Epistulae ad Familiares"

The passing Ages of Man have treated the mages unkindly. With the end of the Mythic Age, much of their former power has eroded in the face of changing human society and culture. Once, they influenced affairs of state from Babylon to the British Isles. They guided the destiny of mankind with the divine wisdom and esoteric knowledge that only they possessed. They danced beneath the moon for the pleasure of the Mother and Her Consort and nature itself bowed to do their will. Three of their kind attended at the cradle of Christ Himself and offered songs of praise at the birth of the Savior.

Now, their estate is quite severely fallen. Whole mystic fellowships have vanished into the mists of passing time, taking with them irreplaceable wisdom. Most of the remaining mages are forced to survive at the edges of the human society they still long to lead into glorious exaltation. Few among them accept this state of affairs with complete equanimity.

Ahl-i-Batin

Among the Magi, the Ahl-i-Batin are known as "the Subtle Ones," and that designation certainly fits

them. They are philosophers and mystics, scientists and theologians, thinkers and wanderers, and their modes of operation have influenced the more esoteric elements of Near Eastern cultures for centuries. They move subtly and invisibly through the world, and, in general, the world is a better place for their passing through it. Unity is their goal, the perfect spiritual union of all living things with God, and that goal is in no way unrighteous.

Unfortunately, the Batini are at several serious disadvantages when it comes to the messy details of living in the world. First, Batini philosophy is often rather inescapably inward-turning; they may not deny the validity of the material world with the ferocity of a Cathar *perfectus*, but in many cases interaction with the external world of flesh and money and politics is viewed as inferior to the exploration of the inner universe. This viewpoint is not conducive to the development or maintenance of material resources — in fact, it tends to encourage an isolationist mindset that gradually leads to the failure of Batini mages to interact effectively with the world at all. The Batini are generally the most likely of all the Mystic Fellowships to rely heavily on servitors to manage their material assets, with all the attendant risks such an approach entails.

Second, the long association of the Batini with the Muslim cultures of Iberia and the Levant has won them few friends in predominantly Christian Europe. The Messianic Voices solidly dominate the mystic field in this era, and the Voice is notably unsympathetic to those perceived as champions of the Moors. What few European power bases the Batini possess have been shaken to the ground or at least severely undercut by the hard-driving successes of the *Reconquista*, their chantries and crays seized by enterprising cabals of Messianic Voices and the Order of Hermes. The Subtle Ones still exercise a quiet influence through the rising universities of the Dark Medieval era, but even that influence cannot hold forever; they are not the only Aristotelian scholars among the Magi, and the Order of Hermes in general has a much firmer grip on the European educational institutions not dominated by the Messianic Voices.

A day is looming where the Batini will be forced completely from Europe for good or for ill, and they will be forced to rebuild their influence in Muslim-dominated regions whose sympathies may be uncertain.

The Batini are among the most internally cohesive and well organized of the Mystic Fellowships; in practical terms, this means they enjoy the benefits of belonging to a group that cares about the develop-

ment of its individual members and contributes in some ways to their support. Mentor is a very common Batini Background, and the teacher-student bonds formed during a Batini magus' training period tend to be among the most enduring social relationships the Fellowship's members maintain. Similarly, the Fellowship's structured nature lends itself to the possession of chantries (small and large, with or without crays) and, most importantly, libraries as a reflection of the group's dedication to the excavation and preservation of knowledge. High ratings in Allies, Contacts, and (nonmagical) Servants can also be used to indicate the general Batini philosophical divorce from and disinterest in worldly matters; the individuals defined by such Backgrounds would almost inevitably be the managers of the Batini magus' material assets or business interests.

Messianic Voices

Of all the Mystic Fellowships, the Messianic Voices may be the only one that can legitimately claim to dominate all others in terms of sheer influence within mortal society. Since its earliest days, the organization has shadowed the growth of Christianity throughout the world, following in the footsteps of apostles and early Church fathers, giving voice to their songs of power and praise. Eventually, their persistence of faith and vision helped earn the followers of Christ an empire, one that they zealously help expand and defend to this night.

Having championed the cause of Christianity from the beginning, the Messianic Voices enjoy the advantage of having inserted themselves into the structure of the Catholic Church at the ground level. No small number of the Voice's chantries double as enclosed monastic communities supported by generous endowments from both the laity and financial stipends from the Church itself. As landlords, the Voice draws both material support and mortal resources from its dependencies, as much practical work is attached to the maintenance of a chantry and its network of relationships, and not enough mages to accomplish it all. More than any other Fellowship, the Messianic Voices often find themselves caught up in the benefits of temporal power to the neglect of their theoretically much more important spiritual mission.

Those mages who look upon the cultivation of material assets as unworthy of the Voice's true mission tend to favor closer relationships with the newly emerging mendicant orders, particularly the extremely charismatic Order of Friars Preachers, better known as the Dominican Order, after its freshly sainted founder,

Father Dominic Guzman. Attracted to the mendicants' apostolic fervor and purity of faith, no small number of mages sickened with the Voice's slide into naked materialism have slowly but surely begun aligning themselves with a force that may yield great spiritual dividends for the entire Fellowship.

The Messianic Voices are, in many ways, defined by the same structure that underlies the Catholic Church and their Backgrounds reflect this fact. Influence is, by far, the most common Voice Background, in reflection of the Fellowship's widespread presence within one of the most prominent religious and social institutions of the time. Following closely behind in importance are Allies, Servants and Contacts (indicative of the Fellowship's close interaction with the common run of humanity in the maintenance of its power base), as well as Chantry and Resources (representing the fact that many Voice chantries double as religious foundations such as monasteries and parish churches, with all the associated income). Cray (often in the form of such things as chalice wells dedicated to the Virgin and other such naturally occurring holy phenomena) and Library are not uncommon. Mentor is somewhat less prominent among the Voices, owing primarily to the rigidity of the Fellowship's notions of rank and a certain arrogance among high-ranking Voices that leads them to regard those beneath them as inferior and unworthy of their attention.

The Old Faith

Easily the most fractious of the surviving Mystic Fellowships, the Old Faith is not a single "fellowship" at all but a loose collection of theoretically like-minded mages who cleave to an older, pagan tradition of magical working. Members of the Old Faith have endured, over the last several centuries, more active and vicious persecution than any other Magi; while the Messianic Voices can justifiably point to the persecution of the Christians under both Roman and Judaic authorities, the Old Faithful can point to persecution and conquest by Romans, Jews, Christians and allegedly "more sophisticated/worthy/correct" fellow mages with equal justification. Nonetheless, they have endured, even if they are greatly diminished in their survival.

Practitioners of the Old Faith are generally the most circumspect of all the Mystic Fellowships, especially in lands under solid Christian domination. In these areas, they tend to stay out of the proverbial spotlight, with the vast bulk of the Fellowship's members functioning at the fringes of society as woodsmen, hunters, itinerant laborers, herb-women and mid-



wives in order to make their living. Their chantries and crays tend likewise to be small and secretive, consisting of tiny wilderness plots and other sites too insignificant to attract the attention of the larger, better-organized orders.

Only in lands where a significant pagan population still thrives does the Old Faith dare act openly. Lithuania, Livonia and Estonia are wracked with Crusade-driven bloodshed, but there the Old Faith still summons the powers of Earth and Sky against would-be oppressors and controls the largest crays and chantries. While the old myth of a "witch-pope" among the pagan Balts is likely nothing more than propaganda, individual mages of the Old Faith can enjoy significant status within and material support from the tribes to whom they lend their efforts.

Depending on where the mage of the Old Faith is located, Backgrounds can vary somewhat drastically. In lands dominated by Christianity, most members of this Fellowship tend to tread very carefully indeed and trust few outside of their own cabal. Many Old Faith mages keep Familiars for personal companionship. If they engage in relationships with outsiders, they generally have relatively disposable Contacts whose services they can live without, rather than potentially vital Allies who could be stripped from them or betray them. Their crays are generally small and well hidden and are only rarely appended to any sort of chantry. In areas where strong pagan majorities exist, such as Livonia and other points in Eastern Europe, the Old Faithful tend to stand in slightly better stead, having Influence among the local tribes, along with Allies, Contacts and much larger Crays.

The Order of Hermes

The Order of Hermes is one of the oldest of the surviving Mystic Fellowships, tracing its origins from the enlightened scholars of ancient Egypt. The Order is also, almost without exception, the most arrogant of all the remaining Mystic Fellowships, claiming to be the sole practitioners of "true" magic and that all other Fellowships and traditions are either illusionists, charlatans or mere hedge-sorcerers whose learning and methods are distinctly inferior to their own.

Needless to say, this attitude doesn't earn the Order very many friends; it is also the origin of much of their success and survivability.

The Order of Hermes is hard-driving. Its House-based internal structure encourages the sort of competition that hones both its members' raw will to power and the sophistication of the tactics they use to achieve that power. Rendered momentarily second place in terms of sheer influence by the dominance of the Messianic Voice, the Order of Hermes nonetheless enjoys a considerable depth of access to the educational institutions of the time, the coffers of nobles beholden to them in some way and the flourishing trade guilds and confraternal societies that are fueling the rapid expansion of urban civilization. Unlike some of the more contemplative Fellowships, which sometimes seem dedicated to finding enlightenment strictly in their own navels, the Order of Hermes isn't afraid to get its hands dirty or to wade hip-deep in the world for the sheer pleasure of living as well as the practical benefits to be derived from so doing. Hermetic mages can most often be found in professions that allow them to use their formidable intellectual tools to best effect: banking, money-lending and money-changing, all of which offer excellent opportunities for skimming funds off the top, trade of all varieties and, of course, manorial business management, where a wise mage can excel as the seneschal of even a middling lord.

Unfortunately, the Order's fatal weakness is also derived from its unquenchable arrogance. Hermetic mages tend to have the worst relationship with the common run of humanity of any of the Mystic Fellowships, and this tends to come back and bite them when they least expect it. It's the rare Hermetic mage who doesn't regard the man with whom he's doing business, the unenlightened scholar with whom he's debating, or the servitor who tends to his bookkeeping as little better than a talking monkey — occasionally amusing, occasionally annoying, but in no way as "real" as the mage himself, and generally less deserving of anything more than the most peremptory treatment. Needless to say, this breeds considerable resentment, as well as hatred, retaliation, and treachery.

The Order of Hermes, like the Batini and the Messianic Voices, is one of the mostly highly organized of the surviving Mystic Fellowships. As a result, they tend to place a high premium on social and professional interactions with members of their own order, and Mentor is, thus, one of their most common Backgrounds. Within the House structure of the Hermetic Order, a mage's Mentor is not only her teacher,

advocate and foster parent, but also the red-hot goad driving her to succeed. The Order's tendency to take a hands-on approach also manifests in the cultivation of Influence (personal, since the average Hermetic magus wants to *experience* life, not just profit from it), Allies and Contacts. Having been acquiring material and intellectual resources for millennia, the Order also tends to have better than average Chantries (with or without Crays) and Libraries (often containing the writings of Hermetic philosophers that otherwise would have been lost with the Great Library of Alexandria).

Spirit-Talkers

While the Order of Hermes and the Ahl-i-Batin both claim to be the oldest mystic traditions in the world, in all likelihood that distinction most genuinely belongs to the Spirit-Talkers. Even less organized than the followers of the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers can nonetheless trace their Fellowship's origins to the beginning of human history itself — anywhere that men believed there was more to the world than could be perceived by the eye alone, there they have been.

Unfortunately, a millennium-spanning pedigree isn't a guarantee of overarching power and influence, particularly in the Dark Medieval. In Christian Europe, the Spirit-Talkers exert no sustained influence over any major segment of society; even in the pagan lands of the East, the followers of the Old Faith tend to possess more in the way of practical contact with and influence over the societies to which both groups belong. Even more than the Batini, the path of the Spirit-Talker tends to lead to a divorce from structured society, if not from the material world itself.

This is not to say that individual Spirit-Talkers cannot be persons of importance in the societies in which they belong — merely that the Fellowship as a whole does not generally cultivate the sort of mentality that lends itself to the pursuit of temporal power. Individual Spirit-Talkers are as likely as other individual mages to seek positions that will lead them into material wealth and influence. In fact, the arts they practice help them a great deal in this regard; after all, everything has a spirit, and those who can communicate with those spirits can often learn some very interesting things.

Despite their relative lack of cohesion as a Fellowship, the Spirit-Talkers nonetheless put great emphasis on the student-teacher relationship. Mentors are important for young Spirit-Talkers coming into their own in an era that, for the most part, no longer recognizes or respects the shaman's approach to living in a world that

echoes with spirit-voices. Such individuals can either shape a young magus into a person who can deal successfully with both the physical and spiritual halves of the world or warp him into a bitter, distrustful recluse who dabbles in the Dark Arts for both profit and malice. Similarly, most Spirit-Talkers are rarely alone, often accompanied by spirit-Familiars and spirit-Servants who help tend to their physical needs, thus minimizing their need for contact with the world. Spirit-Talkers, when they interact with the common run of humanity, rarely have genuine Allies, preferring the shallower relationship represented by Contacts, and rarely possess much in the way of Resources.

Valdaermen

The Valdaermen are another Mystic Fellowship whose time has passed but who cling to their philosophy and traditional mode of existence with a ferocity reminiscent of their Viking forebears. In outlook, they are more closely related to the shamanism practiced by the Spirit-Talkers than any other magical tradition, and their current state of disenfranchisement in their own society reflects that fact.

Traditionally, the Valdaermen served their people as prophets, diviners and rune-crafters. While this earned them fear tinged with awe, it brought them little in the way of respect; Norse society had altogether more unqualified respect for warriors who strode across the battlefield in service to glory than a loose fellowship of skulking mages performing work fit only for women. With the coming of Christianity to the northlands, their position declined even further; now not only were they borderline effeminate weaklings, they were also recalcitrant pagans at best or irredeemable heretics at worst.

No other Fellowship, not even the Spirit-Talkers, is so thoroughly alienated from the culture that spawned it as are Valdaermen. Their influence within their own society is negligible at best; what few chantries and crays they hold are often purchased at great price and just as often require much effort to conceal from the more aggressive and grasping of the other mages, particularly the Order of Hermes.

The isolation from the common run of society that the Valdaermen endure has made them hardy and self-sufficient in many ways. Often, individual Valdaermen will be quite potent Founts, capable of functioning without regular access to either a cray or a chantry. This is fortunate, because both are hard to come by in the lands that this Fellowship calls home, and though they are not impossible to find, most tend to be small. Paradoxically, the Valdaermen also prize

relationships among themselves, and Mentor is one of their most common Backgrounds, representing a solid connection to the loose fraternity of the Fellowship as a whole and the specific relationship a young mage has with his teacher.

Pooling Backgrounds

Like vampires, the mages have the option of pooling their Backgrounds to produce a greater starting point than any individual mage would have alone. They simply do this much more rarely across Fellowship lines — the very nature of most Fellowships' magical practices makes cooperation with others of their kind a somewhat chancy endeavor. Among themselves, individual cabals of same-Fellowship mages generally, but do not always, tend to possess a higher degree of group cohesion and are more likely to pool and exploit their individual resources successfully. This does not mean that multi-Fellowship cabals are doomed to possess much less in the way of material resources than cabals whose members who cleave strictly to the company of their own order. In these days, a willingness to think and act flexibly is a survival tool without parallel, and even the most hidebound senior mages can reluctantly admit that their rivals might have valuable insights to offer.

Chantry

Chantry is naturally the Background that most young mages would very much like to possess, preferably in considerable size, comfort, and undisputed access. In an era where the Mystic Fellowships have shrunk from a dozen viable societies to a handful of hidden and, in some cases, *hunted* near-outlaws, a safe place to live and work and study among one's peers is often heart's desire, unattainable dream and fiercely sought-after prize all rolled into one. This is particularly true if the chantry also houses a cray or a library, though this is not always either the case or the possibility. In practice, a chantry can be anything from a humble crofter's cottage to a students' hall within a university, to a secluded glade deep in the Black Forest, depending on the personalities and needs of any given cabal. Most of the more primal Mystic Fellowships — the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers, the Valdaermen — tend to prefer rural, secluded or more "natural" settings for their chantries; for them, solitude often doubles as an inexpensive security precaution in addition to giving them more room to work. The Batini, Order of Hermes and Messianic Voices tend at least to appear more social, and more structured, in their choices; many of these mages

CHANTRY EXAMPLE

The Wooden Circle (Chantry 5, Cray 2)

The cabal is a small group of "naturalist" Magi — adherents of the Old Faith, Spirit-Talkers, or Valdaermen (or possibly some combination thereof). Their Background pool permits them either a fairly substantial Chantry equipped with a small Cray, or a small Chantry with a small Cray, both equipped with other advantages, such as better security or Aura options. After consulting their Storyteller, the cabal opts for a smaller, more secure Chantry to go with their small Cray and decides that their chantry is a circle of wooden plinths atop a hill, possibly the remains of a pagan temple or shrine. Its security rating derives from both from its location commanding a relatively good view of the surrounding area and the fact that the locals consider the place extremely eerie and avoid it all costs, even going so far as to withhold information about it from the local Christian authorities, fearing that meddling with the site will unleash misfortune on the entire valley.

attempt to locate their chantries convenient to their homes or businesses, sometimes in their homes and businesses. Such an approach is a bit more risky, though it also permits a readier degree of access to the benefits of the chantry.

Cray

Crays are the places where the *quinta essentia*, the fifth element that gives the world its life-spark, bubbles and pools to the surface, providing energy to be drawn on for magical purposes. Such places are much more rare now than they were in ages past, more difficult to find and to protect from those who would steal such a rich mystic possession from any given cabal. They remain, nonetheless, hotly sought-after prizes for young and firmly established cabals alike. In practical Background terms, Cray combines well with Chantry in terms of both utility and security for a cabal, though chantries can (and usually do) exist without crays being present on their grounds, and crays can exist without chantries present to defend them. Crays, like chantries, tend to take many forms; theoretically, Quintessence could flow from the fountain or well in the square of a well established market town, suffuse the trees and plants of a forest glade, or have crystalized into the rocks of a natural cavern or an abandoned

CRAY EXAMPLE

The Unusual Well of Obernewtyn (Cray 5, Resources 3, Chantry 1)

The cabal is an itinerant group, perhaps fleeing the unfriendly attentions of the authorities in the members' homeland, perhaps simply striking out on their own in search of knowledge and adventure. Their Background pool allows them access to a fairly substantial Cray nonetheless (in addition to the money and goods they are able to transport easily), a fact that their Storyteller decides to use when they arrive in the humble hamlet of Obernewtyn, footsore, weary and in dire need of baths, each and every one. It doesn't take the cabal long to notice that their bathwater, the water that the local innkeeper uses to thin wine and beer, and that which everyone uses in cooking and washing is suffused with Quintessence. An investigation of the phenomenon shows the young magi that the vast bulk of the town's water supply comes from a single well near the town center; further, they learn that the well has been there longer than the town, and that the town grew up around it, at least to the knowledge of local storytellers. The well never seems to run dry, no matter how bad the weather might be, and some believe that it has magical properties — the ability to heal the gravely sick, for one. The cabal decides to stay and investigate further, essentially taking over a room in the local inn as their chantry as they study the miraculous waters of the town. Is the well (and its waters) itself the cray, or are the marvelously Quintessence-rich waters merely the visible manifestation of an enormous subterranean well of power...?

salt mine. The cabal's Cray pool determines whether its possession is one huge source of energy or perhaps many smaller, more easily overlooked, sources — a tactic that can provide just as much energy while simultaneously reducing the overall safety risks.

Library

In the Dark Medieval era, access to a library of any significance is even rarer than access to either a cray or a chantry. The literacy rate among the common run of humanity is pathetically low; even in society's elite

segments, the nobility and clergy, those capable of reading and writing are heavily outnumbered by those who consider scholarship a "frill" rather than an essential part of daily life. The technologies that permit the mass production of books are still centuries in the future, and each volume a library possesses is the product of meticulous hand labor. While this tends to make such volumes quite pleasing to the eye, it also makes them almost prohibitively expensive; in fact, illiterate nobles often purchase books for the status attached to owning one, even if only their seneschals or their wives can really appreciate the contents of said book. There are, however, few things in nature more single-minded than a mystic on the hunt for knowledge, and a cabal may pool its Backgrounds into a fairly significant Library. Presumably, such a cabal would be wise enough to keep the precise extent of its possessions secret both from other mages and from the public at large; while possessing an enormous store-

house of knowledge isn't on quite the same order as being caught dancing naked in a faerie grove painted in strange-smelling unguents, it does tend to attract the attention of those whose duties encompass the investigation of such oddities.

Note: Remember that the Library Background costs "double." That is, it costs *two* Background points or bonus points to buy a dot of Library, rather than the usual one.

Servants

The possession of Servants usually goes hand in hand with the possession of a Chantry or some other sort of property or Resources, and those Backgrounds pool together quite naturally. As with vampires, the mages must bear in mind a few things when they gather together their servants. First, they must decide if they want a large number of fairly ordinary servitors or a smaller number of more competent assistants. Each carries its own benefits and risks. The average ordinary human being is likely to be in awe or fear if he should somehow become aware of the cabal's true

LIBRARY EXAMPLE

The Secret in the Cellar (Library 3, Allies 1, Chantry 2)

The cabal is pursuing the rumor that several scrolls, books and other artifacts stolen from another chantry are being concealed in a manor outside the city in which they live. Upon managing to finesse their way into the manor and speaking with its seneschal (the actual owner of the property and the master of all the servants appears to be the absentee sort, dividing his time between several estates, of which this is only one), the cabal is allowed access to the manor's cellars. In fact, the seneschal is a good Christian and quite understandably nervous about some of the things down there, and with good reason. Behind the regular storage areas is a narrow stair that descends into another chamber, possibly even a natural cavern, in which the cabal not only finds the missing scrolls but also a treasure trove of other volumes. Even the walls are scrawled with writing — pictograms and hieroglyphs and ever more exotic forms of verbiage that the cabal cannot immediately decipher. Enlisting the aid of the grateful seneschal and arranging a lease agreement with the owner of the property, the cabal begins the laborious process of examining and cataloging the contents of the library.

SERVANTS EXAMPLE

The Paper Slave (Servants 5, Library 3)

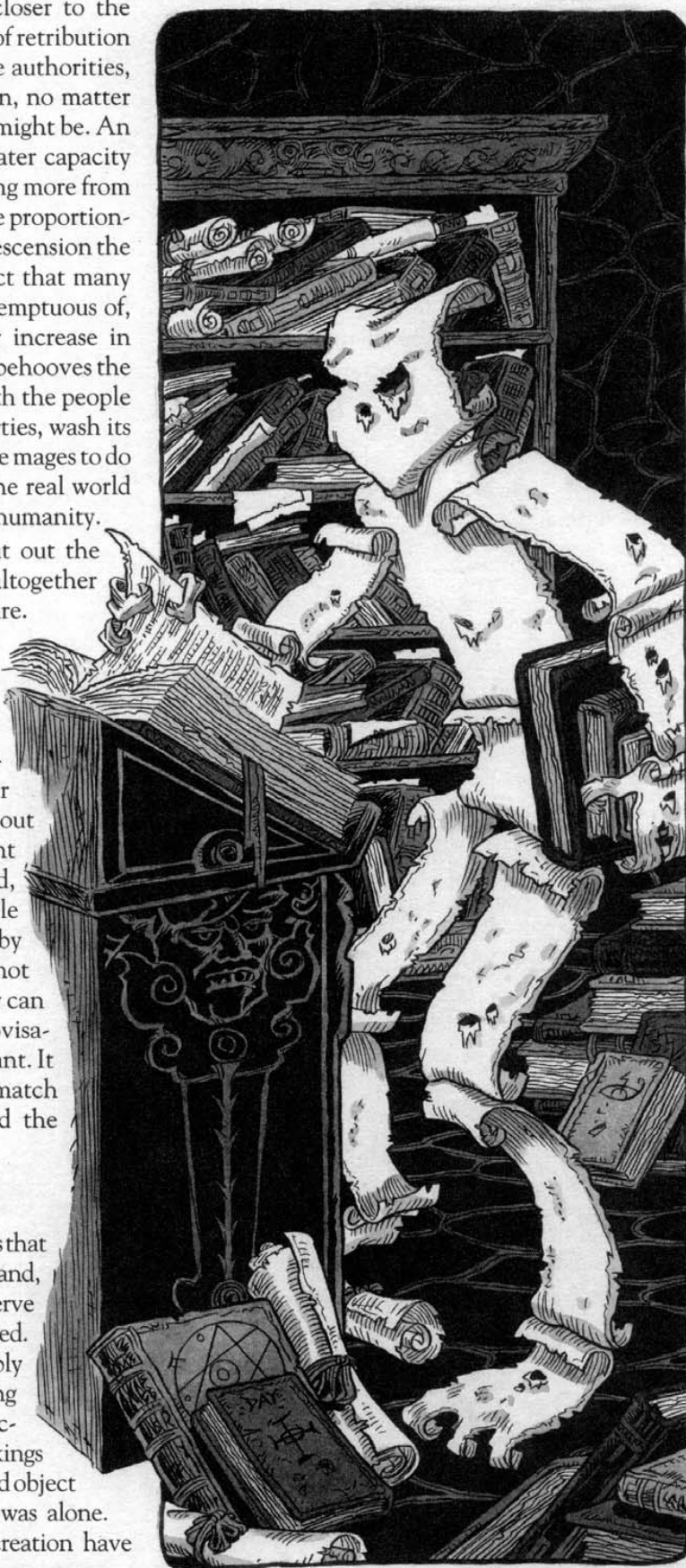
The cabal is a group of young mages still serving out their apprenticeships under the hawk-eyed glare of their masters. Each and every one of them (even the masochistic one who enjoys poring through books and scrolls in truly horrific ancient handwriting) would very much like to do more than burn the midnight oil in the library. Subsequently, when they pool their Backgrounds, they discover they have the wherewithal to create a fairly potent magical servant — a being constructed, apparently, of powdered ink, a stack of loose parchment leaves, the scent of old books and the raw desire of every sixteen-year-old apprentice ever to go skinny-dipping while someone else does all the work. This being is capable of researching only *one* topic at a time but does so at voluminous length, using all the resources of the library at the cabal's disposal and, possibly, of other libraries as well. (The cabal is fairly certain that, unless their masters are really hiding something, none of them possesses a fully illustrated copy of any Arabic love manual, yet the Servant seems well versed in such things.) It won't write their papers for them, but by collecting information and summarizing it well, it does drastically expedite the process.

nature; this could possibly bind him closer to the cabal's service from an even greater fear of retribution from either his master or more mundane authorities, or it could drive him away after a season, no matter what the consequences of disobedience might be. An extraordinary servant might have a greater capacity for performing different tasks and learning more from the cabal itself; sometimes, he will also be proportionally more sensitive to any slights or condescension the cabal offers, and it is an unfortunate fact that many mages become divorced from, and contemptuous of, the common run of humanity as they increase in power and enlightenment. It frequently behooves the cabal to maintain good relationships with the people who tend its finances, manage its properties, wash its clothing and cook its meals; it benefits the mages to do so, as it helps keep them grounded in the real world and in contact with their own essential humanity.

A third option is, of course, to cut out the messy interaction with human servants altogether and craft servants of strictly magical nature. Magical servitors encompass several extremes, from summoned and bound elementals, *ifrits* and other primal entities to fantastic automaton constructions, and everything in between. Magical servants are innately more loyal to their masters and are often capable of carrying out tasks that would leave a human servant mad, dead or both. On the other hand, magical servitors are decidedly less flexible than their human counterparts, hobbled by restrictions on what they can and cannot accomplish, how many instructions they can take, and generally less capable of improvisation than even the dimmest human servant. It would behoove a wise cabal to mix and match the types of servants they employ and the duties to which they're assigned.

Talisman

Talismans are magical artifacts, objects that have somehow been imbued with a power and, very nearly, a life of their own, and that serve specific purposes for which they were created. Some Talismans can arguably be said to have created themselves — arising from once-a-millennium mystical conjunctions, the chancy aftermath of magical workings or the spontaneous coalescence of force and object to make something greater than either was alone. More deliberate methods of Talisman creation have



TALISMAN EXAMPLE

The Gift of the Fallen (Talisman 6, Resources 1)

The cabal has returned to its home chantry from a research outing and has discovered chaos and devastation. The chantry-house itself has been demolished so that no stone remains standing one on the other and looks as though what was left after that was burnt in the fires of hell itself. The library it took more than a century of laborious effort to collect is nothing but ash on the wind, everything living between the walls has been slaughtered, and even the cray itself has been drained to dormancy, possibly by the defenders, possibly by the attackers. Amid the rubble of their former home, the cabal manages to find a few scraps of portable wealth that somehow managed to escape the conflagration and, in the lowest levels of the foundation, uncovers what they *think* is the body of their master. There is little left but a blackened skeleton, all of which crumbles to dust when they touch it — except for the skull. The skull remains inexplicably intact, and when they lift it out of the rubble to give it a decent burial it begins to speak to them, whispering the warning that they must take what they can, including it, and flee while they still can....

either been lost or are jealously guarded and rarely employed; most young cabals receive Talismans from their mentors and such objects are almost invariably artifacts handed down through their Fellowship, which rightly considers them irreplaceable treasures and expects them to be used wisely. When a cabal pools its Background points in Talisman, it can possess either one enormously powerful artifact or several smaller artifacts. The collection of smaller Talismans, while less potent, is also less likely to attract malicious attention; a greater Talisman is significantly less likely to allow itself to be stolen from its chosen cabal.

Sanctum

Sancta are places of power, even more so than crays. While crays contain the lifeblood of the world, a mage's sanctum is something much more personal and intense, a place where the mage himself bonds with the world and the world wraps itself around him and protects him, as well. When in his sanctum, a mage is immune from the Backlash that can arise from

SANCTUM EXAMPLE

The Heart of the Forest (Sanctum 5, Cray 2)

The cabal is a band of Slavic practitioners of the Old Faith, bound together by their love of homeland and their loathing of the Germanic invaders encroaching on it. When they pool their Backgrounds together, they produce a Sanctum of considerable power — a god-tree. The god-tree is an enormous, ancient spreading oak that was, some years before, split nearly half its length by a lightning bolt; miraculously, the strike didn't kill the tree, and it continues to live and breathe the power of Perunn Foestriker, god of lightning, protector of the Slavic peoples, through the forest. While within the radius of the god-tree's power, all who worship the gods of the sky and heaven's fire (including some Valdaermen devotees of Thor, Perunn's Norse cousin) enjoy the benefits of reduced effort in their magical workings and the ability to regain Quintessence from breathing the scent of the god-tree's copper-colored leaves. Conversely, followers of the chthonic gods of earth, most especially devotees of Perunn's mortal enemy Veles, obtain no such benefits.

the use of magic, among sundry other benefits, including the ability to regain Quintessence (without access to a cray) and increase the strength of his Foundation. Cabals can pool their Sanctum rating into a truly spectacular place of power, where their wills hold sway above even the laws of nature itself. Pooling dots in Sanctum, however, virtually requires the characters to be members of the same Fellowship, or at least have magical outlooks so similar to one another that the same mystical energies work for all of them (Storyteller's discretion). Thus, while it's not impossible for members of the Old Faith and the Spirit-Talkers to share a sanctum, Messianic Voices and Valdaermen probably never could.

Inquisitor Protectorates

Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

— Proverbs 14:34

The most Holy Inquisition *contra Diabolus enim et alii daemones* is, in the year 1230, less than four decades old, and yet it enjoys a far-reaching, if subtle, influ-

ence in the mortal world. Three of the five orders of the shadow Inquisition are recognized foundations supported by the wealth and might of the Catholic Church, one is a Bavarian noble family of considerable longevity and influence within the cutthroat political affairs of the Holy Roman Empire, and the fifth is a network of men and women that cuts across all layers of Dark Medieval society and brings to it their unique skills, knowledge, and resources.

The shadow Inquisition hunts the night-things and the foul worshipers of unholy darkness that prey on humanity. This fight is the Inquisition's sole purpose for existing. In theory, its orders and individual cells do not covet power and wealth for their own sakes; money, property and influence are to be developed solely to assist in the defense of Christendom. While apostolic poverty is to be admired by all, and emulated when it is practical to do so, the pragmatic fact of the matter is that travel, covert warfare and intelligence-gathering operations all consume resources, and the inquisitors themselves can't live on air and bread alone. Each order has its methods of developing and cultivating temporal resources, both for basic subsistence and for use in the fight against the darkness.

The Order of the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre

The Poor Knights have the great advantage of existing in an era when public support of the military orders is close to its absolute peak. The Knights Templar, the Knights Hospitaller, the Teutonic Knights and the Poor Knights of the Cross all benefit materially from the current passion for donating land and money to the protection of Christendom. Most of the Poor Knights' commanderies sit on land donated solely for the purpose of constructing a holy fortification and are supplied by the local towns and villages to whom they act as both landlords and resident knight-protectors. Poor Knight commanderies that stand athwart the pilgrim roads their charter enjoins them to protect enjoy similar largesse, often in the form of cash donations given by weary pilgrims grateful for a safe place to rest and have their sore feet tended by a Church-trained physician.

This has granted the Poor Knights a certain degree of self-sufficiency and independence; they do not draw heavily from the Church's coffers for financial support and at some levels tend to resent the necessity of justifying their expenditures to Councils of Faith that their order does not solidly dominate. The Poor Knights take vows of poverty when they join the order; their rule

specifically forbids individual knights to own private property, as the order itself will see to their material needs. Questioning the wealth that the order accumulates in the form of donations, rents and property is tantamount to questioning the necessity of supporting its members and of its very mission, which is never a wise idea. Both Sir Audric, the order's Master Treasurer, and Sir Jehan, the Knight Castellan of the order's motherhouse on Cyprus, have written Cardinal Marzone sharp letters about civilian-dominated Councils of Faith questioning the military expenses of the Poor Knights, and the situation remains a serious point of contention within the shadow Inquisition.

The Sisters of St. John

The Sisters of St. John are in a somewhat different position than the Poor Knights, though they also tend to receive a great deal of material support from the Christian laity of Europe. Where the Poor Knights are perceived as performing an essential function in the protection of pilgrimage routes and the care of pilgrims on the road, the Sisters of St. John clearly serve an even more obviously humanitarian mission. Their abbeys and cloisters serve the dual purpose of glorifying God in prayer and contemplation and of caring for the sick, the crippled and the mad. From those who consider it a more Christian act to support peace than war, the Sisters receive donations of land on which to construct cloisters and hospitals, money with which to purchase such land themselves and even the produce of whole towns in the form of cash rents, rents in the form of supplies and labor obligations. They also submit relatively modest requests to Cardinal Marzone for episcopal funding when their income from rents and donations fails to meet their needs, though this is a relatively rare occurrence.

Unlike the Poor Knights, the Sisters of St. John are generally not perceived as possessing more than they actually need to survive. They are also bound by vows of poverty and a rule that prohibits the ownership of private property. Few join or remain among the Sisters who are harboring the lust for wealth or power in their hearts to begin with, though they do tend to make the most of their relatively good social position. To Christendom at large, they serve a vital need in ministering to the physically, mentally and spiritually infirm. Moreover, their eremitic convents are frequently sought-after spiritual retreats for the genuinely pious among Christendom's powerful landholders, rulers and other influential heads of state. The Sisters are excellent connection-makers and make careful, subtle use of their webs of contacts to shake loose assistance and information, both for their own order and for their fellow inquisitors.

The Red Order

Unlike the Poor Knights and the Sisters of St. John, the Red Order is very nearly on its own in terms of financial and material support from the public. Genuine intellectuals are in short supply in the Dark Medieval era, even among the allegedly more sophisticated members of the ruling elite; what true intellectuals do exist also tend to be men of the cloth and equally impoverished. More than any other group of shadow inquisitors, the Red Order relies upon the good will of the Procurator Fiscalis of the local Council of Faith to keep them in episcopal funding.

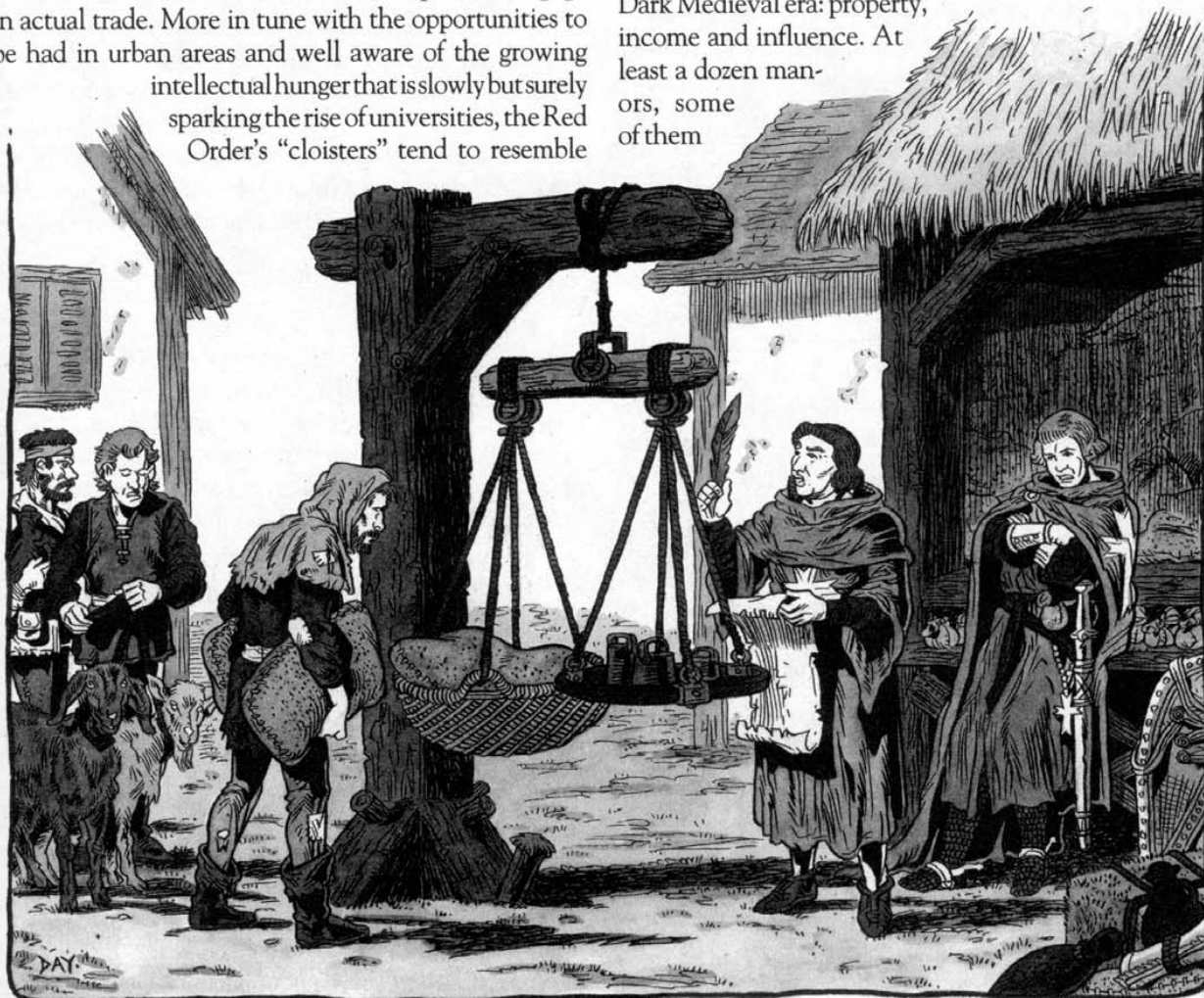
This is not to say that the Red Order is utterly at the mercy of its more orthodox brethren for the basic staples of survival, though it can sometimes feel like that to the heartily put-upon brothers and sisters. The Red Order owns comparatively less property than both the Poor Knights and the Sisters of St. John, but they make the most of what they do possess through shrewd financial arrangements and a willingness to do what neither of the other clerical orders would even contemplate — engage in actual trade. More in tune with the opportunities to be had in urban areas and well aware of the growing intellectual hunger that is slowly but surely sparking the rise of universities, the Red Order's "cloisters" tend to resemble

open campuses and libraries, where they charge top denier for both classes and copying rights. Their *scriptoria* produce beautifully hand-lettered and illuminated manuscripts, the price for which can stop just short of outright extortion. When they collect the rents from the properties they own or the villages that are beholden to them, they pinch every penny, carefully weigh every bale of wheat and rye, and count every single egg, beast and bolt of cloth to make certain they've received what they're entitled to.

The Red Order is perceived, by its inquisitorial fellows, as being a bit too close to the grasping side, though the Red Order usually counters these arguments with the undeniable observation that all they're trying to do is survive and perform their mission.

The House of Murnau

The House of Murnau represents the single most temporally powerful element of the shadow Inquisition, lay or clerical. A county of Bavaria, it possesses all of the advantages of wealthy and prominent landholders in the Dark Medieval era: property, income and influence. At least a dozen manors, some of them



actually fortified castles, are part of its demesne, and all of those manors come attached to a constellation of towns and villages, the produce of which pour into Murnau coffers in the form of rents in cash and produce, taxes and fines levied by manorial courts. The family's primary holding and most important estate, Castle Murnau, sits astride a trade route between Italy and Augsburg, from which it collects tolls in both cash and trade goods. Politically, the House is somewhat famous for the skill with which it navigates the Holy Roman halls of power, guided as it has been by a number of shrewd rulers. Murnau advisors peddle their considerable political acumen across the face of the Empire, bringing the family much in the way of influence both subtle and gross. Its marriage alliances are far-flung, though they have thus far refrained from reaching as high as the royal marriage bed, seeming content to cast a web of relatives across their own stratum of the medieval nobility, and only a trifle higher.

Frederick von Murnau, current head of the House, feels himself rather financially put upon nonetheless. With a son, a daughter, a sister, and a brother all serving the Inquisition in varying capacities, among sundry other relatives and affiliated bondsmen, the lot of them seem to be operating under the delusion that Murnau is rich enough to finance half the penniless itinerant inquisitors in Europe. One wants him to found a nunnery for the Red Sisters in Bavaria, another wants him to make a generous donation to the Sisters of St. John, one wants him to give one of the house's manors and its villages to the shadow Inquisition as a safe-house for German Eyes of God. He thanks God nightly that his stubborn middle son Gerhard hasn't taken it into his head to join the Poor Knights and add to the clamor for another German commandery — after all, Frederick has a sixteen-year-old trophy wife with an insatiable appetite for samite to support, and another child on the way by her.

This is not to say that the Murnau have deliberately withheld resources from the shadow Inquisition. They have given of themselves, with their unique gifts, quite extensively, and of their properties and the produce deriving thereof as well. The head of the household, however, has put down his foot when it comes to making enormous expenditures — such as scraping together the money to found an abbey, monastery or other religious foundation — until such time as the Inquisition proves completely capable of supporting itself.

The Oculi Dei

The Oculi Dei is the most amorphous of the shadow Inquisition's orders. Its structure is deliberately porous

and cellular, and discourages extensive interaction among its own members as well as excessive and unnecessary contact with the rest of the Inquisition. More than any of the other orders, the Eyes are on their own in terms of material support; in most cases, individual Eyes of God have no more resources than what they themselves bring to the enterprise. What this means in practical terms is that the Eyes are much less likely to "lay all their cards" on the table with their fellows and combine their resources; their code of silence and behavior virtually requires each agent to be an island unto himself. How often this code is broken, with stationary Oculi Dei cells and itinerant Eyes pouring their individual resources together in order to create a pool of working funds or a safe-house that everyone has open access to, is unclear; most Eyes know better than to admit such a fact to others, since the act would almost certainly lead to expulsion from the order.

Practically, this means that the Eyes of God are possibly the "poorest" of the orders, even though individual Eyes may be quite wealthy and influential, and they have no ready means of accessing episcopal funds to aid their endeavors, unless they route the request through Rodrigue de Navarre, Aignen le Libraire or Lizia Montesi di Roma. Considering their line of work, there is a never-ending temptation to use some of the dirty secrets their spying invariably uncovers for purposes of financial gain or influence; this is, however, an extremely dangerous game to play.

Moral Quandaries

In the Dark Medieval world, the one basic fact that lies underneath the development of all power is this: If you are wealthy, if you own property, if you possess more than the clothes on your back and a strip of land from which to draw your own sustenance, all of that wealth and power derives from the back-breaking labor, from the blood and sweat, of others.

The orders of the Inquisition are acutely aware of that fact, in rather uncomfortable ways. While the basic feudal social structure assumes that it is perfectly right and correct for one group to dominate another in reciprocal relationships of service in return for protection, the morality of doing so has become an issue within the Inquisition of late. As they have become more aware of their enemies' methods of operation, more and more uncomfortable similarities have come to light. The Adversary preys upon the common run of humanity, conceals itself among their number and acts as a parasite upon the economies of whole nations, all the while appearing to be upstanding members of society.

So, to a certain extent, does the Inquisition itself, and this fact has set off more than one loud debate between members of individual cells and within the orders themselves. Most argue that the Inquisition's holy mission makes them innately "better" than the things they fight; they aren't *parasites*, they are the unsung saviors of Christendom, fighting a dirty, vicious war, and others will never know the horrors that they witness. To a certain extent, this has been accepted for the conscience-soothing excuse that it is. The more intellectually and morally rebellious among the various orders look upon the obvious wealth of Holy Mother Church and her voracious appetite for power with concern bordering on contempt — and they wonder why the Inquisition is often forced to scrape and beg for donations in order to do its work, when some prelates live in the same sort of splendor as the most repugnant of the foes the inquisitors struggle against.

One night, those questions will have answers.

Pooling Backgrounds

Like vampires, the agents of the Inquisition have the option of pooling their Backgrounds in order to obtain greater material resources than any individual inquisitor would possess on her own. The inquisitor-specific Backgrounds most likely to be pooled are Chapter-House, Flock, and Holy Relics.

Chapter-House

Chapter-House is the Background that governs the place any given inquisitor cell calls home. This can be as simple as a small, one-room house or church up to and including a fortified stronghold, a monastery or other religious community, a manor attached to a Murnau possession or a city home belonging to a noble Eye of God. Unless the chapter-house is explicitly deeded in the name of a member of the cell (such as the aforementioned Murnau manor house or private property of an individual Eye), it is not the property of the inquisitorial cell occupying it. Rather, it is the property of the inquisitors' order, and the order will expect it to be treated as such. Selling it, renting it out or severely damaging it will be strenuously frowned on, as such properties are difficult to obtain in the first place and even harder to repair without attracting a great deal of unwanted attention.

Storytellers should also exercise their discretion when permitting their players to design chapter-houses. Yes, nearly every cell of Poor Knights is going to want to live in the functional equivalent of a Templar

commandery, complete with the attendant respect and war chest that comes with belonging to an influential military order. Resist the temptation to let them. The Poor Knights are a relatively recent and thus far minor military order, and while financial support of the military orders in lieu of actually tramping off to Crusade is currently quite popular, the average nobleman has plenty of orders to choose from, and a definite element of competition exists among religious foundations to get their hands on donations from the laity. In this respect, the Poor Knights, the Sisters of St. John and the Red Order are no different from any other order. There's nothing wrong with putting a cell of Poor Knights in a single-room cloister, with the Red Order occupying the richest monastery around.

Similarly, just because House Murnau is relatively wealthy doesn't mean that some Murnau cousins that are poor as church-mice are just as likely to prove as sensitive to corruption as their more privileged relatives. Not all Oculi live in the garrets above stables or wait tables for a living, either — more than any of the others, the Eyes of God represent a true cross-section

CHAPTER-HOUSE EXAMPLE

Just Outside of Narbonne (Chapter-House 6, Flock 2)

An inquisitorial cell has been given a chapter-house to dwell in at the fringes of Narbonne, in the Languedoc. Given that this area was, until recently, a hostile armed camp and that most of the locals remain dangerously sullen about the outcome of the various crusades in the region, the troupe decides to pool some of its Backgrounds, resulting in six points of Chapter-House and two points in Flock. Of the six Chapter-House points, the cell spends three on size and three on security. As a result, the cell possesses the still-defensible section of a castle that was only partially demolished during the Albigensian Crusade, complete with a partial curtain wall, a strong gate, internal sources of water and at least one interior strong-point to which the cell can retreat and hold off violent intruders. Their flock represents the village "attached" to the castle as dependents, whom the cell is specifically enjoined to protect while going about its duties in the area. It takes a few weeks, but eventually the villagers begin warming up to the inquisitors in their midst, and they begin mingling freely, asking questions, and praying together.

of medieval society. When designing the chapter-house of either a single order cell or a multi-order cell, bear in mind that size isn't everything; security counts also, and flexibility is worth most of all.

Flock

Flock is an important Background to most inquisitors for its sheer psychological panacea factor. Superior Virtues often lead to superior mental issues, a fact that most individuals and inquisitorial cells have to deal with eventually. The fight exposes its warriors to the blackest recesses of the human heart and soul, both in themselves and in the foes they struggle against; if they had no safe harbor to retreat to, inquisitors would crack in a matter of months from the sheer mental and emotional stress of their jobs.

For this reason, Flock combines well with Chapter-House when pooling Backgrounds. While eremitic convents are fine for the peaceful contemplation of God and quiet meditation, as anyone who's ever labored under serious stress knows, sometimes it's

therapeutic to spend time around other people, too. Regularly reminding themselves how to play well with others can often be the best thing the average inquisitors can do to preserve their sanity, in addition to reminding them why it is they took up the Fight in the first place.

Holy Relics

Holy Relics is an easy-to-abuse Background that must be adjudicated carefully; no one wants his carefully constructed story of horror and redemption to turn into a bloodbath powered by vials of exceptionally potent holy water and several swords of holy mass destruction. Holy Relics, much like Talismans for mages, are items of power. Unlike Talismans, however, Holy Relics are presumed to be just that — holy, imbued either with the blessings of the truly divine or the highly focused and fervent faith of a true believer. Pooled ratings in Holy Relics can result in either one item of profoundly holy power (such as the genuine piece of the True Cross possessed by the Poor Knights

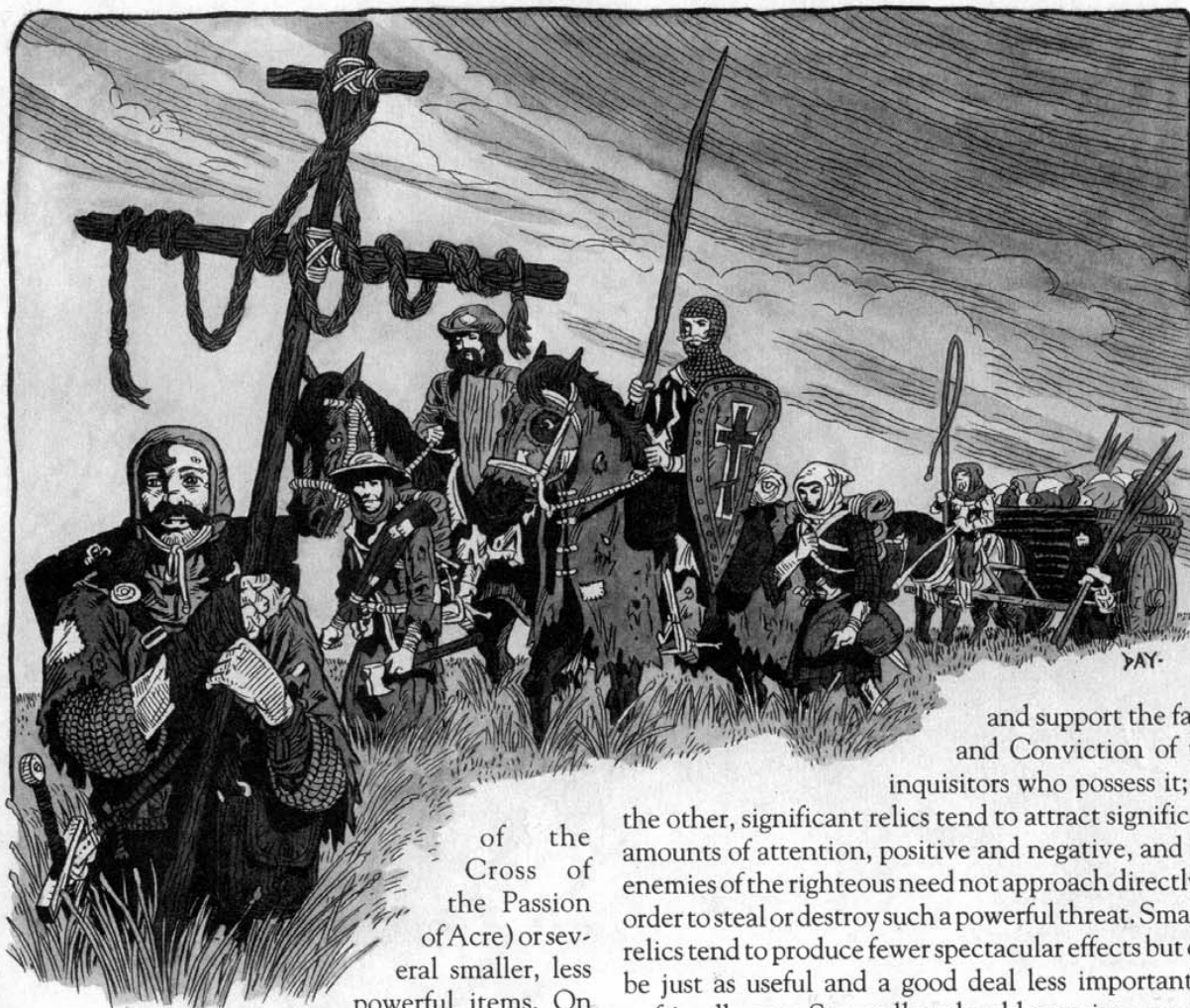
FLOCK EXAMPLE

The Residents of Ravensburg (Flock 4, Chapter-House 4, Contacts 2)

The Hospital of St. Dymphna at Ravensburg is, to put it mildly, a madhouse. It is the repository of the most hopeless cases the Inquisition comes across, men and women who have been broken in mind, body or spirit, and, in many cases, all three, by the cruelties of the Adversary. The task of caring for these unfortunate wretches and making certain they bring no further harm on themselves or others falls on the shoulders of the Sisters of St. John and the Red Sisters of St. Theodosius who staff the facility. Needless to say, this takes a heavy physical, mental, and emotional toll on even the holiest of the holy Sisters, all of whom take their turns tending to all of the patients, from the docile young woman who does nothing but stare into space humming tunelessly to herself, to the husky young man who has to be bound in boiled leather restraints and cleaned by tossing buckets of water on him from the door of his cell. Early on, the Sisters realized that something would have to be done to prevent their own staff from going as mad as the people they care for.

The cell is a group of young inquisitors assigned to a term of duty at the Hospital, replacing another such cell that volunteered for the task but was unable to handle it successfully. When the cell

members pool their Backgrounds, they realize they have a substantial Flock rating and invest it in the town of Ravensburg, which sits at the base of the hill on which the hospital was built. The cell petitions the Mother Superior of the hospital for permission to try an experiment — rotating the Holy Sisters on duty out of the hospital and into the town, for terms acting as charitable workers on behalf of the local residents. Since the town burghers do not object to this experiment, the Mother Superior agrees to it, and soon the Sisters of St. John and the Red Sisters are circulating among the townsfolk, regaining their bearings, talking, praying, ministering, tutoring the local boys and girls in reading, writing and catechism, despite the objections of several more conservative members of the local religious community. Mother Superior serenely ignores these objections for the sake of her own staff's sanity and writes a letter to Cardinal Marzone suggesting that it might be worth an effort to try something similar in other hard-pressed hospitals and convents. The Sisters even pick up a bit of information; it seems many of the locals believe that at least one of the nobles in the area is more than just an eccentric recluse under vows to avoid sunlight.



of the Cross of the Passion of Acre) or several smaller, less powerful items. On the one hand, an extremely powerful relic has the potential to repel anything short of Lucifer himself

and support the faith and Conviction of the inquisitors who possess it; on the other, significant relics tend to attract significant amounts of attention, positive and negative, and the enemies of the righteous need not approach directly in order to steal or destroy such a powerful threat. Smaller relics tend to produce fewer spectacular effects but can be just as useful and a good deal less important in unfriendly eyes. Storytellers should exercise common sense when permitting their players to design their own Holy Relics.

HOLY RELICS EXAMPLE

The Plait of St. Lucrezia (Holy Relics 4) -

The cell is a newly formed group of Poor Knights, Red Brothers, and Eyes of God being dispatched to the Hungarian border to investigate reports of a hideous creature terrorizing the local peasants. Before the cell sets out, the players pool a few Background points to see what sort of assistance they might be able to scrape together for their characters, resulting in a decent rating in Holy Relics. Consequently, the Knight-Commander dispatching the cell gives the group an unusual relic before they depart — the Plait of St. Lucrezia. Lucrezia was a woman of (pagan) noble birth who, upon publicly converting to Christianity, cut off her sumptuous fall of raven-black hair as a sign of her new humility before God. Outraged,

her heathen father and equally unsaved fiancé threw the rebellious girl and her disembodied hair into a pit containing a monster usually described as a dragon. The next morning, when her father came to claim her remains, he was shocked to discover that Lucrezia was not only alive, she had braided her hair into a long, slender rope, which she had used to subdue and bind the monster. Lucrezia's family promptly converted at this obvious sign of divine favor, she herself was eventually sainted as a dragon-slayer, and her hair was passed down through the parish for centuries, remaining perpetually as strong and lustrous as the day it was cut and used to bind a creature of tremendous power and evil.





CHAPTER TWO: HOME AND HEARTH

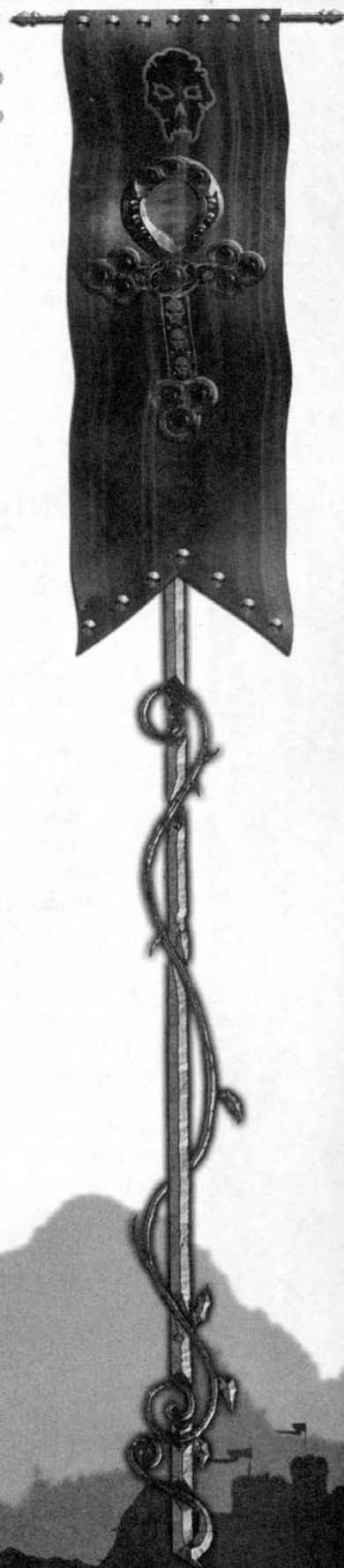
And God blessed them, and God said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

— Genesis 1:21–23

The land is the ruler and the ruler is the land.

In this age, people feel profoundly the bond that holds the land to him who would control, protect or subjugate it. Land is one of the only real powers in this world. Armies die to defend and to conquer it. Inheritance is measured in it. When one noble offers fealty to another, he most often does so by giving a portion of his land to another to maintain and tax in his name. In many ways, a king is nothing more than one who can lay claim to a sizable enough parcel of earth to take on the title. No wonder, then, that there is a nigh-mystic connection between lord and demesne, for is not the land the greatest source of the lord's power?

For some beings in the Dark Medieval, this notion is more truth than fiction. The Tzimisce are bound to the lands of their birth through the bond of sacred soil. The ghosts of great heroes and villains forever stalk the places where they died or perhaps those locations most important to them in life. Among those



Garou born of wolf, the territorial instinct runs strong, and many of their number are tied thereby to the wilds whence they were whelped. Even for those without any ancient pacts or potent sorceries binding them to their chosen land, a powerful incentive moves those close to the land to remain so, to cultivate and groom that land and, when necessary, to spill blood for it. Inquisitors feel the touch of God in those places where Heaven and Earth intersect and the holy power that radiates from them. Mages war over and jealously hoard the sites of crays, great and small, for the incredible power they contain. Cainite lords and ladies carefully nurture connections to local centers of power over the course of their long centuries, seeking to create subtle strangleholds over affairs both mortal and immortal.

Settling In

Most chronicles set in the Dark Medieval world are likely to occur in a single locale, with little need for any kind of far-reaching journeys. This is not an age conducive to travel. Boats and horses are as fast as mundane transit gets and can be every bit as slow, miserable and dangerous as walking. French and Latin are about as close as one comes to commonly spoken languages, but by no means should one expect to be able to communicate with the people from even the next country over.

Most people are tied to the lands of their birth by circumstance, convention and common wisdom. This is not a world filled with the potential for bold and heroic adventure; it is instead a perilous place, stuffed to the gills with robber barons, bandits, homicidal Crusaders, superstitious mobs and obscenities best left unmentioned. When mapmakers come to places of which they know nothing, they pen, "Here be dragons." While they are not necessarily correct, it is certain that dark and horrid things lurk beyond the shelter of one's hamlet. Sometimes, those "things" are monsters in flesh and sometimes they are men who are simply monstrous in spirit. In any case, fear is a powerful motivation to remain at home.

Tradition also binds the average person to her homeland. For most, generations of ancestors are buried on the land, lending a feeling of timelessness and belonging. Many families have dwelt in the same homes for generations. Comfort and familiarity are powerful incentives, and most medieval people have little to pass on to their children save perhaps a small plot of land to farm in the name of the local lord and the house built by a great-grandfather's grandfather many years ago. To move to is to leave behind history and identity in favor of the unknown and the uncertain, a prospect to which few people look forward.

A home carries with it the unspoken promise of safety. Beginning with gatherings in caves, human beings have always sought permanent structures in which to seek sanctuary from beasts, the elements, demons and evil spirits and the depredations of their own kind. From the mightiest castle thrusting its roots into the Earth, its walls strong and unyielding, to the tiniest peasant hovel, all dwellings carry with them a sense of defense, no matter how fragile. Out in the wilds, a person is naked before the many dangers of the world. With four walls and a roof between her and the outside, she has warmth, shelter and a modicum of protection. A home may not be proof against harm, but it is, for most, infinitely preferable to the open road, where the only guarantee is that life will be far more dangerous than it could ever be in any house, regardless of how small or frail.

For those in a position of rule, for whom travel is more possible, the incentives to remain at home and tending the fiefdom are, if anything, even greater. What does the tenant farmer stand to lose, compared to one who commands the lands to the horizon in all directions? At worst, the serf might have his pathetic plot of land churned into useless mud by the hooves of an invading army; a lord whose lands are wrested from him has betrayed the sacred trust placed upon him by his father and his father before him. He has allowed himself to become diminished by losing the only true asset a man of title can possess. Let anyone rail on for hours about the sanctity of a respected bloodline or the necessity of fine deeds, it is the land he calls his own that makes a man noble.

The Significance of Demesne

Give a man a parcel of land and he can feed himself and his family. Offer a sizable piece of property and one could win the hand of a nobleman's daughter. Take enough territory away from a king and he ceases to be one. Even when land is mundane, there is something almost magical about it to the medieval mind. Land alone is what makes title worth having, and it is the ownership of land that serves as the barrier between princes and paupers, not (as some say) the fact that one is addressed as "lord" or "lady." Almost without exception, property is passed from father to eldest son. Naturally, this only truly applies to the nobility, who are, for most practical intents and purposes, the only real landowners. While this tradition may not be as rigidly adhered to in some lands, it is certainly the standard by which inheritance is measured in Europe and any lands currently occupied by European nobility.

When land is claimed and that claim is known and accepted, a great mantle of power settles upon the

shoulders of the claimant. A lord can call up conscripts by making his wishes in this regard known, bending the people of his land to become an extension of his martial will. The fruits of the land become his taxes, and so the land itself, through the hands of its people, serves to feed him, clothe him and make him rich. When the land sickens, his prosperity withers alongside it. When another usurps it, that newcomer forges a bond with the land and becomes its master. The very circumstances of the age conspire to create a sense of mystery and power regarding the connection between a ruler and the place he calls home.

When this connection is applied to the innumerable beings of the supernatural world, mystery and power give way to awe and dread. Many are the tales of potent enchantments laid upon burial grounds, sacred groves and crumbling manors. While a mortal lord can command authority over life and death in his demesne, a lady among the Fair Folk or the Children of Caine can call up powers that make such authority seem pale and fragile by comparison. In such places, the dead are barred from entering heaven or hell, the land itself twists and contorts to satisfy the whims of its unnatural liege, and a sip from a brook binds souls in thrall for all time. At least, such is what is commonly held as

truth among those who claim as their home the sunlit world of crude flesh and ordinary concerns.

Haunted forests, dragons' lairs and wizards' towers all conjure to the mind of the common man a sense of an inviolable domain. A powerful tie exists between the denizens of the supernatural and their chosen realms. Just as with the adage "into the lion's den," a sense lurks that one is stepping out of the world shared among all people and into a place where a single, terrible

power alone holds sway.

As with the lion, it is a power well beyond the understanding of the average person. Who knows the designs of witches and vampires, save to say that such beings seldom suffer trespass? Better and far wiser simply to stay far from the crumbling manors and decrepit huts to which they lay claim.

More than Just a Place

Even for those who are not lords upon the Earth, a home is more than merely four walls and the space it occupies. Home is where all beings, great and small, denizens of the normal world and those of the supernatural alike, can rest easily, comforted by the safety and sanctity of one's own dwelling. While it is important to look at the mythic and mystic connections between, say, a Cainite lady and her expansive territory, remember also to play up the simple pleasures we take for granted of the places



we live. Even the most brutal Tzimisce *voivode* may find his soul at rest while tinkering with the massive water clock in his study. Likewise, the most savage Red Talon Ahroun could perhaps have a certain nook, beneath the boughs of a great pine, where he sleeps as soundly as a newborn pup.

The roots found in the home are a powerful grounding factor for most beings in the Dark Medieval world. It is easy to look to the fantastic elements of this very different and very magical world and thereby to lose the reality of the characters in it. Home and hearth can inject humanity into the portrayal of Dark Medieval characters. When a player or Storyteller focuses on the details of an individual's home, that individual is given a greater depth and a sense of realism that may otherwise be lacking. Whether filled with fine but worn furniture or swathed in blood, the personality of the character is expressed in her chosen dwelling place and the manner in which she keeps it. For those with keen and perceptive minds, this facet of the home can be a great asset and a dangerous weapon. A home in chaos can indicate a lazy individual or a disorganized mind, whereas one maintained in strictest order may speak of an individual given to calculation, industry or asceticism, and a household decorated in the gory remains of previous victims points to a sinister and twisted spirit.

Lushly detailed homes can become characters unto themselves, in a way. When a vicious warlord comes home to a palace of beautiful things and tends his rose garden, he is expressing a facet of himself that must not be allowed to insinuate itself into the reality of his day-to-day life. The palace therefore *becomes* that otherwise unexpressed longing, and its essential spirit grows from there. In a similar fashion, a great, brooding keep, decrepit and festooned with gargoyles and other hideous statuary, seems to crouch menacingly, a titan halfway into the grave, and stare down accusatorily at interlopers. That feeling of "being watched" need not stem from any mundane, or even supernatural, observation but can instead be a product of the castle's own sinister character.

The Stagnation of Eternity: Cainite Homes and Domains

Cainites, more than any other denizens of the Dark Medieval world, have a reason to remain in a single place. Only the foolhardy Ravnos and the savage and uncouth Gangrel travel to any real degree, and they are often looked upon with scorn and derision, in part for that very reason. For vampires, the

ability to stay in one place is not so much a function of comfort or feelings of home (though these certainly can, and do, develop among many of Caine's brood) but is instead a necessary survival mechanism. Lupines stalk the wide expanses of untamed lands between one city and the next. Feeding can be intermittent at best, sparse as a matter of course, and nonexistent under even mildly unfavorable circumstances when one takes to the road. This is a world where demons, spirits and the rare saint wander the old and lonely roads of Europe. Who can say what an unfortunate Cainite might chance across in her hunger on a night when the shadows run thickly and even the moonlight flees from the most forlorn woodland paths, save that she might well be in the company of something far more monstrous than herself?

For members of many clans, the bonds to the land are as natural and intuitive as those between a mortal lord and his holdings. Regal princes among the Ventrue, for example, often come into positions of power as ordinary men and are offered the Embrace only after assuming the right of rule. For the Lasombra, power and influence come naturally. It is to be assumed that a Magister will remain within the web of intrigue, favor and control she has established for herself, whether as a legitimate (in the eyes of the Children of Seth, that is) authority figure or as a more insidious sort of monarch. Just as most folk attribute a divine right to those who govern men so, too, do many Cainites see their lot as a natural extension of that ideal. Among the terrible Fiends of the Carpathians, this bond is considerably more literal. In the case of the most ancient and powerful of the dread Tzimisce, the very moods and fancies of the *voivode* are reflected in the nuances of the land and its environment and inflicted upon the hapless mortals cursed to dwell under his power. His wrath becomes the howling winter gale and the uprising of the beasts of the wilds against town and village, and his glee is a gentle spring wind and the flowering of blooms of surpassing (if unsettling) beauty.

Even for those vampires who never knew the thrill of dominion in their breathing days, the Tradition of Domain entitles them to such in the nights that come after the Embrace. Many Cainites are drawn from the ranks of the common folk of the Dark Medieval world. To be brought suddenly into a kind of nobility can be a heady rush, indeed. After the Embrace, the individual is, in many ways, liberated from the constraints of the familiar social order and given a position within a new one, an order in which upward mobility is possible (if often difficult). Being inducted into Caine's fold is to know the power to influence those one once called neighbors and supe-

riors alike. Such power, however, comes only with the patience to groom a locale to serve as not just a base of operations, but as a demesne, a sanctuary. Though much can be said of the need to cultivate authority and power, it is also necessary to become conversant with the essential nature of a given place, to know its people and its resources. When a Cainite is attacked on territory she has claimed, she can be defeated; when she is confronted in the place she calls home, she is nigh-invulnerable.

Sentimentality is not to be underestimated, even among the immortals. Some of the most merciless and cold-blooded Cappadocians, alien and twisted Nosferatu and terribly depraved Followers of Set may have a certain fondness for the homes they knew as mortals or, conversely, for places that have proven to be special to them in the days since the Embrace. When such attitudes are applied to mortals, they become the strong roots of familial tradition and of the concept of a homeland. When seen through the eyes of the Damned, however, such a mentality grows to become an affliction, a cancer that cannot easily be rooted out. Rather than the pillar that shores up an individual's commitment to a locale, this bond becomes a chain that binds the Cainite, a chain strengthened by the fear of what lies beyond, the ease and comfort afforded by unlifetimes of converse with a given place and, finally, the simple lethargy that comes when one lacks even the faint passions needed to make new vistas desirable.

Still, one should never confuse nostalgia with reverence. While a select few Cainites are given to considering their homelands "holy," most lack that fundamental link to the life of the land that is found among Lupines or mages (for example), who can quantifiably feel the mystic power resonating in the ground on which they tread. While a Fiend may be willing to meet Final Death in defense of her ancestral home, or a Leper fall protecting his warren, most vampires are apt simply to give up their claim if faced with no other option save destruction. After all, with a cunning mind married to eternal existence, a Cainite can always find somewhere else to call home.

Shared among the Dead

It is most often the case that a Domain is either the possession of a single, powerful, Cainite or a number of lesser ones. In the former case, the vampire may make what laws he wishes (provided any others of his kind even dwell there), sample as he will from the mortal herd and generally exist in the manner of his own choosing. In the latter case, a sense of community must, of necessity, spring up among the unliving wherein assets are divided evenly (or at least fairly or,

failing that, reasonably), some few common rules are obeyed, and a few things can simply be taken for granted. It is the same as with any grouping of animals or mortals; acceptable constants must be established. As the Domain of the solitary elder or lone rural Cainite is of little help in defining this sick sense of home and community, it is the shared Domain that primarily concerns us.

Cainites come together for a few basic reasons. The first and most obvious of these is survival. When two or more individuals gather for mutual protection, with the understanding that there will be no undue conflict between them, they are almost always better off than any lone person. So, too, is it with vampires. The average Cainite, then, seeks out the company of those she feels are best able to protect her, those who are strong where she is weak. If she is intelligent, she also tries to find those who are likewise weak where she is strong, so that she will need her companions no less than they need her. Of course, strength comes in many shapes. A physically powerful vampire may want for an ear among the mortal authorities, just as a suave and urbane Cainite may lack command of potent and useful Disciplines. Thus, a careful balance is established. While a vampire must always be wary of her allies, she also knows that eschewing them completely, for fear of betrayal or servitude, leaves her even more vulnerable to outside attack. The trick is in forming alliances with those whose potential and likely desire to do her harm are lowest and whose need for what she can offer is greatest.

The second, and perhaps most compelling, reason that Cainites form unified Domains is the advancement of personal power, under the frail (but universally accepted) guise of advancing their mutual capabilities. While continued existence is a laudable objective, it is that second reason which makes existence worthwhile and, as the years march on, bearable. This ethic of acquisition forms the essence of Cainite society and interaction. The accrual of power is an end unto itself, and any coterie that can manage to further itself on the group level also finds that its individual members' prowess increases in kind. Some astute vampiric scholars note that this, and not any sense of social responsibility or unity, seems to be the primary motivation behind most of Caine's commandments: that the lust for power is the only reason for Cainite law, as it is the only foundation stable enough on which to build this immortal society. The First Murderer obviously understood his heirs well.

The third fundamental reason for collective Domains is the least dwelt-upon but possibly the most significant. As are the mortals from whom they derive, Cainites are often social creatures. Just as a rare few

hermits or other isolated folk exist, there are solitary Cainites, but most vampires have the urge to interact on some meaningful level with others of their own kind, those who can understand and empathize with them. While some vampires call this decidedly human behavior "weak" or "contemptible," it is to be expected that these predatory immortals would hunger for society as much as they lust for blood. The desire for family is a deep-seated one, and, no matter how twisted it becomes by the Curse of Caine, this need remains. This desire transforms a Domain into a home and gives a sense of spiritual value to something otherwise very pragmatic. Some roads, such as Sin and Kings, advocate this more social aspect of the demesne more vigorously than others, most especially the Road of the Beast, which often shuns civilization as a frail crutch for timid souls.

What does community mean to beings condemned to slaughter their former kind for their daily bread, beings for whom treachery and brutality are instinctive? While it would be a gross oversimplification to say that bonds of trust *never* develop between vampires, genuine trust is a rare enough commodity in the Cainite world to virtually write it off as a facet of social interaction. Altruism is likewise nigh-nonexistent for them. That said, what is it that holds Cainite societies together? Companionship is one thing. A lifetime alone is a terrible thing to contemplate for most people. An eternity alone is tantamount to hell on Earth. Even mistrust cannot eradicate the necessity of interaction. No matter how deceitful or untrustworthy a given Cainite, he is at least someone to talk to and who understands on a level no mortal ever could.

This does not mean, though, that the society of the undead is a healthy or natural thing. The very fact that, unlike all beings in nature, Cainite elders do not eventually die to make room for new leadership means that their progeny are perpetually artificially held back from fulfilling their potential. This creates an inherent drive for patricide, stemming from the desire to advance and to lead. As a result, fear becomes integrated as an essential component of vampiric existence: fear of the young and fear of the old (who will destroy anything they perceive as being a genuine threat). Also, as every other commodity known to the Cainite world, sooner or later, degrades or disappears with time, the only true measure of a vampire's worth is the respect of his kind. A sickly sort of love can and does exist between vampires and also contributes to this unwholesome mix. The result is a paranoid morass of interactions that tend toward the reserved but often spill over into the blatant when the need to fulfill the passions of the Man or the Beast grow too strong to ignore.

On the level of the coterie, one finds mentalities ranging from the businesslike to the incestuous and everything in between. These intracoterie interactions constitute the "home unlife" of the average vampire in the Dark Medieval and come to shape much of how each Cainite thinks and acts. In any case, the coterie is one of the only sources of relationships approximating those between friends or relatives available to vampires. While there may be close ties between sire and childe, or from a doting mentor toward a valued neonate, most vampires must content themselves with the relationships offered by the coterie.

Where No Man Dares Tread: Werewolf Caerns

While there is by no means a caern every ten paces or so, the spiritual energy of the Earth flows strongly in the Dark Medieval, and the Apocalypse is looked upon mostly as a parable, a far-off possibility. Further, human encroachment is simply not an issue in many of the far-flung stretches of primordial wilderness in which caerns are found; in some cases, perhaps one human being in a century comes within a day's travel of a given caern. Yet werewolves still gather at these places, guard them and watch over them with a commitment bordering on obsession. Many never leave the territory controlled by their sept from the time of their First Change. Why?

First and foremost, the lupine blood of the Garou carries with it a powerful instinct to remain within certain acceptable "pack hunting grounds." Too much roving leads to conflict between groups of Garou. Gaia's warriors need considerable room to move and to hunt, and the fear of trespass keeps many cubs within the confines of their sept's territory. Just as normal wolves do not often invite trouble by violating another pack's lands, so too do werewolves, barring necessity, keep to what is theirs.

Also, most folk in this age experience little more in the way of travel than the journey from home to market. While noblemen and priests might find themselves with the luxury of travel, the average tenant farmer or blacksmith has few options in this regard. As most homid Garou descend from these latter sorts, their perspectives are likely to be colored by those attitudes and ideas. Besides, travel is inconvenient, bothersome and often dangerous. While werewolves need worry little about being waylaid by bandits, other things are certainly out there that would fairly salivate at the opportunity to lay low one of Gaia's defenders. Even if a given Garou is brash enough not to fear whatever lurks over the next hill, most of her Kinfolk

won't be, meaning that those who journey far are apt to miss out on the opportunities to breed with the best and strongest Kinfolk, opportunities which will be enjoyed by werewolves with a bit more common sense and a bit less wanderlust.

Finally, remember that most Garou are (and rightly so) as superstitious a lot as the vast majority of medieval humans and often more spiritual. Every caern is, to Garou, the equivalent of the site of a miracle, or the place where a saint's bones are interred. They can literally *feel* the Rage and power coursing through the land where a great Ahroun fell in battle and the walls between worlds grow thin where a Totem Avatar set foot upon the Earth to bring together a particularly legendary pack. Garou are drawn to these locations and know that they must be defended. To do any less is to turn one's back on the Mother and to deny the gift She has given.

One cannot address the nature of the caern without first understanding that it is only marginally a *space*. Until shapeshifters make their homes there, it is not a caern, but instead simply an unattended place of power. The sept is the presence of the Garou there and becomes an integral part of the caern through the interactions of the People. The site is the capillary through which the lifeblood of the Earth itself flows. Just as Gaia's blessing impresses itself upon the Garou so too do they imbue the caern with a bit of their own nature. When one talks of the holy places of the Garou, one must start with the nature of the caern and its meaning to the Garou.

Life in the Caern

What is it like to belong to a sept in the Dark Medieval world? First of all, and perhaps most importantly, most septs are comprised of members of only one tribe. A rare few draw their numbers from two or three tribes, typically in areas that are on the geographic borders between the hereditary territories of those tribes or in areas that have seen a recent influx of refugees, travelers or invaders, but these are certainly the exception. Of course, the obligatory straggler can be found here or there — a Silent Strider making a home for himself for a few months before moving on, the rare outcast with enough useful skills to persuade the elders from sending her on her way or worse — but these are likewise rare.

Garou septs have one of the most efficient communication networks known to the Dark Medieval world. Their howls, carrying for miles between the hills and through the valleys, give them an advantage enjoyed by virtually no one else. In a world where the fastest commonly known mode of communication is a courier on horseback, the benefits of the

power to convey information instantly over an hour's gallop or more cannot be overstated. This said, however, most septs are really no less provincial in their attitudes and goals than any other medieval community. News of the world travels very slowly, and most Garou are less interested in the happenings in far-off lands than the average peasant. While some tribes are perhaps a bit more concerned about happenings in the wider world than others (most notably the Shadow Lords, Silent Striders and Silver Fangs), it is nevertheless the norm for Garou to turn a blind eye to anything that does not directly affect the caern, the bawn and the local sept members and Kinfolk. These two factors (swift communication and insularity) combine to result in septs that are virtually worlds unto themselves. A legendary hero from a sept a week's run away is likely to be nothing more than a rumor (and probably an erroneous one at that) to the inhabitants of the next nearest caern. Only the oldest and most revered of the heroes from the Silver Record are known by a majority of tribes, and the enmity between tribes runs almost as hot, in places, as the hatred of Garou for the Wym. A young warrior of the Get of Fenris is apt to receive worse than just an icy reception in a Black Furies' sept.

The Rage and passion of the werewolves runs powerfully and openly in the Dark Medieval. Garou are, by nature, animists; most feel unbound by the moral constraints of the monotheistic traditions of Europe and the Middle East and live their lives according to the dictates of Gaia's law. Emotions are less commonly hidden, for both good and ill. While anger and jealousy are expressed almost as soon as they are felt, excising any bad blood quickly and effectively, Garou are sometimes crippled, killed or forced into exile on account of it. This frankness and pragmatism extend to the matters of the flesh as well. Garou rarely feel the same sort of "uncleanness" that most people associate with sex and procreation. Affection is displayed openly between Garou and their Kinfolk mates, and, among those for whom shapeshifting into beasts of the wilds is the norm, taboos regarding nudity and the natural functions of the body are considerably more relaxed.

Given a rather thin human population density, a single sept might reasonably lay claim to all the land for several days' run in any direction from the caern as the area of the bawn. At least one or two human settlements are apt to be encompassed in this area, save among the most remote of caerns. Many Garou continue to carry on a smaller and less ambitious version of the Impergium, culling the weak and unfit from the human numbers, just as they do for any animal that dwells within the boundaries of the bawn. Of course, with the Garou Nation existing as disparate and isolated enclaves, there is effectively no means of enforcing the laws of that nation on a worldwide scale. Thus, a Shadow Lord sept might

freely consort with vampires if the elders feel it to be in their best interests and a Get of Fenris caern with a strong but unorthodox leader might leave a Blight uncleansed in order to have a place to put the cubs through their Rite of Passage. Local law holds sway in an age where every community is its own microcosm.

Many relationships within a caern are amalgams of the law of the pack and the timeless interactions of early human tribes. Elders give guidance and inspiration to the young by their actions, serving as exemplars of what is expected of sept members. While the relations tend to be a bit more volatile, Garou in the Dark Medieval world understand that the nature of the pack encompasses strife and conflict as well as compassion, and tender, familial bonds can easily spring up between a sept's matriarch and the cub who will put her down for control of the caern a decade later. While this might seem counterintuitive to the human mind, it is perfectly logical to the medieval werewolf. The usurper does honor to her elder by proving that she has been taught strength and resourcefulness and serves Gaia well by casting down the old and unfit so that a new generation can prosper. In time, she knows, those she educates in the Ways will lay her low as well. Thus are the young elevated to their rightful place and the old spared the pain of their scars and the ignominy of lingering infirmity and a slow demise.

Just as the sept is a family to the Garou so, too, is the caern a home and a sanctuary. Virtually all the assets of a sept's Garou are to be found within the caern's bawn, be they Kin, game, human or lupine allies and so forth. A Silver Fang might have a bit of coin invested with the Templars or a Fianna may know of a faerie mound where an

ancient pact was made and the Fair Folk can be called upon, but most werewolves have only what is on the land claimed by their sept to rely upon. That said, Garou do all they can to make a caern as defensible, comfortable and prosperous as possible. Approach to a caern is invariably detected at least a mile off, usually further still, unless the interloper is preternaturally stealthy and knows his way around the Umbral protections, spirits and caern Warder. In almost every case, an uninvited guest is dealt with swiftly and messily.

The Beating Heart of Gaia

At the center of the caern proper, in the place where the spiritual energy gathers (the Gnosis that Garou can draw upon), the world becomes *different*. The banal material world is peeled back to reveal the fundamental essence of life itself. The land breathes in time to a rhythm that can be felt on the edges of the perception but never fully grasped. The caern's nature (War, Plenty, Healing, etc.) is exemplified here. In a place dedicated to battle and fallen heroes, the Garou's blood rushes with the purifying fire of healthy, balanced and instinctual Rage. Where the Earth has been consecrated to spirits of Vision, prophecies and dreams assail the senses, threatening to overwhelm the weak-willed. No matter the caern's nature, the Garou becomes as one with it for a moment.

The Gauntlet that severs the terrestrial realm from its primordial twin is all but nonexistent here. Spirits are seen at the corners of vision and the scents and sounds of nature are too strong, too *real*, to stem from any mundane source. No matter what other emotions stem from the caern, the werewolf who comes to



this holy place feels intensely the reality of Gaia and the Mother's love suffusing every fiber of his being. He knows why he fights and understands truly what he is and what his place is in the world. It is a time of revelation and restoration. It is a vision of the world that was and can be again, a world whole in body and in spirit.

As the Garou leaves the center of the caern, she can feel herself growing smaller, less than she was when she basked directly in the Mother's light. Her perfect sense of purpose fades, leaving her only with what convictions she possessed before entering into the heart of the caern. Suddenly, the senses of the Garou seem weak and frail compared to what she could perceive only moments before. Having been so close to Gaia, she cannot help but feel an instant of loneliness and isolation as the normal world reasserts itself in her thoughts and she eases back into the world of flesh and blood. Though each Garou remembers the experience of drawing upon the caern differently, all remember that it is the very essence of their struggle against the Wyrms, the pure, perfect world that came before the Weaver's webs drove the Destroyer mad and rent asunder the many realms that were one.

Defending the Caern

Just as wolves can be quite savage in the protection of that which they consider to be their territory so, too, can Garou be an unfathomable peril to those who would tread uninvited upon their caerns. Typically, at least one entire pack, the Warder's pack, is dedicated expressly to the maintenance of caern security. Additionally, all werewolves are expected to rise up in the defense of the caern, should such become a necessity. Given the distance a howl carries across the average night, most of a sept's Garou can be roused to come to its aid in short order. Naturally, threats may come from many directions, both earthly and Umbral, and the Warder must keep a careful watch in both worlds if he is to complete his duties satisfactorily. To this end, he often enlists the aid of the Caller of the Wyld, who is usually on good terms with many of the local spirits and should, ideally, be well versed in the nuances and lore of the invisible world.

Most incursions against a sept in this era come, ironically enough, from other Garou. Intertribal conflicts are not uncommon and are likely to become bloody. Granted, the occasional terrible Wurm-thing comes crashing in out of poisoned swamps or up from nightmarish caves lit from within as though by the fires of Hell itself, but these monstrosities are rare. The Wyrms' works cannot afford to come in such obvious shapes. Certainly, there are no gibbering armies of Black Spiral Dancers heaving their way up from the wounded Earth like a cyst filled to bursting. Occasion-

ally, a group of human hunters of one sort or another, possibly even aware to some degree of the nature of their quarry, will stage an attack on a sept. For the most part, the lucky members of such foolhardy hunting parties die quickly and painlessly. Those less favored by Dame Fortune have an opportunity to know what it is they face and to contemplate the howls of bloody vengeance closing upon them as they flee in terror.

For most septs, it is not practical or even possible to erect any kind of standard fortifications for a sept. While the Silver Fangs and the Shadow Lords sometimes have the resources to build stout walls around the castles and forlorn towers where they house their caerns, the vast majority of Garou must make do with less ambitious protections. Keen eyes and constant vigilance take the place of guardhouses and drawbridges for these septs. Each werewolf is a veritable army unto herself, and few foes are capable of breaching the defenses of even a small caern. When a serious threat does arise, the Garou act in perfect concert, with the strength and unity of purpose given only to those whose instincts make many wills as one in time of duress. They harass foes from both the Realm and the Umbra and howl in dissonant tones, so as to mask their numbers and their locations. Their attacks are of such stunning power and brutality that all but the greatest or most foolish foes quickly attempt to retreat. Most of those who flee are run to ground and dealt with no more mercifully than their slower or more stubborn allies.

Even as cubs fresh out of their First Change, Garou are taught ways in which to benefit the sept and its residents directly. This training, unsurprisingly, includes tactics for caern defense. Given the individual physical power of even a newly Changed werewolf and numbers, considering that prowess, that any tactician would consider downright prodigious, this training makes a caern almost unassailable by any save the direst of threats. Of course, such dire threats do exist and, when they rear their heads, are cause for swift and decisive action. In the darkest recesses of the world are shapes bloated beyond recognition by primordial taint, the dread siege engines of the Conqueror Wyrms. Likewise, some spellcasters have power beyond reckoning and greed and amorality to match hunger for the energies of the Garou's sacred caerns. Such beings and those of their ilk, few though they may be, exist and are some of the viable threats to a werewolf caern in the Dark Medieval world.

When the caern is truly imperiled, the Garou of the sept typically use the harassing tactics of the wolf pack, save on a grander scale. They supplement these darting assaults and scare tactics with actual attacks of savage abandon and primal bloodthirst that would

stun the most brutal and sadistic of human warriors. The Garou fight not for a piece of land but instead for a reflection of the life force of the Mother of All, a Mother whose presence they feel more acutely in this place than anywhere else. Their fury when that life force is threatened knows no bounds, and no words can describe it. Some septs coordinate their movements with military precision and others simply unleash their warriors like a phalanx of insensate berserkers, but all such defenses use the astonishing physical might, feral instincts, amazing cunning and spiritual gifts of the race to their best advantage.

The far more insidious threat to the caern comes from gradual human encroachment. While the Garou are thoroughly prepared to ward off one of the Wyrms' spearheads with physical violence, they are usually in much less advantageous a position to disperse the teeming masses of humanity that are spreading in ever-greater numbers across Europe and, indeed, the world. Some tribes have greater influence with local lords or with the populace at large than others, but Garou, as a whole, lack the ability to direct the movements of apes with anything approaching the adroitness of their vampiric foes, the subtler tempters of the Wyrms or even just greedy despoilers of an entirely mundane aspect. Networks of Allies and Kinfolk are vital in this aspect of caern defense. With a Kinfolk as the chamberlain's page or the baron's secret lover, the Garou of a nearby sept are much likelier to know and to be able to anticipate and neutralize threats to the caern long before they become too great to manage. In the worst case, should gentle influence fail to suffice, more than one Shadow Lord has proved willing to secrete an apothecary's most virulent brews into a ruler's cup, in order to place a more pliant heir upon his throne. Likewise, having a friend or relative inside the local guild, knightly order or clergy is a boon beyond measure, for it enables the werewolves to have eyes, ears and a voice where they otherwise would not.

Whelping Litters and Other Concerns

Perhaps one of the most important functions of the caern and its environs is as a home to many lupus and metis werewolves (what few metis are allowed to exist) and a breeding ground for Gaia's warriors. While homids may have the luxury of a home of wood or stone, those who are born to the feral world of wolves have no need of such trappings. The bawn serves as a hunting territory for these wolf-born Garou, and they are likely never to leave it during their lives. Likewise, for those rare metis Garou who are given a

chance at life and yet whose deformities cannot be easily concealed among the human populace (recalling the manner in which infirmity and disfigurement are usually treated in this age and considering how a creature of primal Rage might respond to such treatment), a life at the caern is the only real option.

For these Garou, the caern is a truly a home, as well as a holy place. While homids must often contend with the difficulties of human life in the course of their day-to-day duties for the sept, the lives of lupus and metis are often simpler, if not easier. The lupus population is strongly represented in the Dark Medieval world, and the caern grounds are often laid out in a manner pleasing to their feral sensibilities. After all, homid Garou need only attend the caern to do their duties, whereupon they might return to their cottages and castles; the lupus must make her life by what is to be found in the bawn and must raise her pups there.

For the metis, however, the caern is truly a place of surcease. Though abuse is likely heaped upon him by his whole and healthy brethren, he is more likely to find acceptance among the Garou there than anywhere outside of it, where he is apt to be just as roundly mocked and scorned but without any acknowledgement of what he is capable of. For most metis, it is the best they can hope for. Those who are fortunate are even occasionally recognized for struggling three times as hard as any lupus or homid cub and may be given an opportunity to dine upon the scraps, rather than gnaw on gristle and bone. Even in those septs that treat the metis like lepers, there is a small shred of comfort that comes from belonging to the pack, the satisfaction of one of the basest instincts of the Garou.

A View Closer to the Earth: Lupus Perspective

Garou born to wolves need little in the way of contacts with the village priest or midwife and nothing of gold and silver. Of what use, then, in terms of assets, are the caern and its environs to the lupus Garou? Certainly, the average lupus will care little for the comings and goings of the king's foresters (if, indeed, she can even speak their language), but friends are not always to be found among men alone. While the lupus Garou may disdain the trappings of human civilization, she is nevertheless a being of superior intellect to her wolfish brothers, and all of Gaia's creatures are apt to seek gain and prosperity with whatever means their knowledge and instinct afford them. In short, there is nothing unnatural about the wild-born werewolf who wishes to make the best and most sensible use of his sept's Hunting Grounds.

An extensive birth-pack can provide a ready source of Allies and Kinfolk for the lupus Garou; though not so great in number as in ancient days, wolves are still quite prolific in this age, and a goodly number have relations among Gaia's warriors. Contacts can often be somewhat difficult for the average lupus to come by, although the clever always find means. For those who can speak to beasts, particularly wise, clever or pragmatic animals may live in a sept's territory and would gladly share their knowledge of the movements of men, other woodland creatures or even terrible beings that walk gleefully outside of the natural order, in exchange for a morsel of food or a bit of information in kind (or even in exchange for being spared as a meal).

The point of the matter is that many ways exist for a lupus Garou, should she wish, to use the grounds of her sept as a basis to acquire, maintain and even expand her Backgrounds. While a cunning old lupus Ahroun is a fearsome predator, how much more dangerous is that same Ahroun when surrounded by her kin and her friends among the spirits and informed of the goings-on of her territory by bird and beast? Garou recognize and respect industry and intellect, as well raw physical prowess, and a lupus (just like a homid or metis) can get by perfectly well without any alliances to fall back on, kin to aid him or mentors to guide him. Many of the most successful do, in fact.

Pooling Backgrounds

Garou have as much incentive to pool their assets as any band of Cainites or cabal of mages. In fact, they have a powerful instinct to share what they have communally. Just as the pack sees to the needs of all of its members so too does the sept strive to see that no Garou goes without. In many ways, a sept is made up as much of what assets its members can bring to bear as by the werewolves who compose it. After all, the kind of sept twenty Silver Fangs are apt to produce looks far different than that which the same number of Bone Gnawers might give rise to. The collective Backgrounds of the sept help, in large part, to define those differences.

Far and away, the most common Backgrounds for Garou to pool together and use as an Anchor for their sept are Kinfolk or Hunting Grounds. Each Anchor has its own advantages.

Hunting Grounds

Almost every Garou in the Dark Medieval world calls a Hunting Ground her home. This is where she lives, eats, sleeps and engages in the rites, traditions and practices of her race. It is also where her ties in the world begin. She may have been raised into the traditions of her people by an older Garou at the caern encompassed

HUNTING GROUNDS EXAMPLE

Site of the Teutoburg Massacre (Hunting Grounds 5, Mentor 3, Kinfolk 2)

When the warrior-chieftain Arminius defeated the legion of Publius Quinctilius Varus, he forever sundered Roman power in Germania, laying the dividing line between Latin- and Germanic-speaking peoples at the Rhine. The battle was a slaughter, and only a handful of the thousands of men who composed the Varian Legion limped back to Rome. Needless to say, this is considered a prestigious Hunting Ground among the Fenrir, and the young pack that has claimed it, for both its use and their lupine Kinfolk, has impressed its elders. This prestige is represented by a pooled rating of Mentor, indicating several higher-ranked Garou who are willing to pass on a lesson now and then. The battleground itself was a narrow strip of cleared lands between impenetrable forest and fetid bog, though the Hunting Grounds encompass the terrain for many miles around. This primal wilderness, even now, only rarely sees the tramp of human feet.

by the Hunting Grounds, finding a Mentor in the process. If her human or lupine family live nearby, the Hunting Ground also serves as a shelter for her Kinfolk. If normal (non-Kinfolk) humans live there, she can use the Hunting Grounds as a springboard for finding Allies, Contacts or Influence. In short, it is in the best interests of the individual werewolf to find advantage in the place she will likely call home all her life.

It would not be out of place to think of a werewolf's Hunting Grounds as part of her family, as much a part of it as her Kinfolk, packmates and septmates. They influence the way she grows up among the Garou and color her view of the world around her. Hunting Grounds have a fundamental character all their own and affect and are affected by the Garou who care for them and use them. They are the only place where a werewolf can feel as though she belongs. Just as werewolves can never truly fit in among ordinary humans, they never quite feel at home when outside the boundaries of territory that mark the outer perimeter of the Hunting Ground. It is an instinct, as deep-seated as the need to stalk prey and to mate.

Garou should feel the life of the Hunting Ground as surely as they do the living essence of the caern or the very real bonds between packmates. The outgrowth of Backgrounds from the Hunting Ground should be a natural one. Each werewolf helps to define the life of such places by making connections, and by using the

natural resources of the land (whether those resources come in the form of simple friendships, useful alliances, material wealth or even political connections), reinforces one of Gaia's most fundamental lessons: waste not, want not. To disregard the aid the Hunting Grounds can offer, whether subtle or obvious, is to deny, in some way, the bounty of the Mother who gave it.

Kinfolk

Kinfolk are a resource as valuable to werewolves as the power of the caern itself, representing as they do no small measure of the future of the race, as well as connecting werewolves back to their more terrestrial heritage. Human Kin are capable of serving as a link to the world of men, and many can, with a bit of training and perhaps a bit of string-pulling on the part of their wolvern brethren, come into positions of power and influence, assets that can be lent to the Garou in times of need. Naturally, such Kin are likely to fall into roles appropriate to the tribe's focus (with Bone Gnawer Kinfolk apt to be thieves, beggars or vagabonds and Silver Fang Kin more often than not descended from noble blood, with equal measures of warrior instinct and princely demeanor), though having relations in slightly less orthodox places, such as a Kinfolk scholar for one of

the Fenrir or a powerful knight serving as Kin to the Black Furies, can also be of profound value. Hunting Grounds, on the other hand, give a pack access to larger swaths of territory to call their own, which means better feeding, better land on which to rear young and a little more breathing room, to prevent tempers (and Rage) from flaring due to close quarters, as sometimes happens among werewolves. Hunting Grounds can serve as home to considerable numbers of Kin (many of whom may become involved in commerce, politics, the Church or any of the other institutions described above).

On a related note, Totem may not be used as an Anchor or included in a Background pool. It is, of itself, a separate Background pool and functions under entirely different rules. (All of this, of course, is much more thoroughly explained in *Dark Ages: Werewolf*.)

It is important to recognize that while a small enclave of ambitious vampires or cadre of inquisitors, for example, may hold exclusive dominion over a single stronghold of their respective group, it is highly unlikely, almost unheard of, for one pack, no matter how powerful, to keep an entire caern to itself. The network of Backgrounds pooled by a sept is more often shared on the level of the pack, rather than by the members of the sept as a whole. On the other hand, when dire threats to the safety of the caern arise, this means that the average well connected sept is capable of bringing a frightful amount of resources to bear.

KINFOLK EXAMPLE

Wines Crossing (Kinfolk 5, Resources 3, Hunting Grounds 2)

The tiny settlement of Wines Crossing, in the south of France, doesn't actually produce any wine but is surrounded by vineyards. Merchants looking to buy and sell wine come from several directions and often wind up buying bread and other sundries from the inhabitants. The village is odd in that it doesn't have a church, but travelers thus far have not made too much of a fuss out of this. The village is also unique in that most of the inhabitants are Kinfolk to the Bone Gnawers. The pack's extended family often produces Garou children, and the most recent generation decided to stay close to home and guard the village from the Albigensian Crusaders. The pack's Resources come from the monies and goods of the village itself, and the Garou use the surrounding area as Hunting Grounds. If the Crusaders were ever to discover the village, the pack might be in a great deal of danger, as at least some of the villagers know the exact location of the nearby sept and might well collapse under torture.

In the Shadow of the Cross: Holy Ground

The Inquisition's greatest strength when it comes to creating a resource out of its sanctified earth is undoubtedly to be found in the fact that ordinary people often flock to such sites in untold numbers, hoping to be blessed by the bones of saints, by the sites where great miracles happened or within the walls of great cathedrals. In this fashion, adherents to the faith, many with useful skills, knowledge or connections, come into regular contact with the inquisitors and can be directed to lend their aid in the name of the Cross (whether they know it or not).

Holy Ground can be created by rituals known to some inquisitors or by the power of belief that coalesces around holy sites, such as places where miracles occurred. Alternatively, it can be discovered. More than one piece of Holy Ground is simply found, with no explanation for why it is there. Typically, these inexplicable sanctified sites are weaker than those tied to known phenomena. Higher-ranking inquisitors often maintain that these places probably manifest

their powers through unwitnessed Acts of God, exceptionally holy thoughts, actions that occur under the cover of anonymity (such as tending a dying man or offering kindness to a leper or plague-stricken individual) or proximity to holiness (such as being a place where a saint rested while upon her journeys or a site where a believer was martyred in obscurity). Often, members of the Inquisition try to discern the source of such Holy Ground (so as to honor the cause of each manifestation properly), but the truth of such matters is only rarely discovered. Most times, they must simply content themselves with the knowledge that the Almighty wishes it so.

These sites are more than just gathering places for the Inquisition and all Christians of true faith, they are the Will of God given shape and form. They are places where the divine makes contact with the profane and thereby elevates rude and base matter into something sublime. Holy Ground is a small reflection of the world for which the Inquisition fights, a world united under the one true vision of the Lord.

Bleeding for Saints: Defending Holy Ground

The Inquisition benefits from a considerable number of holy sites in the Dark Medieval world, but this fact does not make them lax in the defense of even one such miraculous place. It is important to bear in mind that each and every patch of Holy Ground is, in some way, a place where God has touched Earth and imbued the land itself with His holy might. Inquisitors rally around these points, using each a staging ground for their never-ending war against the forces of the Adversary. What would the Inquisition do to defend the Holy Ground with which the Almighty has blessed them? Better still would it be to ask what the Inquisition *would not* do to guard such a precious commodity.

The value of the individual has yet to sink in to the European psyche as a whole; human rights are a concept still centuries off. Thousands of lives have been lost to "reclaim the Holy Lands from infidels," and many within the Church would argue that no cost is too great to work God's will (as interpreted through the designs of His clergy) on Earth. In part, this stems from a dogmatic fanaticism, in part from a hypocritical desire for earthly power and in great part due to the mindset that says that the average man is a resource to be exploited by his betters. In coming centuries, these factors will bear bitter fruit in the incarnation of the Inquisition that brings the organization to infamy. In the Dark Medieval, such attitudes result in siege mentality, grim determination and a willingness never to count the cost of service, regardless of who pays that cost.

Naturally, not every inquisitor so readily accepts this ethic of throwing the lambs to the wolves, but nothing can be gained by saving men while failing God. Some inquisitors are likely to put themselves in harm's way rather than to risk the lives of those lay people who serve them, but others will take whatever steps are necessary to preserve the Sword of the Faith as well as its territory. Some do so out of pragmatism (after all, who will be there to defend the whole of the Flock should the shepherd fall in the defense of one?) and others out of more mundane reasons, such as cowardice or selfishness.

What are some of the actual tactics used by the Inquisition to defend its Holy Ground? Misdirection is almost always the first line of defense. Who can say whether a given abbey is a shelter for sanctified ground or nothing more than it seems? Most of the monstrous denizens of the Dark Medieval world have better things to do with their time than to scour the countryside, sniffing out hidden enclaves of divine might. While a handful of the Adversary's demons might be charged to such time-consuming and inglorious posts, the proliferation of structures owned by the Church is so vast as to make this proposition untenable for even an immortal being. Hand in hand with the philosophy of misdirection, of course, is the power of ignorance. Those who do not *absolutely* need to know where Holy Ground is, do not. Every person who knows the location and nature of one of the Inquisition's sanctuaries is someone whose lips might be loosened by dull wits, drink or even torture or demonic influences. All told, it is safer for most involved parties to never learn of the true significance of the places where they live, work and serve. Even high-ranking clergy outside the Inquisition's power structure (or, perhaps more accurately, *especially* those clergy) are kept away from as much of this information as is feasible; such persons are tempting enough targets for all manner of assaults and enchantments on the part of night-devils and necromancers, without adding to their allure with the secrets of Heaven's warriors.

Should these measures fall short and the location of a parcel of Holy Ground come into imminent danger of compromise to the enemies of the Almighty, the Inquisition retains a few options. If this threat is discovered through word of mouth (by Contacts, Allies or the like), individual inquisitors can set their friends and associates on the problem. Ideally, the threat should be neutralized, but most inquisitors will happily settle for throwing the offending creature as permanently off the trail as possible, in the case of beings too powerful to confront directly or those with whom open conflict is, for whatever reason, impossible or unfavorable. The fewer actual inquisitors who

have to expose themselves in these affairs, the better. This returns to the principle of misdirection. Should a potential threat prove easiest or most convenient to dispatch through direct inquisitor involvement, the organization will not hesitate to do so, but it will always attempt to work in as much haste and secrecy as possible. If, on the other hand, an enemy should grow too close to the Holy Ground in question too quickly, or with sufficient stealth to make the use of outside resources impractical, then the inquisitors move in with as much force and speed as they can muster. Many of the world's evils are long-lived beings unaccustomed to swift and decisive response. While protection of the inquisitors' identities and the preservation of their lives are, as always, priorities, neither is the priority in such an instance.

Should a siege by the forces of the unholy befall Holy Ground, the inquisitors are expected to repel the foes of Christ with everything at their disposal, no matter the cost. Fortunately, Holy Ground itself constitutes a powerful weapon against the enemies of the Cross. Many of the tricks and conjurations of supernatural beings simply do not work in these places, or else their effects are sorely hampered (see page 197 of **Dark Ages: Inquisitor** for particulars of an inquisitor's capabilities on Holy Ground). Further, inquisitors are fortified in spirit by the closeness of the divine and are impelled onward to fight with great fury and righteous anger. Some sites are lucky enough to have one or more somewhat more mundane guardsmen, such as knights or men-at-arms, and these warriors will likewise be loosed upon the encroaching darkness, bolstered by the powers of faith, if this is at all possible. Regardless, those who would invade the Inquisition's bastions swiftly come to learn that the guardians of these places sell their own lives dearly in their defense. More often than not, a straight assault on Holy Ground is a futile effort, and the Inquisition can repel all but the best planned and armed and most mystically potent of these attacks.

The Inquisition can also call upon more mundane soldiers of the faith. Despite the desire to maintain secrecy, the Inquisition is certainly not above making use of the laity (or unknowing clerics) in the pursuit of defending the sacred charge entrusted unto them by God Himself. Blatant attacks upon Holy Ground can easily be brought to the attention of local lords or functionaries, whom the clergy may ask to lend soldiery to the aid of the site (though given the Church's power and influence, such a "request" can easily and legitimately be phrased in the form of a demand). As churches, monasteries and other structures serving in the capacity of chapter-houses are regarded as central gathering points and important holdings by priests,

princes and peasants alike, it is not hard to win the support of the local people in the defense of such a site. While it may be fear as much as loyalty that motivates the people to do so (since no one wants to answer to the Almighty on Judgment Day as to why he failed to rise to the defense of his town's chapel), the Inquisition cannot argue with the alacrity with which the common man is moved to the aid of the Church when an obvious threat to it arises.

If the loss of Holy Ground seems inevitable, the priority then becomes the deconsecration of the land. While it may seem counterintuitive to undo some of the only protections remaining to those inquisitors holding out against the besieging force, this measure is viewed as an absolute necessity by most. The deconsecration is viewed, and rightly so, as a terrible price to pay, but it is, in the end, ultimately far preferable to the alternative. Most inquisitors weep at the thought of snuffing out a tangible sliver of God's love in the world, but all choke back their bile at the notion of allowing a sanctified site to fall into the hands of darkness. The blasphemies that can be committed upon such ground, when its holy power is at last subverted, are too terrible to contemplate. Of course, the fates of those inquisitors and their associates left alive at this point are usually as predictable as they are horrible, but Heaven's pure works must *never* be given to the Adversary and its innumerable minions.

When an attack is repelled, the inquisitors quickly set about the business of fortifying the Holy Ground against further attack. Such a locale is never as vulnerable as just after an assault. New inquisitors, guards, clergy and help are brought in, if necessary, while the site remains on the highest state of alert. If need be, physical repairs and modifications will be made to the structure, if any, housing the Holy Ground. Networks of informants will be dispatched in haste to inquire into who might have taken an undue interest in the happenings at the holy site, so that the Inquisition can begin to gather intelligence on any new potential enemies. As quickly as possible, outward affairs are made to seem normal and mundane, even as some rather exceptional preparation and reaction goes on behind the scenes. The very mission statement of the Inquisition tends to attract some of the most militant and paranoid people to its cause, and these attitudes are reflected in the state of defense created after Holy Ground is successfully threatened.

When Holy Ground is actually *lost*, with no time or opportunity for deconsecration, the Inquisition must act hastily or forever accept its own failure in light of the trust extended to it by Heaven. Most beings capable of taking Holy Ground from a well entrenched cadre of inquisitors (and, given the seriousness with which the Inquisition looks upon these

sacred sites, one would be hard-pressed to find such a group that was not well entrenched) are also largely aware of the land's properties and how it might be warped and twisted to suit far more sinister ends. Cults of diabolists, hideous pagan spirits, demons and other such walking nightmares lust for opportunities to saturate these sanctified places with their evil and so unmake a small piece of the Almighty's handiwork in the world. Thus, when Holy Ground is lost, the Inquisition moves with strength, precision, ruthlessness and, above all else, swiftness. Messengers are dispatched on strong steeds, bearing missives to as many known inquisitors as can be reached in a reasonable amount of time, usually two or three days' hard ride at the absolute most. While these riders thunder out across the land in search of more swords with which to beat back the night, the rest prepare. They bless and consecrate weapons, seek the intercession of Archangel Michael and call upon his strength to fortify the limbs and hearts of the faithful as they enter into the lion's den. Many inquisitors offer and take final confessions and Last Rites, for to lay siege to that which was lost is perhaps the most deadly of propositions, and the harshest possible resistance is to be expected. When entering into such a battle, the inquisitors fight not for their lives, nor even their

RITE OF DECONSECRATION (LEVEL FOUR RITUS)

This rite is one almost never taught to young inquisitors, for its purpose is terrible to contemplate and is a burden best shouldered by those with experience. Any who would attain a position of authority within an Inquisition Chapter-House would do well to learn it, however. The Rite of Deconsecration serves to sever the divine connection that imbues Holy Ground with its miraculous properties, forever annihilating the mystic nature of a sacred site.

System: This hour-long *ritus*, performed on the Holy Ground to be deconsecrated, is realized through careful and undisturbed recitation of prayers and chants. The entire process is usually undertaken while kneeling before an image of the risen Christ, imploring His forgiveness for denying a measure of God's light to the world, that it shall not ultimately be turned to evil purpose. The rite requires the expenditure of 3 points of Conviction (it is a powerful act of will to countermand God's glory made manifest, no matter how compelling the reason.) Success rescinds the land's blessings and renders the site spiritually inert.

souls, but instead for a shard of God's favor upon the Earth. No suffering is too great to endure and no price too high to bear.

When the time to retake lost Holy Ground finally comes, the assault is stunning in its savagery, and any weapon at hand, short of Infernalism or other blasphemous powers, is freely used. Typically, it is considered foolish and unhelpful to conduct intelligence before the attack. As the layout of the area is intimately familiar to most of the inquisitors at hand and little time is given to alter the layout of the site significantly, no real reconnaissance needs to be done. Also, as most of the beings capable of wresting Holy Ground away from its guardians have exceptional powers of perception of one sort or another, spying on their comings and goings tips the Inquisition's hand. If the attack can be conducted by day, it will be, for this is the time when devils and their ilk are at their weakest. If, however, the reclamation cannot be conducted with due stealth during sunlit hours, then nighttime must suffice. Of great (though by no means primary) importance is the Inquisition's ability to keep the conflict secret, so as to preserve the ignorance of the people and prevent a panic. The sword, the torch and, of course, the crucifix are among the mightiest weapons the inquisitors can bring to bear against their enemies. Naturally, the miraculous powers of the Inquisition's most faithful warriors also figure heavily into their efforts, especially if no degradation of the land's holy properties has yet occurred. Although the desired end is the destruction of the defilers, driving them out and fully retaking the lost Holy Ground is the far greater concern, and the Inquisition's foes are only rarely pursued in such an instance if they manage to flee. Purification rites and securing the location are much more immediate necessities. If the place cannot be successfully retaken, then as many inquisitors as possible will try to win their way through the actual Holy Ground, in order to deconsecrate it before it can be bent to dark purpose. If at least this much is not achieved, then every inquisitor involved in the reclamation effort has fallen and the world has new cause to weep for the evil that will blossom where once only purity took root.

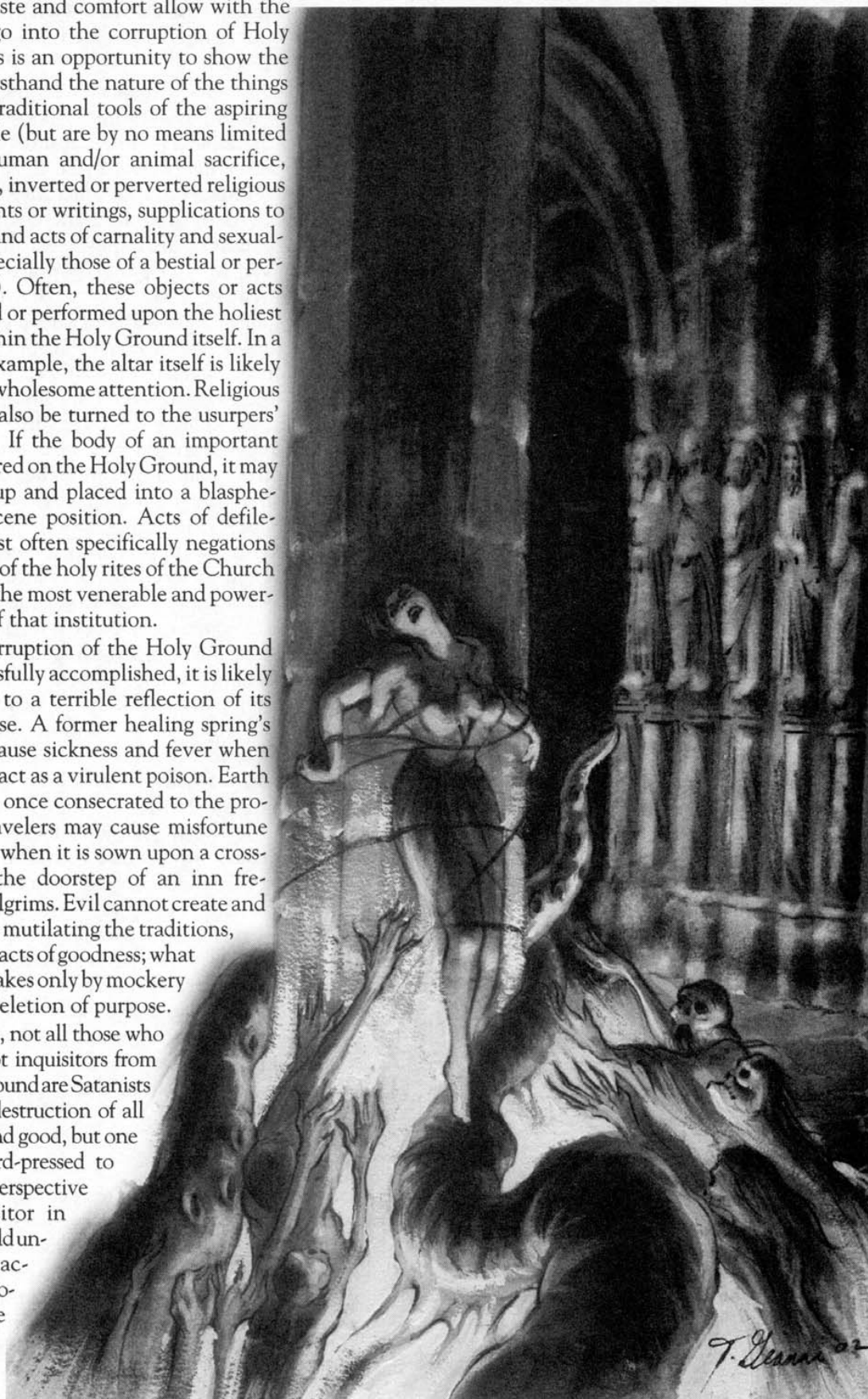
Blasphemous Rites

When Holy Ground is truly corrupted by forces of evil, be those diabolists, demons or other, more esoteric avatars of darkness, Lucifer wins another jewel for his crown. Naturally, this isn't a process that takes place overnight, which is why inquisitors answer a successful siege with all due haste. Typically, it takes at least several days to prepare Holy Ground for defilement. The Storyteller is encouraged to be as

fiendish as taste and comfort allow with the rituals that go into the corruption of Holy Ground. This is an opportunity to show the inquisitors firsthand the nature of the things they fight. Traditional tools of the aspiring defiler include (but are by no means limited to) blood, human and/or animal sacrifice, human waste, inverted or perverted religious symbols, chants or writings, supplications to dark powers and acts of carnality and sexuality (most especially those of a bestial or perverse nature). Often, these objects or acts will be placed or performed upon the holiest locations within the Holy Ground itself. In a church, for example, the altar itself is likely to receive unwholesome attention. Religious artifacts will also be turned to the usurpers' unholy ends. If the body of an important figure is interred on the Holy Ground, it may well be dug up and placed into a blasphemous or obscene position. Acts of defilement are most often specifically negations or inversions of the holy rites of the Church and strike at the most venerable and powerful symbols of that institution.

If the corruption of the Holy Ground can be successfully accomplished, it is likely to be turned to a terrible reflection of its former purpose. A former healing spring's waters may cause sickness and fever when consumed or act as a virulent poison. Earth from a shrine once consecrated to the protection of travelers may cause misfortune and suffering when it is sown upon a cross-roads or at the doorstep of an inn frequented by pilgrims. Evil cannot create and is confined to mutilating the traditions, practices and acts of goodness; what it makes, it makes only by mockery or selective deletion of purpose.

Naturally, not all those who wish to uproot inquisitors from their Holy Ground are Satanists bent on the destruction of all that is right and good, but one would be hard-pressed to express that perspective to an inquisitor in terms she would understand or accept. While a local Ventruelord may simply wish to



see "those troublesome Christian soldiers" dispatched and their sanctuary (an object of pain and discomfort for all Cainites within his fief) destroyed, all that the Inquisition sees is a thing of darkness and evil striking out against the very Will of God. In any case, for those who lack the inclination to offer Holy Ground up to Nameless Lords or any such foolishness, such a site can also be obliterated by physical destruction. The power residing in the land usually stems from a combination of an object, relic or structure and the powerful faith that stems from that focus. By sending servants to burn down a building or destroy a particular sword or robe, much of the Holy Ground's power can be dissolved — enough, at least, that it will come to dissipate fully in time. If the land itself is the source of the Holy Ground's power, then those without recourse to demonic powers are left with far fewer options. Short of burning and salting (which, of itself, is not a certain method), all that can be done is to attempt to draw on the lore of the faith to undo the land's consecration. A tale circulates of one particularly canny Lasombra in Iberia, for example, who arranged for a number of usurers to set up shop atop a particular patch of troublesome Holy Ground, drawing his example from Christ's assault upon the moneychangers at the temple. Indeed, in time, the sacred power of the land faded and was withdrawn entirely.

A Place of Sanctuary

In addition to serving as a bastion of faith against the denizens of the night, Holy Ground is also valuable as a place of rest and succor for members of the Inquisition. When such powerful sites are discovered or created, cathedrals and monasteries are built atop them if possible, making these locales homes to the defenders of the faith, as well as their rallying points. But what is it like to dwell somewhere that lepers come to be cured or a statue of the Blessed Virgin weeps blood on the anniversary of the Crucifixion?

Few people can ignore the veritable saturation of otherworldly forces that congregate at the sanctified wellsprings known as Holy Ground. Depending upon the nature of the site, feelings of benevolence, watchfulness or compassion may be sensed. Likewise, certain among these places radiate powerful sensations of remorse, severity or even rage. It all depends upon the nature of the Holy Ground in question. The burial place of a martyr who never lifted a finger against her persecutors and remained impassive, with a beatific smile on her face, as she was torturously put to death will have a much different aura than one where a hundred night-devils were put to the torch and ten good inquisitors lost their lives, crying out the praises of the Almighty and begging His aid in the pitched battle.

Regardless of the nuances of its nature, *all* the residents of a given piece of Holy Ground tread lightly, for even the most dull-witted or spiritually bereft can sense a definite connection to the Divine, a closeness of powers not of this Earth. Hypocritical or lax clergy are likely to feel uncomfortable or guilty while dwelling in such places, as though the Eye of God is trained upon them in judgment. Children, idiots and other innocents usually instinctively feel safe on Holy Ground, unless the site is attuned to powerful negative emotions, in which case the fanatically zealous are apt to be drawn there. Adherents of other faiths typically feel either out of place or nothing special at all. Those with strong convictions are likely to be most drastically affected or, conversely, completely unmoved. If reason may be found in whether a given rabbi, witch or shaman is touched by these forces or not, it is not a reason readily understandable to the human mind. Naturally, the land itself scourges in spirit Infernalists and those of their ilk by the proximity to the Divine offered by Holy Ground, regardless of their level of faith in the powers they serve.

Veteran inquisitors often have wise words of counsel for those newer to the cause when such raw recruits first come to the Holy Ground that will serve as their base of operations. For some, it is simply a gentle assurance that the dreams about angels are not unusual and that the advice they offer in such visions is to be heeded and acted upon. For others, the wisdom offered is of a far less comforting variety, whether that is to ignore at all costs the terrible screams coming from the catacombs or to be prepared to be tempted by a terrible demon that comes to draw the pious off of the true path and into temptation and damnation. Visions, miracles and the spirits of saints, while certainly not commonplace on most Holy Ground, can often be encountered with far greater frequency there than almost anywhere else. After a time, the odd and disconcerting become a bit more commonplace to the long-term resident, especially when that resident is an inquisitor and has, perhaps, some small amount of greater insight into the nature of these happenings than most, even among the men of the cloth.

Other Gods and Other Faiths

Most practitioners of magic in this age consider what they do to be a holy art. Not all sacred space falls under the purview of the Cross. Among the peoples of the Crescent, the mystics known as the Ahl-i-Batin work with great skill to sanctify places, through the arts of enlightened geometry and spiritual sciences, in the name of the Most Merciful. Likewise, among Hebrew mystics, the secrets of creating holy places date back to the Temple of Solomon. Both of these

faiths similarly have important sites created through divine intercession, rather than human artifice.

Mysticism takes many forms, however, and the faiths descending from ancient Israel by no means have a monopoly on such practices. Among the Slavs, shrines dedicated to Perunn and Svarog still stand in fierce defiance of efforts to eradicate the ancient ways. Witch-

FANTASTIC HAPPENINGS

Certain sacred places are subject to odd conjunctions with other spiritual realms, both benevolent and malign. These amazing visitations can add a great deal of flavor and personality to a given parcel of Holy Ground, as well as lending them a true sense of the magnitude of that which the Inquisition fights for (or against). In a given cathedral, perhaps the odd passing acolyte occasionally hears a choir of surpassing beauty with no discernable source. Though it should be eerie or even frightening, it is instead a thing of such splendor that the listener is moved to tears, rather than terror. For the less fortunate inquisitor, there might be only a scribbled warning, telling her to "beware the Black Man" when she first arrives at her nunnery and a visitation by a seductive man with skin like coal, revealing himself at midnight of her first Sunday there, a man who offers to fulfill her most secret and shameful fantasies if only she will take his hand.

These elements of the fantastic serve to cement the idea that the Inquisition is in constant contact with all manner of otherworldly forces. While such strange happenings should not be used to the point of becoming commonplace, neither should a Storyteller fear to insert them where and when appropriate. While Cainites dwell in a world where the supernatural is a matter of nightly unlife and mages have truck with gods, spirits and demons of all descriptions, the inquisitor is, in many ways, an average person thrust into a very strange world with only her faith as her sword and her shield. Most of what the Inquisition deals with in day-to-day life is not the direct power of the supernatural, but instead the ordinary people they are trying to defend from the machinations of that hidden world. Placing such direct manifestations of the occult within the very sanctum of the inquisitors, whether as ally, enemy or simple curiosity, is a compelling way of never allowing the characters the luxury of being very far from that hidden struggle.

wise folk in Britain maintain burial grounds, crossroads and other such places sacred to the old gods and goddesses. From Scandinavia to Kievan Rus, from Wales to Outremer, one finds countless locations holy to those who would call upon the mystic arts. Within (and without) the auspices of the Catholic Church itself, certain Christian mystics serve as caretakers to what any inquisitor would recognize as Holy Ground, yet many such sites have never known an inquisitor's gaze.

Non-Christian sites do not qualify as Holy Ground (at least, not in the sense that the Inquisition would understand and be able to use it), though mystic phenomena appropriate to the particular faith are certainly possible. On a Hebrew site, this might mean the ability to breathe life into a golem, whereas an old Celtic one may allow for rites to beg the aid of the Fair Folk. While these places cannot grant vast sorcerous powers to those who do not possess them, they can bolster the capabilities of believers skilled in the magical arts and may allow for flashes of intervention for the benefit of an unskilled member of the faithful in times of dire need. In the case of particularly powerful sites, supernatural powers stemming from other faiths may be stymied or, in the most extreme cases, altogether cut off, an important fact for the overzealous inquisitor to keep in mind when pursuing a "demon" back to its den.

While on the topic of demons, it is prudent to note that in some places the land itself has been bent to the purposes of evil. In some cases (as mentioned previously in this chapter), this land is Holy Ground that has been captured and warped by unholy forces. In others, a given site may be a holdover from the time of vast and terrible beings, demon-gods of the Near and Middle East, or land so haunted by the footfalls of the Infernal that it has always been so twisted and unwholesome. Indeed, many kinds of demons stalk the Earth, not all of them such literal servants of Lucifer as most Catholic scholars would believe, and the natures and effects of the lands such beings claim as their own are as numberless as the stars in the sky.

Wizardry, Magic and Sacred Space

Even for those practitioners of the myriad mystic arts whose roots fork into practices more temporal and less sanctified in their purpose, there is something to be said for the sense of sanctuary and protection that comes from having "holy ground." A wizard's keep is where he houses his texts, performs his experiments and rests his head when the rigors of his art demand a few hours of slumber. Just as many beasts are more dangerous in their

dens so too is a mage at her deadliest when confronted in her place of power.

The feel of such a place, regardless of whether the wizard is sinner, saint or simple unbeliever, is often one similar to that found at many mystically fortified holy sites; a strange aura pervades the land and makes one foreign to the mage's beliefs feel out of place or unwelcome. The sole difference in this case is that the otherworldly air surrounding the sorcerer's sanctum is more often than not a product of a powerful human will, rather than the touch of the divine. Still, it does not do to attempt any broad categorizations when dealing with mages. The best rule to adhere to is never to be surprised by whatever seems to hold a mage's tower or grove apart from more mundane lands, be that spirits, the power of the self or even the touch of the Almighty.

Most sites of true wizardry are crays, the gathering points of mystic energies. Those with the gift of sorcery defend these lands as fiercely as any werewolf guards her territory and with as much cunning as any Cainite monitors his fiefdom for threats. Though perhaps not as blatant in their displays of power as they were even a decade or two ago, spellcasters are still beings of great and terrible rage when roused to defend their places of power.

For the most part, mages are apt to look upon their demesnes with the same sense of protectiveness common to werewolves or members of the Inquisition. While many cannot be said to feel any kind of spiritual bond to the land, they understand the scarcity and value of places of power and defend them vigorously against threats. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon the views of the individual mage), many crays are located far away from large urban centers or other human settlements, making them at times inconvenient places for the garnering of mortal influence and the acquisition of goods and services. For some, such as the Spirit-Talkers or the men and women of the Old Faith, this is not much of a concern. For others, like the Order of Hermes or the Ahl-i-Batin, who rely heavily upon trafficking in Commoner affairs, this can be a serious difficulty. Still, for the perceptive mage, opportunity may be had in even the most remote locations, and what might seem, at first glance, to be a barren and uninhabited land may in fact be teeming with unconventional resources.

Protecting the Cray

When defending a cray, most mages are not, contrary to common opinion and folk tales, likely to hurl lightning at the intruder or turn him to stone with a glance. In fact, as most Commoners are simply without the means to detect or use the power invested

in a mystic site, they will pass such a place by without taking notice of its special properties. Thus, wizards, witches and shamans usually need only allow trespassers to move through, none the wiser, in order to keep safe the location and grounds of the cray.

If an interloper of a more knowledgeable nature should come across a mage's demesne, whether by accident or by design, the response depends upon the individual or, if the cray is held jointly by many mages (as is often the case), the group. Some, like those of the Order, are apt to send a party of wizards out to intercept the intruder and question her, in a brusque but cordial manner, as to the nature of her visit. In the case of the more wild and primal Spirit-Talkers, on the other hand, *all* outsiders might be regarded as intolerable threats to the sanctity of the site and attacked mercilessly. Some Hermetic Covenants may also respond with fire and the sword first, asking questions later, and many Spirit-Talkers are more curious about visitors than angry, so one should never assume the best (or worst) until there is a bit of evidence to support the theory.

Should an interloper come with violent intent, however, all subtlety and courtesy are cast aside. Any would-be assailant is likely to be subjected to the most potent offensive powers at the wizards' (or, in the case of an individual, wizard's) disposal. If the mages have Commoner servants or mystic beasts at their command, these are often dispatched first to deal with the interloper. If these deterrents prove ineffective, the mages themselves become involved. Thunder from the sky, assaults of psychic force to twist and shatter the mind and angels and demons summoned forth to put foes to the sword — all these and more may appear on the field of battle when a cray or other site of mystic power is threatened.

It should be noted that many crays and other places of power are successfully assaulted every year. Most creatures that dare to approach a group of mages in their sanctum with conquest in mind do not do so without well laid plans and the means to do so readily at hand. The single greatest threat to a cray or other magical site comes in the form of other mages. The Order of Hermes and the Messianic Voices have been particularly guilty of this affront, sending large numbers of well trained magi to usurp control of powerful crays from their rightful owners, citing "superior" beliefs as justification enough. In this age, where might is as sure a right to rule as wisdom or inheritance, their claims are not so far-fetched. Other mages, of course, are not innocent of this act, from the brutal rune-mages of the north to the blood-witches of the Old Faith. Other beings with a lust for mystic power, such as dragons, chimera and High Umbrood, may

THE HOUSES OF FIENDS

One group that warrants a bit of extra mention at this juncture is the Clan of Fiends. No other Cainites are so intimately tied into the power of native land as strongly as are the elegant monsters of the Tzimisce. While the Fiends' powers and capabilities tend to lend themselves well to dominion over a given locale, there is something horrid and unclean about a patch of land claimed by even the youngest of Tzimisce, as though the very nature of the clan infects the earth upon which the Cainite treads. Most often, this effect of contagion, reflecting the most common demeanor of the Tzimisce, causes soil to turn ashen and decrepit, beasts to become sly and vicious (even to the point that normally shy and timid animals take on a stance of active malevolence toward man) and ordinary mortals to adopt a sullen and apathetic aspect. This is not always the case, however, as evidenced by the raw carnality of the Szantovich and the brute savagery of the Bratovich, as well as by the attitudes evinced by some of the less orthodox or more progressive-minded of Fiends. In the Domains of Embraced revenants, for example, low barbarism might take hold, with wild flora feeding upon hot spilt blood, or lasciviousness and pervasion find root and thrive, beguiling the unwary traveler with the dangerous allure of the flesh. Likewise, those Tzimisce who do not subscribe to the image of the solemn Cainite lord, brooding in his crumbling mountaintop manor, may give rise to other terrors entirely. In one fiefdom, passions cool to the point of being eerie or altogether absent and cold reason finds increase. In another, the dull fear of the average Tzimisce's serfs is replaced by a nightly swell of abject terror, as winds howl and dark spirits take wing upon those ill-omened gales. In any case, these effects of this connection to the land are *always* for the worse, as the Curse of Caine impresses itself upon the land, striking at its shape and mutilating its spirit. Still, as decades become centuries and then millennia, each Fiend can comfortably settle into a land warped to mirror the very contours of her soul. While members of the other High Clans can talk a great deal about the ties between the ruler and her demesne, for the Tzimisce it is an indelible reality.

also attack a cray, seeking to slake their thirst for Quintessence at any cost.

Holy and Unhallowed

The Cainites of the Dark Medieval also have their holy sites. Many Lasombra, for example, take time out of their unlives to give respect and veneration at the tomb of El Cid. What place could be holier for an adherent of Haqim's Road of Blood than Alamut, the Eagle's Nest itself? Even the usurping Tremere, who are said to venerate nothing save power, hold Ceoris, the ancestral chantry of their house, in something of a sacred light. For those who walk the Road of Kings, perhaps it is the tomb of Charlemagne that inspires reverence and devotion, while the site of Constantine's revelation may be held in highest regard among those who would tread the *Via Caeli*.

Many of the places vampires regard as sanctified stem from truly alien schools of thought and moral codes. Most normal humans feel, at the very least, uncomfortable and out of place at these strange shrines and monuments. Even without the abhorrent flesh-sculpting arts of the Fiends or the horrific desecrated temples of the Baali, something about those places where Cainites go to find truth is inherently menacing and unwholesome. After all, the truths conducive to the life and mental and spiritual well-being of a Child of Seth have little to nothing to do with those native to the undead state. Even the most noble-minded and well-meaning adherent of the *Via Humanitatis* is something decidedly other than mortal, and this otherness — the patience of the undying, the power to see with some measure of perspective and a keen understanding of true evil — is invariably reflected upon these places. While some twisted and maniacal mortals could, conceivably, find a sense of succor and grace in a place sought out by Cainite pilgrims, these incidents are rare enough as to be regarded as strange omens by the mystics of the roads. By and large, the Children of Seth and the Childer of Caine do not agree in their interpretations of the divine, any more than they do over their choice of sustenance.

A Thousand Voices in the Night

Many other denizens of the Dark Medieval have their home territories, holy sites and sacred places. It would be a grave disservice not to dwell, even if only briefly, upon those locales and what good (or ill) might come of exploring them. The following treatments are by no means comprehensive and are meant to serve

more as a superficial primer than as any kind of reliable guide. A traveler should bear this in mind when trespassing upon the territory of the Daoine Sidhe in Eire or crossing the line of glyphs scratched into the outer perimeter of the Den-Realm of a Bastet in the Rus. Those who do not let wisdom and discretion prevail when walking in such strange lands are far more apt to leave those lands in tatters than on their feet, if ever they leave at all.

Strange Dens: Other Changing Breeds

While the Garou are certainly the most numerous of the Changing Breeds, they are by no means the only shapeshifters of the Dark Medieval. For the elusive cat-folk called the Bastet, strange realms of spirit tied to the individual are passed on at death to descendants or trusted students. The ancient and benevolent bear-changers, the Gurahl, tend their caerns much as the Garou do, save that they most often do so in solitude rather than in numbers, counting upon their powerful spirit magics and nigh-unstoppable physical might to ward such lands from harm. If the wayfaring Corax call any such places home, they have yet to make these sites known to other skinchangers.

As a rule, as with the Garou, these holy sites are dangerous to venture to, and few unwelcome guests are fortunate enough to walk away from them unscathed. Granted, certain Changing Breeds are an exception to this rule (the faerie-kin Ceilican Bastet, for example, are likelier to respond to an interloper with an attitude more befitting a mischievous fae than an eight-foot-tall living siege engine), but most go out of their way to drive off intruders, at the very least.

Unfortunately for the hapless traveler, few tales circulate of shapeshifters other than werewolves (in Europe, anyway), meaning that little lore exists as to how to properly comport oneself when treading on a werebear's land or how best to protect against its rage, should it take offense. Then again, given the ferocity with which the average shapeshifter defends its home, this is perhaps unsurprising. The only distinctions the werewolves have in this regard are numbers and a particularly fierce and persistent legend (both of which contribute to the considerably greater bank of folklore surrounding the Garou than, say, the Rokea), holdovers from the War of Rage and the Impergium, respectively.

Folk who know that they will be treading upon ground stalked by a skinchanger would do well to carry a bit of silver, preferably in the form of a knife or other small weapon, easily hidden from sight but available if needed. Most people lack the means to be toting about blades of silver, however, no matter how small, and so

simpler wards must often suffice. These protections vary by place and means, but most are, at best, a frail shield. The sad truth of the matter is that there is very little that can be done to avert the wrath of the Fera when they believe they have been wronged. When a pair of eyes that gleam strangely against the full moon's light loom overhead, the best that one can usually hope for is a quick and relatively painless death.

Under Hills and Between Stones: Arcadian Glens

The Fair Folk are a whimsical and mercurial breed, their affairs and bloodlines only occasionally intertwined with those of mortal men. Strange, wild magics rule in their places of power. Men who fall asleep in a ring of mushrooms awaken a hundred years later and not a day older and little boys who do not make the proper signs when crossing over an enchanted barrow are cursed with the ears of an ass or struck dumb. Unfortunately for the average traveler, little exists to distinguish a hill claimed by a high lord among the Sidhe and any other common hill. Centuries of coexisting with the Fair Folk keep the locals informed as to where to tread with respect and where not to tread at all. Thus, wanderers of all sorts are apt eventually to disturb a site sacred to the children of Arcadia, unless they exercise caution and good judgment.

For those wise in the ways of the fae, a scant few signs can be relied upon to know how best to steer clear of faerie mounds and other such (often the best policy): moss that grows on the wrong side of the trees, perhaps, or a brook whose flow sounds a bit too much like gentle laughter. While these methods are by no means infallible, they are at least some small proof against the wrath of the fae, which is terrible indeed.

If an uninvited guest is *extremely* fortunate, it is possible that any Fair Folk who might abide in such a place of power are away or in slumber, or else unwilling or unable to deal with the intrusion. While some rare few tales do circulate about good fortune coming to one who treads unknowingly upon faerie land, most such stories end in pain, misery, madness and even death (or fates far worse). Sadly, there is no sure way to predict when the lords and ladies of Arcadia come and go, nor any simple formula to discern when a bridge troll is off counting his coin or a dryad away from her tree to bathe in the lake. Thus, a number of simple wards and charms have come into common use when crossing land claimed by the fae. The best known of these folk magics, by far, is cold iron (which has never been forged by fire but is instead beaten into shape cold). Most folk wise in the ways of the faerie, however, would hasten to point out that the mere presence of the stuff is bane to the children of Arcadia

and grips them with terrible throes of agony. While effective at dispelling their sorcery and a strong ward against their approach, cold iron does tend to rouse the ire of the Fair Folk in a way almost nothing else does.

Those who must cross Arcadian expanses are advised instead to consider one of the less offensive

wards against faerie magic, such as turning one's clothes inside-out. Also, simple courtesy goes a long way. While the etiquette of the fae is a complicated matter, most will allow an intruder to pass unmolested if the interloper treats

the faerie's land as he would the home of a king or archbishop, with humility, reverence and cautious respect. Though it may seem demeaning to do so in some cases and blasphemous in others, few things in this world are more dangerous than a faerie enraged by what he perceives to be a slight to his honor or a challenge to his demesne.

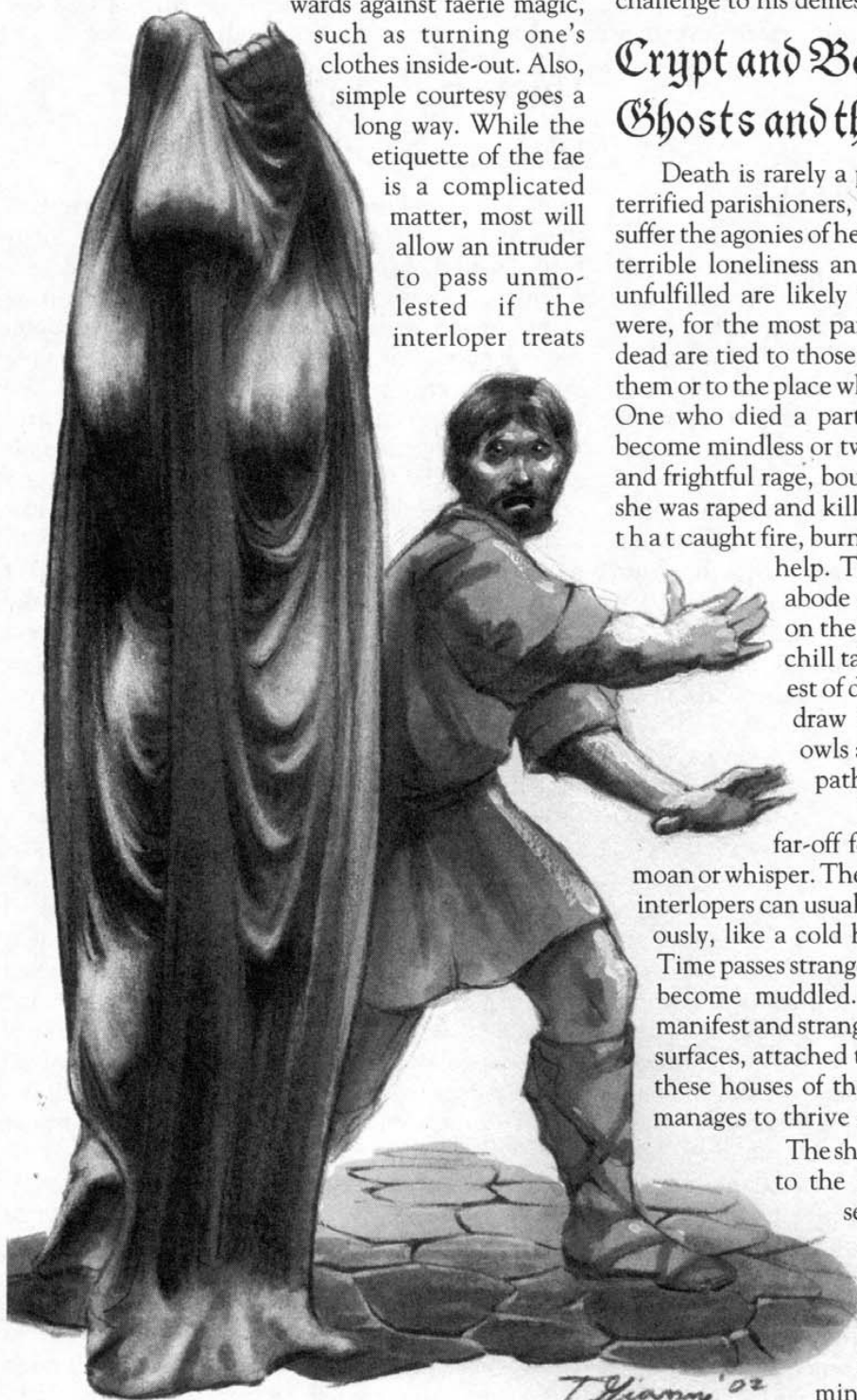
Crypt and Battlefield: Ghosts and their Haunts

Death is rarely a peaceful release. Priests rail at terrified parishioners, informing them that most will suffer the agonies of hell, cast beyond God's sight into terrible loneliness and oppression. Those who die unfulfilled are likely to discover that those priests were, for the most part, right. Many of the unquiet dead are tied to those places that were important to them or to the place where they died or were interred. One who died a particularly gruesome death may become mindless or twisted into a shade of awesome and frightful rage, bound to haunt the village where she was raped and killed or the wing of the nunnery that caught fire, burning her alive as she pleaded for

help. Those who enter into a ghost's abode can often feel it. The hair rises on the back of the neck and a sudden chill takes the air, even on the balmiest of days. Animals will not willingly draw near, save perhaps for crows, owls and other beasts that tread the paths between life and death.

If one listens closely, perhaps a far-off footstep can be discerned, or a moan or whisper. The dead often envy the living and interlopers can usually feel that overwhelming jealousy, like a cold hand upon unsuspecting flesh. Time passes strangely and geography and distance become muddled. Will-o'-the-wisps sometimes manifest and strange shapes move across reflective surfaces, attached to no earthly form. Yet even in these houses of the dead, a perverse life of sorts manages to thrive and flourish.

The shades of the dead are often drawn to the company of those like themselves, coming together in places where they might ape the customs of the living and so forget some of the ceaseless pain of being dead. After all, other things, far worse, fierce minions of Hell, stalk the ashen fields and malevolent woodlands the dead call home, and safety may be found in numbers, a



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call home, and safety may be found in numbers, a

lesson wisely carried over from life. The places where these shades congregate often grow thick with the remembrances of lives long past and a pervasive melancholy sets in, devouring hope and happiness and replacing it with unrelenting misery and a feeling of betrayal by a heaven that never came to claim these lost, pathetic souls.

For the most part, the dead cling to their haunts because those places remind them, in some way, of their time among the living. These sites sustain their connections to the sunlit world and are the few oases in an otherwise barren and terrible land. No wonder, then, that these unhappy shades do what they can to repel any who might bring harm to such locales. Naturally, the first defense that might be called upon by the dead is the fear and discomfort their very presence often engenders. In an age of superstition, almost all creatures shun those places allegedly frequented by forsaken souls. When the presence of those souls is a palpable thing, a shadow that falls upon the heart and exhales an icy breath upon the back of the neck, a malevolent dread worms its way into the conviction of even the most stout and courageous spirits.

If, however, simple terror fails to suffice, many shades have other resources to fall back on. Some ghosts favor subtle manifestations: the far-off rattling of spectral chains, unformed half-whispers at the edge of perception, especially vivid and disturbing nightmares. Others lash out with all the rage and frustration of those forever denied the pleasures of life and the bounty of Paradise, shattering glass with unearthly displays of force, making walls run with rancid blood and distorting the very fabric of time and space. Some have even been known to intrude upon the flesh of the living, overpowering the will of the one thus ridden and driving out interlopers with more corporeal incentives. Protections depend largely upon the proclivities and capabilities of the shade (or shades) in question, but all are generally quite effective. Few, after all, have the desire to contest the dominion of the dead, and fewer still possess the resources to do so. All told, it is often far wiser to let the ghosts of the dead have what lands they would call their own.

... And the Rest

Naturally, the demesnes outlined above are only the commonest sorts a traveler may encounter (if anything about the supernatural world can truly be said to be "common"). Wilder tales still make their rounds, in the dark of night, about the campfire. Though rare and bizarre, the avid wanderer would do

well to take heed of these tales, not only for the information (or misinformation, as is more often the case) they may contain but also for the constant reminder of the myriad shapes of the unknown and the fact that one will never catalog them all, much less understand them, whether one has a single lifetime or a hundred with which to try.

Spirits lair in their own strange homes, and many still abide, at least partway, in the world of men. The territories to which they lay claim are warped and odd by human standards. Such primordial beings answer to no earthly authority in either the execution of their choices or the reasoning behind those choices. To most God-fearing Europeans, spirits are pagan demons or devils of some sort, and that assessment might as well be correct for all the hospitality the average person is apt to receive from one. Most such creatures have a curious sense of morality and a very different idea of where human beings fit in the greater scheme of things. It is said, by those with the erudition to make such bold claims, that the varieties of spirits in the world are without number, both in their individual classification and in their overarching "families," but these are concerns for scholars and sages. All that the average traveler in the medieval world needs to know is that these ephemeral beings are best avoided entirely, lest they turn their attentions, to whatever unknown and unfathomable ends, upon oneself.

In quarters further removed from the heart of Europe, the accounts grow even more unreal. In far-off Araby tales are told of *jinn* who walk the desert sands and of undying sorcerers who trace their lineages back to the days of the pharaohs. Upon the steppes of the Rus, one hears stories of great and terrible dragons and of deathless ancients who are one with the land. On the seas are terrible worms and sirens. The homes claimed by these beings are as varied as the creatures themselves. All that can be said with certainty is that such places are dangerous ground on which to tread, at least as dangerous as the castle of any vampire or the home of any magus.

To sum up, home and hearth are universal concepts, and all of the many things that lurk in the hidden corners of the Dark Medieval world value them. For some, it is a sacred institution, while others see it as a sanctum that must not be violated. Some small few even look to their homes as any normal person might. In almost every case, however, it is a place of shelter, rest and comfort. In this, if nothing else, the numberless souls, dark and bright, walking outside the bounds of common mortality are alike.





CHAPTER THREE: GUARDING THE GATES

"It is not unseemly for a man to die
fighting in defense of his country."

— Homer, *The Iliad*

This chapter deals with creating an area of influence, improving it, joining forces to reap the benefits of cooperation and guarding it all against the enemies that are sure to come. The chapter is intended for both players and Storytellers as a source of both story ideas and game systems on how to combine diverse interests, branch out into new areas and defend territory with mundane and supernatural means.

Strange Bedfellows

This is a book about players and their characters working together, with the players pooling their various Backgrounds in order for the characters to create a demesne that is larger than one of them could hold by himself. As such, most Storytellers will want to have the players create their characters together, making sure that the characters share a Background pool (as described on p. 157 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) and possibly also have common interests, goals and ambitions. Of course, interesting and intense chronicles can spring from a group that is divided in purpose or harbors internal backstabbing, but even such a group may want to pool their resources.

If the characters, be they a coterie of Cainites, a pack of Garou, a cabal of mages or an inquisitor cell, have not combined their assets to begin with, it can be a bit troublesome for them to do so when the game has started. Cooperation might not be one of the themes of the chronicle, but the players (and their characters) might later realize the benefits of working together. Their goals might require them to achieve a level of power that can only be reached through pooling their resources. Or the Storyteller might deliberately have set up the game so that the characters start out as independent individuals who must then find a way to work together to overcome a threat or obstacle. In an established group, the Storyteller, or the players, might wish to change tracks, focusing the game more on gaining power and influence. Perhaps the Storyteller sees the group slipping apart, with all too varied ambitions and goals making it unlikely the characters should stick together anymore. In such a case, forging a shared Background might be just the thing to bring the characters back together. As a Totem ties together a pack of werewolves, a newly discovered cray could be an ideal device to bring a scattered cabal of mages together, while a dockside area unclaimed by any Cainite will be a good reward for cooperation in a coterie that is drifting apart.

A chronicle that starts out with the characters not knowing each other or not sharing an Anchor Background can be an interesting and intense one. One of the key elements of roleplaying is interaction, and if the characters are required to combine their various resources, there will likely be a lot of talking, negotiation and deliberation (especially if the Storyteller or players have arranged that two or more of the characters have wildly different goals, ambitions or ideas). This generally works best with vampires, as the Children of Caine are infamous for their individual ambition and lack of trust. There is no reason why it cannot work with other kinds of characters, however. Mages are also quite fractious, and while werewolves and inquisitors might be united in a common holy cause, groups are still made up of individuals. A Shadow Lord from Hungary will have vastly different ideas than a Bone Gnawer from Poland on how to combine a number of Kinfolk and contacts in the nobility in order to secure control over — or shut down — a silver mine.

When it comes to characters trying to build an Anchor “after the fact,” it is important that all have something to contribute. If one of the players has sunk all her points into individual Backgrounds like Fount (or Ancestors, Generation, etc.), then she will not really have anything useful to give to a group trying to build a domain. Allies, Contacts, Resources, Influence, Domain, Retainers, Kinfolk (for werewolves) and even Mentor are all good contributing backgrounds. Not all

JUST TO REITERATE

With all this talk about pooling Backgrounds, it might be a good idea to take a look at the various Backgrounds and see which ones can actually be pooled.

The “standard” backgrounds available to all characters can be pooled. These are Allies, Contacts, Influence, Mentor and Resources. The demesne Backgrounds (Domain in *Vampire*, Chapter-House in *Inquisitor*, Chantry in *Mage* and Hunting Ground in *Werewolf*) can also be pooled and make for the most common Anchors.

For inquisitors, the Backgrounds of Flock and Holy Relics can be pooled. For mages, the Backgrounds of Cray and Library may be pooled. Sanctum might, with the Storyteller’s permission and a good story, be combined, though only for mages of the same Fellowship. Under normal circumstances, Familiar cannot be pooled, but see Chapter Four for a variation on this. For werewolves, Totem is always a pooled Background, but exists separately from any other Background pools can never be an Anchor. A Storyteller might allow Kinfolk to be pooled if the entire pack (or a majority) is from the same tribe.

characters need to possess the same Backgrounds. One might contribute the money to the project, another the laborers, a third the approval of the nobility and a fourth the assistance of a powerful patron.

By far the easiest, and also most logical, Anchor to build from scratch is a demesne Background. The demesne represents an area that the group controls in some fashion or another. It is also likely that this demesne is known to belong to the group. For vampires, this probably means that the local prince has recognized this as the coterie’s Domain (or that one of them is the prince). For werewolves, the demesne will be seen as the pack’s territory. For mages and inquisitors, the demesne *usually* only covers a building or an estate but sometimes can expand to include a larger area. This, of course, does not mean that the area is universally protected from others who might try to take it over, only that any ambitious enemies need to be either subtle in their approach or so heavy-handed as to deter intervention.

For a new group coming together, a demesne represents the characters’ shared territory, their sphere of influence from where their other joint ventures arise, and is a representation of the fact that they are committed to joining forces. It is probably also the place where they make their homes. As such, the entire group will have an interest in protecting and expanding the demesne. This makes it an ideal tool for tying the group

more closely together. Just going out and forging a brand new Anchor Background, or in fact any new Background, is not an easy task, however (if it were, there would be no reason to invest points in it from the start). Building up a new demesne, or extending an already existing one that one of the characters has, likely requires a lot of work (and roleplaying), but when it finally succeeds the players and their characters will be that much more interested in protecting and expanding it.

The first part of establishing a demesne is finding the territory. The problem is that most good territories are likely to have been taken already. A group can either try to take over an established demesne (but players should beware, as the Storyteller has probably read the section on guards and traps later in the chapter) or try to build up a suitable demesne from scratch, more or less. Different types of characters have different preferences when it comes to demesnes (see Chapter One), but beggars can't be choosers.

After a group has chosen its area, it needs to gain a measure of control over it, as well as make sure that others of its kind recognize it as the characters' demesne (unless they wish to keep it a secret). For vampires, getting the permission of the local Cainite lord is good idea, although it never comes easily. If an area has no recognized lord, it's probably so far away from everything that it will not suit the needs of a coterie. For werewolves, "marking territory," physically as well as spiritually, helps to indicate it as belonging to someone. The group should make sure to be on good terms with the nearest sept, especially if it isn't its own. Mages tend not to be as competitive as vampires for areas of control (except in the case of mystical sites; then they are even more so) and have a far less structured and organized society than either vampires or werewolves. The Batini, Hermetics and Messianic Voices have hierarchies that can recognize a certain area as "belonging" to a certain cabal of mages, but other Fellowships will have to make do on their own. Inquisitors usually seek the approval of a higher-ranking member of their order or the local Council of Faith when trying to establish themselves in a new area.

Obtaining practical control is not necessarily the same as owning the demesne, though if one is rich or noble, it can be. Bear in mind that in 1230, the Church or the local nobility owns most large areas of land, although people can own houses and smaller plots of land. Control means that the group is able to influence the affairs of the demesne, from having the ear of the village elders to blackmailing the city clerk in charge of a stretch of docks. In fact, control is actually more likely to mean sway when it comes to the mortals of the area and can be represented with other appropriate Backgrounds, such as Allies, Contacts or Influence. If a group is seen as having this kind of influence over a demesne, it truly allows it to claim the demesne and helps deter others from taking it over or starting trouble. The various types of characters handle this differently.

Vampires usually use blackmail, bribes, threats or other means of coercion to sway affairs in an area. Some young and inexperienced Cainites resort to the use of Disciplines or the blood oath, but older vampires frown upon this practice as unnecessarily heavy-handed and potentially dangerous. Using these tactics indicate that the Cainite is not intelligent and skilled enough to exert his influence in more subtle ways.

Werewolves, except for the Bone Gnawers and Warders of Men (and occasionally the Children of Gaia), rarely choose Hunting Grounds where the influence of the humans living there is of any import. For them, control means guarding the demesne against outside threats (see below). Bone Gnawers and Warders both tend to influence affairs in their demesnes through Kinfolk in strategic (though not necessarily powerful) positions.

Mage demesnes vary greatly, from ruins in the middle of the wilderness to the teeming masses of a large city. Their method of retaining power also varies, from mages who hold titles or membership in merchant houses to those who simply have friends in the right places. Some mages would rather not use their magic to gain the influence needed to hold a demesne, while others (especially pagan mages in pagan territory) have no such qualms. The Spirit-Talkers, the Valdaermen and members of the Old Faith are often respected among Commoners for their magical abilities, and as such securing a position of influence is easier.

Inquisitors have it relatively easy when it comes to influencing the affairs of their chosen demesne. After all, they are doing the Lord's work, and it would be a foolish man who did not heed the word of a Man of God. Of course, many inquisitors prefer to operate undercover, better to lure the enemies of God into a false sense of security. They tend to draw upon either their contacts within the Church or whatever wealth or nobility their backgrounds give them.

One character might already have a demesne, in which case the process is somewhat simpler. The characters who are to share this demesne need somehow to be "introduced" to it. It must be recognized that these new individuals are now also a part of the demesne, both by the people of the demesne itself and by those who know that the demesne is under the control of the character who first had it.

The Storyteller sets the level of the new demesne Background. One dot per character involved is generally a good starting point, though this depends somewhat on the type of demesne chosen. Smaller demesnes should have some dots assigned to security, while a larger demesne might not be fully recognized as the characters' territory yet, or some of it might fall outside their control. Good or bad roleplaying, clever ideas and any other factors the Storyteller thinks appropriate can influence

BUT WHAT DOES IT COST?

In general, Backgrounds cannot be bought with experience points (but they can be increased with Maturation points; see p. 166 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). If a group bands together in-game to create an Anchor Background, either a brand-new one or one that it built on a Background already possessed by one of the characters, a Storyteller might want to charge experience points. Charging experience points is entirely optional.

After the Anchor has been firmly established, each player contributes one experience point. If the Anchor is built on a Background possessed by one of the characters, so that the group is simply expanding that Background to include them all, then that player need not contribute experience. Contributing to an already existing Background does not increase the size of the demesne, unless the Storyteller decides so and the players have been working toward this as part of building the new Anchor. Contributing to an existing Background may increase its rating, since things like security and other options might change as more characters add their particular touches.

For example, four players have decided that it would be logical for their cabal of mages to try to build a chantry together after a few sessions of getting to know each other. After much toil and trouble, the new chantry stands ready and the Storyteller charges each player a single experience point for this new Anchor Background, which the Storyteller decides starts at four (based on the size of the area, already established in the chronicle). If one of the characters already had Chantry as a Background, the player of that character would not have to pay experience toward the new Anchor.

the final size of the new demesne. Creating a new demesne from scratch should take at least a few sessions, with plenty of opportunities for the characters to make choices, for good or ill.

Building a demesne after the chronicle has started often results in the players ending up with a smaller Domain than if they had put points in it from the start, as the starting size will usually be equal to the number of players contributing. This limits their other shared Backgrounds. Such is the price of not pooling from the start, and it is also a wonderful incentive to increase the size of a Domain.

Putting the Pieces Together

Once the group has managed to build up its Domain, it can also begin to pool other Backgrounds, as described on

p. 158 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*. Since the Anchor represents the common interest, the pooling might be something that has already started during the process of building the Anchor. Also, pooling Backgrounds allows the group to transcend the normal five-dot limit, but it is not as easy as simply adding up the dots and seeing what the new level is. At the very least, some rearranging of resources is required, as well as some introduction to contacts and some moving of servants. If one character has three dots of Allies, which are defined as friends among the bandits that roam the countryside, and another character has Allies 2, defined as clergy whom that character debates theology with, they cannot slap the two together and end up with Allies 5. They don't cover the same areas, and combining them will not yield a greater whole. Uniting to create a pool of Backgrounds requires changes to be made in the way the Backgrounds are described. If one character's Resources comes from the lands he holds by virtue of his nobility and another character's from the embezzlement her ghoul performs while working for a big merchant house, maybe it's time for the nobleman to trade his surplus grain through said merchant house.

Generally, a Storyteller will probably want to assign a penalty of minus one for each contributor who contributes more than one dot to Backgrounds pooled after the fact. For example, if a group of four characters is trying to pool their Contacts of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively, they end up with a pooled Contacts of 7. Once again, good roleplaying and clever ideas can reduce this penalty. A reduced total, however, is a good incentive to start rebuilding, which can lead to some good roleplaying opportunities.

Remember that no pooled background can exceed the Anchor Background. In the case of newly pooled Backgrounds after the creation of a new Anchor, this doesn't mean that the excess is lost or destroyed. Instead, it can be thought of as "in transit," unavailable for the moment, as the new Background pool is not yet large enough to incorporate it. Once the Anchor Background's rating is increased to accommodate the larger pool, more of it becomes available, at no cost. To continue the example above, if the newly created Anchor Background, Domain, has a rating of 6, then one level of Contacts is not available, though it will be so when the Anchor reaches 7. In story terms, this is because the coterie is so busy trying to keep up with expanding the physical size of its domain that the characters don't have time to keep in touch with all of their potential sources of information, and some of their more distant Contacts get ignored for a while.

Guards and Wards

One of the main problems with building a successful territory, be it a physical demesne, a network of merchants

or influence over nobles, is that others are likely to see just how useful the group's territory is and either try to take it away or destroy it. Elder Cainites fear the power of the young coterie, another cabal of mages wants the pray that the cabal has found or a power-hungry archbishop is not content to see a group of inquisitors swaying the nobles of his see. This is not a bad thing for a chronicle. After all, one of the cornerstones of roleplaying is experiencing troubles and overcoming them. Little fun lies in just leaning back and watching your character accumulate more and more influence without any difficulty whatsoever. Also, it is not realistic, even in dramatic terms. Nobody exists in a vacuum, and few people are able to gain power without stepping on a few toes on the way. Enemies are not the only threat; natural occurrences, such as weather or sickness, might threaten influence.

Threats can be both physical and social in the Dark Medieval world. They can also be either mundane or supernatural. It is impossible to guard against all kinds of threats, but a little preparation goes a long way. Remember that the examples below are the most well known and that the key to defending territory lies in improvisation and innovation.

The easiest threats to understand, and thus to instigate, are physical threats. Someone is trying to take over the group's territory, kill its contacts or threaten the people who grant them influence. If a pack of Warders uses its influence with a band of local mercenaries to attack the ruined keep where the Black Spiral Dancer Kinfolk live, the Dancers may attack the headquarters of the mercenaries and try to kill them all. If the coterie of young Cainites has managed to turn a waterfront bordello into a combined haven and feeding ground, the witch hunters can charge in during the day with torches, crucifixes and steel.

Physical threats are also generally quite easy to guard against. The Warders can post a few Kinfolk with silvered spears among the mercenaries, while the young coterie is likely to have a few guards and possibly even a ghoul watching them during the day. Setting traps is also a good way to discover or deter intruders — possibly both.

Social threats are those where the enemies attack more indirectly, using their influence to undermine the power base of the characters. The local Shadow Lords covet the village the players' pack claims as theirs and, instead of issuing a proper challenge, use their influence over the local *knez* to try to force the pack out. The corrupt and heretical nobleman tries to bribe members of the troupe's cell's Flock to betray it. Or the cabal of Messianic Voices who sees the characters' cabal of Old Faith mages as a pagan threat pulls some strings with an archbishop and suddenly a church is being built on the site of the sacred stone circle — using those very same stones. Of course, social-economical-political battles are

much more common among Cainites than outright armed conflict, even during the War of Princes. Such threats require more planning than a simple physical assault but are also much more complex and have less chance of doing real, lasting damage. Still, if an enemy manages to ruin a character's resources, destroy her influence and take over her domain, it is a lot more painful than simply killing her retainers.

Guards

Guards are a great asset. They can watch over the characters when they sleep (especially important for Cainites), guard the group's interests when they are away and, in a worst-case scenario, warn the group about intruders and buy a moment or two with their lives.

Loyal to the Damned

Vampires often make good use of guards. During their daylight sleep, they are especially vulnerable, so a strong haven and some good guards are essential to most Cainites (except for those Gangrel who sleep in the earth). Many Cainites consider guards an acceptable use of vitae; a ghoul guard is stronger, tougher and more loyal than a normal mortal, after all. On the other hand, some Cainites have found that their ghoul guards become possessive or extremely jealous. The Ventrue and Lasombra often have one or two ghouls under strong mental command to guard them. The Dominate Discipline tends to destroy creativity and initiative, but this is a small price to pay for a guard willing to die for his master without question. The Tzimisce are infamous for their *szlachta* ghouls (see p. 314 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*), monstrous creatures warped beyond humanity to become the perfect guardians. The Gangrel and Nosferatu use both ghoul and normal animals to guard their lairs and warn them of intruders. The Tzimisce also use animals, though they too are often warped by the Fiends' crafts. The Cappadocians are known to use reanimated corpses to guard their libraries and tombs and, of course, nobody knows what foul creatures the magical experiments and dark sorceries of the Tremere can produce.

Vampires tend toward a few elite guards, unless their territory is especially large. Most use either normal mortals or one or two ghouls commanding mortals. Some clans, most notably the Tremere, Tzimisce, Cappadocians and, to a lesser extent, the Assamites and Followers of Set, use supernatural guardians. The Tremere have their Gargoyles and various products of Thaumaturgy. The Tzimisce use spirits and demons of the land, sometimes given physical form, in addition to their grotesque ghouls. Even vampires with large demesnes more often focus on guarding their own havens, being the paranoid and selfish creatures they are. Lord Etienne d'Sangre, a Ventrue from the Languedoc, uses a

COMPEL THE GHOSTLY GUARDIAN

Level 3 Mortis Ritual

This ritual was developed by the Giovanni family to guard its warehouses and trading outposts against intruders, thieves and saboteurs. It calls up a spirit of a dead person to guard a specific building, which must be no larger than a large townhouse. The spirit has the ability to frighten away most intruders, as well as alert its master of intrusion. Very few non-Giovanni Cappadocians know this ritual, and it is almost unknown outside Italy.

System: This ritual requires the caster to know the name of a person who has died within the building to be protected, as well as possess a piece of that person's body or an item that was precious to the person in life (some Cappadocians prefer to murder someone in that building to make sure they have the needed ingredient). The difficulty of the ritual is standard for its level, but it takes five hours to perform. The caster paints a special mark in her own blood at every opening big enough for her to pass through (expending at least one blood point in the process). She must then sit as close to the center of the building as possible and call upon the name of the ghost to be summoned. If the ritual is successful, the temperature of the room drops noticeably for a few minutes. Botching the roll summons an angry ghost with all the powers of a normal guardian ghost (see below) but who is hostile to the summoner. The caster can give the guardian ghost a mental image of anyone who is to be allowed into the building. A caster can ward a number of houses equal to her permanent Willpower.

The guardian ghost is mainly capable of scaring away intruders with effects such as a swarm of insects, bleeding walls (the blood is merely ephemera and gives no nourishment to Cainites) or sudden drops in temperature. Animals refuse to enter the building, while normal mortals probably flee as soon as the effects start to show. Especially willful mortals, as well as supernatural creatures, must roll Courage (difficulty 6) or Willpower (for characters without Courage) in order not to flee. Those touched by God (or inquisitors who have spent Conviction) may resist the effects as usual (see Terror on page 163 of *Dark Ages: Inquisitor*). The guardian ghost can also alert the caster of the ritual to the intruder. If the caster is awake, the ghost sends a feeling of urgency. Should the caster be asleep, the ghost can enter her dreams and communicate the nature of the intrusion. Obfuscate, Gifts such as Blissful Ignorance, and other powers of misdirection can fool the ghost, should the intruder think to activate them.



simple peasant militia to ward the villages on his lands against bandits and marauding beasts, while his own castle is guarded by 21 armed and armored men, broken down into three squads of seven, each with a ghoul as commander. His sleeping chamber, deep in the cellars of the castle, is guarded by four ghouls whom Lord Etienne has Dominated to attack anyone and anything approaching the door to the chamber. While the peasants huddle in fear, the great lord feels relatively safe behind all his men-at-arms.

In Defense of Gaia

Werewolves rarely have guards whose job it is to fight against invaders, but rather simply to keep watch and sound an alarm should enemies be spotted. The Garou have a tendency to consider their territory something that they themselves must protect and see themselves as beyond the need for mere mortal (or even Kinfolk) guards to help them do so. When guards (or simply sentries) are required, the Garou mainly use their Kin rather than employing outsiders. Wolf Kin have the advantage of great senses and natural weaponry, while humans are better at identifying threats and can use weapons and armor. Werewolves also sometimes use spirits as guards, particularly around their caerns, though these are more likely to warn the Garou than join in the fray. Any tribe may use Kinfolk as guards and watchers around caerns, but each has a different approach. The Fenrir expect their Kin to fight, and fight well, while the Shadow Lords use them as spies, scouts and sometimes distractions. The Children of Gaia command their Kinfolk to draw back once the battle has begun. The Garou, after all, are quite capable of providing their own physical security.

Werewolves normally have as many guards as are needed to secure their domain (in caerns, at least one pack is usually assigned to guard duty at all times), if they have enough Kinfolk. The combination of Garou mistrust toward humans, the unsettling effect of the Curse and the fact that few werewolves have the resources to pay guards mean that non-Kin guards are a rarity. The Garou also figure that anything likely to cause trouble for werewolves will make humans run in fear or drive them insane, which for the most part is true.

Servants to the Magi

For mages, the use of guards varies from chantry to chantry. The Order of Hermes has a long and proud history of employing grogs, while the strong and independent rune-casters of Scandinavia pride themselves on being able to handle trouble without help. Mages face difficulties with normal guards, at least if those guards are faithful Christians (or Muslims). It takes a special kind of person to guard someone who is quite obviously in

league with the Devil. Those mages who practice their craft subtly or who live in areas where the population is more accepting of mages have less trouble finding people willing to be their guards. In fact, mages in pagan territories might find volunteers to guard them, as such mages are often seen as holy men and women. Some mages are also known to use magical beasts as guardians, mostly in sparsely populated areas (see the Servants Background in Chapter Three of **Dark Ages: Mage**). A few mages use their Familiars as guards, though most Familiars balk at this; they might protect individual mages, but dislike being put on guard duty.

In general, mages tend to be somewhat distrustful of Commoners, unless the mortal's family has a history of service to wielders of magic. Those mages who masquerade as Commoners usually employ a few select elite guards, while those who are more open about their powers tend either to seek out outcasts and dregs of society, who don't care whom they work for as long as they are paid, or to have people who share their own unique outlooks on life as guards. Mages, unless they are nobles or rich merchants, tend toward bodyguards rather than sentries. A valued and trusted guard might even find himself with some minor magical item, the better to guard his charge. Such items are frequently weapons or armor with a simple enchantment. Warding charms, amulets and other items of protection are also sometimes given, although it is a very selfless wizard who bestows a protective charm upon a servant if she can use it herself. Many mages try to cultivate a personal relationship with their guards, which results in a deeper level of loyalty.

For Christ and His Holy Church

Inquisitors frequently use guards, both to watch over their areas of influence and to provide extra shields in dangerous situations. Such guards will often be church soldiers, although a rich inquisitor might hire additional mercenaries, should he deem it necessary. From time to time, faithful young men or even knights pledge their services to an inquisitor. They are only very rarely turned away, especially if they are capable of paying for their own keep. Inquisitors should beware not to accept every brash young man whose eyes shine with faith, however. Stories abound about inquisitors who were betrayed by an exceptionally good actor or someone under the spell of the servants of Satan.

Inquisitors normally use common guards in all situations where secrecy is not essential. Since some of them receive support from the seemingly endless coffers of the Church (or the finite, but deep, coffers of the House of Murnau), their guards may be equipped with the best arms and armor. The guards are also likely to be loyal to the point of fanaticism, fully believing the service they provide to be a direct path to Heaven. Some guards even

go from merely believing in the Lord to having faith strong enough to stand against the foul demons and sorceries that the Inquisition battles. Inquisitors can be harsh masters, however, demanding total obedience and unquestioning loyalty as well as constant vigilance. Punishments against lax guards tend to be strict, and some of the less pious ones might run away or even turn against their employers. Mercenaries are normally loyal as long as the gold that pays them arrives on time, but they will not put up with too much abuse — at least, not without due monetary compensation.

Sword, Shield and Crossbow

When it comes to equipping guards, most employers recognize that a better equipped guard is more efficient. While most mercenaries supply their own gear, an employer must equip freshly hired guards himself.

It can be rather tempting for a wealthy employer to buy swords, metal shields, chain mail and crossbows for every guard. Aside from the difficulty of acquiring such a large order of arms and armor in most places, this is also highly impractical. First and foremost, local authorities are rarely happy to see someone equipping a personal army (of course, should the employer in question be a nobleman, a personal army might be expected). Legal considerations also intrude on such plans. In many areas of Western Europe, only the nobility may carry swords and metal armor. In addition, the Papacy has outlawed the use of crossbows against fellow Christians. Finally, one must take into account the skill and experience of the guards. Young peasant boys and dockside thugs are unlikely to have any experience in using a sword and kite shield, much less wearing a heavy suit of chain mail. On the other hand, most peasants have some sort of skill with either a small bow, a sling or both, and as such these weapons are likely to be better for ranged weaponry. A hand axe or spear is a much better melee weapon for a recently recruited watchman, as it is both cheap and easy to use. For armor, boiled or reinforced leather should suffice, possibly with a small wooden shield.

Sometimes more specialized equipment is desired. Many Cainites equip their guardian ghouls with stakes or wooden-headed crossbow bolts. Garou have been known to issue low-level Fetishes to their Kinfolk, and a soldier of the Inquisition will often find himself in possession of at least a blessed crucifix and sometimes a weapon crafted by the Forge of God *ritus*, though this is generally reserved for the most trusted of servants. Such equipment can also attract unwanted attention. The blessed cross might be a beacon to the servants of the Adversary, allowing them to discover the location of a hidden chapter house. While giving a Kinfolk guard a silver dagger when rival Garou attack may seem a wise idea, that same dagger may wind up aimed at the wrong werewolf if that cousin ever feels mistreated.

Animal Guardians

Animals have been used as guards by normal mortals for millennia and have proven their worth as sentries. As noted above, the Nosferatu and Gangrel clans often use animals for guard duty, but this practice is not limited to the clans who commonly practice Animalism. Not only can any Cainite learn this Discipline, given the inclination and an instructor, but the application of vitae can often be a substitute for it (and the combination of both vitae and Animalism yields even better results). However, simply using blood can sometimes result in an uncontrollable, frenzied beast that must be put down. Therefore, some high-status vampires employ Nosferatu or Gangrel retainers (or ghouls taught by same) to train such beasts. In Eastern Europe, the Animalistic Bratovich family, experts in such training, tend the kennels of the Tzimisce clan. In fact, the hellhounds that come from these kennels are becoming quite renowned (or, more properly, feared) throughout Eastern Europe. Many Cainites who were nobles in life retain their guard dogs, hoping that the instincts of these animals will help them detect intruders veiled in supernatural powers. Rats, stray cats and feral dogs are a favorite for Nosferatu, while nomadic Gangrel and Ravnos seem to prefer wolves. Some Ravnos entertainers have been known to travel with bears. Birds of prey are often used, though a Cainite must be careful not to use a bird above her perceived station. In the Middle Ages, one's status limits the types of birds one could fly. Commoners are allowed to hunt with owls, the clergy use the sparrow hawk, ladies the merlin, knights and minor nobility use goshawks, major nobles hunt with peregrine falcons, and the jerfalcon is reserved for royalty. Of course, only Cainites who have any sort of respect for mortal conventions observe these rules.

Apart from wolf Kinfolk, the Garou have some trouble using animals as guards. Predatory animals tend to attack Garou out of fear or flee, while prey animals simply bolt (and rarely make good guards anyway). The Bone Gnawers of London have had a great deal of success using rats as guardians of their urban caern, but this is probably due to the favor of their tribal totem. A few Fenrir and Shadow Lord septs have trained ravens and crows, but apart from this, animal guards are an extreme rarity among the Garou.

Among the mages, those belonging to the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers and the Valdaermen are the most likely to use animals as guards. In fact, many Spirit-Talkers prefer animal guards to human ones and are known to use their spirit magics to increase the intelligence and natural abilities of those animals. Valdaermen are renowned for their friendship with wolves and ravens, while members of the Old Faith often have animals protecting their sacred groves and stone circles.

The Order of Hermes looks down upon animals as "lesser beings" and prefers magical creations in the shape of animals instead. The Ahl-i-Batin and Messianic Voices sometimes employ guard dogs in the manner of Commoners.

While inquisitors lack the magical abilities to talk directly to animals, quite a few animal trainers reside among those who know the Noah's Favor Orison. Inquisitors are especially fond of large hounds; the loyalty of a good dog is inspiring, and their ability to track, not to mention attack, is invaluable. In addition, many inquisitors believe that dogs can sniff out infernal taint so that even the Devil's gifts cannot help a monster hide. Inquisitors also employ hunting birds such as falcons, and any inquisitor who is also a knight needs at least one warhorse (for animal statistics, see pp. 310–312 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*).

Recruitment

Recruiting guards can be something of a problem. No businesses exist where an ambitious merchant can go to hire guards. While noblemen might have guardsmen who have been in the family for generations, other people must look elsewhere.

At first, recruiting mercenaries might seem like a good answer. With the constant conflicts of varying sizes in Europe, most large countries host a good number of people who make their living as professional soldiers. After the end of the Albigensian Crusade, a large number of French, German, English and Aragonian mercenaries found themselves without work. Mercenaries come with not only their own equipment but also with combat skills and, more importantly, experience in facing threats. The local blacksmith's son might be a giant among men and have been taught to use a battleaxe quite efficiently, but that is of no use if he runs away at the first sight of blood. However, mercenaries are generally violent, restless and easily bored. Without suitable distractions, mercenaries are likely to make their own fun with the locals, something that can easily get out of hand. This is not to say that hiring mercenaries is always a bad idea. Indeed, bringing in a group of professional soldiers at a time when the group expects a physical assault on its holdings can shore up the odds on its side. Unfortunately, mercenaries tend to be expensive. One common option is hiring crippled mercenaries (or crippled soldiers discharged by their lord). While a soldier who can hardly walk without a crutch might be useless on a battlefield, he can still fire a crossbow, keep his eyes open and shout an alarm. What's more, soldiers and mercenaries who cannot campaign due to their wounds might still be

able to train others in the use of weapons and armor. Some vampires and mages have been known to use supernatural powers to heal past injuries, restoring the mercenary to full health. While this might seem like a good way to gain such a person's loyalty, it can also result in rumors about witchcraft. The mercenary in question might also be Christian enough to object to having such sorceries performed on him (even if he doesn't gain such sensibilities until after the fact).

The larger cities offer two main avenues of recruitment. The first is to recruit among the younger sons of craftsmen and traders, especially those who have yet to find apprenticeships. These young men might not have much experience in the use of weapons, but with a little training, they can often perform quite adequately. The second option is to recruit among the dregs of the city. In a port city are likely some waterfront thugs willing to fight, and all large cities have beggars, thieves and footpads. Such people are generally well versed in the use of knife and club, and while they are seldom the most moral people, they can often be counted on to remain loyal toward their employer if she is willing to pay.

In or near villages and towns, one can recruit among the peasants. Many young peasant sons can be persuaded to leave the drudgery of the farm behind for what seems like a far more exciting and rewarding life. It is usually best to recruit among freemen, as the local lord is likely to protest someone stealing his serfs. Like the sons of craftsmen, peasant boys generally have little skill and experience with weapons, although some of them might have hunted with sling or bow.

Sometimes recruitment is a less arduous process. Werewolves can often find more or less willing guards among their Kinfolk. Some mages can actually create their own guards. Inquisitors might find willing recruits among their Flock. And some vampires simply snatch mortals away and either subject them to the blood oath, control their minds, corrupt them to their foul cause (in the case of Baali) or warp them beyond all humanity, forcing the poor creatures to remain with the vampire or face destruction at the hands of a mob (a favored tactic of the Tzimisce).

A Place to Call My Own

Everyone has to live (or at least reside) somewhere, and while Red Talons and Spirit-Talkers might be quite comfortable in dank caves, most other characters want a dwelling of some kind. The type of house which the characters have depends upon a number of factors: the power base of the group, their resources and their desire for protection and visibility.

The most common building in Europe is the peasant's cottage. This is constructed from wattle and daub — a wooden frame spackled with mud, combined with straw for greater strength. It often has a foundation of stone blocks, if such can be quarried nearby. Variations on mud include clay and dung. The roof is made of thatch, simple bundles of straw or sometimes peat, though this requires more framework. In southern Europe, cottages might be made of mud bricks baked in the sun, while cottages in northern Germany, Denmark and southern Sweden are sometimes made of cut peat. In many mountainous areas, peasant huts are made of drywall — stones and small boulders stacked into walls without mortar or anything else to hold them together. The roof has a hole for smoke to escape, the door is made of wooden planks loosely nailed together (or just tied with a thin rope) and might have a latch to lock it with, if the peasant is quite wealthy, while the windows are covered by wooden shutters. This type of cottage offers little, if any, kind of security, and Cainites would need to take special measures (closing the hole in the roof for starters) to stop the sunlight from coming in. The advantage is that nobody looks twice at such a cottage. This type of cottage is also appropriate for a hunter, woodsman or fisherman. Building such a cottage simply requires three dots of Crafts or two with a field of expertise, though building a drywall cottage is somewhat trickier, demanding a field of

expertise in stone constructions. Paying a group of peasants to build a cottage (as opposed to simply commanding them to do so because you are their liege lord) requires Resources 1. Construction time is between two and five weeks.

In large towns and cities, houses are often timbered. This is a type of wattle and daub, where the timber frame contains more wood and the stone foundation goes higher. Doors are likely made of sturdier timbers and the door can be latched or even barred from the inside. Window shutters are also better quality. If the person owning the house has enough money, the door might feature an actual lock, the roof may have a chimney, and the windows might have glass in addition to shutters. In areas where slate is easily accessible, such as Wales and the mountainous parts of Germany and France, the roof may be slated. Elsewhere, this is usually too costly. The cheapest version of this kind of construction can also be applied to stables and barracks. This type of building offers the security of sturdy doors and shutters and raises no eyebrows in a city, town or large village. It could belong to a relatively wealthy freeman farmer. The cost to have such a building constructed requires Resources 2 or 3. Construction time is between one and two months.

Churches, monasteries, warehouses belonging to wealthy merchants and the townhouses and manors of noblemen or church officials are usually the strongest constructions next to actual castles and also the most expensive to build. Construction varies depending on the materials present and the resources expended — either stone, timber or fired bricks. In most places in Europe, stone quarries are close enough that such a building can be made of large stones held together with mortar. This is expensive, however, and generally reserved for churches, manors and buildings constructed near such quarries. In Wales, stone is much easier to acquire than wood, so most buildings are made from stone. In Norway, churches are traditionally built from timber. Monasteries are often constructed from large bricks made by the monks, giving rise to the name “monk-stones.” Windows, if any exist, are shuttered and either have glass panes or iron bars. Doors are made of strong planks or single, large boards of wood cut to shape. Doors are preferably made of oak and are sometimes bound in iron. Locks and either a latch or a heavy bar is used to secure the door against intruders. The roof is generally shingled, slated (with wood or actual slate) or covered with copper or lead. Such a building offers a great deal of security, the degree depending on what the building is intended for. A church is often surprisingly defensible, since in many villages, towns and

THE BROCHS OF SCOTLAND

Scattered across the Scottish highlands are small stone towers which the locals call brochs. They are usually two stories high, open-topped and no larger than a peasant's cottage. While they look like simple drywall towers from the outside, the insides of the stones have been fused together by extreme heat, creating a wall stronger than most castles. Nobody knows who built the brochs — the locals attribute them to the faeries, but the Fianna, who have actually talked to the fae, know that this is not the case and suspect that it was a technique known by the White Howlers and their Kinfolk. Whatever the truth of the matter, the technique has been lost, but the brochs still stand and from time to time host new inhabitants. While local peasants shun the towers, brigands, Old Faith mages and Gangrel vampires have all been known to make their homes in brochs. The first order of business is often to construct a roof.

Breaking through the wall of a broch is as difficult as breaking through a well constructed castle wall.

even some cities churches are designed to be places for people to go for protection in times of war. Warehouses are usually built with an eye toward preventing people from breaking in. Monasteries that lie well off the beaten path have learned to add some sort of defense against marauding bandits and even fouler things that cannot be driven away by prayer. Finally, the manors and town houses of the wealthy, the nobility and the bishops are often not only lavish, but also made to withstand a direct assault. While such buildings offer both defense and space, they are highly visible and also horrendously expensive to construct. Even the most ramshackle warehouse requires Resources 3 expenditure, most churches necessitate Resources 4, while a monastery or manor starts at 5 and goes up from there. Construction time varies from a single month to years.

Castles are the most magnificent, most defensible and most expensive structure of the day. They vary from simple motte and bailey — a hill (the motte) upon which sits the lord's stronghold, a log or stone tower, with the enclosed courtyard of the bailey below — to castles that incorporate small villages within their walls. Castles are always constructed of stone, sometimes with earthen ramparts or a wooden palisade. Oaken gates reinforced by iron bands and sometimes with portcullises bar doorways to the outside world. Windows have glass panes and/or strong shutters. Entryways are protected by murder holes for pouring boiling oil on intruders or by arrow alleys where soldiers can fire bows or crossbows at the enemy. Traps (see below) can be integrated to offer even more protection. Such castles offer the highest levels of security, defensibility and visibility. A well constructed castle can endure sieges for more than a year. However, castles are not only expensive, they often require a noble title as well. Cost varies greatly. A single square tower in a valley in the Carpathians might be a Resources 5 expenditure, while castles such as Carcassonne and Crak des Chevalier will likely be beyond the means of anyone but the most wealthy of characters. Construction time is no less than a year and frequently five years or more.

One option for those who would like the space and protection a castle offers is to take over a ruined castle. Most of Europe holds few empty castles, but due to the recent Albigensian crusade, several castles in the Languedoc area now stand abandoned. During Simon de Montfort's campaign against the nobles of Occitania, time was often an issue, and many times a defeated castle was not torn down but simply torched along with the inhabitants. These castles still stand, not as strong as they once were, but not in total ruins either. They typically lie atop mountains or rocky

hills, limiting access and increasing defensibility. So far, the political climate in the south of France is so confused that very few of these ruined castles have been reclaimed.

In the days of the Vikings, large log halls dominated the Scandinavian towns and villages. While mortals have long stopped building such longhouses, the Get of Fenris still do, both in the septs and in the villages where their Kinfolk live. This type of building has also spread among the other Garou, and one can find them in many septs that lie in woodland areas, from the Shadow Lord septs in Eastern Europe to the Fianna ones in the British Isles. The longhouses appeal to the Garou, as they are not too sophisticated to construct, offer protection against the elements and are big and sturdy enough for a large number of people to congregate in. When all members of the sept not on guard duty gather in such a hall, it promotes a strong sense of kinship.

Breaking and Entering

Breaking into a dwelling is generally the function of Legerdemain, Strength or, given enough time and tools, Crafts. Of course, many houses don't even have a simple latch, enabling people to "open and enter" rather than break anything.

With Legerdemain, an intruder can slip latches with a thin piece of metal, work a bolt, cut ropes used to bind shutters with a slender dagger or try his hand at the new art of lock-picking. All of these activities require a Dexterity + Legerdemain roll. Without proper tools, the difficulty can go up from +1 (improvised, but functional tool) to +3 (no tools whatsoever). The Storyteller is free to determine that a given task is impossible without tools (for more information about crime in the Dark Medieval world, see *The Ashen Thief*).

Slipping a latch: Usually difficulty 5 and requires only one success. Better-constructed doors or window shutters modify the difficulty upward, while a heavier latch requires more successes. Lifting a bar requires an opening large enough to put something through that can take the weight of the bar. If such an opening exists, the roll is Strength + Legerdemain.

Working a bolt: It is usually possible to work open a bolt with a dagger or another slim but sturdy piece of metal. This takes time, however. The difficulty of the roll is 7, the number of successes required varies from 5–10, and each roll represents a minute of work.

Cutting a rope: Sometimes ropes are used in place of latches or bolts. Cutting such a rope is easy enough, if a dagger can be slipped in. The difficulty of

the roll depends on how wide the crack is (6 is standard, but the difficulty can range from 5 to 9).

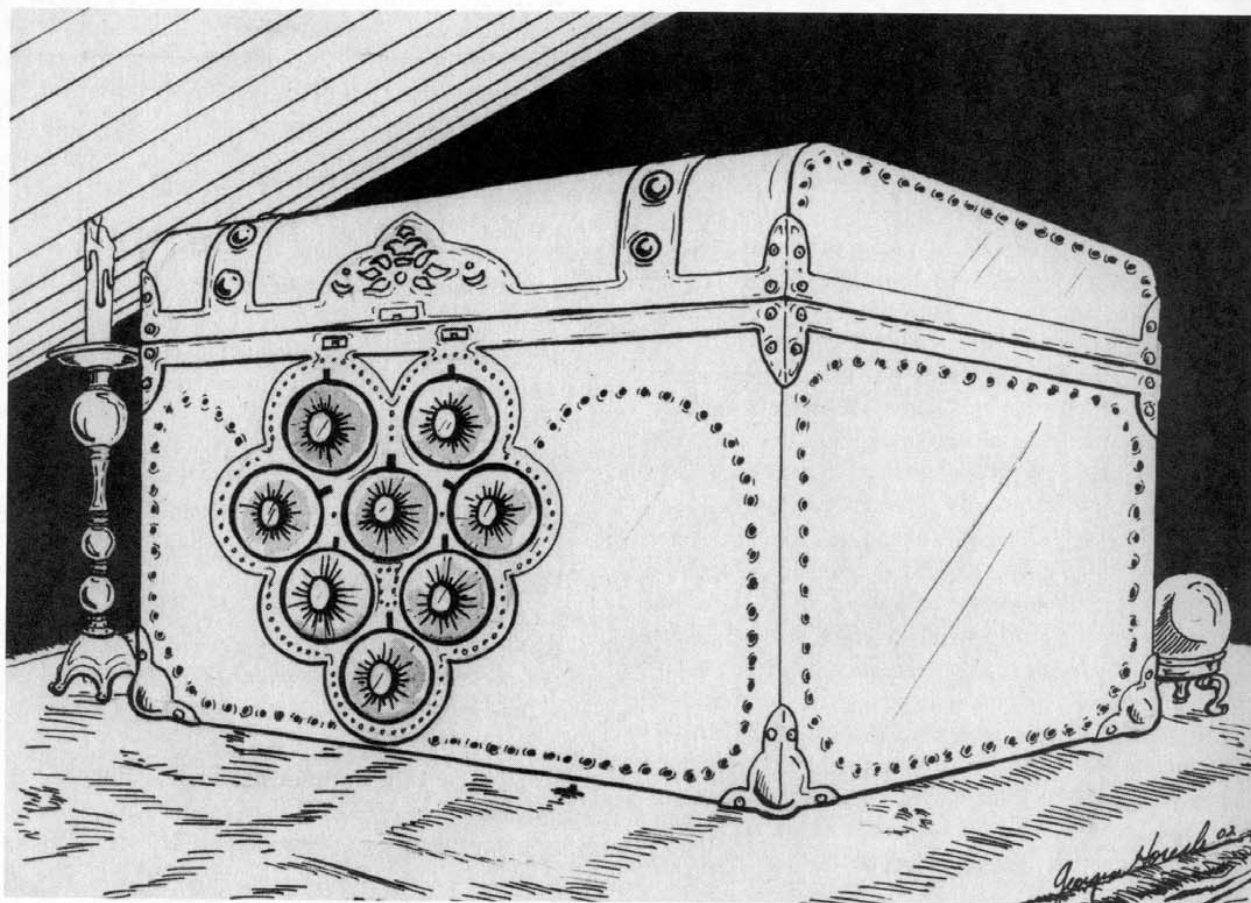
Picking a lock: While the locks of 13th-century Europe aren't too complex, the art of lock-picking isn't all that sophisticated either. A Storyteller is free to declare that picking a lock is impossible without a relevant specialty and that it cannot be attempted without tools. Difficulty depends on the quality of the lock, 6 for a typical front door up to 9 for a well made padlock. Opening a lock typically requires five successes, with each roll representing 10 seconds of work.

Breaking into a building is somewhat less subtle than using Legerdemain, but sometimes it is the best way to go. Smashing through a door or wall is considered a Feat of Strength (see page 228 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*), while breaking through with an axe or hammer is an extended Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6).

Bashing down a door: A weak door held together with rope or a few nails is considered a Feat of Strength 2. A sturdier door requires a Feat of Strength 4, and the best plank door is a Feat of Strength 5. An ironbound door or a door made from a single piece of wood is a Feat of Strength 7. A castle gate can be broken through with a Feat of Strength 10 or 11 for a reinforced gate (provided the would-be attacker isn't shot with an arrow or doused in oil first). Lifting a portcullis is a Feat of Strength 11.

AL-JAZARI AND THE BOOK ABOUT CLEVER MECHANISMS

Sometime in the late 12th century, a Muslim inventor wrote the *Book about Clever Mechanisms*, describing various mechanical contraptions. One of these is a strongbox with a combination lock consisting of eight individual dials, each with more than 10 different settings. The result is a mind-boggling *four billion* possible combinations. Many nobles and rich merchants of the Middle East have had strongboxes, chests and even doors constructed using al-Jazari's principles. These combination locks have also delighted and intrigued members of the Ahl-i-Batin, who have begun to wonder if al-Jazari was one of their own. Several Lasombra, Nosferatu and Toreador have also, for various reasons, expressed interest in al-Jazari's work. These strongboxes, as well as copies of the book itself, are slowly making their way into Western Europe — it is said that they have become all the rage in Venice and the other Italian city-states.



Chopping through a door takes four successes for a weak door, six for a sturdier door and eight for the best plank door. An ironbound or single-piece door takes 12 successes and a castle gate takes 30. Each roll represents one round of work. A portcullis takes half an hour's work to get through with the right tools. A latch or bolt increases the difficulty of the Feat of Strength by one, while a bar also adds one to the successes needed to hack through it.

Smashing a window: Anyone with Strength 1 may smash a glass pane, though a Dexterity roll must be made to avoid a single lethal health level of damage. Wearing gloves or using a tool prevents this, of course. Punching through shutters is a Feat of Strength 2 for simple shutters, 3 for heavier ones and 4 for the best oaken types. Hacking through shutters requires two successes for simple shutters, three for heavier ones and four for the best, with each roll representing one round of work. Bending iron bars or simply ripping them from the stone is a Feat of Strength 6 or 7, depending on thickness and qualities, while bashing them out with a tool requires 10–15 successes, with each roll representing one minute of work. Sawing or filing through bars can take hours.

Breaking down the walls: Breaking through a wattle wall is a Feat of Strength 3. There is no functional difference for the kind of material used, though some more refined characters might object to going through a dung wall. Breaking down a dry wall or mud-brick wall is also a Feat of Strength 3 but requires a Dexterity roll to avoid three health levels of bashing damage from debris (this may be soaked). Smashing down a timbered wall is a Feat of Strength 5, while going through a wall of wooden planks or boards is a Feat of Strength 6. Punching through a palisade, a log hall wall or a wall made of fired bricks is a Feat of Strength 9, and breaking through a castle wall is a Feat of Strength 14 (getting through one with hammers and picks can take more than a day). Creating a man-sized hole in a wall with an axe or hammer requires six successes for a wattle wall and eight for a dry wall (which will dull the edge of an axe) or mud-brick wall. A timbered wall requires eight successes with an axe, 11 with a hammer, while a wall of wooden planks or boards requires 10 successes with an axe, 13 with a hammer. Each roll represents one round of work. Chopping through a palisade, log hall wall or wall of fired bricks (which dulls the edge of an axe) requires 15 successes, with each roll representing five minutes of work.

Down through the roof: Jumping through a thatched roof is a Feat of Strength 3, and a Dexterity + Athletics roll must be made in order to avoid two levels of bashing damage from the fall. Pulling away enough thatch to climb through takes two rounds. Jumping through a peat roof is a Feat of Strength 4. Smashing through a slate or shingle roof is a Feat of Strength 6. Getting through a metal roof or the heavy wooden roof of a castle is a Feat of Strength 12. Hacking through a thatched roof re-

quires three successes, a peat roof requires five, and a slate or shingle roof takes seven. Each roll represents one round of work. Getting through a metal or heavy wooden roof takes 15 successes, with each roll representing five minutes of work.

Traps

One of the main problems with a group having its own domain is that it ties the characters down. Their enemies know where they are and, with some scouting, how to get to them. As such, traps are a good way for a group to protect itself and its dwelling.

In the world of mortals, traps are usually used by hunters to catch animals and by rich folk to protect their chests and jewel boxes. Only the most paranoid nobles and merchants use traps in their homes. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Trap-making (a field of expertise under Crafts) is practiced mainly by Italian craftsmen, though the craft has spread beyond the city-states. However, among those immersed in the supernatural world, paranoia is often a survival trait, and traps of varying ingenuity are routinely constructed in the dwellings of vampires, inquisitors, mages and even werewolves.

Two kinds of traps exist: natural and mechanical. Natural traps are mainly used by hunters and can be constructed with a few tools out of natural materials. Examples are pit traps, snares and rockfalls. Under most circumstances, natural traps are created outdoors. Mechanical traps require specialized tools and skills and often incorporate metal. Creating natural traps requires an Perception + Survival roll, while constructing mechanical traps requires Intelligence + Crafts (Trap-making).

Some of the more commonly used traps are presented below. Each trap is rated by **Type**, **Complexity**, **Time** and **Cost**. Type is either N for natural or M for mechanical. The first number of the Complexity is the difficulty for the trap creation roll, while the second is the number of successes needed to create the trap. Botching a roll resets the total number of successes to 0, while botching without any successes at all totally ruins the process, with consequences left up to the Storyteller. Time is the amount of time each roll represents, and Cost is the level of Resources required to create a particular trap.

Natural Traps

Natural traps are by far the easiest to create, and more than one person can cooperate on the effort to reduce the time needed. The player of the character in charge of the trap-making (usually the person with the highest Survival) makes the roll, but each person helping adds a number of dice to the pool equal to her character's Survival score. If a character has no Survival, she may still be able to help — two assistants without

Survival add a single die to the pool. The character in charge cannot more than double her dice pool with assistants. Natural traps are normally triggered by a rope or vine, though pit traps are, of course, triggered by walking across them. If the trap is designed to be triggered not by trip-rope but by a guard, the Complexity is reduced by 0/-2 and time by 25%. Natural pit traps cannot be triggered by guards.

Spotting natural traps is quite difficult. If someone is not actively looking for a trap, spotting the trap requires a Perception + Alertness or Survival roll (difficulty 8). If a person is specifically looking out for traps or searching the area, the difficulty drops to 6. If desired, more effort can be made to camouflage the trap. Adding 25% to Time means two successes are needed on the roll to spot the trap, adding 50% requires three successes, and doubling the time raises the difficulty on the roll to spot the trap by one.

Natural traps have no Cost, since they can be constructed out of natural materials. This assumes that the character building the trap has the right tool for the job, such as a spade or shovel (or can change into a form equipped for digging) for a pit trap.

The main problem with natural traps is where to place them. Hunters place their traps on game trails or near watering holes, but those who wish to use such traps to guard their demesne against intruders must have some idea about where the intruders are coming from. Limiting the access to the demesne to one or a few routes is one of the best ways to do this.

Example: Fionn Spear-Thrower, a Fianna Philodox, is approached by the Kinfolk of his home village, who tell him of monstrous creatures that attack them and steal away their children. Fionn, realizing that these creatures could be fomori, decides to capture them for interrogation and inspection. He asks his pack for help but realizes that they can guard only some of the access to the village. Remembering the days spent hunting bears with his father, Fionn decides to dig a normal-sized pit trap on a path the pack will not be watching. He has a Perception of 3 and a Survival of 3. His pack, consisting of four more Garou, helps out. The other Garou have Survival 3, 2, 1 and 1. This adds six dice to Fionn's pool; the last die is lost because Fionn cannot more than double his pool from assistance. Fionn also decides to invest some effort in concealing the pit and adds 50% to the construction time, meaning that three successes are needed on the roll to spot the trap. This means that the final roll is 12 dice, against a difficulty of 5, with each roll representing 90 minutes work. Twelve successes are needed in order to complete the trap and it costs the pack nothing except sweat. It takes the pack around three hours to construct the pit (in other words, the player takes only two rolls to accumulate the necessary successes).

Mechanical Traps

Mechanical traps are a good deal more intricate and difficult to construct. The statistics for the mechanical traps below assume that they are constructed at the same time as the structure in which they are created. If traps are added to an already-built house, manor or castle, then Complexity goes up by +1/+25%, Time increases by 25%, and Cost rises by 1 (maximum 5). Most mechanical traps are triggered by a trip-wire. Spotting such a wire follows the rules for spotting a trip-rope or vine, except that Crafts (Trap-making) is substituted for Survival. However, traps using trip-wires can be constructed to use pressure-plates instead. This is exceptionally tricky, adding +1/0 to Complexity, 25% to Time and 1 to Cost. If a trap is activated by pressure-plate, then it is impossible to spot unless one is actively looking; even then, the difficulty is 8. Mechanical traps can also be better hidden, following the rules presented for natural traps, but if Time is doubled, then the Cost of the traps rises by one (maximum 5). More money can be spent to facilitate the construction of a mechanical trap, representing the craftsman buying better tools, working longer hours, hiring a journeyman to help, etc. For each additional dot of available Resources, Complexity is reduced by 0/-1 and Time by 25%. Time cannot be reduced below 50% like this, and Complexity cannot go under half the starting value. This extra cost is added *after* the cost for hiding the trap better, pressure-plate, etc.

Should a character or an ally have the Craft (Trap-making) skill herself, the Cost of the trap is reduced by one. This reduction is factored before all other modifications.

Most mechanical traps must be reset after each use. This can be done by anyone with at least a single dot in Crafts (Trap-making).

Example: Lord Bajamonte di Milano, a Lasombra, has been informed that his childe has received the prince's permission to commit Amaranth upon him. Lord Bajamonte decides to add some protection to his city manor. He hires a local master craftsman to install a swinging axe trap in the corridor leading to his sleeping chamber. Valuing his soul more than his money, Lord Bajamonte spares no expense (he has Resources 5). Knowing that his childe and whatever mercenary scum he can assemble are likely to be overconfident, he opts for no additional concealment and the normal trip-wire. Since the trap must be installed in an already-built dwelling, Complexity rises to 8/26, Time goes up by 25%, and Cost becomes 4. Upping the cost to 5 reduces Complexity to 8/25 and Time back to one day. Lord Bajamonte has managed to hire himself an expert in the field of trap construction, and two weeks later the new trap is ready.

Examples

Pit Trap

Type: N **Complexity:** 5/12
Time: 1 hour **Cost:** N/A

This is a very simple trap: a big hole covered with a thin mesh of branches and then camouflaged with leaves. The statistics above assume a 10-foot-deep pit, inflicting a single health level of bashing damage (see the rules for Falling on p. 256 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). The sides are generally slightly sloping outward and the edges curved so that it is difficult to climb out of the pit. To climb out a character must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) and accrue at least three successes.

The pit can be made deeper. Every additional 10 feet of depth add +1/+6 to Complexity and one health level to the damage inflicted. Also, no normal person can climb out of a pit deeper than 10 feet. The trapper can also add wood spikes at the bottom of the pit. Short spikes add 0/+3 to Complexity and change the falling damage to lethal. Long spikes add +0/+9 to Complexity, change the falling damage to lethal and add two health levels to that damage. It is up to the Storyteller to determine if a vampire can be staked by falling into a pit trap with wood spikes.

Pit traps can also be made mechanically in buildings, in which case it is a trap door, not a mesh of branches that the victim falls through. A mechanical pit trap is **Complexity:** 6/12, **Time:** 1 day, **Cost:** •• and doubles the penalties for not being constructed along with the building. All the options available to a natural pit trap apply to a mechanical one, but stakes put at the bottom are normally made of iron, not wood. The mechanical version is considered to be a pressure-plate trap for purposes of detection. Some of these traps deposit their victims in cages or in rooms containing nasty surprises.

Snare

Type: N **Complexity:** 7/6
Time: 30 minutes **Cost:** N/A

A snare is a noose of rope or vine placed on the ground and with the other end tied to a small tree or large branch, which is bent down and secured with another rope or vine. If someone triggers the snare, the tree or branch is released, whips back into its former position and pulls the victim up by her foot, leaving her to dangle in the air. Freeing oneself from such a trap is difficult, requiring both a sharp blade and some athletic skill. Drawing a blade while hanging upside-down is a Dexterity + Melee roll, difficulty 5 for daggers, 6 for one-handed swords and 7 for bastard and two-handed swords. Pulling oneself up and cutting the rope requires a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 9).

Swinging Branch

Type: N **Complexity:** 6/6
Time: 10 minutes **Cost:** N/A

This is a very simple trap, just a large branch bent back and lightly secured in place, so that when triggered it swings out and hits the person triggering it. A swinging branch normally inflicts four dice of bashing damage, and the attack can be avoided by rolling Dexterity + Dodge (difficulty 9), with each success resulting in one fewer die of damage. If the Dodge roll is botched, the branch hits the head and inflicts five dice of lethal damage. Truly malicious sorts add spikes to the branch. Wood spikes add 0/+3 to Complexity, change the damage to lethal and inflict an automatic health level of damage (unless dodged completely). A vampire who botches the Dodge roll may be staked at the Storyteller's discretion. Metal spikes add +1/+3 to Complexity, change the cost to •, make the damage lethal and inflict two automatic health levels of damage.

This trap can also be constructed as a mechanical trap. Here, a specially cut length of wood is used and is pulled back using the same technique used for catapults or mangonels. It is normally placed around a corner. If placed along a corridor, the opening where the wood is to exit is very obvious, decreasing the difficulty of spotting the trap by one. A mechanical swinging "branch" trap is **Complexity:** 6/10, **Time:** 3 hours, **Cost:** •• and inflicts five dice of damage. The mechanical version can be spiked as well, but adding metal spikes does not increase the cost. A very nasty variation on the mechanical trap version is the back-breaker. This uses three pieces of wood. Two of these pieces swing out at chest and knee height, while the last comes in from the other side, between those two. The result is devastating. The trap inflicts seven levels of bashing damage and forces the victim to make a Stamina roll (difficulty 3 + the number of health levels damage suffered after soak). If the roll fails, the victim's back is broken, reducing her instantly to Crippled (if not already there). Even if a mortal heals from this, she loses one dot from Strength and Stamina and two from Dexterity. The back-breaker cannot be dodged.

Rockfall

Type: N **Complexity:** 8/12
Time: 2 hours **Cost:** N/A

This trap consists of a number of rocks placed high up in a tree. When the trap is triggered, the rocks fall down on the victim. The rocks are quite visible and detecting the trap is at -1 difficulty. The falling rocks inflict five dice of lethal damage, as the rocks tend to strike the head. Adding more rocks makes the trap more visible but also more damaging. For each additional -1 on the difficulty to detect the rocks, damage increases by one and Complexity rises by 0/+1.



This trap can also be constructed as a mechanical trap, with a trapdoor in the ceiling. This version of the trap is **Complexity: 6/12**, **Time: 1 day**, **Cost: ••** and doubles the penalties for not being constructed along with the building. The mechanical version of the trap is no easier to spot than other traps, but each two dice increase in damage add +1/+2 to Complexity and +1 to Cost, as a sturdier trapdoor must be constructed.

Broken Step

Type: Special **Complexity: 7/3**
Time: 10 minutes **Cost: N/A**

While this type of trap is most often found in buildings, it is not really a mechanical trap. Anyone with a bit of knowledge about carpentry can saw halfway through the step of a staircase or the rung of a ladder, causing it to break away when weight is placed upon it. This trap is constructed by rolling Perception + Crafts (Carpentry). If a person is going up the stair, she will have a nasty spill, suffering two dice of bashing damage and likely making a good deal of noise. If descending, the victim may roll Dexterity + Athletics at difficulty 7 to land on the next step (which may have been sawed through as well). If this roll fails or if the next step has been rigged as well, the victim takes normal falling damage. Spotting that a step has been rigged in this way requires a careful investigation and a Perception + Alertness or Crafts roll, difficulty 8. The main problem with this trap is for the owner of the house to remember not to tread on the steps that have been rigged.

Alarm

Type: M **Complexity: 5/6**
Time: 1 hour **Cost: ••**

This trap is designed not to injure or hinder intruders, but to alert the inhabitants of the building. The simplest version of this trap is a trip-wire connected to a bell. If the bell is to be placed far enough away from the triggering point that the intruders cannot hear the alarm, Time rises to 90 minutes. The trap can also be rigged into a door, being activated when the door is opened. In this case, it is +1/+2 to Complexity. If the alarm is to sound in multiple locations, add 25% to Time for each additional location. Constructing this trap in an established building adds nothing to Cost.

Swinging Axe

Type: M **Complexity: 7/21**
Time: 1 day **Cost: •••**

This is a favorite trap for those who wish to see their intruders dead instead of merely detained. It consists of a heavy axe which swings down from the ceiling and hits the person triggering the trap. The axe inflicts five dice and two automatic health levels of lethal damage. It can be dodged like a swinging branch trap. The trigger for

this trap can be built into a door handle. This increases Complexity by +1/+3 but makes the trap undetectable.

Scything Blade

Type: M Complexity: 8/18
Time: 1 day Cost: •••

This is a variation of the mechanical version of the swinging branch trap. Instead of a piece of wood, a blade is used. The damage is four dice plus two automatic health levels of lethal damage. Because the slots that the blade must exit from are quite slender, this trap is no easier to detect than others. Extra blades can be added, each adding an automatic health level. Every two extra blades add one to Cost and 0/+2 to Complexity. Like a swinging axe trap, the trigger for the scything blade can be built into a door handle. A scything blade can be dodged like a swinging branch trap.

Crossbow Trap

Type: M Complexity: 6/18
Time: 1 day Cost: •••

This trap is quite simple to construct and is often one of the first taught to apprentice trap-makers. It consists of a hidden crossbow which fires when the trap is triggered. The crossbow attacks with a dice pool equal to the Perception + Crafts (maximum of five dice) of the person creating the trap. The attack can be dodged at difficulty 8 if the attack comes from the front and inflicts (four + number of successes) dice of lethal damage. If a heavy crossbow is used, Cost rises by one and so does the damage. As with the swinging axe and scything blade traps, the trigger can be built into a door handle. This type of trap can easily be poisoned (see below).

This is just a small sample of possible traps and should provide inspiration to both Storytellers and players for new and interesting contraptions. With the Storyteller's approval, players who start out with a Domain that has dots assigned to security (see p. 155 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**) may state that this security comes from already established traps.

Poisons

Adding poisons to traps is a favorite way to increase their lethality and is often used by some less scrupulous (or more paranoid) people. Some characters might also wish to issue poisoned weapons to their guards. The main problem is that most poisons in 1230 are those that must be ingested, and it is quite hard to create a trap that causes the intruder to eat or drink something. Some useful poisons do exist, however, either alone or in combination with other traps, mainly by smearing them on blade or crossbow traps. Among supernatural creatures, poisons see the most use by vampires (especially Assamites, Baali, Followers of Set and the Nosferatu), werewolves of the Black Spiral Dancer and Shadow Lord

PLAGUE HANGINGS

This is not strictly a poisonous effect, but it falls within the territory. The plague hangings are said to have been invented by the Baali but have been used extensively by Cappadocians, Nosferatu and other less than sociable Cainites. It is also possible that some Black Spiral Dancers and corrupt mages have hit upon the idea.

A plague hanging is a large wall hanging created by sewing together blankets taken from victims of some deadly disease. The resulting tapestry is then hung across a doorway, forcing anyone who wishes to walk through the doorway to touch it. Mortals are likely to be infected with the disease, while vampires might have the contagion caught in their clothes and infect mortals they interact with. Those vampires dwelling in places where plague hangings are used normally change their clothes whenever they go out into the mortal world.

tribes and members of the Old Faith. Poisons are not limited to these groups, and anyone who wants an extra level of protection or who simply has a mean streak might use them. In general, poisons have no effect on vampires, whereas they have their normal effect on both mages and inquisitors, who must look to their supernatural powers to save them. Werewolves without the Gift: Resist Toxin suffer the usual damage from poison, though they may also regenerate such damage normally.

Plant poisons: Plant poisons are the most common, having been known and used for millennia. In fact, all the poisonous plants mentioned here are also used as medicinal remedies and are well known. Recognizing such plants and their effects requires only a single dot in Hearth Wisdom. Finding them in nature requires two dots, while actually making poisons (or healing brews) out of them requires a minimum three dots and a specialty in Herbalism. Some of the common types of poisonous plants are deadly nightshade, henbane (both found all over Europe; the leaves are used), summer elder (found all over Europe; the fruits are used), common foxglove (found throughout west, southwest and middle Europe; the leaves are used) and wolfsbane (found in north and middle Europe; the fruits are used). Blade poisons made from these plants are relatively weak and take effect one hour after the victim receives the wound. Deadly nightshade and henbane both cause lethargy and dizziness. Any injury by a weapon smeared with this type of poison requires a Stamina roll (difficulty 6) or else the victim suffers a +2 difficulty penalty on all rolls for one scene. If the roll is successful, the character still suffers +1 to all difficulties. Summer elder

is even weaker, producing simple pains and cramps. If the Stamina roll is not successful, the character suffers a -1 to all dice pools for one scene. Common foxglove and wolfsbane produces the strongest poison — they inflict three levels of lethal damage, which can be soaked.

Cyanide has made its way into the Middle East from the Orient and is slowly trickling into Europe. It is made from bitter almonds. While it is most effective in food and drink, it can be quite lethal on a blade or crossbow bolt. Cyanide takes effect the round after the character is wounded and inflicts seven dice of lethal damage.

Animal poisons: The most commonly known animal poison is crushed cantharides beetle, which can be found in the Mediterranean regions. One hour after receiving the poison, the character suffers seven dice of lethal damage, which can be soaked. In addition, the character suffers nausea and is at +1 difficulty to all Dexterity and Mental die rolls.

The art of “milking” snakes for venom is not widely known among mortals of Europe. It is quite an art among the Followers of Set, and some Assamites, Baali and Nosferatu also know this skill. Spirit-Talkers of the East may know how to do it, and some groups within the Old Faith have the skill as well. Milking a snake requires a Dexterity + Animal Ken roll (difficulty 7) and is at +1 difficulty if the character does not possess an appropriate

specialty. Such venom generally inflicts six levels of lethal damage, which is soakable.

Other poisons: One of the oldest and best known ways of poisoning a blade is by smearing it with excrement. Horse manure is generally preferred, which can easily cause tetanus. One week after being hit with a weapon smeared with horse manure, the character must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 9). If the roll is successful, another roll must be made at the end of the next week, this time at difficulty 8. The player must continue testing each week at -1 difficulty, until the difficulty reaches 5. If any of these rolls fail, tetanus sets in. It begins with headaches and a stiff neck and ends with all the muscles contracting and locking up. The character loses one point of Stamina every four days. When Stamina reaches 1, Dexterity and Strength are also reduced to 1 and the character can hardly move. The character dies at Stamina 0.

Other animal (or human) feces, a rusted blade or a serrated edge that has never been cleaned of the rotting blood clots caught in it are all good methods of causing gangrene. Injury by such a dirty blade requires a Stamina roll (difficulty 7). Cleaning out the wound with clean water (or milk, wine, beer, etc.) reduces the difficulty to 6, while cauterizing the wound lowers it to 5 but inflicts an additional health level of lethal damage. If the roll is not successful, gangrene affects the infected body part.



The flesh begins rotting and the nerves die away, leaving the infected body part useless. While this does no damage in terms of health levels, the Storyteller should assign whatever penalties she feels appropriate when the rot has set in. In 1230, the most common treatment for gangrene is cutting off the affected body part, but this does stop the infection from spreading. Cauterizing the wound might be effective; the character doing the cauterizing should roll Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 8). The character affected is allowed a Stamina roll (difficulty 10 – the number of successes on the Medicine roll); if this is successful, the gangrene is halted. However, this inflicts at least one health level of lethal damage, more if a large area has been infected. Some skilled surgeons or wise women may know to put maggots on the infected area; the maggots eat only rotten flesh, leaving the unaffected flesh untouched.

Arsenic is a byproduct of much copper and some silver mining. Its poisonous qualities are well known in the Middle Ages; the unlucky people raking out the arsenic from smelting ovens have a life expectancy of 3 to 6 months. Arsenic is used for alloys (as a replacement for tin) but also has more sinister uses. Some vampires pour out arsenic dust on the floors of their dwellings. Anyone walking through this dust stirs it up, and while this does not affect Cainites, breathing creatures are in mortal danger. After breathing in arsenic dust for one minute, a character must succeed in a Stamina roll at difficulty 9. If the roll succeeds, the character is merely nauseated and at –1 to all dice pools until out of the arsenic dust and for one scene afterward. If the roll fails, the character suffers three lethal health levels of damage and a –2 penalty to all dice pools. In addition, a new roll must be made every minute until out of the poisoned area or a roll succeeds. The Gift Resist Toxin protects against arsenic poisoning, but not against the coughing the dust induces. Vampires using this kind of poison trap are advised to change their clothing before leaving their dwelling (unless they *want* to inflict mild cases of arsenic poisoning on those around them).

Supernatural poisons: Assamite blood altered with Quietus. The alchemical elixirs of the Order of Hermes. The vile secretions of various Banes. For supernatural creatures, normal poison is merely the weakest weapon in the arsenal. It is up to the Storyteller to determine the effectiveness of these types of poisons, based on the ingenuity of the player. Some effects, like that of Quietus vitae, can be found in the relevant books, while others, such as the effect of the manticores' venom tapped by the Order of Hermes mage after defeating the creature, must be thought up on a case-by-case basis.

Whispers abound about members of the Old Faith who have used their magic to change venomous creatures, such as snakes, so that they produce extremely

BLOODFIRE POISON

In the Middle East, some Assamite sorcerers have worked together with members of Bay't Mutasharid (Clan Nosferatu) and, combining Animalism, Assamite Sorcery and Quietus, have managed to breed warped serpents whose venom can affect even the undead. If a mortal is infected with the venom, it simply inflicts three health levels of lethal damage and results in –2 to all dice pools for an hour due to intense pain. Cainites, however, feel their blood burning within them. Bloodfire poison deals them five dice of aggravated damage, soakable only with Fortitude. In addition, it causes extreme pain, reducing all dice pools by three until the damage has been healed. This venom is used mainly in traps and by the Mutasharidin, since the process of milking the monstrous snakes is quite difficult and Assamites have easier ways of poisoning their weapons.

lethal poison. Among Cainites, it is a common tale that members of Clan Nosferatu have achieved the same effect using vitae and high levels of Animalism.

Wards and Magical Guardians

While strong walls, skilled guards and clever traps are good methods of defense, vampires, inquisitors, mages and werewolves can also use their supernatural powers to secure themselves and their domains. However formidable these powers, though, they are most often called to use against invaders with similar capabilities.

Vampires

Among the Cainites, magical protection is mainly the auspice of the clans employing blood magic: the Tremere, Assamites, Cappadocians, Followers of Set and Tzimisce. The Tremere are undoubtedly some of the best, having been forced to perfect their hermetic protection spells or face destruction at the hands of the fiends. In addition to rituals such as the various Wards, Defense of the Sacred Haven and Wake with Evening's Freshness, the clan has an entire Path, called Path of Warding, dedicating to protecting their havens and chantries. In addition to this, the Tremere have created a bloodline, the Gargoyles, for the express purpose of using them as guards and warriors. For more information on the Gargoyles, see the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**.

The Assamites and Cappadocians rarely turn their magics toward protection, though some Cappadocians use reanimated corpses or ghosts (see the ritual Compel

the Ghostly Guardian, p. 76, and the Mortis Path of Cadaverous Animation on p. 193 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) as guards. The Assamites have developed few guardian rituals and no paths that can be turned to that use. The poisonous vitae that the clan can create with Quietus works as well on traps in their havens as on the blades of their warriors, however.

The Tzimisce have a long history of using their *koldunic* sorcery to protect their crumbling castles and much-vaunted privacy. They often employ spirits to keep watch, alerting them if anyone trespasses upon their grounds. Their guards are usually altered monstrosities or members of the powerful Revenant ghouls families.

The thaumaturgical Disciplines are not the only ones that can be used to create better defenses. Many Brujah have extremely heavy doors or large boulders blocking the entrance to their havens, while members of the devious Ravnos clan use their powers of illusion to conceal traps and entrances to important rooms. The very nature of the children of Caine can also be put to good use. Some of the Nosferatu of cities such as London, Paris and Venice make their lairs in areas that can be reached only by traveling for several minutes under water.

Inquisitors

While inquisitors trust in God for protection, guidance and strength, many of them also know that The Lord helps those who help themselves. If at all possible, inquisitors place their chapter houses on Holy Ground. If not possible (or if the inquisitors have moved into a new area and taken over a dwelling there), the *ritus* Hallow Ground is used. Cells in which no inquisitor knows this *ritus* have been known to ask other inquisitors to come and perform it from time to time. Inquisitor cells also sometimes have access to holy relics that can help guard their bases of operation. It is said that a *Oculi Dei* chapter house in northern Italy contains a piece of cloth blessed by St. Thomas himself. If any enemies of the Lord enter this place, the cloth immediately glows with a holy, white light. Of the minor gifts of the Lord, the most useful with respect to defense of the home is probably the Orison Eye of Vigilance. An inquisitor thus blessed can act with her fellow inquisitors during the day and remain on guard at night. The same effects can be achieved using the *ritus* Blessed Vigilance.

Some Knights of Acre have experimented briefly with adding extremely heavy doors to their dwellings, requiring Transfiguration of the Flesh in order to open. Most Knights see their Endowments as tools to battle the enemy, however, not to open doors, so the practice is rare. In general, the Knights prefer to trust their faith and sword arms to guard their homes.

The Sisters of St. John's primary defense is Chorale, which, when performed by enough people, can keep intruders away from the inner rooms of a building. This Psalm is the reason most Sisterhood guards carry bows or crossbows, allowing them to attack enemies held at bay by the singing. Those inquisitors powerful enough to have learned Oratorio use this to similar, if even more impressive, effect.

For those well versed in the Holy Arts, the *ritus* of Sunstone is often used to create wards against the creatures of the night. While the creator of the stone must grasp it to activate it, the stone can afterward be dropped and it will continue to shine. Stories abound about a much more potent version of this *ritus* that empowers a larger stone, which can then be called to shine by any faithful. This might just be wishful thinking. It is rumored that the Red Monks have *ritae* that allow them to sense whenever an enemy enters their monasteries, though they have never admitted to this.

Mages

Spellcasters are, of course, experts when it comes to protecting their chantries, sancta and homes with magical forces. In fact, some members of the Order of Hermes have become so enamored of their magical traps and animated guardians that they have dispensed with normal protection altogether — often with rather disastrous results, when their enemies find a way to negate the magic. Most mages avoid this decidedly single-minded approach, but it is a rare mage who does not use some kind of enchantment to ward his home or domain.

Appropriately enough, the Ahl-i-Batin prefer to use subtle spells to defend their chantries. The powers of the pillar of al-Layal provide a good basis for spells that conceal or misdirect, both on a large or small scale. Many Batini chantries are either disguised as something else or completely hidden from the eyes of mortal man. The Pillar of al-Hajj allows for the practitioner to keep a constant watch on her home from her sanctum — a well defended Batini chantry will contain a large number of scrying devices.

Members of the Messianic Voices sometimes seek to place their chantries on holy ground. This sometimes leads to conflict with the Inquisition, which sees many of their more spectacular arts as *maleficium*. For the Messianics, the Gifts of Gavri-El are the most useful when it comes to constructing magical defenses. Wards that, when triggered, unleash holy fire upon intruders may be found in many Messianic chantries, especially those that house enemies of the undead.

For members of the Old Faith, the power of Autumn is the one most used for protection. The Earth itself may be sculpted into fantastically strong dwellings, and the trees may be commanded to wrap their roots around

intruders and to beat upon them with their branches. Those who live near water often use the powers of the Winter season. Small streams suddenly rush furiously when an uninvited guest tries to cross them, marshes suck attackers under, and creatures made of water may rise on the banks of lakes to attack enemies.

To the Order of Hermes, magic is a tool, like a hammer to a blacksmith or a sword to a knight. The Hermetics often use this tool in the protection of their chantries. In fact, due to the sometimes quite vicious infighting in the Order, the Hermetics have become masters of guarding against magical assaults and intrusions — some to the point that they ignore the common realm entirely, often with less than pleasant results. The Forma of Primus forms the basis of such antimagical wards, negating the effect of hostile magic. Spells that reveal the use of nonsanctioned magic (for example, to reveal intruders who have made themselves invisible or shapechanged) are also common. The Forma of Corona is used to create intricate symbols that baffle and confuse all who look upon them, making them easy prey for the magus' guards. Of course, the Forma of Animus can be used to create all kinds of guardians. The Forma of Vires is sometimes overlooked by mages who focus on the manipulation of Primus, but it can be exceptionally effective in keeping intruders away.

Many Spirit-Talkers are too nomadic to need much in the way of protection. A simple plea to the right spirits will result in someone watching over a mage as she sleeps, and that can be all a wanderer needs. However, settled Spirit-Talkers have a few spells at their disposal. Calling upon the Trickster Totem, Spirit-Talkers can cloak the homes of themselves and their tribe or bring misfortune to those who would intrude. When a dwelling is first constructed, the Warrior can help in making it easily defensible. The Wise One may not only offer insight when enemies approach, but also let the Spirit-Talker call upon spirits to help defend her home.

The Valdaermen of the cold north know many runes of protection and use them to great effect. The Galdrar runes are those used most often, but where the Batini employ their powers of the hidden to conceal their chantries, the Valdaermen use the runes to lead would-be intruders into traps or ambushes, preferring to face their enemies (though often from an advantageous position) rather than see them wander off in befuddlement. If absolutely necessary, a Valdarmathr can forbid strangers to enter a protected area, though this sort of spell is used mainly to protect villages and other larger areas. Valdaermen also use their runes to strengthen the walls and doors of their chantries. Finally, Valdaermen are known to invoke curses against those who would trespass uninvited on their grounds, often sealing such curses with a *blót* dedicated to Odin or Loki.

Werewolves

Rites, Gifts and spirits are the weapons in the Garou arsenal, all of which are put to good use when protecting a caern. If intruders are suspected, the Rite of the Badger's Burrow can be performed to determine who, if any, has entered the caern, as well as his location. The Rite of the Shrouded Glen can hide a caern from hostile spirits and attackers from the Umbra, though it makes it impossible for friendly spirits and Garou to find as well. Rite of the Wilderness can protect the area in which a caern lies from human intrusions, something that is quite efficient if enemies strike with influence rather than brute force. For those werewolves who find themselves in need of protecting structures outside a caern, Awakening of Gaia's Strength is a wonderful tool, although it is mainly practiced by the Warders.

Spirits are a great boon when it comes to defense. A normal caern will often be attended by at least a handful of friendly spirits who can keep watch in the Umbra and

FETISH: BELLS OF WARNING

Level Four, Gnosis 7

This fetish consists of a gold bell about the size of a Crinos fist, along with three smaller bells made of brass, bronze or copper. None of the bells has a clapper. The larger bell is placed roughly in the center on the area to be protected, displayed prominently, while the three smaller bells are taken out and hidden somewhere, at a maximum distance of a thousand yards from the center. When all the bells have been placed, a standard roll activates the fetish. For each success on the activation roll, the fetish functions for one week. On a failure, it cannot be activated for an entire day, while on a botch, the user thinks the bells are active when they are, in fact, inert.

The fetish is triggered when any creature larger than a fox, and which was not present during the activation, crosses into the triangular area defined by the three smaller bells. A mental image of the creature is sent to the character who activated the fetish and the golden bell rings out loudly enough to awaken anyone within 15 feet. The fetish does not extend into the Umbra, but it can penetrate powers of invisibility. Roll the fetish's Gnosis in a contested roll versus the intruder's Wits + Stealth. If one of the small bells is found and moved or destroyed, the fetish stops working until the bell is replaced.

To create the Bells of Warning, an ancestor spirit or a spirit of a bird of prey must be bound into the large bell.

sometimes also in the physical realm. Theurges often awaken the spirits of trees in or near the bawn, so that they can lash out and injure or at least inconvenience intruders. In times of trouble, creating multiple talens with the Rite of Binding can help guard an area. In septs blessed with an abundance of ancestor spirits, it might be possible to persuade some of them to help patrol the boundaries of a caern, should extra help be deemed necessary. Some caerns have special seats on rocky outcroppings or in the crowns of sacred trees. Sitting in such a seat allows the character to see both into the Umbra and the real world. With an almost unlimited variety of spirits, almost any kind of warding talen or fetish can be created. Many Garou would prefer to craft fetishes of war instead, however.

Few of the werewolf Gifts lend themselves to protecting an area or structure. The Fianna Gift Faerie Light can be used to lead interlopers away from important areas, the Homid Gift Reshape Object can be used to create intricate traps and doors of exceptional strength, the Black Fury Gift Curse of Aeolus can obscure an area from enemies, and the Red Talon Gift Trackless Waste can be used for those few times when the Talons wish to lead intruders away rather than kill them. Precious few other Gifts are designed to help protect an area, though they most definitely help defeat intruders once discovered.

Branching Out

By now the group has a territory and a dwelling in that territory, the characters' guards are deployed, their traps are set, and they feel confident they can repel anyone who tries to take over their demesne or ruin their influence. What is next?

Build a new sphere of influence, of course.

Vampires

For Cainites, building new areas of influence is almost as natural as drinking blood. It is a rare vampire indeed who does not seek to broaden her power base, and even the insular Gangrel clan has its share of power-hungry schemers.

The main problem for vampires is the fact that they sleep during the day (running a close second is their pallor, which tends to disturb people, although many Cainite Auras also unnerve the common folk). Thus, vampires tend to work through proxies, normally ghouls or people under subtle mental control or simple employment. These pawns can go out during the day, meet the right people, talk to them, eat with them and deal with them in ways that the undead cannot.

Retainers, therefore, is a good Background to have if a vampire wishes to branch out into other

THE BLOOD OATH

In the world of the Cainites, creating a ghoul is not done lightly and is rarely discussed. They may mention putting someone under the blood oath, but it is something done only with a good deal of deliberation. Unfortunately, many players think that ghouling, dominating and various other -ings are the ways to control humanity without problems.

If that were so, then the children of Caine would truly control humanity.

There is a reason why older vampires look down upon young Cainites who throw their blood and powers about. First, it shows that the young ones are not capable of getting things done by their own wits. Second, it risks exposing vampires to those who would hunt them. Consider: A Cainite subjects a merchant to the blood oath. He falls in love with her. The next time he is at confession, he confesses this unnatural desire to the priest. The priest wonders if perhaps the Cainite has put the merchant under some form of vile enchantment and investigates. Suddenly, she finds inquisitors at her door. Also, getting someone to drink blood can be quite difficult. Even if a vampire manages to strike up a friendship with whomever she has targeted, nothing short of mind control will force someone to drink blood, and while there are all manner of surreptitious ways of giving someone vampiric vitae, they all require both planning and luck. What a vampire ends up with might very easily be a nobleman, bishop or merchant who pines away for her love, flies into jealous rages every time she speaks with someone else or goes on a pilgrimage due to his foul and unnatural urges. This is why most Cainites reserve the blood oath for guards and personal servants.

Dominate fares little better. Someone under this form of control has a tendency to lose his capacity for initiative, constantly referring back to his liege in order to get commands. This is rarely the kind of behavior one would want from the master of the Guild of Goldsmiths.

Backgrounds. Grabbing some random person off the street and forcing blood into him will not, however, yield the same kind of Retainer that putting a dot in the Background at character creation will. Backgrounds bought from the start are an integral part of the character, while Storytellers are free to add all sorts of unpleasant side effects or stipulations on

Backgrounds gained during game — the new ghoul might turn out to have a drinking problem, or the priest that a vampire thinks she's made her Contact is in reality suspicious of her nature. Of course, Storytellers can (and should) reward good planning and role-playing.

Using what you have is the way to go if you wish to expand. Look at the Backgrounds at your disposal, decide on what you want to move into and then get as much information as possible. If you have a loyal Retainer, getting him into position as the local baron's chief steward will grant you at least some information about the baron. You could then take this information to the troubadour desperate to win the favor of the baron, granting you a friend and a dot in Allies. Resources can often be converted into at least Contacts and probably also Retainers of some kind. If you have nothing to work with, serving a more powerful and influential vampire might be the only option. While it is somewhat demeaning for one Cainite to serve another, unless it is a childe and sire relationship, many vampire lords recognize how efficient a Cainite retainer can be. It is up to your creativity and ingenuity to use what you have for the maximum effect.

Example

Tomasino of Clan Brujah is a former sailor in Venice. After his Embrace, he finds himself without any real money, but with substantial Contacts and Allies among Venetian sailors and dockside ruffians and a loyal Retainer in the form of his younger brother. After some investigation, and a boon incurred to the local Nosferatu, Tomasino learns of a small war of influence between a Toreador and a Lasombra, both of whom have substantial interest in the silk trade. Tomasino approaches the stronger of the two, the Lasombra, and offers the services of himself and his people for as long as it takes to break the Toreador. His price is a small share in the silk trade and introductions for his brother to the right people. The Lasombra accepts and Tomasino puts his friends to work busting heads, watching warehouses and harassing the people who serve the Toreador. Within a year, the war is won and Tomasino has gained himself both some Resources and a bit of Influence with the local guilds. Now he plans to outfit his own trading vessel....

Inquisitors

While some hold that the Lord's chosen should not be distracted from their holy mission by worldly goods and influence, those very goods and influence can be turned to the Lord's work. Money can be



spent to equip God's soldiers, Contacts can look for signs of heresy, Allies can lend help in defeating the enemies of the Lord, and Influence makes the work that much easier.

Inquisitors face no more difficulty than normal mortals in interacting with humanity, and some of them have gifts granted by God that can help them sway others to their cause. While inquisitors might not have to rely solely upon existing Backgrounds, they still face trouble when trying to get something from nothing. Inquisitors can employ many of the tactics mentioned for vampires above, but they are not forced to work through factors. In addition, their blessings from God and even their very work can help establish new areas of influence.

Example

A mixed group of inquisitors based in Harrogate, Yorkshire, travels to a small village half a day's journey south in order to investigate rumors of diabolical happenings. They find the village besieged by shapeshifters who, from time to time, steal away the children. During the ensuing battle, the entire cell shows divinely granted powers. Unfortunately, the village church is partially destroyed by one of the rampaging lycanthropes and several of the villagers are injured. After the battle, the inquisitors stay, helping heal the wounded. They pay for the church's repair and use their influence with the local baron to reduce the taxes levied upon the village for the next year. Touched by the faith and purity of their rescuers, some of the young men of the village pledge their service to the inquisitors, and the locals promise to report any and all rumors of unnatural events. The inquisitors have gained both Contacts and Flock, though they soon find themselves swamped in rumors of dancing faeries, devil-worshipping nobles, and births of two-headed calves.

Mages

While some mages involve themselves in the affairs of the mortal world around them, most recognize that while no mortal influence can rival the power of magic, it can most certainly help in acquiring books and laboratory materials, as well as keep away suspicious witch-hunters. Some mages, especially those of the Ahl-i-Batin and Messianic Voices, go about building new areas of interest in much the same way as normal mortals — investing money, trading favors, making friends. Others use their powers of magic or even their positions as mages to make money (sometimes literally). In older times, both members of the Old Faith and the Valdaermen would sell their services to leaders, and the Order of Hermes has been known to do such good trade in magical items that laws have been instituted among the Hermetics on what kind of items may be sold to what kind of people.

Most mages find themselves in need of more subtlety these days, however, with the notable exception of the Spirit-Talkers, many of whom still fill positions as holy men among their people.

Mages can often deal with Commoners on a face-to-face basis, although some of them have been marked by their practices and must deal through factors. Their magic can be a great boon in making new contacts or starting up business ventures (a simple rune of good fortune carved on a trading vessel will go a long way), but this does not exclude the use of other Backgrounds, much in the same way as vampires.

Example

A young cabal of Messianic mages has moved up from Germany to occupy an old Valdaermen site near Roskilde, on Zealand, whose former occupants have been driven away by the Church. Seeking to establish themselves and knowing that the Valdaermen might return, the Messianics set about influencing the local area. One of them, well versed in theological rhetoric and having contacts among some of the more renowned bishops of the Holy Roman Empire, strikes up a friendship with the local Bishop, using letters of introduction from his contacts. Another takes up a position as a lay preacher among the small villages in the area, preaching vigilance among the people. A third, calling upon the powers of Repha-El, becomes a renowned craftsman. From this, the cabal not only gains an important Ally in the Bishop, but also Contacts in the local community and Resources from the craftsman's work.

Werewolves

While many werewolves couldn't care less about what the humans are up to and dismiss influence among them as something for the weak and distrusted Warders, the wiser among them recognize that money, influence and friends among the humans can be quite useful in the battle against the Wyrms. The Garou must contend with the Curse when dealing with humans, however. Most werewolves have an extremely unsettling effect on normal humans; while this is a great boon in intimidation, it is less useful when trying to win new friends. Therefore, most Garou deal through their Kinfolk. In fact, many Garou fully expect their Kinfolk to manage any and all sorts of interaction with normal humans. They casually order the Kinfolk to cultivate relations with the nobles living nearby, not caring how it is done, merely punishing failure. Some Garou recognize the error in this and offer both suggestions and whatever help they can.

While Kinfolk who have achieved positions of local power or influence are a great boon to a sept, these very

Kin can also become great enemies. If they feel that they have been mistreated, they might turn their influence against their oppressors. With the knowledge that Kinfolk have about werewolves and their ways, this becomes a great danger.

Warders and Bone Gnawers are the two tribes who mostly interact with humanity themselves, using various Gifts to secure Contacts, Influence and Resources. Their Gaia-given powers and abilities can easily be turned to good use — a Ragabash under the veil of Blissful Ignorance can sneak into a rival's warehouse and wreak all sorts of havoc.

Example

The Sept of Thunder's Favor lies to the south of Buda-Pest. The Shadow Lords know that all manner of Wyrn-tainted abominations dwell within the walls

of this great city, especially Leeches, so they are anxious for both information and ways to combat them without exposing the caern. A young pack, the Runners in Shadows, is assigned this mission. The pack members start off by sending their Kinfolk into the city, establishing themselves as lumber merchants with the money they have been given by the sept and the trees felled by other Kinfolk near the caern. The Kinfolk quickly rise to prominence, due to the sabotage and elimination that the Runners perform on rivals. With this prominence come Contacts among carpenters and Allies in the various builder's guilds, something put to good use when the sept moves against the Leeches, knowing the layout of their homes and what traps might lie within. The money generated by the trade is given to the Kinfolk to keep them happy, minus a tithe to the sept, of course.







CHAPTER FOUR: SHADOW DEMESNES

"Pale Death kicks his way equally in the cottages of the poor and the castles of kings."

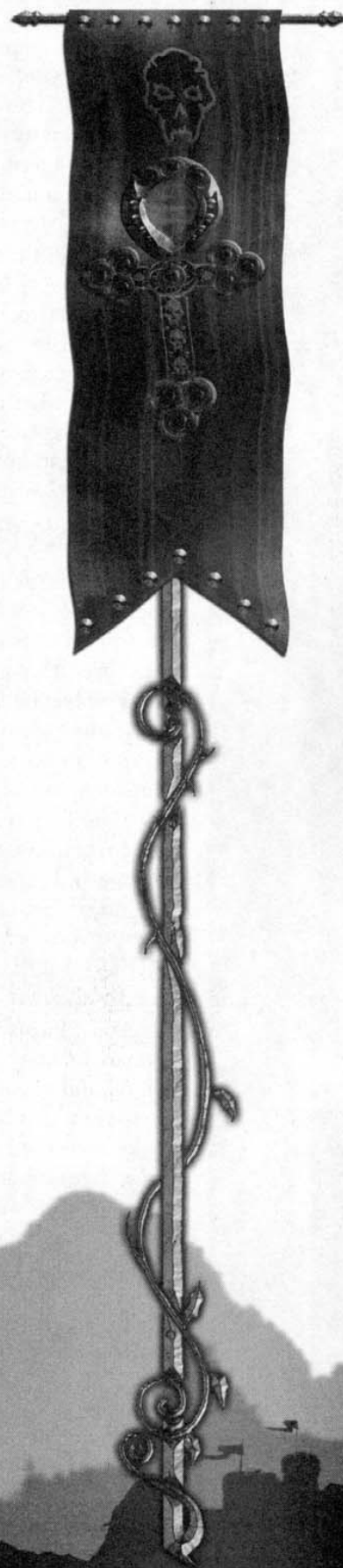
— Horace

The possibilities for Background pools are nearly limitless. While the examples throughout this book should serve to give Storytellers and players some good ideas for what kind of power the characters can command, some fleshed-out examples might also be helpful for designing chronicles, antagonists, or allies.

To that end, this chapter contains four sample demesnes, one for each type of character (vampires, mages, inquisitors and werewolves). These demesnes should *not* be considered "canon"; they are merely examples and will not be appearing in future supplements as established locales.

The Domain of Strood

At first glance, little separates Strood from so many other large farming villages in England. It lies in Kent, about half an hour's ride from the important city of Rochester. Watling Street, a road built by the Romans for the transport of goods, runs through



Strood on its way from Dover to London. This results in a steady stream of travelers, as the road is still used for this purpose, as well as transporting a large number of pilgrims. The village even has a high street on which lies an inn — a real inn with rooms, not just a one-story tavern. The Maidstone Inn is a stopping point for a number of people traveling Watling Street, even though most prefer to stop in Rochester instead.

Another thing that separates Strood from other English villages is the presence of a young coterie of Cainites, derisively known as Jean-Marc's Rabble by Rochester's established Cainites. This coterie is dedicated to increasing the importance of Strood, as the Cainites' own influence and status is closely connected to the fate of the village. They have a number of schemes and plans at work, sharing both the benefits and responsibility of the domain of Strood.

The Coterie

Jean-Marc's Rabble is actually the result of the machinations of Maiselle, an ancilla Toreador with great plans to become the power behind the throne once Strood has grown to become a proper town. Her plan involves building up Strood to become an important trading town, earning recognition for Jean-Marc as Prince of Strood and then ruling the Domain with Jean-Marc as her puppet.

Maiselle is a skilled manipulator, but she brings very little to the coterie when it comes to resources. Her age and generation grant her some status, which rubs off on her associates, and she has some meager savings from which to draw. In addition, she has placed the innkeeper of the Maidstone under the blood oath and Embraced his daughter.

Jean-Marc is a Ventrue in the "gray area" between neonate and ancilla. He is the nominal leader of the coterie and an ambitious Cainite. Maiselle has convinced him that he can become prince, and as such he works tirelessly to increase Strood's importance. He has a large amount of money and some small investments with merchant ventures in London. This income is at the disposal of the rest of the coterie.

Catherine Maidstone is Maiselle's childe, a very young Toreador and a native of Strood. She is the daughter of the innkeeper of the Maidstone Inn and is on good terms with most of the important people of the village. In addition, her brothers are more than willing to come to her aid if need be. Her interest in Strood stems both from it being her home and from the fact that she considers Maiselle her mistress.

Manfred Bauer is a Brujah ancilla in search of a place to stay and a focus for his existence. He ended up

in Strood and has taken a liking to the village and to the other Cainites. A former mercenary, he still has several contacts among such, as well as a great deal of experience in how to guard an area from threats.

The coterie makes its haven in the Maidstone Inn, in a room constructed by Manfred and Catherine's brothers off the root cellar. The door between the cellar and the room is a stout oak door reinforced with iron. During the day, the only guards are Catherine's father and brothers, but no one knows that the coterie is there. At night, Catherine generally helps her family manage the inn, at the same time listening for gossip among travelers and locals alike and making friends with anyone who seems important. If Maiselle is not in Rochester visiting her small herd, she sits at a table with Manfred, often inviting those travelers who seem important over for a talk. The locals think that she is a widow whose husband was a relation to the Baron of Rochester and that she is on bad terms with the Baron, thus staying here with only a manservant. Jean-Marc is generally talking to travelers, trying to trick some money from them, possibly finding a worthwhile venture to invest in, or trying his best to influence the local leaders on various matters. The villagers of Strood believe him to be a distant relative of Maiselle's, and he is highly respected for the help he offers whenever possible. So far, the coterie has been able to explain its daylight absence with business in Rochester or nearby towns for Maiselle and Manfred, business (or sleeping it off) for Jean-Marc and resting and working in the kitchen for Catherine.

The Domain

Strood is a pleasant village, the center of which is located on a hill that gives a good view of the old cathedral and the imposing Rochester Castle. The village's high street, part of Watling Street, is flanked by the Maidstone Inn and the meeting hall, a large building that the leaders of the village use for meetings. In addition, the smithy and the workshop of the village wheelwright (who is also the village cooper and carpenter) can be found here. The church lies a bit off from the center of the village, on a small rise. The area is mainly gentle hills with no real forests nearby. A single, small wood, called Pig's Wallow, provides timber and firewood. The land becomes flatter down toward Rochester, which lies on the banks of the river Medway.

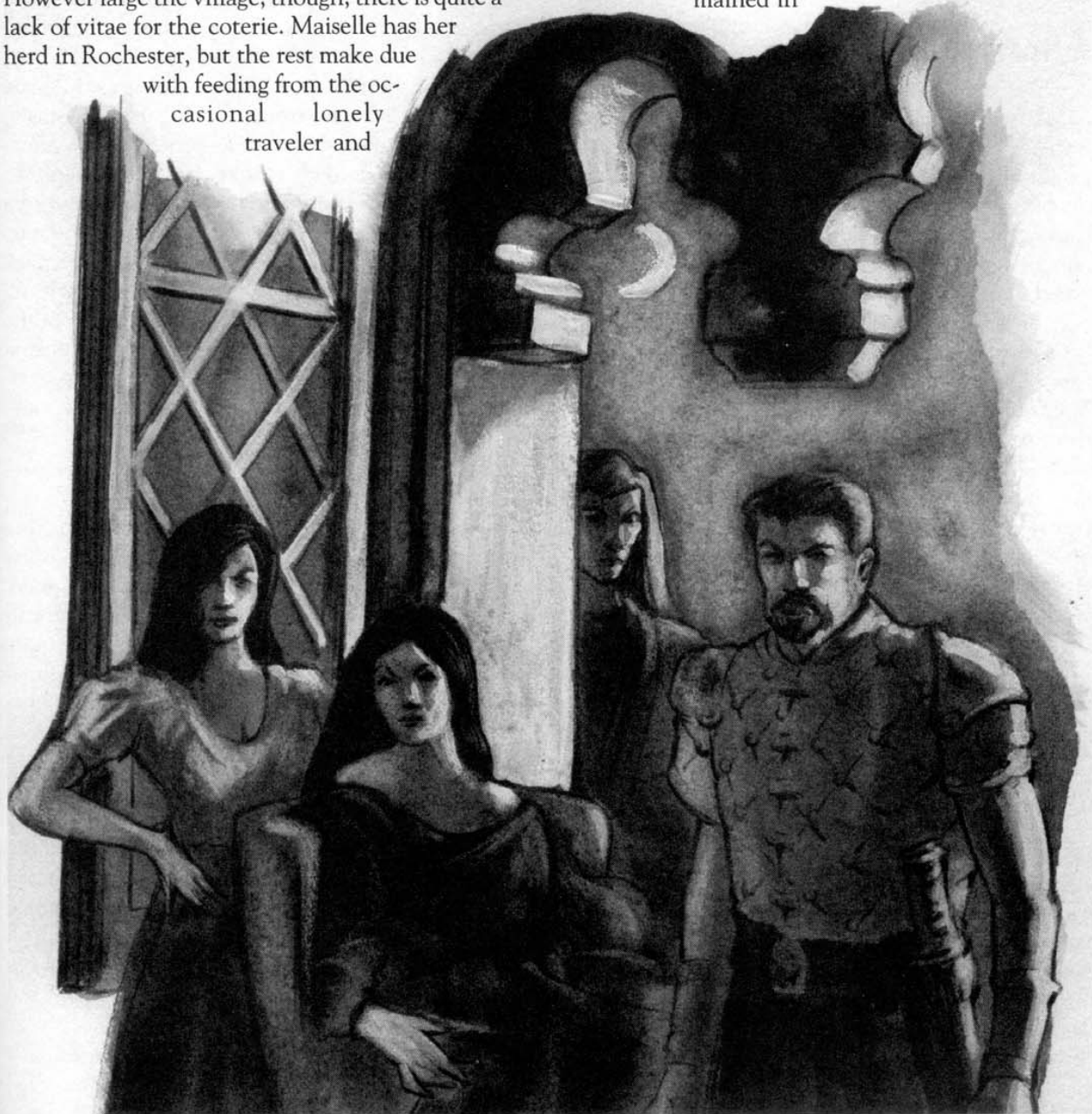
Strood is quite large, with outlying farms spread in a semicircle that reaches in all directions but toward Rochester. The population is somewhere around 500, with just under 50 families, most of them farmers. The

farmers are mainly serfs, bonded to the Baron of Rochester, but there are a few freemen. The crops are mainly wheat, while the livestock is predominantly cows and pigs, and every farm has at least a few chickens. Any surplus of milk, meat or eggs is sold at one of the markets held in Rochester every other Saturday. The few freemen are also allowed to gather fallen acorns in Pig's Wallow and go to the Medway to fish and to hunt rabbits and doves, while the serfs have no such rights. Hunting with owls is quite popular among the freemen, and near midsummer the village holds a competition over who has the best owl. In general, the people are like villagers all over England, if perhaps a bit more ambitious about their village. However large the village, though, there is quite a lack of vitae for the coterie. Maiselle has her herd in Rochester, but the rest make due

with feeding from the occasional lonely traveler and

making forays into Rochester or nearby villages and towns.

The only thing that prevents Strood from being a town is the fact that the Baron of Rochester has so far refused to allow a market to be held in it. During the Siege of Rochester Castle, from October to December 1215, some of the markets of Rochester moved to Strood (others went to villages such as Borstalle and Stoke). When King John succeeded in taking back the castle from the barons who had occupied it (by torching its foundation, using 40 tons of pig's fat), the Cainites of Rochester were quick to nudge those in command to reinstate the *status quo*, making sure that the profitable markets remained in



Rochester. One of the key elements of Maiselle's plans is to win a concession from the Baron of Rochester for markets to be held in Strood, so that the farmers and craftsmen of the village do not need to sell their wares in Rochester. In addition, a market will bring greater trade and a greater number of people to Strood, increasing the wealth and influence of the coterie. If Strood grows into a town, it should be possible to have Jean-Marc recognized as Prince of Strood, greatly increasing his own status and that of his coterie.

If the coterie manages to win rights to hold a market in the village, the next plan is to hire a handful of crippled mercenaries through Manfred's contacts. These mercenaries can then train villagers to fight and act as guards.

Strood in Dots

Strood represents six dots worth of Domain — five dots of size, with a single dot dedicated to security, as represented by the fact that potential attackers would either need to find out where the coterie is sleeping and then get by whoever is in the inn during the day or risk an attack during the night, when the taproom of the inn is usually quite full. Also, any newcomers have to make sure not to be seen by locals, or either Catherine or Jean-Marc will more than likely hear about it. Jean-Marc and Maiselle both contribute two points to the Domain, while Catherine and Manfred add one point each. Jean-Marc contributes three points of Resources and two points of Contacts, while Maiselle adds one point of Resources and Retainers (but keeps her Herd to herself). Catherine contributes two points of Allies, and Manfred adds another two points of Contacts. The Domain is the Anchor Background for the coterie. In total, the Background pool comprises Domain 6, Resources 4, Contacts 3, Allies 2, and Retainers 1.

Outside Interests

The domain of Strood is far too small to play any part in the power struggles of the Court of Avalon. Rochester, however, has become a bit of a chess piece recently, and events that could affect the Rabble's plans are currently underway.

Rochester, in the world of the Cainites, falls under the purview of the Baron (or Archbishop, as he prefers) of Canterbury. Archbishop Adrian is part of the Cainite Heresy and engaged in a power struggle against another of the great powers, James Mannerly of Dover, in England. He has so far been unsuccessful in introducing much of the Heresy's doctrine in the Rochester area. The older Cainites are not interested

in the Church, while the younger fear it. The Cathedral of Rochester, and the clergy therein, is strong in faith, which has caused many an unwary Cainite to burn his fingers, or worse. Adrian would very much like to bring the leading Cainites of Rochester into the Heresy, and if Prince Harold and his court are unwilling, then perhaps it is time for a change. If Maiselle and Jean-Marc were to learn of Adrian's ambitions, they might gain a formidable ally. Neither of them would be worried about entering into the Heresy in order to further their own plans.

As a stopping point for goods transported between London and Dover, Rochester and the area around it are of passing interest to a large number of merchants, local and abroad, some of who have Cainites as partners, investors or masters. These merchants and Cainites are primarily interested in the smooth transport of their goods. As long as there are no bandit attacks, no trouble with getting rooms at Rochester's inns and good maintenance of Watling Street, they are unlikely to take any direct interest in Rochester's affairs. Manfred has suggested disrupting the transportation of wares, but he has not come up with a plan on how to do it so that no clues lead back to the coterie. If the coterie manages to carry it off, enough trouble would mean that the Cainites of the Rochester area would have to direct their attention toward it, giving the coterie more room to maneuver, since the focus would shift from them to the more immediate problem of bandit activity.

Allies

The villagers of Strood are friendly toward the coterie. While many of them fear Manfred for his size and intimidating looks, it is apparent that he is under strict orders from Lady Maiselle, of whom the locals are slightly in awe. Most villagers like Jean-Marc quite well. He is very generous, lending money without asking for interest like the Jews of Rochester. He has helped the leaders of the village earn a few concessions from the Baron of Rochester, and the plan to gain market rights for Strood has been met with general approval. Catherine is a local girl, and not a single man in Strood between the ages of 15 and 45 can keep himself from desiring her. Many of the young men in the village are in love with her, but they are too afraid of her father to do anything about it. In general, all members of the coterie can count on the assistance of the villagers, as long as it is for small tasks and information.

Thomas Maidstone is the coterie's greatest ally. He is a large, tyrannical man with a fading mop of red

hair, and he is not above beating his wife and children, especially if he has been drinking. He acts almost unbearably servile toward Maiselle, and his fear of Manfred, whom he cannot intimidate, makes him treat the Brujah with the utmost respect. Despite his temper and bullying (or perhaps because of these traits), he is one of the leaders of the village. Owning the Maidstone also plays no small part in this. Thomas is both respected and feared by most of the people in Strood, and because of his approval (in large part due to Maiselle's blood oath), Maiselle and Jean-Marc had an easier time earning the trust of the villagers.

Catherine's brothers, Thomas and Michael, love their sister and are willing to do everything they can to help her. Thomas is the oldest, 17, and takes after his mother — tall, thin and pale. He is an intelligent boy, and Maiselle and Jean-Marc have plans to send him into the clergy, gaining a pawn in the church. Michael takes after his father. At 15, he is already nearly six feet tall and able to grow a spot of beard. He has a volatile temper, and Manfred has secretly instructed the young man in the use of a battleaxe. Neither boy is popular among the other villagers; Thomas is seen as fey-marked and Michael as a bully. It is clear that Michael will probably take over the Maidstone and continue in his father's footsteps, maybe even becoming leader of the town council, should Strood grow large enough to have an official one. The brothers are not the best of friends, but they are loyal to their family.

The village smith, Matthew, is also one of the leaders. He is in love with Catherine, despite being married and having five children of his own, and he is willing to do nearly anything for her. Matthew is a short, stocky man with a mild temper and a desire for little else but a quiet life and perhaps a night spent with Catherine. Everyone in the village likes him, and since people from the smaller villages near Strood all come to him when they need a smith, he has an extensive network of friends.

Although the Baron of Rochester rules Strood (through Giles d'Robert; see *Enemies* below), the village also has something resembling a town council, although it has no real power. This council is nominally headed by the eldest male villager and made up of the oldest farmers, along with the innkeeper of the Maidstone, the village smith, the wheelwright and the village priest. Most of the elders are friendly with one or more of the coterie, including Aldrec, the current head of the council. Aldrec has come to rely heavily on Jean-Marc's advice and help, something

that has given Jean-Marc a great deal of influence with the council.

So far, the coterie lacks Cainite allies. Maiselle's sire, should he come back to the area, might conceivably be convinced to lend aid to his childe, but Maiselle doesn't know where he is or how to contact him. Jean-Marc is trying to ally himself with Adelbert, a Nosferatu who claims Rochester Bridge, a key element in Watling Street, as his domain. Adelbert despises the Rochester court, as Prince Harold has tried to take away his domain several times through a variety of schemes, but he is loath to share the wealth and influence the bridge gives him.

Enemies

The Baron of Rochester is not an enemy as such. Maiselle sees him as a pawn of the Prince of Rochester, Harold the Bearded, who is using the Baron to prevent any villages under Rochester's control from gaining permission to hold markets. Giles d'Robert, however, the Baron's steward, is an enemy of both the village in general and the coterie's plans in particular. He is a vain, cruel Norman with an intense dislike of the Anglo-Saxon population of Strood. Before the coterie made Strood its home, he would demand higher taxes than what had been set by the Baron and then take the difference for himself. He was also known to take a village girl with him to the castle from time to time — such girls come home shaking and afraid of a man's touch. Jean-Marc and Manfred have managed to intimidate him into somewhat less extreme behavior, but d'Robert feels humbled and is angry. The coterie cannot simply kill him, as this would raise too many questions, but Maiselle is working on a number of ideas on how to get him out of the picture.

The Prince of Rochester, Harold the Bearded, is a greedy, power-hungry and petty Ventrue. His lineage is not a renowned one, and his relationship with Mithras, who is his sire's grandsire, is his only claim to greatness. Despite this, he is arrogant, patronizing and overbearing with those beneath him and incredibly sycophantic toward his betters. He became prince short after the Norman invasion, orchestrating the removal of the former prince through a great deal of trade in favors. He ended up owing a lot of people and has been suffering under his debts ever since. Harold is determined to hold on to his domain and to scrape every bit of money, power and influence he can from it. He is strongly opposed to the idea of letting villages and towns nearby hold markets, as the markets represent a fairly good income for him and his court. He has

a great deal of sway with the Baron of Rochester, who regards Harold as one of his most trusted advisors, but the Baron's oldest son seems to dislike Harold for some reason. Harold has plans to eliminate him, thus making his younger brother heir to the barony.

Thomas le Petit is the most influential Toreador in Rochester, a tall, thin man with a sallow look. He assisted Harold in the taking of Rochester and has a great deal of influence among the Cainites of the Kent area. It was he who gave the coterie the derogative name Jean-Marc's Rabble, and he is strongly opposed to their advancement. In contrast to Prince Harold, he is not worried about the loss of revenue, as his interest would suffer little if villages were allowed to hold their own markets. His enmity stems from the fact that he believes they are a group of young upstarts (despite Maiselle's age) and that they should be taught a lesson. Thomas left Normandy because of the failures he suffered there and is now trying to prove his worth, mainly to himself, by trouncing those beneath him. He is a vain, selfish man with aspirations to become one of the most influential Cainites in Kent.

Unknown to them, the coterie members have also managed to raise the ire of the local Faerie Court. Ever since the village was founded, a gnarled oak tree has stood on a hill to the north. The hill and the immediate area around it have always been seen as the territory of the faeries, and anyone who dared to farm the ground or graze their animals would be taken by them. Seeking new land for the farmers of the village to expand into, Jean-Marc and Manfred went out to the hill one night and cut down the oak tree, the symbol of the faeries' power. The villagers have slowly begun to use the land, but the faeries living beneath the hill are infuriated. At this point in time, the Seelie Court is dominant and a debate rages as to what should be done. Come winter, though, the Court will change to Unseelie, and there is little doubt that they will demand payment in blood for crime of cutting down their tree. The church prevents them from entering Strood proper, so they are more likely to terrorize nearby farmsteads, hoping to lure the vampires out of the village.

And the Rest

A few of the more noteworthy villagers of Strood are neutral toward the coterie. All four members have avoided the village priest, Father Alwyn, as much as possible. Neither Jean-Marc nor Maiselle are interested in attracting even the smallest bit of attention from the Church. So far, Father Alwyn is completely unaware of the evil residing in his village. He is old, however, and

when he dies, it is likely that one of the clergy from Rochester will be assigned to Strood. This man may be more perceptive and of stronger faith than Alwyn, which might well mean trouble for the coterie.

Andrew, the village wheelwright, is one of the few people who has not been charmed by either Jean-Marc or Catherine. He is an extremely pious man and feels that there is something wrong with Jean-Marc. As for Catherine, he likes her well enough, but he is a married man and thinks that she is not acting like a proper Christian, shamelessly flirting with the men in the Maidstone when she should have already been married. Andrew is also very cautious, and the many ideas for change suggested by Jean-Marc have him worried about possible repercussions from Rochester.

Jean-Marc's Rabble

Jean-Marc d'Martinique, Crafter of Lies

10th-generation Ventrue, childe of Kay of Shrewsbury, walker on the Road of Sin

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 1170

Apparent Age: Late teens to early 20s

Background: If anyone asks, Jean-Marc will gladly tell that he is the eldest son of the Baron of Martinique, but alas born out of wedlock. Given an allowance in return for staying away, he decided to travel first to



Normandy and then Britain, looking for a chance to invest his money in a business venture of some sort. In truth, there is no Barony of Martinique. Jean-Marc was the son of a camp follower and a mercenary. Born without his father's size and strength, he was not made to be a warrior and instead became a thief and a mountebank. He is an accomplished liar and managed to swindle quite a number of wealthy merchants and minor nobles. When his face was too well known in Normandy, he made his way across the Channel. Here, he continued his charade with a success that surprised even himself. A young Ventrue of noble blood but little money Embraced the rich French "nobleman." Soon after, Jean-Marc's sire realized the error he had made and Jean-Marc fled, ending up in Rochester. As luck would have it, he met Maiselle there. She involved him in her schemes, telling him that as a Ventrue he would make a fine Prince of Strood. Jean-Marc, believing it, decided that perhaps it was time to settle down.

Image: Jean-Marc is of average height and slight build. His hair is long and dirty blond, while his eyes are startling blue. With his fine-boned features, he is quite attractive, though his inability to grow a beard in life gives him a slightly boyish look. He generally wears fine clothing and carries a dagger at his belt.

Maiselle of Rochester, Ambitious Ancilla

8th-generation Toreador, childe of Jacques the Fair, walker on the Road of Kings

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: 1107

Apparent Age: Mid 20s

Background: Maiselle's family came to England with William the Conqueror. Her grandfather was given land near Rochester as reward for his services, and with his sons he built a large farm there. Maiselle was born to the youngest brother, a fact she deeply despised. Since her father had no chance of inheriting the farm, Maiselle's suitors were not likely to be especially wealthy and powerful, and wealth and power were the two things she desired most. She managed to get a position as one of the Baroness of Rochester's chambermaids, intent on meeting some young nobleman and ensnaring his heart. Unfortunately, she was not blessed with great beauty to make up for her meager means and so found herself aging without having been married. Then, one night, her lady entertained a wandering minstrel. Maiselle could feel



something about the man, a power that defied description. She confronted him outside his room, demanding to know who he truly was. The minstrel, a Toreador, was impressed. He told her of his world and offered her a chance at greater power. Maiselle was made a ghoul and traveled with the minstrel for a year. After this time, she was given the Embrace and set free. Immediately, she made her way back to Rochester, intent on gaining the power she so desired. Unfortunately, the Cainites of Rochester were old and set in their ways, and she had little success with her petty schemes. She was about to give up and greet the sun when she met a young, inexperienced Cainite with a large amount of money. Immediately, she formed a plan for a domain of her own.

Image: Maiselle is tall and regal, with long, black hair and piercing brown eyes. She favors the clothing of a wealthy woman and her appearance is quite striking, if not beautiful. Her voice is probably the thing that people remember best; it is as if it was created to shout orders.

Catherine Maidstone, Young Beauty

9th-generation Toreador, childe of Maiselle, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: 1229



Apparent Age: Mid to late teens.

Background: Catherine is the daughter of Thomas Maidstone, innkeeper of the Maidstone Inn. She grew up in relative comfort and went from a pretty child to a beautiful woman. Her father's tyrannical nature made her naturally timid, shy and easy to order around, something that, along with her beauty, attracted the attention of Maiselle when she and Jean-Marc came to Strood. Now Maiselle is teaching Catherine how to be manipulative, as well as making sure that her young childe still considers Maiselle her mistress.

Image: Although a bit shorter than average, Catherine is nonetheless a good example of the beauty ideal of the time and place, with wide hips, large breasts and round cheeks. Her brown, curly hair is shoulder-length and defies all attempts at combing. She tends to wear simple, comfortable clothes and smiles often.

Manfred Bauer, Mercenary Cainite

11th-generation Brujah, childe of Symeon Zorn, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Barbarian

Embrace: 1151

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Background: Born in a small village in Bavaria, Manfred seemed destined to follow in the footsteps of his father and brothers as a farmer. The local nobleman drafted him at the age of 16, however, and his great strength made him a natural soldier. After the conflict was over, Manfred, determined not to end up as just another serf, stole the armor and weapons of one of the professional soldiers he had fought with and set out to become a mercenary. He traveled over most of Western Europe, becoming quite a skilled warrior. Then, one night in Portugal, Manfred was Embraced. His sire was a fanatic Jewish Brujah who was simply looking for another soldier in the battle against the Muslims. Manfred was horrified at what had happened to him and quickly left Iberia. He contemplated ending his unlife but did not have the willpower and instead found himself hiring out his skills as a warrior yet again. The world of the Cainites had little use for a mercenary, however, and Manfred was close to falling into total despair when he met Maiselle and Jean-Marc. Manfred had just been laughed out of the undead court of Rochester, and in Maiselle and Jean-Marc's plans he saw an opportunity to get even with the high-and-mighty Cainites, as well as something to do with his unlife. He has come to genuinely like and respect the other members of the coterie.



Image: Manfred is of average height, but his broad shoulders and impressive barrel chest make him seem larger. His hair is cut short, as is his beard. He often dresses in leather armor and is never without a large knife. If possible, he will also carry his axe and short bow. He moves with a confident stride, fully expecting anyone he meets to stand aside.

Ulf's Hall

This house of great wealth, left over from the days of Viking, lies on a tiny, mist-shrouded island just north of a nondescript fishing village in Norway where wizard and Commoner alike continue to practice the Old Ways and the Cross has yet to truly take root. The hall itself is accessible only to the rune-wise. Those who lack the gift of Odin's sight find themselves led astray upon the foggy waters, usually only to emerge from the mists at the banks from which they departed.

For those who do know the ancient ways of the runes, however, the hall's splendors await. At first glance, as the grayish shroud lifts and the rocky island comes into view, Ulf's Hall is rather unremarkable. Though at least two hundred years old, the hall appears to be in good repair and of largish size, though certainly not among the most splendid of fest-halls. But one approach exists to the hall: the west bank of the island, where the slope of the shore is gradual enough to drag a small boat up onto land. Ravens roost thickly on the island and on the hall itself, though their waste is nowhere to be seen, nor does there seem to be any ready source of food for them.

Within Ulf's Hall is its most potent asset. A fortune in plunder, still bright as the day Ulf Grimsson brought it here, rests about the heavy ashen chair where the proud warrior once sat. Powerful weapons, forged by strong smiths and wielded by great fighters, hang from the walls. Jeweled cups of gold sit upon the table, and a drinking horn, torn from a dragon's skull, dangles from Ulf's seat. It is a fortune the likes of which few might ever set eyes upon. Behind the large chair, the runes *Fehu* (possessions) and *Eihwaz* (protection) are carved into the timbers, along with a lengthy warning for any would-be thief, regarding a curse Ulf placed upon the treasure that did not follow him onto the funeral boat. It is free for the taking to one who would put it to honest ends in service to the All-Father but must not be spent frivolously, nor must it be taken in greater sum than is needed for a single endeavor. Out of respect for the ancient Valdarmathr, many who have come since have likewise added of

UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

Normally, the mage-familiar bond conforms to the standard of one human and one spirit, joined through a mystic union to share certain capabilities with one another. Ketil's ravens are an exception to the rule, as at least a significant minority of the birds there are spirits and all of them are favorably inclined toward the young man. These spirit-ravens draw their abilities from a common source (think of them as a "flock" of Umbrood who can split the powers of four points worth of Familiar between them) and, when asked by Ketil, will bestow their gifts upon any member of the Raven's Wing, serving as a normal Familiar for the mage in question.

their own wealth to the hoard, and those who would know Ulf's bounty are expected to give as they may to keep his treasury alive for the next generation as a tribute to his generosity. It is this spirit of community, married to Ulf's sense of adventure and his powerful pride, which holds the hall together even today and fuels the cray here.

In the village itself, the rest of the resources of Ulf's Hall are tucked away. The descendants of Ulf's thralls make up a good portion of the village's inhabitants and at least a few in every generation come into the service of the Valdaermen. The village, nameless and lonely, is a fishing community, with a very few families scraping out some meager farming or herding. Its remote location ensures a small population, which, in turn, means that the attentions of the Roman Church turn elsewhere, for who cares what an isolated gathering of fishermen think? As a result, the hamlet has managed to remain true to the faith of the old gods of the north: the All-Father, the Thunderer and their ilk, especially Njord, lord of the seas and patron of fishermen. This cultural holdout is where the cabal known as the Raven's Wing has chosen to make its stand. While the mages there have little in the way of glorious battle plans to boast of, they do maintain hope that subtlety will succeed in preserving the traditional ways of life where blatancy has failed.

The Cabal

No one knows who first named the cabal that watched over Ulf's Hall the Raven's Wing, but the title was in place when Brand first came here and it has remained since the day he assumed control of the cray. All of the Valdaermen who have come to the hall have felt strangely "called" there, as though only they

were fit to take up Ulf's mantle and restore the bold explorer's home to its former grandeur.

Brand Grydsson is certainly the keeper of the hall and is generally regarded as the leader of the cabal, as well as being the most capable magus among them. He is a towering and barrel-chested warrior whose intimidating physical frame conceals a keen and incisive mind. It is he, more than any of the other Valdaermen of the hall, who wishes to use the resources of the cray and its environs to retrace Ulf Grimsson's ancient journeys, most especially the trek to Vinland. While he would be overjoyed to discover plunder with which to maintain the chantry's coffers, Brand wishes, more than anything, to indulge his sense of adventure.

Gerti Eriksdottir is surely the wisest of the Valdaermen of the Raven's Wing. She tempers Brand's stubbornness with simple common sense (sometimes disguising it in the form of "divinations" or "signs" if he is being particularly bullheaded on an issue). Gerti is a comely woman and is well loved by the people of the tiny fishing village that has grown up on the coastline near the hall. She is a particular favorite of children and young mothers, whom she dotes upon, and is also a friend to the local Commoner leaders.

Ketil Svensson is a reserved, quiet young man. His black hair is a mark of foreign heritage, but Brand also considers the young man's dark mane to be a sign of the All-Father's favor, as it has the dull sheen of raven's feathers. Ketil spends much of his time tending to the hall. He has taken on the unofficial position of doling out Ulf's wealth to the other members of the cabal, monitoring the hoard carefully to see that the old warlord's commandment is upheld.

One day, Gunnar Nyalsson is likely to take control of Ulf's Hall from Brand, one way or another. A strapping and powerful youth, he is probably going to outstrip his mentor's physical might when he is full grown in a year or two. Gunnar is popular with the townsfolk (most especially the village's few young women), and all feel relaxed and at ease when in his presence. He is strong, but kind, and his open-hearted demeanor largely transcends the air of abject loneliness and isolation that surrounds so many of the rune-wise.

The Chantry

Ulf's Hall is a simple affair. While some chantries span grandiose palaces or expansive tracts of woodland, the fest-hall is a largish building, made of solid oak, weatherworn but in no need of repair. A circle of posts, engraved with the sacred letters, is tucked away on the northwestern side of the island. The ravens are

ubiquitous and the whole island is perpetually mantled in mist or fog, save for when rain or snow falls so thickly as to render visibility almost nil.

Within, the structure has a careworn dignity. The long ash table is notched from many knives and bears a few hairline splits, burdened as it often was beneath the great weight of legendary feasts. Chairs are plentiful, but none can mistake Ulf's seat for anything other than the throne of a powerful warrior. It is massive and imposing, worn over the course of years to the contours of his huge frame. A palpable aura seems to rest upon that seat, as though daring any upstart to claim it. Even Brand gives Ulf's chair a respectable berth. Heaped about the head of the table are the mounds of treasure that did not accompany Ulf on his final adventure, the journey to Valhalla. All manner of valuables, from coin to jewels, to weaponry and much else besides, can be found here. A considerable portion of it remains from the days of Ulf's reign here, though no small measure has been added by those who came after him. Some undefined amount seems to come from neither source, and a few of the Valdaermen who have called this chantry home have surmised that the spells placed upon the hall somehow "call" lost treasures and incorporate them into the hoard.

The walls are festooned with trophies of Ulf's adventures and those added by subsequent cabals. Though some are quite old, none look to be in poor repair and the hangings seem neither busy nor sparse, no matter how many generations pass. A great fireplace takes up the better part of the northern wall, easily heating the entirety of the building when the flames are stoked. The kitchen and pantry, adjoining the dining hall, are built largely of stone, rather than wood, and are tucked inconspicuously out of sight.

Ulf's Hall in Dots

Ulf's Hall represents seven points of the Chantry Background. Three go into the actual size of the building, while two are spent on security (the magical misdirection effect that leads outsider mages and Commoners in general away from the island on which the fest-hall is found) and two to integrate the Chantry into the community (making the hall an accepted part of life in the small finishing village). The Chantry Background serves as the Anchor of the cabal's pooled Backgrounds (with three points contributed by Brand and two each by Gerti and Ketil). As lord of the hall, Brand also contributes all five points of the Resources that make up the Chantry's monies. Though some of this treasure is acquired by trade, plunder or other means, a small amount of it seems to come from

nowhere, replenished gradually by the ancient enchantments on the hall itself. The two points of Cray invested in the Hall also come from Brand's Backgrounds. Gerti donates her three points of Allies to the cabal's pool (an old healer woman in the village and her two strong sons, one of whom is ostensibly the Christian priest for the area but is in reality an Odinist, and the other of whom is regarded as a local leader) and her two Servants (a young woman and her seven-year-old illegitimate son, both of whom live at the hall and perform simple menial chores). Ketil contributes heavily to the Chantry, lending four dots of Familiar (the ravens who nest on and around the hall), three dots of Sanctum (an unassuming circle of rune-carven posts on the far corner of the island) and two dots of Library (the tales of Ulf's exploits, both mundane and mystic). As the newcomer, Gunnar lends his two points of Influence (his universal acceptance and esteem among the locals) to the pool. This brings the Raven's Wing to a total of Chantry 7, Resources 5, Familiar 4, Allies and Sanctum 3, and Influence, Library and Servants 2.

A Staging Point

Ulf's Hall is, to no small degree, a shrine to a vanished way of life. With this village, so friendly to the Valdaermen, the cabal has a base of operations from which to do battle against the rising tide of Christianity in an attempt to preserve the venerable ways of the Norse, almost totally crushed beneath the heavy weight of the Cross.

The hall is also a place consecrated to ancient adventures and tales of valor. Ulf himself was a great explorer and mighty warrior and wished for those who came after him, those who would share in the bounty he had borne back to the homeland, to emulate his example and ensure that the days of Viking would never die. The world has long since moved on, abandoning utterly the lifestyle the old warlord knew, but the chantry he left behind still demands that his will be worked. Even as the Raven's Wing fights to keep its way of life from fading into extinction, Brand feels the pull of the cray, demanding battles to shake the heavens and journeys into distant lands, to return with stories and plunder. This is, if anything, a far harder purpose to fulfill than the nigh-impossibility of reversing the tide that has all but eradicated the Nordic faith. Still, as Brand would say, it is far better to face the end in one's boots than in one's bed.

These twin objectives, keeping alive the beliefs of the Old Ways while continuing to uphold the manner of living endorsed by those ways, are a constant effort.

Brand intends to spend a few more years grooming the youth of the village to spread the Nordic faith in just the same manner practiced by the conquerors of the Christian religion, but he is not a patient man. When he has discharged his obligation of looking to the future, he will set out to fight for the past, probably turning the chantry over to Gerti or, if he is old enough and has matured sufficiently, Gunnar.

Outside Interests

Few outsiders even know of the tiny hamlet that serves as host to Ulf's Hall, and fewer still know of the chantry itself. While the Church would be happy to bring the village fully under the sway of Christianity, it is not a priority. It doesn't worry overmuch about a handful of families clustered together on the northern banks of the world. They already have a priest assigned to them and will receive another when this one moves on to higher office or dies. Of course, the former option isn't apt to happen, and the latter will be many years in coming, unless misfortune strikes.

A few hardy woodsmen live in the area, but none who has any interests, benevolent or malign, in what goes on at the village, beyond the occasional trade of pelts for fish. This is not an interesting place to Commoners, and that is precisely the way the mages here like it. Anonymity and remoteness serve to keep missionaries and settlers at bay and shield against the changing political climate of the age.

Allies

While the entirety of the small fishermen's hamlet along the coast, near the tiny island that hosts Ulf's Hall, is allied with the mages there, their influence and ability to aid the Valdaermen beyond the degree to which they already do so are slight. They can occasionally do favors for the cabal, though their greatest contribution comes in the form of their continued adherence to the faith of the ancestors in the face of Christian persecution.

In order for the cabal to branch out and spread the doctrines of the old religion, it must be willing to take risks. Norway is a Christian nation now, despite the scattered small pagan enclaves that hold out against the coming of the new faith. Unfortunately, none of the magi of the cabal even know where to begin in the quest to give the gods back to the people. Between them, they know a handful of other Valdaermen, but these rune-wise folk have their own problems. Their best chances probably lie in seeking other isolated communities and testing the waters, to see how fully they have been integrated with the Christian beliefs

and practices. Ketil's idea, thus far the best of the notions bandied about, involves using the same insidious process of assimilation that the missionaries employed when they first came to this land:

co-opting the ideas, concepts and personalities of the new religion and casting them in the very different light of the faith of the Aesir and the Vanir. After all, this process of cultural insinuation worked very well for the missionary newcomers.

Despite this, however, it remains a dangerous proposition. The soldiers of the Church are afoot, in great numbers and with considerable power at their beck and call.

Other avenues of acquiring power and influence remain open to the cabal. As some members of this generation of youths grow into men, no few may go into the world, seeking fortune and opportunity. With the rune-wisdom of the Valdaermen and the tenets of the ancient faith in their hearts, they will find jobs as merchants, craftsmen and soldiers. They will take families and raise them with respect for the dying traditions of the Norse, traditions already long dead in many parts of Scandinavia. Though it is a frail stratagem, it is, sadly, one of the final recourses available to the cabal members and all those like them, Valdaermen

who would see the terrible day of Ragnarok held at bay for just a generation or two more.

Enemies

The cabal of the Raven's Wing has almost nothing to fear in its isolated locale. The mandate of Ulf Grimsson, however, demands that the mages strike out, across the lands and waters, beyond the borders of their quiet community, to return the ancient ways to a changing world. That said, the first and most potent foe the cabal is likely to encounter in their struggles is the Catholic Church. The "abhorrent paganism" of the Valdaermen is just the sort of thing the Church is working day and night to stamp out.

The few enclaves of traditional Odinists left in Scandinavia are subtle in their worship, fearing the wrath of the Cross that has borne

their gods to the ground and very nearly sapped the life out of them.

Few threats to the cabal could even begin to hold a candle to the dangers posed by the Church while at home, but many potential foes are abroad. If Brand has his way (and it is possible that the cray won't survive another generation if he doesn't), there is no telling what manner of enemies the mages could cultivate.

In a nebulous position — not quite an enemy, but certainly not friendly — is a strange, wrathful



spirit that wanders the land in the night, claiming victims every so often. Ketil's knowledge of the records of the chantry seems to indicate that the being is somehow bound to a treasure Ulf brought back from Vinland, but which was taken by a thieving magus who died somewhere nearby when a freak blizzard rose up to consume him. The spirit is known to the Valdaermen to run across the night sky, especially in the depths of winter, leaving footprints of flame. It usually stays far from the village and seems to fear civilization. The thing has only attacked a rare few travelers caught out in the worst of winter storms. Ketil seems to think that it is connected to a strange affliction that grips the occasional small group stranded in the fierce Nordic winter; cannibalism. The chantry's writings intimate that the spirit hungers constantly and seeks to sate its appetites through the palates of human hosts. While the creature is no great threat to anyone who does her best to stay out of the driving snows of winter (anyone but the foolish or the desperate, for the most part), Brand's lust for battle may turn it into an enemy with the onset of this winter or the next. Of course, even if the cabal can find it, the chantry's library offers no hints on how to placate it, defeat it or banish it.

And the Rest

The Raven's Wing is in the unenviable position of wishing to keep a powerful secret. As Odin himself might tell them, no secret lasts forever. Their cautious efforts to restore the once-proud name of the All-Father would be lauded by some and cursed by others, were they widely known. Some few, however, *do* know about them and are more than idly curious. Whether that curiosity bears sweet fruit or bitter depends largely upon the reactions of the members of the cabal and the manner in which they present themselves when those who watch them decide to finally reveal their presence.

Halvard Firemane, an *einherjar* Gangrel, has watched the Raven's Wing with an increasing amount of interest. He and his companion (a grizzled old wolf he has put under the blood) have recently been pushed into more northerly lands due to troubles with several of the newcomer vampires who are gradually trickling into Scandinavia. Embittered by the weak and simpering politicians who have used numbers, rather than strength, to drive him and his kind out, Halvard is looking for two things, allies and a fight, and he doesn't know for certain which one he wants more right now. Some nights, when they fly out in search of food, Halvard speaks to the normal ravens

that roost on the island alongside their spirit-brothers. On more than one occasion, the Cainite has possessed one of the birds to watch the mages by day. As yet, he isn't sure what to make of them. They seem to honor the Old Ways but are cowering in a forgotten corner of the north. Still, they are men of power, and Halvard knows better than to try to understand them. In them, he thinks, he may have found powerful friends. Failing that, he is certain he can make of them very worthy enemies. In either case, Halvard is sure that these Valdaermen are the key to recovering a small shred of his way of unlife, even if only for a little while.

In Oslo, far to the south, a Hermetic covenant has recently discovered the existence (but not the location) of a cray hidden somewhere right along the north coast. While their efforts to pinpoint that cray have thus far been fruitless, it will not be long before they begin to make some headway in piercing the veils of misdirection that protect and conceal Ulf's Hall. The Order, after all, is quite persistent. When that time comes, they will send several capable magi, as is the Order's custom, to hunt down the cray, and, when they do, they will come into contact with the Raven's Wing. Normally, this would likely portend disaster for the Valdaermen here, as the covenant to the south simply has more and more powerful magi, but these Hermetics are themselves sons and daughters of the north and are a bit more sympathetic to the plight of the Valdaermen than their more southerly brethren might be. Many of them continue to practice the faith of their forefathers, concealing their beliefs beneath a veil of false devotion to the Church. When the day finally comes that these Hermetics find them, depending on how the cabal mages react, they could find themselves with some very powerful allies or truly terrible enemies.

Brand Gyrdson

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Autocrat

Fellowship: Valdaermen

Background: Brand was born not fifty miles from Ulf's Hall and heard the call of the runes when he was but a boy. Others scorned him and mocked him for his pursuit of the "women's work" of the runes, but he was undaunted. He went into the wilderness as a young man, determined to seek out the sacred letters of the gods, and found them, in the full wrath of a blizzard, during which he claims the All-Father himself spoke to him and offered him the chance for life, if he had but the will to accept it. Most of Brand's life since has reflected that indomitable will, that drive to accom-



plish by own hands and on his own terms. If any can truly be said to rule the cabal of Ulf's Hall, it is Brand Gyrðsson. He is a fair man, if somewhat unbending, and he is every bit the Nordic warrior-lord, his very existence denying the world that has moved on and challenging any and all to dare to draw him out of that other age in which he dwells.

Image: Brand is a tall man, easily over six feet in height. He is lean but muscular, with a well groomed blond beard and a full head of long hair. His stare is intense, and he often seems to be gazing at something ordinary men cannot see. He dresses in the fashion of a warrior of old, complete with a battleaxe and ornaments of gold. He moves with the practiced grace of one who knows combat like a close friend. Brand is never seen without one of the ravens from the isle of Ulf's Hall and always wears his rune-stone about his neck, cut with the mark of *Uruz* (strength).

Gerti Eriksdottir

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Caretaker

Fellowship: Valdaermen

Background: Gerti is the daughter of a Valdarmathr, her mother, who was in turn the daughter of another of the rune-wise. She has grown up knowing of the Old Ways and has dedicated her life to the magic of the gods.

Her eyes were opened gradually to her own mystic prowess, rather than the sudden and traumatic experience that brought Brand to the All-Father's attention, and this patience and quiet self-confidence is reflected in her demeanor, as much as Brand's bold and unhesitating attitude shows through in his. She is, in many ways, Brand's anchor to the realities of the world and the restraint to his swift action. She followed a divination to the hall, one in which the gods told her to hold back a furious storm roiling out of the ancient days to spend its fury impotently in denial of the world that has come to pass. When she met Brand, Gerti knew exactly what the Aesir were talking about. While she feels badly about the occasional lies she tells Brand, Gerti knows that the will of the gods comes above all else, even her friendship.



Image: Short but well muscled, Gerti wears her pale blonde hair in two braids that trail well past her waist. Her face is wholesome, if not ravishing, and she exudes a palpable air of self-assurance, completely devoid of any kind of arrogance. She dresses simply, with only a subtle piece of jewelry here or there to denote that she is something more than a common farmer or fisherman's daughter. Gerti is almost never armed with anything more substantial than a knife; the power of the gods is weapon enough.

Ketil Svensson

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Loner

Fellowship: Valdaermen

Background: Ketil's father was obviously a half-breed, the son of one of the many Northmen who went south to take employ in Constantinople in the Varangian Guard. He left the splendor of the Byzantine courts as a young man to return to the land of his ancestors. Sven took a goat herder's daughter to be his wife, and his boy was born in the midst of a terribly cold winter. Ketil, more so than any of the Valdaermen of Ulf's Hall, has embodied the emptiness of their Fellowship all his life. He is silent and sullen, taking comfort in the timeless treasures of the cray and in the company of the hall's innumerable ravens. The forlorn spirits of the frozen north call out to him and, sometimes, he is tempted to answer, despite the terrible price he knows such a reply would carry. His life an exercise in perpetual melancholy, Ketil understands full well that Ragnarok is not coming; it is already here.

Image: Ketil is tall but quite lean, almost gaunt. His black hair falls in an unkempt tangle, the surest sign of his mixed heritage. Like his father, Ketil is certainly swarthier than is common in these lands,



though his haunted look makes him seem paler than he is, a bit ephemeral perhaps. He pays little heed to what he is wearing, though it is most often drab and unadorned. Ketil wears the terrible destiny of the gods like a mantle, and his sad, dark eyes have been known to put fear into even stout-hearted men.

Gunnar Nyalsson

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Jester

Fellowship: Valdaermen



Background: From birth, Gunnar seemed destined for great things. The fourth son of a prosperous merchant, he was born with a radiant face and a chubby frame that family and friends just knew would one day be tall, straight and strong. As he grew from an infant into a boy, Gunnar was bright and athletic, earning the envy of some and the admiration of many. His life was one of contentment and plenty. When a plague came to his town, all of that changed. Gunnar was eleven when his family died, and, rather than seek charity from friends or other relations, he packed up a few meager belongings and set out into the world. At the age of sixteen, he heard the call of the gods. There was no cataclysmic revelation, no great trauma — just a gentle voice in his ear and a feeling of purpose and direction. The fortunate boy had been favored by luck once more. Brand found Gunnar in the woods, not far from the hall, five months ago. He recognized the

potential for greatness in the young man and has taken him under his wing. One day soon, Gunnar knows, fate will smile on him once more and Ulf's Hall shall be his.

Image: Gunnar is old enough that the beginnings of a beard are now poking through his ruddy cheeks, but he has a year or two left to go before he stops growing. He already towers over most men and will certainly stand taller than Brand one day. He dresses like a young warrior-prince, in the finest garb the hall has to offer, supplementing it with jewelry and a fine broadsword. Gunnar has an easygoing, friendly manner and is easy to get to know and even easier to like.

The Protectorate of Compostela

The Shrine of St. James the Apostle at Santiago de Compostela is one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in all of Christendom, trailing only behind Jerusalem and Rome in terms of sheer importance. According to legend, the shrine stands upon the site of the tomb of St. James the Apostle, who was reputed to have preached the gospel to the people of the region and whose body returned there complete with a marble sarcophagus following his martyrdom in Palestine. Its most commonly traversed pilgrim's road begins in France and wends for 450 miles through some of the most mountainous terrain to be had anywhere in western Europe. Nonetheless, the road is traveled more or less year-round by those individuals desirous of bathing themselves in the sanctity of the shrine, as well as by merchants, mountebanks and cutthroats of all varieties taking advantage of the predictable business to be had on the *Camino de Santiago*. (For more detailed information on Compostela and its place in the conflicts of the *Reconquista*, consult *Iberia by Night*.)

Fortunately for the pilgrims, the route is defended for varying lengths by no less than three separate military orders: the Sword of St. James, based in Pamplona; the Order of Santiago, based in Compostela itself; and the Order of the Poor Knights of the Cross of the Passion of Acre, based just outside of Compostela proper. Of these, two of them, the Sword of St. James and the Order of Santiago, provide protection of the more mundane sort, guarding groups of pilgrims from outright attack by brigands and bands of Moorish raiders. The Poor Knights perform this service as well, and add a little something extra to the bargain, as they are dedicated to the destruction of the unnatural enemies preying upon Christendom. They reserve

special loathing, and particularly extreme prejudice, for those night-things that prey on the blood of pilgrims traveling the road to holy Compostela.

The Inquisitorial Cells

The protectorate of Compostela is under the care of two different orders of the shadow Inquisition, each performing its own duties and theoretically working together in order to cover any gaps where those efforts do not naturally mesh. The first, and most strongly established, of those cells is affiliated with the Poor Knights of Acre, the overtly military arm of the Inquisition.

The Poor Knights in Compostela are led by Knight-Commander Baltasar Delgado, a man nearly as hard-bitten as the order's cantankerous old Grand Master, Gauthiere de Dampiere, who considers him a personal friend. Within the order, this simple fact grants him considerable status, which is bolstered by an unimpeachable record of service to God and man on battlefields too numerous to list. Knight-Commander Delgado has no discernable sense of humor and little tolerance for moral equivocating; to him, there is no such thing as a gray area, no matter what a situation might look like on the surface.

Sir Rafael de la Vega is the Knight-Commander's most capable lieutenant, despite the fact that he's a tad too dashing for his superior's taste. The youngest son of an Iberian nobleman, Sir Rafael is possibly a bit less genuinely pious than the average Poor Knight, and, in some ways, this definitely shows. Pride and honor won't let him perform any task he takes on to less than perfection, though he also doesn't see anything wrong with performing his duties with as much personal flair as he can get away with. This has caused a certain amount of personality conflict with his more staid commander, but both are mature and realistic enough to agree to disagree and move on.

Directly beneath him in the chain of command is Sir Fantino di Milano, who leads the Poor Knights' humanitarian mission in Compostela. Recruited from the Knights Hospitaller, Sir Fantino is more physician than soldier, a calm-spirited, insightful man who is regularly accused of being too soft-hearted by Sir Baltasar and simply soft-headed by Sir Rafael. He bears these slings and arrows from his brothers with remarkable good temper and concentrates the bulk of his energies on administering the order's pilgrims' hospice and orphans' asylum. Few members of the Poor Knights appreciate precisely how capable Sir Fantino is when it comes to excavating important pieces of information from the countless "there-I-was-

on-the-road-to-Compostela" stories that come to his attention every year, even when his efforts yield spectacular results.

Beneath these stalwarts are a number of younger knights who perform the bulk of the order's duties when it comes to patrolling the pilgrims' road, as well as providing additional hands in the hospice and the asylum.

The second of the cells is a group of *Oculi Dei*, a recently founded cell based in Compostela proper. Originally a nonmilitary intelligence-gathering extrusion of the Sword of St. James, the Eyes of God have, over the years, become divorced from their parent organization and the scope of their duties has expanded accordingly. The Eyes now provide their intelligence-gathering efforts to the whole of the Inquisition, as well as courier service between its far-flung cells and chapter houses. The group in Compostela was founded for several reasons, not the least of which was that the city represents a rich source of information, one too important to leave solely in the hands of the lamentably unsubtle Poor Knights.

The theoretical "leader" of the Compostelan Eyes is Dona Ignacia Navarro de Souza. Young, wealthy, and recently widowed, Dona Ignacia combines three traits near and dear to the hearts of all Eyes of God: a healthy sense of caution (which has not yet ripened into full-blown paranoia), a keen eye for even the most mundane of details and a ruthless willingness to use any tool that comes to hand. She strongly believes that her husband somehow fell afoul of the "night-fiends" she and her cell are supposed to spy upon; what she will do once she confirms this supposition is anyone's guess, though the heavy involvement of the Poor Knights is virtually certain. Even so, she considers the protection of her cell as high a priority as the eventual unearthing of the truth and does not risk it or its efforts unnecessarily.

"Fortunato" is the name by which Dona Ignacia knows the mysterious individual who is actually the most senior Oculus in the city. He (or perhaps she) contacts the Dona solely via correspondence placed in the base of a small statue of the Virgin Mary located in the Dona's own herb garden. Since all of the letters are written in the same hand, the Dona assumes that "Fortunato" is educated; the letters themselves deal with the seamier side of the city's "pilgrim trade," leading the Dona to wonder how "Fortunato" acquired that education and why (s)he chooses to dwell among the city's dregs in search of truth and virtue.

Ramiro and Ganzalo Carrillo are two long-time residents of Compostela and long-time Eyes as well,

operating within the more mundane strata of the city's society. Ramiro owns a pilgrim's hostel that, in the off-season, doubles as a tavern/brothel for the locals, whose brains the affable old landlord is only too happy to pick. Ganzalo, Ramiro's younger brother, moves in slightly different circles, being a clerk in minor orders attached to the Cathedral scriptorium. Through this position, he has managed to monitor a great amount of the civic and sacred correspondence that passes through the hands of his fellow clerks. Since Ramiro is only barely literate, Ganzalo scribes the brothers' correspondence, which he circulates to the rest of the cell via a certain vestibule in the Cathedral itself.

The commandery of the Poor Knights lies a short distance outside of the city itself, along the *Camino de Santiago*; it is often one of the last places pilgrims stop before entering the city. It consists of a pilgrims' hospice (divided into two sections, one of which is specifically dedicated to the care of those who fall ill on their journey, the other consisting of the standard hostel amenities of bed, board and a place to rest one's feet), the knights' dormitory, assembly hall, chapel, stables, a small vegetable garden, and the enclosed orphans' asylum. The Poor Knights rarely enter the city except to purchase provisions at market and, occasionally, to exchange information with their companion *Oculi Dei* cell.

The *Oculi Dei*, as is the usual case, do not possess a single "chapter house," but rather have several contact points scattered throughout the city. Dona Ignacia's town house is one of these — or, more specifically, the hollow-based statue of the Virgin in her herb garden is frequently used to exchange anonymous correspondence, as are several merchant stalls in the market and a vestibule within the Shrine of St. James itself. None of the members of the *Oculi Dei* cell has, thus far, met another on a face-to-face basis.

The Protectorate

Santiago de Compostela is, for the Dark Medieval era, the functional equivalent of a tourist trap. The Shrine of St. James brings a literal horde of pilgrims to the city each year, and the city has, perforce, developed something of a service-based economy as an effect of dealing with them. Finding new and ingenious ways of separating gullible foreigners from their money can practically be construed as the average Compostelan's civic duty. Countless hostels crowd practically against the walls of the holy shrine itself, as do cookshops, merchant stalls, the odd whorehouse and, of course, souvenir vendors. During the height of the pilgrimage season (which normally begins in early

spring, peaking in late July with the Saint's feast-day on the 25th and declining slowly through the rest of the summer), nearly anyone can rake the filthy lucre in hand over fist provided he has a length of floor that a weary pilgrim could collapse on, the finger bones of a saint crying out for a new home or anything resembling (semi)fresh food. Overpricing is rampant, as are the more direct sorts of thievery, though the civic authorities do their best not to let either get completely out of hand, lest the pilgrims decide it actually would be cheaper to travel to Rome.

During the times of the year when the city isn't thronged with pilgrims, Compostela's resident population declines and the city itself falls back into more mundane modes of existence. Galicia, the region of Leon in which Compostela is located, is cut off from the arid central tableland of the Iberian peninsula by the Cordillera Cantabrica mountain range, and its climate is notably different from that of the *meseta*. Compostela sits in the middle of one of the most water-rich regions in all of Iberia, practically on top of the confluence of the Sar and Sarela Rivers; the hills outside the city are rolling, lush in greenery and free-flowing streams. In general, the climate is temperate; winters are mild, summers are warm rather than parching, and both tend to be rather wet, as rainfall is common in nearly all seasons.

This fact has permitted Compostela to develop a more varied economy in terms of what the land under cultivation can produce both for immediate use and for sale. The coastal fisheries with whom the city maintains trade agreements provide Compostela with regular supplies of octopus, lobster, oysters, cod, sea-bream, conger eel, pilchards and lamprey, along with copious other sorts of salt and freshwater fish. Domesticated livestock includes cows, sheep, pigs and goats (along with the different sorts of cheese they produce), and chickens, ducks and geese, as well as their eggs. Oxen are bred as draught animals, horses and mules as mounts and pack animals. The local forests and hills are rich with wild game, particularly hares, rabbits and partridges; deer and boar are less commonly found in the marketplace, though they are not entirely unknown. Wax and honey, both from wild and domesticated sources, are easily obtainable.

Vineyards and orchards are common in the region surrounding Compostela, as are their produce of wine and cider; in fact, cider is somewhat more commonly drunk than wine. Barley and rye are the principal grain crops, with wheat being somewhat less common than in other parts of Christendom, and millet being the rarest grain of all. The cultivation of flax provides

one of the local textile bases, allowing for the production of a particularly fine grade of bed-and-table linen; locally produced woolen cloth is another common textile. Ceramics are a fairly well established local industry, as is mining for both salt and iron.

What this amounts to, in the final analysis, is that Compostela is a nearly perfect milk-cow awaiting exploitation by any number of enterprising individuals, both human and otherwise. This is why the Poor Knights and Oculi Dei are, ultimately, so keenly desirous of determining whose strings are attached to which interests, and why.

The Protectorate in Dots

The protectorate of Santiago de Compostela represents seven dots worth of Chapter-House expenditures and constitutes the Anchor Background for the paired cells, with four points distributed for size and three for security. The commandery of the Poor Knights makes up the bulk of the protectorate's property, consisting as it does of at least one fortified building and several general-purpose outbuildings, along with the pilgrims' hospice. Dona Ignacia's modest townhouse and Ramiro Carrillo's hostel/tavern/brothel add a bit more to the theoretically defensible/multipurpose holdings of the two cells. Both cells add to the security rating as well, due to the fortifications of the commandery and the extreme caution and security protocols enacted among the Oculi Dei, who carry out the bulk of the protectorate's more sensitive information-gathering business.

The Poor Knights, in terms of the rest of their Background expenditures, are just that — poor. The commandery that they occupy is the possession of their order, as are every furnishing, book and bale of supplies within it, up to and including their swords, armor, horses and the clothes on their backs. The order tends to the material needs of its members but doesn't make much allowance for fripperies; every silver penny, every bolt of cloth and every hand of horseflesh is rigorously accounted for through the borderline-diabolical agency of Sir Audric, the order's Knight Treasurer, and God help the Poor Knight who expends a single bit of it unnecessarily. As a consequence, while the Poor Knights enjoy the single largest land holding of the conjoined cells, they have a combined Resources rating of 1, representative of the miniscule cash inheritance that Sir Rafael received upon the death of his father, which immediately went into the cell's war-chest. Fortunately, Dona Ignacia was somewhat better cared for by her family; her dowry was not only real estate, but *productive* real

estate. In addition to making her townhouse the *de facto* Chapter-House for the Compostelan Eyes, she has additionally channeled her three points of Resources (the financial proceeds of a modestly sized vineyard that is also in her possession) into the financial support of the cells' efforts.

What the Poor Knights lack in money they more than make up for in pure political and spiritual influence. Sir Baltasar, in addition to his personal Rank (which of course is not part of the Background pool), enjoys good relations with the regional commanders of the various military orders, resulting in a contribution of three points of Influence. Sir Fantino likewise boasts a deep connection to the pilgrims who travel to Compostela (expressed as three points in Flock).

Fortunato's considerable Contacts (four points) have informed both the Oculi Dei and the Poor Knights about the movements and habits of the night-hunting residents of Compostela. This web of information across the city covers nearly every social layer, particularly when combined with the equally impressive Contacts (three points, consisting mostly of fellow landlords and other scum of the city types) and Allies (two points, mostly Ganzalo's fellow scribes, who are in a slightly better position to notice significant written information) the Carrillo siblings can bring to bear.

In total, then, the two cells' pooled Backgrounds total Chapter-House 7, Contacts 7, Resources 4, Flock and Influence 3, and Allies 2.

Outside Interests

Compostela is a focal point of considerable interest for both the living and the undead. The Cainite Prince is relatively secure on his throne and has been for quite some time, but the land around the city is nonetheless convulsed in conflict, open and otherwise. The success of the *Reconquista* has seriously shaken the local Cainite power structures, opening up avenues of opportunity that had, under Muslim and Assamite domination, been either closed completely or severely restricted. As a result, Reinaldo del Rubio, the

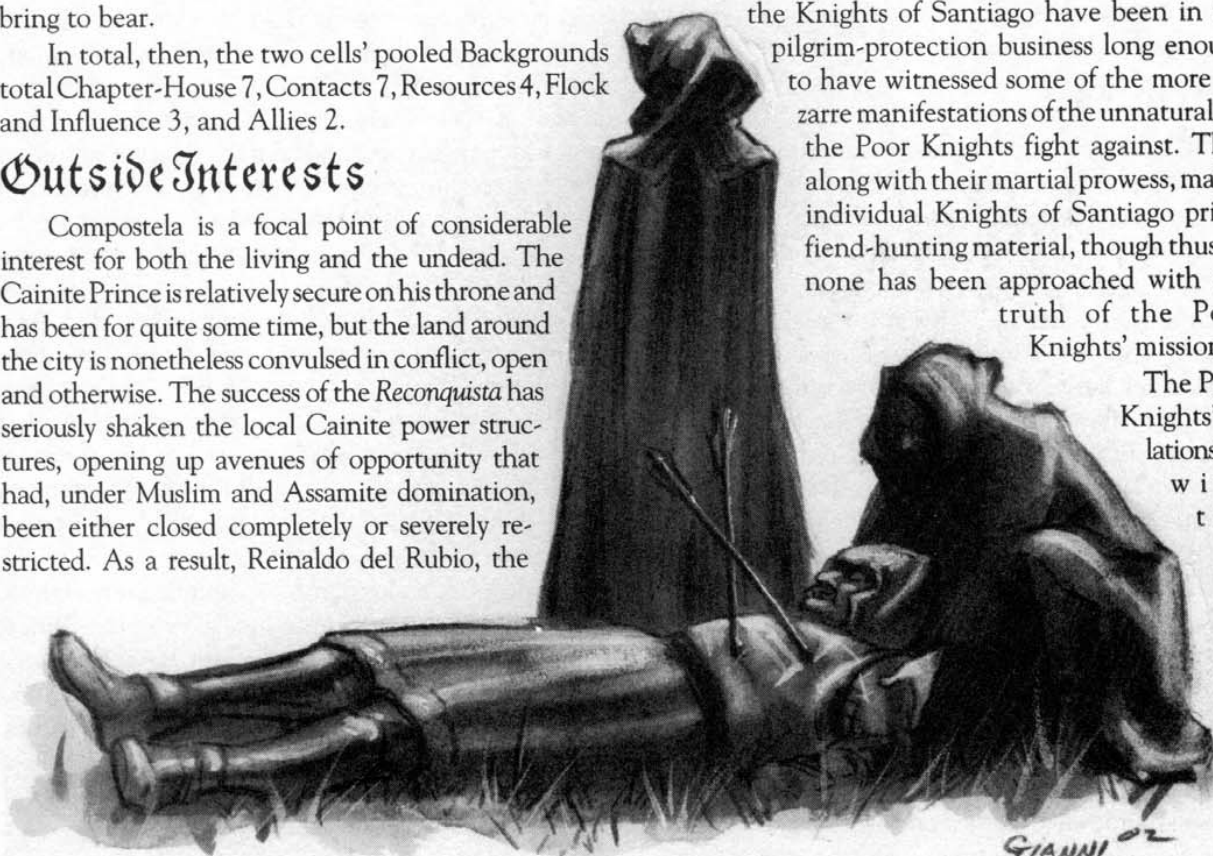
Cainite Prince, has found himself being wooed from several quarters by Lasombra clanmates who would very much like his support in disposing of their rivals; he is currently engaged in the idle sport of playing them off against each other and seeing what benefits he can derive from whoever survives.

Allies

Both the Poor Knights and the Eyes of God enjoy good relations in several different quarters of Compostela's diverse population. In fact, in this area, the Poor Knights enjoy a certain advantage over the Eyes due to their established, relatively open position in the local military hierarchy.

The Poor Knights enjoy excellent relationships with both of the other military orders dedicated to the protection of the pilgrim roads, particularly the Order of Santiago, with whom they share the responsibility of guarding the roads closest to the city itself. Individual knights of both orders are friendly with one another, and Sir Baltasar has remained cautiously optimistic about these relationships, as long as no sensitive information is bandied about in casual conversation. Recruitment from the Order of Santiago has been debated more than once among the Poor Knights in Compostela; it is an indisputable fact that the Knights of Santiago have been in the pilgrim-protection business long enough to have witnessed some of the more bizarre manifestations of the unnatural rot the Poor Knights fight against. This, along with their martial prowess, makes individual Knights of Santiago prime fiend-hunting material, though thus far none has been approached with the truth of the Poor Knights' mission.

The Poor
Knights' relationship
with
the



Sword of St. James is likewise good, if somewhat more problematic. The Sword of St. James is the martial hand of the fantastically paranoid Rodrigue de Navarre, who generally considers the Poor Knights a walking disaster waiting to happen with their shining idealism and utter lack of subtlety. Unfortunately for de Navarre, both orders are in a position to interact on a regular basis, and it behooves them to cooperate and communicate when they do so. As a consequence, relations between the Sword of St. James and the Poor Knights tend to be a trifle cooler than "friendly" and are usually all business. For their part, the Poor Knights know who it is that the Sword of St. James serves and doesn't look for it to be one jot more helpful than it has to be in order to accomplish any particular set of goals.

It is the Eyes of God who enjoy the best relationship with the Sword of St. James, to their considerable chagrin and discomfort. The Sword of St. James is nearly as open in its activities as the Poor Knights; the Oculi Dei, the true children of Rodrigue de Navarre's fear-twisted vision, are equally uncomfortable dealing closely with both. The Eyes feed information to the Sword of St. James in much the same way as they filter it to the Poor Knights — through intermediaries. These intermediaries actually form the bulk of the Eyes' extensive web of allies-in-odd-places, the anonymous informants and message-carriers who are employed in lieu of an itinerant Oculi courier.

Enemies

Whether or not they have realized it, both cells have attracted a certain amount of attention from the supernatural residents of Compostela, unfriendly and otherwise.

During the height of the *Reconquista*, Compostela became the center of a chivalric "warrior cult" devoted to St. James in his guise as *Matamoros* — the Moorkiller. This cult persists and has attracted adherents both living and undead; in fact, both the Poor Knights of the Cross stationed in Compostela and at least two factions of vampires consider St. James their specific patron, an association that would no doubt make all sides extremely uncomfortable were they to learn of it. One vampire band, the Lions of Santiago, has come close to discovering the ideology they share with the Poor Knights, however. Not long ago, a group of these vampire knights traversing the road between Compostela and Pamplona came upon a scene of carnage: a small band of pilgrims had been attacked and brutally slaughtered by assailants unknown. Lying among them was an armed and armored knight, mortally wounded in his hopeless efforts to defend them.

To their credit, the Lions attempted to save the knight's life, though he perished before they could find a physician or one of them could successfully force the Embrace on him; it was when they searched through his belongings to determine his identity that they began to become curious.

The knight was carrying on his person a piece of correspondence written in a code that none of their band could break. Parts of the missive were so soaked in his blood that the ink had run, obliterating the writing and foiling their attempts to read it. Several of the vampire knights recognized his relatively rare arms, the broken cross of the Poor Knights, an order they associated with both the defense of the pilgrim roads and with Compostela. Left with no other recourse, the vampires delivered the body to the nearest church for a decent Christian burial, then went about their way, several of them still harboring niggling concerns about both the vicious assault and the unknown knight.

It wasn't until some months later, when two bands of Lions met and exchanged information, that the minor concern became a full-blown worry. As it happened, the blazon of the Poor Knights was well known among the Lions of Santiago, since it had the unsettling tendency to turn up wherever the Lions had most recently been, and sometimes where they were going as well. A suspicion began to form among the Lions that the Poor Knights were more than they appeared, given their apparent interest in the doings of the Lions as a whole and taking into account rumors concerning the extreme force they could bring to bear on the field of battle. At the moment, that is where the situation lies: the Lions of Santiago have their suspicions but no hard information to go on; they are looking for the opportunity to approach and interrogate a Poor Knight, provided they can catch one alone long enough to get their hands on him. At this point, they are more curious than concerned, though that would rapidly change should they learn of the Poor Knights' mandate to destroy all unnatural creatures, even those who stalk the night with the best of intentions in their undead hearts.

A second, and much more immediately serious, threat comes from Compostela's vampire Prince, Reinaldo de Rubio. The Prince, not entirely surprisingly, has become enamored of no less a person than Dona Ignacia Navarro de Souza, the beautiful young widow of an upstart nobleman unfortunately crushed in the clash of two *Lasombra* destroying each others' pawns. Or, rather, that is how the Prince views her. The Dona has impressed him with her enormous

personal dignity, her wit, her wisdom and the loyalty she showed to her late husband, even unto the final extremity. He was extremely pleased that she didn't go down with him, or throw her life and her fortunes away trying to avenge him, gracefully surrendering the political field and withdrawing to Compostela. There she has chosen to live in dignified mourning for her lord, subsisting comfortably on the resources of the dowry that reverted to her sole ownership upon his death, engaging in those womanly pursuits that redound to the credit of her soul.

Soon her mourning will end, and, when it does, she will no doubt be besieged by suitors, all desirous of having a woman of such sterling quality at their side. Reinaldo intends to be the one to win her, however, as he possesses at least two things that no other Iberian nobleman can offer her — the promise of immortality and the knowledge of who was truly responsible for the ruination and murder of her first husband. He suspects that Dona Ignacia will show her worth to the Clan of Shadows in what she does with that information, and, when she does, he plans to Embrace her as child and bride. Such a woman was not meant to crumble to dust after a fleeting season of beauty and strength; she was meant to rule the night at the side of a man worthy of her.

In his heart, he's already begun composing the sonnets with which he intends to woo her.

The Cells

The shadow Inquisition can call upon many skilled and resourceful individuals in its quest to cure Christendom of its unnatural blight, but only a select few don the mantle of a true inquisitor.

Knight-Commander Baltasar Delgado

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Bravo

Order: Poor Knights of the Cross of the Passion of Acre
Sir Baltasar, like many another Poor Knight in his generation, earned his spurs during the vicious nocturnal conflicts that occurred beneath the open warfare of the Albigensian Crusade. Tempered in the brutality of that crucible, his rough edges show through and he rarely, if ever, bothers to disguise them for purposes of diplomacy. Sir Baltasar suffers fools badly, and, in his opinion, an unfortunate number of his brothers in arms are fools; he prefers action and the immediate, tangible results that may be derived thereof to nearly any amount of pious navel-gazing and moral agonizing. It would not surprise him in the least to learn that he is on the short list of contenders for the post of



Grand Master; when Gauthiere de Dampiere passes on, he will genuinely mourn, but he is ambitious enough to desire the opportunity to shape the Poor Knights into a force that will cause Hell itself to tremble. Still mentally and physically robust in his late forties, he awaits the rewards that three decades of faultless service will surely bring him with only slightly crumbling patience.

Image: Sir Baltasar is an older man, weathered by battles and long marches in the sun. Very few of his subordinates have ever seen him dressed in anything but his armor, and none has ever seen him smile.

Sir Rafael de la Vega

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Gallant

Order: Poor Knights of the Cross of the Passion of Acre

Sir Rafael found himself in the ranks of the Poor Knights almost by default. The youngest of four children (three sons, one daughter) of an Iberian nobleman of middling means, he had no illusions about his place in life, knowing from the very start that the most he could expect to inherit was a sword and doing his best not to resent that fact. When his father elected to enroll him with the Poor Knights of the Cross, he was stunned; no one, including himself, had considered him to be of the sort of temperament that lent itself to



Holy Orders of any type — which, of course, may have been the point. His temperament still doesn't lend itself very well to the religious life, despite his best efforts to accustom himself to living under the rule of the Knights; he is simply, by nature, too in love with the world to successfully deny himself its pleasures for long. This is not to say that he doesn't take his duties seriously, for he does; would that he gave as much consideration to his vows of chastity.

Image: Still young, Sir Rafael has a beautiful, boyish face and dark, lustrous hair. While his vows and his lifestyle don't permit much in the way of niceties, he always manages to look clean and rested.

Dona Ignacia Navarro de Souza

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Order: Oculi Dei

Dona Ignacia is a refugee of the political games played by warring Lasombra houses; like St. James himself, she has washed up on the hills of Compostela with a holy mandate and the will to carry it through. The Dona was raised in the iron-clad traditions of duty and faith — duty first to her father, who doted on his only daughter without spoiling her, and then to the husband her father selected for her, a man who would appreciate his daughter for the well honed mind and steel-true spirit housed within her lovely flesh; and,

above all, faith in a just and merciful God. Dona Ignacia's faith was shattered when, despite all her prayers and her efforts, the husband she dearly loved fell afoul of enemies whose machinations first ruined and then killed him, leaving her widowed and without even his child to be her consolation. Approached by the personal representative of Rodrigue de Navarre himself, Dona Ignacia was recruited by the father of the Oculi Dei to act as his special agent in Compostela, a task she has bent her considerable personal energies and great well of grief and bitterness to performing. de Navarre has implied to her that, should she dig deeply



enough, she will almost certainly discover the truth behind her husband's wretched demise; as of this moment, neither of them knows exactly how accurate that supposition is.

Image: Dona Ignacia was married young and has yet to see her thirtieth year, and is still quite beautiful. She dresses in black and conducts herself like a woman in mourning, always polite but never exuberant.

Fortunato

Nature: Unknown

Demeanor: Unknown

Order: Oculi Dei

Fortunato is an enigma, even to the other Eyes of God in Compostela. Believed by many to be the oldest spider in the web of the city's economy and politics, no

one has ever met him (or her) face to face. Fortunato communicates exclusively through coded correspondence that finds its way into the hands of the literate Eyes and in the form of symbols and graffiti left where the illiterate will certainly find them. He (or she) is easily the most knowledgeable Eye in the city; even Dona Ignacia is somewhat intimidated by the obvious intelligence that informs all of his (or her) observations about the dark underbelly of Compostela, its history, politics, and place in the rapidly changing realm of Iberian society. Fortunato is exceedingly well informed for a reason. Fortunato has been operating clandestinely within the household of the Cainite Prince of Compostela for nearly a decade, accumulating information, assessing strengths and weaknesses, slowly but surely walking the labyrinth of power and influence that may eventually crack open much more than the house of Reinaldo de Rubio. It was at Fortunato's request that Dona Ignacia was recruited into the Oculi Dei when it became obvious that the vampire Prince had designs on her; Fortunato plans to use this fascination to delve more deeply into the darkness than any Eye of God has ever gone before.

Sept of the Bright Promise

Located in Acre, in the Crusader States, the Sept of the Bright Promise houses a rare urban caern controlled by the Children of Gaia and the Warders. It is, as befits its status as a rare joint venture between tribes, a Caern of Wisdom, specifically Craftsmanship. The Garou of the sept are known for their just and charitable natures (as might be expected for them to dwell so close to the heart of the Weaver), and a goodly number of them subscribe to the tenets of Islam, even if such strictures no longer hold religious meaning for them, resulting in perhaps more humble and tempered natures than one usually expects from Gaia's warriors.

Approximately forty thousand normal humans go about their daily business in the city of Acre (known to the Crusaders as Saint Jean d'Acre and Akko to the natives), most populous city in the Crusader states, blissfully unaware of the wolves in their midst. Most of the humans in the quarter housing the caern are merchants and craftsmen, lending an air of reason and progress to this cosmopolitan locale. Indeed, the Warders carefully cultivate the skills of the most cunning and ingenious of the crafters who live and work here,

hoping to aid them in realizing and, ultimately, advancing their true potential. Bonds of goodwill and mutual respect keep the moon bridges between the Bright Promise and a handful of caerns on the Mediterranean available for transit, a genuine *rara avis* in this often insular and isolationist age. The caern itself is in a large building just next to the open-air market, a building that once served as a mercantile emporium. The Warders and the Children of Gaia discovered the site at almost the same time and, rather than fighting for control of the sanctified land, decided to work jointly to preserve and protect this place, fed by the innovations of clever human minds and the far-seeing attitudes of the Garou who first found it. The physical structure is nondescript and continues to function, ostensibly, as the headquarters for a trading house, though few patrons are invited in nowadays. Instead, generous grants of funding from the wealthy Aldo di Venezia (see below) have resulted in a smaller and more opulent structure (a few blocks away) in which to entertain human guests.

A small number of Kinfolk, shared between the two tribes who dominate the caern, live among the laborers of this quarter. They find that the Garou intrude only rarely in their lives and are thus content to give what infrequent aid is asked of them. No few are already mated to some of the caern elders, and some are even currently rearing the next generation of werewolves (alongside their children by their true spouses, in the not-uncommon case that a given Kinfolk is not wedded to the werewolf in question). If any good for the Garou here can be found in the horror of the ongoing Crusades, it is that many orphans need to be taken in, and another child who looks like neither supposed parent is none too rare, quite a blessing in a place with such strict laws regarding fidelity.

The Garou

While the sept is nominally under the leadership of Mohammed ibn-Walid (otherwise known as Thirteen-Stars-Falling, Philodox of the Children of Gaia), the ambitious young Garou of Aldo di Venezia's pack are slowly, insidiously some might say, asserting control over the sept. Their clever schemes, considerable wealth and silver tongues have carried them far in the quest to become the true rulers of the sept, and within a few years (less, if they become more overt in their actions) they may well end up wresting control of the caern from the traditional elements and turning it to the purposes of the progressives.

Aldo ("Golden-Fangs-of-Dawn") is the son of a prosperous Venetian merchant and is in line to inherit

his father's considerable holdings and his trading company when the old man dies (as is likely within the next five years). The young Garou left the city of his ancestors after difficulties surrounding his First Change. He is the backbone of the pack's monetary wealth and is also its most cunning thinker.

Isabeau du Laurent ("Unbreaking-Stone") came to the Crusader States after her husband (a Kinfolk knight named Louis) was given a small land grant to manage here. As well as being pretty, quiet, unassuming and proper, she is a fierce Ahroun of the Warders and has a keen tactical mind too often lacking among Gaia's warriors. This tiny slip of a woman is all the threat of force the pack needs, and Aldo is grooming her to take over as Caern Warder when he finally seizes control of the Bright Promise.

Ishmael (who answers to no human surname but is called "Steps-in-Shadow" among the Garou) is a thief and a con artist. He never found acceptance among the laid-back and proper elders of the Bright Promise and skirted the edge of the sept's society for several years before Aldo arrived. He knows almost every cutpurse and cutthroat within the Hunting Grounds and can arrange to fence goods or have them stolen at a moment's notice, and is well acquainted with many beggars, urchins and prostitutes.

Simon Ben-Levi ("Brother-to-Steel") is a crafter and a builder. He is fascinated with the Weaver and its many spirits, especially those that gather in cities, around acts of human innovation and industry. While he doesn't have much in the way of coin or connections, Simon is brilliant and Aldo values his counsel, even if he finds the Theurge's manner a bit off-putting. For his own part, Simon believes that the elders of the Bright Promise are not doing enough to promote science and innovation.

Rising-River is the pack's sole metis and serves as the sept's historian. While his Galliard nature calls out to him to sing of great and moving deeds, his mangled throat barely allows him to rasp out an incoherent gargle. He accepted Aldo's offer to join the pack after years of being pushed aside and ignored by his fellow Children of Gaia. This, of course, gave Aldo access to all of the Bright Promise's written records. Rising-River hopes to have a position of importance when Aldo takes over, but he will settle for simple acceptance.

The Hunting Grounds

The Hunting Grounds of the Bright Promise are several city blocks in Acre (mostly marketplaces and residential areas), along with a goodly amount of

space beyond the walls. While little actual hunting is to be had there, the space gives the oft-temperamental Garou plenty of room to spread out and stay out of one another's affairs, especially when the oppressive summer heat wears on the nerves of even the most good-natured Ragabash or calm-hearted Philodox. Most of the sept's Garou live as their human neighbors, taking up homes in Acre. Even many of the lupus have adapted to city life (as well as can be expected) and have integrated themselves quite well here. With Islam's tolerant stance on the infirm (despite the fact that Crusaders currently hold the city, it is still largely a Muslim community), the few metis here are able to pass as cripples and enjoy a bit of respite from the terrible persecution that their kind knows almost anywhere else.

A few of the sept's Garou are not entirely content with the current state of affairs, especially the younger werewolves native to Acre and the surrounding environs. While many of these leave the area to seek their fortunes elsewhere, a few have taken to interpreting the meaning of "hunting grounds" in a very different light. As a result, a small number of the young werewolves of the sept live as thieves, claiming what they may by wits and cunning and escaping into the Umbra when the authorities chase after them. It has become something of a game among the youth (a game heartily disapproved of by the caern elders), and it is only a matter of time before weighty consequences come of this frivolity.

The Dilemma of the Bright Promise

The Sept of the Bright Promise has reached its greatest potential capacity, in terms of Backgrounds, under its current style of leadership. In order for the Garou to expand the reach of the sept, they must be willing to take more aggressive steps. Of course, the conservative leadership has no wish to change the equilibrium that has been established. Thirteen-Stars-Falling, the Caern Elder, is the leader of the traditionalists, and it is he who is trying hardest to diffuse this new tide of ambition carried by the influx of European Garou who have filtered in over the course of the last several generations. The Bright Promise has been blessed with peace, and perhaps that has been its greatest weakness.

Many of the European Garou have grown curious of the ways of their brethren in the Holy Land since the days when the Crusades first began. Caerns in Outremer are of especial interest, as Silver Fangs, Shadow Lords and Fenrir seek to increase their tribal



holdings and powerful individuals within those tribes look to their own prestige and power.

The Sept of the Bright Promise in Dots

The Sept of the Bright Promise is a three-point Hunting Ground (consisting largely of urban area, with just a bit of untamed land beyond the walls), of which Aldo contributes two points and Ishmael one. For Aldo's pack, however, the Anchor Background is Resources (four points from Aldo and two from Isabeau). Aldo also contributes one point of his Contacts (a lowly merchant from his father's trading house) to the mix. Isabeau contributes a dot of Kinfolk (her husband) and one point of Allies (a more powerful landed noble friendly to Louis). Ishmael invests three dots of Contacts (local cutpurses and other sundry lowlifes, as well as the occasional constable, whore or crippled beggar) and one point of Allies (a rather cunning and successful bandit who plies his trade on the roads nearby) in the Background pool. Simon lends only one point of Allies to the pool

(a wise and helpful Weaver spirit that has taken a particular liking to the Theurge and is willing to assist his packmates every now and again). Rising-River offers his dot of Kinfolk (as others might be able to make better use of them than a metis) and two points of Mentor (a sympathetic older Garou at the sept who helped to raise Rising-River and who has come to believe in the progressives' cause, but cannot be seen to offer too much aid or advice, lest she lose the esteem of her peers). In total, the pack shares Resources 6, Contacts 4, Allies and Hunting Ground 3 and Kinfolk and Mentor 2. All of this is excluding the points spent on the Totem Background, of course; the New Dawn pack follows Cockroach as its totem.

Outside Interests

The sept engages in quite a bit of trade through human and Kinfolk intermediaries. Aldo himself is the only Garou at the Bright Promise with the combination of even temper, skill and desire to have truck with the merchant class directly, giving him a decided advantage when it comes to advancing the progressives' cause. The goods and services

that flow to and from the Holy Land go virtually everywhere in the known world sooner or later, granting a considerable amount of wealth and power to one who can exert a degree of control over those ventures. Aldo fully intends to get his hands in as many mercantile houses as he safely may.

The European warrior class runs strong in Acre and will for many years to come. Isabeau seeks to ingratiate her Kinfolk husband into more prestigious social circles, increasing her own influence in the bargain. While Louis is not a cunning man, Isabeau tutors him carefully in the delicate art of walking the line between toadying and insubordination, hoping to get him noticed by increasingly powerful lords and rewarded for his initiative and fervor. In this fashion, Isabeau hopes to be able to use Louis to bridge the gap between her pack and the Crusader Garou if possible and, ultimately, to cut them out of the picture (by winning their lords, patrons and Kin away from them) when the time is right.

Friends

The Garou of several septs around the Holy Land and across the Mediterranean respect and esteem the Sept of the Bright Promise as a whole. The same cannot be as readily said of Aldo di Venezia and his packmates. Still, the Sept of Green Grass in the Tuscan countryside, a sept controlled exclusively by the Warders and the first group of Garou to take Aldo in after his First Change, watches the events unfolding at the Bright Promise with considerable interest. While it will not yet take an active hand in the overthrow of such a venerable sept, it offers encouragement to Aldo and may be able to be persuaded into lending more resources, if the sept members believed it possible to extend the power and influence of their own sept into the Holy Land. Aldo works carefully to cultivate the image of a puppet ruler waiting to happen, though he fully intends to use the Sept of Green Grass for whatever it will give and then cast it aside in favor of closer allies when the time is right. For now, however, the pack does its best to garner the favor of the Tuscan sept, hoping that it will eventually make its presence known in the inevitable confrontation.

If Aldo and his pack play their cards right, they may be able to secure the aid of at least a few of the other newcomer Garou. While powerful elders among the Crusader-werewolves are not likely to offer their aid and pledge their fealty to this upstart and his motley band, Garou new to the ways of their people, fresh out of their First Change, might be. Such young werewolves, who know that they are not going to

receive much of a voice until later in their lives, might jump at the opportunity to support someone more their own age, someone who has the drive and the plan to make their voices heard. The area'smetis population, sparse though it may be, pines for a voice (here as everywhere) and could very easily fall in line behind someone who did not scorn them for a crime they never committed. Aldo and his pack could be all these things to these Garou, but it will take time, effort and diplomacy.

Not all of the Garou native to the sept are necessarily such ardent supporters of the traditional ways, despite the fact that most of them must seem to be so, lest they be lumped in with Aldo and his malcontents. A few high-ranking Garou at the Bright Promise could even be publicly turned around to the progressive way of thinking, provided that this attitude seemed to have the upper hand and looked to be capable of winning out over Thirteen-Stars-Falling and his old guard. Just as the pack sides with a young wolf who bests his alpha so, too, will the werewolves of the Bright Promise lend their support to these youths if they can gain and exploit a solid foothold in their, thus far largely covert, bid for dominance.

Enemies

Thirteen-Stars-Falling is, though not strictly an "enemy," at least certainly the most powerful force at the sept opposing Aldo's stunning rise. Both wise and strong, the Philodox sees in Aldo and his lot the downfall of the age of peace, prosperity and unity that typifies the Bright Promise and sets it apart from the brutal and warlike septs of Europe. He and his pack, representing the most conservative elements at the sept, constantly seek to dissuade the young Garou from pursuing the progressive agenda and try to use their clout to sabotage Aldo's path of ascension without challenging him outright (as he's not yet done anything to violate the Litany or give any direct cause for offense). In attempting to be peaceful and reasonable about resisting Aldo's way, the elders have curtailed much of their own potential power. In time, however, Thirteen-Stars-Falling suspects, with heavy heart, that he will have to confront the upstarts directly, in order to secure his dominance and put an end to their ambitions.

With the recent influx of Crusaders, foreign Garou from many quarters have come to stake their own claims. For now, they are poorly entrenched and disorganized, finding as much cause for enmity between themselves as with the native Garou, but it

grows increasingly likely that a powerful and capable leader (odds favor the Shadow Lords at the moment) will unite the European werewolves beneath his banner and begin an earnest war of conquest against the largely pacifistic Garou of the Bright Promise. Should any would-be warlord descend upon the sept to usurp it by right of challenge, Aldo and his packmates will probably have to throw in with the current caern elders, if only to muscle out the competition (most of whom are traditionalists, like Thirteen-Stars-Falling and his ilk, and much less tolerant of dissenting viewpoints than the current elders), so that the more covert and dignified behind-the-scenes struggle that currently engrosses the Bright Promise can resume without outside interference.

The coming of the European conquerors also has meant a growing faction of Wyrms-worshippers and other servants of darkness. Most notably, many of the most savage and murderous among the Crusaders have fallen prey to Bane infestation, becoming twisted into the mockeries of men known to the Garou of Western Europe as fomori. Most of these tend toward more subtle manifestations of power, favoring the Wyrms' more insidious aspects over that of the dreaded Beast of War (curious considering the oft-brutal natures of the men thus afflicted). These creatures hold the attentions of all of the city's Garou, native and foreign alike, considering that their numbers are far too great (and their taints too specifically obfuscated) to be the result of any normal process of possession. Some members of the sept suspect darker powers still, and rightly so, as a small pack of Black Spiral Dancers, concealed behind layers of landed knights and powerful nobles and having come on the heels of a more recent wave of "holy warriors," keep themselves far from the theater of conflict and work tirelessly to spread their master's foul corruption in this sacred land.

And the Rest

Many Garou in Acre are simply apathetic toward the struggle between native and Crusader, traditionalist and progressive. They believe (and may well be correct) that the peace of the Bright Promise has been irreparably shattered and that any outcome will result in ongoing strife and potential ruin. Some Kinfolk are similarly disenchanted, knowing that they are one of the forms of coin in which the success or failure of a tribe is measured. When all is said and done, many Kin will remain beside their brethren, but some are likely to side with whatever group emerges victorious in the struggle over the Bright Promise.

Aldo di Venezia; "Golden-Fangs-of-Dawn"

Breed: Homid

Auspice: Philodox

Tribe: Warders of Men

Rank: Cliath

Background: Aldo was raised to believe that money is the great equalizer, the thing that can make a peasant as a lord or lay low a king. After brutally killing a nun in Venice during his First Change, he toiled to truly and completely suppress his human emotions, in order to deny the terrible feelings of guilt and remorse that plagued him, seeking a balm for his shame in ambition and conquest. In Acre, he sees only opportunity. He is young, but he already wields a considerable amount of influence among the younger native Warders, who see the wealth he enjoys and the art, literature and science he has to offer. He has not yet been put in his place by the caern elders, for he hasn't actually done anything wrong, though it may only be a matter of time. One gets only so far by flaunting tradition before gold and popularity stop being a shield.

Image: Aldo wears his light brown hair at chin-length and his handsome face is clean-shaven. He dresses in elegant finery befitting a lord, though his heavier garb often hangs loosely off his somewhat scrawny frame. He is never seen at sept business without his slim-bladed klaive (where he got it is anybody's guess). His graceful movements and the deep scar above his right eye seem to indicate that he knows how to use it. Aldo's Crinos form is tall but slender, and gray, mottled with light and dark browns. His Lupus form is long, sleek and quite narrow, with short fur, and is thin enough to look a bit starved.

Isabeau du Laurent; "Unbreaking-Stone"

Breed: Homid

Auspice: Ahroun

Tribe: Warders of Men

Rank: Cliath

Background: Isabeau was raised to be a proper lady in rural France by a meek minor lord, but an early First Change and the subtle intimations of Rage beneath the surface put her in charge of the household at a young age. By descent, she is likely Silver Fang or Fenrir, but it was the Warders who found her Kin-Fetch and took her in. She bullied her father into making a match with an unimportant young landless knight and had her Garou



friends in France arrange for his humble estate in the Holy Land. In Aldo, Isabeau discovered a soul as daring and acquisitive as her own. She has taken a fancy to the dashing young Warder and, though it violates the laws of the Litany, intends to pursue him, largely in hopes of snaring him in a web of blackmail and thereby becoming the true ruler of the caern.

Image: With long, red-blond hair that almost refuses to be caged in elaborate styling or beneath any kind of headdress or kerchief, Isabeau presents a striking figure, despite her diminutive size. Her blue-green eyes stare intently out of a pale, lightly freckled, heart-shaped face just this side of stunning. Beneath her proper attire, Isabeau is lithe, lean and athletic, with an almost boyish frame. Her Crinos and Lupus forms are smallish but powerfully built, and the same red-gold as her hair.

Ishmael; "Steps-in-Shadow"

Breed: Homid

Auspice: Ragabash

Tribe: Children of Gaia

Rank: Fostern

Background: Ishmael was born on the streets and is likely to die there. His mother, a thief, was raped after trying to swindle the wrong drunkard out of his purse. His first cry came from a gutter in an alley and he has

lived most of his life in similar places. The one lesson he learned growing up was that the only things one can have in life are those that are wrested from others, whether by force, the threat of force or guile. As he has always lacked the means to back up the former two methods, he has had to opt for the latter. Ishmael's First Change came while he was being pursued for the theft of a half-stale hunk of bread. He came to love being a werewolf, not for the sacred mission it encompassed or for the new worlds it opened to him, but instead for the power it granted. While he was never cast out of the Bright Promise, Ishmael's selfish attitudes endeared him to no one, until Aldo came along. Seeing in the Venetian a kindred spirit, the young Ragabash sides with Aldo in his bid for control.

Image: Ishmael's oft-haggard face is rimmed by an unruly mop of stringy, curly black hair. A scruffy beard fills his hollow cheeks out a bit and serves to conceal a few of the scars on his face. His nose slants very slightly to the right (from an old break) and his beady eyes look simply criminal. His right hand is gone, having been severed for robbery before his First Change, and Ishmael has, of necessity, learned to make do quite well with his left. While he dresses a little better nowadays, he cannot escape the air of shabbiness and poverty that continues to cling to him and mark him as street trash.



Simon Ben-Levi; "Brother-to-Steel"

Breed: Homid

Auspice: Theurge

Tribe: Warders of Men

Rank: Fostern

Background: Simon was born to a Kinfolk blacksmith in Antioch. While his father's income was of great value to the Warder sept there, young Simon seemed destined for other things. He was an intelligent child and quickly took to architecture and engineering. He had an intuitive eye for building things. Given a bit of charcoal and some time, he could sketch out wonderfully accurate depictions of almost anything he could study. When his First Change came (during a particularly vivid nightmare), he was spirited away to the sept and quickly learned the ways of the Theurge. Simon was particularly adept at talking to the Weaver spirits in objects and structures, and the ever-thickening strands of the Pattern Web he could perceive fascinated him. A "misunderstanding" with an older Garou encouraged him to relocate to Acre. Years later, after Aldo came, Simon sensed a hopeful anxiety among the Weaver spirits, as though they discerned some great potential in the young Philodox. Simon could not but offer his aid.

Image: Skirting the cusp between heavyset and corpulent, Simon is obviously both well fed and a bit sedentary. He wears a full beard, forelocks and a *yarmulke*, in the fashion of his ancestors, while in Homid form. Simon has a soft look about him, as though he's never really seen a day's work (which is not entirely true). He often loses focus in conversations, looking past or around those he is speaking to, and his tone takes on a distracted note as he ponders Weaver-spirits, marvels at a piece of architecture or considers an idea.

Rising-River

Breed: Metis

Auspice: Galliard

Tribe: Children of Gaia

Rank: Fostern

Background: Rising-River was born at the Bright Promise to a Warder mother and a Child of Gaia father. His father left in shame, forsaken by his tribe for his sin, while his mother killed herself just after his birth. He has never known the comfort of a family or the love of a parent. He has always accepted this lonely lot even as he

despises it, turning his hands and eyes to the service of the sept, as Gaia did not see fit to give him a voice with which to perform his duties as a Lover of the Ways. At a young age, Rising-River took to the written word with a great passion, perhaps to compensate for his twisted tongue. He fastidiously recorded the events that transpired at the caern, as well as writing down the ancient stories of his tribe. It was Rising-River's obvious bitterness and the patience and precision with which he has carried on for years despite it, which drew Aldo to him. While Rising-River has few resources to offer the pack, he has a dangerously incisive mind when it comes to matters of organization, and he never forgets *anything*.

Image: Rising-River's natural shape is quite unpleasant to behold. His neck is permanently skewed slightly to the left. While he can correct this, it causes him considerable pain after a while. The teeth on the left side of his muzzle don't sit right and his jaw is uneven. His long, matted coat of light gray fur serves to hide the subtle twist in his spine, though he always appears slightly hunched, as though trying to avoid notice. Any vocal noise he makes is breathless and ragged. In Homid form, his deformities remain the same, though his face is not entirely unhandsome. Despite this, he hides behind his tangle of black hair and keeps from making eye contact. In Lupus form, he appears much as in his Crinos shape and limps on his left foreleg.





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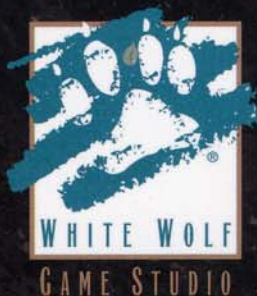
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