

ROAD OF Humanity™



BOLTON 02

A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRE™

ROAD OF Humanity™



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This book is dedicated to Eric Parks, whose devotion to scholarship has made me seem much less ignorant than I actually am, and to Prince, the best cat ever to incessantly pester someone trying to meet a deadline. Eric, thanks for the help you've given me with the many translations I've bugged you about. Prince, you are very much missed.



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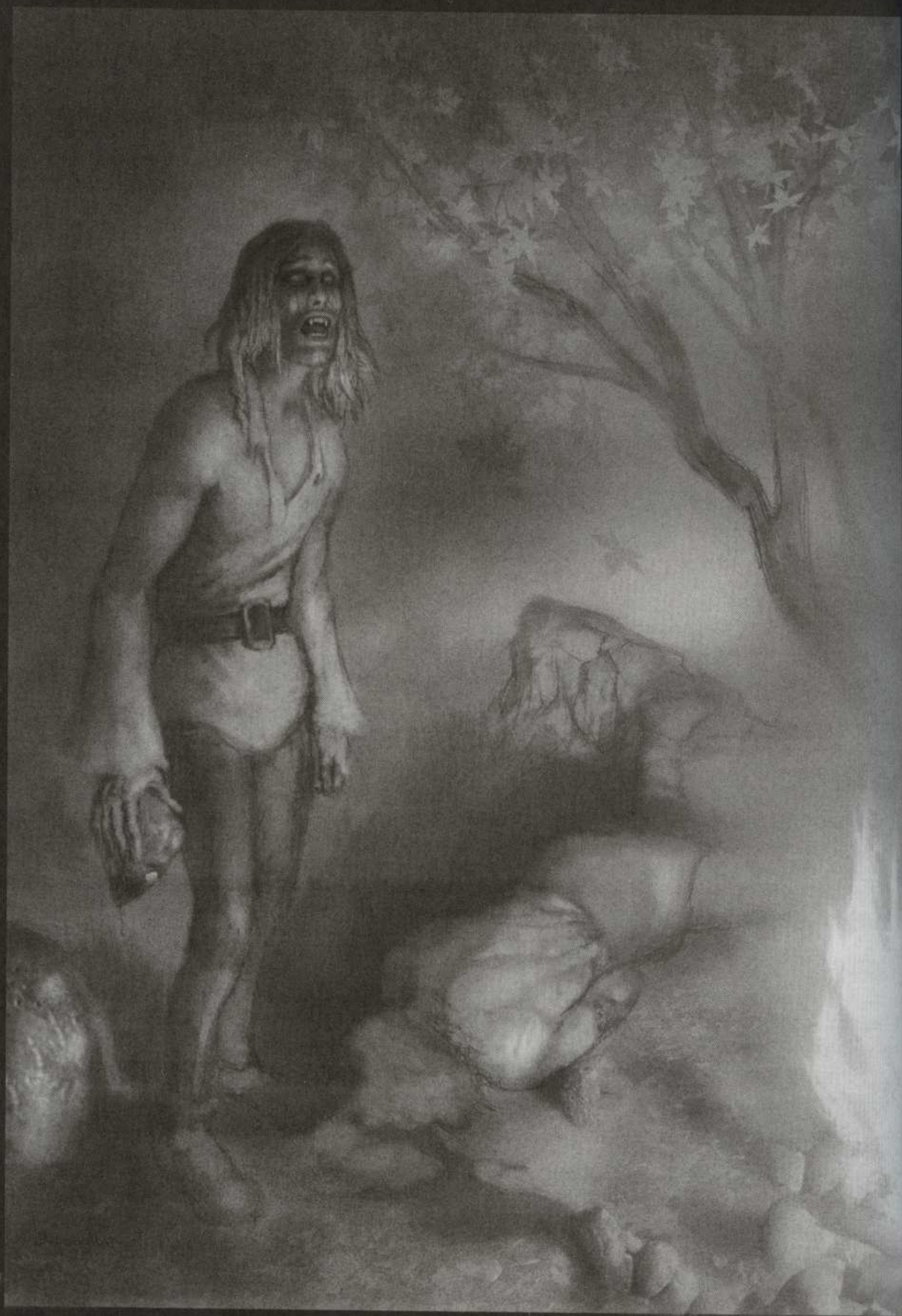
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PRELUDE: THE LEGACY OF CAINE

He was plain, my sire and teacher. His limp, blond hair spilled in stringy tangles around his gaunt shoulders and a day's growth of beard was forever stamped upon his narrow chin. His eyes were neither the icy blue of the wolf's gaze, nor the clear cerulean hues of the place where the sky meets the sea. Instead, they were the watery, washed-out shade that tinges the lips of a man who has just died of the cold. But then, I myself am no Adonis, come to grace the rude Earth with my flawless tread. I am just a man. Or, rather, I *was* just a man.

"Gregory," Gunter rasped, in his tired, gravelly voice, distracting me from my idle contemplation, "I would ask you to accompany me on my evening's hunt. Will you come?"

This was an unusual request. It had been a full turning of the moon since Gunter had discharged me to take my sustenance alone. Did he feel that I had been somehow inattentive in the manner of my feeding of late? Was there perhaps some new trick he wished to impart to me, now that I had grasped the most basic secrets of the hunt? No. Looking into his eyes, I could see that there was some other lesson, one that had nothing to do with the torn throats at which we supped, that he wanted me to learn. As my sire did not stand on ceremony, I simply nodded my assent and rose from my seat.

It would be incorrect to call Gunter's domain a "village." That would be a trifle ambitious. Rather, it was a broad expanse of light woods and several small farms, clustered near a ramshackle church. Swaths of dead, brown grass were scattered throughout the clearing around the church where farmers gathered to trade wares and tales, but these spaces were almost always empty when Gunter and I passed by the churchyard. Mortal men were seeking the comforts of home and family when we awoke and the most we saw of the farmers' market was the occasional rotten vegetable or clump of horse dung. What interested my sire, however, was not to be found in the cruciform shadow cast by the full moon's light. Without pause, we rode on, toward Gunter's most precious resource.

As we came up on the inn (named "The Hoof and Arrow" for reasons I had never discovered), Gunter slowed his steed to a trot and I followed in kind. As Gunter himself once put it, "My home is but a stop between destinations." Thus, even with a population of scarcely a hundred people, Gunter's domain sustained us both in comfort, thanks to the steady stream of travelers who trod upon the old Roman road and bedded down nightly at the Hoof and Arrow. Before my Embrace, I had been one of those travelers.

Gunter was known to the proprietor, whom he had put under the blood oath, and could come and go as he pleased. He had, informally, extended this right to me as well, and I nodded greeting to the paunchy old innkeeper as we found seats. He placed mugs only half-full before us and we quickly made shows of tipping them back and wiping froth from our pallid lips. Though the ale was bad, the savor of even just a few drops of it upon my tongue induced in me a melancholic longing for the finer fare I had known when last I drew breath. If Gunter was thus affected, he never showed it. Perhaps blood alone was sweet to his palate now.

For a long time, we watched the people, local and outsider alike, going about their business. While Gunter had honed his senses to a preternatural degree, I was naturally blessed with eagle's eyes and sharp ears, and did not want for an understanding of what was going on in even the most recessed and shadowed corner of the common room. Human interaction was a tapestry I had rarely taken the opportunity to appreciate when I was alive, and one I could not help but to gaze upon in awe now

that I numbered myself among the dead and damned. Even when it was coarse or outright vulgar, it was fascinating. In the midst of my reverie, however, Gunter spoke.

"I am leaving."

After a long moment, I managed to shake my head in some very basic indication of the fact that I had no idea what was going on. Had I done something to so badly offend against my sire? If that were the case, though, why would he not exile me instead?

Gunter chuckled and dismissed my concerns with an idle wave of his hand, "Gregory, do not be alarmed. You are not at fault for this decision. It is just something I feel I should do. I have dwelt here for many long years now, years during which I have grown complacent and tired. I have spent a generation's time in this tavern, making my way by secrecy, quietly erasing all notice of the fact that I grow no older as the years roll on. You are my chosen son, Gregory, and the time has come for me to pass on my lands and worldly goods to you. I give you my domain for your own."

I began to speak, to thank Gunter for his generosity, to express my gratitude. I was barely into my first syllable of appreciation when Gunter cut me off, continuing on as though his little speech had only hit a pause.

"But not yet. I have one night still as your sire and your teacher before I set you free and make you lord over this place," he said with a wry smile, aware of the irony of calling anything in this territory lordly, "I have one final lesson to impart to you about who we are and the road we walk. Are you ready to learn it?"

Proud and certain that my sire had thought me ready to assume his stewardship over these lands and kine, I replied, "Of course."

My sire drew up his cup as though to drink from it, but instead closed his eyes and slowly inhaled, drawing in the smell of the ale within. It was probably the most sincerely human gesture I had ever seen from him. For a short while, he sat there, taking in the scent of the drink he could not taste and listening to the merry gathering from which he was ever one step apart. When his eyes snapped open, they were cold but very certain. His stare transfixed me and he muttered, "We shall see."

We walked off of the road, leaving our horses stabled at the inn, as Gunter's coin secured the loyalty of the stable boy. I knew well the track we were on, a footpath used by hunters and foresters. Often, we walked this rough track out to where it crossed other such paths, and thereby wove an indirect course back to where we started. Gunter often liked to wander into the woods when he wanted to think or impart some important lesson to me. I was reasonably certain that he was born in some untamed land and the surroundings were familiar and comforting to him.

My sire asked, without looking at me, "Gregory, do you think Caine was a good man or bad?"

Gunter had told me something of the legends of our kind, as much as he knew of them. Also, I knew of the stories of the Holy Book and had heard from my own priest as a boy of Caine's crime against God and his kin. The answer seemed obvious, "A bad man, of course."

Gunter seemed to be answering inwardly for himself the very question he had just posed to me. He sighed gently and asked, "Truly? But did Caine not give civilization to men in his city? And were those kine not protected against the brutality beyond its walls? Was it good or bad to give succor to the weak?"

I replied, "Have you brought me out here to pose questions to me, Gunter, or to yourself?"

At last, he turned his gaze to me, smiling. He shook his head, realizing that I had caught on to his game. He then asked me a new question, "And what part of Caine was it, do you think, that moved him to build his society, Gregory? Was it his human soul, seeking to create something of value; or his bestial urges, admonishing him to claim dominion over those weaker than himself?"

Honestly, I answered, "I don't know. I don't think anyone other than Caine himself could know."

He replied, "A guarded answer, Gregory. I wonder: Do you really believe it? I think *all* Cainites know the answer to that question."

"Then what is the answer, Gunter?" I hazarded.

I could not tell if his smirk was genuine or forced. "Neither, I think. The Beast. The Man. These are intellectual contrivances dreamed up by we who must abide forever with the realities of Cainite existence."

"That runs against all you have told me," I said simply.

"Yes," he replied, "I suppose it does. But you will learn, Gregory, that truth is rarely as plain a matter as 'one thing and not the other.' Truth, sadly, comes in too many shades to count. Mortal men grasp it, even if they cannot always articulate it. For the sake of our own comfort and sanity, we Cainites pretend that truth is, through the Embrace, distilled down to the tenets of a single path, the road we will walk throughout eternity, but it is far more, I think."

I always hated it when he waxed poetic. Shaking my head, I asked, "Where are you going with this, Gunter?"

He answered with a question, "What is the Beast, Gregory?"

I began to relate all of the answers I had been told, all of the answers that would have made the scholars and sages of the Cainite world proud of my skills of memorization. I addressed the philosophical analyses propounded in ancient Greece, the religious themes conceived of by the vampiric thinkers of our own age and many other divergent viewpoints, besides. Through it all, Gunter smiled. I sensed that I was telling him exactly what he expected and was, nevertheless, missing the mark completely. This condescending smirk was one of his most frustrating traits. I felt the anger slithering deep, bidding me wipe the smirk from his face with strength fit to rend his jaw from his skull. As I had been taught, I slowly and carefully suppressed the rage, deflecting its course through a regimen of carefully crafted thought and emotion. When I finished speaking, his smile broadened.

"That," he said, "is the Beast. That lurking hate, roiling beneath your civil answers. It is everything that is there when we wish we could put aside a human solution to our difficulties and embrace a monstrous one. The Beast is what we have always been capable of, but which we have only just, as Cainites, learned to fear within ourselves."

I shook my head, "That is preposterous, Gunter. The Beast is placed within us by the Blood of Caine. We are taught so by every scripture of our kind, or at least every scripture of which you have seen fit to teach me."

Gunter's face took on the philosophical cast that it often did when he was about to tell me

something that he was quite certain was elementary. The words that followed that particular look always seemed to make me feel stupid. He answered me, "Think, Gregory. Who wrote such words? What was their agenda in doing so? All that is written by Cainites about Cainites, save perhaps anything scribed by the hand of the First, is at best mere speculation and at worst self-adulation."

"And so," I said, "we are back to the very answer I myself gave moments ago. None but Caine can know."

Gunter's eyes glinted with something I had never before seen in them. I could not fathom what was in them, but it scared me. He looked away and spoke, "Indeed, it would seem so. This is, I suppose, as it should be. As I said before: one final lesson, Gregory. Let us go to it."

We had returned to within sight of the inn and were watching people come and go. It was late, but some carried supplies for travel with them and wished only for a drink before moving on. Likewise, some wanderers had, it seemed, taken to the idea of simply traveling upon the road until a warm place to sleep could be found or exhaustion overtook them. It was a busy season here and I had grown accustomed to its rhythms. Looking over at Gunter, it was possible to believe he had come to be at one with them. I had difficulty imagining how he would get by without this place. Finally, I hazarded the question, "Why are we back here, Gunter?"

He sat silently, unmoving and unbreathing, for some time before answering me. When he spoke, his voice was cold and he did not turn to look at me, instead keeping his gaze fixed upon the small but steady bustle of activity around the front door to the inn, "To know as Caine knows, of course."

Before I could ask what he meant by that, Gunter rose from his crouch and walked off, away from the front door of the inn and toward a lone man who was leading his horse, a shoddy beast, by the reins. The traveler likely lacked the coin to stay here, a poor, destitute man on the road to some destination we would never know. He was also the only one in sight moving in his direction. I was annoyed. I did not need another lesson in the hunt, yet that seemed exactly what Gunter intended to give me. Irritated, I rose and followed.

We overtook the traveler some distance down the road. He had gone for about an hour, leading his poor, unhappy steed the entire way, before making camp. I expected Gunter to close stealthily on him, but instead he approached openly and with friendly words of greeting. The man's eyes lit up. Clearly, he was afraid to be out here on the path alone and the sound of a kind word did wonders for his spirit. He greeted us warmly and bade us share his fire. Warily, I did so, though Gunter suppressed completely his instinctive dread of flame and sat close by the other. The man offered each of us a drink from his wineskin. I was shocked to see Gunter accept and take a good pull off of it. With as much grace as I could muster in my surprise, I declined, claiming that the ale at the inn had not agreed with me. The man nodded and said that he had suspected something like that, given my pallor. I could not help but to smile at his innocence.

For some time, Gunter spoke to the man, whose name was Peter, getting to know him. I actually began to grow afraid that dawn would be coming upon us, filtering down through the trees; for I had a dreadful sense for time, not at all like Gunter's uncanny feel for the lateness of the hour. Peter laughed and joked with us, though my demeanor was reserved, as I could not forget that strange iciness in Gunter's tone and face some time back. I think Peter likely just thought me slow or unfriendly.

At last, Gunter turned the subject to the impending dawn (which, by his count, was still some hours off yet, a fact that brought me no small amount of relief) and asked Peter what he thought of the many sunrises he must obviously, as a long-time wanderer upon many roads, have seen. Peter proved to be an eloquent man, recounting with able grace some of the more memorable sunrises he had seen. He lingered long on one he claimed to have witnessed not so far from here, in which the sun had risen golden-red over a clinging mist, reflected above upon ribbons of cloud and below within the sea of fog. It was, Peter said, one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. By the end of it, Gunter, whose face was turned away from the traveler, had tears in his eyes. Before I could gesture to him, though, Gunter rose and faced Peter. The traveler shrieked in horror as Gunter snatched a heavy, jagged stone from the ground in one long-fingered hand, his face trailing crimson streaks.

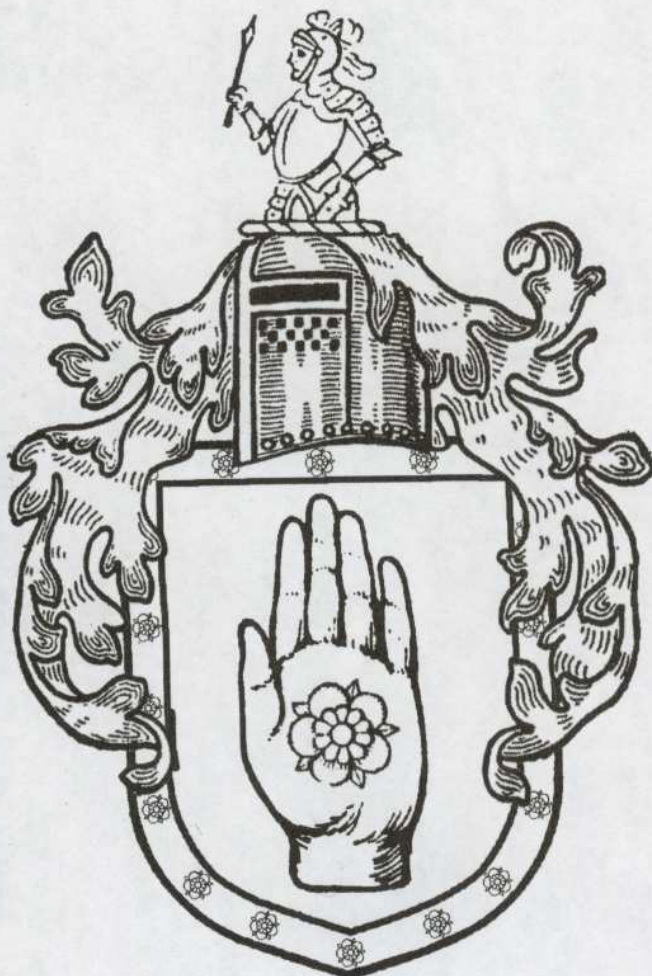
"I have nothing!" Peter cried, "Why would you do this?"

Gunter advanced upon the man and I was frozen and struck dumb, too horrified to move or speak, as he replied, "I could explain, but you would not understand."

With that, my sire smote Peter's head, laying his brains out upon the earth. His body crumpled to the ground and Gunter's gangly frame was illuminated by the reddish light of the fire. He was trembling with both bloodlust and shame as he looked to me.

"Remember this always, Gregory," he whispered to me, the blood of the kindly traveler spattered on his face. "Remember always that Caine was *human* when he struck down his brother out of envy. The Beast, the Legacy of Caine, is the Legacy of Man — and we are, none of us, Cainite or kine, beyond its grasp."

With that, he dropped his crude weapon and walked off into the woods, leaving me to stumble back to the home he had shared with me. I have not seen him since, but I have never forgotten the terrible final lesson, that of the nature of Man and Beast, which my sire taught to me.





CHAPTER ONE: MERCY FOR THE PRODIGAL

When we have done evil it is because we have been worsted by our baser side — for a man is many — by desire or rage or some evil image...

— Plotinus, *The First Ennead*

"I have so much to tell you, my son...."

Those are the first words I ever heard my father speak to me. I am sixty-three years old, or thereabouts, and he looks no older than a man of seventeen or eighteen winters. Yet, somehow, I know it is him. He is exactly as my mother (God rest her soul) described him: boyishly handsome, with short, blond hair, sky blue eyes and the slightest smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose. Everything is as she told me, even his lopsided smile. It is much like looking into a mirror that captured my reflection four and a half decades ago, when I was still filled with joy at the possibilities of my life and anger at the knowledge that he who sired me had fled his responsibilities while I was yet unborn, leaving a simple country girl to be mother and father both to me.

I try to stammer out a reply, but I cannot. My hands tremble, as much with fear and anxiousness as palsy. As the youth who claims to be my father crosses the threshold, another figure enters behind him; a richly dressed man, also young, with a lustrous, dark brown mane, a slender frame and the kind of effeminate face the bishop is known to favor in his attendants. As this latter guest closes the flimsy door behind him, my legs give out on me. Fortunately, I am near enough to a stool to drop clumsily onto it.

Without waiting for an invitation, the dark-haired stranger sits on the edge of the small table on which I have taken my meals alone since Marie passed ten years ago. The one who would have me believe he is my father takes a moment, gathering his thoughts. My mind reels. None of this makes any sense.

"I told you this was a waste of time, Paul," the other says, glancing at me with disdain or perhaps just apathy.

The only reply offered him is an icy stare from those sky blue eyes.

Finally, I find my tongue. "I don't understand."

He steps forward and takes my gnarled hands in his own flawlessly youthful ones. His flesh is as chill as the night air and I shudder under his touch. He seems not to notice my reaction and speaks, "Oh, Guillaume, where to begin? I suppose you must have so many things you want to ask me."

The other snorts and I cannot tell if it is with amusement or disgust. I cannot help but to wonder how this blond youth even knows my name.

I do my best to ignore the dark stranger, keeping my eyes fixed upon this "Paul" (which was, as my mother told me, my father's name) and asking, "Why, after all this time, after sixty and some years of never having known or even seen me, would you come here?"

He smiles, a bit sadly, "A good question, Guillaume. You want to know the reasons that I am here now, claiming to be your father? Very well, then. You shall have the truth of it."

Monsters who Walk as Men

He looks to one of the other two rickety stools in my small home and glances back at me, wordlessly asking permission to sit. I nod and he drags the seat over, lowering himself gracefully onto it. He runs his hand through his hair and closes his eyes for just a moment. The heavy sigh that seeps from between his lips is what first makes me notice that no steam escapes with his breath in the chill confines of my home. A quick glance at his friend, who is smiling patronizingly at me, confirms the same for him as well. In fact, before I tear my eyes away to look back at this strange youth who calls me "son," I note that the other does not seem to breathe at all.

"Guillaume," the fair man says, his tone low and grave, "I am here because of the things in which I have come to believe, but which have, for many years, eluded me. I have come here because you *deserve* to know your father, however briefly, even if I have not earned the opportunity to know you, the man you have become in my long absence. I do this now because I have at last found the strength to show you the courtesy I could not when I turned my back on a pregnant girl because of the new existence which had been thrust upon me."

"It still makes no sense," I say, more confidently now.

The young man smiles, sincerely and without sadness, "I suppose that's fair and as good a place to start as any. The desire for family is a very *human* desire, is it not, Guillaume?" He already has his mind made up as to the question's answer and he continues as though no response is necessary, "And when we find ourselves wondering how much remains of the men we once were, we often turn to those things that remind us of our essential humanity."

Forgetting for a moment that I do not really believe his claims (not to mention my puzzlement over the "we" he is referring to), I mutter, "So, you have come here to indulge yourself and assuage your sense of guilt?"

The other laughs, but his mirth seems genuine and is not, I realize, directed at me. Instead, he slides from his seat on my table and approaches. "Perhaps I was wrong, Paul. Your boy seems to understand *perfectly*. He knows your path better than you do. This was a positively wonderful idea. My apologies for doubting your wisdom in bringing us here."

"Enough, Michel," Paul barks, and there is something menacing in his voice, something that coils ravenously beneath the surface.

The dark-haired man, this "Michel," does not back down and never loses that condescending smirk. Indeed, his smile broadens, revealing teeth that shine threateningly.

Paul starts to step toward him but, halfway through the second pace, stops himself. His mouth sets in a frown and I note that he seems to have, just for an instant, forgotten I was even there, so single-minded is his advance. The cast of his gaze changes, but its focus does not. His eyes remain fixed upon Michel.

"Perhaps, Paul," Michel asks, his voice barely more than whisper, "you will wish to tell your son why, exactly, you have been gone all these years and why it is you look no different from the splendid youth who bedded and abandoned his mother?"

Surprisingly, the blond youth smiles, and replies, "Yes, Michel, I suppose you're right."

A Beast Beneath the Skin

"Guillaume," Paul whispers, turning to me, "Have you ever truly lost control of yourself? I don't just mean getting angry or frustrated, but instead slipping far beyond the edge of reason and sanity, to the point that there isn't even enough of you there to want to come back."

I shake my head.

"I suspected as much," he continues, "That sort of madness is a uniquely Cainite vice. It is what is unleashed by the Curse, the driving need to sate our lust and

our fear, no matter the cost to ourselves or others. It is a terrifying thing, that utter loss of self. When you come back from it, when your senses return to you and your body heeds your mind's commands once more, you realize that you have been journeying in darkness, beyond the Grace of God. That horrid other place is Hell, my son, or surely as close to it as a being yet upon the Earth might experience."

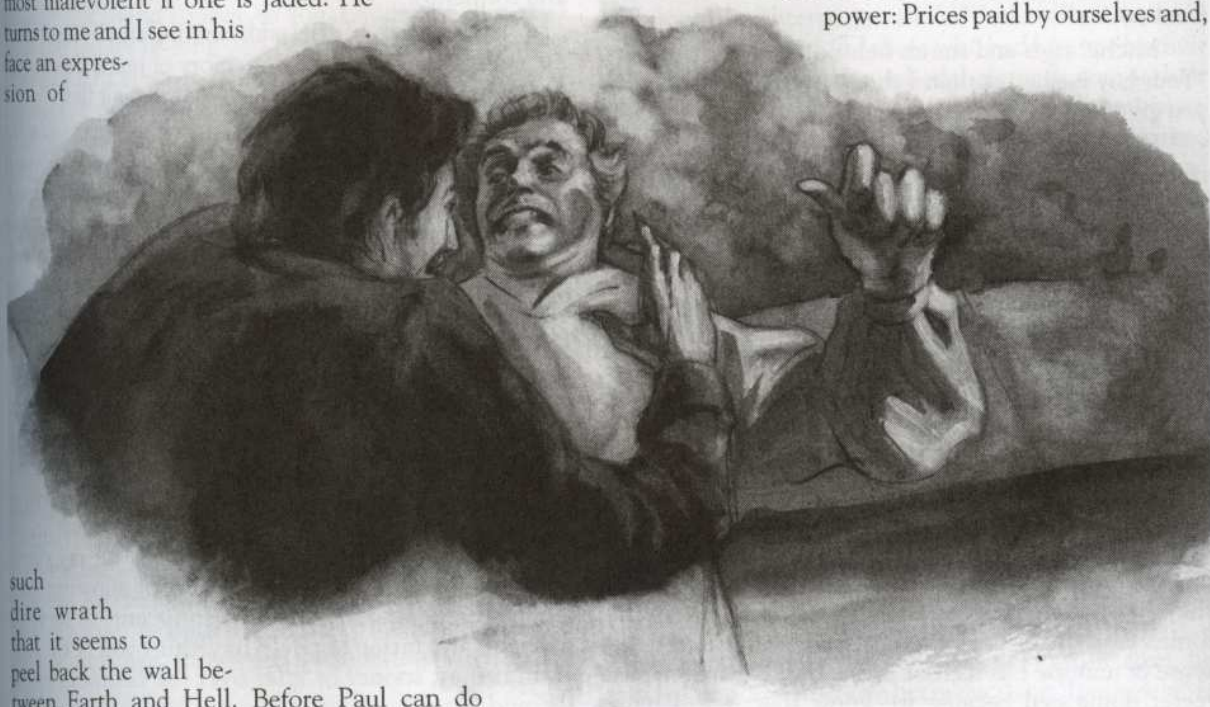
"A 'Cainite'?" I ask.

Paul (for I see no reason why he should not share a name with my surely long-dead father) catches himself and ceases his explanation. His demeanor shows his vexation and it is obvious to me that he is trying to put into brief words something that would, by the look of him, take days to adequately describe. At last, he turns to Michel and lifts his hands, as if to ask, "What do you think?"

The other's smile looks much as I imagine the Serpent's did in the Garden; sweet if one is innocent and most malevolent if one is jaded. He turns to me and I see in his face an expression of

My old heart pounds within my chest, and a long moment passes before I catch my breath. Awkwardly, I right my seat and, leaning on the wall with my entire body atremble, lower myself onto it once more. My breathing is ragged and I can hear my blood throbbing in my ears. I look across to Michel, who is rousing himself from the earthen floor. He stares at me, into me, and I feel that he can see, hear and smell the frantic racing of my blood. He curls his lip back and his tongue slides across his teeth. Paul interposes himself just then, blocking my view of Michel.

"Guillaume," Paul says, placing his fingertips (which I can feel are covered in a smooth shell of calluses, as if from years of labor) under my chin and raising my eyes to look up into his, "I apologize for Michel's display. However, it seems you have the truth of what Cainites are, or enough of it at any rate to come to your own conclusions. The motions of time have no power over us and we possess gifts beyond the reckoning of mortal men, though there are prices to be paid for such power: Prices paid by ourselves and,



such dire wrath that it seems to peel back the wall between Earth and Hell. Before Paul can do anything, Michel is upon me, a slaving thing with fangs that reach greedily for my flesh and eyes that gather up all the dim light in the room and shine it back at me in the red of freshly spilt blood. He towers over me and I fall back off my seat. I feel no shame for my cry of fear. Paul grabs Michel's shoulders and, with strength I had not imagined that he (or any man, for that matter) could possess, heaves him off of me forcefully enough for Michel's body to impact halfway up the opposite wall. A few of the small trinkets scattered about (mostly bought by Marie from traveling merchants) fall over and Michel slumps down the wall, now seemingly an ordinary man, knocking over the last of the three stools as he drops to the floor.

sadly, by others. For now, that explanation will have to suffice."

"Monsters," I mutter, before realizing that the thought has slipped out of my mind and passed between my lips.

Michel rises from the floor and chuckles. He slaps the dust from his fine garments and approaches. "Yes, monsters. You see the whole of it, Guillaume."

I hazard a statement that sounds perhaps a bit like a question in its tone, "You are beasts, then, who walk as men."

Paul and Michel face one another simultaneously, Paul frowning and Michel smiling broadly. Paul's eyes flick to the table on which Michel had been sitting and the other steps back and once more takes a seat upon its edge. The creature that would have me believe it is my father speaks once more, "Guillaume, it is not as simple as Michel makes it out to be. There are two ways, you see, that a person can respond to a wrong he himself has committed; he can either feel remorse for his act and attempt to make amends, or he can choose to embrace the hurt he has inflicted, whether by reveling in it or simply refusing to ponder it. We Cainites can make that choice. Can a beast choose to feel remorse for its actions?"

"Yes," I reply, more quickly than I intended. I then amend my assertion. "Yes, but only under certain conditions. A trained dog can show regret when it does something wrong in its master's presence, but only because it understands that it will suffer for its actions. Its remorse is created by its fear of punishment. It is the same with very young children, who do not yet know right from wrong."

Michel rises and stands behind Paul. He whispers, "Your boy is smarter than I thought. Brighter still than you give him credit for, Paul."

Paul nods. Strangely, I believe he is proud of me. "Yes, of course you are right, Michel. I have much underestimated my son. Better in this, though, that I should treat him like a fool and find him to be wise than I should treat him as a wise man and find him a fool."

Michel's voice takes on that sardonic quality once more. "If I'd taken the same approach with you, Paul, I think I'd not have been disappointed in my first guess and that we would not be traveling together now."

Paul shakes his head, obviously uncertain as to whether Michel's words are intended as jest or not. He looks to me once more and I feel that he has been these past few moments in some sort of reverie. "Do we not, all of us, feel remorse out of fear, Guillaume? Why do men feel good when they do what is right and poorly when they do what is wrong? Longing for God's reward in the former case and fear of His punishment in the latter. All sense of remorse has its root in the self. Ultimately, we regret doing evil because we know that it will have consequences for us."

I snort, "Then you mean to tell me that men are as trained dogs, and that there is no good and no evil beyond what we learn out of selfishness? Next, you will tell me that there is no God." Aware of my words only after I have spoken them, I fearfully and instinctively cross myself.

"Rather, Guillaume," says Michel, still smiling, "I suppose it is worth saying that God's existence or lack of it is without consequence for most people while they yet live — or even simply exist — in this world. Has anything in your life ever happened that you could, with certainty, say was an act of Provi-

dence? Has the Almighty ever reached down from the starry vault to touch your brow with His flawless hand? Speaking honestly, have you ever seen anything that you believe to have been impossible without divine intervention, rather than explicable as chance, or the product of actions taken by purely earthly beings or forces?"

My silence answers all of these questions as one.

"Perhaps," Michel says, his voice somewhere between a whisper and a hiss, "men create gods and devils, that they should have reasons not to kill and rape and steal for all the days of their lives. Of course, such deterrents seem to have little effect in this day and age upon most so-called 'godly' men..."

"And yet," Paul adds, clearly unhappy with the other's explanation yet seemingly unwilling to pursue it into an ideological argument here and now, "Cainites need not dream up any demon who punishes us for our sins, for one is provided to each of us, a personal tempter and tormentor."

"Sometimes," Michel adds, smiling cruelly (and making me to shudder with the memory of just a short while ago), "you can even see it reflected upon our flesh."

"Indeed," Paul interjects, and it is clear from his tone that he is inviting Michel to remove himself from the conversation for a while. Smoothing back his hair with his hands, Michel steps back to the table once more and seats himself upon it. Paul looks sad, though there is a certain natural pensiveness in his face (as there was in mine when I was a youth); and I do not know if the echo of sorrow I see there is just that, or nothing more than the cast of his features. He continues, "You see, Guillaume, I *had* to leave. There was too much danger in my staying; too many things that could have gone wrong. And what could I have said to your mother? Or to you? How would it seem to either of you when I grew no older, held fast in an instant in time, lusting after life itself for my sustenance? And what good could come of allowing such a monster to abide among the innocent, to serve as husband and father? I could have hurt you both. I am certain that, sooner or later over the course of years, I would have."

"What has any of this to do with the 'demon' of which you spoke?" I inquire, my tone more bitter than I might have thought. Strangely, though I know his reasons to be fair, I find myself doubting them with all the unhappiness of a son suffering an injustice from his father. It is a disconcerting sensation.

He looks away and then back, perhaps ashamed, before replying, "Much. Far too much for my liking, my son."

I am skeptical about the things I have heard here (strange, considering what I have seen this night), but nevertheless I ask, "How, then, is this demon kept at bay?"

History

"Long ago, many of my kind sought to discover the answer to that very question," Paul replies, "Most of the answers they found, for good or ill, however, do not concern us. What I must tell you concerns the answer given to me by she who beckoned me into the night all those years ago. It is the story of an artist and a warrior-scholar, a story which took place long before Noah called the beasts, two by two, unto his ark."

I am stunned into silence by this. While I cannot put my finger on just why, I am quite certain that this tale will be blasphemous. Paul continues, as if unaware of the vague sense of horror creeping up on me. Even (or, perhaps, especially) after Michel's denunciation of God's participation in the world, I fear that I will be struck dead simply for hearing him out. Nevertheless, I am compelled to listen and he seems compelled to keep speaking.

"Their names were Arikel and Troile. I know those names must sound strange to you, Guillaume, but they were the names of long-ago people from distant lands. Some say Arikel was a sculptress. Others believe she was a dancer or even a priestess-whore, after the fashion of ancient pagans. Troile was a learned man and a man of the sword. Both of them abode in a city in which my kind lorded over yours, acting as taskmasters and predators and accepting worship like gods for their power, splendor and terrible beauty. Arikel and Troile, however, were much troubled by this, for it seemed to them that this cruelty could only bear bitter fruit in time.

"The two went to the wisest of their number, a healer whose name my mentor once told me but which I have since forgotten and have not heard again, and they asked him what they could do to see the right thing done. The healer thought long on this and finally answered that Arikel and Troile must make the other Cainites of the city understand what it was that they did to mortal men. Moreover, the city's Cainites would have to be made to see the suffering they caused as their own; for as this wise one told Arikel and Troile, *all* men, mortal and Cainite alike, truly weep for suffering only when it is theirs.

"The two thanked the healer and went on their way. They went into seclusion and, at Arikel's suggestion (for she had, she claimed, long before made a similarly meaningful statement through her art), set themselves to the creation of a work of surpassing beauty and majesty. So cunning was their craft that, in our day, we might call it a kind of magic. For them, though, it was nothing more than an artwork conceived of in the mind and given shape by the hands. For over a century they toiled, and the stone became, if not living, then like unto alive beneath their touch. The images shifted in changing light, as though with natural movement; and the words graven there flowed with such sincerity and gravity it seemed as though they

were spoken aloud by a great philosopher or inspiring king. At last, their work was ready to be unveiled."

At this, Paul is very nearly trembling. The tale, it seems, is very much real to him, despite its fairy-story quality. I find it somewhat hard to believe anything he is saying; but remembering the horror that manifested itself in Michel's face not so long ago, I keep my doubts to myself.

Paul clears his throat, and I am taken aback momentarily by the very human quality of it, a stark contrast to the very inhuman behavior I have witnessed this night. He continues, "One hundred and one years, to the day, they labored, and finally brought their work before the court of their king, where were assembled their brothers and sisters. They unveiled the work for all to see. They did not expect the reactions they received. Some, who were most monstrous, grew enraged by what they saw, reminded of their own iniquity by those words and images, graven so skillfully and in a manner they could not deny. The work, at once of faith, art, science, philosophy and literature, assailed them with its undeniable purity of intent; and those who had become by their actions like unto beasts gnashed their teeth, tore at their hair and beat their breasts in shame, anger and pain. Others, who were neither kind nor cruel, but instead simply uncaring, were moved to tears by what they saw, realizing the ways in which they destroyed themselves through their predation upon the world. They were moved to remorse by a force so powerful that they could not turn away or forget what they had seen. Indeed, each saw his or her own crimes played out upon the surface of the work and many fell to their knees, wailing in sorrow. Those few who had believed as Arikel and Troile did wept also, but they were tears of joy and misery as one, for they knew now and could articulate in their minds and hearts and upon their lips what it was they had felt all along. Some became lost as though in a rapture, while others sang with voices dark and lovely, and still others offered comfort to those who seemed broken by the revelation.

"The king, who had himself not wept since the days of his exile and his Curse, beckoned the two forth. 'Arikel,' he said, leaning down to touch her perfect face, 'I see now what it was you tried to tell me those many years ago, that lesson which I, in my pride, would not hear. And you, Troile, whom I have despised for your crime against my blood; I know now why you did as you did and, though you shall never be forgiven of it, I shall no longer make of you an outcast beneath my roof.' The king said this, for his eyes were opened and he bade all rejoice, saying unto them, 'Behold! This is what Arikel and Troile have wrought, a tapestry of living stone that speaks to us of many things but, above all else, of our world and our place within it: of our shared destiny with mortal men. It is a tale to be told, a faith to be practiced, a road to be walked.'

"Inspired by this, even as the king's words ceased to echo in his throne room, Arikel strode forth, Troile's hand in her own, and said, 'Who will walk this Road of Man beside us?' Many spoke assent, and thus was the path of peace between Cainite and mortal man begotten."

Michel, at this last, cannot contain his disgust. He slides off of the table's edge to stand behind Paul, staring me in the eyes. Though he speaks directly to me, I sense that his words are meant just as much for Paul. "And, if you are of a mind to believe such self-congratulatory filth, I am willing to worship you as the Savior, in exchange for a drink at your throat. It is convenient, is it not, to believe great and noble things about oneself, even when all evidence exists to the contrary? I believe, Guillaume, it is best put as you yourself spoke: A dog can be whipped until it whimpers at the thought of displeasing its master, and a child can be taught to feign remorse when it has offended against its elders."

Another View

"As he who made me taught, there are two ways to keep a caged animal civil and obedient," Michel hisses, "denial and indulgence. I have chosen the latter, while sweet, contrite Paul opts for the former. A beast starved into compliance must in time snap at the hand of its keeper; and should it draw blood, it will feast, no matter the cost. This is how I was taught the history of Paul's 'Road of Man.'"

"A wise and cunning man waited at a crossroads outside of the great city in which your father's tale took place. He sat there for many turnings of day and night, watching men come and go. To most, he spared not a word, but instead spoke only to those who lived in moral error. The first man he stopped was a thief. To this thief, he presented a starving waif, and told him that this girl hungered unto death because of his own selfish actions. Overwhelmed with grief and remorse, the thief gave to the girl all he had taken and vowed never to steal again, but instead to make his way by honest work and the sweat of his brow. He departed in haste, to spread the good word he had been given.

"Next, the wise man stopped a violent drunkard and showed him a battered and beaten woman, the drunkard's own wife. The wise man placed his hand upon the woman's belly and told the drunkard that his son would grow hale and strong, carrying on his father's name, if only he would set aside his evil ways and embrace goodness within his heart. Overjoyed by the news about his unborn son and ashamed of his actions, the drunkard thrust his bottle into the wise man's hands and swore never again to raise a hand in violence. He too departed, calling out loudly the counsel he had been given.

"Next, the wise man stopped a liar and bade him outstretch his hands, which the liar did. Unto his upturned palms, the wise man poured the contents of two gourds; one

filled with salty water and the other with blood. In the first, the wise man said, were all the tears shed by those who had suffered as a result of the liar's deceptions; in the other was all the blood spilled as a result of them. Overwhelmed with regret, the liar fell to his knees and swore never again to deceive another. He ran to the city, telling all of what he had heard.

"At last, the wise man stopped a murderer, upon whose brow was set a dire mark. The murderer had watched from a distance and had seen all that had transpired. He asked the wise man what it was he was trying to accomplish. The wise man smiled beatifically and spoke riddles and platitudes, whereupon the murderer seized him roughly and demanded that he answer plainly.

"At this, the wise man smiled honestly and bade the young waif, she whose blood and tears had filled the two gourds, to come forth. He wrenched the thief's money from her tiny hands and beat her away with a switch. He then summoned the drunkard's wife, who abased herself before him like a whore, and took the bottle of wine from her hands, drinking deeply of it. Then he said, 'It does not do for wolves to act as sheep, but if they wish to, I shall shear them and slaughter them according to their wishes. I have stolen from them, beaten them down and lied to them, and they now share my words as though they are the Truth, instead of a Truth — one that serves me and not them. Fools will always wish to do what is best for the world, as though one man can know such a thing, while the wise do what is best for themselves. I would not presume to teach you the way I have showed to the others, for it is not seemly for a murderer to pretend to be like those upon whom he preys, is it?'

"The murderer thought on this for some time. The wise man offered him a drink from the bottle, but the murderer refused, claiming that such drink was bitter upon his tongue and reminded him of things best left forgotten. After some time, the murderer rose from his seat in the dust at the crossroads and began to walk back, toward the city. The wise man called out after him, asking what it was he intended to do. In reply, the murderer began to call out the words that the wise man had told to the others. Intrigued and baffled, the wise man hopped down from his perch and accosted the murderer, asking why he would speak these words, now that he knew them to be folly and lies. The murderer smiled coldly and answered:

"'Because, as it ill-befits the wolf to be as the sheep, so too is it unseemly for sheep to act as wolves. All murderers need victims and all kings need slaves, and a man who is one and wishes to become the other does well to remember that lesson. When men worry that they sin against one another, they worry not that they are sinned against themselves. If wolves must come among sheep, then I will endeavor to see that as many sheep as possible lay down quietly and suffer the fates put upon them by

their betters without protest, for *that* is the Road of Man — or at least the road most men must walk, know it or not.

"And that ingenious deception, dear Guillaume, is whence Paul's beloved code came."

Confused, I mutter, "But which tale is true?"

Paul is about to answer, but Michel cuts him off, his face again twisted into that condescending grin, "I don't know. Maybe both. Maybe neither. Who can say? If you wish to abandon your vices, though, and preach my good word, I would be more than happy to tell you another story..."

"Enough, Michel," Paul snarls, clearly irritated at the other's presumption and cruel jest, if jest it was.

"Surely," I say, "there is more to good and evil than a swindler's deception."

Paul nods solemnly, "Indeed, there is, my son. Indeed there is."

Virtue and Vice

Paul runs one hand through his hair and stops at the back of his neck. Eerily, it is a gesture I myself commonly make. He looks down for a moment and then back up at me, and speaks, "Guillaume, are you a pious man?"

It is, I think, an odd question, given what we've discussed. Then again, perhaps it isn't. At any rate, I reply, "I am faithful in my worship. I attend mass and give to the Church what little is mine to give. I pray to Our Holy Father when I wake in the morning and when I lay down to bed."

Paul presses, "But are you *pious*, Guillaume?"

In all honesty, I can only say, "No more and no less than the next man, I suppose. I'm no priest and I don't know the truth of what I say I believe in."

He presses further. "Do you believe in right and wrong?"

"Of course."

He smiles, "Why is that, do you suppose?"

I begin to give an answer, but it sticks in my throat. In truth, I had never much considered it. Such quandaries are, after all, for meant for contemplation by better men than I. My place is to do as I am told, for my lot in life is to be poor and simple. Instead of speaking, I shrug and shake my head.

Paul answers the question for me and, perhaps, for himself, "You know good from bad, Guillaume, because all men know such things; you do not need God to tell you to feel badly when you have wronged another. Even in far-off lands, lands distant from even the outermost fringes of the shadow of the Cross, most men behave in a way that demonstrates their knowledge of right and wrong."

Without thinking, I ask, "Then what is the point of religion at all?"

Michel laughs aloud and claps his hands once. Ignoring him, Paul says to me, "The laws of the Church, like the laws of civilizations, exist in order to remind of common decency those who are willing to forget such principles and put them aside that they might fulfill their ambitions to the pain of their fellow men. Sadly, though many know virtue from vice, few are willing to hold themselves in check without a sense of the consequences, handed down from some higher authority, for failing to do so. Men like to pretend that they cannot control themselves without being told what to do. It began, I suppose, with Caine's murder of Abel, the first evil act undertaken by someone who claimed not to know any better, but in his heart did. While we may not know religions or philosophies, Guillaume, all are born with a sense of what is and is not acceptable. Else why would all men everywhere, whether Christian, Muslim, Jew or pagan, agree upon a single, fundamental truth: Harm no other needlessly in any way and hold to no needlessly harmful thought? It is an understanding as old as mankind itself, older still than religion. It is something we know to be true beyond the need for proof, so essential as to be ingrained into our souls from the moment of our birth. Were it not, civilization could not exist at all."

I am puzzled and sure my face reflects as much. Michel's expression is one of exasperation, as though Paul is leaving out some critical details, but Paul does not stop. "You see, my son, good and evil are neither secular nor sacred; they are both of these at once. They are transcendent, concepts that emanate from the core of us and tell us how to live. Some," with this, he gestures to Michel, "learn to suppress their sense of right and wrong for the sake of satisfying their own needs —"

"More than you'd like to believe, I'd wager," Michel interrupts, his voice mirthful.

"— but others," Paul continues, "many others, accept this very basic covenant of humanity. Do not take what does not belong to you; do not cause harm save in self-defense or the defense of that which is beloved by you; do not entertain fantasies of giving harm to another. Such precepts are, by their nature, human; and all those who choose to cast them aside, by definition, choose not to be human. It is through the acceptance of this truth that I learned to walk the Road of Humanity."

In the Jaws of the Beast

"You see, Guillaume," Paul says, "our precepts of right and wrong are not so very different. While men learn to obey the letter of the law, we Cainites are bound to its spirit also — or rather, we are if we are wise."

"Lest the Beast devour all," Michel asserts, "A fate no Cainite looks forward to."

"Indeed so," Paul assents, "The most terrible sins we Prodigals, those Cainites who walk the Road of Humanity, acknowledge are sins against others. In fact, virtually

all of what we believe is turned outward, for we see ourselves reflected in the world around us."

"That seems to me an egotistical way to exist," I say.

Michel laughs again, "Paul! What cutting wit your boy has! He could charm the Queen of the Courts in Paris, I'd wager."

Paul heaves a long-suffering sigh and continues. "Not at all, Guillaume. The self is simply the most reliable mirror one has through which to perceive the world. Whatever else is around you, you know that your self will always be there with you. When you measure your lifespan in centuries and even millennia, everything else begins to seem quite fleeting. I think most of us would go mad were it not for the ability to look back and define the world through the lens of the self. Many great philosophers and theologians have done just that over the centuries."

"That is a matter for learned men," I retort, "not farmers bent with years. I do, however, understand what you mean."

"While we can forgive accidental affronts against our fellow men, be they Cainite or mortal," Paul says, "it is the intentional and premeditated violation of another than we find to be the most heinous sort of sin. Reason and intellection, we Prodigals maintain, were gifts given in order to alleviate suffering, not to cause it. Those Prodigals who cannot tame their intelligence to serve the causes of compassion and responsibility are unworthy of the name."

Learning to be Human

"But what do you mean when you say that you *learned* to walk the 'road of humanity,' father?" I ask, trying to turn the subject to other matters and realizing only half a heartbeat afterward what I have called him.

Paul smiles, and it is as though all of the weight he has been carrying is lifted from his shoulders. For the first time since we met, he seems at peace, even if only for an instant. Michel rolls his eyes, but neither of us pays him heed. Instead, Paul answers, "Two paths lead to the road I walk, son. Many come to it of their own accord, taught it by none; they instead instinctively seek to embrace the very values that made them human in the first place. Others, like myself, are specifically tutored by those who sire us into the night, taught to consciously exist in a manner that mimics mortal behaviors. In many ways, the latter is the far easier road to know, but harder to follow. Those who find my road only because they know no other way have the benefit of innocence. There is no calculation on their part, no sense of whether what they're doing is 'human enough.' Ignorance can be a blessing."

Michel cuts in. "But can men do as we do? Can they rend stone with their bare hands, see through to the soul of another or command the beasts of the wilds in a tongue that brooks no dissent? I have seen, in far-off

Araby, monkeys trained to dress like men and conduct themselves in a mockery of human ways for entertainment. I do not suppose them human."

"Choice is the difference, then," I say. Both of the others seem surprised, but I continue, "While an animal can be whipped when it is bad and rewarded when it is good, and thereby learn to ape the ways of mankind, it cannot understand the value of what it does. It cannot understand *why* it is better to act in one way and not another. Animals have no souls. Sin and virtue are meaningless to them, for they will be neither rewarded nor punished for their deeds in any world other than this one."

Michel becomes lost in thought, as though what I have said reminded him of some long-ago conversation or half-remembered dream. Paul's jaw sets with firm conviction and he nods to me, replying, "It is as you say, my son. All men, mortal and immortal alike, can choose to be compassionate, remorseful and upright in our thoughts and deeds. It is the power to make choices that makes us human or, at least, gives us the potential to be so. There are men now living upon the Earth — mortal men — who have chosen, by dint of the morals they cleave to, not to be human. Humanity is a state of ethical choice, not a birthright or a declaration of race. It is a more complex thing to be human than it is to be a wolf or a cat or a crow. The latter three are accidents of birth; the former is a way of life."

"But how," I press, "did you learn this 'road'? You still have not answered that for me."

"No," Paul chuckles, "I suppose I have not. It began with she who made me as I am now, whose name I will not speak. It was she who taught me to control my monstrous desires through a regimen of discipline and tight control of all of my emotions, from the basest to the loftiest. I was fortunate indeed that she was well-versed in the lore of her road. She even educated me in the Pact of Athens."

"And what is that?"

My father shakes his head, realizing that he has spoken of matters best not explored in the short course of one evening's conversation. He looks off for a moment, collecting his thoughts, and then back to me. "Would you believe me, Guillaume, if I were to tell you that it is nothing more than the laws of common sense and common decency set down in no uncertain terms, so that I and my kind would not forget them?"

I find the question foolish, and reply, "Do not all men do the same? It has always seemed to me strange that powerful men seem to need to write as reminders for themselves those things which poor and simple men have passed down for generations and centuries without the need for letters."

Michel interjects, "Guillaume, have you ever swatted a fly?"

Annoyed at so asinine a question, I snap, "Of course."

"And did you feel poorly about it afterwards?"

"Of course not," I answer.

He smiles, and I realize his intent in the asking. He asserts, "Those who possess power and wish to indulge sentimentality must give themselves opportunity to remember why it is they should feel pity when they swat flies. A fly, on the other hand, could it speak, would certainly be able to tell you from memory all the many reasons you should not end its wretched and pathetic life. The weak and lowly need not be reminded why the powerful should not prey upon the powerless. Common men are the fodder consumed by kings, popes and generals to fuel their lusts and ambitions. That is the law of the world and, so far as I can tell, should He exist at all, the only law endorsed by God Almighty."

Reflexively, I cross myself, and Michel chuckles. Paul grabs his shoulder and pulls him away from me. He whispers something harshly to his companion in a language I do not know. Michel holds his hands up, as if to profess innocence, and walks back to his seat on the edge of my table.

"Pay him no heed, Guillaume," my father says, gesturing with a jerk of his head at Michel, "He greatly enjoys reveling in such bluster. But I still have not truly answered your question, have I? The Pact of Athens was set down long ago. Its intent was to teach us the ways in which each of us should hold on to that within himself which is human. We are taught by it to respect the lives, thoughts and properties of others. Also, it admonishes us to esteem the natural world and works of great beauty, for these inspire us to accomplish much good and remind us of the splendors we should embrace as a bastion against the wiles of the Beast."

"So," I ask, "your 'human' ways are nothing more than an elaborate ruse?"

Paul's face falls into a frown, though whether it is of unhappy assent or deep thought, I cannot tell. At last, he says, "Sometimes. I wish I could give a better answer than that, but it is the only one I have to give. Sometimes, we act and think as we should, not because we desire to do right by others, but instead because we have a desperate need to do right by ourselves. The Beast can be thwarted through any stirring of remorse, be it sincere or contrived. Alas, I must admit that no few of my kind have all but forgotten how to truly repent of their dark deeds and selfish thoughts; they are left with recourse to nothing more than a shallow reflection of what it meant to actually feel regret. Better that than the alternative, however."

This arouses my curiosity. "Alternative?"

"Better that be saved for later, if it is spoken of at all, Guillaume," Paul replies, "I feel safer talking of it when dawn is less distant."

I look to Michel for any sign of recognition about the matter of which my father speaks. If he knows, however, Michel's demeanor betrays no sign of it. Instead, he is

glancing distractedly at the walls. Idly, he scrapes with a fingernail at a small gouge on the side of the table. He does not even bother to look at me.

"At any rate," Paul continues, "many of us are not taught to walk this path. Instead, such Cainites find the road through trial and error, learning what works and what does not. It is not always the easiest way, but it often leads to a more intuitive and natural understanding of the ways of men. It is easy to forget what you might learn; less so to forget who you are. Such Prodigals often lack the strict sense of deliberate moral dedication those such as myself cultivate, but they benefit from one of the greatest boons of ignorance; they know of no other way and are thus not confused by the possibility of alternatives to the beliefs they have held since the days when they last drew breath."

"So, it is the one or the other, then? Either knowledge and jadedness or ignorance and innocence?"

He considers this for just a moment before answering, "Not completely. As with almost all things in life, there is a middle way. Occasionally, Cainites draw some experiences from one well and some from the other. Such practices were not common even in the nights in which she who turned me was herself turned, but it becomes more common with each passing decade. Within two or three centuries, the old distinctions may be lost entirely. Many find that a cause for alarm; but I suppose, having seen only a few short decades of change myself, that such things are inevitable, in time. Nothing lasts forever."

Still looking away, Michel interjects, "I don't know that I'd say *that*, Paul. I don't know about you, but I'm intending to be around come the Final Trump."

Unconcerned by Michel's declaration, I inquire, "What do you learn?"

"Many things," my father replies, "Too many to relate to you here, though I will tell you of some of them. We learn to feel sorrow when we should, and remorse, and compassion also. It is harder than you might imagine. To get a sense of it, envision being instructed to feel sad whenever you eat a meal. You are taught to regret many of the very things that help you to survive in the world, and yet to undertake those acts anyway."

"All told, a singularly uninspired way to exist." Michel cuts in mockingly, "I, for one, have never once shed a tear over my supper, nor do I ever intend to. Only the weak lament the fate of the hart when his meat is upon the plate."

"Cainites are not spawned of harts," Paul counters. "Were we, we might do well to lament their suffering. In fact, we do well to lament the suffering of every living thing. A man of conscience can do no less, even when he yields to the necessity of causing suffering."

"Precisely," Michel retorts, "A man of conscience could do no less. I, on the other hand, can do much less. Conscience is a weakness, a crutch."

"The ability to feel empathy for others is what separates us from animals," Paul replies.

Michel rises to stand directly before my father, smiling broadly and condescendingly. "So, too, do the ability to be cruel, the capacity to lie and the urge to sin. Your Road of Humanity teaches you many things, indeed. Foremost, it teaches you how to be a victim. Speaking for myself, it is a far finer thing to be predator than prey. I bow before nothing and no one, most especially not conscience."

"Then I pity you," I say, not realizing until an instant later that I have said it. Michel looks very nearly infuriated. I am certain I have touched some nerve in him. Paul interposes himself between us and lays a hand on Michel's shoulder. Again, he whispers in that other language.

Michel looks to me and says, "He who would stand between the world and the hurts it inflicts upon others will find those hurts thrust upon himself. It is the way of the world. There is no shortage of martyrs on this Earth..."

Do We Not Bleed?

At this, Paul turns back to me and speaks, "Yes, Guillaume. I believe, in this, Michel is right. Though we Prodigals — most of us, anyway — seek to do what we may for the world and the people in it, there is something to be said for self-preservation."

Michel hisses, "Indeed."

"As we try to be like unto mortal men," Paul continues, "we find ourselves aspiring to be flawed. I know that must seem strange to you. We have endless centuries with which to pursue perfection, but we instead seek to be as real and imperfect as any other man. Does that make any sense at all to you?"

I reply, "I should think that an eternity of anything would lose its luster in time. Perhaps not today or tomorrow, but eventually, anything I could think of would cease being worth living for. Especially perfection. Who could bear an existence so predictable? I can scarce imagine facing those long years at all; adding to them the burden of knowing how it will all turn out seems to me a terrible thing."

"We are not perfect," Paul says, "and we never will be. None of us, despite what some might think. We Prodigals, for example, are more apt than any other Cainites to stumble in doubt along the course of our centuries. It is what comes of embracing ethics that have their roots in things other than cold necessity."

"He is a fool who cleaves to beliefs that tell him he must sin to live," Michel murmurs, loudly enough for both of us to hear, disrupting the flow of Paul's speech, "Or, rather, he is a fool who comes to understand that he must regret those sins he commits. Better it is to be wholly unburdened by any guilt at all."

"Please, Michel," my father says, cutting off his companion's musings, "Where was I? Ah, yes. We are also often politically weak among our kin; for others, who accept darker means and ends, often find that the willingness to commit cruelty and the ability to wield power go hand-in-hand, with Cainites as with mortal men. Indeed, the former seems, in most cases, to be requisite for the latter. Thus our voices, as the voices of common folk among kings, princes and bishops, go unheeded more commonly than is right and probably far more often than they should."

"And so you see, Guillaume; neither shepherds nor wolves give a damn about the bleating of sheep," Michel interrupts, again smirking wickedly.

Paul keeps speaking as though Michel had not. "In the extreme, some on the Road of Humanity find it difficult to commit even those small acts of pettiness or selfishness that ordinary men take for granted. Indeed, it would not be untoward to call such Prodigals the martyrs I am sure Michel thinks us all. It is, I think, an untenable existence and I have only met two in my time who were so benevolent and saintly. One went to her Final Death because she could not bear to harm the very mob that had come for her, while the other... well of him I can say little, save that he seemed neither Cainite nor mortal man, though I knew him by his abilities to be the former. In his presence, I felt so at peace as I trust I have not since the days when I was a swaddled babe in my mother's arms.

"Sometimes," he says, "it is hard for us to do the very things we must. More often than is the case with other Cainites, we are faced with the choice between heeding the spirit of our beliefs and submitting to the necessities of survival. When men like yourself are faced with the decision between, say, your life and that of a thief who has come to cut your throat in the night, there is not really any choice at all. For us, more deliberation is called for, even in instances when there is no time for it."

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I gasp in shock at this blasphemy. While I may not be the most godly of men, I like to think myself God-fearing. After this night, I believe I will have much cause to fear the Lord's designs.

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"Never do that again, monster," I snarl, and I am surprised at the forcefulness in my own voice.

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He clears his throat and continues. "Were I in your place, Guillaume, I could scarce afford the wrath you displayed. It might well unleash my Beast and that is the very thing we Prodigals fear most. Once it is free of its cage, that abomination will do what it must to remain free, no matter who suffers on account of it."

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The Bitter Journey

At this, Paul looks off for a time, gathering his thoughts. Michel leans in a bit, apparently quite interested in what his friend will say. After the long quiet, both of us, I think, begin to suspect that he has very nearly forgotten that either of us is here.

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"Hope," Paul says. He looks first to Michel and then to me and asks, "That is something 'less depressing,' is it not?"

"Another road within the road," he continues, "leads to a sense of peace, balance and self-understanding. I was told of it in my early days as a Cainite and I have never forgotten the memory of it. Our legends tell us that this path was first realized by the healer who counseled Arikel and Troile, a way in which we might be reconciled with our inner demons and remember within our souls, rather than just within our minds, that we are not beyond redemption."

Michel snickers derisively, "Surely, you jest, Paul. It is well known that Golconda is a pagan fancy, a lie told by wild visionaries and addled mystics so often that some have come to believe it true."



"The ability to feel empathy for others is what separates us from animals," Paul replies.

Michel rises to stand directly before my father, smiling broadly and condescendingly. "So, too, do the ability to be cruel, the capacity to lie and the urge to sin. Your Road of Humanity teaches you many things, indeed. Foremost, it teaches you how to be a victim. Speaking for myself, it is a far finer thing to be predator than prey. I bow before nothing and no one, most especially not conscience."

"Then I pity you," I say, not realizing until an instant later that I have said it. Michel looks very nearly infuriated. I am certain I have touched some nerve in him. Paul interposes himself between us and lays a hand on Michel's shoulder. Again, he whispers in that other language.

Michel looks to me and says, "He who would stand between the world and the hurts it inflicts upon others will find those hurts thrust upon himself. It is the way of the world. There is no shortage of martyrs on this Earth..."

Do We Not Bleed?

At this, Paul turns back to me and speaks, "Yes, Guillaume. I believe, in this, Michel is right. Though we Prodigals — most of us, anyway — seek to do what we may for the world and the people in it, there is something to be said for self-preservation."

Michel hisses, "Indeed."

"As we try to be like unto mortal men," Paul continues, "we find ourselves aspiring to be flawed. I know that must seem strange to you. We have endless centuries with which to pursue perfection, but we instead seek to be as real and imperfect as any other man. Does that make any sense at all to you?"

I reply, "I should think that an eternity of anything would lose its luster in time. Perhaps not today or tomorrow, but eventually, anything I could think of would cease being worth living for. Especially perfection. Who could bear an existence so predictable? I can scarce imagine facing those long years at all; adding to them the burden of knowing how it will all turn out seems to me a terrible thing."

"We are not perfect," Paul says, "and we never will be. None of us, despite what some might think. We Prodigals, for example, are more apt than any other Cainites to stumble in doubt along the course of our centuries. It is what comes of embracing ethics that have their roots in things other than cold necessity."

"He is a fool who cleaves to beliefs that tell him he must sin to live," Michel murmurs, loudly enough for both of us to hear, disrupting the flow of Paul's speech, "Or, rather, he is a fool who comes to understand that he must regret those sins he commits. Better it is to be wholly unburdened by any guilt at all."

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"Golconda?" I ask.

Paul smiles, seemingly invigorated by the very mention of the word, "It is a heresy, a dangerous belief for any Cainite to hold, but one in which I place my faith. I have been given reasons to, some of which I have spoken of here and some of which I have not and will not. Golconda is the final destination upon the Road of Humanity. It is the beautiful place wherein the journey concludes, not in blood and ashes, but instead in understanding and a sweet sense of forgiveness. It is, I am told, like and yet unlike being human again, a state of acceptance of how one has changed, coupled to the knowledge that we are all still human."

"This dangerous and heretical way," I repeat. "Are such heresies pursued among your kind with the same kind of vehemence and violence with which they are among mine?"

"We Cainites hunt our heretics with a fervor and an unholly determination that would put even the most zealous churchman to shame," my father replies, "Our crimes, after all, are not just crimes against men and one another, but against the very order ordained by God, set forth when He cursed our race."

This last strikes me as quite a revelation, but I press, "What makes this 'Golconda' so perilous to your kind?"

"It is the threat of what it represents," Michel cuts in, "While it is nothing more than a tale told by bright-eyed childer to while away idle nights, in it lies the threat of the disruption of the sacred order of the Cainite world, in which ashen priests hold exclusive dominion over matters of salvation and the soul. Of course, I am certain such travesties are alien to those who dwell beneath the sun..."

The dimmest idiot could not miss the sarcasm in Michel's tone. I am moved to recall word of the heretics put to the torch and the sword here in France. I cannot remember what they were called, but I know of what had been done. As I am told, many of them believed also in dispensing with intermediaries between men and the Almighty. Who can say if they were right? I suppose it does not matter now.

Sensing the half-formed questions and unformed answers roiling in my mind, Paul says, "Yes, it is always the way of those who wield sacred authority to destroy rebellions of the spirit before they become cause for concern. Still, such threats do not prevent hardy seekers from setting out on the journey, regardless."

Eager to change the topic, I hazard a different question, "You say that this 'Golconda' is 'like being human'; what of the mortal world, my world? What do your people think about us?"

Life Beneath the Sun

The silence that follows is almost stunning in its intensity. Paul draws a long, shuddering breath, but I can tell that it is purely an act born of rote. He exhales his

breath in a heavy sigh and again there is no steam. My throat tightens unexpectedly. I feel that I may have made a mistake in asking. Finally, though, he meets my eyes once again. Reflected there, I see neither rage nor indignation, just an abiding sorrow. Again, Michel snorts, giving a humorless chuckle. Paul answers as though he had not heard.

"Son, you cannot begin to imagine how wonderful is the world you live in. It is not something one really contemplates, I think, until wrenched from it," he replies.

"Or asks to be taken from it," Michel adds, his tone strangely devoid of malice or sarcasm. "For some of us, the mortal world is no balm, and it is neither a fond memory nor a futile hope. For some of us, it just is. Most of us, after all, do not waste our time pining for such sentimental nonsense as passing on tales of Cainite depravity to decrepit progeny."

Oddly, this last statement does not offend me and I honestly do not believe it to have been intended as an insult. The truth in this instance is harsh enough. Paul takes a moment to ponder his companion's words before continuing, and when he speaks again, his voice is calm and even.

"Indeed, we *are* depraved, Guillaume," he says, "We are thought of as monsters because we are monsters. I devour the living to slake the thirst of a twisted demon that dwells deep within my mind and spirit. For those such as Michel, it is often easier to regard mortal men as fodder. Those such as myself, however, who try to emulate mortal life as a means to cling to sanity and our very souls, possess a need to have contact with the living. There comes a time when even the familiar grows alien, if one is away from it long enough. Thus, I exist among humankind, hoping by your example to better understand myself."

"You miss the world of men, then?" I ask

He smiles humorlessly. "Many of us do. Some so much that our hearts break with the weight of it and, by the breaking, move us to do unseemly things. Sometimes, such pain moves us to do monstrous things, indeed. It is always a sad affair to see an otherwise worthy soul become so lost in sadness as to betray all that he believes in."

Judging the Damned

"What do you do, then," I ask, "when one of your own is found wanting? Surely, every society makes provision to punish its lawbreakers."

Michel snickers at this. It seems I have said something amusing, or perhaps ironic. I cannot tell.

"Every mortal society, certainly," my father responds, "but I cannot, in truth tell you that we have any way of punishing those who offend against our code. We Prodigals are not a civilization, Guillaume, so much as a philosophy. While one can punish another for not

"It so upsets their delicate constitutions," Michel jibes. Prodigals do not like to dwell upon the matter."

Paul again rests his hand at the back of his neck, rubbing it slightly, and keeps speaking, "Torture, naturally, is an affront to our ways, though it is so difficult at times to draw the line where normal Cainite interactions end and such behavior begins. In truth, there may be no distinction between the two. Accordingly, many of us

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No, indeed, Michel, there is more," my father continues, "There is always more, is there not? I suppose it is worthwhile to discuss what we consider crimes. Murder, theft, vandalism and other acts of wanton destruction; all are certainly frowned upon by us. Rape is not beyond Cainites, either. Indeed, we are capable of more varieties of it than most mortals could imagine."

he does not show it.

"That is all there is to it, then?" Michel inquires, though it seems he is fully aware of the answer. If Paul takes any notice of the attempt to incite him, however,

to be nothing more than myth and rumor-mongering against us."

"We do not, however, usually allow our own laws to be broken in the pursuit of punishing an offender against them," Paul says. "That would hardly be fitting, would it? While the lawmakers of Europe maintain that there are different rules for the headsmen than for the accused, we Prodigals do not have the luxury of deceiving ourselves so. The Beast revels in the tyranny that impels a man to judge another so hypocritically. Prodigals knew this by the time of Greece's ascendancy. Therefore, we named such systems of sentencing anathema. Though it is rumored that certain degenerate sects of Prodigals hold to such interpretations of our laws, I truly believe them to be nothing more than myth and rumor-mongering against us."

both.

"Nor punish us according to beliefs we do not hold and laws we consider to be foolish moralizing," Michel snaps, though he is smiling once more. Confusing others as to his intentions and emotions seems to be either a hobby for him or a source of petty amusement — perhaps

actions upon your world."

notice of the ways of mortals or the consequences of our none of our kind anywhere would take even the slightest it through ourselves. If not for us, I sometimes feel that the laws of men, even if most of us lack the desire to see wrong with forcing other Cainites to be accountable to told, many of us, and by that, I mean Prodigals, see little "It depends, really," my father replies, "Truth be when they are found out?" I ask.

"And what do you do to such 'zealots', as you put it, if subtler in their movements. Only time will tell."

on but, in others, I feel that they grow more numerous, seems to me that such zealots grow fewer as the years wear

What he speaks of, I do not know, nor do I suspect the actions of your brethren in al-Andalus, Paul."

ever will; but Paul's demeanor grows quite serious as he retorts, "You should have minded your manners better, and perhaps checked your lusts, Michel, but that is neither here nor there. It does, however, give me occasion to inform you, Guillaume, that there are those who walk my road who would judge all according to its precepts. They are a true minority and are not, for the most part, organized; but they do exist and are numbered among the most despised of Cainites, for seeking to thrust upon others the hard lot we Prodigals accept of our own free will. Whether such is a betrayal of the Road of Humanity, I could not say. I have never spoken intently enough with one who openly professed such beliefs to make an accurate assessment. In some ways, it

But you are nevertheless correct, Guillaume," Paul interjects, bringing the conversation back to the matter at hand, "We Prodigals have many different ways in which we seek redress for offenses against our beliefs by one of our own. Sometimes, offenders are judged according to the prevailing laws of the local mortal population. Of course, so many laws are tied up in religious now-days, and so this tradition is slowly falling out of favor in most places."

"Well said!" Michel laughs, "Though Saracens are far more civilized folk than any Europeans I have ever met or anticipate to for many a long century, no matter what your small-minded priests and barons say."

Neither, I am told, though I certainly have no proof of it, do Saracens enforce their laws, such as they are, in the same manner as people do here," I say. "It seems that all men acknowledge the same crimes, even if they cannot agree upon the punishment."

way common to us all."

Despite myself, I am curious. "Please, tell me." Michel turns away, satisfied at what he has loosed. Paul looks at him with a bit of anger, or perhaps distaste, before speaking again. "As you wish, Guillaume. I suppose it is worth exploring, even if only a little. When I said that there is no unified system of law among Prodigals, I spoke true. We do not enforce our customs in any way common to us all."

The 'truths' you would have me admit are little worth dispensing, whether or not Guillaume understands their significance, Michel," my father counters. "The 'truths' you would have me admit are little measure of truth."

At the very least, do your son the honor of some small dogs, be those ways openly acknowledged or no. Admit simple as all that. There are always ways of whipping bad "Oh, come now, Paul," Michel chuckles, "It is not as other paths in the night, perhaps, but not for ours."

a cold and self-righteous way to exist. It may be right for believing as he himself does, there is no justice in it. It is

"Sometimes," Paul says, taking only the most cursory notice of Michel's insult, "Prodigals walk so far away from the path through their actions as to renounce it entirely."

"The road that you walk, then," I inquire, "can also be denied?"

Apostasy and Excommunication

My father's expression is grim but resolute as he replies, "Yes, Guillaume. Have you never heard of men who renounce their faith? It is possible, even for Cainites."

In all seriousness, Michel interjects, "Though it is sometimes difficult to discern who has denied the path entirely, as opposed to simply having lived in gross spiritual error, according to his own code. Often, we Cainites do not know the truth of the matter until such time as the apostate sees fit to come forth and declare himself as such."

Paul nods, apparently satisfied with the answer, as I ask, "What do you do about those who behave in such a manner?"

His young face is awash in an expression somewhere between resigned serenity and profound sorrow as he answers, "Most, we allow to leave in peace, provided that they will have peace with us. We've no wish for violence, especially not toward those who once walked the Road of Humanity beside us. Sometimes, it is simply the case that another Cainite is not meant to travel his long nights in the Prodigal way. We do not begrudge others the right to find our way not to their liking."

"But there are always exceptions, are there not?" Michel coos.

"Yes," Paul sighs, "Some will not simply leave the road in peace. Instead, they must make of themselves a spectacle. Some renounce the Road of Humanity with such vehemence as to bring shame and ignominy to us all — or at least attempt to do so."

"And what do you do with such?" I ask, though it seems to me that I already know the answer.

My father looks away and replies, "Most we can persuade to recant their slander. Sometimes, the persuasion necessary is distasteful, but it is better than the alternative. Those who will not repent of their words must sometimes be exiled far from polite society; sometimes, though it pains me even to speak of it, such Cainites meet the Final Death. We Prodigals are already perceived as weak by many of our peers. The esteem we would lose by allowing apostates to freely belittle our ways and beliefs is too great a price to pay. Sometimes, we must choose between evils and hope that our choice is the lesser of them."

"And then, Paul," Michel mutters, "there are always others. Some walk in truly grievous error, by Prodigal accounting. Must not such unfortunates must be driven from the road, one way or the other?"

"True enough," my father admits, "As unpleasant as it is to contemplate, sometimes Cainites cannot or will not grasp the teachings of the road and, by their actions, threaten to pollute its teachings and perhaps lead others off into the darkness that they themselves court. It is an occasion for great sorrow, but we do as we must and deny such failed Prodigals our guidance, our companionship and our love in the hopes that they will thereby be moved to seek out a philosophy more in keeping with their practices."

Though the question forming in my mind seems foolish to me, I am compelled to ask it anyway. "Does it always work?"

"No," Paul answers, "As with all things in this world, nothing is assured. While we do not persecute the apostate, neither will we give him succor. Often, such shunning leads him to another road, one better suited to his ways. Almost always, in fact. Rarely, though, the apostate proves unwilling or unable to cleave to another system of belief. Many of these vanish and we never hear of them again. Some few, we hear and see all too much of. They are, through their rage and isolation, transformed. They become the Soulless."

The Soulless

"What do you mean, 'soulless'?" I ask.

At this, Paul sighs heavily and even Michel's self-assured demeanor slips just a bit. It is plainly a subject with which neither of them is comfortable, and I almost believe that my father regrets having mentioned it in the first place. Regardless, he steels himself and replies, "Yes, the Soulless. The Beast unchained, released from the bonds of propriety, honor, dignity, hope and sanity. All Cainites may lose themselves forever in monstrosity and horror, but we Prodigals alone put a name to it: the Second Death. For a death it is to descend into everlasting wickedness and even mindlessness, a ravenous animal possessed of the cunning of a man and the powers of a demon loosed upon the Earth. The Soulless are mighty and terrible."

Too curious to keep my silence, I inquire, "What do you do about them?"

Michel interrupts, "One runs and hopes not to be the slowest among one's companions."

Paul shudders, slightly and briefly, and I wonder if his knowledge of the subject is purely academic or if he has firsthand experience of it. "Michel, sadly, has the right of it. Most of the time, we can do little save to flee in haste, though I would not advocate leaving any behind as a feast for such a monster. Sometimes, if innocents are threatened, more drastic measures need to be taken. Under such circumstances, many Cainites, even dire enemies, are willing to band together; for defeating one of the Soulless is deadly serious business and is not a task undertaken lightly. Any divisiveness between the hunters is apt to bring about their doom."



am told of an order of our kind dedicated to hunting down and purging the Soulless by the sword, but I have never, to my knowledge, met with any of them."

"It sounds quite terrible," I assert.

Paul nods and smiles but a little, "It is. Fortunately, though, the Soulless are rare beasts. Most of us possess enough sense of self to fend off such horrid temptations and keep control over our actions."

"Or else some Cainites see the signs of it in others and do what they must," Michel mutters.

"Indeed," Paul assents. "I hear, though, that the upheavals in the night, conflicts of which you would understand little and need be told nothing, Guillaume, have taken their toll upon the spirits of many, leading them down dark roads and into never-ending madness. It is a sad state of affairs. I can only hope that this order of hunters, if indeed they exist, is vigilant and strong. It seems we shall have need of such wary protectors before this war in shadows is done."

Then, Paul grows silent and says no more of the matter.

Revelation

"Surely," I say, "there must be better things we could speak of, something joyous."

Paul blinks away whatever grim reverie was consuming him and looks to me once more. His face breaks into that boyish grin again. "You remind me much of myself, Guillaume. I am told that I, too, often turn solemn

subjects into happy ones, if I am able. It is good to know that you are not a sullen man, my son. But, as to your question; yes, indeed, there are better things we might speak of. Not always joyous, but certainly more worthy of discussion than the fates of those truly lost to damnation. Let me tell you what it is like to see with clear sight. As a mortal man, you do not know what it is to feel outside of humanity, cut off from and eternally denied that which makes you happy. You take being a man for granted, and why should you not?"

He rises from his seat upon asking this question, and for the span of a few breaths I wonder if Paul is waiting for an answer. Soon though I realize that, as seems his habit, he is posing the question to himself rather than to any other person. I glance over at Michel, who seems bored. Obviously, he has heard this answer, or one like it, before.

Moments of Truth

"Are you a father, Guillaume?" my own father asks me. The question seems oddly out of place, a bit jarring, even. It pulls me suddenly out of this fanciful world in which my father is some kind of youthful immortal and back into my own younger days, when my hair rested more thickly upon my pate and was more blond than white. It reminds me of holding my twin children in my arms: one a stillborn boy and the other a healthy baby girl. I actually feel a stinging at the corners of my eyes, so strongly does the remembrance of it assail me.

"Yes," I reply, "I am. Or rather, I was. My daughter died shortly after marrying. It was many years ago now, but I can still see it as though it were happening in front of me. She was with child, though it was the better part of a season before the babe was to be born. It was a fever. My little Yvonne was afflicted with fits of trembling. She said to me, 'I'm so cold, father,' even as the sweat poured from her brow. She felt alight as though from a fire within. She died in the late autumn. I remember that the ground was so hard from the cold and we worked long to carve her grave out of the earth, as though it could not bear to take her from us."

I can feel the tears slip from my eyes as the last words leave my lips. Paul takes hold of my palsied old hand and speaks. "It is that passion, that reality of the world in which you live, that makes your humanity so beautiful and so wondrous, my son. We Cainites come to forget in time that which moves us to tears, for long years make it too painful to remember what it meant to grieve or to laugh. And, yet, we Prodigals must struggle every night to recall. Just hearing it from you, I feel the nearness of your sorrow, as though you laid her in the earth just yesterday."

Tears of deep crimson slash their way down his cheeks. Looking into his eyes, I see myself reflected there. I have never sat before a stranger mirror. Somehow, I can tell that he is looking through my stare, that he sees Yvonne, if not in truth, than in an imagination I can only assume to be much grander than my own. In that moment, through my loss and sadness, he comes to know who his granddaughter was, if only in his own mind. For him, it seems to be enough. He releases my hands from his grip and rises.

"Cainites, for our part, must try much harder to know such revelations of the simple truth of what it means to be human," Paul whispers, "It is so easy to lose sight of that, as every night becomes like each that preceded it and each that will follow. Sometimes, even the most dedicated of us stumble upon the road and require moments that bring us back to ourselves, moments to awaken our souls to who we were and give us the strength to contend with what we have now become. Thank you for telling me of Yvonne. I know there is so much more to tell of her, and perhaps one night I shall hear it. But, for tonight, it is enough for me to know that I have failed you and her."

"Oh, yes," Michel snipes, forgotten until now, "this is much better than the last subject."

Paul runs the back of his hand across his cheeks, smearing the blood there. It is only now that I realize how horrific he looks, his face sullied with blood that has leaked from his very eyes. I must startle or otherwise display my fear and disgust, for he turns away quickly to once more face his companion. As he takes out a kerchief and more thoroughly cleans himself, my father replies, "Better things, Michel, are not always joyous. Much may

be learned in sorrow, if only you would accept that there are matters greater than your own aggrandizement, pleasure and well-being, or the thwarting of them as it may be, to be found in this world; matters worth weeping over."

Michel huffs, "I've yet to find one, Paul. But I will be certain to inform you if I should."

"Do you mean to tell me," I ask my father, "that you find something in the story of my Yvonne to prove to you the goodness of your own way?"

"Absolutely," he says, his voice scarcely more than a whisper, "for I see in your tale the beauty of what it means to be human. It is not always a safe beauty and certainly not always a happy one, but we learn by our tears as often as we do by our laughter, perhaps more often. When you tell me of my own granddaughter and I see her through your words, I am moved to consider what might have been, had I but had the courage to try harder, to be the father I should have been, rather than a ghost and a memory."

"Are these revelations ever happier affairs?" I feel compelled to ask.

Paul smiles broadly and it is as though all of his sorrow is lifted from him. The sincerity in his young face and the light in his eyes lifts from me my burden as well and I am left with not the sorrow of Yvonne's death, but instead the happiness I knew as her father. He laughs gently and says, "Of course, my son. Some moments of truth are known to bring us happiness. Here, now, with you Guillaume, I can rejoice. I know what I have not been to you, what I can never be, but I now know also the man you have become in my absence. I know for certain that something worthwhile has come of my mortal life."

Unbidden, the words leave my lips, "Even when you know that I must die soon and end all that which you have made in the world of men?"

He answers me. "No man's legacy is immortal, even if he himself is. Normally, the father lives on through the son. In this instance, I hope that something of the son will live on in the father."

The air grows thick with silent moments. Finally, I murmur, "So, that is all there is to it, then?"

My father considers his words carefully before replying, "It would seem so."

Farewell

I can feel a tightening in my throat and, incredible as it seems, I realize that I am not eager for this parting. I cannot imagine why, but sadness at the thought of my father's departure, the father who has been nothing more than a tale told by a sorrowing mother, is upon me. I feel twice cheated, but I know what it is I must say and do.

"Father," I begin, "I can call you that now, but it does not change what has been all these long years. It does not change what will come in the few short days left to me or

the long centuries that stretch before you. I wonder, will I be to you more than a dream as ages turn and the world is unmade and made anew?"

Paul shudders and, again, red tears begin to flow. He catches a sob in his throat and chokes upon it for an instant. Whatever words he first intended to say die there and are replaced with another sentiment, "I could —"

"No," I cut him off. "Do not. I would accept, and that is not truly what I wish. I see Death clearly now and I have known enough of him in my life to fear him. My good sense, though, tells me to fear far more the life you would offer, such as it is. Of course, I am enough the young and foolish man I once was for my fear to overcome my sense. Best not to ask at all. You are too young to be my father now and I am too old to be your son."

"I love you, Guillaume," my father whispers.

"And I, you, father," I reply, "But we cannot undo history. You have explained to me *why* you were gone all my youth and come to me only now in the lonely twilight of my life, and I forgive you. But I cannot forget. I will not. I owe that much to my mother. As do you, if ever you loved her."

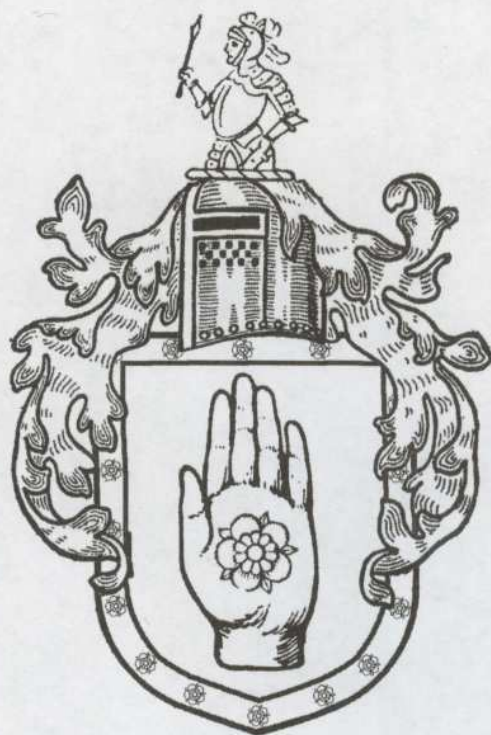
"I love her still," Paul replies, "And you are right. It pains me to say it and the regret of it stings me deeply, but, as I myself have told you this night, not all that is worth saying brings happiness. Indeed, much of what is most worthwhile ends in sorrow. What is there to say now, save goodbye?"

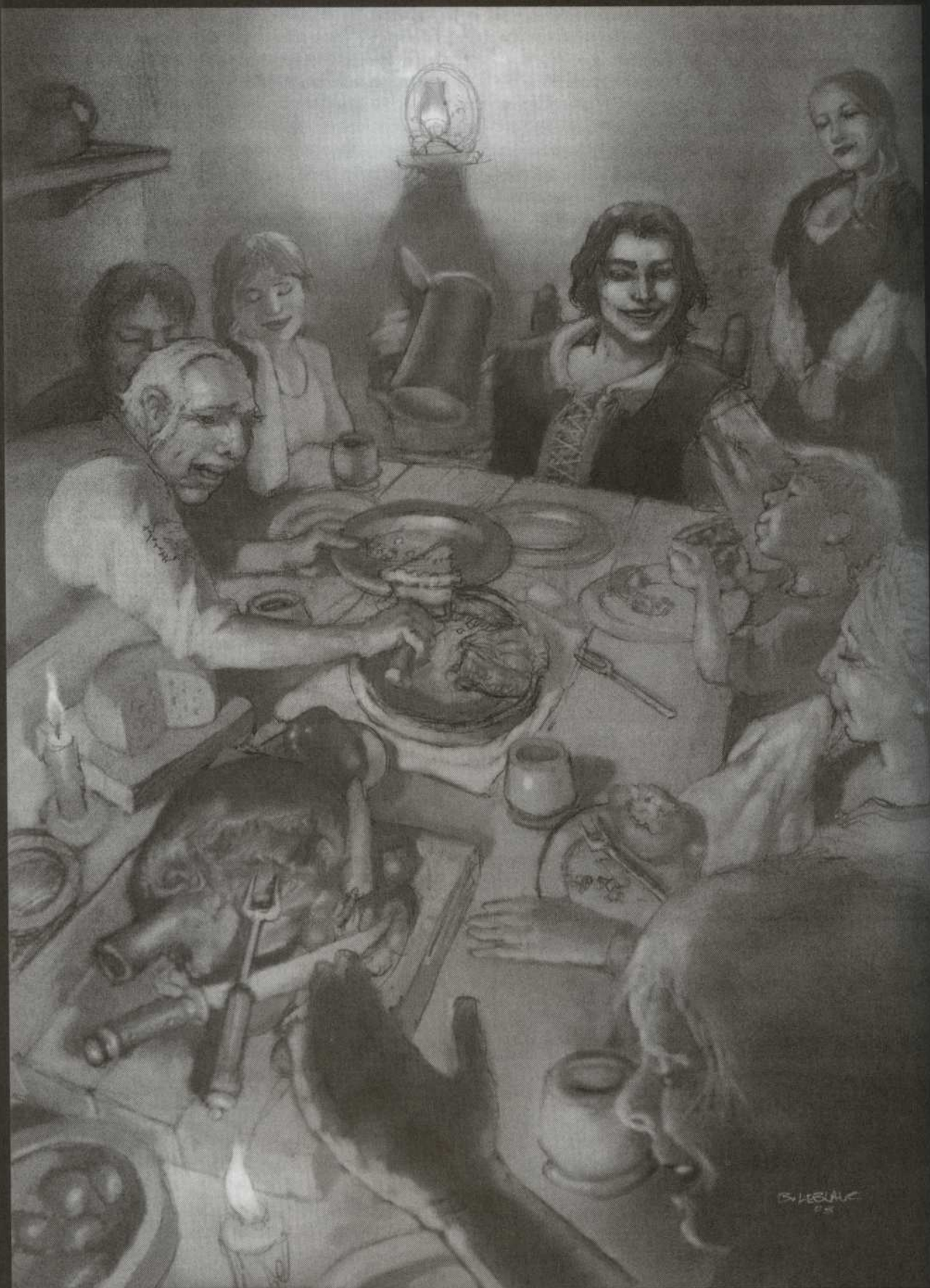
I answer for us both, "Nothing. Nothing at all."

He stands for a long moment, agonizing over the choice that has already been made, before turning and leaving my home, Michel with him. Idly, Michel waves to me without turning to see that I wave in return. I do not.

I watch them recede into the distance, uncertain of what to do from here. I know that I will take some time in digesting much of what was said here. I will spend the rest of my days, few though they may be, chewing on much of it without resolution. Strangely, I am unbothered by the fact. As my father disappears into the darkness, borne away by dim starlight into the night, I know that I will never see him again. Perhaps this is as it should be. I see in him too much of the life which has passed me by and, perhaps, he sees in me too much of the death that will never come for him. Still, if my guess is right, he has seen, though the eyes of his bent and gray-haired son, something of what it means to be human. Though his young and vibrant eyes, I am quite certain that I have also seen much the same. Much, if not all, of the sense of betrayal I felt as a child and young man is gone, replaced by an abiding pity for my father and what must become of him as all he knows withers and dies with the relentless turning of the seasons.

Suddenly, I am very much comforted by the notion that it will not be long until I am together with Marie and Yvonne once more.







CHAPTER TWO: DEAD BUT NOT DAMNED

...Now man derives his species from his rational soul: and consequently whatever is contrary to the order of reason is, properly speaking, contrary to the nature of man...

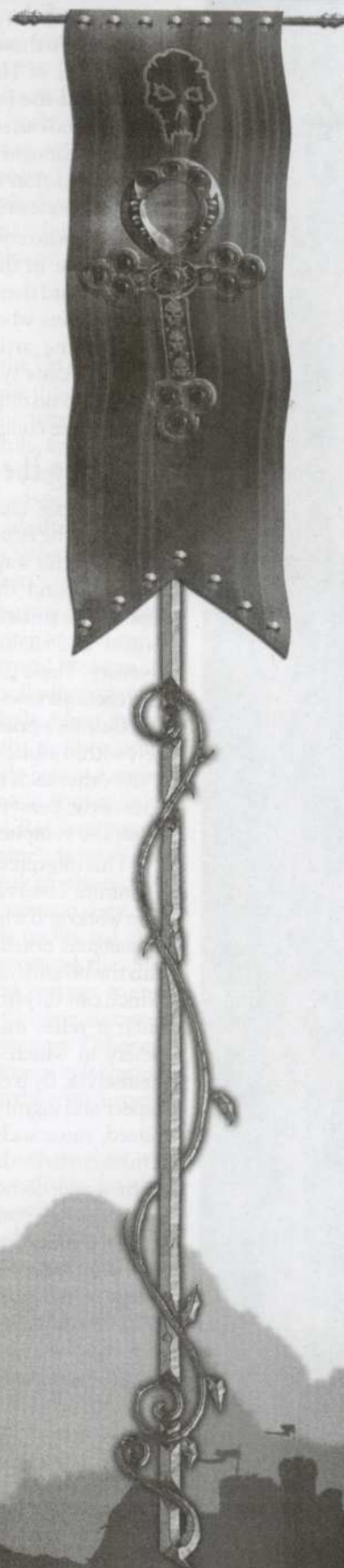
— Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

Much more goes into the creation of a Prodigal than a childe's initial decision, conscious or otherwise, not to be consumed by the fury of the Beast. Even for those who would discover the Road of Humanity in their own time and in their own way, many steps must be taken. Prodigals are not sired; they are *made*.

Two Sides of the One Road

As one of the two "root roads" (the other being the Road of the Beast), the *Via Humanitatis* can be reached in one of two ways: naturally or through training. While most adherents to the *Via Bestiae* couldn't care less how a Cainite came to walk that path, something of a sense of moral conflict and even, on one side, elitism does exist between these two overarching branches of the Road of Humanity.

The distinction is mostly one-sided, with those educated in the road's ethics (most often members of the High Clans, though the Assamites are a notable exception) occasionally adopting a superior stance towards the more instinctive walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis*. In



many ways, this is primarily an issue of High Clan against Low Clan. To those Cainites formally educated in the ways of the Road of Humanity, however, it is much more a reflection of the fall of the road in recent centuries. Any common clod can stave off the Beast through rote repetition of mortal thought and action, but it takes a Cainite of station, erudition and quality to calculatedly thwart that Beast with exacting discipline.

Those who come to the road on their own usually have little interest in the enmity that the "educated" Prodigals project toward them, reasoning that all who would walk the road are peers who should be aiding one another, rather than creating artificial distinctions for the purposes of imposing a caste system. Indeed, to these instinctive Prodigals, there is no difference. The road is what it is, why make matters more complicated than they need to be?

Learning the Path

For those taught the ways of the *Via Humanitatis*, fending off the Beast is a learned skill. Initiates who come to the road in this way are taught not to be human (that is now forever beyond them), but instead how to use human responses to situations as a means of exerting a sense of self-control and maintaining one's faculties in the face of adversity. These Cainites learn how an individual's actions and reactions toward society help to define that individual. The Cainite's primary objective in participating appropriately within a functional social structure is not "being good" or any other such meaningless abstraction; the objective is to leave the Beast no weakness to exploit in its endless quest to rob the vampire of reason and self-determination.

This interpretation of the road benefits from millennia of Cainite observation of kine, with careful attention to what works and what does not. Long ago, the sages of the *Via Humanitatis* noted that the road has precious little to do with the breadth of potential human responses to situations (which can vary from the sublime to the pointlessly malevolent); it relies instead upon what people *should* do in a society in which they value others as much as they do themselves. By treating the world and the beings in it with respect and dignity, it becomes possible to leash the Beast. Indeed, some such scholars note, these very secular concerns seem to be the primary ethics behind the major faiths of the world: do not kill people, steal what is not your own or wish harm upon others, for example. The truths penned at the instruction of the Almighty seem to be nothing more than what is necessary for the weakest among men to be free of fear of the strongest. To irreligious Cainites upon the Road of Humanity, it raises curious questions about why such ethics were promulgated in the earliest days of humanity and by whom, and it remains a point of contention between the walkers on the Road of Heaven and some of the most learned of Prodigals to this night.

Of course, it is very easy to be human when one is born to it. It is much more difficult to deliberately cultivate socially responsible human reactions to situations as functions of an artificial morality (and, from this perceptive, that

is exactly what the *Via Humanitatis* is). Even the average human being does not, for example, suffer a blow at another's hands without at least *wanting* to react violently, even if only for an instant. But that instant, in a Cainite, is where the Beast insinuates its influence and attempts to wrest control away from the higher mind. The Cainite may need to respond violently to a situation but, even when she acts upon that need, she must learn not to want to. She is taught to scorn and reject the "dark" emotions (lust, rage and the like) that motivate crimes against social stability, even when she is made to react to outside influences in a manner that would normally indicate capitulation to such emotions. Effectively, the vampire learns to deny those desires that would or could lead to inflicting harm, by action or omission, upon another.

Finding the Path

On the other side of the equation are those who discover the Road of Humanity on their own. Unlike their counterparts on the Road of the Beast, these Cainites choose to deny their savage urges, seeking to achieve peace and balance through a sense of the people they once were, as opposed to the monsters they now are. Though an accurate count would, for obvious reasons, prove impossible, it is probably the case that more walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis* arrived there by way of personal discovery rather than formalized education. Truth be told, even many sires and other would-be tutors upon the road lack an objective enough understanding of it to adequately instruct their childer in its tenets. Most can offer only intuitive and not terribly helpful suggestions as to the particular beliefs of the road (the sort of thing that the average person could figure out), so these childer end up more or less self-taught in its ways, even if they are building upon the foundations laid by their sires.

Often, among clans that scorn the *Via Humanitatis*, childer who would embrace the values of their former lives (or at least values reasonably similar) end up as renegades, learning for themselves what works and what does not. This not-inconsiderable population of vagabond Cainites is, in many ways, representative of the archetypal self-schooled Prodigal; outcast from the societies of man and vampire alike in their early nights, seeking to come to grips with what they have become and forging a sense of discipline and control that will help to stave off the Beast. Many Low Clan Cainites, lacking their high-blooded kin's standards of propriety, see greater value in allowing their childer to discover their own beliefs rather than thrusting moral codes upon them, as though ethics were something that could be meaningfully taught purely as an abstraction.

This approach to the Road of Humanity is much more organic than the formal training espoused by the elders among the Brujah and Toreador. While the lack of an outside perspective on the road's beliefs can sometimes be a hindrance, it is just as often the case that this more natural understanding is a boon to the Cainite. When a trained Prodigal might be wondering how a conscientious human

"should" act in a given situation, the self-taught one simply acts as she thinks she should, since no definitively "right" or "wrong" answers exist, only those which are moral or immoral, according to her own beliefs. The untaught have the benefit of self-determination; they are not attempting to live up to a fully artificial ideal.

A Middle Way

Some Cainites find their way upon the Road of Humanity through a combination of formalized training and personal instinct. In older nights, this approach to the road was rare, but it becomes increasingly common in the Dark Medieval. Some speculate that the distinctions between the formalized road and the intuitively realized one may vanish within a matter of mere centuries, a development which many powerful Cainites on both sides of the issue are unhappy about. As the War of Princes truly hits its stride, many sires and would-be teachers find themselves with precious little time to impart the important lessons of the *Via Humanitatis*, forcing many neonates to discover the path with incomplete teachings as their guide. Likewise, sires who would otherwise allow progeny to discover the road on their own are now realizing that this time of moral quandaries and dangerous politics requires a more direct and forceful hand, causing some of them to teach their children some basic lessons about the Road of Humanity, that they may quickly and effectively discover the road and focus their attentions upon survival.

Strife Upon the Road

As stated above, the distinction between instructed walker and instinctive one is mostly a matter of High Clan against Low Clan, but elements of education versus ignorance and discipline versus intuition also dog this argument. For the most part, those who discover the road on their own don't much care to engage in debate on the subject (some of them don't even see themselves as walking a road, after all), though some are quite vehement in their insistence that their more organic approach to the *Via Humanitatis* is and always will be superior to the clinical, even calculated, approximation of moral behavior espoused by those trained to the road.

While the ethics practiced by instinctive and instructed Prodigals are more or less identical, the *reasons* for practicing them are very distinct from one another. The tutored Prodigal is, in some ways, much more of a moral pragmatist and even something of a mercenary, embracing the code strictly because it will allow her to ward off the Beast. The instinctive seeker has the benefit of sincere belief, but lacks the framework of tradition (and the tried-and-true methods that go along with it) from which the formally trained Prodigal benefits. It is not a dispute that promises to be resolved any time soon.

Certainly, though, most Cainites do not advertise the manner in which they were "brought up" (so to speak); and a given Prodigal's approach to the *Via Humanitatis* is only apt to become apparent through regular interactions with

others, especially those upon her own road. Some educated Prodigals are an exception to this rule, expressing their devotion to the Road of Humanity in a very obvious fashion, hinging far more upon aesthetics and reason than genuine emotion, but these are rare. Such a method of adherence is, however, somewhat common among particularly old Cainites upon the Road of Humanity. This approach can be strange, even disturbing, to one who has no previous experience with it, as the vampire mimics human actions and responses with a rote precision almost never found among actual kine.

Training and Initiation

Regardless of how the Cainite finds the *Via Humanitatis*, he must strive to realize within himself those things that make him a Prodigal. For some, this takes the form of rigorous instruction by a sire or other mentor, while, for others, it is much more a matter of discerning for oneself the states of mind that best stave off the assaults of the Beast and deny it a foothold within the soul. Being a Prodigal, after all, is much more than pretending to be human whether or not the adherent knows how to articulate that fact.

Being initiated onto the road is, in the case of formalized instruction, often a matter of no small pomp and ceremony. Sire and teacher both (if they are not one and the same) are present, as are at least a handful of other local adherents to the *Via Humanitatis*. Even self-taught Prodigals, when invited, often attend these gatherings to honor the newly educated neonate, if only to show support and to help bestow a sense of community and belonging, so important in thwarting the wiles of the Beast, upon the young Prodigal. Readings from the *Book of Nod* (often those focusing upon Caine's damnation for his brutal, selfish act and those which speak of salvation and peace for the penitent soul) are not uncommon, especially when sire or teacher is old or particularly traditional. Also, many formal teachers of the Road of Humanity ask the child to recite the Pact of Athens (see p. 41) and, perhaps, to enter into a discourse on it with the assembled Cainites, discussing its obvious significance and its deeper meanings. Other customs vary from place to place, though joyous celebrations, somber philosophical debates and everything in between have been seen.

Those who find the Road of Humanity on their own seldom receive any kind of formal recognition for their accomplishments. Sometimes, a particularly kindly older Prodigal takes it upon himself to hold a gathering in honor of the self-taught Cainite, but this just as often comes off as being quite an awkward and even sometimes condescending affair. Accordingly, many new Prodigals of this variety are known to turn down any such offer. It just seems pointless to most such Cainites to accept praise for choosing to act in a manner befitting a civilized human being.

Rituals and Customs

Trying to assign a sweeping and unified sense of purpose to the Prodigals is like trying to find one in humanity as a whole; nothing more than the broadest generalizations

will suffice and, somewhere, someone is acting as an exception to the rule. Most customs among Prodigals deal with the very basics of Cainite existence, serving as a reminder of the community in which they all partake, a shared state that makes all of their kind brothers and sisters in Caine.

The Creation of Progeny

For many Prodigals, the Embrace of a childe and the induction of that childe onto the *Via Humanitatis* is the closest thing a Cainite gets to the natural birth and normal upbringing of children. As mortal human behavior is to be observed attentively, many adherents of the road eventually seek to emulate this most basic tenet of mortality, pending, of course, the permission of any local Cainite authorities to do so.

The downside of this, however, is that creating another vampire is, in many respects, a dire sin, loosing another affliction upon the world. Prodigals must balance carefully this desire for companionship and a legacy with the need to check that desire for the sake of the world around them.

Those Who Serve: Ghouls

The Road of Humanity as a whole takes a dim view of the (regrettably, often necessary) act of putting a mortal under the blood. The blood oath is a loathsome form of slavery; no amount of self-deception, when the needy creature is clutching like an animal at one's feet, praying for a drop of sweet, precious *vitalis*, can allow the Cainite to believe otherwise. It is a wholly unnatural servitude, enforced only through the continual infusion of the mortal with the vampire's cursed and stolen life force. It is, put plainly, an act of selfishness and even evil.

Of course, it is sometimes necessary to create a ghoul, though it is an act no Prodigal undertakes lightly. The Cainite who does so enters into a relationship between master and servant, one in which the servant has absolutely no choice in the matter. Some Prodigals attempt to assuage their sense of

guilt by putting the blood upon a hurtful or otherwise ill-socialized person, in order to mitigate that individual's capacity for harm, but most do not allow themselves the luxury of pretending to adopt any kind of moral high ground in this act. In general, the best the Prodigal can do when faced with the need for a ghoul is to treat the wretch with kindness and compassion, and to eventually give release from such gross subjugation through the servant's death. All told, it is considered an unwholesome business; and it is often thought impolite to discuss the matter socially, save among more philosophical adherents to the road, who often like to engage in debate about what is and is not acceptable upon the *Via Humanitatis* (and such Cainites almost *never* discuss their own ghouls in this fashion).

Excommunication

For a road without any truly formal organization, excommunication is a difficult proposal. Granted, several cults of personality have sprung up around powerful, influential, deviant or otherwise noteworthy Prodigals, but most walkers upon the Road of Humanity exist with the understanding that they are their own judges. How does one tell another that she is not being "human enough," after all, when such an idea is very much open to interpretation? Those Prodigals who fail to faithfully adhere to the tenets of the *Via Humanitatis* tend, by dint of their own moral laxity, to lead themselves into degeneration, obviating the need for this form of punishment.

Of course, some few Prodigals do manage to offend so badly and flagrantly against the Road of Humanity, with neither any sign of remorse for doing so nor any indication that they will cease acting in such a shameful and wicked fashion, that it would be irresponsible of the teachers of the road to allow such Cainites to continue to on in such a mockery of its ethics. In such a case, local leaders on the road simply agree to discontinue guidance for the individual in question, denying them the critical source of inspiration often necessary in order to find one's way in times of moral crisis. In the event of truly abhorrent activities, correspondence is sent to teachers and even paragons for weeks travel around, informing them of the enormity of the Cainite's crimes and strongly suggesting that he receive no further aid from the educators of his road. Though many are loath to essentially condemn another vampire to a slow, agonizing degeneration into monstrosity, some affronts are simply too extreme to pardon. This is about as formal as excommunication on the *Via Humanitatis* becomes. The road isn't really organized enough for anything more to be truly viable.

Apostasy

Just as it is difficult to definitively excommunicate a Cainite from the Road of Humanity, so, too, is branding another vampire an apostate from the road a complicated matter at best. When a vampire decides to abandon the *Via Humanitatis*, few bother to give the matter a second thought, unless the apostate does so in a manner which brutally and

A ROAD FOR ALL PEOPLE

One of the most interesting things to keep in mind about the *Via Humanitatis* is its universality. While the Road of Kings, for instance, seems to draw mostly ambitious and even covetous sorts, and the *Via Peccati* is attractive to those who long to indulge themselves, no matter the cost to others, the Road of Humanity espouses a code that most people in most places and at most times can believe in: the idea of treating others with such kindness, dignity and compassion as one would like to receive in kind. It is a core tenet of many religions and philosophies, as well as being the primary ethic on which civilization, at least in the ideal, is founded. No matter one's station, faith (if any), prosperity (or lack thereof), nationality or even gender, all are welcome upon the road. That is a comforting thought for many Cainites.

terribly offends against the tenets of the road, somehow damages the road's reputation or calls its ethics into question in such a way that even dedicated Prodigals are made to waver in their beliefs.

Particularly horrific violations of the *Via Humanitatis* generally lead the offender into the clutches of the Beast in short order, unless he is spiritually prepared to abandon his road and take up another. If he seems in danger of doing so without any planned recourse, it is not unknown for the knights of the Twilight Order (see p. 51) to take it upon themselves to perform the unhappy task of dispatching the failing Prodigal, before she becomes, in her moral error, something far more monstrous than any normal Cainite.

Celebrations

The Road of Humanity often seems to lack the pomp and ceremony common to most other roads. While the other roads can celebrate the things that make them unique, the Road of Humanity is, by its very nature, not a creed that revels in uniqueness. Or, rather, it is perhaps more accurate to say that its practitioners, overall, do not have as much of a sense of distinction from their mortal beliefs and codes of conduct as do Cainites with other systems of morality. Who celebrates the thoughts and actions inherent in just being human? Conversely, who would celebrate the thoughts and actions inherent in trying to be human, or at least pretending to be?

Ultimately, it is the formally trained Prodigals who seem to share in the far greater number of celebrations, festivals and rituals of the road. This is fitting, given their cognizance of the artificiality of the *Via Humanitatis* (from the perspective from which they learn it, at any rate). Just as with contrived mortal institutions (such as churches and nations) celebrations in this particular branch of the road make examples of its tenets and serve to direct its adherents to more thoroughly embody its beliefs.

The Revels of Carthage

An institution begotten by Brujah Prodigals, the Revels of Carthage have, over the course of recent centuries, been opened to all Cainites who would walk the *Via Humanitatis*. Built upon an idealized remembrance of the way in which the Zealots recall the history of "their" city, the Revels celebrate a society in which Cainites and kine coexisted peacefully, without fear or hatred of one another. It is a whitewashed accounting of history, to be certain, but one that even those elder Brujah (who know some or, in rare cases, all of the truth of the matter) who deign to participate find real value in. After all, who cares what truly happened then, if a sanitized memory of it can inspire neonates to improve the world now?

The celebration usually lasts for about a fortnight and includes plays staged by Cainites young and old, recounting the virtues (and, rarely, vices) of the Carthaginian vampires of old, intense philosophical debates on the matter of the Beast, the human spirit and other (sometimes com-

pletely unrelated) matters, and discussions about the possibility of the creation of an enlightened Cainite domain, one in which mortal and undead might knowingly and freely walk side-by-side. Other activities take place as well, of course; political alliances are made and broken, messages are exchanged and correspondences delivered, and liaisons occur in the shadows. Recent Revels have vilified the Tremere and some plays and recitations have even raised Saulot up to the station of a martyred saint. Young Prodigals attending past Revels have sometimes made powerful allies in great elders or even paragons upon the Road of Humanity and most of them thrill to the egalitarian atmosphere, in which the freshest neonate might (if she has the tongue for it) discourse more or less as an equal with the most erudite

FAITH AND THE *VIA HUMANITATIS*

While nothing about the Road of Humanity makes of it a religion, neither does the road condemn the practice of kine faiths. Indeed, certain philosophical stances circulating among the road's adherents celebrate participation in religion as a productive means of immersion in community and mortal vitality. Of course, many instinctive walkers upon the road were persons of at least some measure of faith before the Embrace and, while becoming a Cainite utterly destroys faith in some, it serves to reinvigorate it in others. The end result is that perhaps as many as a half to two-thirds (no one has ever conducted an accurate census, after all) of all Prodigals have some kind of faith in a higher power beyond an incomprehensible abstraction.

Prodigals, for the most part, tend toward a bit more laxity in their faith than do most mortals of the time, though a scant few (especially those inclined to see themselves as truly damned) thoroughly entrench themselves in their religions and use the Road of Humanity (seeing themselves "unworthy" of the *Via Caeli*) as a shield against whatever "demon" or "imp" or "djinn" seeks to drag them down into insanity and depravity everlasting. Some are simply devout practitioners of their faiths (to the degree to which a Cainite can accurately adhere to the doctrines of almost any major religion of the known world, at any rate), neither fanatic in their beliefs nor given merely to lip-service. Ultimately, the question of what to believe in and whether to believe at all is a choice each Prodigal must make for herself. Many walkers upon the Road of Humanity get along perfectly well without the need for religion at all. The Divine, should It (by whatever name) exist, such Prodigals reason, is either so directly involved in the workings of the Universe as to be inextricable from them or else so remote from Creation as to be an unnecessary concern among the undead. In either case, they argue that the world of flesh is the here and now, and it is the world to which Cainites owe their undivided attention.

ancient; possibilities that, for many, more than make up for the inconvenience and even peril inherent in long travel by land or sea. For the part of old Cainite luminaries, the prospect of gaining young, eager hands in far-flung corners of the world makes the journey worthwhile.

During the Revels, those who kill or even unduly harm a mortal are looked upon with disdain and may even be expelled from the festivities. Some say that particularly horrid offenders are sometimes followed and either put into torpor or even put to the Final Death, their ashes intermingled with coarse salt or soot and cast into the wind or the sea, though this assertion may be nothing more than a rumor. The festivities take place across the entirety of the city in which the Prodigals gather and only a few meetings include even a majority of the Cainites present, let alone all. It is a time for Prodigals to find strength in a community of their own and to reawaken that which is most human within themselves. It is a time for them to take joy in being vampires who have chosen to walk as men.

The Revels of Carthage are usually organized by one or more Prodigal elders (usually Brujah, though often with the aid of a number of ancillae and neonates of various clans) and are normally undertaken once every decade, often in one of the larger cities of the south and east, such as Cairo or Baghdad; somewhere capable of playing host, even if only temporarily, to the large number of Cainites who come to take part. Traditionally, great boons are offered to non-Prodigal princes who play host to the Revels, while Prodigal princes benefit from the profound esteem of their fellows. The recent ignition of the War of Princes and the chaos of its opening aggressions temporarily suspended the tradition of the Revels. The last Revels of Carthage were held in the closing years of the 12th century, on the isle of Cyprus (while the prince, Nehemiah, did not participate, neither did he act to prevent the festival from reaching his shores). Current speculation has the next site of the Revels as Constantinople, both in memory of Michael the Patriarch (who, historically, did not take part in the celebration but was openly a great supporter of its ideals) and in hopes of revitalizing the City of Cities. The elders working to reestablish the Revels have made overtures to Natalya Syvatoslav, the Brujah Prodigal whom many Greek Byzantine Cainites are supporting as a potential replacement for the Latin conqueror-prince, Alfonzo. Time will tell how this obvious play by elder walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis* to put a sympathetic prince (one who venerates the ideal of ancient Carthage) upon Constantinople's Cainite throne culminates.

The Lamentation for Seth

Held in the autumn, and believed to be a holdover from ancient pagan practices, the Lamentation for Seth is intended to honor those kine who have died to slake the thirst of Cainites (especially Prodigals). It is equal parts harvest festival, remembrance of prey, fertility rite and vigil for the dead. Not all Prodigals celebrate the Lamentation, nor do all cities containing Prodigals host it. Some say it was first conceived of by Prodigal Cappadocians, or even

Gangrel. For many, it is too barbaric a practice and it offends against the sensibilities of those who were raised in the traditions of the Abrahamic faiths. This is fitting, for it may well stretch back to days long before Moses commanded the pharaoh to free his people.

The Lamentation takes place on the night of the Autumnal Equinox and it is attended by Cainites, ghouls and those members of herds who are aware of the nature of Cainites. Gangrel, Malkavian and Nosferatu Prodigals particularly favor the Lamentation, as do some rare Cappadocians and Lamia, though no walker upon the Road of Humanity is excluded, should she wish to participate. The opening ceremonies of the celebration usually take place in a graveyard or cave, someplace symbolic of death.

Cainites, ghouls and herd members enter into the Lamentation for Seth as one, without distinction for their respective stations. In older times, it was customary for all participants to be robed and hooded, though this is no longer always the case. Chants (now usually in archaic Latin, though older, pagan tongues, such as Gallic, Pictish and Teuton are sometimes heard in isolated corners of Europe) are recited. The exact wording varies from place to place, but the themes remain constant: giving thanks to the souls of the slain for yielding up their lives to feed the Sons and Daughters of Caine; making sincere expressions of sorrow and remorse; sending prayers or well-wishes for the dead (depending upon the faith, if any, of the participants); and voicing condemnation of the Beast that compels all Cainites to hunt and kill the living.

If at all possible, the procession for the Lamentation then moves out into a clear, open space beneath the night sky, one devoid of the presence of death. At this site, a sumptuous feast has been laid out for consumption by the ghouls and herd members. Also, an animal, trussed and blindfolded (since the rise of Christianity, lambs are favored for this purpose) and a cup full of ashes are present. While the mortals eat and drink their fill, the Cainites recite from the Book of Nod, especially the admonition to "drink only blood and eat only ashes," and cut the throat of the animal. Each Cainite drinks from it, dips her fingers into the cup of ashes and then smears those ashes upon her tongue. This is followed by a period of contemplation, while the feast continues.

Finally, the food and drink are exhausted and the kine, all drunk upon heady spirits and some few upon vitae, enter into an orgiastic celebration, overseen by the Cainites. As mortals are locked in the throes of ecstasy, the vampires feed upon them, each drinking but little from several different kine. It is considered a great honor among Cainites for one to invite another to drink deeply of a member of her herd, particularly a beautiful or otherwise desirable one, at this time. Children conceived during this stage of the Lamentation are considered well-favored by Caine and may be groomed for later Embrace.

When the kine are spent and the Cainites drunk upon their bliss and the drink in their blood, all rest together as one, a community, united in spirit. As the night grows thin, the Cainites rise to seek shelter from the sun, while the kine

dispose of the slain animal (butchering it for consumption the next night if it is a beast suited to that purpose) and cleanse the site of all traces of the Lamentation. Sometimes, ghouls or herd members who wish to do honor to their Cainite carve a piece of one of the animal's bones into a trinket for remembrance. Particularly grand carvings earn esteem for the mortal or mortals involved.

Occasionally, usually in pagan lands yet unbroken by the Cross, the trussed beast is replaced by a willing mortal (either a ghoul or herd member), though it is customary in such cases to drink directly from the vessel. Also, the mortal may be offered any number of partners to couple with before serving as the sacrifice. Each Cainite present offers thanks directly to the mortal and may present him with gifts intended to aid him in the underworld. Sometimes, this vessel is Embraced by one of the Cainites present. If the willing victim is not Embraced, however, the body is often rendered to ash by the kine participants and saved for use the next year.

Recently, the Giovanni family of the Cappadocian clan has taken some interest in the Lamentation and a few of them have been sent to participate.

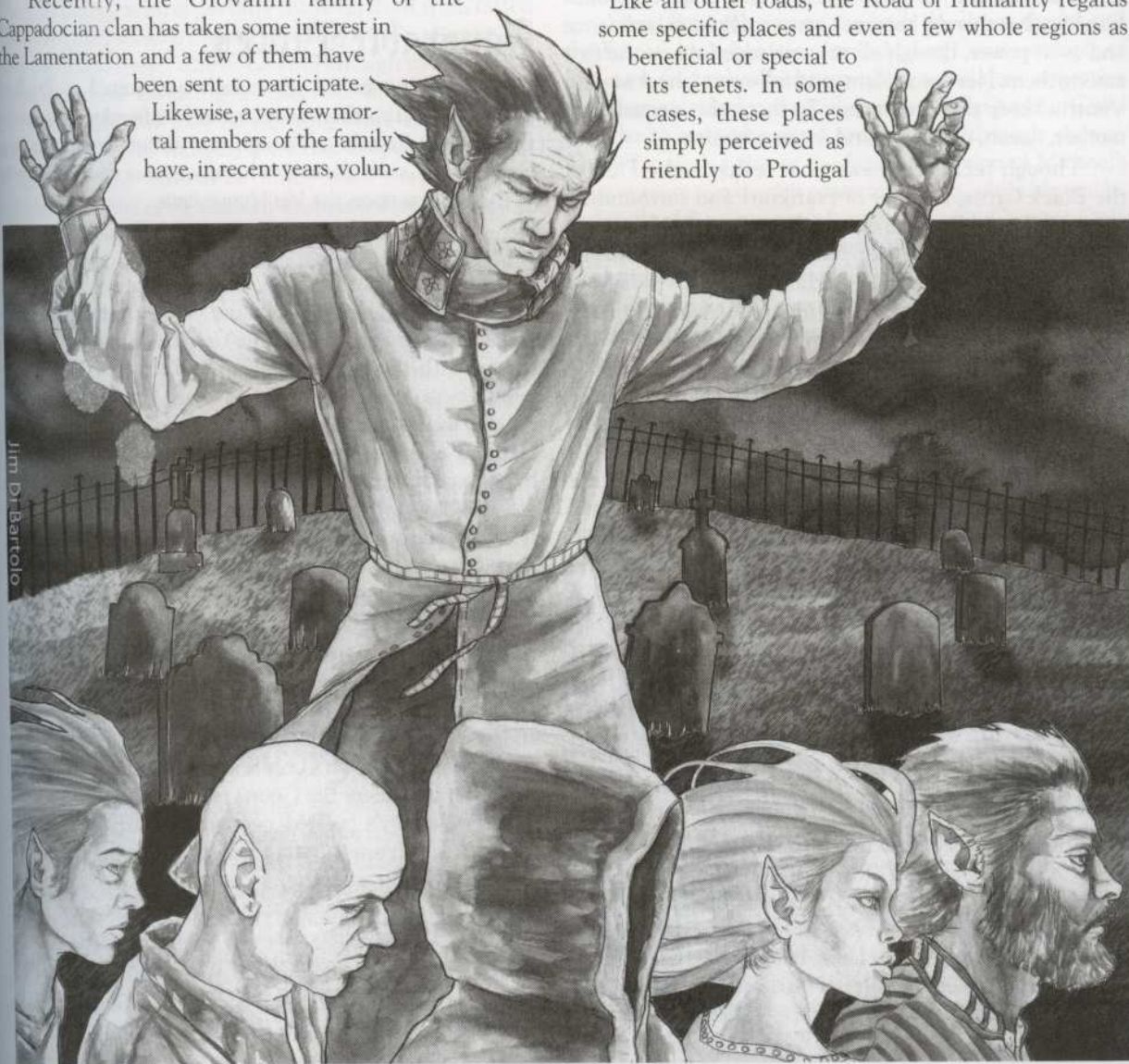
Likewise, a very few mortal members of the family have, in recent years, volun-

teered (likely coerced) to serve as sacrifices. What this bodes, however, none can or will say.

The obviously pagan tradition of the Lamentation incites the ire of devout Christian Cainites and mortals alike (what few mortals hear of it, at any rate), and much effort has been put forth to see it stamped out entirely in recent centuries. Walkers upon the Road of Heaven (for the most part), in particular, find the Lamentation for Seth abhorrent and have sometimes been known to reveal the existence of an impending Lamentation to mortal clerics, knowing full well what will be done about it. Adherents to other roads are not inherently opposed, generally speaking, to the Lamentation, though many have, over time, attempted to pervert its purpose to other ends.

Destinations Along the Road

Like all other roads, the Road of Humanity regards some specific places and even a few whole regions as beneficial or special to its tenets. In some cases, these places simply perceived as friendly to Prodigal



ideals, while others are especially spiritually significant to the road's adherents.

Holy Sites

The Road of Humanity is not much, overall, for pilgrimages. The tenets of the road are reflected everywhere, all the time, in the interactions of those around the Prodigal in the world in which she lives. Only a scant few sites have much spiritual significance to Prodigals and each such site is generally only important to small number of Prodigals.

Frankfurt

The city of Frankfurt, the territory of Julia Antasia, has become something of a place of pilgrimage for Prodigals (especially High Clan Prodigals) seeking the wisdom of the ancient Patrician. While she rarely has much in the way of counsel to offer, others are inspired simply by the manner in which she conducts herself: her poise, balance and moral sense. Indeed, the Prodigals who flock to her find themselves educated by her presence, rather than her words. Frankfurt has thereby become a center of Prodigal influence and even power, though all acknowledge Julia as the first among them. Her descendants and followers (the Antasian Ventrue) keep things that way. To them, she is equal parts mother, queen, councilor and incarnate saint.

Though technically sworn in fealty to the Fiefs of the Black Cross, the city of Frankfurt and surrounding environs (including the old castle just north of the city, which Julia claims as her haven) is its own political entity. While the policies of Hardestadt the Elder and his most favored vassal, Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg, are adhered to, anything ordered by the two powerful Warlords is carried out only reluctantly and then only to the exact degree demanded. Frankfurt has begun to carry, says Hardestadt, the "stink of democracy." Sadly, there is no telling for how much longer Frankfurt will continue to be a safe haven and gathering ground for the Prodigals of the Holy Empire and beyond, no telling when Hardestadt and Jürgen will grow tired of Julia's impending bid to reestablish the Ventrue Senate and simply arrive in force to crush all such pretensions of giving power back to the people. If and when they opt to do so, however, both Cainites will have a brutally difficult fight on their hands and both know it; Julia Antasia is, after all, a Methuselah well over a millennium old, with what is rapidly becoming an army of devoted Prodigals by her side.

The Throne of Light

The Throne of Light, the spiritual center of the heretical Path of Illumination (see p. 68), is rumored to exist somewhere east of the Fertile Crescent. Illuminated mythology insists that the isolated stronghold rests upon the mountaintop where the Archangels first cursed Caine. One of the most complete libraries of Noddist lore rests within the Throne of Light, as does one copy of the *Book of the Sun*

(strongly believed to be the most complete of the manuscripts, and written in Hebrew).

Of course, the exact location of the Throne of Light, as the stronghold of a band of largely pacifistic Cainite heretics, is a well-kept secret. Some say that it simply cannot be found without the guidance of a priest of the Path of Illumination and that it benefits from supernatural powers of occlusion, bestowed through the presence of one or more very powerful elders. Only a very small number of the Illuminated have ever been there. To the best of anyone's knowledge (anyone who would know enough about the path to ponder this matter, anyhow), no one not upon the Path of Illumination has ever been to the Throne of Light. Indeed, the detractors of the path claim that there may be no Throne of Light at all, and that it is all just a fanciful tale fabricated to lend the heretic's claims some measure of validity. The staunch Faithful Lasombra, Cardinal Ambrosio Luis Monçada, favors this view of things and propounds it to those he has put upon the trail of the path's followers (blasphemers he considers on par with the Divinists of the Cainite Heresy).

Favorable Places

A few regions are particularly well-suited to Prodigal existence, offering them welcome and the freedom to practice their beliefs in safety. Though not always friendly to the Prodigal way, such places give hope, surcease and community to the walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis*.

France

The Courts of Love are the fertile soil in which the Western Prodigal lifestyle blooms. While the Road of Kings (especially the Path of Chivalry) is strong there, it shares its throne with the *Via Humanitatis* and likely will for many centuries to come. As the Grand Court has found its power on the wane (despite Salianna's endorsement of Prince Geoffrey of Paris, which some think is much more an effort to undercut his influence than to bolster it) and the Courts of Love have grown to become as much political institutions as social organizations, the Road of Humanity prospers. An environment that is centered as much upon matters of the heart as of power, treachery and self-exultation is one in which the Prodigals of Europe can find their niche.

Particularly beautiful, artistically gifted or socially capable Prodigals find themselves the toast of the Courts; those seeking mentors and patrons among the elders do well to undertake the journey to France, for they often find their expectations met, even if only briefly. The flow of politics and aesthetics that keeps the Courts of Love vital also serves to render yesterday's favored neonate forgotten (unless she possesses the charm, cunning and courtly skills necessary to move from being an object of contention to a player in the game). Even as some very old Cainites become lost in the shuffle of shifting alliances and the games of love, younger vampires (especially Prodigals) thrive, encouraged to achieve their potential by Matriarch Salianna.

The Grecian States

Many Brujah and Toreador Prodigals consider the wide expanses once claimed by Greece to be the birthplace of the formalized Road of Humanity, and the Byzantine Successor States (especially the western ones) are still considered auspicious places for walkers upon the road. Several elders who hold sway there are themselves Prodigals, and well understand the greatness of the *Via Humanitatis* and the heights to which its adherents can rise. Indeed, in Athens, the Prodigal Graverobber Dionysius serves as prince; despite the mortal efforts to Latinize (and, thus Catholicize) the entire duchy, all those upon the Road of Humanity, regardless of faith, are welcome in the city to exchange ideas and to engage in debate. Though no longer the center of enlightenment and culture it once was, Athens and its surroundings remains a stronghold of Prodigal ideology.

Naturally, the Classical ideals of the Road of Humanity hold sway there and most Prodigals in positions of power are formally trained walkers upon the road. The Grecian states, especially those furthest from fallen Constantinople, also boast especially old Prodigals; it is said, here and there, one or two old enough to remember the discussions resulting in the Pact of Athens dwell there, though this may be nothing more than wishful thinking. If such Prodigals yet exist, despite the weight of ages and the enmity of many foes, they would be invaluable sources of wisdom and guidance to a young walker on the *Via Humanitatis* — provided, of course, such beings could be persuaded to part with their hard-earned lessons.

Muslim Lands

While many powerful walkers upon the Roads of Heaven and Kings preside over the Cainite domains on the Islamic world, Prodigals have long been welcome in most such fiefs as followers of a road whose tenets closely emulate the desired stance of a good Muslim toward his neighbors. Prodigals are often treated well by the Cainite rulers of these lands and are shown trust, deference and respect. Granted, this is not the case everywhere in Islamic nations (Egypt being a particularly notable exception), but the Middle East no shortage of well-populated cities in which young Prodigals, even those from Europe, might find some welcome, as long as they are willing to heed local laws and to show respect for the tenets of Islam.

Contested Territory

The Prodigals, by and large, do not make war. Certainly, the Road of Humanity as a whole has never declared open hostilities against any other road. That being the case, the adherents to the *Via Humanitatis* fight for territory on a subtler level than is becoming common during the War of Princes, using connections within mortal institutions, clever politics and sheer strength of numbers to dissuade those who would make themselves enemies of the Prodigals. Two locations, in particular, are hotly contested: one a longtime stronghold of the road, now in decline; and the other, a

region in which power of the road slowly grows, threatening the established order.

Constantinople

Once the Jewel of Cities, Constantinople was, under the reign of Michael the Patriarch, a splendid testament to the heights to which Cainites could aspire, when moved by great passion and the sublime impulses of their human souls. Now, after the fall of the demigod who ruled the city's nights and the scrambling for shreds of his crumbled power among the survivors, Constantinople is not what it once was for the Prodigals. Still, hope remains in the form of the two favored contenders for the throne of Alfonso, the Latin Scion who has only barely managed to seize the mantle of the principedom for himself: Anna Comnena, Prince of Nicaea, walker on the Road of Humanity and herself of the clan of the Warlords; and Natalya Syvatoslav, a Zealot Prodigal and Prince of Thessalonica, who wishes to elevate Constantinople to the greatest heights spoken of in her clan's myths of Carthage and, thereby, resurrect Michael's Dream.

Some Prodigals among the both the Prometheans and the Furores have become entrenched in Constantinople of late, each faction's adherents wishing to see their respective organization's ideology foisted upon the tiring Queen of Cities in order to strengthen and revitalize her through change. These Prodigals point to the frozen perfection of Michael's reign as a sure sign that his power and vision, while admirable, had made of the city a tomb for the souls of its Cainites. Only radical change, they argue (often at one another) can restore Constantinople to its former glory, and perhaps even surpass the splendors of half a century ago. Each side claims that the Dream is not dead, but that it instead sleeps, like the caterpillar in its cocoon, waiting for Cainites with the strength and imagination to give it cause to unfurl its wings and fly as a thing of new and manifold beauty. Of course, neither side can agree with the other, let alone find a consensus among the other Prodigals of Constantinople, so this looks to be nothing more than idle fancy and well-wishing for the foreseeable future, unless one arises among these Cainite malcontents to give them focus and some measure of unity. Of course, should this happen, the wrath of the Scions is apt to crash upon the city like a wave.

The Germanic Holy Roman Empire

While the southerly expanses of the Holy Empire seem to be very much under the sway of the Church (and, among Cainites, the *Via Caeli*), the northern reaches of that empire are slowly becoming more humanist, a sure sign of the rise of the merchant class. Even as some walkers upon the Road of Kings (especially the Path of the Merchant) seek advantage there, a goodly number of Prodigals flock to the region, hoping to draw inspiration from the struggles of the common folk as they begin to find themselves in a position to rise to prominence and, possibly, a level of self-determination unknown since before the rise of the Caesars. Despite the power that the Ventrue monarch Hardestadt, holds over the place, many Prodigals, drawing strength and

inspiration from their paragon Julia Antasia, have begun to win holdings away from the clutches of the Scions.

Of course, though Julia holds uncontested authority in Frankfurt, the rest of the Empire is under the power of the Scions, who are not known to respond well to the claiming of their lands and authority by upstart Prodigals. While some honor is to be found in being bested by another Scion, no such distinction comes of losing territory to a mewling Prodigal in what essentially amounts to a bloodless peasant revolt. Especially infuriating is the fact that Prodigals usually claim domain through guile, subterfuge and ties among mortals. It is, to Scion thinking, a perversion of the way of things, with merchants and populists gradually edging lords and princes out of their thrones. For now, the wars with the Tzimisce *voivodates* keep Hardestadt the Elder and his vassals otherwise occupied; but when a lull in the conflict comes, the old Warlord is apt to find time to deal with this rise of the "lower class."

Movements

Prodigals entrench themselves in many of the social movements of their fellow Cainites, embracing the spirit of revolution (peaceful or otherwise) sweeping the Dark Medieval. Two of the most powerful such movements are the Furores and the Prometheans.

The Furores

Cainites, if not openly desirous of rule, often harbor the need, on some fundamental level, to control their own destinies. Not everyone is born to lord over the night (which is why there are roads other than the *Via Regalis*), but few vampires — especially in the case of Prodigals — want to spend their nights bowing and scraping before another. Thus, a good number of the rebel Cainites known as the Furores, particularly many of the youngest members of the movement, come to the movement by way of the Road of Humanity.

Strongly insinuated into the merchant and artisan classes, the Furores, as a whole, long for nothing so much as the power of self-determination. The *Via Humanitatis* preaches just such an existence, one in which the individual Cainite takes responsibility for her own actions and is free to make for herself those choices which hold the Beast at bay and reaffirm her commitment to civilization and simple morality. Currently, little in the way of bloodshed occurs between these outcasts and the princes and monarchs who despise them; but the night when it all must erupt into violence is coming soon, and none are so naïve as to deny it. What will happen when that breaking point is reached is anyone's guess, but the balance of power is weighted considerably in favor of the traditional Cainite courts.

While some Furores advocate action to seize control of a city of their own (perhaps the Toreador St. Regis' Marseilles, where the Furores currently flock in great numbers), others believe that such a move will prove to be precisely the justification the decrepit princes need to rise

from their moldering thrones and crush the entire movement. While the monarchs may not always get along, they can all agree on one thing: Rebellion must not be allowed to thrive.

Certainly, more than just Prodigals support this movement (there are even Scions to be found among the ranks of the Furores), but walkers upon the Road of Humanity are among the staunchest supporters of its ideals. Low Clan Prodigals are especially drawn to it, cursed to servitude by their blood and lacking the force of will (in the eyes of many adherents to other roads) to seize the mantle of rule through their choice of road. Faced with such a choice (or lack of it, as the case may be), they turn to rebellion and embrace the chaotic cause of freedom.

The Prometheans

Some Cainites are inclined to see "Brujah Prodigal" as synonymous with "Promethean." While the matter is somewhat more complicated than that, there is some truth to the assertion. The movement to build a "New Carthage" (where mortals and Cainites may dwell openly together in harmony) is one which appeals to many vampires, who come to feel isolated from the lives they once knew. This lofty ideal finds some support among walkers upon every road, though the Road of Humanity is particularly active within it.

Scorning the Traditions of Caine, these vampires would cast aside their secrecy and reveal themselves to those whom they are cursed to hunt and feed upon. While there exists a spiritual objective in this (the idea of healing the breach of trust between Caine and Abel, and thus between Cainites and the Children of Seth), more pragmatic reasons, from the perspective of those trained to the Road of Humanity, also motivate the Prometheans. In a world in which mortal men do not view Cainites with fear, distrust and horror, and those who would know the ecstasy of the Kiss might freely and guiltlessly savor it, no vampire needs to feel remorse over responsible, consensual feeding. The criminal feel of the act, even when perpetrated upon a member of a willing herd, can drive Cainites into the throes of guilt and self-loathing. Without that air of a lustful violation undertaken in secrecy and shame, Prodigals could finally dispense with much of that which pains them about their undead state.

Many Prodigals, however, resist the Promethean ideal for just that reason. What is the value of attempting to hold onto one's human soul, they ask, if there is no moral trial involved? More importantly, once one abandons a primary source of remorse, is there any guarantee that the Beast can be staved off with what sense of guilt remains? On a more practical level, many fear that the wrath of the kine, the monarchs, the Antediluvians, Caine or even God Himself would descend upon them like a storm, sweeping them from the Earth in ashes. None, not even the most fiercely dedicated within the movement itself, can deny that it is a dangerous game the Prometheans play. Still, the thought of being able to freely confess their nature to loved ones,

friends and even total strangers without fear of reprisal stirs something deep within many Prodigals, inspiring them to join the Firebringers. Those who scorn their aspirations lament (loudly, at times) that the fire they bring may serve only to scorch the Cainite world to its roots.

Paragons

As is the case with all other adherents to the roads of Caine, Prodigals have their myths and legends, their exemplars of right thought and action. Some, such as Saulot, are no longer numbered among the world's Cainites, while others still walk the Earth, inspiring others through their very presence.

Saulot

While the Faithful are known to hold Saulot up as an ascended saint, so too do the Prodigals claim the father of the Salubri as one of their own. In the decades since his death at the hands of the Tremere, Saulot's mystique has only magnified, and he has taken on an almost mythic quality. Among those who do not support the theory that Troile and Arikel originally laid the foundations of the *Via Humanitatis* (a popular dissent among those who are detractors of the Brujah and Toreador clans or are self-taught Prodigals), Saulot is often venerated as the source of the road's essential tenets. In death, the First Salubri has become irreproachable, and more deeds than he would

have been capable of even in all of his long centuries are now attributed to him; Prodigals are no less guilty of the phenomenon than any others.

Julia Antasia

Called by some the "Relic of Rome," Julia Antasia, Prince of Frankfurt, is, nonetheless, perhaps the most respected Prodigal extant in this age. She is revered by both intuitive and trained walkers upon the Road of Humanity; she does not discuss which of the two sides of the one path she walks, fearing that it will create a division among the Prodigals. In truth, she is likely correct; and so her silence preserves peace and a sense of unity, drawing disparate walkers together to her domain, where the antique notion of the rejection of tyranny thrives, and all Prodigals — High Clan and Low, weak and strong, old and young — can coexist together in prosperity and balance.

Of course, such a revered figure is a target for the contempt of many, including the silent enmity of Hardestadt the Elder and the somewhat more open hostility of his right hand, Lord Jürgen. Still, Julia has thus far made no blatant moves to thwart the authority of the Warlord monarch and so remains a tolerated, if not favored, vassal. (In truth, she and her devotees exist less as subjects of Hardestadt and more as an independent Cainite court.) Hardestadt openly scorns her constant push to see the Eternal Senate reconvened, but in his lonely hours, regards the egalitarian ideas it will engender with quiet dread.



Those who meet Julia tend to describe her as "transcendently human." She seems not to be so much human as instead what humans *should* be. She is calm, respectful, kind, compassionate, dignified, rational, creative, intelligent, aware of herself and appreciative of others. She is, some (especially her followers) would say, perfect. In fact, she is a popular figure for Prodigal Cainites of the Courts of Love (even those who know of her only by reputation) to write love poetry about, and to dedicate other such works to. She invariably disperses such attention graciously, preferring to belong to the Road of Humanity as a whole, rather than to give her heart away to any one walker upon it. Julia is, in many ways, the loving yet aloof matriarch of the *Via Humanitatis* in these long, dark nights of the War of Princes.

Apostates

While most who leave the Road of Humanity do so without fanfare or much in the way of notice, some leave it under such terrible circumstances as to make it nearly impossible for any Prodigal to countenance their continued existence. Few though these twisted souls are, there have been enough of them over time (who have not fallen to the Second Death, that is) to make the notion of apostasy at least passing familiar to a majority of Prodigals.

Savio de Verona

Once a noted walker upon the Road of Humanity, Savio de Verona of the Ventrue compiled a considerable number of venerated writings exploring the morality and philosophy of the road over the course of two centuries. Though he himself was not noted as a great thinker, his skills at gathering the information put forth by others were profound and many texts that might otherwise have been lost to time were saved by his skillful transcription. Indeed, save for perhaps a few elder Cainites, Savio's knowledge of the formalized Road of Humanity was believed to be without peer.

In the course of his work, Savio came into contact with many, many Cainites. Perhaps only his ghoul, Rafaella (who vanished without a trace), ever knew the full extent of his connections. Perhaps it was one of these many associates who first tempted Savio to embrace his own capacity for evil, or maybe he simply grew mad in his self-imposed academic seclusion. Some few believe that, in the course of his work, he came to find some fundamental flaw in the *Via Humanitatis* thus far unknown to any others, or maybe some way to transcend its limitations. Whatever the case, he abruptly abandoned his work in the middle years of the 12th century, leaving his extensive library and vast scriptorium unattended and vanishing for decades.

In the early years of the 13th century, Savio resurfaced in the Holy Empire, now seemingly surrendered fully to the Beast in a way too flagrant, monstrous and undisciplined for even the most jaded Sinner or most savage Feral, yet certainly far too much in control of his own actions to have died the Second Death. Few knew what to make of this creature that walked and spoke with Savio's voice, yet performed acts that would make Lucifer himself to hide his

face in shame. When he departed Cologne under sentence of the blood hunt, Savio left three Cainites, six ghouls and ten kine dead in manners too horrid to contemplate. To this night, he remains at large, hunted by the knights of the Twilight Order for questioning and, likely, destruction.

Zafar of Baghdad

Zafar al-Baghdadi's story is a sad one. He is not rightly an apostate, but certainly he is looked upon with a mixture of revulsion and pity by those adherents to the Road of Humanity know of him. Once he was a noted Gangrel Prodigal dwelling in the great city of his birth, and he was favored by the local Cainite rulers. Though trustworthy and honorable, Zafar was no fool, and those who sought to use his good nature poorly were much surprised by both his cunning in avoiding their traps and the decisiveness of his responses to such attempted deceptions. He was, in many ways, an exemplar of the Prodigal way.

Unfortunately, Zafar dreaded his Beast, seeing it as a punishment from Allah for sins in his mortal days of which he would not speak. Whenever it drew close to the surface during violent encounters, he was known to send it (using his powerful command of Animalism) into his enemies before incapacitating them and recalling it into his own spirit. Eventually, it happened, however, that one of Zafar's allies acted too fiercely in battle and struck the head from the Cainite with which the Gangrel contended, slaying Zafar's Beast. He immediately lapsed into a torpor from which none believed he would wake.

But just under a hundred years ago, he did wake. He spent his nights in endless bouts of lethargy, and could manage to summon up his passions only to weep blood when he too deeply considered the pain and misery of his unrelenting lassitude. The Muslim Cainites of Baghdad gave charity to him in his infirmity and kept Zafar fed, for just as he was without the capacity for violence and wrath, he was also unable to summon up even the desire to protect himself or find sustenance. At last, early in 1221, word reached Zafar's sire Naima, who came out of the wilds in order to save her childe or, failing that, to end him.

Naima goaded herself to the verge of frenzy and sent her Beast into Zafar, seeking to inspire him thereby to remember what it was to feel. It did not have the effect anyone might have imagined. Zafar did indeed frenzy, and his fury was so sudden and terrible that it took everyone present aback. The younger Gangrel struck down his sire in a murderous rage and fled, carrying her torpid body in his arms. Later, a pile of ashes would be found in a derelict building, in and around the threadbare garments of Naima al-Zaynah.

Zafar al-Baghdadi has not been seen since, though many have sought him. Many think he must be dead or else in the Sleep of Ages for him to have so thoroughly vanished from the world. Others think that he travels the wilderness, locked forever into the shape of a beast or of mist. Still others maintain that he has degenerated into something fully inhuman, overwhelmed by the fury of Naima's Beast.

The Pact of Athens

This system of belief was codified over twenty-five hundred years ago by a council of Cainites (mostly Brujah, Salubri, Toreador and Ventrue) gathered from across the Mediterranean and beyond, all of whom were interested in discovering a means to preserve their essential humanity in the face of the Beast's ferocity. It is from this code that almost all formal branches of the Road of Humanity descend. Many sires and mentors force their charges to learn it in its original Greek, in honor of the city-state in which the gathering was held and (to the thinking of such vampires) where the *Via Humanitatis* was truly born. Eight tenets define the Pact and serve as the root principles of the Road of Humanity. A good many Cainites instructed in the road view this creed as the definitive guide to the thoughts and actions that they should practice over the course of their eternal nights.

Desire No Harm

The Beast revels in a hurtful soul, for such a twisted thing is its playground. Even when a Cainite must surrender to the grim necessity of causing harm to another being, she must do so with a contrite spirit and firm reaffirmation of the conviction to do so only when no other recourse exists. To wish harm upon oneself or another is to desire one of the very things that erodes civilization and remakes it in a

terrible, inhuman image. This rule extends beyond physical harm to include mental and spiritual torment as well. To wish harm upon another is morally the same as causing that harm. In fact, when under the sway of the Beast, those two things are often *literally* the same.

Inflict No Harm Needlessly

This tenet is intended to be heeded in both its letter and its spirit. If the Cainite must rationalize a justification for inflicting harm, then the justification is false. The Beast delights in casual brutality and seeks every available opportunity to inflict pain so that the never ending cycle of senseless cruelty is perpetuated. If violence is necessary, it should be undertaken with swiftness and efficiency, to the intended end of neutralizing threats to oneself and to all others as quickly and completely as possible.

Honor the Artifice of Men and the Gods

This rule admonishes the Prodigal to respect objects and places and to commit no vandalism upon them. The Beast, if it cannot assail the living, settles for the inanimate. The human soul thrives when surrounded by works of beauty and scenes of natural splendor, and both of these should be esteemed. Civilization is predicated upon the idea of the permanence of things.

In recent nights, some Christian and Muslim Cainites especially have come to protest the wording of this tenet of



the Pact, citing that there is but one God and that the older, pagan overtones of this rule are blasphemous. Indeed, many sires and mentors now cite the tenet, "Honor the Works of God and Man," though the oldest and most traditional Prodigals continue to pass it on in its original form, many of them firmly convinced that the One God of the faiths of Abraham is just one more figure in the vast tapestry of heavens and hells looked to by men for millennia. Some Prodigals, seeing no need to bring matters of faith into the tent at all, simply teach their students, "Honor the World and All That Man Makes of It."

Claim Not That Which Is Not Yours

Some Prodigals have theorized that civilization is really nothing more than a system established to allow individuals to retain those things that belong to them, no matter whether they are strong or weak. But the Beast is covetous, longing to lay claim to everything without respect for ownership or propriety. The Beast wants the Cainite to steal, for in so doing, it finds the freedom to incite the Prodigal to greater acts of violation and selfishness. This tenet encourages the Prodigal to not only avoid theft, but also the very desire to steal. If an individual does not long for things not his own, then he is beyond the Beast's temptations.

This precept also counsels the Prodigal not to kill in the course of her feedings, for the life of another is, strictly speaking, also "not hers." Some particularly religious or philosophically radical Prodigals take this tenet to mean that they should exist in poverty, claiming nothing at all (since, by their accounting, all that which exists in the world belongs to either God or else no one).

Submit to No Evil Governance

If the Beast cannot be heeded as an authority, then how can a Cainite of good conscience obey the commandments of a leader who counsels with its voice? The Beast wants the vampire to heed the will of a wicked leader, claiming to be merely "following orders." In this manner does the monstrosity within slowly erode resistance to its dominion and overwhelm the human soul. It is easy to bow to tyranny; it is hard to stand against it and to claim, by dint of one's own struggles and suffering, the mantle of just governance or responsible self-rule for others — and yet a good soul does precisely that, working so that others might be free of control by evil and monstrosity. The admirable Prodigal does not bend knee to a bad commandment or a wicked leader.

Embrace Reason and Knowledge

A rational soul is one in which dark passions can find no purchase. An educated mind denies the cry of the Beast, for such a mind knows the Beast's wiles and rejects them with conviction and moral strength. Anyone can fend off the Beast's desires through luck and rote repetition of seemingly effective tactics; but it takes a well-instructed individual to innovate techniques to consistently thwart the Beast's advances, and to work toward the exalted day

when it is conquered completely. Furthermore, reason and intellect are the true powers of humanity, those which set them apart from animals, and are thus to be emulated and honored by every good Prodigal.

Abide Neither Wickedness nor Monstrousness

Committing an act of evil is one kind of sin; standing by and allowing another to do so is another, and one no less repulsive to the self-respecting Prodigal. Society works because of consequences for terrible deeds and it fails when otherwise good people allow such deeds to happen without at least attempting to prevent them. Thus, the walker upon the *Via Humanitatis* should courageously and consistently defy the works of those who would make of the world a dark and brutal place. Often, this entails risk, for the wicked are often also the powerful; but any worthy end is worth the peril involved in seeing it through.

Do No Evil in the Pursuit of Goodness

While great good things may come out of an act of wickedness, such accomplishments are invariably tainted by the circumstances that brought them about. It is certainly easier to murder an evil man than to reform him, but he may leave behind a grieving widow or starving orphans. Likewise, killing a wicked queen only encourages others to see slaughter as an acceptable way to resolve disputes, and means that the next ruler, sinner or saint, is not apt to sit long on the throne. Instead of indulging in morally corrupt behavior in order to see good ends achieved, the Prodigal must take the high (and often difficult) road, opting to do what is just, no matter the personal cost or time it will require. While such endeavors are hard ones, they often prove to be the most rewarding acts a Cainite can undertake. After all, an evil man turned to goodness can teach others by way of his example (both his descent into darkness and his return to the light); and a selfish and terrible queen made to see the error of her ways becomes beloved, just and generous, setting a precedent for those who follow after her.

Other Roads in the Night

Prodigals do not walk the night alone, and their journeys in the world are often colored by the ways in which they interact with those who tread the other Roads of Caine.

The Road of the Beast

The sister road to the *Via Humanitatis*, the Road of the Beast is the dark reflection of all that Prodigals seek to attain. Rather than denying the Beast, Ferals embrace it, seeking to give it just enough freedom to sate its lusts and thus give it no cause to attempt to break the Cainite's will. Despite the polar opposition of the *Via Bestiae's* philosophies to the Road of Humanity's own, Prodigals are often inclined to see the

wisdom in them. Ferals, after all, are not *fabricating* a morality, like the followers of other roads. They are, like Prodigals, subscribing to a set of extant ethics — in their case, the code of every natural creature other than humanity.

Prodigals understand that their Feral cousins often disrespect them and look on them as fools, but they bear such Cainites no particular ill will. After all, walkers on the Road of the Beast are, by Prodigal reckoning, themselves quite addled when it comes to matters of the truth of Cainite nature. Simply calling one's own brutal, selfish urges a "beast" does not make it so, any more than a Gangrel who assumes the shape of a wolf is a wolf. The convention of the Beast is a convenient way of referring to a thing that defies classification and rails furiously against any kind of rational confinement. No animal under Heaven erupts into flames beneath the light of the sun, and God has not yet built a beast that can warp its own frame with the adroitness of a Fiend or an Animal.

Walkers on the Road of Humanity often find stubborn Feral insistence upon existing in a "pure fashion, unfettered by the weakness of civilization" to be at best an act of ignorant selfishness, and at worst one of supreme cowardice. Even the most self-indulgent Sinner is making a *conscious choice* and owning up to the responsibility for it. No one can cast aside their human nature like a soiled garment without dying the Second Death. Ferals would like to believe that they exist as animals do, without the fetters of society binding them. Abandoning social obligation, however, is not really a choice. Beneath all of the (highly intellectual) rationalization about "harmony with the true Cainite nature" are elaborate justifications for carrying on in a manner that continues to allow for personal interaction on some intelligent level.

The Road of Heaven

On the surface, Prodigals have no problems with the moral tenets espoused by most Faithful. While many walkers upon the Road of Humanity find reflection upon God's curse to be a needless distraction, drawing attention away from the vital pursuit of combating the Beast, such contemplation appears to actually *aid* the Faithful in their struggles against madness and evil, and so they are to be lauded. Still, such Cainites often seem to possess conviction so firm as to radiate a certain sense of holiness and even divinity. This is a frightening notion for the Prodigal. As time goes on, most Faithful become something decidedly other than human, and their choices and values reflect as much.

Ultimately, even for religious Prodigals, there exists an understanding that God chooses few to be saints, but makes all men in His image. The best way to honor Heaven's plan is to simply, to the best of one's abilities, be a good person. Those who are meant for more find that the Lord has the means to make His will manifest, and that no fictitious pilgrimage toward Heaven is required. Simply put, to many Prodigals, the Road of Heaven makes no sense. If God's plan cannot be known, why bother attempting to adhere to

an endeavor doomed to failure in a world in which the Will of God is unfathomable? Conversely, it is foolish to believe in that which one cannot understand. Blind faith will never defeat the Beast.

Of course, many truly irreligious and even faithless Cainites walk the Road of Humanity. This is especially true of those educated in ancient philosophical traditions that in no way inherently rely upon any religious frame of reference. To these sorts, the *Via Caeli* is usually seen as a dangerous path of either hubris or wretchedness (depending upon the perspective of the individual Faithful), which can only lead to a grim and terrible fall. Such Cainites reason that God may or may not exist, but men certainly do, as does the Beast. If God does not right the wrongs of the world for even the most upright of kine, what could possibly possess even the most self-important vampire to assume that He would deign to show her even the most cursory display of favor? The power to delude oneself into believing what is patently untrue is deadlier than fire, sunlight or the stake. If God cares about the world in any way, it is in so indirect and obtuse a fashion as to be incomprehensible to lesser beings, meaning that there is no point in trying to win the Lord's good will. It will or will not be given, at His discretion alone; nothing that the individual Cainite can do or say will change that.

The Road of Kings

Most Prodigals' mortal lives were not ones of noble privilege, complete with lands, titles and servants. Many Scions, however, *did* enjoy such benefits and continue to do so as Childer of Caine. It is therefore easy to see the dichotomy between the two roads as a reflection of the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. In many ways, the Road of Humanity is an everyman's morality, admonishing Cainites to conduct themselves responsibly toward all of society, while the Road of Kings advises its adherents to treat the lofty with esteem and the lowly with scorn (in the unfortunate event that such wretches ever display the temerity to act in a fashion that warrants notice by their betters).

In other ways, however, the Road of Kings is no more restricted to lords and princes than the Road of Humanity turns away a sincere and worthy seeker who happened to be born to a gilded throne. Thus, despite some adherents' desires (on both sides) to paint the relationship between the two moralities as that of noble versus commoner (with all of the hostility, condescension and resentment that entails), the interaction between the roads is somewhat more complicated. Both advocate a strict sense of personal discipline to exert control over the Beast. Both propound the idea of social responsibility (in, granted, very different ways) as a means of continually reasserting the preeminent place of human reason in the Cainite psyche. However, whereas the Prodigal internalizes his struggle, the Scion sees in her surroundings the macrocosm of her own inner existence and seeks, through the dominion thereof, to give tranquility and balance to her own soul.

War is, though, the sport of kings, as are various other types of morally questionable behavior (from the perspective of the *Via Humanitatis*, at any rate). Certainly, the average Prodigal would be hard-pressed to engage in the sorts of activities undertaken by the average Scion in the course of his night-to-night existence and maintain his humanity. The critical distinction is that the Scion is willing to have her control at the expense of others, whereas the Prodigal is not. The Scion replaces empathy with *noblesse oblige*, and so becomes capable of looking at matters from the detached perspective of the abstraction of "the greater good" while ignoring the individual needs of people. The Prodigal, on the other hand, cannot make those omissions and must strive to see himself reflected in those around him. As a result, he feels more responsible to individuals, as well as the societies they comprise. It is, seemingly, a small difference, but one that leads to debate and sometimes misunderstanding between walkers on these two roads. Still, all told, Prodigals probably have the best relationships with Scions, since both sides understand, at least in principle, that it is vitally important to do what is right for others, in addition to doing so for oneself. Especially well-favored by Prodigals are the Paladins of the Path of Chivalry, which counsels courtesy and respect toward others, even (perhaps especially) those weaker than the Cainite herself. The sense of social accountability fostered by the *Via Equitum*, that of a goodly lord toward valued lessers, speaks to the Prodigal mindset. It is, if not the proper way to exist, certainly closer to the mark than most.

The Road of Sin

In seeking to emulate human nature, Prodigals are among the first to admit to the temptation of sin. The free will of humanity makes the desire to do evil possible, and it is because of that desire that salvation is attainable. One cannot truly be good if one lacks the capacity to do wrong. Those who follow the Road of Sin, on the other hand, have simply chosen to wallow in the mechanisms of moral trial, rather than attempt to transcend them. They *become* the temptation to do evil, each an unliving morality play all his own. It is, by Prodigal estimation, a sad state of affairs for a Cainite to dwell in. Transcendence of the Beast is not possible for one who works to fatten it on a steady diet of perverse and luxurious diversions. At best, such behavior distracts it from its terrible purpose and holds it in check without doing anything to challenge its hold over the lifeless heart.

Still, the freedom enjoyed by the Sinner is in some ways admirable. While the Feral abandons reason to find meaning and the Scion exists in a state of perpetual contention with what powers exist above her in the many hierarchies of the world, those who walk the *Via Peccati* move gracefully through eternity, indulging in the diversions that other Cainites must deny in order to cling to their selves. Indeed, the "easy out" of glutting the Beast into silence is a most attractive option for those Prodigals who are beginning to lose themselves to its depredations. Many are the Sinners who prove more than happy to lead a failing Prodigal to their own dark road.

More deliberate walkers on the *Via Humanitatis*, however, are truly and completely disgusted by the actions of the Sinners and their moral code (if it can even be called such). Self-gratification at any price and in all things is neither an acceptable ethic nor a way to function within any kind of viable society. At least the Soulless are without the capacity to do anything other than sate their own desires; Sinners make the conscious decision to do so, no matter who pays the cost of it. While this may serve to stave off the Beast, it is by no means a conscientious path to doing so. The end does not justify the means and the world is not a plaything.

Minor Roads

Walkers upon the "lesser" roads are far fewer in number than those who cling to the tenets of the major roads. Thus, Prodigals are less likely to encounter and form concrete opinions about such scattered Cainites. Still, a few of these roads have historically had more frequent (or, at least, more significant) interactions with the *Via Humanitatis*, and so warrant some small mention.

The Cappadocians' *Via Ossium* teaches an acceptance of mortality and decay in all things. It is in many ways a denial of the vitality and vigor which Prodigals seek, and few walkers upon the Road of Humanity reserve much in the way of respect or warm sentiments for these grim, methodical Cainites. The Fiends' *Via Mutationis*, on the other hand, advocates a complete dismissal of the human form, regarding the shape given humankind by God as a larval state at best. To such Tzimisce, humans exist only as fodder for experimentation (the better to understand and hopefully evolve their own forms), animals that walk upright and plead for mercy with words rather than insensate bleating. Thus, Prodigals are often ill inclined toward these unabashed monsters, repulsed by such absolute and callous disregard for the humanity from which all Cainites descend. Lastly, Prodigals regard the Lasombra *Via Noctis* strangely. Though the Redeemers claim to be bettering the human state (and, indeed, in as many cases as not, this seems to be the case in at least the short term), they do so through means that most Prodigals consider questionable at best. Torturing kine into being better people is not, to those who abide upon the *Via Humanitatis*, an acceptable tactic. Still, Redeemers at least seem to fight for some acceptable objective, even if their means are abhorrent.

The Clans and the *Via Humanitatis*

As the easier to grasp of the two "root" roads, the Road of Humanity is probably the single largest in the Dark Medieval. It appeals to a broad range of Cainites, cutting across the lines of clan everywhere in the known world.

The High Clans

With the notable exceptions of the Brujah and Toreador, the High Clans often seem to disdain the *Via Humanitatis*

as somehow beneath them. Perhaps it is a sense that the Road of Humanity is to be scorned for its devotion to the ways of "common" kine, as opposed to the loftier ends espoused by such roads as Heaven and Kings, for example. Still a number of Prodigals exist among all of the High Clans (even the brutal Tzimisce and distant Cappadocians, though most members of those clans may deny it).

Brujah

What is a vampire, save a man who has been given a gift and a curse in equal measure? Should we forget all that which we were, that which led up to the moment of our turning, simply because our circumstances have changed? Like a man, I seek comfort, the betterment of my station and causes, the freedom to pursue my ends, and sustenance. I am no monster. I feed because I must. Look around you, at robber barons, rapist priests and murderous crusaders, who prey upon others for pleasure; and tell me who among the descendants of Adam and Eve, Cainite or no, is free of the Beast.

While it is believed that the Road of Humanity, along with the Road of the Beast, is one of the two primordial moral codes instinctively discovered by the first Cainites, there can be little doubt that the Brujah had much to do with originally codifying and propounding the tenets of the *Via Humanitatis*. Some consider this ironic, given the particular vehemence with which the Brujah Beast seeks the freedom to vent its rage; but the Zealots, often even those who do not walk the road, ardently maintain their commitment to the views espoused by this code of ethics. The very human passion that burns within their unliving hearts serves to unite them all in their support of the Road of Humanity. Even those who do not walk the road believe in its preservation, just as a collector of fine things can appreciate a work of art that is beautiful, even if it is not pleasing to his own personal sensibilities.

Many Brujah maintain that their clan codified the more academic interpretations of the *Via Humanitatis* (as opposed to the instinctive fumbling by means of which many Prodigals find their way to the road) in the days of ancient Hellas and, thereafter freely shared it with those clans that would heed their words (an offer, these scholars recount, only the Artisans ever really accepted). Despite the differences between the two clans, they have remained in agreement over the paramount importance of the intellectual and philosophical interpretation of the Road of Humanity over the course of the many centuries since the preeminence of the Grecian states. Even when struggling to be common, Brujah strive to be great.

Cappadocians

I can teach you the secrets of humanity, childe. They are simpler, and grimmer, than you dare imagine. A man is born, he matures, he dies, he continues on in the eternity to which he is fated. You and I and all others like us have simply reached the end of our mortal journey, only to discover that man's destiny is always death, no matter what its form. My heart is still and cold, but I see through human eyes, touch with human hands and tread upon human feet. I am a man, and a dead one — I simply have better things to do with my eternity than fill a grave.

Many Children of Caine believe that the Road of Humanity is uniquely ill-suited to the morbid and necrotic Graverobbers. Truth be told, many Cappadocians seem to consciously abandon their humanity in the early nights of undeath, seeking a colder, more methodical and objective lens through which to chronicle the slow withering of the mortal world. Some, however, come to accept certain disturbing and often paradoxical truths about the unbreakable ties between the human whose last breath slipped away and the Cainite who stood up afterward. These Cappadocians are occasionally drawn to the *Via Humanitatis*, filled with a sense of vitality almost unheard of among the numbers of this staid and often heartless clan.

The physical changes wrought upon a Graverobber often take a painful toll upon such a Cainite when he chooses to walk the Road of Humanity. His clan's abilities and propensities are far better suited to study of the dead than participation in the society of the living. Still, the vampire's abilities allow him to pursue the betterment of the community with vigor unknown to mortal men. Many Cappadocian Prodigals end up studying the arts of medicine, sanitation, philosophy and history, fearlessly innovating for the future and studiously preserving the past. Among the dead, they find the answers to better the lives of others and so come to understand the truth of their own state. For many of them, damnation is worth at least that much.

Lasombra

Humanity? You want to know the "essence of humanity?" Let me explain it to you, then. The central ethic of the human condition is selfishness. The food on the table, the clothing on the back, even the desire to have children is rooted in a personal quest for immortality. Our vampiric acquisitiveness is nothing more than a refinement of the expression of the very human desire to have our way in the world. Do I walk the Road of Humanity? Better still it would be to ask who does not. We all comport ourselves in the manner of men, try though most Cainites do to deny it.

Lasombra Cainites are generally regarded as ranking among the most imperious, judgmental, self-centered and arrogant of all vampires. Few of them had anything approaching an acceptable sense of social accountability as mortals, since the clan tends not to choose those who believe in the weakness of setting the meek before the strong or any other such sentimental claptrap. Often, Magisters who attempt to set out upon the Road of Humanity while carrying on with the very ambition and drive that won them the Embrace find that it lacks a flexible-enough moral framework (as far as such aspirations go, at any rate) to hold the Beast in check. Instead, such sorts usually end up looking to the *Via Caeli* or *Via Regalis* to provide an ethical compass.

This is not to say, though, that no Magister accepts the teachings of the Road of Humanity; quite the contrary. Human beings are capable of acts of great pride (for both good and ill), as great as those perpetrated by any Cainite. And any Magister worth her blood can attest that it is

unwise to judge a vampire by his seeming; what is visible might be nothing more than shadows. Indeed, sometimes, a particularly driven mortal's perceptions of the world are completely shattered by the Lasombra Embrace, and suddenly, a selfish kine is replaced with a more conscientious and moral Cainite. While it is by no means a common phenomenon, it does happen often enough to be worthy of consideration. It is crucial to remember, however, than no Prodigal need be a saint upon the Earth. Most Lasombra Prodigals would, given the opportunity, be more than happy to prove such to the uninformed.

Toreador

Let me tell you of the splendors of humanity. I am moved to recall a particular young lady whose company I was privileged to share during my brief stay in Florence. Her form was that of an Aphrodite and her mind was keen and complex. I longed for her in a way I had not felt since my blood grew thick and dark within my withered veins. It was not a simple lust; that is a sentiment for baser creatures. No, instead, I felt the desire to share with her my mind and my spirit, as well as my flesh. It was an agonizing pleasure, that experience, and so profound was it that I drank her life, just then, to preserve her as she was, free of the corruption of decline and decrepitude.

The Toreador are keepers of this ancient road, just as much as the Brujah. Artisans feel, more keenly than most, the glorious flow of life and vitality that moves through the mortal world; and their tendency to grow enraptured with detail allows them to appreciate the nuances of that world with a level of discernment foreign to most of the rest of their kind. More so than members of any other clan, Toreador can be said to envy the living the unique beauty of their state, as their well-trained eyes see both the style and the substance of the thing, both the mechanics and the aesthetics of mortality. While some other vampires may shrink back from awareness of the swift blooming and withering of human lives, or else treat such lives with a callous lack of consideration, Artisans long to embrace (and, sometimes, Embrace) Children of Seth for their innocent splendor.

Like the Brujah, the Toreador support the most academic views of the Road of Humanity. It is, for them, a perfected work of moral harmony. While anyone can ignorantly continue on in a mockery of the life he once led, it takes a truly discerning soul to consciously attempt to replicate a code of ethics as an artful outside observer. More so, when one indulges in constant participation in the society one is observing. To the Toreador, the Road of Humanity is a celebration of the best of both worlds; artistic temperance and sensuous indulgence. To the Prodigal Artisan, the mortal world is the inspiration and the canvas, the muse and the method. A number of Toreador do, however, find their way to the *Via Humanitatis* by way of uninformed imitation of their mortal beliefs. Such childer are often treated with a degree of pity and a hint of mockery by their more "well-educated" brethren; though some Toreador, in recent nights, have stopped caring

quite so much about the distinction, choosing to instead focus on more pressing external matters.

Tzimisce

A Road of Man? Bah! Many roads cross in the depths of my demesne, childe, and most of them were ancient when Man was young. I know what the priests of the Nailed God would have me believe about humanity's "preeminent place" in some "Divine Plan," but my gods are older still and their estimation of the place of kine is more in keeping with my own. Why would I seek to be like a human? I consume humans to sate my hunger and pick apart the weave of their flesh and bone to satisfy my curiosity. There are enough frail serfs in this world without Cainites doffing their lordly mantles to go among them and wear the countenance of sheep.

Of all of the High Clans, it is the inhuman Tzimisce that most roundly scorn the *Via Humanitatis* and its adherents. Few self-respecting Fiends Embrace childer who lack a fundamentally monstrous worldview — not exactly fertile soil for the ethics of Humanity to take root and flourish. Of course, the Curse of Caine is not a license to perfect judgment, and some Tzimisce have been known to choose their progeny poorly. While many of these are put to death (or worse) in relatively short order, some few do manage to walk (or at least limp) away; of these, no few end up drawn to the very basic ethics of the Road of Humanity, through a lack of education in any other road if for no other reason.

All told, Fiends often value the *Via Humanitatis*, but only in the same sense that a herdsman values sheep that are docile, well-behaved and not prone to wandering far. Most Tzimisce equate the Road of Humanity with a means of pacifying weak-willed vampires and keeping them in their place through fear of sinning against their fellows. It makes such Cainites socially and spiritually pliant, and admirably transforms them into building blocks for a successful *voivodate*. Every lord needs his peasantry, after all, and the ethics of Humanity, from the overall perspective of the clan, are those of a victim, rather than a rival.

Ventrue

I am not a man, but instead a Son of Caine, damned by his Curse and forever denied the light of salvation. Does this make me inhuman? I do not believe so. At least, not inherently inhuman. Just as men can choose, by their thoughts and deeds, to be monsters, so too might monsters, such as myself, choose to be like unto men. I am no angel, demon or animal of the wilds. Unlike many of my Warlord brethren, I wear no crown upon my brow. I am a poor knight and, if my sire is to be believed, a poor Cainite. I can, however, content myself with the knowledge that I am, in at least some ways, a good man.

While many are hasty to identify the Warlords with the Roads of Heaven and Kings, a strong minority of the Ventrue are, in fact, walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis*. Often, these aristocratic Cainites call themselves by the older sobriquet, Patricians, after the example of the Prodigal paragon Julia Antasia. In fact, most Ventrue Prodigals style their adherence to the road upon the ethics of Rome,

and they are among the staunchest lamenters of the fallen state of Europe and the grasping antics that seem to rule the night during the War of Princes. Most are considered pacifistic weaklings by their more combative clansmen, a claim the most serene and disciplined of them do nothing to disprove, instead content to know that they walk a righteous path, and one that offers greater spiritual rewards than the simple fulfillment of ambition.

For those Ventrue who do walk the *Via Humanitatis*, it is most often through the auspices of formalized training in the road's tenets. A greater percentage of Ventrue come to the Road of Humanity naturally, however, than Brujah or Toreador. Given the Ventrue's exacting standards for childer, most of those who are trained to the road receive their instruction from their sires, while those who come to the road on their own usually do so out of rebellion or rejection of the sire's code. Only rarely does a Ventrue contract a member of another clan to teach one of her progeny a system of beliefs. It demonstrates weakness in the clan and creates too much reliance upon one not of the blood. Exceptions do occur, of course, but they are rare. It is more common for a Ventrue sire upon the Road of Heaven or of Kings, when faced with a childer who wishes to become a Prodigal, to simply turn from that childer in disgust and allow her to go her own way.

The Low Clans

It is among the Low Clans that the Road of Humanity truly seems to flourish. While few Low Clans wholeheartedly endorse the road with the same vehemence as the Artisans or Zealots, conversely, few such clans are as strictly opposed to it as are the more inhuman among the High Clans. Overall, a somewhat higher percentage of Low Clan Cainites find meaning upon the *Via Humanitatis* than do those of the High Clans.

Assamite

A man is born as Allah would have him be. The Most Merciful chooses for him his father and his mother and, no matter what changes about him over the course of the life that is given him, he does not stop being him whom Allah formed and gave life. Many of my brethren choose to see themselves as somehow other than they once were, as though the soul of a man can be unmade by any artifice of the immortals. I pity them for what must surely be a bleak existence. I take comfort and joy in knowing that I am exactly who I was meant to be and that Paradise, as is the case for all good men, is not denied me; I must simply wait a longer time for it than most.

The Banu Haqim have great esteem for the Road of Humanity. Man is exalted above all other creatures, even (or, perhaps, especially) Cainites. Even those Assamites who follow the Road of Blood recognize the great importance of the *Via Humanitatis*. To exist in harmony with one's surroundings is to be admired, and to treat one's fellow men with respect and compassion is as the Prophet admonished. Aesthetically speaking, the Road of Humanity is pleasing to the Assamite sensibility, for it speaks of a sincere heart and a

generous spirit; traits that are to be esteemed, even by those whose moral codes forbid such charitable behavior.

The cities in which many of the Banu Haqim dwell are, as compared to most European settlements, overwhelmingly teeming with humanity. It only makes sense for a clan so entrenched in such vastly populated areas to support ethics that endorse mutual responsibility within the community, and a sense that sinning against one's neighbor makes one monstrous. Further, the powerful hold maintained by Islam upon such lands means that many *fida'i* being Embraced in modern nights grow up with a belief in the sanctity of engaging in right behavior toward others and in lauding only pure thoughts.

Followers of Set

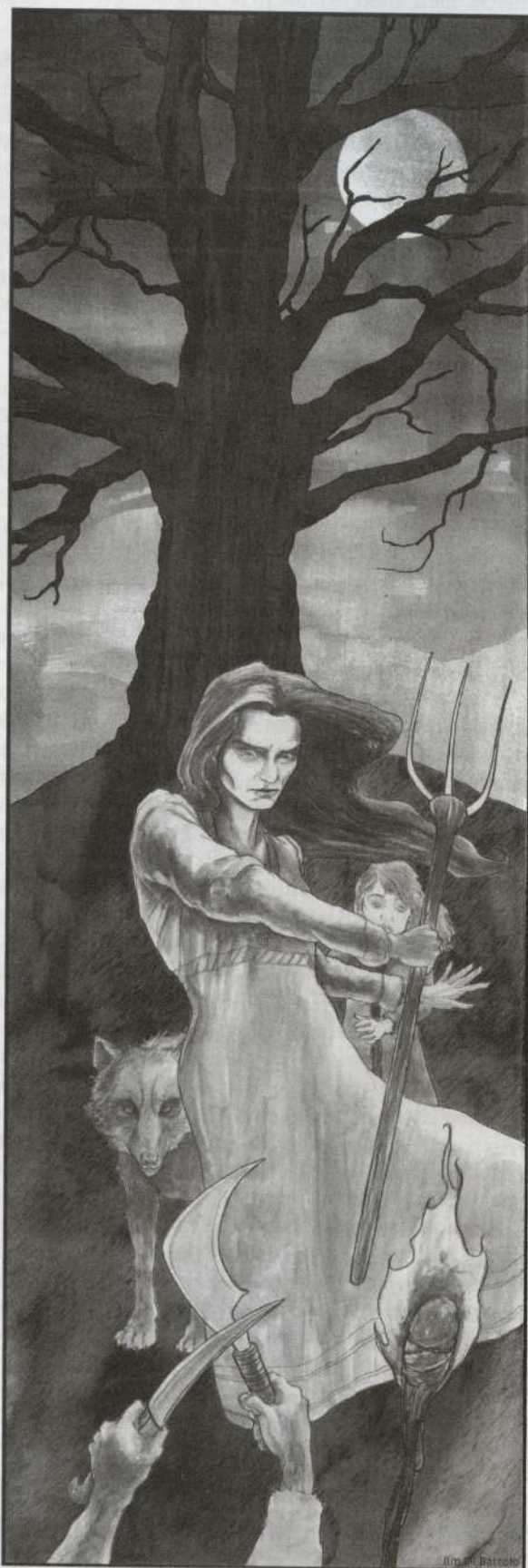
I place great value on humanity. I value it as I would a bevy of prize stallions or a lush crop of hashish. It is a possession to be carefully cultivated for use in trade with others of the Race of Caine. Certainly, one might have a strong sense of affection toward one's finest horse and may even lavish attention upon it, but in the end, it is a dumb beast. Certainly, one does not die for one's steed, and a wise man does not feed his horse before he feeds himself. So, too, is it with humankind.

With the possible exception of the Lepers, the Followers of Set is the Low Clan unlikelyest to have adherents upon the *Via Humanitatis*. The Serpents, for the most part, lack the moral compunctions necessary to accept a human (or humane) way of existence. In a manner similar to the Tzimisce, they specifically do not choose potential childer who have too many "inconvenient" attitudes regarding what is and is not acceptable in a civilized society (those who can expertly play at having such beliefs are valued, but the Followers of Set have little use for prospective progeny who actually cling to such outmoded values).

Many of the very few Serpents who come to walk the Road of Humanity do so as outcasts from their line. Unable to condone the archetypal Setite adherence to the Roads of the Beast, of Sin or of the Serpent, they often turn to the comforting ethics of the *Via Humanitatis*. Such solitary Cainites are to be pitied (not that any wise vampire would pity a Serpent, lest she fall prey to an elaborate ruse on the part of a scheming and seemingly contrite Setite), and usually lead wretched unives as wanderers and vagabonds, trusted by none for their blood and despised by their kinsmen for their devotion to a contemptible creed. Still, a handful does manage to eke out an existence, scattered here or there. Several of these lonely souls migrate to Europe, seeking acceptance and perhaps more formal education upon their road in anonymity.

Gangrel

A beast? I'm afraid not, good sir. You must have me mistaken for someone else. I am a Cainite, to be certain, but I do not spend my nights scratching fleas from my body, clambering in the trees or baying at the moon. I have command over the base creatures of the Earth and, truth be told, can adopt their features to my advantage when need be, but I am no more an



"Animal" than you are, by the gentle looks of you, a "Warlord." I am undead now but, before that, I was my father's daughter and it is who I was before I died that defines me.

For the most part, the Animals have little respect for the Road of Humanity. To the Gangrel, men as a race do not rank among the finest of nature's predators and, as Cainites are undeniably predators, it does not do for them to emulate prey. Indeed, humans are as different from Cainites as they are from wolves. Still, some Gangrel, for whatever reason, lack the desire to set their feet upon the Road of the Beast. Often, these so-called Animals come to walk the *Via Humanitatis*, seeking another facet of the simple existence endorsed by their rustic line. For the most part, the other roads strike many Gangrel as too elaborate and contrived (not to mention counter to the customary attitudes of most members of the clan) to be worthy of much consideration.

Gangrel Prodigals are often staunchly pragmatic, approaching unlife with simple wisdom and an eye for the necessities of existence. Just as the farmer worries about his crop, so too does a Gangrel upon this road personally look to the health of the community; he finds comfort, familiarity and self-worth in the work of his hands. The Gangrel's amazing understanding of the Beast, perhaps strangely, makes for some very fine Prodigals among the clan's ranks, though most Animals who come to tread such a path do so out of instinct, rather than as the result of any formalized education. Short of the animalistic features that gradually come to festoon the Gangrel's frame, many such Cainites pass virtually unnoticed among the locals, and it would take a trained Cainite eye to pick one out from among the kine he cultivates.

Malkavian

Dust and ash are men, for we shall drink only blood and eat only ashes. So says the Book of Nod. Am I human? I can say with certainty that I am tired. So tired. Men tire, do they not? I bleed when wounded, like any man. Indeed, I bleed the blood of every man. Every man in this hamlet, at the very least. God made of His Son a man and men have made gods of one another. For I am the Blood and the Life. So says the Book of the Lord. Men, gods, blood and ashes: All is one. I am a god among men and a man among gods.

The question as to whether a given Madman walks the Road of Humanity and why is often as complex a matter as the particular madness that afflicts her; and as with questioning a Malkavian about her ailment, those who dig for answers usually get what they deserve. It is enough to say that a fair number of Madmen tread this venerable road, most often through a journey of instinctual discovery, though no few are carefully trained on the road by dangerously exacting or obsessive sires. Malkavian Prodigals tend to end up in many of the same places as mortal lunatics, skulking in the most wretched and marginalized urban areas, as well as walking in the local Cainite places of power, valued for their insights as much as they are feared and hated for their particular breed of "enlightenment."

Trying to get a unified opinion out of the clan regarding the Road of Humanity is (as is the case with virtually any other matter) a futile pursuit. Some Madmen are inclined to regard it as folly, while others rant on ceaselessly about its tenets being the only path to salvation. Some Malkavians even grow violent about the subject of sin against society. No few seem to have no opinion at all on the matter, or else seem to change their views on it on a whim. In general, the Prodigal path counsels pity for the mad, since so many of them are incapable of responsible social interaction, but advises caution also, for the very same reason. Some Malkavians lack even the most basic sense of how to participate in a community, and these Cainites are to be regarded with just as much fear and trepidation as charity.

Nosferatu

Do I look human to you, good sir? I thought not. No man wears tusks like these, and as last I knew, no Son of Seth was draped in horned scales and forced to call them skin. The only other corpses I know of so riddled with vermin as myself neither move nor speak. So, no, I would not consider myself human. I could walk the same road as other men, but all that happens is that they run screaming. Leave me to my solitude and seek your answers elsewhere, Prodigal. You will not find them here.

If Cappadocians have some notable difficulty blending into society well enough to enjoy the moral guidance of the Road of Humanity, then the Lepers are truly cursed to forever dwell apart. Their natural forms a horror to behold, Nosferatu lack any ready means, short of the powers of the blood, to participate in most strata of mortal society. This is not to say, however, that they are completely without recourse in this matter. Some Nosferatu have found the salvation of common humanity among the downfallen and outcast: the mad, the diseased, the disfigured and those otherwise spat upon by society at large. Such folk crave companionship, just like the Lepers, and common misery can make for a sense of brotherhood and mutual reliance.

Many Nosferatu, however, are simply too embittered by their painful disfigurements to attempt to delude themselves into believing that interaction with the community is possible. Even when concealed by Cainite powers, after all, such a vampire knows for himself that he is a misshapen monster. So much of an individual's self-image is tied up in the physical form, and it is a psychological roadblock that most of them never manage to surpass. After all, if one looks like a monster, the why shouldn't one try to be a monster or, failing that, turn to the completely beatific, looking for redemption in something other than the world of the flesh? Despite this, however, few Lepers actively despise the *Via Humanitatis* or scorn it. To their thinking, it would be a fine path to walk, if only one looked enough the part to tread it.

Ravnos

Yes, I'm a thief. And an occasional cutthroat. And I was both of those things long before I was a vampire. I can't say as my existence has much changed, except of course for the diet. I'm not interested in being some kind of devil incarnate and I can't

claim that I was ever much for religion. I came to the Road of Humanity of my own accord and on my own terms, as is the case with all I do. My beliefs set me free; free to be whatever sort of man I wish to be. Let other Cainites be enslaved to morals and values they need to be trained in before they can even truly believe in them. For my own part, I will continue on being true to myself, just as I always have.

Charlatans seem to be drawn to the Road of Humanity just as often as they are to the tenets of the *Via Peccati*. Something in the very basic and intuitive ethics of the road appeals to many Ravnos, despite the ethical difficulties that such a journey often means for such Cainites given their line's propensity for crime and vice. As might be expected, most Ravnos who come to tread the road do so as a matter of natural tendencies, rather than education. The wanderlust of the clan does not much lend itself to the staid and rote instruction of Prodigal teachers. Indeed, many Charlatan sires (save for perhaps the most traditional of them, most of whom favor the clan's Road of Paradox to the exclusion of all others) seem to evince little concern in the end for what roads their childer might walk.

Still, the seductively cunning Ravnos Beast does tend to pose a lot of problems for the would-be Charlatan Prodigal. By definition, every act of iniquity that the Ravnos is moved to undertake is a sin against Humanity, which often results in a painfully treacherous path for one who would challenge the immorality that swims in her blood to find her way along the *Via Humanitatis*. The very chaos that the clan's blood calls out for its members to sow runs directly counter to the Road of Humanity's essential devotion to a functional society. Sadly, it is a paradox many Ravnos, despite their commitment to the road, never manage to adequately resolve, leaving them foundering in confusion, doubt and even self-loathing. No few, however, strike some sort of workable balance, either through conscious effort and discipline or else by ceasing to contemplate the contradictions entirely.

Tremere

You want to know what I think of the Road of Humanity? It is nonsense. I know only that I was, not so long ago, the long-suffering apprentice to a brutal and unforgiving magus. He died under the fangs of my clansmen and I was gifted with life everlasting. I walk no road. I wake in the evening and dress, and then set about what business House and Clan have set for me. I am not meant for Heaven and Hell holds no claim to me now. I am forever suspended on the edge of death in the world of men. Is that a road? If so, then so be it. If not, then who cares?

The murderous and treacherous Clan Tremere is a recent arrival upon the great stage of the night. Poised on the edge of becoming an amazingly significant power, it is, nevertheless, spiritually bereft. While many long for what the Tremere can provide and the Usurpers are more than happy to lay claim to resources and favors, they do not yet truly know enough of the Cainite world to be aware of the amazing diversity of moralities available to the Damned. (Not that the Tremere were ever much concerned with

morality.) A few early Embraces lost to the Second Death taught the blood-magi the importance of cleaving to a set of ethics and upholding them to a degree greater than lip-service, but most members of the clan are still walking the Road of Humanity out of instinct. Not all Tremere have yet embraced the idea of being monsters and few have any pretensions to righteousness, leaving the *Via Humanitatis* as something of an acceptable compromise.

In truth, something of a sense of fear lingers among the seemingly brazen Tremere regarding most of the other roads. It is a frightening thing to so consciously and calculatedly abandon normal human beliefs about right and wrong, no matter how skewed the perspectives of the average Tremere were in such affairs; and the Usurpers, with few members of other clans willing to extend them the courtesy of tutelage, end up defaulting to the *Via Humanitatis*. Some members of the High Clans actually advocate an active sequestering of such knowledge away from the acquisitive Tremere, since it will, they reason, help to keep these dangerously ambitious new Cainites in check.

And Others

Of course (though they might have it otherwise), the 13 clans of Caine are not the only ones to bear the Dark Father's Curse. Bloodlines, aberrant and divergent, share in the blood of the Third Mortal and are possessed of both his immortality and his hunger. Such Cainites have their own views on the Road of Humanity.

Baali

Humanity. What an interesting word. Ask a man to define it and he will founder, trying to give it a single meaning. Philosophers and holy men have debated the significance, the nature, of the human state for millennia. None have reached any accord with one another and the only constant, it seems, is that mankind is a race without symmetry or equilibrium. Men are willful, murderous, selfish and easy to control through the bestial passions they try so hard to deny. They long for those things that make them ashamed and then wallow in regret when their darkest wishes are fulfilled. A human makes a fine plaything, but I would never wish to be one.

The *Via Humanitatis* does not appeal to the Baali on any level, save as an easy means by which to control spiritually weak Cainites. Human beings are the coin of the realm, not an exemplar to set upon a pillar and idolize. Primitive men worshipped the beings they hunted and consumed. Now look where those men are: Extinct, or else pushed to the far fringes of the world and awaiting extermination. It does not do to venerate prey. Further, what is there in humanity that can be said to be truly admirable? The overwhelming majority of the world's most despicable individuals have been mortal men and women, living up to the legacy of their sinful natures. Man is a beast, same as any other. He finds a means to satisfy his desires, slays what stands in his way if he is strong enough to do so, and seeks to dominate whatever he may. He is born, he grows, he ruts and he dies. Cainites are removed from that futile cycle by

dint of their exalted Curse. Why try to crawling in the mud after one has learned to fly?

From the perspective of the Shaitan, the Road of Humanity is, as is the case with most vampiric endeavors, a work of narcissistic self-deception. Those Cainites who wish they were human pretend to be; by so doing, they imagine that all of the things they would rather not believe about themselves will just go away. Why accept the Beast that will now be your companion for eternity when you can just cover your eyes and act as though it never fills you with the urge to feed and to destroy? To the Baali, most vampires are children meddling in the affairs of adults and allowing themselves to believe it is a game. None are more contemptible in that regard than the Prodigals, who lack even the modicum of imagination it takes to properly redefine themselves in light of their new existence.

The Other Bloodlines

I stand alone, my brothers and sisters fallen beneath the fangs of cruel Usurpers; yet I do not despair, for the greatest things humans can achieve are had during times of great duress. I believe in the strength of one man, and in all that of which humanity is capable. I chose my road because of that understanding. Hatred, ambition and fear are terrible things to exist for and so I chose to carry on with compassion, honor and reason. I may die the Final Death but I will die as I have lived; a man. There is no finer end to be asked for.

Different bloodlines see the Road of Humanity differently. The opinions of the Baali are addressed above and so do not warrant further exploration here, but the handful of other Cainites walking apart from the Clans of Caine have their own thoughts on the matter. The brutal Gargoyles are simple beasts and have little use for moral quandary. Those who do manage to find some sense of meaning or self (apart from the instinctual adherence to the Road of the Beast common to their kind) tend not to look to the *Via Humanitatis*. This is fitting, as few remember anything of the Cainites they were before their monstrous transformations, let alone the human beings they were before that. The enigmatic Laibon, hailing from distant lands, tend to have a very different sense of what they are and where they come from than most Cainites, at peace with the Beast, and seeing it as both close companion and mantle of authority. As a result, few embrace the tenets of Humanity. The warlike Lamia on the other hand, guardians to the Cappadocians, are mostly to be found upon the Road of Humanity. They do not love their human natures, however; Gorgons walk this road out of a lack of desire to explore morality, favoring instead a simple sense of devotion to the Graverobbers to give them strength. Few indeed are the Lamia who pursue the Prodigal way with an active sense of dedication. The remaining Lhiannan are ill-suited to the *Via Humanitatis*, favoring as they do wild and forlorn lands yet untamed by the Cross. They are a warrior breed, and one rooted in primal and majestic traditions that predate the very idea of civilization. The ways of mortal men are not for them. The fading Salubri are perhaps the strongest adherents among the bloodlines to the Road of Humanity. Many Luminaries

are quick to give credit for the road to martyred Saulot, rather than any artifice of Arikel and Troile. Of all of the bloodline Cainites, Salubri are likeliest to be found upon the formally-trained *Via Humanitatis*, working as active proponents of its precepts and attempting, as best they may, to spread its message before the evil of the Tremere rises up to once and for all devour them and extinguish the light of this fallen clan.

In any case, bloodline Cainites make up only the barest fraction of the vampiric population of the Dark Medieval; their adherence to the Road of Humanity (or lack of it) makes little difference, in any case, to the way in which the affairs of the *Via Humanitatis* are conducted. While some Prodigals of the clans (both High and Low) would like to see this attitude change, there is likely little anyone can do about it. Prejudice and fear of these outsiders, stemming from everything from the long-chronicled evils of the Baali to the terrible misinformation campaign conducted by the Tremere against the Salubri, runs too strong in the hearts and minds of most Cainites for it to be otherwise. For the time being, at any rate, such Prodigals must exist, like all bloodline Cainites, on the outer fringes of the greater society of the Children of Caine.

Factions within the Road

Just as men divide themselves according to their beliefs and practices, so too do Prodigals. Such factions are not (often) political entities, but instead serve to give Prodigals a choice as to *how* they walk the *Via Humanitatis*. While some choose to do so in peace and silence, others defend the road with a militant zeal that would make the most courageous Scion proud (and would likely give her pause the next time she thought of disparaging the Road of Humanity).

The Academy

A network of mostly High Clan Prodigal scholars, philosophers and even scientists, the Academy preserves and propounds the ways of the *Via Humanitatis*, from the most venerable traditions of the ancient past to the innovations of the coming days. Members of this loose coalition participate in correspondence with one another, engaging in debate that spans nations and, in the case of some truly ancient Academes, centuries.

The Academy, widely considered to have been founded in ancient Hellas by a Brujah Prodigal, has not wavered in its purpose since its inception — though its membership, and the influence and respect accorded to that membership by the Cainite community as a whole, has certainly waxed and waned over the years. Currently the organization is enjoying something of a resurgence, as the interchange of ideas engendered by the onset of the War of Princes (one of the *only* benefits of that conflict, according to most Academes) has encouraged otherwise isolated Prodigal intellectuals to connect with their brethren in a spirit of educated discussion.

The Academy stands firmly behind the formally trained interpretation of the Road of Humanity, though more and

more instinctive walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis* are coming into positions of prominence and respect among these Cainite scholars. Among the topics of discussion for these sages are bits of Noddist lore, techniques for harnessing the Beast and innovations in the art of passing unnoticed among the kine. Some princes worry that the correspondences of the Academes (those who are even aware of the Academy's existence, that is) could, with one waylaid messenger, lay bare many of the secrets of the Cainite world; but most of these Prodigal scholars have the wisdom and foresight to encode their communications in elaborate ciphers or else conceal the meaning of their writings in double-talk.

The Gray House

More a way of unlife than an organized faction upon the Road of Humanity, the Gray House is an ascetic fellowship that takes its cues from the subsistence lifestyle practiced by many kine of small means. Walkers on any path of the greater road may be welcomed into the Gray House, though there is no real induction ceremony or even any real hierarchy within the movement. Being initiated is more a case of learning of the Gray House and expressing a willingness to adhere to its methods than anything else.

Members of the Gray House address one another as "brother" or "sister," followed by the fellow adherent's name, on occasions on which they meet. They dress plainly, in the manner of peasants, and do not partake in any manner of luxury, seeing such indulgence as fodder for the Beast's appetites. They are not a flagellant order, but they do eschew wealth and opulent material possessions, and believe that any acceptance of excess gives the Beast an opportunity to feed and grow stronger. While it sometimes rages in its privation, they maintain, it can be most adequately fettered through constant denial. Gray House Cainites feed only when they must (though they never, if it can be at all helped, allow themselves to grow ravenous, and try to feed before lack of blood begins to create even the first stirrings of gnawing hunger). They do not feed from those in altered states of consciousness (such as the besotted or the insane), and avoid drinking from any toward whom they feel intense emotion, since they believe passion goads the Beast.

The brothers and sisters of the Gray House, like many kine, often cultivate their own "crop," in their case working to establish a functional herd for feeding — though ideally, they do not attempt to gather more such mortals than will suffice to sustain them in simple comfort. Most feed exclusively from kine, since it ill-befits a man to consume fare not fit for a human, and they would not presume to defy the Curse of Caine in their simple lifestyle. Such arrogance enrages the Beast and skirts the laws of Cainite society. A simple man does as he must, no more and no less.

The Twilight Order

The Twilight Order, more properly known as the Order of the True Knights of the Setting Sun, is comprised

entirely of Prodigals. Most members were once soldiers, knights, foresters or other such hardy and martially skilled individuals, though a significant minority were once clergy, academics and similar, more contemplative sorts. The Cainites of the Twilight Order are dedicated to a harsh but ultimately necessary purpose: the extermination of those who have died the Second Death.

Naturally, hunting the Soulless is dangerous business. Those Cainites who have completely degenerated and lost their way without the hope of redemption are many and varied. Most are savage fiends, incapable of any action beyond the fulfillment of the absolute necessities of survival. Some few, however, retain their faculties, becoming predators with human intellect, yet devoid of all human compunction. These are among the most brutally perilous hunts that face the knights of the Twilight Order, since their foes are capable of literally *anything* in the course of their attempts to feed and survive, and have the capacity to use complex logic in the course of satisfying the demands of a Beast that has overwhelmed any desire for restraint, control or higher purpose. They are, more so than any other kind of Cainite, monsters in human skin.

Initiation into the Twilight Order is a quiet affair, filled with recitations from the *Book of Nod*, the

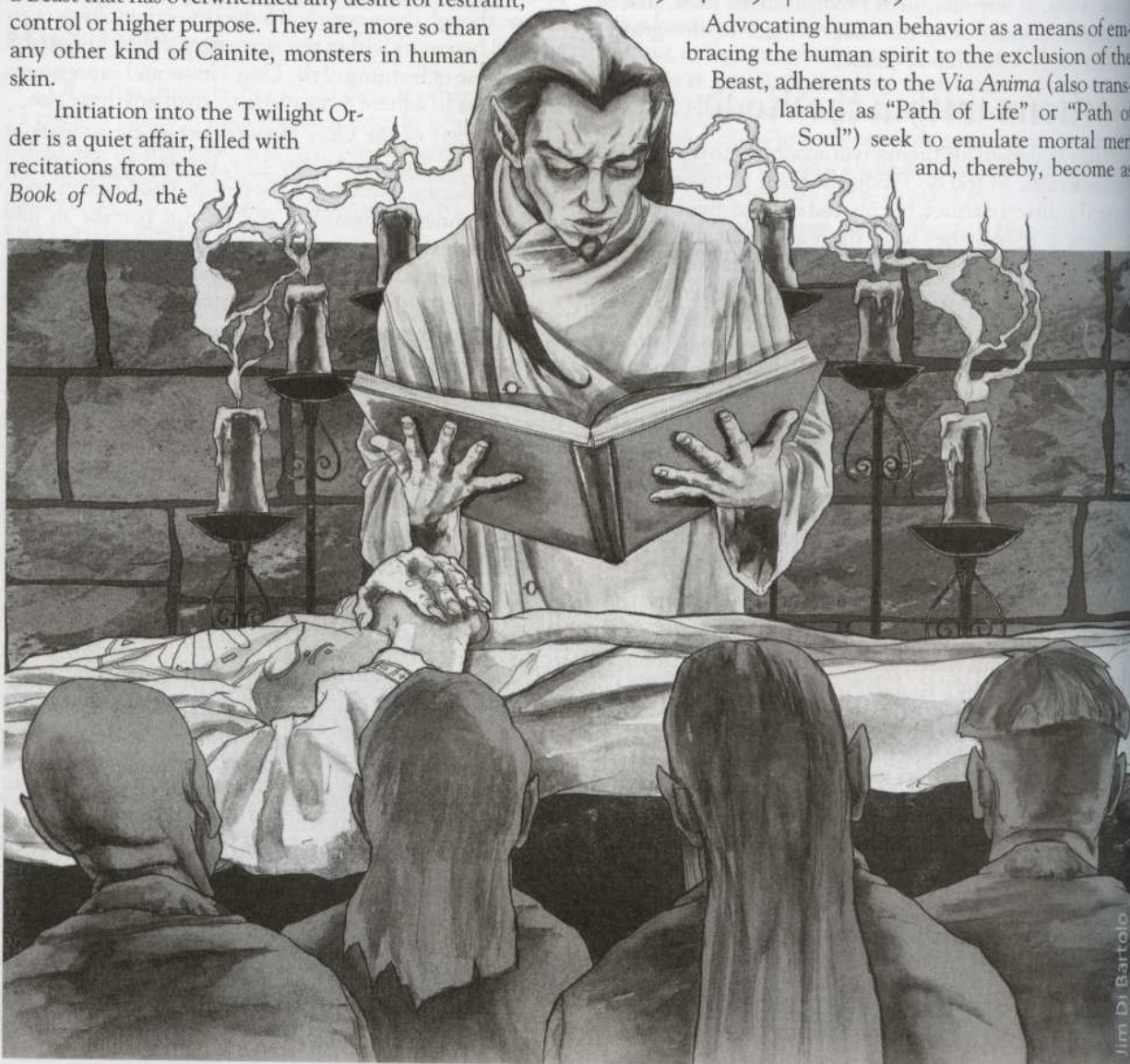
use of incense and the ritual ingestion of blood. Also, the initiate is branded upon the left shoulder with the mark of the Order (inflicting a health level of aggravated damage and requiring a Courage roll to avoid Rötshreck): a shield encompassing a setting sun surmounted by two crossed swords. Through mystic rites, the scar of the brand is made permanent, though it is said that those who abandon either the Order or the Road of Humanity find that the mark fades from their shoulder over the course of a few nights. As most formal rituals of the Twilight Order are undertaken in white robes that leave the arms fully bare, the vanished brand would, if there is any truth to the rumor, be a sure sign that the knight has turned her back upon the fellowship.

Baths

Like all of the other major Roads of Caine, the Road of Humanity contains within it several divergent paths.

The Path of Breath

Advocating human behavior as a means of embracing the human spirit to the exclusion of the Beast, adherents to the *Via Anima* (also translatable as "Path of Life" or "Path of Soul") seek to emulate mortal men and, thereby, become as



VIGIL FOR THE LOST

A ritual unique to the knights of the Twilight Order, the Vigil for the Lost is a solemn occasion, wherein those who have died the Second Death are remembered. The Vigil takes place on the night of the Winter Solstice and is undertaken by all of the knights in a given region who can be there. Religious knights offer prayers, while those ill-inclined toward matters of the faith often simply reflect. If the names of slain Soulless are known, they are recited and recorded by the Order's scribes. Some knights are known to have their blades etched with the names of those they have felled. The members of the Order do what they can to support one another during this time and share tales, both joyous and sorrowful; they use this opportunity to carefully cultivate their sense of humanity in participation in the order. Though it is not spoken of openly, knights' adherence to the Road of Humanity is carefully monitored during this time. The knighthood has, after all, also lost a few of its own to the Second Death; and it does not do for these warriors to watch the affairs of others while failing to keep their own house in order.

The Vigil serves another purpose as well, one that might be considered a bit sinister by even some of the Order's own membership. A small number of scholars and scribes, in recording the names and, if known, clans, roads and even specific lineages of the Soulless, are attempting to compile an accurate system of profiling for Cainites, one that will help to determine which vampires are likeliest to succumb to the Second Death. Eventually, the compendium of known Soulless migrates across the length and breadth of the Order, and the wisest of the knighthood's sages work to discern which of the world's vampires must be most carefully monitored for a descent into madness and monstrosity.

mortals themselves. As the Path of Breath teaches, only the soul makes man distinct from animal, as it is the seat of intellect, reason and the higher emotions.

The Inspired, as they call themselves, embrace the idea that only a human being is capable of salvation of the spirit. Such Cainites deny the lure of Beast by blatantly rejecting the ways of the undead. They dwell among the living and share in their joys and sorrows. The Inspired work hard to establish a façade of life so convincing that even they themselves (and, perhaps more importantly, their ever-watchful Beasts) are deceived by it. While other Prodigals seek to walk a road, Inspired strive to become so well-acquainted with their path as to no longer need to consider it.

The Path of Community

The *Via Communitas* stands for a broader view of humanity and Prodigal responsibility toward it. Exalt-

ing the many above the one, the Path of Community teaches that it is society that saves and, accordingly, society that is most wronged by the iniquities of Cainites. While it is admirable to do right by the one or the few, it is most important, the walkers upon the Path of Community maintain, to be just toward the many, which is the greater civilization in which one exists.

With its roots in the teeming population centers of the Islamic world, the Path of Community has found its way into the growing communities of Europe. The Civilized (as adherents to the path are called) are well-received in many Cainite domains, believing as they do in social order and responsibility toward the greater whole.

The Path of Illumination

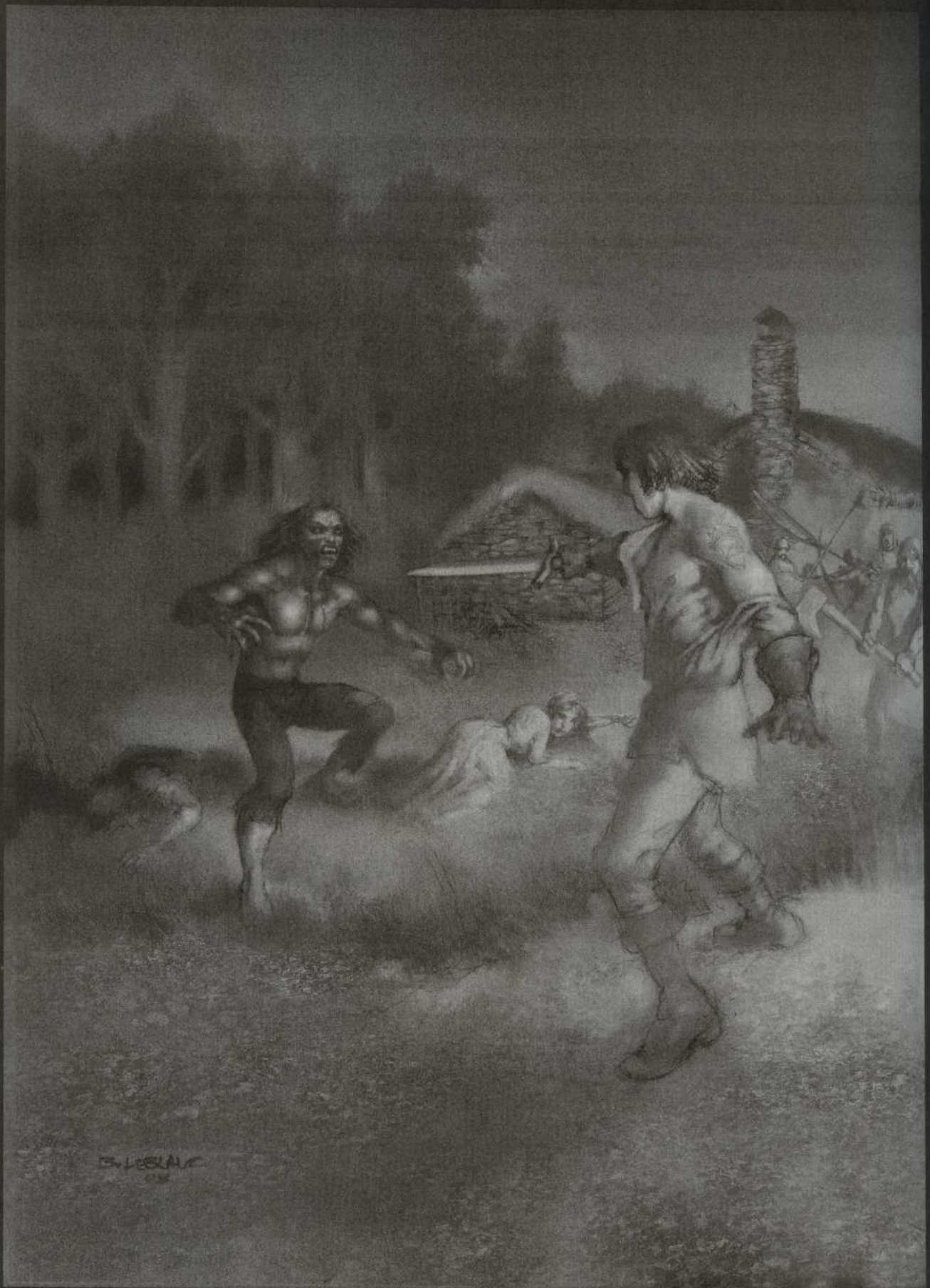
Every faith has its heretics; for the Prodigals, the self-proclaimed Illuminated fill that role. Dualists, the walkers upon the Path of Illumination practice a spiritual tradition of absolute liberation through a strict doctrine of social consciousness. Without exception, the Path of Illumination is taught, rather than found, as it is a complex ethical system, filled with moral reflection and seeming contradictions that must be resolved in order for the adherent to progress in understanding.

Naturally, most Cainites have no love for the *Via Luminis*, as it denounces the Western religious tradition, counsels defiance of unjust rule and considers Caine to be without sin. Since its adherents are hunted by the staunch warriors of the Roads of Heaven and Kings, the Path of Illumination may die out entirely within a few centuries, though that remains to be seen. Despite allegations to the contrary, however, the path has no connection to the much-despised Cainite Heresy.

The Path of Vigor

The Path of Vigor is one of change and motion. The walkers upon the path believe that the essential nature of humanity is to constantly be on the move, whether in mind, body or spirit, and so they embrace trends, movements, innovations and even (to the perpetual chagrin of most Cainites in positions of authority) revolutions. Many on the core Road of Humanity see them as vital, if not always wise, and their contributions to Prodigal society, derived from their human interactions, are well appreciated.

Of course, many Cainites are ill inclined toward the *Via Vireo* and the Rovers who walk it. The path teaches that stillness and stasis (the twin pillars on which stable Cainite society is based) are death and admonishes its adherents to defy such boring and stagnant states. (Accordingly, many Cainites on this path number themselves among the *Furores*.) Other Cainites consider the path foolish, for it teaches Prodigals to embrace the transient world of humanity and to thereby turn their backs upon the contemplation of the slow perfection of the undead.





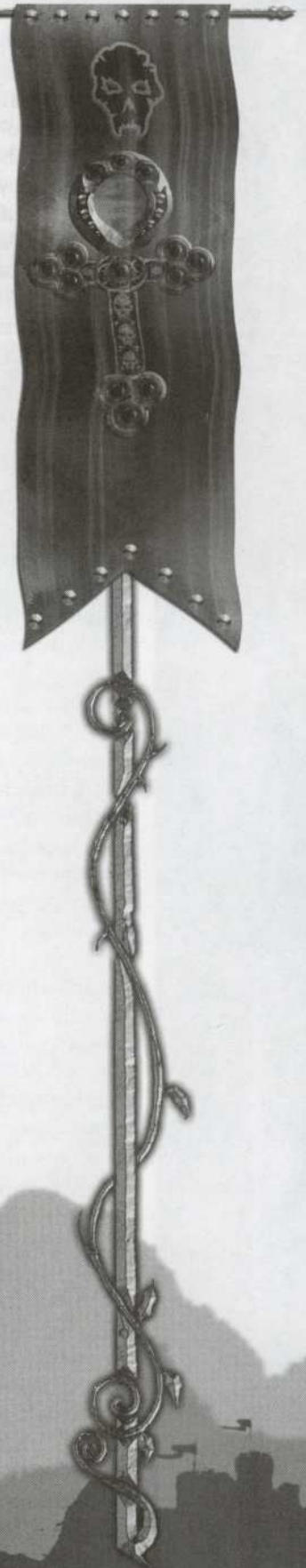
CHAPTER THREE: THE MAN WITHIN THE BEAST

As for you, Gilgamesh, fill your belly with good things; day and night, night and day, dance and be merry, feast and rejoice. Let your clothes be fresh, bathe yourself in water, cherish the little child that holds your hand, and make your wife happy in your embrace; for this too is the lot of man.

— Anonymous, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

Some players are inclined to see the *Via Humanitatis* as a road for weak-willed vampires who want nothing more than to spend their eternal nights drinking blood from rats and rescuing orphans. This is flatly untrue. Consider that humans perpetrate the overwhelming majority of the world's evils. A cutpurse Embraced into one of the Clans of Caine does not usually abandon his criminal ways, nor does a greedy merchant often suddenly turn charitable. The Road of Humanity is capable of encompassing the vast majority of the acts, for both good and evil, of which human beings are capable.

Important to remember, though, is that you are not playing a human who happens to have fangs. A Prodigal is a creature inherently more monstrous than a man, but striving, consciously or otherwise, to be less so. The Beast is a manifestation of all that is base and contemptible within a person: all of the selfishness, savagery, greed, jealousy, hatred and even fear. That in mind, all that exists



outside of the Beast must, by extension, include the best of what remains of the individual who was Embraced.

It is easy to lose oneself to delusions of grandeur, pretensions of divine favor or simple brute lusts; it is *hard* to try to do what is right when the monster within is thrashing about inside its cage, longing to be allowed to rend, destroy, steal, feed and kill with absolute abandon and without even a modicum of respect for civilized behavior. As Prodigals see things, other roads exist to either pardon the reprehensible actions endorsed by the Beast or else to foist responsibility for the vampire's state (and the acts engendered by that state) off on someone else. It is, to their thinking, weakness on par with that which followers of every other road see fit to attribute to the *Via Humanitatis*.

Walking the Road

Prodigals, like only they and Ferals might, come to their road in one of two ways: intentionally or instinctively. Both of these approaches have their distinct advantages and disadvantages. Both choices will probably make a significant impact on the way your character unfolds during its creation and on the way in which you play the character when the game begins. Thus, before you create your Prodigal character, you should probably decide whether or not she was trained to the Road of Humanity.

Characters who are formally educated in the tenets of the *Via Humanitatis* often have a more consciously philosophical bent to their attitudes regarding the Beast and vampiric existence in general, and some even embrace completely secular views of the evil within them. Those who find the road on their own, on the other hand, may have been abandoned by a sire (perhaps in disgust when the neonate could not or would not grasp the ethics of the sire's road), or may have struck out on his own early into his unlife. Perhaps he fled an abusive sire or failed to comprehend the lessons of a teacher in another road's ethics. Every other road of Caine is, in some way, contradictory to what normal people consider to be morally correct.

In some circles, it actually makes quite a difference as to whether your character was initiated into the *Via Humanitatis* by a respected teacher, a remorseful sire or her own intuition and sense of right and wrong. Some scorn self-taught Prodigals as weak, and some regard Cainites educated in the road as coldly logical in their morals. Every choice can make an ally or an enemy, and the choice of how a Cainite found the Road of Humanity should be no exception. Indeed, it is likely to have some impact on how your character sees and responds to many of the situations of her existence.

Of course, the other option is to just begin creating the character and let the chips fall where they may,

drawing the logical conclusions, based upon what you end up with as to whether she found the road on her own, with help or through some combination of the two extremes.

Character Creation

Prodigals are as varied a lot as the mortals they seek to emulate. They are drawn from the ranks of rough laborers, erudite scholars, humble priests and daughters of noble privilege. There is no such thing as an "archetypical Prodigal." While it is often convenient for walkers upon the Road of Humanity to allow others to believe them to be mewling, motley, blood-starved penitents ceaselessly bemoaning their damnation to the night, the truth of the matter is much more complex. Many Prodigals don't even find their state particularly abhorrent, or rather, are fully aware of the futility of seeking to unmake the Curse of Caine and so learn (figuratively speaking) to live with it.

All of the archetypes presented for Nature and Demeanor in **Dark Ages: Vampire** are appropriate for a Prodigal, and there's really no "best" way to spend points on Attributes in character creation for one. Among formally trained walkers upon the *Via Humanitatis*, Mental Attributes might be appropriate to make primary, but this is really just a polite suggestion rather than any kind of mandate.

As to Abilities, Prodigals are, again, a varied lot. Still, a few emerge as particularly useful for such Cainites. Empathy may well be one of the most quintessentially Prodigal of Abilities, for it represents an awareness (whether schooled or intuitive) of the moods and motives of others; a boon for those who would seek to blend in among the kine and who wish to see themselves reflected in the thoughts and actions of others and so draw strength from community and commonality. Additionally, many Prodigals are drawn from the middle and lower ranks of society, making such Abilities as Commerce, Crafts and Hearth Wisdom somewhat common to walkers upon the road.

In the matter of Backgrounds, Disciplines and clans, a somewhat more involved discussion is warranted.

Backgrounds

It is difficult at best to define what Backgrounds a Prodigal *should* have, but a few stand out as particularly ideal for the walker upon the Road of Humanity. Allies, Contacts, Herd and Influence are probably the four pillars on which the interactions of adherents to the *Via Humanitatis* stand. While any Backgrounds are, naturally, valuable and to be esteemed, these four are so integral to the nightly existence of Prodigals as to warrant a more detailed look at each of them with respect to those who walk the Road of Humanity.

Allies

Among the roads, the ability to actually make mortal friends without the need for any kind of ulterior motive is more or less unique to the *Via Humanitatis*. Other vampires automatically filter their interactions with the world of the kine through whatever alien lens their road demands; despite what many Cainites might think, most mortals aren't completely oblivious to the fact that they're being used. The end result of this is that the Allies of a Prodigal are more likely to actually care about their vampiric associate (whether or not they know the truth of the Cainite's state). As anyone can tell you, people do a lot more for someone they care about than for someone occasionally useful to them.

Of course, Prodigals are themselves apt to go out of their way for Allies, seeing them not only as precious resources, but treasured associates and even, in time, valued friends. Through normal and healthy interactions with mortal Allies, a Prodigal can reaffirm her faith in the Road of Humanity, gaining more than merely her practical and temporal needs from their relationship.

Contacts

While Scions may wish to make connections among princes and archbishops and Sinners seek their informants among whores, cutpurses and heretics, the Prodigal, owing to his facility with interactions among the kine, is capable of finding Contacts literally anywhere, in any stratum of mortal society. As those Cainites most apt to interact freely with just about anyone, Prodigals find themselves with access to some of the broadest bases of information and rumors to draw from in time of need.

Prodigals are the Cainites likeliest, overall, to be well received by casual acquaintances. Walkers upon other roads can and do take the time to overcome the natural aversion or deference most kine feel toward them (through the manifestations of their auras) in order to form a relatively close and meaningful bond on a personal level; but few possess the same interpersonal adroitness with which the average Prodigal forms more distant and practical relationships. The Prodigal aura of normalcy gives them an edge in such dealings, since such Cainites do not have to deal quite as extensively and on such friendly and familiar terms with kine in order to have useful interactions with them.

Herd

This may well be the most important Background for a Prodigal to cultivate. Having a bevy of willing vessels can truly make the difference between sanity and the all-consuming madness of the Beast, as the vampire's sense of guilt and remorse at stealing the life from unwilling victims overwhelms her completely. While the willing submission of his vessels to the Cainite's Kiss is not a cure

for the shame that the activity can engender in a good Prodigal, it is certainly a balm for such feelings.

Prodigals who cannot or will not, for whatever reason, cultivate a herd often find themselves feeding from animals or the recently deceased, or else using Disciplines to sample carefully from gullible or sleeping vessels. Some unfortunate few must make do with attempting to reconcile their beliefs with the necessity of a profound nightly sin against them, often by drinking from unrepentant criminals and other detractors from the common good.

POOLED BACKGROUNDS

Given their sense of the nuances of a community and their customary respect for the social unit (beyond purely mercenary interest, that is), Prodigals often make wonderful overseers for Background pools, managing the shared resources of a coterie with a simple dedication and attention to detail that walkers upon other roads may not deign to devote to such concerns. Also, while no self-respecting Cainite is apt to blindly trust another not to seek advantage to her own detriment, many are inclined to see Prodigals as the most trustworthy vipers in the nest, acceptable compromise candidates in the matter of managing common assets. Certainly, while the Faithful does not want the Sinner working closely with her Contacts and the Feral would not countenance the thought of the Scion breaking his Retainers to the leash, virtually everyone can agree that the Prodigal will not commit acts with their Backgrounds that offend against their respective sensibilities.

For their own part, most Prodigals are happy enough to be perceived as mostly harmless functionaries, given leave to coordinate the disparate mundane resources of the coterie, since they so obviously would never abuse that trust for personal gain. And, for the most part, they do act as other Cainites expect in this regard, caring for the Backgrounds of their compatriots with a natural facility. They are kindly and deferential toward the Faithful's Contacts, act as a sympathetic ear for the Sinner's Allies, work to mitigate the effects of the bestial menace exuded by the Feral toward his Retainers and minister to the bruised egos that result when Scion indelicately manifests his Influence. In many cases, the people who comprise these Backgrounds often come to see the Prodigal in a more favorable light than they do those whose Backgrounds they rightfully are. There is, it seems, something to be said for finding advantage in a meek and humble demeanor....

Influence

While each road of Caine has its own particular special field of influence, the Road of Humanity endorses the idea of finding advantage and belonging among them all. Certainly, it can be highly useful to have friends in the Royal Court of France or among the clergymen of Rome, but so too is it favorable to have connections among the beggars of London, the olive farmers of al-Andalus or the sailors who put into port at Alexandria. In many ways, adherents to other roads often blind themselves to the potential value of having a voice among those kine who are not central to their road's interests. Thus, while it is rare for a Scion to be well-respected by the residents of a leper colony, a Feral to be able to make his wishes known among the prince's retainers or a Faithful to have any sway over a city's prostitutes, a Prodigal may well find himself in high regard in any of these circles and more.

Clans

Cainites from every clan can be found upon the Road of Humanity, from the savage Gangrel to the regal Ventrue to the twisted and deformed Nosferatu. All of the bloodlines (save perhaps for the debased Baali) number at least a few adherents to the road among their ranks. Members of some clans, however, are much more likely to walk the *Via Humanitatis* than others.

Among the High Clans, Cainites of the Brujah and Toreador clans constitute the clear majority of Prodigals, with members of the Ventrue clan constituting a respectable minority behind that, and the remaining three High Clans having but a smattering of Prodigals each (somewhat more in the case of the Lasombra clan than among either the Cappadocians or the Tzimisce). The reasons for this are many, but, primarily it is because much of the self-proclaimed "nobility of the night" finds acting in a human fashion to be a base and unworthy journey through existence.

Members of Low Clans are found somewhat more often upon the Road of Humanity. Though these clans have traditions of their own, as ancient and in many cases glorious as those of the High Clans, their somewhat less regimented approach to unlife means that more self-taught Cainites (with respect to the roads of Caine) are to be found among them. As the Road of the Beast makes for a frightfully counterintuitive path for many, the Road of Humanity often becomes something of a "default" for these Cainites. The Assamites and Tremere count among their ranks the greatest number of Prodigals; it is a matter of training for most Assamite Prodigals, and simple ignorance of other options in the case of most of the Tremere upon the road. Followers of Set, Gangrel and Nosferatu often shun the *Via Humanitatis*, but certainly more Cainites of these clans are to be found upon the

road than Cappadocian and Tzimisce Prodigals. Malkavians and Ravnos are sometimes drawn to the road, though, given the natures of these two clans, it is not often worth the effort of trying to discern why.

Disciplines

Hand-in-hand with the issue of a potential Prodigal's clan is the matter of Disciplines. Some are much more appropriate than others, though none are particularly well respected by adherents to the road. One does not accurately emulate mortal humans through the use of supernatural powers unavailable to them.

In general, Auspex, Obfuscate and Presence are probably the most useful Disciplines for a Prodigal, though most mentors upon the Road of Humanity caution their students not to become reliant on them to even the same degree to which most other Cainites do. It is easy to detect a merchant's lie when you can hear his heart hammering away in his ribcage and smell the sweat moistening his palms, but this kind of reinforcement creates a tendency toward reliance on inhuman capabilities. Still, being able to blend into a crowd (looking like the locals, for instance), detect the moods of others or convince a potential vessel to accompany the Cainite to her bedroom (for a more merciful prelude to feeding than a whack on the head in a dark alley) is a boon to the Prodigal.

Conversely, some Disciplines are seemingly, by their very nature, inimical to the tenets of the Road of Humanity. Some, such as the physical Disciplines (Celerity, Fortitude and Potence) are so because they allow the Prodigal to become easily distanced from the normal physical limitations of kine, and so begin to lose that critical sense of empathy with them. This may seem far-fetched to a neonate who is but a little stronger or faster than an ordinary man, but for elder Prodigals who can punch unhindered through castle walls and sustain ballista bolts to the torso without harm, the threat of emotional distance from humanity becomes very real. Other Disciplines, such as Chimerstry, Dementation, Obtenebration or Vicissitude, threaten the Prodigal's sense of humanity by forcing her to manipulate the world in obviously inhuman (and often inhumane) fashions. Still others, like Mortis and Quietus, encourage her to dwell upon death above her contemplation of life, and thereby can lead her into degeneration.

Ultimately, with each use of *any* Discipline, from Auspex to Dominate to even Vicissitude, the Prodigal must weigh the possible consequences of her actions (including moral laxity upon the road) against the potential good she could do. While it is by no means noble to use Dominate to force a mortal to offer up his blood and then erase his memory of the act afterward, it is much more commendable, according to the tenets of the *Via Humanitatis*, to do so in preference to simply seizing him roughly and draining him dry so that he will

not reveal the vampire's existence. Prodigal unlife often offers the choice of two evils, and in the case of Disciplines as with all other such choices, the individual walking upon the road is admonished to pick the lesser of them.

Prodigal Preludes

As Prodigals are taken from all walks of life, it is impossible to say more than few generalities about the Embrace and training (or lack of the latter) that goes into making the Cainite who she will be when she joins her coterie.

• **Remorse:** Perhaps the most important initial, defining feature of the Prodigal, remorse is what separates socially responsible individuals from those who are simply selfish and amoral. While the Prodigal may, at first, revel in the power and privilege of his new existence, he rapidly comes to understand that the terrible price of it (the loss of the sun, the necessity of preying upon human beings and the knowledge that he will watch everyone he loves grow old and die, for example) may not really be worth what he gains. He is not likely to come to the conclusion that these things are truly not worth what he has given up for them (else he would be tempted to end his unlife in haste), but the question should, at least sometimes, be there.

Remorse extends to more than self-pity, however. The young Prodigal, whether he comes to the road on account of tutelage or his own nature, should also feel regret that stems from a sense of sincere empathy for the suffering he must cause to others. Each road of Caine has its own negative reinforcement (personal psychological punishment for violating its ethics); the punishment of *Via Humanitatis* is feeling regret for sinning against one's neighbor. If a vampire cannot grasp the notion of having remorse for wronging another, then he cannot walk this road. It is that simple.

• **Normalcy:** While Cainites setting out upon other roads embrace those things that set them apart from the lives they once knew, aspiring Prodigals must turn back to those familiar memories, seeking to rediscover their human selves as a way of standing in opposition to brutal, terrible urges that command them to abandon basic civility in favor of abject, mindless barbarism. Cainites wishing to find themselves upon the Road of Humanity look to normalcy as a means of staving off madness, gathering spiritual strength in what made them who they were as opposed to what they now are.

The young Prodigal may thrill to her new abilities, but she is often also somewhat afraid of them, since they very blatantly pull her away from those things that remind her of her own essential humanity. She has gifts that no mortal possesses, and that thought is as terrifying

as it can be liberating. Given the choice between the two, the Prodigal often chooses to eschew the extraordinary and mysterious in favor of the ordinary and known. This does not, however, make Prodigals cowardly; it is simply a manifestation of their desire to retain what they might of the people they used to be.

• **Reason:** The Prodigal, even in his earliest nights, embraces logic and the rational mind as a bulwark against the assaults of the Beast's madness. He does not give in to its savage insistence without a fight, and endeavors, as the legacy of his human heritage, to assert self-control through the application of reason. This is not the heartless reason of the average Fiend or Graverobber, however, but instead the firm conviction that the human right to self-determination through sane, rational choice must not be overcome through the brutish forcefulness of inarticulate rage, jealousy, fear and hate.

In formally taught Prodigals, reason is probably the most stressed aspect of training, for it is the one over which the higher mind has the greatest control. While one can strive for normalcy, such is not guaranteed to anyone, Prodigal or otherwise. Likewise, at times it is hard to feel compassion toward another or remorse for a wrong dealt to her. Reason, on the other hand, is the constant companion of the educated mind.

• **Compassion:** The ideal of compassion is probably more important to Prodigals in the long term than remorse. Even the morally and spiritually weak can weep for those wrongs they have inflicted upon others; it takes true strength of character to resist the temptation to do wrong in the first place through empathy with others and a fundamental love of one's fellows. Compassion teaches the fledgling Prodigal what *not* to do. Whether this sense of compassion is a purely intellectual construct (as is the case with the formally educated on the road), or a genuine and instinctive concern for others (as is more often so with the self-taught), it is this kind of social and individual conscience that defines the Road of Humanity and imparts to its adherents a sense of right and wrong.

Compassion, more than any one other thing, enables the Prodigal to remain upon her road. While it is often remorse that first draws a fledgling Prodigal to the *Via Humanitatis*, it is usually compassion that defines *how* she will walk that road. Put simply, remorse typically illustrates the way to the road, while compassion points out its outer boundaries. If the seed of compassion is not at least latently present in the would-be Prodigal, then her journey is doomed to failure. Ultimately, it is genuine empathy for others that most thoroughly foils the wiles of the Beast, defeats it and confines it.

The Prodigal in a Coterie

The Ventruer on the Road of Kings wants to rule, while the Lasombra on the Road of Heaven wishes to serve her God, and the Gangrel on the Road of the Beast seeks to hunt, feed and defend what is his. Where does all of this leave the Prodigal? Unfortunately, the answer is not always easy. At the very least, it must vary from coterie to coterie. A few constants do emerge, however.

First and foremost, the Prodigal acts as a voice of civic responsibility in the coterie. The Scion may know what is good for the throne and the Faithful may have an eye on what best (to his thinking) represents the Will of God, but it is the Prodigal who devotes herself to knowing what impacts the community and how.

Also, the Prodigal often ends up as the talented generalist of the coterie. If a horribly corrupt mortal

PRODIGAL WAYS

Some things to keep in mind when playing a walker upon the *Via Humanitatis*:

- **The Road of Humanity is not inherently religious.** More than anything else, the *Via Humanitatis* is about upholding the social contract. Though the articulation of such a concept in the way in which we know it today is centuries in the future, it is very obvious, mechanically speaking, that the road has nothing inherently to do with God (by whatever name). Instead, it provides a perspective on crimes against a functional society of self-aware creatures and the means by which such crimes are prevented. That said, however, piety is very common in the Dark Medieval, and many Prodigals are religious Cainites. They simply choose to see their relationship with the Divine not as individuals specially cursed or chosen, but instead as normal people doing the best they can.

- **The Road of Humanity is an idealized view of how people "should" be.** The Road of Humanity takes a stricter stance on what is and is not "acceptable" behavior than almost any normal person could realistically live up to. It is, like any engineered morality, an artificial construct, designed to tightly leash the Beast, in this case through an absolute denial of its lusts. In the Dark Medieval (as in all eras), people are generally far too covetous, selfish and inconsiderate to live up to a code as unbending as the *Via Humanitatis*, but Prodigals are not trying to be exactly like other people; they are using a particular ethical mindset to stave off the depredations of the Beast through emulation of an ideal. Kine do not have to deal with constant psychic battery caused by their inner torment and unbridled gluttony given something approaching independent will and a forcefulness far beyond that which even the most temperamental or self-indulgent mortal can understand.

- **The Road of Humanity is about control.** The *Via Humanitatis* is not about instinct, sin, self-fulfillment or any other such notion. It is also not about being a nice person, though the means through which it creates control often causes the most dedicated adherents to the road to appear that way. Looking at the

murder of Abel by Cain, one can say that the fundamental ethic of the Road of Sin is what moved him to strike down his brother out of jealousy, the Road of Kings is what caused him to challenge the Creator, the Road of the Beast is what gave his wrath an outlet and the Road of Heaven is what should have made him realize that what he was doing was a sin. The Road of Humanity is the part of Cain that should have made him stay his hand because it is *socially irresponsible* to kill another human being. Propounding the *Via Humanitatis* is an effort to create a world in which the temptation to yield to the Beast is minimized to the point of negligibility. Prodigals do not try to accept the Beast or reconcile with it; they are attempting to thwart its influence and render it powerless to strip them of their self-control.

- **Prodigals must fight to be "good people," but do not always succeed.** A mortal man can be a sadistic, murdering rapist and not lose himself to his bestial urges in a way that robs him of his sentience. Others may call such a person an "animal," but that is an inaccurate statement. Animals are not wantonly cruel. A Prodigal, despite the fact that such behavior is humanly possible, cannot afford to indulge in those sorts of activities. Remember, the *Via Humanitatis* is not about how people *are* or what sorts of thoughts and actions are *possible* for humans, but instead how people would act if they were trying to shut out all the desires that make them trespass against their fellow men. That said, Prodigals, unlike the followers of virtually *all* other roads, start out with a strike against them: They are forced to commit offenses against their moral code just to acquire sustenance. Even feeding from a willing mortal or a vicious criminal is a violation. Prodigals are, in many ways, the most constantly tested of all of their kind, for their morality proscribes against the very acts that make a Cainite, a Cainite. Surrounded by temptation on all sides, they cannot help but to stumble more often than most other immortals. Conversely, however, they also experience many more opportunities for moments of truth through the course of their night-to-night existences (see p. 63).

nobleman must be approached with obeisance and humility, and yet none of his advances or offers can be accepted, no other road is inherently very well suited to this purpose. A Scion would sooner meet her Final Death than kneel before the unworthy and a Sinner would be sorely pressed not to take whatever such a man might offer. Best not to think of what the average Feral might do to the man. *Someone* has to be able to undertake these duties that normal people could without inherent moral quandary. As all other roads are fundamentally more distant from normal human value systems, they place strange limitations on the ways in which the Cainites who walk them can freely interact with the world around them.

The Prodigal Character

What makes a Prodigal who he is?

The Prodigal is primarily defined by the resolve not to allow his actions or omissions to cause undue harm to the world around him and (more importantly) the people, Cainite and kine alike, in it. Of course, this is a hard path to walk, for most Cainite moralities make allowances for the violations of others inherent in the nightly existence of the vampire. Not so with the Road of Humanity. From its loftiest ethics to its most central, the *Via Humanitatis* would seem to, of its very nature, cripple a Prodigal with inaction. It is time to dispel this myth.

The War of Princes

This epic battle of Methuselahs, sometimes fought on the battlefield, just as often fought with politics and favors, dominates Cainite society in the Dark Medieval. Even those who choose no side in this titanic clash of egos are effectively considered to have adopted a stance in the war. By default, just

being a Cainite in this age makes one a participant in the War of Princes which, unlike the War of Ages, often has occasion to be fought in a very physical fashion. But mere slaughter in the name of one's liege isn't the sum total of the War of Princes. Assassinations, assaults upon property and chattels (including ghouls, members of herds and other mortal connections), theft, slander and many other violations besides are worked in the names of the Cainite monarchs. But where do Prodigals fit into this equation?

Many refuse to participate in the war, reasoning that if such brands them dissidents, then so be it. It is a popular stance among Prodigals, a good number of whom believe that no good can come of this (largely needless, they reason) conflict over resources. After all, Cainite law and history would seem to dictate that no one ruler of the vampiric world will or even can emerge triumphant. It is the lesson of Caine and the First City, and it was learned at great pain and cost in ancient days. To cast that knowledge away would be folly, and is nothing more than arrogance on the part of short-sighted rulers who should know better.

Some Prodigals choose to involve themselves in the War of Princes by taking just the opposite stance; they stand up and claim fiefdoms of their own, in order to see a responsible and acceptable style of governance emerge in at least a few corners of the Dark

Medieval night. No Prodigal princes are so foolish as to believe that they can command the fealty of numbers such as those sworn in service to, say, Hardestadt or Montano, but they do believe that they are capable of carving out their own niches and establishing something friendly to their own way of existence.



WEeping FOR SETH

Players often see Prodigals as the spiritually weakest and most squeamish of Cainites. They alone lament some of the most basic necessities of vampiric existence, like feeding on the living and manipulating the lives of others for personal protection and gain. Some would go so far as to consider the Road of Humanity more or less untenable, in the face of other, more morally efficient, roads. While this is not true, there *are* times when the "ethical leeway" offered by other roads isn't going to cut it for the Prodigal. Sure, it's much easier to murder that nosy shipwright (who is only interested in finding out what happened to his daughter), but the Prodigal won't stand for it.

Times arise when it seems that the Prodigal's moral aspirations paralyze her and render her incapable of taking actions that would be more effective and advantageous. As it has been observed, however, when we cannot do as we will, we do as we must. Sometimes, this means entering into a time of ethical quandary and doubt, but these are the kinds of dilemmas on which great stories are built. Further, the clever Prodigal can almost always find a way to turn others to her way of thinking. Ask the Feral if that priest *absolutely must* die or if there is any better way. (Otherwise, would that not constitute the "needless cruelty" shunned by his road?) Likewise, the Sinner may believe that he has to start a fire in the leper quarter, in order to drive them out that he might use the opportunity to expand his domain, but a far-thinking Prodigal can illustrate to him the ways in which such an act, ultimately, goes against his best interests (thus compromising his adherence to the *Via Peccati*). Further, if she can find no way in which the act violates his code of conduct, she pulls what strings she possesses and *makes* it so.

Prodigals are, in a very real way, the social conscience of the Cainite world. Without them, it is doubtful that there could be any level on which vampires and kine could coexist. They act to temper the most extreme excesses of walkers upon other roads; sometimes, that requires being the sole voice of protest against what, other than a casual atrocity or two, seems like a perfectly reasonable plan.

No small number of Prodigals simply accept a station as subjects to powerful Scions (or, more rarely, walkers upon other roads) in the War of Princes. They gravitate toward whatever tasks best suit them, and serve with as much distinction (or apathy, in some cases) as they can muster. It is not a glorious way to partake in the

War of Princes, but those who seek such accolades are advised to seek truth by avenues other than the *Via Humanitatis*.

The Most Difficult Issue

Feeding.

It is, viewed in almost any light, a trespass against another living being. Undertaken with the aid of mind-altering vampiric Disciplines or perpetrated upon members of a willing herd, it is still a theft of life by a parasitic being. How, then, do Prodigals manage to acquire their "daily bread" without a swift and inexorable slide into degeneration and madness?

Sadly, no hard-and-fast answers to this question present themselves, because so much of any acceptable answer must be tied up in the psychology of the individual Prodigal. Strictly speaking, willingly biting into the flesh of another person and extracting blood is "planned violation of another," a serious sin on the Road of Humanity. Feeding, however, is an absolute requirement. And, just as human beings do as they must when push comes to shove, so too does the Prodigal bow to necessity and find a way to continue to exist while upholding her beliefs.

As noted above, many Prodigals seek to cultivate a herd early in their unives. While nothing about a vessel's willingness to be fed upon makes the act of feeding any more morally correct, it *does* help to assuage the guilt that is otherwise present when dragging an unwilling victim, kicking and screaming, into the dark and drinking her dry. Indeed, Prodigal sires who pass the road's tenets on to their childer are often given to imparting some fraction of their own herds to those neonates, in order to give them (after the fashion of mortal parents) some small resources to start out with. For those unfortunates who, for whatever reason, lack recourse to a herd, a few other options exist.

Naturally, the stereotype of the penitent Prodigal skulking the alleys and filthy corners of a dingy city, clutching rats and the mean beasts of the Earth to his quivering lips for sustenance had to begin somewhere. Though rarely are such well-meaning Cainites successful in their self-imposed injunction against drinking the lives of kine, a scant few do manage to get by (it would be highly inaccurate to say "thrive") on such meager fare. Generally, these sorts must remove themselves to places far from the Children of Seth, for the very sight of a mortal man could well induce frenzy in a Cainite who has long subsisted upon nothing but the thin vitae of animals.

Some Prodigals content themselves with slaking their thirst upon only those members of society who are actively detrimental to its healthy course, such as murderers, thieves and rapists. While it is certainly not right

CRY HAVOC!

The War of Princes is fought upon many battlefields: the high court; the shadowed corridor; in the hearts of disloyal ghouls and servants; and, indeed, upon the literal battlefield. Of course, just through the normal process of engaging in the so-called "sport of kings," a Prodigal is apt to commit numerous sins against his code, some of them quite serious. Surely, though, Prodigals do not acquit themselves as cowards when the time comes to make a stand in this Cainite world at war?

The answer is not an easy one. Given a command by a prince to lay siege to another prince's holdings, the average Prodigal would have to wonder why. If the reason is simple greed, then he would be apt to turn down the request (whether or not it was phrased as a request). Prodigals do not engage in slaughter for the sake of their own avarice; why would they do so to satisfy another's? If, on the other hand, it was in order to "liberate" (for whatever dubious reasons) an area from the yoke of a vicious and tyrannical Cainite ruler (or at least one markedly worse than the Prodigal's own), then the matter becomes the common quandary of choosing the lesser evil. This is also the case if the Prodigal's domain (or a worthy ruler's) is attacked from without.

Prodigals are not cowards (no more so than the adherents to any other road, at any rate). They have

their own fighting order, the True Knights of the Order of the Setting Sun, dedicated to combating the most heinous and monstrous of Cainites, the Soulless. They stand up for peaceable solutions when others clamor for war, no matter how unpopular the sentiment. They refuse to support an unjust leader, no matter her methods of "persuasion." They advocate reasonable and responsible action when others clamor for swift and expedient responses of the most brutal and inhumane variety. This is not the case with all Prodigals; some are truly *are* cowards, but they are the exception, rather than the rule.

Few self-respecting Prodigals would engage in many of the most loathsome aspects of Cainite warfare; smearing pestilent feces in well buckets, firing plague-laden corpses from catapults, using the powers of their Disciplines to fake "visions of Hell" that set brother upon brother, or any of the other low and contemptible staples of vampiric battle strategy. Such acts, by their nature, run counter to the ethics espoused by the Road of Humanity. Instead, look to Prodigals to stand valiantly beside mortal troops upon the field of battle, seeking to save what lives they may; and to provide voices of reason in the courtrooms of great lords and ladies among the Cainites, trying to prevent the need for bloodshed in the first place. It is neither the most glorious path to walk, nor the most popular, but the right thing to do rarely is.

to feed upon any person, no matter how abhorrent, there is something to be said for temporarily incapacitating (or even permanently removing) such unpleasant sorts. Just as the Road of Humanity advocates a sense of moral restraint in the individual Cainite, it is to be expected that the individual Prodigal will do her part to lessen the hold of evil men (who pervert the values of society to their own ends or else violate them completely) over civilization. Sometimes, that takes the form of undercutting their efforts through the use of careful use of connections and social savvy, while at other times it consists of nothing more complicated than leaving them too weakened and faint to rise from bed for a week — or if their offenses are particularly dire, ever again.

Moments of Truth

Like adherents to all other Cainite roads, walkers upon the Road of Humanity sometimes find themselves within a moment of truth, made to choose between the principles espoused by that road and moral failure. Sometimes, these moments arise due to a failing of the Cainite in question (such as a grievous sin against the road's beliefs), and sometimes on account of a profound

revelation or a particularly notable ethical accomplishment (upholding the Road of Humanity despite dire risk and grave personal harm, for example).

Reason Versus Passion

Reason and the higher passions (those which cry out for things other than the basic needs of survival) are the distinguishing features that make human beings distinct from animals. A beast can apply a very limited sense of logic to a problem (such as when a bear pushes in a door to get at the food beyond it), and can feel emotions such as rage and the need to mate; but it cannot reason or feel emotions such as courtly love or genuine remorse. Within the Cainite, however, these two equally compelling concepts are set at war with one another, to the ultimate gain of the Beast.

Each road advocates its own method of dealing with this phenomenon. The *Via Humanitatis*, for its own part, counsels a wary embrace of higher passion, fettered by the application of reason. In effect, the Prodigal does not seek to shut out his emotions, but he *does* want to keep them from spilling over and giving the Beast leave to assert command over him. Prodigals, in terms of their interac-



tions with others, often come off as reserved and hesitant. This is not because they are, as a whole, indecisive or slow-witted, but instead because they carefully consider the consequences, both internal and external, of their actions before committing to a given course.

Thus, for the Prodigal, the moment of truth illustrates the temperance of passion by reason, with both applied to the greater goal of reaffirming the Cainite's place as a creature of the world, a part of society and a being worthy of redemption. Sometimes, this comes by means of an uplifting experience, but it just as often realized through a failing that the vampire learns to transcend. Sometimes, it is as simple as learning to forgive oneself for a sin or earning the forgiveness of others. Ultimately, all such revelations serve to bring the Cainite closer to a healthy human psychology and deny the Beast in every way.

The Prodigal Prince

While uncommon, it does happen that a walker upon the Road of Humanity ends up in a position of rule among her fellow Cainites. While some think that this is perhaps a violation of the spirit of the road, most Prodigal leaders are hasty to point out that this is most certainly not the case. A wide variety of reasons exist for one upon this road to wish to take charge. Adherence to the Road of Humanity does not excise ambition, and there are certainly those

Prodigals who would seek the mantle of a Cainite prince in order to satisfy their egos. Others find themselves guided by circumstance or thrust by necessity into positions of control, whether they wish it or not. Some want to depose an unjust leader or give order to a chaotic region. A Prodigal might rule for many reasons and they go about such an endeavor in several ways.

Governance without Rule

This is perhaps the most quintessentially Prodigal of the approaches to leadership. Governing by example, the Cainite establishes a sense of community and prosperity, and helps his fellows to thrive under his direction. While he enforces the Traditions of Caine as a ruler (if he does not, he will rapidly find himself deposed, after all), his objective is to create a vampiric state in which all of his subjects have the sense of responsibility and accountability necessary to police their own actions. Particularly inspiring Prodigals are even sometimes capable of moving their followers to do so. Often, such Prodigals control their fiefs more out of necessity than any real desire, imposing order because no one else will or can do so.

Executed well, this approach leaves no one in a position to argue the effectiveness and fairness of the Cainite's governance. Who, after all, wants to see a just leader, content to allow his subjects to conduct them-

reprehensible enough proposition in the eyes of most Prodigals, but must also be made an example of, in order to dissuade further such thoughts of rebellion?

Those Prodigals who would take up the mantle of a traditional Cainite Prince do well to surround themselves with servants and allies who are capable of dispensing with such threats quickly, efficiently and, perhaps most importantly, without ever bringing the matter to the Prodigal's attention. Every good ruler needs her spy-master and her assassin, and Cainite rulers are no exception to this axiom.

Democracy

This option (not really a system of rule proper) is best undertaken in locales with a considerable number of Prodigals (preferably with more representation from the Road of Humanity than any other single road), or where there are at least one or two exceedingly powerful Prodigals (or, in the best case, both). Prodigals of the High Clans are particularly well-inclined toward this course of action, since it harks back to the ideals of the ancient civilizations wherein they maintain their first codified the tenets of the *Via Humanitas* (with no small help from the prevailing social structures of the kine in those times and places).

Of course, one who would entertain thoughts of a democracy must also be willing to acknowledge all of the problems inherent in the concept of "One Cainite, One Vote." True democracies become quickly bogged down in internal politics in short order without the presence of charismatic leaders who serve as rallying points for bloc-voting, which, in turn, then essentially transforms the democracy into a demagoguery. This is not to say that such a vision is unattainable (witness Julia Antasia's slowly succeeding efforts at the reformation of the Eternal Senate in the Germanic Holy Roman Empire), just that it is difficult at best.

Naturally, many adherents to the Roads of Heaven and of Kings despise democracies as perversions of the natural order (in which singular rulers are ordained by God); and many walkers upon these two roads, arguably the two most politically powerful of the Dark Medieval, would happily band together with like-minded thinkers to quash such pretensions of equality. Further, the would-be democratic Cainite state must also be monitored for ambition within the ranks of its own citizens, for history has proven that it takes little for the most well-intentioned system of common governance to be subverted by one or two truly covetous souls within its ranks

selves as they wish so long as they respect one another and uphold the Traditions, deposed, only to be replaced with some grasping Scion or fanatic Faithful? Any flaw in the design, however, is all the more accentuated by the unorthodoxy of the Prodigal's praxis, and many are those who would take advantage of any weakness or failing on the part of a Cainite who seeks to rule through kindness and common sense rather than might. It is a thin line best walked only by those who possess the cunning, the intelligence and the skill to manage doing so without stumbling, for vampires are an unforgiving lot.

Indeed, even if the Prodigal governs well, he must be prepared to field challenges to his "authority," from both within and without his demesne. Many Cainites are conditioned to regard non-totalitarian systems of rule as weak and contemptible, and feel some overriding need to depose any who would rather inspire than rule. It is a curious paradox of Cainite nature, for many who are perfectly aware that they would be happier under the gentle governance of a Prodigal can be easily swayed, by appeals to the "simple truths" of vampiric existence, to turn on such a benevolent leader. Thus, any Prodigal who would oversee his domain in this fashion must be constantly alert for both the conqueror's sword hoisted beneath the full moon's light and the dagger of the assassin, clutched in the trembling hands of the so-called friend.

Traditional Princedom

So long as the Prodigal adheres to the tenets of her road, there is no reason why she cannot rule in the manner to which most Cainites are accustomed. A politically savvy prince well-schooled in the ethics of the Road of Humanity is probably one of the finest princes another Cainite could hope to ask for, fair and just, with a sense of devotion toward the well-being of both her subjects and the kine among whom they dwell. In theory, this is an ideal situation. In practice, only the most politically cunning and capable Prodigals can manage this maddening juggling act.

Traditional princedom is a very hands-on system of rule; it often requires the would-be ruler be willing to undertake loathsome tasks, or else order others to do so in her name. This can be dangerous ground for the Prodigal to tread. While night-to-night affairs of the fief don't (usually) require such abhorrent modes of thinking, what does the Prodigal do when her rule is threatened by a persistent and blatant traitor within her own center of rule, one who minces no words about wanting to take from the Prodigal that which is her? What happens when such an individual must not only be disposed of (a

PATH OF BREATH

VIA ANIMA

With a reasonably strong presence among the instinctive walkers on the Road of Humanity, the Inspired (literally, "those who are breathed into") blur the distinction between *acting* human and *being* human. What, they reason, is the difference between those who are human and those who make themselves to seem so? Is humanity found in the beating of a heart and the inevitable descent into old age and death, or is it something less visceral, a product of the aspirations of the spirit? Many who are human by birth, after all, cast aside that birthright in the pursuit of cruel, selfish and unworthy ends. Likewise, those who have been outcast from the race of Seth might, through diligent observance of the ways of man, hope to become human in spirit once again.

The *Via Anima* counsels the denunciation of special Cainite practices, instead admonishing the individual vampire to find meaning and purpose among mortal men. By doing so, the path teaches, the Beast can be made to forget itself, to become lost in the joys of life and so lose its desire to do harm. In this manner, the Beast is not so much defeated as it relents to simple pleasures and the basic human longing to have a place among one's fellows. Such Cainites are known to reject the scheming and violence endemic to their kind, favoring instead a simpler approach to existence. Such vampires take their joy not in power, but in the laughter of children, the smell of fine foods, the very act of drawing breath and the companionship of normal folk. To these Cainites, it is participation in human endeavor, rather than conscious effort to adhere to human morality, that defines a man.

While few Inspired are so naïve as to believe that simply conducting themselves as mortal men do will eventually make them human again; they recognize the value, both personal and societal, in acting like normal human beings. If nothing else, such conduct defies the lure of the Beast and yields up to it no strength with which to cause the Cainite to offend against others or herself. Salvation is not found in personal reflection or overarching social consciousness; *true* humanity is discovered in the moments when the vampire ceases to be a monster within her own mind, through whatever means. All else is unimportant. While it is admirable to see the road clearly, so much better off is she who can navigate the path without the need to consciously perceive it at all.

Additional Ethics of Breath

- Do not shy away from human labors; therein is found the spark of life.
- The Beast dwells within the lifeless heart and cannot endure those things that remind it of human vitality.
- Life is not so much a physical state as a spiritual one.

Practices: The Inspired don't generally have many special practices inherent to their beliefs. In fact, many maintain that actively going out of the way to establish such traditions for the path would, in fact, run quite counter to its spirit. Instead, Inspired Cainites seek meaning in more mundane activities: gardening, contemplative walks, keeping a pet hound, or ordinary conversation and revelry, for example. Of course, such practices vary from place to place, and while religious debate may be a normal activity in the Islamic world, analyzing the intent of the Almighty is not generally considered seemly for most people in Europe. Thus, the individual Inspired must judge for herself what constitutes "normal human behavior," based upon her life experiences and the place in which she abides. Many Inspired, coming to the path by way of instinct, never really give the matter that much thought.

Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control

Hierarchy of Sins Against Breath

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Failure to seem in every way human	We are shaped by others' reactions to us.
9	Inhuman actions under duress	Our actions in desperate moments define us.
8	Injury to another person	Animals cause harm without guilt; men do not.
7	Shunning normal human interaction	The Beast cannot thrive within the human heart.
6	Accidental violation of another	Humans own responsibility for their actions.
5	Inhuman actions when unthreatened	Indulge the Beast and it shall grow strong.
4	Impassioned violation of another	Men are not ruled by their darkest passions.
3	Planned violation of another	Such brutality is antithetical to humanity.
2	Casual violation of another	The Beast thrills at such affirmations of death.
1	The most heinous and demented acts	Are you man or beast?

PATH OF COMMUNITY

VIA COMMUNITAS (ALSO TARIQ EL-UMMA)

A natural outgrowth of the civic consciousness espoused by the core Road of Humanity, the Path of Community takes such a sensibility to its logical conclusion. Especially popular in places with large populations (many cities in Muslim lands, in particular), this path teaches that the first duty of the Cainite is not to individuals, but instead toward society as a whole as a vehicle for salvation. Often, those most drawn to this path were deeply immersed in the community (especially the less fortunate side of the community) in mortal life. Poor village priests and leaders among the peasantry, for example, are much likelier to walk the Path of Community than wealthy archbishops and rulers among men.

Known as the Tariq el-Umma in Muslim lands, the Path of Community is especially popular among Prodigal Assamites, who usually dwell among such great numbers of kine as to make it virtually impossible to, in good conscience, exalt the one above the many. Many Civilized, as they call themselves (in the sense of being worthy of or part of civilization), are formally trained to the path, since it is often a counterintuitive step for a once-human creature to look past the faces she sees before her and see the good of all those with whom she shares a society. Still, some few do come to the Path of Community by way of intuition and instinct, especially those who were in life regarded as pillars of the community (of whatever sort; a particularly well-respected former member of the local leper colony is just as likely to find this path as an influential farmer whose family has dwelt in the area for centuries).

Civilized Prodigals are usually well received by Cainite rulers, since it is well known that they do their best to shore up the social order and to maintain peace and balance between the Cainites and kine. Of course, tyrannical or unjust rulers like them somewhat less, knowing that the civic consciousness of such Cainites may move them to take up arms against those who govern through fear and pain. Just as the Civilized do not condone wickedness within themselves, so, too, do they reject the idea of bending knee to those who harm the community in order to exalt themselves. Accordingly, the most self-indulgent of Scions and Sinners scorn the Civilized. Likewise, many Ferals find the very idea of commitment to civilization worthy of derision and so look with distaste upon them.

Additional Ethics of Community

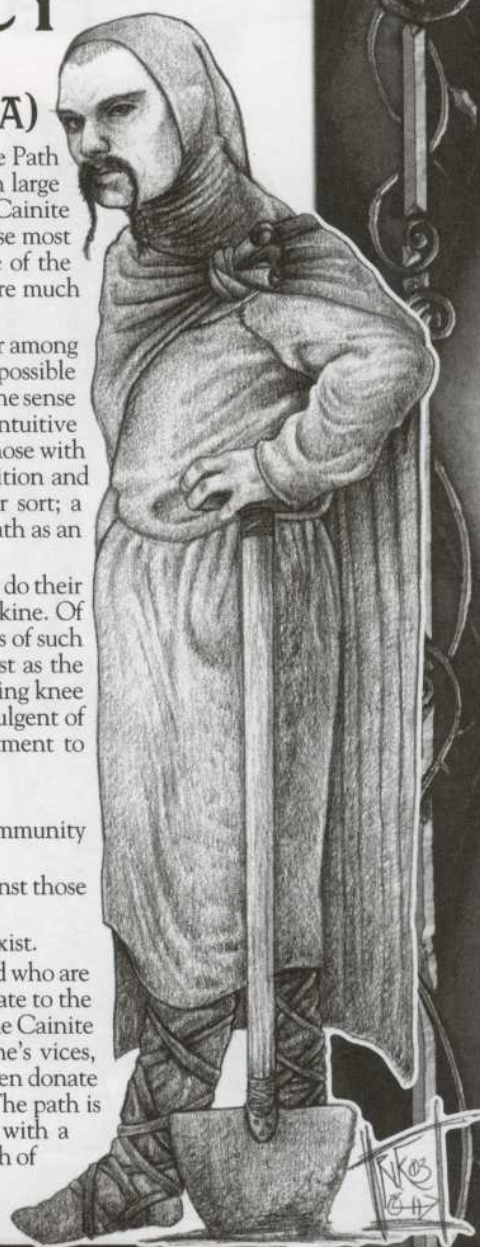
- Dwell among the people and share both their levity and their sorrow, for the desire for community is the most essentially human need.

- Never abuse the trust of those among whom you dwell, for the Beast longs to turn you against those closest to you.

- The races of Caine and Seth in their entirety are the greater community in which you exist.

Practices: Older, more experienced walkers upon the *Via Communitas* induct those Civilized who are trained to the path with pomp and ceremony. Such rites stress the responsibility of the new initiate to the greater community of mankind, as well as to its microcosms; the individual human society and the Cainite court. Such childer are taught that, by sharing one's virtues with the world, the weight of one's vices, including the Beast, are carried by many and that all burdens are thereby made less. Civilized often donate generously to the community, giving of time, monies and whatever else seems to be required. The path is not really organized, though its adherents do consider themselves to be brothers and sisters with a common responsibility toward one another. Bonds of respect, rather than authority, hold the Path of Community together.

Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control



Hierarchy of Sins against Community

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Thoughts that defy the greater good	Criminal thoughts lead to criminal acts.
9	Acting against the greater good in any way	Selfishness begot Caine's own crime.
8	Injury to another person	Hurting others hurts society.
7	Flagrant disregard for a community's laws	He who cannot respect the rules cannot belong.
6	Accidental violation of another	Society suffers for every crime, intentional or not.
5	Wanton destruction	Property is part of what keeps civilization intact.
4	Impassioned violation of another	Without control, there can be no belonging.
3	Planned violation of another	Let him who knowingly works evil be outcast.
2	Casual violation of another	Such monstrosity has no place in a community.
1	The most heinous and demented acts	Acts of such evil deny civilization utterly.

PATH OF ILLUMINATION

VIA LUMINIS

Despised as a possible outgrowth of the philosophies that led to the inception of the Cainite Heresy (a claim supported by little in the way of compelling evidence), the Path of Illumination is a dualist philosophy that encourages Cainites to seek out the Bitter Journey toward Golconda and, thereby, outgrow the bonds of the rude material world. The Illuminated, as they prefer to be called ("Blasphemers" is a favored title for them among the remainder of the Road of Humanity and its divergent paths), maintain that Caine never committed a sin in his murder of Abel; in fact, he *could not have*, since he existed in a world without defined moral law. To their thinking, he was punished without an understanding of the possibility of transgression, since he was given no strictures by which to live. Further, they believe that the "creator" whose agents appeared to curse the Third Mortal is a false god, and the one truly guilty of sin. To their eyes, cursing Caine in a manner which forced him to repeat the very crime (which he was never told was wrong until *after* the fact) that resulted in the maledictions of the angels is the evil act, since the "One Above" (a villainous figure which they consider analogous to the Demiurge) should, in theory, possess the foresight and understanding to comprehend the dire consequences of the act — unless, of course, the entity behind the Curse of Caine was *neither omniscient nor what it claimed to be*.

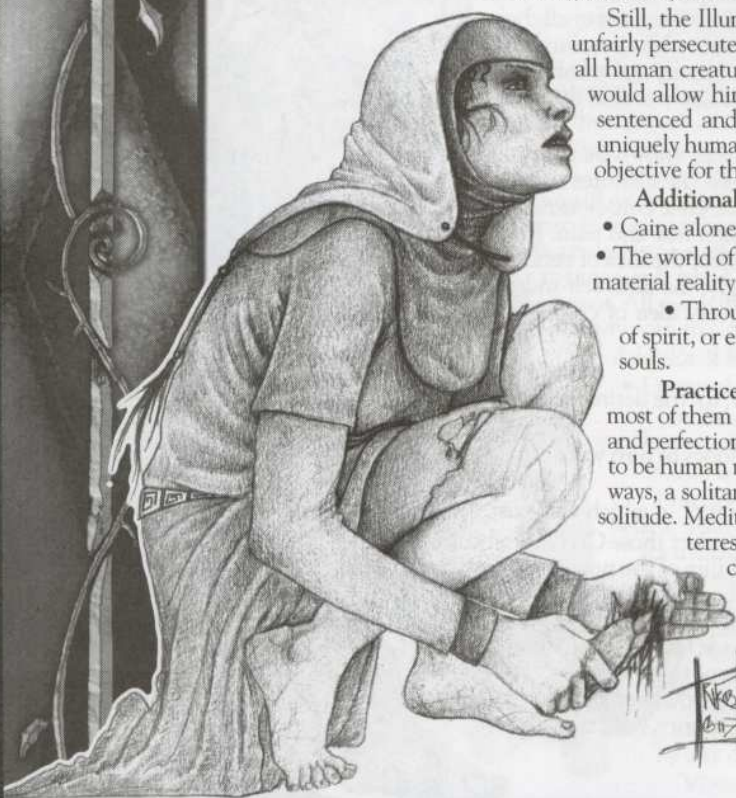
Still, the Illuminated do believe that the True God revealed Himself to Caine, offering the unfairly persecuted Dark Wanderer a gift of hope in the form of the Bitter Journey. After all, he of all human creatures possessed the lifespan necessary to realize the transformations of spirit that would allow him to transcend the parameters of the material prison into which he had been sentenced and attain his ultimate potential. The journey toward Golconda, the pursuit of uniquely human perfection on the part of the lone seeker, took shape that day, the only worthy objective for the morally upright Cainite, harbinger of the Incomprehensible Divine.

Additional Ethics of Illumination

- Caine alone is without sin or even the capacity for sin.
- The world of flesh is a prison, intended to ensnare the human soul (the only substance within material reality capable of evolution to perfection) in an eternal cycle of reincarnation.
- Through Golconda, Cainites transform their souls into a vessel for the perfected world of spirit, or else become human once more and, thereby, discover the means to liberate those souls.

Practices: Generally speaking, the Illuminated are not faithless, just irreligious. In fact, most of them believe that the human (and, thus, Cainite) potential for enlightenment, peace and perfection *cannot* be attained through adherence to external sources of authority. To them, to be human means to be without limitations. Further, as the Path of Illumination is, in many ways, a solitary journey of discovery, most of the practices of the path can be undertaken in solitude. Meditations are common, upon the nature of the Beast, the soul, the Divine and the terrestrial. Rare gatherings of the Illuminated, on the other hand, are uncharacteristically joyous affairs. Taking comfort in the presence of their fellows, the Illuminated put aside the heavy burden of their holy task for a time and revel in what it means to belong to a brotherhood of the intellectually and spiritually liberated. Of course, those who would judge the Illuminated poorly view these celebrations as debauches, forums for all manner of devil-worship, human sacrifice and other such foul deeds.

Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control



Hierarchy of Sins Against Illumination

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Failure to openly seek Golconda at all costs	You are the light of hope.
9	Accepting the rule of others	Only through self-determination shall you be free.
8	Harming or controlling others	The enlightened reject both violence and dominion.
7	Theft and robbery	You have been liberated from material needs.
6	Accidental violation of another	Ignorance does not excuse cruelty.
5	Failure to pursue wisdom and enlightenment	If not for understanding, why do you walk this path?
4	Impassioned violation of another	Those who act as beasts become beasts.
3	Planned violation of another	Reason alone is no shield against the Beast's wiles.
2	Casual violation of another	Shed enough blood and your soul will drown in it.
1	The most heinous and demented acts	Would you so callously betray your human potential?

PATH OF VIGOR

VIA VIREO

The Path of Vigor teaches a sense of respect for not only the *ideal* of Humanity, but also its *nature*. Rovers are drawn to the human tendency to innovate, expand its horizons and otherwise move forward, for both good and ill. The *Via Vireo* is a dynamic, forceful path, not much given to introspection or contemplation. Sometimes, this results in a sense of aimlessness, as the Rover searches for meaning and focus; but it is, such Cainites believe, far better to be in motion than in stillness. Most walkers upon this path come to it instinctively, though a significant minority find it through formalized teachings, emulating Caine in his aspect as the Dark Wanderer, forever walking the Earth. This ethic extends also into the psychology of the Rover (by whatever means she came to the path), resulting in the adoption of trends, ideologies, fashions and other hallmarks of the healthy, vital, mortal society.

Rovers come in a few different varieties. Some embrace the notion of literal movement, never long settling in a given place and developing no attachments to people or things. Such vampires do well among wandering mercenary troupes, merchant companies, Crusader bands and other groups given to long journeys upon distant trails. Some are inspired by intellectual motion, pushing the known and accepted boundaries of learning (in whatever field or fields) through the use of innovative techniques and a persistent drive toward progress. Yet others turn to matters of the soul, adopting or even cultivating new systems of philosophical belief or religious worship, and thereby traveling in spirit. A scant few upon the Path of Vigor accept *all* of these principles, ever in motion, each a microcosm of the larger motions of mortal society as it undergoes its continual permutations and transformations.

As innovators and, sometimes, revolutionaries, Rovers are sometimes poorly received, especially by particularly hidebound or traditionalist Cainites. Often, Cainite rulers view the coming of a Rover as a bad omen; and some simply do not allow such Cainites to remain within their domains for long, fearing that change, the great bane of most Cainites, will ride in their wake, sweeping away the old order and replacing it with something else. On the other hand, domains of more scientifically, religiously or philosophically enlightened and forward-thinking Cainites are often opened, with warmest welcome, to the dynamic and vital Rovers.

Additional Ethics of Vigor

- Always remain in motion, whether physically, mentally or spiritually.
- Embrace change, for it will come, regardless.
- Stagnancy begets boredom, inflexibility and cruelty; all avenues to the

Beast's control.

Practices: Rovers have few formalized traditions of their own, accepting as they do that all things change and grow in their own time, a natural outgrowth of the principles that guide adherents to the Path of Vigor. Often, though, such Cainites are to be found in the thick of kine life, enjoying the company of nomads, free thinkers, revolutionaries, heretics, crusaders and others who, whether physically, mentally or spiritually, are moving forward, blazing new trails for others to follow and otherwise walking into territory yet unexplored. As many find the path on their own, there are but few initiation rites for Rovers. Some have remarked that the surest sign that the rare, formally trained Rover is ready for the path comes when she looks around to realize that her mentor is gone, leaving her to her own devices, thereafter to choose her own way and discover for herself the many mysteries that will unfold during her long journey in the world.

Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control

Hierarchy of Sins Against Vigor

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Failure to embrace something new every night	Life is change.
9	Fighting any impending change	Change is the trial that brings growth.
8	Injury to another person	Harm creates fear; fear paralyzes.
7	Theft and robbery	Even property has a proper means of motion.
6	Accidental violation of another	Ignorance does not excuse cruelty.
5	Embracing permanence	The only thing that lasts forever is death.
4	Impassioned violation of another	Even spontaneity can take on abhorrent shapes.
3	Planned violation of another	Forethought should be turned to worthier ends.
2	Casual violation of another	Such jadedness indicates a soul devoid of wonder.
1	The most heinous and demented acts	These are the hallmarks of a dead and stagnant spirit.



New Discipline Techniques

Prodigals are not notorious for their rush to innovate with the powers of the blood. Disciplines are well and good, but they often serve to distance the Cainite from her human nature and give her ready, unnatural resources to call upon that distract her from normal, healthy, mortal responses to situations. Still, when vampiric powers can be turned to the end of growing closer to humanity, in truth or simply in appearance, or when keen insights into the nature of humanity can be gleaned, Prodigals are just as eager as any other vampires to learn and develop new abilities.

Beast's Communion (Animalism 3, Auspex 4)

Favored by the Illuminated, this ability enables the vampire to force another Cainite's Beast to the fore, there to share the consciousness with the higher self, and compel it to speak through the rational human mind in a manner comprehensible to reasoning beings. When occupying the consciousness with a Cainite's reasoning mind, the Beast is given a voice by which its otherwise alien lusts can be known. The Beasts of different clans are, as a rule, very different in their miens. A Ravnos' Beast is a sly, cunning thing, while a Nosferatu's is base and wretched, and a Brujah's brutal and proud, for example. Whatever the Cainite's clan, however, his Beast is compelled to speak like a person of whatever intelligence the Cainite subjected to this technique himself possesses.

System: Spend a point of Willpower and roll Manipulation + Intimidation (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). If successful, spend a blood point (which lures out the subject's Beast). At this time, both parties engage in an opposed Self-Control/Instinct roll (both against a difficulty of the other's Willpower). If the subject wins, then her Beast retreats, knowing that something is amiss, and cannot be ensnared for at least another full lunar month. If the Prodigal wins, the subject's Beast is locked into his rational mind for a number of turns equal to the number of successes scored in the initial Manipulation + Intimidation roll, incapable of freeing itself and retreating back into the depths of the subconscious. During this time, the Beast must truthfully answer any questions put to it in a reasoning manner (though it may bluster and seek to mislead, it cannot freely engage in brutality or outright deception). The Beast remembers actions undertaken during past frenzies with absolute clarity. Likewise, it knows when outside influences previously forced it to the fore, whether or not the Cainite himself is aware of such. Note that,

while a Cainite may be willing to submit to the use of this power, the Beast always attempts to resist imprisonment within the sane mind, meaning that no vampire can freely relent to the use of Beast's Communion (in other words, all the above rolls are necessary every time).

While a Beast is compelled to speak with reason and intelligence, its reasons for doing what it does are often simplistic and monstrous. Asking a Toreador's Beast, for example, why it slew that Cainite's loveliest and most favored ghoul during frenzy, might result in the answer of, "I hated her and her pretty face." Particularly intense sessions of communion with the Beast (a conversation which the rational mind of the Cainite is perfectly aware of) can actually help to bring on a moment of truth, as well as to unravel mysteries left buried in the throes of frenzy and to discern the motivations behind its actions. A Cainite may not use this power upon herself.

Experience Cost: 28

MET: Intermediate *Auspex*, Intermediate *Animalism*. By spending a Blood Trait and a Social Trait and engaging the target in a *Self-Control/Instinct* test (retest *Intimidation*), the Cainite can compel a target's Beast to rise to the surface and answer questions in a rational manner. This Discipline lasts for a number of minutes equal to the user's permanent Social Traits minus the target's Willpower (minimum one minute). Though it should be noted that while casual brutality is forbidden by this Discipline, it does not prevent the target from truly frenzying during this time if sufficiently provoked, nor can it halt a frenzy in progress. As noted above, the Beast remembers all actions taken during previous frenzies as well as any times it was forced to the fore, and while it can bluster or attempt to mislead an interrogator, it cannot be outright deceitful, though its reasons are often as simple and monstrous as itself. It should also be noted that the target's rational mind is perfectly aware of any conversations that take place. Players are expected to roleplay this interaction as fully as possible, taking such considerations as clan, *Via*, Derangements and other factors to create a compelling persona for their Beast. A target may not relent to this Discipline's use, and an unsuccessful use of this Discipline renders a target's Beast immune to this Discipline for a full lunar month. A Cainite may not use this Discipline on herself.

This Discipline may not be used on mortals, though at the Storyteller's discretion other supernatural beings that harbor similar darker supernatural instincts (such as older ghouls, Lupines or even certain spirits) may be targeted with this Discipline. All

usage costs for these beings is doubled, however, and Rage, Angst or other appropriate Traits are substituted for the *Self-Control/Instinct* test. Inquisitive Cainites must also be advised that while enough similarities might exist to allow this Discipline's use, a Lupine's animalistic Rage abides by entirely different rules than a Cainite's Beast; and when used on ghosts, it is often as though the Cainite is suddenly conversing with an entirely different person....

Experience Cost: 14

Mortal Skin (Dominate 3, Obfuscate 3)

Those Cainites who master this technique need never worry about failing to exhale a breath of steam in the middle of winter or putting chills through a mortal's body by laying an icy cold hand upon him. Though she is not naturally warm to the touch or flushed with life, for example, mortals *perceive* her to be.

System: The player spends one Willpower point to activate this power; it then remains active for the remainder of the night unless the character wills it to terminate (reactivating it then costs another Willpower point). Mortals simply see all the normal signs of life on the Cainite; though she has no pulse, a mortal touching her wrist will feel one; and kine see on her the healthy blush of living flesh. This power does not conceal obviously unnatural features (such as a Tzimisce's *zulo* shape or skin harder than granite) and does not disguise the individual as anyone else; it just makes her look and feel like a perfectly human version of herself (or another, if she chooses to use Obfuscate to appear as someone else). Further, this technique cannot conceal damage to the body (thus, if the Cainite is walking around with a severed arm and six crossbow bolts protruding from her stomach, this power will not really do much for her).

Experience cost: 21

MET: Intermediate *Dominate*, Intermediate *Obfuscate*. This Discipline essentially creates a continuous, low-level illusion of human normalcy surrounding the Cainite, fueled by subliminal suggestions created by *Dominate*. Mortals swear that they see the Cainite's breath fog during cold weather, her skin feels warm to their touch, and even the most studious chirurgeon detects a distinct pulse upon examination. While it can cover a certain amount of "lesser" disfigurements (such as the blighted visage of a Nosferatu or minor animalistic features of a Gangrel), it cannot hide blatantly supernatural features such as wings, taloned hands or rocklike skin, nor does it hide the effects of damage to the body. However, even with those limi-

tations this Discipline generally suffices to cover the many minor yet telling details that can betray a Cainite for what she truly is, and one never knows when the trained eyes of the Inquisition might be watching.

Note that as this Discipline is based partly on *Dominate*, which means vampires of lower generation automatically recognize the deception, as well as *Obfuscate*, which means that otherwise vulnerable Cainites with high enough *Auspex* levels (or other supernatural beings with similarly keen senses) may be able to see through it as well. This Discipline is considered always active unless willingly suppressed or grossly violated in front of witnesses (such as walking down the street in *zulo* form or casually holding one's own severed arm), at which time a Willpower Trait is required to reactivate it. This Discipline should be simulated with appropriate makeup and/or description cards as much as possible.

Experience Cost: 10

New Ritual

Awaken the Quiet Heart

Level-Four Mortis Ritual

This rite creates a rude mockery of human autonomic function in a Cainite. The withered heart begins to beat rhythmically, causing cold blood to flow, the lungs inhale and exhale of their own accord and other such nuances of mortal life reestablish themselves within the unliving body. The vampire looks no more lifelike than normal, but many truly inhuman Cainites are terribly disturbed by the return of sensations and responses thought long ago abandoned.

System: The vampire must spend a half-hour delicately and ritually extracting the heart from a human corpse (a body in any state of decay will do, so long as the heart is more or less intact). The Cainite then places the heart within a circle of grave dust and sprinkles it with a single point of his own blood; the player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8). The heart beats, holding the power of the rite for a number of hours equal to successes rolled. In order to affect another Cainite with the power of this ritual, the Cappadocian must hold the heart aloft while within plain sight of the intended subject and speak her name three times aloud. The ritual heart ceases to function, and the effects detailed above take hold in the targeted vampire's body for a number of hours equal to the successes rolled in the initial casting.

Cainites who adhere to a road that teaches either Conviction or Instinct suffer a -1 dice pool penalty

(minimum dice pool of 1) for all rolls made during the effect's duration, while those who walk a road that teaches *both* of these Virtues are down -2 dice (minimum dice pool of 0) for the same amount of time. Those who tread a road that practices both *Conscience* and *Self-Control* are, while possibly disturbed by the ritual's effects, mechanically unhindered. A Cainite deleteriously affected by this ritual may expend a point of Willpower at the beginning of a scene to negate the ritual's effects upon her for the duration of that scene. Note that Cainites upon certain roads, such as *Humanity* or the *Beast* (or even *Metamorphosis* or *Bones*), may actually experience a moment of truth from the experience of having this rite used upon them.

This ritual has no effect when used upon any being other than a Cainite.

MET: Intermediate Ritual. In addition to normal ritual requirements and those specified above, this ritual requires a Mental test (retest *Occult*); the difficulty of this test is generally seven Traits, though performing it on another adds an additional Trait to this difficulty, and the Narrator may also increase the difficulty by up to three Traits depending on the condition of the heart itself. A target may not relent to the use of this rite. If successful, the ritual's effects last for a number of scenes/hours equal to the ritualist's permanent *Occult* rating. During this time, Cainites walking a road that teaches either *Conviction* or *Instinct* are at a one-Trait penalty on all tests due to the difficulty their inhuman mindset has dealing with these bodily functions; Cainites on a road that teaches *both* Virtues are at a two-Trait penalty. A Willpower Trait may be spent to negate this penalty for one scene/hour, if the target desires. Vampires that practice both *Conscience* and *Self-Control*, while possibly disturbed, suffer no penalties, and depending on their own outlook might even experience a moment of truth from their renewed sense of connection to life (though Storytellers should take care that this ritual is not abused solely to gain this benefit). This ritual does not function on non-Cainites.

Merits and Flaws

As is the case with all roads, the *Via Humanitatis* offers a few unique perks and drawbacks alike to its adherents. Most of these have to do with social interactions and the ways in which the Beast is contained or, alternately, in which it rages against reason and seeks to have its way at all costs.

Academy Scholar (1-pt. Merit)

You belong to the Academy, the loose organization of Prodigal scholars who exchange thoughts on

the *Via Humanitatis* and related matters through correspondence. As a result, you are connected with some of the finest minds to be found upon the road (perhaps even one or two elders, renowned teachers or other such venerated figures) and can call upon them for counsel. Naturally, you may also be asked for your advice on affairs pertaining to the road, by both those more and less learned in its nuances than yourself. You are also considered to be conversant in several of the Academy's methods of concealing the truth of its messages (codes, hidden meanings and the like). At your Storyteller's discretion, you may be able to consider a long series of correspondences between yourself and a Prodigal luminary to be a moment of truth. Of course, there are many perils inherent in long-distance communication in this age, and while Jude of Tyre may be the finest authority you know of regarding the interactions between Prodigals and Sinners, getting word to or from her when you are a Parisian is exceedingly time-consuming, if indeed your missive ever arrives at all.

You must have an Intelligence of at least 3 and be able to read and write in Arabic, French, Greek and Latin in order to possess this Merit, and you should have at least two Knowledges other than Linguistics at 3 dots or more. If you wish (and your Storyteller approves), you may take this Merit in conjunction with levels of Allies, Contacts or Mentor, representing a reasonably sure (if not swift) means of contacting these Cainites. Levels of these Backgrounds dedicated to connections within the Academy *may not* be part of a coterie's Background Pool, unless all of the vampires in the coterie also possess this Merit.

MET: This Merit is largely narrative in function, and players should work with the Storyteller to draw up sketches of some of their most frequent correspondents, their areas of expertise, etc. A Cainite must meet the linguistic requirements outlined above as well as possessing at least three levels in "academic" Abilities in order to purchase this Merit. Bear in mind that while fellow Academy members may be of great aid in terms of progressing along the *Via Humanitatis*, they cannot offer significant aid in any other mechanical capacity unless a player also purchases other Backgrounds such as Mentor, Allies, Contacts or Influence to represent such additional capabilities or connections for his correspondents. Furthermore, while summaries and paraphrases are certainly acceptable in a pinch, both sides are highly encouraged to actually write out at least some of the correspondence involved in this Merit, especially if the player seeks to use it to reach a moment of truth. Note, however, that this does not mean a player must learn four

languages and write lengthy philosophical treatises to benefit from this Merit, only that a player should naturally expect to write out at least brief summaries of their character's ideas regarding the Road of Humanity from time to time.

Oath of Twilight (3-pt. Merit)

You have been initiated into the elite brotherhood of the True Knights of the Setting Sun, fearsome hunters of the most savage and deadly of the world's Cainites, the Soulless. You have received their induction ceremony, and now wear their brand upon your left shoulder. You may have even slain one of the Soulless already. Your devotion to the Road of Humanity (above and beyond that which even many knights of the Twilight Order feel toward their cause) serves as your sword and armor in battle against the foes of your fellowship. Your Aura modifier (if favorable) modifies *all* difficulties directly related to combat with one of the Soulless. (In other words, a Prodigal with a Road of Humanity score of 8 would subtract -1 from all difficulty numbers, such as attack, damage or soak rolls, or for rolls to activate Disciplines, directly related to battling the Soulless.) However, if you ever turn from the Road of Humanity, you lose this Merit forever. Note that you do not strictly need this Merit to belong to the Twilight Order; it instead represents a particularly fierce sense of dedication to the Order's cause.

MET: You may add any favorable Aura rating modifiers to all tests directly related to battling the Soulless; these benefits are cumulative with any other Trait modifiers you may receive from other Merits, Disciplines or other sources. You may also add these modifiers to friendly, non-Discipline social interactions with fellow members of the Twilight Order.

Gentle Enthralment (1 or 3-pt. Merit)

While most vampires engender slavish devotion in their ghouls through the "gift" of their blood, creating spiritually ruined and singularly wretched creatures to serve them, your blood reacts somewhat differently when bestowed upon the Children of Seth. At the 1-point variation of this Merit, while you do create the blood oath and you empower your thralls normally, the psychological reaction of the ghoul allows for a great deal more free will. Your ghouls regard you with a fierce loyalty and a powerful sense of affection (more befitting a beloved friend than an unholy master), but they do not, as a rule, adopt the posture of pathetic, groveling toadies. Not only is this more humane form of enthrallment more morally acceptable for and among Prodigals, it also allows your

ghouls to pass more easily as ordinary mortals (for instance, they are less likely to fly into a rage when someone dares to malign you). The 3-point version of the Merit, in addition to the benefits described above, also results in regular uses of Dominate having few permanent deleterious effects on mortals. Thus, even those conditioned as perfect servants possess the spark of intelligence and initiative necessary to function as reasonably normal human beings.

MET: This Merit is largely a roleplaying mechanic, but one that Storytellers and Narrators should bear in mind when portraying a character's retainers or others under the effects of her blood. They should exhibit notably more free will than those of characters without this Merit, and while they are as loyal as all under the effects of the blood, such retainers also suffer far fewer bouts of jealousy or similarly possessive behavior regarding the character. However, regular use of *Dominate* will still suppress some of their free will and initiative unless the more expensive version of this Merit is purchased, in which case they retain their normal spark and creative energy even following *Conditioning*.

Philosophical Humanist (3-pt. Merit)

You do not much care as to whether or not the Biblical Cain was the forefather of all vampires, whether he was cursed by God or, indeed, if God or Caine even exist. Nor do you buy into the superstitious folderol surrounding the Beast. It is, to you, neither a demon nor some "evil self"; it is simply a manifestation of normal, if dark, human passions, passions exacerbated by the transformative power of the Embrace.

As a result, you find yourself at an advantage in combating the Beast through the judicious application of reason. All of your rolls to resist frenzy and Rötshreck are at a -1 difficulty. Brujah Cainites, though no less capable than any other clan of waxing secular regarding the Curse (and often more inclined to do so), may not take this Merit.

MET: A character with this Merit is one Trait up on all tests to resist frenzy and Rötshreck, regardless of the instigating stimulus. Brujah characters may not purchase this Merit, and Storyteller approval should be secured before a character purchases both this Merit and the Merit: *Calm Heart*, as their cumulative benefits may prove too disruptive to game balance.

Unyielding Resolve (5-pt. Merit)

Most common among formally educated Prodigals (though certainly not unique to them; a few self-taught walkers on the Road of Humanity have

managed, by virtue of their own ethical conviction, to discover such a gift), this Merit enables you to vigorously reassert your human morals in times of spiritual duress. Whenever the Beast threatens to drag you down toward the Second Death, you can call upon reserves of inner strength almost unknown in the Cainite world to batter it down and force it to relinquish its hold upon you. This technique is not without its risks, however; whenever you fail to defeat the Beast in this redoubled contest of wills, you literally feel a part of yourself slipping away, lost to its hunger.

In game terms, you may, when failing or botching a degeneration check, risk a point of *permanent* Willpower to re-roll the Conscience (or in the case of the Path of Illumination, Conviction) check. If you fail or botch *this* roll, you lose the point of Willpower, in addition to whatever else you normally would have. If you succeed, though, you lose nothing and manage, through strict discipline, to reassert your proper sense of remorse and penitence for offenses against your road.

MET: A Prodigal with this Merit may spend a *permanent* Willpower Trait to retest a failed *Conscience/Conviction* test to resist degeneration; if this test is successful, degeneration is averted through strict discipline and suitable remorse for such a grave offense. Only one Willpower Trait may be spent in this fashion per test, and if it fails, the Willpower Trait is lost along with the usual penalties for degeneration. Storytellers should feel free to increase the Experience Trait cost to replace Willpower Traits spent fueling this Merit if it seems the player is ignoring its roleplaying value in favor of simply using it to casually avoid degeneration, up to a maximum of double the normal cost for such Traits.

Beast's Reflection (2-pt. Flaw)

Your inner Beast is particularly ferocious and persistent. It is, in fact, so adamant in its desire to overtake you that it impresses itself upon your outward appearance whenever you call upon the power of your unliving blood. Whenever you spend a blood point, you take on a savage, uncouth appearance (your eyes gain feral yellow or baleful red highlights, you seem to stand a bit taller, with a menacing posture, and your features take on a predatory cast, for example) that gives others pause for a number of turns equal to 10 minus your Road rating. During this time, you are at +2 difficulty to all social interactions with kine and Cainites (save for followers of the Road of the Beast) that do not directly involve causing fear. You are, however, at a -1 difficulty for intimidation-related rolls against mortals for an equal duration. Expenditures of multiple blood points create a cumulative

duration for this effect. No Cainite with an Appearance score of zero may take this Flaw (for they already wear their monstrosity upon their faces), though Cappadocians may (adding the modifier from this Flaw to their own clan weakness modifier after expending blood). At the Storyteller's discretion, some individuals (such as the particularly belligerent, impulsive, devout or knowledgeable in the matters of the occult), sensing the monster within you, may have a more drastic reaction to this limited revelation of the truth of what you are than simple fear.

MET: Any time a Cainite with this Flaw expends a Blood Trait, she immediately acquires the Negative Traits: *Bestial* x2 in addition to any other Negative Traits she might possess, and is two Traits down on all non-intimidating Social tests with kine and Cainites alike, excepting followers of the Road of the Beast. She is considered one Trait up on all attempts to intimidate others, however. This effect lasts for five minutes/turns minus the character's Road rating, to a minimum of one minute/turn, but during that time it should be represented by makeup or description if possible and certainly roleplayed as powerfully as possible. Expending multiple Blood Traits is cumulative to the duration of this effect, though the Negative Traits and other penalties are not cumulative. Nosferatu and other Cainites of similarly blighted visage may not take this Flaw, though Cappadocians simply add it to the modifiers surrounding their own clan weakness. Mortals knowledgeable in the occult are likely to recognize the Cainite as a vampire in this state quite easily, and Storytellers should take this into account should the Cainite spend her blood too freely around mortals.

Mark of Cain (2-pt. Flaw)

Just as the First Murderer was marked and made outcast from the race of Man, so too have you been branded with the taint of your murderous nature. While some Prodigals are capable of blending in among mortals with such facility as to render them undetectable for what they are to all but the most refined Cainite senses, you have been forever set apart with a mark that none can see, but all know to be stamped into your soul. Your Aura modifier becomes an absolute value (disregarding pluses or minuses), to which you add +1. All of these values then become difficulty penalties to interactions in which you try to assert your normalcy (as per the Aura of Prodigals and replacing that Aura). Yes, this means that an exceptionally high Road rating makes you seem just as bizarre and alien as a very low one; the more you try to deny the Mark of Cain and act as the kine do, the more

you are punished and set apart for your presumption. You may not take any other Merits or Flaws that modify or rely upon your Road rating or Aura modifier.

MET: A character with this Flaw adds one to their Aura modifier (disregarding whether it is positive or negative) and is considered to suffer this number as a penalty on all Social tests relating to interactions where the character attempts to assert his normlacy, pass as human or otherwise blend in with humanity. As above, this means that a very high Road rating is as deleterious to human interaction as a very low Road rating — a character with a great presumption of humanity is punished equally as one who has turned from the path of mortals. Depending on the player's desire and the Storyteller's discretion, this "mark" may be a literal brand of some kind or simply an invisible knowledge that follows the character everywhere, but regardless of its nature it cannot be concealed by any known means, nor can it be negated short of buying off this Flaw (which is extremely difficult if not impossible, as the character's very soul has been marked). A character with this Flaw may not take any Merits or Flaws that modify or rely upon a Road rating or Aura modifier.

Fangless (3-pt. Flaw)

Your Beast has manifested in all of the normal ways, save one: You are not possessed of fangs, the deadly natural weapons of the Cainite. Without fangs, you have no inherent means of inflicting aggravated damage, cannot perform a bite attack in combat and cannot easily bite to feed. You must inflict no fewer than two health levels of damage to a creature with your teeth before you can freely drink its blood. (Once you have caused sufficient damage, your victim becomes docile and rapturous as normal, but getting to that point is hard and may actually require Virtue checks, as the subject writhes and screams in pain; coupling this Flaw with Grip of the Damned is an almost certain way to fall from the *Via Humanitatis*.) You can, of course, cut your prey with a bladed implement in order to feed, but that often creates a problem all its own, since you can't lick the wound to heal it.

MET: A character with this Flaw does not have fangs and cannot perform biting attacks; what's more, she must inflict at least two levels of damage with her teeth in order to drink freely, though targets feel the usual rapture once feeding has begun. A character cannot acquire fangs through *Vicissitude* or similar powers until this Flaw is bought off — attempts to grow permanent or even temporary fangs simply fail,

though animal shapes obtained through *Protean* shapeshifting have their usual natural weaponry.

Texts of the Prodighals

A few texts circulate in the Dark Medieval that the Prodighals hold as sacred. Not all see them as such (indeed, the *Illuminated Book of the Sun* is seen as a dangerous and even evil heresy by most Prodighals), but those that follow are two of the most important and influential texts to be found by walkers upon the Road of Humanity.

The Book of the Sun

The *Book of the Sun*, the central text of Illuminated belief, is held to be a semi-accurate accounting of an ancient Cainite's search for Golconda. Fewer than six copies of the text are believed to exist, though the one held by the Throne of Light, written in Hebrew, is probably a second translation. Only one Cainite (long since gone on to the Final Death) ever claimed to have seen the original, and it was, as she recounted, "etched into clay tablets in a tongue ancient when Babylon was young." Unfortunately, all of the copies of the *Book* now (to the best of anyone's knowledge) extant are incomplete.

What pieces of the text do exist are filled with allegory and strange symbolism. Equal parts riddle and mythology, the *Book of the Sun* describes the journey of Sha-Ennu (whose gender is uncertain and seems, at various points throughout the *Book*, to actually change, though this may be nothing more than the product of poor translation; nevertheless, such a probability does not prevent Illuminated Tzimisce from claiming Sha-Ennu as one of their own). At times, it seems to detail real places, and at others, it tells of far more fantastic vistas, realms of pure fantasy. (For, if the wondrous locales described ever truly existed, it was in the time before the Flood and they are no more.) In some scenes, Sha-Ennu discourses with the Creator (or the Adversary; such is never made fully apparent and salvation seems to be found by sometimes heeding this figure's counsel, and at other times by disregarding it), various animals (both real and mythic), wise men, children and him-/herself. At times, it is unclear which of these parties, if any, the Cainite is speaking with.

Tonight, no Cainite claims lineage from Sha-Ennu and none claim to have sired any vampire by that name, though it is likely that the name in the text is a term whose meaning has yet to be deciphered. Even many Illuminated believe that Sha-Ennu never existed at all, but is instead representative of all Cainites everywhere. Others counter by asking that, should such be the case, what is the value of the *Book* at all? (It would then likely be a work of fiction from beginning to end.) As the

argument continues, some say that the *Book* is a work of faith, and that the value to be found in its lessons is not whether the events portrayed therein ever happened, but instead that they *can* happen.

The Dialogues of Troile and Arikel

Recorded in the days of Plato, the *Dialogues of Troile and Arikel* are an accounting of alleged conversations between the two Antediluvians on the part of an ancient Cainite (who did not wish his name recorded in the *Dialogues*), who claimed to have been told the story by his own sire in remotest antiquity. Over the course of time, many have debated the veracity of the *Dialogues*, but most agree that whether they are the actual words spoken by the two clan founders or not is irrelevant. Such Cainites say that their value is to be found in the fact that they (and the various expositions and essays penned by venerable elders to interpret and explain the astoundingly obtuse tangents of conversation) constitute the basis of the formalized Road of Humanity first developed by the Brujah and Toreador clans, and then passed on to the rest of the Cainite world. Indeed, several of the reflections upon the world and the kine are essentially exceedingly elaborate versions of the tenets that would later be adopted in the Pact of Athens.

Between eight and fifteen complete copies of the *Dialogues* exist, with the majority of these resting in the private collections of prominent and powerful Methuselabs and elders. Perhaps one or two copies are currently in the hands of younger Cainites, though this is doubtful. Most copies of the text are written in ancient Greek, though Cainite scribes translated the work into a very few other tongues (Hebrew and Latin, according to common speculation, though one, given as a gift to an esteemed Assamite Prodigal, is known to have been written in Aramaic). A number of incomplete transcriptions of the *Dialogues* exist (usually just fragments consisting of a few passages at most), sometimes given as gifts by Prodigal teachers to their students upon full initiation onto the Road of Humanity. Most of these fragments of the *Dialogues* are quite old, however, and are gradually disintegrating over the course of time, leaving fewer and fewer partial accounts of the legendary discussion in circulation in the Cainite world, and making those that still exist in relatively unblemished condition that much more precious. A minority of Prodigals who know of the *Dialogues* believe that there are still enough partial accounts out among Cainites of varying ages to assemble perhaps one more complete copy of the text. Some younger Prodigals, who maintain that the insights offered by the *Dialogues* grant some kind of special power over the Beast (a rumor that stands solely upon the morally balanced natures of those an-

cients believed to hold copies of it), hunt fervently for the fragments, hoping to unlock whatever elusive mystery is contained therein.

Relics of Humanity

Every society, no matter how scattered or fragmented, has its legends and rumors, and the Prodigals are no exception. Just as Christians have the True Cross and Jews the Ark of the Covenant, walkers upon the Road of Humanity believe in a few famous (or infamous, as the case may be) artifacts of ancient days. Of course, whether or not these relics truly exist, none who yet dwell upon the Earth can (or will) say.

The Blade of Enoch

Believed by those Cainite scholars who know of such things to have been a weapon forged in the First City by the sire of the First Diablerist, the founder of the Brujah line, the Sword of Enoch is, according to legend, a simple, even crude-looking, bronze blade. Most say that its length falls somewhere between that of a short sword and a long sword and that it is very slightly leaf-bladed, though this is mostly speculation. It is unclear if Troile the Elder gave the weapon to Enoch as a gift, or if the weapon simply bears his name as the first of its kind crafted there (and, indeed, anywhere in the world).

Whatever the case, the Blade of Enoch is believed to retain some fragment of its creator's spirit; specifically, his cold logic and power to yoke the Beast according to his reason and will, rather than being ridden by its destructive passions. What exactly that means, however, is a matter for some debate. Most maintain that the Blade, when carried, cows the Beast into submission, making it virtually impossible for the thing to rear its head and assert control over the Cainite, no matter his circumstances. Some believe that the weapon can, with a single blow, deliver unto the Final Death any that descend from Troile the Younger, shattering the particularly wrathful Beast of such a Cainite and reaping upon him a bloody vengeance as the price for the unchecked rage of his forefather. Others say that those struck by the weapon are reduced to heartlessly rational monsters, completely devoid of anger and envy, but also emptied of compassion, hope, mercy or love. Still others believe that, by driving the weapon into oneself, a Cainite can slay her own Beast, annihilating all the dark emotions that drive her to sin against the world, while maintaining the passions that allow her to enjoy her existence; becoming human in spirit while retaining the immortality of the flesh (though this last is seen as more of a parable or even a fairy-tale among serious Prodigal scholars than it is as a legitimate possibility).

The Well of Ashes

Some say it is a fable, meant to reinforce the Cainite mythology: "drink only blood and eat only ashes." Others believe that it is a miraculous work of divine or infernal artifice. The most common rumors attribute its creation to the hands of either Saulot, or the first and most powerful among the Baali (or perhaps, as some daring souls insinuate, of *both* of these Cainites together). What is generally agreed upon is that the Well is nothing of the sort, being instead something more like a very deep cauldron, sculpted out of a single slab of rough-hewn basalt, capable of restoring a Cainite to full mortality, perhaps even permanently.

Many tales circulate as to how, exactly, the Well works (should it even exist), though most of these stories seem fanciful and too good to be true. A number of Cainite scholars who have researched the lore of the Well exhaustively seem to believe in one particularly grim interpretation, involving the utter incineration of no fewer than one hundred Children of Seth (over the course of weeks) within the Well, until it contains a large amount of human ash. Some say that the ash must be rubbed into the skin, others believe that it must be mixed with blood to the consistency of stiff mud and set into a cocoon around the Cainite for a day and a night, and still others claim that a portion of it (though the size of the portion is debated) must be eaten. Whether those kine who are placed into the Well must be *alive* when they begin to burn, however, is a matter none can speak on with certainty.

Martyr's Icon

The practice of creating icons (images of saints and other religious figures) is common to the Eastern Church in these nights, but many people (and Cainites) enjoy the presence of a pleasant bit of art. The Martyr's Icon, which may be crafted by any Prodigal with an advanced understanding of her road, is artwork with a purpose. A Martyr's Icon is usually a small painting or figurine. Typically, it is a rendition of a former victim of the vampire's own feeding, or else an image of Abel. The individual is always depicted in some beatific pose. Often, he is smiling.

After creating the Icon (with the use of the appropriate Crafts field of expertise) the Prodigal may attempt to empower it against the wiles of the Beast and those who embrace its ways. The Cainite may "activate" the Martyr's Icon by letting a single blood point before it (symbolically returning some of what she has taken). The player rolls her Road rating (difficulty 8). For one night per success, the Icon guards the Cainite's abode (an area up to the size of a large house) against those who wallow in the Beast's depredations. Those who walk a road other than the *Via Humanitatis* suffer a +2 difficulty to all actions that would defy the particular moral code (the main Road of Humanity or appropriate path on that road) of the Prodigal crafter while within that area.

Any Prodigal with a Road rating of 8 or more may attempt to create a Martyr's Icon.





CHAPTER FOUR: BLOOD OF SETH, BLOOD OF CAINE

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men.
That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

— The Talmud

Prodigals come from all manner of backgrounds. What follow are some Prodigal templates suitable for play as characters, as well as a number of notable walkers upon the Road of Humanity. These characters can be brought into play by your troupe, or simply used as inspiration as to different sorts of Prodigals in the Dark Medieval. As with everything else here, use what works and disregard what does not.

DEDICATED ARTIST

If you don't mind, that took me a long time to make.
I'd appreciate it if you didn't put your filthy hands all over it.

Prelude: "Such work is not for women."

That was what your father told you when you were young. But you saw the way in which he masterfully manipulated lifeless stone and you envied him his work. He was a profoundly skilled craftsman and was sponsored by the Church, rendering images of angels and saints for the finest cathedrals. He had desperately wished for a boy to continue the family trade, but your difficult birthing had left your mother barren. As his eyesight began to fail from years of stone dust and fine detail work by candlelight, you pressed him to apprentice you. Reluctantly, he agreed.

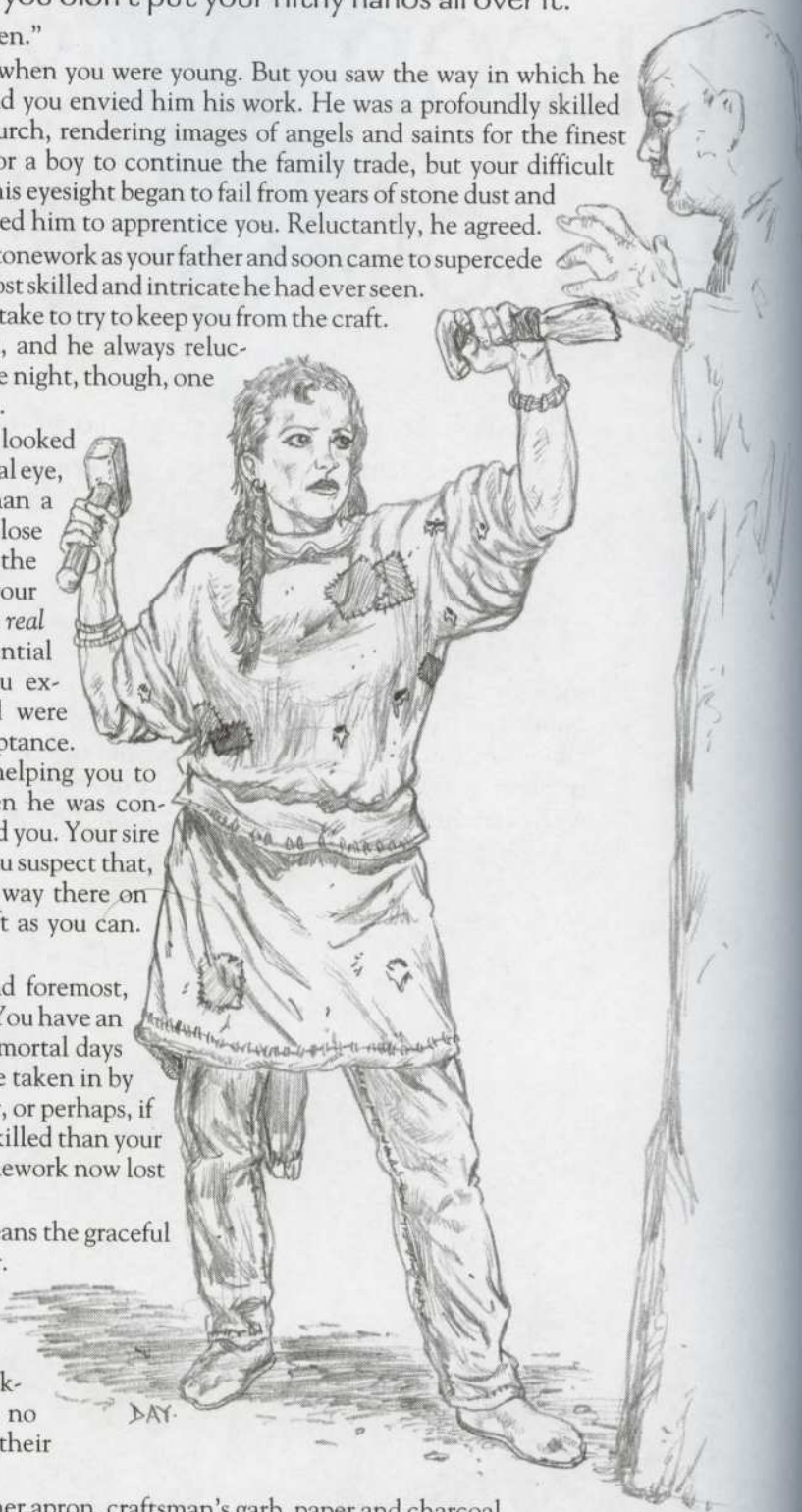
You had the same natural facility for stonework as your father and soon came to supercede him. Your work, he said, was among the most skilled and intricate he had ever seen. Smiling, he told you that it had been a mistake to try to keep you from the craft. Still, appearances had to be maintained, and he always reluctantly passed your work off as his own. One night, though, one of your father's patrons visited the studio.

He did not seem like a priest, and he looked at the newest work in progress with a critical eye, commenting on it as an artist rather than a cleric. Finally, he bade your father draw close and speak to him about the intent behind the work. After a few moments, he studied your father's eyes intently and asked to see the *real* artist. Eagerly and heedless of the potential consequences, you stepped forward. You expected shock or rage on his part, and were completely unprepared for his simple acceptance. He returned every night for a month, helping you to perfect your technique; eventually, when he was convinced that you were worthy, he Embraced you. Your sire brought you to the *Via Humanitatis*, but you suspect that, had he not, you would have found your way there on your own. Angels and devils do not craft as you can. That is the legacy of your human spirit.

Concept: You are an artist, first and foremost, with a profound dedication to your work. You have an intuitive feel for stone that even in your mortal days bordered on the magical. You are apt to be taken in by a Cainite patron seeking a skilled sculptor, or perhaps, if you are fortunate, an Artisan even more skilled than your sire, one who can teach you secrets of stonework now lost to the world.

Roleplaying Hints: You are by no means the graceful lady most people expect of a Toreador. Your hands are callused and your face is plain, but your passion for your craft comes out in all you do. You constantly survey and scrutinize your surroundings, looking for the flaws in the design, and have no respect for those who cannot take pride in their work.

Equipment: Stonecutting tools, leather apron, craftsman's garb, paper and charcoal



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Perfectionist
Demeanor: Architect
Clan: Toreador

Generation: 12th
Concept: Dedicated Artist
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○○○○	Charisma	●●○○○○○○○	Perception	●●●●●○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○○
Stamina	●●●○○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●●○○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○○○○○○	Commerce	●●●○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●●○○○○○○	Law	●○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●●○○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○○○○○○	Melee	●○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	●●○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○○	Ride	●○○○○○○○○○	Politics	●●○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○○	Theology	●●○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Auspex	●●●○○○○○○	Influence	●○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●○○○○○
Celerity	●○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●
Presence	○○○○○○○○○	Status	●○○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		
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Other Traits

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Road

Humanity

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Aura: Normalcy (+/-0)

Willpower

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised		□
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated		□

Weakness

Entranced by Beauty

Experience

FALLEN MAN

Believe me, I know what it is to sin before one's fellow man.

Prelude: Once, the God-fearing folk of your community provided you with your basic needs and you, in turn, gave them spiritual guidance and the comfort of the Lord's words. Of course, you were not as morally strong a man as you might have wished. It would have been nothing exceptional, save that the girl, barely into womanhood, soon grew heavy with your child. She came to you for comfort and, tormented, you turned to the Cross for inspiration. Long hours you prayed, but no heavenly manifestations appeared to advise you; you were left with that most fallible of counsels, the human conscience.

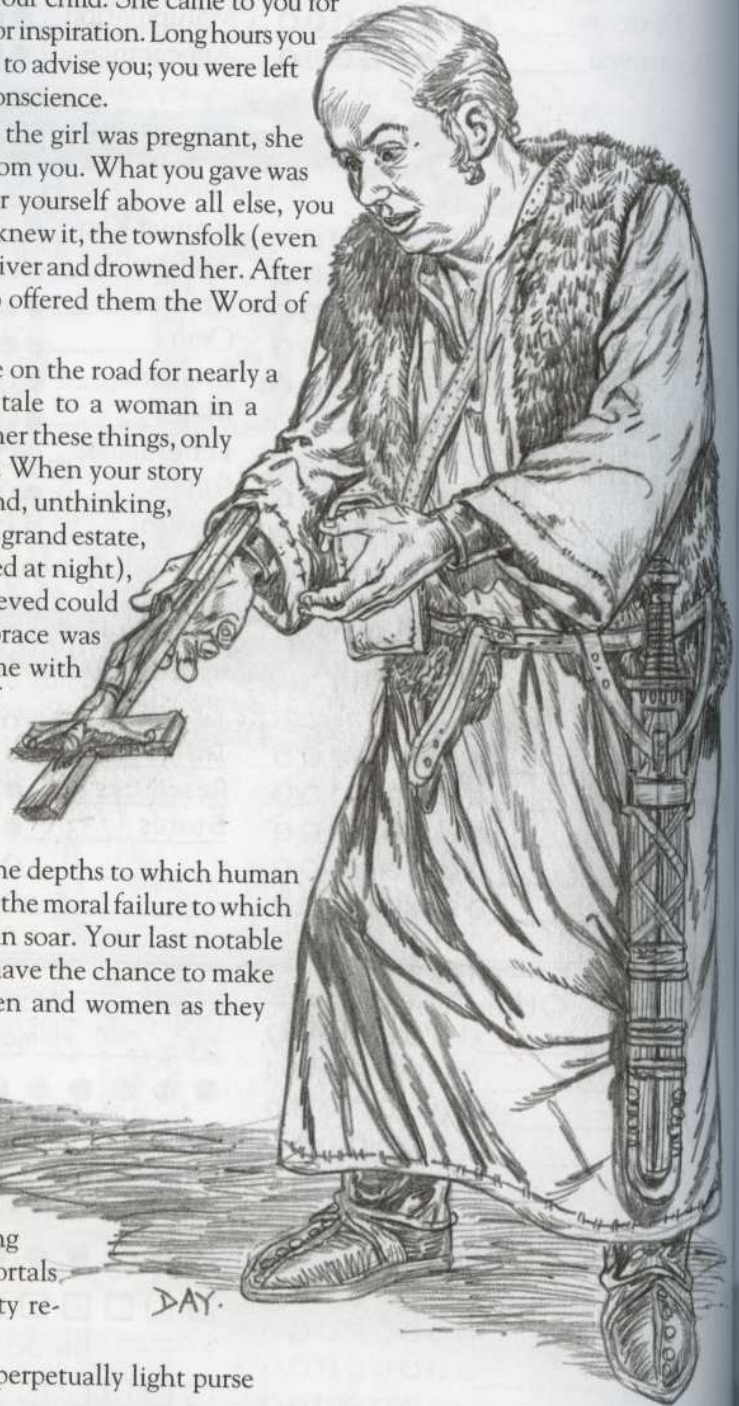
At last, as it became quite clear to all that the girl was pregnant, she privately demanded some kind of recognition from you. What you gave was probably not what she had in mind. Afraid for yourself above all else, you denounced her as the Devil's whore. Before you knew it, the townsfolk (even the girl's own parents) dragged her down to the river and drowned her. After all, *you* were their beloved priest, the man who offered them the Word of God. How could *you* lead them astray?

Ashamed beyond words, you fled. You were on the road for nearly a decade when you found yourself telling your tale to a woman in a Parisian tavern. You did not know why you told her these things, only that she seemed to you completely trustworthy. When your story was done, she bade you accompany her home and, unthinking, you complied. When you arrived at her house (a grand estate, surprising for a woman who wandered unescorted at night), she beat you unconscious with strength you believed could not reside within the mortal frame. Your Embrace was excruciating, and you spent exactly enough time with her to learn of your clan and the Traditions of Caine before she cast you out, to contemplate your crime forever.

Concept: You have no interest in being a man of God again. Just to be considered a man would be honor enough. You are fascinated by the depths to which human beings can sink, and conversely (especially given the moral failure to which they are inclined), the heights to which they can soar. Your last notable act as a mortal was one of selfishness. Now you have the chance to make amends and learn to truly love your fellow men and women as they deserve. Not for God, but because it is *right*.

Roleplaying Hints: You are tired and jaded, and you know that men are wicked and weak. You have a way of getting people to believe you, but are loath to apply it. Your last act of guidance among the kine resulted in an innocent girl dying for your lust. Cainites who abuse and scorn mortals earn your ire, because you see your own iniquity reflected in their actions.

Equipment: Traveler's garb, walking stick, perpetually light purse



Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Penitent
Demeanor: Judge
Clan: Brujah

Generation: 12th
Concept: Fallen Man
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●●○○○○	Perception	●●○○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●●●○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○
Stamina	●●●○○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○○○○	Commerce	●○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	●○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○	Law	●○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●●○○○○○
Expression	●●●○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●○○○○○○	Ride	●○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○○○○	Theology	●●●○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Celerity	●○○○○○○○	Contacts	●●●○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Potence	●○○○○○○○	Generation	●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○
Presence	●●○○○○○○	Resources	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
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Other Traits

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Road

Humanity

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Aura: Normalcy (+1)

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

+2 difficulty to resist frenzy

Experience

ILLUMINATED HERETIC

You believe the blessings of Caine make us inhuman? Friend, you have much to learn of the power of one man's soul.

Prelude: Your childhood among the Obertus was anything but normal. By the age at which others are first learning a craft, you were dissecting the bodies of the dead for study, transcribing histories lost to mortal man and mastering your fifth language. While there were those who called you a prodigy, you were not the sort of youth most Tzimisce would look to for a potential childe. Your love of learning did not cross the line into overt cruelty or even simple amorality. Perhaps it was all the philosophy you read, but as you grew into a young man, you came to believe in the fundamental goodness and very important place of humanity in the world (beyond fodder for Cainites, that is).

Eventually you left home, seeking the company of a Fiend patron who would allow you to continue your work beyond the confines of the Obertus Estates. Your arms bristling with books and scrolls, you presented yourself at the court of this *voivode* or that, offering your services in exchange for leave to pursue your personal interests. Sadly, while your intellect was esteemed, few Fiends had even the remotest inclination toward your humanist studies, craving instead the lore of Cainites, gods and spirits. You were considering giving up and returning home when you caught your future sire's eye.

He was a minor advisor in the court of a powerful Tzimisce lord, wearing simple robes and a humble mien. While the

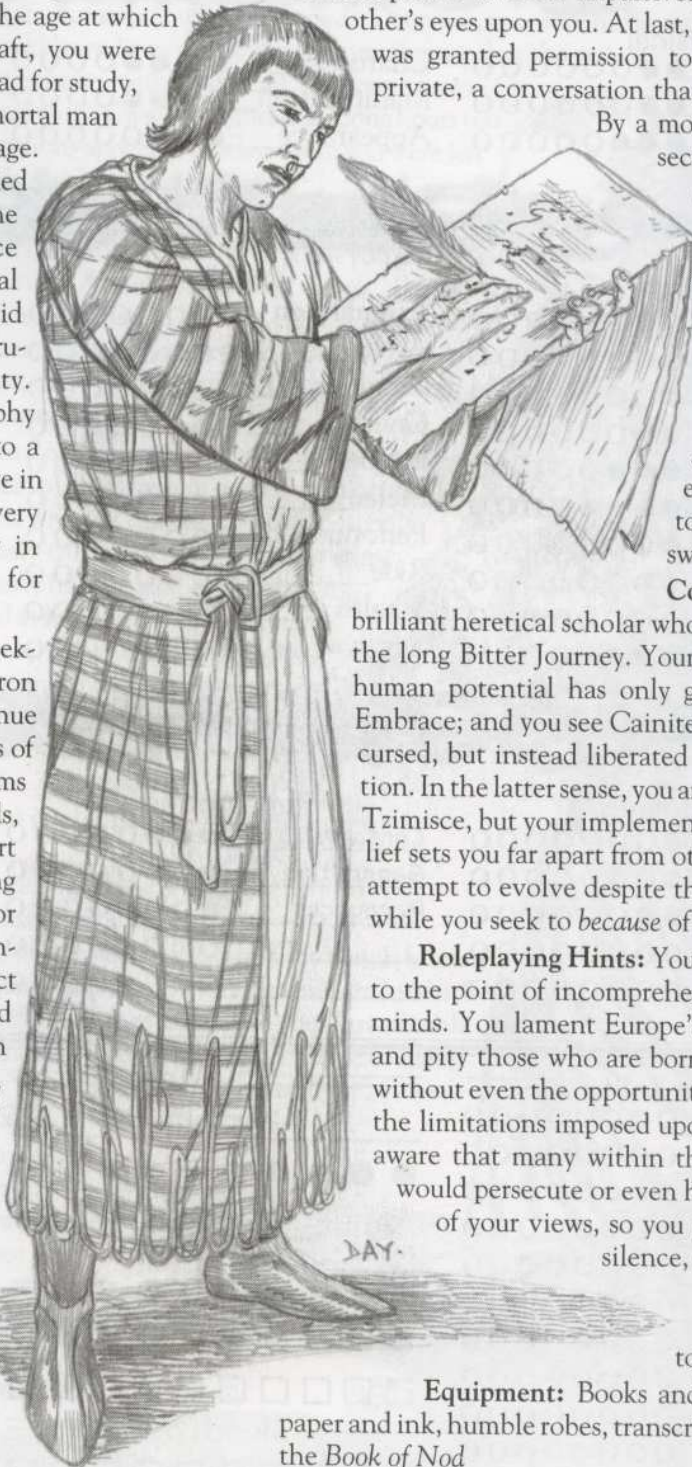
ancient prince listened impassively, you sensed the other's eyes upon you. At last, he begged for and was granted permission to question you in private, a conversation that lasted for hours.

By a month later, he had secured the right to sire you, and soon after inducted you into the teachings of the Path of Illumination. You now know what the *real* questions are, and you have an eternity in which to discover your answers.

Concept: You are a brilliant heretical scholar who has set out upon the long Bitter Journey. Your fascination with human potential has only grown since your Embrace; and you see Cainites not as creatures cursed, but instead liberated to pursue perfection. In the latter sense, you are an archetypical Tzimisce, but your implementation of that belief sets you far apart from other Fiends. They attempt to evolve despite their human roots, while you seek to *become* of those roots.

Roleplaying Hints: You are often erudite to the point of incomprehensibility to lesser minds. You lament Europe's benighted state and pity those who are born into ignorance, without even the opportunity to grow beyond the limitations imposed upon them. You are aware that many within the Cainite world would persecute or even harm you because of your views, so you practice them in silence, ever watchful for opportunities to subtly stumble toward Golconda.

Equipment: Books and scrolls aplenty, paper and ink, humble robes, transcribed fragments of the *Book of Nod*



Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Pedagogue
Clan: Tzimisce

Generation: 9th
Concept: Illuminated Heretic
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○○○○	Perception	●●●○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●●○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○○	Appearance	●●●○○○○○	Wits	●●○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●●●○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○○○○	Etiquette	●●●○○○○○	Linguistics	●●●●○○○○
Expression	●●○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	●●○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	●●●●○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○	Ride	●●○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○○○○	Theology	●●●●○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Animalism	○○○○○○○○	Contacts	●●○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Auspex	●●○○○○○○	Generation	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○○
Vicissitude	●●○○○○○○	Resources	●●●○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
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Other Traits

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Road

Humanity (Path of Illumination)
●●●●●●●○○○
Aura: Normalcy (0)

Willpower

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

Must sleep in native soil

Experience

MAN-AT-ARMS

Witchery? No, I'm afraid all I've got to threaten you with is this axe.

Prelude: In life, you were an ordinary peasant soldier. Actually, that's not completely true. You were an *exceptional* peasant soldier. You may not have had noble privilege, but truth be told, that sort of life seemed like much more trouble than it was worth. You slew the enemies of your lord when commanded to do so and got along comfortably, if modestly, for your troubles. You knew you'd surely be dead long before thirty, but who really wants to waste away in his deathbed, afflicted with too many ailments to count?

You spent your coin on maintaining your arms and armor, whoring, drinking and adequate accommodations, in that order. It was, by your estimation, a good way to live. Eventually, however, it had to end. Your lord took ill and was usurped by his own son, with the aid of several neighboring nobles. The soldiers of those lords were sent in to replace the fighters loyal to the youth's father, and you were dismissed. You spent the next two years wandering as a man for hire. Sometimes you would work a stint among mercenaries, and sometimes you would act as bodyguard to a merchant or cleric.

Your final duty as a mercenary was in Vienna, when you were hired on by a curiously regal woman. She carried herself with forcefulness uncharacteristic for her gender and was accustomed to command. You took well to her service. You accompanied her on her many journeys around the region (strangely, always by night) — mostly there to look like a well-armed brute. Finally your

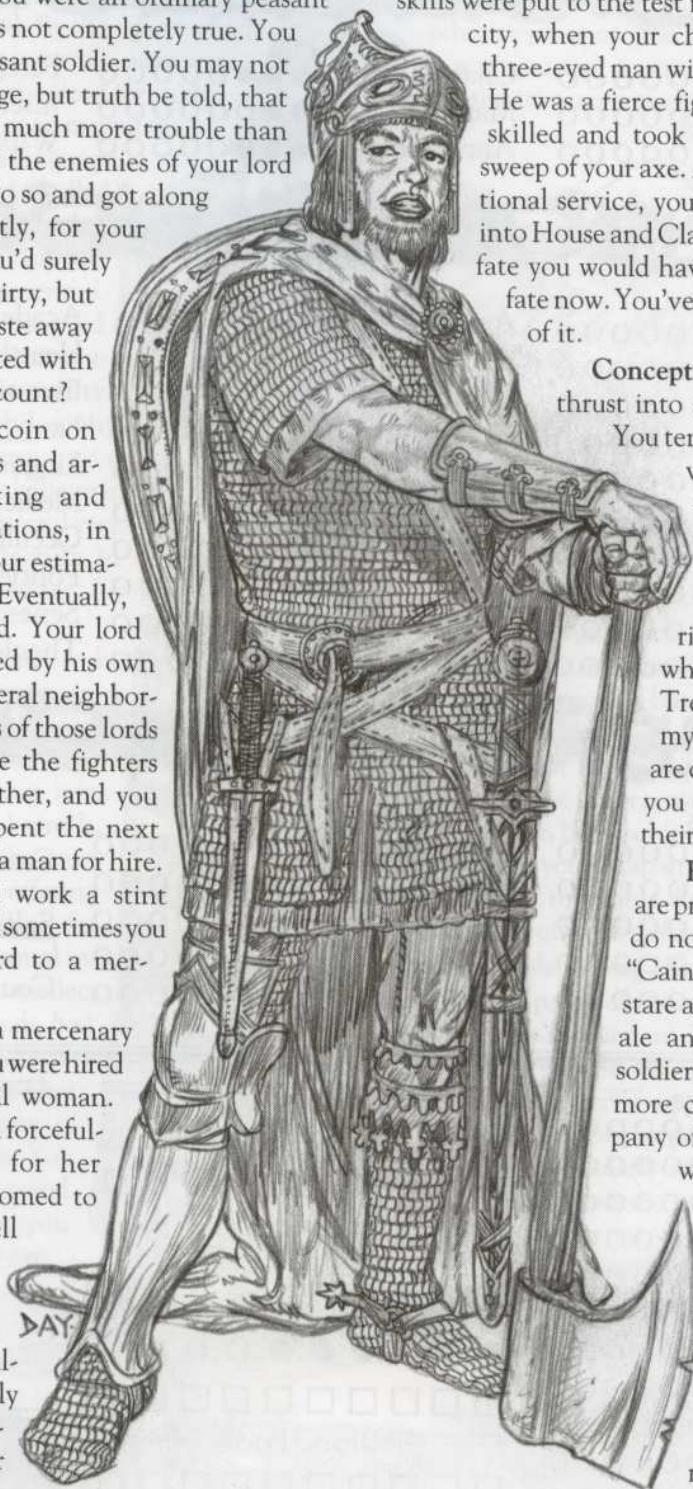
skills were put to the test in the wilds outside of the city, when your charge was assaulted by a three-eyed man with a gleaming long sword. He was a fierce fighter, but you were more skilled and took his head with the final sweep of your axe. As reward for your exceptional service, you were promptly inducted into House and Clan Tremere. It was not the fate you would have asked for, but it's *your* fate now. You've resolved to make the best of it.

Concept: You are a normal man thrust into abnormal circumstances.

You tend to look at things from a very simple perspective, and while some confuse your grounded nature for slow wits, you're the one who makes sure the coterie won't be out in the open when dawn arrives. Other Tremere may affect airs of mystery and power, but you are content to just be the man you are and let others form their opinions based upon that.

Roleplaying Hints: You are practical above all else, and do not put much stock in the "Cainite mystique." Indeed, you stare at pretty girls, pine for fine ale and curse like the career soldier you are. You are much more comfortable in the company of farmers, craftsmen and warriors than you are among vampires, and you do not hesitate to speak your mind on the subject.

Equipment: Notched battleaxe, chain mail hauberk, bow and quiver of arrows, boot knife



Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Defender
Demeanor: Conformist
Clan: Tremere

Generation: 12th
Concept: Man-at-Arms
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○○○○	Charisma	●●○○○○○○	Perception	●●●○○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○○○○
Stamina	●●●○○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○○○○	Animal Ken	●●○○○○○○	Academics	●○○○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○○○○	Archery	●●○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○
Brawl	●●○○○○○○	Commerce	●○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○○○○	Melee	●●●●○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	●○○○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○	Ride	●●○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Auspex	●●○○○○○○	Allies	●●○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Dominate	●●○○○○○○	Mentor	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○○
Thaumaturgy	○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●●●
Fortitude	●○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		
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Other Traits

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Road

Humanity

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Aura: Normalcy (+/-0)

Willpower

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

One step bound to clan

Experience

LADY OF THE BEGGARS

We are family and I will not abandon you.

Prelude: You were a vagabond on the streets of Samarkand for all the years of your childhood, living by your wits and your cunning. Your parents died of a lingering sickness when you were nine, leaving you to care for your five-year-old brother alone. Fortunately, enough of the city's people believed in Islam's devotion to charity for the both of you to scrape by as impoverished orphans.

As you grew, you found yourself becoming an influential figure on the streets. You offered what little you had to those who needed it (even when that meant you had to go without), and tried to give comfort to all of Samarkand's suffering poor. During your seventeenth year, you became a parent when you took in the very young children of another beggar woman, and soon you found yourself regarded as a mother by many of the waifs. You passed on your skills at theft and panhandling to a younger generation, just as you had to your brother before an illness took him from you, hoping to teach the children how to survive.

You attracted the attention of your sire-to-be by filching his purse (as a lesson to a group of youths who were looking on). The handsome stranger caught you by the wrist and smiled in much the same way you imagined a tiger, were it a man, might smile at its prey. His eyes transfixed you; and as he dragged you off into the thick of the crowd, and from there into an alley, you could do nothing save follow. He spoke not a word

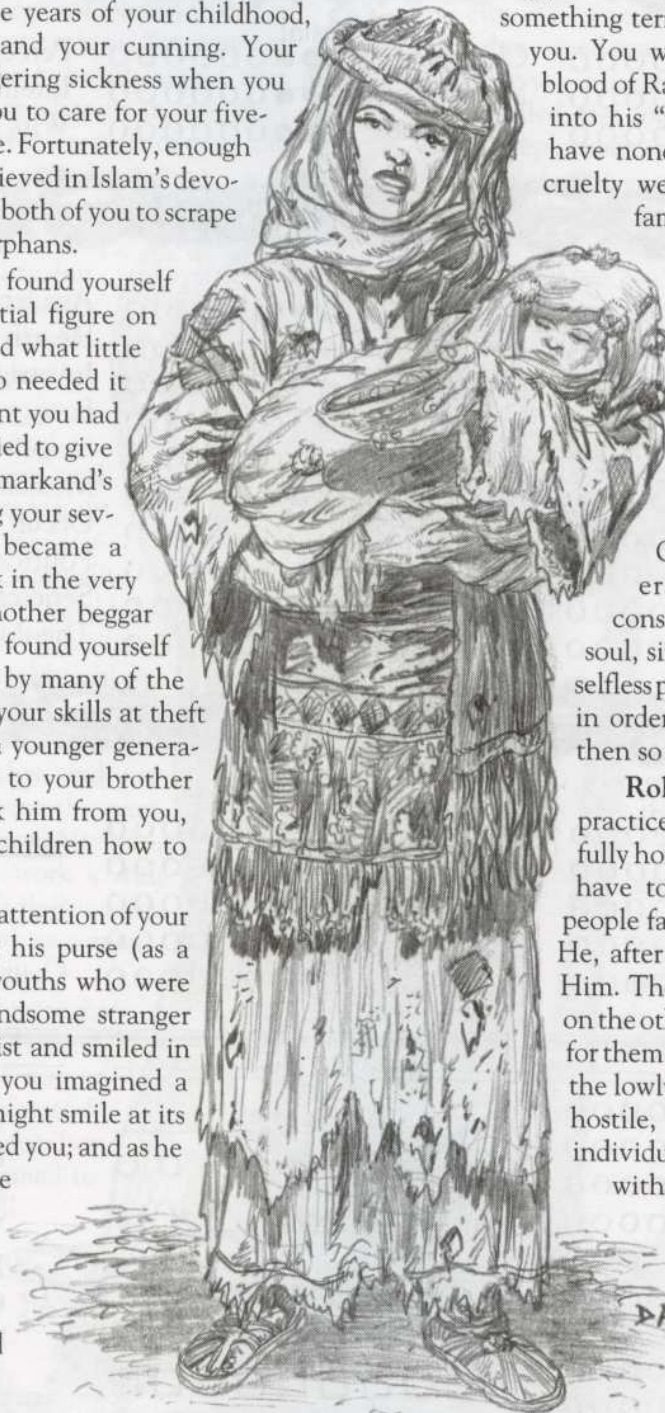
during your shared flight, but you sensed that something terrible was going to happen to you. You were right. He gave you the blood of Ravnos and tried to induct you into his "road of sin," but you would have none of it. Such selfishness and cruelty were not for you. You had a family to take care of, and the Curse of Caine could never take that away from you.

Character Concept:

You are a merciful soul, dedicated to the weak and downtrodden, regarded as a gentle angel by vagrants and street thieves. You honestly believe that you can use your Curse to do some good for others. You've never once considered the cost to your own soul, since you are a fundamentally selfless person. If you must be Damned in order for the needy to be saved, then so be it.

Roleplaying Hints: You still practice Islam, but, if you had to be fully honest with yourself, you would have to admit that you love your people far more than you love Allah. He, after all, has many souls to love Him. The orphaned and the outcast, on the other hand, have no one to care for them save you. You speak gently to the lowly and you become cold, even hostile, to those wealthy or lordly individuals whom you discover to be without true charity.

Equipment: Dagger, a few coins, the rags on your back



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Caretaker
Demeanor: Caretaker
Clan: Ravnos

Generation: 8th
Concept: Lady of the Beggars
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●●●●

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●●●●●	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○
Athletics	●●●●●●●●	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●●●●●●●●
Brawl	●●●●●●●●	Commerce	●●●●●●●●	Investigation	●●●●●●●●
Dodge	●●●●●●●●	Crafts	●●●●●●●●	Law	●●●●●●●●
Empathy	○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●●●●●●●
Expression	○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●●●●●●●	Ride	○○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	●●●●●●●●	Stealth	●●●●●●●●	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●●●●●●	Survival	●●●●●●●●	Theology	○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Animalism	●●●●●●●●	Allies	●●●●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●●●
Chimerstry	●●●●●●●●	Contacts	●●●●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●●
Fortitude	●●●●●●●●	Herd	●●●●●●●●	Courage	●●●●●●
	○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		
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Other Traits

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Road

Humanity (Path of Community)

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Aura: Normalcy (+1)

Willpower

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

Must engage in a particular
crime

Experience

SELF-PROCLAIMED CAITIFF

Mark my words, the world is changing.
Disbelieve me if you wish; your irrelevance is all but assured.

Prelude: You were born into ignominy, the daughter of a prostitute. Desperately poor, you were servicing your own clients at a most unseemly age, and during your thirteenth year you struck out on your own. Unlike your mother, you were both beautiful and intelligent; you knew that you could use both of these assets to your advantage, perhaps working your "worldly arts" to become mistress to a powerful nobleman or archbishop, and through the satiation of his base needs, the controlling partner in the relationship.

By the age of sixteen, you had a fat and wealthy old bishop wrapped around your little finger. Your disregard for religion was enticing to him, since he knew he could not control you through the threat of damnation. Instead, he seemed enraptured by the way in which you exerted your will upon him. Others took notice of your assertive nature as well.

A stern-faced man in a black cassock, who told you in no uncertain terms that the bishop was "his," gave you the Embrace. He said that, while amusing, your game was now at an end, and that you would join your lover as his own property. With a condescending smirk, he informed you that, should you continue to perform admirably for the next several centuries, you may well enjoy your freedom once again. The very next night, just before dawn, you returned to the bishop's quarters and revealed to him your plan.

While the bishop balked at it, your tone brooked no dissent; by early afternoon, your sire had been dragged, semi-conscious, out of his abode by a trustworthy squad of mercenaries in the bishop's occasional employ and allowed to die beneath the sun. A hefty "donation" from Church coffers bought their silence, until such time as you learned enough to put their leader under the blood. Now, you are what you always knew you could be: powerful, deadly and ruled by none beyond yourself.

Concept: You are walking evidence that "human" does not necessarily mean "ethical," "kind" or "just." Your life was one of privation and hardship, and you had to abandon most of your morals along with your innocence just to survive. You seize opportunity instinctively and never relinquish what is yours. You are the one who had to do the work (no matter how degrading or distasteful) to earn it, after all.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an innovator, and you scorn the superstitious notion that your self-imposed, clanless state makes you the fulfillment of some kind of "prophecy of The End." At best, tradition-bound Cainites make you laugh with derision. You firmly believe that you are the way of the future, destined to pry the fruits of the Earth from between the withered fingers of the antiquated Clans of Caine. You are, however, usually wise enough to keep such opinions to yourself.

Equipment: Opulent clothing, random finery, well-armed escort, coin to spare



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Autocrat
Clan: Lasombra

Generation: 12th
Concept: Self-Proclaimed Caitiff
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○○○○	Charisma	●●○○○○○○	Perception	●●○○○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●●○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○○○	Appearance	●●●●○○○○	Wits	●●○○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○	Commerce	●●○○○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	●●●○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○○	Politics	●●●○○○○○
Legerdemain	●○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○○	Theology	●○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Dominate	●●●○○○○○	Domain	●●●○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●○○○○○
Obtenebation	●○○○○○○○	Generation	●●●○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●●
Potence	○○○○○○○○○	Influence	●●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○
	○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●●●○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●●●○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Humanity (Path of Vigor)
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Aura: Normalcy (+/-0)
Willpower
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Blood Pool
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Health

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

Casts no Reflection

Experience

Prodigals of Interest

In every gathering, some stand out as truly remarkable or otherwise noteworthy. Prodigals are no exception. What follow here are some of the influential Prodigals of the Dark Medieval. Some are already figures of great renown or infamy, while others make their mark in subtler ways. All, however, understand the importance of the *Via Humanitatis* and can serve as inspirations to those who would tread that path in their wake.

Dionysius, Prince of Athens

5th generation Cappadocian, childe of Japheth

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 599 BC

Apparent Age: late teens/early 20s

Over the course of his long centuries, Dionysius has proven himself to be a man of many surprises. Born in Athens, the son of a vintner, he was a largely unexceptional youth, save perhaps for his handsome face and his exuberance. During his adolescence, however, both his parents and his younger sister died, victims of a wasting illness that claimed them at the end of a long and arduous struggle. He inherited his father's vineyard and became an affluent man of fourteen. Dionysius was not satisfied with mere terrestrial wealth, though, and the young master of the winery set his extensive new connections on the trail of any who might enable the youth to speak to his family once more. After two years of searching, he made contact with a cult devoted to Persephone, comprised of individuals who, through birth or training, possessed various abilities related to interactions with the underworld.



So desperate was he to say a proper goodbye to his loved ones that Dionysius made the cult the heirs to his fortune if only they would show him a way to speak across the veil between life and death. On his seventeenth birthday, Dionysius drank a cup of pomegranate wine, mixed liberally with hemlock. By that night, the cultists were already discussing, over Dionysius' limp and lifeless body, how they would divvy up his estate. Their surprise was complete when the young man opened his eyes and sat up.

Dionysius claimed to have spoken to Persephone herself during his journey into the afterlife and told the leaders of the cult of her displeasure at the way in which they used the gifts she had given them to profit by the misfortune of others. He laid a curse upon them all and bade them flee into the night, there to await whatever fates would come to claim them. So terrified were the leaders of the organization by Dionysius' return from death that they did just that, scattering into the darkness. Within the next five days, all of them lay dead under inexplicable circumstances.

Thereafter, Dionysius, his power first among them, took control of the cult, for there could be no doubt that such was ordained by Persephone herself. Quickly, Dionysius' fame spread through the shadows of the Grecian city-states. He was sought out by the rich and the poor alike, all of them wanting to speak to a lost father, a fallen son or a beloved grandmother. He turned away none who came with earnest intent, though his gift remained unpredictable. Sometimes, he could put himself into a deathlike trance and return with words from a loved one. Other times, the power would fail him and he would return whatever donation the seeker had brought and, with no small measure of sadness, send her on her way. Soon enough, word of Dionysius' amazing ability spread to even the deepest reaches of the night and unto him was sent a visitor, traveling upon the commandment of Cappadocius himself.

Japheth appeared to Dionysius one night in the vineyard, mantled with a chill mist and a hooded cloak of a blackness so deep it looked to have been spun of the stretches of night between the stars. Dionysius smiled broadly and without fear, and spoke, "My eyes cannot show me whether you are man or ghost; my Sight tells me that you are both and neither." At the end of that one night's discussion, Dionysius accepted Japheth's Embrace. The Son of Cappadocius did not, however, get the childe he had expected.

Dionysius' natural good cheer, compassion and optimism drew him away from Japheth's efforts to instruct him in the clan's Road of Bones and toward the tenets set forth in the Pact of Athens. Gifted as a mortal man with powers over the underworld, he saw no real reason to change who he was on account of his Embrace. Though his features were sallow and his frame gaunt, Dionysius was still a beautiful young man and he kept many lovers, Cainite and kine alike. He

offered up the wine of his vineyard for wild revelry and gave generously to the poor. Those who died penniless, he often claimed and buried at his own expense. Dionysius cared for the living and the dead alike, just as he had when last he drew breath. Over the course of time, other Cainites were drawn to him. Some came to benefit by his prestigious ties of blood; others wished to associate themselves with his great good fortune; and still others, hearing of Dionysius' progress upon the Road of Humanity, came to hear whatever secrets he had learned about that noble way. Within a few centuries, he found himself surrounded by a court of devotees, hangers-on and fellow walkers upon the Road of Humanity and was pronounced, more or less by popular demand, the Prince of Athens.

To this night, Dionysius remains very much the man he was when Japheth bore him into the everlasting night. He is more subdued now with the passage of centuries, though his smile still comes easily and he is every bit the populist ruler he was when first the Cainites of Athens raised him up to his station. All Prodigals, regardless of affiliation, faith, clan or anything else, are allowed within his domain, there to engage in debate, politics, artistic endeavors or whatever pastimes they might choose, so long as they heed the code of conduct set forth in the Pact of Athens.

Currently, Dionysius laments the loss of Michael the Patriarch, a staunch ally to Athens, and seeks young and capable Cainites to make connections for him (for his alliances are now old, and with all of those who went to their Final Deaths in the fall of the Dream, much outdated) among the Greek Byzantine vampires, that they might begin to reestablish something of the glories of only a scant few decades ago. If he can be said to feel any real anger, Dionysius directs it toward the Latin conquerors upon the *Via Regalis* who (just as they did in days long ago) have come to claim that which rightfully belongs to the Greeks.

Mannal, Rebellious Child of the Sultan of Damascus

7th generation Toreador, childe of Darshuf

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: AD 878

Apparent Age: early 20s

Mannal met her sire, Darshuf, at a young age. As one of the *Ray'een al-Fen* ("Patrons of the Arts"; the Toreador), he had a great interest in her father, who was an architect; as she grew into an intelligent and beautiful young woman, Darshuf took her under his wing, granting her the Embrace on her 22nd birthday. He became like a father to her as the years wore on and her mortal family withered and died. It was, by her recollection, a pleasant existence.



Then, the Baali came.

Darshuf at first turned a blind eye to their abhorrent practices, but soon came to revel in their wickedness and cruelty. Mannal was horrified. This was nothing like the gentle, creative soul who had sired her into the night. Darshuf was slowly becoming someone else, someone terrible. It was excruciating for Mannal to watch, and she resolved to do something about it. Her cries for help, carried in the hands of swift and discrete messengers, drew the attention of the Assamite clan, who needed hear only the rumor of Baali involvement to pique their interest. Soon, however, Mannal had more intrigues on her hands than she could deal with. Some Assamites wished to humiliate her clan in Damascus over some ancient slight, supported by Lasombra who planned to stage a coup. Some of her own clansmen supported the Baali, and others wished to see Darshuf slain. The twisted Lepers whispered secrets from the shadows and conspired to bring down all sides. All Mannal wanted was for the Baali to be gone and for her sire to again exist as the good man he once seemed to be.

Now, Mannal walks a dangerous line. Some Cainites counsel her to seize the reins of power and claim Damascus for her own, but she wants no part of it. In her heart, she is still a young woman who loves her sire and just wants him to be well again, free of the awful ideals he has embraced under the guidance of the monstrous Cainites with whom he now associates. Thus, she works to protect Darshuf's power, even as she seeks to undermine his interests. It is a balancing act that cannot long endure. Still, Mannal does her best, working in secret; one night, she seeks to set the Lasombra against the Assamites, another, she lays subtle clues at the feet of the Lepers, trying to inspire them to hunt down the Baali. Thus far, none have yet

discerned the degree to which she is exerting her influence over Damascus, but it is only a matter of time. What will happen then is anyone's guess, but it is not apt to be pleasant.

Joachim, Grand Marshall of the Twilight Order

6th generation warrior Salubri, Childe of Rebekah

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: AD 922

Apparent Age: mid teens

Joachim was born to war. His father was a career mercenary, and he was raised (motherless, after the age of three) in the company of fighting men. As a boy, he sharpened blades, fletched arrows, mended armor and otherwise learned fitting crafts for one who would one day live and, in all likelihood die, by the sword. It was, by his own account, a good life for a simple boy of no great means.

Good life or bad, though, it was by no means an exceptional life. Joachim first took up arms at the age of ten, after a campaign gone awry devastated the company and left it with few options but to gird its youths for battle. He took to the life with earnest passion, neither a bad warrior nor an excellent one. It could not be said that Joachim enjoyed killing, for he was not a cruel or hurtful young man; instead, he saw himself as a craftsman whose medium was war. He never really stopped to consider that his work destroyed, rather than created. It was ignorance, and not active malice, that made of him a killer.

It was in the shadow of a fortress that no longer stands and whose name he can no longer even remember that Joachim lost his life. His heart was pierced by a stray arrow and what strength he had quickly fled him. As

darkness overtook him, the last thing he could remember feeling was the tightness of his grip on his notched long sword. In the darkness was no afterlife, no gods, spirits or angels. There was no one and nothing to herald Joachim onward into either salvation or damnation. Death seemed to him a singularly disappointing phenomenon. Just as he began to realize that all of this was actually happening, as the reality of his own demise had just sunk in, Joachim's body burned with agony and he felt his soul wrenched out of that hateful darkness, compelled to flow into his lifeless frame, to replace the blood that had poured out of it. With a scream of pain and defiance, Joachim fell from the bier onto which he had been laid and stared into the eyes of his sire.

Rebekah could never adequately answer for Joachim why she had chosen him of all the fallen on that battlefield. Perhaps it was his youth and the innocence she thought she saw in his pale and bloodless face. Perhaps it was the ferocity with which his lifeless hand gripped his sword, unwilling to surrender, even in death. Maybe it was something else entirely. He would never receive an answer and, truth be told, cared precious little one way or the other. It was enough to Joachim to know that he would not yet have to face that relentless darkness.

Joachim was educated in the tenets of the Road of Humanity and took well to them, but as was the case in his mortal life, he lacked focus. He left Rebekah's tutelage as aimless as he had been before she found him. He went into the wilderness and sought refuge in battle, attempting to find in familiar arts a balm for his melancholy. In the end, it proved to be of no comfort to him. While he learned to fight with skill he had never before possessed, his reasons for taking up arms were, if anything, more frail and meaningless than ever they were when he was mortal. The diablerie of Saulot, however, changed all that.

Joachim, like many of his warrior brethren, quickly learned of the cause of the Antediluvian's demise and turned his fury upon the usurping Tremere. Though it did not bring him any sense of fulfillment, such violence at least gave him direction. Sadly, he watched many of his kin succumb to the magics of the blood-sorcerers; others fell to their own anger, losing themselves in the obliterating embrace of the Beast. At last, Rebekah herself broke under the weight of the wrath within her soul, transformed into a ravaging monster. When her mindless rage was loosed upon the Tremere, many of them vanished unto dust. At all other times, however, it was the kine who suffered. For the first time in his existence, Joachim knew what needed to be done. He hunted down his own sire, even as the vendetta against the Tremere raged; and when he found her, a farm girl broken and bloodless in her arms, he struck her down.

That night, Joachim abandoned the blood-feud against the Tremere. He, like most of his surviving clanmates, knew what was happening, and he would not



waste his remaining nights in defiance of what had already come to pass. He had sentenced to the Final Death she who had saved him from his own mortality, and he no longer feared the darkness that awaited him—he had seen it reflected in her eyes, those eyes which once looked upon him with such compassion when he woke from death. Finally, Joachim had a cause.

Over the years since then, Joachim has gathered those Prodigals who, like him, feel that the Soulless must be seen to, that the House of Caine must be kept in order. Once, he had a much greater hand in the affairs of the knighthood, but now it has become something very much beyond his control. Joachim remains the spiritual head of the Twilight Order, though only a very few knights, his most trusted, even know of him now. All told, he is happier with things being that way, for he knows that the Order will survive him when at last the Usurpers come to finish the bloody work they started.

Véronique d'Orléans

Véronique d'Orléans is a woman of many skills. She is a capable politician among the Cainites of France (and even beyond); a staunch defender of her mortal friends and allies; a strong warrior; a skilled healer; and a player, even at her relatively extremely young age, in the War of Princes. Sired because of her level-headedness and intelligent responses to the quandaries put to her by her sire, Véronique has never lost that streak of innovation and forethought that set her apart from so many others.

Véronique's relationship with the Road of Humanity is an interesting one. She, like most, began her nights as a Cainite terrified at the thought of what she had become. Anguish and shame quickly subsided, however, when Véronique came to accept that this was her lot and that she had best make the most of it. While her sire, a strong supporter of Julia Antasia and herself a Roman Prodigal, obviously wished for Véronique to follow her upon the *Via Humanitatis*, she left her childe's options open and invited her to study the options for herself. In the end, after much reflection and not a little indecision, Véronique came to the Road of Humanity, believing its values to most closely mirror her own. Still, it was by no means an instinctive, or even swift, choice. Sometimes, she still finds it difficult to reconcile the rage in her blood and her anger over the actions of so many Cainites with the *Via Humanitatis'* admonishments of forgiveness, hope and compassion for all.

Now, Véronique is acknowledged by France's most powerful Cainites and often works far beyond the borders of the Courts of Love; one month, on an errand for Julia Antasia, and another delivering a missive to Lord Mithras in London for Esclarmonde the Black. She is, by any standards, an extraordinarily well-traveled person, and some find it surprising that she finds as much time for the kine, whether members of her herd or simply her friends, as she does. Accepting no recompense, she offers her knowledge of medicine (a bit of the crafts of both her



apothecary father and her midwife mother) to the most wretched and poverty-stricken folk. Some Cainites find it strange that she allows her ghouls and other associates as much autonomy (and tolerates as much dissent and even derision from them) as she does. Still, Véronique finds nothing wrong with this. It is, to her, a relationship built on a more fundamental sense of friendship and proper equality (in which all parties at least have the free will to disagree) than that thrust by most Cainites upon their servants. While many shake their heads in puzzlement, none can argue with Véronique's apparent conversance with the ways of her road, a familiarity she claims stems purely from her willingness to live as a *human being*, rather than trying to be either Cainite or kine.

Profile

9th generation Brujah, childe of Portia

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: AD 1130

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Commerce 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 2, Hearth Wisdom 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Leadership 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Politics 3, Ride 1, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 2, Fortitude 1, Obfuscate 1, Potence 4, Presence 4

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 5, Domain 3, Herd 4, Influence 1, Resources 2, Retainers 3, Status 2

Road: Humanity 8

Conscience: 4, **Self-Control:** 4, **Courage:** 4, **Willpower:** 7

Bertrand d'Anjou, Penitent Crusader

Bertrand was there when the fateful words, "Deus vult!" ("God wills it!") sparked the Crusades. Inspired by the message of Bernard de Clairvaux, the third son of a powerful lord girded for battle and departed French shores to reclaim the Holy Land from the Saracens. He was among those who broke the defense at Jerusalem, and his thirst for Muslim blood was not easily slaked. By his own recollections, Bertrand probably killed no fewer than thirty men — and, he now admits, an equal number of women and children. His mindless zeal was matched only by his swordsmanship. Neither went unnoticed.

Bertrand was among those who remained in the Holy Land, there to maintain Christian dominion over Jerusalem. In part, he did so in order to serve the Cross and, in part, to perhaps eventually be given land and title of his own. He had been there for only a year when vengeance came to claim him. Bertrand was struck down from behind by a Saracen assassin who appeared as though from thin air. Bleeding badly, the young knight rolled away from his assailant and drew his sword. It was only then that Bertrand realized that the enemy he faced was a woman. He saw the hatred and sorrow in the eyes that stared at him from over the veil, and as he imagined her husband or perhaps even children slain by his own hand, the enormity of his crimes fell upon his shoulders like a great weight. Stunned by the realization of what evils he had wrought, evils that would move this graceful slip of a woman to take up arms in violence against him, Bertrand collapsed to the ground, dropping his weapon as his grip suddenly went slack. The rage in the woman's stare wavered for just an instant and Bertrand whispered, "I'm sorry."

The anticipated deathblow never came. Instead, the woman tore away her veil and fell on him with enough strength to bear Bertrand to the ground as though he were an infant. Within hours, he awoke as one of the *Banu Haqim*. "Now," his sire told him, "you have eternity with which to make amends for your deeds, and we shall see if you are truly as sorry as you would have me believe." After that, Bertrand disappeared for years, enduring training at the hands of harsh taskmasters among the Assamites. His mastery of the martial skills was ignored, in favor of an acquaintance with the art, philosophy, culture and religion of those he had despised. Bertrand entered the tutelage of the *Banu Haqim* as an ignorant outsider and left it as a man of great erudition and heavy sorrow.

In these nights, Bertrand dwells once more in Jerusalem, often garbed in the manner of a simple craftsman. The slow darkening of his flesh makes him fit in better than he ever did as a mortal man. Now, he



protects the very Muslims he once persecuted. Since the recent reversion of Jerusalem to European hands (and the subsequent swell of power among European Cainites) he has had much cause to be vigilant. While he walks among Cainite titans such as the Lioness of Jerusalem, Bertrand's attentions are devoted to the lowliest among kine. Though great and powerful elders in the Holy Land orchestrate the very fate of the Race of Caine, the repentant warrior finds purpose in protecting the weak outside his very door. With quiet approval, elders among the Assamites note that it seems even the most abhorrent of the *Franj* can find redemption and a noble purpose.

Profile

11th generation Assamite vizier, childe of Layla bint-Nadr

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: 1100 AD

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 2, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Melee 3, Ride 2, Seneschal 1, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2, Survival 1, Theology 2

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 4, Fortitude 1, Obfuscate 1, Presence 1, Quietude 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Domain 3, Herd 2, Mentor 3, Resources 2

Road: Humanity 7

Conscience: 4, **Self-Control:** 3, **Courage:** 4, **Willpower:** 6

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