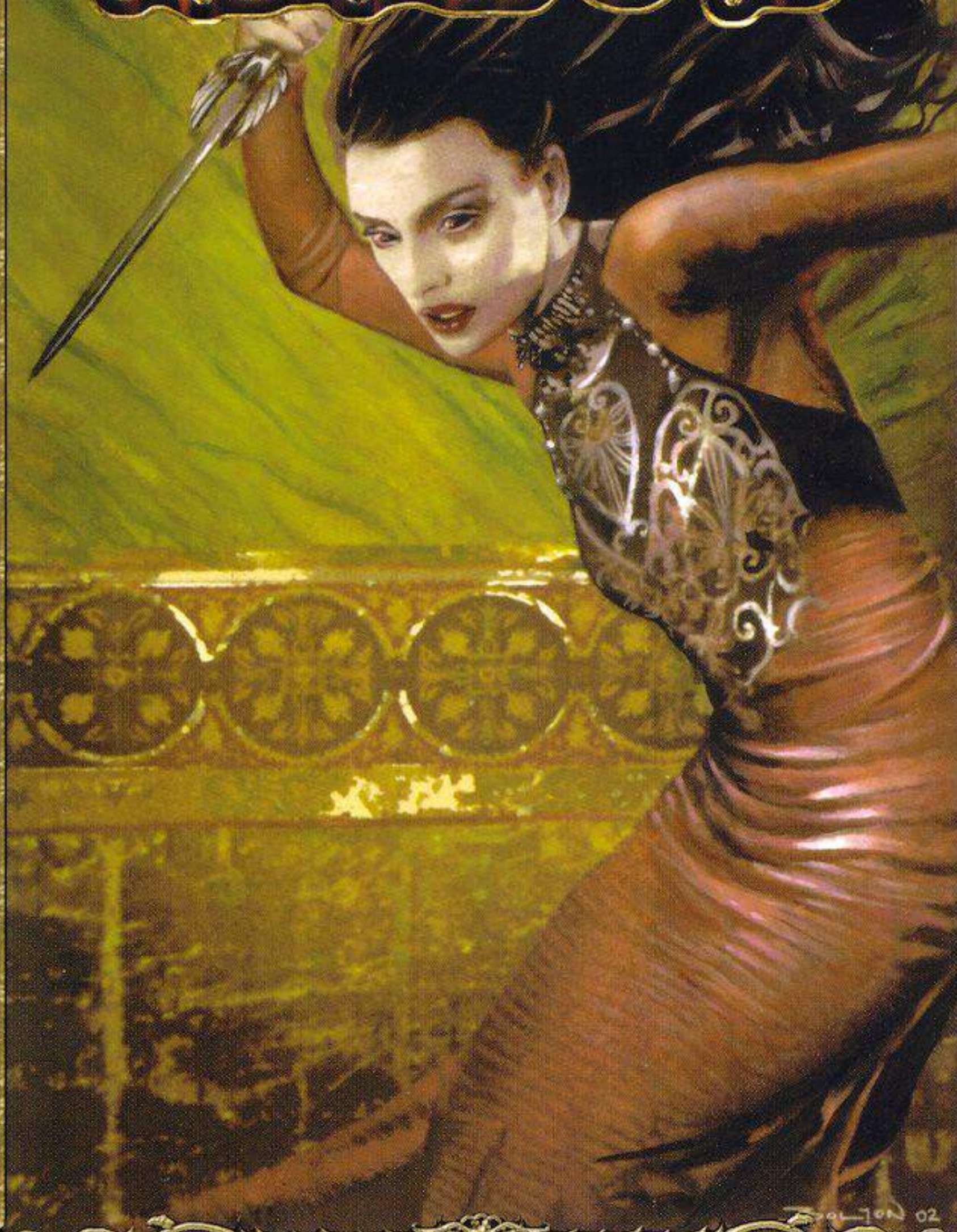




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OF  
KINGS



A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRE<sup>TM</sup>



# ROAD KINGS™



By Steven Kenson

Vampire created by Mark Rein•Hagen



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**Darci “Peekaboo” Strachan** for keeping our interests aroused even as the night wore on.



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# PRELUDE: MIDNIGHT VIGIL

Is it not passing brave to be a king,  
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?  
— Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*

From the windows of the church, stained glass saints and angels looked down on the world of men. Were they watching? If they watched, then they did not see, the poet thought. Otherwise would they allow the late-night world he had discovered of late? Or perhaps they did see, and prepared a special place in Hell for those who transgressed God's law. It was certainly not the first time that thought had crossed his mind.

"They are beautiful, are they not?"

The young man started at the sound of the voice so close behind him, but regained his composure quickly before turning to face its source.

"Indeed they are," he replied. As are you, he added silently. The vision standing before him was perhaps the most beautiful man he had ever seen. Not merely handsome, but beautiful in the way the poets of the ancient world spoke of masculine beauty. His hair was like spun gold, gleaming darkly in the light of the presence lamp, one errant curl across his forehead. His eyes were pools of the deepest blue, like the darkening sky. His features were fair and noble, his skin as smooth, pale, and flawless as fine marble. The simple white



robe he wore emphasized his pallor, making him look like an angel descended from one of the windows above, although nothing could have been further from the truth.

"We find solace in things of beauty," the stranger said, his eyes going to the great rose window behind the nave, its colors like darkling jewels in the lamplight. Then his dark eyes turned away from it. "I am Henri. You are the artist my liege spoke of?"

"Daniel," he said with a bow. "A humble poet and playwright."

A ghost of a smile played about Henri's grim mouth. "Daniel, who walked into the lion's den. How fitting. The son of the Baron of Winchester, are you not?"

Daniel wasn't overly surprised Henri should know his parentage. It was hardly a secret, after all. "The third son, yes. I have two brothers and so no hopes of inheriting my father's estate, thank God."

"Why so?" Henri asked. "A great barony, no doubt wedded to a nobleman's daughter, with fine sons and daughters of your own. There are many men who dream of such things, and many second and third sons made bitter by their loss."

"Not I," the playwright replied. "My only dreams are to pursue my art, not to become muddled in the mire of politics, sir."

"You need not call me 'sir', Daniel, for I am not a knight yet. That is for tomorrow night. Tonight is for me to prepare myself for my duties, and keep vigil here. But first one more question for you; is it true that my lord has commissioned you to write poems and plays based on the tales you gather?"

Daniel inclined his head. "That is so. His lordship is a most generous and gracious patron."

"Indeed he is. I trust that he has also made clear to you the rewards he offers for true and loyal service, as well as the punishments for failure." The threat hung in the still and cold air for a long moment, but Daniel chose to ignore it.

"I shall not disturb your meditations in any way," he told Henri.

"I thank you," Henri said. "I must begin." He stepped past Daniel and moved up to the altar rail, where a knightly raiment of mail was laid out, topped with a fine sword in a leather sheath, its hilt rich with jewels and chased with gold. Henri sank to his knees, hands clasped at his breast and head bowed, muttering words in Latin under his breath. Daniel kept a respectful distance and watched, silently taking in the image of the squire kneeling in prayer and meditation throughout the night, until the coming of the dawn.

† † †

The following night, it was time for the ceremony, and Daniel was permitted to watch as Henri was awarded his knighthood. Lord Rouald presided over the rite, assisted by a priest dressed in somber black, wearing a pure white stole. Henri came forth to have the white belt fastened around his waist and the gold-chased spurs placed onto his boots. Then he knelt before Lord Rouald, head bare and bowed. The lord drew his sword from its scabbard, the sound of metal on metal loud in the silent chapel. He raised it before him, blade held high, and addressed the man kneeling before him.

"Henri, why do you come before us today?"

"To enter into your service, my lord," Henri replied in a firm voice. "I wish to become your liege-man of life and limb and of earthly worship. Faith and truth I will bear unto you to the death... and beyond, in the name of the Dark Father and by my blood, I swear it!"

The sword fell to touch Henri's left shoulder, then his right, then came to rest upon the crown of his head.

"Then I take you as my liege-man, Henri, and invest you as my knight. Faith and honor I shall render unto you so long as you are in my service." He sheathed the sword as Henri kept his head bowed.

"Rise, Sir Henri," Lord Rouald bade, and his new liege-man did as he was asked. Then the lord took a step down to where Henri stood, the two men standing face to face. Rouald spoke softly, but in the silence of the church, Daniel was able to hear the words.

"You have served me well, Henri, so now I offer this gift to you." He spread his arms and embraced the new knight like a son. Then, with the swiftness of a striking snake, Rouald sank his fangs deep into Henri's throat.

Daniel gasped. Henri emitted only a soft whimper, like a sigh of pleasure. His knees buckled but Rouald held him up, his lips clinging to Henri's neck, his arms tight around the young knight's body. For what seemed like an eternity he held him in that dread embrace, until Henri gave another choked sigh and Rouald lowered him to the cold stone floor.

Daniel was paralyzed, watching events unfold with horrified fascination as Rouald drew the dagger at his belt and knelt beside the supine knight. The lord drew the blade across his wrist and allowed the first drops of blood, dark and glimmering in the candlelight, to fall onto Henri's lips as the priest took up an unfamiliar chant in Latin. Moments after the first drops fell, Henri convulsed, his body stretched like a man on the rack, and he cried out. Daniel would never forget the sound of that forlorn cry, like a child ripped from the arms of its mother. Then the young knight



shivered and shook for what seemed like a very long time as Rouald crouched over him, watching silently, as impassive as stone.

Finally, Henri rose and seized upon Lord Rouald's wrist like a suckling babe, drinking deep of the blood that flowed from it, swallowing in great gulps. After a few such, Rouald gently but firmly pulled his arm away and pressed his own hand over the wound. There was a moment of hesitation and doubt in the knight's posture, then Rouald lifted his hand to him. Daniel noticed that the wound was gone without a trace.

"Rise... my childe," he said. The voice of the priest rose in a hymn of some sort that Daniel had never heard before. Although a bit unsteady on his feet, Henri turned and walked slowly from the church. When his eyes fell upon Daniel, the poet could not help but shrink back from the hunger that he saw reflected there.

Henri looked away and strode toward the doors. Lord Rouald followed behind and paused for a moment near Daniel.

"I look forward to reading your rendering of tonight's events," he said lightly, as if they were discussing a fine party.

"Thank... thank you, my lord," Daniel replied, fumbling for the words.

"These things must be remembered," Rouald said to no one in particular. "Our glory must be recorded and known." Then he, too, walked toward the doors of the church.

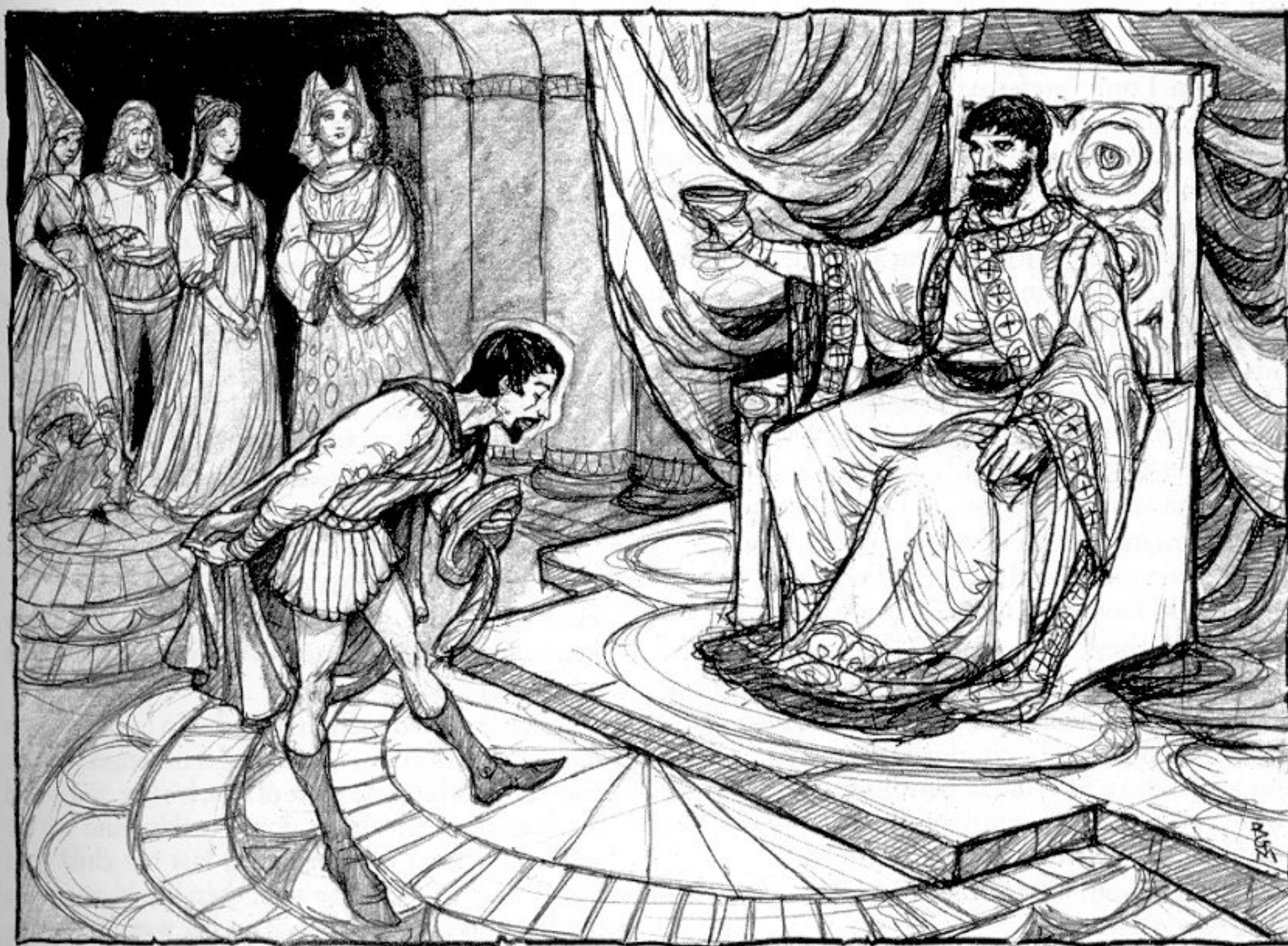
Daniel remained and pondered the annals no living person could read, the stories and poems no living voice would speak and no living ear would hear. "Our glory must be known," Lord Rouald had said, but known by whom? Who would know the deeds of these lords of the night?

† † †

The lord raised a glass, followed by the members of his court.

"A toast," he said, "to the artistry of our own Daniel Winchester, for a tale brilliantly written and performed!" Cries of affirmation followed along with the clinking of glasses before the guests sipped of the blood, still warm and potent. For his part, Daniel bowed and accepted the accolades of the court. He was pleased with how the performance had gone, although he was already filled with ideas for his next work, and would have preferred to be at his writing desk. Still, the praises of his lord and the court were pleasant, and no less his due.

"A fine play, Daniel," said a voice at his side, and the playwright rose respectfully.





"Thank you, my lord."

The dark-clad man who had spoken waved Daniel to be seated again, then took the seat next to him, and set his goblet on the table.

"Please, my friend, it is Henri, as I hope it will always be. We have known each other too long to stand on such formalities. How long has it been, now?"

"Twenty years, my... Henri."

"Twenty years... it hardly seems so."

Indeed not, Daniel thought, to you. Lord Henri Dulaire looked the same as he had the night when he and Daniel had first met, all those years ago. He wore finer raiment befitting his station, but the golden hair, the pale, flawless skin, were all exactly the same, as untouched by time as the statues that stood in the chamber, silently watching over the festivities.

It had been only a year since Henri had been named lord of the domain following the unfortunate demise of Lord Rouald. One of the first things he had done was make sure Daniel knew that his work as the poet of the court would continue, and that he would enjoy Henri's patronage for as long as he ruled, which promised to be a long time indeed. Daniel knew enough of the affairs of the Cainite courts of France to know that Henri was something of a rising star, a valuable patron to have.

"How fares your family?" Henri asked. He never saw them. Daniel preferred to keep that part of his life separate from his nocturnal activities at court. His family knew only that Daniel Winchester was a respected poet who lived on the generous endowments of his patrons and a small family inheritance. Lord Dulaire never asked to see them at court, and Daniel never offered to bring them, but His Lordship still asked about them.

"They are well," Daniel replied, biting back another "my lord." "My son is betrothed to be wed in the spring."

"Truly?" Henri said. "That is fine news! You must permit me to give you a small gift for the happy couple."

"That is most generous..." Daniel began.

"Nonsense. It is nothing compared to the gifts you have given me over the years. Have I told you that your works have been most inspiring to me, Daniel?"

"Have they?"

"Can you have any doubt? You have recorded my career since the time of my Embrace, and reading your works, seeing them performed, gives me a sense of pride but also a measure of humility, to know where I have come from. Your insights into the ways of kings and men are no small things, my friend."

"Thank you," Daniel replied. "That means a great deal to me, Henri."

"Another toast then, to your fine work and to your son's marriage. May they both continue to be fruitful."

The two goblets, one filled with wine and the other with blood, clinked lightly and the two men drank. For a moment, it was as if they were not liege and vassal, but true comrades, and Daniel put aside thoughts of his next work and threw himself into enjoying the celebration.

† † †

"Grandfather!"

Daniel knew that sharp tone of Elaine's all too well, but he pretended not to hear her. He dipped his quill in the inkwell again, writing in a hand that was a little less steady than it once was, but still practiced and sure. A number of filled pages sat neatly stacked on the corner of the desk.

"Grandfather," Elaine said again, bustling into the room. "You should be resting."

"Bah," Daniel said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I'll have time enough to rest soon." He started to turn back to his writing but then a fit of coughing seized his frail frame and he dropped the quill, staining the blank portion of the page with spots of ink. His granddaughter supported him and kept him from falling off the stool.

"Come, back to bed with you," she said and there was no arguing with her. When the coughing fit had passed, Daniel allowed her to lead him back to bed and pull the bedclothes up over him. Then she set about stoking up the brazier in the room to fight off the winter cold.

"I'm not an invalid, you know," Daniel snapped. He could feel a bit more warmth in the room, but it never seemed enough to chase the chill from his bones these days. "You don't have to take care of me every moment."

"I don't mind," Elaine said blithely, drawing the curtains to help shut out the cold wind blowing outside.

"Well, you won't have to be doing it much longer," he muttered.

"Grandfather! Don't say such things!" Elaine said.

"It's true," he insisted. "I've lived a good four-score years, seen my children grown, even held my great-grandchild in my arms. A man can hardly ask for more than that."

Elaine smiled sadly and brushed a hand across his cheek. "And you may live a good time longer yet," she said. "So let's have no more of this. It's late, you should be sleeping." She bent down to kiss him on the forehead, like a mother would kiss her child good night. "Sleep well," she said, then she blew out the candles and closed the door on her way out, leaving



the room lit only by the dull glow of the brazier and the faint shafts of moonlight that slipped through the gap in the curtains.

Daniel lay there for a time, thinking about getting up and getting back to his writing, but Elaine was right. It was late and he was so tired, so very tired...

Suddenly, Daniel was aware of a presence in the room with him. He was not startled, for the presence was a familiar one and he'd long since become used to its late-night comings and goings. The shadow of a man stood beside his bed, framed in the faint moonlight, looking down at him.

"Hello, old friend."

"Henri," Daniel replied. "I'm glad you've come."

"I wanted to see how you were doing." Henri walked around the bed and stopped by the desk, picking up a sheet of parchment, his eyes flicking down the page.

"Still writing, I see," he said with a wry tone. "I should have known that nothing would keep you from your work."

"I fear that this work will not be finished," Daniel replied with a sigh.

"Must it be so?" Henri said. "There is still time...." He didn't complete the suggestion. It had been an old discussion between them.

"No, no," the old poet said, shaking his head slowly. "I have all the immortality that I want. It is too late for me. I've had a good life."

"I know," Henri said, sinking to sit on the edge of the bed. "Of all your work, I think what I enjoy most is how you write about your life, my friend. Reading it, seeing it performed, I can almost know what it is like, almost remember being alive. I can understand why you are reluctant to leave it behind."

"Ah, my young prince," Daniel said. One gnarled hand lifted from the bedclothes to tentatively touch Henri's face. It was as smooth and cool as marble. "You are still as beautiful as that first night that I saw you. You are so like my work, a moment captured forever in time."

A single, crimson tear rolled down that pale and refined face.

"No, do not grieve for me, my lord," Daniel said. "It is my time and I am ready. I have long since made peace with the past and with God."

"I grieve not just for you, my friend," Henri said. "Nor even for myself. I fear that I have done a terrible wrong in keeping your work to myself. How many artists like you have we deprived the world of by bringing you into our nighttime world? What you could have accomplished had you taken what Lord Rouald gave you..."

"Regrets, Henri?" Daniel said with a wan smile. "Regrets are for other men, not for lords and kings. What is done is done, and perhaps the better for it. I am satisfied with my work and, if I did not make the choice to walk away from what I had toward the hope of something different, then that is my failing, and not yours." He took a sharp intake of breath that led to another fit of coughing, and Henri bent forward to cradle the old man like a mother would her child.

"Might I ask a boon of you, my lord?" the poet said weakly.

"Anything. Name it and it is yours."

"Two things," he replied softly. "I do not think that I will finish my translation of the letters of Acindynus for you."

"Do not worry about such things," Henri said. "I will see to it."

"Good," Daniel nodded. "There is..." he gave a wheezing sigh. "There is much insight in them for you, I think."

"And the other?"

"Rule well, my lord, and remember me." The gnarled hand slipped from Henri's shoulder and dropped to the bed. Henri felt the tension drain out of Daniel Winchester's body like a gentle sigh, the gray head rolling back onto the pillow.

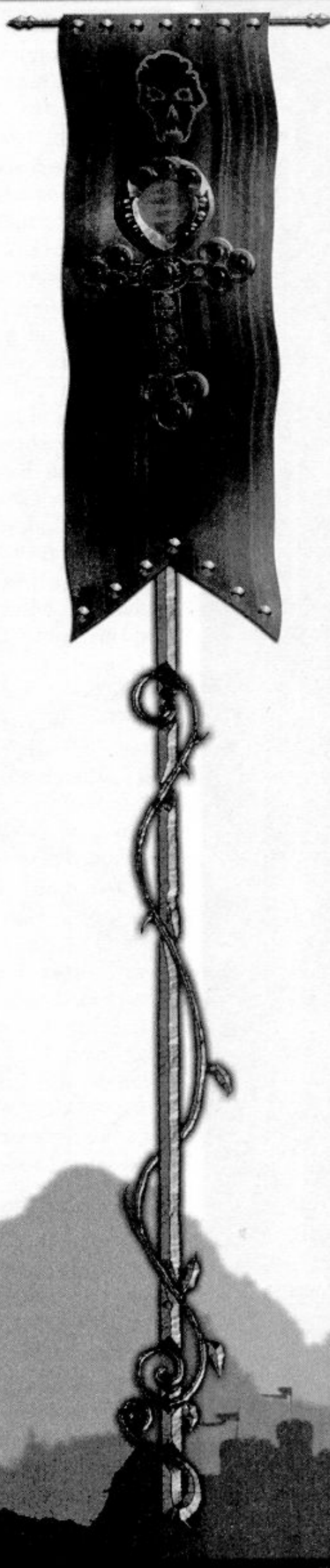

"I will, my friend, always."

And he kept vigil there until the coming of the dawn.









# CHAPTER ONE: CROWNS CAST IN SHADOWS

"Those of your blood who would rule the earth  
Shall cower in the dust by day, fearing the light.  
Thus shall your kingdom be, your prideful empire,  
Its throne made of fear, its crown cast in shadows."

— Book III of The Erciyes Fragments

The following comes from Letters to the Lords of the Night, by the  
Cainite scholar Acindynus, with commentary by other noted Cainites.

## On the Origin of the Right of Kings

The Via Regalis, the Road of Kings, stretches back throughout  
Cainite history to the earliest nights of our kind. It is the first and  
noblest of the many roads walked by the children of Caine since the  
time of the first Embrace, when Caine took up his destiny to rule over  
the Sons of Seth as well as his own offspring. In The Temptations of  
Caine, he says unto the angel of the Lord:



*"I will make my own fate in lands east of Nod And establish my kingdom in exile. I will set my children on golden thrones. And we will rule over Seth's brood together. For surely it is better to rule in the darkness. Than to humble myself falsely in the light."*

So it was that Caine first declared the right of he and his childer to rule over the sons of Man in this world. So it was that the right of kingship first came into the hands of Caine the Dark Father and those who came after him, through Caine's act of willful defiance.

Did Caine defy the will of God in this? Indeed so, but Caine, like all men, was given free will by God, to exercise as he saw fit. So, too, were Adam and Eve, and all their sons and daughters, given free will. Caine chose the exercise of his will rather than unthinking obedience, a choice that has marked his children and the Road of Kings from that time onward. For whatever claims — by mortal or Cainite — to the divine right of kings, kingship truly flows from the power of individual will and the conviction to exercise that will in the face of all obstacles. In truth, the divine right of kings is the unshakable will to achieve power, no matter what may stand in the way. This is even more true of our kind, since no Cainite is king by birth (or Embrace) without the will to take power and hold it.

Thus the right of kings is a matter of individual choice and will, the will to power. We shall consider this further, but it can be seen clearly in the rise of the children of Caine to power in the world throughout our history.

*From the commentaries of Fioré:*

*Acindynus is blasphemous in his inference that the will of God has nothing to do with the right of kings, mortal or Cainite. In fact God's will has everything to do with our right to rule over the mortal cattle, and for certain mortals to rule the day while we rule the night. In placing His mark upon Caine, God showed His favor to the Dark Father by saying that anyone who dared to kill Caine would suffer greatly. Through Caine's blood, the Lord gave us the power to rule, and therefore the right. To suggest otherwise is to court a terrible punishment.*

Still, Acindynus' point regarding the importance of the will to power is valid. The Lord has ordained that the children of Caine will hold the night and rule over the children of Seth, but one must still have the will and the cunning necessary to seize that divine right and wield it, and to defend it against one's enemies.

## The First City

Caine took hold of his destiny and wandered the land until he came upon Enosh, the favored first-born son of his brother Seth, who went into the wilderness seeking the voice of God. He found Caine instead and

Caine took Enosh for his own, calling him Enoch. Together they returned to the lands of men, where Enoch granted his sire the crown that had been offered first to him, and Caine became king of the First City. Caine says:

*"And because they bowed down to me of their own free will, The Lord of Heaven did not intervene."*

Such is the power of free will and the first lesson on the Road of Kings: that freedom cannot be taken, only relinquished by those who have it. Caine, like every king and prince who followed him, ruled at the sufferance of his subjects. Had they risen up against him and Enoch then and there, the First City would have been no more, and the history of our kind would have been quite different.

Even if Caine's power had been enough to slay his rebellious subjects to the last man, woman, and child, their freedom would still be given to them in Heaven, with Caine left alone once again on Earth, for such was the curse of the Lord. Instead, the people of the First City feared Caine's power, and the mark of God upon his brow, so they did not choose to defy him. It is from such fear and respect that the power of kings flows.

Thus the right of kings is a matter of fear and respect. A monarch who is feared and respected earns the fealty of his subjects. A monarch who does not maintain his vassals' fear and respect soon loses their fealty as well.

In his rule of the First City, Caine became Lawgiver, proclaiming his commands to his childer. The ancient code of the Canaille is the basis for all Cainite law and the foundation upon which the Road of Kings is built. Caine said:

*We are given Dominion over the line of Seth, third son of Adam, as he is our youngest Brother, we will watch over his Children as if they were our own, we will show them the right way and in return, they will serve us all of their days.*

*They will serve us while the Sun rides the sky, and watch over our houses, with quenching water, against Michael's fire.*

*They will feed us and provide us with clothes, They will dance for us, and provide us with song, They will lay with us, and provide us with comfort, They will advise us, and we will listen to their advice, They will worship us, and we must not allow their worship.*

This last point is a vital one. Above all, Caine admonished his childer not to accept the worship of the Children of Seth. They were destined to be kings and rulers, yes, but not gods. To challenge the place of God was to court His anger, as Caine well knew, and the Lord has commanded, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." So Caine wisely forbade his childer the worship of their mortal subjects:



*Thou shalt not become as a God to the Children of Seth, for the One Above, growing jealous in the sky, will strike down the line of Caine forever...*

*Know thou that the Children of Seth will rise up with weapons from the One Above, and conquer us, should we be as Gods to them.*

Caine understood the truth of kingship: That its power flows from the individual will to engender fear and respect among one's vassals. In this the divine mandate of God is useful, because those who believe that our power flows from the Almighty are less likely to rise in arms against us. Challenging God's place only gives subjects cause to rise against us, if they believe that they serve a power higher and greater than that of their liege. Caine understood this, and so counseled his children not to aspire to the place of God.

But the progeny of Caine did not heed his wisdom. They became as gods to the people of the First City, and so God sent the flood to drown the city and the whole of the world, giving Cainites their first and harshest lesson in the duties and responsibilities of kingship.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

How blithely Acindynus ignores another of Caine's mandates from the Canaille, where he declares, "They will advise us, and we will listen to their advice." In this Caine tells his childer of the value of mankind, not only as subjects, but also as comrades, advisors, and allies in the truest sense of the word. Caine and the Second Generation were wise to seek not only the company, but also the wisdom and advice of mortals, something that Scions in the modern nights seem less prone to do, so certain are they of their superiority to the mortal herd.

If a prince or lord wishes to rule wisely, he does not ignore the value of the mortals in his domain. To do so is to turn away from humanity, and such rulers will be overthrown in time. To follow the wisdom of the Canaille, then one must consider all of it, and not only the words that support the rights of kings.

## The Second City

Following the Great Flood, Caine left his childer and resumed his wandering. So the Antediluvians founded the Second City, following the example of their sire and ruling over the world of men in the night.

Thirst for power as well as blood grew in the hearts of the Antediluvians, and they made war upon one another. They raised mighty armies and sent them to meet their deaths on the field of battle. They worked alliances and betrayals in the silence of the night. Their mortal agents brought death and fire in the light of the day. They set aside all responsibility, recalling Caine's words that granted them dominion, but forgetting their sire's command to guide the Children of Seth "as a





shepherd guides his flock." Instead they were led like lambs to the slaughter.

So when Caine returned to see the Second Generation decimated, his grandchilder warring amongst themselves, his fury knew no bounds. "I gave you dominion over mortal men and you have abused it!" he cried. He cursed his surviving children and they would carry his curse in their blood down through the generations. The Second City was no more and both the Children of Caine and the Children of Seth were scattered to the four winds.

Thus we learn that the right of kings has corresponding duties. Those who abuse the dominion granted them by Caine face not only his wrath, but the wrath of their vassals and subjects as well. The price of power is the duty to use it well and wisely.

The glories of the Second City were lost, but not forgotten. Veddartha, the founder of our noble clan, offered words to his childer, recorded in the annals:

*Be the law-giver, the tool-maker, Carry the sacred to the people, Keep the covenant, Bind those that rebel, Glory in those who fight and win, Keep strong swords about you always, and sharp eyes at your back.*

*Cower not in fear of the Sun! Shrink not from Fire! Though cursed we may be We are the Lords of the Earth, and all things fall under our dominion.*

Holding to their founder's words, the first Ventrue set out to make them so. In Veddartha's teachings and Caine's laws lay the seeds of the Road of Kings, waiting only for fertile soil in which to take root and grow.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

While I am pleasantly surprised by Acindynus' dismissal of the notion of "the divine right of kings," I am otherwise disappointed by his logic and interpretation of the words of Caine, to say nothing of his clear bias in favor of his own clan and their ways. These poor justifications for Cainite rule are just that, and as thinly veiled as the "divine right" that Acindynus rejects.

Acindynus quotes Veddartha in support of his arguments. Is the right to rule granted by mere words? What of Brujah's commandments to his childer? He said:

*Throw off the Elder's shackles of the mind, reach into thyself and see the truth revealed. The Truth, as truth is seen, will illuminate your soul and heal your wounds.*

*Know who you are, first, and be true to yourself.*

Wise words indeed that so many of our kind choose to ignore. Acindynus and the Patricians would have us believe that looking within reveals only these truths: First, that there is no higher power than the free will given by God to all thinking creatures. Second, that through fear and power one can break the wills of others and force them into fealty and servitude. Third, that such an arrangement is right and natural because it is "freely" entered into.

This is nothing but clever semantics. Does the peasant truly have the freedom to choose to disobey his liege-lord? Perhaps, if he values not his life and the lives of his family, but what choice is that, truly? To pretend that the "right" of kings is anything other than base coercion is foolish. It is true that all men have free will, including the freedom to rebel against a tyrant, but it is also true that not all men have the courage to do so.

If kingship is a matter of exercising one's will in cooperation with others, why then should it not be more egalitarian and to the benefit of all? Acindynus would have us believe that kingship carries with it duties and responsibilities, and here I agree, but I say that those duties and responsibilities go far beyond those acknowledged by him or by any other of his clan. Many on the Road of Kings refuse to acknowledge these greater responsibilities, which the Ideals of Brujah reveal to us, because they limit the exercise of their "will" to power.

## The Ancient World

The first true stirrings of what we know now as the Road of Kings began in the ancient Roman Empire, where Clan Ventrue put the commandments of their elders to the test. The Ventrue were the most influential Cainites in the Empire and embraced the patrician ideals of the Romans (and encouraged them among mortals as well). These ideas embodied the wisdom of Caine and Veddartha, teaching responsibility for one's domain and subjects. Patrician teachings and the duties expected of Cainite nobility strengthened the notion of duty and power working hand in hand to help stave off the nightly demands of the Beast.

Along with the rise of the Road of Kings came other roads, particularly the Via Humanitas championed by the Brujah and other Cainites of Carthage, following the teachings of their sire and the learning of the Greeks. The Scions of Rome noted the growth of Carthage and recalled Veddartha's commandment to "bind those that rebel." So they raised armies to crush and conquer Carthage, scattering the ideal of Humanitas and leaving the Brujah with a long-standing grudge against the Ventrue (and, among those who remember, nearly as great a one toward the Via Regalis that we champion).

Two other roads arose within the Empire, proving more serious threats to the Scions and their rule. The first was the Road of Heaven, gathering followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation he offered. The Scions were influential in first persecuting the believers (both mortal and Cainite) and later co-opting the faith to serve as the state religion of the Empire and strengthen their failing power. But influence over the newly formed church was always split between the Scions and the followers of the Road of Heaven as more Cainites were converted to the faith.



Meanwhile, the followers of the Road of Sin exercised their own subtle influence over the Empire, exulting in orgies and excess, encouraging others to throw off the "shackles" of their duties and responsibilities to indulge their own desires, much like the Cainites of Carthage before their fall. The influence of the Sinners spread like fire through the ranks of the Toreador and Malkavian clans, and then through the Ventrue as well. Decadence rotted the Empire from within, as struggles for power began to tear it asunder. In the end, the followers of the Road of Kings could do nothing but watch as all they had worked to build and maintain crumbled and barbarians poured over the walls to sack the glory that was Rome.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

How typical of the Ventrue to paint the destruction of Carthage in this way! How easily they justify the growth of the Road of Kings through the destruction of our greatest achievements! Since they were triumphant in the matter of Carthage, it must be that their way is superior, when in fact Carthage and what it represented was perhaps a fuller flowering of the Via Regalis than any Cainite kingdom then or since.

Carthage was a true embodiment of *humanitas*. Indeed, it was unlike any other place since the First City itself, where the children of Caine and the children of Seth could exist together in peace and harmony. What could be more perfect according to the ideals of the Road of Kings itself? Cainite rule balanced with responsibility to the people and duty to the state.

Therein lies a lesson about the Road of Kings that is easily overlooked. So many followers of the Via Regalis say it is better to be feared and respected than loved and admired. I say just the opposite. It may be easier to be feared and respected, but not better. A true leader is not measured solely by the power he wields, but also by the love and admiration of his subjects.

I shall also point out that it is curious how the fall of Carthage is clearly a triumph for the Road of Kings and its ideals, showing how superior it is to other Via, how destined for greatness. Yet the fall of Rome is a tragedy that does not reflect badly on the Road or the Ventrue. Clearly it was no fault of theirs, but the work of the devilish Sinners. I would say that perhaps, even in their long dead hearts, the Patricians realized they had destroyed something of extraordinary value and their authority and will to rule fled with it. Or perhaps the deeds of one's own clan are always righteous and glorious and its failures always due to treachery and the weaknesses of others. At least, so it seems with the Ventrue.

*From the commentaries of Camilla:*

The fall of Rome, proof that Sinners lay waste to civilization wherever they go, leaving the poor Scions to fret over the collapse and decay of all that they have built and held so dear. I ask you, if the Scions of Rome held their Empire so precious, why did they allow corruption and decadence to

"spread like fire" through their ranks? Could it be that, when offered the opportunity to indulge in their true desires, the demands and duties of the road paled in comparison?

The noble Acindynus casts aspersions on us to distract from the truth of the matter. The Road of Sin did play a role in the fall of Rome, as it has in the fall of so many false and puffed-up empires. But the only reason the Sinners succeeded in spreading the truth of indulgence and pleasure was because the pious followers of the Road of Heaven and the arrogant Scions of the Road of Kings allowed it, or at least did nothing to stop it. What was it that Acindynus said about the importance of free will in the right of kings? Perhaps it should be considered important in their failings as well.

## On the Growth of the Road

As tragic as the fall of Rome was for the Scions, it proved an opportunity in many ways. Like the fall of Enoch and of the Second City before it, Rome's fall came through a failure to honor and maintain the ways of the road and the teachings of Caine and Veddartha. The greatest and most influential Scions saw a need for order and responsibility among the children of Caine, but they did not entirely agree on how this order would manifest. So the road split much as the Empire did, with Scions scattered throughout the known world, pursuing their goals of attaining power, first over themselves, then over their domains.

This was a time of great conflict among the Scions, and among Cainites in general. Some chose to cultivate the barbarian tribes that sacked Rome and placed a series of would-be rulers upon the throne. Some abandoned Rome for Byzantium and Constantinople, where they developed a true eye for navigating the dangerous waters of politics and manipulating mortal ambitions to suit their needs. The Inconnu held what little power remained in Rome, working to preserve its traditions and avenge its fall.

Those Scions who remained or cast their fates with the German invaders were split into two camps. The majority sought power and influence among the chieftains and petty nobles of the barbarians, building up domains and followings of their own, only to have them fall into conflict with another tribe, often influenced by another Scion. The cycles of warfare, alliances, and betrayals continued on, and more than a few Cainites met Final Death in the conflict. Along the way, the Scions saw the loyalty of the tribal warriors to their chiefs as a reflection of their own path and embraced it.

Some Scions remained within the ranks of the Church, still a growing influence in the world. They sought places as priests, bishops, even cardinals, but more often influenced mortals in those roles. Although Ventrue power within the Church waned over time,



giving way to the Lasombra, the Road of Kings remained strong as ecclesiastical Cainites sought power and looked after the needs of their flocks.

*From the commentaries of Fioré:*

*Too many Scions echo Acindynus in their dismissal of the power of the Almighty and of Mother Church. True, the Church is a route to power for many Cainites, a source of the divine truth revealed to us by our Dark Father and Mother. Some, like the members of my clan, take our duties and responsibilities as clergy seriously and treat them with the reverence they are due, but others see the Word of God as another tool they can use to further their own power. These Scions are no better than the priests selling indulgences or keeping mistresses, even worse, because the truth has been revealed to them through the Embrace and the touch of Caine's blood.*

## On Feudalism and the Road

As time passed, more Scions came to embrace the feudal system as the ideal means of ensuring order and allowing them to pursue their goals. Mortal lords secured the fealty of their knights and landholders, in turn swearing fealty to their own lord, such as the monarch of a nation. How like the ways of the Scions this was, and how suited to the particulars of the road. Scions began to organize their domains along feudal lines, giving them strength of both numbers and arms that few other Cainite elders could match. When they realized how useful they could be, rival elders adopted the feudal ways of the Scions as well.

Scions helped codify the Traditions of our kind, with particular attention to the Tradition of Domain and the rights it grants to princes and lords. Those domains and courts without Scion rulers often have a Scion advisor, to assist the prince in matters of law. More than one ambitious Scion has risen to power by replacing an unfit ruler, so such advisors are carefully watched.

Along with feudal ways, the Road of Kings embraced the notion of chivalry, which has spread rapidly, especially among younger Cainites. The Toreador and Ventrue are particularly enamored of chivalry, and sponsor orders of knighthood for both Cainites and mortals (often ghouls). Some claim that the traditions of chivalry fit seamlessly with the ways of the Via Regalis, but that remains to be seen. In truth, some conflict exists between the chivalrous younger Scions and their elders, giving the elders good reason to keep their young bravos occupied with skirmishes and battles.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

The Toreador are fascinated with the romance of knighthood and chivalry, while the Ventrue see the knightly orders both as a means of grooming capable vassals and of keeping

their childer occupied and under control. Neither truly sees the potential inherent in the code of chivalry, which is a true appreciation for duty and the obligation of the strong to aid the weak and helpless. The Cainite knights of these orders recognize their duty to God and humanity, however. It will be interesting indeed when the ranks of the orders swell with new Cainite knights, who may not prove as biddable as their sires and liege-lords may hope.

## On the Burdens of Kingship

A common misperception holds that the Road of Kings is about seizing and holding temporal power. That is a part of the road, but only a part. The Via Regalis is also concerned with the duties and responsibilities of a monarch and leader, and has been since the first nights of Caine's rule. Ambitious Scions would do well to heed the advice of their elders and teachers and learn responsibility — and patience — if they would achieve success in their endeavors.

## The Nature of the World

The Road of Kings reveals to us the nature of the world. Some rule and some are ruled, but the sovereign only rules by the sufferance of the subjects. God granted man free will to choose, and men can exercise their will to rid themselves of an unwanted or unworthy sovereign. They will do so if pressed hard enough (or encouraged from the right quarters), so it is important to recognize that the mortal herd is not made up entirely of helpless cattle.

Thus the simple truth: Those who do not choose to rule have chosen to be ruled. Those who choose to rule have chosen not to be ruled by others. Though most men never rise above their station in life, they remain low not because of the will of God, but a lack of will on their own part, and a greater will keeping them in their place. The same is true of many Cainites. The Scion who understands this truth has no limits of achievement, regardless of generation or sire.

If this is so, why then does everyone not exert his will to achieve whatever it is he wants? Why do the Scions not fall upon each other like a pack of hungry dogs, rending each other apart in a frenzy of greed and power-lust? I say because the truth of the nature of the world is tempered by the ethics of the Via Regalis, which values stability and order as well as freedom and opportunity. This way of absolute freedom to work one's will is what brought about the fall of Carthage at the hands of the Roman Empire. True freedom must come from strength, and from order, or it is meaningless.



*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

The nature of the world, indeed! The truth that the Scions claim is one that conveniently supports their road as the most "natural," in accordance with the "true" way of the world. It is claims such as these that brought Carthage low, but not because the brotherhood and peace there violated any sort of "natural law!" The wisdom of Brujah and the ideals of the Via Humanitas show us clearly that there are more roles in this world than master and slave. The master is in many ways just as enslaved as the serf or peasant, trapped in chains of duty, tradition, and the need to maintain his position against his rivals.

Acindynus' claim that duty, honor, and loyalty keep the Scions from each other's throats is one many followers of his road would support, I'm sure, but it is a fiction at best. Tradition and duty do serve to rein in the ambitions of some Scions, but they only define the rules of the game of achieving and holding power. Therein is a fatal flaw of the road that no Scion can openly acknowledge. The Via Regalis is based around the acquisition and holding of power, except that Cainites do not pass on their power like mortal kings. We are not subject to the ravages of time, so a Cainite lord may rule long enough to see mortal kingdoms rise, fall, and turn to dust. So it is always a matter of time before the ambitious overcome the restraints of tradition to overthrow their liege and take the throne. Rather than putting an end to conflict among our kind, the Road of Kings guarantees that it will go on without end, as the War of Princes shows.

*From the commentaries of Camilla:*

How Acindynus contradicts himself in these passages! First he claims there is nothing to restrain us but our own will — something which we Sinners understand all too well. Then, before the ink dries, he asserts that the Road of Kings is not an anarchy of power-hungry Cainites struggling for dominance, because they have traditions and rules that they honor. What hypocrisy! But then one must expect a certain amount of hypocrisy from all kings, mortal or Cainite.

## The Right to Rule

So whence comes the Scion's right to rule over his subjects, or any sovereign's right to rule, for that matter? Does it come from the divine right granted by God? Many would say so, that God has ordained certain men to rule over others. If so, then has not God ordained that we should rule over mortals? I know many who would dispute this, saying that God has damned us, showing we are less than the Children of Seth. How can it be that we are meant to rule over them?

To them, I answer: If we are Damned, and untouched by time, no longer mortal, then should we not rule on Earth as Lucifer does in Hell? Consider Caine's words: "For surely it is better to rule in the darkness, than to humble myself falsely in the light." If you would have an end to your suffering and damnation, then go

and face the sun and be done with it! If you mean to survive in the world, you have only the choice of ruling or being ruled. We cannot know the mind of God (for all that some may claim to), so if your efforts are successful, who is to say that God has not ordained them so? After all, He has given us the power to rule the night. Should we not use it?

Others see Caine's example as the reason why we should rule, and why Caine granted his childer dominion over mortals. When Enoch went into the wilderness to see the Word of God, Caine went to him and claimed Enoch, and his crown, for himself. Where was God when Caine drained the last of the blood from Enoch's veins, or when he held the sacrament of his own vitae to Enoch's lips? Why did God not prevent Caine from claiming the First City as his own? It must be that the Lord approved of Caine's actions, since He did not prevent them.

*From the commentaries of Fioré:*

How easily we ignore that the Lord drowned the First City and the whole world in the Flood for the blasphemy of Caine's childer when they made themselves as gods to the people of the First City. When sufficiently provoked, the Lord does answer, and His anger is a terrible thing to behold. Those princes and lords who ignore the advice of the ashen priests would do well to remember this.

*From the commentaries of Parsifal:*

Acindynus has a doubter's approach to the divine right God has granted us. It can be forgiven, I suppose, in light of his background. He shows logically that our right to rule is secure whether granted by the Lord or not. But have no doubt that the Lord Our God, through His mark upon Caine the Dark Father, has ordained that the childer of Caine shall rule over the Children of Seth in the night for all time until the final reckoning of the ages. It shall be a noble rule, and those who do not rule as God has ordained will suffer His wrath.

## Mastery of the Beast

One thing stands in the way of any Cainite's ability to rule, and that is the influence of the Beast. Before a Scion can be fit to rule over others he must first learn to rule over the Beast, and it is the most difficult and treacherous subject a ruler will ever have. The Road of Kings teaches us of the need to control the Beast, or it will tear down all that we have built to satisfy its inhuman appetite for destruction.

Only the strongest wills can hold the Beast at bay, so the Road of Kings encourages us to be willful, but gives us tradition and duty to help guide us. The first step on the Road of Kings begins with gaining mastery over the Beast. There comes a time after each Embrace, often shortly after the transition into unlife is



complete, when each Cainite feels the stirring of the red rage, driven by hunger and instinct. Some grasp at their faith in God or in their own failing humanity. Others feel the frenzy rise, or look down to see their first victim at their feet, and take destiny into their own hands. They understand that only their will stands between them and the Beast's dominion. These Cainites are suited for the Road of Kings, because they no longer accept the role of slave. Those that can master the Beast can master others.

Of course, those who cannot master the Beast cannot progress far on the Road of Kings, so mastery of the Beast, self-control, is the first lesson that any initiate of the road must learn. The student's will must be tempered like a sword to withstand the heat of the Beast's rage and to cut through it like a razor. With confidence and will as your shield and sword, you can hold the Beast at bay throughout all the nights of your existence.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

Underestimate the cunning of the Beast at your own peril, I say, with the Via Regalis as proof of its dangers. The Beast is not merely some animal that can be whipped back to its den by a forceful master. It is all that is dark and cunning and wicked in our souls, the unending hunger that knows no conscience. It is at its most dangerous when it offers us what we most desire, deep in our hearts, even if we do not acknowledge it.

How easy it can be to indulge, believing that you are master of the Beast, and that your actions are a matter of your own will, but are they? The Scions that justify inhumanity and monstrosity in the name of their road serve the Beast just as surely as the ravager running wild and feeding on passers-by, perhaps even more so since their actions are not unthinking instinct but rational and deliberate. When you feel the voice whispering in your heart and mind, saying, "Why not do this? Is it not your God-given right?" ask yourself, is this the voice of reason, or the voice of the Beast?

## On the Exercise of Power

The central gift and responsibility of the Road of Kings is the wielding of power. Scions are made to rule, and must use the power they are entrusted with responsibly or else they prove themselves unfit to wield it. Power and the will to power must be tempered with restraint and duty to tradition and the needs of one's subjects, according to the ancient precepts of Caine and the Traditions of our kind. Although a prince or monarch commands great power, ultimately he is also a servant of that power and of the subjects that he rules.

Scions can use the power at their command for many things: upholding tradition, enforcing the law, seeing that justice is done, protecting their domains, and

guiding the mortal flock in ways that benefit the Children of Caine. They can also abuse their power and position, a grave offense against true kingship.

## Upholding the Old Ways

An important duty of the Scion is to uphold Cainite law and tradition, the foundation of our society and our survival. Without the guidance of law, we fall victim to the conflicts that brought down the Second City in fire and blood. Without law, we become as crazed demons, under the rule of the Beast, and fall upon each other like hungry wolves. Without law, we become prey for the mortals that we once hunted, and they come with fire and with sword to destroy us. The preservation of our laws and traditions is the preservation of the Cainite race.

The Road of Kings recognizes the wisdom of the ancients and the laws set down from the time of the First City by Caine and his childer. These traditions guide us to act in ways that preserve our kind and help us to rule rightly and wisely.

## The Covenant of Caine

*"Thy blood makes thee my brood, crafted in my image. My curse thine, my salvation thine. I stand before and above thee as god-regent. I am the way, my Traditions covenant. Renounce me and renounce all hope."* Thus spoke Caine.

Caine's covenant with his childer is at the heart of our traditions. We are blood of his blood, bearing his power, his curse, and through his way shall we find salvation, through his way shall we find power and rule over the night forever. Caine set down the Traditions to help guide us along this path, and a true Scion knows to honor and uphold them. Failing to do so is the way to destruction or succumbing to the rule of the Beast. "Renounce me and renounce all hope," says Caine. Renounce the Traditions, and renounce all hope of power, glory, and even survival, for you will be destroyed.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

Again we have the great contradiction of the Road of Kings: There is no greater power than your own will, but bow to these rules and Traditions, or you shall be destroyed. Be ambitious, but not too ambitious. Be willful, but not too willful. Little wonder that the Scions plot and scheme against each other in the night, pulling strings like puppeteers and using flowery speeches and clever turns of phrase to conceal and justify their lust for power. The simple truth of the matter is, those who hold the power also choose the rules that everyone else must obey. Caine laid down his Traditions because he held the greatest power, and his childer obeyed. When they did not, they were punished. It is no different for the princes of Europe. A powerful monarch can choose to



ignore some of the Traditions and get away with it, although always at risk of rebellion.

## The Right of Domain

"As I am master of Nod, thy domain is thy own concern. Thou art its master, and all will respect this or suffer thy wrath. All will present themselves when entering, and thou shalt protect them in turn. By right thou are allowed to hunt within the bounds of thy domain, its blood thine own. Accept its responsibilities, minister thy domain, and pay others the same respect thou expect." Thus spoke Caine.

So does Caine set forth the central tenet and tradition of the Road of Kings, the right and duty of all Scions to take and protect their domains and respect the domains of others.

That each Cainite should hold a domain, large or small, is both right and proper because it is our nature to do so. The Right of Domain ensures sustenance, just as mortals hold to the right to work the land for the food they require. As a mortal lord may hold serfs and tenants, and take a tithe from their harvest as his right, so too may a Cainite lord take a tithe of blood from his vassals as part of the right of domain. Those with no domains to call their own are like beggars in the streets, or thieves in the night, taking what does not rightly belong to them. It is just for the lord of a domain to seek to punish them for any crimes against him and his own.

*From the commentaries of Fioré:*

It is true that the right of domain is one set forth for all Cainites, but it is not solely the province of the Road of Kings, whatever the Scions might have us believe, and there are some domains beyond the reach of prince or monarch that should remain so. What of the right of Cainites to claim a domain without being threatened by outsiders? So it has been with those within the Church, who claim a particular monastery or enclave as their own, only to have a prince claim right of fealty over them and theirs, when no mortal prince can claim rule over the lands and goods of the Church. So it has been with Ferals who claim domain over a long forest or isolated mountain, only to have their claim challenged by the prince of a nearby town or city. He demands obedience and fealty, or else the woods will be chopped down, or burned, and the Cainites there hunted. Though respectful of their own domains, Scions and worldly princes are not always so respectful of the domains of others.

## The Right of Progeny

"Thou shalt only sire another with the permission, and blessing, of thy elder. To create is the providence of those closest to me, for they shall be accountable. Break this and both thou and thy progeny shall be slain." Thus spoke Caine.

It is the right of the prince of a domain to choose who shall and who shall not have the right to sire

childer. This is a great responsibility, since the gift of the Embrace is not one given lightly and new childer must be chosen wisely. In this the prince should act as guiding parent and wise counselor to his subjects, ensuring that those put forth for the Embrace are worthy and will strengthen the blood of Caine rather than weakening or polluting it. A domain that sires well can grow strong and prosperous, while a domain that does not grows weak and fractious, and ultimately falls into rebellion.

The Right of Progeny also helps ensure that the lineage of any particular Cainite within the domain can be assured. For it is the right of all Cainites to know from whence they sprang, and to be able to recite their lineage unto Caine and the Second Generation, so that they may know their place among us. That any Caitiff should arise among the ranks of a domain is a stain upon the honor of the prince, and should be removed to assure the purity of the bloodline, as should any who sire without the rightful permission of their elder.

*From the commentaries of Parsifal:*

It is indeed vital that the prince and monarch hold the right of the Becoming, saying who shall and who shall not sire progeny within their domains, because neonates are not often gifted with the wisdom to know who is right for the Embrace and who is not, and are often driven by their passions and prejudices in their choices. It is the duty of the prince to look beyond such things, with the good of the domain and the bloodline at heart, and choose wisely.

## The Right of Accounting

"Those thou createst, are thy own blood until released from thy charge. Until that moment, their sins, their blood and their punishments are thine." Thus spoke Caine.

Good reason for the Right of Progeny, the Right of Accounting places responsibility and duty squarely upon the shoulders of the fledgling's sire, as it should be. Scions take this right and duty most seriously, since it is at the heart of our road. The sire is responsible for the deeds of the childe until that childe is judged a fit neonate and member of Cainite society. For us the duty and responsibility does not end there, however. In truth, the sire is always responsible for the childe to a degree, even long after the Traditions say otherwise. The actions of the childe reflect upon the teaching and upbringing of the sire, so a wise sire keeps watch over his childer like a dutiful father should.

In a likewise manner, a lord's vassals should be as childer to him, and he should be responsible for their actions, guiding and overseeing them in a rightful way. The responsibility of sire for childe, elder for younger, lord for vassal, is at the heart of the Road of Kings. This is why the Right of Progeny is rightly limited only to those who rule, since they must have sound judgment and take responsibility for all under their dominion. If a



childe behaves poorly, then the sire's overlord is nearly as responsible as the sire, and must take steps to correct any improper behavior.

*From the commentaries of Camilla:*

Of course, the lord is not likely to be destroyed for the infraction of a fledgling, while the sire may be. Nor have I seen all Scions (and certainly not all princes) take Acindynus' advice to heart. Cainite lords treat their childer (as well as their subjects) as little more than chattels, tools to be used and then discarded at their whim, and why should they not? After all, few can dispute with them, and fewer still are able to stay their hands. The ideals of the Road of Kings are noble ones. The reality often falls quite short.

### The Need for Silence

*"Never shalt thou reveal thy true nature to those not of the blood. Doing so shall renounce thy claims to my Covenant." Thus spoke Caine.*

Once Caine and his childer ruled openly over the Children of Seth in the First City, but God unleashed the Flood upon them and the First City was swept away. The Antediluvians ruled over the Second City and waged war upon each other, until their number was decimated and Caine pronounced his curse upon them. He gave his commandment that forevermore we would rule from the shadows, not openly as before, lest we draw the suspicion and ire of the mortal herd, and they come to destroy us.

Some Scions bridle at the restrictions of the Tradition of Silence, that requires them to conceal their deeds and their achievements from the mortal world. Certainly there are those who would rule over the kine openly, as in the ancient days. To them I say: Look to the lessons of Enoch and the Great Flood. Look to those Cainite lords who became careless or underestimated the mortals. They are dust, and less than dust, scattered forever on the winds, brought low by those they thought they had no reason to fear.

Though we may rule the night, it is while the mortal world lies sleeping, unaware of the truth of what happens in their halls and in their cities when the sun sinks below the horizon. The wise Scion learns subtlety and stealth, the better to hide his doings from the mortal world. These lessons also serve well in court. The Scion who understands ruling from the shadows will be successful, just as the wise man knows when to remain silent and to listen.

*From the commentaries of Anatole:*

For a wise man, then, Acindynus speaks a great deal. But then, it's hardly the first time that he contradicts himself. Still, there is a difference between obeying the Tradition of Silence and hiding one's light under a bushel, so to speak. Most Scions are able to appreciate the first, but not the second. They have a need to hear of their deeds and their names throughout

the land, and seek the attention and approval of their elders and betters. Scion knights go off a-questing for glory and nobles wage war upon each other, either with armies in the fields or with words and innuendo at court. Those who truly understand the value of silence and subtlety on the Road of Kings are few and far between in my experience, although I agree with Acindynus that they will go far indeed in this world. They will be around long after the legends and names of those who bluster and brag are forgotten. They will be the worthies to greet the Dark Father upon his return, and they are the ones he will judge.

*From the commentaries of Parsifal:*

Here I think that Acindynus gives too much importance to skulking in the shadows. True, we must conceal our true nature and heritage from those who do not and cannot understand it, but that is no reason for us to hide like Lepers, afraid of our own reflections, to cast our eyes down when they should be raised heavenward. Should we not take pride in our achievements? Should we not undertake the quests that others shy away from? If we are to be leaders for our people, then we must lead through example and through action not only through words, but also through deeds!

### The Right of Destruction

*"Forbidden art thou to spill the blood of another of thy kind who is elder. This right belongs only to those closest to me and none other. It is forbidden for those of weaker blood to rise against their elders, in this my final covenant." Thus spoke Caine.*

The final Commandment of Caine places the Right of Destruction, of Final Death, in the hands of those who rule, since they are given the power to mete out high and low justice over their subjects. Although Caine does not forbid spilling the blood of your juniors or childer, Cainites should not fight among themselves needlessly. It is the duty of the Scions to maintain order and to protect the existence of all Cainites, even when it may call for the destruction of those who violate the law or threaten the stability of our society. Administering this justice is the duty of the nobility, which we shall consider further.

The Sixth Tradition also calls for respect for the elders of our kind, those who are closest to Caine in generation, and oldest in years. On the Road of Kings, the Sixth Tradition includes respect and obedience for one's betters in rank and position. A younger Cainite should defer to an elder in all matters, just as a knight should defer to a baron and a baron to a prince. Such respect is the thread that binds the fabric of our society together, and all childer must be taught the importance of respecting their elders, lest they be judged unfit and destroyed, and rightly so, to protect our ways.



*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

Of all the Traditions, the one that is violated the most often — by the Scions most of all — is the Right of Destruction. Acindynus would have us believe that the blood of elders is not shed by followers of the Road of Kings when in truth there is no other means for a Scion to achieve a higher station in unlife except by destroying a superior. In some rare cases they are clever enough to arrange for their rival to be eliminated in a way that does not bloody their own hands. Disgrace an enemy before a monarch, or expose him to a vengeful mob, and opportunities may open. But many ambitious Scions have attained their positions by the destruction of their elders. All the sophistry and justification Acindynus offers us does not change this simple fact.

## Lextalionis Of Justice High and Low

A code of law and justice is all that separates us from the power of the Beast. It is the duty of all Scions to uphold the law, and of all the nobility of the night to enforce it. Our laws are simple ones, compared to the vast collections of scrolls and tomes that describe the laws of mortal kingdoms. Our laws come from the commandments of Caine and from the precept of Lextalionis. The enforcement of the law is in the hands of the nobility, and they have the right to punish offenders as they see fit to ensure that justice is done and order maintained.

Such justice must be swift and sure, a clean stroke to cut out any lawlessness that festers within the domain before it can poison other Cainites. In this, nobles often empower their vassals and agents, particularly a sheriff, with the authority to mete out justice and deal with most of the small crimes that may occur within the boundaries of the domain. Only matters of high justice need concern the prince, although the prince can and should take an interest in how justice is dealt out within the domain, and ensure that it is fair.

*From the commentaries of Fioré:*

Other roads claim a role in administering justice to their own, although not always enough to overcome the right of princes. Lextalionis is sufficient justice for Ferals or Sinners, but not always for Humanitas or the Road of Heaven. Powerful ashen priests may be able to claim benefit of clergy and the right to be tried before a court of their peers. Influential teachers of the Road of Humanity may claim the same, and such requests are granted almost solely on the basis of how much the prince fears the retribution of their followers and fellow adherents. A newly initiated member of the Faithful or a lowly member of the Humanitas will find little mercy or forbearance without a powerful patron or ally, unless the prince is a follower of the same road.

## Protection of the Domain

A prince has the right and the responsibility to protect his domain from all that may threaten it, and the prince's vassals have the duty to aid in protecting the domain, with their blood, if necessary, although the wise prince knows not to waste the blood of his followers needlessly. Many things may threaten the safety and integrity of a domain, not the least of which are other, less honorable, Cainites.

A threat may come from outside the domain, in the form of an aggressive or upstart Cainite seeking to claim territory for his own. Although once it was rare for princes to field armies of their own to battle for dominion and territory, it has become more common in recent years, with troops of mortal soldiers, ghouls, and even Children of Caine fighting to conquer or protect a prince's domain.

Still, outside threats are often subtle, and make take the form of spies or agents of an opposing prince acting as bandits or brigands, causing trouble and weakening the power of the prince if he does not act swiftly to deal with them. The prince's vassals and subjects may be targeted, weakening his support and perhaps even turning them against him if he fails to protect them. Certainly a prince unable to protect his subjects is not worthy of their loyalty or support, particularly if he hides behind them out of cowardice.

A threat to the domain may also come from within, when the prince's subjects break the Traditions, defying the law. This is particularly true of upstarts who commit murder and diablerie against their own kind or those who sire without permission, perhaps seeking to create their own childer to raise a force to overthrow their prince. In such matters justice must be swift and certain. The prince may rely upon his sheriff, but should not overlook any possible threat, or else his domain may be lost.

*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

Of course, most of the "less honorable" Cainites who move against Scions in positions of power are in truth their fellow Scions, seeking to usurp that power. Not all followers of the Road of Kings are bound by codes of honor that forbid them to move against a neighbor, particularly when things like territory and valuable feeding grounds are at stake. Some easily justify such conquests as part and parcel of their road and their greater destiny, and anyone who fails to recognize this destiny pays the price.

## Shepherding the Flock

The final, and perhaps most important, duty of the prince and Scion is the quiet guidance of the mortal flock. In the First City, Caine and his progeny ruled over the Children of Seth, and the mortals served them, but



Caine also admonished his childer to care for and protect the children of his brother. In the same way it is our duty to oversee and protect the mortals dwelling in our own domains, and for vassals to shepherd the flocks of their liege-lords, for the good of all.

When the mortal herd is healthy, strong, and content, a domain can rest easy in the knowledge that vitae will never be in short supply and the hunting will be plentiful. When the herd becomes sickly, starving, or unruly, the hunting is poor for all Cainites in the domain. This also raises the possibility of rebellion and uprising among the mortals, perhaps even war against a neighbor, which can lead to the destruction of the domain if it is not handled carefully.

Plague and disease are perhaps the greatest threats to mortal welfare and the health of the herd. A plague can sweep through a mortal village, town, or even a city, and render it almost lifeless. The blood of the dead and the dying cannot satisfy us, and those who remain may be too sickly to offer much strong vitae. Steps must be taken to keep the herd free of contagion and to root out any signs of plague among their number. We must admonish our vassals to feed not on the diseased and plague-ridden, lest they spread the contagion further among the herd. Instead, use the guise of fevers and disease to conceal feeding on occasion, enough to keep the mortals alert for danger, but not so much as to create waves of panic about an epidemic.

## Of the Sunlit World

Some Cainites would deny any association with the sunlit world, content to lord over the night. Although the night is ours, we must extend our reach into the day if we are to be successful and to understand the mortal realm that is also ours to command, by right of blood and power.

## Mirror Kingdoms

Perhaps more than any other Via, the Road of Kings interacts with the mortal world. While kings and mortal lords rule the day, Cainite Scions and princes rule the night, often from the same halls and throne-rooms as those mortal monarchs. We are their dark reflections, much as they are our mortal mirrors, although few monarchs are truly aware of what goes on in their own palaces in the dead of night.

From the very beginning Scions have attached themselves to particular mortal realms, and to particular mortals and their holdings. In the Roman Empire, Cainites walked the darkened streets and alleys, the silent halls of the Senate and the villas of the wealthy and powerful patricians. We have held court in

Byzantium, Alexandria, London, Paris, and every other place from which mortals have ruled. Over time, we became associated with these mortal dwelling places, close to centers of power, close to those over whom we rule in the night.

It is no simple matter for a Scion to create and rule over a manor, much less a castle or great palace, without drawing the suspicion (and eventually, the wrath) of mortals. Only in the most isolated places can a Cainite lord maintain a haven. The Tzimisce rulers of their own small princedoms do so, with generations of mortal subjects dimly aware of what dwells in the craggy castle or villa set high above their humble valleys. The greatest of Cainite elders also keep their own havens, such as the Castle of Shadows where Lasombra dwells on the isle of Sicily. Even mortals know not to approach this dark place, for fear of their lives and souls.

Isolation, however, does not suit most of the children of Caine, particularly those on the Road of Kings. We dwell close to the centers of mortal power in the great cities of Europe. In these places, it is possible to maintain a small house or manor without raising too many questions, but mortals (nobles in particular) are certain to notice the appearance of the odd palace or castle where the owner remains unknown. In fact, it would serve as an invitation for mortal monarchs to claim such a place as their own. So we permit them to do so and conceal the place's true nature.

Thus the great Cainite courts and palaces of Europe are often hidden within the great mortal courts and palaces throughout Christendom, and beyond. By day, the place's mortal inhabitants go about their business unaware of what sleeps hidden in catacombs, tombs, and secret chambers all around them. They remain ignorant of the ghouls and vassals moving among them, looking after our affairs and carrying out our orders until the sun sinks below the horizon and night settles over the land. Then, as the mortal inhabitants sink down to slumber, coffins, tombs, and crypts swing open and we emerge to greet another night. We hold our courts, conduct our affairs, and rule over the night. We also hunt, satisfying our endless hunger from the mortal cattle, either from our servants or those who sleep believing strong walls and barred doors will protect them. Then we retire to our havens before the coming dawn, when the mortal inhabitants of the place rise and it begins all over again.

So it is that most Cainite domains mirror the kingdoms and realms of the sunlit world and have done since the fall of the Second City. Our fates are tied with those of mortals, giving us good reason to shepherd and guide them toward our own ends.



# On Matters of Faith

The Road of Kings is not without faith in God and His power. After all, did not God make us what we are in placing His curse upon Caine? And in so doing, the Lord gave us the power to take and rule the night as our own. I do not truck with the divine right of kings. God has given us the power, but it is for us to decide how we shall use it. Not every Cainite, nor even every Scion, is Embraced to become a monarch. Still, we recognize the power of the Lord and honor the truth of His words and wisdom through our Dark Father, Caine.

Of course, some Scions are quite pious, while others care little for talk of Heaven and its doings. What can we, the Damned, know of Heaven? Instead it is our lot to rule here in the world of the living and never see the gates of Paradise. We must make our own Heaven on Earth, in the domains we create and rule, our own eternity, crafted and maintained by our hands, to last out the ages until the time of the Reckoning is come.

*From the commentaries of Rodrigo:*

*Acindynus says little of it, but some Scions do not follow the Christian God, keeping their own faith instead. The Tzimisce may follow the Eastern Church, when they concern themselves with God at all. The Cainites of the Muslim lands and Iberia are quite devout in their own faith, and I have encountered Scions who hold true to the old ways of this land, from the times before the Church. No doubt there are other faiths that followers of the Road of Kings honor or profess to honor. It matters little, since it seems that faith is only one more weapon in the arsenal the Scions use to extend their power and influence.*

## Ashen Priests

Some Scions are drawn to a different path to power, a different way of achievement. They serve no earthly liege, but choose instead to serve and to worship God as His priests. In so doing, they also serve the Road of Kings, guiding us by their example and their words, urging us on to glory and excellence. They support the rightful lords of the night and, when necessary, root out those unworthy to walk our road, or to rule.

## On Becoming an Ashen Priest

These ashen priests may have served God before the Embrace, and continue to do so after taking the blood of Caine, but many feel called to service after they have risen to unlife, and have learned from their sire all that they need to know to choose their own way. Sometimes ashen priests of the road will choose particularly worthy novitiates or novices, taking them by the hand and guiding them toward an understanding of our ways so they can be worthy of the Embrace. But

most of the priesthood is made up of Cainites who have chosen it, hearing the call to service in the name of God and the Via Regalis.

The teaching of an ashen priest is much like that of the mortal clergy. They learn the scriptures, both from the Bible and the Book of Nod, from the writings of Cainite priests and scholars of years past. They learn the sacraments, in particular the rites of the Road of Kings, so they can minister to the faithful. It takes years to learn all that is needed, but we have nothing save time, and the time is sufficient to weed out those whose vocation is not strong or who are better suited to other duties.

Finally the novice is ordained into the priesthood of the road, to serve God and to minister to His faithful servants in unlife, to teach and to preserve the ways and traditions of our road, and to uphold the Traditions passed down to us by Caine, our Dark Father.

## The Role of the Justicar

While barons and princes can mete out justice to their subjects, and lords and monarchs can do the same with their subjects and vassals, it can be difficult for a subject misused by a liege-lord (or one of the liege's agents) to seek redress. Likewise, who is to judge a prince, if there is no overlord to whom the prince owes fealty? In these matters, the Road of Kings looks to the Justicars to ensure that the guilty do not go unpunished.

The Justicars answer to no one prince, but to the hierarchy of ashen priests of the Via Regalis. Indeed, they are much like the mortal Inquisition, charged with maintaining the purity of the Road of Kings and upholding its honor and integrity. The priesthood sees to it that every domain of any great size has a Justicar assigned to administer to its needs, although more often Justicars oversee many domains, traveling through them to hear matters requiring their attention. Only the Justicars of great cities and vast domains have enough to occupy them there. Since the Justicar is in no way bound or beholden to the prince, he is impartial and able to dispense justice fairly.

Justicars intervene in only two sorts of matters. The first is when a Cainite brings complaint against one of higher rank, often a liege-lord, and has evidence of violations of the Traditions or improper treatment. In this case, the Justicar is empowered to investigate and bring the matter before the accused Cainite's overlord. The other is when a high-ranking Cainite is accused of a crime and there is no overlord to whom the matter can be brought. In this case, a Justicar is empowered to act as judge, but must call a conclave of the accused Cainite's peers to hear the case and ensure that justice is done. Against the decisions of the Justicars, there is no appeal.

The existence of the Justicars ensures that the laws and traditions extend to all, and affirms the rights and responsibilities of the nobility.





*From the commentaries of Antasia:*

The existence of the Justicars is merely another example of how the Road of Kings seeks to dominate everything within Cainite society. The Justicars are little more than priest-inquisitors of the Via Regalis. They have no true authority over Cainites of any other road, any more than the ashen priests of the Road of Heaven have over the Cainites of the Road of the Beast. But with so many Scions in positions of power throughout the land, the office of Justicar carries a strange legitimacy. The Tzimisce masters of the eastern lands do not recognize their authority, and the Lasombra of Iberia only barely do so. The Ventrue of England grudgingly accept the value of the Justicars, but it is clear that their power is limited there. Only in France and the Holy Roman Empire does the order function as Acindynus describes it, and then only under ideal circumstances. The Courts of Love recognize the Justicars' authority, but individual Queens may insist that a younger Cainite, or even an entire coterie, accompany a Justicar they consider dangerous or untrustworthy. Likewise, any Justicar who seeks to gainsay the Black Cross finds no quarter in the fiefs under Hardestadt, Jürgen, or myself.

The appointment of the Justicars is as driven by politics as everything on the Road of Kings, and their judgments are weighed against the power and influence of the accused as much as any evidence of guilt or innocence. Those upstarts who threaten the rule of the elders may find themselves accused of wrongdoing and dealt with by the Justicars. They serve as another weapon that the Scions use to maintain their power.

## The Church

The Via Regalis and the Church have always been closely related, ever since the Church's founding during the Roman Empire and during the spread of Christendom across the civilized world. While the followers of the Via Caeli see the Church as a source of salvation, Scions understand the Church as a source of power, and always have. Certainly, there is power to be had in the position of bishop or even cardinal. Still, Scions within the Church are more likely to be found pulling the strings of such men as puppets while occupying seemingly more humble positions, or not being



seen at all, except when they come forth from crypts deep beneath the cathedrals and churches over which they rule.

Ashen priests of the Road of Kings strongly influence the Church, offering many Scions another route to fulfill their ambitions. Such Scions are often influential in both the mortal Church and among adherents of our road for their faith and understanding of doctrine.

From the commentaries of Fioré:

Here becomes clear a central tenet of the Road of Kings that is never spoken, but which damns them all. The Scions claim to hold faith in God, but they choose to deny themselves any hope of salvation. To many of them, God has given them the power of the blood of Caine, then washed His hands of the matter and left the Children of Caine and the Children of Seth to their own devices.

Yet it is so clear that the power of the Lord is with us, even still, and that He watches over all his children, including those descended from the blood of Caine. What began with Caine has not yet ended. The Lord is testing us, testing our faith and our understanding of His will. Only by doing His work can we understand and prove ourselves worthy. In time, those Scions who reject the work of God to create a pale shadow of Paradise on Earth will discover they have only created a Hell for their own imprisonment. In time, the sinners and the faithful will both be judged.

## Of the Inquisition

The gravest threat to our influence in the mortal world also comes from within the Church, from the Holy Office of the Inquisition, charged with seeking out heresy and protecting Christendom against it. Unfortunately some of the priests and scholars of the Church are aware of our existence and have not been brought into the fold. They see us as Hell-spawned creatures, and hunt us with fire and steel, believing that their faith will protect them.

Caine warned against underestimating the mortal herd and against usurping the place of God. Cainite influence within the Church is more important now than ever if we are to stem the tide of this new threat before it becomes a true danger to us.

## Commentaries on the Road of Kings

The following commentaries (in addition to those found elsewhere in this work) come from scholars of the other, lesser roads. They are included here simply to remind any wavering Scion what awaits him outside the Via Regalis.

## The Road of the Beast

by Rodrigo

The Road of Kings has taken a simple idea and needlessly tangled it in a web of words, traditions, symbols, and lies. It is in many ways the same idea that we Ferals follow: In this world everything is either predator or prey. Being one, though, does not mean that one cannot become the other. Careless predators may find themselves hunted by skilled and cunning prey. If they are not strong enough, then they are better culled from the hunt to make way for others.

The Scions are right that we Cainites are superior to mortals, but not that we should rule over them. Does the wolf rule over the sheep? Does the lion rule over cattle? No, we may direct the mortal herd where and when necessary to suit our needs, but we cannot rule them. The games of kingship and power that the Scions play are a waste of time, a dilution of our essential nature, and a foolish attempt to deny the power of the Beast within us all.

The Scions use the words of Caine to support their ideas. But consider the fate of Caine and the First City. It was not until Caine claimed regency of a city of mortals that the Great Flood came. It was fighting over the Second City that brought Caine's curse upon his childer. We are not meant to rule cities. They are the home of our prey and we are the wolves that howl at the door. What need do we have for hearths, when our blood has made us strong enough to run free in the wild, with the Earth to protect us by day and the whole world before us at night?

I have borne witness to the struggles of those who would be kings and monarchs of our kind and the mortal world as well. I have seen the carnage that comes from those struggles. It is not the quick and clean kill that they offer. It is torture and mayhem. It is servitude and slavery. Death and worse on a muddied field for a meaningless cause. I say that it is foolishness, but it is no concern of mine, so long as the Scions confine their games to their own cities. Those that would lay waste to the wilderness and use our lands as their battlefields, be warned — the hunter can become the prey, and among us only the truly strong shall survive.

## The Road of Heaven

by Fioré

It is undeniable fact that there is an order to Creation, and that kings and princes are a part of this divinely ordained structure, with the Lord at its pinnacle, and below Him arrayed the ranks of the Heavenly Host, on down to mortal man. We, too, are



a part of His divine plan. God placed His mark and His curse upon Caine, and Caine sired us through his blood. Acindynus dares to suggest that Caine's defiance of the Lord and his rule of the First City places us beyond the Lord's concern, but the Great Flood and the destruction of the First City makes it clear that the Father has not abandoned us. He watches and knows all.

So what then of the right of kings? It is truly God's will that kings should rule over men, but with the guidance of the Word of God. Some Scions heed and obey this truth, rule in the name of the Lord and recognize that their power and their burden comes solely from Him. They are righteous lords and princes, and should have the support of their lawful subjects. To defy such a ruler is not only treason, it blasphemes against the will of God, and Final Death is the only punishment suitable for such a crime.

But then some Scions, like Acindynus, do not give their proper due to the Lord Our God. Even worse are those who commit terrible blasphemy in denying the will and power of the Lord, claiming that they are the ultimate power. Believing that they are eternal, they do not fear the Judgment of Heaven, but they should, for only God is truly eternal, and His judgment is swift and terrible, as the Antediluvians know all too well. These Scions rule without the guidance of God or His priests and prophets, and so forsake the very divine right of kings that they claim is theirs. To defy such a ruler is not treason, but the duty of all who follow the Word of the Lord and would seek to serve Him. The rulers who defy God follow in the footsteps of the Third Generation, and they will bring a terrible wrath upon them, as in the First City.

The blood of Caine is a test laid upon us, and we must not falter or be found wanting in the eyes of the Lord. Those Scions who remain true to His word and His will are worthy and shall lead us to glory. Those who set aside the will of God for their own aggrandizement shall follow the path they have laid out into Hell, and damnation eternal.

## The Road of Humanity

by Julia Antasia

More than any other, the Road of Kings seeks to divide us. Even the Road of Heaven, with its many schisms and sects, is united in its faith in God and His divine plan. But the Via Regalis deliberately pits us against each other because, in the end, its goals cannot be attained by all, but only a select few. First, the Scions are set apart from all others of our kind, cloaked in the same divine nobility that mortal kings and princes claim. They are set above the common folk and they choose to set the Children of Caine above the Children of Seth. Then the adherents of the Road





itself are divided into their ranks: Squires and knights, barons and princes, lords and great monarchs, each with a title and a place in the grand order.

Am I an enemy of order? Not so, I say. The order of the Road of Kings has but one end, the opportunity for a select few to seize power and hold it, climbing on the backs of both mortal and Cainite vassals to achieve their goal. By its very nature, the Road of Kings leads us to conflict, and the War of Princes is a clear result of its ways. After all, there are far more Scions than crowns. Sooner or later it must come to war.

Much is to be admired about the Road of Kings but for this fatal flaw. The road — particularly the noble Path of Chivalry — emphasizes obedience to the law, responsibility, duty, and the value of honor, all qualities we should hold to in the face of the Beast. Some Scions are truly noble at heart, but are they a match for the schemers and tyrants of their Road, who want nothing more than power and the prestige that comes with it? I pray that they are, because if the tyrants seize power throughout the civilized world, at least one of Acindynus' theories may be proven true. Monarchs rule at the sufferance of their subjects, and it is within our power to rise up and overthrow them, if they do not rule well.

## The Road of Sin

by Camilla

The Road of Kings, noble and proud, lords of all that they survey. Killers and hypocrites all, I say. They distract themselves with all their talk of duty, service, kingship, and responsibility. They try to satisfy themselves with the mere quest for power when in the end the power that they seek will never be enough for them. They deny their true natures and deny themselves all that they could have in the hopes of achieving something in time.

Of course, not all Scions are so dedicated to the ideals of service and duty. Some understand that the purpose of power is to bring pleasure and satisfy other, more primal, needs and desires. I have attended lavish fetes thrown by those on the Road of Kings that showed a clear understanding of desire and its satisfaction. But even these Scions shy away from the truth, retreating behind their rituals and their titles. The next night, they turn back to their duties or their scheming for power. They enslave their desires to the cause of kingship, and pretend that there is something more important in their existence than the satisfaction they found in pleasure. They dance and flirt with desire, drawing it close, then spinning it away. They do not embrace it, as we have. They fear to lose their vaunted self-control, their dignity, and their place in society, when in truth we laugh and mock them.

They could be so much more, if only they cast off their quaint notions of duty and responsibility. Our responsibility in this world is to ourselves and to our own satisfaction. The Beast reminds us well enough that it is so and tells us when we are not satisfied. Why starve it and force it into a cage of duty when you can satiate it and füll it to sleep with a hundred different sensations and experiences?

That's really the greatest disappointment about the Road of Kings. For all their high-minded ideals and their lofty goals, their vision is so... limited. They continue to play out the same games for power and control that mortals have done throughout time, when there is an entire world laid out before them for the taking. Like the Caeli and the Humanitas, they prefer to ape the ways of mortals and cling to what they once were, instead of what they could be. The fact that they are so close to the truth is what tempts so many of us to try and show them the way, I think. More often than not, it's wasted effort.









# CHAPTER TWO: THE WAYS OF KINGS

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

— Peter 2:17

The followers of the Via Regalis are nothing if not believers in tradition. Tradition is what holds the Road of Kings together and gives the Scions their strength and authority, so there is a strong desire to preserve and uphold the traditions of both the road and those handed down by Caine to his childer.

This makes the Road of Kings perhaps the most structured of any of the roads, because it is so bound up in Cainite traditions and concepts of nobility and kingship. The adoption of feudal customs and chivalry add to the layers of history already built up on the road. Becoming a Scion is no simple matter, and following the road can be difficult, but then the Scions would have it no other way, since to them nothing worth having comes easily.

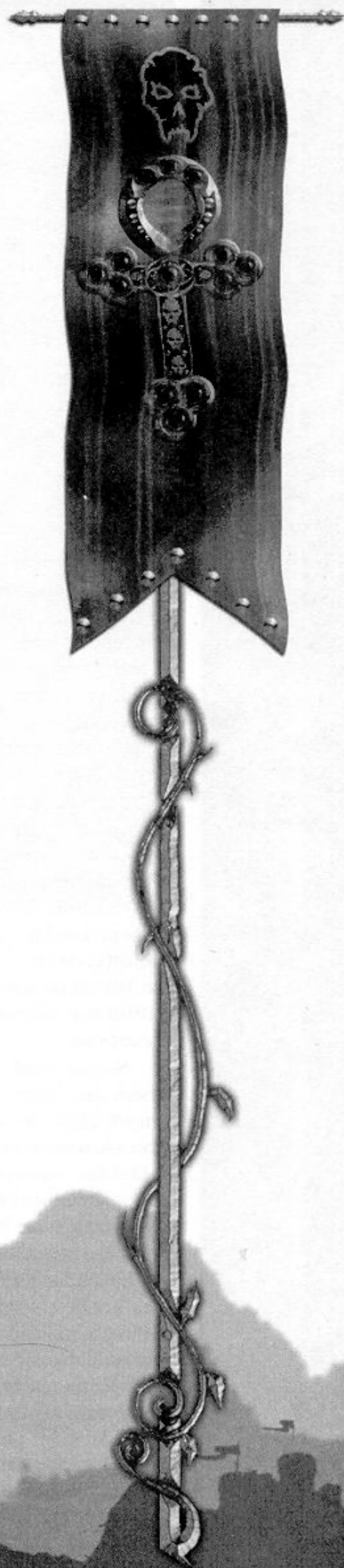
## Choosing New Scions

*"You have served me well, Hans," Lord Vermott said, and the young knight bowed his head in what he hoped was sufficient humility.*

*"Thank you, lord. It is my greatest wish to serve."*

*Lord Vermott smiled a bit at that. "Oh, come now, Hans," he said. "I know that you have greater ambitions than that."*

*Hans' heart skipped a beat. It was as if Lord Vermott knew the contents of his mind. Perhaps he did, for Hans knew that his lord wielded sorcery beyond the*





understanding of mortal men. Did he know everything Hans thought or dreamed about or hoped for?

"Do not be afraid," Vermott said, as if he could read Hans' thoughts. "I understand and approve of your ambitions. I need men with ambition, with fire, at a time like this. There is a place for lesser men among the ranks on the battlefield, but I need better men to lead them."

A small hope blossomed in Hans' heart. He dared to look up at his lord and master. "My liege, I..." he began, but the remaining words died in his throat as Vermott bared his fangs and lunged at him. He fell backward and tried to scramble away, but he was far too slow. He gave only a small whimper as Vermott's fangs sank deep into his neck, which turned into a sigh as the ecstasy of the Kiss spread through his body like sweet poison. It was slowly replaced by a growing cold that overtook his limbs, then his heart. Hans sank back onto the floor, his sight growing dim as Vermott reared up above him.

The vampire lord leaned down to whisper in his vassal's ear as the life ebbed from Hans' body.

"Should your ambitions ever make you consider betraying me, my dear Hans, I want you to recall this moment. If you serve me well, you need never experience death again."

Scions choose their vassals — both mortal and Cainite — carefully. Unlike the kings of the mortal world, Cainite princes and lords do not fall victim to illness or age. Their domains can only pass from them if they choose to step down, or if they are careless and allow their ambitious underlings to overthrow them. Therefore wise Scions choose their vassals carefully and keep a close eye on them (while unwise Scions are quickly culled from the ranks).

Princes and lords control the right to sire offspring with good reason, since uncontrolled Embracing might allow a rival within the prince's own domain to gather a large number of Cainite followers and challenge the prince's rule. Most Scions take the tradition of progeny quite seriously, and violations are reason enough to have the offender and the childe destroyed. A ruler's vassals are always on the watch for signs of unlawful Embracing within the domain, and act quickly to deal with it when it crops up.

Scions tend to be cautious and conservative about whom they Embrace. After all, their blood is noble, of the line of Caine. It is a gift that should be given only to those who are worthy of it, not simply to any peasant or wastrel. A childe reflects on the reputation of the sire, and a sire is responsible for the childe's actions, so siring is not something to be done lightly.

That is not to say that noble blood is a prerequisite for the Embrace among Scions (although some truly arrogant Cainites do consider it so). Scions keep their own counsel about a potential vassal's worthiness to serve, to be given vitae and, finally, to be given the gift of the Embrace. Some find diamonds in the rough among the most rude and common of folk, needing a guiding hand to shape them and bring out their potential. Other Scions are beguiled by a desire for companionship into giving the Embrace to the wrong person, something that has led to the downfall of more than one Cainite noble over the years.

Although the choice of vassals is ultimately a personal and subjective decision, a Scion tends to look for certain things in a potential vassal, qualities that separate the wheat from the chaff. These determine whether a vassal is to remain a simple servant or may become something more in the vampire's service.

The most important is the balance between obedience and personal initiative. It is important that the vassal obeys the lord's commands, but few Scions want only mindless thralls and fawning sycophants in their service. Their servants must be able to handle most small matters without attention from their liege-lord, particularly while the vampire rests during the day. Indeed, the ideal servant is dutiful and demands little of the Scion's attention because most matters are dealt with long before they require it.

The problem is that too much initiative may combine with a dose of ambition and lead vassals to betray their oaths of loyalty in order to secure power for themselves. Any ruler who depends too much upon his advisors and underlings to handle matters may soon find himself nothing more than a figurehead, the real reins of power in other hands. When that happens, the ruler is no longer necessary and may be replaced. So a vassal's usefulness and initiative must be balanced against any ambitions and possible betrayal in the future.

Other qualities that Scions look for include physical strength and a sharp mind. The former is more important for soldiers and vassals expected to defend their lord's holdings, while the latter is more important for advisors, emissaries, and other servants of the Scion.

The remaining qualities after loyalty, drive, and competence depend largely on the individual Scion and influences such as clan. The Ventrue are more likely to seek out those of noble blood, particularly when searching for a potential protégé. The Toreador are drawn to the beautiful, the talented, and the tragic, while the Brujah want free-thinkers and philosophers, and may seek the company of like-minded mortals.

## Training

Once a Scion has chosen a potential new childe, there may be a period of training before the sire decides that the mortal is ready to receive the Embrace and embark upon the Road of Kings. The sort of training is up to the individual Scion. Some receive little or no education before they are brought into the nighttime world of the Children of Caine. Others are carefully groomed and taught by their vampiric mentors before they are considered ready.

On the one hand, some Cainites feel a sense of urgency to Embrace a suitable candidate immediately to ensure that they won't be taken from the world by disease or injury, to capture their essence as they are, and also to bind them to their sire. On the other, mortals learn and change more easily than vampires do, so there is something to be said for molding and teaching a





## WOMEN ON THE ROAD OF KINGS

Women in 1230 might be royalty, and even leaders, but aren't likely to be warriors. In the minds of most men, a leader who cannot carry his troops into battle is no leader at all.

Cainites do not tend to hold onto this sort of thinking for long.

Preconceived notions about gender roles die hard, especially when such things are presumed to be divinely ordained, but most vampires understand that undeath levels the playing field quite a bit. A female Cainite is capable of exactly the same things, from a supernatural perspective, that a male one is. A female Scion has every bit as much desire and drive to lead, fulfill her oaths, and amass power as any man, and so male Scions underestimate their "sisters" at their own peril.

When interacting with the mortal world, however, a female Scion must be somewhat circumspect — a woman demonstrating knowledge of war, tactics, or other "masculine" pastimes is likely to attract the wrong sort of attention. Some women circumvent this by hiding their sex (Badr, the Sultan of Granada, has had great success at this, although she is not a Scion) using either simple disguise or Disciplines such as Obfuscate. Others compensate by ruling all the more harshly, to prove that they can be as firm a leader as any man. The more experienced Scions, however, use the fact that mortals underestimate them and move slowly and subtly. Especially among the knightly orders, a bashful glance and a promised favor can do wonders to motivate a strong young knight to undertake quests in one's name — and leave the Scion completely blameless for the results.

protégé for a time before the Embrace freezes body and mind forever. Some Scions think that childer should be taught so they can make an educated choice about whether or not to take the Embrace, but others tell their vassals nothing until the deed is done and there is no going back.

The training of a potential Scion is much like that of a knight or young noble. In fact, with the rise of the Path of Chivalry, knightly training has become common for Scions, even those not on the path. They start out as squires, either to their future sire or with a knightly order of Cainites (or one with Cainites in its ranks). In some cases, a sire may choose to make a potential childer a squire at court, or arrange a position like clerk or scribe (common for the more scholarly Scions of the Path of the Vizier).

Students are educated in the ways of the world, particularly in the etiquette and rules of Cainite society. Loyalty, duty, and honor are bred into them, making them worthy vassals of their master. Their mettle is often tested with contests and duties assigned to them. Those who are not up to the challenge may still remain useful and loyal servants of their Cainite liege. Those who show particular talent and dedication may advance through the ranks.



## EARLY TRAINING AND PRELUDES

The selection and early training of Scion characters can become an essential part of their preludes, if the Storyteller desires. Certainly, the sire's reasons for choosing the character, any pre-Embrace training or experience, and the circumstances of the Embrace itself go a long way toward helping define the character's background and personality. Playing out those scenes may help give players a better understanding of what it is to be a Scion, even before their character steps onto the Road of Kings. A Scion's early experiences may also serve as the foundation for later moments of truth in the character's career, as something from the Scion's past becomes clear, opening up a better understanding of the road and its tenets.

For more information, see Moments of Truth later in this chapter and Preludes in Chapter Three.

## Blood Oaths and Ghouls

For some students, their mortal life ends once they have proven themselves. Given the Embrace, they are taught what they need to know to embark on the Road of Kings. For others, the path to attaining the blood of Caine is longer. The two additional steps potential Scions may pass through on their way to their mortal deaths are taking a vampire's vitae to become ghouls, and undergoing the blood oath to bind them closely to their future sire and liege.

The blood oath is common for most high-ranking mortal servants of a Cainite lord. It echoes the oaths of fealty sworn to mortal rulers, but with the supernatural power of the blood to enforce and bind it. It is always conducted with a measure of ceremony. Typically, the vassal will kneel before the regnant and offer an oath of fealty and loyalty, "unto death, and beyond," followed by drinking some of the vampire's blood, either from a goblet or directly from the regnant's open vein (although the former is more common among the hidebound Scions).

The blood may be mixed with wine, but Scions usually do so openly, preferring oath takers to know exactly what it is they are drinking. Most followers of the Road of Kings consider covertly using vitae to create blood oaths dishonorable. The vassal's loyalty must be offered freely (although the use of Disciplines like Presence to convince them to swear such oaths is considered fair).

The regnant then swears to safeguard the vassal and treat him honorably in exchange for his loyalty and service. More than most Cainites, Scions take their responsibilities toward their thralls quite seriously. The blood oath is a mutual compact, binding to both parties in its way, although the regnant certainly has the better part of the bargain. The ritual is repeated on the following two nights, after which the blood oath is complete and the vassal is bound in the vampire's service.

For many vassals, the process ends here. Bound by their oath, they continue to serve their liege-lord faithfully. This is typically the case for mortal vassals judged unworthy of the Embrace, or more suited to serving their regnant as they are. Potential childer are sometimes Embraced at the third ritual, making the blood that gives them eternal unlfe the final seal of the blood oath as well.

Sometimes the regnant may choose to give the thrall enough vitae to become a ghoul. This is typically done with the third and final amount of blood. The first two drinks are small, just enough for the blood oath. The final draught is larger, filling the vassal with the supernatural power of the vitae and creating a new ghoul as well as completing the blood oath.

Some Scions consider existence as a ghoul a useful experience for a potential Scion. As ghouls, they learn vampiric Disciplines, but lack the vulnerabilities of true Cainites (and also the power to overwhelm their betters, should they prove treacherous). The process also eliminates some of the urgency with regard to the Embrace, keeping the vassal from aging and allowing the regnant time to complete any necessary training before bestowing the Embrace. Of course, some say it is dangerous to give a potential childe such a taste for Cainite blood so early, thinking it can lead to diablerie later on.

## VASSAL CHRONICLES

It's possible to run a Dark Ages chronicle where the characters are all mortal vassals of the particular vampire liege-lord (or perhaps multiple allied lords). The characters may be ordinary mortals, possibly bound by the blood oath, or they may be ghouls, giving them some access to Disciplines and supernatural powers, but not limiting their ability to move about during the day. Their liege might be grooming one or more of the characters for the Embrace at some point, with or without the characters' knowledge.

Their relative freedom of movement opens up the possibility of the characters serving as emissaries or agents of their liege for various and sundry tasks. The prime limitation of ghoul characters is their dependence on their regnant's blood to sustain them. They won't be able to travel far from their liege before the hunger will eventually force them to return (or lead them to turn to another Cainite for what they need, which can present an interesting dilemma).

A vassal chronicle can go on for some time and tell a compelling story by itself. It can also "graduate" into a full-fledged Dark Ages: Vampire chronicle, with the characters undergoing the Embrace and becoming neonates (likely with considerably more experience and understanding of the inner workings of Cainite society than most starting characters have).



## The Embrace

Regardless of the training, grooming, and preparation, it is impossible for any vassal to walk the Road of Kings until the Embrace is given and the blood of Caine flows in his veins. Also, despite the sire's most careful efforts, there is nothing that can prepare a mortal for the experience of joining the ranks of the unliving.

Scions often treat the Embrace with considerable ceremony, although there are certainly times when it happens suddenly without preparation, or privately. If the sire has time to plan, the Embrace is often much like a religious initiation, particularly among those Scions who uphold (or at least observe) the traditions of the Church or some other religion. It may accompany the recognition of some achievement by the childe, such as attaining knightly status or winning a contest (which may determine the candidate's worthiness).

Generally, a candidate who has come this far must ask for the Embrace and truly want to become a vampire. Scions consider this preferable to "random" or "forced" Embraces, since it affirms the ideals of free will and the personal quest for excellence that their road espouses. Of course, a candidate quite often does not fully realize what he is asking for or what he will experience once his mortal life is over, but that simply serves to test and strengthen his mettle even further. If the experience of the Embrace destroys him, then he was not worthy of the Road of Kings.

## Stepping Onto the Road

Scions come to the Road of Kings in a variety of ways and how they find the road often colors their understanding and experience of it.

Many Scions are groomed to follow the road by their sires or mentors. The rest come to the road on their own, and often prove to be some of the most ambitious and capable Scions simply because they chose their own way in unlife rather than having it chosen for them. While Cainites are incapable of choosing their clan or sire, and many did not choose their unliving existence, they can choose which road they will follow. For Scions, the Road of Kings is the ultimate expression of that free will and the determination to follow it.

## Aspirants

Like the other roads, one needs a teacher or mentor in order to walk the Road of Kings. While some isolated Cainite despots or barbarian chieftains may stumble upon the principles of the road on their own, coming to a crude understanding of its ways, true knowledge (and therefore understanding) of the Via Regalis is best gained from someone who is familiar with the territory. Sooner or later, an aspirant to the Road of Kings must seek out the aid of a teacher.

Cainites groomed for the Road of Kings from their Embrace (or even before) usually look to their sires as mentors and teachers in the ways of the road. Some sires inform their childer of the existence of other roads, presenting them as clearly inferior to the Via Regalis as a serf is inferior to a king. Others do not even bother to tell their fledglings of other possibilities until they are "confirmed" on the Road of Kings, so as not to confuse them with lesser possibilities. Time enough, they say, for them to learn of the other roads once they are firmly on their own path.

## Fosterage

*As the heavy lid of the coffin creaked, Jules fought down the urge to bare his fangs and hiss at whomever had the temerity to disturb his rest. It would not make a suitable first impression in his new home. So he leashed the urges of the Beast with the need for proper decorum and waited until the ponderous lid swung open before opening his eyes.*

*The woman he beheld upon opening them was a vision of loveliness. Her skin was as pale as marble, smooth as silk. Her lustrous chestnut hair was piled high on her head, falling in artfully arranged ringlets to frame her heart-shaped face. Her eyes were the same color as the amber necklace she wore, a rich honey, and her lips were red as blood. They parted to reveal a perfectly white smile as she extended her hand to him.*

*"I am Marianne," she said as he took her hand. It was cool and strong. "Welcome, Jules de Toulouse, welcome to the Court of Love."*

*Jules bent to kiss the back of her hand before rising from his resting-place. "Thank you, milady," he said. "It is a pleasure to be here. The journey was a long one."*

*"You are well rested, I hope?" Marianne asked, looking Jules over and shyly meeting his gaze with a smile that showed her approval.*

*"Well enough," he said.*

*"Good, then I will take you to meet your new liege and see about getting you settled here. I believe that I will be pleased to consider you my brother, Jules, since we are to be fostered here together. I look forward to getting to know you better."*

*"And I you, my lady," he replied. "Lead on, please."*

A relatively new practice among Scions is that of fosterage. In ancient times, in accordance with the laws handed down from Caine, sires were directly responsible for their childer. This meant that a sire was not only expected to teach childer proper behavior and all they needed to know about their lineage and Cainite nature, but was also directly responsible for the actions of his or her childe. A crime committed by the childe could result in the destruction of both childe and sire, so sires were encouraged to choose carefully before they gave the Embrace.

This tradition is still enforced in the 13th century, but relations between Cainite sires have become more complex since those ancient nights. Sires now often owe fealty to particular overlords, and maintain alliances with their peers. Vampire liege-lords may permit their vassals to sire, requiring their vassals' childer to remain loyal to both their sire and their sire's overlord. Like their mortal counterparts, Cainite nobles and princes look for means





to cement their relationships and alliances, to strengthen their positions within the Courts of the Damned. Fosterage is one means of doing so.

The concept is a simple one. Scion fledglings are sent from their sire to dwell in the haven of another Cainite of equal (or sometimes greater) rank. Often they may be sent from one court to another. There they become the foster childer of that Cainite, treated as true childer with respect to the laws and customs of vampire society. It is most common for Scions to exchange childer in fosterage, although sometimes the arrangements can become even more complex, with a circle of vampire nobles passing their childer along to the next Scion in a long chain or circle.

The purpose of fosterage is twofold. First, it allows fledglings to leave the nest early and receive training and education away from "home," where they can begin to spread their wings a bit under the watchful eye of their foster sire. It also allows young Scions the opportunity to see some of the world and understand how affairs are conducted in other courts in Europe. It is not uncommon for a neonate to be fostered to more than one court before returning to her sire's side. The experience and education she gains is invaluable once she takes her place as the vassal of her true liege-lord (who may or may not also be her sire).

Secondly, the practice of fosterage helps to strengthen ties between the various courts of Europe. The presence of a childer in an ally's court is a sign of respect and trust, while fostering a childer to a former

enemy may help understanding and goodwill to grow (or at least provide a hostage for each side to help limit the possibility of open hostilities). Although all Cainites recognize the potential of using fostered fledglings as spies, it isn't openly discussed. It is, however, expected to some degree, and Scion hosts are always aware that their foster childer may be reporting back to their true sire all that they see and hear.

Fledglings are usually fostered with another Cainite noble of equal or greater status than their sire. It's relatively common for fledglings to foster with their sire's liege-lord, perhaps even the prince of the domain in which their sire dwells. Princes are well aware that this allows them the opportunity to cultivate fealty among neonates, assuring that they understand where their true loyalties should lie. Scions seek to foster their childer in this way because it shows the favor of the prince and allows their childer to gain valuable contacts and experience in court. Having the opportunity to foster with a higher-ranking Scion is considered an honor (and may be an excuse for characters to acquire either the Mentor or Status backgrounds).

It's rare for fledglings to be fostered with lower-ranking hosts. This typically only happens for two reasons. The fledglings' sire may wish to teach them some humility and understanding of those of lower station, so they are fostered with some low-ranking Scion in a small domain so they can understand things from the ground up. Some Scions believe that a few years of difficult fosterage builds character,



particularly for neonates that had easy and privileged lives before the Embrace.

A fledgling might also be fostered below his station if his sire is particularly high ranking and there is no suitable peer with whom to foster the childe. In some cases, Cainite lords foster their childer to distant courts in other parts of Europe, but many prefer to keep them closer at hand, and foster them with one of their own vassals. This is considered both a great honor and a grave responsibility for the chosen vassal. It can either indicate a prince who trusts and favors that vassal, or a prince looking to set up a vassal for failure, perhaps even getting rid of a troublesome childe in the bargain.

There is no set amount of time that a fosterage is expected to last, although a year is considered the absolute minimum, and between five and ten years is common. During this time, the fledgling is expected to learn how to behave at court and about Cainite history, customs, and the other skills necessary to a Scion. Gaps in the fledgling's mortal education are also filled in, when necessary, since not all Scions are of noble birth. There may be some rivalry between fosterlings, and sires often encourage it in order to teach them to survive in the cutthroat world of Cainite politics.

## THE FOSTERAGE CHRONICLE

It's fairly easy to build a chronicle around the practice of fosterage at the Cainite courts. The characters may all be neonates fostered to the same court, coming from diverse backgrounds across Europe. Some of them may even follow roads other than the Road of Kings, chosen for fosterage because they belong to one of the High Clans or perhaps because they are childer of a powerful prince or noble who follows a different road.

Placed together as "siblings" in their foster sire's court, the characters can begin to learn about each other and about vampire society and customs. This provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new players to the setting and history of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, learning as their characters learn about the strange shadow-world they have stepped into. Fosterlings may become pawns in the political games of their elders, and targets of jealousy on the part of their foster sire's true childer. Opportunities for court intrigue abound.

Since fosterage can create bonds that last for multiple mortal lifetimes, it can also be an effective prelude to an ongoing chronicle. Perhaps the characters were fostered together for some time as fledglings, helping each other survive and learning about their nature and duties as Cainites before going their separate ways. Now, years later, at the start of the chronicle, some event serves to bring the characters back together. They have no doubt changed somewhat since their time together as fosterlings, but those ties may help to make the coterie more cohesive.

## Initiation

Philippe knelt on the cold stone before the dais, keeping his head bowed respectfully as his mistress glided from the high throne down the steps, the edges of her cloak whispering against the marble. Philippe heard the steely slither of a blade being drawn, but kept his face and body impassive, bowed and waiting.

"Philippe of Agincourt," she addressed him. "Why do you come before us?"

He looked up into her dark eyes. The faintest trace of a smile played about her crimson lips as her fingers toyed with the point of the razor-sharp dirk she held unsheathed before her.

"I will walk upon the Via Regalis," he said, clearly and forcefully. With the swiftness of a snake, her dagger was at his throat. He felt the tiny pinprick of the point pressed there and the Beast surged up inside him. He fought down the urge to hiss and bat the blade away, as her eyes flashed, daring him to do so. Instead, he kept his gaze locked on hers.

"The Road of Kings is not for any childe of Caine to walk," she said coolly. "It is a path for only a chosen few. Are you worthy to walk where kings and princes have trod before you, Philippe of Agincourt? For if you are not, better that you should fall upon this blade and end your existence, rather than bring dishonor to the road."

"I am worthy," he said.

"What do you bring to the road?" she asked.

"I bring my service," he replied, as taught. "I bring my skills. I bring my heart, and I bring my blood. All these I pledge to the Road of Kings. All these are mine to offer freely."

"What are your watchwords?"

"Honor. Duty. Loyalty. Fealty. Power." The words were a familiar chant for him.

"Then rise, Philippe," she said, lowering the blade from his throat. "Rise, Scion of the Road, and be welcome among your peers."

Initiation into the Road of Kings is rarely a simple matter, and the Scions wouldn't have it any other way. While Cainites may choose to follow other roads simply by declaring their intention to do so, a would-be Scion had best have some proof of her worthiness to walk the Road of Kings before proclaiming it her own, or else be ready to face grave consequences.

Initiation onto the road is generally obtained through the Scions of the domain in which the petitioner dwells, although there have been cases of neonates traveling far and wide seeking initiation when it has been refused to them at home. Initiation into a foreign court may be even more difficult, but it may also be the only means available to a displaced Cainite.

The petitioner must have a sponsor in good standing upon the road. Often this is the neonate's sire, but not always. The sponsor is responsible for seeing that the aspirant is taught all the traditions of the road and the necessary rituals for the initiation. Some sponsors handle this themselves, while others have servants to instruct their students for them (or sometimes a combination of the two). Since the performance of a neonate reflects upon the reputation of the sponsor, adherents and teachers of the Road of Kings choose their protégés and students carefully.



Once the sponsor feels that the student is ready, a petition is made to the highest-ranking Scion in the domain. This is often the prince or lord, but not always, since some princes follow roads other than the Via Regalis. The higher the Scion's rank, the more prestigious the petition. Being initiated by one of the great lords of Europe is a true honor, and a sign of a favored neonate that bears watching. Most Scions make do with the local prince or baron, or one of their functionaries.

The exact initiation ritual varies from one domain to another, and the Scion performing the rite can largely arrange it as desired, although certain elements are nearly always present. The petitioner is expected to present himself before the Scion, and often before the gathered court, to formally request initiation into the Road of Kings. Challenges may be leveled to test the petitioner's worthiness. These can range from simple ritualized questions and actions, intended to show the initiate's preparedness, or they can be more difficult. Rather than outright denying a petition for initiation, many Scions will instead pose extremely difficult tests. If the aspirant fails and is disgraced or destroyed, then the petition is denied. If the initiate succeeds, then he is truly worthy of the road. These sorts of tests are more common for neonates of low birth, without sponsors in the court's good graces.

The initiate declares his intent to follow the Road of Kings, and swears an oath to uphold its ideals. He is then welcomed into the ranks, and may be assigned particular duties by his liege-lord. The initiation ritual is often accompanied by the swearing of oaths of fealty between vassal and liege. It may include other rituals such as knighting ceremonies, or even the investing of titles and domain, although such things usually happen well after a Cainite has taken the Road of Kings as his own.

## Self-Initiation

It is rare for a Cainite to begin walking the Road of Kings alone, but it is known to happen. Generally this occurs for one of two reasons. The neonate may be unaware of the existence and teachings of the Road of Kings, but chooses a personal code similar to it (or one of its various paths). Or, the Cainite has been refused initiation into the road and chooses to follow it regardless, hoping to win the approval of her peers (or at least to win over enough allies that it won't matter).

In either case, the would-be Scion has much to prove in order to win the acceptance of her peers. Self-proclaimed Scions may face disdain at court and, worse yet, can be declared anathema for their presumption, separated from the support of the road and even hunted by other Cainites. They are far better advised to either avoid contact with established courts or to move subtly without attracting too much attention at first.

Once the initiate has won some renown or achieved a measure of personal power, then acceptance within the road becomes more likely. Foreign Scions, for example, are likely to be treated as peers (or at least honorable guests) if they have domain or influence at home, regardless of how

(or even if) they were formally initiated. Likewise, success covers many failings, and young upstarts can gain status as Scions by winning victories while remaining true to the road's ideals, even if they are not formally initiated.

## Initiates From Other Roads

Scions tend to take a surprisingly tolerant view of apostates from other roads seeking to become initiates of the Road of Kings. After all, they know that their road is the true path to greatness in the world, so it's hardly a surprise when a follower of another road finally realizes it and decides to take up the true way. Of course, that doesn't mean that the Scions have to make it easy for apostates to follow their road.

An apostate who chooses the Road of Kings still has to prove himself like any neonate seeking initiation. This is particularly true for apostates of the Road of the Beast and the Road of Sin, since Ferals and Sinners are notoriously untrustworthy, and may not be capable of the sort of self-discipline required by the Via Regalis. Apostates are typically tested by their sponsor and by the Scion who initiates them to ensure that they are truly ready to take up the road.

The prime reason Cainites choose to forsake another road for the Road of Kings is the goal of all Scions: Power. Scions often have advantages when it comes to the political games of court and climbing the ladder of the Cainite hierarchy. While it is certainly possible for followers of other roads to become nobles and even princes, it is also true that the Road of Kings counts the most vampiric rulers among its number. So an ambitious Cainite seeking a title or domain may choose to take the road most likely to lead him there. This contributes to the view of the Scions as power-hungry social climbers.

## Moments of Truth

The true transition between sincere initiate and true adherent of the Road of Kings comes with a moment of truth, an experience that shows the initiate the importance of the road and its tenets and helps to strengthen understanding and dedication. All the study in the world will not make an initiate into a true Scion. Only hard experience can show the way to deeper appreciation of the Via Regalis and its principles.

Scions tend to experience moments of truth in two ways, through victory and through failure. Of course, not all victories or failures are moments of truth, only the truly significant ones that highlight some facet of the road for the Scion.

A hard-won or satisfying victory is an affirmation of all that the Scions believe in and hold dear, so any achievement that advances the Scion's lot in the world, gained through personal excellence and effort, may become a defining moment of truth. One of the reasons that Scions so often hold power in the Dark Medieval world is because they are driven to do so by the tenets of their road. They hold the Beast at bay and achieve understanding of their



Damned nature through their struggles to gain and hold power, and from their contests against each other.

An achievement does not need to be one that draws the attention of the whole of Cainite society in order to be a moment of truth (although such achievements often are). It is the victory's personal value to the Scion that matters most. Sometimes the most important victories are the ones no one else ever sees, or at least never appreciates. The ability to resist frenzy under challenging circumstances or finally achieving knighthood after years of training and hard work may both be moments of truth. In fact, a Scion's initiation onto the road often becomes a moment of truth when it is hard-won, allowing the initiate to move immediately on to become a true adherent.

The bitter taste of failure can also prove to be a moment of truth for a Scion, albeit a more difficult medicine to swallow when compared to the sweet nectar of victory. Scions believe in learning from their failures and mistakes, so they too can be moments of truth.

A significant part of the reason why failures serve as moments of truth for Scions is that the Road of Kings demands risk if one is to achieve the excellence and power that it promises. A Scion who does not take risks, who does not strive to be more than what she already is, cannot make the leaps of insight that allow her to progress along the road. That is why some of the most successful Scions "break the rules" of the Road of Kings from time to time. Such daring opens them up to the possibility of a moment of truth. For some, it is a matter of taking a step backward in order to take one forward; committing a sin, degenerating, and then using the insight it grants to improve again. For the lucky ones, breaking a rule is the path to greater understanding and the opportunity to increase their Road rating. Scions play with fire when it comes to improving their understanding of their road.

## Sins on the Road

The ultimate purpose of any road is to keep the Beast at bay another night. The ideals of the roads give Cainites a focus for their dedication and will, making them something more than just ravening beasts preying on the living. Each road offers Cainites a unique way to deny their true nature as monsters by holding on to a different identity. Shatter that mask, and the Beast shows through it. Violate the ideals of the road, and the Beast can claim a little more of the vampire's soul.

There is a saying on the Road of Kings: "The only true sin is failure." Less concerned with religion than many other Cainites, Scions often think of sins against their road less as "sins" and more as failings, failures, or even risks, since sometimes they can benefit by acting unconventionally and breaking the rules. A sin against kingship is an indication of a personal failing within the Scion, a lack of spiritual fortitude and conviction. A great part of the reason that these failings cause Scions to degenerate is because they are so shameful. Shame and embarrassment before one's peers leads to rage, hate, and thoughts of revenge — meat and drink to the Beast.

## STORYTELLERS' NOTE

It might seem that the Road of Kings is a little too lax: The sins are fairly easy to avoid, at least superficially, and players may well fixate on the notion of committing sins against their characters' road and calling it a "risk." This can easily lead to abuse of the road's function as a way to stave off the Beast, allowing Scions to get away with actions that not even Ferals can.

Remember, however, that Scions have responsibilities that others do not. Their road is not the "Road of Ruthless, Manipulative Bastards," it's the Road of Kings. Whether or not the character truly believes in noblesse oblige, he had better practice it, lest the Beast drag him down. A character who violates the road's tenets in order to achieve a goal should still lose a point from his Road rating, even if the achievement thus accomplished allows for a moment of truth (and thus buying the Road rating back up to its former level).

At first, Scions are often too rigid or too lax in their observance of the tenets of the Road of Kings. Those who are too strict in their obedience to the letter of the road tend to be capable, but not particularly innovative or aggressive. They make decent servants and vassals, but will never achieve true greatness. Those who are too lax in following the commandments of the road tend to degenerate. They fall into the jaws of the Beast, become apostates and seek a new road to follow, or remain lowly and only marginally successful Scions, doomed to forever serve and never rule.

The successful Scion walks the path of moderation, observing the tenets of the road and respecting them, but willing to take risks and occasionally break the rules in order to achieve her goals.

## Teachers and Mentors

Scions take the matter of educating their childer quite seriously, since their road relies on an understanding of the nuances of Cainite culture and the feudal system. A neonate Scion has much to learn, and that requires capable teachers and mentors.

Teachers of the Road of Kings take on students as protégés and vassals with an eye toward advancing them through the ranks to become capable and useful servants. It is a mentor's duty to educate and guide his student and encourage excellence and achievement. In return, students are expected to respect their mentors and obey their betters while showing some initiative and ambition. It can prove a delicate balancing act: Mentors must encourage their students and help them to excel, but not so much that they may eventually outstrip their teachers and seek to replace them. Students must show excellence and ambition on the Road of Kings, but not so much that they become suspect, or else their elders might see fit to dispose of them before they can become a threat.



Sometimes particularly renowned Scions will take on students other than their own childer or vassals. This usually happens when Scions foster their fledglings, but some teachers take on any worthy student, provided he has the right background and potential.

## Climbing the Ladder

Lord Jürgen rested in his chair, sitting before the cold hearth, with only a single candle shedding light in the room. The door opened tentatively and a shadowed figure paused there, awaiting Jürgen's command.

"Come in," he said, not rising from his chair, "and close the door." The vampire lord's guest moved to comply. When Jürgen gestured to the chair sitting opposite him, his guest sank into it gratefully and the Swordbearer allowed a moment to look him over as he composed himself.

Manfred had been a ghoul for many years, and he showed the signs of it in his pallor and his manner, eager to please his domitor and serve in whatever way Jürgen wished. Still, Manfred had a measure of the mettle that made him a fine sergeant at arms. Jürgen had seen him on the battlefield many times and he understood the value of a good soldier in his service, particularly now.

"Tell me, Manfred, are you happy in my service?"

The question seemed to take Manfred aback. He'd expected a rebuke, perhaps new orders, anything but his master inquiring after his happiness as if it mattered.

"I am proud to serve you, my lord," he replied, choosing his words carefully. "I am happy to have the opportunity to do so."

Jürgen held back a smile. It was a surprisingly diplomatic answer. Manfred had clearly been paying attention.

"You have served me well, Manfred, and I intend that you will continue to have the opportunity to do so, but I have need of a man like you for something other than simple soldiering. I need a man capable of taking charge and carrying out my orders in the battles to come. Are you such a man?"

Manfred swallowed visibly as his eyes lit with hope and ambition. "I am your man, my lord."

"Yes, I believe you are," Jürgen replied, rising from his chair to stand at his full height. He towered over Manfred where he sat. As he leaned in toward his faithful servant, Jürgen whispered to him, like a cold breath out of a tomb.

"Do not fear."

The Road of Kings is a journey. At its beginning are ignorance, inexperience, ambition, and a drive for excellence and achievement. At its end, for some few, lies the promise of Golconda (or so the ashen priests say), but more important for many Scions is the promise of power achieved along the road. A Scion content to remain where she is in the scheme of things isn't likely to advance far along the road or in the courts of Europe. Scions are ambitious, and seek to further their own lot, whether through accumulating power for themselves or through faithful service to a liege-lord, earning accolades and prestige for their work.

The feudal arrangement of the road is much like a ladder for Scions to climb, moving into more powerful and influential positions until they can reach the pinnacle

that lies near the top, becoming prince or even lord of a vast domain. As yet, no Scion can claim regency over the whole of the Cainite world, but more than a few followers of the Road of Kings dream of that very possibility. They dream of an empire of night stretching across the known world, with all of the Children of Caine paying homage to it, and to the one who rules it. The quest for such power sparked the War of Princes and keeps the fires of conflict burning between the Cainite lords of Europe.

## The Feudal Pyramid

The structure that holds both Cainite and mortal society together is feudalism, a pyramid of oaths and shared loyalty that rises from the lowliest peasant and commoner to the great thrones of Europe. Scions see feudalism as the fullest flowering of their road, the ideal expression of the tenets and ways of kings, making clear who is superior and who is inferior, who owes loyalty to whom, and how the world should be governed.

Generally speaking, in Cainite society Scions place themselves at the top of the feudal structure. Even the lowest-ranking squire or initiate on the road is more important than any commoner from the Low Clans, much less a mortal of even superior rank. The majority of Scions hold the rank of at least knight, or an equivalent place of importance at court. While the ranks of Cainite nobility are not entirely made up of Scions, the Road of Kings is the most widely represented of any among the nobility, for obvious reasons.

## Hierarchy of the Road

The Scions speak of the "leaders" of the Via Regalis, and indeed Justicars claim to act with the "authority of the Road of Kings," but this is somewhat misleading. Ashen priests of the road do indeed answer questions of faith for Scions and in this way dictate policy in the same way the Pope and other Church officials do for Christians. However, the ashen priests of the Road of Kings exert no real authority over Cainites of other roads simply by virtue of being powerful Scions.

Instead, their power comes from that fact that most of the Cainite princes of Europe are Scions, and therefore look to the priests of their road for advice and spiritual guidance. This puts the priests of the Road of Kings in the position of acting as confessors and counselors to the most powerful vampires in the known world — all of which makes the other roads very nervous indeed.

Fortunately, these priests are not organized to any great degree. Every region has at least one Scion who can act in such a capacity, often also acting as Keeper to a prince (or as a prince himself). However, whom these priests report to, if anyone, is a mystery. Some princes and Justicars have heard mention of a truly powerful paragon of the road who acts as an overlord to these ashen priests, but then, each of the priests might simply be content with the measure of power they wield.



## Adherents and Their Duties

The hierarchy of Cainite society holds many roles and opportunities for ambitious vampires. Scions do not always occupy these positions, of course. Adherents of other roads may fill them in certain domains, but they are all considered worthy goals for Scions seeking position and advancement in the world. For more information on the duties of these functionaries, see page 38 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*.

- **Soldier:** The rank-and-file of a vampire lord's army is typically made up of mortals, sometimes ghouls, but there is a need for trusted vassals to command the troops during their nighttime battles in the War of Princes. This task often falls to trusted neonates and ancillae. Service as a soldier is a dangerous business, but a fine route to recognition and promotion for those who do well on the field of battle. A successful soldier can look forward to a larger command or even a knighthood.

- **Squire:** Scions often begin walking their road as squires in the service of a Cainite knight or noble. As squires, their duty is to act as servants of their master and to learn the arts of knighthood and courtly behavior. Unlike mortal squires, who are nearly always boys, Cainite squires are typically adults and may have a score or more years behind them when they take on the role. Cainite squires may also be women, since they are at least as capable as men, sometimes even more so. Once a squire has served long enough (anywhere from a year to a decade), he may go on to become a knight.

- **Knight:** Many Scions aspire to the rank of knight, and many achieve it within one of the orders of knighthood (either Cainite or mortal). Nobles grant knighthood as a reward for good and faithful service, and becoming a knight is the most common route for advancement within Cainite society and along the Road of Kings. A knight can later rise to even higher positions, and perhaps become a baron or prince, given time. Knights may even gain manors and small domains of their own from their liege-lord. In return, the knight swears an oath of fealty to the overlord, serves in a noble's army, and protects the liege's domain from any threat. Knights serve in their liege's army, often commanding ghoul and mortal soldiers in the field. They may also serve as emissaries or even ambassadors from their liege's court to the courts of other nobles.

- **Sheriff:** The sheriff's duty is to maintain order within a noble's domain. Sheriffs ensure that the Traditions are upheld and that anyone who breaks them is swiftly caught and punished. They keep unwanted Cainites out of the borders of their master's domain and deal with any who violate their territory. They also act as their liege's eyes and ears in other matters. Anything known to the sheriff is likely to find its way back to the prince. The role requires both a keen mind and an iron hand to keep order in some of the most populous domains, where neonates have been known to get out of control. Since they are responsible for the protection of the domain, sheriffs are also among the first targeted by their lord's enemies, either to co-opt them or eliminate them and keep them from protecting their master.

- **Warmaster:** Whereas a sheriff's duty is to maintain order, a warmaster's duty is to destroy order, at least the order of other domains, as directed by the prince. A warmaster is the general or commander of a prince's or noble's army and leads them in the field against all enemies in times of war. Since the start of the War of Princes, warmasters have become increasingly common and no prince in these nights would be without one. When not directly leading troops into battle, the warmaster spends time training the prince's army, gathering tactical information, and otherwise preparing for the next conflict. Rivalries sometimes develop between warmasters and sheriffs over the protection of the domain against the prince's enemies (ultimately the duty of the sheriff).

- **Chamberlain:** A trusted servant, the chamberlain oversees the liege-lord's personal needs and private chambers. For Cainite nobles, the chamberlain typically handles the care and protection of the lord's resting place, sees to the care of any personal quarters or chambers the lord might require, and procures the vessels the noble will feed upon. He also attends visitors at the behest of the prince. Chamberlains may be entrusted with preparing "feasts" for visiting Cainite guests or courts, and often have the resources to acquire the necessary mortal vessels without arousing suspicion. A chamberlain may also handle the duties of the seneschal (or vice versa) in a small domain or manor.

- **Seneschal:** The seneschal is entrusted with the care and maintenance of the lord's demesne, including castle, manor, and lands. It is up to the seneschal to ensure that supplies are maintained, servants are performing their duties, and that all aspects of the domain run smoothly. Unlike mortal seneschals, Cainites have little concern with crops, crafts, or other living matters. Instead, it is often the seneschal's duty to maintain the court invisibly within an existing mortal castle or manor, or to ensure that outsiders do not discover the prince's domain. Entrusted with the secrecy and safety of the demesne, and with its smooth functioning, seneschals sometimes become the power behind the throne, making this a favored position for Scions on the Path of the Vizier (page 71).

- **Keeper:** The nature of the keeper's role varies depending on the needs and desires of the lord. Keepers are spiritual and mystical advisors. In the modern nights of Europe, they are most often ashén priests, able to counsel nobles on doctrine and spiritual matters, while also attending to the spiritual needs of the noble's court. Some princes also keep soothsayers, mystics, or scholars to advise them in times of need. It is a sign of wealth to be able to maintain more than one keeper, although some also point to it as a sign of indecisiveness and weakness on the part of the prince. While keepers often follow the Road of Heaven, they may very well be Scions (particularly Viziers), since keeper is a noble and powerful position.

- **Scourge:** The role of scourge is not widely sought after by Scions, although many of them serve in that capacity. This is because a scourge, while feared, often does not advance far within a prince's service. Poor scourges end up destroyed at the hands of their prey or agents of an



enemy. Skilled and capable scourges are far too valuable to promote or lose to another position, so princes tend to keep them where they are for as long as possible. A discontented scourge can be a valuable ally for one of the prince's enemies, of course, so it's not unknown for a prince to become fearful of the scourge and order him destroyed. Still there are some Scions who find that the role of scourge suits them and perform it well for some time. They can become forces to be reckoned with in their domains.

- **Vassal:** Although technically most Scions are vassals, owing fealty to some liege-lord, a true and valued vassal commands a domain of his or her own. These are the landed knights and barons, or princes sworn to the service of a lord or monarch. Most Scions aspire to the role at some point, since a domain-holder has power and resources that cannot easily be obtained through other means. Of course, there are only so many domains to go around, and the best domains are already claimed by older and more experienced Cainites, so younger Scions often have to take measures to ensure a vacancy above them that they can move into.

## Advancement

Scions seek to advance in the service of their lord, eventually attaining power and position for themselves. There are two means through which a Scion may advance, either promotion in the service of another, or through a coup or rebellion in which the Scion seizes power (and then attempts to hold on to it).

### Promotion

Initial opportunities for promotion within the service of a liege-lord are many for neonate Scions. Vampire lords are always in need of more capable knights in this time of troubles, and battlefield promotions (or even Embraces) are not unknown, particularly when battle has thinned the ranks of a noble's entourage. Scion initiates who prove their worth, either as soldiers or as servants in other capacities, quickly find themselves rewarded and put to work for their masters.

Further promotion, however, may come slowly for a Scion, sometimes painfully so. In the mortal world, the feudal pyramid continually changes due to death and retirement, requiring new people to fill the places vacated. Cainites, on the other hand, are undying, and a Cainite seneschal or warmaster may serve his liege-lord indefinitely, until the servant chooses to retire or is removed by some outside force. On occasion, that outside force is the vassal's lord. More often, though, it is an enemy seeking the vassal's position.

In Cainite society, as with mortals, promotions and accolades come from those further up the social ladder. So a baron may grant knighthood to a worthy squire or soldier. Likewise the baron's liege-lord may ennoble one of his vassals, even having him replace the baron, if that is the liege's wish. The great Cainite lords and monarchs have tremendous power to make or break those within their





domains, although many are constrained by how their vassals would react. Few lords wish to provoke a rebellion among their followers.

## Coups and Rebellions

The other time-honored means of advancement in Cainite society is through a coup, overthrowing someone in a superior position and taking it for one's own. Since vampires need never retire or surrender their power due to age, this is often the only means of achieving the highest ranks in Cainite society, particularly regency over certain domains, or the title of lord or monarch. The holders of those titles do not surrender them easily, and the victor in a contest for them can find herself just as quickly challenged by some new upstart. In fact, Cainite rulers spend a fair amount of their time making sure their position is secure against any would-be usurpers.

## Courts of Shadow

*As the setting sun stained the sky like a bleeding gash, Franz sighed and began making preparations. Soon the whole of the palace would be abed and darkness would shroud his nighttime*

### AMBITION VERSUS DUTY

If rebellion is one of the prime means of achieving power and position in Cainite society, how does any domain avoid degenerating into endless rounds of back-stabbing and betrayal as the vampires seek to one-up each other? The truth is that it does happen sometimes, particularly when an alliance of vassals overthrows a powerful liege-lord, then falls to squabbling among themselves over who will take the throne. For the most part, however, the honor and practical demands of the Road of Kings and the Cainite code of law help to keep things in check.

For example, an ambitious Scion might seek the position of another in a domain. It's not enough to simply walk in and behead a rival, then claim his position. After all, a prince reasons, what's to keep such an upstart from doing the same thing to him one night? Instead, it's necessary to eliminate one's rival through stealth and guile. Ideally, a Scion removes an obstacle without anyone being aware of her involvement in the matter, while positioning herself to step forward and take up the rival's position once he's out of the way. Even better is to secure the prince's approval (tacit or expressed) to remove an incompetent or disloyal servant in order to demonstrate the worthiness to take their place.

Scions walk a careful line between pursuing their ambitions and seeing to their sworn duties. Not only are these things important in their pursuit of their road, they're also vital to their continued survival in the face of ambitious and cunning rivals for power.

comings and goings. He always had much to do in the night, but tonight more than ever. Tonight was special.

The few souls still awake nodded to him as he made his way through the halls, occasionally offering wishes of a pleasant night. Franz resisted smiling at the notion. They had no idea of the sort of night that he would have, of what would happen while they slept, and that was just as it should be.

He spoke with the guards in the dungeon and made sure that all was ready. They had no knowledge of what would become of the prisoners they held — his lord and master had seen to that — but they did not question their orders. Then he saw to the other preparations, speaking quietly and covertly with the other servants of the master, making sure that everything was taken care of before the first guests awakened.

Finally, he made his way into the crypts beneath the castle's chapel, where the previous rulers had been laid to rest. He unlocked the gate with care, making his way down the steps into the cold and darkness with only a candle and his own clear memories to light his way. He passed by tombs with effigies atop them, so cleverly carved they might have sat up and spoken to him, but Franz knew they were just lifeless stone.

He stopped in front of a particular sarcophagus and extinguished his candle, as he'd been told to do, plunging everything into blackness as thick as ink. With practiced hands, he took hold of the edge of the stone lid and pushed, sliding it open. As the scraping of stone on stone died away, he heard a faint rustling sound, and quickly fell to one knee beside the stone coffin. A cold hand brushed his face, and Franz reached out to seize hold of it and kiss it.

"All is prepared, master," he said softly, feeling the presence loom up above him. "Your court awaits you."

Throughout the known world, Cainites rule the night and hold their nocturnal courts, often in the very same halls and palaces of the mortals who rule the world by day. Once the sun sets, the world is theirs, and wise mortals stay behind locked doors if they are not already in the service of the lords of the night.

Like the courts of the mortal world, vampire courts have their own character, their own customs and rules of etiquette that must be observed. An important part of the training of any Scion is an understanding of the subtleties of court and the games of power and dominance played out there. Skill at court is just as important, if not more important, than prowess on the battlefield for a Scion who wishes to secure power and hold it for any length of time.

## Courtly Manners

Despite the fact that they've become bloodthirsty monsters — or, in the case of Scions, because of that fact — vampires adhere to certain standards of behavior. The Traditions outline the bare essentials of what is expected of any Cainite, from neonate to elder (though elders are, of course, less answerable to others). In addition there is a body of proper etiquette for Cainites who wish to be successful at court.

Much of this code is unwritten, passed from sire to child and mentor to student. This deliberately keeps



the ranks of the nobility closed to social pretenders, since they don't know the proper ways to behave and quickly expose themselves as inferiors. The exact customs vary somewhat from one court to another (Storytellers should modify the difficulty for Etiquette rolls in particularly foreign or strange courts until the characters become acclimated to their ways). There are some standards found throughout most of Europe, which include the following:

- **Respect for the Prince:** Paying proper respect to the prince is considered paramount. Princes can (and have) punished, even destroyed, Cainites who fail to demonstrate the proper respectful behavior and attitude. This includes foreign Cainites, who are expected to present themselves to the prince as quickly as possible upon entering the domain and obey all the Traditions (notably the rights of progeny and destruction). It also includes never leaving a room without the prince's leave, or deliberately turning one's back to the prince (a sign of disrespect). A prince should always be addressed by full title and name or as "my prince" or "your highness" (or even "your majesty" in the case of true monarchs).

- **Respect for Elders:** Respect also extends to a Cainite's elders and superiors at court. Neonates are expected to defer to ancillae, ancillae to elders, and so forth. Those of a lower rank should defer to those above them. Technically rank supersedes age, but an elder vampire should be accorded respect regardless, even if not a part of the court hierarchy. The older the vampire, the more important to maintain a respectful attitude. Particularly powerful Cainites are treated as peers of the prince (although they do not supersede the prince in his own domain, regardless of age).

- **Discretion:** Courtly Cainites are expected to be discreet when it comes to certain matters. Unless there is a "feast" in progress where vitae is provided for all present, a Cainite should not feed openly, but in private, where there is no risk of provoking others to frenzy (or of others seeing the feeder frenzy, if it should happen). Weapons are only carried openly in court with the prince's permission, and only the most trusted are allowed to carry weapons at all in the prince's presence. Private matters are best kept private, unless there is a pressing reason to talk about them before the court.

- **Polite Speech:** Cainites who spend a great deal of time at court are often given to flowery and delicate speech. Inferiors wait for their superiors to address them before speaking, and are expected to be polite but to the point. Long-winded speeches are more common among the nobility. The proper use of titles is important, since failing to use them can be considered an insult. Princes are addressed as "my prince" or "your highness." Barons are "my lord" (sometimes "your grace"). Knights are addressed as "sir." Lords are called "my lord" or "highness" and monarchs are properly addressed as "your majesty," although some take on unique titles of their own. (More information on courtly titles can be found in the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion*.)

## Midnight Festivals

Scions are among the most social of Cainites. After all, what is a lord without vassals to rule over? Cainite courts tend to be somber and silent affairs compared to their often-raucous mortal counterparts, but Scions are known to sponsor and attend various tournaments and festivals. These midnight gatherings serve both to showcase the talents and achievements of the nobility and offer them the chance to meet, strike alliances, hatch plots, and otherwise advance their own causes. They are cause for terror for mortals, and any kine that stumble across a Cainite gathering are doomed to death, servitude, or (occasionally) the Embrace.

Like their courts, Cainite festivals often happen under the guise of mortal gatherings and celebrations. When the kine have retired for the night, the vampires emerge and take over their tents, pavilions, and fields and use them for their own sport. Things like tournaments and county fairs afford excellent opportunities for vampires to both congregate and hunt. Few people are likely to notice yet another cart laden with boxes trundling into town, and there are always strangers in such places not likely to be missed. If anyone happens to hear the sounds of clashing weapons and celebration late into the night, he is wise to stay inside and pay them no heed.

On other occasions, Cainite lords and princes ordain festivals and tournaments of their own. Set up in some out of the way place and happening entirely at night — often without campfires, torches, or lanterns — these festivals are rarely noticed by mortals. Still they tend to remain close to civilization, since there is always a risk of Lupines or other creatures attacking. But even these may only provide Cainite knights and champions with opportunities to prove their mettle against worthy foes.

At their festivals, vampires engage in many of the same activities as mortals. Merchants, both Cainites and mortals in their service, offer their goods and crafts for sale. Soothsayers and fortune-tellers (typically Malkavian or Ravnos) read cards or bones, offering cryptic advice and words of wisdom. There may be musicians and performers (often entranced or loyal mortal servants), and perhaps even "feeding pens" of kine for guests, if the patron of the festival is feeling particularly generous.

There are also many games and contests for Cainites to test their skills: Jousts, archery competitions, and so forth. More decadent and wealthy lords may sponsor other entertainment, including battles between champions (willing or unwilling, mortal or Cainite), perhaps against wild or ghoulish beasts. "Wild hunts" with human prey are also a popular sport. Winners of such games may gain a noble's favor, perhaps even sponsorship on the Road of Kings or other accolades. It is also common for affairs of honor to be settled on these occasions. Duels between Cainite knights draw a great deal of attention.

A midnight festival can be the social event of an entire year (or more) for a domain. It makes an excellent story hook, since there is always so much going on even at fairly small regional festivals, to say nothing of the more elaborate



ones thrown by powerful lords. A coterie should have no difficulty finding things to do at a midnight festival.

## Clans on the Road

Although some prefer not to acknowledge it, Cainites from all 13 clans walk the Road of Kings. Though separated by their diverse bloodlines, Scions are united by their common goals of excellence, kingship, and guidance for their fellow vampires. Different clans view the Road of

Kings in different ways, with Scions prone to particular paths, interpretations of tradition, and ways of pursuing their goals.

## The High Clans

The High Clans — the nobility of the night — are natural adherents of the Road of Kings. Scions from these clans are the most common, and most consider it their right to walk the Via Regalis, although not all do so for the same reasons.

## Brujah

*There are two uses to which power can be put: Creation and destruction. Destruction is simple. It takes little effort to raise a mob, or even an army, to send them off to their deaths for a cause they may not truly understand. It takes little skill to raze a town or even a palace, to destroy a community or a civilization. The true challenge of power is creation. Can you build something new atop the ashes of the old? Can you make it better and stronger than it was before? Can you keep it safe from all harm, strengthen it when it weakens, and cut out whatever threatens it? Then, and only then, you may have what it takes to be a king.*

Some would think the egalitarian Brujah ill-suited to the Road of Kings, but they forget that the Brujah have been and remain great leaders among the Children of Caine. They simply choose to exercise a different sort of leadership than most vampires are used to. Brujah on the Road of Kings concern themselves with the duties and responsibilities of kingship as much as the accumulation of power and dominion. It is the duty of a leader to show subjects the way, to serve as an example and a guiding elder while encouraging their fledglings to test their own wings. At least, so say the Brujah thinkers and philosophers.

In truth, while many Brujah Scions aspire to the role of wise and benevolent leader, most are forced by the realities of leadership to compromise their ideals, at least enough to ensure that they remain in power. While they may liken themselves to ancient and legendary philosopher-kings, the Brujah can also be blind sometimes to the petty and base nature of humanity. The Brujah are also faced with controlling their legendary tempers, if they wish to be successful Scions. Their tendency towards frenzy can destroy all that the Brujah have built in an instant of weakness. Brujah Scions work to create strong states where security and prosperity offer places for art and learning to flourish. Although they are not even close to recreating the glories of lost Carthage, their dedication to that goal does not waver.

Some Brujah Scions follow the Path of the Vizier, becoming advisors to mortal rulers in an effort to guide them toward right-thinking and productive ways. Of course, for every Zealot Scion trying to build up a kingdom, another Brujah rebel tries to tear it down so that something new can be built in its place. So the cycle of destruction and creation goes ever around and around with the Brujah and their dreams.

## TRIAL BY COMBAT

**T**rial by combat is an accepted and time-honored way of settling matters between Cainites, as it is between mortals. Such a trial must be countenanced by the local prince or noble, and witnessed. Ashen priests often help officiate such trials. The challenger traditionally throws down a gauntlet before the challenged as a sign of the duel. If the challenged Cainite picks it up, then the trial is set, typically after the next sunset.

The participants are permitted to wear full armor and usually fight with swords (although other melee weapons are permissible). When both participants are knights, the contest often takes the form of a joust, beginning on horseback with lances and then moving to fighting on foot when one participant is unhorsed (it's considered dishonorable to fight from horseback against an opponent on foot in these contests). The use of Disciplines is generally permitted, although the prince may place restrictions on them, if he so desires.

The combat lasts until one of the combatants either yields or is killed (or sent into torpor). In many cases, only the death of one of the combatants will settle the matter, although an honorable opponent usually accepts a foe's surrender. It is not uncommon for Cainites to frenzy in the midst of a trial by combat, although doing so is considered a shameful lack of self-control among Scions (that is, cause for a degeneration roll).

The winner of the trial by combat also wins the dispute between the combatants. So if one Scion accuses another of a crime, then defeats the accused in a trial by combat, the matter is settled and the accused is guilty. It's usually a moot point by then, though, since the accused is probably also destroyed.

Often the coup de grace in a trial by combat comes not in the form of sword stroke but the Amaranth, as the victor feeds upon the vanquished. This is one of the only occasions where diablerie is practiced openly on the Road of Kings, if a younger Scion challenges and feeds upon an elder. Some ambitious Scions use such challenges as a means to advance, although challenging an elder is no small matter. Princes often dismiss spurious challenges, and even if they do not, the challenger must still win against an older and more powerful opponent.



## Cappadocians

*You would know of the Road of Kings? Come here then, for I have spoken with kings and queens who ruled lands that have long since turned to dust. I have walked through their royal burial chambers and seen the treasures they left behind them. How many kings have ruled these lands? How many more will rule them in the generations to come? The secret of the Road of Kings is that power is fleeting in the mortal world, but in our world, in a world beyond death, power, like us, can be eternal.*

The scholarly Cappadocians are not given to the pursuit of power. Knowledge and insight are what they crave above all else. Still, some members of the clan find their way onto the Road of Kings and find meaning there.

The Cappadocian view of kingship focuses more on the nighttime world of the Damned rather than the fleeting and brief existence of mortals. They know that all things die, including kingdoms and nations, so there seems little point to seeking temporal power. It will only be gone in a matter of generations. Power should not be acquired for its own sake, but for the opportunities power grants. Therefore, the Cappadocians are most often drawn to the Path of the Vizier, becoming advisors to other Cainite Scions in exchange for their patronage. Princes often sponsor research and scholarly enclaves for their Cappadocian advisors.

## Lasombra

*Come closer, child. There's nothing to fear, now. If you would know about the Road of Kings, it is best to learn from the source, after all. Oh, the Ventrue think they are the embodiment of kingship when all they really do is ape mortal ways and call it tradition. We understand about true rule, the kind that requires no crown, no throne, but wields greater power than any mortal monarch knows. In truth, it is power that matters, not appearances or titles or ceremonies. The key to power is the ability to rule from the shadows rather than standing in the light, since we know well how much the light can burn.*

The Lasombra are one of the most influential clans on the Road of Kings (the other being their rivals, the Ventrue). The Magisters embody the ideals of striving for personal greatness and power, but they disdain many of the outward trappings of the Via Regalis that the Ventrue and others love so much. To them it is the power and greatness that are important, not the ceremonies and titles, although there is no lack of either in the Lasombra's ranks.

Since they prefer to be the power behind the throne rather than the power on it, Lasombra Scions often follow the Path of the Vizier. They are strongly associated with the Church as well. Ecclesiastical Lasombra are split between the Road of Heaven and the Road of Kings, the former true believers in the faith (or at least some form of it). The latter see the Church as merely another path to power and influence, and there is arguably no greater single power in Europe. Unfortunately for the Lasombra, they are by no means alone in the ranks of the Church, and infighting between Scions and Faithful among the clan limits their influence over Christendom.

## Toreador

*Beautiful, is it not? My sire had it commissioned not long after my Embrace and presented it to me when I first took my oaths as a Crusader and vowed to visit the Holy Land. It has served me well in all the many years since then. You could find no finer blade in the world. See the scrollwork by the hilt, and the setting of the stone in the pommel? It is truly a work of art, but more important than its beauty is what it represents — honor, duty, sacrifice, glory. I recall all these things every time I look upon it, every time my fingers caress its hilt. May you say the same about your own blade one night, my childe.*

The Toreador understand duty and responsibility quite well. The very core of the clan's ideal is the preservation, protection, and nurturing of beauty and art. Some Toreadors find the best way to do so is through the power given to a prince or noble to be a patron of the arts. There is also much to be said for the artistry of a brilliant political game well played and the pleasures that come with power and position in Cainite society. All these things draw the Artisans to the Road of Kings, seeking the power to make their dreams a reality and to preserve what they value most in the world. Unfortunately, some Toreador Scions see their dreams turn to dust before them, and find that their enemies strike at them where they are most vulnerable, through their treasures and their art. The anger of these wounded Artisans is terrible to behold.

The Road of Kings has never been so attractive to the Toreador than since the start of the Age of Chivalry in Europe. Many Toreador neonates have joined with knightly orders and embrace the Path of Chivalry, with various Toreador princes and nobles creating and patronizing those orders to cultivate noble and knightly qualities among their vassals. The Toreador knight-errant has become a common sight in the courts of Europe, particularly in France where the clan holds so much influence.

## Tzimisce

*So, you would claim the right of a king, would you? What do you know of the rights of kings? When you have dwelled in these mountains for a thousand years, watched the mortal villages in the valleys spring up like mushrooms, carefully tended and pruned your garden, when you and the land are of one body and one blood, then you may begin to understand the true right of kings. Unfortunately, you will not have those opportunities.*

The Fiends understand the exercise of power like few other Cainites, having so long ruled their *voivodates* in the distant lands they call their own. They consider the Lasombra, the Ventrue, and Scions of other clans pretenders to nobility at best, like children playing at the game of kings and princes, but power is no game to the Tzimisce.

The pursuit of personal achievement espoused by the Via Regalis echoes the truths of the Tzimisce Road of Metamorphosis, and this has influenced the Fiends' view of kingship. They are far less concerned with duties and obligations — one ensures the safety and security of one's own domain and the rest is no one else's business. For them, the Road of Kings is about attaining and keeping personal power and control: Control over the Beast, control over the



body, control over one's subjects and one's inferiors, and showing proper deference and respect for one's betters (few though they may be).

## Ventrue

*Know, my childe, that the noblest of blood flows in your veins, not just the blood of your mortal line, but the blood of Caine, down through the ages to me, your sire. Our blood makes us destined for greatness in this world. I saw such potential in you when I chose you, and now I have given you the gift as it was given to me. We carry the blood of kings, you and I, and I expect great things of you, great things indeed.*

No clan embodies the ideals (and failings) of the Via Regalis more than the clan of kings and princes, the Ventrue. Throughout history, the Ventrue have been associated with the Road of Kings, and it with them, despite the best efforts of some other clans (such as the Lasombra) to wrest control away from them. The road began with the Ventrue in the final nights of the Roman Empire and waxed with them into the Long Night of Europe, and now guides them in the War of Princes.

The Ventrue see themselves as mentors and guides for other Scions. As such, it is their Patrician duty to provide fit examples of the road and its ways. It is also their duty to their clan to remind others of their place in the scheme of things sometimes. While they respect Scions of other clans, the thought that these others may prove the equals of the Scions of Clan Ventrue scarcely crosses their minds.

## The Low Clans

Cainites of the Low Clans also walk the Road of Kings, although they are few by comparison to High Clan Scions. Childer of the Low Clans face many challenges in attaining and following the Via Regalis, not the least of which is the prejudice and disdain of their high clan brethren. Still, the Road of Kings is about overcoming all such obstacles, and the Low Clan Cainites who do so become true exemplars of their road.

## Assamite

*The Franj would be surprised by many of our ways, I think. To them we are Saracen assassins, slinking in the shadows, slaying in exchange for blood. They see only what they wish to see, a mere shadow of our true nature. That is because the ways of the Banu Haqim are not for outsiders, but only those of the true blood of our Founder. It is not we who are uncivilized. We have the guidance of Haqim to show us the way.*

More Assamites follow the Road of Kings than most European Cainites suspect (or would admit to). Two particular paths appeal to the Saracens. The first is the Tariq el-Harb, what they call "the Road of War," which is described in *Veil of Night*. It is a path of the Road of Kings somewhat like the European Path of Chivalry, although embracing Muslim warrior ideals. Assamite warriors are its most common adherents. Unlike the Path of Chivalry, the Tariq el-Harb does not embrace the virtue of Conscience, but Conviction, like the Road of Kings.

The other common Assamite path is the Path of the Vizier (page 71), followed by many of the vizier caste of the clan as the embodiment of Haqim's teachings regarding the accumulation of power and control. Some Assamite princes choose to follow the Road of Kings much as it is known in Europe, since they rule openly, but the virtues of subtlety are so respected among the Assamites that even these princes often follow the Path of the Vizier.

## Followers of Set

*The Road of Kings is open to the Children of Set, because we understand there is only one, true king and he shall rule over all the Earth when his time is come. He will need capable vassals to govern in his name, so we prepare for when the time is right. Other pretenders to the throne will come to serve the Dark Lord as we do thanks to our subtle potions and cunning words or else they will be toppled and replaced.*

Setites do walk the Road of Kings, to be sure, though their purpose differs from that of other Scions. The Followers of Set know that their god and sire will return one night to claim his dominion over the Earth, so his servants merely rule and seek power in his name, preparing for that time. The values and teachings of the road are useful to Setite rulers and princes in maintaining their domains in distant lands.

In Europe, Setites are less likely to follow the Road of Kings itself and more likely to choose one of its paths, allowing them to seek power behind the scenes. The Path of the Vizier is quite common. The sly Setite advisor to court is someone Cainites with any sense know to avoid (or at least stay on good terms with). Some Setite viziers even conceal their presence entirely, appearing in secret only to those they counsel.

The Path of the Merchant is another to which the Setites have taken with a will. While the High Clans disdain such gross mercantilism, the Followers of Set are drawn to it naturally. The wealth and influence they gather helps to further strengthen their position in Cainite society. Setite merchants are well known for their ability to get anything a customer may desire... for a price.

## Gangrel

*So your king has sent you to parley with me, has he? Then let me tell you something of kings, little one, something you can carry back to your lord and master. A king who must hide behind courtiers and armored knights, who cannot lead his men onto the field or battle, or hold a sword, or meet with a peer face to face, is no king at all but a coward. The right of a chief is not won by accident of birth or bloodline. It is achieved by deeds and held by them as well. If your liege would parley with me, then tell him to come himself, if he dares.*

It's the rare Gangrel that follows the Road of Kings, but they are among the proud leaders and chieftains of their clan. Gangrel Scions are often associated with tribes or bands of barbarians in the least civilized places in the world, far from the political games of other Cainites. In their domain, honor and courage are important, not subtlety or courtly manners. Like the rest of their clan, Gangrel Scions are blunt and straightforward.



Gangrel on the Road of Kings sometimes have difficulty restraining their bestial natures. They give rein to the Beast in battle, showing tremendous savagery to their enemies, while keeping it under control off the field so they can temper their rule with wisdom and sound judgment. They take oaths and matters of honor very seriously. Oath-breakers are likely to slake the Scion's thirst with their blood, if the Gangrel even deigns to drink from such a creature. Otherwise they're simply left for the crows to feast upon, or exiled to a slow death in the wilderness (often at the fangs and claws of Lupines).

## Malkavian

*Oh yes, my lord, your greatness is written in the stars and whispered on the wind to me. It is plain for all to see and yet they do not acknowledge it, and they call me a fool, eh? But no matter, you understand a little of your destiny, and I understand that you must know more. I am willing to instruct and guide you, if you will accept my guidance and provide for my needs. I can tell you things you can hardly imagine, unless, of course, you would prefer not to know. Think carefully before answering, my lord. My gift is not for all, but only a special few. Are you one of them?*

The Malkavians rarely rise to the rank of prince, or any role other than court jester in the eyes of many Cainites, but there are certainly Malkavians on the Road of Kings, and the power they wield is considerable. Since time immemorial, vampire lords and princes have had Malkavian advisors and seers because they recognize the

insight in their madness. Of course, they try not to become too reliant on these advisors, but they cannot deny a kind of lure to the strange wisdom of the Malkavians. Some princes have fallen under the sway of a Malkavian soothsayer or counselor, eventually going mad themselves, all while their advisor acts as the power behind the throne, ruling the domain in their name. Those who think the Malkavians have no aspirations to power are sadly mistaken.

Malkavian Scions most often follow the Path of the Vizier, preferring to remain on the sidelines, although there has been an increasing number of Malkavian Scions seeking power openly since the War of Princes, and even Malkavian paladins following the Path of Chivalry. Some Scions try to see a method in the Malkavians' madness, while others know that such efforts are futile and potentially dangerous to one's own sanity.

## Nosferatu

*Welcome, childe, to my court. It is not as pretty as those you are used to, I'm sure, but it is mine nonetheless. My word is law here, and you should consider that before you do anything foolish. It would be a shame to see such handsome features marred, now wouldn't it? Good. Now tell me why you have petitioned an audience with me. If your request pleases me as much as your manners, you may yet leave here with what you came for, and with that pretty face intact.*

No clan is lower than the Lepers, despised and kept out of sight of others. So it is little surprise that few





Nosferatu follow the Road of Kings. Still, even some among these lowest of the low have ambitions and plans of their own. The Nosferatu long ago learned how to secure power for themselves and their clan through gathering and trading secrets and lore, and some Lepers find that power very pleasing.

The Path of the Vizier suits most Nosferatu Scions well. Indeed, they embody the ideal of the unseen advisor pulling strings behind the scenes. Oftentimes even the other Cainites of a noble's court won't know of the existence of their liege's secret counselor, who whispers knowledge gathered throughout the domain, some true and some not, carefully woven to ensure that things go as the vizier wishes them to. The Scion's enemies suffer unfortunate "accidents" or simply vanish altogether into the catacombs or dark, hidden places of the domain. How many domains in Europe are actually ruled from below? None can truly say, and few would be willing to venture a guess, lest it be overheard.

## Ravnos

*Oh, aye, I am a king indeed, a king without a kingdom, for I was foully deposed from my rightful domain by my most trusted counselors, who conspired against me because they feared my righteous rule. I was barely able to escape thanks to the efforts of a few loyal servants, who sacrificed themselves that I might flee ahead of the assassins. All I could take with me were a few trinkets, precious seals of my kingship passed down through the ages. Now I am forced to sell them in order to raise the forces I will need to retake my domain. But rest assured, even though it may take a hundred years, I will succeed! So although it pains me, I must ask. What you would pay for these small tokens of kingship?*

The only clan with virtually no Scions among its ranks is the Ravnos, who find the very idea of kingship as it is defined by the Via Regalis laughable (and they'll be glad to tell you so). The responsibilities and duties that come with being a Scion are as repellent as sunlight the Charlatans, who value their freedom above all else, and do not want to be tied down to a domain or bound by oaths.

Naturally, the Ravnos are a thorn in the side of any true Scion who must deal with them, simply because of their disregard for all that the Road of Kings and its adherents stand for. Ravnos make oaths and then break them at the drop of a hat. They lie, cheat, and steal with no regard for the law. In short, they do whatever they can get away with, forcing the Scions to ensure that justice is done, assuming they can catch the culprit in the first place.

## Tremere

*Knowledge is the key that unlocks power and power is the ultimate goal of knowledge, or else that knowledge is useless. There are those too timid to turn the key in the lock, to throw open the door, and to claim what lies beyond it for themselves. They remain forever locked in the tiny chamber of their existence, never knowing what could have been theirs. It is the ones with the knowledge to find the key and the will to use it that*

*understand power and its benefits. That power is ours now, and we are not afraid to wield it.*

Power is the watchword of the Usurpers. It was for power that they seized vampiric unlife for themselves. It was for power that they diablerized Saulot and created the Gargoyles to serve them. The Tremere desire for power and control drew them to the Road of Kings soon enough, once they began to understand more of their Cainite nature. It now remains to be seen if the Usurpers can hold on to the power that they have seized.

Tremere Scions embody the ambition of the Via Regalis, the unquenchable thirst for power. The Path of the Tyrant calls to some of them, although the Tremere do not as yet have the influence in Cainite society to stretch their power as far as they would like it to go. Some Tremere find the subtle Path of the Vizier better suited to worming their way into the courts of Europe as valuable advisors in the War of Princes, particularly for those who fear Assamite and Tzimisce sorcery. Once they are in place, the Tremere are difficult to dislodge, and they quickly extend and secure their influence. Any prince who makes the mistake of trusting a Tremere advisor too far is likely to become a ruler in name only.

## Factions and Paths

Although the Scions of the Road of Kings do their level best to present a united front to the rest of the Dark Medieval world, the truth is that the road (and its followers) are as fractious and divided as any other part of Cainite society. The Road of Kings is about achieving power, and ultimately only some Scions can attain the power they seek. Some do so through particular factions or sects of the road, while others follow a more orthodox way, sometimes directing the wrath of their fellow nobles against the young upstarts and their new ways, other times creating new factions to serve their own ends.

## Paths Along the Road

Along each road, adherents disagree about the tenets and ideals of the road, much like religious schisms among mortals. Like those religious debates, conflicts over the orthodoxy of a road may lead to the creation of different sects, what Cainites call "paths" of the road. The various paths share many of the same ideas as the orthodox version of the road, but emphasize particular qualities or virtues they believe will lead them to understanding and allow them to keep the Beast at bay.

The paths of the Road of Kings tend to be more unified than most. On some roads the different paths may struggle against each other, but for the most part the various paths of the Road of Kings cooperate because they all recognize the importance of authority, fealty, and duty. Therefore it can be difficult to determine exactly which path (if any) a particular Scion follows, since he is not likely to proclaim it as clearly as others do. The followers of the Path of



Chivalry are the most obvious, but even they tend to blend in among the orthodox Scions who also embrace chivalric ideals and the trappings of knighthood.

For more information about the Paths of the Road of Kings, see Chapter Three.

## The Path of Chivalry

Scions following the Path of Chivalry (known as Paladins), embrace the ideals of knighthood, so much so that they have put aside the ambition so common to Scions and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to championing the weak and helpless. Paladins believe it is their duty to serve above all else, whether their liege-lord, the cause of justice, or the needs of their people (both mortal and Cainite). Paladins are not loath to accept power or authority rightly earned, nor are they as likely to abuse it as others are. They see it as their duty to uphold the rule of just and honorable princes but to bring down those who dishonor the Road of Kings. Of course, as in conflicts between mortal knights, the definitions of honorable and dishonorable often depend on the Paladin's own allegiances and oaths.

Other Scions tend to see Paladins as well meaning and honorable to a fault, if somewhat naïve. Paladins are valued vassals simply because they are less ambitious than other Scions and are extremely loyal, provided their liege does nothing they consider cause enough to turn against him. The more cynical followers of the Road of Kings see Paladins as potential dupes they can manipulate, but they are often mistaken, and need to be taught a painful lesson by these noble knights.

## The Path of the Merchant

Power comes in many forms, and while land and vassals are the most common source of power in the Dark Medieval world, they are by no means the only one. The followers of the Path of the Merchant have discovered another source of power: Wealth. Rather than the wars of kings and princes, Merchants concern themselves with trade and business. Their battlefield is the marketplace, their fortress the counting house, their domain the warehouses and caravans of the world. Merchants see their way as wiser than the typical Scion who seeks to rule a domain in a world already crowded with would-be Cainite princes. Instead, they create new domains, mercantile empires, and rule them.

Merchants often come from the Low Clans, since Scions of the High Clans scoff at the idea of grubbing for money. They barely acknowledge the Merchants as Scions, much less as peers, although they recognize that the goods they sell and trade help keep the mortal herd prosperous and healthy. Sometimes the Merchants even manage to find things of interest to Cainite nobles. After all, one must acquire rare silks, gems, and other fineries from somewhere. The Merchants always seem happy to provide, and all they ever ask is a fair price, and perhaps some consideration in the future, when they might need a favor.

## The Path of the Tyrant

The quest for power is at the heart of the Road of Kings, and none seek power more visibly than the adherents of the Path of the Tyrant. To them all honor, rituals, codes, and traditions of the Road of Kings are merely tools, techniques one can use to attain and hold power. Honor is unimportant; being seen as honorable is what is useful. Whatever allows a tyrant to achieve his goal, that is what he will do, and he will allow nothing to get in his way.

Of course, even Tyrants recognize the importance of the feudal network of obligations and oaths of fealty. If they did not exist, no ruler could effectively govern beyond the reach of his own powers. Again, they are useful in achieving a Tyrant's goals, so they must be upheld. Those who defy the law in a Tyrant's eyes must be severely punished as an example to others.

To most Scions, Tyrants are somewhat crude and grasping, although there is no small amount of admiration for a Tyrant who is successful. Paladins consider Tyrants the worst examples of the Road of Kings, while Tyrants consider Paladins romantic fools and potential pawns in their schemes. All Scions know to handle Tyrants carefully, particularly those who have achieved a measure of power, since challenging a Tyrant is a sure way to provoke a conflict that can only end with one side or the other destroyed.

## The Path of the Vizier

While Scions have a reputation for grandstanding, some understand and practice great subtlety. Adherents of the Path of the Vizier see knowledge — not wealth or military prowess — as the key to true power. Viziers are scholars by nature, but not ascetics who would prefer to sit in their ivory towers to read and debate philosophy. They put their knowledge to work for them in the Cainite courts of Europe, shaping the future to suit their ends.

Many vampire princes and nobles have Vizier advisors, counselors, and aides in their courts, and rely on their wisdom and knowledge. This is just as the Viziers wish it, since it gives them influence. More than a few noble courts are ruled from behind the scenes by the prince's Vizier. This makes the path useful to Cainites of the Low Clans, who cannot easily achieve such power openly and prefer to work clandestinely.

Other Scions therefore see Viziers as useful and important allies, although a wise prince never trusts a Vizier too much. More martial Scions often scoff at the scholarly manner of the Viziers, but those who underestimate or dismiss them often come to regret it.

## Knightly Orders

Over the past few centuries, orders of knighthood have come to increasing prominence on the Road of Kings, as Scions embraced the ideals of chivalry. Cainite lords and princes sponsored various knightly orders of their own while Scions also chose to join (or remain with, in some cases) mortal orders of knighthood. Cainite knights who must pass as mortals usually claim to have sworn an oath not



to see the sun again until they have fulfilled a particular duty or some other event comes to pass (the liberation of the Holy Land is a popular choice).

Membership in a knightly order is the goal of nearly every Scion on the Path of Chivalry, and many others on the Road of Kings consider it a worthy means to achieve status and recognition, and to advance in the service of one's liege. Unlike mortals, Cainites often view knighthood as but a stage of their existence, something to indulge in for a few decades until they are ready to move on elsewhere. Elders see it as a fine way to occupy and temper the fiery nature of many neones, shaping them into worthy Scions and having them available when the call to battle goes out. Younger Cainites are often caught up in the ideals of the order and the opportunity to serve.

Although Cainite knights usually move on to pursue other interests after a time, some choose to remain in service and uphold the cause of chivalry for far longer. They typically must leave their chosen order at some point. Even if they are successful in concealing their true nature, their mortal brethren are likely to notice a knight who does not age a day over the course of decades (members of Cainite orders do not have such concerns, of course). Some Cainites are known to move from one order to another, changing names and identities over the years, even posing as their own descendants in other lands. An elder Cainite knight may have served with several orders over the course of a hundred years, and seen much of the world in doing so.

## Mortal Orders

Many prominent mortal orders of knighthood count Cainites among their ranks. Ironically, they include the most powerful ecclesiastical orders in the world. The Poor Knights of Christ and the Holy Temple of Solomon, or the Knights Templar, have Cainite members, either mortal knights given the Embrace or (more rarely) Cainites that have joined the order since their Embrace. Some Scions also dwell among the Knights Hospitaller, the Teutonic Knights, and various other mortal orders. Followers of the Road of Kings and the Path of Chivalry are the most likely Cainites to join such orders, although followers of the Road of Humanity are quite common as well, preferring the company of their mortal comrades.

### THE UNTOUCHED ORDER

One mortal order of knights is, as far as the Scions know, completely untainted by the Children of Caine. This order — the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre — is relatively young, and yet seems to have a presence throughout Europe. However, while no Cainite lord can say for certain, many Scions suspect that some undead crusader has the ear of the order's Grand Master, given how well-informed the knights seem to be about Cainites.

## Cainite Orders

A number of entirely Cainite orders of knighthood exist, most of them established by Paladins devoted to the ideals of chivalry or Scions who saw the usefulness of such orders. The best known of these is the Order of the Bitter Ashes, which is sworn to protect holy relics, fight against creatures that threaten humanity (including many vampires), and to aid those rare Cainites who seek redemption in the name of God. Only Paladins are selfless and devoted enough to join the ranks of the Bitter Ashes. Other Cainite orders of knighthood have romantic ideals, but not quite as lofty or fanatical as the Ashen Knights. They are strongly influenced by the Toreador clan, which was instrumental in founding most of them at a time when the Path of Chivalry was in its infancy.

Other Cainite orders include the White Company, a Castile-based order led by a Toreador of pristine reputation; the Fellowship of Our Lady, a very small order founded by an English Cainite who received a vision of the Virgin Mary; and the Order of Chanticleer, a zealous order of demon-hunters and staunch enemies of the Baali.

For detailed information on these orders and on the mortal orders, consult *The Ashen Knight*.

## Guilds and Merchant Houses

Followers of the Road of Kings have taken an increasing interest in merchants, craftsmen, and other well-off commoners. Although lacking titles and lands, these folk still have influence in mortal society, and influence is the stock in trade of the Via Regalis. Some Scions have found wealth and commerce a better route for them to follow than conquest and brinkmanship. This is evidenced by the appearance of the Path of the Merchant and its subsequent growth.

Cainite merchants have begun to extend their influence throughout Europe, creating a network of servants they can use to send goods and information almost anywhere, and providing a means for other vampires to travel with merchant caravans as "cargo." Most Scions look down on their mercantile brethren, considering such affairs beneath them, although they have to admit that they are useful from time to time. Mercantile activity represents an opportunity for Scions from the Low Clans to advance their cause in the higher ranks of Cainite society.

## Cults

Like all Cainites, Scions often make use of cults to gather followers (both mortal and Cainite) and to keep them loyal over the years. Cults of the Road of Kings tend to focus on giving the Scions vassals and servants they can call upon as needed, whatever the cult's stated purpose may be.

Scions take a utilitarian view of cults. The cult's beliefs and tenets don't really matter so long as they accomplish the founder's goals. Scions have few qualms about exploiting religious fervor, nationalism, or nearly any mortal vice in order to create a cult that suits their needs. For example,



Mithras, the Prince of London and vampire monarch of England, long ago co-opted the Cult of Mithras and adopted the name and identity of the deity. Although the Methuselah doesn't believe in any of the cult's dogma, the Cult of Mithras is ideally suited for gathering followers among the soldiery, where Mithras' primary interest lies.

Other Scion cults are dedicated to the preservation of particular noble families or bloodlines. Ventrue, who have old ties to the noble houses of Europe, tend to favor these sorts of cults. They range from those dedicated to a particular noble house to ages-old conspiracies to maintain a human bloodline, said to be descended from the blood of Christ himself (through Mary Magdalene) and destined to rule over Europe and the world. Royalist and patriotic cults allow Cainites to shape the political future of nations over time.

For more information on the creation and use of cults by vampires, see *Ashen Cults*.

## Falling from the Path

*Esteban stood proudly, defiantly, before the tribunal. He was clad only in a simple habit, like that of a monk, but he wore his dignity like a cloak despite being stripped of all other signs of rank or office. He was not shackled or bound — they permitted him that, at least — though he knew there were archers and men-at-arms close at hand, watching him warily. The thought that they were so frightened of him pleased Esteban somewhat.*

*The head of the tribunal raised her hands for silence and the murmur in the chamber and in the galleries above died away.*

*"Esteban," she said, fixing him with her dark eyes. "Have you anything else to say before the decision of this tribunal is pronounced?"*

*He took a step forward, keeping his hands folded in front of him. "I only wish to offer my prayers that the Lord, in His infinite mercy, will open your eyes to the truth I have seen, that you will give up these worldly pursuits and come to him as true penitents, to seek His forgiveness for your sins. I will pray for the salvation of your souls, although your fate rests in your hands, and in the hands of God."*

*There was a moment of silence before the head of the tribunal spoke again. "Esteban, since you forsake the duties and responsibilities laid upon you as a Scion of the Via Regalis, it is our judgment that you be stripped of your titles and domain, which shall revert to your overlord, to be disposed of as he sees fit. You leave behind all that you have gained on the road, and choose to walk alone."*

*The apostate shook his head sadly, for his former peers could not understand. "I leave behind nothing of importance, and take with me the only thing that matters. Wherever I may walk now, I shall never walk alone."*

Not all Cainites have the mettle to progress along the Road of Kings. According to the Scions, it takes a combination of confidence, courage, will, determination, and ambition to succeed. They're well aware that the Road of Kings isn't for everyone, how could it be? Only a select few, those capable of meeting its exacting standards, are able to uphold its tenets. Those who cannot do so must find another way, whether they want to or not.

## Apostasy

Scions turn away from the Road of Kings for various reasons. Some are unable to handle the duties and responsibilities expected of them or unable to handle the power they are given. Others find that their needs and ambitions change over time and the ways of the Road of Kings no longer suit them. In either case, they are found wanting by the standards of the Via Regalis, and will inevitably begin to degenerate. Only one of three ends awaits such a fallen Scion: Acceptance of another road, a fall into infernalism, or a final surrender to the power of the Beast.

Scion apostates most often turn to the Road of Humanity or the Road of Heaven. The Via Humanitas appeals to Scions who tire of the games of kings and the constant ambition and competition of their road. They find meaning in the prodigal philosophy of brotherhood and simple virtues. They may or may not bear malice against their former Scion peers. Some apostates who turn to the Road of Humanity become fiery rebels, supporting the overthrow of the nobility and the creation of a new order in which people are judged on their merits.

The Road of Heaven calls to Scions for various reasons, depending on the particular sect toward which the Scion feels drawn. Scion apostates often turn to the Via Caeli seeking forgiveness for a sinful existence, in hopes of redeeming their souls before they are truly lost forever. Others become so convinced of their God-given power and authority that they dedicate themselves to His service to spread the gospel of a particular heresy or to crusade against those Cainites who have not heard the Word, to end their unholy existence and redeem their souls. The combination of the social skills and abilities of a former Scion and the zeal of the Faithful can be a potent one.

## Banishment

Some Scions do not leave the Road of Kings by choice, but are forced from it by their peers and superiors. Banishment from the road is a serious matter, since it may condemn a Cainite to the jaws of the Beast. It is also no simple matter — only a prince or a Justicar of the road may make such a decision, and it carries only as much weight as that Scion's authority.

Scions are declared anathema when it is clear they have violated the tenets of the Road of Kings on numerous occasions, and all efforts to rectify the matter and place the rogue back on the proper path have failed. It is also common in the case of Scions who have committed serious crimes, although in their case banishment is little more than a formality to precede a blood hunt or other punishment. Scion apostates who betray their oaths and their duties may also be declared anathema in absentia, although this is again merely a formality for a Cainite who has already left the road behind.

Banishment nearly always takes place in open court as part of a solemn ceremony, where the apostate is offered a final chance to turn back to the Road of Kings and rectify his behavior. If he refuses (or does so by not being present),



## BANISHMENT AND DEGENERATION

**B**anishment from the Road of Kings may lead a Scion's Road rating to degenerate, particularly during the actual process of being stripped of all titles and honors and declared anathema. However, banishment does not lead to automatic degeneration, and banished Scions can and do remain true to the ideals of their road, although this can be difficult if the Scion is cut off from contact with much of Cainite society. Still, the isolated and exiled Scion, struggling against the temptations of the Beast, seeking to regain his honor and status (or simply avenge himself on his enemies) makes for an excellent tragic character in a Dark Ages story.

then he is stripped of all honors granted him by the Road of Kings. It is common for excommunicates to lose their domains as well, but that isn't necessarily the case, particularly when the apostate has great influence and answers to no overlord.

Once the banishment is in place, no Scion is permitted to offer aid to the excommunicate. Any who violate this tradition risk banishment themselves. It is sometimes possible for a banished Scion to go elsewhere and take up the road again, but word travels through Cainite society, and any vampire violating a banishment in this way is certain to become the object of a blood hunt.

## Important Sites

Since it is the source of power and position in the Dark Medieval world, all land is important to the Scions to one degree or another. The followers of the Road of Kings struggle over kingdoms and lines on maps nightly, playing out the skirmishes and battles of the War of Princes. However, there are some places that hold special significance for many Scions, making them important to the road as a whole. Usually these places are associated with great deeds of kingship, both mortal and Cainite, and serve to remind adherents of the road of their principles and ideals. Some of the more important places in Europe to the Scions include the following (for more details, see *Dark Ages Europe*).

- **The Castle in the Lake (Scotland):** Under Loch Treig in Scotland lies the home of the Order of Bitter Ashes, a submerged castle. Cainite knights (who need not breathe and can walk along the bottom of the loch) can reach it fairly easily. The Order carefully protects the Castle from invaders and stores many of its relics there.

- **London (England):** The center of the Court of Avalon and the rule of Prince Mithras. Ventrue and Toreador Scions have remained in conflict since Mithras seized power, and the prince's court in London is home to any number of plots to dethrone him, although none have been even close to successful as yet. Although opportunities for advancement were common during Mithras' rise to power,





the structure of the Court of Avalon has ossified considerably, and some young Scions are finding themselves frustrated at every turn.

- **Magdeburg (Holy Roman Empire):** A center of Ventrue power in the Holy Roman Empire and of activity for many Scions in the region. Lord Hardestadt holds court in Magdeburg only occasionally, but Lord Jürgen, Hardestadt's protégé, is usually there and uses the city as his power base. It is also the temporary home of the Ventrue elder Alexander, exiled Prince of Paris. Alexander's intentions in Magdeburg remain to be seen.

- **Paris (France):** The center of the Court of Love and Toreador stronghold in Europe, Paris is home to a considerable number of Scions involved in the nightly affairs of the court and seeking opportunities to further their own causes. The Cainites of France tend to be more intertwined with mortal affairs in their domains and opportunities for courtly intrigue abound.

- **Rome (Italy):** The Eternal City is considered by many the birthplace of the Road of Kings, although in the modern nights it is more strongly associated with the Road of Heaven. Still, some Scions harken back to Rome's glory days, when the Empire ruled the known world, and the city still sees pilgrims there to visit the ruins of a once-great empire rather than the relics of the Church. There is also the matter of Rome's new prince, since the destruction of Prince Constantius in 1229. As yet, no one has successfully claimed the title.

- **The Tomb of El Cid (Iberia):** The tomb of the legendary general has become a place of pilgrimage and prayer for Cainite Paladins, particularly those involved in the *Reconquista* in Iberia. Saracen Cainites want to keep the tomb from becoming a rallying point for further crusades against them, while the Lasombra are concerned that Cainites visiting there may draw undue attention to their activities.

## Mortal Vassals

*His grace, the Duke of Milan, sighed and eased back in his chair, stretching out some of the kinks from sitting and poring over page after page of court documents that threatened to put him to sleep. Roderigo, his steward, smiled indulgently as he presented the last of the papers for his duke's attention.*

*"This is the last, your grace. It requires only your seal." The duke vaguely listened as Roderigo explained the particulars of the land agreement. His eyes strayed toward the window, now dark for nearly an hour, the only light in the room coming from the hearth and the candles on the table.*

*He dripped wax onto the bottom of the page and pressed it with his seal. Roderigo began gathering up the other papers while it cooled.*

*"I take it then that I am released from this purgatory?" the duke asked.*

*"For the time being, your grace," the steward said lightly. "Shall I give instructions to the servants for a meal?"*

*The duke shook his head. "No, not right now, my friend. I wish to be alone for a time. Tell the servants I am not to be disturbed."*

*"Yes, your grace," he replied.*

*Only once Roderigo was gone and the door shut and bolted behind him did the duke allow himself to relax for a moment. He quickly doused the candles and the hearth fire, leaving only the faint glow of moonlight coming in through the windows to light the room.*

*The shadows thickened and seemed to writhe. Then they parted and she was there, standing tall and regal. The duke dropped to one knee and took her cold hand in his, pressing it to his lips before bowing his head in fealty before her.*

*"My lady," he said. "How may I serve you?"*

Of course, no Scion rules solely over Cainite subjects. In fact, Scions are more likely to gain mortal retainers and vassals long before they acquire power over their fellow vampires. Mortals remain important subjects even for powerful princes and lords, since mortals rule the daylight world and make for such useful servants and allies.

A Scion's mortal vassals may be as diverse as the great range of the mortal masses allows, but certain types of mortals are commonly found among a Scion's retinue. High-ranking mortals are often more likely to move in a Scion's circles (whether or not as a vassal of a vampire).

## The Nobility

Scions are known for taking noble mortals as their vassals, although there are certain risks involved in claiming dominion over the mortal nobility. Such control gives a Scion great influence, and may even lead to a position as a prince or lord. Certainly the most powerful Cainite rulers have great influence over the mortal nobility of their domain. Those that ignore the value of such mortals rarely remain rulers for very long.

Nobles tend to be better educated and schooled in various skills (notably diplomacy and warfare) that make them useful to their Scion masters. Of course, that same education may also make mortal nobles more likely to question their Cainite patron, or at least less willing to accept everything they're told at face value. Nobles may even learn enough about vampires to know better than to accept the opportunity to serve one, although greed and ambition (to say nothing of vampiric Disciplines) can often overcome a mortal's better judgment.

For this reason, Scions often seek out nobles who are not in positions of power, at least not yet. A king or baron has little reason to accept the patronage of a Scion and may even fancy himself the vampire's master rather than the other way around. Of course, there are things that even kings want, which Cainites may be able to provide, but monarchs tend to be willful and self-confident enough to resist many things that would tempt lesser men. They may also turn their considerable resources against a Cainite who offends, threatens, or frightens them.

Therefore, it is often best for a vampire to seek out those of noble blood not yet in positions of power, but with a potential for power that can be cultivated. If the lord of a manor proves too dangerous or too stubborn, then perhaps the lord's sons might be more amenable to



taking service with a Scion master. This may be particularly true of second and third offspring, who stand to benefit greatly if some tragedy were to befall their elder brothers. Noble daughters eventually grow up and marry noble husbands, and may exert a great influence over their spouses and households on behalf of a Cainite liege. While it may take years for a mortal vassal to achieve great power, vampires have nothing but time in which to cultivate them.

The ideal vassals may not be noble mortals at all, but their servants and underlings. After all, monarchs have little direct power. Servants carry out their orders, and if those servants secretly obey another master, then a careful Scion can effectively direct the kingdom without the ruling nobility any the wiser. This means that mortal seneschals, viziers, sheriffs, generals, and the like are all valuable vassals for a Scion to have.

The greatest risk of seeking vassals among the nobility is that they are also the best protected (and most paranoid) of mortals, and even small changes or suspicious behavior may be noticed and acted upon. It can be difficult to reach a closely guarded monarch or heir without the use of the right Disciplines, and any alarm is certain to bring numerous men-at-arms running to their liege-lord's aid. Some nobles may even benefit from the protection of holy relics or possibly mortal sorcerers (although such things are not likely to be discussed openly in the courts of Europe).

Another significant risk is that a mortal vassal may already be sworn to another Cainite, usually a more powerful one. As mentioned, few princes rule without influencing the mortal nobility of their domain, and princes are likely to notice if anyone tampers with their vassals or tries to lure them away from their service. More than a few palace coups and other conflicts among noble families have resulted from the struggle or two or more Cainites influencing the members of the family and moving them like chess pawns against each other.

## The Gentry

While noble blood does have its appeal (particularly to the refined tastes of the Ventrue), many benefits are to be had by claiming vassals among the mortal gentry, those with few titles but considerable wealth (and therefore influence).

The prime advantages the gentry offer a Scion are their wealth and their accessibility. They are typically less guarded than the nobility, although well protected against mortal thieves and brigands. It's not difficult for an influential Cainite to arrange an introduction to a wealthy merchant or craftsman. The gentry are also often more ambitious than the nobility, or at least less content with

their lot in life, and therefore more interested in what benefits a Cainite has to offer.

The benefits that the gentry can offer Scions include access to their wealth and resources, and access to their social contacts. Although they do not have access to the highest levels of society, the gentry do serve as something of a bridge between the highest and lowest levels of mortal society, which can be useful for a vampire who moves between them.

It's also known for a family of somewhat humble beginnings to rise higher in the world, particularly with the aid of a Cainite patron to guide them. Merchant families and houses give vampires ways to travel great distances across Europe in the guise of cargo aboard caravans and trading ships. The influence that merchants and guilds of craftsmen can exert upon the nobility is growing, and Scions are fully prepared to take advantage of it.

## The Church

The other strata of society most often influenced by the Scions is the Church. The Church is like a nation unto itself, with its bishops like princes and the Pope arguably the most powerful man in Christendom. Such power and influence is a great temptation to mortal and Cainite alike, but there is also considerable risk in influencing the affairs of the Church.

The first danger comes from the fact that vampiric influence is so deeply rooted and felt through different parts of the Church in various areas of Europe. Not only the Scions, but also the followers of the Road of Heaven and adherents of cults like the Cainite Heresy, influence the Church toward their own ends. Infighting between vampires for control of a particular segment of the Church, or to shape things toward a particular end, can be fierce, particularly during the War of Princes. Elder vampires are entrenched in their influence, and at least as difficult to displace as Scions influencing the nobility, if not more so.

The second, and perhaps greater, danger comes from the ranks of the Church. There are holy men and women who know of or suspect the existence of vampires and have for many years. For centuries, a lone few have wielded the torch of their faith as a weapon against the creatures of darkness infesting the Holy Mother Church. Theirs has been a losing battle, until recently. With the establishment of the Office of the Inquisition, matters have become different for Cainites influencing the Church. The number of vampire hunters is growing, and they are increasingly aware of and alert for signs of Cainite infestation. When they find it, they show no mercy in rooting out any threat to the Church.









# CHAPTER THREE: THE BLOOD WILL TELL

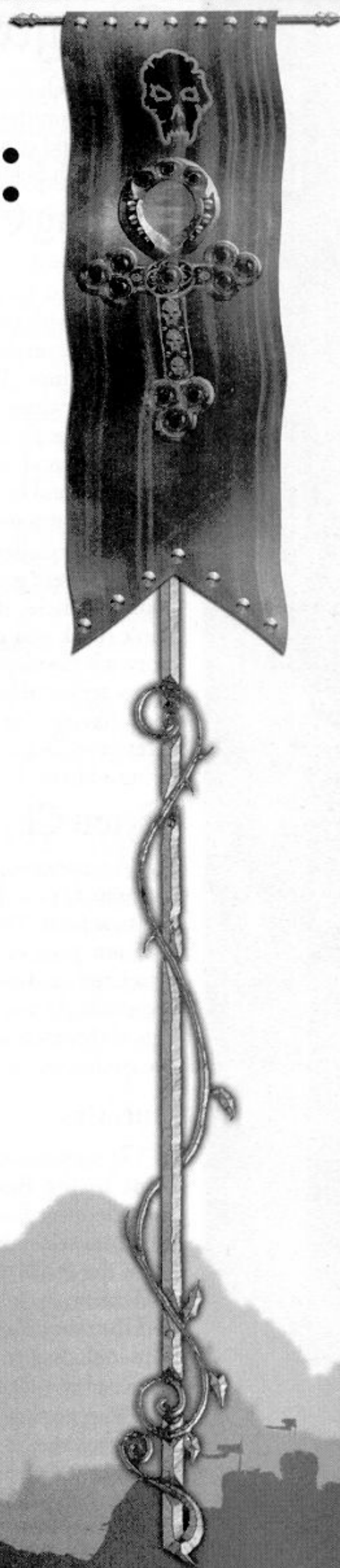


I would rather be tied to the soil as another man's serf,  
even a poor man's, who hadn't much to live on himself,  
than be King of all these dead and destroyed.

— Homer, *The Odyssey*

Playing a character on the Road of Kings can be an opportunity for great deeds, powerful ambitions, and epic drama. It can also lead to problems if you don't take the other facets of the chronicle, particularly the other characters, into account. The nature of their road makes Scions natural spotlight characters, so it's important to know when to step into the spotlight and when to give it up to another character.

**Dark Ages:** Vampire stories aren't about any one character but about the coterie as a group. Although events may focus on one character or another during a story, the overall arc of the story should include all characters equally. Otherwise, some players are likely to feel frustrated and left out. Like the followers of the Road of Kings, players of Scion characters need to balance their goals with their duties and responsibilities to their fellows. This chapter offers some advice on how to do that.





# Storytelling Scions

Scion characters offer various unique challenges and opportunities for telling **Dark Ages** stories. Storytellers should consider the advice in this section when dealing with Scion characters in a story or chronicle.

## Setting Goals

The Road of Kings is a particularly goal-oriented one. Not just focused on the distant goal of Golconda and peace with the Curse of Caine, if at all, Scions also concentrate on short-term goals, such as personal power and excellence. Therefore, it's helpful if the players of Scion characters define their characters' short- and long-term goals before the game begins to give the Storyteller and idea of how to include them in the chronicle, and how the characters' goals may converge or conflict at some point.

As Storyteller, once you have a clear description of the characters' goals, consider how best to fit them into your chronicle. If a particular goal is something you don't think you can deal with in the context of the story, ask the player if it would be possible to change the character's goal to something more suitable. Better than having the player become frustrated and lose interest in the game because the character's goals aren't being addressed.

## Scion Chronicles

A number of possibilities exist for chronicles focusing primarily on Scion characters, their ambitions, and their conflicts. These are by no means the only ones, but they are some of the most easily run with a group of characters, and can include vampires who follow different roads. As always, the Storyteller should discuss the type of chronicle with the players in advance and outline the guidelines for it as clearly as possible.

### Initiates

The characters may start out as initiates, newly come to the Road of Kings. They may have only recently been Embraced, or they may be apostates of other roads, seeking a new path to follow. They might share the same mentor or teacher who is helping to guide them toward a deeper understanding of the road, and they may share some common experiences, perhaps including the moment of truth that sets them on the Road of Kings.

The primary goal of the characters is to become adherents of the Road of Kings and secure suitable positions for themselves. They may have rivals among other initiates of the road, perhaps even rivalries among themselves. They have to overcome the challenges laid

before them by their mentor, as well as by their liege-lord, to prove themselves worthy. They may also have to deal with the schemes of rivals or enemies of their patron(s), plans that may try to use the characters as pawns in a plot against their lord.

An initiate chronicle can be played out for its own sake or as a prelude to a different sort of chronicle. Once the characters have become adherents and achieved some success, the chronicle can switch to a different type, or it may even skip forward to when the characters are established and influential figures in Cainite society, renewing their old ties during the War of Princes.

### Knights in Arms

The characters are all knights in this chronicle. They may be members of a particular order of knighthood (see Orders of Knighthood, page 48) or they may simply serve the same liege (or both). The chronicle's prelude may include the characters' winning their spurs and being knighted (perhaps following a short initiate story like that described in the previous section). Some or all of the characters may follow the Path of Chivalry described on page 68.

As knights, the characters will see battle against enemies of their liege, including rival princes. They can also become involved in courtly intrigue. Perhaps they are courted by a usurper to support a rebellion against their lord, or targeted by such rebels because of their extreme loyalty. They may spend time roaming the countryside as errant knights, doing good deeds and righting wrongs, but always forced to indulge their unholy appetites. This chronicle also affords opportunities for knightly quests, crusades to the Holy Land, and stories of tragic courtly romance (particularly for a Cainite taken with a mortal paramour).

### Servants of the Crown

Characters in this chronicle are all servants of a particular liege-lord (perhaps even a powerful prince or monarch). They can serve in various capacities; one character may be sheriff, another the prince's warmaster, seneschal, vizier, and so forth. The key is that the characters are all close to the court and in positions of power and influence. Those positions not filled by the characters can be played by the Storyteller, and may be allies, rivals, or even enemies of the characters.

The characters need to work together to further the cause of their liege and domain while advancing their own personal agendas (whatever they may be). The chronicle can be played with the characters as a fairly close-knit group, or they may be rivals plotting against each other (or at least willing to sacrifice each other if it furthers their own machinations). They may be loyal to their lord or conspiring against him, or



some characters may be loyal, while others are potential spies or traitors.

The characters can face challenges from outside their domain, such as the agents of a rival noble, the arrival of inquisitors seeking to root out any vampires they may find, or trouble within the mortal herd that threatens the stability and success of the domain. They can also deal with challenges from within, including rivalries and conspiracies within the court (or even their own ranks), the plots of their liege (who may or may not have their best interests at heart), or even an attempted coup. Perhaps the characters' liege turns traitor against his liege-lord, and the characters must choose between loyalty to their immediate liege or to their overlord.

### Allied Princes

In this high-powered chronicle, the characters are all rulers of their own domains, perhaps barons who owe allegiance to the same prince, or even princes under the same lord or monarch. They're likely more capable than the average starting character if they have such significant domains. The Storyteller may want to give the players extra bonus points to round out their characters, reflecting this extra experience. Alternatively, this type of chronicle may take place some time after another chronicle fleshing out the earlier unlives of the characters. For example, characters from a **Dark Ages** chronicle in the 12th century may be powerful nobles some forty or fifty years later during the War of Princes (in which case the information on Maturation and elder chronicles given in the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion** might prove useful).

The characters have the concerns of their own domains to look after, along with issues that unite them against outside forces. For example, the characters may be allied against the aggressive and powerful prince of a nearby domain with designs on their territory, or they may be allied in order to conquer nearby domains and add them to their own (or to their overlord's greater domain). The chronicle can focus on the fairly high-level events concerning the characters, leaving the minor events in their domain for background material, or stories can switch from one domain to another. Perhaps the players even run multiple characters, playing liege-lords in turn while the other players portray supporting characters in the domain.

### Rival Princes

The characters are rulers of domains in this sort of chronicle as well, but they're not so friendly toward each other. Instead they're rivals or even enemies. They struggle against each other for control of their domains and possibly against other Scions run by the Storyteller.

This type of chronicle is best suited for troupes that can enjoy the competition between the characters and the potential drama of it without things becoming too personal. It may be suited for online or Live Action games, particularly for playing out things like parleys and negotiations between the rivals. It's definitely not for beginning players (or Storytellers) or troupes that prefer working together and don't enjoy competition.

### Rebels Against the Lord

In this chronicle, the characters are all allied in defiance of a particular liege-lord, prince, or even monarch. They may be vassals of that overlord, working in secret against him, or openly in rebellion. They may also be outsiders or commoners with good reason to rebel against the poor treatment of an overlord. The characters have to work together to survive and find a way to overthrow their enemy.

The chronicle can range from courtly intrigue and conspiracies to open warfare between the rebels and the overlord. Rebel characters may survive as bandits or brigands on the outskirts of the lord's domain, striking where they can, evading (or perhaps even attempting to ally with) the local Lupines, and waiting for the opportunity to strike a telling blow. They may find allies among the lord's rivals, although at least some of those allies are likely to have designs on the domain themselves.

Once the rebellion succeeds, there also comes the question of what to do with the domain. Do the characters try to claim it themselves, either putting one of them in charge (with the others as trusted advisors) or running it as a cabal, sharing power? Can they do so without falling to fighting among themselves? Can they effectively rule the domain and protect it from outside forces that see an opportunity, now that the overlord has been disposed of? This can easily spin off into another sort of chronicle entirely.

### Agents of Justice

The characters are a group of Justicars (page 23), special agents appointed by the hierarchy of the Road of Kings and empowered by the ashen priests to investigate crimes on the part of the Cainite nobility, particularly to determine if a prince is worthy of his or her domain. They can travel widely carrying out their duties, and are certain to face considerable intrigue along the way.

This chronicle offers the opportunity to involve the characters in many different conflicts in the War of Princes. It can be run as a series of mysteries and investigations, with the characters piecing together clues and testimony to unravel the lies of unfit lords and determine the truth. It can also have elements of



intrigue when the characters are offered bribes — or threatened — to end their investigations, or to find favor with a particular noble.

Characters can see much of the Dark Medieval world along the way, and get to know many of the most influential and powerful figures of the War of Princes. They can help to decide the fates of domains, and are certain to make more than a few enemies (and, perhaps, allies) in the process. They may also face rivals or enemies within the ranks of their own order, seeking to displace or discredit them in order to further their own agendas, and defiance from those Cainites who refuse to acknowledge their authority.

## Scion Conflicts

Scions can embroil themselves in a number of potential conflicts. They are at the heart of the greatest Cainite conflict of the Dark Medieval world, the War of Princes, and their very nature tends to bring them into conflict with rivals, enemies, and sometimes even their allies. Storytellers can bring any of the following conflicts into play in a **Dark Ages** story featuring followers of the Road of Kings.

### Scion vs. Scion

The most common rivals for Scions are their fellow adherents of the Road of Kings. Scions want the same things: Power and prestige for themselves and recognition for their accomplishments. They inevitably come into conflict when they pursue the same goals, but only one can win them. That's not to say that every Scion regards every other as a potential rival or enemy (some do, but they're in the minority), only that other Scions tend to be the most common and — in their view — the most worthy adversaries to have.

A conflict between Scions may be as simple as a struggle for control over a particular domain, or as complex as a battle of wits that has been going on for centuries. They may be bitter enemies, or they may be friends with a legitimate disagreement that comes between them, which neither can honorably set aside. Although they may agree on the ideals of their road, it's the expression of those ideas (namely, who will sit on the throne and rule the domain) over which they disagree.

One of the prime differences between the Road of Kings and, for example, the Road of Heaven is the fact that the Scions can be in perfect agreement about the tenets and traditions of their road and still come into conflict. Followers of the Road of Heaven tend to clash over matters of doctrine and dogma, spinning off heresies and splinter sects. Most of the Scions, and even the followers of the road's various paths, tend to value the same things. The only

problem is that their road doesn't allow them to share very well. This means that two Scions who are bitter rivals for a particular position or domain may still respect each other a great deal, and both remain faithful to their road.

### Vassal vs. Liege

The bonds of fealty are a serious matter for Scions, not to be broken lightly (or even at all). Still, conflicts can and do arise between liege-lords and those sworn to serve them, and such conflicts have been known to topple kingdoms and to raise new ones up to take their place. The kind of struggle that goes on in a Cainite court can be the making of an entire chronicle.

The reasons for conflict between a vassal and his lord tend to be either the lord's mistreatment or misbehavior in the vassal's eyes or the vassal's ambition. In the first case, a vassal may have a legitimate complaint against a lord who does not rule his domain properly, or who mistreats his vassals (although not necessarily the vassal who objects). A formerly idealistic Scion who swore fealty to a powerful master may see his lord degenerate, or may simply lose his idealism enough to recognize him for the cruel and terrible creature that he is. In this situation a vassal can either bear the lord's abuse and behavior or try to do something about it. Rather than violating the tenets of the Road of Kings, working to correct such a situation can be considered upholding them.

In the second case, a vassal may simply be ambitious and seek to overthrow her lord in order to replace him (or put someone else of her choosing in his place). As mentioned, Scions often rationalize this sort of treason as "necessary" because the lord is incompetent, weak, or otherwise unfit (or at least less fit than the vassal is). Cainite nobles are constantly on the alert for signs of disloyalty from their underlings, and the quest to overthrow one's liege-lord can easily take a chronicle to accomplish.

Finally, vassals and lords come into conflict for all the many reasons that any two individuals clash. They may argue over a particular point of faith, a matter of tradition, or other such differences. In the Gothic tradition of romance, an emotional matter may come between them as well, creating a conflict between duty and desire (see below).

### Vassal vs. Vassal

Scion vassals of different Cainite lords come into conflict almost nightly during the time of the War of Princes. Lords and monarchs have their spies and agents abroad, gathering information and sabotaging their rivals, who are doing the same to them. They field soldiers in battles over domains and send emis-



saries to the courts of their enemies to parley or to offer terms, or simply to see what will happen. It is almost inevitable that a Scion in service to a particular lord will come into conflict with the vassals of his lord's enemies.

Even serving the same lord is no assurance that two Scions will get along. In fact, rivalries often develop between Cainite vassals seeking the approval and attention of their liege-lord or vying for the same position within his service. Such rivalries lace activities at court with their venom, often forcing others to choose sides as the conflict deepens and widens, until only one can emerge as victor.

## Desire vs. Duty

The central internal conflict of Scions is their need to balance their duty as followers of the Road of Kings and sworn vassals against their own desires and ambitions. A vassal's oath of fealty — and other oaths sworn — can conflict with what he really wants.

Sometimes it's a matter of the Scion being overwhelmed by personal ambition, willing to violate oaths or do whatever is necessary to achieve power. Such Scions either find ways to justify breaking their sworn oaths, usually by arranging for the other party to violate the oath and free them from it. Otherwise they will degenerate from sinning against their road and either fall to the Beast or become apostates and seek a road more accommodating to their ambitions.

Often the Scion's feelings conflict with her duty, such as a sworn vassal becoming taken with her lord's new mortal or Cainite protégé. Imagine, for example, playing out a Camelot-style love triangle in a Cainite court. The vassals are torn between their desire and their sworn duty to their liege, drawn helplessly together and laying the seeds of their destruction. Of such things are Gothic tragedies made.

Perhaps old loyalties conflict with new ones. Consider a Scion who learns that his family's ancestral land lies within the domain of a rival lord and is likely to become a battleground in the War of Princes, with the mortals there used as pawns in the game. Will he allow his human kin to be slaughtered, his family land destroyed, in order to remain true to his liege, or will he betray his oath in order to warn them or try to prevent the conflict?

## Leaders and Followers

Scions are leaders by nature; they would not be on the Road of Kings otherwise. It's in their natures to take charge of situations and to enforce their will on the world. Although your Scion character may be a born leader, however, that doesn't necessarily make the other

characters followers, unless your fellow players are comfortable with that arrangement.

The distribution of power within the coterie is an important consideration. Are some characters more high-ranking and influential than others? Do some of the characters owe fealty to others in the coterie or are they all (relative) equals? These decisions affect the character and style of the group and should be discussed among the players. There are almost endless permutations and different types of groups, but certain arrangements work best in an ongoing Dark Ages chronicle.

## Company of Equals

The most common arrangement is for all the characters to be on relatively equal footing within the ranks of the coterie. Even if their status within Cainite society differs, the characters treat each other as equals, either because of friendship, past ties, debts, blood oaths, or other connections. Perhaps the noble Scion knew and served with the band's lowly Nosferatu in the Holy Land and still considers him a friend and companion, even though someone of his station would not normally associate with one of the Lepers. Maybe the savage Gangrel saved a noble character's unlife (or vice versa), creating a bond between them that overcomes the social distance, at least somewhat. A particular coterie's reasons for gathering and remaining together will provide ideas for ways to place the members on reasonably even footing.

Of course, outside the coterie things may be different. When they visit the court of a foreign prince, the Scion character and not the Nosferatu will be expected to speak for them. On the other hand, if the coterie happens to visit the catacombs of Rome, then it will be the Nosferatu character's turn to guide the others. Influence at court and among mortal nobility is only one aspect of Cainite existence, after all.

This option helps to keep other players from feeling that the Scion characters are hogging the spotlight or lording their positions over them. Even ambitious would-be princes have friends and allies they rely upon and treat as equals, if only to secure their loyalty for the time when they claim their rightful place and power.

## Servants of the Liege

The members of the coterie might all owe fealty to the same liege-lord. In fact, that may be the common bond that brings the characters together in the first place. Scions may be knights or vassals of the liege, while other characters serve in other capacities, such as spies, advisors, agents, clerics, stewards, and so forth. This arrangement can bring a diverse band of characters together and help keep them together through



their mutual loyalty, even if they don't otherwise care for each other.

The ambitions of any Scion characters in the group are quickly tied to the future of the coterie. If the characters' liege is a good one, whose star is rising, then the Scions have good reason to ensure that the coterie remains in the liege's good graces and rises in esteem, so as to take advantage of their lord's increasing power. If their lord is failing, then the efforts of the coterie may protect him from his enemies and earn his gratitude (or finish him, if the coterie betrays their liege at the right moment). If the liege is a tyrant, then the coterie may form the center of a power base to overthrow him, provided that the characters can be persuaded to change their loyalties. In any event, the Scions have good reason to work with their fellows to achieve their goals.

### Lord and Vassals

The coterie might be made up of a single liege-lord or leader, with the other characters as followers and vassals. Or it may have a few leaders, with the other characters split among them as vassals (along with some retainers and such from their Backgrounds). Since this arrangement places some of the characters in charge of others, it should be discussed among the players beforehand. If everyone is amenable to it, this can be an interesting opportunity for the Scion characters to exercise their leadership abilities. It also shows off the importance of feudalism and oaths of loyalty in the Dark Medieval world. Vassal characters may follow other roads or they may be lower-ranking adherents of the Road of Kings.

One possible option for this style of play is for each player to have a Scion or noble character, along with another sort of character associated with one of the nobles. The players then take turns playing the noble characters and being in charge while the other players take the roles of their vassals, allies, and servants. In this way, a troupe can portray the characters of a small court of vampires, each playing a noble of the prince's court and also playing one or two other important characters at court. It can make for a complex game of intrigue, particularly if not all of the characters share the same ambitions.

### Rivals for the Throne

Scions are ambitious, and it may be that Scion characters don't have identical goals. If the players are comfortable with the idea, the Storyteller can run a chronicle where the characters are rivals or even enemies competing against each other. Perhaps one character plots to overthrow the current prince while another supports the prince and a third represents

another court that could shift the balance of power, if her support can be secured. Perhaps the characters are princes themselves, dealing with neighboring monarchs, not all of whom are allies. The characters could even be powerful elders of the Road of Kings (and other roads as well), spinning out their webs of influence and playing the ancient game of Jyhad using the Cainites of Europe as their pawns.

This sort of game is only for troupes that feel comfortable with their characters competing against each other. Hurt feelings and emotions running high may spoil everyone's fun, in which case it's better to go with a different arrangement. For groups able to handle it, competition can be an interesting challenge and makes for great stories. It also takes some of the burden from the Storyteller to create antagonists for the chronicle, since the characters supply most of the conflict themselves. This allows the Storyteller to concentrate on providing a detailed setting and supporting characters for the drama as it unfolds.

This sort of chronicle works well for online and play-by-email (PBEM) games, since the players may have little contact with each other, and can more easily arrange secret meetings and one-on-one interaction with each other and the Storyteller. Playing this way takes more time, but offers more detail as the players write out their characters' plans and activities, more like writing a shared novel than creating a shared bit of theatre in live play. Players of *Mind's Eye Theatre* may also enjoy this style, since it cuts down the number of supporting characters that need to be portrayed in the game, allowing the players to interact more directly with each other.

### Ambition and Duty

Scions seek power, both over themselves and over others. They balance this with a dedication to duty and the responsibilities of holding power. The feudal system embodies this ideal. Although a liege has great power over his vassals, he also has the responsibility to protect and support them. Even the most ruthless Cainite tyrant realizes that a monarch needs subjects to rule, and mistreatment may lead to rebellions and insurrections. Those Scions who pursue ambition to the exclusion of their duties and responsibilities often come to regret it.

### Duties

Consider your Scion's duties and responsibilities. Any follower of the Road of Kings is likely to acquire at least some responsibility over time, even if it is merely doing small errands for a superior. Does your character have any dots in Allies or Retainers? If so, then consider the character's duties to those people,



in order to earn and keep their loyalty. Characters may have duties to their sire, particularly if they are only neonates. In fact, Scion characters may have the same sire as a means of giving them a common bond and reason to work together (even if they don't care for each other personally).

Your character's duties have considerable impact when it comes to freedom of action. It's difficult to be traveling around the countryside when there are matters that require attention at home. A Scion's time is not always his own, something both you and the Storyteller can take into account in the chronicle. Naturally, a Scion's duties should be adjusted to suit the needs of the chronicle, but few Scions have no responsibilities at all (at least, not Scions who intend to remain on the Road of Kings for very long).

## Oaths

Oaths of fealty are part and parcel of everyday life in the Dark Medieval world. The feudal system is held together by such oaths, and the Road of Kings recognizes that fact. A sworn oath is the most sacred bond a Scion can imagine, with or without the enforcement of Cainite vitae. Among Scions, the blood oath is not as common as some might think simply because the power invested in any oath that is freely sworn. Scions take their oaths seriously, even if others may not.

This means several things for a Scion character. First, Scions tend to be cautious about swearing any sort of oath, since they will be obligated to uphold it. This tends to be less the case for younger Scions, who may be prone to swearing oaths and making vows rashly. A Scion who does not keep to her sworn oaths will soon have no respect in Cainite society, and such oath-breakers may find themselves cast out from the road.

Second, and more important, breaking a sworn oath is one thing certain to bring about degeneration on the Road of Kings. Scions who don't keep their oaths may lose more than their standing on the road; they may lose themselves to the Beast.

Third, Scions take oaths offered to them very seriously. Anyone (mortal or Cainite) offering fealty or swearing an oath before an adherent of the Road of Kings had better be prepared to deliver on that oath, or else face the Scion's wrath when it is forsworn. Breaking an oath is considered good reason for a trial by combat (or even a simple execution) among Scions, since the upholding of oaths is so central to their road.

Finally, the Scions (like many people in the Dark Medieval world) see oaths of fealty — including the blood oath — as two-sided, and the best oaths are those mutually sworn. The vassal swears to obey and serve the liege, but the liege also swears to protect and care for the

vassal, and that oath is just as sacred and important as the first. A Scion who enforces an oath through the power of blood or through Disciplines like Dominate takes on the responsibility for the vassal in the process. Those who use others as pawns and dispose of them are likely to earn a bad reputation in Cainite circles, and will have difficulty finding willing vassals to swear allegiance to them. Those who use trickery or deceptions to secure oaths are considered even worse, not to be trusted any more than absolutely necessary.

## Betrayal

Despite the importance they give to sworn oaths, betrayal is often a part of a Scion's existence. Vampires do not age and pass on their power and their domains like mortal nobles do, so there is a limit to how far any Scion can advance without eventually having to betray an elder or superior in one way or another. This is expected to a degree, and taken into account in the tenets of the Road of Kings.

The only real circumstance where a Scion can break a sworn oath with a clear conscience (in other words, without it being considered a sin against the Road of Kings), is when the oath is forsworn, broken by the other party first. This is also the case when the individual to whom the Scion swore the oath deliberately releases him from it. In these cases, the oath is no longer binding upon the Scion, who can then act freely.

This offers an "out" for ambitious Scions or those who bridle under the rule of their liege-lord. If the Scion is satisfied that the liege has not upheld his end of the oath to care for the Scion and treat her as a proper and honorable vassal, then the Scion's oath of loyalty to the liege no longer applies. Most Scions will, of course, try to take steps to redress the matter with their liege before leaping directly to regicide and diablerie, but it does open the way for the oppressed or mistreated vassals of a liege-lord to rebel, without abrogating the tenets of the Road of Kings. In fact, Scions are all but *required* to turn against a liege-lord who violates the tenets of the road in this way, in order to preserve their own honor and integrity.

If the oath is not forsworn, however, things become more difficult. A Scion can still choose to violate his oath, but doing so is almost certainly a sin against kingship. Unless the Storyteller feels there are important mitigating circumstances, oath-breaking will call for a degeneration check. Normally, it doesn't matter how much the character *wants* to ignore the requirements of the oath, or what the other circumstances are. Unless someone else breaks it, the Scion cannot violate the oath without sinning against his road. Of course, in some cases, violating a sworn oath may prove to be a moment of truth for



the character (as well as an opportunity for drama in the story).

Sometimes Scions may scrupulously keep to the letter of the oaths they have sworn, while feeling freer to violate the oath's spirit, if necessary. This is something of a gray area, and is left largely in the hands of the Storyteller. If a Scion has a good and noble reason to break an oath and finds a way to do so without violating the letter of it, then degeneration is probably not called for. In fact the player may be due a little extra experience for coming up with a clever idea. On the other hand, Scions who routinely weasel around the exact wording of their oaths in order to further their lot through trickery and deception will feel a pricking from their sense of honor sooner or later and a degeneration check is appropriate. As always, the Storyteller should warn the player in advance if a particular course of action will lead to a degeneration check. The Scion always knows in her heart whether or not an action is a violation of her road.

## Character Creation Tips

Scions are cast in a different mold from other Cainites, or so they say. Regardless of the truth or falsehood of the Scions' pretensions, the Road of Kings influences choices made at all steps of the character creation process.

### Concept

Certain character concepts are more likely to suit the Road of Kings than others, although Cainites are not reliant on royal birth or even noble blood for their positions in society, so it may be possible for a pauper to become a prince, given enough time, patience, and cunning. Some concepts show up often among Scions, and players may want to consider others for offbeat or unusual characters.

### Noble

A Scion character may possess true noble blood, either of a long-standing noble family or recently made nobility, perhaps even a noble line that has since died out. Vampires tend to be cautious about Embracing the nobility because it can raise all manner of difficult questions unless it's handled with great care and discretion. It nearly always means the end of that noble's involvement with mortal society, since the duties of the nobility don't usually allow them to sleep away the day and wander about at night. Therefore, Embraced nobles often disappear altogether (which may lead to rumors and trouble in succession, if there is no immediate proof of the noble's death). Otherwise, the noble may choose

to be taken for dead, given proper burial and then unearthed by an ally to take up vampiric unlife. Some noble Cainites exercise influence over their mortal kin generations after their Embrace.

### Knight Errant

Knights in the Dark Medieval have the opportunity to travel far and wide during the Crusades, visiting the Holy Land and other distant countries. In their travels, knights may encounter many strange things, Cainites among them. More than a few Crusaders join the ranks of the undead, either an act of mercy for a brave and noble warrior or a curse laid upon a hated enemy (or some measure of both, perhaps). How many of those who never returned to their homelands and families actually did so in secret, concealing their unliving state? Cainite knights often follow the Path of Chivalry (page 68), but not all do. Some become disillusioned with the notions of chivalry after their Embrace and choose a different path, following the Road of Kings to power and influence. A vampire who was a knight in life is virtually assured a place in one of the Cainite orders of knighthood (see Chapter Two for more information on these).

### Landless Heir

Since life is hardly safe in the Dark Medieval world, most noble families find it prudent to have enough children to ensure their line of succession. "An heir and a spare" is considered the minimum, and a noble family may have many daughters before a son or two are born. Since the eldest son usually inherits all, families have to contend with ambitious or restless younger heirs. Some wind up in service to the Church, while others may find ways to fulfill their ambitions in Cainite society. Younger sons of noble families make useful servants (since they tend to be healthy, reasonably well educated, and trained in fighting). Scions often look for potential protégés among their number, since the loss of a younger son is less likely to trouble a family. Of course, some younger sons are also promised the opportunity to inherit, once their elder brothers are out of the way....

### Lady

Even more than younger sons, the lot of noble daughters can be a difficult one. They are bred to marriage, usually arranged by their family to cement an alliance or improve their lot in the world rather than for love. Yet they are often raised on tales of great romances and of chivalrous knights championing causes for them. A noble woman might have some education if her father or husband is indulgent, but usually her training is limited to the womanly arts of keeping a household, spinning, weaving, embroidery, and perhaps singing or



playing an instrument. Scholarly matters are generally considered over a woman's head. Cainites have learned to overcome some of the cultural prejudices of the age. Certainly a female vampire can be the equal of any male, and women have their ways of controlling a domain just as effectively, if not more so, as their male counterparts. More than one noble lady has fallen into the Embrace of a Cainite mentor or lover and proven herself worthy of the Road of Kings.

## Clan

As Chapter Two makes clear, vampires of every clan choose to walk the Road of Kings, although some clans have far more Scions among their number than others. A Scion's bloodline is likely to dictate some of how he or she is perceived by others, both within and outside of the vampire's own clan. Clan affiliation may also offer particular opportunities or challenges for a character on the Road of Kings.

For members of many of the High Clans, the Road of Kings is almost expected of them. That means many of their clanmates are also Scions, so Cainites from the High Clans will usually be taught the basics of the road by their sires, and will find themselves in good company as they take their first steps along it. Having so many fellow Scions can be a hindrance as well as a boon, since High Clan Cainites face more competition.

Cainites from the Low Clans who choose to walk the Road of Kings may face prejudice, from their clanmates and others. Low Clan vampires may accuse Scions from among their number of putting on airs or trying to get above their station in unlife. They're likely to make unfavorable comparisons with the High Clans, saying how foolish it is for

a Gangrel or Nosferatu to parade around like a Ventrue or Lasombra. It's quite possible the character may be an apostate from a previous road, having chosen the Road of Kings later in unlife (see Chapter Three of *Dark Ages: Vampire* for more information). Conversely, the High Clans may see Low Clan Scions as a threat for getting above themselves or presuming too much. There may be a desire to "put them in their place" and teach them some proper humility.

Although Scions of certain clans (notably Lasombra, Toreador, Tzimisce, and Ventrue) are common, it can be fun to play against type by creating a Scion from the Gangrel, Malkavian, Nosferatu, or Tremere clans.

## Path

Although Scions all follow the same road, they don't all do so in the same way. Each character's interpretation of the road is likely to be unique. The various paths beginning on page 68 of this chapter show the range of different ways of looking at the Road of Kings. Read them over and see if they spark any ideas for characters, and consider your character's views on the road and its paths.

Choice of path can also help make your character distinctive, especially if there is more than one Scion in the coterie. Imagine a Tzimisce or Nosferatu on the Path of Chiv-





alry, a Malkavian or Assamite on the Path of the Vizier, a Brujah or Tremere on the Path of the Merchant, or perhaps a Gangrel tyrant.

A character's choice of path also tells a great deal about the character's goals. Scions generally seek power, but believe in duty and responsibility. Paladins are more concerned with their duty and serving the needs of others, while tyrants are focused on gaining power and holding it regardless of the cost. Merchants seek their power through wealth, while viziers seek theirs through knowledge and influence. What approach suits your character concept best?

The four main paths of the Road of Kings are described on pages 68 – 71.

## Nature and Demeanor

All Scions are potential leaders at heart, so certain personality archetypes are better suited to them than others. A Cainite with a Nature of Barbarian, for example, isn't likely to ever rule over anything. A Scion with a Nature of Autocrat has a very different style of leadership from one with the Caretaker Nature, even though they might both be capable leaders. Consider your character's true motivations and goals in choosing a suitable Nature, and take into account how Nature colors the character's way of thinking and acting.

Don't forget about Demeanor, which can be almost as important to a Scion as Nature. Does your character cultivate a dignified, princely demeanor (Gallant) or an attitude of superiority and confidence (like Autocrat or Pedagogue)? How much of your character's Demeanor is deliberate and how much of it is simply the way your character acts? Will more of the character's true Nature come out over the course of the chronicle? Many stories of nobles and kings show them learning how to behave and think like true leaders, taking on a nobler Demeanor as they progress.

## Traits

Certain Traits, and higher ratings in some Traits, are expected of Scions. That doesn't mean your character has to have them, but you should at least consider them and figure out *why* your character doesn't have them, if that is the case.

## Attributes

The Social Attributes are usually the most important for Scions in the long run. Although being physically and mentally capable are important, a follower of the Road of Kings unable to hold the attention of a crowd, debate, or bargain shrewdly isn't likely to achieve greatness without a lot of help. Which of the Social Traits you choose to emphasize depends on how you see your

character's style. Is she a strong natural leader with a magnetic personality? Focus on Charisma. Cunning and skill at twisting words to one's benefit denotes high Manipulation. Does he have the look of a king, with noble features that turn heads? Then the character should have a high Appearance.

## Abilities

Scions need a wide range of Abilities in order to achieve their goals, but their primary area is generally Talents, followed by Knowledges, and then Skills.

Talents like Leadership and Subterfuge are all but required for any Cainite hoping to succeed on the Road of Kings. Abilities like Expression, Empathy, and Intimidation are also quite useful for presenting the right image and dealing with followers, allies, and enemies alike. A measure of Alertness and Dodge can also prove useful; Scions have a way of attracting assassins, so being able to avoid danger is important.

Scions are a learned lot, and Knowledges such as Academics, Law, and Politics are common among them. Investigation is particularly useful for ferreting out information at court and discovering a rival's plans in time to thwart them or turn them to your advantage. Seneschal is an especially common (and useful) Knowledge among junior Scions and followers of the Path of the Vizier. If you can become indispensable to a prince or other powerful ruler, then you're well on your way to power.

Most Skills tend to be hobbies or diversions for Scions, save for a few. Etiquette is essential for comporting oneself properly at court and rising in the esteem of one's betters. A Scion without at least a dot or two in Etiquette isn't likely to last long in the cutthroat game of Cainite society. Impeccable manners and behavior can take you far (although impeccable manners and a stake through a rival's heart will often take you farther). Melee is the other important Skill for Scions, since many of them spend as much time in the saddle and on the battlefield as at court. A certain degree of martial prowess is expected, especially from followers of the Road of Chivalry.

When choosing Abilities, don't forget about specialties. These allow you to personalize your character's capabilities. After all, any Scion might be a capable orator (i.e., have a high Expression rating), but a Scion who specializes in Formal Debates and one who specializes in Subtle Insults have very different areas of expertise, both useful in the right circumstances.

## Backgrounds

Certain Backgrounds are vital to existence as a Scion. Followers of the Road of Kings seek power and dominion, and Backgrounds can grant a measure of



that before the chronicle even begins. Since Backgrounds are also fairly inexpensive to purchase with bonus points, you can ensure that your Scion has at least some success in the nighttime world of the undead from the start.

Social Backgrounds are of great use to Scions. Allies, Contacts, and Retainers provide them with resources they can use to gather information and handle their affairs in the sunlit world. Any Scion worth his salt will eventually acquire all of these Backgrounds to some degree.

Scions cultivate and value Influence, since it allows them to pull the strings of the mortal community. Influence is rarely a Trait that carries over from a vampire's mortal life, since most Cainites cannot conceal their true nature for very long in the Dark Medieval. Instead, most Scions develop their Influence slowly over long periods of time. That makes it more appropriate for characters who have been vampires for a time rather than neonates. Some Scions focus more on Status in Cainite society rather than Influence in the mortal world, or vice versa. Most Scions cultivate both.

Although Generation is common among Scions, it is by no means required. A low generation indicates that one's sire may be influential or high-ranking in Cainite society, and low-generation Scions often have great things expected of them. Those of the 12th generation may be all the more ambitious, on the other hand, because they start out at the bottom of the social ladder.

Mentor is a fairly common Background for Scions, since they are often chosen and groomed for a place in their Mentor's feudal hierarchy. A Scion may owe fealty to the Mentor, or the relationship may be less formal. While a Mentor may be your character's sire, that doesn't have to be the case. In fact, your Mentor may actually be the sire's rival or enemy, taking the character under his wing either to spite his sire or use the character as a weapon against him. If your Storyteller allows, your character may even have multiple Mentors (dividing your dots in the Background), playing one off the other. It's a dangerous game, but the potential rewards are great.

All but newly fledged Scions usually have some measure of Resources at their disposal. It may be wealth earned or inherited in the character's mortal lifetime, an inheritance or endowment from her sire, or what she has gained since receiving the Embrace. With the ability to accumulate wealth over many mortal lifetimes, elder vampires are often rich beyond dreams of avarice and even younger Scions have considerable wealth at their disposal. Of course, Resources also allow Scions to hire servants and maintain

suitable havens for themselves (and perhaps others they favor).

Note that paid servants aren't the same as the Retainers Background. Retainers are assumed to have some measure of personal loyalty (either oaths of fealty and service or something as strong as a blood oath). Servants are whatever the character can afford based on Resources, and they're only as loyal as money (and proper treatment) can buy. Unless they're paid very, very well, most servants aren't going to work for a blood-sucking monster. In fact, they're likely to flee at the first opportunity or rebel and try to destroy their former employer (depending on how brave and well organized they happen to be). So characters are better off having a trusted Retainer or two to manage their mortal servants and keep them in line so they don't get the idea of setting the manor afire or trying to drag their master out into the sunlight some day.

Status is another cherished goal of the Scions, but fledgling vampires aren't likely to have too much of it, unless they are clearly favored by their elders in some way. A neonate being groomed for a high-ranking position by an elder may have as much as two dots in Status, but more than that is virtually unheard of except for Cainites who have earned their positions. Since acquiring status is likely to be one of your character's goals, you may not want to assign too many dots to the Background at first, allowing your character to earn it during the chronicle (and making the reward that much sweeter for the effort). Of course, if the chronicle is focused on the doings of high-ranking vampires, then you may wish (or even be required) to assign more dots to your character's Status.

## Disciplines

Mastery of certain Disciplines is expected of followers of the Road of Kings. As in all things, personal excellence is emphasized. Disciplines allow Scions to achieve greater and more impressive feats, and to further their ambitions when used carefully. Leaders must balance the value of underlings able to use the most potent Disciplines with the possibility of those Disciplines being turned against them at some point.

Two Disciplines considered vital to the Road of Kings are Dominate and Presence. Clans that have one of these as their clan Disciplines are more often found on the Road of Kings. This is one of the reasons why the road's development was so heavily influenced by the Ventrue, as they are natural masters of both Disciplines.

Scions also make use of several Discipline techniques not typically found among other Cainites. These are described beginning on page 72.



## DOMAIN OR NO DOMAIN?

One Background that deserves particular attention where the Road of Kings is concerned is Domain, one of the ultimate goals of every Scion. Because it is such an important goal, you may want to consider *not* putting any dots into Domain at first. It depends on whether you want to play a character on the road to acquiring a domain, with all the challenges and rewards that go with it, or you want a character dealing with the difficulties of actually ruling a domain. Both can be dramatic stories, but they're significantly different and can influence the sort of chronicle for which your character is suited (the Storyteller might have some input here, too).

A Scion with no domain has greater freedom of action, able to travel widely for long periods of time. Of course, the character doesn't get the benefits of having a domain and Scions with no territory to call their own are at the bottom of their road's social ladder, meaning they're not likely to have much Status, either. Characters with domains have security and resources to draw upon — possibly enough so that feeding becomes less of a concern — but they also have responsibilities. They cannot simply leave for months at a time without very trusted or capable retainers to look after their domains in their absence. Otherwise they are likely to find that another Cainite has taken over the domain while they were away.

Consult with the Storyteller about the chronicle before deciding whether or not Domain is an appropriate Background for your character. If the chronicle is likely to involve a great deal of travel, then having a domain may actually be a hindrance (or at least not much of an advantage, if you're going to spend most of your time away from it). Likewise, it's not suitable in a chronicle where the characters are all fledgling neonates looking to make names for themselves in Cainite society. Gaining a domain is an important character goal in this case. On the other hand, if the chronicle is about vampire lords building an alliance to become a power in their region, then the Storyteller may *require* most of the characters to have the Domain Background, possibly as a pooled Background (see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 157).

## Dominate

Dominate is a useful Discipline for Scions simply because it allows them to enforce their wills on mortal and even Cainite lackeys. Dominate is limited, of course,

to dealing with individuals, and only those that understand the vampire's language.

Of particular use to Scions are the more advanced arts of Dominate. Lure of the Subtle Whispers can slowly bring nearly any mortal (and many vampires) under the Scion's command, while Fealty can seal oaths and bind vassals to obey to the best of their ability. Of course, since the Road of Kings takes oaths so seriously, and oaths of fealty are binding for both parties, Scions are judicious in their use of these powerful abilities.

Although Dominate has its uses, many Scions see the Discipline — particularly its most basic applications — as crude and overbearing. Few Cainites wish to rule mindlessly devoted thralls with no will or initiative of their own. Far more challenging, and satisfying, to play the game of politics well and earn one's place among the lords of the night. Too great a reliance on Dominate can also be dangerous, since some elder Cainites — and a handful of rare mortals — are immune to its power.

## Presence

The most useful Discipline to those on the Road of Kings is arguably Presence, which allows them to hold a crowd entranced, raise a howling mob, or inspire soldiers to fight (and die) in their names. The gifts of Presence are potent, especially in the hands of a talented orator and leader.

Scions still prefer to cultivate courtly skills rather than rely overmuch on the power that Presence grants them, since the effects of the Discipline can be fleeting at times. Most teachers of the road emphasize using Presence to augment one's social and political skills rather than substitute for them.

## Other Disciplines

- **Animalism:** Although dominion over beasts is not nearly so important to Scions as power over the world of men, Animalism is a useful Discipline for them. Cainites required to interact with animals — knights are expected to know how to ride, after all — benefit from being able to overcome an animal's natural aversion to the undead. Some vampire nobles take pleasure in keeping hunting animals — hounds or falcons, for example — as pets. Animal servants can also be useful for spying. No mortal would suspect their liege's loyal hound or their lady's cats of being spies, but for a vampire master of Animalism, they can be.

- **Auspex:** A ruler must be aware of what is going on, particularly of hidden dangers, before it is too late, so Auspex is a common Discipline taught and learned on the Road of Kings. Even the simplest uses of the Discipline can give a Scion a great advantage, being able to sense threats to his person as well as read the intentions of others as clearly as if they were shouted from the



rooftops. When Scions say that they know when others swear them falsely, they often speak the truth. The more advanced uses of the Discipline allow a Scion to learn of and prepare for almost any threat. Masters of Auspex can snatch thoughts from others' minds and learn secrets by scrying and eavesdropping on distant places.

- **Obfuscate:** The art of hiding in shadows seems counter to the nature of the Road of Kings at first. Scions are meant to be seen and heard, to appear before the crowd as a commanding presence. That is so, but some Scions recognize the value of subtlety and the ability to move about unseen. In addition to masking one's comings and goings, Obfuscate can permit a prince to walk as a commoner among his subjects, hearing what they truly think, or it can provide an escape when danger threatens. The ability to disappear in the face of an assassin should also never be underestimated.

## Merits and Flaws

Certain Merits and Flaws are particularly appropriate (or inappropriate) for followers of the Road of Kings. Various physical Merits and Flaws are found among Scions, although Flaws like Leprosy and Monstrous are fairly rare, known primarily among the followers of the Path of the Vizier (which permits them to stay out of the public eye).

Social Merits (and, sometimes, Flaws) are common for Scions, including Prestigious Sire, Debt of Gratitude, Infamous Sire, and Enemy. Crusader is a fairly common Merit on the Path of Chivalry.

Supernatural Merits and Flaws bless or afflict Scions the same as other Cainites. Inoffensive to Animals is useful to Paladins and others working with horses. Spirit Mentor may indicate a Scion guided to greatness by the ghost of a past ruler. Unbondable is useful Merit for Scions, since they are often expected to take blood oaths as part of their fealty to their superiors. It is not as useful as it first appears, however, since Scions take the letter and intent of their oaths at least as seriously as the power of the vitae that enforces it. Even an Unbondable Scion does not violate a freely given blood oath.

New Merits and Flaws that are especially appropriate for Scions can be found beginning on page 74.

## Preludes

Some are born to walk the Road of Kings while others are chosen and groomed for the road (willingly or otherwise). The events of a Cainite's life, death, and Embrace shape the sort of Scion he or she will become in time. The following elements are common in the preludes of those on the Road of Kings. Storytellers may wish to consider including them in one form or another, and players should consider them as part of their characters' Background.

- **Willfulness:** The Road of Kings demands a strong will and a measure of conviction. Scions are often willful, even stubborn, in their mortal lives, enforcing their will upon others. They may be well regarded as natural leaders, or condemned as bullies or petty tyrants. Young nobles often display the willfulness that draws Scions to them, although such youthful arrogance must be tempered and cooled by the Embrace and the teachings of the road before it can lead a neonate to true greatness.

- **Pride:** The Scions are many things, but rarely humble. Those who follow the Path of Chivalry may consider humility a virtue, but most adherents of the road understand and expect a certain amount of pride in one's self and one's accomplishments. Overweening pride can be a danger, particularly when it blinds a Scion to her own faults and dangers close at hand, but pride is also a source of strength. It drives Scions to achieve mastery over themselves, to strive for excellence in order to justify their pride.

- **Self-Mastery:** The first steps on the Road of Kings involve learning to master oneself and the Beast within before attempting to master and lead others. A leader without self-discipline and restraint cannot lead effectively, and will soon be overthrown by someone more capable. All the will and conviction of a Scion is ultimately aimed at caging the Beast and keeping it tamed, keeping hold of their sanity and their dignity in the face of what they have become.

- **Power:** Power is the ultimate goal of every Scion, whether it is rule over a dominion, power over a prince, command of an army, or wealth beyond avarice. Even the adherents of the Path of Chivalry seek power, skill at arms and command of soldiers they can use to further the cause of justice in the world. The reason for seeking it is almost irrelevant. This thirst for power and control is nearly as great as the thirst for blood. For some, it existed long before the Embrace, and their current existence is merely an extension of their lifelong quest for power. For others, their undead state has inspired a desire for power. It may be because they never had a chance to obtain it in life. It may be a substitute for passions they can no longer feel or enjoy. Whatever the reason, it is a part of every Scion.

- **Fealty and Duty:** The Road of Kings is about power, but also about duty and responsibility, which are necessary corollaries to power. Scions may learn those lessons even before their Embrace. Often a conflict between desire and duty leads them into the arms of their sire. They also learn loyalty from their Cainite liege-lord, and may learn betrayal from their fellow Cainites as well. The importance of loyalty and honor are central to the Road of Kings, something every Scion must embrace.



# PATH OF CHIVALRY

## VIA EQUITUM



Although the age of chivalry has only begun in the mortal world, some Cainites have seized upon its ideals and taken them to heart. These Paladins see chivalry as the salvation of their kind.

One of the more recent paths of the Road of Kings, chivalry has spread rapidly throughout the Cainite courts of Europe and its principles are largely the same everywhere.

The philosophy of the path is the code of chivalry. A Paladin

strives to act with honor in all things. Oaths are sacred, and one's duty comes before all other considerations, even personal safety and ambition. Paladins are deferent to their betters and kind and courteous to their inferiors. Naturally, some vampires have seized on this devotion to conscience as a way to manipulate Paladins, but they have found that such insults are repaid harshly and in full measure.

The path is unusual in that it emphasizes service and duty more

than personal power. Cainites are superior, yes, but that means their responsibilities are that much greater than those of ordinary mortals. The princes of Europe encourage the path because they support its ideals or they appreciate how it channels and leashes the ambitions of hot-blooded neonates, binding them more strongly to the service of their prince. Some princes have even sponsored orders of knighthood to encourage the path among their vassals (see *Knightly Orders*, page 48).

### Additional Ethics of Chivalry

- The blood of Caine makes you superior to mortals. Therefore you have a duty to protect and aid your inferiors.
- Duty comes before all else.
- Honor is everything. Without your honor, you are no more than a beast.

**Practices:** The Path of Chivalry is probably the most organized branch of the Road of Kings. Initiates nearly always petition to become squires of one of the knightly orders, where they learn the principles of the path along with the skills to become a knight. Cainites who were knights before the Embrace are usually inducted into an order without the need to spend much time in service to a senior knight, although it is still required to learn the essentials of the path. Initiates who cannot serve are clearly not suited for the demands of the path and may be expelled.

Paladins carry out their duties with as much pomp as possible. They are fond of tournaments and contests where they can win glory for themselves and their patrons, and their rites are carried out with great ceremony. Naturally, the path appeals to many Toreador and Ventrue, who are also the most common patrons of the chivalrous orders.

**Virtues:** Conscience, Self-Control

### Hierarchy of Sins Against Chivalry

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Neglecting your duty for any reason.	Your duty comes before all else.
9	Dishonorable acts (ambush, deceit, etc.)	Your honor is everything.
8	Treating another with disrespect.	A knight earns respect by behaving respectfully.
7	Behaving in an unjust manner.	It is your sworn duty to uphold justice.
6	Behaving shamefully before your peers.	Honor and reputation are everything.
5	Failing to come to the aid of those in need.	It is your duty to protect the weak.
4	Treating a superior with disrespect.	Superiors must be given the respect they are due.
3	Failing to answer a challenge to your honor.	Honor is everything; challenges cannot go unanswered.
2	Breaking your word.	Your word is your bond. If your word is worthless, then so are you.
1	Breaking a sworn oath.	Oaths of fealty hold the world together.



# PATH OF THE MERCHANT

## VIA MERCATOR

While the princes war for control of the domains of Europe, a small faction slowly increases in strength. A few Cainites have recognized the potential inherent in this new class of merchants and skilled craftsmen, and have begun to consider the possibility of buying a throne rather than winning one by force. Traditional Scions scoff at these money-grubbers, but they grudgingly admit that the Merchants *do* have a great deal of money.

The Merchants hold fast to the Scion ideals of ladder-climbing, self-mastery, and deal-making, but for them wealth is the key to power, self-mastery and hard work are the keys to success in business, and oaths and promises are the cornerstone of a Merchant's good name. For many, the path is a means to an end; earn enough wealth to purchase a manor and a title. A rare few see greater potential in the path. Why control a domain openly when you can own it in all but name?

### Additional Ethics of Business

- Wealth is the key to power and control.
- Power can be just as effective behind the scenes, perhaps even more so.
- Your reputation is all that you really own, and is worth more than the rest put together.

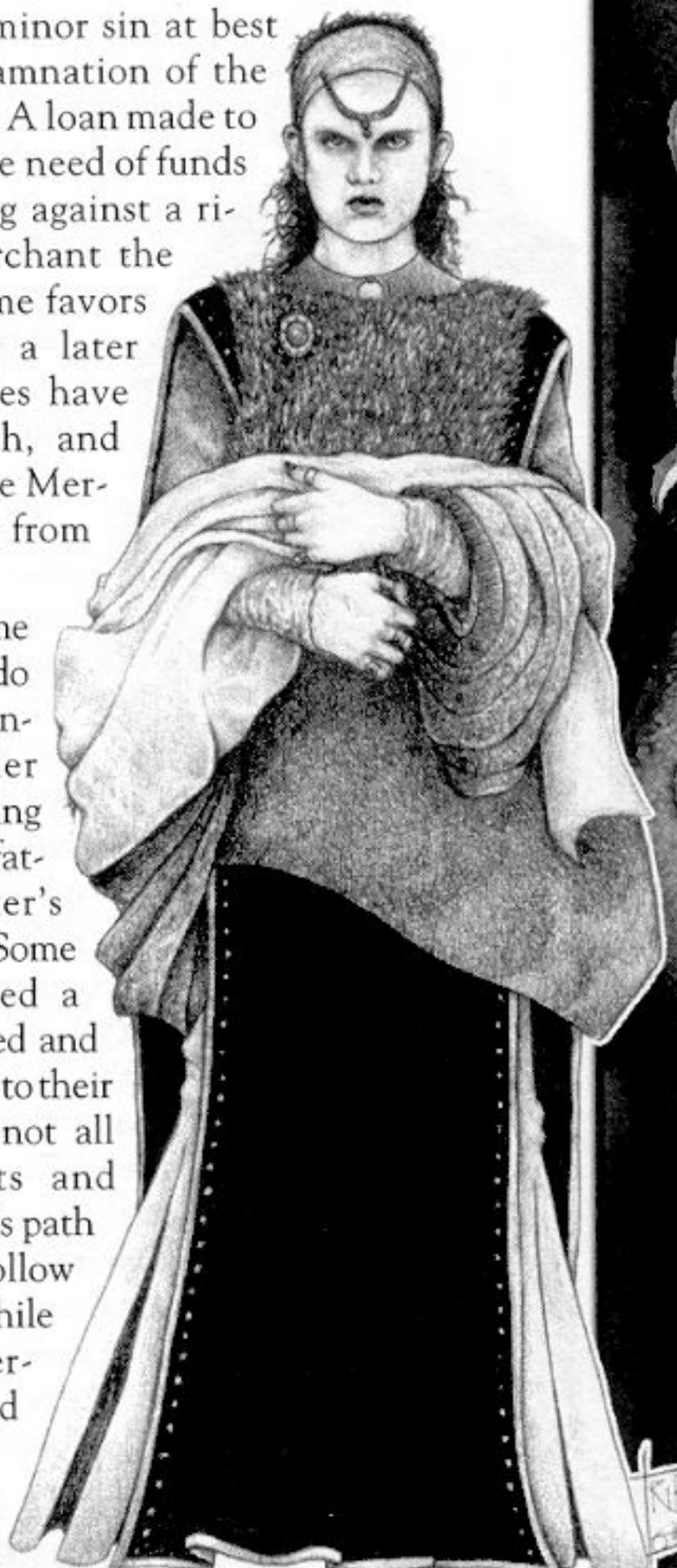
**Practices:** Unfortunately, few mortals do business by night, so the Merchants are forced to work through intermediaries for the most part, doing what little they can after sunset. They exert their influence over mortal merchants and craftsmen, helping ensure that their businesses prosper in exchange for a hefty piece of the profits. Powerful Merchants often have numerous business interests, which may or may not even be aware of each other.

The Merchants also do business with their fellow Cainites. They have no qualms about usury or

money-lending (a minor sin at best compared to the damnation of the Children of Caine). A loan made to a prince in desperate need of funds to continue fighting against a rival can give a Merchant the prince's ear and some favors to be discussed at a later time. Many Cainites have considerable wealth, and hunger for goods the Merchants can provide from far-off lands.

Cainites who come to the path usually do so by becoming apprenticed to an elder Merchant and learning the trade as they go (fattening their master's coffers all the while). Some Merchants practiced a trade while they lived and apply that knowledge to their unives. Of course, not all Cainite merchants and tradesmen follow this path (craftsmen tend to follow the *Via Humanitas*, while a few vampire merchants follow the Road of Sin).

**Virtues:** Conviction, Self-Control



### Hierarchy of Sins Against Business

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Neglecting your work.	Working hard is the key to success.
9	Treating a customer with disrespect.	You must earn the customer's respect and cooperation.
8	Treating an inferior as an equal.	Everyone should know their place, including you.
7	Breaking your word to a customer.	Trust is earned by being trustworthy.
6	Behaving shamefully before your peers.	Honor and reputation are everything.
5	Showing weakness in front of inferiors.	A leader must be seen as strong.
4	Failing to answer a challenge to your good name.	Your good name is all that you truly own.
3	Treating a superior with disrespect.	Superiors must be given the respect they are due.
2	Breaking your word to your superiors or clients.	Your word is your bond. If your word is worthless, then so are you.
1	Breaking a sworn oath or deal.	Such agreements hold the world together.



# PATH OF THE TYRANT

## VIA TYRANNUS



Tyrants understand the importance of vassals and oaths of fealty, but they care little for notions of responsibility and *noblesse oblige*. They find the pretensions of the Paladins foolish and naïve. It is not the duty of the strong to look after the weak, only to ensure that they do not rise in rebellion. A contented populace is the easiest to rule, but if a thousand must die to ensure that the domain remains strong, so be it. Notions of honor and charity toward one's inferiors are useful tools for keeping the sheep in line, but nothing more. In the end, only power and control matter.

The ultimate goal for any Tyrant is power and the security that comes with it. One can either rule or be ruled, and the Tyrants know which option they prefer. They also know there are more than enough ambitious Cainites and not enough domains to go around, so they must be ruthless in eliminating competition. While knights follow the Path of Chivalry, Cainite warlords and

conquerors choose this path as their own, the path to power, the path to glory.

### Additional Ethics of Tyranny

- Power is yours for the taking, if only you have the will to seize it.
- Honor your obligations, as they will earn you allies and loyal servants.
- It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both.

**Practices:** Given its nature, many Cainites find the Path of the Tyrant alone, through their own ambitions and will to power. Often they learn the path from a liege-lord they serve, only to seek to replace their mentor later on. Tyrants tend to be wary, even for Cainites, because they understand the full depths of ambition and what it drives them to do. Unlike mortal lords, they do not groom heirs, since they intend to rule throughout their unliving existence.

Still, Tyrants are not entirely untrustworthy. They value oaths and laws because they are so necessary to a smoothly functioning domain. A Tyrant moves carefully and cautiously, but is ready to seize an opportunity when it arises. They see matters of honor dispassionately, solely in terms of what advantages they gain, rather than the somewhat romantic notions of the Paladins or even other Scions. They are also as ruthless as only creatures that know they are damned can be. As far as the Tyrants are concerned, they already exist in Hell, so they have nothing to lose by further sin and everything to gain by making sure their subjects understand the penalty for disobedience and failure.

**Virtues:** Conviction, Self-Control

## Hierarchy of Sins Against Tyranny

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Neglecting an opportunity to gain power.	Opportunity comes only to those who seize it.
9	Treating a peer with disrespect.	Do not make enemies unnecessarily.
8	Treating an inferior as an equal.	Never let your inferiors get above themselves.
7	Giving up power to a peer.	Power is not gained by giving it away.
6	Behaving shamefully before your peers.	Your reputation is a part of your influence.
5	Showing weakness in front of inferiors.	A leader must be strong.
4	Failing to answer a challenge to your authority.	Those who do not protect their power soon lose it.
3	Treating a superior with disrespect.	Superiors must be given the respect they are due.
2	Breaking your word to your superiors.	Your word is your bond. If your word is worthless, then so are you.
1	Breaking a sworn oath.	Oaths of fealty hold the world together.



# PATH OF THE VIZIER

## VIA CONSUASOR

Not all who rule do so from a throne. Oftentimes they rule from the steps of the throne, or from the shadows behind it. Such is the philosophy of the Path of the Vizier. For the Counselors, power is a subtle game best played away from prying eyes. Where other Scions seek glory and adulation, Counselors work in the shadows, pulling strings to make things happen. To the Counselors, the ideal is to hold power without anyone knowing it, since Cainites perceive anyone in power as a potential threat. Some Counselors are known to be powerful, even as true powers behind the throne, but thinking one knows the true measure of a Counselor's power is usually a fatal mistake.

The Beast is the ultimate threat to a Counselor's plans because it is anything but subtle. Every Counselor knows that the seeds of defeat and failure lie buried deep within and so struggles to keep the Beast caged. Knowledge, cunning, and influence are the Counselor's weapons. Where a Scion may excel on the battlefield or in the council chamber, a Counselor excels in study, writing, sage advice, and building networks of informants and allies. Through this subtle web, the Counselor rules from behind the scenes.

### Additional Ethics of Counsel

- Those seen to have power are the targets of those who wish to seize power.
- Those seen to grant power are the allies of those who wish to seize power.
- Gather power subtly, use it wisely. Be seen as an ally rather than a rival.

**Practices:** The Path of the Vizier draws more scholarly Scions, those not suited to ruling openly, but clever

and learned enough to make rulers dependent on their advice and wisdom, and not only Cainite rulers. Where most Scions seek their own domains in vampire society, Counselors often exert as much — if not more — influence over mortal kingdoms. Many a monarch, baron, or prince entertains nightly visits from a mysterious advisor who offers wise counsel (and perhaps a dose of vitae to keep the ruler strong and vital, and in the Counselor's thrall).

Counselors are also commonly found in the ranks of the Church, where it is difficult to seize power openly. They thrive in an environment of learning and scholarly debate, where they can move key pieces about like a chess match. Although outnumbered by Cainites on the Road of Heaven, Counselors have the advantage of keen intellect, unencumbered by religious zeal, to see their plans to fruition.

**Virtues:** Conviction, Self-Control



### Hierarchy of Sins Against Counsel

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Neglecting your duty.	Those who fail in their responsibilities often lose them.
9	Treating a peer with disrespect.	A leader earns respect by acting respectfully.
8	Openly usurping power.	The shadows are your protection.
7	Breaking your word to a peer.	Trust is earned by being trustworthy.
6	Behaving shamefully before your peers.	Honor and reputation are everything.
5	Showing a lack of knowledge in front of inferiors.	Knowledge (or at least the appearance of it) is strength.
4	Failing to answer a challenge to your knowledge or integrity.	These are the basis of your strength; guard them well.
3	Treating a superior with disrespect.	Superiors must be given the respect they are due.
2	Breaking your word to your superiors.	Your word is your bond. If your word is worthless, then so are you.
1	Breaking a sworn oath.	Oaths of fealty hold the world together.



## New Discipline Techniques

The following techniques are commonly associated with followers of the Road of Kings, and mostly taught and used by them. Non-Scion characters may be able to learn them at the Storyteller's discretion by finding a willing teacher or experimenting on their own.

### An Ear for Lies *Auspex* 2

Scions place great stock in the truth, and successful rulers and leaders learn to discern truth from falsehood, even when spoken by the most convincing liars. This power allows the user to know when someone is lying to him. To the Cainite, lies stand out, harsh and discordant, from all other speech.

**System:** The player must make a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty equal to the subject's Manipulation + Subterfuge). If successful, the character automatically knows if the subject lies to him for the duration of one scene or social encounter. This ability does not detect lies of omission or half-truths, only direct and deliberate lies. If the subject believes what he is saying is true (even if it is not), then the character will not detect any falsehood. This technique does not give a character the ability to discern what the truth is, only to know when someone is lying.

**Experience cost:** 14

**MET:** Make a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty is the subject's Manipulation-related Traits + *Subterfuge*; retest with *Empathy*). With success, the Scion automatically knows if his target lies to him for the rest of the scene/social encounter (the Scion's player may ask the target if she is deliberately lying with intent and the target must answer truthfully). Lies of omission will not register as falsehood, and a subject who believes he is telling the truth (such as while recalling false memories from *Dominare*) will likewise not appear as a liar. This power requires both Basic levels of *Auspex* and costs 14 Experience Traits.

### Inspire Greatness *Presence* 3, *Fortitude* or *Potence* 2

True leaders know how to inspire their followers to greatness, but Cainites can use the power of their vitae to inspire more than mere competence — they can push others beyond their normal limits.

To use this ability, the character must specifically try to inspire or urge a follower on in performing a physical task. This can be battle, a feat of strength or stamina, a physical contest, and so forth. The subject of this technique must look to the character for leadership and guidance, and the character must inspire the subject in some direct way through words or actions.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Leadership (difficulty 7). Each success allows the player to spend one blood point to grant the subject a bonus in performing a

feat of strength or stamina for the duration of the scene. The player cannot spend more blood points per turn than her character's generation normally allows, and no more than the character's rating in *Fortitude* or *Potence* (whichever one she wishes to grant the subject). Successes can be split between *Fortitude* and *Potence*, if desired, up to the vampire's limits.

The effect also varies depending on the subject's nature. Vampires and ghouls gain dots in the appropriate Disciplines (*Fortitude* or *Potence*), even if they previously had no dots in them, with the normal effects and benefits. Mortals gain extra dots in *Strength* or *Stamina* and can even exceed five dots, but do not gain the other benefits of *Fortitude* or *Potence*, such as the ability to soak lethal damage or automatic successes on *Strength* rolls. The benefits last for the scene or until the task at hand is complete.

**Experience cost:** 21

If a character has *Presence* at five dots or more, he may spend an additional 14 experience points to *Inspire Greatness* in multiple people at once. Successes from the Charisma + Leadership roll can be applied to increase the number of people affected as follows:

1 success	Two people
2 successes	Four people
3 successes	Eight people
4 successes	20 people
5 successes	Everyone in the character's immediate vicinity (an entire troop in battle, for example)

**MET:** The Scion must begin by inspiring or urging his subject to a physical feat of strength or stamina, the subject must look to the Scion for leadership, which the Scion attempts to provide by words or actions. The Scion then makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Leadership*). Success allows him to spend Blood Traits to grant his target a bonus to use in *Strength*- or *Stamina*-related challenges. The Scion may not spend more blood per turn than his generation normally allows, nor may he grant any higher than his rating in *Fortitude* or *Potence*. Vampires and ghouls gain levels of *Fortitude* or *Potence*, even if they had no previous levels of them, and the powers act normally. Mortals can gain extra Physical Traits, even above and beyond their normal rating, but may not gain *Fortitude* or *Potence*. The benefits last for one scene or until the feat is completed.

This effect requires the character to have reached the first Intermediate power of *Presence*, plus both Basic powers of either *Fortitude* or *Potence*, and 21 Experience Traits. If the character has Advanced *Presence* or even the powers of the elders, he may spend an additional 14 Experience Traits to *Inspire Greatness* in multiple people. By spending extra Traits in the initial challenge, he can inspire from two people (with one Trait) up to all in his immediate vicinity (with five Traits).



## True Tongue Dominate 2, Presence 2

With the truth such a valuable commodity in the Dark Medieval, the ability to find the truth is useful indeed. A vampire with this technique can render a subject unable to speak anything except the truth as he knows it; lies cannot pass his lips, nor will his tongue utter them. Of course, subjects may simply choose to remain silent. They are not compelled to speak, but they cannot speak lies.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Leadership with a difficulty equal to the subject's Willpower. The subject must also be of an equal or lesser generation than the character (as with all uses of Dominate). Success places the compulsion upon the subject, with the number of successes determining its duration:

1 success	The subject's next statement must be truthful.
2 successes	The subject must speak the truth for the next minute.
3 successes	The subject must speak the truth for the next scene.
4 successes	The subject must speak the truth until sunrise.
5 successes	The subject must speak the truth for as long as he is in the user's presence.

**Experience cost:** 14

Characters with Dominate 4 and Presence 4 can spend 14 additional experience points to learn Aura of

Inescapable Truth. This extends the effect of True Tongue to everyone in the user's presence.

**MET:** The Scion makes a Static Social Challenge (difficulty is the target's Willpower; retest with *Leadership*). Like all uses of *Dominate*, the target must be of equal or lesser generation than the character. For the next scene, the target can speak only the truth as he knows it — no lies of omission, no half-truths, just the facts (and that based on what the target believes to be the truth). The target is not compelled to actually talk, but if he does, he cannot lie.

This power requires both Basic powers of *Dominate*, both Basic powers of *Presence* and 14 Experience Traits to learn. Scions who achieve both Intermediate powers of *Dominate* and *Presence*, and spent another 14 Experience Traits may learn *Aura of Inescapable Truth*, which extends the effect to everyone in the character's vicinity.

## Sound of a Breaking Vow Auspex 4, Dominate or Presence 4

Betrayal is most often done in silence and shadows, but some Cainites can hear betrayal and disloyalty on the wind. A vampire with this technique may know if any who have sworn allegiance to him forswear their oaths. The knowledge comes to the character like a distant sound of bells or breaking glass, or sometimes as a foul stench or a chill up the spine, but it is certain knowledge of betrayal, regardless.

**System:** Whenever one of the character's sworn vassals, through word or deed, violates the letter of his





oath of fealty, the Storyteller should secretly roll the character's Perception + Leadership, with a difficulty equal to the oath-breaker's Willpower. The number of successes determines how much the character learns about the oath-breaking:

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1 success   | The character knows that a vassal has broken faith with him, but does not know who, where, or how.                      |
| 2 successes | The character knows the whereabouts of the oath-breaker, but no other details.  |
| 3 successes | The character knows the identity and whereabouts of the oath-breaker.   |
| 4 successes | The character knows the oath-breaker's identity, whereabouts, and in general what sort of violation has been committed. |
| 5 successes | The character has a vision of the oath-breaker for a few seconds after the violation is committed.                      |

Note that this technique provides no forewarning of treachery or betrayal, nor does it sense disloyal *thoughts*, only deeds. A vampire would receive no warning, for example, if a previously faithful vassal suddenly plunged a stake into her heart, unless bringing such a weapon into the vampire's presence constituted a violation of the vassal's oath, in which case the vampire could learn of it. The technique only affects those who have sworn oaths of fealty or loyalty to the character, not allies, associates, peers, or anyone else. It does affect thralls under the effects of the character's Dominate or Presence Disciplines and those bound by the blood oath.

**Experience cost:** 28

**MET:** With a successful Static Mental Challenge (difficulty is the subject's Willpower, retest with *Leadership*), the Scion knows if a sworn vassal has, through word or deed, violated an oath to him. The Storyteller may choose to make this challenge in secret and inform the player of the result, or come to the Scion and ask for the challenge. With success, the Scion knows that a vassal has broken his word and knows where this happened, and little else. If the betrayal was particularly grave (treachery that kills the Scion's mortal family or reveals a battleplan that could kill hundreds is much more serious than speaking ill of the Scion), the Scion may receive more clues to the oath-breaker's identity at Storyteller discretion. This provides no warning of treachery or disloyal thoughts, only words or deeds in the commission. This power affects only those who have sworn oaths of vassalage or loyalty to the Scion, those who are bound to him by blood oath, or those who are under his *Presence* or *Dominate* powers. Peers, associates, allies, servants or those not bound by such means to the Scion are not affected by this power.

This power requires both Intermediate powers of *Auspex* and both Intermediate powers of *Dominate* or *Presence*, plus a whopping 28 Experience Traits.

## New Merits and Flaws

As with other Merits and Flaws, these are only appropriate to be added to a character upon creation. Although some characters may acquire some Merits and Flaws (particularly Flaws) in play, they are generally not required to pay experience for them.

### Noble Blood 1-pt. Merit

You were born of a noble and honored family, and its blood still runs in your veins, even altered by the curse of Caine. Although you may have lost any title or lands that were your due as a living heir, you retain your heritage (and, perhaps, your family name). This reflects favorably on you with those who place stock in good breeding and hereditary nobility (as many people in the Dark Medieval world do). You may also be of particular interest to certain Scions, and to Ventrue with a taste for noble blood. You receive a -1 to all Social difficulties when dealing with anyone who would be impressed by your lineage, and to all Etiquette rolls concerning courtly behavior in your native lands.

**MET:** You gain a one-Trait bonus in Social Challenges dealing with those impressed by your lineage, and a free retest to Etiquette challenges in your native lands (the second test results must stand, and this cannot be used outside your own country).

### Powerful Gaze 1-pt. Merit

You have a quality that makes your gaze forceful and menacing. Those who meet your eyes must look away, or else are captured, almost entranced, by your gaze. You gain a -2 to the difficulties of all Social rolls where you are able to make and maintain eye contact with the person you are dealing with. This means being at fairly close quarters (a few yards or less), and it only affects one person at a time.

**MET:** You gain a two-Trait bonus to Social Challenges when you can make and maintain eye contact.

### Powerful Liege 1- to 3-pt. Merit

You serve a powerful and renowned liege-lord respected (and likely feared) by many. This gives you a measure of prestige in dealing with your liege's vassals and peers, and others are likely to respect (and envy) your position. As a one-point Merit, the liege is a renowned baron or other local lord. As a two-point Merit, your liege is an influential prince or rising star among the nobility. As a three-point Merit, your liege is a powerful monarch, ruler of a vast domain, such as Mithras of London. You are probably required to wear the standard of your lord prominently, which announces you as his vassal to friend and enemy alike. However, the more powerful your lord, the less willing others are to attack you outright.



## Noble Bearing 2<sup>pt.</sup> Merit

You have the bearing and manner of a true monarch, no matter how low your station. You carry yourself with grace and dignity, and your words ring with purpose and passion. Reduce your difficulty on Social rolls by two in any situation where your nobility can show through, such as at court, or taking command on the field of battle. Your bearing is likely to draw attention to you, and may even earn you the enmity of the petty and jealous, or those who believe you act above your station.

**MET:** You gain a two-Trait bonus during Social Challenges where you can impress others with your nobility. This Merit does not mean you stomp around with your chest puffed out shouting orders. Sometimes, the greatest nobility shines quietly — stand up straight, hold your head high, walk with dignity, raise your voice only when necessary.

## Devotion 3<sup>pt.</sup> Merit

You are devoted to a higher ideal or purpose, be it loyalty, honor, duty, your sworn liege-lord, or your faith in the Almighty. You draw great strength from your devotion, giving you an automatic success on all Willpower rolls (which can be negated by a "1" like any other success) where your devotion is tested in some way. You must remain absolutely true to your purpose in order to retain this Merit. If you falter or are found wanting, you lose it until you can somehow redeem yourself and atone for your sins.

## Destined for Greatness 5<sup>pt.</sup> Merit

You are meant for great things in your unlife. Destiny has some special purpose in mind for you. This Merit has the following effects:

- You are considered to have an extra dot of Status when dealing with Cainites who believe in or recognize your destiny as something special.
- When confronted with a challenge that would keep you from fulfilling your destiny, you can re-roll any failed roll (including botches) and take the better of the two results. You can do this up to three times per story, but only when dealing with circumstances that would prevent you from achieving your destiny in some way (in the Storyteller's judgment).
- Once per story, when confronted with dire or overwhelming circumstances, you can draw strength from certain knowledge of your destiny and regain a point of Willpower immediately, even if you have no temporary Willpower left.

At the Storyteller's discretion, there may be omens, portents, or prophecies concerning you, and various sorts of divinations may show your involvement in certain events. There may also be forces out to thwart your destiny, and circumstances will tend to conspire to ensure

that you have the opportunity to fulfill it, so you will never be able to lead a humble or isolated unlife.

**MET:** You gain the Status Trait *Destined*, which can be used with Cainites who would recognize you or your destiny as something special. When confronted with a test that would keep you from fulfilling your destiny (Storyteller discretion), you may retest any failed challenge and choose which results stand, up to three times per story. Once per story, you can draw upon the certain knowledge of your destiny and regain a Willpower Trait, even if your Willpower is completely spent.

## Onerous Vow 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> pt. Flaw

You have sworn a particular vow in the past (perhaps against your better judgment, or even under false pretenses) that you feel you must honor, even though it is an inconvenience to you (perhaps even a serious one). The value of this Flaw is based on how much trouble your vow causes you. Fairly simple vows (like stopping to pray at every church you pass, refusing to feed on certain people, etc.) are worth one point. Vows that require some risk (like always protecting children in danger, or always being the last to leave the field of battle) are worth two points, while vows that regularly place you in danger (feeding only on priests, attacking certain enemies on sight) are worth three points. Storytellers should reduce the value of this Flaw (or disallow it outright) for non-Scion characters, since they can more easily violate their vow without suffering any consequences (save perhaps for a twinge of conscience).

## Oath-Taker 2<sup>pt.</sup> Flaw, 3 for Scions

You have the unwise habit of swearing oaths too quickly or without due thought, and you feel obligated to fulfill those oaths, once rightfully sworn. This Flaw is particularly common among idealistic and passionate Cainite knights and Paladins of the Path of Chivalry, for whom thought and deed are as one.

In practice, you can never simply agree to something, it must take the form of a sacred oath. If you have a task placed before you, then you swear on your blood that it shall be done. If you express an opinion, you swear an oath to uphold it to the last. If you see the opportunity for a noble quest, you must seize it, and follow it to the end. At the Storyteller's discretion, you can spend a point of temporary Willpower to stave off this urge for one instance, when absolutely necessary.

For followers of the Road of Kings, this is a three-point Flaw, since breaking a sworn oath is a grievous sin for them and requires a degeneration roll. A clever enemy may trick you into swearing contradictory oaths, so that you are forced to break one of them, and characters with this Flaw are particularly vulnerable to the power of Fealty (Dominate 6).



## Artifacts and Texts

While many Scions scoff at the amount of time and energy mortals (and some Cainites) waste in pursuit of "holy relics" and "sacred texts," they do admit that an object perceived to have power does have power, even if merely by perception. Likewise, while they won't usually ascribe any magical or divine properties to a manuscript, Viziers especially recognize the virtues of writing down wisdom so that younger Scions may learn from it later.

### Artifacts

These items are legendary, and Scions trade stories of their existence and properties, as well as their locations. Where these artifacts might rest (and in whose hands), to say nothing of whether these items function as described here, if at all, is a decision left to the Storyteller.

#### Veddartha's Chalice

Whether a simple wooden cup or a solid gold, jewel-encrusted goblet, the Chalice of Veddartha appears in many of the parables and legends that Scions tell of the First City and the rise of Clan Ventrue. Supposedly, the Ventrue clan founder drank his sire's blood from this cup, rather than feasting directly from his veins, during his Embrace. This is an important detail — Veddartha evidently had the will and strength, even after being drained of his life's blood, to raise a glass and choose to drink.

Whether or not the Chalice ever actually existed, Ventrue Scions know the significance of "drinking from Ventrue's Chalice." The expression simply means that despite all odds, a particular Scion has the courage and the determination to see things through, be it to fulfill an oath, finish a campaign, or fight a duel. Of course, some Scions of other clans (notably Brujah) use the same expression to mean "charging blindly ahead with no thought for the consequences to oneself or others."

Occasionally, a Paladin undertakes a quest, often to the Holy Land, to "recover the Chalice from the Saracens." No one has ever discovered its resting place, or even conclusive evidence that it exists. However, rumors do filter back to Europe from Egypt that the loathsome Setites have a similar legend about a cup which their noxious god spirited away from a mighty warrior while the warrior was locked in combat. Most Scions think of this tale as allegory at best, but some Viziers aren't so sure.

#### Tyrant's Lash

Created by a Tzimisce *koldun* shortly after the rise of the Tremere, the Tyrant's Lash is a simple horsewhip with a small barb at the tip. In the hands of a powerful enough Scion, however, it can break nearly anyone with a single stroke.

The Lash magnifies the pain of its strokes and engenders a feeling of weakness and helplessness whenever it strikes a target. Anyone





struck by the Tyrant's Lash must roll Willpower (difficulty 6, modified by the wielder's Aura; thus the difficulty rises if the wielder's Road rating is higher than 7 and drops if the rating is lower than 4). Success on this roll means that the victim must soak damage as usual (the Lash inflicts 3 dice of lethal damage) but suffers no further ill effects. If the roll fails, the victim is immediately driven to his knees in pain and humiliation, and all Willpower rolls for the remainder of the scene (including any required by further lashings) increase in difficulty by one. If the roll is a botch, the victim loses a dot of permanent Willpower in addition to the above effects.

When wielded by a non-Scion, the Lash has no special properties. The Tyrant's Lash is currently in the possession of an unknown Tzimisce warlord. Presumably, a skilled *koldun* could create another such item if properly instructed and motivated.

## Wax Seal

Wax seals are commonly used to bind and sign documents in the Dark Medieval. While custom forbids breaking the seal on a document meant for someone else's eyes, it does happen. However, any Scion of sufficient progress on her road can create a seal that is somewhat more resistant to prying eyes.

The Scion simply drips a few drops of her vitae onto the wax before applying the seal. The player then rolls the character's Road rating (difficulty 7). Thereafter, if anyone except the intended recipient of the letter attempts to break the wax seal, she must roll Willpower (difficulty 7) and gain more successes than the Scion did. The would-be spy can attempt this as an extended action, building up the courage to break the seal, but if at any time she fails a Willpower roll, she must wait until the following day (or night) to try again. While attempting to break the seal, the spy feels as though she is being watched by a powerful being, and knows that she is breaking a trust by trying to break the wax.

A Scion must have a Road rating of 8 or more to create such a seal. If the Scion possesses the Sound of a Breaking Oath Discipline technique (see page 73), the breaking of a seal will trigger that power.

## Texts

Scion viziers and keepers make careful record of any precedent and decision that could affect the road as a whole. This section describes two such documents.

### The Empowerment of the Justicars

Only a half-dozen Cainites throughout Europe have even seen this parchment, but that short list of names is enough to make any vampire quail. If the rumors are true, Mithras, Hardestadt, Salianna, and Montano are among the venerable Cainites who have read — and signed — the Empowerment.

This brief treatise speaks of the "need for Justice among Scions" and the "right of rulers to be judged by their equals." It also outlines specific requirements for the appointment of Justicars, what powers they wield, and where they may practice. In particular, the document states that only when a vampire is "suspected of a grave crime against his subject, God, and Christendom" may a Justicar supersede a Cainite in his own domain. Likewise, unless a prince is under such suspicion, a Justicar may not interfere with the duties of his vassals, including the scourge or warmaster. However, a Justicar may call a prince to trial, if enough evidence can be presented.

The Justicars, as stated elsewhere in this book, hold little authority over non-Scion Cainites, but because so many princes are Scions, other Cainites are well advised to at least treat them deferentially. Whether a non-Scion prince chooses to acknowledge a Justicar as anything other than a trespassing vampire is up to the prince in question.

The Empowerment's true whereabouts are unknown, but decoys are kept in the collections of many important Scions. The overwhelming question about the Empowerment of the Justicars, though, isn't its location, but its author. After all, so many illustrious Cainites would never have signed the document, which has the potential to limit their power so, without a very good reason. So who, ask ashen priests of the *Via Regalis*, could convince the great princes of Europe to empower the Justicars? And what possible advantage could they gain?

### The Letters of Acindynus



Centuries ago, a Roman Ventrue called Acindynus began compiling information on Cainite princes and the rights of kings. Over time, as the Road of Kings solidified, Acindynus' letters became more focused on the *Via Regalis*' history and philosophy rather than the literal practices of leadership and command. These more recent letters still circulate among lettered Cainites of many roads (a sample thereof can be found in Chapter One). Those letters are fairly innocuous — a good primer, perhaps, on the Road of Kings and good fodder for debate, but containing no damaging information.

However, Acindynus has been writing his letters for many years now, and the focus was not always so narrow. In nights past, they included diatribes on everything from daily (and nightly) life in Constantinople to thoughts on the practical battlefield applications of the various Disciplines of Caine. Acindynus has forgotten much of what he wrote so many years ago, and it is entirely possible that these older writings were all lost during the sack of Constantinople. But then, Libraries of the Forgotten (see *Dark Ages Europe*) in various parts of Europe hold books and scrolls thought lost forever in that disaster — perhaps part or all of the Letters of Acindynus are among them.









# CHAPTER FOUR: KINGS AND COUNSELORS

Kings and counselors of the earth, which built desolate  
palaces for themselves.

— Job 3:14

The Road of Kings offers a wide variety of different character types to choose from. The templates in this chapter are only a sampling of the many different Scions abroad in the Dark Medieval world, but give some idea of the range of possibilities. Some characters are likely to travel and see the world, while others have responsibilities that keep them close to a particular domain (perhaps even their own).

These templates are balanced starting characters for *Dark Ages: Vampire*. Players can use them as inspiration for their own Scion characters, while Storytellers can use the templates as ready-made contacts, allies, or antagonists for their stories.



# BARBARIAN CHIEFTAIN

*Quote:* Your word may be law in your manor, but this is my land. Watch your tongue, if you want to keep it.

**Prelude:** Your life was a hard one, but no more so than your death. You fought and struggled as your ancestors did, went on raids with the other men of your village, and returned with spoils. You learned to fish, to hunt, and most of all to fight, in order to survive. You also learned to respect the authority of your elders, enforced with a strong backhand.

It was while hunting that you first discovered what it felt like to be hunted instead. You fled and the hunter pursued you. You turned to fight and he overcame you as easily as you might have dealt with a child. Then you were his. He later told you that he respected you more than any other prey he had hunted in quite some time, which was why, when he'd slaked his thirst from you, he gave back some of what he took from you, and brought you into his tribe.

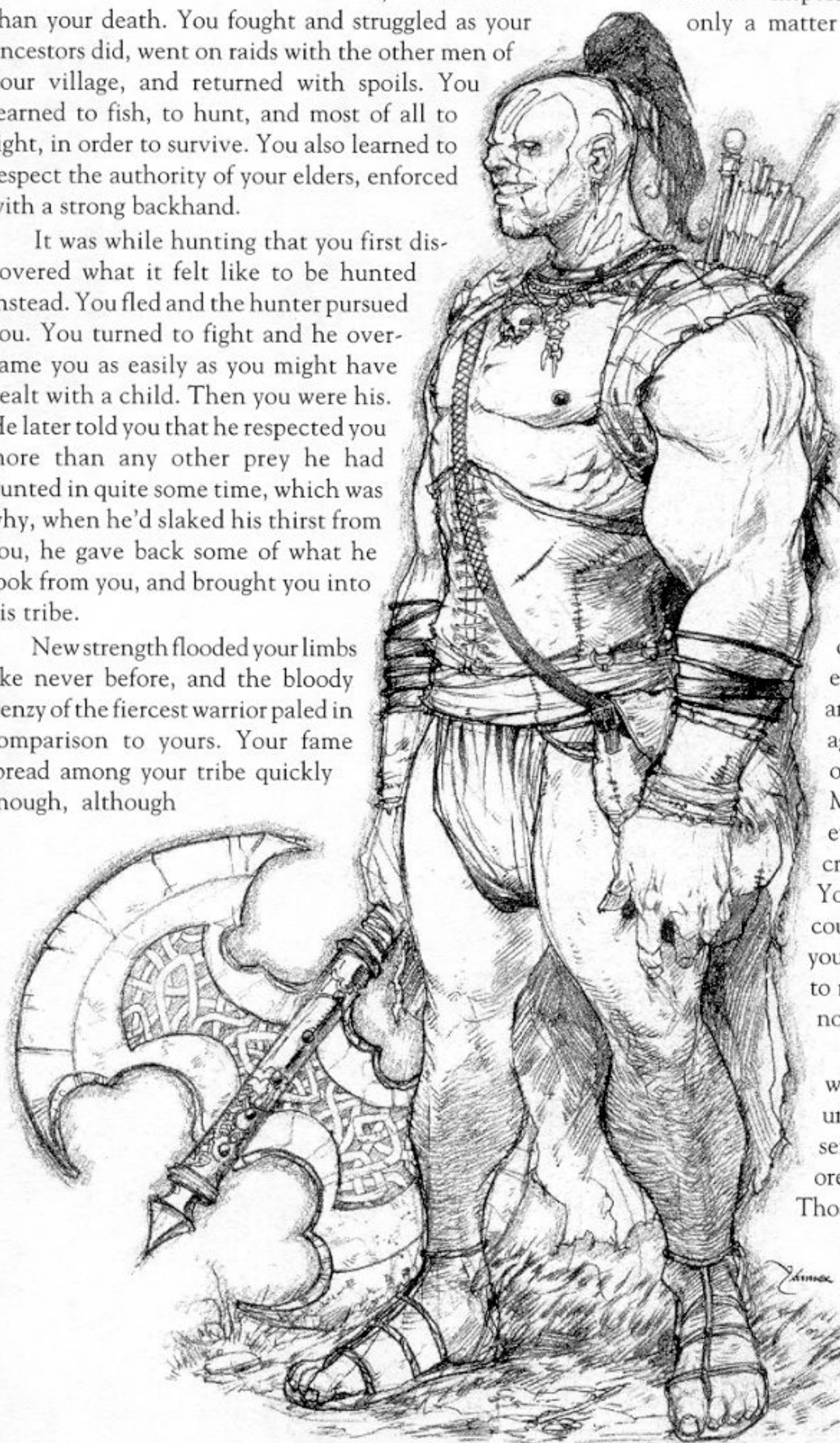
New strength flooded your limbs like never before, and the bloody frenzy of the fiercest warrior paled in comparison to yours. Your fame spread among your tribe quickly enough, although

there were whispers about what you had become. It was only a matter of time before the old chieftain became afraid of you and tried to kill you, but he sorely underestimated your strength, and your kinship with beasts; his last mistake. You displayed his head on a pole as a reminder of what would happen to anyone else who made the same error. Now the warriors of your house grow strong on the drink you give them and your raids more successful. You will be a great chief, so long as you remain strong.

**Concept:** You see to the needs of your village and your people, ensuring that they will be strong and prosperous. You've encouraged more raiding and helped to ensure that your warriors outmatch any others. Few mortals can stand against you, but you know there are others of your kind in the world. Many of them are powerful lords and even kings (or advisors to kings), and crossing them could be dangerous. You doubt that these lords have the courage to face you in your home, but you might travel to meet them first, just to make sure they don't entertain the notion of invading your lands.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You rule with an iron hand, but you treat those under your rule fairly. Those who serve you well and bravely are honored and rewarded with your favor. Those who defy or seek to betray you rarely live long enough to regret their mistakes.

**Equipment:** Battleaxe, light armor, bearskin cloak.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Nature: Barbarian Generation: 12th  
 Player: \_\_\_\_\_ Demeanor: Autocrat Concept: Barbarian Chieftain  
 Chronicle: \_\_\_\_\_ Clan: Gangrel 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	●○○○○○○○	Domain	●●●○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Fortitude	●●○○○○○○	Herd	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○
Protean	●○○○○○○○	Influence	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●●
	○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●●○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits	Road Kings	Health
○○○○○○○○		Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○		Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○	●●●●●○○○	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○	Aura: Command (0)	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○		Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○	Willpower	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○	●●●●●○○○	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
○○○○○○○○	Blood Pool	Weakness
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○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	when frenzy
		Experience



# COURTLY LADY

*Quote:* Your attentions flatter me, good sir. Perhaps we could meet later tonight, that you might recite another poem for me?

**Prelude:** Nobility is a strange thing. You never quite understood what it meant to be noble — members of your father's court and even your family taught you only how to be beautiful. And oh, how word of your beauty spread. Your father and brothers fairly had to fight off suitors, but one in particular would not be stopped. He always arrived after dark — most improper — but something in his eyes captured you. Here, finally, was something whose beauty (and therefore worthiness) matched your own, and you agreed to meet him in secret.

Before long you were meeting on a regular basis, listening to his stories of far-off lands and how the Holy Land looked almost peaceful at night. This continued for nearly a year, and then one day while riding a rock flew up and struck your face. The cut it made was barely noticeable, but your secret companion seemed horrified that anything might mar your beauty. He then offered to make your beauty everlasting, if you would only consent.

Once again, you didn't know exactly what you were in for, but you felt you could refuse him nothing. And so he led you into his world.

**Concept:** A woman on the Path of Chivalry, you embody the notion of the courtly lady; chaste, beautiful, and willing to sponsor brave knights who undertake quests in your name. Other Scions might underestimate you, but your confidence and subtle manipulation can carry you just as far as their dominance and command does them.

You miss your sire, away on Crusade, and sometimes consider undertaking a quest of your own to follow him. After all, so many other gender roles are different in the world of Cainites — why should you sit in a room while others do your work for you?

**Roleplaying Hints:** While you were still very much an innocent young lady after your Embrace, you're learning quickly that "innocence" is a fine front, but a poor reality. Other Cainites are evil and dishonest, and only Paladins and possibly the Faithful may truly be trusted. However, that does not exempt you from your duties as a Scion. Perhaps you might lead by example, or even sponsor neonates as well as mortal knights, if in so doing

you might spread the beauty of courtly love to the nocturnal world. You are uncomfortable around unattractive or monstrous-looking vampires; the notions of "beauty" and "godliness" are nearly synonymous to you.

**Equipment:** Fine clothes, personal attendant, letter from sire.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Nature: Defender  
Demeanor: Gallant  
Clan: Toreador

Generation: 11th  
Concept: Courtly Lady  
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	●●○○○○○○○	Generation	●○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Celerity	●○○○○○○○○○	Mentor	●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○
Presence	●●○○○○○○○	Resources	●●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Kings (Chivalry)

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Aura: Command (1)

Willpower

●●●●○○○○○○

□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised ☐

Hurt -1 ☐

Injured -1 ☐

Wounded -2 ☐

Mauled -2 ☐

Crippled -5 ☐

Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

Enraptured by Beauty

Experience



# WEALTHY MERCHANT

*Quote:* You will find nothing like it in all Christendom! My wares come from the farthest-flung reaches of the world, and there is nothing I cannot acquire, if the price is right.

**Prelude:** A life of travel and trade was what you wanted when you left home to seek your fortune. You got far more than you bargained for. You worked on trading caravans and ships and you've seen far-off lands all along the Mediterranean, past the Straits of Gibraltar, and along the coast of Africa. You learned the trade from hard men who worked at it all their lives, and scraped together your coins for the day when you would sponsor your own ventures and make your fortune.

It was in Alexandria that you encountered her, the mysterious woman who spoke to you so sweetly that you gladly spent hours with her. She seemed fascinated by your family history, the places you'd been, and particularly your red hair. You saw her again twice more before you were supposed to leave Alexandria, but that departure never happened. Instead your tryst turned into your last moments of life as she drained the blood from your veins, then opened her own for your first taste of immortality.

Since that night you've learned a great deal, not the least of which are the benefits of diablerie, when you gave your sire a taste of what she'd given you. You broke away from the pagan teachings of her clan and returned to the business you knew well: Trade. With newfound wealth and influence, you have built a business for yourself and found others of your kind willing to pay for

the goods you have to offer. There is power in the bargain, and soon the haughty nobility will owe you a great deal indeed.

**Concept:** You do not travel quite as widely as you did in your youth, but you still must go wherever business opportunities beckon. You are a merchant of some standing and influence now, with wealth enough for many men, although not nearly enough for you. The wealth is only a part of your overall plan to acquire influence throughout the courts of Europe selling rare goods, services, and information to those able to afford your prices. Often you're willing to provide favors and give away services for free, knowing that such investments may return to you a hundred-fold, when cultivated properly.

## **Roleplaying Hints:**

You ably play whatever role the situation calls for. Normally, you're the affable merchant, able to charm noble hosts with tales of your many travels and adventures. Other times you're the stern but fair master, giving your servants their orders and keeping things running smoothly. You can be humble with the haughty and overbear the meek, as needed to further your cause. All that really matters is closing the deal and securing another success, whatever it takes.

**Equipment:** Fine clothing (suitable for the social occasion), discreetly worn dagger, purse full of coin, small trinkets.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Nature: Celebrant Generation: 9th  
 Player: \_\_\_\_\_ Demeanor: Gallant Concept: Wealthy Merchant  
 Chronicle: \_\_\_\_\_ Clan: Followers of Set 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	
Obfuscate	●●○○○○○○○	Contacts	●●●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Presence	●●○○○○○○○	Generation	●●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○
Serpentis	○○○○○○○○○	Influence	●●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○
	○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●●○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Kings ( Merchant )

●●●●●●●○○○

Aura: Command ( 0 )

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○

□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised ☐

Hurt -1 ☐

Injured -1 ☐

Wounded -2 ☐

Mauled -2 ☐

Crippled -5 ☐

Incapacitated ☐

Weakness

Double damage from sunlight

Experience



# MOTHER SUPERIOR

*Quote:* Tonight we shall hold a midnight vigil for all those slain in the Holy Land. Tomorrow, therefore, I do not wish to be disturbed.

**Prelude:** Your father despaired when you, another daughter, were born. You were told as a child that you would never marry, and would be sent off to a nunnery as soon as possible. You quietly and bitterly resigned yourself to this fate, and when the time came, you left without saying goodbye.

You were quite studious as a holy sister, and developed the skills required to keep the nunnery running smoothly from day to day. While your superiors simply saw this as good managerial skills, the truth was that you had no desire to leave the convent. Your family had consigned you to this place, and you spitefully resolved never to leave.

One night, unable to sleep, you wandered the halls and discovered a man lurking in an empty cell. You tried to scream an alarm, but unseen hands pulled you towards him. He demanded help in eluding pursuers, whom he claimed would arrive the following night and search the place with or without the sisters' consent.

You really had no choice but to help him — he obviously would have killed you otherwise — but on some level, you enjoyed the challenge of sending the sisters into the nearby towns to muster up all the young men they could to protect the convent from foreign invaders. Your strange "guest" was duly impressed, and decided that the Magisters could use a woman like you.

The Embrace was horrifying, but once it was done and your sire explained his reasons, you actually felt somewhat flattered. No one had ever *needed* you before, after all.

**Concept:** You aren't actually the mother superior, but her second-in-command. You make all the real decisions about the convent, but the rulings come from her

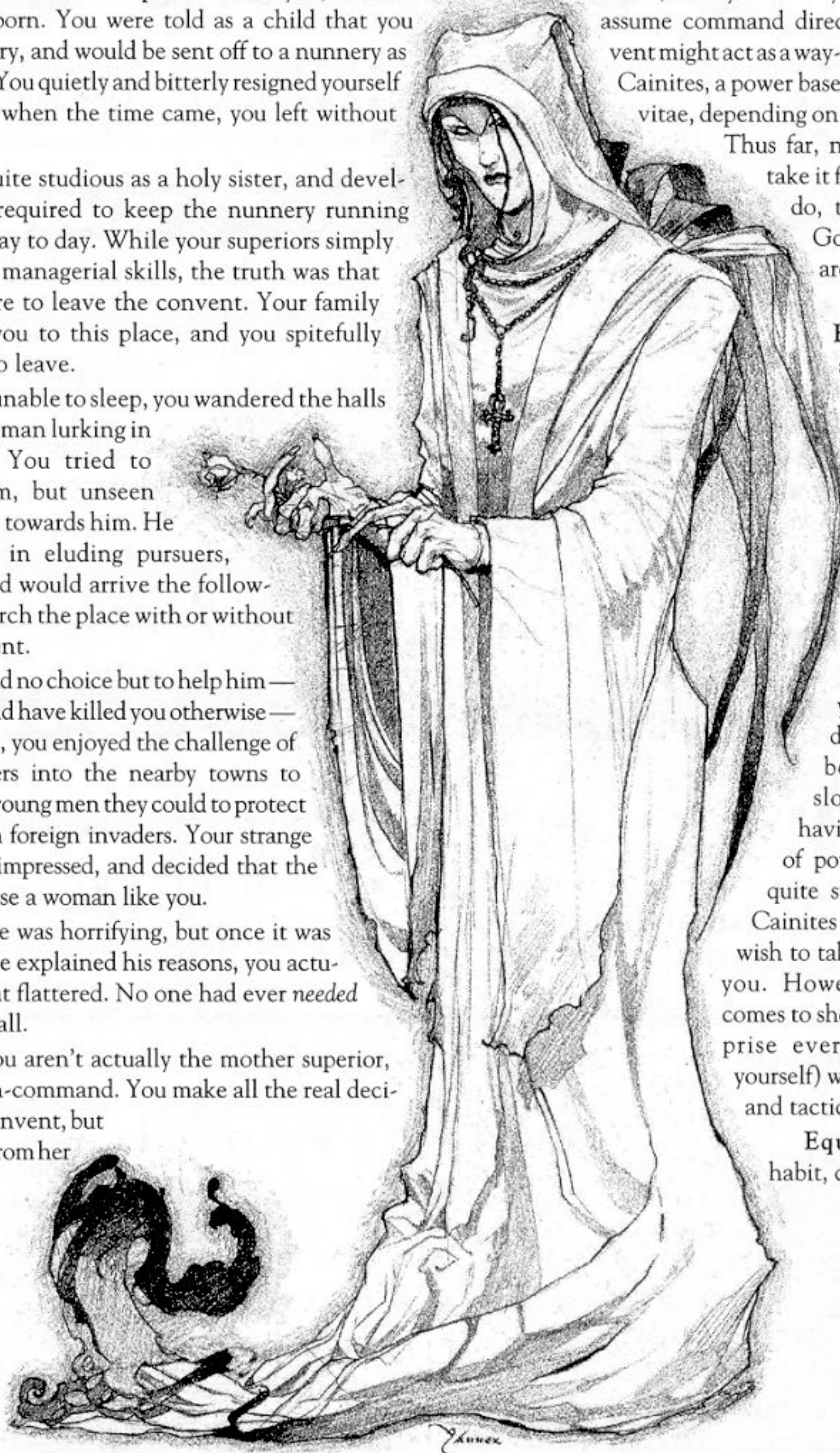
mouth, not yours — you aren't ready to assume command directly yet. Your convent might act as a way-station for traveling Cainites, a power base, or even a source of vitae, depending on your current needs.

Thus far, no one has tried to take it from you, but if they do, they will find that God and his faithful are on your side.

## Roleplaying

**Hints:** You've never stopped to decide how much faith you actually have in the Church, or even God. You knew from a young age that your life was to be spent in the clergy, and since the decision wasn't yours, what choice did you have but to believe? You are slowly adjusting to having any real measure of power, and it hasn't quite sunk in that other Cainites would quite likely wish to take that power from you. However, when push comes to shove, you might surprise everyone (including yourself) with your leadership and tactical skills.

**Equipment:** Nun's habit, crucifix.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Nature: Judge  
Demeanor: Penitent  
Clan: Lasombra

Generation: 12th  
Concept: Mother Superior  
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	●●○○○○○○○○○	Contacts	●●○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Obtenebration	●●○○○○○○○○○	Influence	●●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○○
Potence	○○○○○○○○○○○	Domain	●●○○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○○
	○○○○○○○○○○○	Status	●○○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Kings

●●●●●●●○○○

Aura: Command ( 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



# RUINED NOBLE

*Quote:* I will not be denied my destiny.

**Prelude:** Your future was ordained from the moment of your birth and you have always known that it is your destiny to rule. Born of noble blood, you were raised and taught all the things you would need to know in order to rule your lands well. You learned swordplay and strategy, how to ride, hunt, and hawk, how to behave at court before your betters, and how to deal with your inferiors. You looked forward to the day when you became lord of the manor, but until then little was denied you.

Your inheritance did nothing to settle the fire in your blood. Your lands were not sufficient for you and you wanted more, so you looked to the lands of your neighbors, and made war upon them to claim their territory as your own. You forged alliances when necessary and pressed your advantages, expanding your holdings and spreading your reputation across the kingdom.

It couldn't last. The other nobles in the lands bordering yours rose up, banded together, and took your holdings. They killed most of your family and drove out the rest. You managed to escape, but your spirit was crushed. You were preparing to fall on your sword when he found you. The knight told you he

was impressed with your ambition, but that you had overstepped your boundaries too fast. However, with his guidance, you could retake it all, and more besides.

Though it has cost you your lands, your family, and now even your soul, your ambition will not be denied. Your destiny is truly at hand.

**Concept:** A good leader in peacetime, you truly excel on the battlefield. Now that you have eternity and the powers of Caine on your side, you need allies. You see no shame in asking for help and in promising a portion of the spoils, but make no mistake: Your lands will be yours again. You do not wish to gain power by trickery and manipulation, but if that is the only way for Cainites to ascend, so be it.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You have taken to the Road of Kings with a vengeance, and wish to fully understand its mysteries in order to realize your destiny and forge your own kingdom. You feel, at times, that your sire and liege is only humoring you and has no intention of helping you reclaim your birthright, but if so, you are justified in rising up against him some night. You truly hope it does not come to that, however — in a perfect world, all would recognize their places in the feudal hierarchy as you recognize yours. You plan to make that world.

**Equipment:** Broadsword and chain armor, horse, half-finished coat of arms.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Nature: Autocrat  
Demeanor: Defender  
Clan: Ventrue

Generation: 12th  
Concept: Ruined Noble  
Haven:

## ATTRIBUTES

### Physical

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Social

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Mental

Perception ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Wits ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## ABILITIES

### Talents

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Athletics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Brawl ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intimidation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Legerdemain ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Subterfuge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Skills

Animal Ken ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Archery ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Commerce ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Etiquette ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Ride ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Knowledges

Academics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Hearth Wisdom ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Investigation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Politics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Seneschal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Theology ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## ADVANTAGES

### Disciplines

Dominate ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Fortitude ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Presence ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Backgrounds

Mentor ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Resources ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Status ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
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☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Virtues

Conscience/Conviction ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐  
Self-Control/Instinct ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐  
Courage ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐

### Other Traits

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### Road

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Kings

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Aura: Command ( 0 )

### Willpower

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Blood Pool

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Health

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

### Weakness

Feeding Restriction

Experience



# IRON MISTRESS

*Quote:* Perhaps I hadn't made myself quite clear when last I told you what the tribute would be. Or did you think I could not enforce my laws? In either case, you have failed to offer tribute, which is tantamount to treason, and you know the punishment for treason...would someone kindly stop him screaming like that?

**Prelude:** There are places where the law does not reach. Places where unclean things rule the nights as lords and masters, and neither the Church nor any far-off king can offer succor. You know, because you grew up in such a place.

The lord of your village demanded every second daughter as tribute. When the girls reached their fifteenth winter, they were turned over to his men and taken to his keep. No one in the village knew what happened when they got there, but they were never seen again. Once, you asked what happened if a family refused. No one answered, but the oldest crossed themselves and muttered something about "old Yuri." You didn't bother asking again.

When your fifteenth winter came around, you decided you would be damned before you'd submit to some fearful lord you'd never seen. You were one of five girls collected that night, but you smuggled several knives along with you. You had to browbeat the girls into helping, but with your leadership, you slew the man who drove the coach and set off towards the keep. The other girls wanted to flee. You wanted to see the lord for yourself and end his grip of fear.

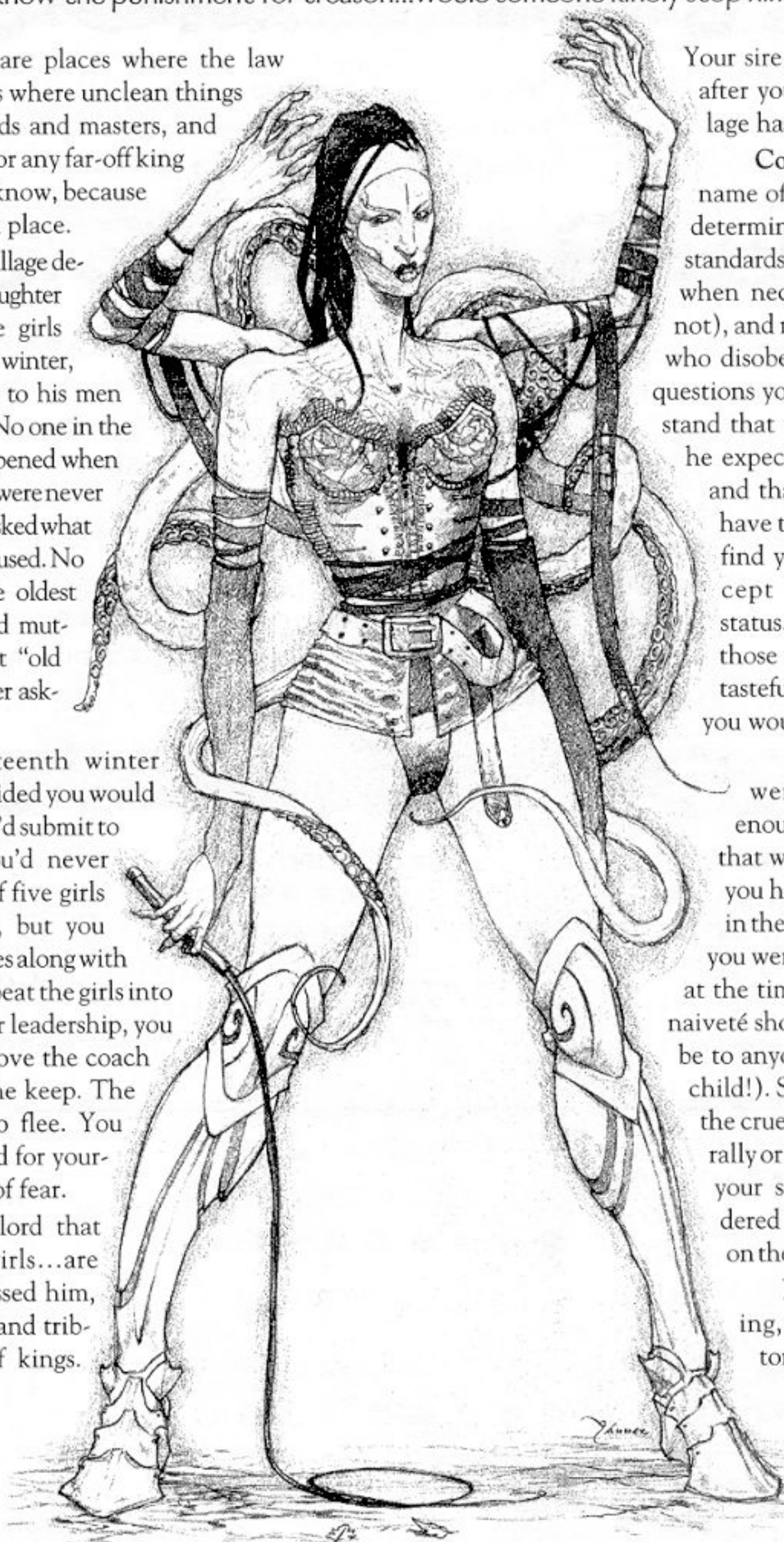
You found the lord that night. The other girls...are gone. But you impressed him, and now you understand tribute and the right of kings.

Your sire sunk into torpor shortly after your Embrace, and the village has a new mistress now.

**Concept:** You rule in the name of your torpid sire, and are determined to measure up to his standards. That means you are cruel when necessary (and often when not), and make examples of anyone who disobeys, tries to flee, or even questions your authority. You understand that when your sire awakens, he expects to take his land back, and that means you may either have to fight him, move on and find your own territory, or accept second-in-command status. You aren't sure which of those choices is the most distasteful. Perhaps if you had allies, you would be better prepared.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You were simply a girl with enough will to fight back, and that will has not abated. While you have gained much wisdom in the years since your Embrace, you were little more than a child at the time, and occasionally that naiveté shows through (though woe be to anyone who treats you like a child!). Sometimes, you wonder if the cruelty you exert comes naturally or if it came with the vitae of your sire, but then, you murdered the coachman so easily on the night of your Embrace....

**Equipment:** Fine clothing, sword, ghouls, torture devices.





# Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Nature: Autocrat  
Demeanor: Monster  
Clan: Tzimisce

Generation: 11th  
Concept: Iron Mistress  
Haven:

## ATTRIBUTES

### Physical

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Social

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Mental

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## ABILITIES

### Talents

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Brawl ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Intimidation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Legerdemain ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Skills

Animal Ken ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Archery ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Commerce ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Etiquette ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Ride ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Knowledges

Academics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Hearth Wisdom ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Linguistics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Occult ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Seneschal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Theology ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## ADVANTAGES

### Disciplines

Animalism ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Auspex ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Vicissitude ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Backgrounds

Domain ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Herd ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Influence ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Retainers ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Virtues

Conscience/Conviction ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐  
Self-Control/Instinct ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐  
Courage ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐

### Other Traits

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
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### Road

#### Kings ( Tyrant )

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Aura: Command ( 0 )

### Willpower

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Blood Pool

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### Health

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

### Weakness

Must sleep in native earth

### Experience



## NOTEWORTHY SCIONS

Every Scion is a leader to some degree. Some are brutal tyrants, some secretive counselors, but all consider themselves worthy of being looked to for guidance. However, they also respect those more advanced on the road than they are, and the greatest Scions in Europe are the subjects of beautiful ballads...and midnight plots. Although there are numerous Scions throughout Europe worthy of the name, some are particularly active in the affairs of the modern nights and in the War of Princes, of interest to Storytellers and players alike. Players might consider these characters as possible overlords whose interests they might represent, or perhaps rivals to their own concerns.

### MITHRAS, LORD OF LONDON

4th generation Ventrue, childe of Veddartha

**Nature:** Innovator

**Demeanor:** Autocrat

**Embrace:** 1258 BC

**Apparent Age:** mid-20s

Once, before even the first stones of Rome were laid, the man now called Mithras was a soldier in the army of a king whose name and lands have been long since forgotten. He was sent into the mountains to root out a rebellion against his lord. The rebels had clever leadership, so it took many days of tense and bloody fighting before Mithras could overcome them and return with the

heads of the rebel leaders — all save one, who escaped in the confusion.

That night, following a victory celebration, Mithras received a visitor — the rebel leader who escaped. Although he tried, Mithras could neither move nor cry out, paralyzed by the stranger's mere presence. But the rebel leader was not vengeful, merely intrigued by the skill and cunning with which Mithras overcame his forces. The rebels were nothing but pawns meant to be sacrificed, but Mithras was something more. So the stranger offered him a choice: Immortality and great power or a quick and painless death then and there. For Mithras, there was no real choice.

Mithras remained with his mentor for a few years, learning more about his new existence. Then he and some companions returned to one of the outlying cities of the kingdom Mithras once served. It was a small matter to convince the simple people there that they hosted gods. Soon there were temples honoring Mithras and his fellows and sacrifices readily offered to them. Mithras helped to conquer his former homeland, then extend its power as the centuries passed by.

Eventually, Mithras' kingdom was conquered in turn by a greater power, an empire to the west. Its soldiers impressed Mithras, disciplined and well-trained, with the finest weapons and clever generals. These Romans, Mithras decided, were definitely of interest to him. Mithras followed the soldiers back to their great city of the seven hills. Ever the soldier and leader of soldiers, he spread his worship through the ranks. Soon temples to Mithras could be found throughout the empire. He never lacked for followers to do his bidding or sacrifices to slake his thirst.

Mithras was most interested in the happenings on the frontiers of the empire, not in the decadent life in Rome, so he traveled far and wide in the company of Roman soldiers, eventually coming to a chilly isle at the edge of the known world. The Romans fought to conquer it, but the inhabitants of the isle resisted them. Mithras advised his soldiers and played out the battles like vast and complex games. There were few other vampires to challenge Mithras, which was as he preferred it. In time the Britons were subdued and Roman rule secured.

The Roman Empire fell in time, as all empires do. Its soldiers left Britain and Mithras lost interest in their doings and the petty battles of the warlords and tribes left in their wake. He tired of the world and sank deep into the earth to rest.

Centuries later, he was awakened by the sounds of battle, when foreigners came to the land and conquered it in AD 1066. Mithras took an interest in these Norman conquerors and their new kingdoms. He spent some time observing them before deciding to exert his influence once more. Finding that his cult had long since





died out, he reestablished it, only to have his first new temple destroyed by priests who worshipped another dead and resurrected god, backed by other lords of Mithras' kind. Here was a true challenge for one of his power and skill.

So Mithras worked subtly, recreating his cult of mortal followers, and learning all that he could of the new Cainite lords of Britain. He immediately saw potential in the childer of these lords and princes, who chafed at the idea of eternal servitude with no chance for advancement. He forged alliances with many of these Cainites, and began setting the princes of Britain against each other. It took well over a century, but the time seemed to pass quickly for Mithras, engrossed in his new conquest. Eventually, he destroyed the last of the princes who opposed him and claimed control of the whole of England, with London as the seat of his power.

Although he paused for a time to consolidate his gains, Mithras grew restless and has turned his eyes toward new challenges. First, he seeks control over the whole of "his" island, so he has begun extending his influence north into Scotland, encountering resistance from the Lupines as well as the local Cainite lords.

The other matters that have begun to concern Mithras involve young upstarts in his own realm, mostly from the Low Clans, and the presence of a Tremere chantry in his realm. Although he would never admit it (even to himself), the tales of how the Tremere gained their power chill Mithras to the bone, and he sometimes has nightmares of being sacrificed and consumed by his followers, like the sacred bull in his cult's rituals.

## ETIENNE OF POITOU

5th generation Toreador, childe of Nicholas the Younger

**Nature:** Gallant

**Demeanor:** Conniver

**Embrace:** AD 1098

**Apparent Age:** Late teens

King Etienne of Poitou is an anomaly in a number of ways. He is the only male ruler of the Courts of Love (besides the Ventrue Prince of Paris, Geoffrey). He is young, Embraced at the tender age of 17. Quite aside from leading an unlife of daring adventure, like a chivalrous knight, he excels at poetry and wordplay. On the whole, he was considered amusing and ultimately not worthy of consideration...until he framed and deposed Queen Esclarmonde the Black.

Esclarmonde, once the Queen of Toulouse and a vassal of Salianna of France, was suddenly discovered to be consorting with Lasombra Cainites from the Sea of Shadows in order to increase her own holdings. Specifically, Lucita of Aragon was discovered on her lands



and, according to the evidence Etienne produced, the young Magister was heard to be mustering Cainite forces to take domain from the vampires of Iberia, allowing Esclarmonde to break from the Courts of Love and become a power unto herself. The evidence was spurious, but Etienne presented it to the court in Paris with such unparalleled skill and eloquence that then-prince Alexander sent for Esclarmonde, so that she could answer the charges herself. However, the Queen of Toulouse sent only a messenger (reportedly out of fear of assassination) and she was summarily banned from the Courts of Love.

Esclarmonde continues to resist, but Etienne is patient. His true goals remain to be seen, however. His lands lie far enough from Esclarmonde's that he doesn't stand to gain much, even in the event of her destruction. Salianna would likely choose a new Queen in any event, rather than grant further lands and power to Etienne, simply in the interest of maintaining balance. Some Cainite observers note that Etienne receives visitors from nearby Bordeaux (a fief of Mithras) and wonder if the move against Esclarmonde might not have been the opening gambit in a far greater maneuver, one that might wreak untold havoc on the Courts of Love....

For his part, the young King remains in Poitiers and plays the role of the Toreador arts patron, protecting the pilgrim routes, patiently waiting for his plans to come to fruition. Among the chivalrous Cainites of the Courts of Love, Etienne may well be a truly dangerous Scion.





## LORD JÜRGEN

6th generation Ventrue, childe of Hardestadt

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 989

Apparent Age: mid-30s

The daring and clever Lord Jürgen is one of the rising stars of the courts of Europe, a Scion to be watched — and feared — in the coming years.

Of noble birth, Jürgen took to his station naturally, with a burning ambition to achieve greatness. His sharp intellect, forceful presence, and dashing good looks combined to make Jürgen a man to be reckoned with. Once he came into his inheritance, he quickly set about expanding his power by making war on his neighbors and rival lords with a will.

Most expected the young upstart would be crushed, but to their surprise, Jürgen not only scored many victories, but showed considerable savvy in adding new lands to his own and gaining the support of his new subjects. He proved as cunning in court as on the battlefield, sealing alliances that allowed him to pursue his enemies without having to worry about guarding his back. With each victory, Jürgen sought a greater challenge and his reputation grew, until he drew the attention of Hardestadt, lord of quite a different domain in the Holy Roman Empire.

Lord Hardestadt arranged to meet this daring Lord Jürgen, and eventually revealed his true nature to him and

told him of the Cainite courts of Europe. Rather than frightening him, the prospects of immortality and conquest on such a grand scale inflamed Jürgen's ambitions to new heights. He wanted the power and opportunities that Hardestadt told him of, and he told the Ventrue magistrate this. Hardestadt was pleased and granted Lord Jürgen the Embrace, taking him as his protégé. Jürgen proved an apt pupil and a very useful vassal, helping expand the borders of Hardestadt's vast domain.

In time, Jürgen grew restive, and his sire recognized that his protégé's ambitions could not be leashed forever. So Hardestadt granted Jürgen a small domain of his own and the right to expand it, in exchange for further oaths of fealty and service from his childe, of course. This at last was the opportunity Jürgen had waited for, to test himself against opponents worthy of his mettle. He struggled for many years on the harsh eastern borders of the Holy Roman Empire, taking territory for himself and carving out a domain. With the western Empire firmly in the grip of Hardestadt and various other Ventrue lords, Jürgen had no choice but to look further east for his conquests.

He moved his court to Magdeburg on the river Elbe, an almost direct challenge to the Tzimisce lords of Transylvania and Hungary. He extended his influence over the order of the Teutonic Knights growing in Germany. They were ideal tools for conquest, particularly if they could be directed toward the lands of Jürgen's enemies, to weaken them and sow confusion, allowing him to conquer. He forged alliances with the western courts of Ventrue and Toreador in support of his goals. In a matter of years, he was ready.

Jürgen's forays into Hungary gained him territory, but he met stiff resistance from the Tzimisce lord Vladimir Rustovich. The battle between the two vampire lords eventually resulted in Jürgen's retreat from the border of Rustovich's territory and the creation of a buffer region between the two domains under the nominal control of the Obertus order. Outright military conquest would not secure Lord Jürgen a new domain. But the Swordbearer is not easily denied, and he is as cunning at court as he is on the battlefield. He has continued to work on means to weaken Rustovich's position among the *voivodes*. All it will take is for one of Rustovich's allies to turn on him — then Jürgen can move in for the kill.

## LUCITA OF ARAGON

7th generation Lasombra, childe of Ambrosio Luis Monçada

Lucita was born the daughter of King Alfonse II of Aragon and grew up a spoiled child of privilege and wealth. She hated the duties and responsibilities that her family heaped upon her and wanted nothing more than her independence. She frequently ran away from home or crept out on her own, forcing her father's men to track her down and retrieve her.





Her father was driven to distraction dealing with his spirited and hot-tempered daughter, and he sent her to confession regularly in hopes that it would teach her some responsibility and decorum. It might have, if Lucita's confessor had been anyone other than Ambrosio Luis Monçada, a priest of the Lasombra clan. Monçada immediately found himself drawn to Lucita, to her great beauty, and to her fierce and independent spirit. Lucita found a confidant in Monçada, who did not scold her as her father would have hoped. Monçada convinced his bishop that the Lasombra could greatly benefit from one such as Lucita, and he was given permission to Embrace her.

Monçada had not reckoned with Lucita's defiant nature, however. In time, she chafed under his benevolent guidance as much as she had done under that of her father. Monçada gives Lucita as much freedom as he dares, fearing to lose his beloved childe, but it is never quite enough for her. Her strength and ambition have made her a force to be reckoned with in her clan, but many (including Monçada) feel it's best that Lucita not spend too much time at the court in Aragon.

Instead, Lucita serves her sire as a diplomat and envoy to foreign courts, carrying the goodwill and greetings of the Lasombra while gathering information and garnering allies among the other courts of Europe. It is an existence well suited to her, although Lucita often wishes she was free to travel where she wants, not forced to go where her elders bid her. She sometimes travels in the company of a Malkavian monk named Anatole, who serves as her spiritual counselor and true confessor (more than Monçada ever was).

As part of her duties, Lucita has also studied the arts of warfare, which she always wanted to learn as a child, but which were denied her by her father. She's proven a very capable student, earning the praise of war-masters from her clan. Although she's not as strong or powerfully built as a man, she more than makes up for it in quickness and skill. She can evade the attacks of stronger (and clumsier) opponents long enough to dispatch them, particularly with her Lasombra command over shadows to cloak her presence and make it even more difficult to strike at her.

7th generation Lasombra, childe of Ambrosio Luis Monçada  
Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: AD 1190

Apparent Age: late teens/early 20s

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 1, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Investigation 2, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Melee 2, Occult 1, Performance 2, Politics 2, Ride 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Dominate 1, Fortitude 1, Obtenebration 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 3, Mentor 3, Resources 5  
Road: Kings 6

Conviction: 3, Self-Control: 3, Courage: 4, Willpower: 5

## WULFGAR THE REAVER

5th generation Gangrel, childe of Vola the Red

Wulfgar's life was so long ago and so brief (compared to his time as a vampire) that he has all but forgotten it. He was born and raised in a village in Iceland, where he was a sailor and a warrior. While on a raid, he encountered the strange wild woman who attacked him and then, perhaps recognizing some potential in Wulfgar, or simply out of spite, Embraced him. Wulfgar rose with the blood of the Damned on his lips, and he thirsted for more.

For many years he existed like a beast, the subject of more than a few local legends and the cause of several disappearances along lonely roads and the outskirts of villages late at night. Although his life and upbringing hadn't shown it, Wulfgar was a bright and clever man, and never gave himself over entirely to the Beast. Living like an animal wasn't enough for him. He was a man, and he wanted more from his existence.

So he took to traveling by night, resting beneath the earth during the day. He met others of his kind and learned from them. He eventually learned more about the roads, and that he could choose his path. The Road of the Beast was not the only way. Wulfgar set out to learn more about





this, which he did from some of the Gangrel chieftains in the northlands, who permitted the traveler to rest in their halls. Wulfgar was inspired by their example, and forsook the Road of the Beast to take up the Road of Kings.

Returning to Iceland, Wulfgar found a sufficiently isolated village and conquered it using a combination of his force of will and his supernatural abilities. He made himself the village's protector as well as its chief, and in time some warriors came to serve him gladly in exchange for the vitae he fed them to make them strong. Their blood fury was great enough to overcome any foe who would try to raid them, and it made them feared and respected. The villagers worshipped and honored Wulfgar, and he was content.

Wulfgar has ruled his village for well over four centuries; so long that no one can recall a time when Wulfgar did not rule there. He Embraces rarely, since he prefers to limit the number of his childer, although he has created progeny over the years. Some of them still serve their sire, while others have gone off on their own or met Final Death. Rather than Embracing, Wulfgar prefers to create ghouls of his most promising warriors, giving them great strength and savagery without making them into potential rivals.

Although he has ruled longer than many Cainite lords, Wulfgar is of only passing interest to the princes and lords of Europe. His homeland is far from the events of the War of Princes, which is just as Wulfgar prefers it. Still, he has begun to grow restive with the current state of affairs at home and is considering taking some men and traveling for a time, leaving his childer in charge in his absence. It would be good to see how the world has changed since he last traveled and he thinks it would do his childer good to get a taste of responsibility.

5th generation Gangrel, childe of Vola the Red

**Nature:** Tyrant

**Demeanor:** Autocrat

**Embrace:** AD 457

**Apparent Age:** mid-30s

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 1, Alertness 3, Animal Ken 4, Archery 1, Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Etiquette 1, Hearth Wisdom 3, Herbalism 2, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Law 2, Leadership 4, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Politics 2, Ride 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 5

**Disciplines:** Animalism 5, Auspex 3, Fortitude 5, Potence 5, Presence 3, Protean 6

**Backgrounds:** Allies 1, Domain 4, Herd 4, Influence 2, Resources 5, Retainers 5, Status 4

**Road:** Kings 5

**Conviction:** 3, **Self-Control:** 3, **Courage:** 5, **Willpower:** 7



# ROAD OF KINGS™

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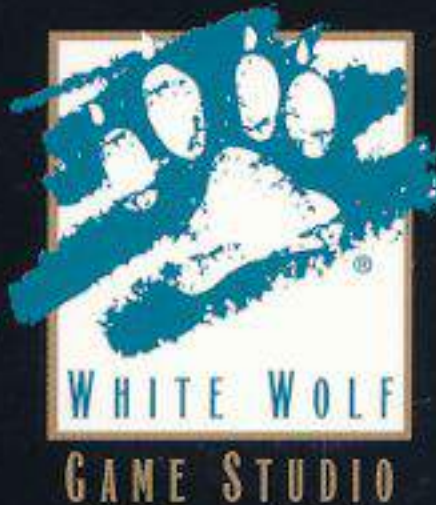
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