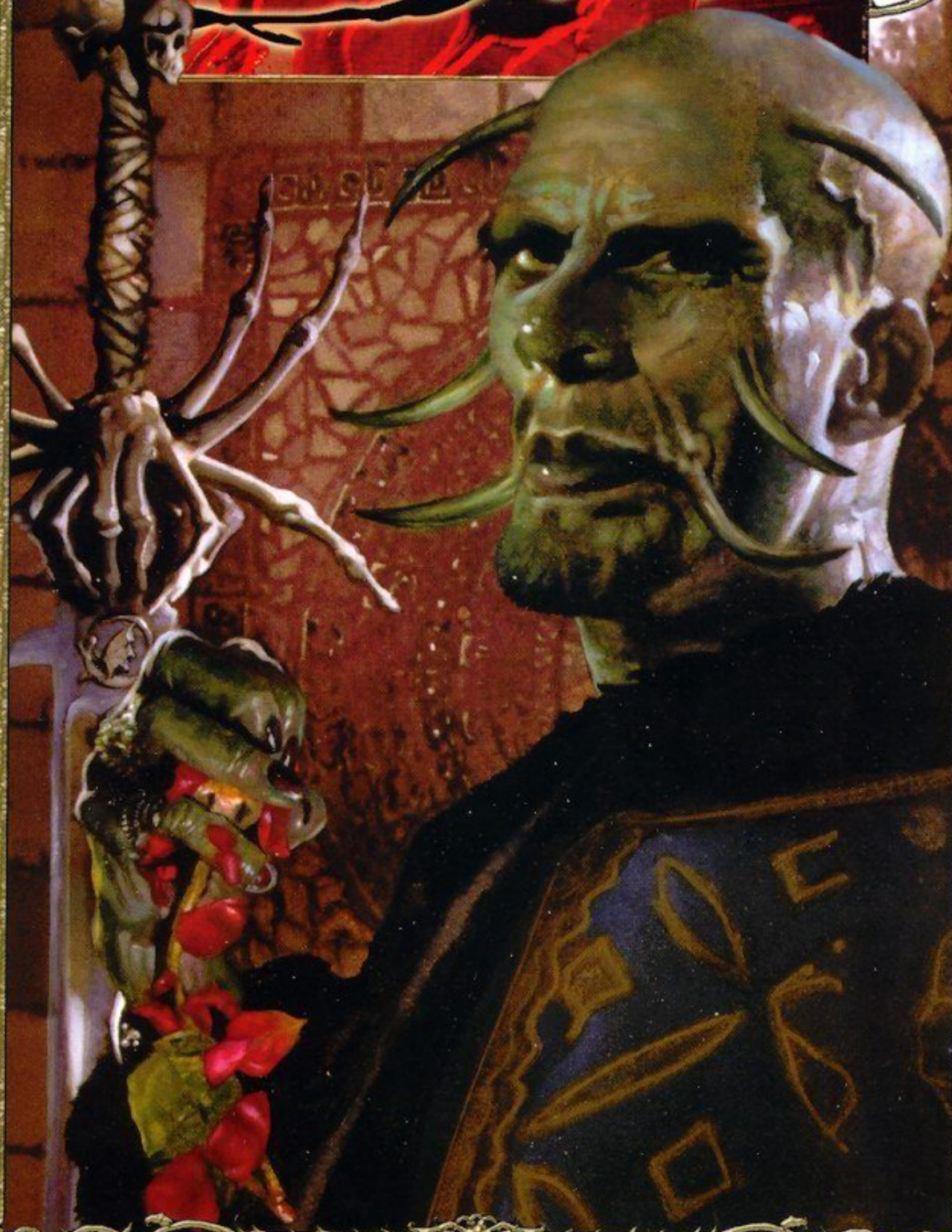


ROAD OF SIN



A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRE™



By Myranda Kalis

Vampire created by Mark Rein•Hagen

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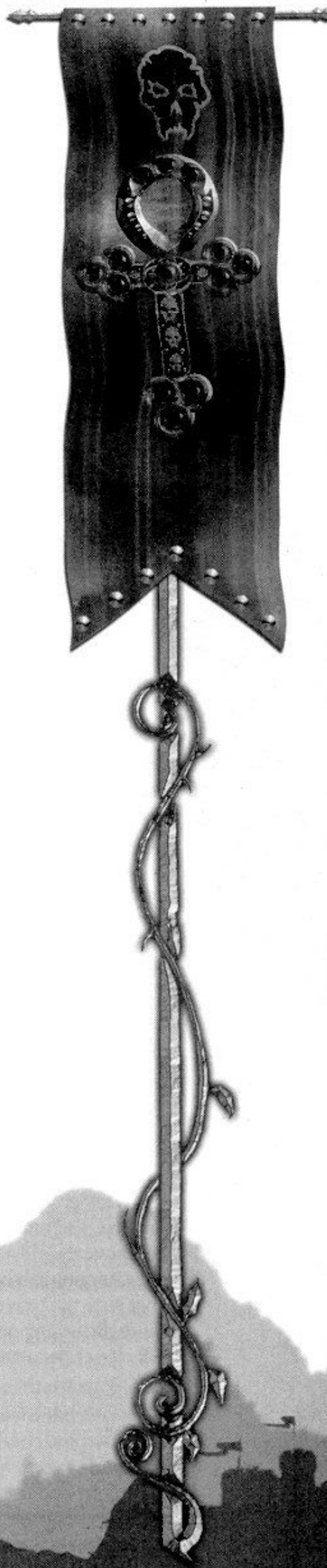

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PRELUDE: EARTHLY PLEASURES

In Constantinople, the revenants of the Szantovich family are a legend — a dark legend of seduction and depravity whispered of by chaste and flesh-denying Obertus monks. The stories about them truly did grow in the telling, until, in the imaginations of the Obertus, nearly every Szantovich in existence was either a dewy nymph with breasts like ripe pomegranates and an insatiable lust for virgins to defile or a comely youth, slender as a cypress and lithe as a eunuch harem dancer, likely just as sensually ravenous as his sister.

The first Szantovich that I ever met was an ancient of that breed, tall and unbent by age but withered to a nearly fleshless husk, deliberately sculpted to suggest the penitential thinness of a man so devoted to God that he subsists solely on bread and scripture. He was Father Petru, overseer of a monastery that had long been a retreat for the powerful and debauched among my clan. Velya, my longtime correspondent, worldly and wise, drew Father Petru's cloister of many pleasures to my attention and introduced me to my mentor, Ilias cel Frumos, at whose behest I actually sought it out.

Ilias cel Frumos holds no set territory. He is a Shaper, one of those wandering *koldun* who travels the homeland, following the spirit-tides of destiny. By his own admission, he is an unapologetic devotee of Jarilo, a god of *eros*, of pleasure and passion, a lover in a time when warriors garner far more respect among our clanmates. We met for the first time in a forest

sanctuary to the god, early in the spring, during the feast-night honoring His return with the rains. More Cainites and mortals were present than I had thought to see, singing among the trees, laying their offerings at the base of Ilias' carved throne of wood and stone and bone, which he did not occupy. He was down among his followers, dancing to the music of flute and tambour around a bonfire burning juniper and rowan, glorious in his ecstasy. His coppery hair, woven with a crown of flowers, shone in the firelight as he approached us, his gleaming skin only a shade paler than the short tunic he wore, and I was struck dumb by his magnificence, by the fierce passion that rose from him like flame itself. Never before had I seen eyes so full of *vitality* belonging to one of our kind, reflecting such pure and unfettered joy in existence. He greeted Velya with a teasing smile, a jest and a kinsman's kiss.

And then, he turned his attention to me.

My grandsire Gesu was considered an unliving saint among Cainites. Even so, I do not believe that I ever stood in the presence of something truly divine before that night. Ilias cel Frumos smiled gently upon me and spoke my name in greeting, and at that moment, everything but he and I ceased to exist. He took my hand and drew me to his throne, where we sat and spoke deep into the night as though there was no one else present. He coaxed words from me that I never through I would speak to another being, and he spoke to me of the way he followed and the passion and pleasure it could give me would I but give my soul to its keeping.

Pleasure and passion lie at the core of the task he gave to me, before sending me to the gates of Father Petru's monastery. I am not unacquainted with the pleasures of the flesh, and physical comfort is in no way abhorrent to me for spiritual reasons. By that same token, neither have I existed in a state where indulgence of my every fleshly whim has been an option open to me. Symeon, childe-in-spirit to Antonius the Gaul, childe-in-fact to Gesu, found no objection to relative comfort but frowned on self-indulgence, believing it to weaken the mind and corrupt the soul.

I cannot say that, even then, I agreed with that view. Now that Symeon is deeply engaged in diplomacy and politics, I find myself with both the leisure time and the freedom to engage in pursuits he would never tolerate were I more closely supervised.

On the surface, Father Petru's monastery is similar to many other such places. On the surface, all of the proprieties are observed and honored, with the standard vows of silence and poverty and acts of compassion and Christian charity to the community that huddles in its shadow. It is passing odd that most of the brothers are fairly young, but considering the more disturbing oddities abroad in the night, that is a decidedly lesser peculiarity.

Beneath that surface, however...

The Szantovich are the masters of every sensuous art ever imagined and condemned as a mortal sin. Daughters and sons alike are raised to regard the ways of the flesh as their birthright and are instructed from childhood to hone their natural talents and appetites. Father Petru's house is one of the places they come to learn both the theory and the practice of

pleasure, exercising their craft on each other and on those select mortal and immortal patrons who know of the cloister's true nature. They are among the most skilled purveyors of sensuality in the world, capable of making even dead flesh sing beneath their touch.

The upper halls of the monastery are entirely normal. No visitor uninitiated in its secrets would ever think it is not precisely what it appears to be. The lower halls, however, are another matter entirely. Burrowed deep into the hill on which the monastery sits, these chambers contain a level of luxury rarely seen anywhere in the East, even in the strongholds of the highest nobles. As Father Petru led me through the chambers to view what his establishment had to offer, I was struck by it. Even my sire's haven in rich and decadent Constantinople was less generously embellished than this place.

The air in every chamber was warmed and scented by braziers burning exotic woods and other fragrant essences and lit with candles of beeswax or lamps fueled by perfumed oils, covered in shades of colored glass or painted vellum. Nearly every surface was richly decorated: Wooden and ivory panels lined the walls, carved in scenes of revelry explicit and abstract; the ceilings were painted with erotic frescoes; friezes of gods and their lovers ran in bands across the walls; and statues hid in nooks shadowed for love play.

In one room, the floor was covered ankle deep in mounds of the finest furs and contained a boy clad in nothing but his own exquisite hair, a night-dark waterfall strategically arranged to conceal more than it revealed as he reclined amid a king's ransom in lynx and ermine. In another chamber, draperies of translucent silk and lamps shielded in green and golden glass created the illusion of a sunny forest glade, the warm light gracing the oiled brown skin of a boy who must have been purchased in the marketplace of some Egyptian city. His voice was sweet as a flute, and his undulating dance revealed the fact that he had been cut quite expertly.

Father Petru invited me to touch and sample wherever I desired before making my final choice, and I admit that I did — it was a banquet for every sense, and having denied those senses for so long, I found the opportunity to gratify them at last intoxicating. I peered through carved wooden screens behind which other patrons had already retired for the evening's revelry, indulging in the vicarious pleasures of the voyeur. In one such room, I watched as a beautiful youth, strapped into a wooden frame and aroused to tumescence, was taken by a half-dozen of his fellows as his Cainite patron knelt beneath him and lapped away the blood that flowed down his thighs. In another, I was beckoned to enter by a Cainite partaking of the blood of not one, but three comely vessels, drugged beyond the possibility of resistance as he played with their flesh using hooks and needles of bone and copper. I lent him my assistance for a time and was rewarded with a draught of thick, sweet *vitalis* for my efforts, a draught that lightened my head and lingered on my tongue long after I moved on.

I found my companion for the evening in one of the smaller rooms off a rear corridor, where the less-favored brothers displayed themselves. When I first saw him, I did not entirely understand why he was not among the showpieces, for he was the most beautiful thing I had yet seen. Then, it occurred to me.

In the outer chambers, none of the youths displaying their charms were more than 14 years of age, at most. This enchanting creature was no boy, no apparently virginal innocent ripe for the defiling. He was at least the age that I was at the time of my Embrace, tall and slender, long of limbs and finely made.

He rested all-but-naked in a nest of embroidered cushions and soft, patterned rugs, amusing himself while he waited for someone to come who would recognize his worth. I stood at the door of his chamber, the heavy curtain closing it off from the hall held in one hand, and watched him for a long moment before letting the curtain fall at my back, indicating my choice.

The object of my attention ignored me but for a single glance — an elegant inclination of the head and neck as he turned his eyes on me, a slight arch of back and hips, as he stretched to his full length before me. His eyes, I could not help but notice, were green, a deep forest green flecked with brown and rimmed by outrageously long lashes, unembellished by any cosmetic artifice. His hair was a cascade of wheat-golden curls spread across a deep crimson cushion, caught here and there with delicate ornaments of beaten gold and garnets or twisted silver wire set with freshwater pearls. Bands of worked metal and three different shades of amber ringed his arms and fingers, ankles and throat, gracing his nudity rather than obstructing it, catching the light of the single lamp dangling overhead as one slender hand moved rhythmically between his milk-white thighs. The air was thick with the scent of roses and cinnamon and the tang of sweat and musk.

It was all I could do not to fall on him at once. A part of me demanded to know why I was even hesitating. Another murmured that I should exercise patience and sample this delight in as many ways as I could. It pleased me, at that moment, to wait and watch him as he finished, his back arching slightly, slim hips rolling, a soft, contented sound escaping his perfect mouth. He skimmed his fingertips through the results of his exertions, cloudy droplets clinging to pale curls, and licked them clean, offering me a hand scented with the perfume of his own body. I accepted it and let him draw me down into the mass of pillows and coverlets.

We regarded each other for a long moment, his eyes meeting mine without any trace of fear or modesty, and I admit that it was strangely refreshing to have someone look upon me without dread or reverence or envy or hate. The expression in his eyes was, in fact, oddly warm, almost wistful. His gaze trailed over me, taking in the quality of my garments, lingering here and there as his head tilted, feline-curious. I examined him in return, reaffirming my initial assessment. Mature beauty, well kept and fair as moonlight on water, but not flawless — two deep scars grooved the insides of his thighs, and several more peeked through the metal encircling his wrists. Somehow, those marks, those imperfections, threw the extraordinary loveliness of the whole into much sharper relief, the way a headless, armless statue will often seem more impressive for the things that it lacks.

He reached out and caressed my cheek, and I allowed him the liberty. Silently encouraged, he continued on, undoing the clasps and ties of my clothing, casting aside garments

until I was even more naked than he, without even a scrap of jewelry to hide behind. I felt the Beast roil within me, discomfited — I have never enjoyed exposing myself completely, even in the act of love, and I felt myself tensing involuntarily. My bedmate sensed it and moved at once to soothe me. From beneath a cushion, he drew a length of carmine silk, stroking it slowly back and forth across my loins before draping it across my lap. I felt a low sound, halfway between a purr and a growl, welling in my throat, and I allowed it the air necessary to take form.

He smiled, a flash of sharp white teeth, and rose above me, reaching up to lower the lamp flame and to retrieve a blown-glass bottle from a nook in the corner. He straddled my hips as he returned, writhing his own slightly as he did so, showing me his renewed desire, aroused even by my cool flesh. The sweet scent of roses wound even more intensely around us as he worked the bottle open and poured a stream of oil down the center of my chest.

He had the most skillful hands I have ever experienced. I still cannot adequately explain, even to myself, how he coaxed my body to respond the way it did. He wrung sensations from me that I thought I would never feel again, that I thought I had left behind with life and breath. I was lost from the instant his oil-slicked palms stroked over my skin, drawing a moan from my throat and a cry from my Beast, and I surrendered myself to the moment, to him and my desire for him. His teeth and tongue nipped teasingly at my throat and collarbones, his thumbs languorously caressed my nipples, and I allowed them to harden, luxuriating in the sensation. The scent of the rose water in which he bathed clung to his hair, mixed with the tang of blood as a sharp edge on one of his bracelets cut into his wrist. The way he caressed my manhood — I permitted the blood to flush into it, whimpered aloud as he took me in. The taste of him, as it spread across my tongue like a thick, salty wine, spilling heat into me as I held him down, his legs tightening around my waist, pulling me in deeper.

His bracelets, biting into my hands as I held his wrists down, and the expression in his eyes, darkened, drowsy, as he looked up at me, blood spilling across his throat and down his chest, as he spoke to me, for the first and last time. My reason returned to me, and I stopped to consider what I should do next. I could feel the unsteady fluttering of his heart against my own breast, and I knew that if I stopped now, he would be weakened for several days, but with the stronger constitution of a revenant, he would eventually recover. I could have him again, could attempt to recreate, in greater detail, this experience. Another part of me regarded this experience as already perfect in many ways, that I should end it deliberately and savor the vividness of that ending. That prospect decided me. He died as we lay still entangled, the last of his life and passion and unashamed sensuality passing from him into me. It remains one of the most intense sensations I have ever felt, and as of this night, I have never met its equal. I do not know if I ever shall.

But this does not mean that I will not continue searching for it.





CHAPTER ONE: ON HUNGER AND ITS SATISFACTION

[Socrates] said that there was one only good, namely knowledge;
and one only evil, ignorance.

— Diogenes Laërtius

Gnothi se auton. "Know thyself."

These words were carved in stone above the entrance to the sanctuary of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. They are simple words, uncomplicated and direct, the concept that they embody foundational to much of philosophy. Know thyself, and be complete. Know thyself, and be whole.

It is a sad, but true, fact of our existence that few Cainites possess the mental strength and spiritual fortitude necessary to pursue true self-knowledge. Indeed, some among our kind *never* look within themselves for the things they need to be complete. Instead, they spend eternity looking outward, defining themselves solely by the wealth they accumulate, the pawns they play, the minions they dominate, never realizing that all their material possessions are valueless because they do not even know *why* they desire ownership of them in the first place. Some of our kind prefer to spend eternity on their knees, mewling for mercy from a God who has turned His face from them, pursuing a path of relentless self-abnegation in the hopes that penitence will purchase forgiveness. Some prefer to reject all of the "traps" of civilization, cultivating only the parts of themselves that are brutal and primitive, neglecting all of the finer qualities of their minds and souls. Some do not even progress that far, choosing to adhere to an insanely idealized version of their former state, clinging to a moral ideal that does not allow for personal evolution at all, only for ultimate devolution and self-destruction.

It takes more courage than most Cainites possess to say, even to oneself, that there is more to existence than merely surviving it. There is more to existence than ruling or being ruled, than fearing God, than clinging to the past, than running with the beasts. To become complete in oneself, one must be willing to walk many paths, to pursue many experiences, to indulge desires perverse and sublime, to learn the shape of one's own soul and to flinch away from nothing one finds within oneself.

Despite the myriad possibilities that unlife offers, only one way allows a Cainite to pursue such a goal, and I have only just stepped fully upon it.

I am Myca Vykos, childe of Symeon, childe of Gesu, childe of he who is called the Dracon, childe of the Eldest, and I am also, finally and completely, a child of Sin. As I write these words, the sounds of the revel taking place in the garden outside reach me, a celebration honoring my choice, my acceptance, my second rebirth. This night, I have taken the last of my own innocence, and I feel the freedom of that change in every drop of blood, in every inch of flesh.

My mentor and lover rests at my side. I know that he does not sleep, for our kind need no sleep beyond the torpid daylight hours, but he is content to lie still against me, his golden-red-haired head resting on my belly, one elegant hand still cupping me, listening as I write. He knows it is my custom to record my thoughts while the sensation, the wonderment, the admiration he arouses within me is still hot. He knows I take inspiration in his passion as well as his wisdom. On this night of all nights — my first celebration of the rites of spring, my true initiation into the ways of Sin — I must record my insights while the understanding still pulses within me like a second heart. For I know now, for I fully appreciate for the first time, *why* I came to this road and why so many others before me have come.

We Cainites are creatures of stasis. We remain the same, unchanging, year after year. Oh, we may change our outward appearance in some small way — or in some great way, as many of the Shaper's blood are wont to do — but that is merely the surface, insubstantial, hollow, a change not of content, but of form. Beneath our elegant and predatory exteriors, we cower in fear of ourselves, in disgust and self-loathing, and deny those parts of ourselves that we cannot bear to admit belong to us in the most primal of all ways, our darkest hungers, our deepest wants. The Beast. We dread and hate it, we bind it with chains of self-denial, and we reject it with all our wills, we deny it, we *deny ourselves*, and in the end, all our denials avail us nothing, for the Beast can never be cast away, never be truly refused entry. It is us, and we are it. By denying it, we strengthen it, we give it the power to control and consume us. It is the ultimate self-defeating vicious circle. We bring upon ourselves the thing that we most fear, the absolute destruction of self, because of the parts of ourselves we cannot bear to face, to claim.

Only a few among our kind reject this folly, a few children of Caine who look unflinching upon the darkness within themselves and embrace it where others quail and flee. We have never been many, we children of Sin, but then, those who choose truth and self-knowledge and freedom have always been the lonely voices of reason. And now, I am one of them.

I will not make the mistakes that my progenitors have made.

I will not choose fear or ignorance.

I will not cower in terror of myself, of who and what I am.

I will not hate myself, nor reject myself.

I am Myca Vykos, and one night, the world shall know me for what I truly am.

The History of the Road of Sin

Where did it all begin? There are as many answers to that question as there are Cainites in this world. I have studied our history, have delved as deeply as I can into the shared past of our kind, and yet, I cannot answer that question, not completely.

In principle, the Road of Sin has existed since the first of our kind, the Dark Father himself, shook his fist in the face of Heaven and rejected the right of the One who had cast him out to judge him. At that moment, when Caine spoke the words — “Of what should I repent? For what beg forgiveness?” — was the first spark of the road lit. The Dark Father spoke those words, but it seems that he himself did not yet fully comprehend all that they could mean. It was only after he vanished from among our kind, after the destruction of Enoch, that the first glimmerings of what could be came into shape.

Very little of genuine historical worth has been handed down to us from the time of the Second City. Indeed, the writings of many elders who could personally recall that time, or whose sires could recall it, are notably terse with regard to the city and what happened within — and, ultimately, to — it. The most extensive records of that time were, of course, until recently under the protection of the Keeper of the Faith, the guardian of the great Library of the Forgotten in Constantinople, who, along with her apprentices, scribed the memoir left behind by her sire, the Dracon.

THE SECOND CITY LAY UPON A RIVER PLAIN, A PLACE OF LUSH GREENERY, OF GOOD SOIL AND FRESH WATER, OF FORESTS IN WHICH TO HUNT AND FIELDS IN WHICH TO PLANT GRAIN. THE CHILDREN OF SETH BUILT SETTLEMENTS THERE OF MUD BRICK AND MILLED STONE, AND THOSE SETTLEMENTS ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THE LOST AND SCATTERED CHILDREN OF CAINE, WHO CAME TOGETHER IN THOSE PLACES TO REBUILD WHAT THEIR FOOLISHNESS HAD COST THEM ONCE. THE GREATEST OF THOSE SETTLEMENTS WAS CHOSEN TO BECOME THE SECOND CRADLE OF CAINITE CIVILIZATION, A CITY WHOSE NAME HAS LONG BEEN FORGOTTEN — AND THAT I WILL NOT SPEAK, EVEN TO YOU, MY WISEST CHILDE.

I DO NOT KNOW WHICH OF THE ANCIENTS, THE BROODMATES OF MY SIRE, FIRST CHOSE THAT PLACE, BUT BY THE TIME I CAME TO IT, [VENTRUE] HELD THE REINS OF RULERSHIP AND HAQIM THE STAFF OF THE LAWGIVER. THE CITY HAD ALREADY SEEN MUCH IN THE WAY OF STRIFE: COMPETITION WAS RIFE

AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ALL THE CLANS, FOR WEALTH, FOR STATUS, FOR PRIDE, FOR VENGEANCE, FOR AMUSEMENT. AND THERE WERE SUBTLER INFLUENCES AT WORK, AS WELL. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE CHILDREN OF CAINE CANNOT INNOVATE, BUT ONLY STEAL THE INSPIRATIONS OF OTHERS. THOSE WHO SAY THIS NEVER WITNESSED THE FEVERISH PACE OF INVENTION WITHIN THE SECOND CITY AMONG OUR KIND.

IN ENOCH, IT HAS BEEN SAID, CAINE RULED HIS KIND AS A CHIEFTAIN RULED HIS TRIBE - STRAIGHTLY, NARROWLY AND WITH AN IRON HAND. HE LIMITED BOTH THE NUMBERS OF HIS CHILDREN AND THEIR INDULGENCES. HE SET LIMITS, AND THE PUNISHMENT FOR TRANSGRESSING THOSE LIMITS WAS THE FINAL DEATH. NO SUCH LIMITS EXISTED IN THE SECOND CITY, AND IT WAS AS THOUGH A THOUSAND THOUSAND YEARS OF PENT UP CHANCE HAD ERUPTED ALL AT ONCE, HAD SPILLED FORTH LIKE A SECOND DELUGE.

BETWEEN THE WALLS OF EVERY PALACE, NEW EXPERIENCES WERE BEING SOUGHT, BEING CONCOCTED, BEING REFINED. SOME OF THESE WERE SUBLIME (I CAN STILL RECALL THE SWEET ACHE IN MY THROAT AND THE BURN OF THE TEARS THAT STUNG MY EYES WHEN FIRST I HEARD THE SONGS SUNG IN GREETING TO THE NIGHT IN THE GREAT TEMPLE OF THE DARK MOTHER), AND OTHERS STILL WERE PERVERSE (I SHALL NEVER FEEL SENSATIONS AS DENSELY TANGLED AS THOSE I EXPERIENCED IN THE PLEASURE-HOUSES OF THAT CITY AND REGRET THAT KNOWLEDGE AS I REGRET LITTLE ELSE IN THIS WORLD). THE REFINED AND THE EARTHY, THE MATERIAL AND THE SPIRITUAL, BLENDED THEMSELVES TOGETHER IN UNPREDICTABLE FASHION IN NEARLY EVERY CORNER OF THE CITY, AND IT WAS A BANQUET FOR THE SATIATION OF EVERY IMMORTAL DESIRE.

TRYING TO STEM THE CHAOS THAT FLOWED THROUGH THE STREETS, TO EXERT THE CONTROL OF LAW AND MORALITY AND CONSCIENCE UPON IT, WAS OFTEN AS FUTILE AS TRYING TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF A RIVER WITH A SINGLE STONE.

Other writings have confirmed this state of affairs within the Second City — the rebellion, as it were, of the third and fourth generations against the lingering memory of Caine's rigidly authoritarian rulership. Fear of the Dark Father's vengeance seemed quite absent in no small number of surviving documents, in which the enumeration of vices, crimes and cruelties sometimes seem to be considered badges of honor. Somewhere in the Second City during this time, the seeds that would become the Road of Sin were first planted, but it would take some time before they would find fertile enough ground in which they could grow successfully. The Second City, never too stable in its society to begin with, fell, brought down by enemies from without and social stresses from within. One by one, the Ancients and

their eldest childer abandoned its shattered glories, scattering to the four corners of the Earth.

The Cainite diaspora sent refugees washing up upon every shore in creation, and for millennia thereafter, Cainite society existed in self-contained pockets, battered to the cities of the children of Seth for survival. Human civilizations rose and fell, aided or hindered by the hidden hands and agendas of elder Cainites, who preyed upon them for sustenance and amusement. Sometime before the birth of Christ, a mortal was Embraced from among the peoples of old Phoenicia, in an ancient and powerful city by the sea.

His name was Tanitbaal-Sahar, and two things drove him — the hunger to learn and the desire to understand. To learn everything that could possibly be worth learning, to dig into unlife with both hands, to crack the bones of existence and suck the marrow from them. To understand the world, to understand his people and, most importantly, to understand himself. He left the city of his birth and Embrace with his sire's blessing and traveled from one end of the known world to the other, endlessly searching, endlessly hungering, seeking the answers to questions that had plagued his soul since before he had become a Cainite. What is the true nature of humanity? What, precisely, is the nature of evil? How can we be true to ourselves in all ways, when denial of what we are is so much a part of both human and Cainite nature? Who and what are we in the end? A Brujah, he was by no means easy to satisfy in his quest for answers, and he sought congress with learned mortals and vampires alike, searching for a deeper understanding of the Cainite condition everywhere he went.

After nearly 300 years of wandering, both alone and with companions he had met along the way, he settled in the great city of Carthage, where his clan claimed to rule a utopia in which Cainite and mortal dwelt and worked side-by-side as brothers. Tanitbaal-Sahar's writings, those few that survive, are notably silent on his opinion of "utopian" Carthage. It is said that he withdrew into seclusion for some time after arriving in Carthage, and even his closest confidants believed that he was sleeping the sleep of the ages, wearied after his long journey. They were wrong. He was not sleeping, nor was he wearied. He was feverishly writing, and soon, he began sending those writings forth, to his friends, to his teachers, to other learned scholars, for he was deep in the throes of the creation of the foundation of his most ambitious undertaking and his greatest work.

What Tanitbaal-Sahar did, locked in his haven in Carthage, was nothing more or less than to create a new road, the codification of a thousand scattered philosophies into a single, coherent entity, the rock to which countless spiritually dissatisfied and disenfranchised Cainites could lash their souls and seek both self-knowledge and inner peace. His efforts attracted the attention of other scholars of Cainite nature, of philosophers and rulers and of the priests of other roads, and eventually, one of them invited Sahar to visit his court as an honored guest. This individual was Titus Venturus Camillus, the Prince of Rome, whom the Warlords remember by the name Camilla. It was in Rome that Tanitbaal-Sahar found the last pieces of the intellectual puzzle he was assembling, the answers to the last of his questions, and he wrote in a frenzy of passion the greatest of his works. A treatise. A polemic. The philosophical heart and the ethical soul of a road. The treatise

was entitled *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction*, and the road that it espoused was called the *Via Desideratio*, the Road of Desire.

As with many things, the Road of Desire began small and, initially, expanded slowly. Tanitbaal-Sahar, Camilla and their small circle of fellow spiritual seekers were, in those nights, the core of the road, philosopher-teachers and students of the way all at once.

From the commentaries of Titus Venturus Camillus (Camilla):

Sahar was uncharacteristically conservative in the beginning. When the rest of us were afire with passionate enthusiasm, he played caution's advocate and advised us to proceed carefully. He did not lack confidence in the way he espoused, nor did he wish us to refrain from speaking of it to others, but he wished to avoid a battle that we could not yet win. There had already been conflict between myself and the followers of my former road, the *Via Regalis*, who had openly accused me of any number of crimes, the most common of which was treachery — though, given that I ruled and they did not, the precise nature of who that "treason" was committed against remained somewhat vague. The Scions, both among my own clan and the Magisters, were whetting their knives, and we all knew it.

I wish, to this night, that we had acted more vigorously, more openly and much sooner.

The *Via Desideratio* began attracting adherents from the clans represented in Rome — which is to say, nearly all of them. Once it was brought into the open by the fiery oration of Camilla the Ventrue and the deliciously evocative poetry of Aconia Messalina the Lasombra, it spread like wildfire among the ranks of the high-blooded Cainites dissatisfied with the hypocrisies and limitations of the *Via Regalis*, the most popular road among the elite of Roman Cainite society. Tanitbaal-Sahar himself turned his attention to the oft-neglected "lesser" Cainites of Rome, bringing to them a message of solace and empowerment, an ethic that rejected the intrinsically greater "worth" of the high-blooded and better born. His Nosferatu disciple, Servius Marius Pustula, spread the teachings of the road among his clan, who took to its ways with startling enthusiasm, as did the Malkavian Drusilla Euphemia. Its more refined form spread across the sea to Carthage, where primitive variants based on the original drafts of *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* had been practiced for some years.

Tanitbaal-Sahar himself, it appears, did not survive to see the most explosive era of growth for the road that he had codified. Shortly before the outbreak of Rome's third and final war with Carthage, he received a summons from his sire, then dwelling in the great city of Tyre, a summons he did not feel he could ignore or reject. He departed Rome in the company of several ghoulish bodyguard-companions, with the express intention of returning when his business in Tyre was done. That much is clear from the commentaries of several of his partisans, including those of his lover, Camilla. Tanitbaal-Sahar did not return. He did not, in fact, ever reach Tyre. His ship disappeared, leaving behind not even wreckage, and none of those he left behind ever truly learned what fate befell him. In grief and rage, Camilla triggered the "battle" that Tanitbaal-Sahar had

feared the fledgling *Via Desideratio* could not survive, and in the end, he won it.

Much has been said in the histories penned by various Magisters and Warlords that the "decadence" that destroyed the Roman Empire was fostered primarily by Toreador hedonists and Malkavian lunatics, but the truth of the matter is, typically, somewhat more complex. During the waning years of the Republic and the golden years of the Roman Empire, three roads vied for supremacy among the Cainites of the Eternal City, the *Via Regalis*, the oldest of the three, and the *Via Desideratio* and the *Via Caeli*, two "upstart" philosophies of relatively new codification. The struggle between them did its part to bring down the arrogant and grasping Empire as it spiraled deeper into corruption — corruption that originated, in truth, in the collapse of mortal Roman culture, which itself mirrored the degradation of the Cainites of the Empire, as such things inevitably do.

The *Via Desideratio* and its adherents tested themselves against the followers of the *Via Regalis* and, for the most part, emerged victorious. The Scions were rigid in their arrogance, their assumption of natural superiority, their attempts to control what had escaped their grasp — the hearts and minds and souls of their fellow Cainites. The children of Kings and the children of Desire have, since that time, been natural foes, separated by mutual contempt. It was, however, against the *Via Caeli* and its adherents that the *Via Desideratio* met their most venomous and persistent enemies. The Faithful vampires of the *Via Caeli* were even more insufferable in their self-righteousness than the Scions and, in the end, twice as potent. The adherents of the *Via Regalis* and the *Via Desideratio* shared a bond of mutual contempt and competition, but between the children of Desire and the children of Heaven there existed not only personal animus, but an utterly irreconcilable philosophical gulf — one that placed the children of Heaven on the side of "right" and "virtue" and the children of Desire on the side of "wrong" and "evil." The Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as his personal faith in the waning days of the Empire, a decision that his successors transformed into an official religious mandate, and the *Via Caeli* waxed in power over both the *Via Regalis* and the *Via Desideratio*. The Faithful actively persecuted the adherents of the *Via Desideratio*, calling their road by its modern name for the first time — the *Via Peccati*, the Road of Sin — and branding its adherents with the epithet by which they are known even tonight.

Camilla, in the long years since the loss of Tanitbaal-Sahar, had grown weary and lapsed into the sleep of ages. The remaining original adherents of the *Via Desideratio* abandoned Rome for more congenial climes, many of them fleeing east to the newly emergent power of Byzantium and, from there, to other destinations. Some traveled to the far-flung outposts of the rapidly unraveling Empire to seek safety and an audience for their efforts. It was them, and their childer and grandchilder, who preserved the memory of the *Via Desideratio* and kept its true legacy alive in the world, at least among their own followers. To Cainite society at large, the *Via Desideratio* was the *Via Peccati*, a road favored by the morally degenerate and ethically bankrupt, its practitioners vigorously condemned and persecuted by the followers of the *Via Caeli*.

DRUSILLA EUPHEMIA, THE ENIGMA

Drusilla Euphemia is the least well-known of all the disciples of Tanithaal-Sahar. In fact, when I first began studying the history of the road, it took me some time to realize that she was the fourth follower. She often goes unnamed in Sinner texts, even in the letters passed among her own closest friends and among their most favored students. Drusilla Euphemia, the quiet one, the Mad-woman that Tanithaal-Sahar took to his heart as his adopted child. It is almost as though someone has systematically attempted to completely excise her memory from Sinner history.

It is apparent, from reading the compiled correspondence of the first Sinners, that the interaction among them was sweet and intense. They all orbited Sahar, were all drawn to him; they all loved him, and he returned their love. His own surviving letters make it clear that he did not think he could have accomplished all that he did without them, that he would have been nothing without the friends and lovers who walked the night at his side. They set each other free. They made each other more than they could have been alone. It is in Sahar's letters that most mentions of Drusilla Euphemia occur. He clearly regarded her as his own daughter, as beloved to him as Camilla, though in a different way. Other mentions of her are few

and far between, and she is often not referred to by name at all. Similarly, no legend appends to her regarding her fate after the splintering of the first Sinners, no myth about where she sleeps, no mention of her final destruction.

I found the matter curious and questioned Ilias regarding it. He initially refused to speak of it at all. Wearing him down took some effort, for he was clearly reluctant to discuss the issue, though he eventually told me what he knew. Drusilla Euphemia was, like all of her kind, utterly mad, though some say her madness took a relatively mild form. She was wholly devoted to the care of her loved ones, and she gave all of herself to them and their efforts, asking nothing for herself. The loss of Sahar wounded all of the first Sinners deeply, though none so deeply as Drusilla Euphemia, whose mind and soul shattered without the focus of her existence to make her complete. Some Sinners whisper that her grief took her somewhere beyond madness, down dark ways where even her demented kind feared to walk, to seek vengeance against the murderers of the one being who had ever loved her without reservation. None know the whole truth of the matter — or if they do know it, none choose to speak of it. Drusilla Euphemia remains a mystery.

The Ethics of the Road

The moral philosophy of the Road of Sin is almost deceptively simple, given to none of the laborious over-complications of ethics and Cainite nature that plague so many other roads. In fact, it views those strenuous attempts to elaborate on the true nature of Cainite existence (The chosen of God! The condemned by God! The natural rulers of all we survey!) to be unnecessary and ultimately self-destructive. Cainite nature is, in the end, a simple thing rendered needlessly obtuse by over-thinking and frantic attempts at self-justification.

Nothing is Truly Forbidden

SOME WILL SAY TO YOU THAT ADHERENCE TO EXTERNAL LAW, THAT THE MAINTENANCE OF ORDER, THAT KNOWING ONE'S PLACE IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS AND KEEPING TO IT, IS THE HIGHEST OF ALL POSSIBLE GOODS, THE GREATEST MORAL VICTORY THAT ONE CAN ACHIEVE IN EXISTENCE. THIS IS A VILE AND SOUL-KILLING LIE, A DECEPTION PRACTICED BY THE POWERFUL AND VENAL TO CREATE A RACE OF SLAVES — SLAVES VENERATING THE DOMINUS WHO WIELDS THE WHIP THAT BREAKS THEIR WILLS, CALLING HIM THEIR GUIDE AND GUARDIAN, THEIR PROTECTOR. THOSE WHO OFFER UP THE AUTHORITY OF LAW AND TRADITION PROTECT NOTHING BUT THEIR OWN COMFORT, GUIDE NOTHING BUT THE WEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF OTHERS INTO THEIR OWN POSSESSION AND STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES ON THE ANGUISH AND MISERY OF THOSE WHO LOOK TO THEM FOR LEADERSHIP.

YOU MUST REJECT THIS MADNESS. YOU MUST REJECT THE RIGHT OF ANOTHER TO RULE YOUR WILL. YOU MUST REJECT THE RIGHT OF ANOTHER TO DEFINE YOUR NATURE, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTHS OF YOUR OWN SOUL. YOU MUST REJECT THE RIGHT OF THE SLAVE-MASTER TO LAY HIS LASH ACROSS YOUR SHOULDERS AND EXPECT YOU TO GROVEL AT HIS FEET AND BEG FORGIVENESS FOR YOUR QUESTIONING. NO ONE IN THE WHOLE OF THIS WORLD IS BORN OR CREATED WITH THE RIGHT TO COMMAND YOUR WILL BUT YOU. NO ONE IN THE WHOLE OF THIS WORLD HAS THE RIGHT TO BIND YOUR SOUL OR ENSLAVE YOUR MIND. NO ONE IN THE WHOLE OF THIS WORLD HAS THE RIGHT TO DENY YOU THE THINGS YOU NEED TO MAKE YOURSELF COMPLETE. ALL OF THE LAWS AND THE TRADITIONS THEY USE TO JUSTIFY THEIR CLAIMS ARE HOLLOW AND WITHOUT MERIT AT THE CORE, FOR THEY ONLY SUPPORT THE GOALS OF THOSE WHO CAN BEST ABUSE THEM.

YOU ARE FREE. YOU WERE BORN TO BE NO MAN OR CAINITE'S SLAVE. REACH OUT, AND CLAIM YOUR FREEDOM. CAST OFF THE CHAINS THAT BIND YOU, THE CHAINS OF FEAR, THE CHAINS OF IGNORANCE, THE SHACKLES OF LAW, THE FETTERS OF TRADITION. YOU BELONG ONLY TO YOURSELF. YOUR SOUL AND MIND ARE YOURS TO UNDERSTAND AND NURTURE, FREE FROM THE HINDRANCE OF OTHERS. THIS WORLD BELONGS TO YOU, AND ITS FRUITS ARE YOURS TO CLAIM, TO SATISFY YOUR NEEDS AND YOUR DESIRES. REACH OUT, AND TAKE YOUR EXISTENCE INTO YOUR OWN HANDS.

The entire concept of "damnation" as an excuse to do precisely as one wills is a fairly recent — and, in the opinions of most Sinner scholars, degenerate — addition to the ethics of the road. Tanitbaal-Sahar himself apparently subscribed to no such foolishness, instead perceiving the natural right of all Cainites to command their own souls and destinies. The doctrine of damnation equating to freedom slunk into the philosophy of the road after the rise to power of the *Via Caeli* and its wholesale condemnation of the road and all its adherents as "evil," and it has since been widely promulgated under the reign of the Faithful's ashen priests, whose views regarding the innately sinful nature of desire are well established.

Claim the Beast, Do Not Fall to It

SOME AMONG OUR KIND PREACH THAT THE ONLY MEANS OF GRAPPLING WITH THE BEAST IS TO DENY IT UTTERLY. "MAKE A CAGE OF YOUR WILL," THEY SAY, "AND PLACE IT AROUND THE BEAST, AND LOCK IT WITH A THOUSAND LOCKS, AND RESIST IT WITH ALL YOUR EFFORT, FOR TO DO OTHERWISE WILL BRING RUIN UPON YOU."

THIS IS SIMPLISTIC AND NAÏVE, AND IT HAS DESTROYED MORE CAINITE SOULS THAN IT HAS EVER SAVED.

YOU CANNOT CAGE THE BEAST FOREVER — NO WILL IN THE WORLD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO EXERT PERPETUAL AND UNWAVERING CONTROL AT ALL TIMES. CAGES BREAK, THEIR BARS BEND, THE THING HELD WITHIN THEM RAGES WITH TWICE THE FURY OF A CREATURE THAT IS PERMITTED, AT TIMES, TO GO FREE.

IT ALSO IGNORES ONE BASIC AND UNDENIABLE FACT OF OUR NATURE. THE BEAST IS A PART OF US. IT IS NOT AN OUTSIDE INVADER. IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT OUR SIREN HAVE POURED INTO US WITH THEIR BLOOD. IT ARISES FROM WITHIN US. IT IS MADE FROM THE STUFF OF OUR OWN SOULS, OUR OWN DESIRES, OUR OWN BURIED WANTS. THE BEAST IS A PART OF US, AND LIKE MANY ANOTHER WILD THING, WITH PATIENCE AND EFFORT, IT CAN BE BOTH COMPREHENDED AND TAMED TO ONE'S WILL — BUT FIRST, YOU MUST BE WILLING TO UNDERSTAND AND SATISFY ITS DESIRES. AND THE FIRST STEP UPON THE ROAD TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR BEAST AND BENDING IT TO YOUR WILL IS THIS: THE BEAST DEMANDS NOTHING OF YOU THAT YOU, IN YOUR DEEPEST HEART OF HEARTS, DID NOT ALREADY WANT. IT CANNOT COMPEL YOU TO ACT AGAINST YOUR WILL IF YOU HAVE LOOKED UPON YOURSELF WITH CLEAR EYES AND KNOWN YOUR OWN DESIRES. THEN, IT CAN BUT ACT IN ACCORD WITH YOU.

The Road of Sin's teachings with regards to the Beast are not wholly original. The *Via Bestiae* teaches many of the same values. Both roads advocate giving free reign to the Beast at times. Both roads advocate an understanding of the predatory nature of the Cainite being as a means of maintaining sanity. Where the Roads of Beast and Sin part is in their methods of *comprehending* and *taming* the Beast. The Feral adherents of the *Via Bestiae* are just that — feral, wild.

They choose to reject those aspects of themselves that are not wholly governed by the predatory nature of the Beast. They prefer the "pure" existence that dismisses the "traps" of civilization and any lingering understanding or appreciation of one's former humanity.

Followers of the Road of Sin take the opposing tack, acknowledging the existence within the Cainite breast of extremes in moral inclination — the man and the Beast — and cultivating those parts of themselves in each extreme that allow for the fullest expression of who they truly are. The *Via Peccati* particularly studies the Beast and its nature, its wants and its desires. For in that dark place, one finds truths about oneself that make the soul complete and whole rather than ripping it into opposing pieces that can have no peace between them. In the end, a follower of the Road of Sin cannot expect to choose a comforting lie about her nature and still survive with mind and soul intact. Within each of us dwells a monster, and that monster derives from who we were and who we are and defines what we shall choose to become. Denying this is like choosing to pull a blanket over our heads in the hopes that the monster sharing the darkness with us will not notice or choose to devour us, but in the end, it always does. Denial strengthens the Beast. It does not cage it, and it certainly does not control it.

The third and fourth precepts of Sin are closely related in both theory and execution.

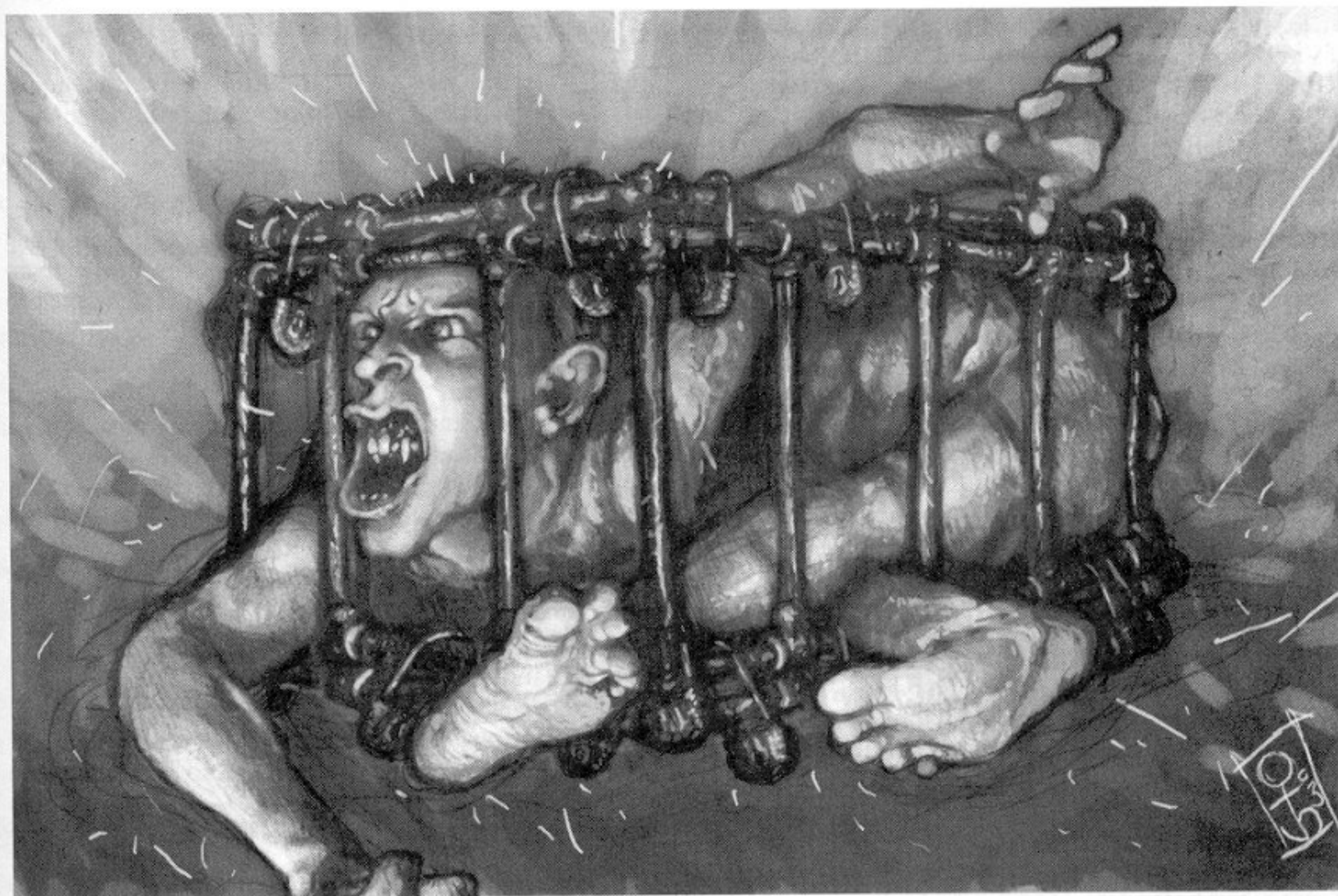
The Night Is Yours to Do with as You Will

TO ACCEPT YOUR OWN FREEDOM, IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY SAY, "I AM FREE." IN ORDER TO TRULY BELIEVE AND UNDERSTAND A THING, YOU MUST PRACTICE IT IN EVERYTHING THAT YOU SAY AND DO.

EXERCISE THE FREEDOM OF YOUR SOUL AND YOUR WILL. THE NIGHT IS YOURS. WALK INTO IT WITHOUT FEAR, WITH YOUR EYES AND MIND OPEN. LEARN THOSE THINGS THAT YOUR MIND AND HEART HAVE ALWAYS LONGED TO KNOW. EXPERIENCE THOSE THINGS THAT YOUR BODY AND SOUL HAVE ALWAYS LONGED TO TASTE, TO TOUCH. WHY SHOULD YOU NOT PURSUE THOSE THINGS? YOUR EXISTENCE IS YOURS, TO DO WITH AS YOU WILL. YOU ARE A CHILD OF DESIRE, UNASHAMED AND UNSHACKLED BY THE FEARS THAT GOVERN OTHERS, AND YOUR ONLY DUTY IS TO EXPRESS THAT TRUTH.

Act When Others Hesitate, for no Law Binds You

SOME OF OUR KIND SPEND ALL OF ETERNITY DWELLING IN A PRISON OF THEIR OWN MAKING. THEY ARE COWARDS, RULED BY FEAR — FEAR OF THEIR OWN DESIRES, FEAR OF THOSE WHO CLAIM TO RULE THEM, FEAR OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANY ACTIONS THEY MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE. THEY LOCK THEMSELVES INTO LITTLE BOXES CONSTRUCTED OF THE LIMITATIONS THEY SET UPON THEMSELVES AND WONDER WHY THEY ARE UNHAPPY.



THIS IS NOT OUR WAY, AND IT CAN NEVER BE OUR WAY. THE FLOWER OF DESIRE DOES NOT THRIVE IN A GARDEN, WALLED AND BORDERED AND PRUNED BACK FROM ITS FULLEST GROWTH, BUT IN THE FORESTS OF THE WORLD, WHERE IT GROWS FREE AND WILD.

PART AND PARCEL IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF YOUR FREEDOM IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO YOURSELF TO USE THE FREEDOM THAT YOU HAVE CLAIMED. BE FREE IN THOUGHT AND ACTION, WORD AND DEED. CLAIM THOSE THINGS THAT YOU DESIRE. SPEAK WHEN OTHERS COWER IN FEARFUL SILENCE. STAY ON YOUR FEET WHEN OTHERS KNEEL. TASTE OF ALL THE SWEETNESS AND BITTERNESS IN YOUR EXISTENCE, WELCOME ALL THE EXPERIENCES THAT COME TO YOU, FOR GOOD OR ILL, AND TAKE ALL OF THOSE ACTIONS THAT EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF YOURSELF. NOTHING WORTH HAVING CAN BE GAINED WITHOUT DANGER, WITHOUT RISK OR WITHOUT EFFORT. IF YOU CANNOT ACT FOR YOUR OWN BENEFIT, KNOW THAT THE WORLD WILL NOT ACT FOR YOU.

Tanitbaal-Sahar's teachings on the principles of freedom and action are closely intertwined, inseparably so, and these teachings have been handed down fundamentally intact through the centuries. To a Sinner, the choice of personal freedom is not a thing to which rhetorical service alone is given, but a principle that underlies one's entire

existence. One must *practice* the freedom of one's mind and spirit, or else, claiming to be free has no meaning. One must be willing to act to defend one's freedom, or else, it may be taken away. One must walk where others fear to tread, or else, one never learns anything worth knowing or does anything worth doing. One must struggle to achieve one's dreams and aspirations, to hunger unceasingly for more, or else, there is no purpose in existence.

In Your Heart Lies the Source of all Pleasure, If You Have the Courage to Seek It

WE HAVE ALL BEEN TOLD THAT OUR HEARTS AND SOULS ARE BLASTED WASTELANDS, SCOURED BY THE RAVAGES OF THE BEAST AND OUR OWN CHANGE IN STATE. SOME SAY THAT WE ARE NOT MEANT TO FEEL, THAT WE ARE NOT MEANT TO EXPERIENCE EXISTENCE AS ANYTHING BUT AN UNENDING AND HORRIFIC PUNISHMENT, THAT WE ARE CONDEMNED FOR THE SINS OUR SIRS AND WHATEVER CRIMES WE COMMITTED IN LIFE TO DESERVE OUR STATE.

AS THOUGH ETERNITY IS NOT A GIFT.

AS THOUGH WE CAN KNOW NO PASSION, NO PLEASURE, CAN FIND NOTHING TO BRING US JOY. IT IS THE CURSE OF THE ONE ABOVE AND THE DARK FATHER, THEY SAY, THAT ALL OF THE CHILDREN OF CAINE SHOULD SUFFER AN ENDLESS STRING OF TORMENTS, OF ALIENATION FROM ALL OF OUR KIND, BECAUSE A FORCE HIGHER THAN OURSELVES WILLS IT.

THAT IS NOT A CURSE. THAT IS A PROPHECY THAT FULFILLS ITSELF - THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN IT ARE TOLD THAT THEY WILL DO SUCH A THING, WHETHER THEY WISH IT OR NOT, AND LO, THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT EVER THINK TO RESIST IT. I PITY THOSE WHO CHOOSE SUCH AN EXISTENCE. IT IS A SORROWFUL AND TERRIBLE THING TO LOOK UPON CAINITES WHO TRULY BELIEVE THEMSELVES ACCURSED BY GOD OR BY CAINE, FOR THEY ARE PITIFUL CREATURES, WALLOWING IN MISERY AND FEEDING ON PAIN, WHO REJECT ANY ATTEMPT TO LIFT THEM ABOVE THAT STATE FOR THE SAKE OF IMAGINARY RIGHTEOUSNESS. REGRET IS THE VICE OF THE WEAK IN MIND AND SPIRIT, AND IT IS THE ONE VICE THAT WE DO NOT PRACTICE.

WE DO NOT CHOOSE SUCH A WAY. WE DO NOT HATE AND FEAR WHAT WE HAVE BECOME. WE WERE HUMAN ONCE. WE ARE VAMPIRES NOW. WHERE ONCE WE FOUND LOVE AND BEAUTY AND JOY BENEATH THE SUN, NOW WE FIND LOVE AND BEAUTY AND JOY BENEATH THE MOON AND STARS. WE LOVE THE NIGHT TOO FONDLY TO BE FEARFUL OF ITS SPLENDORS. LOOK WITHIN YOURSELF TO FIND THE SOURCE OF DESIRE, AND DO NOT FEAR TO FOLLOW WHERE THOSE DESIRES LEAD. IT TAKES GREAT COURAGE TO CLAIM THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL OF YOUR WANTS AND NEEDS, BUT GIRD THAT COURAGE AROUND YOUR SOUL, AND LOOK INTO THE EYES OF THE BEAST WITHIN YOU. IT WILL GUIDE YOU TO PLEASURES THAT YOU HAVE NEVER IMAGINED AND DESIRES THAT WILL SATISFY YOU MORE DEEPLY THAN YOU CAN POSSIBLY GUESS.

It is perhaps the most attractive element of the Road of Sin — the refreshing honesty, the lack of pretense, the refusal to bow one's head and whimper over all one has lost to the exclusion of all that one has gained through the change in state from mortal to Cainite. We Sinners know what we were, and we know what we have become, and we do not scorn the pleasure to be found in the exploration of our new nature. That way lies the trap of denial — and the final fall to the Beast.

On Matters of Faith

The *Via Peccati* is, understandably, one of the least organized roads in existence, and finding a teacher in its precepts is often a matter of fortunate circumstance as much as deliberate intent. The way of Sin is, more often than not, passed from sire to child, and I am told that whole lineages of Sinners exist, scattered across the face of Christendom and Outremer. This does not mean that Sinners do not attempt to educate the followers of other roads, for we do. It is simply that most Sinners prefer to rear the next generation of our kind to the road's ways, beginning that education before the child is even Embraced. I can understand the reasoning in this, for even prepared as I was to adopt a new way of walking the night, the transition has not been without its difficulties, has not been free of strain and anguish and self-doubt. Had I been raised to the way, I know that my moral struggles would have been of a much different tenor.

The Priests of Sin

Its general lack of organization notwithstanding, the *Via Peccati* does possess the vague semblance of an ashen priesthood — though not in the manner most Cainites observing the road expect. It has been my experience that most Cainites seem to believe that the Road of Sin is a single mass of highly organized and motivated servants of evil, a demonic conspiracy spanning the four corners of the world and dedicated to dragging every Cainite and mortal soul into corruption and damnation. For numerous reasons, this entire concept is laughable. Sinners are, to put it mildly, highly idiosyncratic creatures. If you put four of us in a room together, the odds are good that the results would be a positively bacchanalian debauch (or even a fairly civilized discussion) rather than a grand conspiracy. This truth does not prevent many Cainites from fleeing our "unholy blandishments" with their presumed virtue fluttering about them.

Ashen priests among Sinner-kind are, to my observation, rare and almost preternaturally patient individuals. It takes a special Cainite to take on the task of teaching the next generation of Sinners, not the least of all because that education requires such strength of mind and will in both student and instructor. Sinner priests — called *praeceptors* among our kind, in honor of the road's formalized origin in Rome — must be many things to their charges. Confidants, confessors, instigators, tormentors. Friends. Lovers. Mentors. They shoulder the responsibility for others' souls in the delicate early stages of learning the road, of stripping away the illusions of those who have previously chosen to be blind or who have been unwillingly held in ignorance and fear. The *praeceptors* must be able to clearly read the inarticulate longings of a soul moving hesitantly toward self-realization and to guide that soul along the way it must go to achieve that goal. They must aid seekers in breaking down the thousand and one inhibitions that hinder spiritual growth. This is a weighty obligation, and it does not surprise me that so few choose to accept it.

To my knowledge, the investiture of a Sinner priest follows no formal procedure. No single Sinner holy book exists from which every *praeceptor* learns a set catechism. *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* may be found only in scattered fragments these nights, one of which it is my surpassing good fortune to possess. There is no novitiate, no final anointing, no senior clergy who enjoins the newly ordained priests to go forth and spread the holy word with missionary zeal. Any such missionary zeal belongs solely to the individual *praeceptors*, who take on this holy task on their own recognizance, for the good of the road and the souls to whom they minister.

One of the surviving fragments of *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* that the *praeceptors* employ is entitled "The Principal Doctrines of Holy Desire," a series of aphorisms passed down through the line of Servius Marius Pustula. Ilias kindly lent me his copy to study, and I record it here, as well.

From the writings of Servius Marius Pustula, of the Nosferatu:

I. Aid not those things that encourage ignorance of the mind and soul in others. What some perceive as virtuous is, to us, a grievous crime of the spirit. Thwart the wiles of those who equate ignorance with purity whenever you can.

II. It is no crime to be true to one's own nature and to seek the satisfaction of one's greatest need and sweetest pleasure. Feed as deeply as you will, whenever you will it.

III. The wolf has no compact with the lamb, nor do you with those upon whom you prey. Kill when you must, and know that all things in this world survive by slaying and consuming others.

IV. You owe the world nothing, for the world owes you nothing. Make no sacrifices of yourself for the sake of abstractions.

V. Attend your own affairs. No one will pay heed to them for you.

VI. Please yourself above any other, for it is your own pleasure that soothes the Beast and lulls it into submission.

VII. Educate others in the true ways of self-knowledge. Expose the soul-enslaving lie that others call "virtue" whenever you can.

VIII. Listen to the voice of the Beast when it rises within you, and let it guide your actions. To resist is the path to self-denial and self-destruction.

IX. Seek to exist in a state of continuous pleasure, searching out and savoring new experiences at every opportunity.

X. You are bound by the laws of no man, no god and no Cainite, nor should you acknowledge any such bond. Your choice to follow your own will and exist freely places you beyond such considerations.

Initiation

Entrance into the fellowship of Sin is not a journey that should be embarked upon lightly. In fact, it cannot be chosen lightly. The mere decision to pursue the study of the road unlocks and pulls away a fetter that one has worn so long that the weight and constriction of it is like an old friend. You miss it sharply when it is gone, for it is something

you have grown accustomed to from long association. It was a realization that amazed me, for I had felt myself strong and confident, wholly in control of myself and all of my actions, before I realized how guided from without all of my behaviors and desires truly were. And that realization was by no means pleasant to come by alone and without a mentor to confide in.

It is, thankfully, not a crime of this new road I walk to feel gratitude for the wisdom and good service given by another, for I owe Velya cel Macelar a vast debt in that regard. He is not a child of Sin himself, but his acquaintance with Ilias cel Frumos permitted him to bring us together when we were both in great need.

I found the book that would lead me to this road while prowling the corridors of the Library of the Forgotten late one night, in the year 1202. The Keeper of the Faith had finally abandoned all pretense of secrecy in her activities and was openly engaged in gathering the Library's most irreplaceable volumes — as though any of the knowledge gathered there could be easily replaced! — and smuggling them to safer locales. To assist her, she explicitly selected Baron Thomas Feroux and the Nosferatu Malachite, who had, to my knowledge, already removed and hidden several caches of books and artifacts.

I cannot say that she did not know I was pursuing the same task — and at least tacitly approved of the goal, if not the instrument of achieving it. I do not believe that she ever truly trusted me, but on the topic of the Library's preservation, we were of one mind. I had turned my attention to the regions unfrequented by the Baron's Gangrel and Malachite's Nosferatu monks, where the materials those pious worthies might very well have considered deeply heretical, and thus unworthy of preservation, were stored. It was a monumental task — and a frustratingly slow one. I only dared remove one or two items at a time, committing them to the hands of my Obertus messengers, who carried them to safekeeping in the North.

I had already selected Varna as the place to which I would retreat, should the disaster we all sensed coming truly befall the Queen of Cities, and I had begun arguing the case for prudence to my sire, Symeon. That was another task of monumental frustration, as he was disinclined to abandon the city, even temporarily, if his brother refused to leave, and Gesu was determined to remain to the last. I had quarreled with Symeon earlier that night, on that very topic, and came to the Library still seething, wishing a thousand ills on the head of Gesu. I hated him more that night than I even loathed my rival Goratrix, and I will cherish that hate to the end of time.

Normally, I found the quiet of the Library's halls deeply beneficent to my mind and spirit, the scents of parchment and ink hanging in the cool dry air a balm capable of soothing even the deepest vexations. That night, however, the Beast roiled inside me, wrapping its coils around my soul in a strangling grip and sinking its fangs again and again into my heart, until my veins pulsed with its corrosive poison. It was all I could do to remain calm, and I slipped deep into the Library's most forsaken corridors, hoping to meet no one else lest the strain of making even a desultory attempt at civility snap my self-control.

From a stack containing carefully preserved scrolls and palimpsests on the sorceries of Egypt, I selected three volumes. As I sat to examine my acquisitions more closely,

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE, SERVIUS MARIUS PUSTULA

Very little completely credible information survives regarding the origins of any of the original Sinners beyond Camilla, who, being Ventrue, has a place in the lineage of half a hundred Warlords and who is still spoken of with considerable dismay by his kinsmen. The memory of Aconia Messalina causes her cousins endless embarrassment punctuated by the occasional fit of attempted fratricide, as her descendants still rule the city of Ancona in her name.

A more fitting memorial stands in remembrance of the Nosferatu disciple, Servius Marius Pustula. In many ways, the continued existence of the road itself can be laid at his feet, the salvation of countless Cainite souls the unliving testimony of his faith and his efforts. His tale was one of the stories that Ilias poured in my ears during the nights of my novitiate. According to most accounts, Servius Marius Pustula was born to slavery in the household of a wealthy patrician family, domesticated early and educated well, to tutor the sons of his master in those arts every well-bred patrician boy should know. Far from being a resentful or unwilling servant, he was loyal and competent, well aware that his quick mind and talent for imparting his knowledge to others had spared him the much more disagreeable existence of the field-slave or house-drudge. His loyalty was, in the end, what destroyed him, as he was caught up in the struggle between two Roman Cainite lords. He was mortally wounded defending the children of his master when politics erupted into open bloodshed. Left to die, he was, instead, rescued by his sire, who admired Marius' learning and his fidelity and Embraced him into the lowest of the low-blooded clans.

When Servius Marius Pustula learned the truth of his family's murder, he sank into bitter hatred and

loathing of all high-blooded Cainite kind, a black rage that nothing could alleviate. He would have inevitably spiraled into self-destruction had he not met Tanitbaal-Sahar, who coaxed the wrathful Nosferatu to seek a better way to serve the memory of his lost loved ones. He turned to writing scathing political criticism of Roman Cainite society, satirical plays that the high-blooded found being performed on every street-corner and every public square. Savage odes lampooning prominent Romans living and dead papered the city and were scrawled on the walls of wealthy city villas. Complaints to Prince Camilla to do something about the "upstart plague-dog" met with a complete lack of response. Most Cainites, it seemed, had the distinct impression that the prince was amused by all the righteous outrage and the poetry itself.

When Tanitbaal-Sahar disappeared, Camilla and Servius Marius Pustula conspired to avenge his memory on those who had wronged him in word and deed and succeeded in driving a half-dozen high-blooded Cainites out of Rome entirely. It is said that, before he lapsed into torpor, Camilla entrusted the care of the faith to the Nosferatu, above all of Sahar's other disciples, for they had both loved him dearly, and Camilla knew that Marius would not falter, for his existence had always been defined by loyalty. Camilla was correct in his assessment. In the years that followed, Servius Marius Pustula traveled the world over, preaching the ways of Sin to any who would listen and keeping the flame of the road alive in the minds of its adherents. Ilias tells me that Sinner legend has it that, like Camilla, the valiant Nosferatu grew weary with the weight of the years and lapsed into the sleep of ages somewhere in our own homeland. He rests in the bosom of the eastern mountains, awaiting the night when he will be needed again, to rise and raise a new generation of Sinners.

I realized that I had gathered four volumes, not three. The fourth was a slender folio, tucked among the pages of one of the larger books. My interest was immediately piqued, not only by the efforts made to conceal the volume, but by its readily apparent age, its fine condition and the fact that it had nothing whatsoever to do with Egyptian sorcery.

It was a volume entitled *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction*, compiled by one Titus Venturus Camillus, Princeps Romanum. It consisted of correspondence between himself and a Phoenician Brujah philosopher, Tanitbaal-Sahar, who apparently dwelt in both Carthage and Rome. There were perhaps a dozen letters, written in the Latin of the Empire, and I was captivated within moments of glancing at the first passages. I read until my candle burned almost completely down, until I had only just enough time to reach my lodgings before dawn.

And when I left that night, *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* was the only book that I took with me.

For a time thereafter, survival overshadowed any other concerns. My sire and I eventually fled Constantinople for the haven I had prepared in Varna, taking with us what little we could salvage from the wreckage of the Library and the Obertus monastery that guarded it. Then, politics

interfered, as well. Our flight, naturally, did not go unnoticed by our most potent immediate ancestor. Through the efforts of myself and my sire, the ongoing hostilities between Jürgen of the Ventrue and Vladimir Rustovitch were brought to stalemate and an armistice of sorts arranged, along with a safe haven for ourselves.

At no point, even during the darkest nights after the fall of Constantinople when our survival itself seemed in serious doubt, did I allow myself to be parted from *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction*. It was, even by my own estimation, an odd state of affairs. For a certainty, I had found peace and comfort in the written word before, most often in the rigorous mental challenges offered by tomes of Hermetic lore or in the laborious efforts necessary to puzzle out documents written in languages not spoken since Babylon raised its gardens. Esoteric philosophy was no stranger to me. Even now, I cannot adequately define, even to myself, precisely why this book affected me as it did beyond a simple statement of fact: It showed me a way of existing that I had never known before.

As a child in the house of my father, I had known relative comfort and safety. My family was influential, of noble rank, and though I was never coddled, neither was I neglected. As

a youth in the House of the Tremere, wholly immersed in the life of the mind, my physical needs were tended to as perfunctorily as everyone else's. We received food to eat and clothing to wear, wood to burn for warmth and candles to burn for light. Deliberate sensuality was not altogether discouraged — it hardly could have been, in a house half-filled with adolescent magi-in-waiting, awakening both to adulthood and power at once — but neither was it actively encouraged. As an adult in the Cainite court of Constantinople, I experienced true decadence for the first time, witnessed firsthand the full banquet of mortal and immortal debaucheries. At the same time, I was not completely absorbed into it. The position of my house in the city's hierarchy was defined by its spiritual devotions, its rigorous asceticism and its strict and uncompromising denial of the flesh. Little though I agreed with most of Gesu's "holy" precepts, it behooved me to make no open challenges for the sake of our position within the delicate balance of the Dream's powers. Gesu met his final end in the fall of Constantinople. At the time, it seemed symbolic to me — an end that was not an end, but a new beginning, a chance for change, for freedom, for exploration.

My novitiate was, I admit, somewhat unusual, as I came to the practice of the road in inverse fashion. It is far more common among Sinners not reared to the road to meet their mentor first and be introduced to the philosophy of Sin second. In my case, I found the philosophy in the shape of my fragment of *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* and began my halting and uncertain efforts to follow its precepts without initial aid or guidance. Ilias thinks me fortunate to have spiritually and mentally survived this experimentation, for it is dangerous to assume that intellectual comprehension of the road's philosophical underpinnings is all that is required to achieve true mastery of the ways of Sin and an understanding of one's own soul. "Knowledge without experience has no heart" is a caution that rings often in the ears of young Sinners who believe that they have learned all they need to know of their road and themselves from books, the recorded experiences of others. While Sinners grant respect to the great thinkers who have gone before them and passed down their wisdom to their spiritual inheritors, they do not assume that those gifts are the sum total of all knowledge. Personal experience is valued among Sinner-kind as the truest barometer of self-knowledge, more so than the strict adherence to custom.

No two novices are educated in the ways of Sin in precisely the same way, and all are encouraged to read, to write and to act on their desires. Not all novices find this to be as easy as it sounds. The ethics and values that our sires impart, if our sires are not Sinners themselves, are deeply ingrained and not easily cast aside. Many of us have been taught, from earliest childhood, to hate and fear that dark part of ourselves called the Beast, to resist its wiles and fight against many of our most natural impulses. All of us have been taught to revere the Traditions of Caine, the foundational laws of our kind, the basis of Lextalionis, of justice high and low. Many Sinner mentors begin the struggle to free their novices from their chains in one of these two places.

From the writings of Aconia Messalina, of the Lasombra:

You would not believe it to see me now, but when I first set foot on the ways of Desire, I was among the most timid and retiring of all the Cainite maidens in the Eternal City. It was how I had been raised by both of

my families, you see. The man who gave his name to me was a strict authoritarian, a traditionalist, an upright and honorable practitioner of all the conventional Roman virtues: thrift and morality and pious honor given regularly to all the proper gods. No daughter of his would bring shame and dishonor upon the family name! He raised me to be meek and obedient, gracious and silent in company, stoic and passionless and, of course, faithful in every way to those who controlled and shaped every aspect of my existence. I hated him with a passion that I cannot describe, but I feared him, as well, and my fear was greater than my hate, for I knew he could and would cast me out without protection or succor if I displeased him.

I would have rejoiced when he finally sold my hand in marriage, had he chosen for me any husband other than the son of one of his friends, a son who was already nearly half again my age, more a contemporary to him than to me. I would have rejoiced, as well, had my husband not been the faithful servant of Lucius Umbra Maior Italicus, one of the eldest and most powerful Lasombra of the Eternal City, whose lineage had been locked in an ongoing feud with a rival Ventrue line for the unliving memory of nearly the entire Cainite court. Maior desired a newborn child of impeccable breeding to bestow upon the Ventrue as a gesture of peace and solidarity in the face of a mutual threat, namely the growing indifference of the prince to their desires, and it was I that he selected to be the "treaty bride." And again I would have rejoiced had that rival been any man beneath the night sky other than Caius Venturus Jovius Italicus, may a thousand unpleasant gods torment him forever. Jovius was, no doubt, the individual that Servius Marius Dustula had in mind when he suggested that most Ventrue are dead to passion only between the roots of their hair and the tips of their toes. It would have been kinder to Embrace me and marry me to a statue. You have no idea.

If there was one favor that my beloved husband did me in all the decades we spent bound together in connubial bliss, it was that through him I met Sahar. The Ventrue of the city were aflame to pick another fight with the Brujah in Carthage, and Jovius was among the most vocal of that contingent. He was at Camilla almost constantly to lend his support to the effort, much to the annoyance of everyone who wished he would simply be silent and let the prince come to his own decision. You cannot imagine how much I wished he would be silent. He forced me to accompany him on all of his visits to the prince, to bring a woman's touch to the proceedings, he said, not that he listened to a word of the advice I gave him. He would put me in a corner while half a dozen of his clan and mine sat around the table, hectoring endlessly. I wonder to this night at Camilla's endless capacity for tolerance in the face of their idiocy. I fear I would have found some poetically unmistakable way of having them destroyed as a warning to their sires and their sire's sires.

Sahar did not much take part in these discussions, but he was always courteous to both Camilla's guests and their companions, particularly we wives and consorts who were often excluded from an active part in the proceedings. I was, I admit, curious about him from

the start, for he seemed so little the Brujah type. He was soft-spoken and elegant in dress and manner, and despite many attempts to provoke him to violence, I do not think I ever saw him lose his temper. He did not, evidently, feel it was beneath him to speak to a woman as an equal, either, though when he told us that his sire was a woman, this explained much to many of us. I fell quickly under the spell of his gentle voice and his radical ideas and became his disciple in principle long before I had the courage to admit the fact even to myself.

And it took me a long time to make that admission. Fear was very much a part of my existence in those nights. I feared both my husband and my sire. I feared what they would say and do if they should ever learn I was creeping away from my duties to learn philosophy at the knee of the Carthaginian malcontent who had seduced Titus Venturus Camillus from the path of righteousness and reduced him to a decadent husk of his former self (though a decadent husk who managed to hold his throne, despite the best efforts of many to separate him from it). Sahar knew my fear and knew that I must confront it in order to find my strength, to find my true self and free her from the prison of passionless duty and honor in which she had always been trapped. He set me tasks, minor acts of rebellion that strengthened my will and my spirit, and showed me what I could face and endure and survive.

The night that I took the final step and tore the throat from my beloved husband and watched him choke out his last on the marble floor of our villa remains one of my sweetest memories. I may never again be as powerful in myself as I was at that moment, but if I never am, it will still be the finest night of my existence, as I felt my soul soar free for the first time, liberated from the cage in which it had been too long imprisoned.

I admit that Ilias cel Frumos has been kinder to me in my novitiate, in the teaching he has given me, than some mentors of whom I have heard. He has not required me to sever all of my external ties, nor break all the chains that bind me at once. I do not think, even at this moment, that I am prepared yet to do what I must to accomplish that feat. I know that, some night, I must face that inevitable conflict. Symeon, my sire, my wise and kingly and stoic sire, will never accept what I have chosen to become. Some night, there must come a parting between us, and now, I cannot even say that I do not regret that thought. I do. I wish that I could bring him with me onto this way that I am forging for myself, even as I know he is too much the childe of Gesu and Antonius the Gaul to walk this road with me.

Yes, Ilias is kind to me. He has chosen to spare me that grief for now, in the knowledge that it will come in its own time. Instead, he has concentrated his efforts on me personally and those parts of myself that have prevented me from being all that I could be, that have distorted my soul and my life.

I have never been wholly comfortable within my own skin. Why that is, I still cannot fully apprehend. I cannot put a reason into words that will satisfy even myself. I am not, in form, misshapen or hideous, and if I am not deformed or disfigured, neither am I a thing of unsurpassed beauty. Ilias has told me, more than once, that I am beautiful; slender of frame and fine of bones, elegant in my carriage

THE HIGH PRIESTESS OF DESIRE, ACONIA MESSALINA

Aconia Messalina stands out in Sinner lore as the first to break ranks with the "traditional" interpretation of the road and its tenets. A woman of intense passions and unquenchable spirit, of hot lusts and sharp mind, she is the spiritual mother of what eventually became the *Via Voluptarius*, the Path of Pleasure, the first and oldest offshoot of the Road of Sin. Her decision to break with the main way of the road was not, at first, particularly well-received. Servius Marius Pustula, in particular, regarded it as a base and self-indulgent betrayal, a hedonistic dilution of the road's original purpose, and hot words were exchanged between the two. Camilla and Drusilla Euphemia accepted the situation with slightly more equanimity, it appears, though Aconia Messalina decided to depart from the Eternal City despite their nominal support.

Seeking shelter with her kin in what was then a minor trading town, she eventually wove her way into a position of great social prominence and, from there, claimed domain over Ancona, where she ruled personally as prince for more than 300 years. There, she established both her own highly focused philosophical variant of the road and a dynasty of pleasure-priestesses to help promulgate it. It is thought that she never truly reconciled with her former friend, Servius Marius Pustula, though the animus between them declined eventually. She remained close to Camilla until he finally succumbed to the weight of age and grief. It is said that she herself yet sleeps in Ancona, beneath the temple of her patron goddess.

when I am not, and I quote, "slouched over a book or a piece of parchment or a tablet of soft wax." He calls me his flower, for my skin is as pale and soft as the petals of blossoms that only open beneath the moon, sweet and fragrant. And he says also that my beauty lies not only in the pretty outer shell, which is, after all, only flesh, only skin and bone, as changeable as he or I will it to be. He says that the soul that shines within me can be a thing of greatness, of strength and knowledge and wisdom, if I have but the courage to set it free, to let it lead me to my true path. Ilias has a tongue that drips honeyed poetry, and yet, I still cannot see myself as he sees me. Nights pass when I fear that I am not what he sees in me, that I am not worthy of the effort he has given to me nor of the regard he holds in me. Nights pass that I fear that I am only the pretty shell, wrapped around a vast and aching inner emptiness, a void that nothing can fill or satisfy.

I do not want to be that thing, and Ilias knows this. But he is merciful, and he is gentle, and he has taken my hand and has walked me slowly onto the first steps of my journey to inner peace. The tasks he set me to complete during my novitiate spoke to my alienation from my own body, my lack of comfort with the hungers and wants the lashings of the Beast aroused within my flesh. I have never truly enjoyed being touched, not for long. No lingering, adoring caress has

ever given me comfort, and I cannot say why that is. I have never enjoyed being unclad before another, though I have been told, often enough, that there is nothing in my form of which I should be ashamed. These were simply parts of my being that I had, until recently, accepted without much thought, though not without regret.

He began slowly and eased me deeper from there. Even in Constantinople, I bathed alone, eschewing the body-servants so common to wealthy Byzantines and the marked preference of my own people for a servant for every occasion. He bathed me, first with his own hands, then coaxing me to allow the presence of servants into the chamber and then to allow them to lay hands on me without someone having to lose an arm in order to settle my temper. This took some time — and a considerable number of servants, whom I was then required to repair in recompense for my initial lack of control. Then, it was clothing and a gradual lack of clothing. Byzantine garb, perhaps fortunately, has many layers to it. And then, it was sensual stimulation, first during the act of feeding, and then, without. With feeding was much easier than without, it does not shame me to admit. It is, after all, the deepest need and greatest pleasure of all Cainites, the act of invading another with one's own body, penetrating into the most tender and vulnerable places, pressing one's mouth to their flesh and drinking deeply of their hot, liquid offerings. Nothing is so exquisite as feeling your bedmate shudder beneath you, pressing his life more closely to you in ecstatic offering, even as he dies.

Ilias was greatly satisfied with my progress and decided that the time for my initiation was drawing close. The preparations were made beneath a cloak of greatest secrecy — or

rather, they were kept secret from me. I do not know if this is irregular or not, for the details of many initiations are private, unrecorded except as generalities. I do know that most initiations take place in the spring, when the rites of the gods of pleasure were celebrated in antiquity, and are still performed in those places where the rule of Christ wanes when the solstice moon rises.

My own initiation has been a banquet of the senses, in the garden of earthly delights that is Ilias' temple to Jarilo, god of erotic pleasures, hidden in the forested hills above the plain. Other Cainites were already present when I arrived, already deeply engaged in the celebrations to reawaken the passions of the world after the cruel winter months, and for a time, I lingered, watching them. It was impossible not to notice how scantily clad most of them were and how many were wholly and shamelessly naked, baring their flesh to the caress of the moonlight and the night breezes. Two of Ilias' servants came then and took me in hand, before my courage could desert me and I could slink into the night.

They led me inside the enclosure of the temple itself, to where the baths steamed beneath the open sky, and disrobed me so deftly that I could find no fault with the touch of their hands on my person. The first bath was of blood, thick and sweet, kept warm and fluid through some agency that I could not discern, which they laved over my body and unbound hair. The second was of hot water, perfumed with flowers, in which I soaked and washed the last of the blood from my



person, leaving behind only a subtle hint of coppery fragrance. I towed myself dry, and the servants came bearing gifts from my mentor, ornaments of gold and bits of amber from the Baltic lands to the north, deep red in hue, which they bound into my hair, and a flask of oil aromatic with the scent of linden blossoms, which they massaged into my skin.

Ilias himself came to us then, gloriously naked, adorned only by his own golden-red hair and no other artifice, his alabaster skin glowing in the moonlight. He took my hands in his own and kissed me as a kinsman might, smiling at me all the while, and I felt the fear and tension within me loosen and dissolve in the face of his joy, his confidence in me. He led me out, then, into the wild forest garden, where the rest of the temple's devotees were already gathered, illumined by braziers burning aromatic woods and lamps burning perfumed oils, beneath the canopy of the new spring leaves. Ilias called on them to greet me, his student, as a fellow child of Desire, and they did so, rising to greet me. I felt a moment of unadulterated panic at the thought of so many strangers so close to me, stretching out their hands to touch me, and then, they were there, touching me, and those caresses did not kill me nor destroy my control. Someone pressed a mug into my hand, and the blood within it was warm and sweet with a flavor I had never tasted before and that lingers still on my tongue. They swept me in among their number, and I let them take me, my head swimming with the joy of it, to be warmly welcomed and desired. There was laughter and talk and many, many caresses. I believe that I kissed and, perhaps, Kissed, nearly everyone there. There was music, and I danced, as I never thought I would have danced before another living thing, without self-consciousness or concern.

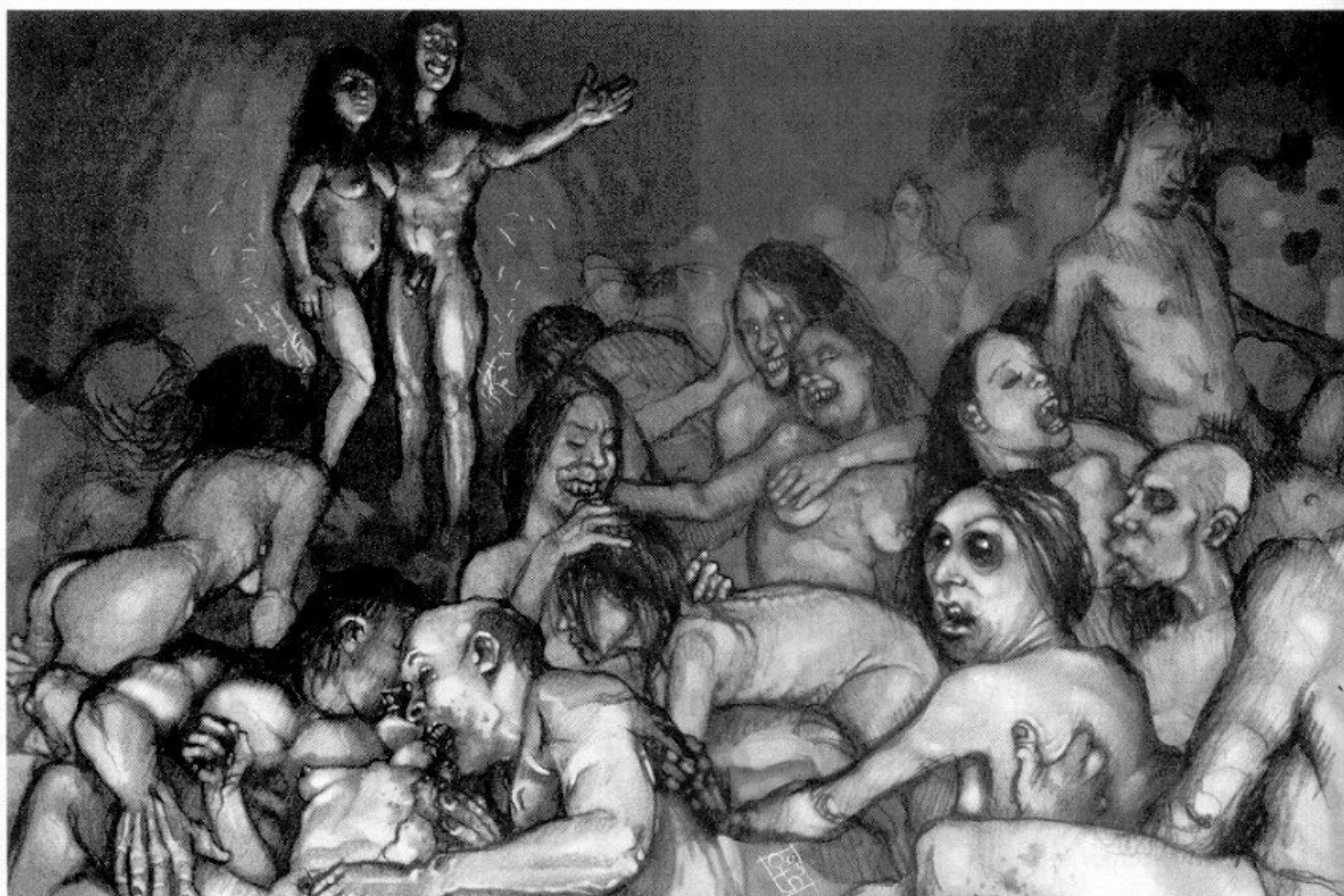
Ilias was the last to dance with me, and when the music died, he took my hand again and guided me deeper into the forest, to the inner sanctuary of the temple, a low round building, half of stone and half of wood, its walls and gates carved with the symbols of the god, the celebration of life and pleasure in all its forms. He took me inside, and the door was closed and barred behind us, and we were alone. The lamps were low, and they perfumed the air with the scent of linden blossoms, the floor scattered with pillows and coverlets, rugs and furs. And Ilias, when he turned to face me, had about him the aspect of the god himself, fierce with his youth and beauty and power, the power given him by the strength of his own desires and his will to claim them. And he asked of me, in a voice that demanded the whole and utter truth of my soul, "Why do you wish to walk this road?"

And I said to him, "Because I am incomplete, and I would be whole. Because I have languished in chains, and I would be free. Because I would acknowledge no master but myself. Because I want you more than I have wanted anything in this world, and I would be worthy of you in every way that you ask."

He took me into his arms, and there, in the presence of the god made manifest through him, we made love as only two of our kind can, mingling the essence of ourselves into an elixir of pure sweetness, of perfect desire and desire's fulfillment.

Moments of Truth

I lay here still, in the arms of my beloved, my teacher, and as we hold one another, I am filled with a quiet awe at the knowledge that this is just the beginning. I am certain



that, for many newly fledged children of Sin, the night of their initiation is a moment of transcendence, a night rife with sudden flashes of insight and understanding. Mine has been, and I know that the nights hold more for me now than ever they did before.

The children of Sin come to the greater comprehension of our road in much the same fashion as other Cainites, loath though they may be to admit the intrinsic similarities in the practice of all faith. We study. *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* may be scattered to the four winds, bits and pieces of it falling into our hands only rarely, but Tanitbaal-Sahar and all of his first disciples were voluminous correspondents. Many compendia of their letters exist in the hands of scholars among our kind all over Christendom and Outremer, as do a handful of other treatises focused on special aspects of the road, its history and the development of its variants. The erotic poetry of Aconia Messalina is still sung at nearly every Sinner fete, and I am told that the Sinners of the Languedoc use phrases from her more commonly known lyrics when communicating privately with one another. The Satires of Marius Pustula, added to and expanded upon by each successive generation of Sinner wits, are as bitingly accurate and cruelly amusing as the night they were penned, more than twelve hundred years ago.

We seek instruction. As I have said before, the Road of Sin is not a road to be walked alone, no matter how independent one might be, no matter how strong in mind and will. Even the most truculent of Sinners needs must seek the counsel of one wiser and more capable than himself on occasion, and in truth, a social aspect pervades much of the road's teaching, as well. After all, one must suffer the follies of lesser Cainites on a depressingly regular basis, enduring the sting of their slights and their ignorance. The company of one's peers, for Sinner-kind, is often a way of restoring one's good temper and vastly increases the chances of having an intelligent conversation with someone who understands you. When it comes to maintaining one's sanity in the long term, this is an advantage that cannot be overlooked.

We seek challenges, for the opportunities for personal advancement that can come of achieving success or suffering failure. One never learns anything by standing still and refusing to act to better oneself. True strength and understanding are forged in the crucible of conflict, when one takes one's unlife and soul in one's hands and strives to be more than one is now, to accomplish more than one thought one possibly could. And sometimes, the understanding comes from the failure of those grand ambitions, from the moment when one's skills and ambitions fail one, in the instant when the Beast ravens up from within and seizes the reins of one's being and runs with them. Wisdom walks at our side in those dark times, as well, when our enemies are all around us and our failures haunt our sleeping and waking moments, showing us the parts of ourselves to which we must attend, to repair our own flaws and weaknesses and grow stronger by so doing.

Ilias stirs against me, and I can feel the lethargy of the day beginning to tug at my limbs as the short spring night wanes. I leave off with this thought, given to me by Titus Venturus Camillus.



At first, I was loath to admit the truth in so many of Sahar's words. At first, though his thoughts intrigued me, they grated against everything that I had been raised to believe, to think of as unassailably true. I first acknowledged to myself that he was right late one summer night, after a particularly vigorous conversation between him, myself and Lysander. Both Lysander and Sahar had departed for the night, and I was left alone in my haven but for my servants and my guards, unaccountably restless and troubled in spirit. I paced the halls restlessly, seeking some explanation and remedy for my disquiet, but peace eluded me, mocked my efforts. Finally, I stepped out onto the loggia, seeking to clear my head with a breath of night air in the garden.

That is when it struck me — the realization of what Sahar had been trying to tell me, attempting to make me understand. There, in the court, was my garden. A small rectangular pool of water in the center, bordered in well-tended grass, jardinières of night-blooming flowers, well-trimmed shrubs, statuary set just so. Exactly like the pleasure gardens of nearly every other well-bred Cainite in the City. Completely orderly, completely structured, as vapid and sterile as it was possible for a living thing to be, all form devoid of content, a thing shaped without true understanding of its essence, its true nature. It struck me so deeply the pain was nearly physical, how like my garden I was, how like it so many other Cainites of my acquaintance were. How we had permitted ourselves to be shaped and molded into a set form, to meet set expectations, to satisfy the demands of things outside of ourselves, our sires and grandsires and advisors, to satisfy the requirements of duty and responsibility and service to everyone and everything but ourselves.

I wept, knowing it was true. I was the prince of the greatest city of the world, and all of my wealth and power and influence mattered not at all, for I could not use them to purchase myself a moment of inner peace. I had blindly chosen to walk the road my sire set me upon and, for centuries, never once doubted that it was the right way, until I realized what a hollow mockery of a soul it had given me, how little it truly served to please me, to help me understand myself.

I vowed, that night, to suffer no longer.



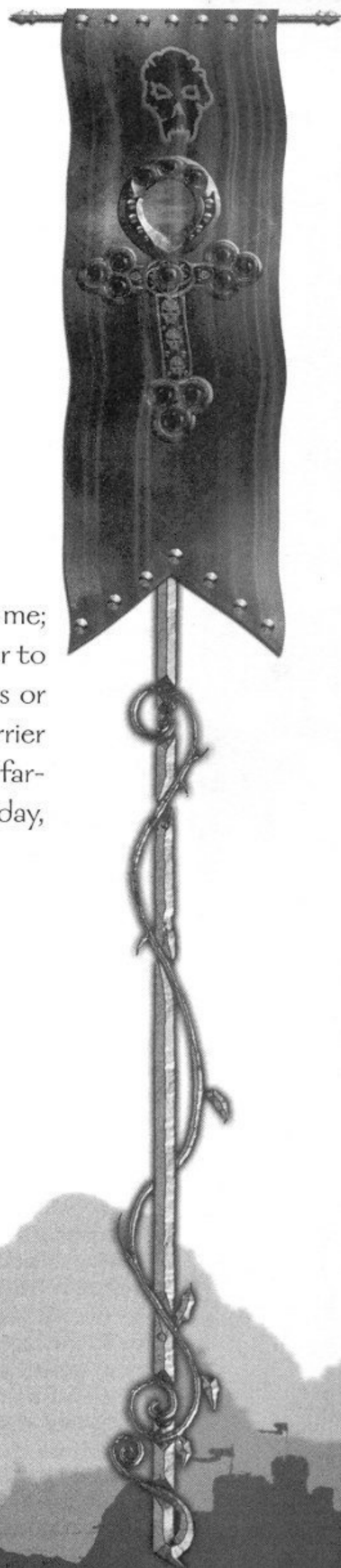


CHAPTER TWO: CARPE NOCTEM

Ask not — we cannot know — what end the gods have set for you, for me; nor attempt the Babylonian reckonings of Leuconoë. How much better to endure whatever comes, whether Jupiter grants us additional winters or whether this is our last, which now wears out the Tuscan Sea upon the barrier of the cliffs! Be wise, strain the wine; and since life is brief, prune back far-reaching hopes! Even while we speak, envious time has passed: Seize the day, putting as little trust as possible in tomorrow!

— Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), Ode I-XI “Carpe Diem”

The adherents of the *Via Peccati* are among the most diverse groupings of Cainites hunting the nights, a true admixture of every kind and clan in existence. As a whole, they respect only a few common traits: personal strength of character, will and vision; understanding and command of the Beast; and knowledge of one's own desires and the willingness to follow through on achieving them. Disregard for arbitrary authority based on age or clan, rather than individual worth, and a general contempt for blind compliance to tradition for tradition's sake — any tradition, human or Cainite — is quite common. What this amounts to, in the final analysis, is a loosely organized, only vaguely hierarchical association of individualists, shameless hedonists and fire-eyed revolutionaries, rather than anything resembling a demonic conspiracy.



Choosing New Sinners

In a perfect world, the children of Sin wouldn't have to work as hard as they do to find others of their own kind. The world is considerably less than perfect. As far as most Sinner would-be sires are concerned, this is a debased and fallen age for all true followers of the mazy paths of desire. Two heavy yokes lay on the necks of nearly everyone — those of the Church and the feudal chain of liege, lord, and lackey — and both choke the passion from the world for their own purposes. The Church teaches that the pursuit of pleasure itself is sinful — denunciations thunder from pulpits all over Christendom, raining damnation down on those for whom passion is as great a good as the love of Christ or those whose desires break the million and one sacred laws governing how one may experience pleasure at all. Meanwhile, priests and prelates keep mistresses and catamites and indulge themselves in every pleasure of the flesh, from fine food to beautiful clothing to all the advantages provided by the obscene wealth of the Church, secure in the knowledge that their own brothers will absolve them of all their sins. The feudal state binds every man, woman and child in Christendom in chains of obligation: obligation to one's community, obligation to one's lord — obligation to everyone, it seems, but oneself. And all to pour wealth into the coffers of another, all for the privilege of paying taxes and fines and fees, all for the right to eke bare survival out of a strip of land less than a 16th of what the lord possesses. Even the rising urban folk aren't immune. City life is an escape from the backbreaking labor of the fields, but survival is just as chancy when wars block trade routes and work dries up, when starvation and disease stalk the streets and charity is thin on the ground.

Many a Sinner looks upon the world and loathes nearly everything he sees. Sinners are revolted by the hypocrisies of the wealthy and powerful, the enslavement of the will and mind and spirit that makes the societies of men and monsters function. And they search for others who share their disgust with the way things are, with the Church that condemns every natural human instinct and desire as ungodly, with a society that warps men into sycophants and tyrants with little in between.

Sinners do not offer the Embrace to the weak — the weak in will, the weak in mind or the weak in spirit. *Something* about the potential childe must resonate sympathetically with the sire's ideas about what truly constitutes strength. Sinners look for individuals who have the courage of their convictions to support them, even if nothing and no one else will. They favor those rare men and women who possess some powerful desire or passion that they pursue regardless of personal risk, regardless of sacred or secular law, unwilling to turn aside until that desire is fulfilled. When such lofty individuals aren't available, Sinners look for those who are reaching the end of their moral tether or those who are noticeably

chafing against the social limits that confine them in their "place."

Sinners tend to be quite egalitarian in selecting their childer otherwise. Having no particular respect for the idea of "innate" nobility or worth transferred by the blood of birth, they choose whom they make their own based on personal desires or needs more than any other factor. While truly educated individuals are at a premium for virtually every road, including the *Via Peccati*, most children of Sin Embrace as much for intellectual potential as for any previously refined gifts. After all, a sire has eternity in which to teach an unlettered but mentally apt childe how to read and speak any language — or any other task or pastime for that matter. Often, a balance of character traits is sought after, the elusive combination of will, passion and intellect that makes truly great Sinners. In most cases, the presence of any one of these traits will do.

Training

Even the most natural of Sinners is not generally ready for the Embrace immediately. The moral restraints imposed by human society pervade nearly every aspect of a potential childe's life, and sloughing them off isn't a task to be accomplished overnight, no matter how ready he might be to leave his old life behind him. Loosing those chains is often a delicate procedure, since it's impossible to tell how deeply those moral strictures are welded to the soul of another until one starts digging them out at the roots. Sinners don't want to destroy their potential childer; they want to destroy their potential childer's reflexive adherence to the enslaving laws of God and man, to awaken and unleash the desires sleeping in their hearts, to set them free from the trap of self-negation and self-denial. One method of accomplishing these tasks involves the systematic and deliberate breaking of one or all of the Ten Commandments handed down as sacred by the Christian Church.

The first four Commandments speak to the covenant between God and mankind, and the next six speak to the covenant of mankind with itself, the ties that bind humanity in relationships of family and community. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most Sinner sires actually find it easier to pick away at the divine covenant of faith — the bond between a "good Christian" (or Jew) and his God — than any other aspect of the training process. Faith is a funny thing that way. Described in many holy texts as the archetypal rock upon which whole religions have been founded, such analogies ignore the weaknesses of stone. Faith, like a rock, can be flawed — flawed in ways that are never noticed until the rock is struck with a heavy enough hammer, but flawed nonetheless. Faith can be brittle and beautiful only on the surface and can wear down like a cliff beaten by the tide and clawed by the wind. And faith, like every other living thing, dies when it's been abused for too long. It doesn't take a classically educated thinker to notice

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The vast bulk of Sinners came of age long after all but the most persistent vestiges of the older, pagan religions had vanished into obscurity. Their sires and grandsires, some of whom could remember the nights when Rome was a center of worship for Mithras and Cybele and the followers of Christ were a fringe-dwelling cult in far-off Judea, were forced to deal with that fact at a very practical level when initiating the training that goes into making all true Sinners. No one knows which clever sire first used the list of "thou shalt nots" neatly laid out in the Bible as though begging to be mercilessly abused to educate his childe in the ways of Sin, but the practice has been largely adopted by the road as a whole (given, however, that the Ten Commandments predate Christianity, it is likely that the practice of intentionally breaking them does as well). In areas where Islam is the dominant religion, a variation has developed utilizing the Five Pillars. Sinners in Muslim areas must take care, however. The Ashirra do not take kindly to such infractions, and they are, on the whole, a more tightly knit community than Christian Cainites.

The Ten Commandments are:

- I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- II. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- III. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
- IV. Thou shalt keep the Sabbath holy.
- V. Thou shalt honor thy father and mother.
- VI. Thou shalt not commit murder.
- VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- VIII. Thou shalt not steal.
- IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
- X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's belongings.

the basic inequities of religious faith in the Dark Medieval — the wealthy and corrupt prelates preaching the value of Apostolic poverty to the poor, the spiritual disenfranchisement of women, the naked violence practiced by the followers of a religion whose God claims to be a deity of peace and love. Doubts gnaw at even the most God-fearing in the small hours of the night, and Sinners are experts in diagnosing and exploiting those tiny, deadly voices.

Most Sinners tend to select potential childer whose faith is either already somewhat less than pristine (for those Sinners who don't necessarily wish to exert Herculean efforts during the earliest training stages) or those whose faith is a shining beacon in the night (for those Sinners whose tastes run toward the deliberate defilement of innocence and/or simplistic moralities or those Sinners whose

taste for a challenge verges on the suicidal). Breaking a potential childe's faith in God is a deeply spiritual act for most Sinner sires, and that, by definition, must be tailored to suit the childe-to-be's needs and weaknesses. Most Sinners loathe pedantry devoid of action, and so, this process is often quite hands-on, and few Sinners do nothing but passively observe. A Sinner generally approaches the potential childe gently, in deliberately ironic homage to Eve and the Serpent before the Tree of Knowledge, befriending him and sounding him out for personal moral strengths and weaknesses. Then, the Sinner begins the more delicate process of "seducing" the childe-to-be, again, in much the same way that the Serpent "seduced" Eve, by arguing with her, debating point and counterpoint and engaging in a battle of wits and wills. Even if the Sinner doesn't wear her potential childe completely down or entirely convince him of the rightness of the cause of Sin, a seed is still planted. At this point, the Sinner must choose whether to press on or to back away and let that planted seed germinate on its own for a time. In either case, the first stage of the seduction process terminates only when the potential childe has broken one or all of the first four Commandments. He must, in some way, publicly or privately, reject the chains of fear and worship his former God clamped about his soul. He must, ultimately, declare himself the only higher power to which he offers unthinking allegiance.

The six Commandments pertaining to the covenant of men, the implication of a greater human community to which all belong and to whom all are responsible, is often somewhat harder to degrade, simply because it is so much more amorphous. Faith in God is vastly more concrete and simplistic than the complex intermingling of motives and interests and emotional bonds that go into all human social interaction. Human families and communities tend to be tightly knit, the values they hand down harder to shake completely, and the wise Sinner doesn't try to accomplish that feat prior to the Embrace. Rather, effort is concentrated on wearing away at one or two areas that resonate with particular importance for the potential childe. A close bond between mother and daughter or father and son? The Sinner will insinuate himself into that relationship and endeavor to take the place of the parent in the potential childe's heart by whatever means seem to work best. A heart filled to the brim with envy and covetousness and lust? The Sinner kindly points out that some people believe that thinking of committing a sin is the same as taking the action and carries the same punishment — if you're going to be punished for something, why not enjoy the satisfaction of actually *doing* it first? A rage and hate that cannot be quenched by anything less than the death of one's enemy? Hate and fury make one powerful, some Sinners teach, and so does the willingness to follow through on one's convictions. Some debts can only be

settled in blood — and it's sometimes better for a young soon-to-be-vampire to learn not to scruple about matters of blood and death. This stage of the seduction process, as before, ends when the potential childe has broken one or more of the last six Commandments.

At this juncture, a Sinners often chooses to administer the Embrace and continue the training period after the Beast has well and truly been woken in her childe's breast. At this point, the training changes tenor, no longer solely concentrated on calling into question the foundations of the fledgling's morality so much as rebuilding that foundation with the new morality of the *Via Peccati*. Fledglings receive intensive instruction in the fundamental principles of the road almost as soon as they awake, and that instruction is usually of the hands-on variety. Dry and bloodless theory is all well and good when one is debating the relative merits of Plutarch and Livy, but vampires cannot thrive on a diet of philosophy alone. Sinner sires often bring their childer directly into the social currents of the Cainite fellowship (such as it is), teaching them on the fly about the society of the night, the Sinner "place" in the same and the nature of the road they follow all as one organic package. Sinners take their role as tempters and predators among predators seriously, regarding their endless questioning of their own and others' moralities and social conventions to be a sacred duty. This duty is passed on early to young Sinners, both to underscore the fact that Sinners aren't pointlessly but purposefully adversarial and to mitigate in some way the self-absorption many young Sinners evidence at this stage in their moral development. Little in the world is more irretrievably self-involved than a young Sinner first coming into his own power, but good sires try to check this tendency lest it develop into a full-blown egomaniacal derangement, which, snide remarks from other Cainites notwithstanding, is not really a desirable result.

The most significant area of study for a newborn Sinner is, of course, the nature of the new childe's Beast, the exploration of its hungers and its wants, its needs and its desires, and how the childe can satisfy both the Beast and himself at the same time. This process is, needless to say, a delicate one, and young Sinners in their "experimental" stage are closely monitored by their sires for signs of moral degeneration — and by most other Cainites for signs of letting go like a poorly sealed dam. Provided that the childe *survives* his experimental stage mentally and spiritually intact, the next step is formal initiation, often at the Sinner Aphrodisiac rite, held every spring.

Recruitment

Sinners tend to have a bad reputation among other Cainites, and that reputation is often based on their habit of actively recruiting new Sinners from the followers of other roads. Followers of the *Via*

Peccati are rarely content to settle for picking off the weak or scooping up strays (though they certainly do both if the situation warrants), and they are regularly accused of "seducing" and "tempting" the promising novices and initiates, as well as the adherents and true masters, of other roads from the "true path" and into the Sinners' corrupt and selfish talons.

Sinners typically consider this interpretation of their activities to be rather simple-minded, not to mention bearing a decided bias against them. Cainites on other roads call such activities "proselytizing" or "preaching the one true way" when they do it, but when a Sinner engages in the same action, she's generally considered an agent of corruption rather than enlightenment. Sinners who actively engage in the advocacy of their road to other Cainites yowl in disgust at this nakedly hypocritical bias and often use it as the basis of their moral "sales pitch."

If there's one thing that can be said about the *Via Peccati*, it's that the road's adherents are nothing if not brutally honest. The Road of Sin teaches that a vampire, though once born of man, is no longer human and is no longer bound by human morality. No human has to live with a hungry and violent Beast dwelling in his breast, and no human ethical or moral structure is, by itself, strong enough to deal with that monster. Some Sinners believe explicitly that this "damnation" renders them outside the pale, already rejected by God and no longer answerable to any divine authority. Others believe that "damnation" is a myth invented by men and monsters to manipulate their fellow beings through guilt and fear, and thus, the entire notion is worthy only of rejection, for no divine authority *ever* had any hold over them, nor deserves any. Sinners reject the right of elders to rule because of their age and the right of the noble to rule because of their birth. They embrace the notion that the competent and capable should lead when leadership is necessary and that personal merit holds more intrinsic worth than a bloodline stretching back to the Second City. And they believe that the satisfaction of one's own needs and desires should come first in whatever actions one takes. Some may call this selfish, but Sinners call it only common sense in a world where one is either a self-willed predator or someone else's pawn.

The Sinner mode of existence can be extremely attractive to other vampires caught in the insoluble spiritual binds of their own roads or stuck in dead-end positions in Cainite society at large. The teachers and prophets of other roads warn their flocks against listening to the seductive lies and blandishments of the Sinners, but the fact of the matter is that Sinners consider deceit in matters of the spirit contemptible. Lying to another Cainite struggling to find an accommodation with the Beast is not the Sinner way, though offering him the consolation of the ways of Sin is considered a sacred act, in violation of no ethic

SEVEN DEADLY SINS, SEVEN MURDERED VIRTUES

Sinner sires overseeing the experimental efforts of their new childer often tend to direct those efforts by employing the useful guidelines helpfully laid out in the form of the Seven Deadly Sins. Each of these concepts represents some aspect of humanity, and the Beast, generally eschewed by other vampiric moralities but embraced wholeheartedly by the Road of Sin as the true path to inner peace and personal freedom.

- **Wrath** is the sin of choice for those whose Beast awakens as an even more frenzied monster than usual. Often, the Sinner in possession of such a Beast died with a great well of unexpressed anger poisoning her heart and soul. In order to tame it, she must recognize that she was angry and define for herself precisely what she was angry at and why, then deal with the source of that anger. Sinners bleed off their wrath by indulging in not random acts of mindless violence, but focused and specific acts of destruction leveled against those people, places or institutions that roused the Sinner's anger in both life and unlife.

- **Pride** is by no means a sin that applies solely to the followers of the *Via Peccati*. It can, in fact, be claimed as the one sin that underlies the entire circus of Cainite endeavor. Proud Sinners are among the most stiff-necked of their kind: unyielding, uncompromising and, most often, laws unto themselves, who acknowledge neither the right of others to rule them nor the necessity of occasionally playing by others' rules. Those Sinners who have recognized pride in their Beast have chosen a lonely but phenomenally self-assured way for themselves, and many who do so eventually gravitate into positions of spiritual authority within the road.

- **Envy** is among the most pernicious of Beasts for a young Sinner to possess. Like the children of wrath, the children of envy can be enormously destructive to those around them. Unlike the children of wrath, the children of envy rarely confront the objects of their emotions openly. Envious Sinners tend to be lethally convivial creatures, thrusting well-honed verbal skewers into the backs of those who become a focus for their Beasts' attentions and engaging in other such acts of social sabotage, reaffirming their personal worth through the misery of others.

- **Gluttony and Lust** tend to walk hand in hand for many Sinners, whose incandescent lusts can often only be satisfied in the gluttonous acquisition of new playthings, human vessels and Cainite lovers alike. Gluttony often manifests itself in young Sinners who, while mortal, were constantly hungry in some way — physically hungry, from malnourishment; intellectually hungry, denied the mental stimulation they longed for; spiritually hungry, from a lack of religious faith or dissatisfaction with the faith they had; and/or emotionally hungry, starved for love or affection. Lust is the secondary manifestation of the gluttonous Beast's needs, as lust encompasses the realms of mind and body, emotion and spirit. Such Sinners soothe their Beasts by pursuing with a single-minded intensity those things they needed but were denied in life.

- **Greed** is a slightly different Beast than gluttony and lust. Where the gluttonous and/or lustful Sinner was often denied something he needed to feel whole, the greed-ridden Beast was never denied anything and doesn't see why it should deny itself now. The greedy Beast is a grasping, wrenching, covetous creature who can never have enough of whatever it is that it most ardently desires. Sinners afflicted with this impulse are often the "collectors" of the Road of Sin, accumulating vast stashes of material goods and social capital, all of which they are loathe to spend.

- **Sloth** can be accurately categorized as the lazy, passive-aggressive aspect of the Beast, the part that would like to shake a fist in the direction of Heaven and plans one day to actually do something, but who really finds lazing around the haven and letting others do all the work to be altogether much more pleasant. The slothful Beast is, blessedly, slow to anger, slow to frenzy and slow to take any action that might generate negative repercussions. Unfortunately, it's also slow to take any sort of action at all and can often only be motivated to engage in shallow social activities on a night-to-night basis. Perhaps ironically, slothful Sinners often led lives of extreme activity prior to their Embraces. They seem to regard the opportunity to actually slow down a bit now that they're undead to be the just reward for lives spent in the eye of the storm.

of the road. Other, lesser beings may consider this "temptation," but to a Sinner, it is viewed as an acceptable manifestation of compassion for a soul in need. No small number of Cainites respond to that strange sense of compassion (coming as it does from a being, a Sinner, not noted for such feelings), as well as to the comfort of the Road of Sin itself.

Expulsion

In truth, very few crimes a Sinner might commit would lead to his formal expulsion from the fellowship of the road, and the road itself has little practical means of enforcing such a judgment, even if some individual or coterie should feel the need to make it.



The *Via Peccati* does not “enforce” its spiritual dictates through fear, threat of physical or spiritual violence or, in general, social ostracism. The fall to the Beast itself is often seen as the worst possible punishment that could be leveled against an erring or inadequately devoted Sinner, and such unfortunates are generally put down quickly and just as quickly forgotten. That being said, a Sinner may be formally ejected from the Road of Sin for only two crimes: apostasy and infernalism.

Apostasy is a sin against every road, including the *Via Peccati*. The decision to abandon one ethical code for the comforts of another is not an easy one to make, as Sinners know full well. Apostates who have come to the Road of Sin from other *viae* tend to find that their precarious spiritual states carry no significant onus among the followers of their new road. Sinners do not require the apostates that they adopt to jump through hoops to prove their devotion, and beyond the training stage of the novitiate, require no “probationary” period of such individuals.

Apostates from the Road of Sin are another matter entirely. Such individuals are generally considered “dead” to their former road-mates and are wholly shunned by followers of the road in general. The formal parting of the ways is usually conducted at one of the two major Sinner festivals (preferably the winter rite of the Saturnalia). The apostate is simply declared no longer a recognized and faithful child of Sin, and the news of the expulsion is circulated through the loose social network of the road. No particular effort is made to otherwise “punish” the apostate, and no particular effort is made to help him or to convince him to return. Indifference to the continued existence of a weakling and a coward is often a much crueler knife than a thousand thundering condemnations.

Infernalism within the Road of Sin, however, is treated neither lightly nor gently — and, assuredly, not with indifference. To put it bluntly: The very nature of infernalism conflicts with the most primal and basic of Sinner ethical beliefs — that one’s soul belongs only to oneself and that to accept slavery for any reason is a soul-killing evil. Infernalists, by definition, violate this precept for the most venal and idiotic of reasons — transitory personal power or equally transitory pleasure — and sell their souls into the most vile of enslavements in order to achieve that idiocy. The Road of Sin suffers such fools badly and deals with them lethally. The dedicated infernalist hunters of the Path of the Devil, the single most highly organized group within the road, were specifically enjoined some years ago, when the precise depth of the infernalist threat to the road was exposed to the view of influential *praeceptors* and one of the first Sinners, to hunt down and destroy those children of Sin who had fallen from the true ways of the road into irreconcilable, irretrievable error. Accusations of infernalism within the road are laboriously investigated for validity, and if an accusation is found to be true, the matter is handed over to the Adversaries for a swift and final resolution.

HIERARCHY WITHIN THE ROAD OF SIN

The Road of Sin does not have much in the way of internal structure. Nothing about the way its highly individualistic ethics function lends itself to a monolithic, Christendom-spanning hierarchy of junior and senior Sinners.

- **Novices** are generally the “youngest” of Sinners, the freshly Embraced neonate childer of other, more established Sinners or apostates freshly accepted from other roads. As such, the classification of “novice” covers a wide latitude of extremes in terms of age and practical experience. Novices are in the foundational stage in terms of instruction in the road’s ethics and have not yet been formally initiated into the fellowship of Sin.

- **Initiates** are, as the title implies, the freshly initiated among the new Sinners; those who have been granted a formal initiation ceremony and recognized as true followers of the road by their fellows. The vast majority of Sinners technically qualify as initiates unless they are actively engaged in teaching the road to others, though most senior “initiates” prefer to be called “adherents” instead.

- **Praeceptors** are Sinners who are actively engaged in the effort to teach others the ways of Sin. They are the closest thing the Road of Sin has to an ashen priesthood, though each *praeceptor* has her own distinct approach to giving spiritual instruction and her own slant on the most important ethical considerations of the road. *Praeceptors* exist for both the main road and each of the several paths. Most *praeceptors* are ancillae, at least, though there exists no Sinner law or custom that either prevents relatively youthful Cainites from teaching the ways of Sin or requires elder Sinners to take on that task.

- **Primae** are truly legendary Sinners, indeed. The title *prima* is usually only appended to the guiding light of the Road of Sin, its spiritual father, Tanitbaal-Sahar, and to those survivors of his original circle of followers.

The Aphrodisiac

The Aphrodisiac transpires in the spring — when in the spring being the choice of individual Sinner coterie, since no one knows how the original celebration was timed. Some coterie arrange for it to occur as early as the appearance of the first leaf buds, blossoms and birds after the long, dark winter. Others wait until spring is well and truly begun, the ground is warm enough to sport on without excessive discomfort and the nights are short but fruitful.

Originally, the Aphrodisiac was a festival sacred to the goddess Aphrodite and was celebrated extensively in Greece, particularly in Athens and Corinth and on the islands of Cyprus and Cytherea. A rite of fertility, it was one of numerous festivals intended to reawaken the fruitfulness of the earth after the long winter months of barrenness, and it included acts of ritual sexual congress with the harlot-priestesses of the goddess in order to achieve that goal. The Sinners have, typically, adopted this basic idea and adapted it to suit their own purposes. While vampires are innately infertile and few of them actually worship either the earth or Aphrodite, they nonetheless love any excuse to throw a fete that is one part rowdy party and one part ritual acceptance of new postulants to the road. The Sinner Aphrodisiac is generally a rite of initiation, the final threshold that novice Sinners cross in order to be acknowledged by their peers, and one of the few formalized representations of this act. A novice does not have to be initiated at an Aphrodisiac in order to be considered a true follower of the ways of Sin, but most want to be, in order to have that moment of spiritual and intellectual recognition, the night that they can point to and say, “This is when I truly knew my own will, my own way, and took, finally and at last, the road that I chose to follow.”

Among Sinners, the Aphrodisiac is a celebration of (un)life, particularly those aspects of it that bring laughter, joy and pleasure. The celebrants who preside over the “formalities” are generally the most highly regarded Sinners dwelling in a given area or the ringleaders of prominent local coterie and cults, and selection of these individuals is most assuredly a popularity contest, due primarily to the Road of Sin’s general lack of an organized ashen priesthood. Specific practices vary widely from region to region, but some things are common to all Aphrodisiac celebrations. Lustration ceremonies — particularly sensual massage and ritual bathing in milk, flower water and, in some places, blood — are not uncommon. Dance and poetry competitions dot the landscape, particularly among Eastern Sinners, who consider ecstatic and exotic dancing to be a sacrament in itself, and among the Languedocien Sinners, whose Aphrodisiac often resembles a troubadour convention. A feast of blood is usually held, the vessels having been fed the finest of viands — excellent wines, liqueurs distilled from aphrodisiac herbs and flowers, sumptuously prepared dishes — that the Cainite guests may

Rites and Rituals

Sinner rites and rituals, contrary to the opinions of outsiders, tend to be quite diverse. While ritualized expressions of the road’s penchant for vice and licentiousness are common, and even expected, not every rite or gathering revolves around these things. Nor does every coterie, cult or circle of friends amongst the Sinners celebrate the road quite the same way, at the same time. In fact, Sinners observe only two major rites consistently from year to year, the Aphrodisiac and the Saturnalia.

savor and enjoy the tastes lingering in their blood. The Aphrodisium of Ancona spares no expense importing ingredients for the special sweetmeats the priestesses prepare, pastilles made from hashish, honey, the petals of roses and aromatic spices, which they circulate to their mortal adherents and, somewhat impishly, into the city of Ancona at large, particularly to the residents of the local religious community.

Initiates are generally the guests of honor for this rite. Guided by more experienced Sinners, the initiate is permitted to sample the full banquet of earthly delights. His ritual bath, usually administered by the most skilled body-servants available, is assumed to wash away any remaining ties to his previous road or

method of morality. Weather and temperature allowing, the initiate often goes either naked or very briefly clad (in gifts of jewelry from one's mentor, a garland of flowers or suchlike) for the rest of the evening, as a symbol of his lack of shame in his new state, his freedom and his acceptance of his own desires. The initiate is generally encouraged to satiate his hungers freely and to explore them without fear or shame. His vessels are usually fed the finest available aphrodisiac substances before the initiate partakes of the blood. For the initiate, the evening usually climaxes when he is taken from among the gathering at large and ushered into the "inner sanctum" of the presiding celebrant. There, he is formally asked, for the final time, his reasons for walking the Road of Sin. Provided that the initiate's answer is acceptable (and, by this point in the initiation processes, the odds of someone taking issue are fairly slim), the new Sinner is born. The celebrant of the rite takes the initiate in an act of sensual congress, a ritual of bloodletting/lovemaking that marks the entrance of a new Sinner into the world.

The Saturnalia

The Saturnalia transpires in the winter and is markedly different in tone and character from the Aphrodisiac, despite some of their surface similarities. At both, revelry is not uncommon, but at the Saturnalia, those celebrations tend to take on a darker cast.

The Saturnalia, unlike the Aphrodisiac, occurs at the same time every year, the week between December 17 and December 23, encompassing the old Roman holidays of the Saturnalia, the Opalia and the Larentalia, as well as the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. Its rites encompass a large number of themes, including but not limited to spiritual and ethical change and growth, sacrifice and endings, chaos, disorder and the overthrow of established societal roles. As with the Aphrodisiac, different Sinner coterie emphasize different aspects of the Saturnalia celebration to suit their individual tastes and desires, though some conventions remain common to all such rites. The most likely common denominator is the use of the Saturnalia to publicly mock, belittle and otherwise undercut the power of the local Cainite social order, usually through the convention of the Lord of Misrule.

The Lord of Misrule is the presiding celebrant of the Saturnalia, elected by chance rather than the Sinner social politicking that generally precedes the selection of Aphrodisiac celebrants. Prior to the start of festivities, the Sinner coterie or household hosting the Saturnalia celebration prepares a number of clay tokens, called *sigillaria*, one for each vampire expected to attend the gathering. The vast majority of these tokens are simple things, images of prominent members of the local Cainite court making silly faces, traditional symbols of the season such as candles or wreaths of greenery, phallic "good-

VAMPIRES AND SEX

After reading both this book (the Prelude in particular) and Chapter One of **Dark Ages: Vampire** (especially the section entitled "The Curse of the Dead Heart" on p. 31), the reader might well feel a bit confused. Can vampires, in fact, take part in and enjoy the physical act of love? Can they draw pleasure from the simple touch of a lover, or must everything end in bloodletting for even a hint of erotic feeling to be present?

The answer is somewhat complicated. Vampires, as presented in this game, are dead, static creatures who can't really take pleasure from sex...

...but that doesn't mean they don't try. Cainites, especially those on the Road of Sin, go through the motions, using every power at their disposal to coax some degree of feeling out of their undead flesh. Such activities are supposedly meant to lull the Beast into submission, and if the Kiss is part of the sexual act, then the Beast might well be sated. Cainites who try to fool themselves (and their Beasts) into believing that they can enjoy sex for sex's sake are in for a rude awakening sooner rather than later, as the vampire's inner demon rages at the time wasted by playing out in bed when hot blood calls out to be spilled.

Can vampires have sex? Yes. Can they enjoy it? Yes, although the enjoyment is more psychological than physical, and even this stimulation becomes harder to achieve with age (unless the vampire mixes feeding with sex, in which case, physical pleasure is also possible). But no matter how hard a Cainite tries, the act of love is, at best, symbolic, a metaphor for something, be it a rebellion against God, a desperate attempt to cling to humanity or passion or even a way to trick the Beast into quiescence. The Curse of the Dead Heart doesn't always take hold instantly after the Embrace — but it always takes hold.

luck" symbols, crude jokes or aphorisms and the like. One such token, however, is marked with the traditional image of the election: a bean (or, in some cases, a bean plant). These tokens are then strung on bits of ribbon and selected by the guests once everyone has arrived, often at a blood feast on the opening night of the celebration. The individual who selects the "bean" wins the role of the Lord of Misrule.

This lucky individual is "crowned" with a wreath of holly and, usually, a mask depicting the features of the local Cainite ruler crafted in exaggerated and comedic fashion, and he reigns as the ruler of the full seven nights of the festival. Depending on the situation, this role can be as central or as ceremonial as any given coterie desires, though the Lord of Misrule is, in general, the primary celebrant of the rites, and his word — and whim — carries the weight of law for the Cainites in attendance. (This fact is, of course, rarely acknowledged by any *legitimate* Cainite authority, though that rarely bothers a Sinner coterie deep in the midst of a Saturnalian revel.) By custom, the Lord of Misrule is usually expected to participate in several activities specific to the celebration.

The first of these involves Sinner rites of passage. At the dark solstice, children of Sin who feel the need to expand their spiritual horizons may approach the Lord of Misrule and request his assistance. This assistance is usually granted in the form of some quest or task assigned to the postulant Sinners, with the intent of triggering in them a spiritual or intellectual change, overcoming a barrier to their understanding of the road or its tenets or placing them on the path to acquiring new experiences. These tasks must normally be completed within a year and a day. On the night of the solstice itself, the Lord of Misrule is usually the one to ceremonially quench the ritual representation of the sun — usually a candle — as well as relight it the next night, and his hand is normally the one that wields the sickle to slit the throats of the ritual libations at the start of the final night's feast. He also judges any dispute or contest set before him.

The Saturnalia is not, however, all ritual judgments and sacrifices. It's also very much about letting the spirit of chaos back into a world that has forgotten how good chaos can feel. A masquerade is usually conducted on at least one night of the festival in which the Cainites and the mortals in attendance swap roles — masters play at being servants, servants pretend to be lords, men dress as women, women dress as men and informality is the rule of the night. Mummies' plays and satirical songs aimed at both Cainite and human authority figures are not uncommon. In fact, prizes are usually given out for the most cuttngly sarcastic use of extemporaneous verse, the best scripted and acted dramatic lampoon of the idiocies of the local court and the best costumes mocking the sartorial follies one's peers and "superiors." Often, this mockery bleeds over into genuine action, as some Sinner coterie use the Saturnalia gathering to make contact with their usually far-flung fellows, to



exchange information and to make plans for the coming year's activities.

The Saturnalia usually ends with a final blood-feast, in which the entire party drinks of a ritual libation prepared using the bodies and blood of specially consecrated vessels (who usually do not survive the evening) mixed with the blood of the Lord of Misrule.

Holy Sites and Areas of Influence

Sites sacred to the Road of Sin are scattered across the face of Europe and the Holy Land. While the notion of a site "sacred to sin" might strike the casual listener as contradictory, the followers of the Road of Sin treat their holy sites with just as much reverence as any Faithful Cainite (even if they express "reverence" a bit differently).

The Aphrodisium of Ancona

The city of Ancona, a trading port and rival of Venice along the Adriatic coast of Italy, is also a major Sinner stronghold and holy place in the very heart of the Papal States. The prince of the city, the Lasombra Valentina della Torchia is herself an old and potent Sinner, a staunch adherent to the Path of Pleasure and an unashamed pagan all at once. Descended from a line of Lasombra Sinners dating back to the rule of Camilla and ousted from Rome by their more orthodox clanmates, Valentina is an unliving annoyance to those pious Magisters who cleave to the *Via Caeli*, who would very much like to see her destroyed. Unfortunately for them, her grip on her domain is exceptionally secure, girded by her influence over both human maritime trade and political structures and her unashamed tendency to fight to the finish to defend what she considers hers. More than a few of her self-righteous clanmates have been expelled from Ancona, licking their political wounds and wishing never again to cross the devious, decadent prince if they can at all avoid it.

No few Sinners have flocked to Ancona over the years, seeking sanctuary from Lextalionis called against them in other cities or simply seeking a safe port from which to travel. Ancona is all of those things and at least one more, having been the site in antiquity of a temple to the goddess Venus. A Catholic cathedral now occupies the site of the former temple, but adherents of the *Via Voluptarius*, in particular, and Sinners, in general, travel from all over Europe to the city every spring for the Aphrodisiac nonetheless, a rite celebrated at Valentina's own Aphrodisium. The largest and most outrageous of all the Aphrodisiac revels, it has, over the years, attracted the attention of the liberal-minded and curious of almost every other road and the outright wrath of the local clergy who have, thus far, failed to conclusively identify the origin of the plague of licentiousness and carnality that sweeps through the city every spring.

Corinth

Another major European pilgrimage site for the Aphrodisiac is the city of Corinth, currently one of the largest cities in the Despotate of Achaia and pressed beneath the boot heel of the Latin "would-be" Empire. As with Ancona, Corinth was once a center of worship for the goddess Venus/Aphrodite, complete with a massive temple on the acropolis of the ancient city occupied by hundreds of sacred prostitutes. The local Sinners and those Sinner pilgrims who choose to make the journey continue to celebrate the rite of the Aphrodisiac every spring, but their revels have taken on a more militant cast since the advent of Latin "rule." Not overly fond of the religious manias and delusions of superiority commonly displayed by Byzantine Cainites, Corinth's Cainite population, including its modest Sinner community, is even less fond of the Latin invaders and does what it can to undermine the support of Latin Cainites and mortals alike. Fortunately, many of the Sinners currently active in and around the city have been practicing this sort of guerilla political warfare religiously for no small number of years and are working the building conflict from multiple angles, though opinion remains divided about what to do with the Latin Cainite prince, Periander. Some Sinners feel that Periander might be salvageable — his ideals, though excessively refined and lacking serious contact with anything resembling reality, have a distinct Promethean cast to them — and like many local and newly arrived Sinners, he shares an interest in, and concern about, the Cainite principality of New Lacedaemonia.

New Lacedaemonia

New Lacedaemonia is, to put it mildly, a complete and utter oddity, a Cainite "state" occupying a small island in the Aegean Sea, home to about 20,000 humans and a tightly knit community of 40 vampires. Obsessed with constructing a Carthaginian-style utopia, the island's vampiric residents have, over the years, attempted to recruit like-minded individuals to their cause, including several prominent European Sinners of a more scholarly and constructive bent. None of these Sinners have been seen or heard from again, a fact that sent a ripple of unease through the road's loose-knit fellowship and aroused the interest of several concerned individuals, particularly the childer of the vanished Sinners. All attempts to investigate the island and its inhabitants have, thus far, met with resounding failure, as has the effort to provoke serious alarm in the Lacedaemonian society's neighbors. New Lacedaemonia is certainly strange and possibly unwholesome, but the island is also isolated and otherwise unremarkable, and the concerns of the Sinners are easily brushed aside in the face of larger, more pressing conflicts in the area.

This is unfortunate, because New Lacedaemonia should inspire fear in the hearts of more than Sinners. The "dictator" of New Lacedaemonia, Hektor, began

this experiment with the best of intentions, but like his Carthaginian Brujah forebears, he failed the final test of righteousness and let true evil seep in through the cracks in his dream. Hektor's vision of vampiric utopia has been purchased with the aid of the Baali infernalist, Maureen, and nightly, control of the enterprise slips from his hands to hers as he sinks deeper into moral decay. No other Sinner has left New Lacedaemonia as anything but ash since the arrival of the Baali priestess. Hektor is rapidly reaching the bottom of his ethical slope, instituting Carthaginian religious practices originally dedicated to the pleasure and sustenance of the Baali Methuselah Moloch in his guise as Ba'al-Hammon and permitting Maureen to recruit her own followers. In the meantime, New Lacedaemonia has become a major port of call for the followers of the Path of Screams transiting from European ports to destinations in the Holy Land.

The port of New Lacedaemonia has been darkened in recent nights by repeated visits from a vessel known as the *Dark Magister*. A Moorish corsair, the ship is captained by the Lasombra Sinner Alejandro Martel y Sandoval, one of the widely feared and despised "black angels" who fell from the relative grace of the Road of Night to the darker Path of Screams, and crewed by a motley band of enslaved human minions and infernalists from various clans. The most recent addition to the ship's complement is the Azaneali shadow-priestess Arishat, one of the first-born childer of Azaneal and easily the most capable agent of his will. Hollowed from within by her ritual Embrace, Arishat is, like her sire, darkness made flesh. Her featureless black eyes are a window into shadowy realms where even the Lasombra hesitate to venture, and her command of that clan's magics outstrips Sandoval's by a considerable margin, despite her youth. Moreover, she has taken nearly complete control of the powers of the *Dark Magister*'s pit, the Mouth of Hell, and has been slowly expanding and refining its connection to the forces resident in Chorazin, in between acts of "diplomacy" aimed at other Baali nests and Screamer sanctums scattered throughout the region.

Constantinople

Scholarly Sinners from all over Europe and Outremer have flocked to the corpse of Constantinople, eager to pick the bones of the city for what little they may recover of its glories. The destruction of the Obertus Library of the Forgotten was, from the Sinner standpoint, a tragedy on a par with the burning of the Great Library of Alexandria. Who knows how much irreplaceable knowledge was lost there? It has been confirmed, through the agency of newly initiated Sinner Myca Vykos, that at least one segment of the treatise entitled *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* was present in the Library of the Forgotten and survives in his possession. Those fortunate Sinners who have had a chance to examine that fragment, a number of letters authored by both Tanitbaal-Sahar and Camilla, believe Vykos' prize to be a complete later

volume and a sign that, perhaps, the Library once housed the entire body of works related to the *Via Desideratio*. Frustrated Sinner historians have been combing Constantinople ever since, attempting to locate and plunder the troves of books and artifacts, removed from the Obertus monastery itself, that Vykos says are hidden throughout the city. In the process, they have run afoul of the new Latin Cainite authorities of the city, resurgent Byzantine partisans (including the Gangrel loyal to Baron Thomas Feroux and the remaining followers of the Nosferatu Malachite) and other treasure-hunters of various origins. Thus far, these Sinners have also not turned up any significant finds, but they have no intention of ending their search any time soon.

Alexandria and Memphis

Egypt, perhaps not surprisingly, houses a fairly significant Sinner population, mostly concentrated in the region of Alexandria and Memphis. Alexandria's Sinner community is small, tightly knit and of unusually mild disposition. This particular group has learned that, surrounded as it is by hostile Setites who seem to take deep personal offense at the Sinners' religious inclinations and even more hostile Ashirra who *definitely* take deep personal offense at their religion, it pays to speak softly and pretend not to be carrying a stick at all. For the most part, the Sinners confine their activities to the mercantile and philosophical. Those of their number not actively engaged in trade of some type — in slaves, in spices, in cloth, in luxury goods of all kinds — are almost invariably scholars, or else gutter-scum of the organized criminal persuasion. Outspoken adherents of the *Via Adversarius* are not particularly welcome among the Alexandrian Sinners, who usually shoo them out of the country altogether whenever possible or else direct them to Memphis, where their activities at least won't result in everyone connected to them being beheaded by some irritable Ashirra official.

Memphis was once many things — once the first and, some say, greatest capital of the united Old Kingdom of Egypt, once the largest city in the world, once the center of the cult of Ptah. In these nights, it is little more than a ruin along the Nile, abandoned after the rise of other, more important cities, its monuments and buildings quarried for their stone. All that is left of Memphis' former glories is the great necropolis of Saqqara, with its step pyramids designed and constructed by divine Imhotep himself, its monuments to Ramses II and its entrance to the vast underground labyrinth-temple known as the Garden of Asps.

The ruins of Memphis, and particularly the Garden of Asps, have long been a particularly significant pilgrimage site to Sinner historians. It was in Memphis, when the city shone in glory second only to Alexandria, that Tanitbaal-Sahar and his small coterie of faithful companions settled for a time after their journey across Persia. There, they lingered while Sahar sought and received instruction with the keeper of the Garden of Asps, a decidedly unorthodox Follower of Set performing a traditional task, maintaining

PRIDE IN DARKNESS, THE LINEAGES OF THE BAALI

As loath as other Cainites are to admit it, the Baali are among the oldest bloodlines in existence, dating from at least the time of the Second City, where their wiles and matchless skill at reading the innermost hearts and souls of others seduced Antediluvians, Methuselahs and mortal worshipers alike. Within the bloodline, nearly every Baali traces their lineage, either directly or indirectly, from one of four individuals.

- **The Molochim** are the descendants of the Methuselah known as Moloch, who was also called Andramelech by the Cainites of ancient Phoenicia and Ba'al-Hammon by the Cainites of Carthage, where he was worshiped openly as a god. Subtle, seductive and cruel beyond human imagination, Moloch devoted his existence to controlling the sleep-cycle of the powerful entities (known primarily as the Children) his mortal ancestors had trafficked with and partially awoken, lulling them down with a symphony of horrors in an effort to prevent them from waking and ending the world. By no stretch of the imagination noble, he enjoyed his work considerably, as well as the power he personally derived from it, a power he kindly lent to the construction of "utopian" Carthage. Supposedly buried there with his lover, the Antediluvian Troile, he nonetheless casts a long shadow across the memory of his descendants, the vast majority of whom incline to the various ways of Sin. The most prominent member of his lineage still active is the Methuselah Tanith, his favorite "daughter" and the reclusive *de facto* ruler of Tyre, who shares with her sire, and many of his other elder descendants, a perverse attraction to innocence and an uncontrollable compulsion to defile it.

- **The Nergali** are the descendants of the decidedly mad and extraordinarily difficult to kill Methuselah Nergal, also known among his kin as Shaitan. Nergal was possessed of a truly divinely inspired madness, convinced that his efforts to wake the entity known as Namtaru from its restless, nightmare-filled sleep would result in his personal apotheosis and that of his faithful followers, a goal that numerous individuals were quite intent on preventing. Bolder and more rapacious than his siblings, Nergal managed to survive the unfriendly attention of the ancient Lasombra priests of the shadowy underworld goddess Ereshkigal, the malicious efforts of his "brother" Moloch to thwart his every scheme and the combined might of the 13 clans on more than one occasion, only to be brought low, at last, by a natural disaster. Nergal apparently met his reckoning when the eruption of the volcanic island Thera destroyed

his haven and brought a premature end to his ritual to wake his patron. His descendants, like those of Moloch, incline strongly to the pursuit of the Road of Sin, though his almost exclusively practice some variation of the Path of Screams, in the belief that the true path to godhood lies through Hell.

- **The Azaneali** are the youngest of the Baali lineages, founded by no ancient Methuselah, but by a relatively young and ambitious Baali of unknown origins, named Azaneal. Azaneal, studious and filled with an almost singular drive and purpose, has galvanized the Baali as few before him ever have, uncovering secrets lost since the destruction of Nergal with the assistance of a coterie of infernalist Lasombra known as the *angellis ater*. Azaneal's quest to unlock the mysteries of the lost, unholy city of Chorazin left him both empowered and changed at a deeply disturbing level. No longer simply a Cainite, or even simply a Baali, he has become the undead incarnation of darkness itself, and his mere existence sends shudders of revulsion through the fabric of the Abyss around the site of Chorazin, near Galilee. Perhaps fortunately, Azaneal's lineage remains small. Apparently, only he possesses the ability to create viable childer, as the blood of all others he has Embraced is sterile and cannot be used to reproduce more of his kind. Those he has Embraced, however, display a command of shadow-magic that has shocked and disturbed even his Lasombra allies. Azaneal is currently content to squat in Chorazin, decoding the remaining mysteries of that place and summoning those Baali who choose to serve him to his side. Not all Baali have so chosen, despite his assumption of the mantle of Shaitan, and what will arise from the strife building within the remaining Baali nests remains to be seen.

- The fourth and final Baali lineage has no name. It is, in fact, as nameless as its originator. On the terrible night that the Baali were created, three survived the attentions of their Antediluvian parent: Nergal, Moloch and their nameless sibling, who is sometimes thought to be male, sometimes thought to be female and sometimes believed to be the hermaphroditic combination of both, fused into one being during the horrors of their mass-Embrace. Baali descended of this lineage are the most elusive and alien of their kind, given to the pursuit of weird researches, esoteric religious inclinations and practices deeply disturbing even to others of their kind. Some refer to them as "the Brood," or "the Swarm." Others choose not to name them at all for fear of attracting their decidedly malignant attention. If they practice a way of Sin, it's a path as yet unrecognized even by other Sinners.



the memory of those who had fallen in the righteous cause of freedom. Eventually, they departed with the blessings and support of the Garden's keeper and left behind one of the first Setite adherents to what would one night be known as the *Via Desideratio*. Sekhemkare, Sothic Eternal, defender of the Lord of Storms in his guise as Alexander, priest of Sin, still keeps the Garden of Asps as he always has, in memory of his blood-kin who have given the last measure of themselves in the struggle against the tyranny of Osiris. In a small, specially dedicated chapel, he also enshrines the names of those Sinners who have sacrificed eternity for freedom's sake. Adherents to the Path of the Devil, in particular, often make the necessary effort to bring the names and deeds of their lost companions to his attention. Those Sinners who have made the pilgrimage to Saqqara claim that at the center of this shrine stands a stele of the Punic type used by the Carthaginians to commemorate their dead and on it is the name of Tanitbaal-Sahar.

Carthage

The ruins of Carthage along the coast of Tunisia are, much like Memphis, a pilgrimage site of particular importance to Sinners — and for basically the same reasons: pure melancholic remembrance of the glorious, and fallen, past. While most Sinners choose to exist very much in the "now," the past holds a magnetic fascination for many of their number, more so than any future consideration. There's a certain romance and wistful longing in Sinner notions about the past, when their road wasn't arbitrarily

judged sinful and its followers weren't necessarily hounded from place to place or suppressed by the vicious and small-minded, but honored and welcomed for their wisdom. Carthage and, to some extent, Rome are both symbols of this time in the minds of many Sinners, and no small number attempt honor that memory in the political and social tasks they set for themselves.

The Sea of Shadows and the Baronies of Avalon

Truly potent and influential Sinners are virtually unheard of in the kingdoms of Iberia. Under Ashirra rule, Faithful vampires of all inclinations vigorously repressed the practice of the Road of Sin, and matters have not improved now that the forces of Catholicism have waxed ascendant. Some few Sinners have managed to carve places for themselves among the more decadent of the *taifa* kingdoms, where they serve their rulers as advisors, consorts and entertainers whose skills stave off having to face the inevitable end for one more night. Tremere Sinners descended from the highly unorthodox Jervais have oozed into the Iberian peninsula, seeking influence for both their clan and themselves, but thus far, their efforts have yet to yield substantial gains.

Similarly, the Road of Sin enjoys little purchase in the Baronies of Avalon. Most Sinners who thrive on Britain's rocky ground are low-blooded guttersnipes permitted to eke out an existence performing those tasks and services

that are beneath the dignity of their betters, but for which those betters are willing to pay a hefty price. This Sinner criminal element is at least nominally of Promethean sympathies, though the Sinners concentrate on the practicalities rather than ideologies of the movement.

The Courts of Love

In stark contrast, the lands of the Languedoc are, and always have been, a hotbed of Sinner activity, the European cradle of the road and its adherents. Culturally distinct from its Northern neighbors in both language and lifestyles, Sinners could be found in every Cainite social niche from wealthy rural landholders, to canny merchants in the great cities of Toulouse and Carcassonne and Narbonne, to troubadours entertaining in the Courts of Love, to dockside ruffians working trades of dubious legality. In truth, most Sinners had little enough to do with aiding and abetting the growth of dualist heresy of the Cathars. The basic teachings of Catharism — that the physical world is a place of suffering and evil, that flesh is a trap for the spirit to be transcended at all costs — stand in stark opposition to everything that the Road of Sin considers holy. Only in the belief that the Catholic Church

is a false and corrupt juggernaut did the Cathars win very much in the way of Sinner sympathy, and even that wasn't enough to mitigate all the other reasons for the Sinners to leave the Cathars alone — or, in the case of some Sinners, to apply their temptations to Cathar *bonhommes* to see which way the chaste and flesh-denying would jump. In some cases, they jumped straight into the arms of Sin, in others, they fell to the blandishments of either Cainite Heretics or those elements of the Road of Heaven of more dualist inclination, and still others remained true to their faith of self-abnegating Apostolic poverty.

All of that changed, of course, with the breaking of the loose fellowship of the Courts of Love, specifically the accusation of treason leveled against Queen Esclarmonde the Black by Etienne of Poitou and the outbreak of war between Esclarmonde and Matriarch Salianna — and the coming of the Albigensian Crusade. These nights, the Languedoc is a patchwork of armed Cainite camps, one of the crucibles of the War of Princes in which new rulers and new war-leaders are being forged. Sinners are, of course, involved in this conflict on all sides as invaders, victims, resistance leaders and profiteers. The most prominent and well-organized Sinner faction currently operating in the

THE UNHOLY HEARTLAND

The Path of Screams possesses a triumvirate of “holy” places along the coast of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, particularly in those areas that were once part of the greater Phoenician dominions, long the favored lair of the Molochim Baali. The *Dark Magister*, while nominally a pirate vessel, has spent a great deal of time recently ferrying individuals and correspondences among these places, as the tremors of conflict pass through infernalist “society.”

- **Tyre**, the City of Mysteries, has been the personal domain of Tanith, first and most beloved daughter of Moloch, for more than 2,000 years and a holy place for adherents to the Path of Screams since its inception. Tanith, ancient and wise, has mentored more than one Sinner coterie over the years. She seems to have a soft spot in her black heart for the road's devotees, infernal or not, though she keeps the darker mysteries of her city from those not yet ready to witness them. She currently shelters the heartily sought-after Mary the Black, plots the protracted demise of the Salubri warrior Qawiyya el-Ghaduba and ignores the pretensions of the whelp Azaneal, who is in no serious danger of dethroning her as the preeminent elder of the region.

- **Damascus**, the Garden of the World, is a city teetering on the brink. Several forces are engaged in a quiet struggle to the death for control of the city and its future — on one side, the Banu Haqim, led by Bistakh bint Fahd, the vengeful childe of a fallen

Assamite warrior; on another, the Baali, who have laired in Damascus since the foundation of the city, led by the cunning and devious Annazir, master of the *Iblii al-Akbar*, the city's great Well of Sacrifice; and, on the last, the Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador), led by Mannal, the rebellious childe of the prince of the city, who seeks to reverse the damage done to both her sire and her *bay't* under the influence of the dark forces she senses at the heart of the city.

- **Chorazin the Damned** lies in the very heart of the Holy Land, its black basalt ruins sitting on a bluff overlooking the Sea of Galilee. These ruins mark the entranceway to one of the darkest mysteries in the world, the fabled “undercity” of Chorazin, where the Baali Methuselah Nergal once housed the sleeping body of the Child of Outer Darkness called Namtaru and refined the rites he hoped to use to wake this unimaginably powerful being. Believed to have been the site of the Baali ritual used to curse the Banu Haqim with the plague of bloodlust, the city has, over the years, been repeatedly scourged by unloving Assamite attentions, though even they have not been able to break into the city's lower levels using the powers at their command. The Azaneali Baali and the *angellis ater* of the Lasombra still consider the city their own, though only Azaneal himself actually dwells there, engaged in his solitary effort to decode the nightmarish writings of Namtaru, etched into the stones of the undercity's walls.

Languedoc is the road's own native resistance movement, dedicated to making the stay of Northern trespassers, Cainite and mortal alike, as short and unpleasant as possible — and fatal when they can. Led by Lozois de Montaigne Noire, an immensely intelligent and charismatic grandchilde of Queen Esclarmonde, this band of Sinners (who call themselves the Brothers of the Black Mountain) has wrought havoc and dismay among Northern aggressors and Southern "collaborators" alike, fighting a war of hit-and-run tactics against both Cainite and mortal foes.

Highly mobile, more thoroughly disciplined than the average band of Sinner malcontents and immensely competent, the Brothers of the Black Mountain are a thorn deeply imbedded in the side of numerous individuals, not the least of which are some of their own kin. The relationship between Lozois and his broodmate, Aimeric de Cabaret, diplomatic agent of Queen Esclarmonde and envoy to the court of Eon de l'Etoile (the Northerner who currently claims domain over Béziers), is a particularly poisonous example of that fact. That Queen Esclarmonde chose to accept a pact of mutual nonaggression with de l'Etoile instead of crushing the upstart bastard sticks in Lozois' craw, but it's the fact that Aimeric brokered the agreement and continues to reside in Béziers as the honored guest of his country's rapists that drives him to a frenzy of hatred. The Brothers of the Black Mountain have been paying special attention to Béziers of late, picking off members of the city's court who stray too far from home insufficiently protected and hoping for the opportunity to assassinate Eon de l'Etoile, Aimeric or, preferably, both of them together.

The Fiefs of the Black Cross

In a way, some of the Sinner-led violence being bred in the Languedoc has spilled over into the region's "neighbors." German Ventrue — particularly German Scion Ventrue, whose attitude of entitlement when it comes to their "right" to seize others' domains is both immediately apparent and instantaneously annoying — are the favored victims of Languedocien Sinners looking to send a message to the Fiefs of the Black Cross. Followers of the Path of Cruelty are often called upon in such cases to carefully preserve illustrative bits of captured Northern enemies — sending the fangs of one's fallen enemy, inscribed with one's personal seal, back to said enemy's sire being a much-favored tactic at present. In the Holy Roman Empire itself, adherents to the Road of Sin tend toward subtlety and toward seduction and tend to be more thoroughly integrated into the fabric of Cainite society... except when they're not.

On the one extreme, some Holy Roman Sinners fail to acknowledge a simple fact of Cainite existence in the Empire: The entire bloody region, from Burgundy to Hungary, the Saar Valley to Marienburg, is quite simply overrun with Scions. In the places where it's not, it's hosting Roman Methuselah relics and the aggressively humanist followers of those relics. To survive in the Cainite society of the Empire, the intelligent Sinner must be willing to make an ethical compromise or two and learn to peacefully coexist with and strategically pander to individuals whose contin-

ued existence is otherwise completely irritating. Truly enterprising Holy Roman Sinners regard the super-concentration of Scions in their choice of abode as a gift, a challenge worthy of their efforts. Scions, after all, make much of the divinely bestowed privilege of rulers, the chains of duty and honor with which they choose to bind themselves. They might as well be slitting their own wrists and waving the blood under the noses of starving Sinners for all the trouble they bring on themselves that way. No Sinner can be asked to resist the temptation to kick the legs out from under a self-righteous Scion, to seduce and entice and twist him into a more pleasing shape — it's practically a sport. Significant status generally accrues to any Sinner who can seduce a Scion. Tanitbaal-Sahar did it first, and probably best, but his spiritual inheritors keep up the tradition proudly.

On the other extreme are those Sinners for whom compromise with any sort of Scion authority, much less semi-friendly social gamesmanship with them, is not only impossible, but actually revolting. When other Cainites speak of the Furores, of bands of revolutionist Cainites stalking the byways and forests and back alleys of the Empire, they are generally speaking of that breed of Sinner and its allies. More fragmentary than their Languedocien counterparts, the Sinner-Furores of the Holy Roman Empire are, nonetheless, explosively violent in temperament and slowly increasing in number. Many consider Sinners who aren't actively engaged in the effort to completely tear down every aspect of Cainite society within the Empire to be traitors to the road itself, worthless decadents more concerned with their own pleasure and comfort than any higher consideration. Some cells actively recruit disenfranchised younger Scions to their cause, believing, correctly, that such individuals are the key to gaining deeper access to Scion courts and are likely to become Sinners themselves, in time. The most prominent example of the phenomenon is the Furore cell known as the Silent Fury. Led by a young Brujah Scion, the cell consists otherwise of Sinners and Ferals and has been aggravating the peace in the Ventrue court of Magdeburg for a short but incendiary period of time. Jürgen, Prince of Magdeburg, would very much like to crush the Silent Fury, but the band has thus far eluded his efforts to either track it down or otherwise entrap it.

The Pagan East

In the lands east of the Danube, Sinner Furores are rare, though not entirely unknown. The Road of Sin itself is popular, in general, with both the decadent elders of the Tzimisce *voivodate* and their most heartily put-upon lesser kin. Elders among the Fiends tend to follow the variations of the road more than the road itself, inclining in particular toward the extremes of the Path of Pleasure and the Path of Cruelty, both being ethical modes that permit the imaginative use of the clan's flesh-sculpting Discipline. The hands of a master Shaper can caress extremes in sensation from even the most unresponsive of Cainite flesh, exploring the outer limits of

both pleasure and excruciation on others and on themselves. Shaper-priests of Jarilo have long conspired with the Szantovich revenant family to create and maintain "temples" to the Slavic deity of erotic pleasure. Many of these temples are disguised as monasteries and convents and are often filled with human (and some young Cainite) "novices" learning the arts of ecstasy to best please their Sinner patrons. The vast majority of these novices are the excess children of Szantovich households, but a significant minority include foreign slaves purchased for the touch of the exotic they bring to the enterprise, and these cloisters have become a major source of new childer for Tzimisce Sinners uninterested in supporting their clan's war effort.

Younger Tzimisce, caught in the ever-grinding maw of the Omen War with the Tremere and the on-again-off-again skirmishing with the Fiefs of the Black Cross, rarely have the time or energy to engage in their elders' pursuit of rarified pleasures. The solace they take from the Road of Sin comes in the form of reaffirming their individuality and their individual worth, both concepts that have tended to suffer over the last two centuries. When the elders of one's clan come to view the childer they ship off to fight their battles as little more than interchangeable pieces of a war machine or, even more likely, expendable cannon fodder, it falls to the childer themselves to find some way of maintaining self-worth. For many young Tzimisce, the Road of Sin is that way.

Sinners and Cainite Society

The Sinner relationship with Cainite society can best be characterized as complex, constantly shifting and at least adversarial, if not outright hostile. This is not to say that Sinners cannot be well-integrated and functional members of Cainite society in general. It's just that Cainite society itself is rarely prepared to deal well with such an eventuality. Sinners, like just about every other vampire, ultimately want a place to belong, a place that is unassailably theirs, in which they are safe, secure and as happy as they can be. Some Sinners pursue this by attempting to remake society, violently if necessary, in the image that suits them best. Others bend to the demands of civil society and choose to move quietly among the rest of their kind, confining any activist tendencies they might have to a small and select circle of cohorts. Some opt out of the Cainite social milieu altogether, choosing to dwell at the fringes of both living and dead society, pleasing only themselves and making their way as they see fit, without compromise for the moral squeamishness of others.

Sinners are, in the eyes of the average Cainite, just that — creatures made entirely of every temptation, every perversion, every wickedness that the good little monsters of the world have been raised to deny, in both

life and unlife. Sinners are, even in relatively mild and seemingly domesticated form, an unliving challenge to the values of the world through which they make their way because the ethics they hold to their own unbeating hearts are in complete contradiction to everything other vampires believe. Even if Sinners don't shout it from the rooftops or attempt to seduce everyone who crosses their path, in their hearts, they harbor the seed of the first sin — rebellion, rebellion against the right of others to judge or rule them, rebellion against the intrinsic holiness of humility and piety, rebellion against the very idea that one must reject and deny a part of oneself for any reason. Even the most conscientious and well-mannered Sinner has chosen to embrace her own darkness, to feed it, to understand it and to tame it to her will, and to other Cainites, the knowledge of that decision is horrifying and frightening and dreadfully, exhilaratingly attractive all at once.

For their part, many Sinners regard their fellow vampires with decidedly mixed emotions, as well, ranging from amusement to contempt to a certain kind of pity. Sinners do not lie to themselves about what they were or what they are. Once, they were human, and that humanity remains an inextricable part of many Sinners, which they do not deny. Now, they are vampires, and the rules and ethics and strictures of human society can no longer serve or save them. The alchemy of the Embrace has transmuted a part of each of their souls into a Beast, and it is the Beast they must comprehend and control in order to survive. Few vampires have the will or the vision to accept that, much less deal with it successfully, and for that, Sinners pity them. The fact that so many of their fellow vampires choose to cling to what they *were* and refuse to deal in any meaningful way with what they *are* earns the sting of Sinner contempt.

Some Sinners attempt to educate other vampires, but no one except the objects of the Sinners' attentions typically appreciates their efforts. Rather, those efforts become one more excuse to hound a Sinner from her home, to seize her chattels, to destroy her childer. It is assumed that some devilish seduction or compulsion must have been used to lure another Cainite from whatever righteous way he was following, that no one following another road might have turned to the ways of Sin of his own free will. Which, ironically, is the only way a Sinner mentor would have him. The children of Sin cherish deep respect for the power of the individual will and the right of others to make their own decisions. Compelling another to turn to the road against his own will is, among Sinners, a contemptible act that carries heavy consequences.

Other Sinners wash their hands of the organized hypocrisy of Cainite society altogether and go their own way. The *Via Peccati* owns possibly the highest concentration of deliberately Autarkis vampires in the world — which is to say, vampires who have voluntarily abandoned the society of their own kind,

as opposed to being driven from it by force or Lextalionis. Elder Sinners and their broods, disgusted with the current state of the world, are the most likely to take this route, slamming the metaphorical doors of their domains and havens and concentrating solely on their own endeavors, ignoring the demands of upstart "lieges" and refusing every bond of society not to their liking. Some simply prefer the mercenary unlife to endless oaths and vows and bonds of vassalage — the willful enslavement of oneself for the sake of a few scraps tossed from the master's table — and make their own way, freelance and unfettered by obligations of honor not governed by hard coin and hot blood. It is these Sinners who have actively profited most from the War of Princes, as their loyalties are fluid, their experience solid, and both are for sale to the highest bidder.

The High Clans

The Cainites of the High Clans consider themselves the natural rulers of the night, and inasmuch as temporal power tends to accumulate in their hands, that is true. High-blooded adherents of Sin often combine a driving will to power that would do any Scion proud with a virtually endless capacity to enjoy the fruits of the dominion they've exerted themselves to claim.

Brujah

On cursory examination, the Brujah would not appear to be particularly well-suited to the morally unfettered pursuit of Sin in all its incarnations. The Brujah may be passionate, and a fire undoubtedly burns in their cold, dead hearts, but rarely is that flame a thing of naked personal indulgence. Brujah lend their passion to *causes*. They reserve their strongest feelings for externalities, intellectual abstractions, idealistic visions that may never become concrete reality. Sinners may be many things, but idealistically altruistic is rarely one of them.

In practice, the Brujah, like every other group of wild-eyed fanatical dreamers, tend to fall well short of their own lofty ideals and visionary goals. Few things in the night are more pathetic than a Zealot whose high-mindedness has been beaten against the indifference of the world one too many times, whose attempts to achieve something greater than himself have repeatedly come to nothing. Such individuals seldom choose the ways of Sin initially but, rather, tend to stumble onto the road after their hearts, souls, minds and aspirations have been shattered to powder. For them, the Road of Sin's inward-turning focus and intrinsic goal of personal self-realization can echo the traditional Brujah concept of Olympic perfection, strength of body and focus of mind. Some of the most potent elder Sinners are Greek Brujah who recognize more than a few of the philosophical underpinnings of the road.

The only true point of convergence between the general Brujah tendency toward causes and the followers of the Road of Sin lies in their mutual appreciation and support of both the Promethean and Furore movements in Cainite society. Both groups of would-be revolutionary social engineers have attracted the attention of Brujah and Sinners — the Brujah because any movement that adopts the notion of "New Carthage" as part of its vision for the future is sure to capture their imaginations and the Sinners through the Furore intent to demolish the existing, stagnant, strangling social order, a goal that no Sinner worth his blood could fail to applaud. Brujah of all ages and philosophical bents are currently brushing shoulders with Sinner-Firebringers and Sinner-Furores, particularly the fire-eating adherents of the *Via Adversarius*, exchanging outlooks, forming partnerships and engaging in a great deal of frighteningly active intellectual cross-pollination. Only time will tell what will grow from this strange and unlikely garden of ideas.

Cappadocians

The Road of Sin finds some of its most scholarly and introspective adherents among the Cappadocians. The relentless inquisitiveness that many Cappadocian sires seek in their childer resonates favorably with several core Sinner values: exploration into the truths of undead nature, the relationship between one's own humanity and the Beast, the Beast itself and the various intellectual and spiritual satisfactions that may be found in the appreciation of one's own state of being. Few Cappadocians cling very long to strictly humane methods of relating to the world — if, in fact, they were particularly humane while they still breathed — and Sin offers the opportunity to explore the limits of inhumanity by whatever means the seeker chooses.

The Graverobbers bring an aura of near-respectability to the practice of the ways of Sin. Few Cainites possess the imagination necessary to cast the Cappadocians as hot-blooded proponents of ravenous self-indulgence or as the unthinking destroyers of social stability and civilization wherever they may tread. Their reputation for scholarly, as opposed to sensual, excess is well-accepted by Cainite society at large, as is their predilection toward Sin; in a way, their general appearance of stability and support for the Cainite status quo has rubbed off somewhat favorably on the reputation of the road. Few people appreciate how destructive of static Cainite social mores the Cappadocians can be when they put their minds to it. The average Sinner of any other clan may generate short-term chaos in a Cainite court with her behavior, but the Cappadocian Sinner will almost invariably take the long-term intellectual approach when it comes to his experiments in social disruption and human moral decay, maneuvering his way into a position of confidence or authority, tugging strands in the web of society, kicking the supports from beneath one institution and

propping up another and observing the fallout that arises from his efforts.

Cappadocians can be found on nearly every Path of Sin, with one exception. Very few Graverobbers adhere to the Path of Pleasure, a fact that surprises absolutely no one walking the road with them. Of course, unpleasant rumors circulate, even among the Sinners, about the precise details of some necromantic practices in which the Cappadocians specialize, but no Voluptuary has yet had the nerve to ask, and some things are probably better left unsaid anyway.

Lasombra

Surprisingly enough, Lasombra generally tend to mix with Sin the way oil mixes with water, which is to say, not at all. While the Lasombra are prone to insatiable desires, particularly for power, several other aspects of their clan culture tend to make the ways of Sin less attractive to their eyes.

For one, many Magisters tend to be conventionally devout in some way, a pious adherent to Catholicism, Judaism or Islam, Embraced from the ranks of Christian, Jewish or Muslim clergy, or a wholehearted follower of one of the various heretical religious movements active in Europe or the Holy Land. The Road of Sin explicitly rejects many human religious doctrines as factors in vampiric morality, doctrines that the faithful Lasombra cling to as the lifelines of their souls. For another, the vast bulk of the Lasombra clan is actively engaged in propping up many of those aspects of human and Cainite society that the Sinners would much rather see torn down — the ecclesiastical dominance of the Church over the moral development of nearly every mortal soul in Europe, for one, and the obvious superiority and right to dominance of noble-blooded mortals and the first cursed among Cainites in secular society, for another. Lasombra arrogance in this regard grates on the nerves of many Sinners and tends to make the Magisters the target of retribution and deliberate sabotage of their efforts, rather than any attempts at seduction.

Those few Lasombra who incline to the Road of Sin are often driven there by the social and moral pressures that build within their own clan and, in many cases, their original roads. Lasombra, like the Ventrue, are often under intense pressure from within their own "families" to excel in everything they do, and rarely is failure considered acceptable. Magisters incline toward moral structures that also value either hard driving ambition or supreme moral rectitude and that allow little latitude for moral frailty. Magisters who fail to achieve the goals they set for themselves often fall from grace spiritually, as well, and find themselves seeking the Road of Sin as an outlet for needs they have no other means of satisfying. Such individuals can be found on every branching path and on the main ways of the road, as well. Some Lasombra who cannot maintain the austerities of the Road of Night turn to the Path of Cruelty as an acceptable moral substitute.

Toreador

The Toreador consider themselves the true patrons of all the best that humanity has to offer. They are the benefactors of human society, the supporters of all its best and brightest: the wisest scholars, the most skillful artisans, the most talented and visionary artists and poets and musicians. The Toreador would very much like to claim that Sin, with its central focus on understanding the inhuman nature and appetites of the Cainite condition, holds absolutely no allure for them.

They would be lying, and many Sinners both in and outside of their clan know it.

The Toreador hunger for beauty. The desire for it lies at the core of their beings and, in many ways, motivates nearly everything that they do. They long for the reawakening of emotion, for pleasure and for passion, and they use these things to hold back the ravaging of their Beasts. It is a tragedy that they exist in an era where every beautiful thing, and the pursuit of beauty itself, is considered sinful unless somehow dedicated to the glorification of God or some other powerful patron.

The Artisans are some of the most natural Sinners stalking the night. Toreador Sinners often come to the road after sloughing off the moral hypocrisy that surrounds human notions of beauty — when the frustrated Artisan finally and forever shouts aloud that beauty is not evil, that pleasure is not wrong, that passion drives the world and that the pursuit of those things is often all that makes existence worthwhile. Newly enlightened Toreador often bring a ferocious convert's zeal to the cause of Sin, throwing themselves into their freshly adopted road with an intensity that few other Cainites can match. Artisans groomed to the road by their sires are often among the most subtle and seductive of their kind, advancing their own moral development through exquisitely directed passion plays of Cainite social interaction and winning converts to the road with their elegance, their intelligence and their silken caresses.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of Toreador Sinners gravitate toward the Path of Pleasure, the way of Sin that allows them to express their powerful aesthetic yearnings to the fullest. Some few Artisans of particularly inhumane leanings take the Path of Cruelty, finding beauty in a scream as well as a song. Very few Toreador Adversaries or Screamer exist, but those that do are often the most vicious and implacable foes of human religious institutions, bending their considerable wrath toward bringing down the most hypocritical and oppressive of their former patrons.

Tzimisce

The Tzimisce are among the most bluntly, honestly inhuman of all vampires, a fact that stands them in good stead when it comes to the Road of Sin. The Fiend's innate lack of hypocrisy with regard to their undead state often eases the painful readjustment period that comes with

waking to discover oneself no longer human and expedites the initiation process for the Road of Sin. Tzimisce sires rarely possess much tolerance for, or any tendency to indulge, any lingering human mawkishness in their childer and, so, waste little time in stripping their offspring of the chains of human morality.

Tzimisce can be found walking every major path of the Road of Sin as well as the main road itself, with one important philosophical modification. Nearly all Tzimisce Sinners sneer at the entire notion that their state is a punishment handed down by any god. Elder Tzimisce who remember the nights before the coming of the Christ and His priests hold the entire notion of damnation in particular contempt, considering the Embrace to be sacred in itself, the ritual death and acceptance of the Waters of Life and Death that transforms the celebrant from one state to another, something god-touched and nearly divine. Damnation is one part myth handed down by hand-wringing weaklings unable to accept their new existences, on the Cainite side of the equation, and one part propaganda tool promulgated by the ambitious and powerful among humans, yet another method they've developed to herd their own prey. In theory, Tzimisce admire the cunning trap of the Christ's minions. In practice, the Fiends tend to grind to powder the bones of anyone who dares judge them in their own domains and use what's left to decorate their thrones. In the final analysis, Tzimisce Sinners recognize and appreciate the nature of the Road of Sin, with its notions of individual worth, personal growth, self-exploration and self-satisfaction.

Tzimisce Sinners tend to be among the most flatly individualistic of all the road's adherents. If they rule, they rule as they please, enforcing their edicts with both an iron will and an iron fist, suffering nothing that fails to amuse them to sully their domains and extracting what they desire from their dominion with a thoroughness that followers of the *Via Tyrannus* can but envy. If they follow, they follow no one but themselves and are ruled only by their own needs and desires, existing as laws unto themselves.

Ventruue

The Ventruue, much like the Lasombra, genuinely find little that appeals to them when looking on the fellowships of Sin. Like their Magister rivals, the Ventruue tend to wade hip-deep in the aspects of mortal and immortal society that Sinners find most contemptible. Their adoption of the feudal social order within the structure of their own clan has aroused the unquenchable scorn of Sinners all over Europe, who waste few opportunities to cut the knees out from under the so-called Warlords and their mortal puppets. From the Sinner perspective, the Ventruue reached the height of their worth as a clan and as individuals during the era of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, when the Ventruue Prince of Rome, Camilla, abandoned the *Via Regalis* for the *Via Desideratio* and took many of his influential clanmates with him along the ways of un-

ashamed Desire. Few among the clan remember those nights favorably now, but those who do wear the Patrician sobriquet with pride. These "Patrician" Ventruue are often Roman-era survivors themselves or else the childer of ancient Roman Ventruue who have been raised to the practice of the Road of Sin in defiance of the clan as a whole. Ventruue Sinners otherwise tend to be embittered vampiric youths, thwarted by the social stasis in their clan and spiritually dissatisfied by the hollow and self-defeating ethics of the Road of Kings.

Low Clans

Some high-blooded Cainites and the more self-righteous adherents of other roads assume that most of the Low Clans adhere to the Road of Sin, as Sinners and the low-blooded vampires share a certain stigma in the eyes of Cainite society at large. This is, however, not always (or even often) the case.

Assamites

The Children of Haqim possess few Sinners within their ranks. While assuredly not the monolithic organization of religious zealots and assassins that Western Cainites whisper of and fear, the Assamites nonetheless exhibit one of the more internally unified and structured clan cultures to be found in the medieval nights, and this somewhat counteracts the spread of Sin amongst the more tightly knit factions of the clan.

This is not to say that the no Saracens walk the *Via Peccati*. While many of the mortal cultures from which the Children of Haqim draw their fledglings are strongly community oriented, more than a few value self-reliance and individual accomplishment as much as any communal virtues. Most Sinners are elders who predate the rise of Islam and their extended broods of descendants, whose personal values handed down through their lineages incorporate Sinner philosophical elements; or dispossessed sorcerers, viziers and some warriors who are, for whatever personal or professional reasons, estranged from the Mountain and the greater body of the Assamite "family."

Followers of Set

The Road of Sin is one of several dominant roads among the Followers of Set. In fact, many European Cainites assume that the epithet *Sinner* is nearly synonymous with *Setite*. This is not entirely the case.

Scholarly Sinners know that the Brujah philosopher responsible for much of the Road of Sin's structure (such as it is) spent a great deal of time in the theophidian temples of the Setites during his wanderings. There, he paid homage to the wisdom of the Serpents, and while he was not accepted as one of their disciples, he nonetheless came away with a profound understanding of their philosophy, their goals and their reasoning. Much of what he learned, he incorporated into his own method of taming his Beast and interacting with the world and other Cainites, shearing

away the religious aspects specific to the worship of the Lord of Storms and retaining those aspects that espoused personal freedom, desire and satisfaction as holy pursuits. The Hierophants and their lesser attendant priests recognized this when the *Via Desideratio* first came to their attention and, thereafter, spent quite some time arguing whether or not to consider that approach blasphemous, heretical or both and what to do about it and its creator in any case.

In the meantime, the *Via Desideratio* was making considerable headway among the ranks of the Followers of Set, particularly among those cults and temples that had somehow fallen out of favor with the Hierophants and other such arbiters of theophidian orthodoxy. It exploded in a particularly virulent form amongst the *Desheru*, the recipients of Embraces granted by sires drawn to the image of Set potential childer wore in their red hair and blue eyes but who otherwise failed to measure up to the Serpents' exacting religious standards. Despite repeated efforts to reunify Setite theology, the road settled in to stay, sitting comfortably alongside the *Via Serpentis* and *Via Typhonis* as the clan's third major philosophical strand. Orthodox theophidians remain bitter about this fact and expend much effort attempting to redirect the energies of their errant clanmates back in the direction of the one true Setite faith, an effort which has, thus far, yielded a significant lack of results.

Gangrel

Gangrel, along with Setites and Tzimisce, are among the more natural Sinners abroad in the night, though few among them recognize that fact. Their own most common road, the *Via Bestiae*, and the *Via Peccati* share more than a few traits in common, not the least of which are a strong affinity for the Beast, a tendency to exist for the moment and a decided contempt for the chains of societal obligation, for the relationship of master and slave, ruler and ruled. Those things taken into account, it's somewhat surprising that more Animals do not incline to the altar of Sin.

The major sticking point for most Gangrel with regards to Sin is their perception of the road's "civilized" nature, which grates against the sensibilities of most of the clan. Relentless physical sensualism rarely appeals to the Gangrel, whose forms are often twisted into more than vaguely inhuman shapes by the close relationship between the Beast and their lack of tolerance for fools and weaklings. Those Animals who take to the Road of Sin do so in recognition of the road's fundamentally individualistic nature, its rejection of the lies and hypocrisies of Cainite and mortal society, and its preference to taking some action, any action, over endless nights spent in maneuvering pawns on someone else's chessboard.

Malkavian

Malkavian Sinners are a diverse and generally terrifying lot, and arguably, no two come to the road for the same reason. Like the clan itself, they are particularly kaleidoscopic and disparate, idiosyncratic and largely

unpredictable by nature. They can be found on every path of the road and reflect all of its aspects — from the most elegant to the most horrific — like images caught in the shards of a broken mirror.

Most other Sinners find their Malkavian cohorts to be a damned disturbing lot. While cults of mortal and immortal followers are common in general amongst the children of Sin, it's a rare Malkavian who isn't the chaotic center of some cult of worshipful admirers, bound to their force of personality, their dark sensuality and charisma. Something about them draws the weak in will and spirit to them like moths to a flame and wears away at even the strongest minds, seeking to pull them into the freedom of unfettered madness. Sinners who value the sanctity of their own minds — which is to say, nearly all of them — give what approbation they can to their Malkavian cohorts and then go away shuddering, grateful to escape the mental downward spiral of long-term association. Many Malkavians possess the ability to invade the minds and souls of others with the tendrils of madness, a fact that many of their fellow Sinners find deeply horrifying. What could be worse, many Sinners wonder, than to have the heart of one's own being violated by a fellow Sinner? The question, thus far, has no answer.

Nosferatu

The Embrace is never kind to the Lepers and neither, for the most part, is Cainite society. Rendered repulsively ugly by the curse of their sires' blood, often ending twisted in shape and mind, they occupy one of the lowest niches of the fallen, the pitiable immortal wretches, scum whom their betters neither wish to see nor acknowledge. Nosferatu Sinners are often angry at the world, quite justifiably so, and take to the ways of Sin in order to vent their hatred and fury before it poisons their minds and souls any further.

Large numbers of Nosferatu gravitate toward the road since, in general, its ethics permit them to approach existence on their own terms, in rejection of the bootlicking toady role all too often assigned members of their clan. No small number of Nosferatu Sinners incline primarily toward the Path of Cruelty, deliberately stripping away their own tender feelings and stoking an internal furnace of hate to vent and soothe their wrathful Beasts, shaping themselves into predators with few peers. Still more take the Path of the Devil, lashing out against a God they feel has unfairly condemned them. A decidedly disturbing minority takes to the Path of Pleasure, using the clan's obfuscatory talents to play games of seduction and horror with hapless mortals and vampires alike.

Ravnos

The Ravnos, along with the Followers of Set, enjoy the dubious distinction of a bad, but fearsome, reputation among the high-blooded clans of Europe. Almost all of the Charlatans are believed to follow the Road of Sin,

and as with the Setites, this is not entirely true. Ravnos manifest a distinct weakness for the types of behavior associated with Sinners in general, but this is not so much an expression of a deliberately chosen philosophical bent as the hair shirt that the Charlatans wear next to their souls.

The Ravnos Beast is a wily creature, indeed. It whispers seductive promises in the ears of the unfortunate Cainites who bear its malice, tempting them to practice vices and depravities that would cause even the most jaded Sinners to gape in surprise. A truly sophisticated monster, the Ravnos Beast generates a naturally occurring addiction to sin and corruption found in no other breed of vampires. For this reason, the Road of Sin — which pursues personal indulgence and vice voluntarily — is both attractive and dangerous for the Charlatans. Attractive because it represents a “natural” means of dragging the instinctual proclivities of the Beast in line with the deliberate intellectual choices of the vampire, generating some modicum of inner peace. Dangerous because, for the Ravnos, the very ethics of Sin heavily blur the line between instinct and intellect, personal choice and involuntary impulse, feeding and taming the Beast and succumbing to it utterly.

Tremere

As the youngest and least formally established of the 13 clans and the only clan to tear immortality from the night rather than to be granted it deliberately, the Tremere

occupy a somewhat dangerous position in Cainite society. Their ambition has won them a toehold of semi-acceptance, as have the unique talents they bring to the table, but they have a long way to go before they become truly welcome, if ever they do. Their understanding of the Cainite condition is continually evolving, but in many cases, they must also go about reinventing the wheel when it comes to dealing with themselves and their Beasts.

Tremere attempting to follow the Road of Sin are very much in this position. Few Usurpers are in a position to seek philosophical instruction outside of their own clan. Such contacts tend to be frowned upon and punished harshly when they become known to one's superiors in the pyramid, as they almost inevitably do. In truth, few Tremere possess the sophisticated Cainite social knowledge necessary to seek out and petition for such instruction, even if the idea occurred to them. Most Tremere Sinners who find their grip on both their humanity and the Beast failing have, instead, turned to more classical sources for their education, the writings of the Greek Cyrenaic and Epicurean philosophers, and cobbled together a somewhat bastardized version of Sin from there. Whether or not this approach is truly successful is a matter subject to debate.

Baali

Easily the most viciously despised and persecuted of all the lineages of Caine, the Baali have nonetheless proven themselves to be survivors, and the Road



of Sin appreciates that sort of strength. Severely weakened by repeated collisions with the self-righteous Salubri, driven from many of their traditional seats of power in the Holy Land by the combined might of the Children of Haqim and the Followers of Set, the Baali diaspora fractured the philosophical unity of the lineage. Young Baali in these nights are rarely indoctrinated in the *Via Hyron* or one of the other philosophies specific to their particular lineage, the vast bulk of Baali nests having adopted the *Via Peccati* and its branching paths. Most of these nests follow the Path of the Devil in its most extreme form, bending their efforts to the corruption and defilement of every human and Cainite religious institution, as well as shaking their fists in the face of God. A significant minority adheres to the openly infernalist Path of Screams, engaging in perversions of the old Baali forms of worship that enrage both their own more traditional clanmates and attract the worst sort of attention from other Cainites.

Elder Baali Sinners, who adopted the road at the feet of its promulgator, Tanitbaal-Sahar, during his time in Carthage, are among the most subtle and dangerous of their kind, both in terms of lineage and philosophical bent. Such Baali are possessed of a deep and eerily accurate knowledge of the hearts and souls of others — how to tempt them, how to seduce them and how to break them.

Factions

The children of Sin are a diverse and fractious group, pugnaciously independent, in many ways united only in their desire to exist as they see fit and to suffer no one else to command their wills. They lack an organized internal “priesthood” of enlightened elders who exist solely to dispense wisdom and instruction, and to enforce rigid road dogma, among aspirants and initiates. The closest thing to a Sinner priesthood is the loose, generally amiable association that exists between many of the road’s well-established elders. Cults of personality spring up around prominent members of the road, persist for a time, dissolve again and reform elsewhere around someone else. New interpretations of the road’s main tenets arise, are debated and analyzed, refined and torn down, rejected and accepted. Sinners, in general, do not shout “Heretic!” at each other over differing interpretations of the road’s core ethics — what would be the point? Heresy can only exist in the presence of inflexible religious dogma, and Sinners avoid such ethical rigidity with single-minded devotion.

This loose internal structure and generalized tolerance for deviation has spared the Road of Sin much of the factionalism and internal strife disturbing the peace of more highly structured roads. Some followers of both the main road and its many branching paths are more “orthodox” in their practice of the faith than others, but rarely do

they pass judgment on other Sinners. Even if they do judge another Sinner harshly, the odds of them taking action to “correct” their erring brethren are slim, indeed.

Paths Along the Road

Unlike other roads, the varying paths branching from Sin are not necessarily regarded as “schisms” within the main philosophical body of the road as much as refinements of particular ethical points. The very concept of an orthodox Sinner is nearly oxymoronic, and the relationships between Sinners following the main road and Sinners cleaving to a particular path tend to be less tense than in other, more rigidly structured roads.

The Path of Pleasure — *Via Voluptarius*

The followers of the Path of Pleasure have, predictably enough, adopted lust as their favorite deadly sin and pursue sensual excess in nearly all of its forms. Driven by more-than-human physical desires, they understand their Beasts to be creatures of raw carnal want and give the ravening things what they want to keep them quiet, purring contentedly under the Sinners’ knowing hands. The Voluptuaries are the most nakedly self-indulgent of all Sinners, pursuing an existence of wealth and comfort that will let them gratify their every material desire, even if they have to work for it first. And, to give them the credit they deserve, they are quite willing to work for their comforts. Sinner Voluptuaries vie with the Scion Viziers as some of the most capable princely advisors in Cainite society, often possessing a penetrating insight into the weaknesses and desires of Cainite and kine alike and how to manipulate those frailties for their own benefit and that of their patrons and benefactors.

The Path of Pleasure acknowledges both physical and intellectual pleasures and specifically embraces the primacy of physical sensualism from a philosophical standpoint. Physical desires and the means used to gratify them are much more viscerally satisfying to the Beast, propitiate it much more completely, render it quiescent much longer and are altogether more pleasant to engage in regularly than the most refined emotional or mental stimulus. Devotees of this path are very much creatures of the now, seeing little point in the deliberate deferment of pleasure, unless immediate pursuit of it somehow works against their best interests, as it sometimes does. In such a situation, these Sinners will temporarily defer their immediate wants and pursue them in a less direct fashion. *Carpe noctem* is most definitely the ideal of this path, as it strongly advocates existing for the moment, wringing every drop of passion from each night and allowing no one but yourself the right to gainsay you.

Followers of Pleasure also place little intrinsic value in the existence of others. They extol the value of self above all other things and consider the achievement of

one's own pleasure the ultimate goal. If they bring pleasure to others in the process of pursuing their own, that result is entirely ancillary and a secondary consideration at best. Interaction with others, both human and Cainite, is perceived as simply the means to the end of achieving maximum personal pleasure, not an end unto itself. The Voluptuous Ones do not value friendship for its own sake and rarely trouble to develop deep emotional ties with other beings.

Other Sinners tend to regard the Voluptuaries as shortsighted and irretrievably self-involved, even for the *Via Peccati*. In the estimation of many sharing the road with them, they're good for precisely two things — bending the ear of whatever master they've chosen to shackle themselves to and procuring, training and supplying fine vessels for Sinner fetes and rituals — and not very much else.

The Path of Cruelty — *Via Crudelitas*

Wrath is the sin of choice for most followers of the Path of Cruelty — wrath and rage, hate and malice, cruelty at its most pure and most refined. The Heartless align themselves with the Beast at its most poisonously vicious, taming it with a regimen of torments inflicted on others. Followers of the *Via Crudelitas* have taken a knife to their own minds and souls, cutting away such human weaknesses as pity and compassion, mercy and forbearance, leaving behind coolly sensuous predators who take pleasure in the agonies of others and the satisfaction of their own physical wants. In general, the Heartless have little patience with the moralistic whining and social preoccupations of other vampires, choosing to exist on the fringes of Cainite society, often as Autarkis, making their way as freelance agents for anyone who can meet their price and not question their methods of achieving any given goal. Some of the more social walkers of this path take official positions as sheriffs and scourges in the courts of less humane princes. The rulers of the Tzimisce voivodate in particular, who genuinely admire the Heartless' lack of human frailty, favor their talents.

Philosophically, the Path of Cruelty is a warped offshoot of the Path of Pleasure, developing as a separate and coherent path when those devotees of Pleasure whose tastes ran toward rites of excruciation began considering the infliction of pain as a distinct and different ethical entity. It grew from there, developing sophistication as its core concept, that the Beast may be tamed through the application of pain to others as well as pleasure to oneself, took on greater definition. Without a doubt, the devotees of Cruelty take pleasure in the pain that they inflict. Why not? They expel their self-loathing and their hatred of the world and everything in it on a regular basis. They milk themselves of their own venom, that they not poison their own souls, and revel in their freedom from conscience and compassion.

Adherents of the Path of Cruelty accept the primacy of self espoused by their pleasure-seeking

philosophical kin but reject the instinctive here-and-now mode of existence embraced by the followers of their parent path, preferring a more measured and contemplative way of existing. Unlike pleasure, which is often intense but fleeting, pain can be made to last. The path does tend to attract more than its fair share of individuals who prefer the constant and imaginative infliction of gross physical torments, but it also harbors adherents who practice more refined mental, emotional and social tortures, as well. The Heartless are multifaceted in their unlifestyles, some simply choosing to follow the hedonistic ways generally expected of Sinners, the better to lull their prey into a false sense of security, and others practicing personal austerities so great as to seem masochistic to other followers of their road. Devotees of Cruelty often seem more personally disciplined than the average Sinner and are generally more willing to defer immediate gratification, particularly while drawing out the details of a particularly engaging exercise in torment.

Other Sinners tend to treat the Heartless the same way they'd treat someone else's dog — with respect and, preferably, from a distance. The followers of this path practice their wiles on nearly everyone who comes to their attention. Their fellow Sinners are not exempted in this regard and are often considered far more worthy of protracted play than lesser Cainites. As a result, they are somewhat more isolated from the loose fellowship of their own philosophical kind.

The Path of the Devil — *Via Adversarius*

"Proud as Lucifer" is a term often used to describe the adherents of the *Via Adversarius*, and that perception is not at all incorrect. In many ways, the Adversaries take the great fallen angel as their inspiration — the symbol of their intellectual and practical rebellion against mindless conformity, arbitrary authority and the dominance of the privileged and sanctimonious over their so-called "lessers" — in short, against nearly every other major underpinning of both Cainite and mortal society. Fiery rebels and would-be revolutionaries, the adherents of this path recognize the destructive tendencies of their Beasts and try to guide those needs into constructive directions: destroying those things that deserve destruction — faith that enslaves rather than uplifts, authority that abuses its dominion — and creating something better to take its place. The Adversaries are one of the driving forces at the heart of the Furore movement, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the humanist Prodigals, a strange marriage-synthesis of politics and philosophy that astounds nearly everyone who witnesses it. Oddly enough, the *Via Adversarius* is one of the most organized of all the ways of Sin, a meritocracy that drives outsiders mad trying to navigate its decidedly counterintuitive (to the medieval mind) structure. The number of Adversaries who

are not, for all practical intents and purposes, Autarkis hardly warrants mentioning.

Philosophically, the Path of the Devil is more individualistic than innately hedonistic in character. Certainly, personal comfort is a fine thing to have, and there's not an Adversary in existence who hasn't at least considered arranging a disturbingly painful and protracted fate for a particularly stubborn enemy, but in general, the Adversaries tend to consider devoting all of one's existence to the pursuit of such things somewhat juvenile. Adversaries attempt to be more balanced in their approach to intellectual and physical activities than other Sinners, striving to unite thought and action into a perfect synthesis, rather than placing all their trust in instinct alone. Like the Heartless, they appreciate the inherent value of long-term planning over instant gratification. Like the Voluptuaries, they appreciate the soul-and-senses stirring power of taking action, any action, just to see the results they can achieve from spontaneity.

Unlike other Sinners, the devotees of the Path of the Devil tend to both perceive and acknowledge the inherent value of other beings, even if that value is solely pragmatic, such as appreciating the unlucky peasant a Cainite exsanguinated last evening or the naïve maiden he idly played with while searching for something more interesting to do. No humans are innately worthless (fodder though they primarily are, every Cainite was human once, and that's something too many other Sinners forget or choose to overlook) and no Cainites (certain individuals, however, push the boundaries of even the Adversaries' tolerance for stupidity), though Adversaries often have to look quite hard to find redeeming qualities in some of their associates. Adversaries are prone to engaging in friendship for friendship's sake, often with individuals following roads innately antagonistic to their own, a fact that baffles other Sinners, who consider this a strange and pointless dilution of the road's inherent self-focus. Adversaries respond to this argument with the point that, as the truly virtuous need fear no evil, no Sinner needs to fear the views of others, so long as she remains strong and sure in her own faith.

Other Sinners regard the Adversaries with a combination of head-shaking wonder and dismay. Wonder because they do indeed cleave close to the heart of Sin, to the vision of the road as it was first preached by Tanitbaal-Sahar in Carthage and Rome. Dismay because they insist on wasting so much energy trying to make the whole Cainite world see that their way is best, a cause that most other Sinners have long since given up on as an impossibility.

The Path of Screams – *Via Quiritare*

The canker in the heart of the Sinner rose, the Path of Screams is a dark way indeed, the way commonly known as *Via Diabolis*, condemned and reviled by every clan and road in existence — including the Road of Sin. Adherents of the *Via Quiritare* are the *true* devils among Sinner-kind, Cainites who, rather than drawing out, understanding and taming their hungers, fell to the darkest of Hell-driven

desires. The spiritually hollowed-out shells of vampires, they have whored themselves to the Pit for power, for pleasure, and have become, in exchange, true agents of corruption, the undead servants of Hell on Earth. Most of them maintain elaborate and crafty social masks that they present to Cainite society at large, hiding the truth of their natures behind the convenient blind of general Sinner behavior, lulling and seducing their victims with a web of pretty lies. They wreak soul-killing destruction and havoc everywhere they go, though their personal methods can be as subtle or as terrible as the tastes of the masters who own their blackened souls.

Sinners are not the only Cainites to fall to the Path of Screams when their ideals fail them. In truth, the path collects the morally weak and spiritually flawed of nearly every other road and path in existence — the Scion whose ambitions are thwarted one time too many, the Feral whose loathing of the weak and useless leads her down the dark ways of destruction, the follower of Heaven whose faith is shattered in a moment of weakness, the Prodigal who strays from the path of righteousness out of desire or ignorance. The service of Hell on Earth yields many benefits to those willing to choose that path, and if the cost is both high and terrible, the same can be said of any other way.

The Road of Sin has, quite publicly, disavowed any voluntary connection to the Path of Screams, and that rejection is truthful. The spiritual slavery that the Screampers have accepted as the price for the power they wield and the pleasures they enjoy is a price no true Sinner would willingly pay. Some Sinners even go so far as to hunt down the infernalists who hide behind their road, often with a viciousness that amazes those who witness it. The followers of the *Via Adversarius*, in particular, find the Screampers' existence a personal affront and pursue rumors of infernalist activity with a fanatical diligence.

Cults, Sects and Organizations

Many Cainite clans and roads engage in the practice of cultism, for ease of feeding if for no other purpose, but the adherents of the *Via Peccati* have elevated the custom to a true art — and the road's single most common form of internal organization and social interaction. Sinners, for all their individualist focus, are social creatures like all vampires and have been known to long for the company of both worshipers and peers — and, more often than not, both together. Masters of the secret desires of both Cainite and mortal hearts, they use that mastery to draw others to them and to bind them close in complex, interwoven relationships of need, desire and fulfillment.

Cults of Blood

The most common reason for any Cainite to gather a cult around himself is, of course, for the exalted cause of procuring an easy supper. Sinners tend to marry this admirable pragma-

tism with a surprisingly genuine sense of responsibility toward the spiritual and intellectual needs of their followers. It's a rare Sinner who approaches the development of a blood cult from the purely cynical perspective of feeding, if only for no other reason than doing so is a one-way path to interminable and absolute boredom. There's nothing worse than spending the effort necessary to build a circle of devoted followers with whom one absolutely cannot have an intelligent conversation. They have to be teachable or at least trainable, capable of holding up their end of a conversation or a correspondence. Dullards and fools only qualify even for feeding-fodder if the Sinner in question is truly desperate.

As a consequence, Sinners tend to be quite choosy about whom they recruit into their cults. In general, they set their sights on individuals whom they find stimulating at multiple levels, preferably intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically, but any combination thereof will do in a pinch. Particularly favored targets include mortal religious officials whose intellectual pride outstrips their faith in whatever god they follow, the more highly educated among the noble and merchant classes and individuals of humble birth and unrefined natural mental or emotional gifts. These lucky individuals become the recipients of the full banquet of Sinner seductive efforts. More often than

SAMPLE SINNER BLOOD CULTS

Blood cults among followers of the Road of Sin take numerous forms, from the typical pseudo-religious form favored by Sinners dallying with notions of heresy to the nearly artistic oddities constructed by the shared whims of Malkavian and Toreador Sinners working in conjunction. For more details on constructing cults in general, see *Ashen Cults*.

- **The Drowned Monastery** is a particularly malignant entity, even by the admittedly liberal standards of the Road of Sin. Occupying the sunken remains of a Benedictine cloister somewhere in the Rhineland, the monastery is truly a tiny slice of Hell in this world, the bastion of a genuine infernalist, his minions and his victims. The Nosferatu Sinner Lukas promised his demonic *patronus* 100 defiled souls in return for the restoration of his physical beauty or else his own soul would be forfeit, and to the misfortune of the world, he succeeded in that task. Now, his cult prospers as it never had when it was laboring solely under the lash of its master's fear of damnation. He has scattered demonically corrupt "novices" to cloisters throughout the Rhineland and even further abroad, to reap an even greater harvest for the creature he serves, and the banditry of his followers in acquiring both goods and victims has waxed bold as his confidence rises. Unfortunately for Lukas, his rapacity has attracted the attention of both the Adversaries of his own road and other, even more pious forces, all of whom would very much like to send him to a face-to-face meeting with his patron.

- **The Carnaval Moriendi**, morbid and bizarre, is nothing more or less than a traveling collection of freaks and oddities, outcasts and iconoclasts and seekers of unorthodox spiritual truths. Comprised primarily of a mix of adherents to the Roads of Sin and Heaven, the Carnaval travels the domains of France, preaching an esoteric form of blood-and-death worship and engaging in positively Epicurean acts of vintage *vitae* appreciation. Found to be weird and only dubiously holy by nearly every Cainite who encounters it, the traveling existence can nonetheless be attractive to vampires looking to leave their home domains ahead of the

prince's sheriff, and as such, the carnival has played host to a rotating roster of Sinners hoping to start anew in places where they're not wanted by the local authorities. More than a few of the carnival's alumni found the basic concept so appealing that they modified it for their own use, and the Carnaval Moriendi can be legitimately said to have parented the efforts of numerous troupes of mobile Sinner buskers, troubadours and other artistically inclined individuals, particularly in the Languedoc.

- **The Aphrodisium of Ancona** is, among Sinners, a symbol of survival in the face of adversity — the survival, in fact, of the road's pre-Christian origins, a memory of the nights when the *Via Peccati* was the *Via Desideratio* and adherence to the ways of Desire was not considered a sin. A labor of love by a rare Lasombra Sinner, the Aphrodisium is a hidden temple dedicated to the natural hungers of both mortals and Cainites, where the only true sacraments are love and those acts that bring pleasure. Valentina della Torchia styles herself the High Priestess of Aphrodite/Venus and leads a cult of mortal and Cainite women, whom she refers to as the Graces. Their primary methods of worship include extensive efforts to undermine the sanctity of the Catholic church in Ancona (as the resident cathedral, the *Duomo di San Ciriaco*, is built over the remains of an ancient temple of Venus), educating all who seek the knowledge in the ways of desire and fulfillment and hosting the single largest and most organized Aphrodisiac celebration known to European Sinners, a week-long orgy of excess and debauchery that has been known to spill over into the mortal community. The physical location of the Aphrodisium itself is a closely guarded secret, but those who have experienced its wonders speak of a marvelous pleasure-garden planted with night-blooming flowers, artwork of an exceedingly fine and explicit nature, and shrines dedicated to such luminaries as Aphrodite/Venus (goddess of erotic pleasure), the many-breasted Artemis of the Ephesians, the Queen of Heaven Ishtar/Inanna and, oddly enough, the sacred whore Mary Magdalene.



not, it takes a stronger person than average to resist a Sinner once she decides she wants you, but then, Sinners also don't enjoy easy fights, finding the satisfaction of wearing down a worthy opponent that much sweeter.

Feeding, however, is only one reason for a Sinner to go to the effort of building a cult of blood. The other is, of course, for the purpose of locating and educating worthy potential childer. It is a sad but true fact that potential Sinners do not exactly grow on trees in these nights, and a great deal of effort must go into the preparatory training of a new child of Sin. (See the earlier parts of this chapter for more detail on this topic.)

Cults of Personality

Whereas Sinners draw together mortal cults of blood for practical purposes of feeding and the production of educated and capable childer, they assemble cults of their own kind, both Cainite and Sinner, for somewhat different purposes. The children of Sin are, almost despite themselves, among the most social of all Cainites. The ethics of their road enjoin them to be strong in their independence and sure of their own self-knowledge, to bow to no will but their own. Those self-same ethics call on them to show the ways of Sin to others struggling in the self-destructive moral quagmire of externally enforced "virtue."

In an effort to combine the best of both worlds — personal independence and responsible ministration to

those Cainite souls in dire need of another way to deal with themselves — many Sinners engage in cult-building amongst vampire-kind, as well. Some seek out ethical and philosophical discourse in deliberately adversarial circumstances, where a well-reasoned and well-fought argument can mean the difference between another night and a final dawn. The Sinner predilection for enjoying a good fight often stands them in good stead in such circumstances, winning converts to the road, yielding exhilarating opportunities for personal understanding and growth in the teeth of conflict, widening circles of social contact and opening doors that might otherwise have remained closed, for good or for ill. Others prefer to pursue their ministry in a more sedate fashion, inserting themselves into princely courts as the keepers of intellectually lively households, where the debates are intense, tend to last for years and cross the boundaries of clan, relative social status and philosophical difference.

Sinners engineer such "cults" for numerous purposes, some practical, others spiritual. In general, the Road of Sin and its devoted followers tend to be regarded with a somewhat jaundiced eye by Cainite society at large. All Sinners are often tarred with one brush, labeled as unconscionable disturbers of the peace, destroyers of civil Cainite and human society, hedonistic libertines without a single thought in their empty heads beyond the current night's amusement. While Sinners can, indeed, be all of those things, those things aren't all

that they are, and Sinner personality cults can and do act as a more publicly responsible face for the road, ambassadors whose elegantly presented acts of seduction rarely leave a Cainite audience feeling violated, repulsed or deliberately manipulated.

Sinners who take the quasi-religious nature of their fellowship more seriously tend to construct cults for the specific purpose of "rescuing" other Cainites who are foundering in their own faiths. The Beast is often the most terrible adversary a vampire faces on a night-to-night basis, as well the Sinners know, and sometimes, the willingness to extend a helping hand to others is worth the cost to one's own independent spiritual development. Guiding aspirants along the difficult beginning steps of the road is a holy task that a righteous few undertake, often with little thanks except from those their efforts save from spiritual dissolution.

Sects

Sinners can be found in nearly every sect known to Cainite society, with only a few exceptions.

Those few Sinners who give any credence to the rumors of the Inconnu or who have the rare personal knowledge of the sect's existence find the entire thought of

them absolutely maddening. The Road of Sin traces its creation as a distinct philosophical entity to the nights of Rome's greatest glory, the rule of the Eternal City by the Ventrue Sinner-Prince Titus Venturus Camillus, known to his clanmates simply as "Camilla," and the Brujah philosopher Tanitbaal-Sahar, the thinker whose vision metamorphosed into the modern *Via Peccati*. Most of the texts and polemics associated with the road in its original form — the *Via Desideratio*, the Road of Desire — were lost with the fall of Rome. Even the most scholarly of modern Sinners rarely possess more than a fragment or two of this precious knowledge, and almost all of them would give a limb, an eye and their first-born childe for a chance to lay hands on a complete copy of *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction*. The idea of an entire sect of Roman relics sulking over the loss of "their" city, possibly retaining possession of the spiritual inheritance of all Sinners in the form of Sahar's completed writings, is sufficient to drive even the most even-tempered child of Sin to a frothing frenzy. What do the Inconnu know of loss?

While the Inconnu tend to drive the Sinners who spare a thought for them insane with frustration, the Order of the Bitter Ashes provokes a snort of amusement, more

SAMPLE CULTS OF PERSONALITY

Sinner cults of personality may, at first glance, bear a suspicious resemblance to Sinner cults of blood. The distinction is simple: a blood cult, stripped of all but its most basic purpose, is about feeding. Sinners are no less guilty than other Cainites of gilding the lily of their bloodlust by claiming to follow a higher purpose, though they're often more open about admitting the truth of their predations. Sinner cults of personality are, however, rarely about food. Instead, the members of such a cult have come together to achieve some specific political or religious goal, and the cult does not often outlive that shared purpose.

- **The Silent Fury** is a rare cult in which the personality that drives it isn't a Sinner at all, but is extensively supported by his Sinner followers nonetheless. Armin Brenner, a German Brujah and follower of the Road of Kings, forms the center of this particularly violent Furore cell. Active in the areas around Magdeburg, the Silent Fury is well on the way to becoming a genuine thorn in the side of both Jürgen, Ventrue Prince of Magdeburg, and Jürgen's Methuselah sire, Hardestadt, Monarch of the Fiefs of the Black Cross. Anarchists of the first order, the Silent Fury practices an extreme version of the Furore political ethic and advocates the complete annihilation of the Cainite ruling class, a goal it attempts to accomplish at every available opportunity. The members have spent a considerable amount of time in the

last decade or so picking off careless or isolated vassals of the Black Cross, aggravating Jürgen and, generally, getting away before any organized response can be mustered to crush them.

- **The Order of the Star of Morning**, also known as the Minor Order of Sinner Preachers by their more sarcastic fellows, is a fellowship comprised entirely of adherents to the *Via Adversarius* who have taken up the cause of infernalist-rousting as their sacred duty to their road. The order was founded by the charismatic and amazingly zealous Toreador Adversary Gabriel de Cambrai after an encounter with an infernalist Lasombra in the Holy Land opened his eyes to the danger lurking inside his own road. He set about seeking other Sinners who had shared both his fears and experiences, then whipping them into a shape sufficient to actually deal with the infernalist threat. The order made common cause with its counterpart on the *Via Caeli*, the Order of Chanticleer, exchanged information and began setting to with an earnestness that makes most other Sinners, infernalist or not, intensely uncomfortable. Thus far, the number of real demon-worshipers the order has dug out of the ranks of the Sinners remains rather small but significant for the stature some of its enemies have enjoyed within the road itself. Gabriel himself remains ardent in his personal desire to locate and destroy the Lasombra Alejandro Martel y Sandoval, captain of the *Dark Magister* and servant to shadows far darker than most with which his kind choose to traffic.



often than not. Few children of Sin can think of anything more damning to do than laugh at them. The entire idea of holy vampire knights sallying forth in the service of God strikes them as inherently ridiculous. Some among the Sinners mix amused contempt with a certain sorrow for the Grail Knights. They are obviously pious and noble, deadly earnest in their faith and so dreadfully misguided that it's almost painful to look on with uncovered eyes. Their stubborn refusal to accept the truth of their own nature has likely doomed them to failure and personal devolution, a fall from grace that the more destructive elements among the Sinners cannot help but aid. Misguided or not, the Knights of the Bitter Ashes are the agents of a virtue that the Sinners despise as a cage for the mind and soul, and clashes between staunch adherents of the two groups are murderous. The waning power and influence of the order is due in no small part to unusually tactically organized and concentrated Sinner efforts, particularly in the Languedoc, where the Albigensian Crusade provided the perfect cover for the settling of old accounts between the Grail Knights and the native Sinners.

As the Order of the Bitter Ashes falls, so do those aspects of Cainite society favored and supported by the children of Sin rise. The Furores and Prometheans, in particular, have engaged the imaginations of many Sinners as few other Cainite social movements have in the years since the fall of Rome.

The Furores combine several concepts near and dear to the unbeating hearts of most Sinners: the perception that their immortality is a gift that liberates the body and soul from the oppression of mortal limitations and human morality, the rejection of the arbitrary rule of the elders in place of the competent and deserving and the unwillingness to subject oneself to servitude, slavery or the dominion of another. Whether or not the originator of the Furore movement was a Sinner, many Sinners have flocked to the crusade's support, a fact that alarms many of the more conservative elements within Cainite society who are aware of the development. Part of what has prevented the Road of Sin from being viewed as genuinely dangerous to the existing Cainite social order has always been its rather diffuse and disorganized internal structure. Crushing a band of malcontent Sinners previously carried quite little in the way of possible repercussions. Most such groups were affiliated solely with themselves and only their sires really cared if they survived or were destroyed. Sinner involvement with the Furores has changed that conventional wisdom in ways few princes, lords and monarchs find at all comforting. The Furores have taken the virtually boundless Sinner capacity for generating chaos and disorder and harnessed it to a political ideology that closely mirrors the Road of Sin's core philosophical ideals. The Furores, it seems, have finally given the Sinners focus. What will arise from that union remains to be seen.



Similarly, the Sinners have taken to the cause of the Prometheans with considerable vigor. While the Furores hack at the branches of the tree of ignorance and tyranny, the high-blooded vampires and mortals at the apex of the feudal social structure, the Firebringers take the opposite tack and strike at the root. Bringing education and enlightenment to the expanding mass of both rural and urban poor is no small task in an era when literacy is considerably less than common, but most Firebringers tackle the task with good will and an ivory vision of the perfect society hanging before their eyes. Or, at the very least, the most rabidly high-minded among their number do. Sinner-Firebringers can be that starry-eyed in their idealism... but for the most part, they're far more personally interested in administrating and profiting from the enterprises that keep the Promethean cause financially solvent. Promethean cults and coteries tend to survive on the fringes of Cainite and mortal society, to insert themselves into the criminal elements and the trade-guild structure of the rising medieval cities for the purpose of sheltering among them and extracting material support from their activities. Vice-peddling being a time-honored Sinner occupation, clumsy newcomer Prometheans irritated established Sinner coteries and vice versa for a considerable length of time, leading to a number of quiet (and not-so-quiet) struggles for dominance among the dregs before the situation began to settle down. Much of that settling down had to do with well-established Sinners rolling their eyes heavenward, negotiating professional boundaries and, for the most part, ignoring the Promethean tendency toward revolutionary rhetoric. The Prometheans are a useful blind for Sinner activities, easy to toss to the local Cainite authorities in some cases and

canny partners in crime in others. Those young Sinners who actually buy into the utopian political leanings of the Prometheans are the objects of considerable exasperation from their more pragmatic elders, who nonetheless are inclined to let their juniors take their lumps and learn from them than to waste air on lectures that are likely to be ignored.

Like the Prometheans, the Cainite Heresy is a sect that most Sinners regard ambivalently. On the one hand, the Heresy does, in fact, appeal to some Sinners with its blatant perversion of human religious doctrine, its quasi-spiritual split personality with regards to the satisfaction of fleshly desires and its widespread intrusion into the realms of power, all of which can be used by a canny Sinner to accomplish many possible goals. On the other hand, Cainite Heretics have a rather high preponderance of having actually *bought* their own palaver, to be suffering from the delusion of their own divinity and, like all fanatics, being unable to either change their minds or the subject. Those Heretics who use their involvement in the sect to venally strangle as much wealth and blood as they can from the world are often a match and more for the average Sinner, if they aren't already Sinners themselves, and so, the sect must be handled carefully, if at all. Some adherents to the Road of Sin are actively offended by the Cainite Heresy, seeing it as little more than a particularly loathsome attempt to supplant an already repulsive institution (organized religious slavery) with something even more distasteful. Sinners cognizant of the irony of that stance never fail to point out that the Heretics are hardly the only band of Cainites in the world battenning on the spiritually weak and easily led, and the debate churns merrily on.







CHAPTER THREE: PATHS OF DESIRE

A strong man and a waterfall always channel their own path.
— Anonymous

Sinner characters present some interesting challenges and opportunities for intense roleplaying experiences. Storytellers may wish to consult this chapter when dealing with Sinner characters in a story or chronicle. Likewise, players wishing to portray Cainites on the *Via Peccati* should read over this chapter carefully. In addition to advice on the conflicts and chronicles appropriate to Sinner characters, it also contains information on playing such characters in a chronicle and having them function within a coterie.

Sinner Chronicles

Many options exist for stories and chronicles focusing primarily on Sinner characters, their goals, their adventures, their ambitions and their conflicts. The suggestions offered here are by no means the only ones possible. As always, the Storyteller should discuss the type of chronicle the troupe would most enjoy with the players in advance and outline the general goals and structure as clearly as possible.

Apostates

The characters begin as apostates from one or more of the other roads. This can be one of the more challenging and rewarding chronicle types to play, potentially both psychologically and emotionally intensive from a character-developmental standpoint. Something drove the characters in question to abandon their old moralities — no easy task for a purely human being and made even more difficult in this case by the inclusion of a ravening, predatory Beast driving them constantly toward mental and spiritual dissolution. Simply deciding what drove the characters to that decision can be a major character-building undertaking, riddled with plot-hooks for later parts of the chronicle, and should forever shape the characters. Often apostates “carry over” their old viewpoints once they begin following their new road, leading to intriguing personal variations of ethics that make for a richer roleplaying experience.

Apostates entering the Road of Sin face proportionally fewer challenges from more established members of their new road but often face greater social difficulties when confronted by adherents to the road they defected from. Few adherents to roads such as the Road of Kings or the Road of Heaven or even the Road of the Beast tend to believe that a former colleague could have willingly turned to the Road of Sin. The knee-jerk reaction is often that the apostate was coerced or seduced or is somehow being compelled against her will to take that action. For those who do understand that the choice was made voluntarily, the contempt directed at Sinner apostates can be corrosive. The characters, in all likelihood, are also forced to endure formal “excommunication” from their former roads.

Apostate Sinners also face the challenge of completely shifting their ethical outlook when they come to their new road. Depending on which of the other roads they followed, this can be a fairly extreme proposition by itself, without any complicating social factors. The beginning steps of the Road of Sin are very basic in their appeal to natural human (and vampiric) desires and yet vastly counterintuitive when it comes to the ethical structure of most of the other roads and the communal nature of human and Cainite society. Overcoming the initial mental resistance is a major first step and moment of truth in a new Sinner’s existence.

Initiates

The characters are all Sinners who have passed the novitiate stage of their training (either as apostates from other roads or freshly Embraced neonate Sinners) and are approaching their initiation as formally accepted members of the fellowship of Sin. An excellent starting point for a chronicle of this sort would be at the actual initiation ceremony, at the Sinner Aphrodisiac celebration or a more intimate setting arranged by the characters’ mentor (or mentors). The characters may all share a single mentor, or their mentors may share one of the loose professional or social associations common within the Road of Sin.

In any case, the newly initiated Sinners share a common goal of some sort that brings together their

efforts, either an interest of their own design or a task assigned to them by their mentor(s). Ideally, this should be something that increases their understanding of their chosen road, deepens their own ties to each other, places the opportunity to build their own resources in their hands or enriches them personally in some way. Appropriately scaled conflict with other Cainites can at this stage, be highly instructive and provide the possibility for recurring nemeses and other ongoing plots, as can a reasonable amount of interpersonal conflict.

Sinners in Arms

Not all Sinners are lovers rather than fighters, and not all Sinner conflicts are of a strictly social nature. While the Road of Sin is somewhat less likely to appeal to or to recruit martial character types, this doesn’t mean that Sinner knights, or Sinners who are willing to take up arms to defend their road and its ideals from enemies both internal and external, don’t exist. The militant Sinners who adhere to the Path of the Devil are only the most obvious example of this phenomenon.

The characters in a chronicle of this type are Sinners who have come together for the specific purpose of defeating some enemy of their road, themselves or their mentor(s). This adversary can be anything from a coterie of Sinner infernalists whom the characters have somehow discovered or run afoul of to a particularly vigorous Faithful or Scion persecutor of the road to one of the growing conflicts of the War of Princes. Ideally, the adversary should not be easy to handle and should stretch the characters to their utmost, forcing them to utilize every resource at their command and triggering numerous moments of truth for the road, but don’t overlook the possibility of just running a good old-fashioned ripping adventure story, either.

Promethean Chronicles

Promethean Sinner chronicles have the strong possibility of being some of the best gritty, dirty medieval street-level stories imaginable. Thematically speaking, the Prometheans themselves are a bizarre and readily customizable mix of high ideals and low ambitions, and their split personality suits a Road of Sin chronicle perfectly, as both approaches work equally well. The characters could be highly idealistic Sinners devoted to the vision of tearing away the shackles of ignorance that bind most of the world, starry-eyed with their own righteousness. They could be completely devoid of anything resembling ideals or visions, manipulating the Promethean movement as a cover for their own criminal activities. Or they could be an uneasy mixture of both — they don’t *want* to believe in the ideal, but something about it prods relentlessly at the backs of their souls, reminding them that, while they owe responsibility to no one but themselves, their road enjoins them to break down the bonds of ignorance and unthinking adherence to arbitrary authority that kill so many human and Cainite souls. The moral dilemma alone makes for great dramatic fodder, let alone all the trouble Promethean Sinners can get into otherwise.

Furore Chronicles

Furore chronicles have the same potential for down-and-dirty street-level play as Promethean chronicles, though of a slightly different type. Even the most vigorous and subversive Promethean groups are still a touch more passive in their aggression than the Furores, who are revolutionaries with the explicitly stated intent of ripping down Cainite society as it currently exists and replacing it with Something Else. What that Something Else is usually varies from group to group, and the same holds true with Sinner Furores, who tend to be quite good at the "tearing down" part and somewhat less refined in their opinions about what should happen after everything they loathe about Cainite culture is rubble. Defining what that might be would be one of the major challenges of a chronicle of this type, as the Sinner ability to take the long view tends to be rather severely impaired by the excitement of the moment at times. Another challenge would involve muddying the waters. Chronicles of this type can often develop into black and white struggles against cardboard enemies. The Storyteller should guard the chronicle from this tendency. Don't be afraid to give a band of Furore Sinners an adversary whom they can *admire* as much as they despise, against whom they have to struggle at a more than physical level.

The Infernal Crusade

Unknown to many Cainites, the War of Princes is being fought on more fronts than they can easily imagine. One of those fronts is the growing storm building within the infernalist "community," the loose fellowship of diabolical Baali nests, freelance occultists of other clans and bloodlines, non-infernal Baali and Sinners and other, external forces applying pressure to the same. The Children of Haqim and the Baali of the Holy Land are engaged in active, nearly open warfare in the wake of the Baali blood-curse on the Assamites, the plague of hunger that is spreading through the ranks of the warrior caste like wildfire. The Baali themselves are also at war with each other, a conflict triggered by the ambitions of the would-be Shaitan Azaneal, whose attempts to unite his scattered lineage under his leadership have provoked something less than a perfect wholeness of purpose. And the adherents of the Path of the Devil are actively engaged in stamping out the infernalist brushfires appearing all over Europe as refugees from the conflict in the Holy Land flee there, seeking a safe haven in which to begin their cults — and their unholy efforts — all over again.

Naturally, chronicles of this type have a tendency to be either unrelentingly grim, which can be dramatically satisfying all by itself, or black-and-white conflicts, which can play out equally well. Sinners do not always have to be portrayed in a morally ambiguous light. Sometimes, it makes for a refreshing change to cast the character whose actions might otherwise be perceived as self-serving as the hero.



Sinner Conflicts

Sinners are deeply enmeshed in many of the conflicts currently warming the Dark Medieval nights. While the Scions are at the heart of the greatest Cainite conflict of the era, the War of Princes, the Sinners are actively engaged on that field, as well. In many ways, the very nature of the road is an adversarial one, calling into question everything others hold holy and inviting the conflicts that result. The following concepts are an example of potential flashpoints for such conflicts, suitable for adapting for individual stories or whole chronicles.

Sinner vs. Sinner

Sinners, unlike the followers of other roads, rarely kill each other over such trifles as temporal power. Power, like sex and blood, is readily available to anyone who wants to exert himself to obtain it. Sinner-on-Sinner violence related to a religious schism is generally confined to the road's habit of personally digging the infernalists out of their ranks and making a bonfire for them with the little parchment scrolls on which they sold away ownership of their souls. Most Sinner conflicts are otherwise actually more of an interpersonal nature rather than a genuinely schismatic religious one.

Nearly every Sinner in existence interprets the nature of the road in a very personal way and uses that interpretation to define her relationship with her Beast, her methods of taming the Beast, her long-range personal goals and her

way of interacting with her fellow Sinners and the rest of the world. Naturally, this produces friction. Some Sinners appear to the eyes of other Cainites to be relatively mild in their ravenous wickedness — because they are. Their interests are inward-turning, and their styles of interacting with the world are more easily integrated into the fabric of Cainite society. They are not obviously destructive, seductive or too hot for others to handle pleasantly. Some Sinners are bluntly hostile to the entire Cainite and human social and religious edifice, and regard others of their kind who make the spiritual concessions necessary to survive within that framework as weak in their faith, dilettantes and hedonists but true Sinners nonetheless. The Road of Sin embraces both extremes as valid expressions of the road, though Sinners following those two extremes tend to grate on one another's sensibilities at the personal level. Such conflicts of personality and style rarely explode into open violence, though there tends to be a significant amount of backbiting and social sabotage.

Sinner vs. the Followers of Other Roads

Sinner conflicts with the followers of other roads, on the other hand, tend to be considerably less than civil. Discussing religion around the Cainite dinner table is one of the fastest ways for a Sinner to find himself embroiled in a vicious struggle to the death with a highly motivated and capable opponent, whether or not he personally initiated the conflict. Sinners cannot, however, be regarded solely as the innocent and unfairly persecuted victims of discrimination and prejudice on the religious front. They do their fair share of starting and finishing such clashes, for both spiritual and material reasons. Sinners cherish a special antagonism for two roads in particular — the *Via Regalis* and the *Via Caeli*. Both of these roads represent aspects of Cainite society that most Sinners consider worthy only of relentless opposition and, preferably, outright destruction.

The Road of Kings founds and prides itself on all those things that Sinners consider most repulsive about the Cainite condition: the unthinking and slavish respect for hierarchy and tradition, the subjugation of duty and submission to the will of others, the fundamental belief that everything in creation should bend knee to something else for purely arbitrary reasons, accidents of birth or age or Embrace. Sinners view Scions as the worst sort of hypocrites. Scions could all make excellent Sinners if they would simply cease the folly of dressing their lusts in garments of honor and duty and pretending to some "higher" purpose, when all they truly worship is their own desire for power. Scions compound the initial error — denying the truth about themselves — by also propping up the social institutions that enslave individuals and stratify them into the roles "foreordained" for them not by their own wills, but the will of "God" or the will of the secular lord who owns the land they dwell on or the will of anyone who has managed to claw his way into a place of power and now can enforce his will on others. Scions clash with Scions in the War of Princes, but they clash with Sinners, as well, who are far

WHEN A SINNER REALLY HATES A SINNER

While most Sinner-on-Sinner conflicts stop well short of actual bloodshed, a significant minority cross the fine line between a simple philosophical disagreement and attempted murder. Conflicts of this type can easily spill over into Cainite society in general, catching innocent bystanders in the crossfire and destroying the relatively peaceful existence of one or more of the Sinner participants. In such cases, Sinners rarely turn to the local Cainite rulers for redress of their grievances — they're unlikely to receive much sympathy, anyway. No matter how deep the rancor might run, inciting a non-Sinner prince to declare *Lextalionis* against a fellow child of Sin is considered extremely poor form, at best, and reason for censure, in general. Sinners are expected to fight their own battles. Of course, if the prince enacts justice on his own, the wronged Sinner is in no way morally obligated to assist his enemy in escaping it or to interfere with the process in any way. Sinners are also expected to reap what they sow, and if they sow discord with their own fellows, they can certainly reap the results.

more dangerous than even the most venomous rival from their own road. Scions, after all, focus almost entirely on power — the acquisition of it, the maintenance of it and the right to wield it like both scepter and lash. Sinners reject that ethic with a ferocity that shocks Scions. What other Scions want to seize for themselves, Sinners want to destroy utterly, and there can be no quarter in most struggles between the followers of these two roads.

It was the self-righteous vampires of the Road of Heaven who first called the *Via Desideratio* the *Via Peccati*, and the Sinners have never forgiven them the insult — or the defamation of the Road of Sin that the Faithful helped perpetrate within Cainite society. The Faithful are completely appalling in the eyes of most Sinners, a festering boil of moralistic twaddle and putrid dishonesty in dire need of a lancing, followed by a thorough burning to cauterize the infection before it kills the souls of more unsuspecting Cainites. It is more than simply the Road of Heaven's intrinsic faith in a benign and loving God, or else a wrathful God that "cursed" the entire Cainite race with damnation, that repulses Sinners of all kinds. More than anything else, it is the Faithful's habit of unstinting and shameless hypocrisy and orthodox self-denial that makes Sinners want to cause them serious and lasting harm. The Faithful have, in fact, grasped that they're vampires, and for this, most Sinners give them credit, but they completely fail to acknowledge the basic fact that, if God exists, he no longer cares about them or what they might choose to do, that the

doctrine of Cainite damnation is a myth and a tool of spiritual oppression. Even more disgusting is the fact that most Faithful choose to define ethics and morals separate from their own as innately evil, particularly the modes of existence favored by the Road of Sin, and to persecute them in the name of a God most Sinners couldn't care less about. Sinner conflicts with the Faithful tend to be even more vicious than those they carry out against orthodox Scions, as the Faithful are viewed as a far more pernicious and irredeemable adversary. Sinners can occasionally come to an accommodation with the Scions. With the Faithful, no such niceties are possible, as their roads are directly opposed at the most fundamental ethical levels.

Conflicts with followers of the Road of Beast and the Road of Humanity tend to be of a much milder sort compared to the tangled war of ethics that rages between Sinners, Scions and Faithful. For the most part, Sinners tend to shake their heads and wash their hands of the humanist Prodigals, viewing them as weaklings beneath all contempt, worthy only of pity. Even the Faithful have a better grasp on the true nature of the Cainite condition than the followers of the *Via Humanitatis*. Some softer-hearted Sinners keep a weather eye on Prodigals of their association, hoping to catch them when they fall off the moral tightrope they choose to walk and rescue them before the Beast eats them whole. More malignant Sinners actively try to push Prodigals off that tightrope, toying with the Beasts of such individuals and tormenting them

SINNERS, SCIONS AND FAITHFUL IN MIXED COTERIES

Fixed coterie of Sinners, Scions and Faithful *do* exist and function, despite the strong conflicts between the ethics of the three roads. Such coterie tend to be of one of two types: a highly structured mixed coterie pursuing a set series of goals or a relaxed, circle-of-friends coterie who associate with one another despite their differences.

The highly structured sort of coterie is the somewhat more prevalent of the two. The concentrated effort required to achieve concrete goals can do much to minimize personal friction, particularly if the individuals walking the antagonistic roads all have their own defined role to play. Scions tend to gravitate toward positions of leadership. They excel in roles that require long-range planning skills, but they sometimes lack the resources or vision necessary to bring all their plans to fruition. Under Scion leadership, Sinners make excellent provocateurs, spies and social saboteurs and are often the driving force at the core of their coterie, prone to acting where more cautious Scions or Faithful would choose to temporize, the risks they take yielding better dividends than a more measured approach to existence. In such coterie, Faithful and Sinners play off each other as only polar opposites can, broadening the scope of any operations in which they jointly participate. Between them,

they can usually expose, consider and repair any deficiencies in planning or execution. Their extremes in personal inclination and experience allow them to draw on a greater pool of knowledge and to advise their coterie-mates more efficiently.

The "circle of friends" mixed coterie is somewhat less common, though not unheard of. The society of the night makes for strange bedfellows, and while most followers of the roads choose to congregate with their own kind, sometimes, that's simply not possible. Even if such options *are* to be had, some Cainites choose not to avail themselves of them. Nearly every Cainite is, at some point, forced to confront the reality that his fellow Scions or Sinners or Faithful are less than congenial company. Sometimes, one can only find true comfort and companionship in the arms of one who should be a dire enemy. This is particularly true among the Scion-Sinner-Faithful triad, who have at least as many quirks in common as they do in opposition. Scions and Sinners often sport with one another for the sheer pleasure of it, with Scions providing the power and the resources and Sinners providing the wild imagination necessary to produce truly epic undertakings. Sinners and Faithful have provided both their roads with examples of star-crossed romance and tragedy, as Cainites who should be enemies dedicated to each other's absolute moral destruction surrender to passions even more destructive still.

mercilessly in the hopes of breaking their folly in some controlled way. Needless to say, few followers of the Road of Humanity appreciate this consideration.

The adherents to the Road of the Beast are the closest spiritual cousins that the Sinners possess, and both sides of the equation acknowledge that fact with a certain wary equanimity. Ferals tend to consider Sinners citified and overly civilized despite their deep knowledge of the Beast and its hungers. The Sinners tend to consider the Ferals poorly socialized and in dire need of a little more civilization in order to counterbalance their deep knowledge of the Beast and its hungers. Fortunately, Sinners and Ferals tend to meet rather rarely, with one exception. The Feral followers of the newly emergent Path of the Grey Hunter and Sinners of all paths meet, mix and fail to kill each other on a semi-regular basis. To the bafflement of all observers, they seem to genuinely enjoy each other's company. In particular, the significantly less than humane adherents of the Sinner Path of Cruelty find much to admire in the ethics of the Grey Hunters. Adherents of both paths consider themselves predators without peer, hunting the most dangerous prey among human and Cainite kind, and meetings between members of the two paths can generate more trouble than a full-blown invasion. The Heartless and the Grey Hunters have been known to engage in running "kill competitions," choosing Cainite or mortal targets at random

and contending viciously to see who can take them down first, with the most style or in the most innovative manner. Needless to say, these activities are frowned on by the local Cainite authorities, and most senior members of the Road of Sin and the Road of the Beast tend to keep a close eye on the most active participants in such "wild hunts."

Sinners vs. the Inquisition

In the year 1230, the Holy Inquisition *contra Diabolum enim et alii daemones* has only been an organized entity for a relatively short period of time, but it has already made its presence felt against the children of Sin. Predictably enough, the first collision occurred in the Languedoc during the heat of the Albigensian Crusade and has spiraled outward from there. During the crusade, numerous Sinner havens were uncovered and destroyed, initially by agency unknown. Many native Sinners simply assumed that their unfortunate fellows were caught up in the general violence. The error eventually became apparent as more and more Cainites in general, and Sinners in particular, fell victim to highly focused acts of violence. By the time the Languedocien Sinners realized what was happening — the enemy that they faced *knew* them, knew Cainite weaknesses and vulnerabilities and how to exploit them — the damage had already been done, and it was significant.

SINNERS AND THE BLOOD OATH

One of the more common methods for Cainite rulers in the Dark Medieval era to enforce their rule is, of course, the blood oath. It is not uncommon for Cainite lords to seal oaths of fealty with a single drink of their blood and a single drink of the prince's blood is also a common punishment leveled against vampire malefactors or criminals.

Needless to say, most Sinners take considerable issue with this practice. Sinners, like some mortal heretical religious movements, consider the very act of swearing a binding oath by word alone to be completely abhorrent (though generally for different reasons) and adding the enslaving effects of Cainite blood to the mix simply makes the act even more repulsive. Many Sinners consider swearing verbal oaths to be a *de facto* violation of the road's ethics, a positive indication that any Sinner willing to so swear is also willing to bend their neck to accept the yoke of slavery to another's will. Voluntarily accepting the supernaturally enforced blood oath is, in that same view, definitely a violation of the road's core ideals. However, being *forced* to accept the blood oath, by trickery or threat, does not carry any onus against the oath's victim. Sinners are pragmatic enough to acknowledge that even the strongest of their kind may be forced into a position where they must either accept the blood oath or be destroyed, and impulsively heroic martyrdom is considered distinctly inferior to survival and the potential to avenge oneself on one's tormentor. A significant number of Sinners, faced with the prospect of being forced into bondage to an enemy they loathe, nonethe-

less choose self-destruction over even temporary slavery. And the vengeance that a band of Sinners wreak in the name of a martyred comrade can be terrible indeed.

By the same token, many Sinners are conscientious about not inflicting the blood oath on others, as well. Sinner mentors do not, in general, bind the wills of their students, and sires do not subject their childer to that indignity, either. A Sinner will use every seductive trick in her repertoire to draw the followers of other roads to her way of thinking, but she never defiles their minds with her blood or forces their wills, or their choice, with her own. In certain zealous cases, some Sinners abstain from creating ghoulservants at all or go to extremes in order to avoid granting their servants that third, will-obliterating drink. One fanatical Sinner in Iberia even embraces and imprisons childer for the express purpose of creating a ready supply of vitae to feed his ghouls. Naturally, he destroys a childe when the ghouls begin showing too much favor toward it.

The only form of the blood oath that Sinners consider to be basically acceptable is the rare, intense mutual blood oath that can grow between Cainite lovers of long acquaintance. Such mutual oaths are, from the Sinner viewpoint, less a form of slavery than a sacred rite of passion, a marriage of two souls perfectly united in desire. Sinner romantics make much of the desirability of such a union, pointing to the spiritual marriage of Tanitbaal-Sahar and Camilla as the perfect expression of the ideal.

SINNERS AND GOLCONDA

The Bitter Journey. The Unmapped Road. The pathway to transcendence, the true mastery of one's own nature.

Even Sinners are not immune to the lure of Golconda's promise. In fact, they may be slightly more attracted to it than more conventionally devout vampires. In the Dark Medieval era, after all, the entire notion of Golconda, a state of personal salvation separate and distinct from salvation achieved through the grace of God or the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has fallen out of favor as a pagan practice that denies the dominion of the One God over the souls of every being in creation. For that reason alone, the quest for Golconda might hold some appeal for Sinners. Also, the legends that surround the process of achieving Golconda entice the Sinners: At its core, both the Bitter Journey of the true seeker of Golconda and the way of existence espoused by the Road of Sin share many traits in common, self-acceptance being the first and most important. Many legends claim that a vampire who achieves Golconda is not a saint, not a more-human-than-human exemplar of undead moral rectitude, but a being who has achieved perfect self-knowledge and self-acceptance. At its core, the Road of Sin embraces the philosophical ideal that true self-knowledge and self-acceptance do not arise from denying oneself, but from exploring all the facets of one's being and finding inner peace by so doing. The Road of Sin is, ideally, one of the beginning legs of the Bitter Journey that could lead a Sinner to the blessed state of Golconda — and can be treated as such with relative ease.

Many adherents of the Road of Sin in the Languedoc and elsewhere are now making it their businesses to try and learn more about their tormentors. Thus far, however, they haven't learned much of any significant value. Languedocien Sinners based in Toulouse and Foix tend to believe that their tormentors might have been a localized phenomenon. They noticed that the frequency and ferocity of the assaults against their enclaves dropped off sharply after the destruction of the Laurendine monastery of the Order of St. Theodosius. Their efforts to obtain more information about that particular monastic order have yielded few dividends. The Theodosians are, apparently, an order so minor and so wracked with controversy that not even the Lasombra have bothered to try and infiltrate them, and intelligence on its rule and activities is rather thin. Languedocien Sinners based in Carcassonne and the territories surrounding the city, however, tell a different tale. Many of them have unpleasant memories of a band of militant brothers that scourged the city's Cainite inhabitants following the city's surrender to the Northern crusaders. Communication between far-flung Sinner coterie being what it is, no one has yet put together the idea that the suspiciously well-informed monastic order and the sword-and-torch wielding knights that assailed Carcassonne could be part of the same organization. Clashes between the chil-

dren of Sin and the shadowy Inquisition *contra Diabolum* are, however, once again on the rise.

(For definitive information on the Inquisition, of course, see *Dark Ages: Inquisitor*.)

Character Creation Advice

Sinners are, as Chapter Two demonstrates, a diverse and quirky fellowship, united by the overarching umbrella of their mutual faith but otherwise as unique as snowflakes when it comes to their personal goals, their former backgrounds and their favored means of making their ways through the night. In some ways, they are truly representative of Dark Medieval society. In others, they share startling recurring similarities.

Concept

Some character concepts suit Sinner characters better than others, though a perfect Sinner character can arise from nearly any starting point. Bear in mind when selecting a concept that Sinner sires tend to place a much heavier emphasis on *who* their childe is rather than *what* she is. Sinners have no innate respect for individuals of noble blood (preferring, perhaps, the temperament that arises from the lack of a privileged background), though they certainly Embrace the gently born if such a one proves worthy. Nor is outstanding personal piety a particular requirement. The most commonly sought-after trait is strength of will, followed closely by sharpness of wit and intellect, a hunger to explore and a willingness to learn.

Common Sinner concepts include:

Criminal

The Road of Sin harbors more than a few dedicated career criminals in its ranks, either pretending to Promethean social ideals for the benefit of having ready patsies close to hand, actually practicing Promethean ideals from the gutters in which they dwell or dispensing with any high-minded aspirations of any type and engaging in traditional Sinner methods of achieving material comfort. Sinner vice merchants are a reasonably common sight in the cities of the Dark Medieval world, as are Sinner thieves, Sinner confidence men (and women) and other such hustlers of all varieties. In the country, bands of Sinner brigands and bandits haunt the roads, preying on travelers and pilgrims for both wealth and blood. A Sinner character could easily have been Embraced from the dregs of human society and elevated to his current, exalted state due to any number of reasons. It could be that the character's sire saw something in him that deserved more than a short, brutal life and an equally brutal death at the hands of medieval law enforcement. Perhaps the character's sire simply needed another light-fingered urchin to round out a nearly depleted gang of sneak thieves and cutpurses, or maybe the character's snake-oil sales technique was particularly impressive. Whatever the reason, the character is likely to be streetwise and not particularly well educated or even literate, but rather, cunning, quick-witted and, quite probably, silver-tongued, the better to lull a shill into a false sense of security.

Heretic

The Road of Sin is, all by itself, fundamentally heretical from the medieval Catholic standpoint, but Sinners Embraced from the ranks of a mortal dissident religious movement tend to be nonconformists of a particularly vivid stripe. Sinners, for all their distaste for organized religion in general, are often drawn to individuals who display unshakable strength in the face of adversity, and whether that strength derives from faith or will is mostly irrelevant if it's a cardinal part of the potential child's character. Many such individuals are found among the various heretical flocks scattered across the face of Christendom and the Holy Land, from the embattled Cathars in the Languedoc and the Italian states to the Coptic Christians of Egypt, from the tenacious dualist heretics of Eastern Europe to the adherents of the Cainite Heresy itself. Characters derived from such a background may very well retain something of their original religious leanings mixed into the ethics of the Road of Sin, particularly if the heresy the character adhered to had a strong dualist component. Some dualist heresies regard the material world as intrinsically evil, to be denied at all cost... and some dualist heresies regard the material world as intrinsically evil and believe that any religious precept relating to honoring it as God's perfect creation should be violated. Such forms of dualism "mesh," to a certain extent, with some Sinner leanings — after all, most things that good Christians consider "perversions," the Sinners simply find to be an interesting way to pass the evening.

Noble of the Somewhat Debauched Variety

It's an honored saw in every age that power corrupts, and in the Dark Medieval world, power is concentrated in the hands of a very select few. Sinners disdain the right of others to rule them, but that doesn't mean they won't prey upon their "betters" and induct the worthy few among them into the ranks of desire. Sinner nobles were, in life, often the most frankly sensual of their kind — not necessarily the wealthiest or the most powerful, but the ones who understood, at a primal level, that all the wealth and power in the world isn't worth much if you never permit yourself to enjoy it. Pious charity to the poor and annual tithes to the Church were not much in evidence in the households where such individuals dwelled, since they were much more concerned with the acquisition of creature comforts — good food and wine, sumptuous clothing, beautiful bedmates and all the other things that make life worth living. Such a character might end up Embraced for the obvious similarities in personality and appetites she shares with her sire or for access to that character's combination of wealth, influence and lack of scruples about indulging personal desires. Unfortunately, Sinner nobles suffer many of the same drawbacks as noble-folk Embraced into any other road, namely, the complications of undead nature when it comes to estate governance. Noble Sinners often end up administrating their holdings through proxies and servants, the same as every other noble Cainite, and facing the same challenges to their domain rights as other rulers.

Less-Than-Pious Monk/Nun

It's a sad but true fact that not everyone who ends up in holy orders is equally suited to the vocation of faith. For every virtuous man and woman of the cloth devoting themselves to the service of Christ, there's an unmarried daughter who was given a cloister in place of a husband and a family or an extra heir who will never rule any demesne greater than a cold, cramped monastic cell. Such individuals tend to be quite justifiably bitter, cheated of birthright and inheritance and trapped in a situation not of their own choosing. They also tend, when set free from that situation, to make exceptional Sinners, venting decades of pent-up frustration and desire in an explosion of pure ecstatic release. Such characters might draw Sinner attention in any number of ways — conspicuous defiance of their vows, public displays of dissatisfaction, scholarly acquaintance — but are normally Embraced for their finer qualities. Expressing dismay with one's situation is not enough, in general, to make a Sinner. That dismay must be coupled with a genuine contempt for religious and social authority, a mind or spirit that is genuinely wasted on the Church or a will that refuses to be broken by punishment, no matter how severe that punishment might be.

Clan

Sinners can and do derive from every clan, and no particular clan produces more children of Sin than any other, despite popular misconceptions to the contrary. Among Sinners themselves, bloodline is generally regarded as being of no particular significance when judging another's deeds or capabilities. Personal merit is more important in this regard, and while certain lineages may raise Sinner eyebrows, none are innately favored or automatically discounted. Interactions by Sinners with other members of their clans following other roads are another matter entirely.

High Clan Sinners often tend to enjoy a special breed of social interaction with their peers, a tangled relationship based on the sublimated hostility that simmers between followers of the Road of Sin, the Road of Kings and the Road of Heaven. The first cursed often treat the Sinners in their ranks much differently than the followers of other roads, regarding them with one part scorn and one part fascination, unsure whether to consider them pariahs or exemplars of what it means to truly be a vampire. Scions, in particular, are given to this reaction, attracted to the many freedoms of Sinner existence and repulsed by the road's rejection of honor and duty to others. High-blooded Faithful simply find the Sinners utterly repugnant, and the feeling is more than mutual. Slow-boiling religious resentments between the followers of these two roads can bleed over into the arena of social politics with little effort expended on either part to check the tendency. Prejudice against the Road of Sin is, in general, much more widespread — if not technically "accepted" — among the High Clans, a fact of which most high-blooded Sinners are entirely aware.

The Road of Sin faces considerably fewer opponents among the Low Clans, who are generally perceived as possessing a higher concentration of Sinners in their ranks. This is, loosely speaking, true. Among the low-blooded, adherence to the Road of Sin carries no particular stigma, except in the same places found among the High Clans. Relations between fallen Scions and Faithful and low-blooded Sinners are predictably volatile. Low-blooded Sinners, however, tend to be in the majority, and so, the prejudicial treatment high-blooded Sinners receive from the followers of other roads is much more muted in strictly Low Clan social circles.

Path

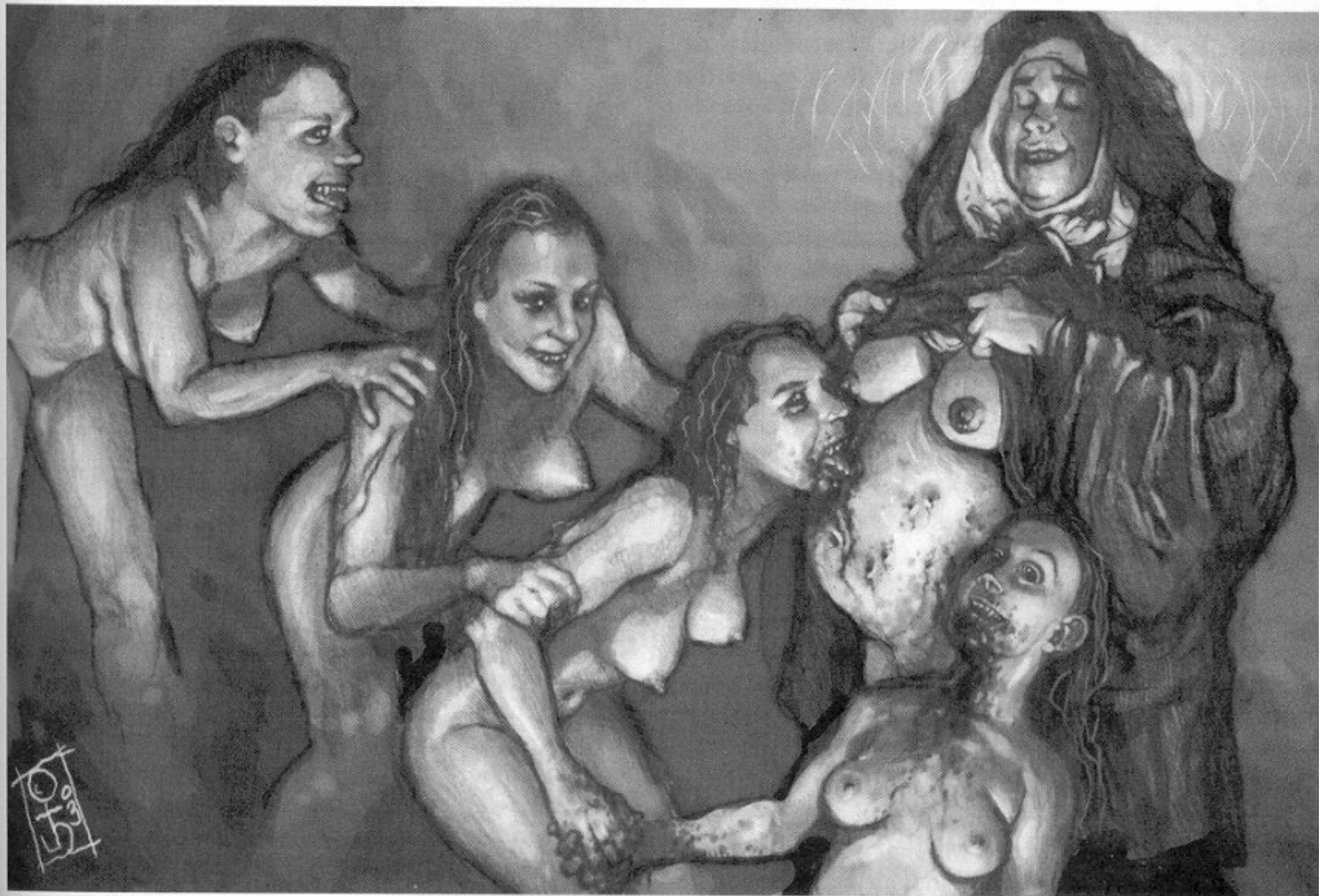
The Road of Sin is one of the most internally variable of all the roads, with nearly every Sinner cult, coterie and individual interpreting its core ethics according to their personal needs and values. The various paths of the road are, of course, the ultimate formalized example of this tendency. Whereas some roads consider their branching paths to be nearly heretical schisms and followers of those paths are looked on with suspicion and dismay, the Road of Sin does not automatically cherish that bias, but neither does it entirely disregard it, either. Followers of the Path of Screams tend to be heartily persecuted even by their "fellow" Sinners.

Path followers on the Road of Sin tend to be much more tightly focused on the specific goals and structured methods of worship that their particular paths espouse. A character's choice of path is a good way to define some of the aspects of her personality and self-image. The Voluptuaries are defined

by their hedonism and their powerful focus on existing in the here and now. The Heartless are known for their extraordinary lack of scruples and complete disregard for compassion and their own former humanity. The principled Adversaries are defined by a nearly chivalrous devotion to rebellion and their efforts to bring the light of truth and hope to those they perceive as suffering. Having players' characters follow the Path of Screams is a trickier proposition, simply because the Screamer's primary ethic encompasses the ultimate corruption and destruction of the world, and such characters can be innately difficult to work into a chronicle. This does not, however, mean that Screamer can't be subtle, seductive and insidious. It just means that their success amounts to no one else's gain, and such a character can easily destroy any trace of group cohesion if her true nature is revealed. Use Screamer carefully, if at all.

Nature and Demeanor

The diverse backgrounds and goals of most Sinners also tend to lead to a diversity of Natures, as well. While most outsiders perceive Sinners as agents of corruption and society-destroying selfishness and hedonism, Sinners rarely perceive *themselves* that way. Therefore, nearly every Nature could theoretically fit a Sinner character depending on his individual motivations and personal perception of his actions. Of course, very few Autocrats, Judges and Penitents walk the ranks of Sin, simply because the major overriding purpose of the Autocrat and the Judge is to forge order out of chaos, a goal that very few Sinners embrace, and because Penitents generally tend to spend their time repenting of all those things that



Sinners consider the best parts of existence. Consider the essence of the character you're trying to create when selecting Nature, and think through how that Nature colors the character's personality and his decision-making process. A Sinner with the Survivor Nature approaches his existence in a much different way than a Sinner Jester.

Demeanor is likewise important, as Sinner opinions on deceit and what constitutes deceit are strong and varied. Some Sinners consider cultivating a social appearance separate from one's own true feelings to be a contemptible exercise, a deception perpetrated against oneself to one's own detriment. Others consider such an act a sort of self-defense, a way of defusing social tensions before they erupt into prejudice that can force a Sinner from her comfortable home and position. Is the Sinner character straightforward about who she is and willing to declare it to the world? Does she exercise the better part of valor? Is she as bold and seductive on the outside as she is full of hot desires on the inside? How does the interaction of the character's Nature and Demeanor shape how she feels about herself?

Traits

Sinners do not, in general, expect each other to cultivate identical sets of talents. As such, nearly any combination of Traits is appropriate for a Sinner character. Some Traits, and significant ratings in those Traits, are more common than others, but there is no intrinsic requirement that a character possess them.

Attributes

A Sinner character's specific mortal background is often more significant than his post-Embrace choice of road when it comes to his primary Attribute selection. Consider this carefully when assigning those characteristics.

In general, Sinners tend to favor Social Attributes as primary, due to the high degree of interpersonal interaction their road espouses. Which Social Traits you choose to emphasize in the character, of course, influences how he interacts with others as well how he perceives himself. Is the character charismatic and witty? In that case, Mental Attributes would probably be a strong secondary choice. Is the character ruggedly handsome from the lifetime he spent in the saddle, riding in the tourneys? In that case, high Appearance coupled with strong Physical Attributes is probably called for. Primary Mental Attributes are not entirely unknown among Sinners, and those individuals often tend to cultivate strong secondary Social Attributes as the best vehicle for expressing the seductive power of their ideas.

Abilities

Successful Sinners tend to cultivate a wide variety of Abilities, depending on their individual backgrounds and methods of operation. In general, Sinners favor Talents, followed by Knowledges and, finally, Skills.

Talents such as Empathy, Expression and Subterfuge lie at the core of most Sinner social interactions. One cannot understand another's viewpoint without the ability to empathize with it, to a certain extent, and one can certainly not

convince another by written or spoken argument without the ability to express one's ideas clearly. Subterfuge is often the purest Sinner survival Talent, despite their general distaste for deceit. Sometimes, a strategic lie can advance one's endeavors — or keep one's head attached at the shoulders. Sinners tend to lead a rather active existence, even if they don't possess much in the way of martial training, and so, Athletics is often useful to them, as is Dodge, for the all-important aptitude for preserving one's own skin against the more skilled opponent. And even Sinners should never overlook the advantage to be found in strategically cowing one's enemies and allies through Intimidation.

Even Sinners need to support themselves and their habits in some way, and Knowledges provide some of their most common methods of doing so. Formally trained Sinner academicians and linguists are not uncommon, and many such individuals make their way as tutors among the Cainite nobility and the Low Clans, as well. A thorough knowledge of both Law and Investigation tends to occur among those Sinners (typically) engaged in criminal activity of some type, as well as those Sinners (atypically) serving in a formal or freelance law-enforcement capacity at a Cainite court, a task some adherents of Cruelty pursue. Politics and Seneschal are practical night-to-night survival related Abilities for considerable numbers of Sinners. And few practitioners of the Path of Screams possess no knowledge of Occult, Hearth Wisdom or Theology.

Sinners tend to cultivate practical Skills that assist them on a nightly basis, such as Commerce, Etiquette, Performance and Ride. Sinners who follow the Path of the Devil will often possess considerable skill in Archery and Melee. Survival is a skill naturally practiced by those Sinners whose unlifestyles require considerable amounts of travel.

Backgrounds

Sinners tend to favor such practical, socially oriented backgrounds as Allies, Contacts, Herd, Mentor and Retainers. Sinners are, after all, enormously extroverted creatures, and their social webs are often widespread and as diverse as their own interests. Herd tends to represent the Sinner habit of cult building for the purpose of feeding, recruitment and teaching. Sinners who lack some sort of Mentor are, in truth, a minority. Like every other Cainite, Sinners actively pursue the acquisition of Resources and Domain for their own safety and support.

Disciplines

Sinners place no particular emphasis on learning certain Disciplines, though some Disciplines are innately more useful than others. Most Sinners attempt to obtain mastery of one of three primarily favored Disciplines.

- **Auspex** is a favorite of nearly all Sinners for its multitude of useful and enlightening applications. The ability to heighten one's senses in order to experience a physical sensation more completely or to gather (and enjoy) the sensations left clinging to objects are favored by many children of Sin. Sinners engaged in existences that require close interaction with humans and other Cainites — which is to

say, nearly all of them — enjoy the advantages granted by the ability to perceive others' emotions and thoughts and tailor their efforts accordingly.

- **Obfuscate** is of considerable practical use to those Sinners whose unlifestyles put them on the opposite side of the Cainite and human authorities. Sinner-Furores and Sinner-Prometheans are often well versed in its ways, as are those followers of the Path of Cruelty whose methods of operation involve cat-and-mouse games of terror and pain.

- **Presence** is the favorite "social" Discipline of most Sinners, being more subtle than Dominate and the perfect underscore to their often already highly developed social and political skills. Few Sinners consider it "poor form" to emotionally manipulate an audience using Presence, in sharp contrast to their general feelings about Dominate and Dementation.

Other Disciplines

- **Dementation** is one of those Disciplines for which Sinners reserve particular loathing. Sinners cherish the sanctity of their own minds and a conscious, deliberate awareness of their own desires. Any Discipline capable of externally breaking down that sanctity and involuntarily introducing a seed of madness into their beings wins no favor in their eyes. Much effort has been made by Sinners to find some universally applicable method of thwarting Dementation's effects on their minds and souls, thus far with only limited success.

- **Dominate** enjoys a similar lack of appreciation among Sinners, who consider the ability by others to artificially twist their wills through the application of supernatural force to be morally repugnant. The fact that so many Scions cultivate this Discipline is just another black mark in the Sinner book of reasons to dislike the "ethics" of the *Via Regalis*. As with Dementation, many Sinners are seeking a consistent method of nullifying the will-destroying effects of Dominate, again, with limited success.

- **Daimoinon** is, for those Sinners aware of the Discipline's existence, a poisonous honey-pot of temptation all its own. Even more highly refined in its ability to "read" the minds and souls of others than Auspex, Daimoinon is often sought after by Sinners for just that reason, though finding an instructor in the Discipline is frequently a soul-harrowing experience at best. Baali Sinners who do not follow the Path of Screams and have achieved some degree of mastery in their bloodline's signature Discipline often enjoy considerable status within the road.

Merits and Flaws

Merits and Flaws are an optional system for adding the final touches of "life" to a character. Naturally, some Merits and Flaws are more appropriate than others with regards to Sinner characters.

Appropriate Sinner Physical Merits often include Eat Food and Blush of Health, in keeping with the generally high degree of social contact Sinners enjoy with mortals. Appropriate Flaws include Addiction, as a holdover from a mortal existence spent addicted to a certain substance or a dependency acquired after the

Embrace. The number of Sinners suffering from a Monstrous appearance or other Flaws that affect appearance (beyond the Nosferatu clan weakness) is small to the point of nonexistence.

Some Sinners are highly picky eaters, and so, the Mental Flaws of Prey Exclusion and Flesh Eater are not unknown among their numbers. On the other hand, they also tend to enjoy a significant amount of preoccupation when it comes to activities they enjoy, and so, the Concentration Merit is not unreasonable.

Social Merits and Flaws can run the gamut, depending on the background of the character and the needs of a given chronicle. Sinners are prone to suffer the Flaws Infamous Sire, Apostate, Hunted and, frequently, Outspoken Pagan/Heretic. Among their own kind, Prestigious Sire is the mirror image of Infamous Sire as far as everyone else is concerned.

Supernatural Merits and Flaws occur with precisely the same frequency among Sinners as other Cainites, meaning that they're rare and, generally, considered quite odd and disturbing, even by other children of Sin. Sinners tend toward such quirky Merits as Lucky (as in, the Devil's own luck) and Inoffensive to Animals and such unpleasant Flaws as Demon-Hounded (particularly among recovering infernalists), Haunted and Grip of the Damned.

Preludes

It's the rare and unusual few who were born to follow the Road of Sin, particularly in the Dark Medieval age, and the events of the character's mortal life and upbringing assuredly do as much to shape the sort of Sinner he becomes as much as any instruction he receives in the ways of the road. Embryonic Sinners generally display certain characteristics that drew their sires to them in the first place.

- **Strength of Will** is among the most important of proto-Sinner personality characteristics. Sinners do not Embrace the weak-willed — the weak are prey, not fellow predators in the making. A young Sinner must display the will necessary to make a hard decision and stand by it, the will to choose one's own path and walk it and the will to act when others dither and hesitate.

- **Strength of Mind** is also important in the eyes of many Sinners. A potential childe does not need to be classically educated or even literate in order to display this quality, but he generally cannot be an out-and-out fool, either. Cunning and wits are valued in a potential childe, as are the qualities of reflection, consideration and, most importantly, *imagination*. An individual who cannot innovate when it comes to the pursuit of Sin is a sorry creature, indeed.

- **Strength of Passion** is more important to most Sinners than nearly anything else — certainly more important than unthinking adherence to law or custom or duty. Passion, whether anyone else wants to admit it or not, is what truly drives the world. It's what permits growth to take place and change to occur, and it reminds even the undead what it means to be truly alive. Those who lack some defining passion, some fierce inner desire they cannot truly quench, never walk the Road of Sin.

PATH OF PLEASURE

VIA VOLUPTARIUS

The Beast lusts. It is a creature of the senses, driven by the instinctual desire for pleasure and comfort, eschewing physical pain and emotional distress. Why resist that primal urge? Why cling to a way of existing that denies the comforts of the flesh, considers pleasure and desire to be sins, defames all things of beauty not first defined as "holy"?

Adherents of this path tame their Beasts through the application of sensual excesses of all types, exploring the outer limits of both human and Cainite sensuality. They do so in the most explicitly physical ways possible, engaging in blatantly sexual feeding rituals with vessels of both genders, exerting the effort necessary to engage in sensual activities other than feeding, experimenting with pleasure-inducing (or refining) Discipline applications and simply leading their unlives floating in a sea of immediacy and physical bliss. They favor comely companions/consorts, beautiful and well-made clothing, rare incenses, warm beds, perfumed baths, larders stocked with rare mortal (and, occasionally, immortal) vintages to please their refined palates and unlifestyles that permit them to pursue all of these things. They shun the physically unappealing, the graceless, the vulgar and the plain, as well as circumstances where and individuals with whom the weight of discomfort or unpleasantness derived from regular contact outweighs any possible pleasure that might arise from the association.

Additional Ethics of Pleasure

- The Beast is a creature of the senses, best tamed by feeding it the pleasure it desires.
- Feel no shame or inhibition when seeking fulfillment; all acts of pleasure are sacraments to yourself.
- Avoid those things that bring you no pleasure, for they arouse the Beast to wrath.

Practices: When other Cainites think of outrageously hedonistic Sinners, they're thinking of the adherents of this path, to whom no form of physical pleasure is taboo, unwelcome or left alone for very long. The Voluptuaries often practice a form of "sacred prostitution" in which they teach others to appreciate the gift of their bodies and senses, as well as pleasing themselves, teasing new understanding of the Beast's lusts out of their social interactions. In Cainite society, they often occupy the role of procurer for other vampires, seeking out and training vessels, supplying aphrodisiac substances and performing other such pleasure-providing tasks.

Virtues: Conviction, Instinct

Hierarchy of Sins Against Pleasure

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Feeling shame for any reason	Shame is a thing imposed by the disapproval of others; you exist only to please yourself.
9	Failing to indulge a new desire	No pleasure should be denied you.
8	Failing to ride the wave of a frenzy	Self-denial strengthens the Beast.
7	Any display of modesty	Modesty, like shame, is a morality imposed from without; reject it.
6	Associating with those who bring you no pleasure	The graceless and vulgar drain the joy from unlives and rouse the Beast's irritation.
5	Turning down a chance for material gain	Your own needs outweigh all others.
4	Acting against your own best interests	Nothing is to be gained from self-sacrifice.
3	Refusing to kill when it serves your interests	No life is more important than your own.
2	Refusing to feed when the opportunity arises	Do not refuse your greatest need and deepest pleasure.
1	Encouraging virtue or the agents of virtue	Virtue is a lie, and its followers are agents of self-denial.

PATH OF CRUELTY

VIA CRUELITAS

The Beast hates. It ravens in the breast of even the most civilized Cainites, urging them to commit crimes born of the blackest human passions. Why resist that siren call of hatred? The world is a loathsome place. The wealthy and the "noble" oppress the poor and the "common," the allegedly holy engage in acts that would make a demon blanch in revulsion, and everywhere, there are sickening perversions of the soul twisting the world into a shadow play of horrors. What is there to love about the world? Hate it, and set your soul free.

The followers of the Path of Cruelty know their Beasts to be creatures of malice and spite, filled with loathing not only for all things righteous and pure, but all things base and profane, as well. The Beast looks upon the world with eyes hot with disgust for both its fellow men and its fellow monsters, seeing nothing in either extreme, or in anything that falls between, so perfect or so virtuous that it does not deserve to suffer. To feed and tame such a Beast, the followers of this path provide it a feast of torments perpetrated against those it most despises.

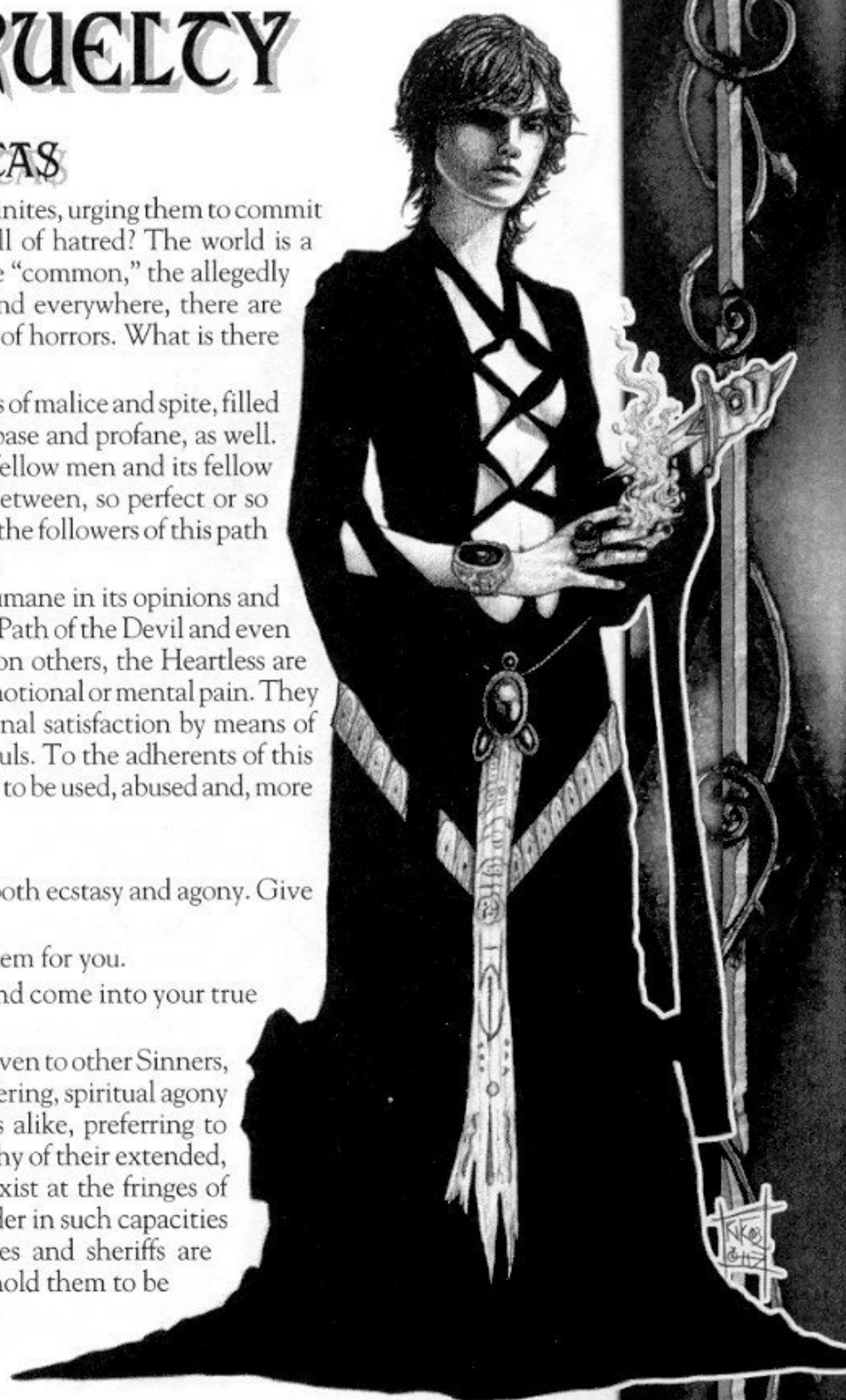
Of all the Paths of Sin, the Path of Cruelty is the most bluntly inhumane in its opinions and its dealings with others. While the adherents of the Path of Pleasure, the Path of the Devil and even the Path of Screams can have deliberate or incidental positive effects on others, the Heartless are frankly and intentionally concerned *only* with causing others physical, emotional or mental pain. They themselves are gourmands of misery and the relentless pursuit of personal satisfaction by means of excruciation. Mercy is a vice they have long since excised from their souls. To the adherents of this path, humans (and even most other Cainites) are little more than objects to be used, abused and, more often than not, consumed.

Additional Ethics of Cruelty

- The Beast is a creature of the senses, hungry to please itself with both ecstasy and agony. Give its pleasures to yourself and its torment to others.
- Serve your own needs first, for no one in this world will serve them for you.
- Mercy and pity are for the weak. Excise them from your soul, and come into your true strength.

Practices: The Heartless are disturbing in their religious devotions even to other Sinners, constantly engaged in the refinement and understanding of physical suffering, spiritual agony and mental anguish. They practice their arts on mortals and Cainites alike, preferring to devour the weak and prey on the strong, whom they consider more worthy of their extended, creative attentions. At a practical level, many followers of this path exist at the fringes of Cainite society, mercenary and friendless, or serve the Cainite social order in such capacities that require the imaginative infliction of "justice." Heartless scourges and sheriffs are disturbingly common, since the jobs already require the Cainites who hold them to be functionally devoid of conscience and human empathy from the start.

Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control



Hierarchy of Sins Against Cruelty

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Acknowledging any moral restraint	You are beyond such weakness.
9	Failing to indulge in pleasure	Your pleasure soothes the Beast as much as others' pain.
8	Failing to indulge in pain	Personal excruciation enhances your understanding of the Beast's hate and pain.
7	Refusing to bring harm to the virtuous	The agents of "virtue" deserve your utmost care and attention.
6	Avoiding injury to others for any reason	Agony is your primary instrument for taming the Beast.
5	Turning down a chance for material gain	Your own needs outweigh all others.
4	Failing to study pain in all its guises	Your own anguish can teach you as much as the pain you inflict on others; do not coddle yourself.
3	Killing too quickly or without necessity	Death is the ultimate surcease from pain; refrain from dealing it out lightly.
2	Refusing to feed when necessary	Meet your physical needs without guilt or overindulgence.
1	Displaying mercy for any reason	Mercy and pity are for the weak.

PATH OF THE DEVIL

VIA ADVERSARIUS

The Beast rages. It hurls itself ceaselessly against the cage of a Cainite's will, rejecting the right of anything but itself to rule, control or command it. It is a creature of wrath and rebellion, driving its bearer to acts of destruction and rejection of all that is "virtuous" and "holy."

Followers of the Path of the Devil (originally the Path of the Adversary) lend an ear to all the lessons that their Beasts try to teach them, but consider *this* one the most important: In the end, your existence and your soul belong to you and you alone. Neither God nor man possesses the right to condemn you. No prince has the right to rule you, no clan nor cause is innately worthy of your unthinking obedience or loyalty. To feed and tame their Beasts of wrath and rebellion, devotees of this path lash out against institutions and individuals that enslave the soul and mind, that compel obedience with the threat of torment and damnation and that exalt mindless obedience to arbitrary authority over the exercise of one's most precious gift — free will.

Adherents of the Path of the Devil tend to be thoughtful monsters. Other Sinners may deride their more obviously pronounced inward-turning focus as pointless navel-gazing, but the Adversaries rarely care. They value both personal introspection and external scholarship, often amassing vast philosophical libraries and deliberately seeking out discourse with followers of other moral and ethical paths, the better to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their foes and to use those weaknesses against them. In action, the Adversaries are often the most relentless and patient of all Sinners, voluntarily devoting centuries to the task of undermining flawed or corrupt religious and social systems, of defiling a single human or Cainite soul, of converting others to the practice of the Road of Sin or of any other goal they set their minds to. Once engaged in the struggle to open another being's eyes to the truth of their own nature, Adversaries are rarely content to surrender short of total victory.

Additional Ethics of Rebellion

- You belong solely to yourself; suffer no man, vampire or god to claim himself your ruler.
- Free will is your most valuable possession — allow none to defile it.
- Destroy that which enslaves the souls and wills of others, and teach them a better way.

Practices: The Adversaries are, in a way, the least intrinsically selfish of all the Sinner types. Yes, they believe in pleasing themselves and seeing to their own comfort, but in many ways, they feel they owe something in return to others, as well. They balance the destructive urges of their Beast against an ethic that requires them to build something to replace those things that they *must* tear down. They feel it their responsibility to raise both men and Cainites above the muck of an enslaving faith and a society in which all creatures are trapped. Adversary-Prometheans are among the most idealistic of the type, fighting the war against ignorance and fear from the bottom up. Adversary-Furores are often the most ferocious of their kind, taking the battle directly to the forces of stasis and slavery, intent on shaking both the pillars of Heaven and Cainite society.

Virtues: Conviction, Instinct

Hierarchy of Sins Against Rebellion

Score Minimum Wrongdoing

- | | |
|----|---|
| 10 | Acknowledging the laws of God or man |
| 9 | Failing to indulge your desires |
| 8 | Failing to ride the wave of a frenzy |
| 7 | Refusing to aid a lost soul in need |
| 6 | Refusing pleasure that injures no one |
| 5 | Seeking material gain at the expense of higher concerns |
| 4 | Refusing to act when necessity demands it |
| 3 | Refusing to kill when it is in your best interest |
| 2 | Refusing to feed when necessary |
| 1 | Encouraging false virtue or aiding its agents |

Rationale

Morality imposed from without enslaves the will and mind. Pleasure and passion are gifts of the soul; cultivate them. Through its lashings, you may come to understand the Beast. It is your duty to aid those who are struggling to understand their nature. There is no wrong in seeking to please yourself. Material gains are transitory and replaceable; enrich your soul first. Temporary inconvenience and self-sacrifice can yield long-term rewards. Sometimes, destruction is necessary to achieve greater growth. See to your personal needs without shame or hesitation. Virtue is an enslaving lie; expose and thwart it at every opportunity.

PATH OF SCREAMS

VIA QUIRITARE

All of the Paths of Sin accept one important fact as the basis of their philosophy: that their followers are no longer human. Darkly transfigured by the dread Embrace of Caine, some part of their essential self — their soul, their mind, their flesh — has been awakened by the experience and transformed into the Beast. Some philosophies preach that the only way to retain control of the self is to reject the Beast utterly. The followers of the Road of Sin take another view, seeking to understand the Beast and propitiate it, to explore and comprehend all facets of themselves, no matter how dark, and to achieve control of their entire being, self and Beast combined.

This is no easy task, and more than one Sinner has fallen from that ideal to a much darker path than any that their fellow Sinners choose to walk.

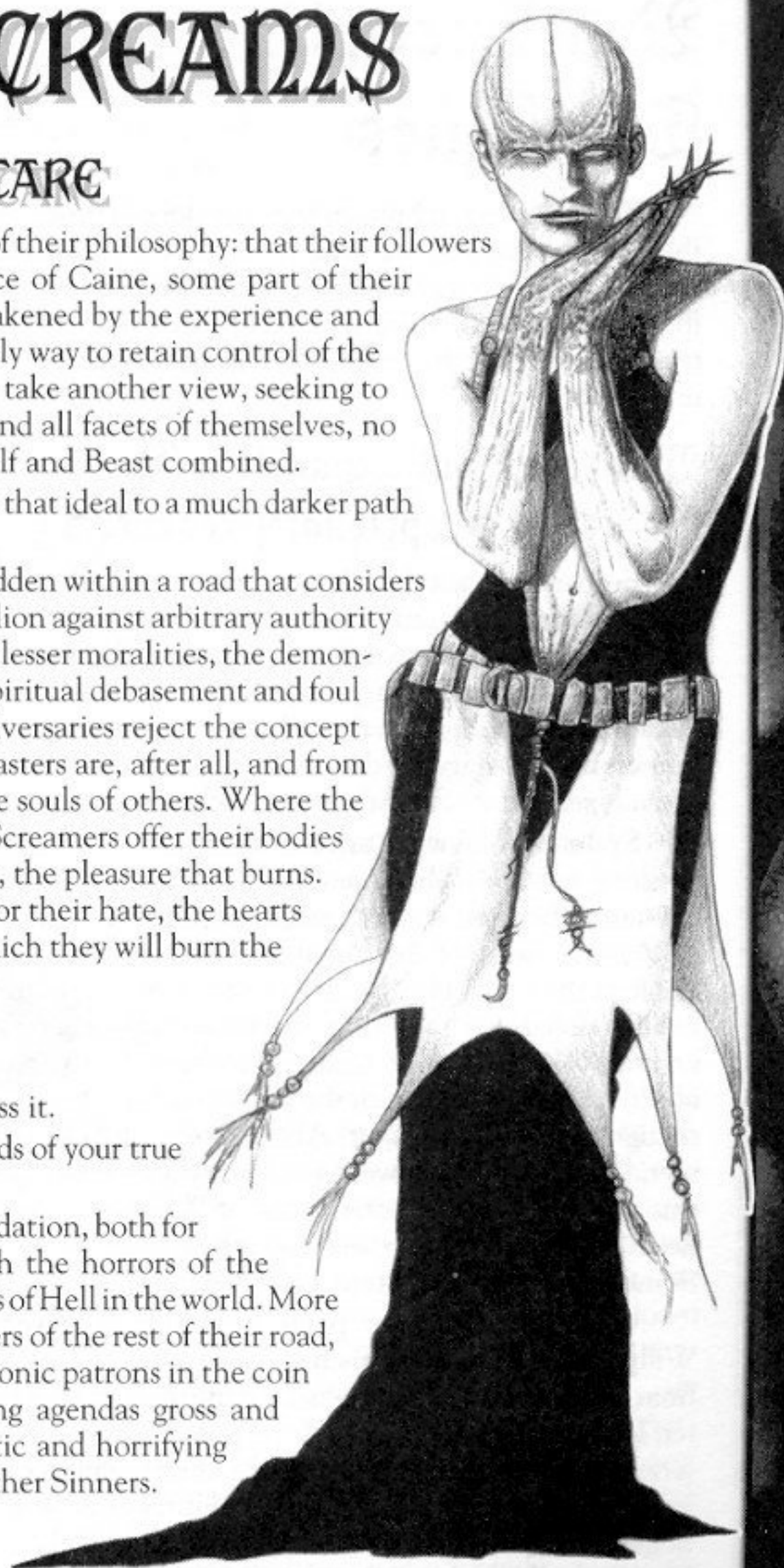
The followers of the Path of Screams are Sinners, indeed. Hidden within a road that considers each of the deadly sins a sacrament to the self, that worships rebellion against arbitrary authority and the freedom to exercise one's own will without the restraint of lesser moralities, the demon-ridden are a bloody perversion, infernalists who have embraced spiritual debasement and foul slavery in order to satisfy their hell-driven desires. Where the Adversaries reject the concept of damnation, the Screammers revel in it — Hell is where their masters are, after all, and from whence comes the power they use to break, defile and deliver the souls of others. Where the Voluptuaries flinch away from the painful and the grotesque, the Screammers offer their bodies and souls to the sensualism of the demonic, the pain that arouses, the pleasure that burns. Where the followers of the Path of Cruelty chill their hearts but for their hate, the hearts and souls of Screammers are pillars of flame, a fire of hatred with which they will burn the world and everything in it to ash.

Additional Ethics of Damnation:

- You are Damned, and you serve Hell on Earth.
- Virtue is a lie; defile and devour those who claim to possess it.
- Freedom of will and soul is an illusion; listen to the demands of your true masters in the voice of the Beast, and do their will.

Practices: The Path of Screams is a way of madness and degradation, both for those who follow it and their victims. Screammers have, through the horrors of the Embrace, come to the conclusion that they are the true instruments of Hell in the world. More truthful to themselves than even the pathetically deluded followers of the rest of their road, they barter their souls for power and pleasure and repay their demonic patrons in the coin of others' defiled souls. They can be found everywhere, pursuing agendas gross and sublime, derive from every road and are among the most pathetic and horrifying beings to walk the night, hunted, hounded and despised even by other Sinners.

Virtues: Conviction, Instinct



Hierarchy of Sins Against Damnation

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10 Acknowledging the laws of God or man	Divine and human dictates have no meaning for a creature of Hell.	
9 Failing to indulge your desires	Pleasure is the gift you give to yourself and your masters.	
8 Failing to ride the wave of a frenzy	It is in the voice of the Beast that your masters make themselves heard.	
7 Refusing to kill when it is in your best interest	No human or Cainite is more important than your mission.	
6 Avoiding injury to others for any reason	You exist to wreak harm and havoc upon the world.	
5 Any display of pity or mercy	There is no mercy in Hell.	
4 Failing to act on behalf of your patrons	You serve Hell on Earth, even when it inconveniences you.	
3 Any display of altruistic behavior	You owe others no aid or assistance.	
2 Acting against the minions of Hell	All minions of Hell are in service together.	
1 Encouraging virtue or the agents of virtue	You are the enemy of everything pure, even the virtues of Sin.	

New Discipline Techniques

The following techniques were developed by followers of the Road of Sin and are used more or less exclusively by Sinners alone. It is theoretically possible for a Cainite following another road to learn these techniques, provided that a teacher is available and amenable, but such arrangements are uncommon.

Ward the Soul's Sanctity (Auspex 2, Obfuscate 3, optional Presence 3)

Even more than other Cainites, Sinners take the sanctity of their minds very seriously and seek to guard their wills against anyone and anything trying to defile them. This power was developed to discover whenever such attempts are made and to guard against them. In more recent nights, some Sinners have managed to develop a variant of this power that actually sends the offending power back against its user.

System: Whenever anyone attempts to use a mind-affecting power on the character, be it the Dominate of a Cainite or the mind-spell of a mage, the character is automatically made aware of that attempt by a "needles-and-pins" tingle in the back of her head. In some cases, this warning is redundant (such as if a Ventrue stares into the character's eyes and says "Leave!"), but whenever anyone is subtly trying to affect the character's mind, she knows that it is being done, though not who is doing it. At this point, the player must spend a point of Willpower to activate the defensive part of this power. If the character is out of Willpower, then the defensive part of this power cannot be used, though the Sinner is still aware of attempts to affect her.

Once the Willpower point is spent, the player rolls Willpower (difficulty 6). Each success subtracts one success from those achieved by the person trying to affect the character. If all successes are removed, the power fails. If the power is one that could normally be resisted, then the player makes any normal resistance rolls or expenditures after Ward the Soul's Sanctity has been used to weaken it. If the player botches the Willpower roll, the character loses one temporary point of Willpower.

Ward the Soul's Sanctity is effective against all powers that seek to alter or control the character's mind, mainly Dementation and Dominate, though certain Thaumaturgy and high-level Serpents effects might also be thwarted. This power is ineffective against Presence, which affects the character's emotions rather than her mind.

The more advanced version of this power, which combines it with Presence, allows the wielder to reflect the offending power back at the attacker. If the number of successes on the Willpower roll exceeds the successes gained by the aggressor, then the power is reflected back, with a number of successes equal to the difference in successes.

Example: *Miranda the Sinner finds herself the target of an Incubus Passion from Mateo the Malkavian. Miranda possesses*

Ward the Soul's Sanctity and, so, is aware that someone is trying to affect her. Her player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Miranda's Willpower of 9: five successes. Since Mateo's player only garnered four successes on his activation roll, the Incubus Passion is not only cancelled, but also reflected back at Mateo, as if it had been activated with one success.

Experience Cost: 21

MET: Prerequisites: Basic Auspex, Intermediate Obfuscate, optional Intermediate Presence. When a Cainite with this combination Discipline is successfully targeted by any kind of mind-affecting power, he may spend a Mental Trait to receive an automatic retest, even if the power normally does not allow a retest. Regardless, he is automatically aware of any attempts to influence his mind as described above, even if he does not defend against them successfully, though the source is not necessarily obvious. In addition, if the user has the requisite Presence and has been instructed in the advanced techniques of this Discipline by a suitable tutor, he may spend an additional Mental Trait whenever he successfully defends against such a power to reflect it back against the original wielder. (The wielder receives a normal test to resist the reflected power and is considered to win all ties in such instances.)

Experience Cost: 11 Traits.

Enhance Sensation (Auspex 3, Presence 3, optional Vicissitude 2)

One of the first things that Cainites learn after their Embrace is that they are no longer able to feel in precisely the same manner as when they lived. Their undead bodies react differently to pain, they cannot experience the pleasure of a lover's touch, food holds no taste to them any longer, and emotions become blunted, as well. Sinners are highly skilled when it comes to counteracting this loss of sensitivity, using powers such as Enhance Sensation. With this power, a Sinner is able to affect both the physical, emotional and psychic awareness of the target, whether Cainite or mortal. Some Tzimisce Sinners, mainly those descended from the Szantovich revenant family, have developed an advanced version of this power.

System: The wielder of this power needs but to touch her target, while her player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Charisma + Empathy, difficulty of either the target's Willpower or (10 - Road rating), whichever is higher. If the roll is successful, the target is overwhelmed with some form of emotion, as chosen by the user, as well as having any physical sensation increased so that it floods her senses. Pain becomes all but unbearable (double wound penalties and the Bruised health level incurs a -1 penalty). Pleasure becomes total ecstasy. The target is powerless to resist any form of pleasure, including the Kiss, and if Cainite, his player must roll Self-Control/Instincts (difficulty 9) to stop feeding. In addition, the strong emotions experienced result in a +2 or -2 difficulty on relevant Virtue rolls (such as -2 difficulty on Self-Control/Instincts to resist frenzy when overcome with happiness or +2 difficulty



on Conscience rolls when experiencing intense hatred). Depending on the nature of the effect, this experience might be extremely pleasurable to the target or very disturbing. Enhance Sensation lasts for one turn per success on the activation roll.

If *Vicissitude* is added to the power, then the target's flesh responds to the sensations in a most disquieting manner — a leering grin for someone overcome with lust, writhing flesh for someone in pain. If the more advanced power is used, *triple* all wound penalties and *Bruised* inflicts a -2 penalty.

Experience Cost: 21

MET: Prerequisites: Intermediate *Auspex*, Intermediate *Presence*, optional Basic *Vicissitude*. To use this Discipline, a Cainite must touch a target (a Physical Challenge if the victim resists), spend a Willpower Trait and make a Social test (retest *Empathy*) against a difficulty equal to twice the victim's Morality rating plus his current Willpower rating. Success means that the target is flooded with an emotion of the Cainite's choice,

which should be roleplayed as well as possible, and all sensory input is heightened to an incredible degree. Aside from the possible descriptive flourishes this entails, it may also entail any or all of the following game mechanics, at the Narrator's discretion: wound penalties are doubled, Storyteller character mortals are helpless to resist the Kiss, Cainites must make a *Self-Control/Instinct* test to stop feeding, and all Virtue tests are either two Traits up or two Traits down depending on the emotion and situation in question. (An overjoyed

Cainite lover would be up on Virtue tests to resist draining a loved one dry, for instance, but also down on Virtue tests to resist frenzying against those that threaten his beloved.) If *Vicissitude* is added, the effects are largely descriptive, though they are generally highly visible (not to mention disturbing) and should be indicated to those present by appropriate makeup or description cards whenever possible. Wound penalties also triple if *Vicissitude* is added to this Discipline.

Experience Cost: 10 Traits

Record Recall Sensation (*Auspex* 3 or 4, *Vicissitude* 2)

Many Sinners, most notably Voluptuaries and the Heartless, constantly search for new and better ways to grant various sensations to themselves and to others. Record/Recall Sensation is a power used for just such effects. While Sinners of the Tzimisce Clan discovered it, those Toreador and Malkavians who have learned the art of flesh-crafting have shown a great deal of interest in the ability. This power literally allows for the user to "record" a certain sensation, be it excruciating pain from torture or the blissful ecstasy

of the Kiss, storing it and then later "playing it back," either upon herself or on another.

System: If the wielder only knows the basic version of Record/Recall Sensation, then physical touch is required both for "recording" and "replaying" a sensation. The advanced version foregoes this requirement; only a clear view of the target is required.

In order to "record" a sensation, either one experienced by oneself or by another, the user's player must roll Perception + Empathy. The Storyteller determines the difficulty based on the intensity of the sensation. The pleasure a woman would feel at hugging her husband would be difficulty 9, the pain a victim of a master torturer feels would be difficulty 4. If the roll is successful, the sensation can be "stored" for a number of nights equal to the number of successes. Sensations can be stored longer by spending a point of Willpower when the time is up, adding another night to the duration.

In order to "replay" the sensation in oneself, all that is required is a moment of concentration. The user feels everything the victim felt at the time, including any wound penalties and/or possible loss of temporary Willpower due to torture or incapacitation due to ecstatic bliss. In order to "replay" in others, the player must roll Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower). Once the sensation is "replayed," it is usually lost. If the user replays a sensation on herself, however, her player may spend a point of Willpower to keep the experience stored.

Experience Cost: 21 or 28

MET: Prerequisites: Intermediate or Advanced *Auspex*, Basic *Vicissitude*. This power consists of two component parts: recording and replaying. Recording a sensation for later use requires that the Cainite touch the target and make a Mental test (retest *Empathy*) against a difficulty based on how direct and easily perceived the sensation to be recorded is — the pain of a suffering torture victim would be fairly easy, while the pleasure of a woman customarily kissing her husband goodnight would be much more difficult to record. Characters with *Eidetic Memory* win all ties when recording sensations in this fashion. If successful, sensations are stored for a number of days equal to the user's Willpower rating; this duration can be extended to sessions with the expenditure of a Willpower Trait. To replay a sensation, the Cainite must touch her target and make a Social test (retest *Empathy*) against the target's Willpower rating plus his *Self-Control/Instinct* rating. If successful, the target immediately experiences the sensations exactly as the original target did, including any wound penalties, Willpower loss due to torture, incapacitation due to extreme bliss and so on. The Narrator has final say on the exact game mechanics involved in any replay situation. This Discipline lasts for a number of minutes/turns equal to the user's Willpower rating minus the target's Willpower rating (minimum one minute/turn). Once used in this fashion, a sensation is lost, though if the Discipline wielder uses

it on herself, she may spend a Willpower Trait to retain the sensation for later. A Cainite may record a maximum number of sensations equal to her Willpower rating at any one time. The advanced version of this power is identical in every way to the basic version, save that physical contact is not required to record or replay, only a clear line of sight to the target.

Experience Cost: 11 Traits (basic) or 15 Traits (advanced)

Veil the Sin

(*Daimoinon* or *Auspex* z, *Obfuscate* z)

Sinners, especially those who follow the Path of Pleasure, often become jaded, having subjected themselves to as many different experiences as possible. In the quest to find a solution to this problem, Voluptuaries developed this power. Veil the Sin allows the Sinner to discover some form of sensation, perversion or act that once brought pleasure to the target but that no longer satisfies him. The Sinner can then make his target temporarily forget that he ever experienced this sensation, allowing him to once again experience the full pleasurable effect. This power can be used on oneself, on a willing subject as a reward or on an unaware target as a future bargaining chip.

System: If used on oneself, all that is required is the expenditure of a blood point and a Willpower roll (difficulty 4). If used on another, the player must first spend a point of blood, and the character must observe the target for a single turn. Then, the player first rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty equal to the target's Road rating). If this roll is successful, the character gains knowledge of a single sensation that no longer satisfies the target and can attempt to make him forget that sensation. This requires a Willpower roll (difficulty of to the target's Willpower). If the power is used on a willing target who freely offers information about what sensations are no longer pleasurable, the difficulty of the Perception + Empathy roll is equal to half the target's Road (minimum difficulty of 4), and each success above the first lowers the difficulty of the subsequent Willpower roll by one.

The duration of this power depends on the number of successes on the Willpower roll.

Successes	Duration
1 success	1 hour
2 successes	1 night
3 successes	1 week
4 successes	1 month
5 successes	3 months

Experience Cost: 14

Note: Veil the Sin has a high potential for abuse by lazy followers of the *Via Voluptarius*; specifically, the danger exists for a Voluptuary to serially "erase" and "reexperience" sensations rather than genuinely following the Path of Pleasure's edict to seek out and

experience *new* sensations whenever possible. If such a situation develops, the offending player should roll for path degeneration for his character at a +2 difficulty.

MET: Prerequisites: Basic *Daimoinon* or *Auspex*, Basic *Obfuscate*. To use this Discipline on herself, a Cainite need only spend a Blood Trait, and it succeeds automatically (and permanently). To use this Discipline on another target, even a willing one, the Cainite must spend a Blood Trait and observe him for at least one minute. At the end of this time, she must win two Challenges against the target — first a Mental test (retest *Empathy*) to discern a sensation that no longer stimulates the target and then, if the first is successful, a Willpower test against the target in order to cause him to forget the sensation in question. A willing target may relent to one of these tests but not both. If this second test is successful, the target loses all recollection of the sensation in question for a number of weeks equal to the user's Willpower rating. Note that the content of his memories is not affected by this power — he is simply unable to recall how something *felt*, not if he ever felt it before or what happened when he did. Thus, if a Cainite uses this Discipline to cause her target to forget... *intimate* pleasures, he doesn't suddenly forget everyone he's ever been intimate with or what happened those nights, only what it actually *felt* like to be intimate. At the Narrator's discretion, such use can put those offering such sensations two Traits up on relevant Social tests due to the increased temptation the target feels once his emotional palate has been cleansed in this fashion.

Experience Cost: 7 Traits

New Merits and Flaws

As with other Merits and Flaws, these are intended to be added at character creation in order to create a more fully rounded character. This does not, as usual, preclude the acquisition of Merits and Flaws through game-play. Merits and Flaws are optional, and the Storyteller may disallow them entirely if she so desires.

Unshockable (1-pt. Merit)

Sinners, with the notable exception of the followers of the Path of Pleasure, are not the sort of creatures who flinch away from much of anything. You not only don't look away, you barely react. Some incident in specific or simply the cumulative weight of your experiences has rendered you completely devoid of even the slightest trace of shame and you are constitutionally incapable of feeling revulsion, pity and even horror, no matter what abhorrent acts you might witness — or participate in. Of course, empathy is also not your strong point. You enjoy a -2 modifier to the difficulty of any Conviction/Instinct rolls stemming from circumstances most Sinners would find trying, such as close association with extremely pious followers of the *Via*

Caeli or particularly obnoxious adherents of the *Via Regalis*, post-frenzy cleanup or exposure to most Screamer ritual activity. You suffer a +2 difficulty modifier to any rolls involving Empathy, however.

MET: You are two Traits up on all *Conviction/Instinct* tests in the kind of circumstances listed above. However, you are two Traits down on all tests employing the *Empathy* Ability. This does not include Discipline use unless it seems especially appropriate to your liability — using *Auspex* to read how someone is feeling would be more difficult, for example, but not reading the impressions off of a mundane object.

Innocent (2-pt. Merit)

You *look* innocent — even if you're not. Something about you causes you to exude an air of dewily pristine virtue to which others, even other vampires, instinctively respond to in a highly positive fashion. They want to protect and shelter you from the horrors and unpleasantness of the world, making them very easy to manipulate, and will often not believe anything bad that might be said about you. They won't necessarily disbelieve the evidence of their own eyes, however, so it often behooves you not to get caught in too many compromising positions and to take special care to dispose of any genuinely damning evidence of your activities. Rather than radiating pure seduction like other Sinners, you radiate a strangely appealing aura of innocence, which is difficult for others to resist. Your aura modifier is as follows:

Road Rating	Aura Modifier
10	-3 difficulty
9-8	-2 difficulty
7-6	-1 difficulty
5	no modifier
4-3	+1 difficulty
2	+2 difficulty
1	+3 difficulty

MET: Your aura modifiers remain the same but apply instead to any situation when you are attempting to appear blameless, play on the sympathies of others, convince individuals of your innocence or otherwise conceal your wicked designs by appearing pure and wholesome.

Jaded (3-pt. Flaw)

You are, in a word, jaded. You have seen it all and done it all at least twice — probably more than twice for the bits you *really* enjoyed — and virtually nothing makes you scream in orgasmic delight anymore. Needless to say, getting a rise out of you takes more than a little doing, and your Beast is, unfortunately, just as weary of all the most commonly available perversions as you are. Your internal monster is getting to be easily roused and difficult to put back down, and you've begun casting about for some diversion exotic enough to settle

it back down consistently. Unfortunately, you haven't found it yet. Fortunately, you're actually beginning to have fun looking. Because your Beast is so restless and irritable, you suffer a +2 difficulty modifier to any attempt to either resist frenzy or ride the frenzy once it's occurred.

MET: You are two Traits down on all tests to resist frenzy or to ride the frenzy once it has occurred, and the Narrator may rule that you must spend additional Willpower Traits to attempt to quell your Beast once it has been loosed if the situation is particularly appealing to it.

Artifacts and Texts

Sinners are, in general, much more prone than the average Cainite to trust their own instincts over the collected, dusty wisdom of their forebears when it comes to their night-to-night activities. This does not mean, however, that they offer no reverence to the past, for they do, and great significance is attached to those few Sinner artifacts and holy texts that exist. Instead of taking these texts to be the inviolable holiest of holies, in which every word is an unbreakable law, most Sinners regard them as guides to correct behavior, containing many useful suggestions on how to understand their individual ways through the night.

Artifacts

Sinners tend to be frankly materialistic in some of their habits. Physical possessions are important to them, for the sheer pleasure of ownership, as well as pure sentimental attachment. Some Sinners amass vast collections of oddities as remembrances of their adventures, as interesting conversation pieces or as jealously hoarded objects of status. Most Sinner "artifacts" aren't things of sorcerous power in any way.

Pilgrim's Badge

In general, Sinners tend to be extremely fond of pretty baubles, jewelry ranging from the exquisitely delicate to the outrageously gaudy, embroidered ornamentation of all types but particularly Byzantine-style metal-and-granulated-jewel work, exotic pieces imported from all over the world. Popular Sinner pilgrimage sites cater to this taste by producing their own unique "pilgrim's badges," mirroring the trend among such mortal pilgrimage destinations as Santiago de Compostela, which gives its visitors vials of holy water in the shape of seashells. These badges vary widely in appearance and construction — tiny replicas of Punic stelae bearing Phoenician astronomic symbols; the "traditional" good-luck-and-good-hunting symbol, a little terra cotta phallus or vulva; blown-glass vials filled with the Water of Venus (see below) — but all are treasured mementos. The *sigillaria* handed out during the Saturnalia celebration and the masks worn by the celebrants are often considered "pilgrim's badges," as well.

The Sigil of the Lord of Misrule

The traditional Saturnalia symbol of the Lord of Misrule — the *sigillaria* bearing the image of Fortune's choice — is made new every year by each Sinner coterie celebrating the dark solstice. The construction process is simple, though a Sinner with a Road rating of 7 or better must carry it out in order to succeed. The Sinner must first manufacture the *sigillaria* itself (any material is fine, though terra-cotta clay, bone and wood are the most common), carving or molding the image of the bean or bean plant with her own hands. Once this is accomplished, the Sinner must drain nine drops of her own blood onto the *sigillaria*. The player must roll Road (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the Sigil of the Lord of Misrule is empowered with the strength of the maker's sacrifice.

Whoever obtains the Sigil of the Lord of Misrule enjoys, for the duration of the Saturnalia festival, the benefits of the Potent Aura Merit (see p. 310 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) and the Ward the Soul's Sanctity Discipline technique (see p. XX) in its most potent form. Moreover, should Ward the Soul's Sanctity be activated by an attempt to manipulate the mind or will of the Lord of Misrule, the "return to sender" effect occurs *automatically* regardless of the number of successes rolled and rebound at the full effect of the Discipline in question against the originator of the attack. At the end of the Saturnalia festival, the Sigil of the Lord of Misrule crumbles to dust.

The Water of Venus

The priestesses of the Aphrodisium of Ancona brew this potent substance as part of their veneration of pleasure, the "recipe" having been handed down for centuries through the lineage of Valentina della Torchia. The precise method of production is a tightly guarded secret, naturally. The Water is a headily aromatic substance, carrying a densely tangled scent of flowers and herbs and sweet resins with a subtle hint of *vitalis*, dark red in hue, which the Graces in Ancona give out in thinned form during the Aphrodisiac revels. Diluted in wine and drunk by a mortal, it has an almost explosively sensual effect, heightening the senses and arousing the flesh to an almost insatiable degree. If a vampire drinks the blood of a mortal under the influence of the Water, the effect passes to her, as well. For the duration of the intoxication derived from consuming blood tainted with the Water, the imbiber suffers the penalties associated with both alcohol (for every two "drinks" consumed, the Cainite reduces her Dexterity and Intelligence pools by one die; the effect dissipates at a rate of one die per hour) and hashish (Perception dice pools reduced by one, resistance to frenzy reduced by one, dissipating in approximately one hour). Diluted in oil (or bath water) and worn as a perfume, the Water arouses the senses of all who smell it and draws their attention to the wearer. The effect of this perfume persists until washed away with clean, unscented water and confers a -1 difficulty on any roll related to Charisma or seduction.

Texts

Sinners tend to place more emphasis on learning from one's own experiences than reading about another's, with one serious exception, though committing one's own thoughts to parchment is often considered a good way to sort through and remember them all. They are also strongly inclined toward music and poetry, particularly forms that are used to communicate core Sinner concepts in an easily accessible manner, pass along messages coded into lyrical imagery, or poke vicious fun at Cainite and mortal authority figures.

On Hunger and Its Satisfaction

This is the lost four-volume masterwork of Tanitbaal-Sahar, first philosopher of the *Via Desideratio*, the Road of Desire, the original name of the Road of Sin, and the ethical inheritance of all Sinners. Six complete copies of the books once existed, one for each of his original followers. Now, the work only survives, for the most part, in incomplete and scattered fragments, as far as most Sinners know. With the fall of Rome and the destruction of the Great Library of Alexandria and the Library of the Forgotten in Constantinople, many Sinners fear that no complete copies of the work endure anywhere. One complete volume — the letters of Tanitbaal-Sahar and Titus Venturus Camillus — lies in the hands of the Draconian Tzimisce Myca Vykos, while one complete set of the books has been pieced together by the recently awoken Titus Venturus Camillus himself. *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* details the philosophical framework of the *Via Desideratio*, its theoretical and practical approaches to existing as an ethical monster and the combination of vision and moral dissatisfaction that drove its creator to reject other methods of taming the Beast. Most Sinners are completely familiar with only one surviving fragment of the work, "The Epigrams of Holy Desire," and would give a great deal to obtain the books they consider the foundation of their ethical heritage.

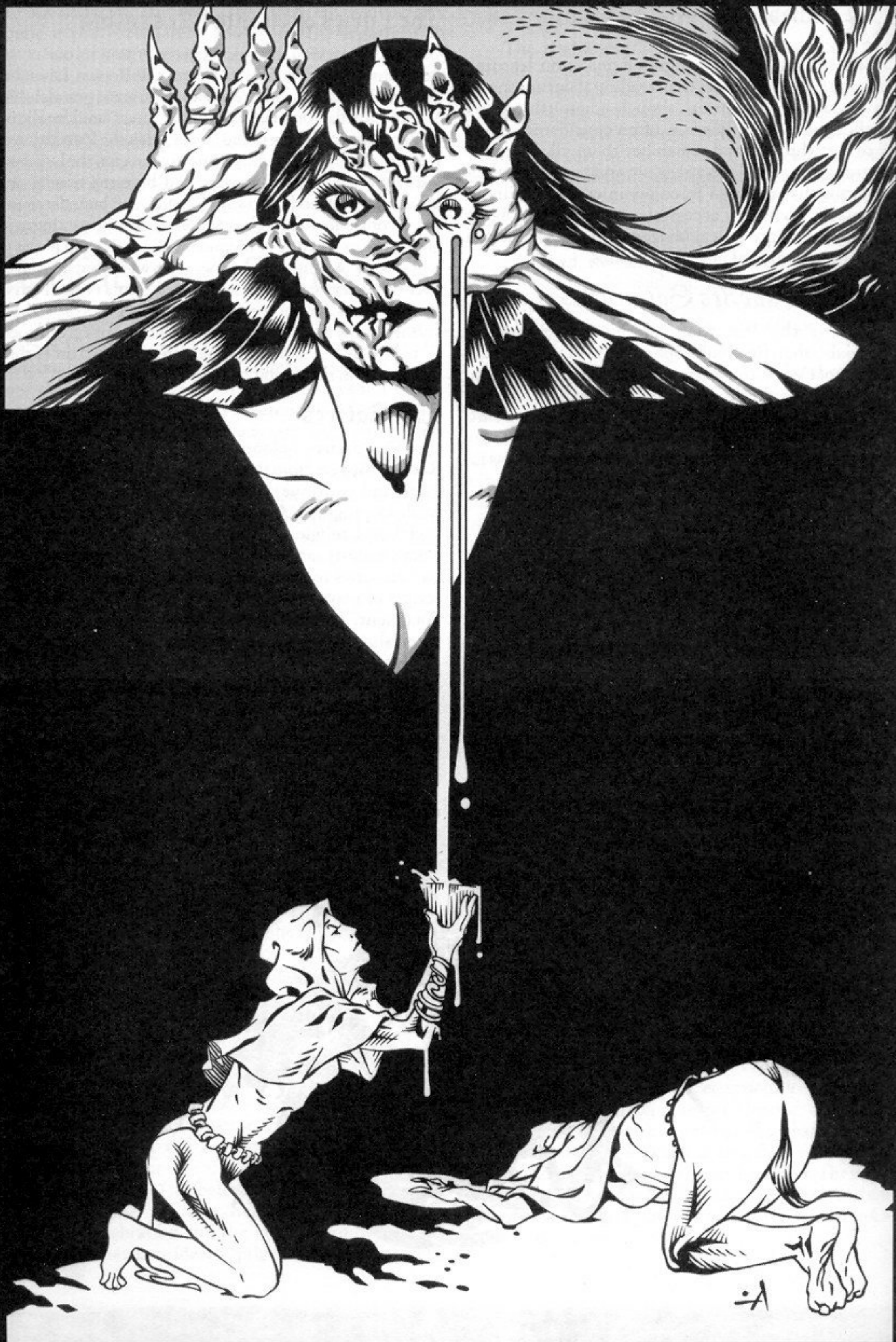
The Lyrics of Aconia Messalina

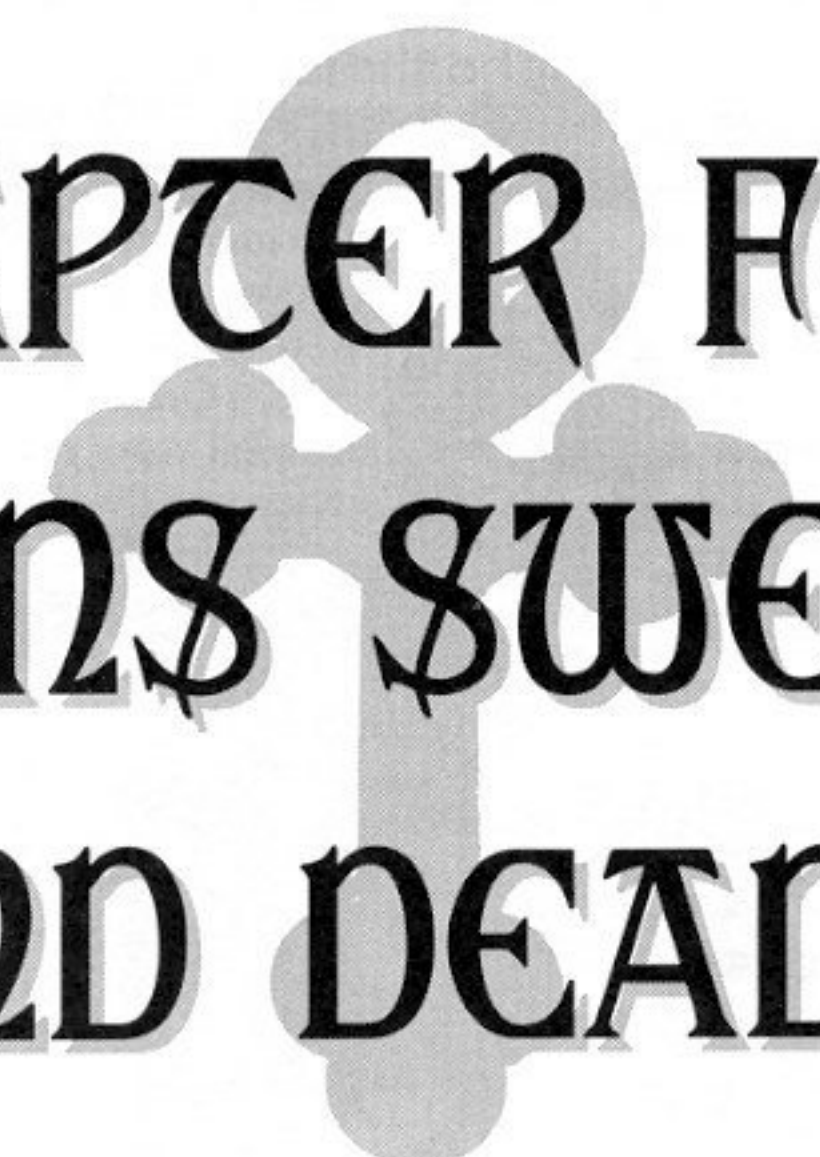

A collection of the lyrical poetry written by one of the first converts to the *Via Desideratio*, the Roman Lasombra Aconia Messalina (whose great-great-great-grandchilde, Valentina della Torchia, carries on the proud family tradition of scandalizing her clan), who also aided in the foundation of the Path of Pleasure. Frankly erotic in character, the Lyrics are lushly sensual in their imagery and by turns teasing and insolent, wistful and filled with longing, and brazenly sensuous. Aconia Messalina's elegy for her mentor is haunting in its grief and loss and one of the most commonly sung pieces of lyric poetry at Sinner gatherings. Her works have survived over the years surprisingly intact. Adherents of the Path of Pleasure consider the performance of her works — both vocally and by recreating the precise "image" of a given poem — to be holy acts and study them extensively as part of their instruction in the pursuit of unfettered hedonism.

The Satires

The Satires belong to no single Sinner author. Rather, Sinners from Rome to the present have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the body of the work-in-progress. A collection of scathing pieces of social and religious commentary in various forms — from viciously sarcastic poetry and, most recently, troubadour songs to the transcriptions of speeches and the scripts of plays — the Satires are by no means a secret document. In fact, Sinners make extensive use of it when slinging invectives at the current objects of their displeasure, circulating excerpts among their literate contemporaries on other roads and mining it for rhetorical flourishes when speaking out. To the annoyance of Cainite authorities all over Christendom, dozens of different copies of the Satires seem to exist, each containing slightly different material from the last, translated into numerous languages (though Latin and Greek, of course, remain the most popular), and virtually impossible to stamp out completely, no matter how many times they incinerate parts of it.







CHAPTER FOUR: SINS SWEET AND DEADLY

To find the greatest darkness, seek within.
— The Erciyas Fragments. IX (Proverbs)

The Road of Sin offers a wide variety of options when it comes to character creation. This chapter contains a sampling of templates and Storyteller characters intended to give some sense of the flavor and possibilities inherent in the road. These templates are balanced for starting characters and can be used for character creation or for ready-made allies or antagonists for the players' characters.

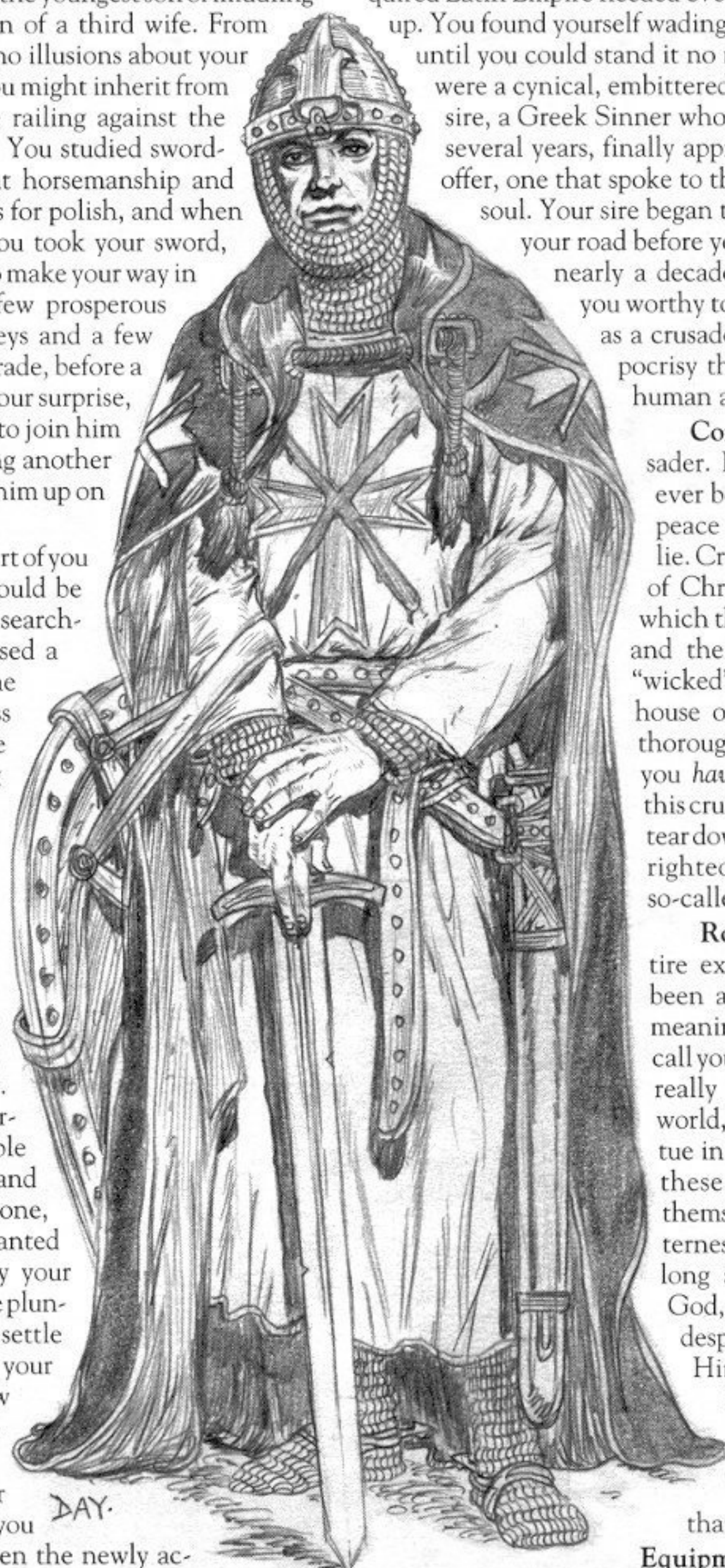
THE DISILLUSIONED CRUSADER

Raise that sword again, cur, and it will be the last thing you do with that arm.

Prelude: You were born the youngest son of middling nobility — the youngest son of a third wife. From earliest childhood, you had no illusions about your place in the world or what you might inherit from it, and you wasted no time railing against the things you couldn't change. You studied swordplay and tactics, excelled at horsemanship and acquired a few courtly graces for polish, and when your 16th birthday came, you took your sword, armor and horse and set off to make your way in the world. You enjoyed a few prosperous seasons riding in the tourneys and a few more plying the mercenary trade, before a new crusade was called. To your surprise, a distant kinsman asked you to join him as part of his retinue. Lacking another patron at the time, you took him up on his offer.

Some small, idealistic part of you sincerely hoped that this would be the purpose that you'd been searching for your entire life. Raised a solid Christian, you had come to question the righteousness of both the Church and of the secular social order during your years of service. You hoped that this would be what you needed to reignite the guttering embers of your faith in both God and humankind. You were to be sadly disappointed. The purpose of the crusade was subverted by Venetian greed and its leaders' own venality. The horrors you witnessed during the rape of Constantinople killed something inside you, and by the time all was said and done, the only thing you truly wanted was out. You wanted to lay your sword aside, go home with the plunder you'd been awarded and settle in some forgotten corner of your homeland to marry, grow apples and bounce your children on your knees.

It was not to be. Your skill and efficiency made you too useful to send home when the newly ac-



quired Latin Empire needed every capable hand to shore it up. You found yourself wading in violence and treachery until you could stand it no more. Faith shattered, you were a cynical, embittered husk of a man when your sire, a Greek Sinner who had watched over you for several years, finally approached you with another offer, one that spoke to the anguish clawing at your soul. Your sire began tutoring you in the ways of your road before your Embrace. Finally, after nearly a decade of tutelage, she deemed you worthy to begin your new existence as a crusader against the lies and hypocrisy that have chained so many human and Cainite souls.

Concept: The embittered crusader. Everything that you have ever been taught about a God of peace and love is nothing but a lie. Crusaders are not the soldiers of Christ. The entire edifice by which the strong prey on the weak and the "virtuous" slaughter the "wicked" because God wills it is a house of cards in dire need of a thorough kicking-over. In a way, you have found your purpose on this crusade, and your purpose is to tear down everything that the self-righteous hiding behind their so-called virtue hold sacred.

Roleplaying Hints: Your entire existence to this point has been a search for some kind of meaning or purpose, a place to call your own, some sign that God really exists and cares for the world, the actual presence of virtue in your fellow men. None of these things have presented themselves to you, and your bitterness knows few bounds. You long ago ceased to believe in God, and you look back on your desperate struggles to cling to Him with self-disgust. You haven't quite given upon your fellow men or your fellow vampires. Of course, you don't know that many vampires yet.

Equipment: Traveling clothes, sword, armor, ghoulish horse

Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Caretaker
Demeanor: Defender
Clan: Lasombra

Generation: 12th
Concept: The Disillusioned Crusader
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	○○○○○○○○	Allies	●●○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Obtenebration	●●○○○○○○	Domain	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●○○○
Potence	●●○○○○○○	Mentor	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○
	○○○○○○○○	Resources	●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Sin

●●●●●○○○○○

Aura: Seduction (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

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

My lord, I think you should know...

Prelude: You were born the daughter of a minor noble family, the only child of your father's much-loved first wife, and raised by your father's exceedingly well-bred sister. At her knee, you learned all of the most desirable feminine arts and grew up smart as a whip, besides. You so perfectly embodied the feminine graces that no one realized what a wild and angry heart beat inside you, enraged at being turned into nothing more than a replica of your dead mother, a doll with which your aunt and father and whatever "courtly lovers" you might attract might play.

You turned to writing scathingly sarcastic poetry, delicately lampooning the faults of your social class and the phenomenon of "courtly love" with your biting wit and elegant command of language. Almost no one noticed, being much more enamored of actually practicing courtly love than listening to barbed criticism of it. You would have despaired, had you the opportunity. You didn't, as one of the members of your minuscule audience decided to snatch you away from the sink of immorality you so accurately described. He had one of his ghoulish minions sue for your hand in marriage and took you in hand as his protégée (and childe) practically as soon as the banns were read.

Your sire, as it turned out, thought you recognized your real worth and place in society with unusual accuracy for a woman. He expected you to be quite happy being seen and not heard, doing what he told you and eschewing all that Toreador-ish nonsense. You thought it would be a bad idea to enlighten him as to your true views about a woman's worth, learned what he had to teach you and searched for a way out. You found it in the form of a Sinner diplomat visiting your sire's court on behalf of his liege. He suggested that you might find your existence much more satisfying as a

self-willed daughter of Sin than being groomed as Scion alliance-barter. You could but agree.

Your parting from your sire was not what you could call amicable, as you staked the bastard and ran away with your Sinner confidante before anyone could rouse him.

You now shelter at his liege's court, learning the beginnings of the Road of Sin and extolling its freedoms in your verse.

Concept: The intellectually rebellious "perfect" daughter, you resented the game you were born to play even as you mastered the playing field, annoyed by the limited latitude of options open to you even in the realm of courtly love. Given the freedom to pursue goals of your own choosing and spiritual growth unbound by moralistic shackles, you do so with enthusiasm and energy.

Roleplaying Hints: You're witty and charming, intelligent and artistically accomplished and gracefully feminine, but in your breast dwells the heart of a true uppity woman. You know your own will, and you trust it to guide you through the pitfalls of your chosen road. You don't necessarily consider "tempting" others to be quite your style, though you do debate ethics and morality whenever you can and try to convince others to understand your view as you endeavor to understand theirs.

Equipment: Appropriate wardrobe for any occasion, pens, ink, parchment, encyclopedic knowledge of contemporary literary forms, tart rejoinders



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Rebel
Demeanor: Pedagogue
Clan: Brujah

Generation: 12th
Concept: The Devil's Advocate
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

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

ABILITIES

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

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Celerity	●○○○○○○○	Contacts	●●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●●
Potence	○○○○○○○○○	Mentor	●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●○○○
Presence	●●●○○○○○	Retainers	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
	○○○○○○○○○	Status	●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Sin

●●●●●○○○

Aura: Seduction (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

+2 difficulty to resist frenzy

Experience

THE MERCHANT FROM HELL

I'm certain that your... wares... are of the finest possible quality.

Now, why don't you tell me what's in this for me?

Prelude: You were born into a minor Italian merchant family and grew up soaked in a broth of thwarted ambition. Your father, a competent but uninspired man of business, aspired to greater means than he'd been able (or willing) to acquire with his own limited abilities. He expected much better of you and your siblings, and you, at least, took those expectations to heart. Your elder brother might have been the heir, but you were most assuredly the prodigy — brilliant, ambitious and utterly devoid of the scruples that doomed your father to mediocrity.

With your brother's permission, you carried out all those activities that no self-respecting man of business in your family would engage in: the procurement of exotic substances for the wealthy and debauched, trafficking in slaves from the pagan East — anything to add to your family's wealth and your own comfort. The slave trade was particularly lucrative for you. You had a good eye for potential, and soon, you were supplying your clients with household servants of the highest possible quality. To your amusement, you discovered that certain of your clients were willing to pay a much higher price for human merchandise of fretfully specific types, nubile young women from Kiev, boys no more than 10 winters in age, matronly women past childbearing. These clients gradually became the core of your business.

You were sitting in your study, going over your books, when one of those clients, who did most of his business with you through a secondary representative, paid you an unexpected, unannounced evening visit. He told you that he vastly admired your work ethic, your eye for detail and your complete lack of conscience, and then, he made you a business offer — one that he was not prepared to let you refuse.

Concept: The completely amoral man of business. You were Embraced for your distinct lack of moral frailty, your razor-sharp mind, your intimate knowledge of the feeding practices of some of your sire's more important peers and your willingness to do anything to advance the fortunes of whoever commands what passes for your loyalty. Your sire somewhat erroneously assumes this will naturally be him.

Roleplaying Hints: You fell onto the Road of Sin as naturally as you used to breathe and have been smoothly integrating its ethics into your customary mode of looking at the world and interacting with others. You've always viewed others as objects. You appreciate individuals other than yourself as marketable goods worth precisely what you can get for them and not one jot more. Rather than waste eternity mewling about your lost humanity, you're energized by the possibilities now open to you and are eyeing the pie to see how big a slice you can claim.

Equipment: Clothing appropriate to your station, ready supply of liquid funds, letters of credit



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Gallant
Clan: Ventrue

Generation: 9th
Concept: The Merchant from Hell
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	●●●○○○
Fortitude	●●○○○○○○○○	Generation	●●●○○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○○
Presence	●●○○○○○○○○	Herd	●●○○○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
	○○○○○○○○○○	Influence	●●○○○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●●○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Sin

●●●●●●●○○○

Aura: Seduction (0)

Willpower

●●●○○○○○○○○

□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□

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Health

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

Weakness

Feeding Restriction

Experience

THE DEVIL IN DISGUISE

Ah, yes, I'm certain that we could do that, if you like.

Of course, it would require a third person.

Prelude: You were born into a world of wealth and privilege, the first-born child (and only son) of a prosperous merchant family from Antioch. Petted and indulged throughout your entire childhood, denied virtually nothing you desired by your doting parents, you "matured" into the sort of spoiled brat that others either loathe or with whom they relentlessly curry favor. You also grew up easily bored, so those who could find new ways to stir your imagination earned the lion's share of that favor.

You experimented with a thousand different diversions (and perversions) before your 20th birthday and gradually began engaging in wilder and wilder behavior just to see if anything could still thrill you. One night, one of your several lovers suggested that you should attend a gathering of "heretical" scholars who were studying the pagan faiths of your homeland. Not normally the cerebral type, you let yourself be talked into it and enjoyed one of the wildest nights of your life, though the details were fuzzy when you woke the next morning, covered in daubs of paint and streaks of blood, with the memory of pleasure still singing inside you. This was definitely the sort of heresy you could give your all to, and you continued attending orgies of sex, drink, drugs and bloodletting, thinly disguised as rituals, eventually coming to lead more than a few of them yourself...

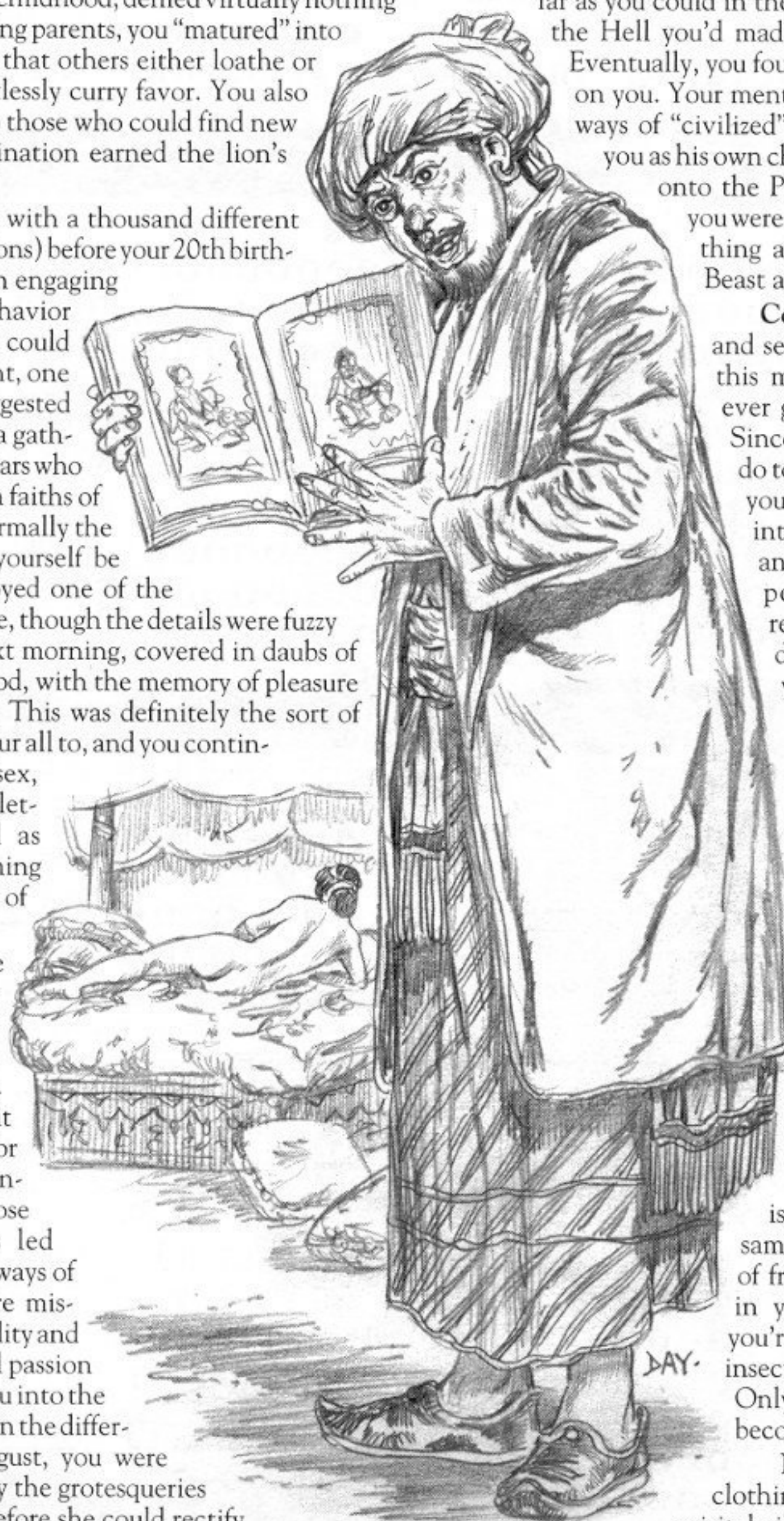
...until the entire enterprise turned into much more than an excuse to stimulate yourself into oblivion. The "heretical cult," as it turned out, was a front for a much darker church, indeed—a *Ravnosjati* whose combined perversions led them down the twisted ways of the infernalist. Your sire mistook your youthful stupidity and self-indulgence for a real passion for evil and Embraced you into the fold before she could learn the difference. Much to her disgust, you were revolted and horrified by the grotesqueries of genuine diabolism. Before she could rectify

her error, however, the *jati* was attacked by unknown assailants and nearly all its members destroyed. You barely escaped with your skin intact. You fled, running as fast and far as you could in the desperate hope of leaving the Hell you'd made for yourself behind you. Eventually, you found someone who took pity on you. Your mentor began teaching you the ways of "civilized" Cainite society, claiming you as his own childe, and also initiated you onto the Path of Pleasure, for which you were enormously grateful. Something about it soothes both your Beast and your nightmares.

Concept: Youthful arrogance and self-indulgence got you into this mess, and now, nothing is ever going to get you out of it. Since there's nothing you can do to repair the damage, you do your best to forget it, sinking into your old lifestyle of vice and self-indulgence in a desperate effort to stop remembering the things you did and experienced during your brief stint as an agent of diabolic powers.

Roleplaying Hints: You've discovered what self-disgust and guilt feel like for the first time in your existence, and you don't like it one little bit. You've also discovered fear, pain and the knowledge that most of Cainite kind would happily destroy you should they ever learn your "little secret," and you don't like that much, either. You're aware that your "mentor" is using you in much the same way you used your circle of friends and associates back in your breathing days, but you're still too off-balance and insecure to do much about it. Only time will tell what will become of you.

Equipment: Expensive clothing, expensive perfume, exquisitely illustrated love manuals



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Celebrant
Demeanor: Gallant
Clan: Ravnos

Generation: 12th
Concept: The Devil in Disguise
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	○○○○○○○○○	Herd	●●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Chimerstry	●●●○○○○○	Mentor	●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○
Fortitude	●●○○○○○○○	Resources	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●○○○
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits	Road	Health
○○○○○○○○○	Sin (Path of Pleasure)	Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	●●●●●●●●○○	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Aura: Seduction (1)	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○		Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Willpower	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	●●●●●●○○○○	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
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○○○○○○○○○	Blood Pool	Weakness
○○○○○○○○○	<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"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Addicted to Sin
○○○○○○○○○	<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"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Experience
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THE FURY

"It is the height of piety to be cruel for Christ's sake." Bernard of Clairvaux said that, you know. And you should also know that, by that standard, I am very pious, indeed.

Prelude: You were born of humble stock, to a Languedocien family of farmers and shepherds, in the heartland of the heretical South, the viscounty of Albigeois. You were still a child when the storm of the Albigensian Crusade broke over your homeland, and before you were fully grown, you understood the true meaning of cruelty. Though your parents were not Cathar *credentes* themselves, they were sympathetic to the plight of their countrymen. Eventually, that sympathy cost your father his life, as he was caught up in the relentless Northern hunt for heretics. That was when you learned to hate with a cold and bitter fury.

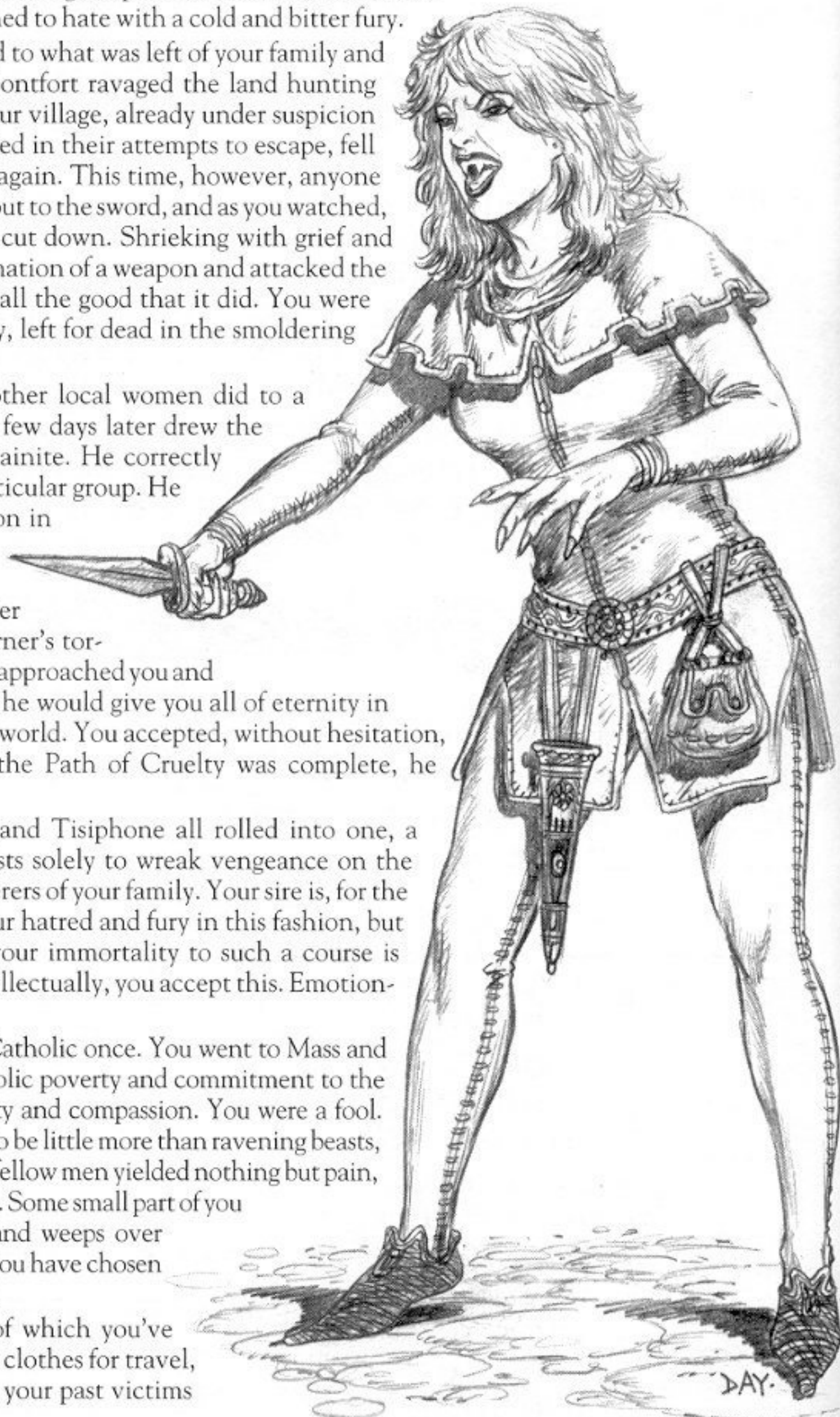
The year 1211 was particularly unkind to what was left of your family and community, as the forces of Simon de Montfort ravaged the land hunting Cathars and Trencavel partisans alike. Your village, already under suspicion for having once sheltered heretics and aided in their attempts to escape, fell prey to marauding French "crusaders" yet again. This time, however, anyone who attempted to interfere or to resist was put to the sword, and as you watched, your elder brother and mother were both cut down. Shrieking with grief and rage, you snatched up the nearest approximation of a weapon and attacked the man who had murdered your brother, for all the good that it did. You were promptly disarmed, beaten and, ultimately, left for dead in the smoldering ruins of your family's farmstead.

The things you and several of the other local women did to a Northern straggler who rode into town a few days later drew the attention of your sire, a Languedocien Cainite. He correctly identified you as the ringleader of your particular group. He also admired the raw violence and emotion in your technique for dispensing pain, though he thought it could be improved with a few artistic refinements here and there. After he watched you stringing out the Northerner's tortuously painful death over several days, he approached you and made you an offer — come with him, and he would give you all of eternity in which to extract your vengeance from the world. You accepted, without hesitation, and once your initiatory instruction in the Path of Cruelty was complete, he unleashed you on the night.

Concept: You are Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone all rolled into one, a creature made entirely of wrath, who exists solely to wreak vengeance on the despoilers of your homeland and the murderers of your family. Your sire is, for the time being, pleased to let you work out your hatred and fury in this fashion, but he has also warned you that dedicating your immortality to such a course is unlikely to sustain you in the long run. Intellectually, you accept this. Emotionally, you have a long way to go.

Roleplaying Hints: You were a good Catholic once. You went to Mass and observed the feast days; you admired Apostolic poverty and commitment to the religious life; you practiced Christian charity and compassion. You were a fool. Your "fellow" Catholics proved themselves to be little more than ravening beasts, and all of your compassion and love for your fellow men yielded nothing but pain, pain that you intend to return in full measure. Some small part of you that remains squeamishly humane quails and weeps over what you've become, but it hardly matters. You have chosen your path, and you will follow it to the end.

Equipment: Torture devices (some of which you've designed and constructed yourself), rugged clothes for travel, fine clothes for court, trophies taken from your past victims



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Judge
Demeanor: Judge
Clan: Toreador

Generation: 8th
Concept: The Fury
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	●●○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Sin (Path of Cruelty)

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Aura: Seduction (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

Enraptured by Beauty

Experience

CLERIC OF MORTAL SINS

Come with me. I have such things to show you.

Prelude: You were a sickly child, weaker than all of your siblings, and that, more than any decision of your own, sealed your fate. Your parents scraped together the dowry necessary to insure your entrance into the local convent, and before your breasts had finished budding, you found yourself sworn to a life of chastity and poverty. You nourished a rather justifiable bitterness about this until your fourth winter — a winter after the crops had failed and the snows fell deep and starvation claimed every third villager... and no small number of your sisters.

You survived, but you were also changed. Where you had once accepted implicitly the love of God for the world, now, you questioned. You studied and thought incessantly on the topic of why God allowed evil to persist in the world — or at least seemed indifferent to the suffering of the faithful. You sought discourse with learned scholars both within the one Church and outside of it when those pious thinkers and theologians failed to answer your questions. One of your correspondents was quite a learned scholar, indeed, conversant in Church doctrine, the creeds of half a hundred different heresies and even in the teachings of the pagan philosophers. He, more than any of the others, helped to expand

your thinking and your understanding of your chosen field.

Eventually, however, your correspondence with him began to take a darker cast. He began telling you things that you never wished to hear, never wished to contemplate, things that could damn your soul. Where once you nearly worshiped his wisdom and vast learning, you began to fear him. You tried to break off your communication with him, but he ignored your requests to cease. Letters from him that you burned reappeared in your cell, undamaged. Finally, he appeared to you, as well, and you were truly damned.

Concept: The fallen scholar. You began your contemplation of evil with the best of intentions, and those intentions failed you. It drew the attention of monsters to you, and now, you are one of them.

Roleplaying Hints: Like many before you, your curiosity was your downfall — not that the fall has ultimately changed your inquisitive nature. Your mind may have been shattered by the Embrace and your soul twisted by the things you learned both before and since, but you are still driven by the desire to *know*, to *understand*, and to put that knowledge and understanding to some concrete use. What that use might be, you haven't yet decided.

Equipment: Simple, rough habit and sandals, nearly complete copy of the *Codex Maleficia*



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Pedagogue
Demeanor: Caretaker
Clan: Malkavian

Generation: 12th
Concept: The Cleric of Mortal Sins
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

Auspex ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dementation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Obfuscate ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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Backgrounds

Allies ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Contacts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Domain ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Herd ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Mentor ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Virtues

Conscience/Conviction ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Self-Control/Instinct ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
Courage ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Other Traits

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Road

Sin (Path of Screams)

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Aura: Seduction (0)

Willpower

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Blood Pool

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Health

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

Weakness

Start Play with 1 derangement

Experience

Infamous Sinners

Not all Sinners are infamous. Some are merely reviled, and others are actually lauded for their contributions to Cainite society (although those latter are typically Sinners who hide their road affiliation). The followers of the *Via Peccati* described herein are nothing short of legendary among their fellows.

Titus Venturus Camillus (Camilla)

5th generation Ventrue, childe of Collat

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 4th century BC

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Titus Venturus Camillus was always a prodigy — prodigiously intelligent, prodigiously ambitious and prodigiously capable. But because of a quirk of fate, an accident of birth, these qualities went almost completely unnoticed. The youngest son of a minor patrician family during the golden age of the Roman Republic, he was plucked from what would have been a life of endless frustration and thwarted ambition by his sire, Collat, who recognized Camillus' worth at an early age and decided to cultivate it.

Collat, Cainite Prince of Rome, took young Camillus first as his ghoul, instructing him in the traditions and responsibilities of his eventual heritage, and then, as his childe. Camillus thrived, earning honor from his peers and increased responsibilities from his sire, constantly, restlessly delving into both his duties and his own interests. He was enormously curious about the world outside of Italia, a world his sire was reluctant to release him into, and took every opportunity to seek out contact with any far-traveled and learned Cainites who came to Rome. During the Roman wars with Epirus, he even contrived to spare the unives of the Greek Ventrue Lysander and Artemis, whom he took as teachers, advisors and confidants. Collat disapproved of this close association with "the enemy." Camillus disapproved much more vigorously of his sire's relentless provincialism, his limited vision. In the end, youth and strength overcame age and treachery, with the aid of the equally ancient and treacherous Lysander, and Camillus took both his sire's unlife and his throne.

As a ruler, Camillus truly came into his own, demonstrating brilliance in his methods of manipulating the political tools at his disposal, his policy of subtly guiding the life of the Roman Republic rather than ruling openly. His court became cosmopolitan,

as he invited Cainites from all over the known world to Rome, hungry for their stories, their philosophies, the wonders of a world he had never seen. One of these Cainite guests was the Phoenician adventurer and philosopher Tanitbaal-Sahar, a sometime resident of Carthage, whose travelogs had captivated Camillus with their vivid and witty descriptions of his journeys. Sahar eventually displaced Lysander in Camillus' regard, much to the Greek's dismay, as Lysander perceived this relationship in much the same light that Collat had Camillus' with Lysander himself — consorting with the enemy. Lysander was constantly hectoring Camillus to lend his support to scourging the "unholy city" of Carthage from the face of the earth, a course of action Camillus was disinclined to pursue. He had little taste for pointless military adventurism, particularly once Carthage was defeated in not one but two wars. Lysander openly accused Camillus of a decadent betrayal of his responsibilities, an action that cooled their once-close friendship.

In truth, Camillus' viewpoint was changing as he aged, shifting away from his youthful preoccupation with external duty and responsibility. Sahar showed Camillus that existence could be much more than that, more pleasurable, more intense, more fulfilling, and he learned the lessons that his philosopher-companion-lover taught with relish. For his part, Sahar was inspired by Camillus' convert's zeal and penned his masterwork, the polemic detailing the philosophical framework of the *Via Desideratio*, a volume that he dedicated to his princely lover.

Sahar's disappearance shortly before the outbreak of the Third Punic War shattered Camillus. He never entirely recovered from the loss. He endured for several centuries more, a prince who had forsaken the way of kings for the way of the self-willed ruler of his own desires, before lapsing into torpor during Rome's long slide from preeminence, never having left the country of his birth. He awoke, some centuries later, as a powerful earthquake shook the underground tomb in which he was laid to sleep. Spared destruction by the location of his resting place, Camillus arose to find the world much changed, his city now the capital of an empire of self-abnegating faith, and the inheritors of Sahar's vision a perverse and self-indulgent lot who, in his opinion, only barely grasped the true nature of the road they had chosen to follow. Vastly offended, he laid low for a time, gathering his personal strength, learning what he could and piecing together the battered remains of his own, complete copies of the *Via Desideratio*'s core polemics. Armed therewith, Camillus recently departed Rome for the first time in

the company of a small coterie of dedicated Sinners, seeking a safe haven in which to settle and begin the task of truly educating his lover's spiritual "children."

Tanitbaal-Sahar

6th generation Baali, childe of Tanith

Nature: Visionary/Architect

Demeanor: Celebrant

Embrace: 9th century BC

Apparent Age: early 20s

The Cainite scholar and philosopher known as Tanitbaal-Sahar was born in the city of Tyre during the height of its power and influence, serving in the great temple of Melqart as a praise-singer to the god. It was his beautifully evocative voice and hauntingly lyrical poetry that first drew the attention of Tyre's reclusive Cainite ruler, the Methuselah Tanith, to Sahar, but it was the power of his mind that kept her interest. Long accustomed to being regarded with fear and reverence by all to whom she revealed herself, Tanith was intrigued when Sahar neither instinctively feared nor worshiped her, but instead, turned his questing intellect on her when she came to him claiming to be a god.

He questioned her quite impertinently concerning numerous issues that had sparked his curiosity during his

time in the temple, clearly more desirous of answers than the exaltation of her attention. Tanith was, needless to say, startled, first irritated, then amused and, finally, intrigued. She discarded the divine approach entirely and, afterward, they spent many a night discussing issues of history and politics, philosophy and human nature. Sahar was hungry to learn, endlessly curious, and he drove Tanith to her limits with his ceaseless questions. Finally, she offered him the most profound gift possible — immortality and an eternity in which to pursue his studies. Sahar accepted her gift, and when he rose from the ritual of his Embrace, he took the name Tanitbaal in honor of his sire.

Tanitbaal-Sahar remained in Tyre learning the vagaries of Cainite society and his clan's lack of place in it for several decades after his Embrace, before his sire released him to wander as he willed. He took on the identity of an itinerant Phoenician Brujah, an approach that served him well as he traveled the length and breadth of the known world, immersing himself in its disparate cultures, both mortal and Cainite, observing all and writing extensively of his adventures. He was particularly fascinated by the rich tapestry of human and Cainite philosophy and religion. Even though profound faith wounded him as deeply as any other Baali, he was drawn to it as a moth to a fire that might destroy it. He deliberately sought out discourse with other students of the Cainite condition, no matter their origins, exchanging hot words with genuine Brujah elders in the *sphairisteriae* of Hellas, seeking out Assamite mystics in the great cities of Persia, bending knee to Tzimisce witch-priests in the mountains of the Far North.

Eventually, Sahar settled at his grandsire Moloch's court in Carthage, both to experience the existence of the Cainites of that city and to compile his centuries of observations and ramblings into a coherent narrative. He not only produced several travelogs based on the contents of his extraordinarily detailed journals, he also began the lengthy and difficult process of translating his own philosophical tendencies and several of the belief systems he had encountered into a rational code of conduct. These literary efforts attracted the attention of the Ventrue Camilla, Prince of Rome, and the two began an extensive correspondence. Sahar eventually relocated to Rome at Camilla's invitation, and the two continued their intellectual companionship. Contrary to the poorly concealed fears of Lysander, Camilla's Greek Ventrue advisor and a venomous foe of the Carthaginian Brujah, Sahar made no real attempt to sway Camilla with regards to Carthage's fate. In fact, he had found the



Cainite culture there distinctly debased, given over to the willing acceptance of spiritual slavery in return for the fleeting mirage of temporal power.

Sahar remained peacefully in Rome, avoiding his "cousin" Cybele, writing the foundational polemics of the *Via Desideratio* and strengthening his relationship with Camilla. Their already strong intellectual bond deepened to something richer and more intense, and the two became not only confidants, but friends, lovers and, in truth, soul mates. Inspired by Camilla, Sahar completed his masterwork just before the outbreak of the Third Punic War. Shortly thereafter, he received an urgent summons from his sire, begging him to return to Tyre with all haste. Despite his disaffection with the Molochim court of Carthage, Sahar was still quite loyal to Tanith and departed Italy via the port of Ostia, bound for home, having promised Camilla that he would return as soon as he was able.

He never arrived. Somewhere between Ostia and Tyre, Sahar's entire ship vanished as though swallowed by the sea itself. Tanith's attempts to summon him via sorcerous means failed. Camilla's investigations yielded nothing but a handful of Sahar's "working journals" found being sold in the marketplace at Alexandria by the prince's agents. Despite their best efforts, neither ever uncovered any evidence of Sahar's ultimate fate.

Mary the Black

4th generation Baali, childe of Anaduk

Nature: Survivor

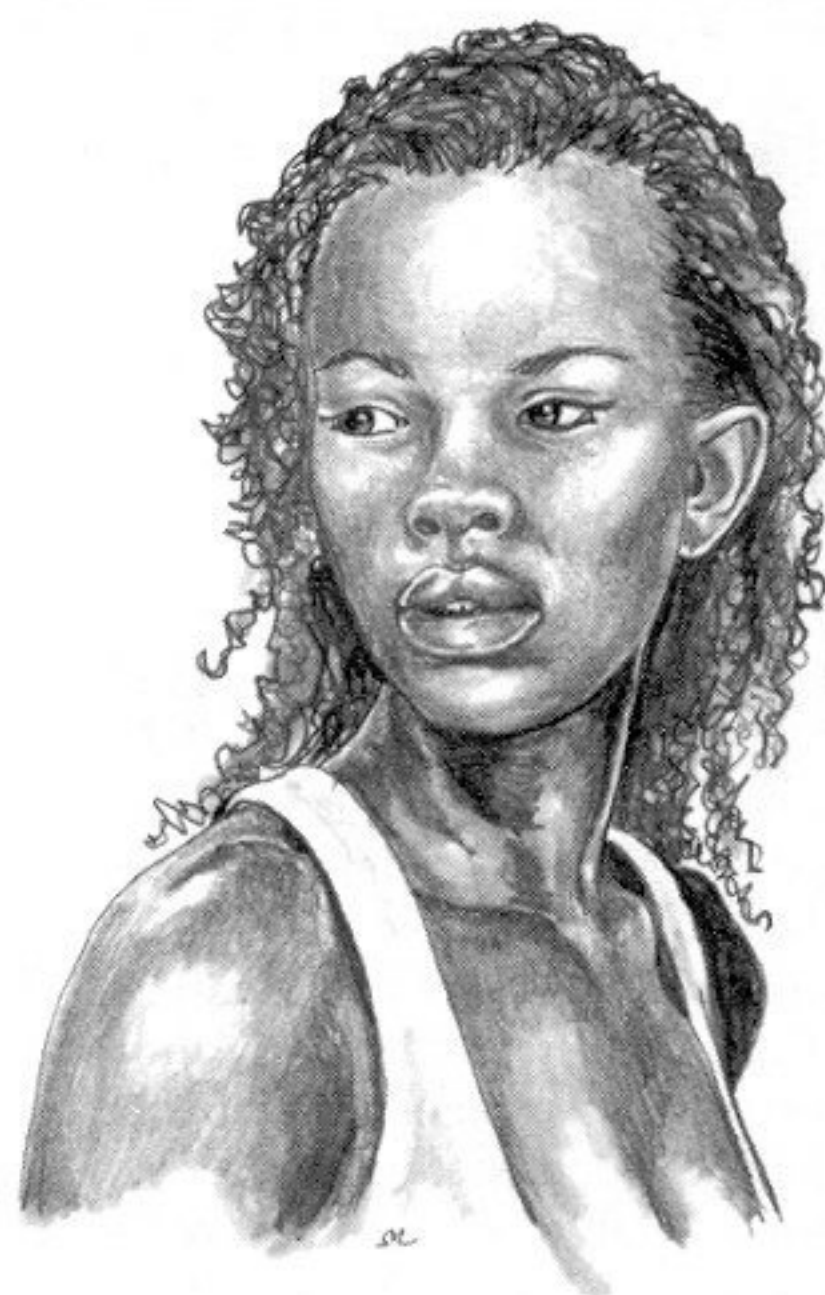
Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 18th century BC

Apparent Age: mid-teens

Her name is a curse on the lips of every Cainite who survived the fall of Constantinople. Mary. Black Ma-ri-ah. The serpent who sank her fangs into the heart of the Dream and drank it dry, the hunted and hated murderer of Michael the Patriarch. Few have ever seen her face and survived to tell the tale, and fewer still know her secrets.

Eighteen centuries before the birth of Christ, the girl known as Ma-ri lived in the lost and forgotten temple-city of Ebla, beloved of the Treador Methuselah Mi-ka-el. She died embittered and alone, betrayed and abandoned by her lover, and took her own life as the invading Akkadians ravaged the city Mi-ka-el built. The fractured remnants of her essence survived, burned into the broken and scattered tablets of the great archive of Ebla and recovered by the Baali Anaduk, who fell



instantly in lust with her fire, her passion, her transcendent rage and hate. He bartered the tattered remnants of his soul for the restoration of Ma-ri's life, and he was the first to meet his end in her quest to regain her identity, the memories of what had brought her to this pass. In the end, she recovered them all and knew the purpose that had truly drawn her back from the grave: vengeance, against her faithless lover Mi-ka-el and all who shared his accursed blood.

And she found him at the center of a new temple-city, nourishing a new holy dream, Constantinople, warded a thousand and one ways against her with its statues and icons and Tzimisce image-magic, as though her coming had somehow been anticipated. But she was patient, for she had waited long already and could wait longer in order to achieve her vengeance, and she was crafty, searching for the flaw in his armor of faith that would allow her to strike at him. And strike she did. As the Dream convulsed and died around them, Ma-ri came to Mi-ka-el and brought his reckoning with her — she devoured his soul, to tear the reason for his desertion and betrayal from him as he met his Final Death.

She learned that, in truth, he had not abandoned her, had not desired to leave her behind, had not betrayed her. He had been compelled by a will greater than his own to leave Ebla before it fell, and she perceived the grief he had felt at the thought of her death. The knowledge broke her, as the driving force

of her existence — her hatred of Mi-ka-el — was rendered hollow and empty, a complete and absolute lie. Maddened, she fled Constantinople, her ironclad sense of self-justification shattered, overwhelmed with self-loathing and teetering on the brink of final spiritual dissolution.

She fled to Tyre, the demesne of her kinswoman Tanith and, there, found safe haven, if not peace, wracked from within by the aftermath of her “revenge.” Tanith gently coaxed her back from the edge of self-destruction, delicately refocusing Ma-ri’s immense inner well of hatred and bitterness in more constructive directions. Ma-ri began her current existence as a demon-whore and became a vampire almost by accident. Her skills as a conduit for dark sorceries and a summoner of infernal entities have few peers. And, as it happens, one of Tanith’s neighbors has been making a vast and unpleasant nuisance of herself — one night soon, Tanith would very much like Ma-ri to meet Qawiyya el-Ghaduba, the Lioness of Jerusalem.

Jervais bani Tremere

7th generation Tremere, childe of Malgorzata

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Tyrant

Embrace: AD 1102

Apparent Age: mid-30s

By turns affable and choleric, politic and irascible, Jervais bani Tremere is many things: former master of *vis* for the great chantry Ceoris, roving diplomatic envoy of his clan and a dyed-in-the wool Sinner. A loyal son of House and Clan Tremere, Jervais is a ruthlessly manipulative, conniving schemer. Though his talents are always at the disposal of his superiors, his specific efforts invariably wind up serving him personally. He does, however, take great care in making certain that the gains he provides to the clan appear, at least, to seriously outweigh any personal advantages that accrue to him, lest some jealous twit use those profits against him.

Jervais is also one of those few Cainites who, rather than receiving tutelage in the ways of Sin, came to the road almost instinctively. Steeped in the classical learning promulgated through the old Order of Hermes, he was already familiar with much of the body of Greek philosophy relating to the worth of the individual, as well as the various egotistic, Epicurean and Cyrenaic schools of thought. His practice of the road borrows much from these philosophical constructions, comprising one-part rejection of conventional Christian morality (particularly the

dogma of Cainite damnation), one-part completely amoral desire for maximum self-indulgence when the opportunity presents itself and one-part towering confidence in his own abilities, judgment and intrinsic worth. While endeavoring to be a self-willed law unto himself, he is nonetheless cemented solidly into the social and political obligations of the Tremere pyramid, an uneasy marriage that is gradually drawing him deeper into an irreconcilable conflict with the personal morality of his choosing.

Myca Vykos

7th generation Tzimisce, childe of Symeon

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Architect

Embrace: AD 1002

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Myca Vykos, childe of Symeon, scion of the Draconian Tzimisce of Constantinople, does not seem like a natural Sinner at first glance. A Tremere acolyte in life, he was Embraced into one of the strangest of the Tzimisce lineages, a “family” whose role in the Dream of Byzantium was a religious one, dominated by ascetic spiritual practices derived from the somewhat uneasy union of Christian and Metamorphosist philosophy. Gesu, the unliving saint of the divinity within and Vykos’ grandsire, frowned on conspicuous



displays of decadence, including usage of the Tzimisce flesh-sculpting arts for purposes not explicitly permitted by Draconian religious teachings, among numerous other checks on the freedom of his descendants. Each and every one of them grated against the nerves of the young Vykos, who, while accustomed to playing by others' rules, was not at all accustomed to being treated as though he were somehow morally inferior because he derived from the same stock as the Carpathian Tzimisce with whom the Draconian Tzimisce periodically warred.

Vykos never entirely accepted Gesu's delusions of divinity but found it advisable to keep such sentiments to himself. Intrigued by the flesh-crafting arts, Vykos pursued a secretive study of their various personal and external applications, seeking training from Carpathian Shapers he had been explicitly instructed to avoid contacting. He eventually acquired several correspondents from his lost homeland, whose origins he was obliged to keep secret, and a small circle of confederates within the city itself, with whom he shared intellectual interests. Intelligent, manipulative and, frankly, self-serving, Vykos systematically wrung everything he could learn out of nearly everyone who crossed his path from the time he entered Constantinople to the time he and his sire fled, building a far-flung network of contacts and colleagues as he did so.

His rejection of the religious precepts of his sire and grandsire, however, left him in a bit of a precarious spiritual position. His initial investigations into the nature of Cainite spirituality had left him vaguely dissatisfied with the options open to him in Constantinople. It was more than expected that he would follow his lineage's teachings. The mere suggestion that he might not desire to do so was regarded almost as apostasy. Frustrated in his quest, his grip on the Beast began to slip — until he acquired his semi-complete copy of *On Hunger and Its Satisfaction* and stepped onto the Road of Sin.

Vykos is, in many ways, the archetype of the thinking Sinner. Much like Sahar, his ultimate goal has always been self-knowledge and self-understanding, the twin mechanisms to achieving true and ultimate self-gratification, the fulfillment of all the desires of mind, body and soul. Following any road is an intellectual as much as a spiritual exercise for him, and he has difficulty sinking into the purely sensual aspects of the road, a defect that his mentor, Ilias cel Frumos, is gradually helping Vykos to overcome.

Bela Rusenko, Prince of Sofia

7th generation Cappadocian, childe of Amalia of Thrace

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 1044

Apparent Age: early 40s

Bela Rusenko, the Cappadocian Prince of Sofia, is among the most horrifying Sinners stalking the night. Born into a well-to-do family in Hungary, he was extensively educated in spiritual matters by his uncle, a Catholic priest. Bela's ready and sharp mind absorbed esoteric knowledge like a sponge, though his soul felt little in the way of true faith. His readily apparent intelligence attracted the attention of his sire, Amalia of Thrace, a penitential and devout Cainite who believed her state a punishment from God but one who could not resist dragging young Bela into darkness as her companion.

Bela rejected his sire's groveling penitence and reveled in the glory of his immortality, a course that drove a wedge between sire and childe despite their mutual blood oath. The pair separated, Bela embracing the Road of Sin and seeking further instruction in its tenets among the Cainites of his homeland. Eventually, Bela came in contact with the Malkavian Ottavio, mouthpiece of the entity known as Kupala. His studies at the knee of the deranged prophet taught Bela much



about the most depraved elements of the ways of Sin, as well as giving him his own most overriding ambition.

A Sinner fallen from the ideal of self-knowledge and self-rule, Bela Rusenko desires nothing more than to become the avatar of the dark and hungry god Kupala. His claim of the rulership of Sofia is simply a step toward achieving that goal, and the rites he conducts to propitiate and seduce his deity emerged from both his own knowledge of esoteric religious practices and the fevered nightmares of a divine madman. Bela has not yet substantially succeeded in his efforts to free Kupala from its prison, much less channel its power into himself, but he has all the time in the world in which to work out the methods he must use to achieve that goal.

At the moment, only two forces are truly in a position to threaten Bela's efforts. His sire, Amalia of Thrace, is among his most devoted enemies, especially since he snatched the rulership of Sofia from beneath her very nose. She and her human minion, Father Patryn, have targeted Bela for "purification," but he has thus far managed to avoid their snares. More significantly, however, word of the oddities in Bela's spiritual practices have spread through the loosely knit Sinner communities of the East, very much to his detriment. The infernalist-hunters among the strict adherents of the Path of the Devil have taken notice of him and have inserted a spy into his city to determine the truth of the allegations against him. When, and if, this spy discovers those truths, the Adversaries will waste no time with subtle traps that Bela might escape.

Albin, the Ghost of Magdeburg

9th generation Caitiff, childe of an unknown sire

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: AD 1191

Apparent Age: mid-teens

Albin of Magdeburg has not precisely enjoyed the typical existence of a Sinner. Rarely, if ever, has he basked in the glow of pure sensual indulgence or been in a position where he could quell the hatred in his heart by expressing it openly. Born the sickly child of a father who abused and tormented him relentlessly, he traded the hell of his mortal life for the chance Embrace inflicted by an unknown Cainite. A Caitiff, he collected the contempt and scorn of even the pettiest of the low-blooded residents of Magdeburg, who could at least claim the slight advantage of heritage and a sense of belonging. He returned the



contempt with interest and fell instinctively onto the Road of Sin as a means of surviving the ravages of his Beast and maintaining some sense of self-worth.

Albin reached the absolute nadir of his existence when he met Jürgen of the Ventrue, the incoming Prince of Magdeburg. Jürgen offered Albin a position as his personal spy. Albin was desperate and hungry enough for respect and recognition that he accepted without thinking twice. He promptly found himself subjected to the blood oath, universally loathed as Jürgen's errand boy and treated by his new master as little better than a slave — an expendable slave. Albin's involvement in the affair of the stolen Toreador sword-gift and the perfidy of the Tremere ambassador saw him imprisoned at the bottom of a well and only desultorily sought after by his erstwhile employer (see **Under the Black Cross** for more on these events).

Albin eventually managed to escape his imprisonment and entered into the service of Hardestadt, sire of Jürgen, to spy on his former benefactor. Jürgen, unaware of Albin's change of allegiances, promptly set Albin to spy on a coterie of Sinner Furores harassing Magdeburg and its dependencies. The Ghost of Magdeburg now stands in the middle of a crossroads of conflicting loyalties. He spies on Jürgen at the behest of Hardestadt, who fears the ambitions of his childe and trusts the Caitiff Sinner to keep him informed. He spies on his fellow Sinners, the Silent Fury, on behalf of Jürgen, who trusts him to continue comfortably as lickspittle and crony no matter how poorly he's treated. And, nightly, the Ghost of Magdeburg changes. He

watches the Silent Fury and their ways, he observes their plans, and he feels the Sinner heart in him pulse with the desire to shuck off the poorly fitted coat of mewling slavery and embrace the freedom that is his true right.

Only time will tell which path he will choose.

Ilias cel Frumos Priest of Jarilo

8th generation Tzimisce, childe of Dorinta

Ilias cel Frumos' sire always told him that he was born several centuries too late. Even a few hundred years earlier, a boy of his enormous personal spirit and immense appetite for life would have been recognized as a summer-born gift from the gods of pleasure and joy. As it was, he spent much of his childhood and youth with a back whipped bloody by his father's efforts to instill him with "discipline" or on his knees being hectored by the village priest in an effort to instill him with "penitence." Neither approach worked very well.

His sire found him by following the blood trail he left as he staggered, dazed and in shock, from his parents' home after a particularly vigorous bout of discipline. Having observed him and his nocturnal activities for several nights, the *koldun* witch-priest Dorinta recognized in him a spark of passion and vitality that refused to be crushed. And having made her decision, she wasted no further time in taking him under her wing, tending his injuries and reassuring him that it was in no way unnatural to *feel* as intensely as he felt or to desire as much as he did. Dorinta took him first as her ghou, carefully teaching him the precepts of the *Via Voluptarius* in such a way as not to trigger his reflexive contempt for religious authority. Ilias responded much more gracefully to the mental stimulus of his sire's teaching and took to the Path of Pleasure as easily as a fish breathes water.

Ilias' Embrace was a lavish ritual affair attended by several prominent *koldun*, who were pleased that the wise and gentle Dorinta had finally taken a childe-apprentice. Auspiciously enough, a bout of relative peace broke out shortly thereafter, and his sire began instructing him in the sorcerous arts of his heritage as well as philosophy. Unfortunately, peace, happiness and security were not destined to be his for long. By mischance or deliberate betrayal, the place of Dorinta's sanctuary was revealed to the increasingly aggressive Tremere and was attacked. Ilias barely escaped with his unlife, ordered away by his sire in an effort to save her last, best work.

To say that Ilias enthusiastically persecutes the Tremere now is a bit of an understatement. Only partially trained in the arts of his heritage, he is an



incomplete *koldun* at best, though he serves as an outspoken advocate of the old ways among his increasingly debased clanmates. He, as his sire before him, reserves special contempt for Yorak's repulsive change-cult and the flesh-denying flavor of the same practiced by the Draconian newcomers fleeing the fall of Constantinople. In Myca Vykos, Ilias feels that he has found someone who shares some aspect of his own situation — caught between extremes in heritage and personal inclination, cut adrift in a new and dangerous age, making the best that he can of the situation.

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Caregiver

Embrace: AD 1104

Apparent Age: mid-teens

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Hearth Wisdom 3, Kuldunism 2, Leadership 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Occult 3, Ride 1, Survival 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Koldunic Sorcery 3 (The Way of Earth 3, The Way of Water 1), Vicissitude 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Domain 2, Herd 1, Resources 1, Status 2

Road: Sin (Path of Pleasure) 6

Conviction: 3, **Instinct:** 4, **Courage:** 3, **Willpower:** 6



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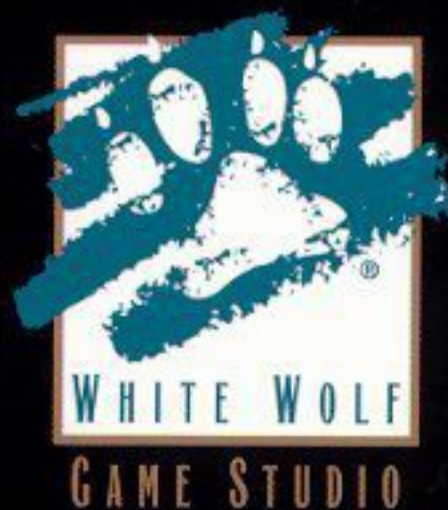
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