

The Ashen Thief



A SOURCEBOOK FOR
VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®

The Ashen Thief



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Rat in the Kitchen

I think, as I sink my claws into the wooden support beam, that I am out of my element. I am a creature of the city - I like horse shit and easy necks, taverns and hangings.

This is one of those moments when I am most grateful that I am a creature of dead flesh. My body does not shiver in the winter night. The moon is hidden in the overcast night, yet in the faint light reflecting off the snow-covered pines, my eyes see every grain of the wood with dim but perfect clarity.

If I were alive, and climbing hand over hand along this endless eave, my arms and shoulders would have gone child-weak with fatigue. I would have been paralyzed by the iron-toothed wind. I would have long ago dropped screaming into the courtyard below, into the midst of those things the owner of this insane chateau uses in the place of dogs.

If I were mortal, the rotten spots would bother me more. I have found three so far. The first one left me hanging by one arm and calmly reaching for a more solid hold with the hand that had just pulled away a 10-inch strip of oak with greasy ease. The next two were easier to spot, and by carefully testing my holds, I believe that I will be able to detect any further such weak spots.

I sink my claws in. I test. I place weight on the hand. Sturdy — no soft popping, no smell of rot or termites. I share my weight between hands, and then release the other grip and swing that hand forward. I test. If I were a mortal, I would be praying sincerely that I did not miss another rotten spot and fall to my death below. As a damned thing, I can only hope.

Another foot covered. I am not counting how many times I have done this. I am not counting how many more times it will be required to reach my goal. I will do this thing until I reach the window, and then I will do the next thing. This is the way I must do it, and this is the way it will be done.

Dinner is being a bore. Again. It's barely struggling, even after the *szlachta* told me it was ready for another bout. The servants are telling me things they think will please me. I wish they weren't so difficult to train. Perhaps if I implanted dog organs of some sort, they would transmit some of that species' inbred loyalty. Unfortunately, they would probably become as distempered as all such lesser beasts do in the presence of their true natural masters. I wonder about this sometimes. Caine was a farmer and a murderer, not a hunter. If anything, one imagines that humans should fear us, and animals show us trust, yet this is clearly not the case.

Academic speculation, and in any case the flesh of the new Garden will be remade to whatever shapes we need and desire. I know this, for the Dracon has informed me of it in his dream-visitations. My schedule is clear for some time, and I am sure there are dogs of some sort nearby I can secure for my research. I shall just take one of the more worn *szlachta* — perhaps the one trying to pour honey in my ears — and see if various levels of replacement with canine parts engender the sort of behavior I desire.

I toss my dinner to the hounds. This is pathetic, and there's little better to do. All the missives that need attention are long digested and responded to. If I keep reading over them, I'll just start second-guessing myself. I send some lackey — his identity is so defaced I doubt even he remembers who he is — to fetch my love. Perhaps the ecstasy of the Kiss will make the night a little less agonizing.

I am working my legs so that they will function again. The damned flesh freezes easily in the cold, and so I must work blood into it so I can move my limbs again. This is important to remember. If I were to forget and attempt to move my feet, I would find they were quite stiff. Given that I must climb into a window soon, this would be a terrible revelation, but not one that would trouble me for long.

First, however, I must get the window open, and that's no easy task. I could always wrench or claw it open, even one-handed, but the commotion would surely draw the attention of the beasts below, to say nothing of the inhabitants of this delightful pile of black stone. Likewise, the window opens onto what is doubtless a staircase — if I stick something through the shutters and flip the bar up, it is possible the

tapestry will catch it. It is also possible that the bar will go end-over-end down a long flight of steps, and that I will die shortly thereafter. Not the sort of wager I'm eager to make, particularly because if I lose it, my mission goes unaccomplished.

I came prepared for this. It seemed much easier when I made my original plans, however. I reach to the back of my belt and draw out a thin, flat pry bar. First, I must gently work the shutter loose from the nails that hold it to the hinges. Then, I must gently tear it loose with a single hand, and work the bar so that it is centered in the loose shutter's staple. Then I must slide it into the window (which is thankfully quite deep), slip quietly inside and then be off on my bloody little errand.

And, of course, I must do this while hanging one-handed in this wire-edged winter wind. If I move suddenly or drop the shutter, then that is the end of me. I give thanks for the strength and surety of the Blood, and curse it, because I'll need to murder someone shortly after getting inside. I must put a monster to its rest before the night is through, a very old and determined monster. After the struggle of getting through this window, I will be in no shape to do it without fresh nourishment.

Some might consider it masturbation of a grotesque sort, or blasphemy, but I do not. It is my love. The glory of the reshaping of the flesh is ours. If the master cannot bear to reshape his seed, is this not hubris? The Blood is great and glorious, true, but by no means is it infallible. It must be perfected. It can, if necessary, be differentiated. Specialized. Made suitable for specific tasks.

For love.

Her embrace is perfection. I know, because I sculpted it as such. It is not beautiful by simple human standards. Mortals, all they want is chalk-white skin and hair. But this is not the imagined purity of false virginity, it is the very real excellence of a form absolutely suited to its function. There are no sacks of fat and erectile tissue to satisfy infancy's remaining hungers, and the curves are not the barely concealed functionality of child-bearing, but those which mate most closely to my body. No clumsy fingers, but a thousand caressing cilia, and fangs to pierce me in the place that I most enjoy — the back of the neck, where the spine meets the collarbone.

She is not intelligent, my love, but I would not be without her. Our exchange of fluids is the revivification of my blood, and she reminds me always of the ideal that I hold highest. She cannot betray me, only love me, as I can only love her with the master's perfect love of that which he has wrought. As the *szlachta* carry her to her resting-crypt, I stretch: The boredom of the evening has been alleviated. I think that I will read some Juvenal, and then retire early. After all, with a mission so grand as ours, we *voivodes* cannot stint ourselves a little leisure. Relaxation keeps the predatory appetite sharp, for when it is most needed.

The window proved difficult, the murder less so. Still hot with the effort of entry, I made one of the deformed inhabitants of this foul chateau my celebratory feast. I hid the body where it would not be easily found, of course. Corpses are remarkably easy to fold once the vital fluids have been removed — most of the flesh's weight and resilience seems to reside within them.

As for the master, I must first get into his chambers. This is easier said than done. There are no tools for this — I cannot

do it correctly. I must do it the wrong way, and hope that I am good enough that, even doing it the wrong way, I can succeed.

I would very much like to live through the night, and the creature that I hunt is not stupid, but I am no weakling either. I am naturally as strong as I am ugly. I learned the wolf-claw trick from Boris, who learned it from his sire. From Magdalena, I learned a different trick — I learned how to be very, very fast.

The Fiend walks right past me, blood streaking the back of his linen shirt. I have no idea what he has been doing, but he is... whistling. This cheery, human sound coming from that perfect, emotionless mask is perhaps the most disturbing thing that I have heard in years. I have no doubt that he could easily detect me, but I am not relying on the blood for my stealth. I am hiding behind a door with hinges I oiled myself while I laid in wait. The most important thing is that the noise of the combat be muffled. If I fight him here, in the hall, they will be on me before his ash has even hit the floor. I do not want to meet my end here, not if I don't have to. There are other monsters to put down, and too few hands to do the job as it is.

Smiling, I let the door swing noiselessly open and step out behind him. Luckily, he is not the sort of Fiend who embeds eyes in the back of his head. He opens his door with an improbable key — the lock must have cost a fortune. He steps through the door, and I follow him, my bare feet noiseless on the flagstone floor. My body is burning with the fires of the Blood, and as his hand sends the door swinging inward, I slash brutally at the limb. What follows is chaos.

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I am caught off guard by the shattering blow to my arm, but my surprise is only the issue of a mortal heartbeat. Unfortunately, it is a heartbeat that almost costs me my existence. Luckily, the blood of a Tzimisce knows full well the value of intrigue, and I have spent many years preparing for such occasions. I dodge as best as I am able and let my body flow into its battle form. Thanks be to our Progenitor, that he created us superior to all other Cainites and gave us the blessing of the battle-body.

My arm is useless, and that is fine.

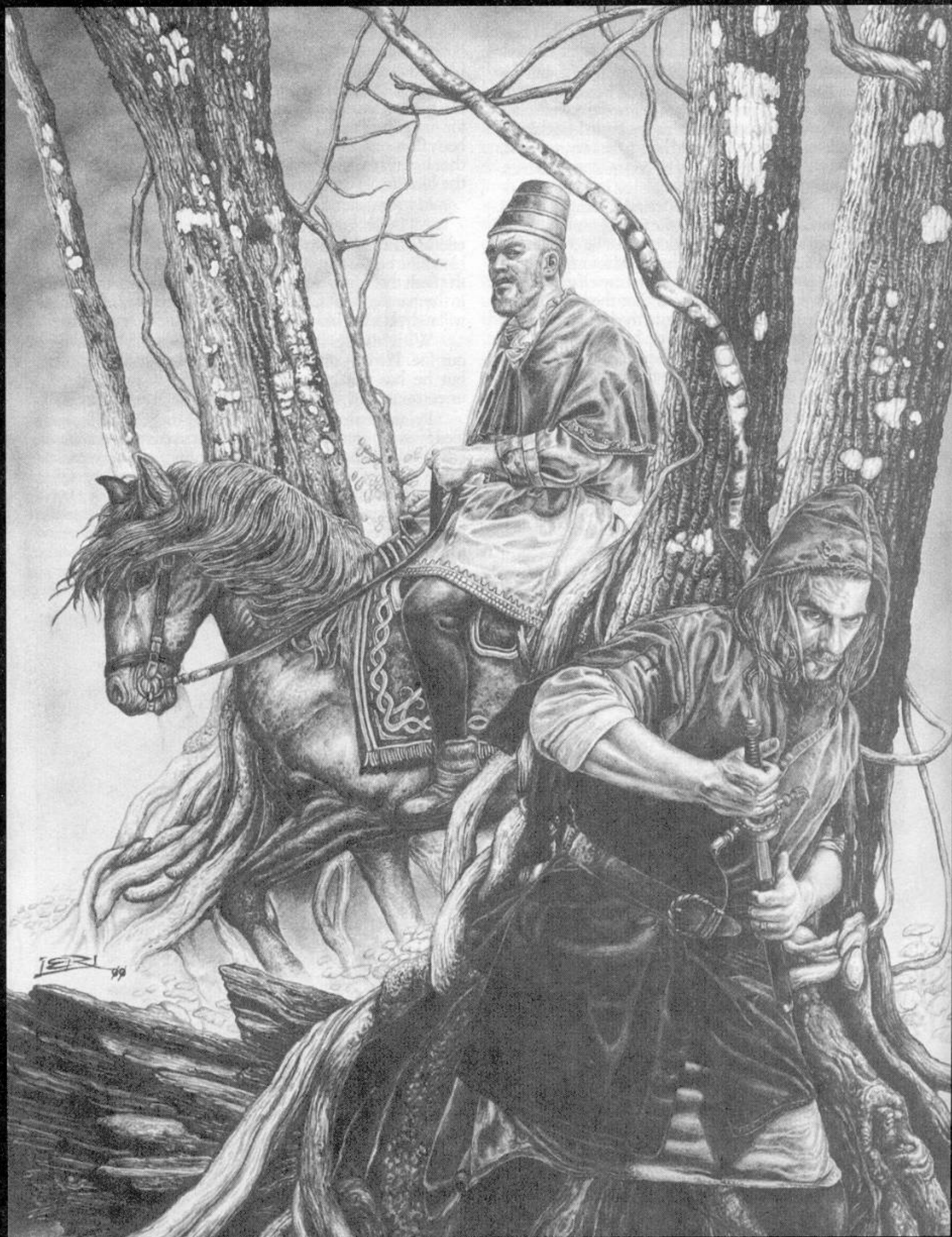
All I wish to do is gain distance, and I succeed, though I take another rake from his claws in doing so. The might of my bloodline begins to run through me, and I show him a trick of the flesh that I have mastered — the extension of the tongue in the manner of the Children of Set. They would not teach me willingly, but the blood is the life, and also the knowledge.

With his eyes removed, he is a markedly less dangerous foe. He can obviously fight through his Disciplines, but he has not trained to do so. He is awkward, and uncertain when relying on sound, on smell, on air pressure.

I puncture his skull twice with my tongue and begin to feed from the convulsing body before it strikes the stone floor. I too am acquainted with the trick of inhuman quickness, and soon, I will be acquainted with who sent this talented but obviously amateur killer to my abode. Particularly, I will know if he has any friends. The act of devouring the soul is unpleasant, but sometimes there is no other remedy. Steeling myself, I drink, and with the draught comes understanding.



A RAT IN THE KITCHEN





Introduction: Beneath the Notice of Kings

... now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.
- William Shakespeare, Macbeth

A WHOLE NEW DOMAIN

Kingly courts. Dark monasteries. Tournaments of clashing knights. Battles for the Holy Land. Ancient keeps in the blood-spattered Carpathians. These are the domains of the childer of Caine — the places of power and intrigue, conquest and ambition.

Or so they think.

In reality the Damned thrive in other corners of the night. Amidst the filth and press of the cities, on the darkened forest roads, a different breed of vampire stalks its prey. Just as mortals profit from the lust, greed and hate of kings and merchants, so Cainite gutter-dwellers profit from the needs and weaknesses of princes. If the mighty elder believes that leprous beggars are beneath contempt, so much the better for the neonate who rules as king of the mendicants. And when the beggar-king makes his move, the royal prince may learn the folly of his dismissal.

ASHEN THIEVES

Third sons, lost childer, discarded wretches — these are the “ashen thieves” of this book. Dark Medieval Europe is in the midst of a vampiric overpopulation; elders and lucky ancillae have established domain over many cities, shires and monasteries. To the young neonate it can seem that every corner of the night belongs to someone else, someone too powerful to divest of their claim any time soon.

And yet — save in the case of some Ventrue — to a Cainite, the blood of a beggar is as sweet as a king's. Vampires are nobles by nature, supreme predators and manipulators who gravitate toward centers of power and prestige. The young, the wretched and the desperate react to this trend by turning to the debased, the poor and ne'er-do-wells for their feeding stock. Among the brigands and harlots, the beggars and mountebanks, they move like sharks swimming in filthy waters.

These ashen thieves are not fools barred from power and influence. In a repetition of an eternal cycle of rule from above and revolt from below, they have found that there is power to be had amidst those princes do not deign to acknowledge. A “base cur” who knows the trick of entering impenetrable havens or riling a mob to terrible, torch-wielding violence can be more useful than any number of landed nobles and monks.

SCOUNDRELS

A large number of the vampires who move among mortal thieves and charlatans share much in motivation with their prey. They are scoundrels and tricksters because that is the way they have found to survive and thrive. They break into houses (and havens) to take what they want because they can. They don't have the skills or opportunity to play the game of prince and Elysium, and so lead a

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rougher unlife. They like violence, and so move in circles where life (and blood) is cheap.

Some are mere thugs, riding the knife's edge of the Beast and indulging in every dark desire, taking what they want and going where they care. Greed and self-gratification rule their damned souls. Others are wretches with little other choice. The childer of a disgraced sire, a Nosferatu in the fief of a prince who doesn't tolerate stench, a thrall who has freed himself from a powerful (and vengeful) regnant — the variations are endless.

Of course, most Cainites fall somewhere in between those two moral extremes. Like mortals, a combination of inclination and external factors guide them toward roguery. For some it is a way station on the path to true power; for others it is just where destiny has put them. If they happen to be highly skilled at killing or robbing fools, then so be it.

ROBBER KINGS

The other major group among vampires in the gutters and robber dens shares much with the princes of the Long Night. Their logic is simple: If the established princes have a lock on the royal courts and powerful abbeys, ambitious Cainites just have to find other domains to make their own. Brigand bands, crowded city streets and brothels make fine bases for power if you know how to use them.

These robber kings play a game of accommodation and deception with the established power structure. They define their domain socially as well as geographically (claiming the beggars and cutpurses of Reims, for example) but the established elder (the *prince* of Reims) rarely acknowledges this. So accommodation comes into play; the robber king pays tribute to the prince, provides him with information and favors he might not otherwise have access to (beggars make fine spies, after all), and gains a certain sanction in return. The deception is that the robber king is satisfied with his place as a subordinate. While paying lip service to the prince, these Cainites slowly build up their position until (hopefully) they are so indispensable that they can make demands of the prince instead of the other way around — or replace His Highness altogether.

REVOLUTIONARIES

The last group of ashen thieves are the smallest but cast the largest shadow. Like robber kings they use mortal ne'er-do-wells to gain power, but instead of simply seeking to gain prestige and place, the revolutionaries want to tear the whole bloody order down. They believe in a better way and in doing whatever it takes to get there. Most are disenfranchised neonates seeking vengeance, but some are skilled politicians with real plans for the future.

Cainite revolutionaries come in two general breeds: the subtle and the blatant. Subtle revolutionaries play the long game; as vampires they have a great deal of time ahead of them, and they are using it to patiently ready their master stroke. The problem is that centuries of work can be for naught if a single elder catches on. The Prometheans, who dream of a new Carthaginian utopia,

are a prime example of subtle revolutionaries; they are establishing a wide-ranging influence over urban criminals across Europe in the expectation that they can make their move when urban centers swell anew.

The blatant revolutionary is less patient. She is ready to take to the streets and burn down the elders' havens *now*. In Cainite circles, these raging radicals are called Furores, more a catch-all term than an actual sect. Every few years a principality sees neonates try to kill the prince and establish some utopia; the other princes mutter about the Furore threat, and then go on about their business. The truth is that the most successful Furores are less blatant than most would believe — they too lay the groundwork for revolt, but they function on the scale of years, not lifetimes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Ashen Thief* is your guide to what stands for the medieval "criminal underworld" and the vampires who move among it. Of course, there is not an underworld in the modern sense in 1197 — laws are too loose and variable for there to be truly organized crime. But there is a stratum of society in both the cities and countryside that subsists through activities called illegal or immoral by their supposed betters. Cutpurses and con artists divest urban dwellers of their coin; housebreakers and murderers do worse. Outside the city walls, brigands and pirates take advantage of travelers foolish enough to trust their safety to fate. And amidst these miscreants lurk monsters.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Chapter One: In Darkened Streets focuses on crime in the cities of Dark Medieval Europe. It examines the various criminal (and legal-but-immoral) activities that go on in these crowded streets, as well as the laws that govern medieval life. Discussion of mortal laws and crimes appear side by side with insight into the Cainite perspective on such matters. The chapter concludes with a look at the Prometheans, the sect of so-called Firebringers who are using urban thieves as the basis for their campaign to create a new Carthage.

Chapter Two: Wearing the Wolf's Head takes you into the woods and forests between the cities. The brigands, poachers and other scoundrels of the rural landscape come to center stage. The chapter focuses principally on the vampiric role, on how brigandage can serve to challenge the power of elders. Discussions of piracy and Islamic banditry round out the chapter.

Chapter Three: Flames of the Furores puts the revolutionaries in the spotlight. The Furores are not an organized sect, but rather a disparate agglomeration of vampires fighting to bring down the elders in their own communities. As such, the chapter examines the process of vampiric revolution, from the first motivation through the establishment of a supposed utopia. Sample Furore communities and guidelines for running Furore chronicles complete the survey of bloody revolt.

Appendix: Mavericks and Cutpurses provides you with four ready-to-play characters. These ashen thieves exemplify the themes and trends that appear throughout the book.

SOME USEFUL SOURCES

Thankfully, there is no dearth of text written about medieval Europe. Crime and criminality have not always been the most respected of topics, but they have their fair share of scholars as well. The following sources should help get you started on your own research, if you feel so inclined.

BOOKS

Daily Living in the Twelfth Century: Based on the Observations of Alexander Neckam in London and Paris by Urban Tigner Holmes — Wonderfully detailed and readable account of daily life in the two cities mentioned, with short discussions of related topics; much of the information in the book can apply to the rest of Western Europe. An excellent quick-reference.

Hearth & Home: A History of Material Culture by Norman J. G. Pounds — Actually covers all the ages of human civilization, but the chapters on the medieval period are quite useful and might nip a host of anachronisms in the bud. One chapter is devoted to the development of urban life.

The Medieval Underworld by Andrew McCall — This book is 20 years old, and the research might be a bit out of date (it's not always easy to tell); but it seems to be the most accessible and comprehensive introduction to medieval naughtiness out there. It covers not only the people we think of as "criminals" today, but also the oppressed in general — heretics, "witches," Jews, etc. There is also a survey of medieval law. Numerous juicy tidbits and facts.

Medieval Crime and Social Control, edited by Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace — Rather than an overall introduction, this book is a collection of papers on highly specific topics, including adultery in medieval Spain, rape in Burgundian France and the sociology of London taverns. Somewhat denser reading than the other references, but full of useful facts and interesting discussions, and very painstakingly documented.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies (edited by Carolyn Schriber) at <http://orb.rhodes.edu/> — A very informative site. It also has quick-links to the other major web sites for medieval research, such as the *Labyrinth*, *NetSerf*, *Argos* and the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*; the last is an especially rich treasure trove of period literature, documents and essays.

Medieval English Towns by Stephen Alsford at <http://orb.rhodes.edu/encyclo/culture/towns/towns.html> — Unfortunately, the site's content deals only with, well, English towns; but within that area, an incredible wealth of history and documents is presented. The site also has several very useful lists of sites dealing with medieval urban life throughout Europe.

BENEATH THE NOTICE OF KINGS





Chapter One: In Darkened Streets

*Look on us six that are hanging thus,
And for the flesh that so much we cherished
How it is eaten of birds and perished,
And ashes and dust fill our bones' place,
Mock not at us that so feeble be,
But pray God pardon us out of His grace
- François Villon, "The Ballad of the Gibbet"
(trans. Andrew Lang)*

O FORTUNA

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CITY'S UNDERBELLY

Professor Aymeric stopped sanding his quill and listened. It was difficult to tell, but he thought he'd heard a noise. Perhaps Nicholas was knocking about downstairs doing something.

After a few moments of silence, he went back to his work, blowing the dust off the quill, then blowing on his fingers for good measure in an attempt to warm them up. Not good enough. He cupped his right hand around the candle flame and glanced wistfully at the brazier in the corner. He could move it closer, but ever since he'd knocked it over six months ago, igniting a good quarter of his gloss on Cyprian, he felt little inclined to dare.

Especially since this was an important letter. He reviewed the next few sentences in his head, mumbling them to himself several times to make sure they were sufficiently eloquent. Then he set pen to parchment for the first long stroke of a capital B.

"Magister."

Aymeric started violently, ruining his letter in an instant. On the good vellum! He cursed aloud and gazed helplessly at the damage. But there was a slightly more pressing issue, wasn't there? The voice had been low, smiling... and did not belong to Nicholas. Who was behind him?

He turned. The figure in the doorway was a mystery, the hood of a weathered cloak pulled down low enough to obscure his face even in the dimming afternoon sun. It was a man, a young man, of that much Aymeric was sure.

"You look surprised, *maitre*," the man went on amiably. "Were you not expecting to receive a call from me? Maybe you hoped I would bid my money farewell after I learned that there isn't any Pierre of Blois staying at the Weeping Maid?"

"Your money?" Aymeric retorted, though he was indeed beginning to place the fellow. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

The man smiled again and took a step into the room. Aymeric half-rose; his heart leaped even further within him. He was too old for this sort of adventure now. Why this week of all weeks? Why the *hell* hadn't Nicholas or Marie stopped this man at the door?

"Come, *maitre*. You don't honestly suppose a cap to hide your tonsure and a bright tunic are enough to disguise you? Do you think the students don't gamble in the same houses?"

"I saw no one I recognized," Aymeric said, his cheeks reddening a little.

"Then you should have been paying more attention."

"Which one of them was it? Which one of the little miscreants told you?"

"Now, *maitre*..."

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"I owe you nothing anyway! You cheated me. You switched the dice for loaded ones."

"That's not what you said at the time." The man was unmoved, almost bored. No doubt he went through countless such scenes. He reached for the dagger at his belt and took another step; Aymeric put out a warding hand.

"Wait— wait, my good fellow." Miraculously, the "good fellow" did. Aymeric took the opportunity to draw in a much-needed breath.

"I maintain that the game was not a fair one. Nonetheless, I'm prepared to drop that objection—"

"How very good of you."

"—seeing that if you so chose, you could break faith with me further, by spreading the story about." And though Aymeric's tenure lecturing in theology had been long enough that he felt he could defend himself against the charge if necessary, he certainly didn't need the additional distraction. Even an unsubstantiated rumor of profligacy might be enough to draw unwanted attention to his leisure hours.

"I'm glad you see things my way, *maitre*. You being in such a reasonable humor, no doubt I can expect my first payment immediately."

"First payment? Don't get over-ambitious. I'll pay you the agreed-upon sum, which is already more than I can spare right now."

"You'll have to do better than that, I think."

"I shall. You shall have the original amount, half now, half on Saint Cecilia's Feast. Then within another few months I'm expecting to come into a little money. I can now promise you 40 sous of it. On the condition, of course, that you leave me alone both before and after."

Even through the shadow of the hood, Aymeric could see the man's brow folding, weighing the merits of the proposal.

"You've already run out on me once," he rumbled.

"Yes, but you know who I am. How can I get away from you now?" Aymeric put his hands behind his back, the great debater making his point.

† † †
Pepin glanced again at the old man and thought it over. Of course he'd raise the price. No doubt the professor was offering far less than he could really afford. But then again it was already well above what Pepin himself could make in 12 holidays, and all in a lump sum. If he pressed too hard, Aymeric might decide to have him ambushed and arrested for robbery instead of paying up. His word against the word of a lecturer at the University: how far would *that* go?

"You might just spend it all before I get to you."

"Nonsense. I'm sure whichever student told you about me will tell you the moment I collect."

"Yes, and he'll expect his share of the payment. 60 sous."

"45."

"50."

He ran the dagger's edge along his thumb, just as a reminder to the old man.

"Very well," Aymeric shrugged. "50."

"If you pay me that first half now."

"Yes, yes. Go downstairs and I'll meet you with it there."

Pepin went, obediently, but with a suspicious glance backward. After a few minutes, the professor emerged, his palm glittering: several silver coins and a little gold ring with a modest stone set in it.

"Here you are, my lad, much good may it do you. This bauble sat on the finger of my dear niece who died last year, the last family I had."

"That's a sad story, *maitre*," Pepin grinned, looking the thing over.

"You remember the agreement. I don't want to see you till Saint Cecilia's Day, after Vespers."

"I remember, *maitre*."

"What sort of luck?" Jehanne wanted to know. Her breasts, somewhat over-large but still quite lovely, swayed back and forth as she rocked on top of Pepin.

Pepin shook his head. "A business arrangement," he managed through his increasing bliss. Of course that was all the detail she was likely to get.

She grinned. "Is that what you're celebrating tonight?"

"Will you shut up and move?"

"Aren't I moving?" She gave a slightly deeper thrust. "There. Is that what you want?"

"Nh."

"And that? And that?"

"Ah, Jesu." He clutched her round buttocks, digging in his fingernails, his whole body locked in ecstatic rigor for a moment; then he fell back onto the mattresses, exhausted. She slid off him gently and laid her head on his chest, listening to the rhythm of his breathing.

Well, that had taken somewhat longer than it should have, but what else could you expect when you got a man drunk? All she'd needed was a single look at his wide smile and well-worn clothes to realize that here was a fellow on an unaccustomed splurge. Within a few minutes he was sound asleep.

She scooted herself over to the edge of the bed and felt around on the floor for his purse. It had looked nicely full; saints be praised, it felt heavy as well. She opened it and looked inside, manipulating the bottom of it with one hand so she could shift its contents silently within: the gleam of silver caught the moonlight. She put it down carefully, then got up, went over to the window and leaned out, not even bothering to slip on her undertunic first.

"Well?" came the hissing whisper.

"At least 25 sous!" she whispered back. "I want eight of it."

"You'll see to him?"

"Trust me, he'll be too busy trying to walk straight to notice you."

"Good. I'll be back at Prime."

"And where do you think you're going?" Mathilde sent Jehanne a stare which should have fixed her to the spot, but the girl kept going, trying to pretend she hadn't heard. The madam's instinct for profit was instantly aroused. They only avoided her when they'd done better than usual. She took hold of the girl's arm.

"Let go of me, you swine!"

"There, there, daughter...." Mathilde knew Jehanne hated to be called that, but it served to remind her of her place. "I only wanted to know what could be taking you away from us so early in the day."

"I'm going to visit my mother. And I'm not giving you a single denier of it!"

Mathilde maneuvered her over to a trestle table, forcing her to sit down on the bench. "Is that so? Is your mother the only woman in Paris who needs to eat? What about us? What about dear Agnes, who slaves to cook for you even when you're behind on the rent?"

"I'm not behind on it now!"

"No, but I've no doubt you will be before too long," said Mathilde dryly. "If you've had a stroke of good fortune this week, share it now and it'll be remembered later on. Bear in mind, my girl, we didn't have to take you on, did we? You're a burden to us, a danger, in fact. Pretty, yes, but if the sergeant ever finds out where you came from... or worse yet, if your husband should hear of it...."

Jehanne flushed. This time last year, the mention of her hated husband had been enough to send her into a terror, but now it only made her furious. Tears leapt to her eyes.

"Well, all right then. If you're going to be that great a pig—," she thrust her hand into her purse.

"Let's see what you've got first, then we'll see how great a pig I choose to be." Mathilde examined the little pile Jehanne held out, picking up the ring and trying it on. A covetous gleam came into her eyes.

"It's for my mother!" Jehanne exclaimed.

"It looks better on my white hand than it would on her spotted one," Mathilde answered smugly. "Now you should be off — you mustn't keep the old woman waiting."

"That girl has got a flogging coming to her!" Renaud declared later that afternoon. A trickle of blood seeped out from beneath the poultice he was holding to his cheek. "And if you don't administer it, I will."

Mathilde wrung her hands. "I am sorry, sir. She's young — she's new — and I can't suffer her to be marked. She's the favorite of a very important customer."

"Oh, and what am I, if not a sergeant of the Châtelet? Little Spanish tart. What did you give her to me for, if you knew she was such a hellion?"

IN DARKENED STREETS

"But I didn't, sir, honestly I didn't. She's been gentle as a lamb ever since she came. I don't know what could have gotten into her. She'll be made to understand how wicked it was, believe me."

Renaud glowered, although he knew perfectly well what had gotten into the girl. Even the whores were reluctant to accommodate his deepest desires. He had barely gotten his hands around her neck — hadn't even begun to squeeze — before she'd driven her knee into his side and lashed out with her fingernails for good measure. She trembled in the corner now, staring with those wide dark Moorish eyes of hers, probably only understanding one or two words in 10.

Mathilde was fitfully twisting a ring on her finger. "I assume this is going to raise your fee."

"You can be sure it is."

"I could give you over to Berthe. She doesn't see anyone but a few regulars anymore, but I'm sure I could persuade her to see you later this week, since your friendship means so much to us."

"That would be an excellent start." The provost himself knew Berthe's well-deserved legend, or so Renaud had heard. She was getting on a bit now. Still, there was no reason to suppose her skills had dulled. "But today?"

"Today..." Mathilde dithered a few moments more, struggling with herself, then dropped her shoulders in resignation. "Today you can take this. It was a present from an admirer, and I cherish it, but I'm sure you can get something for it." With that, she drew the ring she'd been fidgeting with off her finger. He picked it up. A small but flawless sapphire, cabochon-cut and polished to a mirror shine. Hadn't his mistress been saying just the other day how much she liked sapphires?

Renaud made himself frown. "I suppose it'll do."

‡ ‡ ‡

The youth with the long locks never stirred from his spot before the statue in the Lady-chapel — never even raised his head. He spared the man who came to kneel beside him barely a sidewise glance.

"We offer it to you first," he murmured, "because my master knows how much he owes you."

Renaud snorted. "Just you remember that. A word from me, and this place would be so tightly besieged that you couldn't even get your pricks out the door to take a piss. What have you got for me this time?"

"Something special. Look at this."

With a flowing, surreptitious motion, something cold and flat and smooth was pressed into Renaud's hand. He glanced at it.

"The king's seal. And pristine. But I can get these on my own if I want."

"Ah." The youth smiled tolerantly. "The king's seal, say you? Look, if you will, sir. That seal was made with this stamp."

Renaud took the leaden stamp from the boy's other hand, glancing quickly around to see if anyone might be watching.

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They seemed to be alone: the deacon in the nave outside was polishing candlesticks or some such. His slightly out-of-tune humming drifted into their little chamber, providing adequate (perhaps deliberate?) cover for their conversation.

"You have... forged the royal seal?"

"We believe so, yes, sir. For a reasonable price, you may take this sample with you and see for yourself how it compares."

Renaud looked over stamp and seal, pressing one into the other to match them up, his hands trembling slightly.

"And the stamp itself?"

"Will cost somewhat more. After all, to have the royal seal at one's command, without having to waylay and butcher genuine writs to get it.... But we can discuss that later, when you've satisfied yourself of its... fidelity."

"I see. Well, I haven't got a lot on me at the moment."

"That is unfortunate." The boy was the Christ Child; he was St. Cyr; he was a Holy Innocent.

"I suppose you'll be letting others bid on these in the meantime?"

"But of course."

Renaud then remembered the little ring in his purse. Ah, well, Adele could hardly miss a gift she didn't yet know about. He drew it out, polishing it a bit on the edge of his tunic.

"Here. Will this do? For the seal."

The boy held it up to the candlelight, clearly tempted. Perhaps he too had some lady-love.

"Consider it earnest money for the stamp as well," the officer added, sensing that he now had the leverage to press a little harder. "Naturally I must check this against the real thing. But it looks like a fine likeness to me."

"Very well. For the seal. And I shall tell my master that you were sincerely interested."

"Do that, my lad." Renaud got up, patting the youth's head as he did so. He had the gratifying, if short-lived, reward of seeing that icy complacency crack for a moment, the waxen face darkening, and then he was out, heading against the winter breeze that rushed in through the church doors.

‡ ‡ ‡

Heloise listened for the whisper of mortal feet in leather shoes, but most of her attention was on the view before her. It wasn't worthy of a queen, or even a duchess. No lush vistas greeted her eye, no barbered gardens with flowery bowers in which young lovers might make their decorous trysts. It was simply the city, nothing more or less than that. Rows of squeezed-together half-timbered houses, rotting mazes of alleyways, a constant stream of muck running down the center of the street, meandering inch by inch back to the river where it could dump its bounty of filth. Here, directly below her, a drunken student had just pinned his equally drunken friend to the wall, and the two of them were now reinventing the sodomitical wheel — their barking laughs of pleasure no less sharp than the haranguing their consciences would give them tomorrow. There, off in the



distance, a woman was picking over the body of an old man that she'd just found in an alleyway. Somewhere across town, in a room whose dimensions and character Heloise could still only imagine, a creature called Alexandre lay on an old Roman couch and fancied himself ruler of all this.

She smiled, and turned. "Geoffrey."

"Madame." The boy bowed, touching one knee to the ground, gazing up at her with the same lambent adoration he'd vouchsafed the Virgin 10 minutes ago. Then, with no further ceremony, he came forward. She extended her wrist to him, opening a gash in it with her teeth first. He closed his mouth over the wound. Never mind that the arm he clutched was withered and covered with leprous scabs, or that the silhouette that leaned over him bore an unhappy resemblance to the gargoyle carvings at the eaves. As far as his mortal senses were concerned, the former was white as alabaster and supple as a young branch, the latter as finely drawn as a gilded acanthus border in a psalter. She let her weight settle back on her heels, relishing the feel of his hot little tongue scraping on her skin, but steeled herself not to make any noise or touch him in return. It wouldn't do to let a slave know he had power of any sort.

After a few moments, she gently pulled away. He hesitated before letting go, flicking the tip of his tongue to catch the last droplet of blood that beaded on his lips.

"What news, Geoffrey?"

"All is well, madame. He took our bait. I have no doubt he'll buy the stamp."

"Good. And once he has the wherewithal to *really* overstep himself, he'll surely hasten to do it. You see, Geoffrey? Patience is a virtue."

"Indeed, madame. I told Monsieur Hugues just that. He is, of course, eager to see his cousin get himself hanged and thus vacate his very lucrative post." Geoffrey's hungry gaze traveled again to her wrist.

"Pay attention, my dear. Now the honorable Renaud, what payment did he give?"

"Oh." Suddenly the youth was alight with excitement. "I bargained for this, madame. He was going to give it to his wife, but I persuaded him."

With that, he deposited the ring into her cupped hands, eager for her word of approval. She nodded and slipped it on. "Lovely. But how gallant of you, Geoffrey, to acquire such a thing for me." Then she leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. As she did, she couldn't help noticing a little sore just under his smooth jaw, the first flowering of the Nosferatu curse. Ah, well; it was bound to happen. "Now go. Although the night is long, we both have much to do."

"Yes, madame." He bowed twice as he withdrew. His lovesick, triumphant grin was the last part of him to disappear into the darkness.

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Heloise stood silent in the bare chamber, letting her perception move deep into the stone. The Toreador thought they monopolized this power, just as Alexandre thought he monopolized the beating mortal hearts around him. Flecks of color danced at the edges of her vision as she bored deeper, deeper, and found what she had suspected: the subtly wavering density of glass.

She put her ungainly head back and laughed.

"A counterfeit, for a counterfeit counterfeiter," she proclaimed to the birds roosting in the rafters above her. She raised her fist toward them so they could see it. "I think it suits me, don't you?"

CRIME IN THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

First, a little debunking: The "urban underworld," as modern people understand the term, does not yet exist in the Dark Medieval world. Even legitimate civil government has only begun to fumble its way toward a semblance of order. (Indeed, the most telling evidence of the absence of an organized criminal class is the absence of an organized police force.) You will search this chapter in vain for a Dickensian community of mortal rogues who all use the same slang, follow the same unwritten codes, and maintain relations with brother communities in neighboring towns. What you *will* find, however, is an attempt to show some of the colorful panoply of urban medieval crime and suggest the numerous ways in which enterprising Cainites might exploit it. "Crime" in the Dark Medieval world is defined slightly differently than in modern times. For practical purposes, a crime is any action of which the local authority—which also tends to be the most influential authority—disapproves.

It's a little more complicated than that, of course. Accordingly, the first section deals with medieval law and some of its unexpected quirks. The next section brings forth a wide assortment of mortal medieval criminals (by no means exhaustive, but hopefully at least representative).

In the final section, the reader is cordially invited to sit in on a meeting of the Prometheans, a Cainite brotherhood that hopes to harness the skills and power of the cities' human refuse in creating a newer, better incarnation of great Carthage. The Prometheans' own activities will naturally be discussed, as well as the activities of various other vampires who, for one reason or another, choose the low road to success.

Keep an eye on your purse, and follow....

MEDIEVAL LAW

Medieval criminals must fear the law, just as their modern counterparts will in centuries to come, but the threat is of a distinctly different character. The most obvious

difference is that in the Middle Ages, the task of justice is split between two separate bodies: canon law and secular law.

CANON LAW

Christianity was born in an outpost of the Roman Empire; perhaps it's only fitting that its laws should come from the civilization which once ruled Judea along with much of the rest of the world. Moreover, the empire is Europe's one common property, the only cultural authority to which nearly everyone bows. What else could possibly induce Irish monks to agree with French prelates? In the old imperial law, particularly in the Theodosian and Justinian codes, canonists have discovered a system of logic that they can adapt to their own administrative needs. Gratian's recently published *Decretum*, a brilliant summing-up of their efforts to date, now spreads this legal gospel throughout the Continent.

JURISDICTION

For those who give themselves in service to the faith, canon law governs every aspect of life. Naturally, it claims jurisdiction on all matters relating to their religious duties; should one of these shepherds so forget his vows as to engage in theft or murder, only the Church may judge him. On rare occasions, a bishop may so loathe the crimes of an accused cleric that he strips the offender of his status and hands him over to the secular arm for trial. However, the Church normally guards its legal rights quite jealously. Thus the recent dispute between Archbishop (and now

CAINITE LAW

The Six Traditions form a rough legal framework for the courts of most European princes and other Cainite potentates, at least in theory. In reality, the Tradition of Domain—which clearly establishes the power of an elder in his area of influence—tends to be the only one that counts. The local prince then interprets the other Traditions as he sees fit. Mortal legal traditions move into the hidden Cainite world as those versed in law gain the Embrace and the recognition of the local potentate. Most legal appeals in a Cainite court will cite the Six Traditions, but the form of the court, the nature of sentences and even the nature of the crimes are usually based on mortal foundations.

Of course, if a Cainite is dragged before a mortal court, then no appeal to the Six Traditions is possible. The vampire is just another criminal to be dealt with. While certain Disciplines (Dominate and Presence) can make a mortal trial less than threatening to a Cainite, the mere fact that proceedings occur during the day means that few vampires wish to tangle with the mortal authorities. Cainites generally arrange to have charges dismissed, witnesses vanish or simply to escape before any actual proceedings occur.

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martyr) Thomas à Becket and King Henry II of England over, among other things, the proper procedure for dealing with "criminous clerks" — a dispute that ended, but only for the nonce, with episcopal brains scandalously littered on the holy floor of Canterbury Cathedral.

Canon law applies not only to those under lifelong vows (priests, monks, nuns and the rest of the panoply), but also to those whose employment with God is only temporary — Crusaders, pilgrims and so forth. And its reach extends further yet, into the affairs of laymen. Widows and orphans take legal refuge under the Church's protective wing. The Church has the power to condemn anyone for heresy, sacrilege or oath-breaking. Laymen may bring personal actions against each other in ecclesiastical court. On top of all this, canon law enjoys jurisdiction in a number of matters the modern man would consider purely civil: wills, annulments (the one form of divorce acceptable to the Church) and suits of slander, to mention only a few.

TRIAL PROCESS

Bishops, cardinals, archdeacons and vicars-general all maintain their own courts, and a metropolitan (the primate of an ecclesiastical province) can further call a panel of his bishops to sit on a special court called the provincial council. The procedure for a Church trial, in 1197, is increasingly based on the old Roman inquest. That is, rather than employing one of the traditional barbarian methods of establishing guilt or innocence — which will be discussed below — the court conducts a series of examinations and cross-examinations. The burden of proof rests, theoretically, with the accuser. Appeals may be carried all the way to a conclave of the Pope and cardinals (or, speaking more realistically, to the highest level a man's personal finances will allow).

Ancient imperial law forbade the use of torture against free men except in cases of treason and, from the fourth century onward, sorcery. In any case, Church leadership presently agrees with St. Augustine that confessions produced under torture are meaningless. However, beginning in 1209 with Innocent III's crusade against the Cathars of Languedoc (which in turn leads to the founding of the Inquisition in 1231), the papacy will discover detours around its canonical prohibitions of torture.

PUNISHMENTS

Canon law is generally kinder than secular law. Thus the rush by otherwise venal folk to secure the benefit of clergy by taking minor orders — a status which can be proved (or faked) by displaying a tonsured head or reading aloud in Latin.

(An intriguing side note: since universities developed from the old cathedral schools, university students are by definition clerks — i.e., minor clergy. This renders them immune to secular law, which may explain why medieval scholars enjoy such a reputation for roguery. Of course, civil authorities sometimes choose to ignore this privilege, espe-

cially when confronted with a "town and gown" riot; thus the need for secular decrees confirming it, such as the one King Philippe will grant to the University of Paris in 1208.)

The Church nominally concerns itself with the welfare of souls rather than the settling of earthly scores; thus, the sentences it hands down tend to have a penitential quality. Fasts and pilgrimages are common, and of course alms serve the double purpose of remitting sin and helping out one's fellow man. However, judges also order more public forms of penance, such as flogging, the better to impress upon everyone the steep price for defying God's word. A combination may even be employed: For instance, a convict might be whipped through the streets to his local church, where he would then lament his errors to the gathered crowd before departing on a pilgrimage to a prescribed series of shrines.

While heresy is without a doubt the blackest possible sin against Holy Mother Church, actual punishments for it run the gamut from light to severe, depending on the depth of the offense and the convict's willingness to name accomplices. In any case, a convicted heretic forfeits all rights to property — a fact not lost on cynical observers, who have noticed that rich heretics seem to elicit far more prosecutorial zeal from the local lords and clerics than poor ones. Moreover, any kindness shown to a contrite first-time offender certainly won't be extended again should he relapse.

Technically, an ecclesiastical judge may not condemn anyone to death — even a heretic. Instead, he excommunicates and then regretfully "abandons" the wretch to the secular government, which of course hastens to carry out its pious duty. In 1197, with the Albigensian Crusade still waiting in the wings, most Church authorities favor the "civil ban" as the ultimate secular punishment for an unrepentant heretic. This consists of stripping the offender of all legal rights, then exiling him from the realm. Quite often his house is burned down as well, just to help speed him along. Nonetheless, many feudal lords prefer to send their heretics to the stake; the Church is certainly well aware of this, and it's a rare prelate who will step in to stop the proceedings.

Truly heinous criminals among the clergy may also be "abandoned" to secular execution (though, as noted above, they must be defrocked first). More often, they end their days in a Church prison, forbidden even to speak to another human being. Many monasteries have a row of cells built alongside the abbey infirmary for just this purpose. Official documents call such close confinement the *carcer strictissimus*, but waggish monks have dubbed it *in pace* — as in, *Requiescat In Pace* — since it's effectively a tomb for the living.

Even the *carcer strictissimus*, however, pales beside the horror of a sentence of excommunication. In the lesser version of the curse, the unhappy victim is forbidden the comfort of the sacraments as well as Christian burial; in the greater version, anyone who trafficks in any way with the condemned risks excommunication as well. Those who make their living by commerce rightly dread such a fate. Indeed, when a city errs

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greatly in the Church's eyes and thus falls under mass interdict, it can ruin the local economy for years.

Excommunication begins with a Church rite — the bell is rung, the book closed, and the candle snuffed out to show that the condemned is now dead to the body of the faithful. For a particularly influential victim, the ceremony may be read in many churches far and wide; and even a poor excommunicate can expect his local priest to pronounce sentence repeatedly in order to keep public memory alive on the subject. From that point on, the reprobate has one year to make amends with God or else become a heretic in the eyes of the law. And should he have the misfortune to die still excommunicate, his soul will certainly end up in one of the hotter corners of Hell. Or so the priests say.

Even so, people occasionally take it into their heads to defy the ban. After all, a Cathar certainly doesn't care what the Church of Babylon thinks of his kind. And since it's so easy to defraud or frame a person who no longer has any rights under law, everyone realizes that some excommunications are pronounced for less-than-holy reasons. But defiance takes great bravery, not to mention resourcefulness, when even the baker on the corner risks his soul by selling bread to the condemned. Although an excommunicate might try to escape his fate

OFFICIAL WARNING

The Fourth Lateran Council (which won't actually meet till 1215, but will certainly know its business when it does) declares that the excommunicate may not be "admitted to public offices or councils or to elect others to the same or to give testimony. He shall be intestable, that is he shall not have the freedom to make a will nor shall succeed to an inheritance. Moreover nobody shall be compelled to answer to him on any business whatever, but he may be compelled to answer to them. If he is a judge, sentences pronounced by him shall have no force and cases may not be brought before him; if an advocate, he may not be allowed to defend anyone; if a notary, documents drawn up by him shall be worthless and condemned along with their condemned author; and in similar matters we order the same to be observed. If however he is a cleric, let him be deposed from every office and benefice, so that the greater the fault the greater be the punishment. If any refuse to avoid such persons after they have been pointed out by the Church, let them be punished with the sentence of excommunication until they make suitable satisfaction."

Modern readers who doubt the Church's power to make good on this extravagant threat would do well to reread the section on jurisdiction, above, and then further remember that medieval people tend to fear as much for their souls as for their lives. The ruling of the mightiest secular judge only carries as much weight as other Christians give it.

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by fleeing (bear in mind that he can't sell his land or possessions to raise travel funds), such journeys are hazardous, and people often treat strangers with deep but justifiable suspicion. In the Dark Medieval world, a man depends on his social ties to survive — and society likewise depends on that fact to keep him honest.

Needless to say, the bureaucracy that exercises all this fearsome authority puts a great strain on Church coffers. For this reason, convicts can often buy off or lighten even the harshest sentences with sufficiently generous alms. The increasing traffick in such indulgences no doubt comforts the rich malefactors of the world greatly; of course, secular governments are just as guilty of putting justice on sale, if not more so.

SANCTUARY

For the miscreant who can't pay the price of her feudal lord's mercy, the tradition of sanctuary provides a free (if not always reliable) refuge. If she can make it past a church threshold, the secular law is forbidden to go in after her, on pain of excommunication. In a few places, the protection is even extended past the church walls, to as much as a mile's radius (the border of this radius being marked by stone crosses). Elsewhere, the requirements are stricter, and the fugitive must not only get inside the church but also touch a brass knocker-ring or sit in a special seat — called the "frith-stool" in England — to claim her right. Sanctuary technically expires after a month or 40 days, depending on local tradition, after which the felon must face justice or go into exile.

The custom is heavily abused in both directions. As noted above, sentences of excommunication are hardly irrevocable; if an official still doesn't dare risk divine anger, he can always surround the church with an armed guard and settle back to wait. On the other hand, court summoners and sergeants constantly complain of the thieves, gamblers, murderers, forgers, errant apprentices and chronic debtors who use their local cathedral as a more or less permanent home base for criminal endeavor. As for the clergy who protect these felons, one can usually count on them to stand firm, whether they be motivated by a sense of duty to the poor in spirit, zeal for guarding the Church's prerogatives or a small financial consideration.

SECULAR LAW

Since Christendom has no one supreme *secular* ruler, secular law varies a great deal from place to place. In Italy, the heart of old Rome, the imperial codes survive largely intact. Further north and west, ancient barbarian custom still carries great weight, but even there the Roman model is hardly unknown, and the Church has successfully convinced many feudal lords to look to canon law as their exemplar of good government.

JURISDICTION

Briefly put, the secular law has jurisdiction over everything and everyone not claimed under canon law.

AMICUS USQUE AD ARAS

To the fair and noble Dame Rosamunde, from your humble clanfellow, Brother John of St. Albans, greetings in the Blood.

I rejoice to inform you that your excellent cousin is alive and well and under the protection of a Brujah colleague at Norwich Cathedral. As you may know, Norwich is among those churches whose right to give sanctuary is specially recognized by the Crown, so you need have no fear. Dominus may well persuade the reeve to go after your cousin — I hear he has all the royal ministers in Norfolk under his thumb — but even if they are hard-hearted enough to defy God's curse, they will not so easily give the lie to their king's honor, to say nothing of the scandal which would arise from having such rare blood spilt on holy ground.

The time this grants us should be more than enough to arrange young Robert's safe return, provided of course that Your Ladyship has considered and agreed to our price. For now, he enjoys the hospitality of my colleague and his merry little flock. I am told that he is in good spirits and has made many fast friends. No doubt he shall know how to cut a purse-string with the best of them by the time he finds his way back to Your Ladyship's arms. Or perhaps Deacon Aelfred, who is reportedly fond of the lad, will persuade him to a holier calling.

We await your word with all eagerness, and in the meantime our earnest prayers fly up to Heaven on behalf of Your Ladyship and the esteemed fugitive at Norwich. Choose swiftly, and choose well.

By my hand at St. Albans, at the calends of May, Year of Our Lord 1197.

be appealed to a higher court. Furthermore, a monarch may dispense pardons more or less at whim. Every so often one hears of the king giving mass amnesty in observance of some special occasion, or offering to pardon anyone who will pay a certain fine or serve in the war *du jour*.

Note that a bishop or abbot can also be a feudal lord. In such a case, the lord appoints a representative, called an *avoué*, to oversee his secular court.

POLICE POWER

Although there exist a few types of official charged with keeping the peace — sheriffs and bailiffs, volunteer watchmen reluctantly recruited from the merchants' guilds, knights of the watch and their *serjanz* — rulers primarily look to the people of a community to discover and produce the offenders among them. If a community fails in this duty, it can be forced to make restitution or stripped of privileges. Such a citizens' manhunt is known as the hue-and-cry.

In England, this self-policing is formalized in the institution of the tithing, also known as a frankpledge. Each tithing group consists of 10 free men; members in a tithing must stand surety for the other members — which includes making certain that those who are summoned to court actually appear — and can be held liable for their offenses. Tithings are themselves gathered into larger administrative units, called hundreds, which have similar obligations (knights in a hundred, especially, are expected to round up any malefactors in their midst). Englishmen tend to regard any stranger who can't immediately name his tithing and hundred as a suspicious character, possibly even an outlaw.

TRIAL PROCESS

Men of reason everywhere struggle to reform the secular trial, but it's slow going. While the inquest method of examination and cross-examination has become commonplace, torture and starvation diets are still considered perfectly respectable for obtaining confessions from suspects. Although judges sometimes ask for an advisory ruling from a panel of leading citizens, the right to a "jury of one's peers" is pretty well undreamed-of. Moreover, the inquest trial itself still competes with even more ancient methods of ascertaining truth.

The method of compurgation, in which accuser or defendant either swears multiple oaths in multiple churches, or convinces a number of associates to swear to their faith in his word, is no longer generally trusted — although a trial witness may choose compurgation as a way of lending greater weight to his testimony. Many, however, yet believe that God makes His own judgement known in the trial by combat and the trial by ordeal.

Any of the principals or witnesses in a case may challenge each other to a trial by combat. If a witness loses such a duel, his testimony becomes void. In France, the latter stratagem has become so common that witnesses who plainly can't hope to defeat a challenger are often barred from testifying in the first place.

IN DARKENED STREETS

However, this isn't always a clear-cut distinction. In 1197, the relative authority of monarch and prelate is still very much under debate, and some sorts of cases may be validly tried in either court. The Church currently has the upper hand in this struggle for legal territory, mainly because secular justice is so unpopular.

Authority to judge disputes is, like land, parceled out according to the feudal hierarchy. The royal courts decide particularly important cases, especially cases of treason, but in ordinary affairs, each lord exercises justice in his own holdings. (The right of high justice — that is, the power to divest people of life or limb — is sometimes withheld from minor barons, and may be withdrawn from greater lords as a punishment. In such a case, all felony trials go to the next court up.) Towns enjoy, along with their other chartered rights, the power to institute their own courts; merchant guilds in a town usually reserve the right to prosecute their own members for breaking trade regulations.

Although no one's really determined the precise ins and outs of the procedure, unsatisfactory rulings can usually

CAINITES AND CANON LAW

Although the faithful guardians of the Church would be disheartened to know so, the childer of Caine often look to canon law for inspiration and precedent. Some vampires would argue that this has more to do with the system's Roman roots than any ecclesiastical matters; indeed, most of the dark princes of Europe feel a bond toward Rome. But the Lasombra adoption of the Catholic Church as one of its fiefdoms and the importance most neonates and ancillae still put on matters of eternal souls and religious dogma mean that Church authority adds extra weight to the classical legal tradition. Furthermore, Cappadocians, Tremere and other scholarly vampires were often literate in life and so used to being able to claim status (fraudulently or not) under canon law and expect some of the same privileges in unlife.

In some principalities, canon law and its Roman predecessor are the main tools used for interpreting the Six Traditions, determining punishments, and establishing other laws and regulations. Lasombra bishops use this policy most of all. Other courts preserve the kine distinction between secular and canon law, often applying harsher secularly inspired justice to vampires of lesser status. This status can reflect disfavored "inferior" clans (often Gangrel, Ravnos and Nosferatu) or having a disgraced sire or cosanguineus. Furor activity and other forms of dissent are often strong in principalities that use such a double standard.

VAMPIRES IN ECCLESIASTICAL COURT

Most Cainites move silently through human circles and (at least some of the time) pass themselves off as kine. As such, it's very possible for them to be dragged into an ecclesiastical court if they commit a crime and can claim status under canon law. A vampire of status can quickly dispense of such a problem by greasing the right hand (and using the right Disciplines). Even a lowly neonate can usually work something out, unless his elders actively oppose it.

For those unfortunates who must face an actual inquest, unlife becomes much more difficult. For one thing, such events usually occur during the day, although any vampire masquerading as a man will have already created a cover story to explain daylight absences. The matter of faith can also be troubling. Although they are not so common as some might think, there are religious men and women whose very gaze can force a Cainite to back down. Church bells and other artifacts can also make the Beast rile inside the Cainite form.

All this can make resisting questioning quite difficult. The problem is not for the vampire to lie (or even answer honestly) but to not reveal her true nature. One slip and the court will know it is dealing with "hellspawn" of some form, and many of the regular rules fly out the proverbial window. In a minor court, a vampire might well bare her fangs and scare off the hapless priests. But word will spread, inquisitors and exorcists will eventually arrive, and the vampire's mortal identity will shatter. In a provincial or other high court, it is all the more likely that someone who can deal with such a monstrosity will be on hand.

The actual punishments of canon law are less problematic. The civil ban and excommunication are serious matters indeed — vampires never take burning havens lightly — but vampires have nothing if not time to rebuild. Backed by the blood oath, and perhaps useful Disciplines like Presence, Dominate or Obfuscate, rebuilding a new identity or reestablishing oneself in a new land is not all that difficult. Only if the vampire has also offended the Cainite prince can he expect to become a pariah, and then he may have to deal with a blood hunt as well.

Cainites do take advantage of the tradition of sanctuary. Those whose domain is church ground can use it to protect childer and pawns from kine authorities. But a vampire seeking shelter in a church must always be wary, for some sanctuaries are decidedly uncomfortable to the childer of Caine.

CANON LAW AND LEXTALIONIS

Significant elements of canon law have migrated into the interpretations of the Six Traditions, especially in Lasombra courts. Most notably, ideas of appropriate punishment often cross-pollinate from mortal bishops to their Magister counterparts (and those of other clans, as well). Princes often find it useful to have a variety of punishments available to them besides the blood hunt or an enforced blood oath, and these are drawn from canon law.

Excommunication strips a vampire of status within the principality. The protection inherent in the Six Traditions no longer extends to him, although he must follow them himself. He may no longer claim domain, is subject to destruction (without attackers facing justice) and may not create childer. His ghouls may be imprisoned or destroyed. Like a mortal, the vampire has a year to make amends to the prince (and any other offended party) before the decision becomes irrevocable. Lesser excommunication — in which the vampire may still deal with others — is not uncommon for serious breaches of the Traditions. Greater excommunication (in which the vampire becomes untouchable) is rarer.

The vampiric equivalent of the civil ban is exile. The prince strips the vampire of status and forces her to leave his principality. He burns her haven, takes her possessions, destroys her ghouls and unreleased childer, and warns that her return will lead to a blood hunt. This is a rare punishment because it usually inspires desire for revenge in the exile; princes use it when a vampire to whom they owe a great debt commits some crime deserving of destruction.

Most princes have long since adopted and adapted the ecclesiastical tradition of sanctuary because it nicely resolves a long-standing problem surrounding the vampiric Tradition of Domain. If a vampire in good standing shelters a wanted Cainite in his haven or labyrinth, it is unclear whether his domain over the haven or the prince's domain over the principality takes precedence. Can a prince violate a haven to extract a fugitive? In most parts of Europe, the answer is now "only after 40 nights." Like a church, a haven can provide (at the owner's discretion) shelter for that long after which time the fugitive must leave or see his host's claim to domain fall by the wayside.

Certain classes of people are forbidden the trial by combat. Children may not fight; neither may the lame, the diseased or women. (Actually, this last prohibition isn't always observed. Women do occasionally fight and defeat opponents in judicial duels. However, these are exceptional events. When they do occur, the male opponent is usually forced to take a handicap.) Clergy, too, are exempt, although this has only been so since a papal ban of 1140. Finally, serfs and bastard sons may not challenge those more honorably born. In some places, such as London, the trial by combat has been completely abolished.

If the person thus challenged to fight is legally unable to respond, a chosen champion may defend the charge instead. This custom has produced a class of professional champions, but the man who makes his living in this way must be a reckless sort indeed; in many places, the shame of losing a trial by combat is immediately followed by the further discomfort of a death sentence. The profession thus attracts more than its share of felons and ne'er-do-wells. This is doubly unsurprising when one considers the general lack of dignity of the proceedings: trials by combat can take place with the participants mounted or on foot, using almost any weapon or combination of weapons imaginable, from lances and shields to clubs, rocks and teeth. The actual rules vary greatly from place to place.

The trial by ordeal is an even more direct appeal to Heavenly aid, since, in its most usual forms, few could hope to pass it without God's intervention. The ordeal, like the trial by combat, is prefaced by oaths on holy relics and a special Mass for the participants. Next, the priest blesses the implements of the ordeal, and only then can the trial begin. There is an ordeal of boiling water, in which the accused must thrust a hand or arm into a cauldron up to a specified depth, and an ordeal by fire, in which he must walk over red-hot plowshares or carry a heated lump of iron a certain distance. Following the ordeal, the wound is bound up and sealed with a signet, and then examined again after a prescribed interval (three days is traditional). If an open sore remains, the accused has failed the ordeal.

Magical treatises prescribe various ointments for fending off the heat of the ordeal. However, for those disinclined to trust sorcery, a sufficient expenditure can often ensure either a false report of the wound's state, or a lower temperature for the water or iron. Then there are other forms of ordeal which are much easier to beat: the ordeal by cold water, in which the accused is bound hand and foot and lowered into the water, sinking being the necessary proof of innocence (*hopefully*, a rescue follows shortly thereafter); and the ordeal of swallowing a hunk of consecrated bread or cheese (which only a Cainite need fear; indeed, a popular Lombard folktale recounts the misfortune of a "devil in man's pleasing form" — that is to say, a Lasombra neonate — who was narrowly prevented from marrying into the Visconti family by a rival suitor who accused him of murder and challenged him to submit to that very test. The Visconti, for the record, have dubbed this utter nonsense).

Clergy are forbidden to undergo the ordeal, and within a decade, they will be further prohibited from officiating at the ordeals of laymen. Since the ordeal is primarily a religious proof, the withdrawal of the clergy will effectively put an end to its use in most of Europe.

PUNISHMENTS

As might be expected, secular punishments vary according to the severity of the crime and the social status of the convict. The old custom of paying a fine directly to the victim (or his survivors) has finally died out; crime is now an offense against the state, and the state demands recompense. From this, it follows that punishments must not only revenge the wrong, but also publicly demonstrate that justice has been served.

Accordingly, judges design their sentences with spectacle in mind. Imprisonment is rare — although less so in England than on the Continent — except for those awaiting trial. (If one is poor, imprisonment can amount to a sentence of death by starvation, as most inmates must pay for their own upkeep. However, charity provides some funds for prison relief, and certain convicts are granted the privilege of begging at the prison gate or about town.)

Felonies, which include theft, rape, vagrancy and murder, are capital crimes. Usually, this means hanging, but if the judge deems it fit to inflict a greater or longer agony, that can certainly be arranged as well. The really creative methods, like quartering and boiling, are generally reserved for treason. However, even a medieval hanging is hardly a picnic; the long swift drop designed to break the neck and thus make a quick end won't come about for centuries yet. Even after the malefactor is dead, his body can continue to serve as an object lesson. Generally, it hangs all day in the place of execution before being removed to the town gibbet and left for the carrion birds. Loved ones may, in several years' time, be permitted to take down whatever's left and give it a decent burial.

On the other hand, a court may be convinced to issue a lesser sentence, such as flogging, branding or mutilation, particularly on the first offense. Mutilations often serve poetic justice by removing the body part responsible for the crime in question. (Unfortunately, it's easy to mistake a maimed innocent for such a convict, which is why many cripples prudently carry papers from their liege lord affirming their good names.) Branding is less debilitating, but it suffices to mark the condemned for all time, unless he happens to know a sympathetic Tzimisce.

Misdemeanors are expiated by any of a number of petty harassments, most commonly the stocks, the pillory or the ducking-stool. These artifacts of humiliation stand in places where they can enjoy the largest possible audience — in the market, in front of the church or on the common green.

Finally, there's outlawry, which will be covered in more depth in the next chapter. Outlawry condemns a man *in absentia*, after he's fled his trial or his just sen-

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SUSPENDATUR

From the memoirs of Urraca Beguy-Urdina:

...and it turned out that a Provençal judge is even gloomier than an Andalusian *qadi*. I had recovered well enough from the loss of my hand some months before, but now I was condemned to be hung at the end of a rope until the breath was choked out of me. I had to hide my head and shake my shoulders with false sobs so as to hide my amusement. I knew that my undying master could save me from any injury.

I was sure that he would contrive to visit me that night in my cell, but only the fat confessor came. Having naught else to do, I told him of all my thieving and fornication and thus whiled away several hours; yet within myself I trembled. Why had my lord abandoned me? Was he displeased with me for getting caught twice in so short a space?

But then the confessor spoke to me in turn, and the words were not his own, but my beloved master's. "My daughter," he said, "I cannot come to you, for the ruler of the Damned in this city has cleverly summoned me to pay court tonight so as to prevent me. The blood-strength you possess now will never

keep you from strangling for the many hours you must hang. And yet for love of you, I have found a way to save you." Then the insensible priest slit my neck open with his knife; the life drained out of me into the filthy straw; and finally, from a little glass vial, I received the gift of Set which I had so long desired.

I lay there for a long time, burning with hunger but far too weak to get up. Then at dawn I woke to the guards' prodding and clucking. There were 200 people gathered outside the prison, and how were they to get their sport now? In the end, they decided to hang another prisoner who would have died the next day; me they wrapped up in a winding-cloth and carried out.

I could feel tiny lancets of sunlight pricking me through the cracks in the shroud, overcast though the morning was. I bit my lip to keep silent. I had to trust in my master's design and pray that he would find a way to get me to safety before the men unwrapped me again. The soldiers were surprised, though I was not, when they heard savage shouts from the alleyway alongside us...

tence. Anyone with a mind to may kill an outlaw and collect the price set on his head (The base bounty on an outlaw in England is, symbolically, the same as that given for slaying a wolf). An outlaw, like a heretic, forfeits all legal rights, especially the right to property.

Most sentences, even hanging, can be bought off for a fine; and even if a court refuses to be persuaded of the earthly benefits of forgiveness, the monarch may be far wiser. All too often, the pitiful corpses at the gibbet are condemned for a failure of the purse, not of the soul.



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JUSTICE IN THE EAST

Byzantine law, like that of Western Europe, is based on the old Roman codes. There is also a distinction between religious and secular courts. In Byzantine cities, the *eparch* (prefect) oversees trade and guild matters, which includes judging trials having to do with trade regulations; the *symponos* (assessor), his assistant, is charged with keeping order and maintains the troops for this purpose; the *logothete* assists the eparch in administering the courts of law. (In rural areas, things are considerably less organized, although there is a body of men who serve informally as the police.) As in the West, imprisonment is a fairly uncommon punishment compared to floggings and mutilations, largely because of the belief that imprisonment unfairly punishes the offender's dependents. For similar reasons, fines are likewise uncommon (*unlike* in the West).

Slavic law, in general, owes much of its form to the Byzantines. However, Russian law regards physical punishment with unique distaste. Even for murderers, fines and penances are a more common sentence than loss of life or limb. Ecclesiastical lords as well as secular princes and city officials

(dukes, aldermen, etc.) maintain courts of law. Trial by ordeal and combat are highly regarded, although Westerners, who are used to carrying hot irons and boiling their hands, might well regard the Russian ordeal of kissing the cross as a travesty of justice. In Novgorod at least, and no doubt in other Russian cities along the caravan trade route, German merchants are granted special protections under the law, and trials for their offenses are conducted differently than trials of the citizenry.

A CATALOGUE OF DIVERS ROGUES

Scholarly tradition divides society into the three eternal estates of warrior, priest and peasant. Merchants and artisans are, to their betters, simply a new and more presumptuous species of peasant; but one only has to look at the many cities already bursting out of their first walls — not to mention the swelling traffic along the trade routes reopened by the Crusades — to know that the *bourgeoisie* have become a force to be reckoned with.

CAINITES AND SECULAR LAW

Mortal secular law and traditional Cainite law have much in common. The prince is the ultimate legal authority just as the mortal monarch is. Codes of law and traditions have weight, but ultimately it is the elder's personal power and privilege that wins the day (or the night, as the case may be). Both systems also rely heavily on ordeals and combats and believe in brutally final justice. Cainite courts routinely use trial by combat and ordeals of fire and sunlight.

Even in Cainite principalities where Roman or canon law has had an influence, the harsher forms of justice remain in play. Indeed, inquest, exile and excommunication are only useful when one is dealing with a "civilized" criminal. A savage Gangrel or a underhanded Serpent can't be trusted in such circumstances. Or so the princes claim.

The English institution of the tithing also has echoes in many Cainite principalities. The longstanding Tradition of Accounting makes a sire responsible for his childer until their release; this has been expanded among English and other Cainite principalities that a sire remains responsible for his childer facing justice. Although the child is still accountable for his own actions after release — it is he, not his sire, who faces retribution for his crimes — his sire must ensure that he appears before the prince to face justice and accepts the punishment imposed. In some places, those vampires who form coterie become a form of tithing, responsible for each other's actions.

VAMPIRES AND KINE JUSTICE

Vampires can face mortal secular justice just as they can ecclesiastical, and they face the same major prob-

lems. Proceedings occur during the day, and any exposure of monstrosity will likely lead to a quick trip to the stake. Because of this, princes usually manipulate events to deal with troublesome Cainites themselves.

Those who do end up in a secular trial (and somehow manage to have it occur at night) face fewer problems than in a Church trial. For one thing, the dangers of faith are rarely a problem. Those with Disciplines like Dominate can usually influence the presiding lord to find in their favor, but even those without can usually get through a trial. Mortal trials by combat are rarely a problem unless the vampire is truly unskilled or blood-starved; even a lowly neonate can make short work of an equally armed kine. Trial by ordeal is also far easier when backed by Cainite blood, with the notable exception of trial by fire.

Even if found guilty, secular punishment need not be the end for the vampire. Hanging is hardly a problem at all — blood will heal a stretched neck and ceasing to breathe is quite easy. Mutilation, drawing and quartering, and other more traumatic punishments can be fatal even to vampires, but not necessarily so.

Ironically it is not the intensity, but the duration of the punishment that is most problematic. The Cainite vulnerability to sunlight means that even a short stint in a pillory or having one's hanged "body" exposed for days and weeks on end is a sentence of Final Death. In these cases, the vampire either arranges to be spared the exposure or escapes before it is too late.

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THOSE WHO FIGHT

It's really the most pressing question of a military man's existence: What to do in between wars? Some are rich enough to amuse themselves with the sort of entertainment nobles prefer. However, it takes many men to fight a campaign, and not all of those trained to fight enjoy the privileges of knighthood and land; furthermore, even a rich man can succumb to the lure of shining gold languishing in the purses of the weak. For the most part, larcenous soldiers fall into brigandage, which takes them outside the scope of this chapter (although brigands do frequently go into the towns to spend their loot, or even to raid the market on market-days). For those who do become city-dwellers, employment can often be found with a noble, politician or merchant who has enemies to get rid of and no more Christian means for doing so. Alternatively, they may go to work for the government; the best graft is naturally reserved for high officials (whose posts are effectively a grant of legal immunity from themselves, their relatives and their richer friends), but even a humble sergeant of the watch may be able to extract a little silver here and there from ne'er-dowells who wish to purchase his inattention.

THOSE WHO PRAY

The medieval Church could be described, by the ungodly of course, as a very efficient machine for converting piety into currency. Collected tithes must filter their way upward through a steep bureaucratic pyramid, and the book-keeping is sufficiently obtuse to hide any number of sins — especially since said books are kept in Roman numerals. Simony, a grave yet popular offense against canon law, includes such diverse crimes as selling relics, blessed oils, rosaries and holy water; charging for the performance of the sacraments; and trafficking in benefices. However, since "charging a fee" looks remarkably like "accepting alms" to the careless observer, most simony can and does go unpunished.

Added to this are frequent opportunities to mismanage the large bequests that govern hospitals (which serve as free shelters for paupers and travelers, as well as the infirm) and lazaret-houses; prelates repeatedly condemn the many reports of clerics renting out the rooms and beds for personal profit, or even of harboring criminals, harlots and Jews. All these practices, though perhaps not as widespread as heretical rabble-rousers like to claim, are common enough that most folk simply take them for granted.

Should one's cupidity need further accommodation, one can always take up a more actively sinful sideline. Simony can be compounded with out-and-out deceit by doctoring up fake relics, or simply bottling and selling more oil than one could ever have time to consecrate. Then there are those evildoers who pass themselves off as one of the Pope's pardoners (*quaestores*), offering remission for this or that sin for as little as a halfpenny apiece. After all, how many fishmongers and wheelwrights know what a real indulgence

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from Rome looks like? Should such an impostor feel the prick of guilt at his crimes, he can comfort himself that even bishops occasionally forge the papal seal in order to expedite a transaction. Pardoners also have the right to preach; many have been known to station themselves in front of churches and shout their sermons so loudly as to drown out the service going on inside, thus diverting the alms that would normally go to the poor-box into their pockets.

A fair number of clerics never really intended to give Mother Church their sacred devotion — or even their honest labor — in the first place. Instead, they see their vows mainly as cover for a criminal career. Such people usually take minor orders, the minimum commitment needed to secure benefit of clergy. (Minor orders confer one of four titles: acolyte, exorcist, lector or doorkeeper. However, the percentage of clerks who actually *perform* those duties is embarrassingly low. It's seen mainly as a pledge of intent to enter the priesthood.) These minor clerks, like priests, can be stripped of their status, but a ceremony is required to do so, and frankly, most of them aren't worth the bother so long as they confine their mischief to the secular world.

Then there are others who didn't actively set out to fall from grace, but found their way down easily enough. Students who belatedly realize their distaste for the *trivium*; other students who like the *trivium* well enough but reach the bottom of their fathers' purses by the end of the first year; students who've finished their degrees but can't find two benefices to rub together; runaway and expelled monks and nuns; mendicant preachers trying to live on meager alms — all these folk swell the ranks of unruly clergy. To their credit, however, they've also produced a class of wandering poets called *goliards*, whose exquisite verse almost manages to elevate its usual subjects of dicing, sex and drink.

THOSE WHO WORK (IF THEY MUST)

Considering the example set by the more privileged classes, it's not all that surprising that some laborers and tradesmen decide they, too, are entitled to whatever their cleverness can earn them.

VAGRANCY

Most citizens manage to get along well enough on the revenues from a legitimate trade (or several legitimate trades). But wars, plagues, famines and other vagaries periodically dampen a town's economy, putting large numbers of people out of work, and when one town suffers, its refugees scatter into others. Nor are refugees the only people on the run in Dark Medieval society. Runaway serfs and apprentices also seek cover in the tangle of foreign streets, lest they be caught and prosecuted by their former masters.

Such folk can often find no other means of living but begging, yet society frowns on begging by the able-bodied. As a result, many have turned to fraud of one sort or another.

Sores or amputations can be faked by cooking up colored unguents and draping the clothes to hide bound-up limbs; darker rumors circulate of men and women deliberately maiming themselves or their children. Alternatively, one can sew a badge onto one's cloak and pose as a wanderer on holy pilgrimage, or a foreign merchant who's just been robbed or even an escaped Christian slave of the infidels, desperately in need of funds for ransoming fellow slaves. In an age where charity given on Earth is directly deposited to one's Heavenly account, a fine career can be made on public pity.

FALSE-SEEMING

For those too good to beg, other forms of deception may permit a more dignified lifestyle. Some outwardly respectable merchants clip a little off the edge of the coins they're paid in, then melt down the collected shavings into ingots — or, should they feel ready to dare a charge of treason, they might alloy it with a cheaper metal and use the alloy to counterfeit coins. (If they do, they're in good company. The officials who mint the royal coinage are frequently accused of the same crime; indeed, Henry I became so convinced of widespread corruption among his moneyers that in 1134 he gave orders for each of them to be deprived of right hand and testicles.) For this reason, visitors to a city should expect their coin to be bitten, bent and rung on the counter to within an inch of its life. Other tradesmen skim off the other end of the transaction by adulterating their scale-weights; millers are especially notorious for this offense.

If a man knows how to read and write, he can forge official documents — credentials, writs of novel disseisin, etc. — and thereby defraud others of money or land. Nor is this talent useful only among mortals. However, in order to succeed in his task, a forger must not only copy

MISERICORDIE

To Her Most Generous Worthiness, Heloise of Paris, from your sister in suffering, Genevieve of London, heartfelt greetings.

This poor humble Jew who comes to you, Hétouyn de Sessane (you may readily identify him by the scar in the shape of an *upsilon* which mounts his left cheek), is the man I mentioned when we met on St. Aquinas' Feast, and whom you urgently wished to see. He has begged outside the synagogue at Troyes for the past 15 years and heard much of the conversation within and without. No doubt he can shed considerable light upon the doings of your rival Mosse. My Brujah colleague was loath to part with such an informative companion, especially one who can spy for him in the Jewish quarter; but I pressed your petition until he gave in. I now commend this man to your care, hoping that you will remember kindly your Ragged Jenny and all her small services to you.

By my hand at London, Quasimodo Sunday,
Year of Our Lord 1197.

CAINITES AND VAGRANCY

Vagrancy is a blessing to those Cainites who feed at the bottom of the medieval social order and those who wish to move about unseen. Nosferatu are infamous for feeding on beggars, lepers and the infirm, but many other young childer do so as well. In times of famine or economic downturn, when refugees move across Europe, enterprising Ravnos and Setites can much more easily sneak through principalities that have banned their kind.

For those who rule the night from on high — the Magister, Patrician and Artisan princes — vagrancy is a pox for the same reasons. Crowds of human refuse can hide enemies and undesirables, and they create needless disorder among the principality's sedentary herd. Few Cainites princes can eliminate vagrancy itself, so the most successful tactic is to find allies who can move about the wretches. Several upstanding Ventrue princes employ Nosferatu scourges who seek out unwelcome visitors among refugees and beggars.

the appropriate court hand, he must affix a convincing seal to the document as well. Many simply purchase a legitimate writ from a crooked official and transfer the seal from the old parchment to the new. Others steal or manufacture a stamp, but this, like counterfeiting, is usually considered a treasonable activity — and one who stands accused of treason may not claim the benefit of clergy normally granted to the literate.

The illiterate, meanwhile, can content themselves with actually impersonating an official, or even a servant of an official. Mortal governments operate on influence-peddling, just like Cainite principalities; those who work for a bishop, a rich abbess or a provost can make a fortune simply by promising to whisper a few words in their employers' ears. A suitable wardrobe, a bulging purse and a bit of patter often suffice to convince the gullible that they're dealing with someone important.

Other breeds of impostor include the quack doctor, who can quote just enough Galen to ape a university education (and, given the state of Western medicine, may have a success rate depressingly similar to that of his *bona fide* colleagues). The quack sorcerer, too, can prescribe cures for various ailments; or, showing off his alchemist's apparatus and cabalistic seals, he might persuade a young wife or freshman student to give him gold and jewelry, which he promises by enchantment to double or triple in quantity. Needless to say, he then absconds with the treasure or else returns with a heap of cut glass and brass. Far less effort is required for a man to make his living cheating with loaded dice or misrepresenting his skill at draughts, ringing-the-bull or some other tavern game.

Finally, there are those who use deception to lure a mark into parting with bodily caution as well as money. In Laôn, for

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example, according to Guibert of Nogent, the townsfolk like to pose as grain merchants, carrying around cups of corn or barley, which they show to interested shoppers as proof of their wares' quality. They then make a deal for a larger purchase, but naturally the canny buyer will demand to see the rest of the grain before money changes hands. He is duly led to a tall grain bin and invited to look down inside; while thus occupied, the "merchant" pushes him off-balance so that he falls into the bin. From there, his only way of escaping is to pay whatever price his captor demands.

HARLOTRY

Few would dare claim that prostitution is anything but a vile sin. Of course it is — it combines lust with greed. However, even venerable theologians agree with St. Augustine that if it were not for the harlot, men's dammed-up lusts would burst loose and destroy the public order. Although she damns herself in the process, she ultimately benefits society. Thus, prostitution is legal throughout Western Europe.

Men of gentle birth keep their own private harems, sized and assembled to suit personal taste. (In 1170, the Abbot of San Pelayo reportedly had 70 girls so employed.) Most others seek their adventure in the districts specially set aside for it,

CAINITES AND FALSE-SEEMING

By dint of the Sixth Tradition — the Silence of Blood — and the mere fact that passing amongst humans is easier as one of them, most Cainites are skilled at some form of disguise and false-seeming. (Disciplines like Obfuscate and Vicissitude bring this practice to a whole new level.) Vampires (as previously noted) are also better able than many humans to arrive in a new area and rapidly establish a new identity, if only by the powers of their blood.

False-seeming within Cainite circles is a more serious matter. Because the "mark" may well have Auspex, fraud through simple Disciplines is far from reliable. Most princes put a great deal of importance on lineage (both in terms of clan, and also specific sires and grandsires), which creates an incentive for some to misrepresent themselves — and for the prince to punish such a crime most severely. In many courts, false-seeming leads to blood hunts.

Followers of Set and Ravnos are masters of false-seeming, if only because many courts ban their kind outright. They are not the only vampires to hide their true selves, however. In Hungary, Tzimisce *voivodes*, Ventrue princes and Tremere regents alike have royally fêted a certain well-spoken Ventrue, apparently a defrocked priest, who claimed to have been sent by their enemies to negotiate a truce and bore what looked like genuine letters of credence. Of course, they all learned months after his departure that none of their goodwill gifts or urgent messages reached their destinations.

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which may sport descriptive names for the tourists' benefit: Gropecuntlane in London and the *Rue Pousse-Penil* (Pushprick Alley) in Blois are but two examples. Such districts are often, but not always, located just outside the city walls.

Public baths — called "stew-houses" in England — serve double duty as whorehouses. Many inns and taverns also operate more or less openly in this capacity. Some houses, however, exist solely as brothels, and city governments, universities and churchmen do not blush to be their official landlords. In fact, investing in a fine brothel is rightly seen as an excellent way to raise funds for worthier endeavors.

Regulations for the tolerated houses and harlots vary from area to area. The Italian states are the most severe in their requirements, and thus have the most trouble enforcing them; the rest of Western Europe contents itself with laws meant to ensure that business is conducted in a relatively orderly and taxable fashion.

It *should* go without saying, but doesn't: Priests may not frequent prostitutes. Jews are usually forbidden as well. Of course, regulations do no good if they're unenforceable; thus, licensed prostitutes may be required to wear some sort of identifying badge, such as a special ribbon or cloak.

Plainly, prostitution isn't the moneymaker for criminals that it will become in future nights — how can it be, when the ruling class openly and jealously profits from it? However, outside the recognized bawdy houses, one can find a huge number of unsanctioned operators. Some brothels try to divert official notice, lest they be forced to observe all the tiresome rules and taxes or, as is more likely, pay for the selective enforcement of the same. This is especially true for those houses that cater to clients with unusually sinful tastes. Then there are all the unlicensed (and frequently larcenous) streetwalkers and courtesans, some full-time, some part-time, who for whatever reason don't wish to declare as prostitutes, and their procurers and procuresses, who actually attract more scorn from the courts than the girls themselves.

The foregoing has only mentioned the prostitution of women, but certainly no slight is intended to the thousands of catamites similarly employed throughout Europe. (Career prostitutes who cater to female customers are unheard of, although ladies of wealth and influence certainly have little trouble attracting companionship whenever they wish.) Although secular authorities prescribe the death penalty for homosexuality — whether professional or amateur — and Church penitentials list harsh penances for sodomy, relatively few cases are ever brought to trial. Indeed, sodomy (and the less examined, but still definitely wicked, Sapphic vice) flourishes as never before in a number of settings, including monasteries, convents and royal courts — at least, if the moralists are to be believed.

THIEVERY

Thievery is practiced in much the same forms that it has been for centuries. Pockets *per se* don't yet exist, but purses and cutpurses certainly do. Moreover, valuables are carried in

OSCULUM INFAME

From *The Trial of Rixenda de Luzia, Concubine to the Devil*, 1242 (Bib. et Tab. de S. Leopold, 65C-2802 AD 1242):

Then he took her to the question again and said, You have told me that during your immoral congress with the men of the city, you frequently drink of their blood, and this is what secures your eternal youth? And she said, Yes, sir, that is so. And he asked, How is it that they do not die? And she said, sir, the pain is sharp but the wound I make is small; behold the teeth the Devil gave me for the purpose. And he said, Methinks they would still seek to find the source of that pricking. And she answered, They are lost in the supernal joy of my caresses, and they notice it not, nor do they see how I divest them of their jewelry. And he said, No doubt you were a whore even before you went to the Devil, and she answered, Sir, it is true; but even if I had been a nun, I should have turned to this trade upon gaining my immortality, for no one questions why a harlot should be about after curfew, and my prey come to me eagerly, which they would not if I made my true nature known....

the ends of knotted sleeves or in the skirts of the undertunic (called the *chainse*); although these are harder to get at by sleight-of-hand, brute force can accomplish the feat nicely.

Housebreaking is a trickier endeavor. Locks on doors are a privilege for the well-to-do, but many people have locking chests for their valuables, and some even carry

CAINITES AND HARLOTRY

Brothels and stew-houses are among the best of all urban feeding grounds for the childer of Caine. An assortment of men visit and are supremely distracted—ending a visit somewhat weak and pale hardly causes any concern at all in a satisfied customer. The type of whorehouse a vampire frequents or oversees depends on his or her taste for blood and herd—some lounge in the harems of the upper crust, others rut in the stew-houses (legal and otherwise) of the lower class.

These feeding grounds are so desirable that they can be the site of dangerous territorial struggles. Imagine the case of a Cainite who runs a brothel and feeds on the customers, and another who uses the brothel and feeds on the girls; a better recipe for disaster is hard to come by. In many of the larger cities of Europe, the prince (or his representative) has had to lay down the law to keep the peace. In some places all the major brothels are designated Elysium and open to all who remain in the prince's good graces. In other areas, each brothel is recognized as the domain of a particular Cainite—others may use it only at her pleasure. Those who would violate such a ban have to face the brothel's ruler (and the many harlot ghouls she has on hand) and ultimately the wrath of the prince.

padlocks for mobile security. Keys are generally worn on someone's belt all day, whether that of the lady of the house or of the seneschal. The locking mechanisms themselves, however, are far cruder than they will be in the coming centuries, so much so that locksmiths frequently resort to hidden keyholes as an additional protective measure.

Heavy bars secure the outer (typically double) doors of a good house. Inner doors usually have a latch only, but the latchstring which hangs on the outside, permitting someone to work it from the other side, is drawn back inside whenever the family retires or simply wishes privacy. Even those too poor for a proper latch can secure their doors with knotted rope. Windows are shuttered on at least the lower floors. Since shop fronts are not boarded up at night, merchants generally take everything they can upstairs to be locked up. Finally, and most importantly, houses are rarely completely empty. In this

CAINITES AND THIEVERY

Cainites have all the mortal motivations for thievery and housebreaking, and a few supernatural ones. Some enter homes to feed, others to use various blood arts to enslave or torment the (often sleeping) kine within. Madmen may twist the dreams of their victims, while Patricians slowly create slaves of burghers and wealthy merchants. But three nights of forceful blood feeding can create a convenient thrall as well.

Armed with the right Disciplines, a vampire makes an excellent snatch-thief. Obfuscate and Chimerstry are supremely well-tailored for this purpose, but the strength of Potence and speed of Celerity can help divest almost anyone of whatever they may be carrying. Housebreaking is a little more complex. Certainly certain applications of Protean and Obtenebration can make entering a house simple, but few vampires have access to such arts—and fewer still who would lower themselves to thievery in a city. It is most common for Cainite housebreakers to simply use their superior strength and endurance to climb up to less well-locked windows or to use stealth to sneak past any guards. A band of Cainite thieves can also bring to bear a variety of skills.

For the most part, stealing from mortals and breaking into their homes—as long as it doesn't interfere with an elder's games or cause undue panic—is allowable as far as the prince concerned; violating a vampire's haven is another matter entirely. To break into a labyrinth or haven is a clear violation of the Tradition of Domain and punishable by blood hunt in most areas. That is not to say that such violations do not occur, only that they are dangerous indeed. The Assamites' reported ability to get into havens regardless of any defenses is one of the main reasons the "Saracen threat" causes terror in many European principalities.

IN DARKENED STREETS

era, gangs of thieves tend to be fairly small and independent, although they may certainly have dealings with any number of people, from fences to court summoners.

MURDER

Murder for hire is another ancient enterprise. Men of rank can usually find a way to justify any killing they may perform or order, and thus tend to use the forces already at their disposal to do so, i.e., their troops and bodyguards. However, as any Lasombra could tell you, there are times when it simply won't do to have the blood traced back to one's own doorstep — for example, when one is plotting against one's own liege lord; and even commoners occasionally go to the expense of hiring a thug to satisfy some injury for them. As with thieves, however, no large-scale order of professional assassins exists in the West. Would-be employers must take whom-ever they can find among the professional champions, tavern rowdies and so forth — the men collectively known as *ribauz* (good-for-nothings) in France.

Sometimes bloodshed on a larger scale is required. In the cities, one can bring this about by riling up the nascent craft-guilds, who rarely hesitate to defend their hard-won privileges — or better yet, the masses of unprivileged workers (apprentices and journeymen, members of unrepresented trades, and other menials), whose hatred of merchants and clerics is all too easily ignited. (literally — setting buildings ablaze is a time-honored method of voicing public displeasure, and considering how rapidly fires spread in the wooden bramble of a medieval city, Cainites have every right to quake at the

CAINITES AND MURDER

Predators and parasites, Cainites are some of the greatest murderers of Dark Medieval Europe. While many vampires feed carefully, leaving their prey weak but alive, not everyone is so discriminating. Accidents do happen as well and the Beast can be strong. Because of this, most Cainites are quite skilled at disposing of bodies, usually stripping them of clothes, defacing them and dropping them in poor areas of the city or at the bottom of some marsh.

Cainites can and do make a living as hired killers. Murder provides an excellent venue for feeding, and a Cainite can gain a great deal of influence by remembering who has hired him to kill whom. Successful murderers often form bands, sending ghouls out to do the actual killing while they reap the rewards.

Murder of fellow vampires is obviously much more serious as it violates the Tradition of Destruction. Those who can kill and get away with it are supremely skilled and stealthy. They can become quite powerful because the service they provide is invaluable to an ambitious elder who wishes to eliminate rivals without going to war.

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prospect of mob violence.) Heretics, too, cherish the vision of a utopia where the god Mammon is overturned and impious rulers receive their just due; a clever orator can win himself an instant army by appealing to it.

PRINCES OF THIEVES: AN EVENING AMONG THE PROMETHEANS

Oh, *do* hurry up. Yes, yes, it's a lovely piece. Belonged to the Emperor Justinian. Many men have died for the privilege of holding it, gloating over it, listing it in their account books, imagining briefly that it was theirs. How fleeting fortune, eh? If we didn't have real business to attend to tonight, I'd let your Toreador senses revel in it for as long as they pleased. Come along now, or must I blindfold you again?

Here we are. Remember this knock. Twice in the middle of the door, wait a moment, then three times on the frame.

Peter, good evening. This is Peter the Lombard of Clan Ventrue, my companion in arms. Mademoiselle Urraca Beguy-Urdina belongs to the snake-clan — ah, excuse me, my dear — the Egyptians, yes. Don't trouble yourself over her; even a serpent may be charmed by the right tune, isn't that so, mademoiselle? Our two Johns: John of St. Albans, your clan brother, and John ó Conlae of the Brujah. I'm afraid Monsieur Berengar cannot doff his enchanted hood to you, not until we know how far we can trust you. His masters in Ceoris would be most displeased to learn of his secret allegiance. Nor will you be seeing the true face of our Ragged Jenny, but for that you're undoubtedly grateful. We are lucky to have Madame Divya here to report on our progress in the eastern reaches. Have you ever heard of the Ravnos clan? Well, now you have.

Sit down. Please understand that we don't usually invite outsiders to these meetings. It's only because I've told them we would benefit greatly from your joining... and because I know that a man with your penchant for honor would never betray one to whom he owed his life.

Yes, you do indeed owe me your life... or your existence, I should say. I'll elaborate, but first, listen and learn.

MAGNI NOMINIS UMBRA

We call ourselves Prometheans. Truth be told, you've actually deduced quite a lot about us already. As Cainites and Cainite brotherhoods go, we *are* quite young. The name lends a certain aura of antique sophistication, but you mustn't think we're pretending to be something we're not. We borrowed the name purely for its allegory. As Prometheus stole fire from the gods and brought it to Man, so we will bring the flame of a new society.

Similarly, we borrow the legend of Carthage. As a dutiful son, you've no doubt heard all the familiar bogey-stories Toreador and Ventrue grandsires like to tell about

the place. Well, frankly, I find them irrelevant. Perhaps it was an eighth wonder of the world, a vision of harmony; perhaps it was a monument to hubris, built upon the corpses of human children. Does it really matter? Nothing remains of Carthage now but *magni nominis umbra* — the shadow of a great name. That dream is what we quest after, since the historical truth is now lost to us.

Please. Sit, sir. You misunderstand. At present, we don't betray the ancient injunction of Silence — any more than anyone else does, anyway. We choose a trusted few to receive our blood and be bound into our service. The time for a wider revelation will come.

Why, the time when our ends have been achieved, that's what. Think for a moment. Think of those you serve. What have they wrought with the power granted to them? Have they shepherded the mortals as they should? Have they guided you and your siblings to the heights worthy of your immortality, or have they set you one against the other, laughing up their sleeves as you fight for whatever little scraps of sustenance their greed leaves you?

Well, that can change, my friend. The mere fact that we flourish right under their noses — not only here, but in towns great and small throughout Christendom — should prove to you that your elders neither know all nor control all. There are many feasts laid for us, if we only have the patience to look for them. The fare's less hearty, perhaps, but all the better to keep

us lean and tough. Can you afford to disdain it? Do you not appreciate the poetry of dispossessed Cainites ruling dispossessed mortals, and conquering through their combined might?

But enough of rhetoric. You will get a better idea from listening to the particulars — Peter, perhaps you'd like to speak of your endeavors?

EXPLOITS AND EXPLOITERS

VENTRUE AND LASOMBRA

My endeavors, eh? Perhaps I owe a word of explanation to our guest first. You started a bit when you saw me, sir. Don't tell me you've never seen a man come back from the dead?

Yes, I arranged it all. The fire, everything. I was well out of there by the time the blaze flared up, I assure you. My sire has always accused me of impatience. I suppose it got the better of me at last. But consider this: would *you* care to wait a century and a half to be trusted and enfeoffed, treated as a cherished vassal rather than a slave?

That is true, sir: Ventrue don't normally care to deal with human rabble. They aim their intrigues directly at the throne. Why settle for anything less than your true desire? It is a testament to my sire's might and tenacity that no rival has ever broken his hold on the dukes. Obviously, I had no hope of opposing him with the resources then at my disposal — the resources he *allowed* me to possess.



IN DARKENED STREETS

WHO ARE THE PROMETHEANS?

All right, in plain English now: The Prometheans are a loose band of Cainite visionaries and revolutionaries that has cropped up in the cities of the Dark Medieval world. They believe in a semi-utopian "New Carthage," a new covenant between Cainite and kine that (they believe) would be mutually beneficial. Their dreams of the future are not terribly well-developed, but they stand in contrast to the established system of prince and lackey, of the Silence of Blood and of the power of the clans.

The Firebringers (as they are sometimes called) have managed to grow by operating among the messy fringes of urban society. Most of the powerful princes whom they despise use the power of feudal lords or the Church as a front, so by feeding from and manipulating harlots and thieves the Prometheans have thus far avoided a great deal of notice. They have also been quite cautious, preparing the way for a revolt of sorts but not yet going through with it.

The Prometheans are present in most of the significant European cities, including Paris, London, Venice and Milan. They do not control the criminal world in these places, but have influence and contacts within it. In some places they are the predominant vampiric influence over one or more types of mortal miscreants, in other areas they are in active competition with various other Cainites. Local Prometheans are responsible for ensuring their own influence.

RUMORS AND SUPPOSITIONS

Anyone talking about New Carthage is going to attract attention from the Brujah. There are those Zealots who look on what should just be another band of Furores and see the workings of their brethren. Rumors run wild that one elder Brujah or another created the Prometheans as a way to advance his or her utopian ideal.

Such rumors bubble up inside the movement as well. Although a council of various Firebringers supposedly directs the movement, many members wonder if an elder isn't pulling the strings from some hidden labyrinth, as such ancient creatures are wont to do.

For the time being the truth remains a mystery.

What was it to me to rule a barony or county under him, when I knew he'd never let me rule as I saw fit?

My new charge is much more to my liking. Anthony studies the old legends and moderates the dialogues by which we arrive at our philosophy. He talks about how these miserable creatures, these thieves, murderers and vagabonds, may be shaped into men and made to serve a higher cause. I, however, put theory into practice. When they come to me, they know how to cut the throat of a fat merchant and little

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more; by the time I'm finished, they can cause a knight to be thrown from his horse, defend themselves against his lance, sword and mace, and even hold a formation under cavalry charge. I am assisted in this by my *serjanz*, good men all, fighting men who've fallen on hard times.

Of course few of them realize what they're really being trained for. They know only that our little guild cares for their welfare. But the same skills that allow them to dispatch a bailiff or knight of the watch will also prepare them to fight as true soldiers when the inevitable night arrives. And for the nonce, they serve a more immediate purpose. I require every man who trains under me to serve once a week in our own version of the city watch. Should they hear the hue-and-cry raised in their area, they are to rescue the miscreant and bring him to us; in their relief at finding that their necks have slipped the noose, many men — and a few ladies as well — have agreed to join us on the spot.

While I have the floor, I should proceed to my report, my true task for the evening. If our dear guest will suffer me to do so? Thank you.

My brothers and sisters, I've studied the letters of our missionaries, and journeyed to over a dozen towns to speak with various prospects, and I must tell you that I despair of recruiting many more of my blood. Although enough of them chafe as I did under the burdens of their elders, they're too proud yet to pursue glory by such "indirect and ignoble" means as we propose.

Peace, friends; the words are theirs, not mine, and of course it's pure hypocrisy. Do my Ventrue colleagues disdain to attach themselves to corrupt royal ministers and crooked sheriffs, to have the tax collectors assess the people for outrageous amounts, and then bury their thievery in a mountain of parchment? Do they mind being landlords for whores, or purchasing benefices from simoniacal priests? No. They profit from evil as much as we do, and with no higher purpose in mind than lining their own purses; but so long as their foul proxies are at least well-born, they're perfectly satisfied. The tragedy of it is they make more from these gentlemen's crimes in one month than Jenny's thieves and beggars could produce in a year!

And if the Ventrue fancy it a debasement to become Prometheans, you can well imagine what the Lasombra say; *their* vanity forbids them to traffic overmuch with *Cainites* of lesser blood, to say nothing of mortal commoners. Most of the shadow-mongers I tried to approach wouldn't even hear me out.

Even so, Saint Jude be praised, I can boast a modest success — particularly with those trod under Dame Fortune's heel. There is a Lasombra, who once served as vizier for an Andalusian prince but then fell out of favor. He longs for revenge against his former liege, and would bargain with the Devil himself to obtain that end. Then in Lombardy I met a pair of Ventrue brothers who have had the blood hunt called on them for revealing them-

selves to their mortal family. There are a few others, all in need, all deprived forever of the clan honor which might otherwise prevent them from joining us.

Yes, I realize that desperation alone is not sufficient to recommend these men to our cause. They must accept the idea that a ruler serves the interests of his people, not vice versa; or else they'll turn and crush their mortal tools as soon as they have what they want, and there goes our new Carthage. I further concede that such a notion comes hard to these noble Cainites. But they are eager to prove themselves to us... I say we give them the chance. Besides, I prodded them as subtly as I could before revealing my true intentions, and their thoughts on the subject of justice showed that they already knew the essential truth.

Ah, and what is the essential truth, our guest wants to know? Why, I thought it had become plain by now, dear sir. Both a king and a street thief get into your purse whether you like it or no; the only difference between them is that society abets one and condemns the other. Should the whim of society change, a street thief may become a king and vice versa. This is not idle speculation, but historical fact. Trace any great lineage back far enough and you will find the unscrupulous commoner who started it all.

And now, my brothers and sisters, you have the pith of my report. Since the summer nights are short, I will observe the virtue of brevity and give the floor to our librarian of St. Albans.

TOREADOR

Assistant librarian, now. Would that I could continue to enjoy my former honors, but as they say, man proposes and God disposes; I have not shown my face openly in the cloister for many years. *Dominus vobiscum*, my son.

As you all know, the Church harbors a number of Toreador. Unfortunately, despite their lofty talk of charity toward the mortals, most of them are too well-fed and luxurious to wish a place among us. They prefer to take their little slice from the top, ensconcing themselves in a rich abbey or cultivating a bishop's chamberlain. And yet exceptions abound. In the great archbishoprics, our elders have spawned large broods to help them administer their holdings, and there simply isn't enough revenue or prestige to go round. Such scarcity calls clever men to more extreme measures; *Deo gratias*, I have convinced several of these to bring their resources to our aid.

In Reims, I found a fellow Benedictine and his three childer who have all turned their exquisite skills of calligraphy to forging episcopal and even papal writs. A veritable swarm of mortal counterfeiters huddles in their little hospital in the foreign quarter. In Paris, a Toreador barely 50 years in the Blood has made such a successful venture of procuring for the humbler grades of cleric that he knows the pillow talk of every penny-grubbing vicar and starving lecturer in the city. Even better, the poorer clerks on the bishop's staff have begun coming to him. As part of the price of his

initiation, he provided me with a half-dozen letters, correspondence between the bishop and a papal legate, which these lads had copied on the sly for him; by comparing them with other intelligence in my possession, I believe I have uncovered another of my grandsire's wicked plots. But I'll save that account for later in the evening.

Sacrilege, say you? Well, if Holy Mother Church truly were Christ's vicar on earth still, I might agree. But even if you have not been to the Papal States yourself, you surely know that they are a den of Lasombra cozenage. Have you ever kissed the ring of the Archbishop of Canterbury? Would you do it again, if I told you his household has more blood-slaves in it than untainted men? Then don't speak to me of sacrilege. My grandsire batters on the corruption of king and prelate; I shall profit from the sins of humbler men, and use those profits to liberate them. It may not look like it, but this is God's work.

Pardon me, sir, I must return to my catalog of recruits. At Anthony's fervent pleading, I have finally begun to search among the laymen of my clan, and am pleased to report that a young *Minnesinger* has joined us. That may not sound like much of an accomplishment, until you consider that by virtue of his melting voice, he is welcomed in courts all over the Holy Roman Empire. Such men are rarely slow with news. Moreover, he promises that he will cultivate any kindred spirits he may run across. After all, society treats a poor *goliard* or *vagante* singer little better than a thief, and what inflames the hearts of the downtrodden better than a bit of satiric verse?

Our most promising acquisition, however, dwells in Rouen. He is the ruler of a group of mendicant preachers, too dirty and heretical to interest anyone else. With regular infusions of his vitae and a little training, these men have learned to move sinning souls so deeply that even a crowd of stonecutters will weep and give up their hard-earned wages. He told me that if he wished it, his brothers could whip the people into such a fury that the city would topple in a day. I have urged him to be careful; after all, the same city burned Eudes de L'Etoile a mere lifetime ago, and he wasn't nearly as radical. Still, when the time comes, would it not be helpful to have an order of preachers ready to stir our brewing pot? I have asked him to send one of them to us to learn the Saxon tongue.

Which brings me to my final item. From heresy that is heresy merely because it dares to teach the true humility and poverty of Christ, I turn to the Cathars of Languedoc. Some of our colleagues like to insist that the Toreador who belong to this — I hardly dare call it "faith" — would make excellent allies, because they have turned their backs on luxury. I would suggest to you that the riches of Toulouse, the grandeur of their heretic cathedral, the finely wrought yet morally debased poems of their troubadours, indicate otherwise. If we must have Albigensians among us, let them at least be sincere in their asceticism, like the *Nosferatu perfecti* that Ragged Jenny has brought into our fold.

IN DARKENED STREETS

I'm sure Jenny has many other such successes to recount tonight, so I will now yield to her. Milady.

NOSFERATU AND CAPPADOCIANS

My, we are polite. Yes, it's true — there are many of my blood among the Cathars, and a good two dozen of those support our cause most fervently. But why does it surprise you that we tolerate such folk among us? Although we don't agree with them on *all* points, we certainly believe that the modern Church has fallen from grace, perhaps forever. And for their part, as they question the Whore of Rome, often enough they come to question the other whores who rule us — mortal and immortal. The same goes for other heretics as well: Waldensians, Manicheans, even the infidel Sufis of Spain. All dare fiery death to preach a world of true brotherhood, and some go further yet. Though L'Etoile, as Brother John remarked, came to a bad end, he and his raging followers did quite a job of redistributing the wealth of Brittany... but I see I'm upsetting you. Shall I move on to less presumptuous forms of mischief?

Very well. Let us discuss the beggars and cutpurses. I've begun following ó Conlae's suggestions on the matter. The beggar-bands we rule are now organized on the model of the trade guild. Each beggar, upon joining us, must choose a specialty and stick to it, and their dues to the guild are graded according to their expected income. For instance, a man who plays the part of a robbed merchant must pay more than a woman who simply stands in front of the church and feigns an attack of the falling sickness, and she in turn shall pay more than a genuine leper. A portion of the dues goes to Peter's men for their gallant protection, while the remainder is saved up for bribes and expenses. Guild members have been expressly forbidden to quarrel among themselves for territory and so forth; should there be a dispute, they must bring it before one of our blood-servants for judgement or else suffer the penalty of traitors. These changes do seem to be for the better. Indeed, I've begun to notice a remarkable swelling of... well, I would almost deem it civic pride, which has stirred my soul to the utmost. For so many years I've longed to instill in my dear little *ribaux* the same fellow-feeling which has preserved my clan down through the ages.

The thieves, alas, are another matter. They've already bundled up into their own little bands. After all, one needs accomplices to pull off even the simplest housebreaking in safety — a pairing of burglar and lookout, at least. And once a man joins a gang, he tends to look upon other gangs with the envious hatred most folk save for invading barbarians. You won't be seeing any thieves' guilds in our cities for many years, I'm afraid; and yet I have made some progress.

As you know, I've been training mortals in the larcenous arts for some decades now. Most never live to pass on their skills, of course; but every generation, some few of them reach the age where they can no longer squeeze through a window or silently cut a purse string themselves. At that point, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by teaching others. I now have 10

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master thieves, all graduates of my little school, who've begun to instruct others in their turn; and several of my colleagues can boast similar accomplishments.

No, their students don't pay a percentage; they would never stand for that, I'm afraid. Just a flat fee for the lessons. But this is about much more than filthy lucre. Thieving teaches a body to be wary, deft and clever, and we need folk like that. Besides, many of them come to have fond feelings for their teachers, and approach them even years later for advice on whom to rob and what to take. Naturally I make sure that the master thieves are well-provided with suggestions. Behold our latest success. I had my Nicholas mention to a pupil that the deacon of Saint Leonard's was getting quite deaf, and that the toe-bone of a saint could fetch a lofty price in the right circles. Now we possess yet another relic — and its gem-studded reliquary — around which to rally the people. Oh, don't worry. I've been carrying it all night and it hasn't hurt me yet. Saint Leonard is a gentleman.

Then there are the children. Some of our very youngest housebreakers are so adept that I cannot bear to lose their talents to puberty. Accordingly, we've made them blood-servants of the clan. Think about it. They're small, they're fleet, and hardly anyone pays attention to them. With our help, they'll stay that way even as their wisdom increases. I'm training mine to read and understand Norman, after which they should be fit to undertake all sorts of spy-work for us. I will have them dangling from eaves all over England!

Ah, yes, Cainite recruits. I'm afraid that while many Nosferatu do shepherd exactly the sort of mortal folk we seek, most of them already have an arrangement with their princes and don't want to jeopardize it. Gold and information for the privilege of wallowing in the gutter with their charges. You might think they'd balk at such injustice but — heh! — the Nosferatu expect no less from this world. The youngest ones, the ones who feel the sting and disgrace of the curse very keenly still, listen a bit more readily. They also have the least to contribute, though that'll change! At any rate, we've added six Nosferatu to the roster recently, all young, most estranged from their sires, most with no more than a half-dozen mortals at their command.

As for the Cappadocians: We've gained only one since the last meeting, but he's certainly the most interesting so far. He has a gang of thieves and cutthroats in the catacombs under Naples. More importantly, he says he knows a fellow clansman who makes a hobby of raiding ancient havens and elder tombs. The booty from these expeditions is naturally up for bids — he tried to tempt me with tablets from old Carthage. I asked him why he hadn't already sold them to some Idealist Brujah with a fatter purse than I could ever wave at him, and I'm not sure that his answer entirely satisfied me. Still, he's been given his task, and it's a steep one; if he fulfills it, I'll be happy to sponsor his membership. Anything we learn about grave-robbing could come in handy down the road.

But that's enough of my nattering. Ó Conlae's been positively itching to speak for some time now. Go on, dear.

BRUJAH AND MALKAVIANS

Stadtluft macht frei, my friends — breathe the city air and be free. This is not simply a proverb. A serf who manages to dwell within city walls for a year and a day without being caught earns his freedom under the law. You'll pardon me, Jenny, but I can't believe you forgot to mention our new "lazar-houses," where we hide such folk and thus earn their lifelong gratitude! A tincture of Nosferatu blood and certain herbs in a flagon of wine, and they erupt in boils which would satisfy even a doctor of Bologna. Not that the authorities come all that often to inspect. My idea, if you'll forgive my vanity in saying so.

On to even better tidings. My colleagues and I have helped to obtain recognition for poor tradesmen's guilds in eight different towns. Indeed. Why should only London's bakers have rights? Why should Paris alone be just toward her butchers? Must a man own so much property before he may have a say in governing his own trade? Your pardon; my feelings on the matter are strong. Anyway, it seems that for the right fee, our feudal lords are willing to defy even the rich burgesses and their town-guilds — though I fear too many of them are equally ready to reverse themselves again should the enemy make them a better offer. If any does, he shall have the bloodiest workers' riot ever known on his hands, I promise you that! It'll take time, my friends, but with every new guild we establish, that many more people are freed from virtual slavery; and more importantly, the iron grip of our elders and their mercantile proxies is loosened by another inch. In some places, my colleagues seek trade protections not only for non-citizens, but even for serfs.

Ah, look, Anthony, I've brought a smile to the face of our guest at last. In our new Carthage, sir, everyone shall have an honest living; even among Jenny's *ribauz* there are men who know a craft and would practice it, except they can't scrape together the exorbitant price their betters demand for allowing them the privilege. We don't *create* criminals. There are already more than enough, and of those, far too many are already under the control of Cainite masters who have no plans whatsoever of raising them out of infamy.

But back to my report. Recruitment proceeds apace. I can go Jenny one better and tell you that we now have seven more Brujah under us, many of whom were already laboring to better the lot of the poor tradesmen when I found them. Well, after all, it was Brujah who pressed the monarchs to start granting town charters in the first place. But our elders imagine that they've rendered adequate service to mankind in so doing, and now they can simply sit back and reap the material benefits. They ignore all the other work that's left to be done. To be fair, there are a few elders of my clan who've found out about us and have stated their approval. Critias himself writes constantly to lecture me on this and that. Wants to be made an honorary member. Huh!

IN DARKENED STREETS

VERBUM SAPIENTI

From the correspondence of Critias (Bib. Reg. Sol. Tute. Hort. 1572B 778 Vol. 1):

...and, as usual, I urge patience. It could well be worse. At least these childer have some idea of what they plan to do after they burn us all out of our havens. I have begun a correspondence with one of their founding members, a distant *consanguineus* of mine. Of course I shall never actually be admitted into their little society — nor indeed do I wish to be — but I have made a point of asking him nonetheless, and the flattery seems to have loosened his tongue. Last year he wrote to ask my advice on behalf of a Nosferatu refugee who had run afoul of Okulos (and touching on that subject, have you heard aught of what that old heretic is up to these days?). Perhaps I shall soon be able to give you a better picture of these folk and their activities. Meanwhile, let these "Prometheans" have their human rabble if that appeases their lust for control! They readily acknowledge that they must spend some years building up their strength before they can hope to take on their elders; and I think you will find, my friend, that as they wax in influence they will inevitably become more conservative; arrangements will be made with the powers that be....

If they want to help, they can just withhold their aid from the princes when the night of fire and reckoning comes. That will be enough.

Yes, the Malkavian. I haven't forgotten her, believe me. As you all know, the Malkavians are no more worldly a folk than the Cappadocians. Though they often dwell among the downtrodden, they rarely attempt to cultivate them for any purpose other than nutrition. Certainly I know of no Madmen beggar-kings or master thieves. There's the occasional heresiarch, but they doom themselves and their followers to the stake all too quickly. For these reasons, among others, we'd all but given up on the Malkavians.

But last fall, when I was visiting in Liège, one of that blood approached me, a sister of the Beguines. She spends her nights, ironically enough, tending the insane and infirm in several hospitals throughout town. Seemed to already know of my purpose in that uncanny way they have. Her manner was gentle as could be; true, she spoke to Saint Benedict several times during our conversation, but as Malkavians go, I think you'll agree it's a minor fault. She has influence not only in the hospitals where she ministers, but in her Beguine house as well, and remember that the Beguine movement has begun to spread. What say all of you — should I set her a task and see, or does the prospect frighten you too much? Ah, I should have known. Nothing frightens you. After all, we welcomed Mademoiselle Urraca readily enough.

There, did you see the look she gave me? I suppose I'll have to let her go next.

ASHEN THIEF

SETITES

I did not give you a look. How jumpy you Irishmen are.

Yes, I am of the so-called snake-clan, but not by choice. My Embrace was simply the culmination of a long battle of wits between myself and my sire. He could not seduce me to his side any other way. Even now, I disgrace him by joining forces with you, and I dare to do more yet, to undermine my brothers and sisters in blood by revealing their secrets to you.

Firstly, and most shamefully, my clan deliberately aids and abets the traffick in slaves. I am not merely speaking of the selling Christians to Saracens, or vice versa. In clear defiance of the Church's prohibition, we sell Christian to Christian. Or have you not heard what a strong English lad can fetch in Armagh? Fortunately, the Prometheans have chivalrously sworn to help me put an end to this vile practice. I shall get as close as I can to the slavers, induce them to count me as one of their own, and then choose the moment to betray them one by one. Of course the slaves I purchase will be manumitted and given sanctuary with you.

It is the slavery that most wounds my heart, but you may take my word for it, friends: Name a pernicious commerce, and there is a Follower of Set involved somewhere along the way. They attach themselves to Oriental merchants, Venetians, Genoans and men of the *Hanse*; thus they acquire gold, silk, spices and other luxuries with which to corrupt mortal and immortal alike. Worse still, our valiant Crusaders are tempted in the East with Saracen learning which is rightly condemned by the Church, and darker secrets from religions which even the Mohammedans condemn. Then, not satisfied with lying in wait for the innocent, my clansmen see to it that these books of forbidden lore find their way back along the Silk Road, into the monasteries of the West, where some monk or nun with more curiosity than piety may stumble across them. You have no doubt heard of this or that Cainite prince bragging that he possesses a page or chapter of the fabled *Book of Nod*? I tell you now, it is a forgery, and I can introduce you to the man in Constantinople who acquired it for him. What? You really would like to meet him? Well, yes, I can see the potential for havoc in a false scrap of Noddist lore, how it might be used to set elder against elder... I simply hadn't thought of it before. You see, even if I wished to I wouldn't be a very good priestess of Typhon. I'm not even as clever as the Ventrue.

In the cities where my blood dwell, they certainly take over as many thieves, strumpets and murderers as they can. Not only do such folk bring evil and chaos to society in general through their crimes, they are also the perfect tools for corrupting city officials. Frequently, however, other vampires already claim that niche; in such cases, being the patient creatures that they are, my clansmen are usually content to wait, and chip away at their rivals' influence little by little. After all, it is the seduction of other Cainites which they prize above all other goals. Anything that doesn't directly contribute to that process is merely an additional devotion. And those



Followers of Set who *do* enjoy sovereignty over the *ribauz* in their domains — well, I myself would not trust them even to deal squarely with us, to say nothing of joining.

I am abashed, *mesdames et messieurs*... I wish I had more to say, but as you know, I am very new to your brotherhood. Perhaps next time I shall have victories of my own to recount. For now, I will resume my seat, listen, and humbly learn from yours.

RAVNOS, ASSAMITE AND TZIMISCE

In that case, little Divya will take up the tale. The task you charge me with is a heavy one, Anthony; how could even one who has traveled as many roads as I tell you *everything* about the malcontents of the East? I can say this much: Wherever you find the content, you are certain to find malcontents.

But yes, I know, details, details. We Ravnos enjoy a reputation for thievery and trickery. To some extent, it's true. The so-called nobles of the Cainites abuse us terribly, and we return the favor with interest. I say they deserve it. Here they are, gifted with immortality and a wide world to explore, and yet they have nothing better to do than sit in their moldy castles and hoard wealth and power. Frankly, they could use a little shaking-up... or shaking-down. On that much, all of us here agree, yes? If you want them, a round dozen of my brothers and sisters stand ready to join

SERPENT'S TOOTH

To my inexorable sire, from your little magpie, a thousand kisses and all the blessings of the Red-Haired One.

The work goes well. This group of rebels is not quite as clever as we had hoped — it was almost too easy to convince them of my good intent — but their numbers are growing, and their colonies of human filth reach further eastward. Indeed, Volchok in Balgrad already complains that every filthy Saxon in the Empire has come to roost in his alleyways and steal all the trade away from his whores and assassins. For that, you have my colleague Godelinda of the Nosferatu to thank. In time, I hope, these Prometheans shall become a sword pointed at the throats of all your rivals.

As for Marzuq and Galjin: tell them that they have a new customer. Evidently my Ventrue friend wants a scrap of the First Book to set a couple of Frankish princes quarreling. The text should be something on the subject of Saulot and his vision of his own shameful end. I am hoping to spread the report of this parchment's "discovery" to several other elders as well, and with any luck the Christian Cainites will soon have an all-out war on their hands. Or if not, it is still one more corruption, one more deception; and as the Great Father teaches us, they add up, like grains of sand in a storm, to wear down even a Sphinx in time. I am, as ever, your slave and fellow slave, lusting endlessly for your touch....

IN DARKENED STREETS

you in your endeavors. They ask only your regard and protection. Many have never been west of Constantinople, and would fain see the lands of the Franks at last.

Moreover, they possess skills that might be of aid to you. For instance, those who make their way by creating false relics to sell to gullible Crusaders could teach even Brother John's forgers a thing or two about deception. Mademoiselle Urraca was speaking of the Byzantine Serpent who deals in spurious Cainite treasures — you surely don't think he made them himself, do you?

We wander too much to actually cultivate great numbers of mortals, but we know the great scoundrels of cities all over the Levant, and I daresay that if you give us the chance we'll soon accomplish the same feat in the West. So, for instance, if one of Jenny's thieves should manage to rob the duke himself, he needn't risk selling the booty in his own town. We can take it off his hands, for a reasonable fee, and carry it elsewhere. No trouble at all. The wilderness holds no more peril than the city for our cursed folk; as long as we're traveling, we may as well perform a service. Likewise, we'll be happy to carry messages from one Promethean to another, along with tales of any clever trickery we may have heard of or perpetrated, and we can all learn from each other that much faster.

The offer stands — we await only your word and, of course, your tasks. Challenge us! We shan't let you down.

Now let me move on to the childer of Assam. Despite the wars, they still rule much of the Levant, just as the Ventrue do here. And like the Ventrue, many regard themselves as a chosen elite and won't sully themselves by trafficking with the lower grades of mortal — cutthroats, cutpurses, Christian slaves and whatnot. However, Saracens come in many shapes, more than most of you realize. There are scholars who need secrets pilfered, outcast warriors willing to become killers for hire, even blood sorcerers with their own hidden agendas. These Saracens can be useful to us, but I would beware: While none can surpass them at spying and destroying the undead, they seem to hate all other vampires with a rare passion. I have heard that even an outcast Assamite might be able to earn his way back into the Old Man's graces if he can return with enough Cainite blood on his hands. He would not care whether that blood belonged to you, or to your enemies.

I know Monsieur Berengar is eager to hear about the Tzimisce. I must tell you honestly that I myself have had few enough dealings with the Fiends. Nor do I wish more. They, too, are rulers in their own lands; though other clans do dwell there, they dance to the tune the Tzimisce call. The Fiends take precious little interest in mortals — they regard them as food, or at best, amusing playthings. So I doubt you will have much luck finding many to populate your new Carthage, especially since you evidently plan to harbor Tremere within it as well. However, I do know one who has sworn to me that he wants to give up the blood-war and its dangers. You will have to get him free of his sire somehow,

ASHEN THIEF

but if you do, you would have among you a man who can reshape the face of anyone, even into a likeness of someone else. Of course I can perform a similar trick, but it doesn't last that long. Think of the mischief you could cause! You could make a thief up to look like a treasury guard, your ghoul to look like the prince's ghoul. Why huddle in the alleyway trying to listen through a window when you can simply stroll in and find out everything you need to know?

That offer, likewise, stands. I shall leave it to Your Worships to consider. Monsieur Berengar? Only you are left, for I'm sure Anthony will wish to go last.

TREMERE

Yes. Ahem. I must apologize to our guest for my rudeness. No doubt it seems cowardly to you, that I hide my face while the others here show theirs. But it was a condition I set when I joined, that my identity should never be revealed to any who had not been fully initiated. If you'd ever seen the punishments Ceoris metes out to traitors, you'd understand. Most clans content themselves with simply reducing them to ash, but the Tremere have better... uses for the condemned.

Many of you are unfamiliar with my brotherhood. I shall explain to you something of our structure and why it's so difficult to convince other Tremere to join us. Yet I must keep trying, for there is much we could do to further the cause.

Among the Prometheans, I've already begun to hear complaints about the threefold division of rank. Apprentice, journeyman, master: a Promethean progresses up through the ranks through the performance of increasingly difficult tasks. Speaking of that, I must congratulate Brother John on his recent masterpiece. Mine is still in progress, alas — but I shall elaborate in a moment. Of course there are always those who will grouse anytime they're asked to earn their keep. Yet imagine, for a moment, that the Prometheans have not three grades, but seven, and that to ascend in rank you must not only prove your loyalty and utility by braving ever-greater dangers, but also demonstrate your mastery of dread occult arts.

Imagine further that at each stage of this process, you are considered the chattel of your immediate superior. You can be ordered to move from this city to that with no warning, no matter your attachments, or to betray your friends outside the clan, or to go on crusade against the Fiends in Hungary. Even more: imagine that upon your initiation, you must straightaway give up some of your vitae as a guarantee of your good behavior, so that your masters may practice their blood-arts against you should you ever disobey; and that even the smallest sign of disobedience can be taken for treason, for which you shall be pursued by your brothers in the order to the ends of the earth and beyond. Have I satisfied you that it's no easy thing to defy House and Clan Tremere?

Yet I know that I'm not the only one among my blood who resents his fate. There are many others who, like me,

never agreed to forfeit our lives for the sake of our magic; many who feel cheated out of the true immortality which their arts might have won them in time. Many more, I'm sure, who joined knowing full well what they would become, but have grown disillusioned as they continue to bear the indifference of their elders and the hatred of other Cainites.

Do the Tremere ever make use of mortal unfortunates? Well, yes, certainly — as food, for one thing. Even in cities where the prince grants us a chantry, we're rarely allowed to hunt among the choicer vessels. But I daresay that's not what you meant. No, true unfortunates, the so-called deserving poor, have little to offer us but their blood. Mountebanks, however, abound among our mortal servants: fake doctors, false sorcerers and not-so-wise-women, purveyors of penny-magics and stinking unguents. They tell us about the people who come to them for spells and physic, and usually we simply nod and tell them to do as they like. But when someone important comes to them — someone who could be blackmailed, or, better yet, obliged to us — then we take over. After all, it's no great trouble to us to mix up a potion so that a burgomaster's mistress may rid her womb of an unwanted babe, or an alderman dispose of a rival alderman. Some of us can even restore maidenheads, remove branding-marks and so forth. I'm wooing one such magus right now, but I must move carefully. If he should prove loyal after all, and betray me, then I will be hard-pressed indeed to avoid capture.

Finally, on the subject of my masterpiece: Work progresses. As Anthony can attest, I have my spell. With but a drop of blood and a secret phrase, a Promethean may briefly touch minds with a Promethean in a neighboring city. Each of you may devise your own secret phrase, whatever you will best remember — only make sure it's not something your enemies can easily guess. However, I'm still having trouble getting the spell to stick to the mirror for longer than a night or two. It's most odd; after all, I'm adapting a very simple, very old ritual which my clan brethren use to speak to one another from a distance. I suspect the sluggishness with which our magic flows through non-Tremere blood may be to blame.

Yes, I realize how vital it is that I succeed in the enchantment. After all, it does us little good to take a city by revolt or coup, if it's only going to be overwhelmed by reinforcements a few days later. We must be prepared to let loose chaos in several towns at once, grouped together as tightly as possible, so that the prince of any town will be too busy dealing with the mess in his own domain to go to anyone else's aid. Especially important given how the Patricians like to stick together in such matters. Trust me: When my research is ended, I shall be able to provide each of you with a magic mirror by which you may inform your brethren when you feel that you and your mortals are ready to seize the advantage. I will not rest until it is achieved.

Anthony, the floor is yours.

QUO VADIS?

Before I call the next item on the agenda, has our guest any questions?

GANGREL AND CAITIFF

Ah, yes, the Gangrel. Alas, they exclude themselves by their philosophy. We believe the well-ordered city — with the requisite orchards and crops in the surrounding *contada*, of course — to be the best hope for Cainite and mortal alike. Leave the wilderness to the wild things who belong in it; we here are concerned with civilization. Some of us say we should institute, after our victory, a body of folk entrusted with guarding the roads between our cities; and there has been talk of entrusting Gangrel with this task. From what I hear, however, practically the only Gangrel who concern themselves with mortals at all are bandit-kings.

What's that? My own clan? My dear fellow, there's a reason it hasn't been mentioned. I have none. No, I have no idea who she was, nor do I feel any burning need to know. It hardly matters. Without the sponsorship of a sire, I may as well be clanless as far as everyone's concerned. So you see, I don't champion the dispossessed as a moral exercise; it's a subject near and dear to my heart. Like the serf, I have existed, till now, only at the pleasure of great lords who deem it more worthwhile to use me than kill me. But I tell you this: In their cruelty to the orphaned, our masters plant the seeds of their own doom. We're just as immortal as they, bastard and weak-blooded as we are, and those of us who survive shall never forget the injustices heaped upon us. Small wonder that we Prometheans have nearly as many Caitiff as Brujah!

ORGANIZATION

But let me forge ahead, to the things you must know before you can take your place among us. As Berengar explained, we model ourselves after the trade guilds. Anyone less than two centuries old may join us (no, we don't cast anyone out for *reaching* that age; we simply can't be bothered to teach old dogs new tricks). Once a man joins, he becomes an apprentice, and receives assignments and guidance from those above him in rank. From there, it takes three proven successes to advance to journeyman.

Who gets to judge, you mean? A panel of at least three masters. As to what constitutes a "success," I can tell you that bringing in a recruit who's at least your equal in power and influence usually suffices; stripping some elder of a valuable tool is naturally even better. As a rule, we frown on blatant violence against other Damned — it's too dangerous for that yet. When the time comes, we will strike unflinchingly, but first we must gather our strength.

A journeyman chooses his own tasks and pursues them as he sees fit. Don't worry; after you start attending our meetings, you'll quickly come to see what sorts of tasks we deem appropriate for a journeyman. Finally, in order to become a master, you must furnish a masterpiece, just as in a mortal guild — in

IN DARKENED STREETS

our case, of course, a "masterpiece" is an *especially* impressive success — and a quorum of seven masters awards that honor.

In our meetings, everyone has a vote. Yes, even apprentices, though any masters attending can vote twice to break a tie; and anyone can make a motion. We never gather more than a dozen of the order together at once, for safety and secrecy. Nor do we encourage our apprentices to meet Prometheans of other cities until they've shown themselves to be prudent.

No, there is no Grand Master, no King, no Prince of the order. At least, there'd better not be. Leave that tripe to the elders. Our most senior members come to know a great deal of what's going on in their areas, of course, and they keep in contact with each other to make sure they're not working at cross-purposes. But they have no more power under our code than any other master.

The code... shall be taught to you immediately after your initiation. For now, know that the penalty for betraying one's brethren is swift and final, though merciful, and our journey-

men think nothing of traveling hundreds of miles to help bring an oath-breaker to justice. Princes aren't the only ones who can call a blood hunt! Lesser offenses are left to the discretion of the local masters. As a rule, you won't be punished for honest mistakes, so long as they do no real harm to the order. We want to *encourage* invention, not suppress it as our lieges do.

Your initiation is already devised. We tailor it to the individual, but it's always a task that requires one to break Cainite law or betray an elder — preferably both. We want no lapdogs here. Our spies watch over you as you work, and we acquire proof of your treachery if at all possible. Once the task is fulfilled, you must recite and sign an oath, then carry the parchment next to your breast for no less than three days and nights. Any elder with second sight who touches it will know that the document is no forgery. Finally, we take all this blackmail and give it to another apprentice in the guild. You will not know whom. We find this an admirable method of ensuring loyalty.

Don't shake your head. Our elders keep peace among themselves in much the same fashion, and their aims aren't half as lofty.

As it happens, we already have one of your secrets, so we're not all that worried about compromising you further. Well, I did say you owed me your existence. Is the name of Fra Beggio familiar? I rather fancied it was. But you never imagined he'd tracked you this far north, did you? Never fear him and his burning cross again. He's in our hands. His will is far too strong to be bent even by our eldest Ventrue, but iron and stone holds him well enough. How close he came to penetrating your haven!

I leave it to you. From observing you, I've come to believe that you sympathize with our aims. You, too, hoped for more from immortality. You remember Caine's admonition to use our power over mankind responsibly. You weep to see how civilization and justice suffer under the government of our brittle marble gods. Up till now, you've simply lacked a viable alternative. Isn't it so?

Certainly you can choose not to join. And we can choose to release the poor old Fra. But I'm afraid we simply haven't been able to convince him that you aren't responsible for his imprisonment. Stubborn fellow. I hate to think what might happen if he were to fall into the hands of your prince. Should you join us, we'll naturally deliver him to whatever fate you deem fit.

Your task? Nothing too dangerous, I assure you. After all, a man of your status and talents is far more valuable as a spy. Jenny, bring the girl in, would you?

This is Margot, one of Jenny's most accomplished students. We'd originally thought she'd become her childe as well, but I think you'll agree it would be a shame to lose such beauty to the Nosferatu curse, especially considering the uses to which it might be put. Besides, you're over a century old. Isn't it time you became a sire?

Of course. Take a moment to consider. But consider swiftly — we're eager for your opinion on a number of subjects.

PROMETHEANS IN COTERIE

If you've been reading along and wondering how to fit one of these socially conscious rascals into a coterie, rest assured that there's more than one way to do it.

In the first place, a Promethean needn't reveal her other ties to her coterie-mates. Indeed, if they too belong to the criminal world — where distrust is a vital occupational skill, and issues of gang loyalty are well worth killing over — suddenly declaring oneself a robber-prophet with a vision for the New Carthage is probably a bad idea. On the other hand, a Promethean with sufficient charisma might be able to subtly bring her friends around to her way of thinking, and even persuade them to convert.

Even in coterie where the other members aren't hoodlums by trade, however, a character's Promethean allegiance can come into conflict with the demands of friendship. This becomes even more likely if the coterie or its members should begin pursuing and attaining status in "legitimate" Cainite society. (In fact, Prometheans have been known to join ambitious coterie for the sole purpose of playing *agents provocateur*.) Still, with patience and negotiation, a character's coterie can often develop a livable, if not mutually beneficial, relationship with the Promethean order, which after all can always use a few more allies.

Lastly, there is the possibility of an all-Promethean coterie, which should suggest all sorts of wicked inspirations to the Storyteller. After all, the order considers itself lucky to recruit vampires singly; how could it possibly resist the temptation to take full advantage of a tight-knit band of Cainites and all the complex missions such a group might perform?

THE PROMETHEANS: DESTINY

In 1197, the official order is less than 80 years old; the reader has just witnessed them in their infancy. Over the next few centuries, they cautiously expand their influence with various subsets of the urban underclass. Some operate fairly openly as vice lords, arranging a regular bribe in order to stay in business and concealing nothing from their princes except their ultimate intent. Others keep their criminal involvement secret for the sake of reputation; still others, who for whatever reason don't wish to be known, simply keep out of sight altogether.

The order's efforts certainly shape the developing underworlds of the cities it operates in, but the success is hardly unqualified. Ó Conlae's Brujah gradually lose influence in the burgeoning craft-guilds as the guilds grow wealthier and more powerful — and thus more attractive to elder Cainites; of course, each time they're crowded out, they concentrate their efforts on the next level down, and soon cities all over Europe are troubled by Brujah-incited riots and strikes among the unskilled laborers. (The Black Death doesn't exactly help matters, either.)

Despite these troubles, Promethean criminal networks continue growing (thanks partially to the Ravens and Monsieur Berengar's ritual), and by the mid-14th century, many agree that the time is finally right to make their move. Using the Black Death and other crises as cover, they stir up mob violence in city and countryside alike. Unfortunately, though the results are satisfyingly devastating to the mortal authorities, they fail to shake the reins of Cainite power loose from the grip of the elders. Several of the most influential Prometheans, mostly Nosferatu and Brujah, lose their unlives in the ensuing strife, and worse, the secret of the order's existence is exploded for good.

Fortunately, their lack of hierarchy saves the Prometheans from the worst of the purge that follows. Four of the order's senior members consign themselves to the flames in order to avoid being captured and made to betray their fellows (according to rumor, not all of them make this heroic sacrifice willingly); the rest go underground, severing their ties to the others and concerning themselves with their own affairs only, hoping that in time the heat will die down. A feeding frenzy ensues among the beggar-queens and robber-kings of the Cainite world as everyone tries to snatch up all the abandoned mortal syndicates.



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Chapter Two: Wearing the Wolf's Head

Than bespake hym gode Robyn:
"To dyne have I noo lust,
Till that I have som bolde baron,
Or som unkouth gest."
- Anonymous, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*

BRAMBER CASTLE, FIRST WATCH

Come closer, lad. You can't see a thing if you hang back. Just inch you out along this limb. Steady on, I've got you.

THE HILLTOP

Now. Everyone knows that castle over there belongs to de Braose. But he's not the only lord who dwells there, nor even the chief one: Reyner Fitz Payn is one of our kind, and he claims the entire shire for his domain. Mark that bricked-up window there? That's his room. He poses as the lord's invalid nephew, even carries a crutch. Except when he hunts, of course.

Heh. That's not what I meant. He's got his bevy of vessels stashed among the ladies-in-waiting, but no, I was speaking of the *special* occasions, when His Highness holds court. On such nights, Lord de Braose's gaol is emptied. Fitz Payn gives them a half-hour's head start, usually; tells them that if they can survive till dawn without leaving the wood, they'll earn a pardon. Then all the fine, dead lords and ladies mount up and head after them. You'd never heard the tales? Ah, but you were above such old woman's talk. I don't think the lord likes it much, not that he would ever dare defy. People die in gaol of disease and darkness. It happens all the time.

TALLY-HO

From the correspondence of Marco de San Pablo (private collection) —

... You shamed me, you shamed your husband and you shamed yourself. For the sake of your honor, I betrothed you to the son-by-Blood of the greatest prince in the Rhineland! Out of paternal love I contributed a generous dowry and then some, that you might have the most extravagant festivities known to the Cainites in those parts for the past two hundred years! And do not forget, you promised me that you would gird up your spirit when the time came for the obligatory hunt.

But the news has come to me that you wept as the *Ritter* returned to the clearing, their cheeks flushed with vitae and victory, bringing the kills made in your honor; that you dampened their joyous exultation with weak maidenly tears. Have I taught you nothing? If a woman enjoys any advantage in this hard world, it is the willingness of men to shed blood for her. You are no longer a childe, and should certainly be able to look upon a few corpses with equanimity. Further, I am told that the Rhinelanders choose only outlaws for their sport, men who shall not and should not be missed from the world. What were they to you, that you should weep? A gentle heart is a fine virtue, but it will be of precious little use to you in our society, of which you are now truly a part.

ASHEN THIEF

I've lost some good men that way.

When the hunt is on, you must stay out of this copse no matter what. Don't ever let me hear that you came here when His Highness had his hell-mount saddled — do you understand me? Good. Come down this way, there's more to show.

THE FIELDS

Look at this crop. Sad sight, eh? A hail out of season, and all their labor is wasted. Of course, the lord must still be paid for his investment. Once he's taken his share, what'll be left to live on? The coming moons will see poaching aplenty. Now this is old Hereward's kennel. Scratcher there — hst! Quiet, Scratcher! — was lawed a long time ago, as was his bitch... but d'you see there, in the curve of her belly? I'd wager thruppence at least one of those puppies escapes the knife somehow. As for the rest of the villeins, they'll hide their bows and arrows as best they can.

Not everyone in the lord's service is past trusting, my boy. These are stout folk. John atte Well brews ale, and he's sold it to my fellows when they were thirsty. Once he even let us stop and water our horses. The widow Gunnora has a kind heart. Her second son Ham is one of our lads. Broke him out of prison along with Philip a few years back because I knew he shot so well.

No, it's the foresters and their men that outlaws must be wary of hereabouts. Always showing up where they're not wanted, always ready to slap a man in irons. Always thumbing their noses at the law they're supposed to be protecting, too, or do you really think that rascal Fulk *paid* for the wood he chopped down for his new shed, or the roasted boar he had at his son's knighting? Eh? But who's going to report him?

I shouldn't care about such things anymore, I know. The real trouble is that whilst riding hither and yon in search of humble poachers, they're like as not to find us instead. Dear Fulk is good friends with the sheriff, too, and while he may lack the courage to take us on, he'd gladly testify in the shrieval court against us. We mustn't give him the chance.

Hurry now, back to the horses.

THE HIGHWAY, SECOND WATCH

Now this little stand of trees is royal forest, if you ask the royal archives. But ask the people who come through here — they'll tell you it's all ours. Perfect for our purpose as well: just big enough to hide a rough company in, and with a little ridge that gives us a hawk's-eye view of the highway.

Track a deer, and you must search the brush for hoof prints. Men are far kinder. Look there; they've outlined their path for us, broadened it, smoothed it out till you can see it even from this height. We have only to watch and wait. Not much traffic along it at night, of course. That's why it's so important to train the lads well. They carry on most of the work without us.

FOREST VS. WOOD

These two terms are not synonymous in the Dark Ages. "Forest" is actually short for *forestis*, meaning "outdoor" or "outside," and is used to designate areas held in personal reserve by lord or king, which thus fell "outside" the common land of the realm. (The original, longer phrase *forestis silva* did refer specifically to woodland, but only because of the word *silva*.) Thus an area referred to as "forest" in medieval times might actually be barren heath — not too barren, however; after all, the main reason to set aside an area as forest is to ensure the preservation of game, particularly the herbivorous deer and wild boars.

In 1197, forest law is at its most formal in England — King Henry certainly believed in tight administration — but the basic mechanisms described here have parallels on the Continent. Punishments for infractions range from a modest fine to blinding, the removal of bow-drawing fingers, or even (occasionally) death; in particularly serious cases regarding the royal forests, offenders might languish in prison for years waiting for their cases to come up before the proper authority. However strict the enforcement, though, the law itself is always open to financial negotiation. Barons can purchase the right to take royal venison, or buy a tract of land (a *chase*) within a royal forest for their private use and jurisdiction; and even humble villeins can be licensed to gather extra wood or hunt small game (called the right of *warren*; small game is considered harmful to deer anyway, so lords tend to be fairly free with this right).

A POACHER'S LEXICON

The following terminology for English poachers can add flavor to your chronicle:

agist: The pasturing of animals, especially swine (who are most fond of acorns) in the wood. Also called *pannage*. Anyone wishing to exercise this right must pay a fee to the collector, called the *agister*, who counts the pigs as they go in and takes up the toll as they come out.

back bear: An unhappy situation to get caught in — carrying a dead deer on one's back.

bloody hand: An even unhappier situation to get caught in — literally red-handed, over a fresh-slain deer.

dog draw: The offense of tracking deer with a dog.

eyre: The high court of royal forest law, composed of barons and knights who tour the counties every seven years to hear especially grievous cases. Lower courts, thankfully, meet far more often. *Swainmotes*, so called because of their usual occupation with the pasturing of swine, convene three times a year, and local courts meet as often as every several weeks. Evidence of offenses, from antlers and skins to greyhounds, is saved as long as necessary to be presented at the trial.

firebote: The right to gather dead branches for firewood.

forester: One appointed to oversee a forest, whether royal or privately owned. Various types and degrees of forest official exist in Dark Medieval England: stewards are high-level administrators; bailiffs are the next grade down (the term also applies to a sheriff's assistants); surveyors set forest boundaries; *regarders* report encroachments on those boundaries, particularly building or clearing; keepers are in charge of game; bow-bearers arrest trespassers; woodwards are chief officials over private forests; and *lardiners* store deer carcasses for the king (a position of considerable trust). Foresters also hunt game for the table whenever their employer doesn't care to expend the effort himself. Forest officials tend to be chosen from the nobility and yeomanry.

lawing: The practice of removing the first three talons from the front paws of a mastiff or hound, so that it can't be used for unlicensed hunting. Also called *expeditation*.

stable stand: The offense of drawing a bow without license.

venison: In this period, the word actually refers to the right to hunt deer, not to the meat itself. Thus the phrase *offense against the venison*.

vert: The growing things of the wood. The trees themselves, their fallen branches — even the acorns on the ground and the honey in the hive. Gathering or harming any of these things without permission constitutes an *offense against the vert*. A *verderer* is a man appointed specifically to guard the *vert*.

"SOM UNKOUTH GEST"

Ah, the work. The prey.

There'll be the lone travelers. Those are the easiest. We're blessed, lad, to have a number of stout yeomen among us, and a few who squired for years and can ride and use a sword as well as the lord's own guard; but I've seen a gang of

four peasants with naught but cudgels and rope trip a knight's horse and have him down before you could say by-our-lady. Priests and monks make far better victims than knights, of course. If you see one, don't let piety hold you back. No matter how poor he looks, he's bound to have coin on him.

Then there'll be plenty of merchants as well. Cagey lot. They like to travel under guard when they can afford it, and

WEARING THE WOLF'S HEAD

FILTHY LUCRE

Highwaymen, brigands and pirates alike may comfort themselves on one score: Europe is enjoying a tremendous silver rush at this moment in history, and silver coin now flows more freely than ever before. Numerous strikes in the Black Forest, Bohemia, Hungary, Moravia and Sardinia lie in the recent past and near future. Of course, such strikes exert an irresistible siren call on fortune-hunters from all over the Continent (particularly Saxon miners, whose expertise is eagerly sought), and local rulers are generally only too happy to let the prospectors dig for a handsome commission, of course. All the liquid cash generated by these efforts goes to fuel laudable social improvements in all the major nations of Europe, but a considerable portion of it is certainly diverted into brigand and pirate hoards far and wide.

together with other merchants if possible. The bright side to it is they don't like bloodshed. Everything's got its price with them, and their lives bear the highest price of all. Now, lad, I'll tell you how to handle a merchant. Most of them'll give you a portion as tribute readily enough, if it'll get them back on their way with no fuss; they just mark it down as one more tax. The trick is not to bite off more than you can chew. If he has any good coin on him, you'll naturally want that. Don't take anything you can't spend hereabouts unless you know a man that can melt it down and another man who'll buy it. The same thing goes for the goods in the wagon. Don't take it if you can't sell it. Now I knew a fellow once who had the most marvelous trick; he'd stop every wool merchant he saw until he had enough to make up a wagon himself, and then he'd pack up and head to market! But that's a lot of effort. Too much like honest labor for most of us.

Worst comes to worst, a rich enough merchant may himself be taken for ransom, just like a noble; don't take too rich a one, though, because great lords listen when other great men start screaming. You see, if the lord or Fitz Payn *really* wanted to stop us — enough to pay what it would cost, that is — they could do it. The might of arms is on their side. But we're only a nuisance, a fly buzzing round in the corner, and until we cause enough trouble that they *have* to swat us, we're all right.

That, my lad, is why we can't let any other robber share this stretch of road. Any who won't join me, I show them on their way. If this place should ever become such a hazard that the commerce stops altogether, His Lordship and His Highness would take that ill indeed.

THE CAINITE TRAVELER

I'll tell you another thing His Highness would take ill.

One can't be a great lord all alone in a cold little room with the window bricked up, you know. There must be festivities, panoply... and an immortal audience to appreciate it. And since only a few of our kind can fly — ha! —

ASHEN THIEF

most of that audience takes the highway to reach Fitz Payn. His vassals make the journey every year to pay homage, and there are the feasts and hunts, as I said. Sometimes, other Cainite lords send emissaries to hammer out treaties and whatnot. Sometimes, though, they're just travelers heading further north who mean to stop at the castle for hospitality.

Mind you, I've never stopped one of these precious guests myself... not yet. But I must admit that now I'm tempted. I've got you by my side, fully in the Blood, and more men in the band than ever before; and I hear Fitz Payn will be hosting a grand *mêlée* in just a few weeks.

Eh? Well, it's always wise to have an ear somewhere in the castle. In our case, it's a kitchen slut who's tumbling half His Lordship's squires. One takes what one can get.

I promise you, at least one young Ventrue fool will be riding out here in his bright new mail to try his luck. His sire is a man I know, a man who's dwelt in peace from me for far too long. And what scandal it would cause Fitz Payn, whose protection supposedly covers all Sussex! No doubt they'd both pay a handsome fee to get the little bully back....

Don't look so worried, lad. I've survived this long through caution and quick wits. If we try this bold caper — *if* — we'll have our plans well-laid indeed, and our escape waiting for us. We can go deeper into the ancient wilds of Anderida if we must, and a good number of the men would even follow us.

What? Dragons? Hogwash! There are dangerous beasts there, I'll grant, but no dragons. Besides, *you* are one of the night-things now. It can be done; I've done it myself. The wilderness can harbor our kind. Ride with me now and I'll show you.

ST. LEONARD'S WOOD, FOURTH WATCH

When Fitz Payn first declared the blood hunt against me, it didn't even occur to me to go a-robbing. I'd never dwelt in anything but servitude, and what's a yeoman without his liege? I was heading off to London to beg refuge from one of His Highness' enemies when my lads — well, they weren't my lads just yet — tried to stop me. Good thing they did! I stood there, watching 'em writhe on the ground holding their bruised heads, and it suddenly struck me that it would be far better *not* to go to another prince. After all, that's the first place anyone would look for me, isn't it? And these woods are the *last* place anyone would look.

You'd never guess how many of us there are, skulking around Sussex, Kent and Surrey. A lot of Gangrel, of course — the wilderness calls to their blood. The others have their reasons. Some of them are outlaw. They don't dare show their faces in an English court, but they don't want to leave the lands of their birth either. Others never broke one of the Six Traditions, but have made themselves so odious to some great lord that they must disappear or die.

Then I knew a Toreador who came all the way down from Wales, gathered up a band and took to the woods, all for the sole purpose of worrying away at his enemy's wealth and good name. Had his men outfitted with fine green livery and shields with his own device blazoned on them. Even hired a *trouvère* to write a poem about the time he managed to seize some sorcerous Tremere thingummy from a Usurper ambassador's wagon and ransom it back for some other sorcerous thingummy to help him turn invisible. Heylyn of the Oaken Tower. Grand fellow — the humble Dorset folk treated him like a king. He was made to greet the sunrise recently....

Ah, well. Whatever their first intent, they all become bandit-chiefs in time. It's the best way to stay fed. I've heard tales of vampires who could survive on the blood of beasts, but try it once and you'll see why few turn to that sort of fare. You can raid the villages, but unless you've a band of rowdies with you, so that your meal gets lost in all the mayhem, someone's bound to realize what you're doing. Any Cainite with an ounce of wit keeps both ears pricked for tales of mysterious wasting maladies in his holdings — and Cainites don't like poaching on their hunting grounds any more than living lords do.

For that matter, you must also be careful of taking too many poachers and hunters as they wander in the woods. Accidents do happen, but there's a limit to bad luck. As for feeding on your own men, I wouldn't do it unless it meant my death otherwise. The risks are too great — of killing one by mistake, of being discovered in the wrong fashion. Bad business.

No, the best thing is to take the highwayman's part and prey on travelers, on foreigners. Fewer care what happens to them, so many hazards await them on the road, and unless they're writing home at every stop, who's to know exactly where they met their end?

THE MAINTENANCE OF MERRY MEN

Oh, my lads probably have a vague fancy that their master's made a pact with the Devil. They're rough fellows, and I've taught them not to fear their Maker overmuch. As long as the Devil's on their side for now, they're content to die rich men with generous wills and settle their souls' accounts that way. Heh.

Not all Cainite robber-kings take that tack, of course. Some don't even let their men know they exist; they just put a blood-slave or two in charge and then sneak into camp at night to claim their share of the booty. On the other hand, I heard a ballad once about a Lasombra lady in Provence who revealed herself outright as the Daughter of Satan; demanded that the whole band sell her their immortal souls; chanted a little gibberish to convince them the deal was struck; and then proceeded to enslave as many in Blood as her vitae could support. Heh! Now that's steel. Hm? Her name? Clotild. In



WEARING THE WOLF'S HEAD

the ballad, she ends up marrying the prince of Toulouse, or something like that. I don't know if that's true.

But back to my subject, which is managing the men. Mortals aren't any more fitted to the wild than we, as you well know. Yes, meat can be had in abundance, but bread doesn't grow on trees, nor do wenches. The men *must* go into town or village for provisions, if nothing else. And what's the point of stealing a mountain of coin if you can't purchase a few pleasures with it? There's no way to stop them taking their little furloughs; you can only teach them to be smart about it and hope the lessons stick.

Friends, then, friends among the settled folk. You need them, especially when the authorities press harder than usual, and that's the best reason not to go raiding the villages in your territory. Now usually we make do with the likes of Gunnora and John. The taverns of Horsham and Arundel, though, are a suitable reward for an especially good haul. Be sure to gamble, at least a little. If you don't, the men will think something's very wrong with you!

Eh? Yes. Yes, that's true. It sometimes comes to pass that a lord or freeholder adopts a gang of bandits, so to speak, and even receives them into his home. Indeed it can

OUTLAWRY

The word *outlaw*, though loosely applied to criminals in general, actually has a specific legal meaning in the Dark Medieval world.

Criminal justice in the Middle Ages is a haphazard affair at best. Since they lack an organized police force to carry out their dictates, courts have very little power to actually compel defendants to appear. Yes, local communities (like the English tithings and hundreds) are held legally responsible for their fugitives, but this provides only middling motivation, particularly to the offender. After all, everyone knows that the overwhelming majority of trials end in conviction (since criminal cases only proceed that far when the powers that be wish it so). Given the harshness of felony sentences, it should come as no surprise that defendants who can't or won't produce the funds necessary to buy off the authorities very rarely appear for their trials.

Outlawry, then, is the formal punishment visited upon such delinquents. An outlaw is effectively a non-person — certainly a non-citizen. He loses all legal rights, including the right to own property. Any land or chattel he holds is escheated back to his liege. His life is likewise forfeit. Anyone who wishes to may kill him with (legal) impunity, and collect a bounty for so doing.

Although an outlaw's pariah status, as far as day-to-day living goes, only carries the force the local community gives it, it's still an unenviable situation — particularly for a person of high social standing. Class manifests through property; a noble deprived of land and inheritance, in this period, is no longer noble in any practical sense of the word. Such a degradation is bound to come as a stinging humiliation. And with the humiliation comes a question: How to make a living now, when one only possesses the skills suited to aristocracy?

Perhaps that's why the romances are so full of wronged noblemen who embark on their criminal careers only after becoming outlaw at the instigation of usurping enemies (a reversal of what one hopes is the more usual process: the crimes first, *then* the sentence). Eustace the Monk and Fouke le Fitz Warin are good 13th-century examples of the type, and historical to boot — though the reader should be warned that their conduct in the ballads falls a good deal short of Arthurian chivalry. (Eustace, in fact, manages to dabble not only in woodland brigandry but also piracy and even necromancy over the course of his impressive career.)

Another commonplace of the ballads is that the outlaw's king or liege invariably pardons him at story's end, and even rewards him with land and honors. This idea may strain modern credulity, but actually, a number of medieval outlaws *are* able to earn pardons for themselves — some on multiple occasions! — by aiding their sovereign with either money or military might. Indeed, a scandalous number go on to become officials, particularly lawmen. The general rule in the Middle Ages is that if someone important needs your services badly enough, even mass murder and pillage can be forgiven. Clever criminals, take note.

Unfortunately, Robin Hood, the 20th century's consummate gentleman thief, seems to be a yeoman rather than an earl in his earliest incarnations. Nor does he routinely share his earnings with the poor. On the other hand, he has a stylish way of demanding his due: He courteously "invites" his victims to dine with him, and waits till afterward to shake them down.

On a more encouraging note, for those players yearning to portray a Cainite Maid Marian: Women do sometimes join robber bands in the medieval period, according to surviving court records, and are outlawed just as readily as their male counterparts. Joining and leading (as a vampire would surely expect to do) are two different things, true; quite a few heads might need to be cracked before a gang of bandits accepts a woman's authority — or, if she prefers a gentler approach, it may be more practical to join as a regular member and gradually earn recognition through impressive feats.

be difficult to tell such outlaws from a lord's regular men, for they oft behave the same. We have no such arrangements with anyone. Fitz Payn's got the lord under his thumb, and the lord has every freeholder within miles under his. But that's the most comfortable way to go about things, I'll grant. A nice warm home for the lads to return to at night, and influence over the great men who might otherwise persecute you. Of course, you have to give up a fat portion of the take in exchange for such privileges.

You can also let some of the men stay with their own families, if they haven't been outlawed yet, and if their fame as bandits hasn't reached the wrong ears. That eases the burden somewhat. A good half-dozen of my lads can dwell at home safely enough, and of course they do. Better cooking there. They join us when they can. All the rest, I fear, are too widely wanted. Usually they stay at an old deserted hunting lodge a few miles south of that lookout I showed you. It's not much, but it's big enough to have a fire in.

Let's tether the horses here. We must get a little further in before the night's done, and all the vampire blood in the world can't fit these beasts for riding down into that ravine.

THE DEN

Which is the whole point, of course. This is the way I come when I don't want to be followed. Even a woodsman born and bred won't tarry here. Give me your hand. Mark me, you don't want to fall into that swift stream.

There. Now look across the ravine... see that crack in the stone's face? You can't see it from higher up because of the sheltering ledge. It opens out into a little cave after a few feet. Wrap yourself up in a cloak, and you've got a haven for the day. There are nice little nooks like that all along here.

Well, it's far better than burying yourself in the forest floor. Carrion-birds and burrowing creatures can't always tell the difference between a dead man and a sleeping Cainite, as I've learned to my sorrow. A hound or pig might dig you half up before you even realize it. I understand that Gangrel can sink into the earth at dawn and pop up again at sunset fresh as daisies, but I haven't managed to talk any into teaching me that trick.

THE BEAST'S LAIR

Hush. Now, you were worried about dragons—here, we must be wary of something far more dangerous. You should tread quietly, out of respect for the dead if naught else.

You've only been in the Blood a few nights, my lad, but surely in your breathing days you heard the stories they tell about this deep wood. Yes, of poor Elton and his vanished family. You thought perhaps those of the Blood were behind his murder, did you? Well, I don't blame you, but know that there are even worse things than that which you have become.

As you grow older, you'll come to hear many terrible stories of the werewolf and its savagery. Listen well. You see,

they, like we, are a legend proved true; and though little remains for you to fear, they're surely among that remainder.

What's worse, they run in packs, like their bestial cousins. There were a pack of them living right here last year when Elton and his children went a-wandering. Heh! Your eyes are starting out of your head. Don't worry. The demons are gone now. Alured the Gangrel speaks with beasts and learned that they have left on some devilish endeavor or another. Perhaps more will come sniffing along someday, but I for one hope not. To face them in single combat is to ask for destruction, or so Alured says.

In the time since their departure, I have noted a few signs left behind by the demons. Do you see that stone there, stood up on end? There are a few more about, and I believe they mark their territory. That's a silent command to stay away, and I suggest you keep it. The earth was also marked with hellish glyphs when I first surveyed it, but they have faded with the rain. I believe they marked some form of altar, surely where Elton was fed to whatever corner of Hell such beasts serve.

Well may you shudder. Let us hope, lad, that you never see one of these creatures. But if you do, run. They are powerful, but your blood can make you fast and strong as well. Fend them off and make for the night.

It's getting close to dawn now; time for bed. Where do you think you're going? Look here—the old oak's rotting out from within, and the trunk's hollow can fit two quite comfortably. Squeeze in under the root there, and we'll block it up with a stone once we're both within. Of course it works. It worked for Alured and I when we first saw this place.

D'you know, the last time I slept here, I dreamed. We vampires dream so rarely. Some magic left in the tree, I suppose. Perhaps it'll happen again today. If you dream too, you must tell me what it was about. Mayhap it'll hold something of our future in it.

BRAMBER CASTLE, AUDIENCE CHAMBER, THE NEXT EVEN

Really.

I confess myself fascinated. A dream, you say.

No, no, I believe you, sir. Scripture recounts many episodes of prophecy in dreams. If only Pilate had heeded as well as you do.

Yes, young Baldwin has been invited the *mêlée*; indeed, we look forward to seeing him. And yes, he is much as you describe, golden hair and a red beard, a portion of flesh missing from the lobe of his left ear. He lost it to a Saracen blade just before his Embrace. He's almost as new in the Blood as you are, sir; a finer, more valiant vassal could hardly be imagined.

WEARING THE WOLF'S HEAD

I take it very kindly that you come to warn us of the threat against him. By God's grace, perhaps the tragedy you foresee shall be averted. Neither he nor you need die for the sake of your sire's foolish vendetta.

Hm? Ah, your sire. Well, you must understand, he has committed crimes against his liege's honor, and more importantly, against the Traditions of Caine. I cannot afford to overlook such things. If he were to sue for pardon, to offer me suitable recompense, that would be another matter; but you have said it yourself. He is too proud, and will never bow to me willingly. It is... regrettable. I understand he is your mortal cousin? Ah. Doubly regrettable, then. My clan believes very strongly in the sacredness of the blood tie.

Nevertheless, you must ask yourself if you are prepared to join him on his dark path to perdition. You did say he has no idea you're here? Ah, that was clever of you. Good.

Let me have a look at you, my young fellow. Your profile is pleasing, and I notice that you "can of courtesy," as they say. Your grandfather a knight? A Crusader? That speaks well of you. And you have dreamed to do the same? Well, I have precious little influence with the Pope, I'm afraid, so you might have to wait a while for that... but the knighthood might be seen to. In time. If you prove yourself worthy of it. In the meantime, you shall have to content yourself with serving me as the new captain of that bandit regiment.

Of course. As I said, there'll always be banditry. I could try to stamp these little vermin out. Perhaps I would even succeed, for a time — though it's not as easy as you might think. I know that my sheriff is indeed mine. He is pledged to me in blood. But when it comes to his bailiffs, I can only do so much to ensure their honesty and courage. I expect at least a few of them have arrangements with your cousin.

No, one simply can't rely on the wheel of justice to tread such men under. Bounty hunters are far more dependable. Such expertise doesn't come cheaply, naturally. My neighbor prince in Kent once managed to rid himself of a particularly stubborn robber gang through the clever device of pardoning a condemned robber to lead a force against them. However, the man also demanded to be made chief forester as a reward. Which he was, until he died mysteriously a few months later. Yet — and this is the salient point — another gang has appeared right in the old one's place, along the same stretch of highway.

As for your cousin's men, of course, I could have sent all the bounty hunters I liked against them, and all in vain. Do you know, it had begun to occur to me that they were much cleverer than most bandits? I should hardly be surprised to find a childe of Caine in charge.

And a childe of Caine will remain in charge. You will prevent the men from harassing my guests, of course; indeed, you will keep a watch on the highway and inform

ASHEN THIEF

me of any Cainites you see traveling along it, so that I may send them escorts as appropriate. You will also ensure that the robbers' greed and bloodthirst stays within reasonable limits. You will report to me on the goings-on in the wilder corners of Sussex. And it may come about, now and again, that I ask you to waylay some particular victim. There are times when an enemy's tools must be disposed of discreetly, and if their misfortune can be blamed on an accident of travel, so much the better.

Don't be ridiculous. Arrangements like these are hardly a novelty among our kind. You've no doubt heard of this or that company of brigands being maintained by this or that mortal lord. Well, the benefits are the same for us as for them. For one thing, there are only so many legitimate ways to profit from the commerce which passes through one's realm. Through you I shall effectively be putting another tariff in place, and one for which no account need be made anywhere. Is it really just that so much wealth should pour through this area, using our highways and waterways, without benefiting the local folk and especially the local ruler?

I have heard of worse uses and abuses, certainly. I don't suppose you know of Mithras yet — your sire hasn't mentioned him. No. Well, I understand that on more than one occasion, great Mithras himself has caused the formation of Cainite-led robber bands in the north — particularly Yorkshire — as a way of distracting his vassals and enemies. You see, a prince's prestige rests on his ability to follow through on promises and threats. If he cannot even convene a summer court in safety, how can he dare hope that any real business of state shall be conducted in his domain? And if nothing of importance takes place in his domain, well, how important can his domain be?

Bandit gangs may serve as a form of extortion against one's neighbors, as well. Mortals rely on this trick constantly. One lord puts forth some proposal or treaty to another lord; the second lord refuses; lo and behold, he finds that his merchants who trade within the first lord's territory are plagued as never before by thieves and murderers. If he complains, he receives nothing but a shrug of the shoulders in return. Being an observant fellow, or so one hopes, eventually he's sure to notice that no one else's citizens endure such treatment — but that's because they, unlike him, have agreed to be reasonable. Soon afterward, he too shall concede whatever is requested of him. This ruse has also served many a Cainite master well.

Then, though you may not believe it, there are a few Cainites who host robbers against their will. Indeed. Well, young sir, as you come to learn more about our ways, you will understand. Most of us labor under various obligations of honor. For instance, an age-old Ventrue tradition dictates that if another of the clan should formally request hospitality from me, I am compelled to

give him at least a night and a day's worth, even if the petitioner is an ancient enemy. Only if the petitioner is guilty of breaking a Tradition is this obligation lifted. Not that one night of hospitality is all *that* useful to a bandit, unless he happens to be on the run.

And there are certainly other situations in which one finds oneself forced to keep company with the disreputable. You've already encountered one, alas. I daresay you didn't realize, when you agreed to the Embrace, that your sire was wanted by Cainite as well as mortal authorities? He neglected to mention it? Well, there you have it. Blood is thicker than water, as they say. And it works the other way as well. Hardly an elder in Christendom is without... embarrassments among his childer. But if he disowns them, refuses to receive them when they call, it only draws further attention to the scandal; and in any case, petty immoralities like robbing and killing mortals are hardly considered sufficient grounds for such a rejection. Ties of marriage can be similarly entangling. And finally, there are obligations of prestation. Even an unasked-for favor must be repaid upon demand. As a result, I know of several princes in England who must play host, willy-nilly, to scoundrels and mercenaries. Of course, if one must, regardless of whether one profits by it or not, then one may as well profit.

That's good advice for you as well.

Besides, there are matters of security at stake. You must learn to think of yourself as one of a ruling class, young sir. We rule over the humans, even if they don't realize it. And like all subjects, they have a tendency to become... discontented now and again. Most of them are cattle by nature, too cowardly ever to rebel against their betters. But far too many know quite well how to take up arms and get what they want by force.

By managing these bandits for me, you shall mollify one of the more shiftless and dangerous populations of men in my realm. That protects all of us. Heylyn of the Oaken Tower — ah, have you heard of him? A bold leader, but also a careless one. It seems one of his squires came to realize what he truly was, took control of the band, and led the men on a raiding tour of Dorsetshire. Somehow he managed to wrest a number of secrets out of his former master. Three Cainites were burned to death in their own havens before the massacre could be stopped, and I firmly believe that blasted squire is still running around some corner of England with that blasted Tremere trinket. An object lesson in caution, young sir; take it to heart.

Now come. We must have our plans well-laid. I want your sire to survive to stand trial if at all possible. Let me summon my scourge now, for he's very clever at the strategy for this sort of thing. What's that? A scullery maid? Treachery in my kitchen! Well, you can't trust anyone anymore....

STORYTELLING FOR BRIGAND CHARACTERS

Oh, sure, it sounds as though it *should* be easy. Robin Hood with fangs, right? The idea has an immediate swash-buckling appeal. However, actually structuring a chronicle around a band of Cainite merry men (or even one Cainite plus ghouls/mortal consorts) presents a number of logistical and dramatic difficulties. A few obstacles to be aware of:

- **Isolation.** The traditional theater of vampiric conflict is the court, that infamous nest of intrigue. Although players' characters need not be habitués of Elysium to become involved in such plots, they must either dwell in close proximity, or have reliable means of keeping informed of events and influencing them in turn. Cainite courts certainly exist outside the major cities and towns of Europe, but they tend to be far smaller; indeed, they often consist simply of a prince and his personal brood, with occasional visiting guests. The opportunities for direct vampire-versus-vampire rivalry are thus spread far thinner for rural characters, particularly Cainite "outlaws" and officials like the scourge who spend a great deal of time under starlight.

- **The Outlaw Coterie.** When you think about it, there are very few reasons for Cainites to take up the brigand's way *en masse*. Yes, it's a quick path to riches, if done strategically. However, steep problems face such characters as well, particularly feeding and shelter. The more vampires in the group, the less local vitae there is to go around. Nor does it take multiple immortals to overpower the usual prey of brigands, and more substantial victims (such as fellow Cainites) probably pass through only occasionally. Thus, while it might make sense for a coterie to contrive a few ambushes against specific targets, the justification for a whole gang dwelling in the forest full-time is fairly thin.

- **The Silence of Blood.** Cainites who wish to make their fortunes as brigands will certainly want a substantial group of mortals in their employ. After all, clear superiority of numbers is the best way to ensure victims' speedy and bloodless surrender. Smaller shares of loot, yes, but it's worth the greater chance of living to rob again, isn't it? And while a would-be robber-king can insulate himself from having to deal closely with his men if necessary (by using ghoul proxies for example), that deprives a character who is already largely isolated from Cainite society of another major opportunity for social interaction. On the other hand, if the character uses a more hands-on style of management (more fun for all concerned), then he must contend almost nightly with the question of how to either conceal his true nature or put it in the most flattering light possible.

- **Torchlight vs. Halogen.** The true curse of Dark Ages vampires: mortals simply aren't as active in the evening as they will be in centuries to come. That especially applies to

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travel. People don't ride at night when they can help it, even on the smoothest highway. Non-ghoul horses stumble in the dark, and during the new moon or on overcast nights, human beings can't see past the few yards of illumination a lamp or torch provides. Even most raids take place during the day (particularly raids on markets, a favorite tactic of medieval brigands), although there's at least some strategic justification for descending upon a sleeping inn or village. The day-to-day business of brigandry is just that — day to day — which cuts vampires out of much of the fun.

SOLUTIONS

All that said, there are a number of ways to overcome, or, more to the point, sidestep these obstacles while milking the outlaw legend for every drop of story potential:

- **Deeper Characterization.** Since the cast of characters for a Sherwood Forest chronicle is likely to be smaller than that for one set in, say, Constantinople, the Storyteller must ensure that all the *dramatis personae*, including the players' coterie, are even more richly layered than usual.

Not a single character should go to waste, most especially not the villain. The device of a shadowy, nigh-invincible nemesis who is suggested largely through the actions of her pawns and henchmen won't give nearly as much mileage here as in a city chronicle. You need a villain who is truly fun to hate — even if she's not intended to serve as chief villain for the entire chronicle, let her make the most of the spotlight while she's got it. Try making her as clever and powerful as the combined coterie, so that the chronicle can careen satisfyingly to and fro as heroes and villain exchange tenuous victories and narrow defeats. Feel free to provide lucky breaks as needed, within reason. Give everyone in the setting a detailed past, as well as strong feelings about a number of issues (religion, class, current mortal wars, royal successions, the elders of the region, etc.).

- **Mortals, Mortals, Mortals.** An extension of the same principle. As noted above, your Cainite brigands are likely to be dealing more closely with mortals than most other vampires. Make their cohorts and victims colorful (especially the more despicable types), and spend a lot of time demonstrating how the vagaries of these people's petty existences affect the characters. Yes, the cheapness of mortal life is a potent theme for **Vampire** games in general and **Dark Ages** games in particular, but the theme is doubly potent when demonstrated on mortals that the characters have come to appreciate, even as comic relief. Robin wouldn't have been much good at all without Little John and Much the Miller's Son; don't let anybody forget that.

Don't let the myriad rural settings where mortals can be encountered go to waste, either. The woods can host hermits, poaching villeins and royal huntsmen alike; the local monastery and its neighboring village are bound to be hotbeds of minor dramas; ditto for the local manor and its neighboring village, whether or not any Cainites reside there.

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A band of human brigands with a vampire chief is far more plausible than one with multiple Cainites. If your chronicle's robber band fits this model, consider letting the other players in the troupe create mortal characters in the brigand band for part-time or even full-time play.

- **Sponsorship.** It's all too common for brigands and highwaymen to collude with local lords, magnates and officials. If your players' characters have made such arrangements with a nearby vampire, that can serve both as a connection to the wider circles of Cainite society and as a source of endless story hooks. The characters will certainly end up getting entangled in their patron's intrigues whether they like it or not (after all, they're too useful a tool to ignore), particularly if their patron also supports a brood or a Cainite court.

Alternatively, you might cast the characters themselves as the lordly sponsors, which gives you, as Storyteller, more freedom. The characters can take an active role in the brigand band more or less as it pleases them — he who pays the rent runs the show — and then leave it in the hands of surrogates when they must attend to more traditional plot lines in their elders' city and country courts. (Make sure that their patronage of criminals gets them into political trouble more than once!) This approach also helps solve some of the logistical problems, since the characters will have a manor house or perhaps even a fortified castle at their disposal. On the other hand, it does undercut the mystique of rebels living by their wits in the wild greenwood.

- **Rebels With A Cause.** On *that* subject: If your chronicle is built around a gang of bona fide woodland robber-vampires who must get along without easy access to well-fed vessels and soft havens, they'd better have a good reason to be doing what they're doing.

Is it survival? Do they literally have no other option? Is there some reason why they can't simply leave the area and try to find a more comfortable existence elsewhere? Is it a burning vendetta, and if so, why do they all share this common hatred? And how long can you as Storyteller keep the vendetta from being satisfied, and what happens after that? Is it greed, and if so, why are they taking this particular get-rich-quick route? What do they plan to do with their ill-gotten gains? How did they meet? Were they fellow-brigands in mortal life who got Embraced together somehow and just haven't thought to change careers, or were they all originally captains of separate bands who have now agreed to combine forces? The better the answers to these questions, the more easily plot lines will develop.

A noble cause is, of course, the very stuff of legend, so it's worth it to your players to try to find one... or to make their characters *paint* their cause as noble, whatever the reality of the matter. Rebellions have a tendency to live on in story and song, even when the historical truth is nowhere near as pretty. Moreover, there are always (at least) two sides to every story, and most criminals are justified in their own minds.

An outlaw chronicle that takes on such moral overtones provides a perfect opportunity to show the disturbingly fine distinctions between war and brigandage (picture, for instance, an Outremer chronicle where the characters, as Crusaders, are essentially brigands for Christ); between true justice and suppression of dissidence; between legitimate and *de facto* authority; between violence in the name of whatever and violence for its own sake (if your coterie consists of hopeless idealists, consider letting their precious cause degenerate horribly over time as they and their followers lose touch with their roots); between real vampiric depredations and the metaphorical vampirism of mortal authorities; and much, much more.

Have fun.

BRIGANDS BEYOND THE WOOD

This chapter has focused on those criminals most associated with the term "brigand": robbers and highwaymen who prey on travelers through the forests and countryside of Europe. And given the importance of this setting to *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, that's quite appropriate. There are other places where bandits and thieves ply their trade, however, and some mention needs to be made of them. The following sections should serve as primers for your own imagination.

THE TALES OF DEAD MEN: DARK MEDIEVAL PIRACY

Some mention deserves to be made of what is, after all, a trade as old as seafaring, which itself is practically as old as civilization. Alas, 1197 is not a peak year for piracy (although it certainly continues to plague every ocean known to man). In Outremer, the Crusades once again freshly haunt local memory, ever since King Richard recently marauded up the coast of Palestine — taking the island of Cyprus in the process. Still, the peace treaty he signed afterward with Saladin is still in effect (though not for long).

The Hospitalers retain only Tripoli from their major holdings. By the end of the coming century, they are further exiled to Cyprus; upon becoming compulsory islanders, they turn their military genius more and more to naval pursuits, and by the 14th century, under their new name of the Knights of Rhodes, they number among the most notorious pirates and corsairs of the Mediterranean. All that is far in the future, of course. Still, passions in the Holy Land run high in the wake of the war, and where there's ill will, there's inevitably privateering, on the part of Christians and Muslims both. No doubt the Hospitalers contribute their fair share to the effort even at this early date. The diminished Crusader States, now hemmed in on a narrow strip of freshly regained coastline, depend heavily upon Italian shipping for their trade

goods. Cutting off that supply line would undoubtedly devastate them, perhaps even crush them for all time....

The Balearic Islands of Spain, particularly Majorca, are under strong Islamic rule at the moment. Indeed, Majorca itself is now powerful enough to offer its protection (which, obviously, comes with strings attached) to a number of ports on the African coast with which it trades extensively. It has become astonishingly rich on this commerce, and Palma, its major city, is famous for its bakeries, bathhouses and palaces.

However, trouble brews even in this paradise. The eternally feuding maritime states of Pisa and Genoa continue to harass each other for dominance over the Mediterranean trade routes; Majorca is a prize either of them would pay dearly to get, not only because of its importance as a trade port, but also because it would serve as an excellent launching pad for corsair attacks against either city's ships. Majorca's government also has an ongoing rivalry with the mainland Muslims. In the face of these multiple conflicts, it becomes progressively weaker and more vulnerable to piracy, particularly after a revolt and subsequent conquest by the Almohads.

Sicily and Malta have been back in Christian hands for a little over a century, but their nobles still remember the lessons learned under the Muslim pirates and corsairs. Indeed, the current Count of Malta (the Genoese captain Guglielmo Grasso) and his recently deposed predecessor are both famed for their piratical exploits. While the Maltese fleets raid Muslim ships with great gusto, they don't necessarily forbear from attacking Christian merchantmen and cities either — particularly those belonging to the hated Venetian/Byzantine mercantile empire. The King of Sicily, for his part, seems perfectly happy with the situation. At any rate, his corsairs continue to enjoy their customary privilege of not having to pay import tax on foods. Corsica and Sardinia, while not at their apogee, remain eternally attractive to pirates seeking a base of operations.

On the Adriatic Sea, Venice and Hungary vie for control of the Dalmatian ports. Venice being good for business, the port cities tend to favor the Italians at present. Although Venice makes a point of clamping down on piracy (the piracy of *others*, that is), and has indeed succeeded in crushing the vast Narentan fleets, the Omis raiders continue to practice their hereditary craft.

Meanwhile, on the North and Baltic Seas, one of the great mercantile empires of the world is about to be born. The marriage of Hamburg's salt trade to Lübeck's herring trade has propelled both of them onto the stage of world commerce. In the years to come, a number of German and Baltic ports will join their budding association: the Hanseatic League. Not only will the *Hansa* eventually come to dominate trade as far away as Russia, it will also prove a staunch (and well-funded) foe of piracy in northern waters. Of course, many merchants come to regard the *Hansa's* aggressive trade strategies as little more than the civilized version of a Viking raid, but that is beside the point.

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YOU SAY PIRATE, I SAY CORSAIR...

As with the line between a soldier and a brigand, the line between a corsair (or privateer) and a pirate is a slender one indeed. In theory, all of a corsair's or privateer's deeds are rightful acts of war or reprisal, conducted against a recognized enemy. In practice, the majority of seafaring raiders end up preying on friendly and hostile vessels both; so the definition of any one raider as a corsair, privateer or pirate depends largely on the attitude of the present speaker.

PIRATE TACTICS

Many of the basic concerns facing land-based brigands also bedevil pirates: where to corner the foe, how to overwhelm the foe without getting oneself killed, how to obtain booty in a negotiable form, where to hide afterward. However, although there certainly exists a maritime equivalent of the king's highway (trade routes are relatively fixed in these dark days, since sailors remain at the mercy of seasonal winds and currents, as well as their primitive navigation methods), travel by sea presents its own unique challenges. As a result, pirates must employ methods somewhat different from those of their earthbound colleagues:

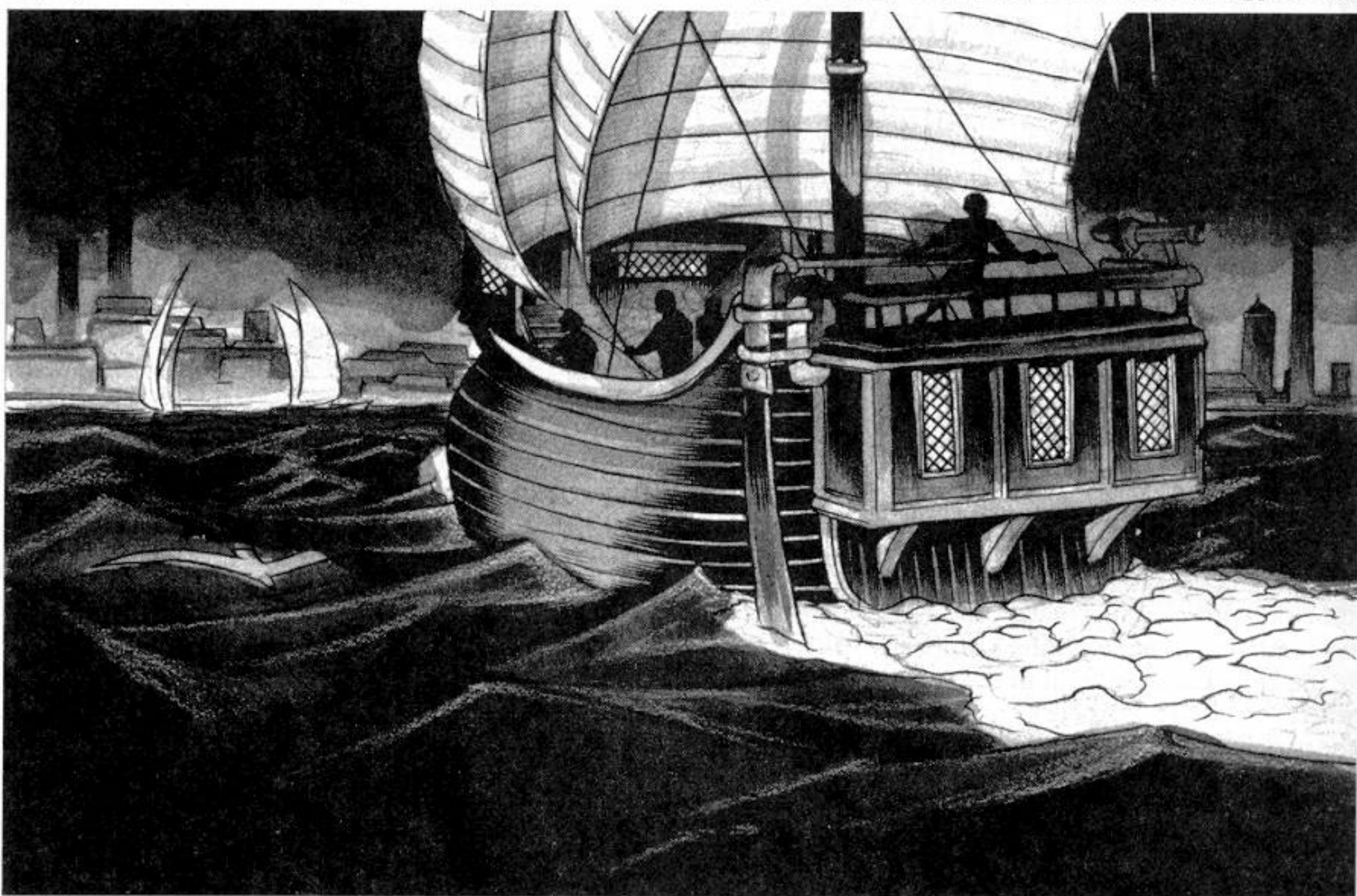
- **Maneuverability:** Pirates don't always have the advantage of numbers. Merchant ships, particularly large cargo ships, prefer to travel in convoys whenever possible. Clever

seamanship, however, can make up for a lack of raw force. Thus, pirates tend to prefer smaller, defter, lighter vessels. The superior handling makes all sorts of clever tactics possible, such as darting in between enemy ships to break up their formation, pulling up close to board a ship or ram its sides and circling rapidly around for repeated archery attacks.

- **Deception:** Although national flags *per se* are not yet in use, ships do fly colors; flying under false colors, then, is certainly a valid strategy even at this early date. A captured or copied flag can allow the pirate vessel to sail right up to its victims without fear; once they are close enough that the enemy's vessel (which is usually clumsier, particularly if loaded down with cargo) can't get away quickly, the pirates reveal their true nature and make their demands.

Other forms of bluffing are equally important tools in the pirate's arsenal: Pirate vessels should be well-armed in order to frighten the enemy into surrender, but in truth, it's to the pirate's advantage to damage the ship and its occupants as little as possible. Damage to the ship can result in the loss of booty and prisoners, by the same token, can be held for ransom (if they're rich), hired on as crewmen (if they're skilled) or enslaved (if they're neither rich nor skilled). Waste not, want not is the pirate's way.

- **Mercy:** Believe it or not, a reputation for going easy on captured victims (once they're overpowered, of course) can work to pirates' advantage. After all, the majority of people on a ship are usually crew, who, unless they too happen to be



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raiders, often have only their wages to motivate them. If they know they won't be harmed, many will gladly surrender without a fight. Even merchant captains whose own cargo is at stake can frequently be persuaded to give up a portion of their treasure if it will avoid bloodshed and the devastating losses that a battle might bring; but if they have reason to suspect that the pirates won't honor a promise of mercy, they're far less likely to be reasonable.

• **Friends in High (and Low) Places:** As with landlubber thieves, all the loot in the world isn't much good if you can't spend it. Although pirates prefer, in times of real desperation, to seek out remote havens protected by mountainous coastline (this is why they love Wales so dearly) and treacherously narrow marine passages, the merchants willing to sail out to such godforsaken locales to buy stolen goods are a sparse and stingy lot.

Fortunately, any number of seafaring nations count themselves privileged to take pirate custom: to repair their ships, buy their wares, change their foreign silver, ply them with a constant stream of venal pleasures and so forth. Governors of outlying territories, unhappy with the relative meagerness of their lot and eager to make useful friends, are often particularly accommodating. Monarchs, for their part, happily overlook and even abet piracy as long as it causes more trouble to their current enemies than to themselves. Corsairs should always be wary of their powerful patrons, however; politics in the Dark Medieval world are notoriously unstable, and a man can find himself degraded from needed ally to superfluous embarrassment in less than a heartbeat.

• **Cowardice:** Don't tell the poets, but most pirate ships simply sail away if their victims begin to put up a determined resistance. After all, as has been pointed out, pirate ships generally enjoy greater maneuverability — no reason not to use it. Unless there's some specific reason to suspect that a particular enemy holds a cargo worth the risk of dying to discover, of course.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

A few ship types for the main Dark Ages period (note that the difference between a pirate ship and a legitimate ship is largely in how it's used and armed):

buss: A more up-to-date version of the knarr (see below). Chiefly used for fishing and coastal trade.

cog: A workhorse of a merchant ship, with a right stern and high sides (which discourages unwanted boarding). When weighted at the bottom with cargo or ballast, the cog is exceptionally stable. A good choice for longer voyages.

dhow: An ancient style of lateen-rigged ship, widely used throughout the Muslim world. (Lateen sails represent a great advance over the square sail, but it will take the Westerners some time yet to incorporate it.) Can be single- or double-masted. Traditionally, planks are sewn together with coconut fiber rather than nailed, a practice

which Arab shipwrights gradually abandon as they begin to experiment with Western construction techniques.

galea: A smaller, lighter, faster version of the Byzantine galley, originally designed for spy missions, which makes it quite useful as a pirate vessel.

galley: An ancient form of vessel, primarily propelled by oars and used mainly in the Mediterranean where the doldrums (a lack of wind to propel a sailing ship) are common.

hulk: Similar to the cog, and often confused with it.

knarr: The classic Viking-style longship, which continues to be used, though less and less widely, throughout the Middle Ages. A fleet ship, its shallow draft permits it to be beached easily almost anywhere, thus providing pirate captains with a convenient method for escaping enemies and raiding coastal settlements. (Particularly determined raiders have even been known to convey it overland across an isthmus in order to confound pursuit.)

nef: A generic French word for "ship," but in this period it most often refers to a common type of Western European single-masted square-sailed ship with a high stern and prow, a starboard rudder, and sometimes one or more "castles" fore and aft.

THE BANU SASAN: ROGUES OF ARABY

"He has slept with the Sufis, has banged his food-bag on the side of the mihrab, and has slept under the rush mats in the mosques..."

—Beggar proverb

Although it is the focus of *The Ashen Thief*, Western Europe certainly has no monopoly on brigands and other ne'er-do-wells. Indeed, the tremendous civic and technological achievements of Islamic society are not without their dark reflection. When (and if) Crusaders wash back up on the western shores of the Bosphorus, their awe-filled tales recount not only the ingenuity of the Arab physicians, but also that of the Arab scoundrels. Arguably the most remarkable of these are the Banu Sasan.

The "Sons of Sasan" like to claim descent from Persian royalty — Shaikh Sasan was supposedly an imperial heir who, upon being cheated out of his succession, took to the vagabond life; but whatever the original truth of that legend, the Banu Sasan brotherhood now encompasses a multitude of ethnicities and professions. It shelters Arabs, Kurds, Persians, Bedouins, Kabulis and Rrom; blind beggars, false cripples, bear-trainers, astrologers, street-preachers, housebreakers and hardened killers all find their place in its thronging masses. Even the term "brotherhood" is a misnomer, for many women belong as well (as the jargon attests — for instance, *baz* refers to a beggar woman who is faking paralysis, *baghla* to one faking blindness).

The common denominator, if there is one, is deceit. Even in 1197, a burgeoning literature testifies to the cleverness of Sasani tricks — now with ostensible disapproval, now with

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THE CAINITE PERSPECTIVE: A CRUSADER ADMIRAL'S GLOAT

... and so you see, my dearest sister in Blood, that while I cannot prosecute the Amaranth against Hanif al-Din Bakr al-Mubarrak because he is a godless infidel, I may certainly pursue him for the wanton breach of Tradition, and the *Amici* will be well satisfied.

Now, thanks be to Him that died for us — and to your cleverness, of course — my enemy has provided us that opening. All that remains is to prove his carelessness to the *Amici*. It is my sincere belief that if his mortal lieutenant is shipwrecked and finds that he must either drink from the wrist of a Frank or succumb to the decay that has awaited him so long, he will drink; and then I shall have all the secrets I require from him. Accordingly, I have spoken to the Venetian, who has agreed to captain the effort on my behalf.

I can fairly hear you now, cautioning me to be wary with the scoundrel. Never fear! I have sailed on expeditions of war and parley quite often enough to know a pirate when I see one, and that he undoubtedly is. But unless his necromancy has taught him tricks even the Devil would blush to know, none of his pasty ilk will ever be able to match one of the Magister's blood in seamanship. Can they call up the void to blacken the waters so that even Cainite ships run aground thinking they have not yet reached their depth, and make a cloaking gloom descend over an entire convoy of vessels? Can they call up false silhouettes of villages on the shore and sirens on the rock, to lure unwary sailors to their doom? Does the great Deep flow through their heart and soul, as it does ours? Until it does, and until he can, he dare not betray me.

He has, of course, requested a favor from me in exchange for seeing to it that the *Tres Magos* of Túy meets its unfortunate end. It seems there is a certain young student in Toledo — some little Norman barbarian from the wilds of the Boulonnais, named Eustace — who presently seeks to ingratiate himself with that notorious cabal of sorcerers at the University, and without much luck. My Venetian friend wishes me to arrange for the young man's removal to his care. You would think there were enough aspiring wizards in his own miserable swamp! Perhaps he hopes to disrupt his clan's mortal enemies in Toledo, or perhaps he has some other wicked thing in mind entirely. In any case, it is a simple, even modest request, and I do not see how I can deny it him when my enemy is so nearly within my grasp....

outright admiration, but always with the titillating details. The chroniclers devote special attention to the ways in which Arabic science can be put to wicked use. A concoction of dragon's blood, gum arabic and gum tragacanth can raise

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piteous sores; indigo-leaf, basil, cubeb and green vitriol, when boiled up and smeared on the skin, produces the effect of leprosy. Should mere leprosy fail to elicit onlookers' charity, razor blades can produce wounds "delivered by the *jinn*," while even more radical procedures involving animal windpipes can simulate severe hemorrhoids. Ground mustard in a cloth or olive oil can help the false pilgrim to Mecca conjure up a storm of convincing tears. Clever metallurgy can dress up a worthless bronze trinket with a precious-looking veneer. (If all this industry seems excessive, bear in mind what a highly competitive profession false-seeming can be. After all, there's only so much coin out there, and it always goes to whoever seems the most deserving.)

Yet despite the numerous exposés, the *akhshan* — the dupes — keep flocking back to get fleeced. As in the Christian world, almsgiving is recognized as a prerequisite to Muslim piety. The Prophet himself reportedly admonished the faithful, "Give to a beggar, even if he appears before you mounted on horseback!" And like Christians, Muslims have a romantic attachment to the figure of the mendicant holy man. This mystique cloaks and protects the able-bodied beggars of the Banu Sasan somewhat. As for the other disreputables, as long as they can steer clear of the *muhtasib* (an official charged with maintenance of order in markets and other public spaces, among other things) and the *shurta* (city guard), they can enjoy all the riches a gullible world has to offer. Or so the Sasaki poets would have one believe.

A LEXICON OF SARACEN THIEVERY

If only to provide a glimmer of the variety of Sasaki endeavors, following are a few definitions and jargon terms. Use them to pepper a visit to the East and to spark ideas for deceptions far and wide.

akhshan: (sing. *khushni*) Outsiders, dupes.

anbar: A place for dividing up or storing spoils. Sometimes a rented space, in which case the owner is sure to demand a cut of the take.

buhlul: A master beggar. Beggar-men in particular are expected to take on young lads as "squires" (and, if you believe the poets, catamites). Accounts also speak of Sasaki shaikhs, hinting at another, higher level of organization. Presumably these bosses would organize a system for collecting dues in exchange for their "protection" and arbitration. (After all, what good is a fancy title if it doesn't net you anything?)

dar al-qaum: A beggars' house. These are usually transient affairs at best, but while the *dar al-qaum* is in use, beggars who are too sick to work their usual rounds can come to it for soup and other handouts from their fellows.

ghazi: A fighter for the faith. Many a beggar takes on the persona of a *ghazi*, raising funds to return to the front, to ransom captured colleagues or to mount a renewed war effort somewhere. Posing as a refugee can bring much the same results. Some beggars even swallow their tongues and, via a companion or wax tablet, explain that the enemy has mutilated them.

hadhur: A circle of mountebanks, astrologers, quacks, amulet-makers and other such charlatan miracle-workers.

hakiya: A mimic, especially one who can pretend to be a foreigner or converted infidel in order to work a confidence game.

khannaq: A "strangler" — that is, a thief who murders his victims. Most operate by either befriending and betraying or else drugging their marks; many pose as travelers or pilgrims, which gives them a convenient excuse to hook up with other travelers.

mastaba: A raised platform in front of a mosque. The Banu Sasan can't practice their trade in the mosque itself, but the *mastaba* and the *suffa* (the mosque's portico) are marvelous staging grounds for tricks of all sorts. Fake relics of Muslim heroes' tombs are easily sold there, and pickpockets can take advantage of many distractions (whether real or staged). One class of beggars specializes in creating obnoxious disturbances just outside the mosque until the beleaguered worshippers pay them to go away. Others, in a medieval version of the windshield-cleaning, sprinkle rosewater on passerby and then demand payment for services rendered. Mosques are a popular place for paupers to spend the night; the stokeholds of bathhouses and kitchens, however, are warmer — one can frequently tell a beggar from the ashes on his back.

muna'is: Shoplifters who prey on market carts.

munaghat: Cant, argot.

musta'rid: A con artist posing as a "distressed gentleman" who has lost everything to fire or infidels. *Musta'rids* are highly respected, being comparatively big-time operators.

muzankil: One who preys upon pilgrims to Mecca. A common ruse is to offer to complete the arduous journey on a weary pilgrim's spiritual behalf — for a fee, of course. Another is for the trickster to stand by the road weeping over the carcass of a dead camel, and explain to passing "fellow pilgrims" that without money for a new mount, his holy mission is doomed to failure; in a more gruesome version, he might stand over the corpse of a man instead, and beg money for his "friend's" funeral shroud.

nabbash: A grave-robber. (Evidently this is a common occupation. Cappadocians, beware.)

naqqab: A thief who specializes in tunneling into people's cellars. Other housebreakers employ an accomplice to distract the targets — for instance, by posing as a member of the *shurta* city-guard and leading the family off on "official business."

qass: (also *wu'az*) A street preacher and storyteller. Like the wandering friars of Europe, these Muslim orators are condemned by the higher religious authorities; but, as in Europe, this hardly hurts their popularity. A wise *qass* can tell stories of the Alids' martyrdom to gain Shi'ite sympathies and pontificate on the virtues of Abu Bakr to get Sunni coin. If he is especially clever, he might plant a *kan* (stooge) in the audience to whip up enthusiasm, or even a *qanna'* (one who pretends to be an infidel and is "converted" to Islam over the course of the sermon). Beggars also frequently pose as Sufi

wise men or dervishes, and perform any number of "supernatural" feats to prove their mystic power.

sahib at-tariq: A "gentleman of the road" — i.e., a highwayman. *Mutashabbiha* is an old term for masked bandits.

tarrar: A common pickpocket. Other simple variants of the thief's trade include the practice of standing on rooftops with a hooked pole and fishing from passing wagons, as well as the delightfully simple ruse of stopping in the street to urinate, and when the folk nearby avert their eyes out of modesty, grabbing their goods and running off.

zakuriyyun: Beggars who carry a special food-bag for going door-to-door. Door-to-door begging is a highly prestigious, specialized and competitive field: *mughallis*, for instance, catch people on their way to work, while the *'isha'an* catch families at suppertime.

ISLAMIC CAINITES, CRIME AND THE BANU SASAN

Christian Cainites have no monopoly on roguery. A wide variety of Islamic vampires gain benefit from mortal thieves, beggars and con artists or partake in these crimes themselves. Specialized skills like the *naqqab's* proficiency at entering underground dwellings can be very useful in violating an enemy's haven, for example. The Followers of Set are quite numerous in Islamic regions and do not hesitate to use false-seeming and other practices in the service of their dark god.

Clan Assamite — more properly the Children of Haqim — usually try to limit these activities in the areas they influence, much like Ventrue and Lasombra princes do in Europe. The clan's vizier caste includes a fair number of legal scholars from many traditions, and they have little tolerance for thieves and charlatans. The warrior caste, despite an increasing willingness to partake in murder for hire, has embraced a certain Islamic militancy. Vampiric *muzankil* and *qass* had best beware, especially given that many other local Cainites also have strong feelings about Islam.

The Banu Sasan themselves are largely a mortal phenomenon, although one that has attracted Cainite attention. A wide variety of vampires have piggy-backed onto the brotherhood, making ghouls or servants of various members, for their own purposes. After all, skilled thieves, beggars and con artists make excellent spies. A Ravnos named Abu-Jamal has been more ambitious than most, trying to gain influence over larger parts of the brotherhood. So far he and his brood have managed to impact the flow of coin in parts of Egypt, and they are expanding into the Levant. However, his attempts to move into Damascus and Jerusalem have attracted the unwanted attention of his powerful clanmate Varsik (see *Jerusalem by Night*). A reckoning between the two Charlatans — with the Banu Sasan caught in the middle — may well be in order.

WEARING THE WOLF'S HEAD





Chapter Three: Flames of The Furies

Violence and injury enclose in their
net all that do such things, and gener-
ally return upon him who began
— Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*

The hatchet rose, its edge a glittering line in the torchlight. The ghoul stood stolidly on the gravel of the courtyard. The elder Cainite stroked his chin.

"Do you understand how you have failed me, Philippe?"

The young Cainite grimaced, his wrist laid across the hatchet-scarred stump where the manor's chickens traditionally shuffled off the mortal coil. "Yes, sire."

"Do you understand that I do not tolerate failure, that it breeds more failure?"

"Yes, sire."

"Amputate the hand, Artur."

The ghoul brought the hatchet down with practiced skill. The hand twitched for a moment on the block, as if it, like the chickens, might scuttle off. Then it collapsed into ash.

"You might think your little faux pas was minor, Philippe, and you might hate me for what I do, but my sire did it to me, and I think there's a lesson to be learned. Everything is critical — we don't live in a world that's tolerant of failure."

"I dripped wax on your cloak, master."

"Our world is not very tolerant of insolence either, Philippe. Artur, take the other hand as well."

The ghoul nodded, and the white-faced young Cainite placed his other wrist on the block. Inside, he boiled, but not now, and not here. There would come a time, though. Someday, there would come a time.

For the young neonate, Cainite society is often quite oppressive. Vampires are usually strongly overmatched by their sires, and their society as a whole favors the old over the young, the strong over the weak. For every Cainite for whom unlife is a gift or a liberation, there is another who spends her existence as a virtual slave to her sire and elders, either bound by the blood oath or simply hopelessly in their debt and thrall.

This servitude doesn't necessarily mean that the vampire is her sire's servant and lackey (though it often does). Being the object of a hopelessly enraptured elder Cainite's affection is at least as terrible a fate as being his servant — indeed, it is quite likely worse. The elder is far more likely to subject his "true love" to the blood oath than a mere catspaw.

For unfortunates, immortality means an eternity of servitude. They cannot escape, or dare not. While this may seem like cowardice, it is not. Many paramours and minions know all too much about their sires' comings and goings and plans to be allowed to flee. After having seen

the way elder Cainites deal with the disloyal, many such childer choose to suffer an agonizing night-to-night existence rather than the wrath of their sires and broodmates.

Other Cainites restrain their childer from rebellion by misinformation. Some teach their childer that diablerie is the common custom of Cainites, that the childer must lay in a particular grave or tomb under pain of death, or that there are a bare handful of vampires in the world, and that flight means an eternity alone.

Finally, there are those who simply cannot run. Some are held under the blood oath and thus cannot conscience the thought of abandoning their sires. Others have something they love, typically mortal relatives or paramours, who will suffer at their sires' hands if they flee. Others are just too well-watched.

Between witch-hunters and Lupines, territorial fellow-vampires and the simple difficulty of surviving on the road, the lot of a traveling vampire is a difficult one. A sensible and experienced Cainite is unlikely to bolt without preparation — hoarded funds, a moderately safe, pre-arranged haven in a new location and ghouls or other servants to watch over and protect him during the daylight hours. A paranoid sire (and most sires who abuse or ruthlessly manipulate their childer are quite paranoid) can make it very difficult indeed for these vampires to get the wherewithal to flee and have any real chance of survival.

Yet some *do* flee rather than endure the tyranny of their sires. Some run without preparation and are fast and lucky enough to get away with it. Others wait until their masters become casualties in the War of Ages, slip into torpor or become distracted with some new plaything or pet project. Some lucky few even manage to secretly scrape together the resources necessary to make an honest go of existence elsewhere, and a tiny handful manage to destroy their sires.

In every case, the young vampire typically endures years or decades of abuse and servitude prior to making his break. Regardless of how the Cainite gains his freedom, he soon finds himself in an unpleasant position. Vampiric peers are everywhere — the Church, temporal governments, even criminal gangs and mortal trade associations. Now, without his sire's power and influence, he must make his own way in a society that goes out of its way to punish impudent youth.

Some do succeed, scrabbling their way upward to legitimacy, either through the established channels or by seeking new ways to expand their might. Most often, these Cainites end up perpetuating the very system from which they fled — siring broods of childer to look after their affairs and falling prey to increasing paranoia as they become swept up in the intrigues of the War of Ages. Such vampires are dealt with elsewhere — indeed, they are the basic character type for **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.

The vampires that are dealt with here are those who attempt to break with this cycle and find a new mode of existence. Like the Prometheans, the Furores wish to build a utopian world, but unlike the Firebringers, they have no desire to stand as equals to the kine. Like the Autarkis, they

HOW BAD CAN IT BE?

Reading this section, you can easily get the impression that every young Cainite is a maltreated wretch whose sire lies to, manipulates and shamelessly exploits him. Obviously, this isn't the case. Some sires treat their childer quite well. However, very few of the fortunate childer end up becoming Furores, and so this section isn't going to talk about them very much. That doesn't mean they don't exist, only that they're not germane to the material at hand.

ASHEN THIEF

FUORES AND MODERN FREEDOM

At the turn of the millennium, we stand at the end of almost four centuries of serious debate about freedom, liberty and the responsibilities of the individual and community. Most Furores know none of this — they exist long centuries before any of the thinkers who laid the groundwork for the modern world.

While the Furores want liberty, they do not necessarily want it on terms that we would be comfortable with. There is no reason for the average Furore to favor democracy or socialism over enlightened autocracy, communism, bureaucracy or any other form of government. Likewise, there is no reason to assume that these Cainites will perceive any difference between Church and State. These ideals are very much products of the modern era, and will not begin developing in earnest until after the Reformation. Indeed, few are likely to have even read the Classical works of Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides.

When portraying a Furore, try keep in mind that while we have well-developed preconceptions about liberty, justice and individual rights, the character almost certainly does not. She is the product of a militarized, theocratic aristocracy who has never really known anything else, stabbing in the dark to build a better tomorrow.

wish to bring the War of Ages to a close, but unlike the Self-Ruled, they are unwilling to just opt out of the system. The Furores are revolutionaries. There are many voices and many solutions, but the pressing need to change, to find a better way even at the cost of war, unites these Cainites.

HISTORY

"And so you're telling me that this is somehow unavoidable, that we should just lay down and let these thugs — our own progeny — have their way with us?"

The Brujah elder shook his head. "No, what I'm saying is that they're part of the natural process. That this has happened before. That the more we push them, the harder they'll push back."

"That is foolish. They are in rebellion. One squashes rebels. That is how one deals with them."

"No, Your Majesty, that is how one deals with them if one would like more rebels. If we accommodate them somewhat, we can steal away the ones that are only somewhat committed to the rebellion."

"That is giving in. If I give in now, I'll have a thousand so-called 'rebels' at my doorstep by tomorrow night. Go back to your training hall, Hemocles. Politics doesn't suit you."

But violence did suit Hemocles, at least as well as scholarship. Before the sun rose the next morning, messengers had been dispatched to local Furores from the newly crowned prince. There would be negotiations, and there would be amnesties, and in the end, a few of Hemocles' peers would sleep with the dead. Who said the political career of the Brujah clan was in its sunset?

WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR SOME

While some Furores may campaign for a utopian world of peace and justice for both Cainite and kine alike, this sentiment is in no way universal. Just because the Furores believe that the oligarchy of the Cainite elders is wrong and unjust doesn't necessarily mean they disagree with the idea that Cainites are naturally superior to kine.

Indeed, it's quite likely that they can embrace both viewpoints without necessarily perceiving them as mutually contradictory. It is only our perception that makes this seem hypocritical — the idea of a system that was not naturally hieratic is probably as foreign to the characters as the idea of a system based on aristocratic lineage is to the average inhabitant of the modern Western world.

Even those trained in Classical politics can find plentiful justification for such a view. Plato's Republic is a meritocracy of the most severe sort, and Aristotle's apologia for slavery could just as easily be extended to embrace Cainite-kine relations.

Just because the character and the player both use words like rights, freedom, justice and equality doesn't mean that they mean the same thing. In different times and different places, it has been seen as perfectly natural to narrowly award and tightly restrict rights and privileges — Dark Medieval Europe is one such time and place.

Cainite social history has a distinctly cyclical pattern. Ever since the fall of the Second City, there has been a pattern of organized vampiric groups forming, then breaking apart from ego pressures, conflicting agendas and the tensions caused by the War of Ages. During the periods of fragmentation, the social pressures that prevent elders from grossly mistreating their progeny dissipate. The result is a wave of unrest that generally results in the destruction of the worst offenders at the hands of mobs of unhappy ancillae and neonates, and the formation of some new Cainite social structure.

Rome, Constantinople, Carthage — all are examples of such a structure. In the East, the crumbling Byzantine Dream and its powerful defenders still hold even elder vampires in check, though Michael's control deteriorates a bit each year. But in the West, Rome and its standards of behavior are long-faded memories, nothing but stories passed down from sires and grandsires, often long since rendered into dust by the feuds of the Children of Caine.

With social controls a historical footnote, the lot of many young vampires is best described as poor. Obviously, even in the Roman era it was not easy to be a neonate or ancilla, and there were always elders who could flaunt the rules. Still, since the end of the Roman milieu, the prospects of the young have grown progressively dimmer.

By 732 CE, when Charles Martel turned back the paynim at the Battle of Tours and Poitiers, there were already a fairly large number of disaffected young vampires.

FLAMES OF THE FUORES

At that time, these dispossessed Cainites had few places to go — most cities were dropping dramatically in population from sack and famine, and the vampires who controlled them were clinging desperately to their thrones. Far from welcoming refugees, these Cainites were in many cases exiling their own childer rather than place undue burden on the vastly reduced local population.

Obviously, not all of these down-at-heel Cainites were devoted revolutionaries. Most just wanted a place to call their own, but there were a fair number — especially among those exiled by their own sires — whose experiences had left them determined to change the way the system worked. By 800 CE, the urban population had begun to rebound, and there was a large population of dissatisfied Cainites. Many of the toughest, those able to survive the post-Roman population crash, had founded communities of various sorts on the fringes of settled society, and the ranks of the dissatisfied grew each year as elders, now free to mistreat their offspring, began to create new progeny to take advantage of expanding populations.

RECENT EVENTS

The Furores have been a real and going concern since the ninth century. Every few decades brings news of some fresh outrage of the young against the old, of labyrinths invaded and Elysiums burnt, of revolutionary states and angry youths eager to commit diablerie. These rebels are the cause for many sleepless days for the elders of western Europe, particularly those whose mistreated progeny have flown the coop, as it were. These dissatisfied youths are ripe for use as catspaws, and many receive financial backing from other elder Cainites.

But repressive elders are not the only ones who fear. The Furores often use sharp, brutal violence — any vampire unfortunate enough to be caught in an uprising can meet the Final Death. Regardless if the Cainite is one of the guilty or an innocent bystander, war doesn't care. As a result, the reaction to these open rebellions is often brutal repression with the support of even comparatively open-minded Cainites.

And the elders know no shame is using this to their advantage. "No matter how justified the Furores are in their outrage," they say to their childer and fellows, "to bow to their demands is to encourage and empower them." Give the Furores an inch, the elders claim, and they'll take a mile; if one elder is handed over to the angry mob, then there will soon be a hundred calls for every vampire's head. Cainites will have no choice but to point the mob at their enemies and rivals before their enemies and rivals point the mob at them.

But the real threat isn't so simple. By bowing to the demands of the Furores, the elders compromise their authority, admitting that some actions are "right" and some are "wrong" or "improper," and thus make themselves subject to an external code of morality. It could be argued that the emergence of such a code is inevitable, but no Cainite savvy enough to become an elder is going to

willingly speed along a process that creates a system that a political rival could use to box him in. The Six Traditions are more than enough common law for most princes.

As a result, the events of recent centuries have had a distinct pattern, as discontent slowly rises in a region. Elders, unwilling to legitimize the rebels by negotiating with them, instead attempt to suppress the discontent with increasingly violent and repressive measures. Each measure hardens the rebels, generating more discontent and more sympathizers for the Furore cause. Eventually, either an outrage or an infusion of aid from an established Furore community enables a charismatic or cunning rebel to bring together the Furores of the area, and take the fight to the elders.

Often, but not always, the elder Cainites of the area close ranks and squash the rebels. Sometimes the rebels are too powerful or too numerous to be crushed. In other cases, the elders fail to close ranks in time, either because they don't recognize the threat, or because they fall prey to that ancient bane of oligarchies: divide-and-rule politics. It only takes one or two elders willing to betray their fellows to the rebels for political gain to doom resistance to an uprising.

The result is often chaos. The average Furore defines herself by her opposition to the existing power structure. Success, when it comes, is often sudden, and the rebels are totally unprepared for the responsibilities thrust upon them. Usually, especially when enough politically savvy representatives of the old regime survive to provide continuity, the system quickly returns to business as usual. Confronted unexpectedly with the need for effective administration, the Furores find themselves assuming the very roles and methodologies of the elders they so recently displaced.

However, this is not always the case. Sometimes there are no survivors of the old guard, or the revolutionaries are ideologically committed enough to consciously reject the status quo. Over the last 300 years, a fair number of such radical communities have established themselves. Often, the vampires who make up these utopian experiments find that they agree on less than they believed they did. Other Cainites turn out to be more interested in making themselves powerful than actually effecting change. Between infighting over which political agenda will be implemented and the machinations of the compulsively ambitious, many (but by no means all) of these revolutionary communities tear themselves apart in short order.

But the rebels aren't always the sole responsible parties for these failures. The primary export of such ideological strongholds is revolutionary ideology, and elders dwelling nearby cannot help but notice this sudden, blatant threat to their position. The ancient Cainites who were backing the revolutionaries just months ago are often the first to encourage divisiveness and factional infighting in the infant sect. What may have been an excellent catspaw against political rivals is a terrible neighbor. Nearby elders carry out every sort of subversion against young Furore communities, from assassination and encouraging mortal witch-hunters and Inquisitors to become active in the

area, to the subversion of the political process through paid agents and open military campaigns. (The latter is especially popular in the Tzimisce-dominated Balkans.)

THESE NIGHTS

Furores today are much like Furores of 300 years ago, just more numerous. The average Furore is a young creature, and experiences events as a human would, not as an elder Cainite long conditioned to the ebb and flow of the historical process would. As a result, the movement — even where there are established communities — exists in a distinctly mortal mode.

Those few rebels that have heard of Carthage know of it as a concept only, a name for a mythical golden age when all Cainites were equal. Many do not even know its general location, and those that do know enough Classical history to be familiar with the story are unable to tell what is folktale, what is Cainite myth, and what is truth.

More recent events are often just as misty. All Furores know that there have been places where the rebels have won, and many have even been to one, or even taken part in failed (or successful) rebellions. This is perhaps the one benefit of being a Furore — practically every rebel knows that there are others out there with similar goals and ambitions. But few rebels — and even fewer elders — have a good picture of recent events as a whole, or of historical trends in the ongoing rebellion of the young against the old.

Those few who do have such a picture have good reason for high spirits or grave worry, depending on their loyalties. With every passing night, Cainite society stumbles a little further toward the brink. Today, the Traditions are honored more in the breach than in the practice. Elders

HUNTING THE HUNTERS

Because these revolutionaries seek to convert neonates and ancillae to their cause as well as to assassinate elders, elder Cainites are reluctant to allow contact between their offspring and the rebels, even confrontational contact. Even a brief conversation at sword's point can sow seeds of disloyalty that will hatch in a decade or three.

Indeed, in many cases the elders of an area actively conspire to conceal evidence of Furore activity from their own progeny. Instead, combat-trained ghouls are used. In places where Furore activity is rife, there are often ghouls whose entire purpose is to scourge the city in search of strangers and subversives. Ghouls can hunt during the day, and are much more difficult to detect than Cainites. Confined by the blood oath, their loyalty is perfect, and their deaths, while regrettable, are hardly heartrending. Better to lose several such ghouls than the loyalty of a prized offspring. (Who says elders do not value their childer?)

eager to have many servants and warriors create ever-larger broods of offspring, and manipulate them more ruthlessly than before, competing brutally with their peers for resources, for power and for prestige. Three hundred years ago, rebellious vampires were almost certainly either crushed immediately or brought into the fold. But each decade there are more — and more successful — rebellions. The proto-sects that have emerged have in many cases persisted, even prospered, and the draconian measures used to quell the tide of discontent have only sown the seeds of future discord.

Unless something changes (and changes significantly) in the next few centuries, the fabric of Cainite society will be rent asunder. Either there will be a Furore uprising strong enough to achieve widespread success and spawn a new social order, or the constant conflicts will awaken the mortals to the menace of the Cainites. Either way, unless matters improve, there will come a day of judgement, and that day, by vampiric standards, is not far off.

THE FURORE UNDERGROUND

The dark-clad vampires turned on Michael almost in unison.

"What in the name of Christ's bleeding wounds are you telling us? That you're a Furore?"

Michael nodded, "Yes, Uwe, that is precisely what I am telling you."

"You pox-rotten dog, you'll get us all set out for the sun! Do you think we bought this operation, laid out all this silver, lost three ghouls fair and fine, so that you could make some political point, die trying to get your fangs into some elder, and ruin everything? Is that what you think?"

"No — yes. Damn you, this is important! Do you just want to live as slaves forever? Is that it? Until you get a chance to be like them and take it?"

The knives were out, and Uwe advanced on Michael. "Yes, Michael, because that's all there is. More and more of that until the Day of Judgement. More control, more power, more violence and more money. It's not about God, or the Devil, or good or evil. It's about who holds the whip and the knife and the purse. There's no reason, and no rhyme"

"You want to spend forever locked in the same routine, living the same miserable existence as your sire?"

"Changing the system is a loser's game, Michael. The people who want to change the rules are the ones too weak to win. Tell me the elders don't live in luxury. Tell me they can't do what they want when they want."

The young Cainite gulped by reflex, and remained silent.

Uwe continued, "Maybe you are right. Maybe it is wrong. But so is the life we lead. I'm not going to steal a woman's life one minute and then wring my hands about justice the next. If you're really right, Saint Peter will understand." Uwe looked to his men, "Kill him."

And they tore Michael to pieces.



ASHEN THIEF

ON THE RUN

Where they do not rule, those who are openly known to support the Furore cause are often quite unwelcome. Because they seek to abolish the rule of the elders, and because their rebellion almost always involves the use of force, the rebels themselves are often the targets of violence.

NO HONOR AMONG THIEVES

Just because many of the vampires who move among rural brigands and urban thieves are not a part of the ruling oligarchy doesn't mean that they are automatically allied with the Furores. Indeed, the hierarchies of these groups are often just as repressive as the society that ostracizes them, and many members of these groups entertain ambitions of their own. These groups are not so much rebels as underdog competitors for the power that the elders currently hold.

The last thing these outcasts want is the attention of the elders focused squarely on the ever-so-narrow shadows where they hide. Furore activity, violent and subversive as it so often is, is just the thing to bring that attention to bear. All it takes is a single assassinated ghoul or poached childe to bring down the wrath of the elders. And with that attention will almost surely come reprisals and the exposure of whatever plots the local bottom-feeders among the Cainite population has been laying to grab their own little piece of the pie.

As a result, the Furores must be careful to conceal their identities when not actually "on the job." Rebels who are discovered by their fellow ne'er-do-wells may be harassed and driven out of an area, possibly with a missing arm to remind them not to return. Indeed, if a Cainite bandit is currying favor with the powers that be, a troublesome Furore left staked on the doorstep of some influential elders would make an excellent placatory gesture.

The Furores return these sentiments, and in places where the Cainite underworld is hostile to their activities, the rebels often harbor more ill will for their fellow criminals than for the elders. Elders, the Furores reason, are just holding onto a good thing, whereas the local scum bear arms against the rebels for a few debased coins and the possibility that some day they might have a tiny little mouthful of the elders' success. In addition, many Furores land in "outlaw" groups prior to joining the rebel cause, and these vampires may have been treated as badly or worse than during the time they were in the thrall of their sires. Outlaws of various sorts who find themselves in a community ruled by Furores would do well to keep a low profile — many Furores are waiting for an excuse to even up the score for some past slight, and woe unto the Cainite that gives it to them.

FLIRTING WITH THE CAUSE

The core of the Furore movement is rebellion against the established power structures. There are "Sunday Furores," but the rebels are a dangerous crowd to run with. Neonates and ancillae whose sires find they've been associating with known Furores can expect punishment. They may lose

privileges or come under close scrutiny. Those with paranoid sires or dwelling in areas where rebellions are real worries can expect worse: torture, domination, the blood oath or possibly even destruction at their sires' talons.

But these sorts of draconian treatments are to be expected only in areas where the conflict is constant, or from sires of the worst sort. Most neonates and ancillae flirt with rebellion and the underworld at some point, and most sires accept this, though they may administer *pro forma* punishments — usually to avoid censure by their fellows or to teach the childe discretion. In places where ghouls are turning up dead and labyrinths are burning down, however, Cainites flirting with the rebel cause had better hope that the vampire who catches them on the wrong side of the line is either a close friend or a closet sympathizer.

REVOLT

Sarah cut an imposing figure from the top of the tun. When she had been alive, men had said she looked like a dray. Now she could coldcock a carthorse and shatter its skull, and everyone in the room was perfectly aware of it. "How long have they kept us down?"

"Too long!" the dozen vampires shouted back. It wasn't ragged. It had been at the start, but Sarah had given them discipline and the sense of being part of something larger. Blood ran to her face, reddening her skin with pride.

"Will we take it anymore?"

"No!"

"What will we have instead?"

"Freedom!"

She nodded curtly and jumped smoothly down from the barrel. "Now let's go over what we'll be doing. Since Christophe and Henri killed his ghouls last week, Arnulf hasn't left his labyrinth. He's been sending out for his herd. Two ghouls go out and get three of the boys, take them in, and bring them out about an hour later. Avis thinks he has one of his progeny in there." She nodded to the Malkavian, who mumbled behind her stained blindfold.

"Avis also found the pattern behind who gets fed on, and she's called it correctly for the last three nights. Tomorrow night, three of us will be replacing the vessels. Avis, Fangdog and Mole will mask themselves and replace his dinner. Once past the gate, they'll slay their escort as soon as they're alone. They'll take the gate from behind, and open it for the rest of us. Then it's all of us against Arnulf, and we never have a fight where we're outclassed."

The group nodded. They clearly thought it was a good plan. Sarah certainly hoped it was. Of course, if it wasn't, there wouldn't exactly be any recriminations afterward.

GOALS

The average Furore has two goals. First, she wants revenge — revenge on her sire, her broodmates, other elders, whoever is standing too close. The thing that separates her from a driven and embittered Autarkis on the road to diablerie is that she also wants revolutions. For the rebels, their actions aren't just a matter of payback, they are an attempt to establish a system where neither

they nor any others will be subjected to the same abuses. Generally, but not always, revenge comes first, utopia second. After all, the natural place to start overthrowing a tyranny is the place that you know best, and that generally means the vampire's sire and his fellow elders.

REVENGE

Hatred is a cold mistress indeed, and most Furores are well-versed in her icy embrace. For most Furores, unlike as a neonate was either indebted servitude or concubinage of indefinite duration. Their sires enslaved them, abused them and quite possibly threw them away as a pawn in some private war. Or an amorous sire may simply have discarded them when she discovered her next "perfect love."

Those who escape these chains can swap tales of physical torture for disobedience, of their sires and elder broodmates' psychological games, and of the endless and often fatal bickering between older Cainites. The Furores are an underground railroad for these escapees, and a society of like-minded allies to help them obtain the only restitution that matters from their sires.

Some rebels simply want their sires to experience one final morning at their hands, while others want their sires' heart blood, for the satisfaction of actually *consuming* the ones who inflicted such pain on them. This latter option is quite popular — diablerie has a visceral appeal as a form of revenge, particularly to vampires influenced by the Cainite Heresy. The increased power certainly doesn't make it unattractive, either.

To the elders, who already fear the Amaranth at the hands of their peers and progeny, this Furore blood-hunger is particularly terrifying, especially after several retellings have made it even more blasphemous and common than it already is. Most elder Cainites can envision all too well the scene as they are held down by a half-dozen thuggish Furores and their very souls consumed to feed their childer's insurgency. These sorts of images certainly don't do anything to engender dialogue between the elders and their rebellious offspring.

REVOLUTION

The Furores' ambitions aren't limited to a simple thirst for revenge and elder vitae. They genuinely want to build a brighter future for themselves and their peers. Yet where the Furores are united in their desire for revenge, it is the desire to build a social edifice of greater justice that most divides them.

Every Furore, it would seem, has her own utopian dream. In most cases, they also have a candidate for leader of that perfect sect in mind — most often themselves, but sometimes the leader of their gang or social circle. While the Furores are largely ignorant of "modern" government, all of the basic human forms except age-based oligarchy are represented in their ranks. The most common forms are merit-based oligarchy, simple democracy and agricultural-commune socialism. However, there are aristocrats,

republicans, theocrats and every other sort of government represented somewhere among the rebels.

The process of determining what the final form of government for a rebel community will be like is often one of the critical moments for a successful uprising. As discussed elsewhere, these squabbles sometimes destroy young Furore communities before they have even finished their victory celebrations. This isn't as common as one might believe, however. Most Furore uprisings are led by one band, and that band is generally united in its belief regarding the ideal state, if for no other reason than the members may never have been exposed to any other possibilities. It's only when the rebels are of several distinct factions that serious clashes tend to develop.

TACTICS

In their revolt against the elders, the Furores are typically the underdogs. They can't just march up to an elder's haven, kick down the door, drag him out and cut his head off in the street. Such open hostility is only possible late in the game, when the Furores' victory is already complete or nearly so. Done too early, a blatant act simply provokes the local powers-that-be to hunt the rebels down like mad dogs. In place of simple bloodshed, the Furores must use cunning. Those who can't or won't are shortly *former* Furores.

FALSE LINEAGE

The most important trick to being a successful and long-lived Furore is not looking like what you are. Some rebels are cunning, strong or fast enough to live outside the cities and demesnes controlled by the princes and elders. Many, however, are not cut out for the big wide world of snakes, bugs and Lupines — which leaves them with an unpleasant choice. They can introduce themselves and attempt to live in the elders' lands under false pretenses while pursuing their own agenda, or they can try to live unrecognized on the fringes of society and hope to avoid the local sheriff, scourge and other interested citizens.

Living under false pretenses is difficult, and for every Furore who makes a successful habit of it, there's another who meets the sunrise for her trouble. The mistake that kills the largest number is to vastly underestimate the connections between various Cainite principalities. Webs of alliance and consanguinity tie elders together across much of Europe, and most princes can obtain some basic information about a newcomer either through a formal request or by calling in a favor with well-placed aid in a foreign court. The War of Ages and other conflicts sometimes cut these lines of communication, but relying on such things is a recipe for disaster. Many a young rebel has brashly introduced themselves as who they actually are, thinking that a thousand miles would have protected them from word of a murdered sire or stolen riches. Little did they realize that the prince they sought shelter with shared a grandsire with the one they stole from.

The trick to successfully living under false pretenses is to know what you're doing before you try it. While

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THE CAINITE HERESY

A vampiric perversion of various Gnostic beliefs, the Cainite Heresy preaches that the blood of Caine is holy, and that Caine himself was punished for his rebellion against Ialdabaoth, the oppressive lord of the material world. To drink the blood of Caine is to drink the holy elixir of rebellion against the tainted world of flesh. Unsurprisingly, these beliefs are propagated by many Cainites in order to secure herds and mortal influence.

However, not every vampire is in on the joke, and there are a certain number of younger Cainites who actually *believe* the tenets of the Heresy. Many of these firebrands are active among the Furores, carrying the fight to their elders, who they feel have themselves become corrupted by the temptations of Ialdabaoth's fleshy prison. Hungry for the blood of their elders, these vampires seek to bring themselves closer to Caine through diablerie, both as a spiritual experience and to gain more power for their crusades against the corrupt elders, and against the blandishments of the material world as a whole.

For more, see the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* supplement, *Cainite Heresy*.

every vampire isn't expected to be able to produce a complete pedigree, Cainites who wander into a city must know their lineage and sire. There are, after all, only so many vampires. The smart Furore will know the names of a few reclusive and surly Cainites they can claim as their sires. The more likely the claimed sire is to simply eat any messenger who comes to ask about his progeny, the better. Sires known to be destroyed also work well.

The reason the wise Furore knows several such vampires is because the smart rebel spends some time incognito before he introduces himself. This allows him to assure himself that he will not have the misfortune to encounter any of his "siblings."

Regardless of how it's done, living under false pretenses is a gamble. No matter how good the story is, the local authorities are going to be suspicious of new arrivals, especially in an area suffering from Furore activity. While not every city is a nest of informants and suspicion, some are, and some Cainites make a tidy living from noticing what people would rather they didn't and then charging for their silence. A Cainite whose façade slips one too many times can easily end up under official scrutiny, or else a blackmailed puppet. The latter is particularly troublesome — what does the blackmailer want, and how long have they known? Can the Furores afford to eliminate this nuisance, or does the cause demand that they act as the servants of some greedy but observant Cainite?

SHADOW UNLIFE

Those Cainites not competent enough to pass themselves off as someone else's progeny (or those too

SHADES OF GRAY

It's certainly possible to paint Furore characters as strong-jawed, gleaming-fanged heroes and the elders as black-hearted manipulators whose minions are lickspittles or violent goons. But real revolutions never work out that way.

Sometimes the people fighting for the cause of justice and right are otherwise completely reprehensible. They may just be out for number one and using the cause as a cover, or simply vile people who are doing the right thing just this once. Likewise, good — even admirable — people can end up on opposite sides of the line for perfectly understandable reasons.

In vampiric circles, all it takes is one careless sip too many, and a perfectly admirable, even heroic Cainite does his very best to send the rebels to their Final Death. Even without the device of the blood oath, there are perfectly good reasons to oppose the Furores.

For starters, many Furores are bloodthirsty fanatics at least as interested in taking down the sires they hate than in actually building a better tomorrow. Whatever they may profess, their "revolution" has a lot more to do with red-handed murder than justice and equality. They found some ramshackle republic of the blood that lasts a year or 10. Then it turns into a dictatorship, or the professional politicians rot it out from the inside, or the neighboring elders march in during a moment of weakness, put everyone to the sword and have their favored progeny take over rule of the area. In the end, they do nothing but cause hardship and strife and push Cainite affairs all too close to mortal scrutiny.

Even those who agree with the goals of the Furores may find themselves on the other side. Personal loyalty to a single elder or ancilla likely to be put to the pyre in any glorious utopia can make an enemy of an ally, as can a desire to preserve some part of the old regime — like a prized treasure trove of art or influence over a mortal institution.

And neither are the princes and elders wholly reprehensible. Indeed, they are very experienced at the business of rulership and know how to maintain the Silence of Blood, to keep Lupines at bay and to stave off witch-hunters. Furore "utopias," often heralded by quite public slaughter, clearly have some problems in those regards.

In the argument of security versus freedom, some will always choose security, no matter what they have to give up to get it. For them, better a balance of terror between the elders than a tottering would-be Carthage with prospects as dim as a vampire's chance of catching noon Mass. That doesn't necessarily make them contemptible, it just means they choose to see matters differently. There can be few things as moving as the conflict between two persons or groups who know that, in the other man's shoes, they'd be doing exactly the same thing.

It boils down to this: Conflicts, particularly social conflicts, inevitably put good and bad people on both sides of the line — don't be afraid to do it in your games.

well-known to risk such a masquerade) have only one alternative. They must lurk on the fringes of society, feeding when they can, hiding from their fellow Cainites as best as they are able, and striking out against the elders when possible. This sort of lifestyle breeds fierce Cainites — the weak die off quickly and the tough get tougher.

There are two main requirements for where these Cainites live. There must be a secure place for them to sleep, and there must be food nearby. Because few European forests are wild, and even fewer are safe for Cainites to wander in, "food" generally equates to "mortals." A safe place to sleep is harder still — a Gangrel can meld with the earth, but that costs blood and means the Cainite must feed more often, once every day or so, rather than once every two or three days.

Some of these rebels live urban existences. While medieval cities are generally not very large, the conditions of the poor and the forgotten are often miserable indeed. Furores can often carve out a safe little haven and herd for themselves among the mortal dispossessed, provided they're careful to avoid the turf of slumming elders and not raise the ire of the populace. It's a hazardous existence, but no more hazardous than living openly among the city's Cainite population under an assumed identity.

The majority of such Furores, however, live what is best described as a semi-rural existence. Avoiding the walled

cities with their high Cainite and ghoulish populations, these creatures instead dwell in places that have high populations of mortals but that wouldn't necessarily attract Cainite habitation otherwise. Hostels for pilgrims, isolated abbeys, county seats, market towns, popular inns and rural dens of iniquity all make excellent bases of operations for Furores who want to avoid major urban areas.

Most of these locales have the advantage of a small number of mortals who must be manipulated to secure the Cainite's safety, and large transient populations that allow the Cainite to exist without a local herd. Even if the place has a Cainite already in residence, a band of determined Furores can usually claim the place as its own, either by destroying the current residents, dominating them, subjecting them to the blood oath or otherwise setting them up as a front. With large numbers of pilgrims and merchants going in and out, the rebels have a ready-made source of spies and messengers, and can easily tag along with a traveling band if they must move across-country.

Elders know this, of course — it's an old trick. In areas of heavy Furore activity, the local powers that be often sponsor their own witch-hunters, either ghouls or duped mortals, to slog through the boondocks in search of Furore strongholds. Others plant ghouls or mortal agents among the residents of particularly favorable locations to look for

FLAMES OF THE FUIRORES

the telltale signs of Cainite habitation. These agents are far more difficult to deal with than the regular run of snooping churchmen and burghers concerned over a wife's sudden anemia. They know what they're looking for, and a terrible accident isn't really an option. The elders who sent them are going to take the agent's unfortunate demise as a sure sign of Furore activity and land on the area with both feet.

Regardless of the risks, these high-traffic areas provide excellent staging grounds and strongholds for Furores. Easily controlled and well-provided with prey, a large hostelry or market town can easily provide a dwelling for six or 10 well-disciplined Cainites who take care not to bite too deep, as it were.

RESOURCES

Determination is not enough — you cannot fight a war without resources. Mortal agents and tangible riches are the two things that elders have in plenty and that Furores lack. Motivation and a willingness to break the rules and get their own hands dirty can go a long way to making up this deficit, but directness is potentially quite costly and can easily trigger an open conflict long before the rebels are prepared.

Rebels who wish to succeed must find a regular source of income. Blackmail is popular — being the dark lord of a market town lets you put the screws to the successful local merchants. The revenue could also be control of some sort

of lucrative holding, or skimmed from the tax coffers of a market town, or even tolls on a bridge or river. Regardless, revenue means flexibility. It means the ability for the rebels to buy, bribe and hire as necessary. Disciplines can substitute for money, of course, but owning your own cart means never causing the sort of highly visible ruckus sure to kick up when local farmers start taking their cabbage wagons to the local city once a week and are unable to remember why.

It's foolish to assume that most Furores are dumb young thugs; dumb young thugs rarely merit the Embrace in the first place. The sort of vampires who become Furores are different from the sort of vampires who become ancillae only in that they have a lower tolerance for being used and abused by their elders. Just because they leave the gutted ghoul servants of elder Cainites hanging upside down at the crossroads doesn't mean the rebels can't operate a financially successful operation at the same time.

SUBVERSION AND RECRUITING

It is natural that Furores attempt to win others to their cause. Once you realize that you were held in chains, it's very hard to not to spread the gospel of freedom. The overall outcome of these recruiting and education attempts is generally mixed.

You may need resources to fight a war, but you need troops just as badly. If the Furores did not spread their message, there wouldn't be nearly as many of them. Even if a Cainite is not persuaded to openly join their cause, a



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turned head or tipped hand at the appropriate moment can prove the difference between victory and defeat, or between flight and the Final Death. Even a vampire under the blood oath has some free will. The seed of rebellion planted today can blossom over the decades into a broken blood oath or one so strained the thrall can work passively toward the regnant's downfall. This alone makes up for the negative aspects of recruitment, and that's a good thing, because the negative aspects are legion.

EXPOSURE

The first and most obvious negative aspect is the fact that attempting to proselytize exposes the existence and identity of the Furores. While it is possible that one or two neonates or ancillae might be approached without the cat getting out of the bag, the fact that the local Furores are on a recruiting drive is just not going to stay secret for long. Once more than a few vampires know that there are Furores in the area, it will only be a few nights (or hours) until the only Cainites in the region who might *possibly* not have heard are the ones in torpor. Once the local elders know, they can start taking precautions, assuming they're the sort of elders who worry about such matters. In the case of Furores pretending to be someone they aren't, one false step attempting to recruit allies means, at best, a flight into exile.

Also, the rebels can't sent just any old Cainite to attempt to convert neonates and ancillae to the Furore cause. Recruiting requires sending intelligent and persuasive advocates of the cause into harm's way. Worse, attempts at recruiting require communication, which generally means face-to-face contact under circumstances that aren't favorable to the rebel spokesman — nobody goes to listen to the bloodthirsty brigands in the middle of the bandit encampment. These contacts are perfect opportunities for elders to set up ambushes, assassination attempts, kidnappings and what have you.

The sort of vampires who make good recruiters are generally the ones whose demise would be the worst blow for the revolution. All it takes is one poor assessment of a recruit's potential to lead a valuable Furore into a death trap or worse. Worse, a vampire capable of making a decent recruiting pitch probably isn't just a useful spokesman for the rebels; she's likely closely involved in most everything the Furore band does. If the prince's agents can get her to talk, it can compromise everything the agent's band is doing.

SOPHISTRY

Worse than being lured into an ambush is being lured into open debate. If the Furores are recruiting, there is the distinct possibility that some elder will draw or challenge them into a public dialogue. In many cases, this is the worst thing that can possibly happen. The worry of ambush or betrayal, which is the primary concern of most rebels, is not the real danger (though it is there). The danger is that most elders have spent *centuries* mastering their ability to manipulate mortals and Cainites alike, even without Disciplines.

The righteousness of the rebel's argument will generally matter little when pitted against decade upon decade of skill at debate. Certainly the rebels can sometimes out-argue their elders, and occasionally the older vampire's obviously rigged arguments may work against him. Generally, however, an open debate is an invitation to a public relations disaster for the young Furores, and that danger is subtle enough that many rebels don't see the pitfall until it's too late.

INTERNAL DISSENT

Openly proclaiming the doctrine of revolt also has another, albeit less dramatic, drawback. Too much recruiting can easily expose just how little most Furores actually have in common. While several rebel gangs might exist in the same region and even work together despite their differences, attempting to make converts to the cause often strains an already-tenuous relationship.

First, it is easy for other rebel groups' recruitment attempts to be seen as poaching. Rebellions and resistance movements require strong personalities at the helm. These are the sorts of people who tend to interpret attempts to gain more members as a threat or personal slight. And in some cases, they're quite correct. The wise rebel plans for what happens *after* the revolution. If two Furore bands have diametrically opposed visions for the future, it is natural (if not necessarily wise) for each to attempt to grab all the resources they can so that when it comes time to fight over the spoils, they have a decisive edge.

Of course, the public spectacle of such conflicts damages the reputation of all the rebel groups involved and creates an open invitation for meddling by elders interested in divide-and-rule politics. Why risk your childer to fight the rebels when some other Furores will gladly meet the Final Death opposing them? Even without recruiting and meddling by the elders, it's already all too likely that matters will come to blows between two up-and-coming gangs in a region. With competition for recruits and elders tossing in the occasional golden apple, it's even worse. Even if one organization is victorious, it has probably bled itself white smashing the opposition, and the elders can pick up an easy victory against their weakened, overextended foes.

TERROR

Going hand-in-hand with conversion is terror. Terror is the best weapon of the Furores. By striking a few well-placed blows, the rebels can make the night seem full of watching eyes and hungry fangs.

Terror has a number of goals. The first is simple revenge. By making them slaves to fear, the Furores make the elders suffer as they themselves suffered. The importance of this as a goal shouldn't be underestimated. As discussed above, the average Furore is a hateful creature, typically with good reason.

The second goal of terror tactics is to damage the elders' position. Assassinated ghouls, burnt or destroyed holdings

and terrified herds all lead elders to take action, spending their finite resources to search for an elusive target.

Elders typically have resources aplenty, but at any given time, most of these are committed to one endeavor or another. Terror attacks not only reduce an elder's might, they force her to pull out of prior commitments, losing face and forgoing the opportunity to use those resources for profit. Instead, the elder must use them to chase down an elusive target and protect her other holdings. Also, the rebels have a significant advantage, in that they are almost sure to have the initiative. They can concentrate on any one target, but the elder must attempt to guard *all* her holdings well enough to stop a full-scale attack. To do otherwise invites the Furores to pick off targets one at a time. Not only would such an elder lose the target itself, but the rebels could quite possibly annihilate the inadequate security guarding it with no loss to themselves. Between the constant drain from increasing security and the cost of the assets actually destroyed in the attacks, one or even several elders can quickly find themselves stretched thin indeed.

But the elder's physical property isn't the only thing that the Furores target. Their mental stability and their image are just as much a target as their ghouls and investments. A frightened, angry elder is an erratic elder, prone to short-term thinking and fixating on what they perceive as "the problem." Like bullfighters, the rebels seek to reduce the elders to an insensible rage during which they can casually slip in the fatal sword. Likewise, an elder who is the target of repeated attacks can lose face. Obviously, their ability to protect their followers comes into question. Perhaps more seriously, a weakened elder may well be attacked or even destroyed by her rivals or disgruntled progeny, who may attempt to dress it up as a Furore attack, or may just show their hand and laugh heartlessly at their enemy's poor luck — the War of Ages is brutal and played for keeps, after all.

Terror's third goal is to make the elders more repressive. This seems paradoxical, but it makes sense from a brutally practical point of view. The very first thing most elders do when they realize there is Furore activity in their region is to lighten up on their progeny. Progeny whose existences are rewarding have little reason to risk Final Death by throwing in with the Furores. By striking repeatedly at the elders, the Furores seek to create a climate of suspicion and anger in which elders are likely to clamp down on their childer. They may become angry over real or imagined failures, suspicious about their childer's loyalty or simply frustrated. Regardless, if they are frightened and angry enough, most elders will lash out at the nearest target. And the more the elders lash out, the more those targets are likely to see the merits of the Furore arguments.

ASSASSINATION

Actually assassinating elders or their favored progeny is a tricky business. Done too early, it will bring down the

wrath of an entire region on the rebels' heads. Delayed too long, it deprives the mounting cycle of terror and repression of its impact and gives the local elders a chance to regain their footing and prepare counterblows. Not only is the timing critical, but the actual process of assassination can be very difficult, particularly if the target dwells within a labyrinth or other elaborately defended haven.

For some rebels, this makes elders with labyrinths the most attractive targets. By destroying the most well-defended target, the Furores show that they can strike anywhere, no matter how secure. The assassination of a well-defended elder increases the level of anxiety considerably among his surviving peers. Resources nearby elders would have used to hunt the Furores or maintain their day-to-day operations are used instead to protect themselves. This grants the Furores increased freedom of activity, to strike again at a place and time of their choosing.

The actual manner of the assassination is of course strictly dependent on the elder and the Furores. One question that is always difficult for a Furore band is how many of their number to send after an elder. The more they send, presumably the greater their chance of success. But killing an elder is never easy, and a wise Furore plans for failure — if a failed assassination weakens the band too greatly, they will be easy picking for the target's revenge. And an elder's revenge is a terrible thing.

What is important is to maximize the impact of the assassination. An attack on an elder involves a great expenditure of resources, quite probably including the Final Deaths of one or more critical member of the Furore band. At such a cost, the rebels must wring every possible drop of benefit from the destruction. This means fully exploiting the psychological effects on other elders and their followers. The Furores make it clear that the elder died by diablerie, even if they didn't. The rebels also make certain that they don't leave the ashes of their own destroyed fighters at the site of the battle — the matter must look as one-sided as possible. Because ghouls are essentially impossible to terrify, the Furores kill them in whatever fashion will most terrify their owners — as if they were no threat at all, or else with gut-wrenching brutality.

How to deal with the progeny and other vampiric minions of an elder targeted for assassination is a matter of much debate. Obviously if they are under the blood oath, there won't be much choice. They'll have to be staked or destroyed. Staking is better, because they'll probably be free of the blood oath when the stake is removed after the elder's death. Rebels would, however, do well to make sure that whoever discovers the scene of the assassination can't arrange matters to their own benefit, for example by decapitating the staked progeny and then claiming the rebels immobilized and executed them.

Progeny and Cainite underlings who aren't bound by the blood oath are more complicated to deal with. Letting them go can mean they fight another day, or imply weakness on the parts of the Furores. Destroying them can make

the Furores seem too bloodthirsty when it comes to dealing with neonates and ancillae — nobody wants to work with the people who butchered a friend or close peer. The actual decision will hinge on the situation, and on what sort of vampires the Furores really are, other than rebellious ones.

REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

"You're leaving!" His tone was accusatory.

"I am."

"You're abandoning us! We need you!"

"No, you don't." I started to keep walking down the road, but he blocked my path. "I have a long way to walk tonight, Erik. Let me go."

"It's just ego, isn't it? We don't want you to lead us anymore, and so you're going to leave. Who'll be our general? Who'll lead us in battle?"

"Aurelius is good. Sven's good, too."

"You bastard! You're leaving me!" He punched me, but just out of anger, not to injure. He certainly had reason to be angry.

I grabbed him by the collar and picked him up off the ground without trying. That shocked some sense into him.

"Listen to me, and listen well. You can come if you want. Go, pack your things, and we'll go together. But I am not staying here, and it has nothing to do with an offended ego. You elected Aurelius as your leader. I don't agree with it, but I don't think it's a terrible choice either. But I know there are some people who do disagree with it, and that there are some other people who wish they had been selected. If I stay here, Aurelius will never be able to rule without everyone looking to me for my approval, or without people bitter over their own lack of success whispering behind his back about what a better job I'd do. He can't do his job that way, and I care too much about what I've built to cripple him. Do you understand that?" I shook him a few times to drive the point home. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I did. He was crying — tears of blood. I should never have hooked up with a kid like that.

I set him down. "Now, either run off and join Aurelius' victory celebration, or go pack your things while they're all at the party and meet me here, but choose."

He nodded, stood up straight, and said, as calmly as he could, "I'll be back." I nodded as he ran off, mostly to myself. Stupid kid — he was going to get himself killed.

If the rebels are not exterminated, and they actively pursue victory, sooner or later they will achieve it. What the rebels do when they stand on the verge of victory — how they divide the spoils if there are several bands working together, how they deal with elders who surrender and how quickly they take over the elders' mortal and supernatural concerns — all shape the government to come. Make no mistake: Actually carrying out the revolution is as critical as all of the rebellion that led up to it. If the end result is no different or no better than what came before, then the whole exercise has been just another bloody little footnote in the War of Ages.

THE REAL SITUATION

Many elders entertain the belief that the Furores are totally unsuited to govern — that if they somehow do end up in control of things, that they'll make a hopeless botch of matters. While it is true that the Furores are usually inexperienced with the reins of power, the idea that they're dramatically unsuited to it couldn't be farther from the truth. While it is understandable that the average elder might want to take comfort in the idea of indispensability, it's not the fact of the matter.

Most Cainites are Embraced because they possess useful skills, and those skills very often relate to administration. A fair number of young vampires were once highly competent nobles, abbots or merchants before they became neonates. Just because they are younger than their sires does not necessarily mean that they are totally inexperienced, only that they are inexperienced as *Cainites*. While obviously not every Furore was once a merchant prince, any given rebel community is likely to have some members in it who are experienced administrators. Lack of skills is not the obstacle that these vampires must surmount. Their challenges have much more to do with the opposition the Furores encounter, and the lack of established institutions with which to meet that opposition.

To be completely honest, their sires are not necessarily any great shakes either. For all that most princes would like to lay claim to the ancient wisdom of the Cainite brotherhood, the truth of the matter is that most "elder" vampires are at most a few hundred years old. Admittedly, this is a long time by mortal standards, and elders who diligently apply themselves can master many fields of endeavor. Of course, elders can also create a brood of progeny to do all their work for them and spend those centuries in scheming and self-indulgence, learning essentially nothing. Truth be told, there are probably more elders of the latter type than of the former.

The Furores also often do not face the full might of the prince and elders they target. Dealing with troublesome rebels usually falls to a prince's minions — a sheriff, scourge or other agent. These Cainites, although skilled, lack the near-infinite patience and instinctive resilience and flexibility in devising plans that typifies the most successful elders. Still ancillae, princely agents become angry, act impulsively and take their defeats to heart. To the Furores, this is useful — if they have access to a gifted politician (or the advice of a truly ancient Cainite), the rebels can take advantage of their enemy's political inexperience. However, it isn't all positive. A sheriff who can be led by the nose is also a vampire who can and will become fixated on Furore communities that thwart him or destroy favored pawns and progeny.

Even when the Furores attract direct attention from elders, they may not be done for. Indeed, Cainites, by their own natures, are static creatures. As the years and the centuries roll by, they become more and more set in their ways. Most typically, this manifests as an inability to understand changes in the world around them — indeed, this lack of ability to



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connect with the world is one of the reasons most elders create progeny. Elders from the Classical Era are products of a freewheeling group of societies and have been through enough trials that the particularly inflexible have long ago met the Final Death. But the post-Roman elders are products of a relatively simple world, that of landed feudalism, and the War of Ages has yet to weed out those who are unable to change. Quite often, the elders the Furores face have difficulty even grasping the concepts behind the tactics the rebels use against them.

CHALLENGES

It often seems as if every weapon is drawn against a young rebel holding. Most obviously, there are neighboring elders worried about their safety and the safety of their power bases. But there are other menaces as well—dispossessed elders and Methuselabs looking for a place to roost, local Lupines and even witch-hunters drawn by the reports of vampiric activity can all make the life of the community a difficult one. Indeed, such threats bring an end to many Furore groups within a decade or two of their initial success.

If a Furore community does the idealistic thing, wiping out or driving off the surviving elders rather than incorporating them into the new government, the rebels must then establish their government from scratch. A certain amount of mortal influence can be retained if the young Turks are quick to rebind the ghouls of destroyed Cainites and pick up vacated social contacts, but sometimes this is not an option. The elders' resources and ghouls may have been destroyed in the rebellion, or the Furores may not know what exactly the elders had their hands in until it's too late to pick up the threads.

Mortal influence is only a tiny part of what a Furore community needs, however. The real menace to a nascent sect is in other supernatural creatures, and this is a menace not so easily addressed as mortal interference. The primary worry is the wrath of neighboring Cainites, and their manipulations are dealt with specifically in "Power Plays and Subversion," below. But, sometimes there is no subtle undermining of the political structure; there is just open war.

A young Furore community must be able to somehow repel attacks on its members or on the community itself by the ghouls and progeny of nearby elders, and even occasionally by the elders themselves. If the Furores do not all make their havens in close physical proximity, the attacks will almost certainly resemble guerilla tactics. This is not because the elders are cowardly, but because they're intelligent. It's much less of a drain on the elders' resources to have a ghouls set a Furore's haven ablaze in the middle of the day than to try to draw the rebels into open battle.

If the Furores all dwell in a fortress or compound of some sort, or if the elder is of a particularly combative inclination (like many *voivodes* or former knights), matters aren't going to stop with a little arson and some daylight ghouls attacks. Instead, a full-scale assault is likely. Ghouls may undertake this raid during the daylight or they may be joined by vampires for a night-time attack; especially chivalrous elders may even issue a challenge to battle on the open field. Such a battle is a

serious matter — the elders are sure to put everything they can muster into it, and losing it means a drastic setback for the rebels, at the very least. On the other hand, such attacks take time and effort for the elders to muster — Furores with spies or sympathizers in the prince's court will probably know about an assault in advance, and may even be able to ambush their enemies while they're preparing or on the march.

POWER PLAYS AND SUBVERSION

The first priority of a successful rebellion, one that must be tended to even before the first elder has withered to dust in the morning sun, is forming a government. Wartime administration cannot substitute for this — wars are won with organization and discipline, but if the victory is to be something more than a prelude to a totalitarian state, there must be an accountable, egalitarian structure to take the place of the wartime hierarchy.

Building that structure is the single most difficult task that a successful Furore community must undertake, and it is the one most likely to go wrong. Resisting attacks is easy — most Furores are seasoned fighters. Building a stable government is hard, and building one that doesn't base its stability on iron-handed authority is harder still.

AUTOCRACY

Most successful rebellions come to fruition because of the efforts of a few talented and driven individuals taking leadership roles. Because vampires are deathless, it is tempting to place all authority in the people (or person) who carried the revolution to fruition. This is one of the most common, and commonly fatal, Furore errors.

First, basing a government on the principle of "we do what she tells us" assumes that "she" will be there in perpetuity. Vampires are unaging, but not immortal. They can and do succumb to the Final Death and torpor. They are also not indefatigable, or infallible, or immune to the temptations of power. A particular Cainite may be a viable leader now, but what happens in 10 years or a hundred when she becomes weary of the post, succumbs to the Beast, proves corrupt or when her leadership style becomes unsuited to changing political conditions?

Similarly, whatever his followers call him, a single Cainite running the operation is the prince. He might be a friendly prince, but it's still essentially the same situation as before, just with different people in the various chairs. In the short term, this can seem beneficial — neighboring elders are likely to see the leader as someone reasonable they can deal with. In the long term, it's disastrous. The community is still going to be troubled by and take part in the same conflicts as before, and in the same fashion, except that now the leaders will have considerably less knowledge and experience.

The error of the one-man show is by no means obvious in the short term. Keep in mind that the vampire in question is often a heroic figure, and that while democracy is by no means unknown in Dark Medieval Europe,

it is not inculcated into their culture the way it is in ours. Of those Furore communities that do exist, a large number are one-vampire shows, run by an unelected leader with no real provisions for succession or removal should they prove unfit. When and while this system works, these benevolent despots provide the best government they're capable of giving. When it fails, as it almost certainly must, it typically marks the end of the community.

AUTHORITARIANISM

Another common path to failure is the authoritarian state. Most typically, a powerful Cainite, either the leader of the revolution or someone who came along afterward, uses a small cadre of loyal followers to terrorize local Cainites into submission. Sometimes this is simply repressive, and no improvement at all over the previous situation. Other times it is much, much worse. All it takes to reduce the community to a black carnival of Amaranth is a ruler who has no ambition but the gratification of her own sick urges. It can and does happen that these hopeful young communities end their existences (or at least their free existences) as the playthings of powerful infernalists, demented Methuselabs or a Cainite who is simply crafty and brutal enough to impose his will on all those unable to escape.

But this isn't always the road to tyranny. Many dictatorships happen one seemingly justified step at a time. With neighboring elders eager to subvert the government, those in power must act to preserve their rule. The rulers must ferret out those who have become beholden to outside powers. They must suppress dissent so that the enemies of the community cannot use it as a lever to tear the body politic apart. They must prevent vampires from doing things that will endanger the community as a whole. If the community has reason to fear infernalism or some other sort of black practice, then that must be policed for as well.

Measures taken to protect the community and preserve its freedom are often a slippery slope toward repression — the goal can easily shift from preserving freedom through protecting the state to preserving the state for its own sake. The habits of wartime thinking are hard to break, but unless they are broken, any attempt to find an egalitarian solution to the problems of Cainite existence is likely to degenerate into a self-perpetuating exercise in power.

While it may have stated goals far superior to the average elder's, an authoritarian Furore community is really just another player in the War of Ages. Having long compromised its ideals, it becomes no different than its opponents. If a vampiric sect will use any tactic to expand its power and assure its internal security, does the rhetoric it uses to justify its excesses really matter?

INFIGHTING

Perhaps the most popular way for a potential utopia to come to an untimely end, political infighting has brought ruin to many a carefully laid plan. As has been said before, successful revolutions are typically led by ambitious people with powerful personalities. Often, several of them must

THE WORLD OF THE FINITE

Keep in mind that elders are working with finite resources. Unless you specifically want the game to run that way, they shouldn't be cartoon villains with endless hordes of minions to throw at the characters in this week's insidious plot. Cainites have only so many disposable resources, and once they run out, there aren't any more. Few elders are stupid, and fewer still are playing the game for anything but keeps. They will aim their blows to kill, and when they have the advantage, they will push it to the fullest.

However, the average elder has a lot of other things on his mind. You don't get to be a powerful Cainite lord by sitting around and twiddling your thumbs. Even if the characters have earned the immortal enmity of a prince, his progeny and ghouls are going to be spread out, taking care of his interests. It will take time, effort and probably great expense to concentrate everything an elder controls to deal with an unusually tenacious problem. While the elders will be striking to kill, they will in most cases attempt to do so in the most economical fashion possible. Victory is meaningless if it brings nothing to the weakened winner but Final Death at the fangs of a rival.

Also, most elders have nothing but time. Not that they don't understand urgency, but without a compelling reason, why should they hurry? Some will resort to force out of habit or anger or immediate need, but most are willing to pursue more long-term, economical paths to their goals. Why sacrifice a few ghouls or a childe when a few years planting an infiltrator, fomenting unrest or provoking a mortal witch-hunt will pay off just as well, for a much smaller investment?

unite to lead their followers to victory. While the needs of the rebellion hold these vampires together against a common foe, what happens afterward is a different story.

The one thing that Furores have in common is the desire to live outside their elders' tyrannical grasp. Beyond that, they agree on very little indeed. Left with nothing to hold them together but the promise of brighter tomorrows, a fervently Catholic Lasombra and a Brujah yearning to return to the glory of the Hellenic age are not going to get along well, and neither are their followers.

Slightly (but only slightly) worse is the specter of political opportunism. In any social group, there will be those who want to better themselves regardless of the cost to the system. The chance to get in at the founding of what is essentially a new sect brings these vampires out of the woodwork. Given the small size of young Furore communities and their often tenuous position, it only takes one or two social climbers or tribe splitters to destroy the rebels' chances.

Of course, and unfortunately, the only alternative is to suppress, exile or destroy these Cainites. This forces the leaders of these infant sects to make painful choices.

ASHEN THIEF

How much dissent can be suppressed in the name of keeping out people whose only motivation is to increase their status irregardless if they tear apart the community as they do it? How often can a leader attempting to forge a better way of life silence those who oppose her before opposition in and of itself becomes grounds for silencing?

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that elder vampires excel at encouraging precisely this sort of thing. A young community of Furores shouldn't just expect to be beset by compulsive power-grabbers. It should realize that these political predators are backed by the money, advice and if necessary the armed retainers of one or more local elders. Maybe the elder is interested in securing the borders of his domain, or maybe he wants to extend his holdings. Either way, he is likely very good at spotting the one (or more) Furore who can convince herself that she can take his resources without compromising herself. By the time she is disabused of such a notion, it's too late.

EXPORTING REVOLUTION

The enmity that elders hold for Furore communities is well-merited. Often, the first thing that a newly established utopian community does is attempt to spread its creed. Indeed, often before the pyres of the last elders are cold, spies and agents have fanned out across the landscape to spread the news of freedom.

This is both understandable and unavoidable. Vampires who have fought so long and so hard to gain their independence are likely to look abroad to find others locked in similar struggles. Likewise, Cainites driven by a compulsion to take revenge against elders as a group aren't likely to stop with just one city or small region.

There are two ways to export rebellion. The first is by actually subverting and attacking neighboring fiefdoms. This is really little more than war, and not terribly dissimilar to the rebels' original revolutionary battles. The differences lie mostly in the fact that the rebels are now almost certainly more secure, possessed of more extensive resources, and hopelessly overconfident.

In this regard, the reach of these young communities exceeds their grasp. It is not uncommon for such vampires to have almost their whole strength out stirring up havoc while the weak sisters and the ghouls keep the home fires burning. The result is obvious: A huge amount of effort is spent stirring up trouble, and that trouble then lands on the unprepared community with both feet. Many successful Furore groups make this error, and it destroys many of them.

The second manner Furores export rebellion is by providing aid and advice to other Furore bands. Some rebel communities are very particular about who they will aid, only assisting those Cainites in complete ideological agreement with them. Others are more generous, and will aid even groups they find objectionable. The enemy of their enemy is their friend, or tool at least.

Regardless, this the safer method of supporting revolution. The aid dispatched may be silver, advisors or well-trained

ghouls to bolster the rebel forces. Regardless, a Furore community can give other rebel bands a much better chance of success without necessarily weakening itself or drawing the wrath of the elders down onto its newly unbowed head.

There are downsides, of course. It's only a short step from supporting other rebel groups to acting as their patron, and from acting as their patron to using them as catspaws. It's easy to play the War of Ages game — without any conscious effort, a Furore community can easily become an alliance of elder Cainites who differ from those they oppose only in that they use rhetoric to justify their actions.

On a more practical level, these efforts must be carefully balanced. While they further the Furore cause and give neighboring elders something to worry about other than squashing the infant Furore state, they are not free. Advisors, silver and ghouls sent out to help another Furore band fight their war are not available to the rebel community from whence they originate. These young rebel communities are often operating in a hand-to-mouth fashion as it is, and many can scarcely afford to subsidize the efforts of others. Likewise, while offering advice and support is less likely than direct attack to bring down retribution, it is still possible to go too far and bring about a concerted attack by a number of princes.

FURORE GROUPS AND PERSONALITIES

"You're bringing in a fanatic!"

"Yes."

"This is not about the Church, and if it was, that... priest is a Heretic! He thinks Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior was a savior for Cainites only!"

"Yes."

"What is this shit? Are you going to pour vitae into a chalice and pass it out at the local church?"

"They are offering to back us up. In case you missed it, Horsingas died last month at the hand of what may possibly be the best Cainite blood-hunter on this side of the Pyrenees."

"They are Heretics!"

"They are sending us one of their missionary priests, who just so happens to have trained under the same person who educated Jack of the Chase, and who has killed more elders than there are people in this poxed army of ours. Don't be stupid. Do you want to get us all killed? He'll try to convert us — so what? We know they won't be forceful about it, and I've met him myself. He's legitimate, he just happens to have some very strange beliefs. Longinus' spear, Shannon, if we stand on our principles, we'll be gone in six months! Ash in the morning sun, just like Horsingas!"

"Fine. I'll listen, but I won't like it."

"You don't have to like it — you just have to learn."

The following section talks about the sorts of Cainites who make up the Furores, and briefly describes various Furore communities that have established themselves in Europe. These societies make interesting additions to an ongoing chronicle — they can serve as a setting for play,

as a location for adventure, or simply as an unusual background element that shapes play.

What has been omitted is the specific location of these communities. As a courtesy to Storytellers who don't wish to find a band of fervent revolutionaries set down in the middle of their ongoing Dark Ages chronicle, only their general location is specified.

COMMON CLANS

There are Furores from every clan — it's not as if any clan's elders have a monopoly on being good or bad people. There are rebellious Assamites, Setites, Tremere and Cappadocians. But by and large, the majority of Furores come from one of four clans. Depending on location, these clans taken together make up between 40 and 70 percent of the rebel population. Because there are more of them than of any other Furores, members of these clans also most often occupy a leadership position. However, just as there are Furores from each clan, so are there Furore leaders from each of them as well.

BRUJAH

Zealots unsurprisingly make up a large proportion of the Furores. A goodly number are rebelling directly against their sires — just because they preach a rhetoric of equality by no means exempts Brujah elders from using and abusing their progeny. Others are rebelling indirectly, against the clan as a whole rather than any specific elder — these vampires reject the introspective elders of their clan and seek to shame them into action by their own success. Indeed, the Brujah are one of the few clans whose members join the Furores without a long history of abuse.

The result is often more than a little awkward. The Brujah are charismatic speakers and excellent warriors, but they're often involved for academic and not personal reasons. Some are fair-weather revolutionaries who vanish when they realize that Final Death is forever, but most soldier on at hopeless tasks to which they have only ideological commitments. This is often met with a mixture of admiration, puzzlement and derision, depending on the vampire doing the assessment: Many Furores believe that someone who hasn't been treated terribly has no business or reason to be fighting a revolution. On the other hand, chronically short tempers and powerful combat Disciplines mean these Cainites are rarely insulted to their faces.

Philosophically motivated Brujah often have very stormy relationships with their sires. These young Cainites are clearly acting with their hearts and not their heads, which makes them foolish, but on the other hand, they're basically doing the right thing, and both sides know it. Unfortunately, the youths make it explicitly clear, often at inconvenient moments, just how they're doing the right thing. The result is huge public spats, followed by unspoken apologies and (often but not always) the quiet provision of assistance or care packages, culminating in another public showdown as Zealot tempers flare again.

VENTRUE

It is perhaps no surprise that the Patricians produce a large number of Furores. A number of those selected for the "natural nobility" of their blood and taken into the clan of "natural rulers" eventually wonder when *their* chance to rule will come. In most cases, the answer is not for a long, long time. Physical abuse aside, the realization that the Embrace was essentially a giant scam is enough to send many Ventrue over the edge.

Envy isn't the sole cause, however, or even the prime one. Many young Ventrue have their heads filled with stories of the *daeva*, insidious creatures whom the Ventrue believe lurk in the shadows behind the world and spin out webs of black-hearted intrigue. It is often rather difficult for young Ventrue, trained to see the plots of sinister demonic beings behind every event, to not see that their own clan and society is also most likely a *daevic* ploy. After concluding that elder Patricians who participate in vampiric society are either minions or dupes enabling the menace even as they allege to fight against it, what real choice do the clan's ancillae have but to attempt to stop it? It's their duty by right of blood, after all.

This somewhat unusual fervor puts the Ventrue near par with Brujah for vampires who join the Furores for ideological reasons. Like the Brujah, their power in battle and their leadership abilities make them feared, if not necessarily respected, by their compatriots. However, while the Brujah will typically hold forth on the righteous nature of their cause for as long as anyone is willing to listen, Ventrue Furores are more taciturn. They fight without giving explanation, remain ever-vigilant for spies and portents, and fear threats they choose not to share with their comrades. Better, believe many of these silent crusaders, if others do not know the gravity of the situation.

LASOMBRA

Just as the Ventrue produce many dissatisfied young vampires, so do their dark likenesses, the Lasombra. If anything, Magister society produces significantly more such rebels, and those rebels are considerably more bitter about the situation.

The Lasombra practice of recruiting second sons and promising might-have-beens bases itself on the promise of recognition and accomplishment after the Embrace. Yet many Lasombra sires mock and punish their progeny for failing to measure up. The clan's collective penchant for overcompensation assures that for these elders, good enough will never be good enough.

Those neonates who persevere until their sires release them find that little more awaits than further chances to be disgraced and passed over yet again. The Magisters divide themselves into an array of social cliques. Just being skilled is not enough—one must also become one of the Friends of the Night. To be otherwise is simply failure dressed up as an acceptable performance. Decades of ruthless exploitation by their sires and brutal competition with their peers embitters many members of this clan, and many of those hateful, ambitious castaways go to join the ranks of the Furores.

ASHEN THIEF

TZIMISCE

Just as with the Lasombra, the Fiends' high expectations and brutal competition produces a lot of Cainite refuse. The nighted roads of Eastern Europe are seemingly thronged by ragged bands of Tzimisce refugees, castoffs from the wars of the *voivodes*. Most are young Fiends whose sires were destroyed, or who disappointed their masters and were disfigured and cast into exile as punishment. Others were mercenaries or accidental victims of the conflicts, thrown into the harsh, dark world by unlucky circumstance.

These Eastern European refugees are in some ways markedly different than their fellow Furores. Colored strongly by the eldritch bloodlettings of their parent clan, these Cainites hold strange beliefs about the sharing of blood, and often share vitae as a ritual of unity. Because they are so fierce in battle, Tzimisce are welcome among the Furores. Indeed, in many places, their blood-sharing rituals have been adopted as a way to encourage loyalty between members of a Furore band. Though most Furores discourage true blood oaths inside the band, the positive emotions engendered by sharing blood once or twice are often encouraged, as they create a sense of unity and discourage betrayal.

NEW LACADAEMONIA (THE GREEK ISLANDS)

New Lacadaemonia exists on the border marches of the Byzantine Empire, just outside the influence of the Toreador Methuselah Michael of Constantinople. During the early years of the 11th century, an elder Brujah named Hektor (no relation to the Trojan hero) awakened from a sleep of several centuries to find the world around him radically changed. The Muslim Caliphate, which had been at its zenith, was now shattered, and the Dream of the Methuselah Michael was clearly on the wane, along with Cainite society as a whole.

It seemed as if the time might be ripe for a new beginning to the Brujah vision of utopia. Hektor had nothing but contempt for the posturing and reflection of his clanmates; he had taken the sleep of centuries because he couldn't convince them to act. Now, the once-strong Cainite social edifices had crumbled to the point where he could operate on his own without bringing down the wrath the elders. The time was ripe for action.

Hektor gathered together a group of disaffected young Cainites. The recruits were mostly unhappy Brujah, grandchilder and great-grandchilder of his own rivals—an irony he did not fail to appreciate. There were also a number of Lasombra recruited from the ranks of that clan's seafaring members, and Tzimisce driven from the border marches by the bloodlettings of the Byzantine-Slav wars and the conflicts between the *voivodes*.

Though Hektor was no Methuselah, he was still old enough to have known most of the local elders' sires, and his power had grown significantly during his long slumber. With him at their head, the Furores' rebellion was short,

bloody and successful — one of the most to date. Most neighboring elders discounted it as just bloody-handed politics, but New Lacadaemonia was soon providing covert aid to a dozen rebel bands around the Mediterranean basin. By the time potential rivals realized the Brujah elder had an agenda other than amassing personal power, the rebels were too well entrenched to be dislodged without support from Byzantium — support which was unlikely to be forthcoming unless Hektor misplayed his cards terribly and antagonized the city's ancient inhabitants.

Since then, New Lacadaemonia has prospered. While it is not terribly different from a normal Cainite community, it does have a much stronger democratic component than is typical. In addition, young vampires may not be mistreated prior to their release, and Cainites who fall into difficulties can plead for relief from the state.

In terms of faith and belief, Hektor and his priestess Maureen preserve pagan practices from pre-Christian days, but many of the citizens retain their Byzantine Orthodoxy. To follow the faith of the dictator, however, has a certain status attached to it, and a growing cabal of Cainites have been initiated into the secrets of their mystery cult.

STRUCTURE

New Lacadaemonia is located on a large island with about 20,000 inhabitants spread across a small city, several market towns and a large number of agricultural hamlets. These mortals are essentially serfs of the 40 or so Cainites who make up the citizenry of the vampiric state. The mortal inhabitants (whom the vampires call "helots") are allowed to retain their own rituals and religion, but are not allowed to move elsewhere.

The island remits the proper tax revenues to the Byzantine Empire, and the Lacadaemonians assure themselves that the tax-farming governors appointed to administer it are scrupulously honest, hopelessly dominated and totally ignorant of the true situation on the island. In this way, the utopia is preserved.

Hektor is the dictator of New Lacadaemonia, and theoretically he holds all power. In reality he serves as a sort of manager, arbitrating between factions and giving assent to decisions of the Assembly, a body made up of every Cainite citizen released by their sire. All of these vampires have a legally equal voice and the Assembly can recommend any action it feels necessary for the community's wellbeing. This includes but is not limited to raising tax revenues and the conscription, exile or even death of a Cainite. Hektor must sanction a recommendation for it to be enacted.

New Lacadaemonia generally abides by several of the Six Traditions: Hektor (and the Assembly) approve every Embrace and review any destruction, sires are responsible (and still release) their childer, havens remain largely sacrosanct, and the community preserves the Silence of Blood to avoid outside attention. But

there is no strict legal code, and all these policies exist at the whim of the citizenry and dictator.

This, of course, is the system's greatest weakness. Everything ultimately relies on the Assembly exhibiting self-control and having a dictator wise and distant enough to mediate any disputes. Hektor is already forced to mediate constantly in the Assembly, and there are no Cainites of his caliber to replace him if he suffers some mishap. The elder Brujah already slips in and out of short torpors regularly, and when he returns to the sleep of centuries, as he inevitably must, his structure will have a great deal of difficulty standing without him.

HEKTOR, DICTATOR OF NEW LACADAEMONIA

6th generation, childe of Philogos

Clan: Brujah

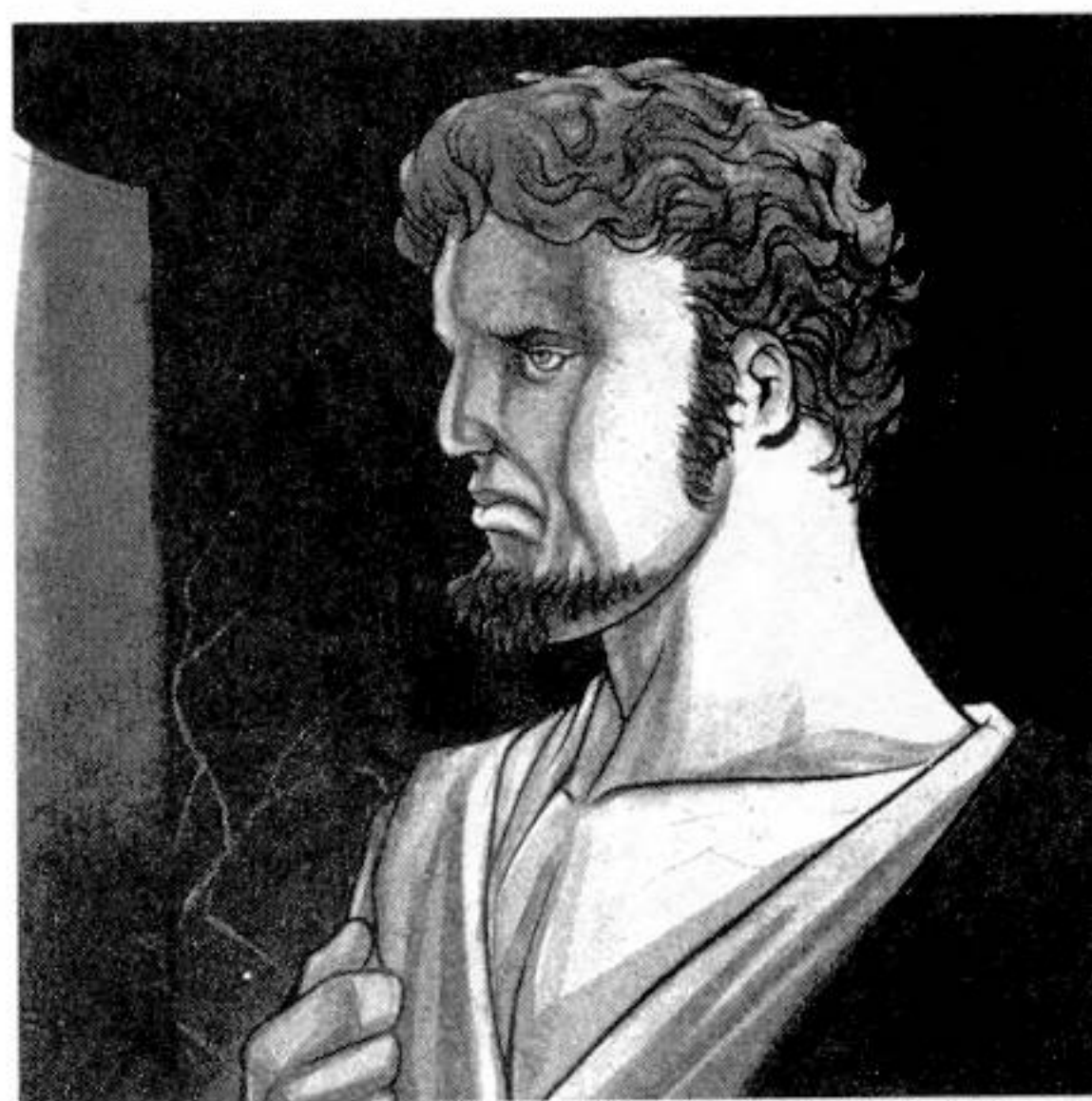
Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 375 CE

Apparent Age: late 30s

Sired during the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the rise of the Byzantine state, Hektor spent his time as a neonate listening to tales of Greek and Carthaginian glory passed down from sire to childe from his great-grandsire, who had once held an important post in Sparta, and who had served as a functionary in Carthage prior to the First Punic War. Frustrated with his sire's and his peers' lack of willingness to actually *do* anything about the decline of his clan or of the world in general, Hektor cast about angrily for something he could seize on to give meaning to his existence. Failing to find anything, he laid down to sleep the morning after he heard the news of Attila's entrance into the Po Valley, and slept away the centuries, never knowing that the Hun had been turned back.



FLAMES OF THE FUIRORES

While a valiant warrior and skilled leader, Hektor is possessed of two faults. The first is that he subconsciously greatly enjoys being the dictator of New Lacadaemonia. While he doesn't think about it very much, his failure to set up a form of government that can continue without him is at least somewhat deliberate.

Hektor's more severe flaw is the fact that his great-grand sire also inculcated in his descendants a tremendous respect for the religion of the Carthaginians, the worship of Baal-Haman in rituals involving human sacrifice. Hektor has very quietly but persistently sought out a Baali priest (see Maureen, below) for his community, and is gradually initiating those he trusts most into the true mysteries of their ancient beliefs.

ANTIOCHUS, THE VOICE OF REASON

10th generation, childe of Lumilla

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1011

Apparent Age: late 40s

Antiochus and his followers form the loyal opposition to Hektor's rule. A Brujah sired in the first year of the 11th century, Antiochus was one of Hektor's first followers. Over the last few decades, Antiochus has been the leading voice urging Hektor to set up a more sustainable form of government.

As a result, Antiochus has fallen somewhat out of favor. While he is still a respected voice in the Assembly, one too many intractable disputes over the same matter have cost him his once-preeminent popularity. Antiochus is no more happy about his intractability than his peers, and has been spending as much time as possible attending

to his duties by advising rebel groups across Europe. The Zealot is taking unnecessary risks, and he doesn't care — the alternative is to tear apart a community he helped found. If nothing changes, Antiochus is going to meet the Final Death sooner or later, and most of the hope for reform in New Lacadaemonia will die with him.

Antiochus is a relatively devout Orthodox Christian responsible for keeping the island free of the Cainite Heresy, despite the degree to which it would be convenient for the rulership. He knows Hektor and some of his cronies are practicing pagan beliefs, and he can deal with the idea of them groveling to statues of Zeus. However, if the Cainite ever finds out precisely what is required to placate Baal-Haman, it will not be something he can abide.

MAUREEN, DARK PRIESTESS

8th generation, childe of Sugareg

Bloodline: Baali

Nature: Monster

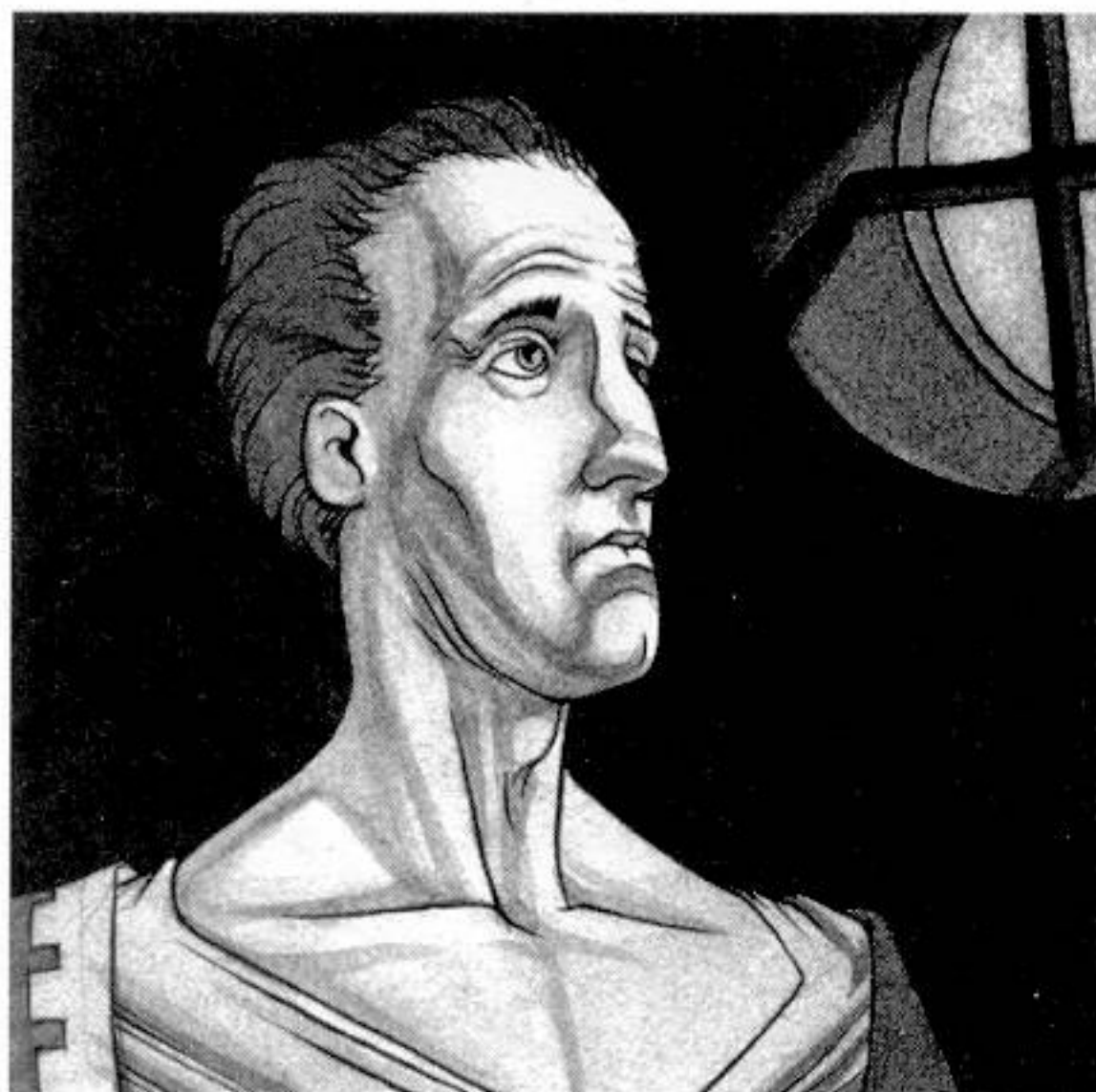
Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 681 CE

Apparent Age: early 20s

Maureen was a young Baali of traditional training who dwelt in North Africa during the early years of the Muslim Caliphate. She took advantage of the early Muslim heresies to make a comfortable existence, but a Tuareg attack on her followers left her without sustenance, stranded in a desert cave and eventually trapped in hunger-torpor.

It was Hektor who unearthed her after immense research, and asked her to become the priestess of his New Lacadaemonia. With her own followers centuries dead, she quickly agreed. Hektor introduced her as the childe of a companion of his deceased sire, and none saw reason to dispute it.



ASHEN THIEF



Since her awakening, Maureen has been growing her congregation in New Lacadaemonia. It currently numbers slightly over a half-dozen, and it is growing very gradually, adding another member every few years. None of those involved are devil-worshippers — all are quite sincere in their placation of the Children. Not that this will matter if the blasphemous faith is discovered.

THE CITY OF GOD (PYRENEES MOUNTAINS)

Founded in 1120 by the (late) Bishop Hugh, this splinter of the Cainite Heresy has proved troublesome to many elders, particularly those involved in the actual direction of the Heresy itself.

The great fortified monastery that has become the City of God was originally held by the Crimson Curia in trust for the Heresy. That was, of course, until a small number of Lasombra took it as their own. The directors of the Heresy had no idea that the three vampires they had invited to the monastery as assistants in keeping it under control were themselves members of a splinter faith — the Red Temptation.

This faith preached that the appearance of Christ as the Second Caine had signaled the beginning of a great uprising against Ialdabaoth, the devilish creator of the corrupt physical world. All former rules were to be abolished, and the followers of the True Faith were to grant Gnosis (in the form of the Embrace) to as many as possible, indulge in as much license as they were able and tear down all structures that served make Cainites and mortals alike dependent on Ialdabaoth's world of clay and accountability. It also taught that many of the Second Christ's childer had been corrupted, and that opposition to the False Creator required opposition to elder Cainites, most of whom were in some ways pawns of dark forces.

This faith was popular among the Ophites, but the sect was largely destroyed early in the Christian Era — mostly by Cainites who quite sensibly saw it as a terrible threat. The three Lasombra had uncovered Red Temptation holy writings while in southern Italy and taken them for revelation. After carefully searching out a well-fortified base whose inhabitants had experienced one too many Red Pentecosts, the three arranged to become its guardians and the providers of its vitae. Given that there were almost 300 monks in the monastery, this had already proven problematic, and the Heresy was glad to have them.

It was only a matter of a few years until the entire populace of the monastery was converted to the Red Temptation, and only a few years after that that the City of God was proclaimed and the monastery freed from the yoke of Ialdabaoth's pawn, the "true" Cainite Heresy. The Heresy sent a number of Cainite warriors and their retainers to the monastery to inquire into the heretical outburst, and only one Cainite and two retainers returned, bearing news that the Lasombra had been Embracing freely and that there were legions of heretics.

Shortly afterward, outposts of the Heresy began to receive missionaries from the City of God. Where the

missionaries were rebuked or destroyed, assassins followed. For the last 50 years, the Heresy has been casting around to find way to deal with this festering sore.

(Not unexpectedly, the **Cainite Heresy** supplement has more information on the Heresy itself.)

STRUCTURE

There are currently around 240 monks in the City of God, about 18 of whom are Lasombra embraced by the original three vampires. The rest are ghouls. The City of God consumes an immense amount of resources keeping all the ghouls fed, given the regularity that Cainites feed on them and their distinctly unhealthy lifestyles. The vast sums of silver flowing in from enfeoffed lands have long ago ceased flowing out to jewelers and merchants of rare delicacies, and begun flowing out to herdsmen. The quantity of meat consumed by the monastery in a single year is amazing, even by the standards of a decadent monastery. The amount of bone meal and leather that flows back out has made the monastery locally notable, though the stink from the tanning vats has made it widely avoided as well — a calculated decision on the part of the bishops.

The City of God is a monastery and generally follows the Benedictine Rule, although not in those instances where the rule teaches a morality that would go against the City's heretical beliefs. The two remaining Lasombra founders now rule the community (the third having died at Heretic hands), and it continues to prosper — it is careful to conceal the blasphemous truth of its existence from mortal eyes, though it is all too well-known among Cainites for hundreds of miles.

Red Temptation missionaries are active in southern France and northern Spain. A half-dozen Cainites and twice that many ghouls routinely try to sway Heretical congregations and debate theology with Heretical priests. Normally, the missionaries are tolerable, but occasionally internal politics reach the point where they become violent, and a few years of tit-for-tat assassinations result.

The Red Temptation is happy to provide assistance to other Furore groups. All they ask is that their advisor-missionaries be given the opportunity to preach and not be persecuted for their beliefs. In the eyes of the Red Temptation, it's more important to pull down Ialdabaoth's world than to make sure everyone recites the right psalms. Indeed, the Temptation sees itself as having far more in common with the average Furore than with the average Heretic. Most Furores would beg to differ, however, and despite their generosity the inhabitants of the City of God are not well-loved by their fellow rebels.

BISHOP ARNAUD, THE FALLEN HERETIC

8th generation, childe of Marie-Claire

Clan: Lasombra

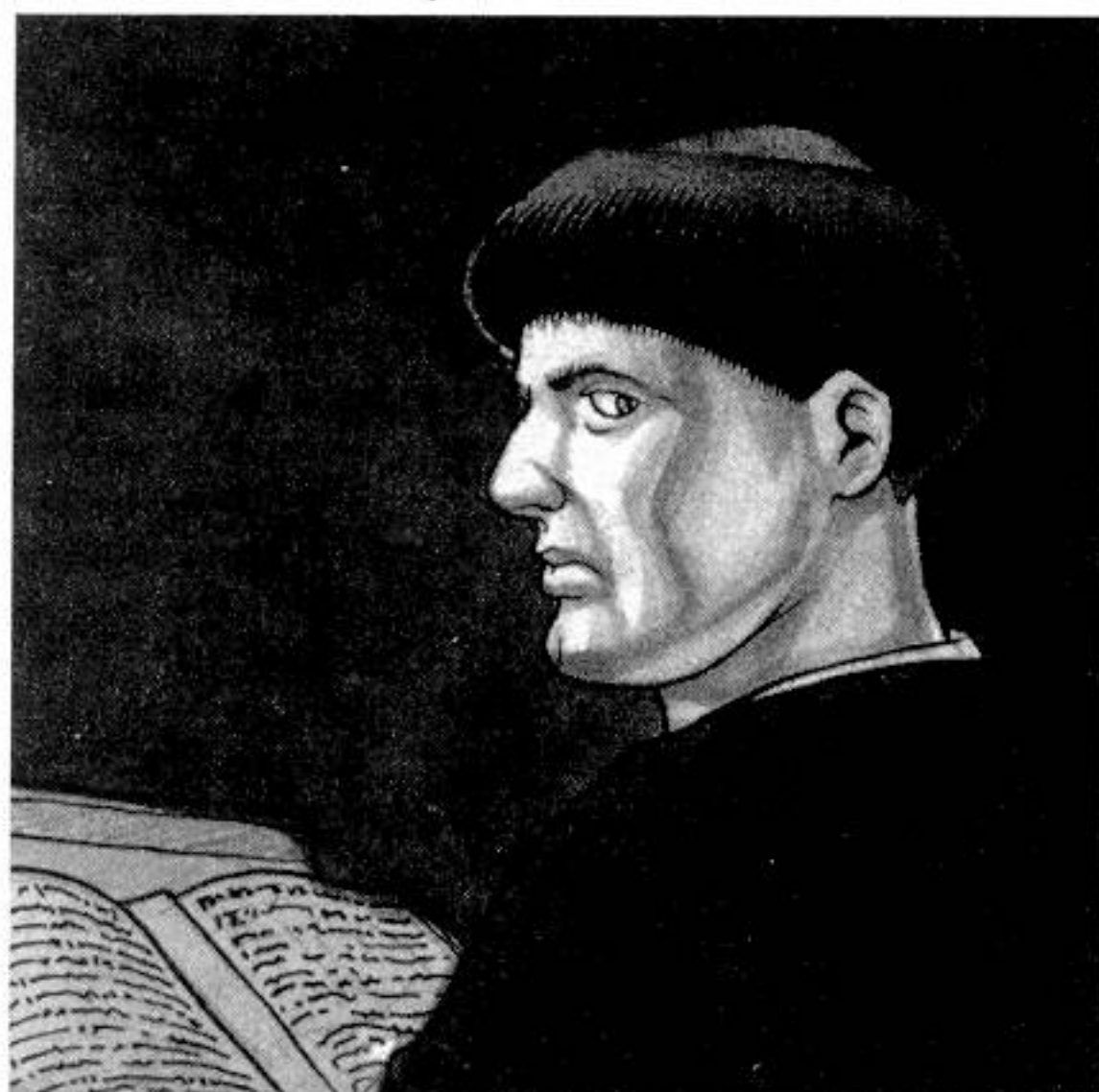
Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 999 CE

Apparent Age: late 30s

FLAMES OF THE FURORES



The Bishop Arnaud has a terrible secret — he doesn't actually believe any of this. Maybe he did once, or maybe he just convinced himself he did for the sake of blood and power. Whatever the case may be, he doesn't believe now, and he isn't exactly in the sort of position that permits crises of faith. To Arnaud, existence in the Red Temptation is like an unending nightmare. Never for a minute can he let it slip that he finds the almost 20 vampires who surround him to be grotesque freaks.

Arnaud slipped once, and confessed his weakness to the now-late Bishop Hugh. Hugh was incensed that Arnaud could turn his face away from the faith and stormed off to the mission trail, there to debate what to do with his weak-willed brother. The next night, Arnaud informed Heresy agents of Hugh's itinerary and arranged his destruction.

Arnaud is constantly struggling with Josephus for control of the City of God. If it was up to Josephus, they'd have swarmed into Rome like locusts by now. Only Arnaud's constant pleas for secrecy, to wait until the time is right, have postponed Josephus' holy crusade. Arnaud cannot even imagine what Josephus would do if he had had even the slightest inkling of his doubts. What frightens him the most is that if Josephus is "touched", a blue bolt from the Heavens seems like an entirely possible response.

BISHOP JOSEPHUS, THE CHOSEN VOICE

8th generation, childe of Hugh

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Monster

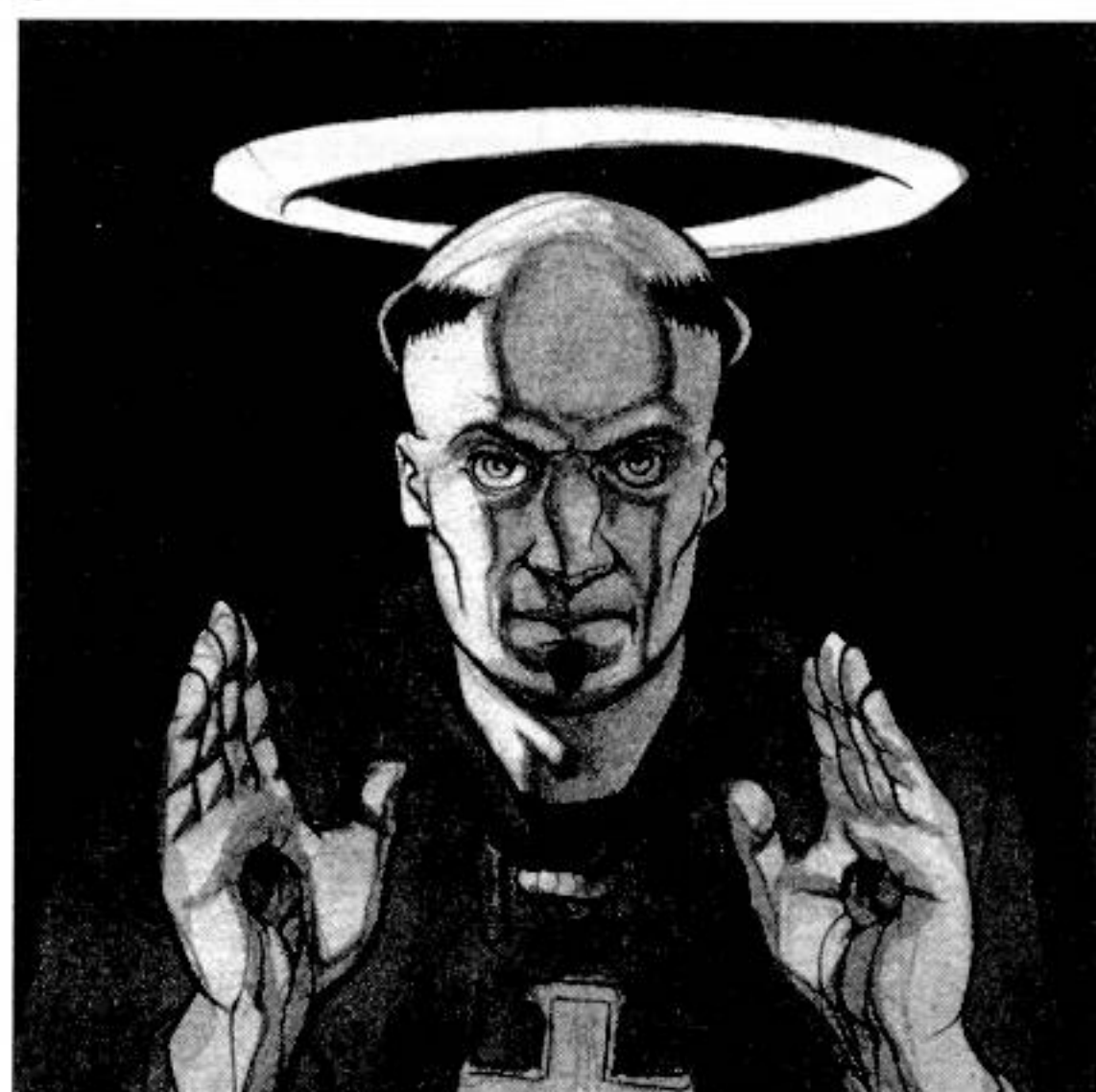
Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 901 CE

Apparent Age: early 20s

Josephus is a fanatic, and what is worse, he would appear to be a fanatic on the right side. When Josephus was just an ancilla, he and his two broodmates discovered

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the ancient holy writings of the true faith, and Josephus knew that it was his sacred mission to bring those teachings to the world and see them come to fruition.

And something powerful, it would seem, agrees with him. Josephus practically glows from within with the light of his faith. Miracles happen around him — chalices of wine turn to blood, crucified figures writhe in agony, the sick are made whole and unbelievers are sometimes consumed from within by the fires of the Lord. Josephus himself is a walking tapestry of Ialdabaoth's wrath — his hands bleed with stigmata, there is a gash in his side, foul things nest in his flesh, but somehow whatever favor he enjoys protects him from the negative sides of these horrific afflictions.

The inhabitants of the monastery worship him as an unliving saint. Monks beg to receive the Kiss and Embrace from him, and he grants it when he is able. Josephus is beatific in his perfect faith. This is all ordained, and everything will work out well. It vexes him sometimes that Arnaud worries so, but he understands that those who do not know are often plagued with doubts great and small. As for Arnaud's reluctance to march on Rome and proclaim the glory of the faith from the Papal seat, Josephus understands that there must be time for preparation. That is why he lets Arnaud stop him. One day, Arnaud's worries will no longer be reasonable, and Josephus will at that point proclaim to him the glory of the faith in the words that the angels have taught him. Until then, Josephus can wait.

THE FREE STATE (FINLAND)

The coming of the Christ-god has not been not kind to the Norse. In just a few centuries, their fiercely individualistic culture has been displaced by Christianity and a Christian social structure that is a poor reproduction of western Europe. While local democracy persists even as the

WHAT IS JOSEPHUS' STORY?

In game terms, Josephus has the 5-point Merit *Miracles of the Faith*, and the 5-point Flaw *Scourged By God*, both from **Cainite Heresy**. You don't need to own **Cainite Heresy** to use him, because the joint effect of these Traits taken together is pretty clearly depicted in Josephus' description. What is causing this phenomena to happen — be it infernal power, strange Chimerstrylike effects that Josephus doesn't even realize he's doing, or a genuine miraculous event — is up to the Storyteller. Whatever is behind Josephus, however, it is clearly potent and focused on him.

Josephus in his full glory is a terrible thing to behold and best reserved for chronicles where horrors of the faith are manifest. In the same way that the most twisted of Tzimisce fiends can ruin a story about personal struggle, so Josephus can ruin a more visceral tale. Use your best judgment as to whether he is appropriate for your troupe or not (and feel free to tone him down if you like — there could just be a Malkavian or Ravnos thrall "behind the curtain" after all).

population is gradually reduced to serfdom and peasantry, the days of the Petty King and the war band are long past.

But these days are not necessarily past for the land's Cainite inhabitants. Most of the *einherjar* (as Norse vampires call themselves) believed as fervently as any of the poor bastards who went toe-to-toe with Christian warriors to prove the strength of their faith. And most of them learned, just as the heroes who supported the old ways did, that the Christians (and their Cainite supporters) kept on coming.

Some died fighting the Christians, some converted and some gave up and slipped into the dark slumber of torpor, hoping to awaken in a world where the Christ-god was forgotten and the old ways remembered.

But some did not. Some tried to preserve the old ways in their own somewhat unwholesome way. In 1160, after gathering about them a large number of mortal fanatics, these *einherjar* retreated into then-pagan Finland to set up a utopian state of their own, from whence they would hopefully oppose or outlive the weak religion of the south.

In all, there were a dozen Cainites, three times that many ghouls and several hundred mortals who wished to cling to the old faith. The band gathered together as secretly as possible, made a great show of setting off for Greenland, and then very carefully sank their boats several fjords up the coast and set off into the interior on foot.

A year later, after losing several *einherjar* and ghouls to Lupine attacks, the settlement was relatively stable. It did some farming, but depended, like the native Lapps, primarily on reindeer herding. With their support structure in place, some of the more emotional members of the community began looking toward striking back against the followers of the Christ-god, and thus was the Free State's support of the Furores born.

(For more on the *einherjar*, see *Wolves of the Sea*.)

STRUCTURE

The Free State is a traditional Norse democracy, more or less. There is an assembly where all adult males are allowed to speak. The Cainites act as the local lords, with their ghouls as their *thegns* (the Norse equivalent of liege men), overseeing the process of debate, gathering taxes and enforcing legal rulings but otherwise letting the community steer itself.

Of course, given that there isn't much to do other than adjudicate law and gather taxes, the assembly is largely a debating club for settling disputes over livestock ownership. The Cainites encourage it nevertheless — they believe it's important to keep the old ways alive while in exile. While the mortals don't really understand just how long the wait may be, the Cainites are estimating they may have to camp out for 300 or 400 years. To this end, they've been carefully grooming the mortals. Those who become discouraged or start to lose respect for the old ways are quietly conditioned with Dominate. They don't believe they'll need it, but the *einherjar* have laid preliminary plans to condition the entire colony, just in case the culture begins to wander unduly. After all, if the old ways are to be preserved, they must remain intact.

Whenever possible, the Cainites feed on reindeer and animals to reduce the load on their people. Almost all the *einherjar* are Gangrel and those who are not have learned Protean — as a result, they are generally only present for nine months of the year, sleeping in the earth during the brief but bright northern summer. The *einherjar* act among themselves as a rough democracy and anarchy in the Norse style. So far there have been none of the lethal duels that are used to resolve the worse disputes in such a system, but it's always a possibility. This is particularly true if the Cainites continue to support Furores across the Baltic and in Norway.

These support operations require tremendous resources (at least tremendous by the standards of a small town), and the thing that the Free State can best provide — free haven — is the thing it can least afford to give. If the location of the community becomes known among Furores, the knowledge will ripple quickly outward, first to Cainites and then to mortal leaders and missionaries. Then there will be an army, and one more bastion of free men will flicker out in the tundra. There are some who would rather lash out, and some who would rather try to preserve the community, and the two groups, while still coexisting, may well come to blows soon.

EIRIK LONGTOOTH, FURORE CRUSADER

10th generation, childe of Kostbera

Clan: Gangrel

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Barbarian

Embrace: 903 CE

Apparent Age: mid 30s



Perhaps the most virulent advocate of intervention on the part of the Furores, Eirik Longtooth is an unliving legend among the *einherjar* of Scandinavia. Embraced while in outlawry for his opposition to Harald Fairhair's conquest of Norway, Longtooth killed almost 50 men before and after his Embrace. As a *vargr* ("wolf," a wilderness-dwelling Norse Gangrel), he roamed the entire length and breadth of Scandinavia, Lupines and fellow Cainites be damned.

Eirik is a hunted creature in Norway, but one with a deservedly deadly reputation. His open alliance with the Free State kept it free from open attack, and it was he and his three progeny who guided them to the eventual site of the settlement, scouted out and chased in the first reindeer herds, and generally did everything in their power to make the settlement prosper.

Now, it is he who is the closest to destroying it. Longtooth is fervently, irrationally anti-Christian. He sees Christianity as the apotheosis of the centralizing, controlling way of life that destroyed the traditional, individualistic Norse world, and hates it even more than he hated Harald Fairhair for conquering Norway. He and his progeny travel constantly, sometimes going south to sell their aid to the pagan *voivodes* of the Tzimisce, other times scouring Norway from north to south in just a few weeks, destroying any Cainite unwise enough to cross their path.

Eirik is the great advocate of the Furores, who he sees as tools in destroying or distracting the southern Lasombra and Ventrue whom he feels keep his people in bondage. Maybe they really do, or maybe they're just an accessible target—it's unlikely that even he knows what he thinks, other than that he hates them. Regardless, Eirik is constantly pushing for a greater community involvement against the Christian Cainites, and sooner or later, he's going to either push the Free State into a war, or push someone (probably Ulfeddottir) into killing him in a *holmgang* (a formal duel).

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KARL THE BLUE, ARCHITECT OF THE FREE STATE

11th generation, childe of Mustafah ibn-Jubair

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 861 CE

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Karl the Blue was a sagaman, a tale-teller who kept the old stories of fame and war and feud alive, to educate and to entertain. He traveled south with Björn Ironside in search of riches and adventure, and was Embraced in Egyptian Alexandria by a disbelieving Toreador. After a time with his sire, learning the stories of the Arabs, Karl made his own way home and began using his now-endless existence to catalog and gather all the stories of the Norse tradition, long before the *Heimskringla* was a twinkle in Snorri Sturlusson's eye.

With the coming of Christianity, Karl saw the traditions, the stories, the very culture of his people vanish, as the followers of the thrice-poxed Christ-god suppressed stories the told the stories of the gods or that they believe taught "un-Christian virtues." He was at first a great advocate of the old way and convinced men to fight the Christian tide, but Karl's spirit broke with the burning of the Norse bastion of Uppsala and the disappearance of the All-High, the progenitor of the *vagr*. He cast about for some way to save his culture from the encroaching tide of forgetfulness, and came up with the idea of the "time capsule" of the Free State.

In many ways, Karl is the heart of the Free State. He originated the idea, and he was the one daring enough to track down Eirik Longtooth in his outlawry and ask him in on the adventure. Karl is also the prime motivator behind the forced conditioning of the Free State's inhabitants. He and Longtooth have struck an uneasy alliance—Longtooth will not object to

the conditioning, if the sagaman will allow Eirik and his progeny to raid where and when they please. While Karl refuses to consent to involving the community directly, he is willing to give the most famous and deadly of the *vargr* free reign if that's what it takes to protect his culture from Christianity.

ULFSDOTTIR, CHOOSER OF THE SLAIN

5th generation, childe of the All-High

Clan: Gangrel

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 808 CE

Apparent Age: late 20s

Ulfsdottir is the most mysterious of the major voices in the Free State. She appeared in the camp just prior to its departure. Obviously a former *walkurie*, she would not discuss her past, or where she had been since the fall of the Uppsala temple. She simply asked permission to accompany the community on its way, and offered her services as a warrior in exchange. Karl, in awe of the All-High and his *walkurie* progeny, accepted the beautiful Gangrel's offer.

Ulfsdottir is a direct offspring of the All-High, and as such, she has some remarkably potent blood in her veins. Though she is relatively young in Cainite terms, she still has three centuries of constant practice at warfare and wayfaring under her belt, and she is quite possibly Eirik Longtooth's superior in combat.

The *walkurie* attempts to remain silent on most issues. She is moderately opposed to both the conditioning of the mortal inhabitants and to Eirik placing the community at risk to carry out his personal vendetta. In neither case, however, does she feel compelled to act. What she has made her feelings clear on, however, is that there will be not open violence among the Cainites of the Free State, unless it

happens over her ashes. So far, none of the inhabitants of the State have pushed her into action, but if Longtooth keeps pushing for more open involvement, tensions will continue mounting until eventually she must take a stand or stand aside. Ulfsdottir keeps no counsel but her own, however, and so none know her plans.

FUEL FOR THE PYRES: STORYTELLING THE FUIRORES

A chronicle featuring the Furores — either as the troupe's characters or as Storyteller characters — need not be that far removed from a mainstream **Vampire: The Dark Ages** yarn. Themes like the loss of Humanity, the quest for power and glory, the conflict with dark forces and the chaos slowly tearing the Long Night asunder are appropriate whether the players portray budding revolutionaries or lords of the night. The storytelling advice in the main rulebook (and in various other supplements) is very much applicable to tales of blood and revolt. A bloody revolt is not the same as a war or campaign of intrigue, however, and this section should help you prepare for those differences.

NOTES FROM THE BATTLEMENTS

The prospect and reality of revolt shifts the priorities in a chronicle. The typical Cainite intrigue and factionalism reaches unprecedented heights as the stakes grow. Once the pyres start burning, survival becomes the overriding goal. Ideology fights it out with bloody-handed vengeance. To properly run such an intense chronicle, you need to keep a variety of points in mind when planning and running it.

BATTLE?

Furores are violent revolutionaries. That makes it hard to tell a story about them that is not, at some level, a war story. Think ahead of time about exactly what sort of war story it will be. There's a world of difference between *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *Saving Private Ryan*, or *Go Tell the Spartans* and *Full Metal Jacket*.

Before the first combat, decide if the action will be heroic or gritty. Do the characters go into sword-swinging toe-to-toe combat with the bad guys, or are the fights squalid little ally brawls where two Cainites grab a ghoul's arms and a third vampire guts her with Wolf Claws? Likewise, how much does the narrative focus on the realistic effects of violence, and how much of it is just conflict in the abstract? Are you running a game about a daring gallows rescue or about the hysterical panic of a prisoner being dragged out to execution? Do you indulge in a harrowing description of the slow expiration of someone the characters mortally wounded and left to



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die, or is it all stage blood and torso wounds discreetly concealed from the camera?

Finally, you should decide just how human the opponents are. Are they sacks of warm oatmeal who rush at the characters because it's time for a combat scene, or do they have at least a rudimentary personality and an annoying tendency to stick up their hands and beg to live when seriously outmatched?

The style of combat you choose has a serious affect on the rest of the chronicle. Cinematic, merrily-lopping-off-heads battles will make it very difficult to create personal horror; why should the players care about their characters' souls if the world is just a stage for them to play upon? On the other, gritty and visceral combat each and every time can weigh down a chronicle, making it so morose that nothing ever gets done. What's the point of taking on the elders if dealing with a single ghoul is a soul-flaying trauma?

A middle road is probably best, occasionally dipping to either end of spectrum. Keep the combat fast and furious when the Beast is raging and the stakes are high, but inject hints of personality and terror into the scene when you can. As the characters rampage through the inn controlled by the prince's sheriff, the mortals scatter; one man raises a sword and looks ready to fight, but then darts to pick up his terrified son and get away.

When the dust clears after a battle, you can bring the gritty reality of the situation home. As the Beast recedes, the characters hear the whimpers of the wounded and the cries of the widows. The prince has lost some resources, but these peasants have lost their livelihoods (and some their lives). Was it all worth it?

IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

Any Furores chronicle should tackle the conflict between belief and action, ideology and reality. Furores, and those who fight them, are constantly placed in moral quandaries. Do they do the thing they believe in, or do they sacrifice their ethics "just this once" in order to take the best possible option? This isn't just a problem for the Furores — a Cainite on the Road of Chivalry is going to have to face some tough choices when confronted with the necessity of stopping a Furore terror campaign. Rebels fight dirty; they can't afford not to. How far will a religious or chivalrous vampire stoop to meet them on their own turf? How far will the rebels themselves go? Blackmail of the innocent? Threatening mortal families? Forcing the blood oath on the unwilling? Necessity is the mother of invention, but she's also an ice-cold mistress. How tightly will the character embrace her in the name of expediency?

These aren't just questions of battlefield ethics. How do the rebels and their opponents deal with the fact that the other side may well believe in what they're doing? Do they demonize them, and if they do, what happens when they can no longer pretend their opponent is wholly monstrous? If they accept their opponent as a fellow being, how do they justify conflict rather than negotiations, and

more importantly, how do they answer accusations that they have compromised the ideals they claim to be fighting for in pursuit of momentary advantage?

IDEALISM, OR NOT

The Furores are essentially a movement of optimists — they believe that by political and military action, they can build a better system than the one they currently live in. But their elders beg to differ. As any of them will explain, the world is a place where might makes right, where the strong devour the weak and where guilt and innocence are not nearly so important as power and alliances. At their heart, most Furore stories are about this conflict between the need to believe versus the moral exhaustion engendered by warfare against opponents, the Beast and the uncaring hazards of existence.

But it isn't a matter of idealistic young heroes versus the evil old grumps. Many elders (even most) believe very strongly in what they do. The War of Ages isn't fought entirely to avoid yawning boredom. It is a struggle to advance families, cities, nations and ideals. No war can be fought without soldiers and no army can march without discipline. Even a heartless elder with faith only in his Cainite existence can claim that without the stern hand of this authority, vampires would quickly draw the wrath of mortals and bring down a persecution on themselves the likes of which they have never seen. Who is more cynical, the elder who struggles nightly to keep the wheels of Cainite society in motion, or the Furore who condemns the elders one and all as morally bereft?

Similarly, the Furores aren't fonts of purity. No one intelligent enough to write propaganda or speak persuasively cannot know that at some level, they're lying while they do it. Similarly, for all their talk about ethics, expediency nevertheless always figures (to some degree) in Furore planning. Are they really that much better than the elders, or are they just less honest about it?

MOTIVATIONS

Furores games are about revolutions, and civil insurgencies are never pretty. They pit sire against child, broodmate against broodmate, paramour against paramour. You need to develop a coherent idea, not just of *what* the main characters are doing, but of *why*. Are an elder's childer sticking by him because they're afraid of him, because they're afraid of the Furores, because they think he'll win, because they're thralls, because they love their sire or their broodmates or because it looks like a good deal for now? Each motivation generates a totally different response to a number of common situations. If the only reason they're present is because the villain needs some henchmen and their response to seeing Furores is to shout, "Yaaaaargh! Get 'em!," it's probably not going to be as compelling a game as it could be.

This goes likewise for the Furores. With rare exceptions, Cainites don't just jump on the revolutionary bandwagon because they're bored. Every Furore is there

for their own reasons. They may be in love with someone, fulfilling a debt of honor, out to get even, out to change the world or just caught up in the situation because their friends got involved and now they are too. Even if a character's motivation is as archetypal as having been abused by his sire, there are a lot of options. Being used as a foot soldier in some arcane feud is a different experience than being forced to exchange blood with your sire in the name of a love you don't feel until the third sip. Depending on the sort of person it happened to, either could engender any number of reactions.

And all this goes for players' characters, too. If they're playing in something as complex and thorny as a revolution game, you should make sure that their characters are interesting. It isn't any fun if nobody ever wonders why they're doing this. During character creation and the prelude, make sure to examine the reasons these vampires want to change the system (or fight to preserve it). Build your stories around their motivations, challenging them and further drawing them out.

MAKING (AND TAKING) OFFENSE

Furores games are about politics back in the days when it was inseparable from religion. Worse than that, they're about bloody, extremist, revolutionary politics. It is not unlikely then, that your chronicle will wander into sensitive territory and offend or disturb a player.

When that point comes, you should know what you're going to do. How are you going to deal with the fact that one or more of your players sympathizes more with the villain than the heroes, and isn't happy about the fact that their personal beliefs are dressed up in a snazzy black hat and boots?

It is strongly suggested that you discuss ahead of time (meaning *prior to the start of play*) what sort of rough direction the game will be taking. Make sure that the players know the level of grittiness and cynicism in the game, and make sure that they all know the general political thesis, if any. In all honesty, if you think letting them in on the secret that socialism is evil will spoil the denouement of the game, just think how much worse it

will be when they tell you to fuck off and walk out at the climax of the chronicle.

Dealing with political themes is one thing, but a storytelling game is not a proper venue for attempted conversion.

TERROR

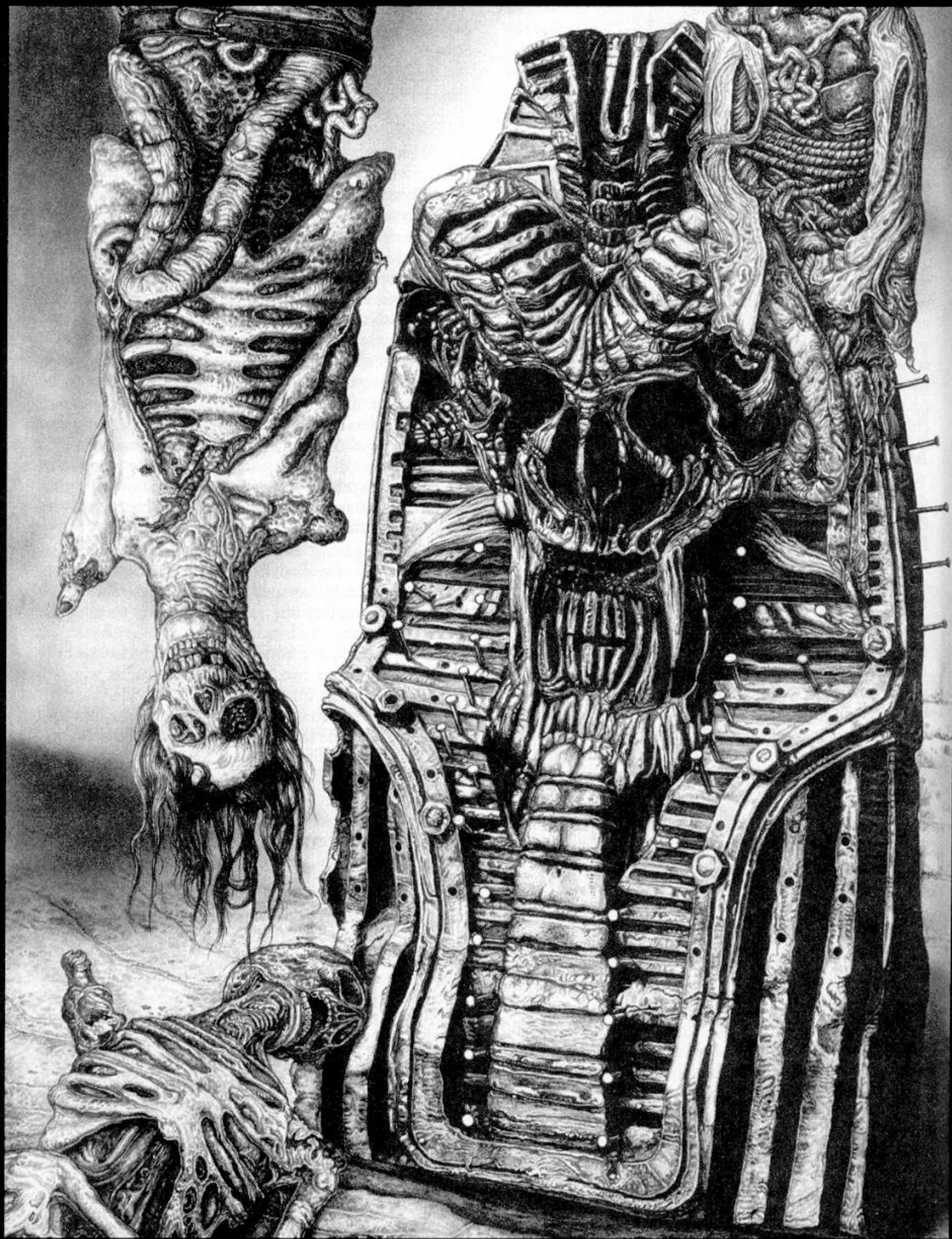
A lot of this chapter has been about terrorism as a political tool, but it's been talked about in a fairly abstract way. As a Storyteller, you want to make it real, and visceral, and as scary as you possibly can.

From the receiving end, a terror campaign is a delightful combination of random violence against things you need or love, mixed with carefully calculated, obviously staged violence against things you *really* need and *really* love. Nothing you care about is safe, it seems, and there's nowhere the enemy can't strike. And none of it comes with any warning, unless it's deliberately given too late for you to be able to do anything.

All around you, ghouls die, havens burn down and mortal contacts are dominated into thumb-sucking morons. The head-cracking stress of the desperate struggle for clues that will let you seize the initiative mixes with the constant terror of an assassination attempt that might come at any second until paranoia becomes a way of life (or unlife).

From the giving end, it isn't much easier. Terrorists are typically overworked, outgunned, short on resources and just as paranoid as their targets, because they know that priority number one for the targets is turning the tables and giving back a little bit of what they've so recently received. Information for the attacks typically comes from one or two spies or sympathizers who are putting their heads into the noose to provide you with targets, and desperately attempting to make sure that they aren't caught or the target of some sort of misinformation campaign deigned to make them reveal their identities.

In short, terrorism is terrifying, and living in an environment where you are trying to dish it out or avoid receiving it is possibly one of the most stressful, least enjoyable existences possible. It's not easy to bring off, but if you do it properly, you can tell some excellent stories.





Appendix: Hovericks and Cutpurses

*If you give me six lines written by
the most honest man, I will find
something in them to hang him*

- Cardinal Richelieu

The Beggar-King

Quote: *Better to reign in hell...*

History: You had a bright mortal career ahead of you. You'd done your time as a squire in the ducal household; you'd been knighted; you'd even learned to write and figure well enough to prove that your father's reeve had been cheating him for 12 years. You were finally ready to start life as a true nobleman, and then the widowed lady of Montenegro changed everything.

Purely because she was nothing like the simpering towheads whom your father pressed you to consider, your passion for her blazed higher than any other you'd known. Perhaps hers did as well, though she never showed it, or perhaps she simply knew a trusty servant when she saw one. At any rate, she Embraced you into Clan Lasombra. You loved her too much to quail at the prospect of damnation.

You belonged to a clan of rulers now, she said, and she promised that in time — when she tired of reigning from the dark alcove behind the duke's throne — she'd retire to the convent and you'd take her place. Years went by, then decades. You were given a small manor house and a dirty little village to oversee, but that was all.

You were hardly the only Cainite in town to resent the lady's iron rule, but as her first-chosen childe, you were the only one with any right to expect more from her. As love gradually curdled into bitter envy, you resolved to penetrate her defenses from underneath, the one angle of attack she would never expect from a fellow Magister and noble.

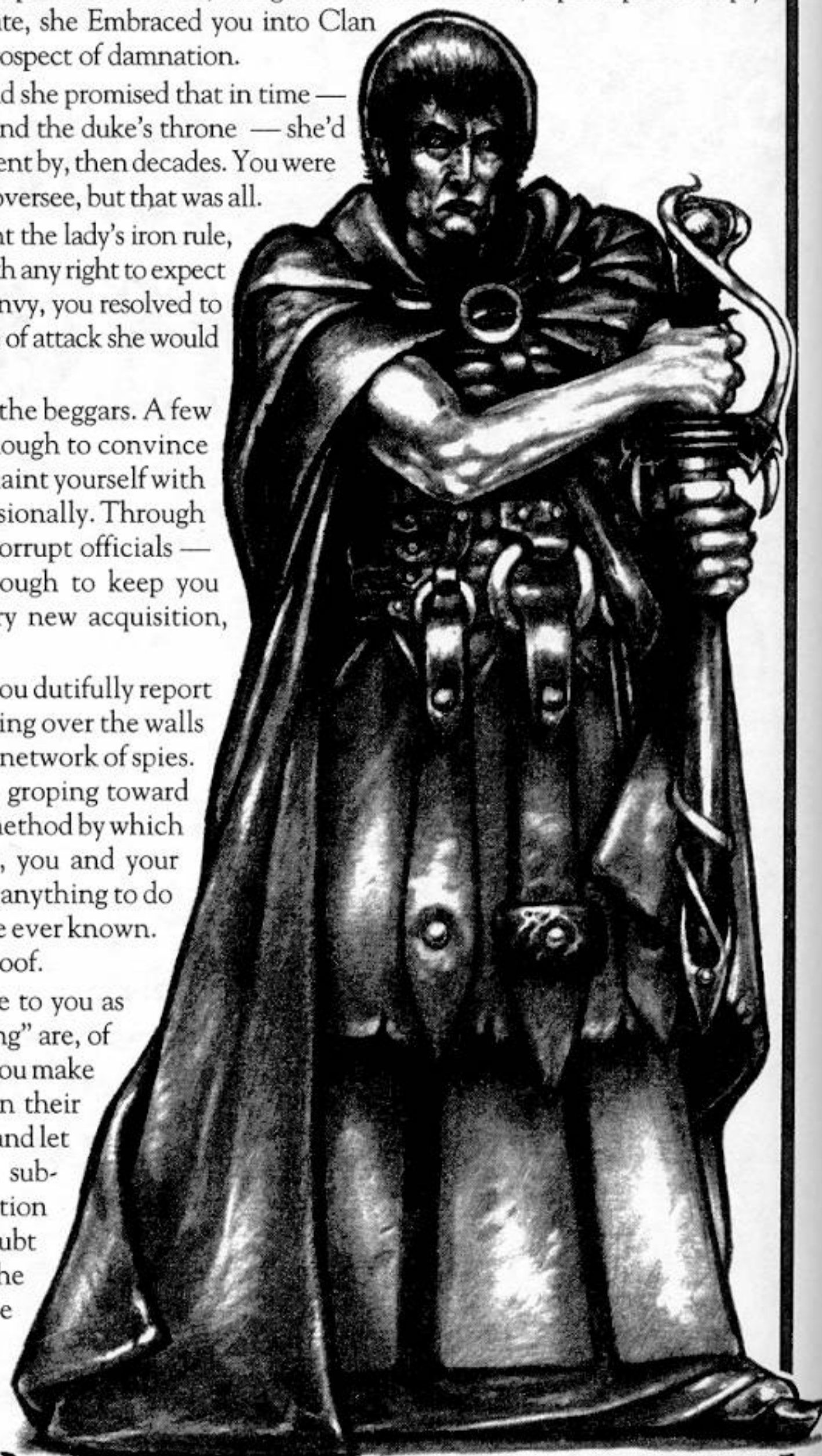
You started off with a protection racket against the beggars. A few ghoulish spies and several mysterious murders were enough to convince most to pay up. You then used that notoriety to acquaint yourself with the cutpurses and highwaymen who dropped in occasionally. Through them, you managed to get your thumb over a few corrupt officials — just a few, and not very important ones, but enough to keep you informed of what really goes on in the city. Every new acquisition, however small, is a resource at your disposal.

Concept: You lead a double unlife: Smiling as you dutifully report on all your trifling assignments in court, then sneaking over the walls and into the city to consort with your ever-growing network of spies. You watch, wait and slowly send out your tendrils, groping toward the eventual discovery of your sire's haven and the method by which it may be overtaken. There's no hurry; evidently, you and your career aren't going anywhere anyway if the lady has anything to do with it. Besides, she's the most subtle creature you've ever known. If you hope to defeat her, your plan must be foolproof.

Roleplaying Hints: The rabble who pay tribute to you as their terrible and somehow all-knowing "Beggar-King" are, of course, useless except as a possible distraction when you make your final move. Still, you take a certain pleasure in their fawning adoration. Guard your operations jealously, and let no vampire stumble onto the secret of your little sub-kingdom without obtaining equal blackmail or prestation to protect yourself. Do everything by proxy. No doubt the lady would laugh to hear of your slumming, but the laughter would quickly end if she realized how close you are to uncovering her own network of puppets.

Equipment: Sword, mail, court clothing, shabby clothing

ASHEN THIEF



The Ashen Thief

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Autocrat
DEMEANOR: Rogue
CLAN: Lasombra

GENERATION: 10th
HAVEN:
CONCEPT: Beggar-King

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●○○○○○○
Dexterity ●●○○○○○○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○○○○

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●○○○○○○○○
Manipulation ●●○○○○○○○○
Appearance ●●○○○○○○○○

MENTAL

Perception ●●●○○○○○○
Intelligence ●●●○○○○○○
Wits ●●●○○○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Acting ●●○○○○○○○○
Alertness ○○○○○○○○○○
Athletics ●●○○○○○○○○
Brawl ●○○○○○○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○○○○○○
Larceny ●○○○○○○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○○○○○○

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○○○○○○
Achery ○○○○○○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○○○○○○
Etiquette ●●●○○○○○○○
Herbalism ○○○○○○○○○○
Melee ●●●○○○○○○○
Music ○○○○○○○○○○
Ride ●●●○○○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○○○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●○○○○○○○○○
Hearth Wisdom ○○○○○○○○○○
Investigation ●○○○○○○○○○
Law ○○○○○○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○○○○○
Politics ●●○○○○○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○○○○○
Seneschal ●○○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Dominate ●●○○○○○○○○○
Obtenebation ●○○○○○○○○○
Potence ●○○○○○○○○○
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BACKGROUNDS

Allies ●○○○○○○○○○
Contacts ●●●○○○○○○○
Influence ●●○○○○○○○○○
Mentor ●○○○○○○○○○
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VIRTUES

Conscience ●●○○○○○
Self-Control ●●●●○○○
Courage ●●●●○○○

OTHER TRAITS

Resources ●●○○○○○○○○○
Status ●●○○○○○○○○○
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ROAD

Chivalry

●●●●●●○○○○○

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

The Furore Fiend

Quote: Conduct our guests to their... rooms down below. If my grandsire is so solicitous as to inquire after my well-being, the least I can do is entertain those she sends to me.

History: You were born to the Obertus revenant family and stood out even in childhood as a candidate for the Embrace. For one thing, you already spoke to the spirits of earth, wood, bone and water; or rather, they spoke to you and you didn't know any better than to answer.

You were apprenticed to a noted *koldun*; when she felt you had learned all a mortal could, she gifted you with the "dead water" — the Embrace. That silenced the spirits, for a little while, although they came back soon enough in a much worse temper. Your sire was also an ardent Metamorphosist, and taught you to see yourself as a nascent dark god whose highest duty was to pursue self-cultivation. You advanced rapidly in your studies. You subdued anyone who dared mutter against you, man or spirit, swiftly and mercilessly.

Unfortunately, those same skills made you the perfect choice to lead her troops against a Tremere incursion. The fight was bloody and demoralizing — you lost most of your men, and you were horribly wounded by enemy balefire yourself — but you won. The Usurpers fled into the night. You returned home for your reward; but instead of praising you before all the brood, your sire called you a coward, spitting on the floor before you, and had you taken to her chambers to answer for your failure to pursue the wizards all the way back to their miserable chantry.

Privileged and pampered as you had been till that moment, you could not comprehend her reaction. Had you truly been expected to sacrifice your precious immortality, your progress along the sacred path, merely to kill a few more worthless Usurper maggots? You survived her rage, but were changed and blasted by the knowledge of her hypocrisy. The next time the Tremere came, you suppressed your protesting, blood-maddened emotions for just long enough to provide them their opening. As your sire died shrieking, you whipped your horse into a bloody foam and rode away, finally free to seek the revelations you'd been promised for so long.

Concept: You've spent most of your existence under the blood oath, and though you were taught the divinity of the vampire (or at least the Tzimisce) as a philosophical principle, only now do you explore that principle to its fullest. You belong to the Furores for supremely selfish reasons: You know that your eternal essence is not yet purified enough for you to face the wrath of your elders alone.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an arrogant liege at heart, and have little patience for fine talk of eternal brotherhood. Meritocracy is your vision for Cainite society, and of course you have firm opinions about who possesses merit and who doesn't.

Equipment: Several chests stuffed with old books and scrolls, various fetishes and animal bones, vials of opium

ASHEN THIEF



The Ashen Thief

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Tyrant
DEMEANOR: Celebrant
CLAN: Tzimisce

GENERATION: 12th
HAVEN:
CONCEPT: Furore Fiend

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●○○○○○○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○○○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○○○○○○

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●●○○○○○○○
Manipulation ●●●○○○○○○○
Appearance ●●●○○○○○○○

MENTAL

Perception ●●●○○○○○○○
Intelligence ●●●○○○○○○○
Wits ●●○○○○○○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Acting ○○○○○○○○○○
Alertness ●○○○○○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○○○○○○
Dodge ●●○○○○○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●○○○○○○○
Larceny ○○○○○○○○○○
Leadership ●●○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○○○○○○

SKILLS

Animal Ken ●○○○○○○○○○
Achery ○○○○○○○○○○
Crafts (Body) ●○○○○○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○○○○○○
Herbalism ●○○○○○○○○○
Melee ●●○○○○○○○○○
Music ○○○○○○○○○○
Ride ●○○○○○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○○○○○○
Survival ●○○○○○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ●●●○○○○○○○
Hearth Wisdom ●●○○○○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○○○○○
Law ○○○○○○○○○○
Linguistics ●○○○○○○○○○
Medicine ●○○○○○○○○○
Occult ●●●○○○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○○○○○○
Science ●○○○○○○○○○
Seneschal ○○○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Animalism ●○○○○○○○○○
Auspex ●●○○○○○○○○○
Koldunic Sorcery ●○○○○○○○○○
Vicissitude ●○○○○○○○○○
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BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ●●○○○○○○○○○
Heard ●○○○○○○○○○
Resources ●○○○○○○○○○
Retainers ●○○○○○○○○○
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VIRTUES

Conviction ●●●●○
Instinct ●●●○○
Courage ●●●○○

OTHER TRAITS

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ROAD

Beast

●●●●●●●○○○

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

MAVERICKS AND CUTPURSES

The Highwayman

Quote: *You rob a wagon full of tithes for Rome, and this is all you find? Come now, Sigurd—you know better than to try that game....*

History: You were a wanderer long before you became a Gangrel. Born to a lowly tenant farmer, you attracted your lord's attention by dint of your great size and strength. After distinguishing yourself in several local skirmishes, you left home and began travelling throughout the country, offering your services. Your cool head and firm courage kept many a shield-wall tight that might otherwise have crumbled under the cavalry charge.

When the Second Crusade was levied, you eagerly set out for the Holy Land, filled with glorious visions of the honor you'd win and the rich loot you'd bring back. Unfortunately, the Christian forces were rather unceremoniously routed, and as you lay dying on the field, having stood your ground in vain, you silently cursed the Pope and emperor both for sending you on this fool's errand.

Your sire-to-be had come upon the battlefield the previous night and stayed on to see the outcome; that evening, he found you breathing your last at the center of a wide circle of corpses. Stirred by your ardor for battle—and not realizing that it had just been extinguished forever—he dragged you back from death into unlife. You accompanied him on the last leg of his pilgrimage, then followed him back West, where he was promptly destroyed by a longtime Patrician rival.

You escaped, and now you lurk in the woods on the edge of the Ventrue's estates, head of a band of robbers. Your sire died without mortal issue; as far as you're concerned, that makes you heir to everything he owned—namely, a locked chest full of Saracen gems. You certainly mean to revenge yourself on the one who robbed and murdered him. In the meantime, you console yourself by harassing your enemy with banditry.

Concept: You enjoy what you do. In fact, you've wondered for some time now whether ruling from the Ventrue's castle could really be pleasanter than dwelling in the deep woods. You take great pains not to let your enemy know you're still in the area. Whenever you join one of your raiding parties, you let some other man pose as leader. You also conceal your identity with a cloth tied over your face from the nose down, and require the other bandits to do the same. Your ill-gotten gains go not only to entertaining the men, but also to aiding certain Cainites and mortals whom you expect to become valuable allies in time. Alas for the local peasantry, you're not much of a Robin-Hood type. You always took care of yourself—let other men do the same.

Roleplaying Hints: You comport yourself with the cheerful irony of an old mercenary who's seen and done it all. The spirit of the wild wood is exerting its pull on your Gangrel soul, however, and you suspect that one night it will claim you completely.

Equipment: Well-nicked sword, staff, dark clothing, courser, hawk, treasure chest

The Ashen Thief

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Survivor
DEMEANOR: Survivor
CLAN: Gangrel

GENERATION: nth
HAVEN:
CONCEPT: highwayman

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Acting ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Larceny ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Achery ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Herbalism ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Music ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Ride ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Hearth Wisdom ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Seneschal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Animalism ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Fortitude ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Protean ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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BACKGROUNDS

Allies ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Generation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Resources ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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VIRTUES

Conscience ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Self-Control ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Courage ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒

OTHER TRAITS

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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ROAD

humanity

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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

MAVERICKS AND CUTPURSES

The PROMETHEAN URCHIN

Quote: *Remember, when the time comes: Our Lord said the meek shall inherit the Earth as well as the heavenly kingdom...*

History: You didn't really intend to rebel, not at first. Circumstances nudged you into it. You were a young lass on the eve of your Embrace, the child of a poor couple who'd fled war in one city only to find even greater hardships in the next. Slipping in and out of the crowds on market-days, you never failed to make off with a fat purse or a bag of spices or produce. Your sire had been watching you for months, entranced not only by your dove-gray eyes but also by the consummate grace with which you exercised your profession. It was art of a sort, he declared, and marked you for immortality.

Well and good, but the other Artisans didn't see it that way. They mocked you for your rude manners, your foreign accent, your permanent scrawniness. After a while, your sire recovered from the disgrace enough to be permitted to make another, more palatable childe. All too soon, even he could no longer find any time to spare you. Angry and lonely, you retreated to your old haunts, the alleyways and churchyards. Your skills were better appreciated among the mortals there, although they still teased you about your size.

Within a few years, you were the mastermind of a highly successful burglary ring. In a moment of glory, your gang managed to break into the archbishop's treasury, and that was when the Prometheans noticed and approached you. Had you perhaps gotten into his library as well, they asked? No, you hadn't; what use could a bunch of books be to you? They laughed, and then offered to teach you to read so that you could find out.

Concept: Like many Cainites, you've come a long way from unpromising beginnings. However, your waifish looks and rough behavior keep you from making real political headway. The Prometheans, however, respect both your skills and the Artisan pride you take in them. Moreover, they freely share their knowledge and wisdom, as well as their dream of a world where the iniquities of both mortal and vampire worlds are righted. You would gladly die to bring that new world about.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a little unsure of yourself still, caught between the unwelcome brat you were and the wise, fearless leader you aspire to be. Sometimes you go a bit too far trying to impress others with your new learning, but you really are quick to grasp things—and quick to become impassioned about them. As a Promethean, your ethics compel you to take blood only from those who give permission or those who deserve it; the latter category, fortunately, includes just about any mortal with high status in society, or those who work for such. When on the prowl, spying or robbing for your new compatriots, you are a vision of sly fluidity, a true master of your profession.

Equipment: Daggers, rope, crowbar, bribe money, dark clothing, well-thumbed and thoroughly glossed Latin classics

The Ashen Thief

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Rebel
DEMEANOR: Defender
CLAN: Toreador

GENERATION: 12th
HAVEN:
CONCEPT: Promethean Urchin

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Acting ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Larceny ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Achery ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts (Carpentry) ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Herbalism ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Music ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Ride ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Hearth Wisdom ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Seneschal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Auspex ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Celerity ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Presence ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Influence ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Mentor ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Resources ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Retainers ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

VIRTUES

Conscience ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Self-Control ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Courage ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

OTHER TRAITS

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ROAD

humanity

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WILLPOWER

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HEALTH

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

WEAKNESS

MAVERICKS AND CUTPURSES

The Ashen Thief

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