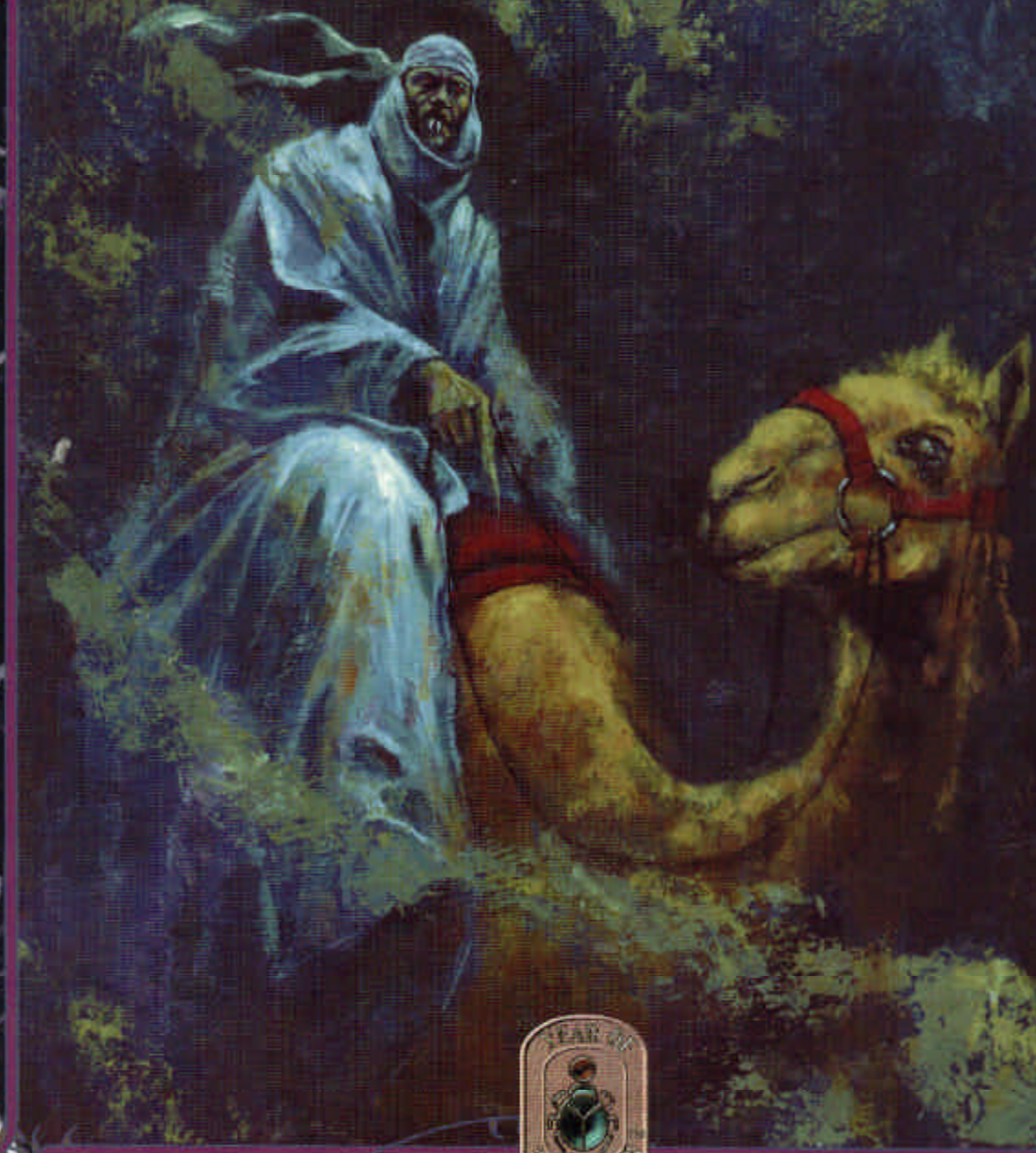
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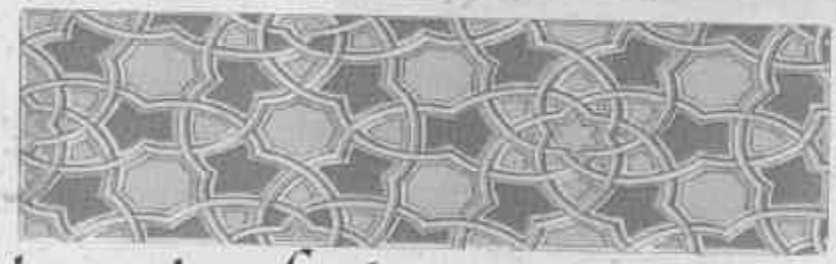


A SOURCEBOOK FOR
VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES®

Veil of Night™

By Chris Hartford, Ellen Kiley, James Kiley, Michael Lee, Sarah Roark, Lucien Soulban and Adam Tinworth





On the night of the new moon

in the month of Rajab, the Prophet put on his robe and went out into the desert to contemplate the wonders of God. In time he returned to the city, but as he came upon his hut a shadow arose before him. It was a monster, its very body forming from the darkness of the city. The Prophet, seeing this, cried out the name of Allah the Merciful. Zayd, his servant, hearing his master's voice, rushed from the hut and struck at the creature with his sword. The blade bit into the monster's side, but it swatted at the sword as a man swats flies and broke the steel into seven pieces. Then the creature turned to the Prophet and laughed. "I have heard your name spoken among the people," it said, "and it pleases me to make you my slave. For through you the people will be made to worship me, and sacrifice the blood of their sons and daughters to sustain me for all time."

The noble Zayd cried out in despair, but the Prophet was unafraid. He said, "Though you may have the strength of ten men, and your bones



may be as hard as the mountains, there is no God but Allah, and you exist only because He wishes it so. You may drink the blood of men and defy the grave, but that does not make you eternal. The days of this world are numbered, and at the end of time you will be judged like all the rest, man and djinni together. Hellfire waits for those who do not turn their face to Allah and repent."

Hearing this, the creature laughed and seized the Prophet by the throat. Its jaws, like a wolf's, gaped wide and closed on Muhammad's throat. Just then Muhammad cried out the name of God, and the monster fell back, crying out in pain. The Prophet's skin shone like iron hot from the forge. The strength of his faith was like a wind, driving the creature to its knees. And the monster realized that for all its power, its strength was of the earth alone, and the earth was doomed to end. "Truly, I am no god," it said. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet!"

Hearing this, the Prophet clapped his hands and took the creature by its shoulders, lifting it to its feet. Then they went into the Prophet's hut like brothers, and prayed together until dawn.

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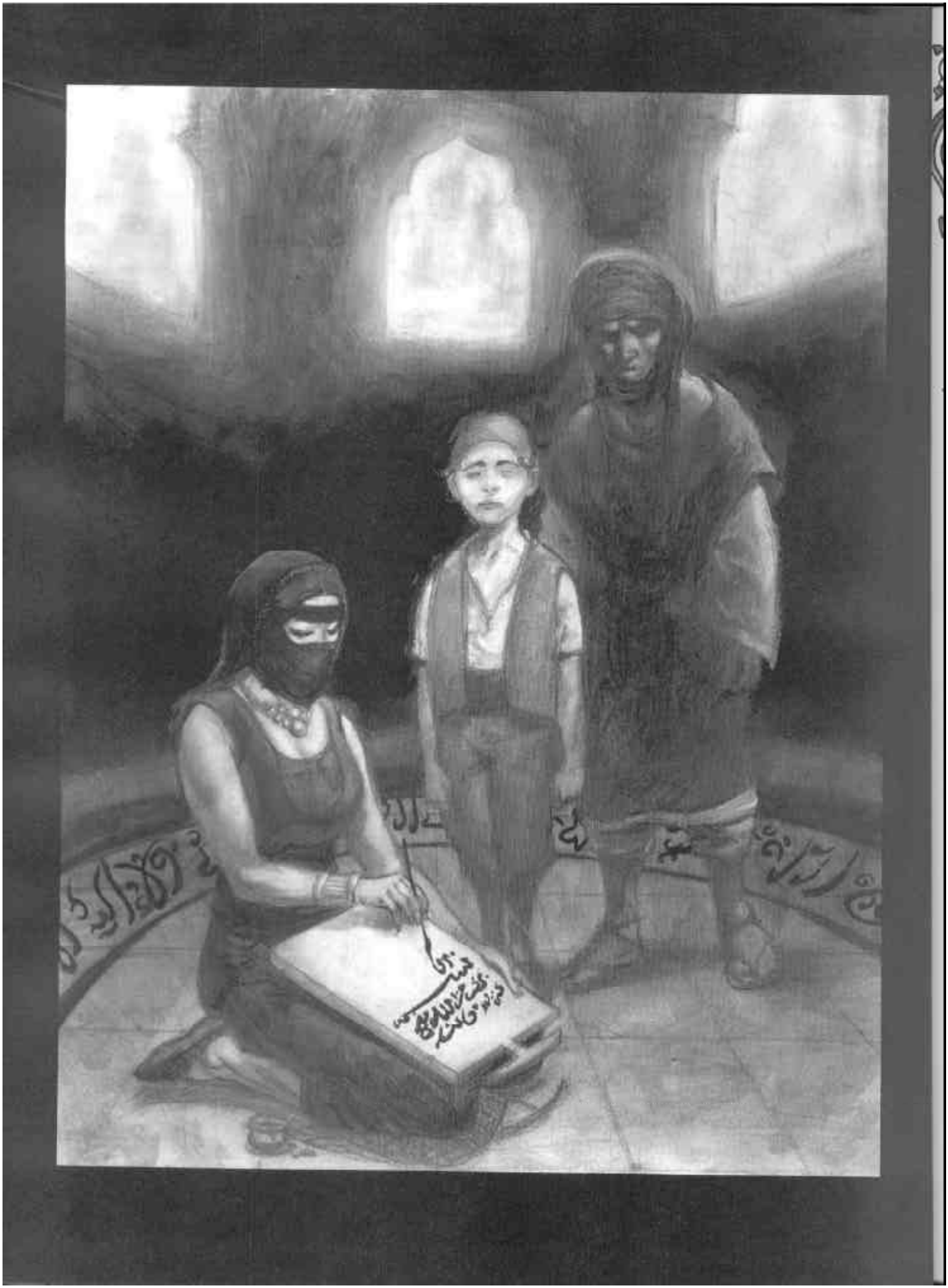
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Prelude: Bait al-Fitna

"It looks like a chieftain's damiga," said Kazan, "only much fancier."

"It's something a little like that," replied Om Kashid.

The mamluk shifted uncomfortably. Om Kashid's keen gaze was, fortunately, fixed on the work before her. But her son-in-blood, Kashid himself, sat close by, taking his role as chaperone rather more seriously than necessary. Or perhaps he simply hated allowing outsiders to observe his teacher's art. In any case, the Tuareg's black face was so dravon and sour one could believe he had bathed in lemon juice by mistake that evening. Kazan made sure to keep a respectful distance.

Om Rashid kept a certain distance as well. That is to say, she never hunched over the writing pad on her knee, despite the intricacy of her design. One could not become absorbed in beautiful details to the detriment of the overall — or so she had explained it. Kazan himself could not read most of the words that she now smelted into such delicate, vegetal shapes. As a slave courier, it was to his professional advantage not to know the contents of the missives he carried.

Nonetheless, he had begun to pick up bits and pieces. He recognized "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" readily enough, braided near the top of the flowering medallion shape. So it was in Allah's name that she invoked this sorcery. Was that not awful presumption? Most human *'ulama* would say yes. And yet Om Rashid was a model of piety in all other regards. Her kinsmen came to Baghdad from far and wide to study *hadith* under her. She had not drunk blood for a week prior to this working, and had made Kazan and Rashid abstain all night just so they could enter the room. Kazan had to assume that she knew her business.

"Tell me how you acquired the paper," she ordered him now, her eyes never leaving the flowing line of ink.

Kazan frowned. Had he done some wrong, had she discovered some imperfection in its surface?

"I went to Samarkand, as you said, and got the blessing of the three-eyed one upon it."

"No. Tell me the story of how it was done."

"Forgive me, madam, but it is a rough story, even a cruel one. You say your thoughts should dwell only on the holy when creating a calligraph." He looked to Rashid for support.

"My wise teacher has always said so," the Tuareg concurred. "Moreover, the gentleness of your heart, madam..."

The barest smile touched her lips, nearly invisible through the veil. "My beloved son, my faithful *mamluk*. I doubt it will please me to hear these things, but I must ask regardless. I am the author of this working. It is by my petition that you have done everything you did. I want to know and remember the price that was paid. You must allow me that much burden."

"I obey your ladyship in this as in all things," Kazan said, and then he began his tale.

†††

I tell you truly, madam, someone could have blinded me in Bukhara, and still I would have reached my destination by scent alone. All Samarkand smells of mulberry now: mulberry growing in the papermakers' gardens and mulberry mush soaking in the papermakers' vats.

Your ladyship's letter to Ibn Nazif must have arrived safely. He met me just outside the wall as I stopped to water my horse, then took me straightaway to the house of Karim. A good thing, too — I would never have found it on my own. The man has taken over a cotton merchant's palace, hiding all the to-do of his immortal court within the bustle of the merchant's commerce. It does not shame him to avail himself of the earthly luxuries such a master of the bazaars can provide. You would think you had landed in the new Sodom.

Perhaps the gossips are right about Karim after all. But what can be called madness in a man so cursed by God? All I know is what I saw. The sultan sat upon his throne, and he wore one felt slipper — one, mind you — which he took off and put on again, off and on again all during my audience. His attendants whispered to him, begging him to stop it no doubt. He'd nod and wave them away and then a moment later would be back at it.

And he would not suffer himself to touch or be touched by anything else. When it came time to sup, he did not even wash his hands, and he made his own brother lift the poor girl's wrist to his lips.

I thought it best not to speak of my true business to the sultan. Instead I made up a story of vengeance against a Serpent who was fleeing eastward from me. I know, I know; God forgive me for deceiving so venerable a son of Alamut. But later I approached his brother Hajar, who received me most graciously in the privacy of his chambers and listened as I confessed my purpose.

Hajar looked over my credentials until he was satisfied. Then, at his order, the three-eyed one was brought out of hiding: a silk-haired Jurchen trapped in eternal boyhood, just as you had described to me. His speech was broken and foreign, but he seemed to understand when I explained your ladyship's requirements. Yes, he knew the proper enchantment, but it was not so simple. He had to be there for the paper's manufacture. There were ingredients to be added, prayers to be offered.

And so we set out the next night with him in a litter — shrouded behind curtains like a fine lady! — while several stout mortals and I rode alongside as guard. All along the way we frightened birds from their roosts. I should have taken warning at that, I know now. Rousing a papermaker from sleep was little trouble. Rousing his workers and convincing them to labor for us at such an hour was more trouble, but your ladyship's generous purse prevailed, and at last the work began.

I stood watch outside as the Jurchen performed his rite, listening closely to hear what spirits or *djinn* he might be calling upon. Yet all I ever picked out was a low thrum, like the sound of fourscore mortals breathing in perfect rhythm. Somehow it set the hairs of my neck on end, and then — I know not why — all at once Caine's cowardly rage swelled within me, battering against the doors of my soul, seeking to burst out upon the men who innocently stood so near to me. God be praised, I held it back. I dare not think what might have happened.

A day to wait while the paper dried, and then it was done. We headed back toward the palace, but a pair of filthy

pagans on underfed ponies ambushed us before we reached it. They were not ordinary men. That much I could tell right away. Indeed I might well have taken them for Wah'Sheen, except I cannot believe that even those curs would be stupid enough to grant immortality to Mongols.

"Give us the demon of *wuzzah*," they said, or something like that — meaning the three-eyed one, of course. In the next moment, a pack of snarling wolves came out of the darkness and stood beside the Mongols' mounts, neither sort of animal taking any fright from the other.

"What I'll give you is peace from your benighted existence," said I.

That did not deter them. Like a whirling storm they circled round and round, firing arrows and urging their wild beasts to snap at us. My horse was struck down beneath me. The mail your ladyship gave me proved its splendid temper by catching three of their bolts. Two more nicked me but did no great hurt. As for the wolves, they were stupid brutes, easily put to flight by a chimera of fire.

Their masters, alas, shrugged my illusion off. Yet in its fading wake, a golden glow began to spread on the ground before me. I did not make it. It must have spilled forth from the Jurchen himself. But I could not see, since I faced the battle.

Their first charge having failed, I did not allow my enemy the chance to make another. They had no skills to wield against an unseen attacker. My blade finished one of the *kuffar* — he shriveled like any blood-drinker once his head was off — and wounded the other. Before I could raise the sword for a new stroke, he seized my hand and stopped it with strength that more than matched my own.

"Enough," he declared. "I cannot fight both you and the demon's evil eye. Still, you have killed Mianda, and only your blood can appease his spirit. I am Taban Chinua. To you now, my name is also Death. Seek me in the mists, hear me in the cries of birds." And then he *was* mist, or he disappeared, anyway.

My fine lady in the litter never even had to get out.

†††

"I have woven your words into the spell, Kazan. Now bring me the gold ink." Om Rashid whetted a new reed for the color as he fetched it. Her expression remained smooth and calm as a courtyard pool. "I trust that acquisition was not without adventure, either?"

"Your ladyship had indeed made an exacting request, but I did at last find what I sought."

†††

I took the *hajj* route toward Jerusalem, joining a large band of pilgrims under the protection of a fearsome old Arab. It seemed the safest way. A lot of the folk were strangers to each other, and the line straggled out for such a distance that no one questioned my absence in daytime. Sleeping in the rolled-up rugs of my servants, I braved the desert sun and kept body (if not dignity) intact. At night, within the cool walls of the caravansary, I extracted my own form of road tax from the weary.

After Damascus we struck out alone and made our own way to the coast, then north. I heard many tales of *Franj*, and Muslim dogs of no faith, too, who dealt in holy trinkets from Jerusalem — including pieces of the Rock. I looked over their wares a hundred times in a hundred streets and markets, yet none of them had anything to offer me but junk and cant.

But a different breeze blew in Tripoli. Quite different from that of jeweled Samarkand, certainly. Here, the bracing odors of citrus and sea salt mixed with the stench of the unwashed *Franj* and their refuse — just as the welcome sight of the *hammam* domes contradicted the crosses mounted atop the holy mosques. It was in Tripoli that I finally learned of a Frankish knight and relic-hawker with a more credible line of patter than most, for he had actually been among the holy city's defilers before Salah al-Din (Allah sanctify his soul) conquered and purified it once again.

I watched this miserable fellow for a few nights. At first I worried that he might be a slave of some Templar blood-drinker, but observation proved him to be as deficient in wit as any of his lumbering race. I determined to steal into his rooms after the household fell asleep — he was dwelling with a cousin, in rather high style for a poltroon, I thought — and learn for myself the truth of his boasts.

It was a comically simple matter to slip past his men. Benumbed as they were with drink, I hardly had need of Caine's gifts. The lock on the chest at the foot of his bed broke with ease; they heard nothing. A mound of stone and clay met my sight. What were these jars of stagnant well water? "Blessed by the priest at the Holy Sepulcher?" And these dusty rocks — "fragments of the *Via Dolorosa*"? At least there were no splinters of the True Cross to be seen! But let me not entirely defame my Christian host. It was quite plain that the brass censer and silver *aspergillum* had really come from a church of some sort.

Perhaps, I thought, he had simply run out of the genuine item years ago, and I turned to go. Then I remembered something about the *Franj* that you told me, madam: that the Rock is sacred to them as well, not because of the Prophet's ascension (peace be upon him), but because even in their debased reckoning it is still the center of the world, the site of Ibrahim's sacrifice and Yacoub's vision. With fingers light as silk I turned back the blankets and uncovered the knight's hairy chest. There, pierced and strung alongside a jumble of medallions on leather thongs, was a plain-looking stone that nonetheless struck me with awe — for this, I knew right away, was the true treasure he had reserved for himself.

I prayed to Allah for mercy. I knew I had broken sacred law by entering even an infidel's apartments without invitation. Yet there I was, about to set my hand upon the holy of holies.

Nor could I properly repent and purify myself here. I reasoned as best I could with God, reminding Him of your pious purpose, begging Him not to punish that enterprise on account of this poor dog's wickedness. By His Most Beautiful Names I asked Him to lend me the courage to do as I must. I drew my right hand into my sleeve, then took my knife in the left. I grasped the thong and cut.

†††

A silence grew between the three Ashirra then, a silence that budded, bloomed and withered in just a few moments.

"I wondered," said Om Rashid, "about the burn on your wrist."

"I soon discovered that mere cloth gives no insulation against the power of Allah, the One, the eternally Besought," the *mamluk* said, cradling the wound against his chest as it sent an echo of that terrible pain shooting down his arm. He had resolved to himself to wear it a full month, in penance. "Truly there is none comparable unto Him."

The sorceress' work in gold was nearly done, limning the darker shape, coursing through it like the precious veins in a mine. But her pen hovered over the page, awaiting another story.

"And the imam?" she asked.

"He remembered you fondly, and your services to him so long ago. He powdered the stone together with gold dust and blessed it with rose water, just as you asked. He said to tell you he prays your spell takes fast and firm hold, because of the warriors in his country, more than half of them suffer the curse now."

"That is grave news." Flowing shapes issued from the reed's tip. "But not unexpected."

"And it is worse than that. He said that of the cursed, many younger ones now say that it is not such a great burden. That it helps them prosecute their jihad all the more fiercely."

For the first time a glint of passion showed in Om Rashid's eyes. "Then they are blind," she said, "and the Baali will be pleased with themselves."

Rashid glared at Kazan for his upsetting words. "The imam was kind enough to pray for me as well," Kazan added.

"Allah sanctify his soul," she murmured. "Well? Say on, my *mamluk*. I sense that even this is not the end of your tale."

Kazan hesitated. "No, madam. It is nothing for you to worry about, assuredly. And yet — ever since I returned, it seems the roosting birds too often take wing when I pass underneath them. But my vigilance is steadfast. When the creature shows himself, he will die like the dog he is."

Om Rashid nodded, blinking back the red glaze that invaded her vision. Everything had been done exactly as she had asked. Everything. She cast her gaze to the floor and, with skill born of long practice, denied her emotions the power to erupt. She must keep the spell tightly loomed,



must return to that selfless, transparent state that was so necessary to creation.

"Truly, my brethren," she said at last, "it is our fate to dwell in *bait al-fitna*, the House of Trial, while we yet walk the earth. No spell can alter that. But come; there is one ingredient more. Kazan has gathered from East and Center. The West was yours, Rashid."

The Tuareg produced a stoppered, wax-sealed vial of colored glass. The prickling sensation of an enchantment released followed its opening. The smell that arose from within immediately reminded them all of their ongoing fast. "As for the story, mine doesn't match Kazan's by any stretch."

"Nevertheless, I must hear it." Om Rashid dipped a fresh reed into the vial.

†††

Since your ladyship demonstrated the errors of my people's faith to me, I have had no desire to return to the Maghrib. Still, I admit it was good to walk the streets of Fez again, however briefly. The Serpent came to me there as arranged, and we rode at once into the mountains. The foul thing lay in a cave he had found, a cave the Berbers all said had an *afrit*.

Superstition, yes, but it guided us aright. Of course many protections lay on the place. There were fire-wards, plague-wards and still darker charms of a kind unknown to me. What I could not remove, however, the blasphemer priest could, and vice versa. Between the two of us, we peeled the layers away: threshold, anteroom, sanctum, crypt.

The tomb itself was rather austere; that surprised me. A row of earthen jars filled with precious ores, bitumen and raw diamond lined its perimeter. And above the jars, murals had been painted on the walls, which the love of faith compelled me to chip and deface afterward, till not a stroke of them could be seen. Now in my dreams those chalky figures cavort and mock me, that I cannot chip them out of my memory so easily.

At any rate, the unholy creature was little more than carrion when we found it. I imagine it went to sleep in the wake of some titanic battle, for it was raked with half-healed scars. It never stirred until the very end, just as I planted my sharpened staff against its breastbone. Before it could open its eyes or form so much as a syllable with its lips, I had driven the shaft clean through it.

†††

"Allah be praised for sparing you the evil one's dying curse, my son. I have heard of those who were not so blessed."

"I give thanks to Almighty God for His mercy."

"And then?"

The Tuareg shook himself from the fog of recollection. "I kept your word, madam, and allowed the Serpent to take the first two jars of ichor from the creature's veins. I left the tomb offerings to him as well, for surely a bottleful of the defiled was enough to travel with. But the creature's heartblood I drained in the manner you prescribed. I tested it to be sure that it was, in fact, of the Baali before I sealed it up. I have guarded it with the greatest care all these many miles back."

"I could never doubt your thoroughness. What else did the Serpent demand, in return for services rendered?"

"What else?" he echoed.

"Surely there was more."

"He swore he would hold no further boon from us."

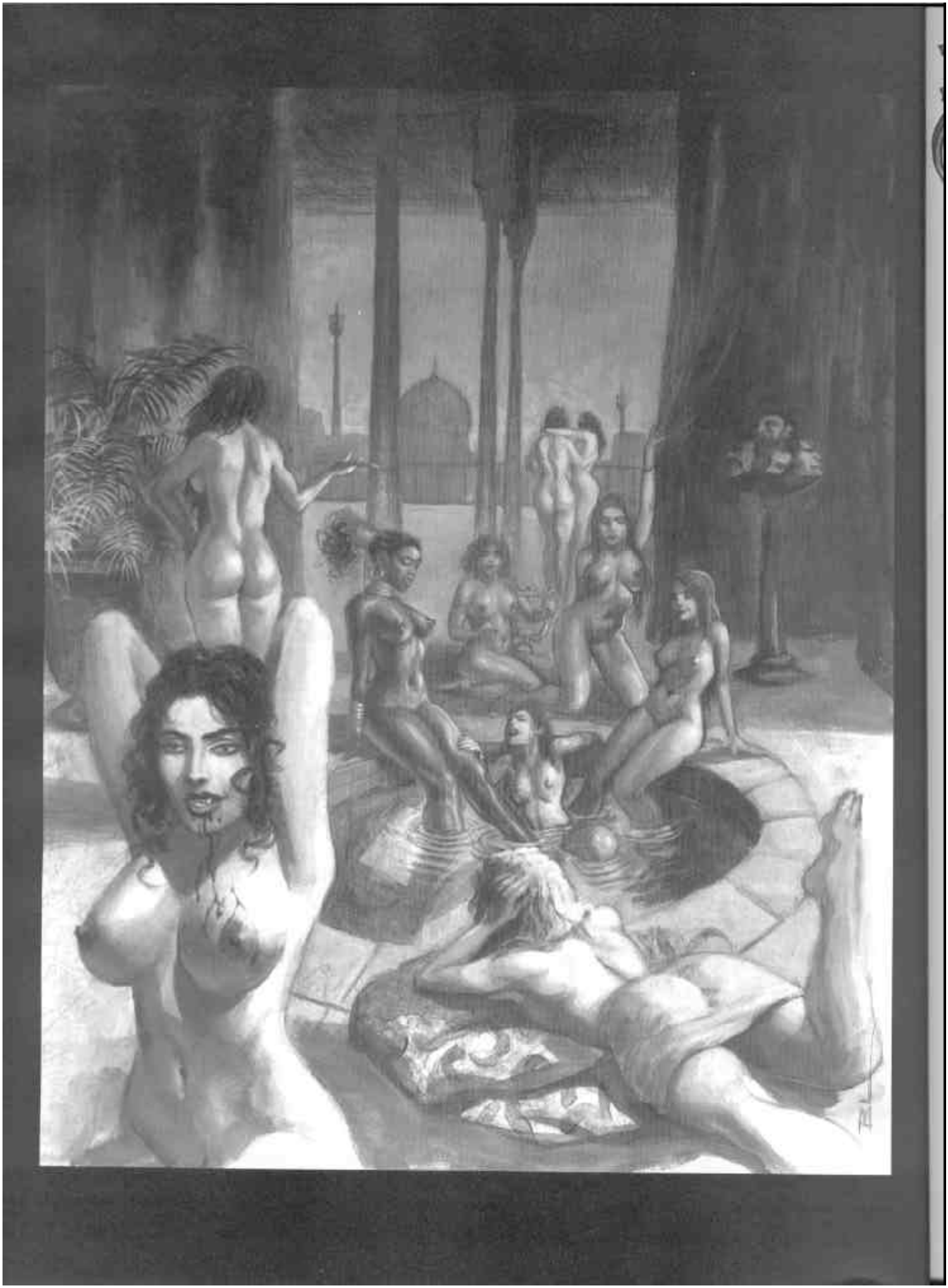
"That is not their way."

"I know. That is why I put him under Truth of Blood and asked again. He said, 'The demonolaters are our enemies as much as yours. We have told you this for many centuries, and still you never believe it. You consider that I have done you a service — but you must realize that you have done me one, as well.'"

"I see."

Om Rashid added the last filigrees of rust red and set her pen down for the final time. Hands folded, she contemplated what she had wrought. Its lines and colors had already begun to writhe. Her enchantment struggled to be born. The two men, lost in their own meditations now, had ceased to watch.

"Then if that was his price," she whispered into the all-too-fertile stillness, "I must bear it with you, my son."





Introduction: Shahada

Glory be to God in the evening and in the morning of your days. [...] It is He who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, who quickens the earth from its lifeless state. You, likewise, will be brought forth.

– al-Qur'an, Surah 30:17–19

Beneath the Veil of Night

For the Christians of Europe, Islam is the faith of the enemy — of the Saracen who holds the holy city of Jerusalem and the Moor who fights in Spain. The Muslim lands are an alien place inhabited by peoples with strange traditions who live without the salvation of Christ and His Church.

The truth is a far different matter.

Islamic culture is lush, highly moral and quite dynamic. This is no Dark Age for Muslims — they treasure ancient knowledge, and their lands host the greatest libraries of the day. Five hundred years ago, this new faith rode out of the deserts of Arabia and conquered huge tracts of land. From Spain to Central Asia, the word of Muhammad — along with the Arab, Turkish and Kurdish soldiers backing it up — spread like wildfire.

But not everything is a story of glory and unity under one true faith. While Islam espouses many laudable values — equality, learning, respect — the caliphates and sultanates it has spawned are flawed, human constructs. Differences of faith and power have split Muslims internally, between Sunni and Shiite, between Umayyad and 'Abbasid, between Fatimid and Ayyubid. Huge wealth and great power have drawn out human ambition and jealousy as they always do.

And where human jealousies and ambitions arise, the unliving hungers of the childer of Caine are never far behind.

The World of Islam

At the dawn of the 13th century, Islam is a mature faith and culture that has shaped the medieval world for thousands of miles around its Arabian birthplace. From the universities of Cordoba to the fringes of China and India, Muslims pray toward Mecca.

In the west, Islam is in something of a decline. The Christians of Spain are gaining momentum in their *Reconquista*, pushing the Moorish caliphates and Taifa kingdoms south off of the Iberian peninsula. In the heartland of Cairo, Jerusalem and Baghdad, dynastic troubles are rising in the wake of a period of strength. Only a few years ago, Salah al-Din led his new Ayyubid dynasty to retake Jerusalem and repel the Third Crusade. Now, the great man is dead and his successors are tearing his legacy apart. Baghdad, the seat of the caliphate, is in a similar decline.

Further east, the faith spreads. It moves into northern India and the golden city of Samarkand. Muslim traders work in Song China and the word of Muhammad spreads further still.

The Mongol horde is a few decades away from crashing into Islam like a tidal wave, but the Mamluks are to rise in Egypt at the same time to create the next great Muslim dynasty. Ultimately, the Mongols recede (some taking Islam into their hearts) and the faith remains.

Amid this change, growth and conquest, the childer of Caine feast like kings.

Unlife and Islam

The vampiric predators who stalk Islam are fundamentally the same as those in Christian Europe. They trace their origins to Caine, the murderous son of Adam and Eve, and are divided into 13 clans and some additional bloodlines. They have all the same strengths and weaknesses as their Christian kin and (in game terms) follow the same basic rules outlined in other **Dark Ages** products.

But a great cultural divide separates Muslim and Christian. Not only did the rise of Islam affect almost every resident — living or otherwise — of Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, North Africa and Spain, but many of the vampires in these areas had different outlooks to begin with. The Nosferatu of the region (known as Mutasharidin) never adopted the penitent stance of their European brethren, for example, remaining true to the heritage of the fearsome hunter who spawned them. And while the "Assamites" and Setites of Europe are strange foreigners, the Banu Haqim and Walid Set are lords of the Middle Eastern night. These are their lands, and it is the rare Ventrue who are the foreign interlopers.

For many of the other clans, Islam itself has created an important change. The Lasombra of the region — or Qabilat al-Khayal, to use their Arabic name — have embraced Islam along with the members of Bay't Mushakis (Brujah) and the Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador). They see an avenue to greater power and even salvation in this new and dynamic faith.

In fact, Islam has broken down some of the old clan divisions. The vampires of the empire now fall into three broad categories, dependent on their own view of the faith rather than the legacy of their blood.

The Ashirra

Those most enthralled with Islam have formed a new sect called the Ashirra. Derived from Shiite Islam, the Ashirra sect preaches that Muhammad offered



Cainites the possibility of redemption if they became good Muslims and submitted to the will of god. Vampiric imams lead religious communities of Cainites in most of the cities of the Muslim world, guiding them toward this salvation.

Of course, politics and ambition poison the sect like any other vampiric enterprise. Imams and other religious vampires maneuver for greater prestige and influence. They make deals with unbelievers and struggle with the faithful. True devotion is rare, and purity unknown.

Like mortal Islam, the Ashirra sect aspires to be a unified community but is actually a diversity of enclaves bound together by some common beliefs. The Ashirra of one city may be zealous defenders of Islam, even persecutors of unbelievers, while those elsewhere may be more casual in their professions of faith. Local realities rule the night, as they do the day.

(**Chapter Two: One Faith for All the World** provides more details on the Ashirra.)

Cynics and Survivors

The majority of Cainites in the Islamic world are Muslim in name, but not truly in heart. Selfish predators like their Christian cousins, they take God and the Prophet seriously but also know their curse separates them from mankind. They follow the dominant culture because it is convenient to do so, but look to other ways to stave off the Beast and make their way through the night. Some focus on the cultured communities of Islamic cities and adhere to the Road of Community (called the Tariq el-Umma) while others lead the harsh existence of the desert tribesman, following the Road of the Nomad (or Tariq el-Bedouin).

Vampires who remember a time before Islam swept into their lands often fall into this category. They may still cling to the animist (or other) faiths of their breathing days, but they take on the trappings of Islam out of convenience. Just like European vampires recognize the influence of priests without always acknowledging Christian dogma, these ancients understand the wisdom of bowing to the dominant culture in order to prey upon it.

Idolators and Enemies

Some Cainites stand consciously outside Islam and reject its tenets outright. Many, like the Walid Set and Baali, pay lip service to the dominant culture for survival's sake while holding beliefs completely rejected by it. The Setites worship an old god and would be called idolaters by Muslims, whereas the Baali actively support forces identified with Satan.



Jewish and Christian vampires fall into something of a gray area. Technically, they are "People of the Book" who hold beliefs not far removed from Islam. But tolerance of their ways is fickle, especially given the slaughters of the Crusades. Some hold Islam in the same uncertain regard.

How to Use This Book

Veil of Night is a major supplement for **Vampire: The Dark Ages**. Unlike the "by Night" series of regional supplements, **Veil of Night** opens up an entire new culture, just as diverse as the Christian Europe of the mainstream products. In the following pages, we introduce you to the lands and people who have embraced Islam, and to the vampires who stalk them.

Islam, although younger than Christianity, is just as powerful a cultural force. Its armies have conquered from Spain to northern India. Muslim traders have brought the faith and the Arabic language even further, even into far-off Taugast (what we would call China). Like Christendom, the Islamic empire is fed upon by Cainites, related to their European brethren by blood but separated by culture.

Veil of Night gives you all the tools you need to set stories in the lands of Islam, from a new look at the clans and Roads in the area, to a geographic and historical tour of the empire, to a detailed look at the city of Damascus. Of course, those running European chronicles can use **Veil of Night** to introduce Islamic elements into their stories. The Spanish *Reconquista* and the Crusades provide the most obvious venues for Christian-Muslim conflict, but there are other possibilities, including trade in the Mediterranean, pilgrimage to the Holy Land and diplomatic envoys.

Theme

Islam translates literally as "submission" to Allah's will. Submission is the main theme of this book. Although it's been around for centuries, Islam is still a religion on the move — losing ground in Iberia but expanding into Byzantium and the east. It is still changing, and being changed by, new peoples and regions. For Cainites (static creatures who take the long view), Islam is a raging brushfire of faith and mortal energy that has radically transformed the land that birthed the childer of Caine. Cainites can either change themselves to submit to this force, change it to submit to them, or fight against it.

By Any Other Name

Throughout **Veil of Night**, we use Arabic names for most of the Cainite clans familiar to **Dark Ages** players. This is a stylistic decision — though the blood of vampires in Islamic lands is the same as in Europe, their attitude is not. Toreador in Paris do not have the same outlook as Ray'een al-Fen in Damascus.

We've made every effort to use context to keep the clans clear for you. As an additional aid, here are the clan names all in one place. Because of the particularities of Arabic, the plural forms of some of the clan names are distinct from the singular. In the case of the Ray'een al-Fen, Qabilat al-Khayal and Qabilat al-Mawt (the "patrons of the arts," "clan of shadows" and "clan of death") there is no specific name for a vampire of that clan. The form "a member of..." is used instead.

Note that in the cases where it is used, "*bay't*" stands for "clan," so a member of Bay't Majnoon is a Majnoon.

European Name	Arabic Name (Plural)
Assamite	Banu Haqim
Baali	Baali
Brujah	Bay't Mushakis (Mushakisin)
Cappadocian	Qabilat al-Mawt
Followers of Set	Walid Set
Gangrel	Wah'Sheen
Laibon	Laibon
Lasombra	Qabilat al-Khayal
Malkavian	Bay't Majnoon (Majanin)
Nosferatu	Bay't Mutasharid (Mutasharidin)
Ravnos	Bay't Mujrim (Mujrimin)
Salubri	Al-Amin
Toreador	Ray'een al-Fen
Tremere	n/a
Tzimisce	n/a
Ventrue	El Hijazi*

** The El Hijazi are a small group of Ventrue long resident in Arabia. The few other Ventrue remaining in Islamic lands have no special name of their own.*

Further Reading

Although **Veil of Night** is the main supplement on Islamic Cainites, there are other **Dark Ages** books that can be helpful to you. **Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door** provides more details on the Banu Haqim (Assamites) and Walid Set (Followers of Set), while **Jerusalem by Night** covers that contested city in detail. The modern supplement **A World of Darkness, Second Edition** also provides information on Egypt and Arabia that can be adapted to the Dark Medieval setting.

Faith underscores this main theme. The Ashirra sect pushes Cainites to submit to God and become good Muslims, something the Beast inside them rages against. Other vampires play at being faithful in their own self-interest, and still others push for other belief systems. The conflicts between these beliefs fuel ambitions and hatreds — and therefore chronicles.

Mood

The world of **Veil of Night** is rich and exotic. Desert warriors, towering architecture, Sufi mystics, fantastic universities and a thousand and one other wonders pepper the Islamic world. The shadows between these wondrous points of light are deep indeed — sectarian massacres, dynastic intrigue, slavery and

Cainite horrors share the stage with the wonders of the Islamic golden age. The conflict between the light and dark plays itself out within every vampire.

Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One: 'Asabiyya traces the history of Islam from its quiet origins in Mecca to the great heights it has achieved. *'Asabiyya*, the dynamic energy of a hungry community, characterizes the early Muslim community, based primarily on the Arabic tribal tradition. As it grows, conquers and absorbs, however, Islam falls prey to the stagnation and intrigues of all great empires. This chapter also traces the rise of the Ashirra sect of Cainites, who tap the hope of the new faith but end up being part of the dissipation of its *'asabiyya*.

Chapter Two: One Faith for All the World examines Islam and the Ashirra sect and how the two interact. The expectations and realities of Muslim life (and unlife) play out in every act of the faithful.

Chapter Three: Under the Crescent traces the travels of an Ashirra across the breath of the Islamic empire. He sees the diversity and drive that make it a great empire, and the divisions that make it all too fragile. The Cainite situation is all the more dangerous, as our traveler soon discovers.

Chapter Four: Ways of the Blood examines the clans and Roads of Cainites in the Islamic world. These groupings are not entirely different from those in Christian Europe, but Islam has had its effect on them all. Different clans play different roles, and cultural differences make the Roads a new experience.

Chapter Five: Blessings of the Faithful provides game mechanics and new systems for chronicles in the Islamic world. Guidelines for character creation, new Traits, a new form of blood magic, Muslim weapons and tactics, and expanded coverage of faith are all part of this chapter.

Chapter Six: Damascus by Night provides you with a complete setting in which to play. The "Garden of the World," once the capital of all Islam, is now a great city facing off against the *Franj* without and a dark corruption within.

Appendix: Arrayed Against the Night covers a variety of other supernatural entities who lurk within Islam. From the monstrous Demons of the East who keep the Ashirra from entering Taugast, to the capricious *djinn*, this chapter shows that Cainites are not quite alone.

Lexicon

Islam recognizes Arabic as the most perfect of languages since it was in Arabic that God chose to reveal the Qur'an to Muhammad. As such it is the common tongue of the Muslim world, the language of religion and education. That is not to say that other languages — Persian, Hebrew, Berber and others — are unknown across the empire, only that Arabic is seen as superior. The following lexicon of terms only scratches the surface of Arabic, of course, listing some of the important terms — vampiric and mortal — in **Veil of Night**.

Abu Lazar: literally "father of Lazarus," meaning Cappadocius.

Al-Amin: literally "the virtuous ones," the Arabic name for Clan Salubri.

Allah: God. Despite some common misconceptions, Allah is not a separate "Muslim god" but the same

On Transliteration

There is just no fully correct way to transliterate Arabic into the Latin alphabet of English. Among other things, the meaning of Arabic words depends so much on intonation and emphasis that even a "correct" transliteration can be made null and void by pronunciation. In most scholarly works, this challenge is taken up by — to an English speaker's eyes — a dizzying array of diacritical marks and other pronunciation aids that embellish Arabic words and help the informed reader approximate the richness of Arabic language.

For the purposes of a book such as **Veil of Night**, however, such thoroughness is counterproductive. Indeed, without a lengthy explanation, such "aids" just make the language more opaque. So, instead of outright accuracy, we have opted for simplicity and consistency. Taking our cue from Albert Hourani's *A History of the Arab Peoples*, we have foregone diacritical marks and only used single quotation marks to indicate the letters *'ayn* (') and *hamza* (') in the middle of words. Like Hourani, however, we choose to use slightly more faithful transliterations of some terms than those commonly used in English — Qur'an instead of Koran, Muhammad instead of Mohammed, Muslim instead of Moslem.

supreme being worshiped (in different ways) by Jews and Christians.

Andalus: Moorish Spain.

***ansar*:** ghoul.

***'asabiyya*:** the dynamic drive and corporate sense of a tight-knit and hungry community; seen by scholars as the engine of conquest and expansion that falters as a culture becomes settled and "civilized."

***Asdiqa' al-Lail*:** the Friends of the Night, the ruling body of the Qabilat al-Khayal (Clan Lasombra), known in Europe as the *Amici Noctis*.

Ashirra: literally "brethren"; an Islamic sect of vampires centered around the belief that Muhammad offered redemption to Cainites who submitted to God's will; more generally, a term referring to a vampire who recognizes Islam (or at least pays it lip service).

***ayyar*:** a war band; among Ashirra, a coterie with a specific martial goal.

Banu Haqim: "the sons of Haqim," the clan known to Europeans as the Assamites.

***bay't*:** a clan, be it vampiric or mortal.

***bilad as-sudan*:** sub-Saharan Africa.

caliph: more properly "*khalifa*," or successor to the Prophet, the title of the political and religious leader of Islam; in the time immediately after Muhammad, there was a relatively clear succession of caliphs, but in later generations multiple caliphs, each ruling a part of the Islamic world, claimed the title; it has become a title with a great deal of symbolic power but little political might.

***damga*:** calligraphic emblem of a Turkish chieftain, similar in some ways to a Western crest or coat of arms.

***dhimmi*:** non-Muslims (Christians or Jews, most often) living under the protection of Muslim rule; they are tolerated but must pay a poll tax.

djinni (plural ***djinn***): a supernatural spirit native to Arabia and the Middle East; some recognize Islam and others do not.

***faris*:** cavalry.

five pillars of Islam: the basic obligations of any good Muslim: *shahada* (the profession of faith), *salat* (daily prayers), *zakat* (almsgiving), *sawn* (fasting during Ramadan) and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

***Franj*:** the Franks, or crusaders, who have invaded Muslim lands.

***ghutrah*:** traditional headdress worn by Arab men.

Hadith: the collected sayings and biography of Muhammad, forming the second great religious text of Islam after the Qur'an. A *hadith* is one of the sayings within this larger compilation.

Hajj, the: a line of Muslim Mutasharidin (Nosferatu) who trace themselves to Tarique al-Hajji, one of the elders of the Ashirra and a powerful blood sorcerer.

***hajj*:** pilgrimage to Mecca, to be undertaken at least once by every Muslim who is able; the fifth of the five pillars of Islam.

***hammam*:** a public bath, an important meeting place in an Islamic community.

***harim*:** the women's section of a large Muslim house.

***Hedayat el-Hawa*:** "Gifts of the Wind," a path of *sihr* blood magic roughly equivalent to the Thaumaturgy path Rego Tempestas.

***Hedayat el-Nar*:** "Gifts of Flame," a path of *sihr* blood magic roughly equivalent to the Thaumaturgy path Creo Ignem.

***Hedayat el-Qalb*:** "Gifts of the Heart," a unique path of *sihr* blood magic.

***Hedayat Iman*:** "Gifts of Faith," the principal path of *sihr* blood magic.

***hijra*:** literally the "breaking of bonds"; specifically Muhammad's flight from Mecca toward Madina in 622 CE, it marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar; it also means abandoning old ways to embrace Islam.

imam: an Islamic religious leader who leads the congregation in prayer; in the Ashirra sect, the imam is the vampire who provides religious leadership to the local Cainite community; often the local vampiric imam and sultan are one and the same, or they have some sort of agreement.

jihad: literally "holy war," the duty of a Muslim to defend and promote the faith. This term applies to more than simple martial matters.

***jund*:** professional soldier who fights for pay and land.

Ka'ba: the temple in Mecca that is the holiest Muslim site. It holds the Black Stone and was once a pre-Islamic animist temple. According to Muslim lore, Abraham built the Ka'ba.

Keening, the: a supernatural effect by which Cainites hear the sun roar while sleeping in Arabia; the effect is strongest near the Muslim holy sites of Madina and Mecca, and prevents most vampires from entering those cities.

***madina*:** the social center of a town or city, not always at the center of its physical layout; the *madina* houses the main mosque and the court of the *qadi*; the *madina* may also hold shrines to saints, booksellers' shops and institutes of learning.

***madrasa*:** theological school for the interpretation of Islamic law; scholarly Mushakisin (Brujah) often make their havens in *madrasas*.

Maghrib: North Africa.

Majnoon (plural **Majanin**): literally "lunatic," the Arabic name for a Malkavian.

***mamluk*:** specifically, one of the Turkish soldier-slaves who form the core of the Islamic military, many of whom convert to Islam and later obtain their freedom (they rise to power in Egypt in the 13th century); more generally, a slave or soldier-slave.

Marid: Malkav.

***maydan*:** hippodrome, the site of equestrian sports and cavalry training popular in Islamic cities.

***mazaar*:** a saint's tomb.

***mihrab*:** a prayer niche in a mosque.

***mudaraba*:** a duly authorized agent in business matters, a proxy; called a *commenda* in Andalus.

muezzin: a crier who calls the faithful to prayer; among the Ashirra, the muezzin is sometimes a practitioner of *sihr* blood magic able to use his voice to calm the Beast.

Mujrim (plural **Mujrimin**): literally "criminal," the Arabic name for a Ravnos.

mullah: a highly distinguished *'alim*, or Islamic scholar.

Mushakis (plural **Mushakisin**): literally "agitator," the Arabic name for a Brujah.

Mutasharid (plural **Mutasharidin**): literally "outcast," the Arabic name for a Nosferatu.

Qabilat al-Khayal: literally "the clan of shadows," the Arabic name for Clan Lasombra.

Qabilat al-Mawt: literally "the clan of death," the Arabic name for Clan Cappadocian.

***qadi*:** a judge specially trained to interpret the *shari'a*; in addition to handing down binding judgments, he might also serve as an arbitrator to amicably resolve disputes.

***qārib*:** a ship, single or double-masted (at this point in history), with a smooth-sided construction; known in Europe as a caravel or caravela.

Qur'an: the Islamic scripture as revealed by God to Muhammad (sometimes transliterated as "Koran").

Ray'een al-Fen: literally "the shepherds of the arts," the Arabic name for Clan Toreador.

***ribat*:** a fortified monastery, serving both religious and military functions; among Bay't Mushakis, the fortified haven of a member of the clan usually located outside the city.

***ruh*:** ghost.

***sadaqa*:** voluntary charity, a prized act of goodwill among Muslims.

***salat*:** the five daily prayers (dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, dusk and evening) required of all Muslims; the second of the five pillars of Islam.

***sawm*:** fasting during the daylight hours of the holy month of Ramadan; the fourth of the five pillars of Islam.

sayyad al-ghulan (plural ***sayyadin***): a hunter of monsters, usually seeking vengeance for a personal loss.

Sea of Faris: Persian Gulf.

Sea of Qulzum: Red Sea.

***shahada*:** the profession of faith, usually in the form of a declaration that "There is no God but God and Muhammad is His Prophet"; the first of the five pillars of Islam.

***shari'a*:** Islamic law.

***sihr*:** Islamic blood magic developed by Tarique al-Hajji.

sultan: literally "holder of power"; a mortal Islamic king who does not claim to be a caliph; among Cainites, a generic term for the preeminent vampire in a city or other large domain (equivalent to the European prince).

***sunna*:** the body of traditional Muslim learning and wisdom, largely embodied in the Hadith and Qur'an.

***suq*:** a city's central marketplace, holding warehouse facilities and housing for itinerant traders in addition to space for selling goods.

Taifa: One of the small kingdoms that arose in Andalus during the 11th century (after *taifa* or "faction"); also a group of Islamic Wah'Sheen (Gangrel) who have adopted the ethos of Islamic scholar-warriors and trace their origins to Andalus.

***tariq*:** road; used in Cainite circles the same way as Road and Via in Europe, to mean the belief system and moral code that keeps the Beast at bay.

Tariq el-A'tham: the Road of Bones or Via Ossis.

Tariq el-Bedouin: the "Road of the Nomad," the Muslim version of the Road of the Beast or Via Bestiae.

Tariq el-Haqim: the Road of Blood or Via Sanguinius.

Tariq el-Harb: the "Road of War," the Muslim version of the Road of Chivalry or Via Equitum.

Tariq el-Hayya: the Road of the Serpent, Road of Typhon or Via Serpentis.

Tariq el-Sama': the Road of Heaven or Via Caeli.

Tariq el-Shaitan: the Road of the Devil or Via Diabolis.

Tariq el-Tanaqud: the Road of Paradox or Via Paradocis.

Tariq el-Umma: the "Road of Community," the Muslim version of the Road of Humanity or Via Humanitatis.

Taugast: China.

***'udul*:** a legal witness, a man of good reputation who provides testimony, vouches for the testimony of others and can enter written documents into evidence.

***'ulama*:** (singular ***'alim*):** Islamic scholars.

***umma*:** the community of believers; among Ashirra, the local membership of the sect.

***wadi*:** a dry watercourse that becomes a river when flooded by storms or seasonal rains.

Wah'Sheen: literally "the beast-men," the Arabic name for Clan Gangrel.

Walid Set: literally "the children of Set," the Arabic name for the Followers of Set.

***zakat*:** obligatory almsgiving; the third of the five pillars of Islam.

***zawiya*:** a convent or monastery of one of the few Muslim religious orders that live isolated from the larger community.

Sources

The authors of **Veil of Night** consulted a dizzying array of sources. Medieval Islam is a rich and beautiful culture, and a substantial amount of material is available in English. The following texts were especially useful and would be informative for players and Storytellers in a **Veil of Night** chronicle.

General Texts

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Fletcher, Richard, *The Quest for El Cid* (Oxford University Press)

Hillenbrand, Carole (editor), *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Fitzroy Dearborn/Routledge)

Maalouf, Amin, and Jon Rothschild, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (Schocken Books)

Some Useful Web Sites

Glossary of Islamic Terms at http://www.iiu.edu.my/deed/glossary/

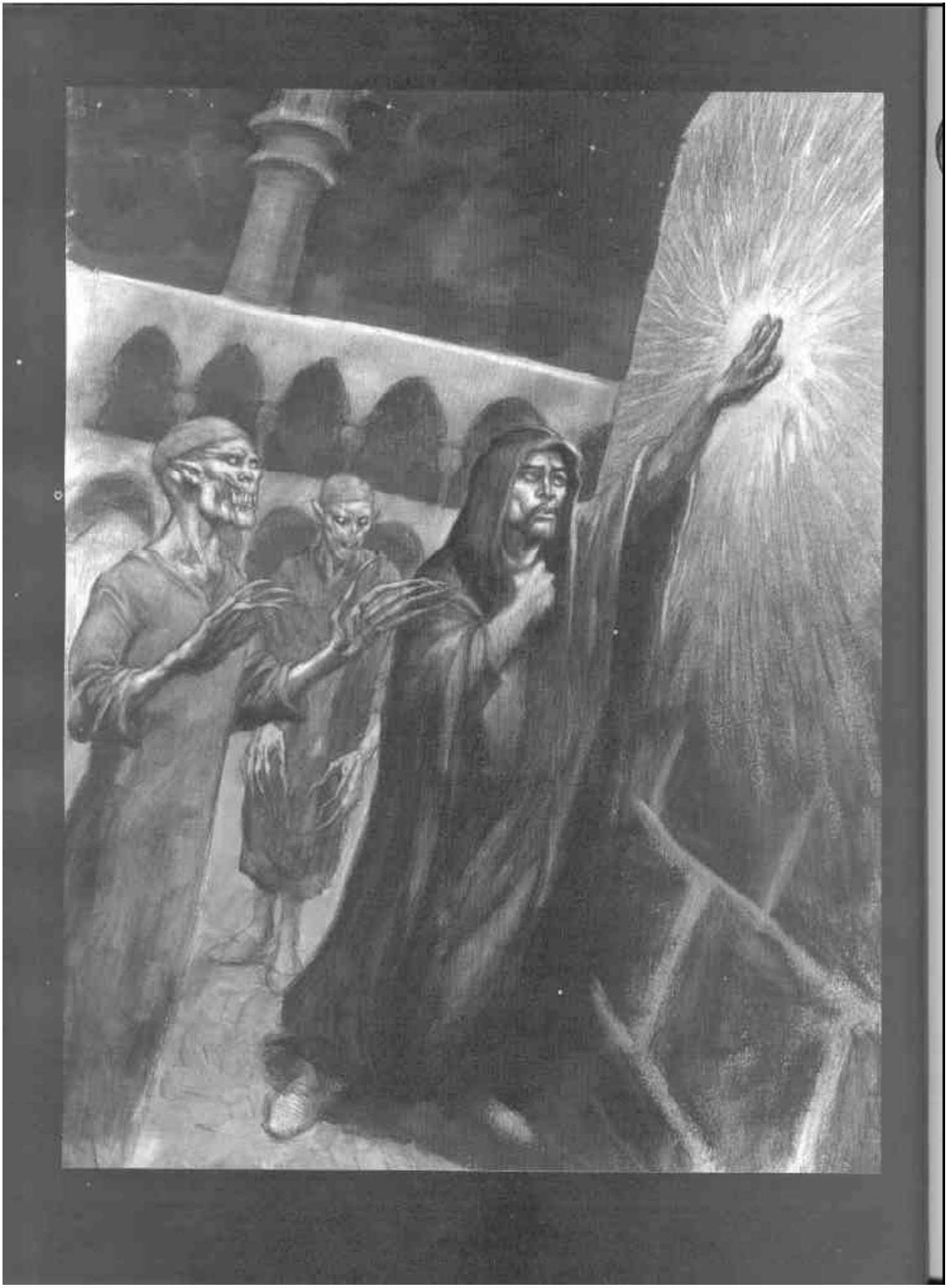
Rizwi's Bibliography for Medieval Islam at http://www.cnwl.igs.net/~faizer/index.html.

The Internet Islamic History Sourcebook at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islam/islamsbook.html

Dates and the Islamic Calendar

The Islamic *hijri* calendar was instituted in 638 of the Common Era by the second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, with twelve months corresponding strictly to the lunar cycle and beginning with the year of Muhammad's escape to Yathrib (later Madina). Based on this cycle, from crescent moon to crescent moon, the first day of the first month of the Islamic calendar corresponds to July 16, 622 CE. The twelve months of the Islamic calendar are: *Muharram, Safar, Rabi I, Rabi II, Jumada I, Jumada II, Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu'l -Qa'dah* and *Dhu'l-Hijjah*. Because the *hijri* months correspond to the lunar cycle, each month — over a 33-year cycle — "rotates" with respect to the Julian calendar that the West favors. The year 1197 CE corresponds to the Islamic year 575.

Though it would be highly accurate to have narrators in **Veil of Night** use the Islamic calendar, it would also be somewhat awkward for readers more used to Christian timekeeping. For the sake of accessibility, all dates in **Veil of Night** appear in their Common Era form (which basically follows the Christian calendar), even though the narrators would not realistically use such months or years.





Chapter One: 'Asabiyya

With God in truth is the knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain; He knows what the wombs have within them. No soul knows what will be its lot on the morrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. God knows all, is aware of all.

– al-Qur'an, Surah 31:34

Great empires are not made by civilized men. The Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun spent many years studying the rise and fall of world civilizations and noted that the vast power of Persia and Rome did not begin with the dreams of scholars, but with the courage and ruthlessness of primitive peoples united in a common purpose. This fierce sense of purpose, which Ibn Khaldun called *'asabiyya*, arises from people who have nothing and no one to turn to except one another. They close ranks against the rest of the world, united by a shared identity. When driven by a common goal, no obstacle on earth can stop them.

But Ibn Khaldun learned that once a race becomes civilized, *'asabiyya* fades. Wealth and comfort fuel personal ambition, which makes men self-centered and corrupt. The more sophisticated an empire becomes, the deeper the rot spreads. Once it starts, the process is irreversible.

By the middle of the sixth century, the once mighty Persian Empire was but a ghost of its former glory, its borders shrinking steadily under the rule of the decadent Sassanid kings and its nobles seduced by the hoary intrigues of Mesopotamia's ancient Cainites. Likewise, the glories of Rome were no more; corrupted by power and ravaged by the lusts of senators, barbarians and the agendas of the undead. The memory of its grandeur lingered only in fabled Constantinople and the Eastern Empire's possessions in Syria and Palestine. The invincible unity that had led these peoples to greatness, their *'asabiyya*, was only a memory.

In the shadow of these former giants lay sandy Arabia, inhabited by a people shaped from centuries of hardship and poverty, a place even Cainites considered fit only for outcasts. A man born to the desert tribes had nothing to commend himself but his lineage and his honor, both of which he guarded zealously. The sands of the Najd owed the tribes nothing; to survive, much less prosper, they had to be bold, cunning and ruthless, whether on the field of battle or in the marketplace.

The people of the desert understood *'asabiyya*. They lacked only a vision to unite them.

The Last and Greatest Prophet

In a time when day-to-day life was precarious, the early life of Muhammad ibn Abdullah was even more chaotic than most. Despite being born into the powerful Quraysh tribe, which ruled the holy city of Mecca, Muhammad's father died while his son was still in the womb, leaving no inheritance for his wife and child.

As a young child, Muhammad was frail and sickly. His mother Amina was too poor and often too ill herself to take care of him. At the age of two, she sent him away to live with a foster family in the nearby village of at-Ta'if, where at least the air was healthier and he could try to eke out an existence as a shepherd. Muhammad's rich relatives in Mecca looked on him with disdain, and his foster family treated him coldly. His earliest memories were of being an outsider.

By the age of four, Muhammad tended the flocks with his foster brothers. His health gradually improved, but he was moody and contemplative, often prone to fits of distraction that left him staring into nothingness for minutes or even hours on end. He questioned everything, natural or supernatural, as if life were a riddle and he would know peace only when he'd learned the answer. His strange behavior increasingly unsettled his foster family, until finally they feared he was possessed by a devil and sent him back to his mother in Mecca. Not a year later, Muhammad's mother died suddenly on a trip to visit relatives in a nearby town. Once again the boy found himself adrift, cast upon the doorstep of his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. Al-Muttalib's house overlooked the Ka'ba, an ancient temple in Mecca that even in those days was visited by throngs of pilgrims once every year. Over the next four years Muhammad's grandfather taught him the history of the Ka'ba and its sacred stone, thought to be a piece of the Moon that had fallen to Earth and was sacred to the lunar god Hubal. Muhammad learned all he could, fascinated by concepts of religion and salvation.

When Abd al-Muttalib died, Muhammad was once again on the move, this time to an uncle, Abu Talib, who was a kindly man but believed that children should earn their keep. At the age of 10, Muhammad was hired out as a camel driver and guard to caravans traveling as far as Syria and Palestine. He worked hard, but his relentless search for answers drove him harder still. In every town he sought religious scholars and holy men, debating aspects of Christian, Jewish and pagan teachings.

Finally, at age 25, Muhammad caught the eye of a wealthy widow named Khadija. She fell in love with him at first sight and asked him to marry her. No more would he have to struggle and scrape for each meal. Now he could manage the affairs of a prosperous estate and raise a family of his own. Muhammad settled down and looked forward to fatherhood, hopeful that here at last was the answer to his unease.

Khadija bore Muhammad six children. Two sons, Qasim and Abdullah, died in childhood. Despite these tragedies, the next ten years passed unremarkably. Muhammad was a lackluster businessman, losing more

money than he made, but for the first time his life approached something resembling completeness. He still engaged in occasional debates with Khadija's cousin Waraqa, a scholar of Judaic lore, but the affairs of his family kept him occupied. He told himself that here at last was the answer to the riddle he'd so long puzzled over. Deep down, he knew that it was not so.

In 606 CE, Muhammad was 35, an age at which most men in his position could at last rest easy and take advantage of the fruits of their labor. His soul still yearned for some kind of meaning behind the tumults of his life, but he was old enough to know that he would never find the answer. Or so he thought.

Revelations

The angels came to Muhammad without warning, on the hottest night of the year. Muhammad still held an abiding interest in matters of religion, and he often journeyed outside the city to meditate in the caves that honeycombed the nearby hills.

One night, after hours of contemplation, he heard a thunderous voice that said simply:

"Read!"

Shocked, Muhammad replied that he did not know how.

"*Read!*" the voice boomed, and once again he protested.

"*Read!*" the voice commanded anew, and when Muhammad asked what it was he should read, he saw a scroll that seemed made from silk, with words inscribed in fire. Though he could not read, he understood the words nevertheless, and would remember them as though they were written on his heart. Terrified, he stumbled from the cave, fearing that he was possessed or insane, but then he heard a voice from heaven saying, "*O Muhammad! You are Allah's messenger, and I am Gabriel!*" Looking up, he saw a vision of an angel, radiant in its glory. The sight drove the fear from his mind. After a moment the vision disappeared, and Muhammad was alone again.

Muhammad ran to Khadija to tell her what had happened. She, and later Waraqa, her cousin, insisted that the vision was a true sign from heaven and that a great revelation was at hand. They were Muhammad's first disciples, along with the merchant Abu Bakr, Abu's son Ali and Muhammad's devoted servant Zayd. They urged him to return to the caves each night, where the angels revealed to him visions of the end of the world and the terrible fate that awaited all those who did not repent their ways and worship the one God. Muhammad was told that he was the last messenger to humanity, following in the footsteps of Ibrahim



The People of the Book

Muhammad's lineage as a holy prophet, stretching from Abraham, then through Moses and Jesus, implies a close kinship between Islam and both Christianity and Judaism. Muhammad acknowledged this, referring to Christians and Jews as "People of the Book," and exhorting the righteous Muslim to treat them with tolerance and mercy, for they are only slightly removed from true belief in Allah. Though there were notable instances of persecution and cruelty directed towards members of both faiths later in Islamic history (even on the part of Muhammad himself), for the most part Christians and Jews were treated with considerable mercy and compassion, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. Even when Salah al-Din recaptured Jerusalem in 1187, he treated its Christian and Jewish occupants with respect and courtesy, permitting them to remain and worship in peace, so long as they obeyed the law and paid the Islamic poll tax, required of all *dhimmi* — protected nonbelievers — in the empire.

(Abraham), Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus), bearing the final exhortation of God's word to mankind.

Despite all that he had been shown, Muhammad remained apprehensive and unsure about his purpose as Allah's prophet. For the first four years following the revelations, he told only those closest to him about what he had seen. His followers numbered less than 40, mainly members of his own household and close friends and relatives. It was not until 614 CE, at the age of 43, that Muhammad at last found the courage to carry his message to the people of Mecca.

Hijra

Muhammad wandered the streets of Mecca preaching the word of Allah and warning of the divine judgement waiting at the end of the world. Most people thought him a madman, but his message — particularly the emphasis on compassion for slaves and the equality of women — had a powerful appeal among the poor and the disaffected.

The city's rulers, members of Muhammad's own tribe, watched the Prophet's followers increase in number. They grew alarmed, then angry. They denounced Muhammad as a heretic, and he and his people were threatened with death. Some of the early Muslims recanted, but most continued to worship in secret, meeting at hidden locations throughout the city or in caves outside Mecca. Among these early believers was a rich merchant by the name of Uthman ibn Affan, who regarded Muhammad with undisguised awe. Later, the Prophet offered one of his daughters in marriage to the merchant. Uthman, overcome with joy, placed his considerable fortune at the new religion's disposal.

The Quraysh continued to persecute Muhammad and his followers. Though they were afraid to kill the Prophet out of concern that his family would seek revenge, they didn't hesitate to kill his followers. During the month of pilgrimage, they placed men throughout the city to strike at any of Muhammad's followers who tried to spread the word of Allah among the pilgrims seeking to worship at the Ka'ba. Yet the religion persevered, and Muhammad's followers grew in number, until even members of the city's ruling class converted to the worship of Allah. Enraged Quraysh issued a decree of excommunication directed at Muhammad and his entire family, forbidding other Meccans to marry into his family or have business dealings with them.

Muhammad's followers could be attacked without fear of reprisal. The Prophet, hearing this, fled to a castle outside the city that belonged to his uncle, Abu Talib, where he remained for three years, venturing out only during the holy month, when violence was forbidden.

These years were the darkest times in the history of Islam. Muhammad continued to preach to his followers, forced to dictate his teachings to scribes who then distributed his words among the faithful. The persecutions continued, and the Prophet came to the realization that if the faith was to survive, he had to leave the city and find a place where his teachings could proceed unhindered. He traveled to at-Ta'if, the city of his childhood, but the people there cursed him and drove him out of the city with a hail of stones. Dejected, he returned to Mecca — and by chance fell into the company of a caravan of merchants just arrived from a town to the northeast called Yathrib.

Yathrib was a prosperous town with a predominantly Jewish population, where the rabbis were continually proclaiming the impending arrival of the Messiah. Muhammad shared his beliefs with the merchants, and surprisingly, the men listened. Before long, they came to believe that he was the very Messiah that the rabbis proclaimed. They said that they would return home and prepare the way for his coming, and would return in a year's time to lead him to Yathrib in triumph. Mustering his faith, Muhammad returned to his fortress-prison and fought to keep his followers from losing heart.

It was sometime during the following year that Gabriel returned to Muhammad in a dream. The angel's voice commanded, "*Awake, thou sleeper!*" and the Prophet's eyes were dazzled by a vision of Gabriel and a strange, winged horse with the face of a man. Muhammad mounted the horse, which flew like lightning in the direction of Jerusalem, stopping briefly at Mount Sinai and Bethlehem, where the Prophet dismounted and offered prayers. Then the horse carried him to Jerusalem and alighted at the great Temple, where Muhammad went into the Holy of Holies and found Abraham, Moses and Jesus at prayer together. The Prophet prayed with them for a time, until suddenly a ladder descended from heaven. He ascended into the presence of God, whose face was hidden by divine radiance. Allah embraced Muhammad, and then, dazzled by the light, the Prophet returned down the ladder and the horse carried him back to Mecca. In later years, pilgrims to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem pointed to the footprint etched in the stone and said that there was the place the Prophet mounted the angelic horse for his return to Mecca.

Time wore on, and the faith struggled in the face of relentless persecution. Exactly a year after their discussion in Mecca, twelve Jews from Yathrib met Muhammad at the Aqaba Pass outside the city and swore allegiance to him. Yathrib was not yet converted, but willing to listen to Muhammad's teachings, they said. The Jews returned to Yathrib with a teacher selected by the Prophet, and Muhammad steeled himself to remain patient and trust in the will of God.

While the people of Yathrib learned the teachings of the Prophet, the rulers of Mecca learned of the meeting at Aqaba. It was bad enough to have to put up with Muhammadans in their midst; how much worse would it be if he gained control of all Yathrib? The Quraysh feared that he might then raise an army and take the city by force. After much deliberation, they decided that— instead of one person attempting to kill the Prophet and risking his family's revenge — they would choose one man from each of the ruling families. They would all share in the murder, distributing the guilt. But before they could act, a messenger arrived from Yathrib with the final word from the city. The people of Yathrib now followed the Prophet.

Muhammad journeyed back to the Aqaba Pass and found no less than 75 men and two women awaiting him. They told him that Yathrib was waiting to welcome him with open arms, and they swore their allegiance to him. Muhammad was overjoyed, but one of his followers raised a question: What guarantees were there for the Prophet's safety? What happened if all the peoples of Arabia rose up against the town that had chosen the messenger of God? The assembled crowd at once swore an oath to defend the Prophet with their lives. One of the men from Yathrib asked Muhammad what their reward might be should they give their lives for the cause, and the Prophet answered simply, "Paradise." The answer reverberated in the hearts and minds of Muslims for centuries to come.

Returning to Mecca, Muhammad arranged for the relocation of his followers. During the following spring and early summer, 150 of the faithful made their way to Yathrib, leaving in ones and twos so as not to alert the Quraysh. Their movements were eventually discovered; one night in June, the city's rulers went to arrest him. The Prophet escaped thanks to the bravery of Ali, who disguised himself to resemble Muhammad and distracted the soldiers long enough for him to escape.

Muhammad and Abu Bakr, Ali's father, fled the city and began the difficult journey to Yathrib. By dawn, the Quraysh had sent armed bands into the countryside to catch the two men, and a reward of 100 camels was offered to anyone who caught or killed the Prophet. Muhammad and Abu Bakr hid in caves by day and traveled by night, and several times bands of men came close to discovering them. Each time, Muhammad assured his friend that Allah was with them, and miraculously, they were not found. After a journey of nearly 200 miles, the two men made their way to Yathrib. On September 20, 622, Muhammad entered the city like a king, escorted by 70 warriors. Thirteen years of persecution and humiliation were over.

Many years after the Prophet's death, the Caliph Umar declared that the Muslim calendar would begin with the year of Muhammad's flight from Mecca. 622 was called the year of the *hijra*, "the breaking of bonds."

Madina

The Prophet of Allah, driven like a thief from his home in Mecca, ruled like a king amid the Jews of Yathrib. Muhammad renamed the city *Madinat Nabi Allah*, "the City of the Prophet of God."

The city's first mosque, which the Prophet helped build, was no more than a rough enclosure with earthen walls and pillars made from date palms. Muhammad delivered his sermons to the faithful as he leaned casually against a palm trunk. He directed his followers to pray three times a day in the direction of Jerusalem and to become circumcised, perhaps as a means of smoothing the integration of his new Jewish converts. Where the Christians used wooden clappers and bells to call the faithful to prayer, and the Jews preferred trumpets, Muhammad used the human voice. The first

prayer-caller was the Nubian slave Bilal, whose thunderous voice intoned, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet! Come to prayer! Come to security!" It is said that after the dawn call to prayer, Bilal would rush from his rooftop and run to Muhammad's door, where he would cry, "To prayer, O Messenger of God! To salvation!"

For a while, life in the city was comparatively peaceful. Muhammad, now married to his second wife, Sauda, took yet another wife, Abu Bakr's nine-year-old daughter Alima. Not long after, Abu Bakr's son Ali, whom the Prophet regarded as his adopted son, married the Prophet's daughter Fatima. At the same time, Muhammad strengthened ties between those who had followed him from Mecca and the new believers in Madina by urging the two groups to swear oaths of loyalty and equality between them.

This time was a crucial, formative one — the new faith had survived the persecutions of the Quraysh, but did it have the strength to flourish? The question was answered (at least in part) in a little-known encounter on the first night of the month of Rajab, when the Messenger of God crossed paths with an Arabian Cainite by the name of Suleiman ibn Abdullah.

In those times, vampires were very rare in Arabia. With Alexandrian Egypt to the west and Sassanian Persia to the east, Arabia was regarded by the Cainites as an impoverished backwater, far from any place of influence or real wealth. And since Mecca was a place of great holiness even in those pagan times, no vampire could set foot there without risking Final Death. So the first 13 years of Muhammad's revelations had occurred beyond the reckoning of the region's few vampires. Suleiman ibn Abdullah, an outcast from the Qabilat al-Khayal looking for ways to build his power anew, learned of a man claiming to be the Messiah in the town of Yathrib, and journeyed there from Palestine to see if Muhammad and his followers could be put to some use. Even in the East, there were countless self-styled prophets and "messiahs" who made good pawns in the undead intrigues of Byzantium, Alexandria and Ctesiphon.

But Suleiman's fateful encounter with Muhammad did not go anything like the vampire intended. Struck by the power of the Prophet's message and his palpable aura of faith, the Lasombra saw in Muhammad a path to redemption and paradise in which Suleiman had long ago lost faith. The Cainite surrendered himself to the will of Allah and became one of the Prophet's devoted disciples. Suleiman summoned his childer and his faithful *ansar* from Palestine and released them from their blood oaths. He shared the teachings of Islam with them; most did not share his belief in the end of the world and the judgment of Allah, and he let them return to their homeland in peace. Yet a few dared to have faith in the Prophet, as Suleiman did, and devoted themselves to Islam. He charged them to spread Muhammad's message first to all the neighboring mortal tribes, and then to the handful of Cainites who haunted the Najd.

The word of Muhammad and the revelations of God spread like the desert wind to every corner of Arabia.

The Sword of Allah

After his first year in Madina, the Prophet turned his attentions once again to Mecca, the city of his birth. He vowed to return there again — not as a supplicant, but as a conqueror. Muhammad told his people that Allah had ordered him to make war on the unbelievers "until there is no more persecution and all men follow the way of the one God." Suleiman and his few devout childer, who came each night to pray at the mosque, heard the words of the Prophet and turned their energies to learning all they could of the Quraysh and their movements. Though they could not enter Mecca, there were merchants and pilgrims who came and went through the city. Before long, a steady stream of information was imparted to the Prophet through Ali, his son-in-law.

Muhammad began his war against the Quraysh by striking at the merchant caravans connecting Mecca to the Najd and beyond. After some initial successes, the Prophet set his sights on the richest Meccan caravan of the year, carrying 50,000 pieces of gold from Syria. The leader of the caravan discovered Muhammad's intentions, however, and sent a hysterical plea for help to Mecca. The Quraysh hurriedly assembled an army of a thousand men and went to rescue the caravan. The army of the Prophet amounted to just over 300 men.

The two armies met at Badr, in a valley set amid a chain of low hills. Muhammad watched the enemy army advance and prayed to Allah to destroy them. The battle raged throughout the morning, while the Prophet prayed and slept in a hut made of palm leaves some distance from the battle. Then, just around midday, a sandstorm rose suddenly. Some of Muhammad's men swore they saw the white turbans of angels swirling in the storm. The Prophet's men fought with fanatical zeal and charged the confused Meccans, who fled in a rout. The Quraysh lost 70 men and had another 70 captured. Though the caravan escaped during the fighting, Muhammad gained a huge quantity of plundered weapons, armor and ransoms. The men of Madina suffered only 14 dead. Overjoyed at their God-given victory, the Muhammadans started on a path of

The Keening

Those few vampires who inhabited sparsely populated Arabia in the days of the Prophet felt the rise of a terrible testament to the will of God. As Muhammad came to understand and embrace his position as the Prophet, a wail audible only to Cainites came to emanate from the holy city of Mecca and course throughout the region. Even before the *hijra*, the Keening manifested itself as a terrible sound that began as a distant whisper at dawn, rising in volume to a whispering roar by noon, robbing Cainites of their slumber and hammering away at their sanity. The Keening grew stronger the nearer a vampire came to Mecca, and any Cainite who set foot inside the city was consumed in blinding white flame.

Suleiman and other devout Islamic Cainites suffered the Keening gladly as a sign of their devotion to Allah. That it kept them out of the holy city of Mecca was only a reminder that they had a great deal to accomplish in order to stand as true Muslims.

When the Black Stone of the Ka'ba was stolen and then returned by the Qarmatians in 950, the blood magician Tarique al-Hajji placed wards around the stone that dampened the effects of the Keening across Arabia to the degree that nearly any Muslim vampire could eventually acclimate themselves to its roar. Entering the holy city of Mecca remains very difficult, however, and his wards seem also to have made Madina hard to access as well. (See page 185 for more on the Keening.)

conquest that would take them to the borders of Arabia and beyond.

The news of Muhammad's improbable victory at Badr further bolstered his reputation as a divine messenger and added weight to his holy decrees. As word of mouth spread, his following grew. He continued his attacks on Meccan caravans, hoping to taunt the Quraysh into coming after him in Madina, far from their seat of power.

The more his legend spread, the more Arabia's few Cainites took notice of him, but every vampire who sent agents or journeyed to Yathrib found the watchful Suleiman waiting in the shadows. He tried to deal peaceably with each arrival, urging them to accept the word of the Prophet and embrace Allah. Most were too old to accept that any god could still lay claim to their souls, but a rare few, mostly those still young enough to remember their mortal lives, believed the Prophet's message and devoted themselves to the One God. Little by little, Madina accumulated a vampiric community out of proportion with its size or influence, worshiping at the town's mosque and acknowledging Suleiman ibn Abdullah as their titular leader.

The Jews of Madina, however, came to see that Muhammad was less and less like the promised Messiah of their teachings. They began to openly complain about his interest in conquest and plunder. In response, the Prophet hardened his heart against them, calling them hypocrites, and declared that Allah had ordered that henceforth the holy prayers would be made in the direction of Mecca instead of Jerusalem.

The Lord of Arabia

Muhammad's war with the Quraysh came to a head in 626, when the Meccans assembled a force of 10,000 men to conquer Madina and end the raids once and for all. The Prophet held a council of war, and a former slave, Salman al-Farisi, suggested that they dig a trench around the southeastern quarter of the city. Within six days the ditch was completed, and when the Quraysh reached Madina, the Meccan generals did not know what to think. Warfare among the tribes had always been a matter of single combats and sweeping charges; they were entirely unaccustomed to siege warfare. They attempted several attacks but were beaten back, and finally they settled down and tried to starve the Muhammadans out.

For his part, the Prophet had reason to be worried. His men were terrified at the size of the Quraysh army, and rumors were circulating that the Meccans expected an uprising within the city. Further, Muhammad received news from Suleiman, his vampiric disciple, that the Bani Quraiza, one of the city's Jewish tribes, was in secret communication with the Quraysh, hoping to betray the town to the invaders to rid themselves of Muhammad and his followers.

The siege lasted for a month while Muhammad fought to hold his people together. The vampires of Madina kept the Bani Quraiza in check, quashing their attempts at sowing unrest. The Cainites were eager to slip into the camps of the Quraysh and wreak a horrible slaughter, but Suleiman did not permit it. The Nosferatu, however, felt very strongly that if the Cainites were to openly use their powers to defeat the Quraysh, they could very well weaken the Prophet's sole authority, which would place the future of Islam in jeopardy. From that point on, the idea of non-interference in the affairs of the mortal Islamic state became an unwritten law

among devout Muslim Cainites, which would have repercussions for centuries to come.

Finally, with the Muhammadans on the verge of surrender, a wild storm blew up one night, flattening the Meccans' tents and dousing their cooking fires. The Quraysh, believing that the Prophet had summoned the storm to destroy them, gave up and broke camp in the middle of the night. Hardly any fighting had occurred during the siege, but the victory was important nevertheless, raising Muhammad's stature to the detriment of the rulers in Mecca.

As soon as the Quraysh were gone, the Prophet turned on the traitorous Bani Quraiza. He and his fellows condemned their men to death, divided their property among themselves, and consigned their women and children to slavery.

In the aftermath of the siege at Madina, Muhammad resolved to take Mecca by force. The Prophet assembled an army of 1,400 men, disguised them as pilgrims, and set out for the holy city in February 627. Spies had been sent ahead to spread rumors and strike fear into the hearts of the Meccans, but when Muhammad was 10 miles from the city, he learned that a sizeable army was waiting for him, ready to do battle. The Prophet stopped at the oasis of Hudaibiyah, at the boundary of holy territory, and settled down to wait. Emissaries ferried between the two armies; Muhammad professed nothing more than a desire to visit the Ka'ba, but the Quraysh weren't convinced.

Finally, however, the Meccans offered a surprising truce. If Muhammad would abandon his aim to enter the city that year, he could return the following year, and the Meccans would vacate the city for three days so the Muhammadans could make their pilgrimage undisturbed. In addition, no young Quraysh would be allowed to join the ranks of the Muhammadans without the permission of their guardians, though Muslims who renounced their faith could remain in Mecca unharmed. Surprisingly, Muhammad agreed to the truce, which was intended to last for 10 years. His followers were appalled, seeing it as surrender, but the Prophet saw it as a sign of the Quraysh's weakening resolve. He would be patient and let the situation ripen, then let the city fall into his hands. Many Ashirra have claimed that just as Suleiman and the other devout vampires learned from the lessons of the Prophet, he in turn gained a Cainite's sense of patience.

Having secured a truce with the Quraysh, Muhammad found other means to keep his army supplied with plunder, leading them against rich Jewish colonies throughout Arabia. At Khaybar, Fadak and Wadi al-Qura , the Prophet's soldiers reaped huge amounts of treasure, sometimes after torturing the city's inhabitants. News of these exploits spread, further increasing the Prophet's status and prestige. During this time, Muhammad sent messengers to all the neighboring princes and kings in the region, imploring them to submit to the faith of the One God. Alongside these messengers came envoys from Suleiman and the vampires of Madina urging the same of any Cainites they found.

Over the next two years, Muhammad's conquests carried his army to the borders of Yemen in the south of Arabia and as far north as Jordan. When the Prophet heard that one of his messengers had approached the Byzantine commander of the fortress at Bostra and been killed, he sent an army of 3,000 men to avenge the murder. At Ma'an, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, they met the Byzantine frontier army, which, according to tradition, numbered about 200,000 Greeks and local tribesmen. For two days the Muhammadans debated attacking the vastly larger Byzantine army, but at length the poet Abdullah ibn Rawaha reminded the commanders that they were fighting with the strength of Allah, and in any event, martyrdom was every bit as desirable as victory. It was the first time the soldiers of Islam faced a Christian army, and they suffered a resounding defeat. The Muslim commander was killed, along with Ali's brother Ja'far, who legend says fought on until he was surrounded, holding up the banner of Muhammad with bleeding stumps after his hands had been cut off.

The news of the defeat at Ma'an appalled Muhammad, who wept openly for the loss of his kinsmen. Despairing of having his revenge on the Greeks,

Dhu'l-Faqar

According to legend, one of the most important pieces of plunder won by the Madinans at Badr was a strange, double-pointed sword that came to be called *Dhu'l-Faqar*, or "Cleaver of Vertebrae." Muhammad wore it during all the subsequent battles of his life, believing it to be a sign of inevitable victory. After his death, the blade passed into the hands of his son-in-law Ali, and over time became a holy relic, passing much later into the hands of the 'Abbasid caliphate, who used it as a sign of their legitimacy to rule. The weapon disappeared in 1258, when the Mongol warlord Hulagu killed the last 'Abbasid caliph and sacked the city of Baghdad. No tales mention it in the hands of the Mongols, nor did it reappear later in the hands of Islam's next rulers, the Osmanli Turks. Its fate remains a mystery.

he turned his attention once again to Mecca. There had been a series of brawls between the Quraysh and a Bedouin tribe that had recently converted to Islam, and Muhammad used this as a pretext for threatening the city. Though the truce still had eight years to run, Muhammad marched on Mecca with an army of 10,000 men. Time and the Prophet's meteoric rise in power had done their work on the people of the city. This time no army stood in his path. The city surrendered without a struggle and Muhammad entered Mecca peacefully, wearing the white robe of a pilgrim. He rode seven times around the sacred Ka'ba, then ordered the idols inside to be swept away. He proclaimed to the Meccans that the days of idol worship in the holy city were over. Suleiman ibn Abdullah tried to approach the holy city some nights later after a *hijra* of his own, but the power of the Keening kept him at bay.

Though Mecca had fallen at last, many tribes across Arabia were determined to hold onto the gods of their ancestors. One tribe in particular, the Hawazin, allied with another major tribe and assembled an army of 30,000 men. They threatened to sever the trade routes between Mecca and Madina, and were determined to fight the Muslims to the death. Yet there was no stopping Muhammad once Mecca was secured. The Hawazin fell in battle in February 630, and afterward ambassadors came from across Arabia carrying tribute to the Prophet and begging to be allowed to worship the One God. Where he had been hardhearted in the past, the Prophet was now gentle and magnanimous, forgiving anyone, even the Quraysh, should they accept Allah. Islam was like a tide, sweeping all before it; Muhammad's influence reached all the way to the borders of Syria and Palestine, and the new Lord of Arabia conceived the idea of a universal empire: "One Messenger, one faith, for all the world!"

The Last Sermon

Muhammad's life held enough triumph and tragedy for ten men. Though he had conquered Mecca and placed Allah as the true god of his people, his health was failing as old age sapped the strength from his bones. When the time of pilgrimage came in 631, the Prophet declined, saying he was too ill. He sent Abu Bakr as his representative. It wasn't until the following spring that he felt strong enough to go in person, and he went to the holy city with a procession of followers 124,000 strong. He rode around the Ka'ba, shaved his head and gave locks of hair to his close companions, then climbed Mount Ararat and delivered his final sermon. The Prophet asked that all his followers should be brothers, abolished usury, proclaimed the rights of women and slaves, and put an end to blood



feuds. When he finished speaking, he proclaimed, "Oh Lord! I have delivered thy message!" Then he made his way down the mountain and began a slow trek back to his home in Madina. By May 27, he had fallen seriously ill, though still found the strength to attend prayers. Few people thought the end was near. Only Muhammad's uncle, al Abbas, and the Cainite elder Suleiman implored the Prophet's foster son Ali to speak to Muhammad and secure his succession as the next leader of the faithful. But Ali steadfastly refused, and his ill-considered decision forever altered the course of Islam.

Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the last and greatest prophet, died at around noon on June 8, 632 in a small hut crowded with his servants and wives. Once, during his life, he said that a prophet should be laid to earth in the place where he dies, so his followers remained faithful to his teachings even at the end. A hole was dug in the hard, flinty earth of the hut's floor. The next night, wrapped in three shrouds of cloth, he was laid into his grave. The man who had single-handedly given birth to Islam and changed the face of Arabia had nothing but an arch of unbaked brick to mark his final resting place.

The Caliphs

Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah, passed from the world without naming a clear successor to lead the faithful. His death, only two years after the lightning campaigns that united Arabia, called the future of the entire jihad into question. The elders among his faithful immediately gathered at the council hall in Madina to debate and consider the best course for the people to take. Some of the people felt that Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, was the obvious choice, owing to his kinship and his exploits in battle against the infidels. Others pointed out, with some justification, that Abu Bakr — one of the Prophet's closest companions and the father of his wife 'A'isha — was better suited to the role of spiritual and temporal leader. Abu Bakr refused at first, suggesting that others were more fit to lead. But the wishes of the majority prevailed, and he was chosen to lead. Bakr accepted the title *khalifat Rasul Allah*, meaning "successor to the Messenger of God." Ali and his followers, bitterly disappointed by this turn of events, refused to acknowledge his father as Muhammad's successor, creating a rift between the true believers and a precedent for revolt and bloodshed that haunts Islam still.

By the time Suleiman ibn Abdullah awoke that evening, the damage had already been done. The Cainites of Madina gathered at the mosque and debated what should be done. Khalid ibn Sahl, a young and zealous Mushakis from the wastes of the Najd, pointed out that, even as Muhammad died, so would all his mortal successors, until finally there would be caliphs in Madina who had never sat at the Prophet's feet or heard his sermons in the mosque. Would it not be better if a Cainite were to be caliph, to keep Muhammad's memory and teachings alive and unaltered until the end of days? Khalid's words made sense to many of the Cainites, but Suleiman disagreed. The people had chosen Abu Bakr. Clearly it was the will of Allah, and the elder argued that it was their duty to serve the caliphate with all the devotion that they had shown to the Prophet himself.

Law and Order

Abu Bakr took little joy in the responsibility now set before him. His was by no means a unified empire; as word of the Prophet's death spread through the land, many tribes revolted against the new caliph, refusing to acknowledge his authority or pay him the *zakat* tax expected of every Muslim. At the time the caliph had a large army at his disposal, one previously recruited to march against the Byzantines and avenge the defeat at Ma'an. Many of Abu Bakr's advisors argued that the army should remain at Madina and defend the city, but the dutiful new caliph said only that it had been Muhammad's will for the army to punish the Greeks; the fate of the city would remain in Allah's hands alone. The army left for the frontier, and Abu Bakr settled down to weather any attacks the rebels might launch on the city. Within two months the city found itself besieged by an insurgent army. Abu Bakr ordered a night sortie with every able-bodied man who could carry a weapon, and the attackers were driven off. Thanks to Suleiman and his brethren, there were reports of angels moving amid the Muhammadans, shouting verses of the Qur'an and slaying every rebel that came against them. Army or no army, Madina was never defenseless.

Before long, the army returned from the Syrian border having achieved little against the Byzantines, but the caliph now felt that his obligation to the Prophet had been fulfilled. Without delay, he unleashed his forces on the rebels who threatened to tear the empire apart.

The carnage that followed was immense. While the Qur'an taught that mercy to a defeated enemy was the will of God, there was no forgiveness for those who accept the faith and later renounce it. In one notable battle at the ancient city of Yamamah, the Muslims attacked a rebel army of 60,000. After days of desperate

struggle, the gates of the city were breached and over 10,000 of the infidels massacred. The losses among the faithful were heavy as well. In those days, the Qur'an — being Muhammad's revelations and teachings — was not in a collected, written form, but memorized in bits and pieces by those who followed him. The thought of so many priceless memories being lost prompted the caliph to order his secretary to begin putting the Qur'an in written form. Suleiman and the vampires of Madina threw themselves wholeheartedly into the task, meeting scholars discreetly in the mosques and imparting firsthand memories of what they had heard from the Prophet. During this period Suleiman impressed upon his brethren that they, as immortals, had a sacred duty as undying receptacles of the Prophet's teachings. He encouraged them to share their memories with one another as well, keeping the Prophet's words alive for generations to come.

The bloody process of pacification continued for the next year and a half. During that time, the beginnings of an administrative infrastructure upheld law and order through the conquered territories. By this time, the Cainite population in Madina had grown very large, and Suleiman directed his brethren to spread across Arabia and establish themselves as guardians over the growing Islamic communities. The army increased in size as well, and Abu Bakr found himself turning more and more to the Quraysh, Muhammad's old tribe and one-time enemies, to fill important roles within the new order. The aristocratic Umayyad clan, led by the powerful and devious Abu Sufayn, secured the governorship of the Najd and the Hijaz. Sufayn's sons, Yazid and Mu'awiya, gained prominent positions within the army. Abu Bakr believed in Muhammad's call for brotherhood between the tribes, but the Umayyads had different plans.

Once Arabia had been returned to order, the devout caliph turned his armies north once again to meet the Byzantines in Syria. A handful of Muslim Cainites, led by Khalid ibn Sahl, discreetly accompanied the army, providing invaluable intelligence to its commander. In the autumn of 633, a Muslim force of 9,000 men confronted the conscript forces of Sergius, the patrician of Palestine, and overwhelmed them in a surprise attack. The Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, had been expecting the Muslim army for some time, and had prepared his army to defend Syria until he felt confident enough to counterattack. The plan worked well, and Heraclius was preparing his counteroffensive when he received word that another Muslim army had outflanked him with a lightning march across the desert and now threatened his rear. Caught between two armies, Heraclius was defeated on July 30, 634 on the plain of Ajnadayn just west of Jerusalem. The survivors retreated into Antioch, and all of Palestine lay open to the Muslim army.

Abu Bakr did his duty to the empire nobly and well. Order was restored, and the defeat of Ma'an was finally avenged. Unfortunately, his rule was not destined to be a long one. Like many of the Prophet's closest companions, he was an old man by the time of his succession, and within two years of assuming the caliphate, his health failed him. He died on August 24, 634. On his deathbed, he designated Umar, another of the Prophet's companions, to succeed him.

Expansion

Abu Bakr was a gentle man who accepted his role as caliph only out of a sense of duty to the Prophet. Umar, on the other hand, accepted the mantle with a crusader's zeal. He saw his role as being the sword of Allah, uniting the world in the belief of the One God. Umar continued the work begun by Abu Bakr, completing a lightning conquest of Syria and defeating Heraclius once and for all in 636, driving him back to Constantinople. It was during this time that the Banu Haqim first took serious notice of Islam, witnessing its pure focus and discipline under the reign of Umar. The first Muslims brought into the clan's warrior caste were drawn from Umar's army in Syria, and it is very likely that Banu Haqim assistance, along with the indirect efforts of Suleiman's brethren, allowed the Muslims to carry the field time and time again. It certainly helped counter the Cainites who infected parts of the Byzantine army and bureaucracy.

The Muslim terms of surrender for the cities of Damascus and Jerusalem were generous and civilized, and became the model for similar terms in later Muslim conquests. Inhabitants were given the opportunity to convert to Islam. Those who did not were allowed to leave with whatever possessions they could carry and were escorted from the city. "People of the Book," that is, Jews and Christians, were allowed to remain as *dhimmi*, or protected people, but they had to pay a poll tax, surrendering one-fifth of their goods each year. The cities were not plundered, nor were their inhabitants unduly persecuted. So long as the lives of Muslims went unhindered and the tax was paid, the empire was content to leave nonbelievers in peace.

By the same token, expansion into Syria and Palestine brought Muslim vampires into contact with established Cainite courts that cared nothing for Allah or the jihad. In these cases, there was no question of discretion or restraint. Muslim Cainites, led by the

zealous Khalid ibn Sahl, unsheathed their swords and delivered the same ultimatum to the princes of each conquered city: Accept the new order or be destroyed. Cainites were encouraged to accept Islam and swear allegiance to the caliph but were not required to do so. Nonbelievers could remain in the city so long as they did not interfere with or prey upon Muslims, and paid the poll tax. Those who did not accept these terms and wished to leave were free to do so. In Jerusalem, the Muslim Cainites' terms were accepted peaceably, and the majority of the city's small vampire population departed for Byzantium. In Damascus, the local Ray'een al-Fen preserved their authority by accepting Islam. In Aleppo, the Muslim vampires found a powerful Assyrian prince named Mamet. Having only recently gained preeminence over the other factions in the ancient city, he was dismissive of the Muslim ultimatum. He tore Khalid's emissary to pieces and vowed to bathe his city in Muslim blood. For a year after the mortal conquest of the city, Khalid and his fellows hunted Mamet's brood, slaying every last one. Of course, this only strengthened the other factions in the city. Since then, though it accepted Islam, Aleppo has suffered under a constant vampiric power struggle.

Umar further expanded the empire in 636, defeating the mighty Persian Empire at Qasidiyah then rushing forward to seize the capital at Ctesiphon. For the first time, the Muslims beheld the riches of an old and decadent empire, and enormous caravans of gold and slaves made their way back to Madina, further fueling the cycle of expansion. The conquest of Persia was both a mighty victory and a deadly poison to the spirit of the faithful. Not only did the trappings of Persian civilization tempt the conquerors with its soft and luxurious ways, but for the first time the Muslims had pushed their way onto lands that had long been the domain of ancient and unliving powers. Here at last, the word of Allah came to the attention of Cainites who were ancient in their ambitions, and who saw the Muslim cause as both naïve idealism and a tool to further their many schemes. The Persian Cainites stepped aside and allowed the Islamic vampires in, then ever so slowly began their intrigues anew. The mighty *amirs* left behind to govern from Ctesiphon were at the mercy of these vampires and their subtle machinations, which eventually worked their way throughout the world of Islam.

Umar's campaigns were completed by the conquest of Egypt in 639, after a lengthy siege at Alexandria. The siege was broken only through the treachery of the Egyptian governor Cyrus, who had been led to believe that he might be allowed to rule the city as an independent principality after the Muslim conquest. Much of the negotiations occurred through Cainite intermediaries; after the bloodshed at Aleppo, Khalid was loath to instigate another fight in a city of such priceless knowledge and culture. The siege ended when Marcellus, the Ray'een al-Fen prince of Alexandria, embraced Islam, then turned his influence on Cyrus to open the city's gates. After the fall of the city, Marcellus made a passionate appeal to the vampires of the city, calling upon them to put aside clan loyalties and take up the cause of Islam as *ashirra*, which in Arabic means "brethren." Many of the city's vampires took up the name, and afterwards Muslim vampires used the word exclusively when referring to one another.

Umar's reign lasted ten years, and he directed his efforts not only toward expanding Islamic domain but also to formalizing the laws of the land and completing the compilation of the Qur'an. He dispatched teachers of the Qur'an to every corner of the land and established schools of Islamic jurisprudence to instruct Muslim judges in interpreting the law of God. Under Umar, the empire's infrastructure grew. It gained a police force, local jails, regional administrators and an effective census to determine accurate tax collection and military recruitment. Sadly, Umar was slain by a former Persian slave who stabbed him as he was entering a mosque. The attack reportedly occurred because the slave believed that the caliph had made an unfair judgment against him in a legal matter. He died in 644, a tragedy overshadowed by his unfortunate choice of successor.

Corruption

None know precisely why Umar chose Uthman ibn Affan to succeed him as the third caliph. Certainly Uthman was one of the Prophet's closest companions, and a son-in-law, like Ali. Unfortunately, he was also proud of his relationship to the Umayyad clan and wasted no time removing capable and proven leaders in favor of close relatives and favored friends. Within a decade, members of the Umayyad clan had occupied virtually all of the major civil and military positions. The Quraysh might have failed to thwart Muhammad while he lived, but through the Umayyads they came to ultimately control all that the Prophet had made.

Uthman's corruption was endemic, and the new caliph lacked the leadership to keep the far-flung generals focused on the will of Allah. Many high-ranking commanders complained about the huge tribute being sent to distant Mecca. More than once, a caravan laden with such bounty simply disappeared, its wealth diverted to personal estates. The borders of Islam continued to expand, more out of inertia than anything else, reaching as far as Carthage in the west and the wilds of Afghanistan in the east. Worst of all, the written text of the Qur'an, the labor

of both Umar and Abu Bakr before him, did not escape the touch of Uthman. The caliph ordered a new version of the book written that downplayed the squabbles between the Prophet and the Quraysh and put his clan in a much more favorable light. Uthman then ordered that all other copies of the holy text be destroyed, including the copies in the possession of Muhammad's own family, so only his substantially altered version survives to this day.

Such abuses could not continue for long without spawning discord.

Revolution

As the years passed and the Umayyad treasuries grew, there were those who loudly disparaged the greed of Uthman and claimed that his actions were not in accord with the word of the Prophet. The most vocal of these dissenters was Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, a supporter of Ali, now middle-aged but still determined to win the caliphate he believed was his due. Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr took 500 men into Madina and took over the mosque, calling on the caliph to abdicate. Suleiman, considered by many to be the imam, or spiritual leader, of the Ashirra, agonized over the challenge to Uthman's authority but ultimately believed that he had no choice but to align with Ali and his partisans. It was clear that if Uthman's corruption continued, the empire would eventually disintegrate. Even more importantly, among the many revisions that Uthman made to the Qur'an was the elimination of the Prophet's offer of redemption to Cainites. No one knows what prompted Uthman to make the change, but as a result, Suleiman had to support rebellion for the Ashirra to survive as members of the Muslim community. The Ashirra took no action against the caliphate, but neither did they protect it.

Uthman attempted to negotiate with Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, appearing personally at the mosque to speak to the dissenters. When they called for him to step down, Uthman refused, saying that he could not put aside the mantle that God had placed on him. Enraged, the crowd threw stones at the caliph, seriously injuring him and driving him back to his home. In the days that followed, the rebels hoped for signs that the caliph would step down, but none were forthcoming.

Sending a group of men to distract the guards at the caliph's gate, the rebels slipped inside Uthman's estate and came upon him while he read the Qur'an in the presence of his family. For all his failings, Uthman faced death calmly. The assassins struck him down, his blood staining the pages of the holy book. Though the Suleiman and the other Ashirra worthies did nothing to assist the attackers, certainly they knew of the plan, and the guilt of the deed haunts the elders of the sect to the present nights.

Ali had been careful to maintain his distance from the rebels; now he came forward to claim the caliphate. But his succession was by no means assured, despite his careful plans. Many in Madina were horrified at Uthman's murder. Mu'awiya, governor of Syria and a kinsman of the slain caliph, demanded justice. 'A'isha, Muhammad's third wife and the daughter of Abu Bakr, loudly decried Ali's worthiness and raised her own army to oppose him. Where he had hoped for a simple and straightforward succession, now Ali and his supporters faced the real possibility of civil war. Ali accepted the title of caliph from the faithful at Madina, then set off for his home in al-Khufa, on the banks of the Euphrates, to establish a new capital that had no connection to the memory of the fallen Uthman. Suleiman and the rest of the Ashirra elders left Madina with Ali, remorseful and uncertain how to proceed. By doing so, they robbed Islam's Cainites of clear leadership in the tumultuous period ahead.

After establishing himself at al-Khufa, Ali confronted 'A'isha and her army, defeating her in a bloody battle at Basra in 656. 'A'isha was captured during the battle and forced into political exile in Madina. That left only Mu'awiya, governor of Syria, who had assembled a huge army of his own. The two forces met on the plains of Siffrin, in Iraq, in 657. Both armies were evenly matched, and neither side was eager to start the fight. Ali attempted to negotiate with his enemy, saying that it was best for the empire if it were united under his rule. Mu'awiya regretfully refused, saying that there could be no peace until the murder of Uthman was avenged. Negotiations finally broke down, and a series of skirmishes turned into full-scale battle.

The fighting raged for three days, but just as it appeared that Ali was winning, one of Mu'awiya's generals conceived of a way to end the conflict. His troops stuck pages of the Qur'an on the ends of their spears and held them aloft, and both sides took it to mean that they were asking for God to intercede and arbitrate the dispute. The fighting ceased, robbing Ali of victory. Both armies returned to their capitals — al-Khufa and Damascus — and each side sent a mediator to a neutral location to argue their respective situations. Unfortunately, Ali was persuaded by his advisors to pick a man of great piety but little political skill, while Mu'awiya sent an exceedingly crafty representative who managed to trick Ali's man into agreeing that *neither* party had a superior claim to the caliphate. The decision left the two sides deadlocked, but that was in Mu'awiya's favor. The longer the situation went unre-

solved, the weaker Ali appeared. For a time the empire had two caliphs, one ruling over Syria, Egypt and Palestine, the other ruling Arabia, Iraq and Persia.

As it turned out, Mu'awiya did not have long to wait. The precedent of armed dissent set by Ali and his supporters spawned other sects of angry partisans, including the Khawarij (or "seceders") who violently opposed the partitioning of the empire and sought revenge against the two men responsible. They failed to kill Mu'awiya but succeeded with Ali. The Prophet's foster son was assassinated on January 24, 661, after a troubled reign of only five years. His murder granted him a degree of glory that he never achieved in life, and his supporters held him up as a divine martyr and a saint on the same level (if not higher) than Muhammad himself. He was buried outside al-Khufa. His supporters — the Shiites, and, by extension, the Ashirra — still make pilgrimages to his resting place.

The Umayyad Dynasty

The twin caliphate established between Mu'awiya and Ali continued through Ali's eldest son Hasan, but within a few years Mu'awiya forced him to abdicate in return for an enormous bribe of five million dinar. Hasan vanished from the political arena to live out his life on his vast estates, and the caliphate passed to Mu'awiya alone, who from the outset determined that there would be no future trouble with succession — he intended to create a dynasty.

Mu'awiya was a master of intrigue and treacherous to a fault, not afraid to betray or murder a friend to improve his own situation. At the same time, he was a brilliant leader and statesman, and his reign did much to reverse the abuses of Uthman, his kinsman. Ruling the empire from Damascus, his generals continued the expansion of Islamic influence to North Africa, the borders of China, and to the walls of Constantinople itself. Twice, in 669 and 674, Islamic armies fought the Byzantines under the shadow of their great city, only to be beaten back. An intelligent and imaginative ruler, Mu'awiya created an Islamic navy and reformed the tactics of the army to follow the Byzantine model of the phalanx supported by wings of cavalry. He represented the transition from Islamic rulers of the rough-edged Arabian mold to the more civilized caliphs who sought to emulate Byzantium and Ctesiphon. Unlike the Byzantines, however, Mu'awiya insisted on being accessible to the people, and was even known to joke with claimants appearing before his court. He was the very image of the enlightened despot and ruled for 20 years, passing the caliphate to his son Yazid.



Yazid, whose mother was a Christian slave named Maysun, was an amiable and charming man with a great love for art and poetry but no talent for leadership. It was said that not a single day of his reign was spent sober. He ruled the empire for three years, and the whole period was one unrelieved tragedy. On his deathbed, Mu'awiya had warned his son that the greatest threats to his rule stemmed from two men: Husayn ibn Ali, Ali's second son, and Abdullah ibn Zubayr, a Meccan Shiite who refused to swear allegiance to the Umayyads. Yazid's first act as caliph was to send messengers to demand the allegiance of both men. The heads of the messengers were returned to the caliph in short order.

Husayn, in his father's home at al-Khufa, was persuaded to rise up and take the caliphate. The Ashirra, who had shielded Ali's sons from danger during Mu'awiya's reign, found themselves once again compelled to aid an attempted revolt. The Ashirra put their energies to work building support for a popular uprising in favor of Husayn, but the son of Ali did not have the patience for such indirect measures and set out at once for Damascus. Yazid, alerted of Husayn's approach, arranged to have him intercepted him only 20 miles from al-Khufa and had him and his retinue slaughtered while his greatest allies slept, powerless to intervene.

Yazid's rash action further polarized his opponents, and both of Ali's sons became venerated by the Shiites as martyrs. Not only did the murder inspire hatred among the Shiites, it also created repercussions that threatened to fragment the Ashirra as well. Yazid's men were persecuting and murdering Shiites wherever they could be found. For the first time in nearly a century, vampires were being hunted in Islamic cities, not because of what they were, but because of what they believed. Suleiman argued for the Ashirra to stay removed from the bloodshed — there was already too much blood on Muslim Cainites' hands. But many of the Ashirra, especially the Brujah Khalid, fiercely disagreed. The murder of Ali's sons demanded revenge, and no one was strong enough to see justice done but the Ashirra. For the first time in their history, the Muslim Cainites were wracked with bitter infighting just when the empire needed their influence the most.

With Husayn dead, Yazid turned his attention to Abdullah ibn Zubayr, who continued to denounce the Umayyads from the holy city of Mecca. Zubayr sent agents to the streets of Mecca and Madina, inciting an uprising against the local governor. Yazid responded with an army of 12,000 Syrians sent to end the nascent revolt. A rebel army marched from Madina to battle the Syrians but was no match for the caliph's forces. Yazid had told the commander of the army to show no mercy. He followed his orders to the letter.

For the next three days, the Syrian army turned on Madina, raping her people and pillaging her homes. The Syrians turned Muhammad's mosque into a stable and destroyed colleges, hospitals and schools. Then they turned their attention to Mecca. The army captured the heights around the city and brought up siege engines to bombard the defenders into capitulation. During the protracted bombardment, the holy Ka'ba burned to the ground, and the sacred Ka'ba stone was broken into three pieces. Abdullah wrapped the pieces in a silk cloth and hid them in his home until the siege was lifted.

Mecca never submitted to the Syrians. News reached the attackers of Yazid's death on November 10, 683, and they returned to Damascus, leaving Abdullah in control.

Yazid's son Mu'awiya II died of the plague just two months after becoming caliph. To succeed him, the Umayyads turned to Marwan ibn Hakam, who himself died after less than nine months in power. By the time his son 'Abd al-Malik came to power, the empire was beset from within and without. It needed a fierce and brilliant leader like the first Mu'awiya; in 'Abd al-Malik they got all of Mu'awiya's ferocity but none of his charm. For 21 years, he fought tenaciously to hold the empire together and ruthlessly eliminated dissent in Arabia, Iraq and even his native Syria. Shiites were persecuted and killed wherever possible, until the movement went underground with its believers concealing their true faith. To combat the reign of the "anti-caliph" Abdullah in Mecca, 'Abd al-Malik ordered the construction of an even greater temple where loyal subjects of the empire could worship. Set in Jerusalem over the ruins of Solomon's temple, the great Dome of the Rock was built over the place where Muhammad mounted his winged horse for the flight back to Mecca. Ironically, this savage caliph ushered in an age of glorious architecture and mosaic art that turned homes, mosques and public buildings into graceful and elegant objects of contemplation and beauty. Thirteen years after assuming power, 'Abd al-Malik shattered the influence of his rival Abdullah in yet another assault on Mecca. Upon his death, the caliph managed to pass the mantle of a relatively peaceful empire to his son al-Walid, who in his time saw the Islam reach the height of its power and influence.

Al-Walid presided over the greatest period of the Umayyad reign, and possibly the greatest period of Islamic rule in general. He made the best use of the peace won so dearly by his father and built architectural

wonders like the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, hiring artisans from as far away as Byzantium to adorn its walls. When the awesome structure was completed, the account books detailing the costs of the project weighed down a train of 18 mules; al-Walid refused to even glance at the books, ordering the records burned. Scholars became prominent fixtures at court, as the caliph called learned men from all parts of the empire to refine his court. Al-Walid's generals, free once again to look beyond the borders of the empire, brought the northern parts of India under Islamic rule.

But the greatest conquest of all, greater even than the triumph over ancient Persia, occurred in 711 when an obscure Berber named Tariq ibn-Ziyad crossed the narrow strait between Africa and Spain. After conquering a rocky island that still bears his name (*Jabal Tariq*, or Gibraltar), he continued on with 7,000 men and descended on the Spanish province of Algeciras. There, he routed an army of 25,000 men under Roderick, the last of the Visigothic kings.

Within three years, the Muslims had pushed the Spanish to the foot of the Pyrenees. What began as an impromptu raid turned into the plunder of the richest kingdom the Muslims had ever seen. When the conquerors of Spain made their triumphal entry to Damascus in 715, they arrived at the head of a column comprising 400 Visigothic nobility, still wearing their heavy gold chains of office; a thousand Spanish virgins; and a caravan of plundered gold and jewels that stretched for more than a mile. Al-Walid lived to see the train of plunder presented to the people in the courtyard of the Great Umayyad Mosque, then died two weeks later, at the height of the empire's glory. After his passing, the Umayyads continued to rule for another 35 years, but in the Shiite stronghold of al-Khufa, the fires of rebellion were being patiently stoked.

The persecution of the Shiites had continued throughout the Umayyad dynasty, and with every year some new act of violence fed Shiite fury. Disaffected members of the Ashirra, led by Khalid, wanted nothing more than to strike at the "usurpers" claiming the title of caliph. In typical Cainite fashion, they waited for the rise of a likely mortal leader to begin the assault on Umayyad power. In the meantime, Khalid strengthened Ashirra ties with the Banu Haqim of Alamut. At last, two Shiite leaders stepped forward, ready to drown the Umayyads in blood: a former Persian slave who called himself Abu Muslim, and Abdu'l-'Abbas Abdullah, the head of the 'Abbasid clan. These men raised an army 120,000-strong at al-Khufah, and Abdu'l-'Abbas pronounced his allegiance to the memory of Ali. 'Abbas was promptly elected caliph by the Shiites. The army marched on Damascus.

The 'Abbasid army met the Umayyads near Arbela in January 750. The 'Abbasid soldiers were dressed entirely in black, and it is reported that they moved like automatons, heedless of any risk or danger. They never uttered a sound in battle but fought like demons, and the Umayyad army was put to flight. Some of these stories stem from the Ashirra and Banu Haqim who moved amid the 'Abbasid forces, but the Shiite warriors' dedication, indignation and zeal after long oppression is most responsible for their practically superhuman prowess on the march to Damascus. Indeed, they pursued their enemies all the way back to the capital, and the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan al-Himar, was slain. Abdu'l-'Abbas, who took the name *al-Saffah*, or "the Shedder of Blood," assumed the caliphate and established a dynasty that still endures.

The 'Abbasid Caliphate

Though the 'Abbasids swept into power ostensibly to right the wrongs of the Umayyads, their reign began with a lengthy series of atrocities far more methodical in scope than their predecessors' crimes. The Umayyad caliph's relatives, no matter how distantly connected, were put to death. Even the bodies of the long-dead Umayyad caliphs were exhumed and burned. Khalid and other militant Ashirra supported this bloody purge and even participated in the slaughter, gladly feeding on their enemies. Suleiman and his "traditionalist" Ashirra were less enthusiastic. They took the exhumations as a sign that the militants were not going to tolerate any opposition — living or dead. Only one member of the Umayyad clan escaped the purges. Abd-ar-Rahman ibn Mu'awiya was 19 when he fled Damascus with his brother and young son. The vengeful 'Abbasids caught his brother and beheaded him, but Abd-ar-Rahman escaped to Morocco and eventually across the strait to Spain. Despite intensive searches by the 'Abbasids, with the militant Ashirra supporting their cause, the young wanderer eluded his pursuers. Though Suleiman has never admitted it, it seems that help from him (and perhaps the wing of the Qabilat al-Khayal) played a role, perhaps as an attempt to atone for the crimes committed by the rogue members of his sect.

Once in Spain, Abd-ar-Rahman raised an army. He defeated the governor of Spain in 756 and established his capital at Cordoba. Like his ancestor Mu'awiya, Abd-ar-Rahman was a brilliant ruler, establishing a dynasty of his own that made the kingdom of Andalus the rival of both East and West for more than 300 years.

Like Ali, who had left Mecca to separate himself from the legacy of the first three caliphs, the 'Abbasids moved the capital of the empire to Hashimiya in northern Iraq. The powerbrokers of the new dynasty soon decided they needed an entirely new capital, which suited the militant Ashirra very well indeed. The new capital of Baghdad, by the banks of the Tigris, would welcome and protect the faithful — living and dead alike. The treasure of the empire was put at the disposal of the city's builders, who completed their task in only four years. Almost as soon as it was completed, Baghdad became a vibrant center for the arts and sciences, drawing scholars, poets and musicians from across the empire. It was not long before the city symbolized everything that was great about Islam.

Intrigues and Divisions

Islam appeared stable. Trade flourished, and in every city it seemed new mosques, colleges and hospitals were being built. But a hidden war tore at the soul of Islam.

Suleiman and his followers were initially caught unawares by the militants and their bloody revolt; they had to admit that supporting the Shiite cause had finally dislodged the Umayyads who had erased their hopes of redemption. But submission to Allah seemed to have very little to do with the goings on in Baghdad's nights. Khalid and his militant Ashirra infested Baghdad, bending mortals and other vampires to their wills in ways reminiscent of Rome and Constantinople. Vampires who paid only lip service to Islam were thriving in the new capital, including Banu Haqim and others who had nested in Damascus when it was the Umayyad capital.

Suleiman and his followers bent their energies to removing the militants' grip on the caliphate. While 'Abbasid nobles feasted in glittering halls, a fierce war of intrigue raged in Baghdad and beyond. The two Cainite factions grappled over the empire and struggled to keep from wrecking it in the process, like two tigers fighting over a sparrow's egg. Both sides worked through knowing and unknowing mortal proxies, vying for political and economic supremacy. Many rejoiced at seeing the unified façade of Islamic Cainites shatter in the face of old-fashioned ideology and personal agendas. For centuries, the Ashirra had taken upon itself the charge of keeping the caliphate free of outside manipulations, allowing the Empire to grow without machinations from infidel Cainites. Now the elders of Persia and Byzantium found themselves welcomed in the courts of Baghdad as the militant Ashirra sought alliances to counter the greater influence of the traditionalists.

For a time, the 'Abbasids tried to reclaim Spain, but political infighting and Cainite manipulations contributed to a decisive defeat at Badajoz around 770. In 782, the 'Abbasids were victorious against the Byzantines, forcing the Empress Irene to sue for peace and acquiesce to a humiliating yearly tribute of 5,000 dinar, but the vicious cycle of palace intrigue and the caliphate's deepening decadence sapped the strength of their early religious fervor. The Muslim *'asabiyya* was fading, like a candle reaching the end of its wick.

From 783 onward, Islam fell into a slow decline as immortal beings fought to decide the future of the faithful. Successive caliphs lost interest in managing the affairs of their sprawling empire, consumed in petty intrigues that were a reflection of the undead forces at work in their midst. Greed, corruption and murder became commonplace. Revolts became more frequent; the moment one was brutally crushed, another arose elsewhere. Morocco broke away completely, its ruler forming a dynasty of his own. The infighting grew so vicious that both factions of the Ashirra began to lose sight of the purpose of their struggle. Both parties were surprised when, in 836, Caliph Muhammad al-Mu'tasim decided that the only way to survive without becoming a puppet or being murdered in his sleep was to remove himself from Baghdad completely. Al-Mu'tasim relocated his court to the city of Samara and surrounded himself with a bodyguard of Turkish mercenaries.

The move caught both vampiric factions by surprise. Even in the worst of their struggles, the person of the caliph remained sacrosanct. Worse, Al-Mu'tasim's decision had removed him from one danger but placed him in another. By depending on the protection of his Turkish guards, the caliph put his fate, and that of his successors, entirely into their hands. For the next 87 years, the empire existed through the whims of the Turkish guard, manipulating a string of puppet caliphs with more ruthlessness than the Ashirra ever dared.

As the influence of the caliphate waned, regional governors paid less and less attention to edicts from Samara and instead ruled their domains as they saw fit. Once again al-Khufa became a hotbed of dissent, this time directed against the decadent 'Abbasid rulers. A band of especially militant Shiites, the Qarmatians, went on a rampage in 929, raiding Basra and going on to attack Damascus. The puppet caliphs were unable to oppose them, and more followers joined their ranks. By the end of the year, nearly all of Arabia was under their control. The Qarmatians waylaid pilgrim caravans for ransom, and in 930 their outrage drove them to sack the holy city of Mecca. Thirty thousand pilgrims were slaughtered, and the fanatics pulled down the Ka'ba

stone and carried it back to their base at al-Ahsa. Never before had the successors of Muhammad been shown to be so utterly helpless.

A similar decline was also occurring in the Umayyad caliphate of al-Andalus. Successive caliphs had turned the Spanish kingdom into a fine jewel, gleaming with mosques, palaces and universities. But each year seemed to sap the strength of the conquerors, making them ever more self-absorbed and indolent. Before long, the Christians of Spain were rising in revolt, supported by the Franks on the other side of the Pyrenees. More and more, the Andalusian caliphs depended on the strength of their Slavic mercenaries to keep the Christians — and their own relatives — in line. Soon they were hostages to their own guards, the same as the 'Abbasids.

Nocturnal Matters

The Qarmatian atrocities at Mecca were an awakening for the Ashirra. When the sect took the Black Stone from the Ka'ba, the Keening that had roared across Arabia since before the days of the Prophet grew silent. It was like a message from Allah — the holiness of Islam was being silenced and something had to be done. But Suleiman and Khalid could barely contain their mutual animosity. True cooperation was impossible without the appearance of an intermediary. A Mutasharid from Andalus named Tarique filled the role. A powerful blood wizard who had studied with arcane masters both living and dead, he came to Baghdad to submit to Allah. Like any good Muslim, he said, he wished to make a pilgrimage to Mecca and asked the worthies of the Ashirra to join him.

Suleiman, Khalid, Tarique and a few others traveled south toward Mecca. Although the Keening no longer roared, the event was truly momentous. They walked the pilgrim's path and saw the ruined Ka'ba. They felt the breath of God upon them. Together, they committed themselves to setting matters aright. Tarique, now taking the name al-Hajji (the pilgrim), prepared mighty wards to dampen the Keening once the Black Stone was returned. Through a combination of quiet negotiation and nocturnal intimidation, Khalid and Suleiman pushed the Qarmatians to return the stone in 950. The Keening roared anew.

Tarique al-Hajji's wards worked just as he intended. The Keening could still be felt throughout Arabia but was more a reminder of Allah's power than a force that pushed Cainites out of the area. Entering Mecca or Madina was still a great challenge, but those of stout heart and pure faith could do so. Tarique and his childer — who now called themselves the Hajj — became the guardians of the cities to prevent either of the Ashirra factions from claiming them. Both Suleiman and Khalid undertook the *hajj* anew and faced the rage of the Keening, proving their worth.

Dynastic Shifts

As the Ashirra focussed on matters of faith and sect, mortal dynasties shifted once again. The Buwayhids, a tribe of Shiites from the southern shores of the Caspian, seized control of Baghdad in 945 and systematically eliminated the influence of the Turks. The Buwayhids then took on the role of caliphate puppeteer, marrying into the 'Abbasid household and directing the course of the empire from their home in the city of Shiraz. Next, a faction of Qarmatians, who called themselves Fatimids, conquered Egypt and Syria. Suleiman relocated to Cairo at this time.

The balance of power shifted again in 1055, when an army of Muslim Turks arrived at the gates of Baghdad. The Turks, led by their chieftain Toghrul, had conquered Khurasan from the local governor and now set their sights on a larger prize. Inspired by the Buwayhids, or perhaps secretly influenced by Cainite infidels, Toghrul demanded an audience with the caliph. A series of arrangements were made, and to the horror of the Ashirra, the caliph pronounced Toghrul to be the sultan of Baghdad. In a single stroke, the power of the Buwayhids had been broken. The 'Abbasids were once again beholden to Turkish masters, but this was no mere cadre of palace guards. The militant Ashirra left the capital for their old haunts in al-Khufa to lick their wounds and plan their eventual return.

In Recent Nights

The years following the downfall of the Buwayhids saw the Muslim Empire divided into three kingdoms. The 'Abbasids controlled parts of Arabia (including Mecca and Madina), Iraq and Persia. The Fatimids ruled Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The Umayyad puppets fought to maintain their hold against the *Reconquista* in Spain. The 'Abbasids were further weakened by the death of Toghrul's grandson, Malik Shah, who forced the puppet caliph to divide the empire among his three sons. This terrible weakening of 'Abbasid power came at a crucial time — in the West, a call had gone up in the courts of France to free Jerusalem from the grip of the infidel.

Had the Europeans faced a unified 'Abbasid Empire, the First Crusade would never have succeeded. As it was, there was no force ready to oppose the Western knights as they swept into Palestine and took Jerusalem by storm. While the 'Abbasids watched in stunned amazement, the crusaders hacked their way into the holy city and wrought a hideous slaughter, killing every man, woman and child they could reach until their

horses were covered in blood up to their fetlocks. The sheer barbarity of the Christian knights horrified the 'Abbasids, who had never in their worst nightmares witnessed such a spectacle. The Ashirra were equally horrified at the tide of infidel Cainites that followed the crusaders like carrion crows, settling into the newly formed Kingdom of Jerusalem and inflicting all manner of injustices against the true believers still in the region.

The 'Abbasids watched these developments in vain, wishing for a source of strength that could rally the faithful and drive the invaders from the region. That strength emerged from an unlikely source. Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Aiyub was a Kurd, the son of the governor of Azerbaijan in northwest Persia. Possessing a fierce intellect and a commanding presence, Salah al-Din was puritanical in both his devotion to the holy Qur'an and his hatred of the crusaders. He regarded the Kingdom of Jerusalem as an affront to the caliph, and so great was his outrage that he gathered an army of followers to crush the infidels in Palestine.

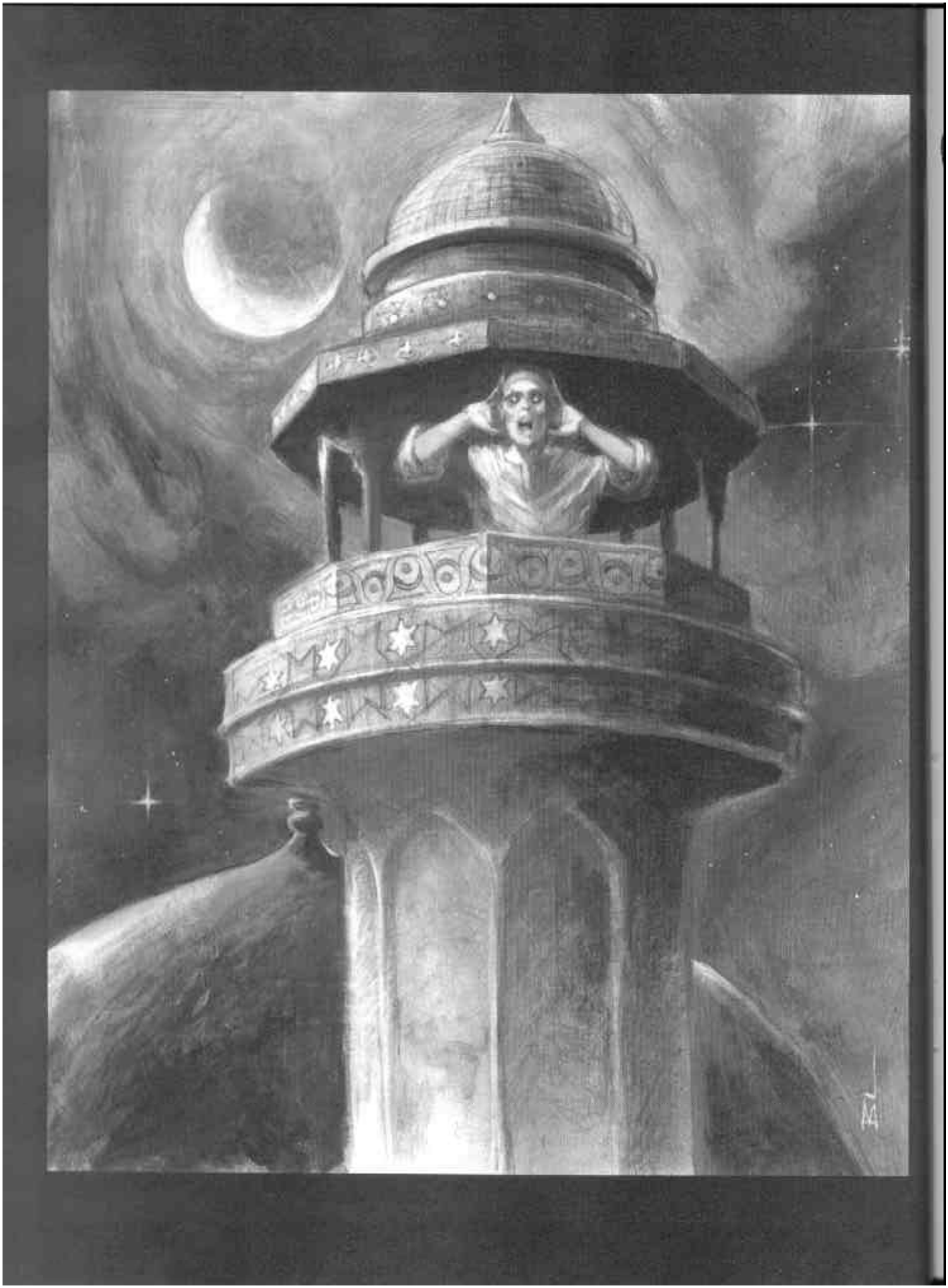
In a series of lightning campaigns, Salah al-Din swept like a whirlwind through the Fatimid Empire, bringing Egypt, Syria and all of Arabia once again under 'Abbasid control. Then the great leader turned his attention on the hated King Baldwin. Like the mighty caliphs of old, Salah al-Din led his armies against the crusaders and decisively crushed them at Hattin in 1187. Salah al-Din took the King of Jerusalem captive. In the name of justice, he executed him and accepted the surrender of the holy city.

Salah treated the conquered city in the same civilized manner as Umar, the second caliph, had so many centuries ago: No harm came to the Christians and the Jews. Instead, they once again had to pay the poll tax if they chose to remain in the city. The great gold cross that the crusaders had affixed to the Temple of the Rock was removed and the gold crescent of Islam raised in its place, but otherwise the inhabitants fared far better than those who surrendered to the crusaders almost a century before.

Just as the coming of the crusaders brought the people of the empire together, the fall of Jerusalem and the arrival of Western Cainites united the estranged factions of the Ashirra against a common foe. Both sides saw in Salah al-Din the hope of an empire reborn, renewed in its faith and united in the goal of spreading the will of Allah.

Now, though Salah al-Din's death in Damascus was a terrible loss to the faithful, Suleiman still holds out hope that the Ayyubids (Salah al-Din's successors) will continue the work of their founder and drive the infidels from their few remaining outposts in Palestine. Meanwhile, the militants use Jerusalem as a rallying cry to pursue punitive campaigns against the entrenched European vampires in the holy city and Antioch, determined to protect the true believers from their corrupting touch.

Islam's glory days are past, but the essence of its greatness remains. God willing, it will be great once more.





Chapter Two: One Faith for All the World

Truly, by the transience of time, loss is ever the lot of mankind save for those who believe and do righteously, who counsel one another in truth, who counsel one another to patience.

– al-Quran, Surah 103

One of the strongest aspects of the Muslim faith is its commitment to building a unified community, embracing every individual regardless of race, gender or social class. Muhammad preached that everyone was equal and deserving of Paradise, including women, slaves and even supernatural beings. Unlike in the West, where spirits of any kind are seen as minions of Hell, Arabic — and by extension, Islamic — spirituality acknowledges that supernatural creatures are beings of free will, not intrinsically damned by virtue of their existence. These creatures, called *djinn*, can accept Islam just like any mortal, and through a virtuous existence find salvation at the time of Allah's judgment.

The implication for Cainites is clear: If the *djinn* can be good Muslims, then vampires can as well.

Ashirra

The Ashirra, or "brethren," are an Islamic sect of Cainites that formed around Suleiman ibn Abdullah in Madina beginning in 622 CE. The Prophet's teachings had a profound impact on Suleiman, who as a mortal had been deeply religious and had long repressed a deep sense of despair at being a damned monstrosity. Referring to his conversion as the Second Embrace, Suleiman took upon himself the role of Islam's guardian and messenger to the Cainites. In the early years after the *hijra* no vampire could enter Madina without first dealing with its protector, who exhorted visitors to embrace Islam. Within six years, eight vampires devoted themselves to Allah, using their servants to help spread the new faith across Arabia and praying by moonlight in the mosque of the Prophet. Under Suleiman's guidance, the Cainites sought the Prophet's wisdom in every particular of their nightly existence, so that by the time of Muhammad's death in 632, the tenets of the sect's faith were established.

Faith

The foundation of the Ashirra's faith is based upon two central principles: that redemption is possible for *any* being who accepts Islam and respects its laws, and that immortality does not exclude a vampire from Allah's judgment. The matter of the *djinn* and their ability to accept Islam is a clear parallel to the Cainites' own condition. Like the vampires, the *djinn* are supernatural creatures bound by their own laws and appetites. They are justly feared for their reputation of deceit and corruption. Legends abound of unsuspecting humans lured to their destruction by gifts or favors granted by these spirits. Despite this reputation, the Prophet said that they were as welcome as any mortal if they dedicated themselves to Allah and fulfilled the duties God required of them. Though no passages in the Qur'an specifically address vampires, the Ashirra point to the matter of the *djinn* as the logical justification for the redemption of Cainites. They also claim that the revisions introduced by Umayyad caliphs removed passages referring more specifically to vampires.

For many vampires, the very nature of their immortality is a sign of their ultimate estrangement from God. Not only does their unlife stand in violation of God's divine order of birth, growth, aging and death, it also prevents a vampire from facing holy judgment. The Ashirra consider immortality to be a fallacy. While a Cainite may defy death and remain changeless from century to century, the prophecies of Muhammad warn of the inevitable end of the physical world and the coming Judgment Day. On that day, all physical existence ends, no matter how ancient or powerful, and all beings stand together before Allah to be judged according to their actions. If anything, a vampire's immortality is a great burden; while a mortal only lives a set span of years and can then rest, a Cainite must strive to be virtuous for millennia upon end until God at last decrees the End of Days. But, as the Prophet often said, Allah places no burden on a man's shoulder that is greater than he can bear.

There has been much conjecture as to what will happen to vampires once the world ends. Suleiman and many of the eldest Ashirra assert that with the end of their physical bodies, the hunger for blood will end as well, and Allah will reward the righteous with a new life in Paradise that is free from the Curse of Caine. The majority of the Ashirra hold eagerly to this belief, but recently a small faction of brethren in al-Khufa have suggested that devout Ashirra will reap an even greater reward in return for the hardships they have endured, assuming a place of prominence just one step removed from the angels. Elders in Cairo, Sevilla and Jerusalem debate the validity of this belief, but the notion that Cainites are especially favored among the faithful has spread among many younger Ashirra, who use it as justification to exert more direct control over the empire's far-flung territories.

Conversion

Spreading belief in Allah is paramount among the Ashirra, as in any devout Islamic sect. Every Cainite that the brethren meet is encouraged to accept the faith, regardless of their clan or social background. Unless a vampire has committed numerous and egregious offenses against the faithful in the past, all a Cainite must do is make the profession of faith before

two or more witnesses, and he joins the brethren. In the case of cynical Cainites who profess a newfound faith after numerous offenses against the faithful (preying upon pilgrims or desecrating holy sites), his case must be brought before a council of elders and legal scholars. If the council considers the case and finds the supplicant's claim to be sincere, his conversion is accepted and his past sins forgotten. If the council finds against the supplicant, he might first be required to atone for his crimes through forfeiture of land or property, or through an act of penance such as restoring a mosque or recovering sacred items lost to the infidel (other Ashirra might be sent along with these supplicants to witness their acts and increase their own reputations through good works). Only in a tiny fraction of cases are a supplicant's crimes deemed too great to forgive.

When this occurs, there is no course left but to slay the offender and ease the spirits of the faithful he so cruelly offended. The condemned is released into the streets of the city at sunset, and a blood hunt is called upon him. An Ashirra who slays the condemned not only earns greater status and respect among his peers, but special dispensation from Allah. A terrible sin can be expiated by a true believer who delivers vengeance against so great a criminal.

In the early days of the sect, when its numbers were small and concentrated in Madina, such appeals were relatively straightforward. In the centuries since, however, the sect has decentralized much like Islam itself. Most major cities have Ashirra communities with leaders of their own who deal with such appeals in their domain. They may not all agree, and some criminals find refuge by converting in a city with a more tolerant council. There is no truly preeminent authority left in the sect, although three Cainites and their entourages do vie for the title. First is Suleiman himself, head of the traditionalist Ashirra and currently residing in Cairo. Second is his rival Khalid ibn Sahl, head of the more radical Ashirra who currently resides in al-Khufa. Last is Tarique al-Hajji, the Mutasharid blood wizard recognized as the leading imam among the Ashirra. He resides in Mecca, however, so reaching him is very difficult indeed.

The ranks of the Ashirra are open to converts from every clan, even Walid Set and Baali (although they must abandon their idolatry). Qabilat al-Khayal is quite numerous, owing largely to the acts of Suleiman, the sect's founder. Bay't Mushakis is also well represented, inspired by the ideals of Islam and its ideals of equality, compassion and pursuit of knowledge. Ray'een al-Fen also flourish among the Ashirra, relishing Islam's love for architecture, poetry and song, but some chafe under its somber refusal to allow representative art (for fear of idolatry). The Mutasharidin are not overly common, but some have a great deal of authority. Tarique has founded a line of his childer and devout clanmates called the Hajj who are skilled in *sihr* (Islamic blood magic). There are not many Hajj, but they tend to have a great sense of religious duty, serving in various communities as vampiric muezzin or *'ulama*.

Members of other *bay't* are present in far smaller numbers. Some of the rare non-Christian Ventrue — left over from Roman and pre-Roman days — have converted. A few Wah'Sheen have taken up the mantle of the Islamic warrior, calling themselves Taifa. Members of Qabilat al-Mawt also occasionally pop up, though often as associated scholars rather than outright converts. Majanin sometimes call themselves Ashirra as well.

Loyalty to God or Clan?

In many regions, particularly in contested areas such as Jerusalem, there are Ashirra whose sires repudiate the Muslim faith, or whose clan as a whole has interests that run counter to the needs of the faithful. Such situations pose a dilemma for any Ashirra — to whom does ultimate loyalty belong?

Islamic teachings emphasize the bonds of family and speak in no uncertain terms of honoring and respecting one's parents, even if they should be unbelievers. The Qur'an enjoins children to obey their parents in all things — except in cases where their wishes would cause the child to commit sin or otherwise act against the faith. In those cases, the devout Muslim has no alternative but to defy his parents and accept the consequences. It is far better to suffer in this world than to offend God and suffer in the next.

The Ashirra extend this belief to relations between childe and sire. The childe is bound to honor the sire in all things, even if he is an unbeliever. Only when the sire's commands cause the childe to commit a sin against God should he defy his sire's wishes. Ashirra lore contains numerous legends of devout Cainites caught on the horns of such a dilemma, requiring them to use all their wits — and often the help of their fellow Ashirra — to fulfill the wishes of their sire in a way that does not compromise their faith.

Finally, there are the Banu Haqim, whose ranks recognize the inherent worth of Muslim discipline but find themselves torn between worship of Allah and devotion to Haqim. Alamut freely chooses Muslims for immortality. From the earliest days of the sect, the Ashirra have enjoyed a close relationship with the Banu Haqim. Many stories tell of the clan's warriors finding sanctuary in Ashirra households, and of Ashirra and Banu Haqim fighting alongside one another in the early conquests of Palestine and Persia. For now, most Islamic Banu Haqim seem able to reconcile their split loyalties by acting as Muslims but obeying orders from Alamut when the time comes.

Duty

Islam's version of "the virtuous life" differs sharply from the Christian conception. Where Christianity presents its tenets in terms of *rights* that God, as creator, expects of His worshippers, Islam defines its practices as *duties*, both to oneself as a child of Allah and to fellow believers as part of the greater Islamic community. Instead of exacting moral behavior through a sense of guilt or entitlement, Islam attempts to promote virtue as a measure of self-respect and love for family and friends.

The Qur'an contains a comprehensive collection of personal traits that define a virtuous Muslim, addressing nearly every aspect of day-to-day life. The ones most relevant to the Ashirra are:

- A Muslim must maintain a sober and dignified appearance, neither given to wild outbursts of emotion nor careless or lewd behavior. The manner of his clothes and ornamentation should be simple and modest, showing proper respect and humility as is worthy of a child of God;
- He is enjoined to respond to his natural urges and appetites, as Allah intended, but only in moderation, never to excess;
- He must not kill, except in times of war or in defense of the faithful;
- He must be honest and forthright in his dealings with others, and once his oath is given, it must be kept no matter the cost;
- He must not steal or gamble;
- He must not have dealings with sorcerers;
- He must be charitable and compassionate to those in need, regardless of their faith;
- He must treat his servants with respect, never abusing them, for they are also children of God;
- He must never be complacent in his personal development, but strive to broaden his mind and enhance his knowledge of all things Allah has created.

These are ideals, but the Ashirra take them very seriously. Personal virtue is a mark of status within the sect and a powerful tool to control the ever-hungry Beast.

The Five Pillars

In addition to the basic practices above, the Qur'an requires a number of social and spiritual duties. First are the five duties prescribed for all Muslims by the Prophet, called the five pillars of Islam. Within the Ashirra, there are specific duties required of a sire to his childe. There are also duties to servants, duties to converts and laws developed by Suleiman and the elders regarding feeding and the Embrace.

Shahada: The Profession of Faith

The absolute focus of Islam is on Allah, the One True God, and surrender ("Islam") to his will is absolutely required for salvation. Thus, the profession of faith (*shahada*) is the first and absolute requirement of believers. On several occasions during each day, in the saying of prayers, a Muslim must repeat the profession, "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his Prophet." To be a true profession of faith, the utterance must express genuine knowledge of its meaning as well as a sincere belief. Like all aspects of Islam, sincere, selfless intentions are paramount to making a respectful offering to Allah.

Salat: The Five Daily Prayers

The second religious duty is the observance of the five daily prayers, called *salat*. All adult Muslims are expected to perform five prayers at prescribed intervals during each day, preceded by ritual cleansing or purification of the body. Each prayer must be performed with the supplicant facing in the direction of Mecca. A prayer involves a specific number of bows, called *rak'as*, during which the supplicant stands, then bows, kneels and prostrates himself while performing recitations of verses from the Qur'an. Each prayer concludes with the profession of the faith, followed by the greeting "May the peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon you." The five daily prayers are: *fajr* (dawn), *zuhr* (noon), *asr* (mid-afternoon), *mahgrib* (sunset) and *isha* (evening).

Of the five prayers, only the noon and mid-afternoon prayers pose a problem for Cainites. Muhammad said on several occasions, however, that if one of the faithful missed a daily prayer through no fault of his own, he could gain forgiveness for the omission by

performing an act of charity. Suleiman and other extremely devout Ashirra have reportedly conditioned themselves to awake at the predetermined times of the noon and mid-afternoon prayer, forcing themselves to stay active long enough to show their proper devotions before falling back into slumber. Most Ashirra simply forego the daylight prayers, arguing that their slumber is imposed by Allah.

For mortals, the Friday noon prayer requires attendance at a mosque. An imam leads the group in prayer and shares an instructional sermon drawn from the Qur'an or the Hadith. This attendance is required of every Muslim, though the Ashirra have adopted the evening prayer as their time of sermons, led by a Cainite imam.

Zakat: Almsgiving

The third pillar of Islam is charity to the needy, known as *zakat*. It is considered an expression of devotion to God and is central to Muhammad's teachings of forgiveness and mercy. The Qur'an encourages charity to the needy, orphans and widows, and distinguishes between voluntary charity (*sadaqa*) and the obligatory *zakat*. The specific amount required by the *zakat* has been the subject of considerable debate, but the accepted amount is one-fortieth (2.5%) of the earnings accumulated in a year, paid annually, and one-tenth of the harvest of land or date trees is payable at harvest time.

Sawm: Fasting

Saum, or fasting, comprises the fourth pillar of Islamic faith, intended to teach the true believer the value of self-discipline. The Qur'an prescribes fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. For the entire month, Muslims must refrain from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from daybreak until sunset. Travelers, menstruating women and sick people are exempted from fasting, though they are expected to make up the missed fast at a later date.

The Ashirra consider the fast to be one of their solemn duties, demonstrating their mastery over the animal urges of the Beast. Most alter the schedule of the fast to apply from sundown until sunrise, drinking from a servant just prior to resting at dawn. Truly devoted Cainites adhere strictly to the schedule prescribed by Muhammad — at the beginning of the holy month, they divest themselves of all the blood in their bodies, voluntarily entering a state of torpor.

In either case, the risk of frenzy is great, particularly among younger vampires. Those who fast only from sunset to sunrise are watched over by an older, more experienced Ashirra in the local community. The elders favor this month-long pairing as it builds stronger ties within the *umma*, or community. Some elders have recently paired traditionalist and militant members of the sect together to heal the rift between the two factions. Ashirra who seek to fast for the entire month place themselves in a thick-walled, windowless room, and are watched over by a retinue of trusted *ansar*, or ghouls. When the time comes to awaken, a lamb is led into the room and placed upon the Cainite's breast. Its legs are bound and its throat slit, and the *ansar* retreat outside the room while the vampire feeds on the thin vitae.

Hajj: Pilgrimage

The fifth pillar of Islamic faith requires that the faithful, at one point in their existence, must make the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. This pilgrimage, called the *hajj*, traditionally occurs only during the first two weeks of the holy month of Dhu'l- Hijja. These rituals, associated with the *hajj*, are reenactments of the various activities performed by the Prophet Abraham when he and his son Isaac first constructed the Ka'ba.

Upon arriving in Mecca, the supplicant must perform a ritual of purification. Men shave their heads, and both sexes don seamless white robes, symbolizing every Muslim's equality before God. After this ritual, the supplicant must circle the Ka'ba seven times, run between the two hills overlooking the Ka'ba seven times and then recite several specific prayers and incantations.

Once these opening rituals are performed, the *hajj* proper commences on the seventh day and continues for the next three days. It begins once again with the ritual of purification, followed by a prayer at the Ka'ba. Then the pilgrims travel to Mina, a hill outside Mecca, where they spend the night. The next morning they proceed to the plain of Arafat, where they stand from noon until sunset and perform a series of prayers and rituals. The pilgrims then head to Muzdalifah, a location halfway between Arafat and Mina, to spend the night. The next morning, the pilgrims head back to Mina, on the way stopping at stone pillars meant to symbolize Satan, at which they throw seven stones.

The final ritual is the slaughter of an animal, to represent Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son Isaac. The meat from the sacrifice is given to poor Muslims, and this ends the *hajj*. Afterwards, the pilgrims hold a feast called the Festival of the Sacrifice, one of the two major Islamic festivals along with the Festival of Breaking Fast at the end of Ramadan. During the *hajj*, most pilgrims visit the Prophet's tomb at Madina before returning to their homes.



All Ashirra aspire to make the *hajj*, but Mecca is the holiest of Muslim ground — only those Cainites who have truly surrendered to Allah can make it all the way to the Ka'ba. Some Ashirra fall back on Muhammad's statement that another Muslim can make the journey on another's behalf as an act of charity, and find a suitable person to travel in their stead. The more devout undertake the journey many times over the course of their immortal existence and travel as close to the holy city as they can, hoping each time to travel a little closer until they can stand in the shadow of the Ka'ba as the Prophet once did.

Duties of Sire to Childe

All Cainite clans have traditions concerning a sire's responsibility to his childer, and the Ashirra add traditions of their own. Most often, these are unspoken expectations, but some texts list specific duties. The

Theory vs. Practice

Much of this chapter is taken up by the obligations and rules of unlife among the Ashirra. Remember — not all of these practices are equally observed by all Ashirra. Membership in the sect is not a matter subscribing to a detailed code of behavior so much as identifying yourself publicly as a Muslim. The degree of adherence to the various pillars and other Ashirra traditions depends very much on the importance placed on them by individual vampires and the various sultans and imams with the power to enforce rules.

Many Ashirra are only somewhat devout. They identify with Islam on a cultural level and recite prayers and pay the *zakat*, but they are unlikely to make the *hajj* or worry about daylight prayers. Their fast for Ramadan likely consists of delaying feeding for a few hours as a concession to tradition. Their own agendas require that they remain strong, after all, so not to feed is foolish. Similarly, these vampires are never that concerned about the purity of the blood they drink — Allah has made them need blood to survive, so the prohibition against drinking it must not apply to them.

Only the truly devout follow all the rules.

actions of the childe reflect directly upon the reputation and standing of the sire. Thus, the sire is bound to maintain significant ties with his progeny to assure that they continue to lead virtuous unlives. In effect, the Ashirra put a great deal of importance on the Tradition of Accounting so familiar to European Cainites.

The specific duties required of a sire toward his progeny are:

- He is responsible for the childe's instruction in the Qur'an, if such knowledge is lacking, as well as duties required by the Ashirra;
- He must present his childe to the imam and the *umma* in the mosque, that the brethren may know of him and his lineage;
- He must teach his childe the strictures relating to feeding and the Embrace;
- He must set an example of charity and compassion for his childer to follow;
- Should his childe commit crimes against the faithful or cause great offense in the eyes of Allah, it is the sire's responsibility to show the childe the error of his ways.

While these duties are admirable in the abstract, and generally maintain a sense of dignity and propriety among the Ashirra, they also make for a great deal of political intrigue in the sect. More than one Ashirra has seen his reputation and social standing tarnished through the missteps of his progeny. Rivals embroil the young childer of their opponents in myriad intrigues, trying to force just such embarrassing missteps.

Most Ashirra eventually travel to distant frontiers or contested cities faraway from their sire, to build their own reputations and personal standing; sires turn to close friends or allies to perform discrete investigations of their faraway progeny's activities. As the sire is equally liable for offenses committed by his progeny, every effort is made to resolve such situations quietly before the news becomes public knowledge.

Duties to Servants

One of the most significant aspects of Muhammad's teachings regarded the emancipation and equality of slaves. He considered it the ultimate act of charity, capable of expiating even the greatest of sins. Unfortunately, the ideal has proven highly impractical, both for the Ashirra and Muslims in general. To the Ashirra, a household of loyal servants is not only a matter of convenience but one of personal survival.

Islamic law specifies that slaves may only come from two sources: prisoners taken in battle or the offspring of other slaves. Some Muslims receive slaves as part of their personal inheritance, often descendants of servants who have been in the possession of their family for generations. Indeed, family elders often pass down valued servants like treasured heirlooms. Most Ashirra of high birth begin with a number of slaves to maintain their household and manage their affairs, and the sect enjoins its members not to take on any more than is absolutely necessary (though many of the devout still create lengthy rationales to justify large and impressive retinues).

An Ashirra is permitted to create as many *ansar* from among their slaves as they wish, but the preternatural loyalty of the blood oath is seen as somewhat distasteful. Ashirra are expected to be especially cautious not to abuse their thralls. But political maneuvering creates a strong incentive to bind slaves through the power of blood. Canny Ashirra can discomfit their political rivals and garner personal prestige at the same time by offering to purchase the freedom of one of their rival's slaves in a public place such as the mosque. Naturally, the owner of the slave can't in good conscience refuse, certainly not in front of so many witnesses — the best he can hope for is to drive the hardest bargain possible. The bargain leaves the rival deprived of a valuable resource while the purchaser reaps praise and acclaim for his virtue and high-mindedness. The blood oath negates this weakness, since a freed *ansar* remains a thrall.

Duties to the Newly Converted

All Ashirra share a duty to watch over and guide newly converted Cainites in the ways of Islam and the teachings of the Qur'an. When a Cainite becomes a member of the sect, he is presented in the mosque, and the elders ask for the community to nominate one of their number to be that Cainite's spiritual mentor for one year. Such mentorship is an opportunity for increased status within the community, demonstrating the mentor's wisdom and leadership qualities. The mentor is responsible for educating the new convert in the ways of the sect, much as a sire instructs his childe, but without the explicit ties of responsibility. This arrangement allows the mentor to build close ties with future political allies, building a power base that could one day lead him to a position on the council of judges or even the role of imam in a prominent city.

Of course, there is some risk involved each time an Ashirra agrees to mentor a convert. Should the convert ever renounce his faith, it is a mark of great disgrace for the individual who mentored him. Though a rare

occurrence, it has led to the downfall of several ambitious leaders within the sect.

The Taking of Blood

All Muslims are subject to strict dietary prohibitions, but the Cainite's particular needs created a number of thorny issues for the early Ashirra to resolve. Who could the faithful draw their sustenance from, and how much could they take? Was the blood of unbelievers clean? Was it possible to purify unclean blood if the vampire had nothing else to feed on?

Early on, the Ashirra under Suleiman ibn Abdullah established a tradition of drinking blood that has been purified and consecrated to Allah. Doing so requires a ritual draining of the blood into a silver bowl, after which the vampire must pray for roughly five minutes. The vampire may also purify an entire living vessel after immobilizing his victim. (See the system on page 181 for more details.)

Though this method of purification is generally accepted, the moral problems of drinking blood have never been fully resolved. Differences of opinion and practice flourish across the Muslim world. Many Ashirra argue that the cause of jihad outweighs the sin of drinking blood — in these trying times, blood can be consumed relatively freely. Others argue that blood is the vampire's natural sustenance and is therefore moral, at least in moderation. Banu Haqim on the Tariq el-Haqim (Road of Blood) see the consumptions of blood as perfectly moral, of course.

On the other end of the spectrum, many Muslim vampires see blood as repugnant. They regard the purification prayer as an insufficient concession to the less devout. These vampires keep their blood reserves quite low or follow a variety of self-imposed guidelines. The most common sanction is to avoid the blood of infidels and pilgrims, to drink only a small amount from any one source and to avoid unwilling sources. Needless to say, those who follow the strictest of these rules put themselves at a serious disadvantage.

Even for those who follow these strictures, numerous gray areas remain unresolved. Are People of the Book considered infidels? Is seduction a valid means of obtaining a willing source of blood, or does that constitute deceit?

The Embrace

The Ashirra look upon the Embrace as a somber and serious affair, for it places a powerful burden upon the shoulders of the recipient. Rather than a mere forty or fifty years in which a mortal must lead a virtuous existence, an Ashirra must struggle for centuries, perhaps even millennia, before Allah at last declares an end to the world. In effect, the Ashirra puts the soul of any prospective childe at greater risk by granting them a vampire's longevity. For this reason, the elders of the sect have decreed that no mortal may be unwillingly Embraced, whether Muslim or infidel.

Any prospective childe must be made fully aware of the perils to their soul that the Embrace brings. She is then given three nights to consider the full implications of such a decision. Only then may she be allowed to sacrifice her mortality and become a vampire. As an interesting corollary, if a mortal approaches an Ashirra and asks to be Embraced, the vampire is likewise required to wait three days to consider the wisdom of such an act before making his decision. Of course, the same questions raised by "willing" blood vessels arise in the case of childer. Can a mortal enthralled by vampiric beauty or the blood oath be considered willing?

Recently, events in Jerusalem have raised a challenge to certain aspects of this law. Ashirra in the contested city have put forth the argument that while Embracing a mortal puts a greater moral burden on her soul, the consequences of allowing an infidel to die without having the chance to convert to Islam may be graver still. Can the Ashirra in good conscience allow a soul to be eternally damned when they could offer at least a chance of redemption? The argument has spawned debates all the way back in Cairo and across the breadth of Islam, and the scholars are torn between what seems to be a moral duty versus the alarming precedent of a wholesale Embracing of unwilling infidels. So far, there appears to be no easy answer to this dilemma.

Penance

While the laws defining the behavior of Islamic vampires are very strict, the Muslim faith is realistic about the fallibility of mortal (and immortal) worshipers. This is one reason why sincere intentions are so important to the Islamic faith — a worshiper is not expected to be perfect, only to try as hard as he can to live according to the teachings of the Prophet. When one of the faithful commits a sin against God, the Qur'an states that he or she can erase the stain of such sin by performing good works for the community or further spreading the influence of the faith. Acts of charity are worthy efforts, such as almsgiving, assisting the construction of mosques or purchasing the freedom of a slave. Virtually any sin, save apostasy (renouncing the faith), may be atoned for, given time.

The Community

As in Europe, Cainites in the Islamic world compete over domain. Whichever elder is able to enforce his will over an area is known as the sultan, the equivalent to the European title of prince. A sultan's power can come from a variety of sources but is generally the fruit of diplomacy and applied force. A sultan remains sultan only so long as no one can displace him.

The spread of Islam and the rise of the beliefs of the Ashirra have had a significant impact on Cainite politics, of course. "Sultan" is a generic term used almost regardless of faith, but in most cases it has become necessary for the vampiric ruler to reach an understanding with the *umma*, the community of Ashirra.

In mortal circles, *umma* refers to the broad community of the faithful, Islam as a social whole. Among Ashirra, it has come to refer to those Cainites in a city or domain who identify themselves as Muslims (or Ashirra, more precisely) and the social compact under which they operate. In some areas, the *umma* is a force to be reckoned with, with a clear leadership and an organized agenda. In most areas, however, the *umma* is made up of fractious individuals, each with his own plans. The common bond of Islam provides only a veil of unity and structure. Nevertheless, a sultan who wishes to remain in power must at least pay lip service to the *umma* and its leaders. These may include an imam, as well as vampiric *'ulama* and *qadi*.

Imam

The spiritual leader in any Ashirra community is called the imam. He protects the faithful, ensuring the safety and prosperity of the community, and enforces the laws of Islam. In addition to these responsibilities, the imam is also charged with maintaining the mosque for the city's Ashirra, which is both the spiritual heart of the community and a place of sanctuary where any Cainite may come in peace and make their grievances heard. In matters of Ashirra law, the imam is the ultimate arbiter, passing sentence upon offenders and having the final word in disputes between members of the sect. Finally, the imam, as prescribed by Shiite law, is responsible for gathering the *zakat*, or obligatory tax, from the city's Cainites.

Obviously, the imam's authority overlaps that of the local sultan, and the dynamic between those two positions is one of the major tensions in the Islamic Cainite world. In some cases, the sultan is the imam, integrating political and spiritual domain. This gives the vampire great authority but makes him the target of criticism.



ONE FAITH FOR ALL THE WORLD

A more stable arrangement involves a strong sultan and a weak imam or vice versa. The strong leader can use her weak partner as a shield against her enemies. Regardless of who collects the *zakat*, the strong leader controls it. Less stable, but far more common, is a situation where neither party is especially weak. The imam supposedly provides moral guidance to the sultan in these cases, but the two often clash.

An imam is traditionally nominated by local *'ulama* and elected by the whole of the local *umma*. This election is most often a formality to recognize the most prominent and charismatic leader in the religious community. In some cases, it is the raw imposition of an elder's will; in others, the result of decades of intrigue and influence.

'Ulama and Mullahs

Mortal *'ulama* are scholars of the Qur'an and the Hadith. They serve as respected wise men of the community. Ashirra who pursue religious knowledge serve as *'ulama* in their own nocturnal community. Many of these Ashirra have committed these holy texts to memory and in some cases have spent hundreds of years contemplating and debating the meaning of the Prophet's teachings. The *'ulama* advise the imam on matters of the faith and can hold considerable political might, especially if they know how to play the imam and sultan against one another.

The most respected scholars of the Ashirra are known as mullahs. While any Ashirra can aspire to be a scholar of the holy texts, the title of mullah can only be earned through years of devoted study and acclimation by the sect's current mullahs. Throughout the Muslim world, only a handful of vampires claim the title. Their numbers include some of the most powerful Ashirra, like sect founder Suleiman ibn Abdullah and the great blood sorcerer Tarique al-Hajji.

Qadi

Mortal *qadi* are the jurists of the Islamic faith, studying the laws set down by Muhammad and interpreting them in disputes or crimes committed among the faithful. Each judge must be versed in both the law as set forth in the Qur'an as well as literally hundreds of previous judgments and precedents laid down by jurists throughout the history of Islam. Most every Ashirra *umma* has at least one vampiric *qadi*, most often one who was a jurist before the Embrace. This judge advises the imam, the sultan and other vampires on matters pertaining to legal disputes and recommends suitable punishments for violations of Islamic law. Mortal *qadi* have the power to order inquiries into the affairs of suspected criminals, make arrests and authorize agents of the court to execute sentences imposed by the imam. In the Cainite world, whether or not a *qadi* can exercise such broad authority depends on the resources he can bring to the table. When acting with the will of powerful elders or the cooperation of many in the community, the judge has great power. When challenging a popular sultan or imam, he must tread carefully indeed.

Politics and Personal Status

Salvation is not earned through virtue alone. An upright Muslim must undertake great deeds for the good of the faith and the community if he is to purify his soul and win entry to Paradise. But expeditions and conquests cannot be undertaken alone, and great buildings such as universities and hospitals require huge sums of coin and many years to construct. It takes significant personal status within the community to

Theory vs. Practice, Take 2

Even in the mortal world, ego and ambition undermine the religious and political authorities of Islam. Imams and mullahs, sultans and *qadi*, all become political animals, compromising their religious ethics for their own authority. Even those who keep the community of the faithful at the center of their agendas have to make some concessions. If the faithful do not survive, what good are morals?

Among Cainites, cursed with undying ambition and raging distrust, these compromises are all the more evident. No vampiric sultan or Ashirra imam can truly claim to be unsoiled by the baser games of intrigue and power mongering. Clashes of wills are commonplace, and every leader must be vigilant against betrayal.

The Ashirra sect prides itself on conferring authority based on religious merit rather than sheer age or power, but this pride ultimately handicaps Islam's predators. A sect of such size — if all of its members were moving in the same direction — would be an unstoppable force. But the Ashirra are bound only by a few common cultural and spiritual threads — they cannot even cooperate enough to face the crusaders (and the vampires among them) as a unified force. Islam gives the Ashirra an energy the vampires of Christendom lack, but it is diffuse and fading fast.

muster the necessary support and resources to make these deeds a reality. Even in a sect devoted to the pursuit of holiness, the give and take of personal politics is a fact of nightly existence.

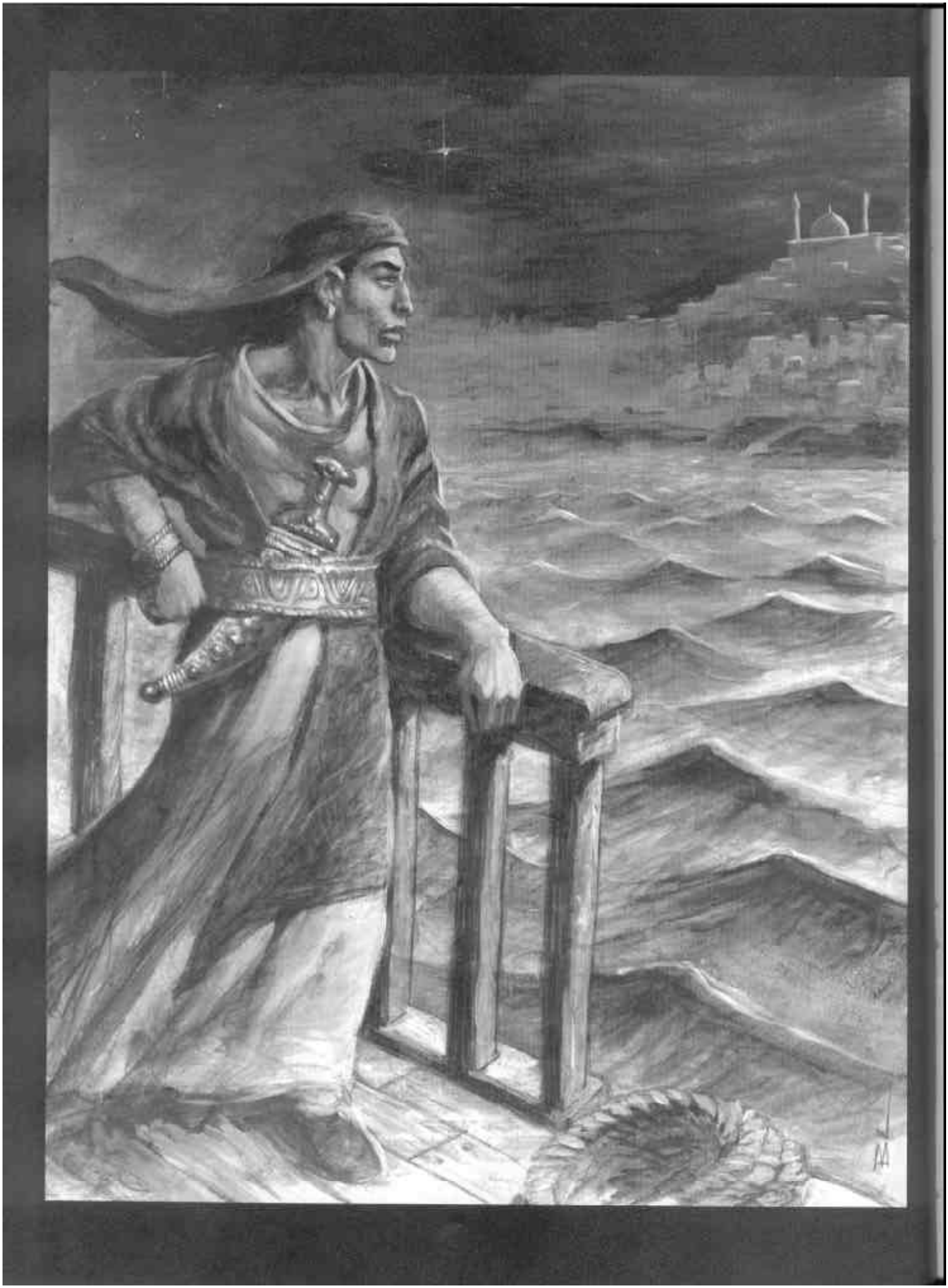
An Ashirra's personal honor and reputation are the foundation of his status within the sect. He must maintain the appearance of virtue at all times and vigorously challenge any allegations to the contrary. If he sins, he must be forthright in his earnest desire to repent. But most importantly, he must be known for his heroic struggles to defend the faith and increase the prosperity of the local community.

There are many ways for an ambitious Ashirra to win renown and gather influence among his peers. He can place himself at the service of his elders, offer to mentor groups of new converts, undertake punitive missions against criminals on behalf of the *qadi* or carry the faith to other Cainites in neighboring regions. Earning the respect and friendship of the city's leaders is a sure way to win allies among Ashirra of lower status, and win support from the imam for ever more ambitious deeds in the future.

Some Ashirra claim their influence by carving niches for themselves as power brokers within a city, placing ambitious Cainites in contact with others who share similar agendas. The voting power of the populace creates the potential for groups of lower-status vampires to band together in power blocs to enhance their influence, and a Cainite (or a group of Cainites) who can build alliances within the Ashirra community can wield significant power.

By far the most common way for young vampires to build their personal reputation is in the fires of war, taking up the banner of the jihad against the infidel. Groups of young vampires band together to carry out punitive raids against infidel strongholds in Palestine and northern Spain, winning renown through plunder, slaves and the destruction of Islam's enemies. Recently, young Ashirra have taken leave of their sires and made the journey to Jerusalem or Sevilla, hoping to win glory and honor in the service of Allah.

In these dark times, Allah has need of many hands and many hearts. Though much of Islam's territory has once more been united by the Ayyubids, the caliph in Baghdad remains a puppet to the Turks, and infidel Cainites from Persia are once more slipping into the capital. Western Cainites in Palestine still cling jealously to Jerusalem, hatching plots to weaken the embattled colony of Ashirra in the holy city. In southern Iberia the faithful shore up the fading jewels of Andalus in the face of Spanish conquest. Suleiman and the members of the sect are stretched thin, struggling to hold together their scattered bases of power in Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus and Sevilla. Islam lies at a crossroads; in the coming decades it will either shatter into a thousand pieces, drowning the glorious vision of the Prophet in a tide of civil strife and anarchy, or it will rise once again.





Chapter Three: Under the Crescent

To God belong the east and the west and wheresoever you turn is the face of God Truly God is all-pervading all-knowing
– al-Quran, Surah 2:115

An Introduction

Greetings to you, reader.

My name is Abu Fahim Kateb. This is neither my full name nor my true name to my Ashirra. I am setting these words in writing at the behest of my sire. He wishes to retain anonymity in these matters. While I write primarily for his benefit, I believe that my travels and experiences may be of use to other Ashirra, and even to other Cainites; my sire has graciously bestowed on me this hopeful honorific, "father of intelligence," so that I need not go among my readers with only one name like a man who owns only one threadbare robe.

It may perhaps assist you, readers, to know more about me. I am Banu Haqim, a member of Clan Assamite in tongues common to Europe, and of the vizier caste. In life I was a trader, tending assiduously to the fortunes of my family. In death, I see to the needs of my clan with the same care. Not only must we house, dress and arm ourselves as befits our station, but also there are the arcane demands of the sorcerers, and also the necessary donations and public works rightfully demanded of us by Muhammad's law.

I am also Ashirra, a follower of Islam. I understand the wisdom of the word brought by Muhammad to Suleiman ibn Abdullah. I am not the most devout Cainite; I admit this to my shame. I trust that God will understand both the common limitations of our form and the particular circumstances placed upon me by my responsibilities. I observe nightly prayers. I have made pilgrimages. I fast as well as I am able without causing harm to my mortal associates, my clan's interests or myself. I do not believe that we are cursed in any way that keeps us from God's grace. The Prophet brought Islam to all, not only to mortal men and women. And do not those mortal men and women face curses of their own, most certainly that of a finite span in which to cleave to the Prophet's teachings? No — though I struggle as much as any Ashirra with the current state of my soul, I have no doubts that there is a place for us in God's creation.

I record for you my travels through the civilized world — those areas that have been enlightened by the teachings of the Prophet. As I travel by horse, ship, caravan and camel I describe to you the cities, those I meet in these places and the wonders that exist there. I will spare you the jots and tittles of finance; my ledgers contain the details that my sire requires. My hope is that you, reader, will use this traveling journal I write to make your path through the night a safe one. The life of a trader is never dull, and travel is never safe — even less so for those of us whose eyes are open. My friends have urged caution, saying that with this writing I benefit my enemies perhaps even more than my friends. To this I reply, I have no enemies that I might wish destruction upon, and I will not be afraid when my time comes to a close.

Travel safely and with blessings,

Abu Fahim Kateb — 17 June 1194

Al-Andalus

The journey begins for you, readers, in the city of Granada. It began much earlier for me, of course, but I see no reason to belabor the description of my journey. A trip from one end of the Muslim world to the other should suffice. The amount of time I have spent enjoying the pleasures of the countryside might seem frivolous to some, though I have the luxury of endless time.

The variety of climates and landscapes in Andalus bewilders me. I come from the vast deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. I have spent time in the mountains among forests of pine, oak and cork trees, seeing firsthand the stands from which the timbers for my ship were cut. The villagers there grow grain and fatten cattle on the land not dominated by the trees. On the temperate plateaus, the peasants farm olives, goats and sheep, sending their surplus by river to the great cities that lie just inland from the coast.

Granada is such a city, nestled into the crook of two rivers, the Genil and the Darro. Downstream, the Genil joins the Guadalquivir River, along which lie the other great cities of Andalus, Cordoba and Sevilla. The peaceful nature of the Andalusian countryside is given the lie by the political foment taking place in the cities — or so I have been warned. The Almoravid caliphate arose from the fierce Berbers of the deserts of Morocco barely a century ago to gather together the remains of the Umayyad dynasty. In the ancient way of things, these invading barbarians (religiously devout, but barbarians nonetheless) became soft and fat on the lush fruits of Andalus — I too may become indolent should I spend too much time in this lovely land. The unfortunate Almoravids have been supplanted, mere decades ago, by the Almohad caliphate, fellow Berbers and just as fierce as those who invaded generations back, who descended from the high Atlas Mountains of the Maghrib with the force and speed of a dashing cataract. Although the defeat of the Almoravid dynasty may have been easily accomplished, the Almohads still face the more delicate task of rooting out the petty kings and sultans who grabbed power during the Almoravid de-

cline — and are loathe to give it up again. These lands have been settled for all of recorded history, and populated again by Romans and Arabs — none of these groups amenable to subjugation.

GRANADA

19 June 1194

I arrived in Granada well past nightfall, my two companions and I mounted on the great white Andalusian horses that have been the pride of this land for centuries. These horses are very different from the mounts of my desert youth. Their curved necks and sturdy, collected bodies denote power and agility, not the heedless grace and speed of our delicate Arabian horses. Their hooves are small to best find placement on rocky hillsides, not broad for pushing against deep sand. They are ideally suited for this their native environment, and I am pleased that they could be had at so reasonable a price, since heavier horses are now desired by fighting men. The cavalry horses once favored by the Greeks, Persians and Romans do quite nicely for a trader of any stature; with such battle-hardened sires in his lineage, my gelding bears a predator more dangerous than any man (with only the slightest agitation).

My two companions are *ansar* who have distinguished themselves through long service. The first, Sanjar, hails from a Persian family of scribes. He is responsible for keeping the detailed records of our business dealings and, on this trip, meeting with those merchants who might be unavailable for or overly suspicious about nighttime dealings. He is not a trader by vocation, but he has a good head for figures and should manage well enough with appropriate coaching. The second, Karif, is my bodyguard, charged with not only my personal safekeeping but also with recruiting and managing the crew of the ship and any mercenaries we must hire. I do not doubt that one day he will join the warriors of my clan, and I hope that he then remembers his time traveling with me as fondly as I — there are too few bridges between the viziers and the warriors in these violent times.

Both of these men are devout; I would have it no other way. Not only must we share an understanding of my nature and purpose throughout this long journey, but the knowledge that these are upstanding Muslim men may prove vital to my self-control should my struggles with the Beast grow dire.

Much of the city of Granada lies between the Genil and Darro Rivers. As we entered this fork, our mounts' hooves clattered on the cobblestone streets. Dwellings built to hang up and over the road obstructed our view of the high plateaus of the mountains to the south of the Darro. It seems that there is a fair amount of activity on the plateau, fires that throw long shadows down high stone walls. I had not expected to see fortifications of such size here, but inquiry will have to wait. Our first order of business was to gain admittance to the *suq*.

In most cities, the *suq* is walled, and guarded by sentries after sunset. This is a slight inconvenience for me, as I must always travel by night should I wish not to arrive unceremoniously in a rolled carpet or a box, but it is a price I pay for the greater assurance of safety for my goods. It is not impossible to gain admittance after dark; a caravan may be held up on the road for a broken wheel, or goods in high demand rushed to market with no heed paid to the sun's course. It is unusual, however, and so I have become necessarily accustomed to presenting the appropriate papers each time I enter a city. The papers I presented confirmed me as the duly authorized agent of my sire in his business matters: a *mudaraba*, or as they say in Andalus, a *commenda*. While my sire does not own a warehouse in Granada's *suq*, and I was at the time without a single trade good, these legal documents still validated my presence in this part of the city. The sentry, after a quick appraisal of my documents, my entourage, and the quality of our horses and accoutrements, prudently fetched the guard captain, who approved our entrance and offered his grandfatherly advice that late travel was not particularly safe. No, I agreed with him, it was not.

The great courtyard at the center of the *suq* where, by day the public comes to buy goods and traders make deals, is empty by night, with only the stalls and tents of regular sellers remaining erect for the next day. Vast warehouses occupy the remaining space in the walled enclosure. Some of them are owned by trading families or associations. Others are owned by the government, which collects rent from the use of these facilities and often turns the proceeds toward charity. The warehouses themselves are locked and dark, but the floors above them burn with light. These upper floors are comfortable lodgings for traveling traders, and they are where circumstances dictate that I do most of my trading with mortal businessmen. Karif obtained lodgings for us, and we gave the appearance of settling in for the night. Leaving Sanjar behind to cover any inquiries, my bodyguard and I made our way back out into the darkness, over the walls of the *suq*, to the south.

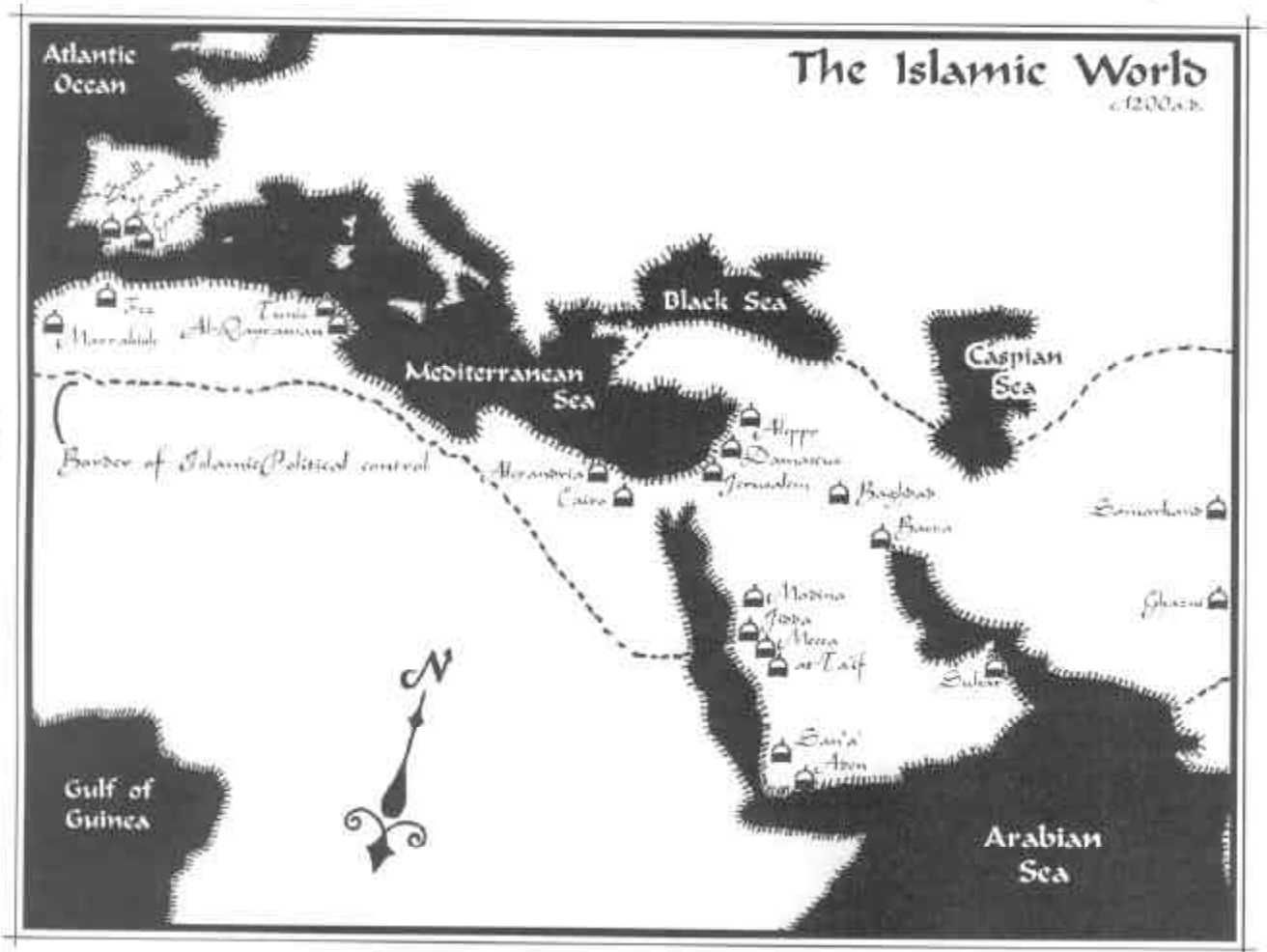
Crossing the Darro was a simple matter. The small, lazy river is covered in many places by bridges and buildings that have been built across its narrow span. Small canal boats are tied off along the water's edge; these boats allow for easy passage of heavy goods

through this quarter of the city during the day and permit stealthy passage for a quiet boatman by night. I, however, am no boatman. Karif and I made our way across a bridge and wound our way through the city's streets toward the plateau, passing walled and gated residential communities only occasionally brightened by the lamps of some diligent scholar. As we began up the winding road to the top of the plateau, I wished it had been possible to bring our horses with us — a blood sweat on my brow when we reached the top would be unseemly.

The road was heavily guarded, no great surprise given the martial nature of the fortifications, and many sweet words were necessary to portray myself as a trader late with a delivery, in search of the quartermaster. Upon gaining the plateau, we lost ourselves in a surprising throng of firelit activity. As I had hoped, where there is nighttime activity, there are Cainites. With cautious and appropriate introductions, I was brought before the sultan of Granada. To my surprise, he was familiar with my name and vocation, and seemed almost eager to see me.

Our formal introduction was somewhat odd. As customary, I presented my lineage and full name in the Ashirra tradition. My host, as is his right, declined, introducing himself without honorific or lineage simply as Badr of Qabilat al-Khayal, descended from Lasombra. The sultan used his command of shadow to shroud his visage with darkness, leaving me no clear glimpse of his face. With formalities aside, Sultan Badr invited me, alone, into a smaller room with maps of the local area spread over every available space. There, he explained to me his need for fortifications and his surprising need for my advice. The sultan is a staunch supporter of Islam and intends to do all he can to prevent Andalus from returning to Christian hands. Not only must his mortal allies face Christian armies, but also armed challenges from other local Muslim leaders who see themselves best fit to lead in the holy war. The sultan wished my opinion on how best to supply the armies under his influence in case of war or siege.

After some hours spent perusing his remarkable maps, I ventured to him that goods in limited quantities



might be brought along the coast and smuggled up through the mountains to the headwaters of the Genil River. Pleased with my appraisal, Sultan Badr bade me good evening with a final admonition that the coming struggle would require the faith and devotion of all right-minded Muslims. He assured himself of my assistance, and my sire's, should the war come to Granada.

Back in my rooms with dawn soon to come, it occurred to me that through the whole night, I never glimpsed more of the sultan than a well-manicured, perhaps delicate hand in the sweep of a sleeve, or heard anything more than a carefully modulated voice even during his most impassioned speeches.

25 June 1194

We have spent several nights in Granada, making arrangements for goods to be sent down the Genil River to our waiting ship. This is a more complicated matter than it might normally be, as we have no goods in trade and certainly not enough coin on hand to purchase the fine quality of paper and soap we intend to carry. Instead, we have drawn bills for the goods, relying on the stature of our trading house as a guarantee of future payment. On this trip, we will redeem several such bills that we have granted to others in the past. The common framework of Islamic law under which the participants operate makes this convenience possible, though it always involves some risk.

During these nights, we have not encountered any Cainites who were not Ashirra, and who were not strongly allied with Sultan Badr (if not in fact his progeny). It seems the sultan's zeal has discouraged Christian, Jewish or simply indifferent Cainites from settling in his city. This is perhaps a wise idea; if war comes to Granada, the small number of Cainites within the city will not draw heavily off the strength of its mortal defenders. It has also become clear, however, that the sultan's mortal allies are not simply preparing to defend the city. They are actively antagonizing rival Muslim factions in the area, indulging in skirmishes and infighting that waste Muslim resources and lives in spite of the looming Christian threat. It saddens me that the sultan's fanaticism might actually make it easier for the kingdoms of the north to reconquer Andalus.

Cordoba

3 July 1194

We left Granada by horse, traveling downstream along the Genil River much of the way. I had no desire to trust my safety to a boatman and his crew when my own ship and crew are a fortnight's journey away. After a week of dark travel on horseback, our mounts choosing their footing carefully on the winding river path and then angling north through the last foothills of the Snowy Range, we came within sight of the beautiful city of Cordoba on the banks of the Guadalquivir River. Although my heart lifted to see its familiar minarets and high walls, I saw that the city was not as pristine as it once was. Segments of the wall that were not of strategic value were in disrepair. Entering the walls, I saw debris in the margins of streets, and orphan children darting through dank alleyways. In the civil war that afflicts Cordoba, several would-be caliphs have grabbed the city, each wanting it as the jewel of his kingdom. Even so, the city teems with people — scores of Cainites could take up residence here.

As we made our way to the *madina*, it almost seemed that nearly that number had. Beastly Cainites lurked in the alleys to prey on orphans. Warriors of my clan watched over city guards with amused eyes. Strains of music too deftly spun for human hands occasionally drifted to my sensitive ears. Though somewhat stunned by the proliferation of vampiric activity, my first priority in Cordoba was, as always, to visit the Great Mosque at the city's heart.

The Umayyads built the Great Mosque in the late eighth century. It is the largest sacred building in the Islamic world. My sire has told me of watching the foundations laid for this glorious edifice; I envy him the opportunity to witness such an important moment — not to mention the incredible opportunity for profit there would have been for a shrewd dealer in rare materials! The sacred enclosure forms a vast rectangle easily several minutes' walk on all sides. I entered first into the Patio de los Naranjos, the Court of the Oranges, breathing deeply of the smell of orange blossoms that wafted from the flowering trees even with their buds folded closed against the darkness. Cloisters surround the courtyard on the north, east and west, unlit but full of the whispering sounds of sleeping breath and murmured prayers.

Passing through the courtyard to the south, I entered a deep sanctuary with an arching roof supported by pillars as wide as oaks, carved from precious stones: porphyry, jasper and marbles of many exquisite colors. The occasional beam of starlight or torch flicker scintillated across the pillars' crystal enclosures. I had never counted the pillars in the sanctuary, and I did not stop to do so tonight, but looking up in the dim light I could see arches with more pillars atop, and yet more arches and pillars above. I stopped at the third *mihrab*, a prayer niche with a small octagonal recess roofed with a single block of white marble. There, amid the Byzantine

mosaics and gold inlay, I made prayers to God, who has made such splendor possible here.

I left the Great Mosque with a gladdened heart but was soon troubled again by the numbers of Cainites I came across on my way to the *suq* and my lodgings. Most of them were young, I would guess — from their actions and lack of manners, rather than from any arcane knowledge on my part. I was admitted to the *suq* without delay — Sanjar had already produced the necessary documentation on my behalf. I have settled in to write for the remainder of the night. Tomorrow I will seek out the Sultan of Cordoba, a venerable Arab named Hilel al-Masaari. He came to the city with the first Muslim invaders in 711 CE and made sure that the armies knew to pull stone from stone and torch the city to eliminate the Gangrel and Ventrue threat that lurked here under the rule of the Visigoths. He has remained a strong sultan since that time — until now, it seems, as Cainites run rampant through his streets.

4 July 1194

I returned tonight to the *madina*, where in the shadow of the Great Mosque and the courts of the *qadi* the sultan of Cordoba holds his own, shadowy courts. I did not meet the sultan himself — I did not truly expect to. Intermediaries performed my formal introduction and welcome to the city. I admit, frankly, I would have been intimidated had the ancient Cainite actually deigned to accept the introduction of a relative youth like myself.

The evening at court was not wasted, however. I made the acquaintance of a young vizier, Enam al-Dimshaq. I arranged to meet with him tomorrow evening to discuss business and politics. I spent the remaining early hours of the evening with mortal traders sheltering in the *suq*, arranging again by bill to have certain luxuries — embroidered fabrics, supple leatherwork and filigreed jewelry unrivaled in the world — sent to our waiting ship.

5 July 1194

I met tonight with Enam al-Dimshaq, and spoke with her at great length. I have a great deal of sympathy for her — she is in a very difficult position in this city, as one of the few Ashirra interested in preserving peace. She was kind enough to invite me into her haven, a small, practical dwelling in a gated community decorated with such a lovely array of carpets and tapestries that I could only assume my hostess is quite a weaver. I commented as much, to her visible pleasure. She offered me the use of her experienced servants to sate my hunger, further endearing herself to me — it is not always a simple matter to feed while traveling, and I had not looked forward to finding sustenance in this city full of predators. With such niceties behind us, I sat to listen with gentle amusement to this young diplomat speak carefully yet passionately about her chosen city and its inhabitants, searching for words that would both convey to me the information that I would need to safely conclude my dealings here and also seed good will in those spoken of that I might choose to share our conversation with. I expect that she can use as much good will as she can accumulate, and in thanks for her hospitality and her information, I must let her good words spread discreetly in my dealings here.

According to my hostess, and my own observation, there are many new Cainites in the city. Some of them are newcomers, warriors brought by the dual promise of glorious holy war and unstaunched bloodshed. Most of these martial souls are Ashirra, while certainly some are spies from the north or from rival petty kingdoms. A number of Majanin and European Malkavians have filtered into Cordoba. This is a matter of grave concern for those who wish to spend their unlives in this place. The arrival of lunatics in such numbers is often seen as an omen of impending doom. Certainly, if nothing else, their arrival presages change, which to the less nimble-minded of our kind might as well be doom. On a practical level, these arrivals in such numbers are taxing the city's admittedly vast populace and adding to the palpable levels of fear that living on the brink of war engenders.

When I asked about the large number of native Cainites, Enam al-Dimshaq demurred, saying only that there were, in fact, many newly created Ashirra and others in recent nights. I am left to draw my own conclusions on this matter, and I conclude as follows: Sultan Hilel remains a warrior at heart, even as sultan, and so naturally he placed the bulk of his influence in the city's military affairs. With the rapid succession of mortal sultans and dictators through Cordoba's halls of power — a succession that must have occurred with mind-numbing speed to a Cainite as ancient as the Sultan — a great deal of his influence has disappeared, leaving him little time to consolidate what remains. Canny predators that we all are, the other nocturnal residents of the city have moved in to grab hold of what power they can. Emboldened, they have begun to flaunt the sultan's rights over progeny. The sultan, holding on to what power he can, has chosen to approve such behavior with his silence, hoping to turn disobedience into a favor owed. I do not believe this a wise choice, but I am not the sultan's advisor.

Before escorting me to a poetry reading that she promised I would find entertaining, my hostess asked me for what she deemed a great favor. Somewhat

enchanted with her manner, I agreed. She requested that should a certain Roman Cainite called Junius be present at the affair, I not speak to him of the current political state of affairs. It seems that the millennium-old Ventrue, who has survived here through the invasions of Visigoths and Moors alike, has become enamored in recent centuries with Islam — but not in a religious sense that might encourage him to convert. Rather, he has an intellectual appreciation for the art of building empires, and sees that our faith, laws and communities have provided a strong framework for an empire that rivals that of Rome. Junius, lost in his intellectualizations, has not yet realized that caliphs and imams abound. His Ashirra friends and allies would prefer, for the time, to keep matters this way. I must agree that it is prudent not to tread the eccentricities of the thousand-year-old dead.

We went out into the night, then, to a fete in honor of Aighar akhu Quzman, a poet just lately released from his sire's tutelage. The young Cainite's unusual name honors not his sire but his mentor, the mortal master poet Ibn Quzman, deceased for several decades. A young man at that time, Aighar was plucked from the living by a Ray'een al-Fen in a mix of rage and panic at having missed the opportunity to immortalize the great singer himself. Fortunately for the Ashirra, the student had an innate talent that his teacher had surely recognized. Ibn Quzman was only the latest and most widely admired poet of Cordoba — a fortunate mix of Berber, Arab and European cultures in this area has produced a wellspring of new poetic forms and musical styles that are admired and adopted throughout the Islamic world. This vibrant arts community has attracted Ray'een al-Fen to the area over the years, where they form a respected part of the Ashirra community. They also host visitors from Christian Europe, pale troubadours who have come to learn exotic styles of verse at great risk to their unlives. Aighar akhu Quzman recited for us from his works, and from his mentor's. The night was, as Enam al-Dimshaq promised, well spent,. I did encounter the ancient Junius, as forewarned, and spoke briefly to him of architecture and weather.

7 July 1194

It is several nights past that pleasant evening of poetry. My business here has been concluded, with an unusual twist. Word has circulated among the traders, as it often does, that I am in the market for items of quality. Sanjar was approached during daylight hours by a bookseller from the palace *suq*, who inquired whether I might be interested in some tomes he had in his shop. My associate set up an evening meeting, and I left for the palace grounds as soon as the sun had set. The palace built by the Umayyads, the Madinat al-Zahra, lies across the Guadalquivir. The remains of a great Roman bridge have been rebuilt in Moorish style. It has been traditional since the times of that great caliphate for the politically and militarily powerful to sequester themselves a short distance from the cities they rule, perhaps so the sounds of their indulgences in women and wine do not immediately bring the wrath of the holy men down on their heads. Whatever the reason, the palace usually holds its own market for the convenience of those who live and work there. High-quality goods not easily available elsewhere may sometimes be found in these *suq*.

The name of my contact gained me admittance to the *suq* even as most shops were closing for the night. By the glow of lamps, I was admitted to the bookseller's shop, and shown the items he had set aside for me. In truth, I was shocked at what he laid before me. Thankfully, I have more years of practice at keeping such emotions away from my face than any mortal trader can boast. The items he carefully set out were illuminated holy works — the full text of the Qur'an and other books — all seemingly done by the same incredibly talented hand. The books were superbly bound in leather and hammered gold. I asked why the owner, and then he, the bookseller, was willing to part with these items. He replied that it had been the owner's wish that these precious artifacts be removed from Cordoba and taken to a safe place where they would be admired and used, rather than have them possibly fall into the hands of Christian marauders. I was again surprised when he named a price in keeping with this noble goal, one I could both easily meet, and would never dream of selling such works for. The deal concluded quickly and pleasantly. Back in my rooms, with the rare books carefully wrapped and secured, I can only hope that I have not unwittingly participated in some heinous crime of murder or theft by acquiring these items. I am ashamed to think such thoughts, when most likely the bookseller's motives are pure.

As I returned from the Madinat al-Zahra, a loathsome figure caught my eye — a Nosferatu, one who wanted to be seen, as I am no match for the masters of stealth. The creature gestured to me to approach it; hiding my repulsion, I advanced a few steps in courtesy.

I recognized the being's horridly scarred countenance from a description given to me by Enam al-Dimshaq. She had called this one Al-Wali, and spoke almost fondly of him as a remarkably forthcoming source of information. Swallowing my distaste, I drew nearer the creature, who cheerfully led me a short way to what appeared to be its temporary nesting place.

It offered me a warm but cooling rat. I declined, and my "host" ripped into his small meal with relish. As he dined, he asked many questions about where I had recently been and where I intend to travel. Although I politely declined to share any details of my upcoming route, the creature nonetheless garrulously offered his opinions on Cordoba's current predicament. With obsequious apologies to my clan, he suggested that Sultan Hilel actually encouraged the proliferation of neonates in the city, with the intent of flinging them against any invading Christian forces. Though I excused myself from the troubling conversation as quickly as possible, I am left to wonder if Al-Wali's appraisal of the situation may not have some truth to it. I can only hope that Cordoba will survive the impending strife. There is much here worth preserving.

Sevilla

12 July 1194

We traveled to Sevilla by horse, following the Guadalquivir toward the sea. We reached Sevilla in four nights. We're several days' travel from the coast, but the river runs deep enough that ships may dock here on the river's eastern side.

As in Cordoba, the night is not particularly quiet in Sevilla, but the sounds are entirely different. Here they are industrious: families late to dine after a hard day's work still bustle about after sundown, tradesmen and guardsmen settle into their barracks, sailors at the harbor furl sails and coil ropes after using the sunset's last light to creep into dock. Sevilla is the capital of the Almohad confederation, and it is obvious that the dynasty has found Sevilla more amenable to lawfulness. Order is much easier to provide here. The city is much smaller than Cordoba, and its proximity to the sea provides it with the protection of the coastline while not opening it to direct naval attack except by means of the river, which affords very little room for maritime maneuvering.

On our arrival, I sent Karif off to begin his recruiting of our ship's crew, while Sanjar arranged our lodgings and saw that the goods we procured upriver were safely ensconced in one of the *suq*'s warehouses.

I went to perform the necessary knee-bend to the sultan. I had heard she was a personable and involved Cainite — very active in the Ashirra community. Sultan Gerushah was a native of Sevilla,



a member of the city's large Jewish population. Many of the Cainites here share that faith, and coexist peacefully with the Ashirra — as peacefully as any number of us may live in close quarters through long years, at least. Sultan Gerushah, however, surprised the city with her Second Embrace, her late conversion to Islam. This has strained relations among the People of the Book in Sevilla. The city's other Jewish Cainites feel betrayed. Among the Ashirra, there are those who mutter that the sultan's conversion is not authentic, but predicated solely on political expedience. It is generally acknowledged, even by the mutterers, that such rumors are unworthy of both the sultan and the speaker, but the rumor spreads nonetheless. Sultan Gerushah met with me personally, not an unwelcome surprise, and spoke with me briefly about my business and affairs upriver. Then she dismissed me. I left assured that business in Sevilla is a safe gamble.

13 July 1194

As Sanjar slept, wearied from a day of checking balances, Karif and I went out into the city. It seems that Karif's work of enlisting sailors is also work that is best done at night. After a long day of working docks, sailors without ships are eager for the sea. I intended to observe the massive construction projects mentioned last night at the sultan's court.

Sevilla avoided the razing that Cordoba suffered when Muslims evicted the Visigoths. Some might argue that the city would have profited from a good razing — the streets are almost literally mazelike, and walled communities are haphazardly interspersed with markets and courtyards. Before the Visigoths came the Vandals, the Romans and the Iberian natives, each successor complicating the city rather than starting over with a fresh plan. I am unfamiliar with the city, and lost my way not once but two times on my way from the *suq* to the *madina*. This is not a particularly pleasant experience, even though I do not feel particularly unsafe.

I wound my way to the appropriate district. I will not become lost again.

In the *madina*, I observed two ambitious construction projects underway. I imagined the dust clouds raised by the workmen must mingle as one overwhelming haze during daylight hours. The great mosque seemed to be the more advanced project, as it is being erected on the foundations of a Visigoth church. I approached the work with some trepidation, and as I wandered unnoticed through the piles of stones, I felt uneasy, a feeling like suffocation in my chest even though I no longer need to breathe. This feeling intensified as I neared what was the front of the Christian edifice. The altar area had been walled off and built over, leaving no way to see what might still be inside, but I believe the rumors I have heard may be true: There is a great, old, barbaric Visigoth monster staked to the very altar of that church. I shuddered, imagining the torment, but I certainly did not pry out a stone to have a look. I hope that the dedication of this place to Islam erases that feeling of dread, and seals that monster in his tomb forever.

I was not the only Ashirra out tonight to observe the other building site, what will be the grand Alcazar Palace. The outer fortifications of this glorious place will reach all the way to the river's edge when it is completed, and already large towers jut out of the riverbank, casting even darker shadows on the black water. I settled in to watch the parade of visitors, and was well rewarded. I spotted a careless Mutasharid lurking about the foundations, reassuring itself that its bolt-holes were still located as planned. I listened as a well-dressed young Cainite escorted a drowsy engineer around the site, nattering on about stone carving techniques and the qualities of the various precious stones that will put a beautiful face on these rugged walls. I watched a poorly disguised, to my eyes, woman warrior lecture guards on likely weaknesses in the palace defense. Every Cainite in the city must have a stake in this marvelous monument that will be decades in the building. I believe that I shall have a stake in it, too, as I now have some years' lead time on arranging the quarrying of certain rare and expensive stones to be shipped to Sevilla.

21 July 1194

The crew is assembled, and grudgingly approved by Karif. Sanjar has counted and carefully packed every item to be moved to the ship, including wines and olives locally grown. We will sail with the tide, which gives me time to record my final thoughts on Sevilla.

Last evening, as I concluded a deal with an increasingly groggy old merchant, I noted a wan yet well-composed young man awaiting my attention. Wishing a good rest to my companion, I escorted him to my rooms and invited the apparent youth in. He introduced himself as Nadim ibn Nuri, a Ventrue of not many years. Ibn Nuri had thrust upon him the unenviable task of organizing his elders and betters, and he believed that my assistance would profit us both. It has fallen on his shoulders to arrange the use of the nearby ruins of the large Roman town of Itálica, which was the birthplace of the emperors Trajan and Hadrian. Located just a few minutes ride from Sevilla and across the river, the remains of the amphitheater are sought after for the nocturnal meetings of a variety of groups: the

Amici Noctis, gatherings of Roman expatriates, dire playwrights with dreadful dramas and the like. After several years of faithfully keeping a social schedule for the deserted town, it occurred to ibn Nuri that he might actually turn a profit, both monetarily and in favors of kind, if he arranged for certain services and goods to be available for these events as well. He now arranges safe havens for those traveling, for suitable feeding vessels for those of his own clan, and for strange items or ingredients necessary for stately rituals. As well I know, he has also found the middleman's portion of an elder Cainite's luxurious needs to be an enticing benefit. I was enticed, as well, and spent the remainder of the evening making lists of strange minerals, expensive oils and very precise requirements for slaves with ibn Nuri. Thanks to his diligence, I will have years to procure the most obscure items on the list. I believe I will enjoy my next trip to Sevilla very much.

22 July 1194

We are safely aboard our ship. The ship's crew includes men of every seafaring land, although I cannot recognize some of the languages they speak. This is according to my direction. Karif could not, unfortunately, have found a reliable crew only from Islamic lands; this ship boasts advances in shipbuilding that most Muslim sailors would be unfamiliar with, so we must simply have the best men we can find. With that in mind, Karif has mixed our mongrel crew as thoroughly as possible. They speak a common nautical pidgin language to enable them to do their work but share languages with only a handful of other crewmen. This language barrier will, I hope, prevent them from sharing rumors about my unusual nature, and from plotting mutiny should it be necessary for me to reveal myself.

The ship that will carry me the length of the Mediterranean Sea is a shining example of the shipwright's craft. She is a heavily modified *qārib* — called, in Andalus and perhaps elsewhere, a "caravela." She is a smooth-sided ship, sleek, carefully pieced together. Her appearance is completely unlike the ribbed sides common to the "clinker" construction native to the northern seas. Many ships of her type have only one mast, and a fixed one at that — incapable of turning sails to the wind — if she is not to sail far from shore. My beautiful ship boasts two masts, the fore sheeted with a triangular lateen sail, and the aft with a large square sail to make best use of even the slightest Mediterranean breeze. A rudder at the stern has replaced the steering oars, a recent advance I don't yet understand. The structure of the boat has been changed in some way to provide a firm anchor point for the device. For my safety, a tightly joined deck covers a full half of the interior of the boat.

Do not agree to a ride on simply any trader's cog, my friends, for you will find yourself huddled to the hull as the sun rises, attempting to shield yourself with whatever boxes and goods may lie to hand. The deck provides shelter not only for myself but also for delicate items: soaps, spices, beautifully dyed cloth and other such luxury items. My ship is not large, carrying less than 24 tons, so to best offset the expense of my journey, we carry high-quality goods that will fetch high prices, leaving the bulk of the trading to be done in my wake, using ships more suited to the purpose.

For those of you unfamiliar with sea travel, let me advise you briefly on what types of ships you might expect to encounter. As I mentioned above, northern-style ships have overlapping planks in the hull; they also rely heavily on sails. Single-masted, these ships may be called "cogs," while a double-masted ship may be termed a "buss." These ships are used with increasing frequency by European traders and Crusaders alike, but there is a chance, should you encounter a ship of this type, that its crew has come from an even greater distance, braving the vast ocean west and north of Andalus.

The smooth-sided *qārib* ships are native to the Mediterranean, as are ships that rely heavily on rowers rather than sails. Rowers were necessary before the introduction of sails which may be turned to catch the wind, and are still necessary on ships of war, which do not carry sufficient stores to survive a prolonged becalming or being blown off course. Should you encounter a ship with several platforms of rowers, be cautious: Such ships are undoubtedly bent on martial purposes, are highly maneuverable and can reach terrifying ramming speeds.

The largest ships you may encounter in the Mediterranean are "galleys," 300-ton ships which can carry 500 men at need. These ships carry bulky cargoes — grains, leather, cloth goods, wines, dried foodstuffs. Should you be fortunate enough to travel on either the Sea of Qulzum or the Sea of Faris, or even better through the Indian Ocean itself, you are likely to see massive, ungainly ships from Taugast in the Far East called "junks." I am given to understand that these ships are built up from two bottom hulls; their sails are a strange construction of smaller sheets and many lines. As odd as they appear, I have seen these ships gliding serenely into the wind.

Leaving Andalus, our captain, Abu Raghid, aimed our ship for the Strait of Gibraltar. I have gone to great lengths to assure myself that our captain is a knowledgeable and skilled man, and I am satisfied. I know only that the strait is a tricky passage; he knows why it is so, what weather and currents to expect at this time of year and so on. I can do nothing but retire to my light-sealed cabin as a haze begins to gather before dawn. I will miss the passage through the strait itself, the looming mountains of the Maghrib to one side, and the Rock of Gibraltar rising up on the other. This is a passage best done by the light of the sun.

The Maghrib

1 August 1194

We land at Sebta, a welcoming bay in the shadow of Mount Hacho. This natural port has been of importance for centuries, harboring Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and now the Almohad dynasty. It funnels gold, ivory and slaves from deep within Africa into the Mediterranean. As vital as this port is, my business lies further south, in the cities of Fez and Marrakish.

This area, called the Maghrib, or "land of the setting sun," was the early heart of the Almohad Empire, and the Almoravid dynasty before it. The majority of the Berber people live peacefully in this region, which stretches from the Nile River Valley to the ocean, and south into the vast Sahara Desert. They farm and cultivate the coastal slopes where rain is abundant and herd sheep and goats on the arid far side of the mountains. As we leave our ship moored at Sebta and begin to travel south through grain fields and olive groves, it is difficult to square the tidy dwellings of these sedentary people with the wild tales of the barbarian conquest of Muslim Spain.

The nighttime serenity here is misleading. The Berbers are a tribal people, and not all of the tribes share the Almohads' interests in political or religious matters. The most effective group of agitators is the Banu Marin, who a century past were allies of the great Umayyad Empire. Even now, these Marinid tribesmen have claimed control of certain isolated regions — the Almohads care so little about these areas that they won't divert their attention from the Christian threat in Andalus. More troubling to the residents of this area, displaced Arab tribes, including vicious cavalry units, were urged westward for years by the Fatimid rulers of Egypt. The Fatimids fell to Salah al-Din, but the homeless Arab invaders still raid and pillage the villages of the Maghrib.

Fez

We again acquired horses, of much lower quality than those to be found in Andalus but seemingly of the same basic stock. The ride was difficult; none of the horses were pleased with my presence, and in many cases I was reduced to walking until Karif persuaded me to feed my beast a nosebag of vitae-laced oats. I was reluctant to do so, as I do not like the prospect of leaving behind an animal that has developed a taste for blood. Our string of pack animals, carrying our delicate trade goods, was also displeased by my presence and the need to travel at night. All told, it took us more than a week to reach Fez, a trip that at best would have taken five days.

Fez is a venerable city, but not as ancient as some of those I have recently visited. It was founded as two separate cities across the Wadi Fez in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, near the place where the intermittent watercourse empties into the Sebou River. The Almoravids built the cities together as one, creating one of the largest cities of the Maghrib. The old city, Fez el-Bali, still remains at its center, bounded by the unused battlements that once defended it. Most of my business will be conducted within those walls.

Also within those walls is the Qarawiyan Mosque and University, the oldest examples of each institution in North Africa. The university and its associated *madrasas*, which gather around the mosque like chicks to a mother hen, have attracted scholars and students from every corner of the world. Not all of those scholars and students are among the living — members of Qabilat al-Mawt, Bay't Mushakis, the vizier caste of the Banu Haqim and even others less disposed to study have journeyed here to seek the wisdom of Cainite elders and wise holy men. We passed the mosque on our way to our lodgings at the *suq*. At night, the five hundred lights from the huge lamp that dominates the interior are visible to passersby, even though the building itself covers almost seven acres. I returned to the mosque later that evening to make my prayers, after taking some time to prepare myself for what proved an ordeal. The combination of the intense light and the holy aura of the place made each step painful, and I fear that my prayers were said at a pace that was not as dignified as I might wish.

The buildings that house the *madrasas* were not so dreadful to enter. I entered the facility. Inside I found the sultan's functionary, poring over a scroll in deep concentration. I waited, both amused and glad for the time to collect myself after my visit to the mosque, for a full half hour before the elderly man noticed my

presence. I had come in duty to Sultan Usama ibn Jabar, but found that the sultan does not make a practice of accepting introductions, ever—such duties interfere with his time in study. Instead, the aged gentleman took a large book from a shelf and recorded my name, my sire's name, and my date of arrival in it. He asked that I present myself again before leaving to record that date, as well, and explained that if the sultan required my presence, I would be notified. I left, somewhat bemused at this approach. I hope, for their sakes, that more attentive administration is not required any time soon.

3 August 1194

A trade problem has arisen that is making my cold blood run fast and hot. One of the bills I intended to redeem on this voyage was acquired in trade by our house as partial payment of a debt. The original party, a mortal trader based here in Fez, refuses to honor the transferred bill, even with appropriate documentation of the transfer. I admit my first inclination was to pay this insolent mortal a nighttime visit, but Sanjar convinced me that I would be best served by attempting to rectify this situation within the law. I am grateful for his reasoning and bravery in the face of my anger.

I returned to the sultan's functionary, this night a different elderly gentleman ensconced in a different *madrasa*. I took with me a bundle of the fine paper we transported with us from Granada—a gift in return for distracting the old man from his studies to assist me. He was pleased enough to do so; while fingering the delicately textured sheets, he told me of a resident Cainite, Nahd ibn Raid, who was in life a member of the *'ulama* and an *'udul*, and who has kept extensive contacts with the mortal *'ulama* of Fez. On returning to my quarters, I woke Sanjar and instructed him to write a missive explaining our situation and entreating this elder's aid. He writes even as I record this, our pens scratching in unison. He will deliver this letter during the day, so that it is available as soon as the elder wakes tomorrow evening.

4 August 1194

I met earlier this evening with Nahd ibn Raid. He wished to meet with me personally before looking into the details of my trade dispute. This is proper; the legal standing of an *'udul* is based not just on his learning but on his reputation in the community, such that vouching for disreputable individuals can seriously damage his credibility. Ibn Raid no longer speaks before the *qadi* except in the most extreme of circumstances, given his nature, but he takes his status and his responsibilities seriously.

I have confessed before in this journal to not being the most devout of men or Cainites, nor am I the most learned. Perhaps, had I lived among men to a more mature age, I too would have joined the ranks of the *'ulama* in time. I am, however, sincere and of good faith. It appears that Ibn Raid has judged me so, because he as agreed to assist me in this matter. There is no fee, as such, required for this service. I owe him a favor, of course; that is how these matters are discharged. I have been fortunate to find here in Fez one who believes so strongly in using the law as a bridge between the Ashirra and the mortal men and women who share our beliefs.

Some time will be necessary to make arrangements with the trader and with the *qadi*. I will be spending more time in Fez than I had thought, and there is little I can do. These are now matters to be resolved under the light of the sun, and I must rely on Sanjar to observe and protect my interests.

8 August 1194

The dispute has been resolved to the satisfaction of all. Sanjar reports that the *qadi* accepted our bill and the documentation of its transfer as evidence when read by the *'udul*. A wise man, the *qadi* indicated to the trader that he considered the bill to be valid, and suggested that the bill be folded into an additional agreement to provide further business for the trader and for my house. Sanjar gave his approval to this arrangement on my behalf, and the *'udul* prepared the legal documents to seal the bargain. As a gesture of good faith, I will pay the *'udul*'s fees for contract preparation. Sanjar has already begun negotiating for quantities of leatherwork and fine wool.

Karif and I have been idle. We have amused ourselves with explorations of the old city's crumbling battlements and by acquiring camels to roam the fringes of the Sahara. Fittingly, it was there on the sands that a spirit messenger found me. While most of my clan relies on couriers and other such mundane means of communication, the sorcerers send out these unsettling creatures to whisper their messages in your ear. Leisurely camel rides in the desert have been abandoned as I labor to assemble the components of the strange request the spirit messenger related to me. We will leave for Marrakish soon; I hope that I will find the remaining materials there.

Marrakish

10 September 1194

We have safely arrived in Marrakish after an arduous month-long journey. Bandits threatened our small group of riding and pack animals a week south of Fez,



but Karif's ready blade and our apparent modest means deterred a full assault. If the ruffians had known what filigreed treasures are carefully wrapped on the backs of those scruffy animals, they surely would have made a stronger attempt.

On arriving in this distant oasis of a city, it was difficult at first to remember why I had traveled so far and so long to get here. The city was not unduly large when it served as the capital of the Almoravid dynasty, and it has been in a steady decline since the Almohads wrested it from their control.

Marrakish is still a busy trade center; Berbers from the high mountains and the arid deserts converge on this fertile, irrigated plain to exchange their dusty goods for the fruits of the orchards. But there is nothing available here that is not also available in Fez to the north, and indeed, the majority of trade has moved to that, more accessible, city. I am here, I recalled as I wiped the dust of the road from my face, to investigate whether the cheaper prices of goods in Marrakish is worth the expense of the caravan back to the shores of the Mediterranean. Reclining in soft, clean pillows for the first time in weeks, my initial inclination is to say that the prices here will need to be very good indeed to induce me to undertake this trek again.

I have yet to see evidence of other Cainites in this city. This strikes me as more than a bit peculiar. I will make greater effort tomorrow to find this city's denizens. It is only polite and fitting that I do so.

11 September 1194

The *madina* of Marrakish, its famous Red City of beaten clay ramparts and buildings of the same material and hue, was alive well into the dark of night this evening. It seems that the drovers and traders in from the desert are more than happy to conduct their deals late into the cooler hours, so long as the merchants of the Jema al-Fna, the city's largest *suq*, are willing to pay for the lamp oil. The great, carved gates to the *madina* are finally closed hours after the setting of the sun. The traders walk unconcernedly through the gently waving palm grove that surrounds the city center to return to their caravans and herds, while the merchants fold up shop fronts and carts and make their way to their waiting families. Through all of this activity, I still witnessed no sign of Cainites; perhaps this is another

reason why the people of Marrakish feel so free to enjoy the night.

The olive groves and the vast walled Agdal gardens were silent as well. I had thought I might at least find a Mutasharid creature lurking amid the hundreds of acres of irrigation canals — but I did not. The evening was wasted, then, but for a visit to the Koutoubia Mosque, so recently built that the red clay dust of the area had not yet stained the mosaic-work of the floors, and the scent of precious woods — brought from the jungles past the desert to the south, no doubt — still held the slightest pungent hint of green sap. The mosque's minaret stands to an impressive height over 250 feet; it must stand as a welcome beacon to daylight travelers weary from the long journey through vast empty spaces.

Tomorrow night I will take full advantage of the insomnia of the citizens of Marrakish to conclude our business and investigations here as quickly as possible. I do not relish the return trip to Fez, but the sooner it is accomplished, the sooner I will be traveling east toward my homeland.

12 September 1194

This night has been a good one for small revelations. Both my *ansar* worked hard through the day, Sanjar haggling with traders and warehouses, and Karif sounding out arrangements with caravans and guards. When I awoke, I was able to close some profitable deals and appoint some local agents, making it possible, I hoped, to do business in this area without having to travel here again myself — or at least not often.

As I sent a new partner off to his bed, I was approached by a young man not of Berber stock, but of native Iberian — not unheard of in these parts, but an uncommon sight. Wary inspection rewarded me with my first Cainite sighting in this otherwise deserted place. He called himself Aratz Labande and spoke Arabic with an accent I could not place.

He claimed that he had traveled so far from home by following members of his family, who were brought here by the Almohad conquerors as slave labor for the building of that grand new mosque and minaret. He did not, you might guess, count himself among the Ashirra — in fact, with the indignities visited on his family members by their Muslim overlords, I do not expect that he could be converted within the span of a human lifetime.

Still, he was drawn to me by my perceived honesty and open dealings, and he wished my advice on how to survive in this area. I gave my opinion that survival here must be quite secure indeed, unless there were lean and hungry desert Lupines or other marauding beasts to be found in the area. He assured me that such concerns were no greater here than elsewhere, but that he worried some ancient Cainite might some night crawl from the clayey soil to smite him for daring to dwell in its city. I assured him, I hope not in error, that torporous Methuselahs were not a great risk, and that if one should wake, it would be as chance a happening as a freak whirlwind sandstorm. He seemed reassured by this and asked if I thought he should claim the title of sultan of this city. His manner at this point changed slightly, the muscles in his face clenching and spasming without his notice or will; I demurred from answering directly, saying that the Cainites of the city should acclaim their sultan.

On a whim, I woke Karif and sent him to the slave quarters before dawn to speak with the overseer about purchasing such laborers. Perhaps they'll be cheap since they are no longer needed after the completion of construction. The overseer would have been happy to make a sale, but many of the captives from Andalus have mysteriously died in the night since the work was completed — some of them murdered by an unknown assailant. Perhaps Labarde is not the only Cainite in the city, or perhaps Marrakish will have a mad and lonely sultan. I do not know, but I will send no agents of Iberian blood to do business here.

8 October 1194

The return journey to Fez and Sebta went far more smoothly than the arduous trip south. Leaving the string of pack animals in Marrakish, as I had traded away or left as a hold on services all the goods we had brought with us, my two companions and I made our way unaccompanied and unaccosted. We were able to reach the coastline in less time than it had taken us to travel from Fez inland.

We are now back aboard our ship and bound for Tunis. It is unlikely, even under the worst conditions, that this part of our route will take the month of traveling that the last segment did, even though it is almost four times the distance traveled between Marrakish and Fez. This is the joy of traveling over the water, my friends.

But the drawbacks to travel by ship are also numerous. Travel of any sort is not to be undertaken lightly. I will be forced to feed on Sanjar and Karif, and indulge in no activities that would sap the strength of my blood. I will see nothing but the inside of hull and the deck above me for days on end — I would rather be seen as an eccentric, arrogant or seasick merchant by the members of the crew than arouse their suspicions by coming on deck every evening with the setting of the

sun. To take best advantage of our ship and the prevailing winds, we will not hug the shoreline, which would allow a hungry Cainite to hunt coastal towns and fishing villages for needed sustenance, but venture far out into the Mediterranean. For a voyage much longer than this one I would consider the slumber of torpor, but if the winds are good to us on this trip I might not wake until some time after reaching our destination. I will read, and write, and pace until we reach Tunis.

Tunis

30 October 1194

We reached Tunis in three weeks — at a respectable pace for this season, Captain Abu Raghid assured me. Our ship must remain moored at Halq al-Wadi, the fortified port that guards the inlet to Lake Tunis. Goods, and more rarely passengers like myself, are ferried to the city via canal. This was uneventful, except for the exorbitant rate I was charged to carry a small amount of goods and three passengers along the canal after dark. The next time I visit Tunis, I must remember to send goods and *ansar* during the day, and make my own way at night, to save some coin.

Tunis itself is a smaller city than I had expected given its premier location between the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean Sea. The city has grown in importance since it was razed alongside Carthage and rebuilt by the Romans, without its population growing in step. This seems ideal for the residents of Tunis — the city is full of craftsmen and merchants who live well, and even the fishermen seem to be well fed and surrounded by large families.

My rooms above the *suq* are filled with the scents of myriad rare oils and spices, long after the vendors have gone home for the night. I must find out who sells this bewildering array of goods and will be sleeping over during the day. I am certain to find the last strange items on the spirit messenger's list somewhere in this mélange of exotica.

I have been given word that the sultan of Tunis, Lady Sophoniba, will host a gathering to welcome travelers, including a handful of Cainites visiting from Europe. As I am to present myself at that time, I find I cannot refuse this invitation, even were I so inclined. It will, I am sure, be an eventful and instructive evening.

2 November 1194

Let me begin this fresh page with a strong word of warning: When in Tunis, do not speak of Carthage. The Cainites of this city are much older than the city itself, more ancient than the buildings of Roman and Arab make they shelter in. They have lived through all three Punic wars, and they have little love for paeans to the glory of fallen Carthage.

Last night's court was held in the baths, with each guest given a private place to make himself clean, and provided with clothing our hosts considered appropriate — some antiquated style of tunic dyed the glorious shade of purple that funded the Phoenician navy. I required the assistance of servants to dress properly. These same deft-fingered servants also made sure I was fed properly before the gathering.

In the main chamber of the baths, the lady Sophoniba was introduced, as were several other Cainites of apparent advanced age — the steam filling the air brought not the slightest blush of color to their limbs. As I was the eldest of the visitors — a surprising development, you may be sure — I made my introduction with as much flourish as I could, and was graciously welcomed to the city.

The European visitors did not fare so well. They were a motley assortment of young Brujah, just recently fledged, who had decided to celebrate their freedom by making a pilgrimage to the site of Carthage. Their new clothing sat uncomfortably on them, and their faces were flushed. They spoke neither the current common tongue of Arabic, nor the lost language of the Phoenicians (which I admit I also neither speak nor read), forcing our hosts to communicate with them in Latin. Their juvenile manners alone would have done their reputations harm enough. Their leader, however, his belly full of blood and his head full of half-digested philosophy, felt it necessary to lecture these venerable elders about the great Ventrue conspiracy and the tragic death of the Brujah dream. As he found his oratory stride, the youth's unease dropped away, but he failed to notice the stony faces and clouded eyes of his audience. There was no warning when lady Sophoniba broke her terrible stillness. With one swift, unseen move, she snapped the head from the brash Brujah, leaving his body to topple into the hot pool where it dissolved in a crimson slick. The other Europeans fled. I excused myself — politely, I hope — not long thereafter.

I woke this evening to find a messenger had delivered a beautifully written scroll containing a poem of apology to the unfortunate's sire — thoughtfully translated into Latin. The others have received this as well; I have been asked to carry a copy in the unlikely event I should meet the addressed sire, as lady Sophoniba is unsure that the remaining Brujah pilgrims will survive long enough to make delivery.

I must settle my nerves now to make a last few purchases in the *suq* — the sellers of such merchandise as I must find rarely restrict themselves to normal

business hours. Sanjar has sent several canal boats back to the port full of carpets and cloth — surrounding myself with that shade of purple will remind me of this night for many years to come. We will leave Tunis with the early tide.

Al-Qayrawan

5 November 1194

We have reached the port of Al-Mahdiya, which serves the holy city of Al-Qayrawan. This is the city from which the Arabs conquered the Maghrib, allowing them to introduce the word of the Prophet across all of North Africa. For centuries, the resting place of one of the Prophet's companions served as a political and intellectual center for Islam while Al-Mahdiya thrived as a trading port. In recent decades, however, the same Arab tribesmen who harass the Berbers as far west as Fez have completely uprooted the farmers upon whom the city depended for its most basic needs, forcing them to adopt a nomadic lifestyle simply to keep one step ahead of the raiders. Trade has moved north to Tunis. The holy city is left to gather dust blowing in from fields no longer irrigated, its only visitors market-day nomads and the occasional devout pilgrim.

And reluctant traders like me. As I wait for the last rays of the sun to fall below the steppe, Sanjar reports that two black horses wait, riderless, near the end of the docks. I am not at all surprised that Myrsus has expected my arrival.

Most Cainites, even Ashirra, deserted the city when the bandit depredations reached their peak. Al-Qayrawan proved to be the ideal destination for a wandering group of Banu Haqim sorcerers, Sufi mystics who have melded pantheism and the strange dervish tradition into their blood magic. I have heard that these sorcerers were banished from Alamut for their practices, which some consider blasphemous and others simply annoying. I have also heard that they left of their own accord, in search of a place where they might have the solitude to refine their rituals — they have certainly found such solitude here. I am not particularly comfortable with their worship, but I know that Myrsus, my companion for many years at the mountain fortress, is a devout Muslim in his own way. Whether I approve or not, the spirit messengers come and these deliveries must be made. I have visited Al-Qayrawan more times than I like to count, but at least this time I have the luxury of a ship.

6 November 1194

Karif rode the short distance to Al-Qayrawan with me, in case of a bandit attack. I would not wish to be the bandit who made off with Myrsus' strange goods, but the unthinkable fate of the raiders would do little to console me as my ashes gusted across the steppe. The steppe was bare, allaying my fears, and the horses galloped off when given their heads as if they surely knew where we needed to go.

Less than an hour later, we skirted the sleeping city. The horses stopped within sight of the *zawiya* of Sidi Sahab, the sacred fraternity that guards the tomb of the Prophet's companion. A procession of riders in white left the gates of the *zawiya*, heading unerringly for our location. I felt some relief as Myrsus pulled the riding veil from his face — his ways are becoming more and more strange as the years pass, but I would rather deal with Myrsus, who I have considered a friend, than many other of the cold and powerful sorcerers of my clan. We dismounted and greeted one another, then busied ourselves unpacking his unusual requests from the horses' backs. Myrsus' companions watched from the backs of their mounts, seemingly without blinking, let alone offering to assist in any way. The items I unpacked included a jeweled jar containing an unguent made from the fat of seabirds, a garland of scorpion tails that still glisten with poison, and a mask carved from wood as black as the night sky — along with other jars and bottles bearing odd titles, the true components of which I do not wish to know. Myrsus sorted through his acquisitions with deft hands and a gleam in his eye, making occasional pleased sounds. No coin changed hands; the payment for such occasional deliveries is made directly to my sire, and most often it is in the form of services. Once satisfied, he carefully wrapped his precious bundles and remounted his horse, heading further off into the moonlit steppe to whirl madly with his companions, indulging in rituals they have been awaiting my arrival to enact. I stopped in the *zawiya* before returning to the ship, praying at the niche before the Companion's tomb in a much more restrained fashion.

The Nile River Valley

6 December 1194

This area is under the control of the Ayyubid dynasty. The great leader, Salah al-Din, has recently passed away, and his brother al-Adil rules as his successor. His empire, wrested from the Fatimid dynasty of Cairo and held together with zealous faith against the assaults of the European crusaders, has begun to crumble into smaller, allied fragments controlled by relatives and vassals. Still, the Ayyubids control the fertile Nile



River, the holy cities of the Arabian Peninsula, Jerusalem and other cities in the Holy Land. The greatest threat to their dynasty remains the crusader strongholds along the coast.

Cairo

The voyage from Al-Qayrawan to Cairo was a long one, stretching more than 1,500 miles across the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. We weathered some rough storms, they tell me, but I do not remember — I took refuge in torpor for the duration, grateful for the rest after unloading that unsavory cargo. I awoke to Sanjar's insistent shaking — never pleasant, and never safe. After a failed attempt to snap his neck, I listened to Sanjar's disturbing tale.

The Coptic shipwright who was to assemble the twin of this ship in the Sea of Qulzum, and who was paid a handsome advance for materials and his labor, has disappeared. The promised ship is, likewise, nowhere in evidence. I will set out tonight to look for our wayward shipwright myself, but I hold little hope of finding much of substance. This may seriously hinder my travels. Speed and safety are both necessary, and I am unlikely to achieve both of those goals in any ship I might find for sale in Cairo. My unusual itinerary makes buying passage unpredictable. I must find another option.

Cairo itself is a wonder. It is quite possibly the largest city in the world, vying only with Constantinople and glorious Baghdad for that honor. It is also the newest city I will visit on my journey. Until the arrival of Muslim conquerors, the political center of the valley was located on the coast at Alexandria. It was the Fatimids who built Cairo's heart, the Azhar Mosque, and surrounded it with a thriving metropolis to serve as their capital.

I am usually glad to arrive in Cairo. Even though the Walid Set dominate the area with incredible numbers, here in Cairo they wear their serpents on their sleeves. If I must, I much prefer to deal with a comfortable, complacent Serite than one who feels threatened. However, this matter of the ship has soured my mood. I will resolve it as quickly as possible so that I might return to enjoying the city.

7 December 1194

I have found my ship and its builder, and I am not pleased. The master shipwright disappeared, as initially reported. The materials to build the ship were never purchased in sufficient quantity. The master's apprentice, terrified at his mentor's uncharacteristic disappearance and with full knowledge of how impor-

tant the contract for this ship was, attempted to fulfill his master's obligation with inferior materials and insufficient skill. The result is unacceptable.

I have sent a messenger to my sire with this news. This may be a simple matter of human greed, but it may also represent unwanted intrusion into our affairs. Whichever may be true, I must continue with my assigned journey and leave further investigation to others undoubtedly more capable. I have arranged for my current ship to be maneuvered as far as possible up the Nile, disassembled, then transported by canal barge in pieces to the sea. I was at first apprehensive at this prospect, but the apprentice shipwright assured me that this is the traditional way to move ships from the Nile delta, which has wood for shipbuilding, to the Sea of Qulzum, which does not. In fact, the pharaohs built the canal that will transport my boat for just such a purpose. The apprentice, with Karif's supervision, will escort my ship, reassembling it and ensuring its seaworthiness once back in the water. This is not a short procedure.

In the intervening time, I will continue up the coast to Jerusalem, Damascus, and Aleppo. It is worrisome to travel through contested lands without Karif's sword as protection, but he is needed here, and I, unlike most Ashirra, do not have time to waste.

I have more pleasant matters to attend to in Cairo. The city's trade in spices and slaves passes almost entirely through Setite-influenced hands, so one must go to them to do business. They are canny traders and drive a hard bargain, but at least I do not need to contrive excuses for my nocturnal habits or skulk about the *suq* to conduct my business. I will not seek out the sultan, not at first. What is one more Ashirra in this sea of mortals and Cainites? Should it become convenient or necessary to announce my presence to Sultan Antonius, I will do so with good grace.

8 December 1194

It has been a productive but unsettling night. As I made my way through the darkened streets, I encountered a familiar face — a jovial Walid Set named Bilaal. I have met him on past visits to the city, and I am sure that he remembers me as well as I remember him, yet he treats me on each meeting as he did on the first — like a visitor, a pilgrim, someone here to see the sights. I am also sure that he does this to see if he can make me angry with such a simple ploy. Bilaal offers tours of the city, guaranteeing safe passage to those who wish to see the resting places of the dead pharaohs and other decaying holy sites. His fee for such services is reasonable enough, and I have not yet heard of anyone coming to harm while under his protection. I have no interest, however, in revisiting the site I paid him to convey me to decades ago — the City of the Dead stretching along the east and south fringes of the city. I would not, and will not, travel with him even as far as the pyramids at Giza. I explained, as always, that I wished only to visit the shrines to Husayn and Fatima, and I know very well where they are is to be found — a mere stone's throw from the Azhar Mosque.

Bilaal chuckled, setting his bulk into disturbing motion, and wished me farewell and a pleasant visit to Cairo. I did not think it was possible for a Cainite to grow more corpulent, but it seems that Bilaal might have managed that since last I saw him. His complexion was rosy, and he reeked of fresh blood. I might consider this another provocation, but for the fact that I am sure Bilaal's appetite did not desert him on his death. Most remarkably, as Bilaal waddled away, he gathered to his side three young Cainites — his childer, I must guess. I find it difficult to imagine that the sultan would allow such a thing, but Bilaal is among the most respected Setites in Cairo. His knowledge of the city and its treasures is unrivaled.

Some time later, I reached the dwelling of Bek, a Walid Set trader of long acquaintance. Given our history of mutually beneficial trade dealings, most of my acquisitions in Cairo for the past several decades have been through him. The level of trust between us is unusual for our clans, and would be completely impossible if we had the years and memories of our elders. The long history of conflict is theoretical for us, not personal, and is more easily set aside. A well-appointed slave girl admitted me to Bek's household. As I awaited my host in the courtyard, I observed a surprising amount of activity, even for the dwelling of a Cainite, as slaves of every hue made their busy way through the house. When Bek arrived to greet me, he was dressed in the finest fabrics and festooned with jewelry, with so many rings on his fingers that I doubt he could fully bend his hand. Bek was wealthy before, but trade must surely favor him these nights.

Indeed, my host bargained ferociously, with the demeanor of one who knows that his goods will be bought, by someone, at the price that he names. I countered by extending the length of our agreement, a condition that Bek somewhat grudgingly agreed to. I see no indication that his prices are to decline in the near future, and this way I have some degree of protection against them rising even higher. Of course, I have nothing but his word that he will honor this deal. The courts of the *qadi* supposedly hold no sway over the Walid Set.

At the conclusion of our usual dealings in spices and human chattel, my host announced that he wished to make a special offer to me, in honor of our longstanding relations. He had in his possession a quartet of extremely valuable slaves, each beautiful and skilled at music, recitation and women's handicrafts. His household, as I noticed, was full, and he would therefore sell these women to me at a greatly reduced price. I accepted; I did not want to appear ungrateful or stingy. Arrangements were made to have the slaves brought to my lodgings when Bek considered them properly presentable.

From these two meetings, and from simple observation of the numbers of Cainites present in the city, it is apparent that the Setites of Cairo have gained appreciably in power — both economic and political. I must wonder that Sultan Antonius, a Ventrue of Roman extraction, would let such power grow unchecked. He has kept control for so many years, and through so many wars, that it seems ironic that this bountiful time would prove such a test of his rulership.

11 December 1194

Previous nights in this city have been merely unsettling. This one has driven me to my wits' end. My apologies to the scribes who will transcribe this missive; my hand shakes such that I can barely read my own words.

It has been several nights since my meeting with the trader Bek. A young boy arrived during today's noonday heat with a message to expect a delivery this evening: enough spices to refill our ship's small hull, and the four slave women I had purchased. Sanjar immediately began preparations — I had apparently neglected to inform him that I had acquired human cargo, which cannot simply be stored in a warehouse until we are prepared to leave. I awoke to the noise of carts being unloaded in the courtyard below, the protests of guards asked to unchain the warehouse after dark, and a soft knock on the door to my lodgings. Sizing up the situation, I opened the door to receive my purchases. The four women were led in, veiled and gently restrained by decorative silver chains. Their escort pressed a small key into my hand, bowed deeply and left. The slaves settled delicately to their knees to await my appraisal.

At a glance, the women appeared to be as lovely as Bek had promised. I unveiled each in turn for a glimpse of her face: a Nubian woman, with skin darker than polished mahogany; a dark-haired, coppery-skinned girl I guessed to be from the islands east of India; and a strikingly pale woman with hair the color of straw from the Aral Sea. As I drew back the last woman's veil, my heart leapt in my chest as if her brown eyes were a wooden stake. The face, beautiful as a moon, her cheeks fragrant roses — this was the face of a woman long dead and lost to me. The sweet curving of her lips into a smile broke the cold grasp in my chest; in its place, a red film of anger descended and I feared I might go mad. I flung myself recklessly from her visage, tumbling through the shuttered window and into the bales of spices below, causing great consternation among the workmen. I fled, then, in blind panic, coming to myself hours later in the gutter of a Cairo slum in the chill winter rain. May God forgive me for what I have done this night: I do not even know what might need to be forgiven.

The women have been taken away. Sanjar is to kill the Arab woman, as quickly and painlessly as he can. He is unhappy with my decision, but I cannot take the chance that she is a spy or an assassin, and I cannot bear her presence. Karif is gone, so the duty falls on Sanjar. I struggle to think: Why would Bek do this? Does he wish me destroyed, or simply unsettled? How was it done — did they scour the desert for the mirror image of my love, or do I have unseen enemies with the power to wrench flesh into the shape of a ghost? I should think on these things, important things, vital things — but all I can focus my thoughts on is that somewhere in the streets of Cairo I have lost that small, silver key. We will leave Cairo tomorrow night.

12 December 1194

I have delayed our departure from Cairo by another night, but it was well worth it. Right after dusk this evening, as Sanjar was readying our transport north, I decided to visit the shrines of Husayn and Fatima. Although I am not a devout creature by nature, I thought some contemplation might help my spirit. The face of Bek's slave girl haunted me yesterday as I slept. I did not relish another day of terrors.

I never made it to the shrines. Indeed, as I made my way through the narrow streets — largely abandoned at night — I noticed a tall Nubian man moving with the quiet confidence I have come to associate with the Curse of Caine. Like I, he was a restrained predator. I thought perhaps he was another Walid Set, maybe even a coconspirator of Bek's, and decided to follow him. A few turns through the maze of streets later, and I heard the call of the muezzin beckoning the faithful to prayer. But unlike most other nights, when the muezzin's call evokes a slight tremor of fear in my damned heart, this time I felt welcome. The ululating strengthened my soul. I made my way toward it, truly craving prayer for the first time in many years.

Only when I had become utterly lost did I finally see the muezzin, atop a minaret that was somehow invisible to me from any other angle. The white robes and scarred face of the thing beckoning me to prayer marked him as one of the Hajj, those holy Ashirra among Bay't Mutasharid. Like their more savage brothers and the warriors of my clan, they can vanish from sight. That must explain the hidden nature of the minaret. I thought this only in retrospect. At the time, a true calm had embraced me, and I made my way into the mosque.

There were at least 30 of us, vampires of many *bay't*. Men to one side, women to another, all kneeling to face Mecca and pray. This was a true Ashirra mosque, the center of the religious community among the scions of Caine. Like the hard rituals of my time in Alamut, this was a moment of unity and communal strength. Other concerns faded before the brotherhood of Islam.

I decided to leave quietly after prayer, unwilling to let idle chat and the inevitable rivalries of our kind ruin the calm I so treasured. I searched the crowd with my eye to find the Nubian I had followed there. He stood at the front of the crowd, listening to the Hajj muezzin. Beside him, draped in a subtle cloak of shadow that marked him as a member of Qabilat al-Khayal, stood another man with the quiet confidence of age and power. His dusky Arab features and piercing eyes gave him the look of desert majesty, of one of the tribal princes who had ridden from Madina with the Prophet and conquered the world.

It was only on my way back to my compound that I realized I had just prayed with Suleiman ibn Abdullah, the founder and first imam of the Ashirra sect. Cairo is a wondrous city indeed.

13 December 1194

The camel plods beneath me as the lights of Cairo fade in the distance through the parted shades of the palanquin. Later, Sanjar will ride and sleep as I walk through the darkness, to take shelter again as dawn threatens. I do not know when our camel drover will rest, and I do not care. The man can sleep when we are far from Cairo.

As we loaded our small caravan to leave, a guard in the uniform of a noble house approached me. The guard informed me that the sultan's advisor wished to speak with me — immediately. As I followed the armed man, I wracked my brain to remember what I might have done in last night's terror that would have drawn attention from such high places. I wrestled in vain. The guard led me to the citadel of Salah al-Din. Waiting within was the advisor, an African Cainite whose black skin reminded me uncomfortably of both the obsidian flesh of my most revered elders, and the kneeling, chained woman from last night. He instructed me to refer to him as Jubal in a quiet tone. Then he proceeded to remonstrate me in less pleasant cadences for not having observed the proper traditions on my arrival to Cairo.

The scolding did not appear to be his only goal, however, and neither did it seem that I had committed some grievous sin that I could not recall. Once I was properly chastened, Jubal spoke conversationally about matters of trade, the sultan's withdrawal of influence from mortal politics in the wake of the Crusades, and the increasing numbers of Cainites drawn to Cairo as a place of culture and history. He urged me politely to visit again soon, and to let the brothers and sisters of my clan know that they are always welcome here in the capital of Salah al-Din's empire. He then wished me good speed on my travels.

The sultan's advisor is a good man in a hard place. I agree with him: There must be a greater Banu Haqim presence in Cairo. The Walid Set have grown too strong and too bold. Perhaps it is time once again to dig out the serpents' nests for the light of the sun.

Jerusalem

27 December 1194

The road to Jerusalem took just over a fortnight to travel, even through occasional blasts of snow. We slowed our breakneck pace several days out of Cairo, when the frigid desert conditions would surely have killed the man who cared for our camels had we pressed on. As my immediate fears faded, we resumed a more typical mode of travel. Now I can only hope that my ship reaches the sea without further incident.

As we neared the city, I sent Sanjar another way with the laden camels so that I might enter through the Golden Gate to the Dome of the Rock. This was, perhaps, a crude evasion of the tradition that business must not enter the holy city in this manner, but in truth I am not in Jerusalem to trade. My contacts have been killed, starved or have wisely elected to move elsewhere in the years of trouble that have plagued Jerusalem. Trade is controlled on one hand by the Mushakis Azif, and on the other by Varsik, whose clan I do not know. The only member of my clan I am acquainted with in this area is a wild assassin woman named Habiba. She lives outside the city in a cave on the Mount of Olives. Her simple presence makes me uneasy. I would not have entered the city at all were it not for the holy monuments here.

Passing under the Golden Gate caused me some distress. Nearing the Dome of the Rock brought the holy pain to almost unbearable levels. I could not enter the hallowed building; my suffering proves that I am not worthy of crossing the threshold. At such times, I briefly mourn for the loss of my humanity, but it does not long comfort me that the most degraded man can enter the Dome of the Rock where I cannot. As I fled to the sanctuary of the Muslim quarter, I felt nonetheless cleansed, excoriated, as though the open sores bled out the impurities accumulated since I last was truly observant. I rejoined Sanjar and the small caravan at the Damascus Bazaar, where he paid bribes to guards and thugs alike to be left in peace until my arrival.

We will rest here a day or two. I will hunt and regain my strength, then we will leave on the road to Damascus.

The Road to Damascus

13 January 1195

I had looked forward to spending some time in Damascus, but it appears our stay is to be a short one. In fact, I write these words from a shelter near the horse market outside the city's walls. This is the closest we will come to Salah al-Din's capital. Indeed, instead of the merchant I expected to meet here, I was greeted by a clanmate.

I had not seen Bistakh bint Fahd, a fierce Kurd warrior woman, since I accompanied my sire to Alamut some years ago. At that time, Bistakh's sire Fahd accepted execution because he had failed to see the infernalism that had gripped the sorcerers and viziers in his charge. I remember that my sire spoke in Fahd's defense and lauded him for his courageous decision to accept the responsibility for a crime not truly his own.

Bistakh appeared in our midst with an ease that made me ill. Our warrior line is truly gifted at the arts of stealth. It can be worrisome to see how vulnerable we are to them. Fortunately, she came bearing me no ill will. In fact she came to warn me that the infernal pits that had damned her sire's charges and claimed his own unlife hid in Damascus. She is here on a mission of vengeance from Alamut and did not want me to be snared by the Baali devils she hunts.

I would not be my sire's childe if I did not manage to honor her request and his own simultaneously, of course. Needing several key items from Damascus, I explained to Bistakh that I had to honor my elder just as she did hers. With some measure of frustration, she agreed to obtain the items for me and have them delivered by proxies during the daylight hours. A warrior's vengeance is no more critical than a vizier's bargain, after all.

We make for Aleppo tomorrow night.

For More...

... on the city of Jerusalem, the Ayyubid dynasty, Salah al-Din and the crusaders, see **Jerusalem by Night** and its companion story **Fountains of Bright Crimson**. You will find both historical information and more Cainites than you can shake a stick at.

For more on Damascus, see **Chapter Six: Damascus by Night**.

Aleppo

29 January 1195

Skirting the Syrian Desert to our east and the rugged mountains of the coastline to the west, we made our way to Aleppo in fifteen nights. Our journey was slow and cautious. The route itself is not particularly onerous, and the mountains provide a natural barrier to the crusaders still encamped all along the coast of the Mediterranean, but all those forced from their homes and into banditry by the invaders lurk on the route, scrabbling what existence they can from the rocky ground. They grow even more desperate in the cold of winter. We traveled through the darkest nights, hiding even from the light of the moon to avoid any confrontation.

Aleppo is an independent city, its rulers descending from Muslim dynasties since the 10th century. It is, in theory, within the realm that the Ayyubid sultanate claims to rule. The crusaders prove a much higher priority, however; the city of Aleppo has survived admirably on its own, fending off a prolonged siege 70 years ago and remaining free of invaders ever since. It would be difficult for the city not to thrive. Its location, a reasonable distance from both the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Euphrates River to the east, has assured its prosperity for millennia. Amorites, Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and at last Arabs have bled to take and hold this city. The marks of bygone civilizations can be seen in Aleppo's streets and buildings — and in the creatures that stalk its nights.

The Cainites of Aleppo have not, to my memory or my sire's much longer remembrance, ever presented a unified front.. The city has no sultan or controlling authority by any name. Instead, three vampires from past eras vie for command of the city. All three are of



considerable power, and the city remains suspended between them like a fragile vessel on a tripod stand. Each has produced broods of progeny to further complicate the struggle. These broods were quite large before the aforementioned siege. When the city was surrounded and the mortal herd struggled to survive, even favored childer were sent over the wall to feed from the invaders or perish trying. Warring neonates once again fill the Aleppo's nights with mischief and terror, but the ancients have not yet forgotten the missing. They blame each other for their losses.

Still, if one can avoid becoming enmeshed in the city's bloodthirsty politics, it is a wonderful place to conduct trade. My dealings here have been profitable in the past, and I look forward to renewing those contacts. The craftsmen of Aleppo make the richest dyes to be found along the Mediterranean, so their textiles and leatherworks are always in high demand.

30 January 1195

The streets of the Aleppo bazaars are covered, making it possible for the brave to venture out before the sun has completely set. I can be brave in search of business, and so I set out. It is an invigorating feeling. I had time to speak with two merchants before the bazaar folded up around me. In darkness, the cloth coverings of the maze of streets resemble ghostly moths fluttering around the citadel high on a hill in the center of town. I have heard it said that the city was once a flat plain, and that each generation of people simply built upon the houses and discards of the last until the mound reached its current prodigious height. The passageways and warrens under the citadel provide havens for most of the city's Cainites, and they spend much energy tunneling in the utter blackness searching for hidden ways into their enemies' sanctums.

Under the moth wings of the bazaar, I wandered upon a familiar face — a face too ghastly to forget, truth be told. It belonged to Samsi, a Nosferatu I guess to have been female by her name. I greeted her politely, and she responded by welcoming me in the Prophet's name. This was simply a gesture of respect or friendship on her part — Samsi's sire walked this city's streets during the Assyrian Empire, and he and his childer venerated, I thought, some ancient god. Yet as our conversation continued, she spoke to me of her Ashirra clanmates and still others. Taking me by the hand,

which I allowed in my befuddlement, she led me through winding streets to meet her new fast friend, Kossos, once one of Aleppo's young toughs. This night he addressed me in halting Arabic rather than the Greek tongue customary to the Hellenic brood; he was practicing, he explained, so that he might better read the Qur'an.

By this time, I am sure that my reserve had crumbled away to show my utter bewilderment. Like eager children they tugged me toward the citadel, determined to show me some prize. In a long, narrow cave beneath the mount, a prayer niche was carved where the altar to Hurris, the Mittani god of night, once stood. The heavy stone idol of a bull yet lay in pieces on the floor. Kneeling before the niche was the elder Cainite Varro — one of Aleppo's triumvirate. As Kossos stepped forward to pray by his side, and Samsi retreated a respectful distance, I turned and scrambled out the dark passageway into the brisk winter air.

I have already drafted a letter to my sire, and sent Sanjar with it to the coast. I write this quickly now and hope that I do not later feel compelled to return to my pages and rip them out. Perhaps I should rejoice at the conversion of an entire metropolis of Cainites to the ways of Islam, but I cannot believe that this has been done with their hearts. I dread to even consider what manner of being would have the power to wield such influence over the three great ones who have struggled here for centuries. I know only that I do not wish to be caught in this being's net, and that I cannot but consider it a grave insult that my faith, and the faith of millions, would be used like some old blanket to smother Aleppo's fire. I must leave quickly, before I experience a strange change of heart.

Arabian Peninsula

18 February 1195

I have arrived in the port city of Ayla, on the Sea of Qulzum, with my *ansar* Sanjar. Everything else that I took with me upon leaving Aleppo — pack animals, drovers, valuables — remains somewhere in the Jordan Valley. Sanjar rejoined me on the road to Damascus after successfully bringing my message to a ship on the Mediterranean coast. The journey was chill and uneventful until we neared Jerusalem. Within days of the city, the desperate bandits who lurk along the trade routes swept down on our small train, in spite of our attempts at disguise and subterfuge. We fled before the sheer numbers of the human vermin overwhelmed us. Those who followed us, not satisfied with the contents of the packs left behind and hoping for some trinket ripped from my person, I dealt with personally. I am not a warrior, and I do not enjoy shedding blood. I console myself with the thought that those I destroyed cannot be considered People of the Book by any estimation, having reduced themselves to animals by their own conduct. As for the others, the value of the lovely paper and soaps they have acquired is undoubtedly lost to them, and I hope that the filigreed treasures they stole freeze to their worthless skins before they have the chance to profit from my assault.

My ship unexpectedly reached Ayla before me — I did not expect that I would be traveling on foot, assisting a wounded scribe, from Jerusalem to the Sea of Qulzum. The *qārib* is somewhat the worse for her phoenixlike reincarnation from a nest of ship timbers, but the apprentice shipwright has grasped the gravity of his situation and provided me with his best work. I believe he may think me capable of walking out of the very bottom of the sea, covered in brine and weeds, to torment him should my precious ship sink. He has made sure that every inch of the hull is patched and sealed, and our captain has verified our seaworthiness. I have written a letter of recommendation for the young man to assist him in finding a new master, with the recommendation that he seek employment in another port, given the overwhelming influence of the Walid Set in and around Cairo.

The crew of the ship has changed for the worse. The sailors who manned the ship all through the Mediterranean were unwilling to leave a familiar sea, reluctant to spend such a long time in port, or had grown increasingly uncomfortable with their nocturnal employer. Whatever the reasons, we have been forced to seek out a more homogenous and less skilled crew. Captain Abu Raghid swears that he can tutor this lot in what they must know, but for a time our travel will be slowed. This will be a trying time, as the trip to Jidda will not be long enough to enter the relative comfort of torpor, yet I must remain apart from our new and skittish crew and carefully ration my strength.

Jidda

28 March 1195

The Keening began to insinuate itself into my dreams as we sailed south. It was as if the sun roared over Arabia, its wail reverberating through my slumber. At times it seemed no more oppressive than the voice of a distant thunderstorm, at others it crashed about my head until I thought certainly the ship must come apart from the overwhelming sound. I think that its strength

must depend on our distance from the shore, but I did not venture out of my sealed quarters to make any sort of measurement. And, of course, I am the only Ashirra aboard to hear the Keening. Once our ship was safely berthed in Jidda, and my feet touched the sandy soil of my homeland once again, the Keening became a familiar solace.

It is impossible to forget, however, my proximity to the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. If the bellowing of the sun were not enough of a reminder, the night air seems thick with faith and difficult to see through. I can no longer enter those cities, whose gates I freely and often without great care passed through as a living man. Had I known what would come, I would have been more circumspect and prayerful in those days. Although my clan is on the best of terms with the mullah Tarique al-Hajj and his fellow Nosferatu (who guard the holy cities), I have not been purified to enter Mecca or Madina — nor would I make such a request for so profane a reason as to conduct trade. Instead, I will remain here in Jidda to make what deals I can among the port's merchants, while Karif and Sanjar travel with my correspondence first to Mecca and then north to Madina to assure the continued cooperation of our factors within the blessed cities.

In the arena of daylight politics, these lands along the coast belong to Salah al-Din's dynasty. His assumption of power in these territories was achieved relatively peacefully. There has not been significant political upheaval in the region since the Qarmatians, Shiite agitators from the south, sacked Mecca and stole the Black Stone from the Ka'ba in the 10th century. Ashirra leadership parallels this stability. Since the return of the Ka'ba, the Hajj have been dominant in matters of faith among the Ashirra, while temporal power is held by an ancient line of the European Clan Ventrue. I say "European" only because the main body of that line is so clearly associated with the *Franj*. These vampires call themselves El Hijazi after the region of Arabia they call their own and have been in the area for centuries or millennia. They are noble and prideful, but utterly Arabian.

These nights will without doubt pass slowly. Jidda has little to recommend itself as a city other than its proximity to holiness. My only consolation will be other Ashirra travelers seeking to undertake pilgrimage to Mecca (at least as far as those of our damned ilk can go), and the numbers of my own clansmen here to assist the Hajj in protecting the walls of the holy city. Unfortunately, I have found that warriors do not make good conversationalists.

FOR MORE...

... on the ancient Ashirra of Mecca and Madina, see **A World of Darkness, Second Edition.**

At-Ta'if

31 March 1195

I am not traveling to at-Ta'if — and I would suggest that you do not either. It is a beautiful little town, graced with sufficient water to support fruit trees and lovely greenery on the edge of the desert. It is also blessed with the tombs of the Prophet's own sons. But at-Ta'if has a dark past, and that dark past haunts it still.

In the time of ignorance that shrouded the land before the coming of the Prophet, the town and the fertile lands surrounding it were the domain of the pagan goddess Allat. Allat's followers did not graciously give way when Muhammad brought word of the one true God. They remained, growing ever more zealous and violent, until it became necessary to drive them out by force. The root of that old religion seems to have remained, however, growing twisted and foreboding underground as centuries passed. It is rumored that the hidden devotees of Allat have consorted with dark and evil forces. Others say that it is not a dead goddess causing unrest in at-Ta'if, but rather a deranged Majnoon Methuselah called Al Ussa, who writhes in torment under the forested plateau (and not beneath hallowed Mecca itself as others believe). Whether the cause is the childer of Al Ussa, loosed *djinn* or fanatic cultists, travel around at-Ta'if is safe only for Ashirra who are not supremely confident in their prowess with blade and bared fang.

6 April 1195

I have survived my self-imposed exile in Jidda with no ill effects other than more coin than I had intended spent on entertaining mortal merchants in the evenings, and fiercely driven bargains for such relatively unimportant items as dried figs cluttering my records. My *ansar* associates have conducted our business in the holiest cities with alacrity, if not with the nuances that I would have brought to the transactions myself. Our ship's captain has spent the intervening time at sea with our rough crew, achieving the dual goal of increasing their familiarity with the *qārib's* advanced rigging and sparing me continued docking fees.

We are now sailing south to the port of Aden, which is nominally under Ayyubid control. The tribes

of the southern peninsula have never felt particularly bound to obey the dictates of remote caliphs, however, and the recent dissolution of Ayyubid power only exacerbates that local tendency. Stability in the area is provided by the Zaydi sect of Islam, a Shiite offshoot from the Fertile Crescent that entrenched itself in the furthest reaches of the peninsula in the ninth century. It has retained great influence over local warlords in the centuries since. Zaydi imams and other religious men wield more sway over the locals than the contesting Ayyubid appointees or tribal chieftains.

Our stops at Aden, and San'a' further inland, are of great importance to my trade — even greater importance than I realized when my journey began. With the stranglehold the Walid Set have established over the trade in spices and slaves through Cairo, it is more important than ever to solidify alternate sources for these vital goods. In Aden, it should be possible to intercept spices from India and the islands of the southeastern seas, and slaves shipped up the African coast, before the ships enter the Sea of Qulzum. I have no doubt that there are Serpents to be found in Aden and San'a', but it cannot be as corrupt as the vipers' nest that Cairo has become.

Aden

28 April 1195

Sea travel from Jidda to Aden was once again a travail. As with the last segment of our trip, our time under sail was too short to slip into the relative comfort of torpor. At least now I do not have the additional worry caused by an unseasoned crew manning a ship with a patched hull. To make best use of wind and current, we have spent many days far from shore, the slapping of waves on the ship's hull overwhelming the faint Keening as the sun follows its course. Even though I have spent a few spare months back in my homeland, I found the Keening's absence eerily disturbing.

I have arrived in Aden and ensconced myself as usual in the merchants' quarters of the *suq*. To my annoyance, it was necessary to bribe the *suq*'s guardians to open the gates after dark. This is a busy port, and this very night I was not the only trader to arrive after the setting of the sun. The guards must line their pockets well with contributions from conscientious merchants who wish to see their goods carefully from ship to shore.

There is little to this city that is not directly associated with trade. The port of At-Tawahi harbor and the *suq* full of warehouses are ancient, in existence for as long as mankind has loaded his wares onto ships and taken to the waves for profit. The dwellings of the people, and even the mosques they worship in, look insubstantial or even flimsy beside the monuments to the merchant's art.

I left the *suq* — incurring another bribe — to seek out the sultan of Aden. In other circumstances I might not have done so. I remembered the ostensible sultan, Shamit ibn Yasir, to be both young and inexperienced, and bound to his sire in San'a', the true lord of the region. However, given the greater importance this port must acquire in my trading, I felt it prudent to make my presence known and graciously seek his approval for my ventures. In retrospect, it appears that I inadvertently made a quite wise decision.

A regrettable amount of skulking was necessary to find a native Ashirra to direct me. I would have expected a more prominent presence in Aden; such a transient population makes for easy feeding. Either this is not the case, or else many of the natives are both wary of visitors and skilled at remaining hidden. The Ashirra I finally observed and approached was startled and seemingly dismayed at having been spotted. He was also quite polite, however, and gave me the information I needed to meet with ibn Yasir, but declined to accompany me to the sultan's court. He gave his name only as Bahjat, neither indicating his sire nor his homeland. Though his visage was shrouded, he did not appear to have the mannerisms of a southern tribesman. I surmise that my polite benefactor is in hiding. From our brief interaction, I can only wish him well.

The sultan holds court not within the city of Aden, but across the harbor to the west, on the peninsula known as Little Aden. He has established a residence there with walls so high and thick it resembles a miniature fortress. Ibn Yasir is a Mushakis, and it is in their tradition to build such *ribat* as their havens. I waited a not unreasonable amount of time in a lovely courtyard before being admitted to the sultan's presence. Gone was the uncertain and deferential childe I remembered from years ago. In his place was an assured but courteous administrator. We discussed the current situation in Cairo, and I made my request to expand my operations in his city. His grim satisfaction at the decline of Ayyubid control and the power of Cairo's sultan was discomfiting but understandable given the region he controls. He assured me that the Walid Set were well under control — a statement I must accept for the moment as I have seen no evidence to the contrary — and that my business here might be conducted without fear of undue supernatural influence brought by the Serpents. Any undue economic influence, he stated with amusement, I must deal with myself. Certainly, a bidding war in Aden can only bring profit to ibn Yasir's door. I do not feel threatened by the vipers

in matters of finance and the logistics of transportation; my assured confidence seemed both pleasing and further amusing to the sultan.

As I left, I asked ibn Yasir whom I should speak to in San'a' about trading matters. I asked with the intention of confirming our business dealings with his sire — a process I assumed would be necessary. The sultan, however, recommended that I speak to certain craftsmen and respected businessmen, both Ashirra and living, without a mention of his sire. I paused for a moment. The sultan, clearly more experienced in reading the intentions of others than I remembered or expected, cut me short with a glance. He coolly but politely wished me safe travel to San'a', remarking that the road inland was no longer as safe to travel as it had been in years past. The road between Aden and San'a' was maintained in enviable safety because of the blood bond between ibn Yasir and his sire.

I must tread carefully in San'a'. Any goods acquired here in Aden will need to be transported north, and the land route up the coast is more convenient and less expensive. You are likely not surprised, reader, that I also do not relish the idea of placing myself in the midst of a conflict between a powerful sire and his childe.

It will take several days, at least, to make arrangements with the local traders and warehouses — longer if the process includes bullying, cajoling or rooting out those under Walid Set influence. This will extend the amount of time I had planned to spend in Aden, pushing us closer to the monsoon season for our long shipboard journey around the peninsula to the Sea of Faris. We will then proceed to San'a' as quickly as possible by camel and horse.

San'a'

2 June 1195

We made remarkable time to San'a', and our animals show the wear for it. The mangy camel I chose to gift with my blood so that it would carry me without complaint was a hearty enough beast, but possessed of a gait that could break the bones of a mortal man. Several times through the trip it shook my palanquin hard enough to wake me from my daytime slumber. In those dreadful moments, the searing heat of the sun just outside the closed curtains pressed in on me, and the Beast shrieked fearfully above the drone of the Keening. You can infer my survival from the continuation of my narrative, of course, but I despise being pushed to such extremes by a clumsy beast of burden. I look forward to slitting the creature's throat on our return to port.

The oppressive heat subsided somewhat as we climbed into the foothills that surround Mount Nuqum to reach San'a', nestled at its western foot. The mountain guards the approach from the east; the massive walls, thirty feet tall in many places, protect the rest of the city, and not coincidentally provide its name: "the fortified place." The local people believe that Shem, son of Noah, founded their city. Whether this is truth or not, the city has harbored the children of Seth for as long as any other founded by the masses of humanity. Christians and Jews lived here, an oasis of godliness in the deserts of pagan Arabia, in the dark times before the Prophet shared his enlightenment. The Jewish quarter, the Qa' al-Yahud, remains to this day in the western part of the city, secure behind its own walls like so many other residential communities. Its craftsmen are among the finest silver and goldsmiths on the peninsula.

I will visit the Jewish quarter some other night. I am currently ensconced safely in the Suq al-Mills, the salt market. This vast marketplace is composed of many smaller *suq* selling a great variety of goods despite the name of the place. It begins just inside the city's main point of entry, the Yemen Gate, and extends past al-Jami' al-Kabir, San'a's great mosque. This geographical arrangement makes it far easier for me to gain access to the *suq* after dark, as there is significant traffic around both gate and mosque after the setting of the sun. I have not visited the great mosque, nor will I — it is primarily a place of worship for the Zaydis. There are 106 mosques within the great walls of San'a', several within sight of my quarters. I would be best for me to visit one of them before the night ends.

Soon I will rouse Karif and Sanjar from their travel-weary slumbers for a quick civics lesson. San'a' is unusual among Muslim trading cities in that it has codified, in a written document, the accepted manner of conducting business transactions within its walls. This is a remarkable aid to traveling traders, as we are unfamiliar with what decisions might be rendered by Zaydi-influenced *qadi* should a contract fall through. Because we have such a short period of time before we must rush to sea ahead of the monsoon winds, even Karif might be pressed into meeting with merchants during daylight hours, and I wish to avoid any legal repercussions he might incur in addition to suffering through the "bargains" he makes. I myself will meet with the Ashirra recommended by Sultan ibn Yasir in Aden. Unfortunately, the resident Ashirra of the city have no such introductory document available.

4 June 1195

Tonight I met with Harvinder al-Cambay, a Cainite well established in San'a' though he hails from Indian

shores. To be honest, I do not know if he is Ashirra; he was among those merchants recommended to me by ibn Yasir, he has no outstanding disputes with any members of the Ashirra community, and he has adopted a Muslim-style name of a sort. These things will have to be enough. Al-Cambay lives in an opulent section of the city. The watchmen admitted me with no complaint, but I was escorted to my host's dwelling by two of their number. The houses here, and in the many ancient and wealthy communities to be found in the city, are built of black rock and sandy brick, with intricate carvings adorning windows and friezes. The dark stone holds the summer heat long after the sun sets; brushing too close to the walls can be alarming to the distracted.

The wealth to support my host in such a luxurious unlife comes from his lucrative trade in mortal men and women. I will have to deal with others to make arrangements for the transport or purchase of spices and valuable trinkets from the coast of Africa; al-Cambay specializes only in the sale of slaves and has a reputation for providing healthy and fit specimens. His selection was much narrower than I might choose from in Cairo because of his location on only one slave trade route, but I look forward to the pleasure of working with a trader who is not one of Set's faithful in this delicate area of business. Since there was relatively little to dicker over in regard to variety, and I was unwilling to drive a hard bargain after my experience in Egypt, our business matters concluded early in the evening and left time for other conversation.

It became quickly obvious that my host was far more conversant in seafaring matters than I. He was intrigued by my neophyte explanations of the *qārib*'s rigging and rudder, and eagerly asked to accompany me back to Aden to see the marvel of engineering for himself. I readily agreed; after cementing the beginnings of a pleasant working relationship in this manner, I felt more comfortable broaching political matters. My new friend informed me that San'a's sultan, Abd al-Haqq, has not been seen for many years. There have been no great crises in that time — according to al-Cambay, none of the city's Ashirra are interested in assuming the position of sultan, at least not enough to anger each other or Abd al-Haqq's loyal supporters. Given the nature of our kind, which I assume you know too well, readers, I find this difficult to believe, though I did not say so to my host. The sultan's *ansar* functionaries have, one by one, dropped from sight. The lights within his haven, the imam's summer palace to the northwest of the city's massive walls, once blazed all night, throwing shadows down the steep outcropping of rock that it perched upon; now the windows go dark like the rest of the city.

We parted after making arrangements to travel south together in several days time. I have woken Karif to instruct him to forgo his "trading" for tomorrow in order to watch the imam's palace through the next night. He is only too happy to comply.

5 June 1195

We leave San'a' tomorrow night. Karif has confirmed that there is no unusual nighttime activity at the imam's summer palace, at least none that he has been able to observe in his few nights of surveillance. I have spoken with several more of the city's Ashirra in the course of conducting business and sharing news gathered on my travels, and all of them are curiously lacking in political motivation. I am, of course, an outsider, but I pride myself on being both an affable listener and a canny elicitor; I do not brag when I claim that I should be able to infer the presence of a citywide plot from my conversations, should one exist. I even spoke with Abd al-Haqq's youngest childe, Sakan. She is still a fledgling, who was not so long ago a fetching nomad maiden fresh from the desert. I expected no lofty political aspirations from her, but I did expect that she might have some knowledge of her sire's disposition — and that she might be the easiest person to pry that information from. The young creature seemed to find nothing untoward about her current unguided state — a condition I find deplorable — and could provide me with no information as to what might have befallen the sultan. I can only hope for her sake that other Ashirra have

Slavery in the Muslim World

Slaves are an accepted part of most medieval Muslim cities. The vast majority are women who work at domestic tasks or serve as concubines. The remaining slaves in a city are eunuchs entrusted with household security. Outside the cities, slaves (mostly male) cultivate the land or serve in the military. Freeborn Muslims can never be enslaved; all slaves are non-Muslim captives of war, victims of slave raids or the children of slaves.

Slavery is not necessarily a dead end. Islamic law and custom afford certain rights to slaves and decree it a worthy act to grant a slave his or her freedom. A freed slave might even marry into the family or take an important role in his former owner's business. Freed military slaves often formed a loyal bastion of experienced warriors for a dynasty — or founded dynasties of their own.

volunteered to educate her, since the Beast is often unbearably strong in the early years.

I have done all that I can in such a short time. I have acquired warehouse space, and contracts for spices, slaves, ivory, precious woods and rare stones. Whoever may be in control of the city's evening affairs, they seem as solid as the surrounding walls. There is always risk in trade, and here I must take the risk that the darkened streets of San'a' might soon run red with immortal blood as its residents grapple for power. It is, truly, no greater a risk than I take in any city where Ashirra or other Cainites gather in such numbers.

1 July 1195

Our return to the Gulf of Aden was hurried but safe. The sedentary residents of San'a' and Aden may overestimate the danger of the route between the two cities, but our safety may also have been due to Harvinder al-Cambay's large, well-armed escort. I usually consider such extraordinary measures to be counterproductive and prefer the safety of the appearance of modest means. However, the large entourage was entirely funded by al-Cambay and it seemed to give him a feeling of reassurance — and it also meant that I did not have to ride that ungainly camel. Al-Cambay expressed both wonderment and delight at the design of my ship's keel and rudder, and wished to rent the craft from me for a short cruise. I had to decline, although his offer was attractive; we will encounter the monsoon winds before we reach the Gulf of Oman as it stands, and any further delay might be catastrophic. Also, I confess to you, my readers, that while I have enjoyed the company of this Cainite for the weeks that I have known him, I did not relish the idea of giving him free access to my haven or my crew. Even a simple lack of caution in dealing with the superstitious men who control my ship could jeopardize my safety, especially as I will take refuge in torpor for the long journey around the southern end of the peninsula.

19 August 1195

When I woke from slumber in the Gulf of Oman, I was damp through. For all of our hurry leaving port, the monsoon winds caught the *qārib* past the port of Dhufar, approximately halfway to our destination of Suhar, 18 days into our voyage. Sanjar tells me that, after several days of high seas and driving rain, many of the Egyptian-style shipbuilder's fastenings, which had to be adapted in Cairo for our Andalusian-built ship, sprung leaks under the strain. The crew spent days bailing and repairing the ship while simultaneously keeping it upright and moving toward our destination. Sanjar and Karif took sole responsibility for the enclosed deck area that sheltered me. The dry areas of the compartment were devoted first to our records and contracts, including this journal, and then to the preservation of delicate goods. I am somewhat discomfited to think that I was left to pickle in the brine, but I have suffered no ill effects from my immersion besides a temporary leaching of dye from my clothing to my skin. Enough goods were spoiled as it stands, and I appreciate that my *ansar* saved an additional body length of spices from the flooding waters.

We should reach Suhar in several days. Once there, we will make quick repairs and assess the damage done to our cargo.

Suhar

23 August 1195

We have safely made harbor in Suhar. The crew and my associates are exhausted from constant vigilance and bailing. I myself have contributed to the nighttime water removal activities under the confines of the deck. Karif reports that the crew is unhappy with my virtual disappearance through the course of this near-calamity, but that their grumblings are restricted to my supposed sense of entitlement as a rich merchant and include no suspicions as to my predatory nature.

There will be little rest in port. The ship must be repaired, salvageable goods dried and repacked, and provisions bought for the mortals on board. It is fortunate that my official business in this port is restricted to one important item: frankincense.

For those of you among my readers who are unfamiliar with the importance of frankincense, allow me to explain briefly. For many centuries the resin of the frankincense tree was worth more than its weight in gold. The resin burns easily and with a pleasant fragrance, so it was used in religious rituals as incense. Its smoke has preservative and medicinal properties, so it was used by doctors to fight disease and by embalmers to combat decay. Lastly, it was used as the basis for rich perfumed oils that ranked among the grandest luxuries. Although frankincense was in high demand, the tree grows only in southern Arabia and a small area of Africa across the Sea of Qulzum. The peoples of these areas were greatly enriched by the frankincense trade. In recent years, the demand for frankincense has fallen dramatically as many of the world's peoples have moved away from the pagan's religious practices that demanded the propitiation of spirits through the use of incense. My clan's sorcerers, however, still make an unhealthy habit of such practices; hence, my need to visit Suhar to ensure our continued access to this resource.

The port city has not fared as well politically as it has financially. Like so many other cities vital to trade,

Suhar has been inhabited for millennia. Its original importance derived from abundant deposits of copper that were greatly desired by the Mesopotamians at the far end of the Sea of Faris, since that region lacks its own metal resources. The control of Suhar and other local ports changed with the rise and fall of empires between the Tigris and Euphrates — first Assyrians, then the Persians and now the caliphs of Islam — punctuated by inevitable local uprisings. Since the ninth century, violent Khawarij and Ismaili sects who moved to this region to escape Sunni control have often led those uprisings. The Qarmatians, who sacked Mecca in the 10th century and stole the Black Stone of the Ka'ba, found shelter in this region, but the caliphs of Baghdad and the depredations of the fierce desert tribes have destroyed their political power. The Ibadis, the only Khawarij sect spared the purge of the violent fanatics due to their more moderate views, are still a force to be reckoned with. They control the hilly interior, mostly leaving the coast and its port cities to outside control. In times of lax control, however, the Ibadis and the nomads make trouble for the occupying forces.

This is such a time of lax control. I do not know who is in control of the city, even though I have disembarked and made my way through the *madina*. The city, which a spare 200 years ago was a jewel in the crown of Islam, stands largely unused, with abandoned buildings tumbling from neglect. The harbor, once full of ships that had ventured far across the Arabian Sea, stands nearly empty.

I have paid a visit to the sultan's haven. It has been burned, the roofs and floors dismantled so that no hiding place from the sun remains. I am saddened; the sultan of Suhar was a Wah'Sheen woman from an Ibadi background who for decades maintained a truce between her fiery clanmates who roam the hills and deserts with nomad tribes and the cosmopolitan city dwellers. I am certain that she has gone to God, and likewise certain that without her presence, the daylight and starlight residents of Suhar are subject to violent and bloody raids by mortal and immortal enemies.

I have no desire to be a victim. I would stay on my ship, no matter how dank, but my presence would interfere with repairs. Instead, we will make our repairs



quickly, cast our nets for frankincense merchants to ensure the survival of some of our contacts and leave for the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Faris in less than one week.

The Fertile Crescent

14 September 1195

I have related to you previously, readers, that this is a chaotic time in much of the world of Islam. It is no different here in the lush lands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Please bear with my necessarily long-winded recitation, readers—and pay attention, as this knowledge could prove vitally important should you need to travel through these lands and further east. The Arabic 'Abbasid dynasty, established on the bones of the world-shaking Umayyad dynasty long ago in the year 750, still holds some sway in this region. However, their power has been consistently whittled away; in these nights, the 'Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad are religious figureheads only. This does not necessarily make them less dangerous for beings of our nature.

The power of the armies is divided among three Turkish dynasties. The Seljuq branch of the Oguz tribe was the dominant force in the region for almost a century and a half, after ousting the Persian upstarts that had wrested power from the 'Abbasids. The devout Seljuq leaders took the title of sultan; by acknowledging the authority of the caliph, they reunited the great Muslim empire.

But there will always be barbarians at the gates. The Karakhanid tribe took the valuable cities of Bukhara and Samarkand (to which I must later travel) from 'Abbasid governors. They became vassals as Seljuq power grew but turned on their lords under the coercion of the Khitan peoples who were expelled from their native Taugast. This mighty alliance, the Kara-khitai Empire, brought the Seljuq military to its knees at Samarkand in the year 1141. The battles have continued since.

Yet more betrayal by the Karakhanid people dogs the Seljuq sultans. The Karakhanid governors of the Khwarizm region, appointed for their faithful service, declared loyalty to the Karakhitai after their victory at Samarkand. Such dubious loyalties quickly proved worthless; in less than a generation, the Khwarizm-Shah had declared independence and set out to war on both of his previous benefactors.

The situation today is chaos and war. I do not know who will control the port of Basra when I land, nor who will command the great city of Baghdad, the capital of the 'Abbasid Empire, when I reach it. The capital may change hands several times as I make my way upriver. Times of danger are always times of opportunity; at least all participants in this war are Muslim, so that I may expect certain niceties to be observed wherever I travel. The Christian invaders to the west cannot be so trusted.

Basra

16 September 1195

The 'Abbasid and Seljuq presences in Basra are entirely gone. I had expected conflict, but I had not dreamed that the vast Seljuq armies would simply disappear from such a vital location. The Seljuq forces, the harbor watchmen tell me, pulled back northeast more than a year ago. Perhaps they maintain a presence in Baghdad; the locals do not know, so I will not find out until I get there.

It is not surprising that Basra was given up so easily. The port is incredibly important geographically, but its history has been fraught with trouble from the beginning. The city was founded in the 7th century by an Umayyad caliph for use as a military encampment. The confluence of the great Tigris and Euphrates rivers forms the shallow and broad lake of Al-Hammar, which then drains to the Sea of Faris through a course called the Shatt Al-Arab. Basra is nestled on the western bank of the Shatt Al-Arab. Creeks and marshes abound, forming canals through the city itself; for all the abundant water, Basra has always had trouble providing potable water for its residents. The city suffered through three internal revolts in the span of one century under the Umayyad dynasty. The 'Abbasid line was faced with three more: slave uprisings by the migrant Zotts from the Indian east, and the Zanj from Africa, took years to quell. The last event was more invasion than revolt; the troublemaking Qarmatians sacked the city, a devastation from which Basra has never fully recovered. With such constant upheavals, it is understandable that many merchant families relocated their fortunes to the city of Siraf on the eastern shore of the Sea of Faris. I fear that this latest chapter in the city's history has written a final end to Basra's brilliant contributions to Islamic culture. Even amid this constant strife, the vibrant mix of peoples to be found here sparked literary artistry and religious scholarship only recently rivaled by the shining cities of Andalus.

I face the task of unthreading Basra's midnight alliances with a mixture of anticipation and dread. In its prime, the city may have hosted more than ten score Cainites from the corners of the world. The Ashirra

could count only a bare majority, yet they controlled the city. In times of upheaval, heretical creatures from distant lands have grasped at any opportunity to weaken the Ashirra's control.

17 September 1195

The situation is worse than I had hoped. Sanjar reports that the city functions well enough by day: Though governors have fled, the administrators who maintain the city's basic functions — the remnants of Persian nobility who have directed affairs in this region for hundreds of years — have remained at their posts. By night, however, the *suq* of the Ashar market district are the scene of a taut truce, with Cainites of all degrees of enmity glaring at each other across quickly emptying tents and stalls. All eyes follow when one group or another dares to leave along the close and overhung streets; more than once I heard faint sounds of conflict echoing back to add to the ambient tension.

Matters worsened when my companions and I slipped from the *suq* to prowl the residential sectors. We were set upon not once but three times in three separate quarters: once by four Cainites whose high generation and few years were quickly apparent; once by small but enraged mob and its equally predatory master; and lastly, most discomfortingly, by a crowd of torch-wielding men or *ansar*. I had neither time nor inclination to investigate that matter, as the first two encounters left us weak enough. Volunteers customarily patrol the residential quarters of Muslim cities. It would appear that the voluntary status of many of Basra's nightly patrols has been revoked. As I have proclaimed to you before, readers, I am no warrior, but I am experienced. I knew that the most prudent path was to return to the *suq* and my guarded rooms therein. I sincerely hope the guards are well paid.

18 September 1195

I have received a not entirely welcome visitor. One of the angry torchbearers knocked at my door — his flame left behind — and offered to barter information for a draught of my vitae. He gave his name as Yusri al-Margil. He claimed to be the abandoned servant of a Turkish Ashirra who fled with the retreating Seljuqs. He and others left in such a desperate position have maintained their empowered state since that time by bargaining with the few Cainite travelers to pass through, or by hunting, assaulting and destroying those young Cainites which now run amok in the city. There is no sultan or Ashirra imam in Basra, he reported; each walled enclave has its own chieftain, none of them yet powerful enough to subdue all potential rivals. Those of some age and subtlety proceed in the time-honored fashion by grasping at mortals with power and influence. Upstarts in the poorer quarters, however, are spawning small armies of childer; after sundown, behind the closed gates, the blood of faithful men and women runs red through the streets to feed the hungry fledglings. Most disturbing, Yusri believes that one of these enclaves may be infested with the Baali.

I dismissed the man as quickly as possible. I was uncomfortable giving my blood to such as him, an admitted slayer of my kind. But a bargain is a bargain, and I keep my word. I must not completely trust him, of course. Even if the beginnings of his tale are true, his reckless hunt for vitae to sustain his unnatural condition has left him open to manipulation by any of the city's Cainites. The majority of what he has told me holds well with what I have seen, however. We will make what arrangements we may with mortal traders — as quickly as they die, merchant families are more stable than the undead in nights like these. The boat is to be transferred to Captain Abu Ragid, who pays for the craft with services and goods. I cannot be sure when I will return from the east, and it would do little good for the *qārib* to stay idle.

Baghdad

13 October 1195

We arrived in Baghdad in an antiquated conveyance — a boat of woven reeds from the Al-Huwaiza marsh. This was not due to some sort of misguided nostalgia on my part, but rather a capitulation to strange circumstances. On leaving Basra to make our way by boat up the Tigris River, which is relatively sluggish along its lower course, we passed through the homelands of the Ma'dan. The Ma'dan have populated Lake Al-Hammar and the surrounding swamps for 1,000 years or longer; after converting from their entrenched pagan ways to the words of the Prophet, they earned the dubious title of "Marsh Arabs." The Ma'dan warned us that our "modern" riverboat — that is, one made of wooden planks — would put us at risk of attack from the swamp monster that has made its home in the spongy margins of the river. Karif suspected that this was merely a ploy to encourage us to trade our craft in for one of lesser quality, but I detected the ring of truth and of fear in the natives' words. So, the exchange was made, and the natives swiftly wove a small hut athwart our new boat in deference to my obvious status. I have a new respect for the deft fingers of the Ma'dan craftsmen; the enclosure, intended to reflect my wealth, also proved lightproof, just as our boat remained watertight for the duration of the trip. Sanjar reports that by daylight we passed one wooden ship half-overturned along a shallow riverbank. Planks and oars had been

scored and splintered by a creature of great strength and large claws, and those parts not submerged were splattered with dried blood.

Nevertheless, it was strange to enter such a modern, advanced city as Baghdad in such a primitive way. Baghdad is a beautiful place, easily the equal of dusty Cairo in size and splendor. The city is situated on both the western and eastern banks of the Tigris, only 25 miles from the Euphrates to the east. Smaller villages crowd around downstream and across on the opposite riverbank where the Diyala River joins the southward flow, like ardent suitors round a beautiful maiden. The weather this time of year is exceptionally pleasant; the scorching heat of midsummer has passed, leaving the days merely hot and the nights briskly cool. Rain does not mar the summer skies — this is, of course, unfortunate for those who must till the soil, as they must also take pains to irrigate their fields using a network of canals and sluices which they are then taxed to maintain. The city is full of 'Abbasid palaces and grand mosques, and its residences reflect the high stature and wealth of those residents who live so near the seat of imperial power.

The city is not without blemish, of course. The original structures of the 'Abbasid capital, the Round City (which the venerated caliph Al-Mansur would have preferred be called Madinat as-Salam, the "City of Peace"), were badly damaged by royal siblings warring over succession in the ninth century. The city also suffered through the "civilizing" of the Turkish tribes brought in by the 'Abbasids to serve in the armies, and the uprising of the native Persian Buyid dynasty — which should have known how to care for such a glorious city — in the 10th century. This is Baghdad as I remember it — worn, perhaps, but still beautiful and prosperous. The more that I write, the more I find that I dread venturing out into the city tomorrow evening to discover what the vicissitudes of time and mortal politics have done to it.

14 October 1195

Alas, Baghdad is not the city I remember. I knew to expect this, but the changes are still wrenching to behold. The Seljuqs and their sultan are missing here as they were in Basra, and again reports have them retreating northeast — perhaps as far as the Black Sea. The Persians and the Turks between them have let the western bank of the city fall into near ruin. The irrigation system, the vessels for the lifeblood that is the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, is in such disrepair that crops have failed and food is scarce. The grand palace of Al-Mansur's heir is gone, so greatly damaged in the conflicts that it has simply been dismantled. Still, even amid such disarray and despair, the residents of Baghdad (still perhaps a quarter million in number) make every attempt to preserve the beauty of their city. New construction in the city is centered on the area between the al-Mu'azzam Gate in the north and ash-Sharqi Gate to the south. A new palace is under construction to house the 'Abbasid caliph, and it promises to be the equal of the one now lost. Other spaces are being cleared for the construction of a college of law and a new mosque. It heartens me to see the city and its people so adamantly resist the chaos of recent years.

My mood was further lifted by a visit to an old acquaintance. I cannot call Ishaq ibn Khayrat a friend; he is so far beyond me in years and learning that I would demean him by pretending to such a status. Ibn Khayrat was in life a greatly esteemed physician, and in death is a member of the Qabilat al-Mawt, the clan my readers familiar with the ways of Europe know as the Cappadocians. He continues to improve his vast knowledge to the benefit of mortal patients. He resides in Baghdad's 'Azdi Hospital, where he provides guidance to the hospital's administrators and staff, and even consults with the private doctors to the nobility on particularly intriguing disorders. I am acquainted with the esteemed doctor mainly through correspondence; his practice requires a reliable source of strange fruits, herbs and oils which are transformed by the physicians' hands into remarkable cures. Our traders, and many others, supply those needs. My sire does not take a profit on these transactions, and in fact we often see a loss. We consider it to be part of the charity all good Muslims must provide.

The hospital is a marvel of architecture, and its functioning is a tribute to the piety of its founders. Airy halls lead to courtyards planted with orchards and embellished with fountains, where the patients may bask in the warm sun and fresh air. Baths with both hot and cold water are also available. No expense is spared for the care of the patients: They eat meat every day for strength, imbibe rare medicines from the well-stocked pharmacy and even cool summer fevers with ice. The hospital's doctors are present to care for patients at all hours, day and night. To ensure their competence, the doctors must pass examinations of their skill and continue their study by means of the vast library within the hospital's walls. They perform marvelous feats, even cutting into living tissue to repair eyes or excise tumors. All of this is provided to the citizens of Baghdad regardless of their ability to pay for their care — not even the meanest waif is turned away from the hospital doors.

Ibn Khayrat welcomed me in the courtyard and led me to his offices, which he has maintained for many years with the full knowledge and cooperation of the hospital administrators. Pleasantries were exchanged, and the hospital's current and expected needs discussed. He seemed mostly unconcerned that the city teetered on the brink of war, except where such matters impact the delivery of needed supplies or increase the numbers of supplicants in need of aid — the details of the administration of empires has never held much interest for him. His greatest concern, and the matter on which he wished my advice (to my great surprise), was the safety of his traveling physicians. The 'Abbasid rulers have always seen the wisdom of maintaining the health of the empire. To this end, they sent out groups of doctors to outlying provinces to minister to the people and report back on their pressing needs. Ibn Khayrat has improved on this scheme; the learned men he sends out among the people are also trained in the arts of observation and have some knowledge of the occult. Not only can these men report a threatening plague or a rash of waterborne illnesses, they can determine the presence of a degenerate Ashirra, rampaging Cainite or marauding Lupine pack threatening the populace. I gladly shared what information I could on safe routes and possible threats. These men provide a great service at tremendous risk to their lives — if only all Ashirra had such bravery!

In the near-complete blackness, I crossed the river to the al-Karkh bazaar district south of the ruined Round City. Picking my way along streets strewn with debris from the crumbling houses of the formerly rich, I reached an alley with one intact structure. By day, it is a curio shop, though the few remaining residents here have little use for curiosity. By night, it is the haunt of a strange Persian sorceress named Mania. I have never before paid a visit to her shop, but other of my sire's childer had warned me of her unnerving ways. Even so forewarned, I was shaken by my visit.

Mania waited for my arrival, crouched directly opposite the door like some bony cat. I had not been aware that she knew of my planned visit. Set on edge by her posture and the acrid smells of some arcane working of hers, I quickly produced my list of ingredients and tools required by our own unnerving sorcerers. Muttering irascibly at my careful script, Mania barked orders and demands in the Persian tongue to, I thought, the air. After some confusion, I discerned that she addressed these orders to a series of small statues that perched on the shelves and counters of her storefront. These statues seemed to be made of colorful glass blown into elongated and grotesque approximations of human form, none of them more than two hands high. Their poses looked uncomfortable and in some cases obscene, and bending closer to examine one in the darkness I noted something like swirling smoke encased in the glass. As I straightened, trying to mask my growing discomfort, Mania subjected a small creature of blue glass to a particularly scathing diatribe — my familiarity with Persian does not cover many of the invectives she used.

The bad-tempered woman then drew me to a back room, plucking with her bent and horny fingers at my sleeve, to fetch some particularly heavy bundle. This I did. On returning to the front room, all of the remaining items on my list were gathered on the counter, wrapped neatly and bundled with twine. The glass statues were frozen in poses — but each had assumed a new position and a new perch. The ill-fated blue construct that Mania had so scathingly addressed was in jagged pieces on the floor. I counted out payment in gold with shaking hands. Other payment is to be rendered in promised favors; I can only wish that my sire does not tap me to perform any sort of service for this woman. I fervently hope that it is only *djinn* that Mania has trapped within her figures of glass.

23 October 1195

The end of our fortnight in Baghdad is nearing. I have spent entire evenings attempting to find the proper being to make introduction to — it would not do to anger a creature of such power as to claim this substantial territory. The reputed sultan of Baghdad has been present here since it grew from a military encampment to a town. I do not know this venerable creature's name, but all in Baghdad are aware that it wishes to be titled Caliph Abd-al-Hadi. Baghdad's eternal caliph disappeared, it is rumored, before the Seljuq retreat. This is not terribly unusual — an Ashirra of such incredible age might often slip into the restful arms of torpor for spans of time. What is unusual is that Abd-al-Hadi's closest advisors left with the retreating forces, or, according to more vicious rumor, were cut down by age-old enemies who bided centuries for a chance at revenge. No one knows where to find the caliph, whether in torpor or fled with the others. Yet no one is willing to risk stepping into that role, lest the effrontery alone should waken him.

To preserve the orderly running of the city's nightly affairs, the grandchilder and further removed heirs of the caliph's line have stepped to the fore and assumed roles of supposed authority. I believe, although I cannot prove it, that these young Ashirra are under the guidance of the elders of Baghdad's other clans. (I call them young, readers, but remember that young to a grandsire

aged many centuries is older than I, and likely older than most of you.) Whether through natural talent or the collusion of these elders, the caliph's reluctant heirs are proving able administrators and diplomats. I cannot trust that this situation will long last, however. The Ashirra here are currently on an emergency footing, but once the elder mentors have had time to grow comfortable with the situation and firmly sink their claws into their students, the intrigues will thicken as they always do.

My introductions were finally made to the newly appointed mistress of the wharves, and therefore of trade, Munya ibnat Mutaz. She received them politely, if somewhat uncertainly. Her task so far has consisted of ensuring that no supernatural aid is provided to those who would smuggle goods past Baghdad's inspectors and tax collectors, thereby depriving the treasury and her mortal allies of funds. In such a position, she is not used to much in the way of courtesies. Never one to miss an opportunity, I warned her of the possible Setite threat from the west, encouraging her to pay careful attention to any spice or slave merchants of suspicious origin. I doubt the Serpents will make ambitious moves to corner trade on the Sea of Faris in the near future, but vigilance (especially another's vigilance) is never wasted. Munya ibnat Mutaz did not take my advice lightly. I do not doubt that she will now watch the passengers that arrive at her darkened wharves as closely as she watches their cargo.

I have heard that the representatives of Bay't Mushakis are to descend on Baghdad in five years for their decennial gathering. I can only hope the city is in good hands by that time. Debate among a clan of zealots in a city without firm leadership would seem a recipe for disaster. But I will be far from Baghdad then, I am sure.

Central Asia

The remainder of my time in Baghdad, I dedicate to preparations for the long trek east along the Silk Road. I am filled with a sense of adventure that I have not felt for many years, not since the awe-filled nights just after my Embrace. I have never traveled further east than Baghdad before, alive or dead. So much of my existence has been directed toward maintaining what I built in life that it thrills me to have this chance at an experience completely new to the heightened perceptions with which I have been gifted. The mundane details of the trip seem almost blasphemous beside my fevered imaginings: horses, carts, guards, food for the mortals. Perhaps Sanjar can handle the preparations; I do not have the attention for them.

Samarkand

25 February 1196

I write this section safely from a room in Samarkand, having met this evening with the city's aged and powerful sultan, Karim. Unlike many Cainites his age that I have met, Karim seems to have retained most of his vigor; he followed with interest and probing questions the harrowing tale which I will relate below. I noticed only minor idiosyncrasies: The sultan seemed to feel that he must remain in his sandalwood-embellished chair despite obvious urges to stand and move around. And since we do not feel the winter cold as strongly as mortals do, it seemed strange that he was enshrouded in heavy robes and thick gloves. A puzzle for another time, I suspect.

In light of the perils I recounted on the road from Nishapur, Sultan Karim offered me lodging in his sumptuous estate in a wealthy quarter of Samarkand. It is a beautiful city: Six main roads converge on the center, one from each gate in the thick, high wall. That wall encloses an area more than a mile and a half across, with sturdy stone buildings — some of which date back at least as far as Alexander of Macedon. The city does not lack for wealth, lying as it does at the junction of trade routes from far Taugast and the lands of the Hindu to the southeast. Wealthy merchants walk from trader to trader laden with silver and gold, even after sundown.

On to the trip from Baghdad: Knowing full well that this trip would take more than three months, I was of two minds. I could will myself into a long sleep; this would reduce travel time, as I would have no need to hunt for blood in the towns through which we passed. However, in such a torpor I would be unable to aid my traveling companions should they come into danger, and I would be extremely vulnerable to attack. In the end I decided to remain conscious and aware of myself along the road from Baghdad to Nishapur; and then, as the land grew less fertile and the human population smaller, I entered torpor for most of the trip from Nishapur to Samarkand.

My emergence from torpor was rather fortuitous; on the night after I awoke, just outside of Bukhara and only a few days from Samarkand, my companions and I encountered a few strange vampires. They were riders from the northern steppe and spoke the local tongue only haltingly. Though filthy with road dirt and barbaric in visage, these three were clearly of the lineage of Caine; they demanded my companions' blood in

> **For More...**
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> ... on the strange, pagan "Caitiff" who deal with our narrator outside Bukhara, see **Wind from the East**. These are the Anda, a line of Wah'Sheen who ride with the Mongols.

payment for our passage and for interrupting their council — they used the word *kuriltai*, I believe.

Though our numbers were closely matched, I did not wish to fight these strangers. I was too hungry, and the danger of loss of control this close to our destination was too great. I agreed to give them any information they desired in return for safe passage. They interrogated me on the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, showing particular interest in the vampiric residents of these cities and the cities' defenses. I attempted to be cautious with my divulgences, as I have no desire to be the instrument in the barbarian sacking of a Muslim city. My roadside "hosts" were pagans and remarkably ignorant of Cainite lore and customs; I can only assume that they are some abandoned line of Caitiff.

After a few hours of this nerve-wracking questioning and a close examination of our Arabian horses (which they dismissed as somehow inferior to their own scruffy ponies) they seemed satisfied and let us pass; I heard their hoofbeats riding away, to the northeast, not long afterward. After passing through the gates of the city, I followed the steps I had been given to reach Sultan Karim, and this takes us to the beginning of the evening's tale. Dawn approaches; the time has come to retire.

28 February 1196

This evening's encounter has proven too unnerving not to commit to paper. While shuffling back and forth between the homes of two merchants eager to curry my master's favor, I nearly collided with a madman singing tales of disaster. I would have paid him no heed but for the sharp and extended fangs he wore. I was unable to have a coherent conversation with him, so overwhelmed was he by his personal demons, but I gathered that his name was Alam, and if he was not one of the *djinn*-possessed scions of Bay't Majnoon, then he had acquired his madness through pains I shall never discern.

Alam sees the destruction of Samarkand all around him. Skeletal men on horseback, I believe, plundering as they go and burning everything their fingers touch. They are only an advance guard, leading archers ten feet tall who run with the wind's speed, and flying men who carry rivers in their arms. Alam recoils from their attacks as though they are real, though I assure you they exist only in his mind.

Most disturbing to me was Alam's reaction when he calmed down enough to see my face. "Your death is on the wing," he said, his voice deep and for a moment perfectly rational. "You can hide no longer from the hand" — such was his emphasis — "that reaches for you. Make ready your affairs."

He left me soon after this, but I had to cancel the rest of my meetings for the evening. What did he see?

Ghazni

9 May 1196

The journey from Samarkand to Ghazni has been trying and hazardous. After our encounter with the degenerate Cainites outside Samarkand, I did not dare to consider closing my eyes for an instant longer than it took for the sun to cross the sky. We were therefore slowed by my need to hunt for blood among the rough peoples of the area — people often fiercely pagan in practice even as they proclaim the faith of Islam. And although we have traveled south, we have also quite literally climbed mountains, crossing the Kushan Pass through the Kabul Kuhestan mountains. Sanjar and Karif were miserable but fared well enough thanks to my vitae flowing in their veins. Our caravan guards and horse handlers were less fortunate; though all survived, some suffered frozen extremities and one fractured a leg. Better him than the stallion he led — the horse we would have had to put down.

Once we reached the city of Kabul, the weather improved and our path followed more temperate altitudes. Kabul is a burgeoning city, but a parasitic one. It produces little of note but thrives on taxes leeched from merchants such as myself who must use the passes to the north, west and east to transport goods through the mountains. (Yes, readers, I recognize the humor in accusing others of parasitism. I doubt that those I fed from in Kabul found much amusement in the comparison.)

The city of Ghazni is the new home of the Gurid Empire. Two decades ago it belonged to the Ghaznavid dynasty, which was granted governorship of the region by the Samanid Turks, then turned on its benefactors to claim the southern portion of their territory. The Ghaznavids first earned the enmity of the Gurid tribesmen in the early 11th century by murdering an esteemed chieftain within Ghazni's walls — by poison, no less. The tribesmen sacked the city in outrage and came back a century later to reclaim their prize with the collapse of outlying Seljuq influence. Gurid power is spreading the Muslim faith south through the Khyber

Pass into the rich Indian lands once controlled by their enemies, lands abundant with gold easily taken from indolent Indian lords.

It is this southward push that has brought me here. The Gurid sultans are desperate for horses, especially horses of the quality to be found in my homeland of Arabia. The light cavalry they field is the terror of the north Indian plains, and they purchase any horse brought this far, even an aged nag, in the hopes that one more colt may be coaxed from its womb. They do not lack the resources to pay; they return from their southward sallies hauling as much gold as they can carry, and with slaves taken in battle to carry yet more gold. I have been in Ghazni for one evening only, and yet I have already acquired copious quantities of both commodities. I may well need the slaves to carry us back if I cannot resist the urge to sell the very horses out from under us.

One item in particular I have accepted in trade is fascinating to me. It is a statue wrought from gold so pure that it has a rosy cast, inlaid with precious red and yellow rubies. At its height, nearly four hands high, it must be hollow, else I would not be able to easily lift it. The statue's visage is fearsome, its mouth full of sharp teeth and its many arms waving martial implements about its head. I cannot tell if it is meant to depict a male or a female, as it seems to have attributes of both. The merchant who gave me this in trade told me it was the central altarpiece of some bloody pagan temple. I can understand why the icon drew worshippers. My gaze is continually pulled to the strange figure — it has taken far too long to write this night's entry while my eyes are continually drawn to the statue and the shadows that dance behind it even in the lampless dark. I took a moment to cover the thing but found myself beside it again, the cloth in my hands.

We will not spend long in Ghazni — we do not have to, as quickly as we can rid ourselves of horses. Then, we return to Samarkand to proceed further east along the Silk Road. These are not strictly the instructions of my sire, but neither of us could know that I would come into such a fortune in the wilds of these Asian kingdoms. This wealth would simply be whittled away by taxes as we returned west. Far better that I return my detailed records to my sire by another means, and venture further east to expand upon our good fortune. The mariners of Taugast know the way to my home; I will return on one of their strange ships with the boxy sails, piled stem to stem with exotic rarities. I have come all this way, and I cannot bring myself to turn back now.

I release this writing of my childe's to the scribes. He would not have taken the trouble to document so much of his journeying if he did not intend for his account to be distributed and read.

I was wrenched from my daylight sleep in the month of April, the 10th day, in the year 1196, by a feeling like my quiescent heart had been ripped from my chest. In a red-limned vision, I saw my childe, who now know as Abu Fakim Kateb, rent limb from limb by five creatures of demonic countenance. His blood — my blood! — gouted from his rent body to drench them all in the evidence of their crime.

I have traveled thousands of miles to retrieve his effects. All that remained was a bundle of leather-bound records, including this journal, hidden by one of his loyal attendants before he too met his end.

My childe was trusting — an amusing flaw, perhaps, for one who makes his way through the night as a trader. I am vengeful — an equally amusing flaw, perhaps, for one who considers himself a scholar. To any of you who might have been complicit in the murder of my childe, be aware — I hunt you. You cannot wash yourselves clean of the crimson stain that comes from my own veins. I will revenge my childe's destruction, regardless of the cost. Count closely your nights.

Characters

Following are some of the characters Abu Fahim Kateb, the narrator of the previous sections, encounters on his journey across the Muslim world. The Storyteller may wish to limit access to the following sections, which reveal several secrets of the Ashirra.

Al-Amin (Salubri)

Bahjat, Refugee of Aden

9th generation, childe of an unknown sire

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 1165 CE

Apparent Age: late teens

The vampire known to few as Bahjat is on the run. He remembers very little about his sire, who gave him his new name, or his life before the Embrace — he suspects that his sire granted him her blood in an attempt to cure him of some illness or curse that had affected his memory. Not long after his Embrace and recovery, Bahjat's sire was destroyed and he was forced to flee. Now, all that he can clearly remember is that even others of his own kind hate him and wish to end his strange existence.



He has never met another Cainite bearing the Salubri third eye.

Bahjat has fled quite successfully. Aden is a relatively quiet city, and it is certainly out of the way. He has sensed no pursuit but keeps his profile low to avoid the wrath he expects from Aden's other nightly predators. He tries to scrape some small meaning from his existence by performing what little kindnesses he can without blowing his cover; as such, he is always unfailingly polite at the least. Kindness from others, at least other Cainites, leaves him shaken and unsettled.

Bahjat's features indicate he is at least part Arab; he has forgotten his heritage along with the rest of his mortal life. His average stature and unassuming features make him difficult to pick out of a crowd, which is how he prefers it. His *ghutrah* headdress hides the third eye in his forehead.

Banu Haqim (Assamite)

Abu Fahim Kateb

9th generation vizier, childe of an unrevealed sire

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 1047 CE

Apparent Age: late 20s

The man known here as Abu Fahim Kateb was in life a middle son of a moderately wealthy Arabian trading family. His education, typical for families seeking to improve their social standing, encompassed a strong measure of religion as well as mathematics and science. Only a passable student, his true talents revealed themselves when he graduated to working with merchants and traders as an agent of his family. His ability to remain serene and good-natured in high-pressure negotiations drew the attention of his sire-to-be at a young age. That sire, however, waited until the young trader had worn out many pairs of shoes with the miles he had traveled before Embracing him into the vizier bloodline.

Abu Fahim's skill as a trader has only improved with the uncanny senses granted by his blood — and the decades of practice unavailable to his mortal counterparts. His vizier flaw can sometimes interfere with his work, however; he finds it almost impossible to turn down a "good deal," even if the items are something he has no possible use for.

Abu Fahim's visage has darkened since his Embrace, returning his skin to a shade most mortals





consider "normal" — a fact he takes great advantage of. He prefers to wear the traditional Arabian headdress, the *ghutrah*, and simple desert robes while traveling. Beneath his headgear, his hair is quite long, but his face is clean-shaven, emphasizing its angular features. While in cities, he adds colorful and embellished garments, and a carefully calculated amount of jewelry, to create the impression of status and wealth.

Enam bint Ayub al-Dimshaq

11th generation vizier, childe of Ayub ibn Mehtar

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: 1148 CE

Apparent Age: late teens

Enam al-Dimshaq has only recently arrived in Cordoba, but her position as an outsider, a woman and an Ashirra of high generation (in sum, not a threat) has enabled her to cobble together an information base and an understanding of the current political situation that is far more mature than many of her elders'. There is a genuine touch of naiveté in her worldview and her dealings with other Cainites, however. She is sincerely dedicated to a peaceful resolution to the current religious conflict in Andalus for the children of Seth and Caine, in spite of all indications that the coming war is inevitable.

Al-Dimshaq has cordial relations with almost every Cainite in the city who does not fanatically push a Christian agenda — if not directly with the elders, then through their childer or grandchilder. Ironically, she is perhaps better liked among the nonpartisans than by her fellow Ashirra, many of whom mistrust her inclusive ways.

She maintains her haven and her comfortable wealth through a husband who has been seen only on paper. In public, she dresses as a wealthy young wife, swathing herself in several layers of linen and silk and a hip-length veil. Her indoor clothing — revealed to visitors to her haven who may need some persuasion — conceals considerably less, and reveals her to be a beautiful young woman with full lips and delicately upturned eyes.

Hilel al-Masaari, Sultan of Cordoba

6th generation warrior, childe of Pelagon

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 580 CE

Apparent Age: late 30s

Only other members of his warrior bloodline have seen al-Masaari regularly in the past century. Those who have caught a blurred glimpse of him as he puts his students through their paces report that his skin has darkened to a mahogany shade that seems to absorb moonlight, and that his head and chest are bald.

Residents of Cordoba outside the circle of warriors know some small amount of personal information about al-Masaari — and are more willing to share that knowledge. The ancient Ashirra died and rose to walk again before the birth of the Prophet. None know the circumstances of his conversion, but he is believed to be among the first Assamite converts to Islam, and to have been a strong proponent of the Umayyad campaign of conquest.

Al-Masaari is a fearsome warrior but not much of a politician. The rapid pace with which each mortal dynasty has risen and fallen in Cordoba in recent years is almost literally beyond his comprehension. Though his few rivals for power in the city are successfully flouting his authority at the moment, the sultan is more than willing to take violent action to reduce the city's Cainite population if it proves to be necessary.





Karim, Sultan of Samarkand

8th Generation vizier, childe of Tamarind

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 552 CE

Apparent Age: late 30s

Karim, Sultan of Samarkand, has ruled since he deposed the city's first sultan, an ancient named Nidal, centuries ago. Some 600 years after his Embrace, Karim retains a grudge against wizards and conjurers stemming back to his mortal brother's death in a *djinn*-roused sandstorm. He only reluctantly tolerates the sorcerers of his own *bay't* when he returns to Alamut, and he does not permit them to work their magics in Samarkand. He knows only rumors of the Usurper Tremere and has never encountered one, but few imagine that he would show any mercy were one to arrive in the golden city. Relations with most other vampires remain generally good, so long as none challenge his authority.

Karim's intolerance for wizardry has caused him problems of late. Only a few years ago, he personally led a small cadre of Banu Haqim warriors to root out a nest of wizards on the outskirts of Samarkand. One

of them, with his dying breath, cursed Karim to suffer the numbness of the corpse he is. The sultan began to lose his sense of touch, a curse which quickly progressed from inconvenience to danger. He cannot feel the burning of fire or even sunlight, despite the damage it does to his flesh. He cannot as yet find a cure for his curse, which may soon consume him.

Myrsus ibn Sharbel, Dervish of Tunisia

10th generation sorcerer, childe of Sharbel
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Penitent
Embrace: 1039 CE
Apparent Age: late 30s



The sorcerers of Al-Qayrawan are a secretive lot. When Myrsus was forced to leave the fortress of Alamut, driven out by warriors who found his mystic leanings even more disturbing than those of other sorcerers, he was recruited by the new brotherhood and retreated with them to their stronghold. As one of the youngest of the sorcerers, and therefore possessed of the most recent contacts with the clan and outsiders, Myrsus has been given the dangerous task of meeting with rare visitors and arranging for the vampires' few physical needs to be met. Understandably, Myrsus combines these duties with a search for new recruits of a mystic bent — the sooner he can fill the position he now holds, the sooner he can devote himself to his ecstatic meditation.

Myrsus is unusually tall, so that his light tan robes and veils hang strangely on his figure. His long hair is generally wrapped tightly in a turban, but during dervish rituals it may fly loose in a dizzying blur of cloth, black hair and pale white skin.

Bay't Majnoon (Malkavian)

Alam, Prophet of Samarkand

8th Generation childe of Mahfuz
Nature: Defender
Demeanor: Loner
Embrace: 1091 CE
Apparent Age: indeterminate

Alam is consumed by visions granted by the *djinn* in his blood. He sees the coming hordes of Hell riding over barren plains to destroy the city. As noted in the main text, he has a broad and deep variety of visions. Most of them are delusions: While Alam occasionally receives flashes of insight or visions of the future, for the most part he is wrapped up in scenes of the impossible.



Every six or seven days, however, Alam regains his senses. Usually this is when his vampiric hunger has gotten a bit of insistence and edge to it. Alam is a ruthless and swift hunter: His awareness of the undercurrents of fear and madness that drive humans' activities at night pulls him to likely prey, and he rarely bothers to spare a life.

Alam's head is bald. He is of indeterminate age; the lines around his eyes and mouth are the products of madness, not decrepitude. His eyes are sunken and somewhat hollow, but they burn with an inner light.

Aratz Labarde, Madman of Marrakish

10th generation, childe of an unknown sire
Nature: Monster
Demeanor: Rebel
Embrace: 1134 CE
Apparent Age: early 20s



Aratz Labarde is not sure how he reached Marrakish. One moment, he was a young shepherd tending his flock in the fields of his Iberian homeland. The next, he found himself a blood-crazed fiend, haunting the village he once called home. Later still, the invaders came and enslaved his village; he joined in the dreadful fray — these were his people, not for anyone else's use! And now, finally, he finds himself in this dusty world of red clay, accompanied by very few of his own people, surrounded by so many of the invaders.

Labarde is entirely unused to the company of other Cainites. With prompting, he may recall the Traditions of Caine, which indicates that he has, at some point in the past, been tutored by a sire or mentor. His preoccupation with Methuselahs lurking in the ground also points to some passing familiarity with Cainite history. He has not met any other Cainites in Marrakish; he has not been looking, however, nor is he particularly approachable. His madness surrounds him like a halo, and his nervous habit of scenting the wind for the airborne tang of ancient vitae gives him an animalistic quality.

Bay't Mujrim (Ravnos)

Harvinder al-Cambay, Slave Trader

10th generation, childe of Thakkur
Nature: Innovator
Demeanor: Gallant
Embrace: 1002 CE
Apparent Age: early 30s

Harvinder al-Cambay is a reluctant slave merchant — not because he feels any qualms about dealing in human chattel, but simply because he



yearns to travel. He came from the shores of India and settled in San'a' several decades ago, and arbitrarily chose his trading specialty, deciding he knew more about humans than about strange plant parts or leather crafts. He was correct; since that time his business has grown in leaps and bounds. The chains of that unexpected wealth bind him — he is uncomfortable leaving such fortune behind, but staying put is beginning to chafe just as badly.

Al-Cambay is beginning to study traveling traders and the sons and daughters of the city's merchants, looking for a suitable childe to leave his interests with. In the meantime, it could take very little to send him haring off, leaving his fortune to the pecking crows: a good ship and a strong wind, a road-weary folksong sung on a melancholy day, or a tale of undiscovered riches in some far-off city.

Al-Cambay is a distinguished-looking man with piercing eyes. He has taken on the desert dress and Muslim customs of his adopted city for comfort, and to reassure those put off by his foreign features.

Bay't Mushakis (Brujah)

Gerushah bint Yoav, Sultan of Sevilla

7th generation, childe of Yoav
Nature: Loner
Demeanor: Judge
Embrace: 854 CE
Apparent Age: early 30s



Gerushah, who was a daughter, wife, and mother within Sevilla's Jewish community, does not know why she was chosen for the Embrace. (Her sire, in typical Mushakis fashion, answered that question with a question of his own.) She quickly rose in prominence among the Cainites of Sevilla on the basis of her quietly assured competence. The final step to the sultanate was taken after her conversion to Islam — without that conversion, it is unlikely that the Ashirra of the city would have supported her.

Gerushah did not convert for political gain, however. Although Sevilla's Jewish community thrived, alive and dead, she felt as though she did not truly belong within it and envied the rival community of Ashirra. For a short time, amid the accolades of her new associates and her claiming of the sultan's power, Gerushah felt as though she truly belonged. Now, however, as the novelty has worn off and the whispering rumors spread, she realizes that she no more belongs with the Ashirra than with her old community of faith. Remembering the upheaval caused by her conversion and knowing the Muslim intolerance for apostasy, Gerushah cannot disavow Islam, and so simply chooses to exist in a less than devout state.

In public, Gerushah dons a short cap and veil and outer wraps of silk. Her figure is matronly, but her hair is almost girlish with its unruly curls.

Usama ibn Jabar, Sultan of Fez

7th generation, childe of Jabar
Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Loner
Embrace: 705 CE
Apparent Age: late 50s

Fez's sultan came to the city at its founding. He was a young Cainite then, but already in search of a place of studious quiet from which to chronicle the great events happening as the word of the Prophet spread throughout the known world. As other vampires wandered into his pristine city, Ibn Jabar discovered that in order to maintain the serenity and solitude he desired, he would have to assume the traditional powers of the city's sultan.

It is hard to imagine a more reluctant monarch. Ibn Jabar's wish to deal as little as possible with other Cainites extends to his own childer — of which he has precisely one, whom he has termed "a mistake." He is assisted in ordering his city by a panoply of *ansar* instead, several of whom are more than a century old, and all of whom are



capable of carrying on an erudite conversation with their master. The precise documentation kept by his *ansar*, combined with the very real threat of rousing Ibn Jabar's temper, has kept the city in good enough order for its entire existence. But that order has yet to face a real threat.

Ibn Jabar makes his haven within the university. In his simple scholar's robes and omnipresent fez, he would look like nothing more than another instructor from a safe distance. Up close, however, the unsettling fire in his eyes and traces of blood in his beard are clearly visible.

Bay't Mutasharid (Nosferatu)

Nahd ibn Raid, Immortal 'Cidil

10th generation, childe of Raid

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: 896 CE

Apparent Age: early 40s

Nahd ibn Raid had lived a full life when he was stricken ill in his fourth decade. He had earned the respect of his community, had many children by several wives, and provided well for them all. Despite all of his religious training and conviction, he was not convinced that he had accounted well enough for his soul. So, on his deathbed, he cried out for another chance to prove himself. His sire answered that call.

Now, Ibn Raid is not sure that he's struck a good bargain. He has more time, yes, for study, charity and improvement, but the gates of Heaven seem farther away than ever, moved back with every minor transgression of the fast or of prayer, and every time another life slips away in his hands. Ibn Raid piles his knowledge of law and tradition up around himself like a bulwark, trading away his services for far less than he could command in an effort to keep his faith vital and meaningful. He has so far not taken up the pilgrimage to Mecca and so is not one of the Hajj, despite his devout demeanor. He fears that his own doubts about the condition of his soul will only be confirmed by attempting to approach the holy cities of Islam.

Fully clothed, Ibn Raid looks almost normal, though his limbs are perhaps a bit twisted and his face somewhat scarred. His body beneath his clothing is covered with open, weeping sores — exaggerations of the illness that nearly killed him. He changes his clothing regularly, but it is still his odor and not his form that gives away his *bay't* to observers.





Samsi, Leper of Aleppo

8th generation, childe of Shutararra
Nature: Jester (Fanatic)
Demeanor: Caretaker
Embrace: 1155 CE
Apparent Age: indeterminate

Samsi is the most outgoing of a large brood of Mutasharidin nesting under Aleppo's citadel mount. She, and the other childer of her sire, were all natives of Aleppo, and all have been Embraced in recent years. Due to their ancient Assyrian sire's overpowering desire to replace the offspring lost to the crusaders' siege, Samsi and the others have adopted Assyrian names, manners of dress, customs and language. This is all done without complaint to please their sire, but Samsi herself has found the charade rather amusing.

In spite of her full knowledge of her sire's obsession with his historical roots, his conversion to Islam along with the rest of the brood seems completely natural to her — after all, she has felt the same irresistible draw, and the same sure knowledge that the Muslim faith is the right path for her. (The Fanatic Nature above reflects this recent, perhaps unnatural change of heart.)

Samsi is unmistakably Mutasharid, when not employing her Obfuscate arts. Her face and body are enormously swelled, hiding her eyes among reddened folds of skin while exaggerating the rest of her features to disgusting proportions.

Laibon

Jubal, Advisor to the Sultan

Nature: Caretaker
Demeanor: Autocrat
Embrace: unknown
Apparent Age: late 30s

Jubal is an enigma to the Cainites of Cairo, as are most Laibon. Jubal has been by Sultan Antonius's side since he took power in Cairo, though not always as his chief advisor. As others have winnowed themselves away through betrayal, ambition or simple bad advice, Jubal has patiently stepped forward to assume greater responsibility. He has no ambition to rule this city, which even on African soil seems so foreign. Were it not for his loyalty to Antonius, Jubal would likely have slipped back to his southern homeland many years ago to assume domain over a large territory.

Recent events have tested Jubal's legendary patience. As if the recent stirrings and graspings of the Walid Set were not enough, the sultan has made matters worse by pulling back from his advisor. Jubal finds his advice solicited less often, and generally ignored even when requested. He suspects the obvious — Setite influence — and is seeking subtle methods to control their growing power. Finally, he



has also received envoys from his own *bay't*. The Muslim traders and envoys who travel south of the Sahara are seen by many of his clanmates as nothing more than cover for predatory Ashirra seeking to challenge Laibon domains. The clan is increasingly responding with force. Jubal has thus far placated his clanmates, but that can only last so long.

Years of unlife have dulled the rich color of Jubal's skin, leaving it a dull, dark gray ash. His head is completely hairless, devoid even of eyebrows, and his teeth are all slightly pointed, making his smile strangely intimidating.

Qabilat al-Khayal (Lasombra)

Badr, Sultan of Granada

8th generation, childe of Marcos
Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Autocrat
Embrace: 809 CE
Apparent Age: indeterminate



The martially inclined sultan of Granada hides a secret that could derail all her careful plans for the defense of Islam in Andalus — *her* plans. While females of her obvious power and talent are certainly more accepted among the Ashirra than among their mortal counterparts, Badr knows that many of the stalwart fighters who currently accept her commands without question would either desert to another commander or begin to question or challenge her orders, were they to know her gender. This is not acceptable; Badr knows that she of all the nighttime generals in Andalus is best prepared to withstand the coming Christian assaults. Nothing can be allowed to interfere with the defense of her faith.

In order to maintain her ruse, Badr wears voluminous cloaks of dark hues and never allows herself to be seen without an accompanying cloak of shadow. This serves a double purpose, giving her slight figure an aura of size and might in addition to hiding her gender.

Mania, Sorceress of Baghdad

8th generation, childe of Pharnabazus
Nature: Rogue
Demeanor: Monster
Embrace: 324 CE
Apparent Age: late 70s

Mania and her curio shop are relics of a much earlier age. She was Embraced during the reign of the Sassanian Persians, and she has remained exclusively in the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers ever since (her enemies, of whom there are no



small number, whisper that she is physically unable to cross the flowing waters). Despite her sedentary habits, Mania's reach is long; she was an aged and capable witch while she drew breath, and the addition of vitae to her arsenal of elixirs and charms only strengthened her power over the spirit world. Her spirit minions range far and wide, bringing back small trinkets or vital ingredients, leaving murder and mayhem in their wake. To acquire larger items, Mania must deal with more mundane details like gold and freight.

Mania has dabbled in the infernal, but her deeply ingrained Zoroastrian upbringing has so far restrained her from all but the most "basic" invocations and summonings. For the last half of her unnatural life, however, her native religion has been driven underground and no longer provides support to her dwindling conscience. As the situation between the rivers grows dire and her premonitions fill with doom, Mania finds herself drawn deeper into demonic practices.

Mania is gnarled and bent, with wisps of gray-white hair crowning her head. Her neck and limbs are covered with red growths both small and large, and her fingers have hardened into bony claws.

Suleiman ibn Abdullah, Mullah of the Ashirra

7th generation, childe of Abdullah

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Director

Embrace: 299 CE

Apparent Age: mid-40s

The founder of the Ashirra sect, Suleiman ibn Abdullah rarely speaks of the evening when he came to Madina hoping to make a pawn of the supposed prophet, Muhammad. He can only say that he saw salvation in that man. He submitted to Allah and was set on a new course. Some of the Ashirra claim Suleiman was redeemed in that moment, but the mullah denies this. The Prophet showed him the possibility of righteousness; the final judgment is in God's hands.

Suleiman came to Cairo in the Fatimid years and has watched great Muslim dynasties rise there. He had hoped that with Salah al-Din's liberation of Jerusalem and the subsequent failure of the Europeans' Third Crusade, a new period of unity and expansion was possible for the Islamic peoples. The dynastic chaos surrounding the succession of Salah al-Din has raised



some serious doubts, but he has confidence that righteousness will ultimately prevail.

Suleiman is more concerned with the fate of the Ashirra than mortal dynasties, however. The split between his more conservative faction and the radicals lead by the Mushakis Khalid ibn Sahl weighs heavily on his soul. He hopes for a reconciliation and is working to gather as much support as he can in Cairo, the largest stable city of Islam. His presence over the last decade has been of great concern to Sultan Antonius, however. Antonius fears the mullah is eclipsing him. Meanwhile, the Walid Set watch, happy to see the Muslims fight among themselves.

Qabilat al-Mawt (Cappadocian)

Ishaq ibn Khayrat

9th generation, childe of Khayrat

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: 946 CE

Apparent Age: late 40s

Ishaq ibn Khayrat was a physician in Baghdad before the founding of the great hospitals. Even with



the Islamic tradition of charity to the less fortunate, caring for the poor and sick was a great challenge for physicians like Ishaq who felt obligated to do so. In the course of following his faith, he contracted a wasting disease from his impoverished patients, lost his wealthy patrons and even his family and was left to die in Baghdad's slums among the poor he had tried to help. His sire, Khayrat, happened upon him during his studies of lingering death and realized his potential.

Ibn Khayrat has been involved with 'Azdi hospital since its inception; his careful script can be found on the design documents and architects' drawings. While he was forced to be secretive about his nature at the outset, his obvious learning and powers of persuasion have earned him an open place among the hospital's staff. He survives on gifts of blood from the doctors and from the healthy relatives of grateful patients, and occasionally on the cooling blood of an expired corpse. On rare occasions, Ibn Khayrat gives his blood to sustain a dying patient, but ordinarily he prefers to let nature and science run their courses.

Ibn Khayrat finds the Persian-influenced dress of Seljuq Baghdad to be convenient for his practice: mid-calf robes with tightly fitted sleeves over trousers and soft boots. A pristine white turban covers his head.

Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador)

Aighar akhi Qizman, Poet of Cordoba

10th generation, childe of Cantara

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Jester

Embrace: 1160 CE

Apparent Age: early 20s

Aighar is an angry young vampire — a fact that he hides very well in the songs and poems about natural beauty and love that he is expected to produce. While he is not unappreciative of the benefits of his current state (some of his best work has come in the aftermath of trances caused by his blood's curse), he can never forget that he was chosen as "second best" before he even had a chance to hone his art and perhaps earn the honor of the Embrace for himself. His resentment of his sire, manfully suppressed through his fledgling indoctrination, has begun to express itself in verse that even the innovation-loving Cainites of Cordoba would find shocking. So far, he has kept these to himself, but if his public keeps clamoring for new works....

Aighar's appearance is a far cry from the stripling, girlish European troubadours. He is short, stocky



and a bit overweight; his hair is patchy, and he was Embraced with a scraggly beard. None of these matters improve his disposition. He wears vests and tunics cut long in an attempt to disguise his stature and is never without a colorful cap to cover his hair.

Sakan, Orphan of San'a'

8th generation, childe of Abd al-Haqq
Nature: Defender
Demeanor: Child
Embrace: 1179 CE
Apparent Age: mid-teens



Sakan was the daughter of a desert tribe's chieftain, about to be pressed into a loveless marriage before the ancient Abd al-Haqq snatched her up on a whim during one of his last forays outside his haven. The aged Ashirra fancied the beautiful young woman as his own bride and Embraced her with very little thought for the consequences — and for him, there have been none. Sakan has been left largely to her own devices, but luckily a chieftain's daughter is not without resources of her own. She has charmed a rudimentary Ashirra education out of her peers and elders, creating debts, true, but also winning allies with her beauty and gentle manner.

Sakan knows the whereabouts and disposition of her sire, Abd al-Haqq. She is also very certain, through a manner she does not fully understand, that she must guard that information closely. She has a deep regard for her sire even as her blood oath to him fades in his absence; he was very kind to her during their short time together. She would not willingly betray him for any price.

Shamit ibn Yasir, Sultan of Aden

8th generation, childe of Abd al-Haqq
Nature: Autocrat
Demeanor: Autocrat
Embrace: 794 CE
Apparent Age: early 30s

The newly empowered sultan of Aden is taking advantage of his sire's indisposition to make a place for himself. Until Abd al-Haqq's seemingly self-imposed seclusion in his haven, Ibn Yasir was required to travel regularly to San'a' to reaffirm his loyalty and renew the blood oath to his sire. Ibn Yasir has no specific disputes with his sire and is in fact pleased that he was chosen over Abd al-Haqq's other childer to administrate Aden, but centuries of servitude can only chafe.

Freed from the compulsions of the blood oath, Ibn Yasir has come into his own. He is not merely an adequate administrator but an extraordinarily capable one — the difference between working to secure someone else's future and securing one's own. He is capitalizing on the importance of his city's resources, in particular the harbor; without the pull of the city of



San'a'. Aden's harbor is useless, but by the same token San'a' relies on its southern outpost. Ibn Yasir hopes that by the time his sire returns to full activity, he will be able to politely force their relationship to a more equitable level. He remains silent against the quiet accusations that he has had some part in Abd al-Haqq's disappearance.

Like most Ashirra in the area, Ibn Yasir wears the enveloping robes that protect from the desert wind (or sun). His brows are heavy, and his wind-pitted face is evidence of a human lifetime spent in the sands of the inland.

Sophoniba, Sultan of Tunis

6th generation, childe of a forgotten sire
Nature: Tyrant
Demeanor: Celebrant
Embrace: 7th century BCE
Apparent Age: early 20s



Sophoniba was embraced in the heyday of Phoenician culture along the Mediterranean. Her relatives were among the honored craftspeople who produced the rich dyes that gave the Phoenicians their fame, and her sire wished the secret of its production. He found surprising resistance from Sophoniba and her entire family — with their assistance, she overcame her arrogant sire and took his blood. While she has forgotten her sire's name and face, Sophoniba still remembers the arts of dyeing and weaving, creating the fine fabrics that are fitted to her statuelike form. Her limbs are like marble to the eye and touch, her skin is flawless, and her beauty rivals that of any immortal creature on the Mediterranean coast.

Sophoniba is very sensitive on the subject of Carthage. Her home of Tunis was destroyed as thoroughly as fabled Carthage by the Roman invasion, yet the people and vampires of Tunis survived through tenacity and skill. She feels, perhaps rightly, that the accomplishments of her city and her people have been diminished by the unending hue and cry of the fate of Carthage. The only thing that can raise her ire more quickly than breast-beating over Carthage are the Romans of the Punic War period. Fortunately, the few Romans left from that era travel as infrequently as Sophoniba herself does.

Ventrue

Junius

7th generation, childe of Gnaeus
Nature: Judge
Demeanor: Tyrant
Embrace: 149 BCE
Apparent Age: late 40s



Ignorance is bliss — for both Junius and the Cainites of Cordoba. Junius was one of the Roman soldiers who invaded the city in 152 BCE. He was a steady if uninspired fighter, a great respecter of the chain of command — it was this quality that earned his "promotion" into the ranks of the Ventrue not long after the city was pacified. Junius has grown into his aristocratic role over the centuries; only those who have seen the polished bronze armor he keeps from his soldiering days would believe that he was once in the front lines. His hair also is a close-cropped soldier's cut.

Junius is extremely well read in Latin and Arabic. His knowledge of Islamic law and tradition is quite possibly unmatched outside the Ashirra. This has earned him a great deal of respect, assuring his safety among them (as though his great age and distinguished generation were not enough). He exists at the moment, however, in a sort of fugue state — perhaps a precursor to a long time in torpor. He has invested a large amount of his personal effort and prestige in Islam, Andalus in particular, and he would likely be quite vexed to find his carefully constructed status yanked from beneath him.

Nadim ibn Nuri, Professional Go-Between

9th generation, childe of Nuri
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Innovator
Embrace: 1132 CE
Apparent Age: late teens



Nadim ibn Nuri is an ambitious Cainite out to make a name for himself, no matter what obstacles his elders may throw in his way. The elders have given him the unrewarding task of coordinating events for not just his Ventrue elders, but the ruck and run Cainites of the area. The fact that his clan has become associated with the Christian enemies of Andalus rather than the Romans of old only grates at him further. Nadim has found ways to turn his embarrassing position to his advantage, however. He is collecting information in prodigious amounts, from what sort of vessels visiting Ventrue must drink from to the preferred havens of traveling lords of the Qabilat al-Khayal to the twisted vices of itinerant Ray'een al-Fen. He also stockpiles small favors for providing services above and beyond the call of his "office" — eventually, these favors will, properly played, amount to boons. Then he will show his elders his true worth.

Of course, it's just as possible that Nadim was given his lowly position not as punishment, but because his elders knew what he could make of it.

Nadim's boyish looks go a long way toward assuring that many regard him as no more than a glorified errand boy. His cheeks are still rounded like a child's even in death, and his eyes are innocent and wide. He reinforces this impression by dressing in the trousers and tunic of a wealthy student.

Wah'Sheen (Gangrel)

Al-Wali, Beast of Cordoba

8th generation, childe of Odoin
Nature: Rogue
Demeanor: Caretaker
Embrace: 672 CE
Apparent Age: indeterminate

Al-Wali's horrible scarring and deformity is not the result of the Murasharid curse but of near-fatal burns it received during the Muslim sacking of Cordoba. The Visigoth Wah'Sheen, driven by a consuming need for revenge on the Banu Haqim who accompanied the invaders and ensured the destruction of its friends and tribesmen, spent centuries in hiding, healing and learning. When it emerged, its façade was firmly in place — it pretends to be an Arabic Murasharid, properly deferential and full of useful tidbits of information. It uses this information, real or fabricated, to suit the moment, to chip away at the foundations of Islamic and Ashirra



control in the area. Its vendetta long ago extended to cover any Cainite who upholds Muslim ways.

The greatest threat to Al-Wali's charade comes from Cordoba's real Mutasharidin. It remains aloof from its supposed clanmates, arousing their suspicion. Though they are inclined to give Al-Wali the benefit of some doubt, given the creature's obvious age and ability, Cordoba's Mutasharidin may piece together Al-Wali's real identity. Whether they have enough time, or will share that information, remains to be seen.

Kossos

10th generation, childe of Marpessa
Nature: Survivor (Fanatic)
Demeanor: Gallant
Embrace: 1157 CE
Apparent Age: indeterminate

Kossos's story parallels that of the Mutasharid Samsi. He is the grandchilde of Aleppo's Wah'Sheen elder, who remains lost in the glory of the city's Hellenic period. He too was Embraced as the elders rearmed themselves after the Crusades. Coincidentally (or not), the Hellenic band experienced an overwhelming conversion at the same time as the Assyrian and Mittani enclaves. Kossos seems to be enjoying his new status, since he has been transformed by his new religion from a mindless thug to a holy warrior of sorts.

Kossos's years of brutality have left him with a full complement of animal features. Patches of fur cover his body, here lush and soft, there coarse and



bristly. His nose is flattened and flared, his ears are pointed, and his upper lip is split in two.

Walid Set (Followers of Set)

Bek the Spice Merchant

9th generation, childe of Teweret
Nature: Jester
Demeanor: Celebrant
Embrace: 1048 CE
Apparent Age: late 20s

Bek is enjoying himself in the "new" Cairo. His reward for years of servitude as an *ansar* was his own sector of trade to ply, and his reward for success in that endeavor is indulgence. After all, a wealthy merchant has appearances to keep up. Bek's part in the planned



reclaiming of Cairo for the Setites is small, but it is a part he is more than happy to play. His current assignment is to hinder the trade operations of other clans within the city, and to strip away or undermine their resources. To accomplish this task, Bek has been given access to information gatherers and assassins that almost rival the Banu Haqim in skill, and certainly exceed many in subtlety. He has no personal grudge against anyone he has taken action against. It's simply how business is now run in Cairo.

Bek is thin, skinny even; in his new role among the wealthy merchants, he pads his figure with many layers of expensive clothing to give the illusion of gluttonous heft. His eyes might best be described as beady, but his smile is quick and disarming.

Bilaal the Guide

Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Gallant
Embrace: unknown
Apparent Age: early 30s

Bilaal is truly proud of his knowledge of Cairo's history, and his delight in sharing that knowledge is genuine. Outside his clan, little else is known about this fixture of Cairo's nights. He does not appear to take part in the traditional clan businesses of slaves and spices. His mission is far more delicate; he is, for all intents and purposes, the Setite liaison to the cities assorted Cainites.

It would have been difficult to choose a better-suited ambassador. Bilaal's very figure is disarming — it remains amazingly rotund despite centuries without food — and his face is equally round and openly friendly. His jovial laughter booms through Cairo's darkened streets.



Of course, even the Setite's public face has an agenda. Bilaal is a master of observation, and he learns an amazing amount from watching those he guides through Cairo's splendors. Anything Bilaal learns, other Setites in Cairo shortly know.

Others

Yusri Al-Margil, Abandoned Ansar

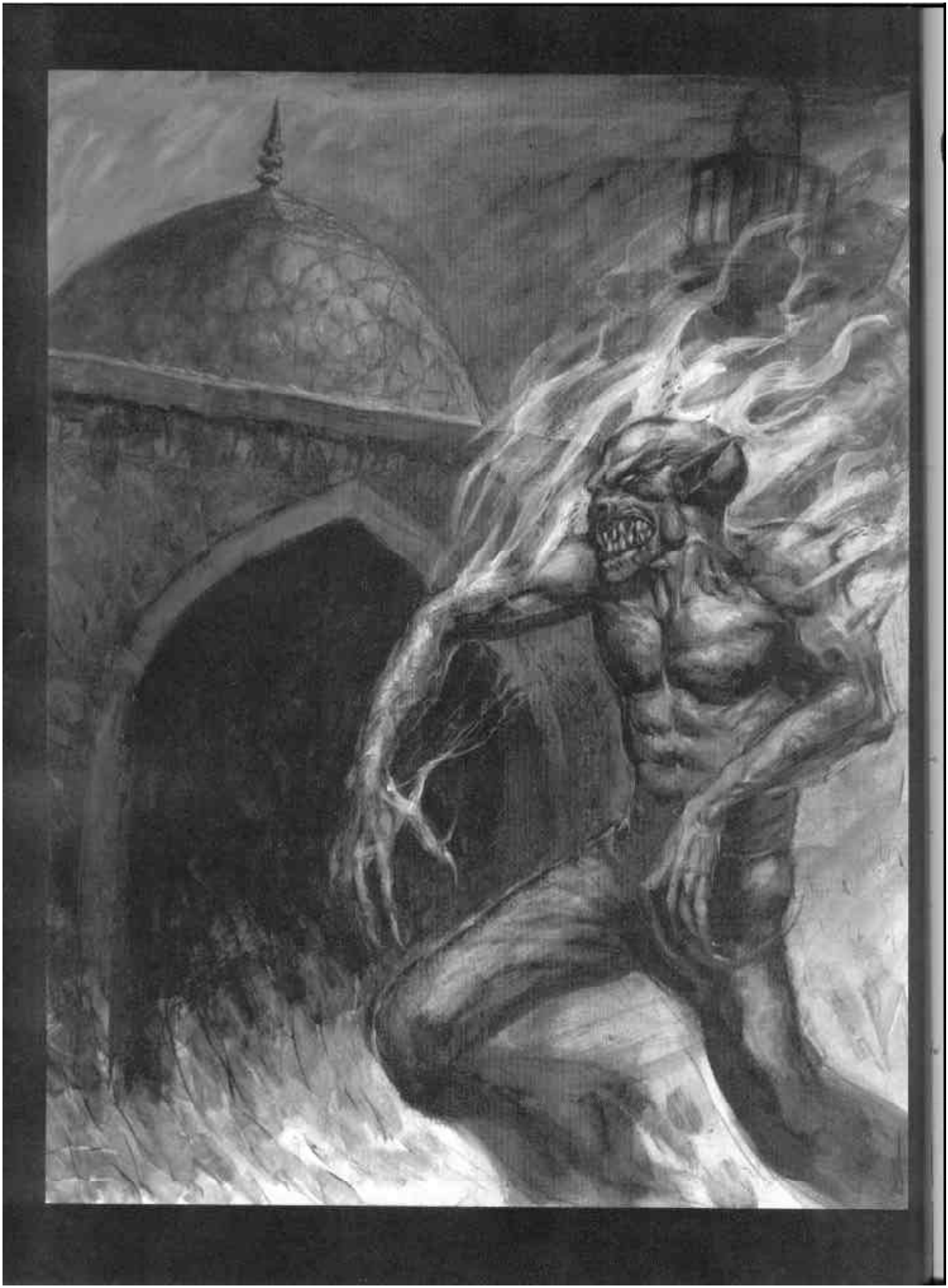
Nature: Rebel
Demeanor: Survivor
Embrace: unknown
Apparent Age: early 30s



Yusri al-Margil was once a craftsman, a man with a family and responsibilities. Then he was a servant to a powerful creature of the night — a position that came with responsibilities all its own and allowed him to improve his family's lot. With the withdrawal of the Seljuqs and his benefactor, Yusri has fallen on hard times. He has corrupted his family, leaving his youngest children to scrabble for sustenance in the destroyed quarters of Baghdad while dragging his oldest sons with him at night in the mobs that hunt down unwary Cainites to feast on their blood.

With every passing night, Yusri grows less trustworthy. He meets with vampires to trade them blood for information, but lately he has taken to evaluating his benefactors as potential targets, regardless of his given word of truce. He also grows more careless of the truth — finding desirable information takes time away from his desperate hunt for blood.

Yusri is currently frozen at an age that might be called "respectable" if he weren't running through the midnight streets like a torch-wielding hooligan. He is tall and strong from a lifetime of hard work, but his face and body carry some hideous scars earned at the claws and fangs of dying Cainites.





Chapter Four: Ways of the Blood

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp
Abode his Hour or two, and went his way.
–The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám

Al-Amin

(Salubri)

In distant history, long before the days of the Prophet, the idolatrous Baali rose in the deserts and hills of the Levant. Their power grew strong and other vampires were forced to flee or face corruption at the hands of these demon-worshipers. Saulot, the revered founder of Bay't al-Amin, decided that enough was enough, and sent his childer to destroy the Baali. Al-Amin warriors, long known as dangerous devil slayers, led a virtual army of Cainites, including members of many other clans. The healers of the *bay't*, long the warriors' companions, organized this unholy alliance and kept interclan rivalries from tearing it apart before its job was done. After a prolonged campaign that cost the unlives of many, the al-Amin stood victorious. The Baali were soundly beaten, and the members of the vampiric army scattered once more.

The al-Amin took the brunt of the casualties, but those who survived, stayed. They knew the Baali would lair in their most hidden nests, lick their wounds and reemerge when they were least expected. The *bay't* took it upon itself to await that dark night. Members of the clan established havens from North Africa to the very fringes of Asia and kept careful watch on the vampiric and mortal rulers of their chosen protectorate. Many also disguised themselves as members of other clans as best they could to avoid scaring off an enemy setting up a nest in a region. As a result, communication between members of the *bay't* became tenuous as best. They concentrated too on vampires whose behavior showed signs of demon worship: the madmen of Bay't Majnoon and the idolatrous Walid Set were particularly scrutinized.

Of course, the best way to see corruption in others is to associate with them. So, the al-Amin often pose as members of other clans and become active participants in the unlife of their cities. They befriend as many other Cainites as possible in the hopes of either spotting a guilty secret or seeing the first signs of diabolic influence on other vampires.

The last century has been very difficult for the al-Amin. They have been so focused on watching for Baali influence that other evils have laid them low. Most al-Amin felt their blood run fire-hot five decades ago, and they knew a great evil had been perpetuated. Those gifted with especial insight felt their progenitor Saulot die as the sorcerer Tremere consumed his heart's blood. In Europe, the Usurpers have hunted the rest of the Salubri line to virtual extinction, and the same fate is coming to Islamic lands. Most other clans are all too willing to see the prideful devil-hunters bear the brunt of their own inquisitorial methods. The al-Amin have had little choice but to go even deeper into hiding and await the arrival of the Tremere.

The Banu Haqim, the clan's surest allies, have been ferrying European Salubri east to the relative safety of the Levant. Local al-Amin sometimes contact these refugees and offer them assistance. Others in the clan, however, fear this is all some sort of ruse to make them show themselves. This would be the most damaging time for the Baali to reemerge.

There are two distinct castes of al-Amin who work together extensively: the warriors and the healers. The warriors fight demon-worshipping vampires wherever they find them and also function as investigators, seeking signs of Baali-inspired debauchery or mental instability. They are accomplished masters in assuming the roles of other clans when the need arises. As a result, they have also lead the *bay't* efforts to go underground, to make themselves difficult targets when the new magic-wielding Usurpers arrive in the region.

The healers use the powers of their blood to repair the forms of those who have suffered in battle. They also, as subtly as possible, specialize in bolstering other vampires and mortal rulers against the blandishments of the Baali. Among younger vampires, the Islamic faith has proved to be a useful tool. Very few of the *bay't*, most of whom predate Islam are sincere believers, but they are prepared to pretend to have faith in order to encourage it in others.

Sobriquet: Devil-slayers

Appearance: Al-Amin can hail from any of the peoples of the Middle East. The most distinctive feature of the *bay't* is the third eye that opens in their forehead when they reach the third level of the Valeren Discipline. While it is closed most of the time, it is still quite noticeable, and

many uses of Valeren cause it to open. Most al-Amin choose to wear some form of headdress or veil to conceal their third eye.

Haven and Prey: The al-Amin prefer to live among humans, dwelling in simple houses within cities. A few, while rarely adopting religious beliefs themselves, choose to live among religious communities, as long as no Ashirra have made their havens there. Many al-Amin avoid feeding off devout people, and a few even try to restrict their feeding to taking sustenance from the petty, cruel and criminal elements of society.

The Embrace: Al-Amin Embrace only rarely because new childer make for tempting targets in a hostile world. To break this taboo, they must either find an exceptional candidate or be in dire need of further support in their vigil against the Baali. They look for people with a strong sense of right and wrong, good self-control and some compassion. People with religious beliefs are sometimes chosen, but only if they display moderation in those beliefs: the *bay't* does not welcome fanatics into its ranks.



Character Creation: Mental Attributes are usually primary, although some warriors focus on Physical Attributes to ready themselves for the upcoming struggle. Al-Amin commonly follow the Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community), Tariq el-Harb (Road of War) or Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven). Generation is a very common background: Few, if any, al-Amin are higher than 10th generation. All al-Amin have a dot in Linguistics, representing the ancient language they use for communications with one another.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Valeren

Weaknesses: A warrior al-Amin cannot refuse to aid someone in genuine need. If she does, the player loses two dice from all her dice polls until she makes restitution for her negligence in some way. A healer al-Amin's role is to mend the body and spirit, not to do harm. If she injures another, even in self-defense, the player loses two dice from all her dice pools for the rest of the night.

Organization: Communication between the al-Amin is infrequent. At most, two or three of the *bay't* reside in a single community, contacting each other only when they have a sighting of a Baali or other demon-worshipping vampire to report. If a visiting al-Amin needs to contact others of the *bay't*, she leaves messages written in an ancient language on city walls or discreetly on the side of religious buildings within the city. While communication is infrequent, the *bay't* loyalty to one another is fierce. When one calls for aid, other al-Amin answer without question.

Quote: *Do not trust that one, my friend. He gets his secrets from the darkest of places.*

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: A good influence on the other *bay't*. Islam is a worthy religion that teaches discipline, restraint and a virtuous life. To see others of our kind adopt it gives me hope.

The Franj: I fear that our vigil here has been for naught. From the tales we hear, the Baali have already risen in Europe. How long before they turn their feet towards our cities? We must be ready.

Baali: Occasionally, they poke their heads out from the rocks under which they hide. We cut off those heads. Perhaps this is why we succeed while those in Europe have failed.

Banu Haqim: Our allies, it would appear. They faced the Baali with us once before, and now they aid us in our time of need. If only I could learn to accept their vicious attitude to other *bay't*.

Bay't Majnoon: Mad ones who believe they are half devil. We have faced devils and know they are deluded. Treat them with compassion, and look for signs of possible corruption.

Bay't Mutasharid: They revel too much in their monstrous nature, so it pays to watch them lest they fall to true evil. These Hajj, though, are a good example of the benefits of the Ashirra's rise.

Walid Set: They may not be demon-worshipers, but they do the Baali's work despite their protestations otherwise. Use them if you have to. Never trust them.

Baali

The Baali know the truth.

The universe is not the plaything of creatures so petty as the scions of Caine. Neither is it some holy garden established by an all-knowing and benevolent God. Humans, like Cainites, are but pests and pawns on a battlefield whose scope dwarfs all comprehension. The universe is in a clash between opposing forces, which it is convenient to call dark and light. Everything and everyone is part of that conflict. Worth is ultimately measured in whether one can actually participate in the struggle. Petty power plays by dormant Antediluvians are insignificant when compared to the struggle of light and dark. The Baali know this and choose to side with the dark.

Bay't Baali arose from the ashes of the first tribe of humans to ever gather around a fire. These primitive men also knew the truth and paid homage to the dark in the form of its Children. These things, the scions of blackness itself, had great power and were true soldiers in the great struggle. At some point, the Children came to be known as the Lords — or *Ba'al* in the language of the time — and their most devout servitors took the name Baali. Just how these dark priests came to be Cainites is a great mystery, but it seems one ancient or another toyed with the *Ba'al* in his hubris and spawned the *bay't* unwittingly. Regardless, these vampires — armed with knowledge of the Children and their true place in the order of things — became a threat to other Cainites and were hunted by them.



In ancient nights, the al-Amin raised an army of Cainites to oppose the most powerful of all the Baali. In Crete and the ancient city of Chomzin, these devil-slayers burned and purged the Baali, whom they branded as *shaitan* or devils. Under the banner of self-serving morality, the Cainites called the Baali infernal and smashed them to dust. The Baali who survived the purge learned the value of subtly and went deep underground, hiding from their enemies and advancing their agendas in secret.

This strategy has largely worked, but it has come at a cost. The Baali have split into a variety of broods, each serving the Children or the ideal of the dark in their own ways. Some serve the swarms of insects associated with the Children, others worship their masters as demons or ancient gods, still others have become as self-serving as other Cainites and seek only to glorify themselves.

The rise of Islam has troubled the *bay't*. A unifying religion dedicated — at least in theory — to moral purity and rectitude ultimately serves the light more than the dark. More worrying still, this faith has swept through the Baali homeland and drawn in many Cainites. The Ashirra's submission to Allah — although often somewhat fleeting — is a worrying recognition of the greater forces at work in the world. The Banu Haqim are especially troubling because they have merged Islam with a warrior's zeal to pursue enemies such as the Baali. In the early days of the faith, newly converted Banu Haqim destroyed many Baali organ pits and threatened a new purge. Elders of the *bay't* met in Damascus to put a stop to this and managed to curse the Banu Haqim with a blood hunger that is still spreading through the line, distracting them from hunting the Baali.

Now, temporal politics and egos are eroding at the Ashirra's dedication. The al-Amin are weak, and the Banu Haqim are cursed. But whenever Baali move openly, enemies spring to attack them. And so the slow moves of corruption and seduction continue, with the Shaitan slowly eroding the forces of light and hoping to strike a blow for the dark once and for all.

Sobriquet: Shaitan

Appearance: The Baali can be of any race and often endeavor to look as ordinary as possible. They dress on the stylish side of typical. Elder Baali often bear the scars of various rituals enacted to honor (and appease) the Children, the swarm or other dark avatars.

> **Note:** Baali are intended for use as Storyteller characters, not as characters for players. Their belief in a greater conflict and servitude to the dark makes them monsters among monsters who rarely work well with other Cainites. If you really, really want to play one and your Storyteller is open to the idea, there is enough information here to allow you to do so, but think very carefully about your reasons. Will it really make for an enjoyable and fulfilling roleplaying experience? How will other members of the troupe react to you playing such a disgusting character? Most likely they won't like it one bit. Bear that in mind.

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: They recognize the nature of the world and oppose us. Fortunately, this dedication is fleeting. Like most other Cainites, they seek to serve themselves more than their God.

The *Franj*: A perfect example of how dedication to a higher cause can erode into avarice. Under the banner of a crucified carpenter, they fight for land and gorge on power.

Al-Amin: A dying breed. Hasten that death.

Banu Haqim: Hateful and skillful enemies, but easily distracted by power and honor. Our curse will lay them low. We have time to wait.

Bay't Majnoon: Ah, a *bay't* that has the blood of a demon running through each and every member. If only they would focus on the present and realize that the *djinn* they see also serve our masters, we could be allies.

Walid Set: Amateurs.

Haven and Prey: The Baali attempt to spread the worship of their patron demons by creating cults of mortals on whom they feed. In many places in the Middle East, the temples of forgotten gods lie abandoned, as the progressive waves of Jews, Christians and Muslims passed through. These make fine havens for the Baali and places of worship for their followers.

The Embrace: The Baali make slaves of the weak-willed but seek to Embrace the strong. Prideful manipulators do not make good candidates because they often wish to serve themselves more than others. The best Baali candidates are mortals who have glimpsed at the greater conflict and moved toward the darkness — such as those who have flirted with the occult, who maintained faith in older gods in the face of Islam or were scholars seeking the meaning of the world around them. The Embrace usually culminates a process of indoctrination during which the candidate joins his sire's cult. Al-Amin whisper that the Baali also know a way in which to re-Embrace members of other clans into their *bay't*.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes usually dominate, with Social Attributes running a close second. Knowledges, especially Occult, are common. Many Baali already have Talents like Intimidation and Subterfuge before they are Embraced. Most Baali follow the Tariq al-Shaitan (Road of the Devil).

Clan Disciplines: Obfuscate, Presence, Daimoinon

Weaknesses: Baali are extremely vulnerable to religious symbols and must flee before them. Even the chants of verses from the Qur'an or calligraphic inscriptions of passages from the book on the walls of buildings will repel them. All members of the *bay't* suffer double damage from True Faith. The muezzin's call to worship makes them uncomfortable, but does not force them to flee.



Organization: Neonates remain under the wing of an elder for several years after their Embrace. The elder's haven is known as a nest and can hold several Baali at once. The secrecy required of the Baali leads to conflict between various nests, as their practices and agendas differ. Baali civil wars are hardly unknown. The greatest nest in the lands of Islam hides in Damascus (see page 202).

Quote: *Allah is a dull god, requiring service and submission and offering nothing in this life. Remember the gods of old, and how they could aid you now....*

Banu Haqim

(Assamites)

The Banu Haqim are among the most common vampires in the Islamic world. The *bay't*, as its name suggests, claims descent from a single vampire called Haqim. This near-legendary figure was a warrior who won endless life after the completion of a quest. He laid down a series of rules for his children, which the *bay't* follows to this day. The rules order Banu Haqim to honor the eldest member of the *bay't*, to protect mortals from other vampires, and to judge and punish those who are found wanting. Sometimes, they diablerize unfit vampires to bring themselves closer to Haqim.

This makes for uneasy relationships between the *bay't* and others in the region. The Banu Haqim see themselves as inherently superior to most other vampires and often act as the judges, juries and executioners of Cainites who do not meet their nebulous ideas of worth. The sheer numbers and power of the *bay't* in Persia and the eastern part of the region in particular mean that other *bay't* have to accept this or leave. However, those vampires who match up to the Banu Haqim's exacting standards find members of the *bay't* to be staunch allies. Ashirra are often found to be worthy, and the clan works with the Muslim sect to prepare for further incursions by the Europeans. The most unworthy of all are the Baali, whom the Banu Haqim hunted long ago with the al-Amin. Unlike the devil-slayers, most Banu Haqim feel the Baali threat has passed, however, despite the fact that a demonic blood-hunger is slowly spreading throughout the warriors of the clan.

The Banu Haqim's heart is the mountain fortress of Alamut in Asia Minor, but the clan has a significant presence in all parts of the empire, from the fringes of India to Iberia. It is divided into three distinct castes — warriors, sorcerers and viziers — which are often treated almost as separate *bay't* by members of other clans. The warriors are the dominant caste within the clan. Skilled in all forms of combat, from fists to siege weapons, they have slowly risen to a position where they dominate the Banu Haqim's agenda and have created the warlike image that many non-Muslim vampires associate with the *bay't*. They are also the caste that adopted Islam first and are its fiercest adherents.

The sorcerers are the *bay't's* moderate caste. They practice a form of magic tied to Cainite blood and expanded perception. Some use *kalif*, a drug grown through sorcerous means. When they ingest it by drinking from the veins of a mortal who has smoked *kalif* leaves, it helps them to achieve enlightenment and direct their magic. Their rituals often call on pre-Islamic gods like the Mesopotamian Marduk or the Persian Mithra, causing conflict with faithful members of the warrior caste.

The viziers value knowledge above the raw power of the other castes. While not the most visible members of the *bay't*, they are its heart, managing its holdings and havens throughout the Muslim world. They keep records of the clan's history and channel information to the *bay't* members who need it most. What one vizier learns from a member of the Qabilat al-Khayal in Iberia may well be valuable information when it reaches another vizier in the Holy Land several months later.

The advent of Islam has caused many problems within the clan. While the vast majority of the younger members of the *bay't* are Muslims, most of the elders are not. The elders argue that a vampire cannot serve both Haqim and Allah, so must choose Haqim, not this new, upstart religion. After all, the *bay't* is the Banu Haqim, not the Banu Muhammad or Banu Allah. Others rationalize Haqim as the vampiric equivalent of Muhammad and see many areas of similarity between themselves and the Muslims.

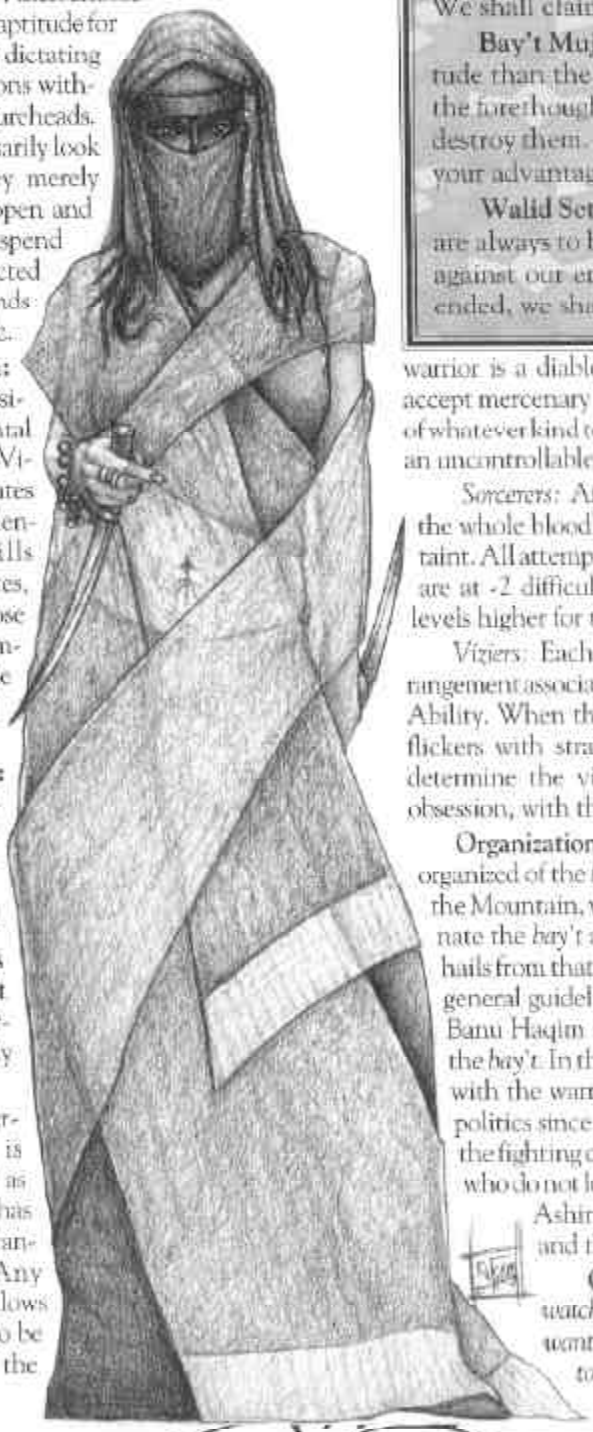
Sobriquet: Saracens

Appearance: The vast majority of the *bay't* are of Arab, Moorish or Persian extraction, although the Embrace tends to darken their skins considerably. Their clothes varies by caste. The warriors dress practically, for freedom of movement. Viziers wear traditional Arabic dress, usually expensive but restrained in design. The reclusive sorcerers care little for their appearance.

Haven and Prey: The *bay't's* elders reside in Alamut, a fortress high in a mountain in Asia Minor. Younger vampires typically choose havens that are isolated from both mortal and vampiric activity. Security is their first concern. Banu Haqim in cities feed as pragmatically as possible. They

choose victims who won't be missed should the vampire's hunger slip out of control, minimizing the risk of discovery.

The Embrace: All three castes are very, very choosy about *fida'i*, or apprentices, often watching a candidate for months before making a final decision. The warrior caste is the most restrictive in its choice of candidates for the Embrace. In recent centuries, male Muslims who show great martial ability have predominated. The other castes are more liberal in their choices. Both look for appropriate talents in their candidates. Viziers choose those who have shown an aptitude for the subtle side of politics, dictating policy and making decisions without ever being public figureheads. The sorcerers don't necessarily look for magical talents. They merely choose candidates with open and inquiring minds. Most spend some time as a *kalif*-addicted vessel, preparing their minds for the rigors of blood magic.



Character Creation: Warriors caste favor Physical Attributes, with Mental Attributes a close second. Viziers favor Social Attributes and sorcerers focus on Mental Attributes. Skills predominate for all castes, but many sorcerers choose Knowledges instead. Common Backgrounds include Mentor, Generation and Contacts.

Clan Disciplines: *Warriors:* Celerity, Obfuscate, Quietus; *Viziers:* Auspex, Celerity, Quietus; *Sorcerers:* Auspex, Quietus, Assamite Sorcery (see **Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door** for Assamite Sorcery guidelines or simply use Thaumaturgy).

Weaknesses: *Warriors:* A warrior is automatically identified as a diablerist, even if he has never drunk the blood of another vampire. Any supernatural sense that allows the taint of Amaranth to be detected confirms that the warrior is a diablerist. Also, all loyal *bay't* members who accept mercenary assignments tithe 20% of their payments of whatever kind to their sires. Some warriors also suffer from an uncontrollable thirst for Cainite blood (see page 159).

Sorcerers: After centuries of practicing blood magic, the whole bloodline is forever marked with its distinctive taint. All attempts to determine this by supernatural means are at -2 difficulty and are considered to operate at two levels higher for the purpose of opposed powers.

Viziers: Each vizier has an obsessive/compulsive derangement associated with her highest intellectual or creative Ability. When the derangement is active, the vizier's aura flickers with strange patterns that allow an observer to determine the vizier's true Nature and the focus of his obsession, with the use of Soulsight (Auspex 2).

Organization: The Banu Haqim are among the most organized of the *bay't*. The *bay't* is ruled by the Old Man of the Mountain, who resides in Alamut. The warriors dominate the *bay't* at the moment, and the current Old Man hails from that caste. However, the organization is one of general guidelines, not of day-to-day orders. The senior Banu Haqim in any city coordinates other members of the *bay't*. In the past, this was often one of the viziers, but with the warriors' more aggressive stance towards *bay't* politics since the birth of Islam, it is increasingly one of the fighting caste. There exist dispossessed Banu Haqim who do not look to Alamut for guidance. They are often Ashirra and serve as a liaison between the clan and the sect.

Quote: *I have listened to your words and watched your actions, my friend, but both are wanting. Rest easy, knowing your blood will be put to good use.*

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: We applaud their devotion to Islam; many of them are worthy, stalwart allies. They give me hope for those vampires who are not of our blood.

The *Franj*: Such arrogant barbarians. They think to impose their values on our lands. We have judged them all and found them wanting. We shall claim their blood for Haqim.

Bay't Mujrim: They deceive with more aptitude than the viziers, but with only a fraction of the forethought. If you catch them at their tricks, destroy them. If you can use one of their groups to your advantage, do so.

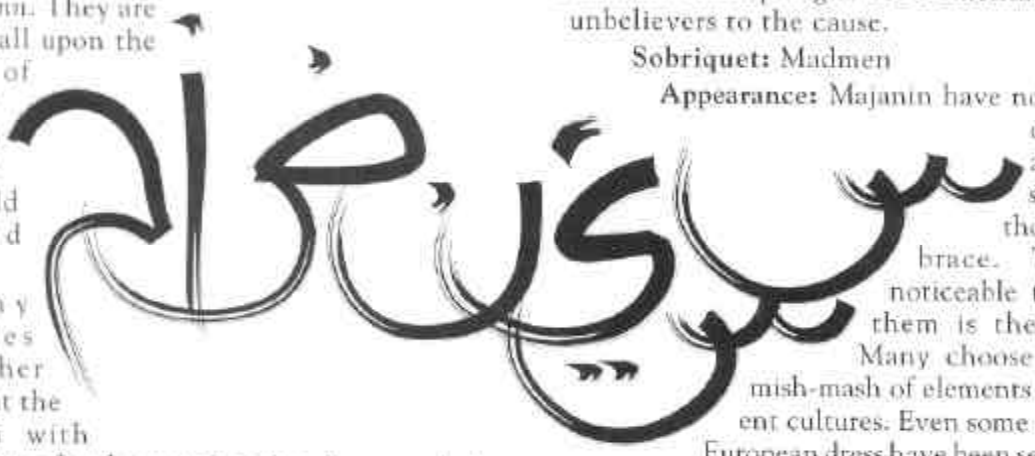
Walid Set: They are not to be feared, but they are always to be mistrusted. For now we use them against our enemies. When their usefulness has ended, we shall drink them dry.

Bay't Majnoon

(Malkavian)

Ashirra recount the cautionary tale of Marid, founder of Bay't Majnoon, who long ago wished to understand the world of the *djinn*. Standing upon the same rock where Abraham sacrificed Isaac, he made a deal with one of the most powerful of these spirits and agreed to share his body with it. The *djinn* gained access to the material world, and the vampire to the realm of the spirit. Unfortunately, the fusing of the two drove both insane. Such is the price of hubris, and the descendants of Marid continue to pay it (and reap its benefits).

Each time a Majnoon Embraces, a portion of that great *djinn*'s spirit passes with the blood into the childe's body and soul. The two spirits fuse, creating the maddened spirit that characterizes the *bay't*. The newborn vampire inherits both the madness of her *bay't* and an insight into the world of the *djinn*. They are able to call upon the powers of the spirits to distort the world around them.



Many vampires from other *bay't* treat the Majanin with great respect for the sacrifice they have made for insight and power. Members of the *bay't* often act as advisors to powerful Cainites, using their oracular abilities, and exploiting the reality-bending gifts of the *djinn* to protect their masters. Majanin are also common in the Holy Land, as many visit Jerusalem to see the site of the sacrifice of Marid.

Since the advent of Islam, which retains the belief in *djinn*, many Majanin have embraced the faith. The way a member of the *bay't* is viewed by other Ashirra depends on her individual actions, just as the Qur'an dictates that each *djinni* should be judged. If they do good, they serve Allah. In they do bad, they serve Satan. Problems with other Ashirra arise because good and bad, even with the Qur'an as a guide, can be very subjective measures.

In recent decades, a few Majanin have utterly rejected the idea that they are possessed by *djinn*. Instead, they claim to be prophets, taking inspiration from the fits and seizures that Muhammad suffered when Allah bestowed visions on him. This claim is extremely controversial among the Ashirra, however, as the Qur'an makes it explicit that Muhammad was the last prophet. Majanin who see themselves as divinely inspired argue that Muhammad was the last of the prophets to the living, and that they are prophets to the unliving, thereby sidestepping the restriction. This is hardly a widely accepted view, but coteries of Majanin, calling themselves *khaqas*, travel the Islamic world, promoting their twisted vision of Islam and attempting to use Dementation to turn unbelievers to the cause.

Sobriquet: Madmen

Appearance: Majanin have no restriction on the race, age, sex or status of those they Embrace. The most noticeable thing about them is their clothes. Many choose to wear a mish-mash of elements from different cultures. Even some examples of European dress have been seen, brought back by the Majanin from Jerusalem.

Haven and Prey: Majanin generally make their lairs in the poorest parts of a city. From their hovels, they prowl among the city's populace, choosing their victims by listening to the voice of their inner *djinn*. If no suitable errant soul presents itself that night, the *djinni* within has to be content with the blood of a beggar instead.

The Embrace: When a Majnoon feels that the part of the *djinni* bound within him has grown strong enough to be divided again, he chooses a potential childe. As they recount it, the Majanin actually listen to the whisperings of their *djinni* who recognizes the mortal soul it is destined to

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: They are no different from what was before or what will be after. They accept the *djinn*'s advice, and that is all that matters.

The Franj: They have no souls. Empty, barren, worthless.

Al-Amin: They call us devils and wish us ill, for they mistrust the *djinn* within us. If they cannot accept what we are, we will play with them until they break.

Baali: They serve demons, yet they do not understand what they are. One day we will explain it to them. Perhaps then they will serve us!

Banu Haqim: They say they judge and punish, but I say they are just greedy. They have not the breadth of understanding to truly make the decisions they do.

Walid Set: Little snake, slithering through the city, I see you, little snake, and I have a forked stick to match your forked tongue.



impregnate. Some seek high and low for years for that destined childe; others take the first mortal they see when the time is right. The Majnoon then harasses the chosen victim with a ferocity reserved only for the Embrace, one of their most important duties. Once the victim teeters on the very brink of insanity, she is ready to survive having her spirit fused with that of a *djinni*.

Character Creation: The randomness of the creation of a Majnoon leads to a wide range of concepts. Abilities, Attributes, Backgrounds, Roads, Natures and Demeanors all depend on who the vampires was before her Embrace, or how she reacted to her sire's harassment. However, most Majanin focus on Auspex (the *djinni*'s insight) and Dementation (the *djinni*'s power) more than they do Obfuscate.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Dementation, Obfuscate

Weaknesses: The *djinni* within drives all Majanin utterly mad. All members of the *bay't* begin play with at least one derangement of the player's choice. This derangement can never be overcome by any means, mundane or supernatural. To get rid of the derangement, the Majnoon would have to expel her *djinni*. That would tear apart her soul, ending her unlife.

Organization: The Majanin have no obvious organization on the level of the entire *bay't*. Small groups of Madmen do cooperate, sometimes as equals, other times in cultlike communities. The *khaqas* who spread the view of the *bay't* as unliving prophets are the most prominent (and controversial) example of this tendency. For the most part, though, members of the *bay't* work with other vampires, providing them with the insights only the Majanin posses.

Quote: *I thank you for your friendship and advice. I regret what must happen now, but your soul will soon know an agony the likes of which you never imagined. It will be worth it, though. You will gain insights you never suspected.*

Bay't Mujrim

(Ravnos)

The Mujrimin — or "Ravnos" as they refer to themselves — hail from India, that great region east of the lands of Islam. According to their own legends, the Mujrimin face a panoply of terrible demons in their homeland and survive through cunning and wit. Sheer survival has thus led the *bay't* to value deceit and stealth, a tendency enhanced by the whispers of their own Beast. Unlike the raging monster of other clans, the Mujrim Beast stokes these vampires' urges to sin, making them greedy thieves, prideful boasters or decadent monsters. Although many Mujrimin fight this tendency, it is nevertheless a recurring theme with the clan and has earned them a bad name in Muslim lands, who are quite intolerant of theft in particular. Indeed, Mujrim means "criminal."

The *bay't* divides itself into extended family groups called *jati*. These are descendants of a common ancestor who immigrated from India. The timing of that immigration and the experiences of the *jat* since then shape the group's culture to such an extent that it functions almost like a separate clan. In the Muslim world, there are three significant *jati*: Roma Ravnos, Alexandrites and Bashirites.

The Roma Ravnos are the most recently arrived, and they are rapidly becoming the most numerous. Apparently, the demons of India have become even more vicious and have driven not only the vampires out of their homeland, but much of the human herd as well. These humans, Indian nomadic émigrés known as the Roma (or sometimes as "Gypsies"), travel in caravans of tightly knit families, supporting themselves however they can. The Ravnos among them see themselves as unholy protectors and predators of these peoples and have little tolerance for other vampires. They have especial disdain for Mujrimin of other lines, whom they see as debased.

Alexandrites are the most well-established Mujrimin in Islam. Tracing their line to an ancient in the city of Alexandria, they have been in that city and many other trading ports for centuries. Alexandrites often suffer from the sins of greed or pride and lead luxurious unlives as traders and merchants. They have little time for a morality that is not their own and are a favorite target for the admonitions of Ashirra *'ulama*.

Bashirites trace themselves to the ancient Mujrim Bashir and live in the Holy Land. Bashir and his brood are Christian and believe wholeheartedly in an apocalypse. They await the battle at Armageddon as others await the dawn. They suffer from sins of pride, lust and greed. Like the Alexandrites, they have their hands in trade, but have a better understanding with the Ashirra. They are, after all, People of the Book.



Sobriquet: Charlatans

Appearance: Most members of the *bay't* dress extremely well, their clothes bordering on the ostentatious. A few older members of the clan show their Indian origins and dress in the clothes of that region, rather than adopting local fashion.

Haven and Prey: Traveling groups of Mujrimin nest wherever they can. Many spend the day in covered caravans, or buried in the sand, watched over by trusted *ansar*. In cities, the family groups often have communal havens. Their prey aren't so much defined by who they are as by how they become victims. Most Mujrimin cannot help but indulge their weakness and so trick mortals into positions where they can feed on them appropriately.

The Embrace: The Mujrimin choose new recruits based on their own nature. City-dwelling groups pick merchants and city officials, often corrupt ones, to further consolidate their influence. Traveling groups of Mujrimin pick wanderers of all sorts, from pilgrims to entertainers, for the Embrace. Some even find frustrated explorers, trapped in one place by work or responsibility, and set them free with the Embrace.

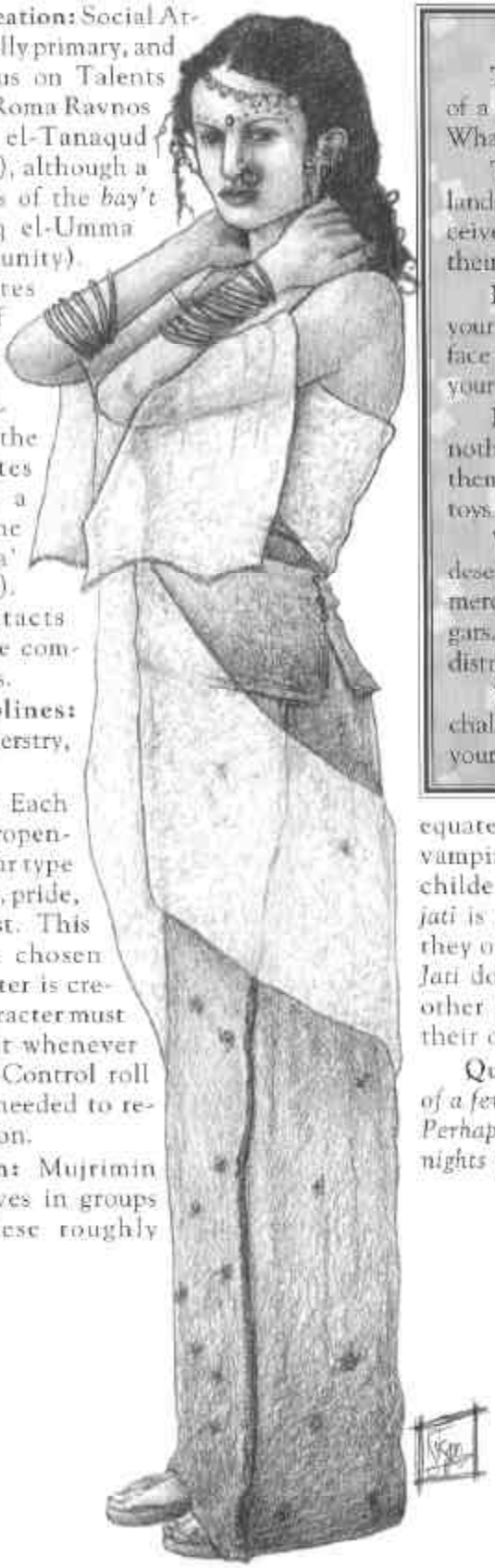
Character Creation: Social Attributes are generally primary, and most Ravnos focus on Talents and Skills. Most Roma Ravnos walk the Tariq el-Tanaqud (Road of Paradox), although a few new members of the *bay't* follow the Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community). The Alexandrites follow a variety of roads, including Community and the Tariq el-Shaitan (Road of the Devil). Bashirites generally follow a harsh version of the Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven). Retainers, Contacts and Resources are common Backgrounds.

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Chimerstry, Fortitude

Weaknesses: Each Mujrim has a propensity for a particular type of sin, be it deceit, pride, blackmail or lust. This specialty sin is chosen when the character is created, and the character must seek to indulge it whenever possible. A Self-Control roll (difficulty 6) is needed to resist the temptation.

Organization: Mujrimin arrange themselves in groups called jati. These roughly equate to family groups, as most are composed of vampires who are directly related through sire-childe relationships. The eldest Mujrim in each *jati* is usually its leader, although in some cases they only act as advisors to the apparent leaders. *Jati* do not seem to communicate with one another terribly often, each being social units in their own right.

Quote: *I know nothing of this crime. I do know of a few places to direct your investigations, though. Perhaps a hand or two will be severed before many nights have passed.*



Stereotypes

The Ashirra: Do they really follow the word of a mortal who was born mere centuries ago? What deception has been perpetrated here!

The *Franj*: Beware those who come to these lands. They are too untrusting of others to deceive easily. If you must deal with them, do so on their own territory.

Banu Haqim: They make excellent tests of your skills. Never be foolish enough to let one face you in combat or discover where you spend your days, though.

Ray'een al-Fen: Simply fools who can see nothing beyond their obsession with art. Provide them with a few stolen pieces and they are your toys forever.

Wah'Sheen: These cowards lurk in the deserts, resting themselves against animals and merchants, or prowl the street, feasting on beggars. They make good sport when we catch them, distracting us from the monotony of the desert.

Walid Set: Like the Banu Haqim, a real challenge. Test yourself against them only when your skills can find no other match.

Bay't Mushakis

(Brujah)

Once the northern coast of Africa was unquestionably the preserve of the Mushakisin. From great Carthage, the *bay't* presided over an unprecedented society where Cainites and kine lived together in harmony. Then came the Roman Empire and its vampiric masters. Together they brought the dream to an end. Or, at least, so runs the legend.

In the centuries since, the exiled Mushakisin have spread throughout the region. While the older members of the clan reflect on their failures, the younger ones seek new ideals and philosophies among the peoples of North Africa. Some think they have already found the answer in Arabia and the new religion of Islam. The faith has a particular combination of discipline and passion that appeals to many Mushakisin. A few Muslim scholars were embraced into the *bay't* centuries ago, creating the beginnings of a religious movement within the clan. In the centuries since, the ideals of the religion have spread through the *bay't*, giving it the focus it has lacked since the end of the Carthaginian era.



In the early days of Islam, a few elder members of the *bay't* listened to the words of the *'ulama*, the mortal wise men who advise on the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith, and debated how the principles of submission could be applied to their own condition. Many became involved in the founding of the Ashirra, along with the Hajj and the Qabilat el-Khayal, and were instrumental in drawing up the vampiric versions of the *shari'a*. These codes now dominate the unlives of many Mushakisin and other Ashirra. The younger members of the *bay't* had little time for this, choosing to take a more active role in jihad, following the conquering Muslim troops all over the rapidly expanding Islamic world. As the conquests took them into the expanses of the Byzantine Empire, they took the opportunity to avenge Carthage by destroying the Roman Ventrue who lingered there, all but driving the clan from the Holy Land. That these two trends have not torn the Muslim Mushakisin apart has a great deal to do with the charismatic example of Khalid ibn Sahl, the leader of the radical Ashirra faction. A vampire prone to both action and reflection, he draws admiration from the holy warriors and scholars of his clan.

Today, while the *bay't* is not wholly Muslim, most members in Muslim lands have adopted its principal tenets to a greater or lesser extent. For some it remains a philosophical exercise, an interesting and stimulating new religious interpretation of an egalitarian ideal that appeals to those seeking to repeat the Carthaginian experiment. For others, their interest is purely pragmatic. The wise men of Islam have one of the greatest collections of works from Ancient Greece. Islamic science and philosophy builds on and far exceeds these early works. The Mushakisin follow this learning assiduously.

Others do truly believe, though. For them, Islam offers a chance to build a utopia in the afterlife rather than on Earth. The Qur'an's merciful stance on the *djinn* and other supernatural creatures leads many to hope the Embrace has not cursed them through all eternity. Perhaps by submitting to the five pillars of Islam, they may achieve redemption. Some of the younger members of the *bay't* are especially zealous. Many seek to support the armies of Islam, especially in the Holy Land. They espouse the views of Salah al-Din, whose successes against the infidel crusaders have proved an inspiration to them.

Other members of the *bay't* choose to take jihad to its extreme and purge the earth of Cainites who do not believe. Despite the Qur'an's mixed messages of tolerance, especially for Christians and Jews, it appears to be quite clear on the fate of pagans. Many elders vampires whose Embraces predate Islam fall into that category. A few elders are beginning to worry that the younger Mushakisin are developing a reflexive hatred of them as a result. Given the intellectual and transitory nature of many of their attachments to Islam, they may not be far from the mark.

Sobriquet: Zealots

Appearance: Mushakisin are mainly drawn from North African and Arabian stock. Most are Embraced at their peak of physical perfection and so are well-built and good-looking in a cold, distant way. They dress neatly, with a quiet dignity. Many adopt the white robes of the *'ulama*.

Haven and Prey: The Mushakisin choose to reside in the bustling heart of a city, often with several vampires in the same building. Many of these communal havens have

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: Through them we build a new Carthage in the hearts of other *bay't*. As our numbers grow, we will rebuild Carthage not as a city, but as a nation.

The *Franj*: Once they came to Carthage to destroy our dream. They try again with their Crusades. This time, the victory shall be ours. Their civilizations will crumble beneath our armies.

Banu Haqim: Their whole society is rooted in a primitive past. Perhaps now that they have begun to see the wisdom of Islam, we can introduce them to other cultured concepts.

Hajj: A shining example of how the civilizing influence of faith can make the world a finer place, and a *bay't* a better thing.

Qabilat al-Mawt: When they cease to pry into the secrets of the next world and start to concentrate on this one, they could be useful allies. Already they make good advisors and debating partners.

Ray'een al-Fen: Their knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an and the *shari'a* are unsurpassed. From them, we gain the wisdom to continue our struggle.

Walid Set: Where we build, they destroy. Where we set foundations, they undermine them. There can be no peace between us.

taken the form of *madrasas*, the colleges of the Sunni branch of Islam, with elder Mushakisin presiding over the education of younger *bay't* members. The more aggressive members of the *bay't* have taken to making their havens on the outskirts of settlements, which they call *ribats*, or fortified monasteries. They often choose to feed off the dull and ignorant, giving them at least some use to society.

The Embrace: Mushakisin look for a sharp intelligence and commitment to a system of beliefs among their recruits. Just as Islam judges a person on his religious devotion not his status, Bay't Mushakis Embraces from any station of life, so long as the candidate shows the right intelligence. Vampires actively engaged in spreading the rule of Islam through force of arms choose warriors with a clear, firm grasp of strategy and an insightful understanding of the Qur'an.

Character Creation: The *bay't* is split between members with Mental and Physical Attributes dominant. Younger Mushakisin are more likely to choose Physical Attributes as their primary group. They usually have assertive Natures, often bordering on the aggressive. Their Demeanors are sometimes similar to their Natures, but some hide their passion behind a façade of intellectual detachment. They choose Talents and Knowledges over Skills in most circumstances, but the most martial concentrate on Skills and Talents. They are most commonly found on the Tariq el-Umma (Road of Humanity), el-Harb (Road of War) and el-Sama' (Road of Heaven).



Clan Disciplines: Celerity, Potence, Presence

Weaknesses: Mushakisin are so passionate about their intellectual and martial pursuits that they easily lose their tempers when frustrated. Because of this, they are far and away the clan most likely to frenzy. The difficulty for a member of the *bay't* to resist frenzy is always two higher than the listed number.

Organization: The Mushakisin of the Middle East meet frequently. Individual vampires within a city gather to discuss intellectual, religious and martial strategy, often debating for several nights without reaching anything more than a single point of agreement. Every decade, each *madrasa* and *ribat* sends a representative to a *bay't* meeting in Baghdad which endeavors, without success, to determine a direction for the *bay't* across the Muslim world.

Quote: *It is a matter of unceasing wonder to me that the other* bay't *cannot see what we can. The mortals offer us more guidance in the ways we can change the world than they imagine.*

Bay't Mutasharid

(Nosferatu)

From the moment a member of Bay't Mutasharid feels the blood of the clan enter her body, she knows she is truly cursed. The painful changes which wrack her form over the next few days are the birth pains of something utterly inhuman. Once made in the image of God, she becomes a horrific, twisted creature. But unlike many of their European Nosferatu cousins, the Mutasharidin of the empire do not begrudge their curse. They are monsters, and taking a cue from the great hunter that spawned their line, they become true predators. While not evil *per se*, they are not humans and operate by a separate set of moral standards. Every encounter with other beings, whether living or dead, impresses upon them that they are horrific, to be treated as monsters. Thus, they act like monsters, seeking to satisfy their own needs with little regard for others.

The *bay't* as a whole is ruthlessly obsessed with its survival, for it is well aware that its acceptance of inhumanity causes many mortals and vampires alike to hunt its members down. One strategy it uses is a combination of concealment and intelligence gathering. The *bay't*'s mastery of Obfuscate makes it easy for it to avoid hunters and to spy on others for forewarnings of a potential threat. In the course of its investigations, the *bay't* comes across a lot of other useful information, which it happily barters for favors from other Cainites. These favors can be very useful when danger rears its head. Some members of the *bay't* take the opposite approach and hide in plain sight. They participate actively in coteries of vampires, working on the theory that there is safety in numbers. Of course, they still keep the location of their havens secret.

Mutasharidin make use of birds and other animals to communicate with others of their kind in distant cities. The distance between communities is often vast and the journeys across the desert arduous, particularly for a vampire. It is so much simpler and faster to have a bird fly the journey instead. Elder Mutasharidin often maintain small breeding pools of blood-tainted water at oases a distance into the desert. They have learned a technique, which they guard jealously, that allows them to make the concentration of blood in the water weak enough to avoid making ghouls of mortals who drink there repeatedly, but strong enough to breed animals of superior size and strength (see page 158).

In recent centuries, though, a large and growing portion of the *bay't* has adopted the teachings of Muhammad and abandoned the traditional behavior of the Mutasharidin, rejecting the idea that they are inherently monstrous. Led by the powerful Methuselah Tarique al-Hajji, these vampires have become the heart of the Ashirra sect. They fully embrace the belief that submission to Allah offers a path to redemption, even for the most horrific Cainite.

These faithful Mutasharidin call themselves the Hajj, taking their name from their founder and from the pilgrimage to Mecca every Muslim is expected to perform at least once. The *hajj* is a harrowing experience for Cainites, as the holy sites of Islam resonate with Allah's power and force all but the purest night-creatures to flee. Agonizing flames lick at a vampire's form as she approaches the holy cities. Few can avoid destruction if they persist in advancing. All faithful Ashirra aspire to enter the holy cities, but very few have managed it — most of them Mutasharidin. Those who succeed in the pilgrimage are welcomed by the Hajj who have already passed the ultimate test of faith and take up residence in one of the holy cities, truly deserving of their line's name at last.

Of the Hajj who fail the pilgrimage, some choose to force themselves onwards, facing Final Death as divine judgment for their failure. Others turn back, bearing the burns on their bodies as marks of their failure and as spurs to greater submission to Allah. After decades of further devotion, much of which is spent teaching and trying to convert other vampires, they try once more. After a period of rest and reflection, the Hajj who has completed the pilgrimage leaves the holy cities and travels to other parts of the Islamic world. These vampires become important parts of Ashirra communities across the empire, often serving as imams, *'ulama* or muezzin.

Sobriquet: Hunters, Believers (Hajj only)

Appearance: Each Mutasharid is unique. The curse of Caine twists her body into a mockery of the form she once had. Facial features collapse, hair falls out, boils, pustules and warts infest the skin. Bones distend, collapse or twist into impossible shapes. No one could possibly mistake a Mutasharid for human. Many Hajj bear serious burns on their forms, the result of failed attempts to approach Mecca. Unlike European Nosferatu, few Mutasharidin or Hajj hide their forms — neither is embarrassed by their horrific mien.

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: A game played by young ones too naïve to know the truth. The blood within us makes us monsters, and no amount of praying can change that.

The Franj: More victims. Let them come. We already know more about them than they shall ever know about us.

Al-Amin: An old game. Hunter hunts hunter. Now, it seems the game is over. Our foes have new problems. If the word from Europe is to be believed, new players enter the game and the rules are different.

Banu Haqim: You judge me, brother? You want to drink my blood? How will you do so when I know where you rest and can look like your closest ally?

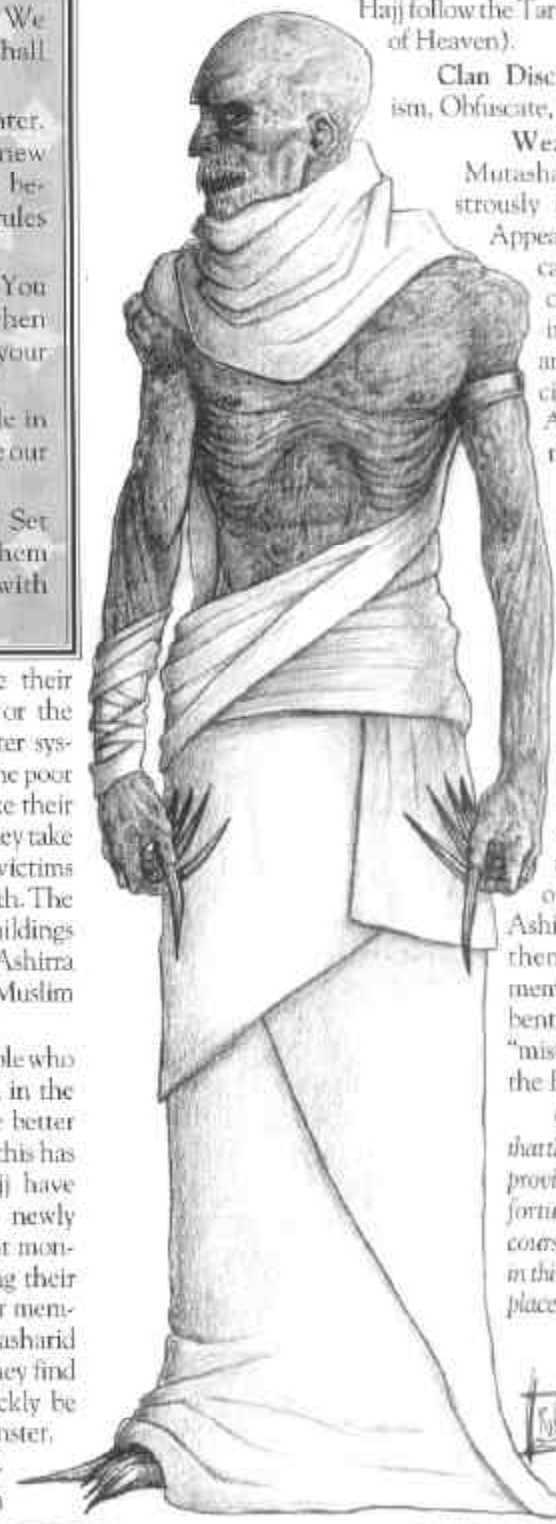
Qabilat el-Khayal: We know of their role in the defection of the Hajj. They will not survive our vengeance.

Walid Set: Our only allies. The Walid Set understand our aims and do much to further them in their own ways. I will not share my secrets with them, but my plans I will.

Haven and Prey: Many Mutasharidin make their haven underground. The basements of buildings or the *qanats*, underground channels of sophisticated water systems, are common choices. They generally feed on the poor and homeless, although some use Obfuscate to make their way into the homes of the rich and powerful. Then they take great delight in revealing their true face to their victims before feeding on them and leaving them close to death. The Hajj make their havens in mosques or other buildings associated with Islam. They generally follow the Ashirra limits on feeding quite strictly, feeding lightly from a Muslim herd or hunting infidels (see page 50 for more).

The Embrace: The Mutasharidin Embrace people who have no direction or who are outcast from society, in the hope that their alienation will allow them to cope better with the rigors of the Embrace. In recent centuries, this has backfired again and again. The ranks of the Hajj have swollen beyond Tarique's descendants thanks to newly Embraced Mutasharidin who reject idea of inherent monstrosity and try to cleanse their souls by reaffirming their submission to Allah. Since more and more younger members of the *bay't* are turning to the Hajj, Mutasharid unbelievers are Embracing bitter people instead. They find that the anger they have against society can quickly be twisted into the proper attitude for a Mutasharid monster.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes are usually primary, although their Social Attributes often improve rapidly after the Embrace, particularly Manipulation. Talents are usually the primary Abilities. Most Mutasharid have a Nature of Monster or something similar. Allies, Contacts and Retainers are all rare in the *bay't*. Most traditional Mutasharidin are on the Tariq el-Shaitan (Road of the Devil) or el-Bedouin (Road of the Nomad), while the Hajj follow the Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven).



Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Obfuscate, Potence

Weaknesses: All Mutasharidin are monstrously deformed. Their Appearance is automatically rated zero and can never be improved through any means. All social rolls involving Appearance automatically fail.

Organization: Bay't Mutasharid is loosely organized but well connected. Its members spread information rather freely between groups and cities. The Hajj are more tightly knit, relying on each other and their Ashirra allies to protect them from vengeful members of the *bay't*, bent on correcting the "mistake" that created the Hajj.

Quote: *I'm sure that the information I have provided will end this unfortunate incident. Of course, you would not be in this situation in the first place if you hadn't been trying to pretend that you were still one of the kine.*

Laibon

Sub-Saharan Africa is a mysterious land for Europeans. For Muslims, especially Arab and Berber traders, it is much closer at hand. Indeed, sea trade along the east coast of Africa and land trade across the great desert have long linked Arabia and the Maghrib to *bilad as-sudan*, the lands inhabited by black-skinned peoples south of the desert. *Bilad as-sudan* remains an exotic land, home to great kingdoms such as Kanem and Ghana, where Islam is only starting to take hold. But a lively trade in salt, gold and slaves encourages prolonged contact and visits. As is the way of things, contact breeds conflict, especially among the children of Caine.

There are Cainites who dwell in *bilad as-sudan* and have for untold millennia, since before the desert rose from the savanna to block large movements of people and predators. These vampires call themselves Laibon and claim to be descended from ancient spirits of the land, seeing the stories of Caine and the Second City as distortions of their own legends. The Laibon have been in occasional contact with the Fertile Crescent and North Africa for a very long time. Indeed, it is a right of passage among Laibon neonates to travel far and wide before they take up a domain of their own. These travelers are often masterful storytellers and pay for the hospitality of local Cainites with tales of wonder.

Back in their homelands, the Laibon are highly territorial. After long travels, they establish large domains in which they dwell alone, overseeing human herds and acting as gods (at least if traveler's reports are to be believed). They are jealous lords and do not tolerate intrusions from other vampires. And therein lies the seed of current problems. Indeed, as Islamic traders have pursued commerce with *bilad as-sudan*, Ashirra have come with them. The presence of foreign vampires promoting a religion intolerant of the local pagan ways angers the Laibon and has led to bloody conflicts. Ashirra and other Cainites who set up domain in the southern lands face attack from local Laibon lords and powerful allies.

In the Maghrib and the Levant, young Laibon still come as travelers, but they now carry messages. They warn that Cainites must curtail their predation in *bilad as-sudan* or face further retribution. Although the *bay't* displays a rare degree of control over their Beast, Laibon elders are powerful and not above striking at their enemies. A tense standoff is in the making.

Sobriquet: Watchers

Appearance: Nearly all Laibon bear the features of the people who live south of the Sahara in Africa, although a few have been Embraced from the peoples of the Middle East. Many bear the ritual scarring of their tribes, which leads some to confuse them with the Walid Set. Travelers adopt the dress of the native peoples within a few days of arriving in a new location and then do their best to blend in.

Haven and Prey: The traveling Laibon often spend their days in the havens of other vampires, or at least those provided by other vampires, as guests. If they have no host, they are adept at finding abandoned or disused buildings to serve as temporary havens. While staying as guests, they ask their host about the best and safest mortals to feed from. Once they have settled in a city, they like to live in some comfort, often making *ansar* of their neighbors. Nearby residents become their staple diet too, and they do their best to drive off other vampires trying to feed in the area.

The Embrace: The *bay't* has only just started to Embrace out of its homelands. Those few that they do pick are carefully chosen to display a mixture of skill in arms, curiosity and ambition.

Character Creation: There is not a single Ability that a Laibon does not prize to some degree, although most that are seen in the Islamic world have some Skills appropriate to surviving in the

wild. However, Mental Attributes tend to be primary. Self-Control or Instinct are usually high, reflecting the *bay't*'s superior control over their Beasts. Survivor and Loner are common Natures. Their Demeanors are tailored to suit their hosts. Typically Laibon follow variations of the Roads of the Beast and Heaven.

Clan Disciplines: Abombwe, Animalism, Fortitude

Weaknesses: The Laibon's control over their Beast (as indicated by the Abombwe Discipline, see **Dark Ages Companion**) comes at a cost. In return for its quiescence, it consumes a tithe of the blood a Laibon consumes or uses. Every time a member of the *bay't* uses or consumes blood, the Beast "consumes" a point, or two if the net change in blood pool is five or greater in one scene. So, if the vampire spends two points to boost her Attributes, she actually loses three. If she drains a mortal of all his 10 blood points, she gains only eight.

Organization: In the Muslim world, the Laibon are either wanderers or more-or-less welcome newcomers to a city. In their native lands, they are solitary creatures, claiming vast domains as their own. Some vampires tell stories of coming across gatherings of Laibon, telling tales and enacting rituals of some kind, but these stories are often dismissed as wildly fanciful. That doesn't stop the vampires who have seen these gatherings from distrusting the Laibon.

Quote: *Your hospitality is unsurpassed and your generosity more than I could have hoped for. Perhaps you might tell me a little more of these lands? I find your culture quite fascinating.*



Stereotypes

The Ashirra: The concept of a single god is strange, but these Ashirra show their human charges more respect than other vampires, so there is good here. If only they would learn to stay where they belong, then we would not be enemies.

The *Franj*: I am curious. The tales of the way their society is structured are almost unbelievable. I must see it for myself before I return.

Banu Haqim: Arrogant monsters who would drink your blood and consider themselves above all others. I avoid them.

Bay't Mushakis: Some of the greatest taletellers I have ever encountered. If you give one the time to talk, he will tell you everything you would wish to know.

Ray'een al-Fen: They make the best hosts, can introduce you to many vampires and tell fascinating stories. What's more, they pose little threat to our ambitions. If you find and befriend one, truly the orishas favor you.

Wah'Sheen: We know these creatures well enough from our own lands. It is amusing to see how much the civilization they hate creates differences in them as we travel.

Walid Set: They know much and make entertaining companions. Never relax your guard, though, for they are quick to force you to pay for their hospitality.

Qabilat al-Khayal

(Lasombra)

Clan Lasombra — known in the Muslim world as the Qabilat el-Khayal, or "clan of shadows" — harbors more genuine believers in God's existence than any other *bay't*. While the majority of the clan as a whole is Christian, a large minority is Muslim, with a very strong presence throughout the empire. Indeed, the first Ashirra Suleiman ibn Abdullah is a member of this *bay't*. Despite the Qur'an's message that Christians are "People of the Book," most Muslims' view of Christians is ambiguous at best and downright hostile at worst. Christians tend to be even less open-minded about the new faith.

Not surprisingly, the birth and spread of Islam has created divisions within the clan, particularly in Iberia, where the two religions are in constant conflict for control. Christian members of the Qabilat el-Khayal fight Muslim clanmates over the fate of the peninsula. As long as the *Reconquista* continues, so too will the disputes. The fighting is now so intense that the "Friends of the Night," the secretive courts of the *bay't*, have become paralyzed by religious differences. Several Ashirra are members of the Friends (known as the *Amici Noctis* in Europe and the *Asdiqa' al-Lail* in Islamic lands), but the Christian majority is pushing them out. For now, the Friends have forbidden any more petitions for the right to destroy another member of the *bay't* for reasons connected with the *Reconquista* or fighting in the Holy Land. It seems like only a matter of time before the Friends become wholly Christian and support a new crusade.

Elder and less faithful members of the Qabilat el-Khayal find Islam a much more frustrating religion than those that preceded it. A religion without priests, monks or clergy offers less opportunity for control and manipulation. Of course, wiser heads see it merely as a greater test of one's skills. A word to the right *'alim*, with some judicious use of Disciplines, can make the critical difference.

Christian Lasombra can be found at the fringes of the Islamic world, mainly in ports. They trade and raid on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea while quietly establishing a presence in each of the key towns and cities along the way. Many, whether they are believers or not, do a good trade helping Ashirra pilgrims on the sea leg of their journey. Indeed, pilgrims from the Maghrib or al-Andalus usually choose to travel as much of the distance by sea as they can, given the difficulties of joining a caravan when you have to hide from the sun all day.

Elsewhere in the empire, Muslim members of the *bay't* are in the overwhelming majority. Most are deeply committed to the Ashirra as an organization. The Qabilat el-Khayal is rapidly becoming the dominant force in the cities of North Africa, as the Mushakisin of the region no longer have the interest in politics they once did. The other major *bay't* in the region, the Wah'Sheen, have little interest in either politics or cities.

The clan is still rare in Egypt, but members of the clan can be found throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Many seek *'ulama* — both mortal and vampiric — with interesting views of the Qur'an. Others have noticed the differences between some versions of the Hadith and *shari'a* across the Islamic world, and seek answers and greater understanding by examining the different versions. Many seek consultations with those blessed Ashirra who actually heard Muhammad speak.

The Holy Land holds more than a few Christian Lasombra, many of whom are frustrated and angered by a Jerusalem in Muslim hands. The Christian faith is slowly being replaced throughout the region, and with it disappears the religious hierarchy and organizations that the *bay't* has influenced and controlled through the centuries. While many younger vampires have been able to adapt to the new religion, many of the elders no longer have the requisite flexibility.

Sobriquet: The Faithful

Appearance: Members of Qabilat el-Khayal tend to be of Mediterranean extraction, with the dark-skinned, fine-boned faces of their native lands. There are an increasing number of vampires Embraced from among other Islamic peoples, however. Most choose to wear simple but well-cut and expensive clothing, especially the merchants who abound in coastal regions.

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: The Hajj are the heart of the Ashirra, while the Mushakisin and Banu Haqim are its strong arms. We, however, are its mind, and without a mind, it would be nothing.

The *Franj*: They are both allies and enemies. However, as long as they continue to underestimate the people, and the Cainites, of the Middle East, they will be easy prey.

Banu Haqim: Worthy foes and efficient allies. However, they cannot be trusted, and their thirst for the blood of other vampires is great. Always deal with them through others. There are some excellent intermediaries out there who would be suited to dying in your place.

Bay't Mushakis: Said excellent intermediaries.

Bay't Mutasharid: With any luck, the old monsters of the *bay't* will turn on the Hajj and leave us as the leaders of the Ashirra. Ah, my mistake. Luck will have nothing to do with it.

Ray'een al-Fen: An insipid *bay't* that does not have the conviction of its faith. Still, some of the younger ones make good scribes.

Walid Set: Cunning and clever, but shortsighted. They have no vision of what their influence should achieve but limited power and confusion.

Haven and Prey: Members of Qabilat el-Khayal enjoy the finer things that position and status bring. Most make their havens in elaborate and expensive houses within cities. The tradition of building homes around a private courtyard with no exterior windows facing the street makes it easy for them to create sunproof rooms without eliciting speculation or comment from their neighbors. Traders spend their days below decks on ships or in their *funduqs* (trade warehouses). They feed on privileged members of the city in which they live.

The Embrace: Members of Qabilat el-Khayal Embrace from among the most highly regarded members of society. Most are genuine believers, but not all. An aptitude in both politics and war are virtually compulsory, and more than a few understand the merchant's trade. *Qadi* (judges) and *muhtasib* (guardians of public morality) are common choices for Caine's curse.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes and Talents are the rule in this *bay't*. Most have Judge or Architect as their Nature. Resources, Retainers and Influence are extremely common Backgrounds. Mentors are less prevalent but are still common. The majority of the *bay't* follows the Tariq al-Sama' (Road of Heaven), al-Harb (Road of War) or al-Umma (Road of Community). Many Christians in the clan follow the European versions of these roads.



Clan Disciplines: Dominate, Obtenebration, Potence

Weaknesses: The members of the *bay't* are forever denied their reflection. They cannot be seen in windows, bodies of water or other reflective surfaces.

Organization: The *bay't* is fairly structured, with a system of respect for elders based on a combination of experience, deeds and age. Few decisions are made in formal meetings, though. Much of the *bay't* policy is set in quiet meetings between two Faithful without the knowledge of those the decisions will affect. The overall ruling body of the clan is the secretive *Asiqa' al-Lail*, which accepts petitions from *bay't* members who wish to destroy other members of the clan.

Quote: *What a brave decision. I applaud you. It shows much thought and the bravery to face the consequences. Perhaps, though, you have overlooked this: as the Prophet once said....*

Qabilat al-Mawt

(Cappadocian)

Cainites are the unliving, but are not quite dead. The members of this *bay't* understand that distinction and seek the secrets of death and decay. Only in the end of things is the truth revealed, they claim, and the Middle East holds a deep fascination for the Qabilat al-Mawt (literally, the "clan of death"). From the visions of the afterlife in Egyptian lore to the new revelations of the Qur'an, the area is rich with possible leads in the *bay't*'s search for a greater understanding of the secrets of life, death and the afterlife. Interaction between the Arabic-speaking peoples all over the region has created a phenomenal network of research. Islamic science, built on the foundation of Greek, Persian and Indian knowledge is the among the best in the world. The knowledge available in the teaching institutions and libraries of the Muslim world is a constant draw for the *bay't*.



The respect that Muslim culture shows for the dead is at once a great boon and a real problem for these vampires. The elaborate cemeteries with their impressive tombs and accompanying buildings that can be found in the major cities make for ideal havens and places of research. The common practice in some areas of using cadavers for medical research is another attraction. However, among some peoples, corpses are considered inviolate. If the abuses of the body that his research entails are ever detected, a member of the Qabilat al-Mawt is liable to face retribution from both mortals and Ashirra alike, outraged by the desecration of corpses.

A large number of the *bay't* are based in and around Asia Minor where they have established remote havens in which to experiment on particularly interesting corpses with little or no risk of detection. The research materials for these outposts are often liberated from nomadic tribes, thanks to their custom of burying their dead in shallow, easily plundered graves.

According to some elders, the clan's founder — known as Cappadocius to the *Franj* and Abu Lazar to Muslim Cainites — plans to diablerize God and take his place as the ruler of heaven. This is not a plan that the *bay't* advertises widely. Those of the *bay't* who associate with the Ashirra, for very few can be said to be members, keep this legend as quiet as possible. A few members of the Qabilat al-Mawt who have adopted the Islamic faith actively oppose the plan. On the whole, though, the *bay't* views Islam much as it does the other religions of the world: as a potential source of information. Few of the Qabilat al-Mawt are true believers in Muhammad's teachings, although — for access to his insight — many profess to be. A very few members of the *bay't* in the region are genuine Christians, and they are outnumbered by the Muslims.

Egypt remains the one area of the Islamic world that the *bay't* would like to gain a foothold in, but which has always eluded them. The ancient Egyptian fascination with death and the afterlife is something the *bay't*'s scholars would sorely like to explore further. However, the Walid Set have, to date, frustrated many of their attempts to access the tombs and records in the region. The Serpents seem to take a particular pleasure in unearthing the hidden desires of the often dour Qabilat al-Mawt and luring them into the service of Set. More than one member of this *bay't* has ended up walking the Tariq el-Hayya, the Road of the Serpent.

Sobriquet: Graverobbers

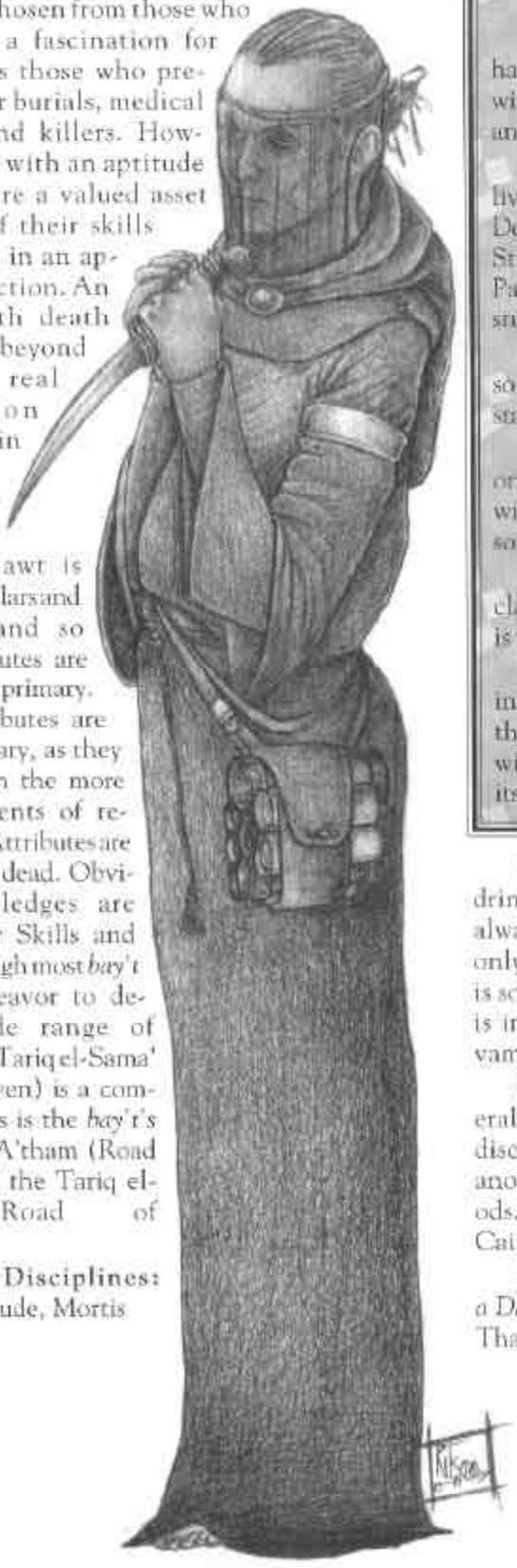
Appearance: Given that so many members of the Qabilat al-Mawt had an obsession with death before they joined the unloving, it should be no surprise that their attire is funerary. Dark-colored, all-concealing robes are the most common form of dress. The *bay't* weakness tends to manifest itself as a dried-out, almost mummified appearance as the years pass. There is no mistaking an elder of the clan as anything but a long-dead thing. Some choose to wear masks, but many adopt the traditional Bedouin headdress instead.

Haven and Prey: Muslims cities feature large cemeteries with elaborate support facilities, including hospitals, libraries, hostels and kitchens. Many of the Qabilat al-Mawt use these as havens, discretely feeding on the visitors there. Others lair in caves deep in the mountains, only emerging to feed and track down new research samples.

The Embrace: Candidates for the Embrace are normally chosen from those who already have a fascination for death, such as those who prepare bodies for burials, medical researchers and killers. However, students with an aptitude for research are a valued asset to the *bay't* if their skills can be turned in an appropriate direction. An obsession with death and what lies beyond is the only real qualification needed to join the *bay't*.

Character Creation: The Qabilat al-Mawt is made up of scholars and researchers and so Mental Attributes are almost always primary. Physical Attributes are usually secondary, as they prove useful in the more visceral moments of research. Social Attributes are wasted on the dead. Obviously, Knowledges are preferred over Skills and Talents, although most *bay't* members endeavor to develop a wide range of Abilities. The Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven) is a common choice, as is the *bay't's* own Tariq el-A'tham (Road of Bones) and the Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community).

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Mortis



Stereotypes

The Ashirra: Useful. The spread of the faith has provided us with many subjects for study. We will not be joining them, but we can deal with them and that is enough.

The *Franj*: There is so much diversity in the living world. In the end, though, it is for naught. Death does much to reconcile these differences. Still, should they crusade again, I shall travel to Palestine, for rarely do we get the opportunity to study death on so great a scale.

Banu Haqim: So skilled in the art of death, but so ignorant of its science. To do without understanding is to be forever without power.

Bay't Majnoon: An enigma, and a dangerous one at that. They claim to be able to see and deal with the *djinn*. Perhaps behind their madness lies some answer. Perhaps they are just deluded.

Laibon: A mystery to be solved. The spirits they claim to represent may be those of the dead. If this is the truth, we must travel to their lands, and soon.

Walid Set: The Serpents are frustrating. Some insights must lie in the tombs of their ancestors, for their fascination with the afterlife is reputed far and wide. If only the Walid Set would allow us access to its tombs.

Weaknesses: No matter how much blood they drink, the skin of a member of the Qabilat al-Mawt always looks dead. Its pallid, lifeless appearance can only be concealed by supernatural means. The effect is so disturbing that the difficulty of any Social rolls is increased by one, and they are easily marked as vampires.

Organization: The researchers of the *bay't* generally work in small groups, minimizing the risk of discovery. They keep in regular contact with one another, to share findings and discuss working methods. The *bay't* as a whole only gathers when many Cainites are needed to perform a particular ritual.

Quote: *If the Qur'an is to be believed, all souls will face a Day of Judgment. Where do they reside until that day? That is what we seek to learn.*

Ray'een al-Fen

(Toreador)

The artisan Ray'een al-Fen have adapted well to the culture of the Islamic world, finding beauty in the region's art and culture since the rise of the new faith. The *bay't* has never been particularly numerous in the empire, though. It spread across the region with the Romans but suffered from the purges that destroyed most of the Roman Cainites that had ventured east of Constantinople.

The survivors prospered. Their profound love of mortal art has lead to a migration south and east as new forms of artistic expression are refined. While the Bedouin and Arabian tribes were of little interest to them, for their art was limited to what they could carry (and the nomadic life rarely suits the Ray'een al-Fen), the cities of Persia, Asia Minor and Egypt harbor members of the *bay't* because of the artistic endeavors of their peoples. Most notably, the sultans of Alexandria and Damascus are both Ray'een al-Fen. However, a fascination with the goods buried with the Egyptian dead and the reputed beauty of some of the art lost in those tombs have brought the *bay't* into conflict with the Walid Set and the Qabilat al-Mawt on several occasions.



Islam's transformation of the desert peoples into city dwellers has birthed a golden age for these vampires. The Almohad Empire is the most advanced in the world. Its architecture, poetry and art far exceeds those of other cultures. Elder vampires have Embraced numerous childer who are better able to understand and explain the new works. The tenets of Islam have forced the creation of a new art form that has caught the imagination of the Ray'een al-Fen, and led to many of them becoming accomplished scholars: calligraphy. It is highly regarded among younger Cainites, following the lead of the Islamic faith that opposes any artistic depiction of people or animals within mosques. Most religious buildings are inscribed with finely crafted quotes from the words of the Prophet or inspirational verses from the Qur'an. Knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith is vital if one wishes to understand the finer nuances of the greatest calligraphy. Vampires of this *bay't* are among the most prolific copiers of books, either by themselves in devotion to their art, or through *ansar* scribes. Many work alongside the Qabilat al-Mawt, translating the texts of ancient cultures, including the Greeks.

However, the spread of Islam has started a major schism within the *bay't*. Younger Cainites, devout Ashirra, frequently clash with the very vampires who Embraced them. The elders seek to protect and preserve the works of art of the religions that fell to the advance of Islam. These images of almost-forgotten gods are treasured as exquisite examples of art by elders and denounced as idolatrous affronts to Islam by the recently Embraced. Many elders have actually gone into hiding to avoid being hunted by the most zealous of the Ashirra Ray'een al-Fen, who work with members of other *bay't* who have also adopted the faith. A few have even entered torpor in seclusion, secure in the thought that this religion, like so many others, will pass.

The *bay't*'s love is also its great weakness. So much of the best art is found in the homes of the wealthy. Ray'een al-Fen are all too often drawn to the excesses and opulence that surround the caliph and other rulers across the region. The vice and pleasure in the sensuous that the Islamic creed rarely censures leads many Ray'een al-Fen to become debauched, seeking new sensations that awake a little of the passion they knew in their days under the sun. In particular, the celebration of love in the stories of the Islamic region has many Ray'een al-Fen meddling in the affairs of the kine. Tales of love between men and slave girls are common, and Ray'een al-Fen often use their Disciplines and more subtle means to recreate these stories in real life and watch the tragic beauty of the tales unfold.

Sobriquet: Scribes

Appearance: Ray'een al-Fen often Embrace for appearance and many are stunningly beautiful by the local standards. All Ray'een al-Fen dress in clothes made from the finest materials available. Female Ray'een al-Fen often push the prohibitions against showing their faces in public to the limit, and abandon them completely in private.

Haven and Prey: Havens of *bay't* members are inevitably in the best parts of a city. They surround themselves with works of art and have the finest calligraphers decorate the walls of their havens with sayings from the Qur'an (and from the Book of Nod in private areas). Some Ray'een al-Fen feed off the artists whose

work they follow. Others choose to leave them alone to create, and feed off the uncultured masses.

The Embrace: Ray'een al-Fen always look for beauty within someone before they Embrace her. This may be physical perfection or a great talent that needs preserving for eternity. Of late, the *bay't* has moved away from Embracing those with a skill for representational art, choosing those with an understanding of architecture, calligraphy or writing instead.

Character Creation: Social Attributes and Abilities are highly prized in the *bay't*. Their inclination tends towards the persuasive rather than the outright intimidating. Most have some rating in Crafts, Music or Acting, and Ashirra tend to have Academics and Linguistics. Passionate and devoted Natures are common, as are Backgrounds like Resources, Herd and Retainers.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Presence

Weaknesses: The *bay't's* obsession with art and beauty in all its forms can surface at the most inconvenient moments. When they encounter something or someone of exceeding beauty, Ray'een al-Fen become fascinated with it. This fascination can last for hours, and only a successful Self-Control (or Instinct) roll breaks the reverie. Otherwise, they remain enrapt until the end of the scene, or when the object of their attention leaves their presence. While under the spell of the thing of beauty, a Ray'een al-Fen may not even defend herself, although an attack allows the player to make another Self-Control or Instinct roll.

Organization: The *bay't* communicates through informal networks of likeminded Cainites. They meet to discuss things of beauty and to promote styles of work they favor. However, a major split has arisen between Ashirra and older Ray'een al-Fen over the use of representational art. The general disdain for the art form among Muslim society has pushed the *bay't* to the edge of internal warfare and is eroding the bonds of communication between different groups of Ray'een al-Fen.

Quote: *To choose that verse for the new mosque... I would never have thought of it. How marvelously insightful and what exquisite technique! I must ponder this insight.*



Stereotypes

The Ashirra: I have no dispute with those who choose to follow a religion that does not restrict appreciation of the finer things. Those it restricts — wine and carnality — are of little interest to me. I cannot understand their attitude towards artistic representations of people and history, though.

The *Franj*: They find too much beauty in warfare. The arts of battle have their place, but that place is not here.

Bay't Mujrim: They give us glimpses into another culture, and some craft illusions of unspeakable skill. Such a pity they are unreliable.

Laibon: Never have I regretted the imminence of the sunrise as much as I did when one of these travelers resided with me. Her tales made the nights pass in the blinking of an eye, yet somehow I did not trust her.

Qubilat al-Mawt: There is a strange beauty to be found in their dead forms and the researches they indulge in. However, they cannot appreciate the past unless they have a perspective on the present.

Walid Set: One needs to be a scholar to deal with this *bay't*. They have much of beauty to offer you, but is it worth the price?

Wah'Sheen

(Gangrel)

The Wah'Sheen wander the desert wastes, as they have done for untold centuries. For them, unlife is a much simpler existence than it is for members of the other *bay't*. Mirroring the behavior of the nomadic tribes like the Turks and Bedouin, the Wah'Sheen follow a straightforward path, either patrolling one area of the desert as their territory or following the local tribes' migrations. Many have little truck with cities, yet some find them strangely fascinating. While they object to the fact that so many of the wandering tribes have settled in them, there are still few settlements of great size and there is much wilderness between them. Many revel in the easy hunting that civilization provides, setting themselves new challenges by selecting a particular type of prey, from a warrior to a harlot, each night.

Still, few vampires know the vast deserts, the harsh steppes and the other wild areas of the region as well as these wanderers. They can navigate through seemingly identical wastes better than most mortal Bedouin. A few offer their services to other vampires looking to travel across the deserts without the complications involved in traveling as part of a caravan.



Wah'Sheen tend to be solitary creatures for part of their unlives, often going for long periods with no social contact except the occasional conversation with the animals of the wild. They break up this isolation with occasional periods — of a month, a year, a decade — in more populated areas, meeting with and testing themselves against other Cainites. As a result of their isolation, however, members of the *bay't* tend to be blunt or rude in their dealings and rarely bother to lie when they choose to spend time in the cities and to interact with other vampires. For the same reasons, few bother to hide the animalistic deformities that they gain as the years pass, believing that each new feature better equips them for survival in one of the world's harshest environments. Appearance matters little. Function is everything.

The *bay't* is populous and is found all over the Muslim world, but the growth of Islam has not pleased the Wah'Sheen. The actual beliefs and practices of Muslims mean little to them, certainly nothing more than those of the other religions that have risen and fallen through the centuries. It is the effect the religion has had on the peoples the Wah'Sheen are closest to, and on the land they see as theirs, that bothers them. Tribes that convert to the new religion often end up settling into new towns and cities. The growth of civilization has been rapid through all Muslim lands. While cities are still far apart, the Wah'Sheen resent the nomadic tribes' transformation to city-dwellers. The *bay't* takes particular pleasure in attacking the caravans that travel between cities because each attack offers a chance to strike back at their civilizing influence.

One group has split from the main body of the *bay't* to such a degree that they no longer consider themselves Wah'Sheen. These rebels, known as the Taifa, have adopted Islam as the focus of their existence and consider themselves Muslim. The group came together in Iberia and take their name from the small principalities of the al-Andalus. They remain most numerous there but have spread through North Africa into the Levant. Unlike the wandering primitives of the rest of the *bay't*, the Taifa see themselves as scholar-warriors fighting a holy war. Many adopt the trappings of civilization, including learning how to read and write, so they can better study the Prophet's revelations. They have warmly accepted the idea of the Ashirra and number themselves among its ranks. However, the Taifa's association with the hated Muslims has brought them into direct conflict with the rest of the *bay't*. Few battles are as fierce as a clash between Taifa and Wah'Sheen.

Sobriquet: Animals

Appearance: The Wah'Sheen generally draw from the nomadic people of the deserts and the remaining pagan tribes at the fringes of the Islamic world. When they bother to dress at all, it is in the traditional manner of their people. Many, as the centuries pass, have adopted the clothes of the Bedouins and other wandering tribes. Those whose Beast has risen to the surface look decidedly animalistic: elements of jackals, jerboa and desert foxes are common, although a few gain serpentine or lizardlike features.

Haven and Prey: It is extremely rare for any Wah'Sheen to establish a permanent haven. They wander in patterns that make sense only to themselves. They stay close to caravan routes for ease of feeding. Some make havens in the

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: The corruption of settlement has lured many vampires. These are merely the latest.

The *Franj*: Is there any difference between one faith and another? I think that each is as bad as the next.

Banu Haqim: They seem to live outside the influence of civilization and have a simple code that we can understand. However, they have let civilization corrupt them. It may be too late for this *bay't*.

Bay't Majnoon: A *bay't* that understands that there is a world beyond the city walls, and one that moves to different rhythms. We do not have much contact with them, but they could be our allies in time of need.

Bay't Mujrim: We have been enemies since before my sire's sire can recall. This will not change until the last of them is dust on the desert wind.

Bay't Mushakis: Proof that our way is right. Time and again they ally themselves with a new state, a new city, a new way of living. Every time, their efforts are reduced to nothing. When they learn the truth of this they will make fine Wah'Sheen.

slums of the cities, while others choose to sleep the nights in the sands, using their Protean abilities to merge into the dunes and escape the burning light of the sun.

The Embrace: Islam's rapid growth and civilizing effect on the wandering tribes of Africa and Arabia has dramatically narrowed the choice of potential members to Bay't Wah'Sheen. Now, a Wah'Sheen who plans to make a nomad his childe waits until the candidate has children so as not to hasten the end of the tribe. They may also choose loners or the dying instead. If they choose a childe from the civilized peoples, it is someone who has rejected society for much of their life: animal herders, explorers and guides are likely choices.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes are almost always primary, Social Attributes almost never. The Wah'Sheen rarely have social Natures or Demeanors, and the two are usually identical. Talents and Skills are preferred over Knowledges. Allies, Generation and Herd are the only Backgrounds most Wah'Sheen have. The *bay't* tends to develop the higher levels of Protean before they manifest other Disciplines, as it is a basic necessity for survival in the unforgiving desert. Most of the *bay't* adopt the Tariq el-Bedouin (Road of the Nomad), but the Taifa more commonly follow the Tariq el-Habd (Road of War).

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Fortitude, Protean

Weaknesses: Wah'Sheen are the closest to their inner Beasts of all the *bay't*. This intimacy leaves its mark on their undead bodies. Each time a Wah'Sheen frenzies, she gains an animal feature. For every five such features gained, one of the Wah'Sheen's Social Attributes drops by one. Elders have often left their human roots far behind.



Organization: The *bay't* is, quite simply, without organization. If word of an elder's deeds has spread, younger vampires show him deference, but that is the limit of it: They are not in a position to command other Wah'Sheen. Occasionally, a small group of Wah'Sheen gathers in a single place. For several nights they exchange tales of their deeds and those of others before going their separate ways once more. It is through these rare meetings that a Wah'Sheen's reputation grows or is destroyed.

Quote: *Foolish of you to travel alone, far from the walls of your city. I will drink your blood, and the desert will eat your bones.*

Walid Set

(Followers of Set)

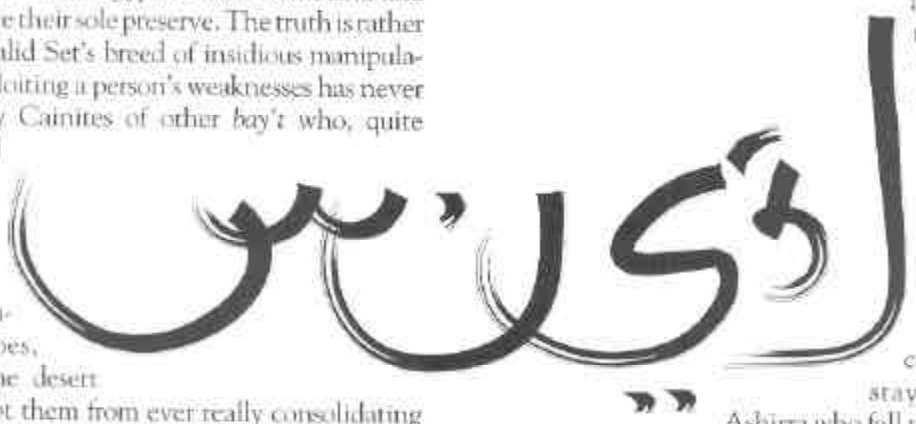
Members of the Walid Set know themselves to be a breed apart from other Cainites, born of the god Set. They believe that the balance between the worlds of the living and the dead, the *Maat*, has been corrupted by the gods Ra and Osiris through their enforcement of the rule of law and custom. The *bay't* seeks to break down and corrupt this order, thereby restoring balance to the *Maat*. This belief — both subversive and idolatrous as far as Muslims are concerned — puts the *bay't* at odds with the Ashirra and many others.

The Walid Set are masters of desire. They know that longing and need are the purest emotions. They posses an almost uncanny ability to discern what an individual truly lusts after. They then exploit that knowledge to their own ends. An individual's happiness paves the way to corruption and failure, and very few victims of the Walid Set perceive the danger until it is far too late.

The Walid Set claim Egypt as their homeland and often act is if it were their sole preserve. The truth is rather different. The Walid Set's breed of insidious manipulation based on exploiting a person's weaknesses has never been accepted by Cainites of other *bay't* who, quite rightly, fear and distrust them. The confrontations between the Walid Set, other *bay't* and numerous other foes, including fearsome desert Lupines, have kept them from ever really consolidating their preeminence in Egypt. Only the remotest desert regions that hold their biggest temples can truly be said to be theirs. In some ways, this is much the way the Serpents like it. Individual members of the *bay't* travel to the cities of the Middle East trapping mortal ruler and influential Ashirra alike in their web of seduction and exploitation. Should one of the Walid Set be caught and dealt with, their temples remain safely hidden. In the meantime the *bay't* successfully polices the relics of antiquity that dot the desert landscape, turning back unwelcome treasure hunters, both mortal and Cainite, viewing them as unworthy products of corrupted *Maat*. The legacy of Egypt must be protected for the eventual return of Set himself, when *Maat* is restored.

The influence of the *bay't* spreads well beyond the boundaries of Egypt. The Walid Set believe their god has commanded them to spread his word all over the world. Inevitably, the lands that surround Egypt see many Walid Set both passing through and resident, carefully playing the strings of each city's political structure to their advantage and sowing the seeds of discord that will lead to its collapse. Attempts to infiltrate the cities of Persia have lead to conflict with the Banu Haqim, its vizier caste in particular. While the Walid Set often have the edge politically, the viziers are able to use warriors and sorcerers to break the corrupters' power base. Fights between the two *bay't* are vicious, quiet and deadly.

The *bay't* follows only one god: Set himself. The idea of submission to the god of Islam is as ridiculous to the *bay't* as their worship of Set is blasphemous to Muslims. The Ashirra have little or no tolerance for the Walid Set, whom they view as sinners of the worse kind; many would like nothing more than to destroy the *bay't*. The Walid Set are just as hostile to the Ashirra, viewing Islam's strict requirement of its followers as another example of the binding laws that are upsetting *Maat* and causing the corrupt world to stay unbalanced. Ashirra who fall to the corrupter's machinations are viewed as another major step towards the restoration of *Maat*.



In recent years, the clan has achieved something of a truce with the viziers of the Banu Haqim. However, it is only a matter of time before the dominant warrior caste decides to turn its eyes to policing the Walid Set once more.

Sobriquet: Serpents

Appearance: Walid Set are typically from Egypt or other parts of North Africa, although a few have been Embraced from the Arabian peoples. In private, they dress in traditional Egyptian robes, while in public few can resist incorporating Egyptian elements into their clothing. Ritual disfigurement is very common, especially in North Africa.

Haven and Prey: The Walid Set like their lairs to be deep underground. Caverns will do at a pinch, but they

prefer purpose-built structures. While these are common in Egypt, it can take time to arrange to have these structures built on the outskirts of foreign settlements. Usually, the craftsmen do not survive beyond the end of the construction period. The Walid Set refer to their havens as temples and decorate them with hieroglyphics as part of their blessing. Many depict the life of Set himself. Human *ansar* and ghoul snakes often live in the temple, tending to their master's needs. The Walid Set feed off the servants or advisors of the mortal leader whose downfall they are plotting. This serves the dual purpose of both weakening the opposition and strengthening themselves.

The Embrace: Most Walid Set serve a period of apprenticeship as the retainer of their sire before the decision is made to Embrace them. It takes years of exceptional and loyal service before the matter of the Embrace is even discussed with a potential childe. Until recently, these restrictions kept the *bey't* largely Egyptian. With its steady spread, and the long service of retainers from other races, more and more Bedouins, Turks and the like are appearing within the *bey't*.

Character Creation: Natures like Fanatic, Innovator, Monster and Tyrant are common among the *bey't*, while members adopt whatever Demeanor suites them at any particular moment. Social Attributes are at the heart of their agendas, while Talents and Skill prove extremely useful in the service of Set. There are few Serpents without the Retainers Background, and most have Herd and Influence as well. All but the youngest or most rebellious Walid Set follow the Tariq el-Hayya (Road of the Serpent).

Clan Disciplines: Obfuscate, Presence, Serpentis

Weaknesses: Despite, or perhaps because of, their origins in the deserts of Egypt, the Walid Set are particularly vulnerable to the effects of sunlight. Double the dice they suffer from any exposure to the sun.

Organization: The Walid Set call their havens temples. This is because the *bey't* is run like a religion, based on precepts reputed to be handed down from Set himself. The eldest Serpent in the temple takes the role of high priest. If a Walid Set has the need to establish herself in a new city, she will attempt to form a cult of mortals, with herself as the priestess. This cult is a source of both retainers and sustenance.



Quote: *No, do not be concerned. Your wish is quite understandable. With little effort, I can make sure it comes to pass. Perhaps you would be so kind as to do a small thing for me in return?*

Stereotypes

The Ashirra: They do make me laugh, these Ashirra. They follow a religion that is younger than many of them! If they seek salvation there, they are fools.

The *Franj*: They are the enemies of *Maat*, without doubt. They bind the world in their chains of lords and servants. They cannot be allowed to bring such ideas here. In time, we will break them even in their own lands.

Al-Amin: There is strength in numbers. In isolation, there is weakness. Once the al-Amin were a danger to us. Now they are little more than a joke.

Baali: When I lived, I had a child who would delight in tales of monsters and darkness, until he became an adult. Maybe the Baali will become adults, or maybe they will sulk like whipped children.

Banu Haqim: Their viziers are our greatest opponents. For now, we have a truce and we work together to turn back the *Franj*. When that is done, we will know enough about our "allies" to bring them to their knees.

Qabilat al-Mawt: Tempt them with a secret, and they will come running into your temple. They will serve Set, too, sooner or later.

The Franj (European Clans)

To the Cainites of Europe, the Islamic world is an alien place. Even vampires of the same *bay't* seem strange to their own nominal clanmates, with different ideas of what it means to be a Cainite. Indeed, most European Cainites believe that the Banu Haqim (whom they call Assamites) are the only Islamic vampires, as those are the tales told by knights returning after the first three Crusades.

Two of the Cainite clans that are common in Europe have yet to make their presence felt in the Muslim world and a third is struggling to regain what little presence it had. This situation will not last, and these European clans are casting covetous eyes on the Middle East as Clans Lasombra and Toreador did before them. They have no intention of adapting to the local ways, however.

Ventrue

The Ventrue have never been common in the Middle East, and the expansion of Islam in the last few centuries has driven out the few that still had havens here.

The clan gained a strong presence in the Middle East centuries ago as the Roman army steadily conquered and subjugated the region. As Rome spread outwards, so too did the Ventrue.

It was never an easy process. In North Africa were the Brujah, who resisted but who were eventually crushed, at the cost of an entire civilization. In Egypt, the Walid Set undermined, seduced and destroyed Venture ill prepared for the talents of Serpents who had had centuries to hone their skills. In the East, they faced the might of the Banu Haqim, and they quickly came to respect the fierce warriors of the Middle Eastern *bay't*. Little did the Ventrue realize that the viziers of the clan were responsible for many of the problems they faced in influencing mortal pawns within those cities. Persia remained unconquered by the Romans — the Ventrue of that lofty empire never spread that far into the Middle East.

Indeed, in the few centuries they were able to establish a foothold in the region, they never really understood the distinctions between the *bay't* and the clans they were related to, assuming with typical European arrogance that they were all much the same. This proved to be their downfall. As the Roman Empire declined, so did the power of the Ventrue in the region. Constantinople came to be governed by a trinity of Toreador, Ventrue and Tzimisce, a level of power-sharing that the Ventrue would never have tolerated had they been stronger.

Then a seemingly insignificant new religion spread among the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula in a matter of decades. The Arabs united around this new faith and struck outwards in a series of amazingly successful campaigns that lead to most of Persia and a good portion of the Byzantine Empire falling before them. With them came members of the eastern *bay't* who had a serious grudge against the Ventrue from the centuries of Roman occupation. As each city fell, Ashirra and other members of the *bay't* hunted down each remaining European vampire. Some were told to return to their homelands. Those who were Embraced in the Middle East were given the choice to either submit to the invaders or face the sun. Many chose to flee before the invaders arrived, reasoning that their unlives were more important that taking a stand against a religion that would no doubt pass, as so many others had.

Ironically, it is only in Arabia itself — in the heart of the new faith — that a line of Ventrue has truly adopted Islam. The El Hijazi trace their lineage to pre-Roman Ventrue long separated from the main European line. That gulf has only widened with the centuries. The Hijazi Ventrue hold sway in several areas in Arabia and are valued members of the local Ashirra, but they are hardly numerous and are closely watched by the Banu Haqim and the Hajj. Other areas also have small communities of Ventrue of Byzantine or Roman stock. Sultan Antonius of Cairo is of this line and has adopted Islam in order to placate the Ashirra in his domain. His devotion seems fleeting, but Suleiman Ibn Abdullah and the other elders of the Ashirra sect see him as a useful buffer against the Walid Set. Antonius feels the same of them.

Finally, European Ventrue are present in the Holy Land, having come during the Crusades. With the Latins pushed to the coast, their lot is precarious, but they are still present and clamoring for another Crusade.

Tremere

The Tremere are coming. In the two centuries since they became Cainites, they have established themselves across Europe from the northern reaches of the British Isles to Italy and Constantinople. Now they have a toehold in the Middle East. A few Tremere can be found in Jerusalem, ostensibly setting up a mercantile concern. They are merely the advance guard for a wholesale push into the region.

The Usurpers have two reasons for coming to the Middle East. First, they are pursuing the al-Amin (or Salubri, as they call them). Their systematic purge of Saulot's brood has lead them to follow escaping refugees into the region. The interference of the Banu Haqim prevented them from following the refugees into the Middle East immediately. They weren't ready to make an enemy of another clan. After all, not only was the Banu Haqim possessed of some astonishingly skilled warriors, but a few of the heathens seemed to wield their own version of blood sorcery. The clan had enough on its hands countering Tzimisce *koldunu* without getting involved in another magical contest. The Tremere withdrew and bided their time.

Still, they were intrigued. The Inner Circle of the clan is now aware of the potential of the region for revealing new sources of magical power, thanks to the clan's small number of encounters with Banu Haqim sorcerers. They might discover secrets there that they could use in their battle to establish themselves among Caine's children and to protect themselves from their plentiful enemies. From the religion of Mithras and Zoroaster to the mysteries of the long-fallen Egyptian civilization, the area is a veritable treasure trove of mystical secrets, if only they can be obtained.

The Tremere do not have the ability to influence the Crusades, so they continue with the mercantile front, establishing trading houses in the Arabian Peninsula. A high-profile ambassador, based in Constantinople, was sent to establish relations with the other *bayt'*. Tremere scouts, often Embraced more for their ability to spy than work magic, have appeared in the cities of the Islamic world. Because they are not the magic-wielding monsters of the refugee Salubri's stories, they are not immediately recognized for what they are.

Rumors are spreading that the clan has established a chantry somewhere in Egypt, with the tacit assistance of the Walid Set. The al-Amin are finding it difficult to confirm this story. Far too difficult to reassure them.

Tzimisce

Clan Tzimisce doesn't get out much. The *voivodes* sit in their castles, lording over their domains in the Carpathians. Their childer are kept from straying too far from home by powerful blood oaths and a general affinity for their homelands that the whole clan shares. Those that have made their way into the lands of Islam are almost all related to the Byzantine Tzimisce and have been driven out for some crime. Usually very bitter, they establish isolated havens for themselves in the mountains, in a parody of their homeland, and prey on the tribesmen in the regions below. The areas around their havens gain bad reputations and are avoided by caravans and wandering tribes. This makes unlife extremely difficult in those sparsely populated areas, leaving many exiled Tzimisce to slip in and out of torpor, feeding only when the opportunity presents itself.

Tariq: One Step Ahead of the Beast

For all their differences in culture and history, the Cainites of the Muslim Empire remain creatures of darkness and blood like their European cousins. Even the most devout Ashirra must constantly hold herself in check, guarding against those moments of hunger or pain when the raw lust for slaughter threatens to take control. Like their Christian kin, the vampires Embraced from Muslim stock have developed their own set of ethics by which they maintain their reason in times of temptation. It is no surprise that the *tariq* — the roads — these monsters walk are fundamentally the same as those in the West, owing to their common ancestry, but the particular ways a Muslim views the path she walks are often very different indeed.

Tariq el-Bedouin

(Road of the Nomad)

In the Western world, Cainites who follow the Road of the Beast surrender themselves body and soul to their carnal appetites, subverting reason to instinct. They cater to the Beast's every whim and thereby deprive it of the overwhelming power of repressed pressure. These *Fiani* are often animalistic and antisocial, staking out a hunting ground like a wolf or a lion and attacking all that trespass in their domain.

In the Muslim world, the Tariq el-Bedouin grows not from a desire to abandon reason but simply to refute the trappings of a decadent, settled lifestyle (best exemplified by the 'Abbasids) and return to the simple, straightforward existence of the desert tribesman. A Muslim vampire follows this *tariq* because he believes that the indolence and seductive luxuries of palaces and cities weakens an individual's self-discipline and moral courage. Rather than suffer the countless distractions of a nightly existence filled with myriad entertainments, the vampire seeks a harder, more desperate existence, emptying his mind of all save the moment-to-moment challenges posed by the wilderness.

A vampire on the Tariq el-Bedouin disdains the trappings of civilization, knowing them to be nothing more than dangerous conceits. Fine clothes, sprawling

estates and expansive retinues are just illusions of strength inspired by cowardice. The people of the sands are taught to face each challenge directly, relying on nothing more than the qualities Allah gave them to see them through. There is only one response to adversity — overcome it with raw courage and cunning. These vampires are constantly driven to test their bravery and their abilities, gladly accepting any challenge and prevailing with naked talent and skill. They shun any thought of regular, well-defended lairs and disdain the need for servants or ghouls to do their work for them. They prefer the night-to-night trials of a wanderer, where there are no guarantees of shelter or sustenance. They believe this sharpens the wits and keeps the mind constantly occupied, thus avoiding the risks of lowering their guard. For the same reason, they are often uncomfortable in the company of notably sedentary vampires.

This is not to say that a Bedouin vampire won't work with other Cainites toward a common goal. The sense of community is still strong in all Muslim vampires, and many of those Cainites who follow the Road of the Nomad hope to "save" others from their soft lives of indolence by presenting a proper example of Islamic virtue.

A Cainite on the Tariq el-Bedouin is decisive to the point of impulsiveness, preferring to go with her instincts in any given situation rather than think the problem to death. Cowardice in any form is despicable; death is preferable to fear. The vampire on this *tariq* either defeats her foe or is destroyed. She wastes no time worrying about negotiation or compromise. Her behavior is straightforward — she prefers to cut to the heart of the matter rather than waste energy in debate. This does not mean that such vampires are not cunning — quite the opposite. Deception and misdirection are acceptable and respected tactics when they succeed.

Bedouin Cainites seek out sources of danger and strife against which to test their bravery. In the sands of Arabia, this means hazardous feats of riding or swordplay, or seeking out a daytime lair only after dawn has begun to brighten the sky. In Persia, these vampires have in some ways hearkened back to the ancient practices of pagan fire worship, testing their resolve by pulling hot coals from a fire or piercing themselves with red-hot needles. Nomads are most common amid the wastes of the Najd, but sometimes the shock of the Embrace causes even the most pampered noble to forget his past life and pretend that the world is simpler than it is.

The tenets of this *tariq* appeal to the broadest range of clans, finding adherents amid Mutasharidin, Wah'Sheen, Mushakisin and even the Qabilat el-Khayal. Devout Ashirra are generally opposed to the

Hierarchy of Nomadic Sins

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll	Rationale
10	Choosing reason over instinct	Thought leads to self-deception.
9	Accepting help from others	Seeking aid shows weakness.
8	Wearing fine clothes or jewels	The slightest mark of luxury stains the soul.
7	Owning more goods than one can carry	We do not barter strength for baubles.
6	Maintaining a permanent lair	We must be as the shifting sands, as God intended.
5	Maintaining a retinue of servants	A strong man does his own labor.
4	Settling down in a city	Stone walls breed weakness.
3	Breaking one's word	Our word must be like iron.
2	Refusing to accept a challenge	We prove our worth by our victories.
1	Showing cowardice in the face of a challenge	Death is preferable to fear.

pursuit of this *tariq*, and try to turn childer from the path whenever possible. The constant focus of a moment-to-moment existence leaves little room for the contemplation of Allah. That being said, there are rare instances of devout brethren who still ascribe to this road, hearkening back to better times when the *'asabiyya* of the faithful was sufficient to overcome any challenge Allah required. These faithful Nomads are often shunned by their city-bound kin, even as poets laud them for their selfless courage and devotion.

Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control, Courage

Appearance: Contrary to the image suggested by this road, a Muslim adherent to the Road of the Nomad wears plain but well-kept robes, and his weapons are often heirlooms of simple appearance but high quality. Often these vampires learn the skill of animal handling, or bind a riding mount to them through the blood, forging a powerful bond between beast and rider.

Roleplaying Hints: You are bold to the point of recklessness, supremely confident in your abilities and skills. Never back away from a challenge, especially when it comes to combat, and choose the hardest and most dangerous tasks as though they were gifts from the heavens. Be blunt and straightforward in your dealings, and expect the same from those you treat with. Give no one respect or trust unless he earns it. Certainly, one day your luck will run out and you will likely meet your end, but risks make a man strong, and Final Death is preferable to weakness.

Quote: *You call that a volley of arrows? It is but the lazy buzzing of horseflies. I will pluck them from my shirt like saddle burrs.*

Tariq el-Haqim

(Road of Blood)

The Banu Haqim, whose clan originated in the East and still has its roots in the mountains of Asia Minor and Transoxiana, owe at least some small part of their current outlook to Islam, whose tenets of self-control, self-reliance and religious devotion affirm the clan's discipline and duty to its masters.

Followers of the Road of Blood are taught that Haqim, the founder of their clan, is the one ancient who understood the place of vampires. The various other descendants of Caine are largely corrupt and have stolen Haqim's gifts. They bring shame upon him with their every unworthy word and deed. Thus it is the duty of those on the Tariq el-Haqim, as loyal followers, to keep the unworthy in line and slay them if they bring shame to Alamut and Haqim. They consume these usurpers' blood, returning their stolen power to Haqim. This duty demands the utmost discipline and devotion, and thus the road emphasizes strict self-control and a rigid code of ethics similar in scope to the laws of Muhammad the Prophet. The Beast is the siren call of spiritual and intellectual weakness, and must be denied without exception.

The Road of Blood is the philosophical underpinning of the Banu Haqim, although not all the members of the clan follow it. It is especially common among the warrior caste, especially the most radical factions thereof. These same factions are those most fascinated by Islam in its conquering expressions, so the idea of the blood of Haqim and the Islamic jihad have been merged in many vampiric minds. This has placed the Banu Haqim warriors on the front lines of the fight against Christian Cainites in Palestine and Andalus.

The association of Islam also means that Ashirra are regarded as worthy in the eyes of those on the Tariq el-Haqim. Banu Haqim and Ashirra elders have debated at length as to whether a devout Ashirra is any less worthy of Haqim's blood, especially since many prominent Banu Haqim are devout Muslims. As both groups share many of the same philosophies and common goals, it is not uncommon for Ashirra and Banu Haqim to refer to one another as "cousin" and treat one another as brethren, at least in principle. Still, both groups zealously protect their individual natures, each side fearful of being subsumed by the other. So far, the opposing forces of common philosophy versus conflicting ideals has resulted in an equilibrium of sorts. How long this balancing act can continue, however, no one knows.

Tales persist throughout the East of vampires who have no connection at all to the Banu Haqim clan yet choose to follow the Road of Blood. Some claim to have turned to the road after being "converted" by the words or deeds of other Banu Haqim, though Haqim's followers treat such individuals as craven kin-slayers who simply seek to justify their own sanguinary ambitions. Some vampires, however, claim blood lineage to Haqim, the same as any Banu Haqim, but their particular outlook on the Road of Blood differs somewhat from the clan. Quite a few of these rogue diablerists see themselves as protecting the world from the unchecked spread of vampirism, taking the blood of Cainites who have proven themselves "unworthy" due to their actions or beliefs. Others believe that their birthright has been stolen by Caine (often viewed by these self-styled zealots as Haqim's craven brother), and it is their right to destroy any vampire and take back their legacy. Regardless of their individual perspectives, these adherents universally hold themselves to a standard of

self-discipline, courage and honor that would be worthy of any Banu Haqim, much to the chagrin of the elders of the clan.

Appearance: Followers of the Tariq el-Haqim often wear simple, functional clothing. Haqim was a humble warrior and so must they be. They often ascribe to Islamic clothing conventions, although women on the Road of Haqim are less prone to wearing veils. Haqim went about uncovered and so do they.

Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control, Courage

Roleplaying Hints: You are dour and sober, concerned with your divine duty and focused on constant vigilance and self control. Even when your mission is to pass unnoticed amongst mortals and other vampires, there is always a part of your demeanor that is cold, quiet, and calculating. Unlike the popular image of Islamic warriors, you are neither rash nor impulsive, and prefer a careful, considered course of action in all things. What is the point of being immortal if you cannot take advantage of patience? Always act in a measured, determined manner, with no word or action wasted.

Quote: *Haqim guides my hand and directs the course of my heart. Do not plead to me for mercy, Cainite, plead to him, if he can hear you.*

Tariq el-Harb

(Road of War)

Among all of the world's major religions, Islam is the only one that, almost from its beginning, tied itself to conquest and the might of the sword. Every male of noble birth is expected to ride well and know how to fight in order to defend the women and children of the faithful and smite the infidel. The culture of the empire places very specific expectations on the shoulders of the Islamic warrior, strict codes of conduct that serve soldierly Cainites in their nightly existence as they fight to resist the excesses of the Beast.

The Islamic Tariq el-Harb differs sharply from its Western counterpart (the Road of Chivalry) in several distinct areas, pointing out sharp differences in the way that Muslims make war and treat a defeated foe. Like a European knight, a Muslim warrior is expected to protect believers from their enemies or those who would interfere with the practice of the faith. Likewise, he is to defend the honor of women and children — off the field of battle. When fighting an enemy household or clan, the Muslim warrior is expected to perform with

Hierarchy of Haqimi Sins

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll	Rationale
10	Acting impulsively in any situation	Discipline is strength.
9	Allowing one's actions to be dictated by passion or anger	Passion is the first stirring of the Beast.
8	Failing to diablerize an unworthy vampire	Return the blood of the unworthy to Haqim.
7	Succumbing to frenzy	Our will must be unshakeable.
6	Allowing the unworthy to go unpunished	We are the judges of the unliving.
5	Acting in a cowardly or dishonorable fashion	Our actions reflect upon our father, Haqim.
4	Showing weakness before the unworthy	We represent Haqim in all things.
3	Failing to honor an oath	Our honor is what sets us apart.
2	Submitting oneself to the will of an unworthy prince or elder, over that of the clan	Nothing in this world must sway us from our sacred purpose.
1	Becoming oathbound to a Cainite	We serve Haqim and no other!

almost reckless courage and utter ruthlessness, putting men, women and children to the sword if it is the will of the general in command. Likewise it is allowed, even lauded, when warriors make use of deception to place the enemy army at a severe disadvantage, something unthinkable to European knights. On the other hand, once he makes an oath, there is no turning back for the Muslim warrior, regardless of danger or personal risk. On the field of battle, he must fight like a man possessed, heedless of his own safety. It is not the warrior's life to lose, but Allah's, and He spends it in whatever manner most pleases Him.

Once an enemy surrenders, however, the expectations of the warrior change almost completely. He must treat a vanquished foe with the dignity and respect fitting their station. Prisoners of war can be taken as slaves by victorious Muslims, otherwise they are to be ransomed back to their homes. If the victims don't have enough money for the ransom demand, the hostage is to be released anyway, for pity's sake. A foe in battle is meant to be killed for the glory of God, but a defeated foe is to be treated with all courtesy, in the hopes that one day he might yet find his way into the ranks of the faithful. He must be allowed sanctuary if requested, and treated like family, even though the day before he may well have tried to kill the victor. It serves no purpose to dwell on things that might have been, or to agonize about deeds past. The warrior only looks ahead to the next battle, and hopes to acquit himself well.

The follower of the Tariq el-Harb gives free reign to the Beast amid the slaughter of the battlefield, to leave it spent of strength at the end of battle, when mercy is required by God. As a warrior, he is always at the forefront of the fighting, always the first to volunteer for the charge that scatters the enemy or topples the fortress gates. He accepts the fact that there are no rules whatsoever in war, and thus recognizes that he must be capable of anything in order to triumph, including acts of trickery and deceit. This apparent dichotomy is not acknowledged at all by the Muslims, who regard the practice of both extremes as purely practical. As the Holy Qu'ran teaches, all things — heaven and earth, body and soul, virtue and brutality — are a matter of balance.

Hierarchy of Warrior Sins

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll	Rationale
10	Refusing to keep fighting in the face of overwhelming odds	Everyone dies, sooner or later; Paradise awaits.
9	Not volunteering for the most hazardous role in the battle	It is our duty to lead the faithful by example.
8	Asking for quarter due to fatigue or injury	The sword of Allah fights until it is broken.
7	Refusing an opportunity to meet a foe in battle	A warrior must always be eager and ready to fight the foes of Allah.
6	Failing to utterly destroy an unyielding foe	The enemies of Allah must be scattered like ashes on the wind.
5	Failing to show proper ruthlessness in battle	No act is too terrible in war.
4	Failing to show mercy to a defeated foe	A warrior honors Allah by his compassion.
3	Failing to protect those under your charge	Our swords are forged to defend others.
2	Surrendering to the enemy	Death before dishonor.
1	Showing cowardice in the face of the enemy	A warrior is nothing without courage.

The Tariq el-Harb is most popular among the Islamic Qabilat el-Khayal, but also finds adherents among the soldier-scholars of the Mushakis and the militant vampires of the Wah'Sheen and Mutasharid clans. More than a few Banu Haqim devote themselves to the Tariq el-Harb as well, still diligently pursuing their duties to Haqim but also finding release in the carnage of the battlefield. Many Ashirra on the Tariq el-Harb consider themselves devout Muslims. Rather than earning their reward through diligent observance of the Qu'ran, they instead choose the hero's way into Heaven, fighting battle after battle in the name of Allah until at last they fall and are welcomed into Paradise. More reflective Ashirra look askance at this philosophy, concerned that the Tariq el-Harb seduces believers into thinking that they can expiate nightly sins by bathing in the blood of their foes, whether such violence is justified or not. This continues to be a source of tension between the traditionalist and militant factions of the sect, at a time when the empire most needs holy warriors, eager to spread the faith.

Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control, Courage

Appearance: Adherents to the Tariq el-Harb dress in the finest robes. In battle, they wear armor of the highest quality, reflecting the hoards of plunder won from the fallen. Their swords are the best they can acquire, and show signs of hard use and meticulous care.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a warrior, so be a devil on the field of battle — cold, calculating, brutal. When your sword is sheathed, however, be calm, composed and rational. Make a special point of dealing with your enemies courteously and respectfully. It is a matter of great personal honor to protect the innocent and the defenseless, and to show a defeated foe mercy and kindness. Treats friends and foes equally, for it is by your actions alone that you are judged.

Quote: *I am Hasan ibn Ali al-Rashid, the champion of Basra! Let the best of you face me, and he who bleeds first shall burn in Hell!*

Tariq el-'Sama'

(Road of Heaven)

It is no small thing to become a monster and still seek God. In the West, this is a path fraught with peril and condemnation, but in the Islamic world it is accepted that even the supernatural must still acknowledge God and worship Him. The follower of the Tariq el-Sama' clings to the revelations of the Prophet and counterbalances the raging of the Beast with nightly prayer and unshakeable faith.

The teachings of Islam emphasize that life is to be lived in balance, acknowledging all aspects of physical existence and the various urges that an individual is prone to. Unlike Christianity, which emphasizes strict denial of "baser" instincts, Islam says to embrace them, for they are God-given and just as much a part of a person as his eyes or skin. The challenge is to keep these feelings in balance, and allow them only in moderation, for evil lies in excess. Thus, the adherent to this *tariq* does not resist the Beast when it stirs, but allows it a moderate release, reining it in when the urges threaten to take control entirely. Wounded or starving Ashirra think nothing of taking what they wish from their mortal servants, or soothing frayed nerves and sharp tempers by hunting the city streets for a careless infidel. Sometimes the heat of the moment is too strong, and one of the faithful must die under the vampire's teeth and claws — a sin, to be sure, but as the Prophet often said, Allah does not expect more from a man than he is capable of, including restraint. In this way, much like the Western Road of the Beast, the pressures are not allowed to build to an intolerable fashion and cause a tragic loss of control.

The Tariq el-Sama' is of course the chosen path of the Ashirra, the sect of Muslim vampires founded by Suleiman ibn Abdullah, and most of the sect's tenets (discussed in Chapter Two) are part and parcel of this path. It appeals to individuals from nearly all the different clans, however. The Ashirra hold no prejudice against any clan, regardless of ancient animosities or elder politics, though faith in Islam has caused serious conflicts of conscience in the past when a believer found himself ordered to take an action that was forbidden by Islam. The holy Qu'ran says that it is permissible for a Muslim child to have parents who are nonbelievers — in this case, a non-Muslim sire — and Muhammad enjoins such children to still respect and obey their elders, except in cases where their wishes are explicitly forbidden by Allah. Then it is the child's duty to refuse, or risk damnation, and this is often the source of greatest conflict that an adherent must face from night to night.

This *tariq* also places a number of restrictions on who and what a vampire may feed from, and who they are allowed to Embrace. A Muslim vampire should not feed from an unbeliever, nor from a believer to the point that the person dies, or is too weak to perform their daily prayers. *Ideally*, Muslim vampires should not feed on people at all, but take their sustenance from animals (except pigs), though this rule is not strictly enforced. A Muslim vampire should not Embrace an unbeliever, unless the mortal is on the verge of death. This is permissible because it allows the recipient another chance to turn to Allah and find salvation.

Strictly speaking, even Muslims may not be Embraced without their consent, and doing so is not greatly different from adopting someone into one's family. Not only does the sire become responsible for the childe, but also any immediate family the childe leaves behind. Needless to say, the Embrace is not given lightly by Muslim vampires. Having said this, the judges among the Ashirra frequently are called upon to rule over "exceptions" that the faithful frequently make to bring mortals into the Embrace. Exceptionally virtuous or pious Muslims are sometimes Embraced in their sleep, or wasting away on their deathbeds, ostensibly so that they may continue to do Allah's work on Earth. Ray'een al-Fen frequently Embrace "willing" devotees enraptured by the Cainite's charms, while Qabilat el-Khayal have been known to use subtle machinations to compel a mortal to "request" their Embrace. Despite the best intentions of the sect, the fact remains that if an Ashirra wishes to Embrace someone badly enough, they find a way to justify it.

The blood oath is allowable, but hardly desirable — it is a form of slavery, which Muhammad often preached against. Granting a slave their freedom is an act of charity that can forgive many great sins, so a favored means of expiation for a great offense against Allah is granting freedom to an oathbound servant.

Ashirra Islam is not the only form of belief that adherents to this road may take. Sufism, an esoteric religious movement that became well established in the ninth century, is based on the concept of the divinity in all people and seeks to return to oneness with God through meditation and ecstatic rituals. Sufi vampires are most common in Persia and Syria, and emphasize maintaining spiritual purity and pursuing an existence of religious contemplation to keep themselves in a state of awareness that is close to God. Additionally, a small sect of vampires in Ctesiphon have hearkened back to the pagan rituals of the old Persian Empire, following a version of the region's ancient fire-religion and expiating their sins through sacrifice and self-mutilation.

Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control, Courage

Appearance: There is little to distinguish an adherent of this *tariq* from a typical Muslim — their clothes and

Hierarchy of Sins Against Heaven

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conscience Roll	Rationale
10	Failing to perform any of the five daily prayers	Constant contemplation of God is the foundation to surrendering oneself to Allah.
9	Failing to actively spread the faith to unbelievers	It is the duty of the righteous to spread the word of Allah.
8	Failing to perform an act of charity	The righteous Muslim shares his wealth with the community.
7	Embracing an infidel	It is not fitting to share our blood with unbelievers.
6	Purchasing a slave	Muhammad preached that all slaves should be set free.
5	Stealing	Theft, even from infidels, is forbidden.
4	Breaking an oath	Allah abhors oathbreakers.
3	Murdering the faithful	Every true believer is a child of God.
2	Slaying pilgrims	Pilgrims are sacrosanct.
1	Turning from Islam to worship idols	Apostasy is the only unforgivable sin.

appearance are well-kept, for Muhammad insisted on cleanliness as a gesture of respect to Allah. Women cover themselves from head to foot but proudly walk about in public, in defiance of Arabic custom but in compliance with Islamic law.

Roleplaying Hints: Be thoughtful, composed and modest at all times, doing nothing to excess and keeping the teachings of Muhammad foremost in your mind. Strive not to let personal or political situations come between you and your duties to God. As the Prophet wished, show respect and courtesy to Jews and Christians, as they are People of the Book, and try whenever possible to show an unbeliever the path to redemption by accepting Allah as the One God.

Quote: *There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet.*

Tariq el-Shaitan

(Road of the Devil)

Some believe that once they have lost all hope of redemption, there is nothing left but to welcome the Beast . The followers of this dark road reject attempts to limit their appetites and instead devote themselves to honing them. The Beast is now part of their soul, and they draw power from it, turning it from a thing of pure rage to a subtle, devilish thing. A pretense of salvation is the worst kind of self-delusion — even a fool can see what awaits a vampire should the Final Death one day claim him. It would be stupid to waste days of freedom and power on pointless illusions of morality and decency.

The Road of the Devil does not restrict the Beast. In many ways it is the Beast, in all its cunning, seductive glory. Vampires on this *tariq* gorge themselves on the best that the world has to offer to keep the inner devil satisfied and in check. Gold, slaves, power — nothing is too ostentatious or too extreme if it will keep the Beast fat and asleep. These vampires understand that the choice is between being a cunning devil or a mad dog.

Each individual follower of the Tariq el-Shaitan pursues different sins and pleasures. In fact, over the course of their unlife, most go through various sins in order to keep the Beast satisfied. After years of seduction and murder, it may take slavery and torture to sate the inner devil. Early in their unlives, many devils surround them-

Hierarchy of Devil's Sins

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conviction Roll	Rationale
10	Failing to indulge in the slightest of carnal urges	To deny the Beast is to deny ourselves.
9	Failing to support a greater power of corruption	The Beast clamors for the end of things.
8	Failing to seek the enslavement and debasement of others	The Beast relishes the death of morality.
7	Failing to surround yourself with symbols of your pleasures	The Beast hungers for the body as well as the soul.
6	Promoting another's freedom	Those in chains should free themselves or remain slaves.
5	Failing to indulge your primary sinful urge	The wants of the Beast must be fulfilled.
4	Actively supporting the social order of a vampiric community	Society is the organized repression of an individual's desires.
3	Actively defending the virtue of another vampire	Virtue, once lost, is impossible to regain.
2	Actively protecting a holy figure from corruption	The holiest are the most in need of the truth.
1	Actively supporting the prevailing moral environment of a city	Morality is a lie to succor the weak of heart.

selves with the very things that their society forbids, reveling in their freedom from the constraints that their peers confine themselves with. What is more, they actively try to subvert the virtues of those around them, corrupting them with gifts and honeyed words, until they are powerless to resist their dark natures as well.

Some followers of the Tariq el-Shaitan go all the way to religious worship of Satan or other dark gods. Elder Baali, who honor the primordial demons they call the Children, subscribe to this variant. In Europe, they would be called infernalists. In Muslim lands, they are idolaters and also seen as enemies of the faith. This pleases the devils in their unbeating hearts—and gives them power and control.

Let others play at morality. They do nothing but doom themselves.

Virtues: Conviction, Instinct, Courage

Appearance: Followers of the Tariq el-Shaitan can rarely prevent themselves from cultivating an appearance of decadence. Everything is chosen on the basis of luxury and excess, because they must please themselves and their Beast. Powerful moral authorities can force them to pursue their interests in secret, but they still prefer rich clothes, makeup and ostentatious jewelry. These Cainites maintain large retinues of servants, particularly *ansar*, both as signs of excess and as a ready supply of flesh to sate their impulsive desires. Their lairs are often large and opulent, and very well defended.

Roleplaying Hints: The whole point of being a vampire is to exist above the law, and those who can't see that are only hurting themselves. Sate your desires by any means necessary and evoke that same self-indulgence in others. There is no greater joy than seeing a self-righteous vampire reduced to a snarling, murderous beast. Of course, an ostentatious display of degeneracy is ideal, but thanks to the hypocritical zeal of the Ashirra and Islam's mortal watchdogs, such an image is often needlessly dangerous. Cunning and subtlety are crucial, allowing you to move invisibly among the unsuspecting moralists. Become adept at deception and seduction, using your charms to ingratiate and disarm strangers, and find your way into the confidence of those in authority.

Quote: *Taste it. Go on. Have you not always wanted to? What is to stop you? God? God is in Heaven. He no longer knows you exist.*

Tariq el-Umma

(Road of Community)

Many who receive the Embrace are unable to hold to their beliefs in Heaven and Hell, whether through bitterness and horror or simply because immortality makes a belief in the afterlife seem pointless. Losing faith in God, any God, leaves most neonates unsettled, particularly if they had led a devout life previously. The Beast wears away at their soul night after night, and they find themselves grasping for some sort of ethical foundation to keep them stable. If Heaven no longer holds any promise for them, it is possible to at least hold to the basic principles of humanity as a way of keeping madness at bay. In Europe, vampires who do so follow the Road of Humanity; in Islamic lands they follow the Tariq el-Umma, the Road of Community.

The Islamic concept of moral humanity is not far removed from attitudes in the West: A moral person acts in moderation, is humble and respectful of her family, charitable and compassionate to her slaves or to the needy, and is scrupulously honest in all her business dealings. Unlike many of the other Islamic roads, the Tariq el-Umma involves strict denial of the Beast. The Cainite strives to keep its excesses at bay by reinforcing her sense of right and decent behavior, particularly in reference to the greater Muslim community.

Followers of the Tariq el-Umma are given to reaffirming their basic natures through acts of kindness and compassion, much like their European kin. Often they seek to protect and help their mortal neighbors in secret, and intercede (when possible) to right injustices or see the guilty punished. Purchasing the freedom of slaves is a favorite act of communal charity, as is donating sums to local hospitals or universities. In fact, many adherents to this *tariq* balance their bestial natures by contributing to the spread of knowledge and healing throughout the Islamic world, becoming patrons of community institutions, helping to build mosques (even if they don't believe themselves) and donating books to schools. Followers of this *tariq* immerse themselves in the needs of others as thoroughly as possible so as not to arouse the selfish appetites of the Beast. They deny their true natures by becoming as human — or more human — than the mortals they share their city with. Often they go to pains to lead public lives of civic virtue, openly seeking the admiration and praise of the community as a bulwark against their damned natures. Of all the Cainites in the Muslim world, the followers of this *tariq* do their best to disguise their monstrous habits from mortals and even themselves, drinking hot blood from a cup or, in extreme cases, chewing raw meat and delicately spitting the remains into brass bowls.

Adherents to the Road of Community are present among all *hay't* but are particularly common among al-Amin, Mushakis and Ray'een al-Fen. Of all the

nonbelievers, the followers of this *tariq* are most welcome among Ashirra communities, looked upon as merely devout souls who have lost their way. For their part, the followers of the Tariq el-Umma view the Ashirra as more-ascetic versions of themselves, and many of the strongest Ashirra cities benefit from a solid alliance between the Islamic sect and the adherents of this *tariq*.

Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control, Courage

Appearance: As with the Tariq el-Sama', there is little to distinguish the adherent to the Tariq el-Umma. They strive to look as much like everyone else as possible, clinging to the manner of dress and lifestyle that they had before their Embrace, even if they can now exist well beyond such humble means. Most seek to maintain large retinues of servants and retainers, and frequently step forward to adopt orphans or family members of destitute mortal friends, as mortal Arabs are known to do. They actively seek significant roles in the mortal community in which they reside, as anonymous benefactors, artistic patrons or prominent leaders of society.

Roleplaying Hints: You are driven to look beyond yourself and to help others where you can, because it is acts of charity and compassion to others (especially strangers) that reaffirm your basic decency. Try to intercede on behalf of those who cannot help themselves and seek out the soaring achievements of arts, architecture, and scholarship that make Islam great. Take solace in facilitating the construction of community buildings or providing patronage for as many poets and artisans as your resources permit. Take part in works that bring the most good to the most people, be they mortal or immortal. More than any other vampire, you devote much of your energy and attention to supporting, protecting and guiding mortal communities, sometimes with tragic results.

Quote: *I am not trying to insult you, sir. Take the gold. It will allow you to rebuild what you have lost. I do not ask for repayment — in the future, when you see someone in need, think of me, and be charitable to them in turn.*

Hierarchy of Human Sins

Road Score	Minimum Wrongdoing for Conscience Roll	Rationale
10	Drinking blood from a mortal	Civilized people do not prey upon their fellows.
9	Failing to give alms to a beggar	It is a civic duty to provide for the less fortunate.
8	Failing to take part in a community project	It is a mark of civic virtue to devote energy and resources to the community as a whole.
7	Failing to pay the yearly tax	All citizens owe their allegiance to the caliph and the community.
6	Failing to adopt or provide sanctuary to a mortal friend in need	Compassion and generosity benefit the community as a whole.
5	Failing to defend the community in times of peril	Each citizen must pledge to protect their fellows in times of danger.
4	Abusing one's servants	A responsible citizen cares for those in his possession.
3	Abusing one's authority in the community	Public power is a sacred trust.
2	Murdering one's neighbors	A citizen's first duty is to protect one's neighbors.
1	Intentionally evoking the Beast	Civilization is the universal denial of our baser natures.

Other Roads

While Muslim civilization has engendered its own distinctive interpretations of the Cainite roads most often followed in the West, there are some paths that remain the same, no matter what the location or the prevailing culture. Bay't Mujrim, the Qabilat al-Mawt and the Walid Set have philosophies that predate the relatively recent rise of Islam and stand in stark contrast to Muslim beliefs. They seem as alien to Islamic vampires as Islam does to the Cainites in the West. The adherents of these *tariq* comprise a minority, but a significant one, among vampires across the empire (most numerous are the Walid Set, whose ancient heartland is a Muslim possession). They are treated with varying degrees of contempt, bemusement and, in some cases, even grudging respect.

Tariq el-A'tham (Road of Bones)

The members of Qabilat al-Mawt haunt the shadows of ancient places across Islam, from fabled Egypt to hoary Persia, quietly pursuing their arcane studies without great regard for politics, religion or Cainite intrigues. Though there are quite a few Islamic scholars who eventually found themselves among the ranks of the Qabilat al-Mawt, the very nature of their esoteric pursuits make petty differences like culture or religious belief largely irrelevant, mere theories with no more or less value than any other. Adherents to the Road of Bones pursue their studies in quiet isolation, and Islamic vampires are content to leave them undisturbed, if they notice at all. (For more on the Road of Bones, see **Clanbook: Cappadocian**.)

Tariq el-Hayya (Road of the Serpent)

The Walid Set practice a religion more ancient than Islam, worshipping their progenitor Set as a literal god. The Tariq el-Hayya is this religion, controlling and channeling the Beast through faith and holy works. The tenets of this faith honor brutal self-reliance and even self-gratification. Civilization is sinful. To the Walid Set, society is a great trick designed to enslave man and vampire alike, and it must be swept away. Subtle, quiet decay is the path to that revolution.

Unsurprisingly, adherents of the Road of the Serpent have little love for Islam or the Ashirra. Islam's calls for submission to Allah, attacks on "idolatry" like the worship of Set, and grand civilization are all black sins from a Setite perspective. The Ashirra return this scorn equally, of course.

Nevertheless, the Walid Set — and the other Cainites they convert to the Tariq el-Hayya — have found ways to survive amid Islam. They are reputed as corrupters because they find the dark wants that bubble up in those who call themselves civilized. By providing slaves and drink, pleasures and vices, they make a place for themselves. Even the lofty Ashirra need their services. (For more on the Road of the Serpent, see **Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door**.)

Tariq el-Tanaqud (Road of Paradox)

The Mujrim trace their origins to distant India, and vampires of this clan of tricksters have a long tradition of wandering through Persia, Arabia and the Holy Land. The Tariq el-Tanaqud is practiced no differently in the world of Islam than anywhere else in the world, and many Cainites regard tricksters as both a challenge and an amusing diversion amid the Muslim emphasis on temperance and sobriety.

This is not to say that there has not been friction in the past between Mujrim and communities of Ashirra. Devout imams have railed against the tricksters' moral turpitude and delight for discord, and have embarked on campaigns to drive them from their cities in a manner that would cause most Western Princes to nod in rueful sympathy. For the most part, though — especially in ancient, decadent Persia — the Mujrim come and go as they please, accorded a measure of respect and tolerance that they do not enjoy in Europe or elsewhere. (For more on the Road of Paradox, see **Libellus Sanguinis 4: Thieves in the Night**.)





Chapter Five: Blessings of the Faithful

He it is Who created you from dust, then from a small life-germ, then from a clot, then He brings you forth as a child, then that you may attain your maturity, then that you may be old – and of you there are some who are caused to die before – and that you may reach an appointed term, and that you may understand

– al-Quran, Surah 40:67

Life, and unlife, in the Islamic world is very different from that in the Christian Europe of most **Vampire: The Dark Ages** chronicles. As such, this chapter provides a wide range of information and systems intended to aid players and Storytellers in creating and running **Veil of Night** chronicles.

Character Creation

Characters in **Veil of Night** chronicles, Cainite and mortal, share many skills and abilities with their European relations and so use the standard rules from **Vampire: The Dark Ages.** The demands of a chronicle in Islamic lands are, however, substantially different to those in Christendom, with radically divergent social, environmental and economic circumstances. The following material provides advice for players and Storytellers on creating characters suited to the chronicle rather than game mechanics for doing so. Some mechanics do appear, but these are suggestions rather than hard and fast rules.

Life and Death

Who characters were before their Embrace plays a major role in their existence as Cainites. Considerations such as sex, ethnicity and age are very important in governing where a character, mortal or Cainite, fits in larger society. Consider such issues carefully and use your decisions to shape the choice of traits. Use the following information as a guide in creating your own characters or consult the sample concepts that appear beginning on page 154. These concepts are not set in stone, nor are they the only character types suitable for **Veil of Night** chronicles, but rather should serve as aids for character creation.

Ethnicity

The Islamic world covers a massive area, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Sea, and from the Caucasus Mountains to the deserts of Ethiopia. Europeans often group the people of this region together, acknowledging the common traits of their Islamic faith and culture while ignoring regional differences. A scholar in Cordoba, while speaking Arabic and practicing Islam, is likely to have little in common with a Sufi in Baghdad. The Islamic people are not homogenous — racial and cultural differences play an important role in the region's social dynamics. For example, the Islamic armies have long relied on troops drawn from the social and geographic fringes of civilization, exploiting the skills and temperament of these less civilized members of society (to the social elite's view). Thanks to their skill and merit, however, these fringe groups gain considerable influence in military and political circles, in effect joining or replacing the elite. Consequently, Turkish and Kurdish warriors play a major role in society, dominating the Arab people seen by the Europeans as synonymous with Islam. Despite this, the frictions between the ethnic groups can play a major role in chronicles, both within a coterie and between the characters and outsiders. Depending on the outlook of the individuals, mistaking members of one group for another (for example calling a Berber a Moor) can bring dangerous repercussions, perhaps violence in the mortal world or something more subtle (and insidious) among the Cainite population.

The principal ethnic groups in the Islamic world are:

• **Arabs:** The Arab people form the core population of the lands of the Middle East. There are several distinct groups within the population, the principal divide being between settled population and those who practice a nomadic lifestyle. The term Arab means tent-dweller though this epithet applies only to the nomadic peoples, the *badawi* or Bedouin, who call themselves the *ahl el beit*, or "people of the tent." Arab dominance of Islamic affairs ended in 1059 with the defeat of al Basasiri by the Seljuq Turks.

• **Berbers:** Many (but by no means all) Berbers follow a nomadic lifestyle. They occupy North Africa, the lands known as the Maghrib to the Arabs (the "lands west of the sun"). Calling themselves the Imazighen (free people) they comprise a number of tribal groups (*qaum*), many of whom have distinct customs. Perhaps the best-known Berber group are the Tuareg, who have their own distinct language and writing form based on Phoenician.

• **Kurds:** Like the Turks, the Kurds play a significant role in the Islamic military which many have used to gain influence in society and form a military elite. Salah al-Din is the epitome of this Kurdish elite which manifests today as the Ayyubid Sultanate.

• **Moors:** Together with "Arab," the word "Moor" is seen by Europeans as synonymous with the Islamic people. In truth, the Moors are a hybrid people of mixed Berber-Arab or Berber-Iberian descent. They predominate in North Africa and Iberia.

• **Persians:** Once the rulers of the Middle East, the people of Persia have found themselves disenfranchised by the rise of Islam, overrun by Arab armies in their initial conquests. Despite this, they

remain an important part of the Islamic world through the presence of the caliph in Baghdad.

• **Turks:** The people of Anatolia, the Turks have achieved suzerainty over large areas of the Middle East and become the ruling class of many nations thanks to their prominence in the military. The Seljuq sultanate once dominated Asia Minor and the Fertile Crescent but allowed their empire to decay and, ultimately, be overthrown by the Kurdish Ayyubid sultanate under Salah al-Din. Once a tribal people, many Turks have abandoned their old ways, though some nomadic bands maintain the traditions.

Sex

As they do in Europe, men have a better lot in the Islamic world, and both the Qur'an and *shari'a* contain a number of provisions to this effect. Islamic society protects females, allowing them only a limited role in society and seeking to safeguard them from corruption. Some work as domestic servants or as entertainers, but these are the poorer elements of society and wealthier women are expected to remain at home, often in a dedicated women's area of the house, the *harim*. When outside or in public places, women wear veils to protect their modesty and are usually accompanied by male relatives or servants. Some hard-line *qadi* (judges) feel, however, that even this is too much freedom and argue females should remain in the home at all times.

The Qur'an and *shari'a* guarantee women some rights and detail the basic equality of the sexes. At the same time, however, they give males a number of advantages such as allowing them to divorce more easily (women need good cause and must apply to a *qadi* while men simply need repudiate their spouse before witnesses), allowing a man to have up to four wives (and any number of concubines) and favoring the evidence of males over females. It should be noted that there are differences within Islamic society, Shiite law being more tolerant than that of the Sunni, though this is a matter of degree rather than the presence or absence of certain restrictions.

Cainites are less likely to feel themselves bound by such prejudices, but female characters still face additional challenges in a **Veil of Night** chronicle. Cainite Disciplines such as Obfuscate (or the *silsr* ritual Mask of Allah, p. 164) offer a way around some of the restrictions, though such a brute-force approach is risky and limited to specific occasions. Instead, female characters might travel with male servants, most likely ghouls, or with family members (mortal or Cainite) to avoid the stigma of being a woman alone. As such, the Allies and Retainers Backgrounds are very important for female characters.

Age and Generation

Age (actual or apparent) can be an important factor in **Veil of Night** chronicles, governing how people react to a character, or how the character reacts to others. Muslim society extends considerable respect to elders, particularly parents, and this extends into Cainite society. As a general rule, an Islamic vampires extends his sire — a new parent in almost every regard — considerable respect and likewise honors those of lower generation. This does not automatically translate to the characters liking each other, but it does mean that older vampires or those of lower generation can expect respect.

Age may also play a significant role in the character's outlook. In Cainite terms, Islam is a new religion (as for that matter is Christianity) but much has happened since its founding. Older vampires may recall life before the teachings of Muhammad took root and the Islamic forces carved out vast empires, perhaps coloring their opinions of the faith. Likewise, younger Cainites may be influenced by the vagaries of politics within Islamic lands, perhaps favoring one of the groups that have fallen from grace like the Fatimid caliphate or the Seljuq sultanate. In Iberia, Cainites may favor the long-fallen Umayyad caliphate or the Taifa emirates that emerged from its fall.

Religion

Religion is the most contentious issue of the Islamic world and a fact central to **Veil of Night** chronicles. Society favors Muslims, and most characters in **Veil of Night** chronicles are likely be of the Islamic faith (at least nominally), but this need not be the case. Islamic society tolerates other religions, recognizing an affinity with both Judaism and Christianity whose practitioners are regarded as fellow "Peoples of the Book." This is not to say, however, that Jews and Christians are treated as equals — they aren't — but their presence is an accepted part of society, certainly more so than Jews and Muslims in Europe. Non-Muslims living in an Islamic region are called *dhimmi* and are expect to pay a *jizya* (poll tax) for the privilege, to be paid personally. Additional restrictions on *dhimmi* include not using Muslim names, not possessing arms, wearing distinctive clothing, living separately from Muslims and showing respect for all Muslims. Even within the Islamic faith there are a number of factors that should be considered. Though open conflict between the Shiite and

Sunni factions is rare, especially while the *Franj* pose such a threat, many frictions color relationships between characters belonging to the different groups.

As with other forms of discrimination, Cainites are less likely to be concerned by religion. Many older Cainites remember the days before Islam and Christianity and are thus not swayed by such matters. At the opposite end the scale, others, notably the Ashirra, have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the new faith. Relations between them and less committed members may be strained.

Arabic Names

Arabic names and naming conventions differ sharply from those used in Europe during this period. Every individual has a personal name called an *'ism*. This corresponds to the first name of a European person and includes names such as Muhammad, Nasir, Yusuuf and Maryam. A *nasab* (patronymic), a *hisba* (descriptive) or a *lakab* (epithet) is usually appended to this name.

Nasab are *ibn* for "son of" and *bint* for "daughter of." Thus a character called Murshid whose father was Usama would be known as Murshid ibn Usama (Murshid, Usama's son) while his sister Sukayna would be Sukayna bint Usama. In the mortal world, *nasab* always relate to the father. *Hisba* cover a variety of subjects, usually related to the individual's occupation or place of residence. For example, Firas of Bagdad would be Firas al-Baghdadi while Jamal the builder would be Jamal al-Ammar. *Lakab* are descriptive epithets, usually relating to religion, a personal quality or a physical feature. Examples include abd Allah (servant of god), al-Basim (the smiling) or ar-rashid (the rightly guided).

It is impolite to use the *'ism*, except between close friends, and instead a *kunya* (honorific) is used. This relates to the individual's children, using the name of the eldest son (or daughter if there are no sons) in a manner similar to the *nasab*. *Abu* means "father of," while *Om* means "mother of." Thus Rashid's father would be Abu Rashid, while his mother would be Om Rashid. These various name elements are often combined, resulting in compound names that dwarf those used in Europe. For example, Abu Rashid Nasir ibn Faysal ibn Jamal ibn Ibrahim al-Baghdadi al-Kareem translates as Nasir, father of Rashid, son of Faysal, grandson of Jamal, great grandson of Ibrahim, of Bagdad, the generous.

Cainite Names

Cainites in the Ashirra sect adapt the mortal practice of the *nasab* to reflect the close relationship with their sires, symbolizing a severing of ties to the mortal world and their new associations in the Ashirra. So Habib, the new childe of the Ashirra Musa, becomes known as Habib ibn Musa, even if in mortal circles he was called Abu Muhammad or Habib al-Asim. Problems arise, however, in cases where the sire is female, as the only case in the mortal world of using a female name in a *nasab* is for the prophet Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary). This discourages the most devout Ashirra from using a matronymic *nasab*, at least in regular usage. On formal occasions, however, they are still expected to acknowledge their lineage.

A few Islamic Cainites use the *kunya* with respect to their childe (so the sire of Amin would be Abu Amin) though this is uncommon and limited to gestures of respect or esteem for a favored childe. In most cases, however, the Ashirra regard all childer as of equal importance, irrespective of their order of creation or gender. The only consistent case of the use of *kunya* is the Arabic name for Cappadocius, Abu Lazar.

Non-Ashirra Cainites with Arabic names generally follow the same guidelines, although the strong tie to the sire sometimes grates on them. These vampires either maintain their mortal names or adapt a *lakab* or *hisba* to reflect their new status.

Coteries

Coteries are a central part of any chronicle, groups of vampires working together towards common (or at least similar) ends. But why should they do so? What holds the group together? Social, political and religious differences (not to mention *bay't* rivalries) can easily drive the Cainites apart. Players and Storytellers may wish such frictions to play a part in their chronicle, but care should be taken to ensure such matters don't dominate (unless you want them to). You should take a number of issues into account when creating characters, spending some time with the other players to determine the details and composition of the coterie. This can take place before or after character creation, tailoring the characters to the coterie or vice versa.

Some topics you may want to consider include:

- **Balance:** Does one *bay't* dominate the coterie? Do all the characters follow similar concepts? A chronicle focusing on the conflict with the *Franj*

Sample Islamic Names

Men's Names (*'ism*)	Women's Names (*'ism*)
Ali	'Aliyah
Ahmad	Ara
	Asiya
Bakr	Banah
Barsuq	Bilqis
Da'ud	Dabah
Duqaq	Daifa
Fadl	Fadl
Firas	Fatimah
	Fawz
Ghazi	Ghaythah
Habib	Halima
Hakim	Hawwa
Hanif	
Hasan	
Isa	'Ijliyah
Ibrahim	'Inan
Ishaq	
Ja'bar	Jaida
Ja'lal	Javairia
Jamil	
Kamal	
Khalfat	
Kutaiba	
Labid	Layla
Luqman	Lubna
Mahmud	Malak
Mansur	Maimunah
Maudad	Mariyah
Mubarak	Maryam
Muhammad	Mellilah
Murshid	
Musa	
Nadr	Nadreah
Nafi'	Naima
Nasir	Nu'm
Othman	Oabihah
Qadir	Qaribah
Qasim	
Radi	Rabab
Rafi	Rabi'ah
Rashid	Rayn
Ridwan	Rusa
Sabah	Saduf
Sa'd	Safia
Salih	Sajah
Salim	Salamah
Shakir	Sara
Sulaiman	Shikdah
Tahir	Tarifa
Tammam	Thana'
Tayyib	
Usama	'Ulayyah
	'Utbah
Wafid	Wahshiyah
Yahyah	
Yusuf	
Zafar	Zaynab
Ziyadatallah	Zulaikha

Men's Honorifics (*lakab*)	Meaning
Abd allah	servant of God
Abû al Khayr	one who does good
al-'Asim	the protector
al-Basim	the smiling
al-Faysal	the decisive
al-Ghazi	the conqueror
al-Hamzah	the lion
al-Karim	the generous
al-Labib	the sensible
an-Nasih	the advisor
ar-Rashid	the rightly guided
al-Walid	the child

Women's Honorifics (*lakab*)	Meaning
al 'Afifah	the chaste
al-Basimah	the smiling
al-Fatin	the captivating
al-Halimah	the gentle
al-Majidah	the glorious
an-Najla	the wide-eyed
ar-Rasha	the young gazelle
al-Zaynah	the beautiful
al-Zarqa'	the blue-eyed

perforce favors warriors, while one dealing with the politics of Damascus or Baghdad favors *'ulama*, imams and courtiers. The nature of the chronicle may shape the coterie or vice versa, depending on Storyteller and player preference.

• **Domain:** What is the vampires' influence? Are they the principal Cainite power in the region or do they defer to a higher authority? Do they operate in a fixed area, in and around a particular town, or are they nomadic, as pilgrims or warriors of the faith? Do they operate openly within the nighttime community or do they hide from the established authorities? Perhaps the characters are rogues with links to a group like the Banu Sasan (see **The Ashen Thief**, pp. 55-57) or they may simply be Ashirra in a region dominated by the *Franj*.

• **Leadership:** Who leads the coterie? Is there an acknowledged leader? Does the coterie operate independently or does it work for a higher power? The existence of a patron offers many possibilities for the chronicle but may also places some limits the characters' actions. Independent coteries have considerable freedom of action but may find themselves isolated in the convoluted politics of the Islamic world.

• **Raison d'être:** Was the coterie formed for a specific reason, perhaps as an *ayyar* (warrior band) to hunt down a Baali nest, to deal with *Franj* incursions or to patrol the frontiers of Islam? Does it still pursue its original mission or has it evolved over time? In many cases the reason for the alliance is short-lived. In such cases, frictions between characters remain strong. Where a group has stayed together for a long time, different social dynamics come to the fore, regulating behavior within the group and limiting membership. These can include elaborate codes of conduct and membership rituals. Individual characters within the coterie need not like each other, but a degree of respect and understanding exists to maintain order. Of course, introducing new characters to the group can grossly upset the situation.

Suggested Concepts

The Islamic World of Darkness is a place of conflict and ambition, of intrigue and religious fervor. The following concepts are starting points for character generation, providing the basic idea and framework for characters suited to a **Veil of Night** chronicle. These are not complete characters but rather ready-made backgrounds and motivations with suggestions for Traits. You still need to make decisions and assign values.

Bandit

Every society has someone like you lurking in its underbelly and living off the work of others. You care little for the laws of the land, only for your own profit and well-being. Perhaps you were a *tarrar* (pickpocket) who robbed to stay alive, who did it simply for the profit or even sought to strike back at corrupt officials. Not that it matters much since you were changed — the rigors of your old life are nothing compared to the concerns of immortality. Still, old habits die hard and you are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities to line your pockets. Your new Disciplines add a whole range of possibilities to your thievery, overpowering or intimidating your victims, or perhaps slipping past them unnoticed.

Recommended Clans: Bay't Mujrim (Ravnos), Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Wah'Sheen (Gangrel)

Recommended Roads: Any, although the Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven) is hard to maintain

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Dodge, Larceny, Melee, Stealth, Subterfuge

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Resources

Mamluk

A Turkish slave-soldier, you spent many years learning the arts of war and are now a lethal killing machine. At home, on foot or on horseback, you are among the best the Islamic world has to offer, living for the clash of swords and the glory of battle. Born an outsider, you converted to Islam during your life as a slave and saw the truth of His will. Freed and able to choose your own path, you worked for one of the many *shaykhs* or perhaps even for Salah al-Din's army before being chosen to walk the night. Embraced for your mix of martial skill and fervor. While the *Franj* remain a threat to the holy places of Islam, you will be there to beat them back, a warrior for Allah and righteousness.

Recommended Clans: Al-Amin (Salubri) warrior, Banu Haqim (Assamite) warrior, Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Wah'Sheen (Gangrel)

Recommended Roads: Tariq el-Harb (Road of War), Tariq el-Bedouin (Road of the Nomad)

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Skills primary, Talents secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Archery, Brawl, Dodge, Melee, Ride, Strategy

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Herd, Retainers

Merchant

Commerce is the lifeblood of society, moving goods, ideas and news around the known world. You loved the business of buying and selling, constantly traveling to acquire new goods and exploit new markets. You led trade caravans to the very borders of Taugast, dealing in exotic goods and meeting even stranger creatures, earning rewards and envy in equal measure. You know people across the civilized world (and beyond). Though your circumstances have changed since the Embrace, moving by night and sleeping in covered wagons or caravansaries by day, you continue to travel and renew these contacts. You are a trusted intermediary, a provider of goods and information that you barter for favors among mortals and Cainites alike.

Recommended Clans: Bay't Mujrim (Ravnos), Qabilat el-Khayal (Lasombra), Walid Set (Follower of Set)

Recommended Roads: Any

Attributes: Social primary, Physical secondary, Mental tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Empathy, Etiquette, Melee, Politics, Ride

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Resources, Retainers

Physician

Civilized? Pah! The Europeans are barbarians with scarcely the first idea about engineering or the sciences. You studied medicine at the greatest centers of learning in the world, in Andalusia or the Middle East, putting your skills to good use in the wars against the Christians. When you were with Salah al-Din's army, you saved many lives with your knowledge and also saw firsthand the *Franj* idea of healing, the amputation of limbs where a simple poultice would suffice and the boring of holes into the skull to release devils trapped therein. Horrific! Your fascination with the human body and its workings brought you to *his* attention and resulted in your Embrace. You view the transformation with a degree of detachment. The suspension of the natural order intrigues you. You now have a long time to study it.

Recommended Clans: Al-Amin (Salubri) healer, Qabilat al-Mawt (Cappadocian), Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador)

Recommended Roads: Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community)

Attributes: Mental primary, Social secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Skills secondary, Talents tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Academics, Empathy, Herbalism, Medicine, Occult, Science

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Herd, Influence, Resources

Sufi

While others sought Allah (praise his name) through prayer, you sought to go even further and draw near to God. You left behind your old life to gain spiritual awakening and to feel His love, abstaining from those things that could bring sin to your life. Perhaps you are like many seeking the ecstasy of union, wanting that perfect moment of His love before returning to the world, or maybe you will turn away from the world after your experience. Perhaps it was your devotion that attracted your sire, recognizing your quest for enlightenment and contact with Him. The Embrace has brought you another step along the *tariq*, heightening your senses and allowing you to reach higher planes, but it has also brought new challenges for you to resist. The cravings for blood and the constant howling of the Beast are at times unbearable, but you know that should you master them, you will truly know Him.

Recommended Clans: Banu Haqim (Assamite) sorcerer, Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Qabilat el-Khayal (Lasombra), Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador)

Recommended Roads: Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven)

Attributes: Mental primary, Physical secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Talents secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Academics, Alertness, Empathy, Herbalism, Occult, Theology

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Generation, Mentor

'Alim

You are a successor to the Prophet, learned in the Qur'an, the *sunna* and the *shari'a*. Unlike the Shiites, who place their faith in imams to reveal His will, you know that the truth lies in the books. By interpreting the words of the Prophet, you can maintain order and morality within the community. Your school may require strict adherence to the Qur'an and Hadith, or perhaps you are allowed a degree of leeway for personal interpretation. Either way, you are a leader, an arbiter of *fiqh*, the way of life to best obey the will of Allah. Your role in the community has declined since your Embrace, but even Cainites require arbiters of the law. Though cursed by the demands of blood, you revel in the prospect of an immortal life to study the Qur'an and *sunna*, creating the definitive interpretations.

Recommended Clans: Banu Haqim (Assamite) vizier, Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Qabilat el-Khayal (Lasombra), Qabilat al-Mawt (Cappadocian), Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador)

Recommended Roads: Tariq el-Sama' (Road of Heaven), Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community)

Attributes: Mental primary, Social secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Talents secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Academics, Empathy, Etiquette, Investigation, Law (Shari'a), Politics, Theology

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Influence, Mentor, Status

Vizier

Be you high or low, you play an important role in ensuring the machinery of state runs smoothly. In life you gained prestige and built a web of influence that you still manage today, albeit from the shadows. Though not the official pinnacle of the social order, you know where the true power lies and manipulate it according to your whims and desires, prompting many to seek you out for favors. Since your Embrace, your power has grown, but you find yourself bound to new masters, required to advance the agenda of your *bay't*. Still, all that means is one more power structure to climb. You enjoy a challenge....

Recommended Clans: Banu Haqim (Assamite) vizier, El Hijazi (Arabian Ventrue), Qabilat el-Khayal (Lasombra), Qabilat al-Mawt (Cappadocian), Walid Set (Follower of Set)

Recommended Roads: Any

Attributes: Social primary, Mental secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Talents secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Etiquette, Expression, Law, Leadership, Linguistics, Subterfuge

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contact, Influence, Retainers

Warrior-Poet

They think that warriors are muscle-bound morons fit only for the shedding of blood and visiting horrors on the enemy. You prove them wrong, demonstrating that valor and culture can go hand-in-hand. Both the sword and the pen have their place in society; those foes you cannot cut down on the battlefield you assassinate with words. Your skills are equally suited to unlife as they were to your mortal days, the convoluted relationships of Cainite existence ideal material for your works.

Recommended Clans: Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Ray'een al-Fen (Toreador), Walid Set (Follower of Set)

Recommended Roads: Tariq el-Harb (Road of War), Tariq el-Umma (Road of Community)

Attributes: Mental primary, Physical secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Skills primary, Knowledges secondary, Talents tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Etiquette, Expression, Linguistics, Melee, Music, Ride

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Herd, Resources

New Traits

Though **Veil of Night** shares many features with conventional **Vampire: The Dark Ages** chronicles, the following new Traits are intended to provide depth and flavor to your games. Some of the abilities presented here are have appeared in other products but are presented here for ease of reference, in many cases adapted to better suit the Islamic setting.

New Talent

Expression

You are a practiced speaker, able to inspire and entertain and to get your point across. You understand dramatic principles and can project your voice to the farthest reaches of a crowd, making your views known and conveying mood and emotion, even if

feigned. The higher the rating, the better your skill and the larger the audience you can "work." Truly skilled orators can whip a crowd into a frenzy or quell an angry mob. If literate, you can write poetry and prose.

- • Novice: You can speak in public without stuttering.
- •• Practiced: People nod as you deliver your tale.
- ••• Competent: Your visits are the highlight of the season in many villages.
- •••• Expert: People come from far and wide to hear you talk.
- ••••• Master: You could bring tears to the eyes of even the most hardened imam.
- •••••• Legend: People hail you as a new Prophet.

Possessed by: Poets, courtiers, imams, military leaders

Specialties: Acting, poetry, fiction, impromptu, conversation, oratory

New Skill

Strategy

You have a solid grasp of the military arts, thanks to experience on the field of battle or extensive schooling. You know what is required to train, equip and lead men into battle, including knowledge of small-unit tactics and what is required to manage a full-scale campaign.

- • Novice: You know which direction to charge.
- •• Practiced: You can hold a battle line.
- ••• Competent: You could command a small battle effectively.
- •••• Expert: You possess a solid understanding of siegecraft and open battles.
- ••••• Master: Warriors cry you name.
- •••••• Legend: You *are* Salah al-Din or Richard the Lion-hearted.

Possessed by: Soldiers, *mamluks*, officers, lords

Specialties: Open-field, sieges, mobile, defensive

New and Revised Knowledges

Academics

You can read and write and understand the basics of mathematics and philosophy, having attended one of the numerous schools that dot the Islamic world. A high rating indicates you have attended one of the prestigious schools in Baghdad, Cordoba or Cairo. Without at least one dot of Academics, you cannot read or write.

- • Dabbler: You can read and write.
- •• Student: You write well and have a good grounding in the basic knowledges.
- ••• Learned: You have read the great works and can debate the comparative merits of Aristotle and al-Farabi.
- •••• Scholar: You could easily teach in one of the great schools should you so decide.
- ••••• Savant: People come from far and wide to consult with you.
- •••••• Visionary: Aristotle was a child compared to you.

Possessed by: Imams, *'ulama*, nobles, courtiers, scribes

Specialties: Mathematics, calligraphy, metaphysics, grammar

Geography

You maintain extensive knowledge of lands and their peoples gained through travels or study. You know the lay of the land, the habits of the people and their political organization. You do not, however, understand their language unless you have the Linguistics knowledge.

- • Dabbler: You know where Baghdad is.
- •• Student: You know the principal trade routes and can lead a caravan along them.
- ••• Learned: You know the difference between a Frank and a Norman.
- •••• Scholar: You have traveled far and wide, to the lands of the *Franj* and the Rus and to the borders of India.
- ••••• Savant: You know the habits of the people of the Sudan as if they were your own.
- •••••• Visionary: You have been to the edge of the world and conversed with the Giants of the East.

Possessed by: Academics, merchants, nobles

Specialties: Navigation, cartography, customs, legends

Law (Shari'a)

In the Islamic world, law is inextricably tied to religion, the Qur'an and *sunna*. Islamic law is steadily evolving, with *'ulama* and imams interpreting the Book and rendering judgments. Characters with this knowledge know what is and isn't allowed under the law and what the punishments are for infractions.

The link between theology and law is so great that understanding of one confers some knowledge of the other. Any character with the Law (*Shari'a*) knowledge is assumed to have the Theology (Islam) knowledge at two levels lower and vice versa.

- • Dabbler: You understand the major issues of the law.
- •• Student: People respect your opinions.
- ••• Learned: Neighbors come to you for advice.
- •••• Scholar: You are a leading figure in the village or town, called upon to render judgments.
- ••••• Savant: People come from all over the region to seek your opinions on the Shari'a.
- •••••• Visionary: Advisor to the Caliph.

Possessed by: Militiamen, *'ulama*, nobles, imams, *qadi*

Specialties: Inheritance, marriage, *dhimmi*, judgments, punishments

Linguistics

A Muslim character is assumed to speak his native language as well as the common Islamic tongue, Arabic. For each level of linguistics, you can speak another language, and your fluency in each improves. You understand the structure of each language, can identify accents and have a chance of understanding phrases in languages related to those you know. For example, a character who knows Hebrew can possibly understand some Aramaic, another Semitic language.

Linguistics does not automatically confer the ability to read or write in that language. You must have at least one dot in Academics before you can do so.

- • Dabbler: One additional language.
- •• Student: Two additional languages.
- ••• Learned: Three additional languages.
- •••• Scholar: Four additional languages.
- ••••• Savant: Five additional languages.
- •••••• Visionary: Eight additional languages.

Possessed by: Travelers, scholars, diplomats, interpreters

Specialties: Technical, diplomatic, grammar, political

Theology

Theology plays a central role in Islamic life, governing the daily routine and the law. Most characters have a basic understanding of theological matters but few have a deep understanding of the Qur'an and *sunna*.

The link between theology and law is so great that understanding of one confers some knowledge of the other. Any character with the Theology (Islam) knowledge is assumed to have the Law (*Shari'a*) knowledge at two levels lower and vice versa.

- • Dabbler: You know key passages of the Qur'an.
- •• Student: You lead prayer sessions among the faithful.
- ••• Learned: You understand the intricacies of the Prophet's teachings.
- •••• Scholar: Imams seek your council.
- ••••• Savant: You have been invited to preach in Mecca.
- •••••• Visionary: Many see you as the leading light of the faith.

Possessed by: *'ulama*, imams, Sufis

Specialties: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, heresy

New Discipline Power

Tainted Oasis (Animalism Level Six)

Elders of Bay't Mutasharid, the highly predatory Nosferatu of the Islamic world, use a variety of animals to aid them in their hunting and in relaying messages. The most loyal of these are oathbound ghouls, but these monsters have also learned of ways to taint natural oases to evoke strength and loyalty in the animals who feed there. By mixing their vitae with the precious desert waters, these vampires breed servants from among all the creatures who drink there. Although the blood creates some loyalty, it is not enough to create a true blood oath or turn a mortal into a ghoul.

System: The vampire taints the drinking water with the equivalent of six points of blood. The player rolls Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 5). Each success taints the spring for one lunar month. Failures have no special effect, but a botch indicates that something in the oasis is especially resistant to the vampire's blood. Assuming success, animals who feed there regularly during the affected time grow unnaturally strong and more loyal to the vampire whose blood they are imbibing. The Storyteller can represent this in a variety of ways, but increasing the animal's Strength and Stamina Attributes by one dot each and lowering all the player's Animalism and Animal Ken difficulties (when dealing with affected beasts) by two is a good start. Prolonged feeding at a tainted pool also passes on some of the Cainite's predatory nature, though. The Storyteller

can portray predators thinning the local herd needlessly and herbivores in constant challenges for herd dominance. The Storyteller can also judge that the effect fades more quickly or that more blood is needed in the case of especially large oases.

New Merits and Flaws

As always, Merits and Flaws are optional. The Storyteller must decide whether these are appropriate in her chronicle.

Eunuch (1-pt. Flaw)

Though Islam frowns on castrating human beings, gelded men play an important role in Muslim society, particularly as *harim* guards or court functionaries. Most are also slaves, though a number gain their freedom and rise to positions of high authority. Their condition is, however, associated with slavery and even free eunuchs suffer the +1 difficulty modifier on Social rolls with nonslaves. Unlike most males, Eunuchs have access to the *harim*, the women's section of wealthy Muslim homes.

Slave (1-pt. Flaw)

Slavery is an accepted part of Islamic culture, though the Qur'an prohibits the enslavement of Muslims (slaves who convert are not, however, freed). Slaves are usually well treated and may have considerable power (while remainingslaves). Freeing slaves is considered a virtue under Islam, allowing many to regain their liberty. There is no stigma attached to being a freed slave, though those still bound to a master suffer a +1 difficulty modifier on Social rolls with nonslaves.

Apostate (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

While welcoming new converts with open arms, Islam condemns those who turn from the faith to join Christianity, Judaism or other religions. As an apostate, you have at some point in your life strayed from the path, either forcibly in lands occupied by the *Franj* or for your own reasons. Even if you subsequently see the wisdom of His teachings and return to the fold, you will find yourself discriminated against.

The two-point version of the flaw applies to characters who have at some point left the faith but have repented and returned to the fold. You suffer a +1 difficulty penalty in any Social tests with Islamic characters who know of your apostasy (+2 if the other character is especially devout). The four-point version of the flaw indicates you remain outside the Muslim faith, most likely worshiping as a Christian or Jew. You suffer a +2 difficulty penalty in any Social tests with Islamic characters who know of your apostasy (+3 if the other character is devout).

Blood Madness (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

The curse that the Baali laid upon the warrior caste of the Banu Haqim has fallen on your head, and you are plagued with an unending hunger for the blood of other Cainites. Whenever you taste Cainite blood, you must make a Self-Control roll (difficulty 8) or you fall into a hunger frenzy in which you will do *anything* to gorge upon as much blood as physically possible. If you follow a *tariq* that teaches Instinct, you are instantly lost to this frenzy; no roll is possible and the Flaw is worth four points. You often find yourself thinking of other Cainites — even Banu Haqim — as potential vessels rather than equals.

This Flaw is mainly found among the Banu Haqim warrior caste. It is much rarer among sorcerers and viziers, only affecting those who have partaken of warrior vitae or who spend the majority of their time associating with warriors. It is virtually unknown among the other *bay't*.

Religious Prohibition (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

You have retained your faith through the Embrace. As Islam prohibits tasting, let alone drinking, blood, this creates a moral dilemma for you. Even animal blood is a forbidden substance, and your conscience pricks whenever you feed.

At two points, you voluntarily restrict your feeding to animals or blood that has been drained by a ritual butcher. At four points, you refuse to feed unless it is an immediate necessity (blood pool is three or less), and even then you may fall victim to depression and self-loathing for several nights after the forbidden act.

Outspoken Dhimmi (4-pt. Flaw)

You are not a member of the Islamic faith and remain a staunch advocate of your own religion (Judaism or Christianity) in contravention of the *shari'a*. This places you in a dangerous position with the authorities who would seek to punish you should you fall into their hands. You may be a crusader now living in Islamic lands or you may be a native of the Middle East, like an Anatolian Christian.

Sihr (Islamic Blood Magic)

Islam openly recognizes the existence of magic but warns its adherents against seeking the aid of sorcerers. To do so is to demonstrate a lack of faith in Allah, who is the only absolute power in the universe. Similarly, those who practice magic, particularly in divining the future, are seeking to usurp some of His power and thus commit blasphemy, barring them from entry to Heaven. This isn't to say that Islam regards magic as inherently evil. Enchantments, charms and illusions of a benign nature are called *sihr* and are seen as harmless (though still indicating *kufr* or unbelief). Magic used to exploit people or to cause harm is referred to as sorcery and shunned by the faithful.

There are some Ashirra, however, who practice a form of magic they believe to be in line with Allah's will. They argue that unlike mortal sorcerers, what they practice is an innate ability linked to their bodies rather than a learned ability in contravention of Allah's will. To the faithful, Islamic blood magic thus avoids the proscriptions on magic use (unlike Tremere Thaumaturgy, which is a fusion of the hermetic arts and blood magic and thus *kufr*). Many nonbelievers argue that this is semantics and that there is little to distinguish between the various practices of blood magic. Nonetheless, it is a vital distinction to Muslim practitioners.

Origins and Practices

The form of blood magic practiced by the few Ashirra sorcerers originates with the Mutasharid Tarique al-Hajji in the ninth Century. Rumor has it that he studied with the mysterious Ahl-i-Batin wizards to develop wards against the Keening, but that has never been confirmed. What is more widely known is that Tarique built contacts with the Banu Haqim, including Khalid al-Munir, a prominent member of that clan's sorcerer caste. Together, Khalid and Tarique developed the paths of *sihr*, its strength originating as much with the caster's faith as with power of his blood. Tarique remains the greatest practitioner of *sihr*, followed by other Hajj such as his own childe Mazen ibn Tarique. A handful of non-Hajj Ashirra and some Banu Haqim sorcerers also practice this form of magic.

The Destiny of Sihr

Over the centuries to come, the distinction between Thaumaturgy and other traditions of blood magic fade as the Tremere come to dominate the Cainite magical arts. The practices of *sihr* is ultimately grouped with Thaumaturgy or Assamite Sorcery and simply considered variant paths. Indeed, several *sihr* paths and rituals are lost over the next 900 years, with only the *Hedeyat Iman* of the Hajj surviving (more or less) intact to the 21st century. The other paths and rituals simply fade from use or are subsumed into Assamite Sorcery, though one never knows when an ancient will wake from torpor and restore the lost knowledge to the world.

In game terms, all *sihr* paths and rituals work in much the same way as the Thaumaturgy Discipline. For path powers, the caster spends a blood point to activate the power and makes the indicated activation roll (if no activation roll is specified, make a Willpower roll against the power's level +3 to determine a successful casting, a botch indicating loss of a permanent Willpower point). Rituals work as indicated below. In addition, the faith requirements of *sihr* oblige all practitioners to have a score of at least five on the Tariq al-Sama' (Road of Heaven) or six on the Tariq al-Umma (Road of Community) and to have a Theology rating equal or greater than that of the power or ritual they seek to use.

Gifts of Faith (*Hedayat Iman*) and Gifts of the Heart (*Hedayat el-Qalb*) are the principal *sihr* paths, but the Ashirra also practice versions of the Creo Ignem (Gifts of Flame or *Hedayat el-Nar*) and Rego Tempestas (Gifts of the Wind or *Hedayat el-Hawa*). Though superficially similar, *sihr* and Thaumaturgy are not compatible; the rituals and powers of one are incomprehensible to practitioners of the other. Indeed, hermetic thinking runs contrary to the thought processes required to use *sihr*. Any characters with the Thaumaturgy Discipline, no matter how devout, may not learn Ashirra blood magic. Thanks to their common origins, however, practitioners of Assamite Sorcery may learn *sihr* powers and rituals if they meet the Road and Theology requirements. However, the Mesopotamian and Mithraic origins of Assamite Sorcery do not sit comfortably with the modern Islamic tradition of the Ashirra. An Assamite Sorcerer suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to all rolls when using *sihr* powers.



Before learning or improving their ability in *sihr*, an Ashirra must study alongside an existing practitioner who knows the power or ritual to be learned. Much of this study consists of prayer, building a center and focusing the caster's attentions inward. Only when this is done (taking anywhere from a few days for a level one power to years for a level five ritual) can the Ashirra actually learn the power or ritual from the teacher. A character cannot learn powers or rituals with a higher rating than his Theology.

Hedayat Iman (Gifts of Faith)

The *Hedayat Iman* play a vital role in the lives on the Ashirra, complementing the faith of those seeking to make the pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam. Prayer plays a central role in all the manifestations of this path, serving as a focus for the caster and a means of conveying his intent to the subject. Used principally by the Hajj (and exclusively by them after the Mongol invasion), this aspect of *sihr* is tightly controlled and thus survives much of the corruption of the coming centuries.

•Saut Allah (Voice of God)

Intended to motivate and inspire, the *Saut Allah* power fortifies the Ashirra's followers and prepares them for the rigors ahead. The caster leads the target(s) of the invocation in prayer toward Mecca, chanting the *shahada* for at least an hour, focusing their thoughts and directing them inwards to identify strengths and weaknesses. The caster may only use *Saut Allah* to guide others to understanding. He may not use the power on himself.

System: After the allotted time for prayer, the player using *Saut Allah* spends a blood point and rolls Charisma + Leadership against a difficulty of 7 (minus 1 per hour of prayer). Each success allows the caster to grant one member of the target group an extra point of temporary Willpower that remains until dawn. Each character may only gain one point of Willpower in this manner. A botch indicates that rather than focusing the target's will, the prayer session has undermined the subjects' confidence, reducing the temporary Willpower of each listener by one.

•• Nuzra Allah (Prescience of God)

A defensive power intended to protect practitioners of the *Hedayat Iman* from subjects who loose control, the Nuzra Allah plays a major role in main-

taining order among Cainites who visit the holy sites of Madina and Mecca. The caster can attempt to exert his will over the subject (usually a frenzied vampire), hopefully forestalling aggression long enough for the subject to regain control. The caster must first make eye contact with the target while praying. In most cases, the caster recites the *shahada* though any prayer that reaffirms the Ashirra's faith in God may be used.

System: Once the character has established eye contact while issuing the short *shahada* prayer, the player spends a blood point and makes a Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to the subject's Willpower. If successful, the subject is unable to attack the caster so long as eye contact is maintained, nor may she take any other action without her player first expending a Willpower point. The player can spend a point to have her character break eye contact, but the caster's player gets to make an immediate Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty 6) to reestablish eye contact. If the result of the original casting roll is a botch, the target's player makes a Self-Control/Instinct roll (difficulty 4) to avoid frenzy. If the caster is interrupted after seizing their opponent, he must make another Willpower roll or else lose control of the subject. Only one person can be targeted by this power at one time.

••• Ruh Allah (Spirit of God)

The *Ruh Allah* aids a Cainite to regain control and bring them out of frenzy by means of their faith. While using this power, the caster chants the *shahada*, which the frenzied Cainite uses as a focus for her efforts to regain control, reaffirming her belief in God's wisdom. The *Ruh Allah* does not, however, provide any means of controlling the target and is thus often used in conjunction with the *Nuzra Allah* to maintain order among Cainites at the holy sites of Islam.

System: The character begins to pray aloud, the player spends a blood point and makes a Charisma + Leadership roll against the Willpower of a single frenzied target. Subtract each success from 10. When the target's Road rating is reached, the frenzy ends. This process may take place over multiple turns, but if the caster is interrupted (he stops praying), all the successes accrued to that point are lost. Any botch result likewise negates all the successes and requires the player to make a Self-Control roll (against a difficulty of 10 - Willpower) or have his own character enter frenzy as a result of the emotional backlash.

•••• Ghadub Allah (Wrath of God)

Mostly a more sophisticated version of the *Nuzra Allah*, the *Ghadub Allah* allows the halting of an attack without the need for eye contact. It relies solely on the will and devotion of the caster and can be used against any character capable of hearing his prayer. The same call can also be used to help stave off frenzy among the faithful. Hajj muezzins use this power to summon Ashirra to prayer at the holiest sites of Islam and extend the calm of their faith upon them.

System: The *Ghadub Allah* functions in two distinct ways. The first works in the same manner as the *Nuzra Allah* save that the caster need only be aware of the attack, not in eye contact with the target. Even characters incapable of hearing the caster's prayer are still affected by the *Ghadub Allah*; the sound of the caster's prayer serves as a conduit for the power's effect, but hearing (or even comprehension) are not required for it to work. Only one person can be targeted by this power.

The second use is as a supernatural muezzin's call. The character makes the traditional call to prayer, and the player spends a blood point and rolls Charisma + Expression (difficulty 6). Even a single success reduces the difficulty of resisting frenzy by one among all Muslim vampires who can hear the call. Additional successes do not further reduce the difficulty but do extend the effect, which lasts for one hour per success.

••••• Kubda Allah (Fist of God)

Also called the Rite of Submission, the *Kubda Allah* allows a practitioner of the *Hedayat Iman* to demand the submission of an opponent. By means of prayer and willpower, the caster seems to crush the unlife out of his opponent, using the force of Allah's will to destroy the enemy's resolve. Use of the *Kubda Allah* is, however, regarded by some Ashirra as evil, involving as it does the domination of another mind. As such, the power is only known to a handful of Ashirra whom Tarique al-Hajji regards as trustworthy and sufficiently restrained to use the power for good.

System: After the character makes eye contact and starts praying aloud, the player spends a blood point and makes a Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. If the target does not immediately submit to the caster's will, each success causes two levels of bashing damage. If the target submits, he may not attack the caster until dusk the

next day. A botched roll indicates that the caster suffers two levels of bashing damage.

Hedayat el-Qalb (Gifts of the Heart)

This *sihr* path focuses on enhancing the abilities of the caster and on examining or manipulating the abilities of others. As with the *Hedayat Iman*, prayer plays an important role in this path, serving as a focus for the caster and subjects though in many cases devotion is less important than will and determination. As such the path is more widespread than the *Hedayat Iman* though this renders it more open to abuse and corruption. Ultimately, the Ashirra abandon the path as irredeemably tainted by forbidden sorcery, many of its powers subsumed by Tremere Thaumaturgy and Assamite Sorcery.

• Hikma min Allah (Wisdom from God)

By means of a prolonged period of introspection lasting at least two hours and accompanied by meditation or prayer, an Ashirra with this power can focus his mind to aid problem solving. By this means, he identifies strengths and weaknesses in his own soul that he can reinforce with the supernatural power of vitae.

System: After the vampire meditates or prays for two or more hours, the player makes a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 6. Assuming a success, the Cainite may spend a single blood point to boost a single Mental Attribute by one point (and one point only). The effect lasts for a single scene and only one Attribute can be augmented at any one time. A failure on the Willpower roll means the vampire fails to obtain the proper calm to focus wisdom from above. A botch means he uncovers some inherent flaw in his own character; the precise effects are up to the Storyteller but can include the loss of one temporary Willpower point, a check for Rötschreck or frenzy, or even a check for Road loss.

•• Idrak' min Allah (Insight from God)

Gaining an insight into the relative strength of an opponent can often make the difference between unlife and Final Death. By means of *Idrak' min Allah*, activated by a short prayer to Allah, the caster gains a glimpse of the target's background and strength. The results are imprecise, often little more than a momentary flash of the truth, but even that can be vitally important.

System: The vampire utters a short prayer aloud. The player spends a blood point and rolls Perception + Alertness against a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. For every two successes, he may ask for details on one of the following regarding the target of the power: clan, generation, current blood pool, highest Attribute or highest Ability. The Storyteller need not give precise answers; she should rather frame the results relative to the caster's knowledge. For example, if a 12th-generation Hajj uses the ability on a 6th- generation Wah'Sheen, the Storyteller's response about generation would likely be that the Wah'Sheen is "substantially closer to Caine than you."

••• Sultat el-Nabi (Authority of the Prophet)

Use of the *Sultat el-Nabi* compels the subject to obey a short phrase comprising no more than ten words. The target must hear and understand the command, which is embedded in a short prayer that requires a turn to recite and ends with the phrase "as Allah commands." If successfully implanted, the command will be acted on immediately and literally. The target cannot be forced to harm themselves or made to go against deep-seated instincts. Eye contact is required when the command is issued but need not be maintained while the victim acts out the compulsion.

Many Ashirra regard use of the Authority of the Prophet as sorcerous enslavement and thus an attempt to usurp God's powers. As such many of the faithful shun this power and those who do use it often have to spend many nights wrestling with their conscience.

System: The character utters the required prayer and order. The player then spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Intimidation against a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. The number of successes indicates the speed and efficiency with which the task is carried out. A botch indicates that not only has the command failed, but the target is aware of the attempt. Storytellers may, at their discretion, judge use of this power as grounds for a Conscience roll to see if degeneration occurs.

•••• Sawt el-Nabi (Voice of the Prophet)

By use of the *Sawt el-Nabi*, the caster may communicate with any Cainite known to him irrespective

of the distance. The caster spends at least ten minutes reciting a prayer containing the target's name, intended to attract his attention. The prayer takes the form "By the grace of merciful Allah and his Prophet Muhammad may the winds carry these humble words to..." If successful, only the intended target hears the message (as a disembodied voice in her head) and may reply to the caster. The communication is not entirely secure — both parties need to speak aloud, though this need only be a whisper — and can usually only be maintained for a short period. Nonetheless, it allows those skilled in its use to maintain contacts across vast distances.

System: Once the vampire has invoked the prayer, the player spends a blood point and rolls Perception + Empathy against a difficulty of 5 + 1 per 100 miles (round up) separating caster and target. The number of successes determines the length of the conversation. A single success allows only a few words before the link is lost while five or more success allows the link to remain open as long as the player concentrates on it. At the Storyteller's discretion, a botch indicates the caster's prayer attracts the attention of the wrong person.

••••• Nar el-Iman (Fire of Faith)

Nar el-Iman is one of the most formidable powers of Ashirra blood magic, using the target's own blood curse against him, but is also one the hardest to use effectively. It exploits the inherent weakness of vampires in matters of faith, undermining the target's resolve and inflicting both mental and physical injury. The power requires intense concentration and vocal prayer by the caster. At first, this may appear as intense concentration, but as the invocation progresses the caster becomes increasingly zealous. The power works best against a target of the same faith but functions against any Cainite.

As with the *Sultat el-Nabi*, many Ashirra regard use of this power as an evil act and thus refuse to use or even learn it. Those who do so are the strongest of the Islamic Cainites but even they find the knowledge a great burden.

System: The character prays aloud for at least three turns, the zeal of his diatribe rising with each moment. The player then spends a blood point and rolls Charisma + Theology against a difficulty equal to the target's Road score (+1 if the target is of a different faith than the caster; -1 if the vampire prays for more than three turns). Each success reduces the target's Willpower by one and inflicts a point of aggravated damage. A botch requires the caster to make a Self-Control/Instinct roll (difficulty 6) or enter frenzy. Use of this power is, at the Storyteller's discretion, grounds for a Conscience roll to see if degeneration occurs.

Sihr Rituals

Sihr rituals take the form of elaborate and precise prayers, based on the theory that specific results require specific supplications to Allah. In game terms, they all require the player to make an Intelligence + Theology roll against a difficulty of 4 + the ritual level. Some rituals have special systems, explained below.

Touch of Allah (Level One Ritual)

This ritual allows an Ashirra to place an invisible mark on an object, place or being that denotes it as blessed to Allah. Any devout mortals or Cainites (like those with True Faith or a Road of Heaven rating of 6 or more) know that there is something special about the touched item and treat it with respect. They do not know why it is special, however, only that it is.

System: To place the mark, the caster purifies the item by sprinkling it with rosewater and praying over it for two hours. If caster is interrupted during this period, the ritual fails. The effect of this ritual lasts one day per success.

Mask of Allah (Level Two Ritual)

By means of this ritual, an Ashirra can disguise himself, appearing as another person, race or even gender. If sufficiently well enacted, the Mask of Allah allows even a hideous Hajj to pass as a mortal. The ritual requires at least 30 minutes of prayer during which the caster concentrates on the appearance he seeks to attain. Any distraction during this period does not halt the ritual, but may, at the Storyteller's discretion, have unforeseen results (such as a distorted visage).

System: The player makes the standard Intelligence + Theology roll, but the difficulty depends on the disguise. It is 5 if the character is tweaking their appearance, 6 if they seek to make radical changes and 7 if they are attempring to masquerade as a member of the opposite sex. The effects of the ritual last a number of hours equal to the successes when casting. During this period only characters with Auspex may perceive the caster's true form, and then only by making a Perception + Alertness roll against a difficulty equal to the caster's Wits + Subterfuge.

Ward Against Djinn (Level Four Ritual)

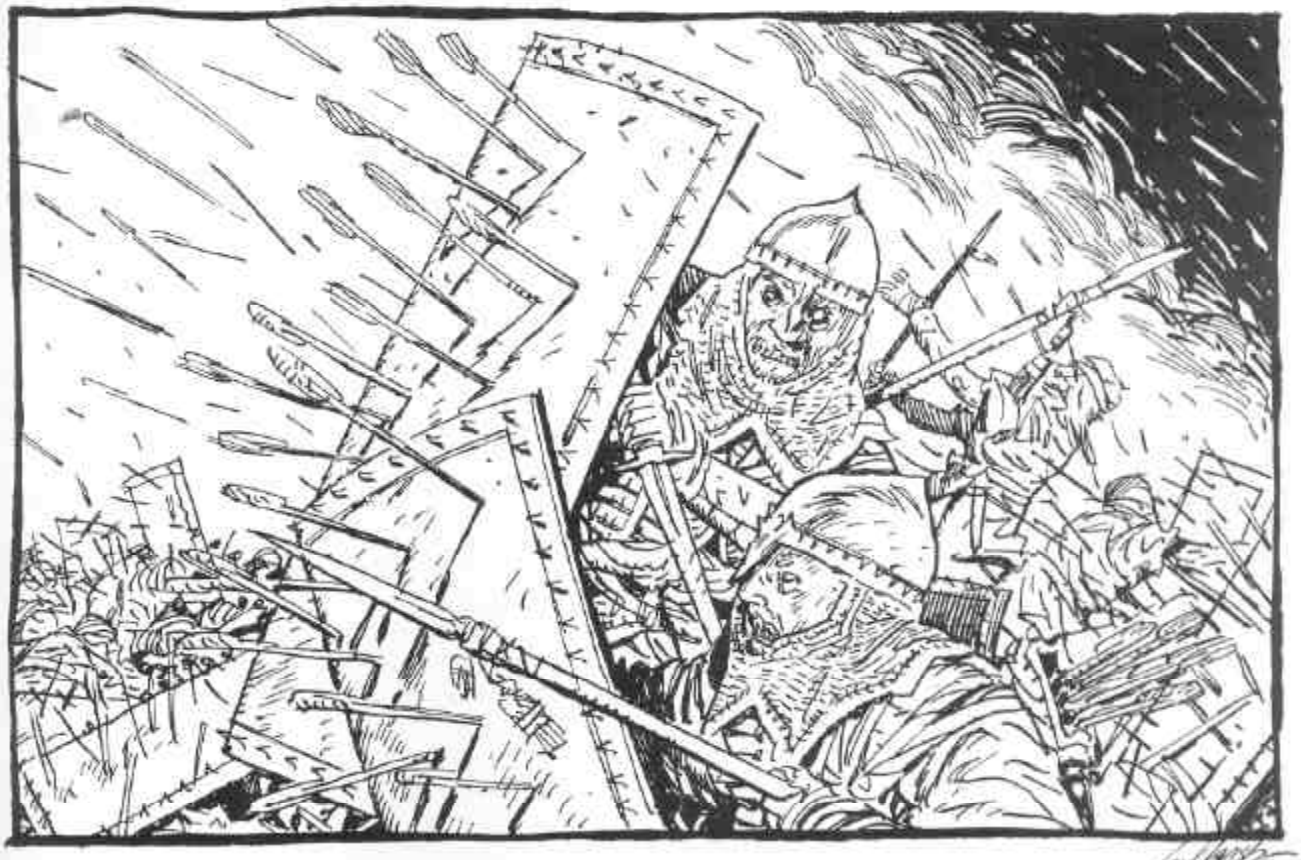
This ritual allows the Ashirra to place a ward against *djinn* on any object. Any *djinn* that encounters the ward suffers intense pain for as long as they are in contact with the item. To place the ward, the caster first purifies the item with rosewater and then sprinkles it with lamp oil, all the while reciting the *shahada*.

System: The purification and warding of the items takes ten hours and requires a small quantity each of rosewater and lamp oil. If successfully cast (requiring an Intelligence + Theology roll against a difficulty of 8) the ritual envelopes the warded item in a bright glow, perceptible to any character with Auspex. Any *djinn* that comes into contact with the item immediately sustains three dice of aggravated damage. Furthermore, once shocked by the item a *djinn* cannot willingly touch the item again without first spending a Willpower point.

Allah's Blessing (Level Six Ritual)

This ritual allows the caster to reinforce a subject's faith, allowing them to enter the holy places of Islam. The ritual involves vocal prayer by both caster and subject, confirming their faith and devotion to Allah. Any lapse of concentration by either participant during this period causes the ritual to fail. If successful, the ritual remains in effect until the next dawn, allowing the subject to freely enter buildings with high True Faith ratings (see page 183). Only a few Hajj — most notably Tarique al-Hajji and Mazen ibn Tarique — know this ritual, and they guard its use jealously. They use it to grant access to the holiest sights to those who have proven their faith.

System: The ritual takes four hours to enact, during each of which both players must make a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 6. If any one of these rolls fails, the ritual is not completed and cannot be attempted again until the next night. If all eight Willpower rolls succeed, the caster's player rolls Intelligence + Theology against a difficulty equal to 10 - the target's Willpower. Success indicates Allah grants the blessing and the Ashirra may enter the holy place unhindered. Failure indicates the normal True Faith and Keening rules apply. Of course, Storytellers may wish to keep the exact result of this last roll hidden from the players.



Melee Weapons

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Conceal	Strength Required
'amud+	6	Strength +2	C	1
cudgel+	6	Strength +1	C	1
dabbu+	6	Strength +2	L	3
khanjar	4	Strength +1	C	1
lance	8	8/Strength*	N	3
lance, compound	9	9/Strength*	N	4
lance, light	7	6/Strength*	N	2
lat+	5	Strength +1	C	2
najikh	7	Strength +2	N	3
saber	7	Strength +2	L	3
sayf	6	Strength +2	L	3
spear (one-handed)	7	Strength +1	N	2
spear (two-handed)	6	Strength +3	N	1
staff+	4	Strength +2	N	1
tabar+	7	Strength +3	N	3
war-hammer+ (two-handed)	7	Strength +3	N	3
yafrut	5	Strength +1	C	1

+Denotes a blunt weapon
** See Special rules below*

Dampen the Keening (Level Seven Ritual)

Before Tarique al-Hajji created this ritual, the Keening that reaches out across Arabia was far more powerful (see page 186). During this period, the Black Stone was stolen and the Keening silenced. Tarique and his allies created a dampening ritual that has reduced the Keening to tolerable levels. Unfortunately, the ritual must be renewed regularly, requiring the combined prayer of several Ashirra. Only the most trusted and devout of the Ashirra know the ritual, and only Tarique can teach it to others.

System: The dampening ritual takes six hours to enact and requires the combined prayer of a number of ritualists. Each player must roll Intelligence + Theology against a difficulty of 9, with a botch result indicating the participant loses a dot of permanent Willpower. As such, only the most devout are chosen to take part. At least 10 successes are needed for the ritual to succeed with each additional success prolonging the warding for a month (10 successes dampen the Keening for a single month). Consequently, the exact period between renewals varies depending on the success of the previous attempt.

Weapons, Armor and Combat

Combat and warfare are likely to be central to many **Veil of Night** chronicles, associated with the incursions of the *Franj* (the Crusades, to the Europeans) or disputes between various local lords. While the Islamic world has much in common with Europe, there are many subtle differences. This section is intended as a guide to martial matters in **Veil of Night** games, with emphasis on rules rather than mood. Players and Storytellers wishing to get a greater understanding of Islamic combat should consult the books and resources presented in the bibliography on page 21.

Weapons

Many of the weapons used in the Islamic world have close analogues in the European traditions — swords, axes, spears and maces — but many also have unique characteristics. The following charts provide game information for these weapons, with additional rules for weapons like the *naft* and the *qaus al-ziyar* in

Missile Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Rate	Range	Conceal
'aqqar	6*	1/2	300 yards	L
crossbow	4	1/4	200 yards	N
husban	4*	1/2	300 yards	N
javelin†	Strength+2	N/A	50 yards	N
qaws al-rijl	5*	1/2	250 yards	L
qaws al-ziyar	12*	1/5	400 yards	N
sling	5	1/2	50 yards	C

**Assuming regular projectiles. See below for alternative ammunition types.*
† May be used only once.

their own section later. Some of the less familiar weapons in **Veil of Night** are:

***'amud*:** light mace with an iron head and a wooden haft

***'aqqar*:** mid-sized composite bow (minimum Strength or Archery of 3 to string)

compound lance: long lance formed by joining two lances together (minimum Strength of 4 to use)

***dabbu*:** heavy all-iron mace

***husban*:** The "grasshopper," a bow equipped with a *majra* arrow guide (also called a *nawak*) designed for firing short arrows, stones and *nafi* capsules

***khanjar*:** broad-bladed dagger commonly used in the Islamic world

***latt*:** light, bronze-headed mace

***najikh*:** cavalry axe

***qaws al-rijl*:** small composite bow also known as a leg bow (minimum Strength or Archery of 3 to string)

***qaws al-ziya*:** heavy mechanical crossbow

saber: curved cavalry sword

***sayf*:** straight sword

***tabar*:** large ax with a large crescent blade

***yafrut*:** thin dagger used principally by the Berbers

Armor

Though never using the same heavy armor as the Europeans, the elite of the Islamic world make extensive use of garb designed to protect them from harm (common foot soldiers often go unarmored). It should be noted that armor is very effective at concealing a person's identity, prompting numerous occasions where women fight alongside men with their gender concealed until the battle's end. The following represent the armor types most commonly found in the period, though there are many variations, prompting a degree of abstraction. Players and Storytellers who desire more precise details of these armor types should feel free to modify these statistics.

Muslim armor types include the following:

***dir*:** The *dir*, or chain hauberk, is the most common protection for Islamic soldiery. Worn over a cotton tunic and sometimes beneath a second, the *dir* features a raised collar and a laced neck opening that both increase comfort and provide greater protection than the European equivalents. Usually complemented by a helmet, and sometimes a mail coif or aventail, the chain hauberk offers substantial protection.

Armor Chart

Armor Type	Armor Rating	Dex Penalty	Perception	Min Strength
dir	2	0	0	1
jubbah	3	0	0	1
kazaghand	3/4*	-1	0	1
jawshan	3/1**	-1	0	2

**A kazaghand provides three dice of soak against slashing attacks, and four dice against all other attacks.*
*** Jawshan may be worn over a cotton tunic, in which case they provide three dice of soak, or over other armor types in which case they add 1 die to the soak value of the underlying armor.*

Shield Table

Item	Difficulty	vs. Melee	vs. Missile
daraqah	4	+1	+1
jamuuyah	5	+2	+2
kalkan	5	+2	+1
lamt	6	+2	+2
tariqah	5	+2	+2
tur	4	+1	+2

Difficulty: The difficulty of Dexterity + Melee rolls to attempt to parry incoming attacks.

vs. Melee: The value is added the difficulty of Melee or Brawl attacks against the character when using passive defense.

vs. Missile: The value is added to the difficulty of ranged attacks against the character when using passive defense.

jawshan: This lamellar armor uses iron plates to protect against injury, each plate overlapping horizontally and vertically to provide substantial protection while retaining flexibility. Though principally cuirass-sized pieces, some larger suits come into use later in the period, rivaling the heaviest suits employed by the *Franj*.

jubbah: A quilted armored vest containing chain mail, the *jubbah* offers substantial protection while remaining light and unencumbering. Like the *dir*, the *jubbah* is usually accompanied by a helmet, coif and leather gaiters.

kazaghand: The armored *kazaghand* coat offers considerable protection, enmeshing several layers of mail within cotton padding. Opening fully down the front and usually slit to the waist at the back to allow riders to sit on a horse, the armor superficially resembles an ordinary coat. Unfortunately, such coats can be very uncomfortable in hot weather, and some wearers choose to keep them unlaced until entering battle, favoring comfort over protection from assassination. As with *dir* and *jubbah*, a helmet, coif and gaiters complete the outfit.

Shields

As with weapons and armor, the shields available in Veil of Night chronicles differ subtly from their European counterparts, with more emphasis on mobility and avoiding attacks than on withstanding large amounts of damage. Shields range from small bucklers, *daraqah*, carried by cavalry to the massive *lamt* used by Berber infantry. The most notable shields are the following:

daraqah: small round shield, usually of leather

jamuuyah: tall, flat-based infantry shield

kalkan: cane and cotton shield favored by the Turks

lamt: massive leather shield used by the Berber tribes

tariqah: elongated shield akin to those used by the *Franj*

tur: large round shield, usually of wood and leather

Ammunition Types

When compared to European soldiers, Islamic forces use a wide range of ammunition types for their bows and crossbows. In addition to varying arrow heads, the addition of a *majra* (arrow guide) allows the use of short darts instead of full-length arrows while bows like the *husban* may fire stones and vials of flammable *naft* (Greek fire). As with armor, what follows is a gross simplification of the real situation and players and Storytellers may wish to expand the details.

armor piercing: Piercing arrowheads are designed to penetrate armor though they are also less effective at causing serious injury. To reflect this, reduce the soak value of any armor worn by the target by one and also reduce the damage value of the arrow by one.

cutting: Cutting arrowheads are designed to sever ropes and rend flesh though their armor-penetrating ability is somewhat impaired. To reflect this, increase their damage value by one but double the soak value of any armor worn by the target.

naft: Bows equipped with a *majra* arrow guide may fire *naft* capsules instead of normal bolts and arrows. The range of such projectiles is limited to 50 yards and the difficulties of such attacks are increased by two, but the effectiveness of the weapon more than makes up for such shortcomings. Upon hitting its target, the *naft* capsule fragments and covers the victim with Greek fire. This burns for one to five combat turns, in each of which the victim should roll Stamina + Fortitude as per the standard fire rules. The difficulty of the roll is 5. Failure indicates a point of damage. Cainites targeted by *naft* must check for Rötschreck. Alternatively, Sto-

rytellers may use the rules for Greek fire found on page 41 of the **Dark Ages Companion.**

Qaws al-Ziyar

A massive crossbow, the *qaws al-ziyar* is a lethal weapon that strikes fear into the hearts of Cainites and mortals alike. Usually mounted in a frame, the *ziyar* requires several men to load and maneuver though a Cainite with Potence could, in theory, man it alone. The size and nature of the *ziyar* reduces its accuracy, particularly against moving targets. Increase the difficulty of attacks against stationary targets by one, and against moving targets by two.

In addition to bolts, the *ziyar* can be used to propel fire pots that work much as *naft* ammunition. Unlike the small bow-propelled capsules, the large pots used by the heavy crossbow may be thrown up to 200 yards, but the difficulty of such attacks is increased by three. Any Cainite struck by a *ziyar* fire pot should roll Stamina + Fortitude as per the standard fire rules. The difficulty of the roll is seven and failure indicates two points of damage while success reduces this to one. As with *naft*, Cainites struck by a fire pot face Rötschreck, though Storytellers may opt use the rules for Greek fire found on page 41 of the **Dark Ages Companion.**

Mounted Combat

Cavalry plays an important role in Islamic warfare though its methods differ somewhat from those of European knights, placing emphasis on mobility and endurance rather than brute strength. Professional cavalry forms the core of Muslim armies, forming a group known as *faris* about whom more details are presented below. The basic rules for mounted combat found on pages 38 and 39 of the **Dark Ages Companion** (and summarized in the sidebar on this page) apply here, with some modifications to represent distinctive Arabic and Turkic horsemanship.

Horsemanship

The high saddle used by many Arab horsemen is more comfortable than the style favored in Europe, both for the rider and the horse. It also offers a degree of support in combat, allowing appropriately equipped riders to have a dice pool up to a point higher than their Ride ability (for example, a character with Ride 2 and Melee 3 can use their Melee ability at full value). The dice pool may not, however, exceed the basic ability — for example a character with Ride 2 and Melee 2 still rolls only 2. Additionally, when called upon to roll Stamina + Ride to remain in the saddle after being struck, the difficulty level is decreased by one.

While Europeans generally regard the horse as sacrosanct and consider attacks against mounts dishonorable, Muslim warriors have no such scruples. If a warrior is too well armored or skilled to be easily defeated, then why not attack his mount, perhaps unhorsing him and placing him at a severe disadvantage compared to the mounted warrior? The difficulty of such attacks is two less than against the rider. The

Basic Horseplay

Rules for mounted combat appear in several products and are summarized here for your convenience:

- The mounted character's Ride Skill serves as a maximum for any combat Ability used on horseback. If the rider has a higher Melee than Ride, for example, use Ride instead.
- On a real battlefield, rather than a hunt or a one-on-one combat, horses may get out of their rider's control. To avoid this, players should split their characters' dice pools to allow for a Wits + Ride roll to keep in control of the mount.
- Trained horses can trample foes; use the rider's Manipulation + Ride to hit and apply six dice (for a Mongolian war-horse and its ilk) or seven dice (for a knight's destrier and similarly sized beasts) of damage to the target. A failure or botch on this roll to hit leaves the horse wide open to attack from the intended target.
- A lance may be used from horseback; it requires Ride 3 and Melee 3, and does eight dice of damage on a successful hit after a charge, or dice equal to the rider's strength if thrust from a stationary position; those struck in a charge must roll Strength + Athletics with a difficulty of (4 + attacker's successes) to avoid being knocked down. Small or weak characters (those with the Short or Child Flaws, or a Stamina of 1) cannot use a regular or compound lance, though they may use a light lance; very large characters (with the Huge Size Merit) do two extra dice of damage; a light lance inflicts two less dice of damage than a normal lance; a compound lance inflicts an additional die of damage.
- Bows fired from horseback suffer a +2 difficulty penalty at a walk or canter and a +4 difficulty penalty at a trot or faster, unless the rider has the "Mounted" specialization to his Archery skill.

player of a rider whose mount is injured must make a Dexterity + Ride against a difficulty equal to (4 + the number of wounds inflicted upon the horse) or see his character unhorsed. A character so unhorsed may suffer three to six dice of damage, depending on whether he is thrown clear or crushed by the falling mount.

To counter such attacks, some warriors equip their horses with leather or mail chamfron and barding. However, each point of armor protection given to the mount (to a maximum of three) subtracts one from the horseman's effective Ride skill.

Horse Archery

Horse archery, the use of a bow from a stationary or mobile mount, is a common practice in Islamic lands, particularly among the Turks. It plays a vital role in Muslim warfare, second only in the rider's arsenal to the lance (see below). Accuracy while moving is very difficult, with even the slightest error in timing resulting in arrows missing the target by yards. Unless the character has the Archery specialty "Mounted," his shots are at +2 difficulty from a moving horse and at +4 difficulty from a horse moving at a trot or faster.

Muslim warriors also practice what is known as "shower shooting," aiming at an area rather than an individual enemy. This tactic relies on the volume of fire provided by a unit of horse-archers, saturating an area with arrows and bolts to negate enemy mobility. This tactic is effective at both long and short range, for harassment at the former and lethality at the latter. Cainites in units targeted by such attacks are in grave danger of being impaled and driven into torpor. When using the open warfare rules from the **Dark Ages Companion** (page 41-49) any missile attack roll that achieves in four or more successes results in the targeted vampire being staked through the heart and driven into torpor.

Lances

The lance is the principal cavalry weapon of the Islamic world, rivaled only by the bow, useful for attacking enemies while keeping them at a distance. Unlike in the West, where a single type of lance predominates and where the main method of use is to charge down opponents, the Muslim armies use several different types of lance in a variety of ways.

The **light lance** is often hollow and can be used by almost all horsemen. Its size makes it more accurate than other types though it inflicts less damage in normal use. Additionally, after each charge attack with a light lance, successful or not, the rider's player should roll a die. On a result of five or higher, the weapon breaks and is useless.

The **compound lance** has a much longer reach than a light or conventional lance, some models reaching 30 feet in length. Requiring formidable strength and being difficult to aim, it is nonetheless a formidable weapon, capable of causing grievous injury.

A character must have a minimum Ride and Melee of 3 each to be able to use a lance effectively from horseback. Otherwise, he is certain to dismount himself on a successful attack — the character takes as many dice of bashing damage as he inflicted dice of lethal damage with his lance. A botch using a lance is generally a terrible thing: The character takes four dice of lethal damage and may fall off his horse (roll Stamina + Ride). Use of a lance is punishing business — characters with the Short or Child Flaws, who have Stamina 1 or who are otherwise below-average size cannot use a regular or compound lance though they may use a light lance.

The lance permits two types of attacks:

Charge: The charge is the most common form of lance attack, used by both the *Franj* and Islamic forces. To make the attack, the player should roll Melee + Dexterity against the difficulty of the weapon as per normal combat. A charge attack inflicts eight dice of damage, increased to nine for a compound lance and reduced to six for a light lance. Those successfully attacked by a lance charge must make a Strength + Athletics roll or be knocked down. Anyone unhorsed by such an attack suffers two to four dice of damage from the fall. Whether knocked down or unhorsed, anyone successfully attacked by a lance must increase the difficulty of all rolls by two in the next turn. In theory, Cainites may be staked by such attacks, though the difficulty of such a maneuver is two higher than a normal attack, requires at least five successes and must cause at least three health levels of damage.

Thrust: Light and regular lances may also be used while the horse is stationary or moving slowly. The difficulty of such attacks is one less than normal lance attacks though any botch result requires the rider's player to make a Dexterity + Ride roll against a difficulty of 6 or else fall from the saddle. Thrusting lance attacks inflict damage dice equal to the rider's Strength.

Siege Warfare

Sieges (*hisar*) play an important role in the Crusades and are thus likely to appear in many **Veil of Night** chronicles. The mechanics of siege warfare are impractical for a roleplaying game, but the following brief introduction should allow Storytellers to incorporate details of such warfare into their chronicles. With



the exception of the use of *naft*, the principals given here apply to both Muslim and *Franj* armies.

Siege Process

The exact process of capturing a fortification varies depending on the terrain, condition of troops and the nature of the commanders. The first stage is to prepare trenches and palisades for the troops, providing defenses against counterattacks and emplacements for siege machines. In many cases, negotiations between the two forces take place during this period and the defenders may choose to surrender, or the attackers to withdraw. In most cases, however, the siege proceeds to the next phase.

The encircling force may choose to play a waiting game, allowing starvation and disease to weaken the defenders and force them to surrender or else weaken them enough to allow an assault. Alternatively, they may choose to batter the fortifications with siege engines in an attempt to gain entry and bring the siege to a swift conclusion. Sapping (undermining the walls) is also commonplace, particularly favored by Muslim forces against strong *Franj* castles. Of course, the defenders use countermeasures — sally attacks, counter-mines and missiles — to drive off the attackers or to slow their progress. Such assault tactics are particularly appropriate where the fortification is weak and can be broken quickly, the defenders have access to considerable supplies and cannot be starved out, or time is limited for whatever reason.

The final phase involves the storming of the fortification, its surrender or the withdrawal of the besiegers. In many cases, treachery plays a role, with numerous citadels having fallen after an agent opens the gate and allows the attackers to gain entry. Bribery is likewise a major factor in resolving many sieges, with attackers paid to withdraw and defender factions paid to open their gates.

Siege Weapons

Much of the equipment used by Islamic siege engineers is identical to that used by the *Franj*. In addition to the *qaws al-ziyar* mentioned above, the following are the principal tools used against fortifications:

***'arrada* (ballista):** Smaller and more mobile than the lever-powered *manjaniq*, the *'arrada* uses a twisted cord to provide momentum and hurl projectiles at the enemy. Though less effective than the *manjaniq*, their portability and ease of manufacture make them common.

***burj* (siege towers):** Though favored by the *Franj*, Islamic forces also use siege towers (*burj*) to attack or scale walls.

***dabbaba*:** *Dabbaba* are wheeled shelters, designed to protect soldiers and engineers from defensive fire.

***kabsh* (battering ram):** Battering rams play a major role in destroying ramparts and gateways, gaining or improving access for the attacking troops. Another type of ram, the *sinnaur*, adds a ploughshare-like head that enhances the abilities of the device.

***manjaniq* (mangonel):** The *manjaniq* is a large machine designed to hurl stones or other projectiles at a target by means of the lever principal. A large counterweighted arm is winched into place, using gravity to propel heavy stones or canisters of Greek Fire over large distances, usually in excess of 150 yards (the exact abilities depend on size and design of the machine). *Manjaniq* are heavy and unwieldy though trained teams can erect them quickly. They are the weapon of choice for destroying walls and towers, especially when used en mass.

***naft* (Greek fire):** In addition to the small capsules used in *husban* bows, Islamic forces use Greek fire against wooden structures, having learned the technology (the hard way) from clashes with Byzantine forces in the seventh century. Despite efforts by Cainites on both sides, the incendiary material remains in common use, particularly against *Franj burj* and *dabbaba*.

Assassination

Unlike in the West, where honor and chivalry leads the *Franj* to regard murder as cowardly, it is an accepted practice in the Islamic world. Success is central to the Islamic concept of honor, so if a dagger in the ribs is more effective than an entire army, it is considered a valid tactic.

The acceptance of such methods colors the perceptions of many high-ranking Muslims. Coats containing a layer of armor such as the *kazaghand* are frequently worn to provide protection against such assaults, even when battle isn't imminent. This is a stark contrast to rank-and-file soldiers who, because of temperature concerns, rarely wear their armor outside of battle. Head-hunting tactics are also an accepted part of Muslim warfare, with archers encouraged to target enemy leaders. The great range of bolts from a *majra*-equipped bow are ideal for such purposes, also exploiting their near-invisibility to strike without warning and cause confusion.

Of course, it is the Ismailis, also known as the Assassins, who have brought the art of the silent kill to the fore in these difficult times. Though perceived as cold-blooded murderers, they were once closely associated with the Fatimid caliphate but went their own way after plans to rejuvenate the nation foundered. Plans to create a new Shiite state were instead transferred to Syria where the Ismailis used murder for their political and religious ends. Indeed, their hatred for the Sunni sect of Islam was so great that the Assassins aided the *Franj* in their early conquests, targeting Muslim leaders and undermining the Islamic defense. Despite attacks directed at him, Salah al-Din chose to leave the heretical sect alone, making several conciliatory gestures aimed at taking their support away from his Muslim and *Franj* enemies.

Ironically, the success of the Ismaili silent-kill tactics has earned admiration among the Banu Haqim upon whom the Assassins are indirectly modeled (a rogue Banu Haqim ghoul has great influence among certain Ismailis). Inspired by their success and effectiveness, some members of the warrior caste have begun to favor assassination over direct confrontation. For further details on the twisted relationship between the Banu Haqim and the Assassins, see **Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door.**

Mamluks, Jund and the Professional Soldiery

Like those of the European nations, Muslim armies encompass a wide range of troops. Unlike the Europeans, the military elite and the social elite are not automatically synonymous in Muslim society. Indeed, many professional soldiers are drawn from the geographical and cultural fringes of society, choosing to make a career in the military rather than it being an extension of their social standing. Also in contrast to the Europeans, Islamic armies are meritocracies, with individual skill and luck (seen as divine favor) earning the warrior fame, power and prestige. Indeed, many famous leaders rose from the ranks, gathering social power as a result of their prowess rather than the other way around.

Perhaps the best examples of this are the *mamluk* soldiers, regarded as the elite of the Muslim armies though they started their careers as slaves. Trained for upwards of eight years and skilled at fighting on horseback and on foot, *mamluk* troops are easily the equal of the Western knights and come to exert considerable influence over Islamic society. Indeed, in 1250, *mamluks* take control of the remnants of the Ayyubid Empire, carving out their own state and laying the groundwork for the Ottoman Empire. *Mamluk* troops form the core of a Middle Eastern army, usually a ruler's personal regiment (*'askar*), supported by regular mercenaries,

other professional soldiers or city militia. By dint of Islamic law (which prohibits the enslaving of Muslims) *mamluks* start out as unbelievers and later convert to Islam and gain their freedom. As such, Turkish and Kurdish rather than Arab groups predominate. No stigma is attached to service as a *mamluk* and many go on to high office after the end of their career.

Nonslave professional forces are known as *jund*, warriors who fight for pay and land. Most are cavalry, known as *faris*, who form the backbone of the Islamic forces. Though not as extensively trained as *mamluks*, *jund* are nonetheless a force to be reckoned with. Unlike European troops who are tied to a specific lord by the feudal system, the *jund* are free to choose their employer. Wealth, religion and ethnicity play a major role in such decisions, as do family ties. Indeed, many defeated *jund* seek employment with the force that defeated them, having walked a fine line between demonstrating their prowess and conserving their strength.

Furusiya

The skills expected of Islamic warriors are codified as *furusiya* and recorded in books. These encompass a wide variety martial skills — riding, archery, courage and obedience being the most common — as well as social and political abilities. In some regards, these correspond to the European ideal of chivalry, governing the warrior's behavior in a wide range of situations and laying down the *siyar* (rules of warfare, see below). Respect for the elderly and women is also considered important, as is knowledge of the correct etiquette for a variety of circumstances.

Unlike the prejudiced ideals of the Europeans, however, Islamic martial leaning encompasses ideas drawn from a wide range of sources. Many are native, but others originate in the classical world, never having been lost from Islamic knowledge. Others originate with the nomadic peoples to the east and north, from Taugast, or, ironically, with the Europeans, the last learned during the Crusades or in al-Andalus.

Siyar, The Rules of Warfare

Established in the eighth century, *siyar* governs the actions of any Islamic soldier, determining the proper cause of action. In many cases, troops' behavior falls short of that outlined in the *siyar*, but the rules of warfare remain as an ideal to which armies aspire. Additionally, *siyar* places considerable emphasis on honor and obedience, including a willingness to keep one's word, even to the enemy. The three principal elements of the *siyar* are jihad, *'aman* and *hudnah*.

Jihad determines who can (and cannot) be fought and under what circumstances. Jihad is not, contrary to Western perception, about forcing conversion but rather about supporting and increasing the power of Islam. Indeed, the Qu'ran states: "Fight against them until idolatry is no more and Allah's religion reigns supreme. But if they desist, fight none except the evil-doers" (Surah 2).

'Aman governs the use and appropriateness of safe conduct for an enemy. For example, women, children and nonmilitary slaves are not to be harmed, nor are religious figures (unless they seek to cause harm). Of course, those who violated the conditions of their parole can expect to be treated harshly, as was the case of Reynald of Chattillon who, after Hattin, drank water in Salah al-Din's presence without his permission — forfeiting his safe conduct as the Ayyubid leader intended.

Hudnah details the rules, regulations and limitations of truces, particularly with regard to trade and pilgrimages. The current "open" status of Jerusalem is the best demonstration of *Hudnah*, with the agreement between Salah al-Din and Richard the Lion-hearted allowing Christian pilgrimages to the holy city (see **Jerusalem by Night**, p. 39).

Systems for Life and Unlife

This section details systems for resolving various situations that may typically arise in a **Veil of Night** game. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive — roleplaying games embody unlimited potential almost by definition. Neither does this list attempt to cover generic situations such as following someone or traditional combat — **Vampire: The Dark Ages** and other core World of Darkness rulebooks cover those systems in ample detail.

Instead, this chapter is explicitly designed to serve as a setting guide of sorts for Storytellers and players alike — a handbook to the situations that are likely to arise in the course of the average story. The Islamic world is not Europe. This chapter adapts many of the systems from **Vampire: The Dark Ages** to the Islamic setting and presents new mechanics for tasks typical to **Veil of Night** chronicles.

Mortal Affairs

Life and unlife in the Islamic world are inextricably linked. Most Ashirra maintain strong ties with mortals, particularly their family and retainers. Others may hide their Cainite nature from outsiders and continue to interact with mortal society as if they were still living. Whatever the case, the following systems allow Story-

tellers to direct the actions of both her own and the players' characters. As with all systems, players and Storytellers should not feel obliged to use these mechanics and may instead simply look on them as guidelines for roleplaying and insights into the culture and society of the Islamic world.

Family Matters

• **Marriage [variable]:** Marriage is a central tenet of Islam, considered a religious duty central to the faith. Families are the crux of Islamic culture. Building a strong family unit and ensuring the continuation of one's lineage is an important part of life. Furthermore, relationships and relations that take place within marriage are considered to obey the will of Allah and form a legitimate outlet for the "needs and desires" of individuals. Relations outside of marriage are considered sinful. Any adult male with the means of supporting a wife and family is expected to marry and have children, though exceptions exist for those who hate children or who believe marriage would adversely affect their religious duties.

Marriages are significant events in a character's life and should be roleplayed as far as possible, though the following section contains several mechanics to ease play and provide structure for character actions. Weddings and their organization offer a host of storytelling opportunities, such as family quarrels, jealous rivals, unrequited love and self-sacrifice. Whether the players' characters are participants or observers, a marriage should be a memorable event.

Marriage is a solemn commitment and should not be entered into lightly, and many serve to cement interfamily alliances. Love and romance are only occasionally a consideration in pairings (despite the importance some individuals place on it, such emotions rarely equate to a successful marriage) but neither are adults forced to marry those they dislike. Before any wedding, the couple meets and assesses each other's worth, though any such meeting is chaperoned by representatives of both sides. Each player should roll Perception + Empathy against the other character's Willpower. Each success provides a deeper insight into the other's mindset and attitudes. This can be reflected in roleplaying by asking short, succinct questions about the other character's attitudes and beliefs that the player or Storyteller must answer truthfully.

For example: *Firas and Jaida meet to discuss their marriage. Jaida's player gets two successes and asks if Firas is honest (yes) and hardworking (most of the time). Depending on the outcome of this meeting, the involved parties decide whether to proceed with the ceremony. Consent must be given by both participants for the ceremony to take place and be legally binding, though a woman's silence is assumed to equate with acquiescence. Girls who have yet to reach puberty may, however, be given away by their fathers without their permission.*

Marriages must be within the faith; marriage to a believing slave is preferable to marriage to a *dhimmi* and is not uncommon among men unable to find willing wives among the free believers. In such cases, permission must be sought of their masters (Manipulation + Etiquette) and the slave must be gifted a *mahr* (dowry) like any other bride, which remains her property.

Deciding on an appropriate *mahr* is an important matter for a prospective husband. Too little and his actions could be considered insulting. Too much and he is weak-willed. The player should roll Intelligence + Etiquette to determine the appropriate gift. One or two successes indicates a barely acceptable dowry, while three or four indicate a fair choice. Five or more successes indicate a perfect dowry, while failure indicates an overly generous offer. A botch indicates an insulting *mahr* and may lead to the wedding being called off. A *mahr* may be paid in a lump sum at the time of marriage or, in the case of a *mut'a* (temporary marriage for a specified period allowed under Shiite law) or where repudiation seems likely, may be partially paid at the time of marriage with the remainder (the *mu'ajjal*) due when the marriage ends. Players who wish to defray part of the *mahr* should roll Wits + Leadership (or Wits + Expression) to convince the other family to accept their terms.

The marriage ceremony is a civil rather than religious bonding but it is normal for an imam to officiate and for the ceremony to be observed by two witnesses. Polygamy is an accepted practice in Islam, with two, three or even four wives common (and an unlimited number of slave concubines). However, the husband must take care to maintain the balance between his wives, treat each fairly and ensure he does his duty by each of them. A marriage contract may, however, limit the number of wives and concubines a man may take.

• **Divorce [Intelligence + Law]:** Marriage is a sacred institution, but Allah appreciates that difficulties may arise and so tolerates divorce. The voluntary separation of two people is preferable to a poisonous relationship that festers and harms the participants and those around them.

Both partners in a marriage may instigate divorce proceedings though Islamic law biases the matter in favor of the man. A woman needs just cause to repudiate her husband (mistreatment, denial of rights,

impotence and madness being the common complaints) and must resort to a *qadi*, or else must have the agreement of her husband. A man need give no reason and must only state his decision before two witnesses for it to be legal. Observing the appropriate legal forms in either case requires an Intelligence + Law roll against a difficulty of 6 (women) or 4 (men).

• **Disputes [variable]:** Arguments within a family, between husband and wife, between parent and child, or between children can lead to long-standing disputes with often bloody consequences. Inheritances, harsh words or even perceived favoritism can prompt arguments that may last for weeks or years. In the worst cases, the feud may pass down from generation to generation and last centuries.

Simply getting the disputants to discuss matters — either among family members or with a local *qadi* or imam — can prove a challenge and requires a Charisma + Empathy roll (or Charisma + Leadership), the difficulty ranging from 3 (a minor squabble) to 8 (a raging feud). Finding an equitable solution requires an Intelligence + Politics roll, and a Manipulation or Charisma + Politics roll is generally necessary to convince the feuding parties to actually set aside their differences and honor the accord. The number of successes on this last roll determines the degree of actual reconciliation that takes place. One success patches a matter until the next excuse, while three bury the issue for several years. Five or more successes indicate a long-lasting reconciliation and end to the dispute.

Exacerbating a feud is much easier than resolving one. A successful Perception + Politics roll points out the ideal way to increase the discord, and a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll is all that's necessary to pour poison in the appropriate ears. Three or more successes actually ingratiates the person provoking the feud with those he is manipulating. A few Intelligence + Subterfuge rolls to fabricate the proper evidence and Dexterity + Stealth rolls to plant it will also work, without leaving open the unpleasant possibility that both sides will begin talking and realize someone has been playing them for fools.

• **Remaining Favorite [variable]:** The Qur'an calls on men to treat all wives equally, and in many cases wives live together in harmony. Slave concubines are not afforded such courtesy, however, and each must constantly strive to remain in their master's eye. In some cases, similar disputes erupt between wives as each jockeys for position within the household, dominating their rivals.

Every month, each concubine's player should roll Charisma + Empathy (vs. the master's Willpower) or Manipulation + Subterfuge (vs. the master's Intelligence + 3), keeping track of the total successes and adding it to their Appearance attribute. The concubine with the highest score is the current favorite and dominates her master's attention. Such attempts to influence a master's favor provide many opportunities for roleplaying, as does the politics and scheming between the concubines.

A wife's player may use the same system to account for her relationship with her husband but also has legal recourse should one wife dominate the husband's attentions. If a wife remains favorite for two or more months in succession, the other wives may protest. Their players roll Charisma + Law (vs. the husband's Willpower) to ensure their marital rights are respected, adding any successes to their next favor roll. If the original wife remains favorite, the other wives may accept the situation or may call for arbitration in the dispute and perhaps request a divorce on the grounds of "denial of rights."

• **Keeping up Appearances [variable]:** Islamic law frowns upon women moving about in public, requiring them to be chaperoned by male relatives or servants. Furthermore, it is widely believed that women should be subservient to their male relatives and their spouse, obeying them in everything. Publicly, almost all women conform to these expectations, the notable exceptions being low-class serving women who must work to support their families. In private, however, many other women are equally active. In addition to the business of the harem, a number of women work through their men, either with their consent (where they are open-minded) or via subtle manipulations. To manipulate a male relative without his knowing requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, the difficulty being the subject's Willpower. The number of successes indicates the degree of accomplishment, while a botch indicates that the target realizes he is being manipulated. Where a woman has the willing support of her male relatives, she must still maintain a façade of propriety, usually requiring a Charisma + Acting roll.

Female Cumites, of course, have a wide range of options to conceal their activities. They may be accompanied by other Ashirra, many of whom are more open-minded than their mortal kin, or by ghoul retainers who obey the Ashirra's every whim yet maintain the image of propriety. Female Ashirra must work hard to maintain their façade to mortal onlookers, though they may use supernatural abilities to supplement any Charisma + Acting roll.

• **Learning and Teaching [Manipulation/Intelligence + Academics]:** Islam calls upon its adherents to open themselves to new learning experiences. The principal center of learning for children is the *madrasa* (or school), usually existing as an annex to a mosque. The principal curriculum focuses on religious learning, studies of the Qur'an and Hadith, but most also teach subjects such as science, law and philosophy. *Ulama* serve as the principal educators and constantly strive to make their lessons clear to their young charges. A Manipulation + Academics roll can simulate those efforts.

Over the last two centuries, separate institutes of learning have emerged distinct from the mosque-affiliated *madrasas*, focusing more on secular studies. Information is readily available in these schools of higher leaning and the emphasis on absorbing this knowledge lies squarely with the student (Intelligence + Academics).

Crime and Administration

• **Adjudicating the Law [Intelligence + Theology/Law]** : The Qur'an, *sunna* and *shari'a* lay down guidelines for Muslims to live their lives in accordance with their faith. However, in some areas, the holy books are unclear or contradictory. It falls to religious scholars (*'ulama*) and judges (*qadi*) to interpret the law and apply it to daily life. They are the guardians of order and morality in the community, respected for their wisdom and insight. There are, however, various schools of law, each with divergent views on key interpretations and the flexibility they allow their adherents in interpreting the scriptures.

'Ulama spend long periods of time considering the *shari'a*, often debating interpretations with their peers. This requires a resisted Intelligence + Theology roll between the players of two competing scholars, each seeking to convince the other of their argument. Such debates may last a few minutes or for days, with rolls made at appropriate intervals. The net successes determine the outcome of the debate. One or two successes indicates the opponent concedes the argument, albeit grudgingly. If three or four success result, the opposing scholar acknowledges that the *'ulama* has a well-argued case that may indeed be a valid interpretation. Five or more successes indicates that the opposing scholar wholeheartedly agrees with the *'ulama*'s interpretation and reasoning.

Qadi are more involved in routine matters, interpreting the practical application of the law in day-to-day life. They may be called upon to adjudicate in a divorce, a disagreement over property, or to interpret the provisions of a contract. To do so requires an Intelligence + Law roll, with the number of successes indicating the strength of the ruling. Where only one success results, the ruling has a basis in law but is shaky and open to challenge. Rulings on the basis of two or three successes are more robust but are still subject to reinterpretation by sufficiently skilled *qadi*. Four or more successes demonstrate a cast-iron verdict that requires superhuman effort to circumvent. Challenging a verdict requires an additional Intelligence + Law roll against a difficulty of 6 + the successes from the original judgment.

• **Bribery and Corruption [Intelligence + Politics; Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** In all bureaucracies, the wheels of state turn more freely if provided with ample lubricants. The Islamic world is no exception. Knowing whom to bribe to get a work permit, to free a "wrongfully arrested" acquaintance or to arrange the presence – or absence – of guards on a particular street is an art that many dabble in but few perfect.

Bribing an official is a two-stage process. First, the appropriate official has to be identified. This requires an Intelligence + Politics roll, the difficulty proportional to the legality and ease of the desired task. For example, determining the correct official to bribe to establish a market stall is easy (difficulty 3) while identifying a potential source of information on the sultan's guard is challenging (difficulty 7). Failed rolls have no effect, but a botch may result in the wrong people hearing of the character's efforts.

Once a suitable source has been located, he must be approached and convinced to cooperate. This requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll against a difficulty ranging between the official's Willpower and his Willpower + 3, depending on the legality of the task. Success indicates how well the official has been bribed: one success indicates the official is wracked with guilt and may confess his sins, while after five successes the official is ice-cool. Failure indicates the official takes the money but does not go through with the "favor," while a botch indicates they take action against the bribing character.

• **Managing a Household or Business [variable]:** Commerce is an essential part of Islamic life, and female characters are likely to play a major role in overseeing household affairs. Managing a business or a household from week to week requires an Intelligence + Seneschal roll, with a difficulty set by the amount of money coming in to the household and the local economic conditions. Bringing in quality partners or hiring good help is a Perception + Empathy roll, with a difficulty set by the quality of help available. One success is adequate help, three is good, five brings in

exceptional talent that is an asset to the business or household. Once partners have been retained or help hired, an eye needs to be kept on them to keep them honest. Auditing the books is a Perception + Investigation roll, and investigating misdeeds among business or household employees requires a Charisma + Leadership roll.

• **Buying and Selling [variable]:** The *suq* (central marketplace) is the principal place of business in Muslim towns, not only a place for buying and selling goods but also for as an exchange for information and services. Usually occupying a maze of narrow streets and comprising a mix of shops and market stalls, the *suq* is a hive of activity during the daylight hours, though in some towns a curfew bars access at other times. In many cities where the Ashirra have a subtle but pervasive influence, the *suq* remains active for several hours after dusk prayers, allowing the vampires to participate in commerce and hunt under its cover.

Finding common goods in the *suq* is a straightforward process, usually only taking a few minutes. Less common items may require a Perception + Alertness roll, the difficulty depending on the rarity of the item being sought.

Haggling is the main means of buying and selling goods. It occurs via resisted Manipulation + Finance rolls, with the winner receiving a discount proportionate to the number of successes he achieves. One successes equates to roughly 10 percent while three successes drives the merchant down to their minimum asking price. Five successes allows the buyer to talk the merchant into accepting a loss.

Learning general gossip in the *suq* is a simple process, requiring a roll of Charisma + Alertness against a difficulty of 3, with the number of successes indicating the number and detail of the stories. Characters seeking information on specific subjects need to seek out appropriate sources, which requires a Perception + Subterfuge roll against a difficulty dependant on the nature of the information they desire. Common knowledge is easy to obtain (difficulty 3) but more jealously guarded information is challenging or difficult to come by (difficulty 7 or 8). Almost all information gathered in the *suq* takes the form of rumors and stories rather than solid facts. Determining what is truth and what is fiction is usually up to the character.

A civil administrator overseas the day-to-day operation of the *suq*, ensuring its smooth running and arbitrating disputes. Routine organization requires a Wits + Seneschal roll against a difficulty of 5 (the number of successes indicating the efficiency of organization) while settling disputes requires Charisma + Leadership or Manipulation + Intimidation.

• **Leading a Trade Caravan [Wits/Intelligence + Geography]:** The Islamic lands stretch from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, from Cadiz to Samarkand. Merchants ply the length and breadth of this region, trading gold from the Atlas Mountains for perfumes from the people of the Indus Valley. They are among the most traveled people in the known world, their knowledge of geography and regional cultures often far superior to that of the scholars. A good trader can make himself rich in short order, retiring to a great house and leaving the hard work to his caravan masters. A bad trader can find himself alone in a far off land, with no money and goods and little hope for the future.

With trade routes spanning thousands of miles, knowing where to buy and sell goods requires considerable knowledge, a grasp of trade routes, prevailing economic conditions and local politics. This requires a Wits + Geography roll, the number of successes indicating the quality or proximity of an appropriate market. For example, one success could indicate a poor market for the goods nearby or could reflect knowledge of a better market some distance away. Similarly, five successes can mean a very good opportunity nearby or a superlative, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in some far-off land.

Once a market has been identified, the trade caravan has to wend its way there. Finding the most appropriate route requires an Intelligence + Geography roll, more successes indicating faster (and safer) routes while a botch indicates the caravan heads off in completely the wrong direction. Once on the road, a caravan master has to oversee affairs within the caravan, maintaining order between wagoneers, camel riders and herders (Charisma + Leadership) and ensuring that the beasts of burden are well treated and fed (Perception + Animal Ken). Finding appropriate shelter such as a caravansary or oasis (Perception + Survival or Intelligence + Geography) is vitally important, as is deploying the caravan guards to best deal with wild beasts and robbers (Wits + Leadership). Once at the destination, there is still the business of haggling (Manipulation + Finance) and dealing with the natives (Charisma + Linguistics or Intelligence + Politics).

Trade ventures take two forms: partnerships, usually between family members or long-standing acquaintances, in which the members share the risks and profits, or *mudaraba*, where an investor provides a merchant with goods or capital to trade. At the end of the venture, the trader is expected to return the investor's principal along with a share of the profits. Finding an

appropriate investor for an expedition requires a Manipulation + Empathy roll, while hammering out favorable terms requires Wits + Law.

• **Hospitality [Manipulation + Etiquette]:** Islam encourages all of its practitioners to extend hospitality to those they encounter, including shelter, food and water for those who need it. By tradition, a gift of salt confers the status of guest on a visitor (though in some cases water substitutes), who may then stay for up to three days. Beyond this, a visitor is expected to help out with the chores as if he were a member of the family, and not to do so is considered impolite.

To request hospitality, the player rolls Manipulation + Etiquette (difficulty 6). Increase this difficulty if the characters are hostile to each other (though even enemies are expected to treat each other with a degree of respect) or reduce it if the characters are well inclined. The number of successes indicates the warmth of the hospitality, and even a failure generates the basics of food and shelter in harsh conditions. A botch, however, always results in the refusal of hospitality. A character that abuses hospitality (or is known to do so) is less likely to receive a warm welcome.

The concept of hospitality – civilized behavior, the sharing of shelter, resources and information – is an important part of Arabic culture and plays a key role in governing relations among the Ashirra. In many cases where groups of Islamic vampires meet, they do so under the protection of hospitality, a tradition that, in the dark days to come, will spread throughout Cainite society as the practice of Elysium, eventually supplanting the Tradition of Domain.

• **Purification [Intelligence + Theology]:** Ritual purification forms an essential part of Islamic life. Before entering a mosque or praying, Muslims ritually purify themselves by washing. Normally, this involves washing the face, the hands and arms to the elbows, the head (superficially with wet hands) and the feet (to the ankles), though circumstances sometimes require a complete bath. *Tayammum*, purification without water, is commonplace for Muslims undergoing a journey, or where no source of clean water is available. This uses clean earth or sand to rub the face and hands, purifying the individual. Carrying out the various steps of purification in the correct order requires an Intelligence + Theology roll.

• **Dealing with the Unlearned *Franj* [special]:** The Islamic world places much greater emphasis on academic learning than does the European world. When used in isolation this offers Muslim academics no special advantages but in any Resisted Action involving Academics or Science against a European, reduce the difficulty of the roll by one.

Courtly Life

• **Poetry and Storytelling [variable]:** The creation of poetry and the recitation of stories plays a major role in many Islamic courts, particularly in the Taifa states of al-Andalus. Such stories acknowledge and glorify the accomplishments of rulers and heroes, in the right hands turning a vainglorious defeat into a superlative victory. Most common is the *qasida* form, a style developed during the 'Abbasid period and used extensively to praise the virtues of a ruler or patron. Other forms include the *muwashshar* (a strophic style, where lines do not rhyme but patterns exist across a series of lines), as often written in proto-Spanish and Hebrew as Arabic, *zajal* (also strophic but usually in colloquial Arabic) and *saj'* (rhymed prose).

Most works are impromptu creations, composed on the spot. Doing so requires a Wits + Expression roll, the number of successes indicating the quality of the poem and its delivery, and a botch resulting in anything from accusations of plagiarism to the inadvertent insulting of the subject. Other creations are more considered works, written over a long period by master wordsmiths. Creating such tales requires the player to roll Intelligence + Linguistics. The difficulty of these rolls depends on the subject and style. Attempting to glorify a great victory is routine (difficulty 4) while turning a crushing defeat into a story of heroism and valor is challenging (difficulty 7) or worse. Use of a common form such as *qasida* reduces the difficulty by one, while more complex forms or experimental styles may increase the difficulty by one or more.

• **Finding Political Allies [variable]:** One of the most critical political matters is finding allies. Despite popular impressions, brutal political games are not generally played by emotionless automatons but by normal beings with a full range of feelings who are simply ruthless about getting what they want. Roll Perception + Politics to find good allies and Charisma + Empathy to become friends with them. Difficulty is set by the relative stations of the parties and the degree of similarity. An elder gaining a protégé would have difficulty 4, while a newcomer to court gaining the trust of an elderly statesman would have a minimum difficulty of 8.

It takes some time between rolls, at least a few days. The total accumulated successes indicate the strength of the friendship. Ten is an acquaintance, 20 is mild friendship, and so on, up to the 80-100 range, which indicates a bond that will last for years (or longer in the

case of Cainites). Both parties can roll, if both desire friendship, but the accumulated successes are not added together — friendship is often unequal.

• **The Poison Tongue [Manipulation + Politics]:** Just as finding allies is critical, turning opinion against a political rival is also of crucial importance. It is a Manipulation + Politics roll, with a difficulty determined by the degree of competence and political aptitude demonstrated by one's opponent. Everyone can turn opinion against the court bumbler, but throwing darts at the hero of the hour without seeming petty is very difficult. The number of successes determines the degree of effect. One success plants doubts, five successes change opinions forever. Note that it can take dozens of manipulations to really affect a change of opinion in the court as a whole. A campaign of whispered slander and insinuation takes months of hard effort to bring to maturation. A botch during this time probably makes the matter into a public feud or even brings about a challenge to duel.

Sometimes whispered insinuations aren't enough. Framing someone for a crime he didn't commit is always a popular way to eliminate an enemy. It is particularly effective if he is suspected of committing that sort of crime but hasn't been caught yet — a process known as "speeding the wheels." Setting the matter up is an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, with a difficulty dependant on the legitimacy of the victim. The actual sting should be roleplayed, and many other systems are likely to be put into use in the process.

Sport and War

• **At the *Maydan* [variable]:** Horse racing is a popular sport among the upper echelons, and the principal venue for such activities is the *maydan* or hippodrome. The tracks of the *maydan* often take on intricate shapes surrounding ornate water gardens (the one at Samara takes the form of a clover leaf). Away from the tracks, pavilions provide shelter for the spectators and are often used to host soirees for impressing visiting dignitaries. Several leaders, notably Nur ed-Din, encouraged the construction of such structures at cities throughout the Islamic world, many of which also double as training grounds for troops.

Regular horse races last for 10 turns, during each of which a rider's player rolls Stamina + Ride against a difficulty of 10 - his character's Dexterity. Add the number of successes to those gained from previous turns, and at the end of the contest the rider with the greatest number of successes wins the race. A failed roll has no effect, but a botch indicates the rider falls from his horse and is out of the race. Furthermore, an unhorsed rider suffers two to four dice of damage from the fall.

The flat surface of the *maydan* is ideal for carrying out intricate drill exercises, fostering the all-important team spirit among the troops. Such events are often major spectacles attended by the elite of Islamic society. Games such as polo (where a small ball is moved down a field by mounted players, requiring a Dexterity + Ride roll), *qabaq* (shooting pots while on a moving horse, requiring a Dexterity + Archery roll) and jousting are commonplace (the rules found on page 39 of the **Dark Ages Companion** apply equally well to the Muslim setting). *Maydans* reach the apogee of their martial significance after the period detailed in **Veil of Night**, notably following the *mamluk* takeover in Egypt in 1250.

• **Hunting and Hawking [variable]:** Hunting serves an important role in military training, prompting warriors to master a wide variety of skills. First, they must master tracking to identify and pursue the prey (Perception + Alertness), in turn exercising their riding skills (Stamina + Ride). The usual prey of such hunts are wild cats, notably lions, and thus a rider faces a considerable challenge in maintaining control of his mount once the prey is cornered (Wits + Ride). Finally, the beast must be dispatched, usually by means of a lance or sword, testing the warrior's courage and skill at arms (Dexterity + Melee). Other forms include the pursuit of deer and wild horses, hunting in this case usually by bow (Dexterity + Archery). As in Europe, hawking (Wits + Animal Ken) is also appreciated, though often restricted to the most lofty social circles.

Monstrous Activities

In addition to the concerns of their mortal kin, the Ashirra must look to their own concerns, feeding, *bay'a* relationships and the like. The following section provides mechanics and details of Cainite activities in the Islamic world. Again, these are intended as guides for players and Storytellers rather than as replacements for roleplaying.

Nightly Matters

• **Passing as a Mortal [Charisma/Intelligence + Acting]:** There are numerous circumstances in which an Ashirra may need — or desire — to pass themselves off as a mortal. Doing so for short periods is a simple process, requiring a Charisma + Acting roll against a difficulty of 5 (8 for Mutasharidin and other deformed Cainites). Traits such as Sanguine Humor (**Vampire: The Dark Ages**, p.277) reduce this difficulty by one. The number of successes indicates the quality of the

masquerade, and a botch indicates that the character exhibits some flaw that demonstrates their undead nature (such as fangs, blood tears or not breathing). Anyone purposely seeking to uncover the character's true nature needs to roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6) and requires at least as many successes as the vampire to identify their true nature.

More long-term masquerading as a mortal requires a subtly different range of skills to conceal the traits and habits of Cainite life, such as preventing observers linking the character's absences with murders in the town. This requires an Intelligence + Acting roll, the difficulty depending on the character's habits and routine (the more outrageous the lifestyle, the higher the difficulty). One success means others aren't immediately seeking out the imam or witch-hunters, though the vampire is thought of as "odd." Three successes mean outsiders view the character as a little odd, though they may otherwise be well regarded. Five or more successes indicates there is no suspicion whatsoever about the character's nocturnal activities and she is seen as a fine, upstanding member of the community.

• **Finding Shelter While Traveling [Intelligence + Survival]:** Predators of a wide-ranging trading culture, Ashirra are more mobile than their European siblings, with many traveling between cities and towns on routine business while others undertake pilgrimages such as the *hajj*. Ashirra with the Protean Discipline have little problem finding shelter, using Interred in the Earth and spending a blood point to meld with open ground. Those without that gift must find shelter, often a difficult task in the wastelands of Arabia or other inhospitable areas. Doing so requires an Intelligence + Survival roll, with the difficulty dependant on the terrain. Cities, badlands and wooded hills have difficulties between 4 and 6 while more open terrain increases this difficulty to 7 or 8 depending on the exact circumstances. Open desert has a difficulty between 7 and 9. If the vampire has the appropriate implements to secure shelter (for example, a tarp or a shovel and an assistant to bury him) decrease the difficulty of the roll by two. A failure indicates the character cannot find shelter but may continue searching (each attempt taking 1 hour). A botch, however, indicates the character *thinks* he has found suitable shelter but will find — too late in most cases — it has a fatal flaw (it is exposed to the sun or is a Lupine den).

• **The Hunt [Perception]:** Vampires are, by their nature, predators and must hunt to maintain their existence. The availability of prey is not, however, a constant. In many cases, the Cainite must spend part of each night hunting out prey, human or otherwise. For



each hour of hunting, the player should roll Perception against a difficulty based on their current locale. If the character hunts for nonhuman prey, they may reduce these difficulties by two (rats and the like are easy to find). If the character is subject to Religious Prohibition (or a comparable Flaw such as Prey Exclusion), increase the difficulty of each by one (to a maximum of 9). Characters hunting near their permanent havens may add their Herd rating to the roll.

Area	Difficulty
Large city, seedy district (*suq*, etc)	4
Large city, middle class district (merchant district)	6
Large city, upper-class district (palace environs)	7
Small city/town, not-so-nice district	6
Small city/town, nice district	7
Village	7
Hamlet	8
Wilderness	9

Success means the vampire finds suitable prey, and may subdue it and drain blood, while failure indicates no suitable prey (or opportunities) have presented themselves. A botch can indicate a broad range of complications: the prey dies, is being hunted by another Ashirra or is not what they seem. Depending on the preference of the players and Storyteller, this process may be abstracted or roleplayed as part of the dark side to their characters.

• **Purification and Consumption of Vitae [variable]:** Many Muslim Cainites struggle to reconcile their faith with Islam's prohibition on the consumption of blood; numerous *surah* in the Qur'an state that blood is forbidden as unclean. Some Ashirra seek to avoid this restriction and still maintain their faith by consecrating the vitae to Allah before feeding. The vitae is first collected in a silver bowl, requiring a Dexterity + Melee roll to draw off an appropriate volume of blood. This action may provoke hungry characters to frenzy. This blood is then purified by means of a prayer lasting five minutes and requiring an Intelligence + Theology roll (difficulty 6). Any number of successes indicate the ritual goes as planned, while any other result denotes the vitae is "unclean" and must be discarded.

In some cases, it is preferable to consecrate the entire victim to Allah, which requires the Cainite to first immobilize his prey (through the use of the Dominate Discipline perhaps) and then sprinkle him with rosewater while praying, a ritual lasting five minutes. As with consecrating vitae, this requires an Intelligence + Theology roll, though the difficulty varies depending on the prey. If the victim is a Muslim, the difficulty is 7, but if they are a *dhimmi* it increases to 8. Consecrating nonhuman prey to Allah has a difficulty of 6. A failure or botch result indicates the prey is "unclean" while any other result indicates they have been purified. Vessels must be purified each time they are used as a source of vitae.

• **Hiding a Body [Intelligence + Subterfuge]:** Occasionally, an Ashirra goes too far and kills his prey while feeding. Corpses in the gutter are (relatively) common in many cities, but a body completely drained of blood is likely to cause panic. Disposing of a body is thus a skill many Cainites have to develop during their unlife, finding different ways of concealing the body or at least the cause of its demise. In most cases, the body is buried or concealed, which requires the player to make an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll against a difficulty proportional to the quality and number of available hiding spaces (ranging from 4 in a rocky river valley to 8 in a densely occupied and bustling city). The number of successes indicate the quality of concealment. One success means nobody finds it immediately, three successes mean that it is unlikely to be found without a thorough search or extraordinary conditions, and five successes mean that the body will almost certainly never be found.

Cainite Politics

• **Cainite Hospitality [Charisma + Etiquette]:** The frequency of meetings between the Ashirra varies widely, though all are governed by a series of rituals derived from the mortal tradition of hospitality. So-called hospitality is intended to ensure civil (if not friendly) relations between Cainites, allowing them to meet and discuss issues without fear of attack by their peers. Not all gatherings take place under the protection of hospitality, but the proportion has grown markedly since the *Franj* invasion and the arrival of European Cainites. A common enemy makes for good relations among the locals.

At such assemblies, one Cainite, usually the oldest or the owner of the venue for the gathering, serves as host, placing the attendees under his protection and extending them hospitality. It is his responsibility to ensure they conform to accepted standards of behavior: no violence, no brandishing of weapons and no deliberate personal insults (at least no overt ones). In the case of larger gatherings, the host is assisted in this task

by a group of enforcers (called *ghulam*). Even bitter rivals are expected to act with dignity and calm while under the provisions of hospitality, though in most cases verbal sparring replaces physical violence.

A player whose character attends such a gathering should roll Charisma + Etiquette to comport himself in an appropriate manner, reacting with guarded neutrality to the actions of the other attendees. Failure indicates a minor faux pas, easily ignored if they behave themselves in future, while a botch indicates a gross violation of hospitality likely to bring down the wrath of the host. Characters may, of course, seek to undermine the position of rivals attending the same gathering, provoking them into rash actions that place them in a difficult position with the host. Doing so requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge (or Charisma + Subterfuge) roll, the difficulty being the opponent's Willpower. A botch indicates that rather than undermining the rival's position, the character's machinations have become clear to all; they have been disgraced by attempting to undermine the principals of hospitality.

• **Meeting the Europeans [Manipulation + Etiquette]:** In addition to blood and fire, the armed incursions by the *Franj* brought European Cainites to the Islamic lands, either as manipulators of the conflict or as pawns. Though sharing many traits, relations between the Ashirra and their *dhimmi* cousins are strained, European (and Christian) ambition at stark odds with the Muslim desire to safeguard their lands. Nonetheless, like their mortal counterparts, European and Islamic Cainites do mingle at times. Ensuring "proper behavior" at such meetings requires a Manipulation + Etiquette roll, the difficulty depending on the circumstances and friendliness of those involved. A pair of neonates, one European and one Muslim with a long-standing relationship, are willing to put up with each other's habits and mannerisms, so the difficulty for the roll is only 4. High-ranking vampires from each side meeting for the first time under difficult circumstances are likely be on their guard for infractions by the other side, resulting in difficulties of 7 or 8. Failure does not automatically indicate hostilities, though it does suggest considerable friction and misunderstanding between the parties. A botch, however, suggests that one party (or even both) has gravely offended the other.

Faith

Even more so than in the medieval Europe of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, religion is a central facet of **Veil of Night** chronicles. Islam is both a unifying and divisive political force, fostering common cultural elements from the Guadalquivir to the Indus while prompting conflicts between different factions of the faith. Islam is ever-present, and its tenets pervade and guide their daily routines. However, while religion dominates the people's lives, and many are committed to its teachings, it is not something prone to a lot of in game mechanics. In most cases, faith is a cultural and spiritual element, something that manifests itself in the comportment of the believers and perhaps in a character's Courage, Willpower and Road Traits. Only in the cases of a few mortals truly charged with holy zeal and of the holy sites of Islam are additional game mechanics appropriate.

True Faith

True Faith is a rare ability possessed by mortals that represents deep religious conviction and an ability to make that conviction manifest. It is not a learned skill and cannot be voluntarily increased. Instead, it rises and falls at the Storyteller's discretion in parallel with the character's religious conviction and belief. True Faith may apply to the adherents of any belief system (some *dhimmi* such as Christians, Jews and pagans also have True Faith, as do some infernalists) though the information presented here relates to True Faith in the context of Islam. As True Faith depends on the possessor's belief, it may be used against targets of any religion or even those who do not ascribe to a belief system. Its impact is, however, strongest against those of the same faith (see Exorcism, p. 186). Some may see the gifts of True Faith as akin to sorcery of some sort, but to the believer it is a manifestation of God's favor — a blessing from above, not a power from within.

Belief in Islam and adherence to its tenets is the first step on the path of enlightenment that culminates in True Faith. Known as *iman* (faith), this places Islam at the heart of every Muslim's life, indicated by their commitment to prayer and behavior as determined by the Hadith. The second stage, *ita'at* (obedience) calls on the Muslim to obey the will of Allah in all things, acknowledging this authority with prayer and submitting himself to His will. The third stage, *taqwa* (piety), requires the individual to direct his life according to the will of Allah as laid down in the Qur'an, Hadith and *shari'a*. They must desist from the actions Allah has forbidden and, where possible, from those deemed unclean. Additionally, the Muslim must adhere to the pillars of society: *shahada* (profession of faith), *salah* (prayer), *zakah* (charity), *sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (pilgrimage). The final step, *ihsan* (benediction), reflects a near-perfect alignment between the individual's will and that of Allah. It is at that point that a character *may* gain True Faith.

Most Muslim mortals ultimately fail to obey every stricture, though many attempt to do so. Ironically, the very commonality of Islam in society, pervading as it does daily life, makes true insight (and thus True Faith) almost unattainable. To the general populace, Islam simply *is*, its provisions and laws unquestionable. In most cases, insight is only possible by those who study Islam — *'ulama*, imams and the like — and thus True Faith is most common in such individuals. On occasion, however, lay people do develop a great insight into their beliefs; True Faith can, in theory, appear in any believing mortal.

Cainites, however, find their very existence at odds with the dictates of the Qur'an, notably those dealing with the consumption of blood, and thus find themselves incapable of the spiritual enlightenment required to develop True Faith. They are, after all, damned. A very few do succeed in attaining appropriate insights into the faith and the corresponding enlightenment (and may purchase the True Faith Merit), but this is extremely rare and must be approved by the Storyteller. This is not to say a Cainite cannot be a faithful Muslim — many are — but few can be considered holy. Instead, their adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and *sunna* can be reflected by a high rating in the Tariq el-Sama' (the Islamic Road of Heaven, see Chapter Four).

True Faith allows a character to use her belief as a weapon against supernatural entities, notably vampires but also ghosts and *djinn*. It has no effect against mortal characters. Islamic True Faith functions very much like the Christian version presented in **Vampire: The Dark Ages** (pp. 236 and 237), the Qur'an or *ta'wiz* amulets replacing the Bible as focal points for Faith effects. Storytellers may, of course, choose to adapt the effects to suit their chronicles.

Holy Places

Islam venerates numerous sites as holy, both for their historical significance (such as Muhammad's birthplace or Syedna Arqam's house from which Muhammad first preached) and for their importance to the faith. In most cases, these are buildings, most often mosques or tombs, but they also include places where saints were martyred. Many such sites gain their True Faith ratings through their innate holiness or the footsteps and prayers of those who visit or worship there. Such places have ambient True Faith ratings that reflect their sanctity and power over Cainites. This power may be limited to within the building or, in the case of *mazaar* (saints' tombs) and major sites like the Ka'ba, may radiate over a wide area. Where the influence of several sites overlap (for example, the Black Stone and the Masjid-ul-Haram, the central mosque of Mecca that houses the Ka'ba) a Willpower roll must be made for each.

To enter a holy place (or to approach a "radiating site") a Cainite must roll Willpower against a difficulty equal to the site's True Faith rating (the very rare Cainites with True Faith reduce this difficulty by their own True Faith rating). In the case of "radiating sites," the True Faith rating decreases with distance from the site, over a few yards for a *mazaar* or over miles in the case of the Black Stone. Indeed, many Ashirra believe the Keening (see page 185) is a manifestation of Mecca's ambient holiness across all of Arabia. Success means the Cainite can enter the site, though he may still feel uncomfortable and perhaps unwell (one success indicates the character feels seriously unwell, three that he feels discomfited, and five of more that he feels no ill effects). Each success also determines how long the Cainite may remain in the site; each dawn, the effective number of successes automatically decreases by one and the Cainite becomes increasingly uncomfortable. Mortals can notice this discomfort on a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty equal to the Cainite's Willpower) and may act accordingly.

Failure results in the character experiencing considerable physical pain if they try to enter the site, though they may force themselves to do so. Characters who do so suffer one health level of bashing damage per scene. A botch, however, indicates the character immediately suffers one health level of lethal damage and must spend a Willpower point each turn to remain in the area. The pain that follows a botch steadily builds. On the third turn (and in subsequent turns) a second Willpower roll is needed against a difficulty of 7. Each success allows the character to put off additional Willpower rolls for a turn, while failure indicates the character frenzies. A botch means the character bursts into flame, suffering three health levels of aggravated damage per turn. These flames may be extinguished by conventional methods, but in each turn they are aflame, the character should make a Courage roll (difficulty 8) or suffer Rötschreck.

The *sihr* ritual Allah's Blessing (see page 165) allows Cainites to overcome the True Faith effects of holy places, even those of Mecca and Madina. Characters protected by such rituals who are inside a holy place (or within the radius of ambient True Faith) when they lapse must immediately make a Willpower roll, increasing the difficulty by two. In such cases, any failure or botch results in the effects outline for botches above.

Even when Cainites feel comfortable in a holy place, the site's ambient True Faith impacts on their activities. All blood point expenditures double and the difficulty of using Auspex or other perception-enhancing Disciplines increases by two. Furthermore, any characters with True Faith effectively increase their rating by one while on holy ground (though characters without the True Faith Trait do not gain a dot) and the difficulty of all Faith-related rolls (like exorcism) decrease by two.

Islamic Holy Places

General Sites	Ambient Faith Rating
Well-used mosque	6
Rarely-used mosque	5
Church converted for use as a mosque	4
Mazar (saint's tomb)	3-5(R)
Sites in Arfat:	
Jabal-E-Rehmat (Mercy Mount)	6
Masjid-e-Nimra	5
Sites in Damascus*:	
Great Umayyad Mosque	7
Maristan Mosque	6
Sites in Jerusalem:**	
Aqsa Mosque	6
The Dome of the Rock	7
Sites in Mecca:	
Muhammad's birthplace	8
Jannat-ul-Moalla (graveyard)	7
Jinn mosque (Masjid-e-Jinn)	7
House of Asyedna Arqam (Dar-e-Arqam)	7
Haram Mosque (Great Mosque, Masjid-ul-Haram)	8
The Ka'ba	9 (R)
The Black Stone	10 (R)
Sites in Madina:	
Muhammad's Tomb	8 (R)
Mosque of Quba (the first)	7
Prophet's Mosque	7
Sites in Muna:	
The Three Pillars	7 (R)

(R) denotes a radiating site
*see also page 200.
see also **Jerusalem by Night, p. 54

Tainted Sites

The Frankish invasion and the constant flow back-and-forth of Muslim and Christian armies has lead to many holy sites belonging to one side or the other falling under the influence of the enemy. In some cases, these buildings are left unmolested, but more often they are subverted by the other faith and used for its religious ceremonies or, worse, desecrated by routine use. This weakens the site's True Faith rating, either temporarily by muddling the original beliefs and intentions associated with the holy place with those of the occupying religion or denuding it though neglect.

Where a site is used by another religion, the Faith rating becomes tainted, dropping by one or two points as the old and new seek to attain a balance. Furthermore, the difficulty of all Faith-related rolls tied to the site increases by one because of the confused nature of the site. Depending on the nature and scale of the new use of the site, this reduction may be temporary or permanent. For example, a site of equal importance and veneration to both faiths (like the Dome of the Rock) suffers only a temporary taint when it is occupied by the *Franj* and again when recaptured by Islam. A major Islamic site used for simple Christian worship would, however, be more likely suffer a permanent drop in True Faith because of its reduced status. Purification and rededication (see page 186) of a site allow it to reach equilibrium, removing the penalty on Faith usage and rebuilding the site's rating.

Use of a holy place for mundane tasks is perhaps the easiest way to denude a site's True Faith rating. In such cases, there is no new faith to replace the old, and without continued prayer and veneration, the rating fades. In the case of low-rated sites, this may be a quick process, taking a few months, but in the most significant of sites it may take years or decades for mundane life to overcome Faith. For example, the Templars used the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as a granary and storehouse for many years, yet the site retained its links to the Islamic faith. In the case of the most powerful buildings, even their destruction may not be sufficient to destroy their True Faith, the ruins and even the very ground becoming imbued with their holiness. Jerusalem is dotted with such locales, belonging to Islam, Christianity and Judaism (see **Jerusalem by Night**, p.54).

The Keening

The rise of Islam brought another great change to the Arabian Peninsula; detectable only by Cainites, the holy city of Mecca became the source of an eerie howl known as the Keening. Linked to the Black Stone and the Islamic faith focused upon it — though no one knows precisely how — the Keening first becomes noticeable as night brightens to dawn, a dull rising susurration that indicates to all smart Cainites to take shelter. As the morning progresses, the whisper becomes a wail, rising in pitch and intensity before peaking as a clamoring cacophony at midday and then slowly weakening as night draws in.

Until two centuries ago, the Keening's wail was a truly terrible roar that drove most of the Cainites in Arabia from the peninsula. Only the original core of Ashirra withstood the sun's cries through purification and prayer. It was only after the Qarmatians stole the Black Stone — which silenced the Keening until the stone's return — that Tarique and his followers were able to establish a warding around Mecca that limited the Keening's effect. Tarique's control over this ritual and its practitioners allows him to wield immense power in Arabia.

The rise and fall of the Keening is a central part of the existences of Arabian Ashirra, and many have come to rely on it to wake and as warning of the approaching dawn. When journeying outside the Keening's reach, such Cainites may struggle to wake at dusk, requiring a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty of 10 - their Willpower). Similarly, they must roll Perception + Survival to judge the length of time until sunrise, success indicating a solid estimation, failure indicating that the character errs on the side of caution. On a botch, the characters overestimate the amount of time remaining to find shelter. Acclimatization to a Keening-less environment takes a month, after which time they have no difficulty waking or estimating the time until dawn.

Outsiders, however, are less appreciative of the constant noise, finding it unsettling and disrupting their sleeping patterns. During their first week in the peninsula, visitors must spend a Willpower point to sleep normally or else suffer a +1 difficulty to Rötschreck checks made during the next day. At the end of that week, they may make a Perception + Alertness roll against a difficulty of 7. Any successes indicate that the character has "acclimatized" and no longer suffers the visitor penalties. Failure indicates that the character continues to suffer, while a botch may indicate anything from a derangement brought on by disrupted sleep patterns to an immediate frenzy.



The Keening Unbound

Many Cainites recall the days before Tarique al-Hajji's ritual dampened the Keening and know full well that should he choose to do so, the ancient could remove the warding and allow the Keening to dominate Arabia once more. In such an eventuality, the full force of the Keening would engulf the peninsula and the difficulty of using any Discipline in Arabia would increase by one, with a botch inflicting five health levels of lethal damage.

Furthermore, the difficulty of any attempt to use a Discipline within 50 miles of Mecca or Madina would increase by two, with a failure inflicting five health levels of lethal damage and a botch inflicting two levels of aggravated damage. Within 100 miles of Mecca and Madina, it would become impossible to sleep because of the roaring, and elsewhere in Arabia all Cainites would have to spend a Willpower point to sleep or else add one to the difficulty of Rötschreck checks made during the next day. Only the *sihr* ritual Allah's Blessing (p. 165) or a similar purification allows a Cainite to remain in the area for any length of time.

Even today, any Cainite within a mile of the Ka'ba suffers the full force of the Keening, Tarique's warding limited the cry outside the city but not within its precincts.

Rites and Rituals

Numerous rites and rituals within Islamic life depend on Theology, True Faith or other religious Traits. In addition to ritual prayer, the most common are:

Purification & Dedication

Upon recapturing a holy site from the Christians, considerable effort is spent on purifying the site, removing the taint from the site (and associated True Faith penalties). The first stage is removing the trappings of the current use — removing the idolatry, images and fixtures of Christianity, or sweeping away the literal filth of more mundane use. The walls and floors of the site are then washed with rosewater and incense is burned to purify the air. Once this physical purification of the site has been accomplished, an imam leads prayers to sanctify the site. Organizing and overseeing the purification and rededication requires an Intelligence + Theology roll to ensure all the necessary procedures take place and are carried out in the appropriate manner. Any successes indicate that any taint associated with a site is removed (though its True Faith rating may remain depressed), while failure indicates a mistake in the process and a need to repeat all the steps. A botch harms the site, either physically (damaging inscriptions from the Qur'an or precious mosaics) or spiritually (reducing its ambient True Faith by one) at the Storyteller's discretion.

Exorcism

Belief in the supernatural is integral to Islam, and a wide range of rituals and procedures exist for warding against evil spirits. Exorcism is the most common and follows the basic rules presented on page 240 of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, using an imam's Exorcism rating in a Charisma + Exorcism roll to repel (or drive out) the target. Exorcists with True Faith reduce the difficulty of the ritual by their Faith rating.

Prayer is central to the ritual, and the 113th Sunna, Daybreak, is the most commonly recited. It reads: "In the Name of Allah the Compassionate, Merciful I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak from the mischief of His creation; from the mischief of the Night when she spreads her darkness; from the mischief of conjuring witches; from the mischief of the envier, when he envies." Furthermore, herbs and sulfur are burned to discomfort the spirit. Rosewater may also be sprinkled on the target for similar reasons, and in extreme cases physical beatings also take place to drive out a possessing spirit (in which case Stamina + Exorcism replaces the usual exorcism roll). Unlike comparable Christian rituals, a book of exorcisms is not required, but the penalty for missing ingredients is more severe (+2 or +3). These rituals are particularly effective against believing targets (Ashirra or faithful *djinn*) who fear the wrath of Allah, reducing the difficulty of the roll by one. After a successful exorcism of a possessing spirit, it is common for a *ta'wiz* charm to be tied around the neck or arm of the victim to prevent repossession.

Relics and Holy Symbols

Like places, items can become imbued with the faith of their owners or otherwise derive power from their connection to Allah. Such talismans and charms often have a True Faith rating reflecting their history and use. If a person carries a talisman with a True Faith rating, the item temporarily adds its Faith to that of the character. Even characters without True Faith may thus gain a (temporary) Faith rating. Only one item may be used in this manner at any one time.

However, players of Cainites who wish to use such items must make a Willpower roll with a difficulty of 6 + the item's True Faith rating. Success indicates the character can carry the item freely, while a failure

indicates that handling the item makes the Cainite feel uncomfortable. A botch inflicts one level of lethal damage and forces the character to drop the item.

While most people see no harm in wearing charms and amulets, some regard them as a sign of unbelief and unwillingness to trust in Allah. Consequently, they refuse to utilize all such items save the Qur'an. The Storyteller may rule that especially devout characters cannot use such talismans.

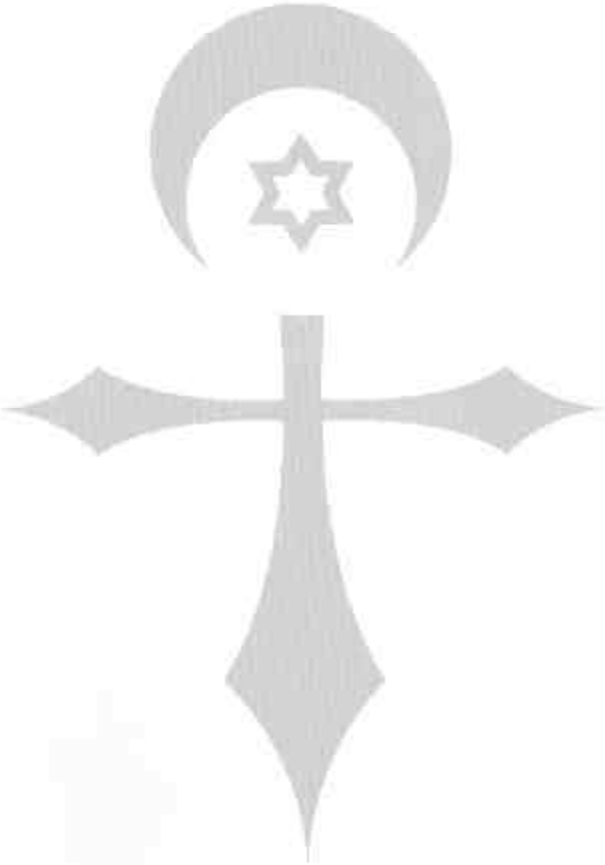
The most noteworthy Islamic holy symbols and items are the following:

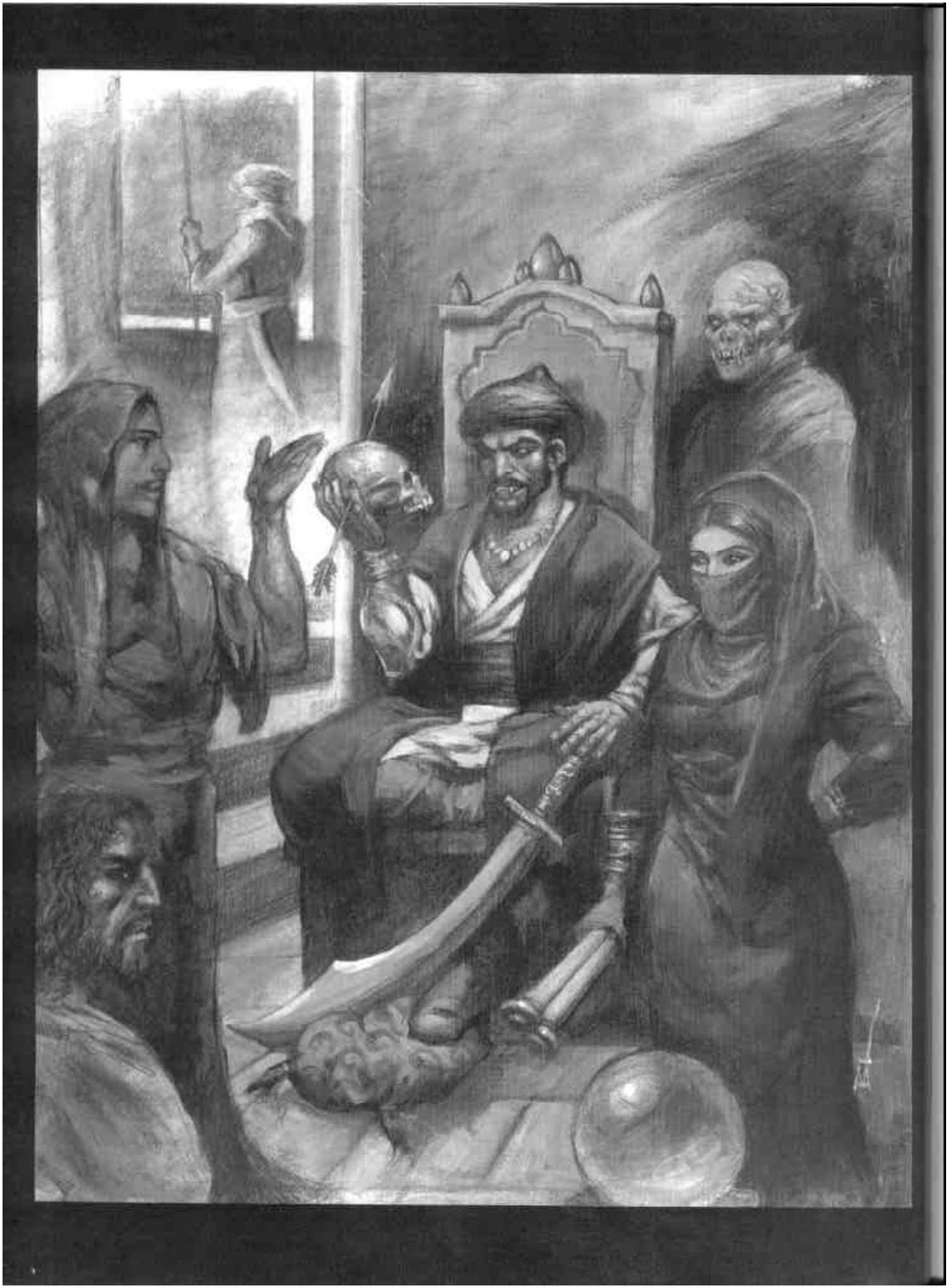
• **The Qur'an:** With Islam shunning idolatry and symbolism, the Qur'an is the main holy symbol used by Muslims. Most Qur'an have no innate True Faith value, but historically significant copies may have a value as high as three.

• ***Ta'wiz:*** These are amulets or charms, usually in gold or silver, worn on the neck, arm or waist and containing quotations for the Qur'an or Hadith. Worn to ward of evil spirits or as a healing charm, *ta'wiz* usually have a True Faith rating of zero or one, though those previously owned by very devout individuals may have a rating of two.

• ***Al-Buduh:*** These "mystic squares" contain a selection of numbers that add up to a propitious value and whose significance confers a wide range of healing and protective powers. *Al-buduh* have no innate True Faith value, though they may gain a rating of one depending on previous ownership. They are common in the east of the Muslim world, particularly among the Bay't Mujrim.

• ***Khoumsa:*** Also known as Fatima's hand, this five-fingered hand, usually made of silver, represents Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali and his sons. It commonly appears on the top of banners, on animal harnesses or over doors as a ward against disease or bad luck. Like *Al-buduh*, *khoumsa* have no innate True Faith, though they may acquire a low rating.







Chapter Six: Damascus by Night

It was in Damascus that I became a man. For the first few months I used to yearn for the freedom of Baalbek. Damascus was a city full of dangers. Not a day went by when we did not receive news of someone important or someone close to someone important being assassinated.

– Salah al-Din, speaking in Tariq Ali's novel, *The Book of Saladin*

Introduction

Fair Damascus, the darling of poets, merchants and scholars, called the Garden of the World, Queen of Cities and even *al-Fayha*, the Fragrant. She is Islam's fashioned diamond, a municipality nestled in the bosom of thick orchards and fertile fields, whose water is perfumed with the taste of rose and whose air is thick with the scent of jasmine. Standing upon the summit of adjoining Mount Qasiyun, one cannot help but wonder whether the lush green vista is Eden revisited. Unfortunately, for all her heavenly beauty, even Damascus has her serpents. Tension has gripped the city as Salah al-Din's brother al-Adil and his clumsy son al-Afdal struggle for succession. The local Ashirra feed off these rivalries, to the delight of the Baali who hide deep in the great city's shadows.

Hailed as the throne of all Islam by the Umayyads, Damascus relinquished her crown after the 'Abbasids moved the center of power to al-Khufa (and later Baghdad) in 750. For centuries, the city languished as a backwater principality until the Crusades brought the war of faiths to her doorstep. By the time Nur ed-Din established the Ayyubid Empire and returned her crown, she was blossoming once again. Damascus now sits in a historical state of suspension. Although still beloved and the third most popular site for Muslim pilgrims, she is contested by the current sultan al-Adil, and by his nephew, al-Afdal. This latest rivalry finds a long and mournful echo in the immortal struggles of the Ray'een al-Fen and Baali who make the Damascene night their domain.

Indeed, a constant power struggle erodes the pillars of Damascus. When the 'Abbasids wrestled the Islamic admiralty from the Garden of the World, they also unknowingly compelled the most politically influential Ashirra to leave for the new capital. They left behind aspiring Ray'een al-Fen eager to turn Damascus into a gem and a number of Baali more than willing to stoke the flames of ambition. When Cainites from Baghdad returned centuries later, they were unprepared for the venomous reception of the Damascene Ashirra. Damascus may be a bright apple to poets and scholars, but she is rotten and worm-ridden to the core.

In Allah's Garden

Damascus, set amid soft rolling hills and deep groves, is among the largest and richest of all Arab cities. Built in the fecund Ghuta Plain, she owes her legacy to the Barada River-fed canals that bring life to the surrounding orchards, and to the desert trade routes linking the Silk Road to the Mediterranean port cities of Aleppo and Antioch. Damascus is a crossroad of influences and knowledge thanks to her central location. The city existed well before Muhammad, Christ, the Romans and even the Greeks. Her proud inhabitants claims she is the most ancient of all existing communities, a title contended by both Jericho and Aleppo, but there is little doubt she is the region's most beautiful city.

Central to Damascus are the renowned Umayyad Mosque and the "Straight Street" that splits the city neatly in half. This avenue boasts the distinction of Biblical mention and draws merchants from across the Levant to sample from the bazaars and *suq* lining the covered arcades. Beyond this thoroughfare, however, the smaller streets curve and twist in Islamic fashion through the remainder of Damascus. Homes and buildings facing each other are so close that their overhanging roofs and balconies nearly touch. This creates a web of dark, cool tunnels and allows travelers to move safely about in the sheltered shadows in all times but noon. It is in these places that the Garden of the World wilts and decays.

The Kine of Damascus

As in many cities, the mortal population is a great and varied menagerie of professions and races. Damascus serves as the overland junction for caravans from the Far East splitting off to the port cities of Aleppo or Antioch. Christians and Jews, who constitute a fair segment of the population, go about their daily business as *dhimmi* or protected people. Scholars and pilgrims from the Fertile Crescent, Asia and even the Latin empires visit the numerous *madrasas* (schools) and their great libraries.

Despite this cornucopia of cultures and ideologies, the power in Damascus rests in an odd balance of three mortal factions. While each would love to emerge independent of the others, current law and accepted conventions prohibit any such actions. At the center of this sociopolitical storm rests one law that keeps this trinity fractured and allows Cainites great influence over the city. Islamic law prohibits hereditary transfer of homes, possessions and land titles. In essence, few men and women outside the nobility can bequeath their titular holdings to their children. It is the prerogative of the sultan to acquire and redistribute capital, status and estates to the households of *amirs* (warriors) and *a'yans* (the learned elite). The death of a familial patriarch sparks conflicts, politicking and negotiations among the other houses looking to somehow strengthen their position. In this cycle of ambition and opportunity, the Cainites of Damascus have become the city's

hidden patrons. By giving a vampire some control over a household's wealth and possessions, a father can hope that his patron will pass along an inheritance in the form of gifts to his children after dying. In turn, the family offers the Cainite a monthly tithe of blood or even a family member as an *ansar*.

The Sultan's Entourage: The Ruling Elite

Although there are no state agencies, bureaucratic offices or feudal aristocracies in Damascus, Sultan al-Adil, his household and those of the district bosses are richer than their Latin counterparts thanks to an abundance of greater natural resources — be they rich crops growing in the fertile Ghuta Plain or the tithes of Silk Road merchants. This allows them to employ the fierce "barbarian" horse-warriors of Kurdish and Turkish stock and continually refresh the local garrisons with new soldiers. Between this and the prohibitive inheritance laws, the sultan has ensured that the military elite rarely has enough dirhams (Damascene currency) to raise their own armies or usurp the ruling families.

Despite his broad and sweeping powers, the sultan is not the despot he could be. It is his right alone to plunder the estates of other households or to divide the holdings of a family upon the death of its patriarch. It is also the sultan's right to appoint servants to political positions such as market inspectors, judges, district bosses, and teachers in various schools or even accountants within the royal treasury. Unlike the ruling families of Europe, sultans and their households rarely alter the cityscape or streets for the sake of deifying themselves. Instead they build in open lots, establish charitable foundations and restore ancient buildings to better ingratiate themselves with the populace. They build for the sake of their citizens and not out of hubris. The sultans never claim any hint of divinity or righteous accord by virtue of their station.

Dirty Secrets

The existence of powerful and ancient Cainites in Damascus is something of an open secret among the most influential mortals of the city. Few people are aware of the exact nature of these patrons, but they know that many families rely on the aid of some connected and astonishingly well-preserved patrons. In most cases, the mortals try not to ask too many questions. Those who do inquire learn that their patron has fallen to a terrible curse or pledged never to see the sun until the *Franj* return all of the Holy Land, until the caliphate stands united again with Damascus as its capital, or some other condition. Others learn that their patrons are great *'alama*, religious scholars whose very righteousness has kept them young.

Not everyone accepts the situation blindly. Some sense the presence of some devilish evil in the Garden of the World, and they are all too right. The Ashuna and the Baali both look for mortals who might rock the boat. They are ruthless in enforcing their own version of the Silence of the Blood. In these days of crusades and dynastic woes, who will question one more disappearance?

Amirs: The Military Elite

Damascus has been under military patronage since the days of Nur ed-Din. Currently, the military elite falls into two categories, the *Wafadiyya* or Kurdish horse-warriors hailing from the nearby tribes, and the capable warrior-slaves serving as the palace guard. A third category exists in the local recruits, but they number only a few handfuls and are hardly a match for the seasoned riders of Turkish and Kurdish tribal stock. The regional lords employ the *amirs* and their armies through financial recompense, prizes or even arable land from which they can draw their salaries. Unfortunately, the gifts of territory are rarely inherited upon an *amir*'s death and fall to the scheming houses serving the sultan. Understandably, many *amirs* plot and scheme to endow their children with their possessions. One costly but certain technique is *waqf ahli*, when land or an estate has been appointed a household religious foundation. Because Islamic laws protect *waqfs* from seizure and permits for temporary possession through a single line of descent, many *amirs* and *a'yan* try to turn their properties into these institutions.

The *amirs*, especially the horse-warriors, are isolated from the population because they are "foreigners." Many are Turks or Kurds, meaning both their customs and language are alien to the Damascenes. It doesn't help either that the *amirs* often go against the Islamic laws that prohibit taxing to raise temporary revenues for their armies. It is not unheard of for these individuals to hold and torture members of wealthy families to coerce them into surrendering their prize estates and riches. Forcing loans and confiscating heirless estates are other (impious) methods of wealth acquisition.

Currently, the *amirs* are in a precarious position. Before Sultan Salah al-Din died, his son, al-Afdal demanded an oath of loyalty from the *amirs* when he came into power. Sultan al-Adil, however, has taken power for himself, and while he is better skilled at warfare and diplomacy than the foolhardy al-Afdal, he

doesn't have the complete loyalty of the local *amirs*. Damascus is thus contested territory, and while fighting is sporadic, Sultan al-Adil is slowly gaining the trust of al-Afdal's viziers and generals. This is a time when favors and promises are weighed in gold and alliances are formed around the eventual confrontation between the nephew and uncle.

A'yan: The Literary Elite

While the *a'yan* are often at the mercy of the *amirs* and sultan, they are easily the most powerful of the three groups. In a society devoid of state agencies and sharply defined bureaucratic offices, the *a'yan* are the city's mercenary secretaries, treasurers, judges, teachers and chroniclers. The ruling families need the *a'yan* to legitimize their administration over the people through the maintenance of records and the accounting of riches. The *a'yan* also act as intermediaries and translators between the foreign *amirs* and Damascenes. It is even of high fashion and good taste for a man of power to be seen learning at the feet of an *a'yan* scholar.

If Damascus is a book, then the *a'yan* are its spine. They legitimize both the *amirs* and sultan's entourage, they mediate disputes between the various factions and they carry out judicial and administrative tasks. The *a'yan* are the authors of history, the teachers of the young and chroniclers of knowledge — and they know it. The other factions are caught between wanting to decrease *a'yan* influence and relying on them in the bureaucratic void. Before 1154, the *a'yan* had even greater power and protected their estates through directed violence — using young military men to ensure their property remained in family hands. When Nur ad-Din arrived, he returned power to the military and absolved the *a'yan* practice of using protectors. Since that time, this cultured elite has watched its advantages dwindle. Now, however, with Salah al-Din five years dead and his brother and sons fighting for his territory, the *a'yan* have greater leeway than before.

Cainites

Damascus may be the Flower of the Levant, but she is a hotbed of politicking and scheming. This has served local Cainites well, for they are the city's unseen patrons. Prominent *a'yan* and *amirs* know of the vampires, if only as influential citizens who can curry favors for a price. Thus these "patrons" are more than willing to help a household protect its titles with the death of a patriarch, establish an estate as *waqf* (a religious domain) and help *a'yan* gain valued positions within the city. Privileged kine, however, know their patrons are long-lived and not quite human, and go about serving them as *ansars* (ghouls). After all, a family can keep its holdings as long as its patriarch remains alive. Cainites know this as well and use this to their advantage.

Damascus labors beneath three factions of Cainites trying to exert some measure of authority. The first and most ancient are the Baali, under the aegis of Annazir. They've existed in Damascus from before her years as a Greek outpost and hold a great deal of power thanks to their unholy organ pit, Iblii al-Akbar. Unlike their child-flaying brethren, however, the Baali of Damascus have learned the art of subtlety to better hide from their regional enemies, the Banu Haqim. Annazir is both the

Chain of Command

The Damascene chain of command is as follows. Ruling the Muslim world as the Prophet Muhammad's successor is Caliph al-Nasir in far-away Baghdad. While he guides the spiritual nature of Islam, he relies on Sultan al-Adil to oversee the maintenance of the region. From the sultan, the hierarchy splits into three offices: the Men of the Pen, the Men of the Sword and the Men of the Turban.

The Men of the Pen are the civilian administrators of the sultan's affairs, headed by the vizier or advisor of the entire group. His subordinates include the masters of the treasury, the scribes and the various secretaries who operate the civil portion of the sultan's rule in Damascus. The *a'yan* fill these positions (mostly through appointment), and they are the source of fierce competition and jockeying.

The Men of the Sword are the military forces (the *amirs*). Immediately below Sultan al-Adil himself is the vice-regent. Following him are the majordomo (below whom are household administrators such as chamberlains, pages and eunuchs in charge of the Harem), the guard officer, the commander-in-chief of the armies, the emir of weapons and the generals. While they wield military might, this lot is mostly illiterate and must rely on the *a'yan*. It is the rare *amir* who is well read.

The Men of the Turban are the religious and moral facet of the sultan's rule and are again prized positions for the *a'yan*. Topping the list are the highly coveted *qadi al-qudat madhab* or chief judges. These men are part religious lawyers and part philosophers. Below them are the market inspectors, prayer leaders, heads of monasteries, deputy judges and legal experts.

most powerful Cainite of Damascus as well as one of the more potent Baali.

The second faction in power is composed of the Ray'een al-Fen who made Damascus their home before Muhammad was even born. When Damascus lost her role as capital city of Islam, a young Ray'een al-Fen named Darshuf remained to guide this backwater principality. By the time Sultan Nur ad-Din returned the ruler's laurels back to the city, Darshuf and his kinsmen were firmly entrenched. The other *bay't* could only establish a presence with Ray'een al-Fen assent. Few realized that the Baali had corrupted Darshuf and his peers over the centuries.

The third group of some importance is a mixture of different *bay't* led by Darshuf's childe, Mannal, who is trying to rid the city of the Baali. This alliance of clans, however, is cracking because a Banu Haqim name Bistakh wants to completely eliminate the Ray'een al-Fen influence in the city, while Mannal is trying to preserve her clan's legitimacy.

History

Damascus holds a special meaning for many Cainites, for she is older than them and provides a constant in their memories. The earliest records to mention the city are tablets from the city of Ebla, dating nearly 2,000 years before Muhammad's arrival. She is far older, however. Legend claims Shem, Noah's grandson, founded the city following the Great Flood. Local legend claims that Mount Qasiyun was where Caine slew Abel. While most Cainites call these mortal legends so much fiction, many do see in Damascus an echo of the Second City.

By the time Roman Legions marched through the region in 64 BCE, Damascus was already a great trade city for various merchant caravans. Under Rome, she became capital of Syria and later a Christian enclave ruled by the Byzantines. Unfair treatment at the hands of Constantinople allowed Damascus to open her gates to the arrival of Muslim forces in 635 CE. While the Islamic movement was entirely religious under Muhammad, the subsequent caliphs created a juggernaut that needed a bureaucratic heart. Damascus proved central to the expanding empire and served her spiritual needs after Mecca. This didn't last. When the Umayyad dynasty fell to the 'Abbasids, Damascus lost her role as Islam's capital and settled into backwater obscurity for centuries.

Cainites of Damascus

A city so ancient as Damascus has had many nocturnal predators. Bay't Mushakis claimed authority under the Aramean Empire, followed by the Qabilat al-Khayal and Ventrue who believed the great Roman machine was their creation. Now, powerful Ashirra from the Ray'een al-Fen call the city theirs. None acknowledge the city's true masters, the Baali who have been a constant sore on Damascus' back.

The Baali were already entrenched in the Fertile Crescent when their great stronghold, Mashkan-Shapir, rested on the banks of the Tigris. When its most powerful infernalist, Nergal, fell to an alliance of other clans, the Baali scattered across Mesopotamia. Among them was Annazir, a young recruit who was responsible for establishing a center of worship in Damascus. Through some luck and much cunning, the young Baali survived the following centuries, tending to his malignant flock and watching kings fly swiftly past the halls of rule. Unlike many of his brethren, who proved too eager to unleash Hell's minions, Annazir possessed a disciplined patience and unique perspective concerning his malignant masters. Hell was inevitable, he believed, so why unleash it now? The Damascene Baali remained strong, but were quiet and subtle in their actions. Unlike Shaitan, who turned the waters of Crete blood red in an effort to awaken his diseased lords, Annazir entered the sleep of ages deep within his organ pit — which would come to be known as Iblii al-Akbar — and subsisted off centuries of steady sacrifice and slaughter.

Meanwhile, Damascus was a battlefield for members of Qabilat al-Khayal, Bay't Mujrim and the Byzantine line of Clan Ventrue, all of whom sought to control the various roads into the Far East. They fought over the Golden Road from Samarkand and the Royal Road to Constantinople, but the Desert Road — leading to Palmyra, Antioch and Tyre — was also a battlefield. The Banu Haqim kept tabs on that route, but members of Qabilat al-Khayal, Bay't Mujrim and the Ventrue established merchant houses in Damascus in the years following Roman rule, hoping to negotiate with the Banu Haqim for trade monopolies. The treaties were tenuous at best and often broke down over the course of weeks if not nights. Any Cainite willing to risk the frontier city of Damascus could earn a king's envy in riches if he survived the murderous treachery of the other *bay't*.

Everything changed with the arrival of Islam.



Allah w'al-Akbar

Few people heeded the religion that conquered Madina through peace and Mecca through war. When its Prophet died, even fewer expected the new faith to lurch forward like a tidal wave and sweep across the Levant, Africa and the Far East in a matter of decades. By this point, Damascus was a Christian city with Jewish enclaves. While the Ventrue, Mujrimin and members of Qabilat al-Khayal contested the region, a third faction was secretly at play. Ray'een al-Fen owing their lineage to the Methuselah Michael of Constantinople had grown tired of their stagnancy under the Byzantine shadow. For all the ancient's greatness, his favorite son was obviously Constantinople, and the more he withdrew from temporal concerns, the less interested he became with such outlying principalities as Damascus. The local Ray'een al-Fen, faced with an indifferent patriarch and warring *bay't*, took matters into their own hands. Rather than treating expanding Islam as a threat, they used their influence among the local Christian churches and monasteries.

Ray'een al-Fen efforts mirrored the mood of the mortal populace and met with support from Banu Haqim who'd become entranced with the religion of warriors willing to martyr themselves in the name of Allah. While mortal Damascus opened her gates to Islam's army, the Banu Haqim swept through the city and eliminated Constantinople's most ardent supporters, the Ventrue. In turn the Qabilat al-Khayal and Bay't Mujrim offered their services to the ruling family of Ray'een al-Fen under the control of young Darshuf, chief of the rebellious Cainites. Constantinople believed Darshuf a Banu Haqim puppet, but the truth was that the viziers and warriors of Haqim had little interest in overseeing the ministration of a mortal city. The Ray'een al-Fen were far more intrigued by Islam's blossoming and unique expressions of art and sciences, and sought to guide her physical development. The local members of Qabilat al-Khayal threw themselves into the bureaucratic force emerging in the new capital while the Mujrimin influenced the merchants and regional trade routes.

This arrangement proved short-lived, however, with the fall of the Umayyad to the 'Abbasids and the transfer of the capital to al-Khufa, then Baghdad. The move was relatively bloodless, but the city spiraled into neglect for the following four centuries. Most Ashirra left the Umayyad capital for greener pastures. The Qabilat al-Khayal chased after Islam's bureaucratic leviathan to retain its power, while Bay't Mujrim split into different chapters and spread across the trade

routes to consolidate its holdings. Only the Ray'een al-Fen remained in Damascus in significant numbers. This was their city, one they had fashioned into a desert jewel. They weren't willing to abandon it so easily.

Hidden Evils

It was also at this time that Annazir awoke from torpor. He did not do so willingly, but at the behest of five of his clanmates who needed the subtle powers of the Iblis al-Akbar organ pit. Charged with the new faith of Islam, the Banu Haqim had struck blow after blow against Baali strongholds in Iraq, Aleppo and Tyre. In response, the five strongest of the *bay't* joined Annazir and enacted a ritual that cursed the Banu Haqim with a terrible blood thirst that is still spreading through the clan. The Baali were subtle enough to use the organ pit as a ritual implement but start the curse elsewhere — they planted the seeds in a powerful Banu Haqim warrior trapped in the lost city of Chorazin. The Banu Haqim uncovered him and never traced the rite to its Damascene origins; this is one of the reasons the powerful sorcerers of Alamut have thus far been unable to stop the spread of a powerful hunger for Cainite blood among the warrior caste. "As you thirst for our blood" the Baali have cursed the warriors of Alamut, "so you shall hunger for all blood for all time." (For details of the blood hunger see the Flaw on page 159. Details of the events surrounding it also appear in **Clanbook: Baali** and **Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door**.)

Backwater Damascus

Darshuf and his fellows claimed Damascus was the flower of the desert thanks to their patronage of artists and scholars. In truth, however, Muslims of the 'Abbasid Empire considered her a backwater principality. She was far from any contested borders (and thus unappealing) and lacked Baghdad's importance. While political sharks among the Ashirra and the far more ancient vampires of Persia played their power games in the new capital, the Ray'een al-Fen perfected Damascus for her return to glory. They played host to coteries of scholars from the Qabilat al-Mawt and Walid Set, looking to learn from the flourishing schools, but rarely played the games of political intrigue one would expect from the courts of the sultan.

With Banu Haqim attention diverted from Damascus, the shrewd Baali crept out from beneath the city's foundations and courted the bored Ray'een al-Fen. Initially, Darshuf and his brethren did not grasp Annazir's nature (who had awoken three centuries prior) or that of his childer. The Ray'een al-Fen believed them fellow patrons of architecture and science who shared in Damascus' growth. When Darshuf finally realized who Annazir was it was too late. The Baali pursued the perfect game by underplaying their reputations. Most Ashirra expected these infernalists to be salivating, child-sacrificing horrors who looked the part of the demons they worshipped. Instead Darshuf encountered a flock of vampires as knowledgeable and cultured as any Ray'een al-Fen. Annazir took as much joy in supporting the endowment of public monuments and the opening of schools as Darshuf had.

The Ray'een al-Fen were in dire straits. They had welcomed the Baali unknowingly, and some had fallen for their beguiling words. Darshuf and his kin were corrupted by "possibility," the greatest of Baali devices to recruit stray Cainites, and Annazir was well protected by their need to keep his existence secret. Though Darshuf was succumbing to corruption, he recognized his descent. While he could not save himself, he and his peers isolated their childer from the corruptive Baali. Darshuf kept his progeny, Mannal, safe within his palace and told her little of the actual evil residing in the heart of Damascus. Annazir, in turn, never pressed the complete corruption of the Ray'een al-Fen, for he needed a respectable façade for his *bay't*. With just the possibility of impropriety, the Ray'een al-Fen willingly hid Annazir's presence and would protect him if necessary from the vigilant Banu Haqim and al-Amin.

Dawn of the Franks

The First Crusade was a violent awakening for the Muslim world, especially Damascus. Now a part of the Turkish Seljuq Empire, Damascus went from a backwater to a frontline city facing the battlements of the Levant's newly established Latin Kingdoms. Refugees pouring into Aleppo and Damascus told of great slaughter at the hands of crusaders. Worse yet, many were Christian Arabs who'd suffered because the Franks indiscriminately murdered everyone. The Ray'een al-Fen worried that this signaled an end to their isolation and relative autonomy, but fortunately, Baghdad was in no position to enforce centralized rule. The so-called capital of Islam had already changed hands over five times to factional strife, and the Syrian cities wanted their autonomy from the caliph. This proved a godsend for the Latin forces who benefited greatly from the infighting. Damascus and Aleppo united with the Frankish forces of Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli after Baghdad sent an army to quell the fractured emirates of Syria.

With increased attention focused on Damascus, Annazir and his Baali kinsmen vanished into the bowels of the city. Their timing was fortuitous, for the mortal Ismaili assassins had grown tired of the sultanate

ruling Syria and set about a campaign of murder. Where the mortal assassins went, Banu Haqim attention followed. This time Darshuf did not contend with the warriors of the clan, but rather its sect of viziers and sorcerers who saw Damascus reemerging in importance and decided to reside within the city. Darshuf and the other Ray'een al-Fen were ousted from power in a quiet coup, but they would not go silently. Darshuf turned to the Baali for help.

The New Dawn of Damascus

Matters in the mortal world were drawing to dangerous conclusions. Damascus, now under the rule of Unur — a long-standing ally of the *Franj* — found the Second Crusade at his doorstep in 1148. This shattered any previous truce the two sides shared. Nur ad-Din rushed to the aid of Damascus and helped drive the *Franj* away, then turned around and used propaganda to besiege the city. By 1154, with the help of Damascene supporters who saw him as a savior, Nur ad-Din strode through the open city gates and claimed the city as his own. Twenty years later, Salah al-Din succeeded him and founded the Ayyubid Empire, with Damascus as its capital. From there, the great sultan rode against the Franj, retaking Jerusalem and pushing them to the coast.

On the Ashirra side of things, Annazir used the Banu Haqim thirst for knowledge against their viziers and sorcerers. The Baali slipped tantalizing texts of arcane erudition into their enemy's research material and played to their interests. The viziers and sorcerers invariably corrupted themselves. Finally, when Nur ad-Din surrounded the city following the Second Crusade, Darshuf sent a note demanding help from the Banu Haqim accompanying the Saracen army. Darshuf implicated their local clanmates in infernal trysts, an accusation supported by the material in their libraries. The warriors of Alamut, disgraced by the actions of their clanmates, destroyed the tainted viziers and sorcerers, recalled those found innocent of infernal concourse and returned Damascus to Ray'een al-Fen rule in exchange for silence. Unfortunately, not all Banu Haqim believed Darshuf innocent of wrongdoings. A warrior by the name of Bistakh was forced to watch her sire's destruction over accusations of infernalism. Ever since, she has vowed to destroy the Damascene Ray'een al-Fen.

Salah al-Din's Death and Current Concerns

When Salah al-Din died in 1193, his empire shattered like glass, leaving his sons, including al-Afdal, and his shrewd brother, al-Adil, to fight over Damascus. Currently, al-Adil rules the city, but a siege is coming soon. Meanwhile, Darshuf has steadily degenerated, marking the feasts of Ramadan in bloody orgies and keeping Annazir close by as vizier. To outsiders, Damascus was a ripe and beautiful plum, but to those living within the city, the decadence became horribly evident. Mannal, childe to Darshuf, has seen the growing debauchery of her sire, but instead of accusing him, she blames Annazir. Several of Mannal's Ray'een al-Fen peers, the childer of the other elders, have slowly vanished or fallen to their progenitor's debauchery. Unable to stand by and watch Damascus rot from within, Mannal has formed a temporary alliance with a group of local Mujrim merchants known as Bashirites. The Bashirites, in turn, act as intermediaries between Mannal and Bistakh, bringing the Banu Haqim back into the city.

Darshuf has fallen too far to ever recover. His one saving grace was protecting Mannal from Annazir, and that still holds true. His love and desire to protect her could see him willingly submit to destruction if it means saving her from Banu Haqim retribution. Annazir, in turn, has finally allowed hubris to get the better of him. He's too visible to outsiders and openly relishes his own corruption. The other Baali, knowing Annazir compromises himself, will readily sacrifice him if it will keep

The Damascene Destiny

The mortal and political landscape of Damascus is set to shift several times in the coming years. In 1201, al-Afdal besieges the city for six months but his uncle, Sultan al-Adil, finally defeats him. Al-Adil then briefly reintegrates the Ayyubid sultanate of Salah al-Din. Then, in 1250, the Mamluks rise in Egypt and forge their own dynasty. While they hold Damascus, the city's star begins to fade. It suffers under repeated Mongol raids throughout the 13th century.

The vampiric destiny of the city is far less assured. Darshuf is ready for a fall, most likely during the chaos of al-Afdal's siege. But Annazir is a subtle devil. Unless he is stopped, he is likely to simply abandon his pawns and return to the underground shelter of his organ pit. The pit itself remains hidden into the Ottoman Era, when the Banu Haqim finally uncover it and burn it out. The blood curse remains, however, having become a part of the blood of Haqim.

Or perhaps another organ pit rests elsewhere.



the organ pit hidden and protected. Mannal, seeing her sire falling into debauchery, believes this is a recent turn of events as brought on by Annazir. She isn't aware that this relationship is four centuries in the making. She hopes she can still save her sire and works to protect him while uncovering the extent of Damascus' corruption. She hopes to sway Bistakh's purge away from Darshuf by offering the vengeful Banu Haqim a dozen other targets to hunt. Unfortunately, revenge blinds Bistakh. Although she represents the elders of Alamut in this matter, she longs for the downfall of the Ray'een al-Fen, including Mannal.

Geography

Damascus is a fortress-city anchored in a sea of green, red and yellow orchards that dapple the fertile Ghuta Plain. To the north of her battlement lies the Barada River and the many canals that sate the orchards' thirst. Small stone and wood bridges span the Barada and her waterways, lending the city a tranquil air. To the northwest of Damascus lie Mt. Qasiyun and the community of Salihiye, where the rich build their estates and palaces.

Despite all the natural splendor that surrounds it, Damascus is the true jewel of the region. Crafted by artisans and history together, she is a mesh of Roman, Christian, Jewish and Muslim styles. Onion-bulb domes and minarets dominate the skyline, but her true charm rests in the merchant *suq* where a dozen languages are spoken. Arabic, Kurdish, Latin, Persian, Aramaic, Turkish, Indian and Hebrew are the tongues of the Damascene and traders alike. Despite her importance, Damascus (as measured by the limits of her walls) is only 4,400 feet long and 2,450 feet wide. Outside the Straight Street that splits the city in two, however, the remainder of Damascus is a nest of small, labyrinthine streets and intimately close buildings.

Even with this dense accumulation of humanity, it is a wonder that Damascus plays host to a fair number of Cainites. Local vampires have established themselves as patrons of the city, often taking blood as payment from their lessers. Damascus possesses a huge transient population of traders, slaves, soldiers and pilgrims. The religious holiday of Ramadan alone brings in caravans spanning seven hundred camels apiece. There is a steady flow of fresh and healthy mortals passing through the gates each week, and the moderate Syrian clime ensures a surfeit of travelers year round. When feeding in Damascus becomes dangerous to the mortal populace, however, Cainites may venture into the Salihiye district or the nearby farming communi-

ties to slake their thirst. Others simply buy more slaves from the brisk trade in the region.

Outside Damascus

Beyond Damascus' walls is the orchard moat of the Ghuta Plains and the web of canals. Further to the north, past Salihiye and Mt. Qasiyun are the Christian villages of Ma'alula and Seidnaya, as well as Yabrud and Menin where Roman and Greek ruins litter the landscape. Occasionally, Darshuf and some of the elder Damascene Cainites who can remember the far-flung rule of Rome or Constantinople come here to reflect or borrow inspiration from the fleeting past.

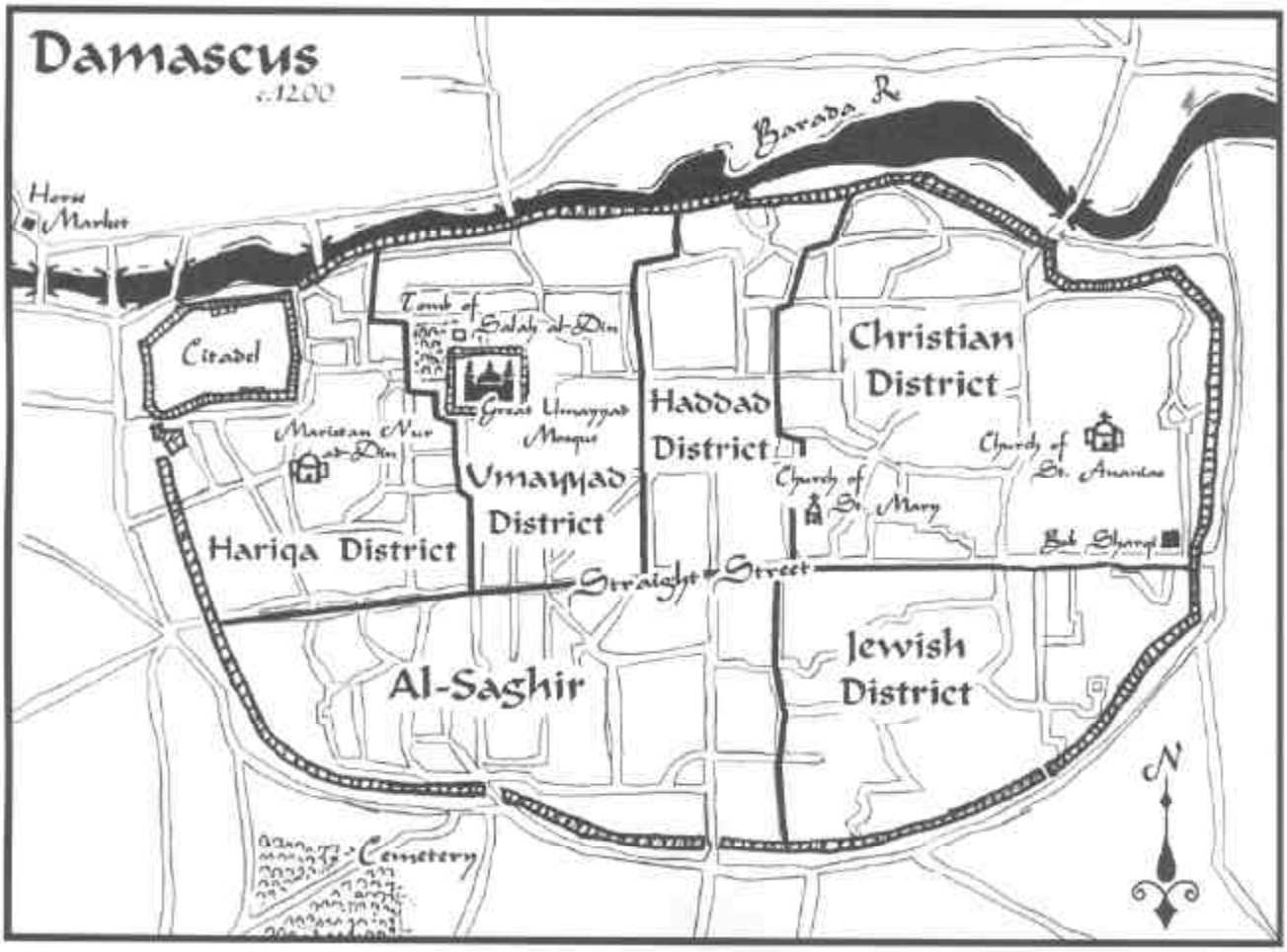
Salihiye

Slumbering against the slope of Mt. Qasiyun, just over three miles northwest of Damascus, is the predominantly Kurdish-Palestinian district of Salihiye. Salihiye came into being in 1156 when an orthodox Muslim named ibn Qudama led 130 families here from Frankish Nablus. They were fleeing the ruler Baldwin of Mirabel, who not only quadrupled taxes but schemed to execute ibn Qudama. Although the district is still young, it is on the cusp exploding into a religious quarter with its *madrasas* (schools) and mosques. Currently, Salihiye is small and comprised of narrow parallel streets. The rich of Damascus come here in the summer to occupy one of many palatial estates and escape the heat.

Cainites visit Salihiye, and it has recently become a haven for the Banu Haqim delegation. The region also sees the occasional band of Kurdish Wah'Sheen drift through the area. Salihiye is mostly free of scrutiny because the resident Kurds serve within the local army and are fiercely loyal to Islam. The most affluent inhabitants are *amirs* and some of the sultan's family. Given the current strife between al-Adil and al-Afdal, however, few members of the ruling household are willing to make themselves such tempting targets. Additionally, regular Damascene citizens are uncomfortable around tribal Kurds and unfamiliar with their language. As such, they stay well enough away.

The Orchards of the Ghuta Plains

The orchards surrounding Damascus serve as muse for many a visiting poet and are celebrated in tales worldwide. It was not until the Second Crusade marched



Madrasas

Madrasas, or law schools, are a common sight across Damascus, and they're growing in number with over 15 in existence currently. Built on the private property of the rich and elite, these establishments are institutions of learning, but their importance goes well beyond such simple descriptions. *Madrasas* exist through private charity, usually from the patronage of an *amir*, *a'yan* or through the help of Ray'een al-Fen like Darshuf. In return, a *madrasa* offers the patron family some influence within the city, whether politically, religiously or socially. Secondly, these institutions attract scholars and learned men, tying them into partial service with the family or *amir* who sponsors the school. Thirdly, by having a *madrasa* proclaimed a *waqf* or religious foundation, the patron family retains some control over the property even after the passing of the household patriarch. Even more so, death, burial and the afterlife are so important to the Damascenes that they use chambers within their own *madrasas* as tombs for themselves and their family. It isn't uncommon for a *madrasa* patron to set his crypt in a room whose windows face the main street.

Madrasas are an important element of Damascus, and a key method by which the Ray'een al-Fen and other *hay't* are involved in the city's political and social facets. As patrons, these Cainites sponsor families and households who are not rich enough to start their own *madrasa*, or they can turn a preexisting school into a *waqf*. To complete the latter, the *madrasa* often relies on some religious relic or icon (the original camel's shoulder bones upon which the Qur'an was inscribed or the sandal of a caliph, for example) to justify its existence as a religious foundation. This is often the sole method of saving private property for the sake of inheritance, and many families are willing to follow the wishes of their dangerous patrons for the sake of the children.

Madrasas follow a simple layout using black basalt, white limestone and marble (when the family can afford such luxuries). The main gate, a huge work of craftsmanship, opens into the central courtyard where four portals or *iwans* access the prayer rooms and classrooms. The students' rooms are tiny cells all situated on the first floor, while the second floor houses classrooms, chambers for scholars and teachers, and the home of the residing family.

straight for the Syrian capital that the Franks also discovered they provide a very potent defense. The orchards rest on the Ghuta Plain, which spreads out from Damascus like a skirt for three miles around. No less than ten roads arrive at the city's seven gates, while the Barada River and her canals cut further paths through the groves. Tall mud walls divide the orchard fields according to ownership, while the trees are bunched close together, restricting large-scale movement through them. These simple but effective battlements create a maze of tight corridors, essentially strangling and herding movement through the area. Rising above the orchards and their enclosures are defense towers, each a small fortress.

When the Latin army moved on Damascus, it pressed through these narrow corridors. Franks perished at the hands of archers firing arrow volleys from the towers.

Today, the orchards remain effective battlements, but the maze of trees and narrow alleys are enjoyed by anyone who wishes to stroll through a spring day and sup in the rare open green space. Occasionally, one encounters the odd building or school set among the lush oases. Just northwest of the Damascus citadel lies a horse market that sells the finest steeds. To the south of Bab al-Saghir rests the al-Saghir Cemetery, an important facet of local life. Damascenes maintain close relations with the dead and the afterlife, and have little fear of it. The cemetery is therefore well maintained and receives frequent visitors. At night, however, few travel the normally romantic environs of the Ghuta Plains alone. Cainites plan their clandestine meetings here, far from the crowded city, and some speculate that a Latin Cainite exiled from Jerusalem has made his haven deep within the orchard maze. Bards speak of an abandoned home within the bosom of the Ghuta Plains, covered by a wild and overrun grove and hidden behind a maze of walls so labyrinthine as to confound the Minotaur itself.

Damascus Proper

With such an illustrious history, evidence of Roman, Christian and Islamic influences abound in Damascus. Rome's legacy remains in the fallen and scattered columns and arches that silently emerge between houses or over alleys. Islam's touch is predominant in the skyline and along the *suq* of the Straight Street. Christians, surprisingly, are present in large numbers as well, but their influences show mostly in the northeast district of the city where the odd church or stylized cross lies. Across the Straight Street, in the southeast district, lies the Jewish quarter, which is far

more understated in the celebration of its faith. These three boroughs are cities in and of themselves, with century-old battlements separating them from other areas. Although their street gates remain open in the day, they are closed at night. This does little to integrate the communities.

Damascus alternates between stifling, claustrophobic streets to high vaulted arcades sheltered from the sun. The avenues are narrow and so tightly packed together that the overhang of roof edges nearly touch. Additionally, most buildings are two stories high (in summer, the families live on the second floor, but in winter they move down to the first). If a sure-footed Cainite or thief wished, she could traverse most of Damascus without ever setting her feet to the ground. In fact, it is the swiftest, if not the most obvious, route across the city. Many vampires prefer stalking the maze of tunneled streets and alleys instead, where it's easier to snatch prey. In Damascus, few homes or buildings have windows to the street. Most face into quiet courtyards. This is part of the city's greater charm. One can walk through dark and rank streets, turn, and suddenly stumble upon a small oasis of citrus trees, balconies, fresh-water fountains, *iwan* portals or a sheltered spot for entertaining guests. At night, these are the communal gathering points for the residents of adjoining buildings. They sit beneath the open sky, sharing a drink of strong coffee and a few stories.

Damascus is a Cainite's dream, for even the threat of sunlight is a toothless dog. The tight and narrow alleys provide an overhang that shields the streets below, protecting vampires from direct sunlight. Only the hours flanking noon present any real danger (assuming a Cainite can stay awake for that long). In other places, *suq* and bazaars rest at the feet of great columns supporting high vaulted ceilings of stone or thatched roofs. One could exist within the shadows of Damascus and never pine for open skies.

Faith Ratings

Once the capital of the caliphate and a city holy to Christians and Muslims alike, Damascus has many sites that qualify as holy ground. The work of the Baali has undermined many of the minor sites, but several important places keep them in check. The following are the key sites:

Site	Faith	Rating
Chapel of St. Ananias	Christian	4
Church of St. Mary	Christian	5
Great Umayyad Mosque	Muslim	7
Maristan Nur ad-Din Mosque	Muslim	6

The Straight Street

Greece's contribution to Damascus lies hidden beneath a Roman veneer, save for the Straight Street. This survivor of Hellenistic engineering follows a classic grid pattern that divides the blocks into rectangles measuring 150 by 300 feet. Subsequent building practices ignored this design, however, and numerous streets were either added or lost along the way. Still, the Straight Street remains somewhat true to its name. It is Damascus' widest thoroughfare and central artery, with a torpid river of traders, travelers and merchants moving up and down its length.

The Straight Street is a constant clash of noise and color. Hawkers shout above the din of traffic, trying to attract buyers to their wares, customers haggle over fabrics for better prices, slavers sell their latest stock of captives or child-brides, animals bleat their complaints while a hundred feet slap the stone roads simultaneously. Damascus is alive with tastes and sounds, and the Straight Street collects it all like runoff to the river. Near the Bab Sharqi (or East Gate), where the Jewish and Christians districts face one another, the Straight Street is a narrow ten to twenty feet across, covered with pointed arches and thatched roofs. West of the Jewish and Christian walls, the thoroughfare expands to accommodate greater traffic and becomes distinctly Muslim. Shops and nomadic merchants sell their wares beneath the sheltered arcades hanging over adjoining buildings. In the span of a few feet, a traveler can go from vendors for cookware and textiles to a coffee shop or slaver's pen. Along the way, the occasional Roman column stands broken and nearly hidden behind a large tree or just beneath an arcade, serving as a makeshift chair for a peddler. Beyond the sheltered arcades are doors for small and claustrophobic shops and businesses.

At night, the indoor shops are closed, but the arcades are still lively for a time. Most crowds gather around the coffee shops to discuss the business or news of the day. Arabs love to conjecture and hypothesize on the state of things and can often be found in friendly arguments concerning interpretation of law or belief. Cainites who wish to learn more about the city would do well to sit in on these conversations. The men of the arcade, whether wise or not, are well informed.

The Gates

Both Damascus' gates and walls bear some mention because of their history. Having faced countless invasions over the centuries, these fortifications have been built and rebuilt into their current mongrel state. The battlements are a smattering of different cultures, with

intact Roman segments giving way to Byzantine, Umayyad and Ayyubid engineering savvy. The seven city gates are also small lessons in history lost, with most undergoing renovations. The only one to have survived from Roman times is the Bab Sharqi, a triple gate with the middle and largest portal for wheeled traffic. Otherwise, pedestrians use the two adjoining side doors.

The Citadel

This large rectangular structure is built as part of the city's walls, and measures some 490 by 720 feet with a total of 12 towers. Four towers rest along the southern battlements, with the remainder placed at regular intervals on the structure's perimeter. The citadel is well defended with thick masonry and machicolated fortifications along the towers and parapets; it has also seen numerous renovations since its years as a Roman praetorium. Even now, it is undergoing heavier refortification given the rumblings of another Crusade stirring in the Latin dragon.

The citadel is the military heart of Damascus with its garrison of soldier-slaves and army offices, and it serves as the royal apartments of the sultanate. It is the best-defended portion of Damascus, and a recent haven for the Cainite Sultan Darshuf. Like many Ray'een al-Fen, Darshuf initially made his home in a local *madrasa*. Given recent events, however, Darshuf has indulged in paranoia and sequestered himself in the citadel. He appears occasionally to head court meetings, but he expresses most of his wishes through his vizier Barqat (who is also a lackey for Annazir).

Hariqa District

In the southern shadows of the citadel lies the Hariqa district, an open and primarily Muslim section of Damascus that runs down to the Straight Street and east to the border street of the Umayyad Mosque. The Hariqa district still bears the original grid pattern that the Greeks laid out centuries ago and is the only portion of Damascus whose avenues neither snake nor twist. Here, Hamidiye *suq* runs parallel to the citadel's southern walls. This bazaar sells a variety of wares, from Damascene steel swords to home essentials, and rests beneath a thatched roof. Thick Islamic columns and a high arching canopy cast deep pockets of darkness across the ceiling or flood the ground with swaths of shadows. Even oil lamps are hard-pressed to drive away the penumbra. At night, it isn't uncommon for a Banu Haqim, Mutasharid or Mujrim to hide among the ceiling's rafters and watch the proceedings below them.

On the eastern border of the district lies the Maristan Nur ad-Din, a school and hospital of some repute built using a cruciform design with high vaulted ceilings in the four halls. Both the large northern and western halls are for treating patients; the eastern one, set across the main entrance is used for consulting or as a classroom for students of medicine. The southern hall holds a mosque. Nur ad-Din himself founded the Maristan in 1154 from ransom money provided by the crusaders for the return of their soldiers. Since then, it has continually undergone renovations to expand its capacity and function. With its large courtyard providing a cool shelter from the desert sky, and the compassionate practice of medicine, it is better equipped and more proficient than any European chirurgeon house.

The Hariqa district, the citadel and the area around Umayyad Mosque remain firmly under the patronage of the Ray'een al-Fen and Qabilat al-Khayal, both claiming links to the Ashirra, since most of Damascus' Islamic landmarks including Salah al-Din's Tomb are situated in this quarter of the city. While this doesn't prevent other *hay't* from visiting and enjoying the district's *suq* and homes, the Ray'een al-Fen and Qabilat al-Khayal consider it bad form and an insult for anyone outside their clans to "sponsor" (ghoul) a resident of this area.

Although not officially a part of Hariqa, the Ray'een al-Fen also offer patronage to the *suq* and shops lining the street parallel to the southern wall of the Umayyad Mosque. This partially sheltered arcade houses some of Damascus' finest wood craftsmen. Their work can be seen across the city —at various madrasas, mosques and homes — and their services are in great demand. Running south from the mosque, down to the Straight Street is also the Suq al-Bzouriah, which specializes in grains, spices and confectioneries, while an adjacent street holds the Perfume Suq and the relatively mundane tomb of Nur ad-Din. Closer to the intersection of the Straight Street lies another of Damascus' common sites, a *hamam* (the Nur ad-Din *Hamam* in this case) or bathhouse. These white façade structures offer hot baths and steam rooms for their clientele. At night, they remain open for the city's Cainite patrons who often arrive here after rising and spend the evening discussing business or politicking.

Umayyad and the Haddad District

The Umayyad Mosque is *the* landmark of Damascus. Its size dwarfs all buildings save the citadel, and it is the first great mosque of Islam. In addition, the actual site predates Islam by centuries, if not a millennium. In the time of ancient Damascus, it was a giant temple for the god Haddad, later for Jupiter-Haddad. In those early years, the temple compound was signifi-

cantly larger and stretched 375 feet further east and 160 feet further west than its current enclosure. During its pagan days, it was also under the influence of the Baali. In the fourth century, however, a group of Christians drove the Baali out (supposedly with the help of al-Amin devil-slayers) and built the smaller Church of St. John the Baptist. Eventually, in the eighth century, the Muslims negotiated for the location and offered the Christians four permanent sites where they could build or maintain their churches. Since that time, it has remained a mosque.

The Umayyad was the first mosque to feature minarets, a *mithrab* (or prayer alcove facing Mecca) and an ablution fountain, and thus served as inspiration for future structures. The outside walls run 1,000 by 1,250 feet, with a tower at each corner, an interior covered by plush and rich carpeting, and a courtyard decorated with the largest mosaic in the world. Because the Umayyad was constructed at a time when Arab builders still lacked proper engineering techniques, they relied on Byzantine architecture and reused Roman Doric columns to support the courtyard arcade and the high vaulted interior. With its forest of columns and arches, and its impressive dome set on the building itself (which dominates the southern half of the mosque), the Umayyad Mosque has a grandeur that would shame many a cathedral.

The Haddad district stretches another 400 feet east towards the Christian quarter. What the Baali lost in influence over the mosque itself, they certainly retained in this area. When the Romans first arrived and married the worship of the god Haddad with that of Jupiter, they rebuilt the temple and included a series of underground chambers that once ran under the entire complex. After the Christians erected the Church of St. John the Baptist, they unknowingly destroyed the tunnels and chambers immediately beneath it. Those under the rest of the temple survived, however, and were expanded upon by the Baali to include most of Haddad. Thanks to the infernalists and their influence over the Ray'een al-Fen, Haddad is their domain, both aboveground and below.

Above ground, the neighborhood is nothing more than a maze of cramped back streets, sometimes no wider than a man. This is a poor district, with the Damascenes living in abject squalor, thieves plying a meager trade in the darkest alley-tunnels and hashish dens profiting from misery. Even when these lanes open into small courtyards, neglect has obviously laid claim to everything. The fountains are stagnant with green and fetid water while creeper vines cover building façades, arcades and *iwans* like curtains. Strangers to Haddad are watched suspiciously, and leprosy blights many people. When the authorities come to take these poor souls to Maristan Nur ad-Din, however, they vanish quickly and quietly into the confounding maze. Many of the miserable are the minions of the Baali, however, and trade away pain for a taste of blood.

Beneath Haddad lie the crumbling remnants of the Roman chambers and Baali tunnel extensions. While

Iblii al-Akbar

Far underground, in ancient chambers that once housed the blighted temple of Baal-Haddad's perverted worship, lies the Iblii al-Akbar. Amid the fallen columns and hundreds of scattered skulls is a pit formed from a dry well a hundred feet deep. Thanks to centuries of sacrifice, the Baali have filled the pit to the brim with innards and vital organs. Iblii al-Akbar is among the longest surviving organ pits, a place of birth, death and ritual for the Baali. The inherent magic of this malignant temple is enough to preserve the entrails placed there centuries ago. The Baali also throw their newly Embraced into the well to see if they have enough strength to crawl back up to the top.

Centuries ago, the pit was capable of powering great acts of foul sorcery, such as the outbreak of apocalyptic plagues. After Annazir and his fellow elders had used the pit to curse the Banu Haqim, however, they knew stealth would be their greatest weapon. If the Banu Haqim or al-Amin ever discovered that the pit was central to the curse, they might be able to stop it. Once they had completed their great ritual, they drew the power to hide from the pit. That has remained its greatest use since then. Those who sleep in the pit gain a measure of invisibility from the devil-slayers hunting them.

In game terms, any Baali who spends the day sleeping within Iblii al-Akbar gains limited immunity to gifts such as Soulsight. Anyone attempting to use Disciplines or the arcane to question a Baali must succeed by two additional successes to gather the pertinent information. Annazir, who has slept the Sleep of Ages deep within the pit, retains this bonus permanently.

It is theoretically possible to channel the pit's powers to other, more direct, sorceries like spawning great plagues or waking one of the sleeping Children (should one of those ancient demons be discovered), but that would announce its presence and lead to an attack from Alamut.



they are nothing compared to the passages beneath Constantinople or Paris, they have escaped notice and are complex enough to hide the Iblii al-Akbar and three minor pits. Additionally, wards, familiar servitors and ghouled dogs all serve to keep the Baali havens and organ pits protected and undisturbed. This mock underworld is an abattoir with centuries' worth of rape, murder, and torture victims. While the organ pits hold the internal viscera of these unfortunate Damascenes, the chambers themselves are covered and littered with a flood of skulls and bones. All entrances and exits are in the cellars of buildings in Haddad and nearly impossible to find. At least one entrance is in a hashish den situated in the basement of a trader and thief known as al-Habib. The remainder are scattered about the district.

The Christian District

Christians, an important segment of Damascus, occupy a sizable nest of winding streets and alleys in the northeast quarter of the city. While as equally labyrinthine as Haddad, the Christian district is less rundown and sinister. Certainly, the area isn't as affluent as Hariqa, for both Jews and Christians are taxed for their right to worship. Save for the limitations placed on them as *dhimmi* (see page 151), Christians live much like Muslims. They trade, sell and work along the Straight Street and gather in the evenings in their courtyards, discussing the events of the day.

The Christian district is a close-knit community that must often contend with thieves from Haddad climbing their walls and stalking their streets. Truthfully, despite the promise of protection from the sultanate and district's battlements, the Christians know they are an island far flung from their brethren, and that their existence is owed to charity, not tolerance. The Crusades are a trying time, for whenever the *Franj* attack the borders of Islam, the Damascene Christians are the first to suffer through the persecutions.

The Christian district's battlements run along the Straight Street in the south, while the Roman Arch and the Church of St. Mary dictate its western limits. The Roman Arch was once an important landmark that distinguished Damascus' two major intersections. While the Straight Street remains, the second avenue that ran north to south has since vanished beneath newer walls, alleys and buildings. The Church of St. Mary is a Byzantine basilica surmounted by a glittering dome. This is the central church of the region and is protected by the truce that saw the Umayyad Mosque built. It is hallowed ground and helps hem in the Baali, whether the local residents (mortal and vampiric) know it or not.

At the opposite corner of the Christian quarter, near the eastern wall, is the Chapel of St. Ananias, who gave shelter to St. Paul the Apostle after he was blinded from his conversion. From the exterior, it appears a simple courtyard with a fountain and encompassing arcade. In the rear, however, are stairs hewn into stone that lead down into the underground chapel. The structure was once Ananias' house but has since become a chapel for the faithful.

Like the Haddad district, this area is a maze of streets and back alleys, but it is far safer than its western neighbor is. The Bashirite Mujrimin, fervent Christians, make their havens here and protect their territory fiercely. This apocalyptic sect of vampires has long been part of Damascus' shadow and is heavily involved with the trade families. The Ray'een al-Fen were predominantly interested in Islamic arts, and so allowed the Bashirites a slice of Damascus and continued about beautifying their portions of the city. The Bashirites, in turn, focused on their community's spiritual and economic life, and didn't interfere with the Ray'een al-Fen, at least until recently. Now the Christian quarter is a place of refuge for Marmal ibn-Darshuf and any Cainite seeking to escape or fight the Baali's corruptive influence.

Jewish District

Similar to the Christian district in its general condition, the Jewish quarter is an isolated segment of Damascus, perhaps even more introverted and intimate given its walls and smaller size. For one thing, this area is something of a slum, filled with rundown homes and ill-kept streets. The community is hard working and close-knit but faces economic and social disadvantages in a Muslim city. There are no sites of importance or historical note, except the local temples. Otherwise, the Damascene Jews live invisible lives, far from the concerns of their Muslim and Christian neighbors. Because of their limiting status as *dhimmi*, the locals prefer working within their community. Few ever rise to the position of *a'yan*, especially given the great deal of competition among Muslims alone. If this seems like a perfect opportunity for persecution and harassment on the part of the Baali, it is not. Although no Cainite has ever seen or encountered this individual, the Jewish district is reputedly protected by at least one Kabbalist-sorcerer.

The Ray'een al-Fen ignore this region because it falls beneath their interest, while the Bashirite Mujrimin remain across the way in the Christian quarter. The only Cainites who make their havens here are a small band of Mutasharidin who've been Embraced from the local stock. Under the leadership of Moussa ibn Yacoub, the Mutasharidin owe nominal fealty to the Ray'een al-Fen and remain free of the growing conflict. Unfortunately, the Banu Haqim have been pressing the Mutasharidin to join the alliance against the Ray'een al-Fen. As a result, the Lepers have retreated into the Jewish quarter like hermit crabs. They guard against betrayal with increasing paranoia and follow anyone traveling through the district.

Al-Saghir District

Last but not least of the districts is al-Saghir, which rests adjacent to the Jewish quarter. Stretching from the Roman Arch on Straight Street, this mostly Muslim community occupies the remainder of southern Damascus. Unlike its northern counterpart, it holds virtually no Islamic attractions, but the homes and avenues are of better caliber than those in the eastern half of the city. The streets twist with the same Islamic aesthetic that appreciates soft flows and curves, and the courtyards are well maintained and lush with the oasis bloom of citrus trees. Al-Saghir caters to merchants, shop owners and those of moderate incomes. Many families are aspiring or lesser *a'yan* households hoping to rise to some position of authority within the city's sometimes nebulous hierarchy. Chief among them are the local blacksmiths responsible for forging the Damascene blades. With steady patronage from both the local *amirs* and a growing demand for their craft throughout the Islamic world, these blacksmiths are enjoying an unprecedented surge in wealth and position even though they aren't officially *a'yan* or of the learned elite. Sultan Darshuf fosters patronage of the Damascene blacksmiths but is more interested in using their success to promote himself into a position of power among other Cainites. Darshuf hopes that by bringing the blacksmiths under his influence, he can gain the respect and fealty of other *bay't*. His plan is suffering limited success, however, since both the Banu Haqim and Qabilat al-Khayal are attempting the same, not to mention the Bashirite Mujrimin who influence the export of the blades.

While the families living near Straight Street are of some affluence, those closer to the walls are of meager incomes. The region bordering Damascus' battlements is impoverished, even though most household members work to eke out an existence engaging in petty manual work. Because, according to Islamic lore, Adam and Eve's punishment was essentially hard physical labor, many Arabs believe this type of chore to be demeaning and even cursed. Thus, Arabs delegate these chores to slaves and frown upon anyone engaged in them "willingly." In terms of social standings, these poorer but industrious sections of city are nearly on par with a leper colony.

Ashirra in the Garden

While Cainites recognize Damascus as a Ray'een al-Fen enclave, the fact remains that Darshuf's star has passed its zenith and now plummets groundward. Anticipating its fall are the jackals that covet the patronage of the city. Chief among them are the Banu Haqim trying to uncover proof of infernal practices. What tempers their unprecedented patience in this matter is that the Ray'een al-Fen know about the corruption of their viziers and sorcerers at the hands of the Baali. The Banu Haqim, save for the zealous Bistakh, do not want this revealed and tread carefully lest the Ray'een al-Fen announce this humiliation publicly. Unfortunately for the Banu Haqim, Darshuf has never conducted or participated directly in any Baali ceremonies. He is a corrupt toady and given to black vices, certainly, but is not guilty of outright infernalism.

Second in line at the Ray'een al-Fen carcass are the clan's own progeny. Led by Darshuf's childe Mannal, this group seeks to retain Ray'een al-Fen leadership while removing the Baali influence. This runs contrary to the plans of the Banu Haqim Bistakh, who wants to eliminate the Ray'een al-Fen over an ancient vendetta and needs no proof to do so. Bistakh also enjoys the support of the Qabilat al-Khayal under Brenda the Raven (who seeks to retake a city she believes was rightly Magister domain). Outside this conflict rest the resident Mutasharidin and, partially, the Bashirite Mujrimin. Both factions sense too many agendas at play and know an alliance with one will make terrible enemies of others. If they side with the Banu Haqim and Qabilat al-Khayal, the purge of the city might conveniently include them. If they side with Mannal, and her sire learns of this, the Ray'een al-Fen could expunge the Bashirites and Mutasharidin from the city in retaliation. Strict neutrality is not viable, but both *bay't* are unwilling to make decisions in a vacuum of ignorance. So while the Banu Haqim, Qabilat al-Khayal and Ray'een al-Fen dance around each other, the Mujrimin and Mutasharidin spy from the shadows and do their best to gather information.

At the eye of the storm are the intractable Baali. While they've remained hidden throughout the centuries, Annazir threatens their relative security through his interactions with the Ray'een al-Fen. The Baali may act against Annazir before he truly jeopardizes their secrets, but they currently lack the power to destroy this infernal elder on their own. Instead, the Baali seek alternative means to dispose of Annazir, and one method might be by betraying him to the Banu Haqim.

Baali: Patrons of Rot

The Baali have always kept their numbers to a maximum of three to five members to escape notice. Led by Annazir, they conduct daily rituals over the organ pit and maintain the swarms growing within it. They all exist beneath the streets and seldom venture beyond the Haddad district. Annazir is the only one who travels the city openly, much to the silent consternation of his lessers.

Annazir, Elder of Damascus

5th generation, childe of Moloch

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Gallant

Embrace: 12th century BCE

Apparent Age: late 20s

Annazir dimly recalls the great nights of his clan, when they ruled over cities such as Chorazin. He remembers the destroyer Shaitan and longs for those times of terror again. Annazir counts himself the first Baali to settle in Damascus and rightfully claims that the nest and its organ pit survived because of his cunning. From his earliest nights as a Cainite, he served the *bay't* as a priest and caretaker of the swarms. Unfortunately, centuries of torpor within Iblii al-Akbar have filled him with delusions of grandeur. As an elder, he is no longer satisfied with



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resting in the shadows and influencing events from there. He longs for power. He longs to watch events unfold directly; in essence, he's forgotten the lessons that made him an elder.

Currently, Annazir maintains a "residence" in the Hariqa quarter, even though he continues sleeping in the Baali's organ pit. He passes himself off as a humble Ray'een al-Fen who advises the *bay't* elders, including Darshuf, but in truth he influences them. Although he's grown bold, he keeps ample distance from the delegation of "visiting" Banu Haqim. He's crossed paths with the assassins before and knows they are in Damascus under some agenda. As such, Annazir is ready to use either Darshuf or his advisor, Barqat, as scapegoats to distract the Banu Haqim.

Xeper, Sultan of Lepers

7th generation, childe of Dirsach

Nature: Tyrant

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 790 CE

Apparent Age: early 40s

Originally an Egyptian trader traveling through Damascus in the years of Byzantine rule, Xeper entered Baali servitude as a ghoul messenger to help link the far-flung infernalist factions scattered across the Levant. When the Banu Haqim attacked and destroyed a generous number of Baali nests, Xeper escaped and returned to Damascus to warn his masters of the growing danger. His actions earned him the Embrace. Since that time, Xeper has remained hidden in the shadows of the Haddad quarter, watching Damascus grow. He has also seen Annazir commit unforgivable mistakes including allowing the Baali to corner themselves in Haddad with the power of Umayyad Mosque and St. Mary's Chapel flanking them. Now Annazir's recent foolhardiness has jeopardized the entire sect, and Xeper has convinced the younger Baali to act against their elder. The only matter stopping them is Annazir's control over the organ pit. Once Xeper fully understands its secrets, he will rise against his master. Until then, he remains hidden in Haddad, trying to find a way to use the Banu Haqim to destroy Annazir without threatening the other Baali.



Bashirite Mujrimin: Patrons of the Blade

The Bashirite faction of Bay't Mujrim claims their elder Bashir sleeps in torpor somewhere within a day's travel of Damascus. They call the city the line's home and say they have been present here since the days of Christ, when Bashir himself met with the Savior. Since the rise of Islam, however, the Mujrimin have been in decline. Varsik, the most powerful member of the *bay't*, moved to Jerusalem long ago. Now only three members of the clan call Damascus their home. They lurk in the Christian district and move among its traders, with more brethren hidden in the villages of Ma'alula and Seidnaya to the north. The Bashirites have steered clear of the local politicking and instead focus on spiritual matters. They spend their nights protecting the district from outsiders, praying and inspiring the faithful with apocalyptic dreams and visions. The Ray'een al-Fen, in a typical jibe, claim that it was the Bashirites and not God who initiated St. Paul's blinding vision that prompted his conversion.

The Bashirites have some inroads with the Christian sect of Banu Haqim, hence their ability to help Mannal when she first came to them. Since that time, they've been caught in a dilemma as to their involvement in the entire matter. The Bashirites enjoy their neutrality as traders, but the possibility of Darshuf's corruption is too troubling to ignore. For now they remain nonpartisan, but they are willing to offer limited support to Mannal at the very least.

They aren't interested, however, in helping the Banu Haqim upend the city. This has caused some friction between the two *bay't*.

Es'kut the Silent

7th generation, childe of Sallam

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 478 CE

Apparent Age: late teens

As a mortal thief and murderer, Es'kut believed he was dying when his sire tore out his throat. He was reborn with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips, a scream in his heart and a vision of impending apocalypse at the hands of Cainite elders. Since that time, he has served God and the Christians of Damascus as a beast of faith. Es'kut endures a vow of silence in the hopes of cleansing his soul and finding answers to the visions that plagued him upon the Becoming; he has carried it for the last century.

Es'kut communicates in a flourish of images thanks to Chimerstry and "speaks" by projecting powerful images directly into the mind's eye of a listener. Although the other Bashirites understand him, it often takes Mannal a week to interpret Es'kut's intent. Es'kut currently leads the Bashirites but finds himself in a sticky dilemma. If he becomes involved in the conflict between the Ray'een al-Fen and Banu Haqim, it will distract him from his chief concern of salvation and his neutrality as a merchant patron. By not helping, however, he ignores the city's obvious Baali problem. With the visions of the apocalypse guiding his fate, Es'kut must temper his decision with the belief that his choice may accelerate the Armageddon he feels is approaching.



Damascene Ray'een al-Fen: Patrons of Heritage

The Ray'een al-Fen, chief patrons of the a'yan families, are a house divided. The city's three clan elders are under the thrall of Annazir and revel in their growing bloodlust. The ranks of the younger progeny, who were once five strong, have thinned, leaving only Mannal and two others. Of the remaining two, one succumbed to his elder's vices and the fifth simply vanished (into the Baali organ pit). While Mannal and her confederates know something terrible is amiss with their elders, they do not believe that corruption has taken firm root. Instead, Mannal tries to uncover her sire's secrets while searching for a way to save him. Unfortunately, while she trusts the Bashirites, she senses that Bistakh has a private agenda.

Currently, the Ray'een al-Fen are the premier clan (publicly) of Damascus. They involve themselves with mortal affairs through a patronage system. Families hoping to turn their homes into *waqfs* and *madrasas* petition the Ray'een al-Fen for their support. With the loss of Darshuf's central leadership, however, the remaining clan members squabble for the patronage of families . They equate power with numbers since they render services in exchange for blood or young *ansars*.

Darshif, Sultan of Damascus

6th generation, childe of Enimachia

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 478 CE

Apparent Age: early 30s

Damascus' Ray'een al-Fen history is written in treachery, and it begins with the ambitious Darshuf. Once a painter of some craft, Darshuf earned the attention of Enimachia, the Michaelite Ray'een al-Fen who traced her lineage to Constantinople. When Islam emerged as the tribal religion of the south, Darshuf used the opportunity to unseat his sire from preeminence — accusing her of serving Constantinople at the expense

of Damascus — and seized power. Bereft of clan aid, Enimachia returned to Constantinople to gather support for her cause, but her Byzantine cousins ignored her plea. She later fled into Europe an embittered woman, and vanished.

Darshuf, through tenuous alliances with the Banu Haqim, has remained Damascus' Cainite sultan and chief patron. Unfortunately, he and his peers have fallen to the whispers of the Baali Annazir. While he engages in no infernal rituals, Darshuf privately revels in disturbing acts of ritualized slaughter and murderous orgies. His progeny Mannal has noticed the shift in his behavior along with his brooding and brutish manner. Despite his fall from grace, Darshuf is highly protective of his "daughter" and wishes to ensure she remain free of Baali corruption. Although the Banu Haqim delegation in Salihiye district is supposedly a secret, he also knows of their presence and realizes they will eventually uncover his sins. To this end he sequesters himself in the citadel, emerging rarely and speaking through his vizier Barqat. Darshuf understands his existence is approaching an end; he seeks to protect Mannal through it all and may do so by sacrificing both himself and Annazir. He doesn't realize that it was in fact Mannal who betrayed him by bringing the assassins into the city.



VEIL OF NIGHT



Mannal, Rebel Childe

7th generation, childe of Darshuf

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: 878 CE

Apparent Age: early 20s

Mannal remembers Darshuf fondly when he became patron of her family. He'd always provided for her and encouraged her pursuits as a young woman. When the Embrace came, he was even more of a father to her than ever. This is the Darshuf Mannal remembers and wishes to protect. Her pleas for help were intended to rid the city of the Baali she suspected among them, not to draw the Banu Haqim's wrath against her sire.

Mannal is a strong-headed woman with a sense of justice and righteousness borne from the *madrasas* of Damascus. With Bistakh pursuing an obvious but unnamed agenda, Mannal must now find a way to protect her sire from the Banu Haqim while still expunging the Baali. In that regard, she is trying to earn the trust and friendship of both the Mutasharidin and Bashirite Mujrimin, but has met with little success thus far.

Barqat, Mouthpiece of Darshuf

6th generation, childe of Masser

Nature: Survivor



Demeanor: Jester
Embrace: 689 CE
Apparent Age: late 20s

Barqat was an accomplished wood worker before the Ray'een al-Fen Embraced him into their fold. Since that time, he's displayed a knack for words and solid advice, quickly earning him a place by Darshuf's side. Where Darshuf went, the ambitious Barqat followed, even when it meant descending straight into Annazir's clutches. Now Barqat is even more corrupt than the sultan. Barqat serves the isolated and frightened Darshuf as a mouthpiece, relaying his wishes and relating news back to him. While he speaks for Darshuf, he does so with Annazir's tongue. Barqat is no longer content with being a mere lackey and believes he is using the Baali to gain the power of the sultan. In truth, however, Barqat is Annazir's tool and serves the infernalists far more than they serve him. Annazir plans to use Barqat as a proxy for the rule of Damascus or, at worst, as a distraction to occupy the Banu Haqim.

Kurdish Banu Haqim: Patrons of the Just

When the Banu Haqim lost an entire delegation to infernalism, Damascus became their shame. When Mannal sought help in ridding the city of Baali, however, Alamut thought they could avenge their humiliation. Since that time, Damascus has proven a thorny issue. The Banu Haqim's chosen fiduciaries of Damascus, the Ray'een al-Fen, may be heavily corrupted, thus heaping more embarrassment upon the Banu Haqim. Alamut wants its delegation to proceed slowly and leave no stone unturned before making their assessment. Unfortunately, one of the delegation's members, Bistakh, has no wish to be cautious and pursues her own agendas. She wants the Ray'een al-Fen destroyed and Damascus returned to the clan's hands. Rather than simply assassinating Darshuf and his ilk, however, she hopes to reveal their shame publicly. Her impertinence threatens the delegation's secrecy, and she may soon go into hiding from her own elders to continue her personal crusade. Bistakh's actions have already revealed the delegation's presence to the Cainites of Damascus and driven Darshuf into hiding.

Bistakh, Sword of Haqim

9th generation warrior, childe of Fahd abu Bistakh
Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Judge
Embrace: 890 CE
Apparent Age: late teens

There is much venom in Bistakh's heart. The elders of Alamut forced her to watch her sire's destruction



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after they uncovered evidence of his infernal dealings in Damascus. Bistakh knew her sire well enough to know he was a righteous man before moving to the "Garden of the World." Once she learned it was the Ray'een al-Fen that betrayed him, Bistakh swore revenge against the entire Damascene *hay't*.

Perhaps it was a shortsighted error that brought Bistakh into the recent Banu Haqim delegation, or someone within Alamut hoped to use her as a scapegoat in the Ray'een al-Fen's destruction. Regardless, she wants Mannal, Darshuf and the rest of them destroyed, but simply assassinating them is not an option. She wants the Ray'een al-Fen humiliated and revealed for the hateful creatures that they are. She wants her sire exonerated. As such, she visits Damascus nightly, spying on or questioning various individuals, trying to solicit the Mutasharidin's or Mujrimin's help, or following recently arrived Cainites. Bistakh may be cunning, but her zeal is getting the better of her. It won't be long before she reverts to threats and outright attacks to uncover her evidence.

Qabilat al-Khayal: Patrons of Shadows

The Qabilat al-Khayal of Damascus have always remained a small and quiet faction. Initially interested in the desert trade routes, they later swore fealty to the Banu Haqim's lackeys, the Ray'een al-Fen, and entrenched themselves within the bureaucratic life of the region. When Baghdad became the Islamic capital, the elder Magisters left, leaving their childer behind. For a time, the young members of Qabilat al-Khayal served the Ray'een al-Fen as viziers, but when Annazir appeared, they lost that honor and simply retired. If they could not influence the Cainite sultan, they would whittle away at his power base. The Qabilat al-Khayal leader Tirhan suspected Annazir of infernal dealings and realized the Ray'een al-Fen were becoming corrupt. Before he could report his suspicions to Baghdad, however, the Baali intercepted the message and saw to Tirhan's fate in their organ pit. The remaining members of Qabilat al-Khayal proved too divided in Damascus following Tirhan's disappearance. The Qabilat al-Khayal of Baghdad sent Brenda the Raven to assume leadership. Since her arrival, the normally under-appreciated childe of Qabilat al-Khayal has become a quiet force of reckoning.

Brenda the Raven

10th generation, childe of Masera

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: 1122 CE

Apparent Age: early 30s

Brenda the Raven hails from Latin parents who settled in the Levant shortly following the First Crusade. As part of a new generation of Franks born in the Holy Lands, Brenda grew up more Arab than European. In fact, she displayed such an unerring capacity to accept both sides of her heritage that the Latin Magisters Embraced her as an intermediary between them and the Qabilat al-Khayal of Baghdad. Brenda the Raven's easy manner and ingratiating attitude earned her a place within the Islamic courts, where she remained as ambassador. With the eventual dissolution of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Brenda converted and began to call herself Ashirra.

Since her conversion, Brenda the Raven has risen to unprecedented power within the Baghdad *hay't*. When Salah al-Din made Damascus a great capital once more, the Qabilat al-Khayal were unable to reclaim their former status thanks to Tirhan's interference. Following his disappearance, however, they sent Brenda to "unite their Damascene brethren," hoping she could prepare the way for the Magisters' return. Brenda, however, sensed the potential to ingratiate herself with the Banu Haqim and not only end Ray'een al-Fen hegemony over the city but place the Qabilat al-Khayal (i.e., herself) in power. She currently sides with Bistakh



but realizes the young Banu Haqim might be too independent to be useful. As such, Brenda hopes to deal directly with the Banu Haqim delegation while falsely swearing fealty to Mannal and her brood.

Mutasharidin: Patrons of Whispers

The Mutasharidin of Damascus are supportive of the Jewish district, if they aren't Hebrews themselves. With a regional pedigree nearly as ancient as the Baali, the Mutasharidin remember Damascus' dim days before the introduction of Christianity. Throughout those centuries, they remained enemies of the Baali, and, at times, the sole obstacle against their incursions in the city. To the other *bay't*, the Mutasharidin are leprous beasts who shun the light. In truth, however, the Mutasharidin are more akin to vigilant guards than monsters. They know the Baali exist within the city and could certainly help uproot them, but the Lepers have grown insular and isolated over the years. They've fought the Baali before, and a small number believe it's their sole responsibility to rid the city of them. The Mutasharidin are convinced (and perhaps rightly so) that by aiding the Banu Haqim in uncovering both Ray'een al-Fen corruption and the Baali's hidden nests, the other *bay't* will take sole credit for the Mutasharidin's actions. Additionally, some Damascene Lepers fear that by entering the conflict, they'll make a dire enemy of one or more factions. As result, they remain neutral and pursue their own agendas until they can make a unified decision.

Moussa ibn Yacoub

8th generation, childe of Yacoub

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Innovator

Embrace: 93 CE

Apparent Age: unknown

Moussa ibn Yacoub has always known Damascus as his home, from his mortal years as a child, past the Embrace and into tonight. There is no other domain where he would rather be, but he fears that the current situation might destroy the city he loves. Ibn Yacoub began life as a successful shop owner on



Straight Street and earned the Mutasharidin's attention because of his Roman clientele and the secrets they shared with him. Once Embraced, he entered one of Damascus' more venerable clans and became part of the shadows. Over the centuries, ibn Yacoub has seen the stream of both mortal and Cainite sultans flow past the city gates. In that time, he has come to lead the Mutasharidin after the Baali destroyed his sire. Their destruction is his personal vendetta, and it is a trophy he is unwilling to share with the Banu Haqim or Mannal. As *bay't* patriarch, he forbids the other Mutasharidin to aid Bistakh or even explain their clan's position. Ibn Yacoub isn't blind, however, and is caught between pursuing a blood feud and helping Damascus survive the coming nights. What the latter entails is a mystery given that ibn Yacoub does not trust Bistakh anymore then he does the Baali. Although not a Muslim himself, he has considered sending for a Hajj clanmate to provide some advice and insight into the various Muslim minds around him.





Appendix: Arrayed Against the Night

He who has a thousand friends has not a friend to spare, and he who has one enemy will meet him everywhere.

–Ali ibn-Abi-Talib, fourth Caliph
"A Hundred Sayings"

Katin al-Bukhara, an Islamic Cainite, has the unusual distinction of having been defeated in single combat by more than a dozen different beings from across the greater caliphate. The fact that Katin has survived all of these defeats is a testament primarily to his fleetness of foot and skill in hiding from would-be attackers, but his persuasive abilities and wide range of knowledge about the supernatural creatures of the world must also have played a part. His letters of warning to childer throughout the lands of Islam have proven to be useful to most Ashirra, and as a result they are excerpted throughout this section.

That Which Stalks the Night

You may wish to expose your troupe to the full range of creatures in the Dark Medieval world. The temptation is always present to spice up a **Vampire: The Dark Ages** game by hurling wild creatures into a chronicle one after the other. For certain kinds of games this is entirely appropriate, but be careful not to dilute the theme and story of your game by turning it into a Monster-of-the-Week chronicle.

The supernatural beings detailed below can be added to just about any chronicle, and, despite this chapter's title, they do not have to act as the troupe's enemies. An ancient Mummy smitten with a young Cainite might serve as his mentor, while old ghosts might make good on a mortal promise to lead the wayward into the light of Allah.

Decide ahead of time how closely the antagonists below will adhere to their own "native" rules. The **Vampire: The Dark Ages** rulebook describes most of them in passing, but nearly all of these have their own World of Darkness game, with far more detail than can fit below. In some cases, using those rules is entirely appropriate. In other cases, it's just not worth struggling to reconcile the themes and cosmologies of two games just to hurl some enemy wizards into the Baali camp. To that end, this chapter provides equivalent Disciplines for most creatures' powers; Storytellers desiring more accurate abilities are encouraged to seek out the appropriate rulebook.

One World of Darkness

You may find the variety of supernatural creatures in this appendix somewhat daunting. Surely you can't be expected to own copies of all the obscure rulebooks necessary to replicate all those powers, as suggested elsewhere on this page. Relax. Not only are you not obliged to have all that stuff on hand, we encourage you to discard most of it as befits your chronicle. Regardless of what **Werewolf: The Dark Ages** might suggest, werewolves in **Vampire: The Dark Ages** do not need to live as tribal warriors and traffic with spirits of the mystic planes. If it better fits your chronicle to have them be flesh-eaters whose shape-changing curse is passed down from mother to daughter, *so be it*... It is not necessary to ram all the cosmology of the other World of Darkness games into your **Veil of Night** stories. Use what works for your chronicle. Ignore the rest.

Sayyadin: Vampire Hunters

It was sheer chance that I stumbled across him when I did, returning to my haven three hours before the morning's light. I had had a difficult night and argued with a few friends, and come home far earlier than usual. He was at least as surprised by my arrival as I was by his presence in my sleeping chamber. I ran for safety, and later had the building destroyed, but I clearly remember his outfitting: he was clad all in black, with black paint on much of his face. He carried a few wooden stakes, a few opaque jars and a sharp sword. And his preparation! He was getting ready to hide in my sleeping chamber, presumably thence to strike at me after the hated sun's rise!

In the Muslim lands, hunters of the undead are rarely seen and do not appear to work in groups. Islam and the Arab culture that spawned it are open enough to esoteric elements and mysticism not to have the same knee-jerk hatred of the supernatural that Christendom often displays. The concept of a witch, much less a witch-hunter, is quite foreign to the faith. However, there are those who fall prey to Ashirra or other creatures and adopt the ethics of the Muslim warrior to pursue their enemies. Although not organized, the common name for such a hunter is *sayyad al-ghulan* ("a faithful hunter of monsters").

Most *sayyadin* are driven by a need for vengeance, but nearly all retain some vestigial sense of honor that guides them in the hunt. They recognize that the horror that vampires carry with them is an evil, wicked thing, but that the very act of hunting the creatures of the night can lead the hunters themselves to acts of destruction and wickedness. A hunter must be careful, for instance, not to light a fire in a dense part of a city, lest the fire grow out of control and hurt more people than his prey might harm in a decade.

Instead, the *sayyad* must stalk his prey carefully, note his target's habits, strengths and weaknesses, and make a single, decisive strike. Should he fail, he has likely signed his own death warrant, for vampires are not known for their mercy. A failed attack on a vampire may simply lead to the death of the hunter, or the Cainite might ghoul or Embrace the mortal upstart. None of these things are acceptable to most hunters, and some do have poison on hand to consume if they are caught.

Most *sayyadin* take up the stake after they suffer a personal loss at the hands of the creatures of the night. The stereotypical *sayyad* is a man whose family has been killed or enslaved by a fiend of some sort, but women also take up the cause. Although they sometimes find support from local imam, *qadi* or *'ulama*, they most often break with the mortal authorities of their region. They see themselves on a one-person jihad and cling to their own faith as the only thing staving off madness. Cut off from their community, most eventually self-destruct or suffer a complete mental breakdown, but a few stalk the night for many years.

In game terms, *sayyadin* are regular humans, although some have access to the True Faith Trait and most learn important combat abilities. Imams and other Islamic clerics and scholars may also have Exorcism. Those who face the supernatural also run the risk of developing various derangements. See pages 182-187 for more on True Faith in the Islamic context.

Crusaders

A few weeks later, in Jerusalem, I encountered a group of Franj *calling themselves Knights Templar. They were crusaders, as one might expect, but I could feel a fearful power radiating from one of them. Wearing a tabard with a red cross and wielding a great sword, the crusader drove me away with his very sight.*

This encounter disturbs me greatly. Perhaps this man wielded some unholy Franj *magic or served one of their own blood-drinkers, but the burning in my blood felt like a purity I have only felt on sacred ground. Could this man be an agent of God? But surely He did not intend for the faithful to be swept from the Earth.*

In 1197, members of all three faiths of the Book reside in Jerusalem, under a peace treaty negotiated between Salah al-Din and Richard the Lion-Hearted in 1192. This treaty comes to an end late in 1197, but for the time being, Jews, Christians and Muslims all pass by one another on the streets of that holiest city. One effect of this truce is that many Christians continue to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Among the most faithful of Christians in Jerusalem are the Knights Hospitaler and the Knights Templar. They cannot walk the streets of the city armed, but for some, their faith alone suffices as a weapon against the forces of darkness.

Of course, not every priest and pilgrim has true faith in God; nor does every crusading knight. Perhaps one crusader in twenty has such fervor in his faith that the damned childer of Caine can feel his presence from a distance; only one in twenty of those has more than one dot in the True Faith Trait.

Most crusaders recognize those among their brethren that can feel the breath of God. Should one of these point at a vampire and shout that he is a servant of the



devil, most will take up arms and attack. So while the touch of God is not terribly common among the crusaders, it is common enough that Cainites of all stripes should walk lightly near them.

The Templars and Hospitalers are also involved in a variety of other supernatural and mortal agendas. Powerful Christian orders, they have attracted powerbrokers of all stripes. Some *Franj* vampires — some fearing God, others not — nest within Templar citadels. Sorcerers of one stripe or another also use the orders as their pawns. And, of course, Templars and Hospitalers are *knights*. Even without faith or sorcery, a skilled warrior with a sword and a sure hand can pose a serious threat to a Cainite.

More information on Christian knights in the Holy Land is available in **Jerusalem by Night** and **The Ashen Knight**.

The Ten Thousand Demons

As we range to the eastern empires — that of the Khwarizm-Shah and even to faraway Taugast — we Ashirra encounter strange vampires of a sort no Westerner recognizes. They call themselves "demons" in their own foreign tongue, and I have no doubt that is what they are. Like us, they drink the blood of men, but they also wield powerful magics and assume terrible forms — some have wings, while others detach their own limbs to cast them after opponents. They call their home the Court of the White Tiger, and they owe their respect to an Emperor of the undead, thousands of miles to the east. Stranger still, there are reports that these things breathe and can separate their heads from their bodies. The only thing of which I am sure is that they hate our ilk and attack all those who set foot in the lands they call theirs.

Taugast is a place of dangers.

Storytellers using **Kindred of the East** or **World of Darkness: Blood & Silk** may wish to introduce Wan Kuei (called Kuei-jin in the Final Nights) into their **Veil of Night** stories. They are most appropriate for use in the far eastern reaches of Islam; by and large, until the 1220s, none of the Demons of the East intrude past Samarkand. Even then, the Wan Kuei are best used sparsely in Cainite stories.

Arabic vampires and Wan Kuei are awfully ignorant of one another (as the first paragraphs of this section suggest); Storytellers should remember that the characters in her troupe should be ignorant of the Wan Kuei, even if the players are not. Crafty Storytellers can use this ignorance to their advantage. A troupe might encounter obvious signs of vampiric activity and work to investigate which faction in their home city is responsible, while the true culprits, Wan Kuei, escape or observe the characters' actions for future reference. Wily troupes might be able to do the same, turning the tables on encountered Wan Kuei or misleading them with tales of false strengths or weaknesses of the childer of Caine.

Wan Kuei encountered in Islamic lands are there for a reason; groups of them (which almost always appear in fives) travel across lands wild or settled in search of holy sites, magical artifacts or mystical knowledge. Demons found this far west often have an affinity for the spirit world, or are assassins or spies; Cainites or mortal rulers who have done harm to Wan Kuei holdings further east may find themselves on the sharp end of a meeting with their victims' undead protectors.

The Wan Kuei do have a disturbing tendency to kill foreign vampires found in their lands, a fact that Arabic Cainites know all too well. Western vampires who travel eastward with Arab merchant caravans learn that the Silk Road is a hostile and forbidding place for the unliving. Such a caravan is not likely to be set upon by a horde of screaming Asian vampires, of course; as befits their westward-looking nature, the Wan Kuei who attack such groups of travelers do so stealthily or from a great distance, with magic. Gentle groups of Wan Kuei might give their Islamic counterparts a few hours' warning before bringing down the powers of Hell, but few gentle beings make their way into unlife.

More information on the Wan Kuei appears in **World of Darkness: Blood & Silk**. The Mongols, who are to descend on the Muslim world in a few decades, are also plagued by these demons (and some Cainites as well), as described in **Wind from the East**.

Ishaq ibn Jamil, Sayyad al-Gurlan

Ishaq's wife and child were killed by a vampire in a frenzy who'd broken into their home, overcome by bloodlust. To Ishaq's everlasting shame, he panicked and ran for his life at the sight of the thing. To make up for this failing, he hunts vampires and hopes to exculpate his sin by dying at the hands of one of the creatures.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Animal Ken 2, Archery 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Crafts 2, Dodge 3, Herbalism 1, Investigation 2, Larceny 1, Melee 3, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Self-Control: 4, **Conscience:** 3, **Courage** 5

Humanity: 6 (and falling), **Willpower:** 6

Tarajian, Demon of Taugast

Tarajian is a member of the Western Trident corpse family; she and her undead siblings have traveled west in search of a powerful mystical site so that they can tap its power for their own use. Tarajian was a wicked woman in life, but now follows a philosophical path known as the Way of the Resplendent Crane, in which she endeavors to perform acts to atone for her life's evil. Of course, she still considers the spawn of Caine to be her enemy, and her philosophy certainly does not spare them her wrath should they cross her.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4; Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3; Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 2, Archery 1, Brawl 1, Crafts 1, Dodge 1, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Geography 3, Intimidation 2, Law 1, Linguistics (Uighur, Arabic) 2, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 1, Melee 2, Occult 1, Performance 2

Disciplines : Celerity 2, Fortitude 2, Potence 2, Protean 2, Vicissitude 3

Self-Control: 4, **Conscience:** 2, **Courage:** 4

Humanity: 6, **Willpower:** 5



Mages and Sorcerers

I called the fat one Master of the Djinni, for he boldly spoke of unseen and ancient spirits that could move mountains and moisten deserts. He dressed most outrageously, in brightly colored robes, attracting the attention of nearly every passerby, despite the late hour. He had not heard of the Cainites called Tremere — of that I made certain — but he had the same sort of puffed-up pomposity that those blood wizards wear like armor. He detested followers of Islam and gave great weight to his own battles against Islamic wizards and their mundane allies.

Eventually, drunk on vitae, I bravely suggested that his djinni were nothing but imagination, and that at best he was a pathetic, self-deluded charlatan. And tomorrow night, if I can find another blank sheet of paper, I will describe my eventual escape from the great eastern desert in which his djinni thoughtfully deposited me in the few hours before dawn.

Supposed miracle workers frequent every bazaar in the Islamic world. Some claim to be able to heal illnesses, while others can conjure gold out of nothing. While illusions might earn you a few laughs and a few coins here and there, real sorcerers focus their energies not on entertaining crowds but on their own grand schemes. They make valuable allies and dangerous enemies. The two most common sects of magic-wielders in the Muslim world are the Ahl-i-Batin and the Taftani.

Ahl-i-Batin

The Ahl-i-Batin predate Islam, but many have adopted the precepts of the faith into their own belief system. Their history is unclear to the Ashirra, but the group is rumored to have come out of the union of a group of two other types of wizards, hundreds of years ago. The Batini, called the Subtle Ones, rarely reveal their presence or their true ends, but those who know members of the tradition well say the group's goal is deceptively simple: the unity of humankind.

Not long ago, the Batini could see the accomplishment of their goal on the far horizon. Centuries ago, the Ahl-i-Batin constructed a nation-spanning magical pattern they call the Web of Faith. This mystical netting was anchored in a series of underground cisterns and other architectural wonders and allowed magical energy to be shuffled from one city to another in times of need, and that power gave the Ahl-i-Batin the ability to defeat a confederation of very powerful wizards that they claim — to those few they confide in — served Hell.

The Web's power has begun to fade in recent years, for reasons the Ahl-i-Batin do not entirely understand. Some blame the depredations of the forces of Hell; others suggest that the Taftani wizards (see below) are responsible; still others suggest that a construct as powerful as the Web of Faith simply cannot persist forever, and that this degradation is just a function of age. However, the Web's power is certainly great enough to lend magical strength to those Batini who must challenge a neonate vampire; Cainites should be warned.

The Ahl-i-Batin are subtle and silent magi. They rarely tip their hand to reveal their true desires; they rarely even reveal their presence as a wizard to those who have not already noticed such. To the average traveler, a Batini is just another merchant or scholar. They prefer this; it is far easier to work when not hampered by requests for magical aid or expectations of wizardly prowess. Even more so, enemies cannot strike at opponents they cannot find. The Ahl-i-Batin work behind the scenes. More than one crusading duke from Europe has met his end at the hands of a Batini assassin, but few of those commanding the Crusades know the nature and power of those opposing them.

Many Ahl-i-Batin mages are devout Muslims who pray to Mecca five times daily, obey dietary laws and fast over Ramadan; as such, some might be sympathetic to truly devout Ashirra and indeed, rumor has it, a Batini wizard helped develop the blood magic Ashirra call *sihr* (see page 160). To gain the aid of a Batini sorcerer, though, a vampire would have to prove his faith — especially given Islam's prohibition against drinking blood. Plenty of other Batini are non-religious, or follow Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism, and might aid vampires of those faiths. Such help is very rare, though. Most often, the Ahl-i-Batin ignore the progeny or Caine. To the great chagrin of those they face, others treat vampires as impediments to the unity they seek and go about eliminating them.

Batini magic comes from Allah — the unity they seek — and their wizardry is spoken as prayer to the Lord Above. Prayer, meditation and chanting allow the Batini to more fully grasp the oneness of God and see clear the path to bringing all to oneness. They also employ astrology and sacred geometry to tap into the powers of Allah, most importantly through the Web of Faith. Unlike the Taftani, the Ahl-i-Batin use their magic for subtle purposes; they are masters of others' minds and moving quickly and quietly.

Taftani

The Taftani is the common name for the other main sect of Arabian wizards. Unlike the Ahl-i-Batin, the Taftani are not People of the Book; they do not follow Islam at all, but rather a hodge-podge of pre-Islamic religions, each as befits his own path to enlightenment. Some follow the ancient sun god Mithra; some the teachings of Zarathustra (or "Zoroaster" as the Greeks would have it); others worship a pantheon of gods from Mithra to Indra, or a scheme of their own devising.

The Taftani hold Islam in great contempt, for it is the followers of Islam who have pushed their own philosophies to the outskirts of modern life. Though Muslims throughout Arabian lands claim to tolerate Zoroastrianism, for instance, communities of Zoroastrians were forced at swordpoint to convert to Islam. This sort of practice enraged Taftani, who lived in such communities and depended on them for support.

Taftani magic is miraculous, and many times the Taftani depend on the *djinni*, who Zoroastrian Taftani might call *ahuras* or *asuras*, for their miracles. These beings are spirits of the world, often in service of the forces of good; they are familiar to Banu Haqim sorcerers as well (and are described in more detail below).

The Zoroastrian faith holds forth that the creator of the universe, Ahura Mazda, is ultimately good and will eventually triumph over his enemy, the evil god Ahriman. However, the battle itself remains worth fighting, because humanity can speed the eventual triumph of Ahura Mazda by doing good deeds and fighting wickedness in all its guises. It is in this conflict that the spawn of Caine are most likely to encounter the Taftani. Many of them believe that the Ahl-i-Batin wizards are themselves incarnations of Ahriman's wickedness, and fight them as they can. But more importantly, most Taftani *know* that vampires are servants of darkness; they recoil from purifying flame, they hide in darkness, they deceive, steal and murder. Taftani might not always get involved with vampires' activities, but almost no Taftani will aid one, should he encounter a creature of the night.

Taftani magic concerns the physical world and the spirits that dance around it. They feel that to hide magic is to lie, so they eschew the subtle ways of other wizards. The Taftani grab the world by both hands and wrench it to fit their needs. Many of them desire to protect humankind from the depredations of the spirit world and put their skills to use in binding *djinni*, ghosts and other spirits into physical vessels. Their sorcery is showy: Rather than bring misfortune to an enemy through a subtle series of coincidences, the Taftani draw bolts of fire down from the very heavens. The ability to do such powerful workings is hardly common, but the Taftani who are a force to be reckoned with.

Other Wizards

The Taftani and Ahl-i-Batin are not the only world-weavers to be found in Arabic lands, but they are by far the most numerous. The Order of Hermes travels Egypt in search of ancient Pharaonic texts on the nature of reality; Jewish communities throughout the region are home to Kabbalistic wizards (called the "Lions of Zion" in the **Sorcerers Crusade Companion**). Many pagan shamans live on the outskirts of Islam. A vampire's path might cross any of these. The Tremere in particular are on rather bad terms with the Houses of Hermes; Kabbalists invariably have close ties to local Jewish communities and are certain to take vampiric attacks in their neighborhoods the wrong way. And some of the rumors about the magic powers of the Knights Templar are true. Magic in the Dark Medieval world is flexible and mysterious. Sorcerers can fit just about anywhere a Storyteller needs them to.

Mortal sorcerers can easily be replicated using the rules in **Liege, Lord & Lackey** and the various paths of Thaumaturgy. Complete information on the Ahl-i-Batin and Taftani appears in **Lost Paths** for **Mage: The Ascension.**

Akil bin Asir, Master of Djinni

Akil bin Asir descends from a long line of djinn-mastering *Taftani wizards. The gift for magic has run in his family for as far back as they keep records; it is said that his many-times-great-grandfather was a wizard in the days before Islam. Akil bin Asir is a pragmatic sort of conjurer with a sense of humor; he stays out of the way of the proper authorities (religious and civil) in any cities he visits, but he is happy to use his djinni to tweak the noses of unusually arrogant civil servants. Most of the time, he stays in his home village and watches over its inhabitants like a shepherd over a flock.*

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 1, Animal Ken 1, Crafts 3, Dodge 1, Empathy 1, Etiquette 2, Expression 2, Herbalism 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Larceny 3, Law 1, Leadership 1, Linguistics 1, Medicine 1, Occult 5, Politics 1, Survival 1

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Potence 3 (with the aid of djinni)

Paths: Creo Ignem 3; Ephemera 5; Summoning, Binding and Warding 5

Self-Control: 3, **Conscience:** 3, **Courage:** 3

Humanity: 7, **Willpower:** 7

Mummies: The Vengeful Reborn

Ah, my greatest victory, against a man who called himself Aranthebes. I had heard that this person and his friends — Followers of the Hawk or the like, they called themselves — had a longstanding grudge against the undead. I prowled around the shadows of Aranthebes' life for a few months, learning his strengths and weaknesses as best I could without calling attention to myself.

Finally, with a cocky swagger, I ambushed him from a dark alley while shrouded in a beggar's robes. Three knife thrusts and it was done. I had the body burned the next day by a loyal ghoul.

You can imagine, childer, my surprise when I saw Aranthebes on the streets of Damascus six months later.

The reborn — who call themselves variously mummies, Shemsu-Heru, or a score of other names — are immortal humans. They can and do die, just as mortals do, but the Shemsu-Heru can reform their bodies after time spent in the Underworld. Most of them are skilled alchemists, and many have other magical abilities learned over their long lives. They travel across the known world, but nearly all call Egypt home.

The mummies of Egypt are ancient beings. Most of them were created in a great rite thousands of years ago and many are still faithful followers of the ancient Egyptian religion. In particular, mummies claim to serve the god Horus, who exhorts them to fight the undead and the forces of Apophis, the Great Devourer. Horus's greatest foe is Set, which means that that undead god's progeny bear the brunt of the mummies' ire.

The rite or rebirth splits the spirit of the mummy in half, into *ba* and *ka*. This is only really noticeable after the mummy has been killed; when his body is intact and functioning, both *ba* and *ka* reside in it. When the mummy dies (by violence or accident) the *ka* remains in the mortal world, and the *ba* makes the trip to the netherworld. Both halves of the soul keep the mummy's sentience and

intellect, but each has slightly different drives. It is the *ka*'s responsibility to guard and protect the mummy's mortal remains, and the *ba*'s responsibility in the afterlife to regain enough energy to repair and rebuild that mortal form.

Mummies do not use Disciplines like Cainites do; they are alchemists and wizards but have no inherent magic in their mortal form beyond the ability to recreate themselves after death. They use a type of ritual magic called Hekau. For the purposes of a **Veil of Night** game, Storytellers can use some Disciplines and Thaumaturgic paths to simulate Hekau. Give mummies subtle abilities grounded in alchemy and ritual, rather than quick and blatant powers.

Additional information on mummies is available in **Mummy: The Resurrection.**

Reborn Lengendry

The reborn recount (to the few they trust) that in the most ancient days, Osiris ruled Egypt wisely and well. He was a beloved king who treated his people with care and devotion, and protected them fiercely. Osiris's younger brother Set was his opposite in nearly every way: selfish and preening, arrogant and vicious. Eventually, due to his many crimes, Set was banished from Egypt. Years later Set returned, with an important difference: He had become a powerful undead lord. Set treacherously slew his older brother, scattering the corpse into 13 pieces across Egypt. He struck out at his nephew Horus as well, stealing Horus's eye and much of his life-force. Cainites know this story differently, of course, especially if they have dealings with the Walid Set. The Setites say that their progenitor returned from the wilderness to destroy the damning rule of law and unjust lordship of Osiris. The reborn balk at such tales, calling them propaganda and lies.

Tales also differ regarding Osiris's nature. Some suggest that a monster called Typhon visited him and Embraced him during Set's exile. Others — including many of the Shemsu-Heru, who are rather fervent on the subject — say that Osiris remained mortal; the Setite scholar Assad believes that Set Embraced his brother rather than kill him.

As the Shemsu-Heru tell it, Osiris's wife Isis knew that only chaos and terror could come if Set were to take the throne of Egypt. So, she and her handmaidens learned of a ritual of rebirth. Along with other enemies of Set's, they gathered Osiris's corpse and performed the ritual over them. To their amazement, it worked: Osiris returned to the world of the living. Osiris spoke of a greater ritual that might be used to rejoin Horus's lost life force by sending the young man through *Duat*, the Underworld.

Horus acquiesced, and died in a bloody ritual. His spirit entered *Duat* and was made whole, and as Isis and her priestesses performed Osiris's great rite over his body, Horus returned to the mortal world whole and stronger than ever.



Horus, Osiris, and their allies prepared for a massed attack against Set. During the battle, Horus destroyed his own lost eye, Set killed Osiris (again) and Horus drove Set into a deep torpor under the earth. Horus vowed unceasing vigilance against the Walid Set and vengeance against his uncle. Along with the priests of the Cult of Isis, Horus used the Great Rite to create several dozen new mummies to aid him in this war, which continues to this day. Creatures calling themselves "Cainites" or "Ashirra" are just deluded children of Set as far as the faithful of Horus are concerned.

Factions

The mummies of the world are divided into four major camps:

• **Shemsu-Heru**: These mummies are the followers of Horus. They obey the Code of Horus and help him to track down and destroy servants of Apophis. This includes vampires of all stripes (as well as the dark god's own mummies; see below), but the Shemsu-Heru hold the Walid Set in particular contempt. Nearly all of the Shemsu-Heru are millennia old; they have not performed the Great Rite since before the days of Alexander.

• **Ishmaelites**: In later years, the Cult of Isis grew lax in its application of the Great Rite. Once the rite was only performed on those mortals who were truly deserving of immortality. As time went on, nearly any loyal servant of Horus could receive it. Horus soon outlawed the granting of immortality, but the damage was done: Several mummies had been created who were not particularly loyal to Horus's cause. These immortals eventually separated themselves from the Shemsu-Heru, calling themselves the Ishmaelites after the first and greatest of their number, Ishmael. They keep their distance from the Shemsu-Heru, who (rightly or not) call them traitors. The Ishmaelites do not have a particular agenda; each is an individual with his own goals and needs, who must be approached on his own terms.

• **Cabiri**: Like the Ishmaelites, the Cabiri keep their distance from the great war that the Shemsu-Heru wage. Unlike the Ishmaelites, the Cabiri are neither Egyptian nor know of Apophis and Set. The Cabiri came about in Europe well after the other mummies were created, and they have their own plans, goals, and values (see sidebar).

• **Claws of Apophis**: In the mists of Egyptian history, Set himself found a nearly complete copy of the Great Rite. Due to an unforeseen flaw in his copy, however, Set created seven immortals possessed of the souls of powerful evil spirits, the servants of Apophis. The seven Claws of Apophis, as they are now called, might even rival Set's own power, were they to act as a group. But, as is the wont of such creatures, they do not; they undermine one another's plans more often than they cooperate. These are not ravening, insane monsters: The Claws are subtle manipulators. They will live until the end of time, and they know it; they are patient.

The Secret Writings of Cabirus

Osiris's great rite exists still, in many forms. A young mummy called Cabirus traveled to Greece in the sixth century BCE and traded a written copy to a mortal wizard, who returned to his home and slowly copied it himself. From there it was distributed to a few other mortal wizards, and several mummies have been created in that time.

These mummies — who call themselves Cabiri — are largely ignorant of the great war that the Shemsu-Heru fight against the vampires and servants of Apophis. And those that do know of the Shemsu-Heru's great crusade simply do not care; they have their own eternal lives to worry about.

Horus's servants have hunted down and burned nearly every copy of the *Secret Writings of Cabirus*, but they have not gotten all of them yet. In 1197, three copies persist, and the location of just one is even rumored: it is said to be in the great mountain fortress Ceoris, citadel of the Tremere clan of vampires.

Others

Then there was the time that I faced seven spirits of vengeance, six werewolves, a were-elephant and four ghosts...

The Dark Medieval world contains more creatures than even the most ardent scholar could catalog. The following descriptions provide the Storyteller with snapshots of various other supernatural beings for use in his chronicle. Should you find these other creatures to be useful for your stories, you may wish to consult the source material listed for each creature.

Changing Breeds

If legend is to be believed, nearly every animal in the Dark Medieval world has a shapechanging cousin that can take on human shape. While this isn't strictly true, there are a great many werecreatures stalking the empty wild places. Most of these are incredibly rare — far more rare than vampires. Those will not be discussed here. However, one particular breed of werewolf, and a few different sorts of werecat are seen in the medieval Arabic world; these are presented below.

Silent Striders

The werewolves known as the Silent Striders — a name that vampires do not know — are commonly found throughout Islamic lands. Millennia ago, unknown forces

banished the Striders from Egypt, and they avoid that land when they can, but that does not keep them from walking the roads from Constantinople to Jerusalem to Samarkand and beyond. They are born roamers and become physically uncomfortable when forced to remain in one place for too long.

The Silent Striders have many characteristics in common with the other tribes of their race: All of them can transform into man, wolf, or rampaging man-wolf form. Most have access to mystical gifts reminiscent of Cainite Disciplines. It is said that they can enter the Underworld and speak with ghosts. The Striders make excellent couriers, for they travel lightly and quickly.

Nearly all werewolves hate vampires. That particular disagreement dates back at least to the days of Set's time aboveground. Lupines speak of vampires as being servants of a malign and destructive spirit who seems to be their equivalent of the Devil. Lupines are certainly not People of the Book, however; they follow their own pagan and animistic religion, worshipping the Earth itself as a goddess and dealing with a variety of godlings and spirits.

The Silent Striders are no exception, and they harbor a particular enmity toward the Walid Set, but they are not wholly irrational beings. From time to time, a Silent Strider might be willing to do a favor for a Cainite who does not seem entirely evil.

For more information on Lupines in general see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Werewolf: The Dark Ages**; for information on the Silent Striders in particular see the **Silent Striders Tribebook.**

Werecats

Werewolves are not the only shapechangers in Islamic lands; vampires who emerge from the cities might occasionally encounter the werecats. They seem to have a rivalry of sorts with werewolves, but few Cainites are privy to the nature or meaning of the conflict. Most simply chalk it up to the natural dislike between cats and dogs.

Of course, werecats are not werehousecats any more than werewolves are weredogs. No, the werecats change from human form into the shape of great hunting cats, tigers, lions and so forth. Werecats are even more rare than werewolves, but they are more willing to enter cities and interact with humankind, no doubt due to their inherent curiosity. They are also considerably subtler than werewolves. A Cainite is as likely to encounter a werecat as a werewolf; he is just less likely to notice the werecat.

Werecats are rather territorial. Should a vampire encounter one's home territory, that vampire should run for safety rather than linger, for the cat-changers are fierce warriors and in battle will easily match a Cainite of the same age.

For more information on werecats, see the **Werewolf Players Guide** and **Bastet.**

Ruh (Ghosts)

She wasn't anyone special, you understand. I suppose that was the point. I was very hungry, for I had just come out of a long torpor. She was the nearest mortal. I could smell her blood across a mile of wasteland. I ripped her throat out without thinking and drank her life's blood before coming to my senses or noticing the squalling infant she left behind. I took the infant to an orphanage and did not think of it again.

Three nights passed before she began to haunt my daytime dreams. I began to awaken each night in a bloody sweat, and one afternoon I bolted upright and sprinted out into the sunlight out of terror at the things she showed me. I finally got her attention and struck a bargain with her; I watched over her son and made sure he would want for nothing throughout his life. She never truly left me, you understand; she just stopped tormenting me. He died a ripe old 72 last year; she stopped

Aranthebes, Immortal

Aranthebes scarcely remembers his mortal life anymore. He was a farmer six thousand years ago, he thinks. Or perhaps he just farmed for a while after one of his early rebirths. It hardly matters. These days are hard for the avengers of Horus; no one remembers the old ways, and Egypt is mostly given over to some upstart third-generation monotheistic religion. Worse still, after millennia of victories over the forces of Set, it now seems as though the Shemsu-Heru are falling into the background as the vampires ascend to power. The plowshare became a sword long ago; now all it needs is a target.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2; Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 4, Animal Ken 5, Archery 5, Athletics 5, Brawl 4, Crafts 4, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Expression 4, Geography 4, Herbalism 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Larceny 3, Law 3, Leadership 4, Linguistics 5, Medicine 4, Melee 5, Occult 5, Politics 3, Ride 4, Science 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 4, Survival 4

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Celerity 3, Fortitude 2, Potence 3, Presence 4, Thaumaturgy 3

Self-Control: 4, **Conscience:** 2, **Courage:** 5

Humanity: 5, **Willpower:** 8

Storyteller Note: Aranthebes is absurdly capable. This is as it should be: the man has lived for longer than many Methuselahs. He should provide a good challenge for an entire coterie of Cainites, but more importantly, he simply should not be used as a physical challenge for vampires. He is better used as a long-term foil whose goals usually, but not always, counter those of the coterie.

visiting me just a few days later. I suppose she has gone on to Paradise and her reward. A good mother, that one.

The presence of ghosts and their shadowy afterlife would give even the caliphs of old pause, for spirits that reside in these places are neither drawn to Paradise for their eternal reward nor to Hell for punishment. They have unfinished business in the world of the living. The restless dead of greater Arabia hang back near the lands of life for a reason; given the havoc that vampires so often wreak on mortal lives, it is no wonder that many of them haunt the Cainites of the Middle East.

Many of the most devout *ruh* are horrified that the afterlife is nothing like that which they were promised in life. The trappings of a Muslim paradise are nowhere to be found. Instead, the faithful persist in a wretched shadow of the world they knew, an insult further compounded by the atheistic and European Stygian Empire, which dominates these lands.

And, as though this insult was not enough, the Emperor Charon of Stygia allows those of Christian faith to travel unmolested along the Byways that connect the Necropoli, the dark reflections of mortal cities. Islam defeats Christianity in Jerusalem in the mortal realm, and hundreds or thousands of Christian knights enter the Shadowlands, proclaiming the glory of the Christian God and questing onward for the Christians' Heaven.

Though dead, the devout Muslim tastes the bitter irony of this and vows to take action. Many find refuge among the so-called Renegades of the afterlife. For the most part, these ghosts are those who refuse to obey the laws of Stygia, and the majority are simple criminals. As far as a Storyteller in a vampire-centered **Veil of Night** chronicle should be concerned, two sorts of Muslims might join Renegade bands after death: those who wish to fight Stygia and those who desire revenge on a Cainite in violation of the laws of the Hierarchy. The former might be willing to trade favors with a vampire who can aid them in their cause; the latter are likely to be dangerous antagonists (or allies, if they share a common foe with the coterie).

Mahfuz Alam, who died gloriously defending Jerusalem from crusading European knights, leads a group of the former sort of wraiths. His place in Heaven was assured through his martyrdom, and the so-called Jerusalem Necropolis is a vile joke to him. He has heard too many false stories of the Far Shores, across the great sunless sea, for him to believe that Paradise can be reached with mere physical effort. Accordingly, Alam and his allies (fewer than a dozen strong, but growing) wish to evict the thousands of Stygian Legionnaires that occupy the Jerusalem Necropolis and establish a Muslim kingdom in the afterlife, to challenge the supremacy of the Fishers (as the Christians are called) and the obviously unworthy Stygians.

In the Egyptian underworld, the Stygians displaced a far older Dark Kingdom, which its inhabitants called Neter-Khetet. This is the ancient underworld of the Pharaohs and of the mummies (see above). Though on rare occasions the wraiths of ancient Egypt rear their heads in the Egyptian Shadowlands, for the most part they are long since gone to Oblivion or a distant ghostland called Amenti, the Dark Kingdom of Sand. The only place that such ancient beings might manifest is in the Shadowlands near the oldest artifacts of the pharaohs' civilization: the pyramids and the Sphinx. Elder vampires or mummies seeking out the true wisdom of the ages might wish to visit these monuments. They might glean a secret or an insight from a six-thousand-year-dead lurker from beyond the grave.

For more information on *ruh*, see **Wraith: The Oblivion** and its supplements.

Djinn: Spirits of Arabia

Djinn are spirits that frequent Arabic lands. Perhaps the most commonly known spirits of Muslim lands, they are not so commonly encountered. Only those vampires who regularly have truck with the spirit world — Banu Haqim and Walid Set sorcerers, some members of the Qabilat al-Mawt, and a few others — are likely to be familiar with their nature and culture; other Cainites believe that the *djinn* are nothing but leftovers from children's stories.

Those familiar with the *djinn* can tell rather wild stories of their own, but the spirits do obey certain general rules and patterns of behavior. They seem to follow a social order of warrior-kings and use titles somewhat familiar to mortal Muslims. Lowly warrior *djinn* call themselves *mamluks* or *ghazi*, while chieftains are *sheikh*, sultans or even caliphs. Some believe these titles indicate a strict caste system among the *djinn*, but that is very much unclear. These spirits are not above lying and inflating their own status, after all.

Some *djinn* — not all — are faithful worshippers of God. They obey the tenets of Islam as best they can. These beings are less tolerant of non-Muslim humans (and wizards, and vampires) than heathen *djinn* might be, but they do retain a fair amount of respect for People of the Book. Despite their devotion to God, most *djinn* are greedy, arrogant and generally dismissive of humans and vampires alike; the most powerful of them can reshape the world at a whim, and they demand respect from those they meet.

Most *djinn* display some affinity for a particular Greek element. Typically, those of an aggressive bent prefer fire and air, while the more peaceful spirits use earth and water. This is hardly a strict rule; *djinn* are not Tremere-conjured hermetic elementals. Mortals and undead who offend a *djinni* might find themselves on the receiving end of an elemental curse, however.

Typically, these curses remove from their victims all of the metaphorical traits of the offended *djinn*'s favored element. For instance, a *djinni* with an affinity for earth might remove all of earth's favor from a particularly rude Cainite. That particular vampire would find his sense of

Thaumaturgy, Sorcery and Djinni

Djinn are spirits native to Arabian and Middle Eastern cultures. They are not the elementals known to Tremere vampires and Hermetic wizards. As such, thaumaturges using Rego Mentem or Rego Manes (see **Dark Ages Companion**, p. 107) to affect *djinn* face a +2 difficulty penalty, as do mortal wizards (of a European tradition) using those paths of Ephemera or Summoning, Binding and Warding (see **Liege, Lord and Lackey**). Middle Eastern wizards and Banu Haqim sorcerers using equivalent paths face no such penalty, of course.

Djinn are bound by Solomanic code, however, so Tremere familiar with those principles who then study with Arabic wizards could well adapt hermetic and thaumaturgic traditions (which share some of the same sources) to better deal with *djinn*. This would involve long study but would eventually negate any penalties.

stability fading away; he would become unpredictable, forget about important engagements and become prone to rapid mood changes. He might even find himself more easily swayed away from a philosophical point that he has defended for decades. Curses in a similar vein but for different elements could be inflicted by *djinn* with different elemental affinities. Such curses can last until the *djinni* feels like removing it — or until he is commanded to do so by a more powerful *djinni*, or threatened into doing so. Those *djinn* who appreciate puzzles and human ingenuity might build a riddle or puzzle into the curse's removal; others may not be so kind.

The *djinn* spend time on the mortal plane only when they have a good reason for doing so: This may include mortal treasures that need tending, mortal friends to whom the *djinni* is paying a visit, or servitude. For the most part, *djinn* live in distant spirit realms; great brass cities and fiery oceans are theirs to rule over. Few vampires could possibly reach such places (or survive there), though they may have allies who could.

The specific abilities of a *djinni* manifesting on Earth are highly variable and are very much up to the Storyteller. For full details see **Lost Paths** for **Mage: The Ascension.**

Said, Sultan of the Fiery Stars

A djinni of some power and more ambition, Said has been dealing with the mortals of Aleppo for generations. A troublesome Tuftani wizard named Akil ibn Assir held him prisoner in a spirit bottle for several years, but he finally obtained his release and has decided to take his revenge on humanity by tricking and enslaving mortals as he was tricked and enslaved. He tells ambitious "wizards" and "masters of the night" that he is the sultan of a great stellar kingdom ready to serve them. He finds Cainites to be especially delicious targets.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8; Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4; Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 1, Acting 3, Alertness 2, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 4, Linguistics 2, Occult 3, Subterfuge 3

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Fortitude 5, Potence 3

Paths: Creo Ignem 6

Self-Control: 3, **Conscience:** 2, **Courage:** 4

Humanity: n/a, **Willpower:** 8

Djinni and Mortality

Can *djinn* wishes remove the Curse of Caine and make a vampire mortal again? The definitive answer is *maybe*. Obviously, the first consideration is the Storyteller's preference; she can simply declare outright that a particular *djinni* (or even all *djinni*) cannot — or will not — overcome the power of God. Some *djinn* are devout Muslims, after all, and they might be unwilling to act counter to the edict of Allah. Even if the Storyteller makes such a decision, of course, she shouldn't necessarily make that known to the players, or especially to their characters.

It is almost certainly possible for a *djinni* to grant a wish to erratically lift the Curse of Caine. Perhaps the character will spend one day a year mortal, or spend a short period mortal after fulfilling a particular condition.

If you, as Storyteller, feel that some *djinn* can help a vampire return to mortality, you should decide which ones can do so. It is likely that only the most powerful *djinn* can provide such a powerful wish. The next consideration should be the wish's permanency. Perhaps the *djinni* can grant mortality for just one year, or until a mortal lover dies, or the like. The *djinni*'s magic may fail should he be enslaved to a mortal or immortal wizard. Finally, you should decide on a price that the *djinni* charges for such a great task. Surely that price will be no trifle: perhaps a decade of servitude, or the character's turning over his next-born child to the *djinni* for service, or a million pieces of gold. Any *djinni* that offers to turn a vampire into a mortal out of the goodness of his own heart has something else on his mind.

Veil of Night™

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