

LAIR *of the* HIDDEN

TM



TIME OF
JUDGMENT

An inconnu chronicle for vampire: the masquerade®

LAIR *of the* HIDDEN



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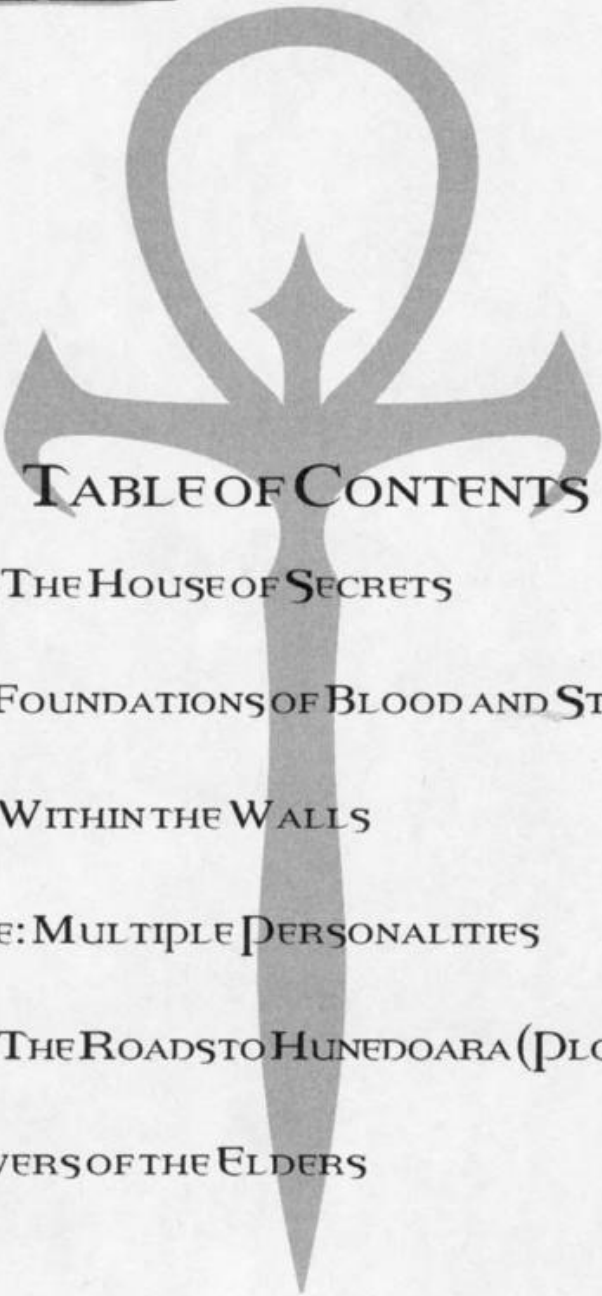
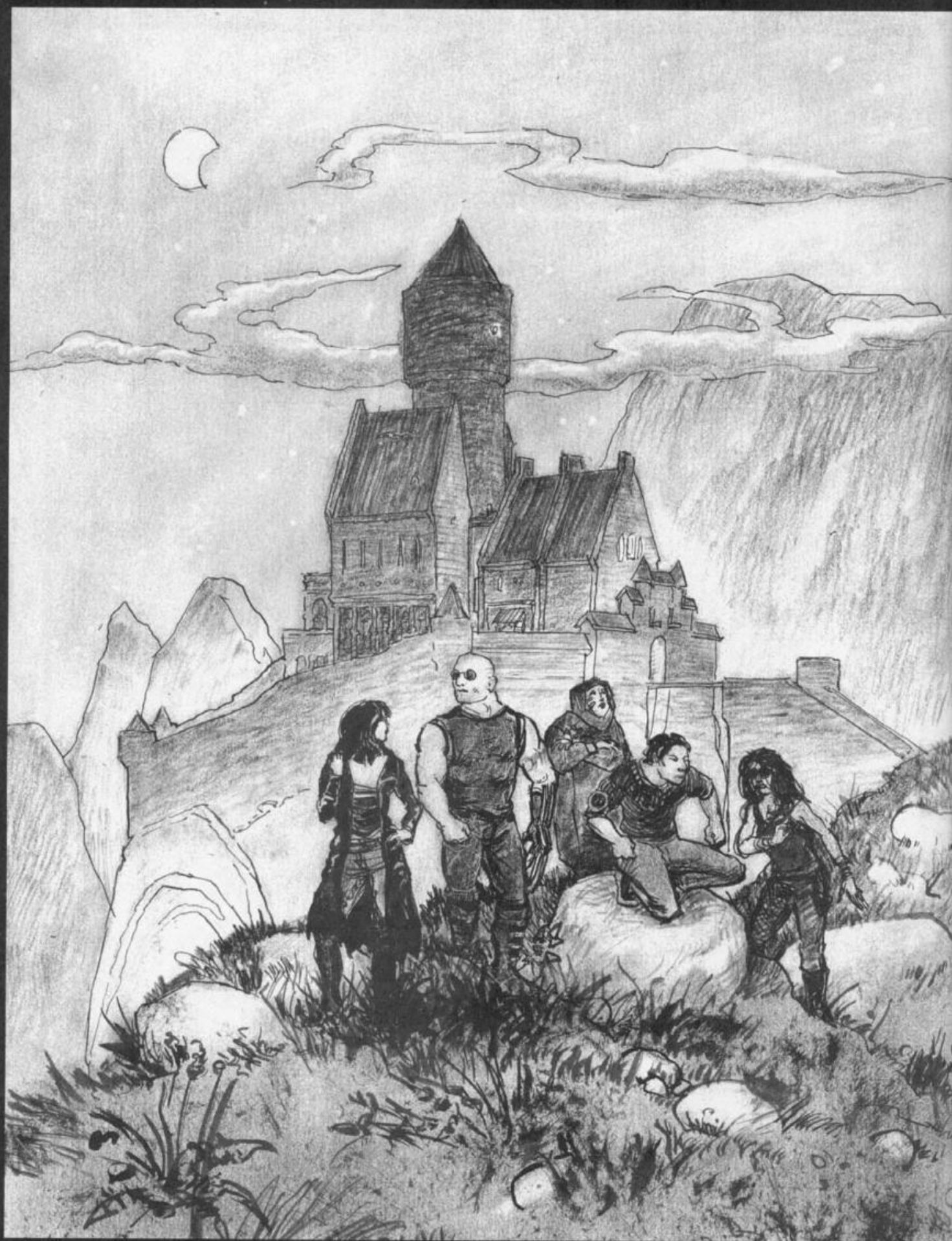


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INTRODUCTION: THE HOUSE OF SECRETS

A small industrial town dozes in the foothills of the Transylvanian Alps. Not much ever happens in Hunedoara. For more than four centuries, the great events of the world passed it by. Armies and revolutions ignored it. When Romania turned Communist, the good folk of Hunedoara dutifully hung their dictator's portrait in every home. When bullets took the last dictator's life, the Hunedoarans phlegmatically took his portrait down again. The town's foundries and factories do not produce anything unusual. Dozens of mill towns just like it dot the Romanian landscape.

Except for the castle.

Five hundred years ago, Hunedoara was a very important place. The town grew around a castle called Hunedoara, named for the family

that built it, the Huniads or Hunyadis. Some Hunyadis became kings. Their castle became prison to another king, the deposed Vlad the Impaler. In the 15th century, however, Hunedoara Castle dropped out of history. Completely. No one knows exactly what happened. Some historians think the Turks or Hungarians destroyed it in one of the endemic Balkan wars. Most historians don't think about the castle at all. Maps seldom show its ruins. Ask the people of Hunedoara where the castle stood and you receive a blank look, a vague wave and a puzzled, "Oh, out in the woods and hills somewhere. Not near here." They would be very surprised to learn that old maps show a magnificent castle less than an hour's walk from downtown.

The castle is unknown.

Inconnu.

Hunedoara Castle still exists. It is not a ruin; it is quite intact — and inhabited. Twelve ancient vampires call it home, along with their servants and... one other. They call themselves Inconnu, a name well known but quite mysterious to many Cainites, and who shall dispute their claim? A curtain of illusion and forgetfulness hides the castle from mortal and undead eyes. From behind that curtain of secrecy, the Twelve of Hunedoara spin webs of power that reach around the world. No enemy can find them. Their unlife is a Cainite's utopia — power wielded in complete safety.

The Twelve hate it. Their utopia has a few small flaws. For one thing, they cannot leave. The Inconnu of Hunedoara are trapped in their house of secrets, trapped by their own power and their own fears and grudges. They cannot harm each other; they cannot stand each other; they cannot get away from each other. They are going mad.

And you are invited to their house. Enjoy your visit.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Lair of the Hidden presents what might be the world's most powerful coterie of Cainites, the Inconnu of Hunedoara. In its pages, you will learn the secrets of the Twelve and the castle they call both home and hell. Along the way, you can expect to learn a little about the pursuit of Golconda, pacts with spirits, the machinations of elder Cainites and the perils of getting what you want.

Do not expect to learn much about the Inconnu. The Twelve of Hunedoara are merely one group of Cainites that happens to use that name. They have no authority or influence over other Cainites who call themselves Inconnu.

This is a scenario book. It is meant for Storytellers. Players who read **Lair of the Hidden** cheat themselves out of the story's mystery, horror and adventure. We recommend that players not read any further.

DISCLAIMER: GABRIEL BETHLEN NEVER SLEPT HERE

The account of the history of Hunedoara Castle in **Lair of the Hidden** departs from the history of the real castle, due to the needs of this story. In the real world, you can visit Hunedoara yourself: The castle still stands in Romania and is in remarkably good condition. In the World of Darkness, however, history took a drastically different turn — and that is the Hunedoara Castle this story is about.

CONTENTS

Here's what you get in **Lair of the Hidden**:

Chapter One, History, tells the background of the Twelve and how they placed themselves in their predicament. The chapter also gives the history of the castle and its mortal dwellers, which intertwine with the history of Romania itself.

Chapter Two, Inside the Walls, describes the castle as it exists tonight. More than a guide to the castle itself, it tells about the Twelve's nightly existence and how they interact with the outside world.

Chapter Three, Those Who Dwell Within, describes the 12 elder Cainites who call Hunedoara their home. The chapter also describes their chief servants and the Twelve's enigmatic servant, master, jailor and protector.

Chapter Four, The Roads to Hunedoara, provides ways to involve your players' characters in the schemes of the Twelve. The chapter offers several ways to bring a coterie to the Lair of the Hidden. A coterie faces terrible danger to body and soul at Hunedoara Castle — but the characters may find patrons, knowledge or even a chance to help the entire World of Darkness.

The **Appendix** describes the extraordinary Discipline powers and thaumaturgical rituals that the Twelve use to manipulate events far from the castle. It also explains the pact that protects the castle and its inhabitants.

Finally, a series of **Relationship Charts** synthesizes the complex ties that bind the Inconnu of Hunedoara together. This is a quick-notes aid for Storytellers who might

otherwise have difficulty making sense of how a dozen different Methuselahs feel about and relate to each other — that is, any Storyteller who's not a Methuselah herself!

THEME

"The truth will out" is the first theme in **Lair of the Hidden**. No secret lasts forever. The Twelve have hid for more than four centuries, but the players' characters will discover them. This can happen in several different ways. Indeed, one of the Twelve might draw the coterie to the castle as part of a convoluted scheme, thinking that he can control the consequences of this act.

More importantly, the coterie may discover the ghastly means by which the Twelve guarantee their secrecy and protection. That revelation can doom the Twelve. The self-styled Inconnu have hidden from themselves as well as the world. They refuse to see how far they have fallen from a noble past. One way or another, the characters force a choice on the Twelve, to confront the horror of their deeds and the petty spite that divides them, or to let that spite destroy them.

The castle itself is a place of secrets. The Twelve are not what they seem; some of them remain in hiding as long as they can. The Twelve also possess lore unknown to other Kindred, from personal memories of Carthage to the parables of Saulot. For the greatest secret of all, two entities whose power dwarfs even the Inconnu dwell in the castle — and the Twelve know of only one of them.

The clash between means and ends provides the second theme to **Lair of the Hidden**. The Twelve believe they do good. In fact, they think they can save the world and stop Gehenna. To protect themselves, however, they commit cold-blooded murder. The burden of their sin, as much as their confinement, drives them to the brink of madness.

The characters face their own tests of conscience. Hunedoara holds the promise of great power, from the Twelve and other sources. That power, however, carries a price. As the characters learn the perils and promises of the Twelve, they must ask themselves how far they will go for the sake of power, knowledge... or, perhaps, mere survival.



A PREVIOUS PUBLICATION

This is not the first appearance of Hunedoara and the Twelve. A briefer and substantially different version of the castle appeared in the first edition of *A World of Darkness*, published in 1992 and long out of print. That version presented Hunedoara Castle as the World Headquarters of the Great Secret Brotherhood of the Inconnu.

That first version had some inconsistencies. Most importantly, it gave no clue how ordinary players' characters could actually encounter Hunedoara and the Twelve. It also applied the name of Hunedoara to an entirely fictitious castle, with some hand-waving about the concealment spell making people forget which castle ought to carry the name. Well, really. Why even use the name if you don't use the location?

Vampire has also changed conceptually. The Inconnu are no longer a Great Secret Brotherhood that could have, or want, a headquarters. Or maybe they are, but that's entirely up to each Storyteller. We do not intend to define the Inconnu as anything but a mystery.

If you use the old version of the Twelve and Hunedoara in your chronicle, you have probably invented a great deal of your own material for your chronicle. We do not ask that you throw it out. Perhaps you can adapt some aspects of *Lair of the Hidden* for your own Hunedoara; perhaps you can turn this version into a completely different group of hidden elders. If you've never seen the older version, fear not. *Lair of the Hidden* is complete and self-contained. You do not need any book except *Vampire: the Masquerade* itself to use this scenario. Although we do refer to material from other supplements now and then, such as special Disciplines and Paths of Thaumaturgy, we summarize the necessary information in the text or in sidebars like this one.

MOOD

As the plot advances, the mood of *Lair of the Hidden* changes. Before the characters learn about the Twelve, Storytellers should strive to impart a sense of mystery. Shadowy forces move about the characters and enmesh them in incomprehensible plots. Strange errands, uncanny murders and bizarre events hint at hidden hands. As the characters draw near the castle, they encounter hints that one of the hands may belong to God Himself.

The tension rises when the characters reach Hunedoara, turning mystery into nightmare. The Twelve strive to place visitors at their ease — but the characters soon realize they are trapped with a crew of vastly powerful maniacs in a castle haunted by something far worse than any ghost. Dreams and spirits blur the limits of reality itself in a place the rest of the world does not believe exists.

REFERENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

Storytellers who plan on using *Lair of the Hidden* may want to spend some time on the World Wide Web. You can find pictures of the castle and town of Hunedoara on several web sites, including sites managed by the Romanian Ministry of Tourism. With a little searching, you can show your players actual rooms within the castle and tell them, "Okay, your characters are here."

If you like movies for inspiration, we recommend those old Hammer Films horror flicks like *The Gorgon* or *Taste the Blood of Dracula* or, if you can stand the extreme campiness, *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. Many of these films are set in a late-19th century Transylvania of the imagination, where every village has a castle looming over it, a pompous police chief in a spiked helmet, a mad doctor, a surly and secretive innkeeper and enough mysterious deaths to set a coroner gibbering. Our town of Hunedoara is that village — but a century later, after Communism and industrialization. The police chief no longer wears a spiked helmet, but he's still pompous, while the innkeeper's great-great-grandson runs a seedy hotel... but he still keeps secrets and grows surly when people ask too many questions.

We also recommend the Edgar Allan Poe adaptations that Roger Corman produced or directed for API, such as *The Pit and the Pendulum* or *Masque of the Red Death*. Not only do these movies provide a visual reference for the overripe, archaic splendor of Hunedoara Castle, they also deal with madness, secrets and sins thought safely buried — the same territory covered by **Lair of the Hidden**.

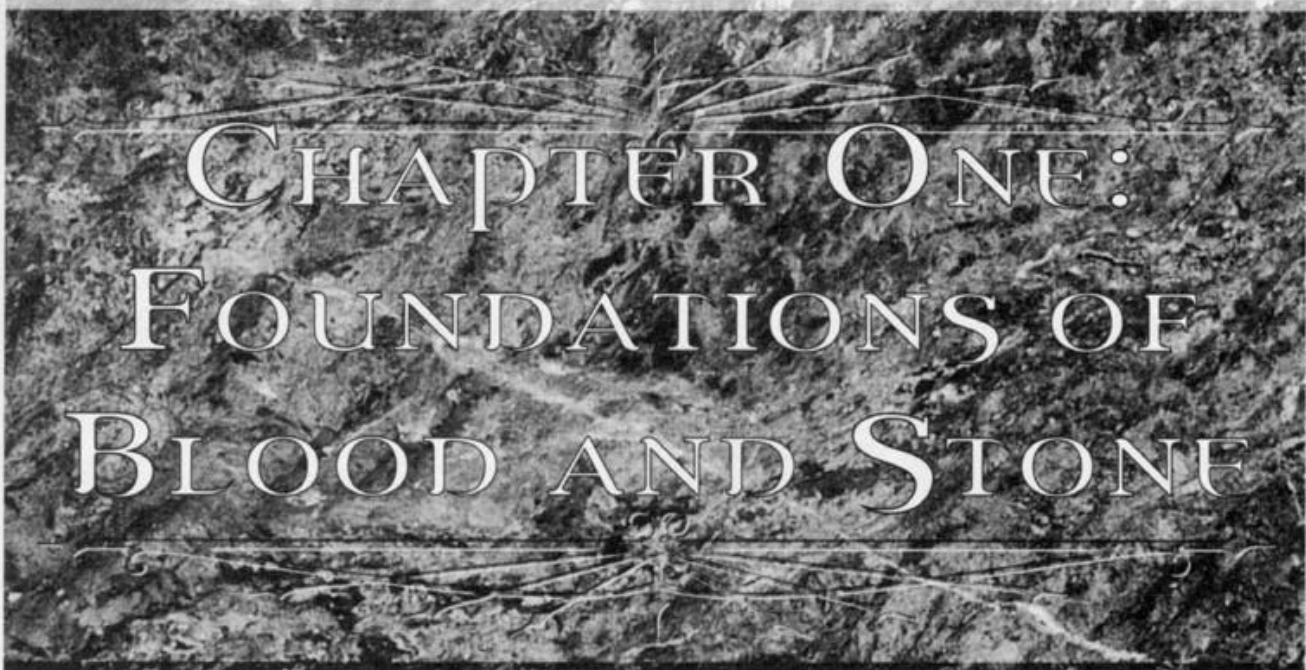
The mother lode of inspiration consists of Poe's original stories and other gothic tales from the 19th century. "Masque of the Red Death" and "The Fall of the House of Usher"

hold particular relevance for **Lair of the Hidden**. For the very first tales of terror set in castles, however, look up *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe. Walpole's book is very short, but be warned that *Udolpho* is three volumes long! Fortunately, you can find "good bits" abridged editions that focus on the chapters that actually take place in the ominous castle of Udolpho itself.

And, of course, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker provides the ultimate guide and exemplar of horror-haunted Transylvanian castles.







CHAPTER ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF BLOOD AND STONE

The three hardest tasks in the world are neither physical feats nor intellectual achievements, but moral acts: to return love for hate, to include the excluded, and to say, 'I was wrong.'

—Sydney J. Harris

How long is eternity? How do the gods measure time? Night follows day, season follows season, year follows year. The moon turns from the faintest of slivers to full silver glory and back again to darkness in but a month. Even the stars, that seem unchanging, move over the passage of many mortal lifetimes. Children are born, grow to adulthood, bear their own sons and daughters, and wither away in the fullness of years. Their children follow them, and their children's children, generation after generation on the same land, wresting green life from the soil, living as their parents did, and their parents before them.

So, too, do civilizations live out their span, rising out of the ashes of their predecessors, survivors of war and plague and famine, moving from barren lands into

plenty, by migration or conquest. Kingdoms rise and prosper, and then at the end, they fall into ruin, with their people and lands being absorbed or conquered by yet another such kingdom whose fortunes are rising, rather than falling.

Indeed, not even the gods are truly immortal. For everything fades in its own due time. Everything save we, ancient heirs to a still more ancient curse. Trapped outside the natural order of the world, we do not grow old, nor do we fade. We measure only the nights, for the days are lost to us. Night follows night follows night, in endless, unvarying procession, stretching into eternity itself.

Without compass or measure, eternity is very long indeed.

—From the journal of Danika Ruthven

HUNEDOARA CASTLE IN MORTAL HISTORY

The castle referred to alternately as Hunedoara Castle, Corvinesti Castle, or Huniadstadt once stood on a steep promontory overlooking where the Zlasi river turns and splits around a rocky island outcropping, forming a deep narrow gorge. Now all that can be seen are a few ruined foundations and fragments of the walls, overgrown and desolate, though historical records are vague as to the nature of the disaster or defeat that caused it to fall. Local legend claims the site is haunted by the ghosts of victims tortured to death in the castle's infamous dungeons, and locals shun the place. Even in daylight the broken ruins seem sinister and foreboding; at night, they say, those who dare trespass on the cursed ground are never seen alive again.

CASTLE OF HUNGARIAN KINGS

Hunedoara Castle was built on the foundations of a still older fortress, constructed by the Romans after the conquest of Dacia. The original castle was little more than a triangular keep and a walled compound when first erected in the 13th century. It commanded a strategic vantage point on the river in the Cerna Valley, which had been an iron-ore producing and smelting industry even during the time of the Romans. King Sigismund of Luxemburg gave the castle, originally a royal Hungarian fief, to a local Romanian nobleman named Vojk of the Corvinus family in the late 1300s, in return for his heroic deeds in the King's service and loyalty during an uprising. Vojk, however, also served another liege — the reclusive Tzimisce sorceress Danika Ruthven.

JOHN HUNYADI, CRUSADER AGAINST THE TURKS

Vojk's son, John Hunyadi, was born in 1385. A devout Christian and consummate strategist and general, John led a number of campaigns against the Turks and was appointed *voivode* (governor) of Transylvania by the King of Hungary. In 1444, however, the Ottomans won a decisive victory at Varna, and the Hungarian king was killed. The Hungarian nobles appointed John Hunyadi as regent for the kingdom until 1453, when the king's

son finally assumed his throne. Hunyadi promptly returned to his crusade against the Turks, which was even supported by Pope Calixtus III. With the aid of Sir John Capstran, a monk, Hunyadi finally defeated the Ottomans at Belgrade and prevented them from conquering Hungary for another 70 years.

Despite his military successes, Hunyadi was distrusted and hated by the predominantly Magyar nobles of Hungary; his eldest son Ladislaus was executed over a plot involving the assassination of the king's uncle, and so at the old crusader's death, the castle passed to his second son, Matthias Corvinus.

During his lifetime, John Hunyadi expanded Hunedoara castle, adding the two great halls, the chapel, the back wing, and the great watchtower he named *Ne Boise* (Do not be afraid) to be used as a last refuge. For a few years, the castle hosted the local Hungarian court, and it was widely regarded as one of the most beautiful in Transylvania.

Danika Ruthven continued to claim the castle as part of her domain, though she did not make any attempts to exert more than the most minor of influences over John Hunyadi himself, lest she attract the unwelcome notice of too many of her Cainite neighbors. Her agents in Hunyadi's court and household guard kept a watchful eye on their lord and reported any sign of outside interference or mysterious advisors to her, and she then took what steps she felt were necessary to prevent such influences from taking root — at least in her own territories.

MATTHIAS CORVINUS, THE RAVEN KING

Born in 1443, the second son of John Hunyadi took the name Corvinus, and bore the raven on his coat of arms. In 1458, at the age of 15, he was elected King of Hungary, an election that the Holy Roman Emperor finally acknowledged in 1462. Like his father, Matthias' fame as a crusader spread widely, and he was approached by Vlad Dracul, Prince of Wallachia and a former ally, John Hunyadi, for aid against the Turks. However, Vlad's cruel reputation and iron-fisted rule gave rise to suspicions as to his true loyalties. Upon being presented with evidence that Vlad, once a Turkish hostage, was conspiring with the Turks to keep his throne, Matthias had the Wallachian warlord imprisoned in Hunedoara Castle, where he remained for nearly 10 years.

King Matthias was then persuaded by Pope Pius II to take up arms against the King of Bohemia, who

THE "DRACULA PROBLEM"

Strong-willed, ruthless, ambitious and cunning, Vlad Dracul would have been a formidable mortal ruler by Tzimisce standards in any case. However, it soon became clear there was something *else* about him: He not only knew about the existence of Cainites, but he also had proven himself more than capable of beating them on their own ground. He had pursued and beaten not just Tzimisce minions, but Tzimisce themselves; he had even sought the power inherent in Tzimisce blood. His imprisonment by King Matthias of Hungary, however, gave the Tzimisce time to plan, and debate: What should they do with this uncanny, dangerous mortal?

One faction, impressed with Dracula's accomplishments and sheer nerve, favored Embracing the renegade prince, making him one of the creatures he had hunted and destroyed. Another faction, however, wanted vengeance for the Tzimisce murdered by the upstart and favored killing him — slowly. Another faction, including Danika Ruthven herself, who had opportunity to meet and speak with Dracula during his Hunedoara imprisonment, judged him dangerous — too dangerous to either Embrace or allow to survive. But Count Vladimir Rustovitch had the final word; when Vlad Dracul was released from his prison to go fight the Turks, he subjected the mortal prince to a blood bond and claimed him as a ghoul.

Little did Rustovitch realize, as he proudly showed off his new "servant" to his peers, and taught Vlad all he wanted to know about Cainite society, what the consequences would be of breaking the Silence of the Blood, or the true nature of the monster he was about to let loose into the eternal night....

had been excommunicated for his heretical Hussite loyalties. Though the Bohemian council of nobles never acknowledged him, Matthias conquered Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia, and had himself crowned as King of Bohemia.

But the real threat continued to be the Turks. King Stephen Bathory of Moldavia, whose borders lay closer to the Ottoman Empire, finally convinced Matthias that Vlad Dracula was their best hope against the Turks, and Matthias let the Wallachian prince go free. Dracula immediately raised an army against the Turks. In 1479,



Vlad Dracula was reported killed in battle outside Bucharest; his head was triumphantly displayed in Constantinople. Legend has it that a band of local monks secretly buried his body, ignoring the ban of excommunication that had been proclaimed against him, but his grave was never found.

Matthias had turned his attention once again westward, fighting two wars against the Holy Roman Emperor, finally even taking Vienna, though his empire was lost after his death in 1490. During his rule Hungary reached its last flowering before its fall to the Ottoman Empire. He was harsh in his fiscal policy and in his administration of justice, but he also valued learning and science, and his library at Buda, the Corvina, was one of the finest in Europe.

During his lifetime, he made further improvements on the castle at Hunedoara, which he used as a summer residence when not engaged in military actions. The castle passed to his son, though the crown did not. The boy died at an early age, however, and Matthias' widow married the Marquis of Brandenburg. The marquis had no interest in the remote castle and sent a steward to hold it.

As the ownership of the Hungarian royal castle came into the hands of foreigners, its undead mistress had likewise left its responsibility in the hands of a surrogate — her youngest child, Anastazi, and a staff of ghouls. For a time, other matters seemed more important than the castle she had watched over for so long.

Hunedoara Castle faded out of history in the early 1500s. While still technically a possession of the Marquis of Brandenburg, and handed down to his heirs, it remained a possession on paper only, providing a small revenue from iron mines and a source of worked leather, as well as tax income from local farmers. But no member of the family ever felt the urge to visit their distant possession, even to inspect its true worth. By 1600, the castle was in ruins, and the property all but forgotten, save for local shepherds and woodcutters who sometimes dared that part of the valley during the day, but were always very careful to be on the far side of the river by dark, lest the hoary spirits that now dwelt there follow them home.

TRAVELERS ON THE UNMAPPED ROAD

*I give you a path to seek peace for your soul
Even in this bitter darkness.*

I give you the light of hope, for you and your children,

To await the day when anger fades, and pride gives way to yearning.

The name of the path is Golconda,

And those who seek it with a true heart may yet gain salvation,

Though they walk in the night like demons

And bear the curses of a thousand angels.

— *The Erciyes Fragments, Book of Temptations*

DANIKA'S QUEST

Danika Ruthven had served the gods for centuries, but in the past few hundred years had seen the cults of Veles, Peron, ancient Triglav and Moist Mother Earth fall into shadowy folklore, and the gods of Rome crumble into dust. The new god had no place for her, but condemned all her ancient kind as demons no better than the ones she bound in ritual each year anew. She was a sorceress and Shaper, a priestess of the Mother, but she had outlived her gods; for little remained but echoes in the forest or on the mountaintops of their presence in the land.

War raged among the Tzimisce, ancient guardians of the land. The Omen War against the Usurpers had already thinned Tzimisce numbers; the inability of the *voivodes* to act in unison or restrain from stabbing each other in the back when opportunity offered itself had doomed their offensive efforts from the start. The younger Tzimisce, who faced the Tremere and their stone-beasts in the front lines, for all intents and purposes ended the war that neither they, nor their elders, could win in a blaze of rebellion. Responding to years of abuse and callous disdain, the young Tzimisce anarchs broke the bonds of blood and turned against their own sires. Many Danika had known for centuries, some even older than herself, fell to their childer's appetites, or perished when their havens burned to the ground. Rumor had it that even the Eldest himself had fallen victim to anarch fangs, though Danika knew her cousin Lambach far too well to give his words much credence.

Now only a handful of the elders of the old clan survived, and those had taken refuge in their remote

mountain fortresses, or sought the relative peace of torpor in some forgotten Carpathian cavern.

But Danika was not content to take that path. It had never been her way to hide from the world, nor refuse to face unpleasant truths. The glories of past nights were gone; nothing would bring them back. However, she felt restless, adrift, cut off from the beliefs that had sustained her for so many years, uncertain now of what the truth of her existence had come to. Her gods had vanished from the world, and she could not hear their voices now over the clamor of church bells and chanting monks. What purpose then did her undying existence have? For what role had the dead water shaped her?

She meditated for a long time on this question, but found no answers in her mountaintop, nor the valley, nor the river. Yet since by all logic an answer must exist somewhere, she resolved she would seek it out. Now that the kings she had watched over, whose castle she had guarded, were gone, she had no more responsibilities to the mortal world, and could go where she would. Yet it was not within her Tzimisce blood to abandon her territory without a custodian. She chose such a man, Anastazi Ladislav, the seneschal of Hunedoara, and offered him the Embrace, which he willingly accepted. She taught him the basics of the Blood, charged him with the guardianship of the castle and its valley, and then left him to carry out his duties.

With a generous supply of her own grave-earth secured in her baggage, Danika rode off into the night, in search of answers for her soul. She traveled west, into lands where other clans ruled the night and Tzimisce were rare, and she discovered they were feared as creatures of the devil. Here the wicked Tremere held sway, whispering slander into the ears of Ventrue princes, so that she found it prudent to not announce herself, but use her gifts to conceal her presence among them.

The clans of the West had joined themselves in a new alliance, where they could overpower their rebellious childer and force them back into subservience. This Camarilla also proposed to hide its very existence from mortal eyes, taking the Silence of the Blood to new extremes for fear of the hunters of the Church, who had slain many of the Blood, from the most inexperienced of fledglings to the most powerful of elders. Danika avoided them as well.

But the elders of the nascent Camarilla did not have the answers she sought. Neither did the hidden Cainite lords who moved prince and elder on the stages of Europe like pieces on a game board, nor

even their most inquisitive childer. Their attention was focused outward, to the world of mortals, and they seemed to be more interested in pretending to be mortal themselves than understanding their true natures. The remnants of the once-rebellious anarch packs were no better, their attention focused on vengeance and defying their elders, reveling in savagery of the Beast, but failing to take responsibility for their actions under its goading.

One night, on a wooded hillside in Bavaria, she heard the screams of the Tremere's rock-spawned hounds, sensed the presence of another of the Blood coming toward her, the hounds in pursuit. His aura blazed with colors she had never before seen from a child of Caine, yet there was no doubt he was one of the undead. As he turned to face the pursuing beasts, she saw his third eye open, and knew what he was.

She might have acted in any case, for the Salubri were few and hunted, and she had no love for the Tremere or their pathetic lies. But there was also something in his aura, in the intensity of his colors, the serenity in his soul as he faced his foes that intrigued her: She saw no trace of the Beast in him.

Against the strength of a *koldun*-priestess of the earth and a Salubri warrior, however wounded and weary, the Tremere hunter and his unnatural hounds had no chance. The Salubri's sword was swift and sure, and her intervention unexpected. The Usurper warlock perished screaming impotent curses to the night, and his beasts crumbled into ash with him.

Thus it was that Danika Ruthven met the warrior Rothriel, and she found her guide on the unmapped road at last.

THE WARRIOR SAGE

Rothriel was unlike any Cainite Danika had ever encountered in all her nights. Far older than herself, he had dedicated himself to the art of the sword and his clan's war against the infernal for uncounted centuries. But unlike the Tzimisce warriors she had known, who had grown jaded and cruel from uncounted years of inflicting death on their enemies, the Salubri knight had retained much of his *humanitas* and sense of honor.

His strength of spirit, however, came from something else. When he had thanked her for her aid most graciously and in perfect Latin, Danika asked if she might travel with him. He seemed at first reluctant, for as he said, the Tremere would soon be on his trail again, even more resolute now that another of their number had died in the hunt.

THE WARRIOR ROTHRIEL

The Salubri warrior known as Rothriel had already seen two millennia pass before he encountered the woman who became Mahtiel, his shield-mate, student and lover. Born in the Bronze Age Harappan city of Dholavira on the Indian subcontinent, he traveled widely with his father and uncle, who were merchants, and learned from boyhood the use of a sword. He was an inquisitive soul, fascinated by everything he saw, full of many questions. His curiosity intrigued a Salubri warrior named Ezrael, who took the boy on as a bodyguard at first, and then as a student. Seeing in the young man a courageous spirit as well as a questing mind, Ezrael eventually offered him the Embrace. On his ritual Blooding as a Salubri warrior, overseen by the ancient Samiel himself, he took the angelic name of Rothriel.

Rothriel fought in many of the conflicts of his clan, against the followers of Moloch and the swarm of Chorazin. He served as escort and guardian for healers of Saulot's blood, and was privileged to have once sat and learned at the feet of the Father himself. He wandered through many lands, lent his sword and the strength of his arm wherever there was need, and served many Cainite lords.

The devotion that he and Mahtiel shared became a legend among the Salubri. Few of the Blood ever knew such a bond as the one that existed between them; only the murder of the Father brought it to an end. When many of the warriors cried out for vengeance, to rise against the Tremere as they had once fought the Baali, Rothriel was one of those who spoke against revenge. For was it not better to remain true to what the Father had taught, no matter what the price demanded of them? Even if it meant destruction, it was better to perish than betray the principles that had always been their greatest strength. It was a position Mahtiel, still comparatively young in the blood and fiercely devoted to her clan, could not understand.

Yet it was that very willingness to permit himself to be destroyed rather than deny the Code he had so long followed that permitted him to find his way on the unmapped road, and achieve the peace of Golconda — or so both Mahtiel and Danika firmly believe.

But she was persistent, pointing out that two were much stronger against an enemy than alone. And when that did not seem to move him, she told him of her long quest, the emptiness in her heart, and begged him to tell her how he had rekindled the colors of his soul. It was a plea the Salubri could not deny.

They traveled together for several years, while Rothriel taught her what he knew of the path of Golconda. He had learned it, he said, from an ancient member of his own clan, who had learned it from the Father himself. It was not a wisdom that could be learned from books, or easily discovered without a guide, for it required mastery over all aspects of one's heart, soul and mind — even the Beast itself.

It was not easy for Danika, for centuries a priestess and *koldun*, mistress of the elemental spirits, to bow herself like a newly risen childe to the words of her teacher. All that she had known as truth she was required to put aside, to accept a new truth she could not yet understand. There were times she despaired of ever mastering even the simplest of the exercises Rothriel put her to. And yet he was always patient, even when she was not, and weathered all her frustration, anger, incipient frenzy, hunger and many, many errors with a steel resolve that would not allow her to accept anything but her very best. Once she set foot on the path to Golconda, she knew there was no turning back.

THE DISCIPLES OF MOKUR

Salubri have many tales of their Father's travels to the East, where he learned many things of great wisdom. One tale speaks of Saulot's voyage over the eastern sea to a green, mountainous island said to be a paradise on Earth. He did not stay long, for he did not wish for the curse of Caine to mar such a beautiful place. But when he left, he took the man who had been his guide on the island away with him to be his disciple and serve as a reminder of all he had seen. The man was of the Jomon people, and his name was Mokur.

Mokur was a simple potter, but he had a rare clarity and immediacy of perception; for him, neither life nor undeath were improved by over-complication. For uncounted years he traveled with his sire, both learning from the Father's ancient wisdom and serving in his own way as anchor for Saulot's restless mind and spirit. He learned of the Unmapped Road from Saulot himself, and as the years went by, became widely known as a teacher of its ways as well. After the tragic loss

of Saulot's wisdom and the final deaths of so many of his blood, Mokur was one of the eldest surviving members of his clan, and much sought after — by both would-be students, and would-be diablerists.

Patient and wise, leading by example and tolerating no insolence on the part of his students, Mokur taught any who came to him on a true spiritual quest. Rothriel was but one of many aspirants who studied at his feet; the ancient Brujah physician Eshmunamash of Tyre was another. But it was the Ventrue sorcerer Cret, childe of Mithras, who became Mokur's best known disciple, for Cret did something with the teachings of Saulot that no other student had attempted — he wrote them down.

FROM THE ANALECTS OF SAULOT

A student said to his master, "All directions lead to the valley of shadows, but only one path leads to Golconda. Master, please show me where that road begins."

The master drew a line in the ground with his staff. "Here," he said.

THE CHRONICLER OF GOLCONDA

A native of Corinth, Cretheus was a scholar, philosopher, priest of Mithras and accomplished blood sorcerer who sought learning wherever he could find it, traveling through many lands. Cretheus became one of Saulot's most ardent disciples, with a researcher's penchant for record keeping; he transcribed many of Saulot's parables and stories, and sought to devise an orderly and logical approach to the transcendent state of Golconda that his master spoke of.

After Saulot's destruction at the fangs of Tremere, Cretheus vowed to carry on his master's work. He sought out Mokur, eldest of Saulot's surviving childer, to continue his path toward Golconda. Cret (as he became known) also attracted students of his own due to his writings being circulated among the more spiritual elders of Cainite society. As such, he was able to take on the roles of teacher, chronicler, counselor, and effective administrator for an informal school of Golconda seekers. In doing so, he also set himself up as doorkeeper to Mokur himself, thus preventing the Master from being deluged by questions from beginning seekers on the path, or the insincere.

Some of the group's other prominent disciples included Cret's childe Hill, and the Nosferatu mystic known as Vanth. The school also attracted the

attention of Pentweret, an eccentric and enigmatic magician-priest of the Snake Clan. Pentweret saw great similarities between the philosophies of Set and the teachings of Saulot; both emphasized the knowledge and acceptance of one's own inner nature in order to gain mastery over it. His path to Golconda was strongly influenced by Setite mental disciplines and philosophy, which emphasized confronting one's deepest desires through tests and ordeals. The difference in his and Cret's approach to the Unmapped Road led to some very lively, sometimes quite heated, debates and discussions between them.

Through it all, Mokur listened quietly, and when asked which of the two strong-willed philosophers was closer to the truth, he merely smiled.

THE PRIESTESS OF ERCIYES

The promise of Raphael to Caine is recorded in the Book of Temptations, one volume of the legendary Cainite texts that comprise the *Book of Nod*. Once enshrined at the Temple of Erciyes, it has been copied and translated many times, and it is on this text that all teaching of the path of Golconda is based. A partial copy of the *Book of Nod*, containing that precious section of the Book of Temptations, made its way from Erciyes to the mysterious Monastery of Shadows, and eventually into wider — though still exclusive — circulation among Cainites.

To the Temple of Erciyes came Drenis, former priestess of a now-forgotten cult, seeking sanctuary and peace for her much-battered soul. Peace eluded her, but she instead encountered a nameless Salubri, who had come to Erciyes in search of a fragment of the *Book of Nod*. She assisted him in locating the book he sought, and then stayed to learn what he found in it. The more she heard, the more the ancient words spoke to her. Meticulously, carefully, she scribed her own copy of the texts, though their true meaning was concealed from her, and then she set out to find a teacher who would guide her to Raphael's promise. She sought first for one of Saulot's blood, for the Book promised that his childer would light the way. But the childer of Saulot had never been numerous, and had been hunted nearly to extinction. Worse, she found herself hunted as well, by her own Cappadocian kin who sought to make their own Giovanni bloodline supreme in the Clan of the Dead.

She found her answer — or at least the beginning of her path — in the kindly eyes of a childe of Malkav, who wept with joy when she showed him

the books she carried. Demetrius was himself on the path to Golconda, seeking wisdom wherever his feet led him, and he invited her to walk with them as long as their paths lay together. Drenis was at first elated and then discouraged when she met the Malkavian's stoic, silent companion, the Salubri warrior Mahtiel. She knew a broken spirit when she saw one; how could such a one be a guide to transcendence? But she had found no other yet, and there was certainly safety in numbers. She agreed to go along.

THE PHYSICIAN OF CARTHAGE

The scholar Eshmunamash had fled the city his clanmates still dream of as a lost utopia; Eshmunamash has given up trying to dispute the legend. A wanderer who had once met Saulot and had enjoyed a long friendship with the Salubri, he was deep in grief to hear the news of Saulot's passing. He had been on the path to Golconda himself for many, many years; now how would he ever reach the summit without the Master to guide him? But then he remembered Cret's nearly obsessive transcriptions from Saulot's own words, and hope began to rekindle itself in his unbeating heart. He sought out Cret to study these precious volumes for himself. With Mokur and the written word of Saulot as his guides, and the support of the rest of the ancient Salubri's disciples, he came to believe that Golconda lay within his reach at last.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF ROTHRIEL:

What can I tell you about the Beast, the hunger and rage that dwells within our souls? This is what my Master taught me: A man was walking down the road, and beheld a strange sight. Coming toward him was a wise man, clad in white, walking with a great dragon by his side. And the fearsome creature was tethered to the wise man only by a thin leash, which he held in his hand.

The man marveled at this and said to the wise man. "How can you control such a mighty dragon with such a thin leash? If it were mine, I would have it bound with a stout chain and collar of iron."

And the wise man said, "If I cannot control him with a leash, a chain would do me no more good, for he is far greater and stronger than I am."

TZIMISCE HOSPITALITY

In the waning years of the 15th century, Rothriel and Danika's wandering had taken them to the borders of Transylvania. Suddenly seized with a longing to see her own lands again, she invited Rothriel to return with her as well and spend the coming winter in the security of her castle. Although at first reluctant, for Hunedoara was far closer to Ceoris than felt comfortable to him, he finally agreed.

But when she returned to her valley, she discovered a terrible thing had occurred. Her castle now was the site of a Tremere chantry; her childer were destroyed, and her people forced to serve the Usurpers' demands. The land cried out to her, ravaged by unnatural magics.

It could not be borne, despite Rothriel's warning that such a detour from the narrow path of Golconda might make the return to it even more difficult than to find it in the first place. She turned to him, and asked for his help, so that she might save her people and not wander too far from the path he led her on. And of course, the Salubri, being both a warrior with no love for Tremere, and being so petitioned, could not deny her. They found that of all her childer, only Anastazi survived; despite his protests that he was no warrior, he was immediately drafted to aid her in taking back her domain.

But even with Rothriel's extraordinary warrior's skills and Danika's own koldunic powers, they lacked the strength to defeat their enemies; the Tremere were well-situated, with mortal and undead servants to defend them, and the castle's walls were high and strong. They needed an army, but even if Danika could inspire the peasants to attack their new masters, they would be no match for the undead wizards.

Rothriel sent out a summons to another of his kind, a fellow warrior to aid them in their attack, and began to help Anastazi turn the mortals they had recruited into an army. Danika turned to the old warcraft of her clan, the reshaping of flesh and bone. Using prisoners and peasant "volunteers," she created a *vozh*, a war ghoul, strong enough to uproot a tree or disembowel a horse, and hungry for Tremere blood.

Unfortunately, the Tremere discovered them before they were truly prepared, and there was no choice but to fight with whatever resources they had at hand. Danika released the *vozh*, and called on the powers of the earth and sky and the spirits of the land; Anastazi and Rothriel led the mortal troops. In the end, they were successful, and the Tremere — there were only

four of them in residence at the time — were destroyed.

But the victory was not without cost. Rothriel, stalwart warrior though he was, found himself cornered on the bridge by the Tremere regent and his ferocious rock-beasts. Before the *vozhd* could reach the warrior's side, the Tremere had managed to use his sorcery to lift Rothriel off the ground, so the warrior had no leverage with which to strike or dodge the talons of the gargoyles, which sought not to rend his flesh but to catch and hold him still — for the stake which the Tremere regent was preparing to send into his heart. Knowing his fate should he be taken captive and unwilling to go down without a fight, Rothriel turned his attention to the unnatural creatures whose talons gripped his flesh. His Eye opened one last time, and he sent his power radiating out from his body to theirs in waves of burning, fiery agony. Screaming in pain and fury, the gargoyles let go their hold on him — and then, heedless of the shouts of their master, the enraged beasts literally tore him apart.

Neither the gargoyles nor the Tremere survived their victory, but there was little satisfaction in their destruction. Even the ashes of Ceoris itself would not begin to pay for the loss of such a wise and gracious being as Rothriel had been. Danika built a memorial shrine for him near where he had fallen on the bridge, but that did not ease the sorrow in her heart.

Perhaps only the sincerity of Danika's grief and her dedication to what Rothriel had taught her saved her from the wrath of Mahtiel when the Salubri warrior finally arrived at Hunedoara. Responding to Rothriel's call for aid but arriving too late, Mahtiel had felt her ancient lover's Final Death from a hundred miles away. Numb with the shock of the broken bond, barely maintaining control in the overwhelming anguish of her loss, Mahtiel refused to stay at the castle, and once Rothriel's ashes were recovered, she rode away into the night.

CAPTIVE OF THE TREMERE

The biggest constraint Danika faced in her attack was one the Tremere shared as well — she didn't want to damage her real estate, especially the castle itself, any more than she absolutely had to in order to be victorious. So it was that when the last of the Tremere crumbled to ash, and she surveyed the castle's rooms, she discovered many things of great interest. The Tremere's mortal slaves she killed or gave to the *vozhd* as a reward for a job well done; their ritual rooms she cleansed with koldunic rites and fire; their treasures she took for her own.



But in the castle's underground vaults, she found a prisoner, a grotesque and naked wretch staked and laid out on a worktable, his leathery, crusted hide carved with arcane symbols. Whatever the sorcerers had planned to do with him, their ritual had been interrupted. She debated with herself whether she dared to release him, or if it would be more merciful to simply destroy him, for he seemed on the edge of madness from their torments.

And yet, she knew Rothriel would not have slain him. So she sacrificed one of her more seriously wounded to trickle mortal blood into the gaping maw, as well as some of her own; she spoke to him in soothing tones and stroked his bony brow, watching for some sign of returning reason or sanity in the mad, staring eyes. Only on the third night, when the bond was complete, was she rewarded with his attention; the eyes followed her as she walked, and when she laid a hand on the stake that bound him, she saw one dark, bloody tear seep out of the corner of his eye.

The only name she could find in his thoughts was Bufo, meaning "toad," a cruel, if descriptive, epithet apparently given him by his captors. His real name was buried in his tortured memory, which she had no desire to plumb. He did not speak, but seemed to understand her well enough; grateful to be freed, he groveled at her feet, eager to obey her slightest command. And so Bufo came to serve the Lady of Hunedoara, an act of mercy that Danika hoped Rothriel's spirit, at least, approved of.

FROM THE ANALECTS OF SAULOT

One day while the Master was giving a lesson, one of his disciples came and fell on the ground before him, weeping tears of blood.

"I have broken your commandments, Master," he said. "I fed in anger, and killed the one who gave of himself to me. I am not worthy of Golconda! I deserve only to die!"

"Did you not kill even before you first chose to set foot on the road?" the Master asked. "And yet the weight of the sins you bore then did not keep you from beginning your journey. Is the burden of another so great that you cannot put your foot forward instead of turning back?"

"But I should know better now!" the disciple wept.

"You do," the Master replied. "Now learn from what you know."

THE INVITATION

Now once again the mistress of Hunedoara, but bereft of her mentor and feeling the weight of the sins on her back, Danika sat in the Council Hall of her castle and brooded over the path before her. How could she find her way now, keep her feet on the proper path, now that her teacher was gone? Who else could guide her on the road?

Rothriel had spoken to her of his own teacher, an ancient childe of Saulot known as Mokur, whom he had believed was still walking the night; he had even considered taking her to meet him when she reached an appropriate point in her studies. He had not, however, said where this Mokur might be found.

And so Danika marshaled all her forces, the spirits of the air and the water, and her mortal servants, to seek for the Salubri master. It took her nearly two years, but she at last found a trace, a rumor of a mysterious "school" of Cainite mysteries in Tuscany. Italy, she knew, was currently wracked with mortal war; if Mokur was indeed there, he would not be there long. She dared not desert her own lands again, and she certainly did not wish to venture into a war zone.

The solution was so elegantly clear. She dispatched a messenger to Tuscany, bearing her invitation to Mokur and his fellows to leave war-torn Italy and find sanctuary in her well-defended castle in Transylvania. Here, she promised them, they could dwell and study in peace, and in comfort; all she asked was to be permitted to study with them, and see to their needs.

As it happened, her invitation came none too soon. The villa where Cret, Mokur and their followers were based was unfortunately on the path of the French Army, an army containing many mercenaries who looked to looting for much of their pay, and containing an occasional ambitious Camarilla coterie looking for Cainite blood. Cret was loath to trust any invitation from a stranger, much less a Tzimisce stranger, even if she had once known Rothriel. Clearly her protection had not saved her former teacher, how could she guarantee they would be safe? However, his warning did no good. Mokur was determined to go to Transylvania, and if his disciples wished to continue their studies with him, they would have to come along, too.

Some months later, a footsore but very impressed band of Inconnu walked across the bridge into Hunedoara's gates, the castle's towers looming overhead, torches and a bonfire lighting the court-

yard, where Countess Danika Ruthven greeted them with the full Tzimisce welcome ritual.

THE INCONNU AT HUNEDOARA

To play hostess to such an illustrious gathering of Cainites was a great honor, and Danika took her responsibilities in that regard seriously. She felt privileged as well to just listen to Mokur speak; his very words brought a new lightness and hope to her soul. Perhaps there was hope; perhaps there *was* a way for a vampire to be free of the Beast.

The Inconnu had been at Hunedoara for only two or three months when Eshmunamash rode up to the gates, toting along his entire library on the backs of three pack mules, and petitioned Danika and Mokur most cordially to join their discussions. The ancient Brujah brought his own version of the Unmapped Road with him, and discussions grew even livelier.

Two years later, the nomadic Assamite Abdalkutba showed up, claiming to have followed a sign in the heavens themselves in order to find the Inconnu retreat. With him came another seeker as well: Zamra Matoub, the proud Lasombra Prince of Algiers, seeking freedom from frenzy that had already cost her the lives of several she held dear. So impressed was she at the wisdom gathered in Hunedoara's walls, she invited them all to return with her to Algiers, where they could continue their discussions and teaching in safety.

This did not sit well with Danika, who saw the Lasombra's invitation as a blatant insult and a play to steal her prestigious guests, and certainly a violation of the hospitality Danika had so freely offered. Only the intervention of Mokur and Eshmunamash prevented sharp words from escalating into something worse. Upon the others' persuasion, Zamra apologized, claiming the invitation was not intended as an insult to her hostess, and if this was where wisdom was to be found, then she would seek it here. Danika accepted the apology rather stiffly, but at least for the moment, the tension in the air subsided.

Then in the early winter snows, three more weary Cainites arrived at the gates, led by the Malkavian mystic Demetrius, already known to Cret and Eshmunamash through decades of correspondence. With him came Drenis, a priestess of the Clan of Death, who was also seeking the peace of Golconda, and who carried with her the Noddist

books of Erciyes (much to the delight of the scholar Inconnu). Leaning on his arm, a bloody sword in her other hand and limping from a yet unhealed wound, was the Salubri warrior Mahtiel.

A COMPANY OF PILGRIMS

Hunedoara now possessed the Cainite population of a small city, most of them elders. Without an actual city to support them, Danika's duty as hostess to provide for her guests' needs became a logistical nightmare. Danika and Anastazi went to considerable lengths to feed the multitudes without sacrificing their own peasant stock. Fortunately there were other sources of vitae in Transylvania whose disappearance would raise no questions: condemned peasant rebels, Turkish prisoners of war, and mortal spies sent by the Tremere.

Unfortunately, some of the Inconnu had either feeding restrictions or, worse, principles. As initiates on the road to Golconda, they strove to rise above the base instincts and brutality of the predator — therefore, the nature of their vessels and how they fed were of utmost importance to them.

Danika found it prudent to expand the castle's working mortal population, building up a host of blood-bound servants accustomed to the Kiss, whose duties outside of providing sustenance for the Inconnu ranged from washing clothes to tending sheep, and all manner of crafts and handiwork in between. Peasants condemned to be executed for rebellion found a new life — and contentment with their lot — working her fields; Turkish soldiers accepted the blood and a new mistress and guard duty on Hunedoara's gates and walls. Tremere spies, however, were too dangerous to grant even the slightest bit of mercy; and since Bufo and the *vozhd*, now known as the Sclav, also needed to be fed, none argued with her disposition of them.

Yet such a gathering of Cainites could not go unnoticed forever. In particular, the Tremere of Ceoris sought to discover just who — or what — had wiped out their brothers and taken command of the fortress of Hunedoara. While the Sclav and her own koldunic rituals were a potent defense, the Usurpers had the advantage of numbers.

Danika did not ask her guests to aid in the castle's defense, but several of them — particularly Pentweret, Mahtiel and Hill — were more than willing to do so. The combined forces of the Inconnu thwarted an attack by a rather potent coterie of Tremere and gargoyles; after that, surprisingly, no further such attacks came.

Danika was unaware of it, but the tale the lone surviving apprentice had told of misshapen monsters, walking corpses, demonic spirits, and a giant serpent caused even the Master of Ceoris no little concern. Clearly whatever Cainite now possessed Hunedoara Castle — if it was a Cainite at all — was very old and powerful indeed, a Tzimisce Methuselah like the legendary Yorak or Triglav, only recently risen from centuries of sleep. Auguries cast by Tremere diviners pointed to a great power growing in the land, a power not friendly to House and Clan Tremere. That the power might be a coterie of allied ancient Cainites rather than a single Methuselah apparently did not even occur to them. It was no secret that the older Cainites grew the less likely they were to work well in concert. Certainly the Tzimisce had never done so, even at the height of their war. There was no reason to suspect that the Tzimisce had suddenly become innovative and less quarrelsome.

Faced with this quandary, Etrius decided to hold back until his spies could determine more precisely what they were dealing with; meanwhile, he began the preparations to move the central leadership of Clan Tremere, and the torpid body of Tremere himself to the chantry in Vienna, further away from an unexplained and clearly dangerous neighbor.

THE VOICE OF REASON

That the Inconnu of Hunedoara acted in concert when a clear threat was presented them was one thing, but when no such common cause existed, the seekers of Golconda were anything but of one mind. Cret favored rationalism and a systematic progression of tests; Eshmunamash and Demetrius favored a more spiritual and less regimented path centered on atonement and redemption; Pentweret challenged every statement a professed expert made, believing that only through overcoming obstacles and opposition could the real truth be discovered. Sometimes the discussion was heated, and Danika would worry over the possibility some of these powerful Cainites might come to blows. Yet every time the debate grew too loud, too close to becoming more than mere argument, Mokur stood and spoke for a while, and somehow diffused the tension without actually declaring any single view as right, wrong or more valid than any other. The ancient Salubri did not lecture his disciples; he taught through short parables, or by asking questions that the others would then debate in order to find the best possible answer. Yet whenever Mokur stood up

to speak, all the others would stop to listen to whatever the Master had to say.

None of them realized how short a time he would be with them.

One night, Mokur came privately to Danika to thank her personally for all she had done for him and the other Inconnu. She accepted his thanks graciously, and assured him once again that he and his followers would always find a refuge under her roof. She didn't realize his visit was in fact a farewell; it wasn't until much later that night that the assembly of Cainites discovered that Mokur was no longer in the castle.

They searched for him until dawn, and then again the following night. Apparently he had packed his few belongings and simply walked unseen out the gate; not even the Sclav had noticed him leaving. Using Bufo as a bloodhound, they followed Mokur's trail for several miles as the Salubri elder traveled into the mountains. Then, all at once, the trail ended. Bufo snarled as he sniffed at the ground; but Danika did not need the Nosferatu to speak in order to know what had happened, what creatures had made the tracks they saw left in the forest loam.

Mokur had been taken by the Tremere.

THE DIABLERIE OF MOKUR

Here, at last, was what Etrius, Master of Ceoris, had been searching for all these years: the last childe of Saulot, the last known 4th-generation Salubri. His chance to become equal with the other members of the Seven, to lower his own generation to match his more aggressive peers. The circumstances were odd; the Tremere hunters who had captured him said the Salubri had not offered any resistance. He'd simply asked them to take him to his father. Following the instructions Etrius had given them, they'd brought him, staked but still undead, directly to Ceoris. The implications were even slightly disturbing — Saulot had not resisted either.

Etrius did what he knew he had to do. And on that moment, as he took the ancient soul into his own, he knew why Mokur had come. *Take me to my Father.* Somehow, somehow, Mokur believed he had heard the voice of Saulot. Calling him. Yet, it had been Tremere himself who had roused enough the night before to tell Etrius where to find the ancient Salubri on the road a few miles from Hunedoara.

More importantly, Etrius now knew what was at Hunedoara, and what a danger they posed, especially now that their master had succumbed to his

fangs. He could not allow them the benefit of preparation, of planning their revenge. He had to strike now, hard, destroy them before they took it into their heads to destroy him.

Etrius called in all the forces he could muster, both military and arcane, and sent them to attack the castle of Hunedoara.

FROM THE ANALECTS OF MOKUR

One night a student asked Mokur to speak of God. Mokur replied, "How can I explain God when I cannot explain mortals or Cainites?" Then the student asked Mokur to tell of the afterlife and the world of the dead. Mokur said, "I do not fully understand this world. How, then, can I understand the next one?"

Cret's Commentary: *I have spoken much to gods and spirits and visited their world. This effort taught me patience and mastery of my own mind, but the gods know nothing of the Beast or the Way. The journey had more value than the destination.*

Eshmunamash's Commentary: *We commit our crimes in this world. Our atonement and salvation must happen in this world as well. Golconda lies on Earth, not in Heaven.*

THE PACT OF NIKANUURANU

The Inconnu sensed their master's Final Death, but were no more united on what to do about it than they had been about their philosophy. Danika's fury in particular knew no bounds, for she suspected the Tremere had somehow lured the ancient out of her care. Mahtiel's cold rage matched her own, and Hill was more than ready for a fight. Still, Eshmunamash and Cret counseled caution, for this was the center of Tremere power they were so casually discussing attacking. Abdalkutba said the stars did not support such a brash move. Drenis and Vanth, though brokenhearted over Mokur's loss, held that he would never have condoned vengeance on his behalf.

Before they could agree on a course of action, the Tremere did it for them; even with the army approaching, the Twelve argued until they rose one evening to discover themselves under siege. The mortal soldiers, however, were not the greatest threat. A large number of the Usurpers themselves had come as well, traveling in sealed

caskets during the day to make time, and now erected a powerful warding around the army's encampments, so that the spirits and magical forces commanded by the sorcerers among the Twelve could not reach their targets.

The castle did not lack for defenders; the entire village had fled inside the walls as the army approached, and Danika's own mortal guardsmen manned the walls and towers. She and the other sorcerers — Cret, Hill, and Pentweret — did what they could to magically enforce the castle's defenses against both sorcerous and physical attacks. However, unlike the Tremere, whose greatest strength lay in their ability to combine their collective magical power into a far greater whole, the magic Danika and her allies wielded came from very different traditions and had never been designed to work together. Danika could not reinforce Pentweret's spells if he grew weary; Cret and Hill could not command the elemental spirits summoned by Danika's will if she faltered or was injured.

The Tremere had no such difficulties. Furthermore, they could draw on the power of their entire clan through ritual linkage if they deemed it necessary. The great age of some of the Twelve would be of little use against such a summoning of force. Although she did not want to admit it, Danika could see — as most of her allies could — that they were doomed. Even worse, the Twelve were still not of one mind. Zamra could not help but point out that Algiers, which had no Tremere, had been a safer option than staying in a castle less than a week's march from Ceoris. Mahtiel and Hill wanted to fight rather than wait out a siege. Drenis and Vanth argued that it was against all Mokur's teaching to be responsible for the deaths of so many mortals, on both sides.

Cret had a different proposal altogether. After much thought and study in his books of summoning rituals, he claimed he had discovered the name of an ancient spiritual entity, with far greater power than they could ever wield themselves, greater than even the Tremere. The price of its aid would be high — to summon such a great spirit would require the agreement and cooperation of all the Twelve in the ritual, for the spirit needed the power inherent in their Blood to focus and direct its own, for it was not a creature of this world. The summoning itself would also require the sacrifice of a mortal life. However, his servant Gregor had already volunteered for the honor of that role, in order to save the others.

AGREEING TO THE PACT

Cret's proposal sparked a new round of even more passionate debate, and many questions, particularly from those who knew enough of spirit summoning to be suspicious. What kind of spirit was it? How did he know it was to be trusted? Why was it being so generous? How could it do what it promised? Cret answered them as best he could, but it was clear (at least in retrospect) that he did not tell them all he knew. It was hard enough to get consensus from the Twelve in any case; if they had known the full nature of the decision they were about to make, or as Cret justified it to himself, they would never have been able to agree, and all would have been destroyed.

Hill was the first to consent, out of loyalty to his sire. Pentweret, Demetrius and Eshmunamash were the next, and then Danika herself, for she saw no other way open to them. Anastazi agreed, for he was terrified of the Tremere and would not gainsay his sire in any case. Drenis assented as well. Abdalkutba spent a few hours in his tower poring over his star-charts and calculations, and then announced that the stars themselves augured this path for them, and that if they continued to follow the destiny laid before them, they would one night be in position to do great things indeed. Cret himself finally persuaded Zamra to consent (although the methods he used were disputed later). Gentle Vanth disliked that the spirit's price must be paid in mortal blood, but the mortal Gregor himself pleaded with her, assuring her of his willingness to sacrifice his life on her behalf, and so she finally agreed.

Mahtiel was the holdout. Cret pointed out that there would be no way to avenge Mokur's death — or Rothriel's — on the Tremere if they didn't survive the siege. So many of her brothers had died, clinging to their principles but defeated in the end. Would she allow herself to be defeated as well?

And Mahtiel agreed to the Pact.

CRET'S RITUAL

The entire populace of the castle, both living and undead, gathered in Hunedoara's courtyard. Even the Slav was present, chained well out of reach of temptation, and Bufo crouched unseen at the fringes of the gathering. Cret began the invocation. Gregor laid down on the makeshift altar, arched his neck back and submitted to his master's knife as the tang of the mortal's lifeblood filled the night air. The invocation continued, and the indistinct, shifting shape of the spirit began to appear in

THE TREMERE ARCHIVES

Needless to say, the Tremere Archives record the incident at Hunedoara in 1525 somewhat differently. Five thousand mortal troops, a dozen gargoyles and 20 Tremere, including Jervais, Lord of Saxony, were massacred at Hunedoara. The battle resulted in the destruction of the castle as well, and subsequent scrying attempts led the Council of Seven to determine that whatever its defenders had conjured there had destroyed them as well. Etrius, however, remained uneasy, and continued his plans to move the body of Tremere and what remained of Ceoris' vampires (for he had lost many of his own forces in this battle) to Vienna.

A few tentative explorations of Hunedoara's site were conducted, but nothing was found save ruins. Etrius has quietly discouraged any further attempts to investigate the site, fearful that whatever the "Inconnu" had unleashed might yet lurk in the castle's broken shell.

the middle of the circle of salt and arcane symbols Cret had laid out on the ground.

Mahtiel had grown more and more uneasy as the ritual progressed. It felt *wrong*. She didn't understand the language Cret was chanting in, but the very syllables sent a chill through her blood. When she saw what was forming before them, her worst fears seemed to be realized.

Cret had summoned a demon. It was tall, indistinct, and utterly silent; its form shrouded in shifting darkness, with great shadowy wings. Its eyes, however, glowed with a cold blue light in a way that was anything but holy.

Switching to Latin, Cret outlined the terms of the Pact, and the Demon bowed its shadowed head in agreement. Then one by one, the Twelve were called upon to do so as well. Whatever misgivings some might have had, still it was too late to go back now. One by one, they faced the Demon's terrible gaze, and agreed. At last, it turned to Mahtiel, whose hand was already on her sword, her face pale, the third eye on her forehead open and staring up at the shadowy apparition looming up before her.

Just when Cret was expecting the Salubri to repudiate the pact and doom them all, the tension faded from Mahtiel's face. She released her grip on her sword, and gave her consent. The Pact was made.

The Demon's form rose up out of the binding circle, growing even larger and then fading into nothing. A new charge, like just before lightning strikes, filled the air. The castle's very walls glowed with a piercing white light. Pentweret cried out and dropped to his knees, hands clasped over his eyes. The light then passed through the walls and radiated outward. The earth trembled beneath their feet, and everything grew still.

Dawn was edging the horizon by this time; the ritual had taken most of the night. The Inconnu sought the safety of their havens, the mortal guardsmen timidly returned to their posts on the walls.

When the Twelve rose the following evening, there was nothing left of the Tremere and their army but the smoking remains of their encampment, dismembered corpses and, where the light of the sun had finally caught them, 20 piles of ash.

RENEWING THE PACT

The fate of their enemies was sobering for the Twelve. Although he would never admit it, the devastating ferocity of the Demon's attack even stunned Cret. He had known it was mighty among its own kind, but not exactly how mighty it could be. Yet it had come because he had summoned it, and it had bound itself to them and submitted to their will. Mighty it was, he still had everything under control.

The Pact's terms bound them within the castle's walls for a full year, and so they sent out the Slav and a team of mortal laborers to dig burial pits and clear away the dead. They soon learned that the castle was, for all intents and purposes, invisible; outsiders saw nothing but ruins. In fact, only mortals who had been bound with them in the Pact could see the castle enough to re-enter it again.

When a pair of exceedingly nervous Tremere apprentices and their well-armed escort came a few months later, it was clear they could not see the castle either. They didn't even find the burial pits. In fact, they found the entire valley eerie and foreboding (or so they said to each other) and left very soon afterward.

At first, the Twelve were greatly relieved. The demon had kept its side of the bargain. Cret was to be congratulated on his quick thinking, and courage in summoning such a fiend. But as the year went by, and the time approached for the Pact's first anniversary, Cret announced to the others that the Pact itself would expire that night. The spell the

demon had cast would fade, and the castle become visible again.

This was not good news, and several spoke angrily at Cret for not saying sooner that the Pact was not permanent. If the castle became visible, they would all be just as vulnerable now as they were a year ago, and the vengeance of the Tremere even greater. They could not even flee until the Pact itself expired. And Danika would not, in any case; this was her home. Given the devastation the demon had wrought on their behalf, it was likely that the Tremere would hunt them to the ends of the earth anyway — even to Algiers.

Cret, as might have been expected, had a solution: Extend the Pact for another year. The castle could remain hidden, until the Tremere had given up and forgotten all about them. They were safe, so long as they remained unknown. The Demon might even be able to do more for them than that, if they played it right, for surely it did not want to return to the pit. There were only two little problems... another sacrifice would be required, and the decision to renew or discard the Pact had to be unanimous. All the original participants had to agree, or the conditions of the original Pact itself would be broken, and the demon would claim their souls.

The whole idea that their souls had been bartered as the guarantee of Cret's Pact enraged his fellow Inconnu. Why had he not mentioned it before? How could he have betrayed them so? How dare he summon a demon from the pit, and then use their souls to bind it by, knowing that in the end, the demon would not hesitate to take its due? What were they supposed to do now, caught between this Devil's bargain with the demon and the surety of Usurper vengeance?

Cret angrily insisted that they had known what they were doing the year before. They had bound themselves knowingly, not expecting they would be the ones to break the Pact. What harm was there in a penalty they would never need to pay? In any case, all they had to do was repudiate the pact, and their souls would be safe — so long as all of them did so. But why not extend the Pact a little longer? Wait for the Usurpers to finish moving their goods and chattel to Vienna, wait until they were not watching the ruins of Hunedoara so closely. They could always end the Pact later. So long as they all agreed, they could extend it or end it anytime they wanted, without any penalty to their souls.

Cret's was not the only persuasive voice this time. The demon itself whispered to them in their

dreams, haunting them with their worst fears, luring them with promises of what other boons they might demand of it in addition to their security. One by one, they agreed — even Mahtiel and Vanth — to extend the Pact another year.

This time, however, there were no volunteers, no willing sacrifice to pay the demon's blood-price. Danika refused to pick a sacrifice arbitrarily, or allow anyone else to simply decide which of the mortals in her domain would die on their behalf. Instead, she instituted the lottery, so that all in the castle, even herself and the other Inconnu, even her servants Bufo and the Slav, would take an equal risk. Let the demon choose its own sacrifice, she said, and bear the responsibility for its choice.

The lots were drawn, and the weeping girl bound to the sacrificial stone. Cret led the ritual, and once again the demon and the Twelve agreed to extend the Pact for another year. The demon accepted its sacrifice, and the Hunedoara Castle remained hidden.

Another year passed, and the time for renewal of the Pact came again. Again there was much discussion, some of it even quite heated, over continuing with it. Were they not seeking Saulot's road of Golconda? How could they continue to feed the Demon's unholy hunger for innocent blood? (Pentweret thought this question quite amusing; they were vampires, after all.) Several of the Twelve dithered, desperately wanting out, but not willing to pay the price with their souls, others still fearful of Tremere revenge — another Usurper investigation party had been spotted in the valley just a few weeks before. In the end, all they could agree on was to keep things as they were, to maintain their secrecy and status quo. Once again, a mortal was chosen through the lottery, the ritual sacrifice made, the renewal agreed to. Once again the Inconnu were safe.

Another year followed, and another, and another. Each year the discussion and debate over whether the pact should be ended or renewed grew shorter and less passionate. Each year, they ultimately chose to renew it and paid the price in mortal blood, for although the Twelve and even the monstrous Slav participated in the lottery, the demon's victim always came from the ranks of the castle servants.

The Twelve dealt with the intervening time between rituals in their own ways. Mahtiel chose to spend more and more time sleeping, saying it was the only way she could find peace. Vanth continued

to study on her own as best she could, hoping to still make her way through Suspire. Danika focused on maintaining the castle and its night-to-night needs, including replacing mortal servants lost to the lottery, accidents or careless feeding. Abdalkutba spent more time studying his star charts and sending his servants to the different courts of Europe just to keep up with what was going on. After the first renewal of the Pact, Eshmunamash seemed beaten down by their circumstances, no longer contesting the Pact, nor much of anything else. Drenis, upon Cret's request, took on the responsibility of caring for the Pact's victims, giving them proper and respectful burial and preventing their uneasy ghosts from creating havoc among the survivors.

Demetrius woke one evening at the turn of the 17th century after having slept most of the week before (not an unusual occurrence for the old Malkavian), and announced that Saulot himself had appeared to him in a dream and guided him through his own Suspire. Now he that he had achieved that blessed state of Golconda, he would stay and guide them so that they too might reach it as well.

While there was some debate among the other Inconnu as to the validity of Demetrius' experience, there was certainly no doubt something had happened with him; he seemed far more at peace with himself than he ever had before. He even claimed to not need to feed anymore (and continued to claim it, no matter how hard Zamra or Pentweret tried to prove to him that he did). After a few months, they got used to him. As Cret observed, it was a waste of breath to try to argue sense to the mad.

THE FAILED SUSPIRE

Demetrius' words, and even more, his incredible calm even in the face of scathing ridicule, had an enormous effect on Vanth. For decades, she had been stalled in her quest for Golconda, and desperately wanted to find the peace that the Malkavian shared. Yet he was unable to explain to her how he'd achieved it, other than saying that the Master had led him to it. She was so close. *So close...* yet the last steps on the road had always been hidden from her. Unable to make sense of what the Malkavian told her, she sought advice from another. Unfortunately, she chose Pentweret.

To say Pentweret's approach to Golconda was confrontational was an understatement; his personal philosophy combined Setite tradition of

self-knowledge and ferreting out and purging false beliefs through tests of fire. He told Vanth that she had been striving for Golconda for two centuries, yet had not moved ahead because she did not dare challenge herself by putting her beliefs to the final test. The road to Golconda, he said, went up a steep hill until it hit a cliff where only a thin rope bridge led to the other side. She could stay where she was for eternity wanting to be on the other side, but until she stepped out on faith and trusted the rope bridge to bear her up, she'd never get there.

Cret disagreed, of course. By this time Cret was disagreeing vociferously whenever anyone talked about a path to Golconda that did not match what he had laid out in his own books. But he had no alternative to propose that Vanth had not already tried.

After several years of enduring Pentweret's challenges and testing herself for any lack of faith in her own strength, Vanth decided to attempt the Suspire. She went into the chapel and shut the door, and did not come out again for three nights. Whatever trial her Suspire presented for her, however, was more than she was ready to face. It was possible that the demon involved itself in her testing, hoping she would fail; it was also possible that Vanth simply wasn't as ready as Pentweret had convinced her she was. She not only failed her Suspire, the experience drove her mad. Vanth lost all sense of her own humanity, even her identity, and entered Wassail.

HUNTER AND HUNTED

Vanth was lost to the Beast, but the Beast was cunning. The Inconnu tiptoed around the chapel, anxious but trying to be patient, not even realizing she was no longer within. Two nights later, two mortals were found savaged and drained in a corner of the cellar, and terrified servants were banging on Danika's door with tales that a kitchen girl had been dragged from her bed by something that witnesses described as a hideous monster. Cret and Hill wanted an immediate blood hunt on Bufo, but when the body of the girl was found in the chapel it was only too clear what had happened.

Danika called all the Inconnu together immediately and ordered all the mortals, even the Sclav, into the most defensible place in the castle, the great Watchtower. During the day, even a wight must sleep; the mortals (and the Sclav) would hunt for Vanth during the day, and return to the watchtower before dark. The Inconnu would hunt her by night.

However, what to do with the monster when they found her? The Pact forbid them to kill her, yet



she was now quite incapable of taking part in the ritual, and deadly dangerous besides. Deprived of easier mortal prey, it was likely she'd hunt even her former companions — and then break the Pact herself. Perhaps one of the mortals could actually kill her... but would that satisfy the demon's requirements or doom them all?

The Inconnu did not sleep in their own havens that day. Like the mortals, they huddled together in the Watchtower. But Bufo was not among them, which troubled Danika; he had never before failed to come when she called him.

The mortals searched the entire castle, with orders to stake, not destroy, the Nosferatu if they found her, but they had no success. Danika woke to find the Slav leaning over her. With a unhappy whimper, the *vozhd* laid Bufo's body at her feet.

Bufo had been badly mauled, but he had somehow survived. From the bloodstains at the place where the Slav had found him, he'd given nearly as good as he'd gotten, and it presented the one possibility to deal with all aspects of this disaster. They could not kill Vanth... but perhaps Bufo could.

Danika and Drenis tended the Toad's wounds, and trickled Cainite vitae down his throat; led by Hill and the newly awakened Mahtiel, most of the others went hunting, though to no avail. The following day, the mortals had even worse luck; one of their search parties stumbled across the monster, but she woke and killed two of them as they tried to stake her. After that, only the stronger wills of their masters could force them to go hunt again.

A skirmish the two nights later left Abdalkutba and Mahtiel injured, but Vanth crippled; still the wight escaped them. She knew she was being hunted; she'd actually ambushed them, and it was with great regret Mahtiel had deliberately not struck a killing blow, severing an arm rather than the wight's neck.

Bufo was awake and moving now, scarred but mostly whole. His mistress gave him her blood and then explained what she needed him to do. With the Slav, herself, Mahtiel and Hill to aid him, Bufo joined their hunt. Alone, it was likely he would have failed and fallen prey to the wight's fangs rather than the other way around; she was many times his age and, in her madness, far stronger. But together, the Inconnu managed to corner the wight, pin her, and let Bufo drain her dry. Even as his former clanmate crumbled to ashes in his hands, Bufo stood up, turned to his mistress, and cursed —

the first words anyone had ever heard him utter — in hoarse, but clearly competent Latin.

Four months later, Bufo stood in Vanth's place during the ritual, and the demon accepted him in the dead Nosferatu's place. The Pact had been preserved.

THE LONG MARCH OF YEARS

After the near-disaster of Vanth's Suspire, none of the remaining Golconda seekers spoke of attempting the Suspire themselves. After the Pact, they said, but everyone knew at this point the Pact was interminable. A century after the destruction of the Tremere and their soldiers, the threat of their revenge seemed far away indeed. Yet the Tremere was no longer the primary reason the Pact was renewed year after year.

Occasionally there were a few tense months, such as when the Slav, acting with unforeseen initiative (or perhaps merely from hunger) had slipped out of the gate and ambushed a pair of traveling Tremere apprentices and their mortal escort who had the poor judgment to ride too close to the castle's broken ruins. There were no survivors. The *vozhd* groveled and whimpered at its mistress' fury, and submitted meekly to its punishment, while the Twelve debated letting the Tremere actually find and destroy the monster should they come looking for their missing brothers. Danika, however, refused to consider such a thing, and was backed up by Anastazi, Bufo, and surprisingly, Abdalkutba and Hill — perhaps because Cret was one of the louder voices in favor of its destruction as a decoy.

But in reality, danger from outside was no longer the chief concern of the Twelve, nor their primary motivation for keeping the Pact alive. Through the first century of their confinement, the demon itself had begun a campaign to secure the Pact for itself, by persuading first one Inconnu and then another, to make a private (and highly secretive) deal outside of the Pact that kept the castle hidden. Some were, of course, easier to persuade than others, but as long as even one of the Inconnu had reasons of his own to want the Pact renewed, none of the others could do otherwise.

The Pact also simply grew... familiar over time. After a hundred men and women had met their deaths on the sacrificial table, the ritual was just no longer as horrific as it once had appeared. The lottery, renewal of the Pact, and even the sacrifice became habit (distasteful but nonetheless necessary and bearable), if one didn't think about it too much.

Mortal servants were, after all, such short-lived creatures. They came and went all the time, their faces blurring together, even their names forgotten by all save Drenis, who saw to their burials and quieted the wailing of their ghosts.

Unfortunately, it was not merely the ritual and sacrifice that grew too familiar — the Twelve began to feel the same way about each other, too.

FAMILIARITY AND CONTEMPT

The Twelve were already strong-willed individuals, already prone to clashes of personality and ideologies. Being forced to spend centuries in each other's company, with nowhere to retreat but their own rooms, only acerbated the conflicts between them over the following centuries. All they had once respected or even admired in each other soon faded from recollection, while every slight, every sharp or disdainful word, every petty little jab was engrained in their memories in every last detail.

Pentweret's habit of challenging what anyone said grew tiresome, then irritating, and then positively unbearable. Danika's sense of duty kept the castle in good repair and mortal vessels at her guests' service, but her pride and cold disapproval was often more than enough to make her guests forget all her labors on their behalf. Cret's own pride and intellectual arrogance would never allow him to admit that his decisions — including the Pact itself — were ever flawed, while many of the others sought to assuage the guilt they felt over years of mortal sacrifices by simply blaming the whole damnable mess on him. Zamra's sharp tongue and clear disdain for all the so-called "Inconnu" who let the principles Mokur and Saulot values fall by the wayside irritated everyone to the point where as much as two years had passed where none would speak a word to her, or even acknowledge her presence in the room, save for the night of the ritual itself. Bufo generally acted like a Toad and was treated like one, creeping in the shadows to spy on his fellows. But he kept his thoughts very much to himself, lest such revelation make him more personally vulnerable to their petty cruelties.

Few alliances, much less mutual respect, admiration or even something akin to trust could survive in such a crucible. With the additional moral and psychological strain of the Pact and the yearly sacrifice, the gains even the most dedicated of Golconda seekers had made in regaining their own *humanitas* were eroded by the spite they now felt for each other.

FEUDS AND ALLIANCES

While all the Twelve irritated each other to some degree, for a few, their antagonism blossomed into something far stronger, hatred to such a degree that only the Pact stayed their hand. After so many years, their bitterness succumbed at first to familiarity and then to lethargy, as actually acting on their grudges seemed more work than it was worth. Still, a great many insults and injuries fester within their unbeating hearts, merely buried beneath a thin shell of ennui and the habits of decades, and might yet destroy them all should even one of the Twelve be provoked beyond caring about consequences.

Hill's admiration for his sire Cret faded with the Pact, and was then even further eroded by the elder Ventrue's insufferable arrogance. Now he does anything within his not inconsiderable powers to inconvenience, annoy or embarrass his elder; for him the blood bond only rankles, and gives his hatred a focus for the regnant that will not let him go. The other sire and childe pair, Danika and Anastazi, are no better; Danika despises the weakness she sees in her last surviving childe, and Anastazi, doomed to forever feel the neonate in the shadow of his elders no matter what his age, hates her for her disdain — and hates himself for deserving it.

Anastazi earned Drenis' undying hatred after slipping into her haven uninvited in an attempt to "get to know her better." The idea that his advances might be unwelcome had apparently never occurred to him. As the youngest of the Twelve, Anastazi feels the contempt of the former Golconda seekers for his materialistic and venal ways, and often goes out of his way to luxuriate in the sensual pleasures and predatory drives of a "true" vampire and childe of Caine, just to irritate them.

Of all the Twelve, only Demetrius maintains his easy-going ways with all the Twelve, even Zamra and Anastazi (though they do not necessarily return his courtesies). Unfortunately, his own spiritual peace, as delusional as his colleagues think it is, only serves to remind them of how much they have lost. Periodically, Pentweret or Cret seeks to burst his bubble, but so far, his madness has proven stronger than their ridicule.

Some alliances — or at least tacit pacts of non-aggression — still exist between the Twelve. Demetrius' deep admiration and affection for his angel Mahtiel remain untarnished, even though she now wakes only to renew the pact, and spends the rest of her time in torpor. Danika still holds the allegiance, reinforced by bonds of blood, of Bufo and the Slav, and even Anastazi, who lacks the strength to contest his sire's will no matter what



he feels about her otherwise. Danika also maintains an ongoing relationship with the Cappadocian Drenis, and is careful not to push the debt the others owe her for her upkeep — most of the time.

Abdalkutba is one of the few who remains on good terms with Cret, even though he recognizes the elder's arrogance is as self-delusional as that of Demetrius. When claustrophobia and frustrated wanderlust are not eating away at his soul, he still shows some hint of his former good nature and insatiable curiosity with regard to his companions in exile. Abdalkutba has also undertaken an unusual kind of outreach to the Slav, and has begun to realize that there is more going on inside the *vozhd*'s misshapen skull than perhaps even its mistress realizes.

Eshmunamash's former respect for Cret's intellectual prowess and dedication to the path of Golconda swiftly turned to contempt after the true nature of the Pact was revealed. The Ventrue is now the focus of his slow-burning hatred, or what remains of it, and Hill's complaints against his sire find in Eshmunamash a ready listener. To the rest, it appears the ancient Brujah has lost his fire — or at least it is banked to ash-covered coals. He sometimes seems to go about in a daze, as if only the inertia of years keep his body in motion. None seek to rekindle it — the power of his clan's legendary rage, coupled with his extreme age and clear ennui, is enough to keep others of the Twelve from piercing his daze. Should the absolute worse happen, Eshmunamash as a wight would be a fearsome thing indeed.

BEYOND THE WALLS

At first it was self-preservation and fear of the Tremere that spurred some of the Twelve to maintain ties with the world outside the Castle's walls. Others were motivated by old ties — Zamra continued to watch her mortal descendents and the fate of her home in Algiers; Cret kept an eye on his sire Mithras; Demetrius continued to correspond with former students or acquaintances, particularly after his (apparent) achievement of Golconda. Danika kept up her ties out of sheer practicality — to assure a steady source of vessels, reliable servants, and all the necessities of both life and unlife to maintain the Castle's population, both living and undead. Abdalkutba and Anastazi first sought outside contact out of sheer boredom, and even in the modern nights are the two most closely in touch with modern cultural styles, eagerly collecting contemporary clothing and artifacts from their agents outside the walls.

THE CASTLE TONIGHT

Most of the world has forgotten that Hunedoara Castle ever existed. It does not appear on any maps. The valley technically belongs to the government

LEGENDS OF THE DEVIL'S CURSE

Two particular folktales seem to be the most popular told about the ruins, though others might be discovered with research. One tells of a troop of Nazi soldiers, following up information on a Romanian underground leader, who set up an observation post in the ruins to use as a vantage point over the whole valley. For three nights, they kept an uneasy vigil (having heard some stories of the place from local informants), guns close to hand, but on the morning of the fourth day, failed to report in to their commander in Deva. After forcing a local shepherd to show them the way, the investigating officer and his men discovered the scene of a massacre. Tents had been ripped apart, camp furnishings smashed, and the jeeps overturned; weapons lay strewn about as if the men barely had time to defend themselves. While the Nazis, naturally, did not report the results of their investigation to the local villagers, rumor got around that of the dozen or so men that had been stationed there, the only three bodies were ever found, torn limb from limb, and partially eaten. Twelve men from the local town were summarily executed for the supposed murders. The commandant in Deva, knowing the Führer's fascination for strange tales, promptly reported the matter up the chain of command, but later investigations turned up nothing unusual in the valley, not even the ruins that had previously been reported.

The more recent tale concerns an attempt only thirty years ago to open a mining operation in the valley, for the Cerna Valley is rich in iron ore, and the Romanian dictator Ceaucescu was determined to wrest all the resources from the land that he could. From the first the operation was plagued with ill luck, but several shafts were opened on a ridge of hills not far from the castle ruins. At first the miners commuted from the town, taking an hour each way over winding dirt roads, and always left the site well before dark. But the mine's government-appointed managers had no patience for local superstition, and halved the miner's pay unless they stayed and worked the full shift, setting up tent barracks so that operations could be carried out around the clock. The first few disappearances were chalked up to desertion, but when two miners were discovered dead in their beds without a mark on them, wholesale panic ensued and no local man would work in the mines, no matter what they were offered in pay. Mining operations continued for a few weeks using the conscripted labor of convicts, but a localized earthquake collapsed the mine's tunnels, and a subsequent landslide wiped out the mining camp.

No one has attempted to develop that particular valley since....

of Romania, but has not been developed or surveyed to any great degree. While some of the Twelve's mortal servants, in particularly Ioan Sturza and Petrascu the cook, are known in the town, no one knows exactly where they live or who their purchases support.

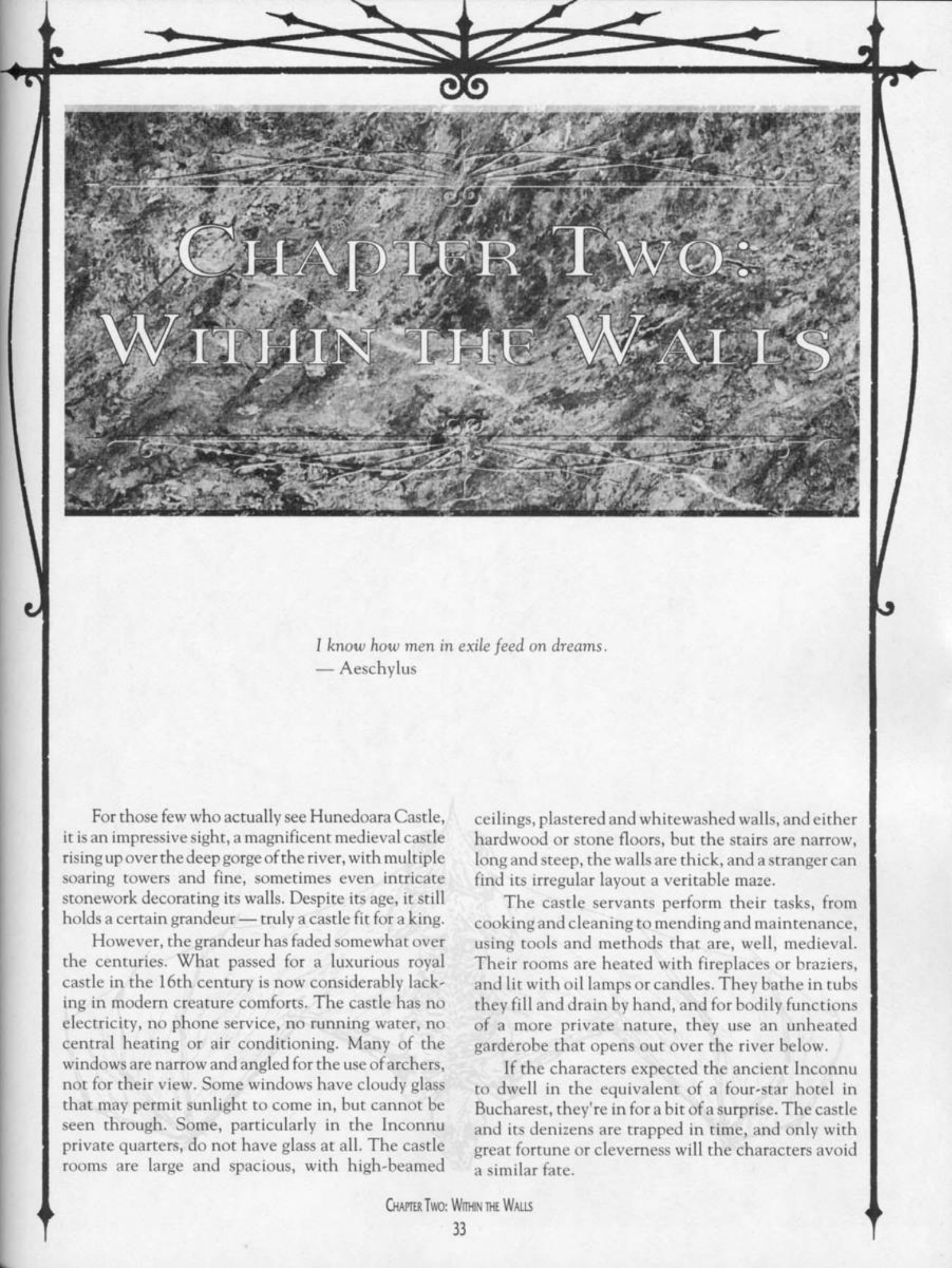
The valley has more than a few folktales attached to it now, ranging from being the domain of a werewolf to haunted with the ghost of Dracula — though why the legendary 16th century tyrant and warrior against the Turks would haunt the place he'd been a prisoner for a decade is left unexplained. The popularity of the novel by Bram Stoker now draws the interest of tourists to Transylvania seeking "vampires" — but few come to the isolated mill town of Hunedoara when there are more romantic places to explore, such as

Castle Bran or the medicinal hot springs elsewhere in the Carpathians.

Hunedoara Castle remains a "hot spot" on Tremere charts of the area — a source of magical energies but for some reason marked *do not disturb*. Etrius has never quite gotten over his unease about what once happened there, and as yet has not been persuaded to allow further investigation of its past. Now, of course, far greater things command his attention.

Even for the odd hiker or campers getting lost in the woods rarely discover the ruins on the bluff overlooking the river, or the carefully hidden dirt track that leads to it. Even in a time of satellite photography and burgeoning industrialization, Hunedoara Castle remains hidden and unknown.





CHAPTER TWO: WITHIN THE WALLS

I know how men in exile feed on dreams.
— Aeschylus

For those few who actually see Hunedoara Castle, it is an impressive sight, a magnificent medieval castle rising up over the deep gorge of the river, with multiple soaring towers and fine, sometimes even intricate stonework decorating its walls. Despite its age, it still holds a certain grandeur — truly a castle fit for a king.

However, the grandeur has faded somewhat over the centuries. What passed for a luxurious royal castle in the 16th century is now considerably lacking in modern creature comforts. The castle has no electricity, no phone service, no running water, no central heating or air conditioning. Many of the windows are narrow and angled for the use of archers, not for their view. Some windows have cloudy glass that may permit sunlight to come in, but cannot be seen through. Some, particularly in the Inconnu private quarters, do not have glass at all. The castle rooms are large and spacious, with high-beamed

ceilings, plastered and whitewashed walls, and either hardwood or stone floors, but the stairs are narrow, long and steep, the walls are thick, and a stranger can find its irregular layout a veritable maze.

The castle servants perform their tasks, from cooking and cleaning to mending and maintenance, using tools and methods that are, well, medieval. Their rooms are heated with fireplaces or braziers, and lit with oil lamps or candles. They bathe in tubs they fill and drain by hand, and for bodily functions of a more private nature, they use an unheated garderobe that opens out over the river below.

If the characters expected the ancient Inconnu to dwell in the equivalent of a four-star hotel in Bucharest, they're in for a bit of a surprise. The castle and its denizens are trapped in time, and only with great fortune or cleverness will the characters avoid a similar fate.

UKRAINE

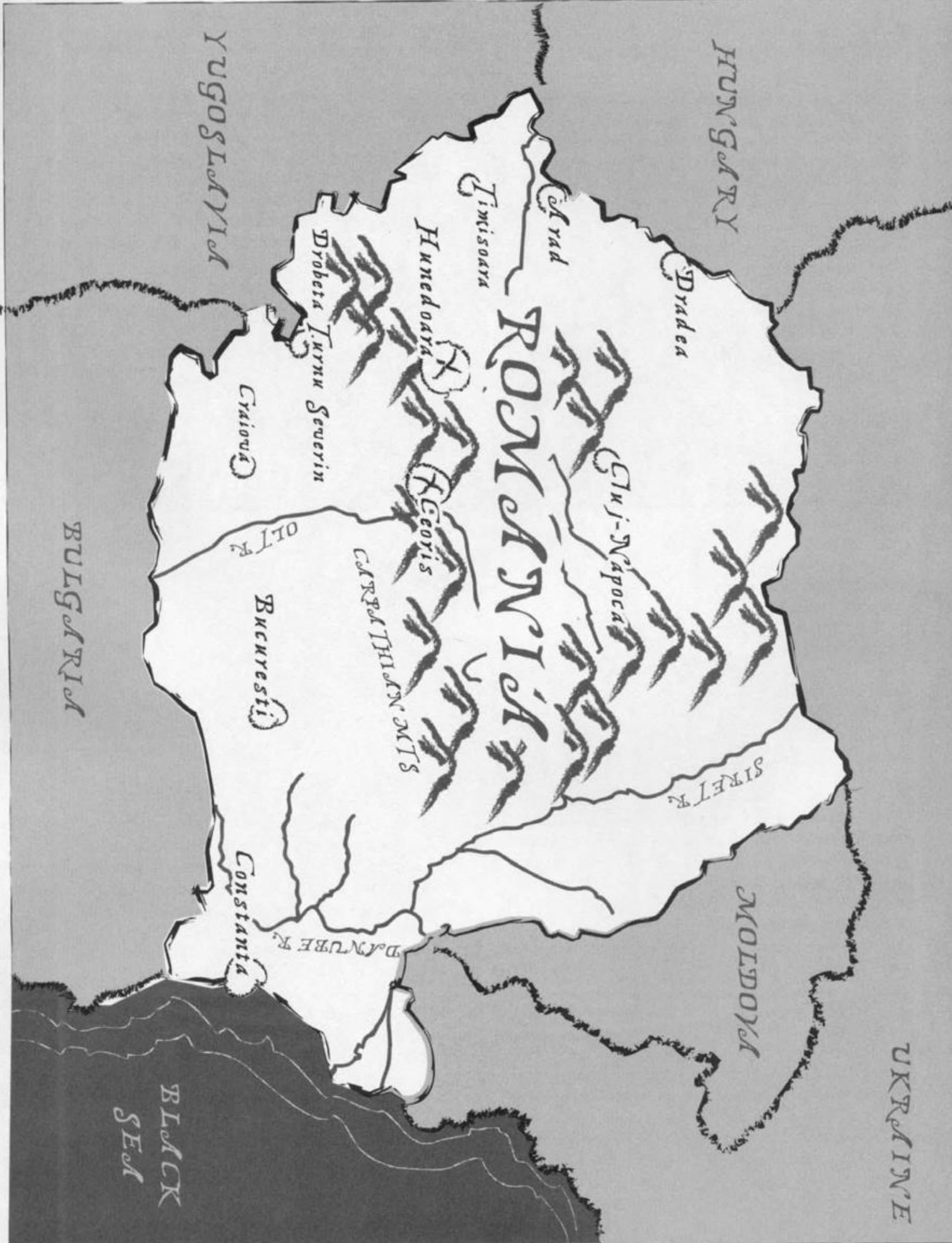
МОЛДОУА

НУНГАРЫ

УГУСЛАВИА

БУЛГАРИА

BLACK
SEA



HUNEDOARA CASTLE: THE GRAND TOUR

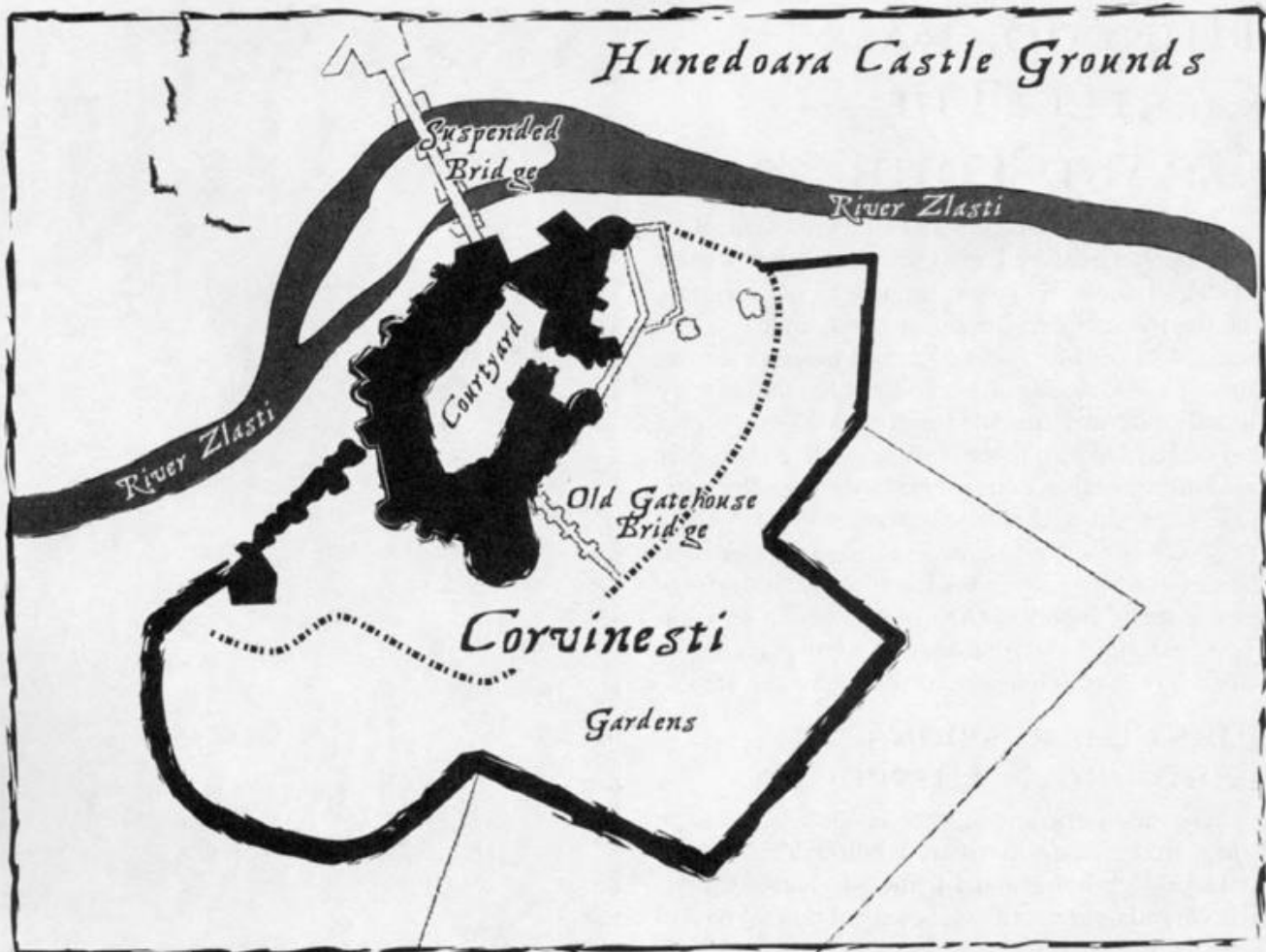
Guests to the castle may be given a tour of its more public areas by Lady Danika soon after their arrival, if they show any interest. The Tzimisce countess is still very proud of her home; it is her castle, and she has worked hard to keep it running these past few centuries, sometimes under very difficult circumstances. The castle's 50-odd rooms can be divided into three classes: public, where any resident, mortal or undead, may safely go; the various rooms allotted to the mortal servants of the Twelve, which the Inconnu usually enter only to give instructions or to feed; and last, the private rooms of the Inconnu themselves, which serve as their personal havens and are generally treated by the Twelve as inviolate, except when they aren't.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: ARRIVING AT HUNEDOARA

The main entrance to the castle is via a high bridge that crosses the river far below. At the start of the bridge, there's a small, long-neglected shrine. The carved figure of the saint within is cracked and worn by the weather; it's not clear at first exactly which saint it is. Anyone examining the saint more closely, however, will see the saint is wearing armor and has a sword strapped to his side. His hair is long and tied back in an elaborate knot; he has a neatly trimmed beard, aristocratic features and a third eye in the center of his forehead. This is a representation of the Salubri warrior Rothriel, placed here by Danika to honor his memory. Rothriel died on the castle's bridge. There is a hidden compartment in the base of the shrine, holding a small brass urn that contains some of the Salubri's ashes.

The bridge is easily wide enough for a horse and cart; for pedestrians it's more than adequate. The castle's gate is normally locked with a great iron portcullis. If the guests are expected, however, the portcullis will be raised, and torches lit within, welcoming them inside. There's a dank, unpleasant odor as the characters pass through the gatehouse, though: the faint reek of something dead, of mildew and rot. The floor of the gatehouse is littered with debris; rank straw, dead leaves, small branches and an occasional fragment of bone. Off to one side,





half-concealed in shadows, is an opening in the wall leading back to a murky chamber beyond. The characters will be encouraged not to linger here, but be urged on into the courtyard, where their hosts are waiting to meet them.

The gatehouse is normally the domain of the Slav, but for the characters' arrival, the fearsome creature will have been banished to the Knights' Hall so as not to terrify the guests. Once the guests have entered the castle and been taken upstairs to the Council Hall, the *vozh* will creep back through the side chamber, close the portcullis, and then take up its normal guard position in the gatehouse passageway. Its instructions at that point are that the honored guests are not permitted to leave, until one of its masters informs it otherwise — and the Slav will obey those instructions to its last breath.

THE COURTYARD

Hunedoara's central courtyard is perhaps a quarter the size of a football field, and completely enclosed by the castle itself. The courtyard is unpaved, its surface hard-beaten earth (or mud) with

a few anemic patches of grass. When the characters arrive, the courtyard will be lit with a few torches held by mortal servants. Otherwise, the courtyard is usually dark, for the Inconnu have little need of light. The center of the courtyard has a blackened bonfire circle ringed in stone and filled with ash.

The courtyard contains a number of entrances into the castle, including a long gallery and covered stair along one side that boasts ornate gothic stone-carving, and another two-level portico in front of the Old Keep adjacent to the gatehouse. A narrow set of stairs leads down to the cellar door at the base of the Old Keep. An arched passageway goes under the gothic stair and leads to the well courtyard beyond. There are also entrances to the chapel, the White Keep, the Knights' Hall, a circular stair, and the servants' quarters in the West Wing.

THE COUNCIL HALL

After being greeted formally at the gate by Danika and other members of the Inconnu, the characters will be led up the circular staircase next to the gatehouse. The stair opens up in a narrow

passage. The characters will be guided to the left, into the elegant expanse of the Council Hall. Once the Audience Hall and Royal Council Chamber of the King of Hungary, the Council Hall is used by the Twelve as their own common meeting chamber whenever the need arises. More importantly, the Council Hall is neutral territory, where any of the resident Inconnu may come and socialize with one another — when they're feeling sociable.

The floor of the hall is polished marble; a large fireplace dominates the interior wall, and five hexagonal granite pillars form a line down the center of the hall, supporting the barrel vaulting of the ceiling 20 feet above. Several fading tapestries hang on the plastered walls, and in front of the fireplace is a huge Persian carpet. On the carpeted area are a few chairs of varying styles and age and several large floor cushions, making up the Twelve's equivalent of a conversation pit. A long table and benches sit in the middle of the floor a little further down the hall. A handsome antique sideboard sits against one wall and displays a small fortune's worth of goblets, saltcellars, plates and bowls of pewter and silver plate. On the far end of the huge room is the Twelve's common library, which consists of a number of glass-fronted bookcases, simple shelves and stacked wooden trunks, all filled to overflowing. Their contents range from decade-old mass-market paperbacks to Victorian penny-dreadfuls to leather bound tomes with illuminated parchment pages. There is no order or methodology to how the books are stored; the common library is merely the repository of any books the Inconnu don't consider valuable enough to hoard in their own quarters, but are still reluctant to throw away.

On the outside wall, three widely spaced archways lead to a long gallery running parallel to the hall the whole length of the building. The gallery contains the ornately carved turreted windows that look out over the river and the outside world. The turrets form a series of intimate little rooms, linked by the narrow passage of the gallery itself — perfect for confidential conversations, or simply to get away from the others for a few minutes of privacy. Each turret also contains a stone bench built into the wall. The privacy of the turrets is mostly illusion, however, since there are no doors and many possible nooks where an eavesdropper could hide, especially an eavesdropper with Obfuscate.

The gallery ends in a blank wall on one end, and in two doors on the other where it intersects with the gatehouse tower. One door leads to Zamra's

quarters, and the other to a circular stair that winds upwards to the rooms of Abdalkutba above.

The Council Hall itself has two exits. Just past the library is a passageway that leads into the West Wing, with several doors. One at the end of the short hallway leads to the personal quarters of Eshmunamash, another to the "foyer" of the Malkavian Demetrius and the long passageway to the great watchtower beyond. A narrow straight stair also leads upward to the floor above, which contains the guest rooms. The narrow passageway where the characters entered the room also leads back through the gatehouse and into the Old Keep, passing the other door to Zamra's rooms, and former royal suite, which is now the haven of the Ventrue sorcerer Cret.

THE KNIGHTS' HALL

Directly below the Council Hall is another chamber that might once have been nearly as grand: the Knights' Hall. Like the hall above, a line of pillars supports a barrel-vaulted ceiling high above. The Knights' Hall has one door that leads directly out into the courtyard, one that leads to the gatehouse through the Sclav's lair, and one that goes into the servants' quarters on the far side.

The floor is laid in terracotta tile, but very little of it is exposed. Over the years, this room has become a dumping ground of broken or unwanted furniture, steamer trunks filled with assorted antique junk, chests filled with clothing a century or more out of date, boxes of personal belongings from ghouls long dead, a case of guns and ammunition dating from World War II and wrapped in the torn remains of German uniforms, a chest full of Tremere ritual implements that none of the Inconnu sorcerers had a need for, and of course, even more books. In fact, almost *anything* could be found in here, if one was willing to take the time and trouble to look — and could avoid the room's other most frequent occupants, the Sclav and Abdalkutba.

The Sclav generally enters the Hall from its lair in the gatehouse, through a door barely wide enough for its bulk. The old *vozhd* finds an odd pleasure in this room, filled with treasures that sometimes even bring back snatches of mortal memories to its patchwork brain. It has created a kind of nest for itself in a corner of the hall near the gatehouse, a pile of old clothes, fraying tapestries, and bloodstained bed linens where it often sits and has conversations with itself while playing with some bit of flotsam from its hoard. Despite its size, the Sclav can maneuver

TREASURE HUNTING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

The Knights' Hall is more than simply the Twelve's junk pile. It is also an opportunity for the Storyteller to plant something in Hunedoara that is of great personal interest to one or more of the player characters, that can serve to motivate or tempt the characters into getting even more involved with the story, and with the Twelve. The Storyteller can also use the contents of the Twelve's attic to provide the characters with a much-needed clue, something to help along a plotline, or simply, a (reasonably) private place to conspire with one another. The Knights' Hall is a treasure trove where one person's junk can be someone else's lucky find.

One item of potential interest to the characters leans against the wall near the courtyard door: the carved stone slab that serves as a sacrificial altar on the night each year that the Pact is renewed. If the characters do explore the Knights' Hall, make a point of describing the slab (along with a number of other interesting items, possibly including the Sclav's "nest" in the corner, a massive framed 18th-century "family" portrait of Danika and Anastazi with a series of vicious rips through the canvas, or the discarded central crucifix from the chapel, so its significance won't be too obvious), as a little foreshadowing of events yet to come.

among the piles and stacks in the room fairly well—and surprisingly quickly, should the need arise.

Abdalkutba comes into the Knights' Hall on occasion to talk to the Sclav, which he considers a fascinating creature. He is the only Inconnu to actually spend enough time with the *vozhd* to realize what is happening within the monster's mind, and to talk to not only Good Sclav, but its mortal shards as well. Abdalkutba also comes to the Knights' Hall just to rummage, to go through his own or others' discarded things in hopes of discovering something new, or just to alleviate his boredom.

Bufo also visits this room, but renders himself unseen with Obfuscate. The Nosferatu finds the doings of Abdalkutba and the Sclav of more interest than any of the chamber's assorted junk.

The room does contain some very cozy window alcoves, and the view out over the river is quite impressive; the window nooks on the other side look out into the courtyard. Except for the presence

of the Sclav, the Knights' Hall is actually one of the better places in the Castle to have a truly private conversation, as few others venture in here. The other Inconnu are simply not interested in their old junk, and the servants are generally too afraid of the Sclav to dare pillage it for themselves.

THE CHAPEL

When Matthias Corvinus was King of Hungary and stayed at Hunedoara, the castle's chapel was just a small private church for the use of the King and his household, a sacred space dedicated to God. But that was before the Tremere took Hunedoara and defiled the chapel so it could be used for other, less holy purposes. Danika being no Christian, she cleaned it out but left it empty until her Inconnu guests arrived and needed a sacred space for their own rituals. So the chapel was ritually cleansed, sanctified and prepared for service, but not dedicated to any single God.

The chapel's main entrance is from the courtyard, though a balcony in the rear can be accessed from the second floor of the Old Keep. The chapel is very plain, without stone carving, gilding or paintings on its whitewashed walls. Its floor is smooth marble. The chapel's most prominent feature, however, is the nearly life-sized statue in the front—a statue of a man dressed in simple robes, hands outstretched as if presenting a gift, and a third eye in the middle of his forehead. It is a fairly accurate statutory portrait of Saulot, or at least of the Antediluvian's form as certain of the Twelve remember it. The statue stands on a plain white marble base about the size and shape of an altar; a pair of matching brass floor candelabras stand on either side of the base, each holding 13 candles. At the statue's feet lay a simple brass bowl and a ritual knife with an ivory handle.

Drenis is the Inconnu most often found in the chapel, where she enacts her prayers and rituals that keep the Pact's ghosts from rising up and seeking vengeance for their deaths. Others of the Twelve make use of it for meditation. Unfortunately the first major ritual use of it was as a setting for Vanth's doomed Suspire, and while the Inconnu would like to believe themselves free of superstition, not one feels ready to put themselves or the chapel to that ultimate test.

The chapel sticks out somewhat from the main structure of the castle, and it has an open space on either side that is still within the castle's walls. On one side, accessible from the main courtyard, is a

smaller courtyard of sorts. Its primary features are a door into the kitchen of the servants' quarters, a locked door in the small tower to the rear, and the castle's well. The well is about eight feet in diameter and two feet high, and covered with a piece of plywood cut to fit. This is the castle's primary source of drinking water; a hand-cranked pump has been installed beside it for the convenience of the servants. Any character examining the well more closely might find an Arabic inscription carved into the stone of the rim. It reads, *"You have water but no soul."* Below it, a second inscription in Arabic reads, *"He who wrote this is Ahmed, who lives as a slave in the fortress of the Devil."* The wall surrounding the castle at this point is about 12 feet high (but three times higher on the other side where the land drops away into a deep ravine).

The locked door in the tower opens to a stair going down into the castle wall itself that leads to the mithraeum (see below for a further description).

On the other side of the chapel, accessible only through a narrow side door in the chapel's rear, is a small private cemetery. There are no headstones; about 25 graves are laid out in orderly rows, and are neatly kept. At least three of them look fresher than the others. Drenis tends the graves of the castle's dead, and the bones of all the mortals who have recently died or been sacrificed for the Pact are interred here. Once the Sclav has devoured what it wants of the body, she collects what's left of the bones, washes and blesses them, and buries them here with all due care and reverence. Each grave holds the bones of several mortals; Drenis knows exactly who is interred in each grave, and how each of them died.

When the graveyard grows crowded, Drenis exhumes the oldest bones and carefully stacks them in the crypts under the East Wing. She separates the bones of the sacrifices from the others. She believes they require special care in order to truly rest in peace. This private ossuary has also become a shrine of sorts for a number of the mortals of Hunedoara. During the days before the annual ritual, they come down here and sit in candlelight vigil with the bones of those who have gone before them, and where they know their own bones will eventually rest.

THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS

The servants of Hunedoara live in what would be considered fairly normal lodgings for the servants of a 16th-century castle. By modern standards, however, their accommodations are disturbingly

archaic. The kitchen, located just off the well courtyard, contains a great hearth, a brick oven, several tables, a great wooden tub for washing dishes, and a considerable range of cooking implements and utensils. The cook, a beefy Romanian military veteran named Petrascu, oversees his territory with a firm (and ready) hand, and he can curse in six languages. He and his staff prepare simple but filling meals for the mortals of Hunedoara, served in the adjacent dining hall. His menus are basic Eastern European peasant cuisine, but at least there's always plenty of it. Leftovers traditionally go to the Sclav, which help keep the monster from hunting his own dinner within the castle walls and solve some of the kitchen's refuse problem. The kitchen has a pantry shelf and a number of non-perishable foods hung from hooks in the rafters, but the bulk of the mortal supplies are stored in the cellar under the Old Keep. Once every week or two, Petrascu and two of his staff, plus Danika's seneschal Ioan Sturza, make a trip into the town of Hunedoara and purchase groceries and supplies that the castle staff cannot produce for themselves. They also purchase chickens and other livestock at a local farmers' market to butcher for meat. The castle has no refrigerators or freezers; all food preparations take this into account. The supplies are hauled back to the castle in a rented jeep, which Ioan then takes back to its owner before returning to the castle. The dining room next to the kitchen is the de facto social center for the mortals of Hunedoara. There they eat, bitch and moan, and gather whenever a meeting of the whole staff is called. New servants are instructed in survival techniques, regaled with horror stories about the fate of their predecessors, and find their place in the social pecking order. It is a small, inclusive and paranoid community of people who share only two things in common — they're now bound to the castle and its masters, and no one in the outside world will ever notice or care that they've gone.

The room beyond the dining hall is one of several dormitories. The dormitory contains a number of simple iron-frame cots or mattresses placed directly on the floor, chests for clothing, assorted personal items, and in winter, a fireplace or small iron braziers for heat. There is no formal arrangement as to who sleeps where, or with whom. No one cares, so long as no trouble comes of it. Ioan rules with an iron fist when problems arise, but otherwise leaves his fellows to sort things out themselves. He cares only that the appointed work gets done, and the masters are not

troubled with minor problems, such as conflicts among their mortal staff. If necessary, he can always invoke the name of the Sclav — which generally quiets any arguments from his subordinates.

The common servants do most of their work during daylight hours, when light is available and the masters sleep. When darkness comes and the true masters of Hunedoara rise, the common servants retreat to the dining hall or dormitories and find what rest they can — or hope for a summons from one of the Twelve for a more intimate and pleasurable kind of duty.

THE OLD GATEHOUSE

There are a few other rooms in the castle that are considered neutral territory, neither the domain of the masters or the servants. The Old Gatehouse next to the White Keep is one of these. It used to be the main entryway into the castle before the castle was expanded and the bridge over the river gorge built; now it serves as the servants' back door. The old gateway was walled up with stone, but the line of the original archway is still visible. A thick wooden door is built into the newer stone, which opens to a narrow wooden footbridge that crosses a

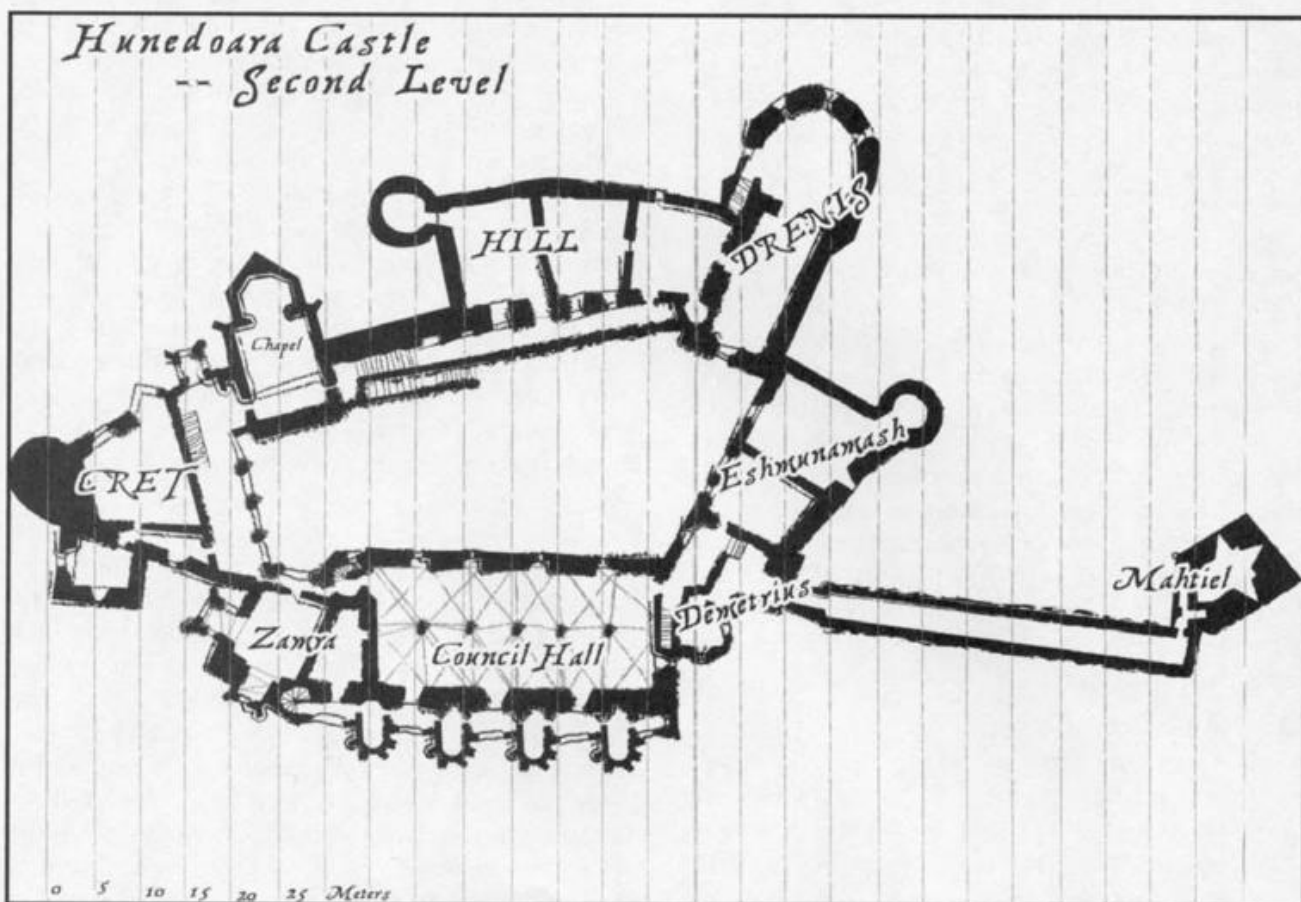
deep ravine behind the castle and goes to the vegetable gardens in the back. The back door is barred at night. All servants are required to be back inside the castle walls at dusk or be considered a free target for the Sclav. Although the servants are unaware of this, the door is also thaumaturgically warded — no vampire can pass through it either in or out of the castle.

The Old Gatehouse has two other exits. One leads to the portico facing the central courtyard, and the other is simply a stair going upward, which leads to the personal haven of Drenis, the Cappadocian priestess.

Other areas of public access include the front chamber of the White Keep, the chamber immediately above the Old Gatehouse, and the cellar under the Old Keep.

THE CELLAR

The vaults under the Old Keep serve as the cellar, primarily used for the mortals' food storage. In the winter, when the snow can block the trails and make trips to town for supplies impossible, the mortals must rely on what they've stored. Winter does provide crude refrigeration, even a makeshift freezer.



The room on the far side of the cellar, which has unshuttered slit windows looking over the river, gets extremely cold. The cellar contains barrels of local wine, smoked hams and racks of bacon, sacks of rice, flour, potatoes and peas, and a variety of (restaurant-sized) canned goods. Other items of particular use to the mortals are here as well, such as the braziers used to heat rooms in winter, a supply of firewood, extra blankets, bed linens, and the big wooden tubs used for laundry or bathing (when weather permits). Ioan keeps a careful eye on what's in stock, what's getting low, and what might be needed in the near future, as a good seneschal should. The mortal servants also sometimes use the cellar, where the masters rarely ever have cause to go, as a refuge in times of trouble, and a somewhat more private setting for sexual liaisons (consensual or otherwise) that the common dormitories do not provide.

On the far side of the cellar is a narrow doorway, with stairs leading down into the dungeon and vault below.

THE DUNGEON

Everyone in the castle, living and undead, knows about the dungeon and how to get to it: through the cellar and then down a narrow set of stairs. Below are two caged cells, with iron bars and a modern padlock, where the less fortunate members of the mortal "staff" are confined. Beyond the cells, another stair winds around and down further where a rarely needed third cell can be found as well. The stair continues down from there to Bufo's flooded vault.

Danika dislikes the necessity of keeping prisoners, as mortals kept confined this way never last as long as those who are given proper duties in the castle above, and only a few of the Twelve will even deign to feed on them. Unfortunately, the screening methods her procurators use in selecting suitable candidates for life imprisonment at Hunedoara often result in mortals who are simply too violent, sadistic, untrustworthy or simply not sane enough to be allowed the freedom of the castle, even under a blood bond. Those who cannot serve, however, can still be useful as feeding stock, and they are confined down here.

The cells contain simple cots and blankets, a chamber pot and little else. The kitchen staff brings down meals and drink, water for washing, and sees to it that the chamber pots are emptied. Both Petrascu and Ioan have keys for the padlocks that lock the cells (the one place in the castle where it was swiftly discovered that 15th-century locks were

simply inadequate for the job). The mortal servants tending to the prisoners are always accompanied by one of their fellows armed with a gun, and their threat is not to kill a troublesome prisoner, but merely cripple him — and then leave him for one of *them* to finish him off later. The occasional glimpse of Bufo *au naturale* or the Slav is usually enough to back up the threat. The mortal staff is rarely tempted to feel sorry for the wretches in the cages, however, as the alternative is to have those same individuals sharing their dormitories, and most agree with Danika's assessment of the risks.

Bufo (usually disguised, so as to avoid dealing with the prisoner's reaction to his true form) is the most frequent user of the captives for vitae, though occasionally one of the prisoners is bled for the benefit of those Inconnu who prefer their vitae served to them in a cup or goblet. Hill also sometimes takes a prisoner up to the terrace or the courtyard, hands him a sword or knife, and indulges in the necessary combat exercises before taking him into a dark corner and drinking his fill.

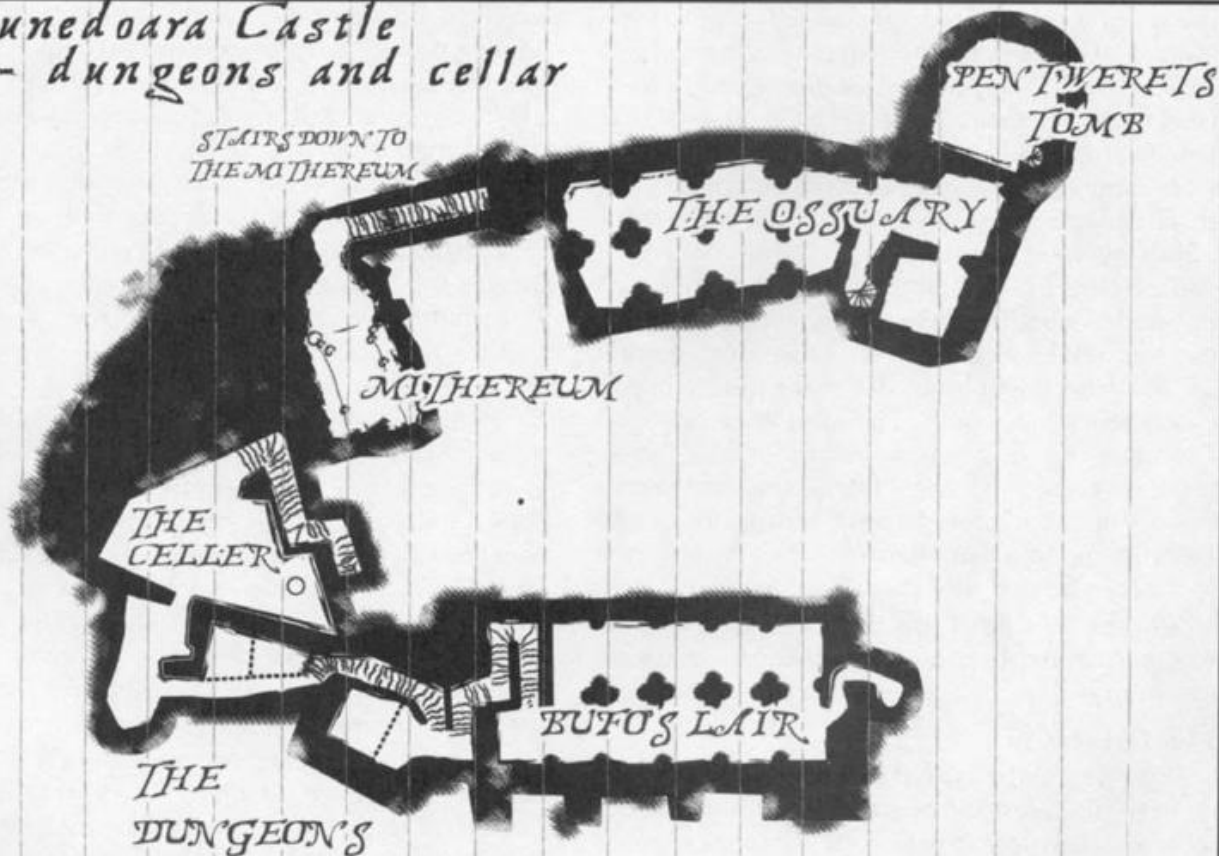
The Storyteller can create whatever scum of the earth she desires to inhabit these cells, should the characters come looking down here (the prisoners are certainly included on Danika's list of vitae sources for guests). If kept prisoner for any length of time, the captives become addicted to the Kiss, and any vampire visiting their squalid quarters is likely to illicit a pathetic display of begging from wretches who have nothing else left to look forward to anymore.

THE MITHRAEUM

Cret once served as a priest in the ancient Roman cult of Mithras. His contact with the god himself may have been broken, but the philosophy and tradition of the soldiers' mystery cult is still ingrained in his soul. Cret discovered the vault under the chapel soon after the Pact was enacted, and after some hesitation, asked and received permission from Danika to set it up as a mithraeum, a temple for initiates of Mithraism. Hill still snorts at his sire's dedication to a long-dead cult, but both Ventruue use the temple for enacting their more powerful spirit-bindings, making good use of the symbols of divine power and authority represented there.

Cret has, over time, initiated a handful of deserving mortal men from the staff into the cult (never women; Mithraism is very much a males-only denomination), and holds periodic rituals and teaching sessions in the mithraeum. Sometimes Hill even deigns to attend, primarily because the cult's initiates also tend to be

Hunedoara Castle -- dungeons and cellar



those he feeds upon, and he doesn't like the idea of Cret having a total hold over his vessels. The door in the small tower that accesses the hidden stairs is kept locked at all times. Both Cret and Hill have a key. Cret has also engaged potent magical defenses for the mithraeum as well, to prevent the curious (or worse, the defiling presence of a female) from poking about in the god's sanctum. Danika finds the exclusivity mildly annoying, but as a former priestess of a pagan goddess herself, believes it wiser simply to respect the cult's restrictions. Unless one of the players' characters is already an initiate of the Mithras cult (which is always possible), it is unlikely they will ever know the temple exists. Neither Cret nor his mortal initiates (which include Petrascu the cook, Kristoff the hunter, and several other men with military experience) will ever mention it or discuss its practices with outsiders. (Storytellers looking to expand on this small facet of Hunedoara Castle are encouraged to do some research on the

practices and beliefs of the cult of Mithras. Such information is readily available in libraries and on the Internet.)

GUEST ACCOMMODATIONS

The Inconnu of Hunedoara don't receive many guests, and may or may not have been expecting the characters' arrival. However, when guests do arrive on her doorstep, Danika Ruthven marshals all her resources to provide for them. Three rooms up on the third floor in the West Wing are normally used by mortal servants who rate the honor of more private accommodations than the dormitories. Upon Danika's orders, these rooms are quickly vacated by their previous tenants, the beds changed, bed curtains hung, carpets brought in, the dust swept away, and the shutters on the narrow windows checked for a tight fit.

The rooms are spacious, and generally have only one narrow window each. Two of the three rooms

have fireplaces. If the characters come in winter, there will be wood available to burn if they desire. The doors are solid oak, bound with iron. They do not have locks, but can be barred from the inside. Each room has a Turkish carpet, a large (empty) wooden chest, a chair, and a handsome four-poster bed, hung with damask curtains and fitted with clean linen sheets, pillows, and blankets. A side table holds a pitcher and basin, and a stack of clean towels; hot water is available if requested.

If the characters have mortals traveling with them, cots will be provided for them as well. If the characters do not have mortal servants, Danika may ask Ioan to assign them one, if for no other reason than to keep them from getting lost in the castle's twisting corridors. (Of course, this provides the Storyteller an opportunity to get the players acquainted with Stefan — see the sidebar later in this chapter.)

HAVENS OF THE TWELVE

Fortunately for the sanity and existences of the Twelve, Hunedoara Castle is quite large and spacious. Therefore each of them enjoys the privilege of private quarters, usually more than one room, where they can rest in peace, and study, work or plot in relative privacy. Those who have personal servants or companions often have that servant sleep in their quarters as well, an additional protective measure as well as a convenience, to have a servant ready whenever a need arises.

The characters will see the private havens of the Inconnu only if the Inconnu in question invites them in. Some of the Twelve will be more willing to do that than others, of course, but for a private discussion to remain private, sometimes one's own rooms are the only venue where confidentiality is possible. Unless the situation deteriorates to the point where no one is paying attention to domain rights anymore, the Inconnu will regard the characters' guest quarters with the same degree of courtesy as they do for each other — which is to say, only when it suits their purposes.

The Inconnu havens are scattered throughout the castle. Each has some form of protection for its resident during the day, and whatever personal belongings that particular vampire holds dear. A Cainite's haven reflects its occupant's cultural heritage, personal tastes, fears, pleasures and obsessions. Since the Twelve have had little else to do but ensure their havens are to their tastes, this is even truer in Hunedoara.

DANIKA RUTHVEN

Danika's haven is where it has always been, the first floor of the Old Keep. She shares her quarters with two mortals: her maidservant Gabriela, who has been with her for over a decade now, and Ioan Sturza, the castle's mortal seneschal. Ioan has his own room, which is both his sleeping chamber and his office. Gabriela usually sleeps on a cot in her mistress' dressing room.

Danika enters her haven from the first-floor portico to the left of the gatehouse. The main room is triangular in shape and contains doors to Danika's workroom, her dressing room/sleeping chamber, and Ioan's office/bedroom. The room is elegantly furnished with Victorian antiques in dark polished wood and velvet brocades, and a pair of thick Turkish carpets on the floor. Lit primarily by wall candles ensconced in glass, it also contains a fireplace with a stout iron screen, and a pump organ. A large freestanding embroidery frame and a foot-powered spinning wheel sit next to Danika's favorite chair; she does a great deal of her own dressmaking and embellishment. This chamber is Danika's private reception room, the place she is most apt to meet with her guests, either others of the Twelve, or the visiting characters.

Ioan's chamber, the first door to the right, contains his bed, a writing desk, a number of sizeable, handwritten ledgers, an old manual typewriter, a small bookcase, a wardrobe, and thankfully, a fireplace for those long Romanian winter nights. His waking and sleeping schedule is extremely irregular, though his duties require his attention more during the day than the night. Ioan keeps the financial records of the castle, which primarily means the care and maintenance of the mortal population, and the acquisition of any new items, materials, or staff members the Inconnu request of him.

Danika's dressing room is really more a private sleeping chamber for Gabriela, though the Lady of Hunedoara does keep some of her gowns in a great mahogany wardrobe here as well. The perk of a private bedroom is something Gabriela values highly, though during winter she has been known to take Ioan up on his invitation to share his fireplace, and his bed. She doesn't care much for him, but it's better than freezing — Danika will not allow a brazier in the dressing room, so close to her own bed.

Danika sleeps in the lower level of the Painted Tower, just off the dressing room. The windows in the dressing room and tower have both panes of semi-opaque glass and tightly fitting wood shutters

to block out all light. The tower room contains additional wardrobes and clothes chests, as well as a small dressing table with a mirror. Danika's bed is a four-poster box filled with her precious grave earth, which is stirred occasionally to keep it "fresh." A thin mattress fits neatly on top of the earth, and is made up with fine linen sheets, pillows, and a cover of soft, thick fur. The posts support thick bed curtains that are an additional level of protection against the light.

The last room is Danika's study. She has a great loom and two small ones, sacks of fleece, skeins of yarn and bolts of fabric. She also has a locked bookcase, which holds most of her more valuable tomes, and a chest that contains her Koldunic Sorcery ritual tools, robes and materials. Danika does not actually perform her rituals in here. Since she can no longer go to the mountaintops or river banks, she does what she can on the terraces outside, overlooking the river and the valley beyond.

Danika feeds from the serving staff, rotating through the ones that are not as popular with some of her guests; as hostess, she believes it proper that her guests have first pick of the vessels available. This sometimes means she must feed from one of the prisoners in the dungeon instead, which is not nearly as pleasant for her. Normally Ioan simply summons the designated vessel up to her chamber, she spends a few minutes in conversation with the mortal, and then feeds, as gently as she can, before sending him back to his rest. She avoids feeding on Gabriella or Ioan, although both of them desperately long for her Kiss. She simply cannot bear it when they beg.

CRET

The personal apartments of King Matthias Corvinus were originally given, as a sign of respect and deference, to Mokur. After Mokur's Final Death and the beginning of the Pact, Cret asked if he might occupy them and Danika agreed, for much the same reason. In truth, better quarters for a Ventrue sorcerer would be hard to imagine. Cret's rooms are above Danika's, on the second floor of the Old Keep, but also include the upper level of the Painted Tower, giving Cret both a fine vantage point over the rest of the castle and a private place to work his own sorcerous rituals.

The Ventrue's rooms are accessed from the second-floor portico in the Old Keep, just down the hall from the Council Room. The door opens to a short entrance hall, which boasts a beautiful set of

glass-fronted book cabinets, an 18th-century portrait of Cret himself, and a parson's bench where visitors can sit and wait for the Ventrue to receive them. On one side of the entrance hall is the door to Cret's sleeping chamber, and on the other, the door to the Gold Room, where Cret studies and entertains visitors (if any). At the end of the hall is a narrow stair going up, which makes two turns before finally coming out in the top chamber of the Painted Tower, Cret's ritual room.

The Gold Room possesses a sad, faded elegance. The broad oak beams of the ceiling still hold the faint traces of painted flowers and vines, the floor is laid in hardwood parquet, and one long wall bears a fading fresco mural commemorating a victory over the Turks. The furnishings are rich, heavy antiques, including a beautiful roll-top desk, a Renaissance-era table with clawed feet, and a pair of Victorian winged-back chairs in slightly threadbare brocade. An ornate brass 16-candle chandelier hangs from the ceiling, which can be lowered for lighting via a chain that hooks to the wall. The fireplace is marble, and decorated with carvings of angels. This room also contains books — one cabinet in particular contains Cret's transcriptions of the *Analects of Saulot*, the *Analects of Mokur*, and other writings on the topic of Golconda and Noddist prophecies.

Cret's sleeping quarters are comfortable, but not overly luxurious, consisting of an antique four-poster bed with heavy drapes, a spacious mahogany wardrobe for the Ventrue's clothes, and a bedside table. The door can be barred from the inside.

Upstairs is Cret's ritual and research room, in the round tower chamber. Windows look out all around its circumference, offering a good view of the castle and surrounding lands. Cret's ritual books are locked in chests or cabinets, along with his supplies of arcane ingredients, robes and ritual tools.

Cret's dietary requirements have given Danika the greatest headaches. He can only feed on intelligent, highly educated vessels — not the kind of candidates that her procurers usually look for, or the kind of individuals who can be taken and not missed. They have, however, found a workable compromise: Cret keeps a herd. Danika's procurer seeks out qualified but impoverished graduate students in several nearby universities, and arranges for them to receive a "scholarship" from a mysterious patron. Cret, being not only old-fashioned but actually archaic, makes sure all his researchers are male. At some point, the grad student is brought to meet his patron at Hunedoara Castle, and Cret

charms and feeds on him, and establishes a thaumaturgical link to the student he can use later to draw blood remotely from the student via a ritual. When the ritual is enacted, the student goes into a kind of euphoric trance, and Cret draws what he needs; unfortunately, the ritual costs blood as well, so Cret must draw at least two blood points in order to get the benefit of one. The trance is as addictive as the Kiss itself. The more often a given student experiences it, the deeper his trance goes each time, and the easier it is for Cret to accidentally take too much and kill his vessel.

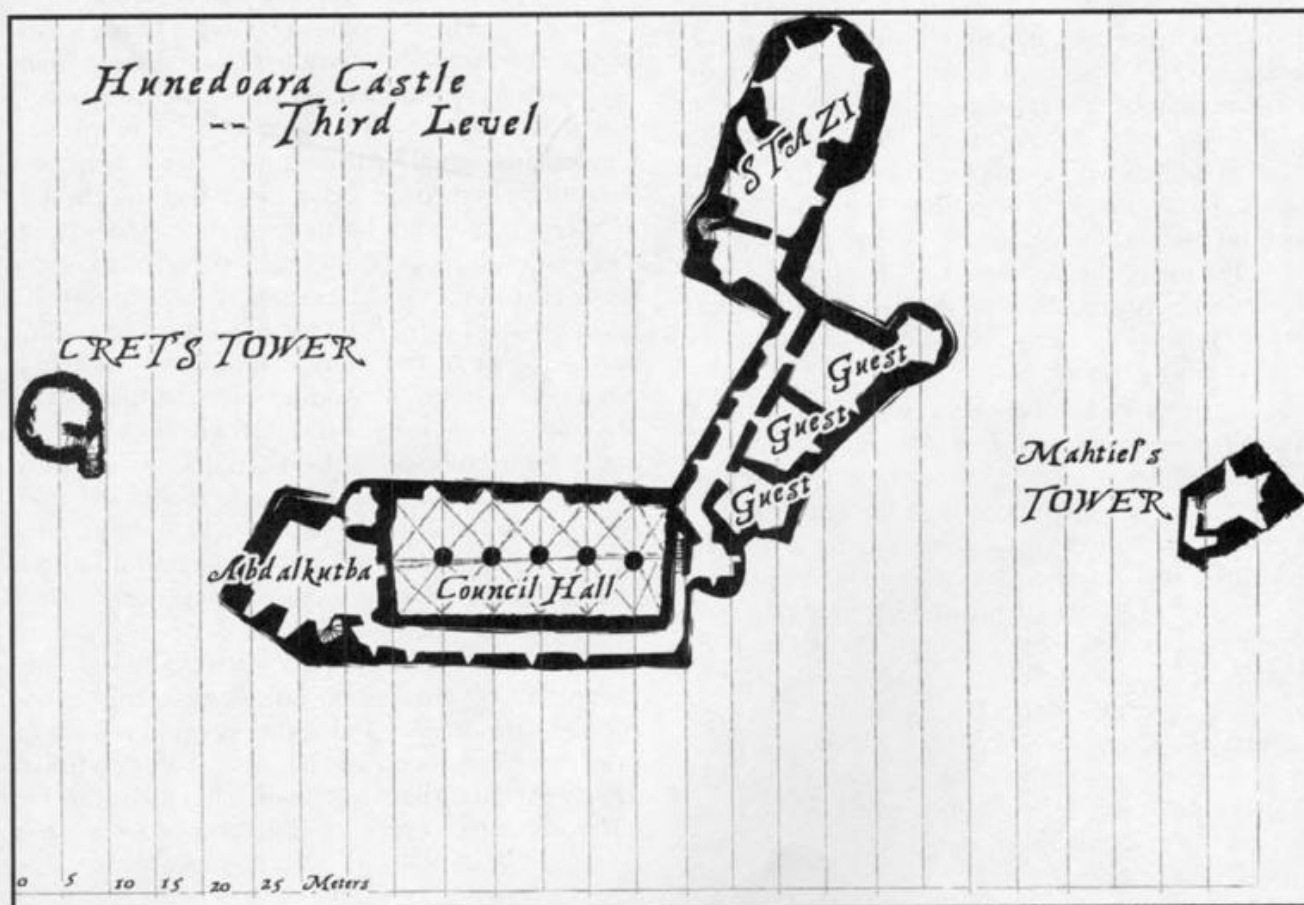
Cret has a manservant, Radu, a former university professor whose outspoken political views under a communist regime forced him to go into hiding. Now he acts as Cret's senior research assistant and secretary. Cret's research has expanded in the past decades. He keeps his on-site (usually at least one or two others in addition to Radu) and off-site assistants busy researching a wide variety of topics for him relating to Gehenna and possible locations for hidden Methuselahs. Radu sleeps in the one of the "guest rooms" on the third floor, and the junior

researchers sleep in the dormitories with the rest of the common servants. The presence of Cainite guests will require Radu to sleep elsewhere, most likely in Cret's quarters. Only Radu and the resident research assistants are required to be present for the lottery and ritual.

ZAMRA

The former Prince of Algiers spends a lot of time in her rooms. Her clear disdain for the so-called "Inconnu" of Hunedoara and her sharp tongue have not made her any friends among her fellow prisoners, so there are many nights she never goes out her door. Her quarters are on the second floor of the Gatehouse tower, and accessible from the turreted window gallery on one side (a door she rarely uses, as it opens into her sleeping chamber), and the hallway is just off the Council Hall.

Her quarters are quite comfortable, at least by Hunedoara's standards. Partly to remind her of the home she can never return to, and partly as a reaction against the asceticism favored by Eshmunamash, Cret and Demetrius, Zamra has spared no expense or labor



to decorate her rooms to her taste, which is decidedly exotic for Eastern Europe.

The main room sits over the gatehouse itself, and boasts two bay windows that project out from the wall and provide a view of the bridge and gate below and the Old Keep. Zamra has made the alcoves into cozy window nooks, with cushions to sit upon. She often reads in one of these nooks, or stares out at the night, seeking contact with her far-flung mortal family. The rest of the room has Persian and Turkish rugs covering the whole floor, and rich damask hangings along the walls that can be pulled across to block out light from the windows. In addition to a desk, a pair of bookcases, and a small table and chairs, the floor also contains several leather hassocks, floor cushions, and a low brass tray table with a collapsible base. The room is lit with the soft yellow glow of hanging oil lamps, or sometimes with only the flickering light from the fireplace.

Zamra's sleeping chamber is lined in swaths of heavy maroon velvet, totally obscuring the walls and even the beams of the ceiling, so the room has the feeling of a sultan's pavilion. A curtain of the same fabric masks the opening in the wall from the main room, and on the inside of the sleeping chamber as well. Here, too, eastern carpets cover the floor, and only a small oil lamp, which gives as much shadow as light, hangs from the ceiling to illuminate the chamber. A carved chest holds her selection of clothing and jewelry. Zamra's bed is low, on the floor, and piled with cushions and coverlets of silk velvet and brocade. It is veiled in another fall of curtains from above, this time translucent black silk threaded with gold. A prayer rug lies on one side of the room, facing east toward Mecca, although she is less wont to pray now — for so many years now her prayers have gone unanswered.

The sleeping chamber also contains Zamra's most precious possession: the history of her family, recorded in correspondence, carefully drawn out family trees, and more recently, photographs of her numerous descendants. Two of those descendants, her grandsons Bekir and Halil, dwell in the castle with her, and serve her the kind of absolute, familial dedication that only centuries of drinking the Blood can instill. She periodically sends one of them out to make more loyal descendants for her, so that her control over them all can remain strong. When in residence, Bekir and Halil share one of the other third floor guest rooms or, should those rooms be occupied, sleep on the floor in their grandmother's rooms. Every year, however, Zamra *does* pray, for one thing and one thing only — that her

grandsons be spared the terrible fate the winner of the lottery must endure. So far, at least *that* prayer has been answered.

Zamra does sometimes feed from Bekir and Halil, but also makes use of the castle's common herd, using her powers of Dominate to ensure they do not remember more than they need to afterward.

ABDALKUTBA

Abdalkutba is very partial to his quarters, which occupy the top two levels of the gatehouse tower. His rooms are accessible from a circular stair at the end of the second floor turret window gallery, or from the long corridor on the third floor directly above it.

Before coming to Hunedoara and joining Mokur's informal school, Abdalkutba was quite the traveler. His insatiable curiosity and wanderlust had taken him all over Europe, the Middle East and parts of Asia. He was even considering a voyage across the sea to this New World he'd been hearing about. Unfortunately, the Pact clipped his traveling wings. Now he travels vicariously through others, collects souvenirs and costumes from all over the world, and does his best to satisfy his curiosity through second-hand sources. His widely varying interests are reflected in his haven as well.

The third floor room serves as his living room. Its windows actually have clear glass panes in them in addition to wooden shutters. In one corner, heavy brocade drapes hang from the ceiling and conceal his actual bedroom, just big enough for a beautifully carved Victorian sleigh bed and chest of drawers that contain his most often worn clothing. The rest of the room is crowded with Abdalkutba's vast collection of oddities from all over the world, brought to him by his servants traveling on his behalf. Some of the more exotic items include a polar bear skin rug, a rattan stool in the shape of an elephant, a camel saddle footrest, a leather-covered coffee table embossed with Incan designs, a bronze statuette of a mermaid on a rock, a Japanese sake set, the skull of a lion, a department store mannequin modeling a traditional man's costume from Iran, a beautiful Chinese spice cabinet, and a two-color marble chessboard with delicately carved pieces in green jade and pink quartz. The walls are hung with tapestries and fine Persian rugs; more rugs of various sizes and styles cover the floor or create paths through all the piles of international kitsch. Abdalkutba is not against having agreeable company; one corner of the room does have a

number of floor cushions and mismatched chairs should the opportunity arise.

The circular staircase continues up to the floor above, which is Abdalkutba's study and workroom. Some of his collection has found its way up here as well, though those items tend to be small statuary or wall decorations, which vie for shelf space with the volumes of his personal library. There is a writing desk and stool, and a larger table as well, which is strewn with maps, books, horoscope charts and a massive ephemeris, which aids him in his astrology work. Several bronze technical instruments (that were considered the height of technology in the 1500s), such as an astrolabe, sundial, and compass, act as weights on the edges of a large map of Eastern Europe and a poster showing the genealogy of Danish royal family, scribbled with notes in Arabic from Abdalkutba's horoscope casting. Hanging from one of the ceiling beams is a stuffed owl, posed in flight, and on a side table there sits a Renaissance-era model of the solar system, which shows only seven planets. A collection of telescopes sits in a corner, and a stack of newspapers from all over the world is piled on a low stool beside the desk. Abdalkutba is always delighted to get more newspapers (any Western language will do) in order to keep up with the world outside. He also casts horoscopes for world events to see how they turn out, and he collects birth times and places for people around the world. Of late, his prognostications have grown murkier and more foreboding, inspiring him to push his forecasting and omniscience to the limit in order to get a glimpse of what he fears is soon to come.

The real joy for Abdalkutba of this chamber, however, lies outside it. On the front and back sides of his tower retreat, doors lead out into a narrow, roofed wooden porch, that totally encircles the tower. From his stargazing porch, Abdalkutba has a nearly perfect 360-degree view of the heavens, and because the castle lacks electric lights, the stars are especially bright and clear... including the ominous red one that has dominated the sky the past handful of years. Abdalkutba has been mapping its course and comparing its presence to the rest of the heavens, and finds what he sees to be more disturbing than he'd like, especially given the significance of the star in Drenis' book of Noddist prophecies.

Abdalkutba feeds from the castle servants; he is not a fussy eater, and in fact can get so absorbed in his research or stargazing that he sometimes has to be reminded to feed. He has a personal servant, Kirsten Møller (and several ghouls and agents who

have never seen his face), but she is rarely ever at the castle, save for the night of the lottery and ritual. Kirsten, a Danish university student with no particular interest in ever graduating, spends most of her time globetrotting (usually via bus or train, and staying in inexpensive student hostels) on behalf of her master, and bringing him back stories and souvenirs for his collection.

BUFO

Bufo only formally became one of the Twelve — he does not consider himself in any way "Inconnu" — in the 17th century, and up until that point didn't care much where he slept, so long as it was secret, dark and safe. As the beastly Toad, he had claimed his territory in the darkest, deepest place in the castle, the vault below the Knights' Hall. Since the vault had a tendency to flood and stank of mildew, no one contested him for it. But once Vanth fell into Wassail and took to hunting her former companions, no place was dark or secret enough, and no place was safe. He spent those days — and nights — curled up in agony on the floor at his mistress' feet, slowly healing from his first encounter with the mad wight. After his diablerie of Vanth, he realized how (literally) low he'd sunk. But to put in a claim for Vanth's old haven under the White Keep, he would have had to admit to far more than he was comfortable with, such as actually remembering that he had once been a mortal man. To let them know that he knew how far he had fallen... Ulrich's pride, such as it was, would simply not allow it. In the end, it didn't matter anyway.

The easiest way into the vault is to come down through the dungeon from Danika's rooms. A narrow winding stairway goes down from there to the castle's foundations. The water comes about halfway up the last section of the stairs; for the visitor it is impossible to tell how much further down it goes. The depth of the water in the vault varies with the season, from 12 to 15 feet in the spring, when the melting snow raises water levels everywhere, to only five or six feet in late summer. Fortunately for Bufo, the water temperature never gets quite cold enough to freeze over, but in winter his damp skin can develop patches of ice, and his flesh is far colder to the touch than a corpse (not that anyone *wants* to touch him).

Bufo can sleep anywhere in the vault, drifting comfortably under the water, but he does have a security hole — a narrow tunnel he managed to dig over several years through the wall and into the

rock of the foundations. Its entrance is under the lowest water level, and it is always flooded, but it's the one place Bufo feels truly safe, and it's where he does his dream-spying from.

Bufo has another way to enter or exit his vault, a narrow fissure in the inside walls where water seepage has cracked the stone. It's a narrow fit, but he can squirm through. From that fissure he has actually dug a tunnel under the castle that comes out in a spot between the west wing and the White Keep, but still within the castle walls.

Bufo has no servants or mortal companions. He feeds on the wretches locked up in the dungeon most of the time, though he has occasionally made use of the same servants as everyone else. He usually approaches in disguise... unless he wants to hear his victim scream.

ESHMUNAMASH

The ancient physician of Carthage is a Kindred of simple tastes — or perhaps he just doesn't care about material comfort anymore. His quarters are on the second floor of the West Wing, above the servants' quarters and just down the hall from the Council Hall. As his usual mode of dress is simple, so are his quarters; elaborate furnishings or wall hangings or even carpet on the cold stone floor are not for him.

The outer room serves both as buffer between Eshmunamash and the rest of the Twelve, but also as the closest thing the castle has to an infirmary. While Eshmunamash's formal medical training is two millennia out of date, his continued interest in his old profession is one of the few things he indulges himself in. Whether his care for the mortals of Hunedoara is born out of centuries of habit, or the fading remains of his own *humanitas*, he still provides a useful service, within the limitations of his own knowledge and the tools he has available to him.

The room contains a few plain chairs and a stout oak table, which is usually covered with a plain sheet of unbleached linen, for examinations. A plain wood cabinet against one wall contains Eshmunamash's medical and surgical tools, most of them circa the 19th century. He also has a number of more recent medical books, though he often finds the text incomprehensible and relies more on the pictures. Fortunately for the mortals of Hunedoara, the old Brujah no longer has a solo practice. Adrian Metzger was a third-year medical student at the University of Heidelberg before the stress of his studies drove him to amphetamines, and discovery

of his habit got him expelled. Discovered in a bar in Munich by one of Danika's agents, "Dr. Metzger" is now diligently practicing medicine without a license and tending to his master's more personal needs as well as those of his fellows in the castle. Over the past three years since his arrival, his medical training has already saved several mortal lives, and he continues to be fascinated by the incredible properties of vampire blood, wishing he had the courage to do a closer examination of the monster they call the Sclav. Adrian had thought his drug addiction was beat, only to find that the addiction to vampiric vitae was much, much worse. Still, at least it enhances, rather than weakens, his mental acuity. Now if he could just upgrade the infirmary to something better than the Dark Ages....

The second room behind the infirmary is the dwelling and sleeping quarters for Eshmunamash and his assistant. Adrian has a cot near the fireplace, and a chest where he keeps his few clothes and other personal items. The room's most prominent feature is its wall of bookcases. Eshmunamash had quite a respectable library even before he came to Hunedoara, and he has been adding to it periodically ever since, more out of habit than any interest in what the books contain. The other noticeable item in this room is a low, muddy-looking worktable and potter's wheel, along with a supply of clay and several finished and unfinished pieces. Mokur was a potter, and often used pottery and working with clay as analogies in his teaching. Eshmunamash took up pottery himself centuries ago in hopes that practicing Mokur's trade might help him understand Mokur's deep inner peace. He has never bothered to fire any of the pieces he makes, however; he simply dumps the dried clay back into a bucket of water for it to dissolve and be used again. The making, not the product, is where his interests lie.

Eshmunamash prefers to distance himself as much as possible from his needs as a vampire, a holdover from his own personal search for Golconda. He therefore prefers not to drink directly from his vessel, but have the blood drawn (which Adrian sees to before his master wakes) and presented to him in a goblet. The ancient Brujah sleeps in a windowless chamber that is part of a small tower, as the round room can be completely closed off from all light. Its only furnishings are a simple cot and some chests of clothing. Eshmunamash has little interest in luxuries.

DEMETRIUS

Demetrius shares his quarters in the Watchtower with the sleeping Mahtiel, but most of the space in tower's four levels is taken up by his own scholarly clutter. If the Malkavian's haven didn't have maid service included as part of the hospitality package, it would be far, far worse, and coated with the dust of decades, if not centuries. Such mundane things as housecleaning have never been high on his priority list, not when there were so many other important things to see to. As a result of his professorial absent-mindedness, books tend to be wherever he last laid them down, clothing gets draped over whatever surface is convenient, and stacks of loose papers, rolls of parchment, piles of spiral notebooks (mostly half-filled), boxes of old correspondence, and notes from various research projects cover every available shelf, table, chair, or other horizontal surface, including his bed. Over the years, the clutter has actually overflowed the rooms of the tower itself, and boxes and piles of books and papers line the walls of the long passageway leading up to it as well.

The watchtower is accessed from a room just off the Council Hall. This entry foyer appears at first glance to be a storage room; it is full of file boxes, crates, filing cabinets and piles of books and loose papers. A narrow passageway winds between the stacks and leads to two doors: One in the back of the room leads to the passageway and the tower itself and the other leads to a small round room, the top level of a smaller tower. This room is occupied by Artemis Jones, a former library science graduate student from Philadelphia whose curiosity and exceptional research skills (and her ability to read Latin and Greek) got her into trouble when she ran across a rare copy of one of Demetrius' writings. Sensing her fascination with his work, Demetrius reeled her in and made her his research assistant. Artemis now has the thankless job of trying to organize four centuries worth of Malkavian ramblings. She also has lost none of her fascination for vampires, or the Kiss, and what Demetrius will not tell her, she asks one of the others, usually Zamra or Anastazi, and takes copious notes. Anastazi in particular is happy to help her with the more practical side of her research. Artemis is still new to the castle and to Demetrius' service; she doesn't know what lies in the locked chamber on the lower level, and has no idea as yet what to expect when the night of the ritual comes around again.

The other door is thick and strong, with a stout bar of solid oak on the other side. Beyond it lies a

short covered bridge that crosses over the 10-foot gap to the gallery on the other side. More boxes, file cabinets, and stacks of books line up down the long corridor, which ends in another heavy, reinforced set of double doors.

The double doors open into a narrow hallway that turns a corner and then opens out into the main level of the watchtower. A narrow stair goes down to the floor below, where Mahtiel sleeps behind a locked door, and another goes up to the levels above. This was originally a guardroom, and indeed it was the room where the Twelve once took refuge when Vanth fell to wassail. This level has only two windows, high and narrow, and they are secured by iron bars and wooden shutters operated by long cords. Currently it is, like most of the tower, filled with boxes of books and papers. There is also small armory here — a chest that contains a few medieval swords, several antique firearms, and some hardwood stakes. Danika left the weapons here because should the worst happen again, the tower still makes the best possible place to retreat to, and should that happen, they will need all the weapons they can find.

The room above is where Demetrius normally sleeps. His bed, which is tucked behind a screen for additional daylight protection, is usually rumpled, unmade and piled with books. An old manual Underwood typewriter sits on a mahogany desk surrounded by file folders, books, and loose-leaf binders. Jars of ballpoint pens, pencils, and old quills adorn several shelf and desk nooks. Demetrius' favorite chair is a recliner that sits near the fireplace, which he has even been known to sleep in on occasion. The three small windows in this room have pebbled glass and stout shutters to keep out unwelcome daylight.

Above this room is the tower's primary chamber, soaring two stories high into the supporting rafters of the peaked roof high above. An ornate stone balcony runs around the circumference of the room about 12 feet up from the floor, where the tower broadens out into a majestic overhanging crown, ringed in the shuttered windows that give the tower its name. A narrow stair runs up the side of one wall to access the balcony. This elegant, high-ceilinged room is Demetrius' library and receiving hall, when any of the others choose to visit him. Lined with bookcases, cabinets for important papers, scrolls and other even more esoteric records, it has several chairs (only one of which is totally clear of piles of clutter), another writing desk, and

a number of filing cabinets. The candle-lamps in this room are all now ensconced in glass; Artemis was horrified at the mere thought of open flame in a drafty room near so much paper and insisted on some safety measures.

Demetrius claims he no longer needs to feed, though if offered vitae in a glass while visiting one of his colleagues, he does not refuse it, as that would be rude. In truth, he subconsciously summons one of the servants when he rises every other evening, but neither his vessel nor Demetrius himself remember the encounter afterward. Due to Demetrius' powers of Obfuscate, the servant's presence is never missed downstairs, nor does anyone see him coming to or leaving the watchtower.

MAHTIEL

The Sleeper of Hunedoara needs little save a safe place to rest, and Danika and Demetrius ensure she gets it. She shares the Malkavian's haven in the Watchtower; Demetrius requested it as the most secure place the Castle had to offer, and Danika willingly granted it to him. Mahtiel sleeps in a locked room on the lower level of the tower. The door is usually kept locked unless Demetrius is in with her. The castle servants know they are not permitted to enter and they obey. They have no knowledge of what lies within.

The room is fairly bare. Mahtiel has few personal possessions nor any desire for them. Demetrius keeps it far cleaner and neater than he does his own quarters; somehow he knows anything less would disturb her rest. The walls are whitewashed plaster, and the floor is bare stone. Mahtiel's 15th-century armor and weapons are displayed along one wall. Demetrius cleans and polishes them once a year to prevent rust. In an alcove in front of a bricked-up window is a small shrine to Mahtiel's lost love. Its altar holds a small incense burner, a beautifully preserved sword and dagger in a medieval Turkish style, a bracelet made from a braided loop of long black hair, and an alabaster urn containing what Mahtiel could find of Rothriel's ashes. Against the opposite wall, a simple chest holds a few articles of clothing, a bone comb, and a few other small personal articles.

Mahtiel's catafalque sits in the center of the room, made of polished brass and ebony, raising the thin, silk-covered pallet on which she lies to about four feet off the ground. The sleeping Salubri lies on her back, eyes closed, arms down at her sides, head resting on a small pillow. She wears a plain white

linen shift. A soft coverlet of blue velvet covers her up to mid-chest; under the coverlet her feet are bare. When lost in her pleasant dreams, the haunted sorrow fades from her face and she looks more like she did of old, when she and her beloved Rothriel rode across the land fighting the minions of the Baali. Especially in the soft light of candles, she very nearly looks the part of the stalwart warrior angel Demetrius believes her to be.

Mahtiel has no personal servants. Only Demetrius is permitted to be near her vulnerable, torpid body. He washes her face and hands, combs her hair, and brushes away the dust. He also attempts to feed her periodically, coaxing her to take dribbles of vitae even in her sleep, and cleaning up the spill if he is unsuccessful. In particular, he makes sure he has enough vitae available to feed her when she *does* rise, so no mortal need fear her hunger on the night of the Lottery.

Mahtiel's level of sleep varies; she does not wake when Demetrius enters her chamber, for he is a familiar and trusted presence. But should a stranger do so, especially with harmful intent, her abilities are such that she would likely sense the intrusion and struggle to awaken — and rise in a less than hospitable mood, although groggy and far from the peak of her martial skills.

PENTWERET

The ancient Setite priest-magician has his quarters on the ground floor of the White Keep, accessible from the Old Gatehouse hall and the Keep's foyer facing the courtyard. His sleeping chamber is down below, sealed off from the rest of the ossuary and accessible only through the shrine.

Most of Pentweret's visitors see only his receiving hall, which is sparsely but tastefully furnished with a few simple chairs and a low coffee table in front of the fireplace. His three statue servitors stand in different corners of the room, and his ghoul snake has a basket near the fireplace (though it can be found anywhere in the castle). This room is otherwise decorated with a heterogeneous mix of different objects: a devotional icon of the Madonna and child, a turn-of-the-century telephone, a wooden tobacco-store Indian, a pair of framed antique dueling pistols, a teddy bear, a carnival mask from Venice, a pair of stuffed and mounted rabbits posed in the act of mating. The chamber presents a sort of Rorschach test for the Setite's guests — he watches to see what catches their attention (or perhaps what they assiduously *avoid* looking at).

Beyond the front room is another, divided in half with a painted Chinese floor screen. On one side, Pentweret maintains his own blasphemy shrine with a partially dismembered, mummified corpse (a German soldier) stretched on a metal frame. The corpse sports a party hat on its head and a noisemaker in its mouth — there is nothing, Pentweret believes, that cannot be mocked, not even his own magical traditions. On the other side of the room is the Setite's personal temple to Set and Saulot. The two statuettes stand side by side, and each can be opened like a Russian doll to reveal a smaller figurine of the other Antediluvian inside.

A narrow circular stairway goes down to another chamber below. This room is both Pentweret's tomb/sleeping chamber and his workroom. A workbench holds wax, paper, papyrus, pens, gravers, awls, files and pliers, jars of semiprecious stones, and other tools of his magic. The floor is gritty with a thin layer of sand, and the walls are painted with hieroglyphic writings and images of the gods. An ornately carved cabinet of teak holds a collection of papyrus scrolls and books. Pentweret sleeps in a simple coffin, with a carved bone headrest in the ancient Egyptian style instead of a pillow.

Pentweret has no mortal servants; his statue servitors and pet snake provide all the help he needs save for feeding, and for that, he accepts whomever Ioan sends to his door.

DRENIS

Drenis' haven is on the second floor of the White Keep, and her only complaint about it, as she once told Danika, is that it was too close to Anastazi Ruthven by about a hundred miles. Danika smiled and agreed, but that was the end of it. Other than her upstairs neighbor, Drenis is about as comfortable as she might expect. Her haven has two entrances: one, a stairway that comes up from the foyer of the Old Gatehouse, and another that opens out onto the second floor of the Old Gatehouse as well. Both doors are fitted with the very best locks the 15th century could provide, and can be barred from the inside.

Drenis led a fairly ascetic existence even in her mortal days. Her haven is rather sparsely furnished compared to that of some of her fellows, and it's always immaculately neat. The long workroom contains a slanted writing desk, a flat worktable, a few chairs and a small cot for Maria, Drenis' personal attendant, near the fireplace. A marble-topped lady's vanity with a mirror sits in a corner. It contains the

cosmetics that Drenis uses to help cover her deathly pallor and sunken cheeks, the mark of her Cappadocian heritage. Part of one wall also contains her personal library. Drenis has a morbid fascination for books about murder, genocide and torture. Her library contains books on the Inquisition, the Holocaust, serial killers, sexual abuse, even psychological portraits of Hitler — anything that touches on man's cruelty to his fellow man, often with detailed photographs.

Her sleeping chamber in the rounded end of the keep has several deep, narrow windows, which have only heavy wooden shutters to keep out daylight and the cold. Drenis sleeps, wrapped in a linen sheet like a shroud, in a lidded casket, which sits on a low bier in the center of the room. The casket is made of polished wood, but its interior is very plain and lacks any padding or lining for its occupant's comfort.

The room is also a kind of shrine — it contains several hundred small terra-cotta figurines, lined up neatly on shelves all around the room. Drenis made the figurines herself, as part of her funerary duties for Hunedoara and the Pact. Each contains a small relic — a bit of hair, a small chip of bone or a scrap of clothing — from the body of the mortal it represents. Drenis knows every one of her figurines by name; she recites the whole long list of the dead in her meditation rituals, and on the anniversary of their deaths, begs their forgiveness for her participation in it.

Drenis' servant was once a victim of sexual abuse. Drenis brought the girl into her service because the Cappadocian felt compassion for what she had suffered. Maria has been with Drenis for less than a year, but adores her mistress completely. She is still wary of most of the other mortals in the castle (never mind the vampires), and spends most of her time in Drenis' quarters.

Drenis has never liked feeding. Both the implied violence and physical intimacy cause her distress, and she still strives to find Golconda. With some assistance from others on the staff, Maria has learned how to collect the blood her mistress needs from the night's designated mortal servant, and has it ready in a cup for Drenis when she rises. While Maria has occasionally permitted Dr. Metzger to surgically draw her blood for her mistress, she has never experienced the Kiss, and fears it as much as she fears the touch of the stepfather who once abused her.

ANASTAZI

When Anastazi was given the option of private quarters at Hunedoara (having previously shared

them with his sire), he took it, and occupied the rooms as far away from Danika as he could possibly get, on the third floor of the White Keep. The space wasn't much when he first moved in, of course; it had apparently been used only for storage. Anastazi would like to think he's made some considerable improvements to it since then.

Anastazi's rooms are accessed either from the spiral stair coming up from the second floor of the Old Gatehouse, or via a somewhat more roundabout route from the stairs outside the Council Hall, past the guest rooms. To say that Anastazi is a packrat is rather like calling a Brujah argumentative. He is very fond of technological gadgets, but is unfortunately far better at acquiring new toys than doing something about the surfeit of old ones. After five centuries of collecting, his haven has the general look of a cross between an antique shop attic and an indoor yard sale. His decorating scheme appears to be based around piles and clutter; every surface in both rooms (and he has a number of tables just for this very purpose) is covered with gadgets, toys and miscellaneous pieces of technology dating back several hundred years. Most of these still work, and Anastazi knows how to operate each one, even if it's a gadget (like a battery-powered electric razor) he has absolutely no use for. There isn't much room to walk in Anastazi's quarters, but many, many things to pick up, examine, play with and enjoy.

Anastazi's fondness for modern technology also has led him to install a luxury in his haven that no other Inconnu enjoys: electricity. He purchased a gas-powered generator a decade or two ago, and has now "wired" (through the use of multiple extension cords) both rooms and put up electric lights. He recently graduated from a crank-operated Victrola to a battery-powered boom box and CDs. He greatly enjoys having an orchestra or vocalist at his command. He saves all the drained batteries in a box under one of the tables; he's been experimenting with various koldunic rituals hoping to find a way to recharge them.

Anastazi sleeps on a waterbed, another piece of modern technology he found particularly enjoyable, especially since he figured out a ritual to fill it for him without having to haul buckets up the stairs. The waterbed is set partially in an alcove, and he has hung heavy bed curtains from the ceiling beams to protect him from any stray sunlight that gets in past the shutters. He has two small silk "pillows" on the bed that contain samples of his grave earth; he usually sleeps with at least one

against his body. Of course, since Anastazi's grave earth actually is from Hunedoara's own graveyard, it's not like he's lacking a source of supply.

Anastazi prefers to feed on women, preferably young and pretty ones, and preferably during lovemaking, though even a pretty young man will do in a pinch. Unfortunately, the available choices do not always excite his appetites. He sometimes sends his manservant Victor to bring back a prostitute or two from Deva; his only problem then is dealing with them afterward, since he lacks the ability to cloud their memories. He usually has to make a deal with Hill or Zamra to take care of that little detail. Anastazi learned back in the 19th century that even the murder of prostitutes might be investigated, when his manservant was arrested, convicted and hung for his master's crime — a very embarrassing incident indeed. He has recently discovered that Victor is more than willing to fill in for a less than satisfactory vessel on occasion, and is quite pretty enough to suit. Hopefully he'll be robust enough to bear up under the repeated strain of his master's Kiss as well.

Anastazi is one of the Inconnu more likely to actually invite interesting (or attractive) characters into his haven to show off his collection to, to chat, scheme, share a vessel, or even share blood.

HILL

The former soldier turned priest and sorcerer keeps spartan quarters on the second floor of the east wing, just off the ornate gothic portico opening onto the courtyard. A door off the second floor of the Old Gatehouse gives entry to a sparsely furnished hall, part museum and part map room. Two hanging bronze chandeliers, of a dozen candles each, hang from the ceiling, giving the room a fair bit of light spilling down from above. A variety of weapons, including Roman *gladioli*, medieval broadswords, Renaissance rapiers and a pair of beautifully matched Japanese samurai blades are displayed on the walls, hanging in racks or laid on folded velvet on the tops of glass-fronted bookcases. A broad table dominates the middle of the room, with its edges raised several inches like a lip to hold the expanse of dirt contained within. On the table is a miniature landscape, complete with hills, tiny trees, a winding road, and a bridge going over a river. Tiny lead figurines, some on horseback and others on foot, are carefully arranged in formation on the landscape, re-enacting some battle of the past. Hill is an avid student of military tactics, and can talk for

hours on the details of many historical battles. He has an extensive library of military history, strategy and tactical manuals, and often entertains certain members of the mortal staff with such visual demonstrations, challenging them to guess what the next move of a commander might be.

The room beyond that serves as Hill's personal dwelling quarters. A small room is closed off in one corner, which serves as Hill's sleeping chamber. The room is just large enough for a plain army cot, a stool, a chest for his nightshirts and a few other personal belongings, and a small shrine. The contents of the shrine have varied over the years; Hill has never yet found a set of beliefs that suited him quite as well as Mithraism once did, yet he is too stubborn to return to a religion he now believes was a fraud. Currently, the shrine contains a small figure of Ganesha, the Hindu god with the body of a man and the head of an elephant.

The rest of the room contains a wardrobe and dresser, a writing desk, and a locked cabinet with Hill's books on sorcery, philosophy and new age metaphysics. There is also a narrow cot near the fireplace, neatly made but unused, with a chest for clothing beside it. Hill's last servant Gyorgy had his name drawn in the lottery nearly 10 years ago, the fourth time in all the long years of the Pact that Hill had lost someone he'd grown to rely on. He has not sought to choose another, yet has not removed the cot, either. Meanwhile, he simply takes care of himself.

Hill normally works his major thaumaturgical rituals in the mithraeum, but he has also performed small summonings and wardings in his own little tower chamber, accessed from a corner of this chamber, whose windows overlook the chapel and back gardens of the castle.

THOSE WHO SERVE

The Twelve are not the only inhabitants of Hunedoara. During the centuries of the castle's existence, even in sorcerous isolation, many mortal servants have dwelt there, serving the needs of their masters — and paying the price of the Pact with their blood. After so many years, so many sacrifices, the Twelve have ceased to pay much attention to their servants as individuals. The chances of losing them to the annual lottery, accidental over-feeding, or suicide are too great; there's no point in getting attached to them. In pure psychological self-defense, the ancient vampires have emotionally distanced themselves from their mortal servants

and companions, even more so than much younger Kindred do in the world outside the castle's invisible walls.

Each of the Cainite inhabitants of Hunedoara has the right to one personal servant, who is bound in blood and sacrosanct, immune by mutual agreement — at least in theory, if not always in practice — to the fangs of his master's contemporaries. This servant usually sleeps in his master's own rooms, as opposed to the common dormitories shared by the other servants, and performs whatever duties his master requires. He is permitted to leave the castle on his master's business, since the blood bond will both keep him from breaking the castle's veil of secrecy and always bring him back again. A personal servant is required to attend the annual lottery; if his name is drawn from the barrel, he must be present to serve his master's need that one last time.

The rest of the servants are a mix of those Danika provides for the upkeep of the castle and its mortal population, and additional servants for those of the Twelve who have needs for their labor. These servants are the basic feeding stock for the castle's undead inhabitants, made ghouls to ensure their obedience, and conditioned to the pleasure of the Kiss. There are usually only about 25 to 30 of these servants, who perform work of many types, from cleaning and maintenance of the castle itself, to preparing meals for their fellows, laundry, working the castle's gardens, and as needed, burying the dead. They sleep on the ground floor dormitories in the west wing. Much of their work is done using tools and techniques that date back 500 years. The medieval methods accomplish what needs to be done, and more importantly, keep the mortals' hands and minds busy, so they do not have too much time or energy to plot escapes or rebellion even if their wills might be strong enough to overcome the addictive nature of the blood.

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

The mortal servants may be all but faceless to most of the Twelve, but among themselves, the situation is quite different. Traditions die hard in a castle ruled by a Tzimisce, and new servants are taught their duties based on a strict code of protocol and tested survival tactics, developed over long years of unending service to their undead masters. A clear hierarchy exists "below-stairs" at Hunedoara, and those who wish to stay alive quickly learn their places in it. The average life expectancy of a mortal at Hunedoara is perhaps a decade, if they're fortunate



enough to endure repeated feedings, medieval living conditions, illness and the annual lottery, though some have managed to last much longer. The servants' hierarchy has as much to do with seniority as much as an individual's specific duties, so those who do manage to survive can expect the dubious reward of rising in it, perhaps even earning more prestigious responsibilities than when they first started.

The highest-status servants are those who personally serve one of the Twelve. Their word is law to their fellows, and their requests treated as if one of the masters themselves were asking it. They sleep not in the common dormitories, but in more private quarters with their respective master, or one of the rooms on the third floor. They move about the castle freely by day or by night, and do not seem to fear even the monstrous Slav. They also leave the castle on errands for their masters, sometimes even going as far as Deva or even Bucharest... a freedom few of the common servants enjoy. On the rare occasions that one of the personal servants is selected in the lottery, or dies due to some other reason, the servants indulge in considerable speculation over — and even competition for — her position.

The personal servants know their lot is no better, and in some ways worse. Their lives hang on their master's whim and their ability to satisfy them; that is all that fills their minds most of the time. They have no more privacy than their fellows if they share their master's rooms, only a cot and small chest in an out of the way corner. They feed on their master's blood and are often addicted to the Kiss, which serves only to underscore their desire to please. They are often privy to some of their masters' secrets, or overhear conversations, arguments and bitter insults traded among the Twelve, which can put their lives in danger should one of the Inconnu decide they know too much. Not all the Twelve have much patience for less than perfect service, so their servants must learn quickly and well what is expected of them.

The castle's seneschal, Ioan Sturza, reports directly to Danika and as such holds rank equal with the servants of other Inconnu. His responsibilities, however, are focused less on her personally, and more toward the castle as a whole. Ioan oversees all the other servants, assigns duties, checks work quality, settles disputes, and makes sure everything is running smoothly so his mistress is not troubled by domestic problems. He also handles the acquisition of necessary provisions, everything from foodstuffs for the servants' kitchen to silk embroidery floss for

his mistress, to Anastazi's growing collection of CDs, to small supplies of antibiotics, herbal remedies and other medical supplies as requested by Eshmunamash.

Every few months, Zamra audits Ioan's accounts, hoping to find some trifling waste, loss or irregularity. Ioan can do nothing but grit his teeth and bear with whatever the Lasombra says, though he does make secret note of anything she finds. Even after so many years, her "If I ran my inn this sloppily, I'd have been out on the street and my children would have starved!" speech still manages to annoy him. After she is finally satisfied, he must go vent his wounded pride on someone else even lower in the pecking order. Ioan is one of the longest-surviving ghouls in the castle. Although he puts his name in the lottery along with everyone else, he has so far not been chosen, nor succumbed to any other danger for nearly 60 years. He has high standards as to the work expected of his staff, and does not tolerate idleness; all the servants strive to look very busy whenever he is in the area.

Others among the more common serving staff include Petrascu, the cook; Kristoff, the hunter, who sometimes brings back game from the woods surrounding the castle; Ilse, who sees to the linens and laundry; Andrzej, who serves as the general fix-it man and builder; and Marushka, who oversees the garden in the back. The castle's mortal population has a far higher percentage of males to females, so the few women on the staff get more than their share of attention from the men, often far more than they want. For those who have been in the castle for any length of time, sex isn't as good as the Kiss, but as they wait for their turn to serve the masters, they settle for whatever other pleasures they can get.

With a few exceptions — Drenis, who knows all names of both the living and the dead, and Demetrius, who simply knows — most of the Twelve have ceased to learn servants' names, other than those who serve them personally. There have been too many of them, and their names run together in the memory. The mortal servants have learned to respond to whatever name they are called, and do not attempt to call further attention to themselves by correcting the error.

Ioan also holds one other duty, which gives him great power over those in his charge — he determines the feeding schedule for the castle's undead masters. He coordinates this with several of the Twelve's personal attendants: Adrian Metzger, who lets Ioan know if anyone is ill or has recently been bled unduly, and Bekir, who is there primarily to ensure "fairness," or at

THE SERVANT OF GEHENNA

If Saulot decides to come to Hunedoara and watch his former disciples face the fate the players' characters bring to them, he chooses to disguise himself as just another one of the common servants. The Antediluvian's power is such that the other mortals accept him as one of themselves without question, and indeed without even wondering where he is during daylight hours. Nor do the Inconnu realize that one of their mortal servants is not one of their normal staff, or in fact even mortal.

As a servant, Saulot may aid the players subtly in figuring out what is going on at Hunedoara, but he will not actually intervene directly in the situation. The characters are his means of "solving" the problem, and if they can't get the Twelve to face reality and renounce what they have become, then no one will. However, he does want to give both the characters and the Twelve a fair chance, so if the Storyteller needs a servant to drop a hint or otherwise give the players a slight nudge in the right direction, Saulot may at least do that much for them.

As a mortal servant, Saulot is a stocky silver-haired Eastern European man of late middle age, who goes by the name of Stefan. He speaks with a noticeable accent and always shows the exact amount of deference and humility the Twelve expect from their staff. He should seem perfectly ordinary in all respects, even if one of the characters chooses to feed on him or kill him out of hand. They will see and experience only what he wants them to, no roll required (and they will not be drinking *his* blood in any case). Killing "Stefan" will probably put an end to any further hints or aid he is willing to give them. He will not reveal his true nature until the matter of the Twelve and their fate is resolved.

least that's what he claims. Serving certain of the Twelve is far more pleasurable than others. Some of the staff are highly addicted to the Kiss, while some prefer being bled to taking the risk of submitting directly to any vampire's uncertain temper. It is rare for a death to occur as a result of normal feeding, though it has happened. The Twelve too, have preferences. Ioan must balance them all, knowing that in the end, the wishes of the cattle matter little to the herder.

Ioan will inquire of the characters what their preferences are, and do his best to fulfill the wishes of his lady's guests, no matter how outlandish or perverse, so long as it lies within his capabilities. Answering what he judges to be harmless questions, or seeing the

characters provided with clean clothes, hot water, wood for a fire, or a girl to warm the bed for them falls within that range. Aiding in their escape, or conspiring against his lady or her other guests does not. He is no more immune to Dominate or other mind-bending Kindred powers than any other mortal, but he can recognize them in use unless the character using them is very subtle, and will most certainly report such a blatant breach of hospitality to his mistress.

FINDING GOOD HELP

The servants of Hunedoara have a higher turnover rate than Danika would like. In addition to the one who is ritually slain every year, they also die from careless feeding, illness, or occasionally, suicide. For one reason or another, a few must be replaced every year, which is no easy task; mortals who come to Hunedoara come to stay. This doesn't mean they never physically leave. The castle staff often must leave the castle grounds in performance of their duties, either to get supplies, run errands, deliver messages or work in the castle's adjacent vegetable gardens.

However, only the most trusted servants, those bound in blood and of proven obedience, are those who make those trips. For a servant newly bound, or whose will is strong or who might otherwise be tempted to forget the consequences of disobedience, the castle gates remain closed and barred.

Danika's procurers make it their business to keep an eye out for likely candidates, in addition to the other duties she requires of them. The qualifications can be hard to meet: The candidate must be healthy and strong, desperate enough to agree to almost anything, and have no family, employer, or other ties to the mortal world so that the person's disappearance will cause any question or investigation. Magda Kovac, one of Danika's procurers, travels around Eastern Europe and the Balkans on business of various kinds on her mistress' behalf. She looks for refugees without family, political dissidents hiding from authorities, or even petty criminals who have gotten on the wrong side of organized crime — essentially, anyone who might have a burning need to disappear, or who would not be missed if he did. She also looks for particular skills or temperaments — someone who is too strong-willed, too religious, too educated, or too violent may be overlooked in favor of the fearful, weak-willed, ignorant or dull-witted. Danika does not want servants who will cause trouble. The weak taste the same as the strong.

All mortals serving in the castle sign a contract of service. This was not originally a condition of the Pact, but the demon has since added that requirement, for

THE OFFER HE COULDN'T REFUSE

On a few occasions, Magda has been less choosy. A former army cook turned petty gangster, Toma Petrascu got on Magda's bad side by cheating her on a business deal and then groping her to make up for it. Some time after that, he found himself unjustly accused of embezzling from his bosses, whom he knew were not forgiving men. Fearing for his life, he attempted to flee the country, but was snatched off the very streets of Bucharest. He woke up in the back of a jeep rattling over a horrid dirt road, his hands tied behind him and a pillowcase over his head. Expecting to be executed at any moment, Petrascu was surprised to be taken to a medieval castle and locked in the dungeon.

When nightfall came, Petrascu was taken upstairs by two men who were stronger than they looked. Before escorting him upstairs, his captors showed him what lurked under the castle gatehouse, grinning as his stoic demeanor and his knees gave way before the visage of a monster out of nightmare. After that, the countess' tale of vampires and sorcery rang terribly, horribly true. She had a folder with Magda's report on him, his entire life written up for her perusal, all his weaknesses laid out before her eyes. She asked him questions, he tried to answer them, and he didn't lie — he feared to lie, in this place. Then she made him an offer, and passed him a contract to sign, a contract for life. Having seen the alternative in the shadows of the gate, he signed it and drank the cup she handed to him. Three nights and three drinks later, he was released from imprisonment. He then knelt before his new mistress and submitted to her Kiss, and then was given a place to sleep and work to do: 30 mouths to feed, a large but primitive kitchen to work in, and as many hands to assist him as he needed.

It wasn't the retirement plan he'd had in mind, but it beat an anonymous grave in the middle of nowhere....

some reason it has declined to explain. The contract was drafted by Cret, and is written in Latin. Of all the servants who have signed it of late, only Artemis Jones was able to read it. The contract binds the signer to the service of the Twelve; by the blood the signer drinks, she has pledged her body, blood and soul, so long as the Pact shall last. The contract is an additional binding

on the castle's mortal staff — if a servant musters the willpower to fight the bond of blood and flee, the curse enacted by the broken contract allows the demon free reign to pursue her and claim her soul.

No mortal, once pledged to the Twelve of Hunedoara, has ever escaped the castle and survived.

Not all the castle servants are shanghaied. Some sign their contracts before they even realize what kind of commitment they are truly making, and the contract need not be signed at the castle to be valid. The procurers are careful, however, to ensure prompt delivery of their charge to the castle's gates — usually drugged so as not to realize where they are or how they got there. The new arrival is kept secure until the bond of blood is established. Unless the individual is slated for the service of a particular member of the Twelve, his first taste of vampiric vitae will be Danika's, and after that, often a mixture of vitae from several of the Twelve. Only the personal servants are bound specifically to one master. The castle's other mortals, like the Slav, are bound to the Twelve as a whole. This practice diffuses the abject adoration of blood-bound mortals among all the Twelve, and means that no Inconnu can claim the undivided loyalties of more than one servant, a measure of protection for all.

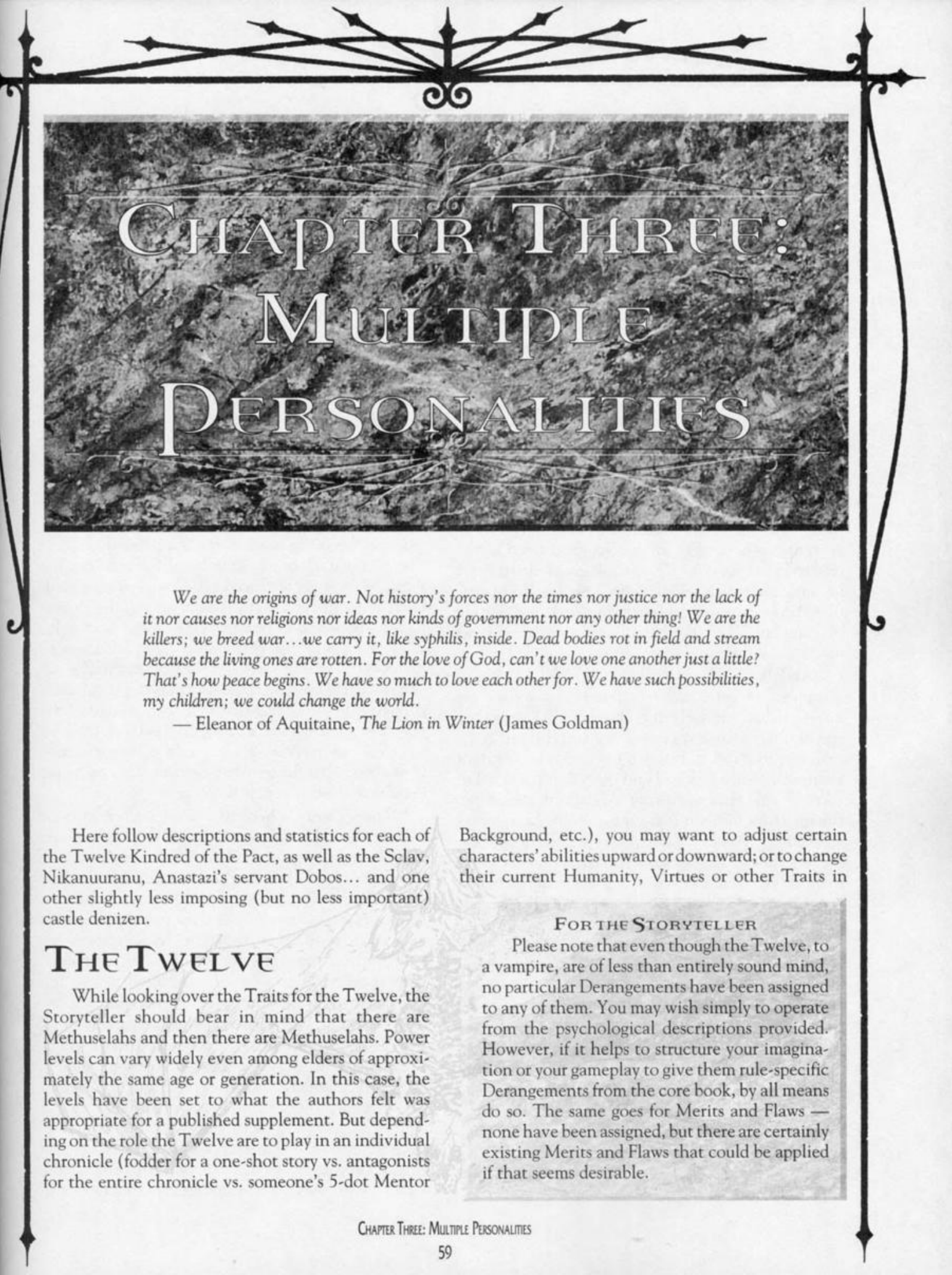
"DA, DOAMN...!"

The Twelve speak many languages, some of them very old, certain of them forgotten tongues altogether. With a few exceptions (Bufo, Mahtiel and the Slav, in particular), the characters will be able to communicate with their hosts in one tongue or another, even if brokenly. However, the common language of the castle, particularly when dealing with the serving staff, is a somewhat archaic dialect of Romanian, with words from German, Polish, Hungarian, French and English added to their vocabulary as needed. This hybrid patois is one of the first things a new addition to the staff needs to master. Of course, the servants may also speak modern Romanian, or any other European language, depending on their origin.

The Storyteller should think about how dealing with the elders' mix of languages could enhance the story — at the very least, work out what language the players' characters are using to communicate with the servants and the Twelve, and what chance the characters will have of comprehending other tongues, should they hear the Twelve or their staff use them.







CHAPTER THREE: MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

We are the origins of war. Not history's forces nor the times nor justice nor the lack of it nor causes nor religions nor ideas nor kinds of government nor any other thing! We are the killers; we breed war...we carry it, like syphilis, inside. Dead bodies rot in field and stream because the living ones are rotten. For the love of God, can't we love one another just a little? That's how peace begins. We have so much to love each other for. We have such possibilities, my children; we could change the world.

— Eleanor of Aquitaine, *The Lion in Winter* (James Goldman)

Here follow descriptions and statistics for each of the Twelve Kindred of the Pact, as well as the Slav, Nikanuuranu, Anastazi's servant Dobos... and one other slightly less imposing (but no less important) castle denizen.

THE TWELVE

While looking over the Traits for the Twelve, the Storyteller should bear in mind that there are Methuselahs and then there are Methuselahs. Power levels can vary widely even among elders of approximately the same age or generation. In this case, the levels have been set to what the authors felt was appropriate for a published supplement. But depending on the role the Twelve are to play in an individual chronicle (fodder for a one-shot story vs. antagonists for the entire chronicle vs. someone's 5-dot Mentor

Background, etc.), you may want to adjust certain characters' abilities upward or downward; or to change their current Humanity, Virtues or other Traits in

FOR THE STORYTELLER

Please note that even though the Twelve, to a vampire, are of less than entirely sound mind, no particular Derangements have been assigned to any of them. You may wish simply to operate from the psychological descriptions provided. However, if it helps to structure your imagination or your gameplay to give them rule-specific Derangements from the core book, by all means do so. The same goes for Merits and Flaws — none have been assigned, but there are certainly existing Merits and Flaws that could be applied if that seems desirable.

order to better serve the needs of drama. The existences of such vastly ancient creatures take many twists and turns, and either the unseemly decay of ennui or unseemly advancement can easily happen along the way. As always, feel free.

ASSAMITE

ABDALKUTBA, THE VOYAGER CAGED

Childe of 'Adnun, childe of Abu Ilaf, childe of Haqim

Background: Abdalkutba was born in Aila on the Red Sea coast, sometime near the close of the first century A.D. He was the son of a spice merchant, but proved too much the dreamer for that line of work. He loved the traveling aspect of his father's career, but wasn't nearly so keen on the actual spice-selling aspect. Upon refusing his arranged marriage — to the daughter of another spice dealer whose enterprises he would then have had to administrate along with his own — he was all but disowned by his family, and so apprenticed himself to an astrologer in town at the relatively late age of 19. This astrologer, skilled though he was, concerned himself mainly with setting propitious dates for the sailing of trade ships and the departure of caravans. Abdalkutba quickly outstripped his teacher's abilities and interests.

Abdalkutba then struck out on his own, making a number of turns down a number of extremely questionable scholarly corridors. An Assamite vizier he approached was impressed with his temerity; realizing that left to his own devices the lad might eventually come to a bad end indeed, he decided to take Abdalkutba under wing. Abdalkutba inherited the quest for Golconda from his (to be honest) far wiser sire. Even as a neonate he was quite sincere about it, but he has always treated it more as a secret to be delved than a peace to enjoy. Certainly he has spent more of his undead years chasing Golconda lore than absorbing it.

Abdalkutba passed a few centuries in the company of his Blood and under the thumb of his sire. Soon enough, however, his restlessness drove him to travel. Although he never converted to Islam, he took full advantage of Islam's expansion. Throughout its era of earthly glory he assumed many names and guises. Sometimes he was the sand-roughened Bedouin, sometimes the cultured wise man of Baghdad. Sometimes he was Aladdin and sometimes the genie. He regularly shucked off old identities for new ones much as the snake changed its skin, and with self-evident pleasure.

He was as outraged as any Assamite by the curse the Tremere laid at Thorns, but while he connived against the Usurpers on his own, the Mountain never quite managed to coax him into accepting what it considered his due post and duty. This and his continuing refusal to accept Allah eventually alienated him from the clan. (Now that paganism has once again reared its ancient, scar-tracked head within the Eagle's Nest, it's possible that Abdalkutba would be more gallantly received there, but the likelihood of his ever going back — even should he somehow escape the Pact — is not high.)

Before long, Abdalkutba had become Inconnu, almost by default. The quasi-sect's neutral stance suited him far better than did the passion of Alamut: The ever-changing feuds and allegiances of the world were always getting in the way of truly important pursuits.

Getting into the Pact: Abdalkutba walked into the Pact with eyes wider open than most. From the very beginning, he had suspicions, supported by exploratory horoscopes, about the "guardian spirit" that Cret planned to conjure in order to seal and keep the Pact. Two things convinced him to go forward regardless. For one, his charts clearly showed that the Twelve had the potential to become a great beacon of light; surely he could not permit the filthy Tremere to remove such hope from the world. For another, he was extremely curious about the spirit itself. He correctly guessed it to be a being that had been present at the very dawn of Creation, a being that had seen Dushara (the Nabataean great god) face to face. He questioned Cret about what it was, what its name was and where it came from with very little success.

Since Then: Where Abdalkutba most seriously overestimated himself was in his belief that he could stand being shut up for this long. He thought he'd long since spent his old wanderlust, but he finds that the longer he remains in the castle the worse his cabin fever gets. Sometimes he manages to distract himself with internal intrigues, sometimes with vicarious adventures lived through his proxies. Sometimes he even takes another stab at Golconda for a decade or two. But none of this can substitute for the wide world.

Relations with Others: Abdalkutba was originally on good terms with Eshmunamash, but they have since split, rancorously, on the issue of Nikanuuranu. While Abdalkutba doesn't trust Nikanuuranu, he honors its past greatness and pities its terrible fall. Over the centuries, they have had some fascinating conversations. Unfortunately, his rapport with it now eclipses his rapport with the group he theoretically entered the Pact to save. Abdalkutba nominally remains one of

Cret's partisans, but privately gave up on the stiff-necked and deluded Ventrue a long time ago.

Even before Mahtiel fell into torpor, Abdalkutba found her aura of tragedy nearly as intriguing as Nikanuuranu's. Unfortunately, she didn't return his interest, and repeatedly refused his offers to cast her stars. Several times over the past centuries, he has deliberately tried to rouse her either mentally or physically, but never with the intended result. Abdalkutba admires Danika's strength but her horoscope has never been well-aspected, and he now fears that her ill stars will triumph not only over her but also over any who choose to side with her. Bufo's extracurricular activities he watches with great curiosity; but he knows that if he actually spoke to Bufo about them then they'd stop, thus depriving him of one of his few reliable diversions.

One night long ago Abdalkutba broached with Pentweret the taboo subject of escaping the Pact. That discussion went very badly indeed. Pentweret, true to form, tested how much "truth" Abdalkutba was willing to face and judged him as lacking. For his part, Abdalkutba resented Pentweret's assuming a tutorial air when he'd approached him as an equal. Each came away convinced that the other would betray anyone in order to escape. That wasn't true at the time, but by now it might well be. They no longer converse, except on superficial topics, and when either sees a chance to humiliate the other before the rest of the Twelve, he generally takes it.

Outside Influence: Abdalkutba plies what influence he has (through both written correspondence and *Auspex*) chiefly to sate his voyeurism. He's become a voracious collector of souvenirs, from the trivial to the blasphemous, and is certainly not above manipulating young Golconda-seekers or clueless *fida'i* into making extremely dangerous journeys on his behalf. In this pursuit, he plays the role of Mysterious Elder to the hilt, strongly implying that the course of Gehenna might well hinge on the outcome of the quest, when in fact he simply wants to hear what it was like afterward. He has even taken a fatal (for others) interest in the creatures called Cathayans.

Among other Inconnu, Abdalkutba has always had a somewhat dilettantish reputation and can't command nearly the amount of respect that Cret or Eshmunamash can. But younger seekers rarely become aware of this fact before it's too late, as Inconnu are generally anything but gossips.

The Deal: Nikanuuranu hardly needs a Deal *per se* with Abdalkutba. All it really has to do is keep telling him stories about the Dawn of Creation. However, this gets tiring, not to mention painful, so it has persuaded



the vizier to accept a more concrete gift. None of the curses currently set in abeyance over Abdalkutba's head will actually go off even if the triggering conditions are met. This doesn't free him from the restrictions of the Pact itself (he still can't harm or kill the others with impunity), and in all honesty, he's never yet figured out a real use for this loophole. Nevertheless, it pleases him to have it.

Image: A Middle Eastern man in his late 20s with a sparse, curly beard, a long thin face and luminous dark-brown eyes, though most visitors previously unacquainted with ancient Assamites notice his shiny coal-black skin first and foremost. Although his rooms are beautifully festooned with costumes from the world over, he generally wears simple traditional Arab men's garb, occasionally livening it up with jewelry—which might be anything from a Ptolemaic beadwork to a green plastic ring fished out of a bubblegum machine.

Roleplaying Hints: You engage with people immediately and deeply. You want to hear all about it, and you're terribly interested in the details. This frequently leads those who don't know better to assume that you care. They don't realize that someone else just as interesting as them will come along after they're gone. You've never been in love and you've never had a true friend (though at one time, with Eshmunamash and Cret, you felt you were getting close). To you, most people are like your star charts: beautiful, complicated, captivating and ultimately rather abstract.

Self-Destruct Button: Even as a mortal Abdalkutba had an enormous capacity to distract himself and others from the emptiness inside. The only

way to destroy him is to remove those distractions. This can be hazardous — if he discovers someone trying to take his trinkets away, pursuing appropriate vengeance against that person becomes his new hobby. Abdalkutba also continually casts and recasts the stars of the Twelve, but his readings only grow dimmer and less distinct. For now he successfully shuts out his mounting despair about this, but if others of the Twelve were to find out, he could no longer deny it to them or to himself.

Sire: 'Adnun

Nature: Dabbler

Demeanor: Celebrant

Generation: 6th

Embrace: Late first century A.D.

Apparent Age: Late 20s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 7, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 7, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Diplomacy 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Hagglng 3, Intimidation 2, Intrigue 4, Leadership 2, Legerdemain 3, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Crafts (Metalsmith) 3, Etiquette 4, Firearms 1, Herbalism 1, Meditation 3, Melee 4, Performance (*Oud*) 2, Ride 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 7, Clan Knowledge (Assamite) 3, Enigmas 4, Expert Knowledge (Astrology) 6, Expert Knowledge (Theology) 2, Finance 2, History 4, Investigation 2, Law 1, Linguistics (Arabic, Latin, Greek, Romanian, others as desired) 5, Medicine 1, Occult 4, Politics 1, Research 2, Science (Physics) 4

Disciplines: Auspex 7, Celerity 7, Dominate 5, Fortitude 6, Potence 5, Presence 4, Quietude 7

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Retainers 3

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 5, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 8

Notes: See the Appendix for a description of Horoscopic Forecast and Supernal Awareness, Abdalkutba's advanced Auspex powers. In addition to the usual Assamite flaw, Abdalkutba also has a flaw associated with being a vizier. He has an obsessive derangement connected to his Academics ability. In other words, he collects his hoarded knowledge about anything and everything with an intensity too focused to be entirely sane.

BRUJAH

ESHMUNAMASH, THE WOUNDED DOCTOR

Childe of Gersakkun, childe of Troile

Background: Tyre was prosperous long before it was powerful, and at the time the child Eshmunamash was born in it, it was still a tributary of the Egyptian empire, a fat cow to be milked. Eshmunamash's father was a doctor-priest of the healing god Eshmun, and in order to ensure the continuation of his trade he offered his eldest son up to the god's eternal service at the age of five. Eshmunamash's earliest memories are of sharpening surgical instruments and hanging up bunches of herbs to dry in the sunlight. By the time he was 12 he had three herbals and a manual of forensic pathology learned by heart, and nothing biological held any horror or revulsion for him. He could handle corpses, chunks of gangrenous tissue and jars of vomitus alike with a remarkable combination of clinical detachment and quiet respect.

It wasn't until he was long grown, however, that this quality of his attracted the attention of the undead. The Brujah Gersakkun of Tyre had gotten into a family argument with a mortal descendant and accidentally flown into a rage. Not knowing what else to do, he brought the half-dead lad to the house of Eshmunamash, who lived nearby. Eshmunamash immediately realized that here was no ordinary ailment, and he clearly suspected Gersakkun to be the cause. But he treated the anemia regardless, dealing with both patient and guest gently. Gersakkun was greatly moved by his dignity; he felt that here at last was a man who could approach the Cainite condition without fear or loathing, a man who could help him come to terms with himself. He Embraced the kindly doctor.

Eshmunamash, however, found it much harder to accept the blood-thirst and the Brujah curse in himself than he had in another. He'd been raised to treat other people as though their bodies were temples and their spirits the resident gods; that he could now take pleasure in bloodshed and violence seemed a betrayal not only of his father and his religion but also his own inner nature. He often sought escape in torpor, but dreaded each rising with its risk of hunger-frenzy. His sire abandoned him in despair and later fell to the Beast.

He was still fighting this struggle eight centuries later when an old colleague in the clan, Shalmat, approached him with a proposal: Come across the water to Africa, to a colony Tyre had recently founded. There the Brujah pursued a fascinating experiment in coexistence with mortals. Shalmat suggested that he

take up doctoring again, reconcile with his god and dedicate himself to the service of humankind. Ancient Troile himself ruled the colony with wisdom and virtue. Eshmunamash accepted the offer, his hope ignited for the first time in years.

For a time he was happy in Carthage, or as close to it as he could remember being. He established a temple and brought ancient Egyptian and Phoenician learning back into mortal prominence. Greek and even Roman doctors made the hazardous sea-journey to come study at his knee. He comforted himself with the thought that he was helping not only Carthage but also the entire civilized world; and if the price of that help was that the bleeding-bowls were emptied into his gullet rather than given in sacrifice to some overfed deity, surely that wasn't too great a burden. Meanwhile, Shalmat assisted the mortals in turning the city into a bastion of grace and delight.

Cainites of other clans gathered in the city in greater numbers, and the Brujah soon began to grumble. Eshmunamash thought it too easy to simply blame the newcomers when the Brujah still led the city. He joined the vocal faction that sought to forbid the founding of blood-cults and place fair limits on Cainite immigration, but was accused of complacency by the Zealots who led the cults. After all, his Herd was assured. What care did he have for those leading a more hardscrabble unlife than he was?

Then came the infamous rites of Baal-Hammon. Although Eshmunamash, like many ancient people, accepted the necessity of human sacrifice in times of great communal need, the fires of the bronze god began to burn nearly once a month, and he became troubled. He went before Troile to protest. Why must children burn in such numbers? Surely the god wasn't that hungry, and if he was, perhaps Carthage was better off without him. Troile promised to investigate, but nothing ever came of it. Eshmunamash's ever-fewer intimates seemed as paralyzed as he felt, and would only mutter about Troile's new lover.

What new lover? Eshmunamash had never seen this mysterious person. Well, perhaps if he paid court to the founder more often he would understand the trouble. Eshmunamash heeded his fellows' advice and visited the palace of Troile for the first time in many years. What he saw at the feast that night shocked him to his foundations. Suppressing his rage, Eshmunamash left Carthage the following night and went directly to Rome. Although he made certain serious omissions in what he told Prince Camilla (in the misguided hope that it would prevent Carthage's complete destruc-



tion), he did provide information that substantially assisted the Roman assault.

Although he never precisely *regretted* leaving Troile and the city to their well-deserved doom, he nonetheless felt the need to retreat and contemplate afterward. His initial suspicions of the promise of Golconda melted away after a handful of face-to-face meetings with Saulot himself. When Saulot was murdered, however, he had to pin his hopes instead on what little had been taken down of the master's sayings and on the keepers of that remnant: Mokur and his self-appointed biographer Cret.

Getting into the Pact: Never again, Eshmunamash swore after Carthage; never again would he be sold a false utopia. And yet he let his great personal faith in Saulot and Mokur blind him to the flaws of their closest disciples. At the time of the siege, Cret seemed simply to be the pragmatic Ventrue, proposing a practical plan for sidestepping a very temporary problem. Even the sacrifice was supposedly a volunteer. Eshmunamash now knows that several of the Twelve said nothing to him or to each other about their suspicions going in.

Since Then: Eshmunamash admitted defeat almost immediately after the Pact's first renewal. While this cost him a great deal of his Humanity at once (causing several episodes extremely disturbing to any who knew the gentle doctor), it also saved him the slow, humiliating, agonizing erosion which most of his peers now suffer. He descends into torpor now and again, rising of course for the Pact. The rest of the time he sees to the medical needs of the castle's mortals,

translates books or, when he can bear to, rereads the *Analects* and wonders why they don't speak more about avoiding evil companions.

Relations with Others: Eshmunamash is the drowsing lion of the castle now. Everyone tiptoes around him, fearful of rousing the ancient Brujah rage, which could well end in a broken Pact and all lost. This is just the way he likes it; privately, he doubts he even has it in him to explode anymore. He saves most of what precious hatred remains for Cret, the great betrayer. But he reserves plenty of scorn for the rest. He remains polite to Danika, whose determination to continue providing for those she hates, till Gehenna if necessary, impresses him long after everything else about her ceased to. He refuses to participate in most intrigues but will gladly advocate any effort against Cret, which means that Hill is one of his more frequent visitors. As for Zamra, he's privately informed her that while he has no quarrel with her futile, if gratifying, campaign of verbal abuse, he'll gladly break the Pact to shut her up if she doesn't leave him alone.

Outside Influence: Eshmunamash deals very little with the outside world. Sometimes he'll tentatively write someone to ask after some Inconnu who seemed close to Golconda when he entered Hunedoara, but he won't prolong such contact for fear of having his own shame exposed. And occasionally, when he learns of a more serious outward plot than usual among the Twelve, he'll use the power of his Presence to subtly counteract it.

The Deal: In an especially bleak moment, Eshmunamash did strike a Deal. He semi-facetiously asked for oblivion, which Nikanuuranu said it only wished was in its power. One week out of every four Eshmunamash can, if he chooses, "sleepwalk." He continues to rise and feed, and can even converse, but does so as if in a trance. During this time he cannot be provoked to Frenzy or Rötschreck, even if injured, nor does he need to make Humanity or Virtue rolls. However, he cannot in any way lie or deceive either, and when asked a question might just calmly speak his complete mind. He often spends the week of the Pact in this state.

Image: A rather avuncular-looking man in late middle age, with Semitic features, black eyes and a gray-peppered curly black beard that he usually dresses in neat curls after his mortal culture's custom. The procurer buys him outfits from all over the world; they're usually loose shirts over loose trousers, with leather sandals, but almost anything simple and comfortable will do. Occasionally he wears Arabic men's robes.

Roleplaying Hints: Be soft-spoken but very faintly bitter. The Golconda lore the others hoard, you dispense upon request as though it were no more than party favors — to you, that's how it feels now. Don't bother warning visitors of their peril. If they're as foolish as you are they can just fall in the trap as well. If they're not, and if they see through the lie more quickly than expected, then you take a sudden interest and begin to wake up... not necessarily a good thing.

Self-Destruct Button: In his current state, Eshmunamash really can't self-destruct; he's curiously stable in his ennui. First, his hope would have to be revived and then crushed. This undertaking requires the arrival of either a brand-new and promising acquaintance or an old comrade — particularly an old comrade whom Eshmunamash once knew to be well along toward Golconda. A fresh betrayal from such a person might well prove enough.

Sire: Gersakkun

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Generation: 5th

Embrace: 16th century B.C.

Apparent Age: Mid 50s

Physical: Strength 8, Dexterity 7, Stamina 8

Social: Charisma 8, Manipulation 7, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 8, Intelligence 8, Wits 8

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Diplomacy 4, Empathy 4, Expression 3, Intimidation 6, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Crafts (Poet) 4, Crafts (Potter) 3, Etiquette 4, Herbalism 5, Meditation 6, Melee 3, Performance (Poetry) 3, Ride 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 8, Clan Knowledge (Brujah) 5, Clan Knowledge (Salubri) 3, Enigmas 5, Finance 1, Investigation 4, History 5, Law 5, Linguistics (Phoenician, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Romanian, Enochian, others as desired) 7, Medicine (Ancient) 5, Occult 4, Politics 6, Research 5, Science (Alchemy) 4, Science (Mathematics) 4

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 5, Celerity 8, Dominate 7, Fortitude 8, Mortis (Grave's Decay) 1, Obeah 5, Potence 8, Presence 8, Protean 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Retainers 4

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 4, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 6

Willpower: 7

Notes: The mathematically-inclined might notice that Eshmunamash's Traits aren't as high as would be expected for an elder created according strictly to the

Storyteller character creation system given in *Children of the Night*. Eshmunamash is an ancient creature and has forgotten nearly as much as he has learned over the millennia; due to his frequent torpor and ever-present despair, he has also declined in many ways. However, if the Storyteller wishes to increase his power level, for what it's worth, up to 60 Ability dots and 8 Discipline dots could be added while still keeping him within the limits of the published system. (Whew!) It might also be a nice point of drama, should Eshmunamash either "wake up" psychologically or, alternatively, descend into Wassail over the course of the story, to have him suddenly "remember" Disciplines or Abilities even the other Eleven didn't know he had.

See the Appendix for a description of Compel Passion, Eshmunamash's special power.

CAPPADOCIAN

DRENIS, THE CHARNEL-MAID

Childe of Asushunamir, childe of Enheduanna, childe of Humuusa, childe of Ashur

Background: Drenis was born to a family of prosperous winemakers, the only surviving son and thus the last chance for continuation of the male line. Toward the end of his 15th year, he was betrothed in an arranged marriage. Two months later, war descended on his people. While trying to defend his father's lands, he was beaten and gang-raped by enemy soldiers.

Ordinarily marriage would have been out of the question after that, but because he was his family's last chance, they kept the incident secret and went forward with the wedding the next spring. It was no use. Drenis went to his wife, who was no older than himself. He beheld her face full of trepidation, and her body tensed with uncertainty, and promptly threw up. Every night for the next few weeks he attempted to do his duty; each time his gorge rose and he couldn't even keep his composure, much less achieve arousal.

Rather than continue to shame his family and dishonor his wife, he ran away, into the arms of the *galloi* priestesses of Cybele. These priestesses had been born men, but in order to properly serve the great Mother, they'd symbolically become women — not just by taking on female dress and manner but also physically, by completely removing their genitalia. Drenis' own manhood had already been stolen (he believed this not only because of the rape but because of his inability to perform a husband's function); and the idea of remaining in a half-state, neither man nor



woman, revolted him more than the price he would have to pay to leave it. Besides, perhaps being a man was not such a fine thing. After all, men had violated him. He joined the priestesses.

Drenis' particular branch of the Cybele cult was quite ordinary in requiring castration for its male priests, but not at all ordinary in other regards: An old Cappadocian called Asushunamir led it, and instead of a mere token arm-bleeding, it practiced a far more ancient form of the rites of Cybele and Attis. Asushunamir recognized a certain darkness in Drenis, even as young as the new priestess then was, and put her in charge of tending the victims both before and after their deaths. Drenis was unsurprised to learn of the true fate of the "blessed" sacrifices' souls, but she reacted to her own Embrace with considerably more horror. Drinking from mortals made her nearly as sick as facing her bride had so long ago. She learned in time to feed, but never to enjoy it unreservedly.

When the cult died, Drenis went wandering. She'd never received satisfactory answers from her sire. Her sire, true to clan, could eloquently explain the necessity of death — but not the necessity of cruelty, bloodlust and suffering. Even the wisest death-priests of Erciyes could not answer this question. Drenis finally decided to seek the Salubri, who reportedly held wisdom no other blood of Caine fully understood. She chanced across Demetrius and Mahtiel; they in turn led her to Mokur, and she became his avowed disciple. She appreciated Cret more in correspondence

than in person, but Eshmunamash, Pentweret and Danika all greatly impressed her in different ways.

Getting into the Pact: Drenis acceded to the Pact even though she suspected the price might be steeper than any of them expected (a fatalist, she believes the price is *always* steeper than expected). And despite the fact that protecting Drenis from the Giovanni was one of the stated reasons for the Pact, it's possible that she joined mainly in obedience to a self-destructive impulse. There are deep wounds in Drenis' psyche, a fundamentally gentle nature long subjected to horrors beyond its capacity, and so she sometimes behaves in ways no one, including she herself, can really explain.

Since Then: While Drenis accepts human sacrifice as a fact of life, so to speak, she feels the Pact has long since lost all usefulness. But because of her background as guardian of a Cappadocian charnel-pit, Cret tapped her for similar duties at Hunedoara. Once again, she dutifully tends to the dead — for most of the year, her job consists of keeping the castle's many unruly ghosts from wreaking havoc. She's gotten to know many of them well, but she likes only a few. She also assists Cret in officiating the Pact's renewal.

Relations with Others: Drenis does participate in castle intrigues. She and Abdalkutba were originally the self-appointed diplomats; unfortunately, they found their efforts distinctly unappreciated. Not only did they fail to reconcile enemies, but they also made enemies of their own, and finally their attempts to repair each other's blunders made them odious to each other. Drenis considers Danika her confidante. The two of them have a fairly close bond — they still bathe together and then comb out each other's hair on evenings when they're speaking to each other — but not an untroubled one. Drenis sees Danika as stubborn and often needlessly cruel. Danika doesn't understand why Drenis continues to labor slavishly for Cret when they've all seen through him by now. Drenis has never quite understood Zamra or Mahtiel, though she admires them both in an odd way, and neither of them even pretends to understand her.

At the time of the Pact, Drenis was nearing a sense of kinship with both Pentweret and Eshmunamash (the latter of whom now despises her on principle as a functionary of the Pact). Pentweret is an alluring hazard. Drenis tends to assume that truth should be painful, and the Setite's methods are nothing if not painful. She's been burned more than once playing with his philosophical fire. For his part, Pentweret no longer tries to illuminate her. As much as he talks about accepting one's darkest desires, he's never seen anyone succumb with such fundamental lack of sur-

prise as Drenis does (in spite of all her sincere atonements afterward). Frankly, it disturbs him. Drenis hates Anastazi with a passion and regards Demetrius with quiet bemusement.

Outside Influence: Drenis has a pet campaign to expose the treachery of the Giovanni to the Camarilla in such stark terms that when the 50 hands of vengeance at last strike the necromancers, they won't be able to call in Camarilla favors for help. She does this Shakespearean-style, selecting appropriate ghosts to manifest to appropriate targets. Anything more active, she feels, would tip her from the path to Golconda. She also frequently makes secret recompense to the families of Pact victims, which has in the process gained her some mortal contacts.

The Deal: What Drenis asked for would hardly be considered a bargain by most. At her request, each night after the Pact's completion she has a nightmare wherein she experiences everything the Pact's victim underwent on the night of death, including whatever lay waiting immediately beyond the Shroud. She believes this to be atonement in service to Golconda, and maybe it is, but when she awakes she's usually closer to Frenzy than at any other time during the year.

Image: A fine-boned, dignified young woman with blonde, curly hair (of a shade slightly too brassy to be natural) arranged in exquisite ringlets around a simple diadem. She wears diaphanous dresses that recall Greek and Roman draping. Her voice and movements are all quite convincingly feminine, and those who have no close prior experience with female impersonators tend to be fooled completely. On the rare occasions when she hasn't had a chance to make herself up, the tight, shiny corpse-pale skin that is her clan heritage is far more apparent (take two dots off her normal Appearance).

Roleplaying Hints: When "on the job," you're the archetypal Cappadocian, the eerily silent guardian of the mystic portal — you brook no disobedience, nonsense or trickery from your ghostly charges. Much of the rest of the time, you listen and watch. Not until you have some idea what sort of person you're dealing with do you begin to speak up, hesitantly at first, and then with quiet passion. Despite (or because of) your role in the Pact, you *will not* give up the quest for peace.

Self-Destruct Button: Drenis' existence is spent in a careful balancing act between the secret belief that not only the Cainite race, but even humanity, is evil and doomed, and the desperate hope that she's wrong about that. There could be several ways to tip this balance. The most brutally effective route would probably be to violate her and thus bring her around full

circle; however, that would also be profoundly ill-advised. Drenis herself would certainly resist with all a Methuselah's power, and most of the Twelve would quickly move to protect or revenge her as well. Such a violating act might also carry severe repercussions for the Morality of the perpetrator or instigator; Nikanuuranu would take a definite interest. If Drenis self-destructs, she's one of the most likely to decide to perform a great act of "cleansing" as she goes by taking as many as possible with her.

Sire: Asushunamir

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Conformist

Generation: 7th

Embrace: Late 2nd century A.D.

Apparent Age: Late teens

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 6, Intelligence 6, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Diplomacy 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 5, Expression 5, Intimidation 4, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 2, Intrigue 4

Skills: Animal Ken 1, Crafts (Body Crafts) 3, Crafts (Beauty) 4, Etiquette 4, Meditation 5, Melee 1, Performance (Dance) 3, Performance (Song) 4, Stealth 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 5, Camarilla Lore 2, Clan Knowledge (Cappadocian) 5, Clan Knowledge (Giovanni) 3, Enigmas 4, Expert Knowledge (Ancient Religion) 5, History 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Thracian, Greek, Latin, Romanian, Turkish, Babylonian, others as desired) 5, Medicine 2, Occult 6, Politics 1, Psychology 2, Science 2

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 3, Dominate 2, Fortitude 2, Mortis (Grave's Decay) 6, Necromancy (Sepulchre) 5, Obeah 1, Potence 2, Presence 2, Vicissitude 1

Other Mortis Paths: Corpse in the Monster 4, Cadaverous Animation 4

Other Necromancy Paths: Ash 4

Backgrounds: Contacts (Kindred and mortal) 3, Contacts (Ghostly) 5, Retainers 3

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 4, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 7

Willpower: 8

Notes: Mortis is a **Dark Ages: Vampire Discipline**. If the Storyteller doesn't have access to Dark Ages rules, appropriate levels in various Necromancy Paths may be assigned instead. Drenis can know virtually any Mortis or Necromancy ritual desired, though Story-

tellers are encouraged to remember her Humanity level and habitual usage of her clan Discipline when assigning them. See the Appendix for a description of Raise the Dead and Corpse Projection, Drenis' special powers.

FOLLOWER OF SET

PENTWERET, THE TESTER FOUND WANTING

Childe of Isenkhebe, childe of Seterpenre, childe of Set

Background: Pentweret, or Pentueris, was a minor functionary in the government of Egypt's Greek rulers, the Ptolemies. The bureaucrat also possessed the traditional education of an Egyptian priest-magician. Pentweret supplemented his income by selling charms for love, luck, revenge and other simple desires. An ambitious Follower of Set later decided that Pentweret would make a useful agent in the Ptolemy government, and blood bound him. Pentweret spent the next 20 years spying on his supposed masters and helping the Setites cover their tracks. Along the way, he learned Setite philosophy and the rudiments of the Serpents' ancient sorcery. In time and after many lessons in the faith of Set, Pentweret earned the Embrace himself. He gained much honor in his clan for his fearless acceptance of every lesson taught by the Dark God, as well as his skill at sorcery and his diablerie of several strong-blooded enemies.

After some centuries, though, Pentweret lost patience with his clan's layers of secrets, deceptions, mysteries and initiations. The popular new Christian religion didn't keep its plan for salvation a mystery; why shouldn't the Setites come straight out and tell



the world what wisdom it could gain from Set's tests of fear, passion and self-knowledge? Why shouldn't everyone have the chance to learn, if they had the courage to face the Dark God?

Pentweret tried to preach Set's message openly. Two months later, a mob burned his temple and massacred his congregation. While hiding out, Pentweret met Saulot. The Antediluvian sympathized with the priest-magician's desire to enlighten the masses, but suggested that people could not accept too many new ideas too quickly — and that went double for Cainites. Saulot explained that other vampires had whipped up the mob: They feared Setite teachings and thought Pentweret was angling for influence in their territories. Pentweret did his own investigations and found that Saulot spoke the truth. Disgusted by the petty jealousies that had ruined his dream, the Setite decided to drop out of undead politics and seek Golconda instead. He saw the doctrine's similarity to his own clan's beliefs about liberation and transcendence through self-knowledge and confronting one's darkest and most deeply hidden fears and desires. Pentweret vowed that when he himself attained Golconda, he would return to his clan and show its hidebound ancients the true path to wisdom. And no mysteries!

That quest occupied Pentweret for the next eight centuries. The final step eluded him, and his anger at Saulot's destruction taught him how far he had yet to go to master his passions. Pentweret also found that even his fellow Inconnu harbored suspicions because of his old clan. Nevertheless, some Inconnu and their disciples adopted some Setite techniques for confronting one's passions. Pentweret came to Hunedoara in hopes that some of his fellow Inconnu could help him arrange his own tests and ordeals. Thus he became one of the Twelve, an act he regretted almost at once.

Getting into the Pact: The Setite immediately figured out what the Pact would require. He agreed to go along with the plan because he saw it as a test of the others' moral strength. The demon's demand for a new sacrifice to renew the Pact did not surprise him: He recognized the demon as a god of sorts, and gods always demand more sacrifices. Would his fellows conquer their fears and let the Pact lapse? They did not... and Pentweret did not want to damn himself and all the rest.

Since Then: Pentweret soon pointed out the moral failure of renewing the Pact. Everyone except Cret and Hill admitted they were ashamed of themselves, but the Pact was still necessary. Year followed year. Pentweret made himself thoroughly obnoxious

in his attempts to make the others confront their hypocrisy and continue their spiritual quests. The happiest night of his unlife came when Vanth asked his help in reaching Golconda. The Setite swears that Vanth began her Suspire... it wasn't his fault the Nosferatu failed. The others bitterly reviled Pentweret after the debacle and the Setite decided to shut up. Eventually, one of the Inconnu asked for his magical help against a rival. Another Cainite attacked him for that aid and the Setite had to levy his own curses out of self-defense. All the while, he grew more disgusted with his fellow Inconnu.

Relations with Others: Pentweret goes through the motions of rivalry and intrigue, but he does not care anymore. He seldom even bothers to point out the others' failings and betrayals of their old ideals. The other Inconnu may ask the Setite for help in their schemes, but they all dislike him. He and Abdalkutba feel particular suspicion for each other.

Outside Influence: Although Pentweret can send his magics around the world, he seldom bothers to do so. He sometimes assists other Inconnu in their plots but Pentweret no longer cares much about the world. He advocates staying out of Jyhads.

The Deal: The demon asked Pentweret what he wanted as his personal benefit from the Pact. The Setite told the Demon not to try that game with him. The demon confessed that the Setite had bested it... the only one of the Twelve to do so. Pentweret knows what his fellow Inconnu receive from the demon — and that he alone retains the strength and purity to resist the demon's lure.

Image: Pentweret is a small, middle-aged man with a shaved head. His skin remains dark despite two millennia of undeath. He customarily dresses in a simple robe of black linen. Pentweret carries the twist-topped rod of an Egyptian priest and wears a variety of small amulets, all tools for his sorcery.

Roleplaying Hints: Once you thought you could keep your fellows on the path to Golconda despite the horror of the Pact and the sacrifices. Then you tried to persuade them to quit the Pact, and failed again. Now you have passed beyond anger and disgust to sheer weariness. You want out of the castle, the Pact and the Inconnu. Nothing would please you more than to see the Twelve agree to end the Pact and go their separate ways, but you cannot torture yourself with such hopes any longer. Let the demon take them all, so long as you escape. Perhaps these new arrivals can help you... whether they want to or not. You hope you do not have to sacrifice them, but what are a few more deaths?

Self-Destruct Button: Pentweret believes he can face any test. Catching him in an act of moral cowardice would deeply shame him. It might make him attempt something foolish and drastic to recover his spiritual pride. He's also touchy about being thought a "heretic" or "impure" for combining Setite teachings with Saulot's, but that's old business among the Twelve. After the debacle with Vanth, he also seeks a dramatic success in imparting wisdom. Another drastic failure, or an especially squalid new hypocrisy from another of the Twelve, would plunge him into despair and convince him that the Twelve all deserve to go to Hell.

Clan: Followers of Set

Sire: Isenkhebe

Nature: Pedagogue

Demeanor: Survivor

Generation: 6th

Embrace: about 180 B.C.

Apparent Age: late 40s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 6, Intelligence 7, Wits 7

Talents: Alertness 5, Empathy 7, Expression 4, Intimidation 5, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 7

Skills: Craft (Jeweler) 4, Craft (Sculptor) 3, Etiquette 5, Herbalism 4, Meditation 5, Melee 1, Performance 5, Stealth 6

Knowledges: Academics 7, Bureaucracy 3, Enigmas 6, Finance 1, Investigation 5, Linguistics (numerous dead languages, plus English and French) 5, Medicine 4, Occult 7, Psychology 7, Setite Lore 5

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Fortitude 2, Obeah 2, Obfuscate 6, Presence 6, Serpents 6, Thaumaturgy 7

Thaumaturgical Paths: Dry Nile 5, Mastery of the Mortal Shell 5, Movement of the Mind 4, Ushabti 5, Weather Control 4

Backgrounds: Retainers 4

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 5, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 8

Notes: Although Pentweret likely knows high-level Obfuscate, Presence and Serpents powers, we leave them to the Storyteller's discretion. The Thaumaturgical Path of Weather Control comes from *Guide to the Camarilla*. The Dry Nile and Mastery of the Mortal Shell Paths are found in **Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy**. The Path of Ushabti comes from **Blood Sacrifice: The Thaumaturgy Companion**; it enables a magician to animate statues as servants. These paths are all Setite Sorcery rather than Tremere

Thaumaturgy. Pentweret's path magic all requires the use of small amulets. He wears these amulets at all times. The Appendix describes two of Pentweret's special rituals: Portrait Link and A Surfeit of Serpents, as well as the common rituals of Greater Scrying, Lesser and Greater Trigger and Servitor Sending.

Pentweret's four Retainers are a huge, uncannily intelligent ghoulish cobra and three animate statues of crocodile-headed men. Pentweret made the statues using the Ushabti Path.

Statues: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, no social Attributes, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3; soaks lethal damage; health levels OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated, Destroyed; punch for Str damage, bite for Str + 3 damage.

Ghoul Cobra: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3; Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Intimidate 5, Stealth 5; Fortitude 2, Obfuscate 2, Potence 2, Presence 2; bites for Str damage, plus venom; health levels OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated, Dead.

The statues and cobra can endure one month after Pentweret's Final Death. They use that month to pursue avenging his destruction. The statues embark on a mindless rampage of destruction, attacking anyone they meet in the castle. The cobra pursues a more directed vendetta of assassination. Several venomous bites can turn a vampire's daily sleep into enduring torpor. This gives the snake enough time to drag a sleeping vampire out of its haven or use its Potence to break a hole and let in sunlight.

LASOMBRA

ZAMRA MATOUB, THE GADFLY

Childe of Nahir, childe of "Tersa", childe of Lasombra

Background: Gratiano, childe of the Lasombra Antediluvian, annoyed his "nephew" Nahir. At a meeting in Algiers, the Antediluvian's new favorite blathered on about natural aristocracy and how the clan should Embrace only from noble, knightly and merchant prince families, like his own mortal family. The other Lasombra present — all of high birth themselves — accepted the implicit flattery. Nahir, centuries older than the rest, did not. He made a bet that within a month he could find a prince of the Damned among the low and obscure of Algiers.

The elder found his prince in Zamra Matoub, a young widow. Her innkeeper husband had died, leaving her with three small children. Various male relatives offered to take her as a junior wife and relieve her of the



inn, but Zamra refused. Two of her would-be suitors then tried to seize the inn through legal action, but neither they, the qadis they bribed, or the bully-boys sent to enforce their dictates could face up to the young widow. Something in the way she spoke and the look in her eye made them back down. Zamra ran the inn and raised her children for several years. The sailors and tradesmen who frequented her inn jokingly called her Queen of Sheba, but they minded their manners in her presence, even when she belly-danced for their entertainment.

Nahir did not ask Zamra if she wanted to join the Damned. He spent an hour telling her the rudiments of Cainite existence. After he Embraced Zamra, he told her to devour her own children; his nascent prince should not be burdened with mortal ties. Zamra smiled demurely, said "Yes, my lord," and threw an oil lamp in the elder's face. Nahir ran screaming into the night, burning. Among the other Lasombra there was much merriment at his expense.

The elder survived, though. A year later, Nahir returned and found his childe already a power among the city's Cainites. As he guessed, Zamra had a natural aptitude for supernatural command, and she had a lower generation than any other vampire in the city. Zamra commanded and they had to obey. Fourteen years later, the Cainites of Algiers acclaimed the neonate as prince. Nahir tortured her for five hours as punishment for burning him, and then complimented her for winning his bet for him.

The innkeeper's widow claimed Algiers as her domain for the next two centuries. The Anarch Revolt

brought Lasombra rebels to her city. First, they wanted to recruit her. When she turned them down, the rebels sought her potent vitae. Zamra outwitted and outfought all her would-be assassins, but she grew weary of the protracted struggle. When she heard of a hidden alliance of elder vampires who renounced the politics of the undead, she saw a way to protect her city.

Zamra also hoped the Inconnu could cure her of frenzy, as rumor claimed. She loved her children and more remote descendants, and kept them close to her, but she had slain many of them in fits of undead rage. Only one of her children yet lived as one of her ghouls.

Her search for the Inconnu led Zamra to Hunedoara Castle, where she invited the assembled elders to make Algiers their home in return for their protection. She soon found, however, that the Inconnu could not protect themselves when the Tremere laid siege to the castle.

Getting into the Pact: The Lasombra did not want to make the Pact. Hunedoara and the "Golconda academy" meant nothing to her; she wanted to go home and leave the Inconnu's battle behind her. Cret changed her mind. Cret insists he used nothing but logic: They lacked the resources to defend the castle and help her past the Tremere, and she could not evade the Warlocks herself. The Pact would only last a short time. Zamra insists the Ventrue forced her will... the only vampire she ever met, apart from her own sire, with the generation and mental force to do so.

Since Then: As the years of imprisonment turned to decades, then centuries, Zamra established herself as the gadfly of the group. The Inconnu's claims of age and wisdom did not impress her, not when they had agreed to such a monumental blunder. She even dared say the unthinkable — to mock Saulot and Golconda itself. Had any of them achieved that blessed state? No? Could they prove that any other vampire had? Oh, yes, Mokur was kind and good and surely, Rothriel had been very brave, but they were still vampires. She hadn't seen transcendence. Or was Golconda a hoax, the delusion of a mad Ancient who yearned for forgiveness?

Relations with Others: The others despise Zamra as much as she despises them. Cret blames her, not the yearly sacrifices, for their declining *humanitas*: They fail to achieve Golconda because the unbeliever holds them back. Nevertheless, some among the Inconnu swallow their hatred long enough to ask her help. The innkeeper's widow commands a unique resource: her mortal descendants. Using a special Dominate power, Zamra still guides her family from around the world and keeps their bloodline pure. Most of the Twelve

need Zamra's help if they want mortal agents to work their will. In return for the use of her family, Zamra buys retributive curses on other members of the Twelve and assistance a fellow prisoner can provide for her family.

Outside Influence: Zamra commands more than a hundred descendants, most of whom do not know that she exists or that they serve her. The Pact does not inhibit her ability to direct them. Zamra keeps two grandsons at the castle as ghouls, and sends them out every few decades to father great-grandchildren for her. She needs such strategies, plus unions between unwitting cousins, to retain her grip over her mortal bloodline after eight centuries.

The innkeeper's widow has arranged the Embrace of several descendants into both major sects and at least six clans. This grants her at least a little "inside information" into the Camarilla, Sabbat and whatever clans suit the Storyteller's purpose. Her mortal descendants also occupy a wide range of jobs in all strata of society. Zamra's Research Trait reflects her ability to find a descendant who can learn what she wants to know.

The Deal: Zamra Matoub fears subjugation to another person's will more than anything. The Demon grants her immunity to Dementation, Dominate and Presence. No one can overpower her will.

Image: Zamra Matoub's skin retains the darkness of her Berber heritage despite her undeath. She has long, straight black hair, black eyes, gracefully arched brows and a no-nonsense set to her mouth. She stands a slender five feet tall but seems larger even when you look down on her. Zamra wears Berber garb with few ornaments, and her confident bearing makes the plain brown-cloth look stylish.

Roleplaying Hints: Never let the others forget for one moment that they are all fools for trapping themselves... and for just about everything else they do, too. Acidly point out the airy uselessness of their philosophies, their attempts to meddle in the world or their reasons not to meddle. Remind them that you did not ask to be here and are not part of their deluded little cult. Treat new arrivals with gracious hospitality as you advise them to flee or stake themselves for the sun before it's too late. Don't point out, though, that you are as ready to enslave and exploit them as the rest of the Twelve. At this stage, you would do nearly anything to attack the others and make them suffer, and you especially loathe Cret. Only the threat of the Demon taking you keeps you from trying to murder the others yourself. Even your family lost its value to you, except as a resource with which to bargain.

Self-Destruct Button: Zamra can handle defeat, but not humiliation. Independence and indomitable will form the cornerstones of her self-identity. If someone forced her to beg, she would seek revenge at any price, including self-destruction.

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Nahir

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1182

Apparent Age: early 30s

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 5, Empathy 3, Hagglng 4, Intimidation 6, Leadership 6, Streetwise 2, Style 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 3, Melee 1, Performance 2, Professional (Innkeeper) 3

Knowledges: Camarilla Lore 1, Clan Knowledge (several) 1 each, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Arabic, English, French, Italian, Latin, Romanian, Spanish, Turkish) 4, Occult 3, Research 3, Sabbat Lore 1

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 2, Dominate 7, Fortitude 3, Obtenebration 5, Potence 3, Quietus 2

Backgrounds: Herd 6, Retainers 2

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 4

Willpower: 7

Notes: Zamra has a special Dominate ability that she calls Dynastic Power. See the Appendix for its description.

MALKAVIAN

DEMETRIUS OF ANTIOCH, THE GOLCONDITE

Childe of Pashedu of Thebes, childe of Panehesy, childe of Malkav

Background: Demetrius the Greek had spent a long, full and enjoyable mortal span traveling the globe as a wandering scholar. His only regret, as he admitted once after a particularly enjoyable debate with a chance-met stranger, was that even at 62, he'd still only scratched the surface. Life, he complained — never expecting his companion to take him seriously — was simply too short to learn all there was to know.

Pashedu of Thebes, an ancient childe of Malkav, agreed and inflicted upon Demetrius the curse of eternity.



Once Demetrius got over the shock (and his disappointment at being cut off from whatever wonders the daylight world still might hold) he took up his quest for ultimate wisdom with new resolve. Over the years, he tried many different approaches: the logic of Aristotle, the mystery-cult of Mithras, even the simple, passionate faith of the Christian martyrs — for anything that led mortals to accept torture and death rather than give it up must be of great worth indeed. He followed them all, yet he still felt he was missing some vital point.

And then he met Saulot. In the space of a few hours, the angel of enlightenment laid all of the wisdom of the ages at his feet. For the first time in his entire existence, Demetrius felt complete, whole in himself, even the need for blood fading from his soul. The following evening, however, he rose to find himself alone. Saulot had gone, as mysteriously as he'd come. And of the great truth the angel had shown him, Demetrius could recall only a few phrases. But since he now knew beyond a doubt that such truth did exist, even for a creature such as he (since the unnaturalness of his state was something he rarely admitted to), he could not allow himself to despair. The truth would come to him again some night even as he groped blindly along the unmapped road.

Getting into the Pact: Demetrius is not the intriguer that others in the castle are. He naturally assumed that Cret and the others were all as sincere as any seeker of Golconda should be. If no one had agreed with the Ventrue, he might have been more suspicious, but everyone else seemed prepared to go along.

Surely it had all been meant for the best... he believes this even now.

Since Then: Demetrius spends his present nights in perfect bliss and serenity, of course. How could he not? He has, after all, finally achieved Golconda. Less than a decade after the Pact began, Saulot himself came to Demetrius in a dream and personally guided him through his Suspire. Unfortunately, few in the castle seem willing to let him share his spiritual bounty; some even tell him that he hallucinated the whole thing. He'll continue to work on them patiently, leading by example just as Mokur did. In the meantime, he reaches out into the world for those more willing to listen, taking great comfort in the inspiration his eager students provide.

Relations with Others: The others think Demetrius is mad (which goes without saying), but none of them have ever punctured his unfailing belief in himself. Even so, his previous good humor fades now far more swiftly than centuries before. If pushed, he'll snap out verbally and stalk off to sulk, a fact the rest make good use of whenever he becomes too annoying.

Demetrius feels most at ease with Eshmunamash, Abdalkutba, Danika, Hill and Cret — though due to their mutual antagonisms, he prefers to deal with them one-on-one rather than as a group. He finds Pentweret's arrogance more than his patience can bear and sees almost nothing in Anastazi worth encouraging. He has little in common with Bufo, Zamra or Drenis, but treats them all well enough. His efforts to befriend Zamra are especially notable, as he's the only one who still tries. Demetrius doesn't hate any of his fellow denizens. He forgives, and indeed outright forgets, their insults quickly. He does, however, feel sorry for them. After all, he succeeded where they couldn't.

The one exception to this is his sleeping angel, Mahtiel. He will not forget a threat to her. His affection for Saulot's orphan is both reverential and paternal. While he knows her for what she is, he also recognizes her great sorrow and pain, and does all he can to ease her rest. (Abdalkutba's occasional attempts to rouse her have fortunately failed so far, and in such a way that Demetrius couldn't quite determine what was responsible.)

As for whether any of the Twelve believe in Demetrius' "attainment": On any given night, some will acknowledge it possible. Drenis feels him to be the closest of anyone there. Eshmunamash doesn't usually think it's Golconda, but in any case it certainly gives Demetrius a peace the old Brujah envies. Cret assumes that it can't be Golconda — because how can one be mad and in Golconda? — but the old Lunatic does

seem to hold some valuable piece of the puzzle. If he could just be made to explain it logically...

Outside Influence: Demetrius long ago gained the rank of Master in the Ordo Aenigmatis, the mysterious, half-mythical order of Malkavian mystics. Even from Hunedoara he's continued to teach his willing juniors, always employing metaphor and riddles to do so, rarely calling anything by its correct name. He believes that words, especially names of people and objects, can lose their power if over-used. Over time his influence has spread somewhat beyond the Ordo, and now he essentially conducts a Golconda cult by correspondence. Through letters (and through judicious use of his Malkavian gifts) he's created a persona, the Master of Ravens, who reaches out from his solitary hermitage to share the peace of Golconda. His pamphlet, *Traveling the Unmapped Road*, has been translated into several languages, often credited simply to "Anonymous."

Unfortunately, something in Demetrius' soul is less deluded than his mind. While the advice he gives is usually sound enough, he can't bear seeing others achieve what some part of him knows he hasn't. He guides his students conscientiously, but if they appear to be too close to achieving the goal, his own disavowed bitterness induces him to lead them astray, all without his ever realizing it.

The Deal: Nikanuuranu reinforces Demetrius' delusion of Golconda, and has all but suppressed Demetrius' Beast. While the old Malkavian can lose his temper or have fits of pique, he never shows even the slightest hint of frenzy. Demetrius also labors under the delusion that he doesn't feed (he does; he just doesn't remember it afterward, and usually neither does his vessel), but that's entirely his own doing.

Image: A kindly, affable, stooped old man. Demetrius has white hair that falls in tangled curls to his shoulders, a scruffy white beard, deep brown eyes, and a continually bemused expression. He wears the same style of long, short-sleeved tunic and mantle he wore during his life, and straps his knobby feet into sandals year round. Around his neck he wears a silver pendant bearing the three eyes of the Salubri clan, a gift Mahtiel gave him years ago. An inscription on the back, in Greek, reads, "For the one who sees most clearly when blind." Demetrius uses a staff to walk, as the Embrace did nothing for his arthritis, and he won't let Danika touch his old knees.

Roleplaying Hints: Be insufferably cryptic. Use creative riddles and metaphors to illustrate your points, and just smile knowingly if nobody understands you — obviously, they aren't as ready as they think. Never

refer to anyone directly by name, lest you inadvertently cause them harm. Even the nicknames you devise for people must be changed periodically, or else they will begin to bear the weight of reality. Perform little kindnesses for guests and treat them with utmost sympathy. If they rebuff you, go off to meditate until your irritation fades and approach them again just as gently later.

Self-Destruct Button: Demetrius steadfastly believes himself to be an honest man and a true teacher of Golconda. Should he ever realize the truth he hides from, his shame and remorse will likely drive him truly mad, and into the jaws of the Beast.

Sire: Pashedu of Thebes

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Guru

Generation: 6th

Embrace: Circa 320 B.C.

Apparent Age: late 60s

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 7, Intelligence 7, Wits 6

Talents: Alertness 6, Brawl 2, Diplomacy 4, Dodge 4, Empathy 7, Expression 7, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 6

Skills: Crafts (Scribe) 5, Etiquette 3, Meditation 7, Melee 2, Performance (Acting) 4, Ride 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 6, Clan Knowledge (Malkavian) 4, Clan Knowledge (Salubri) 2, Cryptography 3, Enigmas 6, Expert Knowledge (Theology) 4, Finance 1, Investigation 3, Law 2, Linguistics (Greek, Latin, Romanian, Arabic, Hebrew, Enochian — or so he thinks — and others as needed) 7, Occult 3, Politics 1, Research 4, Science 2

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 5, Celerity 2, Dementation 7, Dominate 3, Fortitude 7, Obfuscate 6, Presence 4

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Retainers 2

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 4, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 8

Willpower: 8

Notes: Like Eshmunamash, Demetrius is short on Traits going strictly by the **Children of the Night** system. Up to 26 Ability dots and 7 Discipline dots could be added before he would be considered "over-powered" under that system.

See the Appendix for a description of Enigmatic Text and Psychic Double, Demetrius' special powers.

NOSFERATU

BUFO, THE TOAD

Lineage unknown

Background: Ulrich was born early and sickly, the son of a Saxon merchant of Hermanstadt who never forgave him for surviving when his mother did not. When his father married again, Ulrich's stepmother quickly saw how things stood and suggested that the boy be given to the Church, thus removing the chief rival for her own children's inheritance. And so at the age of nine, Ulrich found himself shut away in an abbey for life. Granted, there was something to be said for a roof over one's head, food to eat and clothing, however plain, to wear. Still, as the youngest and weakest of the novices, Ulrich was the designated drudge, last to be served at table, first to serve in slaking his fellows' lusts. When he grew older and stronger, he passed on the lessons he'd learned to those who came after — for above all else, a future monk should know humility.

Ulrich was unpopular among his brethren, and so the post of almoner was all he could aspire to, handing out the monks' leftover food to the beggars at the gate and dispensing the abbey's charity among the deserving poor. Yet the job had its privileges. Many a peasant girl was eager to demonstrate just how deserving she was, and for far less coin than one would expect. Being the son of a merchant and thrifty, Ulrich kept the rest, hiding it in a hollow tree just out of sight of the abbey gates.

But one night, as he returned late to his cache with the day's surplus, he was followed, beaten and robbed by one of those very peasant girls and her accomplice. He threatened to have her hung as a thief. She turned to her companion and said simply, "Do with him what you will," and left them together in the dark. When the creature took off its concealing hood, Ulrich was too startled at first to scream — and afterwards, he never had a chance.

His sire dropped him down a well and left him there; terror and the agonies of the change drove him half mad before he managed to claw his way up and out. He slaughtered a cow and its calf, then fled deeper into the woods, leaving the bloody rags of his habit behind. Brother Ulrich was never seen again.

Many years passed. The Nosferatu became a feral, cunning killer who preyed on anything he could catch, from wild animals and livestock to careless peasants and lost children. The Tremere heard of him and hunted him for three months before snaring him in an ensorcelled net. The regent called him *Bufo*, "the toad," the first words of Latin the former monk had

heard in over a hundred years. It was as close to a name as he could remember, and he took it as his own.

Bufo was still a Tremere prisoner in Hunedoara's dungeons when Danika reclaimed her stronghold. They'd already tormented him considerably with "experiments" and various preparations for sending him to the gargoyle-works at Ceoris. It might have been kinder to kill the wretched creature, but Danika couldn't. Instead she gave him her blood, spoke to him gently, fed him and tended his hurts. When the bond was complete and madness had faded from his eyes and aura, she released him, keeping him bound with an ensorcelled collar and iron chain until she felt he could be trusted.

While Danika's bond assured Bufo's loyalty and relative obedience, and even seemed to restore him to some degree of sanity, it didn't grant him speech or memory of his human past. For many years afterward, he remained her thrall in much the same manner as the monstrous Slav, feeding from castle vermin or local livestock, acting as Danika's watchdog and hound.

Getting into the Pact: When the Pact was first enacted, none of the participants considered Bufo part of it any more than the Slav. Although his presence in the castle that night brought him under its protection, his blood was not given to Nikanuuranu, so he could come and go as he willed, or as his mistress commanded him.

But when Vanth entered Wassail, Bufo alone had the skills and instincts to hunt her down; and in any case only Bufo could do so without breaking the Pact. Badly injured in his first skirmish with her, he finally, with the others' aid, managed to diablerize the wight. In so doing he took not only her soul and her power, but also her portion of the Pact, into himself. Realizing too late the price of his actions, Bufo's first words in over two centuries were scathing indeed — and in flawless Latin.

Since Then: Ulrich is back, and dear God, he doesn't like it one little bit. He was quite content to be his mistress' vaguely man-shaped hound, a creature without past, future or personality. Why was it necessary to take even that away? Of course, the answer to that is obvious. The Twelve acted according to their own needs. Well, Bufo is certainly going to act according to his own needs. He pretends still to possess only half a mind, so that his beloved mistress requires nothing more of him than to perform the occasional task suitable to his station and to show up each year for the Pact. Unfortunately, he still must contend with the strange echoes from Vanth's defeated soul.

Relations with Others: The rest of the Twelve don't think they have a relationship with Bufo, but they're quite wrong. Over time he's learned to impersonate many of the castle's inhabitants, Kindred and mortal, with hardly a slipup. Sometimes he plies this skill blatantly enough that they learn of it afterward (incidentally providing a convenient excuse to misbehaving vampires: "It must have been Bufo playing a prank."). But many far subtler deceptions have gone completely undetected — except by Abdalkutba, who's far too curious to give away the game. So disguised, Bufo can assuage some of his longing for contact. He certainly can't see any point in this Golconda thing they're always going on about (for all the good it does them!), but it beats sitting in the vault all night, listening to water drip and *thinking*.

As himself, he's treated by most of the Twelve as a regrettably necessary part of the castle furniture. Confused by the continuing blood bond, he can't quite decide whether he adores Danika for her kindness or hates her for luring him into the Pact — and indeed for saving him from the Tremere in the first place. Anastazi seems to think Bufo really is a dog, or equivalent to such, and alternately pets and cuffs him, but when Bufo's disguised, he can enjoy Anastazi's company. Anastazi is more down to earth than most in the castle. Drenis is a bit frightened of Bufo — she remembers how savagely he hunted Vanth — but pities him as well. Demetrius actually attempts to converse with him sometimes; Bufo stonewalls, obstinately playing the Toad, but fears he isn't fooling the Malkavian anymore. Hill, too, seems occasionally suspicious of an actual thought process lurking within the loathsome creature.

Outside Influence: Almost none to speak of. While it's easy for Bufo to disguise himself as a servant, or one of the Twelve, and thus influence someone to act on his behalf, he has little use for that at present.

The Deal: Nikanuuranu grants Bufo voyeuristic peeks into the dreams, desires and visions of his fellows in the Twelve. Bufo has become addicted to these glimpses; they're the collective soap opera he avidly follows. They provide admirable distraction from his miseries. They also help his disguises.

Image: The regent named Bufo well. He does look remarkably toad-like, with huge eyes and webbed hands and feet bearing claws at the tips. He can climb any wall of the castle, inside or out, with just fingers and toes. He goes about damp most nights, as he sleeps deep within one of the castle's half-flooded cellars. He wears no clothes, but portions of him, particularly his warty back, are encrusted with moss.



Roleplaying Hints: It really isn't a lot of fun being Bufo, but no one else needs to know this besides you and perhaps Nikanuuranu, who knows everything anyway. You get quite enough pity as it is. As the Toad, you're slavish, cringing, sulking and yet exceptionally fierce on command, speaking only in half-witted snatches of guttural Latin and German. As Ulrich, you're a vibrating mass of fears, hates, envies and longings. Neither state is at all pleasant, which is why you spend so much of your time pretending to be someone else completely or watching the Hunedoara equivalent of reality TV. If someone actually finds some reason to seek you out in your lair and try to talk to you, you'll probably react with dangerous terror, dangerous hope or both.

Self-Destruct Button: Danika holds the real key to destroying Bufo — the blood bond, which she continues to reinforce — but she'd have to have excellent reason to use it, since rescuing and caring for him is one of the few good deeds she can still cling to. Since he's not a Golconda-seeker, and has absorbed the soul of a Kindred in Wassail, Bufo's Beast is easier to provoke than most of the others'. He could be induced to self-destruct through repeated hunger or fear frenzies.

Sire: Unknown

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Monster

Generation: 7th

Embrace: 1406

Apparent Age: Indeterminate

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Dodge 4, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Search 1, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Animal Ken 4, Etiquette 2, Performance (Acting) 5, Stealth 6, Survival 4

Knowledges: Academics 2, Expert Knowledge (Theology) 1, Investigation 2, Linguistics (German, Romanian, Latin, and snatches of a few other languages commonly spoken by the other Eleven) 3

Disciplines: Animalism 6, Celerity 2, Dominate 1, Fortitude 4, Obfuscate 6, Potence 5

Backgrounds: Are you kidding?

Virtues: Conviction 2, Instinct 4, Courage 3

Morality: Road of the Beast 3

Willpower: 6

Notes: See the Appendix for a description of Beast Walk, Bufo's special power. Bufo is on the Dark Ages Road of the Beast, which roughly corresponds to the Path of the Feral Heart in modern terms; in any case, he's never worked very hard at it.

SALUBRI

MAHTIEL, THE SLEEPER

Childe of Ezrael, childe of Samiel, childe of Saulot

Background: Mahtiel's earliest memories are of war: endless lines of marching legions, burning villages, reeking mass graves. The soldiers took her and thousands of her people back to Rome in chains and put them to work filling the bellies of their conquerors.



The life of a field slave was hard, but the girl who would one day be Mahtiel was angry, and her anger gave her strength. One day, however, she lost control of both. A brutal overseer lay dead, and she was sentenced to die as well in the arena. It amused the master of the games to put a sword in her hand and dress her like a legendary Amazon. Of course he never expected her to survive her first bout. When she won two matches in a row, he saw a chance for further profit, and he arranged to have her trained.

But a gladiator's life expectancy was even shorter than a field slave's, and an infected wound laid Mahtiel low. She doesn't remember the bargain the healer made with her master, but she awoke in a moving wagon, no longer feverish. Cool, gentle fingers tended her wounds and gave her water to drink. The man introduced himself as Ezrael and told her she was free. Then he offered her even more, a cause to spend her freedom upon and an eternity to do it in. She accepted and began her true education. After a time Ezrael Embraced her; some years after, she gained her Blooding as a Salubri warrior, taking the angelic name Mahtiel.

It was during her mortal training that she first met the warrior known as Rothriel, a childe of Ezrael's. He was tall and well-favored, and moved with a cat's grace — and unlike Master Ezrael, he laughed. She saw him again after her Embrace, and then yet again after her Blooding. Each time the mere sight of him was almost enough to start her heart beating again.

As it turned out, he felt drawn to her as well. It was no coincidence that the frequency of his visits to his sire had increased after meeting her. For a little while they searched their souls as to whether Saulot's command "not to Embrace love" applied to those already of the Blood, and eventually they concluded that it didn't. They became lovers and gave themselves up to a mutual blood bond. For centuries after, they were inseparable, traveling and fighting together as if each of their souls was but half of a whole, now at last united.

But nothing endures forever. Saulot's death at Tremere's fangs sent ripples of shock and dismay through his scattered childer. The warriors debated among themselves whether they should join forces in a crusade against their father's murderers, as they'd done against the Baali ages before. In the end, the bulk of the caste determined to do nothing, as Saulot had always explicitly counseled against revenge. A small faction of warriors, however, declared they would not let Saulot's murder go unanswered. They took the names of fallen angels and turned their back on the rest of the clan.

Mahtiel's sympathies lay with the rebels. Only her love for Rothriel restrained her from joining them, for Rothriel would have none of their crusade. But now Rothriel spoke of giving up the sword and seeking the peace of Golconda. At first she thought it idle talk, for he'd sometimes spoken this way before when he was weary, but his weariness would pass and he was content to be a warrior again. However, it soon became clear that this time, for this veteran of a millennium's battles, it was no passing fancy. She begged him not to do it, for her sake. He tried to convince her to take the seeker's path as well. Neither was persuaded. Angry and broken-hearted, Mahtiel stormed out of their shared haven and rode off into the night. When she returned a month later, Rothriel was gone.

Mahtiel wandered in blind pain; the fact that she was not taken by the Tremere during this time was due solely to good fortune. The Usurpers now not only hunted the Salubri but also spread vile lies about them. Twice Mahtiel had to fight for her unlife after a once-hospitable domain turned on her. She gave the warlocks no quarter herself, and let no opportunity go by to kill those who destroyed her brothers.

Then late one night, as she lay down to rest before the dawn, she heard Rothriel's call. His voice thrummed in their shared blood, in their lineage, in her heart. He was calling for help. She agonized, but in the end, the desire to see him again was stronger than ever. The following evening, she saddled her horse, packed her armor and weapons, and rode off in the direction of his call.

Before she even arrived she knew it was too late. She felt Rothriel's Final Death from a hundred miles away, the blood bond violently uprooted from her soul. But onward she rode, until she arrived at Castle Hunedoara, met the Lady Danika Ruthven, and learned of Rothriel's last nights. There were no Tremere left for her to slay, no one upon whom she could avenge her lover's murder. Lady Danika made her welcome, but she could find no rest. She searched the castle until she found Rothriel's ashes, gathered them up, and rode away.

Getting into the Pact: Mahtiel returned to her sire's holding, but it had become a desolate ruin. She then searched, in disguise, for three years before she found another of her caste, who had little to say to her. Of the healer caste she found no trace at all. But she did find a Greek Malkavian who helped her fend off a Tremere attack and then eagerly joined her in her quest. Twice his visions warned them of danger just in time and so, in a moment of weariness, Mahtiel let Demetrius the mystic choose their next road. Some-

how she was not surprised to see the towers of Hunedoara rise up before them at that road's end. Lady Danika welcomed them both. This time, Mahtiel was only too glad to accept sanctuary. Much to everyone's surprise, she went along with the Pact after strong initial objections. Some suspect Nikanuuranu offered her something in exchange, but they have no idea what.

Since Then: Mahtiel is the sleeper of Hunedoara. She spends almost all her time in torpor, rising only to re-affirm the Pact. While she sleeps, Demetrius, who regards her as a holy angel awaiting the end of the world, guards her; and Bufo, whose intentions are less honorable, spies on her. Mahtiel sometimes grows restless in her dreams, and her spirit walks the halls of the castle, searching for her lover until her wanderings bring her to the place where he met his Final Death. Then she falls to her ghostly knees and weeps. She may respond to other presences nearby with extreme violence, blaming them for the death of her beloved. While in this form, she can use Disciplines such as Valeren but cannot physically touch or be touched. If she senses sufficient threat, however, she may physically awaken.

Demetrius tries to feed her during the year, dribbling blood into her mouth, but can't always successfully gauge when she's close enough to consciousness to swallow.

Relations with Others: Mahtiel still values the advice of Demetrius and appreciates his solicitude, even though she realizes that it borders uncomfortably on worship. She has little use for Anastazi, however, and even less for Zamra. In truth, she has little relationship with anyone anymore, due to the amount of time she spends in torpor.

Outside Influence: Mahtiel is physically bound to the castle as the others are. However, her spirit can and does go walking beyond the walls, but she won't do so unless there is some link between herself and an outsider; she might, for instance, follow another Salubri or someone who has a fragment of her lover's journal, or answer a spirit-summons from someone who conjures her by name. It's possible that someone (particularly a Malkavian) who becomes familiar with Demetrius' teachings might be affected by his use of the Tongue of Babel, and dream of her, thus providing a beacon for her wandering spirit to find. Whether the recipient of such a vision would consider it real, or another bout of extended dementia, of course, is up to the player. Distance makes no difference to her wandering spirit. If there's a link for her to follow, she can walk down it just as though it were another castle corridor.

Mahtiel has a deep and abiding hatred for Tremere, but is respectful of the Lady Danika's domain and will abide by her wishes (with regards to Tremere characters, for instance).

The Deal: What Mahtiel asked of Nikanuuranu, and what it granted, was to have her Rothriel back again. She spends her nights dreaming of her happy times with him. By this point, every waking moment spent in the real world, where he is irrevocably dead, is an agony to her much-attenuated soul.

Image: Mahtiel is slightly over average height for a woman, lean and muscular. Her honey-brown hair is cropped short about her shoulders, and her face betrays a deep, inner loneliness. When awake, she wears men's clothing: leggings, a tunic and a quilted gambeson from a time past. She also has full armor in her room should she need it. She often wears a blessed sword given to her by her sire. Unless using her powers of Valeren, her third eye is little more than an odd scar on her forehead.

Roleplaying Hints: Mahtiel has fought all her life for one thing or another, but Rothriel's death sapped much of her fire, and Nikanuuranu's narcotic dreams have hollowed her once-indomitable spirit to a shadow of its former strength. Even when walking in the flesh she behaves like a ghost: sad, near-silent and half aware at best.

Self-Destruct Button: Mahtiel blames herself for Rothriel's death as much as she blames the Tremere. If only she'd come sooner, or rode faster, or arranged to travel by day as well as by night... but if she ever learns of Anastazi's guilt in this matter, she will gladly transfer all her rage, shame and self-hatred onto him instead. Nothing will stand between her and revenge — not even the Pact. (His dream "visits" to her over the past few centuries won't exactly help his case either, if she should discover that truth as well.)

Sire: Ezrael

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Rebel

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 3rd century A.D.

Apparent Age: Early 30s

Physical: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 7

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 6

Talents: Alertness 7, Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 5, Leadership 4, Search 3, Subterfuge 2, Torture 2

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Archery 4, Crafts (Farmer) 1, Crafts (Blacksmith) 2, Etiquette 1, Hunting 5, Meditation 3, Melee 6, Ride 5, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Knowledges: Academics 3, Camarilla Lore 2, Clan Knowledge (Salubri) 4, Clan Knowledge (Tremere) 3, Enigmas 2, Expert Knowledge (Tactics) 4, History 4, Investigation 4, Linguistics (Latin, Greek, Romanian, Harappan, Hebrew, others as desired) 4, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Celerity 6, Dominate 3, Fortitude 6, Obfuscate 4, Potence 6, Presence 5, Valeren 6

Backgrounds: None

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 2, Courage 4

Morality: Road of Kings 6

Willpower: 5

Notes: In her spirit-form, Mahtiel is vulnerable to certain kinds of binding spells. Necromancy will not affect her because she's not actually a ghost, but sufficiently powerful Spirit Thaumaturgy may (as the Storyteller decides). Any such effect will be temporary, as Mahtiel will call upon Nikanuuranu for aid if trapped past dawn (Hunedoara time), and since Nikanuuranu is bound to protect her, it will respond immediately and sever the bonds holding her.

The Road of Kings has no exact modern equivalent, but her branch of it is a chivalric philosophy similar in overall outlook to the Path of Honorable Accord.

See the Appendix for a description of Dream Combat and Psychic Double, Mahtiel's advanced Discipline powers.

TZIMISCE

DANIKA RUTHVEN, MISTRESS OF
HUNEDOARA

Childe of Damek, childe of Ruthven, childe of [Tzimisce]

Background: Danika remembers the city of Sarmizegetusa, capital of Dacia, before the Romans came. She remembers the majesty of its great king Decebalus. Above all she remembers the night when, at age 14, her family betrothed her to their patron, the undead *voivode* Damek Ruthven. He lay with her; she submitted to his cold caresses and the painful pleasure of his Kiss, and rejoiced when he left again. Then her grooming began. Tutors instructed the mortal girl in languages and literature, in intrigue and politics, and in the duties of a childe-wife to her sire-husband. During this time, Damek visited her only once a year. She schooled her mind and tongue to loyalty, but couldn't completely control her young heart. Fortunately the handsome guardsman Arnek was sent away

before he could steal more than a single kiss' worth of her virginity.

At long last the appointed time arrived. She was taken to Lord Ruthven's own stronghold and given her first taste of his blood. By the wedding night, she was bound, and could think of nothing else save Damek and the great honor she was to enjoy. When she emerged from the earth of her ritual burial, it was young Arnek whose life's blood made her first meal — a lesson in the price of betrayal.

It was a lesson she never forgot.

Centuries passed. Danika studied Metamorphosist philosophy, but far preferred the arts of the *koldun*. She soon surpassed even her sire in her ability to summon spirits and manipulate the elements, something she took care not to let on. She ruled her own domain now, in service to Damek, who was usually absent. Meanwhile, he (never one for mortal proprieties) began the process of choosing and training a new bride. Danika soon learned she was neither the first nor the last of these, but she would in time prove the most successful. Although she doesn't claim credit for engineering Damek's Final Death at the hands of his Tzimisce enemies, she quickly offered her fealty to the victors, thus retaining the holdings she'd been given, including Hunedoara. And by the time the German Ventrue invaded the Land Beyond the Forest, she had both a sizable brood and a vast store of koldunic learning, and was able to hold her own against them as well.

Then Danika grew restless. The old gods were defeated and banished; nor could she accept the new God, for He reportedly would never accept her. Yet she knew there had to be something worth rising for besides feeding and stargazing, so she decided to seek new wisdom elsewhere. Before she departed on her quest, she Embraced her seneschal, a clever man named Anastazi, to oversee Hunedoara with the aid of his broodmates in neighboring domains.

Danika traveled from one end of Europe to the other; she listened to many who claimed to dispense wisdom, even to mortals. She found nothing of use, however, until she encountered a Cainite of the ancient Salubri Blood, the warrior-philosopher Rothriel. He passed on to her the beginnings of what he himself had learned long ago from Saulot and Saulot's childe Mokur.

At last she invited Rothriel to return to Hunedoara with her and take sanctuary from the pursuing Tremere, but as it turned out, the Tremere had managed to seize the castle away from Anastazi, the sole survivor of her brood. She recruited both her hapless childe and



Rothriel to the cause of reclaiming her home. In the ensuing battle, Hunedoara was won but the Salubri's unlife lost, a consequence she regrets to this night.

For years afterward, Danika ruled her domain once again, fighting off the incursions of Tremere and welcoming any fellow seeker of the path to Golconda. Still following in Rothriel's footsteps, she tracked down the mysterious Mokur and his closest disciples in order to offer them permanent refuge. She also gave shelter to any Salubri who reached her borders — including Mahtiel, Rothriel's old lover, who soon arrived wounded and heart-sore at the castle gate, leaning on the arms of the Greek Malkavian Demetrius and the Cappadocian priestess Drenis. A true Tzimisce, she envisioned bringing her beloved domain to a new glory as the world's chief bastion and school of Golconda.

(For more detailed account of this latter part of Danika's history, see Chapter One.)

Getting into the Pact: Danika hardly liked the sound of the Pact; she was, after all, a *koldun* and knew how tricky spirit-negotiations could be. But at the time it was proposed, she both grieved the loss of another Salubri under her protection — the ancient Mokur, no less — and faced the possible loss of everything she still held dear. Her companions on the road to Golconda, the society they had formed, her ancient home, even her very unlife were threatened all at once by the siege. In retrospect, she realizes that she allowed her own fears to sway her to Cret's sophistry, but this does not make her despise him any less.

Since Then: With the accumulating centuries, Danika has grown less and less interested in anything more than the most critical maintenance to the castle. The stones show the passing of time, crumbling under the alternating assault of the seasons. A number of roofing tiles are loose or missing, and dead leaves and debris clutter the courtyards. The land itself continues to give her power but not pleasure; she can no longer venture out to survey the larger part of what was once her own, feel its earth under her feet and speak with its venerable trees. And she now bitterly regrets the welcome she originally extended, in all but a very few cases.

Yet Danika remains determined to do her duty as a proper Tzimisce hostess. She scrupulously provides for the many needs of her guests. She also continues to plan and oversee periodic group dinners and gatherings, making every effort to see that folk are entertained in some small way despite the distinct lack of bonhomie. For Danika, each night's purpose is to endure to the next with something like dignity; she asks little more of herself anymore.

Relations with Others: Danika still enjoys some camaraderie with Drenis, though that closeness has had its ups and downs. She also gets along fairly well with Demetrius, being one of those who change the subject instead of challenging him when his rambling becomes tiresome. Cret, however, she challenges constantly. She won't be intellectually browbeaten by him. If she can't win the argument she'll start needling him on personal subjects. Of course if he would just once admit he made a mistake, she wouldn't feel so compelled to puncture his ego. She saves most of her genuine ire, however, for Zamra. The gadfly made herself obnoxious to Danika long before she alienated everyone else, by coming to offer the Twelve sanctuary in Algiers — as though something were wrong with beautiful Hunedoara!

Bufo and Anastazi at least remain under Danika's sway. Bufo is distasteful, but usually obedient, and still merits her compassion. Anastazi, however, has been a disappointment since the very beginning, and she doesn't hesitate to pour scorn on him when she's feeling upset. Yet the rest of the time she relies on his assistance with the castle and its provisioning. Protecting Mahtiel has become as much burden as honor, but Mahtiel is still all Danika has left of Rothriel and the Salubri. As for the rest of the Twelve, Danika's attitudes toward them shift from month to month. Some nights she finds their company better than tolerable and some nights they drive her mad.

Most of the Twelve remain outwardly deferential to Danika for Tradition's sake, but the centuries have taken their toll even on such sacred precepts as the etiquette of host and guest. Occasionally discussions over provisions become heated and someone, tired of interminable dependency, lashes out at the hand that feeds.

Outside Influence: In the course of her work as hostess, Danika has developed a network of mortal and Kindred contacts who supply mortal servants, blood, craftsmen, tools and supplies for the upkeep of Hunedoara. Such folk rarely guess the truth about their employer.

As world communications improve, Danika's procurers must grow ever more sophisticated and clever. Fortunately, many places in the world still teem with the poor and homeless, and the disappearance of one, two, or a dozen attracts neither notice nor investigation. Some of her agents are Sabbat nomad packs, willing to trade a few juicebags in exchange for vials of heady elder blood. She also deals with ambitious young neonates and ancillae in the Camarilla and a number of mortal criminal syndicates and cabals. Her agents help fugitives "disappear" and desperate refugees find sanctuary; as promised, none are ever found again by their pursuers. Not all recruits are destined for the fangs of the Twelve, however. Danika draws castle servants, feeding slaves, and future sacrifices from the same pool of candidates.

The Deal: Even with her koldunic arts, Danika can no longer defend the length and breadth of her old domain as she once did now that she's trapped in the castle. At her request, Nikanuuranu uses every trick in its repertoire to prevent other Kindred from claiming domain in Danika's old territory, which roughly corresponds to modern county Hunedoara. (Should this prove inconvenient for a particular chronicle, the Storyteller may change the size of her domain or modify the Deal as necessary. That is, Kindred may move into the area if Danika tacitly approves of them, etc.)

Image: Danika is tall, lean, and proud. While she behaves most generously to guests, her carriage and bearing are unapologetically imperious. She makes no effort to disguise her accent or her age. She dresses in gowns of simple cut but exquisite fabric, recalling the early Renaissance: rust-browns, earth-greens, dove-grays, often with yards of slightly tattered lace or beading. These fine garments don't do much to soften her severely regal face or her arch expressions.

Roleplaying Hints: You're rarely outright rude, but you rarely have anything nice to say either, and

when your patience is finally expended you can be a real cast-iron bitch. The castle servants have learned to sense your mood; the worse it is, the more quietly they speak and tread, hoping the brunt of your cruelty will fall elsewhere. Do not hesitate to ply your leverage as hostess to the utmost, and if someone truly irritates you, plague them with spirits. The quest for Golconda was once your only reason for rising. Now it's duty that keeps you going. In a way, you're grateful. You realize that some here don't even have that much to cling to.

Self-Destruct Button: Danika has already endured one horrible betrayal from her companions — the Pact itself — but at least that betrayal was undertaken to protect her domain and the guests within it, not to destroy them. If one of the Twelve should betray her again in such a way as to hurt her domain or her other guests, then that could well send her over the edge and into a rage.

Sire: Damek Ruthven

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Autocrat

Generation: 6th

Embrace: 1st century A.D.

Apparent Age: early 20s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 7

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 7, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Diplomacy 4, Empathy 3, Expression 5, Hagglng 3, Intimidation 6, Intrigue 6, Leadership 7, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Animal Ken 4, Crafts (Body Crafts) 5, Crafts (Textiles) 3, Etiquette 5, Hunting 3, Meditation 4, Melee 2, Ride 2

Knowledges: Academics 6, Camarilla Lore 2, Clan Knowledge (Salubri) 3, Clan Knowledge (Tremere) 3, Clan Knowledge (Tzimisce) 5, Enigmas 4, Finance 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Romanian, Dacian, Latin, Greek, English, French, others as desired) 6, Occult 5, Politics 6, Sabbat Lore 1

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 4, Dominate 3, Fortitude 1, Mortis (Grave's Decay) 1, Presence 1, Koldunic Sorcery (Earth Ways) 6, Vicissitude 7

Other Koldunic Paths: Fire 2, Spirit 6, Water 4, Wind 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 6, Herd 5, Resources 3, Retainers 5

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 6

Willpower: 9

Notes: Danika knows a great many koldunic rituals, and so can possess more or less whatever the Storyteller desires in that regard (up to her Discipline limit). See the Appendix for descriptions of Danika's advanced koldunic powers — Drowning in Earth, Greater Scrying, Greater Trigger, Servitor Sending and Storm-Hound.

ANASTAZI, THE ETERNAL CHILDE

Childe of Danika, childe of Damek, childe of Ruthven, childe of [Tzimisce]

Background: Anastazi was at one time Danika's mortal seneschal, whose responsibilities included overseeing Hunedoara Castle and maintaining contact with his counterparts on her scattered estates. Ambitious and clever, he was no slouch at seeing to his own creature comforts as well as his duties. He knew exactly how much bullying he could get away with and how far he could push the bounds of his mistress' instructions. That he hoped one night to earn the honor of the Embrace was no secret. Still, when Danika announced that he had a week to get his personal affairs in order, he was taken aback by the suddenness of it. But he did as she required and was duly granted the power of the dead water.

Then his lady announced she was leaving — going on some kind of silly spiritual quest, it sounded like to him, but in the meantime, she was counting on him to "take care of things" for her while she was gone. Unfortunately, he was now the youngest of three ambitious childer, which meant he also was the weakest of three ambitious childer. Equally unfortunately, Anastazi lacked the political experience to handle this situation adeptly. Not long after Danika left her do-



main, he had to flee for his unlife from his own blood-siblings, who had this absurd notion that they had the right to order him around, and that they were more than willing to lock him up and torment him until he agreed.

Then, to make matters worse, Danika returned in the company of a fierce-eyed warrior and pressed Anastazi into service once again — this time to help her retake Hunedoara Castle from the Tremere who had defeated his siblings who had defeated him. Trying to point out the logical error in recruiting one like himself for the enterprise made scant impression on his sire. Just as he knew it would, his courage failed at a critical moment in the battle; unbeknownst to Danika, who was occupied elsewhere, that failure led directly to Rothriel's death. Luckily, no one still walking the night knows Anastazi's perfidy, a state of affairs he'd do nearly anything to preserve.

Getting into the Pact: Anastazi had very little choice about entering the Pact. Eleven vampires all older and stronger than he was seemed to think it necessary, and one of them was his regnant and sire. If they couldn't think of any better way to survive the siege, what chance did he stand? And at the time, the survival of the informal Golconda school was important to him because it was important to his queen, his star. But he's since found a worthier home for his affections, fully removed from the slavery of blood....

Since Then: With centuries of practice under his belt, Anastazi is now a schemer of the first order; but dwelling in a castle with far too many elders and being bound to a sire he now hates has done nothing to improve his inferiority complex. His situation remains remarkably (depressingly) like it was when he was mortal. So long as he performs his duties and stays reasonably within bounds, he has tacit permission to see to his own pleasures as he likes, of which he takes full advantage.

He's also become the castle's resident fix-it man and token technology buff. He owns a gas generator, which he uses to power his quarters' electric lights. He hasn't acquired a computer because they still intimidate him, but he has a number of cheap electronic handheld games from the 80's and early 90's littering one of his tables and a portable stereo with a small CD collection, as well as myriad other gadgets that were cutting-edge at the time he bought them: a Victrola, a tin music-box bank, an electric typewriter, a portable vibrator from the 1918 Sears & Roebuck catalog (for home treatment of ladies' "hysteria" — an "Aid That Every Woman Appreciates"), etc.

Relations with Others: The Inconnu among the Twelve don't understand how Anastazi can have dwelled here for so many years and never evinced the smallest particle of interest in Golconda... but he hasn't. Most have concluded that his is simply a shallow, venal soul. Others, notably the charitable Demetrius, put it down to youth. They all consider him a servant who is to be paid in the coin he honors. They treat him politely — especially when they must request favors of Nikanuuranu, who uses Anastazi as its favorite mouthpiece and go-between — but with a subtle hint of disapproval that is not at all lost on the Tzimisce.

Danika outright despises Anastazi and has ever since she first returned to Hunedoara. He hates her in return. They usually manage to conjure enough civility to get things done for the castle, but when they do lay into each other everyone else quickly retreats to chambers — not so much from fear or courtesy as to avoid feeling contaminated by the sorry spectacle as their insults reach lower and lower. Zamra would never under ordinary circumstances associate with a man like Anastazi, but occasionally she grows tired of being pariah and seeks him out for a game of chess or some such activity. Mahtiel enjoys the dubious honor of being the love of Anastazi's unlife. Or at least she does when she's safely asleep; during the rare times that she's up, he can barely disguise his terror of her. He tried, once, two centuries ago, to come to Drenis' chamber and "surprise" her as she lay in bed reading. Her reaction nearly broke the Pact. Abdalkutba's many hobbies intrigue Anastazi greatly, and the vizier converses with him amiably enough.

Outside Influence: While Danika is in ultimate charge of procurement and provisioning, she delegates some of the night-to-night work to Anastazi, and as a result he now has a number of mortal contacts that he can use to work his subtle will, largely in Europe and America. So far he hasn't pursued many high ambitions using these tools; he mostly uses them for acquiring objects and people of particular interest to him and exacting petty revenge against whomever of the Twelve has most recently offended him.

The Deal: Anastazi has asked Nikanuuranu to give him Mahtiel's heart. This isn't precisely within Nikanuuranu's power, but it has done its best. It projects Anastazi's awareness into Mahtiel's more erotic dreams of Rothriel and assists him in taking on enough semblance of her long-dead paramour to play the part. The entirely justified fear of what Mahtiel would do if she ever found out his little secrets haunts him, but he can't help himself. In all honesty, however, he should

be just as afraid of the possible response of Bufo, who has often shed a tear of romantic sympathy as he watched what he assumed to be an authentic dream-tryst between the ancient lovers.

Image: A less than perfect specimen when Embraced (that is, middle-aged and slightly paunchy), Anastazi has since used his powers of Vicissitude to remold himself into his idea of a paragon of masculine beauty — rather akin to Michelangelo's David. Between that and his use of Presence, he's enough to cause a Toreador to gape. He retains his original complexion, wavy medium-brown hair and hazel eyes, and dresses beautifully to match, often in Romanian folk costume or Western suits of old-fashioned cut. Unfortunately, his fellows in the castle seem immune to his charms.

Roleplaying Hints: A sensualist to your Ruthven soul, you prefer your bed soft, your music canned, and your vessels compliant, submissive and sometimes even drugged; nor do you make any effort to pretend to more dignified tastes. Just smirk at anyone who takes offense at this, particularly among these unfortunate new arrivals. You pamper yourself, you say, because no one else around here is going to do it for you. You move and speak with hard-studied aristocratic grace upon first meeting new guests, but easily relax into your usual roistering self once the vitae is flowing.

Self-Destruct Button: For all his indulgences and adornment, Anastazi is consumed with self-loathing. Rather than try to compete with those he secretly fears to be his moral betters, he spends his existence in an unspoken protest against the ascetic contemplation they revere. But if someone of skill were to start luring him further along — whether a manipulative Setite or a Sabbat "Albigensian" engaged in a well-meaning conversion effort — he would quickly degenerate into complete bestiality. He hasn't the spiritual where-withal or the steadfast self-confidence to actually follow a Path of Enlightenment, and trying to do so would surely lead to his doom. Alternatively, exposing his role in Rothriel's death or his secret intrusions on Mahtiel might lead Danika, Mahtiel, Demetrius, Bufo, or indeed any number of Cainites in the castle to want to murder him.

Sire: Danika

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Generation: 6th

Embrace: Circa 1460

Apparent Age: Early 20s

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 6

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Diplomacy 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Hagglng 2, Intimidation 3, Intrigue 5, Leadership 3, Scrounging 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Etiquette 3, Firearms 1, Performance (Acting) 3, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Clan Knowledge (Tzimisce) 2, Expert (Technology) 3, Finance 3, Linguistics (Romanian, Latin, German) 2, Science 1, Seneschal

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Koldunic Sorcery (Earth) 5, Potence 1, Presence 2, Vicissitude 4

Other Koldunic Paths: Spirit 5, Water 1, Wind 3

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 6, Herd 4, Retainers 5

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 2

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 6

Notes: Danika has taught Anastazi a number of the koldunic rituals she knows, though probably not as many as she would have if they got along better. He is unlikely to know any ritual that she doesn't (though he would certainly welcome the opportunity to learn). See the Appendix for a description of Lesser Trigger, Anastazi's advanced koldunic ritual.

VENTRUE

CRET, THE BITTER-ENDER

Childe of Mithras, childe of Ventrue

Background: In life Cret was known as Cretheus, a scholar from the Greek city of Corinth. Like many savants of his age, he toured Egypt and the Persian Empire in search of the knowledge. After nine years studying arithmetic, geometry, astrology, medicine, law and other arcane arts, Cretheus learned of a competition held in the city of Ecbatana. A Persian vassal offered a great prize to the sage who could best all others in cleverness and argument. After a month trading conundrums, Cretheus won the competition. Then he learned the contest's true sponsor and purpose. The elder vampire who would later take the name of Mithras Embraced the Greek Sophist, blood bound him and made him his vizier.

Cretheus served Mithras for the next 600 years. He learned all the esoteric lore that the soldierly Ventrue thought he might need, but that bored him. That included blood magic. Cretheus learned the ancient style of Thaumaturgy called Dur-An-Ki, "Master of



Heaven and Earth." The sophist also stayed abreast of Greek philosophy and adapted its ideas to magical use as well. When his sire decided to exploit the nascent religion of Mithraism, Cretheus supplied the arcane mysteries and magical power to back up the Methuselah's instinct for drama and ritual. For a few centuries, Mithraism became one of the more popular religions in the Roman Empire.

As the Roman Empire declined, Mithras wearied and decided to slumber off the weight of a few centuries. He directed his vizier to manage the cult and wake him when the next empire rose. Cretheus left his master sleeping in the frontier province of Britain and returned east.

Within a century, Cretheus failed at his first charge. While Cretheus himself spent a decade in torpor, the Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity and made it the official religion of the Roman Empire. Mithraism rapidly declined after that. Cretheus didn't care much; he preferred his magical research and personal quest for transcendence. The occult philosophy of the time taught that a magician could attain a mystic union with the divine through trances and magic rituals. Cretheus had grown weary of fighting the Beast century after century. He wanted to cast off his Beast and ascend into Heaven. None of his magical experiments worked... but he learned of an ancient vampire who had traveled to the farthest East and returned with the secret of transcending the curse of undead. After nine years of search, Cretheus found Saulot and became one of his most ardent disciples. As for Mithras? After meeting Saulot, Cretheus' blood oath to his sire faded

like mist. Mithras could sleep until Gehenna for all Cretheus cared.

Cretheus dutifully wrote down every maxim and parable that dropped from Saulot's lips and studied them for hidden meanings. He devised spiritual exercises for himself. He also talked with Saulot's other disciples and traded progress reports on their search for Saulot's mysterious transcendence. Cretheus — now called Cret by younger Cainites who didn't know older languages and proper pronunciations — attracted disciples of his own, whom he taught as best he could. He had not found Golconda himself, but he knew he was on the right track, and he could share what Saulot himself had said. Cret vowed to carry on Saulot's great work after his destruction by Tremere. He knew that his master saw the future; Saulot must have known what would happen and chosen it for some reason. Surely, he had already provided what his disciples needed to know.

When Cret found Mokur, he realized that the far-traveled Methuselah was the next best thing to Saulot himself. The Ventrue set out to record Mokur's own parables and teachings as well as what the Salubri remembered of his sire. Cret supplied the organizational skill to attract students and manage a group. He quickly built a network of contacts that spanned Europe, spreading the message of Golconda. Cret's own analytical epistles attracted disciples by explaining why a Cainite would benefit from this ill-defined, mystical state. His proselytizing and efforts to protect Saulot's descendants and disciples from the Tremere led him to Danika and Rothriel, then Pentweret, Eshmunamash and other Inconnu. When the countess offered her castle as a home for the academy, Cret felt the breath of destiny upon him — and when the Assamite sage Abdalkutba proclaimed the Twelve the world's best hope against Gehenna, Cret vowed to fulfill that destiny.

Getting into the Pact: Cret did not fear the Tremere attacks upon Hunedoara until Mokur's destruction. Until that night, the Ventrue felt sure that the Twelve's magic surpassed anything the Usurpers could muster. Saulot once told him, though, that he needed faith as well as reason. Cret had faith in the Twelve and in the prophecies of Abdalkutba. He knew of Powers that surpassed any magic of the Blood. Cret applied all his skills to persuade the other elders to join in his desperate plan. He did not tell everyone what the plan required. How did one death compare to saving the world? One of Cret's own servants even volunteered to become the victim. And so Cret, Master of

Heaven and Earth, drew the circles and spoke the words that opened the gates of Hell.

Since Then: Cret tried to keep himself above the cliques and rivalries of the other Inconnu. That lasted about a week. He continues his spiritual exercises but they do not preserve his Humanity any longer. Cret occasionally works on an ever-expanding commentary on the *Analects of Saulot* and *Analects of Mokur*, but spends a great deal of time devising intricate justifications for his own opinions and refutations of everyone else's. His chief activity, however, consists of hunting the Antediluvians and their Methuselah agents through his Thaumaturgy. Cret cares little about uncovering the lesser minions of the Ancients; he hopes to destroy the Ancients themselves through masterstrokes of Thaumaturgy and mortal dupes. It bothers him to no end that he cannot locate his own sire: His divinations say both that Mithras does not exist but was never destroyed.

Relations with Others: Cret and Hill are archrivals. Hill tries to outdo or undercut his sire; Cret tries to prove that he remains the master. He deeply dislikes Zamra and Pentweret, who lose no opportunity to challenge his pretensions of infallibility. The Ventrue merely irritates most of the others, and they irritate him by refusing his guidance. He offers unfailing courtesy to the countess as their hostess, but they often butt heads beneath polite phrases. Cret and Abdalkutba share a desire for ultimate knowledge, however, and often work together.

Outside Influence: Cret employs a variety of rituals to view people and places from afar. For simplicity, Storytellers can assume that Cret can use his Disciplines and Path powers on anyone, anywhere in the world. He also summons a wide variety of elemental minions such as dryads (tree spirits), naiads (ocean spirits) and other nature-spirits from Greek myth, as well as the plague-spirits, ghuls and jinn of Middle Eastern legend. He seldom employs mortal minions.

Cret retains contact with a tiny cult of Ventrue Mithraists. They feed him information about Cainite affairs and new developments in Thaumaturgy. In return, Cret occasionally casts high-level rituals on their behalf. His other Contacts are all spirits.

The Ventrue feeds only upon persons of high intelligence and learning. His vessels must have a rating of 3 or higher in their Intelligence, and have one Knowledge at least. The Twelve's procurer finds him impoverished graduate students. They extend his knowledge base; Cret often talks to them before or after feeding. Thanks to Cret's Presence, his four Retainers think he's wonderful, the greatest intellect

in the world. Cret also troubles the procurer to find him reference books on a wide variety of liberal arts and sciences.

The Deal: Cret wants absolute knowledge — to see God and speak to him face to face. The demon could not provide that, so Cret settled for knowledge of other secret and divine matters. Thanks to the Demon's lore about spirits, angles and demons, Cret researches rituals in half the time that any other thaumaturge requires. (See **Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy** or **Blood Sacrifice: The Thaumaturgy Companion** for rules about researching rituals.) Cret does not enjoy relaying his requests through Anastazi Ruthven.

Image: Cret stands 5'6" tall. He has a narrow face with a sharp chin but full lips. Cret wears his dark, straight hair pulled back, though a few locks tend to come loose and fall forward. He updates his clothing about once a century. Currently he wears black suits with white dress shirts and gold cufflinks. If it weren't for his shoulder-length hair, he'd look like a natty 1930s boulevardier.

Roleplaying Hints: Never, ever admit you are wrong. No matter what argument or evidence anyone else presents, dispute it, even if you have to question the nature of logic itself. Saulot warned you that your greatest challenge would be overcoming your own cleverness, but he's not here and you have to keep the Pact going. The others are breaking; you need to keep them in line. If you give an inch, the pact fails and the demon takes you all.

Self-Destruct Button: Cret's great weakness lies in his intellectual pride. He can rationalize away mistakes (though he loathes admitting even that). If someone made him look willfully blind and stupid, and rubbed his nose in it, he'd explode... especially if the mockery came from someone he knew was far inferior to him in intellect.

A subtler crisis-point waits in Cret's Mithraic ascension-to-god mysticism. His faith holds that magic can lead initiates to the Godhead, where even a vampire might find salvation. Absolute proof that he is Damned, that he can never see God face to face, would crush him into despair. His desire to see God can also draw him into injudicious spiritual experiments — such as evoking a fallen angel.

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: Mithras

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Judge

Generation: 5th

Embrace: circa 430 B.C.

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 8

Social: Charisma 7, Manipulation 7, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 6, Intelligence 8, Wits 7

Talents: Alertness 6, Diplomacy 4, Empathy 4, Expression 6, Intimidation 8, Intrigue 6, Leadership 8, Subterfuge 7

Skills: Crafts (Draftsman) 4, Etiquette 4, Meditation 6, Melee 2, Performance 4

Knowledges: Academics 7, Cryptography 5, Enigmas 7, Expert (Comparative Religion) 4, Investigation 6, Linguistics (many, including English, Classical Greek and Latin) 5, Medicine 2, Occult 8, Research 5, Science 2

Disciplines: Auspex 5, Dominate 7, Fortitude 6, Presence 5, Quietus 2, Thaumaturgy 8

Thaumaturgical Paths: Evil Eye 5, Lure of Flames 4, Elemental Mastery 5, Path of Blood 3, Spirit Manipulation 5, Thaumaturgical Countermagic 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 6, Retainers 4

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 3

Willpower: 8

Notes: Although Cret knows two high-level Dominate powers, we leave them for Storytellers to select from other supplements or invent for themselves. Thaumaturgy supplies Cret's greatest power. The Paths of Elemental Mastery, Spirit Manipulation and Thaumaturgical Countermagic appear in *Guide to the Camarilla*. The Evil Eye Path comes from *Blood Sacrifice: The Thaumaturgy Companion*. It enables Cret to impose several sorts of bad luck on his enemies, from social embarrassment to physical harm. Cret also knows a host of rituals to do nearly anything he wants. He knows the curse-rituals of Soul Disjunction, Platonic Split and Whips of the Erinyes, with Triggers upon them if he wants, and interacts with the outside world using Greater Scrying and Servitor Sending. See the Appendix for these rituals.

HILL, WARRIOR IN SEARCH OF A WAR

Childe of Cretheus, childe of Mithras, childe of Ventrue

Background: At the turn of the 4th century A.D., Cret decided he needed an aide to take over his duties at his Mithraist temple, so he could spend more time on magical research. Cret found his assistant in an Ostrogothic soldier called Hilderic, who had joined a legion (nothing unusual for barbarians) and risen to centurion. As soldiers do, his men abbreviated his



outland name to Hill. More importantly, Hilderic was the youngest man ever to reach the rank of Father, the highest level of Mithraist initiation. Hill's drive and intelligence impressed Cret, and the soldier's situation as a barbarian proving himself to an empire reminded the sorcerer of his own mortal youth. Hill served as Cret's ghoul for a few decades until the sorcerer Embraced him.

After the Mithraic religion collapsed, Cret didn't need an aide anymore so he made the soldier his apprentice in sorcery. They went east so Cret could try learning new developments in Dur-An-Ki. Cret and an Assamite sorcerer traded apprentices for more than a decade. Over the centuries, the Ventrue ancilla would make many journeys east to study under Assamite masters; Hill even helped invent the final power in the Path called Awakening the Steel, before the Crusades made partnerships between Eastern Assamites and Western Ventrue socially awkward.

Hill and his sire gradually drifted apart, especially after Cret became Saulot's disciple. The Inconnu seemed too passive to the soldier, and the Antediluvian threat too remote. Instead, Hill spent 200 years trying to reverse the Dark Ages, with no success whatsoever. He watched the First Crusade and its hideous massacres sickened even his hardened soul. Hill decided maybe the Inconnu had a point about leaving the world to its own devices. Cret welcomed him back. Hill did not conclusively renounce the world, though. He did his best to rescue the Salubri from the Tremere's murderous purge, and struck back more than once himself. Hill knew these actions kept him from Golconda, but the soldier decided that

protecting Saulot's legacy mattered more than his own redemption.

Getting Into the Pact: When the Tremere laid siege to Hunedoara Castle, Hill wanted the elders to fight. He wanted to give the Usurpers a thrashing they would never forget — but the Council of Seven and their Gargoyle legions proved too powerful for the Twelve. Cret proposed the Pact as a strategic retreat and a refuge from which to counterattack. Hill went into the Pact with his eyes open and helped persuade the others Inconnu to accept it.

Since Then: Hill tried to stay loyal to his sire. He defended Cret's choice for a century and a half. In the end, though, he tired of his sire's sophistry. He became one of the most enthusiastic intriguers of the Twelve, always to weaken and oppose his sire. Hill also continued his long-distance harassment of the Tremere and the search for Antediluvian influence.

Relations with Others: Cret and Hill are now bitter enemies, piling up centuries of insults and grudges. The devotion wrought by Hill's blood bond to Cret only makes the sting of mutual hatred all the more sharp. Hill joins any faction that opposes Cret. Everything else is secondary. Mahtiel disgusts him, though, because she gave up the fight.

Outside Influence: Like his sire, Hill uses his Thaumaturgy to spy on the world and manipulate events. Unlike Cret, the younger Ventrue employs mortal minions whom he guides through dream-sendings and equips with talismans. None of these "Retainers" know the true nature of their patron. Hill enjoys plotting campaigns to destroy prominent Tremere or other Kindred whom he believes serve the Antediluvians (knowingly or not).

The Deal: More than anything else, Hill wants to equal his sire. The demon enables him to do this, in part. Once every 50 years, the demon passes one of Cret's rituals to Hill. Thanks to the demon's help, Hill can also summon any spirit known to Cret, except for entities as powerful as the demon itself.

Image: Hill stands 5'9" tall and has an athletic build, with just a hint of paunch. His short-cut red hair turns gray at his temples, and his Embrace caught him in an early stage of male pattern baldness. Since his sire tries to keep up with mortal fashion, Hill chooses anachronistic dress, from the uniform of a Renaissance landsknecht to barbaric skins and furs (which he never actually wore in life).

Roleplaying Hints: You are a soldier with no one to fight except your fellow prisoners, and no mission except to keep them as miserable as you are. Well,

there's the Tremere. Your spirit-minions and sendings harass the clan that made itself your enemy... when Cret doesn't interfere, and when you can find the time between sabotaging Cret and protecting yourself from your fellow Inconnu. Anyone who wants to spite Cret finds you an eager accomplice. (How could he trap you all like this? How could he be so wrong? You thought he was the greatest Cainite in the world!)

Hill can feed on any mortal... but only after the mortal engages in a fight, or at least a vigorous sparring match. The Twelve's procurer finds athletic servants for the castle and Hill trains them to guard the castle as well as perform domestic duties.

Self-Destruct Button: Hill remains sensitive about being a "barbarian" among Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and other "civilized" people, but that's no longer a point of actual rage — more of snide contempt for anyone who brings it up. His Kindred-Oedipal fixation on Cret provides his chief weak point, though one that might help them both under the right circumstances: Hill wants to outdo Cret and see him fail, but Hill cannot imagine his sire ever giving up. Seeing Cret crushed would deeply shock him. Whether this results in complete, bitter contempt and hatred or reconciliation between them would depend on circumstances. On the other hand, Cret has never utterly humiliated his childe. Doing so would drive Hill to frenzy. Hill despises quitters and calling him one could provoke his temper.

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: Cret

Nature: Soldier

Demeanor: Rebel

Generation: 6th

Embrace: about 340 A.D.

Apparent Age: early 40s

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6

Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 6

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 5, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Animal Ken 3, Archery 2, Etiquette 4, Meditation 4, Melee 6, Performance 4, Ride 3, Stealth 3, Survival 5

Knowledges: Academics 6, Camarilla Lore 3, Enigmas 4, Expert (Military) 3, Investigation 3, Law 2, Linguistics (numerous, including English and German) 4, Medicine 1, Occult 6, Politics 3

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 4, Celerity 1, Dominate 5, Fortitude 6, Presence 6, Thaumaturgy 6

Thaumaturgical Paths: Awakening of the Steel 5, Elemental Mastery 4, Lure of Flames 3, Spirit Manipulation 4

Backgrounds: Herd 2, Retainers 5

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 5, Courage 5

Morality: Humanity 4

Willpower: 7

Notes: Hill has one high-level Presence power. We leave it for Storytellers to define for themselves.

The Path of Awakening of the Steel is found in **Clanbook: Assamite**. In brief, it enables a variety of magical feats of swordplay: Sensing who else used a blade; immunity to disarming; destroying armor; deflecting bullets and other missiles; and, bypassing all supernatural defenses, at cost of losing all supernatural enhancements on the attack and damage.

Hill can also send his magics around the world, though his rituals lack Cret's power. He knows the curse-rituals of Soul Disjunction and Platonic Split, with Triggers upon them, and interacts with the outside world using Greater Scrying and Servitor Sending. See the Appendix for these rituals. Hill knows most of the rituals that Cret knows, up to Level Six; he knows only a few Level Seven rituals.

MINIONS

Many people serve one of the Twelve without knowing it, or at least knowing exactly who—or what—they serve. We encourage Storytellers to create their own minions for the Twelve, based on the brief descriptions in this book and the needs of their chronicle. For extra fun, examine the characters you've already introduced to your chronicle and retroactively make one of them a servant or dupe of an Inconnu. Your players will think you planned it that way from the beginning!

As an example, we present the ghoul Dobos, who plays an important role in one of the sample plots for bringing characters to Hunedoara. Storytellers can also use Dobos in any other story they use to draw characters to the castle. You can also change which of the Twelve he serves, if that better suits your chronicle.

We also provide Traits for the seraph, a spirit of flame that Cret and Hill often use to attack their undead enemies. You can use the seraph as a model for designing other spirit servitors. The wraiths described on pp. 282–3 of **Vampire: The Masquerade** provide other models: Just give the spirit dots in whatever

Disciplines or Thaumaturgy paths seem appropriate. For instance, a weather-spirit would possess the path of Weather Control, while a djinn could certainly use the path of Conjunction (both found in **Guide to the Camarilla**). However, spirits do not need a blood pool or any other sort of Trait to fuel their supernatural powers. Also give every spirit at least three levels of Fortitude to reflect that they are not really made of flesh and blood, or even of earthly matter.

MARKU DOBOS

Background: Marku Dobos grew up in the town of Hunedoara. Like any smart, energetic and ambitious boy in Romania, he sought a career in government. He went to college, joined the Communist Party and denounced a few people to the secret police. In return, he received a clerk's position in Bucharest.

After three years with no promotions, though, Dobos realized that Bucharest was wrong for him. The city held too many other young men with the same ambitions. Instead, he applied for a position back in Hunedoara. Dobos became a junior assistant to the political officer of one of Hunedoara's foundries. He earned several promotions over the next decade. He used his new privileges to acquire a bit more money than his salary provided, and found himself a bit more popular with the town's prostitutes.

Anastazi Ruthven wanted an agent in the local government—a low-ranking but hard-working official. Dobos suited his needs. One morning, the bureaucrat found a handwritten note slid under his apartment door. The note said he had come to the attention of a powerful man. If he wanted to learn more and receive a chance to advance himself, in two night's time he must go to a certain old farmhouse at the edge of town... and show no fear.

The bureaucrat went to the farmhouse. He stood his ground, while a dog—no, a *wolf*—trotted up to him. It carried a small cask with a note attached. The note said, "Drink, and in my service you will know power beyond imagination."

Dobos almost fled then, as his grandmother's tales flitted through his mind. Then he reminded himself that a dutiful Communist did not believe in the Devil or other such fairy-tales. Dobos did believe in power, though. He forced himself to drink the cold blood within the cask. As soon as he stopped gagging, he felt strong, energized, powerful. He bowed deeply to the wolf and promised to serve it or its master well. The prostitutes of Hunedoara fared well that night as Dobos celebrated his new position. He didn't know what that position was, but he expected great things.

Dobos enjoyed his next 10 years. Bats and owls brought him messages and carried his replies to his unseen, unnamed master. Later they arranged to use walkie-talkies and Dobos heard a voice, but still never heard a name. Once a month Dobos walked into the woods to meet a wolf, a bear or some other beast and receive another cask of blood to drink. His master asked for little besides information and the occasional purchase — a shortwave radio, a fine Swiss camera (with night-vision attachments), a pistol and the like. Dobos became an important man in Hunedoara and known to higher officials. If anyone wondered at his superiors' tendency toward illness or sudden urges to retire, they said nothing. As Dobos rose in rank, he found it easier to detour government funds to the bank accounts he set up for his master and himself.

The end of Communism did not mean the end of Dobos' career — but a few years later, his nameless master told him to quit his job. He had more important work. Dobos loyally obeyed his new commands. He traveled through Europe and America, looking for the undead. Only then did he learn that he was called a "ghoul," though he had already suspected that he served a vampire.

Dobos enjoys his life. He loves his master, even though he has never seen his face or learned his name. He understands that no one can force him to tell what he does not know. His work gives him pride. He does not know why it matters so much, but his master would not set him to any unimportant task. He sees more of the world than he ever dreamed. Other countries are strange and wonderful, though the prostitutes are comfortably the same everywhere. Every month, however, his heart lifts as he returns to Hunedoara and his next communion with his unknown god.

Image: Dobos looks like a pale man of slightly less than middle height, with the start of a paunch. He wears his straight black hair slicked over his bald spot and wears dark gray suits that don't quite fit. The bags under his eyes hint at a life of dissipation and indulgence, a similarity between domitor and ghoul that neither Dobos nor Anastazi Ruthven recognizes.

Roleplaying Hints: Speak with a strong Romanian accent and occasional errors in grammar. Treat the vampires you meet with the same courtesy you would show to a secret police officer. Even if you must warn them, do so delicately and politely. After all, they are more powerful than you and the same breed as your master — though of course your master is greater than any of them. Stick to your story and deflect questions about the details, just as you would when talking to a superior who could break you. Do your job well and



eventually your master will grant you even greater rewards.

Domitor: Anastazi Ruthven

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Conformist

Ghouldom: 1978

Apparent Age: 34

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Hagglng 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Firearms 1

Knowledges: Bureaucracy 3, Finance 2, Law 2, Linguistics 2 (English, Hungarian), Vampire Lore 1

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 1, Potence 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Influence 1, Domitor 3, Resources 4

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 3

Morality: Humanity 7

Willpower: 6

Notes: Dobos is still a moderately well-known and influential man in Hunedoara, with Contacts in the city government. The players' characters are also not the only Cainite coterie on his payroll.

SERAPH

Background: The seraph is a spirit of light and flame. The Abrahamic faiths call the seraph an angel, a messenger of the Highest. Maybe so, but Cret and Hill summon seraphim in the name of Shamash,



Helios and other ancient sun-gods, as well as Yahweh and the archangel Gabriel. Seraphim can tell much about the bright spirit-realm from whence they come, but this is not Heaven and they have not seen the face of God. Cret and Hill regard the seraphim as fairly minor solar spirits.

Image: A seraph looks like a winged serpent molded of yellow-white flame, with a crest of pale blue flames running down its back. A typical seraph stretches four feet from nose to tail, with a four-foot wingspan. They can hover in the air without flapping their wings and move with the swift, darting motion of a leaping flame.

Roleplaying Hints: Fire is your essence and your joy. Share it with this cold world in which you find yourself. Your touch transfigures undead flesh to release the spirit trapped within; rejoice to bring this blessing and sing wordless songs of praise in a voice of flutes and trumpets.

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 5, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Acrobatics 4, Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Demolitions 1, Dodge 4, Expert (spirit Realm) 1, Intimidation 4, Performance (Pyrotechny) 4

Equivalent Disciplines/Paths: Auspex 2, Fortitude 4, Lure of Flames 4

Willpower: 6

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Banished

Notes: A seraph's flaming body deals one health level of lethal damage per turn to anything it touches (aggravated to vampires); treat this as the heat of an electrical fire (difficulty 8 to soak). If a seraph coils around an opponent and batters with its wings, it deals two health levels per turn. Don't forget the possibility of Röttschreck!

THE SCLAV, GUARDIAN AND SERVANT OF THE TWELVE

Background: The monstrous creature known only as the Sclav — "slave" — was created by Danika in the 16th century to act as a heavy shock troop when she captured her castle back from the Tremere. The *vozhd* survived the battle mostly intact, so after some repair and healing, Danika kept it around as part of the castle's defense force. After the Pact was enacted (in which it took part in the lottery as if it was a normal mortal), it served as Danika's hunter and watchdog, being able to leave the castle as the other ghouls did, and due to its nature, would obey orders unrestrained by any concept of humanity or mercy.

Standing less than 10 feet high and capable of insinuating itself through many of the doors and passageways of the castle, the Sclav might seem small for one of its legendary kind. However, it can still uproot a tree or rip a Cainite apart barehanded, fell a horse and rider with a single blow, and lift even the castle's massive portcullis. It can lope on all fours at nearly the speed of a horse, devour a man or a sheep in a single sitting, and sleep for weeks at a time when its services are not needed. But the Sclav is also extraordinarily old for a *vozhd* — and its very existence has given rise to a demonic experiment exploring the nature of its fractured, composite soul.

Disregarded by the Twelve as little more than a dumb beast suited only to haul heavy loads or dismember trespassers, the Sclav eagerly listened to the demon's whispers in its restless dreams, for the hybrid monstrosity could sense that part of itself was lost, and it longed for something it could no longer remember — a sense of its own identity. As Nikanuuranu sorted through the *vozhd*'s fragmented memories of its assorted former selves, the Demon likewise sensed the monster's need. At first, Nikanuuranu merely amused itself with piecing together such a complex puzzle. But over the centuries, the experiment has grown more and more fascinating.

Although none of the original donor personalities survived intact, several composite ones have emerged as a result of the demon's patient psychological surgery. And while the Sclav's body and will are bound in

blood, not all of its alternative personas are nearly so biddable.

The Monster Inside

Good Sclav — Good Sclav is the face of the loyal Tzimisce ghou, obedient to its masters, eager for the slightest hint of praise, crushed by a harsh word. It speaks slowly, putting more than two words together with difficulty, and only in medieval Romanian. It speaks of itself in the third person: "Good Sclav. Sclav hungry. Sclav do good." Although a ferocious guardian, it is not very clever, and will take any amount of abuse from its masters. Good Sclav sleeps a good deal, curled up in the rotting hay and leaves it has piled in its lair, or in its "nest" in the Knights' Hall, but when awake, it thinks mostly with its (usually empty) stomach, and like a well-trained dog, is willing to do nearly anything in order to earn its supper. Not a fussy eater, Good Sclav is will devour live prey, a fresh kill, week-old carrion, or Kindred intruders with equal enthusiasm.

Bad Sclav — Bad Sclav is a monster and knows it. It also knows it is a slave, and resents it bitterly. But its anger is tempered with cunning, and so it shows no sign of its hidden rage. Instead, it takes its revenge in small, annoying ways that do not rebound on its own head (at least not to such a degree that it cannot bear). Bad Sclav revels in inflicting terror and pain; it takes any opportunity to hunt for its own supper beyond the castle ruins, or to lure unwary hikers within its domain. At its worst, it may mimic the voice of one of the servants, luring one of them out of the "safe" zones of the castle and into its own clutches — then it releases the helpless mortal outside the safety of the walls and hunts her like a cat with a mouse. Bad Sclav definitely prefers its prey alive... to start. Bad Sclav has a conspirator in its little games: Anastazi finds the bloodthirsty sport seductively fascinating, and has been known to supply mortals for Bad Sclav's amusement himself, not quite aware of how close Bad Sclav sometimes comes to indulging its growing taste for Cainite flesh at his expense. Bad Sclav has a particular taste for Tremere. The mere scent of one of that particular bloodline poking about the castle's visible ruins is usually enough to bring Bad Sclav out to become the dominating personality of the night.

Mortal Shards

Whenever Nikanuuranu's explorations into the Sclav's tangle of memories turn up a strong personality fragment, the demon gifts it with a name. Related fragments then are drawn to the named one like iron shavings to a magnet. None are strong enough yet to overpower the composite personality of the Sclav itself for any length of time; sooner or later, the persona hits



a blank spot in its memories or thought processes, falters, and retreats to regroup. In the past few decades several such personalities have emerged, and have occasionally even shared dominance, using the Sclav's different mouths to talk with the Demon and each other. Of all the Twelve, only Bufo and Abdalkutba are aware of the Sclav's growing conversational abilities. The Nosferatu keeps secrets as a matter of selfishness, and the Assamite vizier is too fascinated by the process to dare the probable repercussions from the other Cainites, none of whom would likely view a sentient *vozh*d that talks to itself as a good thing.

Yusuf — At least two of the unfortunates grafted together to form the Sclav were soldiers, Turkish prisoners of war sold to Danika for whatever use she thought fit. Yusuf is a soldier, with a dark sense of humor and insatiable appetite for women, food and strong drink, even though he admits that it's a sin. He is a Muslim, and can quote the Qur'an, and sometimes even seems to be a bit of a philosopher.

Gyorgi — Gyorgi was an old man, a peasant who had outlived his usefulness as a tiller of the soil. Full of half-remembered proverbs, Gyorgi has a dark and pessimistic view of the world, hating both the Turks and the Szekler lords who turned him out like a dog when he grew too old to work with equal vehemence. He also has vague memories of the peasant revolt, and seeing the impaled corpses of his father and brothers displayed as a warning to them all.

Bogdan — A brutish, bullying former soldier who lost a leg when a wound became severely infected, Bogdan's strength of will was such that his personality

survived the koldunic ritual and flesh-shaping ordeal, but did not come through unscathed. Sullen, suspicious and prone to physical violence when sufficiently frustrated, Bogdan's greatest fear is the loss of other body parts. Sometimes he has sufficient mental control to sense and control other parts of the Sclav's massive body, and sometimes he believes himself crippled and helpless — which does nothing for his temper.

Okulina — A slave girl from the Russias, her strongest characteristic seems to be a dour fatalism about everything. From her point of view, life (such as it is) is a curse, but must nonetheless be faced and endured. Patient and longsuffering, she is still somewhat shy, as if she still worries that she may be beaten if she speaks her mind or argues in any way. Okulina has a soft, sultry voice, and still believes herself capable of flirtation.

Getting into the Pact: The Sclav had no more choice in the matter of the Pact than any other mortal creature in the castle; less, really, due to its nature. It doesn't really comprehend the Pact as anything out of the ordinary, and doesn't think one way or the other about its morality. In fact, it rather looks forward to the night of the ritual, because it's always enlisted to help clean up afterward....

Relations with Others: The Sclav is no longer bound in blood to just Danika, but to the Twelve as a whole. Once a month, it receives its ration of mixed vitae from a number of the Inconnu (not always all of them), and it is almost pathetically eager for it. As a consequence, it will obey orders (in theory) from any of the Twelve. It does, however, have favorites among its many masters. It still reveres Danika as its creator, and Anastazi as the one who feeds it. Abdalkutba has long found the *vozhd* to be of particular interest, and while the Sclav may not understand everything the vizier says, it does like the company and being talked to like a real person. It also has had a long understanding of sorts with Bufo, the only creature in the castle who is nearly as shunned and reviled as itself.

The Sclav's relationship with the mortals of Hunedoara Castle has its ups and downs; they are pretty much all terrified of the monster, and know all too well what its favorite food is. Consequently, they treat it with the respect one gives a chained tiger, avoid its usual haunts, and bribe its good will with the leftovers from their own table. The Sclav has no qualm about accepting table scraps from any mortal bold enough to offer them. It has been known to beg when it recognizes those who have fed it in the past, but can then grow irritated if no treat is forthcoming; many

mortals keep some stale bread or a piece of fruit handy if they must pass near the Sclav's accustomed haunts. That the Sclav is also on speaking terms with the demon, not even Danika knows.

Outside Influence: None.

Image: The Sclav is a hulking tower of muscle, bone and sinew patched together from a handful of hardy survivors, merged into one corpus through Tzimisce gifts and Koldunic Sorcery. When fully erect, it stands nearly nine feet high, balancing on powerfully muscled legs and splayed, clawed feet; it sports two pairs of arms, its fingers ending in hooked talons. The lower pair of arms are long and provide additional support and mobility, as the Sclav normally moves by supporting the weight of its upper body on the knuckles of its lower arms like an ape. Its hide is leathery, scarred and tough, and sports a number of bony spikes along its spine and limbs. Its numerous vital organs are protected behind bony plating reinforcing its ribs, chest and back. Its broad head is set into its shoulders with barely any hint of a neck, but it sports two additional half-formed faces, one on either side, so its field of vision goes nearly all around its head. It can, if it wishes, use all three mouths to speak in eerie unison, though only its primary maw is equipped with jagged, wolfish teeth.

Roleplaying Hints: You don't understand that you're a monster. You do know you are big, strong, and that you can easily strike terror into the hearts of mortals, and sometimes that gives you a savage sense of satisfaction. Thinking is not your strong point. You exist in the moment, rarely mulling over the past or speculating about the future, and filling your stomach is usually your highest priority. As Good Sclav you are submissive and eager to please, accepting both abuse and praise with equal enthusiasm. As Bad Sclav you are vicious, ill-tempered and cunning, easily provoked to destructive fury. Your human shards are weak yet, and either of your dominant personalities can overwhelm them; those plaintive tormented souls are free to emerge only when you are calm, fed and resting.

Self-Destruct Button: The Sclav is above all things a very old ghoul, and hopelessly addicted to vampire vitae. Its life expectancy, should the vitae stop flowing every month, would be only a matter of days before its ancient flesh began to decay along with the spells that gave it its unnatural life, and Final Death would come soon afterward.

Domitor: Danika Ruthven

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Monster

Ghouldom: 1498

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Physical: Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 7

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 5, Brawl 4, Intimidation 6, Multiple Attack 4 (vozhd get 10 extra dice to divide among their Attack Dice Pools, though no individual attack may exceed the vozhd's Dexterity + Brawl Dice Pool)

Knowledges: Linguistics 1 (Sclav speaks and understands a medieval dialect of Romanian, but its mortal shards speak their native languages as well)

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Potence 6, Fortitude 5, *immune* to Dominate, Presence and Animalism

Virtues: Conscience 0, Self-Control 2, Courage 5

Morality: Road of the Beast 6

Willpower: 10

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, -5

Blood Pool: 20/2

Notes: The Sclav knows nothing of Roads, Humanity or Paths of Enlightenment, but it does have a kind of free will and limited initiative to act without direct orders. The Dark Ages Road of the Beast (or the Sabbat Path of the Feral Heart) is as close to describing its morality as anything else.

THE DEMON NIKANUURANU, DECEIVER AND DECEIVED

Background: What can one say of a being so ancient and powerful that the worst wiles of the Tremere — or centuries-old Cainite sorcerers — provide only dark amusement? The demon known as Nikanuuranu was not pleased at first to realize that some paltry sorcerer had managed to crack the somatic code of its True Name — and yet, the opportunity to better its own situation, even in a pact with a cabal of cursed undead, could not be cast aside. It was, after all, a considerable improvement from where it had been before, and from the Castle's spires, Nikanuuranu could see the sky and the stars for the first time in uncounted centuries. Was any price too high for such glory, even paid in mortal blood?

Nikanuuranu has had time to answer that question. A spirit of the sky, of the stars and their patterns, of light and illusion, it is now imprisoned on earth, its essence bound into the very stones of the castle as long as the Pact shall last. At first, it was more than willing to offer anything to the Twelve to keep the Pact running. Over the years, it has made secret individual covenants with almost all the Twelve in order to encourage their continued compliance. Now, how-

ever, Nikanuuranu is simply *bored*. The Pact goes on and on, year after year; the Twelve actually seem to enjoy their misery. Unfortunately, Nikanuuranu cannot break the Pact itself. As long as the conditions it set in the original agreement continue to be met, it is required to obey them. The Twelve have the free will to break those conditions, if they dare. The demon Nikanuuranu does not.

The demon's spiritual essence permeates the Castle; it sees and hears everything that goes on within. It is noncorporeal, and can appear with something resembling a physical form in the material world only during the Pact renewal ritual. It can, with some difficulty, affect the physical world, but primarily prefers to constrain its interactions more to the realm of the spirit world, or of dreams. In those non-material realms, it can take any form it desires — but rarely desires its own.

Getting into the Pact: Nikanuuranu could not resist Cret's summons. Even if it could have, its own insatiable curiosity would have drawn it in regardless. It could, and did, haggle over the terms of the Pact, however, seeking to weaken whatever real control Cret had by incorporating conditions to the Pact that allow it considerable freedom of action. Now it regrets some of its choices, but there is nothing it can do about them.

Since Then: Nikanuuranu has kept the castle hidden using illusions and subtle spells that keep the more idle-minded visitors from ever stumbling on the site. It has also made additional deals with various members of the Twelve, presenting itself as the holder of many gifts and pleasures. It regrets that, too; some of its gifts were somewhat extravagant in terms of its own power, and now Nikanuuranu realizes that it baited the honey trap all too well. Now to give up the Pact also means giving up the demon's personal gifts, and there are some among the Twelve who are not likely to want that.

Relations with Others: Nikanuuranu can insinuate itself into the dreams of anyone, mortal or undead, within the castle, appearing as anyone at all. In this way it presented its offers, and both taunts and encourages those who have bound themselves in pacts with it. However, it communicates in this fashion at its own whim. When a mortal or Inconnu want to ask for something, they must go through its agent, Anastazi Ruthven. Nikanuuranu quickly saw the weaknesses in Anastazi's moral fiber, and finds him far easier to manipulate than Cret. It amuses the demon to give such a power to the youngest and weakest of the proud Inconnu, so that they must go to the one they despise



in order to bargain for what they want. And if nothing else, Anastazi is an accomplished haggler. Nikanuuranu reserves a particular hatred for Cret, who called it forth and still holds its True Name over it like a hammer — the demon truly hates and fears someone who has the power to bind it.

Roleplaying Hints: You existed at the dawn of creation and knew the names of all the stars; you saw Adam and Eve fall, and then so did you. Now you are a spirit bound to the material plane, trapped as much as those you once bargained with for your freedom. Your insatiable curiosity brought you into the Pact, and now it binds you as well. You know how to obey the letter and circumvent the spirit of such a compact, and if you see an advantage that may yet gain you your freedom and destroy the one who bound you, you will not let the moral weaknesses of lesser beings stand in your way. You like having control over others, so promise them anything in order to gain it; once they are indebted to you, they're in your power until you release them.

Attributes: Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 9, Essence 22

Charms: Nikanuuranu has the equivalent of 8 dots in any vampiric Discipline the Storyteller wishes it to use. It spends Essence where a vampire would spend blood.

Nikanuuranu is also immune to all effects of fire, and cannot be deceived by any kind of illusion or manipulative power (Chimerstry, Dominate, Presence).

NIKANUURANU: THE FALLEN

You do not need **Demon: the Fallen** to run Nikanuuranu, as its abilities can be as easily described as high-level Kindred Disciplines or simply never defined at all in terms of game mechanics; the demon can be given any power that serves the Storyteller's needs, so long as it remains bound by the considerations of the Pact. It needn't be one of the Fallen at all.

However, for those who wonder how Nikanuuranu might translate as one of the Fallen (or more precisely, the Earthbound), we provide the following suggestions:

House: Neberu (Fiend)

Rank: Lord

Lores: Portals 5, Light 5, Humanity 2

Torment: 5

Faith: 12

Note: Nikanuuranu cannot reap faith from the Twelve themselves, but does benefit tremendously from the Ritual every year, due to the number of mortals present. The pact as it binds the mortals of Hunedoara is its real source of power, not the Twelve.

Weakness: Like all Demons, Nikanuuranu is vulnerable to the holy, such as holy water, crosses, and prayers when wielded by someone with True Faith.

DEMON ATTRIBUTES

Willpower: This trait allows demons to take action, things like attacking or moving through the spirit world, much like physical entities use the Dexterity Attribute. Resisted Willpower rolls are used to resolve conflicts that occur in dreams or in the spirit realm.

Rage: Rage is a spirit's passion, inner fire, and hunger to survive. They use Rage to attack and inflict injury on others, much like physical entities use the Strength Attribute. Rage also determines a spirit's toughness, like the Stamina Attribute.

Gnosis: Gnosis measures a spirit's awareness, and spirits use it for all Social and Mental rolls, as well as most Charm rolls.

Essence: A spirit's Essence equals the total of its other three Traits and is used to power Charms, similar to a vampire's blood pool.

SAULOT, CATALYST OF THE CRUCIBLE

Ancient beyond reckoning, incredibly powerful, immeasurably wise, and finally free in the body of his murderer: The Antediluvian walks the earth again. What

his greater plans are he does not reveal — in fact, he does not even reveal his presence, not even to one of the few survivors of his own blood. Yet he has a purpose at Hunedoara, a purpose he believes is critical now that the Final Nights have begun. Some of the Twelve were known to Saulot once; some listened to his words and strove to follow them. Since that time, they have fallen, fallen far from their goal. But the Antediluvian has a purpose for them still. Saulot has finished with interfering directly in the unlives of others, however — what choices they make now are theirs alone.

What Saulot seeks is for the Twelve to face what they have become, to accept their failures and turn away from them, back to the road of Golconda they once traveled. The Antediluvian has chosen a few Kindred to serve as his agents, to break the stalemate in which the Twelve are trapped — one way or another. While Saulot can — and will, in his guise as the mortal servant Stefan — observe what is happening at Hunedoara through various means, he has no intention of interfering with the unfolding of fate. Whether the players' characters succeed or fail, survive or perish, is out of Saulot's hands. Whether the

Saulot has no Traits; the Antediluvian's abilities cannot be measured on the same scale as lesser beings. Saulot could break the Pact with a word and destroy the castle or anyone in it without any difficulty whatsoever. He knows he can do these things.

But he chooses not to. He chooses to watch. He chooses to hold his hand, and let events occur as they may — though he may, deep in his heart, still nourish a tiny grain of that most fragile of human emotions... hope.

Inconnu can save themselves from their doom or not, the Antediluvian no longer exerts any control over them or their situation. It is up to the characters and the Twelve to determine their own fates, even though Gehenna itself may be triggered — or postponed — by their choice.

The demon Nikanuuranu senses Saulot's presence, senses the hand of a great power holding the strands of fate that encompass the Castle and its denizens, including Nikanuuranu itself. Desperate to be free of the pact, but not willing to return to the Pit, the demon watches as well — and waits.





CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROADS TO HUNEDOARA (PLOT LINES)

For all their wonder and tragedy, power and pathos, the Inconnu of Hunedoara do not matter unless actual players' characters interact with them. This rather complicated chapter presents a general storyline with numerous options.

You can bring characters to Hunedoara in different ways, for different reasons. The first section of the chapter presents a wide variety of story options. You can pick a reason for the characters to seek Hunedoara and ways they can find it. The Twelve meddle in the world in various ways; we describe activities that can attract the characters' attention, as well as reasons why an Inconnu might deliberately lure a coterie to the castle.

The chapter continues with two sample storylines, one for a Sabbat pack and one for a Camarilla or an anarch coterie. They give examples of how you can flesh out the skeleton of a plot. Each one comes with its own set of options so you can adapt them for different coterie.

The next section of the chapter deals with meeting the Twelve and discovering the secrets of the castle. It also details the growing danger to the characters as the rancor among the Twelve escalates to an explosion. Wittingly or not, the characters may push the Inconnu to a crisis — or they may try to defuse the situation and lead the Twelve out of their hellish pact.

The final section describes possible resolutions to the story. The coterie can find itself in a deadly maelstrom of sorcerous vengeance and witness the

castle's doom. They can also bring a happier ending, though not necessarily an entirely hopeful one.

The road to Hunedoara beckons....

GETTING TO THE CASTLE

Physically speaking, characters face no difficulty in reaching Hunedoara. Several roads and a rail line connect the town to the rest of the world. The castle is an hour's walk from the edge of town, or 15 minutes by dirt-bike — if you know the way. None of the trails through the wooded hills are large enough for automobiles. The real question is *why* characters would come to the castle.

ACCIDENT

Could the characters stumble on the castle without intending it? We include this option only to explain why it presents problems. Giving characters a reason to visit Transylvania is the easy part. They could seek sites of ancient but still powerful magic, elder Cainites with valuable information (perhaps a Cainite "ancestor") or records and relics of the early Tremere — to list only a few options. Whatever the characters seek, the trail takes them through Hunedoara. The town is too large and too modern for such horror-movie staples as "The bridge is out, you'll



have to spend the night" — or rather, day — but an inventive Storyteller can concoct a reason to hold the coterie in town for a while. For instance, Lupines might watch the road, unnoticed by mortals but all too ready to slaughter Kindred who travel by night; or Gargoyle minions of the Tremere can patrol the skies around the border of Hunedoara county.

Unless one of the characters has a passion for ruins or long walks in the woods, however, no one would have any reason to go near the castle. Still, you could perhaps give the characters a reason to blunder about the forest without too obviously leading them by the nose. Then they have to get past the powerful veil of Obfuscate and illusion cast by the demon. The castle's aura subtly deflects people around it. Only a person who lacked physical or mental control of his movements could pass the belt of illusion and see the castle as it is.

If you can think of a way to get your characters hang-gliding at night, so a sudden stiff wind can blow them onto the castle grounds, more power to you. A character in frenzy, Röttschreck or running in blind panic from Lupines might blunder into the castle as well. Overall, though, getting the characters to Hunedoara Castle without anyone intending them to go there requires a series of implausible events. It's easier all around if *someone* wants the characters to find the castle.

SEARCHING

The characters themselves could seek Hunedoara Castle without knowing what it holds or even that it still exists. Such a storyline presents difficulties, but not impossible ones.

WHY?

Before anything else, the characters need a reason to seek the castle. The characters can seek the castle on their own behalf or as agents of someone else. For instance, a prince who seeks his mortal granddaughter's murderer or an archbishop hunting an obscure Noddist text might assign the task to a trusted coterie or pack. Some basic options include:

- **Treasure Hunt:** Give the characters a hint that the long-vanished castle held something valuable. Cret, Eshmunamash and other powerful members of the Inconnu were not so unknown back in the 15th century. An old legend or rumor might place a vial of a saint's blood at the castle, or a book of Gehenna prophecies. Just learning that a Methuselah or a seeker of Golconda once dwelled in a ruined castle could

inspire some characters to search. Perhaps some clue remains in a long-concealed crypt...?

For thaumaturges, the castle's location itself possesses value. Danika Ruthven built Hunedoara atop a natural site of occult power — one reason why the Tremere wanted the castle so badly. The castle is forgotten; the site is not. Old records might inspire an ambitious Tremere to visit Hunedoara. The Sabbat's young (or old...) crop of Tzimisce *koldun* could seek the castle's site for the same reason.

- **Revenge:** Some of the Twelve meddle in mortal and Cainite affairs. Sometimes their meddling hurts people. Sabbat who see half their pack mysteriously destroyed could try to punish whoever did it. So might Camarilla or independent Kindred, if someone or something slew their mortal or undead loved ones.

- **Recovery:** The elders of Hunedoara may bring objects, mortals or Kindred to the castle as part of their plans. A stolen Cainite relic or a person strangely vanished might prompt characters to pursue the missing thing or person.

- **Fortean:** A few of the Twelve can project magical effects around the world. These can cause various sorts of Fortean events. A witness could think a spirit minion was a space alien. A magical murder could look like spontaneous human combustion, or leave some equally bizarre trace. Lights in the sky, misplaced objects (like the classic rain of fish) and other anomalies would also suggest magic to any thaumaturge worth his salt. Excitable Kindred might see portents of Gehenna. Either way, a prince, regent or other authority might want characters to investigate... and make sure they are not in danger.

How?

The Twelve do their best, but even they cannot cover their tracks perfectly. Clever and determined characters can find a road to Hunedoara.

- **Historical Research:** It's not easy to erase a castle from history. Old records scattered through southeastern Europe mention the castle of John Hunyadi, a pivotal figure in the region's history. Historical accounts of the castle's destruction are vague and inconsistent. A person who researched the castle might find the very lack of information suspicious. Why has no archeologist at least mapped the ruins? When something drops out of history so suddenly, a clever Cainite suspects that an elder wants to hide something.

- **Agents of the Twelve:** Some of the Inconnu need mortal or Cainite agents to work their will. Characters can gain information from them. They can

interrogate a captured minion, follow one who escapes or backtrack one who dies. Mundane travel leaves a paper and electronic trail. The Twelve generally work through cutouts, subcontractors or conditioned dupes, but one agent can lead to another minion or a clue to who's responsible.

- **Information Brokers:** Some Cainites possess vast reserves of obscure, arcane or secret information. That may include past Methuselah residents of Eastern European castles. The Nosferatu offer the most famous information service among the Damned, but the Followers of Set are not far behind them in vending peculiar lore. The Tremere collectively know a lot, too, but seldom share information with outsiders. Europe also holds elder vampires who might recall rumors of an Inconnu castle in Transylvania. All these potential sources of information demand payment... which can lead to a story or two as the characters scramble to supply the cash, services or boons that the informant demands.

- **Supernatural:** Thaumaturges may consult supernatural information sources, such as divination spells or oracular spirits. Some vampires of the 14th and 15th generation now show an uncanny intuition about the Jyhads of other Cainites. The plots of the Twelve qualify. Such "thin-blooded seers" are rare but they too can supply leads. The Dementation power called Eyes of Chaos can also pull information from nowhere: Whether the characters trust a crazy Malkavian is up to them. Plain old Auspex can supply hints too — at least nudging a character to guess that a theft, disappearance or other event is more important than it seems.

Supernatural methods should never give a clear and complete answer, but they can supply clues and point characters in the right direction. For instance, an oracular demon might say, "The murderer is One among Twelve, disciples of One, protected by One, at the castle of the raven king." Someone who researches old European royalty might learn that the Hunyadi later changed their name to Corvin (crow).

- **Technology:** The demon has tremendous power but it isn't infallible. The veil cast over the castle prevents detection by any natural or supernatural means available in the early 16th century. The 21st century has other options. The castle does not appear on photographs or video monitors, which are just another form of sight... but it shows up just fine to a person who wears infrared vision gear. (Luckily for the Twelve, the Romanian Army never did night maneuvers near Hunedoara.) The castle also appears on radar, seismic surveys and other high-tech means of

detection. For instance, the Romanian oil ministry conducted a seismic survey in the Hunedoara region. The geologists set off explosions and the shock waves bounced back from different rock layers. The geologists noticed some sort of pit or cavern nearby — the cellars of Hunedoara — but it wasn't oil, so they ignored it. The oil ministry still keeps the seismic maps on file. If the characters can find a servant on a mission outside the castle, they might be able to tag him secretly with a radio beacon and follow the tag to the castle.

- **Obfuscate.** The ward that hides the castle is essentially a very powerful Obfuscate effect. It has one small, unexpected side effect: Cainites who use their own Obfuscate powers at the castle's margin are "sucked in." The ward expands to encompass them, and they can see the castle. Any non-Obfuscated Cainite is not affected this way. Once a character sees the castle, though, he can guide other characters to it.

CALLED

The characters most easily find the castle if one of the Twelve actually wants them to come. For some reason — we'll discuss that later — one of the elders in the castle has some use for a group of capable (or gullible) Kindred. How the elder draws them in can be very simple or as complicated as you want.

INVITATION

The absolute simplest method is for one of the Twelve to invite the characters to Hunedoara. The Twelve can establish communications by several methods, from messages projected into a character's dreams to hired couriers with plane tickets and a few padded packing crates. The Inconnu might not necessarily tell the truth about who she is or why she wants some neonates to visit Romania. All of the Twelve are canny enough to offer stories calculated to appeal the characters and their interests (or suspicions). The pitch could range from something honest like, "I hear you want to learn about Golconda. I can take you to an expert," to something utterly mendacious like, "The angel in my dream said I'd find Allison's killer in Transylvania."

SUMMONING

Not all the Twelve need to ask politely, either. Whether through powerful Disciplines or Thaumaturgy, some of the elders can force a Cainite to come to them... or even a whole group. The other characters might see their comrade stiffen and say, "Romania. I have to go to Romania," before he hurries away.

An elder without such magical methods could simply kidnap a character whom she wants. The characters wake up one evening to find their comrade gone. Fortunately, the elder's agents had to hire movers, buy air-freight tickets and otherwise leave a trail of witnesses and documents. Maybe the whole pack or coterie wakes up already in transit.

PLAYED

Elder Cainites often prefer not to show their hand so openly. Neonates might tell other Kindred about their strange invitation. Kidnapping a Cainite requires minions who know at least something of the master's plan. No one can talk, however, if they do not actually know what they do. Many among the Twelve might prefer to draw in characters through a cunning deception. The characters think they follow their own plan, but actually, they follow a series of lures laid by an elder in Hunedoara.

Once again, the elder calculates his deception to appeal to the characters' personalities. Necessary clues appear, but not too easily. The characters find a minion who takes his orders from someone in the town of Hunedoara. An article in a magazine describes the town's scenic attractions and mentions that a castle once stood nearby. A hired information broker produces a tale about a magically hidden castle of Inconnu.

The elder attracts the characters through the same motives that would impel the coterie to seek the castle on their own: greed, revenge, curiosity, fear and so on. The difference lies in the ease with which the characters find the clues to their goal, and the whole situation was stage-managed from the start. The elder arranged the packmate's murder, frightened the prince with a strange manifestation or planted the legend about a potent magical treasure.

SENT

For all the Twelve's attempts at concealment, a few other beings know about them and Hunedoara Castle. A few Methuselahs remember Danika, Cret and other elders, or traced a convergence of Inconnu to the castle. Other Cainites might capture careless minions of the Twelve, force their secrets from them or follow them back to Hunedoara. Such elders might want to send a few duped Kindred into the castle as investigators... or bait.

Saulot also knows about the castle and the Twelve. A mere demon cannot hide his disciples, not when he knows the feel of their souls. Besides, Saulot is an Antediluvian, with powers that lesser vampires cannot imagine. Saulot wants to offer his disciples one

final chance to redeem themselves from their horrible Pact... or to leap into the pit of destruction they have prepared for themselves. Perhaps he arranges for the characters to seek the lair of the Hidden as a test for his fallen disciples.

METHUSELAH MOTIVES

Why might one of the Twelve bring a group of neonates to Hunedoara, defying five centuries of secrecy? The Storyteller has several options. In each case, give thought to why the Twelve need the players' characters in particular. Transylvania has scads of vampires. Why send out for more?

- **Blood Tells.** Maybe the Inconnu who summoned the characters wants a Cainite of her own bloodline. Kindred who know their "ancestry" may be surprised to meet their vampiric forebear several times removed.

- **Blood Tells, Redux.** For an alternative, maybe the elder needs a Cainite who descends from his *mortal* family. This works best for Zamra, who keeps track of her descendants, but even an ancient monster like Cret might find reasonably direct descendants through magic.

For an extra fillip, the target character might belong to both bloodlines, mortal and Cainite. This is too big of a coincidence to be an accident. Someone — most plausibly the Inconnu himself — arranged the character's Embrace to create the double lineage.

- **Special Qualifications.** The elder might desire a Cainite with a particular rare Trait, such as an unusual Merit, Ability or combination of Disciplines. This assumes that one of the players' characters possesses some sufficiently distinctive Trait. If the coterie pursues a Storyteller-character called or abducted by one of the Twelve, that character can have whatever Traits the Storyteller wants.

- **Even More Special Qualifications.** The elder might pick a character for entirely mystical reasons. Perhaps the target character is the seventh childe of a seventh childe, bears a cross-shaped birthmark or was Embraced when the Moon was in the seventh house and Jupiter aligned with Mars. As Storyteller, you can invent any mystical flummery you want and apply it to whatever character you want, so this is a very easy option.

- **Family Connections.** The target character is not herself special, but she has a connection to someone an Inconnu cares a great deal about. For instance, one of the Hunedoara elders might hound the lineage of an old enemy, century after century. One character comes

from that Kindred's lineage; the Inconnu calls him to Hunedoara to do something nasty to him.

Once you give one of the Twelve a reason to pick a player's character, decide what he wants to do with that Cainite.

TO SERVE KINDRED

Perhaps the Pact calls for a special sacrifice every 50 years (the Biblical "jubilee" interval). The Twelve must offer the demon a vampire instead of a mortal. It isn't enough to say that the Twelve would rather sacrifice a stranger than Embrace and offer one of the servants. They must want a particular Cainite — one of the characters. A blood connection to one of the Twelve, some rare mystical condition or a vendetta could explain why they want a particular character.

This option offers wonderful possibilities for treachery. The Twelve need just the one character as their victim. The elders could destroy them all, of course, but why make a fuss? If the other characters merely abandon their comrade, the Twelve spare their unlives and may promise a minor boon... minor for these elders, but incredible for a group of neonates. Will the characters stand aside like properly selfish Cainites or will they follow their conscience at risk to their unlives?

Accepting the Twelve's offer dooms all the characters. These ancient monsters cannot let some pipsqueak neonates go free knowing their secrets. The surviving characters may count themselves lucky if they leave Hunedoara with their unlives; their free will is too much to ask. The Twelve do not let them go without imposing blood bonds and curses to ensure their loyalty and silence. For the sake of secrecy, enough of the Twelve put aside their quarrels to assure that escaped characters meet their Final Death before long.

Spurning the Twelve puts the characters' unlives in peril, too, but does not mean certain destruction. Some of the Twelve hate each other to the point of madness. A tiny nudge from cunning characters could set them at each other's throats. Once one of the Twelve dies, everything goes to Hell in a hurry, giving the neonates a chance to escape.

RECRUITING DRIVE

The Twelve do not all wield sufficient supernatural power to influence events in the outside world — at least not to the degree they want. One of the Twelve might draw in a coterie of skilled and resourceful neonates to offer them a job.

A Methuselah might pick the characters for any of the reasons listed above. The best possible reason, however, lies in the characters' own deeds. None of the

Twelve would recruit a coterie of brutes or bumbler — unless they need some dupes for a suicide mission.

PAWNS

Speaking of dupes and suicide missions.... One of the Inconnu might want some neonates to use against a fellow prisoner. The Pact and assorted hanging curses keep them from harming each other — so bring in an outsider to do the job!

The Inconnu who lures the coterie to Hunedoara does not dare to kill his enemy. Maiming is another matter. As long as everyone shows up at the yearly sacrifice intact enough to say, "Yes," the Pact continues. If one or two of the Inconnu need servants to bring them in wheelbarrows, the demon doesn't care.

REPLACEMENT

An audacious elder might use some neonates in a plot to escape the Pact. The terms of the Pact allow for replacement — this has already happened once. A prisoner who can find some hapless dupe to take his place could depart the castle, laughing.

This cannot be easy, or all the Twelve would have done this already and the castle would hold frustrated ancillae instead of frustrated elders and Methuselahs. Blood connections or mystical qualities could explain why the elder needs one character in particular.

For an especially twisty plot, one Inconnu might seek to replace a *different* prisoner. Once an elder leaves the Twelve, he loses the protection that the Pact affords. The others can then strike at him! Not all the other Inconnu can attack, though. Leaving the Pact does not remove any "deadman switch" curses that the former prisoner levied on other Inconnu.

If one of the Twelve goes mad, enters Wassail or suffers Final Death, all the remaining Inconnu gain an urgent interest in replacing that elder before the next sacrifice comes due. They know that diablerie enables one Cainite to replace another in the Pact. A destroyed pacter forces a more desperate gamble: The remaining Inconnu feed the character the destroyed elder's vitae (stored against this eventuality). Then Danika fleshcrafts the neonate into a body double of the destroyed Cainite, while Cret, Hill or Zamra brainwash him through Dominate so he believes he is the slain elder. Drenis and Pentweret attempt to call the destroyed Cainite's spirit into the neonate's body as well, so that "blood and soul" are present at the sacrifice. Once the character participates in the annual sacrifice, he is locked into the Pact as tightly as the others.

INCONNU ACTIVITIES

The Twelve do not spend all their time sniping at each other. No matter how much they loathe their imprisonment, however, some of the Twelve also realize that the castle provides near-perfect concealment for their own plots — if they have any way to affect the outside world. Faced with further centuries of boredom, some of the Twelve now meddle in the Jyhad in exactly the way the Inconnu supposedly renounce. These plots may draw in characters by accident, or an Inconnu could deliberately attempt to manipulate the players' characters as part of their schemes.

KILL OFF THE ANCIENTS

The Inconnu know that when the Antediluvians rise at Gehenna, their most ancient and powerful childer shall serve as their generals and their proxies. The Nosferatu fear the Nictuku, monstrous childer their mad sire Embraced specifically to destroy them; the Assamites bow to or flee ur-Shulgi, their Antediluvian's eldest childe. Every other clan includes its own roster of Fourth Generation terrors whose names are now legend or lost.

Most Inconnu hope to hide from the Antediluvians and their servant childer. Some among the Twelve believe that the Pact protects them from their ancestors' machinations — which means they can fight back without fear. These Inconnu search for the Third and Fourth Generation, including their own sires. They intend to find these elder monsters and arrange their destruction.

Murdering the Antediluvians would forestall Gehenna completely; but even killing the Fourth Generation would greatly reduce the Ancients' power. Each childe of the Antediluvians slain means one less weapon in their claws and improves the chance that some Cainites might survive or even triumph.

The Twelve have every reason to believe they could succeed. The older members saw four Antediluvians slain within five centuries: their own mentor Saulot and the Cappadocian, Lasombra and Tzimisce progenitors. If they can find some sleeping monster, they need merely give the Sabbat a tip about its location. If the Sabbat proves too compromised and manipulated to do the job, some of the Inconnu wield sufficient magic to destroy any Methuselah. From around the world, Danika's elementals could rend an elder's tomb to let in the sunlight; Cret's demons could deliver purifying flame. Those Inconnu with minions outside the castle could direct them to exhume and

destroy sleeping monsters. For all the vast and unknown powers of the eldest vampires, they still remain susceptible to their kind's universal weaknesses of fire, sunlight and diablerie.

Of course, first they have to find a sleeping Methuselah. The magic of Cret, Hill, Danika and Pentweret renders them most capable in this regard, though the task still is not easy. These thaumaturges cannot simply cast some oracular spell or consult a spirit to tell them where the eldest vampires sleep. They can look through time-lost crypts and temples without leaving the castle, though, or send spirit minions to search through secret catacombs. Their divinations can certainly guide them to any mundane source of information, which they can correlate in ways that would never occur to mortal scientists or historians. Spirits may tell of scenes they witnessed long ago, which may provide further clues to a Methuselah's identity and resting place. The greatest prize is a Methuselah's true name: With such information, any of the four thaumaturges could locate the sleeping elder with comparative ease, despite any supernatural concealment.

Other Inconnu possess their own resources. The ones who can perform astral projection can travel the globe in search of clues. Zamra's family gives her, and any ally, plenty of minions to perform mundane legwork. Any Inconnu who has contact with the outer world can hire, threaten or dupe other Cainites into assisting their quest. Indeed, many Cainites search for sleeping Methuselaha, too, and the Twelve merely need to watch and assist their labors.

SEEK ANTEDILUVIAN INFLUENCE

As a related but less ambitious project, members of the Twelve can seek to discover how the Antediluvians influence Cainite and mortal affairs. Once found, a pawn can be neutralized. Inconnu with outside influence can kill the Ancients' mortal instruments, or deprive them of whatever position in society makes them effective tools. Dealing with Cainite servants does not present much more of a challenge — not for beings prepared to murder fellow Methuselaha. An Inconnu might not kill a suspected pawn right away, though. The elder might watch a tool of the Ancients for years in hopes of tracing further links in the chain of secret power.

Actually finding the servants of the Ancients is quite a challenge. Many of the Twelve do not require mundane communications or influence to work their will, and none of them exceed three millennia in age. The Antediluvians and their eldest, closest childer

must wield even subtler and more powerful means of recruiting and directing their pawns. Zamra commands many of her mortal descendants without them knowing it: Might an Antediluvian command weak-willed descendants without them knowing it either? Do their astral forms walk the Earth while their bodies lie in torpor, like Demetrius or Mahtiel? Do they command more powerful spirits and enchantments than the Twelve's thaumaturges?

They do not know, and so they must guess. Like mortal conspiracy theorists, the Twelve look for current events that might help the Antediluvians. Does a leadership struggle throw the Sabbat into turmoil? That weakens the Sword of Caine and renders it less able to stalk and destroy the Antediluvians' pawns. Perhaps an Antediluvian arranged it! So a Camarilla prince cracks down on anarchists. Does he merely despise their challenge to his authority, or does he keep the Kindred herd together, ready for convenient dining by risen Ancients? A tribal war in Africa flares up again. Mere mortal brutality? Or an echo of an Ancient's bloody hunger? Simply guessing what the Antediluvians want provokes as much argument among the Twelve as among any other Cainites.

If an event seems suspicious, the investigating Inconnu uses agents or long-distance magic to gather more information and probe the minds of involved Kindred and kine. The Twelve now particularly seek Kindred of the 14th and 15th generations, since some of them display occult insight into Cainite Jyhads. The Twelve never find clear evidence of an Antediluvian's will driving events, but they do uncover many schemes by other elders.

INVENTORY THE SUPERNATURAL

The Twelve accept it as given that the Antediluvians influence their childer and their childer's childer. They also know that creatures other than vampires walk the night: Lupines, ghosts, spirits, mortal wizards, faeries and so much more. Do the Ancients manipulate them as well? Some Inconnu fear they may. Although the *Book of Nod* largely dismisses the other supernaturals, the Twelve do not ignore them. They do not want their terrible ancestors blindsiding them by working through non-Cainite instruments.

Some Inconnu hope to exploit other supernaturals themselves. The fury of the Lupines gives pause even to elder Cainites. Ghosts spy upon the world, unseen and unknown to any except the Giovanni and a few other necromancers. Mortal mages wield powers so diverse they defy classification; and other supernaturals

possess their own dangerous powers — dangerous, the Twelve hope, to the Antediluvians and their minions.

Such speculations are neither new nor uncommon among Cainites. Most Kindred, however, lack the time or the power to replace speculation with research. The Twelve have more time on their hands than they want. Some of them could find a supernatural inventory a pleasant diversion.

As always, finding supernatural creatures is a challenge in itself. All the various supernatural races practice their own versions of the Masquerade, and their affairs seldom intersect with those of Cainites in any case. The Twelve had centuries, though, to test legends and follow up leads. If they really want to learn about mages, Lupines, ghosts or other strange denizens, they've had time to do so.

Real people, supernatural or not, seldom deliver long soliloquies explaining the basic principles of their society or activities — stuff the people around them already know. Long-distance magic or Discipline use, however, might prompt a supernatural to break secrecy and explain himself to a mortal companion, or write a discursive essay for a new member of their kind... something one of the Twelve could spy on or steal. Indeed, why do so many vampires feel the need to write such disquisitions and lay out their secrets?

Even long-range snoops like the Danika or Pentweret need minions to pursue some investigations. Those of the Twelve with outside influence can send hapless mortals or Cainites into encounters with other supernatural races, while other minions watch what happens. A coterie could find itself serving as either bait or a recorder, perhaps without knowing it. The Twelve could dupe a coterie into a dangerous encounter and then question them about the result.

HARASS THE TREMERE

The Cainites who joined the Inconnu before their entrapment all hate the Tremere. The Usurpers murdered their guru Saulot and have threatened their fellow Inconnu. The Warlocks must pay for their crimes.

Once again, the thaumaturges have the most powerful and direct ways to harass the Tremere. They are too cautious for direct attacks, but magical sendings and spirit minions could interfere with the Tremere's own rituals. Spirit-walkers like Demetrius can spread nasty rumors or im-

plant hypnotic suggestions to make trouble for individual Tremere or their chantries. Even Bufo avenges his torture: He possesses animals and uses them to steal or destroy magical tools, disrupt rituals and convey tips to the clan's enemies.

Tremere characters could become the target of such harassment. At first, it might seem that Murphy's Law is working overtime on them. After a while, though, even the dullest Warlock could figure out that someone is out to get him. If the player's characters pursue their own vendetta against a Tremere, one of the Twelve might become a hidden patron. In time, their Inconnu ally might even offer a more explicit partnership....

ARTIFACT COLLECTION

The Twelve decided to collect magical objects. Every artifact in their hands was one less that the Inconnu's enemies could use. When Gehenna comes, they can distribute their magic arsenal to their fellow Inconnu for the final struggle against the Antediluvians. At least, that was their plan a few centuries ago.

Some among the Twelve still hunt for magic items. As usual, they need agents to do the actual work of collecting artifacts and delivering them to the castle. They might recruit unwitting characters to acquire an artifact. If the pack or coterie already owns some occult treasure, the Twelve might send agents to buy or steal it from them.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: CHARACTER AGE

The plot and sample stories for *Lair of the Hidden* presume that the characters are neonates, simply because this is the default for *Vampire* chronicles. Nevertheless, you can run this scenario for older Kindred as well. You will probably need to design your own story to draw ancilla or elder characters to Hunedoara, since the sample stories assume characters of low power and relatively low Status. Once the characters reach Hunedoara, though, most elders will probably be in much the same position as the youngest among them, for the Twelve include Cainites of great age and terrible power. If necessary, the Storyteller can add a few dots of Disciplines or other Traits to keep the eldest Inconnu sufficiently more powerful than a visiting elder. The demon, of course, wields far greater power than even elders can imagine.

SAMPLE PLOT: THE VENGEFUL SABBAT PACK

In this sample plot, the troupe consists of a Sabbat pack. The plot is deliberately simple. After a bishop's magical murder at one of its *ritae*, the pack seeks revenge and a chance to clear their names. The trail of vengeance leads to Hunedoara.

Any Sabbat will do for this scenario. The story assumes that the characters dwell in the U.S., but could just as easily work in Canada, Mexico or any other country where people have drivers' licenses. The characters seek the castle of their own volition because one of the Twelve became sloppy and overconfident. The pack teaches the Twelve the danger of attacking the Sword of Caine.

THE HOOK: HEART ON FIRE

The pack plays host to a visiting bishop who has won fame for several expeditions around the world in search of *Book of Nod* fragments and reminiscences from Methuselahs. His attendance at a pack rite gives the characters a chance to impress one of the Sabbat's rising stars. Other Sabbat come as well, for the same reason.

Let the players plan the pack's hospitality for the bishop. You might want to play through part of the reception. The bishop joins the pack for a *Vaulderie*. In the middle of a concluding ritual, however, a mortal strides into the undead bacchanal and demanding which one of them is the bishop — asking for the Sabbat by name.

Before any of the players' characters can act, one of the visiting Sabbat says, "Fuck you!" and pitches the intruder into the bonfire. Another Sabbat complains, "Waste of blood, man." Then the intruder stands up and says, "Bad mistake, monster." He walks out, wreathed in flames.

The intruder sees the bishop and heads for him. The bishop bravely stands his ground. What the players' characters do is up to them.

The flaming intruder does his best to kill the visiting bishop. He uses a simple strategy: Grab the bishop and let the fire do its work. Between Röttschreck and the intruder's own agility, the characters have little chance to save the bishop's unlife. Whether they do or not matters little for the story. At least some visiting Sabbat burn to Final Death.



Still, this is one man against a pack of Cainites. Unless the characters all succumb to Röttschreck and lack the courage to return once they recover, they can defeat the intruder. If they lack weapons, they can simply bludgeon the man with whatever large objects they have on hand.

When the intruder is incapacitated, he loses his immunity to his own fire. The man screams once and a jet of fire erupts from his mouth. It briefly coils into a serpentine shape before it vanishes, leaving the pack with the intruder's burned corpse.

The ceremony has become a fiasco. True Sabbat met Final Death, possibly including the distinguished bishop. Their archbishop holds them responsible. Other Sabbat sneer at them for not protecting their guest (as if they could have done any better). Abstract justice might not drive the pack to investigate this magical murder, but if the characters want to save face they need to explain the crime and find someone to punish. Their superiors might not come out and say it, but they deeply hate the thought of suicidal, magical vampire hunters with even less concern for the Masquerade than the Sabbat themselves. If there's one, there might be others. Anyone who can stop further attacks, and prove it, could expect rewards from the archbishop.

THE INTRUDER

The intruder is an athletic Caucasian man with crew-cut brown hair. He steps into the scene wearing blue jeans, a T-shirt, a camo jacket and sneakers. These burn and rip off him in a few turns of combat, leaving a trail of charred shreds. He also wears a necklace bearing a golden locket inscribed with strange characters and the image of a serpent wearing a rayed crown.

The Intruder

Str 3, Dex 3, Sta 3, Cha 3, Man 2, App 2, Per 2, Int 2, Wits 2

Athletics 2, Brawling 4, Dodge 4, Melee 2

Willpower 6

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2 -2, -5, Incapacitated (and dead one turn later)

Fire Aura: 2 health levels of aggravated damage to vampires, 2 points armor, immunity to fire

THE BACKGROUND

Hill believes that the visiting bishop serves a Methuselah who, in turn, fronts for an Antediluvian. The Ventrue sorcerer's reasons do not really matter to the plot; indeed, the characters might never know them. Hill decided to murder Hobert and steal his collection of Noddist artifacts and literature. He spent

several years finding his assassin, an obscure clerk whose sister was slain by a vampire. (Give the clerk a name and a home city that fits your chronicle. He should not live too far from the pack, in a city that's a center for local government.)

Through dream-sendings, Hill taught the clerk how to hunt vampires. When he felt sure of his pawn's loyalty, Hill called the clerk to Hunedoara to receive a gift: a talisman that placed a spirit of fire within Jeff's body for one hour. The Ventrue's dream-sendings directed the clerk to the Sabbat gathering and the bishop. Meanwhile, a completely unrelated pawn robbed the bishop's haven while he and the rest of his pack were out.

Hill regrets that his assassin dies, but consoles himself with the good that the clerk does in ridding the world of careless Cainites and an Antediluvian's agent. Had the clerk escaped the confrontation with the Sabbat, the fire-spirit would have left his body without harm. Burning the clerk to death was a safety measure to prevent the Sabbat from interrogating him. Unfortunately, Hill does not appreciate how much of a paper trail modern people leave behind them.

THE LINE: INVESTIGATIONS

The second phase of the scenario takes the pack to Hunedoara. As the characters seek the bishop's real killer, they attract the attention of another Inconnu who covertly goads and assists them.

THE TALISMAN

The golden locket provides a clue to how the intruder attacked, if not why. The little golden case is obviously a talisman of some sort. With a successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 6), a character can translate the writing on the case. The words are GBRYAL (Gabriel) HELIOSRA SRPhM (Seraphim). The crowned cobra represents the Uraeus, the destroying eye of the Egyptian sun-god Ra, or possibly the angelic order of Seraphim, whose name means "Fiery Serpents." The locket looks like a typical Gnostic amulet from the early centuries of the Common Era, mixing elements from different religious and magical traditions. If someone pries open the case they find charred flakes of parchment and residue of scorched blood. The parchment is normal for a Gnostic amulet; the blood is not, and clearly indicates Cainite manufacture. Any sorcerer can tell automatically that a powerful thaumaturge made the talisman: Few Cainite sorcerers would dare invoke sun-gods and angels of fire.

WHO THE HELL WAS THAT?

The first step in solving the bishop's murder consists of finding the intruder's identity. Fortunately, this is not difficult. The intruder carried his wallet and the leather partly protected his ID. Parts of the man's driver's license remain unburned, giving the pack a sequence of seven numbers.

If the characters lack Necromancy or other means to interrogate the dead, the pack must seek his identity through mortal records. The Department of Motor Vehicles does not usually assist the undead in after-hours detective work, but the characters can break in or simply Dominate a clerk into helping them. (They can also hire a detective, but other Sabbat will mock them for depending on juicebags.) If the players themselves come up with a reasonable plan to find the information, no dice rolls are necessary. Otherwise, finding the intruder's identity at the DMV calls for an Intelligence + Investigation roll (difficulty 6).

If the roll succeeds, the characters can pull the records of everyone whose driver's license includes the crucial seven numbers. The intruder's hair color and age narrow the list of candidates down to a manageable few. From these, the pack can easily find the man they want through simple legwork: Who's still alive?

Eventually, the characters find the intruder's name. The DMV records also give his date of birth, address, social security number and every other bit of information one could need to follow a person's paper trail. To find how and why the intruder attacked them, however, the pack needs to dig deeper into his life.

THE INTRUDER'S APARTMENT

The intruder lived in the state capital (or a provincial capital or other center of local government). The clerk rented a modest apartment and worked as a clerk in a department that records gifts and donations to politicians and their election campaigns. (Storytellers may substitute some other obscure bureau if that seems more appropriate for the setting of their chronicle.) The pack can break into his apartment with little effort: Wits + Security (difficulty 6) to pick the lock without the neighbors noticing. Resourceful characters may also find other ways into the apartment, such as stealing the manager's keys.

Next, the characters search the apartment for clues. A simple success on a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 6) turns up these clues:

- A sketchbook of clumsy drawings of angels, fiery serpents, vampires baring their fangs, other people, buildings and signs, along with names, addresses and page number references. The last portrait shows the

murdered bishop, with his name written underneath and "This is the one" underlined.

- Several pop-occult books about dream interpretation, as well as standard books about vampires such as Melton's *Vampire Encyclopedia* and Summers' *The Vampire in Europe* and *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin*. The intruder's meager bookshelves do not hold any books on other occult topics.

- An English-Romanian phrasebook.

- The *Lonely Planet* tourist guide to Romania (latest edition). Scraps of paper mark the pages with train schedules and car rentals. Warrick underlined the train schedules from Bucharest to Sibiu to Timisoara. On the map, he circled a little town called Hunedoara.

- A series of crudely carved wooden stakes, a vial of holy water and a cross.

- A framed photo of a dark-haired young woman. The family resemblance to Jeff is obvious. The frame bears five deeply-cut notches.

FAMILY, NEIGHBORS, CO-WORKERS

If the characters investigate the intruder's background, they find he doesn't have much of one. Each datum listed below requires a simple success on a Trait + Investigation roll (difficulty 6) and a halfway reasonable plan for seeking the information.

- **Family.** Intelligence + Investigation. The intruder's parents divorced when he was young. His father lives in another state. He readily says that his son phoned him at Christmas every year but that was their only contact. The intruder's mother died six years ago; the newspaper obituary says lung cancer. His sister died four years ago. The obituary does not give a cause of death but says that her brother hopes her soul finds peace.

- **Neighbors.** Charisma + Investigation. The people in the neighboring apartments did not know the intruder very well. The characters hear "He kept to himself" a lot. No one can name any friends the intruder may have had.

- **Co-Workers.** Charisma + Investigation. Other people who worked at the State Disclosure Commission remember the intruder as a nice guy who didn't talk much about himself. A rather nice (and tasty) middle-aged lady remembers that Warrick advised people several times not to walk anywhere after dark because of muggers and "crazy people," and to stay away from certain bars and clubs. The lady also recalls the clerk mentioning that for his two-week vacation he would visit Romania because "He wanted to see where Dracula came from, ha ha."

• **The Rack.** Each bar or nightclub that the clerk warned against is part of the city's Rack. Even without the hint from the intruder's co-workers, characters with Streetwise might want to question the local Cainites.

Given a little patience, the characters can locate some of the local vampires. No one knows the intruder, but they know his sister became a vampire five years ago and disappeared four years ago. Since then, three more Cainites have vanished, including the sister's sire.

ROMANIA AND HUNEDOARA

The pack has every reason to believe that the intruder flew to Romania and visited Hunedoara. Tourist guides hardly mention the town. Encyclope-

dias and other reference sources say the town was named after John Hunyadi and that it used to include a castle, now destroyed.

Travel is always somewhat awkward for Cainites, but the trip to Romania and Hunedoara presents no special difficulties. Once in town, the characters can easily find rooms in a hotel or obtain lodging in whatever manner suits their tastes.

The pack cannot find any Cainites in the small town. Nor can they find evidence that Cainites ever did dwell in Hunedoara. The town doesn't have a Rack. Determined investigators can, however, find confirmation that the intruder visited. The concierge at a hotel recognizes his picture (after \$5 or Cainite powers jog his memory). After all, the sleepy industrial

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: YOU'RE ON A MISSION FROM GOD

The characters' visit to Hunedoara may be more important than the characters realize. If you want, it can be a linchpin of Gehenna. In that case, God—or someone, at least—sends unobtrusive hints that the coterie's current mission holds transcendent significance. The fate of the world rests on their choices.

THE RED STAR

A few years ago, a strange Red Star appeared in the skies of the World of Darkness. Only characters with Auspex can see this star. The Red Star has grown steadily brighter since it first appeared, until now it shines as brightly as Venus. As the characters drive or ride the train toward Hunedoara, the Red Star seems to move before them. If they approach from the east, they see the Red Star setting in the direction of the town. From the west, they see it rising over the town, to stand high and bright when they arrive.

While in the castle, all Cainites can see the Red Star, whether they have Auspex or not.

THE STREET PREACHER

On a city street or in an airport, the characters pass a revival preacher who harangues the crowd and passes out pamphlets. He catches sight of the characters and shouts to them, "Where will you be on the last day? Where will you stand on the night of judgment?" The preacher's gaze suddenly sharpens. "Remember, brother," he says, "the Devil has no power except what you give him. Saving one soul from the Devil is as great a deed as saving the world."

THE HYMN

The characters turn on the radio and find that the tuner somehow got shifted to a religious station. Instead of the news, traffic report or music they wanted, they hear:

*Once to every man and nation,
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood,
For the good or evil side.*

If the characters don't have a radio, they can hear the hymn from a radio carried by a passerby.

MISCELLANEOUS IMAGES

Storytellers can draw less obvious portents from the more obscure miracles of Jesus and the cryptic images from the Book of Revelation. In each case, players need a successful Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 6) to catch the reference.

- A fish with a coin in its mouth (Matthew 17:27). Someone could find such a fish at a restaurant or market while a character passes by.

- Water turned to wine (Luke 2:1–10). A character could hear a customer at a restaurant or outdoor café complain that he ordered water but received wine.

- The woman clothed in the sun (Revelation 12:1). A woman who wears a dress or blouse printed with sunburst designs.

- Seven lamp stands (Revelation 1:12), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2), seven golden bowls (Revelation 15:7). Characters could see these in show windows.

- White, red, black and pale horses (Revelation 6:2–8). Farmers in rural Romania still use horses now and then. Characters could see these four horses in a field.

town seldom receives visits from rich Americans. The concierge remembers that the clerk booked a room for a week. He spent most of the first three days in his room. He spent half the fourth day hiking, then checked out that afternoon, three days early. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Americans, they're crazy!

MAINTAINING INTEREST

The pack may feel tempted to give up from the lack of obvious leads. Hill's sire, mentor and rival Cret notices the pack, however, and uses a brief ritual to learn their business. The old Ventrue decides to use the pack to embarrass his child. Cret makes sure the pack stays in Hunedoara. Any time the action lags, Cret provides events to hold the interest of the Sabbat — and the players.

- **Gunmen.** A man with a gun in his hand bursts in on a character and opens fire. Their assailant falls unconscious if the characters do not kill him outright. When the man regains consciousness, he does not remember what he did. Any Cainite familiar with Dominate can recognize the signs of possession.

- **Burn Down the Haven.** Cret sends a seraph to ignite the pack's temporary haven. He does not want the characters destroyed, so the fire-spirit attacks just before dusk, when the characters are about to wake up anyway, or just before dawn, when they are bedding down but not yet in their daily torpor. The characters get a chance to see the winged serpent of living flame — just like the one that erupted from Warrick's body.

- **Dire Warnings.** If the characters prove particularly dense, Cret supplies a hint in the guise of a warning. As he attacks, one of the possessed gunmen intones, "Depart from this place! If you continue to seek my haven, you will find only your doom!" Cret does not actually guide them to the castle, though.

Sabbat who try to find Hunedoara Castle face the same challenges as any other Cainites. Once they find their way past its veil of concealment, the fun really begins....

THE SINKER: MEETING THE TWELVE

If the characters attack the castle or try to sneak inside, the demon responds firmly but not fatally. It slaps the characters around with Arms of the Abyss (Obtenebration) and Horrid Reality (Chimerstry) until someone thinks of knocking on the front door. As long as the characters remain polite to the servant who answers the door, the demon treats them as guests rather than attackers... no matter what they did five minutes before. The demon defends the castle as the

Pact demands but it does not want to destroy the characters outright: It recognizes the pack as potential liberators who can free it from its bondage.

No matter what business the characters give as their reason to visit the castle, Danika receives them graciously. She looks very grave as the characters describe the attacks upon the slain bishop and themselves. The countess declares that the affair is no concern of hers, but if the pack can find their attacker within the castle, they may assess whatever compensation they choose. They may not, however, demand the Final Death or torpor of their attacker. Everyone in the castle is her guest and she does not permit guests to destroy each other. Danika assures the Sabbat that they are completely safe as long as they attempt no harm to anyone in the castle. "My castle holds no danger... except what you may have brought yourselves." With that quelling pleasantry, the countess excuses herself and prepares to watch the fun.

If the characters described the flame-serpents that attacked them and the bishop, Danika knows that Cret or Hill is to blame. She wants to see how the pair try to hide their responsibility and foist the blame onto each other. The countess' honor forbids her to help the characters, but she dearly hopes they find who attacked them. Little would please her more than to see the proud Ventrue sorcerers chastised by vulgar neonates. She intends to support whatever compensation or humiliation that the Sabbat choose, as long as it does not interfere with renewing the Pact.

WHODUNNIT?

Danika keeps her word. As long as the characters do not harm anyone in the castle, they may go anywhere and speak to anyone, though she cannot demand that anyone answer their questions. The rest of the Twelve also see the pack's investigation as grand entertainment. They too realize that Cret and Hill must have sent the seraphim, but they do not want the "game" to end too quickly. Various Inconnu realize that they can humiliate rivals by framing them as the attackers. Thus, some of the Inconnu lie to the pack in hopes that the characters demand compensation from one of their enemies. Cret and Hill, of course, accuse each other of the attacks, hoping to deflect the blame for their own assault on the pack.

If the characters (and players) have no idea how to investigate, Pentweret advises them. The Setite does not tell them whodunnit (though his magic can easily reveal the truth). Nor does he give the characters a step-by-step guide to ask questions, sift for inconsistencies and test theories through further questions. The



Setite prefers to drop hints through questions of his own. For instance, Pentweret would not say, "Only Cret and Hill could make the sort of talisman you describe." Instead he would say, "That talisman isn't like my Egyptian magic. I don't put parchment in lockets, I engrave gems. I wonder what tradition does make talismans like that?" And then he would refer the characters to the castle's library. If the characters grow impatient with Pentweret's oblique hints, the Setite suggests that the characters can only trust the answers they find for themselves. Anyone who offers them a complete answer and accusation might be trying to frame someone else, no? By helping the characters, Pentweret shows off his own moral superiority — and keeps the pack from accusing him.

Before too long, The Twelve move from slander to bribery. Some of them — as many as the Storyteller thinks appropriate — offer favors if the pack will finger an enemy as their attacker. Once the characters realize that either Cret or Hill attacked them and the bishop, the two Ventrue offer the greatest bribes of all. These two master thaumaturges can give the characters extraordinary magical treasures and services, if only they will blame someone else.

WEREGILD

The rest of the Twelve gladly support whatever accusation the pack makes in the end. Cret or Hill plead for mercy: Hill on the grounds that the slain bishop served the Antediluvians, while Cret claims first that he merely sought to protect his childe, and that he actually wanted to draw the characters in to punish his childe. Anyone else accused merely insists that the Sabbat have the wrong Cainite, and that Cret or Hill is to blame. If the characters accuse Danika herself, she takes this as an insult to her hospitality and orders the destruction of the entire pack. Some of the Twelve needle her for the breach of trust, but the Sclav obeys her. Both Cret and Hill join in carrying out her sentence. For anyone else, though, the other Inconnu restrain the accused elder so the pack can impose whatever punishment they choose — short of Final Death or torpor.

PRICE OF VENGEANCE

The characters may reject Danika's offer of a weregild and try to punish Cret, Hill or whoever else they think attacked them and the bishop. They can even recruit others among the Twelve to help them if they conceal their actual intent to kill their target. Methuselabs become easier to kill when you have the help of other Methuselabs.

Once the pack murders one of the Twelve, the others panic. The Inconnu feel they must punish the pack, but they also need a replacement Cainite for the upcoming ceremony of the Pact. One may survive but the others must be destroyed. The remaining 11 challenge each Sabbat to justify why he or she should become the replacement instead of meeting Final Death. If the pack escapes, the Inconnu try to fetch them back, but the elders may act too late. The characters may never know what desperate measures the Twelve attempt to forestall their doom... or if they succeed.

If the characters trust Danika's promise of justice, the pack may still trigger the group's destruction. For instance, a truly humiliating punishment could prompt an Inconnu to commit suicide as a spiteful way to revenge himself upon the others. The accusations and frame-ups could escalate to the point where one of the Twelve frenzies and attacks another, triggering the retributive aspects of the Pact and incapacitating at least one of the Cainites. Again, the Final Death or torpor of any among the Twelve throws the remaining Inconnu into a full-blown tizzy that the Sabbat might not survive. The Storyteller must decide for herself exactly how events spiral out of control... but that is another subject, discussed later in the chapter.

VARIANT STORIES

Storytellers can easily adjust the Vengeful Sabbat Pack storyline to suit other Cainites.

- **Camarilla:** The characters' coterie receives a chance to host an Elysium in honor of a visiting dignitary such as an archon or a primogen from another city. If the coterie does not volunteer to solve the supernatural murder, their prince assigns the job to them — or would they rather make expiation directly to the slain guest's superior? The nearest Tremere chantry also "encourages" the characters to investigate since the Tremere do not want anyone blaming them for the murder.

- **Anarch:** A coterie of anarchs probably lacks powerful superiors who would push them to solve the crime. In this case, the murdered Kindred must be someone close to the characters. Consider making the victim a mortal companion or relative of a coterie member, so the characters have the strongest personal motive to seek revenge.

- **Independent clan:** Assamites, Giovanni and Followers of Set have clan hierarchies that could hold a coterie responsible for a luminary's murder. Gangrel and Ravnos require motivations of a more personal nature, but both clans also have a reputation for close

mortal connections. A mortal relative's murder could start a character on the road to Hunedoara with her coterie's help.

SAMPLE PLOT: COTERIE FOR HIRE

In this sample plot, the characters receive a job offer from a mysterious patron. In return for collecting body samples and information about other Kindred in their area, they receive cash, forecasts of the future and guidance in their own affairs. In time, they may learn that they work for two of the Inconnu — which is not necessarily a good thing.

This scenario works best for characters who do not feel any strong sect loyalty but operate on the fringe of the Camarilla or Sabbat. In the Anarch Free State, the coterie's covert employer could seek information about anarch group leaders or the mysterious Cathayans invading the West Coast. For this example, however, we assume that the coterie consists of Camarilla neonates. The scenario also assumes that the characters hope to gain more wealth or influence in the sect. This is also a more elaborate plot than the one before, with a few subsidiary stories of its own.

The sample plot includes a few sub-stories based on assignments from the coterie's mysterious employer. If you don't storytell "Coterie for Hire," feel free to extract these subplots and work them into other stories or use them as freestanding scenarios. "The First Job" provides a model for detective-work stories, while "Too Rich for My Blood" presents a miniature tale about a Cainite artifact of awful power.

THE HOOK: JOB OFFER

As one of the characters goes about his normal nightly business, a man in a brown suit coughs, tips his hat and says in an Eastern European accent, "Excuse me, sir." (Or madame, as the case may be.) "I seek... ones such as you... who have ambition and the willingness to work. My card." The man proffers a business card printed with a name, Dobos, and a handwritten phone number. "The rewards are most great. If you would like a job, please call me tomorrow evening. An hour after sunset, perhaps? If not, please give my card to someone who does. I am in town for another few nights." The man bows and walks away.

The scene occurs in a crowded, public place such as a street corner, subway or shopping mall. Trying to detain Dobos, either physically or using supernatural powers, would attract attention.



The phone number is easy enough to trace. It's for the Contessa Hotel, whose Yellow Pages ad helpfully mentions its reasonable weekly rates, its location downtown and its proximity to hospitals. The characters are sure to contact Mr. Dobos if they follow his instruction and call an hour after sunset. He invites them to set a time for a meeting so they can hear his job offer in more detail.

BACKGROUND CHECK

The characters may want to investigate Dobos before they meet him. He stays at the Contessa until midnight, when he leaves for two to four hours. After he returns he stays up until 5 A.M., then goes to bed.

Breaking into Mr. Dobos' hotel room is no great challenge, since the hotel has no security system and you can slip the locks on the rooms with a credit card (Dexterity + Security, difficulty 5). Searching the room turns up a Romanian passport, three full hospital blood bags and two empties in the room's mini-refrigerator, and a notebook with several pages of Romanian writing. If the characters copy the pages (easy enough; a copy shop three blocks away stays open until 1 A.M.) and find someone who reads Romanian, they find that Mr. Dobos has the names and descriptions of several local Kindred, including the character he accosted,

and the names and locations of the city's Racks and a few other undead hangouts.

The hotel staff gladly talks to characters who offer them at least \$10. Mr. Dobos is very eccentric, sleeping until the afternoon, receiving a hooker between 9 and 10 in the evening, and then heading out at midnight to do God-knows-what. He tips well enough, though. The night concierge thinks that Mr. Dobos must be a Russian mobster in town for some dirty business. "And you must be from another gang, checking up on him! Or... FBI, maybe?" If the characters lay claim to either identity, the manager or attendant unlocks the door to Dobos' room for them.

As the staff says, a prostitute comes to Dobos' room between 9 and 10, and leaves an hour later. She does not talk unless the characters threaten her or offer money. She does not know Dobos; her pimp sends a girl over every night and this night, it's her. Dobos has great stamina, is stronger than he looks, and he bites.

MEETING DOBOS

Mr. Dobos prefers to meet at the hotel dining room. He grudgingly accepts a meeting in some public, well-lit place such as an all-night restaurant. He refuses to meet at a character's haven or anyplace else

away from lots of people. If the coterie can arrange a meeting, he gives the terms of their employment.

The Romanian wants them to find the mortal birth date of a local Kindred, the location of her birth, the date of her Embrace, the names of her parents and the name of her sire. In return, Dobos promises to pay them \$2,000 each, plus expenses. If they can obtain a lock of the Kindred's hair or a smear of her vitae, he pays another \$1,000 each. Dobos wants the information in three weeks. If the coterie can do this, discreetly, he may have other jobs for them with much greater rewards.

The characters might ask Dobos to tell something about himself. He says he's from a Sighisoara, in Romania. He's a ghoul acting for his master, who cannot travel due to his responsibilities. Dobos says his master wants the information as part of a project to trace the activities and influence of his chief rival, an elder in the Sabbat — a private Jyhad that does not directly concern most Kindred in the city, and perhaps not any. The Romanian regrets that he cannot impart his master's name, but promises that his master will pass along any secret Sabbat connections he discovers, which the coterie may reveal or exploit as they will.

Mr. Dobos does not willingly say anything more. If the characters threaten him, he calmly says that physical or psychic violence against his person nullifies the job offer and makes his master the coterie's enemy. In any case, Dobos believes everything he said. He conceals only two important bits of information: that he reports to his master in Hunedoara, and he has never actually seen his master.

THE BACKGROUND

Anastazi Ruthven and Abdalkutba formed a partnership to gather information and sympathetic links on Kindred in other lands. Once Abdalkutba knows a Kindred's times and places of birth and Embrace, he gains virtual omniscience about that Cainite's past and current activities, plus flashes of knowledge about her future. (Sire and mortal parents do not matter for the Assamite astrologer; they help to disguise the real goal of the characters' investigation.) The two also hire the coterie to obtain exotic substances that the thaumaturges need for their rituals. The two Cainites trade the information, body relics and ritual components to Cret, Hill, Pentweret and Danika, so they can target the distant Kindred with their magic and conduct their own manipulations and inquiries. The two Inconnu collect various favors in return.

As usual with domitors, Anastazi considers Dobos thoroughly expendable. The ghoul does good work and Anastazi would regret the need to replace him —

but he does consider the possibility that he may sacrifice his loyal servant. Anastazi keeps samples of Dobos' hair and blood. If he believes that Dobos is compromised, one of the thaumaturges can repay a boon by slaying the unfortunate ghoul from a continent away. The ghoul cannot say much in any case: He does not know his domitor's name, appearance or location, only that he serves a great and shadowy power. They communicate by walkie-talkie, while Anastazi collects Dobos' collected data and delivers his monthly dose of vitae by possessing the body of a wolf. Anastazi believes he has left no loose ends for an enemy to trace back to the castle. The characters may find a chance to prove him wrong.

THE LINE: TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

In this phase of the story, the coterie performs a series of jobs for Dobos. A Storyteller could easily extract these smaller stories from the main plot and use them in other plots where the characters work for the Twelve.

SUBPLOT ONE: THE FIRST JOB

Storytellers should choose a moderately powerful Kindred as the characters' assigned target — preferably someone who already appeared in their chronicle. One of the local primogen would work very well, so long as the target character is not so old that the coterie has no chance to find her vital and post-vital statistics. A fellow neonate is probably too easy a challenge, while an elder Embraced centuries ago in another country presents too many difficulties, at least in the three weeks that Dobos allots. An ancilla is about right.

If you have not done so already, come up with a background for the Kindred whom the coterie investigates. This subplot assumes that the character's quarry was born in a rural county sometime in the 19th century and was Embraced later that century in a city where the player's characters have no connections. Any city and rural county will do; just make sure that you pick places that existed long enough ago for the target character to live there.

As Storyteller, insist that your players themselves come up with a plan to uncover their quarry's post-vital statistics: This is a challenge to their ingenuity. Neither you nor we can prepare for every possible scheme that your players may evolve, but we can suggest some of the simpler strategies that are more likely to succeed — or fail.

- **Ask the character.** You can't get any simpler than this. If the characters come right out and ask their

quarry the date of his birth, his Embrace, and the names of his parents and sire, the ancilla becomes extremely suspicious. He's been a vampire long enough to know that such background checks often occur as part of searches for blackmail information. He tells the coterie that he doesn't tell his unlife story to neonate scum. The next night he recommends them to the city's sheriff or scourge, who starts hassling the coterie.

If the characters ask for a sample of the ancilla's hair, or cannot find a way to obtain a bit of hair, nail clippings or vitae without the Cainite knowing, he assumes they work for Tremere who wish him harm. In that case, he cashes in boons to have the prince order their expulsion from the city.

A character skilled at conversation could wheedle useful bits of information from their quarry. The ancilla does not normally pal around with neonates, but he does not snub characters who find a plausible reason to talk to him. For instance, a character with street connections might say that he heard a rumor about stolen merchandise that he thought might come from the ancilla's business, and maybe they could do some kind of deal? Even though the ancilla says that, no, the stolen goods couldn't have come from his business, it's an opening to ask about more personal subjects such as, say, relationships with sires.

- **Ask about the character.** If the characters are on reasonably good terms with any other Kindred, an acquaintance knows what city the ancilla came from. The accomplice can also ask around for someone who heard the ancilla recite his lineage. This information costs the coterie only the smallest of favors or boons, to the accomplice and to the accomplice's informant... to the accomplice for the information, and to the informant for not telling the ancilla about the coterie's interest.

Once the characters know their quarry came from a particular city, they can visit that city and ask around. This involves presenting themselves to the city's prince, coming up with a plausible excuse for their visit, and more favor-trading with the city's Kindred. The Sabbat destroyed the ancilla's sire some decades ago, but other Kindred remember the character's Embrace and can give the approximate date. They also remember that the ancilla took a new name after his Embrace, but no one remembers the name he used in life.

- **Old newspapers.** The city's university library holds complete runs of the local newspapers from the 19th century. The characters can search the obituaries until they find a drawing or photo of him. From this the characters can learn the ancilla's original name and

date of mortal death. This takes a lot less time if the characters already know their quarry's approximate date of mortal death, of course, but the characters cannot fail if they persist in their search. In one night the characters can search through five years' worth of newspapers.

- **Government records.** Various government buildings hold records from the 19th century. Patient searching and a successful Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 7) turns up records from the ancilla's life. The players receive one roll per night of search. They must accumulate five successes to find the town of their quarry's birth, a little town in a rural county.

The government clerks do not normally let people spend all night in the state archives. We leave such covert access as a challenge to the players' ingenuity. The government buildings possess standard security systems: Dexterity/Perception + Security (difficulty 6) to overcome.

If the players tire of legwork, the government records include the ancilla's date of birth and the names of his parents. If not, send the coterie on to the courthouse in the county of the ancilla's birth. The county courthouse holds the birth records, but the town is small enough and rural enough that the coterie faces a new challenge: Lupines. If the characters want to spend a night rummaging through country courthouse records, they must escape at least one Lupine and dodge other Lupines who search for the invading Leeches.

If the coterie presents Dobos with the information he wanted, the ghoul pays as promised — and the characters have certainly earned every dollar. If the characters also obtained a sample of the ancilla's body, Dobos also pays the bonus he promised. Then he asks if they would like some more jobs on similar lines... but with better pay.

SUBSEQUENT JOBS

If the coterie accepts, Dobos sets them to compile background dossiers and collect body relics from other Kindred in the region. Since playing the same story over again is boring, the Storyteller must give each job a new twist, or maybe two. For instance:

- Dobos wants information and a body relic from a Sabbat bishop instead of Camarilla vampire.

- The one Kindred who possesses the necessary information demands that the coterie steal something of great value from another Cainite. The informant is so sufficiently powerful and well defended that forcing her to talk seems as dangerous as robbing the other vampire's haven.

Indeed, by the third or fourth such "job" you probably should not devote much game play to Dobos' assignments. Leave most of the actual investigation as downtime. Instead, use them as an excuse for the coterie to travel and encounter new situations. For example:

- The coterie arrives in a new city right before a roving Sabbat pack attacks. If the characters do not help drive out the Sabbat, the city's Kindred will accuse them of complicity in the attack.

- A mortal informant realizes what the characters are and changes his price: He wants the Embrace. Do the characters grant him the "immortality" he seeks? If they do, he runs wild, flaunting his undead powers. The characters must protect the Masquerade and hide their own role in the childe's siring — princes declare blood hunts over situations like this.

Now and then, Dobos also hires the coterie to obtain rare substances such as tiger whiskers, wood from lightning-struck trees, children's dropped teeth or opalized fossils. He may ask for distinctly dangerous materials, such as Lupine blood or human pineal glands robbed from funeral parlors (before embalming, please) or city morgues.

As the jobs become more challenging, Dobos offers higher fees. He pays in information as well as money. After the second job, he tells the characters that their first quarry turned out not to be part of the plot his domitor feared, but his master found some other interesting information. Dobos then tells the characters something scandalous from the ancilla's past: That the Cainite betrayed an elder to the Sabbat, for example. The payment for the third job includes information about what other Kindred in the coterie's city *plan* to do. The characters might turn this advance information to their profit; for instance, investing in the prince's company just before it buys out another business for a ridiculously low price (thank you, Kindred mind tricks) and the stock value soars. As Dobos feeds them more and more information about the secrets and schemes of the city's Kindred, the characters can gain a lot more influence than usual for neonates.

THE SINKER: TAKE THIS JOB AND SHOVE IT!

For a while, the characters' arrangement with Dobos works very well for all concerned. Sooner or later, the characters must wonder how Dobos' never-named master gains his information, and what he really does with the body relics and post-vital statistics they collect. Any character with even minimal occult knowledge realizes that samples of hair and blood

suggest sympathetic magic, while the names and dates suggest astrology, numerology and other forms of divination. Certainly, they work for a Cainite sorcerer. Dobos' story about Sabbat and rivalry between elders is patently flimsy. As long as the coterie profits from their employment, though, what do they care about their employer's true goals?

Eventually it all goes wrong. The characters might get greedy and demand more money, information and other favors in return for their service. Curiosity or paranoia may drive them to pump Dobos for information about their mysterious employer, to the extent that the partnership becomes awkward. Then again, the characters could decide not to risk a good thing. In that case, the Storyteller must take a more active hand and show the coterie the dangers of unlife as agents for a hidden master.

SUBPLOT TWO: BAD ASSOCIATIONS

One of the Inconnu thaumaturges believes that a Cainite in the characters' city secretly serves an Antediluvian or endangers his plans in some way. Sometime after the coterie investigates that Kindred for Dobos, she disappears. Other Kindred were nearby; perhaps the victim just left an Elysium or the Rack. Many Cainites suspect foul play, and rightly so. A curse or minion swiftly destroyed the target Kindred.

Within a few nights, some astute Lick wonders aloud, "Say, weren't those neonates asking a lot of questions about so-and-so several months ago?" Very soon, the characters' past inquiries become the talk of the town's Kindred. Other Cainites examine the coterie's deeds — including any recent victories or gains in influence — for sinister meanings and, of course, find them. The prince would have words with the coterie and sends the sheriff to collect them. The characters need to come up with a darn good alibi... and in a world of dark supernatural powers, it's really hard to prove you *didn't* and *couldn't* do something. Some of the city's other Kindred now view the coterie with naked suspicion. Other Cainites want to know how the characters eliminated the victim and promise the characters boons if they would similarly eliminate certain other Kindred.

At this point, the characters may want to ask Dobos what they've gotten into. Dobos responds by telling them that they are certainly free to quit... and forfeit any protection his master extends to his servants.

SUBPLOT THREE: TOO RICH FOR MY BLOOD

The agreement with Dobos could break down because he hires them to obtain something that turns out to be so valuable they don't want to give it up. Alternatively, the object could seem so palpably dangerous

that the characters would rather see it destroyed — they wouldn't trust anyone to own it. For another option, gaining the object might require the characters to take actions so morally objectionable that they rebel. For this sample subplot, we provide an item that fulfills all three conditions: the Seal of Veddartha.

Dobos tells the characters to recover a fragment of a Sumerian clay tablet from Charles Wheatley, a collector in the small town of Greenhill, Massachusetts. Dobos promises them \$50,000. If they find that Wheatley does not own the tablet after all, he still pays them \$1,000 each if they can bring back information on the tablet's whereabouts.

Greenhill is one of those creepy ancient backwoods hamlets that H. P. Lovecraft made so infamous... except Greenhill is gentrifying. The gambrel-roofed colonial homes show recent renovation as weekend cottages for the well-to-do. The repairs continue on the decaying, many-gabled mansion, soon to become the Greenhill Arms Olde Tyme Bed and Breakfast. The characters' quarry lives in a large, neo-colonial home on Green Hill itself, overlooking the brush-filled Devil's Hollow. Despite its sinister name, Devil's Hollow is completely harmless.

Charles Wheatley himself is a real estate millionaire. Greenhill's renovation is his idea. His house has an excellent security system (difficulty 8 to bypass) and the vault that holds his collection of Mesopotamian artifacts has another one (difficulty 8 again). The Sumerian tablet, however, is not in the vault. Charles' daughter Hope wears it every second, day or night, on a chain around her neck. Hope looks like a pale, thin girl of about 10 years old.

The shard of baked clay bears some cuneiform characters and a stamped band of tiny figures. Anyone who can translate the Sumerian writing finds a name — Veddartha.

Charles owns an automatic pistol. He fights to the death to protect his daughter and to keep the tablet hanging around her neck. He shouts that his daughter will die without the tablet. Hope resists, too. She resists with Dominate 5, Fortitude 5, Potence 5 and Presence 5. She is a ghoul, though she has never tasted vitae.

The clay fragment holds the signature of the Ventrue Antediluvian, or at least one of that creature's better-known pseudonyms, writ by its own hand and touched by its own vitae millennia ago. The Seal converts human blood into vitae and passes it to its bearer, who becomes a ghoul. The bearer also reads and speaks fluent Sumerian and gains two dots of Disciplines every year, up to the ratings listed for Hope.

Charles feeds the Seal one point of his own blood every month. Without the Seal, Hope would have died 10 years ago from AIDS. Just as Charles warned, Hope collapses once the tablet leaves her body. She dies a few minutes later, and not prettily. Charles can't help her anymore (if he still lives) because a few seconds after the Seal leaves Hope, he stiffens, raises his gun to his mouth, says, "Help me" around the barrel, and then blows his brains out.

Valuable? The coterie easily finds Charles' notes on how to feed and use the Seal. It works for Kindred, too: The wearer instantly gains one dot in two Disciplines (preferably ones the character does not already possess).

Frightening? Charles obviously killed himself under some mental compulsion. Vampiric artifacts that leave suicides behind them should scare the vitae out of any sensible Cainite. In case the characters are not sensible, have the new owner start writing in Sumerian and talking in accents not his own: The Seal slowly possesses its wearers.

Morally objectionable? The characters kill a little girl to gain the Seal. Humanity checks all around, please.

If the coterie returns without the Seal, either because they leave it with the Wheatleys, they destroy it or they decide to keep it, Dobos becomes angry. He demands to know what happened. No matter what the characters say, Dobos remains suspicious. Within a week, the coterie suffers attacks from the Twelve. Several Inconnu really wanted a magical link to the Ventrue Antediluvian....

If the characters hand over the Seal, Dobos pays them as he promised. Within a week, the Twelve attack anyway. The coterie was too close to an Antediluvian's power: They may have succumbed to it. At the very least, they become a potentially dangerous loose end.

UNDER ATTACK

The Storyteller might want to skip one or more of the subplots above and move straight on to an attack. A magical attack from the Twelve can happen because the characters fell out with Dobos and, by extension, his master Anastazi. A group of the Twelve might attack the coterie simply to spite Anastazi or Abdalkutba. Whatever the reason, one of the thaumaturges launches a curse at one of the characters. How? Through the months of their association, Dobos acquired their birth and Embrace dates, and collected stray hairs and such from their havens. He passes those

on to his master as well, which means any of the Twelve might gain magical links to the characters.

For a variation, one of the thaumaturges might decide to cut out Anastazi and Dobos and work with the characters directly and does it by possessing one of the characters. The target character spends a few nights as one of the Twelve. Afterward, he does not remember what he did for those nights.

We recommend that you select a player who you think would enjoy playing her character as possessed by someone else... without knowing who that someone else is. Then pick one of the Inconnu sorcerers as the possessor, devise a goal and direct the player to draw in the other characters as best she can.

We recommend that Storytellers treat direct attack as a last-ditch way to prod characters into looking behind Dobos. Keep it in mind as an option, though, if the players insist on trusting the ghoul and letting themselves be used.

THE TRUTH ABOUT DOBOS

Nothing can persuade Dobos to tell the characters how he found them, who his master is and what his master's goals are. The coterie must compel him through Disciplines or torture, or successfully follow him back to Hunedoara.

- **Disciplines.** Dobos is just as susceptible to Dominate and Presence as any other ghoul. Auspex Telepathy mostly picks up angry thoughts about what his master will do to the coterie. A persistent character can figure out one significant fact per successful use of Telepathy, such as that Dobos hires other coterie in other cities as well, that he flies to Romania every month for his vitae, and that he's never seen his domitor. The Mesmerize power of Dominate achieves similar results; some Presence applications work, too, though less directly. Because Presence and Dominate go against Dobos' powerful loyalty to his domitor, the Discipline-using character must either obtain three successes on a single die roll or accumulate twice Dobos' Willpower in successes through an extended action. Dobos expends Willpower for as long as any remains to him, to keep from succumbing to the characters' mind-warping powers.

- **Torture.** Breaking Dobos' will through physical persuasion requires accumulating twice Dobos' Willpower through Manipulation + Intimidation rolls (difficulty 8) or Manipulation + Interrogation rolls (difficulty 6). Rolling a botch not only spoils the attempt, it indicates a medical crisis that can kill Dobos if the characters do not then succeed with an Intelligence + Medicine roll (difficulty 6).

- **Following Dobos.** The characters always stay a step or two behind Dobos because he can travel by day. After the work they've done for Dobos, however, the coterie should have developed some skills at dealing with bureaucracies and records. We suggest you leave the challenge of following Dobos entirely in the players' hands: Let them roll dice for "hints" only if they truly arrive at an impasse.

Dobos travels by plane a great deal. Every week he goes to another city where he runs a coterie of young, ambitious Kindred, just like the characters. At the end of the month, he boards a plane to Bucharest. As soon as he deplanes, he rents a car from an agency at the airport. In the course of two days, he drives to the town of Hunedoara.

DOBOS IN HUNEDOARA

Dobos rents a hotel room for just two nights. The first night, he calls his master on a walkie-talkie and they arrange a time and place for meeting. They meet on the second night. Characters who manage to follow Dobos (Perception + Survival, difficulty 6, to follow him; Dexterity + Stealth, difficulty 6, to avoid making noise) see him hike to a forest clearing. A few minutes later, a wolf trots out of the forest. It wears a collar with a small cask, exactly like a classic Saint Bernard rescue dog. Dobos bows deeply to the wolf before he unhooks the cask and replaces it with another miniature barrel. This cask holds the post-vital statistics, body relics and other small items Dobos acquired over the month. As soon as the wolf departs, Dobos drinks the vitae in his cask. He then returns to his hotel, where he rinses out the cask. He starts the drive back to Bucharest the next morning.

Following a wolf through the forest at night is a much greater challenge than following Dobos. Characters with Shape of the Beast can follow as a wolf or bat themselves, while characters with Subsume the Spirit (Animalism) may be able to watch the wolf from the viewpoint of a bat or owl. Trailing the wolf as an animal calls for a Perception + Survival roll (difficulty 7). Tracking it without discipline tricks requires three such rolls at difficulty 8. If a character succeeds, she sees the wolf (or its tracks) simply disappear. The character has reached the edge of the castle grounds, though she cannot know it yet.

See earlier in this chapter for various methods by which characters could locate the castle.

RECEPTION AT THE CASTLE

As usual, characters who politely knock and ask for entry are received graciously. The characters impress the Twelve with their competence at finding the castle, as well as their past service as Dobos' agents. Anastazi explains the entire scheme. Danika deflates

her childe's pride in his own cleverness by pointing out that he needs to punish Dobos for carelessness. She also offers the characters rooms for the day, since it would be churlish to turn them out the very night they arrived! Indeed, the coterie would do her honor to accept her hospitality for several nights, as they see visitors so seldom.... Before the night ends, several among the Twelve ask the characters to work for them directly, and cut out Anastazi and Dobos — and the characters are caught in the intrigues of the Twelve.

VARIANT STORIES

Converting the Coterie for Hire story arc requires only minor changes to fit an arch or independent coterie. The story arc does not work so easily for Sabbat packs, but a clever Storyteller might manage.

- Anarch Kindred: Anarchs require very little change to the plot. They face slightly more challenge than accepted Camarilla neonates because they have more difficulty gaining introductions to older Cainites.

- Independent clan: These Cainites likewise carry few restrictions on their actions. As "neutrals" they do not receive access to other Kindred as readily as accepted Camarilla Kindred would, but they are no worse off than anarchists in this respect. They are also no worse off than anarchists in the degree of suspicion they receive.

- The Sabbat carries an institutional bias against accepting mortals — even a ghoul — in a position of authority, so it would be unusual for a pack to accept a ghoul as their paymaster. At the very least, Dobos would need to claim that he works for a Sabbat elder who wishes to stay anonymous. The characters supposedly assist this elder in background checks as part of a plan to seek Camarilla infiltrators and traitors. Dobos also sets them to investigate some Camarilla and independent vampires.

- Older Kindred, such as ancillae, probably do not need the cash that Dobos can offer. For a coterie of ancillae, Dobos advances directly to payment in secret information about their rivals. This does mean revealing the power behind Dobos more quickly, though, which may reduce the mystery and suspense of the story.

MYSTERIES OF HUNEDOARA

Once the characters arrive at the castle, the story enters high gear. The characters experience strange events as they meet the Inconnu of Hunedoara and discover their secret.

MEETING THE TWELVE

Assuming that the characters manage not to offend anyone within the first minutes of their arrival, the Inconnu of Hunedoara make them very welcome indeed. (If the characters do give offense, the story probably ends rather quickly and messily; see "Escape from Hunedoara," below.) The Inconnu receive few guests. Whether the characters arrive by invitation or as unexpected intruders, the desire for new faces and new conversations soon overpowers any suspicion. After all, the Inconnu know their own power, and that of the demon. What could they fear from a few neonates?

The coterie meets 10 of the Twelve almost at once. Everyone dons their best clothing and their best behavior, as they see it. Danika offers the characters their choice of vessels, while Anastazi marshals the serving staff for inspection. They seem very much the aristocratic Renaissance pair. Pentweret and Drenis lend an ecclesiastical air to the evening, dressed in their somber priestly garb. Demetrius and Hill form a pair of Greco-Roman gentlemen, while Cret looks ready for a night at the Moulin Rouge. Abdalkutba, Eshmunamash and Zamra bring a whiff of the *Arabian Nights*.

After the characters feed, these mighty elders vie for the honor of the characters' attention and strive to outdo each other with their glittering conversation and social graces. Cret the philosopher finds universal principles of wisdom in every offhand remark; yet, Demetrius outdoes him for profundity, though nothing he says makes the slightest sense after you hear it. Hill and Zamra lend a lighter air through jokes and songs from centuries of military camps and the streets of Algiers. Pentweret adds scandalous *bon mots* worthy of Oscar Wilde, and even dour Drenis cracks a smile. Danika insists that the coterie tarry at the castle, so that she may repay the boundless joy their presence brings.

Before the night ends, though, alert characters can tell that these people do not like each other as much as they pretend. Little clues give it away. The assembled Cainites flash quick glances at another Cainite while making a remark, and the slightest tightening of lips or eyes in response. For instance, Eshmunamash introduces the group as Inconnu, and Zamra's eyes narrow the tiniest fraction. Danika says that a powerful enchantment hides the castle from danger, and everyone glances briefly at Cret. Each player rolls Perception + Etiquette (difficulty 8). On a success, the character senses that every remark carries layers of unspoken meanings and associations for these elder Kindred. The Inconnu of Hunedoara know each other very well indeed, but they do not like each other.

No one mentions Mahtiel, Bufo or the demon to the characters. Those secrets come out soon enough, though.

THE SPECTRAL MAIDEN

Introduce Mahtiel some time after the coterie's first night in Hunedoara. This particular subplot works best if the coterie includes a handsome, athletic male character who could remind Mahtiel of her lost love, Rothriel. Any male character will do, though: As she sleepwalks, Mahtiel sees the world through a veil of dreams.

The first character to meet the Ghost of Hunedoara should be alone at the time, to create maximum uncertainty in the other characters. As the chosen character walks through the castle halls, he turns a corner or enters a room and finds that he is no longer alone. A woman with short, honey-blond hair, dressed in archaic leggings, tunic and quilted cloak, walks past... no, *through* the character. If the character follows the spectral maiden, she walks to a spot on the castle drawbridge, falls to her knees and silently sobs for a moment, then vanishes.

Noddist characters may recall the sign of Gehenna from the Chronicle of Secrets: "Mark the maiden who weeps..."

EVASIONS

No one at the castle wants to talk about the apparition. Lady Danika says that ghosts are not unknown in castles with long and tempestuous pasts. She does not waste her attention on them. Drenis confirms the presence of ghosts but says they seldom appear visibly. If asked, the others merely tell the characters to ask Danika; it's her castle, after all. The servants likewise suggest that the characters refer their questions to the countess, but they look more nervous about the whole matter.

No one will say what's so special about the place where the phantom wept and vanished, either. Anastazi completely loses his cool and almost shouts, "Nothing happened there! This is not important, and no concern of yours!"

Using their Disciplines — or simple intimidation, charm or bribery — the characters can force one of the older servants to tell what little he knows. The servant admits that he has seen the apparition himself. His masters do not speak of her, but she too is a Cainite. She does not walk about in the flesh, though, only as an intangible spirit. When he was young and new to the castle, an old servant told him that the Maiden wept for her dead lover. After all, what else would a ghostly maiden weep for? None of the servants know the maiden's name, or that of the hypothetical lover.



INVESTIGATION

The castle holds clues about the spectral maiden's identity, if the characters think to search.

The servants know that the Maiden appears most often in the hallway near Demetrius' quarters. The maids who clean the rooms know that Demetrius' chambers include a locked door that they never pass. No one has seen the door open at all. The servants' most popular speculations about what lies beyond Demetrius' door say either that the Malkavian keeps a fantastic treasure in the locked room, or else that he props up the corpses of victims he slew, and talks to them as if they were still alive. One of the maids swears that while she dusted Demetrius' room, she heard him talking in the locked chamber, though she could not understand what he said.

The castle's library holds two handwritten copies of the *Journals of Rothriel*. One is the Salubri warrior's original diary; the other, a copy made by Demetrius. Both are in Greek. With a successful Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 6), a character who does not know Greek can still puzzle out the first page, where Rothriel writes out his lineage. Rothriel's diary also contains several portrait sketches. One shows the spectral maiden with the name "Mahtiel."

If the characters dare, they can break into the Inconnus' private chambers to look for clues. The locks are the best the 16th century had to offer: A character can pick them with a successful Intelligence + Subterfuge role (difficulty 6). Anastazi's chamber holds a translation of the *Journal of Rothriel* into Latin, if that's any help. Demetrius' room holds a curtained ivory miniature of the spectral maiden clasping hands with a handsome man. Both of them wear armor. The locked chamber, of course, holds Mahtiel's catafalque and torpid body.

DREAM VISITS

Characters who hang around near Demetrius' chamber or the drawbridge may encounter her wandering spirit again. Cainites who read the *Journal of Rothriel* may dream of the two lovers, and so attract her notice. Mahtiel ignores the characters unless one of them calls her by name or tries to attack her.

Mahtiel's response depends on the character's appearance and her current dream. If a character looks even remotely like Rothriel, she calls him by that name and tries to embrace him. Of course, her arms go right through him. Mahtiel stares at the character in horror, then fades away.

If a character acts like he attacks her, Mahtiel's expression hardens. Suddenly she is dressed in armor

and carries a sword and shield. A blazing red third eye opens on her forehead — and suddenly the character finds himself armed and armored as well. He also stands at a moonlit crossroads. The warrior-maiden lunges at him with her sword.... The Salubri has sucked the unsuspecting character into Dream Combat. See the Appendix for details of this potent Valeren power. If the character cannot convince Mahtiel that he is not really her enemy, the Salubri warrior quickly reduces him to stupor. To other characters, the spectral maiden merely seems to glare at the character with that horrid third eye.

Any other circumstance is up to the Storyteller's whim. Mahtiel met a lot of Kindred and kine in her life and unlife. Any character could remind her of *someone* from her past: her sire Ezrael, a slavemaster, the churchman who blessed her sword, anyone. This is an opportunity for the Storyteller to pass on information about Mahtiel's past and, perhaps, the destruction of the Salubri clan long ago.

After this, Mahtiel notices the characters and visits each one as she dream-walks. She can enter the characters' dreams, too. During the day, a character might dream an episode from Mahtiel's past such as her meeting with Ezrael, her passionate union with Rothriel, a battle at his side against demons, or the nightmare race to Hunedoara only to find him slain.

In describing these scenes, be sure to describe without explaining the reasons for the scene. For instance, in a dream of reaching Hunedoara to find Rothriel destroyed, merely describe the sensations of a horse galloping through the night, a glimpse of Hunedoara against the moonlit sky, a feeling of dread, and then overpowering grief as the character — playing the role of Mahtiel — sinks to her knees beside a pile of dust.

Mahtiel may also accost a character during the night, to draw him into a replay of a scene from her past. She is most likely to pull a male character into a replay of her love affair with Rothriel. Without warning, the character finds himself somewhere else, with Mahtiel acting as if he is someone else. When the dream ends, the character sees Mahtiel walk through a wall or disappear. These waking dreams can seem to last an hour or more while just a minute or so of real time passes, leaving the character even more disoriented.

THE FULL STORY

If the characters present any of the Twelve with part of Mahtiel's tale, they can persuade him to tell the rest. Drenis is especially easy to convince: The tragic love story agrees with the Cappadocian's gloomy view

of life and unlife. Of all the Twelve, however, only Anastazi and Danika could give a first-hand account of Rothriel's destruction.

TOAD IN THE HOLE

Bufo does not declare himself to the characters either, not even to a clanmate. The Nosferatu prefers to skulk about, Obfuscated all the while, watching them. His mastery of Obfuscate is such that only Abdalkutba can see through his psychic concealment. The Assamite sees everything the Nosferatu does — but then, Abdalkutba sees everything *everyone* does. He does not reveal Bufo's secrets any more than he gives up anyone else... which is to say, not unless the price is right.

The coterie meets Bufo soon enough, but does not know it because the Nosferatu makes himself look like someone else. He usually impersonates other members of the Twelve. After centuries of practice, he mimics their appearance and voices perfectly. Less often, he impersonates a servant.

The Toad also spies on the characters' dreams — his gift from the demon. Thus, he watches any dream-encounters with Mahtiel or any other peculiar and significant dreams the characters may have.

Since Bufo's impersonations are physically perfect, characters can only infer when they've spoken to the Nosferatu instead of who they thought. Although Bufo knows a great deal about the Twelve, he does not know everything. More importantly, he does not see and hear most of the characters' conversations with the other Inconnu, and they do not know what the Toad says to the characters. Thus, a character might refer to a past conversation, only to have the Inconnu in question say, "Huh?" Bufo might also slip up and miss a reference to a past encounter between a character and another of the Twelve, or mention something that a particular Inconnu could not know (because it happened while Bufo impersonated a different elder).

Bufo holds no animus for the coterie, or at least no more than he feels for the rest of reality. He does not want anything from them except to fool them, learn their secrets and humiliate them.

Before long, he tries impersonating the characters, too. He causes petty mischief such as insulting one character while disguised as another, or committing some rude and embarrassing act in front of the Twelve. If any of the characters are lovers, he tries to impersonate one of them to fool the other — but he may slip up, since he hasn't studied the characters for centuries. For such cases, the Storyteller should roll Bufo's Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 7) to see how well his Mask of a Thousand Faces impersonation works. Then



roll Perception + Empathy or subterfuge for the target character, to see if she spots the imposture. (You may want to bring the player of the character Bufo impersonates into the plot, so the other players do not immediately know that something is fishy.)

The others among the Twelve know that Bufo commits these pranks, though only Abdalkutba knows how often. The coterie most likely learns of the Toad's existence when one of them seems to have committed some horrible gaffe that he doesn't remember, or one of the Twelve has harassed the coterie in an event that he doesn't remember. The Inconnu trade annoyed glances and sigh or growl "Bufo." Then they explain about the Nosferatu in the basement, who is not suitable for polite company.

DREAMS OF THE DEMON

The demon does not declare itself openly. It communicates through dreams and illusions that the characters may mistake for Mahtiel's work (or vice-versa), while it hides its nature as well as Bufo ever could. It cannot act directly to wreck the Pact and destroy the Twelve, but it can nudge the characters in that direction.

COMMUNICATIONS

Talking to the demon is not difficult. It sees and hears everything that happens on the castle grounds. It does not read minds exactly; it reads souls. That means the demon knows every passion and desire felt within its walls, but it must ask questions to gain more detailed information.

The demon talks to corporeal beings through a variety of channels. In its most secret communications, it speaks directly to the target's soul without words, in the language of pure promise and desire. You just *know* that if you name your desire in your heart, it will hear and understand. More often, however, the demon communicates through visions. It can shape dreams or induce hallucinations at will, which no creature less powerful than itself can resist. When the demon uses words, it speaks through a dream-figure of someone the characters knows. It might take the form of the character's mother, another coterie member, one of the Twelve, a favorite fictional character, the character's reflection in the mirror — anyone, really. If the characters aren't sure how many Kindred dwell in the castle, it might even claim to be an Inconnu they have not yet encountered in the flesh (which is almost true, in a way).

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

The demon shows itself bit by bit. The characters surely have questions about their hosts. The demon

sends dreams that show the past of the Twelve, or at least something close to the truth. It does not provide context. For instance, characters who wonder what a Follower of Set is doing at the castle might dream of Pentweret apparently torturing Vanth... without an explanation that Vanth asked for it as part of her doomed, last-ditch effort at Golconda. The demon tries to pick scenes that cast the Twelve in the worst possible light. It may even reveal flashes of the sacrificial rite — just enough to make the characters nervous, without giving them a complete explanation. The demon wants the characters frightened and suspicious of the Twelve.

If a character asks a question aloud, even rhetorically, the demon takes the opportunity to impart information while sowing discord. When the person is alone — so there are no witnesses — the demon sends a vision of one of the Twelve. Through this dream-persona the demon offers to answer the question... but first the character must perform a little service. It always asks for something that provokes strife among the Twelve, and it always asks the character not to speak of the deed to anyone else. Typical tasks include:

- Take something from Cret's room, such as a volume of Saulot's parables or an engraving tool that Cret uses in scribing talismans, and hide it in Hill's room. The Demon might make this request in the form of Hill, and claim that the object is something Cret borrowed and is a few years late in returning. Cret soon notices the loss, demands to know who took it, and then performs a ritual to locate the missing item. A tremendous row results between sire and childe.

- Wreck one of Anastazi's gadgets, such as the radio or phonograph. The demon makes the request in the form of Danika, claiming that she despises her childe's love of newfangled machines but does not want to cause a scene herself. Anastazi is furious and accuses Pentweret of destroying his toy; the others know how much the Setite dislikes Anastazi's modernizing efforts, and accuse him of trying to "challenge" the Tzimisce's love of gadgets. "Believe what you want," the Setite says, and stomps off.

If the character confesses his role in whatever deed provoked the row, Danika applies a modest punishment, mitigated by the honor of the confession. She has the Sclav rip off and eat just *one* of the character's limbs. The character's statement about who put him up to the deed inspires further arguments and recriminations. The Twelve include several Auspex-masters who can read minds, or Dominate adepts who can force a younger Cainite not to lie, so they can verify that the character believes he tells the truth. Unfortu-

nately, they cannot force the truth from each other so easily.

If the character abides by the demon's conditions, the fallen angel does reveal the truth... again, possibly taken out of context to place one or another of the Twelve in the worst possible light, but never actually false. The characters can learn a great deal about the Twelve if they are willing to continue sparking rows among them. They can even learn that the castle's warding depends on a yearly human sacrifice to a demon, due to happen soon.

ATTRactions OF THE INCONNU

At first the mysteries of Hunedoara may not seem dangerous. On the contrary, the castle may seem like a wonderland of opportunities.

Anyone who seeks Golconda soon learns that the Twelve offer a surfeit of mentors. Some of the Twelve met Saulot himself and they all spoke with his arch-disciple Mokur. A seeker can also read the parables of the two sages. The chance to teach again (and perhaps return to the path themselves) could stir an Inconnu from the weary rounds of spite and despair. That isn't necessarily a good thing, since it also sets up the elder for renewed disappointment.

Thaumaturges, or would-be magicians, also find potential tutors in three different schools of sorcery. The thaumaturges among the Twelve can also supply potent magical wonders to their employees. The castle libraries hold a fantastic trove of occult lore amassed by the Twelve. Less ethical characters might hope to steal some of the Inconnu's magical treasures and relics.

Between them, the Twelve know most of the more familiar Disciplines. Any character might hope for training from such masters.

Many among the Twelve are willing to take pupils and employees, too. Maybe a little too willing....

COMPETING OFFERS

The Twelve do not leave the characters to investigate their mysteries in peace. One elder after another approaches the coterie to ask, "How would you like to work for me?" These old and powerful creatures do not regard this as a yes-or-no question. They merely mean *in what capacity* the characters prefer to serve. The job offer happens most quickly if one of the Twelve actually lured the coterie to the castle.

The coterie may decide to take one of the offers. Even trapped in a remote castle, any of the elders in Hunedoara would make a powerful patron. Unfortunately, accepting one Inconnu's offer makes the coterie a target for all that elder's enemies.

For the first few nights, the Twelve stay reasonably polite to the characters. An Inconnu's rival makes a competing offer, or draws the characters aside to bad-mouth the prospective patron. He's a crackpot who will waste the character's time with foolish errands. She's a welcher who doesn't pay what she promises. I can make it worth your while to turn him down. Anything you want to know? Anyone you want destroyed?

Before long, the competing offers become less genteel. Rivals escalate from slander and bribery to threats. One elder says she would become most upset if the characters refused her generous offer. A rival says the coterie's doubts about his warnings gravely insult his integrity. The Twelve cannot kill each other, but they can kill each other's agents. If the characters do not choose a patron and leave the castle quickly — or find a way to distract the other Inconnu — the castle can become their tomb. None of the Twelve take rejection well. Refusing all the job offers, or stringing everyone along, can test the characters' diplomacy to the limit. On the other hand, brave or foolhardy characters might push the Twelve to their limits and spark open war between them.

ESCAPE FROM HUNEDOARA

The characters may decide that no prize or patronage could be worth the danger of staying at the castle. The Inconnu of Hunedoara are too powerful and too unstable. If the characters foolishly attacked one of the Twelve, they might find themselves running for their unives. Discretion, as they say, is the better part of valor, and running away is the better part of discretion. The coterie soon finds, however, that getting out of Hunedoara is easier said than done.

THE DEMON

The demon does not want the characters to leave — not before they doom its jailors. It can turn the veil of concealment inside-out so that anyone who tries to flee turns about and finds himself entering the castle grounds again.

Departing the castle against the demon's will requires stratagems like those used to enter. The characters can penetrate the Obfuscate veil if they act without volition: either not controlling their motion at all, or in blind panic or frenzy. They can evade the demon's mental influence if they guide their steps through infrared night-vision gear, radar or some other detection method unknown in the 15th century. A character who Obfuscates himself, however, does not slip out the veil. That works only to get inside.

If the characters do manage to leave the castle grounds, the demon incites the forest creatures against them. From night-prowling wolves to the rats of Hunedoara town, the characters face attack any time they stop moving for more than a few minutes.

THE SCLAV

The demon also sends the Sclav to prevent escape. The demon knows what the characters think, so any time the coterie scouts the boundaries of the castle grounds they find the Sclav looming out of the night mist, ready to shepherd them back: "Guest lost. Sclav help. Good Sclav." If the characters actually try to escape, though, the demon brings Bad Sclav to the fore and assigns the characters as the monster's prey.

THE TWELVE

The greatest danger, however, comes from the Twelve themselves. The demon's reach extends perhaps a dozen miles from the castle. The Twelve can pursue the characters to the ends of the earth, though not quickly.

Whether the Twelve do this depends on their previous interaction with the coterie. If everyone has stayed polite and nobody's nefarious scheme requires the characters right away, the Twelve face a security breach but not a crisis. Eshmunamash, Cret and Hill have all spoken to the characters at some length; they use their Presence to Summon characters back to Hunedoara. This may take several nights, especially if the coterie contains more than three characters, but they have time. The Inconnu may plan merely to erase the characters' memories of Hunedoara... but other events can get in the way and force a crisis. Effectively, the characters are back where they started, except the Twelve explicitly treat them as prisoners.

If the characters gave the Twelve any reason for fear or anger, the Inconnu react more vigorously. For instance, Sabbath characters might see the captive elders as a diablerist's all-you-can-eat buffet and try to invite all their Sword of Caine buddies to dinner. The thaumaturgical resources of the Twelve must surely tempt any Tremere character. Camarilla archons, meanwhile, could find the Twelve's long-range manipulations, robberies and assassinations a danger to their sect. Any characters might flee the castle to escape sacrifice — and above all, the Twelve don't want that shameful secret to get out. If the characters actually slew one of the Twelve, or goaded one to suicide, the remainder will do *anything* to bring the coterie back, and worry about the Masquerade later. They need every potential replacement pacter they

can find... and if that fails, at least they can take revenge before the demon drags them to Hell.

Just as the Inconnu can extend their power to draw characters to Hunedoara, they can reach forth to affect anyone who endangers their secret. A threat to their secrecy and survival can prompt the Twelve to set aside their grudges and work together. Indeed, a common peril briefly restores the camaraderie they once felt. Anyone who threatens the Twelve finds at least six elders trying to kill him. The characters are unlikely to survive the onslaught for long.

- **Abdalkutba:** The Assamite vizier lacks raw force, but he possesses knowledge. Woe to any character who let the astrologer cast her horoscope: Abdalkutba can anticipate her every move and tell the other Inconnu where to find her.

- **Anastazi Ruthven:** Danika's weaselly childe wields nowhere near the power of his sire. As a thaumaturge, he can do little but assist Danika. Anastazi, however, knows more about the modern, outside world than most of the Twelve. In a grand hunt against fugitive characters, Anastazi unexpectedly shines as the one who knows how to mobilize mortal resources. He has a bank account. He directs servants such as Dobos to hire private detectives. Over the decades, the Tzimisce built his own network of informants and agents in Hunedoara and nearby towns. He could expand it if he tried.

- **Bufo:** In many ways, the wretched Nosferatu is the weakest of the Twelve, but he can still send out his spirit through his Beast Walk power: from a bat flitting through the woods around the castle to a dog in town, to a crow the next day, to a stray cat in Bucharest... Bufo has never found a limit to how far he can go, or for how long. While the Nosferatu cannot muster the raw power of some other elders, he is patient and can harass the characters from unexpected angles — especially when Cret or Hill supply talismans for his animal hosts, or when Anastazi or Zamra tell him how to disconnect power lines, set fires, guide police to where the characters hid one of their kills.

- **Cret:** The mightiest thaumaturge of the Ventrue clan commands demons, elementals, and a host of other spirits. His scrying magic can follow his enemies anywhere in the world, if he has a suitable sympathetic link — and he made sure to collect a hair or fiber of clothing to use as such a link. His will can turn any passerby into an assassin. As mentioned, he can also simply Summon characters back to the castle. Cret prefers not to kill innocent bystanders... but he can rationalize it. Given a week or two, he and Hill can enchant talismans for mortal hunters. He also knows

powerful curses such as the Platonic Split, Soul Disjunction and Whips of the Erinyes.

- **Danika Ruthven:** The Lady of Hunedoara fully equals Cret at long-distance magical attacks, at least with elemental forces. She dispatches Storm Hounds to slay characters with lightning, and does not care in the slightest how many innocent bystanders die with them when their plane crashes or their haven burns down. She knows a variety of other ghastly curses as well, such as Drowning in Earth, which Pentweret can direct from afar using his magical portraits.

The countess also commands the Sclav. If she has a sympathetic link to a character, she magically transports her *vozhd* to slay him — leaving awesome destruction by a perpetrator who vanishes into thin air.

- **Demetrius:** The spirit-walking Malkavian has no way to affect the physical world, but he can still use his Dementation in his Psychic Double form. Aside from direct attacks on characters, he can madden, delude and derange the people around the characters to use them as weapons.

- **Drenis:** If the Cappadocian priestess knows the general location of the characters, she can reach them by possessing convenient corpses. Drenis might not wield much raw power while using Corpse Projection, but can harass the coterie by mundane means. She can also recruit her ghostly friends to search for the characters and attack them with their spectral powers.

- **Eshmunamash:** The old Brujah healer not only Summons characters back to Hunedoara, he can also inspire other people with murderous hatred for them. He needs the help of other Inconnu to find likely agents, though, since his Compel Passion power works only on people he has met or to whom he has some other connection. He can mobilize anyone who ever visited the castle, though.

- **Hill:** Cret's childe cannot equal his sire as a master of spirits; he actually needs mortal agents to work his will. Nevertheless, Warrick was not his only dream-guided agent, and Hill surpasses his sire at military planning. Hill activates other servants, each gifted with a variety of talismans, to hunt his foes, if he, Cret and Eshmunamash cannot simply Summon the coterie back to Hunedoara.

- **Mahtiel:** Of all the Twelve, the Salubri is least likely to hunt fleeing characters, or even to notice them. If any character read the *Journals of Rothriel* or Demetrius' mystical works, however,

that link might guide the Dreamer of Hunedoara to them — and the others could follow her wandering spirit. If the others make the Salubri aware of the danger the coterie poses, she can engage them through Dream Combat.

- **Pentweret:** Like the other thaumaturges, Pentweret attacks through sendings of spirits and other minions. He specializes in living statues, and damn the Masquerade. If any character let the Setite draw his portrait, Pentweret uses it to send curses from himself or any other thaumaturge. His own most powerful curse is A Surfeit of Serpents.

- **Zamra:** Given a threat to her own survival, the Lasombra commits her extended family to the hunt. The Twelve gain all the mortal legwork they need to track the characters, as well as minions with any mundane skill that seems desirable. The thaumaturges can also arm Zamra's descendants with magical devices.

ESCAPING PURSUIT

Characters can prevent the Twelve from pursuing them in several ways. None of them are easy or pleasant.

- Characters can beg one of the Inconnu with Dominate to erase their memory of Hunedoara and send them away. Cret, Hill or Zamra might do this if it would annoy a rival.

- Characters can try to deceive the Twelve into thinking that they accept their job offers, and persuade them that they do not need magical oaths of obedience. Good luck: These creatures are very old, very perceptive and very suspicious.

- Get help from the Tremere or other powerful thaumaturges. Given a bit of luck, the coterie might find a sorcerer who knows a ritual that cuts the characters from any sympathetic links held by the Twelve, and shields them from Summoning. Naturally, the coterie's benefactor expects repayment proportional to the task of saving the characters from the vengeance of 12 elders. This is called "out of the frying pan, into the fire."

- Set the Twelve against each other. Once they start killing each other and the deadman-switch curses start going off, the Inconnu of Hunedoara do not survive long. If any of them survive the domino-chain of revenge, the demon takes them soon enough.

- Interrupt the Pact's renewal. The demon solves the coterie's problem for them. We leave it to each Storyteller to decide how long after the coterie's arrival the Pact's renewal takes place, but it is not long.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: THE PROXY

This plot begins after the characters arrive at the castle. Until then, the characters seem to follow one of the other plots — but that story conceals a deeper plot. Actually, one of the Twelve stage-managed the earlier story as part of a scheme to escape the Pact. Indeed, the scheme began long before any of the characters became undead.

Before you storytell “The Proxy,” examine the players’ characters to see which of them most resembles one of the Twelve. Which ones come from the same clans as the Twelve? Do any of them have any similar events in their backgrounds? For instance, was any character a soldier like Hill, a rape victim like Drenis, or medically trained like Eshmunamash? Do any characters share Natures or Demeanors with any of the Twelve?

Now consider which one of the Twelve you could alter to resemble a player’s character even more closely. You can add or subtract incidents from their past to increase the similarity. In particular, think about ways you could make an Inconnu’s Embrace more like that of a player’s character. You might even change the Inconnu’s clan, if that does not force major changes to the elder’s Disciplines.

You end up with an Inconnu whose unlife and personality parallels one of the players’ characters. That elder becomes the prime mover of The Proxy, while that player’s character becomes the principle victim.

THE HOOK: LURED TO HUNEDOARA

One of the Twelve believes the Pact has a loophole: It never specifies anyone by name. Instead, it refers to individuals by circumlocutions such as “blood and soul.” This Inconnu reasons that if he can create a Cainite who duplicates him, in blood and soul, he can foist the Pact onto that vampire and go free. All of the Twelve know that replacement can happen through diablerie. That solution is obviously not acceptable to the Inconnu who wants to escape. He must ensure the victim’s similarity by every other means possible — to produce a mystical twin.

This Inconnu, henceforth called the “principal,” spent a long time searching for mortals who resembled him, preferably an actual descendant from his mortal family. The principal manipulated the mortal’s life to make it more like his own (within the limits set by centuries or millennia of historical change, of course.) He even arranged the mortal’s Embrace, into his own Cainite bloodline if possible.

This character — one of the players’ characters — is his proxy for the Pact.

The principal finally decides to reel in the proxy. He does it using one of the other plotlines. If the principal happens to be one of the Inconnu described as driving that story, well and good. If not, substitute the principal for one of the other Inconnu or decide that one of the Twelve acted at the behest of the principal to repay various boons.

The principal drops clues if the characters cannot figure out the way to Hunedoara. The elder might plant ideas directly in a character’s head — suitably disguised from the players by asking for Intelligence rolls (whoever makes the roll retroactively becomes the character targeted by the principal). Characters can meet people who know something about Hunedoara, such as a geologist who mentions the unexplained seismographic echoes. Such good fortune may stretch the characters’ credulity (not to mention the players’) but as long as they arrive at the castle, who cares? A desperate principal can send out a ghoulish servant (such as Dobos from “Coterie for Hire”) for the coterie to discover and follow back to the castle or torture for information.

If the characters lose interest, the principal goads them on. The Inconnu might arrange attacks the way Cret does in “The Vengeful Sabbat Pack” by hiring or dominating easily defeated thugs. Attacks by animals are also possible. Mysterious warnings not to go certain places or do certain things convey information while assuring characters that they seek something worth their trouble. As always, you may assume that if the principal cannot do something himself, he can cash in boons and hire another of the Twelve to do for him.

Once the coterie finds its way into the castle, the true story begins — but still in secret.

THE LINE: PERSUASIONS

For the final stage of his plan, the principal needs to share his blood and mind with the proxy. This ritual resembles the Sabbat’s Vaulderie, but only two Cainites take part. It is not actual Thaumaturgy, though Koldunic Sorcery inspires the rite. All of the Twelve have had centuries to learn about Danika’s magic, though no one except Anastazi actually learned it.

The principal can apply various pressures and blandishments to the proxy. The elder can offer the

character a chance to share in his great power as his agent outside the castle. The principal can warn of danger from other Inconnu and claim the ritual provides protection. The principal might even fake an attack by bribing or deceiving another elder. Inconnu with Obfuscate can impersonate other elders to warn of dire retribution if the character takes the offer (nothing like a threat to show what's valuable...) or impersonate a servant to speak of the principal's goodness. If the character is already bound to some other Cainite, the elder points out that the rite will break the blood oath.

The demon plays along, since this suits its desires. It sends dreams that show the benefits of working with the elder and hallucinations of the threat posed by other Inconnu. It can even create hallucinatory documents that speak of a past visitor who used the ritual with one of the Inconnu, to the benefit of both.

THE SINKER: BOND OF DOOM

The ritual to unite the Principal and Proxy, blood and soul, takes three nights. The two Cainites mingle their vitae in a goblet, bless it as they proclaim their union into one being, then they drink.

The elder, as the more powerful personality, dominates the powerful Vinculum established by the rite. That night, the principal tests the soul bond by trying to leave the castle grounds. It works!

Henceforth, the principal or proxy can leave without breaking the Pact — just not both.

At this point, the elder could simply walk out. That's not enough, though. The principal knows the power of his fellow elders... and the rage they will feel when they discover he has beaten the Pact. He decides to wreck the Pact and destroy the Twelve.

At this point, the principal can attack the other Inconnu. He learns that his union of soul and blood does not work quite the way he thought: Retributive damage does not bounce to the proxy. The damage divides, so each character takes half. Ah, well, neither magic, demon pacts or the Curse of Caine are exact sciences. Still, the elder can murder one other Inconnu and survive. Final Death for a Cainite equals six health levels of aggravated damage: Principal and proxy each take three.

The elder forgot about all the deadman-switch curses. When one of the Twelve meets Final Death, the curses he placed on his chief rivals go off. The chain of curses eventually cycles back to the elder and his proxy.

At this point, roll a 10-sided die. On a 1 or a 10, the curse affects both principal and proxy equally. On a roll from 2 to 5, the principal suffers the effect. On 6 to 9, only the proxy takes the effect. Whichever character of the pair dies first, the other comes under the full force of the Pact again. The destruction of Hunedoara has begun.

RESOLUTION: THE CRUCIBLE OF GOD

All the mysteries of Hunedoara meet on one night. Soon after the characters arrive in Hunedoara, the Twelve either renew the pact together, renounce it together — or, if they have begun killing each other, the remaining Inconnu go to hell together.

Which they choose depends very much on the players' characters. If the coterie played on the Twelve's rivalries or joined their intrigues, the elders destroy themselves. If the characters remain cautious and neutral, the Twelve may destroy themselves anyway, if the Storyteller thinks it appropriate; the only question is whether they also destroy the coterie through their infighting. On the other hand, brave characters could try persuading the Twelve to renounce the Pact and seek Golconda once more.

THE NIGHT OF SACRIFICE

If the characters prevent the Twelve into self-destructing, but do no more, they attend the yearly sacrifice to renew the Pact. If they do not already know it, they learn the price of perfect protection. The price may come closer to home than they expect.

SETTING THE SCENE

As night falls, the air feels still, heavy and tense, like right before a storm breaks, though the sky is clear. The servants gather in the castle courtyard. They seem dazed. They cannot explain their actions except to say they are waiting. It's hard to make them talk at all.

At 9 o'clock, the Sclav carries a stone slab out of the Knight's Hall. It lays the slab on four short stone legs that Cret slides into position. The slab is carved with a circle bisected by a line, with rays emanating from the lower half: A successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8) allows the character to recognize this as an ancient symbol of the sun after it has set, the death of light and the power of darkness. No one needs



a roll to recognize the meaning of the gutters carved in the slab, or the iron bowl that Cret places where the gutters converge to pour off the edge.

One by one, the other Inconnu arrive. Everyone wears their finest and most formal garb. Demetrius and Mahtiel are the last to arrive. Phantom no longer, the Salubri looks as if every second brings her pain. The Slav brings a small barrel from the Knight's Hall while Anastazi kindles a fire in a brazier.

At about 10:00, Drenis moves from servant to servant. The Cappadocian writes each servant's name on a handkerchief-sized square of cloth. Then she pricks the servant's thumb with a bodkin and daubs a smear of blood onto the cloth. The bloodstained cloths go in the barrel. Then she does the same for each of the Twelve, including herself. At last, she comes to the characters. All who dwell in the castle must take part in the lottery.

THE DEMON'S CHOICE

At 11:00, Cret produces a scroll. He does not bother looking at it as he intones the words of an ancient tongue. The tension in the air grows. Characters do not see the demon, but they feel its presence. Nothing but a fallen angel could give a sense of such power, or such terror. At the end, the characters hear the Power's name: "Nikanuuranu!"

After the invocation, Cret speaks in English for the convenience of the... guests. He says, "We gather once more. Last year's blood and souls are here again. Do we all agree to continue the pact?" He calls each Inconnu's name. Every one says, "Yes," though some hesitate and Cret must ask them again. Cret adds his assent at the end.

"Then we are agreed. Great Nikanuuranu, choose your sacrifice."

Anastazi reaches into the barrel. He shuts his eyes and stirs the cloths, then withdraws one. He opens his eyes and reads the name.

It is one of the players' characters.

YOUR OWN LOTTERY

In advance of the session, write the names of the players' characters on slips of paper. Make four or five slips for each character, to make a large enough collection. Smear a little ketchup or red food coloring on them, to represent the blood. Place them in a jar or some other container and mix them up. Draw a slip yourself, or invite one of the players to take Anastazi's role.

THE COTERIE'S CHOICE

Do the characters go along with the demon's lottery? This is their last chance to escape Hunedoara. At this time, and no other night of the year, the Twelve are too busy to pursue them. If they run before their names go in the barrel, they can get away. How long they remain free before the Twelve come after them... well, that's up to the Storyteller.

Once their names go in the barrel, the Twelve *cannot* let the characters escape. They have one hour to bring the selected character back before the demon counts the Pact as broken and takes them all. The demon cannot let the characters escape since it cannot *directly* help break its own pact... but it does not use its power to pull the characters back to the courtyard, as it could. The Twelve pursue the characters with everything they have and join the hunt themselves. The characters have one hour to evade 12 powerful elders, dozens of servants and the Slav.

All the while, the demon speaks in the characters' heads. It offers each character his heart's desire if he surrenders his comrade to the sacrifice. They can join the Twelve. They can *replace* the Twelve. They can have power beyond their wildest dreams.

THE SACRIFICE

Normally, the rite ends with the victim — always a servant in former years — tied to the altar. Drenis cuts the victim's throat. The blood drains into the iron bowl. Cret pours the blood into the bonfire with a ceremonial phrase of offering in the same ancient tongue as the invocation. All the cloths from the barrel follow, to signify that all who dwell in the castle accept the demon's power over them. As the smoke of the sacrifice rises, everyone briefly sees a shadow against the sky, darker than the night and blotting out the stars, and a great dark hand stretched out in awful blessing. The demon has accepted the Pact for another year.

The servants, still in a daze, return to the castle and their normal duties. The Twelve scatter as well. Demetrius guides Mahtiel back to her chamber and her dreams. The Slav tidies up: It carries the altar, barrel and body to the Knight's Hall, licks the altar clean and eats the corpse of the sacrifice.

ALL FALL DOWN

This resolution assumes that some of the Twelve hate each other. Not dislike — *hate*. At least one Inconnu plots to destroy the group. That's not so easy under the conditions of the Pact and all the deadman-switch curses the Twelve have laid on each other. The

Storyteller must decide who instigates the Twelve's destruction and who she chooses as the first victim.

SUICIDE

At the furthest extreme of spite, one of the Twelve can stay up to watch the dawn. Her Final Death makes it impossible for the others to meet the terms of the Pact and activates the first deadman-switch curses. In this case, murderer and victim are the same Cainite.

MURDER

A cunning Inconnu might attempt murder if he thought he had a way to escape the Pact and the deadman-switch curses. That requires a player's character to serve as an unwitting proxy. If the Inconnu manages to bind a character as his other self, he soon attacks the Cainite he hates above all others, as described above in "The Proxy." As an alternative, an enraged Inconnu might attack and destroy a fellow pacter in his frenzy.

MURDER, REDUX

The coterie themselves might destroy one of the Twelve — probably one of the weaker members such as Anastazi or Abdalkutba. In that case, the remaining 11 face the double challenge of recruiting a replacement while coping with the deadman-switch curses left by the coterie's victim.

The only possible replacements are... the players' characters themselves. One of the Twelve points this out to the characters and the other Inconnu, which saves the characters from the revenge of the other elders. If the characters diablerized their victim, the survivors draft the diablerist as the replacement. If not, one of the now-Eleven reveals that he does have a vial of the slain Cainite's vitae, while one of the Tzimisce could fleshcraft a character into a body double. Nobody mentions that the plan also requires Cret, Hill or Zamra to Dominate the character into believing that he really is the slain Cainite. Trying to fool the demon this way is a long shot, but it's all the Inconnu have.

The terms of the Pact force the demon to accept a diablerist as a replacement pacter. Once more, we leave it to the Storyteller to decide whether the demon accepts an impostor. Which seems more exciting and horrific: the doom of Hunedoara, or trapping a character within its walls?

DOMINO THEORY

The Final Death of any one of the Twelve activates whatever curses she laid on her special enemies. None of the curses are immediately lethal to such powerful creatures, but at least one other Inconnu falls

within a few nights. That triggers another round of curses... and the dominos keep falling.

All this places tremendous pressure on the various thaumaturges to rescind any curses they placed on another Inconnu's behalf. This also gives the thaumaturges a golden opportunity to make the others grovel over past slights... except these proud Cainites won't grovel. As the "This is *your* fault!" recriminations mount, some Inconnu declare they'd rather die (again) than humble themselves, and the thaumaturges sneer and say, "Then die!"

For an example, let's say that Eshmunamash decides that they all deserve to die and commits suicide. Over the centuries, he commissioned curses from the thaumaturges in the group. As he burns in the morning sun, deadman-switch curses fall on Cret, Drenis and Bufo, originally cast by Pentweret, Danika and Cret. The Ventrue starts shitting snakes. Drenis finds that stone and earth are as yielding as mud under her feet. Bufo suffers the Platonic Split and his own incarnate Beast hunts him through the castle. Bufo and Drenis demand that the thaumaturges lift their curses. Cret says he will lift the curse on Bufo, if Pentweret lifts the curse on him. The Setite sorcerer says he'll do it... if Bufo has Hill lift the curse he placed on Pentweret on the Nosferatu's behalf, and while they're at it, he wants Bufo and Hill to beg his pardon for some insults back in the 19th century. Cret says, "So apologize, idiots!" and negotiations go downhill from there. The demon laughs.

On the second night, Cret has survived his curse but it has wounded and weakened him. Bufo hides from his Beast. Drenis tries to stay on the furniture, but slips and falls through the floor. Before anyone can run downstairs to catch her, the Cappadocian sinks through the cellar floor and is lost. The demon laughs some more. Abdalkutba points out what everyone knew but no one wanted to say: The night of the Sacrifice approaches and they now lack two pacters. They might have replaced one destroyed pacter. Can they replace two?

On the third night, Bufo's Beast finds him and kills him. It rampages freely through the castle. At Bufo's Final Death, Hill's curse on Pentweret activates: A seraph appears and attacks the Setite. Cret could have banished the angel, but he now suffers from the Drowning in Earth curse, which Danika once laid on him on Bufo's behalf. The Setite burns while the Ventrue calls the servants to lay carpets across the stone floor.

Pentweret left his own deadman curses on various Inconnu. He also programmed his statue servitors and ghoulish cobra to avenge his destruction. The statues march through the castle attacking any Cainites they see. They corner Cret and slay the weakened Ventrue.

Cret's deadman curses activate... and so on. By the night of the Sacrifice, half the Twelve are destroyed, in torpor or buried deep in the ground. The demon laughs harder than ever as it takes every pacter who remains.

IF THE TWELVE ALL QUIT

What if all of the Twelve simply decided to end the Pact? Physically, this would be easy. On the night of the sacrifice, the Twelve merely tell the demon that the Pact is null and void. The demon departs... gratefully.

Getting the Twelve to agree is not so easy. They cannot do this on their own. Each one of the Twelve nurses a grudge against three or four others. Even Mahtiel, who avoids confrontation by spending 364 nights of the year in torpor, resents Danika and Anastazi for leading Rothriel to his Final Death.

Before the Twelve can quit the Pact, then, someone must persuade them to forgive each other five centuries' worth of petty slights, arguments and grudges. They all believe they hold legitimate grievances, so the others should apologize first. Even if they can't punish their rivals any other way, they can keep them from going scot-free and getting away with their insults.

The Golconda-seekers among them actually require the most persuasion before they admit fault. After all, they are *enlightened*. After centuries of atonement, meditation and spiritual development, *they* are supposed to confess that they are no better than the others?

The Twelve must also agree to remove the various deadman-switch curses on each other. Once again, it comes down to "You first." After all, suppose they did renounce the Pact and lost its protection against each other? What guarantee do they have that their rivals will not strike against them? The curses born of old grievances, however, have become points of grievance themselves. If they cannot trust each other to disarm the curses, they cannot trust each other enough to renounce the Pact.

Each of the Twelve fears that if only some of them renounce the Pact, the others will strike a new deal with the demon. They might even find themselves offered as sacrifices to seal the new pact. None of them, not even the master demonologist Cret, knows if the demon would accept such a scenario — but none of them want to take that chance.

Ending the Pact, then, goes far beyond rational calculation. The players' characters need to find a way for everyone to back down and save face. The Twelve all feel ashamed at the Pact, but none of them willingly accept that shame on their own. The coterie has a few strategies that might work, though.

• **The Greater Shame.** The Golconda-seekers feel the greatest shame at how far they have fallen from Saulot's ideals. The coterie could challenge them to redeem themselves and prove their enlightenment... or is Cret too irrational to accept the need for ending the pact? Does Pentweret flinch from this ultimate test? After atoning for 2,000 years of death, can Eshmunamash not atone for the sacrifices? Was Golconda a lie all along, and themselves the liars?

• **The Greater Mission.** The Twelve know that Gehenna is coming. Abdalkutba has seen it in the stars. The spirits whisper of dreadful Powers stirring as they awaken. A clan committed suicide and more prophecies come true every year. Some among the Twelve try to fight the coming of Gehenna, but their imprisonment hampers them. If they really want to balk the Antediluvians and their agents, they need to get out of the castle and act more directly. They can't leave the castle unless everyone renounces the Pact. Can they swallow their pride long enough to postpone the end of the world?

• **Honoring a Boon.** In the introverted society of the castle, an Inconnu who defaults on a promise opens himself to endless needling from the others. That's how the others forced the thaumaturges to cast deadman-switch curses on their behalf. If the coterie places one of the Twelve in their debt (as, for instance, Danika's promise of weregild in "The Vengeful Sabbat Pack"), they can demand an apology to the other Inconnu as their repayment. That's only one pacter out of twelve, but it's a start.

• **Moral One-Upmanship.** The Golconda-seekers think they are better than the other Inconnu because they seek redemption. The others think they are better because they don't fool themselves. Each of the Twelve can list the faults and failings of the others in excruciating detail. The coterie might persuade one of the Inconnu that they can prove their moral superiority by being the first to apologize. Removing their deadman-switch curses would show even greater ethical strength. If the coterie work on more than one Inconnu, they might arrange a moral potlatch or bidding war, as the Twelve compete to show who is better than the rest.

All these options require considerable work by the characters. High Social Attributes and Abilities such as Expression, Etiquette or Subterfuge make the task slightly easier. As a Storyteller, however, do not let the players leave the matter to the dice. Insist that the players themselves marshal arguments and stratagems to persuade or manipulate the Twelve into doing the right thing.

AFTERMATH

Quite possibly, all the players' characters meet Final Death in Hunedoara. This is very sad.

This possibility has no aftermath, at least for the characters. They're gone. What happens to the Twelve after that depends on whether the Storyteller wants to bring a new crop of characters to Hunedoara. Quite possibly, the Twelve self-destruct soon after they destroy the characters, or they might continue meddling in the world from the safety of their invisible castle.

The characters might help the Pact continue, though one of them becomes this year's victim. The demon offers favors to the remaining characters. They become part of the Twelve's network of power. The story isn't over, though. There's always next year. That's one more year for the grudges among the Twelve to fester, and one more year for their souls to shrivel under their own hypocrisy. The Twelve call the characters back to Hunedoara for the next sacrifice. It will not occur, though, before the Twelve turn on each other and the dominos fall. The characters merely delayed the Inconnu's doom.

The Twelve might turn on each other and the demon may take them all. This is very sad for the Twelve. It's not very good for the characters, either, because the Inconnu might destroy some of them along the way. Alternatively, the characters might disrupt the Sacrifice so the Inconnu cannot renew the Pact.

This third possibility lets the Storyteller produce a grand, cataclysmic, Industrial Light and Magic ending as the demon drags the Inconnu off to Hell, or whatever destiny their deeds earn them.

If the characters work really hard at it, though, they might persuade the Twelve to renounce the Pact. This fourth possibility has the most far-reaching consequences of all.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF HUNEDOARA

If the night of the sacrifice comes and all the Twelve do not appear to renew the Pact, or they do not offer their sacrificial victim on time, the demon can claim all the pacters who remain. It takes revenge in full measure for its own centuries of entrapment.

The castle shakes as the demon withdraws from its structure, roaring in triumphant laughter. The shaking does not stop as the demon looms over the castle, a vast shadow darker than the night itself, with eyes burning like the fires of Hell. The destruction that the demon averted so long ago catches up to Hunedoara, like a slain vampire crumbling to dust. The walls and towers shiver and fall. The very stones decay as they plummet,

then sink into the ground while waves of moss, weeds and brambles sweep over the castle courtyard. In seconds, nothing remains but a field overgrown with briars and scrub, with a few mossy, half-buried blocks of stone — the very scene the demon conjured to hide the castle.

As for the remaining pacters? They try to run, but they still cannot leave the castle's grounds. The dust from the crumbling castle hides them from the characters' view. When the dust clears, they are gone.

If the characters caused the cataclysm, they find themselves compelled to look up, up, up, to meet the Demon's burning gaze. The Beast within each character quails and wants to flee, but they cannot move. One of the hellfire eyes winks.

"Thank you for your sacrifice," the Demon says. "The Pact is made." Then it vanishes, leaving the characters to parse over every word they said since entering Hunedoara, looking for phrases that a fallen angel might interpret as an offer and a request for a longer-term relationship.

One servant remains — the one who helped the characters. He shakes his head sadly. "They failed. I failed. They chose their damnation despite all I taught them." The servant looks at the characters. "Don't fail, too."

No one ever sees any of the Twelve again. Perhaps the demon snatched them to Hell. This might not be much of a change for them. Perhaps they find themselves back in the 16th century, on the fateful night when the Tremere attacked, but no demon offers a pact to save them. Who can tell? Their fate — and the fate of any character that replaced a pacter before the end — must remain...

...Unknown!

IF THE TWELVE ALL QUIT

If the Twelve renounce the Pact, the castle shakes as the demon withdraws. Here, too, the characters see it as a shadow against the night sky and feel its awful, hellfire gaze upon them. In this case, however, the Demon merely says, "Thank you... and *what took you so long?*" Then it vanishes.

The story is not quite over. The servant who advised the coterie steps forward and clears his throat. "Well done," he says. "I had almost given up hope."

The Twelve glance at the servant. Then some of them do a double-take as they see the servant's aura. "Saulot?" Cret asks. Then a rush of questions and exclamations: "Master!" and "You're not destroyed!" and "Where have you *been?*"

The Twelve soon converge on the final question. Why did Saulot leave the Twelve in the Pact? They

would have ended it if they'd known he still existed, if only he'd asked.

Saulot shakes his head. "And what would that have proved? Obedience would not redeem you." His voice hardens. "And if you could not make the choice for yourself, then all my teaching was in vain, and I would not mourn your loss." He turns and begins walking away. "Teach, and you may learn, before the end. I — I am finished with teaching and Jyhad." He looks back, though, and his expression softens. "Only one here needs my help. Sclav — come, and be whole." The Sclav shambles forward and takes Saulot's hand. Anyone who tries to follow or stop the pair finds that the Antediluvian and the *vozhd* simply vanish.

Most of the Twelve leave Hunedoara. Only Danika still thinks of it as home. Even Anastazi vows never to return, both "native soil" and feudal obligations be damned.

Nothing obviously dramatic happens immediately after that. Hunedoara Castle rejoins the world as subtly as it departed. No one in town suddenly goes, "My god! Where did that castle come from?" It was always there; they just did not pay much attention to it.

Within a year, though, the Romanian ministry of tourism notices the beautiful, well-preserved castle. The government declares Hunedoara a national landmark, prints brochures and arranges package tours to "a treasure of Romania's romantic past."

Whoever stays at the castle — from Danika Ruthven to the players' characters — then faces the challenge of cleaning it up. Cret's magic circles, the shrine of Saulot, the coffins, the animate statues... it's all a gigantic Masquerade breach waiting to happen.

The Twelve do not quietly fade away. They confronted their own fallibility and egotism, and they learned something from the experience. They intend to apply what they learned, too.

Most importantly, they learned that they probably do not have time to atone for centuries of yearly murder. The Antediluvians awaken; Gehenna is nigh. As long as they can stand each other, though, their Disciplines, their Thaumaturgy and other resources make them perhaps the world's most powerful coterie. Freed from the restrictions of Hunedoara, they can rouse the World of Darkness to fight the Antediluvians. Within a year, most of the Twelve work together again.

The Twelve are quite capable of killing the ancient Methuselahs who form the Antediluvians' heralds and generals. The challenge lies in finding them. The Twelve try to unite the world's Noddists in a crash program to locate the sleeping Ancients. Even if they

cannot find or destroy the Antediluvians themselves, the Twelve and their allies can reduce their power.

Indeed, the Twelve recruit every Cainite they can find who wants to destroy the Ancients. Camarilla, Sabbat or independent clan makes no difference to them. They do their best to convince Camarilla and Sabbat leaders to end their perpetual war and go after the real enemy. Far more Sabbat listen than Camarilla elders, though not as many as the Twelve hope: More Sabbat talk about fighting Antediluvians than are willing to put their unives on the line for it. The Black Hand listens, though. Most of them may be young but they have courage and determination. Their war has come; they embrace it.

Cret, Eshmunamash and several other members of the Twelve also give their fellow Inconnu a piece of their mind. The Inconnu follow two goals: Seeking Golconda and hiding from the Jyhad. None of the Twelve believe any longer that isolation from the world helps a Cainite conquer the Beast, and they don't believe you can hide from the Ancients, either. They try to convince the Inconnu to cease their endless hiding and watching and waiting. If they will not join the campaign against the Ancients, they can at least spread the word about Golconda and teach as many Cainites as best they can. If Golconda is indeed the only way to escape the Ancients' power completely, the Cainite race needs as many free agents as possible.

The Golconda-seekers among the Twelve attempt a desperate experiment. They know that each of them approached the blessed state, but never quite achieved or succeeded at the Suspire. When they gathered at Hunedoara, they hoped that pooling their insight would lead to success. They try again — not with themselves, but with students. Eshmunamash, Cret, Drenis and Pentweret seek volunteers for a “crash

SAULOT'S FINAL WORDS

Whether the Twelve damn or redeem themselves, Saulot has one last message for the characters before he disappears into the night.

“Gehenna comes. Nothing can stop it. Already you may see its eye in the heavens. I do not know if you can help yourself, the world or anything you love, but you can try. The One Above looks upon you... and perhaps he looks with favor. We enter the crucible of God. Pray that you come forth as gold, instead of burning with the rest of our accursed race. For myself — He has told me my fate. Do not expect to see me again.”

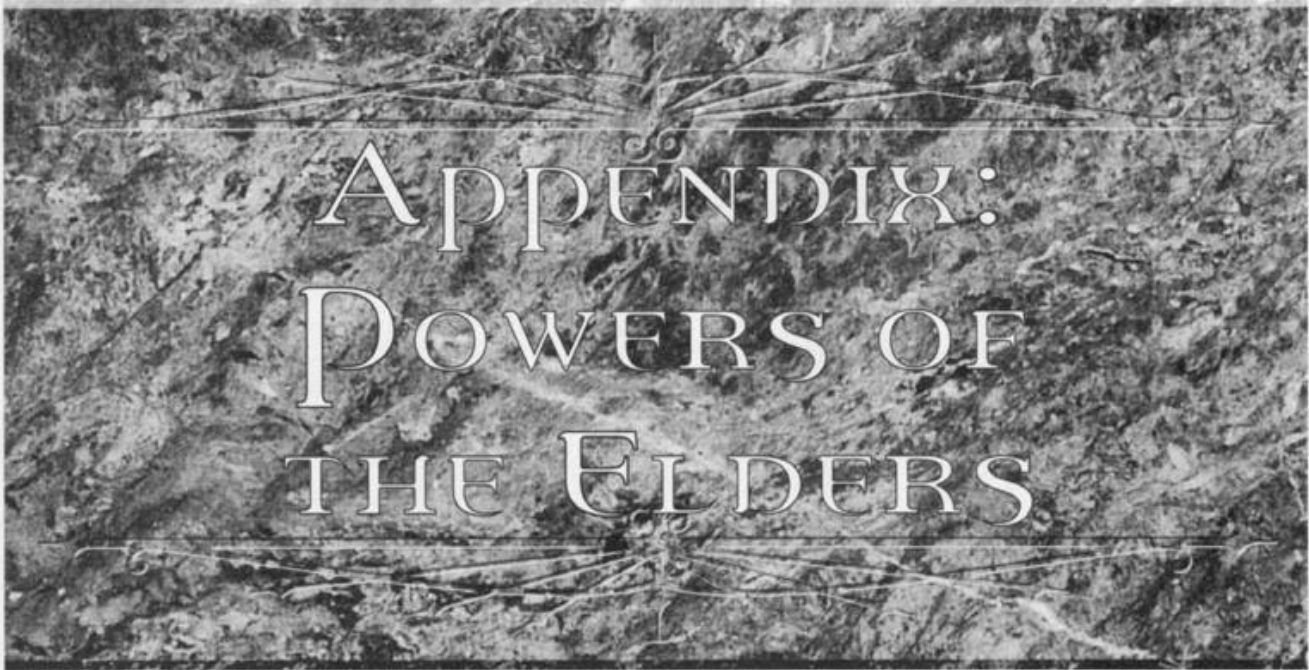
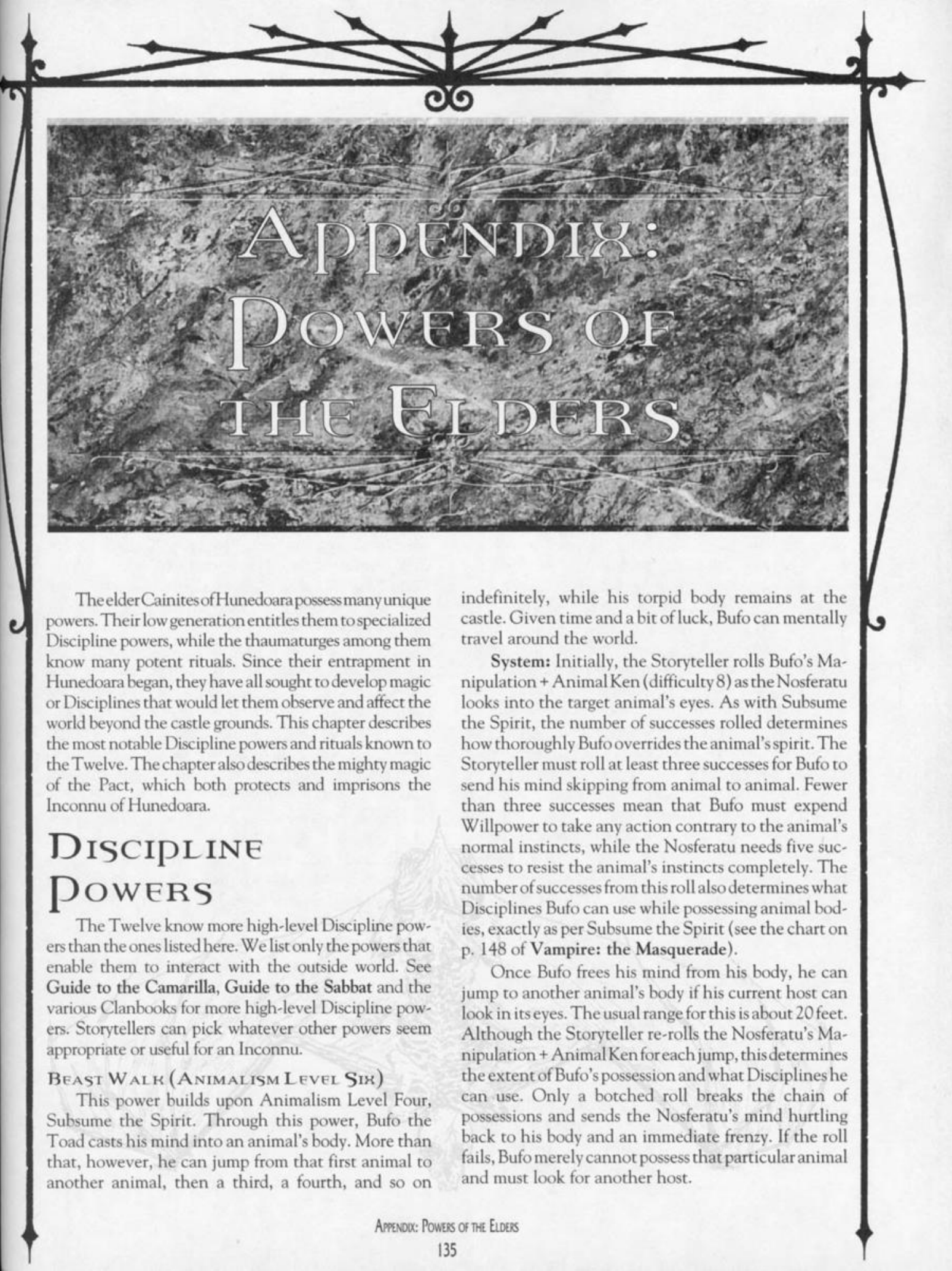
Golconda” program that will make Pentweret's old notions of “hard, fast and dangerous” look slow and timid. Any Cainite brave or desperate enough to accept tuition from the four Inconnu is in for a journey of self-discovery that either brings him to the Suspire in months, or drives him mad like the late Vanth — with no guarantee that the program works at all.

In all of this, the Twelve remain in contact with their liberators as much as those characters permit. The elders do not push the issue if the characters never want to see them again; they are too busy to pester some insightful but contrary neonates. A coterie that accepts the Twelve as its collective mentor can expect an exciting unlife, however, as the elders send them around the world of Darkness on missions to recruit other Cainites, seek clues to the ancients and gather rare components for the dire rituals that can slay creatures older than the Pyramids. They move onto the front lines of the Jyhad as they try to save the world.

All this, however, depends on the players and the Storyteller. It is another story that you must explore yourselves.







APPENDIX: POWERS OF THE ELDERS

The elder Cainites of Hunedoara possess many unique powers. Their low generation entitles them to specialized Discipline powers, while the thaumaturges among them know many potent rituals. Since their entrapment in Hunedoara began, they have all sought to develop magic or Disciplines that would let them observe and affect the world beyond the castle grounds. This chapter describes the most notable Discipline powers and rituals known to the Twelve. The chapter also describes the mighty magic of the Pact, which both protects and imprisons the Inconnu of Hunedoara.

DISCIPLINE POWERS

The Twelve know more high-level Discipline powers than the ones listed here. We list only the powers that enable them to interact with the outside world. See *Guide to the Camarilla*, *Guide to the Sabbat* and the various Clanbooks for more high-level Discipline powers. Storytellers can pick whatever other powers seem appropriate or useful for an Inconnu.

BEAST WALK (ANIMALISM LEVEL SIX)

This power builds upon Animalism Level Four, Subsume the Spirit. Through this power, Bufo the Toad casts his mind into an animal's body. More than that, however, he can jump from that first animal to another animal, then a third, a fourth, and so on

indefinitely, while his torpid body remains at the castle. Given time and a bit of luck, Bufo can mentally travel around the world.

System: Initially, the Storyteller rolls Bufo's Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 8) as the Nosferatu looks into the target animal's eyes. As with Subsume the Spirit, the number of successes rolled determines how thoroughly Bufo overrides the animal's spirit. The Storyteller must roll at least three successes for Bufo to send his mind skipping from animal to animal. Fewer than three successes mean that Bufo must expend Willpower to take any action contrary to the animal's normal instincts, while the Nosferatu needs five successes to resist the animal's instincts completely. The number of successes from this roll also determines what Disciplines Bufo can use while possessing animal bodies, exactly as per Subsume the Spirit (see the chart on p. 148 of *Vampire: the Masquerade*).

Once Bufo frees his mind from his body, he can jump to another animal's body if his current host can look in its eyes. The usual range for this is about 20 feet. Although the Storyteller re-rolls the Nosferatu's Manipulation + Animal Ken for each jump, this determines the extent of Bufo's possession and what Disciplines he can use. Only a botched roll breaks the chain of possessions and sends the Nosferatu's mind hurtling back to his body and an immediate frenzy. If the roll fails, Bufo merely cannot possess that particular animal and must look for another host.

Beast Walk also surpasses Subsume the Spirit in that Bufo can possess an animal's body by day without the need for his own body to stay awake. Instead, the Nosferatu's body is in torpor for the duration of the Beast Walk. He wakes up as soon as he ends the possession (or at least the next nightfall at Hunedoara). As with Subsume the Spirit, if the possessed animal dies, Bufo enters full torpor, with the duration set by his Humanity rating.

HOROSCOPIC FORECAST (AUSPEX LEVEL SIX)

Abdalkutba first used astrology as a tool to focus the psychic, intuitive aspects of Heightened Senses, enabling him to read more into his charts than the average mortal astrologer. After centuries of practice, his combination of astrology and Auspex yielded this unique power. By casting a horoscope for a person, group or institution and inspecting the night sky, the Assamite can gain glimpses of the subject's future.

System: To use this power, Abdalkutba needs information about the target. To cast a mortal's horoscope, the vizier needs the approximate time and place of her birth. For a Cainite, Abdalkutba needs the time and place of both mortal birth and the Embrace. He can get along without this data if he knows the Cainite extremely well: Given a few decades, he can observe the events of the Cainite's unlife, compare them to the motions of the planets and so deduce the conditions of the character's birth and Embrace. The Assamite has done this for the rest of the Twelve, but for no other extant vampires.

For a group or institution, Abdalkutba needs some other time that serves as a point of origin, and as much other information as he can gather. For instance, if the Assamite cast a horoscope for the United States of America, he would draw horoscope charts for July 4, 1776 (the signing of the Declaration of Independence) and March 4, 1789 (the date Congress declared the Constitution in effect), at Philadelphia in both cases.

After Abdalkutba prepares his horoscope charts and meditates upon them, he consults the skies. The power does not work if the vizier cannot actually see the heavens: The astrologer watches for shooting stars, clouds, auroras and the way the stars and planets twinkle, as well as the locations of the planets. After an hour's observation, the shape of the target's future comes to the vizier. To determine how much of the future Abdalkutba sees, the Storyteller rolls the Assamite's Perception + Occult (difficulty 8). For each success rolled, the vizier divines one fact about the person or group's most probable future. If the vizier seeks the answer to a particular question, instead of a general forecast, the difficulty rises to 9. Botches result in false revelations. Even successes, how-

ever, do not always provide a time frame. The vizier might see events of the next night, next week, next year....

Note: Once the Assamite's forecasts extended centuries in advance. His firm assurance to Cret that the Twelve of Hunedoara were among the world's few faint hopes to survive Gehenna helped persuade the Ventrue to establish the Pact. Over the last century, however, the astrologer's horoscopes became more vague and difficult. Since the Red Star appeared in the sky, a curtain has dropped across the future. Now, the Assamite cannot foresee any event more than a single year in the future. His horoscopes for the Twelve also changed. Now their most probable future lies in darkness and fire. Abdalkutba does not speak of this to his fellow prisoners.

SUPERNAL AWARENESS (AUSPEX LEVEL SEVEN)

An ancient vampire can develop such exquisitely refined psychic intuition that he can sense events and deeds anywhere in the world. The Assamite vizier Abdalkutba possesses such awareness. What Abdalkutba wants to know... he knows. He knows who the Sabbat pack killed last week. He knows where the Nazi colonel hid his loot. He knows about that spat you had with your wife — if you sufficiently interest Abdalkutba that he pays attention to you.

To gain this omniscience, however, Abdalkutba must cast a horoscope. If the Assamite knows the time and place of a mortal's birth, that mortal's entire life is an open book for Abdalkutba to read. The vizier can also cast horoscopes for groups and institutions, from bridge clubs to nations. In such cases, he merely needs a thorough description of the group so he can work out what stars and planets govern its fate.

Supernatural creatures resist this near-divine knowledge. Vampires, werewolves, mages and such ilk exist partly outside the normal bounds of reality, so they are a bit blurry to Abdalkutba's intuition. The more powerful a supernatural creature, the less likely the vizier can mystically spy on its actions.

Supernal Awareness is also limited to knowledge of the past and present. The power grants no knowledge of the future.

System: Abdalkutba can use this power at will, if he ever cast the target's horoscope some time in the past. Supernal Awareness supplies information that the vizier could gain by sight or hearing, if he could see and hear everything that ever happened to his target. Supernal Awareness does not supply thoughts, motivations or explanations — just the raw observations. Abdalkutba must guess at the reasons of events.

When the Assamite directs Supernal Awareness at another vampire, the Storyteller rolls the Assamite's Perception + Alertness. The difficulty is the sum of the target character's Willpower and Generation Traits. If the difficulty rises beyond 10, the target is "invisible" to Supernal Awareness. Thus, most high-generation vampires are easy targets, but other Methuselahs usually lie beyond the power's reach. Still, Abdalkutba can deduce a great deal from what happens to the people around an elder vampire.

Other supernatural beings don't have Generation, but they usually possess some Trait of their own that measures their raw magical potential. These Traits can substitute for Generation in determining whether Supernal Awareness succeeds. Mages, for instance, measure their power using a Trait called Arete, while Rank might do for werewolves. If you do not have the appropriate game to use as reference (or don't want to bother with other games' rules), just multiply the target creature's Willpower by one and a half to find the difficulty for Supernal Awareness. Mortals lack any such Trait, so for them the difficulty is straight Willpower.

If an attempt at Supernal Awareness fails, Abdalkutba cannot attempt to gain information about the target for one full year.

ENIGMATIC TEXT (DEMENTATION LEVEL SIX)

The Malkavians' familiarity with madness renders them peculiarly able to extract information from sources where it should not exist. Some elder Malkavians, including Demetrius, can reverse the process and plant information in hidden forms. They usually do this through speech or writing, but Malkavians have planted hidden messages in paintings, music, flower arrangements, trash scattered around the haven or anything else that the hand or mind could shape. A person who sees, hears or reads the Malkavian's work for an extended period recognizes the hidden meaning, though he cannot say exactly where the information comes from. Demetrius writes his tracts about Golconda using Enigmatic Text.

System: Enigmatic communication requires a simple success on a Wits + Expression roll. The difficulty depends on the medium. Planting a hidden meaning in words is difficulty 6; in a nonverbal medium that is nevertheless a recognized form of communication, such as a painting, is difficulty 7; and a form that does not normally convey information at all, such as piles of pebbles or a table-setting, is difficulty 8. The power does not cost blood points. If, however, the Kindred wants to store the Enigmatic Text in a permanent form so that anyone can perceive the message later, this costs the character two points of Willpower.

If someone receives an Enigmatic Text directly from the Malkavian, no roll is needed; the target always understands the message. Imparting an Enigmatic Text directly takes a few minutes. "Reading" a stored Enigmatic Text takes at least an hour, and a lengthy Enigmatic Text may take nights or weeks to understand in full. The character's player rolls Perception + Expression (difficulty 6) to receive the hidden meaning. This is an extended roll. The Storyteller decides how many successes the player must accumulate to comprehend the Enigmatic Text. One of Demetrius' tracts, for instance, typically requires five successes to extract his thoughts on seeking Golconda.

Demetrius' tracts also have a special power not usually held by Enigmatic Texts. Anyone who reads them becomes a beacon to the Malkavian's far-traveling spirit. Anyone who studies and understands one of Demetrius' tracts may, in time, receive a visit from Demetrius himself, using his Psychic Double power (see below).

DYNASTIC POWER (DOMINATE LEVEL SEVEN)

Every wise vampire fears the power their ancient, monstrous ancestors may wield over them. A more tenuous transmission of blood occurs among mortals, but a few vampires, such as Zamra, can send their wills along this line of descent. A vampire with Dynastic Power can supernaturally influence her mortal descendants. Whole families may work at the direction of an ancestor they believe long dead, or have completely forgotten.

System: Dynastic Power affects only one descendant at a time, and Zamra must have some way to identify that descendant, such as a name or a picture. She cannot simply will a command blindly, hoping that some great-grandchild will obey.

The vampire's player rolls Manipulation + Leadership, with a difficulty of 3 + the number of mortal generations between the vampire and the descendant. Thus, a mortal child would be difficulty 4; a grandchild, difficulty 5; and so on, to a maximum of 10. If the roll succeeds, the vampire can implant a hypnotic suggestion as per the Mesmerize power.

Eventually, the blood connection becomes too remote for Dynastic Power to work. A vampire can extend the power's usefulness by arranging unions between descendants. Inbreeding the family this way keeps the blood connection strong: The progeny of first or second cousins (or even closer relations) do not increase the difficulty of Dynastic Power. To maintain a herd of exploitable descendants for several centuries requires careful supervision of the stock. Zamra has bred her descendants this way for

several centuries. She also preserves a few grandchildren as ghouls, to replenish the bloodline. Zamra usually faces a difficulty of 6 to 8.

RAISE THE DEAD (MORTIS LEVEL SIX)

By feeding her blood to a corpse, Drenis can reanimate the body to create a zombie servant. These undead minions do not last long, but they loyally work their mistress' will while they endure. The walking dead possess considerable toughness — most wounds don't matter much because they are already dead — but relatively little intellect.

System: To animate a corpse, Drenis must feed it at least one blood point of her vitae. As soon as the first drop dribbles into its mouth, the corpse animates and sucks for more. For the moment, though, the corpse is so feeble that Drenis can easily stop giving blood when she wants.

A zombie created by Raise the Dead has the same Physical Attributes it had in life. Reanimation does not change the zombie's appearance: A well-embalmed cadaver may look quite lifelike, while a rotting, flyblown corpse looks like a *walking*, rotting, flyblown corpse. While the reanimation lasts, however, a zombie does not decay any further.

The walking dead lose some of their mental acuity, so reduce a zombie's Mental Attributes and all Abilities by one dot each from what it had in life. Zombies obey their animator as if blood bound, and seldom exercise much free will. Whatever their appearance, zombies cannot use Social Attributes for any purpose.

The walking dead receive 10 health levels and do not suffer any wound penalties: A zombie acts without impairment until it loses its last health level and falls inert. Zombies also soak lethal damage with their Stamina (difficulty 6). Unless destroyed, a corpse remains animate for one night per blood point their creator invests in it. The zombie crumbles to dust at sunrise when it exhausts its vitae. Thus, one blood point sustains a zombie for one night, while three would keep a cadaver animate for three nights.

COMPEL PASSION (PRESENCE LEVEL SEVEN)

Many Kindred know how the Summon power, which implants an irrational, inexplicable desire to travel to a Cainite's location. Eshmunamash refined this power so he can drive a person to seek any other person he wants. What's more, the Brujah can make his victim feel any emotion towards the secondary target. The victim might feel driven to seek out a complete stranger whom he loves on first sight, or feel inexplicable rage toward her dearest friend. Through this power, Eshmunamash can bring people together and create various relationships between them.

MORTIS: LOST DISCIPLINE OF A LOST CLAN

The Giovanni emerged from a clan called the Cappadocians, the original Clan of Death. The Cappadocians did not possess true Necromancy. Instead, they mastered a rudimentary death-magic called Mortis. As a Discipline, rather than a magical Path, Mortis possessed levels beyond five, and these higher-level powers constituted an elder Cappadocian's personal understanding of death and the dead.

Mortis is as defunct as the Cappadocians themselves in the modern nights. The few Kindred scholars of old and obscure Disciplines note certain resemblances between Mortis and the Thanatosis Discipline of the putrescent Samedi bloodline. Even fewer recognize the close resemblance between Mortis and the Mortuus Path of Necromancy practiced by the eldritch Harbingers of Skulls, a bloodline of mummy-like vampires of obscure antecedents that recently joined the Sabbat.

Dark Ages: Vampire fully describes Mortis. Storytellers can also use the Mortuus Path described in *Guide to the Sabbat* for the first five powers of Drenis' Mortis.

Like the Summon power, Compel Passion dissipates at dawn — Romanian time, in Eshmunamash's case. An unsuspecting victim may try to rationalize the sudden emotion, or she may think she has lost her mind. Also, like Summon, this power cannot drive its victim into suicidal danger, though the target might face or use violence to fulfill the compulsion.

System: Compel Passion works only on someone Eshmunamash has met, or for whom he has a magical link created by one of the other Inconnu. The power works on mortals and supernatural creatures alike, across any distance in the physical world.

When Eshmunamash uses Compel Passion, the Storyteller rolls the Brujah's Charisma + Subterfuge. The difficulty depends on Eshmunamash's past connection to the target. The base difficulty is 5, for a person the Brujah knows moderately well: For the highly sensitive and perceptive Methuselah, a few hours of conversation render a person familiar. A person met only briefly, or affected through a magical link, receives a difficulty of 7. If Eshmunamash successfully used Presence on the target in the past, the difficulty drops to 4; but if the target resisted the Brujah's Presence before, the difficulty rises to 8.

The number of successes indicates the strength of the compelled passion for that night:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1 success | Subject feels the compulsion but acts hesitantly. |
| 2 successes | Subject acts reluctantly and is easily thwarted by obstacles. |
| 3 successes | Subject acts on the passion with reasonable speed. |
| 4 successes | Subject drops everything to act on the compulsion. |
| 5 successes | Subject is a complete and instant slave to the induced passion, doing any deed necessary to fulfill the compulsion. |

The subject cannot resist Compel Passion unless someone else confronts him with the irrationality of his actions and feelings. A successful appeal using Empathy, Intimidation or some other communication Ability (difficulty of 5 + the number of successes rolled for the Compel Passion) enables the victim to spend Willpower and so resist the emotion for a scene.

Compel Passion does not impart any actual knowledge — only emotion and a drive to go someplace. The victim does not know who he seeks, only that he must go. Thus, Eshmunamash cannot, say, direct a millionaire financier to pay a widow's mortgage. At most, the Brujah can inspire the millionaire to seek out the widow and instantly feel affection and loyalty to her. He can't control the details.

DREAM COMBAT (VALEREN LEVEL SIX)

The Salubri Mahtiel may be the last creature on Earth to know this strange and dangerous power. Once, however, the Warrior Salubri used Dream Combat to confront ghosts or demons that they could not affect physically. The power also works on mortals, Cainites or indeed any creature with consciousness.

By locking the target creature's gaze with her third eye, the Salubri draws the target's mind into a shared dreamscape. In this dream world, both the Salubri and her target can imagine any reality they want, whether for battle or more peaceful pursuits. The target cannot suffer any direct, physical harm from Dream Combat, but the psychic damage can be devastating — and for spirits, who exist as purely psychic entities, Dream Combat can kill.

System: To initiate Dream Combat, Mahtiel must look her target in the eye and expend two points of Willpower. The Storyteller then pits the Salubri's Willpower against the target's in a resisted roll (difficulty of the opponent's Willpower). If Mahtiel wins, she pulls her target into the dreamscape. Neither leaves until Mahtiel is defeated or ends the power of her own will.

In the dreamscape, both Mahtiel and her target can do anything they imagine. They can fly, change their shape, duplicate themselves, create any environment they want, and so on. Affecting each other is more difficult. Combatants can dream up whatever weapons or powers they please; it doesn't matter because the real contest takes place between their wills.

Physical Traits don't really exist in the dreamscape. As dreamers battle, use these substitute Traits:

- Manipulation replaces Strength.
- Charisma replaces Dexterity.
- The character's highest-rated Virtue replaces Stamina.
- Willpower replaces health levels.
- Initiative consists of Wits + Charisma.
- Attack rolls consist of Charisma + Ability. The dream-fighters try to imagine their attacks with sufficient skill and force to make their target believe them. Dream-warriors can imagine any attack they choose, from shooting the enemy to growing 100 feet tall and squishing him underfoot. If the character cannot relate the attack somehow to Brawling, Firearms or Melee, however, use unmodified Charisma for the attack pool.
- Damage rolls consist of the attacker's Manipulation + the number of successes in the attack roll.
- Soak consists of the character's highest-rated Virtue. Dream combat has no analogue to bashing, lethal or aggravated damage, no matter what effect the attacker imagines for his attack.

• Damage applies to the target's Willpower rating. The target suffers penalties to all dice pools as his Willpower drops. Down to half his Willpower (round fractions upward), he stays at OK. Each subsequent point of Willpower lost imposes a -1 wound penalty.

A dream-warrior can spend Willpower points without incurring any penalty. As the character's Willpower rating drops, however, he has fewer points to expend.

• A character reduced to 0 Willpower is incapacitated in some way. Depending on what his enemy wants, the victim could suffer torpor, zombie-like obedience or insanity. An incapacitated spirit risks total destruction from a Salubri's other Valeren or Obeah powers, or a dreaming vampire can destroy a defeated spirit through imaginary diablerie. (This does not improve the vampire's Generation or change his Traits in any way, but provides a dandy excuse for the character to develop strange new Disciplines, Merits such as Iron Will, Strong Blood or Medium — or Flaws such as Nightmares, Beacon of the Unholy or Glowing Eyes. Storytellers should see spirit-diablerie as a blank check to do interesting things to the character.)

DISCIPLINE COMBINATION POWERS

The Twelve also developed a number of combination Discipline powers. One of these is theoretically teachable to high-generation neonates.

PSYCHIC DOUBLE (AUSPEX ●●●●●, OBFUSCATE ●●●)

Astral projection has the annoying limit that the vampire's disembodied mind cannot affect the material world, and even the faintest visible manifestation requires great effort. Through this combination power, a vampire still cannot affect material objects—but she can make other people imagine that they see and speak to her. Demetrius the Malkavian uses this power to project his consciousness around the world.

Demetrius' Psychic Double looks real and solid. His astral form can converse with other people. He even feels solid to anyone who touches him, though he cannot affect physical objects in any way and his Psychic Image does not appear in mirrors, photographs or video images. Mahtiel also knows this power, but her dream-walking spirit usually looks transparent and ghostly.

System: Projecting a Psychic Double costs one Willpower point. As with Astral Projection, Demetrius picks a target somewhere in the world and hopes he projects to the right place. Arriving at the desired location depends on a Perception + Occult roll, with the difficulty set by how well Demetrius knows the target location. A familiar location not too far away is difficulty 7; a place on the other side of the world that the Malkavian merely read about is difficulty 10. A botch on this roll indicates getting lost, and maybe even breaking the silver cord back to the Methuselah's body. Evoking a psychic image with his own appearance automatically succeeds. Appearing as someone else calls for a Manipulation + Performance roll (difficulty 7), just as for Mask of a Thousand Faces.

A character with Psychic Double does not have to project a visible image. Demetrius can make his image appear and disappear at will, with no further expenditure of Willpower. Each time he manifests a disguised appearance, however, the Storyteller must re-roll Demetrius' Manipulation + Performance.

Although Psychic Doubles cannot exert any physical force, a vampire with this power can project certain other Disciplines through his astral form. Since Animalism, other Auspex powers, Dementation, Dominate,

other Obfuscate powers and Presence have entirely mental effects, a vampire can use them freely while astral. Obtenebration works, since the dark force evoked by the Discipline is not actually physical either. An astral vampire can thus affect physical objects indirectly using Arms of the Abyss. A Psychic Double can also employ the non-physical powers of Valeren or Obeah.

The Storyteller should brush up on both Astral Projection and Mask of a Thousand Faces before introducing the astral Demetrius to the chronicle, as the systems for both powers apply to the combination.

Psychic Double costs 24 experience points to learn.

CORPSE PROJECTION (AUSPEX ●●●●●, MORTIS ●●●●●)

In addition to raising zombies using her blood, Drenis can also animate corpses from a great distance and possess the reanimated body. Such zombie possession requires a great effort of will and Drenis can occupy the body for only a single night, but it grants the Cappadocian priestess a limited power to act beyond Hunedoara.

Drenis can use the power in two ways. She can send out her astral form normally, (see Astral Projection on p. 152 of *Vampire: The Masquerade*), look around for a corpse and possess it. Although this is more controllable, the astral form's normal "speed limit" of about 1,000 miles per hour renders journeys to other continents more time-consuming than the Cappadocian sometimes likes. Drenis can also try to hurl her astral form instantly around the world, and possess a cadaver at random. This is quicker, but hard to target: Drenis counts herself lucky even to reach the right state or province. Now and then, when she grows particularly weary of Hunedoara, Drenis launches her astral form completely at random, just to see where in the world she finds herself.

System: Animating and possessing a cadaver while astral costs Drenis a point of Willpower. If the Cappadocian has already used Astral Projection to reach her destination, the Storyteller does not need to make another dice roll to see if the possession succeeds. If Drenis attempts an instant leap, roll her Perception + Occult. The difficulty ranges from 7 to 10, depending on how well Drenis knows her destination. Her old temple in Thrace would be difficulty 7; a location the Cappadocian knew only from an atlas would be difficulty 10. The number of successes determines how close Drenis comes to her desired location:

Botch	Lost in the astral plane, just as with an Astral Projection botch.
Failure	The power fails and the Willpower point was wasted.

- One success** A few hundred miles from the target location.
- Two successes** In the right state or province; within 20 to 50 miles.
- Three successes** 10 to 20 miles from the desired location.
- Four successes** In the right city; within three miles.
- Five successes** In the correct neighborhood; within a mile or less.

The Storyteller should also consider access to corpses that have not rotted to useless dust and bones. For instance, Drenis could not leap to an ocean liner unless she knew it carried a body. Most urban areas, though, supply the Cappadocian with plenty of mortuaries and graveyards. If Drenis attempts a rapid jump, though, she cannot control which body she occupies. She might find herself in a cadaver, in a coffin or crypt too sturdy to escape.

The possession ends when the sun rises at the location of the possessed zombie. Drenis can also end the possession at will and flash back to her body. The zombie instantly collapses as a normal cadaver. While Drenis possesses a cadaver, her own body remains in torpor at Hunedoara.

Note: Drenis does not know that her Corpse Projection has changed ever since a dreadful storm swept through the ghost-realms a few years ago. The bodies she possesses retain a capacity for animation. Wandering ghosts, or fragments of ghosts, are sometimes drawn to her borrowed bodies and possess them in turn.

Corpse Projection costs 30 experience points to learn.

CURSES AND OTHER THAUMATURGICAL RITUALS

The magicians among the Twelve know many curses they can levy upon enemies. The Pact kept them from direct curse attacks, but did not stop them from using the Trigger ritual: Each of the Twelve carries at least one curse primed to go off if another one of the Twelve meets Final Death. Methuselabs may also punish characters by cursing them, or use the threat of a curse to extort service from them.

The Twelve's thaumaturges also know a wide variety of other rituals. Even before the Pact, some of them knew rituals to watch and control events at a distance. They made a special effort to develop more such rituals after

their imprisonment, or to adapt such rituals to their own style of Thaumaturgy.

PORTRAIT LINK (LEVEL FIVE RITUAL)

Like many cultures, the ancient Egyptians believed that a picture captured the magical essence of what it portrayed. This ritual of Setite Sorcery exploits that magical connection. The magician sketches a portrait of her subject from life (or unlife, as the case may be). She then engraves that picture into a stone tablet along with various magic words and the subject's name in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Henceforth, the sorcerer can use the portrait as a sympathetic link to that person. The magician adds the portrait plaque to any other ritual and washes it in beer and her own vitae. That ritual may now affect the subject at any distance.

System: Enchanting the portrait costs the magician two points of Willpower. Using it costs one blood point. Engraving the portrait requires a Dexterity + Crafts roll (difficulty 6) in addition to the normal Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8) to make the magic work.

TRIGGER (LEVEL FIVE OR SIX RITUAL)

This ritual does not do anything by itself. A thaumaturge uses it to place a time delay on some other ritual or path power. The triggered magic takes effect when some condition occurs, such as a length of time, the magician's Final Death, feeding upon a certain person, the magician saying a particular word, or the like. Trigger occurs in every school of Thaumaturgy.

System: The Trigger requires a separate dice roll than the ritual or path power to which it applies. If the player fails either roll, the magic does not work at all.

Trigger comes in two forms. The Level-Five version, called the Lesser Trigger, requires some objective, tangible condition to initiate the stored magic. "Saying Mass" would be a valid condition because that involves specific words and acts. "Slandering me" would not, because slander can be a matter of opinion. "Plotting against me" would not work either, because the magic cannot read the target's mind.

The Level-Six version, or Greater Trigger, expands the range of possible conditions through a rather cruel sense of humor. The magician can set "gotcha" conditions that take effect based on related names, puns or other similarities. For instance, legend says that Sylvester II became both Pope and magician through a pact with the Devil. The pact would come due when the sorcerer-Pope said Mass in Jerusalem. Sylvester thought he was safe since he could easily avoid travel to that city. He died, however, after saying Mass in the church of Jerusalem, in Rome. The Lesser

Trigger would require the actual city of Jerusalem; the Greater Trigger could use the similarity of names to activate a curse.

Trigger has many uses besides time-delay curses. A magician could use Trigger to place helpful magic on himself, ready to go off when he might need it. For instance, a thaumaturge could set a Triggered version of Incorporeal Passage (or some other protective spell) to go off if anyone attacked her in her sleep. A thaumaturge can place only one Triggered enchantment on himself at a time.

DROWNING IN EARTH (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

The Tzimisce's connection to the land clearly influences this Koldunic curse. The magician commands the spirits of the land not to bear up the target of the curse. For the victim, earth and stone are no longer solid. Instead, they act like quicksand. A victim remains safe so long as she stays on wood, metal, plastic, cloth or other substances. Brick and concrete count as stone for purposes of this curse. The victim cannot push through walls because the curse operates only in the "down" direction. Up or to the side, earth and stone remain solid. A victim can fall through stone floors until he reaches ground level.

A victim who keeps his head can slowly "swim" to safety through yielding earth or stone. This requires total concentration: The victim can take no other action, and moves only one foot per turn. Otherwise, the victim sinks one foot per turn. Once the earth closes over a victim's head, he cannot "swim" back to the surface.

The Protean power of Earth Meld partially counters this curse. A Cainite using Earth Meld can stabilize his position in the ground and can return to the surface normally. The character must remain melded, however, if he wants to avoid sinking into the earth again. Indeed, for the curse's duration, the victim can perform Earth Meld in solid stone or concrete — but if the curse ends before the victim frees himself, he is trapped in stone with no way out. Tzimisce legends tell, however, of elder Cainites who chewed or clawed their way to the surface after sinking into solid stone and took terrible revenge on the sorcerer who cursed them.

System: The curse lasts one night and day per success rolled by the magician's player. Multiple castings of the curse do not cumulate: The victim suffers the effect of whichever casting had the most successes. A Level-Seven version of the curse imposes a permanent effect on victims, but this requires expending two points of permanent Willpower. The more powerful curse is the stuff of legends, even to masters of Koldunic Sorcery.

GREATER SCRYING (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

Many thaumaturges know rituals that enable them to scry, or view distant scenes through a crystal ball, mirror, pool of water or other half-reflective, half-transparent surface. (See Scry, a Level-Four ritual found in *Blood Magic: Secrets of Thaumaturgy*.) The Hunedoara thaumaturges all know more powerful versions. Like the lesser ritual, Greater Scrying requires a pool, mirror or lens. The ritual also involves a brazier of incense and ritual tools suited to the sorcerer's tradition. Pentweret uses his Egyptian priestly staff; Cret and Hill add a consecrated statue of the oracular god Apollo and various astrological symbols; while Danika combines rain-water, well-water, river-water and vitae (the water of life) in her scrying bowl.

System: The magician can view scenes anywhere in the world. Targeting a particular person or location, however, requires a separate Perception + Occult roll whose difficulty depends on the magician's degree of connection to the target:

Very familiar, or a complete sympathetic link	6
(Ex.: Your own haven; your childhood home; blood sample; True Name)	
Familiar, or a moderate sympathetic link	7
(Ex.: Your favorite library; a photograph; a fingerprint)	
Not very familiar, or a weak sympathetic link	8
(Ex.: A national landmark you visited once; a signature; complete documentation)	
Unfamiliar	9
(Ex.: A spot on a map; a name and description)	

Failing this targeting roll means seeing the wrong location. The worse the failure, the more off-target the view.

The lesser Scrying ritual suffers the limitation that the sorcerer cannot extend Auspex, other Discipline effects or other enchantments through the scrying. Greater Scrying lacks that limitation. The magician can use Greater Scrying to target any mental effect, such as Dominate, Dementation or Path of Corruption powers (found in *Guide to the Camarilla*), as if he were actually present. Disciplines or magic with any sort of physical effect cannot normally pass through the scrying link. Some rituals, however, are specially designed to affect persons viewed through scrying.

SERVITOR SENDING (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

Danika, Cret, Hill and Pentweret all know versions of this ritual. The magician traces a circle of her own vitae with the appropriate incantations. Then a servant steps in the circle, vanishes and appears somewhere else. The servitor must be a spirit or the sorcerer's ghoul, while the

sorcerer requires a sympathetic link to the destination. The thaumaturge can use a bit of soil, a plant or some other natural relic to target a location. To send a servitor to a person the magician needs the target's True Name or a body relic (such as hair or a bit of blood). Pentweret can also use a portrait drawn from life to target a person, while Cret or Hill can dispatch servitors if Abdalkutba prepares horoscope charts for a target person (based on mortal birth, plus the time of Embrace for Kindred).

System: In addition to three blood points, the sorcerer expends a point of Willpower to transport the servitor. For another Willpower point, the sorcerer enables the servitor to return at will. This "round trip" option remains good only for one hour after the servant ghoul departs.

STORM-HOUND (LEVEL SIX RITUAL)

This Koldunic ritual mimics the Level Five power of the Path of Weather Control, with a few advantages. The sorcerer builds a fire of certain dried herbs and wood from a lightning-struck tree. She sacrifices a puppy and her own vitae to the flames while invoking the Slavic storm-god Perun. The sorcerer also burns something that came from an intended victim of the curse — a hair, a thread from the victim's clothing, or even soil from the victim's footprint. Within 24 hours, a storm appears over the victim and blasts him with lightning. The storm-hound can find its victim anywhere in the world.

System: For each success, the storm-hound launches two bolts of lightning at its victim. Regardless of the sorcerer's Traits, the storm-hound attacks with a dice pool of 6 (difficulty 6 if the target stands on open ground when it appears, 8 if he stays under shelter, or 10 if he is inside but near a window). Each bolt inflicts 10 dice of lethal damage that ignores body armor. If the attack roll fails, the degree of failure suggests how far the erring bolt deviates.

The storm-hound has a certain degree of intelligence. It may wait to attack until the victim moves into more open terrain. The enchanted storm does not last longer than one hour, though. If the victim does not leave cover before the hour ends, the storm-hound attacks anyway. After all, a bolt that misses may nevertheless destroy the target's shelter, enabling a subsequent bolt to strike more accurately.

PLATONIC SPLIT (LEVEL SEVEN RITUAL)

According to one of Plato's fables, humans originally were both male and female. For their insolence, Zeus split humanity into male and female halves. Every soul longs to rejoin its missing half—a literal "soul mate." Vampires also have two spirits in one body, the Man and the Beast. This ritual temporarily divides them and gives them each

a body. The half that receives the Man looks as the person did before the Embrace, though the person remains a vampire. The half that receives the Beast is a ravening, vampiric monster more horrible than any Nosferatu. The Beast is physically stronger, but the Man possesses all the intellectual and social abilities. The Beast hates the Man and lusts to destroy it. If the Beast can be physically restrained, however, the Man can act without the burden of its presence... for a time.

This ritual was once highly regarded. Some ancient Thaumaturges believed they could develop a means to exorcise the Beast permanently. Such hopes were never realized. Splitting off the Beast also carries certain problems that make its loss a dubious blessing. While a few thaumaturges may seek temporary surcease from the Beast, or offer it to other Cainites, the spell can also be used as an attack — suddenly creating an enemy of your enemy that has all his powers.

System: The incarnate Beast has the target Cainite's Disciplines, Willpower, blood pool and Physical Traits. All Social Traits are at zero, and Mental Traits reduced to one. Though the Beast has all the target's Abilities, the Beast is in permanent frenzy. The incarnate Man has all the target Cainite's Disciplines, Willpower, blood pool, Attributes and Abilities, but cannot expend blood points to increase Physical Traits, to heal or to fuel Disciplines — only to wake up each evening. Drinking blood also loses all its pleasure for the Man. [No way to resist the invocation of this power? Pretty harsh. Not really. The difficulty of 9 subsumes the victim's reflexive resistance to the mystical assault — but see below.]

The Man and Beast remain separate for one night per success rolled when casting the ritual. If the Beast can kill the Man, however, it gains a permanent existence until destroyed. The reverse is not true: If the Man kills the Beast, the ritual ends and the two souls rejoin in one body. The same happens if either one dies for any other reason. Once per night, the Man can also try to force a reunion. This requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) and expending a point of Willpower.

A SURFEIT OF SERPENTS (LEVEL SEVEN RITUAL)

This curse comes from the baleful, ancient lore of Setite Sorcery. The sorcerer invokes the serpentine demons of *Duat*, the Egyptian underworld, and commands them to enter the belly of his enemy. Within an hour, the victim's stomach roils in pain. Nausea soon joins the pain, until at the end of the hour the victim vomits a living snake. The pain does not diminish for long, though. Soon the victim vomits another snake. His bowels heave, and he "excretes" snakes. The torment grows worse; he cannot



void the snakes fast enough, and they chew their way out of his flesh, serpent after serpent, until he dies.

System: For each success the sorcerer's player rolls, the victim suffers two hours of the curse's effect. For the first two hours, as he voids snakes through his mouth and anus, the victim loses one health level of bashing damage per hour. Cainites can heal this damage normally. Each subsequent hour, however, the victim loses one health level of aggravated damage as the multiplying snakes chew out his insides. The victim can apply Fortitude against this damage for one hour per dot of Fortitude he possesses, but after that the damage becomes unsoakable. The damage is simply too great.

Cainites can heal the aggravated damage at the normal expenditure of blood and Willpower... and hope that neither Trait runs out before the curse ends.

A demon-snake's bite deals one level of aggravated damage but they are not poisonous. An hour after the curse ends, the snakes all vanish back to *Duat*.

WHIPS OF THE ERINYES (LEVEL SEVEN RITUAL)

This curse torments its victim with guilt for past crimes. Once per night, the curse forces the victim to relive a memory that fills her with shame. This happens every night until the victim no longer feels shame for what she did. Then the curse brings up another shameful memory, and the cycle starts all over again.

System: For vampires, the curse dredges up events that led to Conscience or Conviction rolls. For each night of the curse's effect, the victim's player must roll that Conscience or Conviction check all over again. The torment continues until the player fails the Virtue roll and the character loses a point of Humanity or Path rating: The victim no longer cares about what she did. The cycle of shame wearing down to apathy continues until the victim loses one point of Humanity or Path rating for every success the magician's player rolled when he levied the curse.

The victim can abort the Whips of the Erinyes by spending a year in torpor. Countermagic or the Obeah power of *Mens Sana* can also remove the curse.

SOUL DISJUNCTION (LEVEL EIGHT RITUAL)

Legend has it that the ancient magician Julianus the Chaldean could make people's souls leave and rejoin their bodies. This ritual duplicates that effect and uses it as an attack. In the course of the ritual, the magician appeals to Hermes, the conductor of souls, and infernal gods such as Hecate and Hades, to rip the soul from the victim's body and hurl it into the outer darkness. The magician then completes the spell some time later that

WHO HAS WHAT

The character profiles in Chapter Three tell which powers and rituals each one of the Twelve knows. The descriptions of each power and ritual also say what characters know them. This table pulls the information together for ready reference.

Abdalkutba	Horoscopic Forecast (Auspex 6), Supernal Awareness (Auspex 7)
Anastazi Ruthven	Lesser Trigger (Thaumaturgy 5)
Bufo	Beast Walk (Animalism 6)
Cret	Greater Scrying (Thaumaturgy 6), Lesser/Greater Trigger (Thaumaturgy 6), Platonic Split (Thaumaturgy 7), Servitor Sending (Thaumaturgy 6), Whips of the Erinyes (Thaumaturgy 7), Soul Disjunction (Thaumaturgy 8)
Danika Ruthven	Drowning in Earth (Thaumaturgy 6), Greater Scrying (Thaumaturgy 6), Lesser/Greater Trigger (Thaumaturgy 6), Servitor Sending (Thaumaturgy 6), Storm Hound (Thaumaturgy 6)
Demetrius	Enigmatic Text (Dementation 6), Psychic Double (Auspex 5, Obfuscate 3)
Drenis	Raise the Dead (Mortis 6), Corpse Projection (Auspex 5, Mortis 6)
Eshmunamash	Compel Passion (Presence 7)
Hill	Greater Scrying (Thaumaturgy 6), Lesser/Greater Trigger (Thaumaturgy 6), Servitor Sending (Thaumaturgy 6), Platonic Split (Thaumaturgy 7)
Mahtiel	Dream Combat (Valeren 6), Psychic Double (Auspex 5, Obfuscate 3)
Pentweret	Portrait Link (Thaumaturgy 5), Greater Scrying (Thaumaturgy 6), Lesser/Greater Trigger (Thaumaturgy 6), Servitor Sending (Thaumaturgy 6), Surfeit of Serpents (Thaumaturgy 7)
Zamra	Dynastic Power (Dominate 7)

night by pointing at the victim and saying a final magic word. If the ritual succeeds, the victim falls in torpor while his soul whirls away.

System: This curse duplicates the effect of the Auspex power Astral Projection on the victim — and breaks the silver cord that normally links soul to body. The victim's soul is lost in some distant part of Earth or the spirit realm. Finding his way home to his body is left as a challenge for the victim's player... assuming no one destroyed the victim's body.

THE PACT

The Pact protects Hunedoara Castle from the world and the 12 pacters from each other. As usual with demonic pacts, the demon and Cret, the principle sorcerer, negotiated the benefits and obligations of each side. Cret did his best but the demon knew the old sorcerer was rushed. It forced the Twelve to accept a number of provisions they did not have time to think through. The demon did not think them through either, and now regrets them.

By itself, the demon lacks the power to conceal a castle so completely. The Pact enables it to call upon a far greater occult power — the Curse of Caine, embodied in the twelve pacters. For all practical purposes, the demon possesses eight dots in every vampiric Discipline pos-

sessed by any one of the Twelve, except for Thaumaturgy. However, the Demon can use these powers only to conceal and defend the castle.

Anyone who looks at Hunedoara Castle sees a briar patch (Obfuscate 8), even if they look through a video monitor or take a picture (Chimerstry 8). One feels no desire to poke around the brambles (Presence 8). If anyone were ordered to do so, the Demon would create a false memory of an annoying tramp through the weeds (Dominate 8). Of course, the demon knows about everyone near the castle (Auspex 8).

If anyone found a way to attack the castle, the demon can employ its borrowed Disciplines to defend it. It deceived the Tremere Council of Seven with a blend of Obfuscate and Chimerstry illusions to make them think they destroyed the castle. In succeeding centuries, the demon subtly used Obfuscate, Dominate and Presence to steer battles away from Hunedoara. If some powerful opponent did find a way to pierce the castle's veil of illusion, the demon could mobilize armies of wildlife (Animalism 8), call oversized Arms of the Abyss and fearsome shadow-creatures (Obtenebration 8), or drive attackers insane (Dementation 8). Any attacker who actually stepped into the castle would technically touch the demon, and so become subject to whatever ghastly mutilations a fallen angel could imagine (Vicissitude 8).



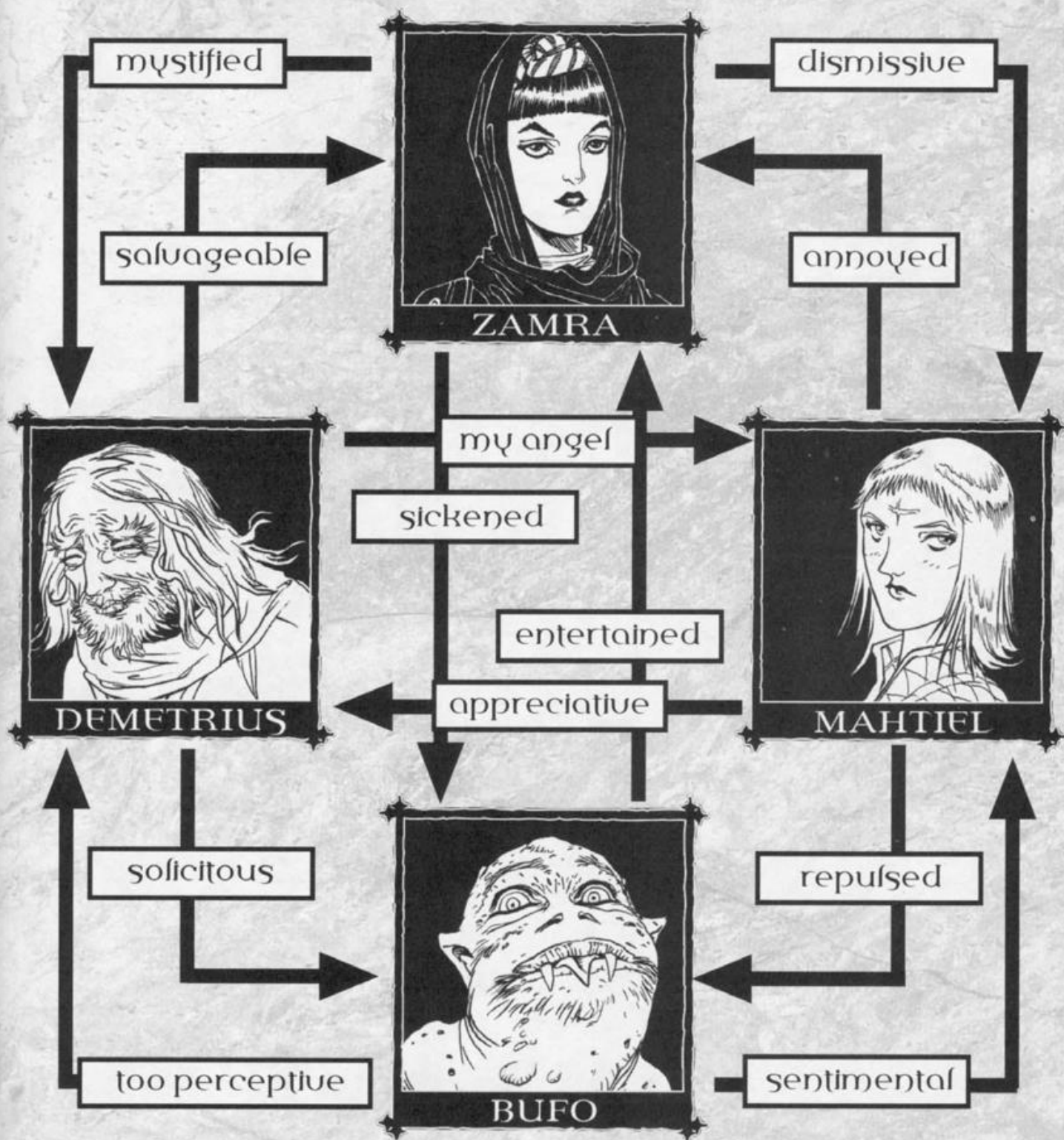
The demon also possesses the crucial power to defend the Twelve from each other. Any attack by one pacter upon another affects the attacker as well as the victim. If one of the Twelve is destroyed, his killer also meets Final Death.

None of the Twelve may leave the castle, on pain of breaking the Pact. The demon insisted on this condition to keep the Twelve under its metaphorical thumb. The original Twelve agreed as a necessary hedge against betrayal and accidents. If some freakish circumstance took a pacter out of the castle grounds against his will, the Pact grants him 10 minutes to return before the demon imposes the sanction of Final Death. This incidentally breaks the Pact. Servants suffer a weaker version of this ban: They may leave the castle on errands, but the demon can destroy them if they try to leave for good. Guests may leave any time they want... aside from the Slav sleeping in the doorway, blood bonds of loyalty and any curses imposed by the Twelve.

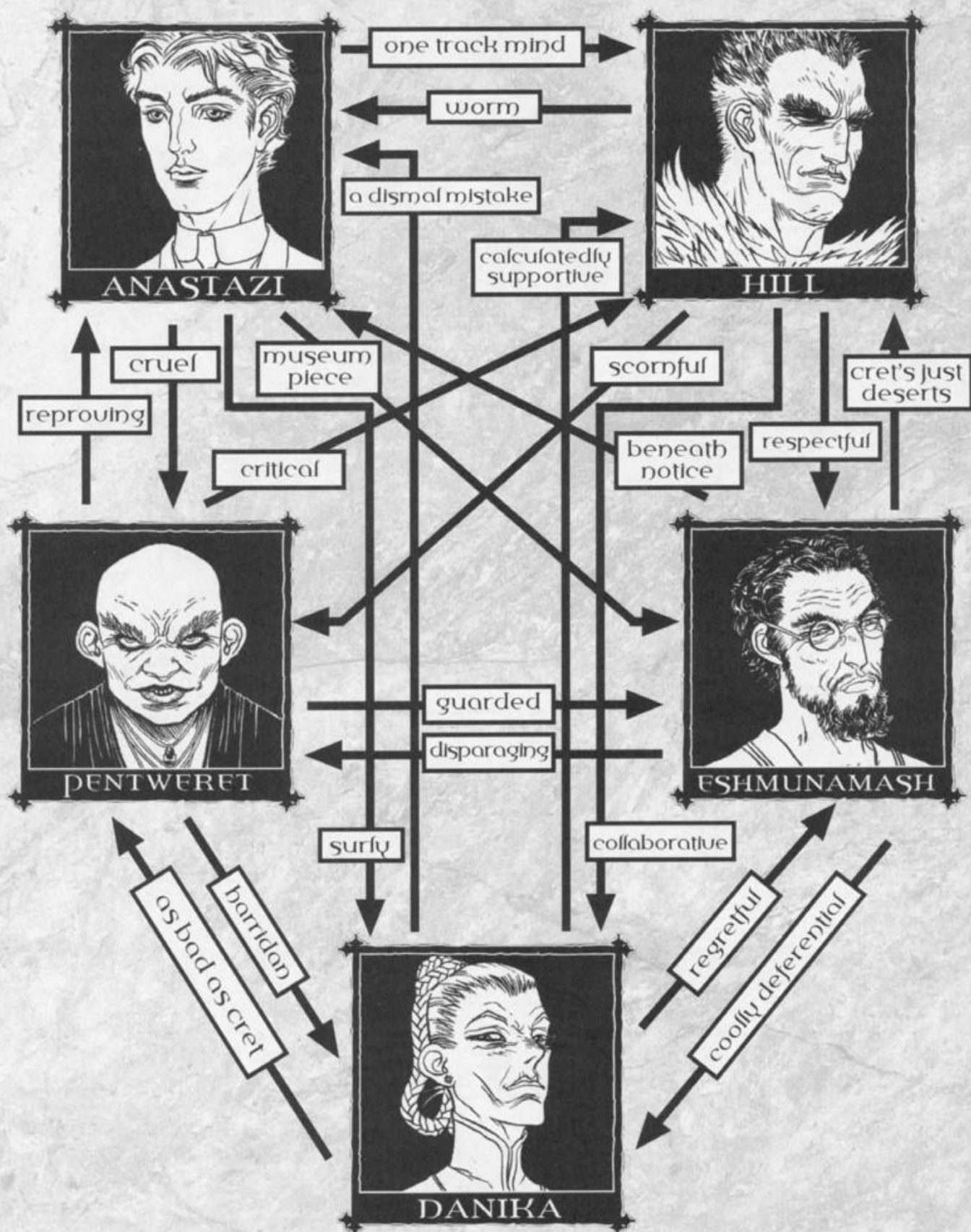
Once per year, on the anniversary of the Pact, the Twelve must renew the contract by offering the demon a human sacrifice. The sacrifice must take place between dusk and midnight. All 12 pacters must attend. The officiating vampire cuts the victim's throat and pours the victim's blood into a fire. Each pacter also sheds a drop of his own vitae.

If the sacrifice does not take place in the allotted time, or all 12 do not attend and affirm their desire to continue the Pact, the demon can claim their souls. The Pact does not take account of special circumstances such as a pacter completely claimed by the Beast and no longer able to speak. On the other hand, the Pact includes some ambiguous phrases that enabled the Twelve to replace a member who lost her human intellect. The demon demands that each of the last year's pacters appear, blood and soul, to renew the contract. When the pacter Vanth lost her mind and the capacity of speech, the remaining pacters persuaded their accidental guest Bufo to diablerize the mad Methuselah. Thus, Vanth's blood and soul attended the ceremony although Vanth herself was dust. Some of the Twelve believe the terms of the Pact permit less drastic means of replacement as well.

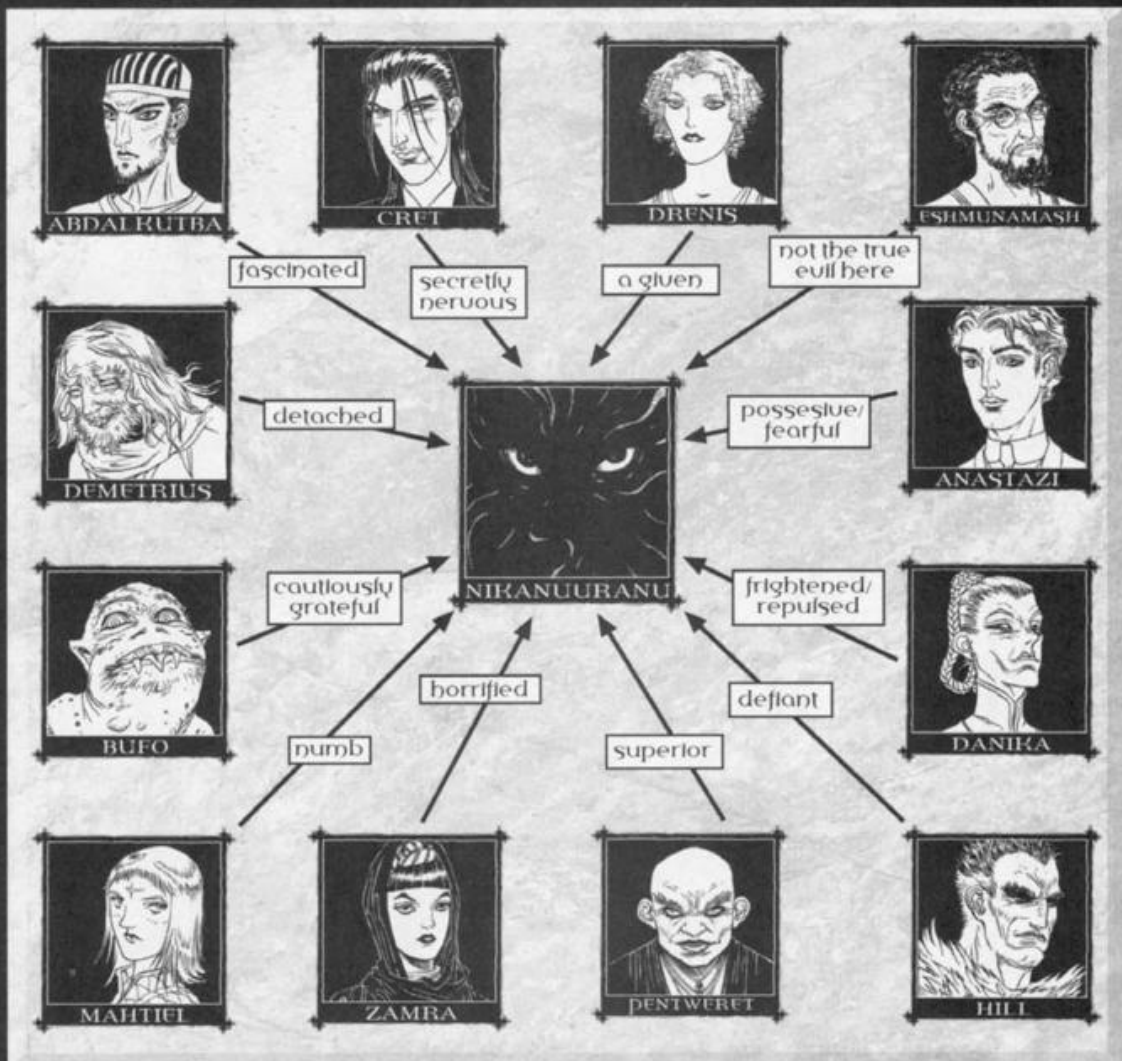
the outsiders



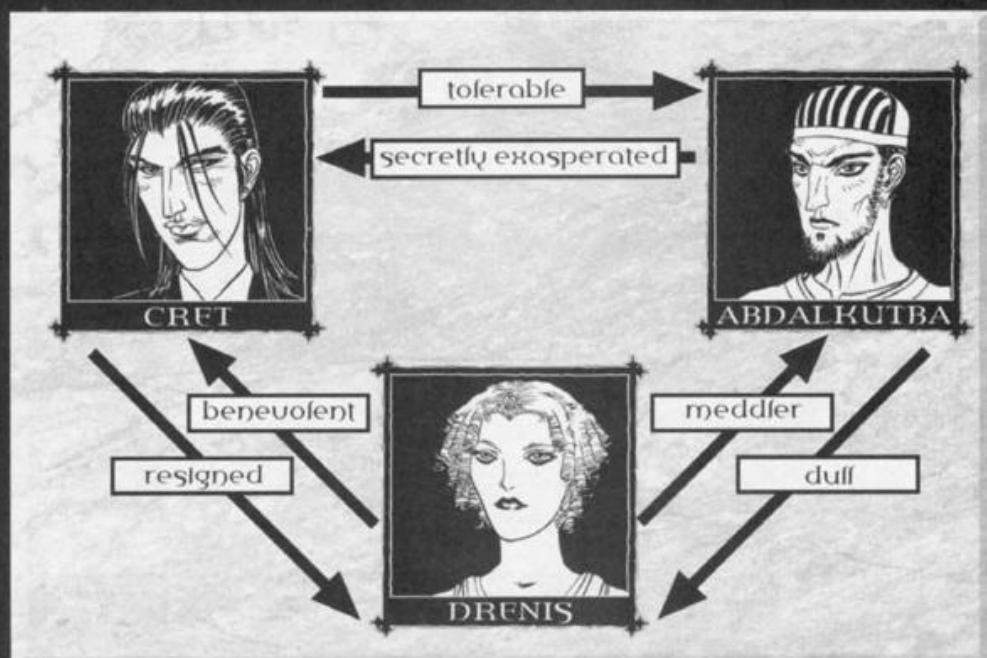
not so loyal opposition



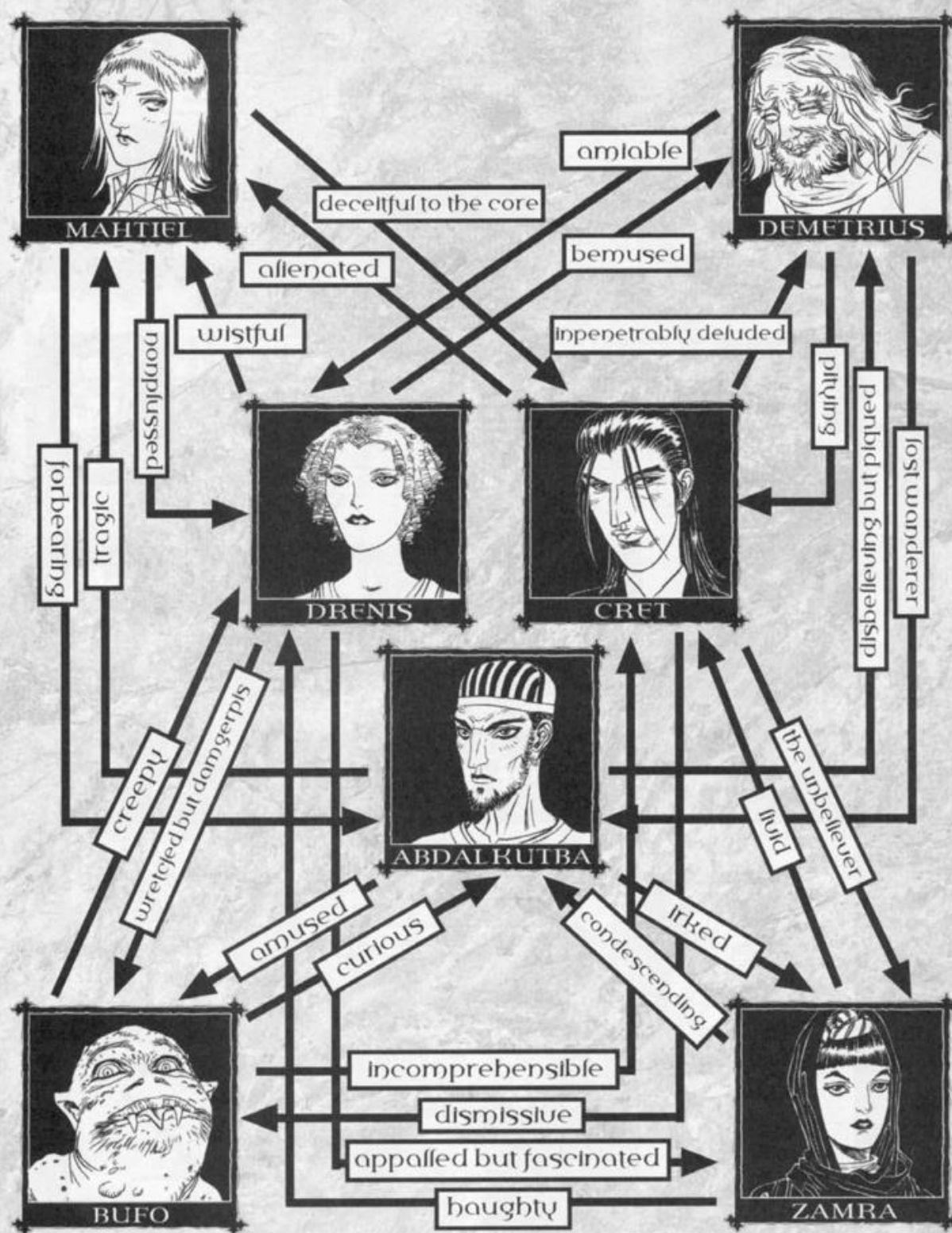
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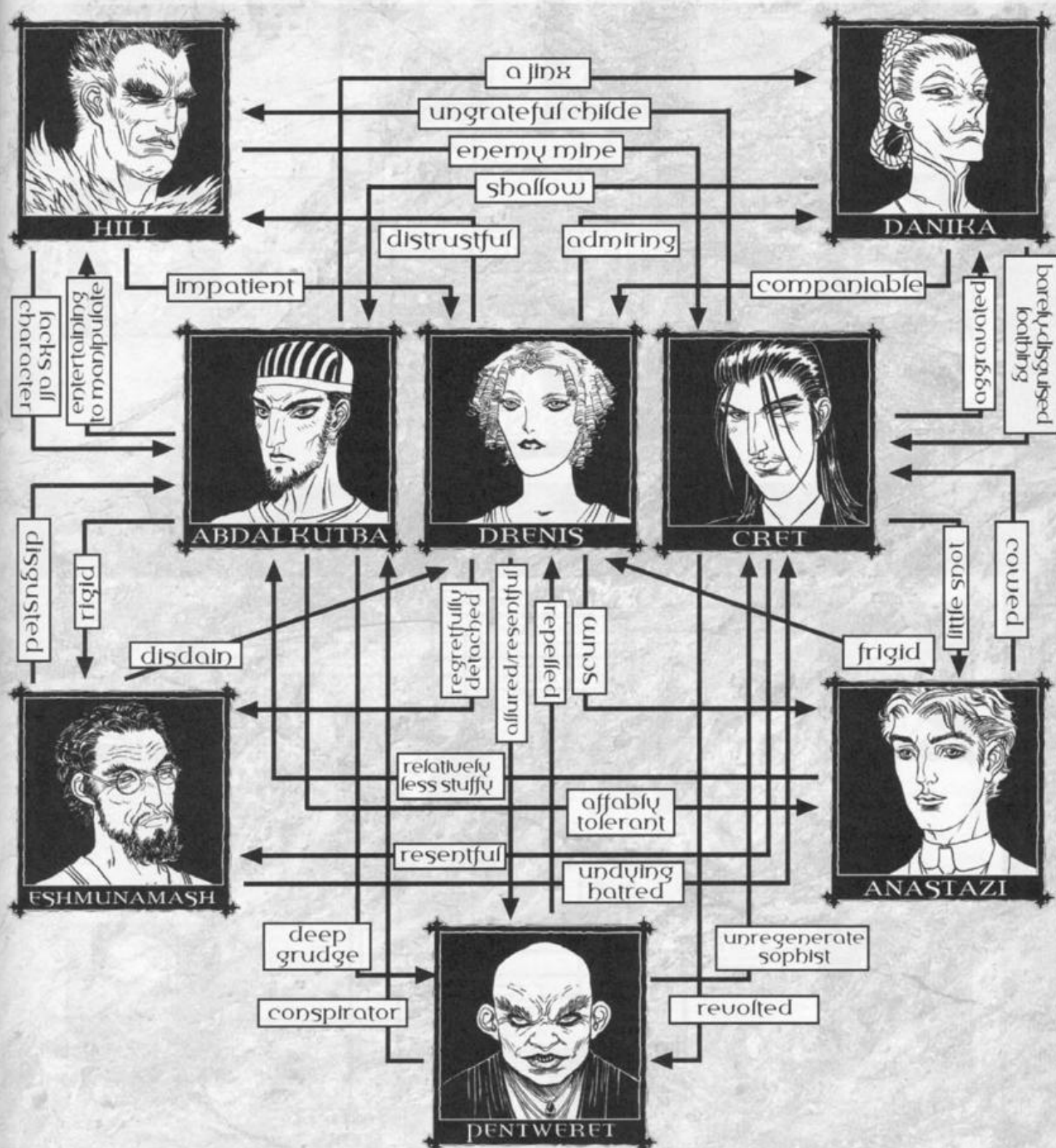
cret and his partisans

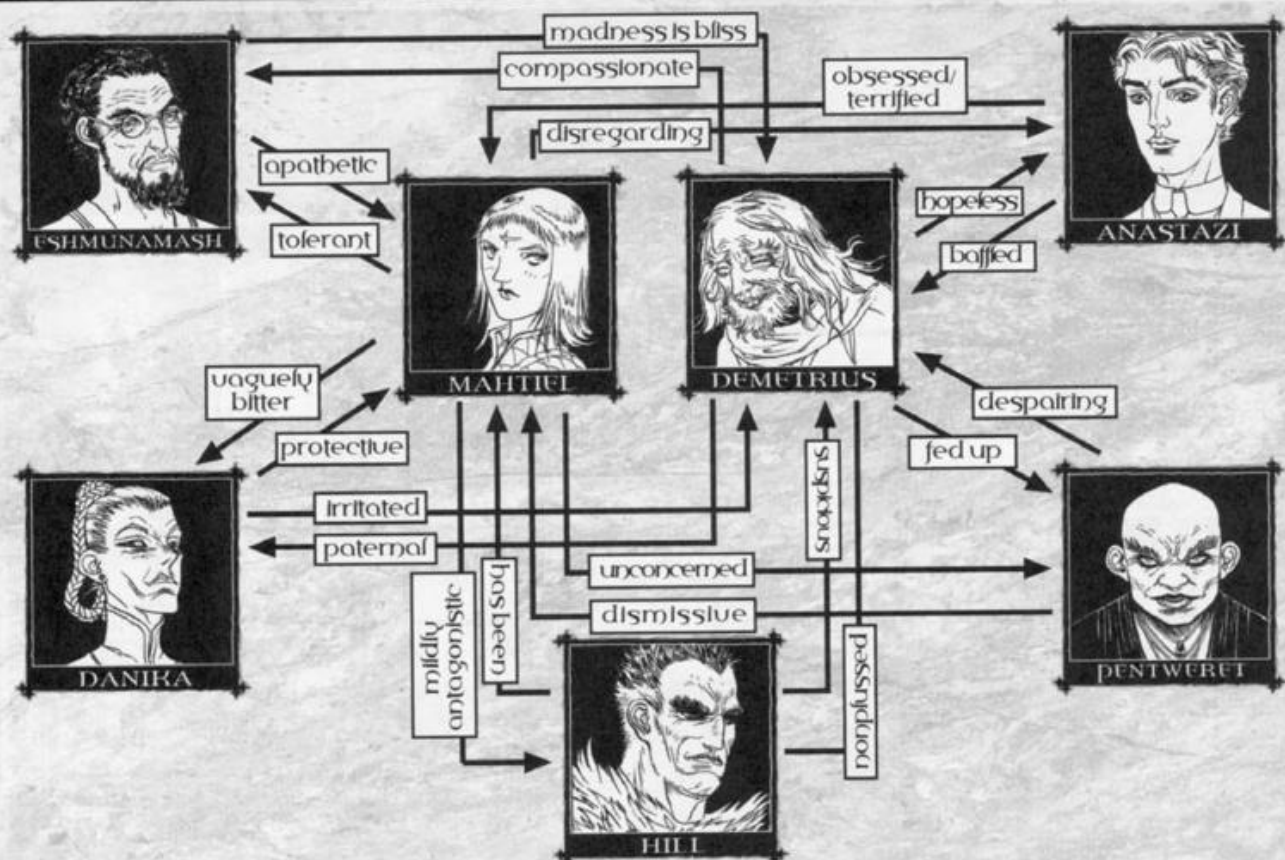


the outsiders vs. cret & his partisans

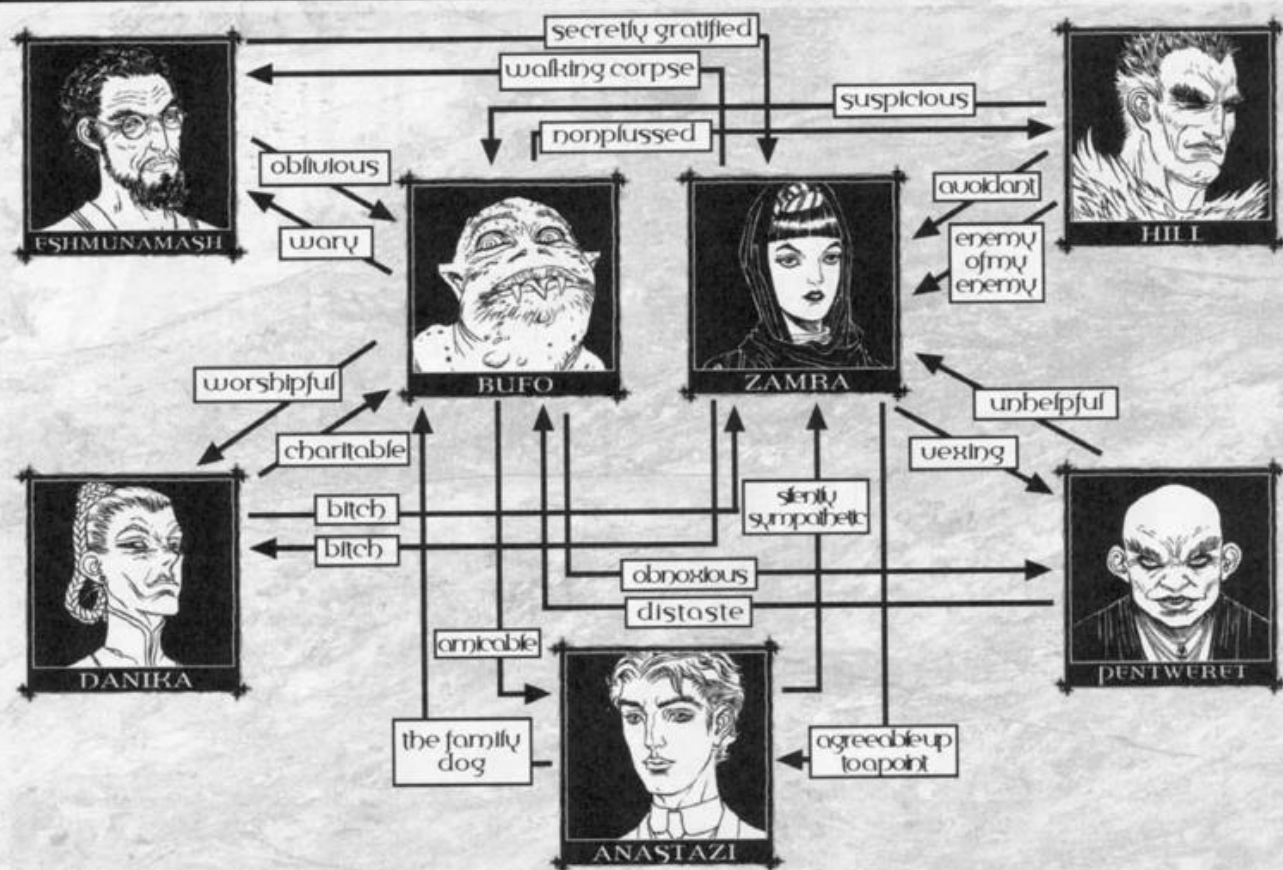


the not so loyal opposition vs. cret & his partisans





the not so loyal opposition vs. the outsiders



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