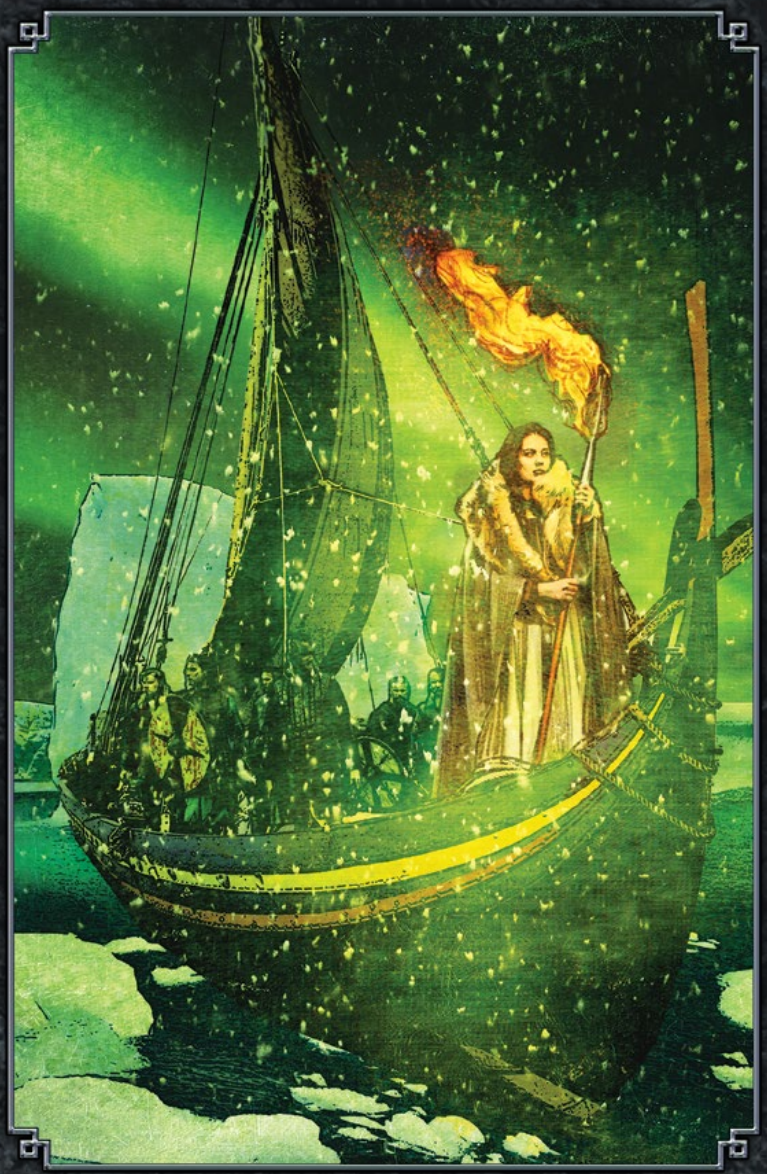
DARK AGES COMPANION



A SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE
20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION DARK AGES

Dark Ages Companion



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Special Thanks

To Jacob Middleton, for his expertise and consultation regarding Mogadishu and what came before.

Dedication

To the memory of Phil Hartman. You might remember him.

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Introduction

Empires rise with the sun and fall with the onset of night.
We just give them a little push, and watch these domains and their Princes topple.

— Erebus, Cappadocian Seneschal to the Consul of Bath

V20 Dark Ages Companion explores the diverse domains of the Middle Ages — ranging from towns in Western Europe to one of the largest cities on the Indian subcontinent, and acts as a resource for Storytellers wishing to set their chronicles in the domains profiled, or for those who wish to pull elements from each and form their own. It provides options for warfare — both intimate and across the battlefield — along with domain building, Clan apocrypha for those seeking mysteries related to the Blood, and new monsters dwelling in the night as a threat to kine and Cainite alike.

Theme and Mood

Each domain profiled within this book possesses a different theme and mood. **V20 Dark Ages Companion** aims to display diversity across historic domains, showing that geographical distance does more than make for an arduous journey — it also impacts culture, hierarchy, and belief.

In Rome the Church is strong, yet the Prince is one of the greatest sinners alive. The domain's theme is one of fallen greatness, with its ruler driving it as far beneath holiness as he is able, unless stopped. The domain is afflicted with the mood of grandeur, despite its obvious faults, its Cainites proud and willingly oblivious to their Prince's unmitigated evil.

The theme in the domain of Bath is one of blood loyalty to an historic ideal, one that may no longer hold true. As the Consul bonds his domain's populace and ensures their loyalty to the god emperor Mithras, he suffers a crisis of faith, leaving the utopia of Bath on the edge of civil war. The mood is desperation, as an increasing number of Cainites flocks to its walls in search of a sanctuary that may soon collapse.

Bjarkarey represents the theme of savagery, as its Gangrel ruler leads frequent raids on neighboring Scandinavian domains, and pursues crusades whenever the desire for blood takes her. The vampires of Bjarkarey must embrace violence to survive in this arduous, small domain. Yet, the mood of Bjarkarey is one of isolation. No hope reaches the distant island of Bjarkarey, forcing it into a perpetual cycle of bloodshed.

The theme in Constantinople is one of faith, as its Cainites strive to believe in something greater than their own petty politicking and attempt to move on from the failure of a Methuselah's shattered dream. As the world's greatest metropolis fractures under the weight of repeated crusades, the domain exudes the mood of hopeful expectation. Its vampires are determined to reject failure, and embrace greatness once more.

Mogadishu's theme is shadow war, as rival tyrants don masks of piety to claim the greatest domain on East Africa's coast and find the faith working against them. Arrayed against the Clans and bloodlines roving the bazaars and alleys are hidden forces and an ancient monster, who on

a whim could destroy all that Mogadishu's usurpers hope to build. The domain's mood is sweltering tension, as opportunities in Mogadishu abound, but the hot-blooded Cainites within violently compete for the richest treasures.

In Mangaluru, the theme is that of resolve, and the old ways inexorably passing into the new. In this domain, the Long Night never ended. Old alliances hold firm, and new bloodlines find the seizing of power difficult. Yet, the mood is *amor fati*. The domain's millennia-old hierarchy is on a path to destruction — their fate — and they cannot help but embrace it.

How to Use This Book

V20 Dark Ages Companion offers numerous domains with varying degrees of detail, so a Storyteller can either set her chronicle within one, or use elements from each to form her own domain, as detailed on p. 105. Within many of the chapters are new creatures of the night — monsters from folklore that prey on the domains featured in this book. The Storyteller can use these monsters to give her games an extra edge of sinister mystery. Each chapter also contains apocrypha for one or more Clans. In some cases, this apocrypha is specific to the domain, but with all of them Storytellers and players can take ideas and use them in their own chronicles to add layers to characters and plots, and present new options.

Chapter One: The Domain of Rome — This chapter introduces the magnificent domain of Rome, fallen to the tyranny of Prince Camilla. The chapter concludes with apocrypha for Clans Nosferatu and Brujah.

Chapter Two: The Domain of Bath — This chapter offers coverage for the small, peaceful town of Bath, as it struggles to cope with an influx of hopeful Cainites seeking sanctuary. The chapter contains the sinister black dog as a folklore antagonist, and apocrypha for Clans Cappadocian and Ventrue.

Chapter Three: The Domain of Bjarkarey — This chapter introduces the isolated island domain of Bjarkarey, off the coast of Norway, as its savage Gangrel ruler seeks to reap the blood of all who oppose her reign. The chapter contains statistics for the fossegrim, an enemy to Cainite and mortal alike, and apocrypha for Clans Gangrel and Malkavian.

Chapter Four: The Domain of Constantinople — This chapter reintroduces the metropolis of Constantinople, in the wake of a Methuselah's failed ambition to make it a vampire utopia. The chapter also introduces the goblinoid kallikantzaroi, and apocrypha for Clans Lasombra, Toreador, and Tzimisce.

Chapter Five: The Domain of Mogadishu — This chapter covers the East African domain of Mogadishu, as its Cainite rulers vie for power over the split city and use faith as a weapon. The chapter contains apocrypha for Clan Assamite and the Ramanga.

Chapter Six: The Domain of Mangaluru — This chapter introduces the bustling domain of Mangaluru on India's west coast, as it struggles to resist the War of Princes and the fall of Clan Salubri. The flesh-eating pishacha are profiled within, and Clans Salubri and Ravnos receive apocrypha.

Chapter Seven: Building a Domain — This chapter details how a Storyteller or group of players may go about building a domain utilizing Backgrounds, and era-appropriate events and characters. The chapter concludes with apocrypha for Clan Tremere

Chapter Eight: Art of the Battlefield — The final chapter handles weapons and armor of the dark medieval era, and new ways to orchestrate combat within the World of Darkness. The Followers of Set receive apocrypha within this chapter.



Chapter One: The Domain of Rome

We're as ageless as emperors wrought in marble, but marble shatters.

— Maginardo, Clan Nosferatu

Rome is as dead as the Damned: fallen, but restless, a corpse roused by alleged acts of God. Three challenges assail Cainites who dare the Eternal City. First, prideful Roman mortals clutch the scraps of the Empire. Once, Rome teemed with residents. They were crushed into apartments called *insulae* or reigned over slave-filled estates. Their numbers and organization provided blood, power, and anonymity. Now a fraction of the old population lives here, providing less influence and camouflage. Even the poorest believe themselves deposed lords, entitled to the riches of Europe. They resent attempts to manipulate them.

The second challenge is faith. Rome is seat of the Catholic Church (a term appropriate to the period but little used, as Reformation stands centuries away). The secret Inquisition flowers under its patronage. St. Peter's Basilica (a Romanesque church-palace that will be torn down and rebuilt in centuries to come) is guarded by True Faith and soldiers who can identify supernatural horrors.

The third trial? The Roman Damned in their age, pride, and antique dreams. They've increasingly fallen out of touch with the reality of 13th-century Rome. Like Rome's mortals, they often believe the rotten bones of the city are still fully fleshed, with the strength to claim Europe anew. They play obsessive games of faith and ideology.

Under Camilla's influence, the Cainite court assumes a defiant anti-clerical position. The Methuselah's only been awake for a short time. He styles himself Pontiff of Sin, and even though many of his followers only pay lip service to his decadent ideals, his eloquence and political skill may transform them into true believers, given time. Such is his power that he dismisses the Gnostic Brujah Thrax, with a laugh and wave. Other Roman vampires of comparable strength refuse to challenge him. The mighty Cretheus might be able to overthrow him, but uses Camilla as an Antipope to pit against the Pope, to inspire the drama of Golconda or the fall of the Church — both options would please him.

Rome's Great Cainites

Camilla, Prince of Rome — (Fifth Generation Ventrue) Titus Venturus Camillus slipped back to power immediately — a surprise for those who expected Cretheus to oppose him. 13 years after rising from torpor, Camilla (the name he's gone by since ancient times) swings between an "Imperial" court that indulges the worst stereotypes of decadent Rome, and an "Anti-Papacy" of frenzied blood gluttony, which he presides over in black bishop's robes. Camilla's pedigree is incomparable. His sire Collat founded the Eternal Senate that ruled classical Rome. In rising to power, Camilla took his sire's soul and office, but, for the great ones, even diablerie goes unpunished.

A master of the Road of Sin, Camilla was a student and lover of its alleged founder, Tanitbaal-Sahar. He leaves Cainites to do as they please, intervening only in crises. The system works because Roman traditions lend stability to resident vampires, but Camilla chafes against Christianity and the dominant morals of restraint. He supports challenges to the Papacy, and in doing so risks attracting the attention of Faith's soldiers and followers of the Road of Heaven.

Cretheus, First Senator — (Fifth Generation Ventrue) Mithras' childe Cretheus was Rome's de facto ruler for nearly 300 years. The Ventrue tolerated various self-styled "Princes" but made it clear that any such government was subservient to Rome's peculiar traditions. Cretheus is the only public member of the body that became the *Ignoti*, or Inconnu. When he bent a knee to Camilla in 1229 it overturned expectations, and was seen to represent the hidden ones' approval.

Cretheus is an indifferent Seneschal, considering it a distraction from his mystical studies. His devotion to his absent sire Mithras resembles worship and indeed, he attempted to both popularize Mithraism and bend it to the service of his master. His efforts failed, and the presence of the victorious Church is one of the few things that visibly irritates him. Cretheus is a slim man who appears to be in his 20s, with pale skin and long black hair.

Maginardo, the Aedile — (Tenth Generation Nosferatu) Before Maginardo the position of Aedile, master of buildings and lairs, had fallen into as much disrepair as the Eternal City itself. Maginardo's sire Marco knew a bit of masonry and carpentry but could most of all be counted on to keep his mouth shut, since the Aedile traditionally vows to keep his knowledge a secret. He wasn't a very skilled builder, however; havens and catacombs crumbled as they aged, and as rival Cappadocians and Nosferatu renovated and destroyed structures in a war for the undercity.

Hearing of his fame as an architect, in 1032 Marco Embraced Maginardo in Ravenna and presented him to Cretheus. In the centuries since, the new Aedile has renovated many underground spaces and even broken through into places that even the elders have forgotten. In the process he all but ended the battle for the undercity, as both sides came to realize that, under their crude care, they'd lost more than they could gain in victory. Yet peace has opened up new secret spaces and rumors of threats in the lightless dark, from which rats and worms flee.

The vampire's face resembles cracked and smashed marble, distorting the features of a man in his 20s.

Otto the Pretender — (Seventh Generation Malkavian) Otto's madness isn't that he's the rightful Holy Roman Emperor. By some measures he really is; he was the son of Otto II and claimed the Eternal City itself in the late 10th century. His delusion is that he still reigns over Germany and Italy as the rightful heir of Charlemagne. Suggestions to the contrary prompt his clarifications: As a vampire, he is forced to operate through mortal catspaws (which do not exist) and he respects the suggestions of "advisors" such as Camilla (who do not serve him). Sometimes Camilla tells him to declare himself ruler for Cainite visitors, and even pretend to be Camilla himself.

He's a skilled warrior, a creative practitioner of Dementation, and skilled at manipulating those who believe he's a deluded, pathetic figure. He relies on the city's true rulers for favor; Rome's ancillae despise him, since many were once the mortal aristocrats Otto stepped on during his mortal days. Otto's sire is a mystic and vagabond who travels under the name Stephen of Kent, but is actually a far older Phoenician vampire who was the childe of Tryphosa, Camilla's advisor from pagan times.

The Bride of Night — (Fifth Generation Lasombra) "I am only a messenger" says the Bride of Night, speaking as if distracted by some compelling inner voice. The Bride hails from the Castle of Shadows in Sicily and is thought to represent either the Lasombra Ancient or one of his childer. She was confirmed as a true representative by Rome's resident Lasombra. She whispered to each of them, and they swore by their Clan that she was truly of the Castle of Shadows. The Bride of Night dresses as a nun, reflecting her interest in the Church.

Thrax, the Rebel — (Seventh Generation Brujah) After the fall of Carthage, Roman Brujah were forced to suffer various indignities: taxes, rituals of submission, and punishment during any political upheaval, even when they weren't responsible. Thrax came to Rome a century ago with a simple mission: Test the fallen Clan of Scholars until they rediscover their ideals or are destroyed. She discovered Rome was apathetically governed. They seized territory, and were ignored. They ambushed, staked, and presumably slew the Toreador Patrician, and Cretheus did nothing. Upon awakening, Camilla declared Thrax's efforts "great sport" and made her *praetor urbanus* against her will, though she feels responsible for keeping the peace nonetheless. Thrax is the local Clan of Scholars' de facto leader. She's converted many them to Katharoi (see p. 19). Thrax now believes she might reform the court, and challenge the "Antipope," Camilla.

Kine and Place

By Maginardo, Aedile of Rome

Honestly, I pay little attention to individual mortals. They're visitors like yourself: pilgrims for a few score years who eventually move on to the Kingdom of God. But if they visit the right parts of the Eternal City they'll get a foretaste of the mansions they believe await them.

People Among the Ruins

Given your somewhat dated finery I'll assume your sire dressed you, and might have misinformed you about the nature of the modern city. Many provincials know Rome through their sires' stories. They don't attend to later events. Perhaps you expected a toga-wearing throng, but if you made it this far you've already noticed that there are fewer people than you expected, and that they dress like ordinary Italians. My Prince, whose wisdom is as vast as it is ancient, told me that Rome once supported a million souls. Can you imagine it? Many of them shared small rooms in enormous buildings they called "islands." What was it like to live as packed together as cut firewood, I wonder? I can show you the ruins. Or perhaps I should show you the Colosseum?

Yes, that would be better. There's a chapel, a few shops and residences, but it used to be a place where Romans gathered for gladiatorial combat, to see beasts battle — everything you heard about in the stories. But nowadays the entire population of the city would fill little more than half the place, were we to restore all the steps and such. From a million we've fallen to 30,000 or so. Be advised that you can't win anonymity in a crowd. When people go missing, Cainite and kine alike know it. Fortunately, foreign visitors come and go all the time, so someone as unfashionable as yourself can probably walk among them without drawing excessive notice.

Rome has more buildings, catacombs, ruins, and hiding spots than anyone knows what to do with. I can find you a place to rest that's as humble or opulent as you desire. By ancient custom I am compelled to keep the location of your repose a secret. I do not advise you to manage your own shelter. You might find an uninhabited place, certainly, but it is in the nature of Roman Cainites to claim the most beautiful and useful ruins. You might ignorantly trespass on a place one of them cherishes. Furthermore, the kine are always scavenging marble and stone from the old buildings for new ones. You never know when a laborer might reintroduce you to the sun. They say it's how the last Prince went to God.

Little Lords of the Towers

Romans love three things: their lost Empire, their families, and rioting. The order of these preferences depends on current affairs, but they all come before their traditional enemy: high nobility. They got rid of their duke 400 years ago, and found no use for a replacement. Popes, neighboring lords, and even emperors tried in vain to command the people. Italians only respect the ones they break bread with. In Rome, every uncle's a lord. Get enough money and Romans behind one banner and that uncle becomes a patrician. They run the kine's day-to-day affairs. The city needs close supervision; Rome's filled with artisans, thieves, and priests who don't like to farm, haul shit, or dig trenches. All the pilgrims, officials, and formal retinues wander around and spend money freely, so Romans cleave to gentler professions unless forced to by the patricians.

About 100 years ago they cut high nobles out of government completely. They founded a new Roman Republic, complete with senators. They revived the Augustan custom of splitting the city into districts; we adopted these to satisfy old Clan-related customs. Eventually the "Roman Senate" became Papal vassals and were reduced in number until just one existed to agree with the Pope about things. The arrogant dream collapsed into typical Roman chaos. We Cainites cannot claim too much superiority, however. We once possessed an Eternal Senate, and like mortals, allowed it to collapse into one elder's office.

Families indulge in little wars from time to time, so we have a custom of fortified mansions. The building of towers eventually became a war of its own, with rivals competing for height and splendor. I've arranged for certain towers to be built deep underground as well as high, and to connect to certain convenient tunnels. When patricians fall, their towers lie abandoned until someone salvages the stone. The opportunities are obvious.

The Lateran Palace

By the Bride of Night

I know who you really are, traveler. The Lateran Palace is not for you. There it lies across the Tiber, with countless apartments, courts, and chapels for the Holy Father, his soldiers in Christ, servants, others. Much of the place would burn you. Perhaps it's God's kiss. Perhaps it's kine prayers, surrounding it as armor.

Yes, there are ways for Cainites to avoid the fire of Faith: techniques, passages. I will not teach them to you. Know that even if you were to enter cleverly, the Holy See possesses priests who smell corruption like brimstone, and warrior-monks whose swords will burn you. It is they who hunt Rome anew, now that Camilla inflicts his excesses upon the people.

Tell your servant to abandon his plans, and my masters have given me permission to describe the true nature of the place: the difference between the Templars and the Knights of Acre, and of the demonologists and their books. Until then, you will only know the Church's fire.

The Thirteen Regions

When Rome's kine revived the custom of regions we adapted it, and renewed the tradition of giving each region to a specific Clan. That comes from the time of the Republic, when the Eternal Senate declared Rome a nation for all Cainites — in theory. Even then, the less honored Clans rarely claimed their rights, and the rest brawled over territory piecemeal.

The specifics? They're complicated, and set by Imperial tradition few remember, but at minimum Cainites of a particular Clan enjoy the right to dwell and feed from their region, subject to the security of the city and any additional contracts. The last condition protects ancient arrangements, so Ventrue dwell in the Cappadocian region, for example.

I know subtle ways to travel between them, should you seek to avoid mortal attention. Know that the Vatican stands apart from all these regions. Cainites should travel there cautiously, for it burns with Faith. It is said the Lasombra have greatest access, though I would dispute that. The old tunnels are known to me, and are owned by neither mortal nor Cainite. I cannot explain further.

The first region is the **Montium et Biberatice**, where the Ventrue reign, and one may come to court at the Forum. Until a decade ago we used one or another of the towers kine built to honor their own political might, but when Prince Camilla returned, he desired the ancient halls. The ruined exterior conceals comfortable, beautiful chambers.

The **Trivii et Vie Late** is the second region, named in part for the Via Lata, the great road emperors used to march down for their Triumphs. It also contains the Aqua Virgo, last of the functioning aqueducts. The road and water supply make it a place where kine congregate in number. It is given to the Brujah to administer, though this is a recent development. Before that the Toreador reigned, but civil unrest prompted a reordering.

Third in traditional order, the **Columpne et Sancte Marie in Aquiro** is held in trust for the Followers of Set, who have never inhabited it in number. I have renovated chambers within the Temple of Hadrian for their use, but of course I may lend them at need.

The **Campi Martis et Sancte Laurentii in Lucina** includes portions of the old Fields of Mars, where soldiers once mustered. This is given to the Gangrel to honor them as warriors, and to note that just as soldiers from afar became Romans through service, Gangrel might join us.

The **Pontis et Scorteclariorum** takes its name from Nero's Bridge, now broken to allow the passage of large ships. Significant trade comes from the river, so the residents here prosper. The Lasombra reign here, though I think the Bride is more interested in the Vatican across the river.

The **Sancte Eustachii et Vinea Teudemarii** is named for the basilica honoring Saint Eustace and is given to my own Clan. We Nosferatu have little ambition to meddle in mortal affairs, so of course this is an unexceptional region.

Of Secret and Noble Places

In old ruins or new towers, Maginardo and the architecture of Rome might inspire the following stories.

Ancient Rights: Throughout the 13 districts, the Roman court pretends to hold the city for all Cainites, but if one of the largely-absent Clans claimed its due, it would upend the political situation. The districts don't override individual favor trading so would-be colonists might discover that "their" district is already controlled by members of established Clans. Significant numbers of Assamites and Tzimisce would be particularly unwelcome. Cretheus might broker compensation, but Camilla could overturn it in exchange for a number of favors.

Builders and Burrowers: Maginardo doesn't have nearly enough allies to do his job. Too many of Rome's ruins and secret ways lie unattended. They say Constantius perished because of his ill-tended haven, and the Aedile isn't eager to have another Cainite's home collapse. He needs skilled builders to assist him, and they must vow, as he does, never to reveal the secrets of Cainite havens. He's especially interested in a Cappadocian aide, to smooth over remaining tensions with the Clan of Death over Rome's catacombs. Should an assistant prove untrustworthy, it would throw the Aedile's office into disrepute, disrupt efforts at renewal, and renew Nosferatu-Cappadocian hostilities.

Down, Down, Down: Rome's endured layers of building and digging, and contains more underground passages than any Cappadocian catacomb or Nosferatu warren could utilize. They fought for territory because some of these places are far more desirable than others. But the waterlogged tunnels, rock-strewn caverns, and tight boltholes they abjure contain rewards and threats to anyone who cares to explore them. Maginardo knows where these connect to the Elder Tunnels (see p. 21) and their weird features.

Flood-soaked sand plagues the **Arenule et Caccabariorum**. The Tiber throws its waters onto the streets frequently, inviting insects and plague. We hold it in trust for the Tzimisce, who of course threw their lot in with the Eastern Empire.

Long held by the Toreador, the **Parionis et Sancte Laurentii in Damaso** houses the Theatre of Pompey and Stadium of Domitan, both in ruins, though I have preserved certain features in secret.

The Pantheon is the most notable structure in the **Pinee et Sancte Marci**. The kine made it a church to Mary and the Martyrs, and moved hundreds of bodies from catacombs for reinterrment. The Cappadocians reign here, many of whom bear the name "Rosselini," or variations on it.

The **Sancte Angeli in Foro Piscium** contains the fish market. It's a center for low trade and held in trust for the Ravnos, should a suitable representative demonstrate his Clan's honor.

The **Ripe et Marmorate** is named for high riverbanks and the marble-clad ruins here. Remnants of grand mansions, they've been depopulated by invasions and civil unrest, their stones seized for newer towers. Nevertheless, one might find refuge here if he avoids the citadel of the Templars, who have their headquarters here. We hold this region in honor of the Salubri. It may be claimed by no other Clan, true or pretended.

Between the first and second regions, the **Campitelli et Sancte Adriani** has been ruled by Malkavians since the age of the Caesars. Many beautiful shrines have been built under their secret patronage.

The 13th **Trastavere** region lies on the West bank of the Tiber, and also claims Tiber Island. This region is held in trust for the Assamites, though tradition dictates that members of the Clan confer with other Cainites on the island, while Cainites are cautioned against entering Trastavere. With so few Assamites, however, the policy is rarely enforced.

The True Third City

By Otto III, Emperor

Rome? Fallen? It's a pose. A conspiracy! My Imperium has roads of shadow. My commands reveal themselves in wolf howls and worm wriggles. You, who have not been given supremacy by the Vicar of Christ and anointed with the fire of God, much less followed the Son beyond death, to confront sin, cannot comprehend the mysteries of power. Indeed, where you see ruins, I see secret configurations. The Roman Empire is strong, but it sleeps, preparing for new ascendancy. I have had dreams. Yes, dreams. A new temple. A black moon. In sleep, one appears weak, but grows strong. I see you are perplexed, and therefore will attempt to describe the face of Rome as it appears to you, despite your limited vision. Even in ruins it remains the Third City. The First City was for the dread Dark Father and the Second was for his childer, and the revelation of their sins. Now we live within the gates of transformation, of redemption — of a reckoning with God.

Cainite History

Rome was nothing, as far we blood drinkers were concerned. Nothing. Just another warlord-run settlement among others, exploited by Cainites and other monsters. Wolves. Witches. Rome's warlords were too smart for their own good. Other petty kings satisfied themselves with crowns and wealth and the right to murder whoever they wanted, but the Roman monarchy made a fatal mistake: They tried to make something of their people. The last one, Tarquin, pushed his subjects through wars and public works enough to enrage them. He built sewers and temples. He founded colonies and great alliances. The Senate loved the kingdom, but hated the king. They killed him, and inherited a mighty dominion. And now — ah, now! — the children of Caine took notice. After the usual secret alliances, wars, and diablerie the great Ventrue Collat bound our kind into an Eternal Senate, based on the mortal institution with but a few adjustments, suited to our natures.

All the Clans elected senators — and all Cainites wanted to *be* senators, since in his wisdom Collat refused to set a fixed number of them. In happy, blood-soaked times there were plenty of favors to go around, and plenty of senators, staining their togas with the bounty of the Republic. Collat understood the system best, manipulated its players, and became first among them. They elected him dictator many times. He might has well have been king!

Unfortunate. He suffered the fate of the mortal King Tarquin, for he prepared a prize worth stealing, and so his childer did. First among them was our own Antipope, my reluctant vassal Titus Camillus — Camilla. 200 years or so before the Lord sent his only begotten Son (not counting the Dark Father, if you believe certain heresies) Camilla and two other Ventrue supplanted his sire, who of course had the good manners to mysteriously vanish. This triumvirate ascended; Camilla became *princeps officium* of the Eternal City and permanent dictator during the Punic Wars, when the Eternal Senate fought Carthaginian Brujah, and their competing Third City. Camilla turned war leader, succeeding not just as a politician but as a strategist. He had a keen insight on the enemy, you see, having entertained one Tanit-



baal-Sahar: a decadent, a demon, a Carthaginian through and through. Thus, one wonders if the battle between Rome and Carthage was as much a lovers' quarrel as a war.

Rome won, Camilla ruled, and this time mortals took inspiration from us, for soon enough they made their own dictator for life out of a warlord, and founded the Empire. Yet in triumph Camilla grew bored, full of the caprice lesser minds confuse for weakness. The Great Fire of Rome supposedly took him, especially since his enemies' servants sifted through the rubble of his haven, exposing every stone to the sun. As you know, he only slept, awaiting more interesting times.

After that, nothing in particular happened until I arrived, about 1,000 years later. Anyone can tell you my history under the sun, my ascension to Emperor, mortal Rome's rebellion — that sort of thing. I know now my apparent failures were foreordained, so that I might be given Eternal Rome, Night Rome, and unite it with my mortal divine right! Thus I rule the Roman Empire through subtle means.

What? Oh yes. The Eternal Senate never exactly disbanded. Many of them left Rome, installing emissaries to represent them. These proxies often refused to identify their ruling elders, who were called *Ignoti*, yet they knew the secret signs given to true members of the Senate. The *Ignoti* became the majority, and then gradually withdrew their servants. Cretheus is all that's left now. He minds the city and manages such offices as are necessary for its upkeep. He bent a knee to me when I adopted the Blood, and I cherish him as a servant, even to the point of tolerating his excessive familiarity. He advised me that one Cainite, Constantius, served as *princeps* in Rome, but of course that was just a title to placate barbaric Cainites who lack the imagination to recognize a grander ruler.

I never liked Constantius. He took his office far too seriously. I admit it: I'm glad the earthquake got him! That was an eye's blink ago, in 1229. Mortals yelled, ruins fell, and in digging through rubble to save the living (or at least, steal the marble) they exposed poor Constantius to the noonday sun. Yet it was truly an act of God, for that selfsame earthquake awoke Camilla. I was concerned at first. I knew his illustrious history and prepared for usurpation. Yet my First Senator, ever-perceptive, told me, "Let him become Prince. He'll attract assassins and consternation that would otherwise strike your Imperial person." Furthermore, Cretheus reminded me Camilla had been Pontifex of the Damned, and therefore

could crown me Imperator Augustus for the Damned, just as the Pope had sanctified my rule for the living.

It was an understated ceremony. Would you like to see the crown?

Glorious Tradition

I'm afraid I must conceal the highest secrets of governance from you. I can't have you turning pretender on me! So I'll limit myself to well-known Cainite offices.

The Prince: Camilla puts on a show of holding the barbaric office known throughout Europe, though of course from my point of view he's the *princeps officii*, who deals with purely local affairs. I let him have his court and pleasures, and you should direct high petitions to him.

First Senator: Cretheus is the last of the ancient order, *princeps senatus*, and only senator now the rest have gone *Ignoti*, dispersed into the wilds. Yet the Eternal Senate never formally abandoned their positions, and Cretheus communicates with them from time to time. Perhaps once in a full moon an emissary who knows the old forms appears, calling Cretheus Monitor, and speaks to him privately. Indeed, this is how the Bride of Night presented herself. He advises the Prince and acts in his stead, when necessary.

Pontifex: Cursed by Caine, we Damned have a great need for religion. But which religion? Mortals may claim one faith or another, but we of the ancient lineage must celebrate the many faiths given to us through history's trials. Camilla is the most learned in these matters, and holds this office as well. I must say, however, that he is hardly unbiased, calling himself "Antipope" and saying that we exist to explore base passions such as the living must ban from their philosophies, lest they degenerate. Don't bother me with the details; his sermons bore me.

The Praetors: God gave us the Beast to humble our immortal intellects. We love battle and blood. The Praetors maintain the balance between violence and pure thought. The *praetor urbanus* enforces the Prince's decrees within Rome. The *praetor peregrinus* protects our borderlands, and is our warrior emissary when we must fiercely assert Rome's prestige against invaders. The Brujah who calls herself Thrax is *praetor urbanus*. I think that was meant to be a joke, but she's an excellent mediator. The latest *peregrinus* is a Gangrel, Maria, who rarely enters Rome proper. Mithraic Praetorians occasionally present their credentials here, but note the distinction. The Praetorians serve Mithras; the Praetor serve Rome.

Aedile: You've met Maginardo. The man's as cold as a statue, and as intimate with stone and carver's tools. This city of ruins and tunnels needs such a functionary. I disapprove of all this secret construction. It encourages skulking and conspiracy. In any event, I keep ordering him to build me a palace but he's always making excuses about why it can't be done.

Reckonings with History

As interpreted by Otto, Rome's history and Cainite traditions can complicate visitors' lives in a number of ways.

The Ignoti, the Inconnu: Rome witnessed the Eternal Senate's transformation into the *Ignoti* or as they are increasingly called, the *Inconnu*. As First Senator, Cretheus is the only accessible member of this group of elders. He has witnessed their transformation from power-hungry Cainites to mystics. Yet, the 13th-century Inconnu doesn't have the same singular devotion to Golconda as it will; some of them would be perfectly willing to return to Rome in power, especially now that Camilla's returned. Cretheus belongs to the group's mystical faction and, through various schemes, prevents would-be Eternal Senators from retaking office. To maintain the fiction of a united body, the First Senator may employ trusted (or safely ignorant) coteries to stymie such efforts.

The Rogue Praetor: As a joke, Camilla made Thrax *praetor urbanus*. Thrax feels morally obligated to carry out the office's duties, but hardly acknowledges the Prince at all. The fact that her Brujah were allowed to kill the Toreador Patrician sent a message that the Prince would let Thrax and her gang do whatever they wish…but, led by Katharoi on the Road of Heaven, they don't abuse their power much. Even the Toreador, Myrna, isn't ashes, but stowed in the tower of an extinguished Roman family. Thrax had planned to bring Myrna under the Blood Oath and convert her to the Pure religion, but her own spiritual journey has since convinced her that doing so would be wrong — however, releasing Myrna with no guarantees would be a disaster.

The Secret Emperor: Don't treat Otto III as a joke. While Cainites have been known to grumble when they bend the knee and indulge him, many Malkavians do treat him as the true Holy Roman Emperor. Due to his Clan, Cainites from the old families who refuse to let the Curse interfere with their traditions, and their mortal relatives and catspaws, Otto really does have a vast network of loyal agents. Through Dementation and Dominate, he has a knack for drawing Cainites into his delusion, so his presumptions of supremacy may take on a pressing reality.

Patricians: Like mortal Romans, we rely on patricians to take care of night to night, Clan to Clan business. Though I am no "patrician," I understand the use of the title refers to my dominion over the Children of Malkav. You may use it in that context without offending me. Rome's full of pilgrims and wayward souls, Cainite and kine, and we represent them as well. Sadly, this means certain patricians are barely Roman, and when their interests change, they leave. Beyond my Imperial personage, the only patricians worth noting are Cretheus, who assumes such duties for the Ventrue, and that irritating Lasombra nun, the Bride of Night.

Our Fallen State

By Cretheus, First Senator

My Sire. My God. Redeemer.

Yes, I see your gaze in this blood drinker's eyes. Did you not teach me the gods were not bound to flesh and thick blood but spirit to spirit, as dreams? So it is with you, who moves secretly among your descendants. What is it like to fly swifter than birds or lightning from far Londinium?

I beg your forgiveness. Cloaked in another's flesh, you were forced to listen to fools and pretenders: the Nosferatu builder, the Malkavian who calls himself Emperor. Let me wash away the lies. I trust that once I'm done you'll remove the memories from your servant's body. I do not wish to destroy her.

The Court of the Antipope

I was a mere sorcerer, dreaming of secret knowledge even as my body decayed, and ensured I'd never live long enough to win the prize of enlightenment. You Embraced me, saying, "I give you 1,000 lifetimes to seek out the knowledge of 10,000." You charged me with discovering an escape from damnation. I've followed your commands without diversion or distraction. I went into the desert where flies sing the names of demons, and learned the sorcery of the Banu-Haqim. I took ships and blood-quickened horses to the origin of silk, following the travels of Saulot. I buried certain secrets' liturgy in your cult, so followers of your Mysteries would know the way beyond damnation.

You know why you slay the bull, Redeemer: in memory of the Great Flood, and to remind us that salvation and sin are one, drenched in purifying blood. The unity of good and evil was Saulot's way, and with study, your true followers know it. In the city of Golconda, Saulot realized that to know the One Above, one must study the Lords Below. He listened to desert insects as I did, and gave them a home in Damned flesh, in pits of sacrifice. You know of the vile bloodline he made, and their secret reign in Carthage. Thus he shed the great evil he cultivated, and prepared for peace.

I cannot allow Rome to become a devil-haunted ruin for the sake of enlightenment to come, but I have prepared the way for Cainites to debase themselves as Saulot did, so they can be mightily purified when Fate demands a reckoning. This is why I resurrected Camilla. As the lover and student of Tanitbaal-Sahar, no vampire knows the Road of Sin as he does. At your command I transfixed him in his lair as the Great Fire burned, and buried him deeper than mortals can dig. I revived him without your leave, and ask your forgiveness. The Tremere appeared, the moon shone black and the little Prince I installed perished. I took these as signs of urgency, and perhaps movement among the Thirteen, and the Dark Father above.

Camilla's subjects explore all the passions that separate mortals from the One Above. You'll have to see for yourself; my words cannot convey the inventive ways in which Camilla weaves together pain and pleasure, taxing even the natural endurance of a vampire's body. This is the sacrament of his court, which he officiates dressed sometimes like a bishop, and sometimes in a purple toga, wreathed like the emperors of old. He declares himself his subjects' priest: "Pontifex Maximus of the immortals." Attendees are often too cowed by his power to refuse his debauched ministry, and he knows it. He's a master of his Road, disciplined in pleasure-seeking. He cannot be blinded by lust. He doesn't remember that I revived him but knows he's part of some greater scheme — and he knows Rome belongs to me. I hide the defiled bodies. I conceal the indiscretions of maddened Cainites. He chooses indulgence over struggle because it is expedient for him to do so.

I made him Prince to test vampires. Some recoil from the Antipope's court. Others lose themselves in lust. They're failures. A few might become Camilla's disciples, masters of Sin, but in keeping with the practices of Saulot we must destroy that attachment as well. Only those who possess the strength to climb back to virtue from the deepest pit of iniquity are fit for salvation. Therefore, I must overthrow Camilla. But not yet.

To Dash Them Against the Stones

You know my loyalty, but you endure my weakness. Rome is my place of penance, for it should have been your capital. Your Pontifex Maximus should be preaching the way of purification, of the Scorpion and the Bull. I spread your doctrine among the living and dead, and in Byzantium when Rome weakened. I devised Mysteries to conceal blood-drinkers' presence, so that they could celebrate with the kine. That was my mistake; they used the cult as an opportunity for personal enrichment, and fighting among themselves, they

BETWEEN SIN AND VIRTUE

Cretheus is a gateway to great secrets. He knows the disposition of the *Ignoti*, and entertains emissaries from the Manus Nigrum. In Rome itself, Cretheus provokes intense conflicts.

Against Christ: While he's too sophisticated to believe that Mithras is literally God, Cretheus thinks his sire is an emanation of a greater Mithras-principle, who suffered the Embrace to offer Cainites salvation. To the First Senator, Christianity is a deceitful abomination, designed to turn mortals and Cainites away from enlightenment. One of the reasons he revived Camilla is that he knows the Prince of Sin's matchless capacity for corrupting others. In his private war on the Vatican, Cretheus sets Camilla's vampires against the Church. He believes that no matter who wins it will weaken the Holy See's grip on Europe, allowing him to revive Mithraic practices. Soldiers of Faith stalk Rome in search of heresy and supernatural dangers, threatening all Cainite residents. It will only get worse.

Rome's Apocalypse: Cretheus believes Saulot found Golconda by immersing himself in evil. He studied it, conquered it, and therefore gave a full account of his sins to the One Above. The First Senator wishes to implement Saulot's way on a social scale, by exposing Rome's vampires to Camilla's extreme vice, then purifying them when the Church exacts vengeance. Mortals will riot and vampires will burn, and a minority of Cainite survivors will understand their sins and follow him to redemption, and Golconda. If characters discover the scheme, they might oppose it by allying with Camilla, but throwing their lot in with the Prince of Sin presents its own complications.

The Silent Bride: Through the Bride of Night, the Lasombra have made it clear they have a certain interest in the Vatican. The Bride visits regularly, taking secret paths that bypass the burning of Faith within. For all his power, Cretheus has no idea what she's doing, though he believes she wouldn't welcome his plans to set the Church against the city's Cainites and weaken it for Mithras' sake. Cretheus thinks he sees on older, coal-black gaze in her eyes. The Bride speaks with Thrax about unknown matters. She seems to be gathering Cainites of a certain spiritual disposition as a third faction, in case of a struggle to come.

destroyed it. The Christians pretended to be weak but resisted every persecution, as if possessed by some mania for suffering. Even before the Lasombra threw their lot in with them, I'd failed you and your true religion.

I can't deny the Christians' faith. My cursed flesh burns in its presence. The One Above rewards sincerity more than truth, it seems. His power resides in more than shrines and relics, however. Certain holy orders refine this raw faith into a form of sorcery. You would think that enslaving devotion to fallible mortal will would be blasphemy, but no: They pray for fire and thunder with carefully rehearsed words, and often win such blessings. These Knights of Acre, Messianic Voices, and Templars are restless in Rome, far from their Crusades.

I will test their faith with Camilla's sin. The Prince is too disciplined to be baited, but his cult of Sin already defies the Silence of the Blood in small ways. I've stopped hiding the bodies. The involuntary Praetor Thrax wrestles with uncooperative Cainites to suppress every report of killings, of fanged women and other terrors. Warriors clad in faith and mail already explore the catacombs.

I foresee two possible outcomes. In the first, the soldiers of faith attack in force, culling the weakest members of the Road of Sin. In that chaos, Camilla loses many of his loyal revellers. I will return him to the earth until we have need of him again, and we shall see which of the surviving Sinners are fit to follow the way of Saulot, from darkness to liberation. In the second, Camilla revives the power he displayed during the Punic Wars. His followers on the Road of Sin take up the sword and liberate Rome from the Christians. Many mortal Romans will join him, for they love the memory of the Empire more than their Holy Father.

We will be surrounded on all sides by mortal and Cainite enemies, but let them come, bulls to the slaughter. Let them come from the Castle of Shadows to defend their pet clerics. We will show them the sun. Let Brujah gnaw at the corners of our efforts. We will show them pits of sacrifice to remind them of the sins of Carthage, but fill them with their ashes. By the way of Saulot or the fall of Christian Rome, we will prevail. No matter what transpires, the results will be pleasing to you, my God, my Sire, my Mithras.

Brujah Apocrypha: The Age of Purification

Learned Sire, fear not. The Franks and Lombards are not as barbaric as we suppose, though I admit they're a tumultuous people. They profess great faith to their Holy Father when it suits them, but wallow in heresy and violence when their ambitions demand it. As we agreed, I have come to Rome, the cracked stone heart of the West, to survey its spirit. This is the conclusion of a wider journey ranging from the Black Forest to Ireland. I studied the state of our Clan in the West. My servant brings another volume of observations, listed kingdom by kingdom, with special attention for our Clan's presence in Toulouse. Their philosophical focus is an exception. More often, our kin drink deeply of the wine of Western disunity. Desperate mortals ask for their protection. Ambitious kine seek co-conspirators against weak kings. Our power-drunk brethren serve them all.

The state of the West might be likened to a cur that withstood many blows from its master. Men who beat their dogs thus tell themselves they instill discipline, but soon find the beasts impossible to train, for they shudder and flee when their masters raise hands for any reason. We must not forget that even the kine have long memories, in traditions passed from mother and father to child. In that sense they remember Rome. Through some wordless disease of the soul, so many know they were once slaves that they refuse all effective government. The pretender Emperor in the West rules through military strength, negotiated through dukes and clerics. The paradox of the beaten cur is that although untrainable, he is never truly free, for fear, not reason, inspires his rebellion. Yet we must give him this: He is no longer a slave to men, but fear.

Our Western kin, Embraced from such, wallow in personal rage and seize such opportunities as can be had from kine who tire of their lords but, lacking in spirit, cannot build new lives for their followers. Yet they have begun to understand their flaws, informed by philosophies they've rediscovered after their Crusades. I, who have by your grace come to the Blood in your unbroken lineage of scholars, now understand my purpose. The Clan of Philosophers must be tested and trained. Only then will they prove worthy to change the order of things.

A sect of Paulicians, called Cathars by enemies in the Western Church, provides an opportunity, though its simple faith must be more closely joined to Greek thought. I will apply such principles to inspire our Western cousins. I will teach them to control intemperate desire and stand with Wisdom against the falsehoods of lust and undisciplined ambition. Untrainable curs must be destroyed, but the Brujah will be stronger for it. To them and to our enemies, the coming age will appear disordered, even though the current state of affairs is truly fallen. I name myself for the turmoil I bring.

She Who is Called THRAX, of the line of Procet, Critias, Menele and Troile, and of the Antediluvian Philosopher

The Pure Ones

Thrax is one of many colonists, firebrands and secular "Crusaders" who've come West to reinvigorate the Clan. Zealot elders sent some forth, but many travel of their own initiative, eager to reassert Brujah power in lands they believe are beset by opportunistic warlords. That the Ventrue and Tzimisce seem to enjoy this state of affairs is a strong argument for such political projects, particularly since Cainites at the bottom of these arrangements increasingly chafe at bending a knee before their "betters."

The Brujah long harbored these ambitions, but in the past they lacked a common philosophy. Western Zealots learned the Clan's Hellenistic heritage from their Sires' anecdotes, fragmentary texts, and legends. In the last case, this was not especially helpful. It's hard to argue for Carthage when an educated Ventrue can answer with tales of the city's corruption.

For many Eastern Brujah the trigger was the sack of Constantinople in 1204. Before that point, the Clan believed Western Europe wanted to unite under the rule of law, and could become a worthy groom for the Roman Empire in the East. After all, the West had thrown off widespread chattel slavery and, through the Papacy, rebuilt a common culture. And unite they did — as marauders against the Saracens, then Byzantium itself.

These wars produced one favorable effect: They provided access to philosophical texts long lost to the West, but preserved under Islam. They opened the way to scientific discoveries, too, but most of all presented the idea that knowledge could exist beyond the framework of the Word of God and its clerical interpreters. Brujah harness these ideas. In an era of increasing resistance to clerical authority, they've chosen Gnostic dualism as the sword best forged for their aims. The Zealots build religions with almost cynical calculation, drawing from Neoplatonism, apocryphal Scripture and other obscure sources. Although Thrax herself remains in Rome, many of her compatriots have gathered in southern France, where they've named themselves *Katharoi*, and support mortal Cathars (the same word, spoken in French and Latin) not as patrons, but spiritual guides.

Thrax is typical in her use of the philosophical sword. She holds one edge forward, against capricious tyranny among Cainite and kine, but the other faces her Clan, to cut down the unworthy. There's no room for corruption in the movement, no tolerance for Brujah who'd ape lordly selfishness. Better the few and strong, than an undisciplined mob.

Against Rex Mundi

Katharoi battle many enemies. They promote heresy, earning ire from the Church and Christian Cainites. They're hated by aristocratic Cainites for rejecting the materialistic tools mighty vampires use to manipulate supposed inferiors. Finally, the Cainite Heresy uses Gnostic sources to make vampires objects of worship, and opposes Katharoi equality rhetoric. Followers tailor sermons to local political conditions, but the main body profess a few teachings in common.

The Reign of the Demiurge: The world was made by the Demiurge: a being subsidiary to God (and perhaps the same as Lucifer, and sometimes called *Rex Mundi*, "king of the world") who hides the true nature of the world in a cloak of matter, pain, and lust. God represents absolute truth and perfection, beyond matter and desire. Brujah Katharoi seek unity with the true God as *Sophia*, the wisdom principle personified, which they believe is equivalent to beholding the Platonic Forms. Mortal Cathars rarely entertain these more abstract ideas.

Denying Material Things: To conquer matter, a human or vampire must deny worldly pleasures: fine clothing,

What Happened to the Pure

In future centuries, some vampires follow the "Path of Cathari," but they're nothing like the Pure of the dark medieval era. Instead, they follow an evolution of the *Via Pecatti*, indulging every lustful whim, and see themselves as monsters predestined to sin. If history follows this path it seems that Katharoi firebrands will fail *catastrophically*. This need not happen in your chronicle, but the possibility suggests serious challenges ahead that can drive your stories, such as:

Camilla and the Court of Rome: In Rome, Thrax contends against Camilla, the second greatest practitioner of the Road of Sin to ever exist. Perhaps Thrax grows powerful enough for the eccentric Ventrue to notice, and he thoroughly corrupts her. In Rome, certain powers seek to explore the nature of Golconda, and perhaps challenge the Church itself. If the Pure Brujah resist manipulation, they might overthrow it all.

The Cainite Heresy: In exalting vampires above other beings, the Gnostic Cainite Heresy is a likely culprit for the destruction of the Katharoi. They use similar teachings, but direct them against everything the Pure Brujah stand for. The Cainite Heresy has many allies among vampires who are either eager to be worshipped, or who honestly believe that they're saintly monsters preparing the way for the third coming of Caine (according to Cainites, the second coming was Jesus Christ).

The Secret Inquisition: Southern France endured the Albigensian Crusade against mortal Cathars. The Church fails to destroy them completely, however, and founds the historical Inquisition to mop them up. Yet even before this, the Secret Inquisition and other sects powered by Faith not only do the Church's work, but specifically seek out supernatural influence. What depths could the most idealistic vampire sink to, once provoked?

PATH OF THE PURE (KATHAROI)

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Desiring a material object or person.	Wanting the things of this world blinds us to true wisdom.
9	Feeding beyond satiation (that is, filling more than half of one's Blood Pool).	Feeding beyond need is gluttony.
8	Lying by omission or passive deception (such as by employing stealth).	Deception is an act of the heart.
7	Giving one's blood to another.	It is a sin to ensnare another in the illusions of this world.
6	Telling a lie; tricking a person.	Blinding another to the truth is the work of the Demiurge.
5	Accepting a position of authority or honor, except as a teacher of the Path.	Pride is the Demiurge's motive, for he pretends to be God.
4	Engaging in sexual congress or drinking another Cainite's blood.	Lust is of the world, and impure.
3	Feeding for pleasure.	Gluttony weighs us down; we ingest the world's foulness.
2	Stealing or killing for pleasure.	You give reign to our material lusts, like Caine.
1	Torturing a person or ravaging a community for pleasure or personal power.	You condemn others to the prison of this world.

food and drink, sex, the lust for power, and pride in one's accomplishments. Thus it is necessary to live communally, respecting knowledge over birth. Mortals should eat, drink, and dress plainly, and engage in sex for reproduction alone. Cainites must follow similar strictures, feeding only when necessary and refusing to accept or receive the Blood Oath, which Katharoi call a lustful and foolish attachment.

Cainite Damnation: Vampires were raised from Caine, the mortal most seduced by matter, to blind humans as he was blinded, and are part of the corrupt world of desire. They serve the Demiurge. But Rex Mundi is not omnipotent, and cannot keep anyone who was once a child of Adam from escaping his world of lies. Cainites who choose the hard road of rejecting matter become wiser than mortals, for they overcome greater lusts and temptations.

The Path of the Pure

Cainite Katharoi may belong to the Path of the Pure. This is a variation on the Road of Heaven, similar to the Paths of Life, Christ, and The Prophet followed by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim vampires, and not a wholly autonomous Road. Beyond the details of the Path, use the same Aura (Holiness), Virtues (Conscience and Self-Control) and general ethics found on pp. 119-120 of **V20 Dark Ages**.

Nosferatu Apocrypha: The Elder Tunnels

My Brother in Penitence, I hope your nights are peaceful, and that you may find balance between dread hunger and your meditations. I thank you for your advice and hope for my soul. Although I do not hope for redemption in Christ, I strive to be a good man in an evil place. I think you would approve of my acts even though I do not pray.

I can explain what you find perplexing. I have given your servant certain books, translated from Arabic. I copied the pictures myself. In them you will find descriptions of the oldest Greek, Roman, and Egyptian buildings, and of new palaces of the finest design. I have taken special care to describe the nature of their supporting structures. These will be of particular use when you attempt to repair and expand your crypts. Furthermore, I can explain the nature of the curious objects you sent to me, which speak of our Clan's ancient presence in your homeland. They must have seemed to depict some twisted autumn wood, with unusual tree branches that turn and separate the way they would on no true tree, and sometimes terminate in fruits of stone and bone, or boxes. They are not branches. They are maps.

I possess a collection of such carvings, given to me when I assumed my master's duties minding Rome's ruins and catacombs. They describe other structures, however. Imagine a system of tunnels, all flooded, turning to ice. Think upon how the ice would appear if the surrounding earth and stone were to dust and blew away. Imagine oneself a giant, able to hold these threads and lumps of ice in your hand. They would resemble the objects I describe. Some are strange trees with dozens of branches, taller than a man, but others might fit into the folds of a robe, and only contain a few branches. Some have other symbols carved upon them. I cannot read them.

These artifacts will not describe tunnels built during the reign of Rome, nor of any kingdom known to kine. They are maps to ancient ways, found beneath the deepest catacombs not only in Christendom, but in the lands of the Turks. In some places a Cainite can travel many miles without seeing the sky, though he might be forced to break his own bones to fit through the smallest passages. I urge careful exploration, however. Long has it been the tradition of ancient Cainites to construct labyrinths as refuges. Creatures who seek to hide from the sight of God dwell underground – "out of the sight of angels," they say, "and closer to Hell." The Kindly Ones have mounds and crypts. I need not remind you of the great enemy of our Clan, which also seeks refuge in the dark. Explore these secret ways cautiously. Use the arts I have described to make them large, safe, civilized dwellings.

Maginardo, Aedile of Rome

Strange Passages

Nosferatu know secret ways: tunnels beyond the usual catacombs and sunken ruins they make their lairs in, beyond even warrens created in the memory of known elders. Ancient Cainites are but one of the monsters one might encounter. To the Dark Medieval mind, Hell lies underground, and superstitious Nosferatu fear to tread in the lowest places,

lest a wall crumble to reveal infernal fire. Even reasonable vampires proceed with caution. They are not the only monsters crawling inside the Elder Tunnels.

Walking the Depths

Elder Tunnels can be found near the oldest settlements, either dug below their oldest structures, or extended from natural caves. In many cases kine know of their upper reaches and make them into storage sites, catacombs, or shelters. German-speakers call them *erdstelln* ("earth-steads"). Elder Tunnels aren't natural features, but may intersect with or expand upon them. They bear chisel marks, or scratches mortals would assume come from tools, but wise Cainites recognize as signs of bare-handed, inhuman strength.

They extend a much greater distance than many would believe possible. Miles. Sometimes Elder Tunnel networks connect, making lightless travel between cities possible. The farther the tunnels extend, the more difficulties a traveler encounters: darkness greater than any night, mud, submerged byways, sharp rocks, and passages barely wide enough to wriggle down. The more comfortable a network is, the more likely it is to have other inhabitants.

Dwellers Below

Nosferatu are one of many groups that claim underground places. Others may be found exploring the Elder Tunnels, and claiming portions as exclusive territory.

Cappadocian Catacombs: The Clan of Death digs underground havens for shelter and to study their morbid arts. These are less wide ranging but more elaborate than Nosferatu complexes. They sometimes intersect the Elder Tunnels. Cappadocians traditionally believe underground places belong to them and lie close to the lands and energies of death. They especially resent Nosferatu intruders.

Fae Mounds: Some of the so-called "Fair Folk" build their keeps beneath earthen mounds. When they connect to the Elder Tunnels, safe passage usually requires some obscure ritual, honoring ancient oaths between the Fae and Cainites. Bringing any sort of iron into a Fae mound is a grave offense.

Ghosts: At certain natural caves and underground springs, the shroud between life and death is thin, so



Way Underground

The Elder Tunnels described here are exaggerations of real ancient and medieval tunnels that can be found throughout Europe. Known as *erdstalls* in modern German, they're less extensive than in the dark medieval era, but their purpose is a mystery, even though many appear to have been constructed as late as the 11th to 13th century. Conspiracy theorists argue that these are part of a common tradition with older underground structures, and form vast networks — and that's the approach taken here, combined with other sites mentioned in the World of Darkness.

Taken together, these open the possibility of exploring a vast underground network, confronting its dangers, and returning with elders' blood and strange artifacts. This of course is similar to another style of game, whose conventions we certainly would never encourage you to emulate. Of course not.

ghosts freely manifest. These were often important places during pagan times, when kine would come to offer sacrifice to their ancestors. These sacrifices cause ghosts to become attached to the place long after their descendants forget them. Furthermore, it is said that some deep places provide swift passage to the true afterlife, across the River Styx. Cappadocians often build havens near such places.

Labyrinthine Havens: Some Methuselahs keep elaborate underground havens, sealing off and expanding Elder Tunnels. Most of these were built during the decline of the Western Roman Empire, but a few date from earlier times. They began as wild bolt holes for vampires whose influence collapsed, but were expanded to include audience chambers, defensive features and ritual spaces.

Lupine Spirals: Vampires know that werewolves are mighty warriors who despise them, and not much else. But the Nosferatu are aware of a "clan" of Lupines similar to themselves, with distorted visages and knowledge of underground places. They've reworked portions of the Elder Tunnels into circular mazes. Nosferatu keep clear of these, since the "Spiral Clan" Lupines within are as unfriendly as the others, and keep monsters as guardians.

Mystery Cults: Descendants of cults that trod underground for their ceremonies, secret mortal sects claim parts of the Elder Tunnels still. They may have replaced the Old Gods with saints, but even then might still worship with strange songs and bloody sacrifices. Sometimes they actually honor a Cainite, witch, or fairy.

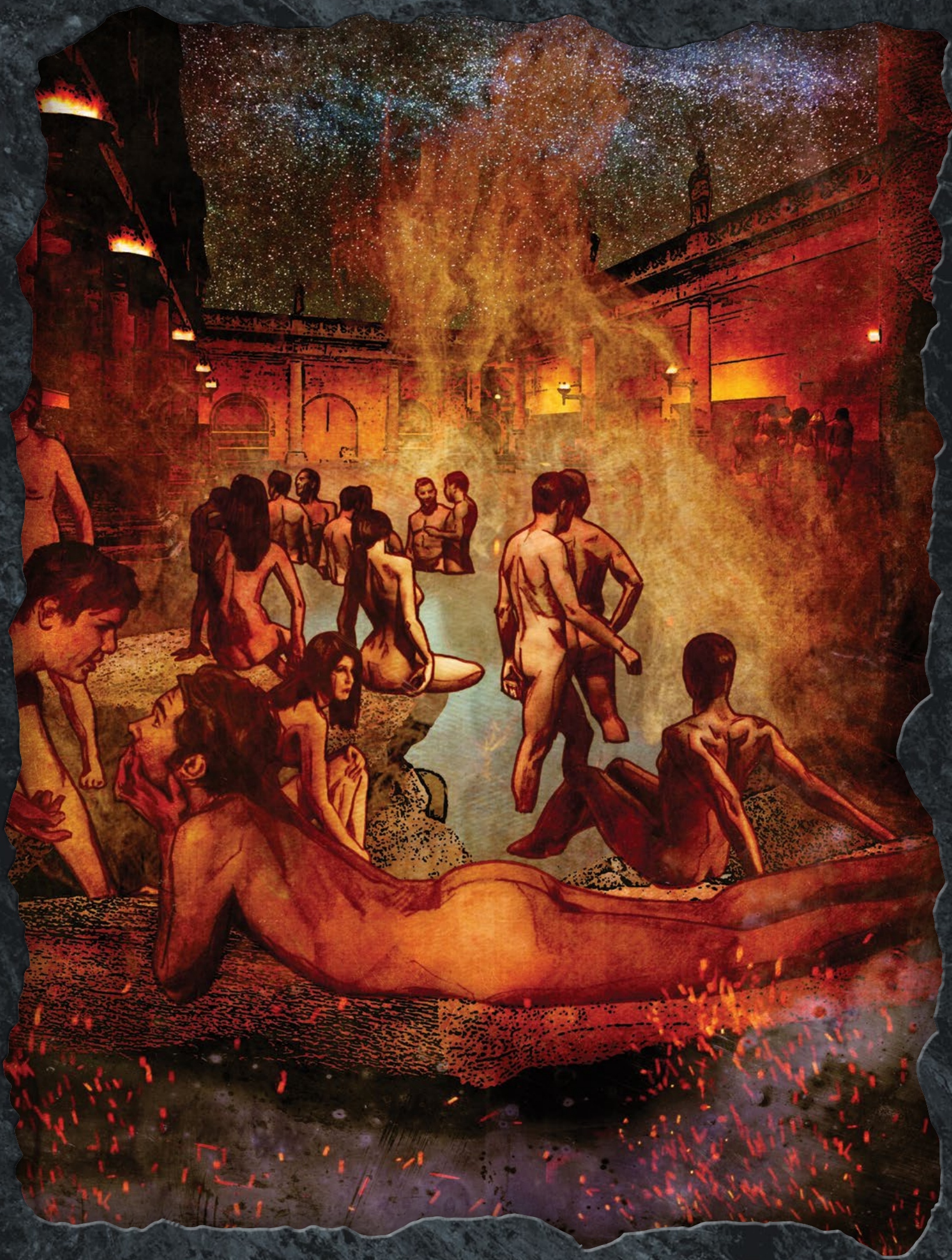
Orphic Beasts: Some things are simply *monsters*. Nosferatu hold a number of theories as to why the Elder Tunnels serve as their refuge. Some report wereanimals who, when made ghouls across generations, bred true with the curse within them, like revenants. Others blame monstrous ghosts, renegade Tzimisce creations, or fallen pagan gods.

Bracchia: Maps of the Dark

Nosferatu rarely map the Elder Tunnels. Knowing of them is considered a Clan privilege, given to well-regarded ancillae and elders. Therefore, those favored are supposed to rely on memory. But in forgotten times, the Priors' ancestors created peculiar artifacts to guide the way. They're called *bracchia*, because they often resemble branches or misshapen limbs.

A bracchium is a three-dimensional model of a tunnel system carved of stone, bone or wood. A rare few are made of copper or bronze instead. The largest are only practical for ceremonies and meetings. Explorers can carry smaller ones. With practice, they can be read by touch. Most are not accurate to scale. They might omit a mile of uninteresting tunnel, or possess thicker portions than they should to prevent breakage.

Some Nosferatu refuse to use bracchia and destroy them when they find them. They believe Niktuku made the bracchia, and they sense when prey use them.



Chapter Two: The Domain of Bath

The colour of the water is as it were a depe blew se water, and rikketh like a sething potte.

— John Leland, poet and antiquary writing of medieval Bath

Towns exceeding Bath's size dot the British Isles, many of which boast markets more grandiose, cathedrals of greater magnitude, and more defensible walls. Few share its beauty, history, or symbolic importance to the Baronies of Avalon. A Cainite might dismiss Bath as a curiously small domain for such a sizeable Cainite populace, and swiftly move on. Bath's Cainites confidently scorn these cretins. "Londinium may be Mithras' seat, but Aquae Sulis is his crown," is a common phrase. To its vampires, there is no domain more important.

Something of Bath, and the outposts standing in its place prior, draws Cainites like parasites to an open wound. A Celtic shrine settlement existed long before the Romans arrived. Even then, vampires in the region were many, and of diverse Clans. The lands and waters spoke to the mystics among them, and others — mortal or otherwise.

In Bath, belief in Mithras is power. Within the town boundaries, the Unconquered Sun's Praetorians train to fight in service to their god. Plotters from across the land make Bath their meeting point, its inviolability as the Baronies' sacred ground unmatched. Mithras' cultists offer any sharing Avalon's foes a refuge, if they accept Mithras as their liege and divinity. An army of Mithras' fanatical subjects grows behind Bath's creamy golden stones.

The settlement's traffic, by way of its position wedged between Wales and the south coast of England, is one of several reasons Bath sustains its impressive Cainite population. Fair meadows flank it on either side, set in a fruitful and pleasant valley, and great hills surround it, out of which spring streams of pure water; the well-appointed town harbors little appearance of grotesqueries. Yet beyond its walls is naught but darkness for miles around. Even villages are scant, as dead battlefields stretch from coast to coast. For a vampire, such isolation is both warming and alienating. The domain's Consul makes clear all who haven within Bath's Roman-built walls must treat their home as sanctuary and keep no secrets. Bath is a domain of truths. Privacy is a luxury granted to few. The outside world offers only threats.

Absolute loyalty to Mithras and the Baronies is a realistic expectation, yet menacing the domain from within Promethean Cainites attempt bloody revolt. The Winchester Tremere's overtures, growing discontent over the taxed feeding stock, and the ancient plans of necromancers start the unwavering domain's slide into disaster.

The Lie of the Land

As told by Evnissyen the Bloodied, Lhiannan Promethean of Sul

This is a domain of truth, the Consul claims, and so I shall tell the truth as my line knows it.

Sul was once this settlement's name. The Welsh of old worshipped a deity named Sul, as did the native vampires, and other beings of mystical significance. My sire Eirianwen tells me the deity is one of the oldest, torpid Lhiannan, but evidence is scant. The holdfast of Sul was divine ground to

those who stood upon it, all thoughts of bloodshed abandoning their minds as they met with those they would typically oppose, break fast, and enjoy tales from other cultures. Sul was significant before the Romans brought their columns of sandals down upon it. It was a fine time to be a scholar of magic and blood. Only in this place could we meet with security, and no fear of reprisals for past slights.

Or so I'm told. I was Embraced after the Roman arrival, and my sire is prone to poetic nonsense. I do know magicians of the Old Faith hold designs on Sul's springs, but find no ground exempt from Arcadius' gaze.

Roman dignitaries fooled the native Celts under banners of peace and joy. Claudius Caesar's men were somehow exempt from Sul's bonds of pacifism. Romans seized this town through deception and slaughter. They followed their acts with supplication to Sul, associating the goddess with their own Minerva, ultimately merging the two and renaming the town as Aquae Sulis — the Waters of Sul. The Romans appropriated the name as insult. They stole the settlement, butchered the peaceful pact, and raped our goddess; forcing her into another. Roman sorcerers cursed the natives and their brethren with tablets buried in the Sacred Spring, dedicated to Sulis Minerva and sapping her strength to fuel their petty vendettas. Many of these tablets remain, buried in the underground channels.

Naturally, the native vampires were far from paragons of the Via Humanitas. Some still roam these lands, especially farther west in Cornwall, Devonshire, and blessed Wales. One such vampire devil, Meryasek ap Ninmug, refutes the term "Cainite." He claims the moorlands as his domain. Meryasek waits on ill-trod trails, encountering unfortunate wanderers, and demands of them enthralling tales. A ferocious killer engages those who fail to entertain, though accounts conflict over whether the attacker is Meryasek, or his fae twin born of shadow.

I cannot say if Sul was Lhiannan or something other. We make sacrifice to the goddess to this night. Drag a Cainite from his haven and stake him over the sacred springs. Watch the vitae run through the stream and towards the town. Allow the kine to drink back what was taken from them, before the scum greets the dawn.

Roman Primacy

Mithras. The first name you hear upon being Embraced in these Baronies of Avalon, likely before even that of your sire. This dragon would take credit for Bath's existence, if he could. As he secreted himself to these isles in the guise of a Persian slave or foot soldier, his designs on the land materialized. Mithras is our jailer and executioner. I spit on his name.

Given the prevalent Mithraic worship among our kind, the impossible reach of his powers, and influence he exerts by just sitting a throne in London, Mithras receives praise for all. Few are immune to the glory of his existence. It is a constant battle to remain free of his will. I find murdering his offspring helps.

When slaves built the domain's impressive walls two centuries into Roman occupation, the stone boundary acted as a clear sign to those with aspirations of the domain becoming peaceable. Sul was a Mithraic town. A war town. A handful of temples to the vampire emperor scarred the domain, most underground, some carved into the soft rock of the surrounding hills. When Marcus Verus Embraced the retired Praetorian Arcadius, he created a Mithraic Consul for Bath. Sul's High Queen disappeared overnight. Her name was Eanflæd, her Clan now stricken from records. Even tonight, Eanflæd's cultists appear, though their mistress proves elusive. Aspiring Unconquered hunt them for sport across moorlands and beneath the town. A great many vampires go missing on these chases.

Assassination attempts were common until Arcadius declared the Brujah Olwen his consort, and won that Clan's favor. Cappadocians began clinging to him like flies after the Ventrue-Brujah union. Some suspect a form of blood magic warding defended him against our daggers, but this is a time well before Tremere's advent. Look to the stinking Cappadocians and their dark magic.

The Great Bath and its many sisters were all children of Sul, ripped from her womb in attempts to emulate the sunken chambers Romans used in their homeland. These baths were among the first projects Roman mortals undertook upon settling, the springs of varying temperature wondrous in a land so often overcast, the air filled with damp.

Bath's location, in the deepest well of a valley, with warm springs and verdant hills surrounding it, is a boon to mortals — from farmers tilling the land to diplomats seeking respite from the cold. It is however uncomfortably humid. Blood-draining bugs regularly congregate on this town, the warm mists sunken, with us often bearing the blame. Truthfully, the fetid Osfryth summons them. She is an unpopular Prior of our domain, but as a Mithraic adherent most tolerate her. I spit on her name, too.

I concede the baths are a thing of beauty. To rest one's cold frame in a sink of naturally hot water, the odor of the earth's depths clinging to your skin, is a chief enjoyment. Arcadius himself holds court in the Great Bath, expecting all comers to strip to their skin and bathe with him as he presides over disagreements and Mithraic mandates. Outwardly, he does so to rid potential assassins of their weapons. In fact, his rationale is to put the prudish Cainites of recent centuries — Embraced nuns and priests among them — in a shameful position.

I have no compunction over unveiling my body, I assure you.



Artorius and other Legends

As told by Erebus, Bath's Cappadocian Augur of Harbingers

Infighting between Roman Britons and Germanic mercenaries began with the Empire's western decline. The breadth of the British Isles became awash with blood, not merely a colorful turn of phrase. Britons not slain on the battlefield were taken to the great rivers and run through, poisoning the waterways with their bodies. I know of many Cainites who partook in this decades-long war, leeches resting in the silt of riverbeds, awaiting their next meal. I admire their wits, if not their dignity.

Aquae Sulis — a domain of consequence to both Romans and Saxons — was subject to siege on two separate occasions. The fighting was an event to behold as flaming arrows illuminated Badon Hill and the screams of the dying made it seem alive. We watched from the safety of Aquae Sulis as the first siege failed spectacularly, and recovered many of the bodies for our own purposes. They rest still in our catacombs, awaiting a time to rise.

The Romans were victorious in the town's defense, the Christian Artorius leading them while wearing the image of the Virgin. This sign of faith bolstered the mortal militia as once did the faith of Sul. It was around this time Consul Arcadius grew wary of Christian worship in his domain.

As the second siege bore down, Consul Arcadius offered his internal enemies — the Christians specifically — as sacrifice to the Saxons. The town passed between mortal hands with no further bloodshed, but the Cainite vitae spilt was copious. Consul Arcadius retained power; his loyalists and the Saxon Cainites who owed him for over a dozen staked vampires bolstered him. It was an admirable display of tactical brilliance, made under my Clan's supervision.

Artorius' fate is a mystery, as he disappeared from Aquae

Sulis between sieges. Local Sarum — now Salisbury — supposedly became his seat. His ascension is a possibility, as the Britons claimed many kings, and readily venerated warlords who could sit a horse. More than simply proficient in swordplay, Artorius was an unmatched manipulator of his own legend. His legacy's followers hunt Cainites to this night. Some claim blood lineage to him, or the knights once in his service. His famed blade passes from inquisitor to hunter. It cuts vampires with ease, never mind their methods of protection. This weapon and the notorious Sword of Nul seem capable of similar feats.

One of Artorius' allies was a magician of repute born long enough ago to recall Bath as Sul. Many a time he visited the domain and counseled sorcerers; my line benefitted greatly from his wisdom. Cainites still seek this sorcerer out, as rumors hold he dwells near Glastonbury Tor, perhaps within the tower atop it. They believe he knows the secrets to immortality, and reprieve from our Curse. These myths are fanciful distractions. This Myrddin exists, but always takes more than he gives. Ask the Cainites no longer capable of crossing the Avon, or hearing the bells of the abbey without their skin sloughing off — all for the dubious boon of being able to eat a meal or father a child.

Artorius' actions in battle proved something to Consul Arcadius. The Consul was enforcing Mithraic rituals, but had not stopped to encourage our faith. With belief, Artorius' warriors were unstoppable. This revelation was integral to Consul Arcadius' future reign. He delegated oversight of the domain to Olwen, and disappeared from sight. In his absence, the nascent Anglo-Saxon rule renamed the domain Bath, within the mortal kingdom of Hwicce. Celtic Christianity took hold over the mortals, but we Cainites never took up the cross, having witnessed the fate awaiting those who stepped from Mithras' shadow. Only in these nights do Christian vampires tentatively trickle in, short shrift greeting any designs they have on the domain or our herds.

As a realm, Hwicce persisted over two centuries. The baths became unpleasant, the walls crumbled, and ecclesiastical dominance stripped away the careful Roman planning of the town. The kingdom was in a perpetual state of warfare, but, as with times past, Bath was a secluded island, at least for the mortals. Some fools believe Consul Arcadius was communing with Sul, and *she* enforced an aura of peace. Ridiculous.

Bath avoided the worst of Hwiccian plots, but Cainites grew restless. Vampires descended to old ways, striking each other over territory and feuds of epochs past. Olwen fell as the Brujah turned inwards, blaming her for the domain's deterioration. The accusation was unfair. She was ever kind and just, but lacked strength to rule.

Consul Arcadius returned the night following Olwen's death. We greeted him warmly. For all his tyranny, the Ventrue represented stability. He brought with him a philosophy, and a promise: those who followed him as a Praetorian of Mithras would find permanent sanctuary within Bath's walls, an eternal position in the shieldwall of the domain, and respite from all hunters.

Arcadius Rufus

Mortal interest in Bath remained as Hwicce passed into the kingdom of Mercia, and finally into the lands of King Alfred. Alfred oversaw the reconstruction of the town, rejuvenating a withering settlement. The town once again became paramount when Edgar was crowned king in Bath Abbey. Though Bath avoided the Norman Conquest, the civil rebellion aimed at deposing King William Rufus led to the sacking of the newly rebuilt town. Those of us with wealth and properties lost much to that petty mortal conflict. Graciously, Consul Arcadius compensated all for resources lost using coin from his personal treasury, housed at the town mint.

The Consul's largesse was a calculated move, modeled on the actions of William Rufus. In order to quash his barons' rebellion, Rufus offered to pay the rebels off. The tactic worked. Bribes, bad weather, and disharmony on the part of William's enemies secured the king's triumph within half a year.

Shortly after Rufus awarded the town to his royal physician, my network discovered Olwen's killers in Gloucester and Deheubarth. Seren's Malkavians kindly staked and delivered them to us. Consul Arcadius offered mercy if they agreed to accept Mithras, along with high positions as Unconquered Praetorians. They all accepted. Again, he emulated William Rufus, who spared his enemies to appease the people.

I wonder at the timing. Olwen falls, the Consul returns. Her killers are found, and they become Consul Arcadius' chosen vampires. Some Cainites seek to avenge Olwen, but doing so would require crossing Consul Arcadius. Not a decision lightly undertook. I understand at least one of her assassins remains in the wilds between Bath and Bristol, somehow broken free from her captors. I would pay handsomely for time with that one.

One of his own archers shot Rufus dead while hunting in forests not far from Bath. This is one of the king's features Consul Arcadius elected not to imitate.

Harbingers of the Promethean Flame

The Ventrue Triumvirate of Geoffrey, Roald, and Liseult arrived with William of Normandy. They sought to win the favor of Mithras' barons during the Unconquered Sun's torpor, first through diplomacy, then through war. Their actions were bold, and briefly successful. After they cut a crippling swath

through our lands, the only domains that refused tribute were London, Chester, Gloucester, and the small holdout of Bath.

A coterie of the Consul's guard was in Glamorgan at the time Roald Snake Eyes met his destruction in that same domain. Mithraic loyalists crushed the Triumvirate's forces after Roald's destruction, confirming Mithras as our one true god and Prince. The Praetorians' reputation spread, and Cainites from across the Baronies of Avalon journeyed to Bath to join their ranks. Mithras' satraps rewarded our domain, declaring it autonomous from the barons' demands, creating the free fiefdom of Bath.

I am told that after the failed invasion, Mithras and his brother in blood Alexander of Paris never spoke again.

The reign of Henry Curtmantle was a time of great honor, as brilliant architects planned and constructed the bishop's palace and further baths during his reign. We exulted in luxury. Bath was once again a place of peace and diplomacy. The Brujah Lady Gwenllian entered a position of prominence as domain peacekeeper. We Cappadocians made inroads into our studies, and continued advising the Consul. The Mithraists welcomed the Breton Malkavian Judikael into their ranks as Heliodromus for the domain. He was long an enemy of Consul Arcadius stretching back to their mortal days, but the two made peace through shared faith. Bath grew stronger.

Come the reign of Henry of Winchester — the monarch of these nights — Bath is greater still.

Bath is a fortress. Here is where we train our soldiers; here is where we worship Mithras in chambers directly beneath the Christian cathedral. We practice our faith flagrantly before Cainites of opposing beliefs, but welcome them all the same. The domain's Cainites tell no lies, and plot openly in the tepidarium.

Some express concern at the number of Cainites drawn to Bath. With one mouth we preach sanctuary, with the other freedom. Discontented Cainites of oppressive domains, exiles from distant courts, and demon-worshipping vermin make their way here due to promises of protection. They bring their herds at this time, but eventually this influx will test our ranks.

We face threats from within and without. The self-styled Promethean Cainites of our domain speak openly of removing the Consul and imposing their own rule. York's Prometheans plot autonomy from tyranny; ours conspire to crush the freedoms of non-native Cainites. They possess a deluded agenda of self-interest. The Winchester Tremere help little, and the Salubri exacerbate the situation. Mithras' personal agents — his satraps — recently proposed the Baronies as a safe haven for all persecuted Salubri, no matter their sins, and so naturally Salubri travel here. We currently play caretaker to half a dozen, and their numbers are growing.

I foresee pandemonium. We are not creatures of peace. Soon, our stocks will thin. Rebellion will occur. Mortal hunters draw closer to our domain. Perhaps if we rely entirely on the Unconquered for stability, and his tyranny is just, we will not greet chaos. Yet, did Praetorians not slay their own emperors?

I foresee doom. This ideal domain of Bath will not hold.

Bath's Unconquered Cainites

Arcadius — (Sixth Generation Ventrue) Consul of the free fiefdom of Bath and Pater of Mithraism, Arcadius is alternately seen as an unwatched tyrant or a champion of faith. Arcadius is restless, chafing under the permanent observation of his ancestors. He's under orders to steadily bond every Cainite in his domain to Mithras, before sending each one to new domains as Mithraic loyalists — potential assassins, spies, and heirs should their new domains fracture. Arcadius respects Clans Brujah and Cappadocian, taking advice from the latter at his grandsire's encouragement, and the former due to his own, defiant leanings.

Erebus — (Ninth Generation Cappadocian) One of Consul Arcadius' three Cappadocian advisers, Erebus has served Arcadius for close to five centuries, acting as oracle and administrator for the domain, while secretly loyal to a Cappadocian sect known as the Harbingers. He intends to subvert the domain's Cainites, their Mithraic faith, and the Unconquered to serve his Clan's ancient schemes.

Gwenllian ferch Arwyn — (Seventh Generation Brujah) Prominent among the Unconquered for her forgiven role in Olwen's murder, Lady Gwen is a skilled diplomat and the Consul's favored peacekeeper. Gwenllian settles conflicts with a balance of passive resolutions and clandestine executions. Tales of her emotional sway over Arcadius are common, as are those of her historically pursuing campaigns of violence against mortals and Cainites throughout England and Wales.

Judikael — (Tenth Generation Malkavian) Heliodromus of Mithraism and Arcadius' former blood foe, the two warred on opposing sides in times both mortal and unliving. They found an accord in recent centuries, though courteous relations rarely escalate to warmth. Judikael is actually one of few confidantes the Consul maintains. He knows all but the Malkavian attempt to manipulate him. Judikael and Arcadius agree that in the event of the Ventrue's incapacity, the Malkavian will act as Consul.

Evnissyen the Bloodied — (Tenth Generation Lhiannan) Only his loathing for Roman Cainites rivals the

Promethean Evnissyen's reputation for savagery. All expected Evnissyen's imminent destruction after the discovery of his political allegiances, yet Arcadius extended the peaceful pact to the Lhiannan. Evnissyen believes Bath will soon fall to ruin if increasing numbers of refugees arrive. Even he does not know why Arcadius gifted him mercy.

Bethany of Ely — (Eighth Generation Salubri, Healer Caste) Bethany led the Cainite Heresy's believers in Ely before Tremere persecution drove her to fall on Mithras' mercy, and excommunication from the faith. Initially forced into making a haven in Salisbury under the gaze of Mithras' satrap, the Lasombra Hywel of Wessex, Bethany, and her loyal Nosferatu page Tobias journeyed to Bath. They now occupy the monastery haven of Matthias, a fellow Salubri who traveled to London to plead alms for his entire Clan. Matthias has not returned, but Bethany's presence draws increasing numbers of Salubri to Bath. She is unaware that to protect her, Tobias intends to gift the Tremere any arriving Salubri.

A Beacon of White and Gold

Bath is remarkable for its architecture. Even before future planners reach the town and determine each building should be made of the same type of stone, a golden hue colors much of Bath, the rocks of nearby quarries contributing to its unique appearance, making it stand out in daytime as gleaming white when compared to other domains of dark earth, wood, and gray stone. At night, the stonework gives the buildings — from the illuminated abbey to the small houses on its outskirts — a dappled, shadowed appearance. Pockmarked structures line the streets, sometimes indented with natural rock alcoves, creating an unusual urban environment.

Bath is a small town, with hundreds of buildings tightly packed within its walls. A full quarter of the town remains unmodified since its Roman foundation, while the rest has grown upwards and closer together. Beneath the cramped buildings lie lairs for guarded mortals and Cainites. The soft earth and rock gives way to cellars, underground streams, and passages running from one end of town to another. The Consul declares these tunnels open, to allow transit and sanctuary in case of fires and hunters. In truth, Arcadius has no knowledge of the number of hideaways and tunnels beneath the town, or their secretive users.

The flow of water to the pump chambers in Bath's various bathhouses provides a feature unlike any other in the British Isles — water clean enough to drink. Despite its purity, it is still favored less than ale, wine, and other drinks requiring boiling. The water contains incredibly high concentrations of minerals and so tastes bitter and carries a rotten odor. Its conveyance via lead pipes adds toxicity, albeit at a level unknown to the people of medieval Bath. Compared to the water in other settlements of Britain, however, it will not kill you quickly. This somewhat morbid difference makes bathing, drinking, and respite in the town an appealing factor to mortals. They would think twice if they knew Bath's Nosferatu and distinctly amphibious Gangrel slept within the pipes, their fleshy tissue shedding and clogging the town's waterways.

Bath Abbey

Bath Abbey stood as a Mithraic temple before its Christian consecration. The Mithraists permitted its shift in faith, as they moved their sacrificial chamber underground. As the building's purpose altered over the centuries between convent, monastery, Benedictine-run church, and abbey, the blood flowed beneath. Mithraists ritually drew fervent Christians below the flagstones and ripped them apart as sacrifice to their god.

The rich abbey, from which the bishopric secured sizeable tithes, was ultimately raised to cathedral status, though its name remains Bath Abbey due to the presence of close to 50 monks living within its cloisters. Beneath its grand, white-golden stonework, Cainite adherents of Mithras plot and perform their own rites. Arcadius and Judikael devour enemy warriors as Mithraists revel on the consecrated land; the aura of faith surrounding the cathedral has no effect on worshippers of the Unconquered Sun.

As the focal point of Mithraic ceremonies, Bath Abbey is where belief is truly tested. To those not ritually sworn as Unconquered, the True Faith of Bath Abbey causes two points of aggravated damage for each minute one stands in its immediate area. The other churches in Bath share this effect, but cause one point of aggravated damage instead of two.

St. John's Almshouse

This hospital stands unique in the British Isles for its use of hot springs as a restorative aid. Built under order of the Church, the stark white structure sits atop the Cross Bath — one of Sul's springs — and provides aid to any infirm Christians, whether titled or poor. The range of social classes present in the almshouse wins it favor in the eyes of any who would see the strata of power leveled.

There's rarely an occasion where the almshouse is not in use, thereby making it a popular location for vampires with unrefined palates. The hospital is a place of disease and watery blood, but also acts as a communal haven for vampires of low standing and a common meeting place for

Prometheans. The water has a necromantic effect on vampires' flesh when they bathe in it for over an hour, granting a thick-skinned toughness equivalent to 1 dot of Fortitude, lasting the remainder of the night.

Bath Guildhall

Standing apart from its sister structures, the wooden Guildhall in Bath shares little of the religious buildings' opulence. No single guild claims the hall. Instead, merchants both local and foreign use it day and night to discuss the flow of trade and timings of markets. Mercenaries and artisans are hired here for their services. Peasants and nobles alike must enter the Guildhall to pay their taxes.

In recent months robbery struck the hall, the crime attributed to newly-arrived pilgrims. As the primary location for arranging transit of merchandise, the Consul now places ghoul spies within the hall during the day, and encourages its use as a place for Cainite favor trading at night. Feeding takes place in the alleys outside the Guildhall, and never within, the number of potential witnesses too dangerous to consider. Olwen's haven was once beneath the hall. Arcadius has not granted the haven to anyone since her death, but with the vampire population growing, it swiftly becomes sought-after territory.

The Great Bath

Pillars and sculptures flank a large pool, designed with rich mosaics and frescoes. Musicians stand around the bath entertaining patrons while they recline in the waters. Noble mortals from miles around travel to experience the curative waters of the Great Bath. Crusaders returning from the east carrying leprosy, variola, and other diseases pay the Church heavily for use of its waters. Chances of recovery do increase after time spent in the Great Bath, though this is more due to the comparative dirtiness of water elsewhere. If it provides no greater restorative aid, the waters of Sul are at least relatively pure.

Arcadius and his council meet guests in the Great Bath, bathing in the waters to discuss matters of politics and faith, and settle disputes in a place where one vampire is ostensibly as vulnerable as another. The bath comfortably fits over 30 bathers, so most announcements for the domain take place there, entertainers on hand, with feeding permitted both in and out of the waters. Complete submersion in the waters increases restorative speed in supernatural creatures, removing a level of aggravated damage across one night, with no requirement for blood expenditure.

The Goblin's Hob

This inn stands as one of the oldest in the British Isles. Celts used the original building for festivities and community declarations, before Bath's subsequent occupants took it over and used it for similar purposes. Somehow, the Goblin's Hob's withstood centuries of competing cultures, as the town grew around it. Despite it being more a drinking hole than resting place these nights, the Hob is a place where both mortals and vampires convene, often to the sounds of minstrels and bawdy conversations.

Christian Cainite-backed monks of the cathedral would love to tear the Hob down. They object to the Mithraic ceremonies openly taking place in its cellar. Judikael forces mortals into drunkenness before binging on their blood and entering a trance where he sees visions and hears Mithras' voice. Erebus wants the Malkavian collared, as Judikael's visions have driven more than one band of aspirant Praetorians to foolish quests.

The Unconquered Praetorian Guard

Bath is more than a sanctuary for the persecuted. Hunted vampires receive schooling in tactics, warfare, and the art of the battlefield. Indoctrination into the ranks of Mithras' Unconquered Guard is encouraged, with those who refuse facing penalty of exile. Not every vampire is suited to combat, so the Unconquered house spies, commanders, priests, and diplomats, all of whom stand at equal rank with soldiers and assassins. The Unconquered are the elite among Mithraists, who do everything possible to strengthen the Baronies of Avalon.

On the interior of Bath's sturdy walls are numerous barracks, each of them bearing the symbol of Mithras dining with an ancient sun deity. These have always been there, as far as the mortal guards and militia are aware. Bath's Cainites know the carvings mean the place is a training school and sanctuary for the Praetorians, who muster for drills within these buildings. The garrisons participate in bloody rivalries with each other, testing candidates by hunting for Lupines, waging battle on the nearby hills, and dispatching ranging missions into the western moorlands to test control over waning blood levels. After five trials, the losers award the victorious cohort gold and territory. Historically, this territory was a permanent boon. The increase in Praetorian numbers now sees boons gambled between cohorts every three years.

Unconquered must drink a vial of Arcadius' vitae, participate in the seasonal Mithraic ceremonies, and accomplish an arduous task the Consul, Heliodromus, or Mithras himself sets to test loyalty. If successful, they drink a mouthful of Mithras' blood from a sealed store the Mithraists keep near Bath. To command a cohort of Praetorians, a vampire must follow the Road of Kings.

The Unconquered are distinct from Mithras' satraps. The satraps serve to spread Mithras' influence and convince rebellious Barons to fall in line. The Praetorians serve de-

fensively: preventing revolts, murdering rebels before they develop followings, and accumulating evidence on all notable Cainites in the Baronies of Avalon.

Every Praetorian receives a brand of Mithras slaughtering a bull, the scar applied directly over the vampire's heart. Any traitors to the Praetorians suffer horribly. Their heads are flayed with a heated blade. Betrayers often take their own lives, as the unmistakable traitor's face is a fate worse than death in Bath.

Cainite Factions

As the population increases, and the Consul's promises of peace become strained, numerous factions move to influence Bath's power structure. The town is presently stable, though many vampires suspect a single unified coterie could swing the balance of power.

The Mithraists

Arcadius and his council have ruled Bath for close to a millennium. The satraps' backing keeps Bath a jewel in Mithras' crown, with Arcadius the appointed warlord, religious leader, and favored grandchilde.

Arcadius' loyalty to Mithraism is unwavering, but he slowly disconnects his worship of the god Mithras from his bond to the vampire of the same name. Arcadius wishes to depart his prison of responsibility, and attempt an escape into obscurity and real freedom. He believes his time as Bath's caretaker is at an end. Only Judikael and Gwen know his feelings. Both debate whether to allow them, or bring him to heel.

Judikael is dedicated to Mithras in all forms, and recognizes the faith must be unassailable in the event of Arcadius' departure. The Malkavian intends to blood bond the Praetorians, and avoid turmoil. As a prominent Unconquered commander, Gwen abhors Judikael's plans. She is committed to preserving Arcadius' legacy, and fears the Malkavian's subversion will cripple the domain.

If Arcadius can be convinced to stay — even with his drawing away from his ancestor — Bath might maintain stability. The Consul does not realize it, but Mithras lost interest in Bath long ago. The stabilizing force, the peace decrees, the Praetorians' foundation — all were Arcadius' initiatives, not those of Mithras. The Consul suspects he is a puppet, but truly he operates with enough autonomy to make Bath into anything he wants.



The Road of Mithras

Arcadius long contemplated the formation of a philosophical path dedicating adherents to the worship of Mithras as war god and father of vampires. He consulted the spiritual Cainites of his domain and wrote to the zealots forging their own paths elsewhere, yet over the centuries he failed to develop a singular Road of Mithras.

Arcadius is not a philosopher; he is a warlord, dedicated to the service of a god, but no pioneer of organized faith. He believes accomplishing deeds as an Unconquered, rather than meditation, study, or contemplation, are what makes a Mithraist. Jealously, he has blocked the attempts of other Mithraists to form a Road. As far as Arcadius is concerned, his way — even if it is flawed and offers little spiritual succor — is the only way.

The Prometheans

Evnissyen's Promethean faction fears the influx of new arrivals in Bath, and pursues a twofold agenda: make Bath less appealing to pilgrims by removing all pretense of sanctuary, and maintain the fiefdom's freedom without the pernicious influence of Mithraism. Evnissyen is aware one course may disrupt the other.

The Prometheans' primary focus on destroying Arcadius and his Mithraic religion trumps all other schemes. Evnissyen and his followers firmly believe the Consul's removal will give pilgrims pause, and destabilize the ranks of those once blood bound to the Ventrue. Their actions may bear fruit, if they can recruit suitably-inclined assassins. The destruction of his grandchilde is bound to draw Mithras' attention, however.

The Tremere

The Winchester Tremere look enviously upon Bath, as a place of mystical importance and a domain housing at least five Salubri. Through careful rites, the Usurpers seek to weaken the bond between the Unconquered and Arcadius, so they may influence the Mithraists' loyalties and secure control over the domain. They require a vial of Arcadius' vitae to complete their ritual, though they are unwilling to attack the Consul, given fragile relations with Mithras.

Bath's Tremere chapter house fell silent just over a decade ago, the Winchester Usurpers blaming the now disappeared Cyclops, Matthias. Tremere pay well for the delivery of Salubri pilgrims, set their thaumaturgic creations on travelers making journey to Bath, and exchange weighty favors for information relating to traveling Souleaters.

The Pilgrims

Not a unified bloc, except through their desperation or curiosity, the pilgrims are all who make their way to permanently haven in Bath. There is no restriction on Clan, background, political or religious inclinations, but pilgrims are expected to play their part in defense of the domain, and within three nights of their arrival introduce themselves to Arcadius or his council.

The domain's existing Mithraists funnel pilgrims into rituals designed to foster loyalty to Bath, the Consul, and Mithras. Some travelers seize the opportunity to join a force offering them protection, while others rebuke these offers. Judikael and Erebus judge those who refuse the Mithraists, and if deemed to offer nothing to the domain, they cast the pilgrims out.

The Salubri Bethany seeks to force pilgrims into cohesiveness for their own protection, while encouraging the growth of Bath's mortal side, to bolster the herd for all. She requires assistance in rallying support for her schemes, though has little to give as payment.

The Harbingers

Erebus and his fellow conspirators play a dangerous game, but he recognizes the promise of Bath as domain, and will not be swayed from the mission his ancestors decreed.

The Harbingers seek an opportune time to drive the Baronies of Avalon into civil war and simultaneous conflict with outside domains, knowing their cause will thrive on a great number of vampire deaths. Erebus steadily pushes the domain down a chaotic path. He needs to discover Bath's wellspring of necromantic power, and when he does, he intends to reap bodies and souls of all those fallen for miles around — from diseased peasants to kings dropped on the battlefield.

The Mithraic Mysteries

Mithraism is a faith practiced by few mortals in 1242 CE, but remains prevalent among Cainites. The Roman and Persian Mithraic faith is alternatively attributed to Mithras' dominion over the sun, feasts, blood, war, and

fertility. This god with so many aspects received worship for close to a millennium, his appearance often associated with a great hunter or warrior slaying a bull, bursting free from the earth, or feasting opposite the sun.

Romans devoted shrines to the Unconquered Sun from their homeland all the way to the British Isles. In underground chambers, warriors pledged their swords to the deity, so he might make their blades strong, their loins stronger, and award victory on the battlefield with feasting and revelry. Mithraic rituals involved blood sacrifice, of either a fertile bullock or enemy warrior. Murder in Mithras' name was a great honor, though this acted as cold comfort to the soldier receiving a blade through the heart. The blood gathered in a bowl, and the faithful painted it on their faces. The Pater prepared the remaining blood with wine, and the attendees consumed the concoction. Some claim this ritual influenced the Catholic Eucharist.

Cainite Mithraists assert Mithras, Prince of London and the Baronies of Avalon, is the embodiment of a god. Debate exists as to Mithras' vampire origins. Some state the deity Mithras possessed a powerful Cainite, and chose to exist in symbiosis with the Ventrue Methuselah. Others claim Mithras walked the Earth in mortal form when he was Embraced, and became trapped in an undying shell. The ardent faithful announce the Ventrue Methuselah forged the Mithraic faith, and all talk of divinity is the whim of Mithras, Prince of London.

Only male mortals practiced the rituals of bloodletting. Vampire Mithraists impose no such gender restriction on their practitioners. Mithras states he expects all to fear him, though his thoughts on Mithraic worship are debatable. Mithras wants all subjects to remain loyal, but he lacks respect for those who blindly follow.

Cainite Mithraists practice rituals designed to foster both loyalty between the faithful and preparedness for battle. Communal bloodletting is favored, followed by drinking from a shared chalice. The rite is largely symbolic, but believers feel they share an unbreakable bond. Mithraists stake infamous foes of the faith and the Baronies of Avalon, bringing them to a Mithraeum for sacrifice. If the sacrifice is a worthy bounty, the Mithraists drink from the paralyzed vampire in turn, with the right to the final drink reserved for the most honored faithful among them. Mithraists forbid the Amaranth, without decree from Mithras himself.

Unconquered worship Mithras as both god and Cainite, and commit blood sacrifice in exchange for future victories. Unconquered are firm believers in servitude to elders, but specify in their code that respect is owed only to elders in the service of Mithras, or elders of a follower's own ancestry.

Unconquered are taught to fight the servants of gods and masters who would corrupt and destroy the world through chaos. Parallels exist between Mithraists and Setites, though the former advocate order over Setite anarchy. Unconquered must never be afraid to draw a blade in defense of their kingdom and faith. The Baronies of Avalon are unbreakable due to the number of Unconquered not only within their ranks, but also acting as spies, ambassadors, and assassins abroad.

The Unconquered:

- Always obey the word of Mithras' line, and the Paters who carry his vitae.
- Make every killing a tribute to Mithras. They do not kill if the death would make a poor sacrifice.
- Never destroy the articles of other faiths — performing ceremonies in their sight.
- Recognize fire as purity. They build resolve and bear witness to it often.

A hierarchy exists within Mithraic worship, with the following ranks represented widely across the known world:

- Neophytes to the faith receive the suffix *Corux* on their name, and have the caduceus sigil branded on their right forearm.
- After siring a fledgling, the Mithraist is called *Nymphus*, and wears a bell or veil for the next month. To Mithraists the adornment is an act of great pride and celebration. The Nymphus and Pater act as surrogate sires to Unconquered without active sires, and may give permission to Embrace.
- A pouch of gold and a belt emblazoned with a Mithraic symbol are awarded to proven warriors. *Miles* becomes their title, to represent their rank as soldier. Many wield lances, to represent the weapon Mithras used in his slaying of the bull.
- The *Leo* wear a laurel wreath like Caesars of old, and learn an art, often music. Among the most trusted Mithraists, Leo travel long distances to rival courts, and therefore must entertain hosts. Leo are utilized as messengers and spies.
- Mithraists titled *Perses* lead bloodletting ceremonies, and act as assassins for the faith. Gifted a short sword, sickle, or dagger marked with their name, Perses receive a branded crescent moon on the left breast.
- Those awarded the suffix of *Heliodromus* receive a branded full sun on their right breast, and are awarded a bronze sun mask, scourge, and toga. The Heliodromus acts as agitator and military commander, rallying the faith and orchestrating violent acts to secure Mithraism's position. Even Mithraists fear the Heliodromus.

- Mithras awards the suffix of *Pater* only to the worthy. Paters are leaders of the faith, wear ruby rings, elaborate robes encrusted with jewels and metallic threads, and keep the sacrificial blood crucible. The Pater must be present for acts of sacrifice, and through the Pater prayers are conveyed to Mithras.

Black Dog

Travelers lost in the gloom of the moors and forgotten byways of the British Isles catch sight of a pair of fiery red eyes that never cease watching, no matter how far or fast they run. Fearful peasants speak in hushed tones of huge black bestial shapes looming out of the fog on nights when the moon keeps her face veiled in gray. These tales and more tell of the black dogs, canine harbingers of death stalking the wild places of Wales and Britain.

Whether they are creatures of flesh or spirit, none agree. Black dogs normally stand as large as an adult human, with eyes that glow like embers and shaggy fur as black as pitch. Their cavernous mouths hold massive fangs designed to rip through flesh and crunch bone to bits. Omens surrounding people destined to soon die attract a black dog, as it intercepts them along the paths leading to the Underworld while walking firmly in earthly realms. When it attacks physically, it's a sign its victim fights to avoid some prophesied doom. The black dog chases its quarry effortlessly, like a wind flitting from hill to hill, then fixes him with a mesmerizing stare that paralyzes him with fear before tearing him apart in its enormous jaws.

More often, though, it simply follows its prey from the shadows, showing itself just enough to cause mind-blanking terror before vanishing back into the darkness whence it came. Frequently, reports of a black dog sighting precede the poor soul's demise by mere days or weeks. On rare occasions, the sighting instead precedes a near-miss, leaving the victim alive. Survivors of such events claim the dogs are angels of death, warning them away from premature fatalities. Repeat encounters like this lead some to believe they are chosen as a black dog's ward, under its protection until such time as their fated ends come to pass.

People of different regions have various names for the black dogs their stories describe. In Yorkshire these phantom hounds are known as barghests, while in Wales they call a black dog a *gwyllgi* or "Dog of Darkness." In other places it's known as a grim, Shuck, the Moddey Dhoo, or a wisht hound.

Cainites wear death like voluminous robes, dragging long and bloody chains behind them. Black dogs harbor a particular enmity for the night's parasitic masters and stalk them with relentless purpose whenever they cross paths. Vampires of the Isles disagree on whether the beasts hate them for defying true death or for killing so many before their allotted time, but they tell similar tales: a phantom hound with a Cainite's scent dogs her steps and inflicts bouts of guilt, paranoia, or fear as punishment for her crimes. A black dog won't willingly give up the chase on a Cainite until forced, or until it has driven her completely mad. Malkavians and other vampires with strong psychic abilities sense these creatures from miles away.

Powers and Weaknesses

- The black dog recoups spent "blood points" by slumbering or successfully stalking prey for at least six hours continuously.
- A black dog does not count as a spirit or a ghost for the purposes of Disciplines and other powers that interact with these beings specifically. However, anything that works on immaterial beings generally can target and harm it while it's using Spectral Body, and it otherwise counts as a normal physical entity.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 5, Manipulation 1, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Empathy 4, Intimidation 5, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Celerity 4, Daimonion 2, Protean 7 (Eyes of the Beast and Spectral Body only), Serpentis 1, Valeren (Watcher) 1 (see note)

Road: 3, **Willpower:** 7; **Blood Pool:** 5

Note: The version of Sense Cycle that a black dog uses grants it omens with insight into when and where its target may die, rather than the usual effects.

Cappadocian Apocrypha: Death Cults

Clan Cappadocian summons you home. Your mission is at its end. Retire your duties. You are to be Harbinger no longer. Become one with your mask. Your true face must never be shown hence. None may know of your role. Harbingers must fade as dreams. Attend the conclave in Kaymakli. Father shall absolve you of your sins. These are the words of Caias.

G.

Study the scroll I send you.

It speaks of our sacred mission ending as the War of Princes draws near. I cannot believe the words I read. They tell me our service was for naught. We failed our mission. I write hastily, for I suspect if I took time to deliberate I would snap every quill in hand.

Does Father experiment with us? Does he test our resolve? How many Harbingers will attend his conclave? Will warmth or punishment greet them for abandoning their masks?

I convince myself this is a trial. We grow so close to our augured destination, and Father seeks to remove the rotten meat from the Cappadocian carcass. I cannot surrender my cause. Our destiny is to witness the impossible deaths and divine meaning. We grow so close, and cannot now stop.

A trap awaits those who believe the words of Caias. We must stay true to our cause. We grow so close, brother. Let not trickster words sway us from our mission.

E.

Life in Death

Vampires exist in a state between life and death, drinking mouthfuls of hot blood one night, sleeping beneath mounds of earth and stone on another. Cappadocians lean closer to death than life. They barely condescend to raise an eyebrow or roll their eyes as fellow Cainites play with mortals' hearts and enjoy their petty political games, for when a Cappadocian plays with a mortal's heart, she handles the muscle between thin fingers, probing it, scratching it, listening closely as it strains to beat against her strong grip. When a Cappadocian endures political tribulations, she does so to achieve a long-term aim, pushing pieces into place that might trigger a war or spread of pestilence.

Cappadocians struggle to maintain interest in the Via Humanitas. As with any vampire, they are Embraced from a vast range of mortal stock, and the first years of darkness are the greatest struggle. At this time, even a Graverobber clings to mortal trappings: family, profession, and love. Steadily though, the Clan indoctrinates the Cappadocian. The death cult of scholars, nihilists, killers, and occultists welcomes the fledgling to their ranks. The Cappadocians appear passive, almost voyeuristic to the War of Princes while others rage at one another, but truly they work their own wicked schemes in the shadows of other Cainites' flagrant actions.

Princes patronize Cappadocians, installing them as trusted servants, assured they will never aspire to more.

Cappadocians are vultures, fit to scavenge the scraps falling from the ruler's table or on the edges of her territory. This underestimation plays into Cappadocian hands.

The Cappadocians want certain tales spun and spread. Necromancers *are* responsible for locating mortals skilled in their arts — the Giovani and Rosselini are prominent examples of families Embraced for their dark talents. The rumor of Cappadocius' plans for godhead *is* true, though his narcissistic actions do little to define an entire Clan. The same Antediluvian *did* organize the purge of hundreds of Cappadocians, though understanding his motives is unlikely.

These fables garner incredulity over fear, for as long as these tales are heard, and doubted, Cappadocian studies and agendas continue without disruption.

The Political

When Cappadocians appear in court as chief stewards or regents, the other Cainites take little notice. As kingmakers and whisperers in the ears of Princes, Cappadocians master the art of hiding in plain view. Cappadocian games of deception are so clear, yet so understated, that only a minority of Cainites attribute the Necromancers with designs on power. They are just Graverobbers, after all.

There exist Cappadocians who take the groveling role of servant, but serve higher causes. These Cainites smile broadly at their masters, listening to every proclamation and nodding at each edict as they calculate their own plans.

The Harbingers

In the centuries before Romans swept through Europe, a wanderer named Sargonnezhad discovered two shrewd Cappadocians in Persepolis. He offered 10 carts filled with bodies: a combination of healthy nobles, dying natives, and dead foreigners. Sargonnezhad offered this bounty to the Necromancers, and promised more, if they followed his edict. He explained the key to life and death. As bystanders, Cappadocians witnessed the scythe. As secret rulers, Cappadocians wielded it from the shadows — spreading plagues, fomenting wars, the deaths of thousands at their command.



One of the vampires proclaimed Sargonnezhad's plan as madness, destined to drive a vampire into the Beast's jaws. The other Cappadocian listened attentively, and under Sargonnezhad's guidance formed a cult of like-minded aspirants. The Harbingers grew in the following centuries — dedicated to divining their own triumphant fate over life and death. The Harbingers would not concern themselves over the deaths of mere individuals; they would orchestrate and witness the death of empires, cultures, and races.

Harbingers ingratiate themselves with other Clans, intent on winning the friendship and trust of their targets. Their unseen influence persists as their grip on humanity decreases, their fledglings often Embraced from the ranks of warlords, ambassadors, and spies: those acting as death's harbingers. Their eschatological knowledge exceeds that of most living philosophers, and adoption of the Road of Kings or Road of Bones is prevalent within their numbers.

Erciyes monks tell of a sharp decrease in Harbinger influence in recent years. Harbingers believed they were closing on the greatest epoch of death, when humanity would lose over half its numbers, and the dead would become dominant. Something in their facade cracked, and their decline was unexpected and severe. Many Harbingers simply disappeared.

Some allege their Clan betrayed them. The abrupt reduction in their number as they neared a zenith pushed them to work against fellow Cappadocians and their vogue bloodline — the Giovani. They enthusiastically pursue campaigns of death in their roles as seneschals and fifth columnists. Pushing fiefs and baronies into slaughters, they jealously target their rival Necromancers.

Other Harbingers believe the next epoch of death is still at hand. They position themselves to seize power in domains on the edge of war-torn kingdoms. They want to stand with eyes open when death stalks the Earth, and record the fall of men and Cainites. These Harbingers believe their numbers reduce as a test of commitment, and will not avert their gaze. With their claws buried deep in the courts of Princes, they will rule over human and vampire alike when war consumes the world, the only beings who know the journey a civilization or culture makes as it suffers annihilation.

For centuries Harbingers have been embedded in domains, wearing their ornate death masks and robes of state. They absorb responsibility for lives, deaths, blood, souls, and their domains' fates. Harbingers discuss their plans with few. Their own Clan believes the Harbingers a myth or dead legacy. In truth, they just obscure their exploits as masters of deception.

No one suspects the corpse in the corner.

The Pathological

Other Clans see the Cappadocian willingness to drink from the sick, injured, and expired as a lack of refinement, or act of desperation. The Necromancers' difficulty in blending in among the healthy kine forces them to such beggary.

It is not forlornness forcing Cappadocians to feed from and consort with weakened vessels — it is experimentation and study. The Graverobbers spend so much time among the dying, their physical resemblance to corpses acts as a form of camouflage. The Necromancers blend in among the dead. Intimate with the departed, they obsessively pry free their secrets.

Fratres Plaga

The world grows ever larger. Mortal pilgrims claim to be of lands thousands of miles away, bringing with them fascinating histories, maps, beliefs, and promises of trade.

They also bring disease.

Maladies have long captivated Clan Cappadocian. The study of why pestilence might strike and destroy an entire city of mortals, but allow the Cainites within it to persist without harm enthralls them. Necromancers likewise chronicle instances where infection *does* afflict vampires. The transmission, cure, or weaponization of epidemics intrigues the Clan.

Emerging from Florence, the Fratres Plaga — three Cappadocians dedicated to epidemiology naming themselves Carnifex, Gentilman, and Holiman — spread outward, examining reports of widespread pestilence in person, and investigating tales of kine and Cainite who suffer from intriguing illness or injury. The Fratres Plaga study mysteries of the body and make connections with questions of the soul. The cult coldly fixates on understanding whether mortals afflicted with deleterious illness are spiritually deficient or whether plague is an arbitrary leveler. Crucially, they wish to know whether spirits can pass on the ravages of plague and pox, as Cainites seem able to do so after feeding from an afflicted victim.

The Fratres Plaga pursue the mysteries of disease, recovery, and death as philosophy, attempting to ascribe higher purpose to the crippling swaths of pestilence that wipe domains clean of feeding stock. The cult divides itself into a trinity of schools. The three vie for true understanding, and each century convene to discuss their discoveries.

An emaciated child takes the title Holiman. He schools his fellow Cappadocians on the idea of plague being God's punishment on mortals for their lack of faith, and Cainites for their slothful, parasitic existences. His faction believes in baptismal purity via God's elements. Immersion in water, walking through fire, inhaling smoke, and burial in earth, bring all beings closer to death and God. God is immaculate, therefore mortals and Cainites can be also, if they divest themselves of weakness. Clan Cappadocian hosts a strong contingent of ardent Faithful on the Via Caeli and its associated Paths, including some among the Cainite

Heresy. Cappadocians following Holiman's teaching find an evangelical way of remaining true to their faith, despite their sacrilegious necromancy.

The beak-masked Gentilman resolutely separates faith and science. His followers believe living decay is a condition of the body, and commit themselves to the Grave's Decay and Path of the Twilight Garden. Gentilman commands his followers corral the sick and dying, not to prevent the spread of illness, but to study and control it. Gentilman's faction Embrace from the ranks of the diseased, attempting to preserve sickness in an immortal shell. Gentilman's faction makes inroads into understanding the Plague of Justinian, leprosy, and variola. They dissect the bodies of the still-living, tasting the blood of those with different symptoms, and exposing ailing kine to others of different ages, genders, and races. Sympathetic to the Harbinger agenda, Gentilman harbors designs on initiating a new plague, through which both his faction and the Harbingers will gain unequaled studies and material power.

The mummified Carnifex's view is one of natural philosophy. His faction teaches necromancy as a facet of nature. The land uses plague as a weapon to purge away harm, and Cainites are as natural as the kine. Carnifex's school teaches Cappadocians and gods are weaker than the living world. Though many vampires dismiss them as nihilistic, his faction displays unusual preponderance for introspection and connection to humanity. While the faction acts as assassins and necromantic savants, they also neurotically protect their herds, looking to strengthen the kine against nature's wrath. Carnifex believes that nature can never be tamed, but it can be balanced, and aberrant elements require culling in order to preserve purity.

Ventrue Apocrypha: The Importance of Lineage

To my blood elder Cretheus, First Senator of Rome

It is with humility I write, and trust this letter reaches you seal unbroken. The messenger is a most honored Leo. Please return her unharmed.

Not long after my Embrace, my sire remarked that our line is one of titans. I retorted that surely all Ventrue must be gods, foolishly believing flattery might endear him. For the affront, I became subject to his chastisement. As thrall, he forced me to humiliation and education. He willed it so, and I learned. After five decades in slavery, he took me in arms once more. The titans fought the gods, said he. Those who call themselves Ventrue fight their masters. We fight gods, and wrest power from their grasp. There is only one god worthy of the titans' worship, and he is Mithras.

Until now, our Clan's pact of titans against gods remained in place despite Arakur's chaos. The new wars between our lineages imply an awakening. The gods rise. Antasians battle the Gaul's dreamers. We war with Alexander's Triumvirate. The rival lineages of Tinia, Artemis Orthia, and Medon grow in strength. We believed Hardestadt free, but activity within the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross implies the influence of his sire, who we believed destroyed. Our power was through unification. I fear the Clan is provoked to war from beyond.

Mithras gives guidance. He commands all must look to him, if we are to survive his fellow gods' wrath. We must protect the titans from themselves, and force the gods into the Unconquered Sun's light. It is the path with which I tutor the loyal Praetorians, and it is how I urge you to stabilize Rome before Camillus places it in Veddartha's grip. Mithras sees the master's hand, and wishes it cut off.

We start in Rome, and in Avalon, and from there take Mithras' word to our fellow titans. Unified under Mithras we might stave off the gods.

With sincerest respect,

Arcadius Pater, Consul of Aquae Sulis
Childe of Marcus Verus, Baron of Deva Victrix
Grandchilde of the God-Emperor Mithras, Unconquered Sun,
Prince of Londinium and the Baronies of Avalon, Progenitor of our Line



Ventrue exalt in the glory of their lineage. A Ventrue in a Toreador court may bore the Queen of Love with recitations of ancestry, but that same Patrician in a Ventrue court will be expected to recount not only the names of her forebears, but their achievements and misdeeds. Woe betide the Power Monger who misremembers.

In truth, there is little to do but take many Ventrue proclamations of lineage at face value. When summoning a vampire of the Eleventh Generation to recite her great, great grandsire's domain name and deeds, it is more a test of the Cainite's ability to tell a convincing tale than a memory exam. Presentation only becomes a factor when naming notable Ventrue. If a Patrician claims their sire as "Francis the Woodsman, murdered by Lupines one night following my Embrace," few Ventrue would shift in their seats. If instead she names an ancestor such as "Titus Venturus Camillus, Prince of Rome," the claim will draw questions, interest, and where the declarations are believed, approval and hospitality. Even rogues are acclaimed, if their legends are known.

No ancestor is as important in the Ventrue lineage as the Fourth Generation Methuselah. Each of the Fourth Generations' lines habitually manifest certain traits, fuelling claims they possess blood more potent than other Clans. Scholars of the vitae postulate each Methuselah spawns a new bloodline, but learned Ventrue refute such speculation. "Ventrue vitae is pure and never spawns a bastard line," they say, "but the Ventrue progenitors' minds are strong, and leave impressions on all but the thinnest of blood."

Noble Ancestry

Each of Ventrue's childer made a play for power. Some succeeded, building great cults of personality, constructing empires, and steering armies. Others failed, their efforts brought low by hubris, bloody feuds, and misfortune. Few of the Fourth Generation are active in the Dark Ages, but neither torpor nor Final Death removes the impression a Methuselah ancestor makes on their line. The following are renowned Ventrue lines, though more exist.

Optional System: Ventrue may not use temporary Willpower points when opposing another member of their linear ancestry, from sires to grandsires and above, straight to the Antediluvian.

The Line of Alexander

Foolish Cainites mistook Alexander for Toreador — the recently destroyed Prince of Paris being a patron of arts, possessed of youthful beauty and golden curls. The warrior tyrant saw to the tortured destruction of all who made that faux pas. He long sat the throne of one of the most powerful domains in the Western Roman Empire, encouraging the formation of the Courts of Love, and the pageantry taking place within them.

Alexander's line possesses passion, oratory resonance, and skills in convincing even the clenched fists of nobles and bishops to give up coin and deeds to territory. Alexander's brood also possesses a reputation for loose tempers and fits of frenzy.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Etiquette and Expression rolls by two when making declarations before an audience. Roll to risk frenzy, if someone successfully interrupts said oration.

The Line of Antonius

Antonius the Gaul — the second of Michael's Constantinople Triumvirate, and stoic rock against which the Toreador tested his Dream — was a great thinker and tactician. Indomitable to a fault, he failed to react to his lover's increasing mania, thinking only of the Dream's architecture, and the survival of the city. Rather than bending with the flow of Michael's ideas, he snapped, lashing out as his own plans went awry. His own childe staked him and left him to the sun's mercy.

Antonian Cainites possess a predisposition towards tactical thinking and administration. They recognize how things work, and enjoy setting wheels in motion from a distance, only to see plans come to fruition in lands far away, or at times far in

the future. Some of Antonius' plans are still on course to see conclusion, despite his supposed death in the eighth century.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Politics and Seneschal rolls by two when examining or planning domain hierarchy. Roll to risk frenzy, if someone disrupts a long-term scheme.

The Line of Arakur

Arakur was among the most ancient Ventrue, ruling in Ur openly as a vampire, claiming hundreds of brides and Embracing each. Cainites were gods, mortals supplicants at their feet. Despite his empire, Arakur was a coward. When his enemies rallied to destroy his kingdom, he fled and hid, only to be diablerized by his own childe, who consorted with a demon to overpower him.

Arakur's line holds a reputation for diablerie, communion with devils, and hubris. It also boasts the most warlords and Road of the Beast adherents among the Ventrue, alongside prestigious rulers, mighty warriors, and vampires of terrifying age.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Self-Control and Instinct rolls by two when attempting to direct the Beast. Make a Courage roll at the start of a battle in which you are outnumbered. On a failure, the character flees to the nearest sanctuary.

The Line of Mithras

Mithras is among the most active Fourth Generation vampires, keenly ruling the Cainites of the British Isles, styling his empire as the Baronies of Avalon. Mithras has traveled far and picked up powers from beings of all types. He acts slowly, but deliberately, crushing all foes and brooking no attempts on his kingdom.

All Ventrue descended from Mithras proudly assert the identity of their ancestor. His line exemplifies pride and power, displaying unassailability both in the court and on the battlefield. Cainites claim the line of Mithras is impervious to flame, due to Mithras being a god of the sun. It is true Mithras encourages hardiness, but his chosen punishment for disappointing childer involves greeting the dawn, thus quashing such rumors.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Courage rolls by two, when facing fire. Increase the difficulty of Willpower rolls by two, when another member of Mithras' line attempts to exert influence or control over you.

The Line of Nefer-meri-Isis

This Ventrue has stalked the African continent for centuries, never sitting a throne, unlike many of her peers. Nefer-meri-Isis' reputation is one of self-sufficiency. Where other Ventrue Methuselahs throw armies at problems, Nefer-meri-Isis tackles them herself, leading to tales of her singlehandedly incapacitating Set after he attacked her sire. She still roams to this night.

Nefer-meri-Isis' descendants exhibit acute awareness. Taking one by surprise is uncommon. Many do their ancestor proud by picking up a sword and fighting for themselves, or building a haven stone by stone, but this is not evidence of humility. Nefer-meri-Isis' line is convinced none are remotely capable of matching their achievements.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Survival and Investigation rolls by two, when pursuing them without aid. Increase the difficulty of Social-based rolls by two, when having to follow orders. Many Ventrue descended from Nefer-meri-Isis have Auspex as a Clan Discipline, instead of Presence.

The Line of Orthia

Ventrue proudly declare that Orthia was beloved by Ventrue and was his first Embrace, but a great betrayal ripped the two apart. Orthia was a battle maiden, who saw inaction as a coward's way and overlong planning as prevarication. She led the Ventrue to victories, playing a role in the Clan's influence over Ancient Rome. Her impulsive desire to clash with foes pushed her to doom, as she led the charge against Brujah Carthage. Her destruction or torpor occurred within the first minutes of battle.

Orthian Ventrue share their Methuselah's desire to destroy enemies through force of arms and men, building great warrior herds and fanatically loyal armies. Orthians seize thrones, and rarely bide their time when a blade can quicken the process. They believe they are due glory, and take it without pause.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Presence rolls by one, when using them in efforts to seize power. Roll to risk frenzy whenever someone other than you harms a valued retainer or haven.

The Line of Tinia

Tinia believed the route to power was through discovery. She led the Etruscan people as a god, acting as teacher and student to human invention. At the peak of her power, she lost the innovation to create, and began stealing concepts from the best mortal minds. After draining her vessels of all independent thought, she grew bored, and moved to explore new lands and untouched people. Tinia disappeared east of Persia, with tales of her leaving settlements filled with mentally-vacant slaves in her wake.

Tinia's childer cling to the passion for discovery, seeking new powers and ever expanding their domains. The eldest among them find this hunger ceases whenever they rest for an extended period. They often rank as the most megalomaniacal Ventrue, possessing wanderlust uncommon among their peers.

Optional System: Lower the difficulty of Dominate rolls by one, when using the Discipline to obtain new information. Increase the difficulty of Conscience and Conviction rolls by two, when tested by something you have experienced before.



Chapter Three: The Domain of Bjarkarey

How kind of you to visit here to minister to us heathens, bishop.
Now, how does it go again? "Hoc est corpus..."

— Queen Valborg of Bjarkarey

Over 200 years ago, the war between White Christ and Red Thor ended. King Óláfr the Holy drove out the Old Gods. At swordpoint, Christianity conquered Norway. But sword is met by sword, and so it was that at Stiklarstaðir, the holy king, died at the hands of Thorir the Hound, chieftain of Bjarkarey. But that did not stop what had been set in motion.

One night, Valborg Crooked-Eye and her band of warriors came to Bjarkarey. Old and scarred, the Gangrel Viking had seen the warring kingdoms united, and then Christianized. She had forgiven neither. She conquered her new island kingdom, and set about restoring the old ways as through a darkened, twisted mirror. The last of the Einherjar states was born.

And so, the long-dead heart of the Viking age has been brought back to unlife, beating and squeezing and spraying stagnant blood through cracked veins. Here, Valborg's Cainite reavers and their blood-thrall companions feast and laugh and venerate their old gods, and their shadows cover all. The followers of the Æsir have long since sacrificed the clergy at the midwinter blót, and any missionaries or traveling monks who might pass through suffer the same fate if they still linger at nightfall. The Christians among the population keep it to themselves, and travel to the church at nearby Thróndarnes on Sundays. The kine dress, speak, and act as their ancestors did 200 years ago, and mortal travelers find themselves quietly advised to be gone by dusk.

Red Thor's Reavers

Queen Valborg Crooked-Eye — (Eighth Generation Gangrel) The foremost Cainite of Bjarkarey is a formidable Úlfheðinn who fights without thought for her own safety. She is aided by preternatural senses, keen reflexes, and her trusty hammer, Kristrbani — meaning Godslayer, Christslayer, or weakling-slayer — a weapon too heavy for mortal hands. A Viking at heart, she spends most of her time on raiding expeditions, using mercenary contracts and the Crusades as an excuse to murder and pillage. Her greatest fear is the distant call of torpor, which would tear her domain from her and leave Kristrbani unbloodied. She has no doubt that the old ways would die without her strong arm to uphold them.

Kindling-Ásgeirr — (Eleventh Generation Toreador) Charismatic and likable, the horrifically scarred Ásgeirr is the face of Valborg's band to the world of mortals. He earned his unhealing scars when he accidentally set himself on fire during a raid in Karelia, and his comrades find that fact hilarious. As the mockery piles up, so does Ásgeirr's bitterness — one night, it might go too far, especially if some new Cainite warrior decides to egg on the jokes.

Mikkel — (Eleventh Generation Gangrel) From far-off Ireland he came to find a place where his terrifying violent rages would not hamper him. Here, they bring him

great honor in battle and laughter in court, and he likes it. His violent episodes make him the most feared and hated Cainite in the domain among the mortal population, most of whom have lost someone to this Gangrel. More than any other thing, his unprovoked spells of rage cause discontent among the kine, and push them towards rebellion.

Guðrunn — (Fifth Generation Cappadocian) Bjarkarey's court völva is a withered old Cappadocian who once was one of Norway's most respected sorceresses and seers. Now she is a relic, a remnant of a dead tradition, and in this she finds meaning. She casts runes and provides cryptic snippets of prophecy, as likely to be genuine as simple manipulation. A contrary old hag, Guðrunn has left most worldly scheming behind — now, her true agenda is to lead her faith to a dignified end, and to bring other Cainites pain or petty annoyance for her own amusement. She arranged for Ásgeirr's accident, and if he ever finds that out the Queen will have to choose between her court völva or her diplomat. She is tired of unlife, and more than happy to aid young vampires who wish to change the status quo, so long as they show wit and subtlety. She responds well to clever banter, even if it is insulting towards her.

Ormr — (Eighth Generation Nosferatu) A levelheaded and soft-spoken young Nosferatu ancilla, it is Ormr who most draws the scorn of the Viking court. In secret, though, he is a passionate believer in Jesus of Nazareth, and the head of Bjarkarey's hidden Cainite Heresy. He is an ally of Guðrunn, and they both work toward the end of the old faith in Bjarkarey. He is charismatic and dignified when away from Valborg's warriors, with features that are unusually symmetrical for one of his Clan. When under the Queen's eye, he is servile and pathetic, acting as the court's jester, but this is an act, and one he does not mind — after all, he is outwitting her. He has a collection of hiding places all over the island, and uses some of these for his masses.

Israel — (Tenth Generation Follower of Set) This strange creature, seemingly made of solid marble, appeared from the sea one night and proclaimed itself to be the archangel Israel. It offered communion, and many drank from the cup laced with its vitae. Since then, Israel has appeared many times, always in the open, always offering communion from its chalice of blood, and the Queen's forces have never been able to catch it. In truth, Israel knows it is not an angel, but believes that so long as it does an angel's work, the difference is meaningless. It has gained many followers but no allies. Rumor insists that members of the hirð have partaken in Israel's communion, but so far it seems to be hearsay. But Israel's time is running out — Valborg has sent forth word that any neonate who slays this "archangel" will earn her favor. It is only a matter of time before an ambitious coterie decides to secure for themselves a patron of elder rank.

Kearte — (9th-Generation Brujah) One night, a Sami hunter and scout named Kearte came from the north, seeking to join the queen in stopping Christianity's advance. An idealist and a romantic at heart, though, her heart bleeds for the suffering of the kine. She has come to hate her liege, and wishes deep down to see the Final Death claim her — or possibly simply to leave the northern lands and travel to far-away Miklagard to seek her fortune in the Basileus' Varangian Guard. She will aid anyone who comes to Bjarkarey to see the Queen's downfall. Her actions poorly hide her misgivings. Though Valborg and her court, already familiar with Kearte, see them as simply part of the Zealot's personality, new blood might recognize them for what they are.

The Hammer and Cross

It has been 200 years since the cross came to Bjarkarey. For a century and a half, the protective peal of the church bells blanketed the town come Sunday and holy days, a sound said to banish evil wherever heard. Though the new faith was ripped out as brutally as the old one was, it had already been the religion of generations. Like the dandelion covering the island in summer, it proved hardy. The Holy Trinity still sees reverence here, and not just among mortals.

There is a Cainite church here, headed up by the charismatic Nosferatu priest Ormr, the only vampire who lived here in life. There are around a dozen Cainites in Bjarkarey, and Ormr is not the only one of that number present at his sermons. Some of the Queen's blood-thrall hirðmen and a few mortals attend this hidden church, where open rebellion against the Cainite rule is preached.

Among mortals, churchgoers mainly travel to Thróndarnes by boat on Sundays, suffering the perils of the sea to hear the psalms, partake in Communion, and have their souls salved and consecrated. At home, they quietly intone their prayers in the evening, hoping to draw the attention of a distant god to their darkened houses and be safe from the ravages of midnight. They pray to Saint Óláfr to return and deliver them from evil, preferably by the sword.

Not all of Bjarkarey's kine believe in the White Christ and his milksop promises. The old gods are still in memory, and some never left behind their bitterness over the conversion King Óláfr the Fat forced on them. Most of them know that Queen Valborg's faith is a twisted version of what their ancestors believed, and so they, too, hope for deliverance. Red Thor was always a friend of humanity: a

heroic, if dimwitted, champion who would kill and drive out the creatures of darkness wherever he went — and it is to Bjarkarey, they hope, that he will come next. Then, they will take up their swords, and hope to die in glorious battle, so they may sit at Odin's table in Valhöll.

Some mortals have come to believe in Valborg's version of the old faith, and for them, the Queen's blood-soaked longhouse is a beacon in a world turned to evil. The Church is conquering the world, they believe, and it is but another face of that old beast, Rome, and its quest for power. It is that old monster that drove the ancient gods out of their ancestral homelands and sent them up north, and now it has pursued them even to the very heart of their new domain. They believe that here Queen Valborg and her exalted companions will stand firm as the bedrock, rallying the faithful and driving the besieging tyranny back even to the cradle of White Christ himself. The ancient freedom that all humankind once enjoyed will be theirs once more.

It is a crimson, death-soaked creed, washed clean in the tides of blood and fire, and it gives the faithful any reason they might want to take to arms and cleave some skulls. Red Thor, blood-soaked Thor, strong Thor — blood is bound into the very fabric of Valborg's cult, considered sacred and pure. White Christ, bloodless and feeble, represents the weakness that the lazy and enslaved embrace and name "civilization." Valborg's followers know true civilization — it is the civilization of the strong, the pure, who build it on the bedrock of their own strength of body and mind. It is freedom, where all men have their say and justice is swift and harsh. It embraces the rain and wind and thunder, and the right to go where you will and take what you want — as their ancestors did before them. It is heady and intoxicating, especially to the Cainite once chained by self-denial.

Blood Feuds and Holy Wars

As a small island of heathens ruled openly by an unholy abomination, it is Bjarkarey's isolated position at the very northern edge of Christendom that has thus far prevented the heavy gaze of the Church or pious Cainites. Queen Valborg and her hirð are also avid crusaders, eagerly smiting the Saracen in the name of the cross, which also stymies Christian wrath. Naturally, it is not loyalty to the religion the Queen despises motivating this piece of apparent piety — it is the promise of plunder and blood without repercussions. Valborg is cunning enough to know that openly warring upon her Christian neighbors would be a swift way to face the dawn underneath a heavy stone slab, whether at the hands of a pious adventuring captain or the much-rumored shadowy hand of the Church. She has set out on several years-long expeditions to slay the Serkir of Outremer under the false flag of the Cross.

Nevertheless, Bjarkarey's Queen is no diplomat, and even Kindling-Ásgeirr's easy charm can only smooth over so much. The fiefdom has made many enemies already, and makes more each summer, when the longboats launch again. Much raiding happens north and east, into lands held by pagans or the Russian Orthodox patriarchate. Notable enmities therefore exist within the burning wreckage of the Kievan Rus'. The Swedish war against the Novgorod Republic provides a similar excuse to raid in the north as the Crusades do in the south. Both the Republic and Karelia are nursing growing grudges against Bjarkarey's raiders, dangers of which the Queen is not yet aware. The ever more settled Cainites of the Crimson Horde are looking for younger vampires to send west and judging possible assaults on the Queen's court. In her eagerness to avoid Catholic ire, she unwittingly stirs up Orthodox wrath.

For mortals, two centuries is a span of generations. The Christening of Norway has long since passed out of living memory — but unliving minds still remember. Among older Scandinavian Cainites, the Viking Queen finds respect, even admiration. Many vampire jarls still believe in the old ways, and Bjarkarey captures what sentimentality they have left in them. Still, they are hardly true allies, and those who would join her cause already have. She sees a potential ally in her fellow Gangrel pagan Werter of Uppsala, but he is suspicious of the Queen's version of the faith and its emphasis on only two of the gods. The Gangrel outlaw Eirik Longtooth, while an ally of Bjarkarey, is not likely to be in the right place at the right time should the island domain come under attack.

Among younger vampires, Christianity has taken root solidly, and they chafe at their elders' heathen ways. The old war over Norway's soul still shambles along in its unliving society, and Valborg is one of the most visible symbols of the old guard. While older Cainites often look at Bjarkarey fondly, the young despise it. Many daring neonate Prometheans dream of taking that throne for themselves.

Perhaps Valborg's most staunch political opponent is the Setite prince named Ráðúlfr. He has given himself the title Hlaðirjarl, considering himself the "night jarl" to his mortal counterpart's "day jarl." Though he only controls the western islands around Lofotr, he considers the whole jarldom of Hlaðir to be his, and that most emphatically and especially includes Bjarkarey. He has maneuvered against the Gangrel Queen before, trying to cut off potential alliances and raiding trade vessels running to and from the island, but the Queen cares little about such matters. She is aware of his designs and has enacted schemes against him in her own exceptionally unsubtle way. They hate each other with the bile only elder vampires can summon up.

Ráðúlfr has been a Christian since the battle of Stiklarstaðir and has old alliances to call upon. He could

easily seize Bjarkarey, were it not for his fellow Serpents. Once a rising star, his conversion has earned him the enmity of the Children of Loki, and they wish to see him replaced with a more faithful Setite jarl. Already, they slither into his court and spread venomous rumors, seeking to undermine him. But in his final hour, he might find an unexpected ally: Queen Valborg herself. As a faithful follower of Thor, she has no love for the Midgard Serpent's get. Those Children of Loki are *southerners*, and whatever else he might be, Ráðúlfr is a true man of the north. Meanwhile, the jarl himself seeks to claim Bjarkarey without expending precious resources. He is currently seeking younger vampires to send into the Queen's court as spies and saboteurs. Even if they should decide to keep the fiefdom, he knows it will be far easier to oust some upstart than the weathered old queen.

Blood and Glory

When Valborg's longboats leave, Ásgeirr, Mikkel, and Kearte are on board. With them sail around a hundred blood-thralls and mortal hirðmen, Viking warriors all. Wrapped in thick sheepskins, the Cainites slumber away the days. At night, the boats pull onto shore so the crews may rest. At that time, Kearte heads off into the countryside to find sustenance for the other three. Should she find kine, the vampires sneak into their homes and drink their fill; should she find four-legged quarry, she slays it and brings it back to the boats, for the Cainites to drink their blood and the mortals to feast on their flesh. So pass the weeks at sea.

When the boats land, Kearte scouts to see where they are. If any undefended settlements are nearby and the Queen thinks it wise, the whole band's bloodlust rises, and they descend on any local peasants and monks. The Queen's preternatural senses ensure none escape. Should the settlements be larger or guarded, the Queen instead sends Kindling-Ásgeirr to shore to offer the band's services as mercenaries in whatever local conflicts might be ongoing. Even in the Levant or Karelia, Valborg prefers to take mercenary contracts, as she sees no reason to go unpaid for doing what she would do otherwise.

Most seasons, the longboats sail south to offer the raiders' services to Christian lords, or east to raid in Karelia and Novgorod. Sometimes, they strike the northern Sami, though Kearte's strongly-voiced disapproval, and the lack of notable riches, has led the old Gangrel to reduce such attacks — Kearte is valuable, after all. Should they enter the so-called Holy Land, they hoist the cross and set off on a rampage across Muhammedan and Orthodox lands both. It is these raids the Queen enjoys best. She has earned some recognition as a stalwart crusader in the courts of Europe, riding on the good name of King Sigurd Jerusalem-Farer, also known as Sigurd the Crusader. She would consider this an insult were she not so amused by the situation. As it is, this reputation is greatly useful to her, so she encourages it with distaste, and hopes one day to be in a position to truly damage the decadent Church.

When the ships sail home, they are laden with gold and captives, thralls for the Queen's service, and trophies and all manner of goods the hirð might need in Bjarkarey. Valborg makes a point of targeting mortal friends or relatives of Cainites who annoy her, some of whom intend to retrieve their lost ones.

Life and Death in Bjarkarey

Bjarkarey is a fishing town defined by its despot, and so it is somewhat ironic that she spends less time here than she does adventuring. Even elder vampires must respect the might of the weather and of the deadly sea, so her ships only set sail in spring, and mostly return in fall. Most times, both happen in the same year, but sometimes Valborg's raiders spend years raiding and killing in the warm south. When she sets off on one of her expeditions to faraway Serkland to slay the Muhammedans, it will be five or more years before the longboats return. When they return, they act as though Bjarkarey is hostile land, as it often is.

When this happens, the old ways' grip on Bjarkarey slips. Most vampires who are truly loyal to Valborg are part of her hirð, and they leave with her, leaving Bjarkarey leaderless. The Queen sees no pressing need for night-to-night governance of her kingdom, and so that situation suits her fine. In her absence, the town is vulnerable, and easy to seize. Many vampires, and even some mortals, successfully conquer the island kingdom, thinking themselves clever, but Valborg is a formidable warrior. She is a Gangrel elder whose focus has been raiding and war throughout her existence, and she returns each time with a small army. Many conquer her small domain, but none hold it.

With the Queen gone, Bjarkarey heaves a sigh of relief. The nights seem brighter, and the population dares to almost openly follow their own faiths. There are open debates about the comparative merits of Queen Valborg and King Hákon IV, and those vampires left behind become much more active, bargaining and building, and occasionally leaving. Mortals, too, depart Bjarkarey in these times of reprieve, but for them, the journey is hazardous. These are poor folk, many of them fishermen or farmers, and without their homesteads they have nothing. The remaining ones have homes, businesses, and families to lose, their ancestors having lived here far before the Queen conquered them, and the ocean is dangerous. To leave means risking death from starvation, cold, or drowning, and most mortals have had family taken by the waves.



In these times, it is Guðrunn who makes the decisions needed from a ruler, and she cares little for preserving Valborg's domain. Instead, she focuses on making choices the Queen will not disapprove of overmuch, along with silently orchestrating her liege's downfall. Mainly, though, she abuses her position to play tricks on the vampire population. These range from the truly sadistic to mildly annoying, and she takes care to make it all seem like accidents. For that, she often uses Ormr, who becomes bolder and uses the Queen's absence to try and shore up the Christian cause in his beloved hometown, often traveling to nearby settlements to build alliances, as well as building secret tunnels and underground chambers within the island's bedrock. The gifts of his blood allow him to go where he wishes unseen, and he willingly lends this ability to Guðrunn's mischief in exchange for her help with his plans.

On a hill where the town's church used to stand sits Valborg's longhouse, and it overlooks the town center. From here, it is but a short walk down to the shore, and the rows of boathouses lining the water's edge where Valborg's fleet of dragon ships rests, as well as those fishing boats belonging to the closest farms. Most of the population lives in scattered farmsteads around Bjarkarey itself, almost tiny hamlets in their own right, each of which can house dozens of people. Dotted around the shores of nearby islands are other farmsteads, clinging precariously to the roots of the majestic mountain ranges, and the people from these farms gather in Bjarkarey to trade and drink. Fashions and language are old-fashioned here, kept so by threat of death, but despite the danger overshadowing their lives and the harshness of their surroundings — or maybe because of these — the people enjoy drinking, brawling, and loud, raucous laughter. Violence, even lethal, is common — Valborg's reign attracts those who ill fit in elsewhere.

When the Queen is at home, her hall is lit by a great bonfire set at the opposite end from her throne. Those hirðmen of lower status sit closer to the fire, and farther away from the Queen. The light from the fire is visible across the whole town, a reminder of both who it is who sits in judgment of the population, and the people's lowly status as mere kine. Formality does not exist here — all members of the hirð laugh and joke and insult each other freely. The experienced ones know to jest about the Queen as well, though they also know over which topics to spare insults. All Cainites dine in the longhouse, with the Queen providing refreshments from the ranks of her thralls and

those she convicts of crimes against her domain. The court spares more valued prisoners, such as Christian clergy or Saracen nobility, for feast days, with the most important ones saved for the sacred midwinter blót. Here, priests, imams, bishops, Capets, counts, and even one particularly unfortunate Holy Roman Prince-Elector have met their end. These, the reavers kidnap in secret to avoid provoking the ire of the mighty — disappearances happen, especially in wartime, and the hirðmen are quite skilled at clandestine kidnappings. Even so, the Princes of the Black Cross know of the captivity of one bishop, and they look to hire mercenaries to rescue their holy man.

While the power in Bjarkarey is mainly vested in the Cainite hirðmen, the blood-thralls are the eyes and fists of the Queen's rule. The more junior ones patrol regularly, checking in on each and every farmstead within the Bjarkarey demesne. All homes on the island itself see a hirðman visit every week or so. The town itself, and those farms belonging to the hirð, see many of the more senior blood-thralls as well. These are vicious and brutal warriors of inhuman physical ability and a violent temperament, and they are often drunk. The mortals of Bjarkarey know to stand well clear of weapon range when a senior hirðman walks by — to do any less is to invite an attack. Some respect and admire these awesome figures, but most see them with resignation and resentment. There's no use getting angry — nothing can be done.

Fortunately for these people, Valborg is disinterested in quelling grumbling and discontent. So long as one makes at least the halfhearted appearance of following the old ways, worshipping Thor and the Æsir, and disliking King Hákon, she simply ignores sedition. So long as they are prepared for the hirð's inspections, and otherwise stay clear of Valborg's blood-thralls, most can go about their business freely. The Queen's shadow is dark indeed, but she has little interest in active governance beyond levying taxes and punishing the crimes she considers most severe, and even these activities bore her. Mikkel arranges the patrols and the defense of the realm, Kearte keeps tabs on potential threats, and Ásgeirr handles diplomacy with any other rulers. So long as they have nothing to report, the Queen would rather not be bored with the details.

While this state of affairs provides some small measure of freedom for the people, it also brings conquerors and adventurers to Bjarkarey, seeking to claim it in Valborg's absence, or simply to slay the old beast. Such conflicts are the main danger the mortals of Bjarkarey face — Valborg draws trouble to her, and revels in it. So long as she rules, there will never be peace.

True Companions: The Gangrel Hird

Drawing from its Viking roots, the hirð is a Clan tradition followed by more Outlaws than just Bjarkarey's ruler. It is the custom of gathering mortal followers and improving their ferocity by the gift of blood, dear to warlords and raiders of Wolf's-Head lineage. More Gangrel choose to be solitary these nights, preferring the company of perhaps an animal or two, and so the tradition seems to be fading from the world. Even now, more hirðs appear among steppe nomads, bedouins, and Europe's dwindling pagan peoples.

Three ranks are observed: kertilsveinr, hirðmen, and skutilsveinr. A kertilsvein is a warrior who has not partaken of the commander's vitae, and it is her job to hold a candle at hirð ceremonies. She is also not permitted to partake in the blót. A hirðman is a blood thrall of the commander, and has partaken in at least one proper blót. A skutilsvein is a Cainite lieutenant of the hirð's commander, and he outranks the mortal warriors. Many hirðs have no skutilsveinr, and smaller ones often make do without kertilsveinr as well.

The Gangrel hirð is bound together by the blót, where every member slashes her wrist and bleeds into a chalice. For Norse hirðs, the blood of a human sacrifice then sanctifies the chalice, and every hirðman and skutilsvein drinks a sip. Christian hirðs often replace the sacrifice with the blood of Communion instead, and other customs exist outside either faith.

All members of the hirð are bound to its skutilsveinr, though first and most strongly to its commander. Hirðmen created in such a manner display an uncanny aptitude for animals, and may always purchase Animalism as though it was a physical Discipline, regardless of their domitor's Discipline ranks.

Fossegrim

In Scandinavian waterways untouched by human civilization lurk the fossegrim, creatures appearing as nude, ethereally beautiful men playing stringed instruments such as the fiddle, lyre, or harp. Their alluring music floats through thick forests and across river valleys, luring the unwary to their pools

and waterfalls, seducing them with dance and melody. The fossegrim are fickle, deciding on the spot whether to drown the unfortunate souls or keep them for a time as favored partners or pets. Sometimes, one offers to teach a visitor to play music as sublime as his own, in exchange for favors, love, or sufficiently-enticing luxuries like fine food or wine. He can leave his watery home for a time but must return eventually, making his love affairs tragic as a matter of course.

The true nature of the fossegrim is lost to history, such that only the oldest Cainite scrolls and the longest of the koldun's memories tell their story. Long ago, one of the first koldunic sorcerers experimented with the limits of his power, bewitching a water spirit by coating the strings of his instrument with his own vitae and playing a mystical lay that compelled it to do his bidding. He forced the spirit and a human to merge painfully into a single being that he kept as a plaything. This fused being became the first fossegrim, and ever since then, they have spontaneously emerged from rivers, falls, and lakes throughout the Norse world. The lay they play tonight to lure their prey is the same one the ancient Cainite sorcerer composed.

Every fossegrim has inherited a vendetta against the koldun from the first of his kind, and knowing little of Cainite ways, he blames all Tzimisce for the atrocity. He senses the difference between a Fiend and other vampires in his vicinity. Whenever he learns one of the hated Clan is anywhere close by, he entices others to his demesne with his enchanted music to convince, coerce, or manipulate them into helping him plot the Tzimisce's downfall. Fossegrim seek out Toreador in particular as partners in crime, knowing how easy it is to gain their cooperation.

Powers and Weaknesses

- A fossegrim replenishes "blood points" by sleeping or playing music for at least six hours continuously.
- A fossegrim's performances are supernaturally compelling, drawing listeners toward him and weakening their wills. He can only use his Presence Discipline while playing a stringed instrument or dancing to music played by another.
- For every week a fossegrim is away from his native waterway — be it river, lake, pond, spring, or waterfall — he loses one point of permanent Willpower. If he drops to zero permanent Willpower this way, he dies.
- By spending at least a few hours in some form of communion with someone, the fossegrim can teach her to be a world-class performer, although he *must* accept a meaningful payment or service in exchange, beyond the communion itself. This communion could involve inflicting mental or physical anguish, sex and other pleasures, ritual worship, mutual meditation, or any other intense interaction that forges a spiritual connection between the two characters. Once completed, this unusual mentorship allows the student to immediately purchase a dot of Charisma, Empathy, Performance, or the Presence Discipline at half its normal experience cost. A character can only learn once this way from any given fossegrim.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Hearth Wisdom 2, Legerdemain 2, Occult 2, Performance 5, Subterfuge 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 1, Auspex 2, Potence 2, Presence 1, Spiritus 2

Road: 5, **Willpower:** 7; **Blood Pool:** 6

Gangrel Apocrypha: A Wanderer's Nocturne

My good friend,

You asked for my recounting of the events following our parting. Naturally, it is a tale full of heroism and bravery, and I fault you not for desiring the full tale told.

We left in good spirits that eve, and went our separate ways, sated and happy. You headed toward Prussia in the northwest, and I east towards the Vistula and Gdansk. I came across some bandit vermin, and all experienced great merriment! I stuck their ratty faces on poles, and held a puppet show for the next travelers, who turned out to be a group of monks. They seemed shocked, but one laughed, so I left him alive.

I came across a village for the night. They offered to lodge me, and I agreed. It turns out they had a problem with some sort of crazed loner wolfman, but no longer! Sated on the shit-stained dogspawn's blood, I left the peasant maggots alone. They promised to honor my name. I made sure they remembered it.

In Gdansk, I hunted a giant sewer leech. The sewers smelled better than the inbred stench of shit and spew above ground, and the people weren't the only thing that smelled up there! The thing had long, uneven teeth set inside some slimy, fleshy orifice. I shoved its ugly maw full of lamp oil and a truly terrible local drink called gorzalka. It burned for hours! Truly glorious — I spent the rest of the night with some gutfaced Nosferatu, trying to see which of us could get the closest to the thing. One of us won decisively.

Further on, I slew a rogue bear menacing some travelers. The shit had spines of bone sticking out of it at every which angle, and was as tall as a house, but I prevailed, my sword slicing its head nearly off! The travelers praised me and held a celebration in my honor at the next town. I am a celebrated hero, my friend! I got drunk on poisoned vitae and defaced some graves, but nobody saw me. I repaired what damage I could, of course, being a pious and humble man, but it was too great. Ah, no doubt they will blame it on the bear — it must have come through here before. Besides, you are supposed to respect the dead, are you not? And, if anyone had complained, that would have been downright disrespectful!

Heading through the forest, I found myself waylaid. Christ's teetes, it seems nobody can do anything well these days, but this lowlife set a proper ambush! I won, of course, but these fought like no mortal men, and a sip of their blood told me why — I tasted Cainite vitae in their vein. Some shitstain actually wasted drops of their own blood on these worms, and had the gall to try and ambush me. Me — the great chevalier Sir Thibault d'Armagnac! Well, it seems the ghouls were attempting revenge for the bear's death. Some twisted Tzimisce dung fly held it as a pet! The Tzimisce paid, of course — and it turned out she was above me on the ladder to the First Corpsesucker! Praise God and me, I have ascended!

It seems these pseudo-vampires come in neat rows. How very convenient. The next one, though, was far more accommodating. He thanked me for destroying his rival and asked me to perform another service. I am hardly one to sneer at mercenary work — 'tis beneath me, true, but I can simply lean over somewhat — and the job seems fairly facile. To slay another Tzimisce! And so to the battlefield I go, to engage in the sublime art of combat.

Ah, a glorious battle! The shitworm sneered and postured, so I lit his manorhouse on fire. I have trained to resist the terror, and he had not. He rushed for the exit, so I kicked his feet out from under him, and he fell headfirst into the fire. How I laughed as I strode away from the inferno. The pay-worm was good for

his word, as well, and rendered the agreed-upon reward unto me. It seems these Tzimisce, may God shit upon their souls and cut their toes off, are good for something after all.

I arrived at my father's estate, and found him holding court. Naturally, he had not changed at all. He remained insistent that I marry and squeeze out larvae for the good of the house. How horrifically revolting! I corrected him decisively by pulling off my britches. Hah! He looked as though small imps were ensconced in his skull, forcefully pushing his eyeballs out! I danced a little dance, swinging my manhood about proudly and singing a bawdy song that I once learned from a demure little nun with the Devil's own sense of humor. My mother pursed her mouth in bemusement, but deep down, I think she approved of my élan.

And of course, my father chose just this moment to sip his wine. The assassin was well worth her money. The physician declared his heart had given out from the shock. Thank Maria and the One who fucked her that my father placed wealth above health, and never hired a Moorish doctor! I put on my most somber demeanor, and voiced my sincere condolences to my mother. Then, I pulled my britches back on and fled before I could be declared heir to father's estate. Not that it was likely, but I find it wise to exercise caution, and it would be a shame to deprive the world of the amazing knight-errant I am.

The aforementioned Tzimisce told me of a Roman ruin, containing some manner of fell beast ripe for slaying. The rubble town smelled like Satan's anus during a particularly bad bout of dysentery. I came across the beast itself wallowing in a pile of bones, interspersed with wood and decayed leaves in a particularly sad display of poverty. It was gigantic! A pustulent sac of tumors and despair, perched atop six fluid-bloated, stubby legs and crowned by four bent, twisted, batlike wings — the very picture of majestic beauty!

Oddly enough, the beast's roar was just as I had always fancied a dragon's call ought to sound. As it spotted me, it roused itself to instant life, and I was astonished that a creature so sickly and ungainly could muster up such speed and grace! It spat its vile concoction towards me. Only my great skill and alacrity allowed me to evade, and grateful I will forever remain, as the piss burned like Greek fire wherever it struck. The Beast inside reeled, and the dragon took flight before I could wrestle my inner demons into submission.

I scrounged up two fairly-fresh heads from the dragon's victims, and when the dragon next struck, I gave the monkfucker two new friends — straight upon the mandibles, thus stymying the flow of fire. I took a moment to laugh — so much more the fool, then, when the dragon's tail whipped out and embedded a sharp, dry vertebra in my gut. No knight is perfect, my friend!

The dragon had now made me angry — a fatal mistake! I leapt upon it, snarling, abandoning my sword and baring claws! I shredded my way into its pus-ridden sac of a body, and dug my way in to its very core, which I then cut loose and brought outside. The beast died looking upon its own heart. The dragon's blood tasted of tar and vomit and curiously sweet spiced apples. It was revolting, but I drank it all, and feasted upon its heart.

And now, my friend, you have heard the tale. Tell it to your fellow nobles, your servants, your scum. Retell it as your own, and embellish it, for it is our way. I dearly look forward to hearing your own version by return, so I may add to it further!

Yours truly,
Sir Thibault d'Armagnac,
Knight-Errant
Dragonslayer

Perils of the Journey

Gangrel are the Outlaws, and they wander. A Toreador court darling or Nosferatu plague doctor shudders in horror as the city walls end and the featureless void of the wilderness takes hold. They know the Gangrel rove, but they imagine little — Gangrel hide, Gangrel feed, and Gangrel prowl. Yet, there is more to the Clan. The Gangrel see things other Cainites can scarcely imagine. The road offers much, but the dangers are grave.

Bandits are the most obvious of hazards on the roads across Europe and farther still. Gangrel guides and travelers never underestimate them. Most bandits are veterans of any of 100 wars, and not simple peasant rabble. Some Gangrel choose to rule them. The Gangrel of the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross and the Voivodate often form their hirð with bandits, following in Attila's footsteps with disparate armies spread across entire nations.

Animals seem natural bedfellows to the Gangrel, due to their Blood-borne powers. A sage Outlaw advises his fledgling brethren to not be deceived on such matters: the deepest forests and deserts hold animals beyond definition, manipulation, or control. Sometimes, the beasts of the land will stop and stare, all at once. If this happens, a Gangrel finds shelter. It is rare, but if a vampire is unlucky, these beasts attack with savagery and no regard for their own health. They will be cunning, using stratagems, and then, suddenly...they simply return to normal. Wherever a wise Gangrel takes shelter, she makes sure to leave a faithful hound outside — she will not be untouched by the madness, and may act as an alarm before a horde of beasts attacks.

Monsters are not mere creatures of myth and legend. Many vampires see only two kinds of monsters: the kine and the Cainite. Some know of the demons, as well. Gangrel lore tells of protean forces, however. These remnants of ancient times stalk the lands. Unlike other Clans, the Gangrel periodically send out emissaries and offer to meet with these fae creatures, shapeshifters, and will-workers, though they are careful — some creatures of the darkness are far more terrible than the Gangrel. The Clan places great honor and reward on the vampire who slays a truly ancient monster, and drinks of their power or wisdom. Thus, a dichotomy exists within the Clan: a sect within the Gangrel known as the Monstrous Few, based primarily in the Italian city-states, attempts to parlay with these creatures, making common accord in the night. Another group, who name themselves the Honorborn, advocates killing every monster, carrying trophies to mark their successes, and sharing tales of their adventures. The Honorborn exist across the Kingdoms of Poland and Hungary, though they spread far and supposedly act as guardians to the waning Telyavelic Tremere.

The Clans of Caine offer both danger and opportunity to wanderers. Most of the other Clans dwell in places where they feel the influence of many other Cainites, finding succor in the company of fellow Damned. The Gangrel travel to the small and isolated places, where one single Outlaw is a power with which to be reckoned. The Gangrel have a code: Weigh the risk and the reward before staking a claim or disappearing into the night. Allowing oneself to be pulled into the games of rural vampire lords brings risk, but the rewards can be quite worthwhile. Unlike their sedentary cousins, they can simply leave with their spoils when the time is right, and let the lordlings suffer the consequences. Gangrel do not hesitate to act as mercenaries if they have ambitions or desires to fulfill. Vampires among the Ravnos and Lhiannan commonly join the Gangrel in these roving bands of Cainite mercenaries, putting aside blood feuds for the chance to profit. Mercenary groups such as the Shieldless — a coterie holding over a score of vampires hailing from the so-called Low Clans — rides across the Courts of Love and Sea of Shadows working for the highest bidder, making their number as rich as any stagnant Prince.

Fellow Gangrel are among the greatest threats a wanderer might face. The Outlaws are of a kind. That should be all the warning a Gangrel needs. Though they are kindred, they are monsters. Hunters. They share tales and revelries freely, but always remember that dogs kill each other on occasion. It is in their nature. Gangrel elders impart a piece of advice to every childe upon Embrace: Be wary of betrayal, never turn your back unless you wish to lure a Clanmate into attacking, and always have an escape route.

Malkavian Apocrypha: A Soul to Bleed

Dear childe,

Sloth is your guide, and will lead you into damnation lest you slay him. Simple tasks: Change the path of the world and bring the moon to Earth, but you refuse. Why? Kill him, my childe. The hooves, I hear them thunder, and their names are known to you. Kill Sloth, the archbishop incumbent, and put a torch to his pyre, that fires come swift and burn swift. Bid them speedy passage, and mark the falling of the star, ere the sky stands empty. Do not trust in carpenters or masons, my childe, brightly lit behind veils. Their table holds seats for 12 kings, and the last seat is Caine's.

The 13 sons of 13 sons will come of age, and sunrise will catch sunset. The stars turn red once, twice, thrice, and the wagoner claims his prize. Thistles grow, one patch wild and one well-kept, in soil made fertile by ash. Kill the messenger, my childe, or all this will come to pass. And watch yourself ever for rats — you know how ill they fare by you.

Ever yours devotedly,

Saint Thomas Aquinas circum deo inter viis

Dear sire,

As always, your wisdom is both profound and cryptic, but I have proceeded to Tarnovo as I believe you desire. The bishop is here, indeed, lodged in the Patriarchal Cathedral as an honored guest of Patriarch Joachim. A touching example of the schism being bridged, to be sure. I intend to keep watchful eyes trained on the cathedral — the bishop must eventually emerge, and I may strike then.

O, woe to the world! I stalked the bishop tonight with lethal intent, and then he entered a brothel! A man of God, abandoning his faith and his flock in the embrace of simple whores — indeed, his very soul. Such piety, such virtue as was once known to humankind is now surely lost.

It is now with regret I pick this letter up and realize I have spent a month in sorrowful reverie between writing each paragraph. Worthless creature! I humbly prostrate myself in apology to you, dear sire, for your being saddled with such a useless and pathetic excuse for a childe. The bishop set out over a week ago, and I know not where.

I shall attend confession at the earliest opportunity, to scourge the weakness from my soul.

Yours truly,

Maria v. H.

Dear childe,

The hourglass has run its course. Your failure is perplexing and vexatious, but expected. The titan eagle shall pluck out your eyes, but that must wait. Now you must travel to the river of pharaohs, and there break the pyramid ere the Typhonic beast can turn it to its wicked ways. Should you fail, this ancient power shall reveal to the serpent everything. Its gaze shall pierce all veils, and creation shall crack and fall. Curse those princes of old and this unholy relic.

Your confession is well advisable, but do not confess to your nature. I grow weary of slaying priests.

Yours in haste,

Saint Thomas Aquinas circum deo inter viis

The Mirror Crack'd

Though the madhouse and its howling inmates is an iconic image, it remains a thing of the distant future in the Dark Medieval world. Disease of the mind is a strange concept, and alien to the cultures of this era. Instead, there is insanity — and while every Malkavian suffers from some form of mental illness, not all are considered insane.

The Embrace of Malkav crashes into the mortal soul as a storm batters the elm. The mind buckles and warps under the onslaught. From this crucible, a Seer emerges — bent, or broken. While the Clan's most esteemed scholars have a view of insanity centuries ahead of their time, those hallowed few are alone. The vampire who arises where the human died will certainly know nothing of his new state...or far too much.

The Bent

For each deadly sin, there is a Malkavian who represents it. The very sin of sloth is called dejection in some Orthodox writings, and one who suffers from depression will certainly be judged slothful rather than ill. When a neonate emerges and finds his new mind inextricably tied to one of these sins, he will regard himself as wicked or cursed. While other vampires will see in him the mark of Malkav, they too will consider him stained with wickedness, not illness. Kine are less merciful yet — knowing nothing of the curses of Caine, they will see sin without reason.

This state is a mixed blessing. Most Cassandras of any notable station come from these ranks — they are the ones who most readily accept the premises of their surroundings, and they are the ones who seem most rational. Some believe such Seers only descend from those Malkavians among the Coronati — Malkav's childer who sucked vitae from the earth surrounding where Malkav was once struck down by Set — in order to preserve him and spread his madness. But these Coronati childer are the sinful, and theirs is scorn to reap. Among Cainites, the Coronati childer are often compared with the Nosferatu. Their minds are not sick, but twisted and warped into unholy patterns. Their souls carry the ugliness inside that the Nosferatu carry openly. Sin and pain stain their souls, whether they suffer uncontrollable bouts of rage or megalomania, or obsessively arrange their possessions just so. They manipulate the madness in others, spreading insanity like a plague.

Even those whose predilections do not run towards true sin will face the same stigma among vampires — if a Childe of Malkav does not display the touch of true madness, then her peers consider her one of the sinful.

The Broken

Those who bend with the storm hold uncanny insights. It is the broken who give the Clan its reputation.

Mad prophets rambling somewhere between truth and delusion; their reality has shattered, and in its place they see something else. Something similar to what they once saw, perhaps, or far removed indeed, but always twisted. The mirror is cracked, but the Childe of Malkav sees an unbroken whole. They will see great significance in minor coincidences and work out elaborate theories to explain them. And sometimes, these theories are right.

Mystics afford this sort of madness importance in the Middle Ages. Madmen are not simply mad, but *touched*, their minds influenced by angels, demons, or those once-angels who chose to side with neither Lucifer nor God: the fae. Or perhaps they bear the mark of witchcraft, whether the practice itself or a malign witch's curse. They are not so much

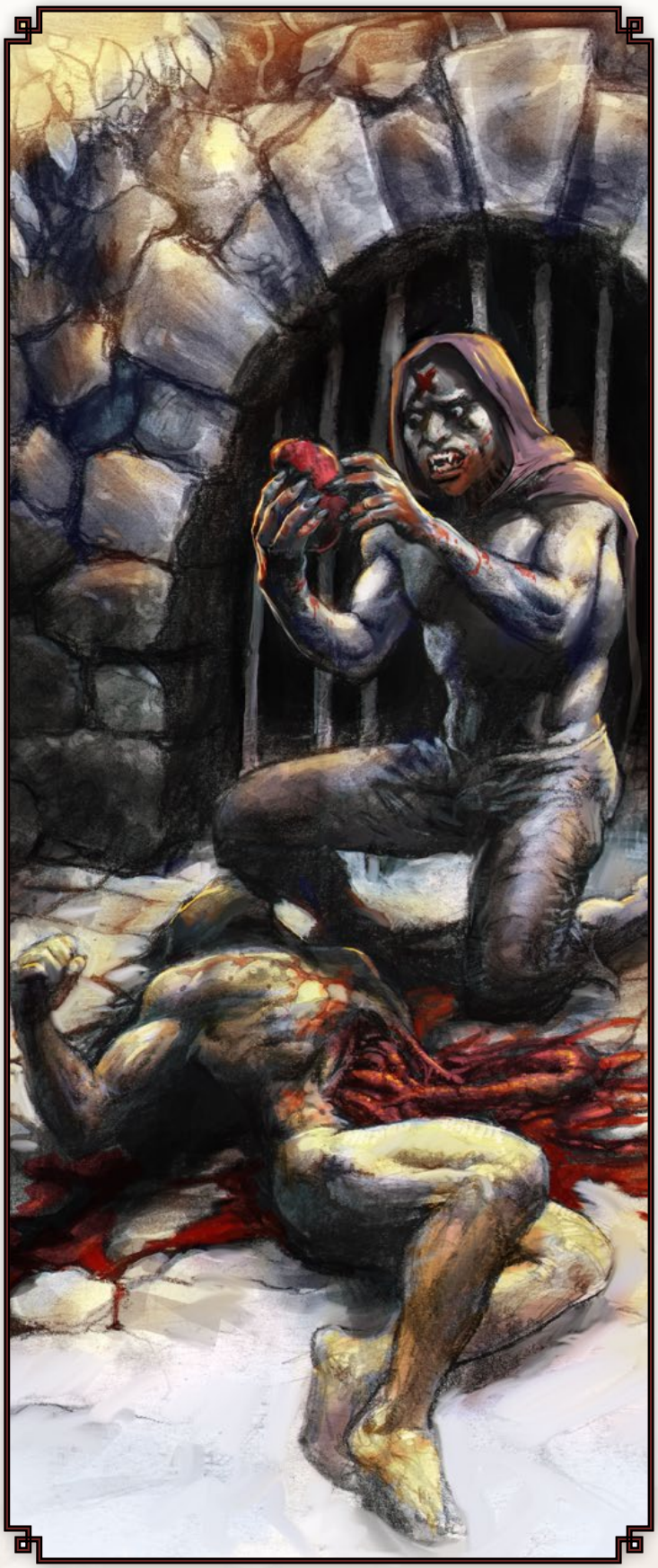
ill as transcendent, their minds seeing the world in two ways at once. They are prophets and warlocks, saints and devils, and they are greatly feared, more so if they seem perfectly rational at the surface.

These charmed souls find awe and fear in equal measure among the sane. They are divine, or demonic, and the difference is so hard to tell. They may suffer upon an Inquisitor's rack or be considered a holy outcast, or both. They will face violence, and find followers who find marvels in the half-coherent philosophies of Malkavians. It is the duality of their lessons that mark the Clan as Seers, and it is the same duality cursing them to be also Cassandras. Others easily dismiss their lessons as empty delusions when they are disagreeable, because most of their ideas *are* empty delusions. But only most — and when the Children of Malkav are right, that is when the wise Cainite trembles.

Whether seemingly touched by angels or demons or something else, the Church objects. An unsanctioned prophet is a heresiarch, spreading the seeds of foul lies, and heresy is a grave threat indeed. Much discontent exists regarding the Church's wealth and power. Indeed, many among the Inquisition root out heresy not to hunt the spawn of Satan, but to preserve their own influence. The simple shape of a cup, to those touched by the beyond, contains truths marking them for death by the powers that be. The broken are doubly hunted by the Church — once for the vampire, and once for the mortal it pretends to be.

This does not stop the common folk from showing reverence when they believe it due. For the uninitiated and illiterate, it is difficult to discern between the religious authority that flows from the Church and that which does not. Many such Malkavians find themselves in the center of a cult, whether cultivated or accidental, and their ability to work miracles makes them local saints. When they bring someone back from the dead in a ritualistic blood ceremony, Malkavians find themselves revered, even if the resurrectee returns with an aversion to the sun.

Those who do not appear to be saints are the ones who face the fear and hatred of the common folk. Others pity, shun, or subject these broken Malkavians to violence. For many, the Church needs do nothing — mortals eliminate these dangerous Cassandras without its aid. Those unfortunate few who are too alien to even hide their Cainite nature need not even wait that long — their fellow vampires will handle it themselves.





CHAPTER FOUR:
THE DOMAIN OF CONSTANTINOPLE

I came seeking God. In the fading gold of the Queen of Cities, I saw only His reflection, broken into pieces. One for the Archangel, one for the Venetian, and one for me.

— Josselin the Blessed

Once, Constantinople dreamed it was Heaven. Then it fell, and imagined it was Hell. Tonight, it wakes up and takes its place beside its earthly brethren. Cainites who spent centuries carried on the wings of Michael the Patriarch's daydream recover now from their crash landing and look for a future amidst the rubble.

The city — *the* city, to so many — toils under Prince Alfonzo's iron fist by night, but wonders and terrors escape through the cracks between his fingers. A Christian heart pumps tainted dogma through its veins while its byways play host to a myriad of other faiths. It stands as the last intoxicating bastion of lost antiquity to Western Europeans, an opulent prize to be won for the Eastern Mongols, and the sleeping promise of a return to paradise for the *Romaioi* who call it home.

The Latin Empire occupies Constantinople's golden throne, but its pockets are emptying and Emperor Baldwin II pawns everything from sacred relics to his own son to keep would-be invaders at bay. Ironically, the Fourth Crusade that ripped the city from the Greeks' cold dead hands came to fill its coffers, but those coffers sailed back to the Doge of Venice. Ancient artworks, marvels of architecture and sculpture, and even holy sites — many of which were brought originally from Rome — were looted, despoiled, or given away in the wake of the crusade. The Empire cannibalizes lesser wonders to restore greater ones, lacking the resources to rebuild properly after fire, ruin, and four decades of decline.

For the childer of Caine, two Constantinoples rise behind nigh-impregnable walls. The fabled wonderland that bestows riches, influence, and mystical might upon the worthy is the Megalopolis of the Dream, a flame, the embers of which refuse to fully die. But the sobering reality is that of a decadent fallen utopia where blood and sharks mingle in the water and faith struggles for expression. Its Prince jealously guards his domain against hidden daggers within the city's walls and brandished swords without. The war drums of the conquering Anda, the whispers of the united Nosferatu, and the righteous war cries of the Nicaeans all haunt Alfonzo's dreams when the sun shines. By night, the city's Cainites quarrel and kill over meager pickings — when the crusaders came, swaths of the population died, fled, or were exiled, and more continue to seek greener pastures all the time. The influx of foreign vampires aiming to capitalize on New Rome's weakness exacerbates conflicts over blood and power.

Despite its troubles, Constantinople remains the coveted, awesome epicenter of East and West. It captures the imaginations of mortals and Cainites everywhere. *Nova Roma's* vibrant history and divine countenance still draw countless travelers and pilgrims. Its conquered citizens yet carry pride in their peerless home, knowing God lives there with them. Even in decline, this dizzying height of culture, commerce, and religion endures as a gleaming capital of Christendom, and though its shadows grow long, its siren call still echoes near and far.

A City of Seekers

Prince Alfonzo — (Seventh Generation Lasombra) Once instrumental in bringing down the Hellenic old guard, Alfonzo secured control of the city through intimidation and spectacular intrigue, and asserted it as a gesture of defiance against his sire in Venice. Now, bereft of the allies upon whose backs (and coin) he built his victory, he clings to his power with all the exigency of a cornered animal, playing the tyrant to hide his fears. The tighter he clutches his worldly authority, the more voracious his unruly Beast becomes.

Malachite, the Rock of Constantinople — (Seventh Generation Nosferatu) Malachite leads his hidden followers in the long game to resurrect the Dream that birthed the city's legend. As Michael's last true faithful, the enigmatic but earnest Nosferatu keeps a close watch on every Cainite that crosses through the Golden Gate. His subtle nudging among the vampiric rank and file gradually marks the path toward a new Dream to honor the old.

Scholarch Elaiodora Sophida — (Ninth Generation Tzimisce) As the self-styled inheritor of the Obertus legacy in New Rome, Elaiodora eschewed the exodus of her Clan to pursue her conviction that the Queen of Cities is the rightful heart of all knowledge. She stalks and recruits scholarly kine alongside her Salubri lover, seeking a cadre of worthy childer to help rebuild the Library of the Forgotten as students and masters in her Akademia. She cares not whose ghouls she plunders in the process of pursuing this, her own image of the Dream.

Bishop Paul Bathalos — (Fifth Generation Toreador) In nights past, Paul sacrificed his treasured beauty to preserve the divinity he believed Michael the Patriarch held within, denying them both a love that neither realized was predicated upon a fantasy. Now he leads his fellow grieving Toreador in melancholic worship of the Archangel, perceived by these deluded devotees as a celestial martyr who gave up his earthly seat in exchange for the glories of Heaven and paved the way for them to follow.

Josselin the Blessed — (Tenth Generation Ventrue) The Frankish Josselin skirts the edges of heresy, gathering a blood cult of mortals and vampires alike to worship him as a risen saint and professing Christian piety. Having arrived with the Fourth Crusade and watched his faith crumble with the sacking of the city, Josselin envies the awe he sees still accorded the destroyed Patriarch by the Romaioi and has stepped into a maelstrom of floundering faith to claim his share.

Gabriella of Genoa — (Eighth Generation Lasombra) Ever the thorn in Alfonzo's side, Gabriella employs a risky gambit against her fellow Lasombra, asserting her influence over the mortal emperor and his court from the shadows. Baldwin II proves a pathetic excuse for a ruler, but Gabriella hopes she can mold him from hopeless liability to pliable asset. Together with her loyal lieutenants, she combs the Cainite population for any who might prove useful in her bid to seize the princedom, stabilize the city, and exact vengeance.

The Dream of the Trinity

I was not here when the ancients came with their Dream. I think it not irony, but pointed message, that the one they call Constantine the Great saw his vision of the holy city he would build in the burning sun. What Dream of the Damned could survive, set upon such a vision? That it would end in flames seems obvious to me. But some seek it still, like penitents calling for the Revelation to bring them salvation. Thus did the childer of Caine stand behind the Eastern empire of New Rome. Though their cousins in the West fell to barbarian wars, Byzantium took up the torch.

I was not here when the one they call Patriarch, radiant Father, and Michael the Archangel, called his Council to set the three Clans above all others: Toreador, Ventrue, Tzimisce. I never saw him or his lovers, the pragmatic Antonius, the uncanny Dracon — Methuselahs all. To hear the tales, this Trinity was as a black mirror held to Heaven. They built a paradise on Earth! At least, so say the Greeks. Certainly, one cannot deny the symbiosis they enjoyed with the kine as their secret keepers. Artisan muses fostered unparalleled arts and culture, while their Lasombra and Tzimisce allies shepherded mortal faith beyond mere words. Under the Ventrue and their Brujah scions, imperial law and vast wealth far surpassed anything Constantinople's peers could hope to achieve. But do you believe a society molded by our kind was free of corruption and strife? Ah, good, you are not as witless as you look.

I was not here when, at the turn of this century, omens of doom came to pass one by one. Antonius, betrayed and destroyed. The Dracon, vanished forever. And Michael himself, madder than a Cassandra and dragging all his Toreador down with him, until someone visited upon him the Amaranth. Then came the machinations of the Venetian, Alfonzo, eroding the purity of faith the Romaioi prized. Then came the Fourth Crusade from Europe, and the city burned. The Greeks would have you believe it was all for gold, but if you ask the Franks, it was just as much a release of frustrations at the Latin nobles treating their holy pilgrimage as a plaything. They all grasp at what was lost in shock and despair, and blame the other side. The Hellenes may have lost a Dream, but the crusaders lost their homes and livelihoods to a fool's errand. Alas, nothing is forever.



I was not here when the Nosferatu leader Malachite, disciple of Michael, embarked upon his quest to find the Dracon and restore the Dream. I have met him though, and in his eyes I see true resolve such as one rarely sees among the Damned. Even now, after his visions and portents brought him nothing but a riddle, he sifts through the dust for the 1,000 fragments of his shattered Dream.

Now, I am here. The Queen of Cities and I, we are as sisters. I, too, must leave the past behind and find a way to start over. I am Rakhama of the Salubri. Together we step into a night darker than any we have yet known.

Doctrine, Dogma, Doubt

When Constantine I abandoned Rome to found a new capital for his empire, he claimed the Christian God guided him to build at ancient Byzantium. Tales say he walked with an angel to mark the boundaries of its first walls, and even now some claim that those who circumscribe the old city along the same route and pay the proper devotions may receive an angelic visitation. Devout Toreador say that Constantine's companion was Michael the Archangel himself. As the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, Constantine raised a Megalopolis to glorify the Lord and it became the beating heart of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Frankish emperors and Latin patriarchs brought their Western Catholicism and now the two sects coexist uneasily, with the conquerors occasionally making halfhearted efforts to subdue the stubborn *Romaioi*. Western vampires who pilgrimage to the city vie constantly with the native Cainites to control the doctrine of the churches and monasteries that litter the seven hills.

Faded Gold

Despite their refusal to submit to the Catholics, the Greeks' faith wavers. The holy city endured fellow Christians murdering, pillaging, and profaning their way into its most sacred places, ignoring the crucifix banners it hung over the walls to show its solidarity and plead for mercy. The pope excommunicated the Latin crusaders for these sins, but as soon as they took power he welcomed them back to the fold, further inflaming the conflict between the Eastern and Western churches. The Hellenes believe the Virgin Mary herself

protected the city from other invaders with miracles; why, then, did she abandon them to the Latins? Has God, they wonder, turned His back on His chosen people to favor the papacy instead? Two score years of excess and ruin have only intensified their resentment, tainting the city's Christianity with bad blood and turning many to seek a truer expression of their religion. Opportunistic Cainites take advantage of this desperate need for untarnished faith, dangling bloodborne devotion before the kine like a Rapture. They push mortal fervor in whatever direction they choose.

A gap wants filling in the city's numerous Orthodox monastic orders. The monks of New Rome have long been scribes, historians, ascetics, and artists. They have championed learning and iconography throughout the centuries. In nights past, the eremites of Constantinople belonged to the Obertus Tzimisce, who avidly took up their causes. When the Fourth Crusade struck, the Obertus packed up and left for their ancestral homeland. The mortal monastics remaining suffered a loss of direction they couldn't fully explain, as many of their leaders were ghouls who departed with their masters. For now they follow tradition with no real agenda. They were drawn into eerie rites of scarification and self-torture as the practice of ritual Vicissitude grew among the Tzimisce, and though the vampires have gone, those rites remain. Thus far, the major players largely ignore them, as they pose no immediate threat, but the Cainite who claims their pens gains control of the city's primary source of knowledge and education, potentially exerting a great deal of influence — not to mention the lingering fragments of Obertus secrets she can glean from unknowing kine.

Beyond the Cross

In the several centuries prior to the *Frankokratia*, or "rule of the Franks," the Eastern Church was relatively tolerant of other religions within Constantinople's walls. All that changed when the Latins took over. Jewish persecution runs rampant and the city's two mosques lie in ruins. Pagan worshippers grieve for the wanton destruction of their gods' statues during the sack of the city and retreat further into its hidden pockets as fragmented mystery cults. Once the head of the erstwhile Cainite Heresy in the city, Prince Alfonzo has long earned the animosity of *every* religious group; he plays catch up now by siding with the winners and hoping to earn their grudging support. He takes his cues from the Church and cracks down on the open practice of non-Christian faiths outside designated districts, capturing anyone caught in the act and forcing them to play prey to his nightly blood hunts — not because he holds any faith of his own, but because he fears that some self-proclaimed Cainite champion will organize these so-called heretics and make a play for his base of power.

Under East Roman rule, Muslim prisoners of intermittent wars with the Seljuk Turks were allowed to worship in a makeshift mosque, and while lowborn prisoners were put to work as slaves, aristocratic ones were treated like imperial guests. Textile merchants from Islamic lands kept their own mosque in the *Mitaton*, a richly-appointed house of commerce sidled up against the shore of the Golden Horn, as their coveted wares earned them respect. Muslim visitors to the city now are few, thanks to the Mongol riders' defeat of the Seljuks just last year, but refugees from the petty warlords that now squabble over Anatolia arrive now and then.

Among the refugees is newcomer Bakhtyar, an Assamite vizier who claims the rubble of the *Mitaton* as his haven. There, he operates a mosque and infirmary with a staff of ghouls to tend the sick, lead calls to prayer, and safeguard the kine from the predations of Latin and Hellenic vampires. He demands no gold from patients or worshippers, instead claiming his due in blood freely given. He takes his duty to protect mortals deadly seriously, and uses his own vitae to nurse to health those whom ordinary medicine can't save. Attendance at daily prayers and quiet conversions to Islam steadily grow as a result. Any who threaten the safety of his sanctuary face the punishment of death — or diablerie — but the larger his community grows, the more likely it is to attract the wrong attention.

Cainite Cults

A good number of Constantinople's vampires are Christians of one stripe or another, but for many of the *Romaioi*, the Trinity's Dream supplanted true Christianity long ago and haunts their prayers still. Every nook and cranny hidden from the light hosts another cult dedicated to some obscure aspect or interpretation of the Dream. It was always nebulous, moreso the farther from Michael's inner circle a Cainite languished, and was only ever defined in the context of the Three themselves. Without them, everybody and their grandsires have their own competing ideas of what the Dream really meant. Malachite and his Nosferatu are widely recognized as harboring the most authentic flavor, but Cainites care less for authenticity than for what the Dream represents to them personally.

The Cult of the Archangel

The Cult of the Archangel is also known colloquially (and derogatorily) as the Martyrs or, to a chosen few, the Nephilim. In the Patriarch's latter nights, his torpid delusions touched the mind of every Toreador in the city, convincing them he was truly the Archangel Michael. Their worship of him overpowered civic duties, creative endeavors, blood bonds — everything. His Final Death hasn't cured them of their devotion, just turned it to a new purpose. Two of his childer, Paul Bathalos and Pakourianis the Dove, lead

the remaining Michaelite Toreador in a fervent quest to find his divinity reborn into a new Cainite prophet to lead them back to the Archangel's side in Heaven. They seek their prophet by intercepting every Aesthete entering the city and performing blood experiments to gauge her soul's likeness to that of their Martyr.

Josselin the Blessed

For those vampires who came to the Queen of Cities more recently, the temptation to step into the void of Michael's destruction and gather cults of personality wearing the trappings of mortal religion is strong. Few can match the Methuselah's talent for appearing truly divine, but blood and obsession substitute well enough. The most successful and notorious of these selfmade idols is Josselin the Blessed.

Once, a Frankish second son of noble birth coveted his elder brother's inheritance and plotted murder. The plot failed, but the marquis' advisor was a Ventrue who saw potential in the frustrated young man and Embraced him. Josselin of Touraine devoutly believed God punished him with the curse of Caine for trying to kill his brother, and vowed to atone. The neonate joined the Fourth Crusade in Venice and made the sea voyage to Constantinople cooped up in a ship's hold. Watching the kine despoil and burn Christendom's greatest treasure poisoned his faith — how could true Christians act thus, out of base greed? He agonized over the answer until the papacy's reversal of its excommunication order for the Latins made it clear to him: religion was naught but a lie, a tool at the bidding of humanity's narcissism.

Josselin mingled with the *Romaioi,* learning about the Dream and the Patriarch. The veneration in their eyes as they spoke of Michael amazed him. Here was a vampire turned to dust, who hadn't been active in over 300 years, and they still adored him! From then on he fashioned himself as Josselin the Blessed. His blood cult is predicated upon the idea that he achieved consecration, then returned from death to guide the flock as an unliving saint. He enacts twisted versions of the Catholic sacraments, presiding over a Eucharist that offers his own vitae in lieu of wine and using his Disciplines to wring awe and fear from penitents. He invites mortal sinners to "make confession" by allowing vampires to drink from them in ritual blood orgies. Then, the vampiric sinners fast in chains under his chapel to repent. He pushes the boundaries on perversions of liturgy ever further to see how far he can warp their faith and still receive their worship. Alfonzo knows about the Ventrue's blasphemy, but has no official route to declaiming it since technically the cultists are Christians. The Lasombra worries about suffering the wrath of the Frank's rabid devotees, were he to interfere unofficially, but he'd take the opportunity to use others with an interest in liberating them if presented.

A War on All Fronts

For all its ragged edges and abandoned districts, *Nova Roma* still commands the fascination of the dark medieval world. Its worldly advantages are plain: whoever controls Constantinople controls the bulk of trade and travel between East and West. Its imposing fortified walls, moat, and secure harbor form a defensive front that boasts the ingenuity of antiquity and has only been breached once — and that through the failings of untested soldiers more than stone and sea. Beyond these, the city occupies a place of reverence for all of Christendom, and a place of enticing mystery for Cainites consumed with curiosity and desire. The thought of throwing open the gates and laying bare all that three powerful Methuselahs had kept to themselves for so long is hard to ignore.

A pall of dread hangs heavy over the mortal populace. Only 40 years have passed since the Latins brutally sacked the city, and everyone can read the writing on the wall: the conquerors hold their prize by the skin of their teeth. People still remember sword and flame, screams and the trampling hooves of horses. They remember the invaders melting sacred relics down for coin and performing lewd acts on the altar of the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia. None among the ordinary citizens wants war to come again, but with all the enemies the Latins have made, they fear its inevitability.

The Prince and the Paupers

The city's first Prince has seen his victory tempered with paranoia, as major players on all sides watch him thirstily for any sign of weakness. The new law of the land is every vampire for herself — gone are the nights when belonging to the right Clan meant the protection of the Legacy of Ashes, which prohibited the destruction of a family member unless the Council condoned it. Tonight, only the Nosferatu claim any sense of fellowship.

Alfonzo responds to these stresses with despotism. He chooses his inner circle with a suspicious eye and keeps it small, preparing contingencies to pit them against each other at the slightest hint of treachery. He plants ghouls throughout the imperial army, influencing its movements and shoring it up for the inevitable wars that threaten the Empire's doorstep. He passes strict laws that micromanage restrictions on Cainite behavior within the walls and heavily police who may enter and leave — though keeping his middle management sparse has hurt his effectiveness with such tyranny. He imposes stringent

zoning boundaries for vampires and their agents, pressuring various groups to keep to themselves.

Any Cainite violating Alfonzo's rules is arrested and dragged to the dungeons under his mansion to suffer punishments and indignities suited to his cruel, moody tastes. When his agents catch mortal servants breaking his laws, he hunts them — along with any other kine he chooses — for sport at midnight blood feasts, where sadistic courtiers drink them dry. These degenerate affairs, dressed up in the accoutrements of nobility, are traditional for the Venetian Prince, but as the anxieties of his precarious situation press down upon him, his fetes grow more self-indulgent by the night. His Beast becomes harder to appease with each hunt he leads, and some whisper that he's already cracked, ready to succumb entirely to it at the slightest provocation. Rumors fly with the names of important vampires he's said to have murdered in a frenzy, though so far no one has proven anything.

One of his courtiers, the Lasombra Matteo, seeks aid in doing something about it. As a mortal, Matteo was a loyal ghoul in Alfonzo's employ. Another Magister eventually Embraced him in the plot that led to Alfonzo's princedom. When his sire left the city, Matteo chose to remain as one of the Prince's most trusted lieutenants, and though he'd follow Alfonzo to the ends of the Earth, he sees a bloodbath on the horizon if current trends continue. Among other concerns, Alfonzo's excesses strain relations with the papacy, which has already sent several Inquisition agents to investigate the bizarre murders and copious reports of missing people. Matteo puts out feelers for any who can propose a better solution than a stake through the Prince's heart.

Lasombra of Venice

Originally, Alfonzo came to Constantinople on the orders of his sire Narses, representing the interests of Venetian vampires and the Cainite Heresy both. Narses influenced the Fourth Crusade's path to land on the shores of the Bosporus, jealous of the Dream and its influence over the collective Cainite imagination. When Alfonzo declared himself Prince after the crusaders' success, he acted against his sire's plans, abandoning the Heresy he didn't believe in and ceasing all tithes back to his Clan. Another childe of Narses, Guilelmo Aliprando, committed diablerie on their shared sire a few decades ago and took his place as the Prince of Venice. He immediately initiated maneuvers to take control of Constantinople away from Alfonzo, viewing it as rightfully his. At first, Alfonzo's arrogance moved him to send his broodmate's ghoul diplomats back in pieces. Now that matters are direr, he fears that what comes across the water next will be deadlier than diplomats. Guilelmo is not above hiring vampire hunters, assassins, and saboteurs, nor has he ruled out the possibility of finding some unaffiliated coterie already in New Rome to act in his interests for a hefty reward.

The Latin Dissenter

The Magister Gabriella of Genoa has opposed Alfonzo one way or another since she arrived in Constantinople in the late 1100s. She believes in the Dream, not as the Greeks know it, but as a practical goal of restoring the city to its former prosperity and working together with the *Romaioi* in a powerful alliance. First, though, she must become Prince.

When Alfonzo began his ascent to the throne, Gabriella and her trusted lieutenants moved against him quietly, trying to outmaneuver him with subtle manipulations in his own backyard. It backfired disastrously when Alfonzo's followers captured one of her people and used him as collateral to secure Gabriella's surrender. Since then, she has watched him squander his power with disgust and has resolved to renew her efforts through loftier means this time, hungry for vengeance. Over the decades she has gained influence in the mortal emperor's court, and now her coterie advises Baldwin II on all matters of state. To stall the draining of Constantinople's treasury, she convinced Baldwin to sell his infant son Philip to merchant princes across the Sea of Marmara — or at least, so he believed. In reality, she mortgaged the child off to the Amici Noctis to be raised among the Lasombra elite and later Embraced if he proves worthy, in exchange for coin and favors. Philip's location is a secret she keeps close to her chest; if it got out, Alfonzo would retaliate through his own Clan contacts and nip her conspiracy in the bud.

Thus far, the Prince ignores the imperial court as useless, and the Genoese schemer intends to keep it that way until she's ready to strike her final blow. Baldwin is a weak and ineffectual leader, which would suit Gabriella's purposes fine if he weren't also reckless and unpredictable; as a result, too much of her energy is spent keeping him in check, and progress is sluggish. To hurry things along, she plies Cainites of other Clans with promises of positions in her court if they support her bid for the praxis, and plots a slow and agonizing end for the Prince's entire entourage to satisfy her lust for revenge. Her lieutenants worry amongst themselves that the latter takes priority over the former, as she becomes more bloodthirsty and impatient with each passing night that she remains uncrowned.

Thunder on the Steppes

Every night, it seems, a messenger brings the news: the Mongol horde has conquered another land. First the horselords came for Transoxiana and the Khwarezmid Empire. Then they came for the Rus', the Georgians, and the

Armenians. Then Hungary and Bulgaria, and finally, even Anatolia and Trebizond fell before the khans. Tonight, the Empire is nigh surrounded, and all can hear the thunder of hooves rolling on the steppes. All know that soon, the Mongols come for Constantinople.

The kine assume it's a simple matter of expansionism, but Cainites wonder what drives the Anda to risk the combined ire of Latin and Hellenic vampires of every Clan to target the Christian capital of the Eastern world. Certainly the horde has numbers and military might, but the Tatar vampires are comparatively few. Arguments among the Constantine Cainites flare over whether to help defend against the invaders or let them have the city — after all, some say, how much worse than the Venetian usurpers could the Anda be? Others insist that at least under the Latins, New Rome remains in Christian hands, and letting the Mongols in would constitute outright blasphemy. Schemes and alliances abound in every corner of the city to prepare for the arrival of the Tatars one way or another. Some hedge their bets on both sides of the question just in case.

A cadre of Frankish Cainites brings tales of a fierce mercenary queen from the island of Bjarkarey, offering her band's services as crusaders. They campaign among Alfonzo's court for support to offer her a substantial portion of their remaining riches to bring her bloodthirsty brood south and slaughter Mongols in Constantinople's defense. The Prince refuses to give such a volatile outsider a chance to threaten his position and many agree that Valborg is too dangerous to trust. Others ready their coffers anyway, considering the less numerous Swedish barbarians preferable to the horse lords. If they find emissaries to bring their offer north without Alfonzo's knowledge, the Vikings could be the spark that lights the flame of open war — and hopefully divides the Mongols' attention. If so, Valborg's supposed ally Kearte intercepts the emissaries with a counter offer: She'll convince the queen to help *Nova Roma* in exchange for their aid in double crossing Valborg afterward.

In truth, the Anda counsel their mortal siblings to ride against Constantinople for a larger prize than gold or renown. During their campaigns in the Balkans, they took prisoner one of the Obertus Tzimisce and questioned her to determine risk versus reward when it came to the Queen of Cities. They learned a rumor they — and many within the city itself — believe is true: Michael the Patriarch was not destroyed, but instead achieved Golconda, and the Trinity hid the secret of ascension in his sepulcher beneath Hagia Sophia. The Tartars became convinced the *Romaioi* encoded this secret in the complex rites the Dracon laid upon Michael's sanctuary and they resolved to claim it. The rumor spread from Noyan to Noyan and now the horde rides to unite Tengri's chosen with their ultimate destiny, and elevate the Mongol people to a new state of being.

Is It True?

The only witnesses to Michael's destruction are dead or long gone, and the only one with relatively solid evidence is Malachite, who saw the events in a vision brought on by a Cappadocian with plans of her own. It could be that Malachite is wrong and the Obertus was right. Perhaps the Trinity *did* discover the secrets of mythical Golconda and conceal them in the cryptic wards of the Patriarch's sepulcher. It's up to the Storyteller to decide which version of the tale is true for her chronicle.

In Alfonzo's mind, the Anda are the greatest external threat to his rule, but not the only one. Although the walls of New Rome repelled a siege by the allied forces of the Nicaean emperor Vatatzes and the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Asen II in 1235, Alfonzo has no illusions of security from the Greek Ventrue or the Bulgar Tzimisce, and believes both harbor designs on his princedom. He would give a great deal to any Fiends or Ambitiones willing to infiltrate his enemies' strongholds and report back on what they find. Alfonzo's coffers are lighter than they once were, but he still has plenty to offer — positions in his court, favors, and blackmail fodder on other Cainites in the city are just the tip of the iceberg.

The Meek Shall Inherit

A circuitous web of sewers, aqueducts, and Cainite-made tunnels runs beneath the city, with hidden entrances in every forgotten niche. For 400 years the Nosferatu have claimed this undercity, and few contest them for it. The subterranean territory is the one unchanged corner of Constantinople amidst the new century's upheaval. From here, Malachite directs his family of leper knights, outcasts, and Michaelite loyalists in the business of preparing future nights for the rekindling of the Dream.

Once, Malachite drank of Michael's blood and knew peace. The Final Death of the Patriarch devastated him, but he clung to hope and sought the vanished Dracon for help. At the end of his long and painful journey he found the Methuselah truly gone, and all he could show for his trouble was the Tzimisce's final message: *Everything must change.* Malachite took it to heart. The Dream could not die, he decided, as ideas do not die, but simply change form. He and his long-suffering Nosferatu play the role of the city's largest and best-hidden information brokerage.

They infiltrate every institution, every cult and company, and they listen. The monasteries are their favorite hunting grounds, but Malachite has agents everywhere: Alfonzo's court, Baldwin II's court, the military, every major religious sect, the merchant guilds, Elaiodora's *Akademia* (p. 72), everywhere. For now, the Priors trade secrets sparingly to those they judge worthy in exchange for resources the Clan needs. Occasionally, they act on their own to protect Hellenic interests, according to Malachite's vision.

The other powers of the city largely ignore the Nosferatu. Their activity is subtle enough to go unnoticed and few even know how to contact them, although most agree that the Rock of Constantinople still lurks around somewhere. He knows every Cainite who comes and goes, and his people investigate them all. If someone catches his eye who might have something to offer the Dream — or threaten it — he sends an agent to find out her intentions and whether she intends to stay. Over time, he builds a small but dedicated group of allies that will one night form the backbone of the new order. One by one they come, the forgotten and the lonely, the wanderers and the lost. Malachite welcomes any Nosferatu and other outcasts seeking haven, provided they in turn accept his Dream as their own.

Lay of the Land

Constantinople occupies a peninsula jutting into the Bosporus, the strait that separates the Western world from the Eastern and serves as a major trade route to and from the Black Sea. The city's northern shore runs along the Golden Horn, an inlet of the Bosporus, and its southern wall borders the shores of the Sea of Marmara. To the west, the city of Adrianople and the land of Thrace — once part of the Eastern Roman Empire — lie under Bulgarian control. The suburb of Galata perches just across the Golden Horn, another victim of the Fourth Crusade; its *Megalos Pyrgos*, or Great Tower, once controlled a massive chain stretching across the waterway to stop enemy ships from reaching New Rome's northern harbors, but the crusaders brought the tower down and have not restored it. Under the rubble, a powerful Cainite who made her haven within now lies torpid, awaiting the arrival of saviors who may never come.

A moat separates the great double landside battlements of the Walls of Theodosius II from the ruined Industrial Quarter that used to thrive on the outskirts of Constantinople. In that decaying neighborhood, noxious waste from



THE DOMAIN OF CONSTANTINOPLE

abandoned tanneries and smithies soaks into the land and attracts all manner of foul, unnatural creatures. The sea and land walls both are dotted with gates and military posterns, the most elaborate and celebrated of which is the Golden Gate on the land side near the Marmara shore. Some two kilometers east of these walls rises the older Wall of Constantine, and still farther east is what's left of the original walls of Byzantium. Like Rome before it, Constantinople is built atop seven hills and separated into 14 numbered districts — including Galata — as well as a few additional regions, like the Exokionion in the Lycus River valley and the area around the central Mese, or main road.

The Latin Quarter

In the nights before the Fourth Crusade, Galata and the four districts opposite it were known as the Latin Quarter, with segregated neighborhoods belonging to various religious and ethnic groups. Since then, the entire city has more or less been Latinized, but Cainites with their long memories still refer to the area by its older name and the segregation continues. Galata houses a flourishing Genoese quarter under Gabriella's *de facto* leadership, while the Venetian vampires claim the seventh district wholesale. Other mortal groups gather in smaller pockets along the Golden Horn, including the Jews, the Pisans, the Amalfitans, several pagan sects, and the Muslims; each hosts a few Cainites battling over feeding grounds within.

Alfonzo and his Latin compatriots have a history of running the deeply corrupt underworld in this region, dating back to 20 years before the Fourth Crusade. Their coin sponsors taverns, brothels, opium dens, gambling dens, blood harems, black markets, smugglers' havens, and any other establishment they can devise that preys on vice. They make a killing on these illicit businesses and suck the economy of this area dry, which is why everything that isn't a Latin racket has devolved into slums, ragged tent camps, and abandoned gutters where the poor scrape by — many of whom are Greeks left destitute and homeless by the crusaders' predations. The Venetian district is more richly appointed than the rest but tends toward ostentatious facades masking dens of depravity, with Cainite nobles at their centers. Even on nights when the Prince doesn't host a blood feast at his extravagant estate, others in his court hold exorbitant affairs of their own. Ironically, the long tradition of wanton violence in this part of town makes Alfonzo's strict rules harder to enforce than anywhere else.

The Great Palace

The Great Palace, or Sacred Palace, of Constantinople was where many of the Eastern Roman emperors lived and where much of the imperial court's work went on. An extensive complex of stately halls interspersed with an assortment of pleasing structures sprawls near the southeastern tip of the city, just south of the Hagia Sophia and just east of the Hippodrome — the massive circus where gladiatorial fights and chariot races once thrived. The crusaders tore the whole area apart, selling valuable pieces of architecture for coin and leaving everything to rot in disrepair. They installed their own emperor at the Blachernae Palace in the far northwestern corner of the city instead. Chapels attached to the palatial buildings lie abandoned now, including several that were once home to a trove of sacred Christian artifacts. The mortal Orthodox Church devoutly protected such marvels as the original Crown of Thorns and the Rod of Moses, which were strictly off limits to Cainites when the Trinity ruled.

Baldwin II, in his ongoing desperation to recoup the empire's funds, has pawned the lion's share of these artifacts to foreign powers in exchange for gold. Imperial soldiers have removed those that remained, guarding them closely in Blachernae's vault for later peddling. The Grand Palace's empty chapels would provide excellent havens for the overabundance of vampires in the city, but none have taken refuge there. Whispered tales speak of baleful curses befalling any who trespass — curses that blind or strike one mute, inflict unbearable agony or wounds that never stop bleeding, transform bones to ceramic so brittle that it cracks under the slightest strain… the list goes on. According to those in the know, angry angelic spirits inhabit these oratories, waiting to dispense swift retribution to anyone handy for the despoiling of their sacred spaces. Any unfortunate Cainite who hasn't heard — or willfully ignores — the superstitions may be in for an unpleasant day's sleep.

The Grand Bazaar

For all the wrack and ruin festering behind Constantinople's walls, nothing has yet been able to snuff the spark of the Grand Bazaar, the commercial hub where Latin and Hellene, east and west, mortal and Cainite, all commingle in a glorious urban cacophony. Thanks to centuries of vampiric influence, the Bazaar never sleeps. During daylight hours, merchants from every far-flung corner of the world unpack their wares and sell, sell, sell. Wagons and carts, tents and shacks, mats and carpets, makeshift booths, stands, storefronts, squares, and even the merchants themselves bedecked from head to toe all offer a whirlwind of goods local and foreign.

When the sun sets, the market grows quieter but no less teeming with merchandise. While the Latin Quarter holds the record for common illicit business, oddities and horrors

found nowhere else in the known world crawl out from the cracks of these night-brokers' shops. They have been serving the perverse needs of the Cainite set since Byzar first planted his flag, and each year they get more creative.

That's the part all Cainites know. What most don't know is that the Grand Bazaar also hides a grim order of vampire hunting maniacs with dead vitae in their veins and murder in their hearts. These fanatic kine were once starry-eyed ghouls in the company of undead gods, serving the Trinity families loyally for decades before it all came crashing down around them. Left behind when their regnants burned or fled in 1204, they pined and wept for years before the loss of their dark masters drove them to a hateful, bitter rage at their own survival. Taking their own (or each other's) lives seemed like a waste of the sacred trust their lords bestowed upon them, so instead they have vowed to cleanse Constantinople of the vulgar filth calling themselves Cainites in these debased nights. The order has no name, communicating only through subtle signs and signals scattered throughout the Bazaar. They work in tandem and in numbers to lure vampires away from the crowd, falling upon them with stakes and fire once they're alone. The only Cainites safe from their predations are the Nosferatu, known to them as true allies of the vanished Dream.

Kallikantzaros

Across Greek and New Roman lands, the kine fear the kallikantzaroi as malevolent goblinoid creatures who appear during the winter season to trick and terrorize people. Those who pay close attention see more in these devious beasts. A kallikantzaros spends most of its time holed up in its subterranean sanctum, fading from the memories of surface-dwellers until it emerges on the winter's first holy day, according to any faith the people of the region practice. It feeds on worship and knows whenever prayer or sacrifice to any deity is offered nearby. By masquerading as gods, prophets, devils, and saints, these creatures steal the worship of the pious from their lips and then round them up to drag them back to kallikantzaroi sanctums.

Because the kallikantzaroi are talented illusionists, few know what they truly look like. Sketches of them in occult tomes usually depict them as various types of devils and demons, but one could just as easily appear as Apollo or Jesus Christ. Those who study these creatures find an eerie correlation between habitually-practiced religions in an area and a kallikantzaros' habits — not just its appearance and the timing of its visits, but its general desires and long-term behavioral patterns. When an empire is conquered and converted to a new faith, the kallikantzaroi subtly shift their tactics and even personalities to reflect the religion's themes and values. A kallikantzaros forces those it kidnaps to worship it throughout the rest of the year once the winter ends, or else die abandoned and lost in labyrinthine tunnels miles below the surface.

Every winter in Constantinople, a rumor circulates that some Cainite or other has seen a kallikantzaros masquerading as Michael the Archangel, or the Dracon. Such rumors remain unsubstantiated, but they've spawned the theory that the kallikantzaroi began as some kind of egregore born from the Cainite Trinity's own usurpation of Christianity for itself. Smart vampires don't mention this theory in front of New Rome's Nosferatu.

Powers and Weaknesses

- The kallikantzaros replenishes spent "blood points" by feeding on worship. It recoups one point per minute of worship directed toward it, regardless of what identity it presents at the time.
- A kallikantzaros can only work its unholy magic on holy days, depending on the religions the people in its area practice, and only during the winter season.
- The kallikantzaros' effective Appearance depends on the form it projects at any given time. Characters with the ability to pierce its illusions, such as those with the Auspex Discipline, see a monstrous, vaguely humanoid creature with mismatched animalistic and demonic body parts, which has Appearance 1.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance (varies), Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Melee 2, Occult 3, Subterfuge 5, Theology 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Auspex 6, Chimerstry 6, Dominate 1, Obtenebration 2

Road: 4, **Willpower:** 9; **Blood Pool:** 9

Lasombra Apocrypha: Shadow Play

Raphael,

I know you're enjoying yourself, but it's time to move. Baldwin's talking about taking another trip to Europe in the spring to prostrate himself for more French money, and if he takes half the relics with him that he plans, the Romaioi will tear the Blachernae Palace down with their bare hands. Before he goes, we must find a way to keep those mercenaries he hired from returning home to their kings. Alfonzo has the army crushed tightly in his meaty fist and he isn't going to lift a finger; we need those soldiers to keep the peace.

In the meantime, have you found out yet who his supplier is for that foul brew his people are distributing in the foreign quarters? I want a stranglehold on his underworld trades, and I want it now.

G

My dearest lady,

I'm afraid the days when my partner and I could simply waltz into the underworld and crack it open like a pungent egg are over. Our esteemed Prince has everyone fearing for their lives, and our faces are too well known to easily pass for mere customers. It's been quite the dance, identifying reliable candidates to replace your last ghoul spy. So hard to find good help these nights, as you well know! Or at the least, help who won't carry everything we say back to Alfonzo, or end up waylaid by one of those fanatics along the Mese. And goodness knows, we walk a fine line between someone lettered enough to write reports but not too lettered, lest we lose him to the Tzimisce! This place has become quite a mire for the poor kine.

But not to worry. As I write this, we're embarking on a survey of the harbors and doubtless we'll be able to find a sailor or two to fit the bill. Then it's a simple matter of monitoring incoming ships and caravans. I promise you, we will find that supplier.

Not to pry, but may I ask what's happened to that clever young Giovani you had on payroll? I'd thought to ask her to lend us a hand but she seems to have gone missing. Nothing serious, I hope?

Yours as ever,

Raphael

I don't know what's become of Matelda Giovani. I worry Alfonzo's put his claws into her at last. Give it another week and if she doesn't surface, shut down anything she had a hand in.

If I had a ducat for every plan I've had to abandon since I came to this cursed place, Baldwin wouldn't have had to sell the Crown of Thorns.

And I don't want to hear "find Malachite" again, please. I've already told you he has no intention of supporting me. He has no love for Alfonzo, true, but he won't settle for anything less than a Greek on the throne. The less reason we give him to send his people poking about our business, the better.

We need a new ally. I want a diplomat who can approach the Anda and negotiate an alliance. I know what you're thinking, but I certainly won't let them have the city. Once we open the gates to them, Alfonzo loses any illusion of stability he has left — along with his head, of course. Then I, longtime ally of the Empire, can rally Latins and Greeks both in a spirited defense, turning the Mongols back and graciously accepting the proffered praxis.

I've had a messenger from the Amici Noctis. They're sending a party to negotiate the remaining terms of Philip's mortgage. I need you to meet them when they come and bring them to me. Ian will bring you the details.

I've also heard a rumor that a faction in Genoa wants to ally with Nicaea against Venice. It sounds convenient, but the Greeks' return delegitimizes any possible claim I have to rule here. We must act more swiftly than this. I will see Alfonzo burn.

G

Lady Gabriella of Genoa,

Your Giovani cohort has proven to be surprisingly resilient. I had expected to hear a great many fascinating things about your business at Blachernae, but she remains silent.

So far.

Meet me at the ruins of the Megalos Pyrgos in three nights' time, if you wish to see her again. I have less pleasant ways of extracting what I want, but we needn't be barbaric about this. Come alone, if you please.

With great anticipation,

A Friend

Find Matelda Giovani immediately. You have two nights. I don't care what you have to do.

Do exactly as I write here, no more, no less.

Take the enclosed missive to Lady Eliana. Tell her to read it immediately and to stay put until I arrive. Choose one of the slaves – an attractive one – to give to her. Make sure she knows the gift comes from me.

The envoy from the Voivode Makovka is no more. Our Prince reduced him to a pile of disintegrating bones over an unpaid debt regarding last night's hunt. Send a servant immediately to clean up the mess in the solar. Break your silence and I shall break your neck. If the Tzimisce discover the murder, the Mongols will be the least of our concerns. I must find trustworthy agents to spread a believable story.

I am at my wits' end, Gjulia. Alfonzo's Beast has a mind to doom us all. I worry for him. But to whom can we turn? Cainites in this city either fear and loathe him, or take obscene pleasure in the status quo. The streets will run red if we don't do something soon!

We have only a few hours until dawn...and I still must decide how to approach the Prince.

Matteo

Byzantine Intrigue

Among Cainites, a few strong Lasombra personalities dominate the secular power in Constantinople. As a result, the character of the city's vampire politics is figuratively quite Byzantine, despite the Latin perpetrators. These Magister games are wide open for a coterie to take up roles in, from acting as diplomats and agents to curry favor, to bartering secrets to the highest bidder, to playing every side against the middle and risking everything to come out on top.

The Storyteller should work with the players to fill in the particulars for her game. Who is "A Friend" and why is this person lying? Where is Matelda Giovani and whose side is she really on? How much of all this do the Nosferatu know? Who knows Philip's true fate and how can the coterie find out? The Storyteller can adjust the details throughout to fit the story, all the way up to deciding how soon the conflict between Alfonzo and Gabriella will explode if the players' characters don't interfere (or if they *do*) and who gets trapped in the blast.

Toreador Apocrypha: Lost in Reverie

See the martyrion church, its mosaics charred and broken, its bells cracked and silent. Hear the whispered prayers and dread hymns of its empty grave. Here worship the Nephilim, childer of Michael in blood or baptism.

The Nephilim

O sire, send to us thy Song and lead us to salvation. Witness thou the gathering of thy blood. With thy wings we ascend. With thy blessing we die.

Few know the fledgling Toreador bloodline as anything more than a handful of delusional holdovers of the Dream clinging to their dead idol. On the surface, these devotees seek reunification in death, and so they're known to outsiders as the Martyrs. Paul Bathalos, the sect's bishop and a master sculptor, and his right hand the painter Pakourianis the Dove were Michaelite muses during Constantinople's golden age. Like their Toreador peers, they came to believe Michael was the Archangel of the same name, come to Earth to guide his chosen Cainites until his ascension back to Heaven. Now, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition of *theoria,* they lead their fellows in ecstatic prayer and meditation to seek a true vision of the Archangel, to be reunited with him through the mystical transformation of *theosis.*

After several decades of failure, the Toreador accepted that, as the Damned, they couldn't achieve this on their own. They believe a Cainite prophet of their Clan, whom they call the Song of Michael, will inherit the Archangel's divinity and raise them up. The Song will appear to them in the purification of the blood, as their dreams have revealed. To find this prophet, Paul and Pakourianis aim to bring every Toreador in the city to their haven in the ruined Church of St. Demetrios for the *katharsis*. This baptismal rite of their devising is supposed to reveal the divinity in the Song's vitae. In those others who are not the prophet, it cleanses them of impious passions and prepares them for their eventual deification, christening them childer of Michael in spirit, if not literally. No one has quite yet caught on that the sacrament itself is transformational, changing these Toreador into something else.

Bishop Paul Bathalos could almost be mistaken for a Nosferatu, to those who know no better. Hideous of face and monstrous of form, he begged a Tzimisce fleshcrafter to take away his ethereal beauty to stop the Archangel from wanting him. With this sacrifice, Paul removed himself as an obstacle to Michael's ascension to glory, and the Nephilim consider him a martyr in spirit for this, the ultimate renunciation of his earthly Aesthete nature. His broodmate is the Presbyter Pakourianis, also called the Dove, a perpetually childlike Cainite who despairs over his failure to learn how to fly, that he might follow his sire into the heavens. His meditations temper his anguish, but the flight of birds, Tremere gargoyles, and other winged things fascinates him.

The Nephilim keep their true name and liturgies secret, lest the heretical Latins interfere. They communicate with one another across the city in encrypted letters marked with their sigil: a stylized humanoid form with wings and fangs, befitting those who will someday ascend as vampiric angels. All Nephilim come from Toreador stock and start off on the Path of the Archangel (below), on the Road of Heaven. Whether the bloodline will breed true for their childer remains to be seen.

Sobriquets: Martyrs (to outsiders), Childer of the Archangel

Disciplines: Auspex, Chimerstry, Presence

Weakness: The Nephilim are afflicted with a profound ache, a yearning for the touch of a departed sire they can



never know in the flesh. Heaven is not a place, but an angel with a vampire's face, and they exist only to join with him. To be found unworthy is anathema. The base difficulty of rolls made when a Childe of the Archangel sins against her Path is 7 rather than 6, and losing a dot of her Path inflicts a +1 increase in difficulty on all actions she takes for one full chapter thereafter.

A Nephilim who becomes an Apostate suffers the difficulty increase at all times until she becomes at least an Adherent on another Road or gains a dot in the Path of the Archangel. However, she doesn't increase the difficulty of sin rolls on any other Road.

Path of the Archangel

The Nephilim are the primary devotees on the Path of the Archangel, but not the only ones. Other Toreador who have so far avoided the cult's baptism nonetheless remember their godlike patron and quietly strive to emulate him still. Foreign Vanitas come to Constantinople and find the tragic romance of the Archangel irresistible, falling into step out of fascination. Cainites of other Clans who were loyal to Michael or one of his scion families, or those strongly dedicated to the Church but seeking vampiric inspiration in it, follow this Path when they reach the end of their rope and seek an example to uphold for themselves. The Nephilim's aggressive proselytizing snares others with their ability to appear as truly divine messengers.

Following in Michael's footsteps means acting as muse and shepherd to all, and as martyr when need be. As adherents to the Road of Heaven, the Archangel's Faithful view Michael as the risen Christ of the Damned and believe vampires must act the part of angels to the mortal herd. Some even believe *all* the angels were vampires, with Michael as their greatest example.

Virtues: Conscience and Self-Control

Aura: Melancholia. A Childe of the Archangel applies modifiers whenever her great loss and longing would engender a reaction, or when being seen as a martyr is relevant.

Constantine Reverie

My childe, I assure you that all the tales you have heard of this mesmerizing city are absolutely true. Last night I took in the sights at the Grand Bazaar and there I found a small den hung with tapestries, where one of our Clan entreated me to join in what she called the "Constantine Reverie." A Milanese, you know, not one of the natives. I'm told the Greek Toreador here labor under a terrible curse of madness! I regret not to have seen them yet.

SINS AGAINST THE ARCHANGEL

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Indulging in any temptation	True *katharsis* purges all passions.
9	Going one night without performing any creative work	In art, we illuminate truth.
8	Turning away from those who need inspiration	An angel's work is in guiding the lost.
7	Refusing to make a minor sacrifice	Shedding earthly things brings us closer to divinity.
6	Leaving fellow Toreador to languish unbaptized	We are all Michael's chosen.
5	Going one week without performing any creative work	Art is how the soul worships.
4	Indulging in temptations of the flesh	In *katharsis* we renounce carnal passions.
3	Abandoning any in your charge	We must earn the worship of the flock.
2	Giving in to your Beast, such as frenzy	*Katharsis* purges our basest urges first and foremost.
1	Refusing to make a major sacrifice	We follow Michael's example in all things.

The den was lit with blue lanterns and incense smoke rose like a thick mist. My host invited me to enjoy the company of carefully-selected kine who partook of every pleasing substance imaginable — the servants brought opium, khat, hashish, belladonna, mandragora, and creations of their own unfamiliar to me. Beautiful boys danced for our pleasure and an oud player performed exquisite music to tantalize the ear. At midnight, a series of chimes signaled us to begin the feeding, and you cannot imagine the euphoria. Such seduction of the senses I have never before found, nor I fear will I ever find again. No mere vitae, this, but a sublime nectar that utterly hypnotized me. It was then that I first saw the true Constantinople, the paradise touched by the hand of God that you hear of in the verses of the troubairitz. The hand of God. I tasted it, then, in the blood of these Hellenes, and I wept.

Once we all had fed, the chimes sounded again and our host led us on a tour of the city's most captivating corners. I swear to you, the curtain of time parted for us. I saw the Dream they mourn painted in gold and silver before my eyes. We watched the gladiators fight for our amusement, we rode with the charioteers and felt the wind lash our faces, and we heard the haunting eventide hymns of the ghouls at the Hagia Sophia. We basked in the beauty of vibrant statues and mosaics, and sampled the Bazaar's most forbidden wares. We dallied in the private pleasure gardens of the Roman villas and marveled at the hues of Syrian silks. As the night wore on and we saw the past fade, we sought comfort in each other's arms at the great loss we suffered. I have walked the night for centuries, and in all that time I have never felt such an emptiness.

My host opens her doors every night, choosing with a discerning eye from among those mortals and Cainites who flock to the Bazaar. Amidst our kind were those of many clans — I never thought to see a Gangrel brute sobbing in the embrace of a Tremere sorcerer, but such is the power of the Constantine Dream. I pray you find your way here some night, and I pray you stumble across the hidden jewel of the Grand Bazaar as I did.

Tzimisce Apocrypha: The Akademia

In the valley of the Lycus River, Roman monasteries and villas lie in varying states of ruin and disrepair, their skeletal towers exposed to the sky, their crumbling foundations blasted by fire. This area, called Exokionion, was home to Greek pagans and wealthy citizens for centuries, set apart from Constantinople's numbered regions. It was also home to the Obertus Tzimisce and their Akoimetai monks, who were collecting and scribing copies of priceless tomes from the great library at Alexandria and other institutions of learning across East and West. The Akoimetai took great pride in preserving knowledge for future generations, copying works originally written on less stable materials to parchment and vellum to ensure their longevity. It was with heavy hearts that the Obertus saw all their hard work go up in flames when the Fourth Crusade came, along with their leader Gesu, childe of the Dracon. The remaining Tzimisce in the city agreed to return to their ancestral Carpathian homes, rescuing those few scrolls they could smuggle out of the fires.

The Scholarch

One refused to go. Elaiodora was born a mortal in Constantinople and lived her life as an orphan there, raised by the Akoimetai before her Embrace and induction into the Order. She dedicated herself wholly to the task of safeguarding knowledge, if not to the Obertus cult known as the Divinity Within or its worship of Vicissitude as a sacrament. She instead viewed the practice of fleshcrafting as an opportunity to recreate the forms of those lost to time, ensuring that their memory would persist for as long as Cainites could remember them. When her Clanmates departed for the cold and distant Balkans, she opted to remain and rebuild the monastery of St. John Studius, where Gesu and his Library of the Forgotten made haven. Her passion for Constantinople guided her toward a new incarnation of the Dream: She would transform New Rome into a paragon of enlightenment and education to rival the great Athenian schools of Plato and Aristotle, preserving its glorious history and legacy forever. Tomes alone were not equal to this solemn mission, she reasoned, but Cainites were immortal vessels that could hold vast centuries' worth of knowledge. She would shape a new generation of Obertus Tzimisce into repositories of lore. She called her Dream the *Akademia* and adopted the name Elaiodora Sophida, naming herself Scholarch of the new Cainite university.

Recruitment has been slow, partially because Elaiodora spends as much time out searching for books and relics to add to her collection as she does teaching, and partially because her social graces leave something to be desired. She believes that to fully embody the lore of Constantinople and its vampires, the *Akademia* should be a trove not only of knowledge but of treasures and artifacts — not these holy tokens of mere Christianity that the kine covet, but true wonders.

The Salubri

It was during a chase for one such wonder that Elaiodora met Rakhama, a Salubri healer from Egypt on a hunt of her own. The Tzimisce's blunt manner and singleminded obsession drew Rakhama to probe for more, and her tales of Constantinople and its lost Dream resonated with the Salubri, who mourned the noble history of her Clan and everything that died with it. Elaiodora came to see Rakhama as an exemplar of unliving history, precisely the sort of Cainite she wanted to create for her own Dream. She invited the healer to return to Byzantium with her, and the two became lovers and partners.

Rakhama presented herself to Elaiodora as a wandering tomb raider when they met, but in truth she seeks something specific: the Skull of Saulot. She has unearthed a whispered rumor that when the Usurpers stole the soul of the Salubri Antediluvian, they used their foul magics to preserve his skull and with it, a fraction of his power. According to her sources, the skull fell into the hands of a faction known as the Harbingers. She pins all her hopes for the future of the childer of Caine on finding the skull and using it to reunite the Salubri. At the start of her partnership with Elaiodora, she couldn't bring herself to trust the Tzimisce enough to tell the tale. Now, she fears hurting her lover with the truth — that some night her Clan will come first, and that in small part she's using the *Akademia* to further her own goals — so she puts off the conversation indefinitely. In the meantime, she helps with recruiting and building their collection, while keeping a sharp eye out for any hint that might lead her to the Skull's location. She keeps up a pretense of being Tzimisce in the city and uses her hijab to hide her third eye, not wishing to draw attention to herself.

The New Obertus

So far, Elaiodora's efforts have yielded an impressive collection of repatriated New Roman history and academia, but not a lot of Cainite support. She believes religion has little place in an institution of learning and condemns her predecessors for letting Gesudian fanaticism distract from their true purpose. Since historically, religion and education have gone hand in hand, and the mortal monastic orders

throughout the city continue as they always have, she declines to court most of the already-established scholars within the walls. Her student body currently consists of a few scribe's apprentices, one or two ghouls, and one young Malkavian recently arrived from France. Frustrated by what she perceives as a lack of suitable Cainite initiates, she has devised a new plan: What better way to shape the new Obertus Tzimisce in Constantinople to match her Dream than to Embrace them all herself?

Ignoring Rakhama's misgivings, Elaiodora now stalks mortals who have promise as potential Fiends. She researches them extensively and follows them around every night to gauge their habits and circles. She has proven willing to interfere in their lives if it means pointing them toward more scholarly pursuits — one young man had, in her estimation, too many suitors to focus on his studies, so she visited him in his bedroom in the middle of the night and mutated his flesh to make him less appealing. She has no compunctions about raiding other Cainites' entourages, either — reasoning that if they were good enough for someone else, they might have something to offer her — and keeps careful tabs on the comings and goings of various dignitaries in case they have kine servants she might like to poach. She has thus far chosen three candidates for the Embrace, and those she keeps as mortal students for now until they've advanced sufficiently in their curricula to earn it.

Rakhama's concern for Elaiodora and her Dream grows nightly. She believes the Tzimisce's preoccupation with seeking perfection and building the *Akademia* primarily from her own childer will tarnish her noble goals. She tries to convince her lover that Embracing with such abandon will put both the Cainites and the mortals of Constantinople in danger, but has met with no success. Now she seeks suitable members of other Clans to enroll and excel, to show Elaiodora the value of cooperation with others. She worries the Fiend has put herself on a new Road, one leading inevitably to the same kind of monomaniacal obsession that she scorned in the Divinity Within, and one that will ruin her as surely as it ruined Gesu.

Points of Interest

Elaiodora is willing to trade a great deal for rare and valuable scrolls, books, journals, relics, and anything else that documents or represents the Cainite or Constantine experience. Even transcriptions of personal anecdotes from long-lived Cainites and people who were present for major events are worthwhile to her. She especially covets artifacts of vampiric power as vessels of living history. Below are a few subjects of particular interest that the *Akademia* has marked for investigation. Anyone with information about them — or the right Disciplines and magic to properly study them — would attract the Scholarch's attention and could bargain for research rights at the cloister of St. John Studius, allowing access to any number of unique resources.

Ghosts of Byzantium: Between the several times old Byzantium was razed and rebuilt, Constantinople's long and torturous history as a playground of inter-Clan intrigues, and the Fourth Crusade, ghosts linger under every rock in the city. The recent unprecedented explosion of atrocities and profound ruination has woken things that have been buried for a millennium or more, emerging now from the broken foundations of their tombs and looking for vengeance. Many of the more recently deceased remain as well, as the Latins had no care to perform the Byzantine funerary rites these dead expected, and all their loved ones were killed as well. Each spirit has a story to tell.

Abyssal Shrines: Before Constantine the Great came to found a legendary Roman capital, a group of Lasombra under the leadership of one Ectoris ruled the small city of Byzantium. They cemented their influence over the kine by posing as a pagan cult to Aphrodite, and a few of their number became involved in a Cainite religion that was part Hellenistic sect, part Abyss Mysticism. Hidden in the ruins of ancient Byzantium lie abandoned shrines that blend blood sorcery rites with worship of the Greek goddess, harboring strange untold power that could yet be unlocked with the right occult keys.

House of Broken Lamps: For centuries, this unnerving shop served as the base of operations for a demon and its thralls, including a mage and a Baali. Standing between the Grand Bazaar and the central Mese, it spawned Cainite legends of things much worse than vampires lurking in its rooms filled with nothing but lamps of every description, that nevertheless couldn't banish the hollow darkness between them. By the time the Fourth Crusade stampeded through the city, the House of Lamps yawned empty but waiting — the demon and its servants were gone, but the dormant power that pulsed within the building's walls was ripe for the taking. Crusaders set the shop ablaze and it exploded in a spectacular display of colored flames, burning for three days and three nights. Now, Cainites and kine alike give the ruin a wide berth, terrified of what might come crawling out of it.



Chapter Five: The Domain of Mogadishu

Welcome to the White Pearl. We specialize in wild dreams and wilder nightmares. I wonder which you are here for, hm?

— Saruuro, Quadi of the Red Sky

The twin cities of Mogadishu, Hamar and Shangani, are beautiful in scintillating hues of light that lend the domain its nickname "the White Pearl." Ships carry an unrelenting stream of mortals in and out, to try their luck and make a fortune. In their wake follow the children of Caine, eager to expand their domains, only to find Africa is already home to vampires of its own. Clan Assamite emerged victorious from this clash of continents, after five centuries of careful maneuvering rising on Islam's tide to defeat the Ramanga. Now the Na'ib looks out over her city to the new masjid dedicated to Allah, and wonders if she can control what she started.

Vampires of every ilk live together in Mogadishu. They're all smiles in public, for the Na'ib demands they keep the peace, while relentlessly plotting in private. Neonates flock to the domain to escape their sires' tyrannies. Ancillae, recognizing that Mogadishu's trade routes bring the entire world within their grasp, come to make a name for themselves. Elders seek new horizons and new experiences — an exceedingly rare commodity after eons of night. Tensions rise as the Jyhad follows the newcomers, chipping away at the Na'ib's dominance and laying the path for the Laibon to finally drown their rivals.

Vampires of the White Pearl

Farnaza — (Seventh Generation Assamite) The Na'ib has not heard her birth name spoken since she claimed power (and the title) over a century ago. No one in the city dares speak her name, and neither her sire nor her fellow Viziers have visited. This initially unnerved her, as if the hammer of Alamut would come down at any moment, but she realizes now that her ostracism isn't a sign of disapproval. Rather, her Elders are confident in her control over Mogadishu and loyalty to Haqim, and see no need to visit the den of infidels the domain has by necessity become. This leaves Farnaza with great freedom, which she relishes perhaps more than she should, but has also left her feeling adrift. She finds solace in the company of an ancient Laibon named Jakuta.

Mazigha — (Sixth Generation Ramanga) Mazigha's sire lost Mogadishu to the Assamites, and she is determined to wipe that stain from her lineage. Older and more powerful than Farnaza personally, Mazigha nonetheless struggles to oust her rival. Storms rage when her traders are out at sea, lightning strikes as her crew finishes the masjid's dome, and famine decimates the Hawiye with whom she makes alliances. A lesser woman might believe destiny itself is poised against her, but Mazigha is no fool. She recognizes

an ancient force working against her, and sends her vassals to find and convert (or destroy) this creature.

Aphobis — (Tenth Generation Follower of Set) Every linen merchant worth his salt traces his business to Aphobis, whose control over fabric trade to Egypt is indomitable. Aphobis abhors the slave trade, since he views the subversion of freedom an abomination against Apep, but his best efforts to stop it have been futile. He also owns the Jade Horse inn, which serves as a gathering place for vampires disenchanted with Mogadishu's balance of power. Patrons believe the big-bellied Egyptian is a dupe for assuming hosting duties (and potential blame) for a group so eager to dethrone the Na'ib, but Aphobis is keenly aware of the risks and rewards of his position.

Bantu — (Eleventh Generation Impundulu) and Esihle — (Bomkazi Witch) This husband team has been together since they were babes. Their mothers raised the boys together, fully expecting both of them to take up the mantle of the Bomkazi witches. For Bantu, magic never took, and the Impundulu chose him to join their ranks beyond death instead. The pair left their home in the Cape to seek an answer to the Impundulu's plight, and believe they found it with an elder of the children of Cagn. They first encountered this creature, ancient and steeped in death, on the Swahili coast where locals named it "devourer of human flesh" or "Mla Watu." Mla Watu abandoned them before they learned everything they needed to, but they have since tracked it further north to Ceel Waaq and finally, Mogadishu.

Sarapion — (Laibon, lineage and Generation unknown) Sarapion is ancient beyond measure, predating the Hawiye people by millennia. The creature traveled the breadth of the African continent and crossed the ocean to Persia and Europe, though it was ill-impressed by the latter. Mortals built the city of Sarapion atop the creature after it returned home to rest, and it's felt connected to the place ever since. Sarapion guided the domain from its first incarnation to the glory that would become Mogadishu, and manipulated the Assamites to topple its erstwhile (and unwitting) Ramanga stewards. Sarapion does not meet with local vampires, who are like ants to it, but the creature's dreams do bleed into their nightmares.

Affairs of State

Sarapion's lineage ruled the ancient city that predated Mogadishu, until the ancient left the region and the Ramanga came from Madagascar to fill the void of power. They, led by Arawelo and creating childer amongst the Hawiye people, held power for nearly five centuries. Sarapion's departure also opened a path for the Emozeidi Arabs, and they brought Islam and the children of Haqim. The Hawiye culture eventually gave way before the Ajuran Sultanate, and the Assamite Na'ib now rules the night.

The Na'ib adheres to the Zoroastrian faith, but she believed Islam offered a way to dethrone the Hawiye kings and Ramanga behind them. She tied Mogadishu's trade to cities on the Persian coast where her Clan was strongest, so she could further undermine the Ramanga hegemony. Her success is perhaps over-complete though, and Mogadishu became a haven for Muslim Assamites. Mistakenly believing that the Na'ib herself is Muslim, they flock to the city to celebrate their religion away from disapproving elders. Disavowing Islam now would alienate them, perhaps even incite rebellion, leaving the Na'ib between a rock and a hard place. Meanwhile, the Ramanga have caught on to the religious game and are outwardly abandoning their matriarchal religion for adherence to Muhammad's teachings. Should the Na'ib ever move away from Islam, the Laibon are poised to pick up any disenfranchised followers.

The High Clans

The Followers of Set, dominating the linen trade with Egypt, add to the Na'ib's woes. Islam took hold in the ancient lands of the Snakes long ago, and they *certainly* take offense. If they can knock the Saracens down a few pegs, they gleefully do so. The leader of the Setites is Aphobis, whose good-natured demeanor hides a talent for stirring up trouble. His current project is inciting the Toreador and Lasombra in rebellion against the Na'ib. Aphobis is eminently subtle, though, and the Na'ib (while she *does* suspect him) can't retaliate lest she appears tyrannical and fuels the Lasombra and Toreador's simmering resentment. As tensions come to a boil, Mazigha is laughing all the way

The Struggle of the Shadow Kings

The Magisters fail to gain a foothold in Mogadishu, despite their — and Aphobis' — best efforts. Their agents are murdered, their ships sunk, and their traders constantly undercut. The Clan blames their eternal rivals the Ventrue for this. In truth though, their struggles are born from Ramanga sabotage, as the Laibon are disinclined to share their dominance over shadows. Never one to take "no" for an answer, the Clan sends Fatimah al-Lam'a to Mogadishu to *try again*.

to the bank — for surely her lineage stands well poised to take advantage of any resulting unrest.

The Cappadocians also maintain a heavy presence in Mogadishu. The Ajurans are consummate builders whose faith demands interment of their deceased — a combination that sees intricate pillar tombs and necropoleis erected in the region. The presence of Laibon necromancers willing to trade secrets only adds to Cappadocian enthusiasm. The Clan offers a generous non-aggression treaty to the Na'ib in exchange for access to the region, which at least does not compound the troubles she already has to juggle. They steadfastly refuse to commit to more than a non-aggression pact though, as they're unwilling to upset any Clans poised against the Assamites. The Cappadocians obey the Na'ib as long as her Clan controls Mogadishu, but would show Aphobis the same deference if the tables turned.

The Low Clans

All Clans venture in and out of Mogadishu (some more successfully than others,) yet the domain is strangely devoid of Nosferatu. The Priors instinctively avoid the city, and those who do visit often disappear. The Ravnos, always ready to jump on opportunity, have taken over as information brokers. The self-appointed leader of the Vagabonds is a woman named Amaria, whose melodious bass voice is the only remnant of her birth-assigned gender. Amaria holds a wealth of information on who's who in Mogadishu, and she's surprisingly willing to share with any newcomers. All she asks in return is a friendly conversation — a gambit that turns out well for visitors who can steer the subject to philosophy or religion (subjects Amaria loves to discuss) and poorly for visitors who end up talking about themselves. Amaria's sharp wit and natural charm mask a darker nature, as she is responsible for slave trade from Mogadishu to her childe Sridhar in Mangalore.

The Laibon

In addition to the Ramanga, who refuse to give up their former stronghold, Mogadishu sees a steady trickle of Bonsam. The Stalkers seldom stay long: They hear the dead footsteps of an ancient hunting them, and while Mogadishu offers a reprieve from *that* particular threat, they sense Sarapion's lingering presence. The Impundulu stay, even if they have to travel a *long* way to reach the domain, as the Cappadocians make natural allies to them. Their leader Bantu actively seeks out the Necromancers, and he finds them agreeable — so far. They remain such a small group, however, that their political impact is limited.

Other Laibon also wander in and out of the city, and they plainly refuse to name their lineage. This obscurity makes it hard for Cainites to quantify the Laibon, or assess the depth of their power, which is exactly the point. Their lineages clearly number (far) greater than three though, and they would *really* like for the invaders to take a step back. The Ramanga, playing the long game, have so far managed to hold their kin's resentment in check, but it's quickly reaching a crescendo.

Take Center Stage

The Setites manipulate the Toreador and Lasombra, the Ramanga manipulate the Setites, Sarapion herself works against the Ramanga, and so on. These layers of intrigue should not merely serve as a backdrop for a coterie's exploits. Quite the opposite: the key to Mogadishu relies on getting a coterie involved. When Mazigha wants to sabotage the Assamite masjid, she tasks (or manipulates) the characters to do so. This makes an enemy of the Na'ib, but provides invaluable blackmail material on Mazigha. They hear how Bantu and Ehsile are looking for Mla Watu, and offer their services in tracking the ancient down. If they are Lasombra, drop Fatimah al-Lam'a and send the coterie to take the city instead. Mogadishu is rife with conflict and the protagonists should be smack at the center.

The Wan Kuei

A single Wan Kuei makes his home in Mogadishu. Bai Qi of the Hungry Ghosts arrived on a trade vessel from the Song Empire. He shows little interest in meeting with Cainites, and claims he knows about them already, though he is willing to meet with Laibon. The Laibon, however, see no point in making either friends or enemies with one lone vampire, and largely ignore him. The Na'ib is aware of Ban Qi's presence and keeps track of his endeavors, even if she sees no reason to act against him (yet).

Trouble in the White Pearl

Underneath Mogadishu lies the ancient city of Sarapion, and below that are even older secrets. The constant building projects of the Ajuran Sultanate disturb the land, and ancient *things* stir underneath. Laibon arrive in the city and carry tales of stalkers in the dark. Trouble is aplenty is Mogadishu.

One Masjid Too Many

Mogadishu is home to not one, but two masjids — or mosques — in mid-build. Assamite neonates pushed the Na'ib to approve construction of the Fakr ad-Din masjid in Hamar. Assamite sorcery, enhanced by azure spires mimicking the sacred geometry of Alamut, calls the favor of Allah to the mihrab in the masjid's inner sanctum. Meanwhile, Mazigha commands her vassal Khusran ibn Muhammud to construct the Arba' a Rukun masjid. At the heart of this white-stoned construct lies a well of liquid darkness connected to the source of all Ramanga power. Both Assamites and Ramanga use the power inherent to their vitae to propel the idea that *their* build started first, creating an (admittedly unintentional) miasma of confusion surrounding the two masjids.

The player of a character caught in the miasma (which covers the entire city,) makes an extended Road roll at difficulty 7, with one roll per night and 20 successes required. Failure causes the character to gain the Obsession derangement focused on the masjid that is nearest when she fails. She becomes emotionally invested in "her" masjid, arguing that it is the true one while the other is an affront. Her arguments need not be rational (at all), but they *are* passionate. She turns her obsession into actions (i.e. by throwing a stone at the builders of the false masjid, or worse) depending on her Nature. The effect ends when the character spends a year away from Mogadishu, which she *isn't* willing to do as it means abandoning her beloved masjid.

Destroying either the Assamite mihrab or the Ramanga well ends the miasma permanently (and defaults the remaining one to "the oldest masjid" forever,) but neither group would ever consider this. Until then, the miasma turns mortals and vampires into obsessed zealots one by one, and keeps them *all* trapped in its honeyed venom.

A Slaughter of Builders

It's only a matter of time before someone snaps under the miasma's effects, and builders — from both masjids — turn up dead. Their corpses hang upside down on the build sites, blood and entrails pooling underneath. Strange and esoteric scribblings in blood desecrate the half-finished masjid, and speak of "Sarapion who Dwells Beneath" after an Intelligence + Occult roll at difficulty 7.

While the Na'ib and Mazigha both find this development troubling, neither is willing to halt construction. The Na'ib doesn't want to rile the Muslim Cainites in Mogadishu, nor is Mazigha willing to abandon her play for the faithful. Both would welcome any group that makes the problem quietly go away. If the characters volunteer (or are assigned) to track down the killer, their hunt leads to a rogue ghoul imbued by the dark power of the miasma (Disciplines: Fortitude 1, Potence 1, Presence 1, Chimerstry 1). No one remembers making him a ghoul, though, and the trail ends there.

The Mystery of Jakuta

From the personal records of the Na'ib

Well. Never a boring night. We've been overrun by refugees for weeks. They rarely stay long (luckily too, or they would sorely tax our resources), nor are they happy to speak with us. I know very little about them, and what I do know comes from Amaria. She seems to have set up a rapport with these Laibon, and even arranged passage to Mangalore for one of them. Why she would do that is a mystery to me, but who am I to complain as long as she sent him to her homeland rather than mine? Either way, she tells me ***most*** *of the refugees are from a lineage called the Bonsam, and* ***all*** *of them are fleeing something called the Hunter.*

She also assures me, as far as I can trust her, that this crisis is of no threat to Mogadishu proper. The Hunter, she believes, is a Methusaleh recently awoken in the heartlands of this continent. The creature pursues a pogrom against its own kind. What makes it no immediate threat to us is that our refugees traveled months to put as much distance between the creature and themselves as possible, while ***it*** *seems to be heading towards the Lands of the Kru rather than Mogadishu. All would be well, then, if not for the latest refugee arriving.*

Jakuta is without doubt an elder. I scent his blood, heady and thick, whenever he is near me. He is also utterly confused, and barely aware of where and when he is. He is unfamiliar with the teachings of Islam, and tells me he learned our language by eating a "foreigner's tongue." From the way he looks at me, I suspect he consumed ***much*** *more than the tongue. He is dangerous — a situation only mitigated by his seeming attachment to me. I'm not sure how I became the object of his affection. Amaria usually gets everyone fawning over her, regardless of their gender, but she passed Jakuta onto me as soon as he mentioned eating tongues. I can't say I'm entirely sorry for it — he is powerful, an excellent philosopher (much more interesting than the usual religious drivel), and not entirely unattractive. I look forward to getting to know him better, as long as my own tongue remains safe.*

Getting to know Jakuta

The Na'ib, for all her power, cannot contain Jakuta to her palace. He wanders the city at night, alternately keen to devour or converse with passing vampires. The player of anyone speaking with Jakuta makes a Courage roll, or the character flees before the diablerist. Those engaging him with interesting conversation by making a Charisma + Expression roll (difficulty 7) are perfectly safe from the ancient, and he recognizes them favorably the following nights.

Tidbits that Jakuta might reveal in conversation:

- He is from the Yoruba people of the Kingdom of Ife.
- He spent measureless time in torpor before the Hunter's rampage woke him.
- He suspects the Hunter is older than him by far.
- He is an accomplished Thaumaturgist.
- He is not Bonsam.
- He claims no lineage at all. This is a source of embarrassment for Jakuta, and he doesn't reveal it in a first conversation.
- He has carried many titles over the centuries, including Changó, Xangô, and Shango.

Liberty at Sea

Sheer distance from European Princes and an air of benign neglect from Alamut make Mogadishu a haven for disenfranchised ancillae and neonates. Or at least — it once did. Fear of Gehenna leads elders to seek far horizons, as if global annihilation will pass Africa by. With these elders come the same institutions Mogadishu's Cainites do so eagerly without: an emphasis on lineage, ancient boons passed from elder to elder and suddenly called in to an ancilla ("your grandsire owes me a favor"), and a strong-arming of neonates into the service of older Generations. Realizing that nowhere on land is safe from the elders' tyranny, a group of neonates and ancillae now take to sea. They band together in a small fleet of ships (and wrecks) off the Somali coast. Their location is ever-mobile and they might have escaped scrutiny if not for one overwhelming need: blood. The fleet turns to piracy of both seaward ships and coastal towns to feed, and rapidly attracts the enmity of Cainite traders. Their saving grace is the secret aid of the Ramanga, who are more than happy to fan the flames of inter-Cainite conflict.

The Liberty Fleet offers a reprieve to characters who bite off more than they can chew in Mogadishu. Its residents offer money, information, and boons in exchange for blood — granting the characters more resources than they could have gained in the city proper.

Ambitions of Princes

Cainites, other than the Assamites and Setites, have a hard time gaining a foothold in Mogadishu. Two fared better than most though: Fatimah al-Lam'a of Clan Lasombra, and Atilia Priscian of the Toreador. Arriving in Mogadishu at the same time, they struck a bargain to work together. Their relationship alternates between uncomfortable and hostile, but they've kept to their deal. The pair waylaid the last two shipments of Indian marble, hoping to delay the building of the Fakr ad-Din masjid and incite unrest amongst the Muslim neonates. They have identified one of the Na'ib's favorite ghouls, a woman named Vesal Sahbazi, and consider whether to Embrace or kill her outright. They've also made overtures to Mazigha, promising to return control of Mogadishu to the Ramanga, and to Aphobis with the promise of a temple to Set under their rule. Neither Mazigha nor Aphobis believes them, but the unrest they cause is too good to pass up.

At the other end of this spectrum are the Cappadocians, whose leader Eriz negotiates a non-aggression pact with the Na'ib. The Brujah Letha offers the same, though the Na'ib is reluctant to accept as the Zealots have a budding reputation as troublemakers. Neither would be pleased with the Lasombra and Toreador upending what little headway they've made with the Na'ib. Characters hailing from Cainite Clans are pressed to the forefront of this brewing conflict.

A Clash of Gods

Islam is the prevalent mortal religion in Mogadishu, and the few Christians and Pagans learn to disguise their faith. The vampire population is not nearly as homogenous, and many elders and ancillae adhere to other faiths.

The Temple of Set

The Temple of Set hides in a warehouse near the beach of Shangani. The building is unassuming — not fancy, not run down, just perfectly normal and average. Wards repel anyone who would enter, perpetuating an air of utter disinterest. Inside though, lies an opulence of riches. The sanctum itself consists of three parts: the first for mortal faithful, Cainite initiates, and rare visitors, the second for Cainite acolytes, and the third is intended for Set himself.

Sweet incense fills the air of the first sanctum, and murals depict the glories of Set as he battles the oppressor Ra. Set's brother Osiris makes a rare appearance on one of the tapestries, depicting a scene of closeness between the two siblings. Assorted statues that dot the room represent Set's deific allies, including a Mithraic statue prominent in bronze. Aphobis keeps servants at hand to provide food or blood, to visitors he values highly. The second sanctum is smaller and dominated by an eight-foot-tall statue of Set, hewn in red stone. Only Set's childer could say if the likeness is true, but the statue's powerful build is certainly fit for a god. On dark nights, when the moon hides her face, the statue oozes thick, putrid blood from its stone skin. At the statue's feet lie gifts for the god: arcane statuettes, gemstones, and bowls filled with the blood of innocents. Great pillows and more statues, these representing the cohorts of Set,



fill the inner sanctum. Aphobis keeps the room pristine for Set's arrival, despite the god's disappearance centuries ago.

The Temple of Set, while hidden from prying eyes and ears, is surprisingly popular in Mogadishu. Aphobis is a true adherent of Apep and preaches freedom in all things. Faithful must cast off the shackles of society, morality, and (finally) of self. He is a remarkably apt teacher, who pushes his students well beyond their limits, but not (or at least since his arrival in Mogadishu) beyond their breaking point. Cainites seeking to change Roads under Aphobis' tutelage ignore the effects of one botched roll when they experience their Moment of Truth (see **V20 Dark Ages** pp.112-115), in addition to the normal benefits of studying with a mentor.

The Hidden Shrine

Told by Nikolai of Clan Nosferatu

We have to go. Now. Leave and never come back. Don't give me that look, I —

Fine, I'll tell you. But then I'm leaving. You stay or go.

You know Mogadishu is part of the Ajuran empire, right? They're these great builders and paragons of architecture and whatnot. Well it's not just big on the topside. Mogadishu is rife with tunnels, like a good cheese, and no one claims them! I know why now, but when I arrived it just seemed like the perfect place to hide from the Na'ib and her prying eyes.

So I've been exploring, mapping the entries and exits, and then one night I got lost. I never get lost, but there I was inside these carved round halls. They're not too big and perfectly circular, like a giant worm burrowed through. I know, crazy right? I'm not really sure how I got there and then I heard it. Her. Him. I dunno, but it was just inside my head. Like waves of the ocean rolling in, or the most beautiful sunrise. So I obeyed the call.

I could already feel the lethargy of the day when I got to the room. Circular, with the same odd rivets as the passageway, but larger. In the middle stood a statue of the most beautiful creature I have ever seen. Remember that time you had a crush on Alexander of Paris? Well this was much, much prettier than him. The most perfect creature ever. So I started weeping and then the statue smiled at me. Admittedly, beauty overcame me, but I'm no fool. I hightailed out of there.

I know. I thought I was crazy at first, too. That I imagined it. But I didn't. I know because I've seen it since. Well, them. People wearing masks looking exactly like it. I have a snack and just as I'm getting up from the ground: a masked face looks at me. I turn a corner to avoid that bore Aphobis and another mask is waiting for me. They're everywhere. They whisper, too,

repeating the same thing over and over: guruh guruh. Whatever the heck that means. Shut up, I'm not imagining it! I — wait. Did you hear that? There's — <abrupt silence>

The House Adeer

Much as the Na'ib can't disavow Islam for fear of alienating her Cainite followers, so too the Ramanga discover that religion is the best way to their little unbeating hearts. Hence the great pomp and circumstance about building the "really the first" masjid. The Puppeteers don't stop there though. While Mogadishu's vampires grow accustomed to the new, more kin-spirited face of the Ramanga (and hopefully come to trust them as confidantes and advisers), the Laibon are already moving in on a promising lineage of mortals. The House Adeer is devoutly Muslim, and a steady stream of vitae lifted them to the top of the mortal hierarchy. Their proclivity for True Faith only adds to the appeal.

Vampire allies to Mazigha find themselves tasked to aid House Adeer. Arrange a marriage here, tutor a child there. Nothing so overt that it reveals the Puppeteer's plans, but enough to move the wheels. Vampires posing a threat, however, find themselves hunted by the religious killers. Mazigha's ultimate goal is to replace the Ajuran Sultanate with House Adeer. Such an effort will be centuries in the making though, and she's happy to use her Revenants as blunt weapon until then.

Ancient Faiths

The mortals and neonates of Mogadishu may be overwhelmingly Muslim, but the older vampires in the domain are decidedly not. The Na'ib is a Zoroastrian, Mazigha adheres to the matriarchal ancestral worship of Arawelo (who later became her own sire), and other Laibon worship Hawiye gods like Huur and Nidar. Yet the Na'ib hasn't publicly spoken about her faith in two centuries, and Mazigha has commissioned the construction of a masjid. Religion to these elders is both a tool and a crutch. They use Islam to sway neonates to their side, and then discover their numbers are such that they can no longer disavow Islam. This balance of power shifts even more as Muslim Cainites flock to Mogadishu.

Zoroastrians

The Na'ib, her two childer, and one of her advisers are Zoroastrian. They practice their religion behind closed doors only. For more on the Cainite brand of Zoroastrianism, see p. 83

Daughters of Arawelo

Arawelo was a powerful queen who defeated all the men in her kingdom to create a matriarchy. She was also a Ramanga, albeit one born, raised, and Embraced in the Horn rather than Madagascar. Arawelo ruled Mogadishu from the shadows for a long time, until the Na'ib rose to power and forced her to abandon the city. Worship of Arawelo continues to this night though, and is especially popular amongst women (including her childe Mazigha). Arawelo, having experienced the transformative power of the Embrace firsthand, believes identity is fluid, and *hijra* find a warm welcome in her cult.

The Birds of Huur

Huur, the messenger of Death, has a large following of Laibon further inland, and his "children" travel as far as Mogadisu. They call themselves "birdmen" or "kinyonyi" in their own tongue. Claiming the country around Mogadishu as their own, the birdmen clash with Cainites venturing too far outside the city. First and foremost amongst these, of course, are the eagerly wandering Gangrel and Ravnos. So far their encounters with the birdmen range from openly hostile to downright violent, with little sign of improvement.

Eebo and Nidar

The Hawiye believe Eebo is the god of the sky, who grants rain and thus life. For vampires though, he is also god of the sun. Not wanting to anger Eebo, Laibon elders pay homage in a subdued fashion designed to draw neither ire *nor* attention.

Nidar on the other hand, is popular among Laibon. Nidar is champion of the downtrodden, exploited, and betrayed. Laibon followers call themselves "the punishers," and they actively resist the takeover of their culture and religion. They're a small group, but efficient in their attacks on Cainites. Once allies of Mazigha, they now rebuke her patronage of the new masjid and no longer believe she will restore Mogadishu to proper Laibon rule.

The Followers of Arcus

Arcus is a Malkavian, one of the first of his Clan to arrive in Mogadishu, who believes the continent holds the secret to Cainite origins. Africa is a very big place and Arcus isn't sure *where* he should look, but he reasons Mogadishu is as good place as any. As the Children of Malkav pile up and loiter around the city, the Na'ib becomes increasingly eager for Arcus to leave. Mazigha is of a different view. The Ramanga was initially merely gleeful at another Cainite making trouble for the Na'ib, but she has come to take him seriously ever since Arcus spoke of "Sarapion of the line of Loz." She doesn't know who Loz is, but she *does* know Sarapion is the old city underneath Mogadishu. Both names send chills down her long-dead spine, and she is determined to know more.

The Children of Sarapion

Sarapion is still awake. Still active. The creature acknowledges no lineage or Generation. The mention of Cagn Who Wrestles the Sun only elicits bitter laughter from it. The Laibon is ancient and immeasurable. And it still calls Mogadishu home even as it wanders the breadth of Africa. Sarapion's influence over Mogadishu is subtle, but persistent. It is the heady toxin trickling down through Assamite and Ramanga sorcery, causing the nebulous miasma that spreads like a cancer. It is the whispered refusal to accept Allah, allowing the cults of Set and Guruh to grow nightly.

Since the nights of Ptolemy, the Children of Sarapion have maintained a presence in the city. They recognize Allah and Set as false gods, unworthy of the attention heaped upon them. The cult of Sarapion passes from parent to child, and its roots run deep. The cult works to enhance the power of Mogadishu through trade, alliances and prestigious building projects. They topple creatures that become *too* powerful, for none may rival Sarapion in its glory. The Ramanga ruled from the shadows for nearly five centuries, until the Children moved against them. The Na'ib rules for now, but the continuing rise of Islam grates on the Children's nerves — another regime change might come soon.

Laibon characters find a ready place amongst the Children, who see them as Sarapion kin. This overt acceptance even allows Laibon to move *against* Sarapion without being suspected (at first). Cainites have a tougher time, and they must prove their dedication to Mogadishu and Sarapion. Even if they are accepted, they carry the stigma of foreigners in Sarapion's ancient domain.

Seeing the Sites

Mogadishu and its surrounding countryside are full of places to visit. Some places are distinctly friendlier than others, though.

Old Hamar and New Shangani

Mogadishu has no natural harbor, forcing merchants to ferry goods with smaller boats to and from anchored ships. Vampires and mortals rationalize this situation, as Mogadishu is one of the few places in the Horn where treacherous reefs let ships pass *at all*, but it's really Sarapion's blood that draws them. The creature's call created the old Hawiye city of Hamar, as well as the new Persian mercantile center of Shangani. Regardless of the city's origins though, the Na'ib now rules both even if Mazigha holds to some power in Hawiye.

Characters allying themselves with the Laibon are likely to make their Haven in Hamar, while those beholden to the Cainites lair in Shangani. This division is not absolute — in fact, the Na'ib deliberately erects the Fakr ad-Din masjid in the heart of Hamar, as an assault on Mazigha's hegemony — but it's a good rule of thumb. Most of Sarapion's (now abandoned) tombs lie below Hamar, with only one below Shangani. The latter is the most recent though, as a nod to the shift of power from Clan Ramanga to the Assamites.

Jade Horse Inn

Neither horses nor jade see much use in Mogadishu, and it isn't lost on the Laibon that a foreigner named this inn. As a result, they rarely set foot in the place, which is just how Aphobis likes it. Aphobis offers aid to all *Cainites* making their first forays into Mogadishu. He demands a modest fee in return, which is entirely a smokescreen for his true purpose: to sow dissent and create chaos. Without the Setite's careful nudges the Toreador and Lasombra might have given up on Mogadishu already. As it is though, they're ever so subtly reminded of the glories of Monçada of Madrid and Alexander in Paris, and what a *pity* it is that the Saracens rule here. Aphobis fails to mention that any war between East and West would leave him supremely situated to take over, as he believes his ties and pockets in Mogadishu are second only to the Na'ib's.

Dar Al-Salam

Mogadishu holds two official vampire gatherings called dār al-salām, meaning "home of peace." The names are steeped in Muslim faith — another sign of the Na'ib's reliance on the religion. Two Quadis, judges appointed by the Na'ib, oversee the dār al-salām and they have complete autonomy in granting or denying access.

Saruuro of Clan Ramanga rules the Red Sky in Hamar. Her position is both a leftover from Arawelo's nights, as well as an olive branch offered to the Ramanga by the Na'ib. Red Sky is the oldest dār al-salām, and a second home to the rich and powerful. Saruuro judges supplicants on their personal worth, age, and power, and does not seem to care much about Clan.

Amaria of Clan Ravnos runs the Hanging Gardens in Shangani, and everyone is welcome here. The Hanging Gardens sees as much wheeling and dealing as Red Sky, but visitors scrape more to get by. Saruuro and Amaria can supply temporary havens as well as blood dolls on request, though both consider such dependency a sign of weakness.

Ceel Waaq

Down the Southern coast lies the town of Ceel Waaq, which means the "well of God." It's a small trade port, no-

where near as important as Mogadishu, and mostly a place for cattle traders. A long-abandoned well in the countryside, however, has attracted the attention of both Impundulu and Cappadocians. The well's waters are putrid, smelling of sulfur and rot. Mortals give it a wide berth, and they consider the water unclean and cursed. Below the water lies a vast network of tunnels, some rising up to dry caverns. Shrines hide in this darkness, marked with the ancient names of Loz and bearing arcane symbols. One vampire even claims to have found an abandoned city down there, though she hasn't been able to retrace her route.

The sunken stelas hold knowledge of life, death, and divinity, and Ashur himself directs his Clan to catalog them. The Graverobbers, unable to fully translate them, turn to the Impundulu for help as they're more versed in the languages of Africa. The Laibon accept this request and seem happy, even eager, to aid. What the Cappadocians don't know is the Impundulu have their own problems, as their feeding exclusion slowly drives them to extinction. The Laibon are using the alliance to measure the Cappadocian's trustworthiness before negotiating direly-needed help.

Assamite Apocrypha: The Followers of Zarathustra

Zoroastrianism ruled in Persia long before the rise of Islam, and many Assamite elders adhere to the religion. The Clan's Muslim neonates have time on their side and their numbers are growing, but real prestige in Alamut — for now — lies with the followers of Zarathustra.

The Story of Zarathustra

Zarathustra lived 2,500 years ago in Persia. Born a shepherd of common birth, he abandoned his people and wandered for 10 years until the god Ahura Mazda spoke to him. God told the prophet that he was the spirit of goodness, but that he had an opponent: Angra Mainyu, the god of darkness. Mankind, the only species capable of free choice, is crucial in this divine battle and must choose between the two gods.

Zoroastrianism is a highly ethical religion, and its followers must do good deeds and think good thoughts. Ahura Mazda judges the balance of their actions, words, and intentions at the end of their lives, and commends them to either heaven or hell.

The Story of Tehmina

Tehmina lived 1,000 years after Zarathustra, and she was a devoted follower and scholar of Zoroastrianism. She dispensed food in times of hunger and founded a free hospital. Tehmina was far from perfect, but her efforts were sincere. It was this sincerity that attracted her sire, who Embraced her either as an anchor for his own humanity, or as a cruel experiment. From here Tehmina's fate becomes murky. She fades from history, until she runs afoul of Ur-Shulgi, who saw her faith as sacrilege to Haqim. Disposing of Tehmina was small work for a creature of Ur-Shulgi's prowess, but he underestimated the impact his actions would have. Her violent death elevated Tehmina to a martyr amongst Zoroastrian Cainites. This early overreach acts as a buffer for the Zoroastrians today, as Haqim's other childer adopted a wait-and-see approach that allowed the Zoroastrians to rise to the top of the Clan's hierarchy unchallenged.

The Road of Zarathustra

Zoroastrians believe that they — beholden to the Beast, Hunger, and eternal night — are cursed by Angra Mainyu. They must explore this state of being and, once they fully understand evil, *choose* to be good and return to Ahura Mazda's grace. Of course, not all make it there.

The Road of Zarathustra is mechanically two roads. Every Zoroastrian starts her path on the Road of Angra Mainyu. She fully experiences the evil of Angra Mainyu, recognizes his hold over her and, finally, rejects him. When the Zoroastrian feels ready (usually when she has reached at least the 5th rung), she switches to the Road of Ahura Mazda without penalty. She now begins her path to redemption and Ahura Mazda. This switch is free only *once*. The Zoroastrian can revert back to the Road of Angra Mainyu at any time (and many do as they chafe against the burden of doing good amidst damnation), but returning to the Road of Ahura Mazda later suffers all the difficulties a normal Road change (see **V20 Dark Ages** p.112-115).

Sobriquet: Zoroastrians, Penitents (Road of Ahura Mazda,) Corrupters (Road of Angra Mainyu)

Initiation: The initiate of the Road of Angra Mainyu buries herself in infertile dirt, where she remains for five days and nights — a mockery of Zoroastrian funerary rites that last the same amount of time. She spends this time contemplating the evil of Angra Mainyu and exploring the

The Road of Angra Mainyu

The Road of Angra Mainyu is mechanically similar to the Via Apophis (**V20 Dark Ages**, p.449), but with these *replacements*:

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Committing any act of kindness	The vampire is a servant of Angra Mainyu, the bringer of evil.
2	Feeding on evil men	The vampire must not harm other servants of Angra Mainyu.
1	Fearing Frenzy	Rage and Hunger are gifts from Angra Mainyu, and the vampire must embrace them.

The Road of Ahura Mazda

The Road of Ahura Mazda is mechanically similar to the Via Humanitas (**V20 Dark Ages**, 123), but with these *additions*:

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Fearing Final Death	The vampire has worked her way back to Ahura Mazda. Heaven awaits when she dies.
8	Speaking evil words, speaking ill of others	Words carry to the ear of Ahura Mazda.
1	Feeding on good men	The vampire has chosen Ahura Mazda, and must protect the good and righteous.

darkness in her own heart (which is easily done after five nights without sustenance).

The initiate of the Road of Ahura Mazda cleanses herself extensively with water. She can be alone while she does this, or request the company of a Dastur to discuss the road ahead. Once her body is clean, she purifies her spirit with fire by placing her hand in a flame. She must do this freely, without restraints (and requiring all the necessary Rötschreck tests). Failure does not carry a penalty, but she must pass the test *before* progressing further on the Road.

Organization: Some of the oldest active Assamites follow the Road of Zarathustra, giving the sect great prestige and power. Knowledge is highly valued amongst them and mentors of both Roads are beholden to teach those below them. Even so, the Road of Angra Mainyu is often lonely, as evil seeks little company. By extension the mentors of the Road of Ahura Mazda are called Dasturs and their wisdom is highly valued. Four Dasturs lead the Zoroastrians, along with the highest ranking adherent of Angra Mainyu whose task it is to constantly challenge and tempt them to evil.

Aura: Vampires on the Road of Angra Mainyu carry an aura of corruption. Their voices are honeyed and they gain a +2 dice bonus to persuade people to evil. Vampires on the Road of Ahura Mazda gain an aura of goodness. They can spend two Willpower during frenzy to name something they absolutely won't do, i.e. "I won't harm that child." ("I won't harm any children" is too broad, and the child of the first example is still fair game in a later frenzy.)

Virtues: Conviction and Self-Control

Zoroastrian Rituals

The Zoroastrians have their own Dur-an-Ki rituals. Any Assamite can learn these in theory, as can non-Assamite sorcerers on the road of Zoroaster (since their shared faith transcends the normal boundaries of blood magic). Both require a Zoroastrian Assamite teacher though.

Vampires are beholden to Angra Mainyu by their own damnation, and many of their rituals require a sacrifice to serve as conduit to Ahura Mazda. The Zoroastrians on the Road of Ahura Mazda abhor this and perform all sacrifices cleanly, without causing pain or fear. Even those on the Road of Angra Mainyu don't needlessly hurt their sacrifices, since harming animals is really beneath them.

The caster may cast all these rituals on herself, or on another beneficiary.

The Guides of Frashokereti

Frashokereti is the time when the world is stripped of evil and everything reunites with Ahura Mazda in perfect unity. A small cult of Zoroastrians believes that Gehenna is a vital step in achieving frashokereti, and they actively work towards it. They try to discern the resting places of Methusalehs and Antediluvians so they can wake them in time, and push towards anything that fits the (known) signs of Gehenna. These adherents add "Fearing Gehenna" to the Via Humanitas at Rating 10.

Guardian's Gaze (•••)

The vampire finds a "four eyed" dog (i.e one with spots above his eyes) and spends an hour or longer bonding with it. She then kills the creature and places its head to oversee her resting place. The dog's spirit guards her as she sleeps, and wakes her if she is in danger. The vampire remains awake until she has dealt with the immediate threat, though she still can't have a dice pool greater than her Road rating.

Vengeance of Angra Mainyu (•••)

The vampire calls on Angra Mainyu to give her victim a glimpse of the hell that awaits. He relives his three greatest sins, and his player rerolls any Degeneration those acts would cause (judged on the victim's Road). Creatures with a Road rating of 10 are immune to this ritual.

Tower of Silence (••••)

This ritual, based on Zoroastrian funerary rites, works on creatures who carry the touch of the grave — vampires, ghosts, and ghouls. The vampire draws three concentric circles on the ground in vitae, denoting them with the Persian words for "male," "female," and "child." She kills a vulture and distributes the remains over the three circles.

She then places a piece of her victim's body or one of his treasured possessions in the circle that matches his



spiritual gender (this may call for improvisation if the target is gender fluid,) and calls on Ahura Mazda to claim the dead. Her victim suffers aggravated damage equal to the successes the player rolled on the ritual activation, though he can negate or soak as normal.

Yasna's Protection (••••)

The vampire slices open her hand and pours vitae onto a fire dedicated to Ahura Mazda. This incurs a Rötschreck test as normal. The ritual strengthens her bond with Ahura Mazda, and offers protection against the destructive forces of Angra Mainyu. She may invoke Ahura Mazda's protection at will to ignore all damage from one source (after attack and soak are rolled normally).

This ritual ends immediately once the effect is triggered, or when the vampire next sleeps.

Padyab (•••••)

The Zoroastrian cleanses herself through elaborate bathing. She then sacrifices a dog, and mingles her blood with the creature's. She cuts off its left ear and keeps it with her during the day. When she wakes the next evening, her player rolls Conviction (difficulty 7) to shed all effects coercing the character's spirit (i.e. Dominate, Presence, and Thaumaturgical curses that affect her mind.) Preparation for this ritual takes at least half the night.

Ramanga Apocrypha: Beholden to Darkness

Deep in the Abyss lies a nameless, faceless horror. It spawned from the darkness before time, and survived against all odds through each rebirth of the universe. Its power was siphoned with every change, though, until it was a mere shimmer of its former malevolence. The creature despaired, slowly sinking into lethargy, until a single mortal voice called out to it. It now rises again from the depths, and draws ever closer to the veil to seek escape. It will use the woman whose blood it cursed as a vessel, and remind the world what *true* darkness is.

Ramanga made a deal with the devil, gaining access to great power and immortal life. She must be faithful to the creature, or lose her power (and possibly forfeit her entire lineage's power). Fortunately for her lineage, she bears the brunt of the deal. Individual childer have more leeway, allowing them to ignore the creature if they desire. It whispers to them when they sleep, offering praise if they please it and persecution when they don't, but has no actual power to compel them (other than through their progenitor).

A Lineage of Darkness

Ramanga tied herself to the Faceless mind, body, and soul — yet not her childer. It is entirely possible that neither she nor the Faceless ever foresaw that she could pass on her power. After all, these deals don't have much precedent. But since she clearly can — and did — why does she allow her childer to remain unbound? It's a curious oversight.

Ramanga's two favored childer are the only ones to ever broach this subject with her. Neither of them shared what their sire told them (or did *not* tell them), but both left her side immediately after. The oldest ventured west to the lands of the Kru, while the youngest traveled north to the land of Persia. They have not returned since.

The Power of Darkness

Aizina comes from a different source than Obtenebration. Lasombra harnessed the power of the Abyss through his own vitae and will, and Obtenebration remains a tool. Aizina, on the other hand, is darkness incarnate — it is the shadowy embodiment of the Faceless, and that creature has plans all of its own.

The Ramanga's Discipline is close enough to Obtenebration to allow access to Abyss Mysticism, but the Faceless is a jealous creature. The lineage carries a strong taboo against Abyss Mysticism (even going so far as teaching neonates they *can't*) and all Ramanga suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on Abyss Mysticism rolls. They have, however, developed several unique Discipline powers of their own. These aren't sorcery (though other vampires often mistake them for such, and the Ramanga don't correct them), but the tightly-knit nature of the lineage grants them power beyond that of an individual vampire. Other vampires may learn these powers only from a Ramanga teacher, and the Laibon are not keen to share.

Compelling Darkness

Aizina •• Presence •••

The Ramanga, clever and secretive, learned to project the force of her will without drawing attention. She can even use this power to compel her victim even in the closed sanctity of his room.

Cagn Who Wrestles the Sun

Does this mean Ramanga really don't descend from Caine? They certainly believe so, and this chapter reflects their own interpretation. If you want to make them a Cainite bloodline though, their progenitor used blood sorcery to summon an Abyssal creature to imbue the Ramanga with power.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge against a difficulty of the target's current Willpower. Success allows the character to use Presence based powers without interacting with her targets, though she must be in the same room (and the player must make all rolls as appropriate).

The player can combine this power with Shadow Communion to negate the need to be in the same room.

Experience Cost: 21

Obscurity of Shadows

Obfuscate •• Presence •

The Ramanga prefers to remain unseen and unnamed as she turns kings and queens to her will. Sometimes though, she overplays her hand and makes too big an impression. While this Discipline does not erase her actions, it does erase her presence.

System: The player names a scene and rolls Wits + Subterfuge (difficulty 7). Characters present in the scene forget the Ramanga's name and identifying features, but not her actions or words. Players roll their character's current Willpower (difficulty 7) opposed by the Ramanga's roll to resist, as does the Storyteller for noteworthy supporting characters.

The number of successes determines how far back the Ramanga can alter perceptions.



Successes	Result
Botch	The power doesn't work, and can't be used again for the remainder of this story
Failure	The power doesn't work
1 success	One hour
2 successes	One night
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year

Experience Cost: 14

Shadow Communion

Aizina •• Presence ••••

The Ramanga knows the darkness that dwells beneath all shadows. This allows her to cast her presence through one patch of shadow and out of another. She can use this to communicate with other Ramanga, or relentlessly pursue her victim with whispers.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 7) to cast her character's voice into one shadow and out of another. She indicates the shadow's general location (i.e. "the shadow under the king's bed") and the roll fails if such a shadow doesn't exist. A Ramanga player on the other side can automatically make the same roll to speak back, even if his character doesn't know this power (though he must have an Aizina rating of at least one). All voices through Shadow Communion come out as a whisper, no matter how loud the participants are actually speaking.

The player can combine this power with Compelling Darkness.

Experience Cost: 24

Weight of Shadows

Obfuscate •• Presence •••••

The Ramanga's influence extends far beyond *one* king. Working with her brethren she pushes her ideology onto an entire domain, making them believe what *she* wants them to. The Ramanga in Mogadishu utilized this power to make mortals in the domain believe the Arba' a Rukun masjid is the oldest mosque in the city.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 8) to determine how long this power works. She names one idea and the vampire plants it in the minds of all mortals in the area. Players of non-mortal creatures, including ghouls, roll their current Willpower (difficulty 7) opposed by the Ramanga's successes to resist. New arrivals make this roll when they enter the affected zone.

Successes	Result
Botch	The power doesn't work, and can't be used again for the remainder of this story
Failure	The power doesn't work
1 success	One hour
2 successes	One night
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year

The number of Ramanga successfully supporting her determines the area of the effect. They need not know this power, but must have at least Obfuscate 2 and Presence 3. Their players make the same Manipulation + Subterfuge roll. The effect ends immediately if the leading Ramanga leaves the area.

The Faceless

The Faceless is one of the oldest dwellers of the Abyss. Its power was once limitless and it enjoyed tormenting all creatures that dwell in light, yet now it is banished to the outer reaches. Its goal is to return to the world and usher in a new era of complete darkness. Storytellers can use the Road of Apep (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p.449) as a basis for the Road of Darkness. Ramanga on the Road of Darkness gain a -2 difficulty bonus on all Aizina rolls and combination Disciplines that utilize Aizina. This even offsets their weakness for Abyss Mysticism, taking them from a +1 penalty to a -1 bonus.

Participants	Area of Effect
1	Room
2	Building
4	City Block / District
8	Half a City
16	Entire City

Experience Cost: 35

Whispered Passions

Obfuscate •• Presence •••

The Ramanga is at her best when she rules from *behind* the throne. She leaves a barely noticeable trail of whispers that slowly turn the king from his passions to hers. Her target integrates her desires as if they were his own, and begins to genuinely work towards their fulfillment.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty the target's current Willpower) to determine how long this power works. The vampire can tie her target to an emotion, i.e. a love for infrastructure, a thirst for war, or the worship of a goddess. The target still believes the idea was his when the effect wears off. If he was neutral towards the idea before, he undertakes no effort to undo his work. If he was hostile before, he believes that he genuinely changed his mind and now changed it back again.

Successes	Result
Botch	The power doesn't work, and the subject becomes aware the Ramanga tried to influence him (though he doesn't realize she did so supernaturally). He can't be affected again for the remainder of this story.
Failure	The power doesn't work
1 success	One hour
2 successes	One night
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year

Experience Cost: 21





Chapter Six: The Domain of Mangaluru

We next arrived at the city of Manjarun, which is situated upon a large estuary of the sea, called the "estuary of the wolf," and which is the greatest estuary in the country [...] The king of this place is the greatest of the kings of Malabar.

— Ibn Battuta

Gods and heroes have walked the shores of Mangaluru for thousands of years. The coast, known as the "estuary of the wolf," was reclaimed by the immortal incarnation of a god. Named for the famed temple dedicated to Shakti in the form of Mangaladevi, Mangaluru is as eternal as Rome or Constantinople, if not entirely as prominent. Indeed, temples dot the countryside, thronged by the pious and the priestly. No less than a Pandava was the city's governor, and many Alupa kings have made their seat within the city.

Only the pious come for the temples, and only the political come for the Alupa courts. Everyone else comes for the spice.

Mangaluru is one of the beating hearts of the spice trade, sending saffron, ginger, and black pepper flowing westward with every high tide. The people passing through Mangaluru continue eastward, links in the great chain of humanity. Persians and Yemenites, Jews and Muslims and Christians, all endure months of hard travel for the privilege of stepping into the shade of Mangaluru's coconut palms. They leave with flavor to their ships and gold in their futures. Home to merchants and the final stopping point for traders bound by sea and earth, the ancient yet humble streets swell with caravans and goods, fresh and different with every day. The nights never change, though. They have remained the same for centuries.

The War of Princes has not touched Indian shores. In Mangaluru the Long Night never ended. Here, the Salubri reign openly, claiming their share in praxis unseen outside Outremer. They own the nights in a triumvirate, joined by the Danava and the Ravnos, joined in secret by the Nagaraja and forming a bulwark against the West. In Mangaluru, loved by the Greeks for its pepper and disdained by the Romans for its pirates, the Clans of Ventrue and Toreador are low, for they have no purchase and no appreciation of the history. Gods walk the soil of the estuary of the wolf still, under a blanket of stars, prayers on their bloody lips.

Their hegemony does not go unchecked. Their bulwark is under siege. The long and storied trade allows the Trembling Ones to gain a foothold in the region, setting the Shepherds on edge. In the wake of the Usurpers come Toreador and Ventrue, seeking to profit from the trade of gold and spices. The Ravnos are ever untrustworthy allies, and the Nagaraja keep their own counsel. The ruling triumvirate has history on their side, but the Salubri know the past is merely prologue.

A Land of Legend

As told by Malsang of the Nagaraja

The people's flesh is hot. The spices, you see? Can you not taste the pepper amidst the copper, so like sun-warmed blood even on the most rain-soaked evening? Ahh, those are the only delights left to me. The night is still beautiful, but how I wish I could see the green of the trees once more,

how the rain must cause the light of the sun to shatter into a thousand colors. What some call our *curse* abates in this place, for the land's blessings are manifold. The sage Parashurama himself reclaimed this land from the sea and built the temple where the Danava now dwell. The sea has blessed us further. Spice has been the blood of Mangaluru, literally and metaphorically. It pools in their livelihood and in their meat. The people pole down the rivers Gurupuru and Netravati, walk through the rolling hills to come here and ply their wares. When the Empire of Rome was late a Republic, that elder of theirs, Pliny, spoke of fearing our pirates. Even then proud Roma refused to face our sailors on equal seas. Lasombra, Ventrue, and Malkavian from Rome, Brujah from Carthage, each sent their childer to our shores, foreign leather planting into the sands over red clay. The Greeks recognized us as one of the greatest fonts of pepper in the entire world, and what their swords could not take their coins bought instead. The Byzars of New Rome come here now, Greek as ever, as do Persians, Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

The triumvirs have been here as long as Mangaluru, and Mangaluru has always been here. How not? The Salubri and the Danava have been close since Saulot received his revelations within the city of Golconda. They and the Ravnos are all enemies of the hated *asuratizzaya* to the east, driving deep the alliance between the three lines of the Blood. Danava and Salubri have always ruled this land, and the *jati* of the Ravnos have been their strong sword arms. They rule with sorcery and legend, demanding blood as payment and giving health as the best of kings. The Children of Danu are not like the Ventrue, lurking under the grand castle of the Premysls, or the Toreador in their fine courts. They garb themselves as holy men, calling themselves Brahmins when they deem to do so at all, and slumber amidst the temple of Mangaladevi, greatest of the Kerala temples. The Kshatriya Unicorns rise in the palaces of kings, existing among the people, hiding in plain sight but watching over them in secret, waiting, protecting.

The Seat of Kings

The Salubri have named themselves rulers since Kulashekara Alupendra, king of the Alupas, made the city his capital. The Alupas were always second to the Chalukyas of Badami, the Rashrakutas, the Calukyas of Kalyani, and the Hoysalas — whichever dynasty held the imperial throne, the Alupas were quick to bend the knee, and so remained favored signatories. The Shepherds attached themselves to Alupendra's court, ensuring their pawns and hangers-on remained strong and in good health. They made sure the king's political enemies and those traders who faltered in their profits made their way to Mangaladevi, to pray for holy deliverance. They found it: sacrificed and consumed to fuel the Sadhana of the *deva* Danava. Those blood sorcerers, in turn, protected the prophets from all enemies. Both hold the Ravnos, commoners in status if not in caste, under their taloned thumbs, much to their chagrin. We came much later, and only the insistence of the Salubri that the city was welcome to all was our salvation.

Common vampires coming to Mangaluru must bring a mortal with them as tribute, one whom they will not miss. If they fail in this, they must procure one from outside the city, for many of the lesser mortal traders who come to Mangaluru fall under scrutiny as soon as they step off their ships. The Salubri judge their impact on the city, the Danava scry their karma, and if the trader suffers under the weight of his sins, Ravnos take him in the night. The majority of these sacrifices go to the Danava, the smallest remainder to we, and by our combined patronage Mangaluru remains safe by blood sorcery. We make more of it than the Danava, clearly — not blood, nor meat, nor soul is wasted by we — but their magics are empowered by their gods, so clearly the sacrifices seem worthwhile. They are the only mortals who perish at the fangs of vampires within the city, though — an unholy murder, performed without sanction, will only result in the swiftest and most terrible vengeance. The travelers and traders taken are relatively few in number, while the residential people of the city and dedicated herds keep safe Mangaluru's Cainites.

Peace and prosperity guide the night's activities. Divinatory magics allow the Salubri to guide foreign vampires to auspicious victims, enriching the capability of the city to support a Cainite population. Even a Trembling One visiting the city (and there are many) can expect an ironic smile and warm welcome from a Salubri. And why not smile, for are they not victorious? What the Hellenic Cainites deemed *Elysium* rules over the city entire. The combined power of Sadhana and Valeren find any who seek to break the peace before the thought even occurs to them. The Shepherds are open about their challenge, telling every Tremere neonate who comes to take a message back to their chantries: Mangaluru is a refuge, one the Tremere may assault if they dare. The Children of Saulot are there, and they are waiting.

Nights of Blood and Spice

Being outsiders — albeit ones cunningly favored by the Salubri to keep the Danava in line and fortify their defenses against necromancy — we Nagaraja tend to take a more nuanced view of the city's politics than the triumvirs. From our mountain huts and rocky tombs, we wait and watch.



It is not so different from the conditions of our sorcerous forebears in Tibet, though the Ghats are warmer and ever more hospitable. Maybe it was our nuanced view and similar heritage that led the Tremere to reach out to us when they finally did arrive on Mangaluru's shores.

The Trembling Ones came subtly at first, sending allies such as blood-bound Gangrel and Western Ravnos, even once a Gargoyle clinging to the underside of a ship. The Danava and Salubri greeted those subtle slaves as they did all others — with a friendly smile and fangs out, Sadhana detecting their intentions almost immediately. Yet the Tremere are cosmopolitan in the Embrace and, like all Hermetics, eager to fold diverse magical traditions into their Blood. Mangaluru has ever been friendly to the Jewish people, who maintain a large community there; even with knowledge aforethought of Tremere malice, they could do little once the Jewish Tremere vanished into their insular communities. The peace enforced by the Shepherds with such daring has allowed serpents more treacherous than we to coil against their breast. Usurpers covet the magics of the Danava, seeking to turn orisons to Shiva and Agni towards formulae of Hermes and Thoth, to reduce a religion's mysteries into blocky symbols and brutal efficacy. They covet the blood of Saulot, seeking to complete their claim on the mantle of Clan. They are wizards, creatures of pride and avarice, and we know them as kindred.

The nights are as quiet as the days are noisy, though they're still full of activity. Sailors sit upon the coasts and drink in their camps, bonfires blazing into the night. Between these fires walk the Danava and the Salubri, and in their wake follow the Ravnos, bringing the power of life and death in judgment to the foreigners. Their orange garb and pious behavior increasingly marks them as outsiders, not the foreign visitors. Merchants grown wealthy with trade drape themselves in rich fabrics, the scent of spice clinging to their elegant clothing. Sailors shuck salt-stained tunics for native silks while they drink liquor in ancient temples. The religiosity so ubiquitous to the area is slowly receding into the background, as trade waxes prominent.

The Shape of Things to Come

As told by Amichai of Clan Tremere

Even without our influence, the Blood of Saulot was doomed to lose its grasp on this region. The Danava are

potent in their magics, but like the Salubri, philosophically riven in twain down their descent — in this case, half of their brood believe themselves angels, the other half demons. The Salubri have an alliance with the former, *devas*, while the *asuras* consider themselves to be a scourge on humanity. Over the course of the last decade, the *deva* elders have fallen into torpor while the *asura* neonates surge in power and strength. The Salubri have never been able to properly set aside their morals without destroying themselves, which is why we will triumph over them. They have reached out to the Flesh Eaters of the Ghats, sought to hew closer to the Ravnos who thickly populate these forests, never realizing that overcoming historical ostracism requires an improvement in conditions, rather than maintenance of the status quo.

Our mortal herds — merchants and scholars — are spreading outward from their enclave, slowly extending their influence. Meanwhile, our Clan smiles back at our weak and feeble progenitors, respecting their peace as we lick our fangs. We speak to the Ravnos and the *asuras*, to the Nagaraja, offering feast rather than famine. The night is already ours; all that remains is to gently remove it from the withered hands of our feeble progenitors.

Holy Fools of Mangaluru

Kiaan — (Seventh Generation Danava) Highest among the deva Danava still active within the city, Kiaan is a master of several Thaumaturgy Paths, and uses them to support the will of the Salubri and thwart the Tremere. Kiaan respects Rodriel, but is keenly aware the Shepherd doesn't share his faith, chafing at the commoditization of his religious rites to another vampire's end. He's aware that he, too, would perish under trembling fangs, so he continues to support the alliance, but the seed of disloyalty threatens to sprout any night. With his elders having met Final Death or having sunk into torpor years ago, Kiaan finds it more and more difficult to control the asura faction of his bloodline.

Rodriel — (Sixth Generation Salubri Healer) Rodriel has been in Mangaluru for nearly 900 years. A Saint Thomas Christian, he accepted the Western nomenclature of his Clan, taking a Hebrew name on his conversion. Unlike many of his Clan, Rodriel walks the Path of Kings, seeing ruling as the best way to shepherd mortality and protect the land. Were he to falter, the Danava and Nagaraja would consume all, sacrificing souls to their pagan gods and consuming the flesh left over. Despite this belief, he is tolerant and knowledgeable about Hinduism, and the strange ways of the Nagaraja. He keeps the peace by praxis alone, and fears what the shortsighted Tremere will do to the region.

Pabrakhar — (Tenth Generation Salubri Watcher) One of the only members of his rare caste within the city, Pabrakhar does what he can to ensure things run smoothly. While the Thaumaturgy of the Danava sees into samsara and can judge the path of karma for those they target, only Pabrakhar's mastery of Watcher Valeren can reveal and neutralize threats outside the limited scope of Thaumaturgy. A devout Hindu, Pabrakhar is continually discomfited with his great-great grandsire Rodriel's Christian sensibilities and lack of respect for the Danava.

Sridhar (Eleventh Generation Ravnos) Dealing with the Nagaraja isn't easy; it requires a lot of patience, a lot of obeisance, and a lot of flesh. Being one of the untouchables in a land that never cared much for traditional castes, Sridhar has taken easily to his task as emissary, even when he finds it difficult to deal with Rodriel's disrespect. The Nagaraja necromancers, for all of their petty demands for supplication, have always treated Sridhar warmly and well.

Chaitra (Tenth Generation Ravnos) Bloodbound to Rodriel, Chaitra remains his foremost enforcer. As skilled with Potence as she is with Chimerstry, Chaitra grew up in Mangaluru, becoming a ghoul as a teenager and then a childe-by-proxy of Rodriel due to the lack of suitable Salubri Warriors. She remains fanatically loyal to the nominal Prince, though her streak of sardonicism makes it difficult to tell how much of that loyalty is due to the blood bond. As a consequence, she finds herself increasingly ostracized by her Clan, as more and more start to associate with Daitya and Tremere rather than the Children of Danu and Saulot.

Amichai bani Tremere — (Ninth Generation Tremere) A skilled mage and Kabbalist, Amichai's talent with magic vanished utterly upon his Embrace, but his facility with Dominate and Auspex proved to be prodigious. Unable to progress through the House and burgeoning pyramid, his sire turned what could be an embarrassment for her into a boon, dispatching her childe to colonial outposts to pave the way. Ensconcing himself within the Chochin Jewish population, Amichai has successfully enthralled several mortals of import within the city, acting as patron for merchant caravans. His lack of magical prowess causes the Danava to dismiss him, even as he maintains a casual and cordial relationship with the Ravnos of the city.

The Domain's Features

Mangaluru's port is eternal, being at the confluence of two great rivers and resting on an easy current from the

Arabian Sea. It's not uncommon to see traders from Mogadishu or the Crusader States end their trip in Mangaluru, so the city takes on a cosmopolitan atmosphere. The city itself has never been large, with the greatest population concentration being the great colorful marketplaces near the port. Wood structures predominate, flowing inland from the sea in a riot of styles and languages. The goods are what make Mangaluru great, not the buildings themselves.

Ships flow through the harbor year round, coming from a massive number of lands and disgorging their goods. Gold and textiles and food flow into Mangaluru, while spice flows back outward. It's not uncommon for Cainites themselves to visit the city, both on the peaceful reputation enforced by the Salubri and to protect their investments in the mortal spice trade.

The grand exceptions to this trend are the temples. It is no surprise the Danava and Salubri cleave so tightly to the religious aspects of their praxis, for religion grips this city, and holds the people in a cultural identity in the face of the sea's onslaught. Dozens of smaller temples sit around the city, most of them in the wooden, two-storied Kerala style. During festivals, the sound of drums rises slightly above the normal sounds of the deep green forest that grows between the rivers and the temples.

Mangaladevi Temple

A short distance from the city, along a well-worn path, lays the temple dedicated to Shakti in the form of Mangaladevi. It's popular to claim the temple was built by the sage Parashurama, but King Kundvarma Alupa ordered it built four centuries ago to solidify and sanctify his rule over the entirety of the region.

Mangaladevi presides over the temple, resting within the central shrine. Other deities possess shrines all around the temple, tended by priests mortal and immortal. Connected from the start to the Nagaraja, their mortal monks and ghouls guard the temple and the shrine to the god Nagar.

In a city of Elysium, the Mangaladevi Temple is doubly sacrosanct. All are allowed here and are expected to maintain the holiness of the temple, lest the deities within take offense to the region entire.

Pandava Caves

Originally the center of worship for a cult of Manjusri of the Sword, the holy caves near the Kadri Manjunath temple replaced their icon of the Buddha with one of Shiva on the orders of King Kundvarma Alupa.

The caves themselves are clean and often dimly lit, making them an easy diplomatic ground for Cainites normally forbidden from the city. Carvings of myths and religious stories break the smooth cave walls, closing off rooms where discreet meetings can take place. And meetings do take place — Daitya, Ravnos, and the Nagaraja, bloodlines generally discouraged from entering the city itself, and they commiserate in their shared fate and brighter future. The Nagaraja take care to never feed within the caves, to avoid offending the Danava or giving the Salubri reason for permanent expulsion.

The Rains

Mangaluru remains relatively warm year round, with summer being oppressively hot and humid during the evening. Of the many Clans and bloodlines who practice blood sorcery in Mangaluru, the Tremere alone possess the Thaumaturgical prowess to affect weather, but they often choose to withhold their miracles unless it's a dire necessity (and unless they're well compensated). Even the Trembling Ones' magic can't stop the rains, which — though constantly at a low amount year round — truly *start* in June and last until October, swelling the rivers and whipping the ocean waves into frothy breaks. The cold, clear rains reach waist depth, driving foreign merchants to high ground. Natives and Cainites don't care, though mortals know to stay off the roads at night. The Children of Saulot have made it known that those who wander during the floods are liable to disappear.

Kukke Subramanya Temple

The deep greenery of the forest gives way to the banks of the River Kumaradhara and the sacred temple of the Lord Kukke Subramanya, a fixture in various forms for nearly 4,000 years. The river rushes down from the Kumara Mountains, and bathing in it is sacred. The Kumaradhara remains a place of pilgrimage for this temple and the nearby, smaller temple dedicated to Adi Subramanya. It's commonly thought that a trip to this temple cures diseases and heals the afflicted, a belief the Salubri eagerly take advantage of. The Shepherds hold this temple and several others around the area, one of the only places where the Danava do not hold hegemony.

The Western Ghats

The Ghats — Sahyadri — mountain range runs parallel to the western coast, easily visible from the ocean. Verdant and green, they rise steeply, making it appear that much of the coast is walled off from the rest of the world. The storms sweeping in from the sea break upon the ranges and flow back westward, making the Ghats an area of constant storms, never without the cacophony of water drops smack-

ing green leaves. The near-constant rainfall produces truly spectacular waterfalls, even during the evening.

The Nagaraja walk the Ghats, traveling north from the peninsular domain of Nagercoil, where they reside around the great temple whose name they bear. Outcast from the city itself, they consume unwary travelers and live humbly off the generosity of the Salubri, carving refuges for themselves in a foreign style.

Kadri Manjunath Temple

The fall of Buddhism didn't result in a great deal of turmoil in Mangaluru, as it did elsewhere. Instead, the temple changed hands — not bloodlessly, but the process wasn't as violent as it could have been. Previously dedicated to the Buddha, King Kundvarma Alupa made the temple another target of religious conversion, subtly repurposing the history and culture of the temple towards Hinduism.

A natural spring sits in the back of the temple at the center of a massive garden, letting water into nine different pools. Supplicants to the temple must wash themselves in successive pools during the day, but during the evening the pools are the stronghold of the Danava bloodlines within the city itself. The Children of Danu teach Sadhana within the garden to the few worthies, spilling blood under the moon, the stars, and the auspice of Manjunatha.

Cainite Factions

As the domain sits, it rots from within. The pressure subtly exerted by the Tremere accelerates this decay, driving the city gradually towards instability.

The Devas and the Asuras

The split within the Danava bloodline hearkens to most ancient roots of the Hindu religion. Half the Cainites of the bloodline believe themselves divine, blessed inheritors of righteous might; the other ones believe themselves the descendants of demons, a scourge on humanity. The blood magic they share, Sadhana, is relatively neutral in the split. For centuries, the *asuras* were marginalized, leaving the city to walk the peninsula in the face of the elder *devas* inhabiting Mangaluru. Yet, curiously, the elder *devas* have fallen into torpor over the last decade, leaving precious few practitioners of Sadhana to ally with the Salubri. And so, the *asuras* are beginning to return, one by one, to the land of their Embrace. The idea that they are even capable of holiness is anathema to them, and the Tremere — known for binding demons — are a far more palatable option for association.

In these nights, the Danava have nearly fallen to a state of open war. The *devas* are unwilling to admit how deep the division in the bloodline goes, but *asuras* have begun hunting their torpid elders and committing the Amaranth upon them, encouraged by hungry Tremere. Trembling neonates excited by the possibilities of foreign magic have begun converting the Path of Praapti, which would give the Tremere rapid transit back to their chantry strongholds in the Carpathian Mountains.

The Nagaraja

For as long as the triumvirs have ruled the city, the Nagaraja have stood apart. 400 years ago, they managed to indelibly associate their mortal lineage with the main temple of Mangaladevi; since then, the Salubri grudgingly accept them, and finally turn to them for aid against the Tremere as the Danava fall to infighting. The Nagaraja have a secret agenda — preservation of the apocalypse city of Enoch, within the Underworld — but have long fought for a place within Cainite society, opposed by the conservative Salubri. The *asuras* and the Tremere alike consider the Nagaraja to be kindred spirits, the former for being fellow inhumans, the latter for being fellow wizards who claimed the mantle of immortality from the Blood.

As ever, the Nagaraja keep their own counsel, even as they bargain with the Clans and bloodlines as clients. The Serpent Kings prize Mangaluru as a port, one giving them access to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It is a vital link, allowing them easy reach to ancient sites of mystic power within Egypt, yet remaining close to their base of temporal power at Nagercoil. The Nagaraja are perhaps the most devoted to maintaining a vital and steady amount of mortal commerce. If Mangaluru becomes a ghost town, they will lose their life's blood.

The Salubri

For centuries, the Shepherds have guided Mangaluru, butchering and preying upon the mortal population with impunity. They weigh the kharmic debt of visitors to the city even as they neglect their own. Their ancient mandate to keep the liminal balance between Cainite and kine allowed Mangaluru to prosper, without the folly of Carthage or the gilded degeneracy of Rome. But in ages past, the Salubri kept their numbers only as large as their pride allowed, for the Blood was precious and rarely shared. Now, they prey upon the less worthy, not to turn over to the Danava but to claim as childer. The three eyes of the Salubri turn to the West, to the resurrection of their Clan and their vengeance against the Tremere. The Healers and Watchers of Mangaluru have long held the preservation of the peace in the city as their highest priority, but for all their shortsightedness, they are not blind to the threat of the Trembling Ones. To that end, they Embrace, and send more roughly-hewn childer — bloodied sailors, pirates, and the traditional thieves Embraced by the Watchers — in the company of disgruntled Danava. The Healer's childer more often than

not fall prey to Tremere hunters without Warriors to protect them, but the Generation of the Mangaluru Salubri is low, and the Blood of Saulot is an infinite font.

In this endeavor, they have turned to their ancient allies, the Daitya: the Followers of Set who converted to Buddhism in the wake of hunting the Children of Osiris to extinction in the Himalayan Mountains. The unity with humanity preached by the Penitents deeply offended the Salubri, and they assume the ancient pacts they made with the Daitya still hold true. Yet the mortal suppression of Buddhism rankles the Daitya, many of whom suffered greatly under the Kshatriya yoke in their breathing days. They find greater common cause with the Jews of Mangaluru — themselves an oft-maligned social group — than with the ruling Salubri, who were princes and high holies.

The Ravnos

The Ravnos exist within all the castes of the Hindu religion, though the degree to which Buddhism still remains within Mangaluru makes caste divisions somewhat irrelevant. Across caste lines, the *jati* of the Ravnos are tightly-knit within Mangaluru, making them a relatively unified bloc. Allied with the Salubri and the Danava in centuries past, many neonates find the nascent Tremere to offer better terms for Indians, both Cainite and mortal. Even within the same caste, the Children of Danu and Saulot rarely give the Ravnos their due, despite being the most populous Clan in the area (and indeed, the entire land). Neither Clan in the triumvirate has ever taken seriously the role the Ravnos play in opposing the *asuratizzaya* east of the Indus. The Tremere don't much care either, but they do respect the Ravnos enough to offer the Charlatans a bigger portion of the pepper trade and help ensure safe passage for *jati* returning from the morally-corrupt Mediterranean.

Pishacha

Any mention of the pishacha prompts Cainites to spit in disgust as a ward to keep them away. These debased vampire cousins plague charnel houses and funeral pyre grounds throughout India, mindlessly feeding wherever they can and spreading infectious diseases as a terrible side effect of their miserable existences.

The pishacha feed not on blood, but on raw flesh — dead or living, they don't care which. They appear as humanoid



creatures with pulsating veins standing out in grotesque relief against stretched skin and blood-red eyes that bulge from their skulls like glistening abscesses. The presence of human bodies burning or rotting and the emotional residue left behind in places of great anger or grief both attract these pitiful creatures, lending them vitality. They are intelligent and know how to manipulate other thinking beings on a basic level, but rarely speak except through the mouths of others, and they stay hidden whenever they're not actively feeding. A pishacha possesses humans by projecting its consciousness into the person's mind and forcing her to say, do, or feel things against her will, although the pishacha itself is vulnerable while it does so. Victims of possession are susceptible to infection with diseases of the body or mind, carried by the asymptomatic pishacha without any intent on its part.

Pishacha suffer the same weaknesses and enjoy the same benefits as their vampiric kin. They burn in the sun, fly into frenzies, and shrug off damage the same way. One major difference is that pishacha can't sire childer the way a vampire does. Corpses fed pishacha blood wither and contort as though wracked by a fatal illness, but they don't rise to unlife.

The Cainites of India and nearby regions argue vehemently over where the pishacha come from and how they're made. Some claim they're nothing to do with vampires and the similarities are mere coincidence, citing Hindu myths about the spirits of depraved sinners who leave behind the pathetic remains of their souls when they die. These spirits merge with corpses and walk the earth, eating flesh in a wretched attempt to regain life. Others say the pishacha are the product of Cainite souls trying to reincarnate as human beings, or that they're vampires that came to be without anything like a soul at all. Cainite fables in ancient records tell of similar creatures that resulted from botched diablerie. Certain Clans whisper rumors that the pishacha are Tremere castoffs, the remnants of unstable blood sorcery or the Embrace gone wrong. An urban legend among Cainite circles claims a normal vampire who drinks the blood of a pishacha deteriorates into one. In places where other Clans particularly look down upon the Nosferatu, stories link them to the pishacha as close kin or even their ultimate fate, though so far no evidence suggests this is true.

Powers and Weaknesses

- Pishacha spend blood points on Disciplines and other innate abilities as vampires do, though their vitae cannot create blood bonds or childer, and they cannot imitate life. Pishacha replenish blood points by consuming human flesh, and are considered vampires of the Thirteenth Generation for mechanical purposes. Living flesh counts as fresh blood, while corpse flesh halves the number of effective blood points available for every hour the body has been dead. Consuming the flesh of a vampire or other supernatural creature provides one extra blood point per turn.
- Whenever a pishacha first enters an area tainted by particularly gory death, mass execution, burning flesh, or violent negative emotion, it gains one temporary Willpower point. It can sniff out such areas from up to a mile away. Using its Dementation or Dominate (Possession) Discipline successfully also earns a Willpower. It can only earn a Willpower this way once per scene.
- Pishacha suffer all the weaknesses of the vampiric condition with some differences, as follow: Instead of falling into torpor when it mummifies after reaching Incapacitated while staked, a pishacha simply crumbles to dust, it can enter frenzy from hunger but not from anger, and it cannot soak damage from sunlight at all.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Melee 2, Occult 1, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 1, Survival 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Abombwe 3, Celerity 1, Dementation 1, Dominate 5 (Command, Subjugation, and Possession only), Obfuscate 2, Potence 2

Road: 1, **Willpower:** 4; **Blood Pool:** 6

Note: The pishacha's consciousness leaves its body while it uses its Dementation and Dominate Disciplines, rendering it unable to use any defensive maneuvers. If it successfully uses one of these Disciplines, the victim must succeed at a reflexive Stamina roll, difficulty 6, when the Discipline ends to avoid contracting either a Derangement or a physical disease of the Storyteller's choosing. The pishacha uses Intimidation instead of Empathy to activate Incubus Humor.

Salubri Apocrypha: The Clan of Three Ways

Matthias –

I think of you, dear Matthias, and my eyes remain dry, for I know your cause is righteous. You are a true scion of Rayzeel, possessing the certitude of saints promised Heaven, our final victory in death safeguarded by Raphael's promise. Yet when I feel my forehead, our Clan's eye weeps, and it pours onto these pages like an offered drink. For whom do I weep? You, Matthias, lost to London? Our Progenitor, lost to hungry fangs? The brethren of Samiel, dying in their rage? If there is one boon from an unbeating heart, it is that it cannot beat with false hope. You will meet Final Death in London, a sacrifice to the Unconquered Sun. You will burn in the Mithraeum, a lamb instead of a bull.

For we are lambs, my dear departed Matthias. The Childer of Samiel would have us be lions instead, but I have seen the carnage left when the lion fights the eagle over scraps. The absence of the Salubri and Assamite Warrior Castes in Ely brings both comfort and clarity to me. In the Reconquista, we Healers clashed with both, all of us chafing under the rule of the Clan of Night. We believed the Warriors split our Clan when they left us in the shadow of Acre, but it was Samiel taking up his sword and willing his Blood to change that split us. With right hand and left, we Shepherds judged those who stressed the kine unduly, acting to keep the Blood of Seth warm and vital, still tasting of the holy sun when we supped in the night. The Childer of Hagim held all of Caine's brood to be in their purview, though. Conflict is inevitable, no matter the stories of brotherly love between Saulot and Hagim. We fought while shadowed ears heard darker promises, and now the Tremere hold high office in the Sea of Shadows.

It is in our nature to seek peace, Matthias, so I pondered this when the Crimson Curia pronounced my exile. I saw hate in Nikita of Sredetz's face when he spoke of my excommunication, but in truth I felt no fear, having left the bosom of Caine long before. Our Clan's course set us before the Clans and their fangs, our care of the Childer of Seth brought us to this end. It was when I stumbled on the shores of Rennes, seeking to wrap the thickest of blankets around myself so the boat across the channel would keep me safe from the sun's immortal gaze, when I realized the truth.

Sacrifice is our purpose, my sibling in Saulot. We are the lambs in Blood as well as in fact. Saulot did not struggle when Tremere consumed him. We felt his placidity, his peace within us, even as we rent our garments with our eyes shot through with blood. Samiel was wrong to defy Saulot, and he delayed our fate for centuries. The Childer of Caine do not deserve redemption, and the Childer of Seth will defend themselves. I wish you could see that happen in the nights to come.

In too many places, we must hide our lamps under bushels, our eyes under wimples. Mithras has opened all of my eyes to walking openly in the light. I do weep for you, Matthias, but they are tears of joy. Our lord's flames shall be a crown of righteousness upon your brow. Soon, I shall walk and feel the sun upon my face once more. Whether I survive is up to my lord Mithras in his bounty.

With hope of our reuniting soon –

Bethany

The Blooding of Samiel

The Code of Samiel was a unique Road practiced by Samiel, but his childer attempted to recreate it. Whether or not they succeeded is a matter for sages and Watchers, for the Warrior Caste was too busy meeting evil with bared steel and furious hearts to ponder overmuch. Righteous vengeance was their pride and purview, and none could contest their right to punish those who transgressed against the kine without a powerful rejoinder from the Warriors themselves.

Only after a customary apprenticeship of seven years is a Warrior considered worthy of the Blooding, though that requirement continues to decline in these degenerate nights. The ritual itself is simple yet secretive, attended by every Blooded Salubri Warrior within the area: While her mentor recites the words of Samiel, heard by his childe or apprentice and all others, his third eye opens and weeps a single, lambent blood tear. This is the Blood

of Samiel, transubstantiated by his childer. It is customary for the Blooded to tenderly embrace her mentor (the last vestige of her compassion shown without steel drawn), and then to tenderly lick the tear from his face. From this night onward, she carries Samiel's Blood within her, and she is considered properly Blooded.

There have been vanishingly few Bloodings since the first Siege of Acre in 1191, when the Clan's victory in the city was overshadowed by their decision to go their separate ways. In these dark nights, the few remaining Blooded Warriors refer to their Code as *Via Dolorosa*, the Path of Tears, and refer to themselves as Noddists. They claim the mandate of judging Cainites who stray from moral Roads, or who prey upon their herds unduly. Some are rumored to have lost their way, inviting demons to possess their souls so they may end their unlives and thus permanently slay the foes of Satan.

Two powers are afforded to those properly Blooded by the Code; both function so long as the Salubri Warrior remains at a rating of 6+ on the Road of Heaven, Kings, or Samiel.

Tracker's Mark (2pt. Merit)

Well attuned to the soul of her quarry, the Salubri's third eye sees the influence of her opponent in the world, rather than mere signs of his physical passage. When attempting a tracking roll (see **V20 Dark Ages**, page 337), the Salubri's player rolls at -2 difficulty. Ephemeral signs of a quarry are considered valid evidence to follow, even if a Salubri cannot normally detect them; for example, if an irate Brujah disturbed a market's peace, the Warrior can discern his presence from the still-irritated traders hours later, making the intuitive leap to relate the event to her quarry's passing.

Blooded by the Code (5pt. Merit)

Inducted by a true Salubri Warrior, rather than a mere member of the bloodline, the young Cyclops possesses supernatural might far in excess of what she might otherwise wield. She is allowed to purchase and use the Discipline power Song of the Blooded at normal cost (40 experience points), *irrespective of Generation*. No other Valeren Discipline power may be purchased unless the Salubri otherwise qualifies for it. Additionally, her Status is accounted as two higher when interacting with other Salubri.

Ravnos Apocrypha: Caste and Karma

To my dear childe —

You are as ever correct in your repeated statements that our alliance with the Nagaraja has consumed a great number of slaves and my profits along with them, yet has borne no fruit. Your apologies are noted, but unnecessary. You are my childe, and I have known you since taking you into the jati. So what if more of our Clan step off the boats of Mogadishu every evening, Brahmin twisting at their robes and bleating piously about their lack of power, at how the "asuras" have shut them out of the nights of Mangaluru? If each holy step withers our Clan's claim to primacy and with it the spices and slaves that keep the jati breathing with both lungs, then such is our karma. If you cannot supplant the Children of Danu, or break their withered souls as Mohammed's followers did hundreds of years ago, I am sure you will find some other way to make peace with their enemies. I have every faith in your capabilities, even if they have faltered and failed our Clan for 1,000 nights before this one.

Remember that you are of the Kalderash jati, Sridhar. We are Vaishya always and forevermore, so long as we remain upon the wheel. So long as your eyes flutter open and your fangs still work, you will do your duty — to your jati, to your sire, and to yourself. I know you can do nothing less so long as my Blood is within you.

-Amaria

Jati

Ravnos cleave together. Where there is one of Zapathasura's childer, there are three more you never see. Even when they are charitable, they disrupt the social order wherever they do not define it. They exist according to their own codes, and worse, they rarely betray one another. The loyalty of the Clan to other members is yet another reason to distrust the Clan of Seekers.

More so than other Clans, the Ravnos are family, and you betray family at your own peril. Alone among the Clans of India, the Seekers Embrace their childer across caste lines, deferring not to mortal castes but to a structure of bloodlines already extant within their own Clan. Clan Ravnos refers to these lineages as *jati*, a term encompassing both caste division and family group.

Most *jati* travel together, roving bands of sires and childer bound together by common ancestry and caste origin. Sometimes, they will form semi-permanent enclaves within Cainite society, ensconcing themselves within cities along trade routes so that traveling Clanmates will be able to find a kindred bloodline.

Ravnos Jati (2pt. Merit)

You belong to a widely-recognized Ravnos *jati*, affording you some measure of status with your Clan members. Whenever you interact with another Vagabond, treat your Status as one level higher; if they also belong to your *jati*, treat your Background as two levels higher and your Allies, Contacts, or Mentor as one higher where your *jati* is concerned. Once per session, if you're in a city with a significant Ravnos population, you can find one member of your *jati* with no issue, who will likely help you out with no questions asked. Once per chapter, a member of your *jati* will seek you out for help with a troublesome and dangerous task.

Phuri Dae

The Indian caste system is somewhat muted in Mangaluru during the Dark Ages; the cosmopolitan air of the city lends itself to a blurring of mortal castes. This is not so among the undead — the *jati* system is still intact, and further divides into prominent bloodlines within Clan Ravnos. The Phuri Dae, named in nights hence, were renowned for their perceptive nature and command of blood magic. In these nights, they are merely brahmin Ravnos.

Brahmin Ravnos substitute Auspex for Fortitude as an in-Clan Discipline; many learn Sadhana as a cultural magic and rite of passage.

Sadhana

Both the Danava and the brahmin Ravnos, the Phuri Dae, claim to have created the proprietary magic of Sadhana. Both wield it in these nights, along with the few brahmin Salubri Watchers inducted into their rite. The blood sorcery involves mantras, mudras, and ascetic magic empowered by blood sacrifice. Their Thaumaturgy has proprietary versions of Potestas Motus and Potestas Elementorum (see **V20: Dark Ages**). A *sadhu* must develop their magic through asceticism — withholding pleasures in order to generate a spiritual heat that allows them to work their magic — and worship. Consequently, a *sadhu* cannot cast a level of a Sadhana Path higher than her Theology Knowledge. Their other Greater Path involves analysis and manipulation of an individual's fate through the cosmic sum of their spiritual actions, called *karma*. A *rakta-sadhu* must engage in grueling austerities to

Jati East and West

Some names demand recognition on both ends of the Silk Road. Some sprawling, famous lineages hold as exceptions to the rule of the distrusted, deceitful Ravnos. Many of these *jati* Embrace Ravnos of any mortal caste, but like seeks like, and they have settled into a pattern of Embraces that ensures the wormy apple never falls far from the bloody tree.

Alexandrites: The eldest *jati* in the West embraces the Hellenistic ethos espoused by their namesake. Hailing from Ptolemaic Egypt, they were the first Ravnos to adopt Greek culture and Embrace Greek childer, and maintain an air of exception and distinction from their oft-distrusted Clanmates. An offshoot *jati*, the **Phaedymites**, adheres strongly to principles of knighthood and chivalric honor; they have managed a persistent presence and power in Francia, despite Toreador bias.

Bashirites: Also known as the Lambs of Bashir, these Charlatans exclusively Embrace Christians, and follow the Road of Heaven as often as they do the Roads of Paradox. They tend towards excessive self-sacrifice and charity as their vices.

Sybarites: If any of the Ravnos *jati* embody the Clan stereotype, it is the Sybarites. Self-obsessed and vice-driven, they ensconce themselves in criminality and pursue narcissistic ends, stopping only to aid a fellow member of their *jati*. They have recently come into conflict with the Phaedymites, leading to open war between the two *jati* in every city from Marseilles to Alexandria.

Yoryari: Related to the Sybarites (by blood, if the rumors tell it true) are the Yoryari, the philosophical heart of the Road of Paradox within Europe. Most of the ashen priests of the Ravnos espouse the Road, and many take it upon themselves to instruct other Seekers. Yet the *jati*'s long association with the Sybarites (who mainly follow the Road of Sin) is beginning to twist the Road of Paradox into a fundamentally broken and self-serving philosophy, rather than the purer belief found in the Clan's homeland.



unlock these specific powers of the Blood. Typical exercises include fasting near to torpor, yoga extended over the course of several weeks, and exposure to fire while resisting Rötschreck.

Besides the Lesser Path of Blood Nectar and the Greater Power of Karma (as the Tremere would classify the magics; the Indian Cainites make no such distinctions), the Children of Danu are also the inceptors and masters of a third Greater Path, called Praapti (see **V20: Rites of the Blood**), blood magic that allows instantaneous teleportation. Created to compete against their rivals among the *asuratizzaya*, this magic has garnered the greatest interest of the Hermes-focused Tremere, who learned of it while hunting a Watcher Salubri.

All Sadhana Paths are activated as Thaumaturgy powers (see **V20: Dark Ages**, pg. 297), save that rituals are performed with the player rolling Intelligence + Theology rather than Occult.

The Power of Blood Nectar

Amrita is the nectar of divinity, the elixir of immortality, co-opted by the asuras after being created with the aid of the devas. The Danava alternately believe Blood Nectar to be a distillation of *amrita* or a crude replacement, depending on which side of the bloodline tells the story. Whatever the genesis of the power, Blood Nectar allows a *sadhu* to grant a mortal, ghoul, or vampire a measure of their supernatural might along with their vitae.

System: Each level of Blood Nectar allows the *sadhu* to confer one level of a Discipline or blood magic Path to a recipient, be it vampire or ghoul. These levels may be used for a single Discipline or split among different Disciplines, however the *sadhu* prefers, though the *sadhu* cannot confer a level of a Discipline they do not know.

Blood Nectar may only confer certain Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Chimerstry, Fortitude, Potence, and Sadhana. Blood Nectar is an exception to this, and cannot be itself conferred upon another.

The *sadhu* spends one blood point and one minute in concentration per level of nectar created (three blood points and three minutes for a third-level potion, for example). At the end of this meditative period, the *sadhu* must offer a recipient a draught straight from their veins, a sweet and thick potion of vitae. The drinker of the blood nectar generated by the *sadhu* receives both the vitae used to make the nectar, carrying with it all the normal effects of a vitae transfusion, and the power to use the Discipline itself as if the recipient had learned it themselves. The power of blood nectar lasts for an evening, fading upon the dawn.

The Power of Karma

We are trapped in samsara, the cycle of reincarnation, though the power of karma. Every deed is weighed, demanding equal compensation. Good karma ensures favorable reincarnation in the next life; bad karma ensures our lives will worsen until we are animals, or worse, insects. Both the Ravnos and the Danava believe Cainites are paradoxically a part of and separate from the cycle of rebirth — but while the rakshashas hold that Cainites have lost their path, a *sadhu* believes their separation allows them to grasp the wheel and turn it in accordance with their karma.

• Threads of the Past

The weave of the world becomes clear with sufficient scrutiny. The first *siddhi* of the path reveals the most recent steps on samsara's wheel — what has brought the target close to the *sadhu*'s own steps this night.

System: Unlike most blood sorceries, this power does not require the expenditure of a blood point. The player rolls Perception + Theology, difficulty 5. Each success on the roll grants the *sadhu* one glimpse of an important event in the target's past, a brief impression of what brings them to this place tonight. Generally, this is either the most important formative event in their lives, or the most direct reason for the target to be in the area. Cainites targeted with this power always have the Embrace as their most formative unlife event, giving the *sadhu* a glimpse of the intimate transmission of the Curse. Threads of the Past also reveals the target's name.

•• Weave of the Future

The turning of the wheel reveals all. A *sadhu* cannot know what will befall a community, a continent, or the world entire…but she can know what will befall a single man, and that is enough for many treading the Path.

System: After spending a blood point, the player again rolls Perception + Theology, difficulty 5. Each success allows the *sadhu*'s player to ask the Storyteller one yes or no question about the subject's future. "Will the merchant see his daughter again?" is a valid question, but "When will the merchant see his daughter again?" is not. The Storyteller should take the nature of the story and the circumstances of the *sadhu* player's question into account, answering with a clear, "Yes," "No," or, "Irrelevant."

••• Certain Fate

Samsara ultimately means wandering, but few wander far from the path they are set upon earlier in life. The turn of the wheel is obvious to a *sadhu*, who has already learned how to read where a subject's life or unlife will take them. Now, she may allow herself to see where upon the wheel the target will fall next.

System: Each success informs the *sadhu* of a certain relevant fact of the individual they are scrutinizing, and how that fact plays out into some part of the individual's future (for example, "His gambling problem will lead him to the secret dice games played in the market.") For three or more successes, the *sadhu* is informed of the most likely manner of the subject's death and whether or not the subject is destined to become a Cainite, ghost, or one of the Wan Kuei.

•••• Past Lives

Sadhus know they have stepped off the wheel of reincarnation temporarily, yet they are still very much a part of the cycle of karma. With a master's practiced hand, they may turn the wheel back, however briefly, to taste of lives past and bring their hard-won experience to bear in the present.

System: Each success rolled by the *sadhu*'s player allows them to gain one dot in any Ability or dot in the Language Merit, up to a limit of three dots gained (other Abilities may be chosen with excess successes). Knowledges chosen generally reflect those known during other times. The *sadhu* may briefly assume personality tics, speech patterns, even other languages (even without choosing the Merit, a *sadhu* may briefly lapse into patois).

••••• Master of Samsara

The master of samsara commands the wheel of rebirth, understanding karma as the gods do. Moreover, a master *sadhu* gains the ability to influence this wheel, apportioning cosmic power and prestige according to their whim.

System: All applications of the power require five successes (at difficulty 8,) or the expenditure of a single permanent Willpower point. Once expended, however, the player may choose from any of the following effects:

- Ordain one fact about a person's future; this effectively grants them the Dark Fate Flaw at no benefit. It could grant a more esoteric Merit like True Love, but it is rare for a *sadhu* to be so benevolent.
- Preordain that the target becomes a wraith or a Wan Kuei upon death.
- Transform a mortal's mind, briefly, into who they were in a past life. This grants them the equivalent of the Past Lives Sadhana power, above, lasting a week. Their "current" life is only a dim, dreamy memory. Cainites targeted by this power do not assume the mind of a past life; they are instead transformed briefly into their human selves, with their time spent as vampires effectively a haze. This transformation affects their body as well, setting the Curse into abeyance. This only lasts until the next sunset, however.
- Set the circumstances of the target's next incarnation, including the *sadhu*'s own. Most elder *sadhu* use this to craft the lives and unlives of favored servants-to-be, and take a cavalier attitude towards the prospect of Final Death, having already crafted an elegant and important incarnation to come.



CHAPTER SEVEN: BUILDING A DOMAIN

The King desires our money/ The Queen our manors too/
The writ of 'By what warrant'/ Will make a sad to-do.

— Eleanor of Castile, as recorded by Walter of Guisborough

The core **V20 Dark Ages** rules use pooled Backgrounds to represent massed character resources in an abstract way, and can be used as such, but there may come a time when a coterie wants to understand its holdings in terms of land and people. Their domain may become a character unto itself, as Cainite masters develop it across generations. A properly cultivated domain extends influence into others until rivals strike it down, dissent tears it apart, or it calls itself a state, even if only in whispers in the catacombs of the Damned.

NEW RULES FOR BACKGROUNDS AND MERITS

The following new rules for Backgrounds and Merits apply to the systems in this chapter:

Parallel Backgrounds

Note that in many of this chapter's systems, characters may possess multiple ratings in the same Background. These ratings do not stack as pooled Backgrounds because they stand for different aspects of the character's holdings that cannot be readily combined. They do, however, allow for multiple uses of the same Background in situations where one rating would be occupied, drained, or damaged. They may also stand for advantages that apply in different places and sectors of medieval society. For example, a character with access to two Resources ratings can fully invest one rating in a project, while enjoying the assumed wealth of the other. Two Influence ratings may affect different groups, such as clergy and commoners, or the peoples of Calais and Brittany.

Experience and Maturation

It's not normally possible to purchase Backgrounds and Merit dots with Experience, but maturation (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 185) provides an exception. The Backgrounds in this section, along with the Vassal and Settlement Merits, may be purchased with maturation Experience at the rate of 2 Experience for the first dot, and current rating x2 for subsequent dots. This represents time spent improving the domain. The Storyteller can award Merit points and Background dots over the course of the story for no Experience, but can take them away as well.

Note that the Domain Background represents the manorial heart of a greater domain, represented by the sum of its Backgrounds, detailed in the following sections. There's no hard and fast rule as to which Backgrounds belong to the domain. The important thing is how they're explained in the story. When multiple characters manage a domain, some backgrounds will be pooled, with an Anchor Background limiting their integration.

Feudal Relationships

The systems in this chapter build upon the rules for feudal relationships introduced in **V20 Dark Ages Tome of Secrets**, which this section describes in compact form, slightly adjusted and expanded. Note that term "feudal" and the concept of overarching European rules are foreign to the period. Instead, characters think of individual relationships that follow local customs.

Lieges and Vassals

Feudal arrangements involve a liege and her subordinate vassal. These are relative terms, and a liege might be a vassal to some other lord: a link in the chain wrapped around Dark Medieval politics.

As a vassal, a character may offer access to 2 dots of Backgrounds to a liege for every 1 Background dot the liege provides in an Anchor Background. This may seem like an unequal trade at first, but as long as neither party attempts to use the same Background dots at the same time, it increases the flexibility both parties possess. Some vassals are extraordinarily valuable, and trade on their reputations in lieu of Background dots. See "Vassal Reputation and Service" below, for details.

The vassal may borrow Background dots on an ongoing basis, pooling them with her own. The liege may *not* pool Background dots, but may use them in parallel with her own. For example, if the liege possesses Resources 4 and the vassal provides Resources 3, the liege may make Resources 3 expenditures twice as often as usual.

The liege may split Background dots to lend some to the vassal, but may provide no more than half of one of her personal Backgrounds. Furthermore, she may make one vassal's Background dots anchor to another's, leaving her personal resources out of the mix. The liege may cut off access to an Anchor Background at any time, but doing so costs the liege 1 dot from the proffered Anchor Background. In cases where the liege allowed another vassal's Background to act as an anchor, the loss affects the vassal, and the liege must provide compensation or be branded an oathbreaker and fraud. And yes, it *is* possible for a liege to lend Background dots between vassals, and even to use them to satisfy her own obligations *as* a vassal. Such arrangements may come crashing down in time, and earn the wrath of everyone involved.

Feudal Oaths

All these Background transfers take place under oaths of service. These lay out the duties owed by vassal and liege. The vassal promises some form of service and general homage to the liege, within boundaries set much like a contract. The vassal might need to provide military service, gold, or certain trade goods. Neither party can use transferred Backgrounds in ways that would violate these arrangements without being counted as violating their oaths.

Vassal Quality

Not all vassals are created equal. Some provide great riches, while others have reputations for excellent service that take the place of their Background value.

New Social Merit: Vassal (1-5; Special)

One or more vassals serve your character in exchange for patronage and favor. For each point of this Merit, your character receives 2 dots of Backgrounds to use as a liege, but she must offer half as many Background dots. Some of these form an Anchor Background combined with some of the vassal's offered Background dots, setting a limit on the combined Backgrounds the vassal enjoys. This takes place under the terms of an oath of fealty devised by the player and Storyteller.

Vassal Reputation and Service

Instead of Background dots, certain vassals may offer their reputations for loyalty, bravery, or sheer power. This category includes military vassals and supernatural beings such as other Cainites, as follows:

Cainites and Other Loyal Horrors: The mere fact that a vampire is an immortal predator with unnatural abilities makes her a valuable vassal. Give Cainites 1 to 5 "phantom" Background dots that can be given to a liege instead of true Backgrounds to satisfy their obligations. 1 dot indicates minor service, while 5 dots represents a willingness to risk near-certain Final Death for a liege. Other supernatural



beings may require similar superior terms. See **V20 Dark Ages Tome of Secrets** for more detailed guidelines.

Knights and Warriors: A willingness to shed blood sets these vassals apart from others. They may offer 1 to 5 dots of "phantom" Background dots representing their reputation. The Storyteller may base this on dots of Fame, representing legends of martial valor, or use the guidelines in **V20 Dark Ages Tome of Secrets**.

Example Vassal: Gyslain of Brittany (4 Point Vassal)

A battlefield veteran, Sir Gyslain lost his immediate liege when he was slain while on pilgrimage. He technically serves the King of France nonetheless, but this doesn't count as vassalage for the purpose of the game systems in this chapter.

Sir Gyslain's career as a knight (experienced, but not heroic) is equivalent to 2 Background points. He's earned Resources 2, but his real assets are his men at arms (Retainers 4). He can offer 8 points of Backgrounds to a liege. In exchange for it all, the liege offers 2 more Retainers dots for further men at arms, increasing the shared Background to 6. The liege also provides 2 more dots of Resources, giving sir Gyslain access to Resources 4. (The liege required Retainers 4 and Resources 4 in order to make this offer.)

In an oath of fealty Sir Gyslain promises to provide 40 days of military service per year. The knight is now a wealthy man with a significant force to deploy for his own purposes, but also to serve his liege. Outside of direct service, the new liege may demand the use of his Backgrounds, but in those cases they are not pooled.

Close Alliances

Not all Background pools require feudal arrangements. The following situations are commonly seen among Cainite and kine alike. Their combined Backgrounds may be used to fuel arrangements with lieges and vassals.

Clerical and Knightly Communes: Monks and monastic knighthoods pool Backgrounds normally, to support common living arrangements and objectives. Once pooled, these Backgrounds cannot usually be separated without acrimony. The character who removes her Backgrounds might suffer Social Flaws unless he acquires permission from the recognized leader of the community. If the character perishes or disappears, her Backgrounds stay with the organization.

Inheritance

In most of Europe, upon the death of a dynast an estate goes to sons, brothers, and deceased brothers' sons before wives and daughters of any age. It's often a winner take all affair. The firstborn son inherits. A lucky second son wins some portion of the estate and tries to marry well. Other sons often get nothing; they join the clergy or otherwise try to make names for themselves. Daughters enter political marriages.

This sexist system often cuts women out of politics and finance, but in many cases, an estate's lady is its only stable management figure. Feudal obligations and rivalries send men to battlefields where they can be killed or taken hostage, or require personal attendance at an ally's court. Women exercise regency in right of absent or underage dynasts, and continued influence over their relatives. Furthermore, examples like Eleanor of Aquitaine demonstrate that not all estates go to men. Eleanor was not only the full-blooded heir, but her half-brother was never acknowledged as having a right to the estate.

Cainites prefer absolute inheritance, where the oldest childe (measured by time in the Blood) in good standing of a vampire inherits her sire's holdings, regardless of gender. The vampire herself may specify alternate forms of succession. In many cases, these are designed to manage holdings in periods of extended torpor as well as Final Death. Of course, Cainite politics being what they are, rivals devise ways to challenge heirs presumptive.

Coteries: This basic Cainite alliance uses the normal rules for pooling Backgrounds. Coteries enjoy varied levels of official recognition among vampires. Some elders refuse to recognize anything but individual homage but outside their reach, some coteries even devise their own heraldic arms and are considered to be equivalent to a military order. In the case of a split, matters are theoretically adjudicated by the local Prince, but vampires tend to keep things bloody and informal.

Marriages and Enfrerements: Married characters pool their Backgrounds as usual. In some parts of the Dark Medieval world, two men may enter into bonds of *enfrerement*, combining their holdings just as if they were married. (Some men thus bonded share true romantic love, but others are just close friends. Homosexuality is defined by publicly-known acts instead of an identity in medieval society, so while enfrerement may be used to secure a household for lovers, it is not automatically assumed to do so.) Characters joined by marriage or enfrerement may divide their Backgrounds once again, but unless their union is annulled by the Church, they might suffer Social Flaws and various disputes over who owns what. Inheritance law varies from place to place.

Anatomy of a Domain

A basic domain consists of the holders' pooled Backgrounds, their vassals' Backgrounds, and everything they represent. The rules in this section describe what these Backgrounds mean in greater detail and, in some situations, expand their scope.

The Manor

The heart of a domain is its manor, represented by the Domain Background on. p. 180 of **V20 Dark Ages**. Cainite manors are places where the undead possess exclusive feeding rights according to elders of consequence. Mortal manors are their masters' personal estates. They own the land, hold court, and deliver justice on behalf of the monarch. It's possible to hold multiple manors, paying Background costs separately for each. Without dots in Resources, Servants (see below), and other complementary Backgrounds, these rules assume a manor possesses just enough staff to maintain itself in a decrepit state, overgrown and with crumbling fortifications.

The **V20 Dark Ages** core rules allow characters to measure a manor through the Domain Background's area and security aspects. The following systems expand on these basics. Divide Background points into the following aspects.

Area (Domain)

This aspect determines the size of the manor and its outlying territory. The Domain Background must include 1 dot of Area, and it is equivalent to the description of Domain in the core rules.

- A single tower, tiny hermitage, or fortified cottage: the smallest structure that could support an impoverished knight or prior. 10 residents could squeeze into such a place. This includes fields and other means of supporting its inhabitants.

•• A keep with one or two towers, a small abbey or some other structure capable of supporting 50 inhabitants, including servants. It stands at the heart of fields and other means to support its residents.

••• A significant castle, monastery, or other structure, and outlying fields and trade capable of supporting around 100 residents total.

•••• A large structure including multiple outbuildings and areas for agriculture and/or industry. Unless it's kept secret, the manor is a major hub for trade and culture, and can support around 500 inhabitants.

••••• A walled town, district, or vast complex that supports up to 1000 residents.

Defense (Domain)

This aspect determines both a manor's physical fortifications and the precautions inhabitants take to resist assault. Each dot imposes a +1 difficulty penalty to intrude by stealth or direct assault.

• Walls and a sparse watch.

•• True fortifications and a well-organized watch.

••• Residents and neighbors trained to look out for trouble enhance extensive fortifications and a strong watch program.

•••• The manor could resist a concerted siege and is built in a strategic location.

••••• The estate is always prepared for war, and takes clever precautions against stealthy invasion.

Prosperity (Domain)

Estates with this aspect possess natural resources or other economic advantages that might be exploited. These don't automatically provide Resource dots, but allow characters to purchase Resource dots up to the aspect's rating for half the normal maturation Experience costs. Each Prosperity dot also provides a -1 difficulty for Commerce rolls.

• The estate has fertile land, good hunting, and perhaps decent wood to harvest.

•• The estate might be prosperous in livestock, contain a copper mine, or host skilled vintners.

••• The estate might be blessed with exceptional natural resources: a good mine, famous cattle or horses. It might host a family of skilled tradespeople such as dyers or weavers.

•••• The estate is blessed with a gold mine or some other exceptionally valuable resource, or produces exceptional crafts, such as fine armor.

••••• The estate harvests or produces goods famed for their rarity, beauty or skilled construction.

Secret Ways (Domain)

Manors with this aspect possess secret rooms, hidden doors, and well-placed tapestries to help those in the know eavesdrop and stealthily move from place to place. Each dot provides a -1 difficulty on rolls to hide or evade attention for characters familiar with the manor's features.

• The manor contains a secret door or tunnel.

•• The manor contains a few secret doors and false walls that might allow someone to squeeze through, from room to room.

••• Secret passages connect important places or provide an escape route in emergencies. A tiny, hidden room might hold emergency supplies or a Cainite's coffin.

•••• Cunning construction conceals at least one sizeable secret room.

••••• Virtually every room has a hidden exit, and that includes multiple secret rooms inside the manor.

Herd, Populace and Territory

The Herd Background represents mortals a vampire may feed from with little chance of reprisal. These kine are normally small groups who've become inured (or resigned) to the Cainite predation. If appropriate, this may be modified into a Populace Background. Populace represents the total number of common kine the Background owner holds sway over, with each member of the herd representing one household of around five people. This in turn defines the size of the ruler's territory. Small territorial values represent a densely-populated area, such as most of France. Large values exist in wild areas, undeveloped by peoples recognized as having rights to the land.

The number of vessels listed as Herd also represents the number of people who can be called up to fight for a lord without imposing undue hardship. It's possible to press even more into service, but more fields go untilled, and crafts go unmade, causing the domain to suffer poverty and hunger. In such cases, the Storyteller may reduce Populace/Herd dots.

A basic population consists of commoners, serfs (when allowed by custom), and a few wealthy families with petty honors who organize communities, but don't need to be detailed as full vassals. These people farm, gather, and

HERD, POPULACE AND TERRITORY

Populace/Herd	Households/ Vessels/Levies	Total Population	Territory (Square Miles)
•	3	15	1
••	7	35	1-2
•••	15	75	1-3
••••	30	150	2-5
•••••	60	300	3-10
••••••	120	600	6-25
•••••••	250	1250	10-50
••••••••	500	2500	20-100
•••••••••	1000	5000	40-200
••••••••••	2000	10000	80-400

otherwise exploit the land to provide for themselves and local aristocrats, and engage in basic trade. Without additional development, the local population is vulnerable to starvation, invasion, and other catastrophes.

Urbanization

To properly harness the populace's potential, a domain needs places for people to gather, make things, and trade them. It needs towns and cities. When people build them, others gather. Artisans ply their trade. In game terms, this takes the form of a new Merit: Settlement. Without it, the populace lives in crude thorps between rough trails, incapable of supporting enhanced trade.

New Social Merit: Settlement (1-5; Special)

The character reigns over a well-developed settlement. The player may choose to either purchase this Merit (indicating a pre-existing settlement) or earn it through developing territory. Each level possesses the minimum Populace/Herd Merit dot required to support it, as well as the time needed to develop it. If the Herd/Populace rating drops below the necessary level, the settlement shrinks. This Merit must be purchased once for each significant settlement.

The primary benefit of a settlement is that it provides its rating in Resources and Influence dots. These are counted separately from the character's other Backgrounds, and don't stack with them except under the rules for feudal relationships and Anchor Backgrounds.

The Merit can be measured on a 1 to 5-point scale, as follows:

1 Hamlet (Populace/Herd • to ••; six months). This settlement includes a church, well-maintained roads, and simple facilities for industry, such as a smithy or mill.

2 Village (Populace/Herd ••• to ••••; one year). A village contains room for several local-scale industries and storage.

3 Town (Populace/Herd ••••• to ••••••; five years). A town is a larger version of a village, and usually supports simple fortifications and a market.

4 City (Populace/Herd ••••••• to •••••••••; 10 years). Cities possess walls, multiple industries, sophisticated markets, and migrants. Half or more of a city's population exceeds the numbers indicated by Herd/Populace dots. These don't provide free dots however, as they possess weak fealty to their lords, and might be transient or criminal.

5 Great City (Populace/Herd ••••••••• to ••••••••••; 20+ years). After a generation or more, a city might evolve into a rare population center with 100,000 inhabitants or more. The Populace/Herd rating only covers a fraction of the inhabitants, who defy easy counting or rule.

Peopling the Domain

A domain's Herd/Populace rating determines its loyal population. Outlaws, tribal peoples, or nominal vassals who ignore central authority (a common situation outside of Europe's dense heartland) aren't counted. Much of a large city's population technically labors under the rule of a local lord, but cannot be readily exploited and, consequently, escape accounting. Despite their infancy, the urban medieval bourgeoisie and guilds exert an ever-stronger challenge to aristocratic rule.

Naturally, characters will want to focus on domain inhabitants skilled or loyal enough to be counted and exploited. The following systems provide starting details. These Storyteller characters stand in addition to full vassals, but are not so powerful or dramatically important to require so complex a treatment.

Note that these categories classify individuals based on what they offer to the domain holder. The difference between greater and lesser people is largely a matter of perspective, but biases hide talent in humble places. There might be geniuses hidden in the countryside, or retainers whose abilities conceal significant flaws.

Allies and Retainers

The Allies and Retainers Backgrounds may be used to represent a domain's skilled staff. In the systems here, characters and allied groups may purchase these Backgrounds multiple times. Each acquisition represents a different cohort of staff.

Allies aren't bound to the domain's rulers except by self-interest. They might be mercenaries, clergy, or staff lent by a friendly lord with the understanding that they won't work for free. To obtain Allies' services, the character must possess sufficient Resources (1 dot per Merit dot) or offer services in kind. In addition to their abilities, Allies bring independent Backgrounds they might use in exchange for such considerations.

Bound to the domain or its masters, Retainers don't possess their own Backgrounds (any they might have are assessed as part of the domain) but will employ their talents without expecting a reward.



Staff possess a variety of Traits. Assess their characteristics as follows:

Ally Backgrounds: Allies have access to 2 + Allies dots in Backgrounds, split between one or more individuals. No Ally possesses more than 5 dots in a single Background. Choose between the Backgrounds listed by Ally type.

Dice Pools: A single Ally or Retainer possesses dice pools of 4 + Background dots in three Abilities (including base Attributes) from the list for their type. If the Allies or Retainers Background represents multiple individuals, reduce these pools by 1 for each additional person. There can be no more than one person for each dot in the Background. No single individual can possess a dice pool higher than 10.

Example: Lady Kaethe decides her Allies 4 Background supplies three mercenaries. These are armigers (see below) with Allies 3 (their mercenary company) and Resources 2 between them. They possess Brawl, Melee, and Ride dice pools of 6 (a base of 8 for the Background, -2 for two additional staff).

Armigers

By dint of wealth or inheritance, armigers are trained in and entitled to wear arms and armor. They typically split their time between personal business and performing various military and security duties for a liege lord. They aren't as well trained as knights, but their duties aren't as onerous and thus, they don't need to be details as full vassals.

Ally Backgrounds: Allies, Resources, Retainers.

Dice Pools (Pick Three): Alertness, Athletics, Archery, Brawl, Intimidation, Melee, Ride.

Courtiers

These politically astute merchants, wealthy commoners, disinherited children, and clergy are usually wealthy and socially connected. They help build alliances, spread rumors, and pluck information from high or low places. They're advisors, diplomats, and spies who've come to the character for their mutual benefit.

Ally Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Domain (Manor), Herd (Populace), Influence, Resources, Retainers.

Dice Pools (Pick Three): Commerce, Empathy, Etiquette, Expression, Leadership, Performance, Politics, Seneschal.

Foresters

Domains employ foresters to aid noble hunters, protect the wilds from poachers, and act as scouts during wartime. This category might include allied outlaws, hermits, nomads, and groups who habitually avoid civilization for the wilderness.

Ally Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Retainers.

Dice Pools (Pick Three): Alertness, Animal Ken, Archery, Crafts, Hearth Wisdom, Ride, Stealth, Survival.

Scholars

Most European scholars are technically clergy, even if they're disinterested in holy vows and religious matters. They might have attended a university, mastered the contents of books from obscure monastic libraries, or follow unexpected passion for knowledge, no matter their personal backgrounds. They might explain Plato or design siege weapons.

Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Influence, Retainers.

Dice Pools (Pick Three): Academics, Commerce, Crafts, Enigmas, Investigation, Law, Medicine, Occult, Politics, Seneschal, Theology.

The Helpful Masses

Between vassals, skilled individuals, and a faceless populace, a legion of others performs numerous essential tasks.

New Background: Servants

Your character controls a retinue of useful servants. (Your domain might possess servants without this Background, but they do nothing more than keep the place from utterly collapsing, and frequently display disloyalty.) The exact number doesn't matter; they come and go as estate business demands. Children replace their parents. On the other hand, when your character needs them to perform a specific task or travel, only a limited number can obey, lest the estate fall into disrepair or suffer various calamities. In matters relating to the domain, servants reduce the difficulty of Seneschal and Leadership rolls equal to their dots. Servants need not be limited to a single manor, and might represent ordinary townsfolk, cottagers, and others pledged to the character's service.

Servants are loyal, but not slavishly so, and might disobey their masters if they feel threatened or offended. A Cainite may use servants as vessels for her thirst, but the player must purchase an equal number of dots in the Herd Background to ensure their discretion. Purchasing both Backgrounds together also means servants replace themselves should your character's attentions cause their deaths, but the most extreme cruelties will never go unanswered. Servants who are not a Herd resist predation, spread rumors, and must be managed accordingly.

- • You have a few servants to deal with light, routine tasks. They can't handle emergencies. Some of them attend you part time, working elsewhere to support families. You can call three of them together for a trip or dedicated task.
- •• Your servants can keep a small manor or settlement running smoothly, and even provide comforts for a small number of guests. You can wrangle seven of them to work on some unusual task or travel with you.
- ••• Your servants manage all aspects of a large manor, and at least one stands on hand to receive your commands. You might gather as many as 15 to travel or work on an unusual project.
- •••• Your servants could keep a large castle running smoothly. Multiple attendants stand by to anticipate your needs and obey your commands. You can be assured that taking a retinue of 30 on the road wouldn't bring estate business grinding to a halt.
- ••••• A veritable legion stands by to ensure your estate functions. They stand in every room, and to get some privacy you'll have to send them away. You can take a retinue of 60 servants with you.

Types of Servants

Servants don't have the skills or Backgrounds of full vassals, Allies, and Retainers, but unlike the domain's Populace, they have the time and inclination to aid characters. They typically possess dice pools of 4 in their primary function, but only 2 or 3 in any other task. They own the minimum equipment needed for their jobs.

Even though not all of the following are technically servants, characters might make use of them through the Background. When these characters prove to have exceptional characteristics, they should be reckoned as Retainers instead.

Administrators: Under various titles, one or more stewards serve as an estate's chief of staff, relaying the lord's orders. Under them, marshals manage horses and arms, chamberlains account for finances, and wardrobe servants manage clothing and many household purchases. Valets attend nobles, and pages carry messages. In great estates, these positions became honorifics given to other nobles, and eventually they can become military and political positions.

Cleaning and Maintenance: The scullery is a washing room that might be used for dishes or clothes. Maids clean and transport them. Large households might have separate facilities and servants for linens and other items. A chandler makes soap and candles.

Cottagers: Poor free farmers usually serve the estate with the bounty of their labors. Much of the time their business ends at the lord's gate, but they also know much about the land and common people. Laborers might come from cottages to dig ditches and perform other muscle-aching duties, or if necessary, settle close to the estate. Such obligatory labor is known as *corvee*.

Guards: Settlements choose local toughs to break up fights and protect communities, but night watchmen are often elderly, since the position rarely requires more than good eyes and the ability to cry at the approach of danger.

Hunters: The master of the hunt (called a *veneur*) oversees hunting, perhaps with the assistance of a falconer.

Kitchen Staff: The chief cook prepares meals in conjunction with a host of specialized servants, including a pantler, who keeps bread, and a butler (named for "butts," or barrels) who manages the estate's alcohol.

Minor Clergy: An estate's chaplain technically serves the church, but when a lord provides for him his true loyalty transfers to his benefactor. Clergy often supplement their incomes with agriculture, brewing, and other rural trades, and they may include barber-surgeons who treat illness with a mixture of inaccurate theory and practical experience. This category also includes hermits, sin-eaters, pardoners, and other purported clerics of uncertain lineage and orthodoxy.

Serfs and Slaves: Serfs are obliged to labor for their lord in virtually any capacity required, but they usually work the land. They're entitled to protection and a portion of the common fields to work for their subsistence. If the lord sells his land, his serfs go with it, to serve a new master. This sets them apart from slaves, who may be bought and sold individually and possess no rights whatsoever. The Church forbids the enslavement of Christians, including converts, but this stricture is occasionally ignored and doesn't restrict the enslavement of Muslims, as occurs in the Crusader States. In Muslim nations, many slaves possess rights granted by religious and social convention.

Domain Events

The following events might occur within a domain as a natural part of the chronicle, but unrelated events and raw fate might trigger them as well. They're just a few incidents out of many, and the Storyteller should use them and their systems as starting points. The duration or fallout of an event usually lasts for a season or more. Once one event takes place, others may follow, and might affect domain Backgrounds and other Traits, as described below.

Curse

Unlucky stars, raving witches, or the Devil himself might curse the domain, or it might be the result of an entombed Methuselah's Disciplines, reaching out while he dreams. A curse takes many forms, from birth defects to strings of unlikely accidents.

Systems: A curse reduces Herd/Populace or local Resources by 1 or more dots (people and/or livestock leave or die) until resolved. It might bring a Faithful One to drive the evil out.

Disaster

An earthquake, massive storm, or flood takes lives and crops.

Systems: A disaster reduces Herd/Populace or the Domain's Size and/or Prosperity by 1 or more dots. Servants can mitigate the damage and rebuild, restoring lost Background dots equal to their own dots. If left in disrepair, the domain invites Invasion and Outlaws. Flooded crops and damaged stores lead to Famine.

Faithful One

Someone with True Faith visits the domain. Why? She might be following a vision to heal and preach, or destroy a monster preying on the land.

Systems: True Faith allows the visitor to perform various miracles. If the character settles for a season or longer, her benedictions and visitors improve Resources by 1 for as long as the Faithful One stays. She might attract a significant number of Pilgrims or found a Heresy.

Famine

A bad harvest, rats, and trade interruptions can all shrink the food supply.

Systems: Famine reduces Herd/Populace by 1 or more dots. Over time, the famine claims Servants dots as well. Outlaws might scour the land for food.

Invasion

A military force enters the domain, intent on taking part of it or inflicting mayhem.

Systems: See **V20 Dark Ages Tome of Secrets** for systems you might use to resolve mass combat. As noted in this chapter, the number of families in your Populace determine the size of the local peasant levy, with Servants acting as additional troops and Allies, and Contacts and vassals providing other forces. The longer the conflict lasts, the more it reduces the Herd/Populace. Sieges reduce Domain dots and block access to Resources outside the character's immediate control. Even in victory, stray troops may become Outlaws.

Itinerant Court

A king or other noble the domain's ruler owes fealty to brings his traveling court to the estate. The local lord must prove himself a loyal, generous host — and of course, defend the liege against assassins and embarrassments.

Systems: The overlord's Status or Influence (whichever is higher) determines the minimum number of Servants dots required to properly host the ruler. Resources may be used to shore up the difference on a dot-for-dot basis by hiring servants, but this is expensive, reducing the host's total by 1 dot. Failing to properly host one's overlord invites all manner of punishments. Exceeding expectations may win the character Resources, Influence, or extra standing as a vassal.

Heresy

A new religious movement offends the Church or, in the case of Cainites, is considered so anathema to a Road that its devotees wish to destroy it. Like the Cathars, it might serve as a useful political tool for a time.

Systems: Supporting the heresy grants Influence over its followers, but of course risks social consequences such as excommunication. Orthodox followers may refuse to serve an excommunicated lord, causing loss of Influence in other areas, Status among Cainites, and Resources controlled by doctrinaire populations. An Invasion in the form of a Crusade might follow, or Outlaws may argue they're doing God's work. Then again, the heresy might have real supernatural power under the leadership of a Faithful One. It might be founded on a Miracle, or profane the land with a Curse.

Miracle

A supposed act of God manifests in the domain. The miracle could have been a one-time event, or it could persist in relics or springs. A Cainite miracle might bring signs of the Dark Father and Mother.

System: A genuine miracle is True Faith embedded in a place or object, but this event doesn't need to represent the real thing. Other powers or wishful thinking could be the cause. In any event, beyond any supernatural properties, the miracle may make additional Resources, Influence, and Status available. Pilgrims may visit and, of course, idolaters might found a Heresy around it.

Outlaws

Brigands, pirates, rogue knights, and other outlaws steal cattle, raid caravans, strong arm peasants for supplies, and

otherwise prey upon the domain. A Cainite might be a brigand of blood, murdering another vampire's Herd for sustenance and pleasure.

Systems: Outlaws might deprive the domain of any combination of Domain Prosperity, Resources, and Herd/Populace. In the last case, the decrease isn't necessarily the result of a true population decrease, but a disruption of their ability to work. Rampant lawlessness ultimately damages the lord's Influence and Status. Outlaws might be outriders or remnants of an Invasion.

Pilgrims

On the way to a holy place in or on the other side of the domain, a significant group of pilgrims passes through.

Systems: Pilgrims need food, lodging. and all manner of supplies. They donate to clergy and pay whatever dues the local lord commands. Pilgrims increase one of the domain's Resources ratings by 1 for the duration of their stay. If the domain proves to be a hospitable place, pilgrims might visit regularly, making the increase permanent. Dishonest pilgrims might become Outlaws. They might follow a Heresy. Perhaps a Faithful One walks in their midst, or their concentrated faith attracts a Miracle.

Tremere Apocrypha: The House Militant

The magus should not forget that he is more than a student of the Arts of Hermes who has attained the immortal state by the grace of his House. Nor should he assume that upon attainment of the perfection House Tremere offers, he is like vampires who acquired their state through the natural Curse, and should trust in the instincts and powers provided thereby. Rather, he is a magus of House Tremere specifically, as far advanced beyond mortal magi as magi are from the unlearned. He is obligated to master a complex Art, greater than that Hermes Trismegistus grants, under the strict guidance of those who possess greater knowledge of the Mysteries. His dedication does not merely serve the goals of the House, for in attaining the state beyond death, the magus' desires become that of the House. Why is this so?

It is a matter of unconquerable reason. The magus acquires many enemies through allegiance to his House. He suffers the envy and violence of natural vampires, who hate his freedom from the full Curse, and from magi, who are most jealous of the greater Art he may now practice. It would not be sufficient for the magus to enter hermitage. This would break his sacred vows and ensure his destruction, but even without these consequences it would be an irrational strategy. Within the degenerate Order of Hermes, the followers of Tremere were the House Militant, governed under the strictest Rule so they might resist all enemies like a shield wall, or a sword of incomparable sharpness. This is why the perfected House prevails still against all enemies. The way of the Tremere is the way of the House Militant, and its true and rational students should master the Arts that provide strength in war.

Reason is loyalty. Loyalty is immortality. Disloyalty is madness. Madness is death.

Rites of the Sorcerer Besieged

In the 13th century the Tremere are a fresh, bloody wound in two societies: of the Cainites, from whom they usurped Clan status, and of the Order of Hermes, a fellowship of magi that once counted them as one House, among many. The Tremere not only survive out of careful strategy and bursts of desperate innovation, but because they were particularly disposed to conflict. Within the Order of Hermes, the Tremere were known for their competitiveness and quasi-military structure. Before they became vampires, they led Hermetic efforts to annihilate rival fellowships, and purge enemies from within. Indeed, before their treachery (from the Order's point of view) the House exterminated another Hermetic House, Diedne, who might have exposed their plans. They didn't steal the curse of Caine; they *invaded* it with the organized implacability of a Roman legion.

Tame the Maddening Flame (Level One)

Note: This is a Haven Ritual (see Dedicate the Haven, ***V20 Dark Ages****, p. 310)*

Fire lights the Dark Medieval and, though Cainites fear it, they can usually control their response in the face of a tamed campfire, hearth, or torch. This ritual protects them when fire might spread unpredictably, such as on a battlefield or when it's otherwise used as a weapon.

The Tremere pollutes a jug of water with a trivial amount of his blood, and uses it to wet the perimeter of a room or outdoor location. An enclosed space of almost any size can be protected, but an outdoor area is limited to a 150 foot (roughly 50 meter) radius. New or existing fire in the protected area takes on a greenish hue and its smoke smells sweet. It can no longer provoke Rötschreck. Furthermore, reduce the damage of all injuries inflicted by fire within the area by one Health Level. This lasts for as long as the caster is present.

Banning Rituals (Level Two or Higher; See Below)

Note: This is a Haven Ritual (see Dedicate the Haven, ***V20 Dark Ages****, p. 310)*

Where wards (see **V20 Dark Ages**, pp. 305-306) hinder mundane intruders and thieves, bans target supernatural powers such as Disciplines and the mortal magic the Tremere once practiced. Without bans, the Tremere would have been at the mercy of mortal Hermetic sympathetic magic, which can annihilate enemies from vast distances.

Like a ward, a ban can be cast on an object or an enclosed space. After one hour of preparation, the Tremere draws a sign in the occult Enochian language that symbolizes the phenomena to be banned.

Each category of power must be learned as a separate ritual, with a level set by the maximum strength of the phenomena to be banned, which is one dot lower. Thus, a Level Two version bans first dot phenomena from one category. The categories are:

- **Infernal Powers:** Demonic powers, Infernal magic of all kinds.
- **The Kindly Ones:** Powers of the Fae
- **Sorcery:** Mortal magic as learned by Path or Pillar
- **Spiritual Malice:** Lupine and spirit Gifts.
- **Wrath of the Dead:** Ghostly Arcanoi
- **Wisdom of the Curse:** Cainite Disciplines.

If the power does not possess a dot rating, use the highest Trait rating involved in its operation. Powers within the category cannot affect a banned object, or cross the threshold of a banned space in either direction, but may still be used within it. For instance, a mortal magus might read a Tremere's mind while both stand in a haven Banned against Sorcery, but not while one stands outside and the other inside.

Similar to wards, bans may be resisted with an extended Willpower roll with a difficulty of 4 + ban level, accumulating successes equal to the ban caster's Thaumaturgy rating. The character challenging the ban must be able to see or touch the object or threshold, however. Success destroys the ban, and no matter the caster's location, she hears a sharp cracking sound when it falls.

Bans last for a number of weeks equal to the successes scored on the casting roll.

Wield the Spear of Damnation (Level Three)

This ritual recalls the legend of Caine itself, dedicating a weapon to satisfy a vampire's nature just as the Dark Father cursed himself, when he raised a sharp stone against his brother. The Tremere writes Genesis 4:10 ("And he said, 'What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.'") upon an edged weapon in purported angelic script, during a meditative trance. This requires one hour. From that moment forward, half the lethal damage inflicted by the weapon (rounded up) converts to blood points, filling the wielder's pool. This persists until the weapon has harvested the caster's Thau-

maturgy rating + ritual successes in blood points. Blood so harvested doesn't inflict extra damage (it comes straight from blood shed by the wound), but is of the target's type. Lupine blood remains doubly potent, and other blood types have their signature effects.

Ravening Walls of Ceoris (Level Five)

Note: This is a Haven Ritual (see Dedicate the Haven, ***V20 Dark Ages****, p. 310)*

This ritual is named for the fortress it was first used to protect. The caster sheds one blood point per 50 feet of a stone wall's length (and spends 15 minutes per section) while invoking the names of earth spirits stolen from the lore of the Tzimisce. For the rest of the night, anyone touching or climbing the wall for the first time is drained of one blood point.

Immune to the ritual's effects, the caster may touch the wall and harvest the stolen blood at a rate equal to her Generation-based expenditure limit, as an instant action. Each section of wall can hold as many blood points as the caster's Thaumaturgy rating at any one time. The wall keeps draining excess blood, but sheds it in the form of a foul black ooze that cannot be used for sustenance.

For every dot of the caster's Thaumaturgy above 5, she can designate one additional Cainite as immune to the wall's blood-draining effects, and able to harvest blood from it





Chapter Eight: Arc of the Battlefield

10. Item, the justices shall have proclamation made in the counties through which they are to go that, with respect to those who do not have such arms as have been specified above, the lord king will take vengeance, not merely on their lands or chattels, but on their limbs.

— The Assize of Arms of 1181, proclaimed by King Henry II of England

This chapter takes **V20 Dark Ages'** arms and armor out of a generic medieval setting to describe what characters wear and fight with in the 13th century. It provides weapons that conform to the period and rules for appropriate armor. An alternative combat system reduces the number of dice rolls and dice pool adjustments required.

Weapons of the Dark Medieval

The following section describes weapons characters will encounter in the 1200s and beyond. The **V20 Dark Ages** core describes weapons and armor in an accessible way but it's not strictly accurate. For instance, in everyday English a "broadsword" describes any wide, two-edged blade, but the term technically refers to a weapon that didn't exist until hundreds of years later.

Knives and Swords

Virtually everyone in the Dark Medieval owns a blade of some kind, even if just to harvest herbs or skin rabbits. Some may be little more than sharpened scrap but a skilled smith makes swift, sharp blades suitable for war.

Dagger and Short Swords: This category of long pointed knives are specifically designed for fighting. The *misericorde* ("mercy knife") possesses a thin blade to penetrate eye slits in

Bearing Arms

After the Assize of Arms in 1181, all English free peasant households are obligated to keep a lance (spear), gambeson, and iron cap. Wealth and title add other mandatory equipment. But Jews are required to sell any mail they own, and freeman aren't allowed to stockpile more weapons and armor than the law requires. This isn't a modern "right to bear arms," but commands families to keep just enough equipment to meet their obligations — but no more than that. Many kingdoms enforce similar requirements.

It wouldn't be considered unusual to carry a knife or cudgel for self-defense. Wealthier individuals wear swords, though they'd be asked to surrender them when visiting an important figure or unfamiliar community. Unless there's a nearby battle or tournament, walking into town armed with multiple weapons indicates a desire to cause trouble.



helmets. In the 14th Century the rondel dagger will deemphasize blade sharpness, and some will only be intended to kill with the point. The old *gladius*, *seax*, and other blades blur the line between knife and sword. Peasants and soldiers both have uses for very long knives (or short swords) as traveling weapons, or to finish off deer and boars. These may simply be shorter knight-style swords, often used with a buckler in the other hand.

Estoc (14th Century): In a century or so, plated armor will resist cuts and impact so well that soldiers will develop the estoc. It's the size of a longsword but its unsharpened blade has a thick diamond cross section, tapering to a wicked point. Soldiers use it to thrust at weak points in enemy armor. An estoc's metal blade can't immobilize Cainites like a stake, but a Potence-strengthened thrust might pin a victim to a stone wall.

TWO WEAPONS

Did European medieval warriors use a weapon in each hand? Viking sagas record combatants using an ax in either hand, or even a sword with a spear. Late medieval and early Renaissance texts indicate that it was already a well-known fighting method. For example, the 14th-century master Fiore de'i Liberi describes using staff and dagger, dagger and club, and twin clubs to defeat a spear-wielding opponent. Later manuals describe double sword and dagger techniques. Yet it should be remembered that the shield was used as an offensive weapon in the off hand and that, in any event, manuals urged fighters to either do something with the off hand or keep it out of the way. These techniques were generally reserved for duels and desperate measures, not pitched battles.

If a character using two weapons earns one advantage: In multiple actions, she may attack twice in a row (but no more), instead of waiting for the turn to cycle around as usual. Two weapons are ideal for the Riposte maneuver (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 347) so you might give double weapon users a -1 difficulty advantage, cancelling out the usual +1 difficulty penalty for the maneuver (but not the difficulty penalty for multiple actions) as long as the defensive maneuver used to set it up is a parry.

SWORDS AND KNIVES

Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str	Notes
Knife	Str	P	1	
Dagger/Short Sword	Str + 1L	C	1	Armor Piercing: 2
Estoc	Str + 2L	N	2	Armor Piercing: 3
Falchion	Str + 2L	L	2	Shorter than other swords
Knightly Sword	Str + 2L	N	2	
Longsword	Str + 3L	N	3	
Saif	Str + 2L	N	2	

Falchion or Messer: Although it usually sports the same cruciform hilt as a knightly sword, a falchion is a single edged weapon, its cutting abilities enhanced by a curve or a broadening of the blade near the point. A 14th-century German weapon called a *messer* is functionally identical.

Knightly Sword: This weapon is often misnamed "longsword." It's a familiar weapon, with the cruciform hilt popularized by the Normans and a double-edged blade tapering to a point. The hilt's long enough for one hand — for two, you'd have to grip the round pommel. This is almost always used with a shield.

Longsword: Also called a "war sword," this is a lengthened version of the knightly sword — it might be called a "bastard sword" in future eras (the hilt type is wrong, though it's long enough). This sword can be used in one or two hands, with or without a shield. Very long swords only see common use centuries from now, against pike formations.

Saif or Shamsir: These are, respectively, the Arabic and Persian words for what Europeans will call the scimitar. It's an increasingly popular weapon in the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa, though it's not all they use. (Straight swords similar to European types are also used, and are the dominant form in many places.) They're usually wielded in one hand and are useful for both mounted and foot combat.

BLUDGEONS AND CLEAVERS

Swords are favored general purpose weapons, but they're expensive. Axes and clubs are often cheaper, and sometimes defeat armor that resists sword cuts.

Battle Ax: Between long poleaxes and throwing axes, the typical battle ax is a one-handed weapon whose blade usually thickens into a metal socket for the haft. The Scottish heavy infantry soldiers called "gallowglasses" wield the two-handed *sparth* ax, based on the Danish poleax but shorter. Some axes are capable of thrusts using the upper corner of the blade. "Bearded" axes with long lower blades are uncommon now, but hooking a shield or weapon is still possible. Double-headed axes are almost unheard of.

Flail: The most common form of flail is a pole weapon adapted from the farm tool, but soldiers use cut down ver-

BLUDGEONS AND CLEAVERS

Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str	Notes
Battle Ax	Str + 1L	N	2	-1 diff. to make Disarm attacks
Two-Handed Battle Ax	Str + 2L	N	3	-1 diff. to make Disarm attacks
Club	Str + 2B	L		
Flail	Str + 1B	L	2	+1 diff. to opponent's defense
Mace	Str + 2L	N	2	Armor Piercing: 2, bashing damage against Class 4 or better armor
Throwing Ax	Str + 1L	L	2	Throwing weapon
Warhammer/Pick	Str + 1L	N	2	Armor Piercing: 2

sions. The ball and chain variety is rare (and not called a "morningstar"); instead, a few iron rings join a short handle to a weighted wooden wedge.

Mace: Many maces are simply iron-shod clubs, but the flanged version spreads to Western Europe from Kievan Rus'. Like the battle ax, this weapon surges in popularity after the rise of plate armor.

Warhammer and Pick: These are essentially the same weapons, as the hammer (in some cases a configuration of sharp metal wedges) is backed with a spike. Most warhammers can be used in one hand. In contrast to popular stereotype, their heads are usually not any bigger than those of a practical tool, though they have longer, metal-shod handles.

Pole Weapons

Reach, ease of construction, and formation tactics make pole weapons as popular as they have been since ancient times. Complex pike formations will take over a century to evolve, but armies remember phalanx tactics and experiment with new methods. Pole weapons are also useful in individual combat. This list is greatly simplified from numerous variations. Some include hooks to trip or dismount enemies.

Glaive: This weapon is a single-edged slashing blade on a pole. In many cases, broken swords and long knives are mounted as glaive blades.

Halberd (14th century): A halberd is essentially a poleax with a spike. It eventually evolves into a shape that allows it to hook and slash opponents.

Lance: The classic lance is a heavy spear modified for cavalry use but in some cases there's little difference between the foot and horse weapon, and "lance" is a generic term for any spear. Knights use them in massed cavalry charges to break infantry lines and defeat other mounted soldiers. In the 13th century, jousting isn't a popular tournament game, but a side spectacle where knights *might* blunt their weapons.

Maul: The two-handed version of the warhammer features a heavy striking surface (sometimes with a back spike, sometimes not) on a pole.

Peasant Flail: These are staves connected to a weighted length of wood by a short chain. Beyond simple reinforcement, they can be taken straight from peasant farms to battlefields, where they are often used in formations.

Poleax: The long version of the battle ax will evolve into the halberd and other cleavers. This weapon was once favored by the Danes.

Spear: On foot, soldiers use spears in small, close formations, similar to ancient phalanxes. The Byzantines maintain old Greek and Roman techniques, but other soldiers as far away as Scotland have developed circular and rectangular *sheltron* formations of braced spears.

Staff: Stick fighting is a common pursuit among all classes, but the staff (not yet called a "quarterstaff") is particularly admired for its utility. Staff fighting passes on skills useful for all other polearms.

POLE WEAPONS*

Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str	Notes
Glaive	Str + 3L	N	2	
Halberd	Str + 3L	N	3	Armor Piercing: 1, -1 diff. to make disarm attacks
Javelin	Str + 1L	N	1	No Sweep bonus, throwing weapon
Lance (Mounted)	Str + 4L	N	3	Armor Piercing: 3, use spear traits on foot
Maul	Str + 5B	N	4	Armor Piercing: 2, reflexive Str + Athletics or take 1 action to ready each turn
Peasant Flail	Str + 3B	N	3	Armor Piercing: 1, +1 diff. to opponent's parries
Poleax	Str + 4L	N	3	-1 diff. to make Disarm attacks
Spear	Str + 2L	N	2	Throwing weapon (except for very long spears)
Staff	Str + 2B	N	2	+2 dice to Sweep instead of +1 die

* All pole weapons are two handed, but can be used one handed at a minimum Strength of 2 higher than normal. All pole weapons except for javelins gain +1 die to Sweep maneuvers. A pole weapon may be given a hook, providing a -1 difficulty break to the Sweep maneuver and the ability to use it at an additional +1 difficulty and -1 die penalty against mounted opponents, unhorsing them.

RANGED WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Range	Conceal	Min. Str	Notes
Bow (Compound or Self)	2L	60	N	2	Compound usable from horseback at no penalty; self at +2 diff. Armor Piercing: 2
Crossbow	3L	90	N	2	Usable from horseback at no penalty but must be reloaded on foot. Reload takes one turn; Armor Piercing: 2
Heavy Crossbow	4L	90	N	3	Reload takes 5 turns - Archery dots; Armor Piercing: 3
Dagger	Str + 1L	C	20	1	+1 difficulty
Dart	Str + 1L	30	L	1	
Hurlbat	Str + 2B	30	L	2	Sharp metal versions inflict Str + 1L
Knife	Str + 0L	15	P	1	+1 difficulty
Javelin	Str + 2L	50	N	2	Armor Piercing: 2
Rock	Str + 0B	40	N	1	+1 difficulty
Spear	Str + 2L	40	N	3	Armor Piercing: 2
Sling	2B	P	2		
Staff Sling	4B	50	N	3	
Throwing Ax	Str + 1L	20	C	2	+1 difficulty

Ranged Weapons

In **V20 Dark Ages**' default year of 1242, the longbow has yet to appear and gunpowder is a rumor born of the Mongols. Ranged combat is most often a prelude to close-ranged battle.

Compound and Self Bows: The main advantage of a recurve compound bow is that it compacts the power of a self bow in a shorter weapon. That makes these laminated wood, horn, and bone bows ideal for horse archers. Self bows are easier to build and require no modifications to be switched from hunting to war.

Crossbow: Crossbows aren't new weapons, but by the 13th century ratchet and strap-levers have made it practice to create stronger examples that can be reloaded in a reasonable amount of time. (The weapons table assumes light crossbows use the strap lever, and heavy crossbows use a ratchet.) Crossbows are considered superior to other bows due to their power and ease of use. Knights avoid massed crossbowmen because bolts can pierce their armor.

Dart: These heavy arrows are hurled by hand or with a sling, at short range.

Hurlbat: A weighted club designed for throwing, the hurlbat will eventually evolve into an all-metal throwing ax similar to those used by the Kongo people of Africa.

Javelin and Spear: The javelin is a light spear, designed to be thrown. Skirmishers harass enemies with hit and run attacks on foot or from horseback. Heavier spears might be hurled when necessary, but are more useful as a close range weapon.

Sling: People make ordinary slings to hunt small game, but rarely use them to fight. In battles, a staff sling allows a slinger to throw a heavier projectile farther. Stones are easy to gather, but lead shot tapered on both ends is more accurate.

Throwing Ax: The francisca-style ax is an antique weapon, but is still occasionally thrown or used as a small battle ax.

Armor

For mortals, armor is a virtual necessity on the battlefield. Cainites knit together flesh with their vitae, or develop the Fortitude to break blades against their skin, but kine break and tear.

Armor and Society

Armor's expensive. Mail requires steel, skill, and time. Knights seize armor as spoils of war or tournament victory. Heavy armor is a sign of wealth or theft from the dead, is uncomfortable to wear for long periods and takes time to don and remove. Wearing anything heavier than a gambeson means you expect a fight. If you're an armored stranger you must be a significant enemy: an errant soldier from a nearby conflict, or a knight turned marauder.

Yet for everything armor signifies, it also obscures the wearer's identity. Women wear the same armor as men, and even open-faced helmets make it difficult to determine the shape of the wearer's face or her hair color. 13th century heraldry isn't the complex art form developed in subsequent years, but an emblazoned shield and surcoat should honestly declare the knight's identity. "Black knights" are products of legend; anonymity is usually associated with shame, not romance.

Piece by Piece

V20 Dark Ages simplifies the wide variety of armor into five classes and indeed, the topic of armor is complex. If Storytellers wish to detail specific pieces of armor, the existing rules provide a solution. Wearing armor of a particular class indicates, at minimum, protection for the torso.

Attacks are assumed to either strike the torso or be hindered by the need to aim for other areas, resulting in strikes that aren't as precise or injurious. To bypass torso armor, the character should target another part of the enemy's body, using the targeting maneuver on p. 346 of **V20 Dark Ages**. Attacking a limb imposes a +1 difficulty penalty; striking at the head adds a +2 penalty. In these cases, apply the armor of the targeted area to any damage. Anyone who sees an enemy wearing mail but no helm is bound to stab for the face. Attacking a vulnerable part of an armored area (such as an eye slit or joint) levies a difficulty penalty of +3 or more, and can only be done with a thrusting attack.

Only torso armor and helmets impose initiative and Dexterity-based roll penalties, but these are not cumulative with each other. Apply the worst between each type. Torso armor penalties arise due to weight and bulk; helmets impose them because they limit vision and head movement.

Torso Armor

Torso armor protects against the majority of life-threatening strikes, save for those aimed at the head.

Armored Surcoat: For extra protection, knights add metal plates to their surcoats. In the next century this will evolve into a full coat of plates. A very thick surcoat might both conceal the plates within and provide enough padding to make a gambeson unnecessary, making it excellent armor for traveling incognito. The plates normally cover the chest and belly, and can be bypassed or ripped out of place by a clever enemy.

Plate Cuirass (late 14th century): Armorers develop single piece steel breastplates by the end of the 14th century, inaugurating the era of plate armor. Breastplates must be worn over gambesons.

Cuirboilli: Cuirboilli relies on techniques that turn leather into hardened, smooth plates, sewn onto a soft leather or cloth garment. These turn aside light slashes and scrapes, but remain vulnerable to strong blows from any weapon.

Brigandine and Coat of Plates (14th century): In Western Europe the armored surcoat evolves into a coat of plates. Coats of plates cover the torso with overlapping strips of metal bolted into a stout jacket, typically worn over a gambeson to further protect against blunt impact. The metal plates usually sit on the inside of the coat, so the studs keeping them in place are visible on the outside. This armor is also known as brigandine, and is popular among Eastern European and Asian soldiers.

Gambeson: This basic form of padded armor is a jacket made of layers of linen with pockets of stuffing. Gambesons are warm; wearing one on a chilly day usually doesn't invite extra scrutiny. Most forms of heavy armor only function properly when worn over a gambeson. This will eventually evolve into the Renaissance doublet.

Lamellar and Scale: Lamellar consists of small metal plates laced together side by side. Scale armor uses overlapping plates fastened to a cloth or leather backing garment. Mongol, Rus, and Byzantine warriors wear this form of armor.

Mail Hauberk: This is the most common form of heavy armor in Europe and parts of Asia. "Mail" is synonymous with chainmail, to the point where it would be considered redundant to use that word. Mail provides excellent protection from cutting blows, but can be defeated by thrusting attacks. It must be worn over a gambeson. Most mail links are closed with rivets; unsecured "butted" mail tears apart much more easily.

Torso Armor by Type

Class	Rating	Penalty	Torso Armor
Class One	1	0	Gambeson
Class Two	2	1	Cuirboilli, Armored Surcoat
Class Three	3	1	Gambeson with Cuirboilli or Armored Surcoat
Class Four	4	2	Gambeson with Mail
Class Five	5	3	Gambeson with Mail and Armored Surcoat, Gambeson with Brigandine, Coat of Plates or Lamellar,
Class Six*	6	3	Gambeson with Mail and Brigantine, Coat of Plates or Lamellar, Gambeson with Cuirass**

* In Western Europe, this class cannot be acquired until the 14th century.

** Plate Armor reduces the penalty to 2.

Limb Armor

Armor for the limbs may use a combination of types. Use the dominant armor on the limb to determine its overall rating, though you may make exceptions if an enemy aims for a specific, small body part.

Chausses: Chausses are padded or armored hose. Most armor requires gamboissed (padded) chausses to protect against pinching and impact. Mail and other heavier chausses fit over these. Knights' armor adds plate reinforcements for the feet and knees.

Gauntlets: The dominant gauntlet is a thick leather glove. This may be covered by a mail mitten, perhaps with a few plates of armor. By the 14th century, armorers develop plate gauntlets in the form of segmented mittens or articulated plates for the fingers.

Plate for the Legs (14th century): After the rise of plate armor, wealthy soldiers wear metal strips called tassets that hang from the cuirass to cover the thighs, cuisses, or plates for the upper leg, poleyns that cap the knees, and metal greaves. In the transition to plate, soldiers adopt greaves and poleyns, and protect the upper legs with armor that hangs under the belt or chausses.

Sleeves, Vambraces and Rerebraces: In the 13th century, mail hauberks usually include long sleeves. Better examples add shoulder, elbow, and forearm plates. After the invention of brigandine and later, plate armor, arm protection consists of plated pauldrons for the shoulders, rerebraces for the upper arms, vambraces for the forearms, and cowters for the elbows. Mail might also be reinforced with "splints," or long attached plates.

Helmets and Neck Protection

Medieval helmets trade clear vision and comfort for protection. Thus, while open-faced helmets invite brutal strikes for the face, they also provide the ability to see the shot coming.

Limb Armor by Type

Class	Rating	Type
Class One	1	Gamboissed Chausses, Gambeson Sleeves
Class Two	2	Leather Chausses and Heavy Boots, Cuirboilli Sleeves
Class Three	3	Partial Mail over Padding (arms or legs)
Class Four	4	Mail Chausses over Padding, Mail Sleeves over Gambeson
Class Five	5	Mail Chausses with Plates over Padding, Mail Sleeves with Plates over Gambeson
Class Six	6*	Plate Armor for Arms or Legs

* In Western Europe, this class cannot be acquired until the 14th century.

HELMETS BY TYPE

Class	Rating	Penalty	Type
Class One	1	0	Arming Cap
Class Two	2	1	Arming Cap and Iron Cap, Arming Cap and Mail Coif
Class Three	3	1	Arming Cap, Mail Coif and Iron Cap, Arming Cap and Open-Faced Helm
Class Four	4	2	Arming Cap, Mail Coif/Aventail and Open-Faced Helm, Great Helm over Arming Cap, Bascinet* over Arming Cap
Class Five	5	3	Great Helm over Arming Cap and Mail Coif, Bascinet* and Aventail over Arming Cap
Class Six	6	3	Great Helm over Arming Cap, Mail Coif and Iron Cap, Bascinet and Gorget**

* In Western Europe, the bascinet and gorget cannot be acquired until the 14th century. If the bascinet's visor is up, reduce its penalty and rating by 1.

** A bascinet and gorget reduces the penalty to 2.

Arming Cap: Leather or cloth arming caps are essential if one is to wear a metal helmet comfortably. They also provide minor protection against blows, though this is not their primary purpose.

Aventail and Mail Coif: Often worn under a solid helm, a mail coif is a hood that fits over the head, neck, and upper shoulders. An aventail is a length of mail that hangs from an attached helmet to the neck and shoulders.

Bascinet (14th Century): In the 14th century the iron cap evolves into a full helm with a faceplate that can be raised and lowered.

Gorget (14th Century): By the later 14th century armorers incorporate the gorget: a solid metal collar. This is worn with transitional armor and later, plate.

Great Helm: This one piece, close-faced, bucket-shaped helm offers excellent protection but a poor field of vision — combatants use ventilation holes to see as often as the eye slits. This is the dominant knight's helm of the 13th century, and is worn with an arming cap, coif, and in some cases, an iron cap underneath.

Iron Cap: This iron skullcap protects the top of the head from blows but leaves everything else exposed. It's worn beneath a great helm or by itself, among poorer soldiers.

Open-Faced Helm: Numerous examples of open-faced helmets exist. One of the most common is the wide-brimmed kettle-helm, which wards off blows with its brim. Nasal helmets are named for the thick piece of metal that falls over the nose, guarding it and deflecting blows from the face as a whole. These helmets are vulnerable to face thrusts, but offer unimpeded vision.

Shields

Shields are exceedingly useful defensive and offensive weapons. A skilled shieldbearer not only deflects blows,

SHIELDS

Shield	Damage	Min. Str.	Conceal	Parry Diff.	Attack Penalty	Notes
Buckler	Str + 1B	1	L	4	0	
Pavis	Str + 2B	3	N	7	+1	Good cover vs. ranged when planted; +2 diff to use as weapon
Standard Shield	Str + 2B	2	N	6	+1	+1 diff. to use as weapon

but smashes enemies and traps their weapons. Knights only abandon them after plate armor is perfected, but Europeans carry bucklers for self-defense up until the 17th century.

Buckler: This small shield is about a foot wide and might be made entirely of metal, or include a metal boss (a round cap). Bucklers are often used when traveling light, or for duels. Techniques use the buckler to cover the sword hand or strike the opponent's weapon and hands.

Pavis: This oblong shield has a flat bottom so it can be wedged into the ground and used as cover for archers and crossbowmen. Once planted, the pavis provides Good cover (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 348) to a single person crouched behind it. Pavises are made of wood, with some metal reinforcements for striking surfaces.

Standard Shield: The two types of shields in common use are a round shield with a boss that Scots call a *targe* (though it is found elsewhere) and the shield Victorians will call a heater, though it has no special name during the Middle Ages. Shields are typically made of wood, though they might be reinforced with leather, a center boss, or a metal edge.

Swift as a Sword Blow: Streamlined Combat

In **V20 Dark Ages** combat, every exchange involves up to four dice rolls: attack, defense, damage, and soak. The system in this section reduces the number of dice rolls and calculations, while adding a few tactical tweaks.

Time, Initiative, and Actions

Roll initiative as usual (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 343) but only once for the entire combat scene. Count down from the highest result to 0.

When a combatant's number comes up, her player declares what the character's going to do, and then performs the necessary dice rolls and other procedures. If two characters act on the same initiative number, their actions take place simultaneously. This means that (for example) if one combatant kills the other, the other combatant still acts, even if the dead character's player hasn't had a chance to roll dice yet.

Multiple Action Phases

Each character acts once in initiative order, initiative modifications and reactions notwithstanding (see below). As soon as a character is called to act, the player must decide how many standard actions she wishes to attempt. This choice imposes the penalties listed on p. 322 of **V20 Dark Ages**. Nevertheless, each character acts once — at first.

After every character acts once, the Storyteller calls for second actions, and again resolves them in initiative order. She then calls for third actions, fourth, and so on, again resolving them in order, until no player has multiple actions to resolve.

A few actions call for exceptions to this, including hustle actions (see below) and certain maneuvers that pair multiple actions, such as the Riposte maneuver on p. 347 of **V20 Dark Ages**. It also applies to all defensive maneuvers, which respond to incoming attacks at any time.

Tagging, Delaying, Interrupting and Reacting

Players may modify initiative and the order of actions in a number of ways.

Tagging: The first (and only the first) player-controlled character to act in a turn may *tag* another character, if his player (or Storyteller, for Storyteller characters) consents. That character gains the tagging character's initiative number. The tagging character's number drops by one; she'll usually go next. This change lasts until some other circumstance modifies the character's initiative again.

Delaying: On the character's initiative, the player may choose to act later. Pick a new initiative number, lower than before. This new initiative count lasts until altered by some other circumstance. The character may now interrupt (see below) during that turn, but not in future turns. Characters may not delay more than once every other turn, and may not drop their initiative counts below zero.

Interrupting: A delayed character may interrupt another character who acts after that character's original (not delayed) initiative count. This takes place after the interrupted character's player declares an action, but before it gets resolved. The delayed character may attempt one standard action before the interrupted character. After that, the delayed character's "original" initiative resets to the delayed count, and she can't interrupt again on this turn. The rest of the delayed character's standard actions (if any) take place at the delayed count in that and subsequent turns.

Reacting: Two situations change the order of actions without changing character's initiative counts. First, a character may perform a defensive action such as a block or dodge, even if it isn't her turn, in response to an earlier



attack. Second, if a character has a longer range action ready to go (such as a bow with an arrow nocked, a long spear, or a ranged Discipline), she may use it before a character with a higher initiative count attempts to affect her with a shorter range action. Thus, a character could strike with a spear before a sword-wielding ghoul closes. In such cases, the shorter-range attack or other action takes place immediately afterward. Neither of these conditions change characters' initiative counts, but do use up actions as usual.

Time and Actions

Streamlined combat takes place in standard turns. During a turn, a character can:

- Move at jogging speed (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 333) or less. A character may run instead, but this counts as an standard action. In an exception to the usual multiple action rules, a character may *hustle*, and perform an additional action in a set of multiple actions at the end of a run during standard initiative (by, for example, charging and stabbing an enemy) instead of waiting for all initial actions to finish. This replaces the usual penalties for acting while moving.
- Perform a number of *standard actions*, depending on how many the player declared she would attempt. Standard actions are those already described in **V20 Dark Ages**.
- Perform as many *reflexive actions* (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 321) as the Storyteller allows.

Combat Procedure

Streamlined combat cuts soak and damage rolls, limiting dice to events that reflect character activity.

When a character attacks, roll the standard dice pool for that attack. When a character defends, roll the dice pool for their defensive maneuver. If the defender scores more successes, she evades the attack. If the attacker scores more successes, the attack strikes. Note the difference between attack and defense successes, which affect damage.

Damage and Soak

Do not roll damage. Instead, add difference between attack and defense successes to the attack's damage rating to calculate the damage before soak.

Do not roll soak dice. Instead, characters possess the following *soak ratings*:

Bashing Soak Rating: Stamina + Fortitude (+Armor for attacks that must penetrate armor). Remember that, in addition, Cainites halve bashing damage.

Lethal Soak Rating: 0 for most mortals. Half Stamina (rounded up) for ghouls and exceptional mortals. Stamina + Fortitude (+Armor for attacks that must penetrate armor) for vampires.

Aggravated Soak Rating: Fortitude for vampires (+Armor for attacks that would be protected by it, such as a blessed blade). The aggravated damage category usually doesn't exist for mortals.

In addition, write down a *hardened* rating equal to half the character's soak rating, rounded up. You can list it with the soak rating, after a slash.

To determine the amount of damage inflicted, use the following rules:

- If the damage before soak is the character's hardened rating or less, the attack inflicts zero damage.
- If the damage is higher than the character's hardened rating, subtract the character's full soak rating from the incoming damage. The character suffers the remainder of any incoming damage, but even if soak would reduce it to zero or less, the character still suffers one level of damage.

Example: *Yodok slashes Arnaut with bone talons. Yodok scores 5 successes against Arnaut's 3 successes to block. Yodok's Vicissitude-shaped claws inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage. Yodok's Strength is 3, making it a 4-damage attack. Two successes over Arnaut's defense increases the damage to 6. Fortunately, Arnaut possesses Stamina 3, Fortitude 3 and is wearing a light chain hauberk that provides 2 levels of armor, for a lethal soak rating of 8 and a hardened rating of 4. Yodok's damage is less than Arnaut's soak, but more than his hardened rating, so he inflicts 1 level of lethal damage.*

Followers of Set Apocrypha: The Accursed Father

A tale told in Egypt, beneath the sands of the Valley of Kings.

"Childe, I bring you beneath the sands to read the language of the gods, lost to all others. You learned the rites. You penetrated the veil of lies surrounding them, to protect them from unready hearts. You've earned the right to question me." The Nebthet bared her fangs at the torch for a moment, against its fire, and placed it in the bracket. I felt I should sweat in fear of her but there was nothing, and I was comforted by my body's defeat of mortality.

"I can speak freely?"

She nodded. "That's what this chamber is for."

"I say the words, I make the gestures, but I've also studied the old walls in Abydos. I've spoken to the mad ones, chained beneath Heliopolis. I've meditated upon the Father of Fear to understand the knowledge within me. There are. . .contradictions. I have praised Set as the father of all blood drinkers, yet I know the mystery of the Bite of Apep. I know the tale of the Contending with Horus, who was forever made inferior to the Father by it, but I have read of the battle with his priests, who abjure age and ashes. I have read the lost language, but also an older language still, and it speaks of us as brothers with the Clan of War, under their Khayyin."

"Ah, but you know we lie. The gods taught mortals the art of naming things truly, to gain power over them. Naming them falsely, we take power away."

"Yes, but we're the Mighty One's priests. Shouldn't we know the truth?" Again, I felt none of the old animalistic fear, but my blood shuddered.

"No," she said. "You proceed from a fundamental error. You believe we earn true knowledge because that is a route to power. But the power of such truths cannot be controlled. So I will tell you: Set is not

the father of all blood drinkers in the crude sense of the Embrace. There was one before him, and others above him, though they perished in their folly. Do you know who he held dominion over, when he was given sacrifices in the sun?"

"The desert. Strangers. Kings."

"Yes, and fools believe they are separate things. But this was one responsibility, never given to him but seized, for the fools of the oldest court cared not for the sounds of the desert, of the possibility of foreigners, and did not acknowledge that their rule could be anything but eternal. For each of the Great Nine were sorcerers, given the secret of naming things true, and all but mighty Set believed their wisdom encompassed the world. Only he ventured beyond the sound of the rushing river, until the sand turned into a substance beyond mortal description.

"He saw beings in the dark beyond, mighty as gods but fragile as gossamer before the finished portions of the world. These strangers, these kings beyond the desert wished to introduce their own true names, which would contradict the names of the created world. They searched for flaws in the Nine's names, in Creation, so that they might introduce their own words, their Chaos-names."

"Demons."

"No," she said. "Demons are of the order of things. Even the deluded priests of our era acknowledge this. They call them slaves of 'Adversary,' an office of the divine order, or declare them lords of ifrit, made of our world's invisible fire.

"Set desired to enter the darkness where these Strangers dwelled, to do battle with them, but mortal flesh could not withstand the place beyond places. He returned to Heliopolis and warned the other gods. They laughed. 'There's world enough for us,' they said. 'We will make our Names indestructible, and create kingdoms and slaves at need.' They were divine from knowing the secrets of making, and cared nothing for their subjects, who tilled the earth and feared snakes striking at their heels.

"But Father Set had traveled farther than the Nine knew. He alone knew there was another city, other gods."

Beneath torchlight, I saw a flash of green, painted upon a crowned man. The Nebthet dug her fingers into the stone as if it was dry mud. When she made a fist the wall cracked, and Osiris was turned to shards in the darkness.

"I'm not sure I should tell you the next part," she said. Her eyes turned yellow, and took on the aspect of the serpent. "Show me your heart," she said, "beyond deception."

I often meditated in the desert, and imagined its vastness within me. When I felt her enter my thoughts, my desert seemed to be a speck of dust on her finger. And then: "You serve Set completely. I will continue.

"He went to the other city. It was called Stubbornness, for its ruler defied Ma'at," she said. "It was unlit by fire. The gates opened to him and he walked alone to its palace. The Defiant One received his audience."

"Caine?"

"What does that mean? In parts or as a whole, the word can be called Spear, Straightener, Redeemer, One Who Accepts, Lamenter. He purchased the world with the blood of his beloved to resist Ma'at. He was cursed, and cast into the darkness beyond, yet he returned to found the city. Set demanded his secret.

USING THE TALE OF THE ACCURSED FATHER

This story highlights a problem Storytellers often encounter. **V20 Dark Ages** includes plenty of flavor and deep setting material, but how do you bring it into the game?

First, understand that the story above is just one example of how it might be told. Characters might find it written on a scroll, have a renegade Setite share it, or, if they belong to the Clan, they might learn it as part of a senior initiation into Set's mysteries.

Next, ask yourself what the story suggests. The Followers of Set are inveterate liars, so you can interpret it any number of ways. Does Set really protect the world from "Strangers" who threaten the world from beyond? Was Apep a member of the Second Generation, or something else?

Finally, turn the answers and process of knowing into story events you can use. The "Strangers" might be fiends of the sort Infernalists worship, and might claim Baali servitors. They make their move, and the chronicle not only uses them as antagonists, but reveals the tale in parts to gradually present the true nature of the conflict, including an unlikely alliance with the Followers of Set.

"'I cannot be removed from this world because I defiled it, and it demands a reckoning' said the Defiant One. 'I went into the outer dark, and it abjured me. In its hate, the world desires me, so that I may be humbled, and one night, repent. Yet when I repent, the world will end.'

"Father Set saw the Defiant One's despair, but he knew the world might end before the time of repentance, at the hands of those Strangers beyond the world. Set was unafraid of being outcast as the Defiant One was and told him, 'I will take your place, and receive the hatred of Ma'at in exchange for your secret.'

"The Defiant One had other children, but they offered no comfort in the way Set did, for they were mere extensions of him, as servile as one's own hand or eye. 'You must share in my making from the source,' said the Defiant One. 'You must be given hatred born from the soil.' So the Defiant One spoke a true name, and it called forth the Snake, Apep, who opened Set's throat, and issued blood and black earth into the wound.

"And therefore Set became the only childe equal to Defiant One. And he journeyed to the place where the sand became what cannot be said. He walked beyond the world for three nights, or six, or 40. He cast down the Strangers so they would not invade for an age. He returned and sealed the way behind him. He repaired flaws in this world, acting where the selfish lords of Heliopolis would not. And came clad in the aspect of Apep, the snake, child of the world's sustaining hatred. In the outer darkness he had become unused to the world's light, but endured its burning.

"Yes, 'Caine' had many children. But only Set is his equal, in power and burdens. For our Father must bear Apep, the hate of the world. And because Set committed no crime, he must sustain that hatred, or else the world will forgive him, and end. Thus we profane the world with lies, and lead kine and blood drinker to celebrate foulness. We offend the world. They must hate us and never know why. No being must discover the way of Set, lest they open the way to the Strangers.

"Thus are the legends reconciled."

"You shouldn't have told me that," I said. "You have no reason to. It can't be true."

"No story is true," she said. "When you find the lies in this one, you'll be ready for the next."

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