TOME OF SECRETS

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

Tome of Secrets

Steffie De Vaan, Lawerence Hawkins, David A Hill Jr,
Matthew Dawkins, Hayley Margules, Malcolm Sheppard

Credits

Authors: Steffie De Vaan, Lawerence Hawkins, David A Hill Jr, Matthew Dawkins, Hayley Margules, Malcolm Sheppard

Developer: David A Hill Jr

Editor: Ellen Kiley

Creative Director: Richard Thomas

Art Direction: Mike Chaney

Layout and Typsetting: Becky Jollensten

Cover Art: Sam Araya

Interior Art: Andrew Trabbold, Sam Araya, Michael Gaydos, Felipe Gaona

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Chapter One: The Dark Medieval World

Introduction

Welcome to the Tome of Secrets. Welcome back to the 13th century, to the Dark Medieval World presented in **V20 Dark Ages**. Here, we'll be treading some familiar ground, and we'll be finding new trails. We're going to pull back some curtains and let you see the meat, skeletons, and bile behind them.

What This Book Is

Tome of Secrets is a series of short supplementary pieces which add material to **V20 Dark Ages**. This is mostly material we wanted to add more of, but couldn't squeeze into such a massive tome. Every supplement, every piece adds material for Storytellers and players alike; you'll find options for your characters and for your stories.

This book is an interesting collection, in that you helped make it happen. Not you specifically, necessarily, but the fans in general. During the Kickstarter campaign for **V20 Dark Ages**, we engaged with the fans, finding the sorts of things they wanted to see more of. Over that month, we added more and more material as we reached additional benchmarks. This is the sort of material we've always wanted to touch on, but didn't necessarily have the space to address in the past. We also got to give more specific identity to these ideas. For example, we give Setite Sorcery more attention than before; it now feels very distinct from reskinned Thaumaturgy. We added more content to our new Koldunism system, showing some of the directions it could go beyond the baselines presented. We added a ritual magic system as well, at fan request.

Also, this compiles the serial fiction from that Kickstarter campaign, detailing the strange phenomenon of the Bloodless Crusade. With the help of our Kickstarter backers, we've even added a series of lost letters, which help shed a little light on (or ask more questions about) the mysterious crusade. We've also added some new Combination Disciplines and rituals showcasing some of our fans' characters. So where **V20 Dark Ages** was a love letter to **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, and **Dark Ages: Vampire**, this is a love letter to fans of **V20 Dark Ages**.

What You'll Find Inside

Here are the supplements you'll find within:

Abyss Mysticism

This section delves further into the darkness of Lasombra sorceries, including new rituals, and some of the terrifying creatures of the dark.

Assamite Sorcery

This is a treatment of Clan Assamite, with attention paid to Alamut's role in the bloodline. We showcase a form of sorcery which is inexorably tied to Alamut.

Fiefdoms

This section offers tools and ideas for building domains and fiefdoms within your chronicles. It looks at the idea of territory in the Dark Medieval World, and gives game tools for presenting that to your players.

Holy Things

This expands on the concepts of True Faith presented in the **V20 Dark Ages** rulebook. It looks at the nature of miracles, and how faith matters for Cainites.

Knightly Orders

Here, we look at knighthood, both in a mortal and vampiric sense. This gives ideas for how to implement knighthood in your stories, as well as knight-specific combat options.

Koldunism

This material expands on the Koldunism content featured in **V20 Dark Ages**, including a system for ritual magic, and a new kraina for your Tzimisce koldun.

Necromancy

Here, we expand upon the magics of the Cappadocians, the Giovani, and Laibon necromancers. We add new Paths and new concepts.

Setite Sorcery

In this section, we offer further Paths for Setite sorcerers, as well as a philosophical approach to what Setite Sorcery means.

Unholy Things

This material deals with demons, the infernal, and vampires' complicated relationship with the unholy.

Warfare

Here, we look at warfare in the Storyteller System, and through a medieval lens. How can you run large-scale combats in **V20 Dark Ages** and make them truly impactful without wading into complex numbers exercises?

The Bloodless Crusade: The Creidne Diaries

Entry 0: Prelude

July 1242

Our patron has promised each of us great fortune if we uncover the city called Scáth. You must bring only a horse, and bring it immediately after nightfall tomorrow.

You ask why we're traveling. You ask for what we travel. You ask for whom we travel.

We travel for the city. It's not a place like Dublin. You cannot just consult maps. It moves. It vanishes from time to time. The city contains a great bounty of ancient and mystical treasures, treasures that can make kings of paupers. It contains a secret so dark, it shall shake our understanding of the blood to its very core.

Our patron is a great Cainite, a power amongst powers. I cannot divulge his name. He has given us a guarantee that within one night's travel, we shall know his power. He asks not for blind faith, simply for one night to prove his credentials.

Our first voyage is to Dublin. We canvas the city. We search. We question. Our patron tells us we shall know for what we search when we find it.

This letter's existence means that you are valuable to our hunt. Come with us.

We ride at nightfall.

—Creidne

Entry 1: Dublin, July 1242

Our voyage takes us toward beaten roads. Our patron has come through on his assertion. We traveled hard the first night. When we awoke on the second night, we found our hunger gone completely.

That is a lie. Our hunger was not gone, and to suggest it was would belittle the truth of the matter. Our hunger was replaced by a new hunger: a hunger for the hunt, for the quest, for the road. Those of us who strayed from the path felt the pangs of starvation the way one might after a week without mortal lifeblood. Those buckling down and marching along felt sated, like we might right after a fresh meal. As we arrived in Dublin, we felt completely satisfied, elated even. This helped the voyage, since so many Cainites traveling together would tax if not eradicate a local population. Without the need for blood, we could devote ourselves to the mission.

Dublin seemed a dead end for three nights. The locals had no concept of this city of Scáth. However, this newfound lack of hunger kept our interest in the search. Some of our number continued to hunt, just to keep the bloodlust at bay. This was a cathartic experience for many.

Our break came in the form of a forgotten alley between two derelict homes housing numerous poor families. The newly appointed Lord Mayor, John Le Warre, told us this tiny ward did not

exist. He told us not to travel to this edge of the city, that any of the other 8,000 people were far more likely to help us on our search. But we found it. "Scáth Edinburgh." This oblique reference made our hearts feel engorged, as if we just slaked our thirsts on a freshly killed, healthy vessel. While the reference was vague, that feeling was enough to send us to our next goal.

Entry 2: Edinburgh, July 1242

Now, the loss of hunger is truly proven a miracle. We have traveled for over two weeks, and none of us has collapsed from the absence of blood. None of us has fallen to the Beast, or to dread torpor. Our blessings are many.

Edinburgh was a quick stop on the voyage. A woman waited for us. Or did three? I cannot remember. I believe I recall their faces. But I only remember one speaking to us. She told us a great many things, but each and every one of us forgot her words. She said we'd remember when it was important to remember. She gave us a fingerbone, clawed, ancient, cold. We kept it densely wrapped, for any plant within a foot of the bone withered in seconds, and no fewer than three horses died while carrying it. One of our charge, an Assamite, holds the bone on her person, and runs with the quickness of the blood alongside our caravan.

She told us to continue on to Norwich. She told us Norwich would not end our journey. She told us that Norwich would give us a knuckle up on the competition.

We have competition? The plot thickens. Did our patron hire multiple companies? Certainly not. Our miracle could not be replicated by anyone short of Caine. Could even Caine abate the need for blood?

We traveled on toward Norwich.

With Norwich our next waypoint, I have to wonder, to where does this voyage take us? We've marched over most of the British Isles, and we do not appear to be stopping.

Entry 3: Norwich, August, 1242

Norwich gave us an immediate clue. We looked toward London, and saw in the night sky a red halo around a star. When we looked to this halo, our hearts pumped the way a young mortal child's might. We knew this was our path.

However, Norwich offered something else. It offered up the first signs of danger ahead. While we discussed with the locals, a messenger came from London to tell the city that the Church sought out a coterie of demons traveling the countryside toward the capital city. This most certainly referenced our band. The messenger said to the locals that they are to lead the questioning devils to London Town. There, the messenger said, the demons shall meet their end.

Some of our number left the party at this juncture, not willing to risk the Final Death for the voyage. They risked hunger, however, and I do not know at this time what happened to them.

Others girded their loins for battle. We took some of the greatest hunters and warriors in Norwich, and Embraced them into the fold. As expected, our patron's great miracle extended to them, too. None of the new childer hungered. None attacked their sires upon rising. We quickly integrated them into the fold.

At that, we moved on toward London.

Entry 4: London, August, 1242

As we arrived, London was silent. This could not be good. As such a massive entourage, we marched to the gates, and were denied entry. The guard told us to find a rural stable to put us up, and to return come dawn. They said current policy forbade strangers from entering at night.

We had a plan.

We would not buckle. We would not wait. The hunger for the quest was too great, and the Beast murmured under our dead flesh. One of our Toreador summoned the guard to a nearby house. We had no time to feed him for three nights, so we gave him the Embrace, and a rapid education. We sent him into the city to investigate and report back.

He did not report back, but he did give us all the information we needed. He screamed. He screamed to high heaven. He growled. He hissed. All the while, we saw the warm orange glow of a bonfire above the city gates.

We would not enter London as a coterie. We dispersed. We surrounded the city walls. We each found haven, and planned to move the next night in a concerted effort, both directly militant and covert.

Entry 5: London, August 1242, Night 2

Tonight, we laid siege to London, a siege of shadows.

Our fearsome Assamite blessed us all with a veil of the very night. She gave a prayer in her native tongue, and our warriors and spies moved without trace or sound, and London's fog clung to them like cloaks bunched in the wind.

Our spies quickly found the source of the travesty; a lone church stood aside from the bustle of the city. This church still bore the ashes of our unfortunate childe across its lawn. "The Ghrian shall tear down the walls of Scáth," some of the congregation murmured under their voices. Tear down Scáth's walls they may, but their eyes could not tear down our sorcerer's blessing.

Our warriors moved in to strike, their claws, fangs, and blades empowered by the hunger we shared. A frightening number of the congregation, at least a dozen, fought with the fires of True Faith. We lost some, mostly the young. But the blood of Caine is strong within us. No man, no mayor, no god will hold back an alliance of the Damned. A peculiar fact overtook us: some of our number were lost in the act of feeding. Our hungers gone, we'd not bothered to explore mortal blood since starting our voyage. But to the knights of our crusade, mortal blood turned to ash like so much food to Caine's get. What were we becoming? We fought hard, and we conquered after a scant few hours of the siege.

We took exactly one prisoner, one Father Childebert Longivad. Like so many fathers of faithful flocks, his faith was not so true. He was nothing more than a power hungry pervert, manipulating the pious to serve his disgusting ends. Under pain of torture, he told us of his order's home in Toulouse. Our hunger calmed. We knew we were on the right track. We strung him to a horse, and dragged him along the next steps of our journey. His body gave out, shredded, and fell into a ditch before the first night ended.

Entry 6: Toulouse, October 1242

We made our way across the English Channel at Bournemouth, and arrived in Cherbourg. We traveled quickly; our horses seemed quickened as if they shared our uncanny hunger for the hunt. We traveled every waking hour of the night across the countryside, south into Occitania. While we oft worried of wild threats such as Lupines, no monster in its right mind would attack a caravan of battle-hardened Cainites.

The "order" of which Father Longivad spoke was no order. No proper order, at least. The Ghrian were not known to the people, nor did they have a church. Indeed, the search for his order took several nights of canvassing. The Ghrian were men of letters, and Toulouse acted as a hub for their activities. Every day, never at night, couriers arrived and quickly left with missives dropped in seemingly random locations.

We made every effort to coordinate interceptions. Ghouls. Mind-controlled servants. Traps. The randomness threw us off nearly every time; when we managed to find a note, it came up utterly empty of meaning, as if our enemies were one step ahead of us. The second such note appeared to be a seneschal's housekeeping records for Joan, Countess of Toulouse. This featured nothing damning, nor could our group decipher any form of hidden meaning.

Eventually, one of our mark contacted a local Ventrue elder, offering great prestation for the service of possessing a mortal shell to intercept a courier. The courier could give little information. His letter however, once recovered, revealed another step on what is becoming a voyage beyond any of our expectations.

Tomorrow, we will make our way to Toledo. We travel one stronger, for our friend Ventrue now possesses the same hunger for the quest, and has asked to accompany us in exchange for erasing the debts we owe.

Entry 7: Toledo, November 1242

As we made our way to Toledo, I listened to my company speak of the city's composition. Our Assamite friend told us tales of its inhabitants. Toledo was her first goal on her pilgrimage from the East; she came as part of a caravan of Muslim settlers looking to expand mercantile associations within the region. She said that in the time of her first pilgrimage, things looked very good for the Muslim settlers of Toledo. The Assamites maintained good relations with some of the Jewish Tremere of the region, where they drew boundaries both physical and conceptual, and traded notes for the advancement of their arts. This arrangement unraveled with the Christian Reconquista; tensions flared, and no faction could get along.

We quickly found two things in Toledo.

A foreman in the construction of the Catedral Primada Santa María de Toledo somehow recognized one of our number, and handed her an iron key. We attempted to question him, to uncover from where the key came, and in where it fit, but he had no awareness. In fact, he could not even remember ever having the key, or having given it to us.

The second came in similar fashion. A smith handed us a gorgeous dagger, a blade of Toledo steel. He told us that the key would plunge into the heart of darkness, and the dagger would open the door. Again, he did not know anything else that could help us.

We toiled for nearly another month, actively pursuing our next lead. We had these tools, but could not tell where they were to be used. Some of our number fled the party. Not many, but our

numbers fell below the starting population. Discouraged, we followed the first potential lead. That lead came in the form of a dream. Our Malkavian, Catherine, told us to move west to the ocean. She said the red light rises in the east and sets in the west. She said tonight, whatever tonight means, we must travel and follow the falling star. Hungry for the road, we rode on.

Addenda: My friend Tremere on our travels tells us that there is no organization of Jewish Tremere. No formally organized cabal exists, and in the time period recognized, the Tremere did not exist properly in that region. He suggests that our Assamite friend may have referenced one of the many Tremori cults, some of which took refuge in the nascent clan.

Entry 8: Lisbon, November 1242

The strangest thing occurred last night. We set out on our road westward from Toledo. We bedded down before the first dawn. When we rose at dusk, we were but an hour from Lisbon. This was not a night's trip; we had expected our voyage to take the better part of a month. We verified the date and our location with farmers; we had traveled the full distance in one night's time.

Where were we that night? How did we travel so rapidly? What of our mysterious patron? Did our patron help us in our journey? I cannot answer these questions.

We still have not fed on the blood of the living. Some of us lament the loss, and speak of how we miss the taste, the connection. One of our number, a Worm, says that the hunt, the feeding, is the only time he gets to remember what it means to be human, because it's his only contact with the living.

We're shaken to the core, one and all. Does this travel peculiarity truly matter? We do not know. But it certainly affects us, and our morale. We cling together. Since entering Lisbon, we've avoided the local Cainites. This is not out of any particular prejudice, but how could the locals understand us? We don't share food with them anymore, and haven't for some time.

Our next clue came from underneath the São Jorge Castle. As we combed through the tunnels in that hill, we saw shadows. We saw dozens of shadows, which scampered through the halls. Even the quickest of our number could not catch these shades; they would give us no answers. But what they did give us was a massacre. We followed them to an antechamber which had no fewer than three dozen bodies, each rent the way you might expect from a pack of wolves. Our hunger drove us to investigate, and we saw signs of the Ghrian. We saw coinage from Toulouse. We saw feathers we recognized from the church there. Amidst the brutality, we found a writ of command from a Bishop in Cordoba. If this Bishop was truly a church official, this puts the Ghrian in some peripheral involvement with the church. The writ spoke of a group of demons traveling from the East, in search of "the city." I can only imagine they mean our Scáth.

We decided to put aside our concerns about the rapid travel, and move on toward Cordoba.

Entry 9: Cordoba, December 1242

We made our way to Cordoba. The trip was mostly uneventful. While we traveled, our Malkavians and Toreador swore they saw eyes on us, from the distance, from the wooded depths. We investigated, sending scouts out in every direction, but came up with nothing substantial. We found tracks that appeared to be Lupine, but are somewhat smaller than any of us are used to. Vaguely animalistic, with claws, but barely human size, let alone larger.

The city, freshly conquered as part of the Reconquista, was a hotbed of faith. Everywhere we looked, we found new churches built. The city had more than enough for its present population; we expect that they seek to expand and maintain a stranglehold on their Christianity. However, these churches gave us something to look into. Many of the buildings were in use, despite being currently under construction.

We learned from our time in London. We briefly took roots in the city, finding connections, and charming the locals. We made the city work for us, in seeking out our prey. Just under a fortnight has passed, and we have found our mark. We have received numerous, simultaneous reports of one certain church with a growing army. However, the reports wildly varied in their numbers. The Ghrian locally call themselves "The Church of the Wayward," and flock around a figure called the Wayward. All reports have him a beautiful man. Some reports say he is old, some young, some clean, some filthy. One report, the one we worry most about, speaks of his sunlight-golden eyes.

We hoped to plan a greater siege, a starvation game, but the rumors speak of the church moving on to the next city, to Granada. Their plan is to move within the week, and thus, we will mount an assault to start the next sundown.

Entry 10 Addendum: Cordoba, December 1242

... I wrote this entry, but I cannot remember writing this entry, or what it contained. I see the faint scrawlings on the next sheet of paper, and they do not match my Entry 9.

Entry 11: Granada, Date Unknown

As I search for Entry 10, I find our coterie in Granada. Again, we know not how we arrived in the fair city. Before I speak of our time in Granada, I wish to compile my understanding of our time in Cordoba, after Entry 9.

We planned an assault on the "Church of the Wayward." We formed a battle plan that night, after I penned Entry 9. Our plan included a thorough attack from ambush, using our Nosferatu and Assamite members to great effect, following with our other members immediately. Our plan was to overwhelm, and to take key hostages for information.

Not a one of us remembers the night after.

However, as we sit in Granada, near the beautiful Alhambra fortress, we assess our situation. Many of our supplies show traces of blood. We all wear different clothing from when we last remember. Many of our weapons are missing; some are broken and show intense wear.

Oddly as well, our mouths, our fangs, our lips show stains of blood. Our bellies feel full, very full. Unlike we have felt in nearly a year's time. We didn't hunger; we do not hunger. But what does this mean? Have we strayed from our voyage? Have we lost our patron's gifts?

Tomorrow, we search Granada. We cannot work with assumptions. The mission must come first.

Entry 12: Granada, January 1243

After our investigation into the matter of our missing time, we discovered that nearly a month had passed since our last known night in Cordoba. Much of that could be accounted for in travel — although who knows, considering our mysterious journey between Toledo and Lisbon. It feels as if we know less of our mission now than before we began. We have a knife, a key, and a few vague references to organizations that may or may not relate to our city Scáth.

Granada offered a beautiful backdrop for our meticulous search. Our next clue came from an odd source; our resident Malkavian found a lamp in the marketplace. The seller spoke of its being possessed of a great spirit, a "Djinn of Scyth, or something close to that," our Malkavian tells us. Our Assamite, A'isha, poked fun at him, saying that he fell for an old confidence scam, and that mystical lamps are a great source of profit for under-performing merchants needing to pay quick bills.

As we set down our encampment, we learned just how wrong A'isha was. The lamp spoke to our camp, and something incomprehensible manifested from it. I could try to describe it, but my words would betray the experience. It looked... like an epiphany. It looked like understanding, wisdom, and knowledge. It looked like so many things that have no look whatsoever. But let me not dwell on description. What it said was much more important.

It told us it was escaped from Scáth. It told us it was just another resident of the dark city, and that it fled. It told us that many attempted escape, but it knows of none other which survived.

It told us that the city entrance moves frequently, but that it could help to guide us. It told us it would only appear to us again in the shadows, but that our navigator would forever hear its advice.

It helped our navigator, perchance coincidentally our Malkavian, telling him where to go through strange, riddle-like suggestions. He worked his craft, and determined we'd be heading to Valencia next.

Entry 13: Valencia, January 1243

The night before our arrival in Valencia, I had a dream.

Please indulge me. I should add that I sleep a dreamless daysleep. I've heard Cainites who speak of dreams, mostly Malkavians with a smattering of others. An ally of mine among the Tremere speaks of one very vivid dream of an Earth with two moons. He dreams it at least once per month.

I do not dream. But I dreamt.

I dreamt of a lovely field, a grove of fruit trees. I dreamt of a figure, sometimes man, sometimes woman. It was cloaked in moonlight pulled tight against otherwise naked flesh. It held me like a lover, and I swooned with its finger between my teeth. I felt vulnerable and helpless, but warm within its arms. "Creidne," it whispered to me. It then hummed a song incomprehensible, full of words in a language I could not hope to understand. Not once, not in its whisper, not in its song, did its lips move. It held me, and I had no hope but to remain in its arms. I felt a fear of the unknown, a fear of the outside. Its arms were my only respite.

And in this dream, the sun rose on this bountiful grove. The sun shocked my eyes briefly, but then the figure wrapped me in glorious wings. These were wings not of feather, of flesh, or of bone. These were wings crafted of the starry sky. I knew I was protected by this darkness. I yawned like a babe, and the figure finally opened its mouth. It leaned over me as I sat cradled, and it spewed from its gullet a strange fluid into my mouth the way a mother bird might her young. This fluid mostly reeked of blood, but also bone meal, a horse's urine, and freshly warmed wheat. I took down what I could, but gagged on the excess. The figure closed our distance into a flooded kiss, forcing the mixture down my throat. While this would seem frightening and stifling, I found this nourishment oddly comforting.

Then, I saw into its eyes. Its eyes were nothing, nothing at all. Not even the blackness of Lasombra blood. This was truly a void. As I looked, my mouth still sprayed with what it pushed between our lips, every bit of me began to pull into its eyes. First my flesh tugged from muscle. Then my eyes snapped from my face. I felt the pressure of being crushed whole, and my body shrunk down bit by bloody bit, snapping and shearing as the figure's eyes drank everything of me in.

Not once, not once at all, did I feel afraid. I pray that I wanted it more. I woke asking myself how I could have that, outside my bastard dreams.

—Creidne

Entry 14: Valencia, January 1243

After my peculiar dream, we made way into Valencia. Our clue, our lead this time, came in the form of a story. Not quite as peculiar as my dream, but none the less interesting.

For whatever reasons, most of our cabal found ourselves in a local tavern, a wealthy farmer's manor. He owned most of the surrounding region, and gave lease to lesser farmers in his periphery. At the event, a traveled trobairitz entertained with tales of her time on the road. She came from the northeast, from Marseilles and Paris. In fact, had we not traveled to Valencia, we'd likely have run across her in our travels prior.

She told a tale she said is sweeping the countryside. She told us of a flock of pale riders, of gaunt hunters from the British Isles. Cheeky and subtle in her telling, she hinted that we could be mistaken for the very flock. We exchanged glances throughout, and later blood. But that's another story.

Her story said this flock represented a premature Armageddon. She said it was the warning bursts of a volcano that may or may not erupt later. In Paris, she told us a prophet spoke of this "Bloodless Crusade." She said he clarified that he did not call it a Bloodless Crusade because it left no corpses in its wake; he said the corpses left in its wake would be without blood, left somewhat preserved. Many of our company struggled to hold back knowing looks and abrupt reactions at this reference. We beckoned her to continue.

She told us the prophet's words, and those words suggested the pale riders would meet an angel in Paris, an angel who would end the suffering of their dark crusade. We asked if this meant the angel would destroy the crusaders. Teasing, she told us she did not know, that the prophet spoke only madness, and nobody should take these silly stories seriously.

It seemed our fate was sealed. Of course we had to find this prophet. Or, if the prophet's words were to be taken seriously, we had to find this angel to relieve our suffering.

That morning, we spoke as a company. We rested in the stables, discussing this issue. We hungered for the road, of course. But as a whole, we agreed that we were not suffering, so the story most certainly could not be about us. But if not about us, what pale riders from the British Isles leave bloodless corpses in their wake?

Come dusk, we will strike out upon the road again, and bid goodbye to our revelatory trobairitz. She has insisted she will see us again.

Entry 15: Marseilles, February, 1243

We stopped briefly in Marseilles en route to Paris. Marseilles held no revelations for us, but the trip did, however. I overheard a couple of our company whispering about dreams. As it happens, they dreamt dreams almost identical to mine. We spoke at length, then gathered the others. One by one, each admitted to a very similar dream. Stranger still, it appears that for the past two months, every night, exactly one of us has had such a dream. Never more. Never fewer. This means some of us have witnessed the dream twice or thrice now.

The dreams appear to differ only in superficial interpretations. Sometimes the event occurs in a fruit grove. Sometimes a garden. Sometimes a desert oasis. This correlates loosely with the vampire's heritage. Our Assamite's dreams occur in a dark, misty Eastern mountain, for instance. But they all end the same, with the sun, with the cloak of darkness, and with the phenomenon I call The Consumption.

So it was, I had a second dream the night we arrived in Marseilles. The only difference was that when the entity whispered my name in the first, this time it instead whispered, "Not their water." I kept this difference to myself. I fancy myself something of a philosopher; I must test these things

and observe, to avoid biases and stories retold to fit mine. After all, memory is part of the Cainite condition as much as the human condition, and we will remember differently to fit the flock.

King Louis felt it necessary to make villains of prostitutes in his kingdom, but the public had yet to cave to his interests. That night, I found a lady to lie down with. To her, I confessed it all. I told my story. This woman, this Alcelma, listened patiently and affectionately. She never once judged me. She barely seemed surprised at the darkest truths. I knew somewhere deep within me that I needed to confess and tell this story to someone outside the company. Once I did, I felt a great burden lift off my shoulders. She understood that if she spoke, she'd be killed as a heretic or madwoman. In a moment of impulse, I offered her my dark gift. She politely, and reasonably, refused. I felt I'd see her again.

With the falling night, we will move on toward Paris. Toward our prophet. Toward our angel.

Entry 16: Outside Paris, March, 1243

As we approached Paris, our trek grew quicker and quicker. In the final nights of our voyage, we only stopped when we could see hints of purple along the night sky. These nights, we'd find a farm house along the road. We'd march in, and our Ventrue would force obeisance from the owners. We'd stay the day, then leave the family no worse for wear.

On one last, inauspicious stop, we met with a family of Lupines. To put it lightly, they did not take so kindly to our encroachment. They called us "worms." They fought tooth and nail — quite literally. However, their anger was no match for our numbers and our zeal. We did lose some of our number. Our Ventrue... I cannot recall his name. We lost him. The fight was against three Lupines and four other family members. Unfortunately, their children fell as well. They stood resistant to our gifts, and we couldn't risk their growing into a pack of vicious dogs that would hunt us until Gehenna. One of our number advised we keep them — we take them as hostages, as subjects of study, and potentially as weapons. I made the judgment call to commit the act of mercy.

The bodies were strewn about, but we ignored their potent blood. In the distance, we could see signs of Paris. We did not bed down for nearly an hour after sun up. Instead, we gorged ourselves on the food stores in the Lupine house. Their grains, their breads, their meats, and their morning stew all found its way into our gullets. Not a one of us could describe the taste, but we most certainly did not suffer the normal fate of Cainites eating mortal food. We spewed no ash, no blood, nothing of the sort. We simply fell to the ground in our gluttony, while our sorcerous Tremere cast a ward against the coming sun. We slept for days. If the local farmers are correct, we slept three days.

We woke hungry for the march. We woke ready to see our fates.

We walk on to Paris, all hesitations and curiosities gone.

Entry 18: Cologne, April 1243

Our encounter with our angel changed our crusade forever. After that night, none of the survivors dreamt again. We three, we felt her though. Each of us shared accountings of her voice, and of her warmth flowing through our veins. On our travels toward Cologne, we all felt

the pangs of hunger. We felt the need for vitae. We hunted, surely, but we also moved on. We hungered for the quest, for the road. It was no longer an inborn hunger, we no longer starved upon straying.

Cologne meant nothing to us. Nothing of import, at least. It was but a waypoint, another step along a long hike. We were slowed by our need for blood, but we were not halted. We met a trader come down from the Rus called Jaredh Immanuel Konstantin. We shared tales of the road, of the hunt.

Magdeburg holds our angel's textile suppliers. It is our best lead. Before leaving Paris, we checked her shop, which had been burned to the ground. We know in our hearts that her fabrics held significance; maybe their source holds similar significance.

Footnote from Eudocia:

In my exploration into the issue, I have discovered ephemeral evidence that they did in fact feed upon this creature's blood. This "angel." It would be irresponsible to conclude that the creature caused their great fast; it would be as reasonable to suggest that her blood ended their fast. I have theories as to what caused the fast, and I have certain accountings from witnesses that suggest it was not nearly as holistic a fast as Creidne suggested.

However, in our sessions, she never once betrayed her piety and adherence to that truth, even under the pain of torture. She swore with conviction that her journal gave a full and accurate portrayal of her abstinence. If I am correct, her feedings were few and far between, mostly occurring during the "dark spots" in her tale, which I do believe she does not properly remember.

I am consulting with an associate of mine from the mountains in Anatolia. He's Gangrel, and notoriously slow to answer letters. He tells me his daughter, Dominique, met them in the French countryside. He also raises questions about the veracity of their story of the Lupine massacre. Unfortunately, my sessions with Creidne were too short to ask for details about that affair.

Entry 19: Magdeburg, May 1243

Magdeburg stood beautiful. The massive city brought in folks from all walks of life, mostly to trade and worship. The place was sufficiently dense that it took us a few nights of research, investigation, and questioning before we found our angel's fabric supplier. The Hanseatic merchants were loathe to give up their sources, suppliers, couriers, and customers. We surmised he worked with a Tzimisce called Asen, but that bore little bearing on our crusade.

The supplier told us that he sells to merchants across the empire and beyond. However, when we described our Parisian seamstress, he knew of whom we spoke immediately. He told us he remembers her so well because she has sisters, or at least identical likenesses, "doppelgangers," in a number of cities. The closest being Nuremburg.

We stopped to admire the Magdeburg Reiter, which stood as an example of the modern Empire and its majestic art. The figure consists of three statues, two men and a woman. To our surprise, the lance-laden woman — a virgin — looked the part of our angel, of our seamstress.

After Magdeburg, we followed a false lead to Denmark. I wish not to dwell on the specifics of that lead; it's a matter of much shame in our crusade. Fortunately, we moved quickly, and were able to find our way back to the path and toward Nuremburg. However, this was our first fruitless lead. We found this markedly worrisome, coupled with our resumed reliance on blood.

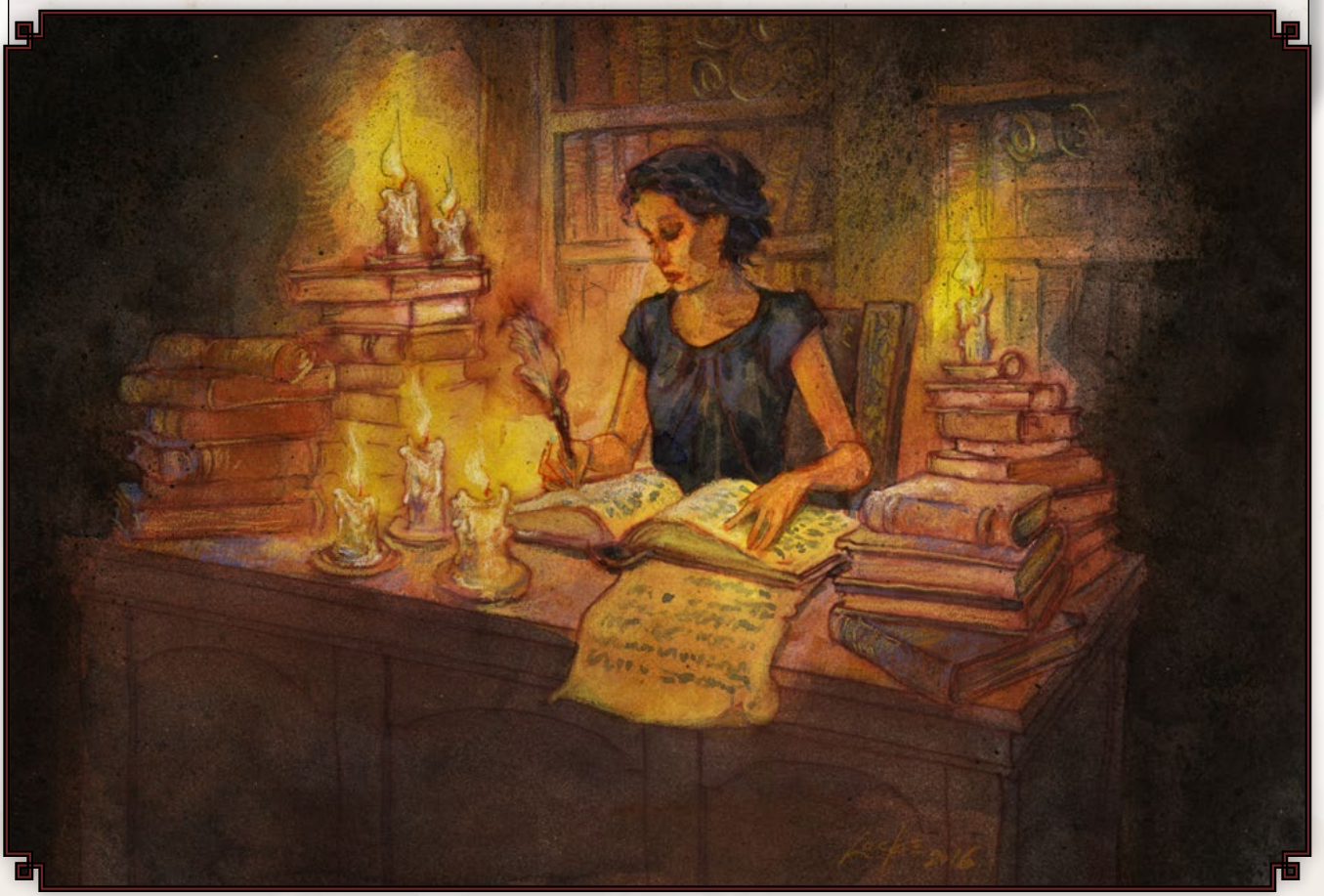
Footnote from Eudocia:

The Bloodless Crusade did travel to Denmark. I felt it worth the effort to explore just why. A discarded journal entry I found in my search of Ionta's libraries from Pisa told me that one of the three — not Creidne — felt strongly that the doppelganger narrative was unbelievable, and would lead them into a trap. This member, named Elaine Jennings, insisted they would find respite in Denmark. They did stay there for nearly two weeks, and Creidne wrote numerous entries in that time. They're their own story, and fascinating, but I don't believe related to the tale of the Bloodless Crusade.

Entry 21: Nuremburg, June 1243

She told us she expected us. She knew our names. She told us that she regretted our brief time in Paris, and that she wished she could tell us more. She told us that our journey would end in Genoa, but we must travel through a different path than expected. That we would see many other cities on our voyage.

She told us that she would return her blessing, our holy mission. That we would sup of her blood, and be sated on our travels once more. We did, and alas, our hunger was no more. She told us Vienna was to be our next stop, but that she would be with us, to guide us, to walk us through the valleys. She told us great peril would come to us, but if we persisted and marched



on, we would overcome the forces that seek to stop us. Genoa would hold our city of Scáth. She told us it does not currently, but when we arrive, it will.

Beware angels, she said. Angels are the greatest liars of them all. I met a Cainite called Gabriel Blake the night prior. Gabriel. "The Strength of God". Coincidence?

Footnote from Eudocia:

Genoa appears to have been the end of their mission. But I cannot find reference to what they found there, or what happened. I have done some amount of legwork to uncover their tracks, but the closest I found was a family burial site along a cliff. It matched precisely with one of the spots on her hand-drawn map of the region. What I most definitely did not find was a city of shadows — although her story does suggest that it moves. I'm not prone to believe such a thing happens, but it's internally consistent at very least.

Entry 22: Vienna, June 1243

With the wings of our angel, we flew fast to Vienna. We kicked up dust in our wake, and nothing could deter us. Our doubts were eradicated with her blood in our veins, and we knew that to continue would be to succeed.

I find no small irony in our newly emboldened states. We were more vampire than we'd ever been. We moved through the city. We hunted. We interrogated. We searched. We moved on. Nothing could stop us. Yet we needed not the blood of the living.

Our most interesting moment in Vienna was when we found a Venetian merchant, a man dealing in spices, masks, and other oddments. He told us of turmoil in Genoa, where the Venetians sought to starve out their commercial elements. This was seen as a form of retribution for their facilitating the Fourth Crusade. Our merchant said that Genoa is becoming truly a city of shadows. We pressed him on that statement. He said he heard the phrase from a wealthy, mysterious man in Pisa, one Anziani Giovani.

Krakow would be our next stop. We knew this because she told us in our dreams. No symbols. No taking turns. All three of us shared a dream, where she spoke clearly to each of us. As we woke, we felt something within us, coming from the southwest. Coming from Genoa. As we felt this push, this pull, this strange sensation within us, we knew we had to keep our distance until the right time. This is why we fled to Krakow; being closer would be perilous. A traveling Tzimisce, one Pyotr Stanislav, told us what to expect of Krakow.

She protects us. And for her, we march.

Footnote from Eudocia:

Anziani Giovani, the "Elder Giovani," is a term commonly attributed to Augustus, head of our nascent student lineage. This is no coincidence; even if this Anziani is not Augustus, none would dare call himself Giovani without affiliation to that family. While not all of the Giovani line are family, even the adopted outsiders bear the name. Circumstances do not permit my congress with the student lineage, elsewise I would investigate his role further. I have seen others use an alternate spelling. I know of one young member named Vincent Giovanni. I'm mildly curious at the reason for the difference.

Eudocia, In Conclusion

With this, we reach the end of the verifiable documents detailing the Bloodless Crusade.

Since uncovering these documents, I have been presented with numerous "lost entries." A man offered me a folio of supposed entries 23–30. They didn't even pass cursory divination. Another found three alternate entries detailing the trip to Genoa. The ink still smelled. I found a separate collection in a clay pot, which is almost identical to the ones I have provided in this thesis. They differ in that they are signed "Conlaoch," a man's name. In my research, I've found that many such accountings and testaments have similar edits. However, I've met Cainites who knew Creidne in passing, or met her on her travels. I can only imagine these edits were to manipulate the narrative if the story ultimately went public.

It is my firm recommendation that we seal these documents. That we hide them away, and catalogue them without direct reference to the events. The stories of the Bloodless Crusade are few and far between, and do not feature many of the more controversial elements of the story. I do believe that if this story falls into the wrong hands, that it could bring about a heretical cult, which is to everyone's detriment except for those ideologues who would wield such a group.

Make no mistake: This document will do more harm than good. We may learn lessons from it. But it raises more questions than it answers. Indeed, it answers no significant questions. Lock it away.

—Eudocia Melachrina

The Derinkuyu Letters

The enclosed letters comprise the most legible of a collection related to the Bloodless Crusade. Consider this a footnote to my research on the Creidne Diaries. Some are more related to the Crusade than others, but I consider all relevant parties to be at least nominally aware of the Crusaders. Future researchers would be wise to investigate these parties.

Most of these letters were intercepted en route. Some were stolen from their respective homes. Some were given over as gifts from survivors — or murderers. One, the one without an original draft analogue, I uncovered by scrying at an opportune place and time.

In the codex, you will find the originals. The following are my translations. While I've taken liberties in localizing meanings, my authority should not supersede that of the original documents when in conflict.

—Eudocia Melachrina

My Lady Ana de Mendoza,

I am regretfully informing you that your cousin has taken to the countryside. He walks from city to city with the nascent covenant of strange pilgrims. I dare not write his name, in case this letter is intercepted. But I trust you know to which cousin I refer.

This is not rumor. This is not speculation. He was seen by one of my agents in Toulouse. He dealt with my agent, offering a remarkable favor in exchange for a rather benign use of the Voice, in intercepting a courier. My agent was not mistaken in identifying him.

More important than informing you, I am warning you. Do not intervene. Do not attempt to contact your cousin. I speak in strictest confidence: This cabal is not fated for success. It marches across dangerous ground. It makes many fast enemies with its brashness and its strange heresies. It speaks of defying the blood. It speaks of the light of day. Before long, it will stumble upon a force not only resenting its words, but also possessing the power to stop its graceless walk.

Lady Mendoza, you cannot intervene. I do not make this request lightly. I hear murmurs from three factions, demanding the heads of these pilgrims. The first is a collective of Lasombra with clan sponsorship, who see the travelers as a threat to their Road. The second is a powerful coterie, some allies of mine, including an up-and-coming Usurper named Meerlinda. This coterie sees the pilgrims as a potential upset, as a potential trigger for a great revolt. After all, if these young bloods buck the Covenant, what's to keep power in the hands of the

elders? The last group is a great brood of the Baali, of which we know little. This is not a group we've known and watched for centuries. This is a powerful network that's only surfaced recently, and perhaps in response to the Crusaders. All three groups aim to see these wanderers eliminated, their message – whatever that message may be – silenced. Strange bedfellows, indeed.

I know your ambitions. I know your methods. And I also know that my telling you to remain mum on this issue may fall on deaf ears. If you truly wish to intervene, I implore you to abduct him. Find him, take him, and leave unnoticed. Employ an Assamite if you must. Do so as indirectly as you are able. You cannot risk being on that field when it becomes a slaughter.

On to kinder words. I have heard your petition for mentorship. I will be passing along my recommendation.

With Utmost Sympathy,

—H

Priestess Livia Yorke,

Your aggressive pursuit of Caine's brood is witnessed and respected. I have received the artifact you've uncovered, and I have both good and bad tidings.

On the good tidings, I do believe the brick in question comes from one of the Second Generation. I have all reason to believe this. As you suspected, it comes from an oven. It looks similar to many pieces we've found from ancient Persia.

Further, the piece has identifying features, hiding for those so inclined to uncover them. This is Irad's brick. Caine's second childe. You see, the mortar contains blood, trace amounts that I've been able to compare to numerous lineages, despite coming from a single donor. Brujah. Cappadocian. Lasombra. Ventrue. This is no coincidence. These are the clans often attributed to Irad's creation. If my research and divination is correct, this confirms a long-standing belief supported by the Book of Nod.

On to the bad tidings. I must say that I do not have long. Since my discovery, I've seen visions. I've seen shadowed figures. These are not Lasombra assassins; my sight would pierce that blackness. These are something else. Each night, they come closer. On the first night, I could not throw a rock and hit the shadows if I tried. Now, I can make out distinct fingers on their hands if I focus. They have six fingers.

Odder still, I've not hungered. I've not fed in a week, nor do I even want to. Some three centuries ago, I encountered a coterie who likewise did not need blood. They went over a month without. But at the end of this period, the hunger caught up with them, they rended each other to shreds, then they fell apart at the very fabric. All crumbled to the Final Death. If the shadows do not get me first, I know that this shall be my fate as well.

I have a solution. Metamorphosis will be my salvation. If my theory stands correct, fate follows identity, and metamorphosis changes identity. We'll soon find whether my theory bears fruit.

Do not wish me luck. Wish my philosophy holds true.

—Myca Vykos

Amadeo Alejandro Ramirez,

I am making this connection by way of Gabriella of Genoa. I need your assistance. And if you understand what this means, I do not need to elaborate.

You've heard of the wanderers, have you not? Those claiming to be free of the shackles of the blood? Soon, they shall arrive in Valencia. I need your intervention. My sire has demanded my time, and in such a way I cannot refuse. But this matter must be attended to.

A man called Augustine travels with them. He shares our blood. He must be eliminated. Unless I am mistaken, he's the only of our line attending this voyage. Make no mistake: This group will fall, and soon. They cannot have one of our clan in their ranks. We cannot be associated with their malfeasance, as I know when the truth comes out about what they're doing, it'll be far worse than any of us imagined.

Things are changing soon. Wheels turn slowly but steadily. We must be clean, pure, and ready for that future. We cannot be stained with this nonsense, because when the last wheel turns, we must be ready to rise righteous as dark and perfect beacons. Whatever enslaves these travelers, we cannot be a party to it.

If you do this thing, know that I'll be indebted. This is a task I'd otherwise never leave to another. It must be done, and must be done properly. Gabriella speaks well of your ability.

For blood above all,

—Lucita de Aragon

Addenda from Eudocia

I have confirmed that Augustine fell in Valencia. I found a diary from one of the travelers, a Tremere called Maximilian Skold, which stated that Augustine never woke from the pilgrims' strange dream; that when they woke, he was but ash. Odder still, this author seems to think that his passing was largely accepted as coincidence, as an expected cost of their dream. Either that writer was mistaken, or the Crusade believed their dreams truly empowered to kill.

I do not discount this possibility. Their circumstances were sufficiently strange that they might rationalize anything.

To the Lord Berwich Nothisen,

Greetings. We spoke briefly during your excursion to Paris. I introduced myself, we spoke of your nascent bloodline. I am Véronique d'Orléans. If you're reading this, you're on travels in Nuremburg, from your home in Saxony. A mutual acquaintance told me of your visit.

I'm going to be direct with you, Lord Nothisen:

I need you to create a childe. There's a young woman in Nuremburg who claims to have seen angels. She says a group of angels rode through her town, and blessed her and a few others. I need you to make her like you, clanless. After the initial feeding, which should be ample, I need you to not let her feed for some time. Wait one week. Perhaps two. See if she shows the signs of losing control, or the call to torpor. If she does, feed her. If she does not, I need you to put a quickbeam shaft through her heart and ship her to me in Paris.

In exchange, I will grant you a great blessing. I have many ears. More importantly, I have many ears about Saxony. I promise you that each Cainite lord in the region will recognize your nascent bloodline. You'll submit to me a coat of arms and a name, and I will see to it that our blood at large acknowledges you as its head.

My offer, while generous, is highly subject to time. I must have you commit this creation within one month, and I cannot promise you my support past that month. So you must act quickly. But this window of opportunity is both rare and potent. I have leverage I can use in your favor, but I need to see results.

We can create great things. Show me the initiative, and you'll be rewarded in a way that cannot be taken away. You've seen the rise of the Tremere. You know this is possible.

Sincerely,

Véronique d'Orléans

Mister Jonathan Crowley,

I know you watch our kind. My friend Anatole spoke of you, and told me where I could connect with you. I need to make this connection, and I hope you understand the gravity of why.

My family faces eradication. Further, my race faces eradication. My family, my kind, we know. We find, interpret, and we teach the secrets of the world when we can. Unfortunately, we've been painted as devils, and each night, we grow fewer in number. Worse, we see the end; and like Cassandra, none will hear our tale.

I've seen signs and portents. Some of our number no longer sup on the fruit of the living. While this appears an interesting blessing, and perhaps a new stage in our very identity, it's a sign of our ultimate downfall. It's the first rung in a ladder down to a thousand hells, a ladder which we cannot climb back up.

I need to tell this story, these portents, to one not of our blood, but one not necessarily mortal. You travel. You observe. You bear wisdom. You speak for a legacy thousands of years old. You're a candidate for this burden.

From me, you'll learn more of my kind in a night than you've learned in a decade's research. I will be as unto an open book. If you'll listen, I'll be open with you. You know my kind enough to know how rare this opportunity is.

I'm not afraid of you. Take this story to your kind. I am a woman who has lost everything. I cannot lose any more. My kind is doomed; there's nothing you can do with this tale to make our situation worse. But, maybe, just maybe, you can carry our story forward. If we cannot have immortality in the blood, perhaps we can have immortality as a tale, as a piece of wisdom to carry on.

He says you speak with the wisdom and free fickleness of a fox. That, I appreciate. I grow curious of what I may learn from you, if only from reverse observations.

I want you to hear our tale. I want you to protect our tale. I want you to share our tale. You are not of our blood, and thus, you may be able to preserve this message.

If you can find out how to connect back with me, to find me, I will tell you my tale.

Great tidings,

Teagan

Watcher of Zao-Lat

Verdiana,

Forget your name. Forget your family. For I will, and I wish to.

The pilgrims march soon through your lands. We'll fake your death. Your second death, as you faked your first in Tuscany. You're not established in Regensburg yet. Walk away from it all. Flee.

Here is my offer.

Come to me. To the Courts of Love. We'll repeat our moment together, a million times over. I'll take you as my childe. I have the necessary blessing. To the world, you'd be but a clever Tuscan girl I took a fancy to. To the world, you'd be Toreador — no serpent, no disciple of Echidna.

The night grows short on the followers of Set. As our courts grow in power, I hear rumors that we'll soon be eradicating problem elements, low clans. We've watched the Salubri fall. Other clans will follow in this race for purity. My sire tells me that perhaps only six or seven clans are safe in the long term.

I don't begrudge you your faith, if that still drives you. You can practice in the shadows, the way your clan has for aeons.

These pilgrims, they are the second in a series of signs. The first came just over a decade ago, when the sun was consumed by night. The third has the Clan of Death birthing their own destruction. We know not how long that will take. Then we see a serpent beheaded. I wish not for that serpent to be you.

Consider my proposal. Even if you do not, please write. Each night, I worry your time has come and I was so very far away as to be ignorant of it.

Yours,

Rosamund of Islington

December, 1241

Initiate Ambrus Kelemen,

I apologize for the shortness of this message. I hope you understand the lack of proper formalities, and for having it appear on your person, invading your privacy.

You've warned us that the Ruthven Tzimisce line shall attack soon. You said you saw their troops gather. We will win or lose this coming battle on your strength. Here is what you are to do:

- Draw or procure a tactical map of the path between the place where the enemy musters and Ceoris.
- Highlight natural vantage points for our combat sorcerers.
- Highlight large clay deposits for quick gargoyle creation.
- Show advantageous spots for landslides and natural disasters we might influence.

I also need the best inventory you can provide. You said they bring great forces. My best informant tells me one of their soldiers fled the Bloodless Crusade, and feeds not on the blood of the living. If you can verify this, we need to understand this phenomenon, since it could transform our entire operation at Ceoris. My informant called this one "Umbri." I don't know if that's a constant name, or simply an alias for the crusaders.

Any advice you have will be taken to heart. Understand that this is your chance, Initiate. Demonstrate greatness. Let us show the world that our place in this world of Cainites is destined and immutable.

I can only presume their attack will occur before the next moon. Alacrity is the utmost virtue in this endeavor. Place your report in the container in which you found this letter to deliver it to me.

From Ceoris with Strength,

Etrius, The First Among Equals

To the one called Leinad Carter,

I have been invited on a great pilgrimage, and with permission, I seek to invite you to London, and immediately. I believe you need this opportunity, that it could change your existence forever.

My group, my fellow pilgrims, we have gone a month without blood. I cannot explain this in more certain terms: We have not fed, nor have we wanted for feeding. We've wanted only for the pilgrimage. My fellows believe this is our one true chance for redemption.

I know of your plight, of your wife-to-be. I understand the tragedy of your story; I understand the devastation it must have caused. I want to see you helped. I see you as a beacon. I see you as hope. I don't speak for my sire, Jürgen von Verden, but I know he has hope for greater things. As his adherence to the Via Regalis falters, I wish to help catch him. I need something. I need a net. I don't think I can find it alone. Each night, I hear more and more rumors that Hardestadt looks to see him destroyed. I owe him.

Walk with me, please. Help me find this net. I know you share my hope for better things. Be my walking companion. My talking companion. Help me to sort this out and make something of it. Help me to bring it to the world.

When you come to London, and I am confident you will, walk the riverside. I'll look each night when the moon is at its apex.

Understand that we may never have this chance again. Everything's changing. You can be part of that.

In hope,

—Magda

Holy Father Pyotr Stanislav,
Childe of Karpeslav,
Childe of Nikosya,
Childe of the Dracon,
Childe of Tzimisce,
Childe of Enosch,
Childe of Caine, Eldest of Adam, Created by God,
Most Holy Koldun of the Tchernoknazi, Flayer of Sins

I reach out to another scholar of the blood, of blood sorcery. I reach out to another of Tzimisce blood. I reach out for aid, for philosophy, and to teach and learn with the clan.

You see, I have witnessed — or to be blunt, experienced — something reminiscent of the phenomenon we've been calling The Bloodless Crusade. It's over now, but I took extensive notes, and conducted extensive experiments. Unfortunately, thus far my experiments have granted me no conclusions. And thus, I am calling a summit of sorts, a convocation of experts willing to put forth the rigor necessary to understand this oddity of the blood.

If you are so inclined, this shall be a month-long summit, held in a month's time. I understand the problems with urgency; however, time may be of the essence if we wish to grasp whatever was lost.

I will be providing sustenance, and fulfilling any other needs. Come alone, or come with assistants if you must; mortal food needs will be of no consequence. I advise you bring texts and other research materials; I've yet to fully settle in my new home in these Balkans. My library is not what it could be, as the fires of crusade devastated it but decades ago. I rebuild, but not as rapidly as I'd like. Bring your Boy if you'd like. Bring Theresa and Tara, they will be accommodated.

I anticipate answers, as should you. Existence without vitae? Imagine, if you will, what advancements we could make with that additional time, without that overwhelming drive pressing our every action. For many of us, this means centuries locked away, working toward our true passions. I don't speak to others' priorities, but I can nary imagine a Cainite this could not benefit.

We stand on the precipice of greatness. Even outside the scope of best-cases, simply understanding our condition on a greater level is a boon.

Your mind is valued. Bring it. Study. Learn. Grow. Teach. When tomorrow comes, let us stand at the forefront.

Myca Vykos

Alexus Comnenus,

I write to inform you of affairs at home. Unlike many of the "Cainites," we seem rather relaxed.

We're redoubling our efforts, and work to erode what's left of the Dream. From a political standpoint, though, we work to distance ourselves from the Filth called Baali. Forces work to weave us with them; as Beshter fell at the hands of the Baali, we're associated in our opposition to his "utopia." We speak to the public, attempting to wash our image clean. We need them to understand that our opposition to the Dream was separate from the Baali claim for power.

I believe our best course of action is to phrase this as an inevitability that we are working toward. Constancia, one of the Cappadocian prophets, spoke of the Dream, and stated that it falls hard. In this narrative, we can act as agents of inevitability, of fate. This not only absolves us of some responsibility, but it helps us to find a place in their mythology.

Their mythology seems to have no good answers for the Cainites who travel from city to city without blood. Some say it's the work of an angel. Some blame the spirits who commune with the Lupines. Me? I take it for weakness. I blame these "thin bloods." These "Cainites" deny Set, and grow further and further from the blood. Their very fangs come from serpents, but they call us heretical?

The "Cainites" do not trust those they call "Laibon." They do not trust anyone who balks at their Abrahamic mythology. Like it or not, I do believe we must use that mythology if we're to progress. In their stories, serpents play maleficent roles. I think we can embrace this though, if we're willing to accept that part in their society. Right now, we don't need a war. But we can present ourselves as an undesirable necessity, and that will at least make us look like actors in the script, instead of outsiders. This will help bring us in.

I have news about Nicaea, and in particular about Anna Comnena. I don't want to be too specific, but Bishop Alfonzo of Venice shall be making moves soon. If you have aims toward Comnena, I can assist. I must admit, I know you have aims toward Comnena. Alfonzo will not simply work with our kind, but I have a favor owed that I can call in. Speak to me in the old ways if you wish to work with me on this.

Glory Be To Set,

Andreas Aegyptus

Chapter Two: Forgotten Sorceries

The Horrors of Abyss Mysticism

Mere amateurs harness the Abyss without. True demigods exploit the Abyss within.
— Boukephos

Those who spar with Magisters may expect honor and grace, but they receive neither. Lasombra demolish their enemies with no quarter given or mercy shown. Such is their reputation for terror on the battlefield and manipulation of the court, and they must maintain it. Their arts of shadow manipulation and drawing forth the primordial darkness rightly infect their foes with fear. Yet, even those who face Lasombra in war, duels of words, or as victims at the ends of their writhing, twilight whips, only know the visible face of the clan.

There exist Magisters who study the darkness. They spend nights staring into the starlit sea, gazing at a pitch-black sky, or examining the shadowed corners of a tomb. To the unenlightened, these Lasombra may be mistaken for Toreador captivated by some dark beauty. The Lasombra know differently; these Abyss Mystics are searching the dark for secrets, slaves, and gods worthy of their worship. Mystics speak to the blackness, and hear its many voices in response. They make offerings to entropy, and in return gain powers to bewilder, horrify, and destroy.

Occupying a hidden role in the clan, Abyss Mystics are accorded both respect and distance by their Lasombra cousins. While Lasombra of all creeds exhibit adeptness with gifts of darkness, the Mystics take their powers a step further. It is a path few Lasombra wish to take. The Abyss — a plane of absolute oblivion and nothingness — occupies a part of every Magister. It is the curse passed down from their founder, who in the earliest nights sought the quickest route to power. Lasombra are at home in pitch black, but in a rare act of benevolence, even the most callous sires urge their childer to keep the Abyss at arm's length. They advise childer of the clan's tradition: "*Use the Abyss, but beware, as it attempts to use you.*" The childer who ignore such convention find themselves pulled by the desire to research, be used by, and succumb to the dark.

To Cainites, the dark is supposed to be an ally. Abyss Mysticism ensures no vampire may find sanctuary in the shadows.

The Oubliettes

Let it enter you. Let it use you. Make love to the dark!
— Common chant from the Mystics' dungeons

Within the courts of Clan Lasombra, Abyss Mystics occupy roles as seers, counselors, spies, and secret weapons used to devastating effect against rivals and enemies. The Mystics come in many stripes, with the only unifying feature being an impossible lust for secrets, and willingness to do whatever it takes to acquire them.

Mystics are responsible for the Lasombra fashion of constructing Oubliettes deep beneath their domains. These impenetrably dark prisons serve a double-duty for the clan, inducing terror in their captured inhabitants, and creating bastions of absolute lightlessness for meditation and study by the Mystics. Within the Oubliettes, claustrophobia becomes a tangible enemy for those unlucky enough to be there against their wills. Some Oubliettes are one-room cells, with walls so tight the inhabitant must remain standing. Others are squat cages, rendering the unablee impossible to do anything other than squat, or bend painfully for as long as she remains incarcerated. The Abyss Mystics' favored Oubliettes are subterranean labyrinths that wind down, through each other, and farther beneath the earth's surface than many a mortal or vampire has trod. Each of these Oubliettes — no matter the size, shape, or scale — is unlit. The inhabitants must become one with the darkness, or be crushed by its dominance.

Abyss Mystics occasionally study Oubliette-bound prisoners in seclusion, but prefer to run field tests in which they release up to a dozen Cainites in an underground maze and watch their actions from the safety of their ever-present friend: the oppressive dark. If a vampire let loose in an Oubliette shows tenacity, or embraces the lack of light, Mystics will offer the Cainite their respect and an opportunity to study the dark a little closer. Few survive with their sanity intact. Those who endure the rite of passage open themselves to Abyss Mysticism. A rare few even hail from other clans and bloodlines.

The Oubliettes are the Magisters' dirty secret. It's not so unusual for a Cainite Prince to hold a horrifying dungeon of legend in her domain, but Mystics conceal their catacombs' and prisons' presence to vampires of other lines. Not all Lasombra appreciate the Mystics' influence within their clan. Those feeling particularly chafed spread tales of the Oubliette rites being bastardized from those enforced by a dangerous vampire sect known as the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Mystics react poorly to accusations of connection to that group, but their knowledge of the sect is telling.

New Background: Oubliette

Vampires who possess at least three dots in Obtenebration and one Abyss Mysticism ritual can construct an Oubliette within a subterranean structure. The darkness within the Oubliette drains Intelligence from mortals immersed within it, at a rate of one dot per night. This Intelligence is not recoverable.

Nightmarish visions constantly beset vampires within the Oubliette, often leading to the swift arrival of Derangements. The player of any vampire immersed in an Oubliette must roll against the character's current Willpower each night; the character may not recover any temporary Willpower points while within the dark. Failure reduces the current Willpower by two points, inducing a Derangement in the vampire once the rating reaches zero. Willpower then resets, and the procedure begins again until the vampire's extracted or discovers an exit. Vampires who enter the Oubliette willingly, and those on the Road of the Abyss or Road of Sin, lose one Willpower point per night.

The darkness within the Oubliette is unnatural and therefore impossible to see through unless the vampire possesses the Darksight Merit. Entities summoned with Obtenebration or Abyss Mysticism within the Oubliette remain permanently, and cannot be dismissed unless they, or their summoners, are destroyed. Any Cainite who braves and survives 20 consecutive nights within the Oubliette and doesn't succumb to torpor has the cost of learning Abyss Mysticism rituals reduced by one experience point for the remainder of the year. The Oubliette's owner is attuned to the dungeon, and therefore suffers no ill effects within it.

The greater the Oubliette Background rating, the greater the volume of the underground structure that is filled with foul darkness. Points in Oubliette are bought at character creation, or earned through roleplay.

- • Coffin or cupboard-sized chamber
- •• Single-room chamber
- ••• Dungeon containing up to five rooms
- •••• Multi-level structure, containing up to 15 rooms
- ••••• Labyrinthine complex, containing multiple structures

Backgrounds with Experience

Backgrounds are generally bought at character creation or developed during the course of a chronicle. A vampire embarking on a mission to build himself an Oubliette, acquire Resources, or recruit Allies is bound to lead to interesting interactions and challenges.

Another method is to purchase Backgrounds with experience points.

In the downtime period between chapters of a story, Backgrounds are purchasable for an experience cost of three points per level of Background. As always, consult with the Storyteller before spending hard-earned experience on something, and ensure it contributes to the upcoming narrative.

Denizens of the Abyss

Immersing oneself in an Oubliette is akin to crossing into another dimension. According to some Abyss Mystics, that is exactly what it is. Shapes warp in the darkness of Obtenebration, objects gain life, angles possess motion, and creatures not supposed to exist in our world manifest. After a certain point, the inmate of the Oubliette believes light has returned to her eyes, and she looks upon a nightmare-land populated by monstrous denizens, humanoid tricksters, and sucking vortices. This vision may be illusory, as Darksight enables vampires to see their mundane surroundings.

A chronicle set in the darkness of an Oubliette will be a harrowing experience filled with nightmarish entities, riddles, tricks, and a fight for survival. The rewards are great — the danger more so. Impossible alien structures exist within the Oubliette, along with creatures never seen in the world above. Lore is hidden here, the secrets of Obtenebration and Abyss Mysticism rich in sunken sepulchers and bloody mires. Few native inhabitants of the Abyss are by nature charitable, but some will consort and converse with Cainites within the Oubliette, providing they have something to gain from such an interaction.

Blatherskite

An entity comprised entirely of limbs, dragging lengthy fingers and toes along the ground in its wake: the blatherskite is no creature born of human gods. This whip-thin entity has no torso or head, instead bearing a trunk made of tangled shadows and a flailing array of arms and digits from stumps all around its body.

The blatherskite communicates only in chirrups and belches, the origins of which are unknown, as it appears to possess no orifices. The noises it produces increase in frequency and volume the closer the blatherskite gets to any creature bearing blood. When in close proximity, it lashes out fiercely with its many appendages, attempting to choke and strangle its victim.

The blatherskite continues to squeeze its victim until blood emerges. Once it obtains several blood points, it languorously flops to the ground and dissolves into liquid shadow.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 3, Performance 2, Stealth 4, Survival 1, Investigation 5

Disciplines: Celerity 4, Obtenebration 1, Potence 2

Willpower: 4

Health: 6, no wound penalties

Notes: Blatherskites commonly have a reserve of five blood points.

Infantile Bezoar

Abyss Mystics claim, "*the Abyss exists within those who enter it*." They're not just being poetic. An infantile bezoar is a living growth that occasions to manifest on the insides of any entity who consumes food or liquid in the Abyss.

The bezoar starts insignificantly enough; a vampire foolish enough to drink from one of the rancid pools of blood or pillars of obsidian flesh stacked high in the Abyss may notice a tiny weight on her heart as the tumor grows. As each night passes, the bezoar gets larger. It continues to grow until it renders the heart an empty husk — draining all blood from it and then burrowing out through the vampire's ribcage.

Abyss Mystics have studied the bezoar in attempts to find out what happens after it escapes its host, but are still to discover its adult form. Vampires in the know are sure to carve Bezoars from their hearts before succumbing to torpor.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

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

Disciplines: Fortitude 3, Obtenebration 2, Potence 1

Willpower: 3

Health: 4

Notes: An infantile bezoar drains and immediately expends one blood point on the first night it attaches to a host, and a cumulative blood point for every night thereafter. It can drain a maximum of six blood points in one night; thus achieving this full amount on the sixth night.

Umbriferous Man

The Umbriferous Man is a source of much conjecture among Abyss Mystics — the main questions being whether it is a humanoid (or shadows coalescing to form one), or whether there are many Umbriferous Men.

To select visitors, the Umbriferous Man will speak in a hundred languages at once, and pose riddles with splendid rewards for those who solve them. Failing to solve such a riddle has no immediate aftermath, contrary to Lasombra tales. Yet, all who fail know the Umbriferous Man will — one night — claim them from the shadows of the world above.

Cainites disappear from their havens, no evidence of their passing remaining. That is, except for shadows permanently imprinted in corners of the room.

The Umbriferous Man is a tall figure clad in multiple swirling rags and cloaks, his yellow eyes barely visible through layers of swaddling. Despite the coverage, his voices ring clearly from his mouth, and he treats all visitors to the Abyss kindly.

If attacked, the Umbriferous Man attempts to fight back, but he is no adept combatant. He's said to carry thousands of pieces of silver that spill from his bandages upon death. Any who take the coins disappear soon after.

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 4, Brawl 1, Empathy 3, Expression 4, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 5, Commerce 3, Etiquette 2, Performance 3, Stealth 2, Survival 1, Academics 3, Enigmas 5, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 5, Theology 3

Disciplines: Abyss Mysticism 2, Auspex 3, Chimerstry 2, Dominate 3, Obtenebration 4, Obfuscate 2

Abyss Mysticism Rituals: Eyes of the Abyss, Subsume the Darkness, The Abyss Knows

Willpower: 7

Health: 10

Notes: The Umbriferous Man commonly has a reserve of 12 blood points, replenished after spending a day in pitch blackness.

The Minacious Legion

Throughout the Abyss reside entities resembling knights riding upon steeds. They are clad in thick, black, spined armor, and wield swords and lances of nebulous shadow. This Legion of knights never dismount their coursers, causing some Mystics to assume they are one with the beasts they apparently ride.

The Minacious Legion are watchdogs and hunters within the Abyss. They speak several dead languages, but rarely find time to converse with their victims — it benefits them more to harry and torment prey, inflicting wounds and instilling terror. Each night pursuing a victim rewards knights of the Legion with increased power, drained directly from those they hunt.

The mounts used by the Minacious Legion are headless things with flicking shadow tendrils for legs and ropy tentacles of black for bodies. These creatures resemble horse-sized woodlice, and smell strongly of urine.

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 5, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Intimidation 4, Animal Ken 3, Etiquette 1, Melee 5, Ride 4, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 2

Disciplines: Abyss Mysticism 2, Animalism 2, Celerity 3, Fortitude 3, Obtenebration 1, Potence 3

Abyss Mysticism Rituals: Eyes of the Abyss, Abyssal Blade

Willpower: 6

Health: 12

Notes: Members of the Minacious Legion commonly have a reserve of six blood points. For each night spent harrying a victim, a knight of the Legion gains one point from one of the victim's Disciplines. This starts with the highest Discipline dots, and prioritizes in-clan Disciplines first. Conflicts are resolved by the Storyteller. Once the knight has all the Disciplines of his victim, he attempts to make the kill. The Minacious Legion are armed with broadswords and lances (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 349) and armored in Class Five Armor (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 350).

Ingurgitant Vortex

Inhabitants of the Abyss are terrifying and varied, yet Mystics fear nothing more than consumption by an ingurgitant vortex. These churning windows of ingestion can appear in anything solid — floors and walls being the most common, coffins and beds being the most dreaded.

The vortex is a concave depression, slowly grinding in an anti-clockwise spiral. It's typically between one and three meters (3 to 10 feet) across, though rumors hold of ingurgitants of greater size. From within the vortex pours a mass of thin, grasping tongues, attempting to pull victims inside. None consumed have ever emerged, and their souls have proved impossible to locate.

The ingurgitant vortex strikes without warning. Deterring the ingurgitant takes application of a natural light, or fire — no mean feat in its domain of the Abyss. Most horrifying of all is the sweet, singing voice emerging from inside the vortex, beckoning victims inside in the voice of someone once dear to them.

Once the vortex has a taste of its victim, it will continue to manifest in proximity to the vampire night after night. It can only change locations three times a night.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

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

Disciplines: Fortitude 2, Obtenebration 5, Potence 4

Willpower: 5

Health: 20

Notes: The Ingurgitant Vortex commonly has a reserve of ten blood points

Abyss Mysticism Rituals

The Abyss is a weapon for those sturdy enough to brandish it.
— Lord Rickard Argentis, Knight of the Abyss

Abyss Mystics hoard their secrets. Members of other groups may not access their Rituals without first dedicating their existences to the Abyss. Some attempt to make such a dedication of words without speaking truthfully, but the Abyss knows. Through rites practiced by the Abyss Mystics, sacrifices of liars are commonplace.

• The Abyss Knows

Mystics make clear that any Cainites implementing the rituals of Abyss Mysticism must stare into the starlit sea and dedicate their eternal selves to the Abyss. They must open all their secrets to intrusion by the darkness. The pledge is only words, but those who do not make it, or state it without conviction in their hearts, are visibly liars to practitioners of The Abyss Knows.

System: The Cainite must possess the Abyss Mysticism ritual Pierce the Veil (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 271) and have the Darksight Merit. By spending one blood point and rolling Perception + Awareness (standard difficulty versus an opposed Conscience/Conviction roll, if resisted), success indicates whether the target is a true servant of the Abyss or an impostor. Failure has no effect; a botch means the Abyss Mystic misreads the result.

• Locating the Oubliette

Abyss Mystics obsessively guard the locations of their Oubliettes from Cainites outside their ideology. Among their own, it becomes useful to know the nearest entry-point to the Abyss. Despite the dangers within that plane, Inquisition or Lupine hunters often drive a Mystic to hide within the darkness, or even lure her pursuers inside to face perils far worse than Cainites.

System: The Cainite must cut herself and expend at least one blood point. On a successful Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 5); the vampire is able to see a line one kilometer (2/3 of a mile) long (with an additional kilometer per success), leading to the nearest Oubliette if one exists. This line remains visible to the Abyss Mystic for one night per blood point spent. On a failure, nothing happens; a botch leads the Cainite to the nearest location bearing True Faith, regardless of distance.

•• Abyssal Blade

Abyss Mystics are assassins and warriors as often as they are cloistered scholars; the Abyssal Blade ritual grants them a deadly force against even the most hardened of opponents. The Abyss wreathes around a Mystic's edged weapon, coating the metal in a swirling ichor of shadow. The ritual enables the blade to cut through armor as if it were immaterial, and inflict wounds impossible for mortals to heal.

System: The Abyss Mystic must immerse the blade of her weapon in the blood of any living creature, holding the weapon's handle as she dedicates her future kills to the Abyss. She rolls Strength + Occult (difficulty 7), with success imbuing the weapon with an unholy power allowing a weapon to bypass armor — not Fortitude — and inflict aggravated damage on mortals. Each success results in the weapon remaining imbued for a night. Once the power runs out, the weapon corrodes and becomes useless. The ritual can be enacted more than once on the same weapon, prior to corrosion. Failure leads to no result; a botch causes the weapon to corrode immediately, and prevents the ritual from being incanted again that night.

•• Implant the Bezoar

Bezoars are native to the Abyss, but Mystics know of ways to draw them out into the world above. Among the smallest creatures in the Abyss, windows of darkness give up these tumorous parasites. Initially stored in pools of blood by Abyss Mystics, they are set loose on the Mystics' enemies to act as a slow poison. Many a foe has fallen to torpor without even knowing she bore a Bezoar clamped to her dried-out heart. The only evidence is a bowl stained with dried blood found outside the vampire's haven, and a small slug-like trail leading from it to the Cainite's preferred resting place.

System: The Abyss Mystic must have access to an Oubliette, or stand in a lake during the new moon, and cut off a finger to produce a blood point. An Infantile Bezoar heads for the vitae, and attempts to enter the Abyss Mystic, unless she is prepared with an existing bowl of separate blood. The Bezoar will remain in the bowl for a night as it drinks its fill, during which time the Mystic can exit the Oubliette — if she knows the way out — carrying the bowl and the feeding parasite. The Bezoar will continue to feed until dawn, at which point it will travel to the nearest sleeping Cainite and crawl inside its mouth to avoid the daytime. The Infantile Bezoar's statistics are stated on p. 33. It dissolves into a puddle of shadow after exiting its victim.

••• One with the Dark

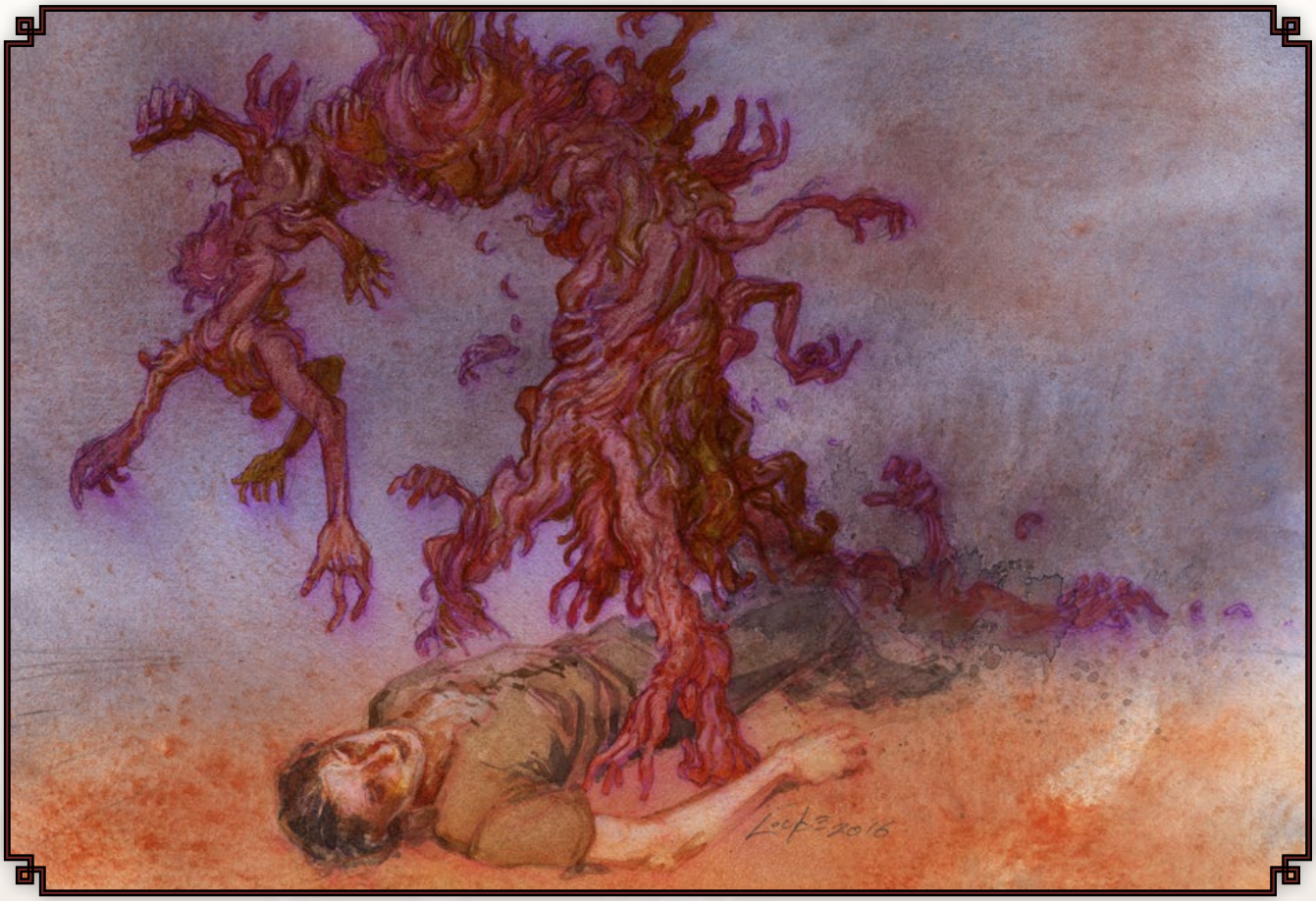
Accessing the Abyss within is a physical ordeal, producing convulsions in the Cainite attempting to do so and requiring a great expenditure of blood. Despite this, Abyss Mystics are enthusiastic to become One with the Dark, teaching this ritual with great pomp and pageantry. Those Mystics who are One with the Dark are seen not as novices, but as adepts — fully prepared to sacrifice their souls for hidden truths, forbidden knowledge, and greater power.

System: The Abyss Mystic must be in an Oubliette, or an enclosed space with no light on a night of the half moon. He must prepare his body with ritual tattoos designed by master Mystics, said to be in the language of the Abyss. Stripped naked and covered in pitch, the Cainite convulses and produces a minimum of three blood points from his orifices, requiring a Stamina + Occult roll (difficulty 6). Each success grants the Mystic a secret belonging to any of the Cainites named in the ritual — the secrets to be determined by the Storyteller — and makes the skin of the Abyss Mystic turn an unnatural, smoking black in color. The Abyss Mystic's Appearance rises to four dots, or by one dot regardless of Generation limits — whichever would be higher — until the next half moon; if the Cainite is on any Road other than that of Sin or the Abyss, performing this ritual reduces the rating by one permanently. On a failure, the ritual does not succeed and his peers shun the Abyss Mystic for at least a month. On a botch, every Cainite in the local domain sees the Abyss Mystic's secrets while they sleep.

••• Summoning the Blatherskites

Mystics publicly snub those who practice this ritual. Blatherskites are uncontrollable Abyssal entities known for attacking victims randomly, albeit in a devastating manner. When Lasombra wish for chaos to reign in a rival domain, however, blatherskites ease from the shadows to tear herds and retainers apart. Mystics may deny involvement, but this ritual sees increasing use as Magisters secure their grip on the Sea of Shadows.

System: The Cainite incanting this ritual must have familiarity with the domain in which she wishes the blatherskites to emerge, having already succeeded on a Perception + Survival roll (difficulty 6) on a night prior to the summoning, in order to identify the darkest cracks. From these, the blatherskites birth. The Abyss Mystic must submerge



herself in a body of water and make an extended test of Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7) with a target of 10, 15, or 20 successes. Over the course of that night, for each target number hit, a blatherskite emerges in the chosen domain and attacks at random whomever it comes across. You do not choose a target; another blatherskite emerges at each benchmark. It can only be harmed by aggravated damage and it melts when the sun rises. On a botched extended test, a blatherskite emerges from the body of water in which the Cainite performs the rite, and attacks its summoner. The blatherskite's statistics are stated on p. 33.

••• Angra Mainyu Consumes Spenta Mainyu

Abyss Mystics despise the light; with its presence, they are incapable of practicing their rituals. This ritual allows them to snuff all light — whether from natural sources, the flame of a torch, or even the Thaumaturgy of Tremere. With retching convulsions, the Cainite practitioner spews a foul torrent of darkness, which consumes all light in the area.

System: The Abyss Mystic must drink a goblet of hot tar, succeeding on a Stamina-based roll (difficulty 9) to avoid throwing it up immediately. Consuming the tar deals two levels of aggravated damage, which may be soaked with Fortitude. This tar remains within the body of the Mystic for a number of nights equal to the successes rolled. At any point while bearing the tar, the Abyss Mystic may roll a Courage test (difficulty 6) to vomit the tar in a shower of unnatural darkness that filters through the air like inky bubbles, gravitating to any light. The tar wraps itself around any such light, and prevents it from relighting for the remainder of the night. The radius over which the tar will travel is equal to 10 meters (11 yards) per success on the Courage test. This does not protect from the sun.

•••• Lord Aludian's Orifices

This ignominiously named ritual is one of the strangest and most horrific among those practiced by the Abyss Mystics. Lord Aludian Thex, in his role as courtier and spy, often uses his body as a weapon; and as such, Clan Lasombra prizes him as a merciless killer and true Magister. Thex devised a way for the Abyss to exist in his body, allowing him to sacrifice anyone who breaches it. On the battlefield, the utility of this ritual is limited at best. In the bedchamber, Lord Aludian's Orifices are deadly.

System: The Cainite must for an hour seclude herself in an Oubliette, or a subterranean cave on a night of the full moon. During this time, she must force vitae into each of her orifices, until they swell and blush with life, at a cost of two blood points. The vampire must then make a Stamina + Medicine roll (difficulty 6); a success results in the blood turning black and forming small gateways into the Abyss. Failure produces no effect, while a botch causes the vampire two levels of aggravated damage, which can be soaked with Fortitude. Any being who enters anything inside one of the orifices — while having sex, for instance — loses one blood point a turn. A reflexive Perception + Awareness roll will notice this, requiring five successes minus the blood lost (to a minimum of one). Attempting to extract the penetrative party causes one level of aggravated damage a turn for as long as the Abyss Mystic successfully grapples her prey. It is possible to utterly consume a victim this way, devouring his weakened body via an Abyss-linked orifice.

•••• Boukephos' Gateway

This ritual is fraught with peril. Abyss Mystics who open their souls to the Abyss irrevocably change their beings, putting power within easy reach but potentially damning the practitioners. The infamous Boukephous designed the ritual as a lesson to Mystics who dabble but do not embrace the Abyss. Boukephos' Gateway makes clear the breadth of powers a Lasombra can attain, if only he is prepared to accept the risk of destruction.

System: The Abyss Mystic spends one whole night staring into a mirror, only darkness reflected back. As the night proceeds, the Mystic must spend three Willpower points, and then succeed on a Conviction roll (difficulty 8) on which no Willpower can be spent. The vampire remains in place, staring at the mirror, even after the sun comes up. Another three Willpower points must be spent, and another Conviction roll must be made (difficulty 9) on which no temporary Willpower points can be spent. Come the following night, the vampire turns from the mirror having gazed into the Abyss and her own, empty soul. If successful, the Cainite bears a broad grin and is now on the Road of the Abyss. In addition, he spends one fewer blood point on Obtenebration powers forevermore. On a failure, the vampire can never move on to the Road of the Abyss, but can attempt the ritual again for the Obtenebration benefit. A botch results in the vampire falling directly into torpor, from which only the vitae of a Lasombra of lower Generation can rouse her. She may never attempt the ritual again, and gains a Derangement.

••••• Beckon the Ingurgitant

Abyss Mystics know the horror of the Ingurgitant Vortex, and some believe it a grand idea to launch these dreaded beasts on their enemies. Ingurgitant vortices are difficult to coax away from the Abyss, so when a Mystic makes the attempt, she tends to aim the sucking hole at a rival Cainite's haven, sleeping quarters, or even a throne if she's intent on humiliation. Ingurgitant vortices have appeared in domains throughout the Sea of Shadows due to this ritual. Lasombra

outside the Mystics find the practice of summoning these creatures abhorrent, and just cause for the elimination of Mystics operating outside the clan hierarchy.

System: The vampire must paint a spiral of vitae on the target area, spending two blood points per meter (1 yard) in intended vortex dimensions. The blood then soaks into whatever surface it's painted on, leaving no stain. The Cainite must then chant and pray to the Abyss for an hour, within sight of the target area, spending two temporary points of Willpower. Finally, she must roll Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 6), with each success allowing the ingurgitant vortex to remain for two turns. Failure results in nothing happening; a botch prevents the Abyss Mystic from summoning any entities of the Abyss for seven nights. When any creature stands in close proximity to the painted sigil, the Abyss Mystic senses its presence and whether it's a mortal or vampire. By spending a blood point, the vampire forces the ingurgitant vortex to form in the surface and attack whatever's close by, strangling and chewing any victims, before dragging them to the Abyss. Those taken to the Abyss remain there for a number of nights equal to the Abyss Mystic's Obtenebration rating, where they suffer the effects listed under Evocation of the Oubliette (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 274). The vortex's statistics are stated on p. 34.

••••• •••• Boukephos' Chosen Oubliette

Underground is where you will find the Mystics' Oubliettes, in winding caverns and blood-streaked dungeons. Boukephos of Clan Lasombra refutes this need to hide from the stars. Whatever entity of the Abyss long ago possessed Boukephos, it made him form an Oubliette on the surface of the world, consuming the entire town of Latava and all occupants within. This Oubliette remained until the sun rose, at which point it dissipated, leaving only a scarred wasteland where a town once stood, and a lone survivor. Mystics have long attempted to recreate Boukephos' Oubliette, but few succeed.

System: The Abyss Mystic must paint a circle of pitch around the perimeter of an aboveground community — whether a hamlet, village, town, or city. This circle is broken if crossed by a child, or a believer with True Faith. Once the circle is in place, the Abyss Mystic must draw her own blood in its center, under the night's sky, spending three blood points as she pools her vitae on the earth. The vampire must then spend one Willpower point, and succeed on an extended test of Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8) with a target number of 8 successes for a small community, 15 for a large community, and 22 for a huge population center. These successes must be accumulated in the course of one night, and the practitioner cannot be disturbed, otherwise the ritual will fail. Upon the final success, the pitch circle surrounding the community ripples, and forms tall waves that crash into whatever lies within it. An aboveground Oubliette forms, and everything within it shifts to the Abyss. Once the night has passed and the Oubliette dissipates, only those within the Oubliette who achieved successes on a Willpower test (difficulty 9) remain, with a Derangement. Everyone else is taken to the Abyss, and will remain there for a number of nights equal to the Abyss Mystic's Obtenebration rating, suffering the effects listed under the Oubliette Background. Botching the ritual results in the Abyss Mystic disappearing into the heart of the Abyss forever. The practitioner is not recoverable.

Assamite Sorcery

"Judge as you would be judged."
—Common Expression, Source Unknown

The ancient school of blood magic, Assamite Sorcery, is almost exclusively practiced by the sorcerers of Clan Assamite. Ever since the sorcerers were created by Haqim, it has been their mandate to study the blood and ultimately find a way for Cainites to lead ethical existences where they are not purely like other, more appropriative clans. Recognizing the difficulty of this in a world where Cainites must feed on blood simply to survive, they still strive to dampen the pangs of hunger, hold back the Beast, and facilitate their clan's purging of evildoers. To do this, those Assamite sorcerers use ancient rituals and magical paths to empower themselves or their brethren in the face of danger, and to keep their mysteries secret.

Detailed in this chapter is a brief explanation of Assamite Blood Sorcery, some of those who practice it, and much previously restricted information about the mystical source of their sorcery in their hidden city of Alamut.

Alamut

The Assamite Holy City lies central to each Assamite's eternal membership in the clan. Alamut stands ready to train all neonates who seek to make the most of their vampiric existences by punishing those unworthy of their dreaded power. And when those neonates age, Alamut stands ready to provide a haven for further study or retreat, and assures instant, reliable communication across the known world.

Clan edict requires all sires to send or accompany their new childer to Alamut upon Embrace. Here, they are bound to the Blood of Alamut, a pool taken from every vampire in the clan, and used to ensure the constant communication that the Assamites rely on for their operations. Those who are charged with keeping the pool are few, but their duties

Call the New Blood Home (Level 2 Ritual)

An Assamite who wishes to Embrace and has demonstrated the worth of her future childe must contact a sorcerer and a vizier of a lower Generation than she possesses. The vizier permits or denies the Embrace, judging if the mortal is a worthy addition, while the sorcerer channels the energy with the approval of the sire-to-be and the vizier. With the invocation of this ritual, all three Assamites must spend a point of blood before the Embrace occurs. The essence of the blood descends upon the soon-to-be-sire, simulating a small portion of the blood pool in Alamut. Upon Embrace, the new sire must place a piece of parchment in the cheek of her new childe with the name of the sorcerer who cast the ritual and the vizier who approved it. When the childe awakens to undeath, he immediately enters the Trance of Return, making his way to Alamut to become a full member of the clan.

keep the clan together, informed, and for the most part, safe. We elaborate on this noble path, the Keepers of the Pool, on p. 41. The Ritual "Call the New Blood Home" joins all Assamites to the same secret path they will walk over the course of their vampiric nights.

Terrain and the City Itself

As an Assamite looks out from the city of Alamut to the north, she sees dry, rolling foothills slowly lowering to a sharp bend in a river that flows north turning east. There, she sees a great desert, the river flowing through all existing elevation but providing no nutrition to the desert around. And to the west, other than the great Western Road that leads to the Mediterranean and along which stand the Assamite Watchtowers, all she sees are mountains. She sees only the pass, the dry rocks, sparse vegetation, and to the south the same.

The city flourishes from within the mountain range itself, taking advantage of natural fissures and caverns carved by the weathering process. Constructions weave in and out of these natural formations almost seamlessly, and the result is a city providing absolute protection from sunlight. The style is deliberately simple. Many rituals protect the city from discovery, including one constantly in use that gives anyone who mistakenly lays eyes on the city a sudden desire to find his way home.

Chamber of Elders and the Pool

The Chamber of Elders houses meetings of the Eldest and her main advisers. These are usually some of the oldest vampires in the clan who are not in torpor. Usually, the ten-person Council houses six viziers, three sorcerers, and one warrior — the Captain of the Guard, who is also tasked with protecting the physical establishment of the city and all clan members who reside there. No magical nor physical restriction prevents any member of Clan Assamite from entering the chamber, but they are not supposed to do so without a summons. Under the circular table winds a staircase used by those who maintain the Blood of Alamut, kept in a pool below.

This pool has several other secret entrances and one main entrance, which leads to a font from which the Assamites may drink their fill from the never-ending pool. This is to keep any Assamite from being blood bound to another, but serves the purpose of keeping each member of the clan bound to the clan as a whole, unable to betray her siblings, sire, and childer while her diet consists of the sacred blood. It ensures that they remember the Alamut, and their sacred vows to uphold the will of Haqim. When not home, they must, of course, subsist — with the permission of the local Prince — on the blood of mortals.

The Watchtowers

The Road to Alamut is well defended from outside attack already, and the city designed to repel invaders. Even if an enemy army came in force to Alamut, the city's warriors are strong and know the secret passageways like no one else. All the same, the Assamites consider it better if an outside attack doesn't even come somewhat close to occurring, and thus: the Watchtowers. It was not long after the Ritual of Return was set and forged with blood magic that Haqim and the viziers realized their secret city could not remain secret if it were possible to follow Assamites on their journey back to Alamut. The Watchtowers were constructed in open areas with no shelter for at least a half-day's journey around and just under a full night's travel from the next Watchtower. Each Watchtower hosts a garrison of twelve warriors, administered by a vizier and pair of sorcerers. All of these are supplied by courier with fresh blood from Alamut every night. Though the price for maintaining these outposts in the desert and mountains is high, their placement allows anyone following an Assamite on her journey home to be watched carefully and stopped before he can find the sacred path.

The Watchtowers are unmarked, so that travelers will not happen upon them, and sealed with ancient, rune-inscribed stones made indestructible to mortal means. Though the Watchtowers can be identified if someone comes close enough

Reluctant Cooperation for the Sake of Organization

Don't get us wrong, the Assamites want to stay organized, and on a macro-level, they see no problems with following the direction of the Eldest. But each caste sees itself as the embodiment of Haqim's will, and while each caste's members recognize the need for the others, they think their caste should be in charge. The viziers especially, whose job is to spread the clan's message in European courts, would rather not have to communicate through the sorcerers. Whether to send messages in advance of their arrival to younger and older vampires of other clans, or to communicate with their own Elders in Alamut when abroad, the viziers would much rather they controlled the Assamite communication system than the sorcerers. Similarly, the warriors don't appreciate the bureaucracy, especially not when it sometimes allows a vizier to stop them minutes before they punish an important vampire from a different clan for his unworthiness of the blood. Older viziers, who for the most part, stay put in Alamut, can't even communicate directly with the younger members of their own caste. All messages of any kind go through the sorcerers, providing older and younger sorcerers alike with a significant amount power to steer the direction of the clan. This breeds resentment that may be interesting to examine in a chronicle.

to read the runes, the stone is normally immovable. When night falls, the stone rolls away, allowing the warriors therein to take their posts for the night, to bring in any Assamites coming home or to eliminate any other Cainite foolish enough to attempt the way along the road to Alamut. Each Watchtower keeps an additional store of blood sufficient to ensure that they are safe from sieges of up to a week, and able to feed their fellow Assamites as they undergo the Ritual of Return.

The Trance of Return

The secret of Alamut is one that all Assamites are sworn to protect. This is actually an easier secret to keep than many in Cainite society, because none of them save the Eldest and Haqim know the location of the Assamite Holy City. All the same, that knowledge is hidden in the blood that every Assamite carries within her and in an amulet around her neck. When an Assamite is sent from Alamut or summoned home, she enters the Trance of Return. Each day, while traveling under the trance, the Assamite awakens five minutes after the last light of the sun has gone from the sky, and finds a safe place to rest an hour before the sun rises. Otherwise, she travels without stop except to escape danger and eat.

Though it is called the Trance of Return, the Trance itself only occurs between the outermost Sentinel Watchtower and Alamut. During this time, the Assamite has no perception of the world around him, and instinctively travels from Watchtower to Watchtower before finally making his way to Alamut on his return, or to the outer Watchtower on his departure. Once he re-enters the city limits of Alamut, or enters the protection of the Outer Watchtower, the Trance is lifted, and he becomes aware again, though he still cannot resist the urge to journey to his destination.

While so entranced, the Assamite can only use Disciplines if he is in danger, at which point he briefly becomes aware of his immediate surroundings. When the threat is removed, he enters the trance again and continues his journey, even forgetting that he was ever in danger.

Viziers and Sorcerers

The three Assamite castes rely on each other to function effectively in vampiric society. While we elaborated on the role of the warriors on p. 431 of **V20 Dark Ages**, here we will discuss the role of the viziers and sorcerers in preserving and promoting the teachings of Haqim.

Clan Elders task the viziers with managing Alamut and promoting a stable image for Children of Haqim in the many Courts of Europe and North Africa, but the viziers rely on the sorcerers for the communication system, rituals, and protections that make their job possible. The sorcerers control the blood pool to which all Children of Haqim contribute, and their research supports the viziers' efforts to propagate a positive image of the clan when engaging in diplomacy.

The viziers know everyone in the clan. They have an idea of where everyone is and what they're after; what the various princes of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa care about; and which of them are being judged by the warriors. The sorcerers control the infrastructure and think they should be in charge for that reason. They differ on their reasons for using magic. Where the warriors see the viziers and sorcerers as tools to facilitate their work, the viziers see all Assamite Blood Sorcery as essential to spreading and following the teachings of Haqim. Meanwhile, the primary concern of the sorcerers is how the magic can be made more

powerful. They're reminded of how central a goal this must be when they recall their original purpose of defeating the Baali, and their absolute lack of success in that regard.

Generational Conflict

While not exclusively true, the vast majority of viziers who actively travel and engage in diplomacy with other vampiric clans are neonates between 50 and 300 years old. These vampires hold reasonably fresh blood bonds and connections to Alamut's power and communication systems, and the Assamites see them as more capable of proving that the clan is just like any European vampire clan. Still, this doesn't come without detriment to the clan. Younger vampires spent their human lives in a very different time than older vampires, and their lives before the Embrace and present time spent traveling around in the 13th century have led to many of them connecting in various ways with the Islamic faith. The Assamite's choice to commission younger clan-members — who tend to identify and connect with Islam — as their ambassadors has led many of the other clans to associate them with Islam, going so far as to call them Saracens. As a result, the Assamites have suffered a promoted stereotype rooted in a different faith from Christianity. The disconnect between old and young viziers means that younger viziers present the image most Cainites see of the Assamite clan.

Keepers of the Pool

Deep within the heart of Alamut lies the sacred pool of blood that sustains the city in the sparsely populated desert mountains that the Assamites call home. Here resides the order of the Keepers of the Pool, who keep the city, the clan, and — they believe — all Cainites safe from the ravages of the Beast. Practicing the ultimate in self control, the Keepers routinely starve themselves to reflect on the gifts of Haqim, using the focus they get from desperation to study the pool as it swirls with the happenings of the Assamite world. Each and every sorcerer, like each and every Assamite, recognizes that the mark of Caine is both a curse and a blessing. While their siblings, the warriors and viziers, see fit to judge and cleanse the wrongdoers, the sorcerers seek, in their minds, a higher calling to reduce the damage that the curse does to Cainites and mortals alike.

In this pursuit, the Keepers are some of the most important sorcerers of all. They keep Alamut fed and allow for the Elders and Eldest to know the fate of the clan and the state of the world. They devote their nights to the study of the many supernatural elements that occur in the Great Pool, learning to read the ripples and currents therein, and also manipulating it for the betterment of the clan. This does not come without a cost. Where other sorcerers and indeed most other Assamites may leave the holy city, the Keepers become bound to it in an intimate way.

Not every sorcerer is expected nor able to become a Keeper. That role is reserved only for the most ardent and devout of the sorcerers. Given the lack of focus that many see in the younger, higher-generation Cainites who are Embraced but still believe in the tenets of Islam, it is considered an enormous honor to be chosen by the Elders for the task. All sorcerers deemed worthy of the sacred task must complete a series of tests encompassing their knowledge of Assamite Blood Sorcery, their understanding of the teachings of Haqim, and their commitment to the goals of the clan. Once they have passed, their initiation begins. By first confessing their failures before the Council of Elders and then emptying themselves of blood, the sorcerers undergoing initiation spiritually and magically drain themselves. As every present Keeper recites the holy vows, the initiates drink from and bind themselves to the pool.

Keepers are unable to go without drinking at least one blood point from the Great Pool each night. When they fail to do so, they take one unsoakable level of aggravated damage each night without. When Keepers must leave Alamut for especially important business, they carry wineskins full of blood from the Great Pool for the sake of personal consumption. When traveling, Keepers may have need of their arts; any of the rituals listed below, save the fifth, may be used just as well with the Keeper pouring the blood into an open-mouthed container.

The Keepers work in close contact with each other, but save for necessary interactions for the purposes of their work, they are largely isolated from other members of their clan. Should a Keeper have a childe, that childe is more likely to become a Keeper herself than other neonates, and the Keepers maintain a certain degree of elitism towards those who wish to join their ranks. When the Elders do choose a new Keeper, they're absorbed into the sect with no complaint.

It is generally expected that Keepers follow the Road of Blood as described on p. 432 of **V20 Dark Ages**. Their auras and virtues will necessarily reflect the information written for that Road.

The Keepers practice an eponymous path of Assamite Sorcery known only by them.

The Keeper's Way

• Sense the Ripples

Assamites learning this path learn first to listen and read the largest ripples in the Great Pool, indicting dramatic events: the death or torpor of an Elder or Eldest, a planned treachery, or worse. Though dramatic events can be seen as they occur, it is only with higher knowledge that a practitioner can know in any detail what has occurred. With each success, she may ask one clarifying question related to the subject that can be answered with yes or no. Paradoxical questions cannot be answered.

• • The Gift of Haqim

With greater study, a practitioner can stretch the blood drawn from the Great Pool. He must drink at least one blood point from the pool. His body is filled by the pool, regardless of how far he is from the actual pool. He gains blood points equal to the number of successes, which come once per hour until fully awarded.

• • • The Distant Crimson

With this spell, a practitioner can observe the physical surroundings of any Assamites in a one hundred kilometer radius. She may see through the eyes of the Assamites present at the location, and can tell their general emotional states, whether they have sufficient blood to get through the week, and whether they have been in combat in the last night. With additional successes, she may filter her perceptions based on an additional, formally recognized trait such as caste or age.

• • • • Know the Fate of One

By examining the minute stirrings of the pool with more clarity, a practitioner can sense a dramatic change in the fate of one vampire. She may ask questions that can be answered with a yes or a no, equal to the number of successes on her roll. This spell is frequently done to discern the true depravity of especially powerful vampires. When the warriors believe they must inflict Final Death on a Prince, they first ask the Keepers.

• • • • • Cast into the Pool of Blood

This spell must always be cast by four sorcerers. By emptying themselves of blood points with their hands in the pool, the practitioners can feel the blood of all members of the clan flowing through them, and can impact the immediate fate of the Clan Assamite. All participants' Generation increase by one, as they sacrifice their blood's potency to influence the clan's fate. Though they may not control time, nor impact things directly, through the power of this ritual they may dramatically impact the result of a series of events. In effect, they choose a goal to accomplish, which must be agreed to by all casting members. For each success, choose one of the following:

- Individuals gain –1 difficulty on relevant actions (to a minimum difficulty 3).
- Individuals gain +1 die on relevant actions (to a maximum +5 dice).
- Those obstructing the goal gain +1 difficulty (to a maximum difficulty 9).
- Those obstructing the goal lose 1 die (to a minimum dice pool 1).

For example: If the goal is to prevent an army from invading Alamut, all warriors would receive bonuses to their rolls made to defend the city, and all sorcerers would gain bonuses to rituals in defense of the collective, while enemies would suffer penalties to attack the Assamites therein.

Rituals

Strength of Haqim (Level 1)

One of the first rituals a new Assamite sorcerer can learn is this protective spell meant to allow her to draw on the power of all Assamites, past and present, to resist domination or blood addiction. By carrying with her an amulet bathed in the Blood of Alamut and reciting a brief incantation, an Assamite may gain additional dice equal to her dots in Thaumaturgy to resist the affect of mind-altering spells or Disciplines. The vampire's defense to these same effects is reduced by one after every failed casting. If the effect does not allow for a defense, this applies as a penalty to the activation.

Ritual of Return (Level 1)

Only Assamites hold the necessary knowledge to locate Alamut, stored deep within the Blood of Alamut itself. When a vizier needs to send an Assamite to or from Alamut, or summon him to the Holy City, the sorcerer casting this ritual uses one of three variations. When the Ritual of Return is invoked, unless specified, the affected Assamite enters the Trance of Return described on p. 40 as soon as he sets out to journey for Alamut. Pragmatically, if an Assamite had taken refuge in a Prince's court, this would take affect once he left the Prince's demesne.

If all participants are in Alamut, then the sorcerer needs only to spit in dirt or dust to make mud before marking each heel of the Cainite being sent forth. Once the vizier speaks

the name of the place, the Assamite immediately enters the Trance of Return. She travels to her destination as quickly as possible, and forgets her journey, only stopping to eat, take refuge from the sun, and at the clan's Watchtowers on her way out.

If all participants are in the same place and that place is not Alamut, the sorcerer casting the spell must set a traveler's hood upon the Assamite and instruct him to return home. The vizier then asks him if he has served Haqim faithfully (to which the Assamite is expected to answer yes). The sorcerer takes the vial of blood kept on the vizier's person and draws a circle around the traveler using the vial as a tool to mark the ground. When the vizier speaks the name of Alamut, the Assamite repeats it and immediately enters the Trance of Return.

If the vizier and sorcerer are in Alamut, but the Assamite being summoned home is not, then the ritual is more complicated. The sorcerer invokes the Blood of Alamut to call home the wandering member of the clan. This requires that the caster be a member of the Keepers of the Pool (as described on p. 41). The Keeper must draw a circle around the vizier, who speaks the name of the summoned Assamite three times while having blood from the pool poured over her head. The clan member feels irrevocably drawn, but may spend the night settling affairs before he begins his journey home the next night, at which point he enters the Trance of Return immediately. The use of this ritual is generally limited to times when an Assamite is nowhere near a major city where viziers and sorcerers would be able to use the second method of invoking the Ritual of Return.

Blood Calls to Blood (Level 2)

A vizier often needs to contact a member of the clan who is roving the world, in a court in Europe, or infiltrating a coterie to judge one of its members. By invoking the name of the Cainite he wishes to contact, the vizier can direct a sorcerer to reach out to the clan member in question as long as he faces that clan member's general direction. If the vizier requesting the conversation is of lower generation than his target, the connection begins immediately and he may then speak into the clan member's mind, hear sent thoughts, and even see through the eyes and hear through the ears of his fellow Assamite. If the requester is of a higher generation, the traveler gains full knowledge of who he and his sire are, where they are, and their general state of mind, and may accept or reject the communication.

The sorcerer merely acts as a conduit enabling the communication, and cannot take part nor hear any part of the exchange. She must spend a point of blood for every five minutes the connection stays open, rounded up. An Assamite of lower generation can use any Clan Disciplines that normally require physical proximity while communicating in this way.

Strength in Wisdom (Level 3)

A sorcerer who witnesses an immoral act that serves as evidence of a Cainite's unworthiness may instill protections upon the warrior or warriors sent to apprehend him. This ritual grants bonus dice equal to the successes rolled. These dice can be divided however the sorcerer wishes among any physical or mental defenses against the target. Any roll using these bonus dice benefit from -1 difficulty.

A Shield of Mirror (Level 3)

With a dance performed in the light of the moon and the proper incantation, an Assamite may protect herself or another from a diablerist external to the clan. If performed correctly, this ritual will grant the recipient a blessing against diablerie. If any vampire attempts Amaranth against him within the same month, he instead takes all her blood into himself – this does not cause a blood bond.

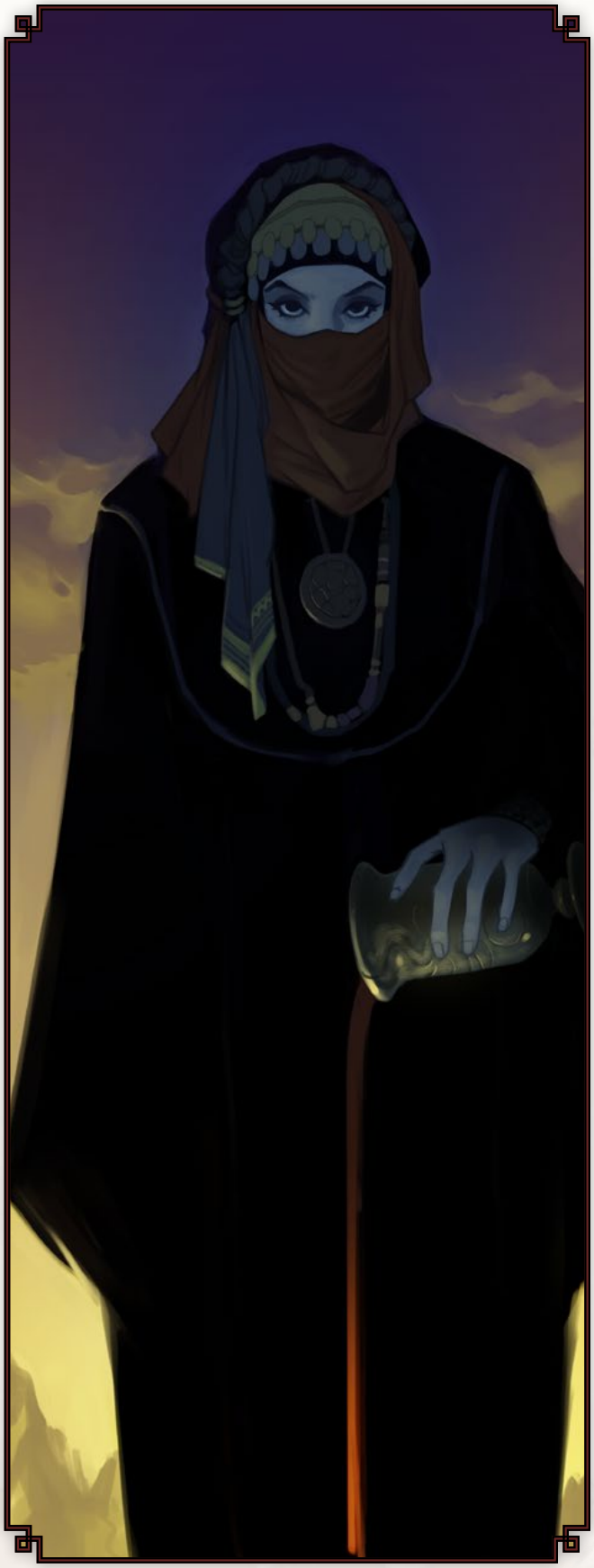
Rebirth in the Light of Haqim (Level 4)

Each Assamite is initiated to the clan after Embrace with blood from the collective pool. Her head is anointed with the blood and her true purpose calls to her. It is only at this point that she is fully welcomed as a warrior, sorcerer, or vizier, as the blood of the entire clan decides her fate. Many consider this to be the will of Haqim.

This rebirth breaks any existing blood bonds. It can also effectively change the character's Clan Disciplines; any Disciplines that become out-of-clan accrue an "experience debt" that must be paid off with incoming experience points. Newly in-clan Disciplines are purchased at in-clan costs.

Occlude the Western Road (Level 5)

The sorcerer enacts the ritual that Haqim himself first created to keep the Holy City of Alamut hidden from the rest of the world. While wearing a traveling cloak and sandals, she must request the blessing of the Eldest in her task. The Eldest recites the teachings of Haqim, and instructs the sorcerer to keep safe the ways to Alamut. The sorcerer then meditates for an hour. Within an hour of sunrise, the sorcerer must take a vial with blood from the pool at the center of Alamut and mix it with dust from the Western Road while speaking the name of Alamut in the language



of the First City under slowly brightening skies. She draws a circle around herself with the blood and implores the sun to erase all signs of travel to and from her location when it rises. The Cainite then anoints her own head with the blood and lays down flat, facing up with arms outstretched. After another incantation, a steady wind rises, at which point the sorcerer must hurry to shelter before the sun crests the horizon. When she sleeps, she is drained of blood, save for one point when she wakes. The sorcerer's ritual erases all evidence of paths to and from her location. Anyone coming within a half mile radius of the location will travel around if reasonably possible, or will pass by without noticing her or the location she wishes to protect.

This effect lasts one month. Used within Alamut, it affects the whole of Alamut.

The Secrets of Koldunism

Power is ever circular. We sacrifice of ourselves in tribute to the earth, so the earth may give of itself to us. You must bleed for your homeland, so that your homeland will bleed for you.

— Raban von Diederik, Koldun of the Bialowieza

Something abominable dwells within the Tzimisce Voivodate; something allowing the Fiends to maintain an unwavering grip on the land and peoples of Hungaria, Poland, Bulgaria, and beyond. To hear the Telyavs of the north tell it, the Tzimisce are in league with the primordial demons of the earth, and act as foremost masters in their summoning and manipulation. The Tremere of beset Ceoris cite Tzimisce pacts with ancient, wicked spirits. The Ventrue resident in the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross make a more mundane observation: Their longtime Tzimisce foes are unified, ordered, and conditioned by a sublimely powerful, entirely secretive cabal of magi kings.

As with all speculation, each theory contains a grain of legitimacy.

The Tzimisce known as koldun are an obscure breed. They are disparate, hoard intelligence individually, and possess access to a form of blood magic so ancient its practitioners only guess at its origins. Certainly, many of them have their hypotheses, some more informed than others. There are always rumors of isolated koldunof the Fourth Generation who respond to entreaties on matters koldunic with unmitigated violence, rendering their existence a subject of further speculation.

The truth is unlikely to be known, but is in these nights widely sought. The Tzimisce have ever lacked unity, especially in times of war. One Voivode will commit the bulk of her war ghouls and fledglings to the task of routing a Patrician enclave, strengthening the defenses of the Voivodate and earning herself the right to liberate slaves and wealth from the abandoned Ventrue stronghold. That is, unless the Voivode in the neighboring domain doesn't take advantage of her weakened state, moving his own army into her land as hers departs for western pastures. The Voivode among Voivodes — Count Vladimir Rustovich — has called for such in-fighting to end, and states the reemergence of koldunism to be key to his clan recovering much of what it's lost to opportunism and petty politicking.

The Tzimisce throw their armies fully into the War of Princes, as they recognize a formative alliance between the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross and the Tremere, who utilize their Gargoyle servants too effectively on the battlefield. While the war grinds into a stalemate, the Fiends seek an edge. Rustovich believes tapping into the ancient kraina of Koldunism is that edge, if the Discipline's practitioners could be called into coordinated action. The Tzimisce will completely crush their adversaries, if the natural, devastating forces of the lands they call home are paired with the unnatural power of Cainite vitae.

Strong incentive that it may be, Koldunism is a many-forked path. Contrary to Rustovich's aims, the study of the kraina forces even greater divisions between its practitioners.

Koldunic Rivalry

There is a simple reason we do not ally with the Voivodate. Koldun do not share power.

— William Ashcroft, Scion of the Ventrue

Tzimisce balk at the idea of serving any beings, let alone demons. Yet, something infernal exists in the kraina. Koldunism is the raw power of the earth, but also contains the spite and discord of demons — the most infamous being Kupala. Cursed blood should not mix with nature, yet this is the fundament of the koldun. Demons bound to the elements utilize this curse to find a hold on the Cainite practitioners of the Discipline. The demons adore chaos, and compel koldun to strive for supremacy in their Discipline, principally by warring with other vampires attempting the same thing. It's no surprise koldun often practice existences of isolation, or surrounded exclusively by their lessers.

System: Whenever the vampire hears of new kraina and koldunic rituals, the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 4). For every point in the Cainite's primary kraina, the difficulty to resist the lure of accumulating further power increases by one. Failure forces the koldun to make a subconscious beeline for the source of this alleged power, even risking the dawn and making excuses for doing so. This effect can be resisted each following night with a Willpower roll (difficulty one higher than the previous). A botch on the initial Willpower roll means the vampire immediately enters frenzy. Restraining the vampire or obviously blocking his path will require the player to make a Self-Control roll for the vampire to resist frenzy (difficulty 7) or an Instinct roll to direct his frenzy (difficulty 5). Success means the vampire resists the urge.

When a koldun witnesses another sorcerer practicing one of the kraina in which he possesses no points, the player must make a Self-Control/Instinct roll to resist/direct the vampire's frenzy (difficulty 7). A point of temporary Willpower cannot be used to automatically succeed on this attempt.

The Many-Headed Seekers

As long as there's fire. As long as there's rain. As long as there's sun. As long as there's blood.

— Kosczecskyu, Koldun in hiding

Rustovich's entreaty spreads far across the Voivodate. As is typical among the headstrong members of Clan Tzimisce, the promise of supremacy inspires coteries into rivalry more than it unifies them under one cause, but some take heed of the Voivode's words, and put clan before Cainite.

Emanating from the Principality of Kiev, the Many-Headed Seekers are a sect of Tzimisce intent on discovering the secrets of koldunism. Koldunism provides a devastating array of power to its wielders, and the Many-Headed Seekers are conscious of the advantage the spread of this power will endow upon the Tzimisce. Comprised primarily of scholars and vampires Embraced from the ranks of mortal mages, the Many-Headed Seekers brave Lupines, Inquisition, and Cainites aggressive to their aims in their quest to become the foremost koldun of the War of Princes, and act as teachers to vampires of similar ambition.

The Seekers are joined in a desire to hunt tales of wise Tzimisce elders, seek audiences with mages possessing a focus on the elements, and extol the virtues of Koldunism. Moving beyond the stipulations laid down by Count Rustovich, the Seekers draw Cainites of other clans and bloodlines to their banner in the War of Princes, with promise of tutelage in the kraina should firm allegiances be born. The Seekers are aware of the risk, but recognize it as one worth taking.

A Tzimisce member of the Many-Headed Seekers is granted the rights and honors of a diplomat in domains

The Fruition of Koldunism

The kraina spawn territorial grudges and violent rivalries strong enough to hamstring any attempt by Rustovich to bring the Voivodate's koldun to common cause against the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross, but it's a noble aim. It still stands a chance of acting as a secret weapon capable of tipping the War of Princes in favor of the Tzimisce.

In your game, if the Seekers' intent comes to fruition, it will greatly empower the Tzimisce. Playing as Cainites within the Many-Headed Seekers, or learning from them in exchange for alliance in the constant melees with Usurpers and Patricians, is a distinct angle from which to run your chronicle, especially if such actions were to seriously harm the burgeoning Tremere.

throughout the Voivodate, due to Rustovich's mandate. All Many-Headed Seekers must possess at least two dots in Status and one dot in Influence, since the Tzimisce place great importance on standing within society.

All members of the sect undergo a trial of loyalty before being mentored in the first step of one of the kraina. Common tests include hunting only forest wildlife for a month, therefore fasting from the blood of mortals; orchestrating the assassination of a notable Ventrue; or proclaiming a domain they hold as subject to the tyranny of Vladimir Rustovich.

Upon passing any trials imposed and being welcomed into the ranks of the Many-Headed Seekers, the sect demands new members return to the place of their Embrace. Once there, burial in the earth or submersion within waters local to the area is required. The Cainite must not fall to torpor, but must be reduced to one blood point over the course of the trial, to form a bond with the elements. The player must spend 10 experience points; the character gains the first dot of the kraina selected by her mentor. She also automatically gains one dot in Mentor for her tutor in the kraina, one dot in Allies for the same, and two dots in Contacts for the sect.

The Bialowieza Kraina

There is no haven here. The very earth wishes to consume you.
— Sarolt Grondrska "The Boar," Koldun of the Bialowieza

Koldun of the Białowieza Forest comprise Polish and Rus Tzimisce, but all nominally fall within the Voivodate. It is a primeval forest of immense size, impassable to all but the most determined travelers; the Sixth Generation koldun Djabelek maintained a solitary domain within, housed in a fabled white tower. His recent disappearance led to the release of several childer into the wild, including the less outwardly antagonistic Grondrska. She invites rivals to face her, along with students who would learn at her feet.

• Domain Breach

The koldun is so in tune with his domain that he is able to detect when an intruder makes her way within its borders. This Discipline isn't so focused as to identify and spotlight the location of the intruder, instead providing adequate forewarning in advance of a surprise. A common tactic upon sensing a visitor is to follow up by sending animal spies.

System: The koldun expends at least one point of blood within the area he wishes to affect with this Discipline, and the player rolls to activate this power (Attribute: Perception). One square kilometer (2/3 of a mile) surrounding the koldun is affected for each blood point spent. For the remainder of the night, the koldun senses if any visitors enter or exit the determined area.

If this power is activated within the Białowieza Forest, no initial expenditure of blood is required. This power cannot be used in a predominantly urban environment.

•• Fingers of Bialowieza

The koldun with this power commands nearby plants and trees to ensnare, and potentially immobilize, their victims. This Discipline affects plants of all size, compelling thin roots through to old, twisted branches. Koldun often use Fingers of Białowieza on plants surrounding paths leading to their havens.

System: The koldun expends blood, ensuring it touches the plant she wishes to affect, and rolls to activate this power (Attribute: Dexterity). The plant will attempt to ensnare anyone passing within two meters (2 yards) of its reach, remaining ready to grapple in this way for one night per blood point spent. For the purposes of grappling, the plant rolls six dice. It inflicts one level of bashing damage for each turn subsequent to a successful grapple. The plant gains an additional die to grappling with each subsequent turn, to a maximum of ten dice. Small plants possess two health levels

for the purposes of destruction, with tree limbs holding up to six, depending on size. They hold one dot of Stamina for each health level, and can soak bashing damage.

If this power is activated within the Białowieza Forest, the plants' bashing damage and their health levels are doubled from their initial numbers, with Stamina increasing as a byproduct of the increase in health.

••• Grondrska's Impasse

The tale tells of a poacher who trespassed into Tzimisce lands. It wasn't long before he was fleeing in a dread panic. He thought he knew the forest, but the trees were moving around him, cutting off his exit, herding him directly to the hungry Cainite waiting within. Grondrska's Impasse makes this terrible legend a reality.

System: The koldun expends at least one point of blood within the area she wishes to affect, and the player rolls to activate this power (Attribute: Perception). One square kilometer (2/3 of a mile) surrounding the koldun is affected for each blood point spent. For the remainder of the night, any visitors sensed using Domain Breach suffer an increased difficulty of three on attempts to track, escape, and navigate within the area, as the undergrowth shifts and looms around the intruder. If the visitor fails his roll, the koldun can choose whether to move him closer, farther away, or in the direction of a well-placed trap.

If this power is activated within the Białowieza Forest, the undergrowth saps two dots from the visitor's Perception, returned if he leaves the area. The koldun can choose to have this not affect certain visitors who triggered the power of Domain Breach.

•••• The Mouth of Djabelek

Djabelek is a terrifying Tzimisce buried somewhere within the Białowieza Forest. It is said that somehow he continues to feed despite his torpid state, opening his mouth while dreaming, consuming whatever falls in. This power often results in swift death for intruding mortals, as the earth opens around them. Koldun are known to make use of The Mouth of Djabelek near their havens as a security measure, and in the heat of battle to catch an opponent unawares. A tongue of cold mud drags the intruder down into the earth, with grinding rocks and crushing earth pulverizing the victim.

System: The koldun spills at least one point of blood within the earthen area she wishes to affect, and spends a point of Willpower along with making the roll to activate this power (Attribute: Strength). Should any being step within ten meters (11 yards) of where the power was activated, a pit two meters (2 yards) in diameter and three meters (3 yards) deep opens. Each blood point spent leaves the victim trapped and immobile for a turn. To break free requires a successful Strength-based roll on the part of the victim (difficulty 8) and requires five successes on an extended test. Beings trapped in the pit suffer two levels of lethal damage each turn, which can be soaked (difficulty 7).

If this power is activated within the Białowieza Forest, the duration of this power is doubled. The koldun can choose to have this not affect certain visitors.

••••• The White Tower

The Białowieza takes its name from Djabelek's notorious tower built of his victims' bleached white bones, stacked high to make a particularly foreboding haven. The tower has long been absent from the forest, but occasional tales of its reconstruction emerge from the wilderness — and not always in the Białowieza Forest.

The White Tower is the gift provided by the demons of the earth with whom Djabelek once made his pact. The bones of all the victims of the Białowieza kraina force their way from the earth and cocoon the koldun summoning them in a tower of earth and bone at least five meters (5 1/2 yards) tall. The koldun can remain inside the haven for as long as her blood will hold out, or fold back into the earth with the tower and reemerge elsewhere, away from danger.

System: The koldun scatters one point of blood on the soil; the player spends a point of Willpower and makes the roll to activate this power (Attribute: Stamina). The White Tower takes effect immediately, the earth shifting, jagged bones and blocks of earth forming an apparently organic circular wall to surround the koldun, at five meters (5 1/2 yards) tall. For each success on activation, another floor five meters high is constructed above the initial one, one floor a turn. The White Tower stretches beneath the earth as far as it stretches above it, and bears no entrance or exit, unless the koldun wills one. Any possessions left within the last time the Discipline was activated remain in the tower. The White Tower is highly resistant to external forces, possessing 20 levels of health and an invulnerability to all but aggravated damage.

The White Tower can fold back into the earth with the koldun in tow, at the expenditure of a further blood point and single point of Willpower. At this point, the vampire is effectively entombed five meters (5 1/2 yards) beneath the earth at the location where the White Tower stood.

For the cost of an additional blood point and point of Willpower, along with the roll for activating the power (Attribute: Stamina), the White Tower emerges anywhere within 20 kilometers (12 1/2 miles) of the previous location, providing the area is forested. The size of this new White Tower is established in the same manner as the initial roll.

The White Tower does not deconstruct if the koldun wills an exit to appear and departs the building. If any Cainite

falls to torpor inside the White Tower, or mortal falls asleep within, it consumes them and adds the vampire's bones to the others lining the walls and floors.

If this power is activated within the Białowieza Forest, it possesses double the levels of health.

Rites of the Kraina

Think — just think — of what we could manage with nights, months, or years of spilled vitae.

— Djabelek, Koldun of the White Tower

Were a koldun to witness the rituals practiced by the Trembling Ones, he would spit vitae and damn the Usurpers for their base understanding and lack of respect. The rites of the kraina are arcane, rewarding risk and sacrifice, punishing the trepidatious. Studying kraina rites is an investment of time and blood, with bounteous fruits to the koldun should the rites be successful.

Practitioners of kraina rites often study independently of those who focus on the mainstream Koldunism Discipline. During the Long Night, the divide between both branches of kolduns was pronounced; those with affinity for the Discipline were often seen as aggressive warlocks, where the rites scholars would take the roles of counselors, or rulers of the homeland.

Most kraina rites provide permanent effects, until a sacrifice is made, or the koldun elects to conclude the rite through force of will or their own Final Death.

Powerful kraina rites require the assistance of willing supplicants. In times past, the Tzimisce would enlist their servants. As the War of Princes leaves the Voivodate with more prisoners, rite leaders often promise such prisoners freedom if they'll volunteer for participation in a rite.

After months of torture in a Tzimisce dungeon, most are only too willing.

System: All kraina rites must be taught by a Cainite, spirit mentor, or demon. The vampire learning rites requires the same level in Koldunism, and the affiliated kraina. To learn kraina rites, the player must roll Intelligence + Occult (the difficulty is the rite's level + 4), and sacrifice the blood and Willpower points stated in the following table. Keep in mind Generation limits on blood expenditure per turn.

Kraina rites must be practiced in a location predominantly possessed of the rite's focus, such as a forest or river. These locations cannot be left once the rite has commenced. If the rite is interrupted, the extended roll requirements reset.

Practicing kraina rites requires the rite leader to roll dice equal to her Occult rating and the Attribute designated by the rite. The difficulty is the rite's level + 4, with each murder committed at the ritual site reducing the difficulty by 1 to a minimum difficulty of 3. A sacrifice of blood and temporary Willpower is required, with figures stated in the following table.

Each additional Cainite partaking in the ritual contributes dice equal to his Occult rating. These Cainites are subject to the rite's blood and Willpower sacrifice requirements, with the rite leader choosing from whom the points are taken. Keep in mind Generation limits on blood expenditure per turn for the leading Cainite. This limit does not affect anyone else chosen for the sacrifice of blood.

Kraina rites reward a risky investment. Removing two dice from the pool reduces the number of successes required by one, to a minimum of one success required. These dice remain out of the pool for future dice rolls on the extended task.

Each time a roll of dice is made by the rite leader, each participant loses one blood point in addition to the number committed to the rite's practice. The longer the rite takes, the more blood is lost. If the rite is aborted or failed, the initial blood and Willpower cost is deducted in full from the rite leader on top of anything already lost.

Unnatural Decay

Level One Rite — The Białowieza Kraina — Attribute: Stamina

Koldun hold special ire for mortals who dare refuse to settle taxes and make blood sacrifices when required. Such disrespect is punishable by souring the earth itself, cursing the bounty it produces and those who consume it.

System: Upon completion of the rite, all crops within one kilometer (2/3 of a mile) of the rite's completion become mildly poisonous to humans, causing those who consume the toxic produce to lose one dot of Stamina a week. The rite is undone through a mortal's bloodletting on the cursed earth. This only technically requires the loss of about three blood points, but often means the mortal's death in practice.

Drinking Death

Level One Rite — The Białowieza Kraina — Attribute: Strength

Mortals farm the earth, and Cainites farm the mortals. When mortals become victim to plague and war, however, a vampire can struggle to find blood. This rite allows a koldun to consume blood from the gravesites of deceased mortals.

System: Upon completion of the rite, the koldun is subsequently capable of drinking blood from the earth of a gravesite. The koldun must lay prostrate on the ground, face in the soil, and take the earth in his mouth. Only one blood point can be gained this way from each grave, and one such grave in the immediate area can be affected per success

Learning and Practicing Kraina

Kraina Rite Level	Cost to Learn	Cost to Practice	Successes Required
1	1b + 1W	3b + 2W	5
2	2b + 2W	6b + 4W	10
3	3b + 3W	9b + 6W	15
4	4b + 4W	12b + 8W	20
5	5b + 5W	15b + 10W	25

b = Blood points. W = Willpower points

Example: In order to learn The Floating Dead (a Level Three kraina rite) Amir's vampire must find a suitable tutor, roll his combined Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7), and spend three blood points and three temporary Willpower. As Amir's vampire is Twelfth Generation, he can only spend one blood point per turn, so he spends one blood point and three temporary Willpower now, rolling his dice. He rolls 2, 4, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, and so definitely succeeds. His vampire understands the ritual, but hasn't yet invested enough of himself to practice it. Returning that evening, he spends one more blood point before resting for the day. The following evening, Amir invests a further blood point. The vampire can now complete the rite. Now all he needs are "volunteers" to help him.

One month later, Amir's vampire has a friend and a couple of prisoners (both vampire and mortal) with him as they stand knee-deep in the hot springs, sulfur burning and tingeing everything with a rancorous odor. With his three companions, he chooses to spend one of his own blood points, and one of his temporary Willpower, mercilessly taking six blood and five Willpower from across his two prisoners. The last two blood come from his coterie mate.

Amir has a total pool of seven dice accumulated from his Attribute (Dexterity, in this case) + Occult. The combined Occult rating of the other three participants is also seven. The total dice rolled by Amir's player will be 14, with a target number of 15 successes. Amir's vampire slays three mortals he brought to the rite, reducing the difficulty to 4. Conscious of the small threshold for error, Amir sacrifices two dice to reduce the target number of successes to 14 on a roll of 12 dice. The dice are rolled, and Amir achieves eight successes! Each participant does however lose a blood point, rendering one of the prisoners torpid. The dice he contributed are no longer in play. Amir now has ten dice to roll, and requires six rolls of 4s or above. Feeling nervous about losing three more dice if this roll fails (his second prisoner will be out of blood), Amir sacrifices another four dice to reduce the number of successes required to four. He rolls his six dice, and achieves all four successes.

in the casting. The rite's effects are permanent until one of the graves is consecrated by an individual with True Faith.

Treasured Ornaments

Level One Rite — The Transylvanian Kraina — Attribute: Manipulation

Treasured Ornaments awakens the spirit of every ornament with a colorful past in the koldun's haven. The spirits will not speak unless spoken to, and will be entirely fearful of the koldun. The purpose of this rite is primarily the creation of immobile sentries. They will — in simple terms — report what they've witnessed when questioned.

System: Upon completion of the rite, the koldun can converse with important ornaments in her haven. The effects are permanent, though leaving the spirits in situ tends to aggravate them over time. An ornament of importance is one with a history — perhaps a gifted weapon, or the cot of a deceased child. The rite is dismissed when an uninvited guest touches the ornaments.

Master of the Domain

Level One Rite — The Transylvanian Kraina — Attribute: Appearance

All mortals must fear the Voivode. This rite allows koldun to take fear to the extreme, a perpetual aura of fear manifesting to make the vampire look large, dangerous, and constantly on the edge of frenzy.

System: Once the rite's complete, the koldun gains a permanent additional two dice to attempts at Intimidation

against both mortal and Cainite subjects within her domain. Master of the Domain also prevents the victims of such bullying from spending temporary Willpower to overcome its effects. The rite can be undone by the koldun's subjects seeing the Cainite bested in any form of contest.

Truth in Water

Level One Rite — The Black Sea Kraina — Attribute: Appearance

Truth in Water is a trick held dear by koldun of the Black Sea Kraina. The rite conveys purification using the simple element of water. Any lies told by a mortal containing the water in their body, or by a party immersed in that water, forces the liquid to heat up to boiling temperatures.

System: Success of the rite converts water into a form of lie detector. The rite only affects enough water to fill a barrel, but this water remains pure until it's spilled on the ground. Once boiling, it deals one level of lethal damage to mortals who lie while in contact with it, and one level of bashing damage per turn to Cainites.

Servitor's Perception

Level One Rite — Genius Loci — Attribute: Perception

When a koldun wants to see farther than her Genius Loci would usually allow, she can stand atop a mountain, tower, or other elevated location, and imbue an animal servitor with her Koldun Sorcery. Depending on the other Disciplines the koldun may hold, she may then command the animal to spy and return, or even observe through the animal's eyes.

System: Upon completion of the rite, the koldun imbues any animal with as many points as she has in Genius Loci. The koldun will require a way of commanding or possessing the animal if she wishes to have any influence on what the animal looks for, or reports back. This rite is broken if the animal is slain.

Borne by Wind

Level Two Rite — The Transylvanian Kraina — Attribute: Dexterity

First impressions are everything. Koldun using Borne by Wind are capable of riding breezes and gales to arrive at locations as if from thin air, in a flourish of sweeping cloaks and chill wind. Tales tell of koldun who use the wind as their steeds in battle, appearing from nothing with sword in hand and fangs extended.

System: Once the rite is completed, the koldun is capable of swooping into an area if a wind is present and he can see his destination. With one turn's focus, he disappears from his original location, traveling at the speed of the wind, and reappears at his intended destination. This rite cannot be used if being attacked, as the Cainite cannot focus in such an occasion. It allows him to make a surprise attack on an unsuspecting foe, however. This rite is neutralized if the koldun utilizes it to launch an attack, and misses his first blow.

Autumn's Armor

Level Two Rite — The Białowieza Kraina — Attribute: Stamina

The koldun possessing Autumn's Armor is permanently augmented by the minerals of the earth. After consecrating herself in a swamp or grave, she emerges with small stones and roots embedded in her flesh. As well as making her a sight to behold, the extra layer constitutes unnatural armor.

System: Upon conclusion of the rite, the koldun emerges from the land bearing earthen armor with a permanent rating of 2 against all forms of damage. The armor increases the difficulty of Social actions by 2. The rite concludes if the koldun is struck by a stone-tipped weapon.

Concentrated Vitae

Level Two Rite — The Black Sea Kraina — Attribute: Stamina

To any other Cainite, blood mixed with water would be foul, if not indigestible. The koldun with Concentrated Vitae is the opposite. Any blood poured into water increases in potency, leading to a fine way of maintaining a herd's reserves.

System: Upon completion of the rite, blood consumed when mixed with the chosen water conveys double the number of blood points as normal. The rite only concludes if the water is befouled with another substance.

Eyes of the Dead

Level Two Rite — Genius Loci — Attribute: Perception

As Servitor's Perception allows the koldun to see through the eyes of beasts, Eyes of the Dead conveys the ability to see through the eyes of spirits.

System: As per Servitor's Perception, with the same restrictions and method of neutralization, but on spirits.

Animate Curios

Level Three Rite — The Transylvanian Kraina — Attribute: Manipulation

As with Treasured Ornaments, the koldun rouses the spirits of objects around his haven. With Animate Curios, the ornaments gain animation and levitation —a sword may fight, a mirror break upon an intruder passing, and so on.

While their skill in guarding may be limited, such animated ornaments easily alarm the superstitious.

System: Once the rite is concluded, the combat and intimidation ability of anything animated is determined by Storyteller discretion. A mundane, traditionally non-violent tool or object bears an Intimidation pool no greater than 3, and a combat pool no greater than 4; a weapon or dangerous apparatus has an Intimidation pool no greater than 5, and a combat pool no greater than 7. The rite concludes if the koldun's haven is put to the torch or the objects are destroyed.

One with the Forest

Level Three Rite — The Białowieza Kraina — Attribute: Stamina

Koldun speak of a time before the Long Night, when they studied kraina with the Lhiannan. One with the Forest allows the koldun to fold himself into a tree within his homeland, and emerge from another in the same area.

System: In the forest where the rite concluded, the koldun may step into any tree broader than him, and emerge from another in the same forest, of equal or greater breadth. The vampire cannot remain in the tree. This permanent effect is neutralized when a tree the Cainite has stepped into that night is felled.

The Floating Dead

Level Three Rite — The Black Sea Kraina — Attribute: Dexterity

Water is no enemy to the koldun. The Floating Dead allows the Cainite to step upon and cross any body of water without sinking, no matter the load he carries.

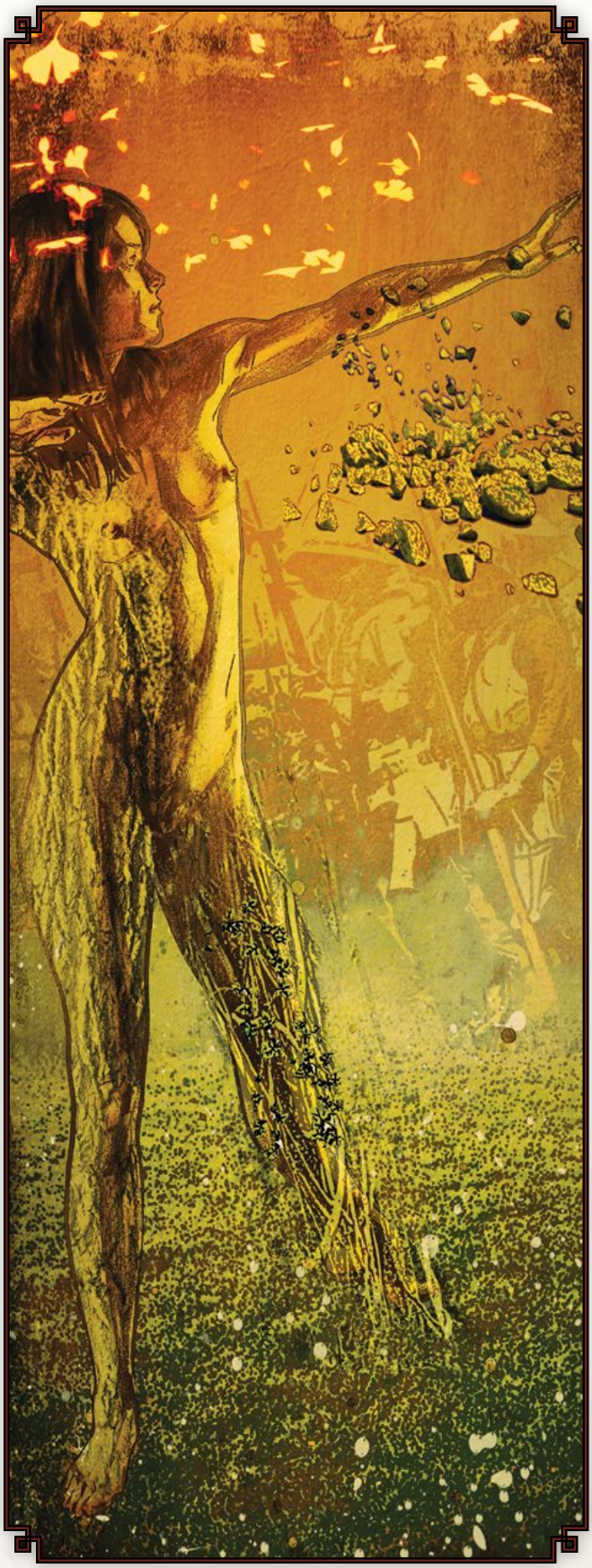
System: When the rite is concluded, the Cainite gains the ability to cross rivers, lakes, and even seas without sinking beneath the waves. This permanent power is nullified if the Cainite is ever submerged in water, by choice or force.

Scrying Pool

Level Four Rite — The Black Sea Kraina — Attribute: Intelligence

Scrying Pool allows the koldun to utter the name of anyone she knows and see their current activities displayed in a body of water, in place of her own reflection. The target's location may not be obvious, and sound isn't transferred, but the view — which is a reflection of the target's face and surrounding background — provides useful clues.

System: By stating the name of someone she knows, the koldun can immediately see what that individual is doing by peering into water. The ability to activate the rite's powers is only terminated if the subject of a scrying



is informed someone is spying upon them. This accusation can be unrelated to the koldun.

Evoke the Storm

Level Four Rite — The Transylvanian Kraina — Attribute: Wits

One of the mightiest known kraina rites; Evoke the Storm allows the Cainite to summon foul weather, lightning strikes, and horrendous gales. The koldun using this rite have sunk ships, electrocuted warlords to death in their gleaming armor, and made rivers burst their banks and wash away villages.

System: To activate the powers imbued by this rite, the Cainite must stand somewhere elevated and open, where the full horizon can be viewed without obstruction, such as a cliff or grand castle. From this point, the koldun can summon forth gales and storms anywhere he can see, stopping just short of hurricanes. The effects of this power are to be determined by the player, with agreement by the Storyteller. This permanent rite is waived if the practitioner is ever awake past the dawn.

The Dark Arts of Necromancy

Scratch a corpse and you come away with more than skin beneath your fingernail. Each layer tells a tale. The farther one digs, the more one learns. Dig deep.

— Marchesa Liliana, Wearer of the Triple-Faced Mask

It's with good reason mortals and Cainites alike distrust necromancers. Those few who put their services on display show uncanny manipulations of dead flesh and spirit substance, neither of which can be deemed healthy, rational pursuits. To meddle with the corpse is to invite rotting plague. To defy the laws of life and death by communing with the deceased is profane in the extreme. Yet, Necromancy is a diverse church. Despite the fearful reservations possessed by the majority, there exist others who recognize the wonder presented through use of the dark arts. While some such dabblers are horribly immoral monsters prepared to slay and revivify cold meat into an imitation of life for the thrill of control, others are passionate scientists trying to explore the process of death and its possible circumvention. For every creative practitioner with aims of furthering understanding, there's a ghoulish necromancer who prefers the company of the unspeaking dead to warm-blooded companions.

When a Prince wants to interrogate the spirit of a fallen rival, he summons a Giovani to court. When war between the Voivodate and Fiefdoms of the Black Cross reaches a new front, Lamiae and Cappadocians are brought forth to display their prowess in spreading disease across the battlefield and allowing each foot soldier a second attempt at fighting, albeit with less fine control than before. Such power is visible, affording the Graverobbers, and even lesser known necromancers such as the Nagaraja and Impundulu, recognition. Such acknowledgment is awarded at arm's length however. Ventrue warlords do not want the stain of decay on their reputations. Tzimisce tyrants want their subjects fearing *them*, not some transient death sorcerers.

The Spoils of Death

Death does not ride alone. He is accompanied by three others. Where Death snatches life unerringly, with swiftness, His siblings leave a trail of ruin.

— Claudia di Sangiovani, Seeker of the Mysteries

A necromancer unearths bodies brought to their ends by plague. She arranges the corpses in formations simulating embraces, kisses, and lovemaking. She spills her vitae upon the dead, and incants the names of her ancestors. The new moon in the night's sky stares blankly at the starlit scene. Achingly, with creaks and snaps, the fleshy shells shudder to life in parodies of romance. They conclude their carnal congress, and stand before their exploiter — animate servants with the fire of passion locked in their sunken eyes; rotting forms hosting the vestiges of the Giovani's long-dead relatives. As the necromancer leads her servile family from the pit, a voyeuristic neonate hides in the trees, and he asks himself, "Is it over?"

Sadly, it's not.

Necromancy leaves a scar — or sequela — on the world, at the material and metaphysical level. The blemish of the forbidden arts marks the location at which the Discipline of Necromancy and its associated rituals are practiced. When a simple rite occurs, the sequela will likely be minor: the plants in the surrounding area will remain stunted for a few nights, and the fertility of nearby mortals will wane for a similar duration. As the level of ritual increases, and the Discipline's effects become egregious, the resultant symptoms grow in their profanity: livestock manifest bizarre, toxic mutations, and parts of the recently buried dead return to life of their own accord.

Whenever multiple successes are rolled for the use of necromantic powers, the Storyteller should feel free to allow any of the following effects to take place. While they may originate within this area, they will persist outside. If a character reeks because of this, and steps outside the area, he will continue to reek.

Once elapsed, the duration does not result in the sequela dissipating instantly. Rather, the effects reduce gradually, ultimately homing in on the source of the necromantic ritual.

SEQUELA EFFECTS

- **Level One:** For environmental sequela, plant growth slows. Living creatures and Cainites exhibit no ill effects. Necromantic sequela have no effect at this level. They last one night, and can affect up to ten square meters.
- **Level Two:** For environmental sequela, plant growth ceases. Living creatures lose a dot of Stamina against sickness and diseases. Cainites exhibit no ill effects. Necromantic sequela have no effect at this level. They last three nights, and can affect up to one hundred square meters.
- **Level Three:** For environmental sequela, plants wither and die with only expert maintenance keeping them alive. Living creatures lose a dot of Stamina and suffer drastic reduction in fertility. Cainites emit a pungent, rotting odor, increasing Social difficulties by 1 (with no effect on Cappadocians). Necromantic sequela decrease all Necromancy-related rolls by 1. Parts of dead bodies can exhibit a limited form of animation without direct necromancer involvement. This lasts one week, and up to 250 square meters.
- **Level Four:** For environmental sequela, plants die at rapid speed, with nothing able to preserve life. Living creatures lose two dots of Stamina and suffer drastic reduction in fertility. Babies born to infected mortal creatures bear mutations or die during labor. Cainites visibly share the appearance of corpses, issuing rotting smells and bearing unhealthy sallowness, increasing Social difficulties by 2 (with no effect on Cappadocians). Necromantic sequela decrease all Necromancy-related difficulties by 1, and the necromancer gains a dot of Occult. Dead bodies in the area exhibit full animation and wander, only acting with violence when met with aggression. This lasts two weeks, and affects up to 500 square meters.
- **Level Five:** For environmental sequela, plants mutate, becoming highly toxic and often carnivorous. Living creatures lose two dots of Stamina, and bear mutations including noxious pustules, rotting skin, and suppurating sores. All within the sequela are rendered permanently sterile. Cainites exhibit definite symptoms of rot and decay, increasing Social difficulties by 2 (with no effect on Cappadocians) and reducing Appearance ratings by 1. Commonly, Cappadocian faces molder off at this stage. For necromantic sequela, all Necromancy-related difficulties are lowered by 2, and the necromancer gains a dot of Occult. Dead bodies in the area exhibit full animation and aggression, attacking mortals without hesitation. The Gauntlet weakens and spirits appear in the living world with greater frequency. This lasts one month, and affects up to a square kilometer.

Example: Heather rolls two successes for Marchesa Liliana's attempt at the three-dot Necromancy power Ashen Lady's Embrace (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 284). Her roll of multiple successes triggers a necromantic sequela. As Liliana searches her victim's home, the Storyteller describes her surroundings. The leaves from trees outside the cabin start to fall, curling as they touch the soil. The victim's dog ceases barking and now lays upon its bed looking ill. As Liliana departs, she steps over the corpse of her victim. The Storyteller describes that despite his being very much deceased, the man's hand still twitches and grasps as if animated with life, the fingertips dragging him into the woodland. As Liliana treks back towards the city, the Storyteller explains the same ill effects tormenting the environment for a good quarter of a kilometer (1/10 of a mile).

The conditions persist for seven nights, by which time the environment and Liliana begin to shuck the effects of the sequela. When she returns to the woods after nine nights, she no longer smells like a corpse, the radius of effect has grown smaller, and the hunter's dog is looking a touch healthier. Upon her final return two nights after that, the Storyteller explains how the effects of her Necromancy now only permeate the plants in the interior of the house. The trees outside are beginning to show signs of strength, and the dog is healthy once more.

Therefore, land where a four-dot Necromancy power was used will remain blighted for 18 nights (two weeks at Level 4, one subsequent week at Level 3, three further nights at Level 2, and finally a single night at Level 1). The sequela from use of a Level 5 power cannot be added to, until it has reduced in size and potency due to time elapsed.

Sequela are a common reason for necromancers to move from domain to domain, or make their havens outside a city. Poisoning the well you drink from is never a sound tactic. However, the deeply invested necromancer who remains static has much to gain from harvesting the ill effects of such an aftermath. Balancing the temptation to practice

At What Cost

The aspiring necromancer may balk at the necromantic sequela, but such is the cost of power. Forming armies of corpses and binding spirits should never be easy, or without a price.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the sequela of a necromantic ritual or Path can be waived through the expenditure of a temporary point of Willpower by the necromancer, or possession of a relic that soaks such unholy effects.

Necromancy in an infected environment with the threat of being driven out by the Inquisition is a struggle all vampires capable of this Discipline must manage. Princes often dictate a necromancer may utilize her powers, but only in service to the liege of the domain. To committed necromancers, this is but a small price to pay.

Concealed Paths

There are arts the Graverobbers do not share with Princes, or at least, not for so common a cost as feeding privileges, the right to Embrace, or haven within the liege's domain. Cappadocians who weave their webs of information and intrigue through the courts, either sitting upon thrones or lurking behind them, often make use of the secretive Path of Skulls. Such practitioners call themselves Harbingers for their cohesive goal of bringing an end to the War of Princes and securing their own widespread power bases. The nascent Path of Woe is an unknown. Its architect is alternately named Rosalina, Rossotto, or de Rubeis for his or her carmine hair, but the founder's clan is a mystery to most necromancers.

The Path of Skulls

Collect the skulls of thine enemies and friends. Death never need signal an end to their utility.

— Gentilman, the Plague Doctor of Sarum

Cappadocians are often dismissed as apolitical, fit only for work in dungeons and plague pits. They possess none of the blood-borne talents allowing for manipulation and control of mortals. The expectation that a Graverobber would be more at home elbow-deep in a cadaver isn't fanciful, but there exists a strata of the clan who enjoy remaining hidden, allowing their childer to wade through corpses while they play kingmaker. These Cappadocians call themselves Harbingers. Their order has existed for millennia. It would form the backbone of the clan, were its numbers not depleted in recent centuries. Rumor holds that the founder of the clan confined a large number of Harbingers to Hell itself.

The Harbingers use Necromancy in an atypical fashion. Before the Long Night degenerated into the War of Princes, they created the Path of Skulls — a necromantic Path dedicated to the theft of identity and knowledge from the dead. From throne rooms to merchant caravans, necromancers who channel the Path of Skulls exert mastery over the diplomatic scene and Jyhad. Cappadocians invidiously guard the Path of Skulls, largely due to the secrecy of the Harbinger agenda. Cappadocians who know the Path will occasionally mentor those who show a subtle political acumen. Knowing whether to assassinate a monarch, his queen, or their heir; perceiving whether to deliver, amend, or destroy a message from one court to another — such behaviors are observed by the Cappadocians who call themselves Harbingers, and rewarded by tutelage on the Path of Skulls.

• Calvaria Emissicius

One of Clan Cappadocian's most prized secrets is the ability to spy via the eye-sockets of the dead. Few enquire why Graverobbers festoon their havens with the skulls of their victims. A simple Cainite may pass off a cluster of skeletal remains as morbid decoration, not realizing from the empty sockets of a skull peers the gaze of a necromancer.

System: The necromancer must possess the skull of any creature he's personally slain. The player spends a blood point and rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 5). Failure has no effect; a botch means the skull crumbles to dust immediately. Success means the necromancer can instantly enter a meditative state in which he can see through the sockets of the skull, canceled only once the trance is broken or the sun rises. This spying state can be reentered a number of times equal to the number of successes.

•• Consilium Mortuus

Myth holds that the dead tell no lies. In truth, wraiths and animate corpses are as capable of falsehood as any other being, but the Harbingers believe there's a grain of truth to the fable. The Cappadocians seek a way to guarantee truthful responses from the deceased, and possession of the skull is the key. By conversing with the decapitated head of the departed target, it transpires that prying a guaranteed truth from decayed lips is quite possible.

System: The necromancer must possess the decapitated head of a being whose language he would understand. The player must spend at least one blood point and roll Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty 6). Failure has no effect; a botch means the head will answer only in lies to the necromancer's

questioning. Success forces the head to answer one question posed by the necromancer truthfully, but it must be to a question to which the head's former owner would know an answer. For each blood point spent above the initial one, an additional question may be asked.

No spirit is summoned with Consilium Mortuus — the dead being with whom the necromancer communicates isn't even aware of being channeled. The answer comes through vestigial memory, traces left in the head's rotting brain, imprinted on its putrefying tongue.

••• Ammorsus Vicarius

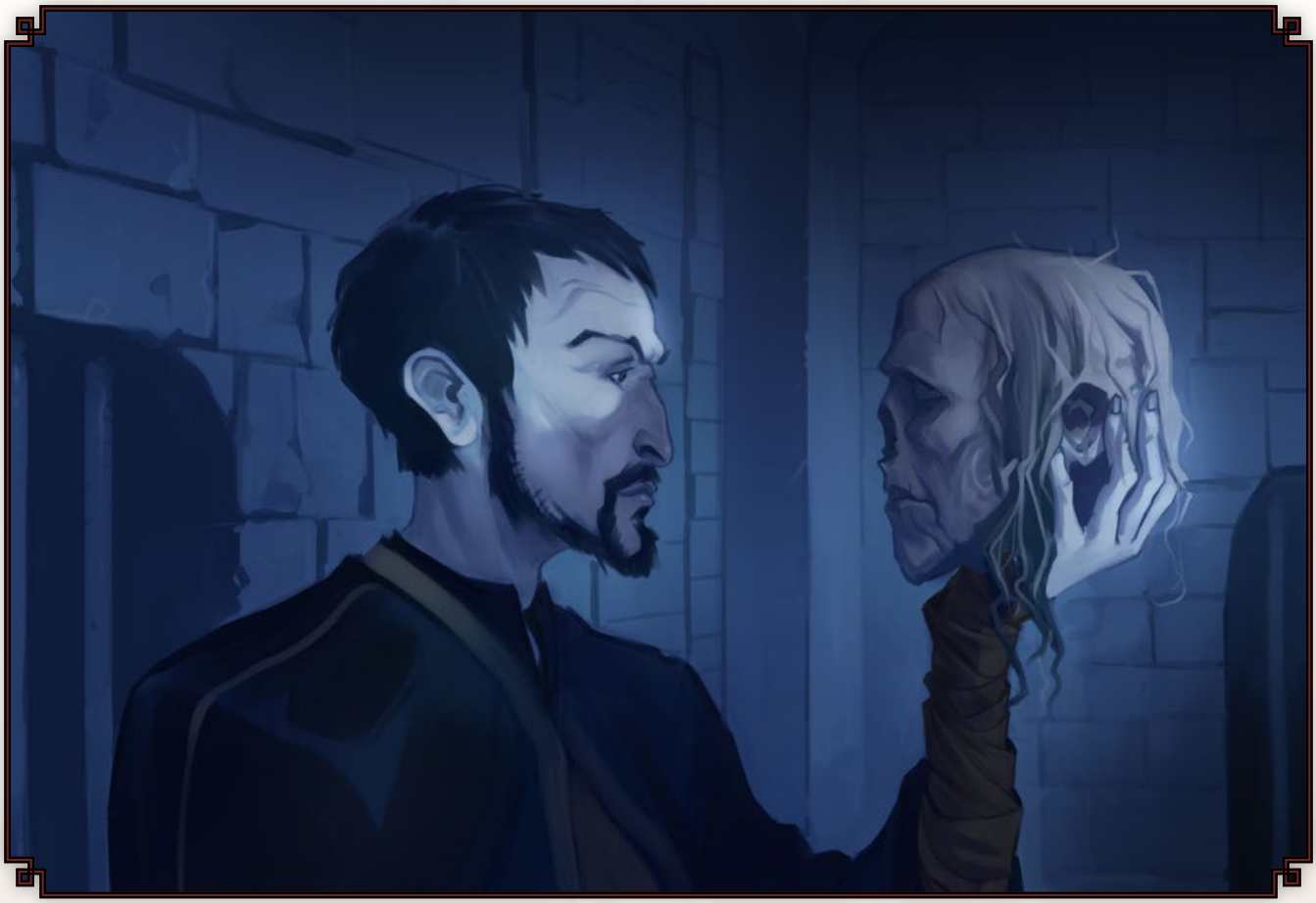
Those practicing the Path of Skulls know being the recipient of sensitive information is a deadly business. The fetish of the Path — the eponymous skull — bears more utility than a simple medium for communication. It can act as a brutal tool in the hands of an accomplished necromancer, and often must do, for necromancers make many enemies.

Using this power, the necromancer can grip the mandible and maxillae of the skull to use as a bizarre close-quarters weapon, affix the skull to a spear-point to attack from a distance, or even leave the skull alone, to act as a trap. If not under the manual control of its wielder, the skull has a limited range. Such a restriction often leads necromancers to place these skulls in beds, on desks, or inside chests. When the teeth clamp down on a victim, blood flows. Each drop rejuvenates the necromancer.

System: The necromancer must possess a skull or rotting head with all teeth removed. The player must spend one point of Willpower and at least one point of blood for this power to take effect. In place of teeth, a vicious row of fangs emerges in the skull, remaining until it consumes as many blood points as spent by the necromancer in its activation. At this point, the skull becomes inert and its fangs fall out.

The skull instinctively bites when in a half-meter (1 1/2 feet) proximity to living flesh and warm blood. With the vampire's expenditure of a second Willpower point, it will also tackle Cainites. The skull is able to propel itself half a meter (1 1/2 feet) with jaws wide on a single occasion, with a total combat dice pool of 6 and standard difficulty. A successful bite from an independent skull is an immediate clinch from which the skull will not retract until destroyed.

The skull may be wielded as a weapon by the necromancer, in which case it holds the same combat dice pool and difficulty as the weapon upon which it's affixed (see **V20 Dark Ages**



p. 349). In this case, the skull will willingly retract its bite if the necromancer pulls it away from a victim.

The skull's bite deals three levels of aggravated damage for every turn its fangs are gripped on a target. It also consumes one blood point per turn, which is necromantically channeled to the Cainite who gave it power. Vitae channeled in this way can count toward a blood bond.

The skull is destructible, but takes at least one turn of focused attack to destroy. For the purposes of defense, the skull cannot dodge or maneuver. It has a Strength rating of 3 for determining resistance to being pried free and a Stamina rating of 2; it only has three health levels, and it can only soak bashing damage.

A necromancer may animate multiple skulls by making the expenditure of Willpower and blood for each.

•••• Exedo Animus

Outsiders are to never know the benefits of this power, for they will assume the practitioner guilty of the Amaranth. The necromancers who perform Exedo Animus are not consuming the soul of one of the dead, but are allowing the memories of the deceased to inhabit their bodies for a time. Such presence gives the spirit no power over the host, but does give the host complete access to the identity, personality, and memory of the deceased.

By bearing a skull — either from a mortal or Cainite — the necromancer forms a sympathetic bond with the skull's former owner. Necromancers have used this power to fool the loved ones of the deceased, by indicating they speak for the dead's last wishes. Others slay rivals, gaining access to their secrets by drinking memories from the skull of the deceased.

System: The necromancer must possess a skull, and know the identity of the person of whom the skull once formed a part. The player must spend two Willpower and two blood points, and roll Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7). Failure has no effect; a botch means the memories of the deceased will be confused and misleading. Success allows the necromancer to upend the skull and drink the personality from it. For each success, the necromancer gains an hour as host to the skull's memories and identity.

The effects of Exedo Animus allow the necromancer to perform Intelligence-based rolls surrounding recollection and memories of the deceased at a difficulty decreased by 3. These memories stop at the point of death — the spirit in communion is a shadow of life, rather than an independent, thinking wraith.

Exedo Animus also grants the necromancer the power to impersonate the identity of the deceased, gaining three dice on Performance-based rolls when doing so. Such an imitation suffers penalties when the necromancer doesn't physically resemble the dead source of her mimicry, but when utilizing Obfuscate or explaining she's channeling the dead instead of *being* the dead, these acts are more successful.

••••• Degulo

When Degulo was first practiced, its necromancer creators celebrated in a long, grim reverie. These nights, Degulo's efficacy is weighed against the dangers it presents. Where Daemonic Possession (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 280) focuses on the art of transposing a departed spirit into the empty shell of a corpse, Degulo is the method by which a necromancer consumes a fragment of soul and retains it forever as a part of himself.

The process by which a necromancer eats a spirit requires great sacrifice on the part of the practitioner, who must give up a part of himself to allow the dead to move in. Some necromancers are known to strip their bodies of frailty in order to take on the souls of mighty warriors, where others lose knowledge of their own languages to make room for ancient, arcane dialects. At the extreme end, some Harbingers divest themselves of their clan-given powers in exchange for Disciplines possessed by passed Cainites. Tales tell of Cappadocians who attempt to lose their curse, replaced with that held by another clan. To date, these attempts have been met with failure, but necromancers are known for their commitment to incessant experimentation.

Necromancy's Tangled Paths

There are parallels between powers on various necromantic Paths; this is not so unusual. Philosophers and magicians poke at corpses and draw similar conclusions, while necromancers and eschatologists discover comparable methods of summoning spirits. Few take identical routes, but their likenesses can't be discounted.

When necromancers encounter one another using different rituals and powers to achieve similar effect, the outcome ranges from enthusiastically sharing notes, to attempting to unrepentantly destroy one another. Jealousy runs rife in cults dedicated to the esoteric. When a necromancer can bind the soul of a deceased rival, there's little incentive to question her while she still lives and can pose a threat. Spirits are infinitely more malleable.

System: The necromancer must possess the skull of the being whose powers he wishes to ingest and subsume. The player must spend two Willpower and make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). Willpower cannot be spent to create an automatic success on this roll. Failure has no effect; a botch means the necromancer loses whatever he was prepared to sacrifice for the Discipline, but gains none of the benefits. Success allows the necromancer to unhinge his jaw and consume the skull whole, subsequently subsuming elements of the devoured spirit.

Degulo forces the vampire to lose any one trait on his character sheet. The Storyteller then replaces this trait rating with that held by the dead person whose skull has been consumed:

Example: Simon is playing Silvanius, a Cappadocian with mastery over the Path of Skulls. Silvanius has procured the skull of his former lord — a Lasombra named Hywel. Always covetous of the Magister's battle prowess, Silvanius wishes to consume this part of Hywel's soul. Simon specifies to the Storyteller that should the Discipline use be successful, Silvanius will replace his Strength rating of 2 with whatever Hywel held. Simon deducts two temporary Willpower from Silvanius' sheet, and makes a Willpower roll. He rolls 2, 2, 5, 6, 9 — just enough for a success. As Silvanius' jaw drops open and Hywel's skull disappears within the Cappadocian's maw, a change comes over his body. Wracked with pain as his muscles wither and atrophy, at first Silvanius believes something has gone wrong. But then, ligaments knit and sinews tighten, muscle-mass forming from the consumed spirit. The Storyteller explains to Simon that he can mark a Strength rating of 4 on Silvanius' character sheet.

The vampire using Degulo is restricted to swapping only one trait rating, and as the skull is consumed in the act, this act cannot be repeated with further traits from the same spirit. Unlike the other levels of the Path of Skulls, if there is a wraith of the deceased, it is affected by this power, gaining the trait bequeathed by the necromancer in exchange for its own.

Degulo's sole restriction applies to Disciplines, allowing only for an equal rating swap of Cainite powers. A necromancer cannot exchange his one dot in Auspex for another Cainite's four dots in Dominate, but can exchange his one dot in Auspex for the first dot of the deceased Cainite's Dominate Discipline. The practitioner of Degulo then loses his chosen Discipline as a Clan Discipline, gaining the consumed Discipline as his new Clan Discipline.

The Path of Woe

The Inquisition condemns their victims to be damned for all time, but they just handle the killing. We deal with the damnation.

— Rosselini, Roman Necromancer

The Giovani proficiency in handling spirits is widely respected by other necromancers, excepting one rare breed — a syndicate of Roman mortals and vampires bearing the name Rosselini, or variations of it. The necromancers following supposed matriarch Rosalina are as adept at ensnaring wraiths as any Giovani, but where the Young Ones probe, interrogate, and barter with ghosts, Rosselini necromancers torture and drain the dead, despoiling the lands of the living in the process. Ironically, most see the Giovani as crude amateurs at best, especially disparaging the Path of the Sepulchre. To its Rosselini founders, the Path of Woe parallels a sacred art form, bearing righteous support from mortal hunters operating under the papacy. These inquisitors would see heretics' souls suffer further, begging for absolution even beyond death. The necromancers who know the Path of Woe are only too happy to carry out the papal edict.

The mortal Rosselinis — bearing the name simply as tribute to their scarlet-maned leader's epithet — have been Embraced into diverse clans and bloodlines. While the Cappadocians and Giovani are chief among their regnants, practitioners of the Path of Woe are found among the Followers of Set, Toreador, and Lasombra in smaller numbers. The Path is new in these nights, but with Louis IX of France preparing another crusade to retake Jerusalem and Christian fervor burning hot, Necromancy styled as a holy form enters vogue within Cainite courts.

• Finding the Locus

Wraiths are often bound to objects, locations, and individuals known as Fetters. Rosselini necromancers know that to flush one out into the open typically requires detecting and threatening its Fetters. From there, interrogation or destruction can commence.

System: The player spends one blood point as her vampire rubs vitae into her eyes, and rolls Perception + Awareness (difficulty 5). Failure has no effect; a botch means the necromancer mistakes the wrong object for a Fetter. Success allows the necromancer to see an ectoplasmic glow surrounding something important to a wraith, such as the sword used to kill him, the dress she died in, the house in which he grew up, or the daughter she gave up to the Church. Each additional success allows the necromancer to see trails to other Fetters for the same wraith. The Discipline effects last for one scene. This power only allows the vampire to see a Fetter. While the wraith will often manifest if its Fetter is threatened, the necromancer will not be able to see it until it makes its presence obvious.

• • Expurgate the Damned

Rosselini necromancers don't care to summon or bargain with spirits. They threaten the dead, and strip away their defenses. If a necromancer is confident that a spirit is in the

room, circle of bones, or vitae-painted boundary, Expurgate the Damned forces the wraith to make itself known. It doesn't bind the spirit, or compel it to talk, but it puts the wraith exactly where the Rosselini wants it.

System: The necromancer must be in an enclosed space, form a circle of human bones, or paint one using his own vitae. The player must spend one blood point (more if painting a circle, with volume at Storyteller discretion) and roll Wits + Theology (difficulty 7, reduced by one if a Fetter within the area is identified, by two if the Fetter is harmed, and three if the Fetter is destroyed). If the wraith was within the area affected by Expurgate the Damned prior to the roll, a success ejects it from the Shadowlands and in to the living world in a vulnerable, physical form. A failure results in the Power not working; a botch pulls the vampire through the Shadowlands, where she finds herself subject to whatever the wraith has planned.

Wraiths expurgated into the necromancer's area bear the statistics in **V20 Dark Ages** (p. 403), and can soak both bashing and lethal damage. Wraiths brought forth in this way can freely return to the Shadowlands, but few do when their Fetters are under threat.

• • • Blood Scourge

Blood Scourge allows a necromancer to inflict torturous pain on a wraith, much to the delight of the Inquisition and Rosselini necromancers. The power demands sacrifice on the part of the necromancer, as she must give of her own vitae. As a bearer of True Faith may possess blood of burning glory, the necromancer's sanctified vitae inflicts purgative pain on the damned. Most necromancers take their time using this power, as a means of drawing out the suffering, and whittling secrets from the spiritual victim. The corpus of the wraith peels off in rotting chunks as the vitae connects with it. The Blood Scourge is a truly foul necromantic weapon.

System: The player spends a minimum of one blood point. The vitae flows freely from the palms and soles of the necromancer, who may cast her hands as if wielding a whip against the spirit before her. The player must roll Melee + Dexterity for her Cainite to hit the wraith, with the wraith granted the chance to dodge if in a position to do so. For every point of blood spent, the necromancer will inflict this number in aggravated damage on the wraith. This burning vitae causes such agony as to increase the difficulty by two on any attempt by the wraith to use its powers.

The Curse of Necromancy

When necromantic rituals are practiced, they stand a high chance of failure where the necromancer is poorly schooled. On the roll of Intelligence + Occult (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 292) to see whether a ritual is successfully performed, each failed ritual should be recorded by the Storyteller. Each failure will build toward a Flaw to be decided by the Storyteller, who can decide whether to continue accumulating the failures, or "award" one-point Flaws for each failure.

Curses such as a horrifying visage, incurable disease, or perpetual haunting may seem unduly punishing, but each point of Necromancy-induced Flaw reduces the difficulty of the ritual when it's next attempted. The pathway to great power can come at huge cost.

Blood Scourge cannot harm wraiths in the Shadowlands, unless the necromancer is present there.

•••• Cursed Eucharist

Necromancy is a costly endeavor, often leaving its masters drained and cursed for following paths none were meant to tread. The Path of Woe allows a resurrection for the necromancer, at the point her determination is flagging. To the necromancers on this Path, the Cursed Eucharist is a gift from God and proof He wants them to continue their holy work. Only by locking their fangs on a wraith, does God show this blessing.

System: The player rolls Stamina + Theology (difficulty 6) while the necromancer attempts to feed from a wraith. On a failure, nothing happens; a botch results in burning ichor being drained from the spirit, causing one level of aggravated damage to the Cainite. Success converts the Passion being drained from the wraith into temporary Willpower, at a rate of one Willpower to every two points of Passion being consumed.

••••• Purge the Apostate's Soul

The Rosselini take their papal mandate seriously. It allows them to practice their Necromancy freely in a world increasingly hostile to magic. Boiling heretics' souls and drinking the run-off is an honor and bonus to the truly malign members of the faith, who recognize the warm benevolence of God in the allowance of their terrible acts. Purge the Apostate's Soul is an infallible method of sending spirits to Oblivion.

Blood magicians narrow their eyes at practitioners of this power, recognizing similarities to their own Cauldron of Blood (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 302), and wondering whether a necromancer stole and reworked their power. Necromancers of course insist that it's quite the other way around, their power being eminently superior and blessed by the Inquisition.

System: The player spends three points of Willpower and rolls Intelligence + Theology (difficulty 8), while the necromancer is in the presence of at least one wraith. Failure results in nothing happening; a botch reverses the effect onto the vampire. Each success inflicts a level of aggravated damage on the soul of the wraith and anyone else within a 10-meter (11 yard) radius of the necromancer, mortal or undead. For every health level lost by the wraith, a sloughed pool of ectoplasm is produced. The necromancer can drink this, recovering one point of Willpower for each pool lapped up from the ground.

The use of this power irreversibly contaminates the 10 meter (11 yard) radius surrounding the necromancer, making it a sphere where life is incapable of growing, and into which wraiths can never again enter.

The Secrets of Setite Sorcery

Sutekh. Set. Typhon. The Serpent. All are words I use in place of "chaos."

— Kemintiri, recently awakened Setite Methuselah

Ask a Cainite Prince which clan she forbids from her domain, and expect one answer: the Followers of Set. It has been this way for millennia; so it is in these nights. Setites have many uses; they attempt to make friends, and adore forming alliances, but nobody wants to be on the losing end of a deal. When a vampire brokers with Setites, he must constantly question, *"What does the Serpent gain, and what do I lose?"*

Setite Sorcery — or Akhu, as it's known to Egyptian Setites — bridged the divide between clans, for a time. As the Long Night wore on, Setites known as the Witches of Echidna offered their services in domains along the Mediterranean, from Iberia to Constantinople. This unique blood magic — predating the rise of the Tremere — increased the value of Setite presence, and encouraged Princes of all lines to provide Serpents sanctuary and a role in their courts. Come the War of Princes, Setites are commonly persona non grata. The Witches of Echidna fade from view. The abilities granted by Setite Sorcery are no longer offered to vampires of different clans. The Followers of Set appear to be consolidating their power, and this means restricting Setite Sorcery to Sutekh loyalists. Yet, the remnants of the Witches pursue a campaign of disseminating their knowledge before they meet annihilation.

There's hope Setite Sorcery will persist, among the many intrepid Cainite mystery seekers, but evidence points toward the Egyptian Setites being advised by their Laibon brethren, who demand this blood magic remains confined. The Laibon Setites' agenda is unknown, but the result is their drawing closer to the Sutekh temples in Egypt, offering and receiving counsel in turn, before heading south and practicing Setite Sorcery with renewed purpose and fire in their hearts. "Setite Sorcery" is a misnomer. Vampires descended from Followers of Set founded the Discipline, but the Witches hold little affinity for their storm god-worshiping siblings. Clans who know little of the Discipline imagine a form of blood magic dealing wholly in the corruption of innocents and enslavement of the clan's foes, forcing them into the service of Set. The Discipline's actual genesis, utility, and subsequent diffusion to Setite schismatics — called bloodlines, by the other clans — silences such gossip, but few dig deeply enough to discover the truth.

The Winter of the Witch

You destroy us because you fear our prophecies are true. You may kill us all, but we shall pass on our years of wisdom to every one of Echidna's children; the Jörmungandr, the Daitya, and yes, even you. All shall know the truth, and dread it.

— Ophioneus IV, Witch of Echidna, seneschal to the Prince of Athens

The Witches of Echidna are the paramount practitioners of Akhu, though their numbers wane in 1244 CE. Long viewed with distrust due to their links to Typhonic Setites, an internal clan war started in the last century continues to this night, wracking the Followers of Set. Accomplished oracles, the Witches anticipated a coming betrayal and purge of their line. They predicted their Egyptian brethren's attempts to destroy their heterodox sorcerous material, or liberate it for return to Egypt and the Hierophants. An ongoing struggle harrows the clan, but separating the Witches of Echidna from their treasured blood magic proves difficult. The Dark Ages see Gorgons making every effort to teach diverse Setite cults in the arts of their Discipline, including the vampires among their executioners.

By way of the Witches' tutelage, in Egypt Orthodox Setites study and brandish this cryptic form of blood magic as a means of tracing and contacting their founder. With the support of Lazarene Cappadocians, they warp the Discipline into an adulterated form of the Spell of Life. In the ranks of the Norse, there exists the Hall of Jörmungandr — a cabal of sorcerers calling on the legends of the Midgard Serpent for inner strength and the ability to distribute this power among their childer and servants. Constantinople plays host to the burgeoning Children of Judas — a cult predicated on decadence, temptation, corruption, and Judeo-Christian guilt, who use the Discipline to debase and break the spirits of their victims. The ostensibly Hindu Daitya of Mangaluru and the Hoysala Empire twist their faith into another form of blood magic using the Witches' sorcery. The Setite Laibon of Nubian origin wield their own form of Setite Sorcery, focused on communing with a hundred gods, and rallying power in the city of Mogadishu.

Each of these lines — and more — practice Setite Sorcery in divergent ways, calling on different benefactors and applying the results in varying terrible fashions. The Witches of Echidna seek this conclusion. They recognize the perfidy of Typhon, and his will via the actions of Setites pitched against them. While they fight against their fates, they zealously attempt to spread the blood magic cultivated over millennia, to ensure their clan — in whatever form it takes — remains strong against the slaves of the Aeons and the caprice of their Antediluvian.

Setites differ wildly, and while many possess zealous piety, this allegiance is to as many gods as there are cultures. Akhu's practitioners tap into and subvert the power of vampiric faith. Faith spawns devotion; devotion leads to blind fanaticism; fanaticism leads to chaos. Cainite scholars who study the Discipline describe it as the power to forge chaos into a tool — whether that tool is for aggression, seduction, or transfiguration. This blood magic is a tangled weave of ethos and dogma, with each cult of practitioners declaring dominance over its peers.

Followers of Set who know of their sorcerers identify them as a peculiar breed. While divergent faiths rarely see eye-to-eye, the Witches counsel the different creeds on sharing a sympathetic relationship. Each one believes he or she is correct, so while they may undertake varied journeys, damning one another for heresy is in opposition to their respective dogmas. Their acts of sacrifice and supplication to the gods at whose feet they kneel unify them, in a mutual, terrible aim:

Their sorcery will strengthen the clan. Their sorcery will identify their founder's location. Their sorcery will please their founder and make him love them forever. If this aim is not accomplished, their maddened founder will be sure to consume them.

The Witches of Echidna believe their nights are numbered. The Hierophants hotly disagree with their portents, and want the bloodline eliminated before their words convince other Setite cults of Sutekh's disesteem. With their probable destruction at hand, the Gorgons work even harder to disseminate their knowledge, further fracturing a clan others suppose unassailable.

Heretical Sympathizer (2 pt. Social Merit)

You are the protector of a Witch of Echidna, or you possess a trove of their knowledge. Whether you do this with altruistic or selfish aims, you stand to benefit from the cult's permanent support and earn the Orthodoxy's enduring distrust. Depending on the situation leading to your taking this trait, you may be able to court favor with the opposing side by selling out your Gorgon ward and gaining the endorsement of the Egyptian Followers of Set.

Hunted by the Hierophants (4 pt. Social Flaw)

Setites claim their religion is one of freedom from indoctrination and conditioning. The Hierophants openly agree, and then crush those who seek to subvert Sutekh's faith. Whether as a result of being a Witch of Echidna, one of their postulants, or simply a Setite who throws off the yoke of Sutekh — the Hierophants are displeased by your decision and seek you out, actively sending Setite warriors to bring you to heel. Depending on the depth of your sins, they will either aim to capture you and bring you back to the Courts of Egypt, or destroy you on the spot. The Hierophants brook no profanation, and will not remove you from their lists until they're convinced of repentance or Final Death. Storytellers are encouraged to make this vampire's existence one of paranoia and near-constant threat.

Postulant of Echidna (3 pt. Supernatural Merit)

You receive the tutelage of one of the Witches of Echidna. This Merit allows you to take Setite Sorcery as a Clan Discipline in place of one of your others. If you're outside the Setite Orthodoxy you may find yourself hunted for integration or destruction by others of your blood. Most Postulants of Echidna have several points in the Mentor Background to account for the Gorgon tutor, though the lack of a Mentor may imply the Witch met destruction. This Merit is predominantly held by Setites, but rumors hold of Witches of Echidna passing knowledge to vampires of other clans.

Akhu

Much remains hidden of the Witches' knowledge. It's said they possess a dozen of what the Tremere call "Paths," and now more circulate, due to the Discipline's spread. Setite Sorcery focuses on the many gods served by the Followers of Set, and the multitude of monsters believed to be a part of their line. Principally, each Path focuses on a different subversion of existing faith. Setites might use Sorcery to transfigure one's body to become a godlike emulation of a deity, erode the belief of a rival religion, or steal from another belief system the miracles that make the faith so appealing. Witches of Echidna advise each cult in the basics of many Paths, and then leave their students with just enough materiel to begin crafting their own.

System: Vampires studying Setite Sorcery commonly learn the Potestas Tempestatum (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 298) as their initial Path, in emulation of Set's role as god of storms. Their secondary Paths often come from one of the following, or altered versions of the magic wielded by the Tremere. Initiating their powers is identical to that of Thaumaturgy (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 297) except that in the place of Occult, use Theology.

The Revelations of Duat

What the childer of Sutekh know of Duat is what draws us to their bosom. Their faith propels them to moments of great revelation in the study of death and rebirth. We study at their feet. We watch. We learn.

— Lazarus, exiled Cappadocian Methuselah

The Spell of Life is the purview of those dedicated to Set's ancient enemy, Osiris. While Witches of Echidna are unable to replicate the powers of the Spell, they long ago forged the first steps on a Path of Akhu; named The Revelations of Duat. After teaching Orthodox Setites from Saqqara to Luxor in the precepts, the Gorgons abruptly abandoned Egypt and retreated to Greece. The reasons behind their departure have fallen into apocrypha, if ever they were known.

Shortly after the Gorgons departed Egypt, Cappadocians in the cult of Lazarus arrived to seek sanctuary with sympathetic Setites. The Setites — novitiates in the promising Revelations of Duat — turned to Lazarus' get for further tutelage. The result is a Path of Setite Sorcery tainted with the gifts of Necromancy, often shared between Setites and Cappadocians willing to devote themselves to the study of death and — at the very least — lip service to Anubis or Hades.

• Sight of the Jackal

Sorcerers with Sight of the Jackal immediately identify ghosts who resist the call of Duat, spying free dead as they ride living vessels or hide in objects and structures. The sorcerer's eyes gain a translucent grey film until the duration of the power concludes.

System: Additional successes allow greater perception of the strength, shape, and history of the ghost. The power lasts for the remainder of the scene. Ghosts become aware of the sorcerer on a botch, and depending on their temperament they may attack the vampire. Sight of the Jackal does not allow sorcerers to communicate with the dead.

•• Weigh the Virtues

To judge the dead, Anubis must weigh virtues and sins. The Setite practicing Weigh the Virtues is able to identify any morally compelling deeds performed by a once-living being, whether they're using this power on a ghost, a corpse, or a vampire. Knowledge of these deeds is key to practicing the further powers on this Path, as Imbue with the Grace of Anubis is predicated on understanding the deceased's crimes.

System: For each success, a different deed — from saving a child from a crocodile's jaws to murdering a rival over a lover — appears to the sorcerer in vivid detail. On a botch, this power reveals one of the sorcerer's sins to his most trusted companions.

••• Pharaoh's Sentry

Unthinking, unemotional, unyielding sentries are the best guards a Prince could want, but to create them

a sorcerer requires a dead body and a dispossessed spirit. Pharaoh's Sentry creates an emotionless automaton who forever serves the sorcerer's edict, acting as a warrior and vigilant guard with no moral qualms against killing, or fear of dying in service.

System: When a sorcerer practices Pharaoh's Sentry on a corpse dead for a single night in a place a ghost haunts, a fragment of the ghost's soul moves to the corpse and causes its reanimation. The sorcerer must have used Weigh the Virtues previously to identify a spiritual hook with which to snare the spirit. Each success allows the power to be used on a corpse dead for an additional night.

The sorcerer's edict must be a single sentence, i.e. "*You must guard this tomb from all intruders but me,*" or "*You must follow this man to his house, and kill him inside.*" Ambiguity leads to grave mistakes. In the previous examples, "*You must guard this tomb from all intruders,*" would lead to even the sorcerer being attacked should he attempt to enter the tomb; and "*You must follow this man to his house and kill him,*" may lead to the victim's murder at a premature point, rather than inside the hoped-for building.

The animated corpse remains active permanently without succumbing to decomposition.

A botch on attempting the Pharaoh's Sentry causes the corpse to rise and mindlessly attack its summoner until destroyed.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 0, Wits 1

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2

Disciplines: Fortitude 1

Willpower: 5

Health: 7

Notes: These sentries commonly have a reserve of seven blood points, and crumble to dust after using them. This blood is dead for the purpose of feeding, so cannot be consumed by vampires.

•••• Imbue with the Grace of Anubis

An unthinking guardian is a potent defender for havens and temples, but sometimes a sorcerer requires Anubis to return more than a flicker of life. By the jackal god's grace, a sorcerer taps into the good deed or sin identified through Weigh the Virtues, and imbues the corpse animated through Pharaoh's Sentry with a compulsion based on that deed. The animated corpse is still victim to the one-line edict, but now harbors emotions and inclinations based on the harvested spirit's former deeds and will act on them when not specifically directed to do otherwise. These inclinations always manifest themselves violently.

The utility of this power comes through the chaos it causes. A sorcerer who sends a horde of corpses possessed by violent emotion into a town, knows the domain will come apart at the seams.

System: A sentry with basic memory of its defining deeds will act impulsively in ways similar to its former life; i.e. a former murderer who cut the throats of merchants will always slay any traders it meets with attacks to the neck, while a priest who assisted the poor will target the homes of the wealthy, burning them down and massacring the inhabitants. A single success plants the memory of one deed in the mind of the sentry, with each additional success giving the sorcerer the option to place another.

The spirit from which the deed is drawn for the creation of this powered sentry is aware of its virtues or sins being drained, but without the sorcerer's aid cannot recover the piece it loses to this power. The sorcerer must spend a blood point to return the deed to the spirit from which it originated, at which point it becomes an unthinking sentry retaining the same statistics, but none of the freedom of thought.

The sentry attacks its master on a botched roll.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 0, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Disciplines: Fortitude 2, Potence 1

Willpower: 7

Health: 8

Notes: These sentries commonly have a reserve of eight blood points, and crumble to dust after using them. Storytellers may augment statistics appropriate for the deed imbued in the corpse.

••••• The Sorcery of Life

In Setite apocrypha, it is said Set's favored servants were the immortal entities known as Bane Mummies. Set and his childer attempted a version of Osiris' Spell of Life in attempts to create their own eternal servants, but the Spell went horribly wrong. Where Osiris' children were given eternal life, purity, and wisdom; Set's immortal servants were possessed only of impurities, regurgitated by the demon Ammut, and reborn as Bane Mummies. Set's frustration was destructive. He blamed his childer, and destroyed every Setite of the Fourth Generation unlucky enough to be in his presence.

Eventually, Set devoted adoration to the Bane Mummies, but ever resented the failures of his childer in their creation. Bane Mummies still exist, but the secret of their conception is something guarded within the temple sanctums of the Hierophants. Few wish to anger Set in such an egregious way as to create new Bane Mummies.

The Witches of Echidna — certain of an impending doom — are not so apprehensive. Their studies reveal a different route to empowering their servants, and in concordance with Lazarus' Cappadocians bequeath this research to the Egyptian Setites. With the Sorcery of Life, a form of Proto-Bane Mummy is twisted into life. The practitioners risk their founder's displeasure creating of these servants, but measure the gamble as one worth taking.

System: The sorcerer must have taken steps necessary to Imbue with the Grace of Anubis, and hold in their thrall an animated corpse bearing the fire of emotion-fueled deeds. Each success converts to points the sorcerer can assign to the sentry's Attributes or Disciplines. Any Disciplines granted to the sentry must be from those the sorcerer holds. The Proto-Bane Mummy is still subject to the sorcerer's whims, but will attempt intricate tasks if its Intelligence is increased to allow understanding of complicated commands.

As with Imbue with the Grace of Anubis, the spirit harvested for the creation of this Proto-Bane Mummy is aware of its virtues or sins being stolen. The sorcerer must spend a blood point to return the deed, at which point the corpse becomes an unthinking sentry retaining the same statistics, but none of the freedom of thought or capability to use Disciplines.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

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

Disciplines: Fortitude 2, Potence 2

Willpower: 9

Health: 12

Notes: These are the default statistics for the Proto-Bane Mummy, before additional successes are translated to additional points. These monsters commonly have a reserve of ten blood points, and crumble to dust after using them. They can acquire further blood through eating a vampire or mortal's flesh. Storytellers may augment statistics appropriate for the deed imbued in the corpse. Proto-Bane Mummies can soak all but aggravated damage.

The Revelations of Eden

Your Dream will be only of the Serpent.
— Khay'tall, Serpent of Constantinople

Cainites know the Followers of Set for their duplicity and prowess in manipulation. Few warrant this reputation more than the Decadents of Constantinople, otherwise known as the Children of Judas. Referred to as heretics by the Hierophants, the Children of Judas are suspected to be the next targets for elimination once the Theophidian Witches' fall is complete.

Despite opposed ideologies, it's perhaps their shared desperation forcing the Witches of Echidna to provide fleeting tutelage to the Decadents. Khay'tall's faction never requested their aid, but welcomed it before his destruction; his Setite followers have picked up the reins of the Revelations of Eden in the wake of the Witches' departure.

A simple Path at its core, the Revelations of Eden break down the will and faith of a victim, allowing room for the Serpent of Eden, Sutekh, or whichever god the sorcerer chooses to take its place. The ultimate corruption found in Path comes with most victims' willing submission to its powers. Like Presence, this Discipline generates a feeling of contentment and desire in its subjects.

System: One success is enough to erode a victim's temporary Willpower. Every additional success removes a further point of temporary Willpower, with higher ratings in the Path bestowing additional effects on the victim. These effects are not cumulative. The victim may attempt to resist the effects of the Discipline with a Willpower roll (difficulty 6). A botch by the sorcerer grants the victim a recovery of all temporary Willpower. A botch by the victim forces the loss of one point of Conscience/Conviction. This power cannot be resisted by using temporary Willpower. Losses noted as permanent can only be recovered via the torpor or Final Death of the Setite sorcerer responsible.

- • Remove one point of temporary Willpower from the victim, and one dot from her Willpower rating.
- •• From the victim remove one point of temporary Willpower, and one dot from her Road rating.
- ••• From the victim remove one point of temporary Willpower, and one dot from her Self-Control/Instinct.
- •••• From the victim remove one point of temporary Willpower, and choose her new Demeanor.
- ••••• From the victim remove one point of temporary Willpower, and choose her new Nature.

The Revelations of Midgard

The cult is family. Family is all. As Jörmungandr eats its own tail to ensure the world survives, we give of ourselves to ensure our family flourishes.

— Edla Olavsdatter, Priestess of the Hall of Jörmungandr

The story of Arnulf "Jörmungandrsson" is infamous among Setites. A Norse merchant turned cultist, ghoul, and ultimately a vampire, Jörmungandrsson was Embraced in Egypt with great pomp and ceremony. His return to the Kingdom of Norway was predicted by the Witches of Echidna to spawn a new front in Typhon's battle against the Aeons. Instead, Jörmungandrsson formed a new cult dedicated to the Midgard Serpent as an aspect of Apep; antithetical to the majority of Setites, but far enough away to not be immediately destroyed by the Theophidians. The Jörmungandrsson imbroglio is a sore point among Orthodox Setites, who swiftly erased record of Arnulf's Embrace, but could do little to remove the widespread word of the prodigal son who abandoned his clan.

For centuries the Hall operated its cults in pleasurable isolation from other members of their clan, their philosophers following a version of the Path of Apep (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 449) they call the Path of Jörmungandr. In recent years, members of the cult traveled beyond Scandinavia and encountered the Witches of Echidna in the Courts of Love and Fiefdoms of the Black Cross, suffering persecution from the clan's Orthodoxy. In solidarity, the Hall granted the Witches alms, and in turn were taught the principles of a sorcery they call The Revelations of Midgard. The Gorgons were impressed by the Hall's devotions to its cultists, seeing in the Norse vampires a devotion to family once shared by the Setites of the Nile.

The Revelations of Midgard allow members of the Hall of Jörmungandr to draw on their inner faith, and with it bolster their ghouls, beasts, and mortal servants. While their faith is inarguably debased, the powers gifted to them by the Gorgons reinforce followers' devotion to the cult.

• Bestowment of Scales

Perhaps more than any clan, the Followers of Set value the worth of their cultists. Many see little difference between the status of a mortal, ghoul, or vampire, in service to their god. This is a belief permeating the clan in all its varied forms. For the love of their cultists, practitioners of Bestowment of Scales may absorb harm dealt to their favored servants, who gain patches of serpent scales on the flesh that would have otherwise been harmed. These scales never disappear, evidencing the grace of Set and the Midgard Serpent.

System: Bestowment of Scales affects any living creature or ghoul from whom the Cainite has fed, no matter the distance. When such a cultist incurs harm, the sorcerer can reflexively apply her undead endurance to the cultist's body, the damage being transferred to the vampire. The Cainite can soak this damage in the normal way, though any damage not soaked by the vampire is suffered by the cultist. The cultist develops scales in the place they would have suffered harm. Depending on the location, this can reduce the cultist's Appearance rating, though Setites acknowledge the deformity as a blessing. A botch on this power allows the vampire to absorb the damage, but prevents her from soaking any of it.

• • Suffer for Jormungandr

Above all else, the Followers of Set are a clan of faith. Belief inspires its bearers with the ability to perform great deeds, both noble and destructive. The Hall of Jörmungandr teaches all its cultists to suffer for their beliefs; with sacrifice comes reward. Those who give of themselves for faith will surely receive spiritual recompense. Vampires who use Suffer for Jörmungandr put this belief to the test, as for their own survival, they bestow heinous wounds on their cultists. The cultists suffering in this way gain serpentine features — a narrowing of eyes, flattening of a nose, webbed fingers, and loss of hair.

System: When a Cainite schooled in Suffer for Jörmungandr receives physical harm, she may apply that harm to a mortal servant from whom she has taken blood, and to whom she has given vitae. The cultist must be within eyeshot of the sorcerer. Suffer for Jörmungandr is activated reflexively unless the vampire chooses not to use it. For each success accrued beyond the first, the vampire may inflict an additional level of the damage that she has incurred on her chosen cultist. Damage acquired in a single turn may not be distributed among multiple cultists, and any damage exceeding the cultist's health track will return to the vampire to soak or incur. The manifestation of this power reduces the cultist's Appearance rating gradually, at Storyteller discretion. A botch on the roll for this power still transfers all damage to a cultist, but each point is converted to aggravated if it's not already so.

• • • Swallow the Tail

The Hall of Jörmungandr believes in the pre-eminence of the Midgard Serpent, fated to ingest its own tail until it rears and devours the world. This strange power's symbolically similar to the myth, allowing the vampire to replenish any blood spilt in battle. Whether pouring from a lesion, staining clothes, or pooled on the ground — sorcerers are able to draw the blood to them in dancing rivulets. Setites

are known to take grievous injuries, their vitae scattering around them, before locking their foes in a hypnotic gaze as the blood upon the earth crawls its way back into their mouths like tiny snakes. Any cultists in the presence of the Setite practicing this power find the blood in their veins bulging to escape. It does not, but forever after the cultists bear snakelike blood vessels prominently marking their skin.

System: This power is always activated as the final action of a turn, after Celerity actions. Blood within eyeshot of the vampire slithers towards her, taking a turn to reach her mouth and replenish lost blood points. It is the Storyteller's discretion how many blood points are in the surrounding area, but each success rolled allows one blood point to slink towards the sorcerer. On a botch, the power forces the vampire to disgorge ten blood points minus her Road rating. This power cannot be used to drain blood from a living or undead vessel.

•••• Cycle of the Midgard Serpent

The Hall of Jörmungandr places family upon a high pedestal. Sorcerers know the importance of mortals and ghouls; cultists sustain their efforts. As they drain blood from the kine, the sorcerers return terrible, poignant gifts to the cult as proof of their god's pleasure. Setites who learn Cycle of the Midgard Serpent impose one of the greatest gifts of blood magic possible on their cultists — the ability to draw on their masters' Disciplines. Cycle of the Midgard Serpent allows sorcerers to vicariously act through their followers, though they have no control over how their cultists use the powers imparted.

System: A Setite using this power may impart points in Disciplines to a ghoul who's consumed at least one point of her blood. The number of Discipline points bestowed is equal to the number of successes rolled. The power remains until the sun next sets. Some powers are dangerous or actually self-destructive if a mortal uses them. The Storyteller has the final ruling on whether a ghoul can use a given Discipline.

For the purposes of Disciplines that require the expenditure of blood points to activate, the ghoul possesses an equal number of blood points to those consumed from the regnant on the night the power is activated. A botch on this roll results in the ghoul gaining the points in Disciplines until the next sunset, but the blood bond to his domitor breaks. The breaking of this bond is not known to the vampire.

••••• Apep's Transformation

To some carrying Set's blood, their epithet as Followers of Set is inaccurate. The Witches of Echidna did, in recent years, come to the suspicion that while their founder may be a monstrous

demigod of capricious and devastating power, the name Set is incorrect. Whatever their founder was, it posed as Set, Typhon, Apep, and even the Midgard Serpent in efforts to achieve worship and slavish adherents. Something in the blood of this Mother of Monsters manifests through Setites using high levels of Serpentis to change form. Apep's Transfiguration allows a Setite to inflict this change — one the Gorgons claim is Set's true form — on a loyal follower. The change is wracking, and painful, but the glorious physique achieved quickly converts or consumes non-believers.

System: This power only affects a mortal or ghoul cultist who's imbibed the blood of the vampire sorcerer. On a successful roll, the cultist's body spends ten turns — minus the number of successes rolled — contorting and shifting into a limbless serpent, its arms and legs sloughing off as an amalgamation of dead skin, tissue, and bone. The Apep cultist bulges into a serpent form approximately the size of a destrier. It cannot speak, but can understand its creator's language. The change into an Apep cultist is permanent. The serpent remains loyal to the vampire as a bestial ghoul, still requiring regular doses of vitae. Any Revelations of Midgard powers usable on followers remain usable on the Apep cultist. A botch on the roll to perform this power kills the cultist and provokes a frenzy test for the sorcerer, as she's presented with a humiliating failure of faith.

The Apep cultist has the following statistics:

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Intimidation 5, Performance 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Theology 3

Disciplines: Fortitude 1, Potence 2, Presence 2

Willpower: 9

Health: 15, no wound penalties

Notes: The Apep cultist commonly has a reserve of ten blood points, and sinks into a torpid state without blood. They can acquire further blood through drinking from a victim. Apep cultists can soak all but aggravated damage. Its bite attack uses eight dice (Strength + 3).

Witchcraft

And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never call'd to bear my part,
Or show the glory of our art?
And, which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you.
— Macbeth, Act 3 Scene 5

Magic is everywhere. Vampires know it because they're unnatural beings, animated by an ancient curse. They know about Tzimisce kolduns, Tremere warlocks, necromancers and secret rites that honor Set. Mortal sorcerers and shamans occasionally interfere with Elders' plans. That doesn't mean most vampires have a solid-enough grasp of the occult, but they know that secret powers exist.

Witchcraft in the Dark Medieval

Despite the secrecy surrounding it, magic is a social practice and suffers from the same biases as others. In the Dark Medieval era scholars exalt male dominated "high magic," founded in ancient philosophy and civil religious mysteries, above the egalitarian "low" magic of countryside, hearth, and home, where half-remembered paganism, folk Christianity, and nature worship combine with intuition. The term "witch" is an ambiguous one that covers everyone from unpopular, smart women to would-be demigods who know the great secrets.

The default period of the **Dark Ages** line precedes the witch craze in Western Europe, but laws against witchcraft exist and imperil anyone suspected of practicing it. The idea that natural magic comes from the Devil grows more popular over the years, but authorities more often oppose it because of its ambiguous connections with poisoning, fraud, and sexuality. Many supposed "witches" are folk healers, or have been accused of witchcraft because of petty disputes with the neighbors, so many lords and priests refuse to condemn alleged practitioners.

The divide between high and low magic reflects a power struggle between secret Fellowships of sorcerers. Their "high magicians" include the Tremere's mortal cousins in the Order of Hermes, the priest-magi of the Messianic Voices, the Muslim mystics of the Ahl-i-Batin, and the natural philosophers called Craftmasons. They're not allies, but they all give little respect to Fellowships they call "witches": shamans called Spirit-Talkers, the Norse Valdaermen, and the rustic, polytheistic Old Faith. The

Magic After the Blood

Upon the Embrace, Path-based and Awakened witches lose their distinct abilities, though they remain skilled occultists, and might develop blood magic counterparts — and sometimes, they don't need teachers. The fact that witches are more likely to develop weird powers causes vampires to variously forbid their Embrace or encourage it, depending on the clan and domain. Upon the loss of their gifts, many witches lose touch with reason and emotional stability. Incantations remain intact, as they harvest magic in the world, not the vampire herself.

Ghouls retain their magic, but may find further progress difficult. They may even fall backward in magical ability, as the Blood Oath and their addiction destroy their concentration and spiritual refinement.

The Witch Cult in Western Europe

Most witches treat their craft as a practice or calling, not a full-fledged religion. Eastern Europe possesses open pagan priesthoods, but in the West witches usually think of themselves as nominal Christians with a little something extra. But power requires commitment, and the more a witch walks the path of genuine magic, the more she immerses herself in pagan beliefs and conspiracies. The best-connected witches are Awakened. They craft alliances with lesser witches as they travel on mysterious missions. They're the closest thing to a great cult of the witches. The rest belong to gifted families and minor sects that rarely communicate with each other.

Order of Hermes appropriates "low" secrets when it can; practitioners should join (as a House in the Order, as the Tremere were) or perish. Direct persecution is rare, but high magi rarely lift a finger to aid their cousins.

Vampires usually don't share these biases. Necromancy and Koldunism both claim chthonic, pagan roots. The only vampires committed to high magic are the Tremere, who stole sorcery from their old kin and the Blood itself from other vampires. Thus, Cainites have better opinion of witchcraft than kine, and a worse view of self-styled high magic. Who uses Hermetic ritual? Usurpers. Who calls upon God for power? Vampire hunters. And who calls upon earth spirits and the dead? Respected, ancient heirs of the Blood.

On the other hand, almost everyone hates devil worshipers. Almost.

Religious and Philosophical Witchcraft

Witches mix religions up, throw things out, merge gods and saints, and add a bit of poetry. High magi categorize, but witches improvise. Therefore, a witchcraft ceremony may include some or all of the following influences.

Abrahamic Religions: Witches trade ideas with and even become pardoners and preachers, often with little direct access to Scripture. They harvest rites from gospels, psalms, apocrypha and heresy. They call upon angels by their Hebrew names. Europeans sometimes appropriate horribly mangled Muslim ideas (see Baphomet, a corruption of Mohammed), and Muslim witches (who are despised in Arabia) might babble Church Latin for effect.

Deviltry: In the coming centuries Christians will reach a consensus that witchcraft comes from the Devil and his fallen servants, but for now, low magic is usually believed to be fraudulent or crude. But everyone knows Satan menaces the world, so he must have some power here. Witches call upon him to give power to curses and other dark rituals. Some Infernalists and Baali style themselves witches, but followers of natural magic hate them for it.

Pagans and Polytheists: In Eastern Europe some pagans still practice openly, but in the West the old gods use saint's names or receive secret worship in obscure, suspiciously clean ruins. Witches invoke Celtic, Norse, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and other deities. They recognize that one god can have different names, depending on the culture, and might be manifestations of a Great God and Goddess (or a Great Goddess alone). Pagans honor lesser stream and grove gods, the seasons, animals, and the hunt. Witches may include the Fae in their rituals, but usually treat them as an ambiguous force, to deal with through established rituals.

Something Greek: Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and other Classical philosophies mutate significantly by the time they get to a typical witch, but many of them know a few names and ideas they use to either create a ceremony whole cloth, or bring clarity to magical phenomena they discover.

The Varieties of Witchcraft

Witchcraft is an imprecise enough term to refer to an enormous array of practices and powers. This chapter divides them into the following rough categories.

Folk Wisdom

The most common "witches" have no magical powers. They master traditional medicine and study nature. Sometimes they can stop pregnancies. They can brew poison, but know how a small amount of it might treat certain illnesses. They see faint animal tracks and stare down wild boars. Scholars distrust this sort of knowledge. They interpret Galen and other Classical sources to learn about medicine and anatomy. Some witches combine folk and formally learned methods, but in most cases just use whatever works. Rituals organize traditional knowledge within a witch's memory and honor her teachers and culture. Herbs have poems. Animals have runes. This era precedes scientific reductionism, so folk wisdom practitioners don't always know which parts of their lore provide the desired effect, and which are superfluous customs. Is it the herb, or the poem?

Incantations

The next tier of power exploits the remnants of ancient wisdom, recurring myths, and secrets hidden in the land and sky. Popular superstitions describe certain feats that anyone can perform, if they learn the exact ceremony. No text contains the full, correct instructions, but might lead the way to a witch discovering the last step for herself. These are called *Incantations* as a category, though many do not involve speech.

An Incantation is a bundle of strictly circumscribed magical potential, unlocked by a precise mix of materials, conditions, and ritual acts. A witch needs time and discipline to master an Incantation, but doesn't need a special soul, second sight, or any sort of enlightenment. Even Cainites may learn them. An exceptional witch might command a handful of Incantations, but knowing even one is enough to make her notably powerful.

A typical Incantation produces one narrowly defined magical effect of moderate power. Some Incantations summon magical entities against their will or bind them to service. These are the most dangerous of all, for no Incantation both summons and commands beings.

Paths of Sorcery

Extremely gifted witches learn *Paths* comparable to the blood magic used by Cainites. A witch cannot improvise a spell using her Path, but develops a deep knowledge of its subject matter. Path witches learn rituals, much like blood magicians do.

Few witches ever attain the Paths. Knowledge requires a mix of spiritual development and fate's favor. At this degree, a witch begins to transform from a practitioner of magic to its source. Only the living may learn Path Sorcery, but it inspires vampires to develop counterparts in Thaumaturgy and other forms of blood magic.

Awakened Witchcraft

Some mortals not only hear the world's secret susurrations, but can make out words within them, and command their refined souls to converse with them. They're the great witches: Spirit-Talkers, Odin's last Gallowsmen, and those called the Old Faith or Sacred Branches (*Verbenae*). These poet-sorcerers invent spells as they will, limited only by their knowledge of the certain broad categories of magic, known as Pillars. In future centuries, they will be called mages. Vampires cannot learn this form of witchcraft.

Folk Wisdom and Incantations

Most witches aren't magical beings, but unearth the world's power using exceptional skill and intuition. They're healers. They know when a strange-looking plant might possess supernatural properties. They draw a hundred subtle cues from the environment, so even their ordinary perceptions can be said to "see the unseen." Cainites are capable of feats of folk wisdom and can learn Incantations.

Folk Wisdom

Anyone can perform folk wisdom feats, but they usually don't. This form of witchcraft represents extreme but ordinary knowledge. A witch's lore often comes through distrusted channels: remnant pagan culture, mothers and grandmothers, rhymes and stories. They're considered less authoritative than proper learning, acquired from religious authorities, Scripture, and dead Greeks. Nevertheless, country superstition trains a witch to perform remarkable feats, including the following.

Animal Entrancement: Roll Charisma + Animal Ken with difficulty equal to an animal's Willpower, with a modifier ranging +2 for wild herbivores such as deer, to +4 for predators such as wolves and bears. Success means the creature will not attack or flee unless another person or creature disturbs the beast. Successive rolls may make the creature familiar with the witch so that it never treats her as a threat or prey.

Body Control: Ascetic rituals teach the witch to stave off hunger, thirst, and other physical discomforts. Roll Stamina + Awareness (difficulty 8). Success removes wound penalties (though not the Incapacitated state) for a scene, or penalties for hunger, thirst, or lack of sleep for a day. Each successive scene or day (respectively) adds +1 to the difficulty of this roll until it fails. After that, body control may not be attempted again until the source of discomfort is treated by healing, sleeping, eating, and so on.

Childbirth and Sexual Health: Witches with two dots in Medicine and one or more dots in Hearth Wisdom possess an advanced understanding of sexual health. They know how to prevent childbirth, act as midwives, and recognize the "diseases of Venus." No systems are necessary, because this should be used to determine the social role of certain witches, not burden characters with game systems. Characters should be assumed to have their sexual and reproductive health well in hand unless their players suggest it as the basis for a story.

Drugs and Poisons: Crafts (Herbalism) or Hearth Wisdom allows a witch to create any of the poisons and drugs on p. 360 of **V20 Dark Ages**. Roll a dice pool of Intelligence + the relevant skill. Difficulties range from 5 (alcohol) to 8 (damaging poisons and hallucinogens). Add to the difficulty when the witch wishes to concentrate or disguise the substance, such as by reducing a poisonous sap to a small amount of dry powder.

Illusion: Some witches use the Legerdemain Skill to perform feats that fall under the modern definition of stage magic, but portray them as real miraculous acts. This requires a Manipulation + Legerdemain roll (difficulty 6) resisted by each audience member's Wits + Alertness roll (difficulty 6). When an audience member succeeds, he notices sleight of hand at work. Preparing the space ahead of time, constructing special props, using assistants and other factors either decrease the difficulty for the witch or increases the difficulty for the audience to catch on.

Mentalism and "Spirit" Communication: A witch might use what we now call cold reading and misdirection to make people believe she can read thoughts or communicate with ghosts and spirits. In both cases, she learns information from the target by using leading questions and reading body language. A Manipulation + Empathy roll

(difficulty 6) resisted by the subject's Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 6) determines if the witch maintains the illusion of supernatural ability, but successes on the witch's roll determine whether or not she elicits information even if the target detects the ruse. Again, props and assistants who gather information for the witch can lower her difficulty, or increase the target's difficulty to detect the deception.

Incantations

An Incantation is a bit of magic bound up in the world. Some say the gods never created the world thoroughly and left parts undone, locked away by divine magic. Incantations are the keys to this potential, but also a promise made to secret powers that once unleashed, the chaos will take some specific form. Incantations aren't flexible spells or routes to greater and greater power. Each one completes a simple task so long as the witch performs its required ritual perfectly, and with supreme focus. Where many of a witch's other abilities rely on intuition, Incantations require rote learning to perform correctly. They permit only the slightest stylistic flourishes — a cry to Mary instead of The Morrigan, perhaps — and so require investment in a Supernatural Merit: Incantation

Incantation (2 Pt. Supernatural Merit)

Your character learns a single Incantation. This Merit may be purchased during play several times, each for a new Incantation. This costs six experience points.

Incantation Procedure

Once the character learns an Incantation, he may use it by following this procedure:

Ritual Requirements: Each Incantation can only be cast in a particular time, place, or both, such as at under the full moon or at a murderer's grave. The Incantation also requires specific materials: certain herbs, say, or worms boiled in a cauldron. Only then can the witch perform ritual acts to rouse the Incantation's magic.

Circle, Amulet, or Potion: The witch must decide whether the Incantation's power affects an area (circle), is bound to an object that can be moved (amulet), or is stored within an object that is later consumed (potion). Incantations possess one great limit compared to other forms of magic, in that they cannot truly affect distant targets unless an amulet or potion is brought to its location. The

exception is To Summon a Being, which draws the target to a location. Note that "circle," "amulet," and "potion" are examples and general names, and a length of red string that expends its magic when tied to someone might count as a "potion" for rules purposes. A circle need not be truly circular, but can define a space with no more than a 15 meter radius. An amulet is transferrable, and can be stolen from or secreted on a person.

Willpower Expenditure and Roll: At the ritual's conclusion, spend one point of the witch's Willpower and roll her permanent Willpower (difficulty 8). Only one success is required to bring about the Incantation's full effect. Additional successes may only be useful if some supernatural power might interfere with the Incantation, in which case the successes scored serve as a general measurement of its strength.

If the roll fails, nothing happens, but the materials are no longer fit for the Incantation, and must be replaced if the witch wants to make another attempt.

On a botch, malformed magic ripples through the witch, causing sudden pain and illness. This inflicts one level of aggravated damage and leaves a mortal bedridden for a few days.

Incantations and Other Magic: Incantations cannot undo the effects of Path magic, Disciplines, and Awakened magic. They're inferior to all of these, and these forms of magic can undo Incantations using their usual systems for countermagic, as if each Incantation were a one-dot power that scored one success.

Sample Incantations

The following Incantations represent a small sample of those learned by witches, and have been selected because the undead may find them of interest. Design more using these as examples.

For Luck

Witches shift fate with this Incantation, calling on saints or gods to reorder the normal course of destiny.

Ritual Requirements: The witch defines one narrow circumstance ("in battle with a sword," or "when I argue with the tax collector," for example) while inscribing the names or symbols of powers that will intercede for the beneficiary. The ritual must be cast outdoors, but out of sight of the stars — heavy clouds are typically required.

System: Cast in a circle, the Incantation benefits one person of the witch's choice for activities taking place within it, granting a –2 reduction on the difficulty of dice rolls related to the circumstance three times, each chosen by the beneficiary's player. An amulet provides this same benefit to anyone wearing it. A potion gives the imbiber one automatic success, which can be stacked with personal Willpower expenditure, on one future, applicable dice roll of the beneficiary's choice.

For Wounds

This Incantation treats serious wounds. It can even knit and smooth the dead flesh of Cainites, though it is less potent than the power in their blood.

Ritual Requirements: In all cases, the witch must acquire the source of the injury: ash from a fire that burned the victim, or a weapon that struck her. (Thus, it can't be used in cases of immaterial or very distant sources of injury, such as body-ripping magic or the sun.) In a magic circle, the witch touches the source to the victim. In the case of a potion (usually a poultice, actually) someone (not necessarily the witch) must touch the source of harm to the potion before the injured party imbibes it. Once cast, the Incantation must be used before the following midnight.

System: The Incantation heals one level of aggravated damage or two levels of lethal damage.

To Bestill the Grave

Witches know that in cursed times and places, the dead shake off grave earth and walk, offending natural cycles. Cainites find this Incantation of singular interest, viewing it not as a way to ensure the peace of death, but deny their enemies childer.

Ritual Requirements: On a moonless night, the witch invokes the Creator or the powers she believes reign over death. She honors an effigy of one of the dead with traditional grave rituals, and includes some payment for the psychopomp, such as a silver coin.

System: Cast in a circle, the Incantation ensures that no being can be brought back from death. Their bones cannot be magically animated, and they cannot receive the Embrace. They do not become wraiths or otherwise persist beyond death. This doesn't affect anyone returned from death outside of the circle, or from before it was enchanted. An amulet ensures its bearer cannot be brought back from death, no matter where he is. These effects last for the life of the witch, suggesting an easy way to nullify them. This Incantation cannot be crafted into a potion.

To Find Treasure

Witches are often called on to find hoards left by dead lords, vanished Roman settlements, or bandits. This is a well-known Incantation not only because of its utility, but

because witches pretend to know it to bilk fools out of coins, because it takes money to find it. Despite the name, the Incantation can be used to find items with no monetary value, but not the living or undead.

Ritual Requirements: Under the full moon, the witch burns or buries an example of the treasure being sought: Roman coins for a Roman hoard, for instance. It need not come from the source being sought, but should have two points of association ("gold" and "Roman," in the prior example). Fraudsters typically ask for more money, and only pretend to destroy it.

System: Cast in a circle, the Incantation gives the witch a vision of the treasure's exact location, if it lies within the circle's bounds, and a rough idea of how to get to it (if it must be dug up or sits in a chest, for instance). A potion gives its user a vision of the nearest items of that type and its immediate surroundings, along with its direction at the time the potion was consumed, but no other information. An amulet pulls in the direction of the nearest items of that type, but provides no other information. The amulet continues to possess this power until its bearer touches or sees treasure of this type, or until the next full moon.

To Summon a Being

A witch must learn a separate summoning Incantation for every type of being she wishes to summon. In the case of humans, Cainites, demons, spirits, and intelligent individuals in general, the Incantation summons a specific individual — one could devise an Incantation to summon Lucita the Lasombra, but must learn it anew for one of her childer. In truth, witches most often use this to summon animals, who may be called as a class — any boar will do. A demon may aid or damn a summoner, but a deer feeds her and wanders out of the king's forest, besides.

Ritual Requirements: This Incantation may only be cast in a circle or as a potion (actually an effigy or item with the being's name on it, which is destroyed when the subject arrives). The witch must possess part of the subject's body (fur from an animal species or an individual's hair or baby tooth, for example) or in the case of ephemeral beings, its secret, "true name." Otherwise, the Incantation's specifics vary from one example to the next, and typically include at least one other burdensome element. It can only be cast once per day.

System: This is a difficult Incantation. If the initial Willpower roll succeeds, roll Charisma + either Hearth Wisdom (for animals, people, nature spirits, and fae) or Occult (for demons, Classical elementals, and other supernatural beings associated with "high magic") at a difficulty of the summoned entity's Willpower + 3. In the case of a potion, make the roll when the potion is used, even if the witch is not present.

If the roll succeeds, the entity feels compelled to travel to the summoner's presence as quickly as possible for the next three days, until time runs out or it arrives. The summoned being uses its full cleverness to come as quickly as possible while avoiding undue risk. The being gains a vision of the summoner (witch or potion user) and knows that person is responsible for its compulsion. If the roll fails, nothing happens. If the roll botches, the being gains the vision, but not the compulsion to come.

Once summoned, the entity is under no compulsion to obey the summoner's commands. The witch often bargains with sacrifices and vows of service in kind. These are perfectly ordinary negotiations, though of course magical beings often have abilities that enforce such oaths, assuming they don't rip an impetuous witch in half for calling them.

Spirits and werewolves with a Rank higher than 3, vampires below 11th Generation, and beings of comparable power may not be compelled with this Incantation, but receive the vision and a sense of the summoner's location for the three-day duration.

Greater Witchcraft: Paths and Pillars

The strongest witches delve deep into the secrets of folk magic, reconstructing the crafts of pagan sorcerers and oracles. Some identify with a god within, mastering magic as an intuitive art. These Awakened witches craft spells on a whim, mastering magic according to a general theme, or Pillar. Others fall short of this apex but find the Paths old gods left in the world. They learn spells from family elders, spirits, fae folk, secret books, or personal revelations.

Path Magic

Path-based magic has appeared in many different World of Darkness books, including **Hunters Hunted II**. Greater witches may learn the "Hedge Magic" Paths there, along with any appropriate Psychic Numina.

Adapting Blood Magic

If you prefer, you may also adapt magical Disciplines such as Necromancy, Thaumaturgy, or Koldunism into mortal equivalents. Witches might learn rituals as well. Paths and rituals with powers that affect vampires but not a wide spectrum of other beings are generally unavailable. For example, mortal witches cannot usually learn an equivalent of the Tremere's Potestas Vitae (also called the Path of Blood). You may make an exception for ghouls.

When an adapted Path's power lists a blood point cost, choose one of the following options:

- The witch suffers aggravated damage (which cannot be soaked) equal to the blood point cost.
- The witch must spend Willpower equal to the blood point cost. The sorcerer's player may only spend one point of Willpower per turn, so if more than one point is required, she must spend these across successive turns.
- The witch must inflict twice as much lethal damage as the blood point cost to another living being. Witches who engage in this sort of blood sacrifice are often unpopular, though the act itself may not be sinister, recalling the old tradition of giving the blood of oxen and other beasts to the gods.

Make the choice for each rank of the Path. It is coded into the magic itself, and may not be changed, once selected.

Despite the fact that these Paths have been adapted from Cainite blood magic they're not the same. Vampires may not teach them to mortals, or vice versa. Nevertheless, on multiple occasions mortal sorcerers have reconstructed their powers after the Embrace. This may be due to the actions of a few prodigies who were gifted witches and magi in life, and reconstructed their abilities after becoming Cainites.

Ways and Limitations

Witches learn Paths that agree with their magical theories and traditions, and cannot learn others. In some cases, a Path may exist in several traditions, though a particular witch only learns the version that fits her beliefs. The witch's style determines the gestures, words, and tools she uses to unleash her magic. A witch has fully internalized her Path, and may forego stylistic touches for a quick glance, subvocalized mutter, and furtive gesture. This adds +1 to the usual difficulty of a Path roll.

Tradition increases in importance when a witch attempts to use her Paths in places that might be hostile or especially conducive to that form of magic. High wizards call these *regio* and debate formal classifications, but for most witches it's enough to know if a place is Sympathetic, Neutral, Opposed, or Hostile. These impose the following modifiers:

Sympathetic: The place has a long association with the tradition, or possesses other properties that make it a natural place to work that form of magic. For pagan witches this includes old stone circles and faerie mounds. *System:* –1 difficulty to Path and ritual dice rolls.

Neutral: The place isn't particularly hostile to that magic in question. For pagan witchcraft, most rural locations qualify. *System:* No modifiers.

Opposed: The physical, social, or spiritual makeup of the place stands against what the tradition holds sacred. Pagan witches would find this condition exists in dense urban areas and consecrated ground. *System:* +1 to +3 to Path and ritual roll difficulties. If a place possesses an opposing religion's True Faith rating, add that rating to the difficulty.

Hostile: Some places are so inimical to a magical tradition that it becomes functionally impossible to use its Paths. Witchcraft that functions smoothly in the hills outside Rome fails in an audience before the Pope. *System:* The Path fails automatically. An opposed True Faith rating that would raise difficulties above 10 becomes Hostile. Large crowds of hostile or skeptical observers may also generate a Hostile circumstance.

Foundations and Pillars

Awakened Fellowships attune themselves to magic according to the major themes of their traditions. Such a witch learns her Fellowship's *Foundation*, a core magical theory and intuitive method, along with a number of *Pillars* that represent broad fields of mastery. To simulate this form of magic with material in **V20 Dark Ages**, use the following guidelines.

- An Awakened witch possesses a Foundation rating of 1–5 dots (though a few legendary figures may possess ratings of 6 or higher) and one to four Pillars, also rated at 1–5 dots (again, legends may possess higher ratings, similar to vampire elders).
- Give the Foundation a keyword representing the witch's theory of magic and herself. For the pagan Old Faith, the keyword is Spontaneity, representing attunement with nature. This provides an aura similar to that granted by a Road, except that it provides a blanket +1 modifier, regardless of the witch's Foundation rating.
- Give each Pillar a keyword representing a category of magic, divided according to the witch's view of her craft. For the Old Faith, these are seasons: Autumn (wisdom, harvesting power), Winter (death, decay), Spring (life, creativity), Summer (fire, passion).
- A witch can use any Discipline (not just blood magic) that would fit under a Pillar she knows, limited to the dot rating in that Pillar. Instead of the listed dice pool, roll Foundation + Pillar (difficulty 7). Even when the Discipline doesn't require a roll, the witch must score at least one success. If the dot rating of the power is higher than her Foundation, add +1 to the difficulty.
- A witch possesses a Quintessence pool and per turn expenditure limit equal to the blood pool of a vampire

with a Generation rating of her Foundation –14. This is not blood, but supernatural energy that the witch must replenish at sacred sites. She spends these points instead of blood points whenever a Discipline lists a blood point cost. She may also spend Quintessence to make magic easier, at a rate of one point per –1 difficulty break (maximum –3).

- Awakened witches must contend with Sympathetic, Neutral, and Opposed places. If a place would be Hostile, it doesn't ban her magic, but adds a further +1 difficulty.
- On a botch, the witch's magic turns against her. This backlash usually inflicts one die of aggravated damage per dot of the Discipline-equivalent power she was trying to harness, and curses her with some other strange effect, such as causing her to cast no shadow or cry bloody tears for a scene. In a Hostile place, add one die of aggravated damage and increase the severity of any side effect.
- Witch Storyteller characters should otherwise be designed as vampires of equivalent power, except that no witch possesses a Willpower of less than 5.

Chapter Three: The Weight of Nobility

Fiefdoms and Vassalage

"It is this remarkable delusion of the neonate that galls me so: 'One day, surely, I shall be free!' Yet here I sit, on weary stones above a mound of ashes. To my north? A traitorous Fiend with a thirst for the most damnable of pleasures, which I provide — and he provides me wheat, barley, and a safe trade route. To my south? My blood sister bespoils every gift that I lay at her feet, and yet I lay them. Why? She has the ear of a dozen worthy knights with kit, horse, and the loyalty of blood. Better to buy her off. To my west? Catholic savages. To my east? Cultured, clever Saracens. And in my bed? A bloated, bleeding corpse of a Bulgar kine that I must call 'my lord' in public, as he pretends in public to keep an unseen daughter that I might replace! Tell me, my childe… How free am I? How free are you, when all you give me are the skills I've spent two decades to cultivate upon your flesh? Tell me — are you free, in the nights I have given you?

Time is counted in receding lengths of chain. I suspect I have been too generous. Return to me."

—Blagorodna Komnene, in a letter to her childe and "champion" afield

When thinking of the Dark Ages, the first images that often come to minds are armored knights and high castles, noble lords and silk-adorned ladies. In many ways, this era of history in Europe and beyond is defined by the systems of feudalism — where noble lieges grant rights, authority, and land to lesser nobles in exchange for their service, loyalty, and a share of their wealth. Many parallels can be found between this, the Traditions, and the relationships between sire and childe. As mortals reap the benefits of ordered agriculture and strict social tiers, so too do the Damned.

This section contains both rules and storytelling considerations for fiefdoms in **V20 Dark Ages**. The path to power is a stairway for a reason — each step stands atop the one before it.

The Liege, the Land, and Many Hands

At its heart, a vassalage or feudatory arrangement is a barter of services. Since ancient days when priests would manage rites and calendars in exchange for care and honors to their gods, the terms of duty have expanded, but never truly changed. From the tithe of the temple came the warlord's tax of grain. From that tax of grain? Armies marched and territories expanded far beyond the reach of one leader to manage. Lands were offered as rewards, and in return? Grain and loyalty.

That grain could be called gold, sons to serve, well-forged steel, or any other resource. The core truth of the trade has never changed. For the spoils of the servant? The liege must offer security.

The feudal societies of medieval Europe honed and codified these practices, empowering local liege lords in the twilight of the imperial legions. Now? The liege stands mighty in the lands he rules, answering only to his liege in turn, and only then against threats beyond his limited reach. Nobles fight amongst themselves, a War of Princes no less savage or cunning than one Cainites have fought in the shadows for millennia. Have they learned these methods from the Damned?

Or perhaps, are the Laws of Caine simply the oldest, bloodiest example of an ancient truth?

For the spoils of the kine? The eldest must offer security. One who fails? Dies.

By Oath of Fealty

Vassals are provided various rights and honors, including land in rare cases, in exchange or *in fee* for their allegiance and services, up to and often including military service. More than just their blood and skills, these vassals are required to provide the supplies and support that skilled men-at-arms might need: training, weapons, armor, and provisions. Equipping such a force is no small expense, and without these feudal arrangements, the grand cavalry charges that redefined war would be very small indeed. So, as the liege provides the means, the vassal provides value.

In terms of game mechanics, lieges provide their vassals access to one of their Backgrounds as an Anchor Background (**V20 Dark Ages**, p. 182) they may pool with their own dots, in return for twice as many Background dots in return. The liege retains ownership of the Anchor Background, but grants its use in exchange for services or favors by oath. Rescinding access to the vassal costs them a dot, the same as ending any other pooled Background arrangement.

Due to this lopsided relationship, the vassal only gains half of the Anchor Background's value, rounded up, before adding their own dots to the mix. The rate of exchange favors the liege, but without the liege's benefices? The vassal would often have nothing but a sword — a double-edged threat if there ever was one, something a wise liege keeps well in mind.

The following Backgrounds may be provided by a liege: *Allies, Contacts, Domain*, Fame, Influence, Mentor*, Resources,* or *Status**

The following Backgrounds must be provided by a vassal: *Allies, Alternate Identity*, Contacts, Fame, Herd*, Influence, Resources,* or *Retainers*

These Backgrounds may only be granted* ***to* *a Cainite. Mortals might unknowingly provide them, at Storyteller discretion*

A liege may add a vassal's Backgrounds to pooled resources among peers, but must provide Backgrounds they alone control toward any vassals they would claim. However, a vassal might draw from his own associates to meet his liege's needs. This drives the vassal to keep his friends under a close watch, as failure to provide will fall upon his head alone.

A liege cultivating vast holdings may grant the same Background as an Anchor a number of times equal to the Background's rating. It doesn't drain five dots worth of Resources to provide several vassals with an equivalent of Resources 3, but the returns they provide retain value.

Backgrounds provided by a vassal cannot exceed the dot rating of his liege's original gift, before rounding. So, if a liege offers three dots of Allies, her vassal would have an Anchor of two dots to work from. In return, he still owes six dots, but could offer Resources and Herd 3.

Each vassalage also comes with a mutual oath of Terms. The greater the elevation (and thus, the more valuable Background a liege provides), the stricter and more significant the oath's Terms. Work with your Storyteller to determine the general requirements of each party. Both liege and vassal have the option to offer additional or more significant Terms in lieu of Background dots. For example, swearing not only to protect a territory in a liege's stead, but also to stand as the liege's champion afield in all wars, grants additional value to the liege and justifies higher favor. In these cases, a party can opt to take a new Social Flaw as a Term rather than provide that many dots in Backgrounds. Single-handedly facing a liege's hated Enemy should have its perks. At Storyteller discretion, certain tasks or oath Terms might require a related Flaw by their natures.

These Backgrounds can only be called upon within the Terms of the agreement, which should probably note exactly when, how often, and how long the Background can be tapped. Failure to honor these Terms gives either party the right to withdraw their gifts entirely. While not enforced by blood or curse, few will tolerate an oathbreaker, miser, or upstart minor noble in their midst.

That said, a liege has far more recourse to protect herself or delay her aid than any vassal.

Territories of Another Kind

The model of vassalage doesn't have to be restricted to land in exchange for knights. Few great overlords have large enough holdings to split among their entire host. Many lesser knights or men-at-arms work and fight for rights and favors, but expect no territory and receive none.

This model can apply beyond lordship to other arenas. A queen of her little rats may trade food and secrets among her smartest boys and girls. A master merchant might of-

fer loans and tips to a fleet of captains, traders, and hired thugs. In giving one's life and service to the Church — or a more secretive cult — one might reap rewards material, clandestine, and (one would hope) divine.

As always, for the spoils of the kine, the elder offers security.

Everything else is just dots on a sheet.

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

You have one or many subordinates who provide you services in exchange for your patronage and favor. For each point of this Merit, you receive two dots of Backgrounds. In addition, work with your Storyteller to set Terms you and your vassal must satisfy. A vassal is linked to one of your Backgrounds as an Anchor. As such, the rating of any particular Vassal can never exceed the anchor Background, plus the Social Flaw value of any Terms you might grant in addition.

1. You have a man at arms, a steward for your lands, or another single capable soul.
2. You're served by someone of moderate means, successful on his or her own merits.
3. You are served by someone with significant power, a lord or lady.
4. Your vassal likely possesses vassals of his or her own, toiling for the benefit of you both.
5. Your chains of fealty both elevate and bind you in your rightful place atop it all.

As above, you may possess no more Vassals than the rating of your highest Anchor Background.

Why Would I Ever Want To Be a Vassal

One might ask: "Why would a vassal go through all of this trouble for a few Background dots?" The exchange rate is slanted. The effort comes at the vassal's expense. They're more likely to have stricter terms and thus lose access to their Backgrounds at inconvenient times. So… Why?

The answers are what makes feudalism work as well as it does, shaping a continent for centuries.

High Value is Hard to Come By

When creating a character, it's a simple discussion with a Storyteller to establish 5 dots of Resources among your other Backgrounds. In practical terms and outside of character generation? That changes. It's fairly easy to justify a few new Contacts or perhaps acquiring a minor Domain. Once you start seeking 4- or 5-dot Backgrounds? A number of problems arise.

Where did this value come from? Who's doing the work to sustain it? And perhaps most important of all, why is this available to you and not to others? Receiving wealth from a liege may be the safest way to acquire wealth within their territory. If you're in a position to swear fealty and to work for them, would you really rather be on their maps as their newest, smallest competition?

Legitimacy Can't Be Bought

Even if you were to innovate, discover, or conquer your way into some significant power on the local field? That doesn't make you welcome on the playing field. Feuds and families, both mortal and Cainite, are invested in each other and the land. You are either part of that balance or a threat to it. By casting in your lot with a respected liege, you protect yourself and slip in.

Once you're a known quantity, people will be more comfortable should you rise among them. Such ties can lead to greater holdings, intermarriage, even supplanting your liege in time. But first? You need an invitation to the table. Once you're there, they need a *reason* to remove you.

Being Valuable Has Its Benefits

People hate to lose their possessions. They'll take steps to protect their property, look after their friends, and compensate their workers enough to keep them functional, if not always pleased. In a world where those of low birth, lower station, or any number of vulnerabilities can be abused, exploited, or destroyed without a second thought, being someone's valuable property has value.

Even beyond the Terms of fealty, a liege would be foolish to let her source of wealth and prestige go to waste. An attack on you is a threat to her way of life. Many problems will end before they begin, thanks to the simple knowledge of whom you work for. For the strong, it's a chance to focus your resources on your actual goals over defense. For the weak? It's survival.

Making Equity Work For You

You don't lose full access to the Backgrounds you provide to your liege, just as they don't lose all use of what they provide you. Something you use rarely or leave to manage itself might be of far more interest to your liege. "Trading In" Backgrounds of limited or situational utility for something normally beyond your reach is an excellent reason to consider an oath to a liege. You tend to have narrower interests, but a liege has fingers in many pies. That focus works for you.

Terms of Benefice and Fealty

While the dots going back and forth are worth some narrative attention, the real focus of a feudal system falls to mutual oath. These binding legal and social agreements define the realms you occupy. Know these like you would know your borders, for they decide where those borders fall.

Aid (Mutual)

The parties offer oaths of protection in times of conflict. A vassal would likely be expected to promise a number of skilled and supplied men-at-arms, while the liege would be expected to mount forces in protection of her vassal and whatever holdings he has — even independently.

Fiefdom (Liege)

This is the most familiar part of the deal, and likely the one most noticeable even to commoners. The liege grants lands or other revenue-bearing properties (i.e. Backgrounds like Resources or Domain) to her vassal, creating a foundation for the loyalty and service she might expect in return.

Homage/Fealty (Vassal)

The vassal publicly declares himself as subordinate to the liege, before God and society. Without this statement of place, the structure would not hold. Without loyalty, there is no trust. Without proof of that loyalty? There is no order. People are most definitely watching all parties.

Leave (Liege)

Rather than, or in addition to, palpable holdings, a liege might grant her vassal a local monopoly. Hunting, fishing, certain trades, or the right to regulate and tax craftsmen — these can often be worth more than soil and grain to someone with the ambition to cultivate them carefully.

Office (Liege)

Many offices within a government are granted by oath, with or without lands. Sheriffs, chamberlains, even esteemed managers of affairs on a liege's holdings might hold hereditary rights to their office by oath. Generations of common office might owe their fate to a liege's line.

Service (Vassal)

A vassal is bound to his liege, but beyond that, the vassal may also provide unique services — education, expert knowledge, a veteran's experience, or an eye toward the wilds and borders. A vassal with unique skills or knowledge is not just a resource gained, but one denied to others.

A Herd of Generations

Cainites live a long time, if they fare well in their nights. As such, they have additional concerns to address in the great game of oaths and duties that shape the feudal world. While vassalage is possible between Cainites, even popular in certain territories, more titles and lands are held before mortal eyes and require more delicate care. Gathering titles can be easy. Keeping them: That requires effort.

Acquisition

Oaths of fealty are neither freely offered nor lightly sworn. Getting a place within feudal nobility is impossible to the vast majority of mortals not already born to station. Parents pass or split their gains among their children. As new opportunities emerge, lieges are quick to secure them for those already loyal and trusted. The strict contempt for those foreign or common-born is strong. So how does someone move into those circles? Not without great risk, cost, and perhaps cruelty.

The most common elevation of status comes through war. Fighting for a lesser or greater lord and proving oneself above the common ranks is one path to being knighted on the field. Your service is secured, and in return, you can start to build a name from the very bottom. It will take years of service, cunning, and competence to earn the respect of your elevated peers, if ever. Many Cainites can put their natural advantages to use, returning from border wars as minor nobility — that is, if the local High Clans would tolerate one of lesser blood to stand among them.

Another path is wealth. While riches alone will never garner you a title, they can foster the allies and influence needed to marry yourself, your children, or your mortal thralls into higher station. The contempt of older nobility is just as palpable, if not more so, but it's a beginning. New kin will leap at the chance to dig into your coffers, take advantage of your necessary largesse, and mock you for the privilege. Few Cainites wish to waste the expense or maintain such patience.

There is a third option. The difference between a landed noble and an occupying warlord is perspective. If you prove yourself to have both the power and the willingness to play the game, the cruelly capable might find themselves rising faster than the wealthy or the brave alone. By playing at both games, they use the fear and resentment of others to their advantage. Few survive the open hostility set upon the usurper, but the wary and the cunning might garner a dark respect.

And last? With the resources and Disciplines at a Cainite's command, there's something to be said for forging one's papers and history and starting at the next country. A few bribes here, a few lies there, and you're established without the petty struggle. That said, if your secret is discovered, you will not only be vulnerable, but a source of fury for every level of society.

Choose well. Earning a place at the table takes a lifetime. You must plan ahead for far longer.

Inheritance

Mortals die. It defines their condition, in fact, but that doesn't mean that what they represent must die with them. One of the Damned might be or masquerade as the rightful liege or vassal to items of great value. In such cases, they must be sure to arrange that these holdings remain in their hands. Linger too long? The Church or other problems start to notice your good health. Fail to set up a smooth transition to a childe or puppet? You risk losing everything. At the point of inheritance, it is possible for a clever Cainite, or even a mortal, to usurp the inherited rights your oaths provide you. If so, all duties and benefices are *his* in the eyes of the mortal world. And among the Damned, if you were so clumsy as to lose your grip? You likely deserved to lose it.

Savvy elders often rotate holdings like crops, arranging cycles of pawns to retain their power. A rare few, especially among the Ventrue, even rotate from childe to sire to childe, waiting for their mortal descendants to ripen before sending them out to "tour the world" or "to visit relatives." They replace the youths, now adults bearing "the family resemblance." Scions who show promise are given new holdings among strangers, taken as ghouls, or Embraced to continue the cycle. Those who failed to impress their ancestors? They still serve — as a rare vintage shared among family.

Loss

When a vassal is killed, subverted, or betrays his liege, the liege loses power and risks losing more. When a vassal is put into question for any reason, the liege temporarily loses the dot in his Anchor Background. If the vassal can't be put back into line or replaced within a reasonable period of time, that dot is lost for good. However, if someone competent can still provide the Background dots the former vassal provided, a smooth transition can be arranged. Many vassals with dreams of standing as their masters' equals have learned how loyal their friends really are.

The liege offers security, but the spoils are hers for the taking. They are not easily supplanted.

But they are far from invincible.

Knightly Orders

But when the drivers of the ram, and other knights of the king, and the young men of our place, armed and avid for conflict, finally saw the besieged opposite them, they summoned all their courage. They may have been picturing in their mind's eye how noble it would be to die for father and fatherland, and what an honorable victory was set before the conquerors, and how infamous and criminal those traitors had been who had made a den for themselves out of the church of Christ, but in fact it seems more likely that they were intent on rushing against the besieged because they were avid and greedy to seize the treasure and money of the lord count, and that for this reason alone they were hastening forward.

—Galbert of Bruges, The Murder of Charles the Good, 1127

What is a knight? By the 13th century, something resembling the basic stereotype coalesces out of tribal war bands. Heavy cavalry needs land to sustain itself. Crusades prompt the invention of knightly orders. Somewhere along the line, the troubadours start singing about knights.

Are knights honorable? Perhaps — but they're not nice. The good ones possess a modicum of professional ethics to establish themselves as worthy soldiers. Besides, people don't

A Killer's Manners

The **V20 Dark Ages** core outlines the principles of chivalry on p. 451, and the Path of Chivalry on p. 126 discusses its norms as interpreted by vampires, who adhere to a certain degree of idealism to tame the Beast. As knighthood evolves from a profession to an aristocratic role, warriors define their social role by elaborating on the chivalric code. This leads to the genre of courtesy books, which cover everything from behavior at court to religiously-driven ethics — all necessary if a knight wants to marry well, gain the trust of his tenants, and please his liege.

Knights in military orders obey whatever strictures their masters place upon them. Templars follow a monastic rule that governs their appearance and possessions (though some of them grow far wealthier than those provisions permit), and limits their ability to speak to women.

ransom honorless knights. Are they cultured? Personalities differ, but most knights come from aristocratic backgrounds and receive some clerical education. They're more likely to be literate. Not all knights are particularly wealthy, but many are.

Can commoners turn the tide of battle to get dubbed on the spot? It's happened, but the answer is usually "no," and not just because of class barriers. Most knights aren't just lucky men with land and horses, but martial arts experts, trained from an early age to operate one of the most sophisticated weapons systems in their world. Not all knights are so competent, but the less talented either buy their way out of service through a tax called scutage, die, or get driven to penury and exile for failing to do their duty through blood or money. Common people serve the medieval war machine by feeding knights, not becoming them, unless there's a shortage of cavalry to throw into the fray.

The average knight is a killer with a veneer of manners and access to violent abilities beyond the reach of commoners, but he relies on them to maintain his position, much like a vampire. It's no wonder that many Cainites find the knight's role so convenient and familiar.

What Knights Do

Landed knights perform military service for about 40 days a year, from simple guard duty and shows of force to major battles. When they're not doing their duty they train themselves, their squires, and their horses; participate in martial games; and mind their land: a manor referred to as a knight's fee in England, and split from the liege's lands. Knights from religious-military orders often belong to collective commandries, which are subdivisions of larger priories. Such knights also pursue their orders' declared missions and political interests. Knights' tenants raise crops, maintain households, breed horses, repair arms and armor, and perform countless other duties. In the end, a knight is a human war machine powered by common labor.

Hastiludes

Knights hone their skills in martial games called *hastiludes*. Nobles tolerate hastiludes as ways for knights to exercise their talents without going to war, but they can turn as brutal as real battles. Tournaments feature several hastiludes, prizes, gambling, and a venue that tolerates winners looting losers. These are raucous affairs; kings outlaw certain events when knights kill each other or otherwise cause trouble. Hastiludes include (but are not limited to):

Women as Knights

It's very uncommon but not unheard of for women to become knights, and when they do so it's the result of military valor or membership in a religious-military order. When women effectively defended Barcelona in 1149, the reigning count created the Order of the Hatchet and recognized the survivors as knights. Historically this knighthood wasn't hereditary, but in the Dark Medieval World this may not be the case, or some members may have received the Embrace. Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights both accept women on occasion, and despite their ostensible non-combatant roles they'd be exposed to the training and duties of their male counterparts, and may well be called to take them up. Storytellers should note that since the Dark Medieval World isn't real history to begin with, they should feel free to "tune" history to open roles for women characters.

Bohort: In the 13th century, individual jousting is a minor event compared to the *bohort*, a battle between two small groups of cavalry. A bohort *might* require blunted weapons, but knights are notoriously cavalier about each other's safety. Winners hold losers for ransom, or take their arms and armor. A knight with the means might employ a kipper: a squire or commoner who persuades fallen opponents to stay down with words and a blunt instrument, and hauls away their gear. Some tournaments are limited to squires or younger knights, to keep them from being defeated and badly injured by more experienced opponents.

Joust: Less popular than the bohort, the joust has yet to use a barrier to divide competitors (making collisions possible) or special lances and armor. Knights blunt their lances, but are still capable of killing each other. The winner unhorses the loser, or breaks the most lances against him.

Judicial Combat: Not a game but a duty, trial by combat is still used in England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Holy Roman Empire. While anyone may settle civil disputes with the "wager of battle," judicial combat is normally only permitted in criminal cases when the evidence is unclear. Clergy, the aged, and people with disabilities may select champions. If one party surrenders combat ends, but that person immediately becomes an outlaw.

Passage of Arms: This hastilude develops shortly after the **Dark Ages** line's default period, but as it evolved from impromptu tests of skill and is reckoned to be older in legends, we include it here. In the Passage of Arms one or more knights lays claim to a bridge, crossroads, or other trafficked area, demanding a non-lethal duel with any knights who'd like to pass. The winner takes the loser's spurs as a trophy. In what may be chivalric play, an answer to harassment, or both, a passing woman may leave a glove to be "rescued" by the next knight who passes by.

Warfare

While they train for multiple forms of warfare, European knights are heavy cavalry first: shock troops who destroy foot formations before proceeding to direct combat with other knights. Chivalric custom encourages this by harkening back to Classical legends of heroic duels, but also because knights ransom their fallen enemies. It's good for the knights, but bad for peasant levies who get dismembered and crushed along the way. The charge begins with the lance, which may break or be buried in an enemy. Every well-equipped knight carries one or more secondary weapons, such as a sword or mace. Knights don't use ranged weapons very often, but don't necessarily consider them "dishonorable." Rather, it's not their tactical role.

Knights' horses come in several grades, and every knight of means owns multiple horses. The best horses, *destriers*, are very rare; most knights ride lesser mounts generally known as *chargers*. Particularly fine specimens might never see battle, since they're more valuable as breeders. These horses are larger than they were in past centuries, but not huge. They're typically the same height as 20th century riding horses, but more muscular and trained to stay calm in a fight.

Well-equipped knights wear mail (or "chainmail," to use the modern neologism) from head to toe, over quilted padding to further protect from impact and keep the mail off skin. Small plates protect the shins and other areas, but plate armor is beyond the period's technology. Some helmets have adjustable visors, but for the most part a knight must choose between clear vision and full face protection. Mail's weight presses down on the shoulders and it's actually bulkier than later plate armor, but trained knights still move swiftly and mount their horses easily.

Systems for Mortal Knighthood

A mortal knight's advantages lie in the status and wealth accorded a knight, the martial training that makes him an effective warrior, and the horses and gear he uses.

The Knight's Fee

As per the rules for fiefdoms on p. 77, a knight who formally swears fealty to a liege (he may serve less formally, with no partic-

A Knight's Fees

Background Equivalent	Service and Skill
•	**Minor:** The knight's been trained, but has no particular accomplishments to speak of.
• •	**Typical:** The knight has completed at least one term of military service for the liege.
• • •	**Veteran:** The knight has completed multiple terms of military service, or accompanied the liege on a crusade or other notable campaign.
• • • •	**Elite:** As Veteran, but the knight performed some exceptional act, such as taking a valuable hostage or protecting the liege.
• • • • •	**Legendary:** The knight has performed at the level of an Elite knight on many occasions.

ular reward beyond room and board, to build a reputation first) attaches the appropriate Backgrounds to the liege's Anchor, but the knight's services are equivalent to Background points for the purposes of providing dots in return. The exact "phantom" Background points depend on the apparent services and skill at arms the knight brings to the arrangement, as follows:

A knight may lean on less than his entire reputation when entering into a feudal arrangement (by submitting two dots of his Background-equivalent reputation when he could actually claim four, for example) though this reduces access to the liege's Backgrounds accordingly. He can also drive a hard bargain (Manipulation + Seneschal, difficulty 8, resisted by liege's Manipulation + Leadership, difficulty 8; the winner shifts the value of service up or down one rank) or lie (See "Credibility" in **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 338; if the liar wins, he chooses his apparent reputation). He retains this "credit" by providing approximately 40 days of military service, along with his own equipment and servants.

It's often better for a knight to remain humble, however, because if he can't provide service when his liege demands it, he owes scutage: money in lieu of service to hire mercenaries. The knight must commit one dot of Resources per dot of reputation-based "credit" for the duration. For example, an Elite knight must devote Resources • • • • to his lord's adventures. Unfortunately, even if the knight's reputation declines, the required scutage doesn't, though the amount might be renegotiated later. Furthermore, a knight's Background-dot equivalent acts as a basic ransom value: the minimum Resources required to pay for his return. Thus, a Typical knight can be bought back as a Resources • • expenditure. Various schemes (usually Social actions) can modify this basic rate. The trick is to become notable enough to command your liege's wealth, but not too expensive to buy back if you get captured.

Horse, Harness, and Arms

Only the poorest knight owns a single horse; and in that case, it's never going to see battle because it's more valuable for breeding, training, and transportation. Beyond raw income, a knight's manor is intended to provide the resources needed to keep and breed horses, as well as maintain sufficient weapons and armor for military service. Their quality depends on the knight's Resources Background:

When the entry indicates "Many" of a given type, replacing them doesn't require a Resources expenditure. In addition, a knight might own various slow work horses, broken swords, and rusty swatches of mail, but these aren't effective military resources and thus aren't counted.

Horses, Harnesses, and Arms

Resources	Horses	Arms/ Mastercraft Arms	Armor/ Mastercraft Armor
•	One palfrey or rouncey	2/0	Class Two/0
• •	One palfrey or rouncey, one charger	4/0	Class Three x2/0
• • •	Many palfreys and rounceys, two chargers	8/1	Class Four + Class Three x2/0
• • • •	Many palfreys and rounceys, four chargers, one destrier	Many/4	Class Four x 4/1
• • • • •	Many palfreys, rounceys and chargers, two destriers	Many/Many	Class Four/Many

Horses: A *palfrey* is a small horse (**V20 Dark Ages**, p. 398 for horse traits) which isn't trained for combat (Brawl 1, but possesses other trained traits) but is swift (Dexterity 3) and will flee violence unless supernaturally compelled to do otherwise. A *rouncey* uses the traits of a small trained horse, except it possesses a Stamina of 4 and can engage in combat. A *charger* is a true war horse, and uses the traits of a trained large horse. A *destrier* is one of the best warhorses, using large horse traits with the following changes: Strength 7, Stamina 6, Wits 3, one additional OK health level, +1 die to listed damage from attacks.

Arms: It's the Middle Ages and everyone has knives; Storytellers should assume that a knight can always find a dagger somewhere. Clubs, staves, and other easily crafted weapons are also always available. Otherwise, this indicates the number of well-forged or carefully crafted weapons (such as crossbows) the knight owns. A *mastercraft* weapon is especially well made and either inflicts +1 damage, or applies a –1 to Difficulty ratings when used to attack.

Armor: The entry lists how many suits of armor the knight owns. Anyone can scrounge together Class One armor, and shields are regularly made and replaced. Class Two armor is a padded garment with strategically placed mail and a helmet. Class Three armor is head to toe mail and full face helm. Class Four armor is mail reinforced with metal plates. *Mastercraft* armor is a subset of Class Four, where additional plating has either been used either to reduce the armor's weight (drop the penalty from 3 to 2) or improve its protective value (+1 to soak).

Hastilude Winnings and the Spoils of War

Some tournaments offer armor as a prize, or cash winnings that can buy what a knight needs, but the traditional spoils of hastiludes are the same as war: the enemy's weapons and armor. The winner has the right to seize the loser's possessions. In tournament settings this doesn't extend to the knight's horse, though exceptions might arise out of a wager. On the battlefield, a knight has the right to claim any of a fallen or captured enemy's possessions. Squires usually do the heavy lifting, but might have to fend off rivals and scavengers to move gear from the bloody mud to their masters' tents.

If a knight loses his possessions, replacing them can bring considerable pain to his household. If the knight has access to "many" of an item, this isn't a concern. Ask, and it shall be replaced. Otherwise, it takes a week to replace a weapon, a month to replace armor, and a year to replace a horse (assuming the knight has an untrained foal or two on hand — if not, it takes two or three years) using resources from the knight's fee. If the knight has upcoming service, he can try to buy these things outright, but the Dark Medieval World isn't an era dotted with convenient shops and hyper-efficient capitalism. Finding a trained warhorse can be a quest in of itself.

New Background: Martial Training

A squire might train 15 or more years for knighthood. Despite popular depictions of knights wildly swinging their swords around, this training is as sophisticated and agile as that associated with fighting methods in other parts of the world. Other soldiers might learn these techniques, but must usually pick them up over the course of a chronicle. To begin with them, one must train from an early age, like a squire or Mongol rider.

Martial Training is a set of Backgrounds: one each for Archery, Brawl, Melee, and Ride. Each dot teaches a special maneuver that may be used in combat, similar to the maneuvers in the combat chapter of **V20 Dark Ages**, but they're slightly more potent or provide special effects. Note that this chapter only includes a few sample special maneuvers specific to knights; the Storyteller should invent others. Archery special maneuvers exist, but are not normally used by knights.

Characters may not possess more dots in a Martial Training Background than they possess in its matched Ability. For example, a character with Brawl 2 may only possess Martial Training (Brawl) 2. Each dot provides a maneuver in the linked Ability, as follows:

•	One special maneuver
••	Two special maneuvers
•••	Three special maneuvers
••••	Four special maneuvers
•••••	Five special maneuvers

Brawl Special Maneuvers

Armored Brawling (Special): Heavy armor helps the character launch unarmed attacks with less fear of injury, allowing him to use the armor's weight to slam enemies. Class Three adds +1 die to Strength + Brawl attacks; Class Four adds +2 dice.

Hammerfist (Strength + Brawl; Difficulty + 1; Damage Strength): Instead of punching her opponent the character clubs him with the bottom of her fist and forearm. The goal is to displace his weight, which may have an effect even if armor prevents the blow from inflicting injury. If the attack scores more damage successes than the opponent's Strength before counting soak, the target suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to his next physical action.

Kick Catch (Strength + Brawl; Difficulty Standard; Damage N/A): The character has trained to quickly trip a kicking opponent. This works the same as the Block defensive maneuver, except that if his opponent kicks (and has no more than two legs), the character automatically knocks her down if he succeeds.

Ligadura (Strength + Brawl; Difficulty +1; Damage Strength + 3): Instead of a conventional hold, the character may employ a painful joint lock (*ligadura* in Italian methods, where they are often taught). Make contested Strength + Brawl rolls. If the character wins, the opponent suffers damage and must choose between experiencing the Crippled Limb effect or being held in place, as per a standard hold.

Tie and Strike (Strength + Brawl; Difficulty +1; Damage Strength): The character holds her enemy in a position that exposes him to subsequent blows. Make contested Strength + Brawl rolls. If the character wins, add the difference between successes as dice to her next unarmed strike or attack with a one handed weapon, so long as it is her next action and her opponent hasn't escaped. Both characters are otherwise considered to be in a clinch.

Melee Special Maneuvers

Fool's Guard (Dexterity + Melee; Difficulty –2; Damage N/A): The character holds her weapon to seemingly invite attack, but relies on her ability to parry and counter. She enjoys a –2 difficulty advantage to parry, but if her opponent successfully strikes anyway, she suffers an additional health level of damage, since she let him strike true. This can be used in combination with the Riposte maneuver.

Half-Sword (Dexterity + Melee; Difficulty Standard + See Below; Damage Normal): Gripping your sword halfway (or shortening the grip on another weapon) sacrifices reach but allows precise control. The character strikes vulnerable spots at will. Her weapon is considered shorter than a comparable weapon and suffers penalties accordingly, but ignores two levels of her opponent's armor.

Mordhau (Dexterity + Melee; Difficulty +1; Damage Strength +1): Holding your sword by the blade, the character strikes with the quillions in the move Germans call the *Mordhau* ("murder-stroke"). He may inflict damage or attempt to disarm his opponent, who suffers +2 difficulty to parry the maneuver, and loses one soak die from armor, if she is wearing it. The Mordhau's damage rating (above) overrides the sword's usual damage. This maneuver must be performed with a sword that possesses a crossguard and Concealability N. If not wearing gloves, the character suffers one lethal level of damage every time he uses this maneuver.

Shield Trap (Dexterity + Melee; Difficulty +2; Damage N/A): The character uses her shield to trap her opponent's weapon. This is a defensive maneuver. If its successes exceed both the opponent's Strength dots and attack successes (individually, not combined, so that 3 successes would beat two successes and Strength 2, for example) the character not only parries, but ensures that her opponent cannot attack with that weapon until he uses an action to pull it back. As part of a multiple action, her opponent must disentangle the weapon with a Strength + Melee roll (difficulty 6) that suffers multiple action penalties, and he must score one success. If he does not take multiple actions, he automatically extricates the weapon.

Wrapping Strikes (Dexterity + Melee; Difficulty +2; Damage Standard): The character swings around his enemy's guard while standing toe to toe. Neither opponent can parry or block attacks, but his opponent suffers a +2 difficulty to avoid your attacks until one combatant steps out of melee range. (If both combatants possess this maneuver, both suffer the +2 penalty.)

Ride Special Maneuvers

Lance Charge (Dexterity + Ride; Difficulty +1; Damage Special — See Below): If she can ride fast toward her target, the character's lance damage is equal to her *horse's* Strength +3 or her own +4, whichever is better. She immediately passes her opponent whether she hits or misses, limiting other actions, though she may always perform a multiple action with the Unhorse maneuver (see below). This maneuver requires the use of stirrups. **Note:** Yes, it is in fact possible to stake a Cainite with a lance. All wood-tipped lances inflict Strength +1 (lethal if sharp, bashing if blunted for tournaments, though these cannot stake). If the attacker uses a metal-tipped lance she needs to run through her opponent to such an extent that the tip clears the other side of the target's heart, requiring five attack successes, not three.

Mounted Grappling (Special; Minimum Ride •••): The character knows how to brace in the saddle while wrestling other mounted opponents and use her horse's weight to gain an advantage. When opponents attempt to escape her Clinch or Hold maneuvers, roll the mount's Strength + the character's Ride, or the character's own Strength + Ride + 1, whichever is higher, against the opponent's Strength + Brawl when resisted rolls are called for. If the character rides away with a held or clinched opponent, she may choose to drop him on the ground (ending the maneuver) or take him away on her own mount, which makes this maneuver unavailable afterward.

Rossfechten (Special; Minimum Ride ••): Due to dedicated training, the character's dots in Archery, Brawl, and Melee are no longer limited to her Ride dots for the purpose of mounted combat dice pools.

Side Slam (Dexterity + Ride; Difficulty 6; Damage Special): From a walk, trot, or canter, the character may quickly pivot her mount to one side and slam into multiple enemies. Roll Dexterity + Ride as an attack which may only be dodged, against up to three adjacent opponents for a typical warhorse, or two for a riding horse. If the attack succeeds, roll the horse's Strength (plus excess successes from the attack, as usual) as bashing damage against each opponent. If the attack's damage exceeds an opponent's Strength, it knocks him prone.

Unhorse (Strength + Brawl or Melee; Difficulty +2; Damage Standard): The character has trained to knock an enemy off his mount. If this attack from horseback hits a mounted enemy and scores as many successes as his Strength, you dismount him in addition to inflicting damage.

The Cainite Knight

Vampire knights generally come in two varieties: those who won their spurs before the Embrace, and those who've been inducted into a Cainite chivalric order, or have been made knights according to the shadow feudalism of the undead.

Cainites in the Mortal Orders

Some vampires were Embraced as knights; others take up the identity. In either case, vampires who swear homage to mortals promptly reverse the balance of power through the Blood Oath, mind-twisting Disciplines, or simple intimidation. The vassal becomes the liege.

Joining a military order? Tricky. Members are comrades in arms surrounded by horses, so slipping into a group of Hospitallers incognito might prove a challenge. Disciplines can compensate, though ironically, the vampires best able to calm both knight *and* beast are the Dracul and Koldun branches of the Tzimisce — traditional foes of the Teutonic Knights. Nevertheless, well-placed ghouls and good excuses can win Cainites positions of trust in various groups.

The Hospitallers: The Order of Saint John of Jerusalem is a popular one among Cainites. The Hospitallers hold considerable wealth, and in caring for the sick, injured, and travelers, provide a pretext for feeding. They possess dozens of commandries organized by *langue* ("tongue") to serve specific cultural groups. Therefore, a knight in good standing can call on aid throughout Europe. The ghouls and Toreador Cainites of the Knights of the Sable Rose protect the greater order from becoming a playing piece in the games of monsters. With their help, mortals maintain control, though they sometimes look the other way when Cainites move among them.

The Order of Saint Lazarus: This small order of hospitaller knights (not to be confused with the Order of Saint John, commonly called Hospitallers) specialize in the care of people with leprosy, and maintain facilities for that purpose in Jerusalem and Acre. Nosferatu are deeply embedded within the order. They usually look nothing like leprosy sufferers, but the Priors have a traditional association with them dating back millennia; and where other Cainites maintain mortal prejudices against people with leprosy, the Nosferatu claim these as their natural herd and protectorate.

The Teutonic Knights: Ventrue command a sub-sect of the Teutonic Knights called the Order of the Black Cross and through it colonize the Baltics with their kind, to the considerable anger of Tzimisce natives. The Teutonic Knights exercise sovereign control over their state, and its relative freedom from entrenched aristocracy makes it a tempting place for enterprising Cainites, who bargain with the Ventrue for land and herds. These arrangements attract even more Tzimisce ire. Thus, the Teutonic Knights are associated with a surprising number of Tremere, who can't be more hated by the Fiends anyway.

The Templars: The Templars are wealthy, influential, connected to the lords of many lands, and control significant military might.

The Templars are a mess.

From its inception, Cainites from every clan (and a few unrecognized bloodlines) have tried to set up personal fiefdoms within the order. Collectively, they helped bring the

Ghoul Horses

As natural animals find vampires repellent, would-be Cainite knights often feed blood to favored steeds. These use the usual rules for animal ghouls (**V20 Dark Ages**, p. 396). Ghouled horses turn aggressive and develop a thirst for flesh and blood, and must eventually be kept away from other animals. Rumors persist of so-called "Diomedean" steeds: revenant horses bred by vampires since ancient times, known for their strength and viciousness.

Hiring a Cainite Knight

Background Equivalent	Service Commitment
•	**Trivial:** The Cainite provides basic services, such as watching out for her liege's enemies, lending political support, and collecting debts on her behalf. These may be a drain on time, but not resources.
• •	**Minor:** The Cainite will make small sacrifices for her liege, such as hosting her and her entourage when requested, permitting safe haven against her enemies, and traveling to her side. Military service against kine forces is permitted. Service may temporarily diminish the vassal's personal resources.
• • •	**Major:** The Cainite will make significant sacrifices for her liege. Examples include an extended journey away from her home territory and permanent loss of Background dots.
• • • •	**Blood:** The Cainite vows to shed blood for her liege, or risk other forms of injury, but may retreat when Final Death seems likely.
• • • • •	**Death:** The Cainite vows to serve her liege unto Final Death.

order considerable wealth, but a reputation for meddling. The politically astute know that when it suits them, Templars side with Saracen against Christian. They flout prohibitions against usury with their loans and bank. Vampires didn't make it all happen, but the order is so mired in conspiracies that despite its power, they can rarely use it as effectively as they'd like. One contact needs a code phrase; another's been Dominated by an unknown party. The Templar's inner circle has always defied Cainite subversion. Those who try, burn. It is said that men of supreme faith command the order: warrior priests and theurgists. The rumors hold that any night creature who interferes with the order is left alone for now, but added to a list of those to be judged on some future day of purification.

Cainite Orders

Cainite knighthoods evolved from novelties into traditions. Numerous orders have come and gone. Most are just pretentious coteries. A few so-called "ashen knights" mimic mortal vassalage, or their societies follow a pseudo-monastic Rule, like the Templars. Groups with occult purposes keep to themselves, admitting none who would profane their mysteries. The best-known mystical sect is the Order of the Bitter Ashes, who allegedly give each member a sip from the Holy Grail. This forevermore quenches their thirsts and make them glow with the light of God. But the last reliable sighting of that order took place perhaps a century ago.

Vampire Vassals

A Cainite becomes a vassal in the same fashion as a mortal knight, but vampires being who they are, mere reputation doesn't cut it. That implies the kind of trust Cainites don't easily give. Furthermore, they know their service is more valuable than that of any mortal vassal. Under the guidance of the Toreador Courts of Love, the knight's Background "credit" in the system uses the services she is willing to provide. In subsequent centuries these promises will evolve into the system of "Kindred prestation."

Drinking from the liege to seal the Blood Oath in whole or part also adds credit to the value of the Cainite's service at the rate of one Background dot per drink within the same year. The regnant promises not to overstep the terms of the agreement even though the Blood Oath makes it easy to demand otherwise. Thus, these arrangements usually require a third party to ensure the liege-regnant's continued good faith.

If for some reason the vassal can't provide the requested service, it is customary for a Cainite liege to accept scutage, though this is a more abstract concept among the undead, who may provide any Background dots vassals are capable of sharing in recompense for lost service. These are temporarily assigned to the liege, who may attach them to her own as a separate Anchor but usually reckons them separately, so that she doesn't have to compensate the vassal for a dot lost through later detachment (See "Pooling Backgrounds," **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 183).

The Warrior's Ashen Rule

Cainites may declare themselves knights of a self-created order, though they'll struggle for recognition without an elder's approval. The coterie settles on a name and a declared purpose. Just as the Templars and Hospitallers exist for specific reasons, so must any Cainite order that wishes to be taken seriously. Like the early mortal Templars, Cainites may emulate communal monasticism, sharing Backgrounds as possible using Anchors.

Orders that swear homage to a reputable liege tend to be taken more seriously, however, as this indicates that they're willing to submit to some greater authority.

After that, a serious commitment typically entails the following steps.

Shared Road

The Path of Chivalry evolved from aspiring vampire knights. The majority are Paladins still, though the order's purpose may alter the ethics and possible sins against the overarching Road of Kings, as follows:

Knights Together: Road changes may not be undertaken alone. At least three vampires must agree to this new variant on Chivalry, strengthening each other with common resolve.

Ethical Changes: Changes to some or all of Chivalry's ethics are permitted in the name of the order's goal.

Religious Duty: If the knighthood exists to further a religious sect, members may replace the 3rd, 5th, and 8th sins on the Road of Kings Hierarchy with sins equal to or lower on the table from one religion on the Road of Heaven. The Storyteller must approve the change.

Shared Disciplines

Members teach each other Disciplines, and combine them in innovative ways. This custom makes knightly orders unpopular with clans who value their distinct gifts. Tremere are forbidden to enter into such arrangements, and elders from other clans may pressure their childer to withhold certain abilities. Nevertheless, Cainite knights cultivate combined Disciplines more often than other groups. Many of these are devised to enhance battle prowess.

Dark Father's Stigmata

Obtenebration 3, Vicissitude 3

Pledged to the Cainite Heresy, the Order of Shining Blood develops weird powers born of cult mysteries and diverse origins. This power laces the vampire's blood with the Abyss. When wounded, the black shadow-blood lashes out at the attacker and creates a growing shroud of protective shadow.

System: When struck with a slashing or piercing weapon, the vampire's player may choose to spend one blood point as a reflexive action. Black blood lashes out from the wound as a solid, thorned tentacle. Roll the vampire's Obtenebration as attack and damage dice; the attack inflicts lethal damage.

After that, the solid shadow-blood wraps itself around the vampire, adding an additional soak die against bashing and lethal attacks for the scene. Multiple wounds cause these soak dice to accumulate.

Experience Cost: 20

Eye for the Weakness of Steel

Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Fortitude 1

Developed among Toreador and Ventrue of the Fellowship of Our Lady, this power has spread to its successors, since the Fellowship collapsed from infighting in 1218. Having examined the way her flesh binds itself against assault, the vampire sees where that property fails in an opponent's armor, sensing openings and weak spots. Her trained reflexes note it quickly enough to redirect blows to these weak points.

System: Each blood point spent allows the vampire's blow to ignore three soak dice from ordinary armor worn by one opponent. This is a reflexive action whose effects lasts for the scene. If the vampire's Brawl, Melee, or Archery attacks strike, the target cannot roll these soak dice to reduce damage. This power has no effect on the victim's innate soak rating, the benefits of Fortitude, or any supernaturally enhanced soak, with the sole exception of armor that has been somehow magically reinforced.

Experience Cost: 7

Medieval Warfare

Generals unskilled in war think a victory incomplete unless the enemy are so straightened in their ground or so entirely surrounded by numbers as to have no possibility of escape. But in such situation, where no hopes remain, fear itself will arm an enemy and despair inspires courage.

Flavius Vegetius Renatus, De Re Militari

In the 13th century, war is an exercise in muscle-powered savagery, driven by revenge, religious fury and most of all, economic forces; but it can also be restrained in ways foreign to other eras. Sometimes, armies break for winter and holy days. Knights prefer to capture noble opponents for ransom, though they trample and cleave commoners on the way. The Pope condemns excessive war and cruel weapons… or urges lords to destroy enemies he's excommunicated.

It's just like Cainite violence: genteel in pose, bloody in practice.

The Shape of War

Europe doesn't have standing armies. Most of its foot soldiers are peasants who train whenever they can spare time away from their crops. In England and a few other places, well-off peasants are expected to be better skilled and equipped, should their liege lords call them to fight. The few professional warriors are knights, aristocrats, or mercenaries. Not even they can concentrate all of their energy on warfare, however. Crops feed war and working horses alike; and with no true armies, one raises a force by calling upon complex debts and alliances.

Jus Ad Bellum

With the distance of history some wars seem inevitable, their causes transparent. But in the Dark Medieval, basic political and economic motives exist in religious and feudal contexts. The concept of total war is utterly foreign, the line between battle and banditry is vanishingly thin, and personal politics usually outweigh state interests. Conflict in one part of France doesn't always compel the rest of the country to act. Thus, wars catch fire from the following sparks.

Conquest: Conquerors rarely announce their intentions, hiding behind one rationale or another, but often speak freely about their plans for outgroups: people from other nations, cultures, and faiths. Although Mongols are infamous for speaking their ambitions plainly, frank talk also accompanied the Crusades, once the religious motives grew stale.

Debt: In 1202, Crusaders invaded Zara because they needed the money. Pope Innocent III promised 94,000 silver marks to Venice in exchange for ships for Crusaders. Fewer showed up than anticipated and they were short of money, so the Venetians asked them to seize Zara as an act of good faith against the debt. Creditors attack debtors and vice versa, or debtors fill their coffers with plunder. Tax revolts fall under this category.

Proto-Colonialism: Europe hasn't developed the colonial ideology that will rip through history in a few centuries, but they're groping toward the idea, founding new states through war and resettlement. The failing Crusader States are the longest of the projects. The State of the Teutonic Order is a similar affair, seized from Baltic pagans by force. Beyond their bloody origins, proto-colonial states experience insurrections, counter-invasions, and influence from foreign nobles who want to take advantage of their instability.

Religion: Religion rarely drives military action by itself. Even zealots need to make these adventures look profitable. The early Crusades offered plunder and the chance to become lords of the Holy Land. In southern France, the Albigensian Crusade pits conventional Christians against dissidents, but also the Counts of Toulouse against the French crown.

Rivalries: Venice and Genoa compete for trade and territory. Astute observers know war will come, and it does, in 1256. Rivalries inspire battles among and within states.

Even though open war supposedly ended over a century ago, the Guelphs and Ghibellines still fight.

Succession: War often follows when a great lord leaves behind a young, incompetent, or hated heir, or no successor at all. Sometimes the rumor that an heir might be illegitimate pushes swords into ambitious hands, or the candidate with a greater claim gets struck with an excommunication. These tend to be short, intense conflicts powered by the intimate hate that only family can provide; but when succession fails among kings, the disruption can last for decades.

Territorial Claims: This is not a world of exact borders or precise legal language. Natural features and meanings change, throwing boundaries into question. Lords assert rule without the force to back it up. English designs on France are one of the best known, longest such disputes. Having passed to the Plantagenets through marriage, the line has often fought to exercise real possession of the Aquitaine and other continental possessions.

Uprisings: Peasants sharpen bill hooks to use against their lords. Conquered and disadvantaged groups fight their oppressors. Most uprisings are local affairs, led against a particular lord and manor, but a few engulf cities and large nations.

Cainite Motives

Cainite conflicts use mortal forces as catspaws, but not to excess, lest the undead reveal themselves. Thus, vampires typically wage war to create an opening for small operations such as storming a rival's lair, or to drain the enemy's social and physical resources. The following things might trigger vampire-directed battles.

Clan: In Eastern Europe the Tzimisce hate Tremere and invading Ventrue. In Spain, Assamites and Lasombra struggle behind religious factions. French Toreador despise English vampires from any clan. Everyone wants to annihilate the Baali. Clan struggles are eternal, but the geography and mortal history of the era create new reasons to fight.

Elders and Methuselahs: An old Cainite may begin a war to continue a grudge from Roman times. She acts through childer, giving them one excuse or another for the battles to come. When the Elder becomes a target, her enemy might have to raise an army to overcome defenses built over centuries.

Road: Roads inspire conflicts like mortal religions do. The greatest danger exists when it becomes a sin against the Road for one side to make peace with another. This might happen with the Road of Kings, for example, when an "inferior" must be put in his place to placate the Beast.

Supernatural Grudge: Like clan and Road conflicts, rivalries with other supernatural beings may unleash open war, as each side gathers mundane allies to fight for them. The best-known example may be the hatred between the Tremere and the sorcerers of the Order of Hermes, who declared the Massasa War against them in 1202.

War of Ages: The deep myths say all wars are one, born of Ancient hatreds from before the Flood. If this is true, even Elders who believe they obey their own wills carry out some maneuver for the Antediluvians.

Gathering the War Host

Once the motive's been established, we come to the problem of sending bodies into the field. Medieval armies are built by feudal obligation. Lords send word to allies and vassals, who pluck troops from wherever they can get them. The backbone of the medieval economy is agriculture, so taking farmers away from their fields might impoverish their lord. Wealthier commoners might be able to put their land in others' care for a time, and competent knights run estates capable of weathering the master's military service. An army of 10,000 is enormous by Western European standards, and many battles involve a few hundred on each side. On the other hand, the Mongols fielded 80,000 against Kiev's 20,000 in 1223.

When the rich don't want to fight, they pay their lieges for the privilege; the lord uses that money to hire mercenaries. But there are only so many mercenaries available, and at times no amount of coin can attract warriors to join. In England, Henry III begins issuing distraints of knighthood, ordering anyone above a certain income threshold to assume the honors and responsibilities of a cavalry warrior. In much of Europe nearly everyone outside the Church is obligated to engage in some military training: archery and foot formations for peasants, mounted combat for the noble-born. Mercenaries train themselves, take in leftover soldiers from other campaigns, and learn through their second profession: banditry.

An army's range is limited to the distance it can travel on foot and its ability to feed itself. Most conflicts take place close to home, but Crusades can involve prodigious amounts of travel. Supplies are a constant challenge, and when carried goods run out, armies must forage or pillage the surrounding area. Many armies engage in secondary battles when the abused inhabitants of pillaged lands take up arms in self-defense.

Medieval armies include (but are not limited to) the following troop types.

Archers and Crossbowmen: Europeans rarely train to use the bow from horseback, and the Welsh longbow has yet to make an impression with its range and power. Archers usually develop their skills through hunting and obligatory practice. The crossbow is an infamous weapon, capable of piercing armor from a distance after a shorter

period of training. The Genoese are said to be the finest crossbowmen in the world.

Camp Followers: Although they're stereotyped as thieves and prostitutes, camp followers are essential to the functioning of a medieval army. They fill the non-combat roles that future armies will eventually define: first aid, supplies, and all kinds of labor. Many are the wives, lovers, children, and relatives of the soldiers themselves. Armies tolerate their looting to a certain extent so that they can support themselves, but treat them brutally when they hinder operations.

Cavalry: Knights are the best-known cavalry, and explored in full in the "Knightly Orders" section above. Arabian *Faris* and Mongol warriors are just as well trained, and use bows from horseback. Horse archers tend to be more lightly armored, however. Their lords use the same arms and tactics, fighting beside them. Horses are expensive, so cavalry service requires wealth. Wealthier commoners might serve as light cavalry, using spears and swift horses to harass the enemy.

Builders, Engineers, and Miners: Although the term "engineer" is still a century off, well-prepared armies still bring along experts capable of building all kinds of structures, including siege engines, and those who know where to destroy walls by tunneling under them. These educated people and their materials are expensive, and only employed when necessary. Siege engineers in the 13th century lack the sophistication of their Roman forebears, but as the weapons themselves were often kept secret, there is some dispute as to which weapons were used — and in the Dark Medieval, certain philosopher-scientists enter the field with wholly anachronistic artillery. The Mongols have used gunpowder weapons against European forces, who have yet to capture the secret for themselves.

Foot Soldiers: Many peasants walk to the fight with light armor or none. Simple pikes, bills, and poleaxes are the rule; sophisticated polearms are uncommon. Foot troops either contend with each other across a battle line or defend against cavalry eager to run them down and get to the real target: other cavalry. They're gradually being replaced by wealthier commoners who are obliged to maintain better gear and training. The best foot troops are mercenaries, who will eventually develop formation fighting into a high art.

Cainite and Other Supernatural Armies

Cainites overpopulate the Dark Medieval but their absolute numbers are still so small that no more than a handful will ever occupy a single battlefield. Furthermore, armies prefer to fight by day, when they can see each other. Potent but restricted to the darkness, vampire warriors are siege breakers and terror troops who might bring a swift end to conflicts. Without Animalism or a ghouled steed, vampires must fight on foot; but each possesses superhuman toughness, and those with physical Disciplines might eradicate a company by themselves. Besides rival Cainites, they might encounter other soldiers with unnatural power.

Ghouls: When a vampire joins an army on the move, ghoul companions are highly useful: loyal by Blood Oath and capable of guarding their master by day. Ghouls can also keep animals that would flee the undead. Tzimisce employ their infamous Vicissitude-modified *szlachta* to break infantry formations and great *vozhd* to terrorize cavalry but sparingly, lest mortals retaliate against the makers of these abominations.

Lupines: It is said Lupines lead great armies on both sides of battles between Kievan Rus and the Mongols. Otherwise, when they appear, it may indicate that soldiers stray too near to their secret places. In any event, wolves follow the smell of blood and seize wounded off of forest paths. For werewolves, it is better to hunt than battle. They prefer swift, vicious ambushes.

Knights of Acre: The Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre (see **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**) often accompany other militant holy orders. They almost never take to the field except to battle night creatures and supernatural blasphemy, so their presence may indicate someone knows Cainites are present, or that another creature has an interest in the conflict.

Sorcerers and Philosophers: Theurgist knights, engineers centuries ahead of their time, and high magicians sometimes accompany armies. When Cainites can identify them they stay well away. One sect called the Craftmasons is said to have employed gunpowder in 1210, before the Mongols introduced it, to bring down the Hermetic fortress of Mistridge. The Tremere have some interest in this, since they're also enemies of the Order of Hermes. The other magical Fellowships usually avoid open battles.

The Fae: Don't believe your eyes. There's never a beautiful woman eager to nurse a wounded knight back to health in the dark wood. Never.

Famine and the Sword

A battle between two forces on an open field represents the worst case scenario in medieval war. Negotiations have failed. The defenders can't hide behind castle walls and the attackers failed to strike by surprise. A battle is a distraction from the main purpose of war: not to destroy the enemy, but to make him stop fighting and accede to the victor's demands. Invading forces usually have limited goals: to capture a castle, or secure homage from a rebellious lord.

This is sensible because defenders have many advantages. They know the terrain better, may prepare while the enemy marches if they are forewarned, and might be able to retreat to fortifications. To support itself and deny the enemy supplies, an invading army pillages and burns the surrounding area. Both sides can then only fight effectively as long as they can eat. After that, it's a matter of waiting for one side to either surrender, or reveal an opening that allows decisive action.

The Church officially disapproves of battle between Christians, but tends to excommunicate whichever side annoys it the most. Christian armies are infamous for slaughtering religious enemies out of hand. Muslim forces have a better reputation in this regard, as specific laws govern the treatment of conquered Christians and Jews. Generally speaking, the longer the conflict, the more brutal its resolution. In most cultures, commanders offer terms contingent upon surrender. Without it, virtually all forms of violence are permitted.

In the 13th century, armies begin by softening up the enemy with arrows and skirmishers before cavalry forces engage each other. Infantry hinder cavalry and occupy territory. Forces avoid fighting at night, during the winter or at harvest time, and may even broker truces to observe religious holidays, but not always. The further an army is from home and the longer it endures the field, the more eager it is to be done with it, no matter the effort or treachery necessary. Heralds move between armies with terms of truce and surrender, note the actions of participants, and record their impressions for posterity.

Cainites in Battle

When vampires wish to influence a battle they inspire unconventional warfare. They need to fight at night, avoiding excessive torchlight and frightened animals. An invader's chief challenge is to find lightproof day shelter on the march or camped near enemy territory. Cainites often send ghouls and other loyal servants to search for the sleeping enemy, who must in turn strike a balance between secrecy and the number and quality of day guardians.

Vampires possess inhuman abilities that can compensate for mortal numbers and cleverness. A Cainite murders instead of slays in a fair contest of arms. She targets kine commanders, climbs walls as a living shadow, and poisons kings wearing their mistresses' faces. Certain Roads and Paths declare this behavior to be abhorrent. A vampire on the Path of Chivalry might only kill mortals out of absolute need, while searching for a monster worthy of her sword.

The Rules of War

Although there are innumerable ways to adjudicate a battle, not all of them fit the functions of a **Dark Ages** chronicle, where characters stand at the heart of the action. If you'd like a system to put armies through maneuvers, dozens of miniatures games, board games, and roleplaying games provide examples. To get to the heart of what really matters, the following systems omit detailed tactics in favor of designing battle objectives that inspire scenes and character action.

Battle Objectives

First, determine battle objectives for one or both sides. Begin with the final objective: the situation that each side considers victory and will end the battle. One side might end the battle by taking the opposing commander hostage. Another might settle for nothing less than the annihilation of the enemy. After that, add intermediary objectives, as follows.

Fortifications: If one side benefits from fortifications, add an objective to the other side that represents the ability to overcome them. If the fortifications are particularly strong, add two objectives. **Examples:** *Starve the enemy out of their castle. Penetrate the enemy's walls.*

Stranger in the Land: If one side is an invader or occupier, give it an objective designed to overcome this disadvantage. **Examples:** *Forage and pillage for supplies. Win the trust of the people.*

Smaller Force: If one side has a notably smaller force, give it an objective to address this disparity. If the difference is extreme (by half or more, usually), give it two objectives. **Examples:** *Demoralize the enemy. Disorganize enemy forces with an ambush.*

Enemy Advantage: If one side possesses a significant advantage other than size, add one objective to the other, or two if the advantage is great. **Examples:** *Neutralize the enemy's* vozhd. *Convince the enemy's elite mercenaries to switch sides.*

General Battle: Finally, add one or more objectives to each side to represent the central action of the battle. Small conflicts warrant one or two objectives. Large battles may require three or more to represent their scope. **Examples:** *Harass the front line. Fend off a massed cavalry charge.*

When one side has an objective that would logically share a scene with another, connect them. If one side consists purely of Storyteller characters, you may omit their objectives, except for the final objective, to streamline the design of the battle.

Storytellers should collaborate with players portraying commanders to develop objectives. Some objectives cannot be defined at the start of a battle. In that case, leave it blank until events determine what should happen. Others may change due to prior events. If one side attains an objective before getting to a dedicated scene, or renders it moot in a way that gives an advantage to the side trying to achieve it, consider it resolved and move on — skill and fortune

rewards them. If the objective stops making sense, but not for reasons that would make the battle any easier for that side, replace it with a new objective.

To win the battle, one side must complete each of its objectives in an order determined by the course of the story, but ending with the final objective — usually. Sometimes, characters will find a way to skip straight to their true goal. Don't use this system to arbitrarily impede them. Nevertheless, the number of objectives serves as a rough measure of how difficult the battle will be for each side.

Each objective requires one battle scene (see below) to resolve. When two objectives are linked, they occupy the same scene. When one side fails to achieve an objective, the situation creates a new one, mandating an additional scene during which it must be resolved. For example, if the characters fail to turn aside a charge, they move to a new scene where they must regroup scattered infantry.

Note that even though some scenes are based on single side's objectives, all sides may participate in any given scene.

Sample Battle: The Night Siege of Loza

Led by the Ventrue Lady Kaethe One-Eye, 200 Teutonic Knights (including 10 ghouls) hold a small fortress at Łoza. Its stones replace the wooden walls constructed by its original owner, the Tzimisce Lodok the Splitter. After begging allies for troops over the course of a decade, Lodok returns with 200 heavy infantry, 50 archers, 10 *szlachta* armored by thickened bones, and four screaming *vozhd*, eager to retake his home. Lodok's ordinary kine troops weren't easy to acquire because few soldiers are inured to working with fleshcrafted monsters. Kaethe One-Eye needs to demoralize these hardened warriors, or eradicate them.

Their situation leads to the following objectives.

The Storyteller tentatively links and orders objective-based scenes, aware that they can change and be reshuffled. Before attempting their final objectives, Lodok must achieve two objectives to Kaethe's three, giving him an advantage. This leads to the following order.

Lodok: Ravage the Land, Denying Support

Kaethe: Predict Siege Tactics

Kaethe: Neutralize *Vozhd* and *Szlachta*

Both Sides: Send Troops Beyond the Walls *and* Repel Besieging Forces (linked)

Final Objectives

The order and types of objectives may change over the course of the battle, but this basic structure lays out the scenes ahead.

The Night Siege of Loza

Objective Type	Kaethe One-Eye	Lodok the Splitter
Final Objective	Demoralize or Destroy Invaders	Take Fortress
Fortifications	None	Send Troops Beyond the Walls
*Stranger in the Land**	None	None
Smaller Force	Predict Siege Tactics	None
Enemy Advantage	Neutralize Vozhd and Szlachta	None
General Battle	Repel Besieging Forces	Ravage the Land, Denying Support

* In this case, Kaethe's side has a relationship with loyal commoners, but Lodok knows the land from before his exile.

Battle Scenes

Once you've structured the battle, its scenes take place under particular circumstances that determine their duration, hazards and other features. These are the varied scenarios of war, from the parapets to the bloodstained mud below.

Battle scenes modify the normal accounting of time in the Storyteller System. War features periods of inactive readiness, frenzied action, muscle-aching marching, and recovery. Some events take hours or days to come to fruition. Scene and turn lengths vary depending on the scenario. A scene ends when a side attains its objective or definitively fails to do so. In scenes with multiple objectives, all must be resolved, for better or worse. Thus a "scene" may last one night or even several.

Long Turns

Some battle scenes feature *long turns*. Each long turn represents about an hour of action, during which a character may attempt as many Physical Attribute-based actions as her Dexterity, as many Mental actions as her Wits, and as many Social actions as her Manipulation. These use full dice pools. If a vampire attempts a combination of action types (such as Physical and Social), use the lowest applicable Attribute to determine how many actions are permitted. The time in between is concerned with maneuvering, petty actions, and lying in wait for punctuations in the action. A Cainite may split one of her actions into a multiple action per long turn, using the normal rules. The default Difficulty for long-turn actions is 6 unless a particular action (such as a Discipline) defines it otherwise. If one long-turn action encompasses multiple actions with variable difficulty, use the highest difficulty in the group.

Cainites move in order of initiative rating, without rolling a die. Equal initiative indicates simultaneous action. In such cases, actions alternate between participants.

Effects that last an entire scene normally only last one long turn. One Physical action may be used to move a significant distance across a chaotic battlefield, or further along a clear path. Celerity and similar powers do not add actions, but either increase movement distance or add their dots in dice to actions aided by speed. Other Disciplines may add their dots to certain other actions, without the need to think about particular powers. For example, Presence may add its dots to Social rolls.

When a Cainite, other supernatural being, or mortal significant to the story directly engages characters, switch to normal Storyteller System rules. The entire exchange uses one action from each participant within the greater long turn. If one participant has already run out of actions, she loses one from the next long turn.

Vampires treat each long turn as a full scene when quickening Physical Attributes. Discipline use requires an expenditure for each target, not the single dice roll. Thus, combat can weaken a Cainite quickly, increasing the chances of frenzy.

Long Turns in Combat

Long turns use the following simplified combat rules:

- Don't make a separate damage roll, but add Potence dots as automatic successes to Brawl and Melee attacks.
- Add a melee weapon's damage bonus to Strength (not the Strength score itself) to combat dice pools. Add half a ranged weapon's damage rating, rounded up to the dice pool.
- Applied against ordinary kine, each success affects one weak mortal — perhaps one debilitated by hunger and long campaigning. Two successes affect a healthy kine soldier, and three affect a mortal veteran at full strength. If attacking, this renders an opponent unable to fight — she flees, is severely injured, or killed.

- If a Discipline offers multiple possibilities, the vampire may apply a different effect to each target. If these would require different dice pools for different effects, use the lowest dice pool among those for powers the character wishes to use.
- A vampire may use an action to evade enemies by rolling Dexterity + Athletics (+ Celerity dots, if applicable). This nullifies successes in the same way as a Dodge action, but represents parries, sprinting, and tactical positioning. Dodging can be used out of initiative order.
- A small horse adds one die to attacks and defenses; a large horse adds two dice. Cainites may devote one success to slay or drive away a small horse, and two successes to eliminate a large one.
- When a Cainite takes an enemy out of combat, she can choose to feed on him. This vampire may drain five blood points per additional action, until the victim is drained dry.
- Vampires soak any damage inflicted during long turns normally.

Enemies All Around

Generally speaking, no more than six to eight combatants may engage an individual at any given time, though certain weapons and tactics may change this. Groups may attempt two actions per long turn and possess an initiative rating equal to the dice value (see below) of the two highest rated members.

Groups of kine possess a single dice pool: one die per weak mortal, two for a healthy soldier, and three for a veteran, multiplied by the number in the group. Groups inflict one health level of damage per success that penetrates any defensive action. Do not roll damage separately. Add weapon damage bonuses once, as for a single vampire in long-turn combat, based on the most common equipment in the group. Each horse ridden adds its own bonus as for a vampire, so two soldiers mounted on large horses add an additional +4 dice.

If they choose to defend, add the soak bonus of the most commonly worn armor to the group's dice pool, minus one die to account for bulk. Roll this pool to remove successes from an incoming attack.

In the case of ghouls and other groups with supernatural gifts, apply their benefits only when the majority of the group possesses them. A ghoul squad's Potence dot typically adds one automatic success to combat actions.

For all other actions, use the combined pool of all participants, without adjustments for weapons and armor, when their collective action would be useful, and the pool of the two highest value members when it would not.

When one of the group is taken out of combat, remove their contribution to the pool. Thus, killing a veteran drops the group's dice pool by three.

Example: One-Eye and the Splitter

Lodok's forces breach the castle at Łoza. The place swarms with soldiers from both sides. Kaethe One-Eye's only option is to find and kill the Tzimisce. Kaethe's initiative rating is 7 (Dexterity 3, Wits 4) to Lodok's 6 (Dexterity 4, Wits 2), so she goes first, opting for combined Physical and Mental actions (three per long turn). *Szlachta* soldiers run up the tower's stairs to confront her, so she climbs out of the balcony and drops to the top of the castle wall in search of weaker prey (Dexterity + Athletics).

She waylays four enemy soldiers who've taken up positions on the wall. The four are typical soldiers (8 dice at 2 each) with Class Two armor (+1 die to defend) and broadswords (+2 dice to attack). She's also armed with a broadsword, and one dot of Potence, so she adds 2 dice and one automatic success to her Dexterity + Melee pool of 7 (total: 9+1 automatic success). She scores 6 successes total, killing three soldiers. For her final action, she uses Subjugation (Dominate 2) on the survivor and succeeds, commanding him to pretend she's one of Lodok's fellow soldiers and lead her to him.

Lodok advances through the broken gate with four *szlachta* (initiative rating 5, 3 dice each, 12 total, +3 dice to attack for bone blades +1 automatic success for Potence, +3 defense dice for fleshcrafted armor) to confront six of Kaethe's elite ghoul knights (initiative rating 6, 3 dice each, 18 total, +2 attack dice for broadswords, +3 defense dice for Class Four armor), two of which are mounted on large horses (+4 dice). They've regrouped in the courtyard to repel him. The knights and Lodok act at the same time, but as they advance, Lodok retreats behind his bodyguards for his first action. The *szlachta* defend themselves, which allows them to act out of initiative order. The knights attack with 24 dice and 1 automatic success, scoring 11 successes; the *szlachta* defend with 15 dice and hit 7 successes, so the knights inflict 4 damage, killing one *szlachta*.

Lodok runs into the fray, fleshcrafting his enemies into broken obscenities for his first action. The Storyteller adjudicates this by allowing him to add his four Vicissitude dots to his 8 Strength + Body Crafts dice. His 8 successes dispatch two knights and a horse, leaving four survivors (12 dice), one of which is mounted (+2 dice). Their counterattack targets Lodok, against whom they can now marshal 16 dice +1 Potence automatic success. They score 9 successes. Lodok defends with his Dexterity + Athletics pool of 7 dice and

scores 4 successes, so the attack inflicts five lethal damage as one or two sword blows cut deep. Lodok soaks two levels, suffering three lethal damage.

The knights have run out of actions, but Lodok's Dexterity permits two more. He steps in front of the knight's horse and uses Whispers of the Wild; it throws its rider off. He splits his final action to mount the horse and massacre more knights with his morning star. His Dexterity + Melee dice pool is 7, but it drops to 6 because his Ride Skill is only 2 dots. Fortunately, the weapon's damage adds three dice for a total pool of 9. Rendered cooperative by Animalism, the horse permits him to mount and no roll is required, but the second roll loses 2 dice and suffers +2 difficulty, though it regains 2 dice now that Lodok rides. Lodok scores 6 successes and kills two more knights.

The three remaining *szlachta* (9 dice, +3 for weapons, + 1 Potence automatic success) move in for the kill. They score a total of 7 successes, killing the last two knights.

As Lodok wheels his horse around, he sees a one-eyed woman throw off her stolen tabard and kick her companion, the Dominated soldier, away. Kaethe raises her sword and glares in a silent challenge. After an hour of bloody battle, the long turns are done, as the commanders engage in direct combat.

Chapter Four
Faith

The Holiest of Things

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

—Leviticus, 17:11

God cast Caine into ashes and darkness, with the blood of the first murder still on him. The kin slayer was damned to wander the earth forever alone — a parasite leeching off the life of others. He remained selfish and arrogant, though, and sought to rebuke God's curse and alleviate his loneliness. God's will cannot be so easily averted; all the father of murder did was drag others down with him.

Caine's spawn leave a trail of blood behind them. The sins of their father are visited upon them in full, and they exist in a pseudo-life of darkness and murder. Some remain hopeful though, even in the face of their own Beasts, and longingly turn their eyes to the light that burns them. These vampires believe they are not hell-bound souls: They are vengeful warriors of God working their way to redemption. The faithful come together from all denominations, some with barely a defined idea of the greater power that drives them, to seek purpose and an outlet for their pain.

True Faith

True Faith means believing in something that cannot be measured and cannot be seen. It means believing in something bigger and brighter than a single person or life. True Faith rebels against the darkness and — sometimes only instinctively — seeks out the light. It precludes knowledge — true *faith* is by definition blind. Nor is it bound by religion: Many Cainites outside religion have faith, while others who claim religion have none.

True Faith In Play

Druidism, Christianity, Hinduism — even belief in "the power of love" — are all eligible as expressions of True Faith, and the Storyteller should work to keep the game mechanic free of his or her own beliefs. Nor should anyone at the table dictate *how* belief is expressed: Supplication, celebration, and ownership are all valid ways to express True Faith. True Faith comes in as many shapes and forms, as do the Cainites that stalk your story.

- Does it make for a compelling story?
- Does the character believe in something bigger than herself? (Though believing herself to be a part of this still counts.)
- Is the character's faith tested? (True Faith never comes easy, or cheap.)

Falling from Grace

While losing faith makes for an intense storyline, losing access to a mechanical benefit can be disappointing. The Storyteller should consider reimbursing the points invested in True Faith. This needn't be done in experience points or freebie points. Did the character make new allies, find artifacts, or experiment with Disciplines in the same storyline that led to her fall? If so, consider switching her True Faith dots with mechanical benefits of similar value.

- Does her faith stand against the forces of darkness?

Example: Niman, Follower of Set

Destanny plays Niman, a Follower of Set. She wants Niman to have True Faith in Set, whom he believes to be a god rebelling against the oppressor Ra. Niman has never met Set (faith precludes knowledge), and Niman genuinely believes Set to be the good guy in the battle against Ra (True Faith resists evil). Destanny's Storyteller can definitely work with this, so he approves the trait.

The situation changes if Niman ever meets Set. Now he *knows* Set exists — the Ancient's existence has moved from faith to knowledge. But does that automatically mean Niman can no longer have faith in Set *as a god*? This is a test of faith, and it makes the story all the more interesting. Does Niman retain his faith, blind to the fact that Set is an Antediluvian rather than a god? Or does knowledge seep in and erode his faith? Both are valid answers as Destanny and her Storyteller craft the story of Niman.

Aspects of Faith

True Faith channeled through mortals (and even the dead) is a living, flexible thing. Objects and places imbued with True Faith aren't as flexible though. Aspects of Faith is an optional rule for chronicles invested in examining True Faith, and it works pretty simply. The Storyteller assigns one aspect to every dot of True Faith a relic or holy place possesses. These are simple concepts that derive from the actions and purposes of the creator, such as love, freedom, or bravery.

The object or location is strengthened by acts that fit those aspects (subtracting –1 difficulty per matching aspect from True Faith rolls), whereas acts that go against the purpose of the object or location diminish it (adding +1 difficulty per matching attribute to True Faith rolls). Lastly, the True Faith rating of an item wielded against its purpose is not added to the character's own True Faith.

Example: Maryanna, a vampire hunter with no True Faith of her own, comes into possession of a knife imbued by a woman who fought to protect the family she loved. The blade has a True Faith rating of one dot, allowing it to rebuke vampires by having Maryanna's player roll one die (the knife's rating) against the Cainite's current Willpower. Maryanna wields the knife against Rasmus, a Malkavian with six current Willpower dots; Maryanna hates him with a passion. Rather than roll against difficulty 6, Maryanna's player must roll against 7 — her hatred doesn't work well with the blade's defining attribute of love. Later in the game, Rasmus threatens Maryanna's husband; now she acts out of love for her husband, rather than blind hatred for the Cainite. In this encounter, Maryanna may attempt to use the blade's True Faith at a difficulty of 5.

An object or location loses some of its potency if it's consistently used against its nature. An item loses a dot of its rating for every year of misuse. Locations work the same, but their power is less easily corroded: Subtract one dot for every 10 years. These dots are not permanently lost, and slowly return (at the same rate as their initial loss) if the item is wielded in accordance with its attributes again. The Storyteller may also roll the item's (dormant) dots against a difficulty of 8 to subtract or reinstate a dot immediately after a particularly heroic or heinous act. Items and locations that have no active dots left also lose the benefits of their miracles (though even a single active dot means the miracle still works — creating a powerful incentive for characters to continue using the item even if their own actions slowly erode the artifact).

Example: Maryanna has lost her husband to Rasmus half a year ago, and the blade's power has dulled in light of her abiding hatred. The hunter is pregnant, but even that cannot rekindle her spark. The Cainite comes again on the night that Maryanna gives birth, seeking to take this last family member from his victim too. As she holds the wailing babe though, Maryanna realizes that she *loves* this little pink thing and she'll defend it with her life. Picking up the now useless blade, Maryanna confronts the vampire. The Storyteller rolls the blade's dormant True Faith rating against a difficulty of 8, and comes up with a success (or maybe he fudges the dice roll to make for a good story) — looks like Maryanna isn't as easy prey as Rasmus thought.

Holy Artifacts

The following are example artifacts, with their attendant miracles.

The Finger Bone of Sofia •

Even as a young child, Sofia saw things other people couldn't. Men in wolf skin, creatures with cloven hooves, monsters who lusted for blood: All were revealed to Sofia. As Sofia grew older, her face lined with the perpetual fear she felt, a demon began to visit her nightly. It lurked at the foot of her bed and whispered foul blasphemies that it wished to visit upon Sofia. Her only comforts were the visits from an angel who likewise visited during the dark hours, standing at the head of the bed and educating Sofia in the demon's weaknesses.

Sofia never realized that both demon and angel were the same vampire who was slowly falling to the Beast, and had latched on to Sofia as anchor for his Humanity. When the creature finally lost its battle and attacked the now elderly woman, Sofia was ready: She destroyed it with fire and silver, even as the raging inferno consumed her too.

Miracle: Placing Sofia's finger bone under your pillow (or in your coffin) as you sleep grants knowledge of *one* weakness of your enemy. This enemy must be on a Road other than Humanity or Heaven, or have a rating of less than six dots in the aforementioned.

Aspects: Seeking the truth in all things

Rating: To know your enemy's failings is invaluable in the Jyhad, but it's also something that can be done through careful spying or use of Auspex. As such, the finger bone is a handy shortcut but no more than that.

The Water of Meriba • •

The water of Meriba provided salvation to the parched Hebrews out of Egypt, but damnation for Mozes himself. Mozes' hubris corrupted the miracle of Meriba in the eyes of the mortal church, but a brisk trade for it still exists amongs Cainites. Mozes, after all, is akin to Caine: cursed by God to never find his way home, even if Mozes was allowed the mercy of death. Most of the bottles of "Meriba water" are fake, but ever so rarely a true droplet of Meriba finds its way to the market.

Miracle: The water of Meriba quenches all thirst, even that of Cainites. The water provides no actual sustenance, but the Cainite no longer feels hunger for purposes of determining Frenzy. The water and its benefits vanishes from the Cainite's system when she next rises.

Aspects: Providing for Others, Self-Sacrifice

Rating: This miracle provides relief, but it is not permanent. Nor can the item be used again.

The Hand of Nikolas • • •

Nikolas was a Nosferatu who, despite suffering both in life and after, never lost faith in the kindness of people. His inner peace was such that he inspired other Cainites to seek harmony too, and a small sect formed around the humble Cainite. Nikolas preached to his kin about the calm of the world for 33 years, until a Cainite inquisitor caught up with him. The inquisitor found Nikolas guilty of heresy and swiftly condemned him to death. The preacher's hands and feet were cut off, his eyes and tongue removed, and he was burned to death. Unbeknownst to the inquisitor though, the faithful followers of Nikolas made off with his hands (though they have since lost one), and continue to gather around the remains.

Miracle: Placing the hand of Nikolas on a Cainite's forehead automatically lets her pass the next Frenzy or Rötschreck roll.

Aspects: Humility, Immolation, Providing Comfort

Rating: Automatically keeping the Beast at bay is powerful, even if the Hand does nothing to abate the threat that provoked it.

The Caul of Jos • • • •

Jos was born with a caul — a sign that he would be lucky in life. His mother carefully dried the skin and sewed it into a small bag for Jos to carry. And indeed, Jos had uncommonly good fortune. He always found someone to employ him for odds and ends, or even to share food and lodgings for free, despite Jos being inept and lazy. He never contracted a disease from the myriad of lovers he had. No constable ever caught Jos, even if what little money he had came from thieving. When a famished vampire attacked Jos on the road, a local priest found him and nursed him back to health against all odds. Even after Jos took up arms against the monsters that stalked the night, he survived all conflicts — except the last, as even luck only goes so far.

A local witch hunter, familiar with the tale of Jos, dug up his corpse to steal the caul. She did rebury the body so it could rest in peace — perhaps a last sign that luck remained with Jos even in the grave.

Aspects: Parental Love (it was Jos' mother who "created" the artifact to begin with), Kindness to Strangers (an aspect granted by the priest who saved Jos), Revenge, Wandering Feet

Miracle: Carrying the caul grants the player to reroll all failed dice on one roll. This only works once per character though, and the caul cannot be passed on willingly — it must be stolen from its owner to work again.

Rating: This item can effectively forestall final death, if the wearer isn't tempted to use it earlier. That chance of temptation, and not being able to use it more than once (or passing it on to an ally) brings the rating down a little.

The Mercy of Ra • • • • •

Amarna, city of heretic-king Akhenaton, is home to many shrines. This one, sitting amid piles of ash and bone, commands a special place in the hearts of Cainites. A vampire may come here at sunset and bring offerings of gold, incense, and blood to Ra. If the offer pleases the god, Ra grants the Cainite safety during a single sunrise.

The Followers of Set have a deep and abiding resentment toward the shrine, which they feel offers the false hope of salvation — only Set, they believe, can bring peace to a vampire by encouraging him to accept his true nature. They don't stop pilgrims though, confident they'll never come back and that their stories will discourage others. The Setites are only partially right. The shrine's reputation is indeed so fearsome that most Cainites never risk it. Of those that do though, a scarce few actually return — and their stories offer more hope than the failures could ever repel.

Aspects: Hope, Leap of Faith, Loneliness, Nobility, Supplication

Miracle: The player rolls his character's Courage against a difficulty of 7 to see if the character has enough faith in Ra, as it is *faith* rather than offerings that pleases the god. The character may take precautions in case of failure (i.e. constructing a shelter, or standing ready to use Earth Meld), but this increases the difficulty by +1. If the character takes no precautions, and truly gambles his life on Ra's mercy, the Storyteller should consider awarding the character a dot of True Faith.

Rating: To see a sunrise doesn't offer practical benefits, but it does go directly against God's curse. Miracles don't come bigger than that. The potential of gaining True Faith for free is also very nice.

Biblical Necromancy

While other Cainites draw upon the foul energy of their graves, the true believers claim that they are doing God's work instead. Their brand of necromancy isn't a blasphemy, but a miracle. The Rosselini lineage is an excellent example of these zealous and self-delusional vampires, but they are not alone in claiming their necromantic prowess is sanctified by God.

These rituals only work if the Cainite holds the appropriate faith, though a player may adapt the ritual to another denomination at Storyteller's discretion.

Pull of the Grave •

Islam teaches that death is the end of physical life. The soul of the dead will be called on Judgment Day, but his corpse must remain in his grave until then.

The necromancer says a prayer to Allah, in which she rebukes the restless dead's existence. A ghost targeted by this spell must make a Corpus roll at difficulty 8, or return to his nearest Fetter for the night. A Cainite victim must make a Courage roll at difficulty 8 to rise next night, though he may reroll every two hours.

Clarion Call to the Loyal ••

The angels will sound their trumpets at the end of days, and the righteous dead will rise to fight the enemies of Christ. While the necromancer is no angel, she can nevertheless *trick* the dead to come to her side. She must fashion a trumpet out of bronze, and blow a single low note to summon a dead warrior to her side. The warrior may be given a specific target (the necromancer must provide a name or accurate description), or a more general task ("stay at my side and defend me"). The ghost is shaped by the necromancer's will, and needs no powers of its own to Materialize. The warrior leaves after its first task is completed, or when the sun next crosses the horizon — whichever comes first.

The Blessing of Valhalla •••

Cainites war with their Beasts nightly, never knowing peace or solace. This ritual brings the dammed to Odin's table and grants them a taste of the quiet that has long been denied them.

The necromancer writes the name of her target in Norse runes, and then wraps the writing in soft fur. Her target automatically passes all Frenzy rolls (but not Rötschreck) for the remainder of the evening. The target also seeks to avoid combat of any kind though, and takes a +2 difficulty on combat rolls if his hand is forced in self-defense. Peace in Valhalla is short-lasting though, as the warriors find themselves on the battlefield every morning, and the Cainite suffers a +1 difficulty on all Frenzy rolls next night.

The target can resist the effects of this ritual by exceeding the necromancer's successes in a Self-Control/Instinct roll at difficulty 7. This is an all or nothing proposition — he cannot cherry pick which aspects of the ritual to discard. Many a necromancer has softened her opponents by persuading them to accept the inner peace this ritual brings, while failing to mention the imposed difficulty in combat or to resisting Frenzy the next night.

Lure of Elysium ••••

Those foolhardy enough to dance with the fae are granted great insights, but this comes at a cost. Stories abound about mortals who slept for thousands of years — and vampires are no more immune to the lure of the little people.

The necromancer places a single speck of silver on her target to attract the fae. Her target must succeed at a Willpower roll at difficulty 7 next night, resisted by the successes the necromancer rolled. If her target loses the roll, he finds it impossible to rise, short of immediate danger to his unlife. Instead he remains in his coffin dreaming of the fae and their wild revelry. When he finally wakes the night after, his player may opt to roll Conscience/Conviction at difficulty 8 to remember shards of the dream. These shards hold clues — albeit cryptic — to a situation (present, past, or future) relevant to the target.

Weighing of the Heart ••••

Before passing into the Underworld, the dead must submit to the judgment of Ma'at. The goddess weighs his heart and, if heavier than a single feather, feeds it to the monster Ammut. Cainites might have escaped the Underworld, but they cannot escape Ma'at — or Ammut.

The necromancer takes an animal heart and soaks it in oil imbued with her enemy's body (blood, fingernails, hair, or bones and ashes in the case of ghosts all work). She then eats the heart while cursing her enemy's name. A Cainite target suffers aggravated damage equal to the necromancer's successes, negated by his own successes on a Road roll at difficulty 8. A ghostly target suffers the same, but rolls the total dots of his Fetters to negate the damage.

The necromancer must wait seven days before casting this ritual on the same target again.

Restoration of Styx •••••

Necromancy is a foul tool that corrupts everything it touches with darkness from beyond the grave. In the hands of the righteous though, it can soothe those who have one foot across the river of death: vampires, ghosts, and mummies.

The necromancer uses one blood point's worth of her own blood to anoint her target with symbols of healing. She then rolls her Necromancy as usual, and heals her target's wounds, up to a number of bashing and lethal health levels equal to her successes. Alternatively, she may spend an extra Willpower to heal him of half her successes (rounded up) in aggravated health levels instead.

The necromancer cannot use this ritual on herself.

Lazarus Rises • • • • • •

Variations of this ritual are known under many names: Lazarus Rises, Hades Rejects, and Ma'at Is Blinded are the most common ones. The necromancer tattoos a Cainite target with tiny symbols denoting her faith, while lining a room with the same script. When the target would suffer Final Death, he instead disappears in a cloud of ashes and reappears — albeit in torpor — in the prepared room. The rules of torpor then apply to him normally, and clever vampires make sure to have a devoted servant guard the room in case it's ever needed. This ritual has a duration of a year and a day, regardless of whether it's invoked or not, and may only be cast on the target *once* during that time. For example, the necromancer can re-cast if her target goes without incident for a year and two days. If the ritual is invoked a week in, though, he must wait the full remaining year and a day before the necromancer may extend her protection to him again.

While it's not prerequisite, most necromancers only cast this ritual on those who share their faith: Scribbling symbols of Hades on a Cainite who worships Allah is bound to bring the wrong kind of divine attention.

The Warriors of Dazbog

In ancient times, when Caine still wandered the lands of Nod alone, a great serpent of roiling darkness fell from the skies. The hateful creature burrowed under the earth as the sun slashed and burnt its flesh, but escape did not come so easily. The sun bestowed a single ray of divine light on Svarog, god of smithing and celestial fire. Svarog then created Dažbog: warrior-god of the sun, and enemy of all that is unholy.

Dažbog tracked the serpent to the land of the Slavs, and their battle was terrible to behold. The creature was wily and merciless, using the earth itself as shield against the warrior's blows. Mortals died by the thousands until Dažbog could stand to sacrifice the innocents no more. He bound the serpent to the land — turning the creature's shield against it, and containing the evil to a single place.

Dažbog then tore his fury away from his entrapped foe, and turned his gaze to the rest of the earth. Darkness was all around him: Demons walked in human flesh, and blood-leeches masqueraded as people. Dažbog knew the hordes were too numerous for him alone and he despaired. A mortal warrior approached the god as he sat weeping, and she chided Dažbog when he explained the cause of his despair. The purpose of battle wasn't always to win, she told him, but rather to *keep* fighting. Doing nothing meant surrender and that, she argued, was the only battle truly lost. Dažbog, heartened by her words, rose again; and from then on the god and the mortal fought the darkness together.

Dažbog's savior and compatriot died aeons ago, but warriors still flock to their banner in an amalgam of religious men and hunters. Dažbog remains their patron to this night.

Appearance: The warriors are a hardy stock and even their priests know how to wield weapons. They are well-muscled, though some favor speed and agility over strength. The warriors come in all shapes and colors, but their positions of leadership still favor a Slavic heritage.

Organization: The warriors of Dažbog observe a strict hierarchy from new recruits to the Champion of Dažbog. Behind the Champion stands the Mouth of Dažbog, who interprets the will of the god and keeps the warriors' ledgers. With the Champion on the front lines and the Mouth shielded in shadows, the warriors have managed to survive for nearly six centuries.

The warriors go where the fight takes them, and their operational cells are scattered throughout Europe, the Middle East, and the coast of Africa (though they have not made many inroads on that continent). Cells range in size from a few dozen, to a single master and apprentice. The warriors have maintained a strong presence in Kiev since the secret sponsorship of Prince Vladimir the Great, and this is where their greatest cell resides. The warriors struggle to get a decent foothold in Romania, as the Tzimisce keep pushing them out.

Recruitment: The warriors prefer to recruit young, often dipping into the families of past and present warriors. They rarely find veteran hunters that meet their standards, given that the warriors are a religious order as much as a group of hunters. They do ally with other faiths though, and see particular parallels between Dažbog (whose name means "Gift from god") and the Carpenter's Son sent to redeem humanity. As such, they're eager to make pacts with Christian hunters — even if that sentiment is not always reciprocated.

Advantages: Warriors are trained from the time they can walk, and they're highly effective against their ancient foes. They receive a –2 difficulty on combat rolls involving stakes or decapitation attempts. The Mouth of Dažbog further surrounds herself with a small group of priests who all possess True Faith. Each priest can channel the divinity of Dažbog to summon fire for a number of turns equal to her True Faith rating. This holy fire triggers a Rötschrek test at difficulty 9 for vampires regardless of its size, and does damage as fire would.

Weaknesses: The warriors have an ancient feud with the servants of Kupala, including Clan Tzimisce. By Dažbog's command they pursue their enemies relentlessly — even when it's unwise. When presented with the opportunity to hunt a Tzimisce, the warrior must do so. Merely *considering* that it might be a trap requires a Self-Control/Instinct roll at difficulty 7 — otherwise the warrior rushes in headlong.

Stereotypes

Cainites: Parasites feasting on the souls of men. Kill them when day comes and they are weak.

Demons: Born from the Darkness before time, they are anathema to our Lord.

Cappadocians: We see you, hiding in your monasteries. Stay put so we can find you.

Tzimisce: Foulest of all! Kill them, kill them now!

Kupala: This. Is. Not. Over.

The Faithful of Nikolas

Spanish Nikolas was born a street-rat and seller of snake oil, but he changed after his Embrace. Brought low by the twin curses of being a vampire and Nosferatu, Nikolas found a peace that he never had in life — nothing more could go wrong, he felt, so surely his struggles must be over now. Nikolas was content to simply eke out an existence among his Clan, staying out of trouble and somewhat merrily going his own way. It didn't take long before the "merry Nosferatu" began to attract on audience and, later, a hesitant following. If Nikolas was taken aback by the small group suddenly gathering around him, he never showed it. Instead he used his natural charm to preach a message of kindness and forgiveness — both to oneself and to others — that steadily drew more and more followers.

Nikolas built his humble but loyal cult for nearly three decades, until he finally gained the attention of Ambrosio Luis Monçada. Monçada was also a Cainite of faith, but he believed in a stern God that was wholly at odds with Nikolas' message of salvation though forgiveness. Unwilling to contemplate that God might have more than one face — or worse, that he himself might be wrong — Monçada manipulated an inquisitor to investigate Nikolas. Nikolas was dead less than three years later — and his torture had lasted longer than the investigation itself.

Monçada, relentless in his zealotry, had failed to grasp the full effect of his actions though. The inquisitor's condemnation not only called more attention to Nikolas, it also made him a martyr. The numbers of Nikolas' followers continue to gather and grow to this night. They center their faith around the cut-off hand of their messiah, which is as perfectly putrid as when Nikolas still walked the night — a sign, they say, that his path was right and true. They share stories about the atrocities their Beasts make them commit, and how they plan to atone for them. They tell each other that salvation *can* be found, if they just get up every night and aim for it. They're an odd mix of religion, self-help, and a fair part delusion, but it works for them — so far.

Organization: The followers of Nikolas gather in secret lest they attract another inquisitor. They huddle in caverns and hovels, far from the halls of their Cainite leaders. Every gathering is led by a preacher and an acolyte, and in a bout of misogyny the former may never be a woman (though the acolyte may). Their greatest stronghold lies in Amanun Portus, which will later become the city of Bilbao in Basque Country. This is also where they keep the relic of Nikolas' right hand.

Clans: The followers of Nikolas welcome everyone, but their need to remain secret and avoid clashes with the Cainite establishment sees them draw from Low Clans more than High. Nosferatu, not surprisingly, are especially prolific among them. Of the High Clans, the Toreador find themselves most drawn to Nikolas' message of kindness.

Factions

Guardians of the Hand: As the name implies, the guardians remain with the hand of Nikolas at all times. They number five in total — never more, never less — and their skills range from combat, to stealth, to medicine to properly preserve the hand. The guardians wield a position of power amongst the faithful, as the hand is literally the last piece of Nikolas to survive. A guardian named Biorna claims that Nikolas speaks to her through the hand. It's unclear if this is is true, a delusion, or a ploy to gain more power, but the attention Biorna gets is quickly sowing discontent among the other guardians.

Faithful of the Bishop: Worship of Nikolas is spreading quickly and his followers are becoming increasingly like a church. Sanchez, a Nosferatu claiming to be Nikolas' lover and childe, leads this change from grassroots to top-down hierarchy. While Sanchez' relation to Nikolas has not been verified, his natural charisma draws scores of followers and he has begun to style himself Bishop — a less-than-veiled attempt at drawing parallels between himself and the Bishop of Rome. Sanchez' tenets are quickly drawing faithful of the High Clans, who see this as a supreme opportunity to mix religion and power.

Friends of Delena: Delena, a High-Generation Toreador, has found herself unwittingly cast against Sanchez. A firm believer in equality, Delena rails against the increasing centralization of power in Amanun Portus. She argues that Nikolas traveled everywhere, spoke with everyone, and never made distinctions between Cainites. His faithful should do the same, and take their cues from the people who need them rather than some self-styled Bishop. Delena has attracted a small and loyal following, but her outreach is limited by her gender as Nikolas himself once likened women to "roses" tended by male "gardeners" — implying that men *do* while women *receive*.

Spies of Monçada: The followers of Nikolas never discovered who set the inquisitor on them, and Monçada isn't even on their radar. The reverse is unfortunately not true. Monçada knows that Nikolas' cult survived his death, and keeps track of them to this night. The Lasombra, perhaps faintly aware that his previous intervention elevated his foe to martyrdom, remains uncharacteristically hands-off for now. That will surely change if the followers of Nikolas should threaten Monçada's supremacy on the Iberian peninsula though.

Combination Disciplines

Blood Apocrypha and Guardian Vigil (see **V20 Dark Ages**, p. 314–315) are both popular with the followers of Nikolas, as is the more straightforward power of Mask Of A Thousand Faces. They have also developed a few combination Disciplines unique to their cult.

Nikolas' Blessing

Dominate 1, Presence 1

While Nikolas' faithful are overwhelmingly just that — true faithful — every religious group draws charlatans. This power mimics the calming effect of Nikolas' hand, allowing acolytes to reach a larger audience with fake hands (and maybe gain a few extra donations). The effects aren't as potent as the real thing, but few could tell the difference unless they're seen side-by-side.

System: The acolyte makes eye contact with her target, drawing him into her own projected serenity. The acolyte's player then rolls Charisma + Empathy versus a difficulty of the target's current Willpower. If she's successful, the target gains a –2 difficulty on Frenzy rolls as long as he remains with her.

Experience Cost: 7

Messenger's Voice

Animalism 3, Presence 3

Nikolas' followers are healers *and* preachers. They seek to spread comfort and solace, while simultaneously pushing loyalty to their cult. This particular power was developed by Sanchez, and remains largely confined to his circle as Delena believes Cainites should accept Nikolas' teachings of their own volition.

System: The preacher spends a blood point; the preacher's player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation versus a difficulty of her target's current Willpower. If she's successful, the target incorporates her teachings as if they were his own. What's more, he instinctively defers to the preacher on all matters concerning his new "faith." This lasts until the target has accumulated successes on a nightly Willpower roll (difficulty 7) equal to the preacher's Conscience/Conviction. Afterward, they realize they've been had.

Experience Cost: 21

The Unholiest of Things

I've yet to encounter a prosaic "unholy" individual, place, object, or ritual. "Holiness" though? By all the gods, there's no greater array of tedium on display than those things described as "holy."

— Annazir, Baali Seeker of Sensation

Cainites are hypocrites and liars. This has been said many times before, but the statement is particularly true in the case of what vampires deem unholy. By their nature, Cainites are unholy creatures. Damned by God, and prevented from genuinely fathering children, finding love, and building a life of creation and virtue; Caine is the measure of unholiness. Therefore, vampires appraising any of their peers, powers, or acts as "holy," are preaching a falsehood. Vampires condemning others as "unholy" are irrefutably charlatans.

Perhaps — some Cainites suppose — there's a scale of unholiness. Vampires on the Road of Heaven undeniably attempt an existence possessed of greater virtue than those on the Road of Sin. Practitioners of blood magic may dabble with power, and even inflict terrible wounds on unwilling victims, but the study of Dark Thaumaturgy, Daimonion, and demon-invoking rituals is a deeper plunge into iniquity.

As vampires age, they lose touch with what it is to be moral — from a human sensibility. Even as ancient Cainites recognize the lure of unstoppable power the unholy provides, they know the cost is one of irreparable damage to their souls, if such things exist. Vampires tentatively dabble in the unholy, attempting to avoid the inevitable fall to damnation that comes with full immersion in the infernal. Many think they're wilier than the demons with which they consort, or protected through use of their undead gifts from a dark fate beyond their control.

This schizoid attitude — understanding the dire risk and taking it anyway — leads to vampires of all lines succumbing to absolute unholiness. Some reap the rewards. More find their souls burning for eternity.

Unholy Worship

Worship your Typhon and pray for gifts he will never give. I know the entities to whom I pray are real, and they give me everything I want.

— Sultan Ameirin, Brujah infernalist of Ankara

Demonic entities know better than to appear as horned devils bearing cloven hooves and weapons dripping in black ichor. Many bear the appearance of a friend, lover, or confidante. Among the most powerful, some masquerade as deities. It's no small wonder vampires — hopeless, perpetually nocturnal beings who persist on the blood of the living — may, in desperation, turn to a sympathetic ear for counsel, guidance, and companionship. Some even worship these entities, who ask for little, and ostensibly offer everything a supplicant may require.

Demons are beings of many shades, yet all are unholy. They all *want* something, even if their desire is not apparent. A demon may spend years in relationship with a Cainite before revealing the thing for which it yearns. By this point, the parasitic entity will already be embedded in the vampire's existence, having removed all obstacles to achieving its aim. It will coerce the vampire into shucking trusted ties, compel its victim into souring healthy relationships, and position its prey into the ideal weakened state: resolve shattered, and wholly dependent on the demon.

Vampires make surprisingly easy prey. Their mythology espouses their abandonment by God. The Followers of Set scoff at such nonsense, and other Cainites outside the Abrahamic sphere curl their collective lip at such self-aggrandizement. *"Abandoned by God?"* they say, *"What makes you so important that any god may take a personal interest in your fate?"* Yet, even among those not raised beneath a Judeo-Christian banner, a hollow feeling persists. If the holy has forsaken them, and the unholy offers alliance, love, and even a little respect — why not embrace worship of the unholy?

Some vampires worship entities regarded as demonic for a sense of meaning — to fill that hollow cavity in their chests and souls — but others do it because they're determined to gain something from this eternal purgatory. The quick route to power may be beset by hazards and threats of hellfire, but at least there's a reward if they manage it.

Blasphemous Pact (6 pt. Supernatural Merit)

In your recent past or long ago, you knowingly made a pact with a being of unadulterated wickedness. Whether the being was a demon of immense power, a reaper wishing to claim your soul, or some greater monster seeking knowledge in exchange for its foul blessing, your pact resulted in your receipt of a gift. This gift allows you to stave off the Curse of Caine, to a degree. Perhaps your gift allows you the ability to walk in daytime while under cover. Maybe you can eat uncooked meat, still running with blood. The gift may allow you to breed. The dark nature of the pact means all this comes at a price. The entity with whom you consort will one night take everything you own, and bring it to ruin. It will destroy all relationships, any reputation, and any good you may achieve. It will claim your soul, and likely the souls of those close to you. Speak to the Storyteller about the nature of your gift. The Storyteller will decide on the price you must pay.

Demonic Patron (5 pt. Supernatural Merit)

Your actions drew the attention of a demonic entity. Maybe you deliberately sought it as a means to gain power, or perhaps it wheedled its way into your existence and now won't let go. The entity became a patron of yours, offering guidance when sought and assistance against your foes. One night it will turn on you and demand something. You will be unable to refuse its request. Until that time, your patron counts as three dots in Mentor and two dots in Allies.

Profane Trappings (4 pt. Supernatural Merit)

You befoul everything you touch. Whether through intent or unfortunate happenstance, your Domain, Retainers, Herd, and trappings are all tainted with the unholy. While this pollutes your surroundings with a constant aura of nausea and unease, it does make any infernal acts easier to perform in their presence. By taking this Merit, any Disciplines you use are considered infernal; at the Storyteller's discretion, using your Disciplines on land you hold, on servants in your employ, or with objects you possess, reduces the difficulty of the roll by –2.

Unholy Stain (3 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Your soul is stained with sacrilege. Some are born or Embraced this way; more earn the stain through wicked oaths and foul deeds. When interacting with any mortal, your Social difficulties increase by one, as people feel unnaturally ill at ease in your presence. Additionally, people of faith feel compelled to hostility when in your proximity. Their initial stance toward you is always aggressive, and it takes little to provoke them to violence. Mortals with True Faith will recognize you on sight, and often attack.

Dark Thaumaturgy

No sacrifice is meaningless. Each one serves your master's purpose. Ultimately, you will be left alone. With nothing left to give, you will finally become his flawless, unquestioning tool. I beg you to consider carefully your destination before taking further steps.

— Ankhesenaten, Follower of Set and execrator of the Lisbon infernalists

The study of blood magic is by no means a pure act. The sorcerer caste of Clan Assamite, the Witches of Echidna descended from the Followers of Set, and even the nascent Tremere understand the scholarly pursuit of dominion over life, the rules set down by God or gods, and basic manipulation of the blood are all impure. Many safeguards must be upheld to prevent the practitioners' descent into spiritual decay.

Those studying Dark Thaumaturgy suffer no such compunction. Assamites murmur of a time when Dark Thaumaturgy was the province only of one of their eldest — a great beast named Ur-Shulgi, who fell torpid after probing too deeply into the dark recesses of forbidden sorcery — though these nights an increasing number of vampires attempt manipulations of the Discipline, consorting with demons of all breeds to gain a foothold on the ladder to power.

Common among the Baali, Tremere novices lacking a firm mentor, and the descendants of Assamites and Brujah present in Carthage, Dark Thaumaturgy is a forbidden fruit. The power gained through its practice is swift, yet each Path bears a price. To learn any aspect of Dark Thaumaturgy, the vampire requires consort with a demon. Some Paths require physical congress with an unholy creature, where others require enforced servitude to a fiend's whims. Even worse are the Paths bearing the toll of sacrifice. Not limited to the sacrifice of a deserving foe, or even a pure and innocent child — these routes to power demand the murder of the blood magician's loved ones and trusted associates.

The Setites despise Dark Thaumaturgy. As a clan devoted to their cults, families, and worshipers, they give would-be thaumaturgists advice on what deal may be good or bad. Serpents excel in earning the trust of other Cainites, though their counter-deals are said to carry as many conditions as those with demons.

System: Dark Thaumaturgy powers incur the same costs and require the same rolls as normal Thaumaturgy (see **V20 Dark Ages** p. 297). Each Path of Dark Thaumaturgy

afflicts its user with a price. Each price is different, though the effects worsen with increased levels in each Path. All targeted Dark Thaumaturgy Path effects may be resisted with a Willpower roll (difficulty 6, plus the infernalist's Dark Thaumaturgy rating, to a maximum of 9).

Die Herrschaft des Wyrm (Tyranny of the Wyrm)

You ask me what people are more likely to be diabolists and murderers. I assure you; anyone can be a diabolist and a murderer.

— Harold the Zettler, Malkavian engraver, and scholar of Banes

Die Herrschaft des Wyrm is a recent Path, first practiced by a line of Malkavian thaumaturgists in the region of Hesse, within the Fiefdoms of the Black Cross. Said to be mentored by babbling demons in service to a three-headed dragon, the neophyte blood magicians soon embraced infernalism with aims of overtaking the embryonic Tremere, and assisting Salubri allies in their retribution against the Usurpers. Tragically, the price of dealing with the unholy soon swept the Malkavians away from their intended course.

A Malkavian engraver, or "zettler," as called by the native people of Hesse, betrayed his entire bloodline in sacrifice to the dragon. In exchange he gained full knowledge of the Tyranny of the Wyrm, and gifts allowing him powers beyond his neonate years. The zettler's recent disappearance, and other Cainites' subsequent discovery of his perfectly preserved scrolls detailing the Path, has led to a boutade of intrepid infernalists arising in the area.

Price: Like the clan responsible for its creation, Die Herrschaft des Wyrm is unstable. Should a victim realize he's being affected through forewarning or evidence of the infernalist's intent, he may make a Wits + Occult roll (difficulty equal to the infernalist's permanent Willpower, requiring as many successes as the infernalist has points in Dark Thaumaturgy). His success causes the power's effects to rebound onto the infernalist. A botch on any Die Herrschaft des Wyrm roll also causes the effects to afflict the infernalist.

A blessing from someone with True Faith will remove any ill effects caused by this Discipline. The infernalist's death does not remove these effects, as in her stead, demons will perpetuate the various curses and pains.

• Malfean Infection

Through use of Malfean Infection, the infernalist desecrates a holy individual, eroding his True Faith without the victim even knowing the power is taking effect.

System: The infernalist must know the name of her target, and paint an eye on her palm in vitae. For each success on the Path use, the victim loses any powers associated with his True Faith for a number of nights:

1 success	One night
2 successes	Three nights
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year
6 successes+	Permanent (or until removed via a blessing)

If reflected back on the infernalist due to a botched roll or the victim successfully combating the effect with a Wits + Occult roll, the Malfean Infection prevents Dark Thaumaturgy's use for a number of nights corresponding to the number of successes, as stated above. This limitation can be removed through a new subservient deal with a demon.

•• Bane to the Soul

The Malkavians who forged Die Herrschaft des Wyrm communed with spiritual demons called "Banes," which they successfully discovered could be summoned and attached to the souls of their enemies. By grafting a Bane onto a foe, they discovered the victim would be inclined to act on all her worst impulses.

System: The infernalist must hold an item or article once touched by her target, and drip vitae upon it. A demonic Bane will attach to the target's soul on a success, increasing the difficulty of Virtue tests by +2 (to a maximum of 9). Each success determines how long the Bane remains:

1 success	One night
2 successes	Three nights
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year
6 sucessess +	Permanet (or until removed via a blessing)

••• Dissonant Miserere

Through chanting, incantation, and inspired clack, the infernalist penetrates her victim's mind with the endless toiling noise of her ravings. The cacophony of a Dissonant Miserere persists night after night, planting a seed in the victim's mind that sanctuary may only be found by calling upon a demon of madness, who might remove the babble. The power acts as a doorway for such a demon, waiting to

strike when the victim is at his weakest. The victim must beg for the demon to step through in order for this to happen.

System: The infernalist must possess a piece of the victim's skin, hair, or a nail, and soak it in vitae. The Wyrm's screaming mouths enter the victim's mind, increasing the difficulty of all Willpower tests and any test requiring concentration by one point per success rolled (to a maximum of difficulty 9), and removes a temporary Willpower point from the victim each night it remains.

The effect is permanent, until the victim receives a blessing or calls upon a madness demon to relieve him of this pain. If the latter occurs, the demon — a shrieking creature without tangible form — will offer the victim a reprieve in exchange for a service. The nature of this service depends on how weak-willed the demon believes the victim is at this point (and is determined by the Storyteller), but typical requests include the murder of an innocent, the divestment of all worldly goods, or a sacrifice of vitae to the infernalist.

•••• Feed the Wyrm

By drinking the blood of his victim, the infernalist creates a sympathetic link between his demonic masters and the targeted vampire. This link causes agony, and sometimes even death, as the infernalist's magic twists and mutates the victim's body. A reprieve is only available if the sufferer agrees to serve the Wyrm with foul future deeds.

System: The infernalist must possess a portion (one blood point) of the victim's blood, mix his vitae with it, and drink the concoction. This may form a blood bond, if the blood is that of another vampire. Once the blood is swallowed, a successful roll inflicts one level of aggravated damage per success. This damage may be soaked with Fortitude. The victim's body contorts with pain and manifests inhuman growths, reducing her Appearance rating by two dots. The Appearance loss is cumulative if this power is used more than once.

The victim may only recover her Appearance rating by agreeing to serve the Wyrm. If she does so, an urge demon of vanity appears in a reflective surface and demands a sacrifice, the severity of which is determined by how great a loss of beauty has occurred. Sacrifices may entail ripping the smile from a newborn's face, slaying a dozen virgins, or the victim allowing a Maeljin to permanently inhabit her soul.

••••• House the Maeljin

According to the Malkavian thaumaturgists who founded this Path, the Maeljin are among the most powerful and wise of demons. These incarnations of vice, filth, and immorality are masters of Banes and extra-dimensional demigods. House the Maeljin allows the infernalist to play host to one of the Maeljin, at the expense of a dire sacrifice. The power benefits for hosting a Maeljin are numerous. The moral toll it takes is immense.

System: The infernalist must murder a mortal or vampire with whom they hold a close relationship. If the victim is a vampire, the infernalist must perform diablerie on his prey. A successful roll manifests one of the Maeljin in the body of the infernalist. Each success determines how long the Maeljin remains:

1 success	One scene
2 successes	One night
3 successes	Two nights
4 successes	Four nights
5 successes	One week
6 successes+	Permanent (or until removed via a blessing)

If the Maeljin remains permanently, the vampire runs the risk of losing all control to the demon inside them. It then becomes a race to achieve purification before the Maeljin can exert absolute dominance.

The natures of the various Maeljin differ. As beings of elemental unholiness, they represent abstract sins, such as shame, loss, anger, and a multitude of further intangible concepts. Maeljin all empower their host with six points to spread among Attributes (no Attribute may gain more than two), six points to spread among Abilities, and six points to spread among Disciplines (no Discipline may gain more than two). The Storyteller decides where these points are allocated on the character sheet.

As examples of how a possessing Maeljin may empower its host, a Maeljin of Lust might allocate six points across Social Attributes, place three points in Performance and another three in Expression, with two points going to Presence, two more to Dominate, and the final two on Daimonion. A Maeljin of Lies may allocate two points to Manipulation, two to Intelligence, and two to Dexterity, with six points spread among coercive Abilities. The final six might be allocated to Obfuscate, Presence, and Chimerstry.

An inhabiting Maeljin allows its host to practice the powers it has bestowed freely. It wants the host empowered and terrible. However, occasionally it will attempt to sway or outright control its host into acting in ways favorable to its alien agenda. In such cases, the vampire must make an Instinct/Self-Control roll (difficulty 8) to not act in the way the Maeljin wishes. The Storyteller determines the Maeljin's wishes. It may attempt to exert control once a night.

As the Maeljin approaches the conclusion of its inhabitation, it seeks to consume the host by driving him

into an act of self-destruction. The Maeljin can only attempt this once, but to resist throwing himself onto a pyre, greeting the sun, or walking into a sanctified building, the vampire must succeed on a Courage roll (difficulty 9). If his coterie attempts to restrain him, he immediately falls to frenzy. The Maeljin will depart peacefully if unsuccessful in its attempt to claim the entire soul of its host.

Rego Calatio (Rule of Summoning)

God punishes us for everything. Open yourself, and let the devil inside!

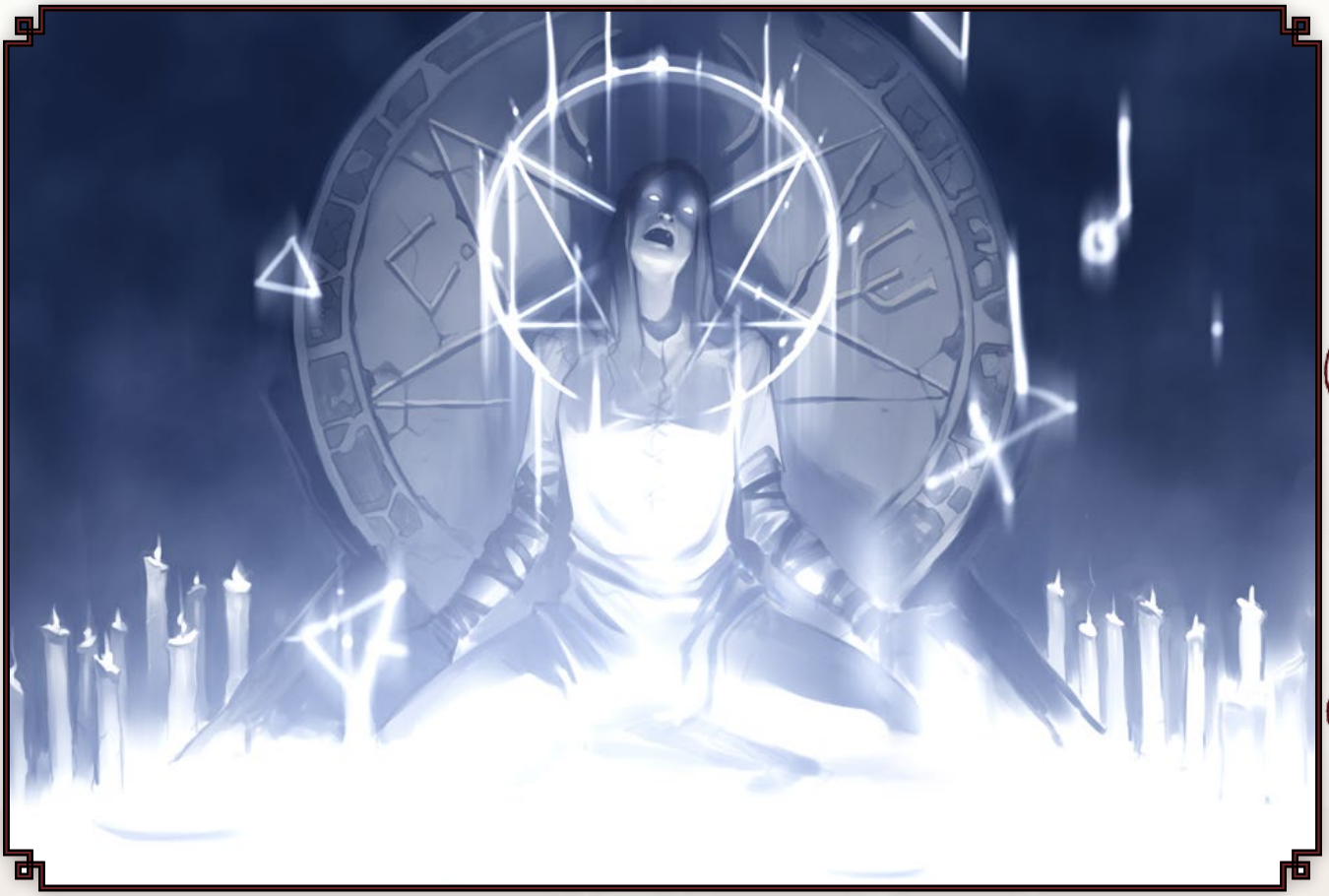
— Ahab the Traitor, infernalist Salubri of the wilds

The formation of the Rego Calatio dates back to an era before records were scribed in ink. The creators of this Path are unknown and unnamed, their researches engraved in stone or daubed in blood on hides and bones. The Path is dedicated to the summoning and binding of demons. In recent centuries, these demons have begun to appear in forms expected and feared by mortals, manifesting as caricatures of greed, lust, sloth, and wrath. In times past, they were as likely to appear as pillars of roiling smoke, the weeping of children, or the stench of rot. The demons contacted by Rego Calatio are not bound to any set form, and may appear however they wish.

Summoners of demons are daring. Demons know that by appearing physically, they are weakened, but can easily dominate and destroy summoners lacking sufficient wherewithal to control them. Many demons are pleased to serve under magical binding, as they're likely to be asked to perpetrate something they'd do if free anyway; but most demons will resist attempts at control on principle. A demon summoned by Rego Calatio remains on Earth until the sun rises, or it hears church bells.

Price: The unholy nature of Rego Calatio is such that any area in which it's practiced becomes spoiled; the people become sick, and the livestock malformed. Use of Rego Calatio produces a necromantic sequela (see p. 52) based on its level.

The practitioner suffers horrific nightmares across a number of nights equal to the successes rolled in summoning. These nightmares force the infernalist to lose two blood points upon waking, instead of the normal one, and a Willpower roll is required (difficulty 7), otherwise two temporary Willpower are also lost. A botch on this roll causes an appropriate Derangement to wrack the infernalist for twice the duration of her summoning-induced nightmares.



System: Each level of this Discipline requires the sacrifice of another being's life, the majority of demons requiring the death of an innocent in a circle of bloodied bones. If a named demon is being summoned, their name must be painted in the summoner's vitae on a rock in the center of the circle. The infernalist must expend Willpower points equal to the level of Rego Calatio activated, otherwise the summoned demon is free and will either ignore or attack its summoner. Demons can soak all types of damage with their Stamina, unless that damage is caused by someone with True Faith.

- • **Petty Demon** (Attributes 4/3/2, Abilities 3/2/1, Willpower 3, Health 4)
- •• **Madness Demon** (Attributes 5/4/3, Abilities 4/3/2, Willpower 4, Health 6, Blood Points 5, two points of Disciplines, one of which must be Dementation)
- ••• **Passion Demon** (Attributes 6/5/4, Abilities 5/4/3, Willpower 6, Health 7, Blood Points 6, four points of Disciplines, two of which must be Presence)
- •••• **Murderous Demon** (Attributes 7/6/5, Abilities 6/5/4, Willpower 7, Health 8, Blood Points 7, six points of Disciplines, three of which must be Potence)
- ••••• **Named Demon** (Attributes 8/7/6, Abilities 7/6/5, Willpower 9, Health 10, Blood Points 10, eight points of Disciplines, allocated wherever the infernalist chooses with a maximum of six points in a single Discipline)

The number of successes rolled determines how much control the infernalist has over his summoned demon:

1 success	The demon is bound to the circle for a night, and will only listen to the infernalist.
2 successes	The demon is bound to the circle for a night, and will listen to anyone in its proximity, answering simple questions.
3 successes	The demon is bound to remaining within eyeshot of the infernalist for a night. It is well disposed and will answer complicated questions accurately.
4 successes	The demon is bound to remaining within eyeshot of the infernalist for a night. It is forced to serve the infernalist in simple tasks.
5 successes	The demon is able to leave the infernalist's sight and do his dark bidding. It willingly submits to the infernalist's decrees for the night's duration.
6 successes+	A demon one grade higher than intended is summoned, and treated as if summoned with 4 successes. The maximum grade is the Named Demon.
Failure	The summoning does not occur. It may be retried with a new sacrifice.

The Inhabitants of Hell

Before you I stand naked; shorn of race, gender, title, age, and identity. Be birthed through me, so I might be reborn.

— Zoroastrian summoning chant

Hell takes many forms. Many faiths lack a codified concept of Hell as a plane, or punishing form of afterlife, but mortals and vampires alike can imagine a spiritual torment awaiting them in the event of transgressions against their fellow beings, betters, and gods.

Necromancy handles the coaxing of departed souls, though the essence of beings utterly rotten in spirit and deed takes an almost elemental form, not beholden to the abilities of Cappadocians and their fellows. Such malicious spirits — sometimes named as negative coalescences, afterdeeds, or Banes — manifest with the beckoning powers of Dark Thaumaturgy Paths and Rituals.

Demons exist in a place mortals sometimes name Hell, dwelling across varied strata of spiritual and material existence. While some entities tell of a plane of fire, ash, and blood in which they suffer for eternity until their calling by infernalists, other monsters — also naming themselves as demons — claim their homes as gulfs of void, mountainous peaks of ice, the space between memories, the shadows behind the door, and the ill will of jealous men. In short, demons are many and varied, and not all fit the criteria of an Abrahamic devil. All are subject to summoning, by one means or another, and all exact some kind of price for their services.

Jollux, Petty Demon

A demon standing a meter (1 yard) tall, and equal length wide — the Jollux is a milk-pale entity resembling an ectomorphic box, or blob, with stump-like limbs and sharpened coins for teeth. Representative of petty greed and theft, the Jollux enjoys making mortals go hungry by sneaking into their larders and devouring all dried foods kept for the winter, before disappearing into the night.

The Jollux is a weak combatant, but bears an animal cunning it puts to use in mischief and humiliation. When given the correct sacrifice, a Jollux may advise a vampire on how best to embarrass a foe or drive another Cainite to frenzy.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Charisma 0, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Empathy 2, Legerdemain 1, Stealth 2, Investigation 1

Willpower: 3

Health: 4

Shp'murrl Tsong, Madness Demon

This demon rarely appears in any tangible way, preferring a roiling form of yellow mist layered with blinking, undulating eyes wreathed in lips, and pulsating veins. The eyes mewl and chitter, and react with awareness to entreaties and threats.

Shp'murrl Tsong is often summoned to act as a disturbance, whether as an instant effect or over a lengthy period. The demon can reside in the walls and roof of a house, inducing a form of mania in the resident. It also holds the ability to bite its foes, though this is a last recourse. The demon prefers to flee when faced with violence.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Brawl 1, Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Stealth 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Disciplines: Dementation 1, Obfuscate 1

Willpower: 4

Health: 6

Notes: The Shp'murrl Tsong commonly has a reserve of five blood points.

Tuqburni, Passion Demon

The Tuqburni appears as an intensely alien being of an unspecified gender, driven to provoking a disturbing sexual reaction from its victims. It's commonly seen stalking the domains of Assamites and Setites. Often clad in very little but for scars in the place of its nipples, genitals, and anus, the nocturnal Tuqburni creeps into the homes of virgins and faithful spouses, stealing their innocence through physical and emotional assaults.

This demon is known to drive mortals into supplication despite the ghastly appearance marring its body. It copulates with its targets in private, who are never able to explain how exactly the Tuqburni consummated the acts attributed to it.

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

Abilities: Empathy 3, Subterfuge 2, Performance 1, Melee 2, Medicine 4

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Presence 2

Willpower: 6

Health: 7

Notes: The Tuqburni commonly has a reserve of six blood points.

Sacristan, Murderous Demon

The sacristan demons are only called upon when bloodshed is required. Monstrous to behold — flesh pierced with jagged pieces of metal and bone, and bearing awful weapons both serrated and dripping with venom — the sacristan possess few redeeming features. They grin impossibly wide as they cut up victims and flay them slowly, ensuring a pained death in which the dying beg for mercy. This is only granted in exchange for their souls.

Sacristan are commonly clad in the robes of a local priesthood, though they are not demons present in any existing religion's history. They gleefully rush into combat, savoring every drop of blood they spill.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Intimidation 1, Melee 4, Stealth 2, Medicine 2, Theology 2

Disciplines: Celerity 3, Potence 3

Willpower: 7

Health: 8

Notes: The sacristan commonly have a reserve of seven blood points.

Marquis Decarabia, Named Demon

Decarabia refers to himself as the Great Marquis of the Christian Hell, though he is undoubtedly more venerable than that faith. The demon claims to lead legions of diabolic minions, and to understand the secrets of poisons and alchemy. He has mastered the ability to shift form between humanoid, a flock of birds, and a pentagram tattoo on the skin of his summoner.

When appearing as a humanoid, the Marquis's brown skin radiates a sick, grey mist. He stands tall and broad like a woodsman, hefting a great, bloody axe over his shoulder. Across his face, the Marquis wears a bone visor comprised of the fingers of a dozen children. He speaks with a rich accent, fluent in every language and happy to converse about any subject.

According to the Marquis, he escaped a labyrinth in which thousands of his kind are held. The veracity of this claim is hotly disputed and researched by infernalists, many of whom have been led to Hell by the Marquis in search of his peers. No infernalists who accompany the demon return to the world of the living.

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

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 1, Etiquette 3, Melee 2, Academics 1, Occult 2, Theology 3

Disciplines: Dominate 3, Flight 3, Potence 2

Willpower: 9

Health: 10

Notes: The Marquis commonly has a reserve of ten blood points.

(Attributes 8/7/6, Abilities 7/6/5, Willpower 9, Health 10, Blood Points 10, eight points of Disciplines, allocated wherever the infernalist chooses with a maximum of six points in a single Discipline)

Appendix: Player Options

The following combination Disciplines and rituals are unique expressions of the Cainite curse, developed by legendary monsters of the Dark Medieval World.

Combination Disciplines

Bulgroth's Exquisite Torture

Daimonion 3, Temporis 3

This power was developed by a Baali Methuselah called Bulgroth. It focuses on the fact that, to a victim, torture always has an end. That eventually, the torture stops, or you die. That eventually, at some point, there is release. This power warps the victim's perceptions of time, and makes him feel as if his current agony will never end.

System: This power must be used on a character suffering lethal or aggravated damage, but who is not unconscious or in torpor. Roll Manipulation + Occult, difficulty the victim's permanent Instinct/Self-Control + 4. If successful, you may mark off a dot of your character's permanent Willpower. So long as that dot remains marked off, the victim suffers the damage in perpetuity. He may heal, but his player notes the health levels remain. Further damage is applied as if he still suffered that damage. He suffers the full wound penalties. The damage doesn't truly exist; it's purely psychological. But to the victim, that's no respite. It's functionally identical to him.

Additionally, any sicknesses or diseases will persist. If they would normally heal, they do not get worse; they remain identically harmful as the moment this power was used. This is to say, they do not continue to cause damage.

At any time, you may end the effect by returning your character's Willpower dot.

Experience Cost: 10

Livia Yorke's Ouroboros

Serpentis 3, Vicissitude 3

A Tzimisce investigating the history of the Ouroboros, a symbol of much importance to her clan, found history of the symbol in ancient Egypt. This prompted her to learn the signature gift of the Setites. In her studies, she merged it with her own family's Vicissitude. One result of these experiments came in the form of this power. With it, the user infects a mortal with a sentient piece of her essence, which devours him from the inside and gains a sickening façade of independence, while remaining mystically tied to the vampire.

System: The vampire must feed the mortal one point of blood, which she has infused with a point of Willpower. This "inseminated" blood becomes the monster within the

mortal. Every day, the mortal's player rolls Stamina. When the mortal fails, the monster reaches full maturity.

When the monster grows to full maturity, it explodes out of its mortal host (which is functionally identically to the Vicissitude power, Rend the Osseous Frame). At this point, the weak monster (which looks something of a serpent, a dragon, or other strange beast of nearly human size) establishes a symbiotic relationship with its creator. It can only become strong by literally devouring its sire.

The monster uses the game statistics below. It lasts until destroyed, but the vampire may only have one such Ouroboros alive at a time. The monster will obey commands from the vampire, but has a selfish, devilish personality of its own.

Ouroboros

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

Abilities: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Intimidation 3

Health Levels: OK, OK, –3, –5, Incapacitated

Disciplines: The beast shares the vampire's Celerity, Fortitude, and Potence powers. It can "devour" the vampire's other powers, and use them.

Soak: +3 dice of armor

Attacks: Bite (Strength +1 lethal), Claws (Strength lethal)

The monster may "eat" from the vampire. For every dot of an Attribute or Skill eaten, the vampire suffers one lethal level of damage. For every dot eaten, the monster gains two of the same dot so long as the dot remains lost to the vampire. The vampire may heal the health level, but choose to leave the dots lost to benefit the monster. She may choose to regain the dots at any time thereafter. The monster's Attributes and Skills have a maximum one higher than the vampire's, as dictated by her Generation. It may similarly devour the vampire's health levels to gain identical health levels. However, these remain only so long as the vampire chooses not to heal them.

McShaw's Grace

Dominate 2, Presence 3

George McShaw is a renowned Toreador who has developed the unique ability of inflicting his clan's curse on those who witness his performances. He doesn't consider it a curse; he considers it a gift of refinement.

System: When taking a Performance or other artistic action, you may activate McShaw's Grace by spending a Willpower point and a blood point. Roll Charisma + Performance, difficulty 7. Any character with fewer Wits dots than your successes suffers the Toreador clan flaw for the scene. If your successes double a character's Wits dots, they suffer the flaw for a full month.

Cost: 6 Experience

Nikolai Steen's Acuity

Auspex 1, Dementation 1

This gift allows the user to see the truths behind a person effortlessly. Many Malkavians use it for a bit of valuable insight in their interactions, so they know exactly how to frame engagement.

System: This power requires no active roll. When using any Auspex or Dementation power to perceive another character, your player can spend a Willpower point to allow your character to intuitively know from which Derangements and Mental Flaws the other suffers.

Cost: 6 Experience

The Rod Raw Rending

Fortitude 1, Potence 1

This power was developed by a Germanic Ventrue posing as a Brujah. Since he wasn't as proficient with Potence as some would expect, he had to fake it with raw tenacity in his strikes. His hands and weapons do not stop when they hit their target; they push through with the weight of his invincible musculature. When he puts his hand through chain armor, nobody questions his Brujah heritage.

System: Activating The Rod Raw Rending costs 1 blood point, and it lasts for the scene. You can ignore 1/1 armor up to your character's Fortitude dots (so with Fortitude •••, you may ignore 3/3 armor). It may only be used with Brawl or Melee attacks.

Experience Cost: 8

Abyss Mysticism

Rickard Argentis's Homunculus (Level 5)

This odd ritual allows the caster to take the personality of a slain mortal, and invest it into a shadow entity. The ritual must be completed with a human sacrifice. The ritual creates a single Arm of Ahriman, which is statistically normal as if created by the caster, except that it can listen, speak, and act of its own will. It also gains Mental Attributes and Charisma and Manipulation equal to the slain mortal's. The shadow becomes, for all intents and

purposes, a copy of the mortal's personality, but under a full blood bond to the caster. It persists until slain, but requires a blood point per week to survive.

Thaumaturgy Rituals

Samira's Kihanah (Level 3)

Samira's Kihanah allows the caster to know that which is truly unknown. To use this ritual, she takes a small, metal, hand-crafted object, no larger than her forearm, and smears it with three blood points over six hours, under the blood moon. The object absorbs the blood, and it takes a reddish hue. Once the ritual is cast, it summons forth a djinn. The caster, or indeed anyone else who holds the object, may ask a question lost to time. This is to say, a question to which no living (or Cainite) person knows the answer. Otherwise, the question remains unanswered. The djinn spreads its consciousness throughout space and time, and returns instantaneously with the answer. However, the djinn will always try to phrase the answer in such a way that the curious questioner will find massive trouble, despite its truth. With each answered question, the red fades slightly, until the third question, at which time the djinn flees the world of flesh. The object remains enchanted until fully depleted. Unanswered questions do not deplete the object.

TOME OF SECRETS

Every occult order worth its weight has a library of mystic truths. But the truly wondrous, truly frightening truths require you look deeper. That you delve in long, lost places. These, my friend, are those long, lost places.

— Creidne

The Tome of Secrets is a treatment of numerous topics about Cainites and stranger things in the Dark Medieval World. It's about peeling back the curtain, and digging a little deeper. Inside, you'll find:

- Expanded treatment of Assamite Sorcery, Koldunism, Necromancy, and Setite Sorcery
- A look at Cainite knightly orders, faith movements, and even human witchcraft
- Letters and diaries from all over the Dark Medieval World

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