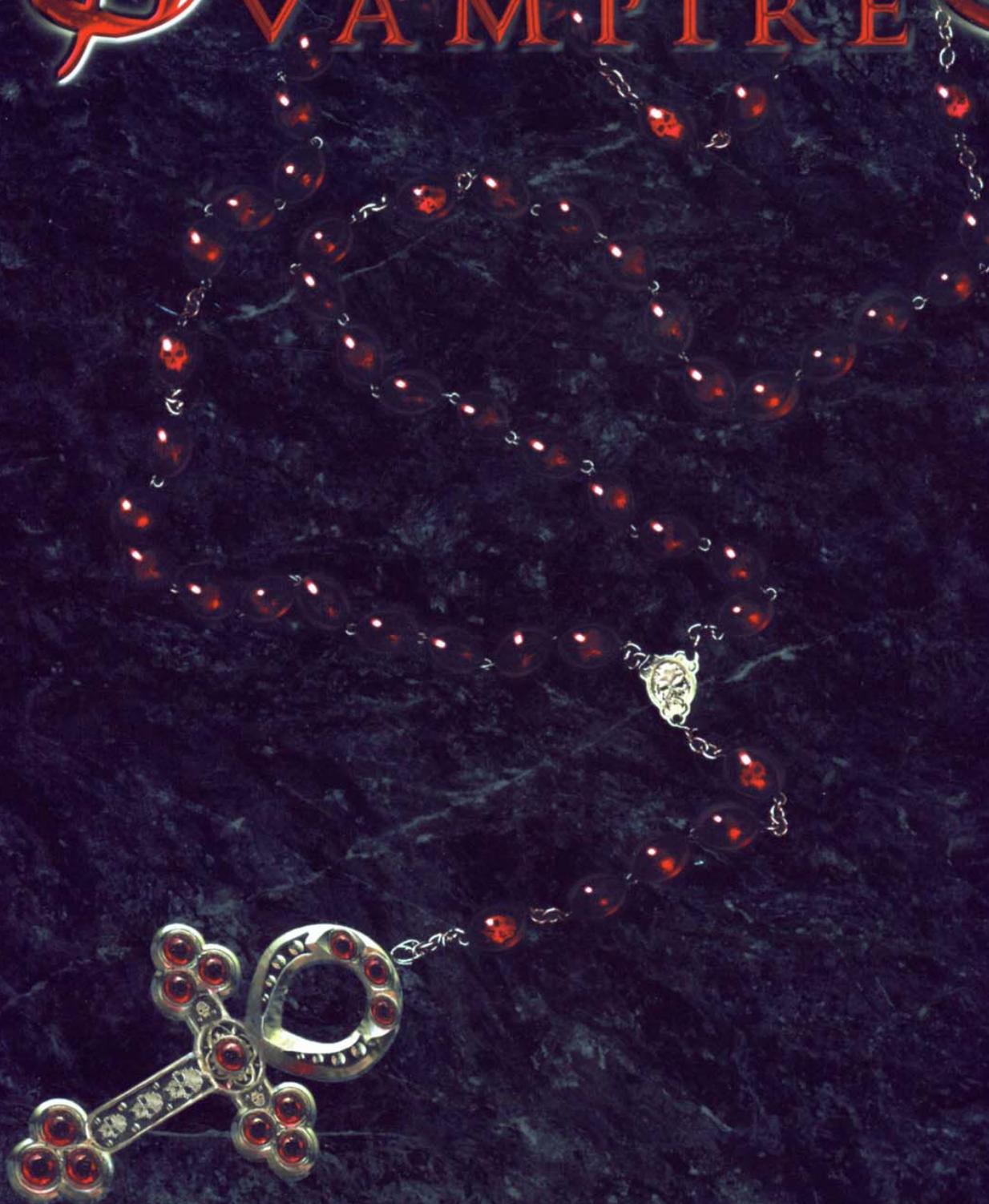


Dark Ages

VAMPIRE

TM



MUWAHID CALIPHATE





Kingdom of Sweden

Letts

Republic of Novgorod



Volga Bulgars

Denmark
Letts

Great Principalities of Vladimir

Knights of the Sword

Principality of Smolensk

Lithuanians

Principality of Polotsk

Prussians

Principality of Chernigov

Polish Principalities

Principality of Kiev

Province of Volhynia

KRAKOW



CUMANS

ALANS

VIENNA

Kingdom of HUNGARIA
BUDA-PEST

ZARA

Kingdom of Serbia

Bulgarian Empire

Kingdom of Georgia

VEN.

Despotate of Thessalonica
THESSALONICA

CONSTANTINOPLE

Empire of Trebizond

Seljuk Sultanate of Iconium
Seljuk Turks

Kingdom of Nicaea

Kingdom of Armenia

ANTIOCH

Empire of Luristan

VEN.

VEN.
Crete

Kingdom of Cyprus

TYRE

Abbasid Caliphate

Province of Antioch-Tripoli

ACRE

Kingdom of Acre

JERUSALEM

ALEXANDRIA

CAIRO

AYYABID SULTANATE



Bolton 02

A Sacrament of Caine

You who are gathered this night to hear my sermon and share this sacrament, you who have come from domains and battlefields far and wide, do not look on me as a savior. Like you, I am but one of the Damned.

But even the Damned can pray for salvation. I walk the Road of Heaven in search of that salvation, and every night that I manage to stay upon this road constitutes another act of penance. Is not repentance the purview of the Damned? If one has not been cast into the belly of sin, then what is there to repent?

We, who walk the night and feed from the living, understand sin like none other, for it rages deep within us. We call this roiling sin the Beast, and it drives our kind to murder, conquest and war. Many of you have seen the wars that grip our kind, have seen undead princes clash in the names of their clans, faiths or monarchs. This is the Beast at work.

And the Beast is here, as well, in this holy chalice. In it is blood taken from breathing men and women who have angered God so much so that He cast them in front of a monster such as I. And to it, I add a drop of my own cursed blood. Thus in this chalice is the sin of breathing man and unbreathing Damned.

I am Father Anatole, and I beg you come forward and sip from this chalice, for it is the repository of all that has damned us and of all that can save us. Such was revealed to me by the angel, and such do I pass on to you.

Drink, and I will tell you of my visions.

The angel's first visitation came in the early nights of my damnation. Like all of us, I had once been a living man, descended from Seth, breathing the rich air and basking in the day's sun. Then, some forty years ago, a monster decided to make me as he was. An unwitting instrument of God's great machinations, he drained my life's blood and fed me a tiny fraction of his own. From that droplet of unholy vitae I gained a legacy of pain, of sin, of power and of sight.

Pain, as my living heart stopped its beating, my organs shriveled and my humors expelled themselves in racking spasms. Sin, as a hunger for more blood to join that droplet rose in me and led me to murder innocent and guilty alike. Power, as I drew demonic night from that very blood, making me hunger for it all the more.

Sight came only on the twelfth night, when I dared asked God Above why he had remade me thus. Then the angel came, and spoke thus:



n a time before time,

two brothers lived,
and enjoyed the light of the lasting sun
One a farmer, the other a herder.
Both knew **God**, and **God** looked down and knew them,
And knew what was to come. These two were called
Caine and Abel, born of **Adam and Eve**.
God asked for a sacrifice,
And **Caine** gave of his brother's blood to **God**.
He let his brother's blood seed the ground,
And rejoin with his creator above, while **Caine** toiled.
Now alone, like **God**, his brother's blood on his hands,
Our **Dark Father** thought he understood **God**.
But **God** was displeased: Death was his providence, his gift,
Not **Caine's** to take, and so a darkness came over **Caine**.

None can understand God. That was the sin of Cain, our forefather, and it is ours as well. From Adam and Eve, we inherit the Original Sin, but from Cain we inherit our Curse. This was the lesson of the angel when it came again on the day after my seventeenth night. It spoke thus:



n the darkness,

God spoke thus:

"**Cain**, you who have taken my gift, will be cursed by it.
Its embrace denied, for as long as the sun burns in my glory.

You are outcast.

Banished for all eternity from my light,

From the race of **Adam and Eve**

And condemned to blood, pride and darkness.

Now leave, leave to walk the wastelands and know that

A mark exists over you,

And all of my creatures shall know this mark.

They will shun you, fear you and never give you

The peace you will desire.

Now leave, beyond here, to the land of nothing — **God.**"

Like Cain, our Dark Father, I too wandered in the land of nothingness that is the night. I learned that the sun's rays burned my cold flesh, and I feared. But still, I had seen the angel of God twice in my damned existence (I cannot ever call it life, for that is behind me now), and I fought despair with prayer.

Traveling along pilgrims' routes rendered empty by the coming of night, through towns and fairs abandoned by the living for the sake of their beds, I sought a road through the eternity that lay before me.

Come, drink anew and hear further revelation. For, in the second year of my travels, the angel came again. It spoke thus:



When the sun set

On **Caine**, his shadow rushed out
To greet him, and the **Endless Night** began.
Three angels came to **Caine**, and three times
Caine cast them away.

And three times they echoed **God's** Curse.

Caine walked alone until he came
To a hut, and within it, awaited **Lilith**,
She, like him, an outcast.

However, she wrapped the darkness about her like a shawl
And taught **Caine** to do the same,
Knowing it would displease **God**, filling Him with jealousy.
For three brief nights, **Caine** knew no hunger, no pain.
He was whole but also cursed, and **Lilith** knew this.
In time, they parted, vowing to return
In nights distant to right the wrongs
That **God** had visited on them.

As the angel had prophesied, I also found my dark lady and took comfort in her. She too wore shadows like a gown of finest silk and wielded the blood-hunger like a fine dagger. From her, I learned that the Curse could be a blessing as well, and from me she learned to pray anew. She delivered me from fear, but unlike Caine, our Dark Father, I would not abandon God for her sake.

We parted after years of travel, and I was alone once more. Then, the angel came again and spoke thus:



n a valley,

Caine came upon a city
Where the children of his second brother, Seth, lived.
From a distance he observed —
Enthralled by their short, brutal lives, filled with pain
But also love and light.

Caine decided that the time had come to stop wandering.
In this valley, he built mystical **Enoch** — the First City.
Here **Caine** did not hide his mark, and ruled as a mighty monarch,
And knew happiness. But soon, sorrow returned
For he was truly, terribly alone in Seth's city.
He longed for **Lilith**, but knew nothing of her.
In sorrow and longing, he committed a second sin, casting his lot to darkness forever.
Three were chosen by **Caine**, and so three became his Progeny,
And the Second Generation was born
And in time, the **Three** sired those of the Third Generation. And on, and on, and on.
However **Caine** knew what he had done, and in his mind, **Lilith** screamed.
And **Caine** pronounced: "An end to this, no more."
But it was too late, the First City teemed with his race and the sky opened up
And the rain fell. **God** has passed his second judgment,
And **Caine** ventured once more to the Wastes,
Leaving his city and Childer to drown.

From this fourth revelation, came my first understanding of God's plan. Caine, our Dark Father, had sinned anew by creating the line of blood-hungry Damned that I now numbered amongst. As had always been his way, he reacted to his sin by turning away from it, leaving his own brood to its dark fate.

I would not do the same. Just as I had guided my dark lady, I would guide others to see the role of God in their own cursed existence. My road was clear, and I took to it with vigor, seeking out those who had walked it before me and taking, in the thirteenth year of my curse, the frock of a priest of our kind.

Frooked and cassocked, I made a fine figure among the courts and churches of Caimites. I gave the sacraments and shared my visions, as I do with you now. But still, the angel was not done with me. He returned and spoke thus:



Nuly Thirteen survived

The Great Deluge, calling themselves **Antediluvians**.
Of **Caine** and of the **Three** nothing was known,
Their footsteps erased by the
Waters that covered the Earth.

In time, a Second City was born, and **Caine's** race prospered. But they were cursed.
Sire distrusted childe, childe slew sire and blood flowed in the Second City.
This time, as has been ever since, **God** did not destroy the Second City.
It was Caine's childer, prophets of their own destruction,
Who caused the Second City to collapse
And all **Thirteen** clans to scatter in exodus.
In their journey, the **Thirteen** came across
Seth's Children, who had crafted empires across the world
More majestic and mighty than Enoch or the Second City.
Here, in cities of gold, the Children of **Caine** flocked
In great numbers, ignoring **Caine** and **God**
And set themselves as kings, queens and gods.
And like kings, queen and gods, the **Thirteen**
feuded and schemed against each other,
Distrusting all and filling the night with tears and blood.
Away from sight **Caine** wept for the **War of Ages**.
The cursed mark of his race, had begun.

With the fifth revelation, my ministry changed. Where once I had warned our kind not to repeat the sins of Caine, the Dark Father who spawned us, now I called us to attest to the wisdom of Caine, the Wanderer who found a measure of wisdom in Lilith after his exile. It was in his settlement in the First City that he sinned anew. After the Flood, he wandered again and saw with fresh eyes his own sins repeated by his progeny.

• And in this revelation, Caine became a wandering penitent and showed me my path.

Drink one last time, my brothers and sisters, and seek your own forms of penance. For those who refuse to atone for the sins, both ancient and fresh, that flow in their cold veins will meet Caine anew, as the Dark Tyrant. For the angel has come to me again, and he has brought me a final revelation:



And Caine saw this,

And became angry.

Angry with his race for damning him with their sins.

And thus, he spoke: "You are all cursed, as I was cursed by God.

I have seen the future, writ in blood, when the nights will end,

And Judgment will come.

Not God's judgment but mine, and in it my absolution.

The signs will be clear, the world will become as Schema,

The worthy will be spared, the others will be consumed by the hunger of ancients,

Of my first Damned whom I know by name.

You will know this time, because mortals will

Burn down your cities of gold and bury your dreams

With ashes and soil. A time when Seth's Children

Will reclaim their world casting light into

The darkness, and the Blood will weaken, begetting

fledglings, impure in damnation

And reeking of Seth's Lot.

Know these signs for they will signal the End.

The angel's holy words show us the truth. Mighty Constantinople, the City of Gold, has burned, and Seth's Children stir against the monsters who rule the night. Look around and know that all our kind know this time has come. The princes and knights of our kind ride to battle like never before, because they know the final war is coming. The schemers in courts across the lands weave schemes more intricate and murderous than ever before. With every moment, Caine's tyrannical final judgment draws closer, and we all struggle to prove ourselves worthy of his gaze.

Ask yourselves, my brothers and sisters, are you?

Dark Ages VAMPIRE™



A Storytelling Game of Epic Horror

Vampire created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Credits

Authors: Bruce Baugh (Characters and Traits), Michael Butler (Storytelling), Chris Hartford (Drama), Steve Kenson (The Roads, Allies & Antagonists), James Kiley (Disciplines), Joshua Mosqueira Asheim (angelic revelations in "A Sacrament of Caine," A Dark Age), Adam Tinworth (Clans Brujah, Gangrel, Nosferatu and Toreador). Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

Additional Material: Justin Achilli (Clan Cappadocian), Philippe Boule (Framing story in "A Sacrament of Caine," Introduction, chapter prologues), Myranda Kalis (Clan Tzimisce), Sarah Roark (Clan Tremere), Lucien Soulban (Followers of Set and Clan Malkavian), C.A. Suleiman (Clans Assamite and Lasombra), Marne L. Vanyo (Clans Ravnos and Ventruue).

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For preserving the art of Heraldry: Tim Binder, Ben Monk

Credit Where It's Due

Dark Ages: Vampire is the inheritor of the work of a great deal of people. Most directly it is an evolution of **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, by Jennifer Hartshorn, Ethan Skemp, Mark Rein•Hagen and Kevin Hassall (with Bill Bridges, Phil Brucato, Brian Campbell, Ken Cliffe, Richard E. Dansky, Ian Lemke, Kathleen Ryan, Stephen Wieck, Cynthia Summers and Robert Hatch). It also owes a great deal to **Vampire: The Masquerade**, in both its original inception (by Mark Rein•Hagen with Steven C. Brown, Tom Dowd, Andrew Greenberg, Chris McDonough, Lisa Stevens, Joshua Timbrook and Stewart Wieck), and in its 1999 revised edition (by Robert Hatch, Justin Achilli, Andrew Bates, Phil Brucato, Richard E. Dansky, Ed Hall, Michael B. Lee, Ian Lemke, Jim Moore, Ethan Skemp and Cynthia Summers). Much of Chapter Four, a few Discipline powers and several Merits and Flaws are taken from that edition.

The current edition also owes much to the line of products released in support of its predecessor, **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, as developed (in succession) by Jennifer Hartshorn, Robert Hatch, Justin Achilli, Richard E. Dansky, and yours truly, Philippe Boule. Various game systems have been appropriated from, among others, **World of Darkness: Blood & Silk**, **Veil of Night**, **Jerusalem by Night**, all four volumes of the **Libellus Sanguinis** series, **Clanbook: Assamite** (revised edition), **Clanbook: Gangrel** (revised edition), **Guide to the Camarilla** and **Guide to the Sabbat**. The quotes at the beginning of each chapter and on the back cover are taken from **The Erciyes Fragments**, written by C.S. Friedman.

Finally, and above all, **Dark Ages: Vampire** is a product of the support, enthusiasm and feedback of its players, Storytellers and fans. To all of you: Thanks.



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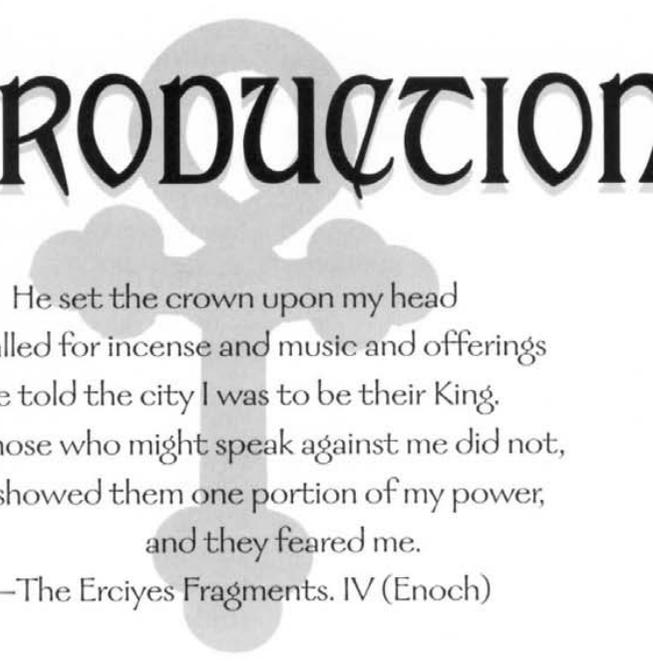
Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

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Bolton 02



INTRODUCTION

He set the crown upon my head
He called for incense and music and offerings
He told the city I was to be their King,
And those who might speak against me did not,
For I showed them one portion of my power,
and they feared me.

—The Erciyes Fragments. IV (Enoch)

The Dark Ages.

Those words conjure images of ruined castles and dark forests, both foreboding and mysterious; of hilltops where armies clash amidst a sea of mud and blood; a time when monsters are made real and terrifying by the simple words, *Here there be dragons*. They paint a picture of a Europe shrouded in mists and superstition — an era when both kings and serfs fear the spirits of the night and pray for dawn to arrive. They speak of the darkness, both physical and spiritual, that descended across Europe during those long centuries between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance. This is the setting of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, a shadow play projected against the backdrop of the bloody 13th century — a time when vampires walked the lands as true masters of the night.



This is not the 13th century found in history books, at least not quite. It is a portrait reflecting the fears and superstitions of the age. The landmarks are the same: Rome, London, Paris and Constantinople stand, but their streets are narrower still and filled with shadows where cutpurses and unspeakable things lie in wait for the unsuspecting. Kings and queens rule in castles and palaces, but they rule over kingdoms divided and at war. It is a time of heretics and crusades, when the fires of the Inquisition are just starting to burn. For the most part, life is dirty and short — even for nobles, who spend less time at court than riding into battle. Peasants clutch their rosaries at night praying for the promise of salvation. The true darkness of the age, however, emerges when the sun has set, and even the light of torches and hearth fires fails to keep it at bay. The undying stroll through the crowded city streets and gather in macabre courts away from mortal eyes.

Vampires

If the daylight world of **Dark Ages: Vampire** is akin to our own history, its nighttime is a wholly different affair. Once the sun goes down and most God-fearing folk retire to the safety of homes or hovels, vampire come out. These blood-drinking creatures have existed from the dawn of time, and they rule the medieval night. They have courts and kings of their own, and they fight wars and negotiate treaties unknown to the living.

These predators in dead flesh, these immortals, these lords of the night, are the stars of our theater of the macabre. It is their roles, that you and your friends undertake in **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

But who — or more properly, *what* — are they, you might ask. As with all good protagonists, there are several answers.

Monsters and Fiends

At the most basic level, vampires are the blood-drinking monsters of myth. Garbed in cold, dead flesh, they have to feed from the living in order to carry on. Their hunger is so strong that it can easily reduce them to savage, unthinking fiends who drain their victims dry in sanguine gluttony. Vampires call this hunger and its accompanying savagery the *Beast*, and it is their constant companion through eternity. It makes them quick to anger and fierce in battle, often closer to predators than to humans.

Rage and hunger are only part of vampiric depredation, however. The constant pressure of the

Beast within couples with the dead, cold nature of the vampire's soul to create an insidious craving for sensation. The joys and sorrows of life are missing from undeath, and vampires replace them with obsession, lust, hatred and envy. As the nights wear on, these illicit urges erode away any vestiges of human morality. Most vampires become fiendishly cruel and evil things — some despite themselves, others quite willingly. Mortals become more than prey, they become playthings to be tortured and mangled like flies in the hands of a demented child.

Cursed and Forsaken

The flip-side of the depths in which vampires wallow are the heights from which they have fallen. Vampires are not a natural part of Creation. They are not a species of predators so much as a brood of people who exist under a great curse. Every vampire, no matter how ancient or fiendish it is, was once a living, breathing person. That person was killed by another vampire, drained of her mortal blood and fed some of the vampire's own blood. This process (called either the *Embrace* or the *Becoming*) causes a dark resurrection: The murdered mortal continues to exist, animated now by monstrous hungers but remembering her days in the sun.

This process of making other vampires is willful — simply feeding from a mortal, even to the point of death, does not make another vampire — and it goes back to the first vampire, Caine. The eldest son of Adam and Even, Caine, was the first murderer, and God punished him for this ancient crime. That curse became vampirism, and blood-drinkers call themselves *Cainites* in recognition of him as their ultimate progenitor.

The Curse of Caine, however, is a subtle thing. It is absolute in a physical sense — the vampire emerges from the *Becoming* as an unliving, nocturnal thing — but not in spiritual or mental sense. The vampire is frozen in the moment between life and death, her soul trapped between Heaven and Hell. She is damned to an earthly Hell in which her dark urges slowly overcome her sense of self.

Warriors and Priests

Thus balanced between the moral beings they once were and the raw beasts they are becoming, Cainites walk a precarious road through the night. There was a time, it is said, when Cainites did this alone, existing in isolation deep in the wilds or among the mortal herd, never dealing with their own kind save those whom they themselves Embraced. Such is no longer the case, and with good reason.



Alone, the Beast has time to wear away at the vestiges of the soul. Alone, the Cainite has no one to turn to who might understand his situation. No mortal can truly understand the rigors of unliving damnation and thus isolated, the Damned can only go mad. And so, the get of Caine come together. When mortals flee to their homes at night, it is vampires who walk through the cathedrals, castles, fairs and villages of Europe.

In these gatherings, Cainites find some measure of solace. They look to their elders and those more enlightened to provide guidance in their immortality. From these discussions arose the *roads*, vampiric faiths and philosophies that teach Cainites to control their savage natures enough for the vestiges of their living will and mind to survive. Teachers of the roads take the frocks of ashen priests and lead nocturnal congregations in unholy sacraments.

Yet reflection suits the Beast no better in a gathering than it does in isolation. The endless hunger for blood must be sublimated with action as well as thought. If the Beast cannot feed endlessly on the blood of the living, cannot destroy everything in sight, then Cainites must feed it with action and conquest. The battles within become wars without.

In ages past, these wars were simple things. Broods of vampires would go into the night, fighting one another for the right to prey on the primitive living. Now, the battlefields are larger and more complex. The breathing descendants of Adam have prospered and multiplied, building cities and kingdoms, trading across counties and continents. Just like the feudal kings of the mortal world, Cainites have become warrior-princes, fighting their battles with arms and intrigue. They erect great courts of their own, protecting domains akin to nocturnal kingdoms. Some of these princes act through catspaws in the Church or in the various guilds; others march onto the field of battle with their swords and fangs bared. All are dangerous and potent, or they are quickly eliminated by their peers.

As Christians reckon such things, it is the year 1230. As Cainites do, it is the era of the War of the Princes.

The Storytelling Game

Dark Ages: Vampire is a game — more precisely a storytelling game. With it, you and your friends cooperate to tell a tale (the storytelling part) and overcome challenges (the game part). It's essentially a game of make-believe, in which almost

everyone portrays a specific character who grows and evolves thanks to his experiences. Taken together, the experiences of all the characters form a story.

The players of a storytelling game are both the actors in the “play” and its audience. Unlike most other games, the players are not playing against each other (or against anyone, in fact). The objective is not to score a certain number of points or be the first to achieve a particular goal. The players’ objective is to have fun telling a good story and to have their characters get what they want. There certainly will be opposition along the way — from rivals and other threats — but the players often cooperate to overcome those challenges.

One player takes on a special role and is called the *Storyteller*. She acts as the narrator of the story and plays the roles of all the other folks whom the players’ characters might encounter. So if the players decide that their characters enter a monastery, the Storyteller describes the monastery (including deciding just what it looks like, who’s in it and whether it’s busy or quiet.) and portrays the monks. From the stoic prior who gives them a quick grunt to the gabby initiate who wants to talk about theology, it all comes out of the Storyteller’s mouth. In effect, the Storyteller serves as the players’ characters’ senses.

The Storyteller then uses all this information to present challenges and opportunities to the players (through their characters). The players then react, moving forward and creating a whole story. Usually the Storyteller has a rough idea of the plot (or at least its set-up) in her mind ahead of time — “The monastery is supposedly haunted, but it is actually the home of a feral vampire who’ll need to be reckoned with.” — but the details emerge from the players’ actions. Some might want to destroy the rival vampire and claim the monastery as their own domain. Others might seek to befriend him or trade information for safe passage. Thus, acting together, Storyteller and players create a unique tale.

Dark Ages is a game because it uses rules to define how and what characters can do. Unlike a board game, these rules are very loose, and every character can do a wide variety of things. But when a chance for failure arises, the rules call for the use of dice to determine what happens. Various traits (such as Strength, Etiquette and Courage) measure every character’s capabilities, and players roll dice based on those traits. Of course, much of the game happens without dice. The best play often occurs with the

Storyteller portraying an informant or “bit part” and engaging the players in lively conversation. There’s rarely a need to roll dice then.

Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One: A Dark Age reveals the hidden world of vampires. Their history, abilities and customs are all explained along with the battles of the War of Princes.

Chapter Two: The Clans of Caine examines the 13 clans (major bloodlines of vampires). These clans are divided into the High Clans, who see themselves as the rulers of the night, and the Low Clans, made up of foreign bloodlines and those considered cursed or taboo.

Chapter Three: The Roads goes into the faiths of vampires. Just as mortals turn to the Mother Church for guidance through their difficult lives, Cainites follow their roads of enlightenment through the night.

Chapter Four: Rules of the Game provides you with the basic rules of a storytelling game, explaining how to undertake basic tasks.

Chapter Five: Characters and Traits takes you through the process of designing your own characters with which to play **Dark Ages: Vampire**. All the character traits are explained here.

Chapter Six: Disciplines reveals the secret powers and special abilities of vampires, from the blood-magic of Thaumaturgy to the fleshcrafting of Vicissitude.

Chapter Seven: Drama gives you ways to easily adjudicate a wide variety of dramatic situations. From combat on horseback to hiding a body to suffering from the vampire’s curse to burn in sunlight, it’s all here.

Chapter Eight: Storytelling takes you through the process of planning and running a chronicle, a series of **Dark Ages** games played with your friends. The chapter is full of pointers to help get you started.

Chapter Nine: Allies and Antagonists examines the other denizens of the Dark Medieval world from ghouls (blood-fed mortal servants) to savage werewolves, ghosts, demons and witches.

The **Appendix** provides you with supplemental rules, including Merits and Flaws (specialized character traits) and statistics for a selection of animals and arcane creatures.

A Scattering of Resources

Medieval history is a broad topic indeed, and there are countless resources out there. Storytellers and players can only benefit from getting to know some of the facts of medieval life, but you shouldn't feel limited by any of them. Use historical material to help enrich your game, but remember that the world of **Dark Ages** is not the world of the history books. The following are some of the most accessible sources, and they can lead those looking for more research to still more:

Carus, Paul. *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil* (Grammercy, 1996) — easily the best book on the subject, it covers everything from early devil-worship in Mesopotamia to the Inquisition to the modern issue of good and evil. Not to be missed.

Costen, Michael. *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester Medieval Classics, 1997) — a readable discussion of life in Languedoc before, during and after the Crusade.

Gies, Joseph and Frances. *Life in a Medieval City* (Harper Perennial, 1981) — a very readable (if at times dated) general look at life in the city Troyes (and by extension lifestyles in many European cities) in the period. Full of useful details. The Gieses have written a whole series of other books in this series, including *Life in a Medieval Village* and *Life in a Medieval Castle*.

Haywood, John. *Historical Atlas of the Medieval World* (Barnes & Noble Books, 1998) — replete with full-color maps of Europe (and the rest of the world) in the period, showing trade routes, pilgrimage sites and political happenings.

Holms, George (editor). *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2001) — an excellent one-stop shop for the **Dark Ages** player or Storyteller.

Kenyon, Sherrilyn. *Everyday Life in the Middle Ages* (Writer's Digest Books, 1995) — chock full of useful detail organized in easy-to-digest tidbits, from clothing styles to weapons to foods to religious practice. Focuses on Britain.

McEvedy, Colin. *The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History* (Penguin, 1961) — not as colorful as Haywood's atlas, but equally useful. McEvedy uses the same general map of Europe over and over,

showing the evolution of political borders, trade routes, faiths and cultures over time.

Men at Arms Series (Osprey Books) — an exhaustive series of visual reference and tactical information guides on military forces and campaigns, a good number cover the period and provide useful references for military characters and chronicles.

Norwich, John Julius. *A History of Venice* (Vintage, 1982) and *A Short History of Byzantium*: (Vintage, 1999) — digestible histories of two important powers in the medieval world and the medieval mind.

Peters, Ellis. *The Brother Cadfael Mysteries* — a classic series of medieval murder mysteries about a former crusader turned quiet (but inquisitive) English monk. Both Peters' novels and the excellent television adaptations (starring Derek Jacobi) provide a wonderful look at the seedier (and very human) sides of faith and life in the period.

Riley-Smith, Jonathan. *The Crusades: A Short History* (Yale University Press, 1987) — a good overview of the entire crusading movement.

Runciman, Steven. *A History of the Crusades*. 3 volumes. (Cambridge University Press 1951-1954) — a longer history of crusading, with plenty of detail on the internal goings on in the Crusader Kingdoms of Outremer.

Seward, Desmon. *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders*. (Penguin, 1972) — a look at Templars, Knights Hospitaller and Teutonic Knights (and some others), in many ways the standard-bearers of the medieval ideal. Seward, like Runciman, is not the most modern or critical of authors on the subject, but he is still well worth the read.

Useful Web Sites

There are several very good web-sites dedicated to medieval research and sources. Many pieces of period writing — including calls to crusade and testimonials about the resulting enterprises — are just a few clicks away. The best of these sites are the Labyrinth (www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth) and the Internet Medieval Sourcebook (www.fordham.edu/halsall).

The Catholic Encyclopedia (www.newadvent.org) is also a good source for all things Catholic. It is organized in an A-Z format and has information on most topics of interest in the period. The online version is the 1913 text, however, and some of the historical material is less than accurate.



„And what do you say of these accusations, Lucía of Aragon?“

Lucita stepped forward by the required three paces to reach the wooden pew to the judges' left. Elieser de Polanco had used her mortal name, not the diminutive made all-too popular by her sire, Archbishop Monçada. She hoped that he did so out of respect for her pedigree rather than as a hint that she was still too young in the Blood and Shadow to be trusted in matters this grave.

“Yes,” said the second judge, the Genoan Maria d'Agostino, who had traveled from her holdings in the Holy Land to attend this session. “You were Don Brexiano's aid during the Bitter Crusade. What were your impressions of the him at that time?“

Careful, her sire's voice said. *Be very careful*. It was just one more maddening thing about her journey into the night that Lucita could not quite tell if the warning was a memory of her own or an actual projection from Archbishop Monçada, sitting off to the left of the hall in Oviedo which hosted this Court of Blood.

Either way, the voice was quite right: This was a time for caution. Tommaso Brexiano may be accused by his own childe of betraying his clan's cause to an Assamite vizier in Muslim Damascus, but he was no fool. Lucita and he had clashed behind closed doors during the debacle of the Fourth Crusade, and she could well make him out to be the fool here. But her testimony was not the only one to be heard by the court. Brexiano knew how the system worked. As an *Amicus* himself, he had likely presided over several of these courts.

“Don Brexiano represented his clan well during the Crusade,” she said. “That the mortal warriors failed to hew to the plans of our fine *Amici* had far more to do with failings in the local leadership.“

“Elaborate.“ The rumble of a voice came from the court's high justice, the ancient Magister Marcellus Rufus. Surprisingly apolitical for a Lasombra elder, Rufus nevertheless commanded great respect due to his age and power. His voice rumbled with both.

“As all know, Venice has long been in the hands of Heretics.“ Although her blood was far thinner than most of those in the room, Lucita could clearly feel the rise of the Beast in some of the judges. *Excellent*. “And in the years I served with Don Brexiano, Archbishop Narses still ruled as prince. His own agenda of vengeance against the Byzantines, and his... *extreme* religious interpretations, made him keep Don Brexiano isolated much of the time.“

“And what of affairs later in Byzantium?“ de Polanco interjected. “Did you not send Don Brexiano home from Constantinople, even though he was your superior and elder in the Blood? That hardly speaks of your confidence in him.“

“That was the point, Don de Polanco.“ Still not devoid of her human habits, Lucita swallowed. *Now for the grand lie*. “Don Brexiano and I agreed that in order to establish a stronger position in Byzantium, it was important for us to momentarily appear weak and draw out opponents. Don Brexiano thus withdrew, leaving me behind to act as his agent. The results speak for themselves.“

None of the judges spoke, and Lucita was very aware that they were weighing options. Perhaps they actually believed her lie, but probably not. But ultimately that didn't matter. The fact that Lucita would alter her stories of those years to laud instead of condemn her superior spoke of his worth, and that was the point.

“That is all.“ Marcellus Rufus was not one for niceties it seemed.

As Lucita left, she wondered just what favor she would extract from Brexiano... assuming he survived.



CHAPTER ONE: A DARK AGE

So did the city grow, in numbers and in strength,
Prosperous beneath my rule.

I chose the best of its blood to serve me,
And the best among those to embrace the night.

—The Erciyes Fragments. IV (Enoch)

A World Darkly Lit

“Dark Medieval” best describes the setting of *Dark Ages: Vampire*. At first glimpse, the Dark Medieval differs little from what we know of the Middle Ages. In fact, it is one and the same, at least on the surface. Villagers toil the land, living a short and harsh existence, knowing only the present and the word of God. Priests speak of damnation and salvation, while monks keep the knowledge of the ancients in damp monasteries. All across the continent, feudal lords, from lowly and chivalrous knights to tyrannical kings, rule over all they survey and fight for God in far-off lands. However, beneath the surface, Dark Medieval Europe is a place of horrors and nightmares where vampires and demons are all-too real.

Dark Reflections

The Dark Medieval thus blends history and horror. It is a doomsday time when parish priests warn that the signs of the

Apocalypse are everywhere and that devils tempt the pious and saintly. Villages and hamlets exist in total isolation, surrounded by deep woodlands filled with the ghastly howls of man-beasts and the chants of witches practicing their damned arts. Across Europe, fortified cities have bloomed with the false promise of safety and freedom. In truth, their crooked cobblestone streets and labyrinthine alleys are virtual prisons from which not even the dead can escape.

The Dark Medieval is flavored with isolation and desolation. Vast miles of untamed hinterland separate villages from cities and hide things that are much worse than monsters. Forests are forbidding expanses, shielded by shadows during the day and illuminated by the faint light of the moon at night. The wind howls through castles, lone sentinels whose walls have been stained red by blood. Superstition and fear keep villages and nobles alike confined to their homes, cowering around feeble candles until morning. In universities and monasteries, scholars and scribes struggle to pierce this uncertain darkness with ancient fragments and half-remembered truths. Kings and counts wage desperate war to keep the darkness at bay, the Church tries to spread the light of Christianity through misguided crusades, and Cainites rule the night.

By Day

To the people of Europe, it is *Anno Domini* 1230 — the 13th Christian century is reaching its midway point. Although it is a time of relative quiet among mortal rulers, the 13th century is still one of strife and unrest. The century started with the bloody and mismanaged Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), redirected by Venetian interests into sacking and destroying Constantinople, the greatest of Christian cities. In England, King John Lackland (1199-1216) signs the *Magna Carta* shortly before his death, establishing the duties and responsibilities of the king to his subjects. His heir, Henry III (1216-1272), finds his power challenged throughout his troubled reign by the powerful English barons, making him a weak king and drawing his attention away from France. Using this to his advantage, Philip II Augustus of France (1180-1223) reclaims most of the territories in France that the English crown holds. He goes on to establish France as one of the premiere powers in the 13th century with the Battle of Bouvines in 1214. To the east, in the lands of Flanders and Germany, Fredrick II (1212-1250) unifies the nobles of the Holy Roman Empire, the last vestige of Rome, but becomes embroiled in the conflicts and intrigues of the investiture controversy, pitting emperor against pope. In the arid Iberian Peninsula, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon are encroaching on the Moorish stronghold of al-Andalus. Majorca falls in 1229, Córdoba in 1236, and Seville in 1248, leaving Granada as the sole Moorish city until 1492. Until then, it remains one of Europe's most learned cities, a center of knowledge and scholarship,

surrounded and besieged by those who are jealous of its wealth and treasures.

The century is also one of heresy, and it witnesses the birth of the Papal Inquisition. While the most gruesome excesses and witch-hunts are still centuries away, the Church prepares itself to deal with its enemies — both mundane and supernatural. The Albigensians of Southern France, who believe the world to be evil and preach a life of poverty, become the victims of the first crusade called on Christian lands. Soon after, the Teutonic Knights march across Poland, Hungary, Livonia and into Russia under the banner of their black cross, fighting pagans and other infidels in the name of God. In the Holy Land, the century sees four different crusades head for various points along the Mediterranean. For the most part, Christian forces suffer the familiar setbacks of the previous centuries, but these setbacks fail to deter one pope after another from calling for renewed efforts.

This is also a time when the east rides into the west. The great Ghengis Khan dies in 1227, but his successors push into Europe. They overrun Persia in 1231, southern Russia five years later, and they reach as far west as Poland and Hungary in 1241. However, the khans and their horsemen are not the only travelers. In 1271, the explorer Marco Polo leaves for the mysterious East, traveling over

OF HISTORY AND FANTASY

Set in AD 1230, *Dark Ages: Vampire* is a historical game, deriving a good part of its dramatic energy and focus from real events — the Albigensian Crusade, the conflicts of Emperor Fredrick II and the rekindling of the Guelph-Ghibelline conflict in Italy, to name a few. The game's roots, however, stretch far back to the chaos that spread after the collapse of Rome, a time when a mighty empire fractured and splintered into the many kingdoms that rule Europe in the 13th century. Historically, the "Dark Ages" refer to a short span of centuries, roughly from the fall of Rome to the rise of Emperor Charlemagne in the ninth century. However, the term captures the atmospheric merging of history and horror inherent to *Dark Ages: Vampire* — hence our anachronistic usage.

Although it is based on fact and history, the core of *Dark Ages: Vampire* rests in the uncharted spaces between the lines of the history books. Although the lives of kings, popes and monarchs are well documented, we know very little beyond their castles and cities with any degree of certainty. The Dark Medieval night is unknown and uncertain, and the fantastic elements of *Dark Ages: Vampire* emerge from this uncertainty. This is not the fantasy of elves, dragons and wizards. It is the wonder of a world uncharted, colored by the fear of the unknown. This is a time of terror and daring, of unspeakable evils and unlimited opportunities.

lands that no westerner will see again for another five centuries. When he returns, Europe is forever changed.

This, however, is the Europe of history books.

By Night

Superstition rules the Dark Medieval just as much as monarchs and popes do. It is an age when religion and faith provide hope and salvation, but they also preach that the Devil and his minions lurk in the night. To the populace of Europe, this is not dogma but reality. The people know that the dark forests hide more than just shadows, and they believe, just as they believe in God, that specters, demons and vampires exist. In this age, farmers attend Mass, praying for forgiveness and salvation, then gather in fields to pay tribute and placate the Old Gods — not because they have no faith, but because they absolutely and completely believe. They believe that evil witches and warlocks can command the spirits of the dead, calling them from their resting-places to torment the living. When returning from their pilgrimages, commoners and nobles alike have seen strange glyphs carved on stones and heard ethereal music when the moon was full. They know that the Devil waits to tempt the faithful with sin, dooming them to an eternity of carnal torment and grief.

The Damned

The nights of the Dark Medieval world belong to the beings known and feared as vampires. These creatures call themselves *Cainites* because they trace their lineage to Caine, first childe of Adam and Eve and murderer of his brother, Abel. This age is their twilight empire, a time when vampires are lords of night and exist without fear. Cainites stand atop ancient parapets and cast long and terrible shadows over all they survey. From Rome to Paris and beyond, they stalk darkened city streets like seductive succubae, while war-bands of vampires clash on silent moors and hills, settling ancient disputes with blood and ashes. While most mortals huddle behind closed doors, vampires hold their nocturnal courts and play their games of macabre intrigue. They drift in and out of the palaces of kings and queens, toying with the lives of mortals with no more a thought than when playing games of dice. Not all vampires clamor like moths to the cities and mortal courts, though. Some Cainites, both feral and mystic, venture into the wilds beyond city walls. Here they carve out kingdoms for themselves, ruling over covens of lesser vampires and cowering humans. In a world of superstition and faith, Cainites ride through the night like the Four Horsemen, leaving death, strife and misery in their wake.

The Children of Caine wear many guises, from the crowns of monarchs to the robes of priests, but all vampires must eventually face the truth that they are monsters,

creatures that cloak themselves with the night and crave the blood of the living. From this curse there is no escape. Each is a cold-blooded killer, a sublime predator feeding on the living with a parasitic intensity that places them beyond the light of God and the company of man. Cainites are abominations, animated corpses possessed by a remorseless hunger that ultimately consumes everything they once cared for, damning their souls forever. All Cainites are cursed, and they bear this mark as their birthright; they will never know the salvation of Heaven or the torture of Hell. Some are all too happy to pay this price, content with the power they obtain in the process: the mystic gifts of blood magic, inhuman strength and reflexes, and above all, immortality. Many, however, lament their transformation into vampires. In mourning some Cainites seek redemption in hopes of reclaiming what they have lost — their souls.

The Trinity of Caine

As the progenitor of all vampires, Caine is worshipped and feared as creator and destroyer. If anything even remotely unites Cainites in these tumultuous times, it is their belief in and reverence for their progenitor. Worship of Caine varies from Cainite to Cainite, but the so-called "Trinity of Caine" as Dark Father, Wanderer and Dark Tyrant is the most widely accepted form in the 13th century. The influence of Christianity is hard to miss, and most of the iconography is drawn directly from Christian sources. Pagan, Muslim and Jewish Cainites color the Trinity of Caine with their own symbols and icons, though.

The Dark Father

Many Cainites worship Caine as their progenitor, the Dark Father whose sin reaches down through the endless ages to curse them, but who is also their link to God. Unlike mortals who have only their faith to sustain their belief in God, Cainites can look to Caine as proof that God *does* exist. This proof vindicates vampires as divine creatures, cursed but nonetheless blessed and touched by God. If they have been cast into darkness, it is because of the will of God, and many Cainite theologians insist that this means there is light, and that God exists in that light.

The Wanderer

The figure of Caine as mystic is both strong and contentious. Many Christian Cainites consider this portrayal too pagan for their tastes. Nonetheless, all vampires feel the inherent isolation and loneliness of being Cainites and hence look to the Wanderer as a guide to help them cope with their curse. Melancholic, the Wanderer waits, knowing that a reckoning will one night be at hand. He hopes that a new path may be found in the wilderness away from his children — one that leads to redemption.

The Dark Tyrant

This last incarnation strikes fear into even the most ancient vampires. *The Book of Nod* speaks of a final judgment when Caine will return and stand above his race as tyrant. He will condemn many to ashes while others will fall, destroyed by the endless hunger of their own sires. Once the ashes settle, the legend continues, Caine will rule for 1,000 years, and a great darkness will descend across the land. Some Cainite mystics claim that the time for the Dark Tyrant is at hand, and that Caine will soon return to reclaim his kingdom.

The Book of Nod

Many Cainites adorn their lairs with shrines to Caine, trying to understand their curse through the trails and tribulation of the Third Mortal. *The Book of Nod*, Caine's chronicles penned by his own hand, is both widely sought after and widely forged. It recounts Caine's first nights and offers dire predictions of Gehenna, an apocalyptic time of bloodshed and darkness when Caine will return and pass judgment on all vampires. Some sources claim that *The Book of Nod* offers insight into God's curse and how to find redemption, while others believe the text to be filled with demonic knowledge and blacker magic. Like the Holy Grail, *The Book of Nod* promises understanding and salvation, answering many of the questions that plague all vampires. No complete copies of the Book exist in the 13th century, but fragments and forgeries can be found if one knows where to look.

In the last several decades, copies of a series of extracts from the Book have become highly influential. Spread by the Cappadocians from their hidden temple in Anatolia, the so-called Erciyes Fragments are a group of nine different texts from the Book. The first four, titled *Genesis*, *Lilith*, *Temptations* and *Enoch*, are said to have been penned by the Third Mortal himself, and they tell of his banishment to Nod and the First City. The next two, *Lamentations* and *Transgressions*, were apparently authored by one of the Antediluvians, and they speak of the flood and the Second City. The final three fragments, *Commandments*, *Prophecies* and *Proverbs*, are the most terrible, consisting of laws for the Damned and a dark oracular vision of Gehenna.

Although there are those who dispute the Fragments' origins, they have come to be accepted as the closest things to definitive scripture among the unliving. Vampiric priests endlessly quote from and refer to the Fragments, and their monastic brothers have produced a flow of copies. Among the princes and lords of the night, possessing a fine copy is seen as a great honor indeed. Owning a truly ancient fragment, especially from the lost portions of the Book not in the Erciyes Fragments, is akin to owning a relic of Christ.

Dying the Endless Death

Although they were once human, Cainites are now damned and forsaken creatures of the night. All Cainites, from the youngest fledgling to the most ancient elder, are



terrifying creatures — powerful, alluring and capricious in nature. They wield forbidden powers drawn from their cursed blood and known as *Disciplines*. These dark gifts inspired the tales of vampires possessing preternatural senses, the ability to fade into shadows or transform into bats and wolves. Disciplines also allow Cainites to command the dead, call mighty storms and possess the minds of others. Vampires are also immortal beings who are beyond death and capable of shrugging off almost every wound and disease. Blood and force of will can heal almost any injury short of decapitation in a matter of seconds. As deadly predators, Cainites are both stronger and quicker than mortals. They can scale castle walls with their bare hands and unhorse a knight in full armor with a single blow.

Cainites may be sublime and powerful, but they are not without weaknesses. These failings are as much a part of their unholy heritage as is their command over blood and their undying natures.

Destruction and Torpor

Although they are immortal, vampires are not beyond destruction. A Cainite's nocturnal existence is fragile, and it demands constant vigilance. The threat of the *Final Death* haunts all vampires, its oblivion both frightening and captivating to those tired of unlife. Final Death occurs when a Cainite is destroyed, either through decapitation, conflagration or exposure to sunlight. Exactly what happens when a vampire meets the Final Death is a matter of much conjecture among Cainite scholars. Some claim that the Cainite's soul is released from the Curse of Caine and finally welcomed by God into his kingdom. Others claim that only the Adversary and the Pit await the Cainite beyond the last sleep.

A Cainite can meet Final Death in a variety of ways, but it is not always a simple matter. Many of the myths of how to destroy a vampire are just that, human superstition and legend. A stake through the heart does nothing more than paralyze the vampire. The usefulness of crosses, rosaries and other religious symbols is usually determined by the conviction of the holder. These objects, wielded by the faithful, can repel a whole coven of vampires (which explains why most Cainites are careful not to attract the attention of the devout). Wounds inflicted by other vampires can also prove fatal from time to time. If they are great enough in number, even mundane wounds can condemn a vampire to Final Death. It is more common, however, for Cainites to enter *torpor* than to face Final Death in these circumstances.

Torpor is a state of deep, death-like slumber that can last for a few nights or countless centuries. While in torpor, the Cainite is utterly defenseless, barely cognizant of the world around her, and then only as if in a dream. Ancient vampires are said to be able to communicate and use their Disciplines while in torpor, but younger vampires are unable to do so. They remain consigned to a deep coma until their unnatural

bodies recover. Some Cainites enter torpor voluntarily, usually driven to do so by a deep sense of melancholy. Fearful of the future, these Cainites retreat to isolated lairs and dream of ages past.

The Curse of Caine

Just as man was made in God's image, so are all Cainites cursed as their progenitor was cursed. Vampires belong to a forsaken race, and they are reminded every night of their damned heritage and of God's condemnation of Caine. The Curse, the "Endless Death" to use the terminology of Cainite mystics, is what truly sets vampires apart from humanity and damns their souls. It condemns all Cainites to immortality, to the fear of the sun and fire, and finally to the hunger. Once Embraced into the darkness of unlife, there can be no respite from it. Cainites feel their curse on a nightly basis.

Immortality

Immortality, the birthright of all Cainites, is both a blessing and a curse. Few Cainites are so blind in their hubris as to call themselves immortal. Most prefer the term *undying*. As undying, vampires are freed from the ravages of time. Cainites do not age in the ways mortals do — their limbs do not grow flaccid, and their mental capacities do not diminish. Instead, they become fixed in age and look just as they did when they first emerged into the night as vampires — their beauty or hideousness framed for all of eternity. Immortality also has other benefits. Cainites are immune to almost all diseases, though they can easily play host for them, becoming plague bearers as they move from city to city and feed on the unwary. Possessing dead bodies, Cainites do not feel pain like mortals do, and they can use their unholy blood to heal injuries that would fell the most stalwart of knights.

Immortality is also a curse, and all Cainites eventually fall under the melancholic ennui of eternity. Immortality might place vampires beyond death's grasp, but the abyss of eternity is ultimately more horrifying than the oblivion of death. The millennia stand before all vampires like a vast, sunless sea dwarfing even the mightiest of Caine's children. In time, every one of the Damned comes to the realization that nothing lasts forever. The places of their mortal births crumble to dust and ruins. Loved ones grow frail and die. The Cainites themselves become nothing more than relics of ages long past. The Children of Caine are masters of the night, because it is as eternal as they are. But that Cainite apocalypse called Gehenna draws nearer with each passing night. While Caine's final judgment might be centuries, even millennia into the future, immortality ensures that most of his progeny will be present when it arrives. It is a constant threat that looms over every vampire, a reminder that no matter how many centuries pass, they will be judged for their sins one night.

Of Fire and Light

Cainites are cursed to fear fire and the light of the sun — both symbols of God's providence and the birthrights of Seth's children. Fire and sunlight are capable of condemning even the most ancient vampire to the Final Death — reducing ageless bodies to smoldering ash in an instant. Even the slightest exposure to fire (such as the flame of a candle) or the merest glint of sunlight is severely painful to Cainites, excruciating in its agony. Unlike normal wounds, Cainites are powerless to heal injuries caused by fire or sunlight. Those unlucky enough to be caught outdoors at dawn, or in the pyre of some witch-hunt can only hope that their destruction is quick. It is not merely that fire and sunlight are anathema to vampires, however. Their caution around these banes quickly gives way to outright terror and rage. Like all creatures of the night, vampires fear the light. Even the most calm and reserved Cainite can fly into a fit of panic at a glimpse of sunlight or the uncontrolled flames of a fire.

But fear is not the whole story. The desire for the day torments all Cainites, no matter how deeply buried or masked as hatred it is. Banished from the sunlit world, all vampires long to bask in the light once more and remember how it felt. From the moment they cross the threshold into immortality, Cainites are forever haunted by the last time they saw the sun — a symbol of both their curse and what they've lost in becoming vampires.

The Hunger

All Cainites crave the blood of the living, and in some very fundamental ways, it is what drives their unholy existence. This hunger is ceaseless in its demands and voracious in its appetite, turning even the pious and noble into killers and the deranged into monsters. Sustaining their immortal existence is the primary concern of all Cainites. They may curse the unholy things they have become, but all fear the Final Death, and so they feed. Whether vampires drain their victims in orgies of blood or daintily sip from them during nocturnal trysts, they are still bringers of death in the end. The first few deaths might shock and upset them, but they grow callous in time and take life without a second thought.

Feeding is the ultimate rush for Cainites, an intoxicating act that rivals and ultimately overshadows sexual pleasure. It is at once a physical and spiritual act. For a brief moment, vampire and victim become one. The world bleeds away until all the Cainite can focus on is her victim's body growing limp and heavy as its blood is drained. Quite literally, the vampire steals her victim's very life through feeding. Many describe the sound of the victim's dying heart as a siren song, luring the Cainite deeper and deeper. This is the only time a Cainite ever knows silence from her animalistic hungers.

Cainite mystics hold that the most ancient of their race discover after centuries, even millennia, of unlife that human blood no longer sustains them. They crave the blood of their own kind instead. According to legend,

the Antediluvians sired their clans to have a ready stable of blood to feed their ancient appetites. The young tell themselves that this tale is a fabrication of the elders, told to keep them in line, but only the ancients know for sure.

This hunger is not an abstract impulse; it is the essence of God's curse distilled into raw form. It is a stain that perverts and destroys all vampires, not only in driving them to kill to sustain their immortal lives, but because it completely possesses them. It taints their emotions and thoughts, slowly dragging them further and further into damnation. Cainites call this hunger and its ravenous instincts *the Beast*.

The Beast

The Beast lurks within each vampire, a possessing spirit that craves blood and thrives on cruelty and violence. Capricious and malicious, it perpetually damns all vampires. As long as it howls, no matter how strong or faithful the Cainite is, redemption and salvation are forever beyond her grasp. It is the Beast that propels Cainites to become monsters, to devour and destroy everything they touch and care for. It makes vampires quick to anger and feeds on their emotions, tainting and corrupting them in the process. The pious and religious among Caine's childer suggest that the Beast is nothing but a reflection of the Original Sin inherited by Caine from his parents. Having sacrificed their immortal souls in becoming vampires, Cainites can no longer suppress the urge to sin; hence they are doomed to spend eternity as captives to their own base desires and urges.

Whatever its origin, the Beast warps the vampire's identity, amplifying any mental flaws that the Cainite had when he was human. A father confuses love for obsession. A priest becomes set in his own righteousness, even going as far as excusing his vampiric sins as God's will. A knight's love toward his lady becomes tainted and corrupt, spawning hate and resentment. In the end, the Beast makes all vampires selfish. Their needs, their sins, their torment, their loves and hates become of singular importance, more important than anyone and anything else. It screams from the deepest pit of the soul begging to be released. The weak cave in and become feral monsters driven by the basest of desires and needs — usually survival and hunger — a state all Cainites fear because it means the end of their former selves.

The strong of will and conviction fare better, keeping their inner monster caged, feeding only when necessary and keeping their emotions in check. Cainites look to dark faiths and philosophies they call *roads* for help controlling the Beast, and that is what all Cainites want — to be free of the ceaseless hunger and urges, to find silence once more. For this reason, all Cainites crave control. They seek to control their surroundings because the Beast is forever beyond their influence. Cainites might rule kingdoms and empires, but they are reminded every night of the simple fact that they are nothing but slaves to their Beasts. This is a struggle no vampire ever wins.

To Traffic with the Devil

For Cainites, the Beast is the abyss: a force that possesses them, damns their souls and casts them forever from the light. There is no escaping its corrupting whispers, which beg and cajole the Cainite to commit atrocities to sate its selfish hunger. The Beast destroys the one thing that people in the Dark Medieval world know for certain — the promise of salvation. Without salvation, there can be no hope, and without hope, Cainites find themselves alone in a dark world.

No matter how damning the Beast is, though, it is also the source of a Cainite's power. Although its impulses drag the Cainite into the abyss, these same impulses and instincts allow her to live even though her body is dead. The blood the Beast craves is what sustains the Cainite and allows her to experience physical sensations and, above all else, exist. Without the raging hunger of the Beasts, Cainites would be nothing more than rotting, mindless automatons.

The realization that they are nothing more than monsters, beyond salvation and alone, is what drives Cainites over the edge. Defeated and lost, they succumb to the Beast and embrace its darkness.

Frenzy

The Beast is aptly named, for it is the animal mind of instincts and impulses. Very little about the Beast is rational, which is what many Cainites fear. Like an animal, the Beast lashes out with all its power and destroys all higher thought, plunging the vampire either into a frenzied blood rage (triggered by hunger or anger) or the mad fear Cainites call *Rötschreck* (the "Red Fear" triggered by fire or sunlight).

A vampire who is lost to the Beast is a terrifying thing. It knows nothing except rage, and it lashes out like a crazed animal against whoever steps in its way. In battle, a frenzied vampire is a fearful sight to behold, but the vampire who keeps her Beast bubbling beneath the surface is far more menacing. The Beast can be subtle, and its insidious evil is revealed thus. It works to pervert everything the Cainite believes in. It poisons the Cainite against those who mean no harm, filling her head with paranoid fears until the Cainite trusts no one, not even herself. It whispers to the Cainite with false promises of power, power that only serves to damn her in the end.

The Primacy of Blood

Blood ties all Cainites together. It was the blood of Abel that cursed Caine, and in turn, it is Caine's blood that now flows through the dead veins of all vampires. This unholy blood, which vampires call *vitae*, fuels a Cainite's existence, but it also has other mystical qualities. It is through blood that all Cainites trace their ancestry; from the vampire who created them all the way back to Caine himself. The blood also grants Cainites

inhuman strength and reflexes and the blood-magic of the Disciplines. While the Beast damns Cainites, and Caine's Curse haunts them, the blood defines them as their own race.

Lies of Blood: Generation

All Cainites trace their ancestry according to how far removed they are from Caine, how many generations down their cursed line they are. When Caine sired in Enoch, he sired the second generation, who in turn sired the third and on and on until the present night. Cainites use generation to describe their heritage as Caine's children. Those of low generation, two or three times removed from Caine, are accorded more respect than those nine or ten times removed. In the Dark Medieval night, only 13 generations have been counted, and the wretches of the 13th are seen as less-than-whole by their supposed betters. Indeed, each generation dilutes the blood of Caine, making that generation weaker than the one preceding it. *The Book of Nod* speaks of a time of thin blood when Caine's legacy will be so diluted that half-human, half-vampire mongrels will overrun the cities and lairs and herald the coming of Gehenna. For this reason, many old Cainites fear the younger ones, distrusting vampires of the 10th, 11th and 12th generations.

Caine

Caine has the dubious honor of being the first among the Damned, the malignant seed from which all other Cainites claim their heritage. Nothing has been heard from Caine since he vanished after the Great Flood, and only those of the third generation have any real memories of the Dark Father. Some Cainites claim to have met a mysterious wanderer, ancient as the land itself and wearing a cloak made of the night. Whether this wanderer is Caine or not, no one knows. Those who believe also fear the night Caine returns, for it is prophesied that he will bring with him a final accounting for his spawn.

The Second Generation

Caine is said to have embraced only three children — the mythical second generation and sires of the 13 Antediluvians. Like Caine, little is known about the Three, who most likely all met their end in the Great Flood or in the upheavals of the Second City. Even the mighty Antediluvians are hesitant to speak of their sires, beings of incredible beauty, but also tyrants and demigods. It is rumored that one, or all three may have survived and spent the centuries looking for Caine, waiting for his return to rebuild Enoch once more.

The Third Generation

It is with the third generation that myth and legend meet reality. *The Book of Nod* claims that only 13 vampires

belong to the third generation and that each are the progenitors of one of the 13 clans. Only Caine and the Three, however, know how many of the third generation were actually created. They are quite literally “Antediluvians,” having survived the biblical flood by slumbering under the waters to hide from the sun. They are so ancient, it is said, that most can exist only in torpor, that state of dark slumber that affects all Cainites of advanced age. Legend says that when the Antediluvians finally emerge from their slumber, they will devour their clans to sate their eternal hunger, and this time will be Gehenna.

The Fourth and Fifth Generations

Known as *Methuselahs*, the vampires of the fourth and fifth generations are almost as powerful as their sires. Although they are old, some have escaped the call of lasting torpor, and even those who have failed are only condemned to slumber a few centuries at a time. Their power lies in their advanced Disciplines and age. Few vampires of subsequent generations can match a *Methuselah's* power. It is said they can will volcanoes to erupt and command the legions of Hell itself. Their age is also their greatest weakness, though. Many of the fourth and fifth generations fall victim to their rivals' and enemies' schemes, or they become infected with a deep melancholy. Few recover from this ennui, fading into the veil of time or becoming dispassionate, playing their games of intrigue with a detached intensity — a dangerous combination.

The Sixth and Seventh Generations

Younger than the *Methuselahs* and Antediluvians, many of the vampires of the sixth and seventh generation are still elders of Cainite society. While few Cainites ever cross paths with a fourth-generation vampire, most encounter the self-styled lords of the sixth and seventh generations. Although they are not as powerful as the *Methuselahs*, these Cainites are still formidable opponents, who gladly sacrifice mystical and spiritual power for temporal influence. These Cainites rule over vast kingdoms, donning the crown of monarchs and commanding armies of younger Cainites and mortal thralls.

The Eighth and Ninth Generations

Achieving a delicate balance between age and generation, these vampires are the most visible ones in the 13th century. Although they are young, the blood of Caine flows strong through their veins, usually enough to give them an edge over those of higher generation. They are nowhere near as old as most Cainites of lower generation, however, which places them in a delicate position. Most Cainites of eighth and ninth generation overcome this disadvantage by siring large covens of childer. In the last century or so, this practice has led to an explosion in the Cainite population, mainly of the ninth and higher generations.

The Tenth and Eleventh Generations

While they are comparatively young, most vampires created within the last few centuries belong to the tenth and eleventh generation. The blood of Caine still flows through them, but they have only recently overthrown the shackles of their sires and become powers in their own right. The Curse of Caine has not yet blinded them as it has those of lower generations. The night is still full of wonder, and these Cainites burn with passion and conviction. Caine's blood might not flow as strongly in their veins, but their undead hearts burn with a furious intensity that makes them forces to be reckoned with.

The Twelfth Generation and Beyond

Fledgings and neonates, these vampires are separated by blood and millennia from Caine. Nonetheless, all are powerful creatures by virtue of their damned nature. Although they lack the powers of the lower generations, the vampires of the 12th generation stand above men, capable of besting the strongest mortal knight in battle and wielding influence over barons, merchants and counts. The Cainites of the 12th generation are children of the present nights. The vast majority were Embraced within the past few decades, which gives them leverage that not even the sixth and seventh generations can claim.

In the 13th generation, facts again mix with rumor and myth. Cainite scholars claim that Caine's blood is so weak in them, that those of the 13th generation are not even full vampires, but *Caitiff* — wretches able to survive for only a decade at the most. The few vampires of this generation that have survived are seen as heralds of Gehenna and abominations of Caine's curse. Most 12th-generation vampires are prohibited from siring, and the few that do usually hide their progeny for fear of being destroyed. Those 13th-generation Cainites who survive are treated with both suspicion and paranoia.

The Gifts of Lilith: Disciplines

According to legend, it was Lilith, Adam's first wife, who awoke Caine to the power of Disciplines — the blood-magic that all Cainites wield. Lilith is revered as the Dark Mother, complete with her own cults and sects devoted to her worship. Like the mortal cult of the Virgin Mary, vampiric worship of Lilith is varied, and each congregation focuses upon one aspect of the Dark Mother. It is because of Lilith's role as Caine's first teacher that female Cainites are usually treated as equals in vampiric society — and woe to the foolish male neonate who believes otherwise. However, in the Christian climate of the time, a few Cainites are unwilling to acknowledge the role of a woman, much less one such as Lilith, in teaching Caine the Disciplines inherent in the blood.

Theological arguments about their origins aside, the Disciplines grant all Cainites mystical powers such as the ability to command animals, the power over illusions and

shadows, the commanding gaze and so on. Some of the more unorthodox Disciplines include power over the flesh or the ability to raise the dead as slaves. There are almost a score of known Disciplines, some common to many Cainites, others the jealously guarded providence of a particular bloodline.

Blood fuels the Disciplines, both as the catalyst and the medium. Therefore, their use requires the Cainites to accept, even if hesitantly, their natures as vampires. This is the devil's bargain, and all but the most strong-willed fall victim. Through Disciplines, Cainites ultimately indulge the Beast, making it more powerful.

The Embrace

Cainites carry Caine's curse as a terrible mark that sentences them to an immortality dogged by the Beast, but perhaps the true cruelty of their existence is not the hunger for blood, but the ability to condemn others to the night. The act of creating a vampire is called the *Embrace*, and it is the ultimate sign of Cainite hubris. As solitary creatures, denied the company of mortals and cast into darkness, all vampires eventually crave companionship. In time, this urge intoxicates them and fills them with a passion that only the Embrace can sate. Some seek out a worthy protégé to inherit their blood and thus become their *childe*. Others long for a companion, a kindred soul who understands their curse and pain. Then, there are those who Embrace for power, to create vast broods of underlings for protection, even subsistence. But none of the many reasons to Embrace — lust, beauty, pride, power, pity, even love — truly justifies or exonerates the Cainite.

The act of Embracing is analogous to courtship. The childe catches the eye of the sire, and in turn, the sire is drawn to the vibrancy and energy of the childe. Some sires stalk their childer, testing them from afar to prove their worth, slowly destroying everything they care for, then Embracing them. Others court their childer, flowering them with gifts and proclamations of love. However, no one *chooses* to become a vampire. Only the foolish and naive believe that they freely sacrificed their souls in exchange for the Embrace. Those mortals who do not become enraptured by their future sire, who cling desperately to their lives, do not stand a chance against a vampire who has made up her mind. Once a mortal has caught the attention of one of the Damned, the best they can hope for is death — the worst, eternal torment as one of the undying.

In the end, either out of love, desperation or lust, the vampire succumbs and sires, baptizing her childe in blood and taking that most precious of gifts — life. Cainites may delude themselves into believing that they're preserving their childer from the ravages of time, but they Embrace because they've become infatuated and obsessed. Drawn like moths to a flame, the vampire longs to possess the human, to make him her own, and the Embrace guarantees this for eternity.

This irony eventually poisons the relationship between sire and childer. The Embrace, which was meant to

sustain the human in immortal perfection, ends up destroying and corrupting him. Vampires Embrace in a vain attempt to recapture their lost humanity, hoping that in making a new vampire they will magically remember what made them human at one point in the distant past. However, this hope is quickly shattered when the sire realizes her childe is no different than herself — a blood-thirsty monster forever doomed to the night.

Becoming

If folklore is to be believed, anyone who falls victim to a vampire's bite is doomed to rise the following night and become one of the undead. If such were the case, all life would have been extinguished long ago and only ashes would remain in the world. The act actually requires conscious and deliberate effort. Simply drinking the blood of a mortal is not enough, nor is killing him. The Embrace requires the childe to be at death's door and then fed a portion of cursed blood from his sire. Then and only then is the Embrace complete.

While all Cainites possess the ability to sire, not all are successful. The blood of Caine is so weak in those of high generation, especially the 12th generation, that the Embrace sometimes fails. This is why there are so few 13th-generation vampires, their sire's blood is not old enough to transfer Caine's curse. Failure to Embrace is utterly devastating. Few Cainites recover from the loss of their childe, most weeping tears of blood until the sun condemns them to Final Death.

Embracing also requires permission. This is one of Caine's commandments, which Cainites in positions of authority enforce to the point of destruction. Since the early nights of Caine, the act of siring new vampires has been a privilege only the eldest vampire can bestow. This law is usually strict among Cainite courts, and those who break it are subject to persecution and Final Death. Rarely, however, does this stop those who desire to sire, a trap most vampires fall victim to at some point in their unives.

Reborn to Darkness

The Embrace is horrifying in its simplicity. The act that dooms the childe to immortality and damnation is not immediately painful. In fact, the act itself is extremely pleasurable. First, the sire must bring her childe to within a whisper of death. Once the victim is hovering above the abyss, the Cainite must feed the childe some of her blood. Some sires slash their wrists, letting the blood flow into their childer's mouths in a torrent, others bite their own tongues and physically kiss their childer, letting their blood mix together in unholy union. The quantity is not important. A single drop of cursed blood is all that is needed, and the change begins to take hold immediately once that blood slips into the childe's mouth.

All sound bleeds away as the childe's body dies, leaving a silence so suffocating that it eventually drowns out the sound of his own dying heart. Then, when his heart beats for



that final, terrible time, darkness washes over the childe and the world literally sinks beneath the darkness. Yet, the childe is not alone. Shapes emerge surrounding him. For some, these shapes are their fading memories. Others see loved ones saying good-bye, and a few even see angels casting them from the light of Heaven, or Hell. Whatever the image is, it will haunt the childe for the rest of his unlife — a constant reminder of all he has lost.

As the sire's blood insinuates itself into the childe's every fiber, a burning takes hold in the pit of his stomach. This fiery pain that shatters the childe's bloodless haze and rips him back from the Elysian Fields. The burning sensation becomes stronger and stronger until whatever peace the childe had resigned himself to shatters. The childe becomes aware of her stiffening body, which has grown cold, heavy as marble and utterly alien. Most terrifying of all is the sensation of her soul becoming trapped in her dying body. The process corrupts the soul, tainting it and allowing the Beast to take hold. Then, as the course of the Embrace nears its frightful conclusion, the childe screams a silent scream, unable to draw air into his dead lungs, and his eyes thrust open in desperation. The faint light of the night assails him, and he becomes aware of a ceaseless hunger, a desperate thirst for blood, that will be with him forever.

With a mindless ferocity, the newly sired vampire sets upon whatever he can feed on. Usually it is the wrist of his sire, greedily drinking back his stolen blood, but it

could be a hapless victim his sire prepared or even some unfortunate rodents. Lost to his hunger, the childe feeds like a starved animal, his Beast in total control. The childe's hunger recedes once he is gorged on blood, but the pain lingers for hours as his body goes through the process of dying and purges itself of needless waste. Large organs shrivel into reddish black lumps, while the smaller ones are transubstantiated into blood. The childe then vomits up the other useless humors in painful heaves of phlegm and black and yellow bile, leaving a metallic taste in his mouth.

When the red haze of the hunger falls away and the childe's body goes through its last death throes, the childe emerges as a vampire — no longer human but a descendant of Caine, sentenced forever to the night. Old wounds and scars seem to vanish as the childe's skin whitens to an unnatural pallor that gives the childe a decidedly stark beauty. Even those who were homely in life seem to acquire newfound allure in death. However, this beauty is not purely physical. The childe's eyes shine with raw passion, both predatory and alluring, standing in marked contrast to his marble-like skin. The childe's hair, fragile and delicate, falls like whips of fine gossamer thread, framing his immortality. His nails harden, becoming crystalline and sharp, while his gums recede, revealing sharpened fangs, both fine and terrifying.

The childe is also changed in other, less perceptible ways. Gazing out into the night, he becomes

aware of how shadows shimmer and seem to bubble, each a bottomless abyss where other horrors lurk. The wind whispers and taunts the childe like the wail of banshees lamenting her change. The childe can see death everywhere. Mortals appear, not solid and substantial, but shimmering, their fragile lives short and bitter. Plants and flowers appear muted in the night, their lavish colors reduced to shades of grays and browns. And yet, the childe remembers. He remembers the joy of the sun and the cheer of family and friends. As these memories come, the weight of his curse bears down on him. In a cruel dichotomy, the childe is constantly reminded of what he's lost although he is now dead — a corpse reanimated. The Curse of Caine opens his eyes to the real beauty of the world but also banishes him from it.

The First Nights

A childe's first nights are a tumultuous time, which he spends mainly learning from his sire and understanding what he has become. Some sires are kind guides, teaching their progeny how to cope with the curse and wield the gifts of Caine. Those childer who are so lucky learn to trust their sire as progenitor, mentor and even lover, creating a strong bond between them. Other sires are cruel and dictatorial — treating their childer with no more compassion than one would have for a beast of burden. These childer learn hate and fear, becoming tyrants like their sires in time. Worse, some sires abandon their childer completely, leaving them to the mercy of the night without instruction or guidance. This fate usually amounts to a death sentence for the childe, and few last for more than a handful of nights before falling victims to their own ignorance or the torches of enraged peasants.

During this period of apprenticeship, which can last from a few months to decades, childer are considered fledglings and not full Cainites. They are under the protection of their sires and have no standing in Cainite society. It is only once the childe is formally presented to the eldest vampire in the area, usually as part of a vampiric coming-of-age ceremony, that he can cast off the title of fledgling and becomes a *neonate* — fully accepted as one of Caine's race. These early years are critical in the formation of the childer, molding them forever. They learn the vagaries of Cainite society and its customs while experimenting with their newfound gifts and how to control the Beast. Some fail to do so, finding the Beast too wild and the hunger too strong. Like rabid animals, such childer must be put down lest they awake the ire of mortals or worse, other Cainites. The lucky (or perhaps unlucky) eventually find a balance and come to accept their Beasts.

The first nights are also a time of revelations. The fledgling comes to understand the full ramifications of

being one of the unliving. In quiet desperation, the childe learns what he has lost and what he's become. Most come face to face with their own inhumanity and discover that they are incapable of feeling or experiencing true emotions. Many a childe refuses to cope with his Embrace, eventually seeking the light of the sun to end his torment. In time, those who accept what they've become and learn what they need to survive become true Cainites.

Hunting

Even the most callous and tyrannical sire teaches his childe the finer points of feeding, for without this lesson, a fledgling stands little chance of surviving more than a few nights before attracting the attention of mortals. The childe learns how to hunt without endangering herself, and more importantly, how to conceal any traces of the Kiss — the act of feeding — by licking the wound shut. In the beginning, the childe, still young and inexperienced, is likely to kill her prey, driving her deeper into the abyss of despair. Few sires wean their charges on animals or even teach them that they do not have to kill outright to feed. This revelation often comes too late, after the childe has killed repeatedly in clumsy attempts to feed.

In time, the childe learns how to control the Beast, reducing its frenzies. Instead of gorging on her victims until they collapse, the childe takes only enough blood to quiet the Beast and leaves her prey alive. Soon, as the childe feeds with greater frequency, she becomes enamored with the rush and the delicate pantomime between hunter and hunted. Her predatory instincts kick in, and the childe begins to stalk the night on her own. All Cainites are territorial, as the childe learns early on. The sire shares his haven and feeding grounds with his childe at first, but the sire becomes more and more protective of his territories as the childe evolves.

Domain

During the first nights, the childe also learns the importance of domain — of securing a safe haven to hide from the light of the sun and meddling mortals. A keen childe observes how no other Cainite hunts in her sire's domain, and those who visit show nothing but respect toward her sire. Soon, it becomes apparent to the childe that a Cainite's domain, and haven, is often an important font of their influence and indicates their standing in Cainite society. In the case of especially influential vampires, domain extends beyond their exclusive hunting grounds, and the fledgling becomes aware of the semi-feudal nature of Cainite society and its customs dictating domain.

As the fledgling becomes a neonate, she must leave the comfort of her sire's domain and strike out on her own. Deciding on a haven is a personal choice,

dictated by the aesthetics of the child and her perception of existence as a vampire. Some choose the solitude of graveyards or crypts, while others prefer the comforts of palaces and city estates. Older vampires usually take all the choice domains, leaving the neonate with the scraps, such as abandoned water wells, a tavern's wine cellar or a ruined mill. No matter how meek the domain is, a neonate has all eternity to expand her influence. Most long for the night when they rule over a vast demesne like their elders.

The neonate must choose a haven that offers a degree of protection and isolation, especially while she is young and relatively weak. A neonate may have no trouble dealing with mortals (even a mob) at night, but she is vulnerable during the day, with only the secrecy of her haven as protection. It is also not uncommon for covens of neonates — often called *coteries* — to band together for security reasons and to increase their domains.

The Curse of the Dead Heart

Cainites are abominations, creatures both unnatural and unholy. They are no longer human in any sense of the word — a realization few vampires are willing to admit to and one that profoundly changes their psyches. Cainites exist forever outside the sphere of natural things. Their bodies are dead, yet they continue to exist, think and act. Although they were once human, their curse as vampires has marked their very souls, transforming them into beings both sublime and forsaken. Many neonates fail to see the difference between their mortal lives and their existence as Cainites, but this change becomes apparent as years fade into centuries. Eventually all vampires realize they *are* dead, frozen in that terrible moment when eternal rest was denied them and replaced by torment and hunger. And this realization is followed by another: The Beast trapped within them is their very soul, screaming for a release from an eternity in undead flesh. They are nothing more than monsters, beyond salvation and alone. This is what Cainites call the *Curse of the Dead Heart*.

Undying yet Unliving

Cainites are parasites, not ethereal and immortal beings. A vampire is nothing more than an animated corpse kept alive and thinking, not by force of will or skewed sense-of-self, but by the unnatural and cursed blood flowing throughout its dead body. For all their powers and abilities, vampires are static in nature, caught forever in that moment of death, aware but not enlightened. Cainites are dead in body *and* mind; it is their unnatural Beast that fuels their corpse, fills them with emotions and allows them to think. In the end, their human selves are really nothing more than fading echoes.

It screams to be heard over the howls of the Beast, but it eventually becomes lost as years turn to centuries.

As dead things, vampires do not evolve or grow like humans — even their emotions become stilted and perverse. They stop being able to feel physical pleasure, knowing only the extremes of pain and hunger. Cainites are largely incapable of learning from their experiences in the way mortals can, they only remember bitterly what they've lost, and they never forget past slights. Learning new ways of thinking, that wondrous ability of mortals, becomes alien and foreign to vampires, reducing them to unliving anachronisms. Cainites are capable of mastering new mannerisms and skills, but they cannot assimilate them into their very being as they did when they breathed. They wear newly found customs like masks, concealing their stagnant natures. Only the endless hunger and rage of the Beast can push a Cainite to new experiences, tainting him with its dark nature. Vampires are like marble statues, witnesses to the endless march of time, but forever outside it. This quality makes all Cainites rapacious and predatory, not creative or nurturing. Their once human selves strive to retain these qualities — to be able to look at beauty and appreciate it without the need to possess it — but their Beasts drag them down to the abyss of despair through lust, pride and murder.

Forsaken

Cainites know no respite from the uncertain night. Worst yet, they know that darkness hides terrors, and the most terrifying of all these, their own Beasts. Let breathing priests talk of a fiery inferno, for Cainites, the Beast is Hell made manifest. It is a force that possesses them, damns their souls and casts them forever from the light. There is no escaping it or their status as forsaken creatures. The Embrace destroys the one thing that people in the Dark Medieval world know for certain — the promise of salvation. Without salvation, there can be no hope, and without hope, Cainites find themselves alone in a dark world. With this realization comes another. The awareness that, from this moment on, all a Cainite will know is darkness: both the physical darkness of night and the spiritual darkness of the soul condemned as a taker of lives rather than a giver.

Many Cainites who were Embraced within the last few centuries see themselves as hell-spawn, and they act accordingly. Denied Heaven, these vampires give in to their base and predatory instincts and revel in their damnation. They first become dispassionate and callous killers without pity or remorse, then progress into savage homicidal beasts. Even those who still harbor faith and try to find redemption eventually slip. The demands of the Beast are too powerful to ignore.

However, this degeneration into evil is neither sudden nor complete. It is a slow descent into madness and damnation, one in which the Cainite is not an unwilling victim of her curse, but an equal accomplice. Vampirism does not condemn outright, it merely exaggerates the dark side that lurks within. The blood of Caine and the Beast accentuate all the perverse impulses and thoughts mortals have. The horror of the transformation comes from the slippery descent of moral decline inherent in all humans, but accelerated by a Cainite's forsaken nature.

The Roads to Salvation

Vampires are not without hope, however. Cainites may be denied Heaven and Hell, but somewhere along the line between damnation and redemption lie the roads — the mystical beliefs developed by Cainite sages. The roads (*viae* in Latin) help Cainites cope with their existence as vampires and offer some control over the Beast. Many Cainites refer to the roads as the Religions of Caine, but not all roads resemble mortal faiths. Instead, the roads are more analogous to philosophies, and their organization is akin to that of cults rather than actual churches.

All roads teach Cainites how to rein in the Beast through spiritual and ethical tenets. Like mortals who look to the Church for answers and solace, Cainites follow the roads to obtain a measure of peace. Central to the roads is acceptance of the vampire's damned nature. The roads do not try to deny what a vampire has become or claim that she is something other than what she is. Rather, the roads foster a belief and metaphysical framework that allows Cainites to understand and eventually accept their curse as vampires.

The roads, like Caine's childer, are varied and unique. There is no central road that all Cainites follow. Instead, roads change, evolve and adapt themselves to the times. In the 13th century, five roads serve as pillars in the night attracting large numbers of followers:

- The *Road of Sin* focuses on the darker side of a Cainite's nature and its followers feed the Beast's malevolent urges so that it does not overwhelm them.
- The *Road of Humanity* on the other hand teaches that, although they are cursed, vampires are still human, and that salvation lies in suppressing the Beast's instincts and urges.
- The *Road of the Beast* teaches the way of instinct and embraces the predatory nature of all Cainites.
- The *Road of Kings* teaches that vampires are superior to mortals, and that their destiny lies in ruling over humanity.
- Finally, the *Road of Heaven* claims that, although they are forsaken, Cainites are agents of a higher power, divine in nature and mission.

Beyond helping a Cainite accept and understand her curse and gain a measure of control over the Beast, the roads teach that vampires are not without hope or salvation. The roads are called such because they lead Cainites from the abyss of damnation to the light of a mythical state known as *Golconda*.

According to Cainite legendry and *The Book of Nod*, *Golconda* is an equilibrium between the human and vampiric natures. A form of redemption offered to Caine and his brood by God and communicated by the Archangel Raphael. Whether *Golconda* is truly achievable is unknown, but it is appealing since it is purported to be the only peace available to Cainites — a state in which the instincts and impulses of the Beast lose all power over the Cainite. If the legends are to be believed, *Golconda* spares the vampire from Caine's curse so that she no longer needs blood to sustain her immortal existence. However, those who embark on the long road toward this exalted state face an uphill struggle, one at which only a handful of Cainite mystics are even rumored to have succeeded.

Perhaps sadly, many Christian, Jewish and Islamic Cainites see *Golconda* as a pagan lie, a trap that leads vampires away from true salvation in the light of God. These pious vampires believe that only in forgiveness from God can they redeem themselves. Following the roads to *Golconda* can lead only to Hell. It is not uncommon for such devout Cainites to hunt down and persecute those who pursue *Golconda*, proclaiming them heretics and blasphemers. Like the mortal folly behind so many crusades, those who take the banner against their pious brethren are blinded by their love of God and have condemned many Cainite mystics to the flames of righteousness. The ones who escape the pyres usually go into hiding, pursuing *Golconda* in secret and denying their guidance to other Cainites who are desperately in search of a way to silence their Beasts.

Society of the Night

At its heart, Cainite society is built on a dichotomy. Vampires are solitary predators without an actual need for the companionship of their own kind, and yet this companionship is precisely what they crave. Like moths to a flame, Cainites flock to each other, drawn to the most powerful of their kind. Perhaps it is their predatory nature, but those who are strong lead, and those who are weak cower at the feet of others for protection. Even Cainites who resist this urge and lead a solitary existence rarely manage to do so without arousing the suspicions or jealousy of their more social brethren. Those who persist in being outsiders are distrusted and eventually hunted down. Although they are solitary by nature, Cainites are no different from pack animals, and they are just as vicious, territorial and violent.

Cainite society is peopled by fiends and monsters, so it is not guided by normal, or even moral, tenets. Murder, intrigue and unholy acts form the pillars of the social order. And yet, Cainites are refined beings. They surround themselves with art and beauty, patronize artists and commission great works of architecture. Cainite society is as ordered and structured as mortal society, if not more so, and dominated by a strict hierarchy. For the Damned, being born noble or peasant means nothing; it is blood and age that elevates one Cainite above another.

The Bonds of Blood

Cainites can trace their ancestry to one of 13 clans, extended blood families spawned by Antediluvians of the third generation. Although each vampire is unique, she inherits certain traditions and mannerisms from her clan. The most obvious legacies are the Disciplines, as each clan holds providence over one or more of Caine's gifts. Caine is said to have cursed each of the Antediluvians for their actions after the Great Flood, and these special curses flow down through the blood of the clans. Finally, and perhaps most unfortunately, Cainites also inherit their clan's intrigues and feuds — traps that few vampires can ever escape.

The ties of blood between clanmates are strong, but this does not mean clans operate as cohesive entities, much less as united ones. On the contrary, the clans are vipers' nests in which intrigue and rivalry run rampant. Although they are families of the night, the clans are actually amorphous and loose in their organization. The Antediluvians are so ancient that they have all retreated into one form of torpid withdrawal or another. Therefore, there is no central authority to marshal clans or enforce any form of unity. Instead, the clans are splintered into countless blood-families, each dominated by a potent, charismatic and, above all, cunning elder. Although clan is important, often determining the expected standing of a vampire, a Cainite's precise pedigree is often more critical. All Ventrue claim a heritage of warrior-kings, for example, but being the only child of a potent and respected Ventrue lord carries both status and respect. In the last century, many Cainite scholars have busied themselves scribing books of Cainite genealogy, trying to weed out imposters and determine which vampires have legitimate claims.

Finally, like the mortals of the time, Cainites divide themselves along those clans of privilege, the *High Clans*, and those that are more savage and uncouth (at least in the eyes of the high-blooded), the *Low Clans*.

The High Clans

The High Clans rule supreme over the medieval night. They are the Cainite nobility composed of princes and barons who rule over vast feudal domains and Cainite courts. The High Clans refer to themselves as the *first cursed* and claim that their progenitors were Embraced during the early nights of Enoch, before those of the *fallen* (the Low Clans). The first cursed blame the Low Clans for the strife of Enoch and its eventual destruction. The following clans make up the High Clans:

- **Brujah:** Made up of crusaders and philosopher-kings, Clan Brujah is a fiery clan known for zeal and quick tempers. The clan's past is checkered, a long and sad history of stunning accomplishments and devastating defeats. In the 13th century, the Brujah struggle to maintain their status among the High Clans. Far too many Brujah elders are melancholic for the clan's greatest moment in history, and they still mourn the passing of Carthage. Its younger members are tired of the oppression of the time, and they long for change.

- **Cappadocian:** Mystics and scholars, the Cappadocians are both feared and respected as oracles and sages. Although they look to Anatolia as their ancient home, Cappadocians reside all across Europe as advisors to princes and vampiric monks. They try to remain aloof of the intrigues and wars of the other High Clans, choosing instead quiet contemplation of the greatest mystery of all — death.

- **Lasombra:** The kings of shadows, the Lasombra are among Caine's most skilled manipulators. The Lasombra are convinced of their own decadent superiority, and they embrace religion and faith — not out of pious reverence, but to vindicate their power. The Lasombra hold their courts across Europe, but Italy and Iberia are the homelands where they rule uncontested.

- **Toreador:** Children of art and beauty, the Toreador are Cainite muses and poets. Although they surround themselves



with pomp and beauty, the Toreador can be as fanatical as the Brujah or as cunning as the Lasombra. The clan's bastion is in the lands of France with its chivalrous knights and singing bards.

• **Tzimisce:** The fiends of Transylvania, the Tzimisce revel in their inhumanity and rule over a frightened population as the dreaded *voivodes*. Inhuman and driven to fanaticism, the Tzimisce dismiss ways other than their own as fundamentally flawed. They are constantly shocked by the upstarts who dare challenge their natural position at the peak of the food chain. They reign with mandate from Caine, from their founder and from their own power.

• **Ventruë:** Forever in the shadows of the Lasombra, the Ventruë are slowly rising to challenge their dominance for the medieval night. The 13th century is *their* age, and while clans such as the Lasombra are busy scheming, the Toreador lost to their art, the Brujah raging and the Tzimisce ruling over desolate kingdoms, the Ventruë will take and do what they must. The energetic Ventruë know that their time is



now, and while the Brujah and Lasombra hold on to the Mediterranean cradle of European civilization, the Ventruë are forging ahead in Britain and Germany crafting new empires and rallying to their birthright as leaders and defenders of all Cainites.

The Low Clans

Despised and misunderstood by the High Clans, the Low Clans do not bother with the pomp and arrogance of the first cursed. Instead, the fallen prefer to move in different circles, pursuing their own goals and chasing their own intrigues. Many of the Low Clans are, in fact, foreign to Europe and its Christian Cainites. Others are simply so alien and different that their very presence perturbs the more "civilized" Cainites. While the High Clans hold the reins of power, the Low Clans are gaining ground after years of neglect and abuse. They are more in tune with the spirit of the age than are their first cursed brethren locked away in castles and towers.

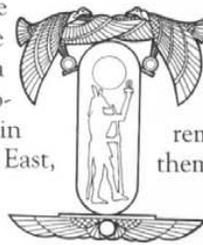
• **Assamite:** Proud and deadly, the Assamites — who call themselves *Banu Haqim* — live by a foreign code. Originating from the Holy Land, the Assamites consider



themselves judges and guardians of the night, serving as soldiers and generals of Caine. Although they are militant, the Assamites are not limited to physical battlefields. Their ranks are filled with ancient mystics and revered scholars as well. Few Assamites leave the lands of the Saracen east, but those who venture into uncouth and barbarian Europe do so as spies and emissaries, relegated to low-blooded status by their foreign ways.

• **Followers of Set:** Believing themselves to be descendants of an ancient god, the Setites are devious fanatics. They carry themselves with a malignant air and pride themselves in being custodians of forbidden knowledge and traffickers in sin and damnation. Lairing in the sands of the Middle East, the Followers of Set have wormed their way into Europe following the upheaval of the Crusades. Although they are distrusted as foreigners, the Setites thrive in Europe by providing the things few others can, or want to. Ingenuity and guile are a Setite's calling cards.

• **Gangrel:** Inconstant and indomitable like the moon, the Gangrel reject the chains of master and slave, lord and vassal, sire and child, choosing instead to roam the night free. The forest and glade are their hunting grounds, not the hamlet or port. To the proud Gangrel, a vampire is no more evil than other natural predators. The only



question to them is whether they choose to be proud wolves or cowering dogs.

• **Malkavian:** The Malkavians are cursed by insight and madness, damned to see the world as a shattering mosaic. Long ago, they were Cainite oracles, foretelling the future and seeing things others could not. Now, they are pariahs because of their madness — cast from court and cities for fear that their lunacy will affect others. They are heralds and prophets of a coming darkness.

• **Nosferatu:** Transformed into hideous creatures by the Embrace, the Nosferatu wear their curse on their very skin. The Nosferatu remind all Cainites of the evil that lurks within them. Many Nosferatu take their twisted mien as a clear sign that they must accept their curse and repent. They carry themselves with a noble and regal manner that rivals that of the High Clans.

• **Ravnos:** Refugees (and their descendants) of a great war to the east, the Ravnos carry with them a wily Beast that whispers dark urges. Few are trusted in Europe, because their curse makes them especially dangerous. Those who are accepted act as messengers, envoys or spies, moving between the courts of Cainite lords and carrying out their own agendas in secret.



• **Tremere:** Many refuse to call the Tremere a clan at all, since these usurpers received their dubious title by eradicating one of the oldest and most revered clans — the Salubri. Tremere himself committed the most heinous crime known to Cainite, the deliberate cannibalization of the Salubri Antediluvian, Saulot. Although the clan is young, having come into existence only in the past two centuries, the warlocks of clan Tremere are still powerful. They lack any real allies, however, and they are beset on all sides by mortal and Cainite enemies. As the lords and princes of Europe jockey with each other, many begin to look toward the Usurpers (and their potent magic), welcoming more and more warlocks to their courts.



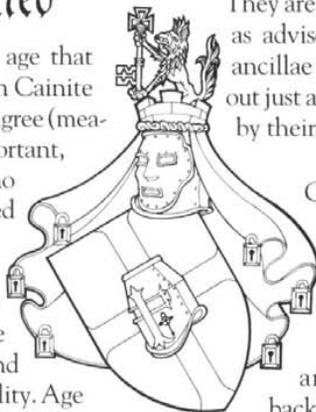
the Holy Lands (either as humans or on their sires' errands) and returned both wiser and harder for it. They may lack the power of age, but immortality has not tainted most neonates like it has paralyzed their sires and elders. While the Methuselahs plot and the elders wage war, neonates are the real catalysts of Cainite society. Neonates lead charges on the battlefield where elders are too scared to do so; they make new alliances with mortal merchants, barons and priests and generally infect Cainite society with dynamism and energy. The majority of Cainites in the 13th century are either neonates or ancillae.

• **Ancillae:** A vampire becomes an ancilla after his first 100 or 200 years of unlife. Although they are not yet elders, ancillae have proven themselves in Cainite society and established themselves as powers to be reckoned with.

They are respected and granted prestigious positions such as advisors and men-at-arms to older Cainites. Many ancillae shine brightly as ascending elders, but many burn out just as quickly, overstepping their limits while blinded by their own pride.

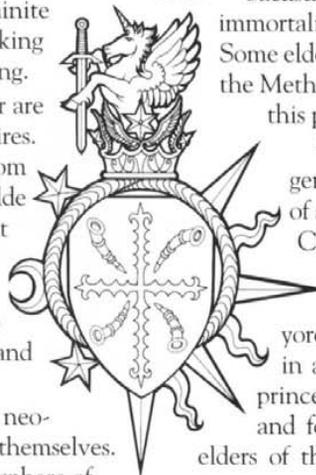
Hierarchy of the Damned

Blood binds all vampires, but it is age that determines their standing and position in Cainite society. Although a vampire's undead pedigree (measured by sire, clan and generation) is important, real respect comes with age. Vampires who have survived for centuries, have amassed great power and have faced countless challenges are the dominant powers in Cainite society. However, age is not everything. A complacent elder can easily be destroyed by an ambitious neonate, and only the foolish lose sight of this harsh reality. Age might mean power and influence, but a Cainite stagnates without action and purpose, making him easy pickings for the young and cunning.



• **Elders:** Elders are the regal authorities of Cainite society. Most elders are centuries old, some Embraced sometime during the Long Night or before. They rule cities and large domains, uphold Cainite laws and keep younger Cainites in line and subservient. They have become entrenched in their power, and they will do anything to maintain it. Scheming and backstabbing, elders have grown comfortable with immortality, and they fiercely defend the status quo. Some elders are aware that they are nothing but tools of the Methuselahs in their vendettas, but they gladly pay this price in return for security and influence.

• **Childer:** The newly created, childer are young and still under the charge of their sires. They are regarded as children but are seldom treated with love or compassion. Once a childe has learned all that is needed (in a period that can last nights or decades), her sire presents her to the eldest vampire in the city, usually the prince. It is up to the eldest vampire to accept the childe into Cainite society and proclaim her a neonate or destroy her.



• **Princes:** Although it is not tied to age or generation, the title of prince is nonetheless one of singular importance to Cainites. A prince is a Cainite who has claimed a large domain (a city, county, even kingdom) as her own, forcing other Cainites to bow to her rule. In time of yore, the title of prince went to the oldest Cainite in an area, but a Cainite claims and enforces a principedom in recent times through political savvy and force. Many princes in the 13th century are elders of the sixth and seventh generation, but many ancillae, and even some neonates, are staking their rights as princes as new cities and towns emerge.

• **Neonates:** Considered full vampires, neonates are young and eager to make a name for themselves. They are young knights in the feudal atmosphere of Cainite society. Although Europe is overpopulated by vampires, there are still enough cities, towns even castles and road-side taverns where young neonates can stake their claims. Most neonates who were Embraced within the past 50 years understand the 13th century better than their elders do, for they are children of this turbulent time. They move with ease through bustling cities and cross the continent without fear. Many have journeyed to



It is easy, however, to proclaim oneself prince; it is harder to maintain and support that claim against other Cainites.

• **Methuselahs:** The real power in the 13th century rests with the handful of Methuselahs who stand above the elders in age and influence. Usually centuries, even millennia old, Methuselahs know no equal — except perhaps the slumbering

Antediluvians. It is said that a change comes over vampires when they reach this age. Physically, these vampires slumber for weeks, years or even centuries falling to torpor with growing frequency. Emotionally, they become sullen and withdrawn, overcome by a deep sense of melancholy and desperation. They long for the nights of old, but they know that Gehenna only comes closer with each new night. Some react to this despair by retreating from the world, becoming mystics and hermits pursuing Golconda. Others, vengeful and terrible, lose themselves in strife and drown out their doubts and fears with blood and intrigue.

- **Lords:** Like princes, the rank of lord is accorded not by age, but by influence and power, and it is a relatively recent addition to the Cainite hierarchy. A lord is simply a prince of princes—a potent elder, or more rarely a Methuselah—who claims influence over a number of princes and their domain. Much of this arrangement is feudal in nature, the lord parceling out his domain to younger Cainites in return for their oaths of fealty and support.

- **Antediluvians:** Mythical beings and tyrants, the Antediluvians are absolute masters of the War of Ages and the founders of the 13 clans. From their lairs, they plot and scheme against their rivals, steering their clans like mighty armies across Europe and the world. What their goal is—what the purpose of this madness is—only the Antediluvians and Caine know.

Outsiders and Criminals

Not all Cainites agree to exist, or are welcome, in this society of the Damned. There will always be outcasts and renegades, and such is no less the case among Cainites. There are Cainites who refuse to abide by the Old Ways (the laws of Caine) or who have committed heinous crimes in the eyes of their fellow vampires. These Cainites are either exiled or, if warranted, hunted down and destroyed. Those who do not adhere to the Old Ways are seen as a threat to the established order of the clans, which makes them dangerous.

- **Caitiff:** Cainites without clear blood ancestry are called Caitiff. These clanless vampires never know the origin of their blood, usually having been sired and left for dead or Embraced by another of the clanless. Although they are not unknown at Cainite gatherings, all Caitiff are distrusted, treated like mongrels, little better than dogs. Caitiff are tolerated in Cainite society, but they never achieve any real standing among their clan-born brethren. The clanless are doomed to exist as second-class citizens at best, and outcasts at worst. They become easy scapegoats, and they have no rights in most principalities. The stigma of being Caitiff is steep—a curse on top of being damned.

- **Autarkis:** These vampires have turned their backs on Cainite society, refusing to live by anyone's rules except their own. They defy the Old Ways and the War of Ages, wanting nothing more than to become masters of their own destiny. For this reason, the elders consider them subversive and treat them like a threat. Once branded Autarkis, a Cainite faces

the night as a renegade, hunted by princes and elders and condemned to Final Death if caught. Some, however, consider this danger a small price to pay for freedom.

The Prince

Since the time of Enoch and Caine, lone vampires known as princes have ruled over clutches of others—serving as leaders and protectors. Blood and age shape Cainite hierarchy, but it is the rule of princes that gives it its draconian and predatory nature. Indeed, a prince does not rule for altruistic reasons, he does so for his own security and to feed his need to dominate other Cainites. Among the Children of Caine, there is neither equality nor democracy, only the rule of the strong and the cunning, who use the title of prince to symbolize their dominance. Throughout the ages, the title and duties of the princes have changed, usually influenced by the civilization to which the prince was born or over which he ruled. Although princes are common, so are kings, dukes, Caesars, archbishops and countless other titles borrowed from human nobility and religion. Women who rule as prince (and many do), traditionally assume the title of queen or duchess if they wish for a gender-specific title. Princess is uncommon, and many simply go by prince, gender be damned.

Traditionally, as in Enoch, the eldest Cainite in an area serves as prince—his age conferring this honor. Such is rarely the case in these nights, though. Those who are strong and powerful rule, all others are either vassals or rivals. As the War of Princes marches on, younger, more ambitious Cainites are usurping principedoms from older, complacent vampires. In turn, many elders realize the obvious dangers of holding the title of prince and either bequeath their title to a younger Cainite in hopes of hiding in the shadows or slavishly defend their domain, creating a schism between young and old.

Domain

Vampires are territorial creatures, as most predators are, and a prince's domain is his font of power. Without a fiefdom, a prince is not a prince. A prince's domain can be anything from an isolated hamlet in the Bavarian mountains to a vast expanse of lands overlooked by a fortified stronghold. The larger the territory is, the more prestige and influence the prince holds. Usually, a prince rules over a city and claims domain over its walls, taverns and estates, forcing all Cainites within (through force or oaths of fealty) to acquiesce to his rule.

Domain is critical for a prince. First, it grants influence and temporal power. The prince often has agents and observers among the mortal institutions of the city. Through favors or guile, the prince knows what the merchants are smuggling, who the archbishop invites into his chambers at night and just what can agitate the nobility into marshalling troops against a rival city. Domain also grants the prince and his subjects feeding grounds, the most prized commodity of all.

Agents of the Prince

Princes rule through the right of fealty. No single vampire could effectively enforce his will across such vast territories without having trusted vassals. By offering domain to those who are loyal, the prince assures their support. In return for her fealty, the prince grants the new vassal a domain to hold as her own. Princes seldom rule their domain without the support of other Cainites. Smart princes court other influential Cainites when making their bids for power, creating a council of advisors and lieutenants to handle some, or all, of the administrative duties of ruling their fiefdoms. Although the titles may change, most princes rule with the support of the following Cainites:

- **The Sheriff:** The prince's enforcer, the sheriff normally handles matters of jurisdiction and security. It is the sheriff and his cronies who keep young neonates from causing too much trouble and make sure no unwanted Cainites have infiltrated the city. During times of war, many sheriffs become *sergeants*, coordinating the efforts in defense of the city while the prince and the warmaster take to the battlefield.

- **The Warmaster:** The leader of a prince's army, a warmaster, serves only a truly powerful prince or lord who can marshal enough forces to justify his post. While the sheriff's primary duty is internal security, the warmaster is a tactician and leader without equal. Many warmasters of recent times have come from the ranks of the Brujah or Ventrue.

- **The Seneschal:** The prince's right-hand man, the seneschal, occupies his nights with the minutiae of the city's administration. The seneschal is first to hear all complaints before choosing (with the right bribe or promise) which to bring to the attention of the prince. In some principalities, the seneschal is nothing more than a secretary, a lackey and personal attendant of the prince. In others, the seneschal wields more power than the prince and is the real power behind the throne.

- **The Keeper:** Most princes understand the need of having the counsel of a mystic or spiritual advisor. Long ago, princes used Malkavian or Nosferatu oracles (and some still do), but in the Christian atmosphere of the time, most turn to *ashen priests* — adherents and teachers of one of the roads of Caine. Princes use ashen priests to lead the sacraments and advise them on matters both political and mystical.

- **The Chamberlain:** As the social heart of a prince's court, the chamberlain organizes feasts and tournaments, welcomes out-of-town dignitaries and attends to the prince's person. The chamberlain's main talents are gossip and rumor-mongering. However, all princes understand the benefits of having a chamberlain, and most allow them to feel the pulse of their subjects and weed out any potential detractors.

- **The Scourge:** The sheriff maintains law and order within a fief, but the political nature of the position often ties his hands, making him unable to dispatch swift justice without provoking the ire of the prince's detractors. This is where the scourge, the prince's private executioner, comes

in. The scourge's duty is simple, to patrol a prince's domain for the unwanted — Caitiff, Autarkis and other undesirables — and either bring them to the prince or destroy them outright. The position of scourge is a solitary one, and it carries a heavy stigma. Few Cainites trust scourgings, and many fear them outright.

Rights and Responsibilities

There is no universal code of princely conduct. Aside from the loose interpretation of the Old Ways, a prince is free to govern his domain as he sees fit. However, a prince's rule is measured by, and depends on, the power and influence he wields over his vassals. In some cases, the prince is nothing but a figurehead, powerless to effect any changes unless he has the support of his elders. Then there are princes who stand like tyrants, ruling with impunity and calling blood hunts on any who whisper against them. Most princes lie somewhere between these extremes, secure in their influence, knowing that the threat of violence and censure is often all that is needed to keep the peace. This game, however, is a dangerous one to play, for complacency has been the downfall of many a prince.

Rights

As prince, a Cainite is entitled to the following rights:

- **Destruction:** Only the prince can destroy (or order the destruction of) another Cainite. Princes hold the power of Final Death over their vassals as ultimate proof of their claim to princedom.

- **Siring:** According to the Old Ways, only the prince is allowed to sire freely, while other Cainites must first ask permission. Those who don't, or who disobey, are destroyed.

- **Domain:** Any Cainite within the domain of a prince effectively becomes a vassal of that prince. The prince is also within his right to assign and bequeath domain to those who are loyal as rewards or even bribes in return for their support.

- **Feeding:** It is the prince who establishes feeding grounds and any rules associated with its practice (only by the light of the moon, after a certain hour, no killing and so on).

Duties

The title of prince obliges the Cainite to meet certain expectations and fulfill certain duties. Those who ignore their responsibilities quickly find themselves without support and facing an angry populace. The responsibilities of a prince include:

- **Upholding the Old Ways:** The Old Ways grant a prince charter, but this charter requires the prince to uphold and enforce all the Traditions of Caine. Complacent princes can only hope to rule through force if they fail to adhere to the Old Ways.

- **Protection:** Just as the prince can count on the protection of his vassals, the prince must be ready to defend his subjects. A prince who looks the other way when one of

his subjects is destroyed (by a rival or another vassal) stands to lose all credibility and support. The honor of principedom requires eternal vigilance. Those who are ambivalent may soon find themselves facing the merciless sun.

• **Shepherding the Flock:** In order to keep the peace, the prince must ensure that there are always enough humans to sustain his vassals. While the prince sets hunting limits through feeding grounds and domains, he must also shepherd the mortal flock. Without a healthy supply of mortals, the prince's vassals would soon be at each other's throats.

The Traditions

Much of a prince's authority is derived from the Traditions of Caine, or more properly from the so-called *Old Ways* — the largely oral tradition of inherited vampiric codes of conduct based around the Traditions. The Old Ways underpin Cainite society and are the only real social compact between the fiends of the night. Cainites abide by a strict sense of tradition, driven by fear of divine retribution. The Old Ways are the remnants of Caine's rule in Enoch; hence they are respected but not always strictly followed.

Regardless, the Old Ways form the compact from which all princes (and lords) draw to legitimize their claims and rights as princes. The Traditions also figure dominantly in the education of childer. Many elders do not consider a childer a vampire until his sire recites to him the Six Traditions, sealing their covenant with Caine.

The First Tradition: Covenant

"Thy blood makes thee my brood, crafted in my image. My curse thine, my salvation thine. I stand before and above thee as god-regent. I am the way, my Traditions covenant. Renounce me and renounce all hope." Thus spoke Caine.

The notion of covenant is central in understanding the Old Ways in the Dark Medieval. It is through the First Tradition in particular, and all the Traditions in general, that Cainites recognize Caine as monarch of the night and affirm their lineage as sublime beings, both cursed and blessed. Cainites look to the Old Ways and the covenant of Caine to acknowledge their spiritual link to Caine. Through the dictates of the Old Ways, Caine is present and not a figure of myth or legend. In adhering to the traditions, Cainites confirm their faith in Caine and their damned natures — for better or worse.

Those who abhor the curse look to the First Tradition in hopes of finding salvation, that in following Caine's ways they will find redemption. In turn, those who seek power follow the covenant, believing in its hidden promise of power in return for faithful service. Princes and lords, likewise, look to the First Tradition to legitimize their rule. Like mortal kings who rule through divine investiture, princes cite the First Tradition, and Caine's covenant, as proof of their mandate to lead just as Caine "stand[s] before and above" all Cainites.

The Second Tradition: Domain

"As I am master of Nod, thy domain is thine own concern. Thou art its master, and all will respect this or suffer thy wrath. All will present themselves when entering, and thou shall protect them in turn. By right, thou art allowed to hunt within the bounds of thy domain, its blood thine own. Accept its responsibilities, minister thy domain and pay others the same respect thou expect." Thus spoke Caine.

The Tradition of Domain has always been central to Cainites, and such is especially the case in these times of feudal relationships and vampiric overpopulation. For the last 200 years, Cainites of all ranks and clans have been desperately fighting over shrinking domains, reaching a murderous frenzy in the last few decades. Domain often denotes more than influence and protection, it grants the Cainite sole feeding rights within its boundaries. Claiming domain over a tavern means a near limitless supply of victims, while an isolated hamlet would be hard pressed to sustain more than a single vampire. A Cainite will not go without blood as long as she claims domain (regardless of its size) and she can protect it by keeping other Cainites out.

Holding a domain also requires the Cainite, be she prince or neonate, to offer hospitality to those vampires who enter and present themselves. While in the domain of another, a Cainite can expect to be treated with respect. The owner of the domain is responsible for the safety and well being of guests, and she must share her feeding grounds with them. However, guests who abuse their stay may face strict sanctions. Recently, as tensions flare between princes and elders, a few have closed their domains to visitors, isolating themselves and sentencing any and all who enter their domain uninvited to Final Death.

Domain is also the feudal cornerstone of the rule of princes. In this age of Cainite lords and monarchs, domain has become of paramount importance. A prince extends his influence by acquiring more domains. Doing so allows her to grant portions of the conquered territories to her loyal vassals, further cementing her power and attracting more and more Cainites to her banner. Just as mortal regents claim ownership over their knights, some Cainite lords have gone as far as to claim domain over individual Cainites themselves and expect their vassals to supply them with tithes of blood and victims in return for their royal "patronage" or grants of domain.

The Third Tradition: Progeny

"Thou shalt only sire another with the permission and blessing of thine elder. To create is the providence of those closest to me, for they shall be accountable. Break this, and both thee and thy progeny shall be slain." Thus spoke Caine.

According to the Third Tradition, only the eldest vampire can grant permission to sire a childer. However, for as long as most Cainites remember, the princes have held the privilege of the Third Tradition. The reason is simple — the need to control and limit the Cainite population in their domains. The more childer one's subjects Embrace, the

higher the demand for blood and the scarcer feeding grounds become, taxing a prince's ability to provide for his vassals. Princes also hold dear the right to create progeny to limit their rivals' ability to amass legions of newly sired vampires as shock troops. A prince can also promise permission under the Third Tradition as a gift to obtain favors from another Cainite, or as a reward for loyal service.

Those vampires who Embrace without permission usually face the destruction of their childe and, if the offence is severe enough, themselves. Few princes waver on this point. In truth, the act of monitoring who is Embracing and who isn't is impossible. It is often easy for a sire to send his childe away and keep her a secret until the time is right. Therefore, any prince who wants to hold his fief needs to severely punish those who are caught. They must serve as an example, or the prince's other subjects will begin to question his power and authority.

The Fourth Tradition: Accounting

"Those thou create are thine own blood until released from thy charge. Until that moment, their sins, their blood and their punishments are thine." Thus spoke Caine.

A prince never grants lightly the right to create. Once bequeathed, the sire becomes solely responsible for her childe's actions. This Tradition warns all Cainites to choose their progeny wisely. The Fourth Tradition requires the sire to both educate and protect her childe, the penalty of doing otherwise is simple — the sire pays for her childe's indiscretions and crimes. Those who are wayward in their duties as sires, and who give their childe too free a reign, eventually face the ire and condemnation of their prince. Fearful of the consequences, some sires force their offspring to swear blood oaths. These oaths, which involve repeated drinking of the sire's blood, make the childe into a supernaturally bound thrall, thus guaranteeing loyalty. Most vampires abstain from this practice because it also tends to make the childe into a sycophant.

The custom of the Fourth Tradition also requires the sire to present her childe to the prince for approval. The prince decides if the childe is worthy of joining the ranks of the Cainites as a neonate or if he should be destroyed. Many princes use this custom to keep their vassals in check — offering the right to Embrace, then destroying the childe citing improper tutelage.

The Fifth Tradition: Destruction

"Forbidden art thou to spill the blood of another of thy kind who is elder. This right belongs only to the closest to me and none other. It is forbidden for those of weaker blood to rise against their elders. This is my final covenant." Thus spoke Caine.

Princes jealously uphold the Fifth Tradition, using it as a buffer to keep their vassals in line and to remove any potential troublemakers. The right to destroy another Cainite is the final cornerstone of a prince's authority. Not only can a prince sire freely and claim domain, he can also decide who meets Final Death. The prince can use the Fifth Tradition to punish any crime, no matter how trivial or minor it is under the *Lextalionis* — the Cainite version of biblical justice.

In the feudal climate of the Dark Medieval world, the right of a prince to destroy another Cainite is often conferred as a gift. Cainites of rank, such as the warmaster or sheriff, are usually granted charter of the Fifth Tradition to dispense justice and enforce the prince's rule. However, most princes are cautious when ordering the destruction of Cainites who are the vassals of another lord or prince. Although some princes do not hesitate, others who are more guarded send the offending Cainite back to her prince for punishment. If the accused is then not punished, this may be grounds for war.

The Sixth Tradition: The Silence of Blood

"Never shalt thou reveal thy true nature to those not of the blood. Doing so shall renounce thy claims to my covenant." Thus spoke Caine.

Cainites may be supreme hunters, but being careless and alerting mortals to their true nature never bodes well for them. Vampires depend on a certain amount of secrecy and deception to keep their nighttime realm secure from the masses of dormant mortals that surround them. Most medieval mortals know that *things* stalk the night, but they are much less clear as to just how to deal with these things (other than avoiding them). Were humans to fully understand the weaknesses and customs of the race of Caine, a great purge would become possible.

Therefore, princes enforce the Sixth Tradition in varying degrees. Some, especially princes of large cities, hold the Silence sacrosanct because they wish the mortals to delude themselves that walled cities are somehow safer than scattered hamlets. (In fact, the feeding is much easier with mortals all together in one place.) In other principalities, the Silence is paid lip service and largely ignored. There are places where Cainites boldly and openly attend mortal courts, ruling through terror and confident in their dominance. Unless they are secluded and miles away from other mortal settlements, however, such fiefdoms rarely last for more than a few decades before they are put to the flame by the Church or other Cainites. Generally, Cainites allow (even encourage) manifestations of their damnation that are likely to keep mortals fearful and cowed, and they ban those that are likely to bring organized resistance. Seeing the difference is the mark of truly skilled prince.

Lextalionis

A prince enforces his rule through the *Lextalionis*, the body of vampiric law as set forth by Caine's and expressed in the Old Ways. The *Lextalionis* is not codified or bound in dusty scrolls. Rather it is a code of just retribution, outlining the rights and powers of a prince, allegedly created by Caine. This code follows a single simple precept: Those who break a prince's law are slain. The *Lextalionis* is rooted in biblical justice — "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" — and it grants the prince tremendous power to punish anyone who disobeys his laws. Through the *Lextalionis*, a prince can strip



a Cainite of her domain, exile her or, for truly heinous offenses, order her destruction. The Lextalionis is also not the sole providence of the prince. Any Cainite can evoke the Lextalionis to air grievances, but only the prince has the power to enforce it. Princes who abuse the Lextalionis soon find themselves victims of their own punishments. A prince can never hope to have the Lextalionis enforced without the support of his subjects, so he must walk a fine line between strong-arm justice and leniency. The prince can choose how strictly or loosely to follow the Lextalionis, and he is free to determine the style and severity of punishments or what constitutes an offense.

Blood Hunts

Blood hunts are both common and violent, a death sentence that few Cainites escape. The prince must formally announce the hunt, allowing the accused an opportunity to escape the city before midnight. Once the hunt is called, any vampire is free to hunt down and destroy the offending Cainite, though usually the sheriff and his cadre lead the hunt. Some princes even offer a reward to the Cainite who destroys the renegade vampire, such as the hunted vampire's domain, thereby unleashing a murderous, blood-hungry lynch mob. If a Cainite is unfortunate enough to be the target of a blood hunt, she is dead to all other Cainites, for all intents and purposes. Anyone caught aiding the fugitive is considered an accomplice and usually becomes the target of her own blood hunt.

Traditionally, one calls a blood hunt only in extreme cases, but as domain grows scarce and tensions between princes flair up, no one is safe. Political enemies are usually the targets of the hunt, but anyone unfortunate enough to cross the prince can find herself running for her unlife. However, even in the violent nights of the 13th century, few princes call a blood hunt lightly.

Branding

Cainites can easily resist almost all physical wounds, but not burns. Therefore, those who commit minor infractions are usually branded, their crimes visible to all. Infractions of domain and theft are the most common reasons for branding. Upon being found guilty (often at the whim of the prince or sheriff), a mark is burned onto the Cainite's forehead or arms and then rubbed with salt to slow its healing. Depending on the severity, the brand might be applied every few weeks to prevent it from fully healing.

Exile

Some crimes are not severe enough for a blood hunt, but still serious enough to have the Cainite exiled. Considered Autarkis, these Cainites are branded and then cast out from the prince's domain. The fate of such unfortunates is seldom pleasant. Without rights or the protection of the prince, many are hunted down. Those who escape to other cities are usually turned away and left to fend for themselves in the wilderness. Few survive for long, but some form bands of

brigands and outlaws. In Cainite circles, these outlaws are called *Furores*.

Ordeals

Borrowing from mortal society, the prince can call for an ordeal and allow the offending Cainite to prove her innocence through a challenge. The challenge can vary in severity, though many are designed more to be entertaining (to the prince and assembled court) than to be fair to the Cainite on trial. The most common ordeals include trial by combat, ordeal by fire, test of the Beast and the purifying light.

- **Trial by Combat:** The most common manner in which a prince can settle the matter of a subject's innocence is through trial by combat, which pits the accused against his accusers. Princes and elders are traditionally offered a trail by combat to prove their innocence. Lesser Cainites seldom get the privilege, unless the prince is bored and in need of a spectacle. The prince sets the conditions of the trial, naming arena, weapons and rules (though fair fights are rarely the norm). Although the trial does not have to be to Final Death, most end only when one of the two combatants drinks the other's blood.

- **Ordeals by Fire:** Another popular alternative to the blood hunt is the ordeal by fire. In an ordeal by fire, the accused is forced to walk over burning coals or tied to a wooden stake that is then set ablaze. If the accused survives, she is presumed innocent and set free. However, few Cainites do. For less severe transgressions, a prince might order the accused to hold a burning coal or reach into a fire to retrieve a ring or other object to prove their innocence. Although not fatal, such ordeals require great will on the part of the accused — so much so that innocence rarely plays a part in the outcome.

- **Tests of the Beast:** Inspired by tales of Byzantine Cainites, the test of the Beast consists of caging the accused, usually in iron cages suspended in midair, or in dank cells, denying them any sustenance. Cainites who frenzy are summarily destroyed, while those who resist their Beasts are pardoned. However, even if pardoned, there is little guarantee that the accused will be set free. Many are condemned to spend the remainder of their unives either caged like animals or in torpor.

- **Purifying Light:** Like the ordeal by fire, few Cainites survive the purifying light. Those who are condemned to the purifying light are locked away on rooftops, open attics or courtyards minutes before dawn. If the Cainite survives for a period as set by the prince, she has proven her innocence and is freed. If not, Final Death proclaims her guilt.

The Nocturnal Nobility

The Dark Medieval night belongs to Cainites. They exist by their own rules, firm in their command of the time from dusk 'til dawn. In cities, the breathing head home or to the taverns and brothels to take refuge from the darkness and drink their fears away, leaving the streets vacant and quiet. Even nobles and knights refrain from stepping out into the cool night — allowing Cainites full run of the cities. In castles

and royal palaces, Cainites gather and hold their own courts of blood once the mortal dignitaries have gone to sleep. The world of mortal kings and kingdoms fades, and Cainites become the nocturnal nobility, concerned with their own goals and intrigues. Princes and lords only care about mortal kings and queens when it concerns their immediate survival or plans. After all, a breathing monarch rules for no more than a few decades, making him almost insignificant in the eyes of Cainite princes who have existed for centuries. Mortals — the *kine*, to use the Cainite's derogatory term — inhabit the world of day and vampires that of the night, and rarely do the two collide. Rarely, but not never. When they do, the results are usually violent and cataclysmic — flooding the streets with blood and filling the sky with ashes.

Even short of such pitched conflict, the schism between the Cainite and mortal spheres is neither clean nor total. The relationship is akin to that between natural predators and their prey. Cainites do not control mortals any more than a wolf controls a herd of deer. Instead, the wolf reacts to the herd's movements and influences and alters the flow of the herd in turn. The worlds of Cainites and kine exist on two separate levels, but both react and are influenced by each other. In time, this relationship may change, but for now, Cainites are confident in their supreme mastery, and they have developed their own form of feudalism to fill the nights with conflict and intrigue, just as do mortal rulers living by day.

Feudal Lextalionis

Cainite society has reached its feudal apex, creating a society of the night that is both complex and beautiful in its intricacy. Cainite feudalism, more commonly known as Feudal Lextalionis, is the heart of Cainite society and what drives the War of Princes. The system is closely tied to the teachings of the Road of Kings, whose members are concerned with the proper distribution of authority. Not all rulers are followers of the road, but most pay lip service to its precepts and have advisors who are schooled in its teachings.

The Cainite nobility is replete with ranks and titles. Some are ceremonial, and others are tied directly to a vampire's status. Unlike the mortal nobility, gender does not divide Cainites; there are probably as many male princes as they are female ones. While some male Cainites might hold on to their mortal preconceptions about the "fairer" sex, only the truly foolish underestimate their female counterparts.

Monarchs

Monarchs stand above all others, they are regents of Cainite kingdoms who rule over courts that span across Europe and reach to the Holy Land. Most, if not all, are Methuselahs, ancient Cainites who remember the nights of Rome as clearly as most neonates remember their mortal lives. The monarchs were once lords themselves, exiles and survivors of Rome's fall, who grew powerful when Europe was still young and unknown. In the War of Princes, the monarchs goad their lords and princes to battle, trying to secure themselves for the uncertain future that unfolds with each passing night. Some fear that the age of Cainite

dominance is coming to a close, and that they will eventually have to hide from humans and rule like lepers in the night. Others long for battle, centuries of absence making them thirsty for conflict and strife.

The monarchs keep their physical locations well hidden, known only to their most loyal lords and attendants, and they don't claim domain over vulnerable cities that can be burned down by Cainite rivals or zealous mortals. To exert their influence, they sponsor powerful lords (through force, coercion or promises of power), effectively claiming domain over them. Doing so provides a lord with the backing of a potent Methuselah, and it grants the monarch agents in return with which to extend his influence, without having to compromise or expose himself outright. This last element is key, especially considering the fact that some monarchs have been in torpor for centuries and their power bases have eroded. Yet some monarchs, such as the Ventruë Mithras and Hardestadt or the Lasombra Montano, are very active in the War of Princes. They do not shy away from making a personal appearance or leading the occasional charge.

Lords and Ladies

Although they are nowhere near as powerful as the monarchs, the lords command vast domains and armies of loyal princes, barons and knights. Lords rule territories analogous to most Medieval kingdoms, which are divided in turn into a number of principalities held by vassal princes. Most lords hold their own courts only once or twice per year, spending the rest of their time traveling to the courts of their vassals, settling disputes and attending ceremonies and tournaments.

Princes

The most active rank in the War of Princes, prince is a generic term for a vampire with domain over a significant, and strategically vital, territory and tied to the feudal system. This domain is usually one of Europe's cities — which are growing in number — or large towns or even key castles. Princes who ruled their fiefdoms before the First Crusade are commonly called counts or dukes to distinguish themselves from younger princes. Although they are impressive titles that command much respect, count, duke or earl are normally honorific.

Barons and Baronesses

As aides-de-camp and companions of princes or lords, barons are the field commanders, sheriffs and chamberlains of the nocturnal nobility. Although most claim a domain of sorts (a hamlet, guild, bridge or even castle), the rank of baron is bequeathed in part because of the skills and talents of the vassal. From the title of baron, many Cainites eventually earn their own fiefdoms and become princes themselves. While princes and lords are the plotters and schemers of the War of Princes, barons (and the knights below them) are Cainites of action.

Knights

The lowest rank, but in many ways the most important, vampiric knights are usually neonates and ancillae who have

proven themselves and sworn fealty to a baron or prince. Although it is a common rank, knight is a noble title and a privilege that puts the vampire above his kin and ties him to official vassalage. Knights are usually dispatched to rival courts as messengers and spies, or they are granted a small domain to test their worth and devotion to their prince, lord and monarch. In the War of Princes, it is more often the ashes of knights and their squires that cover battlefields, left to scatter with the morning winds. But it is also the neonate knights who stand to gain the most. Many inherit vast domains as spoils of war and become forces to be reckoned with in the War of Princes. Knights have little to fear. Most are too young to dread eternity, so they throw themselves into the fray with reckless abandon. Europe might belong to the lords and monarchs, but the battlefields belong to knights.

The Low Clans

The Low Clans are stigmatized under Feudal Lextalionis. Although individuals are routinely welcomed at court, their broods rarely receive the same treatment that a Lasombra or Ventruë's might. It is possible for a low-blooded vampire to rise into the nobility, but she must work twice as hard and face constant second-guessing. It is far more common for low-blooded vampires to be given a post at court without the noble rank that usually accompanies it. Malkavian mystics, Gangrel sergeants, Nosferatu spies and Tremere sorcerers are becoming more and more frequent at court, but even being knighted for their service is a rare blessing.

The War of Princes, however, has started to blur the lines separating High and Low Clans. Many Low-Clan Cainites take to the battlefield under the banner of princes and lords, which has given them significant leverage in recent years. Their status grows with each battle, and some have even received domains as their reward. And of course there are several powerful low-blooded vampires who have simply claimed and defended domains, earning the title of prince without some high-blooded fool's approval.

Fealty

Fealty lies at the core of Feudal Lextalionis, as a network of oaths and alliances that tie the many courts of Europe to their lords, and through them, the monarchs who are the true powers of the Dark Medieval. From the knights to the monarchs, fealty is represented by oaths and vows that underpin the courts as social bonds and governing institutions. Whenever one Cainite acknowledges another as her superior, she is pledging her fealty in return for protection and support. The Feudal Lextalionis fosters ties from the lowest to the highest strata of the nocturnal nobility.

In swearing fealty, the vassal, be he knight, prince or lord, offers support and loyalty to his liege, both military and political. The vassal also vows never to attack her liege, though in the turbulent War of Princes, such is not always the case. In return, the liege usually, though not always, grants the vassal a domain, to rule as her own. The size of the fief depends on the rank and status of the vassal — knights are usually

given taverns or small neighborhoods, barons larger estates or providence over a guild for example. Finally, the liege also vows to protect the vassal on the battlefield and at court. The Traditions of Caine help institutionalize the act of swearing fealty and, thus, the feudal system as a whole. The Traditions of Domain, Progeny and Destruction cement the rule of the liege. They allow the liege to both protect and offer domain and other gifts (such as the right to create progeny) to vassals in return for their fealty. They also allow the liege to punish any transgressions.

At the bottom rung of the feudal ladder, a knight offers to protect the liege (usually a prince, but sometimes a baron or even a lord) and support his endeavors, by acting as emissaries or on the field of battle. In return, the prince (or baron or lord) grants the knight a domain and all its privileges, and he pledges to protect his vassal. Most princes also require a tithe to be paid, usually a percentage of any income that the domain generates or, in times of war, to raise a troop of vampires or ghouls under the prince's banner.

Above the knight, princes bow down to lords or monarchs, but the bonds of fealty are not as strict. Many princes hold their fiefdoms because those fiefdoms were bequeathed to them by a lord—or because the prince pays the lord enough tribute to prevent him from marching in and taking over. Even so, a goodly number of princes see themselves as autonomous, and they only ally themselves with a lord to present a united front against mutual enemies. The rival of a prince who is under the banner of a lord or monarch had better think twice before starting a war, at least without the backing of his own lord. Furthermore, for a lord to hold his domain, he must maintain the predominance of his vassal princes. Therefore, Feudal Lextalionis provides a system whereby a rival lord (or monarch) can usurp control by setting up his own “rival” princes or extracting feudal oaths (by force, coercion, etc.) from vassals of the first lord.

The Roads

The rule of kings and the power of the Church are often entwined, creating a complicated system that has found a tenuous balance in the 13th century, and this is no different for the courts of the nocturnal nobility. Matters of faith (either in God above or the roads) are not trivial or academic—they underpin Cainite society as they do mortal courts. In the medieval mindset of most Cainites, roads are not only ways to deal with the darker urges of vampirism, but also a measure of a vampire's worth. Those who are faithful and pious in their road are respected, seen as noble in body and soul and hence worthy leaders. The sinful, on the other hand, are no better than devils, and a prince or lord of low road standing must usually resort to tyranny or violence to cement her rule. The roads, like the Roman Church, are powers unto themselves. While they are nowhere near as organized as the Church, the roads are part of the Feudal Lextalionis nonetheless.

The rise of the roads in Cainite society has mirrored the rise of Christianity. Most roads, which started as small cult-like faiths in the nights before Rome, have blossomed into

quasi-religions in the 13th century, complete with rites, liturgies and priests. Although not all roads have developed these trappings, the religious atmosphere of the age means that all roads possess a spiritual and political dimension. While the nocturnal nobility rules the night, the roads hold domain over the souls and Beasts of all Cainites, and this the source of their political power. Even roads like the largely apolitical *Via Bestiae* carry a degree of power that helps counter the established rule of lords and princes. All Cainites claim duel fealty—to their liege and their road. One protects the vampire from her rivals, the other from her Beast.

Many princes, like their mortal counterparts who look to the Church, use the roads to legitimize their claims to the throne. Most undergo elaborate coronations in which their right to rule is conferred, not only based on their claim of domain and enforcement of the Lextalionis, but by the blessing of their road. In other cases, princes and lords court the roads and their priests for their backing and the support of their followers. The result has been a slow but gradual rise of the roads as political entities. As princes and lords look to the roads for support and offer gifts of domain and other promises, the roads and their clerics grow in prestige and influence as advisors or outright feudal powers.

Ashen Priesthood

The term “ashen priest” derives from the pale cloth French followers of the Road of Heaven wore in the early 1100s, but it has come to refer to any Cainite who has been recognized as a legitimate teacher of a road. In the feudal system, they fill a role similar to that of mortal priests, bishops and archbishops: to counter-balance the power of lords and princes. Many claim domain over their followers, just like a prince claims domain over her subjects. The difference is that the ashen priesthood does not require oaths of fealty, but rather asserts that anyone following a road automatically fall under their providence, and hence, domain.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, many roads (namely the Roads of Heaven and Kings) began to take on the trappings of organized religions. Ashen priests began appearing in great numbers, divorcing themselves from the burgeoning feudal movement. In time, various elders and princes adopted titles such as bishop and archbishop, both out of piety and to counter-balance the growing influence of the lords and monarchs. This is especially true of the early 13th century, when resourceful and independent elders refuse to bow down to lords and their monarchs. They use their roads and followers to gain influence and power instead, creating a parallel to the mortal schism between king and pope.

The role of ashen priests is complex. They are spiritual advisors and mystics, wise in the ways of the roads and great scholars of Caine. They are also political entities, throwing their support behind princes or lords who promise them (or, from time to time, their roads) more influence and respect. The backing of an ashen priest might be enough to grant a prince, or rival, an easy victory over a contested domain. Ashen priests also have the power to depose a prince, citing sins against their road as breaking the covenant of Caine—



an accusation that severely tarnishes a prince's reputation and influence. For this reason, few princes suppress the roads and their priests, knowing that doing so might be enough to touch off a revolt or expose themselves to their rivals. This is not to say that ashen priests who belong to the same roads are unified. Discord and intrigue are just as common among the Cainite priesthood as it is among the nocturnal nobility. This conflict serves to keep the ashen priesthood from becoming too powerful. Also, savvy princes rarely let a single road grow dominant in their fiefs. Instead, they open their doors to as many roads as possible, forcing them to compete for whatever influence a prince grants them.

Sects

Although the network of Cainite feudalism dominates the Dark Medieval night, not all vampires choose to exist under the banners of the lords and princes. Cainite society, for all of its appearance otherwise, has always been fractured, composed of cults and blood families. In the shadows of the courts, a handful of other sects exist. Some are nothing more than secret societies, while others are rivals to the princes and lords of the era.

The Inconnu

When Rome fell, many of its old and powerful Cainite simply vanished—fading into the shadows never to be heard from again. These secretive and melancholic vampires make up the Inconnu. Unlike the monarchs, many of the Inconnu

choose to remain hidden. They are rumored to lair beneath ancient cities, watching their younger brethren make the same mistakes they made with Rome. Some try to guide and help; others are vengeful and proud and only wish to see all Cainites suffer as they did when Rome collapsed. It is said that the Inconnu played a role in the fall of Constantinople. If so, this is a crime for which the sect may never forgive itself. Since the dawn of the 13th century, the Inconnu has practiced a policy of non-interference, only going as far as dispatching spies and envoys (“watchers,” to use their term) to keep tabs on the lords and princes. The Inconnu is also leading efforts to safeguard Cainite knowledge as the War of Princes rages, and old and precious manuscripts go up in flames.

Most princes and monarchs discount the Inconnu as a rumor—superstitious babble of ancient “bogeymen.” Behind closed doors, however, those who remember Rome remember the powerful lords of its nights and know better than to provoke the anger of the sleeping dragon that is the Inconnu.

The Order of the Bitter Ashes

The Cainite knights of the Order of the Bitter Ashes seek the redemption that Caine rejected and devote their unives to the Light of God. Its origin is shrouded in mystery, but the Order is present in Europe and the Holy Land. It pursued a mandate supposedly handed down by Christ himself. Most of its followers believe that it is their duty to safeguard and protect holy relics—tangible proof of God's existence—from falling into the wrong Cainite or mortal hands. Countless tales of the Order exist. Some claim that they ride ghoul

stallions and fight infernal forces in the name of God, or that Cainite knights of the Order have partaken of Christ's blood and been freed of the torments of the Beast. Only the knights of the Bitter Ashes know the truth, and few are willing to share their sect's secrets with outsiders.

However, the Order is past its prime. Both internal intrigue and external enemies have eroded much of its influence. Many of its holdings in the Holy Land have been lost, along with its relics, because of the Crusades and Cainite infighting. Even in Europe, the Order is on the defensive. Although the Order was once a power to be reckoned with in Languedoc and Iberia, the Albigenian Crusade and the *Reconquista* have made ruins of many of the Order's keeps. Only its headquarters, the Castle by the Lake, in Scotland remains hidden and safe — but for how much longer none can say for sure. Still, no matter the setbacks, the knights of the Order remain faithful to their mandate, and they are always on the lookout for those who are worthy of God's redemption.

Although the Order is waning, this has not stopped its knights from continuing their holy mandate. Across Europe, from Provence to Northern Germany, Grail Knights search for lost relics, following rumors and legends to the dark concerns of the known world. It is said that a Grail Knight sees more of the world in a single year than most elders do in centuries of unlife. However, as the Order comes into contact with the blood courts of princes and lords, its knights find it hard to avoid being drawn into the conflicts of the War of Princes. This is proving to be a losing battle. Many princes and lords have baited Grail Knight into fighting for them with promises of relics.

The Furores

The nights are changing. Cainites are pushed further and further into the shadows and the young chafe under the oppression of the old. Wherever there are those with power, such as lords and princes, there are always malcontents and outlaws. Among Cainites, these outlaws have a name — the Furores. Most Furores, be they brigands, bandits or rebels, refuse to bow down to the archaic Traditions of Caine and the rule of the elders. They see unlife as a gift that liberates them from the oppression of their mortal lives. To willingly subject themselves to servitude, whether to their sire or prince, is unforgivable.

Chaotic free spirits, the Furores are growing bold. The rise of the cities and its middle class of guilds and merchants have allowed the Furores to carve out their own kingdoms under the noses of the lords and princes who would not dirty their hands with the likes of artisans, performers and laborers. It is not surprising that the ranks of the Furores swell with neonates of both Low and High Clans who are tired of being oppressed by their sires and princes.

Furores might share a common bond and desire, but they are no more united than the courts of blood. Furthermore, they face a nightly struggle for survival. Many live as outlaws, forming colonies of Furores in the wilderness far from the reach of princes and their sheriffs. Others, hide in the cities using the guilds to mask their movements and agendas.

Over the last few decades, the port city of Marseilles has become a haven for the Furores, a constant source of embarrassment to St. Regis, the Toreador prince of the city. As more and more Furores flock to the city, tensions inch their way toward open warfare. St. Regis, however, is fighting a losing battle, as he is isolated from both the Courts of Love and Paris because of the Albigenian Crusade. Many among the Furores hold out hope that Marseilles will become a free city before the end of the decade.

The Prometheans

The Prometheans remember Carthage and long to recreate it. Taking their name from Prometheus, who defied the gods and gave humanity the gift of fire, the Firebringers (as they are also sometimes called) want to enlighten both Cainites and mortals. They want to usher in a new age when both the Children of Caine and of Seth live as one. Dreamers and idealists, their utopian vision of "New Carthage" unites the Prometheans with a common goal. The sect attracts Cainites from all strata, from princes and lords to those of the Low Clans. Like the Furores, the Firebringers hope to effect change from the bottom up, targeting young Cainites and the burgeoning mortal middle class rather than going after nobles and elders. More organized than the Furores, the Prometheans have influence over the growing criminal elements in cities, as well as the merchants and guilds.

The Cainite Heresy

Dreaded and feared, the Cainite Heresy is a stain upon the nights of the 13th century. Tainting Gnostic and early Christian dogma with lies and Cainite apocrypha, the Heresy's origins stretch as far back as the first centuries after the birth of Christ. Since then, it has used its blasphemous teachings, coercion and outright manipulation (not to mention evangelism and proselytizing) to increase its congregation and weave its tentacles into the Church and many of the royal houses of Europe.

The Crimson Curia, a body of the cult's most influential priests, leads the Heresy. It is the Crimson Curia that sets the Heresy's doctrine and attempts to coordinate its movements, a task near impossible given the Heresy's fragmented nature. The Curia espouses that Caine was, in fact, God's favorite and that his mark was a sign of God's favor, not a curse. In turn, having been touched by the hand of God, all Cainites are akin to angels, revered as divine beings and true prophets and messiahs. Since its early nights, the Cainite Heresy has infiltrated and subverted the Catholic priesthood, amassing great wealth and influence in the process. It has even woven its tendrils into the Road of Heaven, turning otherwise pious Cainites onto a darker path that can lead to darkness and damnation. In turn, some prominent followers of the Road of Heaven have started to focus their attention on eradicating the Heresy.

More pressing for the Heresy is the belief that the year 1239 will herald the coming of Gehenna. Many of its followers, both mortal and Cainite, are busy preparing for this eventuality, convinced that Caine will return to pass his judgment before the decade is over.

A History of Blood

My Dear Dracon,

“How will it end?”

You asked me this once, many nights ago, when Constantinople still stood, a simple question to which I did not have an answer. Yet your words have haunted me ever since and filled my nights with uncertainty. But what else could I expect from the ineffable Dracon, the phantom of Byzantium, rogue childe of Tzimisce and inheritor of the Dream that was Constantinople? Where were you when, twenty-six years ago to the night, it burned to the ground? Did you watch as your lover, the Patriarch Michael, became ash? What of your childe, the Cainite Saint Gesu? Did you save him or condemn him to darkness? What of your monasteries and books?

You asked, how will it end? Let me ask a better question, “How did it all begin?” What rough hand of fate threw our kind’s lot and cast us adrift on a sea of blood and ashes? I finally understood that you were asking, not about the future, but about the past, the past that shackles our kind and condemns us to repeating the same mistakes for eternity.

Preamble

Our history is one of cities — have you not found it curious how we mark time by the passing of great cities? First Enoch, cradle and birthplace of the clans. Then came the Second City and the strife that destroyed it. Mighty Rome and its decadence. Carthage razed and salted haunting us to this night, and more recently Constantinople. All gone, all nothing but memories that only our cursed race remembers. What is our infatuation with cities, and why do our mystics — like yourself and even Caine himself — abandon them?

Another note before continuing. Throughout my treatise, I refer to our history in the plural even though I never walked in the Second City or through Rome in its heyday. I do this because I believe we inherit more than blood when Embraced as I am sure you, in your mutability, agree. Like a hydra, our kind has many heads (the clans) and many gasping maws (our brethren) but a single body — Caine. There is one beginning and one end. All else is meaningless.

Roots

Of the First City, of the creation of our founders or of the righteous flood that washed away Enoch, no more needs to be said. The legacy of the First Nights is our heritage. This we cannot escape. When we made ourselves gods in Enoch and Embraced without limit, it did not damn us in the eyes of Caine or God. We were already damned, damned by our very own existence and our future writ in blood. The truth is that Enoch was only the first, and we have tried so hard since the time of the Great Flood to rebuild it from broken promises and memories only to destroy what we have built. Enoch is a memory and nothing more, a memory that drives us to destroy what we build, a memory to remind us that nothing we touch can last. It is the memory of Enoch — that promised land of our kind — that set us on our dark path. This is why Caine turned his back on Enoch as the rain fell and why he left us.

Our history begins with the Second City and not with Enoch. In Enoch our kind did not have a choice. Those of the second and third generations merely followed Caine. But after the Flood, our kind did have a choice. The Antediluvians could have scattered to the darkest corners when the waters receded and waited for that final night. Some did just that. Others chose to craft an empire in their image, and they built the Second City. And like Enoch, the Second City was doomed from the start. It was not the hand of God, or even Caine, that destroyed it this time, but the Antediluvians' own jealousies and vendettas. By this time, the Second City teemed with our kind, and the clans grew fat and proud knowing no limits to their excess. However, I hear whispers that you remember this time, so I will not pretend to know what that city must have been like. What I know is that the clans started bickering and this poison ran deep.

Whatever started it, I pray we never know, but the Antediluvians first slew their own sires and then warred with one another until the Second City was nothing but ruins. Caine is said to have returned one last time in the wreckage and cursed them all. Yet, this was not enough for the Antediluvians. They vowed to have their vengeance one night, for they all blamed one another for the destruction of the Second City. And so, the War of Ages began.

The Great Exodus and Early Empires

After the fall of the Second City, many of our kind scattered far and wide. Of the Antediluvians little is known after this point, but their influence flowed from their broods (which would eventually grow into the clans), which they guided and coerced in the invisible pantomime that is the War of Ages. Still, the world was a different place back then, and a wide gulf separated the many Children of Caine. Our kind walked across lands that would one day be called Babylon, Britain, Egypt and beyond. The world was young, and in hundreds of different places, a hundred Enochs were crafted. In time, they all fell one by one.

Wherever our kind settled, strife and conflict followed. Cainite rivals would maneuver empires to defeat their age-old foes without a single thought to the mortals who perished or the civilizations that were destroyed. Although kine needed no help to start wars, our kind was all too eager to goad empires into battle, as we still do. Often, when the mortal fighting would end and night fell, Cainites would take to the battlefield. They would feed from the dead and dying, then continue the fighting with a ferocity and savagery that knew no equal. A mighty clash of titans shook the earth and drew storms from the heavens.

As mortals spread out and grew more numerous, however, our kind was forced into hiding — for protection from both overzealous humans and Cainite rivals. Although our numbers were small, our feuds and vendettas were not. From open rulers, we fell into the shadows where we discovered we had more room to maneuver. In this manner, we settled in Greece, among the tribes of Europe, in Persia and even the unknown East. The memories of Enoch and the Second City are nothing but legends, and we repeated the same mistakes. Wherever a city was born, our kind flocked to it — and nowhere was this more devastating than in the Eternal City, Rome.

What a wondrous place Rome was. Not that dirty shantytown of ruins that exists tonight, but a labyrinthine city of columns and temples that became a nexus for our kind, as if its very streets beckoned us. First the Ventrue and Lasombra came, then the Malkavians and Toreador, each taking turns

whispering into the ears of the Senate and then the Caesars. Our population swelled. Never, not even in Constantinople, had so many of our kind dwelled within the same city. We laired in the catacombs, in the hillside temples and luxurious villas that make the castles and cities of tonight seem like primitive abodes. And how the blood did flow.

Slaves died by the cartload, and no one seemed to notice. The coliseum held blood feasts in the dead of night, and this without our doing, though our brethren were all too happy to partake in the festivities. We just rode the wave of mortal excess and took it to new levels. Still, there was hope during the early nights of Rome. Perhaps Rome, named by some mortal poet as the Eternal City, was the bastion that would outlast our wars and remain until the Final Nights. Many held this to be true, as I am sure your companions Michael and Antonius did. But again, our jealousy and hatred would make sure that this was not to be. How many more times are we to repeat the treachery of the Second City?

Carthage

Carthage. The word still resonates, even for those of us who were not born when the Roman legions marched over its remains. Carthage. Writing that word echoes with the cries of the many who lie in torpor below its ruins, eternal witnesses to the highest of Cainite folly and pride. To this night, we're still deeply divided over events that transpired more than a millennium ago. Its memory is still fresh and painful for those who survived those frightful nights.

Carthage. Damned city. I hear it was the Brujah that made Carthage their own under the shadow of the Romans. They built a mighty empire and sent their trading ships across the Mediterranean while Rome was in something of a decline. However, this was not enough of an affront to warrant its obliteration. No, instead the Brujah and others who flocked to Carthage ruled as Caine himself had done in Enoch. They did not hide or prowl the streets like wraiths. They ruled in the open, demanding blood tithes from the mortals who gladly gave their vitae in return for their protection. Many called Carthage the New Enoch, and this enraged Rome's Ventrue and Malkavians. Accusations of sacrilege echoed across the Senate at night, soon replaced with Carthago delenda est: Carthage must be destroyed. And so the legions were unleashed, and the first great war between our kind came to pass. For close to 50 years Brujah and Ventrue, Carthage and Rome fought.

In the end it was Rome that won. I can only imagine what it must have been like to witness such terrible destruction, and I wonder if perhaps you witnessed it: to see the legions march across Carthage led by Ventrue and Malkavian (and if the rumors are true, some Sangrel) generals. All life was extinguished, and it is said the Ventrue ordered the legions to salt the earth as morning came, trapping hundreds of our kind in torpor for eternity.

Rome paid equally, however. Once the legions and victors returned, hope seemed to vanish from Rome. No longer was it a magical place for our kind. It was a reminder of the terrible mark we carry and the fate that we seemingly cannot escape. Some turned their backs on Rome and left, including you and your lovers, the Toreador Michael and the Ventrue Antonius. Many more decided to stay, terrified of the dark world that awaited beyond Rome. Although Rome and its empire lasted for a score of centuries after Carthage, its magic was shattered and all that was left was decadence and petty intrigue. Rome had died for our kind, but many would ignore this until the beginning of the Long Night.

The Long Night

When the barbarian hordes descended on Rome, a quiet fell across our kind. Broken and lost, we scattered once more. Some headed back to the sands of the Levant, others to the wilds of Europe. Rome became a silent city, its ancient Cainite masters either destroyed, in torpor or in hiding. The younger ones left Rome to carve out their own kingdoms; nothing more than a ruin remained. In a short century, they became lords of the so-called Long Night. All across the darkened land, Cainites prospered. Even the young, those only a few decades old, became like kings and chieftains, ruling over domains that would bear witness to the rise of the kingdoms of England, France and Castile.

It was a grand time for our kind, and the Long Night seemed to stretch into eternity for those who walked under its veil. Vast insurmountable distances separated one domain from the next, and Cainites gathered in courts, not out of necessity, but for companionship. In this time of quiet, the War of Ages raged nonetheless, but it had lost much of its vigor, which allowed many Cainites to craft new kingdoms, but nothing on the scale of Rome. Some vanished while others grew to become jewels in the night, and here I speak of your city Constantinople — that Dream crafted by the faith of a Coreador, the pragmatism of a Ventrue and the vision of a Tzimisce. For close to a millennium, your city withstood the strife that eroded so many of our realms. Even after the death of Antonius, the Dream infected all those who walked its cobblestone streets. Perhaps Constantinople was the closet our kind will ever get to heaven — and now it too is gone. Its shell remains, but like Rome, its essence is lost. But, there is more to speak about before mentioning that terrible crusade that ended your Dream.

The Night Shattered

The quiet of the Long Night was, upon reflection, a façade and nothing more. Our kind prospered because Europe was dark and few dared to venture far from their domain, not because we finally learned how to coexist in peace. Perhaps fitting then, that it was the kine who roused us from our sleep. Below our noses, the Church grew strong and unleashed the Crusades to liberate the Holy Land from infidels and creatures of the night. To our surprise, the faithful (and misguided) sailed across the Mediterranean in unprecedented numbers. They flooded Jerusalem with blood, and still we ignored the signs. Battle after battle raged in those sacrosanct lands, and with each one, the ancients stirred in their slumber — including the Antediluvians themselves if we are to believe some of the tales. Many Methuselahs left the Holy Land and settled across Europe, eager to stretch their long dormant limbs. Yet, they were not the only visitors. The Crusades provoked the ire of our Islamic brethren, and another great schism among the race of Caine ran red with hate.

But still our kind remained blind. We had our kingdoms and cities, we enjoyed the culture of the mortals and were content. We had grown complacent and heady, but we all heard the final scream of Saulot as Tremere himself, once a mortal magus, drew his blood and obliterated one of our best. Not since the ancient Brujah patricide in the days of the Second City had one of the 13 met Final Death to be replaced in blood, and the crime was far worse this

time. This was no familial dispute, but the usurpation of blood and heritage by outsiders. How blind must our kind have been to ignore the signs, and how much more desperate were we to ignore the rise of the Tremere and stand idly by as one our best was extinguished? It is true, your Tzimisce clanmates have fought the Tremere since the Usurpers' earliest nights, but this was never to avenge Saulot. The struggle is about pride and jealousy. After the diablerie of Saulot and the fall of Clan Salubri, only the foolish failed to see that the Long Night was ending.

The Present

It wasn't until the words "Constantinople burns" echoed, however, that the veil of the Long Night finally slipped away, and an uncertain century was revealed in its place. Again, our kind would want to claim credit for the fall of Constantinople — blame the jealousy of the Second City — but the truth is that our kind had little to do with its destruction. It was mortals who burned the Second Rome, and our kind could only stand by helplessly and watch the ashes fall. When the fires dimmed, a new world emerged, one where the night no longer offered us succor.

The kine are claiming more and more of the night, pushing us into the shadows. Their Church, strong and united, knows of us and sends its hunters after us with their torches. Cities are becoming overcrowded, and the law of domain is ignored as Cainites starve for blood. This is the first time of weak blood, and Cainites twelve times removed from Caine have appeared among us. Like mortals — how often do we ape their customs, their cultures and wars — our princes fight for domain, waging terrible wars that echo the destruction of Carthage. Our elders hide, fearful of those who are creatures of this violent age. To the neonates and ancillae of this age, Carthage, the Second City and even Rome, are legends. They see the night as endless and are desperate to claim their share. Everything is fraying. Prince fights prince, sire betrays childer, and childer sacrifice sire. Our time of ascendancy is coming to an end.

This age will be known as the War of Princes — our last stand before the uncertain future takes hold.

How will it end...?

Constancia of Erciyes,
Childe of Japheth,
Childe of Cappadocius



The War of Princes

The détente of the Long Night has finally crumbled and given way to a time of conflict and strife for the Children of Caine, when young and old alike take to the battlefields. Across Europe and the Holy Land, the War of Princes rages. It rallies lords and their vassals to maneuver against their rivals, to vie for power, to conquer or to settle ancient grudges.

At its most basic, the War of Princes is the intense conflict between a handful of powerful and active Methuselahs, the so-called monarchs of the Dark Medieval night. The conflict gets its name from the princes who direct many of the battles and the principalities that are their major prizes. Unlike the lords and monarchs to whom they swear fealty, princes control discrete domains. These domains can be attacked by force of arms, usurped through intrigues or swayed to switch overlords through enticements and threats. It is the princes who have the most to lose and the most to gain from the present conflict; therefore, it is their war.

As was the case in the Second City, Carthage and Constantinople, the War of Princes has already overflowed its bounds. What some thought would be just a settling of status between the monarchs has become a generalized state of conflict and strife. Cainite plotters and knights move from fiefdom to fiefdom taking what they can. Even the most conservative among the Damned must react, either by retreating into the shadows or by striking out before they are stricken down themselves. The complacent feed the pyres while the bold seize what they can.

Origins

Like any storm, the War of Princes had been brewing for some time before some Cainite troubadour gave it a poetic name. No single event caused the war, but a series of happenings gradually fanned the flames of strife into the inferno that now rages across Europe and Outremer. Many of these preliminary conflicts seemed quite minor at the time. French Toreador withdrawing support from the Grand Court in Paris, for example, seemed like just another Cainite scheme amidst so many others. But suddenly weakening the powerful Ventrue Prince Alexander led others whom he had held in check to move. In the Holy Roman Empire, the agents of High Lord Hardestadt suddenly had far more freedom of action, and they were able to renew their expansion east. This led to greater conflict between German Ventrue and the Tzimisce to the east, which sowed chaos in Hungary and gave the Tremere blood-sorcerers room in which to grow into a power to be reckoned with. This process of isolated incidents building upon each other repeated itself time and time again throughout the 11th and 12th centuries.

Of all events leading to the War of Princes, however, none can compare to the impact of the slaying of Saulot. Almost single-handedly, the magus Tremere changed the world of Caine's race, striking a deep and terrible blow that caused even the mighty Antediluvians to shudder in their sleep. For all the jockeying and intrigue of the War of Ages, never had an Antediluvian fallen to such a foe. The diablerie of Saulot sent shock waves through Cainite courts that still reverberate in these nights.

It is hardly coincidental that the rise of the Tremere was soon followed by the reappearance of the monarchs — mighty Methuselahs stirred from torpor and hungry for power once more. Of course, some Methuselahs had remained active throughout the Long Night. Michael, the Toreador Patriarch of Constantinople, had shepherded his golden city since the third century despite growing religious mania, and Montano of Sicily had attended to his torpid sire, the Lasombra Antediluvian, for countless centuries. But starting in the 11th century, several of their contemporaries in the Blood rose from slumber or contemplation to take a much more active role in the affairs of Dark Medieval Europe. In each case, mortal events built upon vampiric issues to lead them to activity.

In Britain, the ancient Ventrue Mithras had slumbered since the Roman nights, but he woke shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066. He rose to become Prince of London and gathered the Ventrue of England and France to his banner. Shortly thereafter, as the First Crusade took Jerusalem in 1096, Caliph Jamal of the warrior caste of the Assamites rose to action in the Levant, calling his clan to push back the Frankish vampires who accompanied the crusaders. Perhaps in response, Montano exerted subtle influence over his Christian clanmates in Iberia to commit more and more to their "Shadow Reconquista" looking to push Muslim vampires from that peninsula. In Germany, the Ventrue High Lord Hardestadt marshaled his forces to push east into the Tzimisce homelands and secure domains across the Holy Roman Empire. To the west, perhaps fearing the influence of powerful Ventrue in England and Germany, the Toreador Matriarch Salianna's agents withdrew their longstanding support from Alexander, the Ventrue Prince of Paris. Other, more subtle Methuselahs played deeper in the shadows, including the Cappadocian Japheth (his sire's keeper) and the archfiend Yorak, high priest of the Tzimisce Cathedral of Flesh. With equal shares of cunning, coercion and charisma, these monarchs crafted nocturnal kingdoms from the loose conglomerations of lords and princes that had characterized the Long Night. In the process, old rivalries were re-kindled and new ones set ablaze. By the end of the 12th century, the powder keg of the War of Princes was in place; all that was needed with the spark to ignite it. That spark came with the Fourth Crusade.

The events of the crusade of 1202 through 1204 were traumatic enough; its implications were far worse. In the

daylight, the crusaders ended up sacking Constantinople, the grandest of Christian cities, and never once faced Muslim opponents. The so-called Army of Christ ended up carving up a Christian empire and serving the interest of French nobles and Venetian traders. The New Rome was sacked, burned and parceled like a roast hog. For the scions of Caine, matters were even more chaotic, as faction after faction failed to exert more than the slightest influence over the crusaders. Assassinations, petty wars and power-plays all failed to ride herd on the mortal masses. Constantinople, which had been the grand experiment of the Toreador Methuselah Michael, came crashing down as he met his end. Many of his powerful subjects, from the Ventrue tyrant Caius to the Tzimisce visionary Gesu met similar fates.

Empires had fallen before, of course, and the ancients had all seen childer and siblings meet the Final Death. But with the tensions already in place, the debacle vampires would come to call the Bitter Crusade, made two things abundantly clear. First, a time of reckoning was coming. The mortal herd was hardy and angry enough to lash out madly and take down its predators. Second, no one's safety was assured. Michael has been among the most potent active Methuselaha, and in the end, all he had built turned to ash with him. If he could suffer such a fate, so could anyone else. Therefore, a potent vampire who wished to survive needed to both secure his own position and move against any enemies before they had a chance to do so.

The war was on.

Battlefields and Intrigues

As the century marches forward, the princes and lords of Europe fight the War of Princes across a multitude of fronts, some as obvious as night-shrouded battlefields, others as subtle as the play of influence over merchant houses or mortal kings. From the cloaked valleys of Transylvania to the courts of France and the cathedrals of Italy, the War of Princes rages in conflicts both small and large. Vampires are competitive predators, and they have been warring with one another since biblical times, but the last 40 years have seen that conflict take on a whole new intensity. Where Cainites might once move with unliving patience, readying whole generations of agents and catspaws to bring down their rivals, they now marshal nocturnal armies to settle matters in blood. Intrigues and honeyed words still have their roles to play, of course, but the quiet game of the Long Night has become a cutthroat shadow war of murders and betrayals. Understandings that have kept the balance of power since the nights of Rome fall by the wayside as ambitious princes grab what they can before another grabs it from them.

The most obvious sign of all this change is the upsurge in all-out battle between Cainite forces. The term "vampire army" is something of a fallacy, since even the largest vampiric forces at battle rarely contain more



than a few dozen of Caine's brood, but these few can bring to bear terrifying destructive power. In the valleys and crags where they fight, only destruction reigns. Add to them their entourage of ghouls, thralls and catspaws, and the War of Princes takes on a very literal meaning. But as always, for every unliving prince who leads his troops on the field of battle, there are five more who use guile and more subtle tactics to further their interests. Every nocturnal court in Europe sees its share of ambassadors and spies, of new alliances and betrayals.

Of the multiple intrigues and conflict, the following are the most active:

The Eastern Marches

Eastern Europe is the traditional nesting ground of Clan Tzimisce, but its hold in the region has come under increasing threat. Ever since a cabal of mortal magi used Tzimisce blood to make themselves into the nucleus of Clan Tremere, the vampiric *voivodate* of the region has tried to wipe out these usurping warlocks. This conflict — sometimes called the *Omen War* — has raged unchecked for almost two centuries with little sign of letting up, and only succeeded in deepening the hatreds of all those involved. The Tremere have sought out allies where they could, using the traditional Tzimisce isolationism against the Fiends. After a few false starts, the Usurper clan has found that many princes are willing to make unofficial deals and provide covert support in exchange for working blood-magic and performing special favors.

This long-standing conflict has turned into the breeding ground for much of the fire of the War of Princes. In courts and castles across Europe, Tzimisce and Tremere envoys play a game of cat and mouse while various lords try their best to capitalize on the situation. The Ventrue of Germany and Hungary in particular see the Omen War as a chance to cut into the Tzimisce heartland, and they have fought several campaigns in Transylvania itself, as well as further afield in Prussia and Livonia. Gangrel war parties, Nosferatu plague-bearers and demagogues of all the roads only add to the endemic chaos. Rumor even has it that other mortal wizards have joined the fray, or at least are using the nighttime wars as an excuse to settle their own scores.

The Crusades

Although principally a mortal concern, each call to crusade drags more and more Cainites into its grasp. In the decades since the turn of the century, the Fourth Crusade has marched into Constantinople, the Fifth to Damietta (in Egypt), and the Sixth has reached Jerusalem itself. Meanwhile the Albigensian Crusade has hunted Cathars across Languedoc and helped destroy the ambitions of Toulouse and Aragon alike, while the Livonian Crusade has launched German knights into Prussia and the Baltic. A goodly number of vampires attempt to ride the waves of these crusades, from the French Queen

Esclarmone la Noire (who broke from the Courts of Love during the Albigensian Crusade) to Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg (whose thralls among the Teutonic Knights fight in the Livonian and Prussian campaigns). Others simply take advantage of the battles to claim domain or hunt down enemies, leading to further retaliation. Still others must simply deal with the chaos of marching armies and shifting borders. Outremer — the thin strip of Christian holdings in the Holy Land — is a warren of desperate and ambitious vampires, each fighting for pre-eminence and facing the enmity of Muslim clanmates and outsiders alike. Clan Assamite, arguably the most powerful among Muslims, has called for its warriors to push back the Christian vampires who claim domain in the region, leading to further bloodshed.

The Inquisition and the Cainite Heresy

The Albigensian Crusade, aimed at heretics in Europe rather than heathens in the Holy Land, is in the midst of giving birth to a wider papal initiative to hunt down and punish heretics of many stripes: the Inquisition. In 1230, all the elements are there, but the hammer has yet to fall. However, in the shadows, select agents of the pontiff have been operating for several decades to uncover the "night devils" that they know lurk across Europe. This shadow Inquisition, which seems to include lay operatives, monks and monastic knights, is bringing a whisper of fear to the Damned. Armed with the armor of their faith, these holy warriors (or raving fanatics, depending on one's perspective) are a growing threat. Still, most princes refuse to believe the rumors. Only a few, such as the Cappadocian oracle Constancia and the ashen priest Anatole have taken notice. Anatole has even started his own pogrom against these mortal Inquisitors, launching a bloody shadow war.

The Cainite Heresy, which blends Gnostic tradition with Cainite apocrypha, also has much to worry about from the rise of the Church's hunt for all forms of heretics. The Albigensian Crusade already cost it dearly, and the involvement of its Archbishop Narses in the Fourth Crusade has convinced many princes and ashen priests that the time has come to destroy the Heresy. Not all of its enemies are zealous or motivated by pious concerns; many are simply jealous of the Heresy's power. From England to its cradle in Italy, the enemies of the Cainite Heresy sense its weakness and are preparing to move in. Yet, few are aware of the full influence and power the Heresy wields. (Should a full-scale war erupt, it could dwarf the Omen War in comparison.) The Fourth Crusade also left the Crimson Curia divided, and internal strife has plagued the sect since, spilling over into many of the Italian city-states and beyond.

The Shadow Reconquista

The last stronghold of Islam in Europe, the shrinking lands of al-Andalus stand against the Christian kingdoms

of Aragon, Castile-Leon, Portugal and Navarre, and their *Reconquista*. The once-great cities of Sevilla and Córdoba face the brunt of the conquest, while Granada braces for the conflict to hit it as well. Nevertheless, it all remains a bastion of learning and the domain of many Islamic Cainites. Indeed, while uniting the mortal kingdoms of Spain, the *Reconquista* is tearing Clan Lasombra apart. Once united and powerful in their influence over Spain and Italy, the Magisters are divided. The heated debates of the last century as to which side to support have given way to an unofficial civil war as Muslim Lasombra fight their Christian brethren. From the Castle of Shadows in Sicily, Lasombra himself stirs, and it may be only a matter of time before he becomes involved.

The Rise of the Low Clans

Ignored and overlooked, the Low Clans are growing tired of the arrogance and intrigues of the High Clans. While most princes have their eyes focused elsewhere, the young and outcast are starting to make their move. Tired of centuries of oppression, the Low Clans are ready to claim their status as equals. While princes and lords grasp for crumbling empires, the Low Clans are making their stand as bandit kings and infiltrating the burgeoning guilds. Such sects as the Prometheans and the Furores whisper of a mighty revolt and have begun preparing for its glorious arrival.

Prominent Courts and Fiefdoms

The monarchs, lords and princes at war in Dark Medieval Europe exist in a complex system of allegiances and oaths of fealty. Although many of the monarchical domains are akin to mortal nations, matters are much more flexible on a nightly basis. Not all princes in a region swear fealty to the same lord or even the same monarch, for example. The following are the most prominent vampiric monarchical domains, but many others are spread out across Europe.

The Fiefs of the Black Cross

Monarch: High Lord Hardestadt (5th-generation Ventrue)

Prominent Vassals: Lord Jürgen (6th-generation Ventrue, Magdeburg), Julia Antasia (5th-generation Ventrue, Frankfurt)

Key Domains: Magdeburg (and areas east), Cologne, Munich, Leipzig and various fiefdoms along the Rhine River and the northern Alps (mainly Bavaria).

The Fiefs of the Black Cross have long been bastions of Cainite feudalism. Although vast forests (rumored to be the homes of ferocious Lupines) separate the fiefs, Hardestadt and his lords maintain an iron grip over their domain. Despite the fact that the Holy Roman Empire is

in something of a decline, it is still prosperous. There is also no shortage of conflicts. With predictable regularity, the nobles of the Holy Roman Empire skirmish with each other and their emperor, often betraying the machination of Hardestadt's court. In recent years, the Black Monarch, as Hardestadt is known, has ordered that his vassals shall no longer expose themselves and their nature to mortals, enforcing the Silence of Blood with the threat of Final Death. This proclamation has caused a number of Cainites to leave the cities under the banner of the Black Cross, but those who remain have found that secrecy often works better than outright control.

Although the court is firmly in the hands of Hardestadt, Lord Jürgen has come to the front as the most influential of his lords. His recent forays into the east (moving his court to Magdeburg) and frequent clashes with the Tzimisce *voivodes* have thrust him and his vassals into the limelight. Using his ties to the Teutonic Knights and Livonian Order, he's embarked on a campaign to reclaim the east from the Fiends. Jürgen suffered a setback five years ago, when he was forced to retreat after the Battle of Tuzföld in Transylvania against *Voivode* Rustovitch. However, the arrival of the Byzantine Myca Vykos, now a lord under the Dracon, cut Rustovitch's victory short and ended the first Ventrue-Tzimisce clash in a stalemate.

Currently, the Fiefs of the Black Cross face a number of issues. The conflicts between Rome and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire continue to bring Hardestadt and the Lasombra lords of Italy into conflict. To the east, Jürgen is moving his forces into pagan Prussia and Livonia, facing Tzimisce and other enemies. The Hungarian brood of Ventrue known as the Arpads have also stubbornly maintained their independence from the Black Cross and have their own schemes afoot in Transylvania. Bohemia is also cause for concern as Shaagra, a powerful Tzimisce ancient, moves in the shadows to push west into Germany.

The Baronies of Avalon

Monarch: Mithras (4th-generation Ventrue, Prince of London)

Prominent Vassals: Baron Stephen (5th-generation Ventrue, Lincoln), Baron John (6th-generation Ventrue, York), Archbishop Adrian (8th-generation Toreador, Canterbury), Baron Nathaniel (6th-generation Brujah, Carlisle), Baron Gerard le Vieux (8th-generation Toreador, Bordeaux)

Key Domains: Large swaths of England, parts of Scotland and the Duchy of Aquitaine

The island of Britain is firmly in the hands of the Mithras, ruler of London since the earliest Roman nights and godhead of his own soldier's cult (having usurped the role of an ancient Persian deity). Mithras's domain is organized slightly differently from the other major monarchical courts, however. Although Mithras's cult and

influence never vanished entirely from the British night, he remained in deep torpor for six centuries until he awoke around the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066. In order to reestablish his power, Mithras reached accords with many Norman clanmates and other vampires of influence. They stand less as cowed subjects and vassals than as independent petty lords, who can shape the fate of nighttime Britain acting together. They grudgingly acknowledge Mithras's claim to England in return for certain rights and considerations. Chief among these is that Mithras cannot raise or marshal armies aside from a small personal retinue (an attempt to curtail the popular warrior-cult that Mithras has wrapped himself around). Instead, only the barons are allowed to have official troops. In turn, the barons swear, some by blood oaths, to defend London and Mithras. Although it would seem to put Mithras in a compromised position, it's actually one of his strengths — no single baron would dare attack London for fear that the others would retaliate. And in the 170 years since, Mithras has been able to turn the system even more to his advantage. Many of the smaller baronies have come under more direct sway as their rulers have joined the monarch's cult or taken the blood oath. Only a handful of more powerful barons approach Mithras in status and can make demands of the lord. By right, these powerful barons should be counts or dukes, but they eschew those titles since Mithras's formal pledges are with the baronies of Britain.

Mithras is also one of the few monarchs to rule an actual domain, attending to visiting envoys and keeping his barons in check from his palace in London. He's been known to travel to the Courts of Love in France, and he regularly visits his Ventrue brethren in the Holy Roman Empire. Although his enemies are many, Mithras is a popular monarch who is happy to ride the prosperity and stability of mortal England while other courts face more pressing matters.

Mithras's chief concern is the rise of the Tremere, and he unofficially supports the Tzimisce in the Omen War. Doing so has placed him at odds with Hardestadt and Jürgen's agenda of eastern expansion, and both Ventrue courts are moving apart. Although Tremere have crossed the English Channel, Mithras keeps a watchful eye and has his barons curtail their influence at every corner. The dynamistic troubles in France and England and the loss of Norman holdings has strained the once-cordial relationships between Mithras and the Courts of Love. The unstable situation in Paris only makes matters worse. The Matriarch of France has established stronger ties with Hardestadt, presumably to cement her recovery of the Grand Court in Paris. There remain baronies that harbor druidic vampires called the *Lhiannan* (whom Mithras has fought for centuries) and other forms of bandits and enemies.

The problems in France and the rise of the outlaws are also at the root of current unrest among the powerful barons. Although none dare say so aloud, some (namely

the barons of York and Carlisle) whisper that Mithras is growing weak and is leading the court of Avalon into decay. Although no one has mentioned the word revolt, the air in London is tense. This would not be the first time Mithras had faced a coup attempt — and he is prepared.

The Courts of Love

Monarch: Matriarch Salianna (5th-generation Toreador)

Prominent Vassals: Isouda de Blaise (7th-generation Toreador, Queen of Anjou and Chartres), Hélène La Juste (6th-generation Toreador, Queen of Champagne), Etienne (5th-generation Toreador, King of Poitou), Geoffroi du Temple (5th-generation Ventrue, Prince of Paris)

Key Domains: Western France

While the Fiefs of the Black Cross embody the harshest essence of feudalism, the Courts of Love shine in pomp and luxury. Like many things influenced by the Artisans, these courts meld the political, social and military into a seamless whole. The Courts of Love began as a social movement among Toreador of Western Europe taken with the emerging concepts of chivalry and its most poetic expressions. In Iberia and the Holy Land, they evolved into various chivalric orders associated with the war against Islamic enemies and instruction in the Road of Kings. In France, though, they became something more akin to gathering points. Those interested in aspects of chivalry were made welcome and played for favor and position among their Artisan hosts. Those who proved their worth through skill at arms and at court gained status and followers. These fortunates came from many clans, most prominently the high-blooded, but included not a few Ravnos and Malkavians, and even some others.

With the Children of Caine, however, nothing is a purely social exercise. The various princes of France found the favors of the Queens of Love were of a great help in securing their domains and advancing their agendas. Soon enough, that advantage became an outright requirement and the Courts of Love had become the major axis for intrigue among French vampires. The queens had become lords of the night, a position reaffirmed when Salianna, their Matriarch, made herself known as the sponsor of the whole system of courts. A childe of the semi-deified Byzantine Toreador Michael, she provided the final center of power needed and became the vampiric monarch of the region. Rumor has it that she had been active in France for centuries but had kept to the shadows, perhaps put in stalemate by the Ventrue Methuselah Alexander, who ruled Paris. Indeed, shortly after Salianna's appearance, the French Toreador withdrew their support from Alexander's so-called Grand Court, isolating him to such a point that he was forced to leave Paris in the 1220s. His childe, Geoffroi du Temple, now rules the city and has established a tense truce with the Matriarch.

The Courts of Love are hardly immune to the chaos of the times, however. Queen Esclarmone of Toulouse, once a loyal vassal of the Matriarch, took the opportunity granted by the Albigenian Crusade to break away from the Courts of Love and establish her own independent fiefdom — perhaps with support from Iberian Lasombra. Salianna sees the War of Princes as nothing but a prelude to an even more devastating conflict ahead, and she is trying to establish some common cause with High Lord Hardestadt and others. To this end, she has sent envoys across Europe and Outremer to find princes willing to cooperate to stave off further bloodshed.

The Sea of Shadows

Monarch: Lord Montano (4th-generation Lasombra, voice of his sire)

Prominent Vassals: Sylvester de Ruiz (6th-generation Lasombra, Lord of Iberia), Alfonzo of Byzantium (7th-generation Lasombra, Prince of Constantinople), Miriam bint Aisha (8th-generation Lasombra, Emir of al-Andalus), Nastasio the Galician (7th-generation Ventrue, General of the *Reconquista*)

Key Domains: Iberia, Sicily, Mediterranean islands and coastal regions, Byzantium

The Eldest of all Lasombra is said to be the most active of his generation (save perhaps for the Usurper Tremere) and is thought to reside in an isolated castle of shadows on the Sicilian coast. Montano, his eldest child, speaks with his authority as one of the monarchs of the European night, with tendrils reaching far into the Levant, where his clan is well-established. But Montano's main occupation seems to be tending to his sire, who is said to spend eternity in contemplation of the great Abyss of Ahriman. Add to this the ambitious nature of all Lasombra and the fact that they can hardly prevent other clans and groups from acting in their traditional Mediterranean domain, and the so-called Sea of Shadows is turbulent indeed.

In the last few centuries, the greatest divide has been the Shadow *Reconquista*, the effort by Christian Lasombra and their allies, to put an end to Muslim power in Iberia, displacing their Muslim clanmates and their Assamite (and other) allies. This effort is hardly an exclusively Lasombra matter — Toreador, Ventrue and others play a major role in the struggle — but it does look to Sicily's *Castel d'Ombro* for ultimate justification and the lord of Iberia is the Magister Sylvester de Ruiz. His child, Archbishop Monçada, only adds to the explicitly Christian tenor of the court, calling for the eradication of the Cainite Heresy and expulsion of Muslims.

Obviously, the many Lasombra raised in a Muslim society — who call their bloodline the *Qabilat al-Khayal* (or Clan of Shadows) — have little tolerance for this policy. They see de Ruiz and Monçada as great enemies and pay only formal respect to Montano. So where once Sicily's influence girded the Mediterranean, it is now

most concentrated in Iberia and Italy. Even in Italy, the Heresy is very popular, and many others see their cities as independent enough to set terms. Thus far, Montano has been unable or unwilling to bring them into line. Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Milan, Naples and Florence all have vampiric masters who pay lip service to “Old Man Montano” but are happy to deal with all others as well.

Montano stands above this, saying he is but the voice of his father, and uninterested in petty struggle for territory or even faiths. De Ruiz is glad to take that non-interference as support and marshal the prestige of the monarch to his cause. For the most part, this remains the expulsion of Muslim vampires and their mortal herds from “his” peninsula. One recent external success, however, saw him obtain the fealty of Prince Alfonzo of Constantinople, a former Heretic who became prince after the city fell to the Fourth Crusade. When the choice came down to continuing on as a heretical bishop of the city (and facing his enemies alone) or rejecting his faith to become a vassal of an Iberian lord, Alfonzo saw reason.

Other Courts

The vampiric courts at play in Britain, France, Germany and Iberia are the most iconic of the War of Princes. They are the most clearly feudal and those most closely tied to mortal kingdoms and their fates. But they are hardly the only courts or lords at play. Some of these are also feudal in nature, others use other bonds and reject feudal Lextalionis altogether. Some of the most prominent include:

- **The Obertus Landholds:** Once an order of purely Byzantine Tzimisce and revenant monks, the Obertus have spread across parts of Europe in the wake of the fall of Constantinople. Acting in the name of their hidden monarch, the Dracon, the monks have a network of monasteries and diplomatic contacts in many domains. In Transylvania, the Obertus Myca Vykos has established domain over parts of the Olt Valley as a buffer between Hungary and the Carpathians, but there are landholds in the Balkans and as far away as Livonia. Although the Obertus are not a powerful military force, they are privy to many occult secrets, and they often serve as diplomatic envoys for warring parties.

- **The Voivodate:** Long before the establishment of the Feudal Lextalionis, the Tzimisce of the Carpathians ruled over craggy and mist-shrouded kingdoms. Established in the seventh century, the *voivodes* terrorized the countryside with their inhuman abominations. The most esteemed and powerful Tzimisce lord, or *knezi*, gained sole right and privilege over the mortal ruler of the region paving the way for the draconian and bloody conflicts that have filled the Transylvanian mountains since. Until recently, the *voivodes* were content to fight their own wars, bickering with each other and only making the rare foray against Constantinople. However, the arrival of the

Tremere changed everything. Although the *voivodes* still fight against each other, they now know a common enemy. The Omen War still rages to this night, and it has dragged in other courts. For the first time, the *voivodes* are beginning to look beyond the Carpathians.

• **The City-States of Italy:** From Venice to Pisa, Milan to Florence, the system of lords has all but broken down. Here, powerful and egotistical princes rule independent of lords or monarchs, gladly flaunting their freedom and attracting Cainites from High and Low Clans to their bustling cities. Here, a new Cainite order is emerging, one that has an easier time adapting to the changing mortal world. The Cainite of the city-states of Italy hide from mortals, existing as shadowy benefactors of the rising guilds, merchant or nobles. However, there is a price to pay for their freedom. Both the Courts of Love and the Fiefs of the Black Cross cast an envious look toward the riches of Florence, Milan and the like. Also, the dreaded Cainite Heresy lurks within these cities. Only the Lasombra elders of the Sea of Shadows can bring significant influence to bear here in the name of clan bonds, but even this task is made harder by the position of the cities.

• **The Midnight Crescent:** The Holy Lands and the Islamic kingdoms of the Mediterranean are *terra incognita* for most European Cainites. Strange tales of divinely blessed Cainites and rumors of lairing Antediluvians keep most European vampires out of the lands of the Midnight Crescent. Those who do make the trek find a land that is exotic and alluring. Here, the clans have developed a different social structure than in Europe, hiding among caliphs and pilgrims. Relationships between Westerners and their Arabic counterparts, the *Ashirra*, are strained, and a wide gulf separates European and Islamic clanmates.

Lexicon of the Damned

The vampires of the Dark Medieval use a variety of terms all their own. The following are some of the most common and important ones.

Amaranth, the: The act of drinking the blood of another Cainite to the point of destroying him and assimilating part of his essence. Also called *diablerie*.

ancilla (pl. ancillae): An “adolescent” vampire, usually between one and two centuries old; no longer a neonate, an ancilla is also not yet an elder.

Antediluvian: A vampire of the third generation, who survived the Great Flood to found one of the clans.

ashen priest: A vampire who leads services or offers instruction tied to one of the roads of enlightenment. Most often used for teachers on the Road of Heaven who adopt the manner of Christian priests.

Autarkis: A vampire of no status in vampiric society, cast out from all domains.

Beast, the: The destructive drives and urges that are the most basic effects of vampirism, including the hunger for

blood. Many Cainites think of the Beast as a sort of wild devil inside them, one they struggle to repress or control.

Becoming, the: The transformation into a vampire, also called the Embrace.

Bitter Crusade, the: The vampiric struggles that accompanied the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). The Bitter Crusade saw the destruction of the Methuselah and monarch Michael of Constantinople and ignited the War of Princes.

blood oath, the: A supernatural bond of fealty imposed on anyone who drinks the blood of the same vampire three separate times. The oathbound person (who can be either a vampire or a mortal) is called a thrall, and the vampire who’s blood he drank is the regnant.

Book of Nod, The: The closest thing to the Cainite Bible; a collection of texts supposedly going back to the earliest nights. No complete text exists, although the so-called Erciyes Fragments are becoming influential.

Cainite: A vampire, descended from the biblical Caine. (Certain vampires do not believe themselves to be descended from Caine, but the term is still almost universal in Europe.)

Caitiff: A vampire with no known clan affiliation, either because of banishment, an anonymous Embrace or weak blood. The lowest of the low in Cainite society.

childe: The progeny of a vampire. A vampire who has yet to be presented to the local prince and released from his sire’s responsibility.

clan: One of 13 extended vampiric families descended from the Antediluvians of the third generation. Clanmates share certain characteristics of the Curse, such as specific weaknesses and a propensity for key Disciplines.

consanguineus: One of the same lineage, usually the younger childe of the same sire.

coterie: A group of Cainites who cooperate, usually in order to stake a larger domain than any could alone, or to accomplish some task.

Damned, the: Vampires.

diablerie: Informal term for the Amaranth.

domain: The fiefdom claimed by a vampire, usually something of substance like a village, city or county. By tradition, the vampire has exclusive feeding rights and other powers in his domain.

domitor: The vampire who has fed blood to a mortal to turn her into a ghoul.

elder: A vampire of at least three centuries of age. Elders are very powerful but not so old as to be drawn into the torpor and madness of many Methuselahs.

Embrace, the: The act of creating another vampire by draining a mortal of all her blood and feeding her some back at the point of death.

Erciyes Fragments, the: A version of *The Book of Nod* (or extracts from it) promulgated by the scholars of Clan Cappadocian (and named for their temple at Erciyes, in

Anatolia) over the last 30 years. There are nine fragments, including three supposedly penned by Caine himself.

fledgling: A newly Embraced vampire.

Gehenna: The vampiric vision of Armageddon, in which the Antediluvians return and feed on all other vampires.

generation: A measure of how far removed a vampire is from Caine, the first of their kind (and the first generation). Thus, a 10th-generation vampire is nine steps removed from Caine. The lower a vampire's generation is, the more powerful she can become.

ghoul: A mortal (human or animal) who has ingested significant quantities of vampiric blood. Ghouls stop aging (as long as they have vitae in their system), and they can use the blood to heal damage and power certain Disciplines. Most ghouls are under the blood oath.

Golconda: Apocryphal state in which much of the curse of vampirism is lifted, including the hunger for blood. Once a popular aspiration for religiously inclined Cainites, it is now widely dismissed as a pagan falsehood.

haven: The home of a vampire or the place where she sleeps.

kine, the: A contemptuous term for mortals, often used in opposition to Cainite.

Kiss, the: Vampiric feeding by blood-drinking, and the ecstasy that results in the victim. Sometimes used as a synonym for the Embrace.

Lextalionis: Cainite law, based upon the Traditions of Caine and other established practices. Lextalionis in Europe is feudal in nature, emphasizing the bond between lord and vassal.

lineage: The bloodline of a vampire, traced by Embrace. If clan is a vampire's people (like the mortal Franks or Catalans), then lineage is her family.

Long Night, the: The period roughly lasting from the fall of Rome to the burning of Constantinople during the so-called Bitter Crusade. It was a time of both prosperity and stagnation for the Cainites, who mostly ruled as independent princes across Europe.

lord: A vampire with an extensive domain and several princes as his vassals. Most lords are themselves vassals of the great monarchs, but some have independent domains.

Lupine: A werewolf, the mortal enemy of the vampires.

Methuselah: A vampire of the fourth or fifth generation, who has been unliving for millennia. Methuselahs are subject to long periods of torpor, and very few are active on a nightly basis.

monarch: The most powerful of the vampires in the feudal system of Europe. A monarch typically rules a domain equivalent to a mortal kingdom with the help of various princes and counts who are his vassals.

neonate: A young vampire, usually no more than 25 years from the Embrace. Neonates are nonetheless full members of vampiric society, having been presented to the local prince and released from their sires.

Old Ways, the: The Traditions of Caine and the associated tradition of Cainite law. Lextalionis.

prince: The preeminent vampire in a region, usually a city or county. Prince is the traditional terminology, but duke, baron, lord and queen are also used by some individuals often to convey a lesser or greater sense of status.

progenitor: The vampire who founded a recognized line of vampires. Caine is the progenitor of all vampires, while the Antediluvians are the progenitors of the clans.

regnant: A vampire to whom another is bound by the blood oath.

revenant: A member of a ghoulish family, born with the ability to create small quantities of vampiric vitae. Revenant families are bred by Clan Tzimisce.

road: A vampiric system of belief and behavior that keeps the Beast at bay and allows the Cainite to exist without becoming an unthinking monster. There are five major roads (Road of the Beast, Road of Heaven, Road of Humanity, Road of Kings, Road of Sin) and countless smaller paths. Sometimes called a road of enlightenment or *via* (pl. *viae*).

sire: The vampire who Embraced another (his *childe*). The act of Embracing.

Thaumaturgy: Literally "the making of miracles," it is the complex form of blood-magic developed by the magi-cum-vampires of Clan Tremere. It is a potent weapon that makes the small clan very dangerous. A practitioner is called a thaumaturge.

Third Mortal, the: Caine.

thrall: One who is bound by the blood oath to a vampire.

Traditions of Caine, the: The six key laws of vampiric culture that structure their nocturnal society. They are the Covenant, Domain, Progeny, Accounting, Destruction and the Silence of Blood. Sometimes called simply The Traditions or the Old Ways.

vessel: A potential or past source of blood, typically a human.

vitae: Blood, most often vampiric blood.

War of Ages, the: The ancient battle between the Antediluvians, said to be fought from torpor in slow moves and subterfuges. Called the *Jyhad* in Saracen lands.

War of Princes, the: The battle between the vampiric princes of Europe, waged on many fronts. The so-called monarchs are the ultimate faction-heads in this struggle, but it is princes and lords who battle on a night-to-night basis.



„I am surprised to see you here, Obertus“

The statement came from a chorus of voices, coming from a choir of inhuman mouths adorning the walls of the cathedral. Vykos did not shudder, despite the display of authority. To show fear was to suggest weakness, and weakness would not do here.

“I was not aware,” he said, “that one could surprise you, Excellency. Certainly not in your very home.”

This time, it was a single voice speaking, coming from a throaty gullet that opened at Vykos’s feet. “The ever-changing has no home, Obertus. This is a church, not a nest.”

“Ah, yes. The Cathedral of Flesh. My apologies, Excellency.”

“Yes, the cathedral. Have you come to pray? I think not.” The old man emerged from the membrane at the far end of the room, sinew not so much releasing as birthing him.

“I bring a message from my Lord Dracon, and I will be sure to let him know that the mighty Archfiend Yorak has blessed me with a sight of his true form.” Actually seeing Yorak in anything resembling a human form was a rare honor indeed.

“You goad me, Obertus. You know as well as I that no form is true for those who embrace change. This is but a transitory aspect.” With that, it folded back like skin peeled from a corpse and the voice continued from the vibrations of vocal chords stretched across the vaulted ceiling of the cathedral. “What is your message, then?”

“The ambitions of *Voivode* Rustovitch have apparently fallen your way, Excellency. Our nominal overlord believes that the hold you have over other Metamorphosists in our clan poses a threat to his power. He plans to erode that support.”

“And how does he plan to do that, Obertus?”

“This is unclear as yet, Excellency, but your brother in the blood felt it wise to pass on what warnings he could.”

With that, and without waiting for Yorak to dismiss him, Vykos turned and left. There was no way the archfiend could dismiss such a warning, but he would have to expend resources to confirm it. Resources that could then not be spent limiting Obertus movements in the Olt Valley.

“Well played,” a disembodied voice said. Yorak apparently understood Vykos’s scheme, and the Obertus felt a brief surge of the elation of victory, a feeling to which he was becoming accustomed.

“But remember, Myca Vykos,” Yorak continued, “I know of your lies. All of your lies.”

Vykos felt the dark cold swirl of dread in his unliving gut. This was a feeling to which he had not become accustomed.



CHAPTER TWO: THE CLANS OF CAINE

For what you have done I will curse you all
Not merely with a handful of words,
But each according to his nature,
Each one according to his crime.
Let my curse reign in his blood forever,
Let it be passed down through his embrace,
To each of his childer, and to their childer in turn.
—The Erciyes Fragments. VI (Transgressions)

The Embrace is both a death and a rebirth. The fledgling is ripped from the mortal coil, and her breathing days end. Matters of family, race and gender all fade before the Curse and the Blood. But just like a human child arrives in this world with the inheritance of its parentage, the Embrace conveys its own legacy. The vampiric childer literally receives his sire's blood and takes a great deal from it. This legacy includes a propensity for certain Disciplines and certain curses passed down from the Antediluvians. Clan also has a social implication just as mortal parentage does. Some clans are thought to be made for rulership, others for scholarship, others for less savory tasks. These beliefs are most obvious in the divide between the High Clans and Low Clans.

The High Clans

In all societies, there are those who are destined to rule, even among the Damned. Especially among the Damned, some would say, as the Beast drives many Cainites to dominate, influence and enslave those around them. Over the millennia, this quest for power has taken many forms. In the ancient cities of Mesopotamia and Greece, Cainites stood as nocturnal gods and demigods, pagan monsters who exacted a price in blood for their favors. In Rome, they were emperors and senators of the night, ruling in councils and holding the grandest—and most depraved—of orgies. In the frozen woods of the far north, vampires lurk as spirits of war and wood. In Eastern Europe, they are ancient masters of inbred families both noble and villainous.

Many of the Damned have adopted a feudal system of rulership in the last few centuries, and the High Clans are those who exist in its ruling class. Cainite feudalism grew out of one of the same processes that led (and continues to lead, as of 1230) to the spread of mortal feudalism: the need of rulers and ruled to establish secure personal relationships with others. The glue of the feudal structure is an oath, sworn by ruler and ruled alike, that binds the two together. The ruled swears fealty to his lord or lady, providing the support of his knights during times of war and part of the bounty of his lands during times of peace. The lord, for his part, swears to take good care of his vassals, not to overtax them and to provide them with the stability and security needed to prosper. In times of instability and chaos, the personal bonds of vassalage add much-needed strength and proximity to relations. Loyalty is not to some far-off emperor or council, but to a baron or duke one knows and deals with regularly.

If anything, this impetus is stronger among the Damned. Cainites are willful, independent creatures who distrust relations with those whom they cannot see. Therefore, oaths of fealty (sometimes backed by the preternatural power of the blood oath, see p. 260) are far more trustworthy than bonds to sect or clan. Being the prince's vassal is a personal bond, one undertaken between individual monsters and backed by their own willful ways. This relationship is a mutual and flexible one — each participant must gauge his counterpart's feelings and his own with each decision. When the various monarchs stepped from out of the shadows as the Long Night came to an end, the feudal structure gave them an excellent way in which to organize their broods. Creatures who had once ruled as gods (like Mithras) or high priests (like Montano) became kings.

The High Clans are the six major bloodlines who have accepted and integrated into the feudal structure most strongly. Much of their clan identity — at least as it is expressed in Europe — is based on their participation in the feudal or semi-feudal power relationships. A "typical" Ventrue, Lasombra or Toreador is a vassal to some prince who respects that prince's position (at least for the time being).

The Role of Scions

Scions (followers of the Road of Kings) have a lot to be proud of in the Dark Medieval. Indeed, the current state of Cainite feudalism owes much to their teachings and to their teachers. It was Scions who promulgated the feudal system among the Damned, taking its first stirring among the mortal herd and applying it to their own condition. And it is the Scions who provide much of the feudal system's strength. Its teachers and scholars often serve as witnesses to various oaths between vassals and lords. They share stories of oathbreakers and others who reject the system, making sure they receive no shelter in other courts or orders. Rumors persist of Scions who take it as their duty to hunt down oathbreakers and Autarkis.

Myths and Convenient Fallacies

Only the very young and inexperienced can doubt that the divide between high and low is not set in stone. For one thing, secure princes who hail from the Low Clans are

scattered across Europe, including Roque of Pamplona and Etienne of Acre. Individual achievement goes before pedigree almost without exception. Elders also remember previous social orders in which a different assortment of clans ruled the night. In Rome, for example Lasombra, Ventrue and Malkavians held the balance of power, with the supposedly high-blooded Brujah and Tzimisce treated as foreigners and ne'er-do-wells. Those who have traveled extensively in the Levant, speak of a society of the Damned in which Assamites, Lasombra and even Nosferatu are the highest clans.

Nevertheless, with the Children of Caine, blood does indeed run true. Clan is more than a convenience of Embrace, and the high-blooded can (and do) point to many stories to reinforce their rule. The following are the most frequent:

- **Primogeniture:** The most common justification for the primacy of the High Clans is that they are the descendants of the eldest of the Antediluvians. According to this belief, the progenitors of the High Clans were the first clutch of the third generation to be Embraced, and they may have been the only Embraces allowed or planned out by the second generation. This gives them an elevated status among the Damned. Beyond this basic belief, the primogeniture theory has many (and often contradictory) variations. Clan Ventrue says that its founder was the first childe of Enoch (first of the second generation). Others say that all the High Clans descend from a single member of the second generation. Others claim that they descend from two of the three. Some argue that the progenitors of the High Clans were Embraced centuries before those of the Low Clans and that they reigned in a perfect Second City before the arrival of their lesser brothers and sisters. The fact that the high-blooded often call themselves the "first cursed" has much to do with the theory of primogeniture.

- **The Blessing of Caine:** The next leading theory is that the high-blooded clans or their founders were somehow blessed or sanctified by Caine himself. Some say that the Third Mortal sanctioned only their Embrace, therefore, only they are his legitimate successors. Others tales say that the high-blooded progenitors distinguished themselves during their early nights (by countering the schemes of the low-blooded, according to most tales). Fervent adherents to the roads (especially the Roads of Kings and of Heaven) are especially attracted to this theory, which brings with it the promise of sanctification and perhaps salvation from Caine, the Dark Father.

- **Treason in the Second City:** The flip side of the previous theory, this one argues that it is the Low Clans who have been punished, more than the High Clans have been raised up. Generally this idea goes back to the destruction of the second generation and the fall of the Second City. The High Clans tell stories of the low-blooded progenitors (and, usually, their ill-defined "broods") murdering their parents and drawing down the curses of Caine and his loyal grandchilder. This theory is often used in conjunction with the other two to magnify the divide between high and low. "Not only were we blessed," the first cursed say, "but you are doubly Damned."

BRUJAH

The Brujah are warriors — but always warriors for a cause. The fierce heat of passion burns within their cold, dead breasts and it drives them to champion causes that they believe can set the world to rights. When Caine slew his bother, he threw the world from its intended course. The horror that it has become must be corrected, and the Brujah intend to do just that. Each member of the clan has her own vision of the way the world should be, and she strives to make that vision become a reality through argument, manipulation and force of arms.

In the earliest nights, passion was not a trait of the Brujah. Indeed, the founder of the clan, Troile, was actually Embraced for his cold wisdom. His ability to assess the virtues of an idea without emotional involvement was valued by his sire and grandsire. However, in his long years banished from the sun, he grew ever more remote from both the humans of the First City and his own childer. What few emotions he had left atrophied completely. As he developed theories, his experiments to test them became ever more cruel. He would use and sacrifice the living and the Damned, just to satisfy an idle whim.

One of his childer, whose name is lost to time, could no longer stand by and watch this cruelty. He dreamed of a world in which the humans and Cainites had at least an understanding. Even then, he thought that genuine peace was too much to ask. He tried to convince his sire to abandon his ruthless behavior. Troile's arrogant dismissal of the childer's arguments drove the childer to the very edge of frenzy, and he threw himself at his sire. Long out of practice in hand-to-hand combat, Troile eventually fell beneath his childer's fists and fangs. Once he had tasted his sire's blood, the childer was unable to stop himself drinking. Within minutes, Troile was no more.

From the shadows stepped Caine himself, his face clouded with fury. "Never before has one of my progeny drunk the very soul of another. I curse you ever to aspire to your sire's wisdom, but also to be prey to the very fury which led you to this diabolic act."

The childer took the sire's name and position among the third generation. He assumed the burden of Caine's curse, but also strove towards his own vision of a better world. His passion seemed to spread like wildfire through the line of his childer, and at first he rejoiced in their crusading zeal as they worked to make the world a better place.

In the city of Carthage, Troile (the younger) and his childer worked to establish what he had dreamed of in earlier times: a society in which mortals and Cainites coexisted for their mutual benefit. But again and again he saw those of his



clan start to repeat his mistakes and give in to their anger. In despair, he left the city and was never seen again. Carthage fell far from that ideal, until even some of the demon-worshipping Baali were welcomed within its walls. Soon, the other clans acted under the guidance of Roman Ventrue to destroy this abomination.

The Brujah have fought to improve the world ever since, but the failure of their grand experiment has made their blood boil ever hotter. As the centuries pass, the world seems to fall ever further from what it should be. As kine philosophies, religions and ideas multiply, proliferate and die, the clan becomes more divided as to what should be done to make the world right — and even as to what that right should be. Many of the younger members of the clan no longer heed the wisdom of their elders. Their blood calls to them to do something *now*, not watch and observe for a few centuries until the patterns of society become apparent to them. The elders merely shake their heads and recall the misjudged dreams of their own youth.

Some Brujah follow the great philosophies and religions of the past, while others adopt new faiths

STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: They cling to some ideals, to be sure. Too often, though, these ideals are selfish and achieve nothing more than the advancement of a single Cainite at the expense of his fellows and the world itself.

The Low Clans: Some are dullards, worthy of neither our attention nor of the effort it would take to disdain them. A few bring new ideas that we would do well to examine.

Lasombra: These shadow lurkers are everything that is wrong with the world, locked up in an animate corpse.

Malkavians: Where wisdom drives us to anger, insight drives Malkav's children to madness. You can learn much from their words, as long as you stay wary of them.

Toreador: Like us, they seek wisdom in the ways of man. Unlike us, they seem to find nothing but distraction and games.

Ventrue: We hate them for bringing an end to our greatest chance to make this world right. We pity them, for they are unable to do anything but shore up the established order.

and ideals with equal vigor and convince themselves that the salvation of the fallen world lies there. Some even jump from idea to idea in search of the one that fires their imagination and drives them toward a better world. All of them pursue their ideals with a vigor and commitment that would put a hardened crusader to shame.

Sobriquet: Zealots

Appearance: The Brujah have always chosen among the best of humanity for their childer, so most of them are strong, well built and imposing. However, they tend toward the ideal of fitness, rather than simply transitory notions of beauty. The women are striking, rather than beautiful, for example. The clan's adoption of, and commitment to, mortal philosophies and ideas keeps the Brujah in touch with mortal fashion, and most dress in ways that match the local area. Most tend to be extremely neat in their dress, as if perfection in attire could help their quest for perfection in the world.

Haven and Prey: Almost without exception, the Brujah choose to live amid the bustle of humanity, usually in a city or busy town. They pick places where exceptional thinkers or believers make their homes. Often a sire and childer haven together, with the sire subjecting the fledgling to long periods of tuition and physical training. In recent years, small groups of young Cainites with similar beliefs have set up communal havens. Most Brujah prey on the dull, the weak, the ignorant or those who choose to take a stand against the idea that the vampire espouses. The dullards should perform some small service, even if they can't see the truth.

The Embrace: The Brujah look for three qualities in recruits: commitment to a cause, the intelligence to comprehend that cause and the passion needed to make it a reality. Most choose their childer from the upper echelons of society, assuming that the most capable can be found in their number. A small but significant number of the clan, however, were low-born in life but showed enough drive, belief and spirit to attract the attention of an undying Zealot.

Character Creation: The majority of the clan takes either Physical or Mental Attributes as their primary group. Younger members of the clan are slightly more likely to have Physical Attributes as their primary choice. Social Attributes almost always fall a poor third. Their Demeanors are often cold and aloof, but all have Natures that are passionate, even aggressive. Most have a decent balance of martial Skills and Knowledges. The newly Embraced sometimes have Talents as their primary group, as their

sires plan to mold the development of promising childer so that they come to espouse the correct ideals. Most of the clan can be found charging along the Road of Humanity, the Road of Heaven or even the Road of Kings.

Clan Disciplines: Celerity, Potence, Presence

Weaknesses: Thanks to Caine's curse upon the first diablerist, the fury of the clan's founder runs through the veins of all Brujah. Their tempers are always close to the surface, which makes them even more prone to frenzy than other Cainites. The difficulty of a Brujah's roll to resist frenzy is always two higher than the listed number.

Organization: The Brujah have found so many different ideals to espouse in the Dark Medieval world that they find it increasingly hard to work together. Often a sire and her fledgling stay together for some years, with the childer acting as an apprentice to his sire.

The childer usually finds his own cause and sets off alone to pursue it wherever he thinks best, rather than waiting to be formally released. In some major cities, groups of Brujah gather every few years for grand councils in which each puts forward his or her view of the world and the clan's role within it. Sometimes they achieve great things at these councils, and a great and passionate speaker wins over many of her fellows to a particular cause. More often than not, though, they become week-long exercises in circular debates and all-out conflict.

Quote: *With the wisdom of a few more years behind you, you will be able to see why what you propose is wrong. I truly believe that my way of addressing this challenge will achieve the best results for us all.*



CAPPADOCIAN

For members of Clan Cappadocian, bloodline is often as much of a philosophy as it is a lineage. The vast majority of Cappadocians are fascinated by the concepts of death and undead — most specifically with what remains once the eternal soul has left the body. Some were scholars in their mortal lives, while others were men of faith or philosophers. Such inquisitive natures remain vital even after the Embrace, and although the Cappadocians' bodies resemble those of the dead, their minds are quite alive with the metaphysical secrets of the night. Their studies and obsessions manifest most potently in their twisted Discipline of Mortis.

Within this archetype, however, these so-called Graverobbers vary widely. For every one who was a priest following the events of the Crusades, there is a clanmate who was a knight fighting in those same holy wars. While the Cappadocians are not politically powerful as a clan, they do earn their place among the High Clans with their knowledge, wisdom and contacts. The most politically active act as advisors to princes, viziers to mortal kings and even tutors to royal families, while the scholarly more typically haunt monasteries or plunder graveyards for the "subjects" of their inquiries beyond the veil of mortality.

The clan is suspected of originating in the depths of Anatolia or Armenia; several clan legends mention desert sands, subterranean cities and rolling plains. The progenitor of the clan, known only as Cappadocius ("of Cappadocia"), gives his childer great berth, merely asking that they uphold the quest for answers to the undead state. Scholars believe that many Cappadocians either spend their nights in the cold arms of torpor or have immigrated into the Saracen East, as Cainite history implies that they were once far more common than they are tonight.

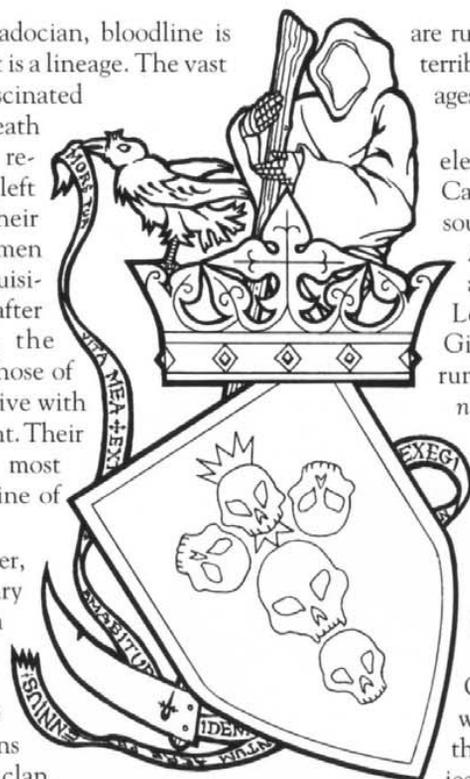
Although they are disorganized and far-flung, many revere knowledge and congregate at certain times in temples, libraries and universities. There, they consult with one another on what they have learned, trading secrets and blasphemies, sainted truths and gossip. The clan's spiritual center is said to be in the great temple at Erciyes in Anatolia, where Lady Constancia acts as priestess and oracle, and where fragments of *The Book of Nod* were gathered at the end of the 12th century. Despite the fact that no outsiders — and very few Cappadocian neonates — have seen Erciyes, there

are rumors of temples more secret and more terrible still, including buried necropolises of ages past.

With its broad scope and well-traveled members, Clan Cappadocian has Cainites all over Europe and even to the south and east. Coptic monasteries in Africa are havens to Graverobbers, as are the courts of pashas beyond the Levant and even the halls of the Giovanni, a Venetian merchant family rumored to be skilled at the arts of

nigricancy. It is a cosmopolitan clan, with as many of its members claiming humble origins as hail from noble or clerical stock. To the Cappadocians, a keen mind is more important than breeding, and any Cainite with an inquisitive nature earns the esteem of his sire and peers.

Other clans often regard the Cappadocians as secretive and morbid, which is true to some extent. Indeed, their practice of Mortis and related studies require patient research and a plentiful supply of dead flesh. Members of the clan have been known to cloister themselves for decades, emerging from their laboratories and havens only to procure sustenance and subjects for their experiments — often one in the same. Beneath this dark side, however, lies a serious spirituality in many Cappadocians. Although their practices tend to make them cold, alien and withdrawn from the mortal world, they delve into mysteries that lesser Cainites and kine couldn't begin to fathom.



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Our station is among them, but I don't recall ever being offered a choice.

The Low Clans: Even were I capable of sympathy, I probably wouldn't spare any for these mongrels.

Brujah: Too many of them have forgotten the first half of their roles as philosopher-kings.

Tzimisce: They are cruel and deluded; the mysteries they seek are merely of the transcendent flesh.

Ventrue: Arrogant and vain, but nonetheless strong leaders made stronger by our own counsel. Their positive qualities are often offset by their selfishness, however.

Sobriquet: Graverobbers

Appearance: Afflicted as they are by their clan weakness, the Cappadocians all exhibit a ghastly pallor and emaciated frames. Many try to hide this corpse-like appearance, though it is not so pronounced in some cases. They tend to affect the garb of their station, from the cassocks of simple monks and scholars to the fine robes of a chamberlain or even the rotting rags of a gravedigger.

Haven and Prey: Cappadocians usually make their havens away from the mortal world and even other Cainites, where they may study in seclusion or conduct morbid experiments without unsettling other residents. Such havens include disused chambers of castles, out-of-the-way monasteries, neglected cellars and Roman-era sewers or cisterns.

Of all the High Clans, the Cappadocians are probably the least exclusive when it comes to choosing prey. Indeed, many Cappadocians see the Kiss as little more than a function, and they deny the emotional charge it gives to both predator and prey. Few Cappadocians have any reservations about feeding from animals or even corpses, but fresh, human blood is still more delectable. When they do feed from mortals, Graverobbers are often as unobtrusive as they are in Cainite society, discreetly feeding from the dregs and untouchables of humankind.

The Embrace: Being possessed of somewhat morbid mindsets, the Cappadocians usually Embrace those who are interested by death or work with it in some fashion, or those whose scholarly talents may be turned to the Graverobbers' own intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Soldiers, priests, hermits, pilgrims, gravediggers and supposed witches have all been Embraced into Clan Cappadocian. Additionally, the clan seems inclined to less of the European prejudices than the other clans exhibit, Embracing such far-flung folk as Persians, Moors and other foreigners.

Character Creation: Mental Attributes and Knowledges tend to be primary among Cappadocians. Concepts, Natures and Demeanors lean toward the introspective and contemplative, while Virtues lean toward one extreme or the other, either very developed or callously ignored after the Embrace. Backgrounds, like other aspects of the Cappadocians' personalities, usually focus on making the

Cainite self-sufficient or at least well regarded by others. There are Cappadocians on every major road, but most tend toward the Roads of Heaven or of Sins. The clan's most spiritual and morbid members follow their own Road of Bones.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Mortis

Weaknesses: The Cappadocians bear the visage of death, which makes their skin appear cold and corpse-like. No matter how much vitae a Cappadocian imbibes, she never shows the "flush of life" that other Cainites may choose to display. This grim condition also exacerbates with age, and some of the most venerable Cappadocians literally resemble nothing so much as shrunken cadavers. Difficulties of Social rolls for Cappadocians — any roll involving a Social Attribute — increase by one.

Organization: While Cappadocians may seem solitary, their inquisitive nature leads them to seek at least correspondence with others. In some cases, they form fraternities or societies of like-minded scholars, while others form coterie whose journeys may lead to the recovery of a lost relic. Others are simply cabals of fellow intellectuals who share their observations. The clan as a whole has no formal hierarchy (although most voice respect for the priests at Erciyes), so it is up to individual Graverobbers to provide for their social urges individually.

Quote: *Is our undeath a curse or an exaltation? No easy answer exists. It is the question that has plagued us since God cast out Cain.*



LASOMBRA

Devious and refined, the Clan of Shadows sees itself as the superior bloodline in a world governed by superior blood. Lasombra believe that whereas the Low Clans exist to shoulder the burden of Cain's curse, the High Clans — led by their highest clan, naturally — function as the inheritors of his majesty. They are the embodiment of Divine Right, and the absolute epitome of Cainite existence. As a result, the Lasombra accept no other Cainites as equals, although they readily admit that each clan has its place in Cainite society. That place simply lies beneath that of the Lasombra.

From its earliest nights, Clan Lasombra has been associated with the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, where the clan's founder is said to have been born and first brought into undeath so many millennia ago. Since then, his dark seed has crept outward, touching all the surrounding coastal lands and isles, including Iberia, Italy, North Africa and Byzantium. The center of this dark domain is the *Castel d'Ombro* (Castle of Shadows) in Sicily, wherein the Eldest himself is rumored to lie in fitful sleep. To this night, pilgrims of Lasombra's line come from all over to visit the shadowy isle in search of an evening's discourse with the patriarch of their blood — the Cainite king of kings — or his venerable regent, Montano.

One characteristic endemic to the Lasombra character is an insatiable appetite for power in all its myriad forms. From the hushed quarters of cloisters to the glimmering halls of royal rule, Lasombra seek to entwine their shadowy tendrils around every realm of influence available to them. According to clan lore, however, such ambition is merely the outward manifestation of their internal struggles. The Lasombra claim that it is their curse to exist as eternal conduits to the Abyss itself, that they might be perpetually confronted by the inner darkness of the undead form. This curse has given the Lasombra an instinctual awareness that undeath is much more than mere feral subsistence, and many seek their own mastery of this eternal conflict through a reconnection with the divine. One clan tendency feeds into another, as spiritual revelation drives many Lasombra into the arms of the Church — the greatest single source of power in the Medieval world. As such, the entire monolithic organization, from its lowliest parishioners to the papacy itself, crawls with the machinations of the clan and its numerous mortal agents. Indeed, many of the clan's most prominent members are those with the strongest ties to mortal religious institutions, such as Archbishop Ambrosio Luis Monçada, a Castilian ancilla with a great deal of power across the clan.

The spread of Islam throughout the Iberian peninsula, however, saw a terrible rift appear throughout the clan. During the golden age of the Córdoba Caliphate, many Muslim



Lasombra claimed vast demesnes in al-Andalus, signaling the dawn of a shadow war with entrenched Christian clan members already in residence. Even the *Amici Noctis* ("Friends of the Night"), the secretive ruling council of the clan, was split by religious differences: Just as many clan elders supported the mortal *Reconquista* as railed against it. The Christian faction mounted a "Shadow *Reconquista*" to eject their Muslim clanmates and the tide of mortal fates have turned their way in recent times. Rumor has it that Montano has brokered a secret accord to ensure that Muslim Lasombra who accept the mounting Christian victories (and abandon their Muslim allies of other clans) can maintain their domains in the expanding Castile-León. If this agreement does exist, there are certainly Lasombra who reject it, such as the zealous Sultan Badr of Granada.

Although they are bitterly divided over Iberia, Christian and Muslim Lasombra find

STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Those who fancy themselves pretenders to the Lasombra throne. What more need be said?

The Low Clans: In every society there are those who lead and those who must follow. If they do not like it, they can always return to the leprous pit from whence they came. It is high time that the underlings of the night recognized that they have masters in eternity.

Assamite: 'Tis a shame that the Children of Haqim have not learned from the failings of their contemporaries. In their fervor, they have become as blind as those against whom they would spend an eternity at bitter odds.

Brujah: In taking up the sword, they passed the torch of scholarship to those better suited to such pursuits; a decision they rue to this very night. Indeed, it would seem that the Zealots spend a great deal of time nursing regret.

Ravnos: Graciously welcome one into any court at which you may be an advisor, then graciously watch as the Charlatan tightens the noose around his own incompetent neck.

Tzimisce: The epitome of the vampiric noble-savage, although typically a trifle heavy on the savage part. Watch their war with the Tremere Usurpers closely, for it may determine our outlook regarding further interaction with these warlords.

Ventrue: Always stay at least one step ahead of these Teutonic curs, and at all times, lead them to believe that they are at least three steps behind you.

common cause in hatred for their clanmates in the Cainite Heresy. While the notion that the clan itself is of superior breeding appeals to even religious Lasombra, they draw the line at the system of beliefs those in the Heresy adopt. Lasombra Heretics have proven both subtle and powerful, and they comprise the majority of the Crimson Curia that rules that twisted church. However, since the recent death of Narses of Venice, one of the sect's most prominent Lasombra, the Heresy has suffered many losses and found itself in a state of turmoil. Some feel that the end of the heretical movement may now be in sight, and pious Lasombra are debating putting aside their sectarian differences in order to crush the Heresy once and for all.

Sobriquet: Magisters

Appearance: Lasombra hail almost exclusively from noble families, particularly those of Italian, Moorish or Spanish extraction. Features are often fine and well-bred, with dark or olive skin draped in the finest raiment wealth can provide. The exception to this rule lies in those Lasombra connected with holy orders, who often dress in vestments or other simple attire as befits their service to God.

Haven and Prey: Often born into wealth, many Lasombra take refuge in the manors or landed estates of their own mortal families. Some Magisters simply engage in a clever transfer of title by masquerading as their own inheritors after their transition into undeath, allowing them to retain pecuniary control over any former holdings. Such maneuvers also allow for convenient feeding, as significant numbers of live-in mortals are required to maintain such domains. Lasombra lurking among churchmen often feed from the lay of the congregation, although some feel a compunction against this sort of behavior and seek out sinners to punish with feeding.

The Embrace: Lasombra typically Embrace from among the most highly regarded members of whatever society they belong to. In these nights, this distinction includes individuals of title and station or (equally as often) men and women of the cloth. Innate aptitudes are highly regarded as well, as the Lasombra tend to view the Cainite condition as merely a magnification of an individual's latent capabilities. Many Lasombra take pride in those whom they would Embrace, wooing their would-be childer for months or even years at a time. Indeed, the length of this dark courtship is a good indication of the sire's esteem for her fledgling.

Character Creation: Magisters respect only excellence. Therefore, they

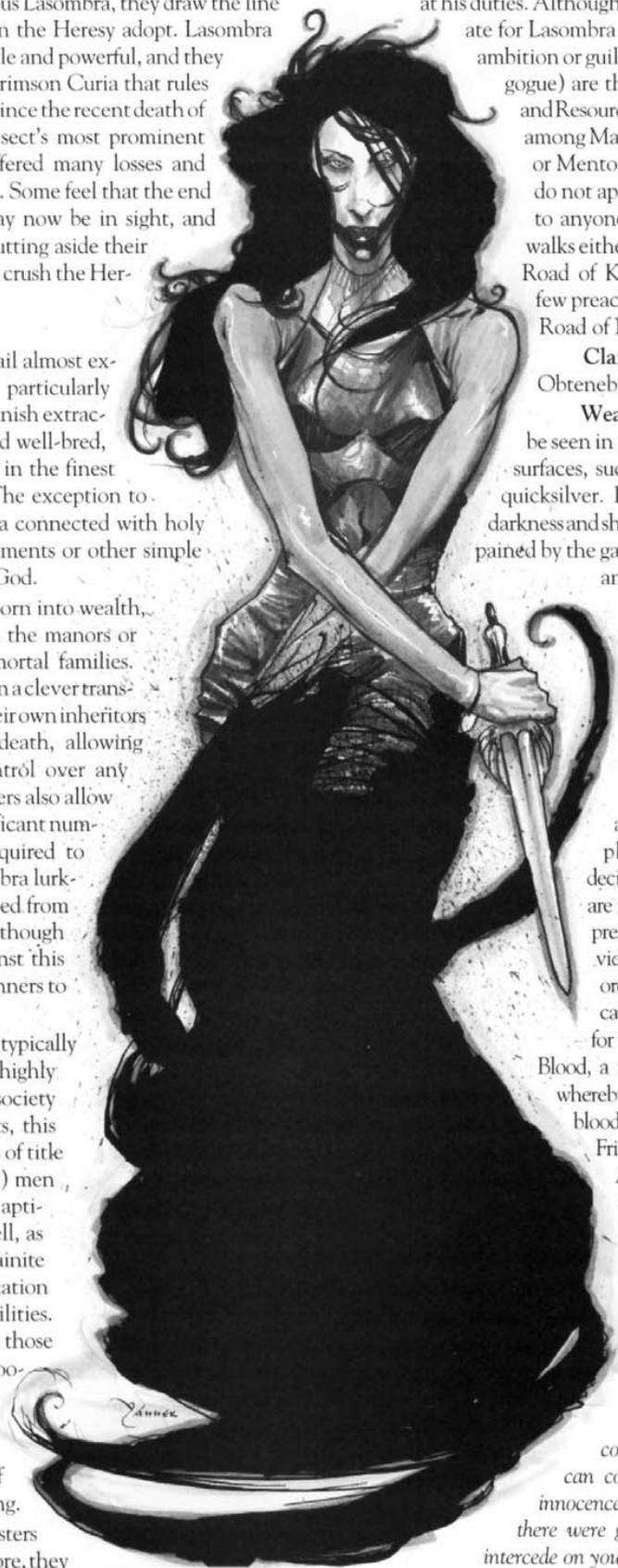
prize Mental Attributes and Talents most highly, followed closely by whatever traits the vampire requires in order to excel at his duties. Although many Natures are appropriate for Lasombra characters, those that favor ambition or guile (such as Autocrat or Pedagogue) are the most common. Influence and Resources are common Backgrounds among Magisters, as are either Domain or Mentor, but rarely both; Lasombra do not appreciate being openly vassal to anyone. The majority of the clan walks either the Road of Heaven or the Road of Kings, although a dedicated few preach the clan's own puritanical Road of Night.

Clan Disciplines: Dominate, Obtenebration, Potence

Weaknesses: Magisters cannot be seen in mirrors or in other reflective surfaces, such as pools of still water or quicksilver. In addition, as creatures of darkness and shade, the Lasombra are greatly pained by the garish presence of bright light, and they suffer an additional level of aggravated damage from any exposure to sunlight.

Organization: On the whole, the clan's organization is a structured one, with position often stemming from a combination of factors such as age, ancestry and past accomplishments. Although few decisions that affect the entire clan are made in formal gatherings, the presence of the *Amici Noctis* provides an overarching semblance of order for the clan at large. Specifically, the Friends are responsible for the disposition of the Courts of Blood, a method of clan jurisprudence whereby one Lasombra may call for the blood of another, petitioning the Friends for the right to commit the Amaranth. Otherwise, much of clan policy is established in private chambers between a single Lasombra and his visitors, or in secret, between a trusted Magister and his Cainite liege... or prey.

Quote: *Naturally, I would like to be of assistance, and your argument is indeed a compelling one. Whether or not I can convince his Lordship of your innocence is another matter. Perhaps if there were good enough cause for me to intercede on your behalf...*



TOREADOR

The moment the blood of Caine flows through a fledgling, his days as a human are over. Each new night edges him further away from his living roots. Of all the clans, the Toreador are the most likely to fight against that distancing from mortal society, keeping themselves close to their prey. Understanding and maintaining relationships with the kine helps them keep a rein on their Beast, or so they reason.

That, at least, was the belief of one of the three vampires of the Second Generation. He saw others of his generation and their progeny grow ever further from the breathing folk who had spawned them. Caine himself came to his childe, and expressed his frustration with the incomprehensible kine and their now-alien viewpoints. His childe promised to bring him an answer to his misery.

The childe chose one of the greatest of the artists among the humans, one Arikel, to be the instrument of his solution. She labored for him every night, crafting an expression of the mortal plight in Enoch. With Caine in attendance, she unveiled a mural of stunning beauty, which the legends say brought into stark relief the relationship between God's curse upon Caine, and his race's eternal problem in controlling its Beast. In their anger, Caine and his childe never saw the final section, which showed how Arikel thought the vampires could retain something of the human soul. Caine destroyed the mural and ordered his childe to drain the artist dry.

Looking at the dying husk of the artist, the Third Mortal spoke: "As you have distracted me from important matters, so shall your attention ever be consumed by that which you deem beautiful." He then ordered his childe to Embrace her. Such was the power of his blood that every member of Arikel's line felt Caine's curse.

To her childer, however, Arikel also passed the secret of controlling their Beasts: Through an appreciation of beauty, they can continue to understand what it means to be human. Every time a member of Clan Toreador sees a truly outstanding work of art or another supremely beautiful thing, she feels a rush of passion that reawakens the emotions that the Embrace atrophied. This sweet reminder of the pleasures of life, some-

times compared to suddenly remembering to breathe, is supremely intoxicating. The quest to regain this rush destroys the weak of will, but others can use it to regain some ownership of their damned souls.

Therefore, the clan continues to move amidst mortal society, courting the finest artisans, the wisest scholars and the most talented artists. From them and their work the Toreador are able to gain an understanding of humanity and its troubles through every century. This keeps a small spark of what they were alive in their dead forms. While other Cainites are left behind by changes fashion, language and culture, the Toreador can continue to socialize with, and subtly influence, their prey.

Toreador remain vampires first and foremost, however, and the same curse that afflicted Caine afflicts them. Few can resist the chance to manipulate the people around them, setting one group of artisans or scholars against another or competing with others of their clan in the area to see who can best



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Sometimes our rivals, but never our equals. They failed to heed Arikel's lesson and so will never have the ability to survive amongst our prey as we do.

The Low Clans: What they find worthwhile in the squalid depths of humanity I'll never know. The mad, the ugly, the primitive? They are little better than beasts themselves.

Brujah: Their intellectual interests and commitment are laudable. Their inability to focus their energy is their failing.

Lasombra: Dangerous opponents and worthy friends. Existence would be poorer without them.

Nosferatu: Ugly wretches who, if they weren't so useful, would make excellent sport for those of us who enjoy the hunt.

Ventrue: Ruthless and competent rivals, whose arrogance is actually a strength. Never let one know that she is your enemy.

cultivate their chosen part of society. Many of them argue that these manipulations give them a greater insight into the human soul, which makes these acts not only justifiable, but necessary. As they age, this tendency only worsens, and the games they play with their mortal toys become more and more extreme. Many see beauty in the patterns of destruction on the battlefields and in the suffering of those whose loved ones are killed in these petty skirmishes. After all, these experiences too are all part of the human existence they must not forget.

Sobriquet: Artisans

Appearance: The clan's appreciation of all things aesthetic and its close relationship with the mortal herd means that most Toreador dress in the finest clothes, made by the best local tradesmen. Nighttime fittings might be inconvenient, but few clothiers are able to turn away one of the charismatic and influential Artisans. The members of the clan are, on the whole, as beautiful as their clothes, although that beauty sometimes reflects the aesthetic values of a bygone age or foreign land once dear to that Cainite's sire.

Haven and Prey: Toreador make their havens among the upper echelons of society: those who can afford to pay for art and a sizeable collection of books. Many maintain town or city homes to which they add secure and comfortable cellars in which to spend the day. Artisans are faddish about their eating habits, spending a month drinking from the local whores, before devoting a couple of weeks to drinking from the family of a local lord, for example.

The Embrace: The clan chooses the most beautiful and socially adept people for its fledglings. An appreciation of the fruits of humanity in life is a prerequisite for maintaining that humanity in death, after all. Great scholars, scribes and artists also make for good childer. Artisans rarely Embrace from the peasantry, although they often choose artisans and craftsmen. They sometimes even take members of the Church into the clan, particularly those who were more concerned with secular affairs.

Character Creation: The Toreador value Social Attributes and Abilities beyond all else, al-

though some regard is given to Talents. Some choose Knowledges as their primary Ability group, though. Backgrounds such as Domain, Retainers, Herd and Resources are very common. The Roads of Humanity and of Kings are the Toreador's preferred journey through the night.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Presence

Weaknesses: Caine's curse upon Arikel is still strong, and all members of the clan are prone to distraction when confronted with a thing of beauty.

When an Artisan



encounters music, a piece of art, a person or even an idea that meets that criterion, she becomes fascinated with it and enters a reverie that may last for hours. The Storyteller decides what triggers this rapture, but the player is allowed to make a reflexive Self-Control or Instinct roll (difficulty 6) to resist it. Unless that roll is successful, the character remains enrapt until the end of the scene or until the object of the reverie leaves her presence. While under this rapture, the Toreador may not even defend herself, although an attack allows the player to make another Self-Control or Instinct roll.

Organization: Artisans typically keep in regular contact with clanmates in their vicinity. These meetings are hardly friendly, though — they are more akin to social and intellectual battlegrounds. The most influential of these gatherings occur in France, where the Courts of Love — once a venue for Toreador socialization — have become the ruling structure for vampiric domains.

Quote: *I think you'll find this evening's entertainment quite fascinating. Some of the minstrel's songs remind me of the days when... Well, you'll hear, and then we'll decide who has had the more profitable year.*

TZIMISCE

From the earliest nights, the Tzimisce have haunted the European east, laying claim to northern marsh and southern mountain, fertile plain and trackless forest. The *koldun* — the clan's witch-priests and lore-keepers — have preserved the tale of how the Eldest, solitary and arcane, turned his back on the ruin his siblings' power-struggles had made of the Second City and went into the world to build a dominion of his own shaping. He came to the mountainous heart of their homeland as though called, and there he settled. He laid deep roots and forged pacts of blood and kinship with the old gods of the earth, binding his line to the land in a sacred union. God-touched through their unbreakable tie to the earth, the clan both ruled and served, offering sacrifice in the blood of the men and beasts within their domain to renew the earth, and paying the price from their own strength when that was not enough. This duality and symbiosis persisted for millennia, and the Tzimisce were unconquerable within their homeland.

All things come to their end.

In these nights, the Tzimisce are beset from all sides. From the very heart of their homeland, the sorcerous Tremere have violated both Tzimisce blood and domain and have provoked the most vicious nocturnal war since the fall of Carthage. In the north and west, Germanic Ventrue have taken the opportunity to invade territories left vulnerable by the struggle with the Tremere, assaulting pagan enclaves in Livonia and Lithuania through crusade and undermining the weak-livered Kingdom of Hungary with commerce. Worse yet, within the clan, hereditary rivalries and fresh resentments sabotage any attempt at unified action. More and more of the clan's eldest broods disintegrate amid petty struggles for power, and precious knowledge is lost with every *koldun* who falls.

Tzimisce pride is the red-hot goad that has blinded them to their own failings, to the undeniable fact that there are forces arrayed against them that can finally drive them to their knees. Within the most stable domains of the *voivodate*, unlife continues in traditional fashion — elders rule their childer, their childer scheme and serve in the hopes of earning favor, and they sire offspring of their own who do the same. Among themselves, the Tzimisce still value what they always have: respect for (and submission to) their elders, concern for personal honor, adherence to the demands of the family hierarchy and, above all else, a fierce love of and devotion to the homeland.



"No man may take what we have claimed for our own — we are the very soul of this land," Tzimisce sires whisper over the ritual graves of their childer. This is true. What is also true is that the holy ties of earth and blood are no longer enough. If the Tzimisce wish to survive, they must unite beneath a hand strong enough to shape them as they have sought to shape their world.

Sobriquet: Fiends. (Some *koldun* and more scholarly members of the clan refer to themselves as Shapers.)

Appearance: It is the rare Tzimisce that can be described as normal. Either derived from revenant breeding stock (see p. 286) or modified through their flesh-sculpting Discipline of Vicissitude, Fiends tend to be shockingly beautiful or stunningly hideous, with very little middle ground. Alterations in Tzimisce directly involved in the conflict with the Tremere tend to be of utilitarian, martial nature (semi-permanent "natural armor" and the like). Adherents to the

Metamorphosist change-cult twist themselves into whatever form best expresses the god within. Elders lean toward modifications that inspire awe, desire or fear.

STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Peers? We do not have *peers*, childer. There are those who covet what we possess and those who know their own place — and very little in between.

The Low Clans: Those who know their place. For the most part.

Gangrel: Our *Veela*, our *Valkyries*, our fierce and merciless pack of wild hunters. Respect their feral self-knowledge and the raw savagery they bring to our cause. If we must share our homeland with any, better these than the thrice-damned Tremere or the carrion-eating Ventrue.

Tremere: Kill them. All of them. Do not waste time on lessons they should not live long enough to appreciate.

Ventrue: Know this — our struggles with the Tremere are but a passing dalliance compared to the conflicts we have known against this clan of would-be kings. Never submit to the dominion of a Ventrue while Tzimisce blood still runs in your veins.

Haven and Prey: The Tzimisce claim one of the largest territories in all of Europe, from the isolated hinterland of Livonia nearly to the walls of Byzantium. Their havens and herds are likewise diverse. In the pagan north, where some Tzimisce elders are still worshipped as gods, richly sculpted temples, sacred hills and groves, and blood-cults of mortal devotees are not uncommon. In the nominally Christianized south, the Fiends tend toward less blatant displays, dwelling in fortified country manse and reigning as the cruellest landlords local villages have ever suffered. Consciously or otherwise, many Tzimisce place their havens near the summits of hills, one of the primal confluences of earth and sky in pagan *koldun* belief. Tzimisce cherish elaborate protocols of hospitality, feting those whom they invite into their domains as princes and punishing trespassers with a viciousness that earned the reputation they enjoy.

The Embrace: Traditionally, young Tzimisce are selected from among the clan's revenant minions and groomed for the Embrace from a young age. More rarely, a particularly gifted (or lusted-after) individual captures the attention of a prospective sire, or a *koldun* suggests that the auspices are right for enlarging "the family." The war with the Tremere and other interlopers has added a more practical impetus to many recent Embraces, however. More warriors than "brides" or "pets" are selected in these nights and in greater haste. Even so, when at all possible, Tzimisce sires gift their fledglings with the funeral rites believed to cement the new child's holy bond to the earth.

Character Creation: Most Tzimisce are Eastern European in origin—which can be anything from a pagan Baltic tribesman to an erudite Greek monk. Mental Attributes are usually primary. Domain is the most common Background, though Mentor (in the form of one's sire and immediate family), Retainers (most often revenant underlings or Vicissitude-sculpted human or animal ghouls), Herd and Resources are also popular. Most Tzimisce believe, quite simply, that they were born to rule, so the Roads of Kings is popular as

are the aspects of the Road of Heaven that glorify the follower. Few Tzimisce profess any open allegiance to the Road of Humanity, lest they incur the wrath of their brethren, (especially the hardcore monsters who follow the cult-like Road of Metamorphosis).

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Vicissitude

Weaknesses: The Tzimisce are arguably the most territorial of all the clans, sharing as they do inviolable ties of blood and spirit to the land they rule. When a Tzimisce rests, he must surround himself with at least two handfuls of earth from a place that was important to him in life—usually either the land of his birth or the soil of his grave. Failure to do so halves the player's dice pools every night that the vampire has not rested in appropriate earth. This halving continues until all actions use only one die. Eight hours' rest amid the special soil negates it.

Organization: The Tzimisce are hierarchical, but they do not follow the rigid feudal chain of lord and vassal. Rather, the Tzimisce are familial, nearly tribal, in nature. Most Tzimisce families consist of a sire and her brood, but each of these families is connected to many others. Therefore, many regions of the east are dominated by networks of blood relations descended from a single individual. Within the family, the elder receives great respect as the natural center of the household, while her childer compete murderously for acknowledgement, advancement and affection. Rival families often maintain running vendettas across the centuries, are similarly murderous, governed by maddeningly complex social protocols.

Quote: *This earth has drunk our blood for more years than your small mind can comprehend. This is my homeland, and I shall hold it or die trying.*



VENTRUE

At the end, there will be war. Mortals speak of the Battle at Armageddon, Cainites of Gehenna. Either way, there will come a night when drawn swords and mustered armies are all that stand between the Damned and the saved. The Ventrue take these predictions as their marching orders. They are the fearsome knights, noble warriors and empire-builders of Caine's get. Let others "rule" as priests and potentates. When the last battle comes, they will beg for protection like all others cowering behind the arrayed Ventrue knights.

According to clan legendry, the Ventrue founder was the first child of Enoch, eldest of the second generation. Therefore, they are destined by special mandate to carry the mantle and the burden of leadership.

In more recent night, the Ventrue identify strongly with the late Republic and early Roman Empire, looking to Julius Cesar and others as great exemplars of the warrior-king ideal. In the later Empire, however, the decadent Lasombra and addled Malkavians were surely closer to the heart and soul of the Eternal City. The other clans rub the Ventrue's face in this transformation every time they call them "Patricians," the name of the Roman noble families who became an inbred privileged caste.

The Long Night was not a grand time for the Ventrue, either. Skill at arms was hardly unnecessary in the period after Rome, but the get of Caine were so isolated as to shrug off the urge for empire-building. In these centuries, many who could not prove their worth on the battlefield chose other methods. They became the guild masters, the courtiers and the seneschals who whispered promises of power to come.

In these nights, however, things have changed. After a tense build-up, the War of Princes rages at last, and the Ventrue know that their time has come. Several of their elders have returned to the fore to gather their armies and claim new kingdoms. The knight — a warrior-lord bound by his honor and judged by his sword — is the Ventrue ideal made manifest, and the clan has organized several orders of chivalry for the Damned. The Ventrue call themselves Warlords, and it is no empty boast.

But the corruption of late Rome and the indolence of the Long Night are not easy to shake off. The clan's warriors clash with one another as often as they do with outsiders, either in personal vendettas or under the banners of one of several great Ventrue factions. And still others refuse to return to the warrior's ways. They seek power in commerce and intrigue instead.

The greatest Ventrue factions are the Normans who follow Mithras, Prince of London and Monarch of the Baronies of Avalon, and the Germans, under Lord Hardestadt of the Fiefs of the Black Cross. Both courts rally around powerful Methuselahs and claim whole swaths of Europe as their extended domains. Various merchant princes who have been carefully constructing their leadership around a system of money-lending and cooperative guilds are strong as well. This new class of Ventrue still remains a strange aberration to many of the more traditional elders, but the power of these guilds is a force to be reckoned with. Other Ventrue warlords and nocturnal dukes stake



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Nobility is not simply in the blood. It is in the deed as well.

The Low Clans: As long as they stay in their place, they have a role to play in the battles to come.

Assamites: Our counterparts among the paynim, they fail to understand the battles to come. Their hold on the Holy Land must be broken lest it condemn us all.

Brujah: Despite their pointless grudges, they are worthwhile. Listen to their theories and put them into practice. Call upon their warriors' skill and lead it to appropriate targets.

Lasombra: Masterful schemers, useful allies and very dangerous rivals all at once. They make good use of words and daggers, but this is a time of swords and lances.

Toreador: Do not be deceived by their reputation as mere artisans, as our tenuous alliance with this clan has proven them capable leaders. But don't give them any more credit than is due, either.

Tzimisce: They say that our eastern lords have begun to adopt some of the customs of this clan.

claims of their own or under the banners of other lords, including the Arpad brood of Ventrue in Hungary and the freelances who fight in Iberia under Lasombra banners.

Mortal society is important to the Ventrue, but not nearly as important as what one gains after the Embrace. Only then can the true power and potential of the fledgling be realized. A few independents maintain influential positions within mortal political institutions and the Church, but not enough to truly impact society as a whole. Any Ventrue with ambition, however, should be viewed with respect, for the clan is a formidable force indeed.

Sobriquet: Warlords (some still use the less-flattering Patrician sobriquet)

Appearance: Whether merchants or princes, the Ventrue dress to their station impeccably. An impressive elegance goes a long way toward creating the appearance of leadership, and the Ventrue work to portray what they embody. Commonly present too are the various arms and weapons, that prove that the Ventrue lords are both willing to and capable of defending their lands and leading their forces into battle.

Haven and Prey: Every leader requires followers, and so the Ventrue are never far from centers of political power or from the battles where it is to be gained. Old castles and mansions make excellent havens, as do fortresses built on the frontier, be it in pagan Livonia or in the Holy Land. Younger Warlords either serve under elders at a great court or head to outlying areas to gain power and position. Because of specific feeding habits of the Ventrue, they often choose a haven that allows them access to the specific type of prey that they require.

The Embrace: The Ventrue seek to Embrace those who personify honor, power and conquest. More often than not, they Embrace members of the existing aristocracy and especially tradition-oriented clan members even go so far as to Embrace only those of a specific lineage, keeping a pure line of descent throughout the ages. Other powerful mortals, be they military leaders, merchants or the occasional Knights Templar, also make excellent candidates

for the Blood. Sires often train childer for several years, forging vassals and lieutenants out of their progeny.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes and Skills are primary in the most martial of the clan, but rulership is more than skill at arms, so Social Attributes and Knowledges are also popular. Important Backgrounds include Allies and Retainers (for brothers in arms), as well as Domain and Resources (for lands that they hold). There are Ventrue on every major road, but the clan identifies most strongly with the Road of Kings.

Clan Disciplines: Dominate, Fortitude, Presence

Weaknesses: All Warlords have a specific limitation on their feeding habits. They may drink the vitae of only one type of mortal (priests, non-Christians, virgins, Englishmen, and so on), chosen at the time of character creation. While they can physically imbibe the blood of those mortals who are not among their selected prey, they gain no sustenance from it. This weakness does not extend to the blood of other vampires, however. The Ventrue can always gain sustenance from that.

Organization: The Ventrue believe firmly in Cainite feudalism, and they organize themselves accordingly. Oaths of loyalty (sometimes backed by blood) are common between Ventrue of differing rank. Others join chivalric orders of the Damned, some of which exist as a conspiracy within mortal orders. The largest one is the Order of the Black Cross, which is hidden within the Teutonic Knights.

Quote: *You think yourself a ruler? I will teach you the true meaning of power.*



The Low Clans

If some must lead, others must follow — or so the theory goes. To ask most of the low-blooded, their status is not a matter of following but of being different. The Low Clans are, overall, those who do not participate wholly in the feudal system. Many of their members do, if only to survive, but they do not typically rise high in its structure. The typical Ravnos or Gangrel is not a prince and may not even be a vassal. This does not mean they do not seek influence or advantage, simply that they do so in other ways or in other places.

In the feudal nomenclature, the Low Clans are sometimes called the fallen. This appellation reflects a wide-held belief in Europe that the Low Clans have somehow fallen from whatever grace their high-blooded betters enjoy. Often these stories go back to betrayals in the Second City, but there are other stories as well. The Nosferatu and Malkavians are almost always held up as exemplars of these theories because they so obviously suffer from debilitating curses in the form of twisted miens or fractured minds. Similarities to the Brujah's rage or the Cappadocians' deathly pallor are, of course, overlooked.

In Europe, the other Low Clans are usually dismissed as foreigners and barbarians. The Gangrel are hardly foreign, but their common rejection of settled unlife makes them seem so. The Ravnos have been in Europe to some degree since the time of Alexander the Great, but their clan tales of life in far-off India helps brand them as outsiders. The Assamites and Followers of Set tend to appear in Europe only as ambassadors or travelers, making their status dubious at best.

The Tremere are not even a clan at all, as far as most Cainites are concerned. They are a usurping bloodline that has offended the Tzimisce and stolen Salubri blood (perhaps even Saulot's, if one believes the most scandalous tales).

The Crime of Usurpation

There was once a seventh High Clan, and it still persists in some parts of the world. Clan

Salubri was divided between fierce warriors and arcane mystics, and never a numerous bunch. The warrior line warred against infernal vampires called Baali in the nights before Rome, and it has been reduced to a stout few. The mystics, solitary scholars and researchers lair in lone monasteries and quiet merchant houses. It's said that they exist under a debilitating curse in which the harm they do to others is revisited upon them. Needing to subsist on the blood of the living and saddled by a raging Beast (like all other Cainites) this curse causes the so-called Unicorns no end of trouble — or so the stories go.

And to many young vampires, stories of the Salubri are all that remains. Over the last century, the clan has fallen into sharp decline. Its members have become even more scarce, some falling to enemies, others going deep into hiding. Where most major courts and domains in Europe could once count on a clutch of Salubri mystics lairing in some temple nearby — often ready to serve as advisors, power-brokers and oracles — now very few make their presence known. Marked by the third eye that grows on their forehead as a sign of unliving enlightenment, the Unicorns were once exotic but well known. Now, only in Outremer are there significant numbers of them. (They are said to be even more numerous in Saracen lands, but the stories of those lands are fanciful in the extreme.)

The cause of such a precipitous fall is unclear. Some great tragedy seems to have befallen Saulot, the Salubri progenitor, around 1130 or so. Some elders gifted in the Discipline of Auspex report having experienced terrible visions of blood and ash involving Saulot at the time. Others report seeing a great eye close forever in their fevered daytime sleep. Just who might have destroyed or wounded Saulot is another question without a solid answer, but the leading candidate is the Usurper Tremere. Indeed these warlocks-cum-vampires were once but a troublesome minor bloodline tied to the Tzimisce. In the last century, they have grown in power by leaps and bounds, holding back their enemies and seemingly forging a form of blood-magic (called Thaumaturgy) that is superior to any other vampiric sorcery used since the Second City. The elders of the High Clans associ-

ate such power with the blood of the third generation, and accusations that the Tremere stole Saulot's heart's-blood in some ritual are growing louder. (The Cappadocian oracle Constancia is a major proponent of this view.) The fact that the Tremere once spread rumors about the Salubri being infernalists — which many princes found hard to believe — only adds to the suspicions.

Bloodlines and Offshoots

The blood of Caine is not always as static as some would have it. While most childer do indeed inherit much from their sires, the Curse still manifests itself differently in each individual. In some cases, a qualitative change occurs in one childe and then passes on to that vampire's own progeny, creating an offshoot of the main clan. (Such an offshoot is usually called a "bloodline.") It's a common belief among the High Clans that this mutability is a sign of inferior blood, that it is only the Low Clans who spawn strange offshoots. Nobility runs true, it is said, while villainy is ever-mutable.

Princes and courtiers can site much anecdotal evidence to support this view: The leprous Nosferatu and the Charlatans of Clan Ravnos, for example, are widely recognized to group into familial broods who share characteristics. The wild Gangrel — hardly a clan at all, according to some — are believed to have spawned dozens of twisted offshoots in pagan lands from Ireland to Scandinavia to Rus. The Tremere usurpers are not a clan at all, according to most, but a creation of poorly understood magics. Even the Saracen Assamites, who present themselves as nobles of their heathen lands, are rumored to be nothing but an aggregate of several bloodlines.

As with most "common knowledge," however, the claims of the High Clans are somewhat specious. Indeed, stories of offshoots of Clan Ventrue and Brujah are rife from the time of the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage, and Clan Cappadocian quietly maintains clutches of offshoots of its own.

SIGNIFICANT BLOODLINES

The total number of vampiric bloodlines is, in all likelihood, unknowable. Indeed the term is so loose that it could refer to almost any inherited variation from the clan norm. The following bloodlines, however, have displayed unique gifts that make them worth mentioning:

- **Baali:** Once the scourge of the Holy Land, the Baali are debased vampires who serve various demons and hell-beasts. They lurk in Europe as well, where they have learned to hide among the living and unliving alike.

- **Laibon:** Said to hail from the lands of Prester John, the dark-skinned Laibon appear only very rarely as travelers in Europe. They are said to commune with spirits and to know the secrets of Golconda, but no proof of these claims has ever been forthcoming. They are more common in Saracen lands.

- **Lamia:** The priestesses and temple guardians of ancient Cappadocians, the Lamia are among those who put the lie to the belief that only Low Clans spawn bloodlines. The Lamia worship Lilith and have a reputation as fierce warriors.

- **Lhiannan:** Thought to be an offshoot of the Gangrel, these so-called Druids lurk in the guise of nature goddesses and priestesses in pagan lands. They are highly territorial and said to be targets of local churchmen and Cainites alike.

- **Gargoyles:** Strange thaumaturgic constructs of the Usurper Tremere, the Gargoyles are *made* rather than Embraced. Nosferatu, Gangrel and Tzimisce are said to perish in Tremere labs to provide raw material for the making of these slave-warriors.

ASSAMITE

The Cainite princes of Europe call the Assamites diabolists, fanatics, assassins and Saracens. Most properly, they are the Children of Haqim, the lords of the Levantine night. Although high-blooded scholars apocryphally regard the Assamite progenitor as a traitor who abandoned his brethren in their time of need, Assamite lore speaks of Haqim as a noble warrior-judge who opposed the inhuman machinations of the Third Generation in the Second City. Haqim's descendants trace their roots back to ancient Persia, the founder's birthplace, and claim to be the Cainite power behind the Mesopotamian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Haqim laid down a series of rules to his childer in those nights, commanding that they honor their eldest, protect mortals from the schemes of other Cainites and judge (and punish) those found wanting. Since the collapse of those ancient kingdoms, the clan has come to be associated with all the tribal peoples of the Middle East and, through them, with Islam. By the reckoning of most European vampires, Clan Assamite is a monolithic army of paynim zealots.

In fact, it took many nights for Islam to be accepted as even remotely legitimate by the Children of Haqim. From Alamut, the clan's spiritual heart in the mountains of Anatolia, clan elders at first claimed that it violated their covenant with their progenitor. As the combination of zeal, wisdom and unity that was so evident in the early caliphate entranced more and more Assamites, a deep rift tore through the clan. Some renounced their lineage entirely during this time of strife and came to be called the Dispossessed. It took the threat of destruction at the hands of the infernal Baali for Haqim's divided brood to finally reunite. After a bloody and terrible nocturnal war some five centuries ago, the clan emerged far more unified, if only to safeguard its holdings. While a majority of the clan does indeed now feel protective (or possessive) of the Muslim herd, significant minorities call themselves Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians or followers of other more obscure faiths.

Beyond matters of faith, the clan is also broken up into three distinct castes — warriors, sorcerers and viziers — and each follows Haqim's laws in its own way. Warriors are the dominant caste, but they have only held this position since the Prophet's death. They remain Islam's fiercest adherents in the clan.

Assamite sorcerers claim to be the oldest practitioners of vampiric blood-magic. Many use *kalif*, an herbal hallucinogen grown through mystical means. The drug is ingested through the blood of mortals who have smoked leaves of the plant, and it offers the sorcerers a glimpse at enlightenment and a means

by which they may focus their consciousness. This caste is responsible for much of the clan's tight-knit organization, as its members excel in mystical methods of communication across great distances.

Of all the castes, the viziers typically spend the most time around Cainites of other clans, and the caste has cultivated numerous contacts in Europe. When they are successful in their diplomatic endeavors, viziers often emerge as either sagacious advisors or objective third-parties in various Cainite negotiations.

Sobriquet: Children of Haqim; Saracens

Appearance: The vast majority of Assamites are of Middle-Eastern descent. Although their dress tends toward the more traditional, a great variety can be found between the three different castes, especially among those who depart the relative safety of the Levant for destinations in Europe proper. Rather than paling over time, Assamites are unique in that their visage darkens with age. A true elder can be marked by the ebon and somewhat lustrous shade of his skin.

Haven and Prey: Assamites gravitate toward havens that conceal their nocturnal activities, particularly those they



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: It was by their command that the call for crusade was issued among the *Franj*, and it is upon their hands that the blood of those who died yet remains.

The Low Clans: A curious epithet, considering that the Children of Haqim, Nosferatu and Gangrel in particular possess infinitely more honor than all those who would classify them as "low."

Followers of Set: In the Crusades, we have found our first and final commonality with these serpents. Rest assured that when the last of the *Franj* are turned away, we shall direct our attentions to them in earnest.

Lasombra: Our Muslim brothers among them made great strides in al-Andalus before their Christian counterparts set about reclaiming lands held by those of their *own blood*. Never have I seen such intentional disunity.

Ventru: It is good to see them stir from the complacency of their hidden thrones and fortresses. Perhaps now we might meet them on the field of battle — face to face, for a change.

procure while visiting European domains. Security is always paramount, and all but the most materialistic Assamites favor a well-concealed hovel over a dangerously conspicuous palace. When in foreign lands, Assamites feed with deliberate care, often upon a city's undesirables, lest they draw unwanted attention from mortal or vampiric authorities.

The Embrace: The Children of Haqim prefer to select potential *fida'i*, apprentices, from the ranks of their own tribal followers and families, although outlanders (including Europeans) occasionally prove themselves worthy of Haqim's blood. Beyond this, warriors value faith, dedication and, above all, loyalty. Sorcerers tend to Embrace mortals whose experiences mirror the work of the undead blood-wizards themselves, such as Sufi mystics and Bedouin dervishes. Viziers fledglings typically share an overall sharpness of mind and keenness of ambition.

Character Creation: Members of the warrior caste typically possess highly developed martial skills, favoring Physical Attributes and combat Abilities. In broad strokes, sorcerers tend toward Mental Attributes and Knowledges, and viziers toward an eclectic mix of Mental and Social Attributes and Abilities. Most Saracens have at least one dot in Mentor (their sire), as well as one or two dots in Generation, due to their practice of diablerizing those who have been judged unfit. The Roads of Heaven, of Kings and of Humanity are all popular, although the most traditional Assamites follow the secretive Road of Blood.

Warrior Disciplines: Celerity, Obfuscate, Quietus

Warrior Weakness: The warriors are marked by their tradition of ritual diablerie. Any supernatural ability to sense the dark taint of the Amaranth confirms a warrior Assamite as a diablerist, even if the subject has never tasted the blood of another Cainite. (Some also suffer from a blood-curse laid upon them by the Baali, and have the Blood Madness Flaw — p. 309 — for which they gain extra bonus points.)

Sorcerer Disciplines: Assamite Sorcery (or Thaumaturgy, see p. 171), Auspex, Quietus

Sorcerer Weakness: Sorcerers have difficulty hiding their arcane nature. All mystical attempts to determine magic usage on and around the character are at a -2 difficulty and are considered to operate at two levels higher for the purpose of opposed powers and rolls.

Vizier Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Quietus

Vizier Weakness: Viziers are exacting to a fault. Each character is considered to possess an obsession or compulsion derangement associated with his highest intellectual or creative Ability. While this derangement is active, the character's halo glows in such a way as to provide a careful observer with hints as to the vizier's true Nature, as well as the object of his obsession, upon any successful use of Soulsight (Auspex 2).

Organization:

Thanks in part to the communication powers of its sorcerer caste, the Assamites are organized much more intricately than many other clans. Overall, the "Old Man of the Mountain" (the eldest child of Haqim not in

torpor) leads the clan from the Black Throne in Alamut. That honor currently falls to the sorcerer Sha'hiri although he is said to be slipping into the Sleep of Ages. Each of the castes maintains its own distinct figurehead, and it is these three individuals — collectively called the *du'at* — who are most responsible for the night-to-night operations of the clan. The most powerful voice on the council is Caliph Jamal, the powerful sword and statesman at the head of the warrior caste.

Viziers follow the dictates of Tegyrus, who once rode with Alexander the Great. The sorcerers have been led for many centuries by the mighty Amr al-Ashrad.

Quote: *You, who would have us stand by as you make a ruin of all we have come to hold sacred, shall know the judgment of Haqim.*



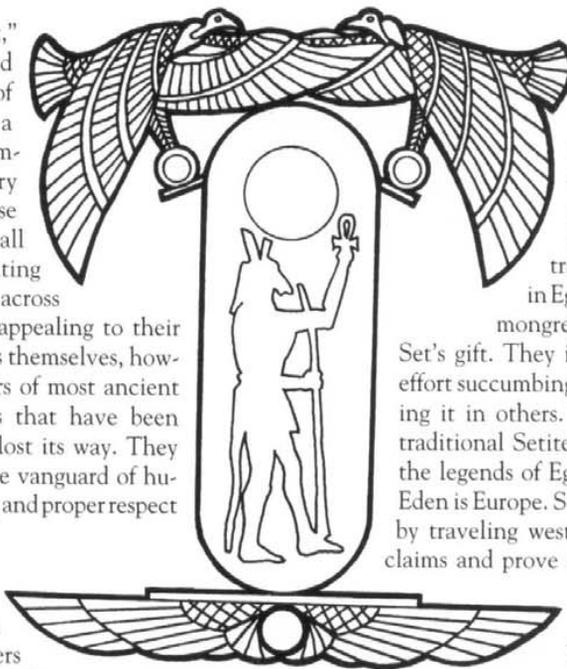
FOLLOWERS OF SET

"Recognize Eden by its serpent," ashen priests tell their initiates. And the serpents among the garden of the night are the Followers of Set, a clan of Egyptian and Eastern vampires rumored to practice every ignominy under the night sky. These vice merchants are said to truck in all manner of desire and fancy, cultivating a bloom of corruption and heresy across the face of the known world by appealing to their clients' baser wants. To the Setites themselves, however, they are merely practitioners of most ancient traditions who cherish freedoms that have been stamped out in a world that has lost its way. They prefer shadows because light is the vanguard of hubris, while darkness breeds humility and proper respect in all great mysteries.

The Followers of Set claim lineage to Set himself, a deified figure on equal footing with Cain, if not God. Indeed, the Followers dispute any ties to the supposed Third Mortal. They trace their history back through to the ancient nights when the desert sands were still mountains. It was in these mythic times that the great hunter Set tore into Geb's bosom and drank of the Earth God's blood, thus making himself a god by action and his children the avatars of his marble-cold divinity. Cainites claim that these were corrupt and debauched days, but the Setites remember it as a time of uncensored freedom... at least until the war against Set's brother Osiris and nephew Horus took its toll. Accounts vary as to the victor of this bloody familial feud, with the Followers claiming the upper hand and their enemies asserting otherwise. Alas, Egypt still fell to a march of foreign mortal conquerors, forcing the Setites deep underground where they perfected their insidious ways.

Calamity later struck again in the early nights of the first century, when Set vanished from his sarcophagus after plaguing his most venerable childer with prophetic dreams. Now, slowly, the dreams come to fruition, and the Followers of Set debate dogma with a greater interest in the world. Although they once limited their activities to the shores of the blessed Nile, they now wander the known world, spreading Set's wisdom from deep inside dark caravan tents or at the end of twisted alleys in the city slums.

The Followers embrace misfortune, disease, tragedy and calamity because such conditions create patrons in need of their services. They cherish unmitigated freedom, the chaos of fulfilled desire and the satisfaction of want... any want. They revel in sensation and pleasure, twin connections with their god, but times are slowly changing. The Setites spread beyond the Nile out of necessity, but they chose to keep Set's blood mostly to Africans and Saracens, thus keeping their traditions



thriving. Only occasionally did they Embrace *Desheru* ("the red ones") or those Franks with the prized red-hair (which is believed to be a mark of Set). Now, however, some *Desheru* breed without care and establish nests in Europe, away from the control of the traditional caste of ancient Setites in Egypt known as Hierophants. These mongrel Setites are an abomination to Set's gift. They ignore tradition and spend more effort succumbing to their own vices than cultivating it in others. This is creating friction among traditional Setites and the *Desheru*, who say that the legends of Egypt are fading and that the new Eden is Europe. Some Hierophants have responded by traveling west and north to investigate these claims and prove to the renegades that their holy traditions need not be abandoned simply because the site of a temple does.

Sobriquet: Serpents, Setites

Appearance: Most Followers are of Middle-Eastern or African extraction, which brands them as foreigners in Europe. In addition, the clan has adopted the Nubian practice of scarification. By rubbing ash into cuts and wounds, they create

STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Just another example of the tyranny of laws. Smile pleasantly and woo them with their hidden wants. They can be useful tools if properly subverted.

The Low Clans: Some are willing slaves and so the worst of fools, but others show remarkable will and rage against the world that has damned them. Perhaps they are touched by Set after all.

Assamites: Convenient allies against the Franks, and we must now ensure their loyalty. Still I trust them as much as I trust my own blade not to cut me when held by another.

Cappadocians: Play the patient crocodile with this lot. They believe themselves superior for their scholarly pursuits, but when their precious books can no longer sate their questions, they seek us out.

Gangrel: Laudable fury against the tyranny of civilization, but without any plan for fighting it. Once trained and bridled, as useful as any other desert dog.

Ventru: The Assamites' opposite number, and useful for the same reasons. They can grant much and may yet use their herds to expel the Arabs from our lands — only to be expelled themselves, of course.

patterns of scars and raised welts. In terms of clothes, most Setites dress as merchants and traders, and they are known for their skill at travel (there is safety in flight). In private, they return to the tradition of the ancient priesthood. They keep their bodies shaved to protect against lice in the filthy warrens of Europe, and they wear neo-Egyptian robes made of linen. The few Europeans whom the Serpents Embrace can more easily pass as Cainites of other clans, and they often do by varying their dress and mannerisms. Many of these *Desheru* are also red-headed, either naturally or thanks to henna dyeing.

Haven and Prey: While the Followers of Set prefer their lairs underground — be it in great caverns, forgotten cisterns or buried temples adorned with ancient script and linens — these trappings are the privilege of the sect's most venerable members. Most Setites throughout Europe maintain sarcophagi on caravan trains or own buildings in the city slums close to ports and trade districts. Regardless of their surroundings, however, Egyptian hieroglyphs, papyrus paintings, linen draping, alcove temples with statues of Set and temple pottery predominate the interiors of these havens. From these temple-lairs, Setites prey on the underclass of a European city making sure not to raise the ire of a well-placed Cainite lest they be displaced.

The Embrace: Traditionally, only those born of Egyptian stock or near the Nile itself were acceptable candidates for Set's blood, and the bulk of the clan remains Egyptian, Arab or African. But the blood of Set is reserved for those strong of will, not of a particular

shade of skin. Most fledglings spend time as mortal (or ghoul) retainers for their sires, a time in which they must prove themselves. If they are sycophants, they may be useful as servants, but nothing more. The Embrace is reserved for those who have the will and conviction to remain strong. The actual Embrace takes place before a statue of Set and involves a complex (and secret) ritual. The *Desheru* tend to be more idiosyncratic and less ritualistic in their Embracing, but no Followers of Set worth her salt, no matter how unorthodox, would waste the Embrace on a fool or a weakling. A majority of *Desheru* are Greeks (as their center was once Constantinople), but they include a growing number of Franks.

Character Creation: Social Attributes and Knowledges tend to be primary with the Followers, representing the charms and arcane knowledge they bring from the East. Commerce is also a common

Ability, and some more physical types bring a complement of martial Abilities as well. Backgrounds are key to most Setites, who travel with Retainers and a Herd (their caravan) and have significant Resources. Contacts, Influence and Mentor are also common. The most orthodox of the clan worship Set in all they do and follow the secretive Road of the Serpent. Others look to their progenitor as a guiding principle that leads them down the Roads of the Beast, of Kings or of Sin.

Clan Disciplines: Obfuscate, Presence, Serpents

Weaknesses: Set lurks in the night and hates the day, which is the domain of the tyranny imposed by Osiris and Horus. Therefore, Followers of Set suffer greater susceptibility to the sunlight, enough so that exposure to the sun inflicts twice as many levels of aggravated damage to them as it would to other vampires.

Organization: Traditionally, Setites favor the ancient priesthood practices of Egypt, with each temple run by the Superintendent and First Prophet of Set. Thereafter, the remaining Setites fall into line as the Second, Third and (where applicable) Fourth Prophets of Set, though this last is rare. Circumstances now favor small intimate cults of mortal followers with the chief Setite acting as First Prophet of Set. Still, any hierarchical structure belies the Setites' respect for one another as vessels of Set's blood. *Desheru* are less stringent and ritualistic. They often simply gather what slaves will follow them.

Quote: *Come. I can promise you'll never desire again.*



GANGREL

The natural kine tendency to gather together has been a boon to Cainites. Most choose to follow their prey into the towns and cities of the world, where the feeding is easier. The Gangrel are the exception to this rule. From the Tartars of the east to the Arabs of the south and the barbarian tribes of the north, the Gangrel make their homes among the wild people of the world. To them, cities are traps wherein once-strong Cainites grow weak and lazy.

The Gangrel do not believe themselves to be descended from Caine, though. In the days before history, they say, the greatest gods chose many to be their children. A pair of twins among the gods became bitter rivals. One twin, Ennoia, chose only the most worthy warriors as her children. The other, Churka, chose those best versed in deception. The broods warred for long years, until Churka coerced two of Ennoia's most trusted children to leave the field of battle. In her anger and despair, Ennoia decreed that all the children of both twins should have to depend on the blood of others for their lives. The other gods approved of her decree, and so Clan Gangrel, the children of Ennoia, came to be.

Members of the clan believe that their mother will relent one night and call upon them to fight for her once more. Then, and only then, will Churka and his lackeys finally suffer the fate that has been due them since the dawn of time. It is the duty of the Gangrel to ensure that only the most hardy and skilled join their numbers, so that the clan may triumph when the day of that final confrontation comes. Then they will be welcomed back into their mother's love.

Civilization is a trick of Churka to ensure that those who deceive are better suited to the final conflict than those who fight. The clan refuses to fall into the trap of their ancient enemy, and instead chooses to recruit and hunt among the nomadic and wild peoples of the world. The chains of master and slave, of lord and lackey, are utter anathema to them, and hierarchical European society repulses them. They see the ability to survive and prosper under all conditions as the greatest test of an individual's worth. They value simple but profound concepts such as bravery, honor, martial prowess, survival skills and knowledge of the land.

Necessity forces the Gangrel to spend periods of time on their own. More than one of them preying on a particular group of humans can quickly reduce the number available to feed on, or rouse suspicions enough that a confrontation is inevitable. A

good hunter knows better than to wipe out all of his prey. Many Gangrel learn to survive alone simply because it is all they have ever known since they were chosen. Sires often leave their childer to fend for themselves, to see if they have the mettle of true Gangrel.

Solitude cannot continue forever, however. On the most practical level, there is a value in numbers if only to form hunting packs. But even then, unlife is hard away from the cities. Gangrel face constant dangers. Lupines stalk many woods, and it also requires cunning and stealth to catch human prey without alerting the whole settlement or group to the vampire's presence.

Therefore, most Gangrel spend at least some time among other vampires. Testing themselves against humans and animals is all very well, but they can only truly test themselves against others like them. That means spending at least a little time in the cities, learning the ways of their rivals. A few have even come to live in cities full time, prowling the night when most prey are locked up in houses. But the weak, diseased and ineffectual humans who dwell there with over-complicated, manipulative vampires feeding on them breed contempt in most Gangrel. For most of the clan, unlife is a series of long periods of rural solitude and interludes of a few years among the massed herd and rival predators.



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Pathetic creatures who think walls and human ways make them safe from the law of predator and prey. They will learn.

The Low Clans: Some, like us, understand the skills needed to survive and prosper. Others are too busy submitting to others to understand the true nature of the world.

Malkavian: They are tormented prophets who speak with the voices of the Gods. When they talk, listen — but from a safe distance.

Nosferatu: Some fancy that their twisted forms make them monsters. They are mistaken.

Ravnos: Children of Churka, our greatest foe. Do not trust them. Kill them if you can.

Tzimisce: They understand territory and the rule of the strong, even if they have a strange obsession with twisting their flesh into unnatural forms.

Sobriquet: Animals

Appearance: Gangrel develop animalistic characteristics after their Embrace, and few see any reason to hide them. Indeed, they wear them with pride, as signs of their survival skills. Clothing, when worn, is practical and usually simple. Their general appearance tends to reflect the people upon whom they have spent most time preying, but with a distinctly rougher edge.

Haven and Prey: It is rare for any but the few full-time city dwellers in the clan to have a permanent haven. They hunt over a very wide territory so as not to thin the herd, so they move too much to take the time to create a safe refuge from the sun. Instead most seek simply to merge with the earth through their Discipline of Protean or take advantage of natural shelter, like deep caverns. Gangrel take a particular pleasure in feeding from city dwellers who are traveling through the countryside, or other humans who have been foolish enough to wander alone at night.

The Embrace: Most Gangrel come from the so-called barbarian peoples — groups like the Tartars (or Mongols), Celts, Norsemen, and Livs. A growing proportion, though, are drawn from those people in the civilized world who have jobs which require survival skills: hunters, foresters and other rural folk. Most are left to survive for months or years on their own, while their sire keeps half an eye on them at best. If they show the strength needed to survive, they are trained and welcomed into Gangrel society. If they don't, the sire (or some other predator) reclaims the blood.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes are, by and large, the primary choice for this clan, and Social Attributes often come last. Many Gangrel have identical Natures and Deemeanors — they are not ones for dissembling or deception. Talents and survival-orientated Skills are chosen before Knowledges. Rural and wilderness-dwelling members of the clan tend to focus their Discipline development on Protean before they develop other Disciplines, as it gives them a significant edge in survival. The Road of the Beast is typically Gangrel, though Animals may walk almost any of the other roads as well.

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Fortitude, Protean

Weaknesses: The Gangrel's closeness to their inner Beast tends to manifest itself in their bodies. Every time a clan member frenzies, she gains an animal feature (furry arms, cat-like eyes, heavy fangs, etc.). For every five such features gained, one of the Gangrel's Social Attributes drops by one. Some Gangrel view this as a blessing rather than a weakness.

Organization: The clan has little in the way of formal structure, falling back on an approximate status system. Childe and sire often maintain infrequent contact once the neonate has been trained. When members of the clan meet, relative status is established through a combination of recounting of deeds and whatever reputation may have preceded the Gangrel. Occasionally groups will meet for "gathers," where regional leaders — an informal position at best — and overall status are determined. Even rarer are revels — war parties of Gangrel gathered to face a particular threat.

Quote: *I hope the next town has worthier prey than you to catch.*



MALKAVIAN

Medieval folk respond to lunacy with quiet fear. It is never clear whether the mad are touched by God, the Devil or a little of both. Some say that their ways are infectious or that they have been touched by the Fair Folk. In any case, it is best to leave them alone, lest they curse those who come across their paths. In Clan Malkavian, all these fears find their most terrifying expression. Acute madness, oracular insights, ceaseless predatory hunger and the Blood of Caine combine to make these vampires among the most feared in the Dark Medieval night. Their merest words can drive ancients insane or reveal insights of harrowing genius. In moments of perfect lucidity, they grasp the universe and the great mechanisms that operate the theaters of existence. They see everything in one sweeping picture and touch upon God Himself... but only for the briefest instant. Then the truth escapes them, remaining only as a bitterly ecstatic memory. In their quest to regain understanding, they achieve lesser insights that are still far beyond the reach of other vampires: glimpses of the future, the true nature of the soul, the grand scheme of nations and pontiffs alike, the portents in the very stars. It all pales in comparison, but it keeps their quest for perfect, maddening apotheosis alive in their unliving hearts.

The clan's progenitor was Malkav, whom Cainites remember as the oracle and prophet of the third generation. Some legends say that Malkav delivered enlightenment to Caine but failed to warn him of the depredations of his brothers and cousins in the Second City. As punishment, Caine cursed Malkav and his progeny with a madness so great they could no longer share their wisdom. Others claim that the curse was unintentional, that it came when the Third Mortal shared his memories of the face of God at the moment of his own curse, shattering his grandchild's mind. Still others claim that Caine baptized Malkav in his own blood, damning him thus.

It is something of a game among scholars of Nod to exchange theories about Malkav's affliction, but few dare ask the Madmen themselves what they believe. In truth, the clan as a whole welcomes its so-called lunacy because, at the very least, madness is a vibrant, creative force in their otherwise dead and decaying world. To them it is not a block on their insights, but the cause of them. Even beyond that dynamic seed in their breast, madness also unites the clan in a manner few outsiders can understand. Their shared connection with

the mind-boggling architecture of Creation creates a common frame of reference and some of the Madmen are said to communicate in a secret language all their own. The problem is that this vision is fractured and too great to envision at once, so all Malkavians see different portions of the picture at the same time. That is why they prize the perception of others, if only to gain a sense of the landscape beyond their ken.

Malkavians are social and often passionate creatures. Some say that madness is nothing without company, but the truth is that Malkavians appreciate insight and adore unique perceptions. Perhaps this is why they flock to causes as easily as they abandon them, or why they enter seemingly fruitless alliances. Unfortunately, while the Malkavians love company, few appreciate their companionship for extended periods of time. Certainly, an ambitious lord or lady might tolerate an evening with them, gleaning some greater truth to their predicament, but even that can be a distressing experience. Indeed, it is rarely clear — until it is far too late — whether an individual Malkavian has crossed the boundary between dark sage and fiendish devil. Determining the polarities of a Madman is like taking flame to different powders, trying to determine which is the incense and which the explosive. Still, what frightens Cainites most is not the Malkavians' own nature, but that they can share



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: They try to impose order on the night and fail at every turn. Who are the true madmen, I wonder?

The Low Clans: Far truer to the gifts of their blood than those supposedly above them. Most are still blind to the truth that lies within, however.

Gangrel: We envy their ability to commune with the Beast within us all. Pity they're too busy bellowing at it to listen properly.

Lasombra: They fill their existence with all these webs, then grow upset at us when we clear them away. Pray tell how are they supposed to see anything otherwise?

Tremere: All that effort to venture somewhere, and they haven't an inkling where. Never has there been a brood so blinded of purpose and so dedicated to remaining blind.

their insanity through their Discipline of Dementation. It takes great courage or desperation to court a Malkavian's attention for long.

The history of Clan Malkavian is, therefore, a pendulum swinging between respect and terror, between status and banishment. When they are in the graces of their brethren, Malkavians are the advisors, seers, oracles and shamans of Cainite society. Inevitably, tolerance turns to wariness, then fear. The latest iteration of this story saw the Madmen fall from their mantle as one of the leading bloodlines of Imperial Rome. Now, they bear the stigma of having cursed that great enterprise, and they are said to be the agents of unholy forces. At best, Cainites in the Dark Medieval pity and offer charity to the supposedly feeble and infirm clan. At worst, the Malkavians must face persecution, torture and even destruction.

Sobriquet: Madmen

Appearance: Malkavians do not offer the Embrace based on any social standing or regional concerns. They offer the Kiss to whoever possesses a grain of madness or insight. Therefore, Malkavians can be of any description, any race, any class, from the wild seer on the outskirts of a hamlet to the local midwife who feeds newborns her vitae.

Haven and Prey: Malkavians flock to ruin, be it the village devastated by plague, the burnt church, the forgotten abbey or the decrepit building in the most vile slum. The interiors of such havens differ, however, according to the lunacy afflicting the Malkavian. Some havens are repositories of animal and human bones, others are adorned with charcoal-written script, still others are pristine and Spartan-bare. Some of these same idiosyncrasies manifest in their choice of hunting stock, but many Malkavians see their depredations as serving to punish the wicked. Few agree as to who is and is not wicked, however.

The Embrace: Most Cainites treat the Embrace as an honor doled out only to those who prove themselves worthy. Malkavians see the fledgling as the gift, bettering the sire and clan. Only those who have the seed of lunacy within them —



expressed or not — can qualify, and Malkavians can seek for decades without hearing the elusive siren's call of the mad soul crying for dark release. The Madmen prize individuals who are possessed of keen intuition, madness, vision or whimsical insight. Their Embrace is a cause of celebration for sire and clan alike, for it offers another piece to their fractured mosaic.

Character Creation: Malkavians are a fluid lot, blessed with a maddening disparity of outlooks and aspirations — and therefore Natures and Demeanors. Most Malkavians possess high Mental Attributes and a proficiency in Talents, though some are adept at Social Attributes as well. Backgrounds vary by the individual, but Status is rare (but hardly unknown). There are Malkavians on every major road, although the Road of Heaven is the most popular.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Dementation, Obfuscate

Weaknesses: It is said that Caine offered Malkav the maddening truth, a secret the Antediluvian forever shares with his progeny through his sanguine genealogy. Therefore all Malkavians automatically possess one derangement (chosen at character creation) that they can never overcome, even after spending Willpower. For more on derangements, see p. 261.

Organization Once, all Malkavians belonged to one of a variety of secret orders that taught the most arcane insights carried in their mad blood. Now these *ordo* are few, and they hide behind layers of mortal cults and other fronts. The majority of Madmen now exist free of their hierarchy and guidance, bonded only by a loose sense of affinity with their clanmates. They turn to road and coterie to provide the structure they need to keep a handle on their quicksilver minds.

Quote: *Mad? Are we mad, milord, or is it, perhaps, that our truth is maddening?*

NOSFERATU

Of all the clans, the Nosferatu feel the Curse of Caine most acutely. Their Embrace is an agonizing experience as the clan's tainted blood burns through their dying veins, twisting their bodies into monstrous aspects. Each and every member of Clan Nosferatu is remade into a hideous, deformed horror. Once the change is complete — which can take up to a week — not even the blind mistake them for human, for many of them also have a dire stench that offends God-fearing nostrils. A mere glance at their terrible mien confirms that they are evil, creatures of sin incarnate, forevermore set apart from humanity.

Some go mad once they realize what has happened and have to be destroyed by their sires. The rest find different ways to cope, but all are changed by their traumatic experience. Many newly sired Nosferatu blame the vampire that created them for their condition, and with good reason, for he chose them for this terrible fate. Although most neonates have to spend a while under the wings of their sire, they seek escape from the monster that made them a monster as soon as they can. These bonds of hatred stretch back to the very first of their line, if the legends are to be believed.

Absimilliard, the founder of the clan, was obsessed with beauty — both his own and that of others. Some say that he led the rebellion against the Second Generation, Caine's own childer. Others say that he won the affection of a mortal with whom Caine was fascinated. Whatever the cause of the Dark Father's anger, Absimilliard was cursed with the removal of that which he held most dear. His ugliness was a torment to him. Even worse was the constant rejection from beautiful people, including his lover, whenever he approached them. The first Nosferatu turned his anger on his childer, and he is rumored, even now, to hunt them through his pawns.

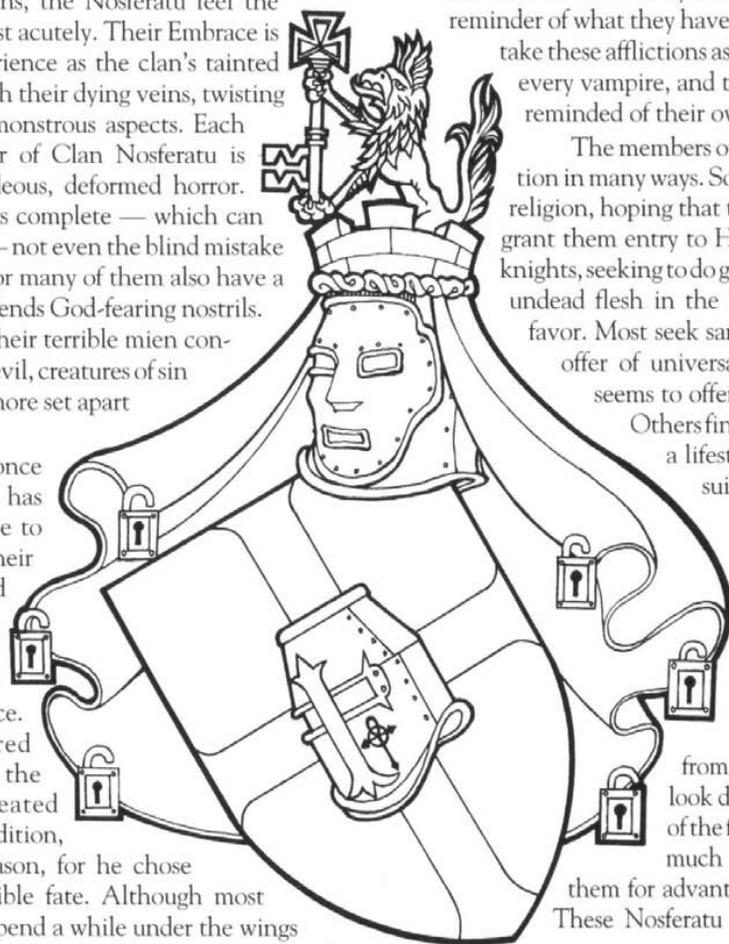
Vampires of this clan have learned the ways of concealment to mask their curse. They are masters of hiding, deception and subterfuge, both supernatural and mundane. While some of their abilities allow them to appear normal for a while, the pain that surges through them when they were

Embraced never entirely leaves them. It remains a constant reminder of what they have become. Many other Cainites take these afflictions as a visible sign of the evil within every vampire, and they shun them to avoid being reminded of their own damnation.

The members of the clan deal with their affliction in many ways. Some seek solace or penitence in religion, hoping that the Lord will forgive them and grant them entry to Heaven. They quest as Cainite knights, seeking to do good deeds, or they mortify their undead flesh in the hope of winning their Lord's favor. Most seek sanctuary in the Church, whose offer of universal forgiveness through Christ seems to offer the best path to redemption.

Others find the heresies of the age to offer a lifestyle and a set of strictures that suits them better.

Others seek to hide from society, living among the leprous and the diseased and making themselves of some use to Cainite society by bartering and trading the information that they obtain as they watch, listen and learn from the shadows. The High Clans look down on these wretches, yet few of the first cursed ever admit quite how much they have come to depend on them for advantage in the War of the Princes. These Nosferatu often gather in small groups,



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Oh, so high and mighty until they need something from us. Then they grovel in the mud with the rest of us.

The Low Clans: They are as outcast as we are, yet too self-obsessed to realize it. That gives us an advantage.

Lasombra: Each one is obsessed with herself, but most are aware that information is the best coin.

Toreador: Their pretty faces let them play with the kine. How can they forget how their playthings would run if their lord's true nature was revealed?

Tremere: Aspirant monsters who must be taught a lesson in what it means to be a vampire.

Tzimisce: They understand what we are, and they even try to make themselves like us.

whose actual numbers they do their best to conceal from their vampiric neighbors.

The last group sees their visages as an irrefutable sign of damnation. Their souls are corrupted beyond redemption, and they make no effort to win the favor of a God who has so callously abandoned them. Instead, they become monsters seeking revenge on living and Cainite society in whatever ways they can.

Sobriquet: Lepers

Appearance: The defining characteristic of the Nosferatu is their utter ugliness. It can take many forms: anything from a twisted, deformed body with hunches, misshapen or displaced limbs and distended head through to leathery skin, pustulant boils and perpetual gaping wounds. A few of the more religiously inclined members of the clan take the latter to be a sign of the suffering that God wishes them to undergo, mirroring the stigmata of Christ. Some deformities are passed from sire to child, creating distinct families of Nosferatu. Most seek to conceal their bodies as best they can beneath all-encompassing robes, often made of rough cloth, like those worn by mortal lepers.

Haven and Prey: Each member of the clan finds herself a lair as far from the mainstream of society as she can. Abandoned, run-down or plague-ridden settlements are a favorite, as are the Roman-era sewers and underground passages of the few cities that possess such luxuries. Many lurk in the farthest and least-used parts of monasteries or castles. A few choose leper colonies, so that their deformities don't stand out from the crowd. The down-trodden, infirm or mad are the clan's usual prey, although some religious members of the clan choose to feed from those who they feel don't live up to their particular creed.

The Embrace: Some Nosferatu choose those who are already deformed, outcast or diseased in the hope that their mindset will be suited to the rigors of the Embrace. Others have

found that people who are bitter about their lot in life adapt more quickly. Still others — particularly those who give themselves over to their monstrous natures — choose the beautiful, successful or high-placed for the Embrace, delighting in their horror and madness as they try to come to terms with their new condition.

Character Creation:

Mental Attributes are dominant in most of the clan, although Nosferatu warriors and thugs whose primary Attributes are Physical do exist. Most of the clan values Knowledges over Talents or Skills. Contacts are quite common in the clan, but Allies and Retainers are exceptionally rare. The clan is split between those that walk the Roads of Heaven, of Sin and of the Beast. The Road of Humanity is rare to the point of non-existence among the Lepers.

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Obfuscate, Potence

Weaknesses: All the Nosferatu are left deformed and hideous for the rest of their unlives. Their Appearance is automatically rated 0, and it can never be improved through any means whatsoever (they even lose the automatic dot that all characters get in Attributes).

All rolls involving Appearance automatically fail.

Organization: Despite their appearance and uneasy relationships with their sires, most Nosferatu are surprisingly social creatures, at least with each other. This may well be because only other members of the clan don't judge them by their appearance. Many gather in small groups and freely exchange information with each other. Religious Nosferatu usually maintain contact with others of a similar faith to encourage each other in their efforts.



RAVNOS

Followers of vice and discord, misunderstood members of a society that cannot grasp the potency of the Beast that drives them, Clan Ravnos's compulsion toward sin breeds distrust wherever its members travel. They are known by many, welcomed by few and trusted by almost none. Travelers by necessity, they hurry from city to city, rarely taking the time to build permanent connections or settlements. This makes the Ravnos ideal traders. Goods, information, secrets — everything has a price, and these itinerant vampires know exactly what to ask in exchange.

The origins of the Ravnos are shrouded in mystery, even to the clan members themselves. Those who now reside in Europe trace their lineage to a series of waves of immigration from the eastern lands beyond Persia, dating as far back as Alexander the Great. Before that, history fades into legend. While those initial waves of Ravnos have broken into several distinct *jati*, or castes, lightly scattered across Europe, Africa and the Middle East, most agree that their founder still rests in those far-off eastern lands, perhaps in India, having been banished there after the Great Flood.

In the last century, a trickle of Ravnos has arrived from those same far-off lands, however, and they weave a wholly different tale about the clan's ancestry, spreading stories of a founder who was, at the very least, a great hero, and perhaps even a god. But these newer Ravnos have been exceedingly critical of their more established clan members, and little information is forthcoming. Just what part of this tale is truth and what part myth is unclear, as befits all tales of a clan condemned as Charlatans.

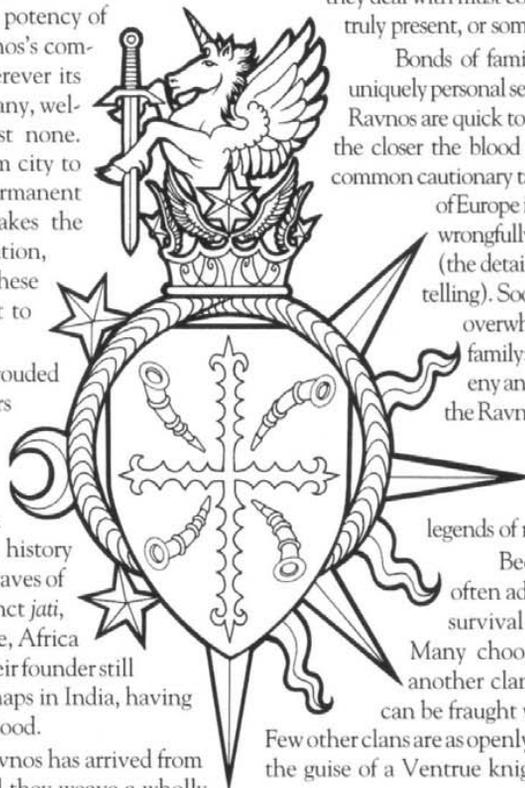
The weakness of the clan causes great discomfort to the high-blooded lords of Europe. Each Ravnos is addicted to sin, and the clan as a whole is accused of spreading chaos through the lands in which they wander. But foolish indeed are those who mistake the Ravnos's tendency to indulge in the whispered urgings of their Beast as an inability to maintain self-control. An upstart prince might be tempted to banish the Ravnos from his lands, but the tales of the consequences for doing so are a matter of legend among the High Clans. Banishment serves only to bring the wrath of the victim's *jati* upon whoever was pretentious enough to attempt such a feat.

In the best of times, the Ravnos are a disjointed unit, and they distrust one another nearly as much as others distrust them. Eastern and Western Ravnos oppose each other with equal vehemence, and the philosophies espoused by each frequently clash and cause tempers to flare. Wherever they go, their (not unwarranted) reputation for trickery precedes them. Many Ravnos excel in chicanery, and those

they deal with must consider whether what they are seeing is truly present, or some fantastic deception.

Bonds of family and caste, however, do provide a uniquely personal sense of security for members of the clan. Ravnos are quick to defend members of their own *jati*, and the closer the blood relation, the swifter the response. A common cautionary tale among the seneschals and scourges of Europe is that of a Ravnos who was banished or wrongfully punished by a high-blooded prince (the details of who and where change with each telling). Soon thereafter, the prince found himself overwhelmed by "requests" from the victim's family: her sire, her fellow childer, her progeny and so on. Open warfare is not the style of the Ravnos, but they can bring a city to ruin just as easily by corrupting it from the inside. Leaders must carefully weigh the risks of a Ravnos guest against the legends of retribution for expulsion.

Because of their reputation, Ravnos often adopt one of two distinct strategies for survival and success amid Cainite feudalism. Many choose to masquerade as a member of another clan. While existing in such a position can be fraught with dangers, the benefits are many. Few other clans are as openly distrusted as the Ravnos, and taking the guise of a Ventrué knight-errant or a wandering Toreador



STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: Such a pity they are always hurrying us out of their domains. We could prove invaluable to them if only they would learn to trust what we offer. They must realize that the illusions they build around them are far greater than any we could provide.

The Low Clans: It seems like such a poor distinction, this separation into High and Low, for all must be watched with equal impunity, and the latter certainly trust us no more than the former.

Gangrel: They hate us with a rage left over from their time in East. Beware their rage, but thank Caine they are easily deceived.

Toreador: They publicly spurn us as any other clan, but get one alone, and they quickly become covetous of what we have to offer. A good courtly secret and a bolt of silk can buy off the best of them.

Ventrué: Some among us whisper of shadowy dealings with the Normans and their prince, but don't be fooled into thinking Warlords will tolerate us any more than any other clan.

troubadour leaves the Charlatan free to pursue his vices discreetly. Because discovery means certain retribution, some vampires spend decades or even centuries building a network of people who support their false claims. Others spurn this approach, however, along with the very idea that any Ravnos should be forced to hide who they are. They act openly as traders, messengers, spies and mercenaries.

The dangerous trickery of the clan is made most manifest in their Discipline of Chimerstry. This art — which few outsiders understand — allows the Ravnos to conjure illusions big and small and twist perceptions as an artist would play. The use of Chimerstry brings its own dangers however, and tales of Charlatans who have deceived themselves are passed around the *jati*.

Sobriquet: Charlatans

Appearance: Those Ravnos who are open about their clan ties often purposefully dress in a manner to underline their exotic nature. Their attire stems from Indian or Mediterranean origins, and their clothing includes rare materials and dyes from the East. Vibrant purples, blues and golds figure prominently in the garb of this clan, and the designs are loose and less restricting than those of the European nobility. Those masquerading as something other, either briefly or for a period of years, dress as suits their role.

Haven and Prey: The Ravnos's reputation for sin and revelry is not wholly unwarranted, and they are often found in places where there are opportunities for corruption and pleasure. Because they are primarily travelers, many seek out cities where there is a large market to haven within during their stay. Port cities serve especially well for this purpose, though Ravnos can be found inland as well in smaller numbers. Large cities also allow them to disappear quickly should their presence become suddenly less than desired by a local prince. They may feed on mortal family members when they travel, but when a larger base of prey becomes available — within towns and cities — those of the lower classes serve just as well.

The Embrace: While a good number of Ravnos are Embraced due to their successes in life, the choice varies from sire to sire as to what qualities would make a good child. Many look for mortals with a distinct sense of trickery and a desire to travel, but others seek out those who are particularly virtuous in life, believing that a person can never know virtue until they have truly experienced sin. Some from the East desire to keep the bloodline pure, but mortals of all origins have been Embraced into the clan in Europe.

Character Creation: Ravnos must either be able to convince the locals of

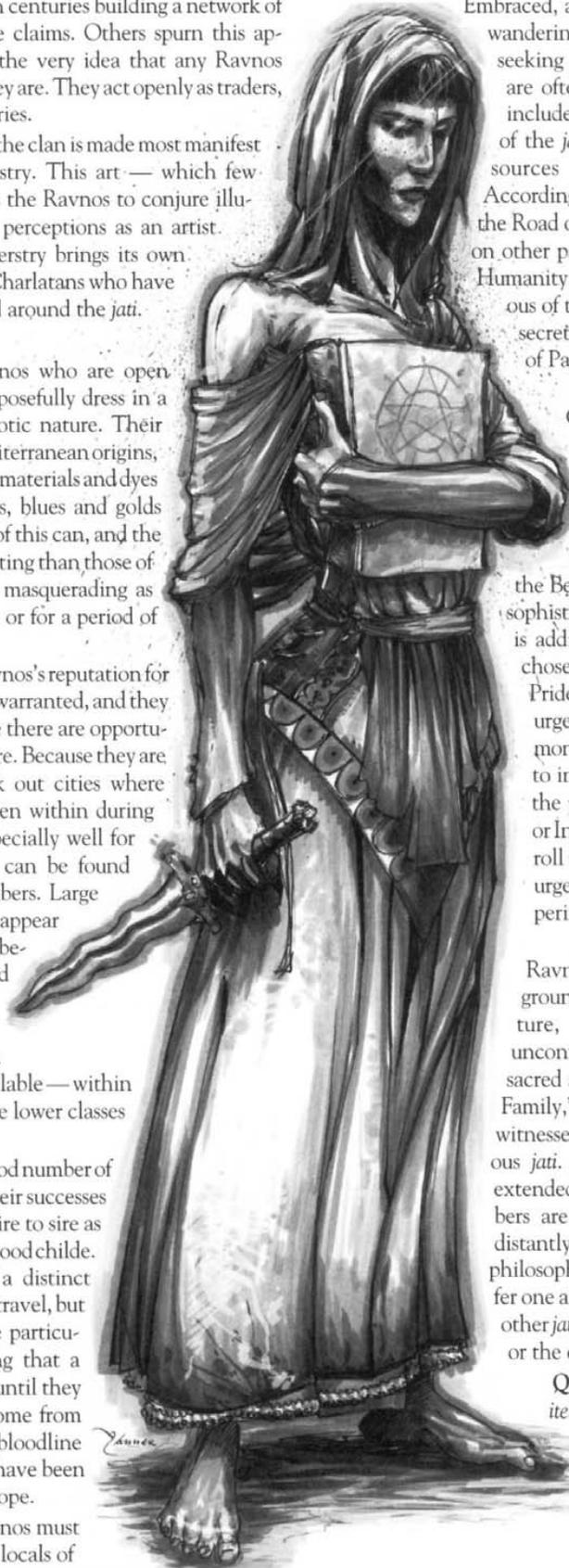
their sincerity or trick them into a false confidence, so Social Attributes are usually primary. Drifters of all kinds are Embraced, and good concepts may vary from wandering musicians to local guild masters seeking to expand their territory. Talents are often primary. Typical Backgrounds include Allies and Mentor (for members of the *jati*), as well as Contacts and Resources (for traders and their goods). According to most rumors, all Ravnos follow the Road of Sin, but there are, in fact, many on other paths, most especially the Road of Humanity. The most traditional and dangerous of the Charlatans are said to follow a secret faith of their own, called the Road of Paradox.

Clan Disciplines: Animalism, Chimerstry, Fortitude

Weaknesses: The Ravnos Beast is a seductive monster, not the mindless hunger of other vampires. While Ravnos are still subject to frenzy and Röttschreck, the Beast also pushes them toward more sophisticated indulgences. Every Ravnos is addicted to some sort of sin or vice, chosen at the time of character creation. Pride, avarice, lust, thievery or any other urges to use and exploit others are common. When the character is in a position to indulge her vice, she does so unless the player succeeds on a Self-Control or Instinct roll (difficulty 6). Even if the roll is successful, the character feels the urge and may even hear her Beast whispering in her head.

Organization: As wanderers, the Ravnos have little time to develop firmly grounded contacts or holds. Their structure, like their society, is fluid and unconventional. The only rule that is sacred among the Ravnos is "Protect the Family," a directive that is most commonly witnessed through the actions of the various *jati*. These *jati* function as a sort of extended family for the Ravnos. The members are usually tied by blood, however distantly, and they often espouse similar philosophies. In addition, they willingly offer one another protection and aid, helping other *jati* members in matters such as travel or the exchange of information.

Quote: *Come, My Lord, this exquisitely crafted dagger must be worth at least 20 drachmas to you... after all, I would hate for you to find it in your back should I sell it to your brother down the street. What? You didn't*



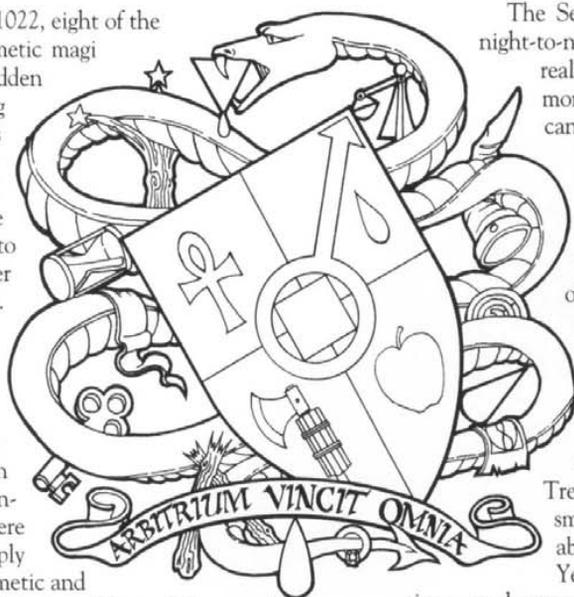
TREMERE

On a chill, cloudy night in 1022, eight of the world's most accomplished Hermetic magi gathered in a hidden room in a hidden castle in Transylvania, stumbling and bleary-eyed from a sleepless week of preparations; poised to conclude a ritual which, they had been promised, would put the Philosopher's Stone — the key to true immortality and limitless power — within their grasp at long last. The promise was kept (after a fashion), but their deed plunged their august house of scholars forever into vilest infamy, damning them as vampires through the usurpation of the Blood of Caine. Even some among that cursed eight wonder if even their leader, great Tremere himself, realized how fate would ply him as her tool to alter both Hermetic and Cainite history. They wondered if they would spend the rest of their hunted, harried existences scrambling to escape the consequences of this one fatal act. But then, rushing in where angels fear to tread has always been the very hallmark of House Tremere.

The two centuries since have seen bitter theorizing from insider and outsider alike. *Is magic truly dying in the world, as Tremere and his seven acolytes said, or did they believe so only because their lust for eternal youth and might outstripped the supply? Did they not know, or not care, what fate they dragged their brothers and sisters toward? Are they improvising their moves now, or is it all part of some vast incomprehensible plot... and if so, whose?*

All anyone knows is that the Tremere grow bolder the harder they are pressed. A once-great house of magi has yielded to a vampiric bloodline — the Hermetic Order banished them in 1202, and the resultant war doomed their forlorn human remnant to Embrace or execution by their Damned brethren. Their Tzimisce foes, from whom they stole the Blood but who wavered for just a few precious years too many, are fought to a standstill. Spells and strange beasts drive them back from the heart of the infection they would cauterize. Although the Tremere have never *officially* admitted to butchering the Antediluvian Saulot and guzzling his heart's-blood (thus making themselves into a clan), few elder Cainites have failed to notice his progeny dwindling just as the ambitious newcomers wax in power.

And now these Usurpers, despite (or because of) their eternal besiegement, cherish a fresh ambition: a place at the Cainite table. In this task they face their steepest odds yet. Even those vampires who don't personally hate the Tremere treat them as unclean. The wizards' hands are stained with sacrilege, and the taint could well rub off. Many a clutch of young Tremere, suddenly helpless as the Embrace robs them of their mortal magics, has been discovered and slaughtered. Still other fledglings have been dragged before princely thrones to answer for their ignorance with their unlives.



The Seven — Tremere's seconds and the night-to-night leaders of his House — quickly realized that they must placate their fellow monsters, must learn the rules of this arcane little culture and at least appear to play by them. Surely the Tremere have much to offer. True, their new blood-arts of Thaumaturgy, however effective against the primitive Tzimisce *koldun*, fall miserably short of the arts they once wielded as breathing warlocks. True, they feel more alone, more vulnerable than they ever have. But no *outsider* ever need know that. Wheedling and making oneself "useful" to others' ambitions does not come easily to the proud Tremere soul. Many chafe at having to smile while Ventrue lordlings use and abuse their gifts with seeming impunity. Yet they bear it in the name of despera-

tion — and enterprise. In private, they scoff. If they must bear the Usurper epithet, they should earn it.

Unfortunately, neither the clan's tightening hierarchy nor the partial blood oath each Tremere pledges to his superiors has brought the unity the Seven desire, though they only have three of their own to blame: Goratrix the Sleepless, lightning-rod for the clan's radical elements; Etrius the Reluctant, whose faction plays clan conscience; and wise Meerlinda, derided as a mere conciliator even as she assembles her own base of support. And there are deeper rifts yet: between those who welcomed immortality and those who feel betrayed and enslaved, between authoritarians and champions of wizardly autonomy, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Still, most Tremere understand that the rest of the world hates them far more than they could ever hate each other. In the face of external threat or scrutiny, even the deadliest rivals close ranks.

Sobriquet: Usurpers

Appearance: Most Tremere consider themselves truth-seekers and dress the part: scholarly robes in sturdy fabrics, a deliberately

STEREOTYPES

The High Clans: We need patronage, and even if they're too damned blind and hypocritical to admit it, a lot of them need us too — particularly among the Ventrue. That's all that's keeping us on this side of death.

The Low Clans: Even they sling muck at us; but they also know we'll not stay in the muck long. And I think they already hate us for that, even more than their lords do.

The Tzimisce: When they first descended, we had no idea why they thought us such dire enemies. Now we know enough about them to agree wholeheartedly.

The Salubri: Are you *sure* it was alone?

scant wardrobe. (Clan coffers overflow, but individual luxury is considered frivolous.) Tremere regents tend to keep themselves, their apprentices and their chantries austerely. Usurpers serving as Cainite liaisons, however, might wear anything from a court-conjurer's gaudy robes to the silks and ermines of nobility. Apparent ages vary widely, a result of the conversion. Tremere can hail from anywhere in Christendom or its bordering regions, though the Germanic and Slavic lands are presently the clan's ethnic center.

Haven and Prey: Nearly all Tremere dwell in secret houses of thaumaturgic study called chantries, usually alongside a handful of their clanmates, though regional headquarters can be larger. Vampirism is forcing chantries into the cities, where, because of their pariah status, Tremere usually get stuck with the dregs: slums, ghettos, foreign quarters and their often underfed inhabitants. Some officially unacknowledged chantries can't even claim that much, and the draining nature of blood-magic complicates things further. Luckily, clan culture discourages gourmands. Many chantries keep a "larder" of mortal prisoners and simply forbid their apprentices to risk hunting.

The Embrace: Despite the proximity of enemies old and new, Tremere still recruit furtively from occultists' cabals, Gnostic cults, cathedral schools, universities, abbeys, nunneries — anywhere the life of the mind is honored. Recruits of all faiths are, however, expected to discard what the Hellenic-influenced Tremere think of as the unenlightened aspects of their creeds, especially since the conversion to vampirism. Some regents also create their own mortal secret societies for use as feeding and recruiting grounds. And there are occasional Embraces of Hermetic magi who either looked too promising to pass up or stuck their noses somewhere unfortunate.

Pragmatism rules the seemingly more outré choices: knights for the "Hungarian war" and courtiers or even the odd prelate for diplomatic duty. Such folk are seduced or ambushed as necessary. Regardless of background, the ideal initiate combines a blazing intellect with a hunger for secrets and, above all, a freebooting spirit. Other Cainites, deceived by the fusty exterior, may not recognize until he's too late the scope of a Tremere's daring.

Character Creation: Most Tremere follow the Road of Humanity (or occasionally the Road of Sin), being either ignorant or leery of alternatives. Mental

Attributes and Knowledges are usually primary, although concept might dictate otherwise — e.g., warriors, diplomats, initiates with a magical "wild talent" but no formal education. Mentor is the most common individual Background, but chantries may enjoy considerable pooled Backgrounds.

Clan Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Thaumaturgy

Weaknesses: Tremere culture encourages obedience to House leadership, and that obedience is augmented by the forced partial blood oath — one drink of the combined vitae of the Seven — that each new acolyte must undertake. Tremere superiors thus have a -1 difficulty to Dominate their clanmates of lower rank. Perhaps more dangerous still, each Tremere surrenders a vial of his own blood to his immediate superior, and the High Chantry at Ceoris is rapidly assembling its own exhaustive collection of Tremere blood. The blood magic of Thaumaturgy makes the lesser Tremere a potential target for dark rites of punishment.

Organization: Out of a desperate need for coherence (and, supposedly, for the sake of a massive cabalistic working) the Seven are slowly formalizing the House's old hierarchy into something reverentially dubbed the Pyramid. Eventually, they hope to have seven apprentices under each chantry regent, seven regents under each regional lord, seven lords under each of the Seven, and thence to Great Tremere himself — who rests in Ceoris, the High Chantry and greatest fortress of the House, located high in the Transylvanian Alps.

Ascending these degrees is a labyrinthine business, requiring feats both mystical and mundane. With all their looming perils, many Tremere still find the nightly tasks of chantry establishment and survival far more important than impressing some remote superior. But the clan's initiatory oath declares death the price of open defiance, and ranking magi have the means to carry out that threat.

Quote: *It pains me to disagree with your Ladyship's privy advisers, since they have doubtless*





BOLTON 02

Once more, Zoe was on the run.

The priests had found her hunting in the streets of Troyes, a man's blood on her lips and his sleeping form at her feet. The fact that the man had been as much a monster as she — a sinner who did more than covet his neighbor's wife and daughter — seemed of no matter to these supposed men of God.

The first priest had been easy to elude. He looked like a country friar unaccustomed to an agglomeration of people like that at the great fair, even at night. For just a moment, even Zoe herself had believed that the old mule was rearing in its makeshift stall. The friar had recoiled in fright of the blow to come from the beast's hindquarters, closing his eyes like a boy. By the time he opened them, to find the beast sleeping quietly, the "devilish harlot" he had been chasing was long gone.

Father Anatole would not be happy that she had been seen, of course, but he would understand. "Almighty God," he was wont to say, "brings us all to our fates. When hardship strikes, it is but another test of our faith."

The second priest, however, was more of a problem. This one came flanked by a knight who bore both the cross of one who has gone to Outremer and the seashell of a pilgrim to Santiago. This soldier was no inexperienced squire, and the priest he guarded was no parish fop. He was a Dominican, Zoe thought, for his garments were deep scarlet under his traveling cloak. A crucifix of gold hung around his neck.

The problem with this priest and knight was that they wouldn't go away. For every turn she took or every distraction she created, the pair seemed to have an instinct to follow the right path. They might stray for a second, but they continued on the right course, as if following some unseen path. A chill ran through Zoe's already cold body as the fear rose up inside her. "God guides them," she whispered to no one in particular. To rid herself of them, she would have to do something permanent. But these were men of God....

All men are sinners. The thought came unbidden, from the deepest part of her unliving soul. *And those who sin in the name of God are the greatest sinners of all.*

And they had sinned in God's name, hadn't they? They hunted her, a child of God and Cain, a follower of the Road of Heaven, because of her nature. A nature God himself had imposed on her as a penance. *Would they challenge God's workings?* That would be unthinkable. The gravest of cardinal sins. Pride writ large and apocalyptic. To deny God? How *dare* they? *To let them continue would be the sin.*

The priest and crusader never saw her circle back. Their deaths were neither quick nor painless.



CHAPTER THREE: THE ROADS

And if they think me a god for my power, I shall not
correct them.

And if they offer me that which is first and best of all
they possess,

I shall not refuse their gifts, nor cast them out.

—The Erciyes Fragments. II (Lilith)

Within each of the Damned lies the power they call the Beast. It is the unending hunger and limitless savagery that gnaws at their soul, night after night. They must learn to master the Beast or else go mad, becoming little more than ravening monsters until they are put down by their own kind like rabid dogs. In order to stand against the nightly demands of the Beast, vampires embrace a variety of philosophies, beliefs they can hold on to and build a strong center around, perhaps even paths to greater understanding of their nature and a measure of peace. They call these ways roads (or *viae* in Latin), and through them lies hope, and often power.

The Nature of the Roads

The roads are philosophies, ways of existing and understanding the world, that give their followers a greater sense of self and purpose. As the peasant turns to the sacraments of the Church for solace from the misery of everyday life, so do Cainites look to their roads for solace from the knowledge of what they are, and from the Beast that lurks within each of them. The more strongly devoted to a road he is, the more easily a Cainite can overcome or control the urges of the Beast, but also the more

fanatical the vampire becomes about the road's beliefs, as zealous as a saint... or a martyr.

Although the roads share the common goal of keeping their followers from madness, they each do so in their own way. Some deny the Beast, others seek acceptance and accord with it. Each road focuses on a particular belief, but the individual tenets of the roads vary greatly. Some, such as the Road of Heaven and the Road of Humanity, seek redemption and hope of salvation. Others, such as the Roads of the Beast and of Sin, give in to the Beast as a means of satiating its hunger. Others still, such as the Road of Kings, focus on the superiority of the Children of Caine over the mortal herd. Each road serves the purpose of keeping the Beast at bay, but that is perhaps the only thing upon which they agree. They are like differing religions, often quarrelsome and competing for influence over Cainite hearts and souls.

The Order of the Roads

Many neonates focus on the parallels between roads and religions, and there is indeed a great deal of faith and belief involved in the *viae*. But the roads are neither as organized nor as powerful as the Church, no matter how much their adherents might wish otherwise. Each road is ordered according to its nature, and some are more organized than others. As a general rule, roads that teach adherence to an established code of social morality and the repression of the Beast's urges are more organized and hierarchical than the ones that guide followers to be true to their personal honor and instincts. (These distinctions, in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, are often expressed in terms of traits called Virtues, as explained on page 158.)

THE FIRST ROADS

Cainites scholars and elder priests believe that the Road of the Beast and the Road of Humanity are the most basic, and oldest, roads of the undying. Indeed, these moral paths begin with an instinctual desire to hold on to the grounding of humanity or to embrace the savage nature of the Beast. The other roads and paths are said to build upon this most basic, most instinctual decision. Therefore, all vampires are said to have walked one of these two roads however briefly. From there, instructions from a sire or teacher and personal experience can lead the childe to adopt another road or reaffirm her original choice. Even if she stays on the road to which she first was drawn, doing so becomes a choice rather than a gut reaction. No vampire can long walk even the so-called "root roads" for long without choosing to act in a way that promotes their virtues. Ferals and Prodigals face just as many moral choices, and they must practice their road as fervently as any other vampires.

Organized roads often have different sects, based around divergent paths or the political ambitions of particular Cainites. Therefore, the roads are even less united than the domains of the princes, but those Cainites with high positions within a road's hierarchy still wield considerable power and influence, much like the high-ranking clergy of the Church.

An adherent's progress along a road over time is one thing that determines status, but it is also a matter of politics and social maneuvering, like anything in Cainite society. The leaders and teachers of a road are usually the most advanced in it, but not always, and every road has its prophets, zealots, heretics and divergent sects. If any of the roads were able to come together into a single order, it would wield power in Cainite society nearly equal to that of the Church in mortal society. This is usually enough to unite the other roads (and various princes) against the possibility.

Walking the Road

The roads are difficult paths to follow, but they are necessary if Cainites are to resist the siren call of the Beast within them. Following a road is a process that begins not long after a vampire is Embraced, and it continues throughout her immortal existence unless she meets her end, falls prey to the Beast or achieves the legendary goal of Golconda.

Initiates

Newly Embraced vampires choose a particular road to follow. Some neonates make this choice with a full understanding of the implications, after their sires teach them the ways of Cainite belief. This technique is the preferred one among the High Clans and some of the Low, but it is hardly universal. More likely, the childe has little detailed understanding of roads or may even be blissfully unaware of them at all. Her own instincts guide her to a broad *via* she can follow. Such Cainites follow their roads out of blind faith or instinct, clinging to whatever beliefs they can to ward off the Beast. Proper instruction in a road is one of the reasons princes insist on controlling the right to create childer. Caitiff left to their own devices too often degenerate into monsters and stir up the mortal population against Cainites in general.

However vampires arrive at their chosen road, they all begin as *initiates* of that road. Their first steps are tenuous and cautious. An initiate is not yet fully committed to the road, so he does not yet enjoy the full benefits of it. Initiates, whose convictions have yet to be tested, are less able to hold back the Beast, which makes them more susceptible to the madness of frenzy and the Red Fear. Initiates also do not yet radiate the aura of their road (see p. 161).

Adherents

Initiates remain initiates until they experience a moment of truth, a powerful insight into the nature of the Beast and their chosen road. This comes quickly for some, while others struggle for some time before stumbling upon the insight. Some roads and teachers work to create moments of truth for their initiates while others allow them to happen in their own time. A moment of truth affirms a Cainite's faith in a road. Those who have experienced one can progress from initiate to true *adherent* of the road. Thereafter, moments of truth allow the vampire to advance further along the road (see "Moments of Truth," p. 266).

The majority of Cainites are adherents of their particular roads, having experienced a few moments of truth to strengthen their beliefs. They follow their road's ethics and strictures as a means of holding the Beast at bay each night of their existence. Some fail and let the Beast claim a bit more of them, while others struggle forward along the road. All adherents are equals, at least in terms of their road, although they may differ greatly in terms of status, generation and so forth. Some roads differentiate adherents based on experience, seniority, faithfulness and other qualities.

Teachers and Priests

Some Cainites who are particularly experienced in their road and firm in their beliefs, with many moments of truth behind them, choose to share their insights with others in order to help them along the way. They become teachers and ministers of their road. They may do so deliberately or simply fall into the role as more and more students come seeking advice and guidance. Sires usually teach their childer at least the basics of their own road, if not all the major roads, so that the fledgling can survive in Cainite society. Other teachers take on many students and debate among themselves the ethics and qualities of their road, further refining their knowledge and passing it on to others.

Many roads (particularly the Road of Heaven) have a religious dimension to them, and experienced adherents take the role of priest as well as teacher. These ashen priests, as they are known, minister to the needs of adherents on their road and act as confessors, counselors, teachers and guides. Although some were priests and nuns in life, most find their vocation after the Embrace, ordained by a particular sect of their road to perform their duties. The Road of Heaven has many such sects, while the Road of the Beast has few teachers and fewer priests. The other roads lie somewhere in between.

Ashen priests and other great professors of the roads have some influence in Cainite society, much like mortal priests and scholars do in mortal society. Although the roads have nothing to equal the unity of

the Church, the highest-ranking ashen priests wield power like that of a bishop or even cardinal, and princes and barons seek their favor and support.

Paragons

Above even the greatest teachers of the roads are the paragons, those Cainites who embody the principles of their road in every word and deed. These worthies have endured many years of unlife and faced countless challenges on their path, overcoming them through dedication and strengthening their devotion. Their wisdom is unparalleled, and they are looked upon as the equals of Christian saints and mythic heroes. Mystics claim that some paragons have even attained the legendary state of Golconda, but such paragons are incredibly rare. Indeed, many Cainites doubt that they even exist as anything other than legends and parables created by ashen priests to encourage their flocks and give them examples to emulate.

A paragon is more than just a Cainite with a strong dedication to her road. While some Cainites begin walking their road as initiates full of devotion and vigor, few find that their initial blush of dedication survives years of unliving existence and the temptations of the Beast. For most, their road is a constant struggle, a tug of war between their free will and the Beast. For each step forward, there is at least one step back, creating an uneasy equilibrium. Paragons are those who have undergone many trials and moments of truth and learned from those experiences, using them to strengthen their devotion and deepen their understanding of their path. They manage to continue forward on their road and maintain the high pinnacle to which they have ascended.

Apostates

Sometimes, Cainites turn away from a road they have chosen, but apostasy is a grave decision that risks the character's soul. Either the vampire takes up a new road in short order, or he is lost to the Beast forever.

In either case, apostates turn away from their current road. They no longer honor its principles or follow its traditions. Doing so allows the Beast greater reign over the vampire's heart and soul, and apostates become increasingly dominated by the needs of the Beast. They sneer at their former beliefs and may even become outcasts at court or among other adherents of their road. Most apostates fortunately have the patronage of a teacher or priest of another road to shield them. Those who do not may be declared anathema or even become the prey in a blood hunt.

Eventually, after casting aside most of their road's beliefs, apostates reach what some Cainite scholars call "the jaws of the Beast." Like a drowning man, they can either swim or sink. They must take up a new road, dedicate themselves to it and struggle to regain their

mastery over the Beast, or they surrender and sink into complete savagery and irreversible damnation.

Even apostates who are successful on their new road carry a slight stigma with them, particularly among their former fellows, but changing roads is not considered a crime. Still, relatively few Cainites choose to change their road once they become adherents. Those who commit apostasy more than once are looked upon with suspicion; they possess extraordinary strength of will, but little strength of character, making them dangerous.

Excommunication

Even rarer than those who turn their backs on their chosen road are those Cainites banished from their road by an elder or teacher, barred from its sacraments and made anathema to their fellow adherents. Not all roads practice excommunication as such, and it is never invoked lightly, but influential priests and teachers of a road have the power to declare an adherent outlaw, and groups of them can even banish one of their own.

The excommunicate is cut off from all involvement with the road, its rites and its followers. Anyone associating with or giving aid to an excommunicate is likely to suffer the same fate. Although they can continue to practice the rites of their road on their own, excommunicates often begin to degenerate without the support of their fellow adherents, causing them to become apostates and seek another road, or else fall into the clutches of the Beast forever.

Therefore, excommunication is a serious matter, since it may condemn the banished to the Beast. Most consider it close to a blood hunt in severity, while some consider it worse. A swift Final Death is often kinder than slow degeneration into a monster. Such is particularly true on the rare occasions when a vampire is outlawed from Cainite society in general and no teacher or priest of any road will take him in. Powerful ashen priests wield the threat of excommunication like Cainite princes wield the power of the blood hunt. It is a rarely used, but ever-present threat that hangs over the heads of their enemies.

Forking Paths

Each road has a large number of followers scattered across Europe and beyond, all of whom agree on basic precepts, but who may disagree on some areas. In most cases, these disagreements are reflections of individual experiences, and they do not lead to factionalism so much as personal insights. One follower of the Road of Humanity may believe in mimicking the latest human practices, whereas another may follow the models of previous societies. But real movements do grow up within the roads, either in reaction to a spreading insight or around an

especially charismatic ashen priest. These so-called paths are refinements of the practice of a road and its tenets.

For example, along the Road of Heaven, there is the Path of Divinity, which teaches that Cainites are divinely blessed, touched by the hand of God and set above mortal men. The practice of this path can be seen in the Cainite Heresy, among other places. In stark contrast, however, lies the Path of Penitence, which teaches that God cursed Caine and that those who carry Caine's blood are also cursed for their sins, with their vampiric unlives as penitence. Both paths believe in the power and greater glory of God, but each considers the other's beliefs heretical.

In other cases, the diverse paths of a road exist more or less in harmony (or at least without any overt conflict). The adherents of the Road of the Beast respect the various beliefs of its paths, since they are simply differences in expression of the principles they all hold true. Some paths relate to their road like a diocese to the Church, while others are more akin to holy orders, monasteries or, in some cases, heretical sects.

Rites of the Roads

Each road is more than just a set of beliefs. For a road to be useful, its ideas must be put into practice, and Cainites carry out the sacraments and rites of their roads as part of their nightly existence. These rituals affirm the Cainite's belief in the road and hold the Beast at bay for one more night. Like the sacraments of the Church, rites have an important role in Cainite existence. Without them, their roads would be so much lip service and meaningless philosophy. With them, the roads offer adherents an existence other than the one offered by the Beast. Failing to perform the rites of their road on a regular basis can erode the vampire's moral center, a process known as degeneration (and detailed on page 267). The exact rites vary from one road to another, but they fit into certain categories that are common to all roads.

Prayer

In solitude or together, the adherents of the road recite sacred texts, often passages from the Bible or the so-called Erciyes Fragments, extracts of *The Book of Nod* which have been passed through vampiric circles in recent decades. They offer up prayers of thanks for the will to carry on another night or of thanksgiving for their unliving state. They honor God (or whatever pagan gods they believe in), or they simply meditate on the truths of their road and how their experiences illuminate them. Prayers to ancient figures from legend such as Caine and Lilith are known among some of the Damned. Nightly prayers are an important devotion for the Road of Heaven, and Cainites walking the Road of Humanity sometimes find solace in them, although

they more often prefer Socratic debates and dialogs on the nature of humanity and their own existence.

Study

Cainites often spend time in study and contemplation of the tenets of their road and what those words of wisdom have to teach them. They may study under the guidance of a teacher or priest, alone or in the company of other adherents. Some roads have ancient texts and holy books, penned by their greatest teachers, while others have only the lessons of the world, studied in mortal courts, dry tombs or the darkest wilderness. Time spent in study deepens the adherent's understanding of the road.

Ritual

The roads have numerous rituals, from the Mass of the Road of Heaven to the knighting ceremonies and pomp of the Road of Kings to the ritual combats and hunts of the Road of the Beast. Rituals tie the adherents of a road together, giving them common experiences, and rituals serve to mark important events and reaffirm devotion. During rituals, adherents are most in touch with their road and its precepts, embodying them and carrying them out.

Celebration

While rituals are usually solemn affairs, celebrations are more spontaneous but still honor the beliefs of the road. The Bacchanalian excesses of the Road of Sin and the tournaments and competitions of the Road of Kings are both examples of celebrations, while stories are told about how followers of the Road of the Beast celebrate in

savage contests and wild hunts. Those on the Road of Humanity often find solace and strength in the celebrations of mortal society, affirming the joys of life and its simple pleasures.

Ministry

Some adherents of the roads choose to honor their beliefs by teaching and ministering to the needs of their fellows. Professors and priests are important to the continuance of the roads and for initiating neonates into the ways of the road. They also officiate other rites, such as priests offering the sacraments to the faithful or lords bestowing knighthood and other honors. Ministry and teaching are usually reserved for experienced adherents of a road.

Penance

In addition to preventing degeneration, a road's sacraments offer solace and hope when a follower sins against it. This may be a literal confession and penance like that of the Road of Heaven, or it may be a more metaphorical affirmation of the road's ethics, like an adherent of the Road of Humanity feeling remorse and doing humane deeds or a follower of the Road of the Beast casting off more of civilization's chains to be wild and free.

Penance can take place any time adherents sin against their road, whether or not they degenerate. If they do not degenerate, then they atone for their sin and rededicate themselves to the road. If they do degenerate, then proper (and often lengthy) penance may serve as a way for an increasingly callous adherent to rediscover his moral compass. The guidance of a priest or acolyte at these times can make the difference between recovering from sin and failing before it.



OTHER ROADS

The five roads described in this chapter are not the only ones. They are simply the most prominent and the ones most often followed by the vampires of Europe. There are other minor roads (often seen as paths of the five great roads). Their most common adherents are Cainites of a particular clan or bloodline, who created the road to embody their own precepts and goals. These other roads include the following:

- **The Road of Blood (*Via Sanguinis*):** The mysterious code of the Assamites, handed down to them from their clan's founder. It teaches that the blood of Caine is a dangerous and powerful gift, one that only the followers of this road are truly worthy of. They hunt and diablerize other vampires.

- **The Road of Bones (*Via Ossium*):** Followers of this morbid road are fascinated with the nature of death and the soul, and how the unlife of the Damned relates to both. They study death in all of its forms with a cold detachment, seeking to learn more about its true nature. The road has few adherents, mostly members of the Cappadocian clan, along with a few morbid Tzimisce.

- **The Road of Metamorphosis (*Via Mutationis*):** The esoteric Road of Metamorphosis is the realm of the Tzimisce and their flesh-shaping arts. It preaches a transcendence of

all things, from human compassion to weaknesses of the flesh. The body is only clay to be shaped for the perfection of the spirit. It is a secretive road, open only to the Fiends.

- **The Road of Night (*Via Noctis*):** Cainites on the Road of Night embrace the darkness and all that dwells within it as their birthright. They are also drawn to the darkness within others, seeking out sinners to punish them. *Via Noctis* is most common among the Lasombra, masters of shadows that they are.

- **The Road of Paradox (*Via Paradoxi*):** The bastion of a small and fanatical core of Clan Ravnos, the Road of Paradox is ill understood outside the Charlatans' ranks. Its principle belief is that every living creature has a specific destiny. The Embrace creates a fundamental paradox by removing a person from his destiny, and the only way to compensate for that is to help others reach their destiny or remove from life those who don't follow destiny's dictates.

- **The Road of the Serpent (*Via Serpentina*):** The serpent is a subtle tempter, leading many Cainites to believe that this road is a path of the Road of Sin. But in truth, it is a road of its own, most commonly followed by the Setites. Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, they offer both truth and damnation.



ROAD OF THE BEAST

VIA BESTIAE

Most Cainites struggle against the hunger of the Beast, but the Feral followers of the Road of the Beast accept their destiny as the greatest hunters in the entire world. They see themselves as kin to the wolf and the lion, predators that live in wild places, stalking their prey. They rely on their instincts and animal cunning to help them survive. Abandoning civilization, they give in to hunger and savagery, and satiate the Beast in so doing, giving it no need to overwhelm them. This road may be the oldest among Cainites, harking back to the first nights, when they were the mightiest hunters in the world. The Ferals certainly think so.

Ferals leave the trappings of civilization behind and survive by their own laws and those of the wild. Theirs is a simple existence: When they hunger, they hunt; when they tire, they rest; and when they are threatened, they strike swiftly and without mercy. Doing otherwise is to show weakness, and the weak perish so that the strong may survive. Among the followers of the road is a saying: "The Feral wins every battle but one,

and in that one is death, true and final." But cruelty is no more the way of the Beast than mercy. Ferals kill because they must, not for sport or pleasure. They prefer to kill quickly and cleanly, and only when necessary.

But Ferals give no thought to regret or recrimination. Followers of the Road of the Beast exist in the moment. The past is past, and the future is yet to be written. All that matters is now, satisfying the needs at hand. In the extreme, they do not plan beyond choosing their next meal or finding a safe haven from the coming of day. They typically have no patience for plotting and scheming, preferring to act where others think. This boldness makes

Ferals seem naïve to some Cainites, but they are not fools, and they do not care to be treated as such. They see with the eyes of the hunter. Everything in the world is divided into predator and prey, enemy and ally. There is no room for anything else.

Like true predators, Ferals either walk alone or roam in hunting packs. More elaborate



HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST THE BEAST

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Putting yourself at risk needlessly	Survival is paramount.
9	Not challenging a weak leader	Only the strongest should lead.
8	Killing for any reason other than survival	Murder is a creation of society.
7	Avoiding contact with nature	In nature lies strength. Civilization is soft and weak.
6	Needless torture or cruelty	Only "civilized" folk engage in these things.
5	Making a sacrifice for someone unrelated to you	You owe others nothing.
4	Refusing to kill when important to your survival	Nothing is more important than survival.
3	Failing to defend your territory	Those who do not defend their territory have it taken from them.
2	Showing mercy to an enemy	Mercy is for the weak.
1	Abstaining from feeding when hungry	The Beast must be satisfied.

social bonds seem odd and confining to them, and they hold mortal and Cainite society in contempt. They have as little to do with either as possible. Some even go so far as to reject the legend of Caine and claim that their lineage comes from older, pagan sources. They value their freedom above all else and hate to be caged or bound. They owe fealty to no lord, and they avoid the blood oath at all costs, except when it is freely exchanged as a pledge of loyalty. They live by their wits and their strength and have no need for the softness of civilization. They give their trust and their respect only rarely, but that gift is unconditional when they do. They only obey those they respect and only respect those who prove their strength — of body, mind and spirit.

Ferals are wanderers, so they are found in wild lands everywhere near their prey. They dominate the wilderness where most Cainites fear to tread. They range in appearance from naked savages to fur-clad barbarians to cunning woodsmen. Common belief to the contrary, their Feral nature is not always immediately apparent, though it always comes to the fore, sooner or later.

Naturally, few of the members of the High Clans follow this road that rejects the very social order that guarantees their prestige. Those high-blooded Cainites who do embrace the Feral way are usually outcasts and exiles from the courts of princes and barons. The road is much more popular among the Low Clans, especially the Gangrel, who are most strongly associated with the Road of the Beast in the Cainite mind. Still, members of any clan can follow this road if they are strong enough to survive it.

Sobriquet: Ferals

The Ethics of the Beast:

- Exist in accord with the needs of the Beast.
- Do what you must to survive. No more, no less.
- Mercy is for the weak. Only the strong survive.
- The past is dead, the future is unborn. The moment is yours.
- Respect only the strong, and swear fealty to no one.

Initiation: Many Ferals take up the Road of the Beast on their own, giving in to their animal sides. It is most common among barbarians and rogues who are already outside the

laws of civilization. Some Ferals seek out and teach students the ways of the wild before leaving them to survive on their own, and Feral packs also “adopt” initiates from time to time. Initiation onto the *Via Bestiae* is made up of harsh lessons, intended to strip away novices’ remaining ties to civilization and harden them to the realities of existence as hunters. Those who fail are culled without mercy, to leave more prey for the worthy.

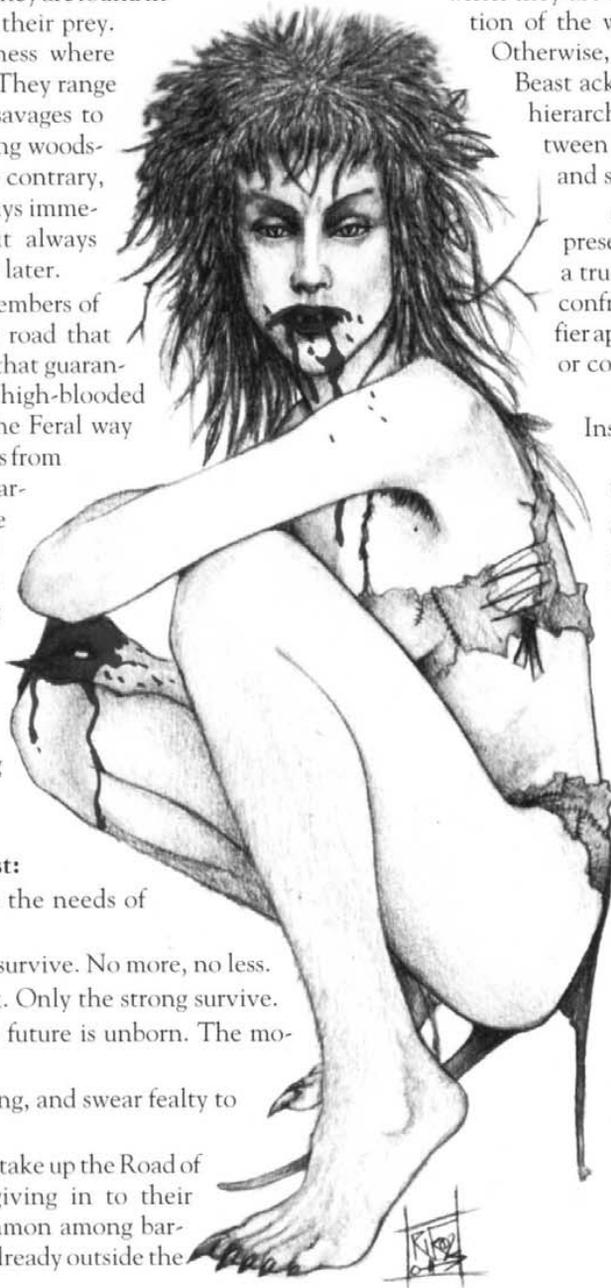
Organization: The Road of the Beast has even fewer leaders than it has teachers. Ferals sometimes gather in packs, led by the strongest among them who must face down any challenge for leadership from the other members of the pack. These packs tend to exist only as long as they are useful, breaking up and going their separate ways when they are not, or ending in the destruction of the weaker members of the pack. Otherwise, followers of the Road of the Beast acknowledge no leaders, nor any hierarchy save the relationship between predator and prey, and teacher and student.

Aura: Menace. Those in the presence of a Feral know that she is a true hunter, just as deer do when confronting a wolf. The aura modifier applies to rolls aimed at terrifying or cowering an opponent.

Road Virtues: Conviction, Instinct

Paths: Path of the Hunter: *You are a predator, and all others are your prey.* Path of the Nomad: *Civilization is slavery. Run wild and be free.* Path of the Savage: *Embrace your hatred and rage, and use them to destroy the weak.*

Roleplaying Tips: You are a monster, more terrible and savage than any natural beast. You see all others as potential prey, and you respect only those stronger than yourself. You are free and unencumbered by morality or material things, guided by your instincts and your needs. You exist in the moment and follow the laws of the wild. You strike without mercy or regret. As long as you are strong, no one can stand against you.



ROAD OF HEAVEN

VIA CAELI

The Damned know they are cursed by God, and many of them curse God in return. But others accept the burden the Lord has placed upon them and seek to find purpose in it. These Faithful know that everything is a part of God's plan, even the Children of Caine. Followers of the Road of Heaven devote themselves to understanding that purpose. The answers to the question, "Why has God done this to me?" lead to the many divergent paths of this road. Like the mortal Church, the Road of Heaven is given to schisms, sects and heresies.

The road as a whole is built upon the belief that God is testing the so-called Faithful, just as he tested Abraham and Job to strengthen their faith. Theirs is a heavy burden, but they bear it gladly, because it is the crucible in which their faith is purified and made holy before God. Many Faithful are drawn to various Gnostic heresies that claim that the material world is Hell, a belief that fits well with the Cainite condition of damnation among the living. Others tie themselves to more



orthodox Western and Eastern Christian teachings and seek salvation in the rejection of truly undying temptation. They all agree that a heavenly reward is not unattainable, although it is far harder for the Damned to achieve than the living. God does not withdraw His grace from sinners.

Among all of the many sects of the Road of Heaven, the voice of the Beast is that of Satan, the great tempter, seeking to lure the Faithful away from righteousness and into sin. They shun all servants of evil, such as devil-worshippers, demons and followers of the Road of Sin. The Faithful continue to carry out the sacraments of the Church even in their unliving existence, and ashen priests are the most common on the Road of Heaven. Followers gather in small congregations to worship, guided by their priests. Some support the mortal Church while others reject the Church in favor of their own heretical beliefs.

HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST HEAVEN

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Violating any of the Ten Commandments, for any reason	God's word is law.
9	Failing to speak out against corruption and sin	All the Devil requires is for the faithful to do nothing.
8	Acting out of pride, avarice, gluttony or some other sinful impulse	Sin is the road to the Beast.
7	Theft, robbery, willful vandalism	Thou shalt not steal.
6	Causing harm to a pious and virtuous person	God sees all and punishes such sins.
5	Feeding from an innocent without permission	God protects the innocent.
4	Blasphemous or heretical acts	Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Denial of God leads only to damnation.
3	Allowing a crime or major sin to go unpunished	"Vengeance is mine," sayeth the Lord.
2	The murder of innocents	Thou shalt not kill. Do not repeat the sin of Caine.
1	Aiding a demon or other supernatural agent of evil	Serve evil and you serve the Beast.

The Faithful are found throughout Christendom and beyond. Those in the East often follow Muslim ways, and there are Jews and even pagans on the Road of Heaven as well. Monasteries are particular havens for the Faithful, isolated from the outside world and permitting them a measure of solitude (and a mortal herd to feed on). Outwardly, most of the Faithful appear no different than the mortals with whom they sometimes mix, save for a fanatical gleam in the eyes and the air of holiness that surrounds them.

The various paths play a much greater role in the Road of Heaven than paths do in most others vampiric beliefs. Among the Faithful, these paths form large and sometimes overtly organized religious movements. The adherents of the Paths of Penitence and Retribution often worship alongside other Faithful, but they emphasize different points of theology. The former believe that unlife is a penance they must endure in order to purify themselves and prove their worthiness to God. Many of the penitent take vows of charity and poverty, seeking the Lord's forgiveness, and they feed only on the thin and bitter vitae of animals rather than humans. Those on the Path of Retribution, meanwhile, see themselves as instruments of God's vengeance against the sinful and the wicked — living and unliving alike. They hope to win back God's favor by acting in His name and rooting out evil.

Much more contentious, however, is the schismatic belief that Cainites are not cursed, but *avored* by God. These heretics say they are set above mortal men, with great powers at their command, like the saints or even the Heavenly Host. The Cainite Heresy (see p. 46) arose from their beliefs, along with other heretical cults and sects that worship vampires as saints, angels or gods themselves. The Heresy's bishops are very often in conflict with other ashen priests of the road.

Sobriquet: The Faithful

The Ethics of Heaven:

- God laid His mark upon Caine and his childer as part of His great plan.
- The word of God is law. Defiance of God is sin that leads to damnation.
- No one is above God's law.
- Love and serve God in all things.

- Deny the Devil through denial of the Beast and all creatures of Hell.

Initiation: Many who come to the Road of Heaven were believers in life, particularly clergy and crusaders sworn to the cross. Others find God after their Embrace, seeking meaning in their unliving existence, and these converts are among the most zealous. Initiation onto the Road of Heaven is much like a Church confirmation or baptism. The initiate swears before a priest and God's altar to renounce Satan and his works on Earth and to honor the will of God. The specific trappings and rites vary depending on the sect. Crusaders additionally swear to battle the forces of Hell, while heretics twist the sacraments to glorify themselves as the chosen of God.

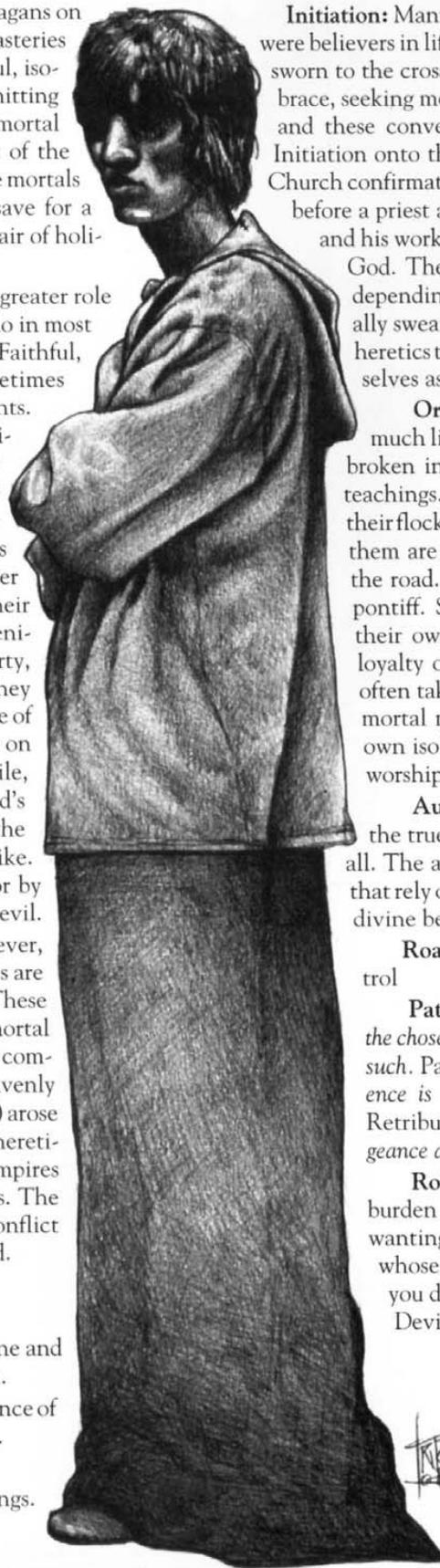
Organization: The Faithful organize much like the mortal Church, but they are broken into even more disparate sects and teachings. Ashen priests see to the needs of their flocks and perform the sacraments. Over them are the various abbots and bishops of the road. The road has not chosen a single pontiff. Several elders claim that title for their own sect, but they do not have the loyalty of all of the Faithful. The Faithful often take to the monastic life, influencing mortal monasteries or even creating their own isolated communities where they can worship and serve God in their own way.

Aura: Holiness. The righteousness of the true servants of Heaven is apparent to all. The aura modifier applies to Social rolls that rely on the vampire's image as a holy and divine being.

Road Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control

Paths: Path of Divinity: *You are among the chosen of God and should be worshipped as such.* Path of Penitence: *Your damned existence is punishment for your sins.* Path of Retribution: *You are God's angel of vengeance and scourge of the wicked and sinful.*

Roleplaying Tips: God has laid a heavy burden upon you, but you shall not be found wanting. You are among the truly devout, whose faith is tested and made strong. If you deny the Beast within you, deny the Devil and all his works and remain steadfast in your faith, you will be rewarded. You do not always understand the reasons for your suffering, but God works in mysterious ways. You do not need to understand, only to believe.

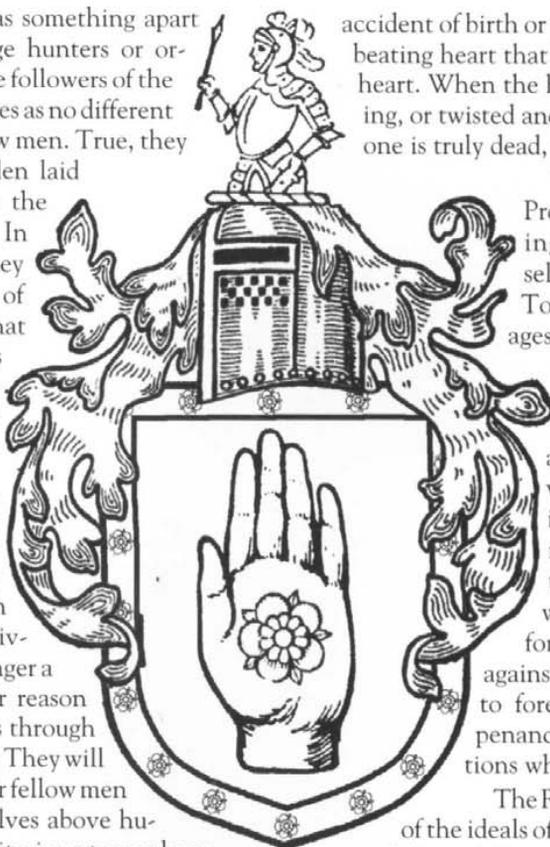


ROAD OF HUMANITY

VIA HUMANITATIS

Other roads see Cainites as something apart from humanity, be they savage hunters or ordained princes of the world. The followers of the Road of Humanity see themselves as no different in mind or soul than their fellow men. True, they have a great and terrible burden laid upon them, but they cling to the vestiges of their human nature. In the darkness of their souls, they work to fan the dying embers of their humanity into a flame that can light their way. Let others seek to become monsters or angels; the Prodigals consider themselves human and will remain so.

Unlike those on the Road of Heaven, Prodigals do not look to God for their salvation. They find it in simple acts of human compassion, in the very act of living, even though they are no longer a part of the living world. Their reason and conscience are their guides through the dark maze of their existence. They will not become beasts, treating their fellow men as prey, nor seek to set themselves above humanity. To a Prodigal, humanity is not merely an



accident of birth or physical circumstance. It is not a beating heart that makes one human, but a feeling heart. When the heart is hardened against all caring, or twisted and blackened by wickedness, then one is truly dead, whether Cainite or mortal.

The Beast represents all that the Prodigals struggle against: unceasing hunger, depthless cruelty, selfishness and inhuman madness. To them, it is the Beast that encourages Cainites to become monsters, and only by holding on to those behaviors that are uniquely human can they deny the Beast and its urges. But in order to survive, Prodigals must sometimes indulge those dark urges. They must feed, and they must protect themselves against those who would destroy them. These goals force a Prodigal to forever struggle against the Beast, committing small sins to forestall greater ones and seeking penance and redemption for their actions when they can.

The Road of Humanity embodies many of the ideals of the Brujah clan, particularly the possibility of Cainite and kine living together in

HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST HUMANITY

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Selfish thoughts	Thought is as good as deed.
9	Minor selfish acts	Compassion separates us from the beasts.
8	Injury to another person (deliberate or otherwise)	Follow the Golden Rule.
7	Theft and robbery	Respect the property of others.
6	Accidental violation of another (e.g., drinking a vessel dry from starvation)	Ignorance does not excuse cruelty.
5	Wanton destruction	Man creates; the Beast destroys.
4	Impassioned violation of another (e.g., killing in frenzy)	Those who act as beasts become beasts.
3	Planned violation of another (e.g., murder)	If you surrender to the Beast, you become its slave.
2	Casual violation of another (e.g., wanton killing, feeding past satiation)	Others are worthy of your respect.
1	The most heinous and demented acts	Are you man or beast?

peace, with respect for human dignity and freedom. Many Brujah follow this road, along with members of every other clan. The Road of Humanity is one that many vampires come to by instinct. After all, they were all human once, and the Embrace often leads to an understanding of how precious (and fragile) one's humanity is. Some falter and seek another road, while the rest continue to shelter the light of their humanity against the dark.

Prodigals are found most often among or near the common folk rather than the nobility. Among them, they learn how to be human all over again, while continually testing the strength of their convictions against the desires of the Beast within. Of all Cainites, Prodigals seem the most normal to mortals, and they are the least likely to stir feelings of either awe or mistrust within them.

Sobriquet: Prodigals

Ethics of Humanity:

- A man is measured by his words, his deeds and his heart, not an accident of birth or circumstance.
- The ability to reason separates man from beast.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- All men are brothers.
- Freedom is earned with dignity and justice.

Initiation: Many followers of the Road of Humanity come to it on their own after struggling with the realities of their Cainite nature. They affirm their belief in their own humanity and hold to it tightly, usually after a harrowing experience with their own capacity for monstrous behavior and the power of the Beast, which serves as a moment of truth. A neonate who kills savagely to sate his hunger, a fledgling who seeks revenge for a petty slight; these Cainites look at the blood on their hands and reject the monsters they have become. Others come to the road more gradually and are taught its precepts by their sire or another teacher.

Organization: The Road of Humanity claims that all men are brothers and that each should be measured according to his or her words and deeds. Therefore, the adherents of the road accord their great teachers and philoso-

phers the respect they are due, and they tell tales of the paragons of human virtue that seek (and sometimes find) the secret of Golconda. But they have not formed any broadly recognized hierarchy. Instead, the Prodigals associate with one another through a network of largely egalitarian guilds and fraternal orders. Some influential teachers and philosophers of the road gather students around them to form schools in the Greek tradition, but such groups are usually small,

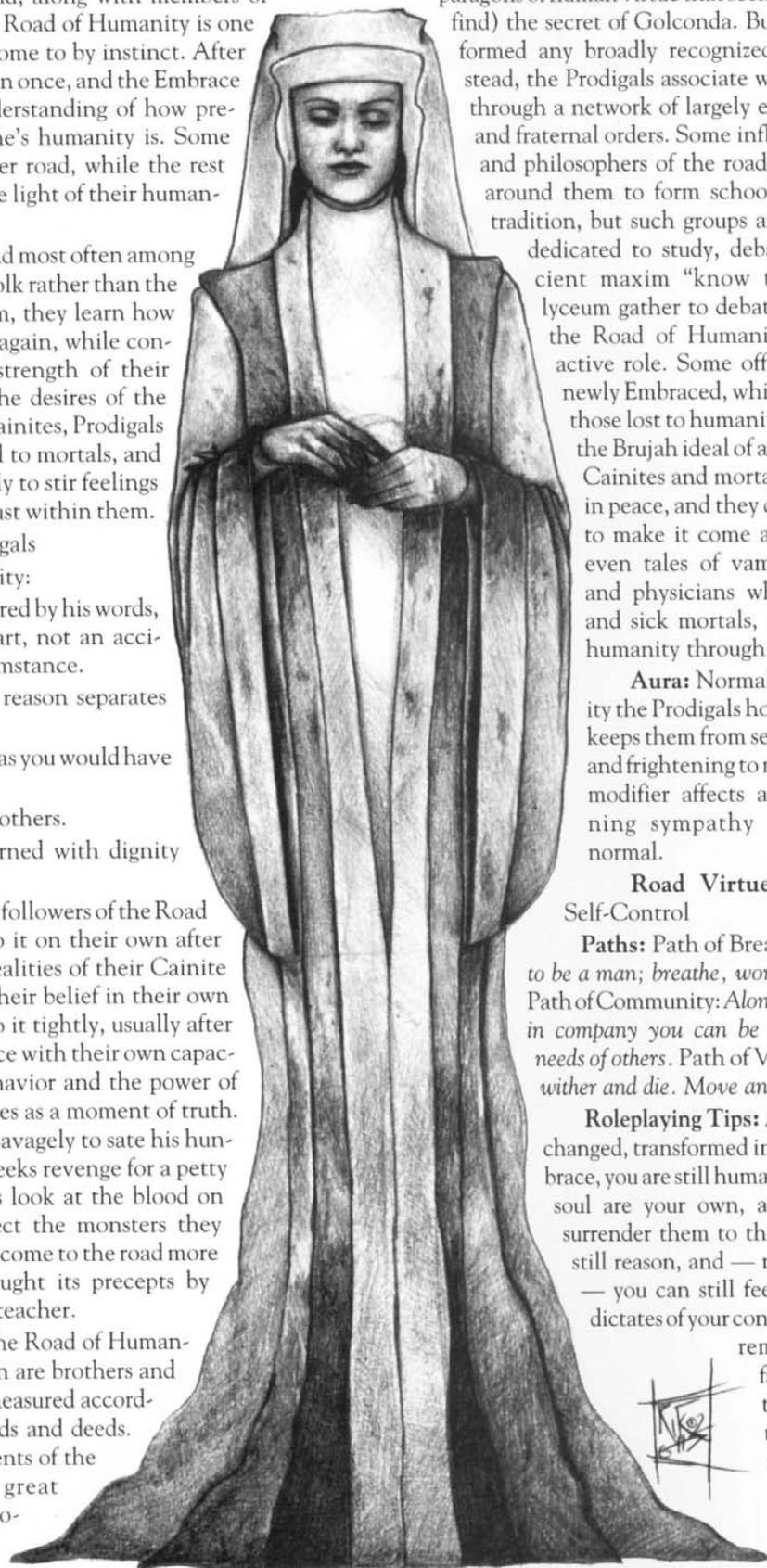
dedicated to study, debate and the ancient maxim "know thyself." While lyceum gather to debate, other sects of the Road of Humanity take a more active role. Some offer succor to the newly Embraced, while hunting down those lost to humanity. Others follow the Brujah ideal of a society in which Cainites and mortals exist together in peace, and they do what they can to make it come about. There are even tales of vampire hospitalers and physicians who treat injured and sick mortals, reclaiming their humanity through their mercy.

Aura: Normalcy. The humanity the Prodigals hold in their hearts keeps them from seeming so strange and frightening to mortals. The aura modifier affects attempts at winning sympathy and appearing normal.

Road Virtues: Conscience, Self-Control

Paths: Path of Breath: *Act as a man to be a man; breathe, work, revel and live.* Path of Community: *Alone you are damned; in company you can be saved. Serve the needs of others.* Path of Vigor: *To stop is to wither and die. Move and you shall live.*

Roleplaying Tips: Although you are changed, transformed in body by the Embrace, you are still human. Your mind and soul are your own, and you will not surrender them to the Beast. You can still reason, and — more importantly — you can still feel and follow the dictates of your conscience and know remorse when you falter. As long as those things are true, you will never be the monster that others say you are.



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ROAD OF KINGS

VIA REGALIS

Just as God ordained that kings should rule over men, by placing His mark upon Cain He ordained that Cainites were above the mortal herd, and that some also held the divine right to rule. The Scions, followers of the Road of Kings, believe that power and rulership are their inheritance, secured by strength of arms and skill at court. Just as the mortal nobility wars for control over land and wealth, so do the Scions war among themselves for control of Cainite domains, with lesser vampires and mortals arrayed like pieces on a chessboard.

But the Scions are not all war and glory. They are also concerned with rulership, and the first lesson an initiate of the road learns is that one must be able to rule over the Beast within before commanding the loyalty of any subject or vassal. In a world where one either rules or is ruled, the Scions learn to master the Beast, to command inferiors and to defer to betters, all while seeking to claim the destiny of power laid before them. They understand that all Cainites are empowered to rule — as all royal families are — but that only the strong, the swift, the cunning and the bold can seize a throne and hold it. Divine (or Damned) right can become manifest only through skillful action.

The Beast stands in the way of a Scion's destiny. It represents all the dark impulses that drag a ruler down and

lead to rebellion and betrayal. But, carefully controlled, those same passions can raise a ruler up to greatness and give him the power to conquer his enemies and hold on to his throne. So the Beast must be controlled, and conquering the Beast is a necessary first step in conquering the world.

It's little wonder that the Road of Kings draws many of the High Clans to it, particularly the Lasombra, Tzimisce and Ventruue. Those who rise to the position of prince often do so by following this road. Although there are princes of the other roads as well, none have made rulership so much a part of their very being. And Scions often make the best rulers because they see their endeavor as larger than simply hoarding personal power — that is the domain of the Beast. A true king creates justice for his subjects and inspires loyalty in his vassals. And the only way to understand how to inspire loyalty is to have been loyal oneself, therefore, many Scions spend time as vassals and knights in other's service. Others serve as judges and magistrates, dispensing justice in the name of a lord whom they serve.

Because of their appreciation for feudal bonds, Scions have adopted the tradition of chivalry as their own, and Cainite lords sponsor orders of knighthood wherein initiates and adherents of the road can learn its ways and



HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST KINGSHIP

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Neglecting your duty	Those who fail in their responsibilities often lose them.
9	Treating a peer with disrespect	A leader earns respect by acting respectfully.
8	Treating an inferior as an equal	Everyone should know their place, including you.
7	Breaking your word to a peer	Trust is earned by being trustworthy.
6	Behaving shamefully before your peers	Honor and reputation are everything.
5	Showing weakness in front of inferiors	A leader must be seen as strong.
4	Failing to answer a challenge to your honor	Honor must be maintained; challenges cannot go unanswered.
3	Treating a superior with disrespect	Superiors must be given the respect they are due.
2	Breaking your word to your superiors	Your word is your bond. If your word is worthless, then so are you.
1	Breaking a sworn oath	Oaths of fealty hold the world together.

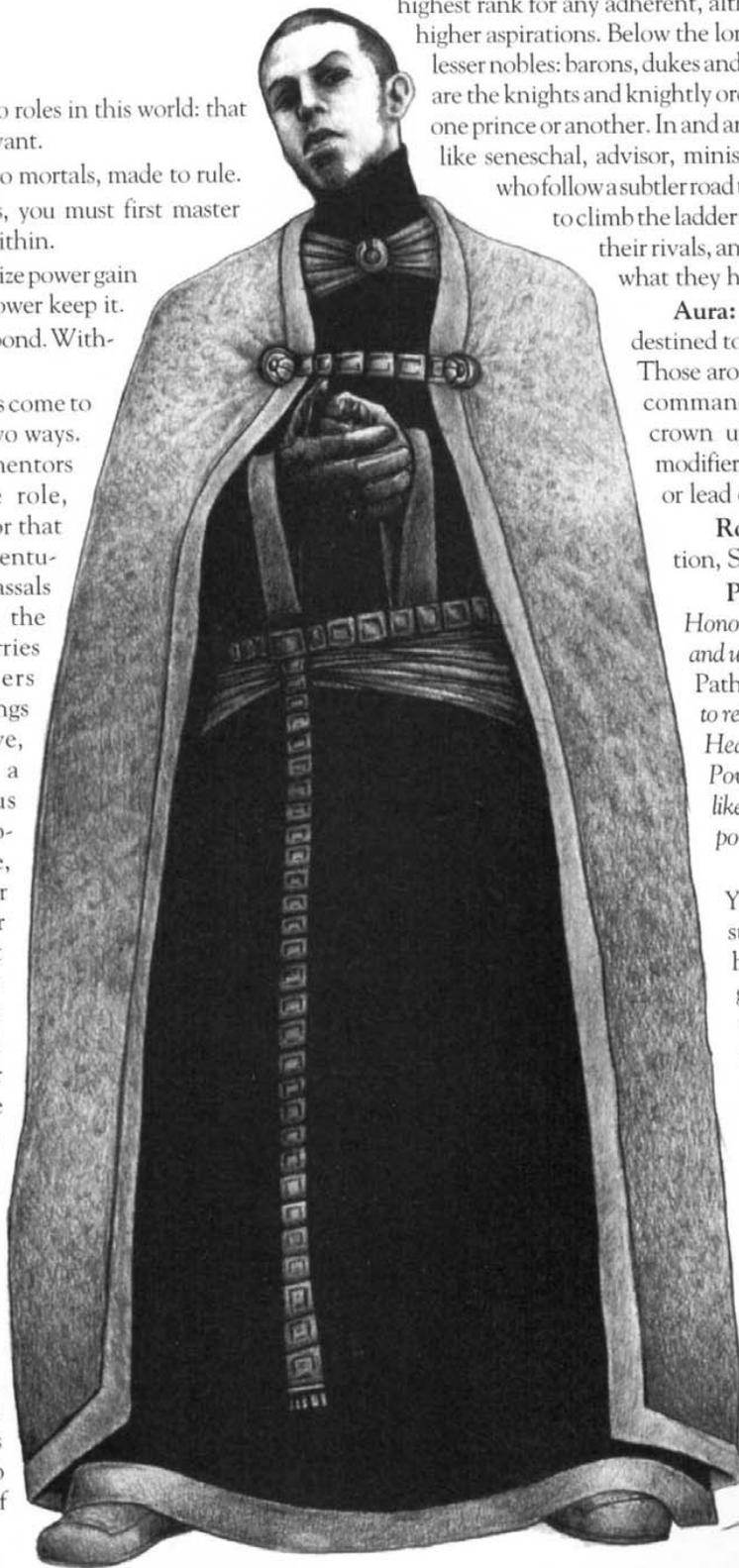
prove themselves worthy through their deeds. But chivalrous Cainites are proving a challenge to more traditional Scion lords. The lords claim that they are the ultimate source of law, whereas the knights look to a nebulous moral code, either drawn from mortal chivalrous tradition or said to be handed down by Caine.

Sobriquet: Scions

Ethics of Kings:

- There are only two roles in this world: that of master and that of servant.
- You are superior to mortals, made to rule.
- To master others, you must first master yourself and the Beast within.
- Only those who seize power gain it; only those who use power keep it.
- Your word is your bond. Without it, you are nothing.

Initiation: Initiates come to the Road of Kings in two ways. Some are chosen by mentors and groomed for the role, sometimes Embraced for that very purpose. They eventually become trusted vassals of their liege, though the ambition of some carries them higher. Others achieve the Road of Kings through their own drive, winning the favor of a patron with glorious deeds and carefully chosen words. In either case, initiates usually enter their patron's service for a time (with or without the assurances of the blood oath). They learn discipline and personal mastery under their patron's guidance while serving as page, squire, clerk or the like. With the rise of the orders of chivalry, it is common for initiates to begin as squires and eventually achieve the rank of knight. It has also become common for sires and liege lords to "foster" fledglings with each other to strengthen the bonds of fealty between them.



Organization: The Road of Kings is perhaps the most organized of all, with each adherent owing fealty to his betters and having it owed to him by his inferiors. Much of the organization of the Cainite courts is dictated by the traditions of the Road of Kings, and lord is currently the highest rank for any adherent, although many have even higher aspirations. Below the lord and princes are many lesser nobles: barons, dukes and the like. Beneath them are the knights and knightly orders, often sponsored by one prince or another. In and around the court are roles like seneschal, advisor, minister and such, for those who follow a subtler road to power. Scions struggle to climb the ladder, often over the bodies of their rivals, and they fight to maintain what they have gained.

Aura: Command. Scions are destined to rule, and they know it. Those around them can feel their commanding presence like a crown upon them. Their aura modifier affects rolls to command or lead others.

Road Virtues: Conviction, Self-Control

Paths: Path of Chivalry: *Honor and service are all; follow and uphold the code of chivalry.* Path of the Tyrant: *It is better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.* Path of the Vizier: *Power is a subtle game. Play it like a master and become the power behind the throne.*

Roleplaying Tips: You are a scion of Caine, superior to the mortal herd and destined for greatness. You are the master of your fate, not a slave to it. Take up your destiny and let none stand in the way of achieving what is yours by right. You are just and firm with your followers, deferent to your betters and terrible to your enemies. You will rule the night for ages uncounted, and all glory and honor will be yours.

ROAD OF SIN

VIA PECCATI

The common folk of the Dark Medieval world know full well that vampires are creatures of the Devil, and many Cainites agree. If they are damned, then why should they not indulge in the dark desires welling up within them? Rather than falling on their knees and begging forgiveness, they exult in their newfound power and use it to satisfy their every wicked impulse. Other Cainites look at these Sinners and see those who have given in to the temptations of the Beast, but they are not mere slaves to their own desires. They master the Beast by indulging and feeding it, existing in cooperation with it. Although many Cainites condemn Sinners for their excesses, many more secretly envy them their freedom and find the sinful life very tempting indeed.

Despite some accusations to the contrary, few Sinners are agents of Hell. The minority who do become infernalists do so of their own free will as an opportunity to indulge and gain the Devil's favor as well. After all, the Adversary is interested in corrupting the souls of the innocent — the Damned are already his. Most Sinners follow their own wills, and selfishness is at the core of their road. The power they command as Cainites gives

them the means to do as they please, and woe betide anyone who stands in their way.

Their interests are as diverse as the depths of sin itself. Some indulge the senses with art, perfumes, music and similar pleasures (although not food and drink, which are denied them). They serve as patrons or muses, or they become obsessive collectors. Others practice the art of seduction, gathering harems

of beautiful mortals. They play the heart like a finely tuned lute. Some corrupt others and lead them into lives of indulgence and excess for their own amusement and vicarious enjoyment. They explore the limits of pain and degradation mortals (and even other Cainites) can suffer. Because they are already damned, nothing is forbidden to them.

In fact, the only thing that is truly forbidden to the followers of the Road of Sin is failing to satisfy their endless need for indulgence. Through it, they feed the Beast and keep it sated. Denial awakens the hunger within them, and forces the Beast to take matters into its own bloody hands. Sinners know the Beast better than



HIERARCHY OF SINS AGAINST INFAMY

Score	Minimum Wrongdoing	Rationale
10	Acknowledging any moral restraint	You are beyond such weakness.
9	Failing to indulge a new desire	No pleasure should be denied you.
8	Failing to ride the wave of a frenzy	Denial only strengthens the Beast.
7	Refusing to tempt the virtuous	Virtue is a lie you must expose.
6	Avoiding injury to others at the cost of your own pleasure	No pain is worth more than your pleasure.
5	Turning down a chance for material gain	Your own needs outweigh all others.
4	Acting against your own best interests	Only fools sacrifice themselves.
3	Refusing to kill when it is in your best interest	No life is more important than your own.
2	Refusing to feed when the opportunity arises	Do not refuse your greatest need and pleasure.
1	Encouraging virtue or aiding agents of virtue	Virtue is a lie and a prison for the spirit.

most, and they have no desire to become its slaves. Sinners know that total denial of the Beast only strengthens it in the long run, leading to an ultimate destruction of the self. And Sinners value the self above all else.

The Road of Sin is a tempting one, and many Cainites find themselves drawn to it, each seeking to satisfy a particular desire. High-blooded Sinners, particularly Toreador, tend to be given to sublime pleasures, from delicate beauty to exquisite pain. Cainites of the Low Clans who follow the road are said to be more savage, but this perception has more to do with social stereotyping among the unliving than actual practice. Indeed, the excesses of Tzimisce Sinners and their flesh-crafting arts, make the debaucheries of the Low Clans pale in comparison.

Wise Cainites are wary of the Sinners, but they recognize the road as a legitimate one. As long as the Sinners do not violate the Traditions or the edicts of their prince or lord, they are left to their own affairs, which is just as the followers of the Road of Sin prefer it. Some Sinners even make a place for themselves as scholars of the Beast, advising princes and potentates on how to deal with the darker impulses of their subjects.

Sobriquet: Sinners

Ethics of Sin:

- You are already damned, so nothing is forbidden to you.
- Claim the Beast and make it yours. Do not let it claim you.
- The night is yours. Take what you want and do what you will.
- Act where others hesitate. The laws of neither man nor God bind you.
- In the dark depths of your heart lies pleasure, if you have the courage to free it.

Initiation: Initiation onto the Road of Sin is often a matter of breaking the many chains that bind the neophyte into a moral straight-jacket and loosing the desires within her. The Embrace begins the work, awakening primal and dark hunger within the neonate's breast. Tempters — teachers of the Road of Sin — encourage their students to follow that desire;

not to shy away from it, but to revel and luxuriate in it. To feel the pleasure that comes from the power they now command. Others claim that the priests of this road are nothing but foul corrupters, but they maintain otherwise. After all, do the truly righteous and devout have anything to fear from the pleasures that they offer? Or do they point accusing fingers because they know, deep in their hearts, that they *want* the freedom the Road of Sin offers?

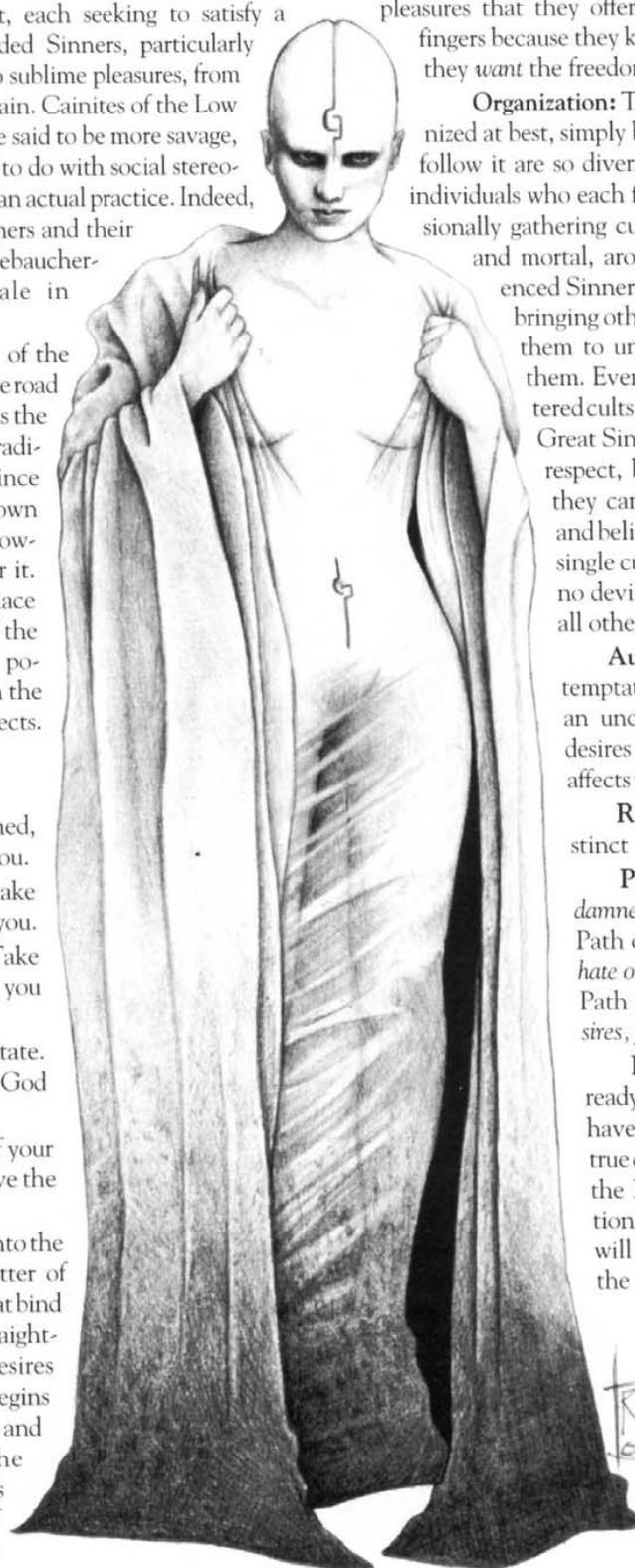
Organization: The Road of Sin is loosely organized at best, simply because the goals of those who follow it are so diverse. It tends to be broken into individuals who each follow their own desires, occasionally gathering cults of followers, both Cainite and mortal, around them. The more experienced Sinners become tempters and priests, bringing others onto the road and teaching them to unleash their desires and claim them. Even the infernalists exist in scattered cults, serving their demonic masters. Great Sinners are accorded a measure of respect, but they hold only the power they can enforce. Despite the rumors and beliefs of many Cainites, there is no single cult or leader of the Road of Sin, no devilish conspiracy seeking to drag all others into corruption.

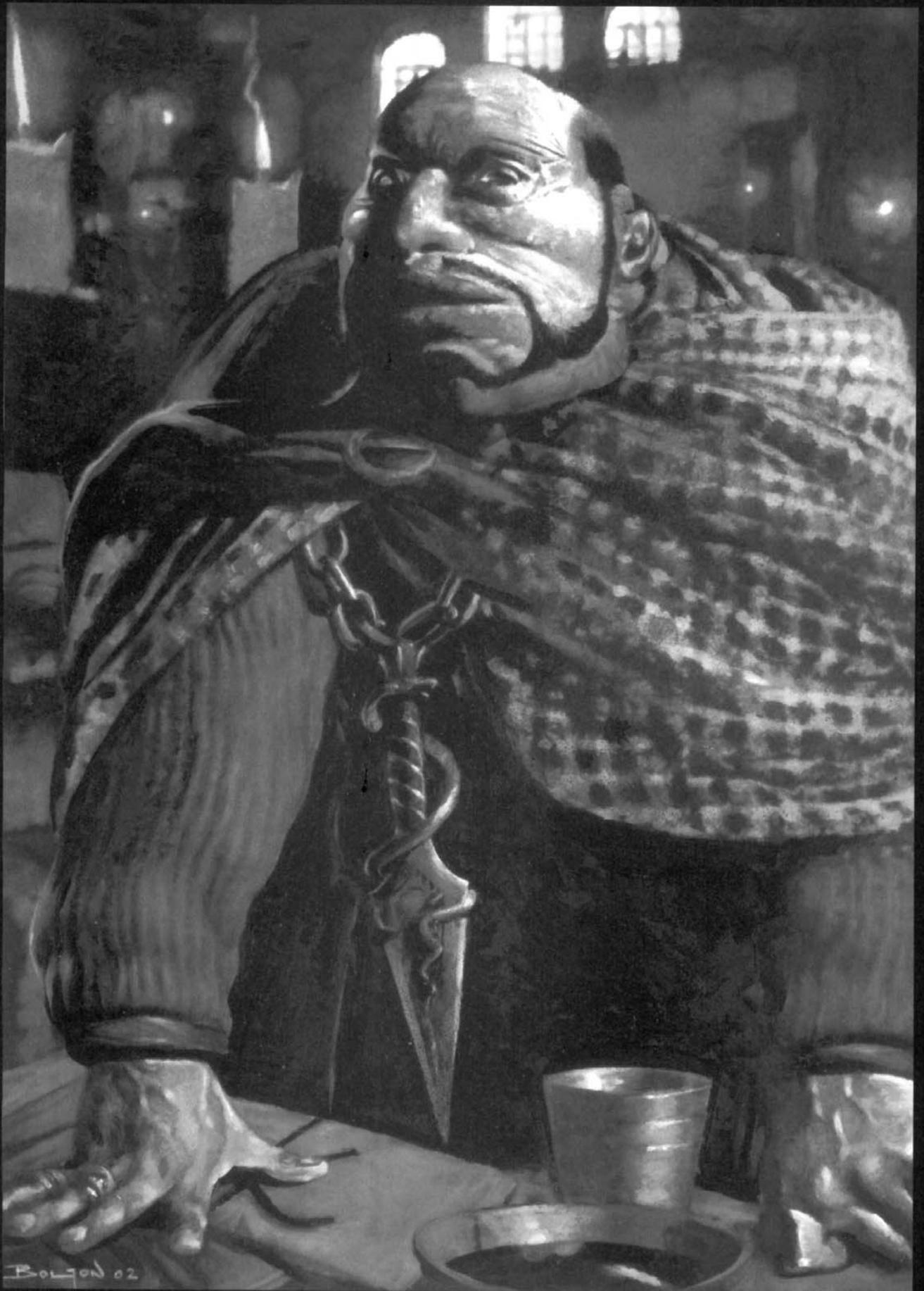
Aura: Seduction. The Sinners are temptation incarnate, and they have an uncanny knack for knowing the desires of others. The aura modifier affects rolls to tempt and seduce others.

Road Virtues: Conviction, Instinct

Paths: Path of the Devil: *You are damned, and you serve Hell on Earth.* Path of Cruelty: *Inflct your pain and hate on others and soothe it in yourself.* Path of Pleasure: *Indulge all your desires, for they lead you to your true self.*

Roleplaying Tips: You are already among the Damned, so what have you to lose by indulging your true desires? Denial only strengthens the Beast. You do not fear retribution in the hereafter, because you will never truly die. You are free of the shackles of morality that bind mere mortals and even so many of your unliving brethren. That makes you capable of fulfilling your every wish. What is there to stop you?





BOLTON 02

„Stefan! Come here at once!”

Master Jervais's voice rang through the halls of the chantry like a thunderbolt. Stefan, the magus's apprentice, ran from the dormitory like a rabbit from a hound — save that he was running toward a predator's jaws and not away from them. He rounded the corner into the hallway at a sprint and didn't slow as he dove through the heavy red curtain that masked the lab's entrance. He could only hope that the fearsome wards emblazoned on that tapestry had been well attuned so as not to reduce him to ash.

They were, but when he saw Master Jervais's face, Stefan wished the wards had done him in. At least his suffering would have been over quickly.

“Can you explain to me, apprentice, why these specimens have not been prepared?” Towering over his apprentice as he did over most other people, the magus waved his hand dismissively at the iron cages that lined the far wall of the lab. In them, a family of peasants cowered but made few noises. Stefan had watched his master cut out their tongues himself three nights ago.

“I thought that perhaps—”

“Who granted you the right to think, boy?” Jervais's bellows exposed the sharp canines that he seemed no longer able to retract completely. “I wanted the pups exsanguinated by now, and you should have known that. Why else would I have initiated you into the mysteries of the vitae, but to grant you understanding?”

“I'm sorry, Master Jervais.” Stefan hurried to the array of equipment in the center of the room. He released a beg that allowed a series of chains — each tipped with a sharp hook — to descend from the ceiling. “I'll prepare them now.”

Jervais only nodded and turned to another working surface, where Fidus, his other apprentice was sitting, pen at the ready. “Back to this letter: Our presence in your fair town poses no threat to you, Prince Duncan.”

Stefan brought the youngest of the prisoners to the exsanguination table. The child struggled, but Stefan had the strength of his master's blood, and the boy had not eaten in three days. His struggles were barely worth Stefan's attention.

“In fact,” Jervais continued across the laboratory, “we are ready to pay for your permission with an array of friendly services that, I'm sure, will show you that the stories of Clan Tremere's perfidy are the product of the jealousy of ill-informed rivals.”

Stefan inserted the hooks and pulled the chains tight again. As the lad's body rose from the table and his blood began to flow, Stefan noted once more how bothersome the grunting screams of those without tongues were.

Some night, he would find a way to rectify that.



CHAPTER FOUR: RULES OF THE GAME

Every Cainite is a pawn on someone's chessboard.
—The Erciyes Fragments: IX (Proverbs)

Dark Ages is called a storytelling *game* because it has rules. Those rules, however, don't exist to limit behavior or keep anyone "in line." They exist to provide the players with challenges and the Storyteller with simple ways in which to adjudicate those challenges. In a larger sense, they exist to help tell the story.

Because the players are both participants and audience, it's critical that they identify with their characters and experience (vicariously) the thrills and chills of the unfolding tale. Just like you hold your breath when reading about a hero who's about to be done in, you'll hold your breath when your character does something risky. Having an impartial way to resolve the situation — Does Anatole make it out of the burning building? Does Lucita get to the prince in time? — helps to maintain that tension. The Storyteller can just decide whether your character succeeds or fails, of course, but that's usually less fun for everyone, because it leaves things open to favoritism. Truly unbiased rulings need some sort of standard or precedent so that everybody knows that everyone's getting the same treatment.

Hence, rules.

Dark Ages uses only a few basic rules to get things done, but these rules can have countless permutations in the context of the game. This chapter covers the very basics, such as rolling dice. More specific, detail-oriented rules can be found throughout the book. Don't worry about mastering all the permutations at once, though. Learn these basic rules first, and everything else will come naturally.

Time

Over the course of the game, time is presumed to pass as it would in the normal world. Tuesday follows Monday, month after month, and so on. There's no need to roleplay out every second that ticks away. There's a huge difference between the speeds at which "game" time and real time pass. Over a four-hour game session, a week, a month or even a year might pass in the setting of the game — or the entire session might detail the events of an action-packed half-hour. You can play out a combat turn by turn, taking it in three-second increments, or you can let months pass away in a few minutes of real time. (The passage of time without players taking any real actions is called *downtime*. Learning to use this little trick can help the pacing of your game immensely.)

To help maintain a sense of the passage of time without resorting to tedious charts and the like, **Dark Ages** uses six basic units to describe game time:

- **Turn:** The amount of time you need to take a fairly simple action. A turn can range anywhere from three seconds to three minutes, depending on the pace of the current scene.
- **Scene:** Like the basic division of plays and movies, a scene is a compact period of action and interaction that takes place in a single location. This could be the storming of a Tremere chantry or a moonlit conversation on a parapet. There are exactly as many turns in a scene as the scene requires. A scene might not even have turns if it consists of nothing but dialogue and character interaction.
- **Chapter:** An independent part of a story, almost always played out in one game session. It consists of a number of scenes interconnected by downtime. Essentially, a game chapter is like a chapter in a novel or an act in a play.
- **Story:** A full tale, complete with introduction, rising action and climax. Some stories can take several chapters to complete; others can be finished in one.
- **Chronicle:** A series of stories connected by the characters themselves and their ongoing narrative, possibly even by a common theme or overarching plot.
- **Downtime:** Time that you gloss over with description rather than playing it out turn by turn or scene by scene. If the Storyteller says, "You wait in the courtyard for four hours before the lord's ghoul summons you," rather than actually letting the characters play out their wait, the Storyteller is considered to be invoking downtime. Downtime allows trivial or tedious passages of time to go by quickly. One can also use it to let several months, years or even decades pass

between stories in a chronicle (taking advantage of the longevity of vampires).

Actions

Over the course of a game, your character will do many things. Some of these tasks are considered *actions*, while others aren't. Speeches and conversations aren't considered actions as such, but just about everything else from throwing a punch at your sire to trying to decipher a code is probably an action. One action typically takes one turn of game time to complete.

It's easy enough to attempt an action. Just tell the Storyteller what your character's trying to do and how she plans to go about it. Most actions — crossing a field or donning armor, for instance — are easy enough to be considered automatically successful. However, if you're trying to cross a field with many pits while being chased by a knight on horseback, or you're trying to don armor in a hurry before an attacker arrives, there's a chance you might fail. So when reasonable doubt arises over whether an action will succeed or not, you may have to roll dice to determine the results.

Reflexive Actions

Not everything that your character actually *does* counts as an action. For instance, a vampire spending blood to increase its strength is considered to take less than a second of game time. You roll no dice, and your character can do this while doing something else. Such a "free action" is called a *reflexive* — in essence, a feat that doesn't require taking an action to accomplish. Of course, you still have to be conscious to perform many reflexives, but they don't get in the way of anything else you want to do in a turn. (Augmenting strength and other traits with blood is fully explained on page 162, by the way.)

Rolling Dice

Although the Storyteller is within perfect rights to declare whether a given action succeeds or fails (usually for dramatic purposes), chance enters into the equation in many cases. Therefore, **Dark Ages** uses a simple, portable form of "chance in a pocket" — dice. To be specific, **Dark Ages** uses 10-sided dice. (You can find these in any game store or even many bookstores.) The Storyteller may need quite a few; players need plenty as well, but they can share among themselves. Ten dice are the most that a beginning character will need at a given time.

You roll dice whenever the outcome of an action is in doubt or the Storyteller thinks that there's a chance your character might fail. Your character's strengths and weaknesses affect the number of dice you roll, and thus directly affect your chances of success.

Ratings

Although your character's personality is limited only by your imagination, his capabilities are defined by his traits, which measure his aptitudes and abilities (and appear on his

character sheet, see p. 318). Most traits are described by a rating of 1 to 5. A 1 in a trait is barely competent, while a 5 is the pinnacle of human achievement. Most people's traits range from 1 to 3. A 4 in a trait indicates an exceptional person, while a 5 is nearly incomparable — among humans, at any rate. It's also possible to have a 0 in a trait. Such a low rating usually represents a skill that the character never learned, but some exceptions (such as the hideous Nosferatu's lack of an Appearance trait) do occur. Some traits are measured on a 1-to-10 scale. These special traits, and most of the others, are explained in Chapter Five.

For normal traits, the following scale applies:

x	Abysmal
•	Poor
••	Average
•••	Good
••••	Exceptional
•••••	Superb

Whenever you roll dice, you roll one die for every dot you have in the appropriate trait. For instance, if your character is trying to find something and he has three dots in Perception, you would roll three dice. However, you almost never simply roll the number of dice you have in an Attribute. Raw potential is modified by skill, after all. The most common rolls in the game involve adding the dice gained from an Attribute (inherent aptitudes, see p. 140) to the dice gained from an Ability (learned capabilities, see p. 142).

For instance, if Veronica were trying to find a specific text in the cluttered library of a monastery, the Storyteller might have her player, Lynn, roll Perception + Theology — an Attribute plus an Ability. In this case, Lynn would take two dice for Veronica's Perception of 2, plus as many dice as she had in Theology. Veronica has Theology 4, so Lynn gets four more dice from that. Veronica has a total of six dice to attempt her task. These dice are called the *dice pool* — in other words, the total number of dice you roll in a single turn. Most often, you'll calculate a dice pool for only one action at a time, although you can modify it to be able to perform multiple tasks in a turn.

Of course, you might not need to add an Ability to an Attribute for some rolls. For instance, there's no Ability that will help Veronica heft a large chest. In such cases, Lynn would use only the dice from the Attribute — in this case, Strength.

There is absolutely no situation in which more than two traits can add to a dice pool. What's more, if your dice pool involves a trait whose maximum rating is 10 (such as Willpower, see p. 161), you can't add any other traits to your dice pool. It's effectively impossible for a normal human being to have more than 10 dice in a dice pool.

Elder vampires, on the other hand...

Difficulties

There's no point in rolling dice unless you know what results you're looking for. Whenever you try to perform an

action, the Storyteller will decide on an appropriate *difficulty* and tell you her decision. A difficulty is always a number between 2 and 10. Each time you score that number or higher on one of your dice, you're considered to have gained a *success*. For example, if an action's difficulty is a 6 and you roll a 3, 3, 8, 7 and 10, then you've scored three successes. The more you get, the better you do. You need only one success to perform most actions successfully, but that's considered a marginal success. If you score three or more, you succeed completely.

Naturally, the lower the difficulty number is, the easier it is to score successes, and vice versa. Six is the default difficulty, indicating actions that are neither exceptionally tricky nor exceptionally easy to accomplish. *If the Storyteller or rulebook ever calls for you to make a roll, but doesn't give you a specific difficulty number, assume that the task is difficulty 6.*

The Storyteller is the final authority on how difficult attempted actions are. If the task seems impossible, he'll make the difficulty appropriately high, while, if the task seems routinely easy, the difficulty will be low (if the Storyteller decides you even have to roll at all). Particularly easy or difficult tasks might even demand difficulty numbers of 2 or 10, but such should be extremely rare. A task of difficulty 2 is so easy that it's not really worth the trouble of a die roll, while an action of difficulty 10 is almost impossible. You have an equal chance of botching (which is explained later) as you do of succeeding, no matter how many dice you're rolling.

And, in case it needs to be said, a result of a 10 is always a success, no matter what the difficulty number is.

The following charts should give you a good idea of how to combine difficulties and degrees of success.

Failure

If you score no successes on a die roll, your character fails his attempted action. He misses his punch. His attempt to persuade the prince falls flat. Failure, while usually disappointing, is not so catastrophic as a botch.

Example: *Feodor, a Nosferatu, is attempting to spy on some suspicious activities in one of the halls of the castle, and he is perching precariously on an overhang to do so. Justin, the Storyteller, tells Feodor's player, John, to roll his Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 7). John rolls and gets 2, 5, 6, 6, 4, 3 — no successes. Justin rules that as Feodor attempts to shift position on the overhang, his foot slides on some crumbling stone, and he loses his balance. The thugs below don't see Feodor, but he is definitely in trouble...*

The Rule of One

Bad luck can ruin anything. One more basic rule about rolling dice is the "rule of one." Whenever one of the dice comes up as a 1, it cancels out a success. Completely. Take the die showing 1 and one of the dice showing a successful number and set them aside. In this manner, an otherwise successful action may be reduced to failure.

Storytellers who want a more cinematic edge to their games can institute a "rule of 10" in which the player can re-

DIFFICULTIES

- | | |
|---|--|
| 3 | Easy (sharpening a blade) |
| 4 | Routine (calming a trained dog) |
| 5 | Straightforward (seducing someone who's already "in the mood") |
| 6 | Standard (swinging a sword) |
| 7 | Challenging (firing an arrow at long range) |
| 8 | Difficult (forging a fine blade) |
| 9 | Extremely difficult (fighting blind) |

DEGREES OF SUCCESS

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| One Success | Marginal (landing a glancing blow) |
| Two Successes | Moderate (making a handicraft that's ugly-but useful) |
| Three Successes | Complete (fixing something so that it's good as new) |
| Four Successes | Exceptional (making a perfect translation of an obscure text) |
| Five or More Successes | Phenomenal (creating a masterpiece) |

roll every die that comes up a 10 and try to get additional successes. This rule is purely optional, however, best suited for people who like especially spectacular play.

Botches

Occasionally, truly bad fortune strikes. If a die roll garners no successes whatsoever, and one or more 1s show up, a *botch* occurs. If 1s cancel out every success and even more 1s remain, the roll is still considered a normal failure. A roll is considered a botch only if no successes came up in the first place.

A botch is much worse than a normal failure — it's outright misfortune. For instance, rolling a botch when trying to run down mortal prey from horseback might result in your horse rearing and throwing you, while botching a Stealth roll might result in your character stepping on a dry twig. The Storyteller decides exactly what goes wrong. A botch might produce a minor inconvenience or a truly unfortunate mishap.

Of course, some Storytellers may find that botches are cropping up a little too frequently in their chronicles. In that case, it's the Storyteller's privilege to give everyone, player and Storyteller character alike, one botch "free." In other words, the first botched roll of the session doesn't count. This rule tends to make unlife a little easier on the players' characters — but then again, there's less chance of their enemies suffering a run of bad luck either....

Example: *Alexandra, a Tremere played by Rebecca, is in desperate trouble when twisted Tzimisce monstrosities overrun her chantry. In order to make her escape, she must climb up a rope strung over the chantry wall and leading toward a hidden exit. Rebecca rolls Alexandra's Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) and gets 1, 3, 4, 3, 6. Not only did a 1 occur, but no successes were scored at all, so the action is a botch. The Storyteller rules that the frayed rope snaps under Alexandra's weight. Alexandra starts to run for the kitchens, hoping the Fiends won't find her there....*

Automatic Success

Let's face it — sometimes rolling dice gets tiresome, particularly when your character could perform a given

action in his sleep. And anything that streamlines play and reduces distractions is a good thing. Therefore, **Dark Ages** employs a simple system for automatic successes, allowing you to skip having to roll for tasks that your character would find frankly mundane.

Simply put, if the number of dice in your dice pool is equal to or greater than the task's difficulty, your character automatically succeeds. No dice roll is necessary. Mind you, this does *not* work for all tasks, and it *never* works in combat or other stressful situations. Furthermore, an automatic success is considered marginal, just as if you'd gotten only one success on the roll. If quality is an issue, you might want to roll dice anyway to try for more successes. But for simple and often-repeated actions, this system works just fine.

There's another way to get an automatic success on a roll: Simply spend a Willpower point (p. 161). You can do so only once per turn, and you can't do it too often since you have a limited supply of Willpower, but it can certainly help when you're under pressure to succeed.

Trying It Again

Failure often produces stress, which often leads to further failure. If a character fails an action, he may usually try it again (after all, failing to pick a lock does not mean the character may never try to pick the lock again). In such cases, though, the Storyteller has the option to increase the difficulty number of the second attempt by one. If the character fails yet again, the difficulty of a third attempt goes up by two, and so on. Eventually, the difficulty will be so high that the character has no chance of succeeding (the lock is simply beyond her ability to pick).

Examples of when to use this rule include climbing a wall or interrogating a prisoner. After all, if you couldn't find a handhold or get the prisoner to talk the first time, there's a reasonable chance you might not be able to do it at all.

Sometimes the Storyteller shouldn't invoke this rule. For example, failing to hit someone with a sword, to detect an ambush, or to track a fleeing victim are to be expected in stressful situations. Such failure does not automatically lead to frustration and failed future attempts.

Example: Sir Jerome, a vassal of the Prince of York, is not having a good night. He's at the table with a Nosferatu envoy in some critical negotiations, and things aren't going well. When Jerome wishes to add some references to the great orations of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux to smooth things over with the envoy (a follower of the Road of Heaven), the Storyteller craftily suggests that Jerome's player, Edward, roll Wits + Etiquette (difficulty 6) in addition to roleplaying his banter. Edward does so—and Sir Jerome fails to realize that his reference to the great Catholic preacher only alienates the Nosferatu, an Armenian Orthodox monk in life. (The envoy, however, has no difficulty informing Sir Jerome of the fact.) Jerome attempts to make amends, but the Storyteller tells Edward that the difficulty is 7 this time. Jerome is under pressure, and another insult could break negotiations off entirely.

Complications

The preceding rules should be enough to get you going, and they might be all you ever need for chronicles that favor storytelling over dice-rolling. They don't necessarily cover all instances, though. For example, what if you're trying to do something while a Storyteller character is actively trying to stop you? What if your companion tries to help you break a code?

The following various ways to complicate matters are intended to bring extra color to games. You certainly don't have to use them, but they might add more realism and suspense to your story.

The following complications are relatively simple and generic, usable to describe a wide variety of actions. For plenty of situation-specific complications, see Chapter Seven.

Multiple Actions

Occasionally, a player will want her character to perform more than one action in a turn—for example, striking two different opponents or climbing a ledge while kicking at pursuers below. In such situations, the player can attempt actions normally, though all actions suffer a penalty.

The player declares the total number of actions he wants his character to attempt. He then subtracts a number of dice from his first dice pool equal to the total number of actions. Additional actions lose an extra die from their pools, and the penalty is cumulative. If a dice pool is reduced to 0 or below in this manner, the character may not attempt the action.

Example: Justin wants his character, Hall the Nosferatu, to throw a punch while simultaneously dodging two incoming blows. Hall has Dexterity 3, Brawl 4 and Dodge 3. Justin calculates the dice pool for the punch (Dexterity 3 + Brawl 4 = seven dice), then subtracts three dice from it (because of the three total actions), for a final pool of four dice. The first dodge has a base pool of six dice (Dexterity 3 + Dodge 3), minus four (three for the number of actions, plus one for being the second multiple action), for a final pool of two dice. The final dodge has a pool of one die (six, minus three for the number of actions, minus an additional two for being the third action attempted). Hall had better be pretty lucky.

Vampires with the Discipline of Celerity (p. 179) may take multiple actions without subtracting dice from their dice pools. These extra actions may not themselves be divided into multiple actions, though.

Extended Actions

Sometimes you need more than one success to accomplish a task fully. For example, you might have to spend all night tracking down obscure theological references in a library, or climb a cliff face that's impossible to scale in a single turn. If you need only one success to accomplish an action, the action in question is called a *simple action*. But when you need multiple successes to score even a marginal success, you're undertaking an *extended action*. Simple actions are the most common action in *Dark Ages*, but you will have ample opportunity to perform extended actions.

In an extended action, you roll your dice pool over and over on subsequent turns, trying to collect enough successes to accomplish your goal. For example, your character is

ACTION TYPES

Action	Example	Description
Simple	Dodging a blow, Sensing an ambush	Task is completed with one roll and requires (at minimum) a single success. The Storyteller announces the difficulty and the players roll dice. Automatic success is possible.
Extended	Mountain-climbing, Research	Task is completed when a given number of successes are obtained, which may require more than one roll (which provides more chances of botching).
Resisted	Shadowing	A contest of skill between two individuals. They compare their number of successes; the character with the most successes wins.
Extended & Resisted	Arm wrestling	As a resisted action; the contest requires a given number of net successes and may take more than one turn to complete.



trying to dig a temporary haven in the forest floor, using only his bare hands. The Storyteller tells you that you need 15 successes to hollow out a den that provides sufficient protection from the sun. You'll eventually succeed, but the longer you go, the more chance there is of you botching and collapsing the tunnel. What's more, if you have only so many turns before dawn, the speed with which you finish your task becomes doubly important. In all cases, the Storyteller is the final authority on which tasks are extended actions and which aren't.

You can usually take as many turns as you want to finish an extended action. (Of course, situations being what they are in **Dark Ages**, you won't always have that luxury.) If you botch a roll, however, you may have to start over again from scratch. Depending on what you're trying to do, the Storyteller may even rule that you can't start over again at all; you've failed and that's that.

Because extended actions are often quite apropos for describing certain feats, they're used frequently in Chapter Seven. However, because of the amount of dice-rolling involved, extended actions should probably be kept out of the more intense sessions of roleplaying.

Resisted Actions

A simple difficulty number might not be enough to represent a struggle between characters. For instance, you may try to batter down a door while a character on the other side tries to hold it closed. In such a case, you'd make a *resisted roll*, in which each of you rolls dice against a difficulty often determined by one of your opponent's traits, and the person who scores the most successes wins.

However, when it comes to determining the degree of success, you're considered to score only as many successes as the amount by which you exceed your opponent's successes. In other words, the opponent's successes eliminate your own, just as 1s do. If you score four successes and your opponent scores three, you're considered to have only one success. These leftover successes are called your *effective* or *net successes*. Therefore, it's difficult to achieve an outstanding success on a resisted action. Even if your opponent can't beat you, he can still diminish the effectiveness of your efforts.



Some actions (arm-wrestling contests, debates, chases) may be both extended and resisted. In such cases, one or the other of the opponents must achieve a certain number of successes to win the contest. Each turn, the opponent who achieves net successes adds them to a running tally. The first to achieve the designated number of successes achieves her goal.

Teamwork

You don't always have to go it alone. If the situation warrants (usually during an extended action such as researching a family tree or decoding an Aramaic inscription), characters can work together to collect successes. If the Storyteller decides that teamwork is possible for the task in question, two or more characters can make rolls separately and add their successes together. They may never combine their traits into one dice pool, however.

Teamwork can be effective in many situations — dog-piling on the prince's pet enforcer, shadowing a hunter or doing research in the library, for instance. However, it can actually prove to be a hindrance in certain situations (including social interaction such as fast-talking or seducing a subject), and one person's botch can spoil the whole attempt.

Try It Out

Well, that's it. Those are the basic rules — everything else is just clarification or expansion, the icing on the cake. If you understand these rules, you should be able to play the game with no problem. If you don't yet understand them, reread the section. Better yet, try a couple of rolls yourself.

Let's say that Alexandra is facing a bandit on the road back to her chantry. Her ghoul bodyguard, Terrence, has already been taken out of the picture, so she grabs his sword and takes matters into her own hands. The difficulty for hitting someone is 6 (see Chapter Seven for more details on combat). Take three dice for Alexandra's Dexterity Attribute of 3, and one for her Melee Skill of 1. You have four dice in your dice pool — fair, but not great. Now go ahead and roll. Count up your successes, but don't forget to take away a success for every 1 you roll. Did you make it? Did you botch? The more successes you get, the more accurately placed the blow is (and the better the odds are that the bandit won't be merely grazed and strike back with his ax).

Now try an extended and resisted action — we'll say a debate. (It might not sound that interesting at first, but consider that a debate held before the prince and his knights has some very high stakes....) This will be an indefinite series of rolls, each one perhaps using a different trait and requiring different difficulties. You need to accumulate five more successes than your opponent to prove your point and sway the council. A botch eliminates all of your accumulated successes (you've made yourself look like a fool somehow).

• **First Roll:** Each player rolls Charisma + Expression, difficulty of the opponent's Wits + 3. (Those opening remarks are very important.)

THE GOLDEN RULE

The most important rule is simple, but all-encompassing: *Above all, have fun.*

This means that if the rules or systems in this book interfere with your enjoyment of the game, feel free to change them. The world is far too big to be reflected accurately in any set of inflexible rules. Think of this book as a collection of guidelines, suggested but not mandatory ways of capturing the Dark Medieval in the format of a game. You're the arbiter of what works best in your game, and you're free to use, alter, abuse or ignore these rules at your leisure.

• **Second and Third Rolls:** As the debate heats up, each player rolls Intelligence + Expression, difficulty of the opponent's Intelligence + Expression.

• **Fourth and Subsequent Rolls:** Each player rolls Manipulation + Expression (difficulty of the opponent's Wits + Expression) to put the final spin on his argument.

Examples of Rolls

This rules system is designed with flexibility in mind, and as a result, there are about 270 combinations of Attributes and Abilities. This daunting number is just the beginning, too. You can certainly devise more Talents, Skills or Knowledges if you think there's need. In this manner, you have a huge variety of rolls to simulate actions — whatever you think is most appropriate. The following examples of rolls are meant to give you some idea of the possibilities that might come up in a game.

• You want to conduct yourself flawlessly at the king's banquet (and you can't actually eat anything). Roll Dexterity + Etiquette (difficulty 8).

• You're miles from your haven, and the sun will be up soon. Roll Wits + Survival (difficulty 7) to find shelter for the day.

• You try to distract the bodyguard with your left hand while surreptitiously slipping your knife back into your belt with your right. Roll Dexterity + Legerdemain (difficulty of the bodyguard's Perception + Alertness).

• You've got access to the chantry library for exactly one night. You'd better find the name you want quickly, but there are a lot of books here. Roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8) every hour; you need to achieve 15 successes.

• Can you distract the guard dogs while you slip in? Roll Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 8).

• You try to get his attention by driving your knife through his hand and into the oaken table. Roll Strength + Melee (difficulty 6).

• A gang of bandits roaming the county has been awfully good at picking out targets tied to the vampire

prince. Roll Charisma + Larceny (difficulty 8) to see what people know about them. The more successes you get, the more information you receive, but the legwork will take an entire night regardless.

- You have to keep running if you're going to outdistance your pursuers. Make an extended Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 7). If you collect 15 successes, you've outlasted them.

Lexicon of Game Terms

Here we define a number of terms used in the rules that first-time players and new Storytellers might not be familiar with.

- **Ability:** These are traits that describe what a character knows and has learned, rather than her physical and psychological make-up. Traits such as Intimidation, Melee and Theology are Abilities.

- **action:** An action is the performance of a deed, which is a consciously willed physical, social or mental activity. When players announce that their characters are doing something, they are taking an action.

- **Attribute:** These traits describe what a character inherently is. Such things as Strength, Charisma and Intelligence are Attributes.

- **Background:** A type of trait that measures social and inherited advantages, such as allies, domains and status.

- **botch:** A disastrous failure, indicated by rolling one or more 1s and no successes on the 10-sided dice rolled for an action.

- **character:** Each player creates a character, an individual he portrays over the course of the chronicle. Although "character" could imply any individual, we use it here to describe the players' characters.

- **dice pool:** The amount of dice you have in your hand after adding together your different traits. It is the number of dice you can roll for that action.

- **difficulty:** The number from 2 to 10 that measures the difficulty of an action a character takes. The player needs to roll that number or higher on at least one of the dice in his dice pool.

- **Discipline:** One of the mystical powers of vampires, they each have their own trait.

- **downtime:** The time spent between scenes, where no roleplaying is done and turns are not used. Actions might be made, and the Storyteller might give some descriptions, but time generally passes quickly.

- **extended action:** An action that requires a certain number of successes, accumulated over several turns, for the character to actually succeed.

- **Health:** This trait measures the degree to which a character is wounded or injured.

- **net successes:** The number of successes the victor of a resisted action had above those of the loser. Also called "effective successes."

- **points:** The temporary score of a trait such as Willpower and blood pool — the squares, not the circles.

- **rating:** A number describing the permanent value of a trait — most often a number from 1 to 5, though sometimes a number from 1 to 10.

- **reflexive action:** A situation in which dice might be rolled, but that does not count as an action for the purpose of calculating dice pools. Examples of reflexive actions are soak rolls and Willpower rolls to resist mind control.

- **resisted action:** An action in which two different characters are in direct competition. Both compare their number of successes, and the character with the most wins.

- **scene:** A single episode of the story. A time and place in which actions and events take place moment by moment. A scene is often a dramatic high point of the story.

- **score:** The temporary value of a trait or combination of traits used in a single roll.

- **simple action:** An action that requires the player to get only one success to succeed, though more successes indicate a better job or result.

- **Storyteller:** The person who creates and guides the story by assuming the roles of all characters not taken by the players and determining all events beyond the control of the players.

- **system:** A specific set of complications used in a certain situation. Rules to help guide the rolling of dice to create dramatic action.

- **trait:** Any Attribute, Ability or other character index that can be described as a number (or in terms of dots).

- **troupe:** The group of players, including the Storyteller, who play *Dark Ages*, usually on a regular basis.

- **Virtue:** A type of trait that measures the soul of the character, from her conscience to her courage.

- **Willpower:** A measure of a character's self-confidence and internal control. Willpower works differently from most traits. It is often spent rather than rolled.



BOLTON 01

Fatima walked through the mostly empty streets

of Toledo and tried her best not to pay attention to the signs of her own faith. Even she, now 130 years under the Blood of Haqim, was too young to remember when *El Campeador* had conquered the city from Islam for the Christian king of Castile.

Still, in her mortal days, it had been an open city with a bustling community who followed the laws of Muhammad. Even on her last visit, she had heard the muezzin's cry and felt refreshed.

But the city was becoming less and less hospitable to her faith with every passing year. The great mosque was gone, and a cathedral was growing from its ruins. The great defeat against the Christians some two decades past had taken the wind out of the Muslim sails at last. Córdoba and Sevilla might still resist, but Toledo was Christian evermore.

Fatima's warrior spirit raged against such an injustice. Her Beast growled and hungered for the blood of those who perpetuated their *Reconquista* in the land of her birth and Embrace. When it came to the Cainite monsters who lurked among these Christians, she was hard pressed to control the blood-rage. With the help of but a few of her fellows, she was sure she could decapitate the leadership of those shadow-born crusaders.

The gasp of a street urchin brought Fatima back to the moment at hand. She scolded herself silently when she realized that, in her anger, she had let slip her appearance as a simple fishmonger. The boy had seen her true form and fled. As she moved to silence the lad, she was all too aware of the dark satisfaction in her belly. *Enough*, she thought, *no more useless spilling of blood*. She was not here to rail against Christians or reverse the decisions of her clan to let them move southward.

She was here after one of her own.

"Hiding among the Christians will not help you, Salim," she whispered. "All Children of Haqim know the punishment for murder."



CHAPTER FIVE: CHARACTER AND TRAITS

In blood you were made, and in blood I now claim you.
Let your veins be emptied of the life that God provided
And filled with the power that God has granted unto me.

Let your soul be emptied of its false humility
And your spirit filled with the night's own strength.

—The Erciyes Fragments. IV (Enoch)

Your character is your window into the Dark Medieval world, the fictional persona whose thoughts and actions you'll play out in the course of a chronicle. The preceding chapters describe the visible state of the world **Dark Ages: Vampire** characters inhabit, as well as many of its secret faces. This is your opportunity to take the generalities and turn them into something specific — an individual man or woman, who lived a particular life, was Embraced by a specific vampire for specific reasons, and who now stands among the ranks of the Cainites. Your character may be a paragon of virtue (as interpreted by one of the clans or roads) or an outcast. He may be rich or poor, prominent or reclusive, as you choose within the guidelines your Storyteller provides for your chronicle.

The character sheet provided on page 318 allows you to easily record all of your character's salient traits. By taking a brief tour of it, you can get to know the basics of character creation and the important characteristics in **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

The character sheet records the following important traits and facts:

Name: Your character's name. Vampires, like most medieval folk, don't have a family name. They sometimes add an appellation tying them to their place of birth, such as "Gunther of Bremen."

Chronicle: A chronicle is a series of stories featuring the same characters. The Storyteller often gives it a name to suggest a mood (e.g. "The Last Crusade").

Attributes: These traits measure your character's inherent capabilities, and are divided into Physical, Social and Mental Attributes.

Abilities: These traits measure what your character has learned to do. They are divided into Talents (innate aptitudes), Skills (learned aptitudes) and Knowledges (academic and learned lore).

Advantages: These traits are some of the most important and the ones that make your character most special. *Backgrounds* are the mostly social edges your character has over others. *Disciplines* are the special vampiric powers your character has. *Virtues* measure your soul, from your fearlessness to your conscience. (See Chapter Six for Disciplines.)

Aura: Every road has an aura attached to it. This is an emotional sense that a follower of the road projects to everyone around him. (See Chapter Three.)

Blood Pool: Vampires drink blood to animate their undead bodies and to perform all kinds of feats (boost their strength, power Disciplines, etc.). Your blood pool is a measure of how much blood your character has in her body to be spent. It will go up or down in play.

Nature: This is a one-word archetype that represents your character's true self. A complete list of Archetypes appears in this chapter along with their implications.

Demeanor: Another one-word archetype that represents the face your character shows the world. Taken with Nature, this allows you to get a quick handle on your character's personality.

Clan: Almost all vampires belong to one of 13 clans, bloodlines descended from the ancient Cainites called the Antediluvians. Clan determines some of your character's social position, your choice of starting Disciplines, and a special supernatural weakness you suffer from. (See Chapter Two.)

Generation: This is a measure of how far removed you are from Caine, the first vampire. Having a lower generation (thus being closer to Caine) means you have the potential to be more powerful over the long run. Your generation is 12th, unless you buy the Generation Background (see p. 155).

Health: A vampire may not be alive, but a broken bone still limits what she can do. When your character gets hurt, you mark off one or more boxes to indicate what her current health level is. Each level limits your character's actions, as discussed on page 251.

Willpower: Willpower is your character's mental reserve and ability to overcome impossible odds.

Road: Every vampire follows a moral code called a road, which limits his behavior but helps him keep his violent nature (the Beast) at bay. The higher your Road score is, the more closely your character hews to that code. (See Chapter Three.)

Dark Ages VAMPIRES

Name: Zoë
 Player: Elizabeth
 Chronicle:

Nature: Penitent
 Demeanor: Survivor
 Concept: The Machine
 Clan: Kados
 Generation: 10th
 Banner:

ATTRIBUTES

Strength	Physical	Charisma	Social	Perception	Mental
Dexterity	●●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●●	Wisdom	●●●●●●

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●●●●	Animal Ken	●●●●●●	Academics	●●●●●●
Athletics	●●●●●●	Archery	●●●●●●	Hearth/Wisdom	●●●●●●
Brawl	●●●●●●	Commerce	●●●●●●	Investigation	●●●●●●
Dodge	●●●●●●	Crafts	●●●●●●	Law	●●●●●●
Empathy	●●●●●●	Enigmas	●●●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●●●
Expression	●●●●●●	Melee	●●●●●●	Medicine	●●●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●●●	Performance	●●●●●●	Occult	●●●●●●
Leadership	●●●●●●	Rak	●●●●●●	Politics	●●●●●●
Leadership	●●●●●●	Stealth	●●●●●●	Sensual	●●●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●●●	Survival	●●●●●●	Theology	●●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Chimerstry	●●●●●●	Generation	●●●●●●	Conviction/Composure	●●●●
Fortitude	●●●●●●	Agent	●●●●●●	Self-Control/Insight	●●●●
	●●●●●●	Resources	●●●●●●	Courage	●●●●
	●●●●●●		●●●●●●		

Other Traits: ●●●●●●

Road: Heaven ●●●●●●

Aura: Holiness ●●●●●●

Willpower: ●●●●●●

Blood Pool: ●●●●●●

Health:

Paralyzed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Winded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incappeditated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weakness	_____

Essentials of Life and Unlife

By their very nature, all vampires share some particular elements of personal history. The details vary from one vampire to the next, but you should keep these elements in mind while you look over the possibilities and consider what appeals to you.

In Life, I Was . . .

Every Cainite was once alive. Some reject their mortal lives. Some can't even recall much before the Embrace. Some try to cling to as much of their lives as the Curse of Caine allows. But in every case, they had a life. Think about your character as he was before vampirism ever came into his experience.

The vast majority of people in the Dark Medieval world are poor. Most are farmers, struggling to make a living in the face of uncooperative land, marauders (be they bandits or officially sanctioned soldiers, who are sometimes difficult to distinguish from each other) and all the other challenges of life. Some people live in towns and cities, generally no richer but at least surrounded by a bit more variety than farm life offers — including variety of crime and disease, of course. A more fortunate few enjoy some creature comforts as nobility, but even the richest families of the age lead lives devoid of the comfort and safety that people in the developed nations of the 21st century can take for granted. In between, practitioners of the professions, crusaders and others enjoy varying degrees of ease and freedom of opportunity.

See “Thinking Medieval” on p. 126 for some additional leads in this regard.

My Sire Chose Me Because . . .

Something not only brought your character to the attention of a vampire, but made her want to Embrace him. It might have been the culmination of years of observation and interaction, the vampire courting your character in hopes of winning his allegiance and support. It might have been an act of desperation on the part of a solitary vampire who was badly injured and in need of a controllable companion with supernatural power *right now*.

There are as many reasons for one vampire to create another as there are vampires. No vampire does it carelessly, as it requires a substantial effort, but standards for what constitutes good and sufficient motive vary wildly between clans, roads, factions and even regions. Note that your character may not know everything you decide about the sire's motives, and also that you may choose to have some surprises yourself if you feel comfortable leaving some decisions in the Storyteller's hands. In some chronicles, the ensuing hunt for hidden answers makes a fine major theme, while it would just be disruptive and unpleasant in others.

Note that outside circumstances sometimes force siring on vampires who aren't ready for it, or lead them to act in deliberately unconventional ways. Overly self-conscious inversion of stereotypes can become just as tedious as the stereotypes, but many interesting possibilities lie in between.

Now I Spend My Nights . . .

Finally, having lived, died and returned as undead, your character is doing something on a routine basis now. **Dark Ages: Vampire** assumes that she has completed the fundamental training in Cainite social traditions as described in Chapter One and now enjoys some measure of autonomy. Does her sire still play an important role in her routine? Does she maintain her haven somewhere near her sire, or has she moved far away? Does her sire even exist anymore, or might he have disappeared, been destroyed or just drifted out of touch?

Some vampires maintain a social position much like what they had in life, albeit limited in many ways by vampirism. People of all social strata can claim to be suffering from a curse, since supernatural power is acknowledged and accepted in the Dark Medieval world, and they can also claim to have taken on a peculiar duty. A crusader might swear, or claim to have sworn, never to face the sun again until the holy city of Jerusalem is altogether free of infidels, while a devout blacksmith might feel called, or claim to feel called, to work by moonlight and starlight as a symbol of the darkness of sin within which humanity labors. Exotic disease is also a possibility, particularly in cities along trade routes. Vampires must take care not to attract too much hostile or skeptical attention, but in many ways, it's easier to construct a plausible cover in this era than it will be in later centuries.

Other vampires change their social status and move into new roles — not always to heights denied to them in life, though social climbing is very popular among the unliving. Some vampires turn away from the trappings of the mortal elite for the sake of a post-mortem calling, whether it's as mundane as being able to practice a trade deemed unsuitable for a gentleman or lady or as exotic as applying vampiric strength and speed to innovations in engineering or medicine.

Finally, some vampires step out of mortal society altogether. They deal with humanity through ghouls and other intermediaries and give themselves wholly to Cainite affairs. These are the vampires who set the tone for the culture of a coterie, all the domains in a region or even entire clans. They make many of the crucial discoveries required to develop new Disciplines and refine old techniques, and they prosecute the War of Princes directly against their rivals most vigorously.

This last aspect of your character's history may follow clearly from the early steps, reflect a drastic break or fall somewhere in between. Real life is full of unexpected shifts, and while fiction doesn't get the excuse of “but it really happened that way,” you still have substantial

BUT I DON'T KNOW!

Some players create character concepts in one fell swoop, with everything emerging in fairly short order, but not everyone works that way. It's perfectly all right to work out only a few crucial details at the outset and fill in the gaps after play begins. You need to know enough to answer the most basic questions about your character, such as gender and ethnicity and current circumstances. You don't have to provide a complete biography, as long as the information you do create before play begins satisfies you and your Storyteller.

freedom to create a convoluted past if it feels satisfying to you and fits with the other concerns of the chronicle you'll be playing in.

I Am, We Are: Coterie and Domain

Unless you're playing in a chronicle with just one player and a Storyteller (and not always then), your character is one of several vampires who spend some of their time together. The coterie isn't just a convenience for game play, it's the fundamental unit of Cainite society. Solitary vampires simply cannot pursue the opportunities that a group can by working together. The coterie provides leverage against targets and defense against enemies.

- **Making Contacts:** As you think about who your character is as an individual, also think about her as part of a coterie. Work with the other players to identify points of contact in the backgrounds you create. Perhaps they were rivals before the Embrace, or they all hail from the same village, or two characters once courted the same woman. The more you consider the coterie as well as the character early on, the better use you can make of the opportunities that the mechanics of character creation provide.

- **Since the Last Sunset:** Vampires are predators. They depend on prey. Some coterie lead nomadic existences, but most claim a piece of land and its inhabitants. The rules in this chapter assume that your character's coterie has existed for a few decades, long enough to secure claims and establish with the other vampires its members deal with that, yes, the coterie is there and needs to be considered. The prelude (see p. 277) bridges the gap from your character's mortal days to the point represented by the numbers you'll be assigning here. You can just as easily make characters who have been vampires less time but made particularly good use of their opportunities or older but not so quick to exploit possibilities, all without varying the available numbers. For farther-reaching modifications, check with your Storyteller.

- **Hearth and Haven:** The place your characters occupy should matter, opening up some possibilities and closing off others. One of this game's themes is the differences between the visible, daylight world and the secret truths in the shadows. It's perfectly acceptable for the members of a coterie to contrast with their environment, but there are limits. A coterie of former Vikings just isn't going to do very well in the midst of Rome or Cairo without very serious changes to their routine: Even vampires cannot sail longboats through densely populated cities and expect no interference. "Who we are" and "where we are" generally develop in tandem, and you should generally feel free to change one in light of a good idea for the other.

Many good storytelling possibilities follow from characters who are part of their place as it once was, but isn't anymore. The Dark Medieval world isn't stagnant: Wars, crusades, plagues and other upheavals wipe out leaders and whole communities, while advances in farming and other technology turn former wilderness into civilization (by the era's standards). Families and tribes move in search of opportunity or just relief from persecution. The vampire who's stayed the same while the world changes around him is an archetype precisely because it's rich in tragic and dramatic potential. In the midst of confusion, the company of one's peers may be very welcome even if they don't especially like each other as individuals — at least they share a frame of reference.

The Nature of Our Cause

At their most basic, all coterie are small groups of Cainites who cooperate (or commiserate), but they aren't all identical in purpose or organization. You and the other players should agree on the ties that bind your vampires together. Some basic options follow:

- **The Coterie of Mutual Survival:** The simplest pattern is this: A group of vampires — all of one clan or of several, likely Embraced at about the same time — comes together to exercise authority over a piece of land and its people. Its members work together for that purpose and otherwise occupy themselves as they choose. Coterie can be substantially more closely knit and focused if players choose, however.

- **The Coterie of Influence:** Many coterie exist because of shared interest in some aspect of mortal society. A group of vampires who all hold some influence in a particular social class or profession can largely set the tone for the target community by cooperating. No vampire alone can hope to keep track of everything that goes on in a community of any size, but with teamwork and a division of responsibilities, the coterie together can forestall most independent action that is contrary to its interests. Some vampires see the chaos among Cainites as a challenge they must overcome; others see it as an opportunity to pursue their own concerns with greater freedom than a more orderly time would allow.

• **The Coterie of Lineage:** Some coteries are linked very directly by lineage, all sharing the same sire or with a few sires responsible for all the characters. Prominent Cainites sometimes create broods for specific tasks, such as administering the sire's holdings in a remote location or spying out the activities of possible rivals in an area of mutual concern. Brood coteries of this sort may well operate under cover stories, so that other vampires don't immediately recognize the coterie's members as agents of a common cause. Another variation arises from the practice of some high-blooded sires who imitate mortal nobles and send their childer to train with allied Cainites. This practice can create a "brood" of characters from several different clans.

• **The Coterie of the Disaffected:** In the tumult of the War of Princes, some childer rebel against their sires and flee beyond the horizon. Refugee and rebel coteries may present whatever appearance their members think they can get away with, or they may operate openly as a gathering of the outcast in hopes of winning the support of others like themselves. Conversely, when one or more characters' sires have fallen into disgrace or simply unusually eccentric behavior, childer who are loyal to the sire's rejected affiliations may make a visible display of loyalty to the cause. They separate themselves from their unworthy creators and set about repairing their own standing in the eyes of fellow adherents to a clan, religion or other identity. They may well hope to win permission to destroy their sires, but few vampires would be so tactless as to admit that as a goal to anyone whom they didn't trust very deeply indeed.

• **The Coterie of Wayfarers:** Most vampires are sedentary creatures, but not all of them. Some coteries travel together, sharing their resources to arrange more protection than a single vampire can, and perhaps also for the sake of appreciative, understanding company. Devout vampires may go on a pilgrimage or undertake to guard a pilgrim route. Crusading vampires can and do ride with mortal armies in search of heretics and infidels; merchant vampires go wherever there's a prospect of profit. Note that undead merchants enjoy a competitive advantage in many regards over their mortal rivals, not having to worry about most diseases, better able to cope with harsh climates and capable of fighting off many human would-be predators. Of course, they must often use ghoul intermediaries to sell their wares to townsfolk who are reluctant to go to market by moonlight.

This list is not exhaustive. If a concept that doesn't fit into any of the preceding categories occurs to you, talk it over with other players and the Storyteller to see what they think. Keep in mind that characters may all think of their coterie in somewhat different terms. It's not necessary for all the characters to share a complete unity of purpose. It would, in fact, be very remarkable if they did. Compatibility should be the goal, and it allows for a great deal of diversity.

Thinking Medieval

Most people in the Dark Medieval world face contradictory truths, which they try to reconcile as best they can. (Neither cognitive dissonance nor paradox suddenly sprung into being for the 21st century.) Some zealots do hold straightforward, simple views of the world; most people juggle conflicting claims, and the interplay of concepts fuels both passion and doubt. A character yearning for certainty may commit to a course of action despite reservations, or indeed precisely because of them, to feel that she's facing temptation and persevering in her search for truth. Another character who's long held a particular outlook may suddenly stop to reappraise.

• **Order and Chaos:** Once it was a perfect world, created by God in the seven days of Genesis. Manifestly it's not anymore, and neither banishment from Eden, the Great Flood or the sacrifice of His only Son on the Cross seems to be enough to set the world (and humankind) back on the right track. The search for just what causes a chaotic and unjust world in the face of God's omniscience and omnipotence is one of the great questions of the age, one to which your character may hope to find an answer.

Nowhere is this question more starkly illustrated than in the matter of dualist heresy. These heresies (the Cathars in southern France, the Bogomils in the Balkans and so on) claim that the entirety of the physical world and the various social hierarchies within it are irredeemably corrupt and separate from God. Only the spiritual remains holy. Therefore, it is there, and only there, that man's focus should lie. The Church, for its part, believes that these heretics are twisting the Word of God, which holds the only hope of returning to His grace. Both sides are utterly convinced that the other represents a grave threat to the salvation of man. The bloody Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars is only the most glaring example of the stakes of this battle of ideas, a battle in which your character may well become involved.

• **Good and Evil:** Your character believes that there is a fundamental source for virtues, and likewise for vices. Just as the world seems uncertain in its orderliness, so in its goodness. Christians, Jews and Muslims all believe that God is essentially good, but many believe that He's given the world over partly or entirely to demonic powers for the time being. Pagans believe that gods and spirits of many sorts contend, and that the outcome of their struggle is by no means guaranteed to favor goodness. Doubters hope or fear that even though there are magical and supernatural powers, they're essentially amoral, lacking any direction except that imposed by acts of will. Almost everyone, of every outlook, agrees that the questions "What's supposed to happen when I act virtuously or wickedly?" and "What is likely to happen when I act virtuously or wickedly?" have very different answers. The brokenness of the world is something accepted as given

almost everywhere, except among gatherings of some mystics and the outright foolish.

• **Hierarchy:** Most people in the Middle Ages believe that inequality is an important part of the world. There are superiors and inferiors, and a good society acknowledges this fact so that those who are fit to lead can direct those who are fit to follow. It's in the details that things get complicated. In practice, there are wicked or incompetent rulers in both the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Coups, wars and crusades stem in part from disagreement over who's fit to rule and why — either the heavens keep silent about such matters, or they reveal signs that lend themselves to more than one interpretation. The idea of fundamental equality is, again, a notion for mystics or for those who despair of justice short of the overthrow of all existing powers. Your character has some thoughts about what the proper lines of authority are and what she should do when they're broken or corrupted, and these thoughts guide her in times of disorder.

Five Steps into Darkness

The process of creating a character is divided into five basic steps, discussed here and outlined on page 128. These steps carry you from the kernel of an idea to a complete set of game traits and some concrete facts about your character's background. You may find yourself skipping about the steps somewhat as ideas come to you and you adjust decisions on the fly, and that's perfectly natural. The steps are here to provide you with an easy path, not to limit your wanderings.

Preliminary Assumptions

The rules that follow for building your character make certain assumptions and set some limits. Keep them in mind.

• **Scope.** The rules themselves do not assume that your character must be a particular age, gender or background. The definitions of specific traits given here use common outlooks from the Middle Ages to illustrate their points, but the same scores can just as well describe someone from long ago or far away. The rules do assume that your character has been a vampire for a few decades, created less than a century ago and released into the world after an average of about 20 to 30 years' training as a fledgling childer. The Background traits are designed so that the baseline in each accommodates characters of this sort.

You can change these assumptions to suit the needs of a particular chronicle or the needs of some characters within it. Make sure that the Storyteller and players agree on what's going on. (Discuss rather than leap to independent conclusions that you conceal or neglect to mention.) Any result can be fine if it works for the people playing in that chronicle; any result can wreak major havoc if assumptions come into conflict.

• **Detail.** The numbers presented here are all deliberately broad, fuzzy definitions. The numbers support roleplaying effort rather than supplanting it, and there's a great deal of room for individual clarification. Two characters of approximately average strength, for instance, may have the same numerical score in the Strength Attribute and yet behave differently in play. In some cases, the Storyteller may grant one player a little bonus on some rolls for the somewhat stronger character or assign the other player an occasional handicapping penalty for the somewhat weaker character. The numbers provide true and useful information about characters. They simply don't tell the whole story.

• **Step by Step.** You have a fixed total of points to allocate to certain characteristics at each step. You'll also get bonus points to spend in the final step, to fill in gaps in your character concept. Note that you'll often wish that you had more points than you do. Keep in mind that your character will improve in the course of play, through experience.

• **The Scale.** There's a standard scale from incompetence to excellence in each trait you'll be rating in the following steps. A score of 1 reflects bare minimal ability, a bit better than lacking the trait altogether, but not much. A score of 2 is average for most people, and 3 is notably above average. A score of 4 is distinctly excellent, the mark of someone with both innate talent and experience. A score of 5 reflects mastery at the level of the world's best. Some special characteristics work on a 1-10 scale instead of 1-5, and they're each described in detail later in this chapter.

• **Teamwork. Dark Ages: Vampire** is a group endeavor, not a solitary one. You have an obligation to your fellow players, just as they do to you, not to wreck the game. Once you and the Storyteller know what you all want to do, you need to work within those guidelines until and unless you persuade the other participants to change. It's trivially easy to make characters who comply with the letter of the rules and even with the spirit of the Dark Medieval world but who are totally unsuited for a particular chronicle: devout Muslims in a chronicle focusing on the secret politics behind the Church of Rome, for instance, or resolutely territorial, stay-at-home characters in a chronicle set up to follow a pilgrimage or crusade.

You can do many things that are sometimes a good idea but unwise for a particular situation. Don't be a jerk about it. Cooperate, and you'll get back better entertainment for everyone.

Storyteller, Troupe and Character

In every game, someone has the final say over what's suitable and what isn't in a particular situation. In **Dark Ages: Vampire**, that's the Storyteller overseeing your game. The Storyteller lays out guidelines as to what sorts of characters are particularly desirable, or particularly undesirable, and he should work with you in refining your concept.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Step-by-Step Process

- **Step One: Character Concept**

Choose concept, clan, road, Nature and Demeanor.

- **Step Two: Select Attributes**

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Attributes. Start with one dot in each Attribute. Divide 7 additional dots among primary Attributes, 5 dots among secondary Attributes, 3 dots among tertiary Attributes.

Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Social Attributes: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

- **Step Three: Select Abilities**

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary categories of Abilities. No automatic Ability dots. Divide 13 dots among primary Abilities, 9 dots among secondary Abilities, 5 dots among tertiary Abilities.

Talents: innate aptitudes

Skills: learned abilities

Knowledges: academic and intellectual lore

No Ability can have more than three dots at this stage.

- **Step Four: Select Advantages**

Divide 4 dots among clan Disciplines, 5 dots among Backgrounds, 7 dots among Virtues (plus one free dot in each Road Virtue and Courage).

- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Road rating is equal to the sum of Road Virtues. Willpower is equal to Courage. Current blood pool is the result of one die's roll plus one additional point for each dot of Domain and Herd the character has.

Spend 15 bonus points (see chart).

Clans

The High Clans

- **Brujah:** Proud, angry crusaders.
- **Cappadocian:** Cold scholars of death.
- **Lasombra:** Rich, decadent manipulators.
- **Toreador:** Consummate social predators.
- **Tzimisce:** Inhuman lords of forest and mountain.
- **Ventrue:** Ambitious seekers of power on and behind the throne.

The Low Clans

- **Assamite:** Stewards and judges of Caine's brood.
- **Follower of Set:** Descendants of a dark god, out to overthrow the tyranny of order.
- **Gangrel:** Wild, sometimes feral, outsiders and wanderers.
- **Malkavian:** Fear-inspiring visionaries and oracles.
- **Nosferatu:** Twisted lurkers and penitents.
- **Ravnos:** Independent wanderers and corrupters.
- **Tremere:** Innovative usurpers.

Roads

- **Beast:** Acceptance of the Beast and the cultivation of instinct.
- **Heaven:** Submission to Heaven's will despite personal damnation.
- **Humanity:** Continued loyalty to the virtues of the living.
- **Kings:** The disciplined pursuit of excellence and power.
- **Sin:** Indulgence in vice as one's destiny and nature.

Archetypes Nature and Demeanor

- **Autocrat:** You were made to lead.

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

- **Barbarian:** Civilization is the crutch of the weak.
- **Caretaker:** You are your brother's keeper.
- **Celebrant:** Pursue excitement in all things.
- **Defender:** You stand guard over that for which you care.
- **Gallant:** Whatever you do, do it with style.
- **Jester:** The real fools are those who don't see the flaws you point out in them.
- **Judge:** Someone must decide, must make the hard choices.
- **Pedagogue:** The world needs instruction.
- **Penitent:** You are a sinner. Can you make up for it?
- **Rebel:** The order of the world is corrupt. Are you?
- **Survivor:** When the horn sounds on Judgment Day, you will be there.
- **Protean:** The Gangrel power of taking animal forms.
- **Quietus:** The Assamite power of stealth and judgment.
- **Serpentis:** The Followers of Set's power to assume the form of their serpentine god.
- **Thaumaturgy:** The innovative Tremere system of blood magic.
- **Vicissitude:** The Tzimisce power to sculpt living and unliving bodies.

Backgrounds

- **Allies:** Trusted individuals who share your cause.
- **Contacts:** Sources of information.
- **Domain:** Space in which to feed and rule.
- **Generation:** Strength of the blood.
- **Herd:** Mortals willing to offer their blood regularly.
- **Influence:** Authority and status among mortals.
- **Mentor:** A sponsor or guide among vampires.
- **Resources:** Property and other sources of value.
- **Retainers:** Personal assistants, both living and otherwise.
- **Status:** Authority and renown among vampires.

Disciplines

- **Animalism:** Affinity with and power over animals, and the bestial side of humanity.
- **Auspex:** Preternatural alertness, perception and premonitions.
- **Celerity:** Inhuman quickness.
- **Chimerstry:** The Ravnos power of illusion and deceit.
- **Dementation:** The Malkavian ability to induce and direct madness in others.
- **Dominate:** The power to command others' obedience.
- **Fortitude:** Inhuman toughness and resilience.
- **Mortis:** The multi-faceted Cappadocian art of dealing with death and the corpse.
- **Obfuscate:** The ability to conceal and disguise oneself.
- **Obtenebration:** The Lasombra power of mastery over darkness.
- **Potence:** Inhuman strength.
- **Presence:** The power to sway the emotions and affections of others.

Bonus Point Costs

- **Attributes:** 5 bonus points per dot.
- **Abilities:** 2 bonus points per dot.
- **Ability Specialties (max. three per ability):** 1 bonus point each.
- **Disciplines:** 7 bonus points per dot.
- **Backgrounds:** 1 bonus point per dot.
- **Virtues:** 2 bonus points per dot.
- **Road Rating:** 1 bonus point per dot.
- **Willpower:** 1 bonus point per dot.

On the other hand, the point of playing with other people is precisely to get more than your own creativity at work, and engaging character concepts may well lead the Storyteller to revise his original plans. Sometimes the characters fit precisely and things get underway without a hitch. More often, there's some adjustment on both sides. Cooperation often gets you more of what you want than obstinacy — and with less hassle.

Most of the time, your character doesn't emerge in a single flash of celestial lightning instantly ready for play. Other players may have suggestions, along with the Storyteller. It's often (though not always) good to work out connections in characters' pasts, strengthening the bonds between them in the history of events before play begins so that if the Storyteller prefers not to focus primarily on strangers getting to know each other, he doesn't have to. Of course, if the chronicle has that as a major theme, then extensive prior connections may be very much a bad idea. Individual circumstances take precedence over all these generalizations.

Your Storyteller should have at least some sense of the rules before character creation begins. Remember while expecting the best that everyone has a first chronicle at some point, and if this is that time, then don't expect instant mastery. In addition, even experienced players sometimes lose track of details, and they may need to pause to check specific aspects of the game system. White Wolf will not send anyone around to award prizes to those who memorize the whole book first, nor dispatch the jack-booted game police to confiscate copies of **Dark Ages: Vampire** from those who continue to rely on the index. Allow room for human fallibility.

Some troupes dive right in to the mechanics of character creation after minimal orientation from the Storyteller. His chronicle idea might take just a sentence or two to explain, or it may require a great deal of qualification and clarification. Some players prefer to spend time discussing ideas and possibilities before getting out the character sheets, too. Experiment a little to find what works for you (and feel free to try alternative approaches from time to time, even after you know one way that suits you well). Listen to your Storyteller's description of what he has in mind and pay attention. Nobody likes endless repetition, and it takes time away from more rewarding pursuits.

Storytellers should generally plan one whole session for character creation and preludes (see p. 277). Vampires are complex characters, who necessarily have personal baggage, and it takes some time for everyone to get a sense for their characters. You'll need to see for yourself whether it's better for everyone to create characters and play through preludes together, or whether it makes sense to work individually with the Storyteller. The more complicated the concept is and the more secrets the character is keeping at the beginning of play, the more suitable individual introductory sessions are. At the end of all this,

you should have a character with not just a complete set of numerical ratings but a personality and style, ready for ongoing action.

Step One: Character Concept

Each character begins with an idea. Sometimes it's a personal quirk, sometimes an ability, sometimes a piece of background. You may wish to expand on one of the typical concepts for a clan or road, or try something a little out of the ordinary. Whatever starting point suits you is good as long as it leads to a well-developed character in the end.

You don't need to have all the details lined up at this step. "This is a former Crusader who lost his faith after the Embrace but is now regaining it, in a dark and twisted way," suffices. So does, "I want to play a rebellious peasant who's infiltrating the nobility thanks to clever use of Disciplines and working to undermine his enemy's legacy," and, "I'm thinking of an old woman Embraced by mistake by a Nosferatu with a grudge against someone else in her community, who hates her condition but feels duty-bound to protect her descendants." The steps that follow supply details naturally.

Overall Concept

Refer to the key questions discussed previously: "In life I was..." "My sire chose me because..." and "Now I spend my nights..." If you can complete those statements, even in the most general way, you've got enough of a concept to proceed. Pages 135 to 137 describe a series of templates that can serve as basic concepts and help you maintain the medieval atmosphere of the game.

Clan

Every vampire has a sire, and therefore every vampire has a legacy behind that, of the sire's sire and so on back to (perhaps) Caine, the first murderer and first vampire. Clan does not determine your character's personality, though. It necessarily contributes only a set of powers that your character learns more readily than others and a common weakness that afflicts your character's existence. Clans are not monolithic, rigid structures, not even the relatively hierarchical Tremere, but they do have communities of interest and outlook. Some sorts of personality are more characteristic of some clans than others, as described in the overviews on p. 128 and in more detail in Chapter Two. Even the choice of no clan at all, Caitiff status, carries social consequences.

You may choose to play a character who doesn't know her own clan. Possibly her sire has lied to her and trained her with false assumptions. You know the truth, but she does not. Alternatively, if you choose, *you* may not know the character's clan, either. Some Disciplines occur often enough that knowing which ones are "in-clan" for the character doesn't tell you for sure what the clan is. This is a matter of some delicacy, and it requires

player and Storyteller to work together in a trusting relationship. You are not a bad person if you just don't feel comfortable with it.

Bad

Your character's sire forces vampirism upon your character, and clan lineage comes with that automatically. Diablerie (see p. 258) can change your character's generation in the blood, but clan remains fixed. Your character *can* choose how she responds to the Curse of Caine, what she holds as good and desirable in the face of the temptations that the world and her own Beast throw at her. This is the character's road. See Chapter Three for a full description of the roads.

Note that not all characters who follow a particular road do so with the same fervor. A character with a low Road rating is apathetic or nonchalant about some of the moral convictions that she shares in principle with a high-rating zealot. If your character is not exuberantly committed to her road, she may intellectually acknowledge some tenets but not really worry about them in practice, or she may not even be aware of them yet. Your character's road is as much a matter of potential — how her moral vision might develop — as a statement of what she now believes and seeks to do. It also affects some of your character's opportunities for social interaction — most importantly in who she goes to “church” with.

Archetype: Nature and Demeanor

The two aspects of Archetype sum up key features of your character's personality. Nature is the essence of your character's deepest drives. What motivates him beneath it all? In terms of game mechanics, opportunities to satisfy the impulse that Nature expresses let your character regain Willpower. In terms of play, these opportunities gratify the character's most profound instincts and create a sense of completion and fulfillment. Demeanor is the face your character presents to the world, and it is purely a matter of roleplaying. It may be identical to your character's Nature, or it may differ wildly, depending on how duplicitous your character seems. Archetypes serve as useful shorthand for your character's personality and behavior.

Step Two: Choosing Attributes

This is the first step that involves assigning a batch of numbers. Attributes measure broad categories of human (and vampiric) capability. They come in three categories: Physical (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina), Social (Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance) and Mental (Perception, Intelligence, Wits). Briefly, Physical Attributes cover your character's innate strength, speed and endurance; Social Attributes cover her charm, ability to influence others and her looks; Mental Attributes cover her awareness of the world, intellectual capacity and her

speed of insight and response. Full descriptions of all the Attributes appear on pages 140 through 142.

You must choose one category of Attributes as primary, one as secondary and one as tertiary. A character who is fit and fast, reasonably smart but awkward in society would have Physical Attributes as primary, Mental Attributes as secondary and Social Attributes as tertiary. A powerful charmer who is (at best) middling clever, on the other hand, would have Social Attributes as primary, Physical Attributes as secondary and Mental Attributes as tertiary (or reverse the primary and secondary choices).

All characters begin with one free dot in each of the nine Attributes (except for the Nosferatu, whose clan curse denies them the ability to have any dots in Appearance). You divide more dots among each category depending on the priority you've assigned it.

- Divide seven dots among the primary Attributes. If your character's primary category is Physical, for instance, you might add three dots to Strength and two each to Dexterity and Stamina for someone who's very strong and quite fast and tough, or four dots to Dexterity, two to Stamina and one to Strength for someone who's astoundingly fleet, resilient but only of average strength. Tinker with the possible combinations to suit your concept.

- Divide five dots among the secondary Attributes. If your character's secondary category is Social, you might assign three dots to Manipulation and one each to Charisma and Appearance for someone of average looks and charm who's really very good at getting others to do what she wants, or two dots each to Appearance and Charisma and one to Manipulation for a character of significant beauty and charm but only average persuasive power.

- Divide three dots among the tertiary Attributes. If your character's tertiary category is Mental, you might assign one dot each to Perception, Intelligence and Wits for a character who's average across the board, or three to Perception and none at all to the others for a sort of idiot savant of tracking or alertness.

You may find yourself wondering why it is that your character ends up above average in so many ways. Vampirism has its rewards — if it didn't, the Curse of Caine would never have any seductive power. Unlife confers a dark glamour and twisted vitality. Your character's inner desires become at least somewhat manifest in the flesh: Weak people become stronger, and plain people more beautiful as the complications of life recede in the face of the animating *vitae*. So, yes, your character is something more than typical, which is part of the Cainite nature.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Abilities are more focused areas of experience. Unlike Attributes, your character doesn't begin with automatic dots in any of them. There are many feats your character can attempt only at a penalty, or not at all, simply because nobody can know everything. (Over time, elder vampires may know more than any mortal can dream of, but there's

always something more.) As with Attributes, Abilities are divided into three categories: Talents (innate aptitudes and matters one can learn through experience), Skills (abilities requiring training and practice) and Knowledges (academic and other intellectual pursuits).

You must also assign one Ability category as primary, one as secondary and one as tertiary, as with Attributes. A bookworm who's made some effort to acquire non-academic skills but lacks much of anything in the way of physical potential likely has Knowledges as primary, Skills as secondary and Talents as tertiary. An ill-educated woodsman who's seen some of the world as a soldier likely has Talents as primary, Skills as secondary and Knowledges as tertiary. No Ability may finish this step with more than three dots, though you can spend bonus points to raise some later.

- Divide 13 dots among the Abilities in the primary category.
- Divide 9 dots among the Abilities in the secondary category.
- Divide 5 dots among the Abilities in the tertiary category.

One final point of similarity between Attributes and Abilities is that the Curse of Caine also enables greater-than-mundane mastery of some Abilities. It sharpens the character's prowess... making it that much easier to commit a wider panoply of more complex and deep-reaching sins.

Full descriptions of the individual Abilities appear on pages 142 through 153.

Step Four: Choosing Advantages

This step deals with the qualities distinctive to vampires. Most human beings don't have the competence of a starting **Dark Ages: Vampire** character, but they can know the same sorts of things. Some things, however, are unique to the undying.

Disciplines

Your character's sire taught him certain supernatural powers, known as Disciplines; in addition, your character may have developed some on his own. You have four dots to divide among the Disciplines of the clan you chose in step one. (See Chapter Two, or the summary chart on page 128). If your character is Caitiff, you may purchase whatever Disciplines you choose, subject to Storyteller approval. You can buy out-of-clan disciplines only with bonus points later in the character creation process. Full descriptions of the Disciplines appear in Chapter Six.

Backgrounds

The term "Background" is a sort of catch-all that refers to many aspects of a character's persona and situation that don't fit into the categories covered so far. Some Backgrounds, such as Generation, are mystical internal features. Others, such as Allies and Contacts, deal with the character's

place in mortal society, and some, such as Domain and Status, cover the character's place among Cainites. See p. 129 for one-line summaries and pp. 153-158 for the details on each Background. You have five dots to divide among Backgrounds as you wish, though your Storyteller may say that some Background choices don't fit the character. A destitute wanderer, for instance, has little opportunity to build up many riches, so he cannot plausibly have high Resources without a great deal of justification.

You and your fellow players can pool some Backgrounds, with characters combining their resources for best effect. Backgrounds available for pooling include Allies, Contacts, Domain, Herd, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Retainer. See p. 157 for details.

Depending on the nature of the chronicle, your Storyteller may rule some Backgrounds off-limits and others highly recommended or even obligatory. Depending in turn on the roles the characters are to play, the Storyteller may simply give you extra dots to apply to the mandatory elements so that you retain the usual quota of choices. (This is almost always the best way to handle it: If something *must* be, don't require players to give up other choices for it.)

Virtues

Every character has scores indicating his strength in three Virtues: one covering his resolve in the face of danger, one covering his internal moral compass and one covering his response to destructive impulses. Together they provide the moral and spiritual bulwark against the endless temptation to sheer mindless rampage and wanton flight, the twin temptations of the Beast within every vampire.

The road you choose for your character determines the choice of two of these Virtues. All vampires possess the Courage trait, in varying degrees. The other two issues each present a pair of very different responses. Conscience and Conviction both provide a character with a source of moral law to follow, but Conscience draws on prevailing social views while Conviction is a deeply personal and often thoroughly inhuman system. Self-Control and Instinct represent diametrically opposite views of the Beast. Self-Control teaches the vampire to avoid falling into the abyss of pure passion, while Instinct allows the vampire to immerse herself in the passion and steer it, to some degree, moment by moment.

As with most **Dark Ages: Vampire** traits, Virtues are rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is minimal ability and 5 is moral excellence (in terms of the outlook the Virtue encourages, which may be horrific in other lights). Your character begins with one dot in Courage and one dot in each of her Road's specified Virtues. You then have seven more dots to allocate as you see fit.

The sum of dots in the Road Virtues determines your character's initial Road rating, which in turn shapes the character's sense of what's deeply or lightly sinful as well as some of the effect she has on others who sense her moral orientation. See Chapter Three for details. Willpower,

the character's reserve of inner strength for times of need, begins equal to Courage. Keep these consequences in mind as you distribute dots among Virtues, and remember that bonus points can raise some scores later.

Step Five: Finishing Touches

The major work of character creation is now over. You have taken a concept and translated it into a character sheet that shows your vampire's mundane and supernatural capabilities. Likely you also have some areas for which you wish you could improve the scores; these are incentives for play. This step rounds out the character's description with several traits that come in handy.

Road Score

Your character begins with a rating in his chosen road equal to the sum of his Road Virtues, as described previously. Road ratings run on a scale of 1-10 rather than 1-5. A Road of 5 (the lowest possible for a typical starting character) represents a profound lack of self-control and a general aimlessness that is, for vampires, almost always the immediate precursor to the complete loss of intellect and individual personality. A Road of 9, possible if your character greatly neglects Courage, reflects a degree of moral purity comparable to the holiest of saints and apostles, albeit perhaps purity within a monstrous creed. Most characters begin with Road ratings around 5-7, reflecting determination but something less than all-consuming passion for perfection. Characters start play having already gone through one or two moments of truth (see p. 266) unless they take the Flaw: Initiate to the Road (see p. 308).

Willpower

This trait is also measured on a scale from 1 to 10. A Willpower of 2-3 is about average for most human beings. Surviving the temptations of vampirism requires more than usual determination, and most vampires have substantially higher ratings. At this step, Willpower begins equal to your character's Courage score. Almost all players find it wise to spend at least a few bonus points to raise Willpower higher. A vampire with a Willpower of 3 or less simply isn't likely to last long.

Blood Pool

Your character's generation (see p. 164) determines the maximum possible quantity of blood she can hold and use. The conditions of the Dark Medieval world seldom allow for complete satiety on a regular basis, however, and there's always some randomness in feeding success. The one and only randomly determined score during character creation, therefore, is your character's current blood pool rating. Roll one die, and add one per level of Domain or Herd Background (whichever is higher), up to the character's generation-imposed maximum.

Bonus Points

At last you can fill in the most annoying or pressing gaps between your sense of what you'd



like your character to be and what the points that are available at each step make possible. You have 15 bonus points to spend. Dots in different sorts of traits cost different quantities of bonus points, as described in the chart on page 129.

In the earlier steps of character creation, you could put no more than three dots in any given Ability. Three dots represents significant mastery of a field, enough to make your character one of the best at that ability in his region. With bonus-bought dots your character can rise to greater heights, as part of the supernatural prowess that comes with the Curse. If you raise Abilities to four or five dots, keep in mind what this means: Your character has now become one of the best of the best at those Abilities. If you give your character five dots in Leadership, for instance, you've made him in likelihood better at rousing the masses than the king, cardinal and other great leaders of that land. **Dark Ages: Vampire** certainly allows you to do so, just think carefully when assigning your character such ratings.

The Spark of Unlife

You presumably began this process with a concept in mind. The actual step-by-step mechanics almost always change your character concept, sometimes in big ways. Now it's time to take stock of the results.

Remember that the rating scales used in **Dark Ages: Vampire** deliberately leave room for individual variation through roleplaying. Consider, for example, three characters who all have Intelligence 2 and Theology 2.

- Anders is a Norseman raised in one of the devoutly Christian communities of southern Norway, and he was a missionary among the remaining pagan communities to the north until his Embrace. He has little academic experience and he's not particularly fast on the uptake, but he's extremely persistent. He specializes in the details where Norse beliefs may be interpreted as precursors of Christian revelation.

- Battista is a Sicilian nun with a flair for religious poetry and hymn-making, who sees her vampirism as a test of faith that she'll overcome some night. Much of the world passes her by, but she has a particular knack for wordplay and puzzles.

- Concepción is a noblewoman of Aragon, very distantly related to the royal family from which the Lasombra Lucita, childe of Monçada, descends. She has no use for abstract issues, and she does best managing her family's holdings while the men fight the *Reconquista*, with vampirism a serious nuisance rather than an essential element of her identity. She's learned a great deal of practical lore about Islam so as to work most effectively with prisoners and prospective converts.

The players of these three characters would use the same Attribute + Ability pair very differently to reflect

the characters' diverse circumstances. Their Storyteller would likely let each character accomplish some feats automatically, rule others simply outside the character's experience and sometimes modify standard difficulties up or down in between.

The numerical ratings are, as you can see, not the whole story. Take the time to think about what they mean in practice for your character. When your character draws on a specialty, what do others see — great confidence, calm mastery, something else? If your character is physically weak, does that appear as some noticeable deformity, flabbiness, lanky thinness?

For each Attribute and Ability your character uses often, ask yourself, "How does this show in the world around the character?" Some expertise, of course, leaves no visible mark until it's used... but then the exercise of secrecy is itself something to consider in roleplaying. Wherever your character's ratings diverge significantly from the norm for his society, people are likely to notice *something*, which is all potential fodder for your gaming. Your character should feel vivid and interesting to you, since you'll be spending a fair amount of time with him.

Similar considerations apply to Virtues, Backgrounds and the other traits. Chapter Three described how the character's standing on her chosen road affects her dealings with others, but there remains room for customization and individual touches. The awe that people feel around a deeply compassionate healer is not like the awe that they feel around a fanatical crusader, for instance. Two members of a coterie might both deal with the same person in their town in very different ways: One knows the constable as an ally, an old friend whom the vampire shields from the grim realities of vampirism, while the other knows him as a contact, a useful tool to be discarded or destroyed if he ever becomes inconvenient.

Wherever possible, you should be able to explain your character concept in words — use numbers to support them rather than relying on numbers alone. Saying, "Sir Giles is a perennially smirking middle-aged man who's nonetheless disturbingly persuasive," is a lot more useful in some circumstances and almost always more fun than saying, "Sir Giles has Appearance 2, Manipulation 4 and Presence 3."

The Prelude

The very last "finishing touch" is the character prelude, a brief session of play during which the Storyteller guides you through some of the formative moments of your character's unlife. There isn't much die-rolling or any grave threats in a prelude, and it can even be reduced to a series of quick questions if need be, but it also provides a lot of useful context for your character. You'll get to play out how you met your mentor or contacts, just where you learned Theology up to level 4, how you met the other characters and other key moments. Managing the prelude is up to the Storyteller, and Chapter Eight goes into the details for her (see p. 277).

Twilight Vistas: Starting Points

All vampires are individuals, just as all living people are. Vampires also belong to the society of their time, and some combinations of history and personality occur more often than others. The following templates describe some of the common types of vampires in the Dark Medieval world. Each one sketches out some features of that type of person's past and provides recommendations for some traits. You still make the detailed decisions, and you're free to use some ideas and ignore others. The templates should open up possibilities for you, not close them off.

Crusader

In life, you answered the call to take up the cross and follow your leader into battle against the heathen, whether in Iberia, the Holy Land or on the Baltic coast. You did what would have been terrible things if they weren't in the best of causes. Eventually your courage and dedication attracted the attention of one of the brood of Caine, who offered you the opportunity to continue the calling with superior resources. Sometimes you worry about the cost to your soul, but it's been worth it so far.

Recommended Clans: Brujah, Lasombra, Toreador, Ventrue
Recommended Roads: Kings, Heaven, Humanity
Attribute Prioritization: Physical, Mental, Social
Ability Prioritization: Talents, Skills, Knowledges
Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Influence

Devil in Dead Flesh

To others, you seem to be the person you once were in life, albeit now transformed by the Curse of Caine. You know the ghastly truth that most vampires deny, which is that the person you once were is truly gone, that soul off to its eternal torments in Hell. While you remember that person, you aren't it anymore. You're one of the legions of Hell risen into the world to usher in the Apocalypse. The struggle you feel within you is merely ignorance or confusion, which will fade in time as you pursue your mission. There can be no pardon for you, and only Satan's victory in the last war might conceivably set you free.

Recommended Clans: Cappadocian, Malkavian, Ravnos, Tzimisce
Recommended Roads: Beast, Sin
Attribute Prioritization: Social, Physical, Mental
Ability Prioritization: Skills, Knowledges, Talents
Recommended Backgrounds: Herd, Influence, Resources

Fugitive Criminal

Life was never anything but a burden to you. Having to live by the sweat of your brow was part of the curse laid on

Adam, so the preachers said. Adam must have sinned mightily indeed, if your experience was any indication. In the end, you couldn't live by their codes. You committed some crime—a theft, a rape or perhaps a murder—then you fled. It was in the midst of flight that you encountered one of the souls even more thoroughly cursed than you. He made you into one of the Damned. When he tried to use you as a tool, you broke his laws, too. Now you exist under a freshly constructed cover identity, hoping that neither your living nor your unliving past will catch up to you.

Recommended Clans: Brujah, Follower of Set, Gangrel, Ravnos

Recommended Roads: Beast, Humanity, Sin

Attribute Prioritization: Physical, Social, Mental

Ability Prioritization: Talents, Skills, Knowledges

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Domain

Gravedigger

People die. It's the fundamental fact of life. You've always been a bit obsessed with death, torn between horror and fascination. As a child, you learned the basics of preparing a body for burial, the symbology for well-made tombstones and other aspects of the process of laying the dead to rest. As an adult, you became the one others turned to in the hour of final need: the one to say the right prayers to ease an inescapable passing and to mark someone's passing with honor and dignity. When plague or war swept through your area, you were ready. When you were the last one standing, the sole survivor of your family or village, you took it as God's sign that you should move on and minister to the same needs elsewhere. You still do, even though thanks to the mysterious companion in your travels, you now have a somewhat different perspective on death's meaning. You have time to study it all.

Recommended Clans: Assamite, Cappadocian, Follower of Set, Gangrel, Malkavian

Recommended Roads: Heaven, Humanity

Attribute Prioritization: Mental, Physical, Social

Ability Prioritization: Talents, Knowledges, Skills

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Mentor, Resources

Heretic

All institutions fail, and those that profess their holiness fail most of all. The conventional wisdom of the great powers is wrong, and fatally so. It has lapsed from true doctrine into grievous error. Your assigned role is the recovery of lost truth. The powers that be call you a heretic, and you're content to let them do so, since you serve God's truth rather than their convenience. Your living fervor kindled something in the heart of one of Caine's brood, bringing your sire back from the brink of suicidal despair and into fresh zeal for continued existence. In return, your sire gave you the Embrace. You use

your new powers to preach the truth and smite the slaves of error that much more efficiently. Let them call their crusades and issue their decrees; you continue preaching on the dust that was once their bones.

Recommended Clans: Assamite, Brujah, Cappadocian, Gangrel, Malkavian, Ravnos, Toreador

Recommended Roads: Heaven, Kings

Attribute Prioritization: Social, Mental, Physical

Ability Prioritization: Knowledges, Talents, Skills

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Herd, Retainers

Lady of the Night

You were raised to be a lady, and that means much more than being decorative. You learned useful arts and crafts, as well as the skills necessary to manage holdings when your husband and lord might be off on war or crusade. Being a pretty but useless frail thing was not an option, any more than it is for the vast majority of the nobility. That's the prerogative only of the very wealthiest, and while your family's holdings might generate wealth, they also *cost* wealth to operate. So you were a useful (if not always valued) member of the household. Vampirism hasn't changed everything. It has let you be a better lady of the manor in some ways, now that you no longer tire or suffer from heat and chill. You explain away your nocturnal existence as a vow or curse or mysterious illness, and you press on.

Recommended Clans: Brujah, Lasombra, Toreador, Tzimisce, Ventrue

Recommended Roads: Heaven, Humanity, Kings

Attribute Prioritization: Social, Physical, Mental

Ability Prioritization: Skills, Talents, Knowledges

Recommended Backgrounds: Domain, Herd, Influence, Resources, Retainers

Magus

You were always interested in puzzles, but human senses and human reasoning can take you only so far. You were still young, or so it seems to you now, when you were apprenticed to a mysterious stranger who told your parents that he'd put your curiosity to a better use than they could in their little village. For more than a typical mortal lifetime, you did the routine labor that his real work required, gathering the specimens and disposing of the remains while he unraveled the world's mysteries with magic. Finally he decided that you were worthy, and he Embraced you to begin your real discipleship. Now you mostly work as your own master, though you may assist him in specific projects from time to time, and soon it will be time for you to take apprentices of your own.

Recommended Clans: Assamite, Follower of Set, Ravnos, Tremere, Tzimisce

Recommended Roads: Kings, Humanity, Sin

Attribute Prioritization: Mental, Physical, Social

Ability Prioritization: Knowledges, Skills, Talents

Recommended Backgrounds: Domain, Mentor, Resources, Status

Penitent

Power corrupts, and so does life itself. You once enjoyed wealth and position, making others do your bidding and profiting by their labor. Things changed when the strange traveler crossed your path. Her words seemed conventional enough at first: judgment impending, repent, the same old story. But she showed you things, forced you to confront the consequences of your actions, to experience the feelings and ideas in others created by your commands. When you broke down under the weight of guilt and hunger for repentance, she took you out of life altogether. Now you roam as she did, making amends for your own misdeeds and forcing a similar awareness into the hearts of others.

Recommended Clans: Lasombra, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Ventrue

Recommended Roads: Heaven, Humanity

Attribute Prioritization: Social, Mental, Physical

Ability Prioritization: Skills, Knowledges, templates

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Herd, Influence, Mentor

Power Behind the Throne

God has appointed the strong to lead the weak, so you're told. In life you might have thought yourself (and been) strong; you could just as easily have been a weakling, outcast or underling. That's all behind you now. Whatever you once were, your ambition drew the attention of the vampire who became your sire and showed you what power was really all about. You could rule openly on your own behalf, but that would create complications. It's so much simpler to bide your time and give orders to those whom the world at large believes to be the real authorities. You amass ever-greater power, and the world will belong to you and your kind in the end.

Recommended Clans: Assamite, Cappadocian, Lasombra, Malkavian, Tremere, Ventrue

Recommended Roads: Kings, Humanity, Sin

Attribute Prioritization: Social, Mental, Physical

Ability Prioritization: Skills, Knowledges, Talents

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Influence, Retainers, Resources

Worldly Monk or Nun

Monastic life was a good scam, as far as you were concerned. Make a few appropriate professions of piety, and the gullible masses would give you donations, feed you, let you take charge of their estates in their wills. That was wonderful. Rather suddenly you learned that you were by no means the most efficient manipulator around, when the shadows came to life around you and revealed someone vastly older and more clever than you. You

appealed to your sire as a reminder of lost youthful days. Now you study how to apply your new powers to the same basic task, which is (as ever) survival. In the war between you and the world, you'll bet on yourself. So far you're winning, very comfortably.

Recommended Clans: Follower of Set, Lasombra, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Ravnos, Toreador

Recommended Roads: Humanity, Sin

Attribute Prioritization: Social, Mental, Physical

Ability Prioritization: Skills, Knowledges, Talents

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Domain, Herd, Influence, Mentor, Resources

Virtuous Monk or Nun

As a child, you heard God call you to holy service — perhaps even literally, with words and visions others couldn't experience. You gave up whatever secular glory you might otherwise have had for the sacred toil of monastic life. You're not a fool, and you learned early on that others had taken orders for less deserving reasons, but that's between them and the Judge of all flesh. Keeping yourself on the road to purity was work enough, and you emphasized compassion in dealing with others' weaknesses. Then came the tempter, who offered you a terrible choice: the opportunity to continue ministering to others until the end of days (and nights), at the cost of your own soul. You still lie awake sometimes, feeling the curse within you and wondering if you chose well or if this is not just another species of that oldest of sins, pride. Only fresh diligence in the gardens of the world's need can bring you peace again.

Recommended Clans: Brujah, Lasombra, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Toreador, Tzimisce, Ventrue

Recommended Roads: Heaven, Humanity

Attribute Prioritization: Mental, Social, Physical

Ability Prioritization: Skills, Knowledges, Talents

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Domain, Herd, Influence

Character Creation

Example

Andrew tells his friends that he's got a nifty idea for a **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicle. He's been reading about the history of chivalry and wants to delve into changing ideas of holiness in the midst of secular duty. He asks those who'd like to play to come up with character concepts that include a strong religious component. This sounds great to Elizabeth, who's been toying with "survivor" concepts. She puts her thoughts together with Andrew's guidelines and gets the image of a young vampire whose whole existence has been marked by calamity, struggling against looming fate. Andrew gives her the go-ahead, and she starts considering details.

With Andrew's permission, Elizabeth creates a character whose sire is a published **Dark Ages** character. Specifically, she finds Gregory the Wonder Maker, a Ravnos who appears in **Constantinople by Night**, appealing. She knows that he flees Constantinople as it burns during the Fourth Crusade, and she imagines her character as a competent young adult chosen to act as Gregory's escort during the flight. She also decides that she'll play a female character, since she wants to poke at medieval possibilities and limitations for women along with the religious-destiny aspects of her character. After looking at some lists of Byzantine names for women, she settles on "Zoe" and begins thinking about statistics. For her Nature and Demeanor, she chooses Penitent and Survivor, respectively. Zoe is known for having survived Constantinople and other hard times, but her true self is focused on her own soul.

The Magus template (see p. 136) appeals to Elizabeth — she likes the notion of a character who applies her mind and wits to the mysteries around. She follows the template in making Mental Attributes primary, Physical Attributes secondary, and Social Attributes tertiary. After considering various possibilities for the allocation of dots, Elizabeth settles on Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2; and Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3. Zoe is very fast on her feet and very observant. In fact, that's the combination of traits that led Gregory to choose her as his new child. She's average in most physical and social aspects, and she's smarter and more clever than average.

Elizabeth decides that the template's suggested roads don't fit her concept, so she settles on the Road of Heaven. Zoe wasn't particularly fervent about her religion in life, but the terrible chaos of Constantinople's sacking shocked her deeply, and when her sire later perished in fire during the Albigensian Crusade, only fanatical religious commitment sustained her resolve to avoid suicidal despair. Still later, she began traveling with the Malkavian prophet Anatole, whose fervor supports and refines her own. Heaven is Zoe's goal, and nothing must stand in its way.

Zoe takes increasingly clear form in Elizabeth's imagination. In keeping with the Magus template, Elizabeth makes Zoe's Knowledges primary, Skills secondary and Talents tertiary. After a number of false starts and backtracking revisions, Elizabeth settles on Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Legerdemain 1, Subterfuge 1; Archery 1, Crafts 2, Etiquette 1, Melee 1, Performance 1, Ride 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1; and Academics 2, Hearth Wisdom 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2, Occult 3. She also sees that she'll have to use bonus dots to fill in a number of gaps between what she can buy at this point and what she feels Zoe should be capable of.

As a member of the Ravnos clan, Zoe begins her vampiric existence with an innate aptitude for Animalism, Chimerstry and Fortitude. Elizabeth envisions Zoe as an

urban vampire and decides to let Animalism wait for now. She assigns three dots to Chimerstry and one to Fortitude. Zoe is already a skilled crafter of illusions and somewhat unnaturally tough.

Dark Ages: Vampire characters begin at 12th generation by default. Elizabeth must commit two of Zoe's Background dots to Generation, since Gregory is established as ninth generation and Zoe must therefore be 10th. Elizabeth assigns two dots to Mentor, reflecting Anatole's unstable but nonetheless useful presence as Zoe's guide and instructor. The last dot goes into Resources, reflecting Zoe's resourcefulness in picking up items of value wherever she travels.

The Virtues of the Road of Heaven are Conscience and Self-Control, and Zoe begins with an automatic dot in both, as well as in Courage. Now Elizabeth has to think carefully about how she envisions Zoe's moral strengths and weaknesses. She settles on Conscience 3, Self-Control 3 and Courage 4. Zoe does pretty well for herself both in maintaining her moral compass and in keeping her Beast in check, but she does better at holding fast in the face of danger. Her courage developed under the repeated shocks of her early years, and it is crucial to her survival. She begins with a Road rating of 6, the sum of her Conscience and Self-Control. This rating is about average for a fairly recent vampire, and it provides her plenty of room to aspire for better or to plummet into wickedness, depending on how things go. Her starting Willpower is 4, equal to her Courage, and her blood pool is 13, thanks to her relatively low Generation.

Finally, it's time to spend bonus points. Elizabeth starts by assigning three points to Willpower, raising it to 7. Zoe needs all the help she can get surviving in chaotic circumstances. The remaining 12 dots all go into raising various Abilities: Athletics, Legerdemain, Subterfuge, Stealth and Survival to 2, and the new ability of Dodge at 1. Elizabeth knows that she'll happily burn up any experience points she acquires refining Zoe's Abilities, too.

Nature and Demeanor

The twin faces of a character's archetype, Nature and Demeanor, point at aspects of his personality beyond and beneath any specific aptitude or knowledge. Nature is the "big story" about a character: When everything else fails or falls away, what's left? What's the thing that most drives him in the face of all adversity? That's his Nature. Demeanor is the essence of the character's outward personality. Sometimes it's identical to Nature, when the character simply is what he appears to be. In other cases, it's quite different, whether through deliberate deception, self-denial on the character's part or the accumulation of cover stories and partial truths that define many people and nearly all vampires over time.

Keep in mind that Nature and Demeanor are indicators and summaries, not high stone walls sealing off possibilities. Not all character concepts lend themselves to one of the Archetypes listed here. Where it's appropriate, the Storyteller and player should work together to come up with a definition that *does* suit the character. If it works with a summary label and short description, fine. If not, also fine. What matters is a clear definition of what the character must do for self-fulfillment and the renewal of Willpower, not making it fit a particular word count. The Storyteller's response to a player saying, "I don't quite see anything here that fits my concept," should be, "Then let's modify one of these if we can, and make up a new one otherwise," rather than, "Then you can't play that concept."

The character's inner nature does matter in play, and not just for reasons of roleplaying completeness. The Willpower trait measures the character's available mental, physical and spiritual reserves for moments of greater-than-usual effort. Over time, the character draws on those reserves and they can run out. Significant accomplishments in accord with the character's Nature are the key to restoring lost Willpower. See p. 162 for the details. Briefly, when the character achieves the kind of thing toward which his Nature drives, you can make a roll to see whether one or more points of spent Willpower become available in the character's Willpower pool again.

Autocrat

The time is out of joint, and you were born, or Embraced, to set it right. You thrive when you can take charge and bring order to what's been chaotic. You might have been a great leader in life; you might also have been one of the powerless masses, now serving in a role that was denied to you all your mortal days. You trust your judgments, and why not? Experience tells you that you're made for special insights into both the world's problems and their solutions.

- Regain Willpower when you lead a group to some significant accomplishment.

Barbarian

Civilization is the trap that the clever set for the weak, and in which they end up snaring themselves. Truly intelligent, brave, strong people understand that sedentary existence only brings you that much closer to the grave, and that what counts is what you achieve as an individual. You respect only actual deeds. Anyone can boast or scheme, but all words vanish in the end. Only deeds remain, having changed the world.

- Regain Willpower when you beat "civilized" competition through your barbaric virtues.

Caretaker

You are, indeed, your brother's keeper. Whether you understand it as the will of God, your duty to your ancestors and the spirits or simply as the obligation of a fully aware

human being, you know that the most important obligation is providing for others' needs. Not everyone appreciates your effort, as you already know from bitter experience, but rejection and ingratitude do not give you license to stop doing what you know you should. There can be no rest until the world is at ease, and that's a long way off.

- Regain Willpower when you put forth significant effort that benefits others without any particular return for yourself. (This isn't martyrdom, just acting for motives other than self-interest.)

Celebrant

The greatest joy in life (or after death) is the only thing worth having. Some particular kind of consummate satisfaction draws you on. Depending on who you are, it may be the ecstasy of prayer, the heady rush of battle, the textures of the finest fabrics... almost anything might be the key to sensual happiness. Whatever it is, you'll do whatever seems necessary to protect that pleasure and enjoy it. You may or may not feel compelled to share the joy with others.

- Regain Willpower whenever you experience a new pleasure within your favored category (using an unfamiliar type of weapon in battle, praying in accordance with a new liturgy or hymnal, wearing a fabric you've never worn before), when you convert another character to a proper appreciation of the pleasure's merits or when you repeat the single strongest pleasure of your chosen sort.

Defender

Everything that matters in the world struggles to survive in the face of its enemies. This isn't necessarily a commitment to tradition, though. The thing you defend may be some fragile innovation or the hope of future progress. You may see your role in martial terms, or otherwise; this is an Archetype for healers and priests as well as warriors. You find your fulfillment in defending the cause to which you've given your allegiance.

- Regain Willpower whenever you successfully defend your chosen object of loyalty from some outside threat.

Gallant

Never mind goals and ultimate conditions: What matters is how you make your way. The most important thing in the world is style in all its manifestations — the right appearance, the right accoutrements, the right speech and actions. You aspire to be the gentleman or lady whose panache sets the tone for the community around you. Romance and rhetoric guide you; morbidity, depression and earnest self-denial are the great enemies.

- Regain Willpower whenever you accomplish a significant task with particular style and grace.

Jester

In a world full of woes, what can anyone do to survive but laugh? In a world full of fools with power, what can

anyone do but mock them? You are the one who sees the world as it is (a veil of folly and deceit) and who enlightens others through the subtle ways of humor. They may see only slapstick or broad comedy, but your insights creep past their mental walls and set up camp, so that in the end, the stupid, vicious, clumsy powers that be all fall down. Where there is wholesome laughter and relieved scorn, there is no room for tyranny. Let the world's would-be masters beware, for you strike at the fear that sustains them.

- Regain Willpower whenever you raise the spirits of those in great misery, or whenever you undermine a bully or tyrant by making him the object of ridicule.

Judge

Above all, the world cries out for judgment. Someone must weigh competing wants and needs in the balance, rewarding those who deserve it and punishing the guilty for their offenses. That's you. Whether you hold any official role or not, you are one of the latter-day heirs to Joshua, applying right principle and careful consideration to the tumult around you. You act to resolve conflict and administer justice. It is not necessary for others to appreciate or understand your work; their obedience is sufficient.

- Regain Willpower whenever you settle a long-time dispute or whenever you convince contentious factions to submit to your judgment.

Pedagogue

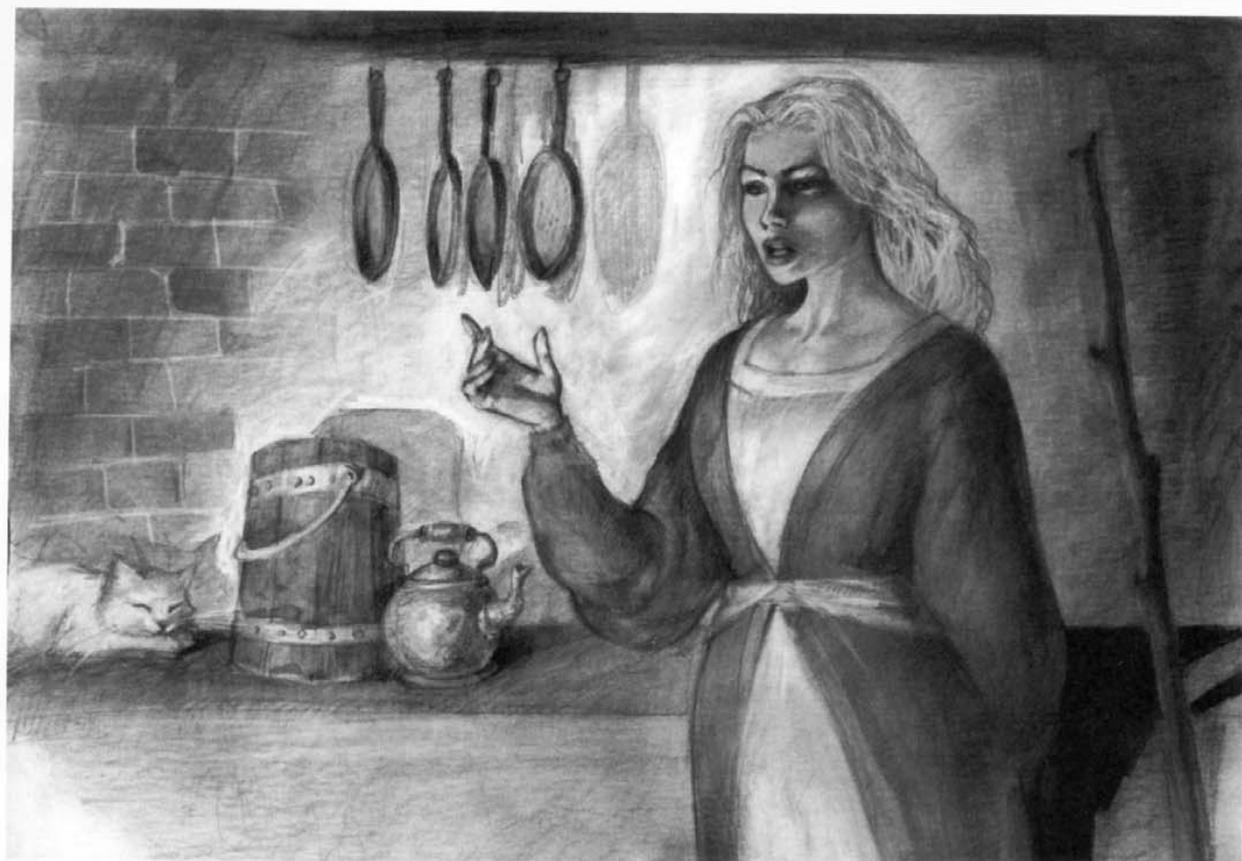
"But I didn't know," says the criminal and the sinner. They protest, but they have a point. Who can do right without being instructed? The old Adam in us all denies us access to the divine knowledge that is our birthright. In the absence of revelation, we must all apply ourselves to the task of learning. Someone must teach others the facts of the world, and that someone is you. You find the greatest joy in correcting error and removing ignorance, whether others appreciate your efforts or not.

- Regain Willpower whenever you see someone survive a significant threat thanks to knowledge you gave them or whenever you can make a point of instruction compulsory, thereby abolishing that ignorance for good.

Penitent

In the beginning there was sin, and in the end there will be judgment. In between, there is your guilt and the world's, so much wrong that must be acknowledged and for which atonement must be made. Your whole existence is given over to the struggle for redemption... which never comes easily for vampires, and may be altogether mythical for Caine's brood. You do everything you can to deny your darker impulses or at least to channel them into some productive, virtuous enterprise.

- Regain Willpower whenever you make a substantial sacrifice to atone for a recent violation on your



hierarchy of sins. The greater the sin, the more lasting the sacrifice must be.

Rebel

Priests talk of Satan, kings talk of the Jacquerie. They mean the same thing: that nobody should ever dare challenge the existing order. You understand that *everybody* should challenge it, for the existing order is rotten to the core. Authority is your enemy, and you will do whatever it takes to topple it. Impulsive or calculating, patient or rash, you know your enemies. In time, they will know you and fear you.

- Regain Willpower whenever you inflict significant damage on the order you despise.

Survivor

The Day of Judgment may be imminent, or it may be thousands of years off. (More? Who knows how long God will tolerate this mass of sinful flesh and corrupted earth?) Your goal is very simple: to be there when the end comes. You'll do whatever it takes to survive in the meantime. Alliance and betrayal, devotion and hypocrisy, these are all just tools for you to use when appropriate. You do care about what happens around you, and if you can take others with you on the longest journey, so much the better. It's just that you won't let them stop you, if it comes down to that.

- Regain Willpower whenever you survive a serious threat through determination and tenacity, or whenever

your leadership allows others to survive a threat that would otherwise have destroyed them.

Attributes

Attributes are qualities that every human being possesses to some degree. A person who lacks any rating at all in an Attribute is either dead or suffering from an extreme supernatural curse, such as the Nosferatu clan's loss of Appearance. Each Attribute is rated on a scale of one to five dots. A single dot represents the low end of human potential. A rating of 2 is average for humanity taken as a whole, and 3 represents distinctly above-average capability. Four dots make the character one of the best in the region in the quality that Attribute represents, and a character with five dots is one of the best in the world, or at least one of the best likely to ever appear in the chronicle.

With age, most vampires can rise to the heights of human potential. Vampires of sufficiently low generation (see p. 164) can go even further, to blatantly supernatural prowess.

Physical

The Physical Attributes measure qualities of the body, such as its strength, speed, coordination, resilience and so on. Vampire may temporarily increase their Physical Attributes by "burning blood" as discussed on p. 162.

Strength

Strength is a character's innate muscle power, governing how much he can lift and how hard he can hit. Strength is the Attribute that provides damage dice for most combat feats, as well as for leaps, shoves and the like.

- Poor. You can lift 40 lbs.
- Average. You can lift 100 lbs.
- Good. You can lift 250 lbs.
- Exceptional. You can lift 400 lbs.
- Outstanding. You lift 650 lbs.; you routinely break the bones of (and otherwise intimidate) anyone who gets in your way.

Dexterity

Dexterity covers the qualities of physical prowess apart from strength, such as speed, agility, coordination and so on. The ability to hit things at a distance and to move gracefully both depend on Dexterity.

- Poor. You are always awkward and often clumsy.
- Average. You get through life without too many embarrassing accidents.
- Good. You move with notable grace, and you can do well at the athletic efforts that attract your interest.
- Exceptional. You could be a professional tumbler or other acrobat, and you have the reflexes to make an outstanding warrior.
- Outstanding. You have the constant grace of a demigod.

Stamina

Stamina includes overall health, toughness and resilience. Characters with high Stamina can take more damage in and out of combat, and they recover more quickly from the injuries they do suffer.

- Poor. Your existence is a constant parade of minor (and major) miseries. In life, you got hurt easily and healed slowly.
- Average. You're of average health.
- Good. In life, you seldom succumbed to the illnesses sweeping around you. In unlife, you resist injury better than many vampires.
- Exceptional. You keep going in the face of challenges that exhaust others.
- Outstanding. Perhaps Adam and Eve were this vigorous before the Fall.

Social

Social Attributes measure how well a character deals with others in various ways. They encompass her appearance, charm, ability to master social graces and so on. Social Attributes provide the dice for rolls to make a good

first impression, impress or cow others and understand what's happening in one's community.

Charisma

Charisma is the mysterious quality that lets one person impress and please others through force of personality. Charisma plays a part in efforts to win others' trust and sympathy, and to bring them into alignment with the character's own views and goals.

- Poor. Even your best moments contain many minor gaffes.
- Average. You seldom give unintended offense, and you enjoy reasonable social standing among your peers and neighbors.
- Good. People trust you and enjoy your company without always realizing how much of your outlook they're adopting.
- Exceptional. You naturally lead whatever group you're in.
- Outstanding. You have the confidence of the blessed.

Manipulation

Manipulation is the quality of expressing oneself in ways that get others to agree, even if they don't necessarily trust the character. Where Charisma brings allegiance, Manipulation brings obedience in the present moment, with or without lasting affiliation. Note that Manipulation isn't necessarily dishonest: People can and do use rhetorical tricks in the service of causes that they genuinely believe in.

- Poor. You have a hard time sounding sincere even when you are.
- Average. You can persuade and be persuaded about as easily as anyone else.
- Good. You're accustomed to getting your way.
- Exceptional. You have the makings of a good preacher or inquisitor.
- Outstanding. Your words move all who hear them to aid your cause, and you speak with divine (or demonic) charm.

Appearance

Appearance is the sum of all the factors that make an individual attractive to others. Physical beauty is part of it, but so are one's implicit attitudes, the subtle cues of body movement and poise and many other less obvious features.

- Poor. You're ugly by the standards of your own society and those of many others.
- Average. You're inconspicuous.
- Good. You attract favorable attention almost everywhere you go.

- Exceptional. You stand out in nearly any crowd, for good and ill.
- Outstanding. People routinely compare you to a demigod or angel incarnate.

Mental

Mental Attributes are qualities of the mind, such as reasoning, intuition and sharpness of the senses (which is as much a matter of understanding what the senses tell one as the quality of the sensorial organs). Depending on the individual, high Mental Attributes can represent wide-ranging genius or more focused cleverness.

Perception

Perception is the ability to accurately sense one's environment. It combines keen senses with the intuitive grasp of what may or may not be significant, without needing to pause for labored analysis. It contributes to efforts at concealment and finding what others have concealed, as well as preparing for and defending against ambushes and to interpreting clues.

- Poor. You may be bright but self-absorbed or simply inattentive.
- Average. Subtlety may elude you, but you don't miss the obvious, and you can do all right with the obscure if you have time and good circumstances.
- Good. You're aware of your environment in significant detail without having to strain at it.
- Exceptional. Little can remain hidden from you when you choose to find it. You see all things clearly.
- Outstanding. The book of the world opens its every page to you.

Intelligence

Intelligence includes a character's ability to master facts and knowledge, recall them at need and put them together to produce new insights. Problem-solving and logic lie within the domain of Intelligence. It does not include common sense, moral judgment or other useful qualities, and the clever but inept scholar is as much a medieval stereotype as a modern one. Depending on the individual, low Intelligence may indicate actual impairment in mental faculties or poor use of one's potential.

- Poor. If you're not actually a half-wit, surely you have less than one full wit.
- Average. You're unremarkable, and you manage to get through life without too much bewilderment.
- Good. You're insightful, and you can count on making sense of many mysteries.

- Exceptional. You learn much, forget little and routinely make innovations in your chosen field.
- Outstanding. You're a latter-day Solomon or Odysseus.

Wits

Wits is the capacity for quick thinking; not necessarily for brilliant intellectual reasoning or even for careful appraisal of the environment, but rapid response based on available information and survival instinct. It also contributes to more deliberate efforts to identify clever courses of action and ways around others' defenses and recall precisely the necessary datum at the key moment.

- Poor. Your jokes fall flat and you're the last to notice.
- Average. You get through life without too many unpleasant surprises.
- Good. You're quick on the uptake, and you often get the best of others when speed is essential.
- Exceptional. You're the one who makes everyone else think, "I wish I'd thought of that."
- Outstanding. You have the Psalmist's gift for the appropriate response for every occasion.

Abilities

Abilities measure your character's capability to undertake specific kinds of tasks. Whereas Attributes measure raw potential in broad fields, each Ability is a much more focused area of knowledge or expertise. Abilities let your character use his potential most effectively and compensate for underlying deficiencies in some cases. A weak but experienced knife fighter can make mincemeat out of a big burly opponent who has no clue how to fight well, for instance, and a priest who lacks personal charisma but understands the principles of rhetoric can defeat a charming but unskilled opponent in debate.

Specialty and Expertise

Most Abilities (with exceptions noted in their respective descriptions) start out with a common body of lore, with many variations and separate branches available depending on a character's culture and circumstances. Specialties measure this property in game mechanics. When your character has a relevant specialty, you roll one more die than usual on tasks that involve it. You purchase specialties with bonus points or experience points; the cost for each appears in the relevant chart. You may have up to three specialties in any given ability, but no more than one can apply to a single roll. So if your character, who has Melee with both the "swords" and the "multiple opponents" specialties, is fighting off three brigands with his broadsword, you still only roll one extra die.

ACTING WITHOUT AN ABILITY

There is bound to be a time when you want your character to do something that uses an Ability she just doesn't have. What then? Does the fact that you didn't buy dots in Dodge mean she can't duck when someone screams, "Get down!"? No, not at all. But the fact that you didn't spend points on Medicine *does* mean she doesn't have much hope treating a disease or healing a mortal's wounds.

It's actually when you don't have an Ability that the differences between Talents, Skills and Knowledges become clear. Talents are relatively easy to do by the seat of your pants, Skills are harder, and Knowledges are downright impossible. When you need to roll an Attribute + Ability combination but you don't have the Ability in question, you roll the Attribute alone. That roll is modified depending on what category the missing Ability falls into:

- **Missing Talent:** No additional penalty
- **Missing Skill:** +1 difficulty
- **Missing Knowledge:** No roll possible (automatic failure)

Expertise is a special form of specialty that applies to the Crafts Skill and a few other catch-all Abilities. It is a field of endeavor the character has studied, such as woodworking, forging or boat-building. Expertise works just like a specialty, granting an extra die when it applies, except that it *can* be combined with a specialty (for a maximum bonus of two dice), and that a character can have only as many fields of expertise as he has dots in the governing Ability. Most catch-all Abilities grant one free field of expertise and require that you purchase others with experience or bonus points. They also usually limit the ways in which you can use the Ability if your expertise does not apply. Few architects can hope to forge iron successfully without knowing how, for example. See the individual Ability descriptions for full details.

More Than Human

Vampires who are close enough in lineage to Caine, their Father in Darkness, can develop their prowess to heights that are literally unobtainable by any mortal man or woman. See "Generation," p. 155, for a description of how the vampire's lineage raises the limits of the possible.

As mentioned previously, the scale of one to five dots measures the range of human potential. Characters who master Abilities at the sixth dot or above all produce the same sort of effect on others who see them demonstrating this mastery: the awe that accompanies the fifth dot, only magnified. All but the most careless or distracted observers can see that someone with six dots in an Ability does things that nobody else can, with an unparalleled grace and confi-

dence. It may seem angelic or demonic, but it never looks mundane unless the character makes a deliberate effort to conceal the full extent of his competence.

For roleplaying purposes, use the descriptions provided for the fifth dot in each Ability and amplify them.

Talents

Talents are matters of innate aptitude, requiring no training to develop, and they improve primarily or exclusively through experience. Characters get better at them only by doing them regularly. It's possible to attempt actions related to Talents that a character doesn't possess. The player simply rolls the character's Attribute dice pool without the benefit of Talent-based dice, but also without penalty. Everyone (or nearly everyone) possesses a rudimentary grasp of each Talent, even without the minimal competence required for one dot's worth.

Alertness

Alertness is the ability to notice things that are going on in one's vicinity, with or without actively searching for them. Most Alertness rolls pair this Ability with Perception, and it generally applies to physical stimuli rather than matters of mood, the soul and so on.

- Novice: You're seldom taken completely by surprise.
- Practiced: Whispers do not go unheard in your vicinity.
- Competent: You maintain a constant vigil.
- Expert: Few hidden things are safe around you.
- Master: Your senses push the boundaries of human potential and rival those of the beasts of the field.

Possessed By: Burglars, Hunters, Messengers, Sentries, Tramps

Specialties: Ambushes, Angelic/Demonic Manifestations, Crowds, Forests, Noises, Paranoia, Traps

Athletics

Athletics is aptitude for physical exertion, be it during relatively formal sports or simply in the course of an active life. Athletic feats that are directly related to combat are covered by Brawl, Dodge, Melee and the other combat Abilities, except in the case of thrown weapons. These require Athletics.

- Novice: You lead a moderately active existence.
- Practiced: You can compete effectively in local sporting competitions.
- Competent: You can support yourself, at least in large measure, with the prizes you win in challenges of physical excellence.
- Expert: Stories of your prowess circulate widely.
- Master: Your reputation precedes you, and would-be rivals feel awe at your ability.

Possessed By: Barbarians, Entertainers, Spearmen, Squires, Warriors, Youths

Specialties: Climbing, Dancing, Juggling, Running, Swimming, Thrown Objects, Tumbling

Brawl

Brawl is the ability to fight unarmed, whether with a specific system of techniques or simply flailing away and relying on one's experience of where and how to strike. Brawling well requires coordination, speed, the ability to withstand pain and the willingness to deal out "unfair" assaults, particularly against strong or quick opponents.

- Novice: You don't immediately fold in the face of a fight.
- Practiced: You've had your share of tussles with neighbors and other local brawlers.
- Competent: You fight with confidence and competence, and you can count on winning or at least coming through a fight and remaining standing.
- Expert: You can take on most opponents and expect to win.
- Master: You do as much with your fists as many soldiers and knights do with their weapons.

Possessed By: Brigands, Bullies, Soldiers

Specialties: Arm-locks, Boxing, Drunken Fighting, Grappling, Showing Off, Throws, Wrestling

Dodge

Dodge is the ability to get out of harm's way, whether in combat or in the face of other sorts of danger. It encompasses the use of cover and agile maneuvering, and it comes from the systematic training of a knight or the rough-and-ready experience and instincts of a thief or brawler. Dodge plays a crucial role in the survival of any character who fights often, greatly increasing his chances of escaping damage.

- Novice: You reflexively avoid most minor sources of injury and show a measure of grace in your movements.
- Practiced: You're hard to hurt unless someone or something catches you by surprise.
- Competent: It takes serious effort for an opponent to hit you; you get out of the way of most thrown objects as well as immediate dangers.
- Expert: Only skilled warriors can expect to hurt you very much.
- Master: Wherever a threat is, you're almost inevitably somewhere else.

Possessed By: Animal Trainers, Brawlers, Criminals, Hunters, Scouts, Soldiers

Specialties: Backstep, Dive, Duck, Find Cover, Horseback, Leap, Sidestep



Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand others' emotional states and to present a suitable response — whether the character genuinely sympathizes with others or simply wishes to use them. It's crucial in unraveling motives and helpful in detecting dishonesty.

- Novice: You seem sympathetic to people with whom you share something in common.
- Practiced: You share others' joys and sorrows, even when you haven't made any particular effort at it.
- Competent: You display keen insights into others' souls and enjoy a measure of respect or fear depending on how you use your wisdom.
- Expert: Few people can deceive you. Enemies mutter that you deal with dark powers, and friends believe that God has given you a special perception.
- Master: Nothing human is mysterious to you.

Possessed By: Commanders, Diviners, Gossips, Merchants, Parents, Priests, Tricksters

Specialties: Background Emotions, Emotions, Family Problems, Long-Term Concerns, Personalities, Truths

Expression

Expression is the ability to communicate clearly and appropriately with words, be they spoken or written. Characters with high Expression ratings make their arguments persuasively, regardless of the extent to which the truth may support them. They can bring out subtle truths or convey subtle deceptions, depending on how they use their ability. Expression, although used when composing written texts, does not cover the ability to actually read and write (that's Academics).

- Novice: Sometimes you find just the right words.
- Practiced: You routinely speak well, and (if you are literate) you can correspond reasonably clearly.
- Competent: You can make a living with the spoken and written word, and you can count on winning arguments.
- Expert: Your sermons, proclamations or other acts of expression garner widespread respect, and others copy your style.
- Master: Your fame runs far and wide among devotees of good style, and others find it nearly impossible to argue against you.

Possessed By: Minstrels, Poets, Preachers, Rabble-Rousers, Teachers

Specialties: Acting, Conversation, Improvisation, Poetry, Preaching, Storytelling

Intimidation

Intimidation is the ability to make others do what you want, not out of respect or conviction but out of fear

of the consequences if they disobey. It may include the use of threats, physical force or purely psychological tactics, depending on the individual.

- Novice: You can reliably get your way with much weaker targets.
- Practiced: People around you know that when you make threats, you mean them, and they try not to cross you.
- Competent: You exert the commanding presence of an authority figure, regardless of your actual status.
- Expert: Even those who like you feel some nervousness in your presence, and the masses fear your wrath.
- Master: You are well on your way to becoming one of the legendary tyrants of the age.

Possessed By: Bullies, Commanders, Lords, Thugs, Torturers

Specialties: Blackmail, Overt Threats, Physical Coercion, Politics, Pulling Rank, Staredowns, Veiled Threats

Leadership

Leadership is the ability to make others carry out orders. It doesn't change their underlying outlook or convictions; it lets the would-be leader seem credible and worthy of respect based on whatever their standards are. It's usually rolled with Charisma rather than Manipulation to reflect this distinction.

- Novice: You've organized small ventures in your hometown with moderate success.
- Practiced: You routinely direct small groups of your neighbors and peers.
- Competent: Your duties include the exercise of authority, such as serving as captain of the guard or abbot of a monastery, and you discharge them well.
- Expert: You act capably as a leader of people throughout your region.
- Master: You are, or can be if you choose, a great warlord, pillar of the Church or other famous leader of your time.

Possessed By: Commanders, Constables, Ecclesiastical Authorities, Family Patriarchs, Nobles

Specialties: Commands, Compelling, Friendly, Noble, Oratory, Pious, Stern

Legerdemain

Legerdemain is ability to perform feats of manual dexterity, ranging from picking a purse from a belt, to juggling and feats of trickery such as palming objects. It encompasses the stealth and concealment involved in using that dexterity without being noticed, such as when palming an object or performing a conjuring trick.

- Novice: You've sometimes taken very small items when nobody was looking and gotten away with it.
- Practiced: You can rob alms boxes and steal from blind beggars with impunity, and you are good enough at sleight-of-hand to entertain local gatherings.
- Competent: You can gracefully make off with nearly anything that isn't nailed down, and you have the polished manner of a professional entertainer, even if that's not your chosen livelihood.
- Expert: When you perform your tricks, they seem genuinely supernatural to most observers.
- Master: People wonder if perhaps supernatural powers are performing the thefts you commit, thanks to your audacity and the lack of any clues left behind.

Possessed By: Beggars, Jesters, Minstrels, Robbers

Specialties: Concealment, Conjuring Tricks, Juggling, Picking Purses

Subterfuge

Subterfuge is the ability to lie convincingly and to conceal one's own motives and feelings. It serves legitimate as well as criminal purposes: Diplomats and even confessors sometimes use it to draw out information from others.

- Novice: You get away with small lies most of the time.
- Practiced: You're seldom questioned about your chosen explanations.
- Competent: You maintain the trustworthy demeanor of a professional thief and liar.
- Expert: Even wise and noble souls are pawns in your schemes.
- Master: Whenever the accusations fly, you're the last one anyone doubts.

Possessed By: Courtiers, Charlatans, Heretics, Minstrels, Spies, Wooers

Specialties: Changing the Subject, Finding Weaknesses, Flattery, Patter, Seduction, Selective Omission

Skills

Skills are all arts that people learn through apprenticeship or other disciplined instruction. It's possible to attempt actions covered by Skills without having enough training for one dot's worth of the Skill in question, but the roll suffers a +1 difficulty penalty.

Animal Ken

Animal Ken is an understanding of beasts' actions and desires. It allows one to predict their behavior, control them in difficult situations and train them.

- Novice: You work well with domesticated animals.
- Practiced: You understand the ways of all the animals that are common in your vicinity, and

you can train those species most susceptible to it, such as horses and dogs.

- Competent: You're a skilled hunter and tracker, and you work well even with difficult animals. Everyone in the area knows you're the one to come to when there's animal trouble.
- Expert: No domesticated animal resists your will, and most wild beasts regard you with at least some good will.
- Master: People compare your spiritual harmony with animals to Saint Francis's.

Possessed By: Cavalry, Falconers, Grooms, Hermits, Kennel Masters, Lords

Specialties: Bears, Birds of Prey, Dogs, Farm Animals, Fish, Horses, Rodents, Snakes

Archery

Archery is the ability to use bows, the most common ranged weapon of the era. Experienced archers also know how to maintain and repair their weapons, and even how to make them. Archery covers crossbows and other related weapons. It does not cover spears or other thrown weapons. Using those weapons requires Athletics.

- Novice: You can shoot adequately as long as the situation isn't too distracting. You can maintain a bow, but not repair it.
- Practiced: You can hunt and fight competently with the bow. You can maintain and repair a bow, but not craft a new one.
- Competent: You use a bow with grace and style, and you can make weapons that are respected for their craftsmanship.
- Expert: Warlords and others who need superior archers seek you out.
- Master: Neither distance, darkness nor anything else seems capable of stopping your arrows from going precisely where you want them to.

Possessed By: Bandits, Foresters, Guards, Poachers, Tournament-Circuit Competitors

Specialties: Ambush, Fields, Forests, Horseback, Hunting, Moving Targets, Quick Shot, Target

Commerce

Commerce is the ability to successfully bring goods to market, with all that entails. It includes the ability to evaluate goods and to identify who would want them, a knowledge of trade routes and fairs and skill at negotiating prices. Commerce is a catch-all Ability, and you should choose one class of goods as a field of expertise when you first purchase it. You can buy additional fields of expertise with experience or bonus points within standard limits (see p. 142). You can use Commerce outside your field of expertise to identify potential markets and experts in the field and to negotiate and haggle over just about anything. Evaluating an item or a trade

route with which you have no experience is beyond you, and it counts as acting without the required Ability.

In the Dark Medieval, the line between legitimate and illegitimate trade is blurry to non-existent, and Commerce comes into play just as much when buying cheese as when hiring a mercenary, soliciting a prostitute or selling stolen goods. As such, Commerce conveys a general sense of the shadier side of life — what modern folk might call being streetwise.

- Novice: You can get a fair price when you bring the harvest to market.
- Practiced: You can broker exchanges in your field of expertise and know who in the vicinity deals in what trades, legitimate or otherwise.
- Competent: You can make a good living as a merchant or moneylender. You can draw on the expertise of those in other trades without difficulty.
- Expert: You are one of the preeminent experts in your field, and you are rarely (if ever) taken advantage of. No market is closed to you.
- Master: You are a master merchant, expert in commerce spanning the continent.

Possessed By: Artisans, Farmers, Mercenaries, Ne'er-do-wells, Prostitutes, Traders

Specialties: Evaluation, Negotiation, Swindling, Trade Routes

Fields of Expertise: Clothing, Foodstuffs, Livestock, Mercenaries, Relics, Silks, Slaves, Spices, Stolen Goods, Wine, etc.

Crafts

Crafts is a catch-all Ability covering skill at making and fixing things with your hands and evaluating such work by others. Skilled craftsmen produce works known for their beauty as well as their utility. You must choose a field of expertise when you first purchase Crafts and buy additional ones with experience or bonus points within standard limits (see p. 142). You can use Crafts outside your field(s) of expertise to undertake basic repairs and evaluate the craftsmanship and condition of an object, but not to build anything new. Doing so is considered acting without the required Ability.

In the Dark Medieval, the Crafts Skill covers what will in later centuries become applied sciences such as engineering. Architecture, metallurgy and so on are all fields of expertise under Crafts.

- Novice: You can repair broken goods and make gear that more or less does what it's supposed to.
- Practiced: You can attend to the needs of people in your immediate vicinity for the craft you know.
- Competent: You can make a good living as an artisan or craftsman, and you enjoy the respect of all who call on your services.
- Expert: You routinely make excellent goods that are treasured widely for their elegance and durability.

- Master: You're one of the leading craftsmen in your field, and you can pick and choose from clients across several countries.

Possessed By: Artisans, Farmers, Ladies, Pilgrims, Soldiers, Townsfolk

Specialties: Detail, Evaluation, Fast Work, Invention, Metalworking, Organization, Sanitation

Fields of Expertise: Architecture, Armory, Blacksmithing, Boat-Building, Jewelry, Masonry, Sewing & Embroidery, Woodworking, etc.

Etiquette

Etiquette is the understanding of social customs in one or more cultures and the ability to behave as becomes one of their members. Characters begin with this knowledge as it applies to the land and class into which they were born. Mastery of Etiquette encompasses speech, movement, dress, furnishings and the like.

- Novice: You avoid most social gaffes and seem reasonably well behaved in the culture you know best.
- Practiced: You can conduct yourself without embarrassment in your culture's version of high society.
- Competent: You understand principles of social organization well enough to respond calmly to unexpected and unfamiliar circumstances.
- Expert: Lords and bishops admire your conduct.
- Master: You set the standard to which others try to hew.

Possessed By: Children, Courtiers, Envoys, Guild Masters, Handmaidens, Heralds, Nobles

Specialties: Courtly Manners, Family Traditions, Foreign Customs, Peasants, Professional Conduct, Street Culture

Melee

Melee is the ability to fight with hand-to-hand weapons, from sticks and clubs to swords and more exotic weapons, depending on the details of the character's training. Like Archery, Melee includes the ability to maintain one's weapons (and even to make them), but manufacturing metal weapons requires Crafts.

- Novice: You can handle simple weapons and any weapons that are particularly popular in the area where you grew up. You can maintain but not repair a weapon.
- Practiced: You can fight moderately well with common weapons. You can do basic repairs on an axe or other simple melee weapon.
- Competent: You know how to use a variety of weapons well, and you can make a living as a professional soldier if you choose. You can do basic repairs on a sword or more complex melee weapon. You can manufacture simple melee weapons.

- Expert: You routinely distinguish yourself in battles, tournaments and other martial displays.
- Master: Everyone who uses your favored weapons knows your deeds — which may breed challenges as well as respect.

Possessed By: Barbarians, Guards, Lords, Soldiers, Thieves

Specialties: Axes, Clubs, Disarms, Knives, Multiple Opponents, Rapid Draws, Swords, Team Tactics

Performance

Performance is the ability to perform artistic feats. It covers both the technical aspects of the chosen form of expression and the social knowledge of what audiences like. Performance is a catch-all Ability, and you should choose a field of expertise when you first purchase it. You can buy additional fields of expertise with experience or bonus points. Performance is useful outside your field of expertise to evaluate another's skill.

- Novice: You can entertain friends and family when more skillful alternatives aren't available.
- Practiced: You take part in local entertainments on a regular basis, and you do fairly well at them.
- Competent: You can make a living as an entertainer, and you enjoy a reputation as a good one to call upon.

- Expert: Your fellow performers study your work carefully. The masses flock to see you in your specialty.
- Master: You can pick and choose your audiences, and you are always in demand almost everywhere you go.

Possessed By: Musicians, Troubadours, Actors, Ladies, Spinsters, Monks and Nuns

Specialties: Bawdy, Composition, Courtly

Fields of Expertise: Acting, Dance, Percussion, Singing, Stringed Instruments, Wind Instruments

Ride

Ride is the ability to travel astride a horse or other riding animal, keeping it under control in varying circumstances. Experienced riders can fight from horseback, tend horses' common ailments and evaluate the quality of their mounts and related gear. See p. 244 for the details of fighting on horseback.

- Novice: You can get around on a good mount as long as things don't get complicated.
- Practiced: You can hunt, chase and sustain long rides safely, if not always comfortably.
- Competent: Horses hold very few surprises for you, and you can fight from horseback without penalty.
- Expert: You can engage in fancy stunts and keep your horse calm and healthy in the midst of dangerous, rapidly changing situations. You're the one who gets called on when most people fall and fail.



- Master: Alexander the Great and his Bucephelas were no closer than you are with your favored steeds, as troubadours routinely remind their audiences.

Possessed By: Circuit Officials, Crusaders, Huntsmen, Knights, Merchants, Messengers, Nobles, Travelers
Specialties: Combat, Forest, Jumping, Speed, Stealth, Stunts

Stealth

Stealth is the ability to move without alerting others — to enter without permission, remain undetected while about one's self-appointed business and to leave without creating a stir. You generally roll this Skill in combination with Dexterity against observers' Perception + Alertness. It does not cover sleight-of-hand, which is the domain of Legerdemain.

- Novice: You can make your way through familiar places without attracting attention as long as no one's searching very actively for you.
- Practiced: You can hide yourself fairly well in familiar places, and you can hide reasonably well in unfamiliar places that are related to something you know, such as any church following the standard orientation.
- Competent: You move in mysterious ways, and it takes dedicated effort to keep you out of most places you'd like to go.
- Expert: You enjoy the reputation of being able to bypass almost all barriers... which makes you a frequent target of suspicion, as well as valuable to those who have need of stealthy allies.
- Master: You feature in ballads of master thieves, questing knights who make their way into the Grail Castle and others who triumph over all obstacles. Your gift seems holy or wicked depending on how you apply it.

Possessed By: Burglars, Hunters, Scouts, Shy People, Spies
Specialties: Crawling, Crowds, Prowl, Shadows, Wilderness, Tracking

Survival

This is the ability to cope with the challenges of harsh environments: shelter, navigating to civilization, foraging for food and water, hunting and so on. It includes knowledge of the common threats posed by a particular sort of wilderness, such as forest or swamp. Stealth rolls in wilderness cannot include more dice from Stealth than the character has dots in Survival.

- Novice: You can cope with the routine challenges of whatever sort of wilderness was closest to your home.

- Practiced: You won't starve in most environments, though it won't be comfortable until you get to the next settlement.
- Competent: You can get yourself and others to safety in most circumstances, and you can make an effective living off the fruits of hunting, trapping and the like.
- Expert: You can blaze new paths through unbroken wilderness and cope with almost any challenge that the natural world can throw at you.
- Master: The dark powers of the night (and day) in the lands beyond civilization hold no terror for you.

Possessed By: Bandits, Barbarians, Crusaders, Penitents, Pilgrims, Refugees

Specialties: Coasts and Shallows, Deep Sea, Deserts, Foraging, Forests, Hunting, Marshes and Swamps, Mountains, Tracking, Trailblazing

Knowledges

Knowledges are Abilities that require intellectual mastery of information. They almost always require rolls with Mental Traits, though some other sort of Attribute may prove useful occasionally. Apart from the most general popular lore, characters who lack dots in a particular Knowledge can't even attempt an action requiring it. Note that although the descriptions of what characters with various scores in a Knowledge can do refer to formal academic instruction, this isn't the only way to develop a Knowledge. Individual teaching and institutional tutoring in non-academic contexts also let people learn these Abilities.

Academics

Academics covers the standard curriculum of the Middle Ages: the trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and the quadrivium of arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. Anyone who attends university learns the lore of the world divided into these two categories. Any character who acquired Academics within the last 300 years must choose the trivium or quadrivium as an initial field of expertise (and can acquire the other one later). Only vampires who were created before the rise of medieval universities or thoroughly self-taught individuals escape this requirement. Any other categories seem strange at best (and actively suspicious at worst) to conventionally educated people.

Your character must know Latin, requiring Linguistics 1, to acquire the second dot in Academics.

- Dabbler: You know rudimentary Latin and the most fundamental authorities in your field of expertise.
- Student: You can construct solid arguments, and you know some of the important commentaries in each area your expertise covers.

- Learned: You can make a living instructing others. You know some Greek and possibly other languages in addition to Latin, and your own commentaries and glosses earn the respect of your peers.
- Scholar: Lay people admire your mind, but they may feel that you've neglected the rest of life for the sake of learning. You can confidently advise potentates on important matters.
- Master: Any library on the subjects in which you specialize seems inadequate without your works.

Possessed By: Court Officials, Monks, Priests, Scribes, Tutors

Specialties: Instruction, Quoting Text, Research

Fields of Expertise: Trivium, Quadrivium

Hearth Wisdom

This is the lore of the people, as opposed to the academy. It's unsystematic, but in its haphazard way, it covers the body of knowledge accumulated by peasants, traders and other people who do not benefit from servants or live in isolation. It includes mundane matters such as which plants and animals are safe to eat in the area, which herbs are good for cooking and for medicinal purposes, signs of impending bad (or good) weather, rules of thumb for resolving domestic disputes and the folk wisdom regarding the dangers (supernatural and otherwise) of the night. Unlike other Knowledges, those characters without Hearth Wisdom can attempt feats that require it, but they do so at a +2 difficulty. Despite its diversity of topics, Hearth Wisdom is not a catch-all Ability with fields of expertise.

- Dabbling: You know all the common fireside tales of your home and you can recall them at need.
- Student: You know the obscure and traditional lore of your region, and very little — even if it's strange and dangerous — takes you by surprise within the fields you know.
- Learned: You quickly acquire the lore of any area you pass through, and others know that when the unseen world makes itself visible, you're the one who most likely knows what to do about it.
- Scholar: You are famous for your knowledge of mysterious affairs, and some fear you because of the potential for pacts with dark forces that your explorations afford.
- Master: Your supreme insights into strange matters make you the target of pleas from individuals both high and low who suffer mysterious depredations.

Possessed By: Farmers, Herbalists, Hermits, Magicians, Matrons, Village Elders, Witches

Specialties: By county or region (southern France, northern France, England, Bavaria, etc.), and Arabic, Cures, Jewish, Omens, Wards

Investigation

Investigation is the ability to systematically examine one's environment and analyze the results. It's the central tool for judicial inquiries, religious searches for heresy and the like. It includes a grasp of the principles of research as well as an eye for detail.

- Dabbling: You regularly see things that others miss, and it's hard for the people of your home to keep secrets if you choose to seek them out.
- Student: You know how to extract information from others without alarming them, and you can unravel many mysteries.
- Learned: You can make a living as a professional investigator for religious or secular purposes, and even if you practice some other trade, your acuity is widely respected.
- Scholar: The most complex and best-concealed matters unravel themselves when you confront them.
- Master: When all other means fail and the holy saints do not choose to intervene directly with supernatural revelations, people who are bedeviled by mysteries turn to you.

Possessed By: Bounty Hunters, Confessors, Constables, Judges, Parents, Spies, Tax Collectors

Specialties: Accounting, Locate Informant, Record-Keeping, Search, Stalking

Law

Law is the body of knowledge about justice and its applications to practical affairs. In the Dark Medieval world, Law covers two wildly different subjects: the organic (not to mention chaotic and contradictory) accumulation of common law based on case-by-case rulings, and the rigorous, academic tradition grounded in Roman law and guided by logic and theology. The higher a character's social rank is, the more the latter dominates. Canon law, the religious law of the Church, draws primarily on Roman law for its assumptions and principles of development, and scholars in canon law have a significant advantage in familiarity when issues of Roman-based secular law arise. The same applies to secular legalists trying to deal with canon law.

- Dabbling: You know all the important laws of your home and a good sample of the less important or less frequently invoked ones.
- Student: You can defend yourself and your comrades against most charges, and you know the grounds on which to accuse others, as long as you've had a while to study the laws of the area.

- Learned: You can make a living as a lawyer or advisor to a court, secular or religious depending on your specialization. People in your vicinity seek you out for legal advice.
- Scholar: Your views on the proper application of law shape practice in wide-ranging areas.
- Master: You're revered as one of the great legal theorists of the age.

Possessed By: Constables, Criminals, Judges, Kings, Lords

Specialties: Canon Law, Diplomacy, Feudal Obligations, Laws of Ownership and Inheritance, Local Law, Sentencing

Linguistics

Linguistics is the knowledge of languages other than the one most common in a character's childhood. Every character begins with one language for free. Growing mastery of Linguistics covers the principles underlying languages, their relations and evolution as well as the contents of specific tongues. Dark Medieval Europe is a warren of dialects and regional tongues, but (at the Storyteller's discretion) you can assume that skill in one major language comes with understanding of its major variants and dialects. Major languages include Latin, Occitan, French (or Francien), English (Middle English), Castilian, the various Italian dialects, the various Germanic dialects, Greek and many more.

- Dabblers: One extra language.
- Student: Two extra languages.
- Learned: Four extra languages.
- Scholar: Eight extra languages.
- Master: 16 extra languages.

Possessed By: Diplomats, Dock Workers, Interpreters, Merchants, Priests, Scholars, Travelers

Specialties: Diplomacy, Politics, Profanity, Technical Terms, Theology

Medicine

Medicine is the lore of the human body (and, to a lesser degree, the body as transformed by vampirism, lycanthropy and other exotic conditions). Depending on a character's particular inclination, it may cover both practical relief of trauma and injury, as well as the academic tradition based in Greek and Roman scholarship, which is often greatly mistaken about the realities of anatomy and physiology. Medicine also covers the knowledge of which herbs and plants are useful for remedying ills.

- Dabblers: You can fix minor wounds and help people recover from fevers, minor infections and the like.
- Student: You can deal with most common problems, not providing luxury or instant relief from misery but at least keeping people alive long enough for normal healing to run its course.

- Learned: You can make a living as a surgeon or other medical professional. If you do something else for a living, such as mercenary soldiering, you nonetheless regularly get requests for aid.
- Scholar: If you devote yourself to treating others, the area in which you live enjoys a particular reputation for health and prosperity. You often achieve new insights into pressing medical problems.
- Master: Popular accounts describe how you and the spirit of Hippocrates work together to cheat the imps of Hell from the dying souls they'd otherwise claim.

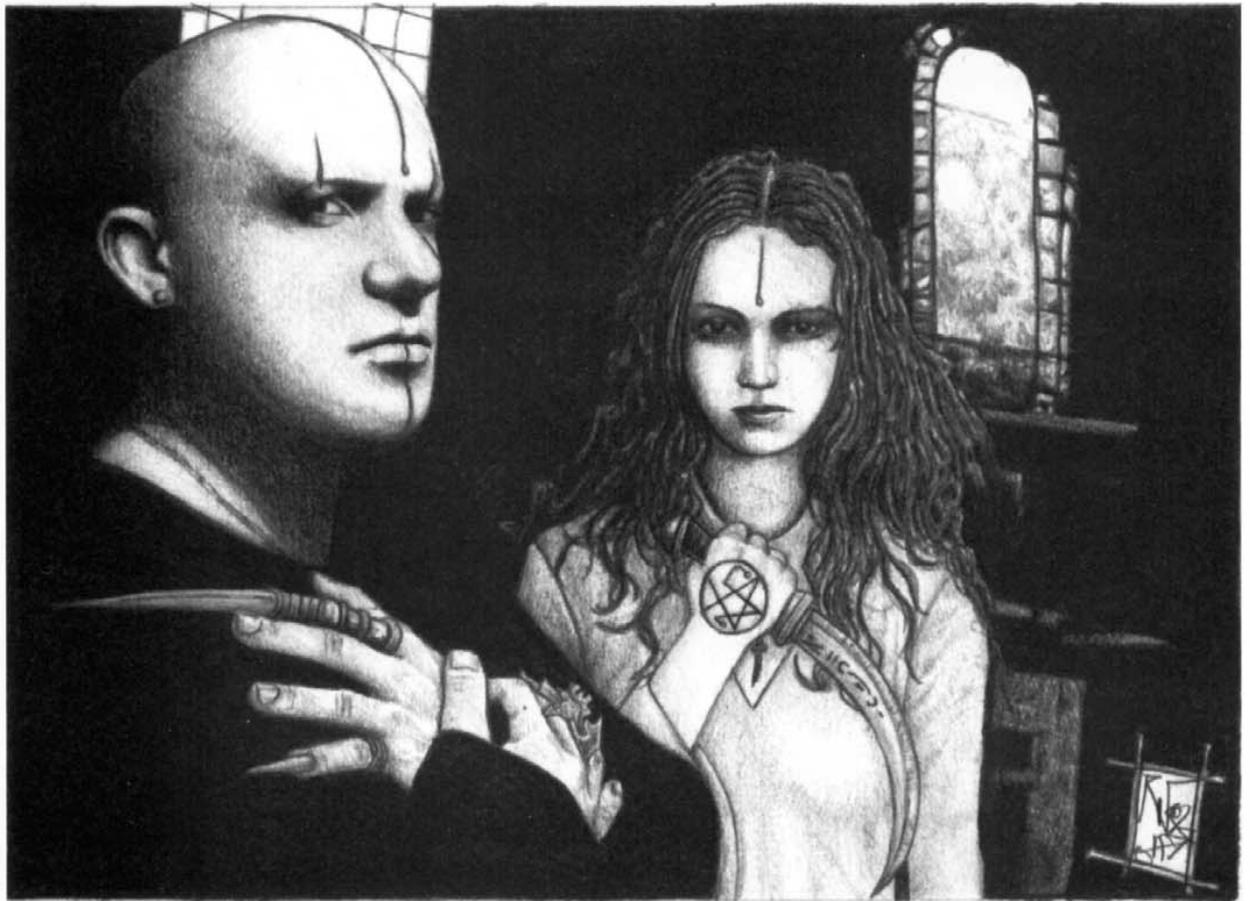
Possessed By: Apothecaries, Barbers, Field Surgeons, Ladies, Midwives, Squires

Specialties: Battle Wounds, Childbirth, Diagnosis, Disease, First Aid, Herbs, Minor Surgery, Poison Treatment

Occult

Occult encompasses all the lores of supernatural power, most especially those that derive from formal studies, experimentation and treaties (and hence beyond Hearth Wisdom). Occult generally provides a more focused body of knowledge, with a somewhat higher ratio of truth to error and distortion, but inevitably one field bleeds into the next. Occultists can and do acquire smatterings of information about a great many subjects. The higher a character's Occult score is, the more generally reliable the results of his Occult rolls are. There is a certain overlap between Occult and Theology when it comes to a knowledge of the powers of saints or recognizing the miraculous.

- Dabblers: You know the general framework of the good and evil (and neutral) powers at work in your area.
- Student: You understand many things about the supernatural world. You may have had some direct experience with supernatural beings, though you likely misunderstood at least some of what happened to you.
- Learned: You're known as a scholar of the mysterious, regarded with a hopelessly tangled mixture of fear and respect by those who need you to explain the supernatural to them. You may have regular contact with some sort of supernatural being.
- Scholar: The mysteries of the night society lie open before you. If you possess any significant social rank, some secular or religious authority probably wants you as an advisor.
- Master: The demon named Legion may seek you out for a second try at defeating the age's holiest man, but it won't win.



Possessed By: Heretics, Inquisitors, Judges, Magicians, Pagans, Priests, Satanists, Witch-Hunters

Specialties: Ancient Secrets, Paganism, Qabbala, Sufism, Vampires, Witches

Politics

Politics is the theory and practice of governance: what ancient and modern governors have written and how people respond to authority of various sorts. It includes insights into how people gain power, how they maintain it and how they lose it. High levels of Politics include more theory and more information about the practices of realms far from home.

- **Dabblers:** You know how things work in your home community, and you can usually use the local system to get what you want.
- **Students:** You deal confidently with the authorities if you're outside the hierarchy, or confidently with the governed populace if you hold some local office.
- **Learned:** You know how to make use of the hierarchy at every level that touches your existence, and you can conduct yourself effectively whenever you need to deal with political matters.
- **Scholar:** You're known widely as a competent governor or advisor, and your comments garner widespread respect.

••••• **Master:** People look to you as a modern Plato or Cicero.

Possessed By: Counselors, Courtiers, Heralds, Jesters, Lords

Specialties: City, Feudal Obligations, Heraldry, Historical, Religious

Seneschal

Seneschal is the ability to administer holdings, from households to kingdoms. It covers the knowledge of physical assets and their needs, from crop harvesting to the maintenance of buildings, and the social skills to coordinate others' labor, resolve disputes, keep those who must be paid satisfied and so on. A skilled seneschal can evaluate the state of others' holdings based on personal experience and theoretical knowledge, too.

- **Dabblers:** You can keep your family's household going smoothly and manage a few other resources as long as there's no intense pressure or stress.
- **Students:** You can manage a business or manor and keep almost everyone involved reasonably happy.
- **Learned:** You successfully oversee multiple properties over an extended area, even in times of war, famine and other calamity.

- Scholar: Rulers know that they can give you custody of their lands and goods and get them back in better condition than you received them.
- Master: Preachers illustrate the contemporary significance of the parable of the talents with stories of your accomplishments.

Possessed By: Innkeepers, Knights, Lords, Seneschals, Stewards, Wives

Specialties: Common Households, Farms, Feudal Estates, Inheritance, Noble Households, Religious Orders, Urban Holdings

Theology

Theology is the lore of the queen of the sciences, the study of God's will in all things. It combines historical scholarship with logic and a measure of artistic expression. Theology by itself does not make a character articulate, but it can provide the information necessary for effective persuasion, and it's crucial in evaluating many social matters. Nothing human or physical lies outside the scope of God's commandments, as heretics and the orthodox agree, and there is a theological dimension to political, economic and other disagreements. Keep in mind that, for medieval people, this is not a matter of unfounded supposition and personal conviction, but of knowable truths susceptible to reasoned analysis. It is as rigorous a matter as medicine or ballistics.

- Dabber: You know the major tenets of whatever faith prevails in your home, and you grasp the essential spirit of common doctrines even when you're unclear on details.
- Student: You know holy writ and important teachings, past and present.
- Learned: You can debate the technical points of right belief, as you understand it, and readily understand the beliefs of others even when you disagree with them.
- Scholar: Heretics and infidels fear to contest with you, and you're a pillar of the community of faith wherever you are.
- Master: You are a latter-day Saint Paul or Saint Peter, depending on whether you turn your attention primarily to winning unbelievers' hearts or ministering to the needs of those who already believe.

Possessed By: Devout Laymen, Heretics, Magicians, Monks, Priests, Troubadours

Specialties: Confession, Debate, Exposition, Heresy, Orthodoxy

Backgrounds

Backgrounds measure your character in ways that aren't as innate as Attributes or Abilities. They deal with your character and her connections to the rest of the

world: who she knows, what assets she can bring to bear, what reputation she enjoys. As with Attributes and Abilities, Background scores quantify and set boundaries to conditions that characters perceive more fluidly. Your character doesn't think, "I have precisely three friends I can count on for this kind of information," for instance. Only a vampire's generation is as clear-cut a matter of whole numbers for characters as it is for players.

Allies

Allies are mortal men and women who support the character. They may be members of his family, friends (from before or after his Embrace), fellow members of an organization to which he gives allegiance, or related to him in some other way. Whatever the case, they provide him with aid willingly and without coercion. They're not always available — in crucial moments the Storyteller may limit their availability in varying degrees — and they're not bound to provide aid to the point of suicide.

The details of your character's allies depend on your imagination and your Storyteller's approval. Temporal and religious authorities, people prominent in commerce or a professional, family figures and the like are all possibilities. Describe your character's allies before play begins, so that you and your Storyteller both know what you're talking about.

Storyteller's Option: With your Storyteller's approval, your character's allies can be fellow vampires or other supernatural beings. Your Storyteller may wish to require one more dot than usual for a vampiric ally and two more dots than usual for a ghost or other supernatural ally. If you try this approach and your Storyteller agrees, remember that unusual allies may mark your character for attention from powerful forces who regard the alliance as a threat or as something to exploit for the examiner's own ends. Benefit and hazard go hand-in-hand.

- One ally of moderate influence and power in the immediate community.
- Two allies, both of moderate power locally and some influence in the county or region.
- Three allies, one of whom wields significant power, official or otherwise.
- Four allies, one of whom is extremely influential.
- Five allies, one of whom is a major force in an important institution and can provide aid from far away.

Contacts

Contacts are people who are willing to provide the character with information, though they are unlikely to offer any service beyond that. Each level of Contacts includes a specific individual, for whom you should work out a description, and a surrounding "halo" of lower-grade connections throughout a social stratum. If you have a specific contact in the local cathedral, for instance, you can also get at least rudimentary information out of some

vicars, deacons and altar boys in the area. If your contact is the harbormaster, you can count on getting some information from sailors, longshoremen and tavern-keepers nearby. The difficulty of rolls to extract information from these secondary contacts is always greater than ones involving the individuals with whom your character deals most often, however — at least 7, and perhaps higher, depending upon how rapidly you want the information or how esoteric the information is.

When your character needs information in the utmost hurry, roll Wits + Contacts against a difficulty of 7. Each success produces a distinct piece of information relevant to the topic. Your character needs potentially useful people in the area for this to work, though. (Even the best roll is unlikely to turn up anything if your character is searching for advice on conditions in the Mediterranean Sea among Scottish peasants, for instance.) To gather information over time, your character can put out queries and wait for the results to trickle back in. Roll Charisma + Contacts against difficulty 7. Each success produces one specific piece of information and takes a week to come in. You can shorten this time to three days per piece by raising the difficulty to 8, or one day per piece by raising the difficulty to 9.

- One major contact and two or three secondary contacts.
- Two major contacts and about five secondary contacts.
- Three major contacts and eight to 10 secondary contacts.

- Four major contacts and 10 to 15 secondary contacts.
- Five major contacts and a great many secondary contacts (almost anyone in the general field of experience in the area may share some information).

Domain

Domain is physical territory, almost always within a town or city, to which your character controls access for the purpose of feeding. She can't keep the living inhabitants from going about their business, but she can keep watch herself. She can also have allies or servants specifically look for unfamiliar vampires and alert her when they find some. Domain refers specifically to the land and properties on it, as opposed to the people who may dwell there (which is the emphasis of Herd). Domain plays an important part in Cainite society — vampires who lack significant domain seldom earn respect — but it isn't an automatic entitlement to status among Cainites.

Each level of Domain reduces the difficulty of feeding checks by one for your character and those whom the character allows in. It also adds to your starting (not maximum) blood pool. If you use the domain security option, each dot of domain security raises the difficulty of feeding checks by one for uninvited vampires.

- A family home or a farm and its outlying properties — enough for a basic haven.



- A church or other large structure, a pier and adjacent warehouse or a bridge and ford — some place with ready but easily controllable access to the outside world.
- A city block or the buildings around a country crossroad — some place with more opportunities for concealment but less thorough security.
- A labyrinth, network of cisterns, the estates on a hill overlooking a town or the inns and watch posts on each side of a mountain pass — a place with both prospects and security.
- A ghetto district, self-sustaining border garrison or multi-family farm holding.

As noted previously, characters in a coterie can share their domain resources for better results. Six to eight dots secure all of a small town as a domain. Ten to 15 dots secure an important but not huge trading destination or center of pilgrimage. A city such as Rome (let alone Cairo or Baghdad) would require many hundreds of Domain points.

Storyteller's Option: Your Storyteller may allow you to designate one or more dots in Domain to increase the security of your character's territory rather than its size. If this option applies in your chronicle, each dot assigned to security provides a +1 difficulty penalty to efforts to intrude into the domain by anyone your character hasn't specifically allowed in and a -1 difficulty bonus to efforts by your character to identify and track intruders in the domain. A Domain of one dot's size and two dots' security, for instance, is small but quite resistant to intrusion, as opposed to a Domain rating of three dots' size with no extraordinary security. Domain security can be used with pooled Domain points as well, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Generation

Generation measures the number of vampires in a direct line between the character and Caine, the First Vampire. Most new vampires in the Dark Medieval era are of the 12th generation, and having a lower generation than that means that an elder (or a successful diablerist) chose the character as child for reasons of his, her or its own. See p. 164 for the details on what benefits generation provides.

- 11th generation. Blood pool of 12, can spend 1 blood point per turn, Trait maximum of 5.
- 10th generation. Blood pool of 13, can spend 1 blood point per turn, Trait maximum of 5.
- 9th generation. Blood pool of 14, can spend 2 blood points per turn, Trait maximum of 5.
- 8th generation. Blood pool of 15, can spend 3 blood points per turn, Trait maximum of 5.
- 7th generation. Blood pool of 20, can spend 4 blood points per turn, Trait maximum of 6.

Herd

Herd is the deliberately derogatory term among Cainites for mortals who readily let the character (and

vampires she allows to join in) drink their blood. Motives for this submission range widely, from believers who are convinced that the character is a dark angel granted divine authority over them to ambitious schemers who regard the humiliation and fatigue as the price of admission to the vampire's favor for negotiation and power over rivals. It's hard to give one's herd detailed orders: They're addicts to the experience of feeding, not much use as allies or contacts (unless you also buy those Backgrounds to refer to the same individuals). They don't automatically share all their territory and goods, either. Those benefits require separate purchases of Domain and Resources.

Some common factor ties the herd together, whether it's shared membership in a monastery or chivalric order, being members of one or a few extended families, residence along a particular street given over to the practitioners of one trade or something else. Work the details out with your Storyteller, since threats to and the fortunes of your herd are great sources for stories once play begins.

Each level of Herd rating provides an automatic blood point per night your character chooses to feed, in addition to the vagaries of regular hunting.

- 3-5 reliable vessels.
- 7-10 reliable vessels.
- 15-25 reliable vessels.
- 30-50 reliable vessels.
- 75-100 reliable vessels.

Influence

Influence measures the degree to which your character can make her wishes count in mortal society. In most cases, she's acquired influence through multiple means, including persuasion, bribery, intimidation, direct manipulation of minds and emotions and passing herself off as mortal when necessary. It takes time to accumulate more than a dot or two of Influence in a community of any size, and high Influence ratings are the realm of vampires who are prepared to spend years or even decades cultivating their position. Nor is Influence license to do whatever strikes your character's fancy. It's always easiest to get institutions to do what they're already inclined to. Constables need little prodding to arrest suspicious strangers or break up illicit operations whose owners haven't been paying bribes lately, for instance, but they require more incentive to go out killing apparently innocent bystanders or trying to arrest the most important civic leaders. Roleplaying therefore supports straightforward declarations of Influence use, and more so as the vampire twists the institution's purpose and outlook.

(The exercise of the Influence Background contributes a great deal to the inevitable tainting of institutions in the Dark Medieval world. Vampires are among the legions of darkness against whom preachers and reformers caution, gnawing away at the bowels of society for personal gain and gratification. It takes time to discredit or

undermine believers in a cause and to replace them with susceptible pawns and leaders who are willing to abandon moral restraint in their sundry pursuits, but then vampires who survive their early challenges have that time. Vampires make the Dark Medieval as well as suffering in it.)

Each level of Influence reduces the difficulty of relevant social rolls by one. Keep in mind that this applies to the field and area in which your character has influence: Influence among the clergy of Provence matters not at all when dealing with the beer brewers of Vienna.

- Moderately influential: significant in the affairs of a city or parish.
- Well-connected: significant in the affairs of a county or diocese.
- Position of influence: a force to be reckoned with throughout several counties or an archdiocese.
- Great personal power: a force in the life of a nation or transnational order.
- Vastly influential: a power behind the throne of the Church, or behind more than one national throne.

Mentor

Most Cainites are pretty well left to their own devices after release by their sires. Mentor reflects the continuing presence of an older vampire who takes an interest in the character, providing advice, aid and resources (depending on the mentor's interests). The mentor is not a magic cure for all the character's problems — a sufficiently determined fool convinces the mentor to take his support elsewhere. Nor is the mentor at the character's beck and call, since he presumably has matters of his own to attend to. He is a good source for letters of introduction, historical perspectives on current problems and other relatively discrete, specific assistance.

The mentor is often your character's sire, retaining social ties after release. It can be any other elder whom the character encounters along the way, however, or even a group of like-minded vampires such as the members of a local Tremere chantry or the vampiric denizens of a nearby monastery.

- An ancilla with little influence, though good wisdom.
- A respected elder.
- An influential and well-connected Cainite of the area.
- An elder with significant power in surrounding mortal society and strong connections to other Cainite communities.
- One of the significant vampires of the age (whose full importance you likely don't yet realize).

Resources

Resources are valuable goods whose disposition your character controls. In the currency-scarce Dark Medieval world, these assets may be actual money, but they're more likely to be property of some sort — land, grazing rights, animals, tax claims in kind as well as money and so on. Remember that vampires don't need to arrange for any food except blood and that their actual needs (as opposed to wants) for shelter and the like are very easily accommodated. Resources for vampires go mostly to pay for luxuries and for the associated expenses of developing and maintaining Status, Influence and other Backgrounds. A character with no dots in Resources has enough clothing and supplies to get by, but little margin for luxuries.

- Sufficient. You can maintain a typical residence in the style of the social class you choose and seem unmiserly, even if fits of largesse come seldom. You can maintain a servant or hire specific help as necessary.

- Moderate. You can display yourself as a member in good standing of your chosen community, with the occasional gift and indulgence seemly for a person of quality. You can maintain a small staff of servants. A fraction of your resources are available in letters of credit, readily portable jewelry and other forms that let you maintain a standard of "living" at the one-dot level wherever you happen to be, for up to six months.

- Comfortable. You are a prominent and established member of your community, with land and property, and the reputation which lets you draw on credit at very generous terms. Trust is as much a key resource as any particular valuable commodity at this level. You can maintain a one-dot quality of existence wherever you are without difficulty, for as long as you choose.

- Wealthy. Troubadours spin tales about the richness of your clothes, the health of your livestock and the beauty of your home. You hold more wealth than many of the local authorities (and need to deal with their jealousy from time to time). When you travel, you can maintain a three-dot existence for up to a year, and a two-dot existence indefinitely.

- Extremely Wealthy. Midas, Croesus and you, at least in the popular mind. You have vast and widely distributed assets, with huge staffs and connections to every level of society through a region. You travel with a minimum of three-dot comforts, more with a little effort. Kings and cardinals sometimes come to you for loans.

Retainers

Retainers are servants and companions with personal bonds of loyalty to your character. Depending on the character, they may be actual servants, fellow veterans of a crusade, fellow members of a monastic sect, childhood friends and the like. They may be ghouls,

bound to the character by the ties of blood, or may not, depending on the character's preferences. Work out a description of these retainers and the nature of their commitment to your character so that you and your Storyteller know what to expect in play (and what might make interesting surprises).

Keep in mind when designing retainers that feudalism evolved in large measure to *limit* the power of those in authority. Feudal lords do not have absolute authority: They take oaths committing them to defend their vassals and to attend to their vassals' needs. Retainers ought to matter to the characters, and if characters abuse their retainers, the Storyteller can and should make this a matter for scandal or even legal action by the characters' own lords. Untrammelled power is a nightmare of the medieval past, something feared as the source of both physical and spiritual suffering, and it would be greatly out of character for most medieval masters to feel at liberty to treat their retainers any way they might want.

Most retainers are of average ability and competence: In game terms, they have two dots in most Attributes, perhaps three in one or two and relevant Abilities at no more than three dots. If you want to acquire one or more particularly competent retainers, you can do so by merging dots.

- One retainer.
- Two retainers, or one of unusual competence (three Attributes at three dots, most professional Abilities at three dots and one at four).
- Three retainers, or two above-average retainers, or one remarkable retainer (built to the same total as a starting character).
- Four retainers or two above-average and one typical or one remarkable and two typical.
- Five retainers or three above-average or two remarkable.

Status

Status marks the character's reputation and position among Cainites. At the outset, neonates' status reflects the prestige their sire has earned and bequeathed. In areas where clan affiliation is strong, belonging to the "right" (or "wrong") clan may contribute to a character's status, and so may particular professions or mortal backgrounds, depending on the views of the Cainites around the character. Characters who have risen to become teachers or priests on their road usually have hefty status. Note that tradition provides for a certain amount of quid pro quo in accommodating the status of strangers, so that even when a character leaves the area where she earned her status and enters a place that uses other standards, at least part of her reputation travels with her. Cainite logicians spend a great deal of time on questions such as, "What does it mean to give honor on grounds one rejects?," and everyone else simply goes on about their business.

- Known: an exemplary neonate or a typical ancilla.
- Respected: one of the most remarkable neonates in the area or an ancilla of significant accomplishments.
- Honored: An outstandingly successful ancilla or a typical elder.
- Powerful: An elder of position as well as accomplishments, such as an advisor to the prince or a major participant in mortal society on a grand scale.
- Revered: A successful prince or other leader within Cainite society.

Pooling Backgrounds

Some Backgrounds lend themselves to joint ownership. Specifically, the members of a coterie may choose to pool their individual stores of Allies, Contacts, Domain, Herd, Influence, Resources and Retainers. Generation, Mentor and Status are necessarily individual matters.

The Anchor

You and the other players choose one Background as the anchor that holds the shared assets together. In most cases, this Background is Domain, with the physical place the characters claim for hunting, which also acts as a meeting ground for the mortals they deal with, a repository for their wealth and so on. Any of the poolable Backgrounds can serve in this role, however: Mentor might be the key to wealth and connections, the willing if ignorant population on whom the characters feed a source of servants and so on.

No Background pool can have more dots assigned to it than the Anchor Background does. If it's damaged by events during play or between sessions, other assets drift away from the characters' control, and it takes effort to win them back.

Any character contributing to the pool may pull his stake out at any time. The dislocations guarantee some damage: The character gets back one dot less than he put in. Making the transition more peaceably requires spending half the time it would take to develop a new dot in the relevant Background (for each Background involved), as discussed on p. 167.

Example: *The members of the coterie of the Chapel de Saint Sebastian build their Background pool around Domain. The physical territory of the chapel and its environs give them the opportunity to interact with important members of the clergy and local nobility and a pool of devout mortals whom they can cow into long-term servitude. They put a total of four dots into Domain and three each into Influence and Retainers.*

Then calamity strikes. A particularly zealous campaign against local heretics leads the authorities to seal off many of the catacombs associated with the chapel, and enthusiastic heretic-hunting guards patrol most of the ones that are left. The Domain

rating drops from 4 to 2. Some of the local dignitaries take their prayers and meditations to less turbulent landmarks, so the coterie's effective Influence rating falls from 3 to 2. Scared gentry, uncertain of their own position in the doctrinal war, stay at home more often, so Retainers also falls from 3 to 2.

Sustained effort by the coterie can repair the damage. Many options are available, from intimidating the guards away with monstrous manifestations — or the appearance of saints and angels who caution away sinners from such holy ground, backed by covert use of mental Disciplines to install awe and a sense of unworthiness and guilt among those who see the sight — to straightforward political maneuvering to get the authorities concerned with some other target. As the Anchor Background score rises again, so do the scores of those anchored to it, and it takes only half the usual maturation points to restore these lost associated Backgrounds.

The coterie can also change the Anchor Background. Doing so requires double the usual maturation points to buy the next dot's worth in the new anchor, and the cap remains in effect: Any other Backgrounds rated higher than the anchor are lost. When the loss follows from a change of Anchor Background, there's no cost break in rebuilding them to their earlier levels.

Using Pooled Backgrounds

Pooled Backgrounds are shared resources, essentially the coterie's communal property. Anyone who contributes to the pool (no matter how much he contributes) has equal access to it. Even if the character donates to only one of the pool's associated Backgrounds, he still has equal access to it. Not everyone can use the pool simultaneously, though. A Herd pool of seven dots can grant only a total of seven automatic blood points a night to the entire coterie. Just how those points are split up depends on the circumstances and agreements between the characters.

Example: Four players decide that their characters are forming a Background pool. Their anchor is Domain (the trading village of Andersburg), and they wish to get dots in Contacts (from traders and their gossip), Resources (money and goods from local commerce) and Retainers (a few town watchmen). Bill contributes three dots of Domain; Heather contributes another two dots of Domain and two of Resources; Lisa contributes another two dots of Domain (assigned to security), two to Contacts and one to Resources. Finally, Steve — who is short on dots — contributes only one dot of Retainers. This makes the pool Domain 5, Contacts 2, Resources 3, Retainers 1. All the players can have their characters tap this pool equally, even Bill who contributed only a single dot.

At the Storyteller's discretion, players can agree to place some limits on shared Backgrounds.

Upper Limits

By pooling points, a coterie can get Backgrounds that surpass the normal five-dot limit. This arrangement is normal, and it reflects the advantages of cooperation. A group can secure a larger domain or maintain a larger

network of allies and contacts than a single vampire can. There is no absolute upper limit on the level to which a pooled Background can rise, but things can get downright ludicrous if you aren't careful. It's usually best for the Storyteller to impose a 10-dot limit on the Anchor Background (and thus on all others). This limit represents domain over a important trading port or center of pilgrimage or a herd that consists of much of that same center's population.

Virtues

Virtues are just what they sound like, the foundations of your character's moral outlook. The road you choose, as described in Chapter Three, lays out your character's overall sense of sin and redemption — what's wrong with the world, what right conduct includes and so on. The Virtues underlie the roads and govern how your character sees particularly challenging or threatening situations, as well as how he's likely to respond.

Keep in mind that there are very few actual paragons of virtue among Cainites, certainly not as most human beings would see it if they understood the situation. Even a vampire who engages in holy works and charitable deeds does so through rigid self-denial, and even such a hard-working soul still feeds on the blood of the living and necessarily flees from living men and women whose faith is strong. The question is not whether your character is a nice a person, but how your character deals with the challenges of existing with a ravaging ancient curse working inside him, poisoning his hopes and pushing him toward a final orgy of chaos and violence.

It's much easier for a vampire to hew to a standard that deals with outward conduct than some kind of inward conviction. Stoic nobility is within the grasp of many vampires; overflowing love untainted by blood hunger escapes almost all of them. The central struggle in **Dark Ages: Vampire** is to hold on to one's inner self in the face of constant challenge, to achieve good (however defined) despite all rather than to bask in the satisfaction of being a good person already and reforming the world on that basis.

Responses to Society

Every vampire has a sense of right and wrong, however poorly defined and weakly held it may be. The Virtues of Conscience and Conviction summarize two fundamentally different approaches to the question of understanding right conduct. The details of a vampire's sense of moral failing vary greatly from one Cainite to the next. For some it's a purely external matter. If others find out and know that he's failed to adhere to the standards he professes, he'll feel shame, and too much shame will ultimately weaken his ability to concentrate on maintaining standards. For others it's a purely internal matter.

He knows that he's failed by his own standards, and he feels guilt regardless of whether anyone else knows it or not. Vampires are cursed with a drive to mingle with and compete against others of their kind, so that occasions for both guilt and shame arise in the course of night-to-night existence.

Note that, as discussed in detail on p. 267, *succeeding* a Conviction or Conscience roll when your character "sins" means that she retains an awareness of having failed. She is troubled, and she wants to make amends in accordance with the standards of her road. *Failing* the roll means that your character is no longer troubled by a particular failing, and this is the beginning of degeneration as your character concocts some suitable excuse for acting badly in that way.

Conscience

Conscience measures the character's commitment to the moral standards his society espouses. He accepts the tenets he grew up with, or ones he's heard preached along the way, and he feels shame and guilt when he deviates from those standards. The inner voice of conscience helps him resist temptations. When he commits questionable acts, his Conscience score affects how much remorse he feels. Depending on the particular outlook your character holds, "remorse" may not be the actual response. The numerical rating applies to a wide range of possible outlooks, not just to ones whose attitudes suit these labels.

A deeply committed Stoic would feel shame but not guilt at his failings, while an adherent to one of the Gnostic sects, which teach that sin against the world's laws sets the spirit free, would feel embarrassed over a very different set of actions than those that would offend an aspiring rabbi.

- Uncaring
- Typical
- Ethical
- Righteous
- Remorseful

Conviction

Conviction measures the character's commitment to moral standards as part of a reasoned, deliberate choice taken after rejecting the proffered social norms. He defines his duty himself, and he cares little what others think. Sin is a matter of failing to meet one's chosen goals, with higher Conviction scores making the character more acutely aware both of implications in his code and of his own fallibility in holding to it. High Conviction makes a character obviously inhuman and disconnected from the views of the people he moves among and preys upon.

- Steady
- Determined
- Driven
- Ruthless

••••• Completely Self-Assured

Responses to Self

Every vampire feels the constant call of the Beast, that animalistic and worse-than-feral side of her that finds satisfaction only in destruction. Every vampire of more than a few nights' experience has seen what happens when the Beast takes control. What was once a sentient being becomes forever afterward a thing of mindless impulse, unleashing its powers with cunning but without reflection or contemplation, until it's finally destroyed. In some areas where Cainites proliferate, stern elders keep a few of these tragically lost souls on hand to provide object lessons, but it happens often enough that, alas, no zoo of the Beast is really necessary. Heaven is far off, eternity waits at the end of time, but the Beast is always at hand, and a vampire learns how to control it or perishes.

Self-Control

According to some Cainite scholars, Self-Control is a particularly "civilized" response to the Beast. The character uses her will, backed by observation of warning signs of growing power on the Beast's part and rules of internal discipline, to fight down the urge to frenzy. She learns to sacrifice some of her emotions and even some of her otherwise reasonable plans for cool, restrained conduct to deny the Beast its spiritual sustenance. (Note that physical hunger limits this virtuous aim: When your character's blood pool is lower than her Self-Control rating, you can roll only one die per point of blood on hand. Feeding is a very practical matter.)

- Unstable
- Normal
- Temperate
- Judicious
- Self-Possessed

Instinct

Instinct is the "barbaric" alternative to Self-Control. The character accepts frenzy and complete surrender to passion as part of her nature. Instead of aiming to hold the frenzy back, she aims to retain a core of controlled awareness even as the frenzy unfolds, so that she can choose her course of action moment by moment. Whenever the threat of frenzy arises, she embraces it automatically, unless the difficulty of the frenzy roll is less than her Instinct score, in which case she can choose whether or not to succumb. Thereafter, each time the character wishes to choose a particular action rather than follow the imperatives of frenzy, you must roll Instinct against the frenzy difficulty. Success allows you to specify one single action that the character takes. She then resumes her unity with the moment until the frenzy exhausts itself. Among Cainites, this act is called "riding" frenzy.

- Intuitive
- Savage
- Bestial
- Visceral
- Feral

Responses to Threats

Every vampire faces danger, and the Curse of Caine makes some dangers particularly critical. Fire, the closest thing to sunlight on Earth, quite readily turns undead flesh to smoldering ash. Injury awakens the Beast with the urge toward flight rather than fight. Physical force, social leverage and spiritual might all sometimes make a vampire want to run away and hide somewhere.

Courage

Courage measures the intellectual, moral and spiritual reserves that allow your character to stand fast when his impulse is to flee. (See the section on Röttschreck, p. 265, for particular mechanics in this regard.) Characters with high Courage ratings still feel fear, but they're able to block the immediate translation of that fear into unthinking action. The details vary wildly. Some vampires genuinely don't feel fear on the emotional, instinctual level in the face of fire, holiness and other threats. They possess only a reasoned awareness of the dangers. Others discipline the fear through military training, monastic practice or some other systematic code. Still others subdue it with as much instinct as in the fear itself. They may not really know why they keep control or be able to explain it to others.

- Timid
- Normal
- Bold
- Resolute
- Heroic

Variable Traits

Each of these traits shares a quality that sets it apart from the others you've defined for your character so far: They are likely to fluctuate over the course a session, story or chronicle, and not simply as the result of the player improving the traits through experience (see p. 165). In some cases, there are permanent ratings (that act much like other traits) and temporary ratings (that are expended in play). In other cases, the rating simply fluctuates according to the sways of the character's experiences.

The four fluctuating traits include: Road, Willpower, Blood Pool and Health.

Road

A road is a system of vampiric belief, the moral compass a Cainite uses to deal with the Beast and preserve

her sanity. The details of each of the major roads appear in Chapter Three, but the Road trait lets you keep track of just where your character lies within the belief system you choose for her. Unlike most traits, Road is rated on a scale of 1 to 10 instead of 1 to 5. The higher your character's Road rating is, the more seriously she takes the tenets of her belief and the less prone she is to become a soulless monstrosity. With a higher rating, however, she becomes more sensitive to the sins she must commit on a nightly basis.

The Road trait fluctuates because a vampire faces the possibility of moral degeneration when she commits an act that she considers sinful. She becomes increasingly callous and loses her ethical footing. The character's Road trait decreases thus. If a vampire's Road rating ever drops to 0, the character's heart and soul are completely dominated by the Beast. Such unfortunates are controlled by the Storyteller and are no longer suitable as characters for players. Characters can also advance along a road (improving their Road rating) with dedication, hard work and experience. (For more on raising the Road trait and on degeneration, see p. 266.)

The following expressions of the Road trait refer to the character's relation to the ethics of his own road, so are necessarily vague.

- Soulless
- Lost
- Uncaring
- Immoral
- Distant
- Removed
- Moral
- Faithful
- Righteous
- Saintly

Starting characters in **Dark Ages: Vampire** are assumed to be adherents of their chosen roads, having undergone one or two moments of truth to reaffirm their faith.

Road Effects

A Cainite's control over the Beast (as represented by the Road rating) has several effects:

- **Virtues:** The ascendancy of the Beast affects a Cainite's Virtues. Whenever a certain Virtue is called into question, the player may not roll more dice for a Virtue than her character has in dots of Road rating. As the character sinks deeper under the influence of the Beast, qualities such as conscience, confidence, instinct and self-control, all begin to give way to mindless rage and hunger. Note that this weakening can speed a vampire's degeneration once her Virtues begin to fail (see "Degeneration," p. 267).

- **Sleeping:** The Beast sleeps deeply and is reluctant to wake. Vampires with higher Road ratings rise earlier in the evening than those with lower Road ratings do (see p. 235). Also, if a vampire is forced to act during the day, the

player's maximum dice pool on any action is equal to his Road rating.

- **Torpor:** The length of time a vampire spends in torpor (p. 254) is based on his Road rating. Those with low Road scores remain in torpor for a longer time than vampires with higher Road ratings do.

- **Aura:** Each road carries a particular *aura* with it, a feeling or impression the Cainite unconsciously projects. The greater the Cainite's Road rating is, the stronger this aura is. For example, followers of the Road of Kings have an aura of majesty about them, while followers of the Road of Humanity seem more normal, less like creatures of the night. Generally, a vampire's aura has little or no direct effect. It's only a vague impression. Very high or low Road ratings impose a bonus or penalty to the difficulty of Social rolls associated with the character's aura. These modifiers can affect Social rolls used for Disciplines.

Road Rating	Aura Modifier
10	-2 difficulty
9-8	-1 difficulty
7-4	no modifier
3-2	+1 difficulty
1	+2 difficulty

Willpower

Willpower measures a character's determination— not courage precisely, nor conscience, but everything that leads to persistence in the face of adversity and to effort that transcends her normal limits in a moment of supreme crisis. Like Road, it is rated from 1 to 10, but unlike any other trait, Willpower has two ratings: one for permanent potential and one that varies up and down depending on circumstances.

The permanent rating indicates your character's overall will in much the way other traits function. It serves as a dice pool when you must roll Willpower, and it can be increased with experience. The temporary rating varies in the course of play, and you can spend its points for various immediate effects. Doing so makes your character more prone to outside influence, however. When someone challenges your character with Willpower as the difficulty rating, use the temporary rating.

- Spineless
- Weak
- Unassertive
- Diffident
- Certain
- Confident
- Determined
- Controlled
- Iron-Willed
- Unshakable

Spending Willpower

Willpower serves several very useful purposes in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, so your character's temporary Willpower score is likely to move up and down faster than any other trait, with the possible exception of blood pool. Be sure that you understand these applications, as they can make the difference between success and failure at crucial moments.

- **Ensuring Success:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to get an automatic success on a single roll. You can spend only one Willpower this way for a particular action and modify only one action in a single turn this way. Nothing cancels out the success, not even rolled botches. If your character puts forth that special exertion, at the least he'll get *something* to show for the effort. When the task involves extended effort, you can spend one Willpower each turn to reinforce the results of sequential rolls.

Note that you must declare your intent to spend Willpower on a roll *before* you actually make the roll. This isn't license to retroactively fix an unfortunate result. First the effort, then the randomization. The Storyteller may also sometimes disallow Willpower modification of particular rolls, for reasons discussed in the Disciplines and Storytelling chapters.

- **Resisting Instinct:** Some actions are nearly automatic: stepping back from a dangerous precipice or barely controlled flame or sunlight filtering through a thin curtain, for instance. Your Storyteller may allow you to spend a Willpower point to have your character avoid the reflexive response. This is a discretionary matter, and the Storyteller needn't always provide the option, though it's generally suitable. Sustained conquest of reflex may require additional Willpower expenditure a few turns later.

- **Maintaining Sanity:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to restrain a derangement from manifesting for the rest of the current scene. Particularly strong stimuli may overwhelm this expenditure, requiring a Road roll or even applying automatically. Most of the time, however, Willpower can temporarily overcome other compulsions. Using Willpower thus repeatedly can weaken most derangements over time and even eventually cure them. Malkavian vampires cannot use Willpower for permanent triumph over the derangement that manifests in them at Embrace, and other specific cases may also resist cure.

- **Overcoming Injury:** Spend one temporary Willpower point to ignore wound penalties as described under Health for one turn. Doing so allows your character to take heroic actions in spite of grave injury, in accordance with a long tradition of special vibrancy on the part of notable heroes (and villains). Incapacitated characters and those in torpor can't use Willpower thus.

Regaining Willpower

Running out of Willpower is a very bad thing for characters. Even though they don't look at their character sheets, characters know the feeling of fatigue and the com-

pulsion to act according to a few particularly deep-seated impulses. It's hard for a character with zero temporary Willpower to do much of anything. Storytellers shouldn't be too harsh in letting characters regain Willpower — this venture is not an adversarial one, and the rules do assume that characters can draw on at least a few points of Willpower as circumstances require.

- **Acting In Accordance with Nature:** Characters regain one or more points of temporary Willpower when acting in accordance with their Natures, as described previously (see p. 138). When your character reaches zero temporary Willpower, the Nature overwhelms pretty much all other desires until he can act in a way that qualifies him to regain at least one point of Willpower.

- **Completing a Story:** Your character's Willpower pool returns to its maximum rating at the conclusion of a story-line. This is the point at which your character and his allies have brought resolution to the conflicts facing them and gained the opportunity to rest and reflect after multiple sessions of effort. Limited success may restrict the Willpower your character regains this way, and abject failure may cancel it altogether.

- **Resting:** At your Storyteller's discretion, characters can regain one Willpower at the start of each night as they rise from slumber. This gain reflects the renewed determination that comes with rest.

- **Triumphing:** At your Storyteller's discretion, characters can regain one or more points of temporary Willpower upon achieving some outstanding goal or victory. Overcoming vampire-hunters who've penetrated the coterie's haven, for instance, is often good for some Willpower reinvigoration, as is a decisive victory in a battle of prestige or the popular acceptance of an artistic or other innovation. In addition to these general matters, where the bonus usually applies to all the participants in the success, individual characters may earn Willpower for acting successfully in accordance with their respective Natures. A character who succeeds in several challenges that require (or allow) her to act upon her Nature's imperative within one scene may qualify, as can a character who succeeds in at least one such challenge per scene for several scenes in a row. A number of notable successes of this sort equal to the character's permanent Willpower is a good benchmark for progress, though Storytellers can and should vary the details to fit the needs of the chronicle and the moment.

Your Storyteller may come up with other situations in which it's appropriate for your character to regain Willpower. Feel free to make suggestions, but respect the Storyteller's authority in this matter. In general, the faster the Storyteller restores Willpower, the more "cinematic" and action-oriented a chronicle tends to become, while restrictions on the recovery of Willpower feed (when things work well) a mood of tension and desperation or (when things don't work so well) an unhappy groping for alternatives in the face of repetitive failure.

Blood Pool

Every vampire has a reserve of *vitae*, which is human blood transformed by the Curse of Caine into the eldritch substance that sustains vampiric existence. A blood point corresponds to about a tenth of the blood in an average mortal adult, though human capacity varies. (In addition, the process of feeding is not as traumatic as the loss of a tenth of a person's blood through open wounds would be. The Curse is efficient.)

A vampire's generation determines his maximum blood pool. Vampires further removed from the Father in Darkness have reduced capacity for blood: They can't take in as much, and they can't burn it off as quickly as their elders can. Vampire sages foresee a time when high-generation vampires become nearly indistinguishable from mortals in their strengths, while perhaps just as susceptible as ever to all vampires' shared weaknesses. The still small but growing ranks of the despised 13th generation of vampires, with diminished capacities, provide fodder for such speculations. In the meantime, the advantages that are available to low-generation vampires make diablerie perennially attractive to younger, higher-generation rivals looking for improvements that are otherwise denied to them.

If your character ends up with a temporary blood pool of zero, expect frenzy to follow, and to last long enough for the starving vampire to replenish at least a few points. One of the functions that a coterie provides for its members is the double-checking on each others' condition and the shared access to feeding that reduces the rate of embarrassing incidents involving out-of-control bloodsucking. While your character teeters on the brink of starvation, all feats of self-control are more difficult, too. You cannot use more dice than you have points in temporary blood pool for such rolls, even if your character's Self-Control or Instinct rating is higher than that.

Spending Blood

Vampiric usage refers to "burning" blood, and sometimes it's almost literally true. In the heat of vigorous action — mental as well as physical — vampires sometimes flush visibly, and their veins feel hot, hotter than they ever did in life, as *vitae* discharges the supernatural vigor it carries. Other times, the act of using blood is less dramatic, and its passage leaves behind only a slowly growing sense of hunger.

- **Waking:** Spend one blood point when your character awakens each night. It takes a modicum of effort just to animate cold, dead flesh.

- **Healing:** Spend one blood point to heal a level of bashing or lethal damage. Your character usually must rest while this takes place. A slow walk or horseback ride is usually acceptable (though particularly serious injuries may require total relaxation), but running and fighting aren't. If you want your character to heal while taking other actions, roll Stamina + Survival (difficulty 8) after spending the

blood. If you fail, that blood is wasted. Note that this is the only way in which vampires heal wounds. If your character doesn't spend blood to cure damage, he'll remain damaged indefinitely, with the accompanying penalties.

- **Physical Augmentation:** Spend one blood point to raise a Physical Attribute of your choice (Strength, Dexterity or Stamina) by one dot for the duration of the scene. You must declare that your character is doing this at the start of a turn, but it doesn't require concentration, so she may take other actions that turn at no special penalty. You may spend as many blood points per turn as your character's generation allows for this purpose, but you can raise each physical Attribute to only one dot higher than her generation normally allows for the scene. (To six dots each for a vampire of eighth generation or higher, to seven dots each for a seventh-generation vampire and so on.) You can spend additional blood to raise Attributes even higher than that, but the excess wears off three turns after your character allocates blood to it, and you can never raise attributes to more than 10 dots.

Blood-boosted Attributes may produce peculiar manifestations, depending largely on your character's self-conception. Someone who's normally weak but suddenly strong for supernatural reasons is more likely to develop distended bulging muscles than someone who's naturally fairly strong. Blood-boosted Stamina may include very noticeable changes when the character suffers damage, with tissues leaping closed after cuts and fountains of *vitae* coating burns and scars. Storytellers should use this sort of complication as opportunities for roleplaying, not as more ways to make characters and players regret ever drawing on the benefits vampirism provides to offset its liabilities.

- **Feeding Others:** Drain out one or more blood points from cuts made for the purpose of giving *vitae* to other creatures. Vampires can drink them in and add them to their own blood pools. See p. 260 for more about blood oaths, which may follow from this sort of transfer. See p. 284 for more information on the condition of ghouls, which applies to humans and animals while they have active vampiric blood in them.

- **Masquerading:** Spend a variable number of blood points to hide the consequences of vampirism in a blood-borne fervor of activity: warmed skin and breath, softened complexion and so on. A vampire in this flush of health may pass as human in physical all ways for the duration of the scene. Doing so requires 6 - Self-Control points' worth of blood for characters on the Road of Humanity. Characters on other roads must spend an additional two blood points (for a total of 8 - Self-Control points), since they're further removed from humanity and making a deliberate effort to suppress many traces of mortality in themselves. Vampires who have no Self-Control rating at all, following roads that cultivate Instinct instead, have a very difficult time impersonating living people. (They must spend eight points to use this effect.)

- **Using Disciplines:** Spend one or more blood points to fuel some vampiric Disciplines, as described in Chapter



Six. Although Discipline use usually constitutes an action, that action includes spending the required blood.

Acquiring Blood Pool

Vampires get blood just as folklore says they do: by taking it from others. A vampire who is unwilling to prey on others is not a vampire who can last very long, and this compromise with necessity sets boundaries on the viability of some “nice-guy” concepts. Vampires are necessarily predators.

Feeding is not an exact science. Vampires can lose control while feeding and accidentally drink their victims dry. They can also acquire some diseases carried in the blood. Keep in mind that your character doesn't get to tally blood points received or the size of dice pools. He experiences this all in more subjective terms. Many vampires (and nearly all victims) experience intense euphoria during feeding. It's not a sexual passion, but something that is perhaps less unlike sexual ecstasy than other feelings. (Vampiric theologians write long treatises about the implications of this similarity.) In the midst of feeding, a vampire's sight and hearing often fade or blur, and time may seem to pass more quickly or slowly than usual. Lack of blood produces a gnawing agony that combines memories of mortal hunger with a sense of literal emptiness within one's guts. The inrush of blood infuses shriveled tissues to produce a physical as well as psychological fullness.

A vampire may drain up to three blood points per turn from the target of the moment. The more blood a vampire takes, the more forceful the draining is, and the less pleasure there's likely to be in the process. Resistance stops once fangs

break skin. The passionate sensations of the Kiss, as it's euphemistically called, make it easy for targets to become addicted to feeding. Of such addicts are herds made, among other tragic consequences.

Players of vampires with the Self-Control Virtue may make a roll at difficulty 8 to avoid succumbing to the Kiss. This gives some would-be victims of diablerie the chance to fight back.

A human typically has 10 points worth of blood, but wounds reduce available blood. Reduce a target's blood pool by one point per level of currently unhealed injuries... and note that vampires seldom perform detailed medical examinations of their prey. Discovering an unrecognized deficiency a little too late is one very common way for vampires to accidentally take life while feeding. It is possible to feed on animals (although their blood is less nourishing), as described on page 310 of the Appendix.

Old blood, outside a warming body, rapidly loses its value. Stored blood goes bad in a matter of hours or a few nights unless one preserves it through magical or supernatural means. The blood of elder vampires, on the other hand, is not only still good but more potent than other forms of blood. Each blood point taken from an elder counts as two or more blood points as it diffuses through the feeding vampire's system. It's not that elders hold more physical blood, but that it's concentrated thanks to the intensified power of the curse working within them.

Rumor ascribes marvelous properties to the blood of werewolves, faeries and other creatures. Experience shows

GENERATION CHART

Generation	Trait Maximum	Blood Pool Maximum	Blood Points/Turn
Third	10	unknown	unknown
Fourth	9	50	10
Fifth	8	40	8
Sixth	7	30	6
Seventh	6	20	4
Eighth	5	15	3
Ninth	5	14	2
Tenth	5	13	1
Eleventh	5	12	1
Twelfth	5	11	1
Thirteenth+	5	10	1

Trait Maximum: The maximum number of dots a vampire of this generation can have in any one Attribute or Ability.

Blood Pool Maximum: The maximum number of blood points a vampire of this generation can store. Remember that elders concentrate the *vitae* within them rather than swelling up with huge physical volumes of blood.

Blood Points/Turn: The maximum number of blood points a vampire of this generation can spend each turn.

Remember that **Dark Ages: Vampire** characters belong to the 12th generation unless you purchase the Generation Background or they commit diablerie.

HEALTH LEVELS

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Uninjured	-0	none
Bruised	-0	none
Hurt	-1	none
Injured	-1	halve running speed
Wounded	-2	no running; may not move, then attack
Mauled	-2	max. speed 3 yards/turn
Crippled	-5	max. speed 1 yard/turn
Incapacitated	total	cannot move

that vampires who try to feed on such targets almost always end up drained of their own blood and therefore unable to report on any special benefits gained.

Health

The Health trait measures just what it sounds like: the extent to which your character is injured or otherwise impaired. There are seven levels of health, ranging from completely uninjured to outright destroyed (for vampires) or dead (for mortals). The dice pool penalties described here are not cumulative — characters at Mauled lose only two dice. The dice pool penalties do not apply to soak dice pools, most Virtue checks and Willpower rolls to abort from announced actions to some other option. The dice pool penalties do apply to damage rolls for Strength-based attacks but not to ones relying on mechanical force like crossbow bolts.

- **Uninjured:** Nothing impedes the character's freedom of action.
- **Bruised:** The character suffers minor nuisance injuries, which may have roleplaying consequences but not mechanical ones.
- **Hurt:** The character has superficial wounds, which do not impair her movement but reduce her dice pool for the turn by one.
- **Injured:** The character has minor but significant wounds, which halve her running speed and reduce her dice pool by one.
- **Wounded:** The character has significant damage, which prevents her from running at any speed faster than her usual walking rate and reduces her dice pool by two. She may not move and then attack. She always loses dice for the divided actions of moving and attacking in the same turn.
- **Mauled:** The character is badly injured and can hobble at no more than three yards per turn. Her dice pool decreases by two.
- **Crippled:** The character is catastrophically injured and barely able to move, at a maximum of one yard per turn. Her dice pool decreases by five.
- **Incapacitated:** The character cannot move and is usually unconscious. A vampire who reaches Incapacitated

levels of damage and has no blood points left enters torpor (see p 253). A mortal who suffers any more damage of any kind while Incapacitated dies. A vampire who suffers an aggravated wound (see p. 253) while Incapacitated dies the Final Death.

Experience

Characters who survive grow and change over time. Even vampires, whose forms linger through the ages, acquire new capabilities, learn new things and bring out latent potential in themselves. Much of this change happens on the level of roleplaying: New outlooks and behavior do not require mechanical support. Other matters do affect your character's ratings, and that's where experience points come into play.

Dark Ages: Vampire actually has two separate systems for measuring character growth. Regular experience points track the accumulation of learning experiences in night-to-night existence at times when your character is often busy, encountering danger and challenges and otherwise being very busy. While many vampires have exciting times once in a while, the long-term pace of Cainite existence is much slower. Maturation points reflect this much more sedate, thoughtful process of change. Experience points can come in a single night; maturation points accumulate over the years.

Uptime Experience Points

In the end, it is your Storyteller's decision how many points to award after each session and at the end of each story-line. In general, experience points reward successful risk-taking on your character's part, as he rises to the challenges the world presents to him, and good roleplaying on your part. Common awards of experience points include the following.

Per Session Chapter Awards

- **Automatic:** One point for showing up and making some effort. Your Storyteller should withhold this award only if you fail to take part in the session at all.

EXPERIENCE COSTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 4
Existing Ability	current rating x 2
New Specialty or Expertise	current rating
New Ability	3
Clan Discipline	current rating x 5
Other Discipline	current rating x 7
Secondary Path (Thaumaturgy, Mortis)	current rating x 4
New Discipline	10
New Secondary Path	7
Virtue	current rating x 2*
Road	current rating x 2
Willpower	current rating

* Raising a Virtue with experience points does not raise the traits based on it, such as Road and Willpower.

• **Learning Curve:** One point if you can provide a cogent explanation of what your character learned about himself and the situation as a result of the session.

• **Roleplaying:** One point (or more) for bringing your character to life through particularly vivid description, dialogue and so on.

• **Heroism:** One point (or more) for courting grave danger in the pursuit of some larger goal. This applies to genuinely life- or unlife-threatening circumstances in which your character has some valid motive. Mere carelessness and frivolous risk-taking don't count; racing against fire and the sun to save an ally does.

Per Story Awards

• **Success:** One point for each character who completed some significant part of her goals. Minor victories count. So do clever adaptations to unforeseen difficulties.

• **Danger:** One point for each character who confronted significant physical or other risk at some point.

• **Wisdom:** One point for each character who contributed something of noteworthy cunning or insight as the coterie planned its actions, or who came up with something intelligent on the spur of the moment when necessary.

Storytellers can use these examples as guidelines — this list isn't exhaustive.

Spending Experience Points

It takes some time to develop more mastery in any field of study. The first dot in an Ability can come in a matter of nights (10 – [1 per dot of Intelligence], as a rule of thumb). Raising an Attribute is usually a matter of about a month per dot for sustained dedicated effort, or a few months per dot if

your character has other pursuits. The first dot in a Discipline often comes in a flash of inspiration. Higher ratings require more time, up to many years or even decades in the case of sophisticated Disciplines. Your Storyteller may require that experience points be spent all at the end of this study, or spread throughout the period, so that your character's studies might be interrupted but resumed later without wasting all earlier effort.

Note that Backgrounds aren't modified with experience points but with roleplaying. (Your character actually has to recruit new retainers or expand her domain.) In some circumstances, the Storyteller may allow you to increase well-established Backgrounds (or restore ones that have been downgraded by circumstances) at the same cost as Virtues (current rating x 2).

Downtime Maturation Points

A story may take place over a few nights of "game time" (that experienced by the characters, not the players), but a chronicle can go on for significantly longer. One of the best parts about portraying undying monsters is the chance to tell stories set across a large expanse of time. The typical **Dark Ages** chronicle has stories separated by years or decades. In the time between stories — called downtime — characters develop much more slowly. Vampires are static creatures, and unless they are stirred into development by action (e.g., during stories) they grow at a snail's pace.

To reflect this, characters accumulate maturation points during these periods, which you can spend between stories. Note that the number of points earned during maturation varies on a sliding scale, with more points gained in the early years. This reflects the fact that vampiric learning slows the more time passes since they were stirred to activity. While a vampire who has been keeping to herself for a few years may seem as active as any other, one who has been out of the loop for a couple of centuries probably spends whole months staring at the same page of text or reflecting about an obscure point of theology. Therefore, it is most efficient to have a few years of downtime between stories rather than a few decades.

Spending Maturation Points

Your Storyteller may require the stress and extra concentration associated with earning and spending uptime experience points when your character acquires the first dot of a new Ability or Discipline. Before you start budgeting points, make sure you understand whether maturation points apply to developing new capabilities or only to refining existing ones.

You spend maturation points right before play begins on the next story, and the effects come into effect immediately. Unspent points are not wasted and carry over to the next period of downtime. You can spend maturation points to raise traits as follows:

Time Period	Maturation Points
First 5 years	1 point per year
Next 25 years	1 point per 5 years
Next 100 years	1 point per 10 years
After 130 years	1 point per 20 years
In torpor	No points

- **Attributes:** Five points per dot while your character is less than (Willpower) centuries old; 10 points per dot after that.

- **Abilities:** Two points per dot. Specialties and fields of expertise cost one point each.

- **Disciplines:** The cost of learning Disciplines rises as your character ages. It costs three points per dot for the first two centuries, plus one every two centuries thereafter. This expenditure provides two dots instead of one when your character is studying one of the multi-path Disciplines: Thaumaturgy or Mortis, most likely, in the Middle Ages,

possibly others in other eras. Add one point for each dot of an out-of-clan Discipline.

- **Virtues:** Two points per dot.

- **Road:** One point per dot up to your character's Willpower rating, two points per dot over Willpower.

- **Willpower:** 2 points per dot.

Backgrounds

"Time and chance happen to them all," as the prophet wrote. Your character can count, generally, on the results of sustained study of her own potential. Working on her ties to the world is necessarily riskier. The cost of raising a Background rating is one maturation point for your character's first two centuries, plus one for every two centuries thereafter. (Older vampires have more trouble interacting with the world in changing or new ways. Those who survive figure out some way of coping, but it's never all that easy or fun.)





BOLTON 02

The one who found the beast was, of all things, a farmer.

He tilled the soil, planted vegetables and tended to geese, pigs and other things. He was no knight or monk or crusader. No great hero of Christ or agent of Emperor Fredrick. Just a peasant, brought to this land to help settle it.

When the call to help settle the lands of the Prus and Livs came, it was obvious that his lord was glad to "grant" him and his fellow farmers to the German holy knights. With the hogs dead and the lands fallow from two years of sickness, he had little need of them. The Teutonic Order, however, needed hands and bodies to occupy newly Christian lands.

Perhaps, he had been a little too eager to take part in this crusade. Or, more likely, he had simply wanted the lands he would now work to be as far as possible from knights and sirs, holy or not. He would give the product of his labor to the Order, but he wished to see them and hear their crusading zeal not at all. One uncle killed and one brother maimed by levies in the dynastic wars had been enough of swords and knights for him. His wife sometimes seemed scornful of such dubious valor, but neither did she wish to lose him — and fertile lands, even pagan lands, were better than starvation at home.

And she could never say that these lands were not beautiful. After several months of work, the endless woods were making way for some lands to till and the fowls and hogs were doing well. The light in this land was what he liked the best, though. They said that the pagans worshipped dark forest gods, but it was the dawn and dusk that he loved. The red-tinged light filtering through the grand trees and the shifting winds. The knowledge that his hands would tame this land. It had its glory. Perhaps the brother-knights were correct, and God had ordered this enterprise.

Appreciation for the setting sun, however, meant acknowledging the coming of night. And on this glorious dusk, his admiration had drawn him just a touch far afield. To see the light cut through the treetops as it faded, he had wandered well past the last signs of his own tilling and clearing. The shadows spread from the trees rising slowly to fill all available spaces. The call of beasts wild and hungry started as he still glanced at the last crimson ember of light on the tip of the tallest tree.

His eyes adjusted to the darkness, of course, but it was still deep. And he barely noticed the softness of the forest soil he stood upon as it shifted. He looked down, kneeling to get a better look, and watched the ground move. *An animal*, he thought. A burrowing thing.

A strangely calm part of his screaming soul noted that he was half-right when first one, then two, powerful hands shot from the earth to grab him. The thing's head soon followed, a parody of Man with glowing red eyes and a mouth stretched open to reveal great teeth.

The farmer's last thought was that the forest gods were dark indeed in these parts.



CHAPTER SIX: DISCIPLINES

Behold, the gates of death are in my keeping,
Secrets of ages scripted for my eye.
—The Erciyes Fragments. II (Lilith)

Blessings of the Curse

According to Cainite lore, Caine wandered alone and accursed after his banishment to Nod until he found Lilith. The first wife of Adam, expelled from Eden for her pride, she was a powerful witch. Lilith showed Caine some of the secrets of his damned blood. From her, he learned to become quicker and stronger than before, to see into other worlds, to call forth darkness and light. These gifts were each an application of Caine's will over the raging hunger inside him, and because of this regimented aspect, they have come to be known as Disciplines. In these nights, there are more than a dozen such Disciplines, some shared by many vampires, others jealously guarded by certain clans and bloodlines. It is said that in the earliest nights, every vampire had access to a broad range of powers from the time of the Embrace. With the coming of the third generation and its clans of progeny, the gifts became more limited. With time, however, elders and Methuselahs can learn a stupefying array of blood powers.

Beyond its origins and uses, each Discipline write-up also discusses how that ability is as much a part of God's curse on Caine (or Caine's curse on the Antediluvians) as it is a blessing. These notes are provided for roleplaying purposes. You do not have to worry about your character losing dots in the Etiquette Skill, for instance, just because you bought Animalism up to 4 or 5.

Clan Secrets (Optional Rule)

Disciplines are potent manifestations of the power of the Blood, and vampires do not tend to share them. Many of the more esoteric Disciplines are closely associated with a few bloodlines, and elders of these clans often take measures to ensure that their secrets aren't shared with others. The system of experience points (see p. 165) makes purchasing "non-clan" Disciplines more expensive, but Storytellers who wish to keep the secrets of various Disciplines truly hidden from members of clans who do not have those abilities as clan Disciplines may wish to use the following optional rule.

Under this rule, a Cainite can freely improve only the three physical Disciplines (Potence, Celerity and Fortitude) and her clan Disciplines. To learn a new Discipline, the character must partake of the blood of a Cainite for whom that ability is a clan Discipline and receive instruction from him. This rule forces vampires who wish to learn the secrets of, say, Obtenebration, to enter into a relationship with a Lasombra. As long as the character receives blood and instruction, the player may purchase his first dot in this new Discipline at the standard cost (10 experience). She can then improve the Discipline up to level 5 at the standard out-of-clan cost (current rating x 7) without further special instruction or blood. Only one drink is necessary, but it does take the student one step toward the blood oath with his teacher (see p. 260 for more on this).

It is also possible to learn the first level just with blood of the appropriate clan (from a staked victim, for example) and without instruction, but the experience cost doubles to 20. As long as the character does not receive instruction from a member of the appropriate clan, the player's cost to improve this "stolen" Discipline also doubles (to current rating x 14). Likewise, this drink can lead to a blood oath.

This optional rule keeps Disciplines from getting more than one step away from their native clans. Many players, particularly those of Brujah characters (who receive just one non-physical Discipline) may balk at this rule, so you may wish to discuss it with your troupe before putting it into place.

Blood Sorcery

Two of the Disciplines listed in this chapter, Mortis and Thaumaturgy, behave differently than the others do. Most Disciplines have discrete powers at each level, and increasing your Discipline's strength by one dot with experience points grants you access to that power. Mortis and Thaumaturgy, however, are forms of blood sorcery, and they unleash a wider scope of powers. To reflect this property, they are each broken into two parts: path magic and rituals.

Path Magic

Each sorcerous Discipline has at least a few paths. They are best thought of as courses of study of a particular specialty within the broader field of Thaumaturgy or Mortis. Path magic is quick and almost improvisational; it reflects a character's general mastery of one aspect of his Discipline. A Tremere advanced in the Rego Vitae path is so schooled in affecting blood that he can do so without much in the way of specific preparation. Path magic is ranked from 1 to 5. Even those fortunate individuals who begin play below eighth generation cannot achieve a sixth rank in any path, for such powers simply do not exist.

Choose a primary path when you take the first dot in a sorcerous Discipline. Tremere magi and Cappadocian sorcerers can choose any of the paths of their Discipline as their primary path. Blood sorcerers from other clans are more limited (see sidebar). The primary path always remains at the same level as the Discipline itself, increasing as that Discipline increases.

You may purchase and raise secondary paths separately with experience (see p. 166 for costs), but until you have reached mastery (five dots) in your primary path, all other paths must remain at a lower level than it. Therefore, if your primary path in Thaumaturgy is Rego Motus, which you have at three dots, you cannot raise Rego Tempestas above 2 until you have brought your Thaumaturgy to 4, (which gives you a Rego Motus rating of 4).

Rituals

Unlike path magic, blood sorcery rituals are time-consuming and formulaic. They are not well suited to spontaneous use or improvisation. Some rituals work well with multiple participants; others are solitary tasks. No ritual takes less than five minutes to perform, unless stated otherwise in its description; most take longer.

Rituals are ranked from level one to six. Unlike paths or Disciplines, however, a character doesn't have to separately raise any ritual rating. Your character can learn any ritual whose rating is less than or equal to her Thaumaturgy or Mortis score, as appropriate. There are no prerequisites among rituals; you don't have to learn Ward Versus Ghouls before learning Ward Versus Vampires, for instance. Your character can learn any ritual to which she has access — and that generally means access to a substantial library, an indulgent mentor or some kind of bargain with someone who knows the ritual you desire. That "someone" can be another member of your clan or perhaps a being from beyond the physical plane — legend has it that the denizens of Hell are well versed in arcane magics. Rituals do not cost experience points to learn. Their only cost is in time (and what is time, to the undying?). Typical rituals take one week to learn per level. The Storyteller is free to increase or decrease this requirement as suits the needs of his chronicle.

Those Cainites who are obsessed with advancing the art of their Discipline invariably own whole libraries full

of ancient and mystical writings, as well as reams of their own notes, detailing personal investigations into the supernatural and lessons from their elders. At the Storyteller's discretion, characters may research their own rituals. This process is time-consuming, taking a minimum of one month per level of the new ritual (and sure to take far more than a month per dot for rituals of level 5 and above). The character must have a rank in the appropriate Discipline and in the Occult Knowledge greater than the prospective ritual's rating (e.g., he needs Thaumaturgy 4 and Occult 4 to create a level-three thaumaturgic ritual). The character will also need a decent level of Resources, for he will not have the ability to wander on far-flung adventures while he sits at home studying, exsanguinating small forest creatures and taking notes. The Storyteller is encouraged to come up with other requirements on a rite-by-rite basis, working with the player to create a ritual that is useful and worthwhile without being overpowered for its rating.

Animalism

Needing humans to prey upon, vampires are often urban creatures, but the Dark Medieval world is overwhelmingly rural. The lonely farms and trackless wilds between cities are dangerous places. Ignoring supernatural dangers, mortals and Cainites who leave the protection of cities may find themselves threatened by wild animals, from the wolf pack to the enraged elk. Vampires who are too squeamish or desperate to feed from humans must often approach wild animals for their blood, as well. The wilderness is a place of tension and danger for vampires.

Humans also need animals. They ride them, work them, eat them or keep them as companions. Animals make up an inextricable part of mortal society. Animals infiltrate every part of human life, and for the most part, humans ignore the swarming animal life in their midst. This is just as true in cities as it is in the countryside: Fowl, pets and even small livestock wander around even the richest of medieval houses.

Ordinarily, a Cainite needs a moderate rating in Animal Ken just to keep mundane animals from panicking when the beasts catch the scent of such a supreme and unholy predator. With Animalism, however, vampires can use animals as food, as spies and occasionally as weapons. Such activity does go against animals' natural instincts, but the unholy power of the Cainite is more than sufficient to trample the creatures' basic desires. After all, as more than one Gangrel has pointed out, being saddled and ridden goes against a horse's natural instincts, and yet they acquiesce to such treatment quite readily after learning their place in the universe.

Animalism, like all Cainite Disciplines, contains a reflection of God's curse on Caine. Vampires who use Animalism extensively recede from humanity and from Cainite society — a fact that may help explain why the

Nosferatu and Gangrel are such outcasts. Animals' activities and reactions are simple and predictable, and they easy to shove about with Animalism. This is much less true for humans and vampires, and Animalism users risk the loss of their social skills.

Animalism is a clan Discipline for the Gangrel, Nosferatu, Ravnos and Tzimisce. Their twisted visages and outré habits push these vampires farther away from the embrace of immortal culture and out into the company of beasts. Nosferatu, many of whom are devoutly religious (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim), believe that Animalism is one of the last remnants of God's blessing over man. They frequently refer back to biblical stories to help explain their manifestations of the Discipline. The Gangrel, most of whom do not even believe that they descend from Caine, see this Discipline as a reflection of their role as supreme hunters who are favored by their gods. The Tzimisce, in a somewhat similar light, see themselves as absolute masters of their faraway mountain domains and believe that it is only right that they dominate the creatures of their lands as easily as they do the peasants who toil under them. Many Ravnos treat the animals that they turn to their service as faithful companions or servants, at least as valued as any human ghoul. In these nights, Animalism is a useful Discipline for nearly any Cainite, but many of the High Clans eschew it in favor of those abilities that more directly affect the human psyche. Animalism is favored by those on the Road of the Beast in particular. Regardless of clan, those who live as peasants, knights or travelers find much of value in Animalism.

Traits for various animals appear in the Appendix (pp. 310-313).

• Feral Speech

This power allows the Cainite to hark back to the days before the fall of Babel, when all speech was one. Although he cannot use this ability to communicate with humans or Cainites who do not speak his language, he can communicate with animals, be they wild or domesticated. The vampire needs only to look into the creature's eyes for a moment, and he briefly gains facility with that animal's native speech. The two communicate in the animal's tongue — a vampire speaking to a horse must whinny, one talking to a wolf might bark or howl and so on. (The animal replies in kind, of course.) According to rumor, the Nosferatu can communicate with animals without making a sound, but they must concentrate solely on the creature in question, and they cannot lose eye contact for even a moment.

The use of Feral Speech does not predispose an animal to react in a friendly fashion toward the vampire. Keep in mind that animals that have not been made ghouls tend to react poorly to supernatural predators of the night. The character can bully small creatures such as squirrels or rabbits easily, but raptors and swift, independently minded animals do their best to escape from such a situation. Larger creatures require some negotiations to get any useful information.

This ability does not grant the animal in question any unusual information. The Storyteller should consult the Appendix (page 210) to determine a rough level of intelligence for the animal, and use that and the creature's known behaviors as a base for roleplay. Remember that few animals can count or read, and humans mostly all look alike to them. The character may be able to convince animals to do him favors if he is sufficiently impressive to them. If such is the case, the beasts do their best to perform such favors.

System: No expenditure or die roll is necessary to activate this power, but the character must spend one turn getting the animal's attention and looking into its eyes in order to key his own Beast to the creature's language. Roll Manipulation + Animal Ken to get favors or useful information out of an animal. The difficulty is 6, unless modified up or down for circumstances. Each success gleans one favor or one useful piece of information; five successes gets the character roughly anything he needs, within reason. The style by which the character gets what he wants depends in part on his road and Nature, but primarily on the roleplaying between the player and Storyteller.

•• Noah's Call

This ability — named by those Cainites who believe that Noah called on all the wild creatures to come to his ark before the flood — allows a character to call out a summons for a particular kind of creature. In order to use Noah's Call on a particular kind of animal, the vampire must already have used Feral Speech on an animal of that species in the past. The Cainite then uses his sublimated memories of that "language" to cry

Successes

Botch

Failure

1 success

2 successes

3 successes

4 successes

5+ successes

Response

A random fraction of the creatures respond, but are hostile to the character

No response; you may try again

One animal responds

One-quarter of the animals within range respond

Half the animals within range respond

Three-quarters of the animals within range respond

All animals within range respond

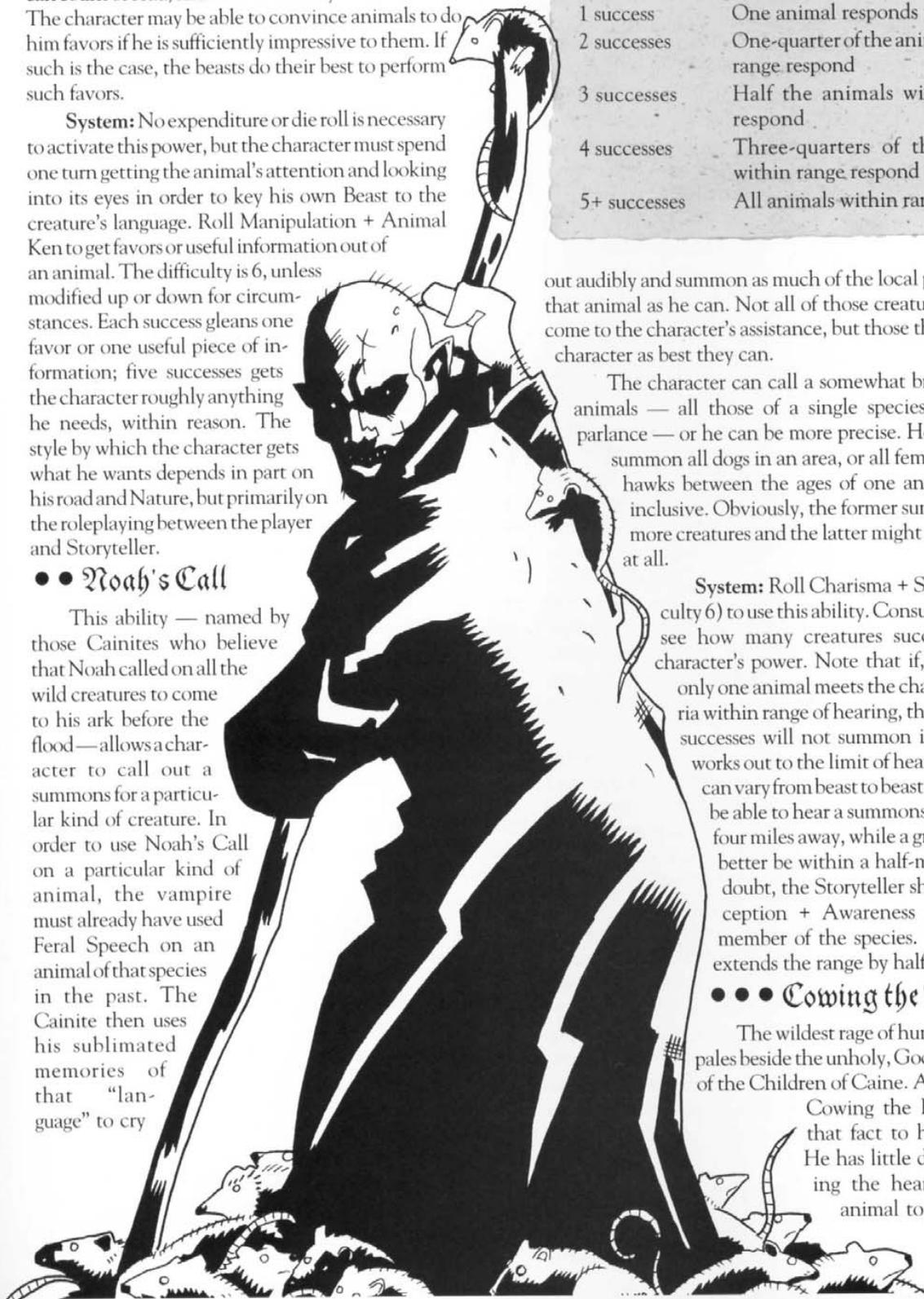
out audibly and summon as much of the local population of that animal as he can. Not all of those creatures definitely come to the character's assistance, but those that do aid the character as best they can.

The character can call a somewhat broad group of animals — all those of a single species, by modern parlance — or he can be more precise. He could try to summon all dogs in an area, or all female red-tailed hawks between the ages of one and three years inclusive. Obviously, the former summons brings more creatures and the latter might not bring any at all.

System: Roll Charisma + Survival (difficulty 6) to use this ability. Consult the table to see how many creatures succumb to the character's power. Note that if, for instance, only one animal meets the character's criteria within range of hearing, then one or two successes will not summon it. The power works out to the limit of hearing — which can vary from beast to beast. A wolf might be able to hear a summons howl as far as four miles away, while a groundhog had better be within a half-mile. When in doubt, the Storyteller should roll Perception + Awareness for a sample member of the species. Every success extends the range by half a mile.

••• Cowing the Beast

The wildest rage of human or animal pales beside the unholy, God-cursed Beast of the Children of Caine. A Cainite with Cowing the Beast can use that fact to his advantage. He has little difficulty causing the heart of man or animal to grow faint at



the very sight of him. With a modicum of effort, he can cause an opponent to run shrieking into the distance or collapse into a gibbering heap.

If the target suffers from fear-driven derangements, she is likely to succumb to them, as the sight of a vampire using *Cowing the Beast* drives the *Discipline's* target into paroxysms of terror. Nosferatu and some Gangrel pass the secret of using this ability to soothe an opponent's *Beast*, rather than dominate it. Those who do so refer to the ability as *Song of Serenity*. (To learn this *Song of Serenity* effect, the character must simply find a teacher and spend a few nights learning it. It is an effect inherent to *Cowing the Beast* that many Cainites simply do not realize they can unlock. There's no additional experience cost.)

As with many aspects of a Cainite's existence, the use of *Cowing the Beast* involves a harrowing loss of control to the vampire's own *Beast*, if only for an instant. The character cuts loose for a moment, letting his *Beast* terrify his target's inner animal nature. Those Cainites who are not on the *Road of the Beast* are likely to be rather unsettled by this display themselves, as their rational natures must momentarily give way to a rush of power and hatred.

System: When the character uses *Cowing the Beast*, the player should roll *Manipulation + Intimidation* (or *Manipulation + Empathy*, if using the *Song of Serenity* variant), at a difficulty of 7. This action is exclusive. The character cannot engage in combat, run, or create works of art while activating the *Discipline*. The character must earn a number of successes equal to the target's *Willpower*. If doing so takes more than one turn, then the *Discipline* becomes an extended test, and it succeeds as soon as the character collects that many successes. Failure means that the character loses all collected successes. A botch means that the target's *Beast* is forever beyond the character's control.

A successfully cowed mortal or animal is so intimidated that she cannot engage in any form of struggle and may even refuse to move unless the Cainite orders her to do so. The victim will not even defend herself unless her player makes a *Willpower* roll. The player of a cowed character cannot spend or regain *Willpower*. She should roll *Willpower* (difficulty 6) every night until she accumulates as many successes as the vampire's *Willpower*. The effect then lifts. The *Song of Serenity* has the same game system effects, but it makes its victim utterly listless.

Cainites' *Beasts* cannot be cowed with this ability, but the *Storyteller* may permit characters to use the *Song of Serenity* variant to pull a vampire out of a frenzy. Should the character earn three or more successes, the frenzied target may attempt to pull herself out of the frenzy, using the same difficulty as the stimulus that pushed her into it.

●●●● Ride the Wild Mind

Cainites who know *Ride the Wild Mind* are able to dislodge their own souls from their bodies and seat them

in the bodies of wild animals. Since animals have no souls, by any reasonable definition (including the Christian one of the time), the Cainite commits no sin by resting his own in the creature's body for a short time. While possessing an animal in this fashion, the vampire controls the beast's every move and reaction.

The character must stare for a moment into the animal's eyes before possessing it. His body then drops into a torpid stupor as his soul drifts out of his body and into the animal's. The character may remain in the host animal for as long as he likes, but his body still loses blood at its normal rate while he does so. Those using *Ride the Wild Mind* are prone to adapt some of their host animal's behaviors when they emerge from the possession. Many Tzimisce sculpt dogs or wolves into hideous war-ghouls and then possess them with *Ride the Wild Mind*, giving themselves command of a frightening monster during a battle while leaving their bodies safe at home. Some superstitious Gangrel and Ravnos believe that a piece of their soul remains in the animal when they leave it, so they make a point of consuming the animal's blood when the ride is done.

Cainites who miss their living days exult in the freedom and power of *Ride the Wild Mind*, as it brings a strong sensation of life along with it. Those who no longer miss their living days — particularly those not on the *Road of Humanity*, or who have low scores in that road — find the power's use to be disconcerting. Once again, the vampire can feel "his" heart beating, he suffers from mundane hunger, and sweats and produces filth all on his own. These sensations are long absent even in the ancilla.

System: Roll *Charisma + Animal Ken* (difficulty 8) while the character looks into the animal's eyes for a turn. The character cannot possess worms or other creatures without eyes, as they have no easy passage for the soul. The animal must also be a living creature of flesh and blood to be possessed. The Cainite cannot ride a demon (even a familiar in animal form) or a ghost. One success allows the character to just barely take over the animal's body; multiple successes give him greater access to his *Disciplines*, per the following table:

Successes	Result
Botch	Roll to resist <i>Rötschreck</i> as the character's <i>Beast</i> is overwhelmed by the animal's nature.
Failure	Cannot possess; try again next turn
1 success	Possess the animal, but cannot use any <i>Disciplines</i> *
2 successes	Can use <i>Auspex</i> *
3 successes	Can also use <i>Presence</i> *
4 successes	Can also use <i>Dominate</i> , <i>Dementation</i>
5 successes	Can also use <i>Thaumaturgy</i> and <i>Mortis</i> (paths only), <i>Chimerstry</i>

Results marked with an asterisk (*) also require the character to spend Willpower to take any action that the Storyteller deems out of line with the animal's base instincts. While using Ride the Wild Mind, the character may walk around as the animal in the sunlight without suffering any ill effects, although he must make a Road roll to remain conscious, just as he would in his own body (see p. 235).

When the character leaves the animal's body to return to his own, the player must roll Wits + Empathy (difficulty 8) and score as many successes as days the character spent within the creature (minimum of one). If the player fails this roll, the character spends the same number of days in a purely animalistic mindset, obeying the urges and instincts of the creature whose body he just left. Should he botch, the vampire frenzies and then drops into the animalistic mindset just described.

Whether the player succeeds or fails at that roll, the vampire is stuck thinking in the creature's ways for some time. The character must spend seven Willpower points or seven days (or some combination of the two) to get over the effects of having used this power. Until that time has passed, the character reflexively reacts as his old host did. A vampire who spent time in the body of a wolf may growl at unexpected visitors, kowtow excessively to princes and others of acknowledged higher status and so on. Many Gangrel use this side effect of Ride the Wild Mind to their advantage, possessing a wolverine for extra ferocity or a squirrel to get themselves in the habit of storing goodies away for wintertime.

Should the animal die while being ridden in this fashion, the character's psyche returns to his body. When it does, it may be slightly traumatized, an effect that has no game mechanics but which the player is encouraged to roleplay out.

●●●●● Drawing out the Beast

Cainites with this ability are so familiar with the vagaries of animals' instinctive reactions that they can even read the reactions of their own Beasts. What's more, as the vampire's Beast becomes more aroused, he gains the ability to send it out into another being, rather than allowing his own spirit to be overwhelmed by the blood rage.

The target of the Cainite's Beast is immediately overwhelmed by a frenzy, and during that frenzy, he acts precisely as the Discipline's user does when in frenzy, right down to the occasional murderous turn of phrase. Those who know the vampire might recognize their friend's Beast in another, but such a thing is quite rare.

The Gangrel use this power to enable their ghouls and childer to act as terrible proxies in time of battle, while the Ravnos use it to torment individuals who present themselves as beacons of righteousness. The Tzimisce use Drawing out the Beast to wreak dreadful havoc on an opposing *voivode's* holdings before bringing their full force to bear, while the Nosferatu prefer to use

the ability to humiliate other vampires whom they feel need to be taken down a peg.

System: The character must be in a frenzy or near one — that is to say, exposed to a possible source of frenzy (see p. 264) and engaged in a test of Self-Control or Instinct to resist or ride it. To use the ability, announce a target to whom your character has line of sight and then roll Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 8). At least two successes are required on this roll to achieve the desired effect.

Successes	Result
Botch	Enter a tremendously dangerous frenzy, from which even Willpower expenditure cannot rescue you.
Failure	Enter a terrible frenzy, that lasts twice as long and requires twice as many successes to shrug off as normal.
1 success	Accidentally release your Beast upon a friend.
2 successes	Transfer your Beast successfully, but you are stunned, and lose your next turn to inaction while you recover.
3+ successes	Transfer your Beast successfully.

If the target leaves the character's immediate vicinity before the frenzy ends (or vice versa) the character risks losing his Beast permanently, as it remains with the victim. The vampire's Beast often likes "living" inside other beings, and it is loath to return to the vampire it knows so well after having a taste of freedom. Should the character lose his Beast, even temporarily, he becomes lethargic, sleeping late in the evenings and needing to spend Willpower to perform even such tasks as feeding.

To recover his Beast, the character must first find its carrier — who is probably not having an easy time of things, especially if he is mortal — and then coax his Beast back to his body. To do so, the character must act in ways that would lure a ravenous, frenzy-yielding vampiric monster toward him. The Storyteller should make sure to play this scene up for all it's worth. In the tragic event that the Beast-carrier dies, the vampire's player makes an Instinct roll against a difficulty of 9. Even one success returns the Beast to its owner, but a failure means the vampire has lost his Beast forever. The shock of the Beast's death cry immediately sends the vampire into torpor.

●●●●● Quell the Herd

This power works similarly to Cowing the Beast, save that the Cainite using it subdues the passion and individuality of a whole group of mortals or animals simultaneously with the power of his own Beast. It does not work against Cainites, though it does affect ghouls.

As many as 20 targets may be affected by this ability at once, as long as all involved can see the character.

System: Roll Strength + Intimidation (difficulty 7). This is an extended test: You must accumulate as many successes as your target has temporary Willpower. You cow any target whose Willpower you exceed with successes — as soon as you have rolled 5 successes, all targets with a Willpower of 5 or less are subdued. Failing your roll means that you have to begin accumulating successes again from 0, but your victims do not become free. A botch not only sets your victims free of the quelling, but sends them into a frenzy, howling for your blood.

Those cowed with Quell the Herd behave and free themselves in the same manner as those affected by Cowing the Beast.

Auspex

As the supreme hunters of the night, Cainites have senses that are unmatched by any mortal — many Cainites can smell an uninjured human's blood from yards away. Members of several clans — the Toreador, Cappadocians, Malkavians, Tzimisce and Tremere — have refined those senses to the point that their own senses outstrip Cainites' abilities to the same degree that Cainites' outstrip mortals'.

Many vampires with high levels of Auspex cease to perceive events in the same way that mortals do. What a farmer's wife might think of as a foul stench, a Cainite's nose breaks down into its component scents, identifying the source of the odor, its distance and its age. Such vampires stop making value judgments about strong odors, harsh sounds or strange sights, instead taking such vistas in and considering their components individually. Vampires of such refined sensibilities are apt to lose themselves as they take in the physical world; bright lights can sometimes stun them as they consider the darkness, or harsh sounds as they examine a faint cry.

Gatherings of Cainites whose members include those skilled with Auspex soon learn that secrecy is extremely difficult to maintain; a whispered conversation is audible across a courtyard to a vampire with high levels of Auspex. In fact, some elders take advantage of this trait and carry on public conversations from opposites sides of cathedrals while barely speaking loudly enough to be heard by mortals sitting next to them. Characters who wish to keep secrets in a group of such Cainites must resort to passing notes back and forth or finding a private chamber in which to speak.

Auspex is said to be part of God's curse on Caine because it encourages vampires to obsess on minutiae. Rather than witnessing God's plan for creation — or another Cainite's plan for the future — the high-Auspex vampire occupies his time by dwelling on insignificant details. However, rare is the Cainite who cannot take advantage of Auspex in some fashion.

• Heightened Senses

The most basic ability of Auspex doubles the range and sensitivity of a vampire's senses. The character can see and hear twice as far, and can see better in faint light than other vampires do. Similarly, she can pick up scents as well as a hunting dog and follow them if she learns to do so. Her senses of taste and touch do not increase in range, of course, but they do become vastly more sensitive. A character with Heightened Senses might detect the vintage in a victim's blood or recognize a long-absent mortal acquaintance in pitch darkness.

At the Storyteller's discretion, Heightened Senses can provide glimpses of the past, the future or faraway lands. These flashes are nearly always cryptic premonitions that must be interpreted. Whether these messages are the character's own clairvoyant tendencies extended beyond her conscious control or messages from torpid Methuselachs — or other powers — is not known, and the source of debate. These sorts of visions never come when willed, and they are almost always disorienting and frightening, leaving the vampire with a brief loss of sensation of the here and now.

When concentrating on faint sensations, the character is particularly vulnerable to strong ones. A bright flash of light in the dark or a thunderclap in a silent cave might blind or deafen the character for as long as an hour.

System: It takes a free action to activate this ability, but no roll or other cost is required. The difficulty of rolls associated with using the character's sense (such as Perception + Alertness) decrease by a number equal to the character's Auspex rating when the power is engaged.

The Storyteller should remember the potential hazards listed previously and fit such blindness or deafness to the situation at hand, perhaps allowing a Stamina + Alertness roll to overcome its effects. The content and frequency of insight and premonitions are left to the Storyteller's discretion. She may roll the character's Auspex rating as its own dice pool (with a difficulty ranging from 6 to 9) to see if a vision comes at an appropriate moment, if she wishes. Intelligence + Occult rolls may also be necessary to interpret the visions gained with this power. Such visions should be quite rare: The voices are no mere servants, to come when bidden.

•• Soulsight

Cainites with Soulsight claim that every being with a soul projects a halo a short distance from his body. They know this primarily because Soulsight lets them see this halo, which shimmers and undulates with each person's mood and changes color as various emotions wash over them.

Harsh emotions tend toward the red end of the spectrum, while calm and cool ones are bluer; strong emotions are bright, while weak ones are dim. As it is rare (outside of frenzy) for anyone to feel just one emotion at a time, most halos are mosaics of color, with veins and spatters of secondary emotion that tinge the primary feeling. A vampire's halo

is pale, much as the Cainite's skin is, while a healthy mortal's halo fairly pulses with life. It is relatively easy for a vampire with Soulsight to distinguish between the two.

Soulsight does not work well as a lie-detector. Most accomplished liars (particularly Cainites) are perfectly calm and comfortable while lying, and they frequently learn to distract themselves with pleasant thoughts while spinning the most outrageous lies. Conversely, someone may be being totally truthful and still be nervous. Additionally, spying on halos is not a subtle thing. The character must ogle her target to get a good view of his halo.

System: Roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty 8). The Storyteller may prefer to make this roll for you, so that you don't know just how much information you have gained or whether you have failed or botched. You must get one success to get even basic information, per the following chart:

Successes	Information
Botch	Misleading halo
Failure	No aura
1 success	Can read the shade (pale or bright)
2 successes	As above, and can distinguish basic color
3 successes	As above, and can recognize patterns
4 successes	As above, and can notice subtle shifts
5 successes	As above, and can identify mixtures of color and pattern

If the target has around a quarter cover or concealment (which includes moving around in a crowded room), increase the number of successes needed by one (so one success gives no information, and four gives patterns). If the target has more than around half cover, increase the number of successes needed by two. You cannot read the halo of someone with more than three-quarters concealment.

You cannot reroll to improve your character's perception of another character's halo until at least an hour has passed. Doing so is treated as an automatic botch. Also, it is very easy to sneak around you while you are ogling a halo, and observant foes are sure to realize that and gain three dice to all Stealth totals against you while you use Soulsight against another.

The halo colors chart offers sample colors and patterns for the Storyteller to use in describing a character's halo. However, the Storyteller should not feel constrained to stick to these halo colors, nor even to this metaphor (emotional state as halo). For certain characters, Soulsight might manifest by making other beings appear as though they were carved of stained glass; others' might perceive distinctive scents. In all these cases, however, your character will still understand the basic meaning of the halos he sees.

••• The Spirit's Touch

A mortal creature leaves a subtle scent on everything it touches. Ask any king's keeper of hounds: Dogs, among

HALO COLORS

Condition	Halo Color
Afraid	Orange
Aggressive	Purple
Angry	Red
Bitter	Brown
Calm	Light Blue
Compassionate	Pink
Conservative	Lavender
Depressed	Gray
Desirous or Lustful	Deep Red
Distrustful	Light Green
Envious	Dark Green
Excited	Violet
Generous	Rose
Happy	Vermilion
Hateful	Black
Idealistic	Yellow
Innocent	White
Love	Blue
Obsessed	Green
Sad	Silver
Spiritual	Gold
Suspicious	Dark Blue
Condition	Halo Shade or Pattern
Vampire	Appropriate color is pale
Confused	Mottled, shifting colors
Daydreaming	Sharp flickering colors
Diablerie	Black veins in aura
Frenzy	Rapidly rippling colors
Psychotic	Hypnotic, swirling color
Magic Use	Myriad sparkles

others, can easily track this scent. In the same fashion, mortals and vampires leave a trail of their own essence upon anything they touch. Vampires with Spirit's Touch can see this immaterial residue. Although Spirit's Touch users generally cannot track people with the ability — a person must keep an item long enough to leave an impression, or care about it strongly — they can easily determine who the last owner of an object was, who created a work of art and the like.

Beyond this simple identification, a character with Spirit's Touch can catch glimpses of the object's creation, use and meaning to its owner. These impressions vary widely, but a brief glimpse is rarely sufficient to learn anything useful about the item. The character must have time to sit and study it.

Members of the clans to whom it comes naturally treasure the Spirit's Touch. The Cappadocians can recreate the end of a life from examining a corpse and its

treasured possessions, which may aid in their divinatory abilities. The Toreador use Spirit's Touch to refine their own techniques with musical instruments or other artistic tools, or to help gain insight into the creative process of a long-dead master. The Tremere are better able to identify the properties of magical potions and enchanted items than any mortal wizard. Some Tzimisce use Spirit's Touch to ensure that a letter passed from another *voivode* was created by the one whose seal marks it. And many Malkavians are known to rob mortals' homes of treasured items, then use those objects to gain a disturbed sort of insight into the minds of those whom they wish to torment into madness.

System: Roll Perception + Empathy, with a difficulty based on the strength of the psychic impression. An item that one handled only briefly, one that was unimportant to its last owner or one that is otherwise meaningless has a target of 9. The stake that Tremere may have used to immobilize Saulot while diablerizing him would have a target of 4. Other difficulty numbers range between those. When in doubt, the Storyteller may wish to assign a flat 7. The number of successes rolled determines the amount of information available:

Successes	Information
Botch	The character is overwhelmed by psychic impressions for the next 30 minutes and unable to act.
Failure	No information of value
1 success	Very basic information: the last owner's gender or hair color, for instance.
2 successes	A second piece of basic information.
3 successes	More useful information about the last owner, such as age and state of mind the last time he used the item.
4 successes	The person's name.
5+ successes	A wealth of information: nearly anything you want to know about the person's relationship with that object is available.

●●●● Steal Secrets

The character can open a doorway between his mind and the target's, allowing her to read the target's surface thoughts as though they were spoken aloud. She may also speak her own thoughts to the target inaudibly, but the target cannot turn the tables on the character and listen in on her surface thoughts. A character with this ability can also use it to plunder the mind of her target, stealing information she desires and learning the target's secret wants and fears.

In group meetings among the many clans with access to this ability, there are often two or more lines of

conversation going on, quite divergently: one audible, and one or more sub-rosa, passed from mind to mind. Steal Secrets is another power that makes the Toreador such potent conveyors of social standing: You might be sure that the court chamberlain isn't talking about you, but it's impossible to know what he's *thinking* about you.

System: Roll Intelligence + Subterfuge, with a difficulty equal to the subject's current Willpower. Each success allows you to ferret out one thought or fact from the target's surface thoughts. To penetrate another layer of thought (surface thoughts and basic attitudes to hidden thoughts to simple memories to deeply buried thoughts) costs an additional success. Learning a single simple memory from a peasant costs three successes rather than just one. Additionally, the mind of a Cainite is naturally closed to contact, unlike a mortal's. To crack through this defense, you must spend a Willpower point in addition to succeeding in the roll.

Surface thoughts are fleeting and often quite chaotic, and the Storyteller is encouraged to describe a target's thoughts in terms of impressions and unexpected images instead of simply blurring out the target's plans and ideas. Such thoughts' interpretations are best left in the player's hands, though generous Storytellers may allow a Perception + Empathy roll to filter out the worst of the "noise" coming from a target's mind.

Your character may project her thoughts without a die roll beyond that described already. These thoughts, however, are obviously intrusions into the target's mind, so they cannot be disguised as his own feelings or ideas. However, your character may attempt to disguise her mental "voice" with a roll of Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 9) so the target doesn't recognize her as the "speaker."

●●●●● Anima Walk

In dreams, Cainites and mortals alike walk the earth. They may travel from place to place at unearthly speeds and witness impossible deeds. The vampire who has learned Anima Walk learns to dislodge her spirit from her physical body at will and wander the earth as an invisible, disembodied spirit. This spirit, or *anima*, is connected to the vampire's physical body by a silver cord that is invisible to those on the mortal plane. The *anima* can move at great speeds and even fly. It can pass through solid objects as though they did not exist or drift through the very earth. The *anima* cannot travel farther from the character than the moon; it cannot even reach that luminous orb.

When the character activates this power, her physical body drops into a state reminiscent of torpor, though it returns to full awareness when she returns to the body. However, when the character leaves her body behind, she must have a set destination in mind. Changing her destination means that her silver cord may become tangled in the spirit realm, and she may lose her way back to her body. Should this happen, the *anima* would become lost in the spirit world, subject to a variety of terrifying and unearthly

sights and encounters — most of the ghosts and spirits of the natural world seem to be quite hostile to Cainites.

Many Toreador with Anima Walk use it to eavesdrop on talented artists during their working hours without disturbing the creator. Some Cappadocians — particularly the upstart Giovanni family — use it to engage shades of the dead in conversation. Most other clans use it to spy on one another or to ensure that their minions are acting according to instructions. Cainites who know of this power's existence tend to assume that the most powerful Methuselaha and clan founders use it from torpor, keeping tabs on whole bloodlines for their inevitable night of return.

System: Spend a point of Willpower and roll Perception + Occult. The difficulty is a base of 7, modified by the distance and complexity of the voyage you plan to take. A quick step out to the corner tavern might require only a 4, while a trip east into Taugast could require a 10. Three successes are needed in order to have a safe and largely uneventful walk outside your body. Just achieving one or two successes lets you leave your body and go on the voyage you intend, but it will take longer than expected and involve hazards to your spiritual body. A failure indicates that you must spend another point of Willpower and roll again, while a botch snaps your silver cord and casts your spirit-body far from your physical one: into a distant land, a dreamlike spirit realm or the dark lands of the dead. If your silver cord is broken for any reason, your body immediately drops into torpor. Should you change or add to your destination while on an anima voyage, you must roll Perception + Occult again at a new target number as designated by the Storyteller, with the same consequences for varying degrees of success.

You are invisible and immaterial while projecting into the spirit realm, unless you should encounter another spirit or a Cainite who is also using Anima Walk. Other characters with particular sensitivity to ghosts and psychic activity (including those with lower levels of Auspex) may notice you with a Perception + Occult roll. The difficulty here is 8, and the target must roll more successes than you did when activating the power. Even those who do notice you won't be able to identify you; you are merely an immaterial shade hovering in the general area. You do not carry clothing or objects on your anima walk. You appear to be an idealized version of yourself, clad only in spirit-stuff. Legendary or magical objects might come along with you as you project your soul. The Storyteller has the final word on this.

To other Cainites using Anima Walk, you are entirely physical, and you can interact with them as you would interact with someone you encountered on the physical plane. However, should combat begin (either with another vampire, or with spirits) you have no Physical Attributes. Instead, you should use your Wits as your Dexterity, your Manipulation as your Strength and your Intelligence as your Stamina. Additionally, you cannot attack your target directly. Instead, you must attempt to cut his silver cord. Successful attacks drain temporary dots of Willpower from an opponent instead of costing

her health levels. Neither combatant risks wound penalties in this fashion, but when you are out of Willpower, your silver cord has been cut, and you are sure to become lost in the spirit realm. Finding your body might take days, or even longer if you are in unfamiliar territory. Without your silver cord to guide you unerringly home, you may find yourself in great danger.

You can use other Disciplines while using Anima Walk, but they affect only the astral plane on which you travel. So you could dominate another vampire who is using this power, but not the lowliest of mortals you observe on the physical plane.

●●●●●●● Farsight

A Cainite with Farsight can extend her senses over nearly any distance, and see and hear activity on the other side of the world without leaving her body, if she is familiar with the target of her scrying. This puts her at no risk. Unlike Anima Walk, the character's soul does not leave her body. However, she must have traveled (either physically or spiritually) to the place she wishes to scry or have met the person upon whom she wishes to spy.

A vampire may use a tool of some kind as a focus for her concentration while using Farsight. She might use a favored mirror or a detailed map to guide her spiritual travels. However, this is not necessary for all Cainites.

System: Roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6, or 8 if you have only visited the target using Anima Walk). No matter how far away the target is, you can spy on it if you succeed on this roll. You can use your other Auspex abilities normally on the target if you achieve two or more successes on this roll. The use of other Auspex powers requires the appropriate rolls and expenditure of points, of course. Other Disciplines are not available through the medium of Farsight. Only the preternaturally sensitive — those with Auspex 6 or higher — will even have a chance to recognize that they are being spied on in this fashion, on a roll of Perception + Occult (difficulty 9).

If you choose for your character to use a physical focus to aid her concentration, the Storyteller may reduce the difficulty for using Farsight or related Auspex powers by one if he so wishes.

Celerity

Celerity is one of three core physical Disciplines that are common to most Cainites. Even those clans whose members don't actively favor Celerity (that is, those who are not the Brujah, Toreador and Assamites) find the power just too useful to do without. Celerity enables a vampire to accelerate his reaction time up to speeds that the mortal eye can barely follow, letting him move more quickly or fell half a dozen foes in a few heartbeats. Some Toreador use Celerity to enhance their ability to perform physical arts such as dance; Assamites, Brujah and most other clans use it to swiftly end fights, either by fleeing or by brutally dropping foes before they can react.



Most Cainites assume that Caine or the Antediluvians developed this ability to enable them to hunt more effectively, which is a paradox of sorts, since using it for any length of time costs the user as much blood as she might gain from a successful hunt. Other vampires claim that Celerity is part of Caine's curse on his undead children, as the great speeds it bequeaths a vampire are fleeting, and leave the Discipline's user exhausted, hungry and impatient with the ordinary, slow pace of nightly life. Perhaps the world's speed might catch up with a Celerity-using vampire's desires in the distant future, but for now, he must suffer through a quiet world of horse-drawn carts and trudging through the dark from city to city.

System: Vampires with Celerity can use the Discipline to take multiple actions in a turn without the normal penalties to their dice pools (see p. 116). These actions can include movement, enabling the Celerity-user to sprint at unheard-of speeds.

Each point of Celerity allows up to one extra action, and the vampire may use his entire dice pool for each additional action he takes. The character must spend one blood point per extra action taken per turn, and she may spend blood points beyond her normal generation maximum. For instance, an 11th-generation Brujah with Celerity 3 may spend three blood points to gain three extra full-dice-pool actions. The blood points must be spent at the beginning of the turn, and they cannot be mixed with any other blood expenditure. Additionally, the actions provided by Celerity cannot be further divided into multiple actions — the character may use her basic action for multiple action as much as she likes, but each action granted by Celerity is "indivisible." Also, Celerity-granted actions must involve physical action. The Discipline does not allow a vampire to translate a text or perform a Thaumaturgy ritual more rapidly.

Celerity has no separate powers below the sixth dot; each point simply grants an extra free action. Rumors abound of alternative abilities for elder Cainites who possess levels in Celerity above 5, but these are only rumors.

Extra actions granted by Celerity do not take place until after each character has taken one ordinary action, so that everyone gets to act once before anyone acts twice. Everyone who is able to act twice does so before anyone takes a third action, and so on. The only exception to this rule is using Celerity actions to provide for emergency defense: A character may use a Celerity action to dodge or block even if he's already taken an action, for instance.

These extra actions may be taken to provide extra movement, allowing the character to move across a battlefield, room or sunlit field very quickly. Each action can provide a full turn's movement.

Chimerstry

The Ravnos clan is the only one with a facility for Chimerstry, and it is from them that all tales of its origins

come. Most believe that it originated with the clan's founder, a wanderer who delighted in capriciously torturing mortals by twisting their perceptions of reality. Some stories say that the Ravnos clan founder learned this ability from drinking the blood of the Fair Folk — a tradition a few European Ravnos maintain to this day. Others suggest that in torpor, he reached his mind out to touch a corner of Hell, and he brought back the Devil's flair for blending truth and fiction.

Chimerstry allows its user to create realistic illusions with which to flatter or torment others. Chimerstry is an elusive Discipline. It works best when its victims do not know that its possessors are using it. Therefore, those who are proficient with Chimerstry rarely confess to it. Those Cainites, however, who are familiar with the lore of other clans know that it is likely to be found in the blood of the Ravnos, which gives the high-blooded one more reason to mistrust Ravnos and deny them entry into their cities. It's undoubtedly responsible for their sobriquet of "Charlatans."

Chimerstry is one of the most versatile Disciplines available to the Children of Caine. With appropriate levels of it, and additional staging where necessary, nearly anyone can be made to believe almost anything, and it isn't necessary to resort to blunt-instrument Disciplines like Dementation or Dominate to make it so. The Discipline is useful for anything from feeding to ousting the prince of a desirable city.

Chimerstry has its downside. Most of the Discipline's abilities require the expenditure of Willpower, representing the fraction of the character's self that must go into creating the illusion. At the moment of creation, the illusion is very real to the Chimerstry user; for just an instant, her power fools her, too. In addition, a botch on any Chimerstry power causes the character to be haunted by the illusion she creates, as described under each power. The fabric separating perception from reality is a tenuous one, and the character toys with it at her own risk.

Chimerstry does not allow its user to create an illusion that she cannot sense in some fashion. She cannot create a purely auditory illusion somewhere she can't hear it, or the image of a crown if she is blinded. However, if she can sense the illusion in any fashion, she can create the other sensory components of it. That is to say, if she has Dweomer (Chimerstry 2), she can create an illusory bowl of stew and it will taste right, even if it were across the room from her. She could create that crown if it were to rest on her head, so that she could feel it.

A victim of Chimerstry illusions cannot generally dismiss them, even if the victim is doubtful of their reality. Just because you don't believe that the window in front of you is actually bricked shut doesn't mean you can suddenly see through it. However, Chimerstry illusions cannot support weight or impede movement past a quick sensation of resistance. So, assuming that the bricks on a window were created with Dweomer, you would feel their surface if you reached out to touch them, but you would pass through if you tried to push them over. If they were

created with Ignis Fatuus, your hand would sail right through. Therefore, Ravnos entertainers can dazzle a crowd with shinning lights and dancing spirits even if the crowd suspects that the lights are the work of illusion, and it is very difficult to be absolutely sure that an illusion really is illusory.

There are a few exceptions to these guidelines. Characters who experience damage from sources created with Horrid Reality or Mass Horror and then become convinced of its illusory nature can be relieved of the pain they have suffered. In addition, vampires with Auspex and others with forms of supernatural perception have chances to both detect and learn to "filter out" the illusion, hence seeing through illusory darkness or hearing past an illusory scream. Detecting an illusion in this manner is automatic if the watcher's Auspex level is higher than the caster's Chimerstry level. If it is equal to or less than the Chimerstry level, she must convince herself of the illusory nature of the apparition through mundane means (such as plunging her hand into illusory fire). To filter out an illusion once the vampire knows it is false, the player rolls Perception + Alertness against a difficulty equal to 6 + caster's Chimerstry - observer's Auspex. A single success filters it out of all her senses.

Chimerstry is said to reflect God's curse on Caine by deluding the Ravnos into believing that they are capable of truly creative acts in the likeness of God, when in truth all they do is to pervert and twist God's creation.

Chimerstry is a useful Discipline for con artists, thieves and spies of any clan.

• Ignis Fatuus

This ability lets the user create simple, motionless illusions that affect only one sense. The illusion stays stationary with respect to the earth: The image of a ship does not bob in the waves, and the image of a tunic does not move with its "wearer." An illusion can be purely tactile — a gust of wind, or a simple illusory contact — but such a thing cannot truly harm anyone or exert any real force.

System: Spend one point of Willpower. No roll is necessary, although you must use an action for your character to concentrate long enough to summon the trickery. The illusion remains for as long as you like, as long as you can sense it and wish for it to persist. Terminating an illusion thus is a free action, and it does not even have to be your action should you wish to do so during combat.

As with all Chimerstry powers, your character must be able to sense the illusion herself — so she too will experience the foul stench or rancid taste she summons up. In such a case, she can choose to have a single other person within her line of sight per dot of Chimerstry also experience the sensation, or permeate an area of a radius 20 yards per level of Chimerstry with it. Single targets who move more than a few feet or out of an affected area are free of such illusions. This limit functions for smells, tastes, illusory gusts of wind, diffuse glows or a shroud of darkness. More isolated visible

illusions (a single point of light, a standing guard) can appear anywhere within sight. Sounds can emanate from anywhere within earshot.

Despite the fact that the character experiences the illusion, she knows that it is illusory and suffers no ill effects. She is not blinded by darkness she imposes on another, for example.

•• Dweomer

Dweomer improves the character's mastery of illusion. She can now create motionless phantoms that are real to multiple senses — even all five, if the character prefers. The phantoms are, of course, only illusions. A character might feel the sharp blade of an illusory sword on his thumb as he tests it, but the weapon will pass right through him rather than so much as crease his skin. Illusions created with Dweomer cannot move under their own power, but they can react naturally to their surroundings if the character wishes. An illusory crown might move with its wearer or fall to the ground if released. Alternatively, the Dweomer can remain completely motionless, as with Ignis Fatuus.

System: Spend one Willpower and one blood point to create the Dweomer. You must decide whether the image will remain motionless or tied to a particular person, animal or thing. Whichever you choose, it will remain that way as long as it persists. The illusion's duration and ranges of effect are as per Ignis Fatuus.

••• Apparition

Characters with Apparition can give a static illusion created with either Dweomer or Ignis Fatuus the semblance of movement. Such an illusion moves as the character directs. The movement can be as simple as a banner flapping in the (illusory) breeze or as complex as a galloping horse and rider. If the character is unfamiliar with the type of movement in question, witnesses to the illusion are more likely to pierce it, but if he's seen it before, it should be perfectly natural and not arouse any suspicions.

System: Create an illusion using either Dweomer or Ignis Fatuus, and spend Willpower as necessary to do so. At the same time, spend an additional blood point to animate the illusion as you wish. As long as you concentrate on the illusion, it can do whatever you like, within reason. An illusion that does things that are physically impossible, however, gives viewers a chance to recognize the apparition for what it is. A Perception roll, using Empathy, Animal Ken or Alertness as appropriate for the situation, gives the victim a chance to see through the illusion in that case. The Storyteller should determine the difficulty based on the situation at hand, but he should probably require around as many successes as you have dots in Manipulation.

Once you stop concentrating on the illusion, it can continue in simple, repetitive motions — roughly speaking, anything that can be described in a simple sentence, such as a guard walking back and forth along a parapet. After that, you cannot regain control over the illusion.

You can allow it to continue moving as you ordered, or let it fade as described under Ignis Fatuus.

•••• Permanency

Like Apparition, Permanency stacks with other, simpler Chimerstry powers. It eternally extends the duration of illusions created by those abilities, allowing them to persist even when the character who created them is no longer nearby. It will remain for all time — even past the character's Final Death, unless the character chooses to dismiss it as described previously. If he uses this ability on an illusion given movement by Apparition, the character must guide the illusion through its normal pattern of movement once before he can make it permanent. Despite the illusion's permanency, however, it is no more real than an illusion created by any of the abilities listed already. It still can neither harm a character nor bear weight.

System: After creating the illusion, spend an additional turn and one blood point to make it permanent. Note that Permanency does not work on any Discipline other than Chimerstry, nor does it work on other sources of illusion that you might wield, be they hedge magic, Thaumaturgy or a shackled fairy.

••••• Horrid Reality

When a vampire masters Chimerstry, he can sharpen it, focusing the Discipline's altered reality so that it affects only one victim but is terribly real to that victim. A sword created with Horrid Reality seems to harm as easily as a real one, because the sword is real to the power's victim. The Horrid Reality ends when you stop concentrating on it or can no longer sense it yourself.

System: Spend two Willpower points to create your illusion; you must name your target when you create the illusion. The illusion cannot carry any weight or otherwise take action that would require it to exist to anyone other than the victim, but it can attack the target and do semi-real damage. To cause your illusion to attack the target, roll Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty is the victim's Perception + Self-Control or Instinct). Every success inflicts one unsoakable level of bashing damage on the target. You may choose to do less than the damage you rolled.

The character heals all his damage instantaneously if he can be convinced that the damage he took was illusory, but convincing him may take some doing. If you wish to do him a favor, a simple display of showy Chimerstry tricks should suffice. Otherwise, friends who wish to convince him that the attack was illusory must roll Charisma + Empathy, with a difficulty of your Manipulation + Subterfuge, and score at least two successes. The target must be convinced of the attack's illusory nature within 24 hours of its taking place, or it becomes too well ground into his memory, and he will have to heal the damage using blood (if a Cainite) or over time (if mortal). Depending on the nature of the Horrid Reality, it may have other effects beyond the simple damage it inflicts. A vampire who truly believes that she is engulfed in flames suffers Röttschreck, for example.



●●●●●●● Mass Horror

Mass Horror works as Horrid Reality, except that it can affect small groups of people, rather than a single person. Anyone in the immediate vicinity can sense the illusion, but it is unreal to them, as an image created with Apparition would be. However, the true targets of Mass Horror experience a disturbing warp of reality, just as targets of Horrid Reality do.

System: Spend two Willpower points and select a number of primary targets equal to your permanent Willpower. Those targets are treated as the victims of a shared Horrid Reality. Other witnesses in the area experience a milder version of the same illusion, as if they were each seeing an Apparition. The Mass Horror ends when you choose to end it or you can no longer concentrate on it.

Dementation

Dementation revolves around inflicting madness and its side effects on other souls. Cainites who know Malkavians personally — and even those who have only heard stories — fear Dementation more than any other Discipline. Dominate might erase your memories, Vicissitude might reshape your form, but Dementation can destroy your soul. And although Dementation is presented here as having a fairly unified core of abilities, each Malkavian's use of Dementation is filtered through the madness that taints his soul. The application of Haunt the Soul will be quite different from a Malkavian who believes that he is the Devil incarnate than from one who suffers crippling phobias from crowds.

It is impossible to learn Dementation without possessing at least one derangement, regardless of bloodline. Should a character attempt to do so, finding a Malkavian who is willing to turn a blind eye to his relative banality, he finds himself slowly going mad, blossoming one or more of his own derangements before he is able to learn even the simplest power of the Discipline. The ability is powered by madness, and intertwines with it; sanity is salt in the soil in which one plants Dementation.

Dementation is an obvious part of Caine's curse on the Malkavian clan founder. Some legends claim that the Eldest Malkavian was a schemer and planner during the Antediluvians' revolt against Caine's first childer, and Caine cursed him with incoherence and madness to prevent this from ever happening again.

Dementation is commonly used by mystics, jesters and the deeply disturbed.

● Incubus Passion

This ability inflames emotions that already exist in its target. This can be done for good or ill, but even a positive emotion that is tripled in intensity becomes an uncontrollable, frightening thing. The Malkavian using Incubus Passion seizes on the strongest and most obvious emotion, and he intensifies it to the level of madness. The target casts aside

other feelings he might be experiencing in favor of this one. A talented user of Dementation can use this ability to make frenzy all but unavoidable in a Cainite. Under no circumstances can it be used to calm a situation down or bring people to a more relaxed state.

When used on mortals, this power mimics one of the emotional effects of the Curse of Caine: Affection becomes obsession, desire becomes avarice, irritation becomes hatred and so on.

System: Roll Charisma + Empathy against a difficulty of the target's Road score (for Cainites) or Willpower (for mortals). Every success extends the duration of the inflamed passion, per the following chart. Failure on this roll has no effect. A botch takes the emotion that would have been kindled in the target and forces it onto you, at the tripled intensity that this power creates. That effect lasts for a scene.

Successes	Duration
1 success	One turn
2 successes	One hour
3 successes	One night
4 successes	One week
5 successes	One month

You may choose to use this ability to affect a Cainite's frenzy, instead. Every success you roll adds one to the number of successes that the target must accrue to avoid the frenzy.

•• Haunt the Soul

This power lets its user bombard a target with maddening visions for hours or even months, assailing her sanity and degrading the boundary between reality and imagination. The character cannot predict or control the images beyond a certain point: He can decide on a desired effect, but the images are spawned entirely from the victim's mind and are invisible to the vampire using the power.

The images themselves are fleeting. They are only visible on the edges of the target's vision, or they superimpose themselves over the current scene, but they exist for only a moment. Victims report that these images tend to follow a general theme: They might revolve around the target killing her family, messages from angels and saints or fire consuming everything it touches. The images may last long enough to drive the target mad, or she may find strength in herself or her faith in God to outlast an incipient breakdown.

System: Roll Manipulation + Empathy. The difficulty is the target's Perception + Self-Control or Instinct. The number of successes necessary determines the period over which the visions appear. A failure on this roll does not infect the target with the images, and you cannot try again for one full night. A botch might infect you with those images (plucked from the target's unconscious, not your own) or shut down your Dementation abilities for a full night. Success yields the following duration:

Successes	Duration
1 success	One night
2 successes	Three nights
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	Three months
6+ successes	One year

Throughout the determined time period, the target risks losing his mind. While this degeneration is something best played out or left to the Storyteller's devices, it will surely cost Willpower to keep hold of one's sanity. Those characters who do not act in accordance with their Natures, so as to better regain spent Willpower, are likely to go mad.

••• Eyes of Chaos

Madness, randomness and chaos writhe around every Malkavian. Though even the least enlightened Cainites of that clan can pierce the fog of normalcy that wraps most people, the Eyes of Chaos open whole new vistas as the character truly gains insight from the madness of others and from seemingly random events in the world around him. The Eyes of Chaos see through the mask that mortals and Cainites place between their true natures and the surrounding world, and they enable their user to sense madness in another.

Vampires using the Eyes of Chaos receive portents of the future with some regularity, yet they cannot always deduce the portents' meaning in time to use the information to their advantage. Their mad visions also clue them in to others' driving goals and obsessions, though again, the visions are often obscured by their medium and may convey the necessary truths too late to be of any good.

System: Roll Perception + Occult. The difficulty varies and is set by the Storyteller based on the available information, your familiarity with the situation and the taint of madness in the immediate area. To learn the Nature or derangements of a companion requires an 8; similar traits for a stranger might require a 10. The greater the madness inherent in the thing you're analyzing is, the lower the target number is. Deranged ranting written in a strange tongue is easier to assess than the clinical scribing of a monk. Analysis of a piece of art or craft — anything from a manuscript to a woven blanket — can reveal the creator's Nature or derangements much as analyzing the person can (though one extra success is required). With five or more successes, your character can find prophetic truths in such a work that the creator did not consciously put there. And truly chaotic, random events or images are seductively easy to analyze through the Eyes of Chaos. The vampire might well be able to see into the future after an evening spent staring into a fire or watching clouds scud by. This sort of divination, of course, is left entirely to the Storyteller, who may have her own plans for your character's future.

Information that one gains with Eyes of Chaos is inherently untrustworthy, as it is an analysis of madness as filtered through the eyes of an insane vampire. Storytellers should be sure to convey a character's impressions subjectively, preferably filtering them through the character's primary derangements.

●●●● Silence the Sane Mind

Ancillae of nearly every clan fear the Malkavians, and with good reason. This ability, for instance, allows a Malkavian to suppress another's conscious, sane mind for as long as a month. One common application is to confuse the target by suppressing the higher mind's ability to make sense of the world. Doing so makes the target little more than a pliable automaton. The victim can do simple tasks, but she is prone to follow simple orders from anyone who states them forcefully enough. When the victim returns to her senses, she does not remember what she did under its influence. A sort of gray fog descends over her memory, obscuring nearly everything about that period.

While confused, the victim cannot remember many details about herself or her life. She wanders confusedly and has no sense of time passing — only the Röttschreck caused by the rising sun forces her to safety, and that often fails to protect her. The victim of Silence the Sane Mind rarely remembers the identity of her assailant, making it very difficult for a survivor of this ability to exact vengeance single-handedly. A confused character seems very much like a village idiot: He can answer direct questions, but he has little initiative and is unlikely to act without being ordered or shoved around.

Befuddlement is not the only possible effect of this power: Cruel Malkavians may use it to enrage their targets, driving them into a frenzy; or cripple them with fear, bringing about not the terrified flight of Röttschreck but rather a sobbing collapse into catatonia. In such cases, the character still has a general absence of mind, as seen for the confusion aspect of the ability.

System: Make eye contact and engage in simple conversation with the victim. Activating this power takes one full turn and a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (resisted by the target's Perception + Self-Control/Instinct). A botch on this roll causes the Malkavian to enter the desired state for his target for a duration determined by the Storyteller. A failure renders the target immune to the character's Dementation powers for the rest of the scene. Success causes the target to enter the confused state for a duration listed as follows:

Successes	Duration
1 success	One turn
2 successes	One hour
3 successes	One night
4 successes	One week
5 successes	One month

A victim afflicted with fury immediately enters a state akin to frenzy — though many of those Cainites who have been so targeted say that their Beasts are not truly unleashed in the way that a true frenzy does. The fury this power creates lasts just for one full day, unlike the confusion option. A victim driven to catatonia collapses and is not able to take any useful action for a full day.

●●●●● Howling Lunacy

This ability turns its victims temporarily insane. Not merely quirky or eccentric — thoroughly, gibbering, barking mad. The user of the power chooses what sorts of madness afflict the target, but he has relatively little control over the insanity's duration. The end of that duration represents the end of the active phase of lunacy, wherein the target is entirely out of control of his actions and has lost his mind. However, from that point onward, the target may suffer flashbacks of this time when he is under great stress or during nights of the full moon, when the touch of the heavens is at its greatest.

System: The character must gain his target's undivided attention for a full turn. The player then rolls Manipulation + Intimidation against a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. On a botch, the vampire's own derangements fade for a few minutes, just long enough for him to realize precisely how badly deranged he really is — the shock and horror of this drags his madness back to the forefront. A failure means that he cannot use Dementation on this target for the remainder of the scene. Success means that he can inflict five derangements of his choice on the target for a length of time determined by the chart that follows. These derangements should make sense as a group even if only through dream-logic. While the player may choose a general effect, the precise game-mechanics derangements are up to the Storyteller to decide.

Successes	Duration
1 success	One turn
2 successes	One night
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year

●●●●● Kiss of the Moon

The effects of this ability are not as dramatic as Howling Lunacy, but unlike that power, Kiss of the Moon is permanent. The vampire chooses a pair of related disorders and, after a few moments' conversation with the target, she passes them on to that poor soul. These afflictions haunt the victim for the rest of his existence. Rumors persist that the user of this power can withdraw the insanity it brings at will, but few Malkavians are willing to stop the flow of enlightenment that such madness brings, and almost no Cainites outside of Malkav's get are talented enough with Dementation to attempt such a thing.

System: Make a resisted roll with your character's Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty 6); the target resists with her current Willpower (difficulty 6). If you achieve at least two net successes, you may select two derangements (or describe two, if you have particular ideas that the Storyteller approves) and apply them to the target. The target cannot eliminate these derangements, but he may fight them as he would any other derangement (see p. 261). The Storyteller may allow you to withdraw derangements that you create with Kiss of the Moon, but he will undoubtedly require an excellent reason for doing so. Even then, the Curse of Malkav may be irreversible. Note that derangements created with Kiss of the Moon do suffice to allow the target to learn Dementation.

Dominate

Scions, vampires who follow the Road of Kings, teach that Cainites were made to lead, that their orders demand obedience by unholy right. There is no better manifestation of this belief than the Discipline of Dominate. With this gift, a vampire may impose her will on another, compelling her to obey commands or even rewriting her memory. Where Malkav's gift of Dementation turns its victims minds inside out, the high-blooded ability of Dominate forces the weak of will to submit to the strong.

Dominate is not always an easy power to use, however, since it requires both eye contact and speech for most of its applications. Clear gesturing (holding up a hand for "Stop!") can work for the simplest commands, but anything more complex requires verbal communication. Unless the victim has already become a will-less thrall, eye contact is an absolute requirement and the most limiting, since it means commands can be imposed on only one person at a time. Beyond these limitations, most targets can be made to submit to the will of a Cainite skilled in Dominate. The major exception is subject of more powerful blood. Any vampire of lower generation than the user is totally immune to her uses of Dominate. Therefore, Scion thinkers say, this power cannot be used to upset the right hierarchy of blood among the Damned.

There are a few other limits to the uses of Dominate, but they occur much more rarely. Stories claim that some mortals blessed by God are immune to the breaking of their wills — their fear of the Lord is greater than any other subjugation. It is also easier to force a victim to act in a way close to her true self than to make her reject her nature. In game terms, efforts to Dominate a character into doing something in line with her Nature (make a Barbarian strike someone, make a Defender stand guard) enjoy a -1 difficulty bonus. Efforts to Dominate someone into doing something utterly against her Nature (making a Caretaker commit murder) suffer a +1 difficulty penalty.

Finally, it is always possible for the Cainite to taint the subject's will himself. Dominate is best used with

precision, and careless applications can unnecessarily arouse the defenses of the immortal (or Damned) soul. Whenever a player botches a Dominate roll, that subject becomes immune to her character's Dominate efforts for the rest of the story (and shakes off any of her existing effects).

The Lasombra and Ventrue are the ancient masters of this Discipline, but they do teach it to others on the Road of Kings. Most accept the story that the power reflects the curse of God in that it erodes the basis of friendship or true intimacy. Such is the price of leadership, however, and they pay it gladly. The Tremere, sorcerous upstarts in the Cainite world, also have an affinity for Dominate, said to be a corruption of the mind magics they once wielded in their breathing days.

• Observance of the Spoken Word

The most basic ability of the Discipline of Dominate is to give a one-word command which must be obeyed. The Cainite must make eye contact with his victim and speak in a language that the victim can comprehend. To ensure instant compliance, the command must be clear and unambiguous: flee, dismount, enter, silence. If the command is unclear, the subject might act slowly, ineptly or not at all. Commands that require the subject to act over a sustained period of time hold force until the subject removes herself from the commanding Cainite's influence, or until the end of the scene. Therefore, a subject commanded to flee will do so until she is well out of the dominating vampire's sight, while a subject commanded to be silent will not speak for the remainder of the scene, unless a countermanding order is given.

The single-word command need not stand alone. A Cainite who wishes to camouflage his orders in polite conversation may do so, as long as he makes eye contact as he utters the command word.

System: The player makes a Manipulation + Intimidation roll with a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. Additional successes improve the subject's response time.

• • Murmur of the False Will

Murmur of the False Will is more than simply an extension of the Observance of the Spoken Word, though it may be used as such. In this case, clearly worded instructions are given to the target, who must immediately obey. Orders may also be given to be carried out at another specified time — "at moonset" or "next spring" — or in response to a specific event — "when next you attend the *voivode*" or "when you next hear the phrase, 'Sleep well, my lady.'" The clarity of the orders affects the subject's alacrity and skill in carrying them out. Eye contact must be maintained continuously between the dominator and his subject when the orders are given; this is not an ability that can be used politely. The instructions will be carried out at any length, but a wise Cainite knows that extended and detailed commands are more likely to confuse the subject or introduce unforeseen elements into the path of events.

A much more subtle use of this ability simply imposes an idea or concept on the victim's mind — "You are a brave warrior" or "Your lord's wife is a very handsome woman." The subject includes this idea in his or her routine activities, acting on it as opportunity presents and according to his or her Nature. Again, eye contact must be maintained throughout the implanting of the idea, but one may do so more subtly than by giving a string of precise instructions.

The commanding Cainite may impose only one set of instructions or insinuated idea on a subject at any given time. Imposing a new command or concept aborts the previous instructions, no matter how incomplete, or negates the imposed idea. In many cases, replacing one concept with another or with a command is the only way to be rid of it — once subject to this power, most victims are never completely free-willed again. Another Cainite who wishes to command the same subject may do so, but only a Cainite of a generation equal to or lower than that of the first dominator can impose conflicting commands or ideas.

Commands given using this power may not force the subject to directly harm herself. Neither commands nor implanted ideas can force the subject to act contrary to her Nature.

System: The player makes a Manipulation + Leadership roll with a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. The number of successes determines how well the suggestion is implanted. At fewer than three successes, the subject does not do anything she finds too strange (riding a horse naked through the streets of town, for instance), but she performs instructions or parts of instructions that seem reasonable. With four successes, the subject carries out orders completely unless doing so greatly endangers her. (Engaging in fisticuffs with unarmed opponents can be expected, for example, but punching an armored knight cannot.) At five successes, the subject obeys nearly any command.

To countermand or contradict another's orders, the character must be of equal or lower generation than the original dominator, and the player must roll more successes on a Manipulation + Intimidation roll than the first dominator tallied with Manipulation + Leadership. The commands or ideas cannot simply be removed. Commands must be replaced with new commands, or the old idea must be replaced with a new one.

••• Reveler's Memory

This terrifying ability allows the Cainite to remove or re-create the subject's memories. Minor erasures and alterations can be made to remove all remembrance of a chance meeting or of a singular encounter such as feeding. More invasive work is required to remove all traces of a planned meeting, and more subtle work is necessary to alter the details of just one encounter if the subject is familiar with the manipulating Cainite. At the greatest extreme, the vampire may erase and reconstruct his victim's memories from the very beginning, crafting a person with the virtues and peccadilloes he requires.

Successes	Effectiveness
1 success	Memory loss lasts a day.
2 successes	May remove, but not alter memory.
3 successes	May make slight alterations to memory.
4 successes	May alter or remove entire scene from subject's memory.
5 successes	Whole periods of subject's life may be reconstructed.

Fortunately for the victim, memory is a wonderfully elastic thing. Even the most skilled manipulator of minds may not be able to remove *all* traces of an offending memory. Those with less skill must be content with temporarily misplacing the subject's memories or making minor alterations to them. A feeding might be altered in the subject's memories to a wild animal attack, and the man encountered on a dark street may be remembered to have snowy white hair rather than dirty brown.

Memories lost to this power may flood back to the victim when she is cued, such as by a familiar face or an odor from childhood. They may also drift, piecemeal, to the surface of her dreams. A Cainite with the ability to alter memory is capable of recognizing tampering in the minds of others, and he may also be capable of restoring the lost memories. Unfortunately, the vampire cannot tell when his own memories have been altered, nor can he restore his own lost memories.

System: Roll Wits + Subterfuge with a difficulty of the target's Willpower, then consult the following table to determine how deeply the target's memory can be affected.

To attempt to recover removed memories or detect created memories, the character must possess Dominate at a level equal to or greater than the vampire who tampered with the target's memory. Unlike with *Murmur of the False Will*, the vampire can be of higher generation than the original dominator and still undo her work as long as his level of Dominate is high enough. The player must gain more successes on a Wits + Subterfuge roll with a difficulty equal to the Willpower of the tampering vampire.

The Storyteller's discretion must be used to determine if and when removed or altered memories return on their own. As a general guideline, the subtler the changes are, the more likely the alteration or deletion is to remain, while incautious and dramatic changes will almost always come undone, even if it takes hundreds of years.

•••• Lure of Subtle Whispers

A vampire skilled in Dominate comes to consider his retainers and other dominated subjects as among his most prized possessions. Over time, this ability allows the Cainite to break in and mold a subject's will like a leather glove, using constant manipulation and insidious temptations to sap her

spirit. After weeks or months of torture, the result is a subject who is unable to further resist the vampire's Dominate, obeying him even to the exclusion of other supernatural influences. The Cainite must pay a price for this unquestioning servitude, though. His servants are passionless and unimaginative, showing no initiative on their own behalf—or their master's. Capable only of following orders, they are like the walking dead.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Leadership with a difficulty of the target's Willpower. Completely conditioning a subject requires an extended action, and the player may attempt only one roll per night. The Storyteller determines in secret the number of successes required to break the subject's will (typically between five to 10 times the subject's Self-Control). The player can never be certain he has achieved success based simply on die rolls; the Cainite must judge his degree of control from interactions with his victim. A botch during this process eliminates all accumulated successes and generally causes the would-be subject to act out against the vampire according to her nature—responses ranging from a desperate attack to a quiet report to church authorities are possible.

Once the subject's will is broken, she becomes so thoroughly Dominated that the Cainite does not have to make eye contact or be physically present to enforce her will. (The Auspex power Steal Secrets can be used to telepathically give orders to subjects, and even a mundane item like a letter affixed with the Cainite's seal very likely invokes the conditioned response.) Additionally, the difficulty for other Cainites or supernatural beings to dominate the conditioned servant increases by two, to a maximum of 10.

Orders must perhaps be even clearer and more carefully worded than before, since the subject lacks the initiative to puzzle out confusing commands. When the vampire gives an order by any method, the player must make the appropriate command roll. Both success and failure give a positive result; only a botch indicates an anomalous failure to impose the vampire's will. During this break in control, the subject may make a Self-Control roll with a difficulty of the controlling Cainite's Willpower. Success allows the victim enough freedom to remove herself from the vampire's power by suicide if the means are available.

The effects of this level of Dominate on the subject's psyche are relatively easy to notice. Any Cainite (or knowledgeable mortal for that matter) has a chance to notice the telltale signs during a brief meeting, such as an audience with the viscount or transaction with a merchant. The player rolls Wits + Empathy with a difficulty of 7. During extended interaction, such as shipboard or living under the same roof, anyone familiar with the effects of Dominate cannot fail to notice the subject's condition, although it will not be obvious who is responsible.

●●●●● Vessel

This power allows the Cainite to sever the soul of his subject from her body and mind. By displacing the victim's soul with his own corrupt spirit, the vampire takes com-

plete control and may use the vessel's body as if it were his own. The Cainite must make eye contact with his intended victim even if she is conditioned through the Lure of Subtle Whispers, but such an unfortunate soul has even less chance to resist than a free-willed mortal. Once the psychic struggle commences, the victim cannot simply look away. Only two outcomes are possible, complete domination or utter (if brief) freedom.

While this power is in use, the vessel is only dimly aware of the actions that her body takes, and her memories afterward have the quality of nightmares. The Cainite's body lies as if in torpor, insensate and defenseless.

Vampires cannot possess each other using this power. Only a complete blood oath can begin to compare with the level of control the dominating Cainite gains.

System: The target vessel must be prepared by completely stripping away her will to resist. The player spends a Willpower point, then rolls Charisma + Intimidation, while the target resists with Willpower (difficulty 7 for both). For each net success, the vampire strips away a point of temporary Willpower from his victim. Ties or successful resistance by the victim only prolongs the struggle. The victim will be free only if her attacker botches his control attempt (a botch renders her immune to Dominate attempts of any kind from the attacking vampire for the remainder of the story).

Once the vessel is bereft of temporary Willpower, the vampire may move his mind into her. The player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation with a difficulty of 7 to determine how much of his supernatural might he can infuse into the mortal shell. In a manner similar to the Animalism power Ride the Wild Mind, multiple successes allow the Cainite to use some mental Disciplines, noted on the following chart (blood required by these Disciplines is spent from the Cainite's own body, not the vessel's).

The vampire may travel as far from his body as his vessel can manage. If he leaves the vessel, either by choice or by force, his spirit returns to his physical form instantaneously, regardless of the distance between them. The Cainite may also venture out during the day in his mortal vessel, but he must struggle to remain awake just as he would in his own body (see page 234). The vampire will leave the vessel if he fails to remain awake or is supernaturally exorcised.

Successes	Result
1 success	Cannot use Disciplines (the vampire's non-Physical Attributes, Abilities and Virtues carry over, however)
2 successes	Can use Auspex
3 successes	Can also use Dominate, Presence
4 successes	Can also use Chimerstry, Dementation
5 successes	Can also use Mortis, Thaumaturgy

The Cainite keenly experiences both the vessel's pleasure and pain. The link between his body and spirit is strong enough that the vampire actually suffers any damage applied to the vessel's body (although the vampire can resist this damage with a soak roll). The only thing that can sever the link between the Cainite and his rightful body is the sudden death of the vessel, before the Cainite has a chance to remove his spirit from the newly deceased vessel. If this should happen, the character falls immediately into torpor. Many Cainites suspect that the sudden ferocity of the deceased soul's passage to either Heaven or Hell rips the Cainite's spirit loose from its corrupt moorings, leaving it adrift on the astral plane to find its way back to its body.

The Cainite can remain in his vessel if his own body is destroyed, but he cannot survive this way for long. At each sunrise, the player must make a Courage roll (difficulty 8) or be expelled from the mortal body. If expelled, his spirit is permanently lost in the astral plane. If the vessel is Embraced, the vampire's spirit is immediately expelled and lost without recourse.

●●●●● Fealty

Fealty allows the Cainite to ensure the loyalty of those who voluntarily swear oaths or allegiance to him. Whenever a mortal or Cainite makes a free oath to a vampire who then uses Fealty, the subject is compelled to fulfill the oath to the best of her ability. The subject cannot later change her mind or take back her words, and false intentions or subterfuge are swept aside by the power of the Fealty invocation. The subject may be unable to resist upholding the oath, but she may act against the vampire in any matter not covered by the oath.

Invoking this power is a dramatic display. The Cainite must make a statement of affirmation (such as, "I accept your oath," or, "May your word be as law to you,"), and power tangibly surges between the vampire and the oath-taker. None witnessing it can have any doubt that, somehow, the oath has been supernaturally enforced. (Savvy Cainites will invoke the power of God, while suspicious onlookers may infer darker powers at work.)

System: The player rolls Charisma + Leadership with a difficulty of the target's Willpower. The number of successes determines the duration of the Fealty oath, as follows:

Successes	Duration
1 success	One week
2 successes	One month
3 successes	One year
4 successes	10 years
5 successes	100 years

Fortitude

All vampires are more resistant to damage than mortals. Cappadocians and Tremere — the only clans



who really study such things — believe that blood in the vessels of a human is what renders them so vulnerable to injury. The rapid loss of blood is very dangerous to them. By contrast, a Cainite has nearly absolute control over his blood, so he does not risk injury nearly as easily.

The vampire with Fortitude, however, gains immense resistance to damage, and even some measure of protection against those banes of a vampire's existence: sunlight, fire and supernatural attacks. This ability is most commonly seen among the Cappadocians, who see it as a reflection of their affinity with the corpse, the Ventrue, (re)born for the battlefield, and the Ravnos and Gangrel, who risk the sun's rays more often than most Cainites.

Fortitude is a reflection of God's curse on Cainites, for it breeds overconfidence and arrogance in its users. Legends speak of Methuselahs whose gifts of Fortitude vanished at the moment of their undoing, leaving them to the mercies of ravenous childer or the piercing sun.

System: This Discipline grants the user increased protection against all forms of physical damage. Each dot of Fortitude adds one to the user's dice pool to soak bashing and lethal damage (see p. 239). Unlike normal Cainites — who cannot soak sunlight or other aggravated damage at all — Fortitude users can roll Stamina + Fortitude to soak damage from sunlight and fire. They roll Fortitude alone to soak other forms of aggravated damage, such as that imposed by holy ground or the claws of Lupines.

Fortitude reinforces the vampire's body in all ways. It helps soak any damage that results in injury.

Mortis

The Cappadocians carefully guard the secret of the Mortis Discipline. Clan legend has it that the abilities inherent to this Discipline were handed down to the clan's Methuselahs by Cappadocius himself. Mortis allows its user to unlock and use the secrets of death itself. They can steal the traits left from the living in a dead body, they can strengthen or weaken the corpse-like nature of a vampire's body, and they can animate the dead. Those who use Mortis, be they Cappadocian or not, often develop an obsession with death and the dead. This unnatural preoccupation often turns inward to an analysis of the nature of vampirism and occasionally provokes a melancholy that can be cured only by a long walk on a sunny day.

Mortis is a form of blood sorcery concerned with the condition of the corpse after death. The Cappadocian scholars teach that the soul leaves the body and goes to its reward when life ends, yet something remains. It is this "something," both the physical fact of a rotting body and the spiritual echo left within it, that is the subject of Mortis. Rumor has it that elders of the clan have purposefully Embraced Venetian sorcerers skilled in the ways of affecting the souls displaced from bodies, an art they call *nigrimancy*. Many traditional Cappadocians find the idea of trafficking with ghosts and souls unpleasant at best and heretical at worst.

Mortis progresses along three paths, though rumors persist of others. (The Lamia bloodline of warrior-priestesses, who serve in certain Cappadocian temples, are said to practice their own path of Mortis, for example.) A vampire who learns Mortis can pick any of the three major paths as her primary path (see p. 171 for more on paths).

The Grave's Decay

The first Mortis path is derived from the observation of the working of time on all things mortal. Stone crumbles and the corpse rots away to nothing, a process of endless fascination to the elders and scholars of Clan Cappadocian. Indeed, for the undying, the process of decay is a fascinating disease that afflicts everyone and everything save them. Under this path, a practitioner of Mortis channels that force.

• Destroy the Husk

Cainites who kill their victims, rather than just feeding upon them, frequently find themselves in need of a quick way to dispose of a corpse. While there are many ways to make sure that a corpse is not found — feed it to a pack of hounds or weigh it down and throw it in a river — many of these methods do involve risk to the vampire and are not guaranteed to succeed. Destroy the Husk, by contrast, is foolproof. Use of this power simply turns one human corpse to a pile of about 30 pounds of unremarkable dust, roughly the size and shape of that body.

System: The player spends one blood point as the vampire drips her vitae onto the corpse. The player then rolls Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 6). One success is all that is needed to render the corpse into dust, although the process takes a number of turns equal to five minus the successes. While successful use of mortal hedge magic, Thaumaturgy, Auspex or an appropriate Mortis ritual might tell a wizard or vampire something about the pile of dust's prior identity, no ordinary mortal force can ascertain the dust's former nature.

•• Rigor Mortis

One of the first changes that comes over a dead body is rigidity; the corpse becomes stiff as a board, frozen in a single pose. The Cainite who wields Rigor Mortis is able to push a living or undead body to that frozen point using only his will and understanding of the forces of decay. She forces her target to become rigid, unable to move without enormous effort of will as his very muscles betray him.

System: The player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Medicine (difficulty 7). Each success freezes the target in place for one turn. A failure simply indicates the loss of your Willpower point, while a botch renders the target immune to your use of the Grave's Decay for the next 24 hours. The target must be visible and within about 25 yards for this ability to take effect. A frozen target is treated as though he has been staked (see p. 254). With a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) and two successes, the target can break out of the rigor on his or her turn. Failure causes a level of bashing damage and means another turn wasted and frozen.

••• Wither

Reminiscent of some of the abilities of Clan Tzimisce, the Wither power allows a vampire to cripple an opponent's limb. Whether the foe is living or undead, muscle shrivels away, skin peels, and bone becomes brittle. The target is unable to exert any noteworthy strength in the crippled limb. This injury lasts for far longer than most injuries trouble Cainites, and in mortals it simply does not heal.

Wither doesn't have to be used on a limb, although that is its usual purpose. It can also be used simply to affect the target's face and hair, making him appear venerable beyond his years. It could also be applied to a target's eye or ear, killing the sense in that organ (and thus requiring two uses to permanently blind or deafen). Wither cannot be used as an "instant-kill" power — Cainites cannot wither vital organs — but it can inflict a wide variety of injuries on a foe.

System: The player spends a Willpower point. The character chooses a limb on the target and then touches that limb. If the target is trying to avoid contact, the player rolls Dexterity + Brawl to hit as normal. If the character succeeds in touching the intended limb, the target suffers two aggravated wounds. Unless the target soaks both wounds (with Fortitude), the struck limb is crippled and unusable until both of those wounds have healed. Cainites heal the wounds as they would any other aggravated wound (see p. 253). Mortals are incapable of healing aggravated wounds, so they suffer throughout their lives unless they are healed through supernatural means. A withered limb does not degenerate further, even on a mortal. The character may be crippled for life, but the limb won't become infected or gangrenous.

The effects of the withering depend on the affected limb. A crippled arm has a Strength of 0 and cannot carry anything heavier than about half a pound. A crippled leg prevents the character from moving at faster than a stuttering hop or dragging limp. The character suffers the effects of the *Lame Flaw* (see p. 304). A single withered eye or ear imposes a +1 difficulty to relevant Perception rolls. Losing both eyes or both ears imposes the effects of the *Blind* or *Deaf* Flaws (see p. 304). A withered tongue imposes the effects of the *Mute Flaw* (p. 304), while a withered face reduces the target's Appearance by one for each aggravated wound suffered.

•••• Corrupt the Undead Flesh

Corrupt the Undead Flesh blurs the line between life and undeath, turning an undead creature into something just living enough to carry and suffer from disease. The disease inflicts the target, causing lethargy, dizziness, loss of strength, clumsiness and the inability to keep blood in his system. This pernicious influence is extremely virulent among mortals. They pick the disease up simply by spending a few hours near the victim. Other Cainites have a harder time acquiring the disease. They must consume the victim's blood to do so, but they suffer just as much as the original target of the Discipline afterward — including passing the affliction on to others.

The disease fades after roughly a week.

System: The player chooses a target within her character's line of sight and no more than 20 yards away. She rolls Manipulation + Medicine (difficulty 6) and spends a point of Willpower. The victim's player must roll Stamina (+ Fortitude, if appropriate) against a difficulty equal to the attacker's Willpower. If the player scores more successes than the victim, he acquires a virulent disease immediately. The disease has the following effects:

- The victim's Strength and Wits are halved (round down).
- The victim loses one point of Dexterity.
- The victim's player must spend one additional blood point every evening, just for the vampire to rouse himself to consciousness. Mortals lose one health level per day, instead.
- The victim's player must roll Self-Control or Instinct after each time the character feeds (difficulty 8). On a failure, the vampire cannot keep the blood he just ingested inside his body, and he vomits it up in great horrifying gouts of gore, losing any benefit the blood might have provided. Humans vomit up food.

Every evening at sunset, the victim has a chance to throw the plague off. The victim's player rolls Stamina, with a difficulty of equal to 11 minus the number of sunsets since acquiring the plague. On a successful roll, the character fights the disease to a standstill and begins to recover. He instantly regains his ability to manage blood, and he heals back one lost Attribute point per hour until all have returned.

••••• Dissolve the Flesh

This ability brings the Grave's Decay path full circle, as it returns to the level-one power, *Destroy the Husk*, as applied to vampires. Dissolve the Flesh allows a Cappadocian to attempt to turn vampiric flesh to dust or ash, as though the target had been burned or left out in the sun.

System: The player spends two blood points and a Willpower point as the vampire extracts a quantity of her vitae charged with the power of the grave. If she drips it onto a single Cainite victim anytime within the next few turns (most of the blood must reach the victim, so flinging a few drops is ineffective), it causes whole chunks of the victim's body to crumble to ash. The player rolls Willpower against a difficulty of the victim's Stamina + 3. For every success, the target takes one aggravated wound.

The undead flesh damaged by this power turns to dust (gone for the time being), and it must be regenerated painstakingly by the victim, should he survive. That dust doubtlessly has mystical properties that the Cappadocians, Tremere and other blood sorcerers might be able to take advantage of. Every wound inflicted by this ability represents the loss of about one-eighth of the target's weight; the Storyteller chooses where the loss comes from. (It might be shed from all over, leaving the victim a bit gaunter, at the victim's discretion.)

Regenerating body parts occurs naturally while healing aggravated wounds at the normal rate (see p. 254).

The Corpse in the Monster

This path enhances the Cappadocian understanding of the unliving form and allows the user to fully experience the corpse, the gateway between life and death. The path lets the Cappadocian apply some of a corpse's traits to a vampire, and she can enhance or reduce these traits at various levels of the power.

• Masque of Death

The character with this ability can assume a visage of death or inflict that shape on another Cainite. The character's flesh becomes pallid and thin (if it is not already), and skin pulls tight against bone. This ability can be very useful, as it allows one to hide in plain sight in a tomb or crypt at any time (though the character remains as vulnerable to sunlight and fire as ever). When a Cainite uses this power on another Cainite, the victim gains the same corpse-like demeanor. In this sense, the ability works as something of a minor curse.

System: The player spends one blood point for the character to gain the form described. Those afflicted with the Masque of Death lose two points of Dexterity and Appearance (minimum of 1 in Dexterity and 0 in Appearance) for the duration of the power. The player also gets two extra dice to his Intimidation dice pool, should he wish to terrify any onlookers. Also, if the character remains perfectly still, observers must roll five successes on a Perception + Medicine roll (difficulty 7) to distinguish the character from a standard corpse. The player need not roll anything to have the character stop moving — vampires have no autonomic functions.

If the user inflicts Masque of Death on another character, he must spend a blood point, touch the target and then make a Stamina + Medicine roll (difficulty of the target's Stamina + 3). The Masque of Death lasts for a full night and day, unless the character who created the masque wishes to extinguish its effects earlier.

•• Cold of the Grave

The dead feel no pain, though, of course, most undead do. With this ability, the character can temporarily take on the unfeeling semblance of the dead, in order to protect herself from physical and emotional harm. When assuming the Cold of the Grave, the vampire's skin becomes unusually cold. When she speaks, her breath mists even in warm air — those with exceptional senses might even see a slight red tinge to the breath.

The power brings a sense of lethargy over the character, as a mortal might feel under the influence of a mildly unpleasant disease. It becomes difficult to rouse oneself to action, and very little seems important enough to really worry about. The corpse has no worries, after all.

System: The player spends one Willpower point. For the remainder of the scene, the character takes no wound penalties, and the player gains an additional die to all dice pools that involve resisting emotional manipulation, such as Intimidation or Empathy. However, the player also loses a

die from dice pools to emotionally manipulate others. The character is something of a cold fish to those she interacts with, and they do not respond readily to her. The Cold of the Grave does not protect the character against the depredations of the Beast, though. She may be emotionally cold on the surface, but if others taunt and anger her sufficiently, she is still subject to frenzy as normal.

••• Curse of Life

The Curse of Life inflicts some of the undesirable traits of the living upon the undead, removing their corpse-like nature and creating a false life to remind them of the worst things about being alive. Targets of this power regain only the unpleasant aspects of life, as culled from the memory of the Discipline's user. This may include mundane hunger and thirst, sweat and other excretions, the need to urinate and defecate, a decrease in sensory acuity and a particular vulnerability to attacks that the character might shrug off as a hunter of the night.

System: The player spends one Willpower and rolls Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 8) to affect a target within line of sight and no farther than 20 yards from the character. If the roll succeeds, the target suffers the weaknesses of the living without gaining any benefit from that state. He does not become immune to sunlight or holy artifacts, for instance. However, he does become badly distracted by mundane needs, to the net result of his player suffering a +2 difficulty penalty to all rolls. He can ignore these distractions at the cost of one Willpower point per scene. Additionally, the victim cannot use blood to raise his Physical Attributes while this power is in effect, and Willpower cannot eliminate this penalty. The power remains in effect until the next sunset.

•••• Gift of the Corpse

This power, one of the most potent on the Corpse in the Monster path, enables a Cainite to ignore most of her race's inherent weaknesses for a short time. A dead body is not particularly vulnerable to sunlight, holy artifacts, frenzy or being staked through the heart, and so it is with a Cappadocian using the Gift of the Corpse. As with the Cold of the Grave, above, the character using this power takes on an even more deathlike mien than the one typically associated with the Cappadocian clan. It lasts for less than a minute, typically, but that time may be enough to enable a character to charge through a burning building without fearing frenzy or instant death. Vampiric scholars believe that this ability entered the hands of the clan through some kind of bargain between an archangel and the Antediluvian Cappadocius. Just which archangel is unclear, although Gabriel — the angel of death who is said to have cursed Caine with the blood hunger — is a leading candidate.

System: The player spends one Willpower and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). For every success, the character can spend one turn in a state in which he is more akin to an animated corpse than a vampire. Holy artifacts and sanctified ground have no effect, and the character is immune to frenzy and Röttschreck. Sunlight does only mild damage (bashing damage only, and then

only if bare skin is exposed on a clear day). Being staked through the heart is only as much of a danger as getting stabbed through his dead spleen would be. Fire harms him only as it would a mortal — causing lethal damage instead of aggravated.

Should the character end the power's duration while exposed to any of the aforementioned harmful things, he immediately takes full effect. If he is staked, he become immobilized; if he is on or near fire, he begins to take the damage a Cainite should take, and he must immediately roll against Röttschreck.

Those who can see the character's halo during this power's duration may note a pulsating red tinge to it, and his appearance changes as described previously. He is free to use all of his other vampiric abilities, however, including the advantages in soaking bashing and lethal damage.

Use of this ability can be construed as a rejection of even the echo of humanity in the Cainite form. Therefore, it may interfere with a character's road advancement, at the Storyteller's discretion.

●●●●● Gift of Life

The Cappadocians' obsession with the line between life and death has led them to approach — but never quite reach — the line between the mortal and the undead. Try as they might, they cannot give themselves both the richness of mortal life and the power and immortality of vampirism. Most of this path represents the result of various experiments down such roads. The Gift of Life is the most complete one known outside certain elder sects. With it, the character can experience the best and most positive things about being alive. The overwhelming hunger for blood temporarily abates, allowing the character to consume and enjoy food and drink. She can also experience and enjoy sexual coupling as she wishes, and the sun does not burn her.

The Gift of Life comes with a dark, terrible cost, however. Its use is almost sure to result in the death of a mortal, as the vampire must expend an enormous quantity of vitae in order to initiate it. The Discipline's effects last until the midnight after the character uses the power, so it is in her best interests to use it just after midnight. Those few Cainites outside the Cappadocian clan who have heard of this power distrust and fear the Graverobbers even more than other vampires might. The Clan of Death believes that this reaction comes from envy (or a fear of being attacked by daylight), but vampiric scholars agree that so obviously flouting God's curse on Caine is a tremendously dangerous thing to do, one that might bring a heavy cost in nights to come.

System: The player spends 12 blood points (yes, 12), burning as much blood as possible each turn until she meets that level. She then rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 6) and needs only one success for the power to work. A botch has catastrophic effects. The character might be instantly killed or might inadvertently Embrace her victim, for example. If it takes longer than one turn to spend the necessary blood to enact this ability, it does not take effect until all 12 points have been spent. However, the

blood must be spent continuously — the vampire cannot burn five, run off and feed, then burn seven more an hour later. On the other hand, she may feed as she activates the power — in one turn she might burn one blood point while drinking three. Since few Cainites above the 7th generation can easily expend such an amount of blood, the most efficient way to activate this power is to have a human nearby who can be sacrificed to power the transformation.

After her transformation, the character gains many traits of an ordinary human. She is largely immune to the scorching effects of the sun (Fortitude difficulties to soak damage from direct sunlight are halved, and she takes no damage if she is sufficiently covered), and she can experience and enjoy many of the fine things about human life. She retains a few of her vampiric benefits, however. Fortitude and Auspex abilities remain in place if she has either of those Disciplines. The Storyteller may allow her to retain other Disciplines as well if he deems them dramatically appropriate. She also retains the vampire's benefits when it comes to handling bashing damage. However, she is still vulnerable to holy artifacts, human faith and being staked. Her blood remains vitae, not human blood. Use of this ability — which creates a mockery of human life — may interfere with a character's road advancement, at the Storyteller's discretion.

The vampire is no more vulnerable to fire than any other mortal while in this half-alive state, but she still suffers slightly from the Beast. Frenzy and Röttschreck difficulties are halved (round up). She can remain active during the day without road-based dice pool caps, although she is certainly tired during the day, since that is not her usual time of activity.

Her Beast exacts a dangerous retribution when her day of "life" is done. Although its influence is greatly suppressed during this power's duration, the Beast has its way with the vampire for the next six nights, as all difficulties to resist frenzy increase by three. The wise Cappadocian hides herself away somewhere during that period, but, depending on road and temperament, enforced isolation might drive her to frenzy on its own.

Cadaverous Animation

The Grave's Decay and the Corpse in the Monster paths are both basically sympathetic studies. They are concerned with using an understanding of the behavior of corpses to apply that behavior to other matters, be it living or unliving flesh. Cadaverous Animation relies on theories of magical contagion instead, proposing that dead bodies — once inhabited by living souls — can be made to imitate the habits of life. The Venetian necromancers recently Embraced into Clan Cappadocian are said to have a deeper understanding of this path and related arts, but those are but whispers among the Graverobbers.

Statistics for the various forms of animated corpses appear in the Appendix (p. 312).

• Trace of Life

The Cappadocian with this ability can cause a corpse to exhibit one or two traits of life by directly stimulating the dead flesh to twitch or move slowly. This power is most often used either to convince those beloved of the deceased that their loved one is alive, or to cause them terror. The vampire cannot force the corpse to speak, and if he makes its eyes open, any doubt that the subject is still dead is dispelled by the milky, rotted appearance of its orbs.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 6). With even one success, the character can make a single corpse within 30 feet twitch or make similar slight movements. This ability can even replicate the throbbing of a human's pulse. More successes enable more realistic motions, though the character cannot make the corpse do more than replicate a sleeping mortal, even with many successes. A single success allows a quick twitch, a deep breath or another single movement. Four or more successes allow the vampire to establish a pattern of movement — a pulse, breathing, slight stirring or even all three — that lasts for a scene.

A failure means the power has no effect, but the player can roll again next turn. A botch causes the corpse to rapidly decay as though the Cainite had used the Destroy the Husk power of the Grave's Decay path. In any case, observers must roll Perception + Medicine (difficulty 7) and earn more successes than the character did in order to realize that the corpse is, in fact, dead. This difficulty drops to 5 if the observer touches the body and notices the lack of warmth. Success is automatic if the observer can look at the corpse's milky eyes.

The Mortis wielder can use Trace of Life on a vampire in torpor. The results are the same as with a corpse, save that the player needs two additional successes. (Therefore, he needs a minimum of three successes to achieve any effect at all.) This power is ineffective on vampires of stronger blood (i.e., lower generation) than the wielder.

• • Call the Homuncular Servant

With a small application of her blood, a Cappadocian using Call the Homuncular Servant can cause a small, mobile piece of a dead body to slough off the rest of the corpse and move around under its own power. Generally, the Cappadocian animates a hand, but the power has been used in the past to enable eyeballs to roll around under their own power, and even stranger stories occasionally make the rounds.

The homunculus has mystical senses enabling it to see and hear, it hides extremely well, it moves quickly, and it has a modicum of its own intelligence. When it is within a quarter-mile of the vampire, the servant can communicate what it sees and hears with the vampire who created it, via a rough sort of telepathy. The servant is intelligent enough to understand simple spoken or telepathic commands, but it lacks initiative, a failing that is particularly obvious when it leaves the Cainite's radius of control. The servant cannot carry anything, although jewelry or other very small objects might be attached to it.

System: The player spends a blood point and rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 7) while the character drips vitae on the appropriate piece of an available corpse. With one success, the corpse's hand (or other member) becomes an animated creature with game statistics as described on page 314. If the roll fails, the character may attempt to create a servant from the same member again next turn. A botch spoils the life-like residue in the cadaver, making it forever useless for purposes of this path.

The homunculus is totally obedient to its maker, and it utterly ignores other orders or requests (although rumors persist of a ritual to usurp control of a servant). It can communicate with its maker telepathically as long as it doesn't move more than a quarter-mile away. If it does, it acts according to its most recent instructions from him until it hears otherwise.

The servant remains active for one scene per success. If the player spends blood again and rerolls Dexterity + Occult at the end of this duration, he can extend the "life span" of the servant for a further scene per success. This process can continue indefinitely, and many Cappadocians have a long-term homunculus of this sort. The servant can be killed in combat like any other creature, and it does not gain a vampire's resistance to bashing damage.

• • • Raise the Corpse to Service

This ability allows the Cappadocian to bring a lifeless corpse into a semblance of unlife, turning it into a shambling mockery. Raise the Corpse to Service works equally well whether the corpse is just half an hour old or has decomposed to a purely skeletal state. The servant is not capable of independent thought, but it can follow spoken orders perfectly well. A corpse servant is not a combatant, however. It can interfere with the vampire's enemies by getting in their way or trying to take their things, but it does not have the ability to attack. It is most akin to a shambling major-domo, and it is a mainstay of Cappadocian monasteries and havens.

System: The player spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 6) as the character drips vitae into the corpse's mouth. The process takes three turns, and the corpse servant is active for one day per success on this roll. If the roll fails, the character may attempt to create a servant from the same corpse again after the three turns have passed. A botch destroys the corpse in an unholy flame. The corpse servant has game statistics as described on page 313. The servant is not completely stupid. It can do simple household tasks such as tidy, prepare meals and escort visitors through a home. However, it is a corpse, not a vampire. It is slowly decomposing, and it exhibits symptoms of that decay. It cannot speak, but it can gesture (though its gestures are typically ponderous and simple). While it cannot fight, it is happy to attempt to relieve "guests" of their heavy weapons and armor, incompetently trying to disarm foes if ordered to do so. Once the duration of the raising ends, the corpse can be raised to service anew at no penalty.

●●●● Call the Athanatos

Unlike *Raise the Corpse to Service*, *Call the Athanatos* turns a human or animal corpse into a true monster, an animated killer. The Cappadocian controls the undead warrior through force of will, but the thing itself is driven by only one motivation: death. Legends surrounding this power suggest that the undead warrior is a tool not of its creator but of Death itself, an unholy spawn of the Grim Reaper. The creature animated by this power is a skilled combatant, familiar with most melee weapons even if its body was not that of a warrior in life (though the corpse of a warrior is more effective than that of a peasant). *Athanatos* (plural *Athanatoi*) is a slightly ironic usage of Herodotus's term for the so-called "Immortals," elite guards of the ancient kings of Persia. Cappadocians of a less classical bent often simply call the warriors corpse knights or *ministerialis* (a name borrowed from the serf-knights of Germany).

This power must be used with caution. Stories abound of foolish Cappadocians who created an undead warrior only to lose control of it and be taken to their doom by their own creation.

System: The player spends two blood points and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8), as the character spends five minutes dripping vitae upon a corpse in a ritual pattern. Success means the corpse rises to become an animated warrior with the game statistics listed on page 312. Additional successes can improve the warrior's combat abilities. The warrior immediately attempts to become free of the character's control. Though mindless, it is strong-willed, and if the Cainite loses control of the warrior, it will attack the nearest thing, be it mortal or vampire. The character must roll Willpower (difficulty 7) to retain control of the *Athanatos*, at which point it obeys commands.

The warrior's game statistics are on page 312. Note that if the corpse from which the warrior springs had (in life) Brawl, Dodge, Archery or Melee ratings greater than the creature's default, the creature has those statistics instead. Additionally, extra successes on the initial Stamina + Occult roll can be applied to give the warrior points in any of those Abilities, with a maximum of 5 in any of them. The warrior is utterly incompetent at all but the simplest non-combat activities. It can open a door, but pouring a goblet of wine is beyond it.

This ability lasts a full night, at which time the undead warrior must be reanimated with the expenditure of more blood and another Stamina + Occult roll. Additionally, the character must keep a tight lid on the monster's murderous impulses. If the undead warrior moves more than 100 yards away from the character, it acts on its own, trying to kill nearly anything it encounters. The Cappadocian can attempt to impose his will on the thing again with a new Willpower roll, but he must get within a few yards of the murderous thing to do so. If the creature does enter combat, the character must make another Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to retain control when the combat ends and no further enemies are in the vicinity.



••••• Muster the Corpse Army

This power is similar to Call the *Athanatos*, except that it creates a number of warriors to serve the character. Mustering a corpse army is an even greater risk to the user than Call the *Athanatos* is. While a loss of will for a Cappadocian using Call the *Athanatos* means that she might have to face down one of her own creations, loss of will for a Cappadocian facing a corpse army means that she'll surely have to fight half a dozen of the same creatures.

System: The player spends three blood points and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8), as the character spends 10 minutes ritually sprinkling vitae upon as many corpses as she wishes to animate. Each success animates two undead warriors with game statistics as per Call the *Athanatos*. Additional successes cannot be used to improve the abilities of a horde's members, but the corpses of soldiers and knights are more potent than those of peasants or highborn ladies. Failure and botches have the same effects as in Call the *Athanatos*.

As with that power, the Cappadocian must maintain rigid control over the murderous things she has summoned, a task far more difficult with an army than a single warrior. The Cappadocian must impose and maintain control exactly as described under Call the *Athanatos*, save that the difficulty of the Willpower roll is 9. As with single warriors, the army lasts for a full night.

This power can be used more safely to create a group of corpse servants. The difficulty remains the same, but successes can be used to create corpse servants who do not require Willpower rolls to control.

Mortis Rituals

Mortis rituals are rarer and more closely guarded within the clan than Thaumaturgy rituals are among the Tremere. Many Cappadocians know only one or two. Characters with Mortis start play with a single level-one ritual. Learning others takes time and access to a source of instruction.

Unless otherwise noted, Mortis rituals require the player to roll Intelligence + Occult against a difficulty equal to (4 + the ritual's level). They take, on average, five minutes per level to perform. Some take significantly longer, as indicated in the descriptions.

Final Sight

Level-One Ritual

This rite allows a Graverobber to look into a corpse's eyes — assuming that they are still intact — and see the last static image that that person saw while he was alive. The rite entails extracting that last vision from the eyes themselves, a process that consumes the organs, leaving the sockets empty and pitted. The ritualist must have access to at least one eye (so skeletons or corpses from which the soft tissue has been consumed by animals are not usable). Just what she does to the orbs varies from version to version. In some instances, the Graverobber east the eyes themselves; in others, she drips a few drops of vitae onto them and they rot away. In any case, the ritual cannot be used on the same eye twice, so it is useful at most twice on the same corpse.

System: The player rolls as normal while the Graverobber spends five minutes enacting the ritual. With even a single success, the character sees the last image the deceased did before her death. The ritual gives neither particular insight into the late target's state of mind, nor analysis of the image presented. Although most people close their eyes under great stress, the final image is never darkness — it is the last thing that the victim saw before closing his eyes. Additional successes can convey greater details at the Storyteller's discretion.

Revivify the Cold Vitae

Level-One Ritual

Cappadocian scholars spend much of their time away from the living and among the dead. This practice can make hunting for living blood problematic, and the blood of corpses loses its potency so quickly as to be useless after a few hours. (For more on this, see p. 164.) With this ritual, the vampire may refresh the vitae locked in a fleshy corpse to allow her to feed without hunting for living prey. The cold blood created thus is considered reprehensible by some vampires and a delicacy by others.

System: The vampire must have access to a whole (or mostly whole) human corpse that still has a substantial amount of flesh on it, no matter how putrid. The ritual takes half an hour to perform, and it revivifies a number of blood points equal to the player's successes on the Intelligence + Occult roll. This cold blood works just like normal mortal vitae, save that consuming it causes very little pleasure in the vampire. Cold blood remains fresh for only a scene.

The rite transforms the putrid fluids of the corpse and thus makes that body useless for further Mortis arts (including the Cadaverous Animation path). Therefore, many Cappadocian scholars keep larders of rotting lesser corpses for their nourishment and save prized bodies for experimentation.

Eyes of the Grave

Level-Two Ritual

The fate of every being is already written, so the wise men say, so every living thing carries with it a premonition of its death. This ritual allows the Graverobber to awaken in a target the images of the end to come, forcing the victim to experience premonitions of his own demise.

The ritual involves a series of incantations taking two full hours and requires that the Graverobber have a small item that is sympathetically related to the target. An image of the victim, a small item in his possession or a lock of his hair are traditional choices. The object is consumed by the ritual, usually burned in a small censer. Assuming that the ritualist has access to a proper item, there is no maximum range to the ritual's effect. Fate knows no bounds.

Over the next week, the target experiences a series of terrifying insights into and visions of his death. These images are not always fully consistent and some theorize that the images have more to do with the victim's fears than his actual fate. Either way, the result is the same: intermittent terror and lasting distraction.

System: The player rolls as normal. For every success, the target experiences one terrifying vision per day (or night) for the next week. A botch causes the power to affect the caster herself. Every time the victim experiences a vision, his player must roll Courage (difficulty 7) or the character is incapacitated for three turns. A botch on such a roll means incapacitation for a full scene and a +1 difficulty penalty on all actions for the rest of the week.

Walk Through the Shroud

Level-Five Ritual

A development of the Giovanni necromancers recently Embraced into the clan, this rite allows a Cappadocian to force his own soul to follow the course of one that actually dies, leaving his body behind and crossing into the lands of the dead, but with the ability to return to the physical plane. This return is accomplished through a focus on the spiritual echoes left in the undead corpse (those same echoes utilized in the Cadaverous Animation path).

Still tied to the body, the Cainite's soul is not able to travel further than the dark limbo of lost souls. Heaven and Hell (and the soul's ultimate rewards) are not accessible to the practitioner of Mortis. In these dank shadow-lands, the Cappadocian may encounter ghosts and other lost souls, and he may well be able to extract some information or arcane services from them.

This rite is not to be undertaken lightly. The ghosts in limbo are rarely happy to see vampires, and a Cainite may find that the ghosts of some of his victims are bent on vengeance.

System: The vampire must undertake the rite — which involves chanting incantations while surrounded by grave dust — from dusk until midnight, at which point it takes effect. A single success on the Intelligence + Occult roll allows the vampire's soul to separate from his body in a manner similar to Anima Walk (Auspex 5, see p. 174). The soul is immediately swept through the shroud between life and death, however, and arrives in the nightmarish limbo of lost souls. The Storyteller is free to describe this dark realm as she sees fit. Some Cainites have reported it to be an endless land of choking mist, others a dark reflection of the living world, and so on. The number of ghosts in the area depends on how likely the Storyteller feels the place is to be haunted. Graveyards, battlefields and hospices are always replete with the lost.

The Cappadocian's soul can remain in this underworld for one hour per success on the rite's roll (or until he decides to return). His body remains vulnerable as with a vampire using Anima Walk. The Cappadocian cannot bring anything back across the shroud, save his own memories.

Obfuscate

Obfuscate allows its user to hide or otherwise conceal his identity. Often one can do so in plain sight, by fooling the minds of those around him into believing that he is not present. Apprentices in this art must remain motion-

less and cloaked in shadow to hide; masters can conceal a small crowd in the middle of a busy street. Those affected by this Discipline do technically still see the user, but they do not notice that they see him, and they cannot find him. Accordingly, dumb animals are only misdirected by Obfuscate. The power's user makes them uneasy even if he is entirely hidden from them.

Obfuscate is one of the oldest Disciplines known to Cainites. It is said that this ability allowed members of the third generation to hide from their sires until the time was right to strike at them. Various legends suggest that either Caine himself or Lilith taught the Discipline to the Nosferatu Antediluvian, to better hide his visage, but the Children of Haqim insist that it was their sire who refined his own hunting and stalking talents to this supernatural level.

Those vampires who use Auspex are sometimes unaffected by Obfuscate. Although the power tries to reach through such a character's senses and fool her mind, the rarefied senses of the Auspex-user prod the target into realizing that the Obfuscate-user is not as he seems. Generally speaking, a character with more dots in Auspex than the user has in Obfuscate recognizes that there is something wrong. A Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) pierces any illusion the character has summoned up. A Cainite with fewer dots in Auspex, however, is no risk to the obfuscated vampire. In the event that another character has as many dots in Auspex as the vampire has in Obfuscate, the players make a resisted test, both using a difficulty of 7. The obfuscated vampire's player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge, and the Auspex-user's player rolls Perception + Subterfuge.

Obfuscate is particularly valuable to those who wish to go about their daily business without being noticed. While spies and thieves are sure to get a lot of use out of it, a vampiric monk who must enter and leave his monastery unnoticed or a courtier who wishes to listen in secret to conversations at court is sure to revel in the power this Discipline gives. Obfuscate is part of Caine's curse on the third generation, for it is said that Caine wanted to blot his grandchilder from the Earth. Obfuscate does the next best thing, from that perspective. Those who use Obfuscate regularly find themselves divorced from society around them, only observing and never participating in ordinary social interactions.

• Cloak of Shadows

With the aid of shadows and concealment, the Cainite using Cloak of Shadows can hide his presence from all those nearby. He deftly eases himself out of the way of mundane senses, and thus remains unnoticed until he moves, makes a sound or does something else to call attention to himself. He must remain under cover during this time. However, should someone suspect his presence in a particular place, sustained investigation and examination reveals him.

System: No roll is required as long as the character acts as described. An observer with an Auspex rating greater than the vampire's Obfuscate rating is not fooled by Cloak of Shadows.

●● Unseen Presence

Unseen Presence allows the Cainite to move around and remain under a degree of concealment. Mortals and Cainites who are restricted to ordinary senses simply ignore the character's presence, unconsciously averting their gaze and paying more attention to the surrounding landscape than the character. Such victims even skirt around the character without realizing that they are doing so. They might notice that they had done so only after going back and looking at their own tracks.

The character must be careful not to call attention to himself while using this power. A clumsy action or a loud noise alerts those nearby to the Cainite's presence, and any benefit provided by Unseen Presence is at least momentarily lost.

System: As with Cloak of Shadows, no roll is immediately necessary to activate this power as long as the character starts off in a concealed place. Using the power while moving stealthily and subtly requires no roll either, but circumstances may arise that require particular stealth. In such a case, the player rolls Wits + Stealth against a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller (typically 7). Success allows the character to remain concealed. Examples of such circumstances include walking through a noisy area (a squeaky wooden floor or leaf-covered forest floor) or speaking quietly to someone nearby without being noticed by others.

Taking drastic or showy action immediately draws the attention of bystanders, who snap out of the minor trance this power puts them in. Their players make a Wits + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) to recall the character's actions while the trance lasted.

●●● Mask of a Thousand Faces

While using this ability, the Cainite remains fully visible but changes his appearance to fit a particular image. The character may choose to invent an image of his own devising or alter himself to look like a particular individual. The vampire's appearance does not really change — this isn't the Tzimisce Discipline of Vicissitude — but rather, a temporary vision is superimposed over the character's face and body.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 7). See the following chart for the level of change the character can then make to her appearance. Bonuses to Appearance are listed, but these cannot raise the Attribute above the character's generation maximum (see p. 164). If the player rolls enough successes, the character can reduce her Appearance to 0 (taking on the aspect of a leper, for example).

The number of successes needed to masquerade as someone else depends on the differences between the vampire and the person she is emulating. Doing so also has its own set of risks, however. Regardless of the vampire's new appearance and voice, she is likely to confuse that person's acquaintances or give away her ruse if she cannot adequately pretend to be the other person. Plenty of Subterfuge and Performance rolls are sure to be necessary in this case.

Successes	Limit
Botch	A hideous transformation into a Nosferatu-like monster or worse.
Failure	No change.
1 success	Same height and weight, minor alterations to your image; maximum of +1 or -2 Appearance.
2 successes	Substantially different looks; acquaintances certainly would not recognize the character; maximum of +2 or -3 Appearance.
3 successes	Look like pretty much anything that's still roughly the character's size; maximum of +3 or -4 Appearance.
4 successes	Can change entirely, concealing voice, mannerisms and so on; maximum +4 or -5 Appearance.
5 successes	Can appear to be a different gender, vastly different height/weight and so on: Drastic changes are possible; maximum +5 or -6 Appearance.

●●●● Vanish from the Mind's Eye

A character with this ability can disappear from plain sight, even while he is in clear view of dozens of witnesses. Such a disappearance — if done skillfully — causes chaos, confusion and general mayhem in its wake, a state that is entirely conducive to the character's making a swift getaway.

Once he is out of sight, the character can use Unseen Presence (or other Obfuscate powers) to remain hidden or move around while concealed. He may even choose to turn around and launch a semi-surprise attack on enemies who may have been observing or surrounding him.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Stealth, and the difficulty number is equal to the highest Wits + Alertness to be found in the surrounding crowd. With three or fewer successes, the character does not disappear so much as become a ghostly and indistinct image; those who are particularly perceptive are still be able to trace her activity. With four or more successes, the character vanishes completely, and any target with a lower Willpower than the player's number of successes forgets that the character was ever present. Vanish From the Mind's Eye does not have a fixed duration. It lasts only until the vampire can get out of sight (usually one or two turns).

Those who wish to track a ghostly semi-image of a character should roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty of the obfuscated character's Dexterity + Obfuscate). If the pursuer succeeds, he can interact with the obfuscated vampire normally. If he fails, he suffers a +2 difficulty to any further interaction with her, whether socially or in combat.

The player of any character, friend or foe, who witnesses the vanishing should roll Wits + Courage (difficulty 5, or 9 if the witness is a mortal). Failure on this roll means that the

witness must spend two full turns in a daze, attempting to comprehend the violation of God's law and logic that has just taken place.

●●●●● Cloak the Gathering

This power, one of the supreme expressions of the Discipline of Obfuscate, can be used to extend other Obfuscate powers over a group of friendly individuals. Should any member of the protected gathering violate one of the rules of the individual power used to conceal the group, that individual (and that individual alone) loses the protection of Cloak the Gathering and the other powers used to hide the group.

System: You may conceal one additional character for every dot of Stealth you possess. You can grant any single Obfuscate power that you know to the entire group simultaneously by spending the appropriate blood or Willpower and rolling the necessary dice. As mentioned previously, if any individual in the group falters and violates one power's rules, that individual loses the protection of Cloak the Gathering. Only if the Cainite who initiated Cloak the Gathering falters does the entire group lose the power's concealment.

●●●●● Soul Mask

Princes and ashen priests guarding their courts and cathedrals typically post as guards at least some Cainites with Soulsight (Auspex 2). The ability to see the spiritual halos of those coming to see the potentate are hard to overestimate. Although Soulsight is not a lie detector, it does identify ghouls, vampires, diablerists and the disturbed with great ease. Masters of Obfuscate, however, can walk past such surveillance without concern. A Methuselah may appear to be a simple whelp, a mortal or even to have no halo whatsoever.

System: The vampire with Soul Mask can project a halo that is different from the one that represents her actual condition or she may project no halo whatsoever. The vampire must burn blood to change her halo, in different quantities to effect different changes. Changing the halo's color (hence masking the underlying emotion) costs a single blood point. Changing its shade (to appear mortal or as a ghoul) costs two. Changing other characteristics (to display or hide magic use or diablerie, to suppress the halo altogether) costs three. The effect lasts for an entire scene, but the false halo can be dropped (or modified again through blood expenditure) at any time. Changing haloes requires an action and a moment for concentration, but is otherwise quite secure. Only if an observer has as many dots in Auspex as the character has in Obfuscate can he pierce the mask. In such a case, the observer's player rolls Perception + Subterfuge, opposed by the masked vampire's player, who rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge. If the observing vampire has more levels in Auspex than the masked character has in Obfuscate, he sees through the mask automatically.

Characters without any real experience at Soulsight can only suppress their haloes rather than change them.

Soul Mask has no effect on other forms of deception, and it cannot be used by Assamites to mask their clan weaknesses (see p. 79).

Obtenebration

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep," says the Book of Genesis. "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." God created the heavens and the earth before anything else. But before the accursed Sun, before Eden and well before Caine, there was darkness. It is this darkness that the eldest Lasombra revere, and this ancient, unknowable darkness whose depths they plumb with the Discipline of Obtenebration. With it, the Magisters can coax filaments of the shadowy void out into the physical world. Here those filaments can take on solid form and obey the commands of those who summoned them.

The source and inhabitants of the ancient darkness are unknown. Many Lasombra claim that the darkness predates God Himself and is the home to a more powerful entity kept at bay only by the power of the Sun. In that, they see themselves reflected. Many Lasombra strive to master this ancient being and its minions. Many of those who fail to fully master the shadow find themselves haunted by phantoms in the darkness. Other Lasombra suggest that the darkness comes from a corner of Hell, cut off from the shining firmament of Heaven or from some pre-Christian pagan underworld. The most common name given to the darkness is Ahriman, the dark half of Zoroastrian dualism — a faith that has had a long association with the Lasombra, most recently as one of the spiritual underpinnings of the Cainite Heresy.

Obtenebration frightens ordinary mortal creatures and animals. Most Cainite scholars believe that this is because Obtenebration is part of God's curse on Caine. By gaining power through calling forth the forces of Hell, or whatever the outer darkness represents, the character pulls himself further from the gaze of God and closer to eternal damnation. Characters with a mystical bent, philosophers and those who consider themselves to be damned souls favor Obtenebration.

● Shadow Play

This relatively simple ability gives the Lasombra control over local ambient shadows. It does little to allow her to conjure primordial shadow from the Abyss, as later Obtenebration powers do, but the power still provides plenty of social advantage. The Lasombra can use Shadow Play to manipulate a social circumstance to her advantage, placing shadows in advantageous locations throughout a room, or giving herself a more stern and imposing visage. Alternatively, the Lasombra can use the local shadows to hide a bit more stealthily.

System: The player spends one blood point as the character exerts her will. For the remainder of the scene, the player can add one die to Intimidation and Stealth

dice pools as the vampire moves shadows around to suit her needs. The vampire can also accomplish minor feats of shadowplay, such as moving a person's shadow here and there, or leaving a looming shadow over another Cainite's hiding place in order to fool him into thinking he's about to be discovered. She can also manipulate ambient shadow in a way to help her see through it, reducing a darkness-related penalty by her Obtenebration rating (to a minimum of zero, of course). No die roll is required for these abilities, but the player must still spend blood.

Mortals are often quite disturbed by use of this power, and their players must make Courage rolls (difficulty 7) when they see Shadow Play used. Failure means the mortal suffers a one-die penalty to Social dice pools for the remainder of the scene.

● ● Nocturne

The Lasombra with this ability can create a cloud of unnatural darkness that is strong enough to completely obscure light and even muffle sound. Those who spend time inside the darkness are often terrified by the experience, as all senses are equally twisted and suppressed by the power. Victims lose their sense of direction and place, and they cannot defend themselves against attack from without.

Nocturne does not extinguish fire within its radius, but it does suppress the fire's light such that it cannot be seen even from an inch away. The Lasombra must concentrate on Nocturne throughout its manifestation, or it fades away almost at once. She can move the cloud as she concentrates, but doing so is not easy.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). If he succeeds, the vampire creates a cloud of inky darkness some 10 feet in diameter (though its shape is unstable, and it undulates and writhes over time). Additional successes can double the cloud's radius, at the vampire's discretion. He can summon up the cloud up to 50 yards away and does not have to have line of sight to the cloud in order to do so (though creating a cloud he cannot see requires a blood point to be spent and brings the power's difficulty to 9).

All Perception dice pools drop by five within the cloud, unless the victim has a supernatural way to see through darkness — such as Witness of Darkness (Protean 1) or Heightened Senses (Auspex 1) — in which case dice pools drop by only two. Regardless of sensory abilities, all non-sensory actions are at +2 difficulty, and the cold dark leaches away at the life essence of those within it, reducing all Stamina-based dice pools by two.

Mortals and animals wrapped in Nocturne do not find the experience pleasant in the least. Their players must make Courage (or Willpower, for animals) rolls much as with Shadow Play, with similar consequences for failure.

● ● ● Arms of Ahriman

As the Lasombra masters his control over the inky, primordial blackness, he turns the darkness into a weapon. He can draw tentacles from shadowed reaches and use them to attack enemies nearby. In the traditional lore of

the clan, the practitioner is literally calling out to the dark half to make itself manifest and grasp at its victims.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Melee (difficulty 7). Every success creates one tentacle, six feet long with Strength and Dexterity equal to the character's Obtenebration trait. The player may spend additional blood points to increase the Strength or Dexterity of a single tentacle by one per blood point, or increase its length by six feet per blood point. Each tentacle has four health levels and does not face wound penalties. It soaks damage using the character's Stamina + Fortitude total, and it has even worse vulnerabilities to fire and sunlight than a Cainite would have. It cannot soak aggravated damage of any kind.

The tentacles can undertake mundane tasks such as lifting objects, and they can make simple bludgeoning attacks. They use Dexterity to attack and do Strength bashing damage. Alternatively, they may attempt to grapple a foe, again using Dexterity to hit and constricting for Strength + 1 levels of bashing damage if they succeed. The tentacles do not all have to come from the same source as long as all sources are within about 20 yards of the vampire. Controlling them does not require exclusive concentration. The Magister can take ordinary actions while controlling the Arms of Ahriman, at no penalty as long as her orders to the arms are straightforward. ("Attack" is fine; "Lift the key from the guard's belt" is not.) More complex actions require the vampire's attention.

● ● ● ● Nightshades

The Lasombra may create illusions crafted from shadow, perhaps summoning dark spirits or reflections of Ahriman. Although the images are only made of inky blackness, and therefore would not be realistic in the light of day, vampires rarely work in such environments anyway, so they can easily craft illusions that are quite believable under a night sky. The illusions are typically human-sized and shaped, but with sufficient will and skill, one might make a larger illusion or a whirling nightmare of shadows and chaos.

System: The player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). Each success lets the vampire create one human-sized illusion; multiple successes can be combined to make a single illusion that is much larger than human. Victims of these illusions must make Perception + Alertness rolls (difficulty 9) to deduce that they are not real.

The vampire can also use Nightshades to fill an area with a cloud of shadowy madness, a reflection of the dark half itself. The players of those in the area who don't have Obtenebration reduce their Initiative scores by three and take a two-die penalty to all dice pools. The vampire can fill an area up to 10 yards in diameter per success with Nightshades in this fashion.

● ● ● ● ● Tenebrous Avatar

The Cainite using this power can transform her body into an inhuman shadow. The form this living shadow takes depends more on the character's inner nature than on her mastery of Obtenebration. For some, the form may be



undulating and serpentine, while it might be a formless cloud for others. Still others might take an ominous and imposing monolithic shape. While assuming the Tenebrous Avatar form, the Lasombra is virtually immune to harm, and she can pass through slight cracks and very small openings by extruding her shadow essence to the necessary thickness.

The touch of the Tenebrous Avatar is disconcerting to mortals, and taking on the shape brings the sensation of being in the grasp of a cold and inhuman otherworldly being. Lasombra lore talks of this power as a step toward becoming Ahriman itself, a mixed blessing indeed. The character can also see through even the deepest blackness while in Tenebrous Avatar form.

System: The player spends three blood points while the character takes three turns to fully transform. This transformation time can be reduced by one turn for each additional blood spent, but it always takes at least one full turn. While she is a Tenebrous Avatar, the character is immune to physical damage, but she cannot physically attack others. The most she can get away with is to wrap a victim in inky blackness, which is frightening enough to most beings to require a Courage roll to avoid panic. The character can, however, summon Arms of Ahriman from her form and the surrounding shadows, but she must do so separately.

Your character is still vulnerable to fire and sunlight in this form, and she is even more vulnerable to them psychologically, as the darkness of which she is now made recoils insanely from its opposite force. Add one to the difficulty of Röttschreck rolls when exposed to fire or sunlight in Tenebrous Avatar form.

●●●●● Walk the Abyss

Masters of Obtenebration can enter a patch of darkness that is large enough to admit them and step through an otherworldly space to emerge in another shadow roughly within eyesight of the first. The abyss between shadows is a twisted and unholy place, described by some as Ahriman itself, as its resting place or as a circle of Hell. Regardless, it exists such that any two shadows within 25 yards or so are just a step apart. This also means that the Cainite can lean into one shadow, using this power, and grab someone or something that is within arm's reach of a remote shadow to pull it to her location.

System: The players should pick an exit point and check with the Storyteller to ensure that both your entry and exit shadows are large enough to admit the character (they must be at least roughly human-sized). If the Storyteller allows it, the player rolls Intelligence + Stealth (diffi-

culty 7) for the Lasombra to step through shadow successfully. If instead the vampire intends to grab something near the distant shadow, the player rolls Intelligence + Brawl (difficulty 7). One success is enough to grab the target, and two are necessary to pull it through the darkness. A failure on this roll indicates that the vampire cannot reach the target; a botch means that something either comes out of the shadow or pulls the character in.

The vampire can Walk the Abyss between shadows separated by a maximum of five yards times his Intelligence + Stealth total. The player must also make a Courage roll (as must any passengers). The difficulty is 5 for anyone with Obtenebration, and 7 otherwise. Failure indicates panicked collapse or Röttschreck upon coming through the shadow. A botch on this Courage roll by the player leads to her character panicking to such an extent as to become lost in the Abyss. The player must make another Intelligence + Stealth roll to reopen a gateway. The Storyteller is free to determine just how far the character has traveled and how long she has been in the Abyss. Disappearances of several years are not unknown.

Potence

Every Cainite has the instinctual ability to increase her strength by burning blood (see p. 163), giving herself the capacity for feats that mortals can only dream of. The Discipline of Potence compounds the benefits of vampiric strength, tapping otherworldly reserves of power to allow for truly astounding displays of might.

A vampire with high levels of Potence can easily lift a horse or cow, break forged chains or crush a mortal's bones to powder with a few blows. Dark whispers also suggest that the unholy might granted by this Discipline gives its bearer an advantage in the struggle for a vampire's soul that comes at the end of diablerie.

There is no doubt that Potence is one of the most effective combat Disciplines. The clans that favor it (the Brujah, Nosferatu and Lasombra) certainly make the most of its benefits in that arena, but great strength also provides an advantage when performing hard labor or when physically trapped. It is also useful for impressing mortals, and it is generally the first Discipline a ghoul learns. Potence is a reflection of God's curse on Cain and his ilk because it removes a Cainite's ability to be gentle. The entire world becomes fragile and easily broken in the hands of a particularly potent Cainite.

System: Potence grants one automatic success per point on all tests of Strength. This includes feats of strength and lifting tests (see p. 228) as well as damage rolls in melee and brawling combat. The player still rolls the character's full Strength dice pool for these tests, then adds her Potence rating in successes after the dice have been tallied. Potence successes do count in diablerie (see p. 258).

Presence

A character using Presence becomes supernaturally attractive and charismatic. She can draw others to her side with a smile

and sway the emotions of large crowds with just a few words. She can incite all varieties of emotion in her victims.

The Toreador, Ventrue, Brujah and Followers of Set favor Presence, and each of them have different uses for it. Many Toreador use Presence to better evoke a particular set of emotions in those who witness their artwork or performances. The Ventrue evoke a majestic air and cow their subjects easily with this ability. The Brujah often evoke the righteous spirit of their listeners, swaying them to whatever cause the Zealot espouses, be it the cause of deposed king or a new crusade. Setites prefer to use Presence in more intimate surroundings, coaxing their victims this way and that and driving the victims to give way to their baser urges. However, this Discipline is a common one in Cainite circles. Knights can use it to drive their footmen into a killing rage before battle, peasants can garb themselves in the haughty attitude of the wealthy without suspicion, and sea captains can easily cow a rowdy crew far from shore.

Unlike Dominate, Presence does not turn its victims into mindless automatons. Victims of Presence might feel differently toward the power's user, but they retain the ability to think and act on their own. This aspect of Presence can be very useful—a pawn might come up with a useful solution to a problem that the character might not have seen. It can also be problematic, though. Pawns are remarkable for their ability to surprise their beloved with expressions of affection at the worst possible time. Targets of Presence do not leap to obey spoken commands, as they do with Dominate. They need to be persuaded that a particular course of action is the best one for them. Doing so is rarely difficult, but it is not automatic by any means.

• Awe

Awe is an active use of the subtle charisma that flows from all characters with Presence (see sidebar). The vampire concentrates for a second and swells in the mind's eye of all those around her. There is no visual or physical symptom, but suddenly the vampire becomes the most fascinating thing in the vicinity. Depending on her overall mien, she may appear stunningly beautiful, simply fascinating or chillingly impressive. She is, quite literally, awesome.

Such an impressive character can sway a crowd with ease. Those of weak will bend over backward to please her, while those of stronger resolve still acknowledge her worth. Even dubious arguments and strange demands become workable since the very act of emanating from the character's dazzling lips gives them a legitimacy with which mere logic cannot compete. This effect is not absolute — no matter how awesome the vampire is, she'll never convince man or beast to leap into open flames — but with subtle application, it is very potent indeed.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Expression (difficulty 7). The number of successes determines how many people are affected, as noted on the following chart. If there are more people present than the character can influence, Awe affects those with lower Willpower scores first. The power stays in effect for the remainder of the scene or until the character chooses to drop it.

Successes	Effectiveness
1 success	One person
2 successes	Two people
3 successes	Six people
4 successes	20 people
5 successes	Everyone in the vampire's immediate vicinity (an entire auditorium, a mob)

Those affected by Awe can use Willpower points to overcome the effect, but they must continue spending Willpower every turn for as long as they remain in the same area as the vampire. As soon as an individual spends a number of Willpower points equal to the successes rolled, he shakes off the effect completely and remains unaffected for the rest of the scene.

•• Dread Gaze

While all Cainites can frighten others by physically revealing their true vampiric natures — baring claws and fangs, glaring with malevolence, hissing loudly with malice — this power focuses these elements to insanely terrifying levels. Dread Gaze engenders unbearable terror in its victims, stupefying them into madness, immobility or reckless flight. Even the most stalwart individual falls back from the vampire's horrific visage.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty of the victim's Wits + Courage). Success indicates that the victim is cowed, while failure means the target is startled but not terrified by the sight. Three or more successes mean he runs away in abject fear. Victims who have nowhere to run claw at the walls, hoping to dig a way out rather than face the vampire. Moreover, each success subtracts one from the target's action dice pools next turn.

The character may attempt Dread Gaze once per turn, though she may also perform it as an extended action, adding her successes in order to subjugate the target completely. Once the target loses enough dice that he cannot perform any action, he's so shaken and terrified that he curls up on the ground and weeps. Failure during the extended action means the attempt falters. The character loses all of her collected successes and can start over next turn, while the victim may act normally again.

A botch at any time indicates that the target is not at all impressed — perhaps even finding the vampire's antics comical — and remains immune to any further uses of Presence by the character for the rest of the story.

••• Entrancement

This power reshapes the subject's emotions, instilling a sense of willing and just devotion toward the vampire. Therefore, the victim is inclined to heed the vampire's every desire, but does not become the addled drone of a victim of Dominate. Entrancement affects the heart, not the will. This power does make the servant somewhat less predictable, however. Independent thinkers (no matter how loyal)

have a tendency to think for themselves. Vampiric lore is replete with entranced mortals doing foolish things to please their masters and ladies. It is also replete with stories of the entranced who become hateful once the effect wears off, which is one reason why such thralls are usually either kept close and bound by the blood oath or eliminated once they have served their purpose.

The vampire chooses the emotional flavor of the entrancement. Some may wish for their retainers to serve out of love, others out of the respect of vassal for lord, while others prefer the fear of slave for master.

System: Regardless of the emotional flavor, the player rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty of the target's permanent Willpower), and the number of successes determines how long the subject is entranced (as per the following chart). The Storyteller may wish to make the roll instead, since the character is never certain of the strength of her hold on the victim. The vampire may try to keep the subject under her thrall, but he can do so only after the initial effect wears off. Attempting this power while Entrancement is already in operation has no effect.

Successes	Duration
1 success	One hour
2 successes	One day
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year

•••• Summon

This impressive power enables the vampire to call to herself any person whom she has ever met. This call can go to anyone, mortal or supernatural, across any distance within the physical world. The subject of the summons comes as fast as he is able, possibly without even knowing why. He knows intuitively how to find his summoner — even if the vampire moves to a new location, the subject redirects his own course as soon as he can. After all, he's coming to the vampire herself, not to some predetermined site.

Although this power allows the vampire to call someone across a staggering distance, it is most useful when one uses it locally. Summoning a knight to Britain from Outremer may be an impressive feat, but the knight must still obtain passage and undertake a journey of several months. This is made all the more complicated by the fact that the summoning dissipates at dawn. Unless the subject is trained to continue toward the vampire after the first call (which most ghouls and thralls are), the Cainite must summon each night until the target arrives. The subject also does not neglect his own well being. While he won't shirk physical violence to reach the vampire's side, he won't subject himself to suicidal situations.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Subterfuge. The base difficulty is 5, but the difficulty increases to 7 if the subject is virtually a stranger. If the character used Presence successfully on the target in the past, this diffi-

culty drops to 4. If the attempt was unsuccessful, however, the difficulty is 8.

The number of successes indicates the subject's speed and attitude in responding:

Successes	Result
1 success	Subject approaches slowly and hesitantly.
2 successes	Subject approaches reluctantly and is easily thwarted by obstacles.
3 successes	Subject approaches with reasonable speed.
4 successes	Subject comes with haste, overcoming any obstacles in his way.
5 successes	Subject rushes to the vampire, doing anything to get to her.

●●●●● Majesty

With a thought, the vampire who has mastered the Discipline of Presence can make one, overwhelming fact clear: She was made to rule. A vampire using Majesty stands out even in a room full of vampiric princes and mortal kings. Centuries of power and lineage manifest in her mien. The beautiful becomes a new Dido, a seductive queen of a dark kingdom; the homely becomes a terrifying monster-king; the stoic becomes the harsh despot of a perfectly cold republic.

Those around a Cainite using Majesty can barely conceive of questioning her rule or demands. To do just that is a feat of great will. To actually raise arms against her is a feat of legend — or folly itself. Even those who manage somehow to suppress the urge to fall into lockstep are faced with the throngs of loyal subjects who are anxious to prove their worth by eliminating one who would dare show defiance.

Unlike most other uses of Presence, Majesty is a weapon best used sparingly. The feeling of abject submission it creates is likely to remain a sticking point with those who have experienced it. While toadies simply cower forever more and do their best to avoid any further humiliation, more willful subjects (including most Cainites) feel their resentment grow. And even the lowliest of the Damned, have a long time to plot vengeance.

System: No roll is required on the part of the vampire's player, but she must spend a Willpower point. A subject must make a Courage roll (difficulty of the character's Charisma + Intimidation) if he wishes to be rude or simply contrary to the vampire. Success allows the individual to act normally for the moment, although he feels the weight of the vampire's displeasure crushing down on him. A subject who fails the roll aborts his intended action and even goes to absurd lengths to humble himself before the vampire, no matter who else is watching. The effects of Majesty last for one scene.

●●●●●●● Passion

True masters of the Discipline of Presence can toy with the emotions of an entire crowd with but a glance. Passion allows a vampire to create violent, overwhelming sensations in another, subsuming her victim's rational mind under waves of emotion. The most stoic monk can become a sex-starved beast or a raging killer. The most hateful barbarian can be filled with true love. With something as simple as a few whispered words or a glance, the vampire changes the balance of humors in her target, creating the desired effect. The victim might not be aware of the arcane nature of his sudden emotional change, but he will likely realize that the vampire is the source — if only because his feelings seem focused on her.

System: The vampire can use Passion to create any powerful emotion, as long as it involves a loss of control: Fear, lust, envy, love, hatred and anger are all viable candidates. When the vampire uses the power, the player must decide whether she is making herself the subject of the emotion or not. If so, it is the vampire herself whom the victim will love, hate, fear or desire. If not, the emotion is unfocused and much less controlled: Rage, paranoia or lust simply overwhelms the victim. The vampire cannot make a third party the subject of Passion.

To use the power, the vampire must initiate some form of communication with the subject, be it a glance, a subtle touch or a charming whisper. The player then rolls Manipulation + Expression (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower). Success indicates that the victim is overcome by the desired

UNCONSCIOUS PRESENCE

Characters with a few dots of Presence tend to be imposing and noticeable even when they are not actively using the power. Often this effect is merely a function of the character's other Social traits — characters with a lot of Presence are often social monsters with high scores in Charisma, Appearance and Manipulation — but even without those strengths, such characters are noteworthy nearly all the time. Bystanders tend to remember them, and people at social gatherings unconsciously shift their attitudes, paying slightly more attention to the character with a high Presence rating. Such bystanders neither attribute any supernatural attraction to the character nor feel as though their minds are being controlled. They simply find the character more interesting than they might if he didn't have high levels of Presence.

This isn't always a good thing, nor is it always a bad thing. Characters with Presence seem to be more important than they really are, which earns such characters unusually strong reactions — both positive and negative — from those around. Characters can suppress this side effect of Presence for a scene by spending a point of Willpower.

emotion for a scene. A botch renders the target immune to the vampire's Presence powers for the rest of the night and may have other effects at the Storyteller's discretion, such as making the target hate the vampire for the indefinite future.

The specific effects of Passion depend on the emotion created, but they are mostly up to the Storyteller and player to portray through roleplaying. Some of the most common uses function as follows:

Successes	Targets Affected
One	Two people
Two	Four people
Three	Eight people
Four	20 people
Five (or more)	Everyone in the vampire's immediate vicinity.

- **Love:** The subject falls madly in love with the vampire. He reacts to her as if he were under the blood oath (see p. 260) except that he feels affection and romantic love rather than feudal loyalties. Each success on the initial Passion roll also reduces all of the victim's dice pool by one die for Social rolls made against the vampire.

- **Fear:** The subject becomes terrified of the vampire or overcome by a generalized panic. The victim is immediately subject to Röttschreck (difficulty 5 to resist, see p. 265) and each success on the Passion roll adds to that difficulty. Mortals do not enter Röttschreck, but their players must roll Courage against a similar difficulty.

- **Greed:** The subject becomes completely focussed on acquiring valuables, status and wealth — as fast as possible. The victim's player must make a Self-Control or Instinct roll (difficulty 5 + successes on Passion roll) to resist taking any action that will lead to immediate material gratification such as stealing an available jewel or agreeing to murder a baron.

- **Rage:** The subject's heart fills with rage, and she lashes out at anything nearby. Vampire victims immediately become subject to frenzy (with similar difficulties for fear). Players of mortal victims must roll Self-Control.

The vampire can also choose to target Passion at a single subject or at a crowd. If she is targeting a crowd, the vampire must be able to communicate clearly to everyone within it, and the number of people who are affected depends on how many successes the player gets on her Manipulation + Expression roll, which has a flat difficulty of 7 for a crowd. The vampire cannot choose specific people in the crowd to affect. The emotions waft over the crowd and grip people starting from those closest to her.

Protean

While other Cainites huddled in caves and villages with mortal populations, the Gangrel stomped about for thousands of years conquering the world as they knew it. They adopted mortal tribes and migrated with the herd

and harvest, following their human prey from grassland to grassland. Gangrel nomads benefited from their own Discipline of Protean, a secret of the Blood that meant that they did not have to keep within half-a-night's run from the shelter of a hut or cave. For millennia, the Gangrel kept this Discipline secret and private so that members of no other clan could learn it. Gangrel legends say that the other clans believed them to be gods of the steppe, immune to the sun's scorching rays.

In these nights, the secret of Protean is no longer entirely the property of the Gangrel. Other clans have unearthed the Discipline's secrets and passed them from sire to child, but no bloodline has the flair for it that the Gangrel do. Protean allows a Cainite to change his body's form to aid in his nightly hunting, and in escaping his enemies (both physical and spiritual). The ability is a reflection of God's curse on vampires because it peels away the layer of protection and civility provided by a vampire's human shape. It displays the Beast in the vampire using it and keeps him from denying it or hiding from it.

As a character's shape changes, the use of certain Disciplines may become impossible. A Cainite in mist form cannot use Dominate, as it depends on eye contact, for instance. While general guidelines are provided, the final decisions in these matters rest with the Storyteller.

• Witness of Darkness

The vampire with this ability can see normally in ordinary darkness — even a cloudy, moonless night is as bright as overcast day to the character. However, the Discipline does cause the character's eyes to glow a visible red, which unnerves most mortals who see it.

System: Activating the Discipline is a free action, but it takes a full turn to take effect. While Witness of Darkness is in effect, the character suffers no dice pool penalties based on ordinary darkness. It is impossible to disguise one's inhuman nature while using this ability. However, while the Discipline is active, the player adds one die to Intimidation dice pools against mortals who are not acquainted with the supernatural.

•• Talons of the Beast

A Cainite with Talons of the Beast can extrude wicked claws a few inches long from each fingertip. Despite the power's name, the claws are far more dangerous than those of a mere wolf or bear. They can tear through chain armor and still dig deep into flesh. Wounds inflicted upon mortals by the Talons of the Beast never quite heal; Cainites find that vitae alone is insufficient to heal them. Some vampires exhibit other minor changes when activating this power. Eyes might turn a chalky white, blood might seep from the palms, or the character might be unable to keep his fangs retracted.

System: Activating the Discipline is a free action, but it takes a full turn to take effect, and the player must spend one blood point. Wounds inflicted by the Talons of the Beast do Strength + 1 dice of aggravated damage.

••• Interred in the Earth

Many Gangrel claim to be descended from an ancient warrior-goddess called Ennoia, and some even purport to be pagan subterranean gods themselves. This ability is one of the reasons they can do such a thing. The vampire using it takes advantage of the Cainite affinity for the grave by sliding his body into the earth itself, as though stepping into a tomb for the day.

The Gangrel cannot move around once he is entombed in the earth; in fact, she cannot even be dug up. She is immaterial and merged with the soil around her. An attempt to dig her up will eventually fail, as the roughly man-sized blob of earth the vampire inhabits cannot be moved or pierced without powerful magic. However, the ground above her resting place is disturbed and overturned, as though a mortal were considering planting a garden there, so those who are knowledgeable in such things can uncover the place of entombment.

The vampire must have direct contact with the ground itself in order to use this power. A wooden or stone floor blocks her melding into the dirt. She also cannot use this power while standing on a large piece of rock. She can inter herself in earth, not stone. The power provides perfect protection against the sun's rays and the heat of ordinary fire above. The character can be considered to be six feet under the earth for such purposes. The Animal may choose to remain conscious while interred, though when the sun rises this becomes more difficult, as always.

The very existence of this power sets paranoid Cainites to thinking. If powerful vampires remain in torpor for centuries, and many of the eldest Cainites are assumed to be able to inter themselves, then there could be hundreds of elders buried in the earth, and they could emerge from torpor nearly anywhere at any time. Surely the emergence of a multitude of such creatures would be a harbinger of Gehenna. The ancient masters of the Roman nights are said to have known a ritual to lock such slumbering ancients in their earthly prisons. This secret apparently involved salting the earth with a special mixture of alchemical powders. It was used to greatest effect after the destruction of Carthage, when Brujah and other elders were locked under the soil of North Africa.

System: The player spends one blood point, and the character concentrates for a full turn, taking no other action. Once activated, the character is essentially immune to all attacks. The character can use *Auspex* and other purely mental abilities while interred, but he may not activate any Discipline with a physical effect.

•••• Form of the Beast

A vampire with this ability can turn himself into a wolf or bat through the magic in his blood. Rumor has it that some Gangrel can transform themselves into quite different wild forms, but most Cainites are limited to these two forms. While wearing a different shape, the character retains his own mind and will, but his physical

characteristics change, and he cannot invoke all of his Disciplines. His senses increase in acuity when he is a wolf, however, and he can fly around at 25 miles per hour when he is a bat.

System: The player spends one blood point for the character to transform over three turns (during which he can take no other actions). At the Storyteller's discretion, the player may spend three blood points (instead of just one) to have the character transform in a single turn. The vampire's Physical Attributes, Manipulation, Appearance and Perception change to match those of either a wolf or a bat. The character also gains any attacks or special abilities (such as flight). The character activate only those Disciplines whose manifestations do not depend on him having human features. (Most *Thaumaturgy* and *Mortis* powers are out, for instance.) Transforming back into the vampire's natural form costs nothing, but it takes three turns. Traits for the animals appear in the appendix.

••••• Body of Spirit

Most vampires who can use this power or have seen it in use believe that the character who invokes it, turning himself into mist, is abandoning his humanoid form for one composed entirely of spiritstuff. This impression is consistent whether the Cainite is Christian or pagan. The mist body the character wears is seen as the truest expression of his innermost nature. However, this mist is physical rather than some kind of ghostly spirit form. The character's perceptions expand throughout the mist, and every gust of wind sends ripples through her being. Her vision is focused in the center of the mist (that is where her eyes seem to be, to her), but with brief concentration, she can see or hear from any part of her mist form.

The character becomes a small cloud of mist, perhaps four feet in diameter. She can move about at the equivalent of her walking pace. She can fit anywhere that a misty cloud might go, and she can pass through most cloth, up a chimney or through a crack under a door. As a cloud of mist, the character is less vulnerable to the depredations of the sun, though it can still burn her. Even the strongest winds cannot disperse her form. They can and do push her around, however, if she cannot find a barrier behind which to hide.

System: The player spends one blood point, and the character takes three turns to transform his body into mist. As with *Form of the Beast*, the player may spend three blood points to have the vampire transform in a single turn. To resist the buffeting effects of strong wind, the player rolls *Potence* (not the character's natural *Strength*), with a difficulty ranging from 6 (mild breeze) to 10 (gale-force winds). Each turn, she may have to roll again to have the character move against the direction in which the wind pushes her. On a calm night, the mist may move about at the character's regular walking or jogging speed.

Sunlight and fire do burn the vampire in mist form, but they cause one less level of damage and it's much easier to find shelter in mist form. The character's percep-



tions are normal except as described, and sufficiently stimulating experiences can lead her into frenzy and Röttschreck. The character is immune to normal physical attacks (except for fire and sunlight), and she cannot affect anything physical in the world about her while she is in mist form. She can use Disciplines that do not require a physical component, however.

●●●●● Blissful Slumber

Elder Gangrel with great blood potency can sleep in mist form, rather than entombed in the earth. This form provides advantages, in that the character simply cannot be disturbed by physical attacks while sleeping, save by strong winds. However, while in this form, she cannot snap herself into consciousness until sundown.

System: The player spends five blood points, and the vampire takes three turns to transform into the advanced mist form of Blissful Slumber. (Extra blood cannot be spent to speed up this process.) While wearing this form, nothing physical can harm him. He is immune to the ravages of the sun and fire, as well as ordinary weapons or the teeth and claws of other vampires. Wind still moves him around, and it may awaken him at the Storyteller's discretion. When he awakens, after the next sundown, he immediately transforms into his normal form unless he spends an additional blood point (above the standard point to wake). In the latter case, he transforms into the lesser mist of the Body of Spirit. He cannot remain conscious in the nigh-invincible mist form of Blissful Slumber.

Quietus

Quietus is the province of the *Banu Haqim*, the vampires whom European Cainites call Assamites or Saracens, and they guard its secrets jealously. Within the clan, it is the warrior caste that is most closely associated with Quietus, and its current applications largely revolve around the use of blood poisoning to kill. The vizier and sorcerer castes have equal claim to the Discipline in the clan's legendry, however, and they make use of it in subtly different ways to aid in their tasks of mystic exploration and subtle governance.

The scholars of Alamut recount that Haqim himself developed Quietus after a long period of self-exploration. By examining his own blood, he unlatched the secrets of affecting others' vitae. He used these secrets to impose Caine's law on the Second City and to punish those who contravened it. When the revolt of the third generation began and Haqim's siblings expelled him from their usurper kingdom, his mastery of the Blood allowed him to escape and found a tripartite clan of his own. Ever since then, his children have seen themselves as separate from Caine's other get, purer and stronger judges of the righteous use of blood. Quietus is the premier expression of that belief.

Ironically, the very strength of the blood-poisoning arts can also be a vulnerability. The details are secrets of the elders, but it seems that — just as a master Charlatan must

momentarily fool himself in order to deceive others with Chimerstry and madness is a prerequisite for the use of Dementation — the use of Quietus creates a subtle taint in the blood of those who use it. This taint manifests itself as the caste weaknesses of the various lines of *Banu Haqim* and in an overall susceptibility to blood curses on the clan. Assamite individuals are no more vulnerable, the sorcerers say, but blood curses tend to infect clanmates at a prodigious rate. The most glaring example of this, of course, is the curse set upon the Assamite warrior caste by the dark bloodline known as the Baali (see page 309 for more).

• Silence of Fiery Blood

Warriors and lovers both know the sensory effects of fiery blood. In the midst of battle or passion, all extraneous sounds fall away and one is only focused on the enemy or the partner. For Assamites, this state is second nature. Warriors use it in battle, viziers and sorcerers in study. With the blood-power of Quietus, however, they can make it manifest in the very world around them. All things around them fade into silence — for the Assamite and everyone else. Although sounds from beyond the immediate area can and do filter through, nothing in the immediate vicinity can emit even a peep. Be it a victim's screams, a loud crash, a lover's moan. It all fades into nothingness. In most cases, this nimbus moves with the vampire, but it is possible to infuse a specific location with the Silence of Fiery Blood.

System: No roll is necessary, but the power costs one blood point and one standard action to activate in its common version. In this case, the power creates a zone of utter and absolute silence around the character. This zone has a radius of 20 feet in large spaces or it simply fills the room, hallway or enclosure the character is in (unless it is larger than 40 by 40 feet or so). No sound occurs inside this zone, though sounds originating outside the area of effect may be heard by anyone in it. The zone remains in effect, following the vampire wherever she goes, for an hour or until she wills it to stop.

The vizier caste is especially fond of a second application that is sometimes called the Curse of Silence. In it, the player spends two blood points and the character spends five turns in concentration in a room or enclosure. Thereafter, a silence as described previously fills the room and remains in effect until the vampire wills it to end. The vampire may leave the room, and the silence remains in it, lasting through day and night. A single vampire can create no more than one zone of silence, however, so if she ever wishes to use the basic application (or curse another room), the zone in the first room fades automatically.

••• Scorpion's Touch

By changing the properties of her blood, the vampire may create powerful venom that strips her prey of his resilience. This power has acquired a terrible reputation among the Christian vampires who have faced Assamite warriors (and their blood-coated blades) in Iberia and the

Levant. The poison can also be delivered by a deadly spit or by coating a seemingly innocuous object (a favorite tactic of vizier assassins).

System: To convert a bit of the character's blood to poison, the player spends the number of blood points she wishes to convert (up to a maximum of her Stamina) and rolls Willpower (difficulty 6). If this roll is successful, the poison is ready. It remains potent until the next dawn or until it is used. When the poison contacts a victim's skin, that character's player rolls Stamina (+ Fortitude, if any) and the character immediately loses a number of levels of Stamina equal to the number of blood points of poison minus successes on the Stamina roll. This loss lasts for a duration based on the successes on the original Willpower roll:

Successes	Duration
1 success	One turn
2 successes	One hour
3 successes	One day
4 successes	One month
5 successes	Permanently (but the player may buy Stamina back up with experience)

If a mortal's Stamina falls to 0 through use of Scorpion's Touch, she becomes terminally ill and loses immunity to diseases, her body succumbing to sickness within the year unless she somehow manages to increase her Stamina again. If a Cainite's Stamina falls to 0, the vampire enters torpor and remains that way until one of her Stamina points returns. If a Cainite is *permanently* reduced to 0 Stamina, she may recover from torpor only through mystical means. Assamites are immune to their own poison, but not the blood-venom of other Assamites.

Afflicting a target with the poison requires getting it on his skin. This can be done through various surreptitious means (such as smearing an object or pooling it in the mouth for a "kiss of death") or in combat. In combat, it may be smeared on hands or on a blade, or spat directly at the target. Smearing it on hands or a weapon requires an action to prepare and then a successful Brawl or Melee roll (the poison cannot be coated in thrown or missile weapons, which shed it in flight). Spitting the poison requires the player to make a Stamina + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). No more than two blood points' worth of poison may be expectorated, and a Cainite may spit a distance of 10 feet for each point of Strength or Potence the character possesses.

••• Dagon's Call

With but a touch, the skilled Quietus user can turn her victim's own blood against him. By concentrating, the vampire bursts her target's blood vessels and fills his lungs with vitae that proceeds to strangle him from within. The blood actually constricts the target's body from the inside as it floods through his system, so it works even on unbreathing Cainites. Until the target collapses in agony or death throes, this power has no visible effect, and many Assamite viziers prefer it because it leaves no trace of their presence.

System: The vampire must touch her target prior to using Dagon's Call. Within an hour thereafter, she may issue the call, though she need not be in the presence or even in the line of sight of her target.

Invoking the power costs one Willpower point. The player then makes a resisted Stamina roll against the target's Stamina; the difficulty of each roll is equal to the opponent's Willpower. The number of successes the attacking player achieves is the number of levels of lethal damage the victim suffers. These levels cannot be soaked. For an additional point of Willpower spent in the next turn, the player may continue using Dagon's Call by engaging in another contested Stamina roll. As long as the player continues to spend Willpower, the character may continue rending her opponent from within.

●●●●● Baal's Caress

A refinement of the blood poisoning of the Scorpion's Touch, Baal's Caress allows the vampire to transmute her blood into a virulent ichor that destroys any living or undead flesh it touches instead of simply causing weakness. One usually does so by coating a bladed weapon with the blood poison, and Cainite veterans of the *Reconquista* and Crusades report stories of the Assamite warriors licking their blades to lubricate them with this foul secretion as they ride into battle.

Baal's Caress may be used to augment any bladed weapon. Everything from poisoned knives and swords to tainted fingernails and claws has been reported.

System: No roll is necessary to transmute the blood to poison. The player simply decides how many points to transmute and coats any bladed weapon. The blood-poison is sticky and highly concentrated (something like a thick black sap), so it can be used to coat even an arrowhead. Claws and fingernails can also be coated.

For as long as the blade is coated, the weapon's damage becomes aggravated. Every successful strike (even if it inflicts no damage because of soak with Fortitude) expends one blood point from the total coated on the weapon. Therefore, it is in the interest of a warrior to coat a sword or knife with a goodly amount of blood, but more than one point spent on an arrow is wasted. If the attacker misses outright, no blood-poison is consumed.

●●●●● Blood Essence

Masters of Quietus have a control over the supernatural properties of vampiric vitae that is terrifying to behold. Blood Essence demonstrates some of the most frightening aspects of this control since it clearly illustrates that he who controls the blood has access to the unlife of the vampire. With the power an Assamite can distill the unholy life force of a vampire and extract it as a thick, blackish blood. This process is deadly to the victim and very similar to diablerie. Indeed, the distilled essence truly is what Cainites refer to as the "heart's-blood," the potent vitae that contains all of the vampire's power and self. Once extracted, this mere cupful of blackish liquid contains all the destroyed vampire's es-

sence, and anyone who consumes it effectively diablerizes the victim.

Blood Essence is an important part of many rituals among the Children of Haqim. Warriors extract the heart's-blood of victims felled in battle and bring it back to their elders or even to hidden Alamut itself. They then either consume the essence themselves or present it to an honored teacher. The growing blood addiction among Assamite warriors (see p. 309) has unfortunately undermined this practice. Assamite sorcerers and viziers are said to have many uses for the heart's-blood, using it to peel back the layers of a victim's long existence year by year. The essence is also a key component in religious observances among followers of the Road of Blood.

System: The process of distilling the Blood Essence is very similar to diablerie itself. The vampire drains all his victim's blood through whatever means are available, and then must drain the heart's-blood. Instead of sucking it out through brute force, however, the vampire uses Quietus to distill the potent vitae. The vampire's player does not make the extended Strength roll of diablerie. Instead, he makes an extended Willpower roll (difficulty 9) that functions like the Strength roll, causing an unsoakable level of aggravated damage per success. Failure means the vampire must pause to distill the essence but can continue next turn. A botch means the effort fails (though the vampire may then proceed to attempt traditional diablerie). As in diablerie, the victim remains alert during the entire process and can fight back. Once all health levels are gone, the victim is destroyed and his essence is fully drained (usually into a chalice of some sort).

The distilled heart's-blood remains liquid and fresh for a number of nights equal to the Quietus master's Willpower. After that time, it becomes caked and dry, losing its potency. Anyone drinking the heart's-blood while it is still fresh gains all the benefits and potential pitfalls of having successfully diablerized the victim, such as lowered generation.

For full details on diablerie, see page 258.

●●●●● Ripples of the Heart

Masters of Quietus can not only change the physical properties of their own blood, but lace others' vitae with emotions and other sensations. With Ripples of the Heart, a vampire can leave an emotional trace in one from whom she has fed, which then resonates in any Cainite who feeds from it. Assamite elders are said to use this power to mark and protect their herds from rivals, but it can also be used quite easily to send tainted mortals into an enemy's domain to be fed upon and hence weaken the area's defenses. Iberian elders still tell tales of stout Cainite warriors going mad just before their cities fell to the Almohads and the Assamites who rode with them.

System: The character drinks at least one blood point from the subject mortal then spends a minute in physical contact with the subject while concentrating on the emotion he wishes to leave in her blood. The player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty

7 under normal circumstances, 5 if the character is currently experiencing the intended emotion, 9 if he is currently experiencing a strong opposite emotion). The subject's blood carries the weight of the intended emotion for one lunar month per success on the roll. A mortal's blood can only carry one emotion at a time. Subsequent attempts to use Ripples of the Heart on the same individual have no effect until the previous application has worn off.

Any vampire who drinks from a vessel under the effects of Ripples of the Heart must succeed in a Self-Control or Instinct roll (difficulty of the mortal's Willpower) as soon as she swallows the first blood point. If she fails this roll, the vitae-borne emotion immediately overtakes her. The strength of the emotion depends on how many blood points she drinks. One blood point results in a momentary mood swing, two cause a significant shift in demeanor, and three or more generate a complete change in emotional state. Depending on the circumstances and the precise emotion, the effects of this may be spectacular or catastrophic. A vampire overtaken by romantic passion might temporarily believe that she is in love with the mortal (or any other convenient bystander). One who drinks from a hate-infused vessel may rend her prey to shreds, and one who takes a draught of a mortal touched with fear may run away screaming. The vampire remains subject to the emotion for a number of hours equal to the mortal's Willpower, although she is still subject to other feelings after the initial rush of sensation.

The mortal who is under the effects of Ripples of the Heart is unaware of the power's effects on him, though he is slightly predisposed toward the emotion in question while the power is in effect. The vampire who used Ripples of the Heart on a mortal is immune to any of its effects he places on targets through the use of this power.

Serpentis

The Followers of Set do not consider themselves cursed by God, or even vampires in the sense that the other Children of Caine are. Serpentis, their Discipline, was granted to them by the god Set himself. The nature of the clan's relationship with Set prevents them from sharing their secrets with other vampires. Only on very rare occasions do they deign to teach its nuances to so-called Cainites, and such students are invariably initiates in the Setite cult.

Followers of Set laugh off the suggestion that Serpentis might represent a curse from God. The most they will admit to is that they represent the serpent of the Garden and are a curse on humanity, rather than being cursed themselves. More often, the Followers of Set say that Serpentis allows its users to assume a semblance of godhood. Perfection of Serpentis brings the Setites closer to the metaphorical serpent shape they identify with their founder/god. Astute scholars note the many similarities between this ability and the Protean power of the Gangrel and wonder to themselves what the relationship between the two clans' founders might have been.

• The Eyes of the Serpent

Myths of the cobra and asp — as well as the Greek Medusa — ascribe hypnotic ability to them, and Set's first gift to his childer is a facsimile of that power. Should the character catch the gaze of a mortal or Cainite, he can beguile them with his gaze and render them immobile. He cannot give them commands or instructions — this is the province of Dominate — but they cannot move, nor speak above a whisper. The target remains immobilized until the character looks away — even so much as a glance breaks the trance.

System: Initially getting the target's attention requires the player to make a Manipulation + Etiquette roll (difficulty 4). If the target is already looking at the vampire, however, (they are engaged in conversation, for instance) no roll is necessary. The ability works automatically on mortals. To use it on a vampire of any generation, the player engages in a contest of Willpower (difficulty 7). Both parties roll, and if the Setite's player wins, the target is immobilized. If a potential victim knows not to look at the Serpent, no force in the world can make her do so, except for distraction. A successful Manipulation + Etiquette roll (difficulty 10) can allow the vampire to catch the target's attention for long enough to entrance her, but a failure or botch on this roll gives his intentions away and ensures that the victim avoids his gaze for the rest of the scene.

• • Tongue of the Asp

Set's next gift enables his get to turn their tongues into weapons reminiscent of a snake's forked tongue. It extends in length by more than a foot, making it a viable weapon for close-in fighting, all the more so since it becomes sharp, wickedly barbed and tainted by the vampire's unholy blood. Wounds caused by the Tongue of the Asp do not heal normally.

System: No roll or blood expenditure is required, and although the power takes a full turn to activate, the character may do other things while it does so. The tongue does Strength damage in close combat, but the wounds it causes are aggravated. The player rolls Dexterity + Brawl to strike with the tongue as normal. Should the vampire inflict one or more health levels on the target, she may feed from him on the next turn as though she had bitten him with her fangs. A strike from the Tongue of the Asp does not necessarily immobilize a foe, but the target is caught in the pleasure/pain of the Kiss as soon as the vampire begins to drink her blood.

• • • Skin of the Adder

Every new power of the Discipline of Serpentis brings the vampire closer to the god-form of Set himself. The Skin of the Adder brings this blessing to the vampire's undead skin, using vitae to strengthen and thicken it. His form also becomes more snakelike, though it is still obviously humanoid.

System: No roll is required, but the change takes three turns and costs one blood point. If the player spends

three blood points at once, he can reduce this time to one turn. While wearing the Skin of the Adder, the character is scaly, mottled and clearly monstrous. This power reduces soak difficulties for all damage to 5. In addition, the player can use Stamina to soak aggravated damage from claws and fangs (though not from fire or sunlight) even if the character does not have Fortitude. Additionally, the vampire is more limber and his joints become capable of dislocating without damage. He can fit through any opening large enough to admit his head, and he can dislocate his jaw to allow one more blood point to be consumed per turn of feeding.

•••• Form of the Cobra

Some Cainite myths describe Set's true form as that of a gigantic cobra, hundreds of feet long and as thick around as a great whale. This ability lets one of Set's childer echo his founder's nature by transforming himself into a huge cobra, eight feet long and nearly a foot thick, weighing as much as the character ordinarily does. The cobra is strong and swift, and it has a sense of smell better than any mortal's. Additionally, its bite carries a poison that is fatal to humans and animals (but which has no effect on Cainites). The character loses the ability to speak while in this form, but he can communicate with others in the same form.

For the Followers of Set, the Form of the Cobra is a sacred state, one akin to apotheosis. Many of the most devout of the clan — those elevated on the secret Road of the Serpent — use this form in dark rituals to Set. Set teaches that law is a lie, a deception of the tyrant-god Osiris, and in the Form of the Cobra, his follower is free to experience the savage truth.

In dealing with outsiders, Followers of Set reserve the Form of the Cobra for mortal combat only. Letting the profane see the sacred form of their god is not something to undertake lightly. Those Serpents less inculcated with traditional beliefs are somewhat less restricted in their use of the form, but not greatly.

System: The player spends one blood point, and the transformation takes three turns. As with Skin of the Adder, that time can be decreased to one turn if the player spends three blood points at once. The vampire's Attributes remain identical, but the player gains two dice to any dice pools involving scent and loses two dice from pools involving hearing. She also gains a similar two-die bonus to Dodge and climbing dice pools. As a creature roughly a foot in diameter, the vampire has an easier time moving around in tight spaces, and he can escape from many prisons that are meant to hold a mortal or vampire. Activating this transformation in a single turn gives her a free chance to escape from a grapple, as her form writhes and contorts unexpectedly. The vampire's bite does the same damage as it would in human form, but she does not have to grapple her target before biting. The venom does seven levels of aggravated damage to any mortal the vampire bites, but no special damage to Cainites.

Unless the vampire decides to reverse it earlier, the transformation lasts until dawn. It costs no blood to reverse, but it takes three turns to revert to human shape.

••••• Cheat the Scale of Anubis

Egyptian legend has it that the god Anubis weighs the hearts of the deceased on his great scale. If the heart is not in perfect balance with the feather placed on the other plate, it is considered to be weighed down by sin, and the soul of the deceased is fed to the Devourer and destroyed. Setite faith sees this story as a corruption of the dark truth: Anubis acts as a gatekeeper for the tyrannical Osiris, who rules the afterlife. Those who have proven their soul's strength by being willing to reject the laws that make them slaves (hence those who have "sinned") are destroyed before they can enter the afterlife and overthrow the tyrant-god. If Set and his followers are ever to reverse this state of affairs, there must be a way for the strong to get around Anubis's scales. This power allows a master of Serpents to do just that by removing his heart (as well as his other vital organs) from his body entirely and wrapping his flesh in a protective cocoon.

The power, more akin to a ritual, can only be performed in the dark of night — either after the moon has set, before it has risen or during the new moon — and only on oneself. It takes a few hours to complete. Once the Setite has removed his heart and other vital organs, he must place them in specially prepared clay urns (called Canopic jars). After that, servants can bury or hide them away. After the vampire has removed all his major organs, his vitae and undead flesh combine to wrap him in a dry, scaly shroud that is nearly impenetrable. Only a small opening over his mouth remains in the shroud. The character then falls into a sort of torpor. Only feeding him his removed internal organs can awaken the character. Once that is complete, it takes about one minute for the cocoon around the Setite to crumble to dust.

The enshrouded vampire is virtually impossible to harm — no known direct force, from inferno to high-noon sunlight, can do him damage while so wrapped. However, the extracted organs are vulnerable, most especially the heart. Exposing it to fire or sunlight causes the vampire's instant and terrible immolation, destroying him. Although terrible, this destruction is actually the final part of the ritual — in which the vampire's followers burn his organs before a statute of Set. By meeting the Final Death in this way, a Follower of Set reaches Anubis without a heart and is hence able to pass him by without ever undertaking the test of the scales, entering the afterlife as a powerful agent of his god.

It is possible to undertake this ritual only part way, something usually done for one of two reasons. The first is to assume the fully enshrouded form for protection's sake, which some Setites do when they are traveling. Their ghouls carry them as cargo in a ship or caravan and then feed their master his organs when they arrive at their destination. The other option is to stop the ritual with the removal of the heart. The vampire is perfectly able to



move about without his heart, but he becomes immune to standard staking or diablerie. However, if an enemy gets hold of the Canopic jar containing the extracted organ, the vampire is in serious trouble. Not only does it provide a powerful ritual connection to the vampire, but a simple flame or glint of sunlight can destroy the vampire outright, and driving a stake through the organ drives the Setite into torpor.

System: To undertake this ritual power, the vampire must have time to herself (assisted by acolytes, perhaps) and be acting on a moonless night. The power fails at any other time. The player makes an extended Dexterity + Medicine roll (difficulty 7) for the character to undertake the ritual. Each roll means an hour of activity, and the ritual ends in failure if the moon or sun rises before the player achieves the necessary successes (five to remove a heart, 12 to achieve the mummified form). A failure on a roll has no effect other than to extend the process another hour. A botch entails a catastrophic failure that ends the ritual and causes two levels of aggravated damage to the vampire. Any vampire who witnesses the process is subject to Röttschreck (difficulty 6).

The enshrouded body of such a Setite is completely immune to harm. No source of injury — save perhaps the might of a Methuselah or Antediluvian — can do it direct physical damage. The organs, however are extremely vulnerable, and even the slightest sunlight or flame destroys them outright. The jars are opaque, but easily broken open. Except for the heart, destroying an organ causes an unsoakable level of aggravated damage to the vampire. Destroying the heart destroys the vampire outright.

The removed organs are rich with vitae. Most contain one blood point's worth (which reduces the vampire's overall blood pool), and that blood remains fresh indefinitely in the withered organ-meat. A ghoul or vampire who consumes a Setite's removed organ takes one step toward the blood oath as normal. The heart contains two blood points and a vampire consuming it is attempting diablerie against the Setite. Once the two blood points are drained from the heart, the attacker passes straight to the heart's blood and her player must make a Strength roll as normal, save that the difficulty is 7. (For full rules on diablerie, see page 258.) Staking the heart, stakes the Setite if he is still active.

●●●●● Breathe the Sandstorm

In classic Egyptian myth, Set is portrayed as a trickster god of the desert sands, master of sky and storm. An elder Setite with Breathe the Sandstorm can call a scorching sandstorm from his patron founder's source of power and expel it from his mouth. This whirling, screeching cloud of hot sand scars and pits everything in its path. The cloud is just a few feet across, but that is more than enough to catch a Cainite unaware and riddle him with deep wounds.

System: The player spends one blood point for the vampire to exhale this roiling mist. The cloud is three feet in diameter, and it can affect a target up to six feet away. To hit, the player rolls Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 6). The opponent cannot block or parry this attack, he must dodge by

diving out of the cloud's volume. Successes remaining after the opponent's Dodge roll do levels of aggravated damage that the victim can soak only with Fortitude (meaning most mortals will never recover from their wounds). The cloud dissipates at the end of one turn. The sandstorm can also be used on inanimate objects, destroying roughly an inch thickness of the substance per use.

Thaumaturgy

Once mortal wizards who traded their souls for immortality, the Tremere found upon their transformation into vampires that mortal magic no longer worked for them. Mortal magic depended too greatly on a human's life force, which a vampire can only mimic. The Discipline of Thaumaturgy came about through frantic trial-and-error experimentation in the wake of the Inner Circle's faux-Embrace. The new Cainites found that while most of their magics failed, those that were based on certain pagan rituals — particularly those requiring blood sacrifice — continued to function. It has taken more than a century for the Tremere to become well established in the Cainite community, and during that time, they have established several Thaumaturgic paths and dozens if not scores of functioning rituals.

Thaumaturgy is a large Discipline, even as new as it is. The Tremere are aggressive about discovering new forms of blood magic and converting forms of mortal hedge magic into their own paths and rites. The Tremere have developed secret paths of great power, including the only whispered-at "Rego Magica" path which is said to allow them to control magic itself. Thaumaturgy uses a rigorous system of invocations that allows the Tremere to perform a wide variety of magical feats both through quick incantations from one of several well-defined paths, and through longer, time-consuming rituals. Thaumaturgy as described here is a Tremere secret of the highest order. Teaching it to non-Tremere for any reason is sufficient cause for the teacher's recall to Ceoris for reeducation or worse.

System: Unlike the variability of Mortis, Thaumaturgy is much more consistent and rigorous. When a Tremere uses any power from a thaumaturgic path, the player spends a blood point and rolls Willpower against a difficulty equal to the power's level + 3. Only a few powers go against this basic system, as indicated in their descriptions.

Rego Vitae

This path was the first one the Tremere devised, and it remains the primary path of many a Usurper. It works to control and analyze vampiric vitae, and it was a key in uncovering ways in which to unlock the broader powers of Thaumaturgy itself. The havens, laboratories and workshops of Usurpers who study this path are often adorned with vial after vial of blood — vampiric, mortal and some from more esoteric sources still. Strange alchemical stills, barbed hooks and needles and arrays of especially enthusiastic leeches are all part of such a magus's thaumaturgic repertoire.

• A Taste for Blood

With a taste, the Cainite with this power can analyze the power in a drop of blood. A vampire's blood reveals its owner's secrets: generation, freshness — telling how long it's been since the vampire last fed — and the amount of blood he has in him. Mortal blood reveals the presence or absence of Cainite vitae mixed in (which would unmask a ghoul), as well as the presence of any diseases that stem from an imbalance between blood and another bodily humor.

System: The vampire simply ingests a drop of the target's blood, which is sufficient to take her one step toward a blood oath if the target is a Cainite. The player then spends blood and rolls as normal. The number of successes determines the amount of information gained and its accuracy. A single success would reveal that a vampire was of comparatively high or low generation (compared to the thaumaturge) or that a mortal was healthy or ill. Five successes would reveal all the secrets listed thus far and even more (Storyteller's discretion).

• • Blood Rage

This ability lets a thaumaturge control another Cainite's expenditure of vitae, rousing the victim's Beast as he does so. The Tremere must touch the target for a moment to activate the power, and he must maintain contact if he wishes the target to continue using blood at his behest. The Usurper can force the target to burn blood to heal wounds or augment physical capacities, but not to activate a Discipline that requires blood.

System: The player rolls and spends blood as normal once the character touches the target. Each success forces the victim to spend one blood point to either raise a Physical Attribute or to heal a non-aggravated wound. The Tremere's player chooses just how each point is spent. Each success also raises the target's difficulties to resist frenzy by one. If the target is not currently at risk for frenzy, he may become so through the use of this power.

• • • Blood of Potency

The Tremere who uses this extremely valuable power can concentrate his blood, thickening it to the potency of the vitae of low-generation Cainites. In so doing, he lowers his effective generation for a short time. Younger Tremere, Embraced in the last few decades, theorize that some early, secret version of Blood of Potency allowed their elders to achieve generations so close to Caine during their early nights, but Tremere and his close acolytes refuse to share any details.

System: For every success on the standard roll, the player can decrease her character's effective generation by one, or add an hour to the power's duration. If she allocates no successes to duration, the effects lasts for a single turn. Childer Embraced during the duration of Blood of Potency are, as per normal, one generation higher than their sire's normal generation. This power does not give Tremere the ability to create super-childer. Similarly, the vampire cannot learn high-level Discipline powers while he is under the influence of this power. Nor do those who diablerize her while she is in this state gain any special benefit from that



foul act. The power affects only uses of the Discipline of Dominate, blood expenditure and maximum blood pool size.

••••• Theft of Vitae

Theft of Vitae allows a vampiric sorcerer to steal the life essence from a target as far away as 50 feet, as blood leaps through the air from the target to the blood-wizard. Truly a horrifying sight, this image may incite frenzy in hungry Cainites or raw terror in unprepared mortals. The blood can come from either a Cainite or mortal victim. It makes no difference to the power's user.

System: The player rolls and spends blood normally. For every success, the vampire steals one blood point from the target and his blood pool increases as though he had consumed the blood himself. A Cainite victim does not take damage from this theft, but a mortal takes one health level of lethal damage for every blood point stolen. Neither a mortal nor Cainite victim experiences the blissful effects of the Kiss from Theft of Vitae. It is a painful process indeed. Stealing a vampire's blood does put the Tremere a step toward the blood oath with respect to that vampire, however.

••••• Cauldron of Blood

Once, the secrets of turning a victim's blood against her were the Assamites' alone. Now, masters of Rego Vitae can make a victim's blood literally boil within his veins. This is certainly lethal to any mortal, and it does terrible damage to any vampire or ghoul subjected to it. The thaumaturge must touch his target to begin the boil, though of course his hand is cool to the touch.

System: The vampire touches the target (possibly requiring the player to make a Dexterity + Brawl roll) and the player rolls Willpower and spends blood normally. Every success destroys the equivalent of one blood point in the target and deals her one level of aggravated damage as well. If the target is a mortal, one success is sufficient to kill her.

Creo Ignem

This power allows a Cainite to call into existence small, short-lived pockets of unholy flame, which rest in the palm of its wielder's hand. Although it is bright, this blood-fire is cool to the touch and does not subject its wielder to Röttschreck. Those two things change as soon as the wielder releases the flame. The sorcerer who wields *Creo Ignem* can direct his creation's initial destination. He cannot, however, manipulate the fire he sets once it has left his hand.

The released fire quickly grows and immediately becomes true flame. It is hot, and it can ignite nearby combustibles (and vampires). As soon as the released flame strikes something, even its creator may risk Röttschreck. The rush of heat and crackle of burning material strikes fear into every Cainite heart.

System: The player spends blood and rolls as with any other Thaumaturgy path power. For each success, the vampire can hold the flame for one minute before casting it away. Targeting the flame upon its release in combat requires the player to roll Perception + Alertness. It doesn't generally require a roll outside of combat unless the vampire is trying something very difficult.

The following chart describes the amount of flame created based on the level at which the thaumaturge com-

mands this path. The various difficulties and damage ratings are for a direct application to a vampiric target. These ratings can change as the thaumaturge uses the flame to ignite other objects. For complete rules on fire see p. 257; for Röttschreck, see p. 265. Damage from thaumaturgic fire is aggravated.

Path Level	Flame Size	Diff. to Soak	Dam./Turn
•	Candle	3	1
••	Handful	4	1
•••	Campfire	5	2
••••	Bonfire	7	2
•••••	Conflagration	9	3

Rego Tempestas

A master of this path controls the weather. He can bring about lightning-filled thunderstorms on a cloudless night or clear away clouds to allow the hated sun to shine down over anything — or anyone — left exposed. This power is very useful for a Cainite who has no choice but to move around during the day. Remember, of course, that even a sun cloaked by heavy clouds and rain can burn a vampire.

System: The player rolls and spends blood as normal and the number of successes determines the speed with which the vampire can alter the weather, as described here:

Successes	Speed
1 success	12 hours or more
2 successes	1 hour
3 successes	15 minutes
4 successes	3 turns
5+ successes	1 turn

The Storyteller is free to alter difficulties based on the current weather conditions and the local environment. Bringing overcast weather to the shores of Britain is much easier than doing so to the African desert. The following chart gives the number of dots you must have in the power to make the listed change. You can change average, clear weather into the weather pattern listed, or you can change the weather pattern listed into average, clear weather. And of course, you can always choose to take a less extreme tack. You may wish to reduce a thunderstorm to an overcast day, rather than clearing it up entirely. Kind Storytellers may grant extra dice to perform tasks that are simple relative to your level of mastery in this path. The change of weather remains in effect until local conditions dissipate it (usually after one scene per success).

- Fog
- Rain
- Wind
- Storm
- Lightning (Perception + Occult to hit a specific target, 10 dice lethal damage)

Rego Motus

This path allows the Tremere who wields it to control the motion of objects and people. He can summon a sword from across the room, or fly across a county in an evening. Of course, such things cannot move too quickly — this power is no catapult or longbow. Objects do not move faster than the Cainite controlling them could. This does mean that weapons or shields can be used through Rego Motus, assuming that the thaumaturge has enough progress along the path to enable him to carry such things.

System: The player spends blood and rolls as normal, and the Tremere can control the object (or group of objects) for one turn for every success. If, however, the player rolls five successes, the vampire can control it for the remainder of the scene. Conscious creatures can resist this control through force of will if they wish to do so. Both players roll Willpower, with a target of the opposing character's Willpower trait. Whoever achieves the most successes gets the result they desire from the contest.

The degree of mastery of this path determines how much weight the thaumaturge can carry. If the player wants to make her character fly, she needs to have three dots in the path (even if the character weighs more than 200 pounds). To strike an opponent with a weapon that was animated that turn, the player simply uses the successes on the initial Willpower roll as if they were successes on a Melee roll. Damage is determined by the weapon, using the character's Rego Motus rating instead of Strength. To strike with the weapon in subsequent turns, the player rolls Rego Motus + Melee to hit.

- One pound (page through a book, sweep aside a light curtain)
- 20 pounds (wield a dagger or light club, move a book, open a door)
- 200 pounds (fly, open a locked door)
- 500 pounds (lift a loaded wagon, knock over a tree)
- 1000 pounds (lift a horse, knock down part of a stone wall)

Rego Elementum

In the days before their transformation into vampires, the magi of House Tremere had access to generations of elemental research. Their fellow Hermetics and others had undertaken great strides into communion with (and exploitation of) the inanimate world as expressed in the four classic elements of earth, air, fire and water. Elemental spirits (animate manifestations of these primeval forces) were their playthings. Much of this power has been lost with the curse, but the Rego Elementum path still remains. For those Tremere who remember, it is a far cry from what was once theirs. For other Cainites, it is a sign of unprecedented mastery over the unliving world. Unlike some mortal forms of elemental magics, Rego Elementum cannot affect living things, be they plants or animals.

• Earth-Born Strength

The thaumaturge can draw upon the strength and resilience of the earth beneath his feet to increase his physical prowess without the need for large amounts of blood.

System: The player allocates a total of three temporary bonus dots between the character's Strength and Stamina. The number of successes on the roll to activate the power is the number of turns these dots remain. The player may spend a Willpower point to increase this duration by one turn. These bonus dots vanish immediately if both the character's feet ever leave the ground from which he is drawing his strength. This power cannot be "stacked." One application must expire before the next can be made.

•• Wooden Tongues

The thaumaturge awakens, albeit in limited fashion, the elemental spirit locked within an inanimate object. The spirit can do nothing save speak to the thaumaturge. The conversation may not be incredibly interesting, as most rocks and chairs have limited concern for what occurs around them, but the vampire can get at least a general impression of what the subject has "experienced." Events that are significant to a vampire may not be the same events that interest a stone pillar, of course.

System: The number of successes dictates the amount and relevance of the information that the character receives. One success may yield a boulder's memory of a forest fire, while three may indicate that it remembers a shadowy figure running past, and five will cause the rock to relate a precise description of a local Gangrel.

••• Animate the Unmoving

The thaumaturge is now able to awaken the elemental spirit in an object to the point of animation. Objects affected by this power move as the vampire using it dictates. An object cannot take an action that would be completely inconceivable for something with its form, though. (For instance, a door could not leap from its frame and carry someone from a room.) Seemingly solid objects can become flexible within reason, though. Chairs can run with their legs, staffs can twist out of their owners' hands, statues can mimic human movements, and boulders can suddenly roll down hill.

System: This power requires the expenditure of a Willpower point in addition to the standard blood point and success on the Willpower roll. Each use of this power animates one object. The thaumaturge may simultaneously control a number of animate objects equal to his Intelligence rating. Objects animated by this power stay animated for up to an hour, as long as they stay within the caster's line of sight.

•••• Elemental Form

The thaumaturge may now transform his very form into one made up entirely of one of three of the four classic elements (earth, air or water). The elemental form can vary in form and state just as the elements vary. A watery form may be a limpid pool or a patch of fog, an earthen one could be a large clump of soil or a man-sized chunk of rock. The form cannot be processed in any way, however. The thaumaturge cannot take on the form

of a stone archway, for example. The elemental form's overall volume is roughly that of the thaumaturge, but weight and distribution can shift from a heavy chunk of iron to a light mist or breeze. The form is inanimate.

System: The number of successes determines how completely the character takes on the desired form. With a single success, the character becomes a sort of statue of himself made of the desired substance. With two successes, she becomes what she desires as long as it is akin to a natural formation of one of the three elements. With three successes, she can also use her normal senses and Disciplines (as long as they don't require movement or eye contact). In the Elemental Form, the character is essentially immune to normal damage, but she takes one level of unsoakable bashing damage for every turn in which her form is substantially disrupted (by a strong breeze blowing through a patch of fog, people trampling through a puddle or kicking over a mound of earth and so on). Regardless of the amount of disturbance, however, the thaumaturge's form cannot be dissipated. (Her watery parts flow back together, for instance, or her mist refuses to part.) The transformed thaumaturge is also immobile, although she may be carried by wind or currents if the form is appropriate. This power lasts for the remainder of the night, though the character may return to her normal form at will.

If, and only if, the thaumaturge has mastered the *Creo Ignem* path, he may also transform into a patch of cold fire. This form can be a smoldering heap of ash or a blazing bonfire, but in all cases, the flames are blackish and cold to the touch, and they refuse to ignite anything. They consume no fuel, cast only a wane light and do not cause *Rötschreck* in vampires.

••••• Summon Elemental

The thaumaturge may now summon one of the traditional spirits of the elements: a salamander (fire), a sylph (air), a gnome (earth) or an undine (water). The thaumaturge may choose what type of elemental he wishes to summon and command.

System: The character must be near some quantity of the classical element corresponding to the spirit he wishes to invoke. The spirit invoked may or may not actually follow the caster's instructions once summoned, but it generally will at least pay rough attention to what it's being told to do. The number of successes gained determines the power level of the elemental.

Elemental spirits have traits akin to demons and ghosts (see p. 292). The summoned ones have a Willpower and Rage of 3 + successes on the caster's initial roll, a Gnosis of 3 and an Essence of 4 + successes. They all have the *Materialize Charm*, the ability to attack for Rage + 2 lethal damage, and an assortment of other abilities based on their type (and at the Storyteller's discretion).

Once the elemental has been summoned, the thaumaturge must exert control over it. The more powerful the elemental is, the more difficult a task it is to do so. The player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the number of successes scored on the casting roll + 4).

Successes	Result
Botch	The elemental immediately attacks the thaumaturge.
Failure	The elemental goes free and may attack anyone or leave the scene at the Storyteller's discretion.
1 success	The elemental probably does not attack its summoner.
2 successes	The elemental behaves favorably toward the summoner and may perform a service in exchange for payment (determined by the Storyteller).
3 successes	The elemental performs one service, within reason.
4 successes	The elemental performs any one task for the caster that does not jeopardize its own existence.
5 successes	The elemental performs any task that the caster sets for it, even one that may take several nights to complete or that places its existence at risk.

Transitus Velociter

This path allows the Tremere to move himself, his mount or a large group at a much greater speed than he could otherwise attain. It similarly conveys upon its beneficiaries the necessary endurance to maintain that speed over long distances. This ability is useful only over great distances. *Transitus Velociter* does not provide its targets with the sort of supernatural swiftness conveyed by the Discipline of Celerity. Instead, it imbues them with the single-mindedness and stamina necessary to travel overland for hours at a time, at speeds just high enough to be impossible without such aid.

System: The player spends blood and rolls normally as the character selects a group of targets. Each success enables that group to maintain a speed of 30 miles per hour (over a road) for a period of one hour. This ability is useful only for long-distance journeying. A character in such a group who is attacked does not increase his combat movement speed.

Transitus Velociter works on mortals and Cainites as well as horses and other draft animals, but it is certainly more efficient to use the path's powers on beasts of burden, as they can carry men and equipment more easily than men can.

The character's rating with this path determines the number of targets he can endow with preternatural speed.

- One being (a mount or walking human)
- Up to six mounts or one laden wagon
- Up to 12 mounts or four supply wagons
- Up to 24 mounts or eight supply wagons or one siege engine
- Up to 48 mounts or 16 supply wagons or four siege engines

Thaumaturgic Rituals

The paths of Thaumaturgy are flexible, almost improvisational, forms of blood sorcery that give the Tremere an impressive array of powers at their fingertips. These are the results of a great deal of occult experimentation and a background in slow and methodical rituals. Therefore, the Usurper clan has access to a great array of rites, both more specialized and more demanding than path powers.

Thaumaturgy rituals have a variety of requirements, from specific movements and incantations, to the sacrifice of animals and the collections of rare herbs. A Tremere must have access to these ingredients to attempt the ritual, but actual success depends on using these ingredients and performing these incantations in exactly the correct way, an act of supreme concentration supported by long hours of occult study. Therefore, every Thaumaturgy ritual uses the same game system unless it specifically says otherwise in its description. The player rolls Intelligence + Occult against a difficulty of 3 + the ritual's level. Rituals usually take five minutes per level to perform, but that is more variable.

Starting thaumaturges begin play with a single level-one ritual, and they must find the time and the sources to learn others.

Communicate with Sire

Level-One Ritual

The blood-wizard who uses this ritual enters into immediate mental contact with his sire, no matter how far

OTHER SORCERERS

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Assamites, Followers of Set and Tzimisce have blood wizards of their own. Like the Cappadocians, these sorcerers predate the Tremere by centuries. The Usurpers, however, have a true advantage over these ancients in that Clan Tremere is the first to rigorously catalog and experiment with blood-magic (outside of the death-sorcery of *Mortis*). The magics of these clans do not work in the same way that Thaumaturgy does. Tzimisce *koldun* sorcerers cannot improve their own art through tutelage by anyone other than another *koldun*. However, for game purposes, the Thaumaturgy Discipline is used to represent such powers.

Assamite sorcerers can start with any path of Thaumaturgy as their primary path, while Setite sorcerers must take *Rego Tempestas* and Tzimisce *koldun* the *Rego Elementum* path. A student of any of these traditions cannot learn path magic from the follower of another tradition. However, varying traditions may be able to share rituals. Generally, an Intelligence + Occult roll is necessary to translate a ritual from one magical framework to another. The base time on such a task is two weeks per level of the ritual.

away that vampire is, as long as his sire is willing to allow the contact (and hasn't been destroyed). The vampires can then communicate silently and mentally. This ritual, however, does not allow either vampire to raid the other's mind for information or exercise mental Disciplines. It is useful purely for communication. Either party may terminate the conversation before the end of the ritual's duration. Sires in torpor cannot communicate in this manner unless they are powerful enough to retain some form of consciousness in that form.

System: The character must have an object that her sire previously owned. The ritual does not consume it, however, and the same object can be used every time she performs this rite. The Tremere spends 30 minutes in meditation on the object and the person of her sire to initiate contact. Every success allows for 10 minutes of communication.

Defense of the Sacred Haven

Level-One Ritual

This ritual prevents the hated sun's light from crossing the boundaries of an area 20 feet in radius from the center of the performance. The light simply fails to pass through doorways, cave openings or openings in castle walls. The area protected thus must offer at least some defense against the sun, however. It can be cast in a hut or even a lean-to, but not in the middle of an open field. The sorcerer must use his own vitae to inscribe mystic sigils on any portal that might admit light. In the case of simple openings (rather than doors or windows) the character must inscribe the sigils across the opening's threshold. The ritual lasts until the sorcerer leaves the protected area.

System: The player spends one blood point (and rolls as normal) as the character spends one uninterrupted hour writing mystic sigils in blood and speaking phrases in long-dead tongues. Any distraction means the ritual fails, but it can be attempted again. A botch means the character makes an error in the ritual but doesn't realize it (with possibly disastrous consequences once dawn comes).

Deflection of Wooden Doom

Level-One Ritual

A wooden stake through the heart immobilizes any ordinary Cainite. With the use of this ritual, however, a Tremere can protect himself from such a fate, at least once. The character places a splinter of wood under his tongue and surrounds himself with an unbroken wooden circle for one hour while he chants and meditates. At the end of that time, his heart is protected against the first stake driven to pierce it. That wooden stake simply crumbles to dust. The ritual works against only one stake, though. Should an opponent have a second stake, this rite provides no defense against it.

System: The rite lasts until the next sunset. The stake in question must be about to truly pierce the character's heart for the rite to take effect. A hunter or foe cannot fool the magic.

Devil's Touch

Level-One Ritual

Use of this ritual is reserved for those mortals who have earned the thaumaturge's anger, for Devil's Touch is essentially a curse. The Tremere places a penny somewhere on the target's person, and that individual is received badly by all who meet him. The victim is looked at as being somewhere between a murderer and a leper. Strangers curse him and spit at him, and even dear friends prefer to keep their distance, for reasons they can't quite understand.

System: The ritual lasts until the next sunrise, and it only works on mortals. The victim's player receives a +4 difficulty penalty to all Social rolls while it is in effect. Should the character manage to discard the penny that is the rite's focus, the spell's effect vanishes at once.

Wake with Evening's Freshness

Level-One Ritual

Much as Defense of the Sacred Haven and Deflection of Wooden Doom, this ritual is especially useful for defending a Tremere whose haven is invaded before sundown. Wake with Evening's Freshness awakens the sorcerer — even in the middle of the day — should those with hostile intent toward him come close. Upon awakening, he is as alert and able as he would be at midnight, not suffering the lethargy and confusion that Cainites usually feel during the daylight hours.

System: The Tremere sprinkles the ashes of burned feathers over the area she wishes to protect. Should danger come to her through the dusted area, she immediately becomes conscious, and the player ignores the Road-based dice pool limit (see p. 161) for the first two turns after the character wakes. The penalty does take effect immediately thereafter, but by that time, the character need not roll to wake, only to remain conscious.

Revelation of the Blood Lineage

Level-Two Ritual

In the Cainite world, the Tremere have discovered, everything eventually comes down to blood. With this ritual, the thaumaturge can uncover the lineage and blood ties of another vampire.

System: This ritual requires three hours to cast, reduced by 15 minutes for each success on the roll. It requires one blood point from the subject. Each success allows the caster to "see back" one generation, giving the caster both the name of the ancestor and an image of his face. The caster also learns the generation and clan (or bloodline) from which the subject is descended. With three successes, the caster also learns the identities of all parties with whom the subject shares a blood oath, either as regnant or thrall (both Cainite and mortal).

Donning the Mask of Shadows

Level-Two Ritual

This ritual renders its subject translucent, her form appearing dark and smoky and the sounds of her footsteps muffled. While it does not create true invisibility, the Mask

of Shadows makes the subject much less likely to be detected by sight or hearing.

System: This ritual may be simultaneously cast on a number of subjects equal to the thaumaturge's Occult rating. Each individual past the first adds five minutes to the base casting time. Individuals under the Mask of Shadows can be detected only if the observer succeeds in a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty of the caster's Wits + Occult) or if the observer possesses a power (such as Auspex) sufficient to penetrate Obfuscate 3. The Mask of Shadows lasts a number of hours equal to the number of successes rolled when it is cast or until the caster voluntarily lowers it.

Principal Focus of Vitae Infusion

Level-Two Ritual

This ritual imbues a quantity of blood within the object upon which the ritual is cast. The object must be small enough for the vampire to carry in both hands, and it may be as small as a coin. After the ritual is conducted, the object takes on a reddish hue and becomes slick to the touch. At a mental command, the thaumaturge may release the object from its enchantment, causing it to break down into a pool of blood. This blood may serve whatever purpose the vampire desires. Many Tremere wear enchanted baubles to ensure that they have emergency supplies of vitae.

System: An object may store only one blood point of vitae. If a Cainite wishes to make an infused focus for an ally, she may do so, but the blood contained within must be her own (and if the ally then drinks the blood, he is one step closer to the blood oath). The ally must be present at the creation of the focus.

Ward Versus Ghouls

Level-Two Ritual

The fearsome Tzimisce warlords who have dogged the Tremere since they stepped into the night use twisted ghouls and revenants as their principle troops. This ritual was created to protect the Usurpers against such foes. By invoking this ritual, the Tremere creates a glyph that causes great pain to any ghouls or revenants who come in contact with it. The Cainite pours a point's worth of blood over the object he wishes to ward (such as a piece of parchment, a coin or a doorknob), and recites the incantation, which takes 10 minutes. In 10 hours, the magical ward is complete, and it will inflict excruciating pain on any ghoul unfortunate enough to touch the warded object.

System: Ghouls who touch warded objects suffer three dice of lethal damage. This damage occurs again if the ghoul touches the object further. Indeed, a ghoul who consciously wishes to touch a warded object must spend a point of Willpower to do so.

This ritual wards only one object. (If inscribed on the door of a house, the ward affects only that door, not the whole house.) Wards may be placed on weapons, such as swords or arrowheads. Weapons get scuffed through use and maintenance alike, however, and in order for a ward to

remain intact on a weapon after combat, the player needs three successes on a Crafts, Melee or Archery roll.

The thaumaturge may choose to attune his ward to one or more ghouls (his own or others), so as to make them exempt from the damage. To do so requires either the presence of each individual who is to be exempt from the ward or a point of their blood when the ward is cast. The difficulty of the roll to cast the ward increases by one. The thaumaturge may exempt a maximum number of individuals equal to his Thaumaturgy rating from each ward he casts.

Flesh of Fiery Touch

Level-Three Ritual

This defensive ritual inflicts painful burns on anyone who deliberately touches the subject's skin. It requires the subject to swallow a small glowing ember, which does put off some thaumaturses with low pain thresholds. Some vain Tremere use this ritual purely for its subsidiary effect of darkening the subject's skin to a healthy sun-bronzed hue.

System: Flesh of Fiery Touch takes two hours to cast (reduced by 10 minutes per success). It requires a small piece of wood, coal or other common fuel source, which ignites and is swallowed at the end of the ritual. The subject who swallows the red-hot ember receives a single level of aggravated damage (difficulty 6 to soak with Stamina + Fortitude). Until the next sunset, anyone who touches the subject's flesh receives a burn that inflicts a single level of aggravated damage (again, difficulty 6 to soak with Stamina + Fortitude). The victim must voluntarily touch the subject. This damage is not inflicted if the victim is touched or accidentally comes in contact with the subject.

This ritual darkens the subject's skin to that which would be obtained by long-term exposure to the sun in a mortal. The tone is slightly unnatural and metallic, and is evidently artificial to any observer who succeeds in a Perception + Hearth Wisdom roll (difficulty 8).

Incorporeal Passage

Level-Three Ritual

Use of this ritual allows the thaumaturge to make herself insubstantial. The caster becomes completely immaterial and thus is able to walk through walls, pass through closed doors and escape manacles. The caster also becomes invulnerable to physical attacks for the duration of the ritual. The caster must follow a straight path through any physical objects, and he may not draw back. Therefore, a Cainite may walk through a solid wall, but he may not walk down through the earth (as it would be impossible to reach the other side before the ritual lapses). This ritual requires that the caster carry a shard from a shattered mirror to hold her image as she moves in an insubstantial form.

System: This ritual lasts a number of hours equal to the number of successes scored on a Wits + Survival roll (difficulty 6). The thaumaturge may prematurely end the ritual (and, thus, return to solidity) by turning the mirror shard away so that it no longer reflects her image.

Shaft of Belated Quiescence

Level-Three Ritual

The Tremere have had to become skilled in the ways of war among Cainites and their very survival against the Tzimisce is proof of how well they have learned their lessons. The Shaft of Belated Quiescence is just one example of the rituals and rites that give the Tremere resiliency and effectiveness on the battlefield. By the awakening of a small elemental spirit, this ritual turns an ordinary wooden stake into a particularly vicious weapon. When the stake penetrates a vampire's body, the tip breaks off and begins working its way through the victim's flesh to his heart. The trip may take several minutes or several nights, depending on where the stake struck. The stake eludes attempts to dig it out, burrowing farther into the victim's body to escape surgery. The only Cainites who are immune to this internal attack are those who have had their hearts removed by masters of Serpentis (see p. 221).

System: The ritual takes five hours to enact, minus 30 minutes per success. The stake must be carved of rowan wood, coated with three blood points of the caster's blood and blackened in an oak-wood fire. When the ritual is complete, the stake is enchanted to act as described.

An attack with a Shaft of Belated Quiescence is performed as with a normal stake: a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 6, modified as per the normal combat rules, as the attack does not need to specifically target the heart) with a lethal damage rating of Strength + 1. If at least one health level of damage is inflicted after the target rolls to soak, the tip of the stake breaks off and begins burrowing. If not, the stake may be used to make subsequent attacks until it strikes deep enough to activate.

Once the tip of the stake is in the victim's body, the Storyteller begins an extended roll of the caster's Thaumaturgy rating (difficulty 9), rolling once per hour of game time. Successes on this roll are added to the successes scored in the initial attack. This represents the tip's progress toward the victim's heart. A botch indicates that the tip has struck a bone and all accumulated successes are lost (including those from the initial attack roll). When the shaft accumulates a total of 15 successes, it reaches the victim's heart. This paralyzes a Cainite and is instantly fatal to a mortal or ghoul.

Attempts to surgically remove the tip of the shaft are made with an extended Dexterity + Medicine roll (difficulty 7), rolled once per hour. In order to remove the tip, the surgeon must accumulate a number of successes equal to those currently held by the shaft. Once surgery begins, however, the shaft begins actively evading the surgeon's probes, and its rolls are made once every 30 minutes for the duration of the surgery attempt. Each individual surgery roll that scores less than three successes inflicts an additional unsoakable level of lethal damage on the patient. In addition, any surgery performed past the first hour is fatal to mortals and ghouls, since it involves far too much digging about the body.

Shaft of Belated Quiescence may be performed on other wooden impaling weapons, such as spears, arrows or practice swords, provided that they are made of rowan wood.



Heart of Stone

Level-Four Ritual

The Tremere, said to have drained dry more than one torpid vampire in their brief unives, are especially fearful of staking. A vampire under the effect of this ritual experiences the transformation suggested by the ritual's name: His heart is completely transmuted to solid rock, rendering him virtually impervious to staking. The subsidiary effects of the transformation, however, follow the laws of sympathetic magic. The vampire's emotional capacity becomes almost nonexistent, and his ability to relate to others suffers as well.

System: This ritual requires nine hours (reduced by one hour for every success). It can be cast only on oneself. The caster lies naked on a flat stone surface and places a bare candle over his heart. The candle burns down to nothing over the course of the ritual, causing one aggravated health level of damage (difficulty 5 to soak with Stamina + Fortitude). At the end of the ritual, the caster's heart hardens to stone. The benefits of this ritual are that the caster gains a number of additional dice equal to twice his Thaumaturgy rating to soak any attack that aims for his heart and is completely impervious to the effects of a Shaft of Belated Quiescence. In addition, the difficulty to use all Presence powers on him increases by three due to his emotional isolation. The drawbacks are as follows: The caster's Conscience (or Conviction) and Empathy scores drop to 1 (or to 0 if they already were at 1), and all dice pools for Social rolls except those involving Intimidation are halved (including those required to use Disciplines). Heart of Stone lasts as long as the caster wishes it to.

Ward Versus Cainites

Level-Four Ritual

This warding ritual functions exactly as does the Ward Versus Ghouls, but it inflicts injury upon Cainites. It was developed to defend against both the revenants' Tzimisces masters and rival Tremere clanmates.

System: Ward Versus Cainites behaves exactly as does Ward Versus Ghouls, but it affects vampires rather than ghouls. The ritual requires a blood point of the caster's own blood and does not affect the caster. The ward may be attuned as outlined under Ward Versus Ghouls.

Enact the Blood Contract

Level-Five Ritual

This ritual is the result of intense study along the Rego Vitae path, and it requires mastery of that path to enact. With it, the thaumaturge creates an inviolate contract between two or more parties. This contract is bound by the power of the thaumaturge's blood, which compels the participants to fulfil their commitments in two ways. First, it carries some of the compulsions of the blood oath, bending the participants' will to compliance. Second it carries part of God's curse on Caine, attracting curses and other dark forces if the agreement is not fulfilled.

The contract is written in the caster's blood and signed in the blood of whoever applies their name to the document.

This ritual takes three nights to enact fully, after which all signing parties are compelled to fulfill the terms of the contract. The caster need not be a signatory, and the signatories need not be vampires.

System: Once enacted, the contract remains in effect until all of its terms are fulfilled. If a participant does not fulfil his end of the bargain (or even puts off fulfilling it) the power of the blood begins to take effect. At first, the offending participant only feels mild pangs of guilt. After a full night of delay, it takes a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to resist acting to fulfil the contract. This roll happens once per night, with the difficulty rising by one each night (up to a maximum of 9). If the participant continues to resist, darker things happen, which are left to the Storyteller. (They can include bad luck, various curses and afflictions or the intervention of demons and spirits.) Vampires on the Road of Kings who resist fulfilling a contract (a formal oath) must test for degeneration (see p. 267).

In the case of very time-sensitive contracts ("I shall kill the king by sundown!") the effects can be accelerated at the Storyteller's discretion.

Escape to a True Friend

Level-Five Ritual

A raw manifestation of the power of sympathetic emotions, this ritual allows a thaumaturge to be magically transported to the person whose friendship and trust she most values. The ritual has a physical component of a yard-wide circle charred into the bare ground or floor. The caster may step into the circle at any time and speak the name of her friend. She is instantly transported to that individual, wherever he may be at the moment. She does not appear directly in front of him, but materializes in a location within a few minutes' walk that is out of sight of any observer. The circle may be reused indefinitely, as long as it is unmarred.

System: This ritual takes six hours a night for six nights to cast, reduced by one night for every two successes. Each night requires the sacrifice of three of the caster's own blood points, which are poured into the circle. Once the circle is complete, the transport may be attempted at any time. The caster may take one other individual with her when she travels, or a maximum amount of "cargo" equal to her own weight. The caster must speak the friend's true name, not an alter ego or appellation. Tremere legendry is replete with stories of thaumaturges who spoke false names and were lost to the void.

Ward Versus Spirits

Level-Five Ritual

This warding ritual functions similarly to Ward Versus Ghouls and Ward Versus Cainites, but it inflicts injury upon spirits of the natural and elemental worlds. Several other versions of this ward exist, each geared toward a particular type of non-physical being.

System: Ward Versus Spirits behaves exactly as does Ward Versus Ghouls, but it affects natural and elemental spirits. These beings include those summoned by the Rego Elementum path, as well as the spirits of animals and plants

commanded by certain types of mortal warlocks. The material component for Ward Versus Spirits is a handful of pure sea salt.

The other versions of this ward, also level-five rituals, are Ward Versus Ghosts and Ward Versus Demons. Each of these three level-five wards affects its respective target on both the physical and spiritual planes. Ward Versus Ghosts requires a handful of powdered marble from a tombstone, while Ward Versus Demons requires a vial of holy water.

None of these spiritual wards can be attuned to allow passage to certain spirits.

Vicissitude

Vicissitude competes with the Madmen's gift of Dementation for the title as the most harrowing power of the unliving. Cainites of Clan Tzimisce consider this Discipline their true gift, which allows them to reshape living or unliving flesh. Neonates might call attention to the similarities between Vicissitude and Protean, but ancillae and those who are familiar with both the Gangrel and Tzimisce recognize the truth. Protean allows a Gangrel to manifest certain aspects of his Beast for the world to see. Vicissitude, by contrast, allows the Tzimisce to visit his foulest perversions upon otherwise innocent victims and present them for the world to see.

All Vicissitude powers require at least a moment's physical contact. Some require considerably longer periods of time, in order to physically sculpt flesh and bone into the proper shapes. Vicissitude cannot be used to heal damage, though. That takes vitae, in the case of vampires, or time, in the case of mortals. And some of the reshaping that Tzimisce perform upon their victims takes time to heal into its new form, in the same way that a broken bone must reknit, and it might do so at an odd angle if it is set incorrectly.

Typically, changes made by Vicissitude are permanent, with a couple of caveats. First, a victim of lower generation than the Cainite using Vicissitude can heal any changes made as though they were aggravated wounds. Second, Vicissitude can be used to undo changes wrought by that power — but such a thing might take time and a great deal of work. Finally Vicissitude cannot permanently undo the horrid aspect of a Nosferatu, the deathly pallor of a Cappadocian, the inky blackness of an elder Assamite's flesh or the animalistic features of a Gangrel who has frenzied overmuch. Those features are intrinsic aspects of the victim's blood, and they return after a day's rest.

Vicissitude is a part of God's curse on Caine because it replaces the ability to create and nurture new living things with the hideous compulsion to reshape God's creation in a twisted new image. Those Cainites on the Road of Heaven rarely use this power, but it is popular among former butchers and peasants, as well as those who grew up in the shadow of Tzimisce holdings. Some Tzimisce fanatics follow a Road of Metamorphosis that uses Vicissitude as part of its holy (or unholy) sacraments. They are even said to worship in a horrific temple known as the Cathedral of Flesh.

• Malleable Visage

A Fiend with this power may alter his own bodily parameters: height, build, voice, facial features, hair and skin tone, among other things. Such changes are cosmetic and minor in scope — no more than a foot of height can be gained or lost, for example. He must physically mold the alteration, literally shaping his flesh into the desired result.

System: The player must spend a blood point for each body part to be changed, then roll Intelligence + Body Crafts with a difficulty of 6. To duplicate another person requires a Perception + Body Crafts roll with a difficulty of 8 instead. Five successes are required for a flawless copy; fewer successes leave flaws ranging from minute to glaringly obvious. The player may increase his Cainite's Appearance trait with Malleable Visage, but the difficulty of the Intelligence + Body Crafts roll is 10, and a botch permanently decreases the Attribute. For those who do not habitually fleshcraft themselves, these changes in Appearance are permanent. To Tzimisce and other rare Vicissitude wielders, Appearance can vary wildly from sunset to dawn. It is limited only by the Cainite's imagination and his generational trait limit.

• • Transmogrify the Mortal Clay

This power is similar to Malleable Visage, but it allows the Cainite to perform drastic, grotesque alterations on other creatures as well as himself. Only flesh (including muscle, fat and cartilage, but not bone) may be transformed. The power is permanent on mortals, but vampires may spend blood points to "heal" the transformation.

System: The vampire must grapple or restrain the intended victim, and the player make a successful Dexterity + Body Crafts roll (difficulty variable: 5 for a crude yank-and-tuck; up to 9 for precise transformations under stressful conditions). Increasing another's Appearance is done as described under Malleable Visage. Reducing the Attribute is considerably easier (difficulty 5), though truly inspired disfigurement may require careful work and a higher difficulty. In either case, each success increases or reduces the Attribute by one, though the transmogrifying Cainite may elect not to use all his successes. Players who wish their vampires to "heal" their disfigurements must spend blood points equal to the total successes, regardless of the total Attribute loss or gain.

A vampire may use this power to move clumps of skin, fat and muscle to provide additional padding where needed. For each success scored on a Dexterity + Body Crafts roll

BODY CRAFTS (SPECIAL SKILL)

To get the best results from Vicissitude, a character should learn the Body Crafts Skill. Note that this is not a field of expertise of the Crafts Skill, but rather a full-fledged Skill all its own. Few outside of Clan Tzimisce bother to learn it, as it has very little use outside the application of Vicissitude powers to flesh. However, those skilled in Body Crafts learn insight into arts such as taxidermy, ritual scarification, embalming and tanning.

(difficulty 8), the vampire may increase the subject's dice pool for soaking attacks by one, at the expense of either a point of Strength or a health level, at the vampire's choice.

••• Rend the Osseous Frame

This terrible power allows a vampire to manipulate bone in the same manner that he shapes flesh. In conjunction with Transmogrify the Mortal Clay, this power enables the Cainite to warp a victim (or himself) beyond recognition. When used alone, it can inflict traumatic injury. Tzimisce often use this power to transform dogs and other beasts into terrible hellhounds and their mortal servitors into *szlachta*, monstrous war-ghouls used to guard havens or strike terror into foes on the battlefield.

System: When using this power in conjunction with Transmogrify the Mortal Clay, the player makes a Strength + Body Crafts roll (using the previously delineated difficulties). Cainite victims who wish to "heal" their disfigurements must do so as if they were aggravated wounds (see p. 253), even though no actual levels of damage are done.

The Cainite may instead use Rend the Osseous Frame as a weapon, without the complementary fleshcrafting arts. Each success scored on the Strength + Body Crafts roll (difficulty 7) inflicts one level of lethal damage to the victim, as his bones rip, puncture and slice their way out of his skin. Vampire victims may soak the lethal damage, but their bones are still warped and misaligned. This may cause problems with movement or sight, for example, and putting the bones back is also treated as healing aggravated wounds.

The vampire may use this power on himself or others to form spikes or talons of bone, either on the knuckles or feet as offensive weapons or all over the body as defensive "quills." In the former case, the recipient takes one level of lethal damage. In the latter, the subject takes a number of levels of lethal damage equal to five minus the number of successes. (A botch kills a mortal subject, or sends a vampire into torpor.) This damage may be healed normally. Knuckle or foot spikes inflict Strength + 2 lethal damage in combat, while defensive quills inflict a hand-to-hand attacker's Strength in lethal damage unless the attacker scores three or more successes on the attack roll. (The quill-bearing defender still takes damage normally.) The quills also add two to all damage rolls for grapples or body slams.

The most fearsome attack possible with this power collapses the victim's ribcage, piercing her heart with her own bones. While this does not send a vampire into torpor, it does cause the affected vampire to lose half her blood points, as the seat of her vitae ruptures in a shower of gore. Mortal victims die instantly. This attack must be declared before the attack is rolled, and it requires five successes on the Strength + Body Crafts roll to succeed. The victim still loses the blood points if she soaks all the lethal damage.

•••• Awaken the Zulo Shape

The traditional war-form of the changeable Tzimisce *voivodes* is the *zulo* shape, a hideous monstrosity a full eight feet in height,

with sickly greenish-gray scaled skin and powerful arms tipped with jagged black nails. A row of spines sprouts from the *zulo*'s vertebrae, and the external carapace exudes a foul-smelling grease.

System: The *zulo* shape costs two blood points to awaken. All Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina) increase by three, but all Social Attributes drop to zero, save when dealing with others also in the *zulo* shape. However, a vampire in *zulo* form trying to intimidate someone may substitute Strength for a Social Attribute. Damage inflicted in brawling combat increases by one due to the jagged ridges and bony knobs creasing the creature's hands.

••••• Ascendancy of the Sanguine Humor

A vampire with this power can physically transform all or part of her body into sentient vitae. This blood is identical to the vampire's normal vitae in all respects. She can use it to nourish herself or others, create ghouls or establish blood oaths. If all this blood is imbibed or otherwise destroyed, the vampire meets Final Death.

System: The vampire may transform all or part of herself as she deems fit. Each leg can turn into two blood points worth of vitae, as can the torso; each arm, the head and the abdomen convert to one blood point. The blood can be reconverted to the body part, provided it is in contact with the vampire. If the blood has been utilized or destroyed, the vampire must spend a number of blood points equal to what was originally created to regrow the missing body part.

A vampire entirely in this form may not be staked, cut, bludgeoned or pierced, but he can be burned or exposed to the sun. The vampire may ooze along, drip up walls and flow through the narrowest cracks, as though she were in Tenebrous Avatar form (p. 201).

Mental Disciplines may be used, provided no eye contact or vocal utterance is necessary — and if a vampire in this form "washes" over a mortal or animal, that mortal must make a Courage roll (difficulty 8) or fly into a panic.

••••• Chiropteran Marauder

An even more terrifying version of Awaken the *Zulo* Shape, this power transforms the vampire into a terrifying, bipedal bat, bearing a wickedly fanged maw and veined, leathery wings. This power confers all of the benefits of the *zulo* shape, in addition to a few others. The mere sight of the marauder is enough to make mortals or weak-willed vampires flee in horror.

System: The vampire gains all the effects of the *zulo* shape. In addition, the fluted wings allow flight at 25 mph, during which the vampire may carry, but not manipulate, objects of reasonable size. The player may make a Strength + Body Crafts roll (difficulty 6) to extend bony claws at the end of the wings, where hands should be. These claws inflict Strength + 2 levels of aggravated damage. Also, the vampire subtracts two from the difficulty of all hearing-based Perception rolls (though he adds one to vision-based Wits and Perception rolls). Assuming the mantle of the Chiropteran Marauder costs three blood points.



BOLTON 02

I will not lose control of myself. Not tonight. Not again.

To calm the Beast, I walk, seeking the company of the kine lest my fellow Cainites arouse my ire. The fools! The tyrant Alexander is gone from this so-called Grand Court, but we continue to play the roles he set for us. We scheme against the Artisan Queens and the Warlords of Saxony and England. We delude ourselves into thinking we are invincible while we lurch toward our own destruction.

At least here, among the thieves, traders and washerwomen of Paris, I am away from such hubris. Let my noble-blooded fellows come here and see the life they so foolishly have abandoned. They speak of duty and destiny, but they are but automatons of tyranny. Feudal oaths run both ways, and the king who doesn't honor his subjects is bound to fall. Prince Alexander, though thrice removed from Caine himself, could not stand without the support of his vassals. Now, his successor repeats his mistakes.

This is where we must find our inspiration, our life. The Embrace has deadened our hearts, but it need not have closed our eyes. While we war and rage, these lowly men and women live lives of passion and community. An ember of that still lives in our dead hearts, it is up to us to stoke it. But they scoff, call us idealists or even deluded madmen. They pray to Caine for guidance. They ride to battle to prove their mastery. They rage like wild animals. All the while, they forget that they were born to life and treat those who were their brothers as nothing but—

There. He seems so out of place. Bearing arms and walking tall in the midst of the huddled workers. They fear the darkness, and he relishes in it. He does not breathe, and he wears clothes too light to hold back the night's chill. Sir Vincent's flesh is already cold of course, for he cares nothing for the living.

He sees a redheaded whore on the stowhouse steps, and I can all but hear his Beast growl. He wishes to sate his refined blood-hunger. But this is my domain, and unlike most, I take the welfare of the herd seriously.

I approach from behind, my skin warm like a living woman's, my chest heaving in and out an unnecessary but welcome breath. He never sees me until it is too late. I forget control and indulge in justice.



CHAPTER SEVEN: DRAMA

You cannot save yourselves, you foolish kings,
You cannot stop the coming storm, or even halve its rage.
—The Erciyes Fragments. VIII (Prophecies)

Dark Ages chronicles encompass a wide variety of situations. Characters may find themselves involved in court intrigues in Paris, debating with scholars in Cordoba, warring with the Saracens of the Levant or facing enraged peasants in Transylvania. They need to feed, to shelter from the burning sun and — perhaps — to pass as a mortal in a world where the populace believes that demons rule the night. As Storyteller, you must evenhandedly adjudicate such events, and this chapter provides a framework and tools by which you may do so.

As with all rules in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, use these mechanics only if they do not interfere with game play and the flow of your chronicle. Let roleplaying take the place of dice pools whenever possible. Use these systems only when there is doubt as to a character's ability to succeed at her desired action.

Dramatic Systems

This section provides systems for dealing with a broad range of circumstances, both mundane and supernatural. These circumstances range from routine matters (such as lifting objects and bartering), to

hunting and combat to even more esoteric matters. The list, however, is far from exhaustive. Medieval life has far more eventualities than can be covered in a single chapter, so you should use your discretion in creating new systems or adapting existing ones to specific circumstances. Many of these systems rely on the basic Attribute + Ability dice pool explained on page 114.

Automatic Feats

Automatic feats usually require the player to spend an action, but they are considered routine and do not, under most circumstances, require a die roll.

- **Blood Use (Healing, Augmenting Attributes, etc.):** Vampire characters may use stored blood to heal themselves, boost Physical Attributes or activate powers. The full range of these abilities, and the associated mechanisms, appear on page 162. Note that spending blood to boost Attributes or power Disciplines does not constitute an action, although using the Disciplines usually does.

- **Getting to Feet:** A player can spend an action for a fallen character to get to her feet. If this is her only action, no roll is required. If the character wishes to carry out other tasks in the same turn, the player must take a multiple action (see p. 116) and roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 4). If the roll succeeds, the character stands up and may attempt her other tasks. Failure indicates that the character remains on the ground. A botch indicates that the character is injured while attempting to rise, thus incurring a level of bashing damage.

- **Movement:** Characters may walk, jog or run without a player having to roll the dice. Walking characters may move up to seven yards per turn, while jogging characters may move a number of yards equal to 12 + Dexterity. A running character may move 20 + (3 x Dexterity) yards per turn. Walking does not count as an action for dice pool purposes (unless the Storyteller decides the character is undertaking something so complex that even casual movement is distracting). Anything faster than that requires the player to take multiple actions. Moving faster than half running speed means the character can undertake no additional actions. Injury may reduce the distance a character can move in a turn while some abilities may increase the movement rate.

- **Readying A Weapon:** A character may draw a knife or sword or nock an arrow in preparation for combat. If the character is taking no other action, no dice roll is required. If the character wishes to ready a weapon while carrying out another action, the player must take multiple actions and roll Dexterity + Melee or Dexterity + Archery (difficulty 4). With one or more successes, the character readies her weapon and can act unimpeded. Failure means the character readies her weapon but has an effective initiative rating of 1. A botch indicates that the character drops her weapon, breaks the bowstring or suffers a similar mishap.

- **Yielding:** A player can temporarily forfeit her character's action and allow the character with the next

highest initiative (see p. 237) to act. The yielding character may still act at the end of the turn, but if everyone (all players and the Storyteller) choose to yield in a single turn, no one does anything and the turn ends. Yielding does not count as an action.

Mortal Affairs

Dark Medieval life and unlife are inextricably linked, and many Cainites maintain strong ties with mortals, either as vampiric lords, manipulating the kine to their own ends, or seeking to go among them and conceal their true nature. Whatever the case, the following systems allow Storytellers to direct the actions of both vampiric and mortal characters. As with all systems, players and Storytellers should not feel obliged to use these mechanics and may instead simply use them as a guideline for roleplaying.

Physical Endeavors

- **Climbing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Scaling vertical surfaces, be they cliff faces or walls, is a staple of those who walk the night. For a character to climb a surface, the player must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6, though use of Disciplines that improve the character's grip, such as the Protean power of Talons of the Beast or Vicissitude-crafted bone spurs, reduces this difficulty to 4). This is an extended roll, with each success indicating that the character moves up 10 feet or so. The Storyteller may adjust this distance depending on the difficulty of the climb (perhaps 15 feet per success for an easy slope with lots of handholds or 5 feet per success for a more challenging ascent across a tightly bonded wall). Failure indicates that the character is currently unable to progress on the climb, perhaps unable to find a suitable route or needing to adjust her position before proceeding. A botch, however, can prove disastrous. At the Storyteller's discretion, the climber may become stuck, panic as a result of the height or fall.

- **Encumbrance [Strength]:** Most medieval folk carry the tools of their trade with them, but there are limits to the amount of equipment that can be transported without encumbering the character. Each may carry 25 pounds of equipment per point of Strength (+ Potence, if any) without penalty. If the character exceeds this amount (known as the *encumbrance limit*), increase by one the difficulty of every physical action. Furthermore, every 25 pounds over the allocation halves the character's base movement. (With 1-25 pounds over, the character moves half her normal rate; with 26-50 pounds over she moves a quarter, and so forth.) A character carrying double her encumbrance limit cannot move. There's no need to strictly enforce this rule (say by having players maintain a detailed inventory of their characters' equipment), but it is useful to prevent characters from becoming pack horses.

- **Jumping [Strength, or Strength + Athletics]:** Jumping is a simple task, and short leaps may be made

without any die rolls. Longer leaps or those in which a mishap may occur, are rolled against a difficulty of 3. Standing jumps use the character's Strength, while running jumps use Strength + Athletics. Each success allows the character to jump up to two feet vertically or four feet horizontally. A failed roll indicates that the character failed to clear the required distance, though the player may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to grab onto a ledge or otherwise avoid injury as the character falls. On a botch, the character fails in her attempt to jump, either landing short and injuring herself in the fall or overshooting and slamming into an obstacle, with similar consequences. Characters may attempt to judge the distance required for the leap (and thus the number of successes required). To do so, the player needs three successes on a Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 6).

- **Lifting [Strength]:** Some Cainites are capable of superhuman feats of strength, while others differ little from the mortals that populate the Dark Medieval. Listed in the "Feats of Strength" table are the minimum Strength values required to lift or damage various items *without* having to make a die roll. (For example, a character with Strength 4 can throw a full barrel without making a special roll to lift it.) The Discipline of Potence enhances a character's power, each dot in the Discipline adding to her effective Strength. At the Storyteller's discretion, the required Strength may be reduced if the character merely wishes to drag (rather than lift/break) an object.

A character may attempt to lift an item heavier than her Strength allows, but doing so requires the player to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9). Each success increases the character's effective Strength by one (so a Strength 4 character who gets two successes would have an effective Strength of 6). Failure leaves the character's effective Strength unaltered, but a botch indicates that the character's vain efforts injure her and inflict one

health level of bashing damage as a result of muscle strains or dropping the item on her foot.

Several characters may work together to lift an object, each player rolling Willpower separately and combining their successes. The number of characters that can cooperate in lifting an object is at the discretion of the Storyteller.

- **Opening/Closing [Strength]:** Forcing open a locked door with brute force requires a Strength roll (difficulty 6). The number of successes required depends on the type of door and fastening. A single success suffices for the simple latched door of a cottage, while two or three successes are needed for a more solid door or one secured by a bolt. A barred door in a castle requires five or more successes. At the Storyteller's discretion, the attempts to open the door can be an extended action, the accumulation of successes reflecting increasing damage to the door or its frame. Teamwork may also be used for forcing a door, particularly in the case of large portals such as castle gate (which may have a difficulty of 8 and require 10 or more successes to force). On a botched roll, the character takes one level of bashing damage as her shoulder or legs suffer under the battering.

- **Swimming [Stamina + Athletics]:** To swim, a character must have at least one dot of Athletics. Most routine swims do not require any form of roll, but those involving long distances or difficult conditions do. In most cases, the target for this Stamina + Athletics roll is 5, but this can be increased one or two points for difficult circumstances. A Cainite's lack of natural buoyancy means she automatically increases the difficulty by one (i.e., to a base of 6). The specific circumstances determine just when a roll is needed: Long-distance swimming requires a roll after an hour and only one success is necessary to remain afloat, though the difficulty of such rolls increases by one every hour. (This assumes that the character swims at a slow, steady pace of one or two miles per hour. Characters who attempt to swim faster tire more quickly and thus should roll every few hundred yards). Characters in difficult conditions (e.g., a raging river or a rip current) should make a roll every 10 yards. Failure to get any successes doesn't mean the character drowns, rather that she begins to have difficulty and perhaps lose ground. Only on a botch does a mortal character begin to drown (see Drowning, p. 256). A Cainite character cannot drown, but she can get into difficulty, perhaps attracting the attention of a predator or sinking below the surface (making progress and navigation difficult).

- **Throwing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Small objects (those weighing three pounds or less) can be thrown a number of yards equal to 5 x Strength. For every additional two pounds, the distance an object can be hurled decreases by five yards. Streamlined or irregularly shaped objects may travel greater or lesser distances, at the Storyteller's discretion. Throwing an object with any degree of accuracy requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll

FEATS OF STRENGTH

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Rip a shirt	40 lbs.
2	Smash a chair	100 lbs.
3	Kick through a wattle wall	250 lbs.
4	Smash a barrel	400 lbs.
5	Overturn a laden cart	650 lbs.
6	Rip chain mail	800 lbs.
7	Bend a one-inch-thick iron bar	900 lbs.
8	Lift a horse	1000 lbs.
9	Punch through a palisade	1200 lbs.
10	Lift a laden cart	1500 lbs.
11	Lift a portcullis	2000 lbs.
12	Break a small tree	3000 lbs.
13	Lift a siege engine	4000 lbs.
14	Punch through a stone wall	5000 lbs.
15	Topple a castle wall	6000 lbs.

with a difficulty of 6 (at half or less the potential range) or 8 (half to full range). The size of the target area and the object's characteristics may also modify the difficulty, as may environmental factors such as wind and light. If an object is thrown as a weapon, consult the rules on p. 246. One or more successes indicate that the object lands where it was intended, while failure indicates that the object misses its target area. A botch may be anything from dropping the object (perhaps on the thrower's own toes) to hitting an ally, depending on the circumstances.

Crime and Administration

• **Bribery and Corruption [Intelligence + Politics; Manipulation + Commerce]:** In all bureaucracies, the wheels of state turn more freely if provided with ample lubricants, and Europe is no exception. Knowing whom to bribe to get a guild permit, to free a "wrongfully arrested" acquaintance or to arrange the presence — or absence — of guards on a particular street is an art that many dabble in but which few perfect. Bribing an official is a two-stage process. First, the appropriate official has to be identified, which requires an Intelligence + Politics roll (difficulty proportional to the legality and ease of the desired task). For example, determining the correct official to bribe to establish a market stall is easy (difficulty 3), while identifying a potential source of information on the baron's guard is challenging (difficulty 7). Failed rolls have no effect, but a botch may result in the wrong people hearing of the character's efforts. At the Storyteller's discretion, the player may roll Intelligence + Commerce if the question has to do with trade and goods.

Once a suitable source has been located, she must be approached and convinced to cooperate. Doing so requires a Manipulation + Commerce roll against a difficulty ranging between the official's Willpower and his Willpower + 3, depending on the legality of the task. Success indicates the official has been bribed and how well: one success indicates that the official is wracked with guilt and may confess his sins, while five successes means the official is ice-cool. Failure indicates that the official takes the money but does not go through with the "favor," while a botch indicates that she takes action against the bribing character.

• **Buying and Selling [Manipulation + Commerce]:** Although coins are found all across Europe, barter remains the cornerstone of the Dark Medieval economy. Markets and fairs rather than shops are the most common sources of goods (though craftsmen and specialists may well sell from permanent facilities), with farmers arriving at town gates around dawn and completing their business during daylight hours.

Finding common goods in the markets is a straightforward process, which usually takes only a few minutes. Less common items may require a Perception + Commerce roll, the difficulty depending on the commonality of the item being sought. Haggling is the main means of buying and selling goods, particularly when bartering other goods and

services rather than using cash. Haggling occurs via resisted Manipulation + Commerce rolls, with the winner receiving a discount proportionate to the number of successes she achieves. One success equates to roughly 10 percent, while three successes drives the merchant down to her minimum asking price. Five successes allow the buyer to talk the merchant into accepting a loss.

• **Gathering Rumors [Variable]:** News is important to the denizens of the Dark Medieval, and it is often exchanged in taverns and markets, each of which is a hotbed of local gossip and an exchange for stories from further afield. Hearing news is a simple matter, requiring a Charisma + Alertness roll, the successes indicating the number and detail of the stories. Sorting out truth from fiction is more difficult, requiring a roll of Perception paired with whichever Ability best covers the subject of conversations. Commerce, Etiquette and Politics are common choices, but not the only ones. Common knowledge is easy to obtain (difficulty 3) but more jealously guarded information is challenging or difficult to come by (difficulty 7 or 8). Of course, a local market (such as at Kings Lynn) is less likely to provide news from across Europe than is a major regional fair (such as those at Troyes or Lübeck).

• **Managing a Household or Business [Variable]:** Managing a business or a major household (such as a lord's retinue) requires considerable acumen and skill to balance the books and keep things operating at peak efficiency. The primary necessary Ability is Seneschal, but others come into play as well. Managing day-to-day affairs requires a weekly Intelligence + Seneschal roll, the difficulty depending on the complexity of the business/ household and the local economic affairs. Managing day-to-day affairs in a small house in Lincoln is difficulty 4 — largely routine in all but the most strenuous economic circumstances — while managing the king's fortress in Paris, the Louvre, is at least 7, even in ideal circumstances. Hiring staff requires a Perception + Empathy roll, the difficulty linked to the number of available workers. One success is adequate help, three is good, and five brings in exceptional talent that is an asset to the business or household. Retaining these staff (and keeping them honest) is part of the regular routine, but where misdeeds occur, handling them requires Charisma + Leadership. Keeping track of finances, stock levels and related items requires a Perception + Seneschal roll (perhaps Perception + Investigation to track down any misdemeanors).

Managing relationships with the local craft and trade associations (called variously guilds, communes and corporations) is often as important as the day-to-day running of the house. Doing so requires a weekly Manipulation + Seneschal roll. Characters who are senior figures in the guild also have to deal with the secular (nobility) and spiritual (clergy) authorities, neither of whom are allowed membership. Dealing with them entails Intelligence + Politics rolls. It should be noted that although Dark Medieval society is riven with gender discrimination, women *are* accepted as a vital part of business, either

working alongside their husbands or as owner-operators in their own right.

• **Pursuit [Dexterity + Athletics/Ride]:** Cainites may be forced to chase down their prey or to flee from pursuers (such as witch-hunters or other Cainites). Such chases can be resolved simply if one character/ group is clearly faster than the other (see movement) and no opportunities for evasion exist: The faster party simply catches (or escapes from) the slower. However, where the two are of comparable speed or the terrain provides opportunities for evasion, the pursuit is more complex, relying on endurance (at least in the case of mortals) and cunning rather than raw speed. The following system simulates such pursuits.

Pursuit is an extended action in which each participant rolls Dexterity + Athletics (if on foot) or Dexterity + Ride (if mounted). The target starts the chase with a number of extra successes dependent on her initial distance from her pursuers: one success for every two yards if on foot, one success for every 10 yards if mounted. In each round of the chases, both the target and the pursuer roll the appropriate dice and add the successes to those they have already scored. If the pursuer's number of successes equals or exceeds those of the target, she has caught up and may attempt whatever actions she deems necessary to end the chase. Otherwise, the chase continues. At the Storyteller's discretion, a Perception roll may be needed for a pursuer to maintain sight of her prey. The base difficulty of this roll is between 4 and 6 (depending on the circumstances), and each success of the target beyond that of the pursuer adds one to the difficulty. If the roll fails, the target has escaped (though the pursuer may keep looking). A botch indicates that the pursuer mistakenly identifies another figure as her quarry, or worse. Mortals may chase (or be pursued) for a number of turns equal to twice their Stamina. Each round thereafter imposes a cumulative +1 difficulty penalty to the pursuit/ evasion rolls.

Example: *The Tremere warlock Adolphus flees from the Tzimisce warrior Constantine in the streets of Buda. As the streets are busy, the Storyteller judges the base target number for the Perception roll is 6. Adolphus's successes total six so far while Constantine has only four, a net difference of two. Therefore, the difficulty of the Perception roll is 8 (6+2). Constantine better have sharp eyes....*

• **Shadowing [Dexterity + Stealth]:** Sometimes one character wishes to follow another without being seen, a process known as shadowing. The shadowing character's player should roll Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 6), gaining at least one success to avoid standing out at the beginning of the tail. Failure at such a roll does not automatically reveal the tailing character's presence (Storyteller's choice), but a botch almost certainly does. The target character can attempt to detect any pursuers, either as a part of a spy's craft or the result of a slip by the pursuer. To do so, the player should roll Perception + Alertness, opposed by the shadow's Dexterity + Stealth. The base difficulty for such actions is 6, though this may be modified up or down by conditions, such as crowds or

familiarity with the terrain. If the target rolls more successes than the pursuer, she spots the tail; otherwise she remains unaware of her pursuer. To minimize the chance of detection, groups of pursuers may work together (which requires special training), constantly "handing off" the shadowing roll so that no one person stands out. Such groups may combine their shadowing rolls.

• **Sneaking [Dexterity + Stealth]:** Combat is not the answer to all problems. In many cases, stealth — sneaking — is much more likely to succeed than a direct confrontation. Characters with Obfuscate can use that Discipline to hide in plain sight, but others may attempt to sneak past guards or hide in shadows using only caution and skill. Doing so requires a Dexterity + Stealth roll, the base difficulty of which is 6, though it may be increased by observant watchers or a lack of cover and reduced by darkness, ample cover or distractions. A roll is also made (collectively) for the watchers, using Perception + Alertness against a difficulty of 6 (likewise modified by conditions). If the sneaking character has more successes than the watchers, she sneaks past. If the watchers have as many (or more) successes than the sneaker, she is detected. A botch by the sneaker indicates that she does something that makes her presence obvious, such as walking into the open or stepping on a cat's tail. A botch by the watchers indicates a complete lack of attention, for example talking about last night's events in the tavern or even falling asleep. In situations where it's impractical to account for the traits of all observers, the player makes a simple Dexterity + Stealth roll against a difficulty set to reflect the overall security of the area. Use the number of successes to determine just how well the character remains undetected.

• **Tracking [Perception + Survival]:** Unlike shadowing, where a character closely follows her target, tracking is the skill of following someone by the evidence of his passage alone. The tracker uses footprints, damage to vegetation and other physical signs to pursue her prey, often combined with a large dose of instinct. The number of successes when making the Perception + Survival roll that tracking calls for, details the amount of information revealed. One success allows the tracker to know that her target passed through the area, while three successes allow her to judge how long ago and the number of people in the group. Five or more success allow the tracker to determine the target's speed and weight, as well as any injuries or load (from step patterns, the depth of print indentations and so forth).

The base difficulty for tracking is 6, but it might decrease if the target is a large group or is careless, and it might increase in difficult terrain (like over limestone paving) or adverse weather (such as rain). The signs of passage also fade with time, so the time since the target's passage can increase the difficulty. On a botch, not only has the tracker failed to find her quarry, but her blundering has disturbed the evidence making it impossible for others to pick up the trail. A character can cover her own

tracks with a Wits + Survival roll (difficulty 6, modified by circumstances). Each success raises the difficulty for subsequent efforts at tracking her.

• **Inquiry [Perception + Investigation]:** Secrets abound in the Dark Medieval night, be they the identity of the power behind a king or regent, the method of smuggling illicit goods into a city, the reason for a brutal murder or the gathering place of heretics. Searching out the clues — physical, social or psychological — that cast light on these mysteries is a complex matter that varies wildly depending on the circumstances and nature of the investigation. It may be systematic, examining everything in fine detail, or it may be intuitive, relying on leaps of logic by the investigator. The former is more time-consuming but likely to turn up clues (eventually). The latter shortcuts the process for a quicker result, albeit at the expense of accuracy and depth. A single Perception + Investigation roll covers about one night of especially systematic work (difficulty 4), roughly a scene of normal work (difficulty 5), and only a few minutes of intuitive work (difficulty 7). One success reveals basic details, while multiple successes provide detailed information and may even allow for deductions based on physical evidence. On a botch, obvious clues are missed or even accidentally destroyed. At the Storyteller's discretion, the process may require an extended action, covering several nights of work.

• **Interrogation [Manipulation + Empathy/Intimidation]:** Asking often isn't enough. Sometimes "persuasion" is required to gather the requisite information, and such acts are much appreciated by Dark Medieval rulers. Interrogation can be careful yet clever questioning, leading the target toward subjects about which the interrogator desires information, or it can be far more brutal. Though mental torture is not unknown, physical violence and pain are the main "inducements" at this time, and the services of a good torturer are highly prized. The techniques used vary considerably, especially where supernatural beings are involved. For example, ducking (submerging the target's head underwater) has no effect on a non-breathing vampire, and a Cainite's innate healing ability allows them to repair most injuries quickly. As such, the system here is abstract, requiring the questioner to make a series of Manipulation + Intimidation rolls (difficulty 6) while the target rolls dice equal to her Willpower or her Stamina (+ Fortitude) + 3, whichever is higher. In cases of mental torture, the target always resists with Willpower. In the case of friendlier persuasion, the inquisitor rolls Manipulation + Empathy against the target's Willpower.

In both persuasion and torture, the questioner gains information if she rolls more successes than the target. The amount and detail of this information is dependent on the net successes of the questioner. If the number of net successes equals or exceeds the target's Willpower, she surrenders to the interrogator and reveals everything she knows. A botch by either party can have a wide range

of meanings. For example, the subject may accidentally blurt out information, while an inquisitor may go too far and harm her subject. In the case of Cainites, a botch may plunge the character into frenzy....

Torture can be carried out only for as long without inflicting serious harm on the target. For every turn of torture, the target loses one health level (physical torture, treat as bashing) or temporary Willpower point (mental torture). If health reaches incapacitated or Willpower drops to zero, the character collapses.

• **Intimidation [Strength/Manipulation + Intimidation]:** Subtle manipulation is the staple of Cainites and nobles, but sometimes a more direct approach is needed, using intimidation or outright threats to persuade recalcitrant individuals. Also favored by base-born rogues, intimidation works passively and actively. Passive intimidation is a result of the character's form and attitude. Crowds in the market part as a tough-looking soldier passes through, or patrons give up a seat to him when he enters a tavern. The higher the character's Intimidation Talent is, the more distance he gets — though some bravos may see him as a challenge and take action. Passive intimidation does not require a roll.

Active intimidation can be subtle or overt, involving intimation or direct threat. Intimated threats require a resisted roll: the character's Manipulation + Intimidation against the target's Willpower. The intimidator must gain more successes than the target to successfully cow her opponent, the net number of successes indicating the degree of success. Levels of Presence grant either party automatic successes. If the intimidator gets fewer successes than the target, the victim is uncowed. If the character botches, her efforts fail utterly, and the target may even be amused by the pathetic efforts. Direct threats — usually involving violence — work in similar manner but substitute Strength + Intimidation rather than Manipulation. The target may also use her own Strength + Intimidation in lieu of Willpower.

Social Endeavors

• **Carousing [Charisma + Empathy]:** Vampires are social creatures, and many revel in hedonistic acts. These activities may also prove useful in influencing others (by buttering up a potential ally or discovering information) or strengthening bonds between characters. The base difficulty is 6, but it may be affected by the Nature of the people involved. A Celebrant both relaxes more readily and has a better chance of influencing others than a Penitent does, for example. The number of successes indicates the degree of accomplishment, while a botch indicates a major mishap (insulting the target, starting a fight, a slip in the character's human façade and so forth).

• **Fast-Talk [Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** Reasoned argument works well among nobles or the clergy, but on the street, quick thinking and a faster mouth are often the difference between a pleasant encounter and the wrong end of a guardsman's spear. Whether truth, lies



or something in-between is used, the goal is to convince (or baffle) the target. The speaker makes a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, while the target rolls dice equal to her Willpower. The difficulty of both actions is 6, and the character with the most successes wins, either convincing the opponent of her veracity or resisting attempts to be bamboozled. If both characters have the same number of successes, their conversation continues for another turn. A botch by the speaker means that she has gone too far, usually by being caught in a lie. A botch by the target means she accepts the speaker's words as truth, and she will argue for its veracity even when presented with evidence to the contrary.

• **Seduction [Variable]:** If the physical aspects of sex lose much of their appeal with the Embrace, they are more than compensated for by the addicting ecstasy of the Kiss. What's more, vampires are social predators, and the dark pleasure of coaxing mortals into illicit liaisons only grows with unlife. The process of seduction is a long, drawn-out process involving many steps and a wide range of skills. It is often best handled through roleplaying, but the following system can serve as a useful shorthand.

The first step is approaching the subject and establishing a repartee, which requires an Appearance + Subterfuge roll with the difficulty equal to the target's Wits + 3. One success means the subject's interest has been piqued and he responds favorably. Additional successes reflect increasing interest and reduce the difficulty

of subsequent rolls, while a botch means the subject may be uninterested or even offended.

The second step is to build on the initial contact with flirting and witty repartee. Doing so requires a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty of the subject's Intelligence + 3). One or more successes signify that the relationship progresses, and each success after the first reduces the difficulty of subsequent rolls. Failure means the subject departs but remains on good terms with the character (perhaps called away or simply not interested in any romantic entanglements). On a botch, the target is offended by the character's efforts and departs angrily.

The third and final stage requires a Charisma + Empathy roll against a difficulty of the subject's Perception + 3. If the character gets one or more successes at this roll, the subject is interested in taking the relationship further, enamored of the character and willing to become "better acquainted." Any subsequent events may be roleplayed but could involve physical intimacy and/or feeding. Failure at this final roll means that the seduction falters (but may be pursued at a later date) while a botch results in an irrevocable breakdown of the relationship.

Artistic and Academic Endeavors

• **Artistic Creation [Variable]:** Although it is not as renowned as the eras that followed, the Dark Medieval sees the birth of many great works of art. Troubadours create

songs, and beautiful craftworks decorate churches and palaces alike. Many Cainites involve themselves with such endeavors, most often as patrons of the arts but also directly, seeking to create something worthy themselves, be it a painting, tapestry, song or a tale. Depending on their personal inclination, such an endeavor can be a demonstration of their sophistication, an outlet for twisted creativity or an anchor to lost mortal lives. Although Toreador have the grandest reputations as vampiric patrons of the arts, many other Cainites act in this way as well.

The creation process varies from character to character and from work to work, but it follows three basic stages: conception, execution and presentation. The player can select the basic theme and style of the work, but a Perception + Expression or Perception + Crafts roll (depending in the type of work) indicates how well the character enacts the idea. The difficulty of this roll varies depending on the complexity of the work. A simple poem has a difficulty rating of 4, while a song that lampoons a prince while outwardly praising him has a difficulty of 8. In the case of static works, such as paintings or sculpture, the number of successes indicates the quality of the work and provides a fair idea of how well it is accepted. Performance works — songs, plays and the like — further rely on the skills of the actors or orators (see “Oration” or “Performance”), but the character’s initial rolls indicate the underlying quality. A good performance can improve the reception for a mediocre piece, just as the true quality of a work may still shine through despite a poor presentation. Still, turning a sow’s ear into a silk purse is a major challenge....

• **Oration: [Charisma + Expression/Leadership]:** Whether one is addressing the court or inspiring an army, oration is a vital skill in the Dark Medieval. The ability to manipulate other people through the use and delivery of words is a major tool in the arsenal of politicians, generals and the clergy. When a character seeks to sway others in this manner, roll Charisma + either Expression or Leadership. Use the former if the character is enchanting the crowd and the latter for efforts to rouse a crowd to action. The difficulty of this roll is usually 6, but it might increase or decrease depending on the number and attitude of the audience. A small, friendly gathering is much more open to manipulation than a large, hostile crowd. The number of successes indicates the strength of the orator’s hold on the audience (if she has no successes, her influence is negligible). A botched oration roll may result in damage to the character’s reputation or a friendly crowd becoming hostile. Proper preparation (Intelligence + Expression) might increase or decrease the difficulty of the oration. Spontaneity (real or apparent) makes the speaker appear more genuine, but a well-written speech can make the difference between success and failure.

• **Performance [Charisma + Performance]:** Storytelling, musical recitals and plays involve one or more entertainers performing before an audience. When a character is involved in such entertainments roll Charisma + Performance. The base difficulty is 6, but it might

increase or decrease depending on the audience’s mood and the material used. A hostile audience is hard to please, while the quality of a well-written play (see “Artistic Creation”) shines through even a poor performance. One success indicates that the performance goes well but is uninspiring. Three successes result in a memorable event that is the talk of the court for weeks. Five or more successes is a truly magnificent performance that is remembered for years. Failure indicates one or more minor problems, while a botch is a truly dreadful performance, one that is remembered for all the wrong reasons.

• **Research [Intelligence + Academics]:** The longevity of Cainites exposes them to many experiences and to a wide range of facts, but finding specific information on a subject is often a laborious task. Private libraries are rare among mortals, usually restricted to clerical institutions, though many Cainites have collected books over the years and centuries. Hunting through these tomes (often works of art in their own right) for specific information requires a roll of Intelligence + Academics. When a character is researching a subject tied to another Knowledge (be it Roman law or the secrets of occult rites), roll Intelligence + the *lowest* of Academics or the Knowledge appropriate to the information sought. The number of successes indicates the depth and breadth of information uncovered, while a botch indicates that the character found nothing (or came to erroneous conclusions). However, the scarcity of books means that when consulting their own libraries, the maximum number of successes a character can gain when researching is equal to her Resources Background. This restriction does not apply when using ecclesiastical or university libraries.

Courtly Life

• **Finding Political Allies [Variable]:** The War of Princes is fought as much in the political arena as on the battlefield. Finding and maintaining political allies is a major part of this process. Despite popular impressions, brutal political games are not generally played by emotionless automatons but by normal beings with a full range of feelings who are simply ruthless about getting what they want. In getting what *you* want, trustworthy friends and allies are critical. A Perception + Politics roll allows a character to find good allies and a Charisma + Empathy roll to become friends with them. The relative station of the parties and the degree of similarity determines the difficulty. To the base difficulty is 6, add the target’s Status and subtract the character’s.

Example: *An ancilla with Status 3 seeking to gain a protégé of Status 1 would have difficulty 4 (6+1-3), while a newcomer to court (Status 0) gaining the trust of an established statesman (Status 3) would have a difficulty of 9 (6+3-0).*

It takes some time between rolls, at least a few nights. The total accumulated successes indicate the strength of the friendship. Ten is an acquaintance, 20 a mild friendship and so on, up to the 80-100 range, which indicates a bond that will last for years (or longer in the case of

Cainites). Both parties can roll if both desire friendship, but the accumulated successes are not added together — friendship is often unequal.

• **The Poison Tongue [Manipulation + Politics]:** Just as finding allies is critical, turning opinion against a political rival is also of crucial importance in the War of Princes. Doing so requires a Manipulation + Politics roll, with a difficulty determined by the degree of competence and political aptitude demonstrated by one's opponent. Everyone can turn opinion against the court bumbler, but throwing darts at the hero of the hour without seeming petty is very difficult. The number of successes determines the degree of effect. One success plants doubts, five successes changes opinions forever. Note that it can take dozens of manipulations to really effect a change of opinion in the court as a whole. A campaign of whispered slander and insinuation takes months of hard effort to bring to maturation. A botch during this time probably makes the matter into a public feud or even brings about a challenge to a duel.

Sometimes, whispered insinuations aren't enough. Framing someone for a crime she didn't commit is always a popular way to eliminate an enemy. It is particularly effective if she is suspected of committing that sort of crime but hasn't been caught yet. Setting the matter up requires the player to make an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, with a difficulty based to the legitimacy of the victim. The actual false accusation should be roleplayed out, and many other systems are likely to be put into use in the process.

Sport and War

• **Hunting and Hawking [Variable]:** Hunting serves an important role in medieval society, providing a way for warriors to demonstrate their prowess and hone their skills. First, the hunter must master tracking to identify and pursue the prey (Perception + Alertness), in turn exercising her riding skills (Stamina + Ride). The usual prey of such hunts are boars and bears, so a rider faces a considerable challenge in maintaining control of her mount once the prey is cornered (Wits + Ride). Finally, the beast must be dispatched, usually by means of a lance or sword, testing the warrior's courage and skill at arms (Dexterity + Melee). Boars may also be hunted on foot with broad spears, a more difficult and dangerous proposition that tests the warrior's courage (roll Courage) as well as her skill at arms in the close confines of the forest (Perception + Melee). Other forms include the pursuit of deer and wild horses, hunting in this case usually by bow (Dexterity + Archery). Hawking (Wits + Animal Ken) is also appreciated, though often restricted to the loftiest social circles.

• **Maintaining Weapons and Equipment [Perception + Crafts]:** The equipment used in the Dark Medieval is often subject to great stress and wear, and without regular maintenance, it can lose its effectiveness or even break. Most such tasks are simple and routine — oiling a saddle, sewing a tear in a jerkin or attaching a new buckle — but others require a

modicum of skill and training. Keeping a weapon in good order is perhaps the most significant and the most commonly ignored by sloppy soldiers. Without regular maintenance — sharpening blades, oiling the mechanisms of crossbow, checking the fastenings on spearheads — weapons become increasingly ineffective and may even break. Armor likewise needs preventative maintenance if it is to provide protection (removing rust, keeping it supple and the straps strong). This work requires a number of minutes each day (and weapons are usually maintained directly after combat), but the player need roll only Perception + Crafts (difficulty 5) once per week of game time. (To maintain appropriate weapons, the player may roll Perception + Archery or Melee instead, although the difficulty is 6.) One or more successes indicate that the character completes all possible maintenance work on her equipment, which remains in usable form. Failure indicates that, although the character tries her best, she misses something. The exact nature of the problem is left to the Storyteller, but suggestions include a strap that breaks (at an inopportune moment), reduced effectiveness of a weapon (-1 damage) or reduced armor effectiveness (-1 soak). A botch indicates that instead of maintaining her equipment, the ministrations actually harm one or more items.

• **Treating Wounds [Variable]:** Vampires heal through the power of their blood and through that power alone (see p. 162), but mortals are not so lucky. Medieval medicine is, at best, an imperfect art. Although hospitals and medical colleges exist, most medical care is undertaken by local village women who rely on popular cures discovered through trial and error or passed down from their predecessors, sometimes with explicitly non-Christian elements. That is not to say that such folk cures are ineffective. Indeed, they are just as useful as those administered by supposedly well-educated doctors in many cases, if not more so. The curing of disease is terribly hit-or-miss, but the treatment of wounds, though limited, is effective. Medieval healers of all sorts can ease pain and stop mild infections. The best doctors are said to be Jewish, especially Iberian and Levantine Jews who have access to the Greek medical texts preserved by the Muslims.

The most basic thing a healer can do to help a patient is to reduce her pain. This can be done with various poultices and herbal draughts, as well as splints and other bandages. To do so, the healer's player rolls Intelligence + Medicine or Hearth Wisdom against a difficulty of 5 + the wound penalty of the patient. (If the patient is Incapacitated, the penalty is considered to be 5.) Even a single success halves that penalty for a day.

A healer can also be of significant help to mortals who are wounded as the result of bashing damage, which isn't life threatening by itself. For a healer to speed recovery from such wounds, the player rolls Intelligence + Medicine against a difficulty of 5 + the wound penalty of the patient. Success halves the patient's healing times for these wounds. A healer can try to help thus with Hearth Wisdom instead of Medicine, but the roll suffers a +2 difficulty penalty.

Given the state of medicine, European healers are of significantly less use in dealing with lethal wounds. Stanch-

ing wounds requires a Wits + Hearth Wisdom or Medicine roll against a difficulty of 3 + the wound penalty of the patient. Even one success stops further wounds from bleeding and infection. If the patient is Crippled or Incapacitated, this stabilization lasts an only hour. Actually helping the healing process is significantly harder. When a patient under the healer's care is ready to make a Stamina roll to heal a level of damage (as outlined on page 255), the healer's player should roll Intelligence + Medicine against a difficulty of 7 + the patient's wound penalty. Each success reduces the difficulty on the patient's Stamina roll by one (see p. 255). At the Storyteller's discretion, the player of a Jewish healer or another who has trained in Saracen lands may make this roll at -1 difficulty.

Any failed roll related to treating a patient means the current effort fails, but the healer can try again after a few hours (or minutes if stanching a wound). Any botch immediately causes an additional lethal wound to the patient.

For more on mortal healing, see p. 255.

Cainite Affairs

In addition to the concerns of their mortal kin, Cainites must look to their own concerns, such as feeding, clan relationships and the like. The following section provides mechanics and details of Cainite activities in the Dark Medieval night. Again, these systems are intended as a guide for players and Storytellers rather than a replacement for roleplaying.

Nightly Activities

- **Awakening [Perception, Road]:** The rising and setting of the sun is a powerful force upon Cainites. Most are nocturnal, waking (un)naturally after sunset and falling into a deep sleep when the sun rises. While a character may use Willpower to remain awake into the day, waking early is a difficult feat for most. If a character is disturbed while dormant, the player can make a Perception (+ Auspex, if any) roll against difficulty 8. If she gains any successes, she may awaken and attempt to react. Upon being roused in such a manner, the player should roll a number of dice equal to the character's Road trait against a difficulty of 8. Each success allows the character to act for a turn, though five or more successes indicate that the character is fully awake and may act indefinitely. (A vampire may have no more dice in any dice pool, however, than her Road rating if she is awake during the day.)

- **Finding Shelter While Traveling [Intelligence + Survival]:** Many European Cainites are not widely traveled, preferring instead to hunt in the cities and towns. Occasionally, however, need arises for them to journey across the land, and finding suitable shelter on such travels is a major problem. Cainites with the Discipline of Protean have few problems, using the Interred in the Earth ability to sink into the ground. Characters without that ability (or who are unwilling to spend blood), however, must use more traditional methods of finding shelter. Doing so requires the player to make an Intelligence +

Survival roll, with the difficulty dependent on the environment. In the towns and woodlands of Europe, the difficulty ranges between 4 and 6, while more open land may have targets of 7 or 8. Where the Cainite has tools and equipment to fashion her own shelter (for example, a tarp) reduce the difficulty by two. A successful roll indicates that the character has found shelter, while a failure indicates that no protection has been found though she may continue searching. A botch, however, indicates the character *thinks* she has found suitable shelter but will find — too late in most cases — that it has a fatal flaw (e.g., it is exposed to the sun, or it is a Lupine den).

- **The Hunt [Perception]:** Cainites must feed to survive and each spends a portion of the night searching out prey, be it human or animal. The difficulty of finding prey — or at least finding suitable and accessible prey — depends on the locale. For each hour spent hunting, the player rolls Perception against a difficulty that depends on the venue. Characters hunting for non-human prey may reduce these difficulty numbers by two (rats, dogs and the like are easy to find). Characters subject to Prey Exclusion (including *all* Ventrue) increase the difficulty of the roll by one (to a maximum of 9). Players whose characters have the Herd Background (see p. 155) reduce their difficulty by its level if the vampire is hunting in the area frequented by her herd. These characters also have access to one blood point per level in Herd every night without having to roll to hunt, but taking these points cancels the difficulty bonus to hunting attempts.

Each success indicates that a suitable victim has been identified (and may be subdued and drunk from) while failure indicates no suitable prey or opportunities. A botch offers a host of opportunities to the Storyteller:

HUNTING TABLE

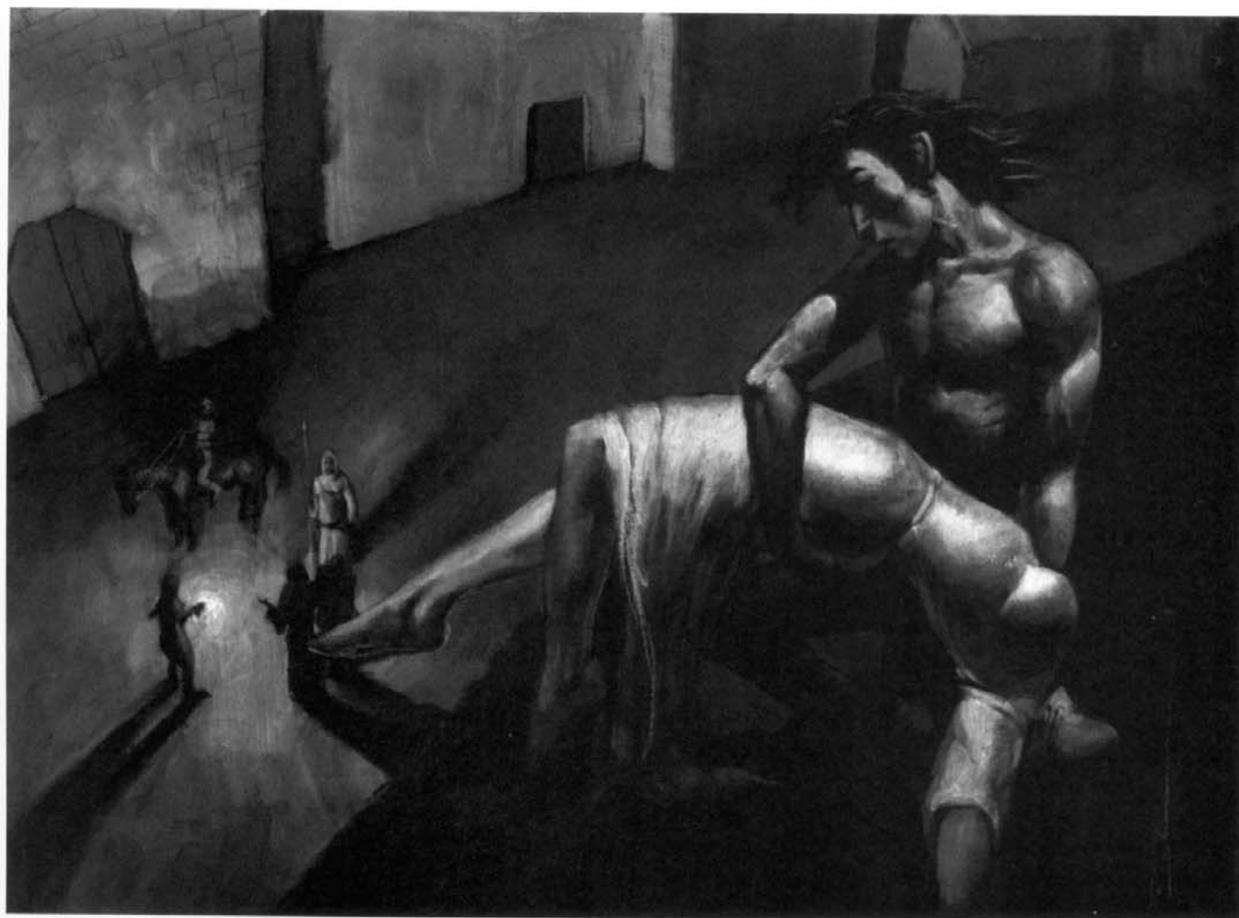
Area	Difficulty
Large city (e.g., Venice, Paris)	
Seedy district	4
Merchant district	6
Catacombs	7
Palace environs	7
Small city/Town (e.g., Troyes, Nottingham)	
Market Fair	5
Not-so-nice district	6
Nice district	7
Others	
Monastic grounds	6
Farmland	7
Pilgrimage Road	7
Village	7
Forest	8
Hamlet	8
Wilderness	9

The prey may die and have to be hidden, or there may be more to them than meets the eye. The hunt can be roleplayed or abstracted as best suits the players, Storyteller and the tone of the chronicle. The amount of blood that may be drunk and the effect on both mortal and vampire are covered on page 164.

• **Hiding a Body [Intelligence + Subterfuge]:** Whether deliberately or accidentally, occasionally a Cainite kills her prey (or others she stumbles upon). While dead bodies are not unknown in Dark Medieval cities, ones drained of blood are likely to cause mass panic among the superstitious masses. As a result, one of the first lessons for most Cainites is how to dispose of the evidence, either concealing it entirely or obscuring the manner of death. Where time permits, burial or concealment of the corpse is the most obvious method. The player should roll Intelligence + Subterfuge against a difficulty based on the number and ease of access of hiding spaces, ranging from 4 in the wilderness to 8 in a busy city. The number of successes indicates the quality of the concealment: One success means the body will not be found immediately but is unlikely to remain hidden for long. Three successes mean that the body is unlikely to be found without an organized search, while five or more successes indicates that the body is unlikely to be found no matter how thorough a search is made.

• **Passing as a Mortal [Charisma/Intelligence + Subterfuge]:** There are many occasions when a Cainite may need — or desire — to pass herself off as a mortal. Doing so for short periods is a simple process, requiring a Charisma + Subterfuge roll against a difficulty of 5 (8 for Nosferatu and other deformed Cainites). The number of successes indicates the quality of the masquerade, and a botch indicates that the character exhibits some flaw during the “performance” that demonstrates her unliving nature (such as fangs, blood tears or not breathing). Anyone who is purposely seeking to uncover the character’s true nature needs to roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6) and achieve at least as many successes as the vampire. A Cainite may spend blood points to give herself the semblance of life — warm breath, flushed skin and so forth — which decreases her difficulty by one and increases that of any observers by one. Details of this blood use are on page 163.

A long-term masquerade requires a subtly different range of skills to conceal the traits and habits of Cainite life, such as preventing observers from linking the character’s absences with murders in the town, her nocturnal lifestyle and so forth. Doing so requires an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, the target number depending on the character’s habits and routine (the more outrageous the lifestyle is, the higher the target number rises). One success means others aren’t immediately seek-



ing out the local constable or priest, though the vampire seems "odd." Three successes means outsiders view the character as a little odd, but she may otherwise be well regarded. Five or more successes indicates that there is no suspicion whatsoever about the character's nocturnal activities, and she is considered a fine, upstanding member of the community.

Combat Systems

Combat and warfare are likely to be central to many **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicles, be they associated with the mortal conflicts that plague Europe or the War of Princes between Cainites. This section is intended as a guide to martial matters in **Dark Ages: Vampire** games, with emphasis on rules rather than mood. Players and Storytellers who wish to get a greater understanding of medieval combat should consult the books and resources presented in the bibliography on p. 17.

The following mechanics attempt to capture the drama and feel of combat without bogging the game down in unnecessary detail. They are, by necessity, somewhat abstract, but they are intended to be true to the limitations and dynamics of combat. The same mechanics apply to both mortal and Cainite characters, though the latter can bring their own unique traits to bear in the martial arena.

As with all aspects of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, the Storyteller should be flexible. Combat systems are meant to add depth to the game, not detract from the experience.

Types of Combat

There are two types of combat, each involving the same basic system with minor differences:

- **Close Combat:** This system covers unarmed combat and melee. Unarmed combat uses Dexterity + Brawl as its main dice pool, and it can cover a down-and-dirty barroom brawl or an honorable test of skill. Opponents must be within touching distance (one yard) to engage in unarmed combat. Melee involves hand-held weapons such as maces and swords, and it is the principal form of combat in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Opponents must be within one or two yards of each other to engage in melee. Players usually roll Dexterity + Melee during melees, unsurprisingly.

- **Ranged Combat:** Armed combat using such projectile weapons as thrown knives, bows and crossbows. Opponents must normally be within sight (and weapon range) of each other to engage in ranged combat. Dexterity + Archery is the common dice pool for bows, and Dexterity + Athletics covers thrown weapons.

Combat Turns

Combat is often fluid, with multiple things happening at the same time or overlapping with each other. For simplicity within the game, a more rigid structure is applied

to timekeeping during combat, a series of three-second combat turns used to regulate matters. Each combat turn has three distinct stages: *Initiative*, *Attack* and *Resolution*.

Stage One: Initiative

The first step determines the order in which characters act in each combat turn, preventing disputes over the sequence of events. The action may be anything from an attack to movement to yelling out a (short) message. Each action should be described to the Storyteller in as much detail as it requires, and some may even take multiple combat turns to accomplish.

Every character has an initiative rating equal to her Dexterity + Wits. To determine the order of actions, each player rolls one die and adds the result to her character's initiative rating. The character with the highest score acts first, then the other characters act in decreasing order of their score. If two characters have the same score, the one with the higher basic initiative rating goes first. If initiative ratings are also tied, the characters act simultaneously. Wound penalties subtract directly from a character's initiative rating.

To reflect the ability of faster characters to react to slower ones, actions are nominated in reverse order, slowest to fastest. This may be an attack, movement or the activation of a Discipline (including the requisite expenditure of blood or Willpower). Actions may also be held until later in the turn, either until after a certain point ("I swing at the ghoul *after* Hans attacks the Toreador.") or conditional ("If Lucita misses the Gangrel, I'll throw a dagger at him."). Such delayed actions may take place at any time after their designated order in the initiative, preempting or following the actions of a slower character. If two characters delay their actions to the same point, the one with the higher initiative score for the turn acts first.

In most cases, characters act in initiative order. Delaying actions as outlined here is one exception, but others are defensive actions and multiple actions. A character may undertake defensive actions according to the rules outlined on p. 241 provided she has actions remaining to use.

Multiple actions (be they a result of activating the Celerity Discipline or other means) occur at the end of the turn after all characters have had the opportunity to act once. If two or more characters take multiple actions, they take place in order of initiative, save for defensive actions (such as multiple dodges), which happen as needed to avert an attack. All second actions must take place before any third actions take place, and so on. For more on taking multiple actions, see p. 116, as well as the rules for Celerity on p. 179.

Stage Two: Attack

Although they are not the only actions that one can take, attacks are at the heart of the combat turn. As with general skill use, each attack requires the player to roll

STEP-BY-STEP COMBAT TURN

There are times when it's critical to know just when events, modifiers and effects come into effect during a combat turn. Consult this chart for those questions.

Preliminaries

- **Spend Blood:** Vampires burn blood reflexively (up to their generation limit) to augment Physical Attributes or heal damage.

- **Activate Celerity:** Vampires with Celerity can burn blood to take additional physical actions this turn, on one-for-one basis, up to their Celerity rating. This expenditure ignores generation limit.

- **Declare Multiple Actions and Turns Spent Parrying:** All characters can announce taking multiple actions. Declare the total number of actions to be taken (excluding Celerity) but not the nature of these actions. At the same time, characters who intend to do nothing except parry this turn declare so.

- **Roll Initiative:** Everyone rolls one die and adds the total to their initiative rating (Dexterity + Wits). Wound penalties subtract from initiative, but not penalties for multiple actions.

Declaration

- **Declare First Actions:** Every player declares his first action. The player with the *lowest* initiative score declares first, and others do so subsequently based on their scores. Since those with higher initiative scores will act first, however, they can delay their actions to any time later in the order of initiative — as long as they announce it now.

Action

- **Target Announces Active or Passive Parry:** A character who is about to be the subject of an attack (the first action in this part of the turn) and has the choice between parrying passively or some other form of defense should declare which option she is using.

- **Fastest Character Takes First Action:** The character with the highest initiative acts (unless he is delaying the action). If the action is an attack, the player rolls the appropriate dice pool, usually Dexterity plus the Ability tied to the attack form (see p. 239). The difficulty is usually 6, modified by conditions such as range and passive parrying.

If this action is one of several taken without the benefit of Celerity, subtract the total number of actions to be taken from the dice pool.

- **Target Defends:** In a resisted action, the target acts reflexively, and the player rolls the appropriate dice pool. His successes are subtracted from the attacker's successes to determine the net successes.

If the target is being attacked and has an unused action remaining this round, she may abort to a defensive action (dodging or parrying, as appropriate).

The defending player first rolls Willpower reflexively to abort (difficulty 6). If successful, she rolls her defensive action (Dexterity + Dodge or the appropriate weapon Ability) and subtracts her successes from the attacker's.

Resolution

- **Action Takes Effect:** If the action is not an attack (and doesn't otherwise cause damage) and the acting player is left with net successes (or the action is automatic), the action takes effect immediately unless the action's specific description says otherwise.

- **Determine Damage:** Determine the attack's base damage and add any net attack successes beyond the first (unless the attack is with a thrown weapon, in which case the additional successes are ignored for damage). Roll that many dice against a difficulty of 6.

- **Roll Soak:** The defending character rolls soak (assuming there are any damage successes). Mortals roll Stamina to soak bashing damage, but they can't soak lethal or aggravated damage. Vampires roll Stamina to soak bashing and lethal damage, but can't soak aggravated damage. Players of vampires with Fortitude roll Stamina + Fortitude against bashing and lethal damage, as well as against fire and sunlight damage. They roll Fortitude alone against other sources of aggravated damage. Any soak successes reduce the net damage successes.

- **Apply Attack Damage:** Apply any net damage successes as lost health levels to the defender. Vampires halve this number for bashing damage. Wound penalties take effect immediately, and characters who reach Incapacitated collapse (or may even die). Characters who suffer more levels of damage than they have Stamina (for mortals) or Stamina + 2 (for vampires) are dazed.

Repetitions & Finals

- **Repeat for Subsequent Characters:** Repeat the steps under Action and Resolution for each character who still has a first action, starting with the next to act. Characters who took a defensive action have already taken their first action, so they cannot act again until their second action (if any).

- **Repeat for Subsequent Actions:** Repeat the steps under Declaration, Action and Resolution, and the previous point, for each additional action. Players keep their initiative scores but now declare their second actions, take them and resolve them. Those without second (or third, or fourth) actions cannot act — although they may suffer at the hands of those who can.

- **Extended and Delayed Effects:** Extended actions that end this turn, and any action that says it takes effect at the end of the turn, takes effect.

dice equal to an Attribute + Ability combination dependant on the type of combat:

- **Close Combat:** Use Dexterity + Brawl (unarmed) or Dexterity + Melee (armed).

- **Ranged Combat:** Use Dexterity + Archery (bows and crossbows) or Dexterity + Athletics (thrown weapons).

If a character doesn't have points in the necessary Abilities, use the rules for acting without an Ability (see p. 143). In brief, the player rolls a number of dice equal to the appropriate Attribute. In the case of Archery and Melee, the attack also suffers a +1 difficulty penalty.

In ranged combat, both the weapon and the conditions may modify the dice pool or difficulty. See "Ranged Attacks" (p. 246) for more details of ranged combat.

The difficulty for most attacks is 6. It can be adjusted for situational modifiers (long range, weapon type). If the player rolls no successes, the attack fails and inflicts no damage. If the result is a botch, not only does the attack fail, but the character may be subject to adverse effects: A bowstring breaks, a blade shatters, or she strikes an ally.

Stage Three: Resolution

The final stage of the combat turn determines the outcome of each character's attacks (or other actions taken during combat), namely the damage inflicted and its nature. The core of this system is expressed here in mechanical terms — a number of health levels of damage inflicted on the target — but it is generally more interesting for the Storyteller to handle this in a narrative manner. "Your broadsword slashes 'round and carves a rent in the ghoul's chest. He leaps back screaming as blood pours from the wound," is more appropriate than, "The ghoul loses three health levels."

The base damage for each attack depends on the character's Strength and the weapon or maneuver being used, but it may be modified by the number of successes rolled in the attack. Each success above the first adds one die to the damage dice pool. These dice are rolled versus difficulty 6, each success inflicting one health level of damage on the target. Damage rolls cannot be botched, though rolling no successes indicates that no damage is inflicted — the blow glancing off the target's armor or weapon.

Damage Types

Damage may be of one of three types, detailed further in "Health" (p. 251).

- **Bashing:** Bashing damage comprises punches and other blunt trauma that are less likely to kill a victim (especially a vampire) instantly. All characters use their full Stamina ratings to resist bashing effects, and the damage heals fairly quickly. Because their bodies do not bleed or bruise in the same manner as mortals, Cainites who suffer bashing damage take only half (round down) the number of health levels of damage after they have made their soak roll. Bashing damage is applied to the health boxes on the character sheet with a slash (/).

- **Lethal:** These attacks are meant to cause immediate and fatal injury to the target, and they include strikes from swords, spears and other weapons of war. Mortals may not use Stamina to resist lethal effects, and the damage takes quite a while to heal. Vampires may resist lethal damage with their Stamina. Like bashing damage, lethal damage is applied to the health boxes on the vampire's character sheet with an X.

- **Aggravated:** Certain types of attacks are deadly even to the undead. Fire, sunlight and the teeth and claws of vampires, Lupines and other supernatural beings cause aggravated damage. Aggravated damage cannot be soaked except with Fortitude, and it takes a very long time to heal. Aggravated damage is applied to the health boxes on the character sheet with an asterisk (*).

Several additional effects take place when a character is subject to massive damage and/or specific types of attack:

- **Dazed:** After soaking, if the character suffers a number of health levels greater than her Stamina (for mortals) or Stamina + 2 (for vampires and other supernatural beings), she is dazed. She must spend her next available action shaking off the attack's effects. Characters with multiple actions automatically lose *all* actions remaining in that turn but may act normally in the next combat turn.

- **Knockdown:** Some attacks (such as tackles or sweeps) are intended to knock a character to the ground, and a massive blow from a more conventional attack may have a similar effect. (This occurs at the Storyteller's discretion, but a number of attack successes greater than the target's Stamina + Brawl is one option.) If his character is knocked down, a player should immediately make a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll. If successful, the character may immediately get to her feet, but she suffers a -2 penalty on her initiative in the next turn. If the roll fails, the character must spend her next action getting to her feet in addition to the initiative penalty. On a botch, she must spend the next turn getting to her feet *and* suffer an automatic level of bashing damage.

Soak

Everyone can endure a certain degree of physical punishment without sustaining serious injury. In game terms, doing so is called *soaking damage*, and each character has a soak dice pool equal to her Stamina. Normal humans can soak only those attacks that cause bashing damage, (this reflects the body's natural resilience to such attacks) while a vampire (or other supernatural being) is tougher, and can thus soak lethal attacks. Aggravated damage may be soaked only with the Discipline of Fortitude. Against bashing or lethal damage, Fortitude adds to the defender's soak rating (so a character with Stamina 3 and Fortitude 2 has five soak dice against bashing and lethal damage and two soak dice against aggravated damage).

Soaking damage is reflexive, and it neither requires the expenditure of an action nor has its pool reduced by other dice pools (or wound penalties for that matter). The

base difficulty of a soak attempt is 6, though weapon and/or situational modifiers may modify it. Each soak success subtracts one from the total damage inflicted. Like damage rolls, soak rolls cannot be botched.

Example: *Anatole has Stamina 4 and Fortitude 1. He is attacked with a broadsword, and the attacker scores three levels of lethal damage. Anatole may soak this damage with five dice (Stamina 4 + Fortitude 1). He rolls 8, 5, 2, 7 and 5. The 8 and 7 are all equal to or greater than the difficulty of 6, and each reduces the damage inflicted by one level. Anatole takes one health level of damage. Had he been mortal, however, he would not have been able to soak the lethal damage and would have lost three full health levels.*

Armor

Armor provides additional protection against injury, adding dice to the character's soak pool. Add the armor's rating to the character's base soak for the purposes of reducing damage. Some protective equipment, such as a shield, only adds to the soak pool in certain conditions. Light armor provides scant protection but has little impact on the character's movement. Heavier armor provides greater protection but also hinders the actions of all but the strongest or most skilled characters. Characters with either a Melee rating of 3 or higher, or those with a Strength (or Strength + Potence) that doubles what is required to use the armor suffer only half the indicated Dexterity penalties when wearing armor. Armor types, their ratings and other specifics are described on p. 249.

Armor can sustain only a certain amount of damage before being rendered useless. If the damage rolled in a single attack equals twice the armor's rating against that type of attack (excluding any bonus for helmets), the armor is destroyed.

Combat Complications

The basic system of initiative, attack and resolution can be used as is for much combat. A quick scuffle or tavern brawl really does not require any more detail. In a time as full of conflict as the War of Princes, however, you can expect to deal with battle more often than that. When dealing with more complex situations — such as skilled combatants at tournament, a pitched battle or dealing with archers — it can be useful to have other systems to fall back on to keep everyone honest. The following mechanics should get you through any combat that comes up.

Many of these complications appear in the form of *maneuvers*, which are the martial equivalent of the various non-combat systems that appear earlier in this chapter. Like those systems, these appear in point form with the appropriate Attribute + Ability combination in brackets (if any). Because of its moment-to-moment, life-and-death nature, combat sometimes needs a few extra details. Therefore, some of these maneuvers have other traits that appear after their plain-English description.

- **Accuracy:** This indicates how many dice, if any, are added to (or subtracted from) the dice pool for the maneuver. A "+2" adds two dice to the pool for that attack, while a "-1" subtracts one.

- **Difficulty:** The basic difficulty for combat actions is 6. This entry denotes any additions to or subtractions from that base for the maneuver. For example, a "+2" increases the difficulty by two (usually to 8 from a base of 6).

- **Damage:** This entry indicates the damage pool for the maneuver.

Basic Modifiers

These modifiers reflect situations and maneuvers that can occur in any type of combat.

- **Ambush:** Any combat in which one combatant is clearly caught unawares by another is an ambush. In such surprise conditions, the attacker (who set the ambush) automatically wins initiative. The players of ambushed characters each make a Perception + Alertness roll against a difficulty of 8. The number of successes indicates the number of dice available for actions that first turn. Preparing an ambush generally requires a Wits + Stealth roll (difficulty 6) as well as proper cover.

- **Blind Fighting:** Darkness or fighting with impaired vision (blindness, dirt in eyes) imposes a +2 difficulty penalty on Brawl and Melee attacks. Ranged attacks cannot be made while one is "blinded." Some Discipline powers, such as Heightened Senses (Auspex 1) or Witness of Darkness (Protean 1) partly or fully negate this penalty.

- **Blindsiding:** Attacks from the flank or rear are harder to defend against. Players whose characters attack targets from the flank gain an additional attack die — two dice if attacking from the rear. Shields provide no protection against rear attacks and only protect one flank (see p. 250). Storytellers may allow the target to make a Wits + Perception roll (difficulty 6 against flank attacks, 8 against rear attacks) to avoid being blindsided. To avoid giving the attacker this advantage, they must gain a number of successes equal to the attacker's Stealth Ability (minimum of one success).

- **Immobilized Targets:** If a target is immobilized but still struggling, add two dice to any attacks made against them. If the target is completely immobilized — staked, unconscious, etc. — attacks against them hit automatically. In such cases, add two dice to the damage pool.

- **Movement:** A character may move up to her walking distance (see "Movement," p. 227) and still take an action in a turn. More complex movement, such as jumping, diving or balancing may be distinct actions or impose difficulty penalties on actions, depending on their complexity and the Storyteller's discretion.

- **Multiple Opponents:** A character who finds herself fighting multiple opponents in close combat has to keep an eye on each one. Her player suffers cumulative +1 difficulty penalties to attack and defense rolls for each opponent after the first (to a maximum of +4).

- **Targeting:** A skilled warrior can target a specific location, accepting increased difficulty in favor of height-

TARGETED ATTACKS

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage
Large (door)	0	0
Medium (limb, chest)	+1	0
Small (hand, head)	+2	+1
Tiny (eye, heart, lock)	+3	+2*

(*) This damage bonus does not apply if the attack is an attempt to stake a vampire (see p. 254)

ened damage or targeted effects. The difficulty (and any additional damage) is dependent on the size of the target and the Storyteller should consider additional effects, depending on the attack and the target.

Defensive Maneuvers

Soaking damage is all well and good, but it's better yet to get out of harm's way all together. Combatants who are under attack can do several things to escape damage, from ducking out of the way, to limiting an enemy's options of attack with a shield, blocking her strikes blow for blow.

- **Aborting to Defense [Willpower]:** A character may abandon her declared action in favor of a defensive maneuver (e.g. block, dodge, parry) provided she has an action remaining this turn. To switch gears in this way, however, the player must make a reflexive Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or spend a Willpower point. If it succeeds, she may adjust her action as desired, provided the new action is defensive.

- **Blocking [Dexterity + Brawl]:** A block is an interception of an incoming attack with the defender's bare hands (or another body-part). Only brawling attacks that cause bashing damage can be blocked, though the Storyteller may allow skilled combatants (Brawl 3+) to block bashing melee attacks. Characters with the Discipline of Fortitude or wearing armor can block lethal attacks. Successes on a blocking attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack.

- **Dodging [Dexterity + Dodge]:** A dodge is an effort to avoid an incoming attack altogether, and it is useful against any attack the defender can sense coming (Storyteller's discretion). Even missile weapons such as crossbow bolts — which move faster than the eye can see — can be dodged by diving for cover if the target sees the archer taking aim. The

Situation	Difficulty Modifier
Multiple attackers	+1 per extra attacker
Close Combat	
Attacker unarmed	-1
Limited mobility	+1
Ranged Combat	
Full cover within half a step	-4
Full cover within diving distance	-2
Partial cover only within three yards	+1
Flat and featureless terrain	+2

basic difficulty of the attempt is 6, which assumes a typical combat situation such as fighting a single armed opponent in close combat, or having access to cover from arrow fire not very far away. Use the following chart to modify that difficulty as appropriate. A player whose character is suffering multiple simultaneous attacks can divide successes from a single Dexterity + Dodge roll between the attackers, but the difficulty of the dodge attempt suffers a +1 penalty for every attacker past the first. Successes on a Dodge attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack.

- **Parrying [Dexterity + Melee]:** A parry is a block using a melee weapon or shield. It is useful against bashing and lethal melee attacks, and it can even be used to block brawling attacks, although weapons (not shields) used for this purpose suffer a +1 difficulty penalty. The standard difficulty of a parry is 6, but shields and certain specialized weapons have lower difficulties that reflect their special design (see weapons chart, p. 248). Successes on a parrying attempt reduce the net success of the incoming attack. It is not generally possible to parry missile attacks, though in some circumstances it may be possible at the Storyteller's discretion.

Passive Defense

In Europe, shields are the most common piece of equipment used for parrying, but a second weapon sometimes also serves, notably among the Moors. Shields are favored not only because they are effective at actively intercepting incoming attacks (using the parry maneuver), but also because their size allows them to reduce an attacker's effective options and even protect against unseen missile attacks. This "passive" use of a shield or other parrying weapon simply adds to the difficulty of the attacking character. It does not require the defender to take an action, and it applies to all attacks made against the character in that combat turn. Most items have differing scores for missile and melee defense. Shields or parrying devices may only be used to protect the character from attacks from the front or the side where the shield is held. They provide no protection from rear attacks.

It is possible to use passive parrying if one is armed with only a sword and no shield or other parrying item, but only if the character does not attack with that weapon this turn. Assuming the character has actions, however, she may use "active" parry maneuvers.

It is not possible to use active and passive defense at the same time. Defensive devices may be used either to parry attacks or passively defend against them, but not both. The defender can choose which sort of defense the weapon offers on a per-attack basis, however, so it still offers some protection when her dice pool is exhausted. The player must choose before the dice are rolled for the attack.

Full Defense

Especially skilled combatants (Melee 3+ or Brawl 3+) can dedicate themselves entirely to defense for a turn. The character can do nothing but take a single defensive action over and over again (either a parry or a block), but she can intercept a stunning number of blows in this manner. The



player makes her first Dexterity + Melee/ Brawl roll at no penalty and reduces her dice pool by one for every subsequent parry that turn. When she runs out of dice, she can no longer parry. Even characters with Celerity cannot undertake other actions during a turn dedicated to active parrying in this way, but the character gains a number of additional parries equal to her activated levels of Celerity before her dice pool starts decreasing.

Example: *Fatima has Dexterity 3, Melee 4 and Celerity 3. Faced by an onslaught of attackers, she decides to spend the turn parrying. Her player declares so and spends three points of blood to activate her three levels of Celerity. She gets to parry the first four attacks (one standard + three levels of Celerity) at her full dice pool of seven dice. On the fifth parry, she rolls six dice; on the sixth, five dice and so on. All told, Fatima can parry an astonishing 10 attacks in the turn, although her dice pool is very small for the last few ones. If she hadn't activated Celerity, only the first parry would occur at seven dice.*

Passive defense is not possible during a turn of full defense. It is possible to abort a full defense to another single defensive maneuver. The character is considered to have a single action available to do so, but it ends the full defense for that turn. The usual reason for doing so is if a character is suddenly confronted by an attack that his full defense cannot stop (such as an archer when parrying or a sword-strike when blocking).

Full defense dodging is not possible.

Shield Damage

Parrying devices are of limited effectiveness against strong opponents. A parrying weapon (e.g., dagger, sword) can not be

used if the attacker's Strength is twice that of the defender (or more). Shields may be used against any opponent, but can sustain only limited damage. Whenever an opponent rolls a 10 in a Melee roll, the shield takes a point of damage. For each point of damage to the shield, reduce any passive defensive bonus by one (to a minimum of 0) and reduce the number of dice used in an active parry attempt by one.

Hand-to-Hand Combat

Those who fight bare-handed have more than the basic punch and block at their disposal. Wrestling was a specialty of the Ancient Greeks, and grappling is a staple of most unarmed combat. The following maneuvers cover most standard attack types:

- **Bear Hug/Clinch [Strength + Brawl]:** The attacker attempts to wrap her arms around the target and crush the life from him. It requires the attacker to first get a grip on his target (Strength + Brawl) and inflicts Strength damage. In each subsequent round, the attacker and defender make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. If the defender has more successes, the bear hug ends, otherwise the attacker may choose to continue or end the attack. A variant of the attack, the clinch, involves both characters attempting to crush the other. In a clinch, both characters sustain damage, and the one with the most successes decides if the attack continues or ends.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing)

- **Bite [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Vampires (and other supernatural creatures with sharp teeth, such as Lupines) may bite their opponents. There are two forms of bite: a combat bite intended to inflict damage and the Kiss to drain blood. To use either form of bite, the Cainite must first make a successful bear hug, grapple or tackle maneuver. On the following turn, the player may declare a bite attempt and make a roll. If successful, the attack inflicts Strength + 1 aggravated damage. The Kiss is enacted in the same manner as a combat bite, but it inflicts no health levels of damage. Instead, the Cainite may drain the victim's blood at the normal rate (see p. 164 for details) during which time the victim is usually helpless to resist. If she desires, the vampire may lick the puncture wounds caused by the Kiss, causing them to close and hiding any outward evidence of feeding. A combat bite does not cause the ecstasy of the Kiss (or, more properly, that ecstasy ends when the vampire rips the victim's flesh out).

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: +1

Damage: Strength +1 (aggravated)/Special

- **Claw [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Vampires with the Protean power of Talons of the Beast, those who construct bone spurs with the Vicissitude power Rend the Osseous Frame or other supernatural creatures with comparable powers, may use a claw attack against their opponents. Such attacks inflict aggravated damage (Talons of the Beast, werewolf talons) or lethal damage (bone spurs).

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: +1

Damage: Strength + 1 (lethal/aggravated)

- **Grapple [Strength + Brawl]:** Rather than inflicting damage, a grapple is intended to immobilize an opponent. The initial grapple is a Strength + Brawl roll, which if successful, indicates that the attacker has gripped the target and immobilized her, at least until her next action. At that time, the combatants should make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. If the attacker has more successes than the defender, the grapple remains (if she so desires). If the defender has more successes, she breaks free. In the event of a tie, the grapple continues.

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: None

- **Kick [Dexterity + Brawl]:** Kicks in the Dark Medieval are not the roundhouse blows or aerial spins of the Middle Kingdom or the Final Nights but rather simple front-kicks (though a Cainite may experience such attacks if she strays too far East). The base difficulty of a kick is one higher than normal, and the kick inflicts Strength + 1, though Storytellers may modify these values to better suit the circumstances. As a rule, however, the complexity (and thus difficulty) of a kick increases in parallel with its damage rating.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength + 1 (bashing)

- **Punch [Dexterity + Brawl]:** A simple attack with a fist. The base difficulty and damage values are for a standard punch. Characters wearing heavy gauntlets may inflict greater damage but may also find themselves at a disadvantage (+1 difficulty, +1 damage)

Difficulty: Normal

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing)

- **Sweep [Dexterity + Brawl/Melee]:** In a sweep, the attacker attempts to knock her opponent to the floor by sweeping her legs from under her. This may be carried out with the attacker's own legs, or he may use a staff or similar weapon. If the attacker's roll is successful, the target takes Strength bashing damage and must immediately make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) or suffer the effects of a Knockdown (see "Damage Types", p. 239). If a weapon is used in lieu of the attacker's own limbs, the weapon's damage statistic is used instead of Strength.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength (bashing) or weapon damage; Knockdown

- **Tackle [Strength + Brawl]:** In a tackle, the attacker charges at her opponent and attempts to use momentum to bear her to the ground. The maneuver requires a Strength + Brawl roll (difficulty 7) and if successful, it inflicts Strength + 1 bashing damage. Furthermore, both combatants must make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) or suffer a Knockdown (see "Damage Types", p. 239). Even if he is not knocked down, the target is unbalanced for the next turn and suffers +1 difficulty to any actions.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength +1 (bashing); Knockdown

Melee Maneuvers

The Dark Medieval is not a time of artful fencing and fine rapiers, that awaits the coming nights. That doesn't mean that armed combatant are limited to simple strikes and counterstrikes, however. The following maneuvers cover efforts to accomplish special feats in melee combat.

- **Disarm [Dexterity + Melee]:** With this maneuver, the attacker attempts to deprive his opponent of her principal weapon, via strength or finesse. To try to disarm the target, the attacker makes an attack roll (difficulty 7). If successful, damage is rolled normally but neither applied nor soaked. Instead, if the number of damage successes exceeds the opponent's strength, the opponent is disarmed. Failure on the attack roll or insufficient successes means the disarming effort fails (but may be considered a Weapon Bash, see p. 244), while a botch indicates the attacker is disarmed or is struck by the target's weapon.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Special

• **Double Knife Strike [Dexterity + Melee]:** Close-in knife fighting doesn't rely on the massive blows and endurance of traditional melee. Instead, it favors speed, lightning reflexes and a succession of smaller blows. Characters using a double strike can divide their dice pools for the action between two or more attacks against the same target, each of which is resolved separately but occurs as part of the same action (hence happening before any other character has a chance to act). Each attack's dice pool receives one additional die but the difficulty of the attack increases by one. Determine damage normally for each attack. The character's Dexterity + 1 is the maximum number of dice that can be used for each attack, and the maximum number of attacks is equal to half her Melee skill (round fractions down).

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: +1, divided dice pool

Damage: Normal

• **Paired Weapon Strike [Dexterity + Melee]:** Although it is not common until the Renaissance, fighting with two weapons is an old concept. A second weapon — usually a dagger — may be used as a parrying device (p. 241), for attack or a combination of the two. Such fighting techniques are most common among the Saracens (some of whom favor two swords) and the Northern barbarians (who may use two axes). Directing two weapons is not, however, an easy task, and it requires considerable skill and determination. A character must have a Dexterity + Melee pool of at least five dice before she can use two weapons at once for attacking. The weapons can be used in separate actions through the standard rules for multiple actions, or the attacker can use them together for greater damage. Such a paired strike is not easy, however, and it incurs a difficulty penalty.

Difficulty: +1

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: +1 (to the most damaging of the two weapons used)

• **Shield Bash [Strength + Melee]:** Though designed for defense, a warrior will occasionally use a shield as an ad-hoc weapon, bashing her opponent (often in the face) as an attack of opportunity — or desperation. Such an attack may be made only if the target has engaged in melee combat with the attacker in the current turn or the immediately preceding one. Such ad-hoc attacks are awkward (difficulty 8), and they inflict less damage than a regular attack, but the target of a successful shield bash attack suffers a -2 penalty to her initiative in the next turn.

Difficulty: +2

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Strength -1 (bashing); Special

• **Stake [Dexterity + Melee]:** Staking a Cainite in the midst of combat is a tricky proposition. It requires strength and precision that is not often possible in the heat of battle. The attacker must make a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 9) and must inflict at least three health levels of damage to be successful. See p.254 for the effects of staking.

Difficulty: +3

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Staked

• **Weapon Bash [Dexterity + Melee]:** Disarming an opponent is a tricky proposition, and in many cases, deflecting the enemy's weapon is sufficient to give an attacker a decisive advantage. The attacker may deliberately target the opponent's weapon (difficulty 8). If successful, damage is rolled normally but rather than being applied as damage against the target, each success increases the difficulty of the enemy's next attack by one (to a maximum of 10).

Difficulty: +2

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Special

Mounted Combat

Cavalry plays an important role in medieval warfare, though its exact application varies widely. The knights of Western and Northern Europe favor heavy mounts and armor, while the Saracens of the Levant prefer lighter armor and greater agility. In most cases, ownership of a horse marks the warrior as a member of the elite, both a sign of his status and a weapon of war. In Europe, the concept of chivalry is inextricably linked with the nobility and horsemanship. Indeed, the very word stems from the French word for horse, *cheval*.

Individual horses are not unthinking automatons or mindless transports for the characters, but rather living creatures with their own quirks and traits. Some are placid with a longing for turnips, while others are aggressive with a tendency to bite anyone who approaches them (including, in most cases, the rider). When storytelling, keep this in mind, and give each horse its own personality.

Traits for various types of mounts appear in the Appendix (p. 311).

Controlling a Steed

In addition to the cost of maintaining their stable, vampires have problems controlling horses, which like all animals, are distinctly uncomfortable around the unliving (+1 difficulty to all actions while on horseback). Animalism or Animal Ken may be used to get around this penalty (Animalism 1 or Animal Ken 2), but the most common way for a Cainite to solve the problem is to feed the mount some of his vitae, in effect turning it into an equine ghoul. The Tzimisce, of course, often take this practice even further. The Fiends' war steeds are commonly horses in general appearance only, having been shaped into terrors with razored hooves and the mouths (and appetites) of predatory beasts. Vampires without Animalism, Animal Ken or Ride cannot control a horse at all.

Controlling a horse in combat is even more difficult and requires great skill. If the character's Ride Skill is equal to or greater than the mount's control rating, no roll or action is required (though injury to the mount may prompt one). Otherwise, the rider's player must roll Wits + Ride to maintain control of the steed in combat. The difficulty is the



control rating + 2, and maintaining control requires the vampire to take multiple actions in order to accomplish much on the battlefield.

Combat Effects

The height advantage of the mounted warrior can often be decisive on the battlefield. Foot soldiers attacking a mounted target suffer a +3 difficulty to all Melee or Brawl attacks unless they are using a long weapon such as a spear. Missile attacks against mounted targets suffer no penalty unless the target is moving at speed. Mounted characters may also use a variety of special maneuvers that take advantage of their height and power (see p. 246). There are some limitations, however, the most noticeable of which is that an effective knight or other mounted warrior must be both a skilled fighter and horseman. Therefore, the major limitation in mounted combat is that any combat Ability used on horseback is limited to that character's Ride Ability.

Example: *A knight attempting to use a sword from horseback has Dexterity 3, Melee 4 and Ride 1. His Dexterity contributes the full three dice to the player's attack pool, but only one die is added for the Ability since the character has a Ride skill of only 1. As such, the dice pool is only four while on horseback, but seven while afoot. Time to improve that Ride ability!*

Characters who suffer damage while mounted should make a Stamina + Ride roll. The difficulty of the roll is at the Storyteller's discretion, but a suggestion is the number of successes the attacker made *before* any soaking is applied. Failure indicates that the mounted character is thrown from

her horse and suffers two to four dice of bashing damage. A botch indicates that the damage is lethal. Thrown characters also run the risk of being trampled (see p. 246).

Horse Archery

Horse archery, the use of a bow from a stationary or mobile mount, is common practice in the lands of the East, notably that of the Saracens and the horse tribes beyond. Accuracy while moving is very difficult, and even the slightest error in timing results in arrows missing the target by yards. Unless the character has the Archery specialty "Mounted," his shots are at +2 difficulty from a moving horse and at +4 difficulty from a horse moving at a trot or faster.

Lances

The lance is the principal weapon of both European and Saracen cavalry. In Europe, the main use of the lance is to charge down the opponent, though the Saracens also use the lance as a thrusting weapon. The lance permits two types of attacks, charge and thrust.

A character must have a minimum Ride and Melee of 3 each to be able to use a lance effectively from horseback. Otherwise, he is certain to damage himself on a successful attack — the character takes as many dice of bashing damage as he inflicted dice of lethal damage with his lance. This may be soaked as normal. A botch using a lance is generally a terrible thing. The character takes four dice of lethal damage as the lance shatters and narrowly misses impaling him. In both cases, the player should make a Stamina + Ride roll to determine if the character is thrown from his horse.

Use of a lance is punishing business. Characters with the Child Flaw (see p. 304), who have Stamina I or who are otherwise below average size cannot use a regular or compound lance. They may use a light lance.

Mounted Maneuvers

- **Lance Charge [Dexterity + Melee]:** The charge is the most common form of lance attack, used by both European and Islamic forces. To make the attack, the player should make a Dexterity + Melee roll against the difficulty of the weapon as per normal combat. The charge does the damage listed with the appropriate lance (see weapons chart, p. 248). Those successfully attacked by a lance charge must make a Strength + Athletics roll or be knocked down. Anyone unhorsed by such an attack suffers two to four additional dice of damage from the fall. Anyone knocked over or unhorsed by a lance charge suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to all actions during the next turn. In theory, Cainites might be staked by such attacks, but the difficulty of such a maneuver is two higher than a normal attack. Furthermore, the maneuver requires at least five successes, and it must cause at least three health levels of damage.

- **Lance Thrust [Dexterity + Melee]:** Light and regular lances may also be used while the horse is stationary or moving slowly. Such attacks are used exclusively by the Saracens, and thrusting lance attacks inflict damage dice equal to the rider's Strength. Any botch result requires the rider's player to make a Dexterity + Ride roll against a difficulty of 6 or else fall from the saddle.

- **Mounted Charge [Dexterity + Melee]:** While lance charges are the most glorious mounted attacks, they are not the only time a mounted warrior benefits from his horse's speed and agility. Any warrior attacking from horseback in the same turn in which his mount moves at least half its movement rate adds two dice to her damage pool. Lance charges do not gain this bonus, which is already factored into their damage rating.

- **Trampling [Manipulation + Ride]:** In addition to using them as mounts, some warriors train their horses to be an active part of their arsenal, biting, kicking and trampling opponents on foot. To use this attack, the rider's player makes a Manipulation + Ride roll against a target number of 6. Failure indicates that the target avoids the attack, while a botch leaves both rider and mount open to counter attack (reduce the difficulty of all Melee or Brawl attacks against the rider or mount by four). The target may dodge such an attack if she sees it coming, but may not parry or gain the benefit of defensive equipment such as shields. A prone target may still dodge, but the rider's difficulty number decreases by three. The amount of damage inflicted by the trample depends on the type of horse and is considered bashing damage.

Ranged Attacks

Not all combat takes place when the combatants are within arms reach. Though disdained by many nobles,

knives, spears and bows are a staple of medieval armies, providing a means of projecting a unit's reach. The main limiting factor on the use of missile weapons is the need to reload. The base difficulty of all missile attacks is 6, though they are subject to range combat modifiers (see chart). The dice pool to hit is Dexterity + Archery. Most missile weapons take one action to fire and another (or more) to reload. In most cases, this means that weapons cannot fire every round, but exceptionally fast characters may fire and reload in the same turn (see the "Quick Reload" maneuver, p. 247).

Thrown Weapons

A number of weapons can be thrown, including knives, hatchets, spears and rocks. Like missile weapons, the base difficulty for thrown weapons is 6 (modified by the ranged attacks table) but the dice pool used is Dexterity + Athletics. Unlike regular combat, additional successes on the attack roll do not increase the damage. Damage and other game statistics for common thrown weapons appear in the weapons chart (p. 249).

Other weapons (such as swords) may be turned into ad hoc missiles, but they are ill suited to such forms of attack. The basic range of such attacks is three yards per point of the thrower's Strength (+ Potence). These weapons also suffer a flat +2 difficulty penalty as indicated on the "Ranged Combat Modifiers" table. Furthermore, at least two successes are needed for the blade (rather than the hilt or haft) to strike the target and inflict lethal damage. If the attack achieves a single success, any damage inflicted is bashing. Non-weapon items (such as chairs or plates) may also be used as ad hoc missiles, but they only inflict bashing damage. The Storyteller should determine the number of damage dice for the item (and its potential range) depending on its size and nature. For example, a plate can be thrown much further than a chair but is much less likely to inflict damage.

Ranged Maneuvers

- **Aim:** By carefully aiming before loosing her shot, an archer can greatly increase her chances of hitting the target. For every full turn spent aiming, the archer adds a die to her attack pool. The maximum number of dice that can be added in this way equals the character's Perception. The character must have Archery 2 or greater to use this maneuver, and she must have a clear line of sight to the target in each turn she is aiming. If the attacker does anything but aim in this time, the benefits of the aiming are lost immediately. The target of the aim must also be stationary or moving no faster than walking speed.

- **Missile Staking [Dexterity + Archery]:** Although it is very difficult, it is possible to stake a Cainite with a carefully placed arrow or crossbow bolt. To attempt a long-range staking, the player must inform the Storyteller and make her attack roll at three levels of difficulty higher than normal (to a maximum of 10). To stake the target vampire, the attack must achieve at least five successes and inflict three levels of damage. At the Storyteller's discretion, a Cainite may be staked accidentally by missile fire if at least one attack die is a natural 10 and the other

RANGED COMBAT MODIFIERS

Situation	Diff. Modifier	Notes
Target at half-range	-1	thrown weapons only
Target at range	0	
Target at 2x range	+2	
Windy	+1	may not fire beyond range
Dark/Foggy	+2	halve range
Running target	+1	
Mounted target	+2 (trot)/+3 (gallop)	
Ad hoc missile	+2	thrown weapon only
Attacker on horseback	+2/+4	see "Mounted Combat," p. 244

conditions are met (successes vis-à-vis the staking are determined against the attack difficulty + 3).

Difficulty: +3

Accuracy: Normal

Damage: Staked

- **Quick Reload [Dexterity + Archery]:** Reloading a bow usually takes one turn, but a skilled archer may hasten the process, allowing her to fire every turn. To do so, she must make a Dexterity + Archery roll (difficulty 7) and gain at least two successes. Crossbows cannot be reloaded quickly in this manner. A quick reload does count as an action, so to fire every turn, a character must take multiple actions.

- **Sidearm Throw [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Over-arm is the most common technique for using thrown weapons, simple and accurate, but is not the most deadly. Sidearm throws use more large muscle groups and thus results in a longer, harder throw. The attacker must have sufficient space to swing her weapon though (usually several arm's lengths), and accuracy of the throw is much reduced. Standard throwing rules apply but the difficulty of the attack is increased to 8 and the thrower's effective Dexterity decreases by one. Even still, though, her effective Strength increases by one when determining damage dice.

Difficulty: +2

Accuracy: -1

Damage: Normal +1

Medieval Weaponry and Armor

The final "complication" to combat is the specific weapons and armor of the combatants. A wide range of arms and armor are used in the Middle Ages. The following are the most common types, but this list is far from exhaustive. Basic descriptions of these types appear here, but for simplicity of play and presentation, weapons and armor are grouped into general categories that mask much of the variety a character might experience in travels from region to region.

The weapons chart (p. 248) and armor chart (p. 249) provide the game information for these arms. Additional

rules also appear there for some special weapons such as poleaxes and morning stars.

Melee Weapons

The recourse of knights and peasant levies, melee weapons are used in man-to-man combat. They range from the simplest club to the most expertly crafted sword. Most need no introduction, but some of the more esoteric include:

- **Bastard Sword:** A long (roughly three-foot) blade, intended for one- or two-handed use.

- **Great Sword:** With a blade four to six feet long, these two-handed weapons are lethal but unwieldy. They cannot be used from horseback. Not common at this period.

- **Morning Star:** Similar to a mace but with the head connected by the haft by a chain, allowing extra damage but also increased danger to the wielder. (On a botch, the weapon either becomes entangled or strikes the wielder.)

Ranged Weapons

In addition to thrown knives, spears and rocks, the medieval soldiery has access to more sophisticated ranged weapons. Archery is also useful for hunting.

- **Bow, Short:** A small weapon, three to four feet long, intended for hunting. It may be used from horseback (most frequently by Saracen cavalry).

- **Bow, Long:** A powerful, six-foot-long weapon intended for war. It may not be used from horseback.

Cavalry Weapons

Cavalry weapons are specialized arms that take advantage of the strengths of a horseback warrior or compensate for his weaknesses.

- **Lance:** A long, heavy spear intended for use from horseback. The most common cavalry weapon, used to charge opposing infantry or cavalry.

- **Lance, Compound:** A long, powerful lance formed by joining two lances together. Primarily a Saracen weapon it takes great strength to use but causes grievous injury when used well. (Minimum Strength of 4 to use)

- **Lance, Light:** Another Saracen weapon, this is a light and usually hollow lance. It is easier to handle, but it inflicts

MELEE WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Conceal	Min. Str.	Notes
Axes				
Hatchet (melee)	Strength +3L	C	2	
Hand Ax	Strength +5L	L	3	
Battle-Ax	Strength +6L	N	3	2 Hand
Blunt weapons				
Club	Strength +1B	C	1	
Cudgel	Strength +1B	C	1	
Mace	Strength +1B	L	1	
Morning Star	Strength +3B	L	1	Difficulty +1; may strike user on botch
Warhammer	Strength +5B	N	3	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand
Blades				
Knife	Strength +1L	P	1	
Dagger	Strength +1L	C	1	Difficulty -1
Saber	Strength +2L	L	3	
Broadsword	Strength +4L	N	2	
Bastard Sword	Strength +5L	N	4 (3 one-handed)	May be used one or two-handed
Great Sword	Strength +6L	N	4	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand
Long Weapons (no penalty against mounted targets)				
Javelin	Strength L	N	2	
Pitchfork	Strength +1L	N	1	2 Hand
Spear (one-handed)	Strength +1L	N	2	Difficulty +1
Spear (two-handed)	Strength +3L	N	1	2 Hand
Staff	Strength +2B	N	1	
Poleax	Strength + 6L	N	3	Difficulty +1; 2 Hand
Lance, light	6 or Strength L	N	2	Fragile; see rules p. 245
Lance	8 or Strength L	N	3	see rules p. 245
Lance, compound	9 or Strength L	N	4	see rules p. 245

RANGED WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage	Range	Conceal	Min. Str.	Notes
Missile Weapons					
Bow, Long	4 L	120 yards	N	4	1 turn to reload
Bow, Short	2 L	60 yards	L	2	1 turn to reload
Crossbow, Light	2 L	120 yards	L	2	2 turns to reload
Crossbow	3 L	100 yards	N	2	3 turns to reload
Crossbow, Heavy	4 L	150 yards	N	4	4 turns to reload
Sling	5 B	50 yards	C	2	1 turn to reload

Thrown Weapons

Knife	Strength L	15 yards	C	2	+1 difficulty
Hatchet	Strength +1 L	20 yards	C	2	+1 difficulty
Javelin	Strength+2 L	50 yards	N	2	
Spear	Strength+1 L	40 yards	N	2	
Rock	Strength B	40 yards	P	2	

ARMOR AND HELMS

Armor Type	Soak	Penalty	Min Str.	Conceal	Notes
Light Armor	+1B/+2L	-	1	L	helm required to protect head
Composite Armor	+2B/+3L	-1 Dex	1	L	helm required to protect head
Heavy Armor	+3B/+4L	-1 Dex	3	N	helm required to protect head
Knight's Armor	+4B/+4L	-2 Dex	3	N	helm required to protect head
Light Helm	+2B/+3L	-1 Per	2	N	protects head; soak bonuses not cumulative with armor
Full Helm	+3B/+4L	-2 Per	2	N	protects head; soak bonuses not cumulative with armor

SHIELDS AND PARRYING WEAPONS

Item	Parry Diff.	vs. Melee	vs. Missile	Notes
Small Shield	4	+0	+0	
Footman's Shield	6	+1	+1	May not be used on horseback
Cavalry shield	6	+1	+1	+2 difficulty when used by footmen
Dagger	5	+0	+0	
Sword	6	+1	+0	

WEAPON AND ARMOR TRAITS

The following traits and notes are used in the adjacent weapon and armor charts:

Damage: The number of dice used to determine damage and its type: B = bashing, L = lethal, A = aggravated.

Conceal: A rough estimate of how easily the weapon or piece of armor can be concealed in clothing. P = may be concealed in a pouch; C = in loose clothing (e.g., a tunic); L = in a long cloak; N = may not be concealed.

Min. Str.: The minimum Strength required to use the weapon or armor.

Range: For ranged weapons, the distance (in yards) to which the weapon can be used without penalty. In most conditions, the weapon can be fired at a target at up to twice this distance at a +2 difficulty penalty.

Soak: For armor, the number of dice added to the wearer's soak dice pool when attacked. Most armors have different ratings for soaking bashing (B) and lethal (L) attacks.

Penalties: For armor, the reduction in the character's effective Dexterity (Dex) or Perception (Per) Attribute caused by wearing the armor.

Parry Diff.: For shields and other parrying weapons, the difficulty of Dexterity + Melee rolls to attempt to parry incoming attacks with the item.

vs. Melee: For shields and other parrying weapons, the value added to the difficulty of Melee or Brawl attacks against the character when using passive defense with the item.

vs. Missile: For shields and other parrying weapons, the value added to the difficulty of Missile or Brawl attacks against the character when using passive defense with the item.

2 Hand: The weapon must be used two-handed.

Fragile: The weapon is prone to breaking. After an attack with it (successful or not) the player rolls a die: on a result of 5 or higher, the weapon breaks and is useless.

less damage than its more solid cousins. It is also likely to break when someone uses it.

- **Saber:** A one-handed sword, roughly three feet long, intended for use from horseback.

Armor

The Dark Medieval encompasses a vast range of permutations of armor and protective equipment, which have been simplified into four categories for the purposes of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Most common is light armor, worn by city guards and the like, while nobles and the elite soldiery utilize ever-more-sophisticated combinations.

- **Light Armor:** Light armor comprises pieces of leather, sometimes hardened by boiling (called *cuir bouilli*), at other times quilted. The padding worn under heavier armor counts as light armor when worn alone.

- **Composite Armor:** This slightly heavier armor comprises leather reinforced with metal rings and/or studs, or perhaps light chain mail.

- **Heavy Armor:** Heavy armor comprises metal, usually ring or chain mail, over a layer of quilted padding.

- **Knight's Armor:** Like heavy armor, knight's armor comprises chain mail worn over leather padding, complemented by bulky gauntlets and leg-guards. It is usually worn with a heavy metal helmet but is *not* the traditional "plate-mail"

(which does not come along for several centuries and which was quickly rendered obsolete by the invention of gunpowder.)

- **Light Helm:** A metal helmet protecting the wearer's head and neck from attack. May include a nose-guard but otherwise the face is open. Usually worn with heavy armor.

- **Heavy Helm:** A full helm protecting the head, neck and face of the wearer. Vision is through a narrow slit or eyeholes. Usually worn with knight's armor.

Shields

Made from wood, leather and metal, shields provide added protection against the rigors of combat. Unlike armor, which warriors wear at most times, shields are generally used only in times of unrest. They cannot be concealed, though most have a leather strap that allows them to be slung on the wearer's back.

There are several types of shield, including:

- **Small Shield:** Usually round and made of wood, either painted or covered with a leather skin, small shields cover only a small part of the body (thus provide no significant passive defense), but they are ideal for parrying.

- **Footman's Shield:** The larger bulk of the footman's shield protects more of the wielder's body but at the cost of maneuverability and ease of parrying.



• **Cavalry Shield:** Long and thin, usually kite shaped, cavalry shields are designed for use on horseback, in which case it is roughly as effective as a footman's shield is on the ground.

Health and Injury

Each character, Cainite and otherwise, has a Health trait, comprising seven levels that reflect increasingly severe injuries. The ease and permanence of reductions to Health depend on the type of damage inflicted and the nature of the character. Vampires are more resilient to injury than mortals, but they may still be hurt, incapacitated or even destroyed.

The Health Chart

Each character sheet contains a Health chart to allow damage to the individual to be tracked and its effects on their actions assessed. Each box after the first has an associated dice-pool penalty that increases with the severity of the wounds. As the character's condition worsens, it becomes harder to carry out actions. Each point of damage inflicted on the character (after soaking) reduces his health levels by one. The first point of damage, Bruised, has little effect on the

character's actions, but penalties mount until the seventh point, Incapacitated, at which point the character is unable to carry out any actions.

Damage is marked off on the Health chart in different manners depending the nature of the wound, since some types of injury are easier and quicker to heal than others. (See "Applying Damage", p. 252). The lowest checked box denotes the character's current health level. The number to the left of the box indicates the current dice-pool penalty. This penalty is assessed on all dice pools save those associated with reflexive actions (such as soak) as long as the wound remains. Injury also impedes a character's movement as noted on the accompanying chart. Characters with no checked boxes are in full health and suffer no penalties. Those with all boxes checked are Incapacitated — either unconscious or otherwise unable to act.

• **Incapacitated:** An incapacitated character may or may not be conscious, depending on the circumstances and the extent of her injuries. In either case, she is unable to carry out any actions save for spending blood points to heal damage. If an incapacitated character sustains further injury, she either enters torpor. If the damage is aggravated, she suffers Final Death. An incapacitated character whose blood pool is empty automatically enters torpor.



FIGURE 1

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

FIGURE 2

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

FIGURE 3

Health		
Bruised		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Hurt	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Injured	-1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

Mortals who suffer a health level beyond Incapacitated simply die.

- **Torpor:** The Cainite state of *torpor* is akin to comas among the living. A vampire in torpor is in a death-like sleep — apparently dead to non-Cainites — and she is (largely) oblivious to events in the outside world. Entry into torpor may be voluntary, perhaps by a Cainite who is tired of the modern age or seeking to sleep through mortal turmoil, or involuntary as a result of wounds or blood loss. More details of torpor may be found on p. 253.

- **Final Death:** If a vampire at the Incapacitated health level or in torpor (irrespective of her health level) takes one more level of aggravated damage, she dies permanently and irrevocably. Additional bashing or lethal damage may also send an incapacitated or torpid vampire to Final Death. This is at the Storyteller's

discretion, however, and the damage should be sufficient to destroy or dismember the corpse. The character plays no further role in the game, and the player should create a new character if she wishes to continue in the game.

Applying Damage

The three types of damage (bashing, lethal and aggravated) are cumulative and the gravest checked box on a character's health chart indicates the character's status and the penalties she suffers. Each damage type is indicated on the same chart, but in a slightly different way. Bashing damage is marked with a slash (/), lethal damage with an X, and aggravated damage with a large asterisk (*). This is done because the different wound types heal at different rates. For the same reason, aggravated wounds are always recorded "highest" (that is with the lowest wound penalty) on the chart, followed by lethal wounds and finally with bashing wounds. This is done by "moving down" bashing and lethal wounds as appropriate. This allows the gravest health levels to be healed first.

Example: Anatole, an ashen priest on the Road of Heaven, faces off against an angry Gangrel who has had enough of his mad preaching. Karsh, the Gangrel, first pushes the Madman away, slamming him into a nearby tree. This causes two levels of bashing damage, so Anatole's player marks off the Bruised and Hurt levels with slashes (see Figure 1).

Anatole won't cease his holy mission, however, so Karsh picks up his large ax and lays into him. The blow does one level of lethal damage, so Anatole's player adds a bar to the Bruised box on his chart (turning the slash into an X) and puts a slash through the Injured box, hence moving the existing two levels of bashing damage down the chart (see Figure 2).

Finally, Karsh goes over the edge and summons up the Talons of the Beast, using his unholy claws to tear into Anatole's undead flesh. The attack causes two levels of aggravated damage, so the player turns the marks in Bruised and Hurt to asterisks, the one in Injured to an X, and puts slashes in Wounded and Mauled (see Figure 3). Anatole's player now suffers a -2 dice penalty to all actions, and the Madman can only hobble a few yards per turn. Thankfully he can also burn some blood to heal some of that damage.

Damage Types

Characters in **Dark Ages** can suffer injury from a broad range of sources. It may be bruising from punches and kicks, broken bones from a mace or slashes from a sword. A character's physical nature determines her susceptibility to injury and the degree to which she is affected. A Cainite can shrug off wounds that would maim a mortal, yet sustain injury from sources that a human wouldn't regard as a risk at all.

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage is unlikely to kill, and it can be healed swiftly, even by mortals. It represents bruises, sprains and similar minor injuries, inflicted by falls, punches and the like. Cainites are largely unaffected by bashing damage. The absence of blood in their body tissues means that they don't

HEALTH CHART

Level	Dice-Pool Penalty	Effects
Bruised	0	The character is injured, but the wounds have yet to interfere with his actions.
Hurt	-1	Injuries begin to hamper the character's ability to act.
Injured	-1	In addition to increasing difficulty in routine actions, the character is limited to half his maximum running speed.
Wounded	-2	The character is really beginning to feel the effects of his wounds. Actions are more difficult, and he is limited to walking speed.
Mauled	-2	Movement is now very difficult because of the injuries and the character may hobble no faster than three yards per turn.
Crippled	-5	Any action is a major effort, and movement is limited to a crawl (one yard per turn)
Incapacitated	-	The character is incapable of carrying out any movement or action (save spending blood points) and may be unconscious. Cainites whose blood pool is empty enter torpor (see p. 253).
Torpor	-	Suspended between life and death, a character in torpor exists in a coma-like state, unable to carry out any action (including spending blood points) until a certain time has elapsed. (For more, see p. 254)
Final Death	-	The vampire is permanently destroyed.

bruise in the same manner as mortals, so they suffer only half (round down) the indicated number of health levels from bashing damage. Both mortals and Cainites use Stamina to soak bashing damage, though vampires add their Fortitude rating to the roll (if they have the Discipline). A Cainite can heal a level of bashing damage by spending a point of blood (see "Blood Use," p. 162).

While Bashing damage rarely kills, it can weaken the character to a point where she is more susceptible to other forms of damage. If a Cainite character falls to Incapacitated due to "normal" (i.e., bashing or lethal) damage and takes another level of normal damage, she is forced into torpor. If a Cainite character is Incapacitated due to "normal" damage and takes a point of aggravated damage, she suffers the Final Death. Bashing damage alone cannot destroy a Cainite although a mortal may die from its effects. Once a mortal's Health chart is full, additional levels of bashing damage cause existing bashing slashes to be replaced with lethal crosses, as bones are broken and internal organs rupture.

Lethal Damage

As the name suggests, lethal damage is more serious than bashing with the potential to kill or maim, especially if the character is mortal. Most bladed weapons inflict lethal damage, as do some blunt weapons if targeted appropriately (+2 difficulty). Vampires soak lethal damage with Stamina (+Fortitude, if any) because their undead flesh is less prone to debilitating injury and internal bleeding is rarely an issue for them. Mortals, however, cannot soak lethal damage at all (save with armor). Similarly, a vampire can heal lethal damage as easily as bashing, while a mortal must spend many weeks or months recovering.

A mortal character at Incapacitated who suffers a level of lethal damage dies. A Cainite in a similar position is driven

into torpor by the additional level of lethal damage, but she does not meet the Final Death as a result. As with bashing damage, however, such injuries make the character vulnerable to aggravated damage, and if she is at Incapacitated or in torpor as a result of lethal damage and then sustains a level of damage from an aggravated source, she is destroyed.

Aggravated Damage

Although their bodies are more resilient than those of mortals, some forms of injury are grievous even to Cainites. Largely elemental or supernatural in origin (e.g., fire, sunlight, the teeth and claws of other vampires) these sources of injury are hard to resist and can be soaked only with the Fortitude Discipline. Aggravated damage is also much harder to heal, each level requiring five blood points and a full day of rest to remove. Provided the Cainite gets at least one full day of rest, however, she may spend points of Willpower in lieu of the additional days of rest as long as she can meet the blood point cost of the healing. A vampire who is incapacitated or in torpor and who suffers a level of aggravated damage suffers the Final Death.

Fire and the claws of supernatural beasts cause lethal damage to mortals. There are some rare instances where mortals do suffer aggravated damage, however, which cannot be healed save through other supernatural means. (These are explained on a case-by-case basis as they occur.) Sunlight causes no damage whatsoever to mortals, of course.

Torpor

Once in torpor, the character remains insensate for a period determined by her Road rating, during which she is not required to spend blood points. Characters with lower road ratings sleep deeper and longer than those with higher

Road Rating	Length of Torpor
10	One day
9	Three days
8	One week
7	Two weeks
6	One month
5	One year
4	One decade
3	Five decades
2	One century
1	Five centuries
0	A Millennium or more

ratings. Those who enter torpor voluntarily (doing so is automatic and requires no die roll) may attempt to awaken after only half the indicated time.

Once this period has passed, the Cainite may attempt to awaken (but is not required to do so). For her character to rise, the player must spend a blood point and make the appropriate roll (see p. 234). If the roll fails, the character may not rise that night but may make another roll the following night (expending another blood point). A vampire who entered torpor voluntarily retains her pre-torpor health levels. A character who entered torpor as a result of injury is considered Crippled when he rises.

A Cainite who enters torpor because of blood loss may not attempt to rise until she is fed at least one blood point (four in the case of a vampire who enters torpor as a result of deterioration, see p. 255). Unless fed, she remains in this state indefinitely, but may attempt to rise as soon as she consumes new vitae, irrespective of her Road rating. Such “early revivification” only works for Cainites who enter torpor as a result of blood loss. Those who enter voluntarily or as a result of injury must sleep for the period indicated on the accompanying chart.

A vampire who awakens from torpor with less than three points in her

blood pool must check for frenzy. One who awakens from torpor after deterioration *automatically* enters frenzy.

Staking

Contrary to popular myth, a stake through the heart does not kill a vampire. Instead, it totally paralyzes her, making it impossible for her to move, spend blood or activate Disciplines. The character remains conscious, however, and is fully aware of her surroundings. This forced immobility is among the most feared states for vampires, who find the feeling of helplessness terrifying. This fear is so intense that when the stake is removed from a Cainite’s heart, the player must immediately check for frenzy (difficulty 5, or higher if the vampire has been staked for a long period).

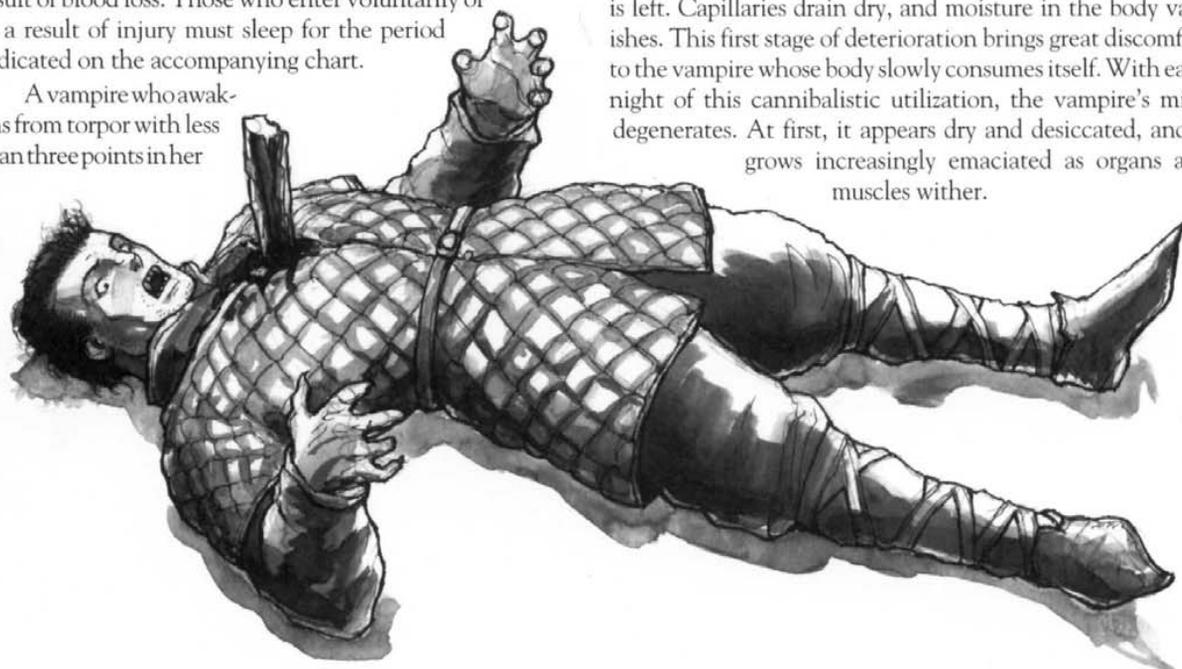
Although she is unable to use Disciplines or blood, a vampire must continue to spend blood on a daily basis as outlined under “Blood Use” (p. 162). Cainites whose blood pool is empty suffer deterioration as outlined below.

Placing a stake directly through the heart is tricky. It requires the attacker to make at least five successes in her attack roll and to inflict at least three levels of damage.

Deterioration

The hunger for blood is more than a fiendish desire among Cainites, it is a necessity of unlife. Without access to blood, a vampire cannot animate his unliving form, and he deteriorates physically as the Beast screams for sustenance within. Deterioration occurs when a vampire is staked — still spending blood to awaken every night but being unable to feed — but it can happen whenever a vampire is cut off from a food supply. Long journeys without access to hunting stock are not to be undertaken lightly.

While a Cainite retains blood in her system, her body remains unchanged. However, once her blood pool is exhausted, the body deteriorates as it consumes what little blood is left. Capillaries drain dry, and moisture in the body vanishes. This first stage of deterioration brings great discomfort to the vampire whose body slowly consumes itself. With each night of this cannibalistic utilization, the vampire’s mien degenerates. At first, it appears dry and desiccated, and it grows increasingly emaciated as organs and muscles wither.



The pain of this process increases steadily (which the Cainite must suffer in silence if staked). Every night the character cannot burn blood to rise, she suffers one level of lethal damage and loses a dot of Appearance, until she reaches Incapacitated. By this point, the vampire resembles little more than a desiccated corpse and is in constant, excruciating agony. If she is further denied blood, she slips into torpor. Once in torpor, the character is freed from the pain of deterioration but is also much harder to return to health. Until her body is healed to the Injured level, she remains insensate and, upon awakening, she immediately succumbs to the Beast and frenzies, attacking and drinking from the nearest source.

If the vampire gains access to blood, she can heal these levels of damage as usual, and her Appearance returns with them. Some sadistic vampires feed their staked victims just enough blood to prevent them from entering torpor. This keeps the vampire conscious and fully cognizant of the pain wracking her body. By this method, the staked Cainite can be kept alive for weeks, months or even years, her torture prolonged indefinitely. Those few Cainites who survive this process often suffer permanent mental damage, such as catatonia or hysteria.

An unstaked vampire denied a source of new blood (for example, trapped in a chamber) also suffers the effects of deterioration. Cainites in this position will seek out any source of new blood, and they are likely frenzy (see p. 264).

Mortal Healing

Cainites simply spend blood to heal (see p. 162), but mortals are much more fragile and slower to return to health. Where a vampire can heal instantly all but the most grievous wounds, a mortal human must spend days, weeks or months recovering. The following indicates the length of time required for a mortal to heal her injuries. Each level must be healed individually, so a mortal who has reached Incapacitated through Bashing damage will require 12 hours to heal to the Crippled level, and a further six hours to recover to Mauled.

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage is largely superficial, and it will heal without treatment. Healing bashing damage does not require the mortal's player to make a roll. The main factor in such healing is time, though the application of poultices and compresses can alleviate their effects and speed healing. (For details on doing so, see page 234.)

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised to Wounded	One hour/level
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	Twelve hours

Lethal Damage

Lethal damage is just that, and it is often fatal to mortal characters. Even minor wounds may become infected and thus become life-threatening, while scars are commonplace.

Mortal characters with levels of lethal damage below Hurt who do not receive medical aid, automatically suffer an additional level of lethal damage per day, reflecting blood loss and infection. After initial medical attention, the ministrations of a healer are not required, provided the character is at Mauled or better. Characters at Crippled or Incapacitated require constant medical care and are usually delirious or unconscious.

Whenever a mortal character seeks to heal a lethal health level, the player should roll a number of dice equal to her Stamina score. The difficulty of this roll is 2 + the number of Health chart boxes crossed (e.g., a character whose Wounded level is the lowest box crossed has four boxes crossed, so the difficulty is 6). On one or more successes, that level is healed. If no successes occur, the character's situation remains unchanged. On a botch result, the character suffers a new lethal wound and might (if already at Incapacitated) die as a result. The presence of a trained healer may reduce this difficulty, but only in Arabic lands is medicine sufficiently advanced to have an appreciable effect. For more on the effects of healers, see p. 234.

A mortal at the Incapacitated level who takes an additional wound (bashing or lethal) dies immediately.

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Three months
Crippled	Four months
Incapacitated	Five months

Other Sources of Injury

A vampire's superhuman strength and resilience spares her the effects of many injuries, though it does not mean she is entirely immune. Her mortal thralls and prey are far more vulnerable.

Disease

Disease is a major factor in the lives of medieval mortals, though Cainites are largely spared its direct effects. They may, however, serve as a vector for contagion, spreading it among their herd. There are a wide variety of diseases present in the Dark Medieval, of which the most common are:

- **Dysentery (The Flux):** Caused by contaminated water and poor hygiene, dysentery causes gastrointestinal problems in the victim, including bleeding, bowel pains, fever and dehydration. Often fatal to mortals, this disease has no direct effect on Cainites. It can be transmitted via the Kiss, though.

- **Ergotism:** A result of fungal poisoning (ergot, growing on rye, and thus possibly used in bread), ergotism causes agonizing muscle pains, convulsions and hallucinations. Mortals often lose limbs to the disease, as a result of gangrene, but Cainites are largely unaffected. Drinking blood infected

with ergot causes a sensation like pins and needles in the vampire's arms and legs, though.

- **Idropesie (Dropsy):** Dropsy is the result of a weak heart that is unable to pump blood efficiently. This disease has no effect on Cainites, but a vessel suffering from the disease has two less blood points than a normal character.

- **Leprosy:** Leprosy is one of the most significant diseases of the Dark Medieval. It is a degeneration of the nerves, which reduces feeling and exposes the victim to a host of secondary infections that can harm the skin and damage bones, leading to disfigurement and mutilation. It is rarely fatal, but those infected with the disease are cast out of normal society, forced to wear distinct clothing and carry a bell to warn others. Most Cainites are immune to leprosy, though some claim that the Nosferatu curse is a virulent form of the disease.

- **Plague:** Various plagues (bubonic, pneumonic and septicemic) permeate the Dark Medieval, becoming mass epidemics in the mid 14th century, devastating the population of Europe. The mortality rate of plague is 50-80 percent, with the period of illness characterized by fever and delirium. Cainites are immune to bubonic and pneumonic plagues, but they can transmit it to their victims. Vampires, however, are susceptible to septicemic plague, which makes them feel sick and usually causes them to vomit blood. This reduces the Cainite's blood pool by between one and 10 points (roll randomly). If this drains all the Cainite's blood, she becomes subject to frenzy, and may suffer deterioration or torpor. The next time the vampire feeds, the player should roll Stamina (+ Fortitude) against a difficulty of 8. On a success, she can hold the blood down. On a failure, she vomits it up. On a botch, she not only vomits it up but suffers the effects of a night of deterioration as her body expels the blood in her capillaries and withered organs. The player rolls every time the vampire feeds until she accumulates five total successes without botching (she can fail rolls while accumulating successes).

- **Syphilis:** Spread by sexual intercourse (or the transmission of blood), syphilis manifests initially as a fever and minor aches and pains. Eventually the signs become apparent in the form of ulcers and bad skin, though the worst damage is internal, damaging bones, muscles and the brain. Vampires who contract syphilis suffer a point of bashing damage for each week that the disease remains in their blood.

- **Tuberculosis:** The greatest killer of the Dark Medieval, this disease can affect any part of the body, though the lungs are the most commonly affected organs. The disease causes a fever and sweating, and also leads to emaciation and tissue destruction. The symptoms lead to the alternative name for the disease: consumption. Like dropsy, Tuberculosis has no effect on Cainites, but it reduces the blood capacity of an infected vessel by one to three points.

A vampire carrying a blood-borne disease passes it to his victims until he can purge the blood from his system. Players whose characters are fed upon by an infected vampire roll Stamina to avoid infection. The standard difficulty is 6, but it can increase for virulent strains and heavy feeding.

The process of purging infected vitae is not an easy one, since all the vampire's blood quickly becomes infected. Purging or expending blood points above one quarter of the character's total blood pool takes place as per the normal rules. However, expelling the remainder of the blood—the last quarter of the blood pool—requires formidable strength of will. Roll Willpower against a difficulty of 10. Reduce this difficulty by one each if the character has Vicissitude, Quietus or the Thaumaturgy path of Rego Vitae. For example, a Cainite with all three Disciplines would have a difficulty of 7, while one with just Vicissitude would have a difficulty of 9.

Each success purges a point of blood from the blood pool while allowing the character to remain in control. A failure to get any successes requires the player to resist frenzy as if hungry. A botch indicates that the character frenzies immediately. If the character empties her blood pool, she is free of the disease.

Falling

Although a Cainite's preternatural strength and superhuman resistance allows him to resist damage from falling, it does not allow him to completely escape injury. For every 10 feet she falls, the character suffers one level of bashing damage that may be soaked normally with Stamina (+ Fortitude). This damage may not exceed 10 levels, but if it reaches that level, it is treated as lethal rather than bashing, and the soak value of armor is halved (round down). Likewise, if the surface on which the character lands has sharp edges (such as spikes) the Storyteller may opt to inflict some or all of this damage as lethal rather than bashing.

Drowning or Suffocation

Cainites do not breathe, so they can neither drown nor suffocate. Mortal characters, however, are vulnerable, particularly if they botch a swimming roll, cannot swim or are weighed down. The length of time a mortal can survive without air depends on her Stamina. After this period has elapsed, the mortal loses one health level in bashing damage per turn. Once her health chart reaches Incapacitated, the character has drowned, and he dies after a number of minutes equal to her Stamina rating.

Stamina

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Holding Breath

- 30 seconds
- One minute
- Two minutes
- Four minutes
- Eight minutes
- 15 minutes*
- 20 minutes*
- 30 minutes*

* Only possible if the mortal has some means of boosting her Stamina to superhuman levels, beyond the mortal limit of five dots.

Fire

Fire is one of the few things Cainites fear. It can end their unives yet is ever present in the Dark Medieval, as cooking fires, braziers and torches. Balancing their fear of fire and a need for it to light their way is one of the inherent contradictions in the unlife of Cainites.

Fire causes aggravated damage and ignores all armor protection. Indeed, metal armor exacerbates the situation by retaining heat. Damage from fire can be soaked by characters with Fortitude, who roll Stamina + Fortitude, the difficulty of the roll depending on the sized and intensity of the fire. Characters without Fortitude cannot soak damage from fire. If he doesn't soak, the victim suffers the full damage of the flames, which are expressed in automatic health levels rather than damage dice. A character whose clothes are on fire, or who is trapped in a fire, continues to take damage until she escapes or extinguishes the flames.

The external signs of fire injury can be truly horrific. For every two health levels of damage caused by fire, reduce the character's Appearance by one. To a Cainite, this disfigurement is temporary. To a mortal, it is permanent.

Exposure to fire may trigger Röttschreck (see p. 265).

FIRE EFFECTS

Soak Difficulty	Fire type
3	Candle flame
5	Torch
7	Cooking fire
9	Pyre
10	Molten metal
Aggravated Wounds/Turn	Fire Type
1	Torch (limb burned)
2	Bonfire (half the body exposed)
3	Inferno (all body exposed)

Drugs and Poisons

Mortals use a variety of substances and herbs to heal, harm or alter perceptions. Most cannot be used directly by Cainites, though they may be imbibed indirectly through the blood of unwitting victims or willing volunteers (such as the Assamite sorcerers' *kalif*-smokers). Rather than detailing the effect of every drug and poison used during the War of Princes, the following are the most common and typical effects.

- **Alcohol:** A vampire drinking blood that contains alcohol suffers some of the effects of being drunk. For every two "drinks" consumed by the victim, the Cainite reduces her Dexterity and Intelligence pools by one die. This effect dissipates at the rate of one die per hour.

- **Bloodroot (Sanguinaria):** The rare and deadly bloodroot is one of the few poisons directly harmful to Cainites. Consuming it (for example, mixed with blood) causes three health levels of aggravated damage, while

using it as a contact poison (such as on a blade) inflicts two health levels of aggravated damage in addition to any injury caused by the weapon. The poison attacks vampiric vitae, turning it into an ash-like black dust.

- **Food Poisoning (Salmonella):** The vampire who consumes blood tainted by salmonella becomes nauseated and suffers a level of bashing damage. Additionally, she has difficulty drinking blood until purged of the bad blood, but she may force herself to drink (a Stamina roll against difficulty 6). The effects of food poisoning wear off after about a day.

- **Hashish:** In common use in the Middle East, hashish has a calming effect, but it also affects the imbiber's attentiveness. A vampire drinking hashish-tainted blood reduces any dice pool involving Perception by one. They also reduce the difficulty of resisting frenzy by one. These effects last for approximately one hour.

- **Hallucinogens:** Hallucinogenic drugs such as cowbane, henbane and nightshade (belladonna) are used as both painkillers and poisons in the Dark Medieval. A vampire drinking blood that contains small quantities of such herbs reduces all dice pools between one and three (depending on the amount consumed by the victim) because of impaired concentration. The character also suffers effects equivalent to Haunt the Soul (Dementation 2, see p. 184). Other effects are at the Storyteller's discretion but may include a temporary point of Auspex or Courage. The effects of hallucinogens last for a number of hours equal to 8 - Stamina.

- **Painkillers:** As with hallucinogens, herbs such as hemlock, mandrake and monkshood are used as both painkillers and poisons. In small doses, they reduce the disabling effects of injury, reducing by one the dice pool penalty inflicted by wounds. The effects last for a number of hours equal to 10 - Stamina.

- **Poison:** Larger doses of hallucinogens or painkillers, or extracts such as arsenic, strychnine or cyanide, can prove fatal to mortals and harmful to Cainites. While a mortal may suffer an agonizing death, a Cainite subtracts one from all dice pools and takes between one and three health levels of lethal damage, depending on the strength of the poison and the amount of tainted blood drunk. Poisons cannot kill Cainites or drive them into torpor, but they can temporarily incapacitate them until the bad blood can be purged and the effects healed.

Sunlight

Harmless to mortals, sunlight is the bane of Cainite existence. Even the most diffuse sunlight can burn a vampire as badly as a naked flame, while full sunlight can cause the vampire herself to burst into flames. Like fire, sunlight causes automatic levels of aggravated damage unless soaked, and only characters with the Discipline of Fortitude can do so—players roll Stamina + Fortitude. The difficulty of soaking depends on the intensity of the sunlight, and the damage depends on the amount of skin exposed. A character looking into a sunlit area may suffer temporary blindness as reflected



sunlight sears her eyes. Some Cainites claim that moonlight causes them pain, but few suffer any real effects beyond feeling mildly uncomfortable.

The soak roll must be made for each turn of exposure. A botch indicates that the character herself has caught fire and must also deal with the effects of fire. Exposure to sunlight may trigger Röttschreck (see p. 265).

SUNLIGHT EFFECTS

Soak Difficulty	Intensity
3	Indirect rays, heavy cloud or twilight.
5	Fully protected by heavy clothes
7	Indirect light through a window
9	Outside on a cloudy day or struck directly by a single ray of light.
10	Direct sunlight on a clear day
Aggravated Wounds/Turn	Exposure
1	Small part of body (hand or face)
2	Large part of body (leg, arm, head)
3	Half or more of body

States of Mind

A character's mental state is as important as her physical health, and it is much less controllable in many cases. A vampire can use blood points to heal a physical wound, but mental injuries and states are less open to manipulation.

The Amaranth, or Diablerie

It is through vitae that the Curse of Caine passes from sire to childe, steadily diluted with increasing distance from the progenitor. The blood of elder vampires is performe more potent than that of later generations, a power that can be taken by consuming the vitae and soul of the older vampire. This act — considered a heinous crime by most Cainites, akin to cannibalism among mortals — is called the Amaranth, though younger vampires also use the term diablerie. The only clans not to balk at Amaranth are the Assamites of the Levant, some of whom practice the ritual diablerie of their enemies, and the Lasombra, who sanction the Amaranth of sire by childe if the *Amici Noctis* approve. The Tremere are likewise predisposed to the Amaranth though it is not enshrined in their rituals and practices.

At its most basic, the Amaranth is the act of feeding on a Cainite as a vampire feeds on a mortal, though to complete the power transfer, *all* of the elder vampire's blood must be consumed in the act. In addition to providing the feeding vampire (called a *diablerist*) with sustenance, the potent vitae of the older Cainite changes and enhances her body, bringing them closer in strength and stature to Caine himself. As such, even the youngest Cainite can hope to steal the powers of their elders if she has the cunning and courage to carry out the theft. The elders know that ambitious neonates will — literally — try to consume them in their quest for power, prompting a dichotomous friction between sires and their childer.

Committing Amaranth

Although the process of diablerie begins like any other feeding, the amount of effort required to complete the act is monumental, and many who attempt it fail. The diablerist must first subdue her victim and begin the feeding process as outlined under "Combat Systems" (p. 238) and "Blood Pool" (p. 162). The diablerizing Cainite must then drain all of her victim's vitae, a difficult proposition given the potent nature of elder's blood. Only then does the true Amaranth begin.

Once the target's body had been drained of blood, the diablerist must suck the very life force out of her victim, an action called "drinking the heart's-blood" of the victim. Doing so requires the player to make an extended Strength roll (difficulty 9). Each success inflicts one automatic health level on the victim (considered aggravated and unsoakable, even with Fortitude). A failed roll indicates that the diablerist is temporarily unable to draw any more life force out of the victim and must pause briefly to "digest" the victim's essence. A botched roll, however, does not indicate that the target recovers health levels — rather that the diablerie attempt fails and may not be resumed. The victim remains alert and mobile unless her health level is reduced to Incapacitated. Once all levels have been drained, the victim's body immediately begins to decay (the exact rate depending on the age of the victim — immediately and visibly if the body is more than a decade old, more slowly for new-born Cainites) as its essence merges with that of the diablerist.

The process of the Amaranth absorbs all the diablerist's concentration and effort, leaving him vulnerable to outside forces. Any attacks or actions taking against a vampire attempting diablerie are made at difficulty 2.

The diablerist must drink the victim's vitae immediately and directly, and must be the only person involved in the act. A group cannot diablerize a single victim, nor may the elder's vitae be stored for later diablerie (though it may be stored for later consumption). Thaumaturgy may, however, provide a way around these restrictions.

Boons and Curses

In the immediate aftermath of the Amaranth, the diablerist is filled with an orgasmic sense of joy and power, exulting in the experience of draining another's soul. The

emotions of this act are often enough to trigger a frenzy, so the diablerist must make a Self-Control or Instinct roll against a difficulty equal to 10 - his Road rating. Where a Cainite diablerizes a vampire of equal or higher generation, this "rush" is the only effect of the Amaranth, a sensation to which some Cainites become addicted. The true power of the act comes from diablerizing a Cainite of lower generation, for example an 11th-generation vampire drinking the blood and soul of a member of the ninth generation.

In such circumstances, the act of consuming the other vampire's soul transfers some of his power to the diablerist, effectively lowering her own generation by one. This effect enhances her ability to use and store blood, and it may allow enhanced traits and Disciplines. If the victim was considerably more powerful (five or more generations lower) then the diablerist may improve her generation by more than one step at the Storyteller's discretion. The likelihood of finding — let alone overcoming — such a powerful Cainite are not good, though. Diablerists may also gain a *temporary* increase in one or more Disciplines (usually one or two dots), reflecting the elder's power coursing through her veins. This benefit is short lived, however, and it rarely lasts longer than a scene.

Unfortunately, the signs of Amaranth are plain for all to see, at least those with the Auspex power of Soulsight (see p. 176). The diablerist's spirit halo is shot through with black veins, reflecting the imperfectly merged souls of the Cainite and her victim. This *de facto* admission of guilt fades in a number of years equal to the difference in generation between the diablerist and her victim (with a minimum of one year), and trace evidence may last decades or centuries and be detectable with Thaumaturgy. Even those Cainites without Soulsight can sense something *wrong* about the diablerist for several months after the act. This effect lasts for one month per generation of difference between victim and diablerist, and it can be detected only after a Perception roll (difficulty 8). (Because of their unique weakness, the halos of members of the Assamite warrior caste, always bear the signs of diablerie, even if they have never committed the act themselves. The subtler sense of taint, however, appears only after an actual diablerie.)

The Amaranth is usually a contravention of the Tradition of Destruction, which prohibits the young from destroying the old. As such, evidence of diablerie may provoke reprisals from other Cainites. However, the exact reaction of the vampire's peers is at the Storyteller's discretion. She may be punished, or others may simply file the information away for later use when they desire a boon. There is, however, a case in which the Amaranth is permitted: during a blood hunt. Usually (but not exclusively) carried out by a sire on her childer, the victim is presented with the bloom of the amaranth flower a week before the hunt commences to signify this intent, a practice that gave the rite its name.

According to legend, those who diablerize strong-willed Cainites may take on some mannerisms of their

victim. These tales say that for this to occur the victim must have an “unshakable will” and have blood of the highest potency. The exact nature of these effects is up to the Storyteller.

Committing Amaranth may, at the Storyteller's discretion, be a transgression of the character's moral path, requiring a degeneration test. This is particularly true for Cainites on the Road of Humanity.

The Blood Oath

One of the strangest properties of Cainite vitae is its ability to forge a link between the vampire and the drinker. This power is used to create ghoulish servants (see p. 284), but it can also be used to bind other vampires to the Cainite's will. The strength of this bond depends on the number of times the victim has drunk the blood of the same Cainite, but after three such sups, the drinker is almost irrevocably bound. The person (living or unliving) who comes under this bond, called the *blood oath*, is known as the *thrall*, while the Cainite holding power over them is the *regnant*.

A fully bound thrall is utterly devoted to her regnant and cannot take action against her. In many cases this is like a mortal addiction or obsession. The thrall need not like her regnant (though many do), and she may even actively despise her, but she follows her orders nonetheless, even if she is dominated or otherwise manipulated by outside agencies. Many Cainites have described the oath as a compelling force, but it is not necessarily a compulsion to do exactly as the regnant says. Rather the thrall is honor-bound to demonstrate loyalty, to not disobey orders or the express wishes of the regnant. This distinction between compelled obedience and loyalty is a fine line, but it allows the thrall to demonstrate some flexibility. Invariably, however, the thrall follows her master's wishes, the way of oathbound loyalty in the Dark Medieval world for mortals and Cainites alike. Going against the master's wishes is simply unconscionable.

The power of the oath is not dependent on the regnant's generation. The blood of a 12th-generation neonate can bind an elder as readily as the elder binds others to her will. This is the only Cainite power that does not appear to degrade with generation. A Cainite may be fully oathbound to only one regnant, but she may have several thralls and lesser bonds (those involving one or two drinks) herself.

Taking the Oath

The blood oath is both a physical compulsion and an expression of the bonds in Cainite society. Although cautionary tales of regnants force-feeding their blood to thralls abound, very few Cainites ever come under the full effects of the blood oath. Most of the Damned are simply too willful to surrender themselves so permanently. Nevertheless, there are vampires who were ghouls before their Embrace (and thus carry on their blood oath), and the chains of Cainite feudalism can be strengthened by the

power of the oath. It's fairly common for oaths of fealty to be accompanied by a single drink of the lord's blood, but taking steps beyond that is exceptional. The Usurpers of Clan Tremere use a similar technique to ensure the loyalty of their neonates.

The most common way to undergo the full oath or even the single drink is in a ceremony of outright fealty. This involves a gathering of a Cainite court, at which point the thrall drinks from the regnant's slit wrist and, her lips still smeared scarlet, swears loyalty to her lord. The lord also swears to protect his new vassal, as if she was of his own blood. It is from this practice that the oath gets its name.

The power of the blood oath depends on the number of drinks taken from the regnant (which must be at least a night apart). One or two drinks leaves the prospective thrall imperfectly bound. Only after the third drink is the thrall fully held by the oath.

- **First Drink:** After the initial sup of the regnant's vitae (which may be as little as a single drop of blood, depending on its potency), the drinker finds herself drawn to the other Cainite. This effect has been likened to a mortal infatuation, with the vampire finding thoughts of the regnant creeping into her thoughts and dreams, and her subconscious driving her to seek out the regnant again, usually in “coincidental” encounters. There are no hard rules for this stage of the oath, but as with infatuation, the link between the two fades with separation. Suggested effects include a -1 difficulty for the regnant using Dominate, Presence and similar mind-affecting powers on the thrall. The drinker may find herself thirsting for the regnant's vitae (Willpower roll, difficulty 6, to resist).

- **Second Drink:** The second drink binds the drinker closer to the other Cainite. She begins to take deliberate actions in her regnant's favor, and she actively seeks out further encounters. The drinker may find herself obsessed with the regnant, suffering a broad range of often conflicting emotions (simultaneous feelings of intense love and hate are not uncommon). She is not bound to the regnant but may find it difficult to act against him (requiring a Willpower roll), and she may be commanded easily by the regnant (reduce the difficulty of the vampire's Social actions against the drinker by one). The drinker often rationalizes her actions as “respect” for a worthy lord and a willingness to obey those in power. The prospective thrall continues to thirst for the regnant's blood, and she must spend a Willpower point to refuse another drink.

- **Third Drink:** The third drink concludes the oath, tying the thrall to the regnant. In many cases, the intense passion of the weaker bonds fades, replaced by a strong sense of loyalty and belonging. Whether the thrall loves or hates the regnant, she has a sense that her place in the natural order is correct, that she is in harmony with her own lord and vassals. Like and dislike is irrelevant; respect and loyalty are the heart of her existence. An oathbound thrall can be dominated by her regnant without the need

of eye contact — hearing her master's voice is enough. Furthermore, the difficulty of any attempts to resist the regnant's Dominate commands increases by two. Generation does play a role here, though. A higher-generation regnant cannot dominate a lower-generation thrall.

Oathbreaking

The degree of obedience by a thrall depends on a wide variety of factors. A weak-willed vampire (Willpower of 5 or less or with a Nature inclined to obedience) obeys any command given by her regnant, whether it is to pass a scroll, murder innocents or walk into the noonday sun. Those with greater self-image and will can attempt to resist the regnant's commands. Doing so requires the thrall's player to succeed on a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 8 (though the difficulty may increase if the regnant has treated the thrall well, or decrease if she has been mistreated). To temporarily break free of the oath requires a number of successes equal to the number of times she has drunk the regnant's blood. These successes may be accumulated over a period of time (the roll can be made once per week) representing accumulated insults and resentment, but older offenses may be forgotten. Therefore, the longest these successes can be saved is a number of weeks equal to the vampire's Willpower rating. Once the vampire has accumulated enough successes, she can spend these successes (and a Willpower point) to circumvent the provisions of the oath. This resistance may be in effect for an entire scene if the vampire merely intends to disobey the regnant (passing information to a rival, allowing a group of villagers to escape an ordered massacre) to a single turn (if she wishes to attack the regnant directly). This period of freedom can be extended by spending additional Willpower points, but once this expenditure stops, the oath resumes its full force.

The blood oath may be broken, or lapse with time, but doing so requires a long period of separation between regnant and thrall and considerable willpower. As a rough guide, if the thrall abstains from drinking the regnant's vitae for a period of 12 - Willpower months (weeks if the thrall never took the third drink) and avoids the regnant's presence during the same period, the binding power of the oath weakens by one level. If the thrall was grossly mistreated by the regnant, this time requirement may decrease at the Storyteller's discretion. If the thrall can avoid the regnant and her vitae for long enough (an act that usually involves a lot of determination and cunning), the strength of the oath decreases to nothing.

Example: *If a Cainite with a Willpower of 6 can avoid meeting her regnant for six months, the strength of her blood oath diminishes. However, it takes a full 18 months for the bond to be reduced to nothing, which is a long time to avoid her master — and resist temptation.*

The blood oath also ends if the regnant dies, though the effect of this breaking varies from thrall to thrall. Some claim to feel a sense of great elation and joy when the bond breaks, while others liken it a shattering blade, the fragments tearing into her soul and causing grievous

wounds. Yet others, most often those with dependent Natures, feel at a loss without their regnant. These tortured souls may attempt to forge a new oath with a new regnant as a means of "completing" themselves, while others may seek out Final Death. Such matters are solely at the discretion of the Storyteller.

Derangements

The true Curse of Caine, some vampiric theologians say, is not the hunger for blood but agelessness. Cainites have before them an eternity of nights without release, centuries of fighting back the howls of the Beast and watching all they care for crumble to dust. Already saddled with the animalistic rages within them, Cainites often fall victim to other forms of dementia and lunacy. In some clans (notably the Malkavians) derangements are endemic, while members of other clans gain them as a result of mental trauma. In most cases, they reflect an inability to accept the world at face value, resulting in a twisted perception of reality that better suits the character's mental capacity. Some characters have these quirks at the start of play. Others accumulate them during game play at the Storyteller's discretion, usually after periods of intense stress, terror or anxiety.

Derangements are not intended to straightjacket a character, although they unquestionably create challenges for the player and her companions to solve. They also provide opportunities for dramatic roleplaying and storytelling. Madness is a very real part of the Dark Medieval, and those who suffer from it are variously seen as cursed or blessed. In many cases, they respond to outside stimuli in a manner that makes perfect sense to them but is odd to outsiders who do not comprehend their frame of reference. Derangements should not be arbitrary in their effect, but linked to their own internally consistent set of rules. Most often these rules are linked to the origins of the character's derangement and should be agreed upon by the player and Storyteller. For example, a fear of flames might come from the vampire being tortured with fire by an inquisitor. A neonate might develop a perfectionist nature if her sire punished her severely for being sloppy.

The system effects of derangements vary from case to case. They usually result from having botched a Virtue roll or experienced a truly traumatic event. When appropriate, the Storyteller can ask a deranged character's player to toll Self-Control or Instinct to resist a derangement overcoming the character when presented with a relevant stimulus. The difficulty ranges from 5 to 8 depending on the power of the stimulus.

- **Amnesia:** Amnesiac characters blot out some part of their past, perhaps a horrific incident (for example their Embrace) or even a whole period in their lives. The reasons for this memory loss are almost always stress-related, though physical injury may cause a similar effect. Amnesia usually affects just memory, but in some cases, a character may forget

some Abilities and be unable to use them, or be surprised by his ability to do certain things. (Amnesia can be represented by its Flaw, described on page 305.)

- **Catatonia:** A character suffering from this derangement may withdraw from the world entirely at times of stress, remaining largely immobile and unresponsive. Due to the major limiting factors on their actions, catatonia is not recommended as a player derangement.

- **Fantasy:** Some characters cannot accept the real world, so they transpose themselves into an illusory world instead. The scope and degree of this fantasy varies considerably. A character may hold conversations with characters who aren't there, or hear "voices from the gods" commanding him to carry out a wide range of acts. He may also interact with people and institutions of the Dark Medieval in an almost normal manner but with their perception of events skewed by their fantasy. For example, a Cainite may regard himself as Lancelot from the Arthurian legends, on a quest to slay a vile demon or rescue a fair princess. Such fantasies manifest as a quirky outlook, but they are rarely dangerous (unless the Cainite believes that he can walk about in the daylight...). They can, however, adversely affect the character's reaction to others, perhaps making them more likely to frenzy ("They are Mordred's get, milord!") or determined to carry out a mad assault ("The grail lies this way!")

- **Hysteria:** Hysterical characters are unable to control their emotions, and they suffer from severe mood swings. A hysterical Cainite will frenzy more easily than other vampires (increase the difficulty of his Self-Control/ Instinct rolls by two), particularly when faced with great stress.

- **Lunacy:** This madness comes and goes, linked to the cycle of the moon. When the moon is full, the character is manic and delirious, while at the time of the new moon, he may be reserved and melancholic. At other times, he may appear normal and unaffected. His ability to resist frenzy and Röttschreck varies accordingly, increasing and decreasing by a point to reflect his mood.

- **Megalomania:** Characters with this derangement believe that they are destined to lead, and they seek to accumulate power, irrespective of their skill and the attitude of others. They believe that those who dismiss their claims are jealous, seeking to hold onto power and deny them their dues. The megalomaniacs believe that these opponents should be destroyed, politically or physically.

- **Melancholia:** Cainites with this derangement frequently slip into deep depression, losing interest in their normal activities and becoming withdrawn. When suffering from melancholia, the vampire's Willpower rating is greatly reduced (half, round up, the normal value) and they have difficulty becoming motivated. These depressive periods often follow failure of a particular action, though they may also result from hunger (a blood pool of one-quarter or less) or psychological factors.

- **Multiple Personalities:** Something in the character's past has caused his personality to fragment into a number of distinct selves, each with its own traits, outlooks and agendas. The number and nature of these personalities should be agreed by the player and Storyteller, as should matters such as the trigger to switch personalities (often emotional stress) and the knowledge each possesses. In Cainites, these personalities may exhibit different Virtues, traits and Disciplines, and they could even believe themselves to be of different clans. However, only the Storyteller can decide if the skills exhibited by a personality are real or delusions.

- **Obsession:** Obsessive characters become fixated on a particular activity, person or thing. They may seek to ensure that all objects in their possession are categorized and sorted by type, or they may strive to keep their hands spotlessly clean and thus be constantly washing them. They may become fixated on feeding from a particular group of mortals, or in a particular manner, or they may seek to visit all the shrines of a particular saint. Whatever the nature of that obsession is, the target is the center of the character's existence. If he is denied access, he might become agitated.

- **Overcompensation:** An overcompensating character attempts to make up for a flaw in her character (real or perceived) by stressing another aspect of her personality. This limits her actions and skews her perceptions of the world. She may take a "holier than thou" attitude toward others, lecturing them about *their* shortcomings, constantly attempting to take the moral high ground. If the character's own flaws are revealed, the embarrassment would be acute and her reaction unpredictable.

- **Paranoia:** They are jealous of you, or scared. They want to do you in and end your unlife! Paranoid characters believe that they are the victims of persecution, either by an individual or a group. They are very wary of social interactions (+1 difficulty to all Social tests) and fearful that others are in league with their tormentors. Even the slightest thing can trigger a paranoid episode, prompting the character to withdraw into himself or even strike out in fear. Of course, just because a character is paranoid doesn't mean there aren't people out to get him....

- **Perfectionism:** Perfectionists seek to control every aspect of their unlife, often following a rigid set of rules intended to ensure that everything "runs to plan." All their efforts are directed to ensuring that things happen as intended, and if they don't, the perfectionists become agitated, possibly even entering frenzy.

- **"Possession" (Sanguinary Animism):** This uniquely Cainite derangement leads sufferers to believe that they drink the souls of their victims as well as their blood. They believe their victims communicate with them as voices in their head or memories seeping into their consciousness. In some cases, the sufferer blames his actions on these voices, claiming that they are an effort to pacify his tormentors.

• **Regression:** Characters suffering from regression also have difficulty accepting the real world. However, rather than retreating into a fantasy environment, they retreat into a more simplistic mentality, often that of a child. Such characters are usually heavily dependent on others, both for tasks and decision-making. They are frequently naïve, which may be a boon or a curse depending on the circumstances. This refuge of youth may be permanent, or it may kick in as a result of stress. Some characters retreat even further when placed under great pressure, their mental faculties completely shutting down and leaving them to operate on instinct alone. These episodes result in blackouts and periods of memory loss that may be roleplayed, with the character acting on instinct subject to a predetermined set of guidelines, or abstracted, with the character coming to her senses with no recollection of the last few minutes/ hours/ days.

• **Saint Vitus's Dance:** Technically a disease of the nervous system (known in the 21st century as Sydenham's chorea) rather than a derangement, the effects of Saint Vitus's Dance are thought of as a form of madness by the inhabitants of the Dark Medieval. It causes involuntary movements of the face and limbs, resulting in a dance-like series of movements that persist for days or weeks and then disappear, sometimes permanently but often reappearing after months or years. Often a result of rheumatic fever, Saint Vitus's Dance can spread throughout a group, leading to mass outbreaks of the "madness." Unlike most mortal diseases, Cainites can suffer from Saint Vitus's Dance, which they contract via infected blood.

• **Visions:** This derangement leads sufferers to believe that they are granted an insight into the divine through visions, trances and other ecstatic states. During these spells, they may be catatonic, in a trance-like state or rave uncontrollably. Their ability to recall details of the visions is similarly varied, sometimes recalling precise details while having only the vaguest recollections of others. Some details may not resurface until days after the revelation, emerging in response to some external stimulus. These visions may be products of an overactive imagination, or they could, at the Storyteller's discretion and very rarely, reflect a real insight into the unknown.

Frenzy and Röttschreck

Cainites walk a fine line between their civilized human nature and the base passions of their vampiric nature. The dark side of their personality, known as the Beast, relies on passion and instinct rather than reason. This part of the character usually comes to the fore at times of strong emotions — fear, humiliation or hunger — something most Cainites try desperately to resist. Sometimes they succeed and they retain full control of their actions. At others, the Beast takes over and the result is an orgy of instinctual violence. These outbursts are known variously as frenzy and Röttschreck, or collectively as "succumbing to the Beast." Röttschreck differs from other manifestations of the Beast in that it is a primitive

fear response (rather than one of anger and passion), so it is dealt with distinctly from frenzy.

Frenzy

Frenzy represents an uncontrolled emotional outburst, akin in many regards to a temper tantrum, but much more primitive and violent. The vampire is consumed with rage, attacking friend and foe alike and ignoring her usual standards of behavior and morality. The difficulty of resisting the Beast varies wildly, depending on the character's personality and outlook. Events that would send one Cainite over the edge into frenzy may have no effect on another Cainite. Most triggers are emotional, but some are physical, notably injury and hunger. If a character has yet to have his commitment to his road tested (and is thus an initiate, see p. 95), resisting frenzy is notably harder. The times when a player should roll to resist frenzy are at the Storyteller's discretion, but they may include:

• **Anger or Frustration:** When something makes the character angry, she must fight to keep her emotions within normal bounds. Failure to do so may result in a frenzy, during which the Cainite strives to destroy the cause of her anger. During the initial part of this frenzy the Cainite's actions are very focused, but even slaying or driving off the source of anger may be insufficient to sate the Beast, resulting in others becoming victims of the uncontrolled rage.

• **Danger:** Great danger may provoke a Cainite to frenzy, prompting them to launch a preemptive attack. The frenzy is systematic in its targeting of threats, though the definition of "threat" while in the grip of the Beast is open to broad interpretation. A vampire in a danger-provoked frenzy almost certainly targets the greatest threat first, and then works her way down through the lesser threats. However, their subconscious and bestial nature may also regard allies and bystanders as "threats" and result in their being attacked. Danger-provoked frenzies are not manifestations of terror (that is Röttschreck), rather it is an effort to eliminate threats, real or perceived.

• **Deliberate:** Some Cainites, notably those on the *Via Bestiae* or the Norse *einherjar* deliberately seek out the Beast and seek to harness it to their own ends. They push themselves into frenzy, relying on their instincts to control the manifestation of the Beast. This practice of deliberately triggering a frenzy is known by various names, but "summoning the Beast" is the most common, while "riding the Beast" is the accepted term for attempting to steer the frenzy (deliberately induced or not). For more on riding the Beast, see p. 265.

• **Hunger:** After anger, hunger is the most likely cause of frenzy in a Cainite. A vampire's need for sustenance — blood — is not merely the dull ache that humans experience, but rather an all-encompassing addiction. She feels the need in every fiber of her body, so when her blood pool is reduced, she feels compelled to feed from any — any — handy source. When a character's blood pool falls below a quarter of its full level, she begins to crave blood and must



BENEFITS OF FRENZY

Although they are reduced to a bestial state, vampires in frenzy gain several temporary benefits:

- They may ignore all dice pool penalties stemming from wounds (though movement penalties remain in effect).
- The Beast fights outside influences, so any characters trying to dominate the frenzied vampire suffer a +2 difficulty penalty.
- A frenzied character who uses Dominate on others reduces her difficulties by two, again representing the power of her bestial nature to overwhelm others.
- A frenzied character need not Willpower to attempt a feat of strength. Her Beast suffices to give her the strength of mind.
- She is immune to Röttschreck.

roll to resist frenzy whenever tempted by a vessel. As the vampire's blood pool diminishes, this desire mounts (increase the difficulty to resist by one per point of blood less than a quarter). If this roll fails, the character immediately attacks the nearest source of nourishment with a view to drinking from her. She continues to drink until either her blood pool is replenished or the victim dies. If the former happens, she may attempt to end the frenzy. If this fails, or her blood pool is not fully replenished, she attacks another victim, and so on until the frenzy ends or she is sated.

- **Shame:** Embarrassment is another powerful emotion that can lead to frenzy. The severity of the embarrassment required to trigger a frenzy varies from character to character. Those with self-reliant Natures can usually resist all but the gravest insults. Those to whom the opinion of others is important may be "set off" by relatively minor provocations. Once frenzy ensues, no one in the immediate vicinity is safe. The Cainite's fist victim is likely to be the person who embarrassed her, or who brought her the news, but the Beast may also seek to slay all other witnesses to the vampire's humiliation.

- **Temptation:** Some Cainites try hard to walk a straight path, remaining true to a mortal code and their human nature. Temptation, however, is ever present, whispering in her ear and encouraging her to carry out grievous acts. Sometimes these voices are too strong, and the Cainite must fight the Beast itself or enter frenzy.

The Storyteller should decide exactly when a player must check to see if his character frenzies, allowing her to tailor its prevalence and nature to her chronicle. If she decides a check is appropriate, the following rules are in order: When faced with provocation, a Cainite either fights the Beast or tries to work with it. The former allows her to try and maintain control, forcing her humanity to the fore, but if unsuccessful, she allows the Beast to rage unchecked. "Riding the Beast" — working with the frenzy

— allows the Cainite to retain some control over her actions but largely guarantees that the outburst takes place. How a vampire reacts depends on her morality. Those who follow roads that teach Self-Control resist the Beast; those who learn Instinct embrace it.

• **Fighting the Beast:** The player makes a Self-Control roll against a difficulty that depends on the provocation (see chart). If the vampire is trying to resist temptation to commit a heinous, evil act, the player can roll against a difficulty of 9 - Conscience instead (if that is lower). The vampire must score five successes to completely master the Beast. A lesser number of successes postpones the frenzy one turn per success (though each passing turn “uses” a success), during which time she may continue to resist. Each new success further postpones the frenzy (though a botch means that each turn of postponement costs two successes), and if she accumulates five unused successes in this time, the Beast recedes until new provocation presents itself. If the number of unused successes decreases to zero, or if the player rolled none initially, the character frenzies. A botch on the initial roll indicates that not only does she frenzy, but the character may also suffer some form of derangement (at the Storyteller’s discretion).

A player whose character is held in the grip of frenzy may spend a Willpower point in order to regain control of the character for one turn. He may do so in order to attempt to flee, to utter an apology (or receive one) or to turn away from an intended victim. This brief exertion of will does not end the frenzy, however. That only happens when the provocation has been removed (or eliminated) and the Cainite’s fury has spent itself, typically after a scene.

• **Riding the Beast:** In this case, the character automatically enters frenzy unless the difficulty is less than her Instinct trait (in which situation the decision to frenzy or not lies with the player). If she desires, the player can spend a point of Willpower to boost her Instinct rating by one, allowing her to resist minor temptations. Once in frenzy, however, she may not use Willpower to reason with the Beast. Instead, the player can attempt to direct the character’s actions by making an Instinct roll against the frenzy provocation’s difficulty (see chart). Each success allows the character to resist (or more properly, redirect) the frenzy for a turn, though it does not end it.

Provocation	Difficulty
Smell of blood (when hungry)	3+
Sight of blood (when hungry)	4+
Being harassed	4
Life-threatening situation	4
Malicious taunts	4
Physical provocation	6
Taste of blood (when hungry)	6+
Loved one in danger	7
Outright humiliation	8
Significant nearby source of fire	+1
Character is a road initiate	+1

Rötschreck

Fear is a major motivating factor in all beings, living and unliving, yet Cainite resilience and effective immortality frees them from many of the worries inflicted on humanity. Yet, while this freedom results in characters who tackle the world head-on, it also results in a more extreme reaction to those few sources of true fear for Cainites. The primitive terror response in vampires is known as Rötschreck, the Red Fear. Fire and sunlight are the principal triggers for this condition, which is as mindless as frenzy but leads the vampire to desperate attempts to flee, utilizing violence and powers to speed her progress. As with frenzy, if a character has yet to have his commitment to his road tested (and is thus an initiate, see p. 95), resisting Rötschreck is notably harder.

All vampires have some control over the reaction and can largely suppress their instinct to shy from fire — just as well given that naked flames are the principal source of light in the Dark Medieval. The flame has to present a real threat to the Cainite to trigger a test for Rötschreck, so the presence of a torch in a wall sconce or a candle on a table does not require a roll. However, if the same torch is thrust in the vampire’s face, all bets are off. The presence of large torches and braziers does put Cainites on edge. Vampires resisting frenzy under such conditions suffer a +1 difficulty penalty to do so. For this penalty to be in effect, there needs to be substantial open flames in the immediate area. A simple candle will not do.

To avoid Rötschreck, the vampire must make a Courage roll, the difficulty varying dependent on the degree of danger. Just as with frenzy, five successes are required to fully quell the Beast, and fewer successes allow the Cainite to resist for a period of time. Each success holds off the Red Fear for a turn, but each turn of postponement decreases the net number of successes by one. If the total drops to zero, Rötschreck grips the Cainite. A botch during this period increases the “cost” of postponing the effects to two successes per turn, but if the character achieves five unused successes, the risk of Rötschreck abates.

Failure at the initial roll means the vampire flees madly from the danger, taking the shortest route to shelter and attacking anyone or anything that gets in her path. A Willpower point may also be spent to retain control or (if the character is already seized by the Red Fear) to direct her actions, perhaps avoiding an attack on a trusted companion. A botched initial roll results in the character entering a frenzy and attacking the source of danger.

Provocation	Difficulty
Lighting a candle	3
Sight of a torch	5
Bonfire	6
Obscured sunlight	7
Being burned	7
Direct sunlight	8
Trapped in burning building	9
Character is a road initiate	+1

Golconda

Hope springs eternal. Many beings seek salvation, in this life or the next, and Cainites are no exception. Indeed, without the prospect of redemption, many Cainites would give themselves over to the Beast and revel in their base nature. Various paths of redemption have been suggested, but Cainite mythology espouses the state of Golconda, a legendary state of transcendence that reflects their mastery over their bestial nature.

In nights past, many on the Road of Heaven sought Golconda, following a loose process referred to as the Bitter Journey, but few — if any — attained it. The number of questors has, however, fallen off markedly, with many devoutly Christian, Muslim and Jewish Cainites condemning Golconda as a pagan practice, at odds with the idea of redemption through God's grace alone. Indeed, the most fanatically religious Cainites have been known to hunt down those undertaking the Bitter Journey and slay them as heretics.

There are stories of Cainites who achieve the state, but these usually take the form of "a friend of a friend" with no direct witnesses. Whether Golconda truly exists is a matter for the Storyteller to decide. There are no fixed systems for Golconda — any attempt to create them would be pointless given its ephemeral nature — but the following "legends" offer guidelines for Storytellers who wish to use Golconda, or the quest for it, in their chronicles.

- **Acceptance:** Those who have attained Golconda accept themselves for what they are. They do not rail on about their "damned" status, nor do they suffer jealousy of mortal life. They are simply part of existence.

- **Calm:** Those who attain Golconda are reputed to have mastered their Beast and never fear succumbing to frenzy or Röttschreck.

- **Hunger:** Though still tied to the requirements of blood, a Cainite who has attained Golconda needs to feed much less often (perhaps only required to spend one blood point per week, rather than per day).

- **Strength:** A Cainite who has attained Golconda is not fully bound by the shackles of generation and may learn Disciplines and traits in excess of their usual limits (perhaps to 10 dots). Her blood pool, and the amount that can be used per turn, remains unaffected.

- **Mortality:** Perhaps the most seductive of the legends associated with Golconda is that, through enlightenment, a vampire may throw off Caine's curse and return to mortality. How such a transformation might be effected is spoken of only in whispers, but self-sacrifice, true love and devotion are recurring themes. Even those who believe in Golconda usually regard these stories of transformation as fanciful, but as always, the truth of the matter is in the hands of the Storyteller.

Road and Morality

For a vampire to survive for any length of time, she must follow a moral code known as a road. Chapter Three discusses these Cainite belief systems in detail, but there are several important dramatic systems related to road. These systems come into play most often when a character fails to abide by the strict tenets of her road, something that happens all too often when dealing with the Beast.

Moments of Truth

For Cainites to become true adherents of a road or to advance along it, their beliefs must be tested through a *moment of truth* — an epiphany related to the ethics of the road which shows their worthiness. Until undergoing that moment of truth, the vampire remains a mere initiate, unable to understand the road's deeper mysteries and implications. Further moments of truth deepen and broaden Cainite understanding of a road, allowing them to progress along it (and the player to spend experience on the Road trait, see p. 165).

Since the safest and most reliable means of achieving a moment of truth is with the aid of a teacher, many Cainites seek out more experienced mentors on their road and study with them to learn what they need to know. On some roads (such as the Roads of the Beast and of Humanity), this teaching is informal, mentor to student. Others (such as the Roads of Heaven and of Kings) have more formal priests and professors of the road, and students may be expected to compensate their teacher in some way (particularly on the Road of Sin, in which nothing is free). The Storyteller is encouraged to use the quest for a teacher or other moments of truth as story hooks in an ongoing chronicle.

Moments of truth are not game systems, in that the player doesn't roll dice to experience one. They can result from other game system events, however, as well as the narrative of the story. It's ultimately up to the Storyteller when a moment of truth occurs for a particular character, but the general guidelines that follow are a useful summary.

A vampire experiences a moment of truth when:

- She commits a major sin (ranked 1-3 on the road's hierarchy of sins), whether or not she fails the degeneration roll. The magnitude of the sin shows the importance of the road and the dangers of the Beast clearly.

- She frenzies but does not degenerate as a result, representing greater understanding and acceptance of the Beast.

- She studies with a teacher of the road, gaining a greater understanding after a number of months of instruction equal to her current Road rating.

• She experiences a momentous event in the story related to her understanding of the road (in the Storyteller's judgment). This may spring from external events or from introspection.

• She has recently degenerated and undertakes acts of repentance in line with the road's teachings and the severity of the sin.

Degeneration

A road requires dedication to a set of ideals and principles, even if they are not things that would be considered "moral" by human society. Sometimes vampires take actions that violate the ethics of their road, either intentionally or despite their best efforts (because of frenzy or Röttschreck). Such a lapse allows the Beast to tighten its grasp on a Cainite's soul, and it can lead to *degeneration*, a step down the slippery slope toward becoming a mindless monster.

Each road has a *hierarchy of sins* associated with it (see Chapter Three), which presents examples of actions at each Road rating that call for a degeneration roll. The requirements become more stringent as the character's Road trait increases, including all of the sins for ratings below the current rating. An action that's forgivable for a lower-rated character cannot be overlooked for someone who is supposed to embody the road's ideals. Therefore, the higher the Road rating is, the more difficult and demanding it is to maintain, and the easier it is for the character to slip. The lower the Road rating falls, the greater the sins are that the character must commit to degenerate further. This causes characters to degenerate quickly at the top of the hierarchy, but more slowly toward the bottom, allowing a player the opportunity to arrest the character's spiraling descent.

Whenever a character takes an action that constitutes a sin for that character's current Road rating, the Storyteller calls for a degeneration roll. The player rolls Conscience or Conviction (whichever the character has). The difficulty is generally 6, although the Storyteller can raise or lower it based on the circumstances (a +1 difficulty penalty if the character has been lax in practicing his road's rites is altogether appropriate). Willpower cannot be spent on this roll — all the determination in the world won't protect characters from the consequences of their actions.

If the degeneration roll succeeds, the character's Road rating does not decrease. He is sufficiently repentant to reject the power of the Beast, seeking atonement or absolution through his road. If the degeneration roll fails, then the character loses a point of Road trait as he manages to rationalize or justify his actions in some way. What was previously forbidden now seems acceptable. If

the roll botches, the character also loses a point of Conscience/ Conviction and gains a derangement. This madness is chosen by the Storyteller and related to the situation that caused the degeneration roll.

Changing Roads

It is possible, but difficult, for a Cainite to stray from a chosen road and take up another. Some find that their chosen road does not suit them and become apostates, or they are forced to abandon their road because of exile or excommunication. The time of moving between roads is a dangerous one for Cainites, for their resistance to the Beast is weakened and may fail altogether. To leave one road behind and take up a new one, a vampire must fulfill the following requirements:

- Study with a teacher of the new road for at least a year, learning its precepts and ethics. This alone may result in the Cainite's old associates shunning him.

- Reduce his old Road rating to at least 3 (but not lower than 1). This is accomplished normally through degeneration, deliberately committing sins against the old road. But these actions cannot be sins against the newly chosen road. The character sins against the old road while upholding the ethics of the newly chosen one. So a vampire switching from the Road of the Beast to the Road of Humanity might leave the wilderness behind, try to be merciful and charitable, eschew violence and so forth.

- Reduce any Virtues inappropriate to the new road to 1. This is likewise accomplished through degeneration. Once the Cainite's Road rating reaches 3 or less, the player can choose to reduce a Virtue rather than the Road rating when he fails a degeneration roll. This can be done only when deliberately seeking to change roads.

When he has met all of the requirements, the vampire undergoes an appropriate test for the new road. The Storyteller (playing the role of the character's teacher or mentor) decides on the nature of the test. It should be something the apostate must do to prove his faith in his new road, anything from breaking some final tie with the character's old road to a significant deed affirming the new one. The player rolls Willpower against a difficulty 4 + the character's current Road rating, + 1 per Virtue to be changed (if any). If successful, the character's Road and Virtues change, and he can begin to progress along the new road.

The requirements do not apply to initiates, those who have not yet undergone a moment of truth and become truly committed to their road. An initiate seeking to change roads need only study for a season (about three months), reduce his inappropriate Virtues (not Road rating) through degeneration and roll Willpower against a difficulty of 6.



IBOLYON 02

It is only here, in the Lazarus House,

that I feel at home. Once, a seeming eternity ago, I was called the "Rock of Constantinople" by my people, and I walked openly among the Damned of that gilded city. Surrounded by lords in purple and priests in black, I had respect and was a king among the Damned.

But all that is gone. I have seen my beloved city burn and my patriarch cast me out. A damnable blood-witch murdered him in punishment for his pride and beauty, and the night is darker for it. The dream that welcomed me into its bosom is now a shambles.

Here, in this land where priests speak Latin instead of Greek, where kings and not emperors rule, where popes replace patriarchs, I am just one more wretch. Even among the Damned I am cast out by my tripartite shame. I am Nosferatu, my mien an offense to the Frankish ladies and lords of the night. I am Greek, my language an offense to the priests and prelates of Rome. I am a foreigner, my presence an offense to the warring princes of Europe.

Thus, I have here, in the Lazarus House of Saint Sylvester. The abbey of the same name is a half-night's walk up the road, but the monks keep us at a fair distance. We are all lepers, struck with the flesh-eroding curse of so many. Some here were once nobles, others priests, others simple farmers, traders or craftsmen. Now we are all but lepers. When we travel or greet visitors — rare indeed — we must garb ourselves in sackcloth and clack castanets to announce our twisted presence. We suffer the beatings and scorn of our fair-faced betters as they throw a few *sous* or rotting foods our way.

But none come to the Lazarus House at night, and that is when I wake. Then, we all shed cloaks and castanets and display our fearsome aspect with dark pride. Sores and rotting flesh bared to the night air, we of the Lazarus House speak of the gifts granted by our curse. It is the wretched who see the pure most clearly, we say. With every lash of a nobleman's whip, with every sour glance of a monk's pity, we see the lies of nobility and grace. We discuss these things and plan fanciful ways in which to quietly, by night, balance the slights of the day. We concoct schemes of murder, fornication, abduction and banditry.

For most, these tales are but crutches to allay fears and fill the dark hours between dusk and sleep. But there are a few who see the real possibilities, who are ready to drag the princes from their thrones if only their infested limbs had the strength to do so. These are my kin in spirit, and with a few gulps of my blood they gain all the strength they need. And with every sip, we repeat the one word that drives us all forward.

"Vengeance."



CHAPTER EIGHT: STORYTELLING

Hearken to the prophet's words of blood-filled dreams and
shortened nights,
Of hunger risen to claim its own, of arrogance turned to ash.
Hearken to the words of the seer, whose vision rends the veil of
time.

—The Erciyes Fragments. VIII (Prophecies)

Introduction

The name says it all: storytelling game.

The rest of this book provides the tools with which to tell stories: setting, characters, game mechanics. This chapter is all about *how* to tell them. Whereas much of the other material is aimed at the players who portray the “stars” of the game, this chapter is exclusively for you, the Storyteller, who has the most challenging and most rewarding job of all: setting the story in motion and guiding it toward its climax. The following pages highlight the elements that set **Dark Ages: Vampire** apart from other games, and include practical suggestions on how to prepare and run a chronicle. Whether you're new to storytelling or a veteran with years of experience under your belt, you'll find something of use.

Understanding the Setting

The overall description of **Dark Ages: Vampire's** setting is “Dark Medieval,” which labels its historical period as well as its overall atmosphere. The game focuses on a span of time roughly from the end of the 12th to the middle of the 13th century (with 1230 as the basic “starting date” for

chronicles). This was a time of great change and upheaval in mortal history; so too was it a time of great change for the Children of Caine. This section first examines the Dark Medieval generally, then takes a closer look at the basic facts and configurations of Cainite society.

Welcome to the Dark Medieval

You most definitely do not need to be an expert on medieval history to put together a good **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicle. Doing some reading can only improve your game, but it's not necessary, and you shouldn't be discouraged if you're not a historical expert. This is a fantasy game based on a historical period, so some liberties can be taken with real-world history and culture if they make your stories more effective.

What you do need is a firm grasp of the specific ways in which the historical setting affects your chronicle. These are the elements you should try to emphasize to your players if you want to get the most out of the setting.

Dark Ages

Medieval life takes place mostly during daylight hours, and its routines revolve around the rising and setting of the sun. For people accustomed to rising at dawn and retiring at sunset, the coming of the night is not just a nuisance or a signal that the day's work is done. The night brings unseen menaces and horrors into the world, suddenly made hostile and alien.

Because they can function only at night, Cainites are largely removed from the mortal world. Their contact with the living is greatly curtailed, and many remember their own mortal fears of monsters lurking in the night. When you add to this the fact that one of the most important social activities among the Children of Caine is hunting and feeding, you end up with a great divide between living and unliving. Your players' characters may be willing to stride about at night, unafraid of what may lurk in the shadows, but no mortal will. Use this fear to good effect in your game. It's virtually impossible for a Cainite to convince a mortal to "step outside," unless "outside" is well lit and well populated, for example. You should also emphasize that even though your players' characters are monsters who lurk in the dark, only the most foolish of Cainites is not wary of unseen menaces.

Further, illumination in medieval times means fire (or sunlight) and for a Cainite, this means Final Death. Any mortals they encounter are likely to want to stay close to fires and torches, to light up dark rooms and generally to be close to one of the few things that can truly destroy a Cainite. Use this to add an edge of worry to any encounters with mortals. The Children of Caine don't like being around fire, and it's very appropriate to use the rules for Röttschreck (p. 265) in such situations. Neither mortal nor immortal should feel comfortable in the other's favored environment.

Mother Church

Generally speaking, in medieval times mortal and immortal alike see the world through the lens of the Church. Even for those who reject the teachings of the Church (as some Cainites do), those same teachings continue to color everything they have learned and everything they experience. The social order is based on the devolution of authority from God down through His agents, from the pope to kings to barons to local lords to peasants. Be wary of players who bring modern political sensibilities (especially ideas about revolution and democracy) into your game. Such ideas would be anathema not just to mortals, but to most Cainites as well. In effect, a challenge to the feudal system is a challenge to God's order. This is not to say that dissenting voices are not raised, but dissent is generally aimed at individuals (a rapacious baron, or a heretical priest), not the feudal system itself. Note that this doesn't mean that all characters should be superstitious or closed-minded, simply that than even the broadest medieval mind has its limits.

In an age of widespread illiteracy, the authority of the clergy is hard to underestimate. Most (but not all) nobles are literate, but for the peasantry, literacy is very rare indeed. This can have several interesting effects on your game. Most characters (both yours and the players') are going to be illiterate. A peasant who can't read makes a useful courier or dupe, but beware the educated spy who can read your "secret" document. It also explains why influence over the Church (or at least over key churchmen) is so important for Cainites. Having mortal pawns who can read and write is a huge aid to communication and control. No Cainite ever gives up a pawn easily, but a learned man is easily worth 10 illiterates.

Knights and Crusades

The 13th century is not a time of tolerance and diversity. Rival faiths are threats to the power and control of the Church and the kingdoms who derive part of authority from it. The great enthusiasm for crusades (against pagans, Christian heretics and Muslims) and pogroms (against the Jews) amply demonstrate the Church's desire to eliminate these threats to its power.

Ideas of feudal duty and the urge to defend the faith are not restricted to the living. Many Cainites were members of the nobility in their mortal days, and many retain their old mindset. Therefore, some Cainites take an attitude of stewardship toward their (mortal and/ or immortal) inferiors, while others eagerly take the cross and meet the enemies of their faith head-on. Many Cainites are filled with crusading fervor for the same variety of reasons as mortals: earnest religious convictions, lust for battle, hunger for land and wealth and desire to escape the rigidity of life in Europe. With so many Cainites traveling to and from the Crusades, the relative stability of most vampiric courts has been shattered.

Humble neonates return as triumphant heroes, while elders and ancilla sometimes do not return at all.

Nor, it should be added, is the Muslim world much different. Although much more tolerant of Christians and Jews, regarding them as fellow *ahl-al kitab* or "People of the Book," their social hierarchy is similarly influenced by religious authorities. And these authorities move just as quickly as their Christian counterparts to neutralize opposition to their influence. If your chronicle sees contact between these cultures, remember that when Christian and Muslim Cainites meet, their common status as monsters does not usually unite them as much as their differing religious and cultural backgrounds divide them.

Cainite Society

What, then, is the nature of Cainite society? Vampires are parasites, unable to create anything truly new. Cainite feudalism, however, is legitimized not so much by God, but by power, pure and simple. An army of crusaders (and its undead manipulators) has sacked Constantinople. Its vampiric patriarch, Michael, has been destroyed, and his grand attempt to create a new home for the Children of Caine is over. The lesson is clear: Power is a Cainite's only ally, and corruption and madness await any who challenge this fact.

Lords of the Night

The key to security for any Cainite is land. A secure domain is a safe haven, a feeding ground and a source of crucial allies, information and wealth. The elders have extensive domains that they rule directly, as well as vassals whose territories they also (nominally) control. This is of particular importance when feeding. The Second Tradition (see p. 39) speaks to the sanctity of domain, which in turn cuts to the fundamental fact of vampiric existence — the thirst for blood. No Cainite may feed in the domain of another without permission. For this reason, Cainites carefully cultivate networks of informers and spies throughout their territory. Allowing interlopers to feed without permission — or retribution — is a fatal admission of weakness.

Handling your players' domains is important. Is their territory under threat from a rival? Are they neonates with no land, depending on the grace and favors of others? This may well inspire them to seek their own territory, either locally or further afield. Oftentimes, an elder will sponsor a younger Cainite's quest for domain, as it cements a friendly bond between the two and gets a potential rival out of the way. This can provide the impetus for travel and adventure in foreign (or at least distant) lands.

On a larger scale, Cainite elders claim domain over as large an area as they can. Then, keeping a number of prize locations for themselves, they grant domain over certain areas within the greater territory to worthy vassals in exchange for their loyalty. This is the social convention. The reality, unsurprisingly, is a little different. The

elder vampire cannot hope to effectively control her entire domain directly, so she parcels it off to ambitious vassals, who, knowing that they are not powerful enough to challenge their liege openly, accept her protection and the grant of land. A mutually beneficial arrangement, it is essentially a matter of the liege holding her enemies close, where they can be watched, and her vassals accepting the security and protection of her liege and her fellow vassals. The liege's greatest fear is that a vassal or an alliance of vassals will attempt to topple her, so much time is spent cultivating hatred, rivalry and distrust among them. But their ability to defend their domain against outsiders cannot be damaged. Cainites have an instinct for detecting weakness and vulnerability, so every liege and her vassals must make a display of unity and common purpose to the outside world. For their part, the vassals are always plotting against each other and courting their liege's favor.

High and Low Clans

Possibly the most pervasive division in Cainite society is that between the High and Low Clans. As the Storyteller, it's crucial to understand the reasons for this divide and the ways it affects both Cainite society and individual Cainites. It's also important to understand how individuals from both sides of the divide relate to each other, especially if your players' coterie has a mix of high- and low-blooded vampires within it.

Crudely put, the high/low division functions as a rough Cainite analog of the feudal system. Just as mortals are born into families that (by and large) determine their status and role in society, so too are vampires Embraced into clans that (by and large) determine their status and roles in Cainite society. This is not to say that the lowly cannot be raised high or the high brought low. Rather, a Cainite's clan governs the expectations and opportunities that shape her destiny. How the individual responds to these expectations and opportunities remains her own affair.

High vs. Low in Society

The high/low divide could be said to be a distinction between rulers and subjects, which is certainly how the High Clans would see it. The Low Clans characterize it as a simple matter of differing goals: The high-blooded are those who most often seek temporal power, while the low-blooded have other priorities.

The High Clans see themselves as the Cainite nobility and are the more likely to Embrace humans from the upper levels of mortal society, which reinforces their belief that one is born to rule. The High Clans don't Embrace from only the mortal nobility, though. Cainites are pragmatists, and if a mortal demonstrates skills or contacts that would be an asset to the clan or to the sire, the Embrace follows, regardless of the mortal's social station.

For their part, the Low Clans are similarly pragmatic. The fact that their interests do not lie in overt political leadership does not mean that they have no long-term agendas. Rather, these clans do not see political leadership

COURTLY INTRIGUE

Courtly intrigue can provide some great opportunities for creative storytelling. The key is to have a firm grasp of who is at court and what they want. This allows you to draw up the factions and alliances with sufficient complexity and (most importantly) consistency. Perhaps an ancilla wants some information about a rival or is looking for allies. Or a player's character might need information to counter a threat to his domain.

The liege generally sets the tone of a court. An overbearing soldier who respects only strength at arms has a court of thugs and schemers. A courtly prince has bards and performers and a lively trade in gossip. A

madman with paranoid delusions has a nervous, flighty court ready to crack (unless the madness is just an act to flush out those most ready to betray the liege). For more details on the structure of a typical Cainite court, see **Chapter One: A Dark Age**.

Alternatively, with many Cainites away chasing their fortunes in far-flung lands, there are many domains that are far less secure than they have been for centuries. Perhaps this makes the liege nervous and receptive to a vassal who will remain on their land. Or perhaps it would enrage the liege if an interloper should be so crass as to attempt to steal the domain of a good vassal engaged in such a noble enterprise.

as essential to their goals. On the occasions when it is, no effort is spared to secure the needed position or authority.

High vs. Low Among Individuals

How, then, do individuals from the two sides of the divide interact? There can be no blanket answer, but a few generalizations are possible.

For starters, a high-blooded Cainite is likely to want to assume leadership or control of any situation. Remember however that Cainites respect power and results beyond all other concerns. A Cappadocian neonate is unlikely to try ordering an ancient Ravnos about. She may well try to exert her authority where possible, however, offering alternative

plans of action or performing minor acts of disobedience (or "creative interpretation" of instructions).

The low-blooded also rankle at being ordered around. Just because they don't want to rule doesn't mean they want to serve. Still, they have fewer problems with it. They place less value on broader social hierarchies, so they're less concerned with being at the top of the heap. This also means that they won't hesitate to question or disobey an order or instruction they don't agree with, however.

High vs. Low Within the Coterie

It's important to let your players define their own character-to-character relationships within the coterie,



but it's equally important to ensure that all your players are enjoying the chronicle. Just make sure that the players of high-blooded characters aren't trying to dominate the game and that the players of low-blooded characters aren't being obstructive all the time.

You should also remember that, when your players' coterie meets other Cainites, the members of High and Low Clans tend to gravitate toward each other. In most social situations, Cainites generally prefer to deal with members of same-status clans (i.e., high with high, low with low). This dynamic can lead to a number of interesting permutations, and it provides plenty of fodder for good roleplaying. It also helps make the social division seem more real to your players. It's always best to show the players the social divide in action by the action of Storyteller characters instead of imposing limits on their own actions.

The War of Princes

The destruction of Michael and the sack of Constantinople have shaken Cainite society from its peaceful slumber. Once again, Cainites have been reminded that they are destroyers, not creators, and that personal power and ruthlessness are the keys to survival. The Long Night is over. The War of Princes has begun. But what does that mean in your chronicle?

Most importantly, remember that the War of Princes is a "hot" war, not a "cold" war. While there's still a great deal of scheming and political maneuvering going on behind the scenes, the stakes are higher now and the war is spilling over onto the streets and fields. A bloodletting has begun, and Cainites are playing for their unives, not favors or fancies. The strong are preying on the weak, using them to attack and destroy their enemies.

There are a number of ways in which you can bring this conflict into your chronicle. The most obvious, perhaps, is through the influence of princes and sires. Cainite society is based on feudalism, but there is no system of inheritance. When your vampiric father is going to control the family holdings indefinitely, simply biding your time until he dies and it all becomes yours isn't a viable strategy. Some senior Cainites react to this problem by cultivating their progeny or vassals as allies, sending them out into the night to conquer and claim their own fortune. This strategy is very attractive, as it focuses the younger Cainite's energies elsewhere and results in either the younger Cainite's destruction (in which case a potential competitor has been removed) or in the establishment of a new domain indebted to the elder. This system lessens the threat to the elder's holdings and gives him an opportunity to observe the younger vampire in action, giving valuable clues as to her methods and potential weaknesses.

The risk, of course, is that the childe or vassal may become emboldened and attempt to take the elder's position by force. To counter this possibility, sires and elders usually make their inferiors compete against each other for scarce resources such as domain, valuable arti-

facts, personal or political favors. This usually leads to resentment, but it is a common tactic nevertheless. In the current climate of fear, the desperate race for the security afforded by a domain of one's own or the protection of a powerful elder is an overriding concern, and most neonates lack the connections, the cunning and the raw power to take on their elders and win.

In the case of true neonates (those only just released into Cainite society), elders are always on the lookout for pawns and allies. Again, the usual tactic is to offer support (publicly or otherwise) to an individual or coterie in exchange for their loyalty. The coterie performs tasks for the elder, who watches it carefully and evaluates its usefulness. Suicidal missions are not uncommon, and neither are assignments whose ramifications are not explained to the neonates. More subtle elders prefer to manipulate events from afar, laying a train of clues or information to draw a coterie toward an important objective with the belief that they are acting independently.

Preparing a Chronicle

Now that we've examined some of the particulars of the setting, it's time to get down to the real fun — preparing your own chronicle. Whether you're intending to use one of the published chronicles for **Dark Ages: Vampire** (or its previous edition, **Vampire: The Dark Ages**) or to cook up your own "home brew," the suggestions that follow cover the major questions you should keep in mind as you make your preparations.

Gathering Ideas

Hopefully, by now, you'll have identified a few areas of the setting that are of particular interest. Perhaps you're keen to run a very political chronicle, focusing on courtly life and the machinations of the elders. Or maybe you prefer a more action-oriented chronicle focusing on the efforts of your players to carve out their own territories and keep them secure. Perhaps you're fascinated by the history of Clan Tremere, the Crusades or the *Reconquista*.

All you need to do initially is make some rough notes. Try to get into the habit of jotting down your ideas whenever they occur; keeping a notebook handy is always a good idea. Snatches of conversation, stories from the news, books, comics, locations, favorite bits of the game setting (clans, legends, Disciplines, etc.), characters in fiction and individuals from real life can all be used in, or adapted for, your chronicle. Don't worry if your ideas seem derivative or if you're stealing chunks out of your favorite books and films. You'll need to rework them to make them usable, so by the time you've finished mixing all your ideas together, you'll have a chronicle uniquely your own.

You'll find that certain elements begin to suggest connections. Perhaps a character and some dialogue and a location make a scene. Or maybe your broad idea for a story would be enhanced by the inclusion of a character from your

favorite clan. When you have a couple of such groupings, you have the building blocks from which to construct your chronicle. Depending on what you've got, you'll be able to build plots from your story ideas or even from your characters. This next step is discussed in more detail later.

Theme Mood

Before getting on to the specifics of your plots and characters, it's a good idea to give some consideration to the theme and mood of your game. These two elements are somewhat intangible but if you spare them a little thought, they'll add a great deal of consistency and emotional weight to your chronicle.

Theme

A chronicle's theme is what it's essentially about. Of course, in the broadest sense, your chronicle will be "about" vampires in the Middle Ages, but that doesn't tell us very much. Is your game about the struggle to control the Beast Within? The quest for temporal power? The corruption of the elders?

Choosing a theme, and presenting it effectively, adds emotional resonance to your stories. Some especially appropriate themes for a **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicle include:

- **Hope:** Just because war sweeps through the European night doesn't mean that all hope has died. There are many who still strive to create something of value, who hope that some purpose can be found for the Children of Caine. The dream of a new Carthage, for example, is still held dear by many Brujah, even though they know its realization is years (if not centuries) away.

If you decide to make hope the theme of your chronicle, emphasize the efforts of mortals and Cainites alike to build (or destroy) institutions, ideas and places that will have a lasting effect on the world. Priests determined to spread the light of salvation, a corrupt baron determined to crush the spirits of his vassals and Cainites inspired by the example of Michael of Constantinople (or driven to despair by his destruction) should abound.

- **Salvation:** Cainites are called the Damned for a very good reason. Cut off from God's grace, some succumb to their base urges and prey on humanity, sating their lusts on the innocent. Others focus on the state of their soul or seek Golconda, the perhaps-mythical state of balance between the higher self and the Beast.

A chronicle with salvation as its theme focuses on the characters' roads and the various Cainite religions and heresies. Perhaps the characters spend their time hunting down ancient tablets and rituals or defending innocent mortals from the depredations of unscrupulous vampires and other supernatural creatures, hoping to redeem their monstrous selves.

- **Corruption:** Vampires are unnatural creatures. They exist because of Caine's act of murder, and this stain marks all his descendants. No matter how pure their intentions are, all Cainites corrupt or destroy what they hold dear at some point. The destruction of Michael and the end of his Dream is proof enough of that.

A chronicle with corruption as its theme can take many shapes. Perhaps it focuses on the battle against (or for) the Cainite Heresy or adherents of a particular road of enlightenment. Perhaps the coterie wants to fight against the tide of corruption flowing from their undead brethren. Or perhaps the characters realize that, despite their best intentions, they have corrupted or destroyed something (or someone) they once held dear.

- **The Cross and the Crescent:** The overriding mortal conflict of the age is that between Christianity and Islam. Many Cainites of both persuasions still have strong religious convictions and have joined this struggle. Some fight to preserve their religion, others to preserve their culture and way of life. Others fight simply so that they can revel in carnage and death.

A chronicle with this conflict at its center could focus on anything from Cainite diplomats debating theology and politics to the bloody struggle for the Holy Land. The battles between religions are fought on many levels, and a chronicle that exposes its players to them all provides something of interest for players (and Storytellers) of all stripes.

- **War:** Not all Cainites are interested in questions of morality or faith. Some see religion as a crutch for the weak. Some are interested only in naked power and dominion over others. This is especially the case now that the Long Night has ended and the War of Princes has begun. Power is the currency of survival; does the coterie have enough to pay its way?

A chronicle with this focus would obviously revolve around the characters as they resist the power of others or seek power of their own. Domain likely plays a key role, as Cainites of all ages and clans seek to secure the resources and security that a stable territory can bring.

Mood

The mood of a game is its overall feel or tone, the emotion it most often evokes. As with theme, it's easy to just pronounce that **Dark Ages: Vampire** is a horror game, but that doesn't really say much. If you can settle on, and evoke, a consistent mood in your chronicle, you'll go a long way toward providing your players with stories that will touch an emotional chord. The following are some suggestions for moods:

- **Fear:** It's scary being undead. For all their power, Cainites have much to fear, from insane elders to jealous rivals to witch-hunters and angry mobs. One of the reasons so many ancient vampires are insane is the unremitting weight of centuries of fear pressing down upon them.

The key to this mood is to find out what your players' characters find frightening — say, their sires, or the Setites, or loss of control — and to bring it closer and closer to them. You should also play on their minor insecurities and let them know that no matter how many enemies they defeat, there is always another waiting in the dark.

- **Paranoia:** This is not quite the same mood as fear. In a "paranoid" game, the players should never be entirely

certain of even their allies' motives. The paranoid is not afraid of his enemies as much as she is certain that there are enemies out there that she doesn't even know about (and that friends are actively plotting her downfall).

One thing to avoid in a game with a dominant mood of paranoia is constant betrayal and reversal. Done occasionally, it can be quite effective, but if every major Storyteller character ends up giving the players the shaft, the mood will wear thin. Rather, keep the players guessing at the Storyteller characters' motivations and surround them with characters who might be persuaded to be allies (or who might just be pretending...).

- **Isolation:** No matter how many allies, retainers, clanmates and coterie members Cainites have, they all must face their fate alone. Cainites (as individuals and as a society) are pulled in one direction by their need for company (to prevent them from becoming mindless monsters), and in another by their fear of their fellows. For some, the fear wins out and their isolation and degeneration are assured.

In a game with a mood of isolation, make sure that the characters are approached by others, tempted to betray or act independently of each other and shown the inevitable results (insanity, betrayal and death) that befall those who withdraw from society.

- **Instability:** Despite their cold, undead demeanor, Cainites are also creatures of great passion. Even elders can be provoked to frenzy if sufficiently goaded. This is what makes Cainite society so unpredictable and, to some, so exciting. But instability eventually makes building anything of lasting merit impossible.

To use this mood in your chronicle, you should make sure that your players see and experience reversals in fortune, carefully laid plans destroyed by careless words or actions, hopeless battles suddenly turned by a betrayal or change of heart. Allies should switch sides (but, to be fair to your players, not without warning or a chance to discover what's going on) and enemies should not always be seen as totally evil.

- **Violence:** Cainites are killers. To survive, they must take the life-blood of mortals and fend off their immortal rivals. And for some, the thrills of the hunt and of facing death become the only things that make them feel remotely alive. For others, violence was their mainstay in life — why should death make any difference?

The idea behind stressing violence as a mood is to uncover the truths behind Cainite existence. Make sure that violence (not necessarily combat) comes up frequently, but make equally sure to show its aftermath. Grieving relatives, plans that lie in ruins, and battles and wars that do not solve anything should all help your players question the worth of violence as a path in life and as a solution to their problems.

Plot

If you want your game to tell a story, you'll need to devise a plot. Coming up with stories that involve and challenge your players week after week is no mean feat, but in many

ways, story creation is the most satisfying aspect of running a chronicle. Game sessions are a co-operative effort, and things can quite often end up going in odd directions. Actually preparing the session is a solitary pleasure enjoyed by the Storyteller alone.

Keep in mind that conflict drives a story. Take out your notes and the information you've already gathered. If no story ideas present themselves, take a look at the characters you've prepared for the chronicle (and your players' characters, if they've been made). Building stories from characters is relatively simple and a very effective technique; it is the actions of individuals, after all, that move history. Look for conflicting goals, personalities and desires. If two Cainites have a similar goal, it's a sure bet that they'll only opt for co-operation over outright hostilities if they think that betrayal is their best guarantee of success.

Storyteller Characters

You can cut corners on just about every other aspect of the game and still make it a success as long as you have a cast of interesting characters. Why? It's because your (Storyteller) characters are your player's principle means of interacting with the game world. When you describe a scene or run a combat, no matter how skillfully you do it, your players are still at one remove from what's going on. They're not actually swinging swords or seeing Bremen at night.

But when they interact with your characters, they're directly taking on the role of their characters, unmediated by dice or verbal description of other sensory information. They talk and you respond in a real conversation, and this interaction minimizes the barrier between character and player. (This is the same reason that using real-world items as props can be so effective, as it engages more of the players' senses and attention.) So you need to make sure that your Storyteller characters are up to the task. Nothing makes a player feel more personally connected to a game than having a rival, ally or enemy with whom they've established an ongoing relationship.

At the very least, you should jot down each important Storyteller character's immediate and long-term goals, her Nature and Demeanor and, of course, clan, road and generation. Once you have decided on the character's goals, you can determine what resources she has to pursue them, how much she is willing to sacrifice and how she'll deal with rivals, friends and enemies. A vicious Gangrel, hardened by centuries under the moon, and a Malkavian neonate might both want to possess a holy tome, but their reasons for wanting it are likely to be quite different.

Backgrounds are especially informative here, as they determine how the character interacts with the mortal world. Herd, Allies and Contacts are of particular use and interest in this regard. If a character lacks mortal agents or connections, how does she get things done? Such a character is cut off from the mortal world and is likely to be a thief, a bravo or a beggar, always intruding on the domains of others.

Outline what your Storyteller characters will do to achieve their goals. Look for places where their plans intersect and places where you can leave clues. Once you know what a character wants, how important it is to him and what resources he has to pursue his goals, you've got yourself a story. If you know that the prince wants to acquire an ancient manuscript so he can trade it to his sire for information she desperately needs to shore up her domain's defenses, while her seneschal wants the same text so she can secretly perform an unholy ritual to prove her dedication to the Followers of Set, you're in business.

When deciding how to frame the conflict and characters in your story, refer back to your theme and mood for inspiration. If you can use your plots to express your overall theme and mood, then your story will have far greater appeal to your players.

Character Creation

It's a good idea to have some input when your players make their characters. You should try to strike a balance between giving your players the freedom to come up with the characters they want to play and offering guidance so that they'll come up with characters who can interact with each other and with your story.

It's important that your players create a group of characters who are able to function well together. This is not to say that they should be like-minded companions who always agree and always get on with each other. That makes for a pretty dull game. But equally, when players come up with brooding loners and set themselves against their fellow players, justifying their actions with the old standby, "I'm just playing my character," you've got a (potential) problem. Your players have a responsibility to make characters who'll fit into your game and help make the experience enjoyable for everyone, not characters who'll annoy and alienate the other players.

To some extent, you can cover any difficulties like this when you run individual and group preludes (see "Preludes"), but it's best to give your players some information about your chronicle before they make their characters. You may do little more than give a rough outline of your game, or you may suggest some broad character types that would fit in especially well and leave the details to the players. A simple description, such as Brujah warrior, Ravnos wanderer, Cappadocian necromancer or Tremere diplomat can suffice to get the players onto the right track.

Alternatively, you may (if your players are amenable) give quite detailed guidelines — the childe of such and such an elder, a dispossessed former priest seeking redemption and so on. The idea isn't to control or straitjacket your players, but rather to give them whatever level of guidance they feel comfortable with so that they can be confident that all of their characters will fit into the game.

And listen to their crazy ideas. Players want their characters to be right in the thick of things, so if someone

wants to secretly be the grandchilde of the prince, don't dismiss it out of hand. It's a great story hook, and it gives you even more to work with.

Running a Chronicle

Now you have all the elements in place. You have a plot and characters who work together to evoke a mood and underline a theme. Your players have their own characters, who will drive the action forward and be the stars of the chronicle. Now all you have left is to *do* it.

Is it challenging? Yes, but don't worry, the following advice will get you well on your way.

Is it rewarding? Yes, very much so.

Preludes

A useful first step in running your chronicle is to take each of your players through a prelude. The prelude is a kind of "flashback," a short pre-game session usually between 10 minutes and half an hour long, in which you go over the major events in a character's life so far. This gives the player a chance to test out her character and see if she works the way she's intended to, and also to flesh out her background and get a better feel for the character. It's one thing to say that a Baali murdered your sire and you're seeking revenge; it's quite another to have actually played out the crucial scenes in a prelude and witnessed the murder.

Preludes are generally played without dice. Simply describe events and situations to the player and get her to describe her responses. Dice aren't necessary because the situation is essentially "safe." The character is guaranteed to survive until the start of the chronicle. It's a good idea to have a look at the character's sheet before running the prelude, so you can get a feel for her capabilities. In addition, you'll want to get answers to (and prepare brief scenes describing) the following questions, and any others you come up with, which you can then use in the prelude itself.

What was your mortal life like? Have the player think about her character's mortal years. Was she rich or poor, pious or bawdy, violent or timid? Once dead, vampires are static creatures who find it difficult to change, so her mortal years are the ones that establish her personality. Even if the Embrace changed her radically, these changes are grounded in who she was before she died.

You're looking here for a few scenes of mundane, daily life to establish a "baseline," a measure of what the character's life was like before it was ended. Even a simple scene describing the taking of a harvest or the hardships of war will help give the player a feel for their character's living years.

When did you first meet a Cainite? Some characters have no awareness of the supernatural until a starved vampire lunges from the shadows and bites deep. Others are stalked, terrorized or seduced before being Embraced. How did the realization that there is a world beyond the natural

affect the player's character? Did it shatter his faith in God or strengthen it?

This scene is very important. Was the character horrified or delighted? Was her first kill an experience of joy or revulsion? Did the character feel abandoned by God, welcomed into a community of monsters or something else entirely?

Who was your sire? Who took the character's life? Regardless of the relationship that follows the Embrace, there is an unbreakable bond between sire and child. Ask the player if her character was Embraced for a specific reason? Did her sire abandon her or teach her the ways of Cainite society? Did she spend time in her household or was she told to seek her own domain?

This is a great opportunity to emphasize the importance of a Cainite's lineage. You may choose a scene in which a sire abandons the character or presents her to the prince. The key is to give the character a clear idea of her sire's attitudes and personality. Not knowing your sire is like not knowing your parents. Some people don't, of course, but that's a worthy story (or scene in a prelude) in itself.

How do you feel about mortals? To some degree, the player's answer to this question is determined by his character's road. Is humanity prey? Does he want revenge upon them, or are they simply lesser beings, useful tools or, at best, capable animals? Cainites in the Dark Medieval have few opportunities to interact with mortals, so give this question careful thought.

A good scene to illustrate this question is a feeding — perhaps even the character's first. Does he stalk his prey and savor its fear, or does he strike quickly and cleanly, to minimize the suffering of the victim? Is the victim left alive or drained to the point of death?

How do you see yourself? Ask the player if her character considers herself to be a monster? Regardless of the manner of her Embrace or the road she has chosen, the night she died and was reborn changed her forever. No longer a living being, she is now an animated corpse, held imperishable and (physically) incorruptible for as long as she drinks the blood of the living. Or has she felt the touch of God, charging her with a sacred mission?

A good scene to run here is one in which the character embraces a road, or has an epiphany. You should require your player to articulate why her character has her beliefs. If you don't want to use the character's road, try a scene in which the character must make a choice that reveals something about herself, such as allowing an innocent mortal to escape some terrible fate — or consigning her to it.

How did you meet the rest of the coterie? Vampires are, by and large, social creatures. No matter how they might try to bridge it, an impassible chasm separates them from the living. Only in the company of their fellow undead can they find true companionship.

The question to answer here is, essentially, why does the character associate with the other players' characters? This question might best be handled in a group prelude,

unless some of the characters knew each other before the start of your chronicle.

Where is your domain? All Cainites crave domain, a territory to call their own, to make their haven and hunt their prey. Does the player's character have a domain? Why or why not? Is he on the run from his sire, or is he roaming the Earth, seeking a place to settle down?

If the character has a domain, you should help the player describe how he got it and give some indication of the responsibilities that go with it, from attending court to defending it against intruders. A scene in which the character greets a visitor or drives off an interloper can help drive home the importance of domain.

What drives you? The fundamental question. Eternity is a long time... how does the character intend to fill the years? Will she be consumed by her craving for power, or does she seek Golconda? Does love of God or art or humanity consume her, or does she seek to debase everything she touches?

A good scene to run here is one in which the character comes to a realization or decision about the purpose of her life. This can be as simple as deciding to take the Cross or as complex as a philosophical debate that leads to a moment of revelation that shapes the character's destiny. The main thing is to make it a powerful scene, one that the player will remember vividly.

Group Preludes

Another good use for prelude is to describe how the players' coterie came into being. Few things get a chronicle off to a less dramatic start than telling the players that they've all met by chance and then to have an elder looking around for "a few good men" to take on some deadly task. Far better to have established before the game begins, exactly how and why the characters have come together.

Start the process of establishing connections with the individual prelude. Look for common points of belief and background. If, for example, two characters have a mentor, might he be one and the same? Then run a group prelude in essentially the same way as the individual ones. You need to cover not only how the characters meet, but why. Are they all on the run from the same elder? Have their sires ordered them to co-operate on some mission or task? What were their very first meetings like? Do they get on, or is there tension within the coterie? Do they have a regular meeting place, or are they on a journey somewhere?

If you can cover these questions in a group prelude, then your players will be able to begin your chronicle proper with a much greater understanding of their characters and their relationships.

Playing the Game

Once you've got all of your plots and characters and prelude sorted out, it's time to start preparing for your actual game sessions. Some Storytellers like to make extensive notes, drawing up maps, preparing a sound track and so on.

Others prefer to have only few notes to spur their memories, and still others prefer to rehearse things in their minds and improvise the actual game session. No approach is better or worse than any other; it's simply a matter of finding the style that you feel the most comfortable with. You may even find that for certain sessions, or certain scenes, a different approach might be needed. You might like to carefully prepare a number of crucial scenes but be quite happy to improvise the investigations and actions that lead the players to them.

Whichever style you prefer, there are a number of things you should consider and have clear in your mind or your notes before your session begins.

- **Locations:** Unless you've devised a story that takes place in a single room, the characters in your chronicle will move around. Make sure you have a good idea of each major location's layout. That way, when your players want to lie in wait for a seneschal bearing a secret message, or sneak into a cathedral to overhear a baron's confession, the game won't come to a halt as you try to decide the details of the place on the spot. Photocopying some pictures and floor plans of churches and castles will be of great help here. For outdoor locations, you can transpose places you know into the game. Again, photocopied pictures can be helpful (library collections and *National Geographic Magazine* can be especially useful for this).

- **Characters:** Before the session, you should review all the major Storyteller characters who'll be turning up. Obviously, the major movers and shakers will be your focus. You need to have a firm grasp of their plans and resources. This helps if (or, more honestly, when) your players go off on a tangent or manage to throw a major wrench in the works. You need to know how your Storyteller characters respond to the pitfalls and obstacles that your players might throw in their path.

For minor characters, all you really need is the basic information: name, clan, sire (if relevant), generation, road, Nature and Demeanor. You can improvise the rest. It's also very handy to have a list of names (especially foreign names) written down, so that, when you invent a character on the spot, you won't stumble when someone asks his name.

- **Story:** If you don't have a handle on your story or the key events you've come up with to move your chronicle along, you're in trouble. To a large extent, your Storyteller characters can generate these ideas, but it's helpful to outline at least the key encounters or situations before you run them. Few things are more annoying than realizing that you forgot to give your players a crucial clue when they met with the ailing duke just before he was assassinated, taking his information with him to the grave.

Improvising

If you've taken care of the preceding matters, you'll be ready when your players' characters take off in an unsuspected direction. But sometimes you can be taken by surprise as they *really* go off on a tangent. You have two options:

Either force them back to your main story or roll with it and improvise by allowing the players to decide their own course of action without interference or gently guiding them back to your story.

You should definitely avoid the first option (pushing your players back into your story). Players can always tell when their hand is being forced, and they invariably resent it. On the other hand, if they have made some conclusions (even if they're wrong) and think they're hot on the trail of something, it's not unreasonable for you to reward their creative thinking. You need to decide whether you want to go with them as they explore (essentially) a new story or gently bring them back to your original plot. Call a quick break if you need to. Your players will prefer a break followed by a sensible resumption of play to a hastily improvised scene that makes no sense and violates the chronicle's continuity.

- **Letting Your Players Write the Story:** Sometimes, your players have better ideas than you do. If they somehow see a connection or evidence of a scheme that you haven't thought of, and if it sounds plausible and dramatic, why not go with it? Listen carefully to your players as they talk among themselves, and decide how much of what they've come up with you can use. Then quickly make a few notes and let the game continue.

This can be an especially good way to reward clever players who are thinking on their feet and making an effort to move your story along. Just make sure you don't let on that it's actually their story. And don't let them be correct about everything — throw in a few surprises, just to keep them on their toes. Your original story can be brought back into the picture at a later time.

- **Bringing Your Players Back Into Your Story:** Sometimes, your players get an idea firmly stuck in their heads that they won't let go no matter how odd it seems. The best way to handle these situations is to gently bring them back to your own story. Perhaps they've decided that the local abbot is hiding something, and they won't budge from their conviction. It's better to let them be partly right than to simply refuse to deal with their decision. Let the abbot be privy to some secrets, but make them secrets or other information that the players already have, or that will lead them back to your main story.

The advantage of this method is that it strikes a balance between allowing your players to contribute to the story and not compromising the decisions you've already made, without forcing particular situations or courses of action upon them.

Dealing with Players

As they say in the military, no plan survives contact with the enemy. If you've prepared your game and have a firm grasp on who is doing what to whom (and why), you should be able to deal with the curve balls your players throw at you. This section has some hints on how to deal with the curve balls they'll throw at each other.

It's inevitable that your players will end up at loggerheads from time to time. As far as possible, let them sort out their conflicts and disagreements between themselves, in-character. All you need do is to keep an eye on the situation and make sure the players are enjoying themselves.

Character Conflict

When characters disagree, your game can come to a screeching halt. If it gets serious, you might have a problem. It's a rare group of players who'll take an in-game betrayal or outright refusal to co-operate in their stride with no hard feelings. When characters clash, it's often necessary for the Storyteller to act as a circuit breaker.

If your players are simply being indecisive, having in-character arguments about tactics or approaches to diplomacy, you might want to have another coterie take decisive action while they hesitate, or give them a little prod, such as a hurry-up from their elders. Few things motivate players more than being disrespected or outmaneuvered by Storyteller characters. The advantage here is that it reminds your players that if they won't act, others will. It also reinforces the impression that your game-world is a living place where things happen independently of the players.

If, on the other hand, the characters are truly stuck, break the deadlock. Have a messenger arrive with crucial information, or have some enemies attack. In the aftermath of the arrival of the messenger (or the attack, or whatever you decide to use), provide the players with a clue to help them along. If you have to provide this kind of help to your players, you might want to beef up their opposition a little. After all, while the players' characters have been doing nothing, their rivals and enemies have been advancing their plans and gathering their strength.

Player Conflict

Genuine conflicts between players can be fatal to your game. Most groups of gamers are friends or at least acquaintances, so this shouldn't be too much of a problem, but it can happen that a player or players constantly disrupt the game. Allow your players some time at the start of a session to chat, but once the game is on, demand their attention. If someone starts talking about TV or movies or books, politely cut them off and whatever you do, don't join the discussion. You're responsible for setting the tone of your game, and your efforts and preparation deserve some respect from the players.

When you see two players getting annoyed with each other, try to get the game moving. If the players remain intractable, try to find out what the problem is. If it's an in-game situation that's causing the problem, you might be able to resolve it. For example, if the player's Cappadocian is always having her carefully laid plans and diplomacy wrecked by another player's brash and uncouth Gangrel, you might be able to do something in-game to resolve the situation. The Gangrel might fall foul of enemies who could have been avoided, or the Cappadocian might be captured when negotiating.

On the other hand, if the players are not getting on, talk to them (separately or together) and explain that you expect them to leave their problems behind when they game. If the problem persists, you might need to drop one or both players. This is a harsh solution, but in such a situation, the players are showing no respect for the effort you've put into the game or for the comfort and enjoyment of the other players.

Endings

Despite their immortal nature, not all of the Children of Caine will survive until the Final Nights. This is true of your players' characters and also of your chronicle. When it's time to say farewell to a familiar character, or to wrap up your chronicle, you should take some time to make sure that the end is both memorable and dramatic.

Character Death

Some Storytellers don't mind racking up a body count. Others have "safe" games where the players know that their chances of getting their characters killed are essentially nil. You don't need the threat of death to generate dramatic tension (after all, many people have interesting lives without regular death threats), but you do need to be consistent with the consequences of actions. The following are a few different approaches to character mortality; go with the one with which you feel the most comfortable.

- **Let the Dice Fall Where They May:** A middle-of-the-road position. The Storyteller doesn't let his players walk into deathtraps with no warning and no way out, and planning for combat is important. But just as in real life, it's a dangerous world. Once the players have made an enemy or started a fight, they'll have to reap what they've sown, no matter what that might be.

- **Fortune Favors the Bold:** The dramatic approach. As long as your players are acting like bold heroes (or anti-heroes), you'll fudge the occasional roll here and there to keep the story going. If this fits with the overall style of your game you're okay, but if you're striving for a more refined mood and your players keep acting like action-movie heroes, you might want to review your options.

- **Kill 'em All; Let God Sort 'em Out:** Never cut those players a break. Never moderate the opposition. If the players are careless or get in over their heads, let their stupidity kill their characters if they don't have the sense to run. This approach can lead to high body counts and angry or upset players, so you should tell them to expect it. This works especially well in games with a darker mood. The players won't assume that victory will be theirs, so their characters will be more circumspect in their planning and actions.

- **Three Strikes, You're Out:** This approach allows your players to make a few mistakes, but *only* a few. (Two, three, four... whatever you think is reasonable.) If they won't learn from their errors, their characters will die by them. If, in the first session, they jump into battle with a

band of hardened Gangrel warriors without any thought, you might let them off with a severe mauling. In the second session, when they pick a fight with a group of Lasombra knights, they might end up seriously wounded and imprisoned. In the third session, when they decide to storm a Tremere stronghold single-handed, well, they've asked for it....

A Final Word

When a character does die, let the player have some fun with it — after all, it's the last time he'll be able to play that character. Give the player the satisfaction of a dramatic death scene, complete with moving final words. Nothing's worse than having a character you've played and enjoyed for some time simply cut down with no chance to strike back or at least make an eloquent soliloquy or demand for vengeance.

Ending a Chronicle

All good things must come to an end. One of the saddest fates that can befall an otherwise memorable chronicle is for it to simply fade away. After each session, it gets harder to organize the next, the Storyteller loses interest, and you eventually realize that the chronicle is over.... Most unsatisfactory. It's far better to have a final session to finish things off and bring your story to a dramatic conclusion. Give each character a chance to wrap up any subplots he's been involved in, but you might want to leave a few plot threads hanging, so you've got a place to pick up from if you decide to revive your chronicle at a later time.

Give careful thought to the style of ending you want for your chronicle. Some examples are listed here, but make sure you choose an ending that will satisfy not only yourself, but your players as well. After all, it's their game too, and you shouldn't short-change them (or end it in a way you know will piss them off) just to satisfy yourself.

• **Triumph:** This one is almost guaranteed to please. The players' characters vanquish their foes, complete

their quest or save their city. Try to bring home not only the joy of victory but also its cost. For the Cainites, every victory should be just a little tainted. After all, they're not really (or only just barely) the good guys.

• **Tragedy:** If handled carefully, a tragic ending can be very memorable. In a tragic story, characters succeed in their goals, but their own flaws (pride, rage, arrogance) bring them low. The cost of a tragic victory is usually personal — the tragic hero typically destroys (or injures) himself more so than his allies or those he was defending.

• **Pyrrhic Victory:** A Pyrrhic victory is one in which the victors pay as high a price as the vanquished. So the coterie may succeed in bringing down the corrupt prince, but the price they pay may be expulsion from their domains, or the destruction of a trusted (and innocent) ally. One of the main things that differentiates the Pyrrhic victory from the tragic is that the victory's cost is borne not just by the protagonists but by their allies and those they were trying to help or save.

• **Sacrifice:** Are your players heroes? Will they sacrifice their immortal lives to bring about a greater good or the victory they've been pursuing? Just how willing are they to achieve their goals? Another bittersweet style of ending, your players should be forced to give up things that are important to them. This in turn will require them to reflect on just how important their goals are and whether they're really congruent with the people they claim themselves to be.

• **Monsters:** Monsters we are lest monsters we become. Another great "kicker" of an ending, you may or may not allow your players to achieve a dramatic success. The key thing is to show them how, in pursuit of their goals, they have lost sight of their true selves. Perhaps best suited to a chronicle with a central, truly mad or corrupt antagonist, the players should reflect on the things they have done to bring him down. Did they uphold their principles, or did they abandon them in blind pursuit of victory?



I have stood vigil at Lady Rosamund's door since first light.

The slightest glimmer of the sun's pale luminescence comes through a window at the top of the stone stairs, and it is from its slow progress that I measure the day's passing. Neither hunger, nor fatigue, nor want of relief has more than a passing grip on me now, and I stand ramrod straight throughout the long summer's day.

There are few visitors. They know that milady is unavailable at such a garish hour and know the reception they can expect from myself, her guardian. One foolish man — a Briton from the sound of his bleatings — bribes or blusters his way past my less-reliable fellows above. He begs me to deliver a message to Lady Rosamund, and stammers a few prayers when I draw my blade in answer. He leaves his note and his pride behind and flees like a washer-woman.

The day is long, but the hour after sunset is longer still. I am to be called after dusk and not a minute passes in which I do not think I hear milady's voice. Now, my muscles ache and my humors roil, but not with fatigue or mere hunger. It is desire of the purest and deepest sort that hammers at my soul. As much as an angel seeks Heaven, I wish to open the stout door at my back, but I resist. I swore to stand guard until relieved, and I am no oathbreaker.

Finally, the door opens itself. Or rather, Lady Rosamund's toad-like attendant, Peter, opens it for me. He sneers at me like the lickspittle he is, and I fight back the sudden urge to run him through. One glance at milady stills any thought of Peter.

"You have done well, Sir Thomas." She sits on her bed, her slight form hidden under a thin linen smock. Her hair is loose and red, her shoulders and arms bare. "You have taken wine with me and made pacts most honest."

"Yes, milady." I can barely speak.

"By your service, you have proven yourself worthy of a greater honor still. Are you willing to undertake the most serious of oaths? To swear yourself to service everlasting as I swear to protect you evermore?"

"Yes, yes milady."

"Then draw your blade across your own palm, Sir Thomas." Her mouth parts in a slight smile like none I have seen before when I hesitate. I am as a child before her, who must have his lessons explained. "The greatest of oaths can only be sealed with blood, Thomas, surely your confessor has told you of this when performing the Eucharist."

"Of... of course." I draw my knife across my right hand's bare palm and the blade cuts deep and true. Red blood pools in my cupped palm. Without being asked I approach Lady Rosamund.

Her light, girlish hand supports my own and guides it to her mouth. She drinks the fluid lustily and looks up at me when she is done. "Do you swear to serve, defend and attend me so long as your life's blood flows?"

I kneel before my lady. "I swear it."

Her hand reaches for her garment and exposes one of her snowy legs. A deep blue vein runs along the inside of her thigh, standing out in the pale field of her flesh. She takes my own dagger from my hand and draws it across that porcelain expanse. Red-black blood wells out of the wound. "Drink of me as I have of you, Thomas."

My lips and tongue follow the rivulet of blood from her calf, up her knee and along her thigh until the surprisingly cold blood flows directly down my throat. I am greedy and grasp at my lady's leg with unholy might until I hear her sigh in contentment.

So happy am I to see her pleased, that I don't even notice the wound on my hand knit itself shut.



CHAPTER NINE: ALLIES & ANTAGONISTS

So does he create us all, the bright and the dark together,
And leave to man's hand the tilling of the soil, the taming
of the wild,

The harvest of good and evil by which we shall be judged.

—The Erciyes Fragments. II (Lilith)

Cainites are by no means the only creatures that walk the Dark Medieval night. There are other things lurking in the shadows, from the servants that Cainites create to monsters even they do well to avoid. These creatures have supernatural powers of their own, and many consider the Damned their enemies. Cainites also have mortal enemies who grow increasingly aware of their existence and wield their faith as a weapon.

This chapter details vampires' most common allies and adversaries, along with archetypal examples of these creatures.

Servants

Cainites cannot rule the night without subjects, as well as servants to care for their needs and protect them when the sun is in the sky. The medieval world has no electric lights or late-night businesses. Although some feasts or other occasions may last into the night, most sensible folk lock their doors and shutters when the sun sets and do not emerge until the break of day. Therefore, vampires find it useful to have servants who are able to move about in the light and serve as their eyes and hands in the mortal world.

Ghouls

Long ago, Cainites discovered that mortals who consume their blood take on a small measure of their power. They gain supernatural strength and dark appetites, but they remain alive and able to endure the touch of sunlight. For centuries, vampires have chosen mortals and fed them blood to create *ghouls*, powerful servants inevitably bound to their master — called the *domitor* — by the fealty of the blood oath. Over time, ghouls gain a powerful thirst for vampiric vitae along with other dark cravings, a touch of the Beast in each ghoul's soul. They remain loyal to their domitors, but their passions often run as hot as the vitae coursing through their veins, and they are given to a sanguine nature as the blood changes the balance of their bodily humors.

Since the kine of the Dark Medieval world tend to be tightly knit folk, Cainites often take entire families as ghouls, and there are tales of families living on the outskirts of mortal society with a strange way about them. True lords of the night such as the Tzimisce even breed their ghouls to create lineages to serve them over the years. Other Cainites create ghoul "families" from communities, such as the isolated brethren of a monastery, the high-ranking members of a guild or a troupe of wandering entertainers.

For some, ghouls are an intermediate step toward the Embrace. Some princes do not even require their subjects to seek permission before creating ghouls, as they must

when creating childer, allowing Cainites to maintain someone they consider worthy of the Embrace until they can obtain such permission. Some domitors dangle the promise of the Embrace in front of their ghouls like a carrot before a horse, helping ensure their loyalty. Other vampires have no intention of Embracing their ghouls. Why lose a valuable daylight servant?

Ghoul Abilities

Ghouls share the following abilities in common:

- They may store up to 10 blood points of vitae in their bodies, and they can spend one blood point per turn as vampires do. Elder ghouls can store an additional blood point per century of age, but they still cannot spend more than one blood point per turn.
- Ghouls do not age as long as they have Cainite blood in them. This promise of eternal youth is one of the strongest temptations for mortals to become ghouls. Once a ghoul has passed his natural life span, he must always have vitae in his body, or he will swiftly age and die. For most, this takes several days, but very old ghouls can wither to dust in hours or even minutes.
- Ghouls can use the vitae in their bodies to heal themselves and increase their Physical Attributes like vampires do. Ghouls that do not use blood to heal recover like other mortals.
- Ghouls can regenerate lost or crippled limbs by spending a Willpower point, an appropriate number of blood points (one for a finger or eye, two for a foot or



forearm, three for an entire limb) and rolling Stamina (difficulty 8). If the roll fails or botches, the ghoul can never regrow that limb.

- While they have Cainite blood in them, ghouls can soak lethal damage, but they still soak bashing damage like other mortals (i.e., they do not divide net damage in half).

- Ghouls automatically gain Potence I within minutes of first drinking blood, and they can also learn Celerity and Fortitude. Ghouls can sometimes learn other Disciplines, if they consume the blood of a vampire that has that Discipline. Most ghouls can only learn the first dot in a Discipline, although some can progress to higher levels with time and training. The limits of a ghoul's Disciplines are determined by his domitor's generation. (Storytellers who want more powerful ghouls in a chronicle can use the optional levels in parenthesis.)

Domitor's Generation	Maximum Discipline Level
12th-11th	1
10th-9th	1 (2)
8th	1 (3)
7th	2 (3)
6th	3 (4)
5th	4
4th	5

It costs a ghoul's player 20 experience points to learn the first dot in a new Discipline. When increasing Disciplines with experience, it costs (current level x 15) for the clan Disciplines of the ghoul's first domitor and (current level x 25) for any other Disciplines. The ghoul must consume the blood of a vampire that knows a particular Discipline before learning it (except for Celerity and Fortitude, which all ghouls can learn).

- The vitae a ghoul consumes carries the curse of the Beast with it. Ghouls can frenzy like vampires, although their difficulties to resist are two lower, since the curse is not as strong in them.

- Ghouls who consume five or more blood points gain their domitor's clan weakness, which lasts until they have less than five blood points in them.

- Ghouls that go without feeding for a month are overcome with hunger for vitae. Whenever they have the opportunity to gain vitae — from any vampire, not just their domitor — they must make a Self-Control roll (difficulty 7) to resist. Additionally, each week of self-denial after the first month, the ghoul's player must make an Intelligence + Self-Control roll (difficulty 6), lest the character sublimate his cravings for vitae into a hunger for *human* blood or flesh. The ghoul can spend a Willpower point to avoid giving in to these cravings, unless the roll botches, in which case he is automatically overwhelmed by them.

- Ghouls are subject to the blood oath, but they cannot put others under it. Most ghouls are oathbound to

their original domitor, but this oath can and does erode as with any other thrall. The Cainite tendency to treat ghouls as chattel — which erodes the power of the oath — is usually more than offset by regular feedings of vitae.

Bestial Ghouls

Humans are not the only creatures that can become ghouls. Any beast can be fed vampiric vitae, giving it all the abilities of a ghoul and making it loyal and obedient to its Cainite master, as long as it is fed regularly. The most common animal ghouls are “hellhounds,” dogs or wolves batted on Cainite blood, and horses, fed vitae to give them preternatural strength and swiftness, as well as making them more willing to tolerate Cainite riders. Other animal ghouls are known, from Nosferatu rats to Setite serpents, and beasts fleshcrafted by the Tzimisce such that their original species is no longer clear.

Animal ghouls have all of the abilities of human ghouls. They tend to be loyal and obedient (particularly once they are bound by the blood oath). Additionally, the domitor's difficulties for using Animalism on that beast are reduced by one.

Human-sized animals can contain up to 10 blood points of vitae. Smaller animals can hold proportionally smaller amounts of blood. As a general rule, a dog can hold up to six blood points, a cat can hold four, and a rat can contain two. The same goes for similar-sized creatures.

Traits for animals and some bestial ghouls appear in the Appendix.

Revenants

The Tzimisce maintain ghoul “families” over generations, breeding their ghouls to make new servants. Over the years, the taint of vampiric vitae has been passed on, creating ghouls that are not entirely mortal but partake of a greater amount of Cainite nature. These revenants, as they are known, are gathered into families, usually with a long history of service to their vampire masters.

Revenants are like ghouls, save in a few aspects. Most fundamentally, they are capable of generating their own vitae without feeding from a vampire. They are born into this condition rather than made. The child of two revenants is (usually) a revenant, and he begins generating vitae sometime around 13 years of age. Revenants regain one blood point per day, so they never actually need to feed from a vampire. Their own vitae is slightly thinner than a true vampire's, so it does not retard aging (that's only possible by ingesting true vitae) but it works to power all other ghoul powers. Revenants also have their own “family” Disciplines, so they are not restricted to learning their domitor's Disciplines. Each family has its own weakness, however, similar to vampiric clan weaknesses.

The revenant families in service to the Tzimisce are:

- **Bratovitch:** The Bratovitch family is made up of the foot soldiers and hunt-masters of the Tzimisce. They are among the lowest-ranking revenants, lorded over by

the Szantovich, but they are masterful woodsmen and trackers. They tend to be crude and common in their habits and manner, but they serve their masters loyally. Bratovitch revenants have Animalism, Potence and Vicissitude as their family Disciplines. Their association with beasts shows in their temper. They frenzy as if they were Brujah vampires (+2 difficulty on frenzy rolls).

• **Grimaldi:** The Grimaldi are agents of the Tzimisce in mortal society: merchants, traders, tinkers and the like who move quietly through the world, influencing a decision here, catching a bit of gossip there. They serve as their masters' eyes and ears, and occasionally their invisible hand as well. Grimaldi revenants have Celerity, Dominate and Fortitude as their family Disciplines. (Note that, as ghouls, Grimaldi cannot use Dominate on Cainites, but they can use it effectively on mortals and other ghouls.) As recent creations of the Tzimisce, their blood is thin compared to that of other revenants. They have only eight blood points rather than the usual 10.

• **Krevcheski:** The Krevcheski family is made up of scholars and tinkers, particularly interested in ancient lore and in new inventions of all kinds. They develop elaborate clockworks, siege engines and other devices for their masters. The Tzimisce do not entirely trust the sly Krevcheski, however, and with good reason. The family is fascinated with the lore of the Tremere, and it has already made secret overtures to the Usurpers in hopes of advancing its own lot in their service. The Krevcheski have only Auspex and Dominate as family Disciplines, a sign of Tzimisce distrust.

• **Obertus:** This family is the revenant wing of the Tzimisce monastic order founded in Constantinople. These mortal monks and nuns, who practice ritual copulation for reproduction, were once only known in the Greek East, but have spread in small numbers into Western Europe and back into the Tzimisce homeland over the last century. They are scholars, clerks and librarians, painstakingly copying old manuscripts and cataloging collections of books and scrolls. When a Fiend wants to know some obscure fact, she consults one of the Obertus. If he doesn't know it offhand, odds are he knows where to find it. The Obertus have Auspex, Obfuscate and Vicissitude as their family Disciplines. They're known for their single-mindedness, and every Obertus has either the Obsession or Perfectionism derangement, although their particular obsession may change over the years.

• **Szantovich:** The Szantovich family are the Fiends' alluring and seductive spies. They marry into noble society, pulling strings for their masters. But the Szantovich sometimes become too complacent in their roles, sliding into decadence and hedonism. The conflict between their masters and the Tremere has kept them busy and led more than one Fiend to purge their ranks of dead wood. The Szantovich have Auspex, Presence and Vicissitude as their family Disciplines. They sometimes become addicted to certain pleasures. Whenever a Szantovich enjoys an especially pleasurable experience, the player must

make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to keep his character from becoming addicted to the vice.

• **Vlaszy:** The hardy Vlaszy come from an honorable line of Magyar warriors and serve as the Fiends' cavaliers, skilled in horsemanship and warfare as well as statesmanship. It is said that they entered the Tzimisce's service willingly to repay a debt owed them. They have Animalism, Potence and Presence as their family Disciplines. As a sign of their obedience, the Vlaszy must all take the blood oath with one of the Tzimisce upon reaching adolescence.

There are also rumors of other revenants bred by various Tzimisce lords for their own purposes, including some made twisted and monstrous through the use of Vicissitude, haunting the lonely forests, river valleys and mountain passes of Eastern Europe. Even darker rumors recount that the Baali, a bloodline of infernalist vampires, have bred their own revenant families.

Thralls

Of course, not all of a vampire's servants are ghouls. Few Cainites can afford the effort and vitae necessary to maintain a large number of ghouls, so most servants are ordinary mortals. Although they don't possess any supernatural abilities, the loyalty of these servants is often acquired or secured through supernatural means. Cainites are all too vulnerable to treachery from those close to them, so they choose their servants carefully.

One common means of securing loyalty is through the blood oath. This is why ghouls are among the most trusted servants. Since they drink of their master's blood regularly, their loyalty is strong. Mortal servants are given smaller amounts of vitae, not enough for them to become ghouls, but sufficient to secure the blood oath and maintain it over time. Once the oath is in place, few mortals have the will to resist it (see page 260 for more information).

Cainites also use their various Disciplines, particularly Dominate and Presence, to create thralls. Over time, Dominate can erode a mortal's will to the point where he becomes a mindless servant (often referred to as a "vessel"), while regular exposure to Presence (particularly Entrancement and Majesty) can enthrall a subject's heart and win his undying loyalty. Presence tends to create more passionate and mindful servants, while Dominate creates mindless, but utterly obedient, thralls.

The Blessed

Even more than the mortal herd of the Dark Medieval world, the Damned have no doubt of the power of God. After all, do they not bear His curse, laid upon Caine? Vampires have seen evidence of holy power in the hands of God's priests and faithful, but also among pagans and heretics. Those who believe in God's supreme power say that such things are the work of the Devil and his minions. Others believe that there are lesser gods and

spirits abroad in the world as well. Whatever the case, it is clear that faith has power, as do those blessed by it.

The Power of Faith

True Faith is a trait like the various Attributes and Abilities, only it is rare indeed. Most people in the Dark Medieval world have faith, of course (they attend Mass and follow the doctrine of the Church), but True Faith represents a more potent, pure and enduring faith. It is a profound belief in a higher power and obedience to its will.

For most Europeans, this is faith in Christ, but other faiths are equally powerful (if not as common). Muslims, Jews, pagans and (so-called) heretics can have as much or more True Faith than devout Christians do. The absolute truth of the belief is not as important as the strength of the believer's conviction.

True Faith is rated from 1 to 5 like most other traits. Only the most sincere and devout believers have even one dot, and higher levels of True Faith are correspondingly rarer. In theory, a mortal can have a True Faith rating greater than 5, but such individuals are one in a generation or more, the sort who become venerated as saints. Their powers are limited only by God (and the Storyteller).

True Faith can grow with time and experience, as the believer's conviction and devotion deepens, and it can wane when the believer becomes jaded, cynical and uncertain. The Storyteller should control the rise and fall of characters' True Faith, based on their actions and their devotion to their beliefs.

Note that only mortals can possess True Faith. The Embrace strips a vampire of the purity needed for it. A Cainite can *believe*, and those who rigorously follow the Road of Heaven may touch upon some of the holiness that accompanies the blessed.

The Gifts of Faith

True Faith provides believers with several benefits that help to safeguard them against vampires and other denizens of the night:

- Faith strengthens the will and conscience. Add a character's True Faith rating to the difficulty of any attempt to influence his mind, heart or soul with supernatural powers, including vampiric Disciplines such as Dominate and Presence. A difficulty higher than 10 means the attempt against the character fails outright. The character also adds his True Faith rating to his Conscience when making Conscience rolls.

- The blood of the faithful is unpalatable, even deadly, to the Damned. A vampire must drink a number of additional blood points equal to the character's True Faith in order to gain one blood point from that victim. So drinking the blood of someone with True Faith 2 means the vampire must drink three blood points to add a single point to his blood pool. The blood of the truly blessed (True Faith 3+) is poisonous to Cainites. The vampire takes a level of aggravated damage per blood

point drained from the victim (not gained by the drinker). If the vampire has Fortitude, the player can attempt to soak the damage with Stamina + Fortitude with a difficulty equal to the victim's True Faith + 3.

The blessed can also gain other abilities related to their faith. The Storyteller decides when a blessed character gains these abilities, but one per dot in True Faith is a good rule of thumb. Storytellers should feel free to come up with other appropriate abilities for the faithful as suits the chronicle.

- **Blessing:** The character can purify objects and make them holy, filled with the power of faith. A blessing generally requires an appropriate ritual conducted by the character and results in an item with a True Faith of 1 (see "Relics and Holy Objects"). At the Storyteller's discretion, especially blessed people or especially long rituals may create objects with a higher True Faith rating. Most faithful and honest priests in the Dark Medieval have a slightly less potent version of this power, which allows them (among other things) to bless holy water and the sacramental bread and wine used during Mass.

- **Exorcism:** The faithful can cast out harmful or malign influences. He rolls dice equal to Charisma + True Faith, with a difficulty based on the desired effect, given on the following table. These difficulty ratings assume that the character has access to the appropriate trappings of faith (a Bible, a crucifix, candles, bells, salt, water or other items appropriate to the character's faith). If these props are not available, increase the listed difficulty by one or two.

- **Healing Touch:** Gifted with the power to heal, the blessed one's touch can cure injuries and maladies. This blessing effectively better the mortal's current health level for healing purposes only (healing time and difficulty) by a number of levels equal to the healer's True Faith (see "Mortal Healing," p.255). If the effective level rises above Bruised, the patient heals in a matter of a few hours, a step above that, the patient heals instantly. These effects last only until the patient recovers (or attempts to recover) a health level, and they do not effect dice pool or movement penalties. Healing Touch cannot raise the dead, but it automatically saves the dying. It speeds recovery from illness and poison the same as any other sort of injury.

Example: *After a battle with the get of Satan, Gauthier has been reduced to the Mauled health level by lethal damage. Normally, he could only attempt to heal to Wounded after three months of rest and would roll Stamina against a difficulty of 7 (2 + 5 health levels). Fortunately, Sister Isabelle, a renowned faith-healer is nearby, and she performs a laying on of hands on Gauthier. Isabelle has True Faith 3, so Gauthier need only rest three days (as if her were but Hurt) and roll against a difficulty of 4. Assuming he succeeds, he recovers a health level and is Wounded.*

- **The Sight:** Some of the faithful are sensitive to the presence of holy as well as unholy things. The character can sense the presence of a vampire, ghost or demon with a Perception + True Faith roll (difficulty 6). This diffi-

culty is not affected by Obfuscate, Stealth or any means of concealment. The character need not even try to sense the unholy. The roll is automatic as long as he is at peace — quietly reading, praying, meditating, even sleeping. The blessed cannot sense a presence while occupied (e.g., engaged in a debate or duel) or distracted (in a noisy marketplace or feast hall). The character does not automatically know what he senses, only that something unclean and evil is nearby, although a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 7) may provide some insight at the Storyteller's discretion.

• **Warding:** The character's True Faith is a shield against evil. By brandishing a holy symbol or uttering prayers, she can keep a vampire or other unholy beast at bay (from whence the legend of such things comes; it is the faith, not the symbol, that wards off vampires). The person rolls True Faith against a difficulty of the vampire's Willpower. The number of successes indicates how many steps back the vampire must take. If no successes are scored, the vampire need not step back, but he cannot advance toward the wielder of the symbol, either. A botch means the vampire can advance unhindered. Furthermore, if the character touches the vampire with a holy symbol, each success on the True Faith roll inflicts a level of aggravated damage as the symbol burns the vampire's flesh.

Holy Ground

Some places become the focus of considerable faith, witness to miracles, rituals and blessings. Many of these places are the sites of churches and temples, or the resting places of saints (or their relics). These places have True Faith ratings of their own, reflecting their holy power. For some, their True Faith affects only a particular area (near an altar or reliquary, for example) while others radiate True Faith over a given area (miles in the case of some sites in the Holy Land).

Holy ground has several effects:

- The player must make a Willpower roll (against a difficulty of the area's True Faith rating) in order for a Cainite to enter holy ground. Success means the Cainite can enter the place, but feels uncomfortable (one success means serious discomfort, three mild discomfort, and five or more no ill effects). Each dawn, the vampire's number of successes decreases by one, leading to increasing discomfort and an eventual need to leave the site. Mortals notice this discomfort with a Perception + Empathy roll (with a difficulty equal to the vampire's Willpower).

Failure on the Willpower roll results in physical pain for Cainites if they enter the holy site: They suffer one level of bashing damage per scene. A botch results in one level of lethal damage and requires the vampire to spend a Willpower point each turn to remain in the area. The pain increases as long as he remains, requiring a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) on the third and subsequent turns. Failure means the Cainite frenzies. A botch means he bursts into flames, suffering three levels of aggravated damage per turn and requiring an immediate Courage roll (difficulty 8) against Röttschreck. The flames can be extinguished normally, but the other effects remain.

- Holy ground limits Cainite powers. All blood point expenditures double, and the difficulties for Auspex, Chimerstry and all perception-affecting Disciplines increase by two.

- The True Faith rating of the blessed increases by one while they stand on their own holy ground, and the difficulty of any True Faith roll (including True Faith-based abilities) decreases by two while on holy ground.

The ashen priests of the Road of Heaven are said to know rites that allow faithful vampires to enter holy ground more easily, but they do not share these secrets very readily. Most Cainites either shun holy sites or look on the discomfort they feel as part of their penance for damnation.

EXORCISM

Task	Difficulty
Force a vampire to flee in terror	Vampire's Willpower + 4
Force a ghost to flee in terror	Ghost's Willpower
Permanently expel a ghost from a place	8
Force a minor demon to flee in terror	6
Force a major demon to flee in terror	9
Permanently expel a demon from a place	10
Ward against Dominate and Presence (adds the character's True Faith to all difficulties)	6
Banish the effects of Dominate or Presence	Vampire's Willpower
Sever a blood oath	10
Inflict (True Faith) dice of aggravated damage to a demon, ghost or vampire by touch	Target's Stamina + 4

Relics and Holy Objects

Relics are items filled with holy power, usually associated with a saint or other important person from Christian history. The greatest relics in Christendom are the Holy Grail that Christ drank from at the Last Supper (and that caught his blood at the crucifixion), and the Holy Shroud he was buried in. The Spear of Longinus, which pierced Christ's side at the crucifixion, is also a mighty relic, along with pieces and splinters of the True Cross and the nails from it.

Many relics are bones, locks of hair or blood from the bodies of saints, and they carry a portion of those saints' holiness within them. These relics are often collected by the Church, placed in gilded and jeweled caskets (called reliquaries), and revered by the faithful. Almost every medieval church has at least one relic, although some are of dubious origin. Their reverence helps to maintain and even increase a relic's potency over time. Other relics are minor things such as a pilgrim's badge or staff or a holy bishop's ring. Charlatans peddle numerous fake relics, which common folk buy to ward off evil. Thousands of shards of the True Cross are offered for sale along with bones collected from criminals or even animals and passed off as those of saints. Ironically, these false relics can sometimes acquire a measure of their own True Faith, if enough worshipers consider them genuine. Their faith empowers the relic over time.

There are also plenty of holy objects that are not, technically speaking, relics. The water, wine and sacramental bread blessed by a priest in church often takes on some degree of holiness without being directly associated with a saint. Pilgrimage badges, although tied to a shrine, are also not relics, per se. Finally, priests and prelates have also been known to bless the weapons of the faithful — especially of crusaders — which can grant these arms special powers against the spawn of Satan.

A relic usually has a True Faith rating of its own, which adds to the True Faith of the person who carries it, even granting a temporary True Faith rating to those who have none (although not necessarily granting any special powers to go with it). Multiple relics do not add their True Faith ratings together — only the highest rated one applies. Relics kept in a particular place (tomb, church, etc.) over a long period of time may hallow the ground (creating holy ground). This makes places holding many relics uncomfortable for Cainites. Some holy items do not even have True Faith ratings in and of themselves, but grant special bonuses and abilities (see accompanying table).

Some relics also have special powers. The Storyteller may assign a relic any of the powers of the blessed described previously, or any other suitable power, using the wielder's True Faith (plus the bonus granted by the relic) to determine its effects. Some relics may have powers similar to Cainite Disciplines, particularly Animalism, Auspex and Presence. The most powerful relics may be capable of performing miracles, particularly in the hands of someone with substantial True Faith.

The Storyteller may allow for relics belonging to other religions as well. Certainly the Jews and Muslims have their own holy relics, and pagans may venerate items reputed to belong to great heroes or even the gods themselves.

The Church

The center of faith in the Dark Medieval world is the Church of Rome — simply called the Church by most folks. It is the shepherd of souls on Earth, founded on Christ's ministry and message to the faithful, and offering salvation through its sacraments.

The Church is the single most powerful organization in the Dark Medieval world. It has vast wealth and political power granted by the faithful. The Church and its rituals permeate every aspect of Western European life, from baptism to marriage to the last rites, and being

Relic	True Faith Rating
The Holy Grail or Shroud	5
The Spear of Longinus	4
Skull or blood of a major saint	4
Nail from the True Cross	4
Bone of a major saint	3
Shard of the True Cross	3
Skull or blood of a minor saint	3
Bone of a minor saint	2
Major pilgrimage badge	1
Blessed crusader's weapon	0-1 (inflicts aggravated damage on the unliving in combat)
Holy Water	0 (causes one level of aggravated damage to the unliving on contact)
Sacramental Host	0 (causes one level of aggravated damage to the unliving on contact, two if ingested)

deprived of the rites of the Church (and therefore of salvation) is one of the greatest terrors of the medieval mind. Excommunication is a real and powerful threat, and the Church wields it as a weapon against nobles who oppose its doctrine.

The Church's language is Latin. The Bible and most Church documents are written in that language, and all rituals are performed in Latin. The pope in Rome is the supreme head of the Church, and below him are his cardinals and bishops, as well as many religious orders. Those orders range from the monastic Benedictines to military orders like the Hospitalers and the Templars dedicated to protecting the faith and winning back the Holy Land in the Crusades. More recently, a new branch of the Church has begun to form, the Inquisition.

The Inquisition

Heresy is a matter of great concern to many in the Church. The various Cathars, Bogomils and others threaten to dilute and confuse the Word of Christ, and that can lead only to damnation for the flock. The pope and cardinals are thus organizing a coherent response to the problem, a program to neutralize heretics before they can spread any further. Historically, the Church has been reactive on this matter — various bishops simply dealing with various accusations of heresy as they came up. Rome is now preparing to seek out heresy on its own, through authority from the pope himself. This is what will soon become known as the Inquisition. As of 1230, the Holy Office of the Inquisition has not yet formed in name, but its Dominican organizers are already operating in the Languedoc under the auspices of the Albigensian Crusade launched against the Cathar heretics.

There are those in the Church, however, who know that heresy is only part of a larger problem. Outright monsters and devils walk the Earth in human form to tempt the faithful and lead them astray. Worse yet, they have even corrupted some within the Mother Church! So no one is above suspicion, and no one can be entirely trusted. The wiles of the Devil are many, and he is capable of quoting scripture to serve his ends. Therefore, a secret inquisition has been afoot for several decades. A growing number of dedicated holy warriors and priests — said to be acting on papal authority — operate from the shadows, hunting the beasts that lurk among men. Most are well educated, and nearly all have True Faith as their weapon and their shield. Cainites are becoming aware of the danger posed by these mortals who would turn the hunters into the prey.

The Knights Templar

Perhaps the greatest military order of the Church is the Poor Knights of Christ and the Holy Temple of Solomon, commonly known as the Knights Templar. They were founded in 1114 and officially recognized by

the pope in 1128. The white surcoat with red crusader's cross of the order is well known throughout Europe and the Holy Land, along with their black and white checked banner, surmounted with a red cross. The Templars are dedicated to winning back the Holy Land from the Muslims, and answer only to the pope himself.

The Templars have learned a great deal from their time in the Holy Land, and the upper ranks of the order include wizards who practice ancient magic and even commune with spirits. They have collected a considerable body of occult lore, along with a collection of relics and treasures. Their wealth, faith and mystic knowledge makes the Templars a potential threat to Cainites, but fortunately they are interested solely in freeing the Holy Land. They will even deal with the Damned if it serves their goal. In fact, the Templars count a few Cainites among their ranks, a fact that would be of great interest to the Inquisition.

Other Faiths

Christianity is by no means the only faith in the Dark Medieval world, although it is by far the most populous. Scattered communities of Jews are found throughout Europe. They are often persecuted by Christian authorities and blamed for all manner of atrocities. Tales of Jews using the blood of Christian babies to make their Passover bread sometimes leads to riots and the lynching of many Jews. For the most part, Jewish communities are insular, although Jews have a reputation as moneylenders and merchants (since the Church considers usury a sin). This only fans the flames of jealousy and mistrust toward Jews.

Islam is the faith that extends over the Holy Land, particularly the Arabian Peninsula. Muslims controlled large parts of Iberia until the *Reconquista* forced them back to only the southern province of Granada, but their influence can still be seen throughout the land. Christian armies clashed with Muslims in the Crusades, and it is rumored that orders such as the Knights Templar even learned mythic and occult secrets from the Muslims in the Holy Land.

The old pagan beliefs of Europe are also kept alive in many places. Rural folk often celebrate pagan rites alongside Christian holy days. The Church permits this to a degree, even co-opting pagan festivals and making them Catholic holy days. Few places remain wholly pagan, although Lithuania is still a pagan kingdom and parts of the British Isles maintain old pagan ways and beliefs.

Finally, Rome is not the only center of Christian belief. Various heresies continue to thrive in parts of southern and southeastern Europe, some diverging quite a bit from Rome in their portrayal of Christ. The Orthodox, or Eastern, Church also continues to hold sway over much of Eastern Europe and the former Byzantine Empire. In the Levant, there are likewise Armenian, Antiochan and Coptic Christian churches.

Demons and Other Spirits

All Christians know that Lucifer led his host of angels in rebellion against God and that the war in Heaven ended with Lucifer and his lot being cast into the burning pits of Hell for all eternity. The Devil is responsible for tempting Eve to taste the fruit of Knowledge and the subsequent Fall from Paradise, and Lucifer, the Great Satan, and his minions seek to corrupt mortals and take their souls to Hell. In the Dark Medieval world, demons are blamed for curses, plagues, hysteria, madness and a host of other ills. Although they're not as widespread as most folk believe, demons are at work in the world of the living, and the legions of Hell are very real.

Demons are malevolent spirits that corrupt human souls. They rarely appear or involve themselves directly in mortal affairs. They prefer to work through temptation and subtle manipulation. It is said that a demon cannot force anyone to do anything against their will, he must trick his victims and lure them with honeyed words and promises so that they fall into sin willingly. Demons particularly delight in the corruption of the pure, pious and innocent. Needless to say, Cainites are none of these things.

Since their souls are already damned by their undead existence, demons have little interest in Cainites as

victims, but some demons do find uses for vampires as pawns and agents, and they offer them power in exchange for service and fealty. Most vampires refuse the Devil's bargain, preferring to be masters of their own fate. But some are drawn to power and the opportunity to corrupt mortals. These infernalists are outcasts even in Cainite society, but they form a secret society of their own. An entire vampire bloodline, the Baali, serves the Lords of Hell on Earth, and even other Cainites consider them perverse and dangerous.

Although the Church considers all spirits "demons," there are actually some spirits that have no dealings with Hell. They are more akin to the Faerie Folk, associated with wild places and pagan folk, but the line is a fine (or non-existent) one for most people.

Sorcerers and wizards are known to deal with demons and other spirits, calling them up and attempting to bind them to do their bidding, or else bargaining with them in exchange for power. Rarely does a wizard end up on the winning side of such a bargain. Demons are patient, and they can corrupt nearly anyone who gives them an opportunity.

Demonic Traits

Demons and spirits have a host of powers at their command. Although demons rarely appear in physical form, they have many other abilities that allow them to influence others. Those rare demons that *do* appear in



physical form are terrible indeed, and few foes, mortal or immortal, can hope to stand against a demon and survive.

Demons and spirits have different characteristics than physical beings. They are described by four traits: Willpower, Rage, Gnosis and Essence. They also have various powers at their command, known as Charms. Spirit traits range from 1 to 10.

- **Willpower:** This trait allows demons to take action, things like attacking or moving through the spirit world, much like physical entities use the Dexterity Attribute. Resisted Willpower rolls are used to resolve contests of such things between spirits.

- **Rage:** Rage is a spirit's passion, inner fire and hunger to survive. Spirits use Rage to attack and inflict injury on others, much like physical entities use the Strength Attribute. Rage also determines a spirit's toughness, like the Stamina Attribute.

- **Gnosis:** Gnosis measures a spirit's awareness, and spirits use it for all Social and Mental rolls, as well as most Charm rolls.

- **Essence:** A spirit's Essence equals the total of its other three Traits and is used to power Charms, similar to a vampire's blood pool.

Charms

Demons and other spirits have a number of powers called Charms at their command. Each spirit has a unique complement of Charms, but the more common ones include the following:

- **Corruption:** Demons can tempt and corrupt mortals using this Charm. It functions like the vampiric Lure of Subtle Whispers (Dominate 4). The demon's player rolls Gnosis to use the power.

- **Disciplines:** Demons and spirits may have powers similar to Cainite Disciplines. They use Essence rather than blood to power them and roll Gnosis in place of the Discipline's normal dice pool. Common demonic Disciplines include Animalism, Dementation, Mortis, Obfuscate, Obtenebration and Presence.

- **Immunity to Fire:** No earthly fire can compare to the flames of Hell; demons are immune to harm from fire.

- **Investment:** Demons often offer their victims power... for a price. Assume that a demon can grant one or two dots in any Discipline, and that more powerful demons can grant more dots (as many as five or more). Those who strike bargains with demons usually get exactly what they deserve in the end, though.

- **Materialize:** On rare occasions, a demon may actually appear in physical form. In this case, the demon's Willpower determines its Dexterity, its Rage determines Strength and Stamina, and its Gnosis determines all of its Social and Mental Attributes. Demons usually have the same number of health levels as mortals, but more powerful demons may have more, and most demons regenerate one health level each turn. Killing a demon's physical form doesn't destroy it, though. Doing so only banishes it

WHAT CAINITES KNOW: DEMONS

Common Knowledge:

- Demons exist and are agents of Hell.
- Demons are interested in reaping souls to swell the ranks of the damned in Hell.
- Demons are at least as vulnerable to holy powers as Cainites are, if not more so.
- Demons can be bargained with, but they are cunning and deceitful beings.

Informed Opinions:

- There are many ranks of demons, ranging from the lowliest of the infernal hosts to the mightiest dukes who serve Satan himself.
- Demons are interested in Cainites solely as pawns and agents for their own schemes. They sometimes offer power in exchange for servitude.
- There are magical rites for summoning and binding demons, but they are complex and difficult. Most summoners bargain with demons instead, offering something the demon wants (usually a soul) in exchange for service.

back to Hell, and demons have memories as long as a vampire's eternal unlife.

- **Possession:** Some demons can possess living beings, which requires a Gnosis roll (difficulty of the victim's Willpower + True Faith). If successful, the demon controls the victim for as long as it likes, or until it is exorcised (see p. 288). Those who are possessed by demons gain its immunity to fire, and the demon may be able to use its other Charms through the host, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Demonic Weaknesses

Although demons are powerful creatures, they are vulnerable to the holy powers of the blessed, which can cast them out. They are also prideful and arrogant (or else they would not have rebelled against their Creator in the first place), so demons can sometimes be tricked by those who play to their egos.

Lupines

Folk of the Dark Medieval world believe that vampires are demonic corpses that rise from their graves to feast on the blood of the living. They also believe that some folk are cursed — or make pacts with the Devil — to transform into wolves by the light of the moon, hunting and killing sheep, cattle and even people before regaining their senses with the light of day.

These stories about werewolves, which Cainites call Lupines, are about as accurate as folk beliefs about vampires, which is to say that small grains of truth are mixed in with the chaff of myth and exaggeration. Even the most learned



vampires have gathered only a small amount of knowledge about these fierce creatures, and they do so at their own peril.

Lupines rule the dark and wild places of the world, just as Cainites hold sway in the cities and towns, where their prey is most plentiful. Since Lupines are territorial and they savagely defend their homes, wise Cainites do not travel through the wilderness alone. Lupines are able to sniff out Cainites and usually attack whenever they detect one. The Lupines are willing to parlay in some cases, but even then they make clear their utter disdain and contempt for vampires. Cainites prefer to avoid dealing with Lupines whenever possible.

Although Lupines are savage, they are not mere beasts. They have a society of their own, as secret as the Cainite clans. They appear to live in close-knit tribes, much like the Celts and Vikings, who are often associated with them. There does not seem to be any central authority among them; each tribe rules its territory as it sees fit. Risking life and limb, some Cainites have discerned some social distinctions among Lupines:

- **The Nobles:** Werewolves have a noble class, sometimes known as "Shadow Lords" or "Silver Fangs." The role may be bestowed or inherited. Lupine nobles rule tribes and set laws for their people. They are fiercely proud and often arrogant, but they are also among the most willing to negotiate if it suits their needs. A wise vampire treats a Lupine noble with all the respect and deference due a mortal king or Cainite

prince, since their honor is easily offended and their anger terrible to behold.

- **The Warriors:** The Lupine tribes are defended by a fighting order known as the "Ahroun," called "Fianna" among the people of Britain and "Fenrir" in

WHAT CAINITES KNOW: LUPINES

Common Knowledge:

- Lupines live in the deepest woods and wild areas.
- Lupines can assume the shape of a man, wolf or savage man-wolf; the latter is truly terrible in combat, easily a match for a vampire.
- Lupines hate vampires and often attack them on sight.
- Lupines hunt by the light of the full moon.

Informed Opinions:

- Lupines are most active (and dangerous) during the full moon, but are active at all times of the month (both day and night).
- Lupines are highly territorial and organized into tribes or clans, each claiming a region as its own and jealously guarding it.
- Lupines are pagan things, having truck with strange spirits and magic.
- Lupines have a mysterious ability to appear and disappear suddenly.

the Holy Roman Empire. These are the fiercest Lupines, capable of rending a man (or Cainite) limb from limb and crushing bone in their powerful jaws. They have a lust for battle, and the Viking berserkers may well have learned from them, since Lupine warriors match a vampire's frenzy for pure savagery. Lupine warriors bear weapons in their human form, but have little need of them in beast-form.

- **The Wizards:** Lupines have their own wizards among them, who advise tribal leaders and commune with strange spirits, binding them to do their will. Lupine wizards are clearly pagan folk, and their powers often involve command of the natural world: animals, plants and the elements. They can render themselves and others invisible, allowing Lupines to appear out of nowhere to attack.

- **The Outcasts:** There are Lupines similar in some ways to the Nosferatu, strangely deformed in both their human and wolf forms and they are apparently looked down upon as outcasts by their tribes. They are found in the company of other Lupines. They are as dangerous as their kin, perhaps more so, since they seem to want to prove themselves. Cainites also suspect that they are spies like the Nosferatu, sometimes using the guise of lepers or beggars in human form.

Lupine Traits

The primary ability of Lupines is their power to change form, in a way similar to the Protean Discipline. They can appear as humans, wolves or in some combination of the two. In battle, most Lupines assume the form of a nine-foot tall, wolf-headed figure that inspires blind terror in mortals. In this form, their Physical Attributes are doubled, but they cannot use their Social Attributes or Abilities with creatures other than beasts and fellow Lupines. Other important Lupine abilities include:

- Lupines can attack two or more times per turn, in ways similar to vampires using Celerity, but with no blood-point restriction.

- Lupines heal damage almost instantly, regaining a health level every turn. Only aggravated damage (from fire, silver or the teeth and claws of other supernatural beings — including vampires) stops their regeneration. They can also soak all forms of damage — bashing, lethal and aggravated — with their full Stamina rating. They cannot soak damage from silver weapons, their greatest weakness.

- Werewolves can frenzy as easily as the Brujah (+2 difficulty on rolls to resist frenzy), and they suffer no wound penalties while they frenzy.

- Lupines have a variety of supernatural "gifts" similar to Cainite Disciplines, and some can work magic similar to Thaumaturgy. The most common Disciplines include Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate, Protean and Thaumaturgy. They fuel their powers with their innate spiritual energy, called Gnosis, which they regain

through rest, meditation and communing with certain spirits. This is similar to a vampire's blood pool.

- Werewolves can enter the "spirit world," becoming invisible and intangible to the physical world, and they can travel great distances there, allowing them to appear out of nowhere to attack. They do so in a way similar to Anima Walk (Auspex 5), save that they do not leave their bodies behind.

Wizards

Any peasant knows that magic is real, and there are men and women with knowledge of the arcane arts that allows them to work spells and charms for good or ill. The Church says that magic is the work of the Devil, and that witches and warlocks have pledged him their souls in exchange for their infernal powers. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Still, many village folk visit the local wise-woman or buy charms and potions at county fairs (often in the very shadow of their local church or abbey). Scholars still study the arcane and the mysterious, and they secretly work rites and spells in the dark of the night.

Cainites know more than most that magic is real, but they understand it little more than mortals, and they have good reason to mistrust it. The Tremere were mortal wizards when they captured and killed Cainites, and they used Cainite vitae in the spell that gave them eternal unlife and vampiric power. The blood magic of the Tremere remains mysterious and dangerous to most Cainites, and other magicians among their kind are spoken of in whispers: Saracen sorcerers of the Assamites, the dark magics and forbidden rites of the Tzimisce and the Setites. Therefore, Cainites tend to be wary of wizards and their abilities.

Sorcerers, Witches and Warlocks

Common folk rarely draw much distinction between different sorts of wizards and magicians, but vampires are often more familiar with such things. The rise of the Tremere has led all Cainites to be more aware of the power of magic and those who wield it. These magicians range from village folk who know a few useful charms to learned wizards with untold power at their command.

- **Folk Magicians:** Most wizards are simple folk, practicing herbalism, fortune telling and charms handed down to them across the generations. A few of them are pagans, but most combine the old ways of their ancestors with devout belief in Christianity. They offer their services to the community in fair trade, and many come to them for advice or help with domestic problems. They consider their craft a humble and healing one, not associated with the Devil or his minions, but the Church does not necessarily agree. It has begun to more strongly condemn any practice that smacks of magic. The Church claims that witches are the Devil's whores, cavorting naked in midnight revels with their

infernal master and receiving power from him, as well as demonic spirits that take the form of animal familiars. Such magicians are also likely to become the victims of jealous neighbors, who may blame them for their own misfortune, though there are those who truly do place curses on those who offend them.

• **Magi:** Where witches and folk magicians are often (but not always) women, magi are usually men, scholars who study the arcane arts and ancient lore. They are learned men who spend their entire lives perfecting their art. The mightiest among them are said to command truly earthshaking powers, although they use them sparingly and jealously protect their knowledge.

Magi often gather in secret groups or orders for protection and the sharing of knowledge. One such is the mysterious Order of Hermes, a collection of small (and fractious) mystical houses. The Tremere once belonged to this order, but they were cast out once the elders of the other houses discovered the truth about the Tremere's new unliving state. The wizards of the Order of Hermes are at war with their former brethren, considering the Tremere abominations, but their conflict is fought with spells in the shadows, away from the eyes of even the Damned. Although the Order of Hermes would make a valuable ally for Cainites opposed to the Tremere, they are not now likely to trust any vampire. They keep their own counsel.

• **Infernalists:** Although most wizards are not the Devil's disciples as the Church believes, there are those who have pledged their souls and their service to Hell in exchange

WHAT CAINITES KNOW: WIZARDS

Common Knowledge:

- Wizards' spells and charms give them powers much like Cainite Disciplines, except they require time and rituals, and they are often farther-reaching.
- Powerful wizards are rare, but it is often difficult to tell a mighty magus from a humble herbalist.
- Wizards tend to be solitary, but some join together to form covens or mystic orders.

Informed Opinions:

- Magic requires considerable talent, training and will, and only a small fraction of kine are capable of it.
- Cainites cannot perform kine magic. They must draw upon the power of their blood, a secret jealously guarded by the Tremere.
- Wizards' spells and rituals can backfire on them, sometimes disastrously. They take great care to ensure that every part of a ritual is perfect, and they prefer to work their magic in secret whenever possible.
- Although they would deny it, the Church has wizards in its ranks, although they may simply be those especially blessed by God.



for power. These wizards are outcasts even among their own kind, but they find the fear others feel toward them a sufficient substitute for respect, and they revel in their power and the freedom it grants them. Infernalists do the bidding of their demonic masters and work to corrupt and sacrifice others as part of the payment for their gifts. Their magic is raw and powerful, making them a match for any wizard. Like demons, infernal sorcerers sometimes find uses for Cainites in their foul schemes.

Magic

Magic is an art, *the Art*, according to many of its practitioners. It involves arcane knowledge, innate talent and unshakable will combined into complex rituals and spells to bring the magician's wishes into being.

In general terms, magic is divided into "paths" or spheres of influence. A wizard's knowledge of a particular path (and associated rituals) determines the power he has over it. The Thaumaturgy and Mortis Disciplines give several examples of paths and rituals, and you can assign these to wizards. They may also have ratings in certain Disciplines to represent scrying spells (Auspex) or other effects. They may have rituals that duplicate individual Discipline powers as well.

To use these powers, the wizard's player generally rolls Willpower for path powers and Intelligence + Occult for rituals, just as with Thaumaturgy (see p. 213). Wizards can spend points of Willpower instead of blood and may have access to ritual supplies that provide them with a few extra points for this purpose.

As a general rule, magic requires time to conduct the appropriate rituals (at least a few minutes, often as long as an hour or more) and special props or ingredients, including herbs, candles or torches, a lock of the subject's hair, ritual implements, books and scrolls and so forth. The greater the wizard's skill and power, the more quickly she can perform magic and the fewer props she requires.

This system is generally sufficient for wizards as mysterious Storyteller characters. Additional details appear in **House of Tremere**.

Ghosts

The shades of the dead sometimes return to haunt the living. They remain tied to life by chains of undying passion, either love or hate. Most folk know to take precautions against ghosts, and proper burial in consecrated ground and blessings by a priest are essential to lay the soul to rest. But some souls refuse to rest. Trapped in a limbo between the world of the living and the hereafter, they act out their unresolved passions, remaining close to loved ones, seeking vengeance against their enemies or trying to complete the things they left unfinished in life.

Most Cainites have little or no dealings with these restless spirits, and few can claim to have seen one. Clan Cappadocian deals with ghosts more than all of the others

WHAT CAINITES KNOW: GHOSTS

Common Knowledge:

- Ghosts are the souls of the dead unable to move on to the hereafter because of unresolved passions from their lives.
- Ghosts have no substance, and they cannot normally be seen, except with Auspex.
- Ghosts are ruled and driven by the passions that keep them tied to the world of the living.

Informed Opinions:

- Ghosts often have the power to affect the world, either through possession of a mortal or the movement of objects.
- A ghost's passions are its weakness as well as its strength. If the things that bind it to the living world are destroyed, a ghost is no more.
- Ghosts dwell in an underworld kingdom that is like a dark reflection of the living world.

put together, since the shades of the dead have much wisdom concerning the nature of death itself, but even those Cainites are typically more concerned with the effects of mortality on this side of the great divide. Nonetheless, Cappadocian scholars sometimes seek out and speak with ghosts, and they curry their favor by acting as their agents in the world of the living. There are also mortal wizards and death-scholars who deal more extensively with such shades, including the Venetian family known as the Giovanni — some of whom have become Cappadocian vampires. The Tremere are likewise rumored to traffic with spirits of all sorts, including ghosts.

For their part, ghosts have little interest in vampires, except on the rare occasion when their goals intersect or come into conflict. Ghosts have appeared to protect beloved mortals from becoming another meal for a Cainite hunter, and there are tales of vampires haunted by the vengeful spirits of former victims. Since few of their powers can affect a ghost, haunted Cainites most often turn to the Cappadocians (or even the Tremere) for aid.

Ghost Traits

Ghosts are immaterial beings and invisible to mortal eyes unless they choose to be seen. They flit through the world like shadows and mist, but their ability to affect the world of the living is likewise limited. Ghosts have the same traits as demons and other spirits (see p. 292), used for the same purposes. Their other abilities include:

- Ghosts have various arcane powers, similar to vampiric Disciplines. Their most common abilities include the equivalents of Auspex, Chimerstry, Dominate, Obtenebration, Presence and the Thaumaturgy path Rego Motus (for the ghostly movement of objects). Some also have the Possession charm (p. 293). They power their abilities using their Essence.

- The restless dead feed on strong emotion to recharge their Essence, and draw strength from certain things associated with their lives before they died. Ghosts defend these fetters fiercely.

- Ghosts appear most often in haunted places associated with death and suffering (graveyards, ruins, battlefields, torture chambers and the like). Their powers are strongest in these places, where the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead is thinnest.

The Fae

They are known by many names: the Fair Folk, the Gentry, the Good People. They are faeries. People speak of them carefully, since everyone knows that they are quick to anger and can curse others with madness or bad luck. They're associated with the wild, untamed places of the land, and country folk often have rituals intended to placate and please them, allowing them to live in harmony so close to the Good Folk. When encountering a faerie, respect and good manners are paramount.

No one in his right mind goes abroad in the faeries' domain at night. The Fair Folk kidnap mortals and make them their servants and their toys in their realm "under the hill." Sometimes they hunt humans for sport, running in a howling pack after them through the darkened woods, bogeys and goblins and redcaps that stain their hats with human blood. The Fae are a wild and elemental force, best left alone, even by Cainites.

WHAT CAINITES KNOW: FAERIES

Common Knowledge:

- Faeries are pagan creatures that live in wild places and often play tricks on mortals for their amusement. They are easily offended, cruel and vindictive.
- Faeries have powerful magic, particularly the ability to change shape and create illusions.
- Holy ground, church bells and, most particularly, iron drive away faeries.

Informed Opinions:

- Faeries are vulnerable to weapons of iron, but not steel.
- Faerie blood has strange effects on Cainites who drink it, driving them temporarily (or even permanently) mad.
- The Fae are divided into two courts: the Seelie and the Unseelie. Both are capricious and devious, but the Unseelie is the worse of the two.

Still, vampires have been known to encounter these dark tricksters, and have learned a small amount about them from those mortals and Cainites who came away from their encounters with the Fae with their wits intact. There are several kinds of Fair Folk known:

- **Wilderness Faeries:** The most common faeries dwell in the wilderness, in the deep forest, the high mountains and



untamed rivers and lakes. They frolic in beautiful forest glades and "faerie rings" of mushrooms that grow there. They include nymphs, dryads and satyrs among their number. They jealously guard their domain, and they're known for sometimes taking mortals to share in their revels, or placing charms or curses on them for sport.

• **Household Faeries:** Other faeries are homebodies: brownies, gnomes, boggarts and the like that perform small chores and protect a household in exchange for small amounts of food laid out for them. They live in and around the homes of rural folk, but they are as easily offended as their wild cousins and can turn malicious once angered. They jealously guard their domains, and woe betide an intruder or visitor who offends them.

• **Noble Faeries:** The rulers of the Fae are beautiful and terrible beings, so refined and graceful that they can bring one to tears. Treaders tell tales of the incredible beauty of these faerie lords and ladies, and of how they have captivated both mortals and Cainites in the past. Faerie nobles command considerable skill at arms as well as powerful magic. Their laughter is as pure as silver bells, and their anger is terrible to behold. They're capable of great and inhuman cruelty as well as bouts of generosity, but one never knows which mood will take them.

• **The Unseelie:** The Unseelie or "unseemly" faeries haunt the deepest, darkest shadows of the forest. They are the goblins, ogres, trolls and imps, the most monstrous of their kind. It is said that their rulers are as fair as other nobles, but they are even more wicked beneath their outward beauty. While their Seelie cousins may hunt

mortals for sport or play cruel tricks on them, the Unseelie are merciless, and their spite and cruelty knows no bounds. Torture and murder are games to them, with the world made up of toys for their amusement.

• **Changelings:** There are many tales of faeries abducting mortals (particularly babies) and replacing them with their own kind, made in the mortal's image. These changelings live among mortals, never revealing their true nature. Cainites do not know if this legend is true, but stories continue to circulate of faeries masquerading as mortals beneath a veil of illusion, so there may be at least some truth to it.

Fae Traits

Unlike ghosts or demons, faeries are physical beings. Therefore, they have Attributes and Abilities much like mortals, but they have various magical powers akin to Cainite Disciplines. They fuel these powers with Glamour, which they use as a vampire uses blood. Standard faerie abilities include:

• Most faeries have a power akin to Chimerstry. They are masters of illusion and deception. Other powers include Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Dementation, Dominate (particularly Reveler's Memory), Obfuscate, Obtenebration, Presence and Protean. Faeries such as ogres and trolls may have Fortitude and Potence as well.

• Faeries can soak both bashing and lethal damage. They take aggravated damage from fire and weapons made of cold iron. They heal like mortals do, but many of them know healing magic.

SENSING THE SUPERNATURAL

Many of the supernatural denizens of the Dark Medieval world conceal themselves as well as or better than vampires, appearing as ordinary mortals (or not at all) to mortal eyes. But vampires have means of sensing the true nature of these beings, using the discerning sight of the Auspex Discipline.

• **The Blessed** generally do not bear a mark detectable to vampires, save in the form of the pain and discomfort that True Faith can have. Vampires who witness the use of True Faith can, with a single success using Soulsight, notice a bright golden halo surrounding the touched one as the blessing manifests.

• **Demons** are crafty and subtle. It requires at least three successes on Soulsight to detect one possessing a mortal (whose aura appears dark and smoky). Vampires using the Spirit's Touch on an object tied to a demonic action may catch a glimpse of the devil. A clear understanding that she is seeing the infernal requires three successes.

• **Lupines** in human or wolf form can be detected with one success using Soulsight. Their haloes are bright

and vibrant compared to those of ordinary mortals (humans or wolves). Lupines can likewise sniff out Cainites with their bestial and supernatural senses.

• **Wizards** appear as ordinary mortals, but three successes on a Soulsight roll can reveal the pattern of sparkles resulting from active magic use in mortals just as it can in thaumaturges and other vampiric blood sorcerers.

• **Ghosts** and other spirits generally function as demons do for Auspex purposes. Distinguishing between demonic and ghostly possession requires five successes on Soulsight. Some ghosts manifest as phantasmal images. A single success on a Soulsight attempt reveals such an apparition for what it is (its halo is weak and intermittent, even paler than a vampire's).

• **The Fae** often conceal their true nature behind illusions, but Soulsight can sense a faerie's true halo with three or more successes. Of course, many faeries do not care to have their true nature revealed, and they may become angry.



Benford 01

„You can take me from this place?“

Ankhesenaten looked up from the bolts of silk that the merchant had laid on the chest and looked at the man again. As he had first suspected, this man was no regular trader in exotic fabrics. Among other things, he did not breathe.

“That depends on the conditions. Venice is not a place one normally has trouble leaving.”

“Leaving is not the problem, in and of itself.” The man glanced about the small shop that Ankhesenaten had borrowed from a mortal vendor for his night’s work. “The issue is more one of not being followed.”

“I see.” He passed his hands through the silk once more. The sensation was intoxicatingly pleasurable, and he knew well that others would find it so. “I may be able to help you, my friend, but I must know just whose gaze you wish to avoid.”

“Is that really necessary? Can’t you just hide me?”

“One hides in differing ways depending on who one is hiding from.” He looked sideways for no other reason than to set his guest a little more ill at ease. “Where *did* you get these fabrics? I must know.”

“They come from the paynim in Baghdad. I have a... brother in Acre who introduced me to the Arab traders there. But what has that got to do with anything?”

“I am a trader in many things. I find it rarely hurts to uncover the source of fine goods. But, you are right, back to the topic at hand. Who chases you?”

“Saracens. I met them in Acre, and they’ve come here after me. I can’t seem to get rid of them.” He glanced around again, his creeping fear palpable in the air. These noble Cainites were so used to rules and order, Ankhesenaten knew, that they had great trouble with such situations. Another weakness of law, that was.

“I will not ask just what you did to offend the *Banu Haqim*, but this is a serious problem for you. They are a tenacious and skilled lot. I fear you will not see the Holy Land again soon.”

“I don’t care. Just get me away from them. To somewhere safe.”

“Of course, I am sure that if you were to sell me your supply of this fine silk, I could bring you along with it to market in Toulouse. My asking price, of course will be significantly below what you might expect in more stable conditions.”

“Fine, whatever you wish.” He looked around again, mumbling thoughts to himself loud enough for Ankhesenaten to hear — further proof of panic, that. “I can contact Father Luke there, I think. He’ll help....”

“Excellent, we leave at next dusk.”

Dealing with Assamites was rarely easy, but Esclarhone la Noire, the Artisan Queen of Toulouse, was obsessive about fabrics. These silks would open many doors with her. There were few things more useful, Ankhesenaten knew, than a prince in your debt.



APPENDIX

To find the greatest darkness, seek within.

—The Erciyes Fragments. IX (Proverbs)

Merits and Flaws

Merits and Flaws are traits that can help players add detail to their characters, representing special advantages (Merits) and liabilities (Flaws) that the character must deal with in play. Ideally, the system encourages the players to work out more of their vampires' background and personality, adding some unique capabilities and disadvantages to them in play. In some cases, however, Merits and Flaws only bog down play with extra mechanics or encourage point-counting among players to take random Flaws so as to start play with higher Discipline ratings. Therefore, Merits and Flaws are wholly optional. The Storytellers can forgo them altogether, disallow some or many or even just assign them based on the prelude and background the player works out.

Players usually choose Merits and Flaws during the “finishing touches” of character creation, when spending bonus points (see p. 134). Merits each cost a certain amount of bonus points and are akin to highly specialized Backgrounds. Flaws, on the other hand, “give back” bonus points in compensation for the problems they are sure to cause in play. A player who chooses

the two-point Flaw: Ragged Bite for his character (a savage Gangrel with protruding, animalistic fangs) gets two more bonus points to spend on traits as outlined on page 128. There is no absolute limit on the number of Merits or Flaws players can choose (as long as they end up spending 15 freebies when all is said and done), but it's wise to avoid excess. A few well-chosen traits are much better than an unplayable mish-mash. Storytellers are free to limit players to seven (or even five) points of Flaws or to insist that Merits and Flaws balance out to within a point or two, all in the interests of keeping players from sacrificing character for dots.

After character creation, Merits and Flaws are out of the players' hands. Most Storytellers do not assign any more in play, but you can assign new ones based on events in play and have others fade away after the situation causing them is resolved. If this happens very quickly, you might replace one Flaw (or Merit) with a new one of equal value. You can also simply look to Merits and Flaws for inspiration for character elements but never use the point values.

Merits and Flaws are divided into four broad categories: physical, mental, social and supernatural.

Physical

Physical Merits and Flaws represent special characteristics in a character's undead form that have a direct impact on his capabilities, but aren't reflected in the basic Attributes and Abilities. Therefore, there is no "Poor Hearing" Flaw since that is simply represented by a low Perception rating, and no "Catlike Balance" Merit, which simply translates into high Dexterity and Athletics ratings.

Ambidextrous (1-pt. Merit)

You have a high degree of off-hand dexterity, and you can perform tasks with the "wrong" hand at no penalty. You must still use the rules for taking multiple actions, but you do not suffer a difficulty penalty if, say, you use two weapons or are forced to use your off hand.

Eat Food (1-pt. Merit)

You have the capacity to eat food and even savor its taste. While you cannot derive any nourishment from eating regular foods, this ability is useful for passing as mortal. Of course, you can't digest what you eat, and there will be some point during the evening when you must force yourself to heave it back up.

Blush of Health (2-pt. Merit)

You look more hale and healthy in appearance than other vampires, allowing you to blend with human society much more easily. You still retain the color of a living mortal, and your skin feels only slightly cool to the touch. This Merit is unavailable to Cappadocians and Nosferatu.

Efficient Digestion (3-pt. Merit)

You are able to draw more than the usual amount of nourishment from blood. When feeding, you gain an additional point to your blood pool for every two points

of blood you consume. This Merit does not allow you to exceed your blood pool maximum.

Huge Size (4-pt. Merit)

You are abnormally large in size, at least six-foot-ten and 300 pounds in weight. Aside from making you extremely noticeable in public, this extra mass bestows an additional Bruised health level. Characters with this Merit may also gain bonuses to push objects, open barred doors, avoid being knocked down and so on.

Short (1-pt. Flaw)

You are well below average height — four feet tall or less. You have difficulty reaching or manipulating objects designed for normal adult size, and your running speed is one-half that of a normally proportioned human.

Smell of the Grave (1-pt. Flaw)

You exude an odor of dampness and newly turned earth, which no amount of scents or perfumes will cover. Mortals in your immediate presence become uncomfortable, so the difficulties of most Social rolls to affect mortals increase by one. Characters on the Road of Humanity with this Flaw subtract one from their aura rating (so a +1 becomes a 0, a -1 becomes a -2, etc.).

13th Generation (2-pt. Flaw)

Your sire was of the 12th generation, long thought unable to sire. The fact that you rose from the dead may even have come as a shock to him, and it certainly concerns any elders who put stock in prophecy (in other words, most of them). You may be a clanless Caitiff or may carry your sire's clan, but you are likely seen as something less than proper among the High Clans. Thirteenth-generation vampires must at least take the Cannot Embrace Flaw (see p. 308), but almost all suffer from Weak Blood (p. 309).

Ragged Bite (2-pt. Flaw)

Unlike most other Cainites, you lack the ability to lick the wounds of your feeding closed. Instead, you leave raw puncture wounds in the flesh of your prey. These wounds also have a one-in-five chance of becoming diseased. The Storyteller determines the precise nature of the infection.

Leper (2- or 3-pt. Flaw)

Before you were Embraced, you suffered from leprosy or a skin disease that might be easily confused with leprosy. Your Appearance may be no higher than 2, and your flesh is marred by rashes, pale patches, festering sores, scars and so on. Your skin disease, whatever it actually is, is obvious to any who look upon you. Mortal authorities refuse you entry to any city, and you are treated with fear and revulsion. You may be compelled to dress in a specific manner and even carry castanets or other devices to announce your coming.

In the three-point version, your condition is still contagious. Although it cannot have any further effects

on your unliving form, you may transmit it to those upon whom you feed. This Flaw is worth only one point to Nosferatu, and then only if their disease is contagious.

Addiction (3-pt. Flaw)

You suffer from an addiction to a substance, which must now be present in the blood you drink. It can be alcohol, a plant extract or simply adrenaline. This substance always impairs you in some fashion (see "Drugs and Poisons," p. 257, for particulars).

Lame (3-pt. Flaw)

Your legs are damaged, which prevents you from running or walking easily. You are forced to walk with a cane or possibly leg braces, and you have a pronounced limp to your stride. Your walking speed is one-quarter that of a normal human, and running is impossible.

Monstrous (3-pt. Flaw)

Your physical form was twisted during the Embrace, and it now reflects the Beast that rages inside you. Characters with this Flaw appear to be savage or disgusting monsters, and they have Appearance ratings of 0. Nosferatu may not take this Flaw as it is already their clan weakness.

Permanent Wound (3-pt. Flaw)

You suffered injuries during your Embrace that your transformation somehow failed to repair. At the beginning of each night, you rise from sleep at the Wounded health level, although you may not heal this nagging damage by spending blood points.

Slow Healing (3-pt. Flaw)

You have difficulty healing wounds. It requires two blood points to heal one health level of normal damage, and you heal one health level of aggravated damage every five days (plus the usual five blood points and Willpower expenditure).

Child (4-pt. Flaw)

You were a small child (between five and 10 years old) at the time of your Embrace, leaving your Physical Attributes underdeveloped and making it difficult to interact with some aspects of mortal society. You may not have more than two dots in Strength or Stamina, except when raising Physical Attributes with blood points, and the difficulties of all die rolls when attempting to direct or lead mortal adults increases by two. This Flaw also includes the effects of the Short Flaw, so no character can have both.

Deaf (4-pt. Flaw)

You cannot hear. While you may ignore some applications of Dominate, you may not hear warnings, and you have great difficulty in normal communication. The difficulties of any Alertness rolls that involve hearing increase by three.

Mute (4-pt. Flaw)

You cannot speak. You may communicate with the Storyteller and describe your actions, but you cannot talk to player or Storyteller characters unless everyone concerned uses Linguistics dots to purchase a commonly understood sign language or you write down what you wish to say.

Flesh of the Corpse (5-pt. Flaw)

Your flesh does not fully regenerate itself once it is damaged. While you are able to heal yourself to the point of regaining full functionality, your skin still retains the cuts, tears and wounds you have incurred. Depending on the nature of the damage, this Flaw will make social dealings exceedingly difficult.



Blind (6-pt. Flaw)

You cannot see. Characters can compensate for the loss of vision by becoming more sensitive to other sensory input, but visual cues and images are lost to them. Actions involving hand-eye coordination are very difficult to perform, especially under stressful conditions. Difficulties of all Dexterity-based rolls increase by two. Vampires with Auspex 2 (Soulsight) are still able to use this ability, though the information is interpreted via other senses.

Mental

Mental Merits and Flaws define certain special facts about the way the character thinks and sees the world

about him. Again, many such factors are already covered by the basic Attributes and Abilities and thus not repeated in this list. An iron-willed character simply has a high Willpower trait, not a special Merit.

Celestial Attunement (1-pt. Merit)

You have an innate link to the passage of time and the movement of celestial bodies. You can estimate the time until sunrise or sunset within a minute or two, and you can follow the phases of the moon in your head. Those with some training in astrology and this Merit can even foretell certain astrological conjunctions without access to charts. You can accomplish any of these feats with only a minimum of concentration.

Common Sense (1-pt. Merit)

You have a significant amount of practical, everyday wisdom. Whenever the character is about to act in a way contrary to common sense, the Storyteller can make suggestions or warnings about the implications of said action. This is a very useful Merit to give to beginning players who are unfamiliar with the game.

Concentration (1-pt. Merit)

You have the ability to focus your mind and shut out any distractions or annoyances. Characters with this Merit are unaffected by any penalties stemming from distracting circumstances (e.g., loud noises, hanging upside down).

Eidetic Memory (2-pt. Merit)

You remember what you see and hear with perfect detail. Documents, events and conversations, can be committed to memory with only minor concentration. Under stressful conditions involving numerous distractions, you must make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) to summon enough concentration to absorb what your senses detect.

Light Sleeper (2-pt. Merit)

You can awaken instantly at any sign of trouble or danger, and you can do so without any sleepiness or hesitation. You may ignore rules regarding how Road rating restricts the number of dice available during the day.

Deep Sleeper (1-pt. Flaw)

When you sleep, it is very difficult for you to awaken. The difficulty of any die roll to awaken during the day increases by two.

Nightmares (1-pt. Flaw)

You experience horrendous nightmares every time you sleep, and memories of them haunt you during your waking hours. Upon awakening, you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or lose a die on all actions for that night. A botched Willpower roll indicates that, even when awake, you still believe that you are locked in a nightmare.

Prey Exclusion (1-pt. Flaw)

You refuse to hunt a certain class of prey. You might refuse to feed upon peasants, women, priests or poets. If you accidentally feed upon such an individual, you automatically frenzy and must make a roll to prevent Road loss (difficulty 7). Witnessing other Cainites feeding on the object of your exclusion might also provoke a frenzy, at the Storyteller's discretion. Ventrue may take this Flaw to represent an additional, self-imposed prey limitation beyond that imposed by their clan weakness.

Amnesia (2-pt. Flaw)

You are unable to remember anything about your past, yourself or your family, though your past might well come back to haunt you. Your origins and the circumstances behind your amnesia are for the Storyteller to determine, and she is encouraged to make it as interesting as possible.

Deranged (2-pt. Flaw)

Either a pre-existing condition or the trauma of damnation has sown madness in you. You begin play with a serious derangement that dogs you in your undying existence (see page 260 for a list of possible afflictions). It is possible for you to get over this madness in play (a long and arduous task). Malkavians may take this Flaw to represent an *additional* derangement beyond the one endemic to their blood.

Territorial (2-pt. Flaw)

You are extremely territorial, staking out a particular area as your domain and reacting aggressively to trespassers. If another vampire enters your territory uninvited, you must make a frenzy roll. If you fail, you immediately attack the interloper and continue attacking until the intruder is dead or has left your hunting grounds. You are reluctant to leave your domain except in desperate circumstances. It is possible (but not common) to take this Flaw without taking the Domain Background, in which case your absolute claim to territory is not at all recognized by other vampires.

Vengeful (2-pt. Flaw)

You have a score to settle, incurred either during your mortal days or after the Embrace. You are obsessed with taking your revenge on an individual or group, and it is your overriding priority in any situation in which you encounter the object of your revenge. You may temporarily resist your need for vengeance by spending a Willpower point.

Religious Prohibition (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

You have retained your faith through the Embrace, and you suffer because your beliefs prohibit drinking the blood you need to survive. You may have lived as a believer in Islam or Judaism (both of which explicitly ban blood-drinking) or

even as one of the strictly vegetarian Cathar *perfecti*. As even animal blood is a forbidden substance to you, your conscience pricks whenever you feed.

In the two-point version of this Flaw, you voluntarily restrict your feeding to animals or blood that has been drained by a ritual butcher. At four points, you refuse to feed unless it is an immediate necessity (blood pool is three or less), and even then, you may fall victim to depression and self-loathing for several nights after the forbidden act. Most vampires with this Flaw are on a version of the Road of Heaven, and they might also have the Outspoken Pagan/Heretic Flaw.

Flesh Eater (4-pt. Flaw)

It is not enough for you to draw nourishment from the blood of mortals — you believe you must also consume your victim's heart, liver and other blood-rich tissue. Of course, this will necessitate the deaths of all of your victims (unless you are extremely creative), which might lead to numerous problems with the herd and with your own conscience (and road). Characters with this Flaw must additionally purchase the Eat Food Merit (p. 303).

Social

Social Merits and Flaws represent facts about the vampire's background and beliefs that affect his relations with others. Many of these facts give reasons for others to either respect or frown upon the character before getting to know him. For the most part, the Storyteller should just represent these attitudes in the portrayal of other characters. Those who want a more concrete benefit or penalty, however, may alter the difficulty of Social rolls in situations when the Merit or Flaw comes into play. As a rule of thumb, increase the player's difficulty on such rolls by the point-cost of a Flaw and reduce it by that of a Merit.

Crusader (1-pt. Merit)

You once donned the crusader's cross and successfully returned from the Holy Land, having done your duty to God, and those around you know it. You may well have joined the forces of Richard the Lion-Hearted and Philip Augustus in the Third Crusade, those of Andrew of Hungary in the Fifth, or those of Emperor Frederick in the Sixth. This accomplishment gives you special standing and repute among those knights, lords and ladies who never made the journey to Outremer. *Jongleurs* may request that you share stories that they may turn into fanciful tales, and others may ask your opinion about events in the Latin Kingdoms or Iberia.

Prestigious Sire (1-pt. Merit)

Your sire has or had great status in her court or clan, and this has accorded you a certain amount of prestige. Although your sire may no longer have any dealings with you, the simple fact of your ancestry has marked you forever. This prestige might aid you greatly in dealings

with your elders or other neonates, or it might engender jealousy or contempt.

Debt of Gratitude (1- to 3-pt. Merit)

An elder owes you gratitude because of something either you or your sire did for her. The depth of gratitude the elder owes depends on how many points the player wishes to spend. One point might mean that the elder owes the character a favor; three points might mean that she owes the character her unlife.

Dark Secret (1-pt. Flaw)

You have some sort of secret that, if uncovered, would be of immense embarrassment to you and would make you a pariah in the local Cainite community. This could be anything from having murdered an elder to being a secret member of the Cainite Heresy.

Infamous Sire (1-pt. Flaw)

Your sire was, and perhaps still is, distrusted and disliked by many of the local Cainites. As a result, you are distrusted and disliked as well. The stigma follows you even if you repudiate your sire. One cannot escape one's blood.

Mistaken Identity (1-pt. Flaw)

You look similar to descriptions of another vampire, which causes cases of mistaken identity. This can prompt numerous awkward or even dangerous situations, especially if your "twin" has a terrible reputation or is wanted for some crime.

Sire's Resentment (1-pt. Flaw)

Your sire dislikes you and wishes you ill. Given the smallest opportunity, she actively seeks to do you harm. Your sire's allies also work against you, and many elders may resent you.

Enemy (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

You have an enemy, or perhaps a group of enemies, who seek to harm you. The power of the enemy depends upon how many points the player wishes to spend. (Five points indicate the wrath of a Methuselah, arch-magus or other potent supernatural foe.)

Apostate (2-pt. Flaw)

You have publicly recanted one of the vampiric roads in order to step onto your current one. Changing roads is not uncommon in the early years of unlife, but you have done so in an especially spectacular way — perhaps accusing your former faith of being false or ridiculing former teachers. You carry the stigma of a traitor among your former fellow-travelers, while your new co-religionists still wonder if you are truly committed to their faith. You must work twice as hard to receive half the recognition of others.

Hunted (4-pt. Flaw)

You are pursued by a fanatical witch-hunter who believes (perhaps correctly) that you are a danger to

humanity. All those with whom you associate, be they mortal or Cainite, may be hunted as well. The hunter may or may not be part of the shadowy Inquisition (see p. 291).

Wathbreaker (4-pt. Flaw)

You are a known defector. You turned traitor to your former liege and you still have much to prove before you are accepted by the Cainites you have defected to. Elders, ancillae and even neonates treat you with distrust and even hostility, and your reputation might even sully those whom you regularly associate with.

Outspoken Pagan Heretic (4-pt. Flaw)

You are either not a Christian at all, or you are a follower of one of the heresies declared anathema by the Church, such as the Cathars or Bogomils. Although Jews, Muslims and pagans are no strangers to Europe, they are subject to various forms of oppression and social stigma in a culture that is unabashedly Christian. Many non-Christians carry on (and even thrive) by doing their very best not to antagonize the Christian community in any way. They practice their rites in private, find economic and social niches where they are tolerated or appreciated, and they watch for signs of bubbling hate or resentment. Not so you. Either because of past "offenses" or current behavior, you are permanently branded a heathen — somewhere between unsavory and evil in the eyes of the Christian majority. You regularly face discrimination, accusations and even outright persecution. Even among the undying, you carry a black mark, especially among Christian followers of the Road of Heaven.

Supernatural

Supernatural Merits and Flaws reflect the vagaries of the Curse of Caine. Although all vampires suffer from a basic set of limitations and enjoy certain gifts in common, each individual is unique. Clan differences reflect this variation in the ancient Antediluvians, who passed them on to their progeny.

Inoffensive to Animals (1- or 2-pt. Merit)

Unlike most Cainites, you do not cause hostile or even unsettled reactions in animals you encounter. Instead, the animals simply treat you like an ordinary human. For one point, you can avoid upsetting a particular species. For two points, you can be inoffensive to all ordinary creatures (though those that are renowned for their affinity to the supernatural, such as black cats or owls, might still react unusually to your presence, at the Storyteller's discretion).

Medium (2-pt. Merit)

You possess the natural affinity to sense and hear spirits, ghosts and shades. Although you cannot see them, you can sense them, speak to them and, through pleading or cajoling, draw them to your presence. You may call upon them for aid or advice, but there will always be a price.

Arcane Resistance

(2-, 4- or 5-pt. Merit)

You have an inherent resistance to the rituals of one or more forms of magical rituals and practices, such as those used by the Tremere, Assamite sorcerers, Cappadocians or living wizards. For two points, you are resistant to a single form of magical practice (Assamite Sorcery, Koldunic Sorcery, Mortis, Setite Sorcery, Thaumaturgy or any one school of mortal magics). For four points, you are resistant to all magics of either the undying or mortal mages. For five points, you are resistant to them all. In any case, the difficulty of any appropriate magic directed at you, both malicious and beneficent, is two higher. This deals only with magics aimed specifically at you — a Mortis-born corpse-knight can still strike at you at no penalty, for example. Regardless of the nature of the resistance you take, you may never learn any form of magic (be it Thaumaturgy, Mortis or another).

Oracular Ability (3-pt. Merit)

You can see and interpret signs and omens. You are able to draw advice from these omens, for they provide hints of the future and warnings of the present. When the Storyteller feels that you are in position to see an omen, you will be required to make a Perception + Occult roll, with the difficulty relative to how well the omen is concealed. If successful, you may then roll Intelligence + Occult to interpret what you have seen, the difficulty again relative to the complexity of the omen.

Spirit Mentor (3-pt. Merit)

You have a ghostly companion and guide. The identity and exact powers of this spirit are up to the Storyteller, but it can be called upon in difficult situations for help and guidance.

Unbondable (3-pt. Merit)

You are immune to the blood oath. Dominate, Presence and other forms of influence affect you just like any other vampire, however. Tremere may not take this Merit.

Lucky (3-pt. Merit)

You were born lucky — or else the Devil looks after his own. Either way, you may repeat any three failed rolls per story, including botches, but you may try only once per failed roll.

True Love (4-pt. Merit)

Like a character from a troubadour's song, you have discovered, perhaps too late, a true love. He or she is mortal, but is the center of your existence and inspires you to keep going in an age of darkness and despair. Whenever you suffer, the thought of your true love gives you the strength to persevere. This Merit grants you one automatic success on all Willpower rolls, which can be negated only by a botch die. This can be a great gift and also a hindrance, for your true love may require protection and occasionally rescue.

Nine Lives (6-pt. Merit)

Fate has granted you the opportunity to come as close to Final Death as anyone can get and still survive. When a roll occurs that would result in your death, the roll is made again. If the next roll succeeds, then you live — and one of your nine lives is used up. If that subsequent roll fails, then another reroll is made, until either a successful roll occurs or your nine lives are used up. The Storyteller should keep careful count of how many lives the character has remaining.

Initiate to the Road (1-pt. Flaw)

You are a newcomer to your chosen road of enlightenment and have yet to face your first moment of truth upon it. Although you understand the road's tenets and teachings on an intellectual level, you haven't put them to the test against the Beast, so you cannot claim the mantle of a true adherent. This may be the result of having only recently been Embraced or having just changed roads, in which case the Apostate Flaw may be appropriate (p. 306). You do not have the aura tied to your road, and you face a +1 difficulty penalty in resisting frenzy and Röttschreck, but you have an easier time changing roads if you wish to do so (see p. 267).

Repulsed by Garlic (1-pt. Flaw)

You cannot abide garlic, and the smallest whiff of its scent drives you from a room unless you make a successful Willpower roll (difficulty based on the strength of the odor).

Touch of Frost (1-pt. Flaw)

Plants wither as you approach and die at your touch. Your touch leaches heat from living beings, as though you are made of ice. As you walk through a forest or across a field, you do not leave a huge swath of death, however. Instead, you leave behind small patches of dead leaves and withered or rotting foliage. Someone tracking you through the wilderness gains a -2 difficulty bonus to do so because of these marks.

Demon-Hounded (1- to 4-pt. Flaw)

A demon from below has taken a special interest in you. It appears to you occasionally, using threats, bribes or honeyed words to win you to its cause. Sometimes it just asks you to perform innocuous favors. Sometimes it asks you to become its eternal servant. Sometimes it offers favors or information without any apparent catch. In any case, it is not your interests it serves, but those of its diabolical masters. For some reason, the demon sees you as an especially useful tool for ensnaring the mortal souls it craves, and although it may occasionally provide you with a short-term benefit, you are disposable to it. At some point in the chronicle, it is likely to try to dispose of you in some decidedly uncomfortable fashion.

The details of the demon and its personality are largely up to the Storyteller, but the point level determines some generalities. A minor demon (1-pt. Flaw) may be an annoying imp, incapable of doing anything



more than distracting you, thieving small items and pleading for souls. Its plans are unimpressive, but they can be frustrating. A greater creature (4-pt. Flaw) is your physical equal, and it can concoct horribly devious plans to make you its slave. (For more on demons, see p. 292.)

Cursed (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

You are the recipient of a supernatural curse. The strength and pervasiveness of the curse depends upon how many points you wish to incur. Examples follow:

- If you pass on a secret you were entrusted with, your betrayal will come back to harm you in some way (1 point).
- You stutter uncontrollably when you try to describe what you have seen or heard (2 points).
- Tools break or malfunction when you try to use them (3 points).
- You are doomed to make enemies of those whom you most love or admire (4 points).
- Every one of your accomplishments or triumphs will eventually become soiled or fail in some way (5 points).

Any other supernatural Flaw (and many of the others) can be used as a curse as well. The manner in which you can lift the curse are up to the Storyteller, but they generally involve making amends to the one you have offended.

Cannot Embrace (2-pt. Flaw)

Either due to your high generation or because of some other factor, you cannot pass on the Curse of Caine to another. No matter how much of your vitae you feed to a freshly drained mortal, she does not rise as one of the

undying. It's altogether possible for a character not to know that she can't Embrace until the moment of truth, when a potential child lies dead at her feet. This Flaw is common among the 12th generation. In fact, until recently, most thought that no 12th-generation vampire could sire. You can still create ghouls and blood oaths as normal.

Cast No Reflection (1-pt. Flaw)

You actually cast no reflection. This can have a very detrimental effect when trying to pass as a human. Vampires of Clan Lasombra automatically have this Flaw at no point benefit (and you may be mistaken for one of them if you possess it).

Eerie Presence (2-pt. Flaw)

Mortals have an unconscious awareness of your undead nature, which makes them anxious and ill at ease in your presence. Because of this, difficulties of all die rolls relating to social interaction with mortals are increased by two.

Repulsive to Animals (2-pt. Flaw)

With this Flaw, every natural animal you encounter is automatically and severely upset by her presence. This is much more severe than the unease that almost all Cainites cause in animals: Creatures panic and flee, and some rare few attack. You cannot calm the creatures down with Animal Ken. It requires either use of Animalism or a taste of vampire blood (which makes the creature a ghoul) to settle the beast down.

Blood Madness (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

The curse that the infernal Baali bloodline laid upon the Assamite warrior caste has fallen on your head, and you are plagued with an unending hunger for the blood of other Cainites. Whenever you taste Cainite blood, you must make a Self-Control roll (difficulty 8) or you fall into a hunger frenzy in which you will do *anything* to gorge upon as much blood as physically possible. If you follow a road that teaches Instinct, you are instantly lost to this frenzy. No roll is possible, and the Flaw is worth four points. You often find yourself thinking of other Cainites — even Children of Haqim — as potential vessels rather than equals.

This Flaw is mainly found among the Assamite warrior caste. It is much rarer among sorcerers and viziers, only affecting those who have partaken of warrior vitae or who spend the majority of their time associating with warriors. It is almost (but not wholly) unknown among the other clans.

Haunted (3-pt. Flaw)

You are haunted by an angry and tormented spirit, most likely the ghost of one of your first victims. This spirit actively attempts to hinder you, especially when feeding, and it does its utmost to vent its anguish upon you and anyone in your presence. The Storyteller determines the exact nature of the spirit, its powers and whether or not it can eventually be laid to rest.

Can't Cross Running Water (4-pt. Flaw)

You cannot cross running water without suffering physical pain and riling the Beast. In order to cross any body of water that is two feet wide or more and not completely stagnant, you must roll Courage (difficulty 6-8, depending on the size of the body of water). Failure means you refuse to cross, while a botch throws you into Röttschreck. Success allows you to cross, but not without pain. You take one level of unsoakable bashing damage per turn of the crossing. If you actually wade into the water instead of using a bridge, the damage is aggravated.

Grip of the Damned (4-pt. Flaw)

There is no ecstasy in your Embrace — only terror and pain. Mortals upon whom you feed struggle and shriek all the while as you attempt to feed, requiring you to grapple with them for as long as you wish to take their blood. Depending on the vampire's road and rating, this may cause a degeneration roll, at the discretion of the Storyteller.

Dark Fate (5-pt. Flaw)

You are doomed to experience Final Death or, worse, suffer eternal agony. No matter what you do, you cannot avoid this terrible fate. At some point during the chronicle, your Dark Fate will come upon you. Even more ghastly is the fact that you occasionally have visions of this fate, and the malaise these images inspire requires an expenditure of a temporary Willpower point to avoid, or else you lose a die from all of your actions for the remainder of the night. It is up to the Storyteller to determine the exact nature of this fate and when it will occur.

Light-Sensitive (5-pt. Flaw)

You are even more sensitive to sunlight than other vampires are. Sunlight causes double normal damage, and the light of the moon can cause lethal damage in a manner similar to the sun, though it must shine directly upon your skin. Followers of Set and Lasombra, who are already light-sensitive due to clan weaknesses, may take this Flaw to represent especially acute sensitivity. They double the augmented damage that the sun causes to a member of their clan.

Weak Blood (5-pt. Flaw)

Your blood carries only a fraction of the power that is the unholy legacy of Caine. You may be a member of the despised 13th generation, a Caitiff or suffering from some other affliction, but your vitae does a poor job of powering your unliving form. All blood point costs are doubled (e.g., using blood-related Disciplines or healing damage), and you can never learn a Discipline above four dots. It also takes six drinks for a thrall to become oathbound to you, and you are incapable of creating ghouls or progeny. You cannot take the Cannot Embrace Flaw (p. 308) which is already incorporated into Weak Blood.

Weak Aura (2-pt. Merit or Flaw)

Your personality and outlook have relatively little unintentional effect on others. You may well be a master of Presence and other forms of manipulation, but that is all planned. Your road aura is very weak, manifesting only if you are a true exemplar or reprobate of your belief system. Your aura modifier is as follows:

Road Rating Aura Modifier

10-9	-1 difficulty
8-3	no modifier
2-1	+1 difficulty

This trait is a Merit if your starting Road trait is 4 or less, and a Flaw if it is 5 or more. The Storyteller may also rule that you do not cause unconscious Presence effects (see p. 205). For complete information on roads and auras, see p. 161.

Potent Aura (3-pt. Merit or Flaw)

The power of your own personality and outlook is such that it reaches out and affects others with disturbing ease. Others, be they mortals or vampires, get a powerful first impression of you that colors many of their interactions with you. Your road aura is significantly more powerful than that of other vampires of your outlook. Your aura modifier is as follows:

Road Rating Aura Modifier

10	-3 difficulty
9-8	-2 difficulty
7-6	-1 difficulty
5	no modifier
4-3	+1 difficulty
2	+2 difficulty
1	+3 difficulty

This trait is a Merit if your starting Road trait is 5 or more, and a Flaw if it is 4 or less. For complete information of roads and auras, see p. 161.

A Dark Medieval Bestiary

Animals are an inescapable part of medieval life. The vast majority of the population lives off the land, works fields with the help of beasts of burden and raises fowl, pigs and goats for meat, eggs and cheese. Wild beasts, from boars and deer to bears and wolves, roam the unending forests. Even in the cities, animals are omnipresent, not only in the form of rats and carrion birds, but in the dogs, pigs, goats and fowl that are part of households of any size.

And of course, the medieval knight derives much of his status from his steed. The following bestiary details the more common beasts along with some of the arcane things that haunt the night.

Animal Traits

Like people, animals are represented by a set of traits that quantify their abilities in **Dark Ages**. These traits are similar, but slightly different than those used for mortals and vampires.

- **Attributes:** Natural animals have five Attributes instead of nine. Their Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina) function as with mortals, although animals may not be capable of some feats of strength (see p. 228) because of their inability to lift things. Animals have only two Mental Attributes: Perception and Wits. Perception is essentially the same as with mortal humans, that is an aggregate of their various senses. Most animals have a quite high Perception, and it can reach levels higher than 5. Wits is a basic measure of the animal's instincts and survival skills. In rough terms, it measures a prey animal's ability to escape predators and a predator's ability to catch prey.

- **Willpower:** Willpower is essentially the same for animals as it is for people: a measure of mental fortitude and resistance to outside influences. Animals cannot spend points of Willpower.

- **Health Levels:** Depending on their size, animals have a varying number of health levels. These are expressed in terms of each level's dice-pool penalty. Animals whose health levels include Incapacitated can survive longer than those without it. Others die when they run out of health levels.

- **Attacks:** Most animals have some form of natural weapon or form of attack, from a horse's kick to a wolf's bite and claws. Biting, clawing and goring generally causes lethal damage. Trampling and kicking causes bashing damage.

- **Abilities:** Animals have ratings in Abilities to represent their natural proficiencies in such things as tracking (Alertness and Survival), using their natural attacks (Brawl) and escaping harm (Athletics, Dodge). Abilities listed in brackets are those typically resulting from training at the hands of humans. (Use common sense in applying these Abilities: Regardless of its Athletics rating, a cat cannot throw a spear!)

- **Control Rating:** Used with riding animals and other beasts of burden, Control Rating is a rough measure of how ornery the animal is. The higher the rating is, the more skill is required of the rider to use the animal effectively (see p. 244).

- **Blood Pool:** Animal blood provides Cainites with significantly less sustenance than mortal vitae. A single point of blood from a cow represents significantly more volume of liquid than a point of human blood, so even large animals have lower blood pools than mortals.

Animal Ghouls

At the Storyteller's discretion, any of the following natural beasts can be turned into ghoul retainers with

occasional meals of vampire blood. Such companions gain Willpower, a dot of Potence, a blood pool of 10 and some "trained" Abilities that wild animals lack.

Beasts of Home and Farm

Cat

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Wits 4
Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Claw or bite for one die (lethal)
Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Climbing 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4 (Empathy 2, Subterfuge 2)

Blood Pool: 1

Cow/Ox

Strength 3/5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3/5, Perception 2, Wits 1/2
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for three dice, gore for six (both lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 0/3

Control Rating: 2

Blood Pool: 8

Dog/Hound

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 6, Wits 3
Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for five dice; claw for four (both lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3 (Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2)

Blood Pool: 2

Horse

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for six dice (bashing); bite for three (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1

Control Rating: 3

Blood Pool: 6

Warhorse

Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Wits 3
Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Trample or kick for seven dice (bashing); bite for three (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Intimidation 2

Control Rating: 3

Blood Pool: 8

Mule

Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 1, Wits 1
Willpower: 6, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -2, -4, Incapacitated

Attack: Kick for five dice (bashing); bite for two (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2

Control Rating: 4

Blood Pool: 4

Pig/Boar

Strength 2/4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4/5, Perception 3, Wits 3

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -4, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite for two/four dice (lethal); boars gore for five (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2 (Intimidation 2)

Blood Pool: 3/4

Rat

Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 5, Wits 4
Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -5

Attack: Bite for one die (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Stealth 3

Blood Pool: 1/4 (1 blood point equals 4 rats)

Sheep

Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Perception 1, Wits 1
Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: None, though rams can gore for three dice (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Empathy 2

Blood Pool: 3

HORSE/MOUNT TABLE

Mount	Control Rating	Trample Dam.	Move (y/turn)	Notes
Riding Horse	3	6B	15	
Arab Horse	2	5B	20	Available in Iberia or Saracen lands only.
Warhorse	3	7B	12	
Camel	4	5B	10	Available in Saracen lands only, -1 difficulty to avoid being trampled.
Elephant	4	9B	10	-2 difficulty to avoid being tramples

Beasts of Wild and Wood

Bat

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 6, Wits 2

Willpower: 2, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -3

Attack: Bite for one die (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Dodge 3, Stealth 2

Blood Pool: 1/4 (1 blood point equals four bats)

Notes: Bats can fly at 25 mph.

Bear

Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Wits 3

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Claw for seven dice; bite for five (both lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 1

Blood Pool: 5

Bird of Prey

Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 7, Wits 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -5

Attack: Claw for two dice (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2 (Brawl 3, Empathy 4, Intimidation 4)

Blood Pool: 1/2 (1 blood point equals two large birds)

Notes: This template can represent a hawk, crow, raven, owl or even vulture. A bird can typically fly at 25 to 50 mph.

Deer Stag

Strength 1/3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2/3, Perception 4, Wits 2

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: None/gore for five dice (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 2

Blood Pool: 5/7

Hare

Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 5, Wits 5

Willpower: 1, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -2, -3

Attack: Bite for two dice (lethal); rear claw kick for one in desperation (bashing)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 1, Stealth 4

Blood Pool: 3

Wolf

Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 6, Wits 4

Willpower: 3, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bite and claw for four dice (lethal)

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Stealth 2

Blood Pool: 2

Notes: Vampires who turn into wolves move at double normal running speed.

Beasts Marvelous and Terrible

The following beasts are more marvelous than real. Demonic creatures serve demons and infernalists, ambulatory corpses result from the Cadaverous Animation path of Mortis (see p. 193), while the more esoteric ghouls serve the fleshcrafting fiends of Clan Tzimisce. Many of these creatures have the full complement of Attributes and are somewhat (or even extremely) intelligent in the human sense. Disciplines are listed along with Abilities for those beasts that have them. For more on ghouls and demons, see pages 285 and 292 respectively.

Athanatos Corpse Knight

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

Willpower: 0, **Health Levels:** 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, -5

Attack: punch for Strength +1 bashing damage; typical *Athanatoi* are armed with a sword (Strength +4 lethal) and wear light or composite armor (+3 soak).

Abilities: Archery 2, Athletics 2, Brawling 2, Dodge 3, Melee 3

Notes: *Athanatoi* (Greek for "without death") are terrible warriors raised from the grave by the Cadaverous Animation path. Assuming the Cappadocian maintains control of the knight, it obeys her. *Athanatoi* move as normal humans. As truly dead things, they are immune to most effects of mind-altering Disciplines, and they soak lethal and bashing damage like vampires.

Corpse Servant



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

Willpower: 0, **Health Levels:** 0, 0, 0, -2, -2

Attack: None

Abilities: Crafts 1, Seneschal 2

Blood Pool: 0

Notes: Corpse servants are shambling bodies given a semblance of life by the Cadaverous Animation path. They serve as assistants and obey their master. They cannot speak, and they move slowly, shambling at five yards per turn. As truly dead things, corpse servants are immune to most effects of mind-altering Disciplines, and they soak lethal and bashing damage like vampires.

Demonic Custodian

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

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -3, -5, Dispelled

Attack: Claw, bite and grab for seven dice + Potence (lethal)

Abilities: Brawl 5, Stealth 5, Fortitude 3, Potence 4

Blood Pool: 10

Notes: These minor devils are bound to guard a place and its contents. They recognize only the one who summoned them, and they attempt to eat all other trespassers. They are dull-witted and slow but immensely strong and persistent. Most of them appear as large spiders or giant toads covered in caustic slime. A few may have poisonous bites or other abilities.

Demonic Familiar

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

Willpower: 5, **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, Dispelled

Attack: Claw for three dice (lethal), possibly poison as well for three to five dice (lethal)

Abilities: Dodge 3, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Occult 5 (familiars can teach their master this knowledge), Animalism (same type as the familiar's form only) 3, Auspex 2, Celerity 3

Blood Pool: 5

Notes: Familiars are tiny demons that are bound to a specific master. They generally appear as small animals (toads, cats, weasels and ravens are common), and they serve as spies and gossips. Familiars need to be fed the blood of their master weekly or they will wither and die. They may have various arcane powers akin to low-level Thaumaturgy rituals at the Storyteller's discretion.



Hellhound Ghoul

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 6, Wits 3

Attack: Claw for three and bite for five dice (lethal); armor plating gives +1 die to soak rolls (Tzimisce



hellhounds only)

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2, Potence 1, Fortitude 1

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Blood Pool: 10

Notes: This template refers to any of several sorts of ghoulish canines used by vampires as guardians and hunting beasts. Tzimisce add their own touch, using Vicissitude to add bony spikes or plates.

Homuncular Servant



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

Willpower: 0, **Health Levels:** OK, -5

Attack: Pinch, strike or claw for two dice (bashing)

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Dodge 2, Stealth 2

Blood Pool: 0

Notes: Cappadocian homunculi are parts of dead bodies (typically hands) given a type of life by the Cadaverous Animation path. They serve as laboratory assistants and spies for Cappadocians. They can move two yards per turn.

Szlachta War Ghoul

Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelli-



gence 2, Wits 2

Willpower: 4, **Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Attack: Bonecrafted weapon for Strength + 2 dice (bashing or lethal depending on the weapon); bite for four dice (lethal); armor plating gives +1 die to soak rolls.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Potence 1

Blood Pool: 10

Notes: *Szlachta* (an ironic usage of the Polish Slavonic dialect's word for "aristocrat") are guardian ghouls used by the Tzimisce. The Fiends shape these servants into twisted creatures using their art of Vicissitude, a process that most often destroys the *szlachta*'s mind, leaving it a maddened killer and nothing more.

Vozhd War Ghoul

Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

Willpower: 5; **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -3, -3, Incapacitated

Attack: Strike for eight dice + Potence (bashing); constrict for six dice + Potence (lethal); bite for eight dice (lethal). The *vozhd* has multiple limbs and can make multiple attacks. It gains an additional five dice to split among these attacks, although no single attack may have a higher dice pool than the ghoul's Dexterity + Brawl.

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Intimidation 5, Potence 6, Fortitude 4

Blood Pool: 20



Notes: These mammoth composites are used as living siege engines by Tzimisce warlords. A *vozhd* consists of multiple ghouls fused together through koldunic magic and Vicissitude into one composite behemoth. Strength, health levels, dice for multiple attacks, Disciplines and blood pool all depend on the amount of “raw materials” used. This template represents a *vozhd* made of four ghouls.

Packs and Swarms

Although the traits listed here detail individual creatures, some animals attack en masse. Also, it’s quite atmospheric for a vampire elder to overwhelm his victims with rodent or canine minions. If a swarm of hornets or horde of rats accosts the characters, use the rules that follow.

Instead of trying to determine what each and every member of a pack or swarm does, simply roll to see if the swarm itself harms a character. Narrate the results from there.

Each beast type is given a listing on the following chart. Roll the damage dice pool listed once per turn (difficulty 6)

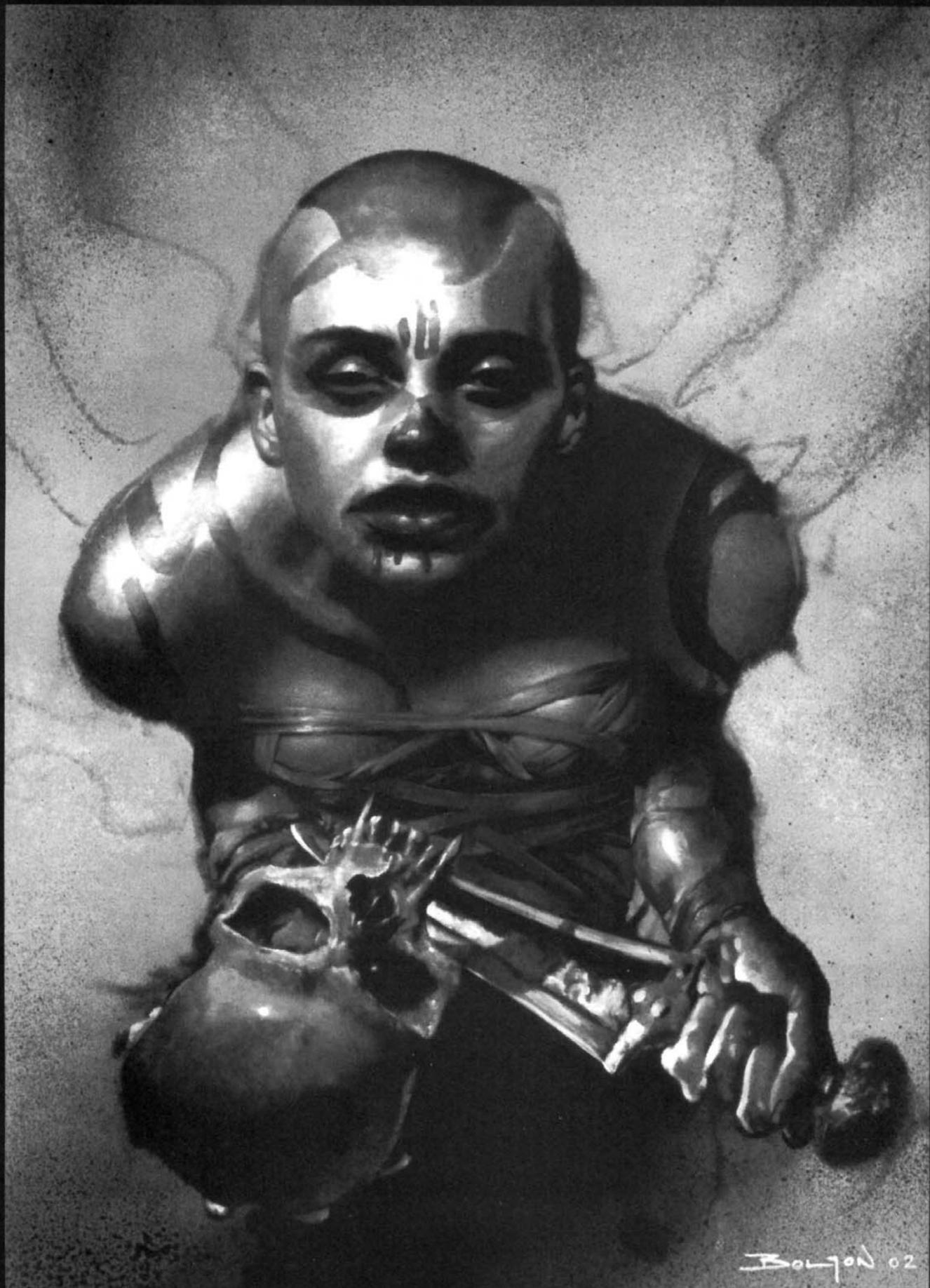
and allow the characters to try to dodge or soak the result. This damage is lethal, or possibly bashing in the case of small or weak creatures. Packs attack once per turn per target and act on the initiative given on the chart.

If a character dodges, he can move normally for the remainder of the turn. Otherwise, his attackers slow him down to half his usual movement. If they score more than three health levels worth of damage in one turn (after the target soaks), or if the player botches an appropriate roll, the character is knocked down and overrun. He can move only one or two yards per turn, and the swarm’s damage difficulty falls to 5. Efforts to get back up and continue moving have higher than normal difficulties (typically difficulty 7 or 8).

The health levels listed reflect the amount of damage it takes to disperse a pack or swarm. An additional two health levels destroy the attackers completely. Arrows and small melee weapons (knives, claws, bare hands) inflict a single health level per strike, no matter how many attack or damage successes are rolled (that is, the strike hits only one creature). Large melee weapons (swords, staves, boards) do normal damage (each damage success rolled eliminates one health level of the swarm as a whole), as do large-area attacks (Greek fire, frost storms, gusts of wind). Swarms and packs don’t soak.

Depending on the size of the pack, two or more characters might be affected by it and can attack it in return. Anyone who helps an overrun character can be attacked as well. A human can outrun some packs or swarms (those consisting of rats or bugs), but can’t hope to outrun others (those consisting of hyenas or birds).

Animal	Damage	Health Levels	Initiative
Small bugs	1	5	2
Large bugs	2	7	3
Flying bugs	2	5	4
Birds, bats	4	9	5
Rats	3	7	3
Large rats (one or more feet long)	4	9	3
Feral cats	4	6	6
Wild dogs	6	15	4



BOLTON 02

Constancia stared down the Well of Bones

in the center of the Temple at Erciyes. She had looked into this deepest point of the temple complex many times before, but never with ease. The osseous remains of whole nations of the dead lined the temple room's walls and the rim of the deep shaft at its center. In that well swirled a misty darkness that hid the secrets of the dead, and to them she came with an offering of two cups.

"All that is dead carries the echoes of its life," she whispered in the Greek of her own breathing days and poured out the cup in her left hand. Fine gray ash dropped into the mists, scattering into a smoky gray cloud not unlike that from a funeral pyre.

"All that lives hears the call of its death," she continued the incantation and poured from the cup in her right hand. Red and heavy, the fresh blood ran in a dark stream into the mists. She continued, as the black-robed monks began a low chant.

"We, who stand on the threshold of the grave, frozen in the moment between life and death, seek these echoes and callings for guidance. We call to the remains of the dead and the cries of the dying to answer us."

A clattering resounded through the chamber, as the bones answered their priestess' call and shuddered in remembrance of life. The door in the grand archway at the eastern-most point of the chamber opened, and from it stepped the sacrifice. Young and swarthy-skinned, the boy's beauty was almost painful to behold. He did not look around, but instead strode forward, his eyes empty save for the power that had called him forward.

When he stopped at the edge of the well, Constancia looked at him anew. "No thrall can feed the well. Free yourself."

The child's eyes lost their cool glaze, and panic rose in his expression. He glanced left and right, as if seeing this elaborate tomb for the first time. The monks grabbed at him with unliving strength and pushed. For an eternal, sweet second he hung suspended at the edge of the well. Then, with a scream he plunged into the roiling shroud of mist below.

There was no sound of hitting bottom, for the Well of Bones had no bottom save the stygian depths. As Constancia looked down, however, the black mists gave up the secrets of the dead. Echoes reverberated and the course of time sundered for the briefest of moments.

She saw the times to come, and they were dark indeed.

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Wataah
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Major Conflict Zones



Obertus
Monasteries

KRAKOW

VIENNA
Tzimisce
Voivodate

BUDA-PEST

THESSALONICA

CONSTANTINOPLE

ANTIOCH

Outremer

TYRE

ACRE

JERUSALEM

ALEXANDRIA

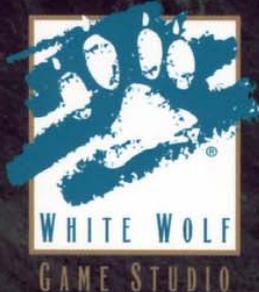
CAIRO

HOTZ

I will make my own fate in lands east of Nod
And establish my kingdom in exile.
I will set my children on golden thrones
And we will rule over Seth's brood together.
For surely it is better to rule in the darkness
Than to humble myself falsely in the light.
-Caine, in the third Erciyes Fragment, "Temptations"



Dark Ages

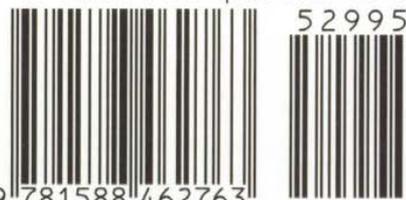


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