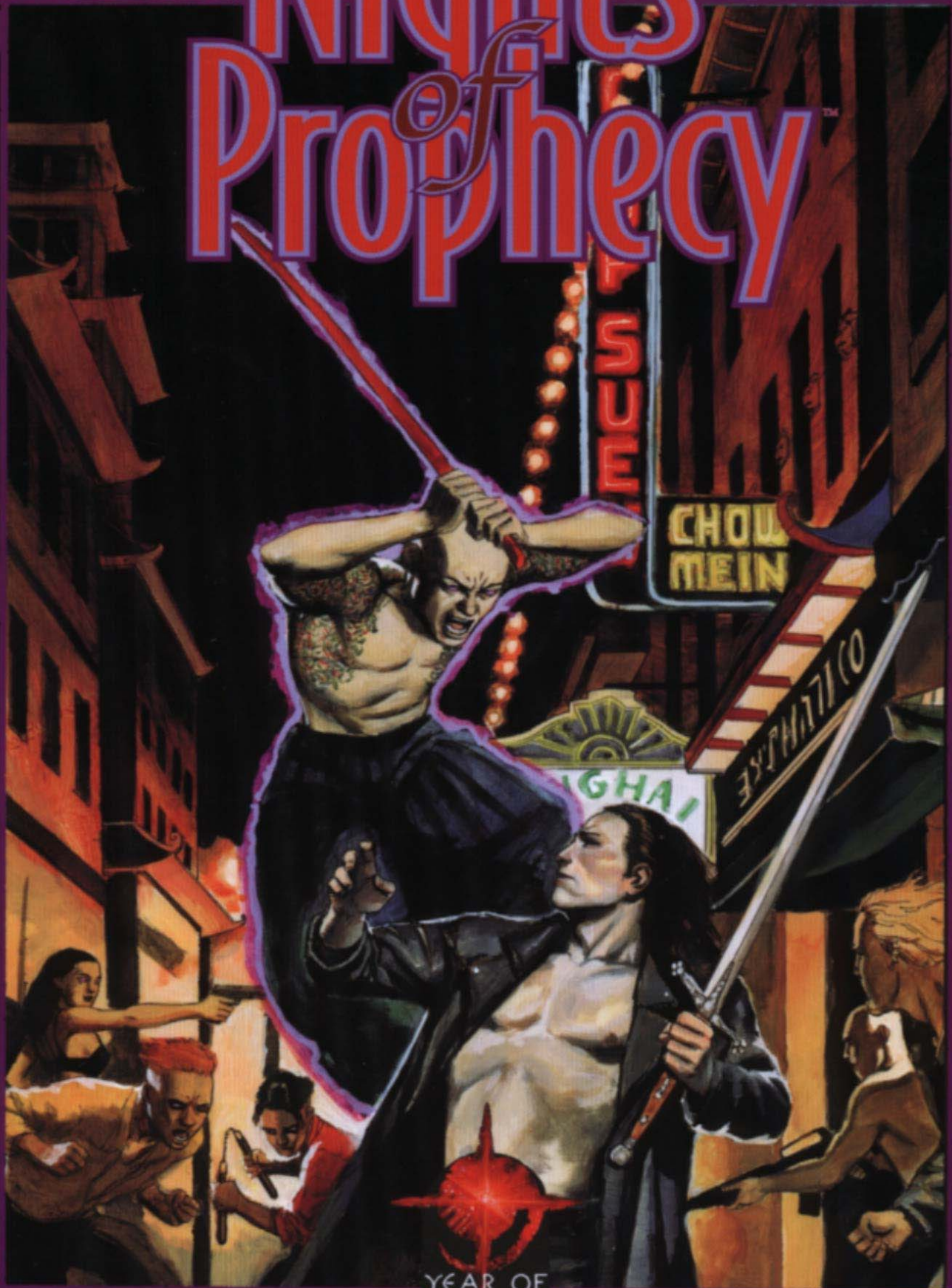


Nights of Prophecy



YEAR OF
REVELATIONS

A storytelling and setting update for vampire: the masquerade®



Nights Prophecy™



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INTRODUCTION

The process of reading is not a half-sleep, but, in highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; the reader must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay — the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work.

— Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas"

Welcome to **Nights of Prophecy**, a collection of stories for **Vampire: the Masquerade**. Each scenario involves the imminent fulfillment of the fearsome prophecy of Gehenna, when the Ancients awaken to destroy the world and consume their childer. Each story also promises a revelation about the World of Darkness — though the players' characters might not see the promise fulfilled.

- **Chapter One: The Return of the Succubus Club** reveals a new institution in the World of Darkness. The original Succubus Club, the most notorious nightspot for the Damned, suffered destruction at Lupine claws a few years ago. Now it's back as a traveling warehouse party. This gypsy spectacle is more than just a place for trendy Kindred to see and be seen. *Everyone* comes to the Succubus Club — Camarilla, Sabbat, anarch and independent. To the strobe lights' glare and the mesmerizing beat, characters may discover startling unity with supposed enemies. But the Succubus Club has secrets of its own.

- **Chapter Two: Walking After Midnight** introduces American Kindred to the growing danger of the Cathayan vampires. The anarchists of San Francisco find themselves on the front lines as the Kuei-jin launch a bitter strike into California.

- **Chapter Three: To Grandmother's House** hints at the full power of the Ancients. The Nosferatu elders believe that their Antediluvian progenitor wants them destroyed. To this end, it created a cadre of nigh-omnipotent horrors, the Nictuku. After centuries of hiding, the Nictuku declare themselves — they are not what anyone expected.

- **Chapter Four: The Hunters Hunted** introduces characters to the new hunters who stalk the night. The Damned now face a Reckoning amid the glittering madness of Las Vegas. The meeting leaves the characters with many questions but few answers — assuming they survive.

- **Chapter Five: House of Lies** brings the characters to the Sabbat's northern stronghold of Montreal. In the City of Black Miracles, the characters pursue a newly discovered fragment of the *Book of Nod*. They are not the only interested parties, though. As they negotiate webs of treachery and deceit, the characters may learn more about the Jihad than they really wanted to know.

These stories are all independent. Although a few Storyteller characters may appear in more than one, we do not expect a troupe to play through them all. These stories are

“snapshots” of major events in the World of Darkness, offering characters a chance to shape the future. These events take place around the world and have no particular connection to each other. Frankly, it strains credulity to suppose that the same coterie of characters finds themselves at the heart of each event!

Players should not read this book if they expect they might play through these scenarios. Why spoil the surprises?

A NOTE ON CHARACTERS

Each story involves a number of important Storyteller characters. We present these in an abbreviated format: name, clan, generation, sire, Nature, Demcanor, date of Embrace, apparent age and a brief description of the character's history, personality, appearance and goals within the scenario.

Attributes, Abilities and other numerical Traits are not given. This saves space, leaving more room for story material. Also, Storytellers may take it as a reminder that not all interactions between characters are of the lethal variety. The players' coterie should interact with many of these characters socially; challenge the players' roleplaying skills, not their dice-rolling skills.

Nevertheless, characters do get into fights. Before play, the Storyteller should inspect each character and assign whatever Traits seem appropriate. Different Storytellers run different chronicles. A character whose Traits make her a deadly foe to a coterie of neonates may be a trivial threat to an elder. If an adversary is described as “nigh-invulnerable,” the Storyteller should give the character enough Stamina and Fortitude to easily resist the coterie's best attacks... or ignore Traits and describe the adversary striding forward through a hail of gunfire and shrugging off the characters' Disciplines.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Storytellers can use these scenarios in a variety of ways.

The easiest way is to run them as stand-alone stories with no connection to a larger chronicle. This removes most of the problems of involving pre-existing characters. Storytellers might want to run a one-shot game just as a change of pace.

Such scenarios are especially useful when you don't really know who will show up to play. If your old high school buddy visits and wants to play *Vampire*, but your chronicle cannot easily accommodate a “guest star,” you can play one of these scenarios instead. Conversely, if some regular players cannot show up for a game, you can use one of these stories as a fill-in.

Integrating these scenarios into your chronicle takes a bit more work, though the results are more rewarding. Your players will surely enjoy a chance to have their characters meddle in seminal events in the World of Darkness. Although the new Succubus Club can come to wherever you set your chronicle, the other scenarios have definite settings — San Francisco, Las Vegas, and so on. What if your chronicle is not set in one of those cities?

As Storyteller, you can invent some excuse for the characters to travel. This works best if the rationale grows out of the characters' motivations and the ongoing plot. If the prince suddenly orders the coterie to retrieve a package from Las Vegas, the players will smell a setup. On the other hand, the next time the coterie needs to leave town in a hurry (it's bound to occur), let them hop a freight train that just *happens* to take them to Las Vegas, straight to a confrontation with the new hunters in town. Let the antiquarian of the coterie learn about a rare Cainite artifact in a museum in Russia. An undead punk band, of course, goes wherever their agent finds a gig. Examine the characters for hooks to draw them logically and naturally to the setting of the scenario.

Then again, who says you're bound to a particular setting? If you set your chronicle in Seattle, have the Cathayans invade Seattle instead of San Francisco. If Montreal is too inconvenient for your chronicle, move the characters and events of *House of Lies* to some other city instead. In *your* World of Darkness, maybe Milan or Denver is the Sabbat's City of Black Miracles. If you can't justify the characters going to Russia for a meeting with Baba Yaga, invent your own Nosferatu Methuselah who operates somewhere in their home area.

Regardless, the Storyteller must still flesh out the bare bones of the plot into a real story. You must decide how the Storyteller characters react to the actions of the players' coterie — especially when the players do something completely unexpected (as players always do, God bless 'em). Compared to the spontaneous creativity your players demand of you, giving a scenario a setting transplant is a piece of cake.

FUN WITH METAPLOT

All five of these stories fit into a “metaplot” for the World of Darkness in general, and *Vampire: The Masquerade* in particular. A metaplot is an overarching story line of the great changes in the world. The metaplot is the big picture — the major events that affect Kindred everywhere. Each scenario grows out of something larger than itself. They have roots in the past and consequences in the future. On the broadest scale, each story depicts one incident in the count-down to Gehenna.

WHY HAVE A METAPLOT?

This is really two questions. Why have a metaplot in a chronicle? And why include metaplot in supplements?

The first one's easy. The events that characters take part in become more interesting and meaningful if they have a context. Even if a chronicle takes place entirely in one city, the outside world still exists. Wars, economic trends, elections, scandals, conflicts of religion and ideology — all these things shake up life (and unlife) in a city. A metaplot reminds players that the world does not sit still, passively waiting for

their characters to do something. Nor does the world unquestioningly accept their actions without imposing some sort of consequence.

Broad, external events can even suggest new stories. Even vampires are affected by current events. Suppose a CEO a thousand miles away moves the city's largest industry to Mexico, sending local unemployment rates skyrocketing. Other businesses close in a chain reaction of bankruptcy, including some owned by the city's prince. Suddenly the prince has much less influence over the mortal world. An ambitious primogen sees this as an opportunity for a coup. The city's Kindred fight a small civil war... all because someone a thousand miles away wanted cheap Mexican labor. The local plot — a Kindred civil war — gains context from a metaplot — industrial flight to the Third World.

Presenting an ongoing metaplot through game supplements is less easy to justify. How dare we impose our metaplot on the world's Storytellers?

Quite simply, we don't. It's impossible. Storytellers who don't want to use a published metaplot, don't — and we don't want them to. At most, a metaplot you can build your chronicle around serves the same function as a gallery of characters (such as *Children of the Night*) or settings (the *by Night* series). They are conveniences to help Storytellers build their chronicles. We hope that even the most resolute do-it-yourself Storyteller finds some new idea, character, plot line or storytelling hint she can adapt to her chronicle... just as we know that even the most resolute by-the-book Storyteller must inevitably place her own stamp on a published scenario in the course of play.

CUSTOMIZING THE METAPLOT

Players and Storytellers should certainly not regard any aspect of the Vampire metaplots as graven in stone. They are meant to be twisted and rewritten. We know you'll do it anyway. If some aspect of a published metaplot clashes with your chronicle, change the metaplot. Know-it-all players are warned not to take what they read in a sourcebook as gospel for their Storyteller's chronicle!

For one thing, Storytellers do not need to accept every metaplot. If all the metaplots were tightly interconnected, this could be awkward. But what happens in Russia does not really have much to do with what happens in Las Vegas. The secession of the Gangrel has no connection to the Assamites' breaking the curse on their clan, unless the Storyteller wants it to, of course. You can throw out one metaplot without greatly affecting the others.

ALTERNATE EXPLANATIONS

Storytellers can further customize metaplots by changing the reasons why things happen. The "official word" may say that event A happened because of cause B. Feel free to think up alternate explanation C, leaving the "official word" as a rumor or a hoax (which is often what we do when we write

these books). While you're at it, plant rumors for false explanations D, E and F. Don't tell the players which is real. Let them feel what it's like to exist in a world of secrets and lies — the World of Darkness.

ALTERNATE PERSONS

Big events might happen to different people than in the "official" version. Instead of the Gangrel abandoning the Camarilla, make it the Brujah, Nosferatu or some other clan, if you feel that works better for your chronicle. Instead of the Ravnos, destroy the Setites or the Giovanni... or for a real surprise, the Ventrue or the Lasombra. If having the archbishop of Milan defect to the Camarilla is too remote for your chronicle, make it the archbishop of some closer city instead. Have fun. Go wild. It's your game.

ALTERNATE PLACE AND TIME

Storytellers can also change where and when the metaplot takes place. Some developments, such as the Malkavians' mass adoption of Dementation, have no specific location. If you really want to build a story around some event, but the "official time line" says it already happened, throw out the time line. As long as the consequences of the event remain in sequence, the date does not matter. For instance, telling a story about the Assamites breaking the ban on diablerie becomes tricky if you have already established that all Assamites can drink the blood of other vampires.

CASE STUDY: WHO FREED THE ASSAMITES?

Children of the Night resolved part of the mystery of how the Assamites broke the ban on diablerie imposed by the Tremere so long ago. The Methuselah ur-Shulgi, assumed to be the child and viceroy of the Assamite Antediluvian itself, recently awoke and used its matchless knowledge of blood sorcery — greater even than that of the Tremere Inner Council — to break the curse. That's the official story.

Don't like it? Here are three very different alternatives, based on the premise that even ur-Shulgi cannot out-magic the top Tremere (assuming you want to use the Methuselah in your chronicle at all).

- **The Malkavians:** Some say that the oldest and most powerful Malkavians can impose their madness on matter, not just upon minds. They see the world in a different way, and once in a while the world gives up and goes along. Certainly, the clan includes some frighteningly skilled sorcerers (such as the Methuselah Louhi, who for millennia has sought a ritual to blot out the sun). Malkavians are notorious for trying to shatter boundaries and restrictions. God only knows *how* the Malkavians could break the Tremere curse, but it's not hard to see why. The rampaging Assassin Clan throws all the other clans into chaos. It also tests the Assamites themselves, forcing them to confront the contradictions in their ideology and the ways of the old ones.

- **The Inceptor:** Assamite sorcerers learn that "thin-blooded" vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations may

spontaneously generate new Disciplines. After long effort, they discover a 14th-generation Caitiff who has a very odd Discipline: He can manipulate the inherited traits of the Curse of Caine. For instance, he can make Disciplines that were once easy more difficult to learn, or vice-versa (in game terms, he can change which are Clan Disciplines). He can also change a vampire's clan weakness.

The Assamites kidnap the Caitiff, take him to the sleeping body of Haqim and tell him to do his mojo. The Tremere made their curse impossible to break through Thaumaturgy... but the Caitiff does not use Thaumaturgy. The Caitiff lifts the curse on Haqim, and the Antediluvian's own inconceivable power sends the change cascading to all his descendants. Bye-bye curse (and bye-bye Caitiff, a few minutes later).

• **The Least Likely Suspect:** Only eight vampires knew the secret of the Tremere curse: the seven councilors and Tremere himself. Tremere has not been himself lately (see below); he now wants to destroy the clan he founded. Who better to do it than the most skilled and devoted diablerists in the World of Darkness, who just happen to hate Clan Tremere? For the thaumaturge who laid the curse, lifting it was easy. He did it from the other side of the world.

In this story, the Assamites themselves do not know who ended the curse. They credit their own sorcerers. The viziers play along while trying to discover what really happened.

USING THE METAPLOT

How do you, the Storyteller, make the metaplot *matter* to your chronicle? After all, if these big events do not affect the player's characters, why should they care?

Sometimes it's possible to maneuver the story so that the player's characters become involved at the center of an event. This is great if you can do it — but this is rarely practical. Placing a coterie to witness crucial moments in Iraq or Bangladesh becomes difficult in a chronicle that hitherto has restricted itself to the greater Chicago area.

Instead, characters see the consequences and side effects. Just as the metaplot gives context to events in a chronicle, your chronicle can give meaning to the events of a metaplot. As the Storyteller, you figure out the consequences of metaplot events. How do they affect those with whom the characters interact?

Work out how important groups react. Who knows about the event? How much do they really understand? What do the movers and shakers of the Camarilla think about what happened? The Sabbat — how do they respond? Who tries to exploit the situation? It doesn't matter what the situation is; someone, somewhere, thinks he can turn it to his advantage. Even if a metaplot does not touch the players' characters directly, the reactions of other characters might affect them in personal ways.

CASE STUDY: AFTERMATH OF THE WEEK OF NIGHTMARES

As a study in the local effects of remote events, consider the Week of Nightmares — a week of terrifying dreams and portents that climaxed with the Ravnos clan's self-destruction in a cannibal frenzy (see *The Time of Thin Blood* for details). Very few vampires actually *know* about the Ravnos Antediluvian's awakening, or how its apocalyptic Final Death brought madness to all its descendants... but they can guess.

The Ravnos themselves suffered the most. The majority met Final Death, either at the fangs of their clanmates or from other vampires anxious to protect the Masquerade. The Kindred have seen the destruction of clans before — but never so swiftly or strangely. Other vampires wonder if madness will strike the Ravnos again. Is it contagious? Who's next? Remaining Ravnos may find themselves regarded as plague dogs by frightened vampires, marked for Final Death or expulsion. Even in cities with no Ravnos, the tale of their destruction sparks hysteria.

The Week of Nightmares marginally helped the Sabbat. Many vampires routinely invoke the mythical Antediluvians to explain anything that frightens them. For once, they are right. Such vampires now see an immediate threat from their ancient forebears. The Camarilla's dismissal of the Antediluvians seems foolish at best. On the other hand, Sabbat tactics make the sect look like children picking a fight with a tank corps. The Sabbat's best propaganda is the relatively high proportion of Ravnos *antitribu* who survived the Week of Nightmares, thanks to the support of (and forcible restraint by) their cosmopolitan packs.

The Camarilla responded to the Week of Nightmares with characteristic denials and calls for greater discipline and obedience. For a change, though, the elders have become the target of reciprocal demands from the rank and file. Neonates and ancillae demand that the princes, justicars and the Inner Circle itself must *do something*. Defeat the Sabbat. Make peace with the Sabbat. More power to princes. Less power to princes. *Do something*.

Leaders of both sects vow not to go down without a fight. Both sects sponsor secret expeditions and research programs to locate the Antediluvians and their most ancient Methuselah childer, hoping somehow to destroy them before they awaken. Such programs meet with interference, however, from some of the more lunatic Gehenna cults, who want to rouse their monstrous "gods" prematurely. Those who still do not realize the full power of the Antediluvians build impregnable havens in hopes of riding out the coming holocaust.

Any of these responses could involve your troupe's characters. A prince could deputize a trusted coterie as secret agents to hunt a Gehenna cult. An archbishop could ask a pack to seek a powerful Methuselah's tomb. A surviving Ravnos might beg an anarch gang for refuge.



Finally, let's not forget the mortals. Despite a frenzy of concealment, a few mortals know that *something* epic and awful happened. They might try to learn more — and act on what they learn. From a psychiatrist who finds unexpected coherence in his patients' ravings to the intelligence agencies of major governments, the Kindred face a new wave of hunters. The Week of Nightmares has energized older groups like the Society of Leopold and the Arcanum, too. They knew that vampires endangered individuals. Now, however, they see a threat to the survival of humanity itself. New or old, they pursue their prey with zeal not seen since the Inquisition. Woe betide any vampire they find.

CASE STUDIES: WHAT'S NEW IN THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

In the last four years, the World of Darkness has undergone many drastic changes. Political alliances have shifted. Cities changed hands from one sect to another. Whole clans metamorphosed; one nearly killed itself off, while new lineages emerge from hiding as thin-blooded vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations display uncanny powers. Evidence of an actual, no kidding, end-of-the-world Gehenna steadily accumulates. Is it any wonder that many vampires worry about the future?

Although each scenario in *Nights of Prophecy* deals with one aspect or event in the Vampire metaplot, publishing a scenario for every major development would be cumbersome. Instead, here is an update on some ongoing conflicts in the World of Darkness: the rampaging Assamite clan; the Camarilla-Sabbat war, featuring the Camarilla's reconquest of New York; and the Anarch Free State's struggle against the Cathayans after the events in *Walking After Midnight*. A special report reveals who destroyed the Tremere *antitribu*. Storytellers receive general advice about using these events in their chronicles. This section concludes with glimpses into a few mysteries yet to be fully revealed.

THE CRAVING

"Submission to God, submission to Haqim — how can you see any difference?"

—Fatima al-Faqadi, Assamite Hand of Vengeance

"Don't think me ungracious," Prince Cyprian said, "But would you mind explaining yourself?" Seven others stood on the roof of his mansion: his three primogen Eugene, Harley and Mackelroy, two of Cyprian's ghouls, Firdaus Soroushani and a torpid second Assamite. The two ghouls chained the slack prisoner to the chimney.

Soroushani bowed slightly. "Not at all, sir. I came to your city in pursuit of one who has broken the laws of my clan, and of your Camarilla. I do not dispute your right to judge him and condemn him to the sun."

"Your laws?" Mackelroy asked.

Soroushani stiffened at the scorn in her voice, but he spoke calmly.

"We do have laws, Brujah. We observed them faithfully for five centuries, even if some of us forget them now — to our disgrace." The captive Assamite stirred in his chains and opened his eyes. Soroushani turned to face him.

"The Quran forbids man to drown his wits in wine." He slapped the captive. "Shall he then become a slave to other intoxication? Perhaps you know of the curse once placed upon my line, so that we could not drink the blood of other vampires. Now I regret the breaking of that curse." He slapped the other Assamite again. "We taste vitae and feel a raging thirst forever after, like a — what is the phrase? — like a junkie for a fix." A third slap; the captive was now fully awake. "We forget God, we forget tradition, we forget honor. We forget that we are not beasts and behave like gluttonous swine!

"I regret that Zal has slain your subjects to feed his craving. May I beg one favor, prince, in return for my help in stopping him?"

"Perhaps," Cyprian replied, carefully noncommittal. Harley and Mackelroy already stood in the roof doorway; the east was uncomfortably bright.

"Let me stay with Zal as he meets the sun." From his pocket, Soroushani pulled a necklace bearing a square of agate carved in Arabic script and fastened it around his neck.

"But you'll— ah, some sort of talisman?" Cyprian asked.

"The pain will still be intense," Soroushani said, "But no matter what his disgrace, I must remain with my son when he dies."

"You mean your childe?" Eugene cut in. Even as he spoke, however, the Assamite's profile caught his eye and the Toreador knew it was not so.

"I mean my son," Soroushani replied bleakly. His reserve broke and he clasped the other Assamite to him. "My son Zal, who became mighty among the rafiq to please me." Red tears ran down Soroushani's cheeks. Zal strained to lick at them.

Eugene stripped off his overcoat and placed it over the Assamite's shoulders. "Here," he said. "It'll shield you a little more."

As he and the others filed through the doorway, Soroushani called out, "Thank you — Eugene. Thank you all. I hope you will speak well of me in your conclaves. All of you." Cyprian, the last to leave the rooftop, shut the door behind him but left it unlocked.

An hour later, only Eugene and Cyprian remained awake. Soroushani had not come down. One of the prince's ghouls retrieved the manacles, and swept up. He reported only one pile of ashes by the chimney.

"Damn," Cyprian said. "I'd hoped the necklace — and your blasted coat — wouldn't be enough. You realize that every one of us owes him a life boon for stopping that maniac?"

"Zal," Eugene said.

"Whatever," Cyprian snapped. "Every goddamn one of us, and he knows it." He guided Eugene to the guestrooms in the

basement, to join the other primogen. "He'll collect at a conclave. God only knows what he'll want."

THE ASSAMITE SCHISM

For centuries, Western vampires thought they understood the Assamites. During the Long Night, the Assamites were terrifying Saracen killers from the mysterious East, the cannibalistic enemies of Christendom. After the Tremere curse, the clan's bloodthirsty reputation was tempered with an uncompromising honor: Whether bounty hunter, assassin or bodyguard, an Assamite kept his word unto Final Death. Since the Assassins seemed to leave their Middle Eastern homelands only on business and seldom socialized with other vampires, no one really knew what Assamites did besides fighting and killing. With the end of the curse, public opinion returned to the medieval view. If the Camarilla did not have so many other problems, it would surely declare a war of extermination. Having forsaken honor in their lust for diablerie, the Assamites stand revealed as pure menace — every stereotype of the fanatical Middle Eastern terrorist made undead flesh.

At least, the first wave of Assassins fit that stereotype. Not every Assamite, however, has abandoned their code of martial honor to pursue low-generation vitae... and they make sure that other vampires know it. Westerners see a small but growing stream of newcomers from the East who turn old ideas on their heads. Assamite sorcerers offering their services in competition with the Tremere? Assamite courtier-warriors, as proficient with poetry as a blade? Assamites priests of ancient, long-forgotten gods? Assamite missionaries, preaching repentance and submission to God as the only escape from Gehenna? Assamite pacifists?

The Assamite clan seems to have a diversity that Westerners never suspected, rather like the lands from whence they come. Kindred who gather reports of these "new Assamites" see evidence of great turmoil building in the clan. Assamites generally take clan identity more seriously than most Kindred — so they take their differences seriously, too. The Tremere curse held the clan together through shared resentment and the trade in vitae. With that external pressure removed, they can no longer paper over their disagreements.

Religion runs like a great chasm through the Assamite clan. Most Assamites come from Muslim countries, with minorities of other "peoples of the book": Zoroastrians, Jews, Eastern Christians, Baha'i and related sects. The most ancient Methuselahs of the clan, however, remember times before Moses. The Assamites have tried to compromise between mortal religion and the Path of Blood, casting their Antediluvian as a wrathful prophet in the line reaching from Adam to Mohammed.

As the clan's true elders awaken, however, their deputies realize that their grandsires are a bunch of "devilish heathens." The Methuselah ur-Shulgi, Childe of Haqim and

returned Master of Alamut, is not a servant of Allah! Many Assamites readily accept diablerie and war against all other vampires as their only creed. Like so many mortals, they mouth whatever dogma serves their purpose while their true gods remain Obedience, Ambition and Appetite. As the Methuselahs insist that the clan return to the old gods and the pure form of the Path of Blood, however, increasing numbers of younger Assamites bridle at such "paganism." They can accept Haqim as their prophet, but not as their god. Certainly they do not bow before idols of Nergal and Inanna.

The Assamites also differ in their response to the end of the Tremere curse. The followers of the Path of Blood view diablerie as a sacrament. They believe that the incredible rush of consuming another vampire's soul is the touch of Haqim's divine grace. Other Assamites, trained for decades or centuries in rigid honor, see the lust for vitae for what it is: an addiction. The loss of self-control horrifies them.

Both sides can justify their position through faith. Exceptionally devout Muslims argue that Islam's prohibition against drunkenness forbids *all* forms of intoxication, including diablerie. More moderate Assamites make an exception for the *kalif* drug used by the clan's blood-sorcerers. These Assamites want the clan to continue collecting vitae for generation-reducing potions. A few Assamites feel such disgust for their addiction that they see monastic seclusion from other vampires as the only escape from temptation. They renounce even artificial diablerie.

Path of Blood devotees retort that the addictive pleasure of vitae is God's way of encouraging them to diablerize the wicked vampires of other clans.

Another factor has encouraged Assamites to leave their old homelands. Many countries in the Western world now have sizable populations of Middle Eastern or Muslim immigrants. The United States, for instance, has 5.1 million Muslims, both immigrants and converts. Assamites who want to leave their elders' "blasphemy" can find receptive communities abroad. Conversely, some Assamites who want to visit their mortal relatives must travel.

This Assamite diaspora avoided attention until now; the clan's reputation encouraged concealment. Increasing numbers of Assamites find excuses to travel, however, as a way to avoid the clan's doctrinal conflicts. The diaspora grows and therefore becomes more noticeable. As other vampires become more angry and frightened about Assamite attacks, the emigrant Assamites find more incentive to downplay their reputation as fanatical killers.

As rank-and-file Assamites see increased strife between the vitae-addicted Path of Blood elders and the human religionist leaders, many fear an outright civil war within the clan. Ur-Shulgi has already purged some clan elders, including the previous Master of Alamut. The more thoughtful religionists realize that they cannot defeat ur-Shulgi's coterie of ancient vampires. Some Assamites now see their diaspora



as a last-ditch escape route; they renounce their clan as the Unconquered did five centuries before. They have not established Assamite cells in Western cities as part of some villainous campaign of terror and murder — they want a new haven among Kindred who once proved they could humble Alamut itself.

Finally, what happened to the Assamite *antitribu*? On the one hand, their chief quarrel with their parent clan no longer exists. The Tremere curse is broken. On the other hand, the Angels of Caine claim that Haqim is just another nefarious Antediluvian whom they must destroy. Certainly they have no reason to sympathize with the religionist faction. Perhaps the *antitribu* Methuselaha who guide the Black Hand will change their doctrine and return to Alamut's fold, or perhaps their doctrinal differences and pack bonds will preserve the Angels of Caine as a third force, at war with both.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

Assamite characters cannot easily avoid the growing schism in the clan. Storytellers can place them in situations where they must choose between their faith and obedience to Alamut (or their leaders in the Sabbat). Meeting other Assamites who have already chosen sides forces characters to examine and define their own beliefs and loyalties. Characters must also decide how to deal with the addictive power of vitae. The Path of Blood, to which many Assamites aspire if they don't already observe it, tells them to glory in their bloodlust — but after an Assamite has lost control a few times and perhaps attacked an ally or failed in a mission to feed his addiction, he might question this view.

Other characters can no longer assume they know what motivates an Assamite. The "Assassin" who just came to town might not be a blood-mad diablerist or contract killer. Even if a *falaqi* of Assamites attacks a city's prince or archbishop, are they diablerists carrying out Haqim's Jihad, or conducting an independent power play? A coterie of players' characters might find themselves opposed or allied to either side — without knowing which is which. Religious Assamites might pose as loyal servants of Alamut, while Path of Blood fanatics might try to gain the confidence of other Kindred, the better to destroy them.

STORY SEEDS

- A series of murders of Kindred and kine suggest Assamite involvement. Perhaps one murder was improbably silent, resulting in a rampant rumor mill. The players' characters (investigating the murders, or by chance) discover an Assamite in town — but the Assassin claims that he did not commit the murders and has a moderately convincing alibi for at least one. Is he lying, or is there another Assamite in town? Could the murderer be a vampire of another clan, or even a mortal? Even if the Assamite was framed, or it's all a coincidence, the Assamite still might have some sinister agenda.

- An Assamite vizier sets up shop as a sorcerer for hire, charging both money and boons in return for her services.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The Quran dictates five absolute duties for all Muslims:

- To make the profession of faith in Allah as the only god;
- To pray facing Mecca five times a day;
- To give alms;
- To fast during the month of Ramadan;
- To make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's life.

Islam also disapproves of wine and pork. The commandment to *jihad* — holy war — is often interpreted as simply enjoining the faithful to spread the true doctrine.

Muslim vampires do not find these duties more onerous in undeath than in life (granting certain small concessions to their nocturnal existence, such as praying five times per night instead of during the day). Many Muslim vampires regard themselves as fully orthodox and, as such, not intrinsically Damned. This hinders the Sabbat, the Assamite Methuselaha and others who seek to convert Muslim Kindred to other ideologies. They can't give any clear, simple reason why Islam no longer applies to the undead.

VITAE ANONYMOUS

The World of Darkness has no 12-step program for Assamites who find vitae addiction intolerable. At the Storyteller's option, however, addicted characters can expend Willpower to resist their bloodlust for a short time. Eventually, the Storyteller may rule that the character is no longer addicted (just as a character may eventually cure herself of a derangement). This only means, however, that the character no longer must make frenzy checks every time she encounters vitae; the Storyteller should emphasize that the character still feels the urge to gorge herself. She is not cured, merely in recovery, and can become dependent again. Like alcoholics, Assamites who retain self-control cope one night at a time... and as Alcoholics Anonymous recommends, many seek help through religion.

She helps one character out of a tight spot, so he owes her a major boon. Unfortunately, another character owes a major boon to a Tremere who hates the new competition. Both the Tremere and the vizier cash in their boons by asking for help in disgracing or destroying their rival. The closer the relationship between the two players' characters, the better this works. Alternatively, a character may find *himself* needing to fulfill a boon held by the Assamite and the Tremere....

- An Assamite who has rebelled against Alamut seeks sanctuary and begs the characters' pack or coterie to protect him from the assassin deputized to kill him. If they succeed, he owes them each a life boon — but the Assamite has taken a vow of nonviolence. He helps them in any way *except* combat.

SABBAT PROBLEMS

Sword of Caine? Two swords make scissors. Cut the paper tiger. But there's a rock out there somewhere. Rock — paper — scissors... rock — paper — scissors....

— Playboy, Malkavian *antitribu*

The Sabbat presses against the Camarilla on all fronts, and the Camarilla has suffered grave blows. Nevertheless, not everything goes the Sabbat's way. The Sword of Caine has its own problems.

LATIN BLOOD

The Sabbat may gain ground in North America, but South America is a different story. From Buenos Aires to Caracas, from Lima to Rio de Janeiro, the Sabbat hunts rumors. Fearing what it might learn, but fearing ignorance more, the sect pursues stories of blood-drinking man-spiders, of bat-winged things flapping out of the jungle, of lost temples and bloody, ancient sorcery. They wonder what clan spawned the pair of Methuselaha who drove the Sabbat and Camarilla alike from Honduras, and what Kindred may have haunted the Incan and Aztec nights.

Someone has declared war on the Sabbat of South America. Someone *powerful*. Someone the Sabbat cannot identify, but who can declare their enmity with unforgettable horror....

In March of 1999, the archbishop of Lima sent a messenger to the Sabbat of Callao, to ask why they had not responded to his letters or answered the phone for the last six months. The messenger found the Callao pack's haven splashed with dried blood and ashes. She also found a box, addressed to the archbishop. The box held the severed head of the Callao pack's ductus — still animate and speaking, but hopelessly mad. Several nights later, as a number of enthralled Tzimisce researchers poked and prodded the head, it finally spoke an intelligible sentence: "Leave Peru or you all die." Then the head crumbled to dust. A week later, a Cainite disappeared from Lima — the first of several.

Other archbishops and cardinals received similar warnings in the next few months. Half the Lasombra scheming for influence in Bogotá met Final Death with stakes in their hearts; the others took the message and left. A daytime fire consumed the haven of the bishop of León in Nicaragua. The Tzimisce Archbishop of Guatemala who calls himself Xipe Totec has suffered losses among his scouting parties and ghouls for years. In November of 1999, an entire pack went berserk and attacked him. The archbishop survived; not so the rest of his pack. Xipe Totec only killed one member of the pack. The others burst into flames when they could fight no more, destroying two of their opponents as they burned. The berserker's corpse swiftly crumbled to dust, as usual for destroyed vampires, but not before Xipe Totec found that the traitorous vampire had no heart.

Whoever — or whatever — hunts the Sabbat, they are moving north.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFICULTIES

The Sabbat has some undeniable advantages in its war with the Camarilla. It has an overarching chain of command, from regent to pack ductus. In the Black Hand, it has a large cadre of soldiers. If military force alone could decide the shadow war between sects, the Sabbat would have won long ago. As the United States learned in Vietnam, however, one may win the battles but lose the war. In city after city along the North American East Coast, the Sabbat conquers the night... but can it hold what it conquers?

Whatever its faults, the Camarilla is fundamentally pragmatic. So many Kindred play by its rules because those rules protect them from each other. Princes survive by making themselves useful as arbiters, coordinators and (when necessary) enforcers. A city's Kindred may grouse about their prince, but in a crisis they often see the value of obeying. If a prince cannot earn that sort of respect, the primogen find a new prince.

Sabbat loyalty, on the other hand, rests on the Vaulderie, personal charisma and reputation. An archbishop or priscus has only as much authority as her strength, cunning and charisma can win her — and she has to win it over and over again. Even then, many Sabbat refuse to follow orders on principle, even if the orders make sense. Other Sabbat pursue mystical goals with little concern for politics or the good of the sect. As a result, an archbishop cannot simply order other Sabbat to deal with a Camarilla infiltration. The roving pack badasses say, "Do it yourself!" and roar off on their motorcycles to hunt Lupines in the wilderness; the Tzimisce scientist grumbles about taking time from his Metamorphosis research; the archbishop's second-in-command suggests that she's lost control and should step aside for new leadership.

Instead, the archbishop must *suggest* a course of action, and play upon the other vampires' motives. The archbishop mentions the Camarilla plot, but worries that the roving pack members aren't tough enough to deal with the Camarilla's minions ("The fuck you say! We'll rip out their hearts and eat 'em!") She begs the Tzimisce to lend his inhuman genius to the cause ("Yesss... And I could use some new lab animals anyway"). Finally she claps the ambitious bishop on the shoulder and says the cardinal surely appreciates his success at tracing the infiltration to its source.

Every Sabbat operation teeters on the brink of total chaos — such is the nature of their sect. Ambitious Sabbat usurp their leaders and assume titles they cannot satisfy. The sect has had three civil wars because some faction got in a snit or wanted too much power. Even the Black Hand, long a bastion of discipline and unity, shows signs of infighting among its leaders. No Black Hand member has heard from Seraph Izhim ur-Baal for months.

Loyalty? The Sabbat talks about loyalty so much because it has so little. The Camarilla's strategists are learning how to take advantage of the anarchy at the sect's heart. Camarilla elders have found that by sacrificing neonate couriers

carrying “secret messages” they can plant misinformation in a Sabbat community. A “secret treaty” between a prince and a bishop can provoke spasms of accusations and Monomacy. A rumor of a sleeping Methuselah can lure Sabbat war parties into traps or draw them away from a besieged city. The surest (but riskiest) way to end a Sabbat Crusade, however, is to assassinate its leader. Sabbat follow strength and reputation, not offices and titles. Without a powerful, famous vampire to unite them, Sabbat packs go their separate ways.

THE MORTAL WORLD

As a whole, the Sabbat scorns the mortal world. Many Sabbat employ mortal pawns, but they tend to break their tools. In contrast, the Camarilla’s jaded elders may kill their vessels without a thought, but they cultivate mortal institutions with precise care. They recognize that businesses, churches, government bureaucracies, newspapers and the like are sources of power, comfort, security and entertainment. Too many Sabbat simply take what they want — robbing a bank if they need money or stealing a car for transportation. Such behavior makes people and corporations flee to safer neighborhoods. As wealth and jobs depart, other institutions decay as well. Crime flourishes among the poor and desperate kine who remain in the Sabbat’s turf. Thus does the Sabbat destroy the life of cities as well as individuals.

The Camarilla has recently learned the full measure of the Sabbat’s imprudence. The Camarilla’s greatest victories

in recent nights all involved the use of mortal agencies. Five years ago, the Sabbat’s radical separation from the mortal world seemed like a strength. Sabbat packs had no Masquerade to uphold, no mortal minions requiring constant manipulation. In the modern nights, increasing numbers of Camarilla vampires believe that in disdaining the kine the Sabbat may have placed a sharpened stake at its own heart.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

Sabbat characters with magical or investigative skills could venture south to unravel the strange campaign of terror. The Storyteller has no shortage of candidates for the Sabbat’s mysterious enemy. South America has fierce man-beasts with strange and terrible powers, large enclaves of Giovanni and Setites, a powerful member of the Tremere Council of Seven with a knack for strange alliances and a number of utterly mysterious pre-Columbian Methuselaha. There is no “wrong” perpetrator for the Storyteller to choose! Indeed, two groups might cooperate (closely, grudgingly or unwittingly, at the Storyteller’s whim) to drive the Sword of Caine from their land. See *A World of Darkness 2nd Edition* for more on South America.

STORY SEEDS

- A captured Camarilla vampire implicates one of the players’ characters as a Camarilla agent, casting suspicion on the whole pack. The characters must clear their names and prove their loyalty to the Sabbat.



- The characters find evidence that a Camarilla prince has built great influence over their city's government, business or organized crime, which he uses to harass the city's Cainites. Perhaps the characters have suffered an attack themselves. For their own protection, the characters must uncover the Camarilla's mortal agents.

- Another bishop has received a talking, severed Sabbat head as a warning. She wants a Harbinger of Skulls to interrogate the ghost of the destroyed vampire, in hopes of learning who did the foul deed. She sends the characters as negotiators. They have broad authority to dicker with the greedy Lazarene, but the bishop isn't happy if they promise too much.

THE CAMARILLA RESURGENCE

"For five centuries, you princes practiced cutting each other's throats. If you had brains, you'd turn those skills against your common enemies."

— Karsh, Warlord of the Camarilla

The Sabbat's greatest enemy remains the Camarilla. Mighty even in its decay, the Camarilla shows a new energy in recent nights. Faced with enemies on all sides — and perhaps the end of the world — many elders recognize the need for change. As the Assamites learned centuries ago, the Camarilla is slow to rouse its forces, but its gathered strength can overcome nearly any threat. At the last conclave, the Inner Circle admitted that "The habits of custom we found necessary in 1498 ill serve us in 1998."

The mustering of forces begins — and the first target is the Sabbat.

UNCLE CAM WANTS YOU!

The Camarilla has lost the Gangrel clan, while the Sabbat has gained small but powerful and fervent new bloodlines, the Salubri *antitribu* and the Harbingers of Skulls. The Camarilla shrinks; the Sabbat grows. At least, that's the case at the moment.

After all, the Camarilla claims that it represents the interests of all vampires. The seven great clans merely had special privileges because of their numbers and their elders' involvement with its inception. No one ever said that other clans *couldn't* join the Camarilla with their own justicar and representation in the Inner Circle. The seven august clans never showed much interest in recruiting others, however, and offering clan status to picayune bloodlines like the Gargoyles or Daughters of Cacophony was clearly absurd. The ivory tower seemed like an eternal monolith.

The Gangrel proved how wrong *that* picture was.

The defection shook the elders of other clans out of their complacency. If the Gangrel could abandon the Camarilla, so could others. But if clans could leave, maybe clans could join, too?

Princes, primogen, archons and elders now openly speak of greater participation by other lineages. Princes assure the

odd resident Gargoyle that they notice and appreciate loyalty. Ventrue financiers negotiating deals with Giovanni counterparts drop hints about the advantages of a broader partnership. Lasombra *antitribu* emerge from hiding to "offer opinions" at primogen gatherings and salons. After all, does not the Lasombra clan now claim the principedom of a major city? The defection of Giangaleazzo, former Archbishop of Milan, is the Camarilla's propaganda coup of the century. Several elders point to the Samedi Archon Lithrac as proof that any vampire can achieve high status in the Camarilla.

Members of other lineages also show new interest in Camarilla affairs. The princes of several cities around the Caribbean rim have received emissaries on "goodwill missions" from Baron Samedi. Surviving Ravnos, shocked by their sudden decimation, have shown unusual deference to princes. In many cities, Setites have appeared from nowhere to offer their unique help in these troubled times. Throughout the Camarilla, Kindred eagerly debate who stands the best chance of recognition as a new seventh clan... and why stop there?

The most unlikely rumors receive a serious hearing. A few armchair generals even propose granting honorary clan status to the Caitiff — buying the anarchs' submission and shoring up the West Coast against Sabbat subversion and Cathayan invasion. Conservative elders who hear such talk sternly warn that Caitiff legitimacy means Caitiff princes, fulfilling the *Book of Nod's* prophecy that the Ancients will awaken "when the Clanless come to rule." By Caine's blood, do these young fools *want* Gehenna?

BLOOD ON THE WIRES

"They're turning SchreckNET into fucking AOL!"

— Foureyes, Nosferatu hacker

The new dynamism of the Camarilla shows itself in other ways, too. The sect's leaders have seen how their juniors use the Internet and fax machines. More than one neonate or anarchist has embarrassed a city's prince by knowing more than she about current events in far cities. Conversely, more sheriffs and scourges trade digital dossiers of condemned Kindred. In one spectacular case, the scourges of five Midwestern cities conducted a joint Blood Hunt that destroyed the red-listed rogue Blood Brother and serial arsonist who called himself Angelo.

At the 1998 Conclave, the Inner Circle blessed the new technology. The Inner Circle directed all accredited princes to link their sheriffs and scourges through SchreckNET, the Nosferatu clan's private Internet subsystem. The justicars and archons will also trade information online.

Some Nosferatu object to letting "ignorant newbies" and "#lamerz" onto SchreckNET. The clan's elders, however, lick their chops at the thought of all the "confidential" e-mail they can divert and read. Besides, the princes have to pay for SchreckNET's further expansion — while the Nosferatu retain most of SchreckNET's secrets. The "newbies" only learn a fraction of what SchreckNET can do....

UNLIFE-LONG LEARNING

The new justicars have begun a smaller but still significant program of their own. They encourage their archons to swap investigative stratagems, dirty tricks, names of reliable informants and other useful information. Tremere justicar Anastasz diZagreb even suggested a newsletter. Another justicar gently pointed out that such a document would be a Masquerade breach waiting to happen.

Some of the senior archons have informally traded their tricks for decades. For instance, the celebrated Toreador master of disguise, Vidal Jarbeaux, was the first vampire to disguise himself as Rasputin, beginning a legend that spun far beyond his control. By now, justicars and archons of several clans have used the Rasputin identity, not to mention dozens of wise-ass neonates playing pranks. To Jarbeaux's delight, rumors of the Mad Monk have become so numerous, contradictory and downright absurd that sophisticated Kindred dismiss every report of Rasputin-the-vampire as a hoax — which makes the Mad Monk a splendid disguise for undercover archons. Jarbeaux now hands out a false beard, wig and monk's robe to every new archon who is white and male... and a few who aren't.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

Any Camarilla character can play a part in the sect's resurgence. Members of independent clans and bloodlines might want to build informal contacts within the sect, even with insignificant neonates, as a prelude to closer relations. Then again, the independent vampire might use the hint of future *entente* as bait for some devious trap or subversion. Elders find the game of prestation and diplomacy expanded as they seek to divine the true intentions of other clans' envoys. Characters from independent clans, meanwhile, may find themselves pressed into diplomatic service by their elders. If they have committed offenses against Camarilla vampires, their elders may want them to make restitution... or throw them to the Camarilla's vengeance. Independent clan leaders may also encourage coterie to seek ways of building their clan's power, either to secure a better position within the Camarilla or to resist the sect more effectively.

The Nosferatu *antitribu* already know about SchreckNET and value it. When (not if) the other Sabbat learn of its existence, they will certainly try to disrupt the system. Characters (in either sect) who have notable computer skills may find themselves in demand with the elders — perhaps too much in demand, becoming a prize in the elders' rivalries and power plays. Indeed, Camarilla characters with any remarkable skill might find themselves pressed into service as consultants or trainers for the archons.

STORY SEEDS

- The characters' prince (or some other powerful patron in the Camarilla) requests that their coterie make a diplomatic visit to a powerful elder of an independent clan or bloodline. The elder also receives an embassy from a Sabbat

cardinal at the same time. Shortly after they arrive at the elder's stronghold, however, their gift is stolen and a retainer of the elder is murdered. Did the Sabbat sabotage their mission, or did someone else?

- A Nosferatu character receives an e-mail from a SchreckNET confidant saying that his city's Nosferatu are under attack from an unknown source. He asks for help as repayment of past boons of information. Only now does the character realize that her contact is actually a Nosferatu *antitribu*. What does she do?

NEW YORK: A HELL OF A TOWN!

The most dramatic sign of the Sabbat's changing fortunes, however, comes from New York City. The Camarilla and Sabbat fought for dominance in New York for decades. A few years ago, the Sabbat seemed to have won, cementing its dominance of the East Coast. After the famous Cardinal Polonia personally slew Prince Michaela, her numerous progeny scattered and the Sabbat reduced the Camarilla presence in New York to the Five Boroughs chantry of the Tremere and a number of ghouls working at the Stock Exchange.

In 1999, the Camarilla took back the night in the Big Apple. The Battle of New York provides a case study in Camarilla tactics — especially *Ventrue* tactics. *Ventrue* from several of their regional "Directorates," from Lady Anne of London to the Methuselah prelate Fabrizio Ulfila and the nascent Jan Pieterzoon put aside their differences to plot a masterful campaign. Vampires from every clan in the Camarilla took part in the conquest, but they fought according to the *Ventrue*'s plan.

Brujah may brawl and Assamite hunt — but war, true war, is the sport of kings.

PREPARATION

"We do not scheme for power within the Camarilla. We simply accept responsibility... and everyone else is glad to offer it."

— Jan Pieterzoon, Protégé of Hardestadt the Younger

The battle began long before the first shot. As any good general knows, valor is only a small part of winning wars. The Camarilla laid the groundwork for its attack more than a year in advance, using its knowledge of human institutions to recruit unwitting proxies. Police, garbage men, social workers, private eyes... they all thought they were just doing their normal jobs. The cops who snapped telephoto pictures of every visitor to Cardinal Polonia's mansion firmly believed they pursued a Colombian drug baron. The sewer workers who looked for new construction underground had no idea that they mapped the Nosferatu Kingdom. The IRS agent who audited a Sabbat-owned business never knew who else read his report. If any of the proxies met grisly deaths at Sabbat fangs... well, that was information too.

Six months before the attack, two Followers of Set began selling small quantities of low-generation vitae, intoxicating in its potency. As usual for Setites, they never

divulged their source. Many Sabbat indulged, eager to taste an elder's blood. Their leaders suspected some foul Setite ploy to addict their customers, but the vitae contained no drugs or spells. The Setites merely collected the usual cash and small favors in return.

No one thought to check the vitae with a Geiger counter. After draining vitae from the prince and primogen donors, the Ventrue's hired technicians added a tiny trace of radioactivity. The Camarilla's ghouls could track them from helicopters for a few nights after they drank the tainted blood. The Setites, of course, had no idea of the taint in the vitae they sold. The Ventrue paid them well not to ask questions.

Only a fool just sends soldiers charging into battle. The Camarilla began encircling the Sabbat without a single vampire entering the city. Cardinal Polonia insisted that New York's Sabbat learn to recognize each other — hardly an infallible plan, with nearly 200 vampires in the greater metropolitan area — and bring all unfamiliar vampires directly to him. The Ventrue made sure that Polonia captured a few expendable saboteurs and assassins. Once again, the real operatives were all human. Could the Sabbat chase the paper trail behind every real estate transaction, every new construction? Would they check everyone who rented an apartment near one of their havens, just to be sure that no one acted under mesmeric compulsion? Who saw anything sinister in the buyout of a toxic waste disposal company? Every purchase had a legitimate, mortal buyer. Slowly, quietly, the Camarilla's agents built killing grounds and fortified havens in the heart of Sabbat power.

A month before the attack, New York's Giovanni vampires accepted the Ventrue's shilling. The Blue Bloods offered them some remarkable business opportunities. The clan's elders blessed the partnership, after Ventrue financiers caused a brief plunge in the value of Italy's currency — just enough to establish credibility.

In the week before the attack, these Giovanni helped the Camarilla smuggle archons and war coterie into New York. The vampires entered as freight, hidden in everything from tanker trucks to container ships. Faithful ghouls and other blood-bound minions drove into the city to meet the sleeping vampires and convey them to staging areas. Mortal servants brought abundant reserves of stored blood.

Most importantly, the Camarilla's masterminds used money, the blood bond and hypnotic conditioning to gain influence in the mass media. The Ventrue financiers spent millions hiring petty criminals to draw the police away from battlefields at the right time. Protecting the Masquerade still came first.

THE BATTLE OF NEW YORK

The attack itself began during the day with a rash of accidents. Certain buildings caught fire; in the following weeks, arson investigators found no hint of foul play. Stalled cars blocked streets to delay the fire trucks. In the worst

accident, a truck spilled hundreds of gallons of acid into the sewers; the lawsuits will certainly put the company out of business. A number of gas mains burst, too, but that's so common that New Yorkers hardly noticed. The Nosferatu *antitribu* did, though — those who woke up in time.

The NYPD conducted the second phase of the attack. The Sabbat employs few ghouls, (mostly the retainers of prestigious leaders), but the Camarilla did not overlook them. By nightfall, most of the Sabbat ghouls in New York City were under arrest on trumped-up charges, on the lam, or in a few cases, killed while trying to escape. The officers involved will not soon forget how much it took to subdue these "alleged perpetrators."

The Camarilla's ghouls made up the third wave. Dozens of ghouls followed up the campaign of accidents by attacking the havens of less powerful Sabbat. Disguised as cops, firemen and paramedics, they carried stakes, hatchets and Molotov cocktails. Their masters promised them the Embrace as a reward... if they survived. Not many did, since a few Sabbat awoke to defend themselves and their packmates. The Sabbat, however, lost a quarter of their number by nightfall. That they did not lose more was a tribute to Polonia's determination to fortify and fireproof the havens. Unfortunately, many Sabbat refused to follow his suggestions, and paid with their unives.

As the daylight died, the Camarilla's main force awoke. The famed archon Theo Bell commanded the ground forces, with Justicars Jaroslav Pascek and Lucinde as "field marshals." The Nosferatu Justicar Cock Robin led an invasion from below, entering the city through the two enormous tunnels that supply the city's water. More than a dozen coterie joined the attack, either because of personal grudges against the Sabbat or to win a powerful position in the city's new order. The leaders assured the soldiers that if anyone had black veins in their auras after the battle, no one would ask inconvenient questions.

The Sabbat awoke, too — but the Camarilla already had strategic superiority. The Sabbat had no boundaries they could guard, only a few strongpoints. Most of them scattered. Those who stood and fought found that the night did not shield them. The Ventrue hired helicopters with infrared floodlamps to fly over the battlegrounds while the Camarilla vampires wore the appropriate night-vision goggles.

The remains of each destroyed Sabbat went directly to the Giovanni. The Necromancers contacted the destroyed vampires' ghosts, when possible, and tortured them for information. The justicars neglected no potential source of information about the Sabbat's resources, boltholes, identifying signals and plans. If the Giovanni wanted to interrogate the ghosts about the Sabbat's other activities, the justicars had no objection.

On the second night, the Camarilla chased the Sabbat. When the Sabbat fled their havens, the Samedi archon and former coroner Lithrac examined them for any traces of the



departed vampires. Every hair or smear of blood went to the Five Boroughs chantry. The Tremere knew a ritual to locate a vampire by such small traces and brought in every available clan member who knew the ritual. They already had hair from Cardinal Polonia's chief lieutenant, collected from his suit (the Ventrue knew which dry cleaner the bishop used and bought the business). That night, the bishop met Final Death. He had a lot of company, as the Tremere relayed updates on Sabbat positions using encrypted cell phones. Their magic might be medieval, but many Tremere love gadgets, especially technology dealing with secrets.

On the third night, half of the remaining Sabbat regrouped in the Bronx, led by Cardinal Polonia and the Tzimisce elder Lambach Ruthven. This resulted in the largest single engagement of the battle. Technically, the Sabbat won. Cardinal Polonia himself proved invincible, his slashing blade beheading four Camarilla vampires and forcing the Nosferatu Archon Federico diPadua into torpor. Ruthven had a reputation as a weak and cowardly vampire, but his age and potent blood made him formidable nevertheless. Yet Polonia and Ruthven won only a safe retreat for the Cainites.

By the fourth night, Cock Robin and his operatives secured the Nosferatu tunnels and sewers. The Nosferatu *antitribu* were all destroyed; if some gave their parole in return for escape no one questioned the justicar. Cock Robin joined the other Camarilla vampires in a massive assault on Polonia's final stronghold, a district of ruined factories with a thousand hiding places. This was close combat of the most brutal sort. The Camarilla's command, control and communications superiority counted for little. The Sabbat, however, only put up a token resistance before fleeing. Polonia slew two more Camarilla vampires, but of Ruthven the attackers found no sign.

The fifth and sixth nights consisted of mopping up. Several small but fierce clashes took place as Camarilla and Sabbat vampires fought from house to house through Brooklyn, Greenwich Village and Harlem, but the Sabbat knew they had lost. The Tremere could not find Polonia anywhere in the city. By the seventh night, the city lay in Camarilla hands. The Setites and Giovanni received bonus payments for their services, while the surviving ghouls received the Embrace as promised. The Ventrue know the value of happy subcontractors.

BERLIN ON THE HUDSON

Can the Camarilla hold onto New York any better than the Sabbat could? They intend to try — but the Camarilla's victory proved the difficulty of defending such a gigantic city from infiltration. A provisional prince and primogen council of elders now work to reestablish Camarilla influence in the greater New York area.

Like the Sabbat before them, the provisional council tried to seal off the easy entrances into Manhattan. Ghouls at the bridges, tollbooths and tunnels watch IR scanners for

motorists who lack body heat. The great water tunnels now have strong metal grills and alarms, while the port authority received ghouled dogs trained to sniff out vampires as well as narcotics. The task is hopeless; a vampire can walk across the bottom of the Hudson River, if she has no other way available. The Camarilla merely hopes to eliminate the less clever and determined raiders.

The Kindred remember, though, that their connection to the mortal world is their greatest strength. The new "administration" encourages the new residents to make contacts within city agencies, and the local offices of state and federal agencies. The Nosferatu, of course, immediately resumed their potent influence over the sanitation and maintenance departments, as well as the police kennels. The provisional council further directed all Kindred to throw their weight behind Mayor Giuliani's "Get Tough" police program. Rampant crime in the streets makes a good cover for hungry Camarilla vampires, but it's an even better cover for the Sabbat. The Kindred must simply exercise more self-control—and cultivate herds if they can. Brujah gangbangers find themselves restrained by Brujah social engineers, who see New York as yet another attempt to "recreate Carthage" (not that any two Brujah agree on what their mythical utopia was like).

The council also encourages the new residents to get to know their mortal neighbors. If anyone new takes residence near one's haven, find out about her! After all, the Sabbat can blood bond mortals too, the Lasombra equal the Ventrue at hypnotic conditioning, and the Tzimisce—well, the Tzimisce have their own unique methods of securing obedience.

New York City eventually needs its own prince and primogen. The provisional council returns to their own domains after the next Grand Conclave. Would-be princes have several years in which to build their influence, cultivate allies and demonstrate their leadership. The council also needs a sheriff, scourge, seneschal and other Camarilla scions. Since most of the elders who came for the war went home immediately after their victory, neonates and ancillae have a remarkable chance to win high status in one of the world's greatest cities.

In Cardinal Polonia, however, the Camarilla faces a brilliant, determined foe with great resources of his own. The Sabbat regrouped in New Jersey to scheme and spy on the Camarilla, so the Kindred of New York must stay constantly alert. So far, the Sabbat have not caused serious harm.

In the time since the reconquest, though, the Kindred have noticed something odd. Not every Sabbat pack comes to New York to cause mischief. Some genuinely seem drawn by the city itself. They avoid the Camarilla but do not seem interested in gathering intelligence or plotting terrorism. Nor do they seem to care that Camarilla vampires secretly watch them as they prowl the slums and nightclubs or enjoy the museums, Madison Square Gardens, Broadway and other cultural attractions.

Almost all of these "tourist" packs have Tzimisce members. After several months, each pack disappears, leaving their haven unkempt, as if they expected to return in the morning.

The city's Nosferatu know where the missing Sabbat go. That's why tons of construction materials vanish into the maze of tunnels below the city. Once the Nosferatu labored to turn Manhattan into a subterranean labyrinth to deter the Nictuku—the powerful, monstrous childer of their mad Antediluvian ancestor. Now they work to seal off the tunnels and chambers they dug deep below the sewers. They rarely talk about it to other vampires because they cannot imagine what anyone else can do. Even the Nosferatu don't know everything, though. That dubious honor belongs to a single Sabbat... but no one believes him.

UNDERWORLD

"The good news is, we don't have to worry about Nictuku attacking New York from below."

— Uncle Smelly, root administrator of SchreckNET

Lambach Ruthven wished he had picked some other week to visit New York and its Museum of Natural History. Last night, he fought the Camarilla. Now he followed a slave through the deepest tunnels under Manhattan, tunnels hewn by the Nosferatu and found on no map, because the slave served one whom Ruthven dared not disobey.

"We are here, lord," the pudgy revenant announced over his shoulder. Ruthven and the Zantosa turned another corner and stepped into a fever dream. An unbroken layer of raw meat coated the passageway. Inch-thick veins and tendons ran through the flesh and continued past its border as vines. As Ruthven watched, an artery heaved itself free from the enclosing flesh and sprouted tiny leaves. Glowing bladders shone a firefly flight.

Zantosa noticed that Ruthven had stopped walking. He turned and said, "Come, lord. You are expected." Ruthven followed slowly, wincing at the way the yielding flesh twitched underfoot. Zantosa beckoned him to hurry. Ruthven gritted his teeth and obeyed.

The revenant led Ruthven through nearly a mile of tunnels. Sometimes other tunnels joined, with caverns at the intersections. Vines and hirsute moss grew over massive guns; Ruthven could not imagine why the Nosferatu would have installed such armaments half a mile below the city. Every hundred feet or so, he saw the vine-veins join at a beating heart. A cluster of buds, each as large as Ruthven's fist, opened to release a swarm of red-winged butterflies. One butterfly perched on a mouthlike orchid bloom, which snapped shut and ate it. A glowing pod grew legs and bulbous eyes and hopped away, a luminous toad.

Ruthven remembered how a mighty Methuselah of his clan had merged his defeated enemies into a gigantic Cathedral of Flesh. That was centuries ago in Transylvania, but Ruthven knew one other who could equal such a feat. The revenant led him past a shrub bearing the heads of children instead of flowers, and Ruthven shuddered as the heads sang a Romanian lullaby he remembered from his mortal youth.

The two entered the largest chamber yet. In the center the fleshy floor rose into a hillock surmounted by a tree. A gigantic heart beat steadily in the tree's trunk and blood-red fruit hung from its branches.

Zantosa knelt before the tree. "Master," he whispered reverently, "He is here."

Ruthven looked around him. A faint blood-sweat darkened his forehead. Birds fluttered from the tunnels and converged on the tree. They pressed together on its branches, forming an oval mass — a face! The tail of one bird and the body of another defined an eye, with the head of a third as the pupil; two swelling breasts formed a nose. A few birds shifted to make the mouth move.

"Lambach." The voice was high and sweet, coalesced from a hundred birds calling at once. Lambach dropped to his knees beside the revenant.

"Father," he replied, trembling with fear.

The face remained silent. At last Ruthven could no longer endure the wait. "Master, why have you called me?" The face did not respond. "What is this place?"

The face stirred again.

"Myself," it sang. "Metamorphosis. Ascension. I am that I am." The face broke up again into dozens of whirring birds.

A clump of vines twitched, rolled in on itself and coalesced into a leaf-green wolf. It said, "I am the land, awakened by blood," and loped away.

"No longer a larva," an orchid-mouth said. "The pupal stage ends, for myself and the others."

The flesh beneath Ruthven writhed into a gigantic face. It whispered "Did I not promise to rejoin you at Gehenna?" then vanished into the meat again.

Zantosa rose and walked to the tree. He plucked one of the globular fruits, split it in half and tossed one half to Ruthven. Red juice trickled from its flesh — no, his nose told him it was vitae, more potent than he had ever smelled before.

"Eat," the revenant said. "You will be as God." He bit into his half, blood trickling down his chin.

Slowly, Ruthven picked up the fruit.

"Eat," Zantosa urged again as he walked back to Ruthven. "Let the blood of the Father sustain you, from life to death to life again."

Ruthven lifted the fruit to his lips, then hesitated. "What does it feed upon?" He waved the fruit at the seething, ever-changing lifescape around them. "How does it sustain all this?" He touched the flesh beneath him. "This is warm."

"The Father has ascended from undeath. He feeds upon the life of the Earth and becomes one with the world. He offers you — he offers all his childer — the same. Share his metamorphosis! Eat!"

Ruthven flung the blood-dripping fruit into Zantosa's face. Springing to his feet, he brought the sturdy metal flashlight down on the revenant's balding head. Zantosa's skull cracked in a spray of blood and the revenant fell. His body sagged in his clothes and began merging with the pulpy floor. Then Ruthven ran, praying that his ancestor was too lost in his infinitude to notice him. He tripped on a vine and screamed as he fell, dropping the flashlight. One hand sank into the meaty floor. As it dissolved, Ruthven

heard his grandsire's voice in his mind. Join me... JOIN ME. Terrified beyond fear of pain, Ruthven squeezed his elbow and willed the flesh and bones to part. He scrambled to his feet and ran again as his forearm sank into the seething flesh. A thousand voices called after him. He fled through the hideous sea of his grandsire's body until he reached the black tunnels beneath Manhattan, blundering along the walls. Still he heard the voice, whispered from a thousand many-formed mouths, echoing through the endless labyrinth. "Join me, Lambach... Join me..."

When Ruthven reached the surface, he tried to tell his clanmates about what grew beneath Manhattan. They laughed at him. Then, on the cover of a tabloid, he saw a picture of a patch of mildew in Nebraska that looked like a human face. The tabloid suggested it was the face of Jesus. Lambach recognized it as his grandsire. So Ruthven gave up, and hunted drugged and drunken men as he tried to forget.

It never worked for long.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

A Storyteller could easily build an entire story arc around the Battle of New York, and a chronicle around its aftermath. Any character in the New York area — Sabbat, Camarilla or independent — has to work not to get involved.

The battle itself could be played from either side (or both, if your group plays simultaneous Camarilla and Sabbat chronicles). This could be a bloodbath, with lots of building-to-building fighting. Characters can meet famous vampires such as Theo Bell or Cardinal Polonia while still having plenty to do themselves. Characters of less martial temper could struggle to avoid the all-consuming battle, or work to hide the war in the streets from the kine.

After the battle, Camarilla characters face the challenge of harvesting influence in America's largest city. For once, the elders have not snapped up all the reins of power already. The characters can try their hand as big-time operators, manipulating powerful institutions. Instead of blood bonding the manager of a local network affiliate, a character can enthrall the news director of the whole network. A neonate can go from cultivating a city councilman to hobnobbing with United Nations diplomats. The characters may find, however, that one must employ powerful pawns cautiously. If the *New York Times* suddenly changes editorial policy, someone (or some thing) notices, and wonders. On the other hand, a newly influential character may receive supplicants or would-be allies who want her to use that influence on their behalf — and who don't take no for an answer. Unlife becomes... exciting.

Sabbat characters, on the other hand, can become part of Polonia's schemes. They, too, have a chance to advance rapidly through nerve and cunning. The Sabbat runs on glory the way the Camarilla runs on influence. A Sabbat pack that entered New York City to spy on the Camarilla, assassinate emerging leaders or engage in terrorism runs great risks — but could win great prestige if they succeed.

Characters from independent clans can involve themselves, too. Both the Camarilla and the Sabbat need allies (if only allies of convenience). Independent characters find New York a city of wonderful, if dangerous, opportunities to play one sect against the other for their own gain.

STORY SEEDS

- Even before the attack, the Camarilla sent disposable agents into New York City. Polonia expected attempts at assassination and espionage, so that's what the Ventrue generals gave him. Camarilla characters might find themselves on such a suicide charge (perhaps without knowing it). Conversely, Sabbat characters in New York might hunt for Camarilla saboteurs.

- Camarilla characters with special, exceptional skills might be recruited from cities far away to help in the war effort. "Mad thinker" players may enjoy devising cunning and devious ways to gain intelligence on the Sabbat, set deadly traps and smuggle vampires into the city.

- For something different, a coterie might run "damage control" during the battle. They try to keep the authorities from noticing the battle and deceive them about the significance of whatever fighting they see.

- After the battle, Sabbat characters may try to turn the tables on the Camarilla by subverting independent clan members in New York City. This requires great cunning — they must evade the Camarilla, and the independents are no fools either.

- Polonia tries to blood bond and subvert city officials, just as the Camarilla does. Sabbat and Camarilla characters clash in an ongoing campaign of espionage and counter-espionage.

- Sabbat characters might try to find out why other packs — always with Tzimisce members — sneak into New York and vanish. Undercover work in the Camarilla's most guarded city would be extraordinarily dangerous. The characters might even follow a pack into the city's labyrinthine depths as the other Sabbat answer the Antediluvian's mysterious call to his descendants.

MERE ANARCHY?

So much for the Camarilla and Sabbat — now for the anarchs. Hitherto, the anarchs achieved little... which, for them, was sort of the point of being an anarch. Having overthrown a prince or two to establish the Anarch Free State, they didn't *want* to establish a new order. Coteries and lone vampires did whatever the hell they wanted, only uniting to resist attempts to force them into one sect or another. Their primitive council in Los Angeles had no power and most members didn't show up for meetings.

In 2000, the West Coast anarchs learned that freedom requires more than a leather jacket, a nose ring and a Motley Crüe haircut. The "New Anarch Movement" is dead — along with many of the anarchs themselves.

The previous case studies dealt with the recent past. This section concerns the near future — what happens after the events of *Walking After Midnight*.

THE CATHAYAN INVASION

"Now you know what it felt like for us."

— Leaping Marmot, Gangrel *antitribu*

The Cathayans had plenty of reasons to invade the American West Coast. The Week of Nightmares reinforced the racial prejudice many Cathayans feel against the Kin-jin. The West Coast has a large Asian population, vulnerable to anarch predation (and anarchs are hardly paragons of racial sensitivity). Cathayan vampires arise once in a while among the Asian diaspora, and they need teachers to explain what they are and train them in proper conduct. Great Xue, what if one fell in with the Kin-jin and was trained in *their* barbarian ways? Conquering the night in California, Oregon and Washington State was not merely a first step in exterminating the white devil vampires and avenging centuries of Western invasion of the East, it was a moral duty to the Kuei-jin "orphans" of those foreign shores. Besides, the anarchs were disorganized, easy targets.

So the Cathayans sent a few of their number across the Pacific to reconnoiter. Then they sent a few more to influence the Chinatowns, Little Vietnams and other International Districts in the largest cities. At last came the great invasion of San Francisco described in *Walking After Midnight*. The Cathayans win.

What next?

TAKING BACK THE NIGHT

The news stuns vampires up and down the coast. Rival sects were, in a sense, homegrown enemies, and Cainite societies cut across the kine political boundaries of North America. Now *a foreign threat occupies an American city* — something the United States, at least, has not seen since the War of 1812.

In the United States, shock quickly gives way to rage. Asian districts suffer for the Cathayans' victory. Anarchs from throughout the nation head west. Not a few patriotic Camarilla neonates join them, and even a few Sabbat.

What can they do, though? Furious, disorganized raids into San Francisco only produce dead vampires. The anarchs realize that they need a plan. More than that, they need organization. They need to present a unified opposition.

Fortunately, some of the anarchs grew up back when children learned history in schools. A few of them actually participated in that history — from the Revolutionary War to the Weather Underground. From San Diego to Vancouver, the anarchs create resistance cells to gather weapons and vampires for the struggle to come and hunt the Cathayans already in residence.

Two centers of resistance emerge. In the south, Los Angeles becomes a *de facto* warzone as the Cathayans establish

a second beachhead. The City of Angels sees a constant low-level skirmish of raids and counter-raids, arson and gunfire in the streets. Mortals blame it on escalating conflict between rival gangs such as the Bloods, the Crips, the Tongs and the Mexican Mafia. Already, several affluent neighborhoods have become gated communities; this trend accelerates as middle- and upper-class kine try to confine the violence to the poorer neighborhoods. In the north, several anarch leaders gather in Seattle. It's the biggest city north of California, a major hub of Pacific Rim commerce with a large Asian population. The anarchs believe it to be the Cathayans' next target. They cannot afford to let the city fall. Anarch military leaders gravitate to Los Angeles; the Seattle committee has more interest in politics.

The Los Angeles anarchs find a surprising ally in Bishop Cicatriz of Tijuana. He cannot help very much, because most of his forces remain deadlocked against the Camarilla of San Diego. Nevertheless, he smuggles weapons from Mexico to Los Angeles, asking for nothing in return... for the moment. Some anarchs doubt the bishop's altruism, but no one else has helped them.

The Seattle Committee members swallow their pride and send delegations to the princes of San Diego and Vancouver. They ask — no, *beg* — the Camarilla for help. Tara, Prince of San Diego, refuses any support unless the anarchs help her purge her city of Cathayans first and break off all contact with her rival Cicatriz. The prince of Vancouver pleads that hostile Lupines prevent him from committing resources and manpower to the fight. He forwards the anarchs' plea to other princes, but warns that most American princes already have their hands full dealing with the Sabbat. Perhaps the anarchs should try negotiating with the Cathayans?

Survivors from San Francisco tell the prince about the Cathayans' ideas of "negotiation."

Within a year, the anarchs of the Free State become a resistance movement. No further cities fall to the Cathayans, although the anarchs cannot yet drive them from San Francisco or Los Angeles. They have achieved this much with only a little help from one Sabbat bishop, a few of the lesser Camarilla Kindred and some sympathetic (or opportunistic) free agents from the independent clans. The Camarilla and Sabbat themselves remain too preoccupied with their great struggle to worry about the anarchs.

A THIRD SECT?

"Play time is over. Time to go to work."

— Jocelyn Crane, Unbound financier

The anarchs start to wonder if perhaps they can defeat the Cathayans without the help of *either* sect. The Cathayans have strange and terrifying powers, but seem unable to replenish their numbers quickly. The anarchs can always Embrace new members — and they do. From backwoods survivalists to millionaire entrepreneurs, they find mortals willing to fight the invaders.

Some feel disgust at "becoming the Man." Other anarchs, however, see the Cathayan invasion as a blessing in disguise. These self-proclaimed "Unbound" argue that hitherto, the anarchs defined themselves by what they were against: The Camarilla, the elders, the Sabbat, the Cathayans. Instead, they should think about what they are *for*. If they can expel the Cathayans without any significant help from the Camarilla or Sabbat, should they abandon what they built and go back to lawless self-indulgence? They have a chance to turn the Anarch Free State into a new society of vampires. If for no other reason, the anarchs have to organize and stay on guard against further Cathayan attacks.

The anarchs have yet to expel the Cathayans, however, and most anarchs don't care much for political theory. The Unbound remain a distinct minority. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of anarchs feel (correctly or not) that the Camarilla spurned their plea and abandoned them to the Cathayans. Nor do they trust the Sabbat. If they deal with either sect in the future, these vampires want to do so as equals — members of their own society and culture. No one knows what the future holds for the Anarch Free State, but one thing is certain — these vampires will never beg again.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

Ordinary neonates may find extraordinary opportunities in the Free State. Few anarchs could be considered ancillae, let alone elders. As in New York, neonate characters can seek the sort of influence that only princes and elders normally enjoy. On the other hand, this means that characters also experience the headaches and responsibilities such power brings. For instance, they can learn how much trouble it is to cover up Masquerade breaches without the benefit of numerous Disciplines and blackmailed minions.

West Coast characters can engage in all the normal vampiric activities — hunt, scheme, negotiate, backstab, fall in love, suffer, chase their ambitions and fall on their faces — but the guerrilla war against the Cathayans overshadows their nightly personal dramas. Characters might not fight the Cathayans in person, but other vampires expect them to play some role in the war effort. After all, a guerrilla army needs weapons, money, havens, informants and ideologues as well as soldiers. A character who has the ear of city bureaucrats, manipulates the media and builds a business empire, but refuses to help the fighters, could become quite unpopular with other anarchs.

Unlike the Battle of New York, typical neonate characters aren't foot soldiers carrying out a grand strategy. At the start, the anarchs have no real chain of command among coterie leaders and resistance chapters. Eventually, generals and political leaders emerge — but any player's character can hope to win such a leadership role through their own cunning, charisma, skill and valor.

STORY SEEDS

- A Cathayan somehow contacts the coterie and offers to betray a hated rival Cathayan to them. Destroying one Cathayan, and possibly gaining a blackmail hold on another, enhances the characters' prestige among the resistance... but is the Cathayan actually setting *them* up?

- Most anarchists do not know that Cathayans arise spontaneously, rather than through an Embrace. A new Cathayan emerges from a city's Asian immigrant population — a berserk *chih-mei*, not yet aware of what it is. Do the characters destroy it or capture it? If they choose the latter, they might learn the truth about Cathayan genesis, or even try to indoctrinate the new Cathayan into the resistance. Other Cathayans somehow learn of the "neonate" and try to retrieve her.

- A Camarilla prince retains the characters' coterie for (or punishes them with) a fact-finding tour of the Anarch Free State. Perhaps the prince considers supporting the anarchists' cause as a way to protect the rest of North America from the Cathayans — or perhaps he intends to sabotage them, fearing they will grow too powerful.

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE TREMERE ANTITRIBU

"Oh, cruel gods of night and hell! You let someone smite the perfidious Tremere — and it wasn't me!"

— Velya the Vivisectionist, Tzimisce Cardinal

For more than 200 years, the Sabbat included a small number of rebel Tremere. These Tremere *antitribu* followed the mighty magus Goratrix, a founding member of the clan's Council of Seven and once a confidant of Tremere himself. "House Goratrix," as the Tremere *antitribu* sometimes called themselves, gave the Sabbat magical expertise that even the mightiest Tzimisce *koldun* could not equal. The rest of the Sabbat didn't like them and never trusted them — but they were useful.

In 1998, the Tremere *antitribu* died. As far as their Sabbat allies can tell, the hundred or so *antitribu* went to a special meeting... and never came back. Eventually, one Sabbat snoop located the secret chantry of House Goratrix, buried far below Mexico City. Instead of a hundred Spellbinders, he found a hundred pillars of ash.

WHODUNNIT...

Rumor and speculation spread rapidly through the Sabbat, and eventually beyond, to the independent clans and the Camarilla. The most popular theory is that the Camarilla Tremere finally found a way to destroy the rebels. Other vampires speculate that the sorcerers attempted some great ritual but *something* went wrong. Other rumors blame the holocaust on vengeful Assamites, as a trial run before attacking the main body of the clan that cursed them.

The first rumor is almost correct.

The Tremere themselves have many stories about their founder. Matchless wizard, thief of undeath, diablerist of an Antediluvian god — and unseen except by the Inner Council for centuries — great Tremere lends himself to extravagant fable. The hyper-competitive, secret-drenched atmosphere of Clan Tremere fosters such tales, too, as each Warlock seizes upon any scrap of information that might give him an edge over his rivals. Many Tremere hear whispers that their master is not himself, that some legacy of stolen power has turned upon him. A Warlock hears that his archmage has metamorphosed into a great white worm, and he recalls how their founders stole undeath from the flesh-warping Tzimisce. Another clanmate whispers that Tremere has grown a third eye, like the mythic Antediluvian whose blood and soul he consumed. They wonder who or *what* really sleeps in their master's crypt.

All these rumors are entirely correct.

Tremere himself burned the *antitribu* to ash... but Tremere is not Tremere anymore.

The old magus always did leap before he looked. That was why he and his chief acolytes used a vitae-powered immortality spell without testing it first for side effects. That was why he diablerized an Antediluvian without considering what the Ancient's soul could do to his own. From the stories about Saulot the healer and teacher, Tremere thought the Antediluvian was a weakling. He never heard the stories about Saulot the demon hunter, or the legend that Saulot sired the devilish Baali in a moment of rage. He never read the *Book of Nod*, which clearly spoke of Saulot as a prophet. He never wondered why, if it was so easy to devour a sleeping Antediluvian, no one else had done it in thousands of years.

The Antediluvian's soul slept or hid for centuries while the Warlocks hunted and destroyed his weak, imperfect childer. At last the Ancient roused. Saulot's will wrestled with Tremere's as the mage sank into torpor. They fought for centuries, and the Vicissitude in Tremere's blood shaped his flesh to reflect their struggle.

Less than ten years ago, the fight ended. Tremere only shows one face, and it is not Saulot's. The Antediluvian won, as he knew he would, but why expose the ruse right away? Saulot is still weak from the struggle. He requires some years yet to gather his full strength for the battles of Gehenna.

Saulot's victory, however, was not total. Tremere escaped from his body to take refuge in another's flesh. He now occupies the body of his closest disciple and co-conspirator: Goratrix the faithful, the one who wrought the spell to turn House into Clan and the only member of Clan Tremere who knew the truth about his master.

Once figurehead of a mighty clan, Tremere now walks the night alone, hiding behind the face of Goratrix. As Goratrix, he called the Tremere *antitribu* to the chantry below Mexico and destroyed them all with a mighty invocation.

What happened to Goratrix? He had no disciple's body to usurp, and Tremere did not want another voice in his head. The soul of Goratrix now resides within a crystal mirror in Tremere's sanctum, carefully preserved against the night when Tremere can find him a suitable body. Look at the mirror from just the right angle, and you can see Goratrix's face pressed against the glass, silently screaming for release.

...AND WHY?

Why did Tremere do it? He could reasonably expect the Tremere of House Goratrix to accept him as their leader, just as Saulot could reasonably expect the Tremere of the parent clan to obey him when he awakens. Tremere is no fool; he does not throw away a useful tool lightly. When he incinerated the *antitribu*, what did he gain that was more valuable than a hundred disciplined, loyal thaumaturges and access to the highest councils of the Sabbat?

Each Storyteller must decide this for herself, but the possibilities include:

- **Generation:** In Goratrix's body, Tremere is only (only!) a 4th-generation vampire, and therefore limited to the 9th level of Thaumaturgy. Antediluvians could Dominate him. This is not good for a vampire who intends to win the Jyhad. Perhaps by sacrificing 100 of his clanmates, Tremere temporarily lowered his generation to 3rd again. How long does this last, before he must murder another 100 vampires?
- **Service:** As a master magus, Tremere knows about buying services from spirits. The mightiest spirits, however, insist upon payments commensurate to their power. Offering the souls of 100 sorcerers could buy a lot of favors.
- **Curse:** The most potent rituals of Tremere Thaumaturgy can affect entire clans, at least back to the 4th generation. Long ago, the Council of Seven so cursed the Assamite clan. Perhaps Tremere has levied a more subtle curse upon some other clan, to manifest when the old magus decides the time is right. But which clan? His own would seem most plausible....
- **Temper Tantrum:** Tremere has spent the last several centuries fighting for control of his soul, and he's still... stressed. He didn't mean to exterminate the Tremere *antitribu*, but something made him angry. Who knows what sets off a body-stealing, millennium-old vampire archmage and sometime Antediluvian? Tremere unleashed his awesome magical powers and incinerated a hundred vampires in a single moment of frenzy. This possibility is perhaps the most frightening, because of what it suggests about the *real* Antediluvians.

If Tremere, occupying a fourth-generation body, could wreak such destruction in his rage, what could a vampire ten millennia old do in a fit of pique?

Whatever the Great Usurper plans, it can't be small. No one among Kindred or kine has ever equaled Tremere for sheer audacity.

CHARACTER INVOLVEMENT

Characters probably don't know when they become entangled in Tremere's machinations. The old magus hides himself well (he'd better, considering that he has at least one Antediluvian and several clans as enemies). Tremere himself is the only witness to the *antitribu* holocaust. Thus, players' characters can only become involved in the aftershocks, as the Sabbat and other parties try to solve the mystery and Tremere tries to rebuild his power.

STORY SEEDS

- One Sabbat officer charges the characters' pack to solve the mystery. For all the Sabbat's talk of freedom, this is an offer they cannot safely refuse. Unfortunately, the leader's rivals have deputized investigators of their own. Each pack has orders to block everyone else; each leader wants a monopoly on the information. Let the fun begin!
- Tremere needs something, but he cannot get it himself without showing his face. After all, Goratrix supposedly burned with the other Tremere *antitribu*. If any Sabbat saw him still active, it might raise awkward questions. He hires, blackmails or otherwise persuades the players' characters to obtain the item for him. The characters never know who hired them, though they might guess eventually.
- Some Storytellers may assume that Tremere *antitribu* players' characters did not attend the Mexico City convention. Therefore, they might be the only remaining Tremere *antitribu* in the world. If the surviving Ravnos are treated as plague dogs, how much more so for the world's last Sabbat Tremere? Suspicious Sabbat leaders might wonder if the character had something to do with his clan's destruction, and try to torture the truth out of him.

TROUBLING LETTERS

Not all of the important events in the World of Darkness are so splashy and epic as the Assamite schism or the various wars. Some remain quite secret. Perhaps in years to come they will emerge to shock the world. Let's read other people's mail for a few clues....

To Meerlinda, Councilor of North America:

As a loyal member of House and Clan Tremere, I submit to your edict and end my investigation into the death of my child, Mahalia Romano. I can surely fabricate some lie plausible enough to satisfy the surviving members of her coterie – at least for now.

May I humbly request, however, that you explain this request? Miss Romano's mediumistic talents proved invaluable in recovering the Orion Stone and exposing the plot against the Milwaukee chantry. Her loyalty never wavered, despite her associations with other Kindred. She met Final Death attempting to unearth an occluded secret, I am sure, in Salt Lake City. Such service should not pass unremarked. Nor should anyone presume that they can destroy one of our number with impunity. My three centuries within house and clan convince me that certainty of our swift and inescapable vengeance is as an upraised shield before us all.

I assure the Council of Seven that I mean no contumacy. I would not expend such efforts on this matter if a number of peculiar circumstances did not attend Miss Romano's destruction. For instance, I cannot find any report of Kindred residing in that city – not Camarilla, Sabbat, anarch or unaligned clan. I know of no other comparable city that has no Kindred presence at all. Cainites pass through Salt Lake City but none stay – unless they disappear.

I urge that you, as Councilor of North America, take action in this matter – or at least explain why I may not.

Yours in Almonsin-Metatron,
Jean Baptiste Morin, Pontifex Exemptus

To Dr. Douglas Netchurch, M.D.:
Your speculations on death,
the soul and eternity are correct,
but insufficient. With training,
the death-touched soul can do
considerably more than perceive
the past and future.

To Jean Baptiste Morin, Pontifex Exemptus:

I share your grief in the loss of Adept Romano to our clan. You are quite correct: Only the most extraordinary circumstances compel me to abort your investigation. The Inner Council already knows who destroyed Adept Romano, how, and why. Out of regard for your three centuries of service, you may learn this as well. You must, however, volunteer to suffer Final Death yourself before divulging this information to any other being — even another member of our clan. To receive the rest of this letter, prick your finger and touch this sigil:



Thank you. You have five minutes to read the rest of this letter before it erases itself.

There are Kindred in Salt Lake City — powerful coterie of Nosferatu and Tremere. Neither we nor the Nosferatu cabal have any interest in the city itself. Rather, we both desire exclusive access to the genealogical archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. To this end, we both take action to prevent any other vampire from staying in the city for long (a cooperation that is completely accidental).

The Mormons have compiled the most complete record of birth, death, marriage and parentage in the entire world. They hope to compile a “family tree” of the entire human race. Their theological reasons for such a project do not concern us.

The Nosferatu desire this archive because of the information they can extract from it. This clan includes savants who can detect hidden Jyhads through demographic data. They can track a vampire through a dozen false identities through inconsistencies in birth and death records. Access to the Mormon archives would greatly enhance the Nosferatu’s power within the Camarilla.

We have a different use for these archives. You are, I should hope, familiar with the concept that knowing a person’s ancestry supplies a sympathetic link to that individual, analogous to learning their True Name. The Mormon archive contains the True Name of virtually everyone in the Western world.

The records have an even greater value when considered as a whole. In striving to document everyone who ever lived, the Mormons have created a unique sympathetic link to the entire human race, becoming stronger as the percentage of humanity so represented rises every year. In effect, they have found the True Name for the human species itself — not a generic name of humans as a class, but the specific True Name that allows a working to affect everyone in the world at once. Clan Tremere could win the Great Jyhad in a single stroke.

Unfortunately, the True Name principle depends upon limited access to the information. In most cases, the custom of neonates reciting their lineage before the city’s assembled Kindred renders Cainite ancestry as useless to us as a name published in the telephone directory. The Nosferatu want to transfer the entire Mormon archive onto this newfangled “Internet” for ease of use. They have already succeeded with several hundreds of millions of records. If the entire archive becomes available, the ancestry-derived True Name of humanity becomes public knowledge and magically useless. Our mission in Salt Lake City therefore must succeed soon or not at all. Researching the precise rituals that can exploit the Ancestral Name will take decades. In view of recent disturbing events worldwide, the Inner Council cannot tolerate any unnecessary delay.

I regret that in this case, haste has bred ruthlessness to one of our own. All the members of the Salt Lake City chantry send their deepest condolences, but they had the strictest orders to eliminate any other vampire seeking to establish permanent residence. Alas, they simply did not have the time and resources to dissuade Adept Romano’s coterie in some subtler and less lethal way. I hope that you accept the necessity of such actions, in view of the tremendous prize we seek.

Sincerely,

MEERLINDA

To Krassimir, my childe:

In the last century, I have heard disturbing reports about the activities of your childe. I pray that they return from the path of vengeance. I understand full well how irritating the childe of the Onoklept can be. The rational soul naturally longs to relieve the Earth of these demi-beasts. Nevertheless, bid them desist. Revenge must partake of wrath, however concealed, and what are the Imposters but childe of wrath? They show the evil of their sire more clearly in every generation, while we strive to rise above such things.

A dispassionate analyst must conclude that the Onoklept's swarming lineage dooms itself. If their folly does not finally impel the other clans to destroy them out of sheer irritation, their sires will consume the Imposters ere long. The latter possibility must dictate our efforts. We must survive the holocaust to come. To survive, we must know the truth — of the First and Second Cities, of Caine and Lilith, of the Creator, and of the Pleroma from whence we believe he came.

I myself have compiled and correlated a veritable ocean of history, myth and archaeology in search of the Cainite Phial, supposedly hidden by Ventru in the age of the Second City. I now believe that the Phial might literally exist, though Abbas remains convinced that it is only a metaphoric prophecy of the strange powers so oddly prevalent among the Final Generations. I need skilled and intelligent assistants to pursue various clues to the Phial's location. I hope that your brood possesses enough self-discipline and altruism for this vital labor, as well as the ingenuity they display in their schemes to undercut the Imposters. Remind them that opportunities to participate in my plans and imbibe of my intellect do not occur often.

I hope to receive your reply within the next few years. Time is of the essence.

Synesios

To Nebzeni, High Priest of the Temple of El Kharga, Childe of Ororionth, Childe of Ta-urt, Childe of Set, most respectful greetings:

After due consideration, the elders of the True Lineage agree to open the Scriptoria of Vulci and Harran to those Followers of Set who shall receive authorization from a High Priest of El Kharga, Saggara or Ombos. Visitors to the Scriptoria may not remove the volumes or artifacts collected therein, but shall be permitted to make copies to the best of their ability.

In return, the Temples of El Kharga and Saggara must open their records and relics to members of the True Lineage who shall present authorization from a senior archivist of Vulci or Harran and agree to the same restrictions, as well as any rites of purification deemed necessary by the elders of said Temples.

As a token of trust and goodwill, the Scriptorium of Vulci donates five copies of the Guarded Rubrics to the Temple of El Kharga.

I hope that through this partnership, each of our great clans may advance toward true and verifiable knowledge of the origins, nature and destiny of the soul and of the Cainite race. Let the True Lineage accept that the Followers of Set seek Gnosis through faith. Let the Followers of Set accept that the True Lineage seeks Gnosis through reason. Let not these different approaches divide us or blind us to the Truth, no matter how obtained.

Synesios, Senior Archivist, Scriptorium of Vulci

Childe of Shalmath, deceased

Childe of Belit-Sheri, deceased

Childe of Brujah

Dearest Josiah,

Will I ever understand India? How can such intoxicating beauty exist side by side with such misery and squalor? I weep red tears at the glory of a temple; an hour later, I see an old man dying unheeded in the filth of an alley, and though my heart no longer beats I still feel it breaking from pity.

To think that I hoped to find Rodrigo's "Dead God" in just a few nights! Oh, Rodrigo, why didn't you tell me more? New Delhi is such a large city — and yet, were this any other country in the world, I know I could learn your fate with ease. "The Dead God" — how many blood cults could a city hold? In India, it seems, dozens!

What a joke the Masquerade is, here in the East! Why pretend to be a mere mortal when a few simple conjurations persuade the kine that one of their own is a god? How easy, then, for a vampire to gather a gullible herd. I have spent only a week in New Delhi, and I have already encountered two such cults, with directions to several more.

The vampires themselves seem terribly frightened. Everyone talks about how the "Rakshasas" destroyed themselves — they mean the Ravnos. They believe that Ravana, the Rakshasa King, died and somehow took all his descendants with him. They blame it on a strange clan of vampires who invaded from even further east.

At least now I have a guide. I think that Omaha Singh Khatri is an Assamite; it's hard to tell because the clans all have different names here: Yatu, Vetala, Daitya, Bhut and more. Omaha loves Westerns because his name is also the name of a famous Old West city. He agreed to help me if I told him about America. He wants to go there some night. His cowboy hat and gunbelt go oddly well with his Sikh beard and dagger.

Omaha says that the key to understanding the Kindred of India is that their clans are also castes. Hindus have five castes: Brahmins are priests, Kshatriyas are warriors, Vaisyas are businessmen and tradesmen, and Sudras are farmers. Pariahs — Untouchables — are below even Sudras; they do the nasty work such as laying out corpses and washing clothes. (I can't understand what makes them so "impure," though, not in a country where people smear cow dung on a house to bless it.)

The Cainites use the same system, even the ones who aren't Hindu, just because of tradition. (Well, some things are the same as in the Camarilla.) Omaha says that because of his clan he holds Kshatriya rank, while the Rakshasa-Ravnos were all Vaisyas. Other clans hold Brahmin, Sudra and even Pariah status, and no one can ever change. As a Kshatriya, Omaha always and forever outranks any Ravnos, but always has to defer to an undead Brahmin. At least that's how it worked in the old nights. Now, I gather that the lower-caste clans don't "keep their station" very much. Omaha says that as a Sikh he doesn't hold with castes, but I still horrified him by asking to meet a Pisacha, the Untouchable-caste clan. He says that like mortal pariahs, they have too much contact with corpses.

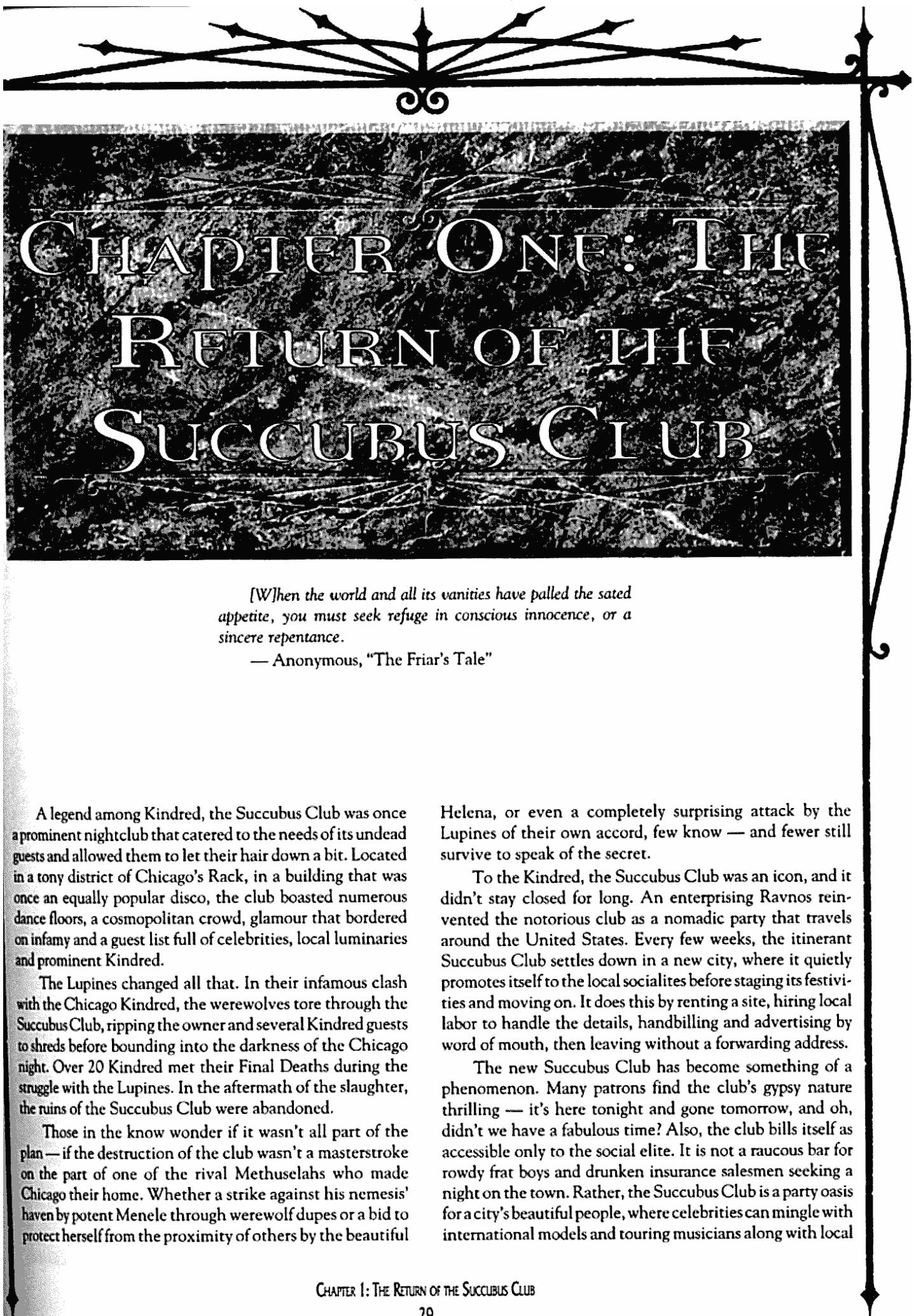
Anyway, Omaha says that he can introduce me to some vampire Brahmins, who make it a point to know all the blood cults in the area (keeping track of the competition, what else). These "Daitya" have a snake fetish like the Followers of Set, but Omaha says they've been in India forever as priests for the undead. He also says that this Daitya called Surendranath has always played him straight, even if he is an infidel. I hope that Surendranath can help me find out what "Dead God" Rodrigo met.

I miss Rodrigo so much. I'm so afraid what might have happened to him.

All my love,

Tanya





CHAPTER ONE: THE RETURN OF THE SUCCUBUS CLUB

[W]hen the world and all its vanities have palled the sated appetite, you must seek refuge in conscious innocence, or a sincere repentance.

— Anonymous, "The Friar's Tale"

A legend among Kindred, the Succubus Club was once a prominent nightclub that catered to the needs of its undead guests and allowed them to let their hair down a bit. Located in a tony district of Chicago's Rack, in a building that was once an equally popular disco, the club boasted numerous dance floors, a cosmopolitan crowd, glamour that bordered on infamy and a guest list full of celebrities, local luminaries and prominent Kindred.

The Lupines changed all that. In their infamous clash with the Chicago Kindred, the werewolves tore through the Succubus Club, ripping the owner and several Kindred guests to shreds before bounding into the darkness of the Chicago night. Over 20 Kindred met their Final Deaths during the struggle with the Lupines. In the aftermath of the slaughter, the ruins of the Succubus Club were abandoned.

Those in the know wonder if it wasn't all part of the plan — if the destruction of the club wasn't a masterstroke on the part of one of the rival Methuselahs who made Chicago their home. Whether a strike against his nemesis' haven by potent Menele through werewolf dupes or a bid to protect herself from the proximity of others by the beautiful

Helena, or even a completely surprising attack by the Lupines of their own accord, few know — and fewer still survive to speak of the secret.

To the Kindred, the Succubus Club was an icon, and it didn't stay closed for long. An enterprising Ravnos reinvented the notorious club as a nomadic party that travels around the United States. Every few weeks, the itinerant Succubus Club settles down in a new city, where it quietly promotes itself to the local socialites before staging its festivities and moving on. It does this by renting a site, hiring local labor to handle the details, handbilling and advertising by word of mouth, then leaving without a forwarding address.

The new Succubus Club has become something of a phenomenon. Many patrons find the club's gypsy nature thrilling — it's here tonight and gone tomorrow, and oh, didn't we have a fabulous time? Also, the club bills itself as accessible only to the social elite. It is not a raucous bar for rowdy frat boys and drunken insurance salesmen seeking a night on the town. Rather, the Succubus Club is a party oasis for a city's beautiful people, where celebrities can mingle with international models and touring musicians along with local

die-hard scenesters and figures of prominence. It is a place where a debauched Ventruie in a five-thousand-dollar tuxedo may rub elbows with a Brujah harpy in the latest Milanese *couture* while the outrageously club-clothed kine whirl and sway around them. The Succubus Club is a rave cotillion, a high-society club crawl, an elegant hedonism.

And of course, as a Kindred institution, it hides numerous treacheries beneath its polished veneer.

A PACK OF LIES

The *Return of the Succubus Club* is set up as a modular story, in which players' characters can expose (or aid...) just one of the many gambits taking place, or all of them, depending upon how savvy and social they are. Additionally, this story suggests numerous outcomes to suit just about any coterie or pack. Violent Kindred may satisfy themselves with physical solutions, social Kindred may make new contacts by abetting the clever undead in attendance and mystically oriented Kindred might find out just how close Gehenna is—and help or hinder it as they see fit.

In the end, *The Return of the Succubus Club* is not an epic tale or one with a significant ending like the other stories in this book. Even if the dimmest coterie of knuckleheaded vampires walks into the club and guns down everyone they see, the world isn't going to end. We have done this with the intent of leaving the story open; failure is as much a factor in the world of the Kindred as it is in our own, and good players relish in the fact that it's up to them whether their characters succeed or fail.

The following collection of minor plot threads occur over the course of the Succubus Club's Atlanta appearance in early 2000.

- The Succubus Club's promoter, Sennuwu, has stolen a work of art from another Kindred's collection and takes advantage of her stay in Atlanta to sell it to an interested Cainite.
- A gathering of Daughters of Cacophony performs a chorus and aria. Elder Kindred who have heard of the event respond to it with both fear and amazement—the performance has several elders worried about the Daughters' agenda, while it entices others with its unique appeal. In the end, the performance is not as it seems, though Kindred who harbored concerns about it may not have been entirely wrong.
- The Giovanni use Atlanta as a transfer point for drug shipments that originate in Italy and travel through Cuba before finding their way into the United States. The Succubus Club serves as a venue where Kindred who represent all three sides of this Giovanni interest have come to convene. Additionally, one of Atlanta's Cainite drug traffickers resents the imposition and wants a share of the Giovanni business that comes through Atlanta.

As if this weren't enough, the Camarilla use the Succubus Club to "scout out" Atlanta after its fall to the Sabbat. Almost

giddy after successfully ousting the Sabbat from New York, the Camarilla has set its sights on the jewel of the genteel South and hopes to reclaim Atlanta as well. With Atlanta and New York as support centers for the sect, the Camarilla can then focus on recovering the rest of the East Coast from the Sabbat scourge. Theo Bell is present, and the characters might recognize him in the crowd.

Of course, because this is a Vampire story, none of these plots exists in a vacuum—the personalities involved in each are connected somehow to another, which serves to draw the troupe's coterie into deeper layers of intrigue. Character charts illustrate how each subplot relates to the others in *The Return of the Succubus Club*.

THEME AND MOOD

The Return of the Succubus Club relies on the Machiavellian nature of the Kindred for much of its feel. Wheels turn within wheels, defeated plots reveal others beneath them, and enemies in one scene may become allies in another. The whole story should have a frantic, disjointed feel as the action quickly flashes from one exchange to another. By the end of the story, the characters (and perhaps the players...) should be exhausted after serving as the pawns who played every game the Succubus Club brought to bear. Such is the nature of the Jihad.

THEME

Paranoia fuels *The Return of the Succubus Club*. Although the characters may initially suspect that they have stumbled upon some pleasant treachery that involves fellow undead, they soon find out that the Succubus Club is a nexus of Kindred machinations. The characters should be nervous wrecks, certain that every time they even speak to another vampire, they resign themselves to yet another ruse that's just seconds away from coming to fruition. Indeed, by the end of the story, they may be the most popular Kindred at the club, but fame exacts a deadly price—attention.

MOOD

The mood of *The Return of the Succubus Club* is one of nonstop, frenzied excitement. Each conversation yields another revelation. Each clue has application to multiple mysteries. Each contact represents multiple interests. The coterie can't turn around without meeting another possible ally or enemy. The story should feel almost like a montage or series of harsh, choppy "film cuts," with little or no downtime between scenes. To heighten the tension, Storytellers may wish to play upbeat, staccato music such as trance techno, drum and bass, house or speed garage, big beat, electronica, or EBM with no vocals. Such music fits the backdrop of the story's setting and keeps the players on edge without distracting them with lyrics.

WE'RE NOT KIDDING

The *Return of the Succubus Club* is not a traditional, linear story that progresses neatly from beginning to end and resolves in a clean denouement. Instead, it is a collection of various plots and schemes in which the characters become involved.

This story depends on the individual motivations of the characters. It does not play smoothly if the characters are two dimensional or if the players have no vested interest in their character's personalities. If the players are used to being led by the nose or roleplaying simple, objective-oriented "quest" stories, this probably isn't the story for them. *The Return of the Succubus Club* is more a collection of vignettes intended to test the characters' morals and focus upon them as individuals. There's also some good, old-fashioned undead intrigue.

Quite simply, "story fiat" doesn't work here — at least one character needs to have some connection to at least one element of the story. Advice is included for handling this, but to avoid obvious railroading, make sure someone has a vested interest in *something* that's taking place.

ATLANTA AT A GLANCE

Like most large cities, Atlanta has neighborhoods "in town" and several suburbs to accommodate its almost three million residents. While this is by no means a comprehensive "Atlanta by Night," it explains the features of the city most likely to come into play during this story.

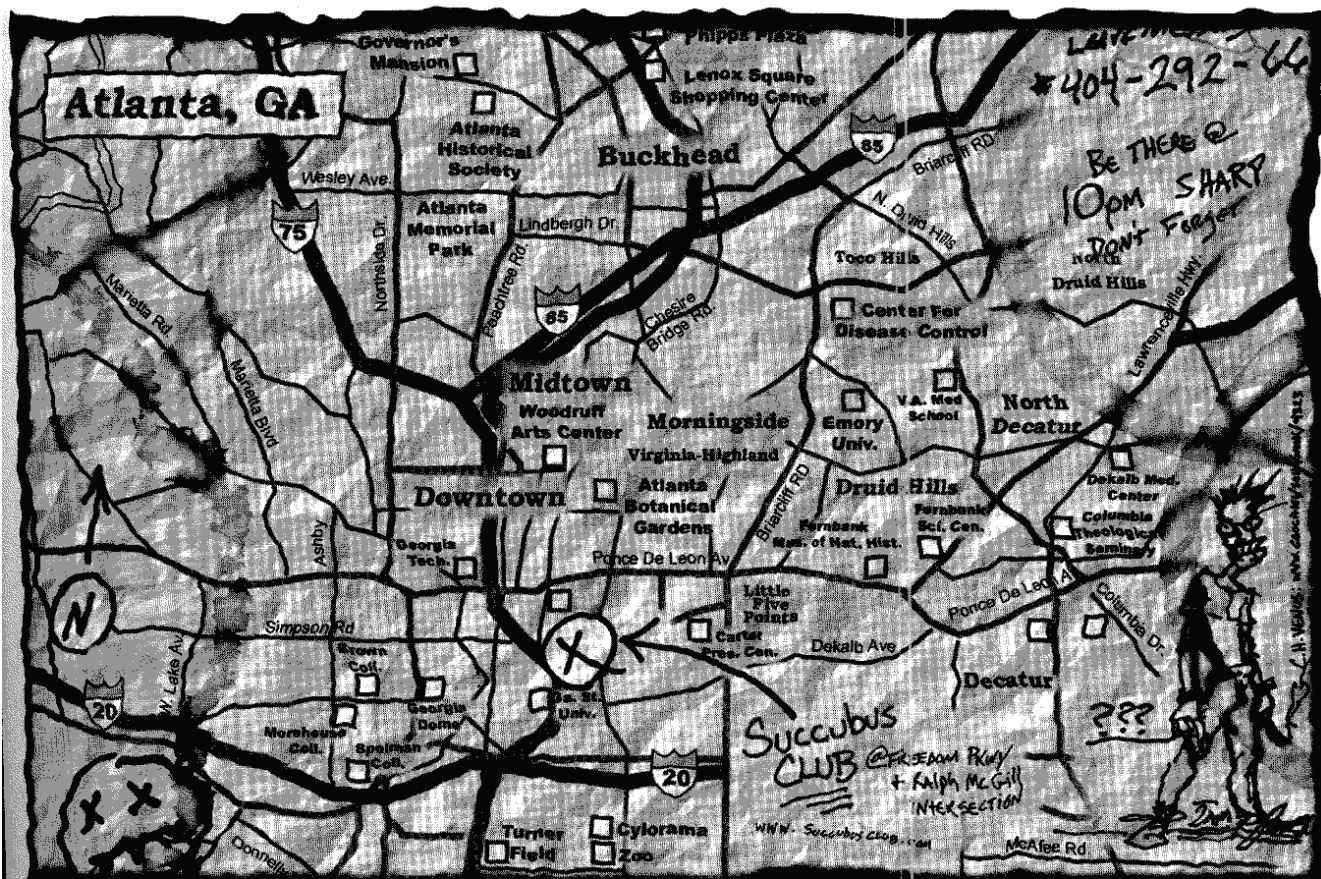
Downtown

A "renaissance neighborhood," downtown is one of Atlanta's current gentrification efforts. As with many cities' downtown areas, Atlanta's is a heavily trafficked business district by day. By night, downtown is not really "the place to be," as few nightclubs and theaters operate within its boundaries. Still, a few exceptions to the rule exist, such as the historic Fox Theatre, several sports arenas, a few trendy club spots and live music venues. Most of Atlanta's finest hotels are downtown, providing a place for business travelers to stay where they can be near the offices and convention centers of the city proper.

The Succubus Club site, the Empire Building, is located in Poncey Highlands at the intersection of downtown and the Buckhead, Virginia-Highland, Midtown and Little Five Points neighborhoods.

Buckhead

The Buckhead community is a curious neighborhood of expensive real estate and least-common-denominator excess. The neighborhood itself is quite prestigious — it boasts



exquisite restaurants, international shopping, a few expensive hotels, notable galleries and upscale condominiums. The other side of the coin, however, is the almost late Roman atmosphere of decadence. Buckhead is host to many bars, nightclubs and concert halls, where plenty of drunken rowdies can be found any night of the week. During the day, Buckhead gleams like a diamond while at night it glints like cheap glass. Still, not every fete in Buckhead is an inebriated debauch — many of Atlanta's old money families still make their homes in the streets surrounding the area, bastions of an eroded Southern aristocracy.

Midtown

The neighborhood of choice for young, single professionals, Midtown is a charismatic area of historic charm and modern amenity. Residents may choose to live in converted, turn-of-the-century townhouses or in one of the prestigious high-rises. The area abounds with cozy pubs and bars, verdant Piedmont Park provides a place to pass the time, and numerous local restaurants and shops line the streets. Midtown's a little too close to downtown for some tastes, but that's the appeal for others. Midtown also boasts a high percentage of gay and lesbian residents and is considered one of the most liberal neighborhoods in the city.

Virginia-Highland

Named for the intersection at its center, Virginia-Highland is dominated by residential buildings, though the stores at the center provide some of Atlanta's best shopping. Located near Emory University, Virginia-Highland is another moneyed neighborhood, though it lacks the elitism of Buckhead.

Little Five Points/Candler Park

Once the center of Atlanta's bohemian and "alternative" cultures, Little Five Points is currently undergoing gentrification. L5P, as some locals know it, remains a center of counterculture, however, though it possesses a strong pop culture current as well, now that the neighborhood has been made safe for wealthy suburbanites who want to flatter themselves with examples of their own hipness. This part of town is known for its live-music venues, and many local bands make their start in Little Five Points.

THE SUCCUBUS CLUB

The Succubus Club itself is located in the Empire Building, at the intersection of Ralph McGill Boulevard and Freedom Parkway. It stands apart from other buildings in the neighborhood — out of sight and hopefully out of mind. As of this book's publication, the real-world Empire Building was being converted to lofts. Feel free to tell any player whose character conducts the appropriate research that the building is scheduled to undergo renovation by a developer after the club departs.

The building itself occupies about 80,000 square feet, all of which has been converted temporarily into dance floors, bars and party space. The main room has been scrubbed clean and painted a water-soluble black, with enormous stacks of

speakers in the corners and large racks of lights and smoke machines bolted to temporary scaffolding suspended from the ceiling. A daunting column of amplifiers and electronic sound gear has been stacked near the DJ booth — 300,000 watts of power for turning the former factory into a thunderous vortex of sound. A dozen bars have been erected at various places around the building, each stocked with an impressive array of liquor, draft beer, wines, water and "accessories" — little things one needs at a party but seldom remembers to bring, such as aspirin, earplugs, condoms, substances that can be used as inhalants, breath spray and cigarettes.

A secondary room has been outfitted with a "labyrinth," in tribute to the dark maze that occupied the lower level of Chicago's Succubus Club. An ill-lit series of catacombs, the labyrinth has numerous hidden vestibules and crannies where partygoers can have some sense of privacy. Another secondary room is set up for live music; part of the room has been converted to a temporary stage. If the characters' coterie is a band scheduled to play the Succubus Club, here's where they perform (three other bands perform otherwise). The back of the stage has been set up as a small dressing room, where performers can primp for their appearance. The whole collection of rooms (as well as the workshop area, receiving dock and a small office) are under one roof, so guests don't have to worry about the weather. Cover for the club is \$35 in advance (tickets may be purchased through any local vendor) or \$50 at the door. Anyone arriving without tickets is subject to the velvet rope at the hosts' whims.

How you use this in the story is up to you. Some Storytellers might keep the details of the club itself as secondary — it is merely a setting for the various plots to unfold. Other Storytellers bring the minor events of the club to the fore: Kindred may smell the sweat and excited vitae of the vessels thronging the floor, they may dabble in doomed trysts or seek out drugged individuals from whom to feed or they may even lose themselves to the powerful rhythms and escape, however briefly, their own damnation. Bombard the Kindred's acute senses and press their desires. Storytellers should gauge their players' reactions to their characters' environments. Do they enjoy the setting itself, or do they want to get down to business?

CHANGING LOCATION

Although this story is set in Atlanta, Storytellers can relocate the Succubus Club to any city that strikes their fancy. The story works as an opportunity to throw a little upheaval into a chronicle's home city or put a coterie "on the move."

Don't ignore the setting entirely, as that defeats the purpose of having the club come to town. Not only is the club awash with undead schemes, it is a melting pot of every dangerous excess. The environment is tense, brooding and more than a little hazardous — just how the patrons like it.

The characters should hear about the Succubus Club a month or so before it arrives. This gives them time to become involved with the affair should they be so inclined, whether as local promoters, a band or DJs scheduled to perform on a side stage, performance artists, fashion show models, or any other aspect to which they may be suited. Storytellers should feel free to add other events or involve the coterie in whatever manner suits them best. Of course, the coterie doesn't have to work the party — it simply gives them an excuse to get "behind the scenes," though other methods may work. It's perfectly appropriate to have the characters show up at the event, but be wary of railroading them into participating in the plot at that point.

TELLING THE STORY

The Return of the Succubus Club is set up so that its scenes are nonlinear in presentation. Storytellers may focus on only the stories that affect their troupe's coterie, arrange the stories to build to the one of greatest significance, cut scenes altogether or even stretch the affairs of the Succubus Club over a few nights. It is easiest to conduct the events of the story as presented, but feel free to rearrange them to suit your troupe.

THE SCHEDULE

Below is a timetable of events taking place at the Succubus Club on its one-night Atlanta appearance. The story assumes the party occurs on a Saturday. Italicized events are part of plots described below or otherwise special affairs that are not open to regular club patrons.

Time	Event
7:30 P.M.	<i>Staff arrives and prepares</i>
8:00 P.M.	Bouncers, hosts and hostesses take positions outside
10:00 P.M.	Doors open
10:30 P.M.	First live band performs on stage in secondary room
12:00 A.M.	Runway fashion show on stage in secondary room
1:00 A.M.	Second live band performs on stage in secondary room. <i>Sennuwy conducts auction in workshop</i>
2:00 A.M.	<i>Giovanni and Tock discuss "tribute" in main room</i>
2:30 A.M.	<i>Daughters of Cacophony perform aria on stage in secondary room</i>
7:00 A.M.	Succubus Club closes doors
10:00 A.M.	By this time, the club and all traces of it are gone....

SCENE ONE: ART IMITATES UNLIFE

As a "side business," Sennuwy sometimes acts as a fixer and fence, selling and buying unique objects from Kindred whom she meets in her travels. The nomadic nature of the Succubus Club provides her with the perfect cover while she tours — she may come into possession of an object in one city and then sell it on the black market in the next; no one has any idea she is responsible. Sennuwy isn't stupid — she knows that she must keep this part of her business quiet. If anyone suspected that she was stealing from them and then moving their personal property to other Kindred, they'd avoid her altogether, putting a serious kink in her unlife.

Sennuwy's current prize is an original painting by New York artist Minako Yamano. A circuit board painted on a traditional Japanese shoji screen, Yamano's "One Day" is a stirring, patinated piece with a melancholy air, perfect for the haven of any brooding Kindred. Sennuwy has a few prospects in Atlanta, including Bishop Sutphen, hungry to add the piece to their collections. Ever the mercenary, Sennuwy intends to play the collectors off one another, inflating the price and using the fact that the collectors all know the piece is stolen to keep them quiet should they leave unsatisfied.

The coterie can play any of several roles in this scheme. Moral characters may wish to see the painting returned to its owner. Characters interested in art might want to own the painting themselves. Camarilla characters, upon learning that Atlanta's bishop has his sights set on the piece, may wish to use it as leverage against him, or just take the opportunity to meet with him and gain insight into his personality. Some coterie members may even choose to steal the painting for themselves and sell it, cutting Sennuwy out of the profits — there is no honor among thieves.

INVITATION ONLY

In the nights prior to the Succubus Club's opening, Sennuwy entertains parties interested in purchasing the screen. Characters with reputations as art dealers, art collectors or black marketeers, or who simply have significant Status, estimable Mentors or prestigious sires may receive invitations to inspect the piece.

Sennuwy stays at the prestigious W Hotel Atlanta in a comfortable suite. She does not hesitate to order room service to her guests' tastes. Observant characters notice that she hides the painting before room service enters the suite. Although she entertains only one guest (and their entourage) at a time, she makes no effort to hide others' interests in the painting. In fact, she tells her visitors about the others, dropping names as if to impress status-seekers.

Her real reason for doing this, of course, is to further protect both the artwork and herself. If the piece suddenly

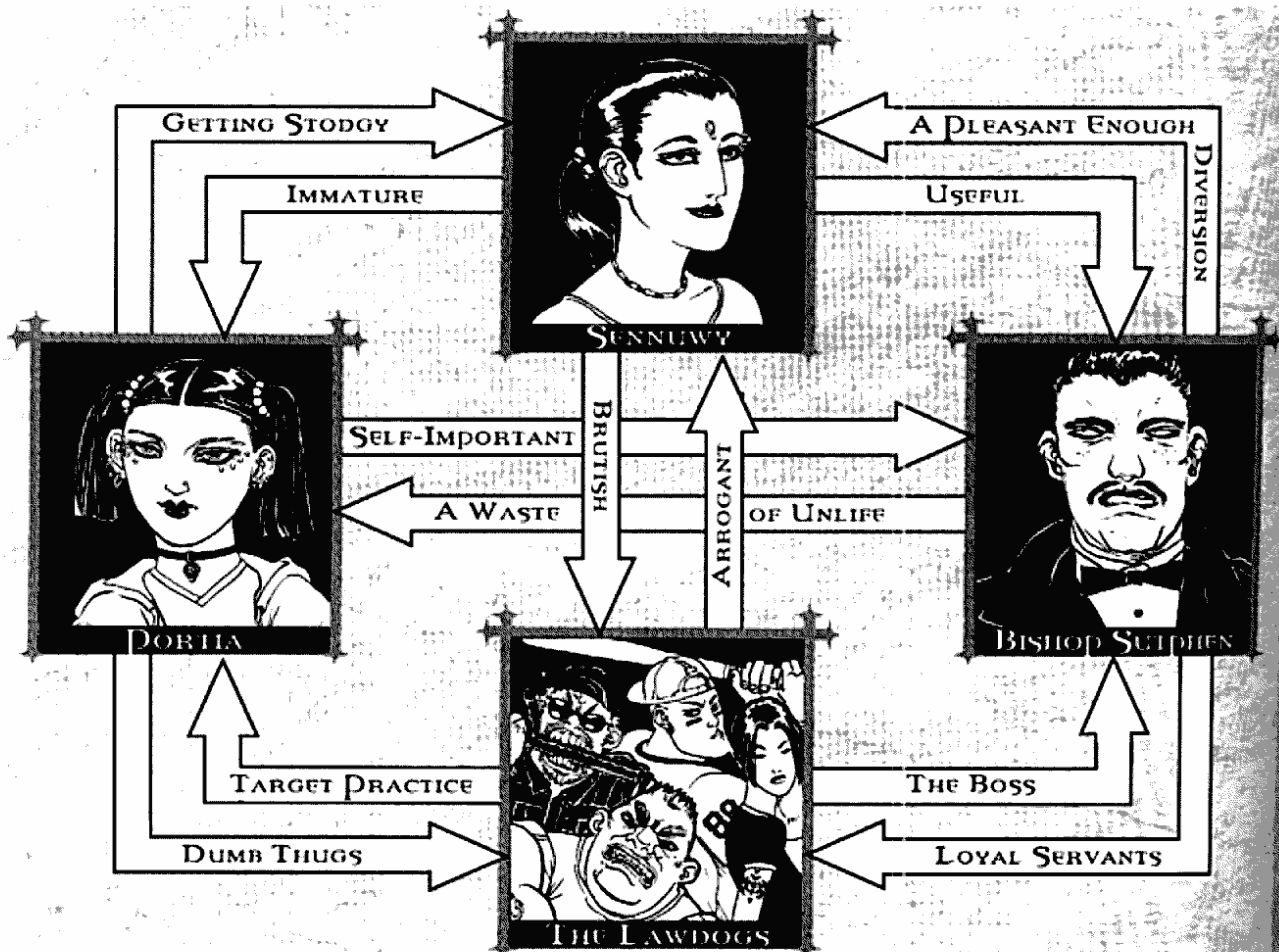
goes missing, each of the interested individuals has some idea of who might have been the culprit. Additionally, everyone involved knows the piece was stolen from the original artist. Anyone who goes to the police in a fit of disappointment over losing the bid quickly finds himself up on variety of conspiracy and stolen goods charges. In this regard, Sennuwy trusts that the individuals seeking the painting would be more embarrassed by a public scandal than by simply not winning the bid for the painting. With the possible exception of the players' characters, she's right.

Although she has no real background in art, Sennuwy can converse intelligently about the work. She answers any questions the characters have, though she is not averse to lying if it protects her or earns a higher bid. During the characters' visit, the phone rings frequently and the fax receives a seemingly endless string of transmissions. The Web-capable television in the room shows a website devoted to the club. If the characters are rude enough to ask, Sennuwy explains that it's all "Succubus Club business details."

Unless the characters have anything specific to do while meeting her, she bids them goodnight after allowing them to look over the piece and informs them of a brief auction Saturday night at the Succubus Club. Bidding begins at 1,000 dollars.

DOING THE DIRTY WORK

Unless the characters are hopelessly honorable (or daft), they might want to look into the others vying for the piece. For the most part they are prominent Atlanta socialites and business personalities, a dozen or so, all mortal and oblivious to the existence of Kindred. One of the names, however, belongs to a Cainite — Bishop Julius Sutphen of the Atlanta Sabbat. The characters have likely heard his name before (especially if they are native to Atlanta or did any research into the city before visiting it). Should they look into him, what they discover should match the effort they devote to the search. Simply chatting about him with other vampires yields that he is largely respected, if not actively liked. Invasive investigations turn up stories of his prodigious brutality, brief outlines of his personal career with the Sabbat and other such details. In any conversation about Sutphen, characters should have the distinct impression that others have been asking about *them* as well. Apparently, Sutphen's scouting the opposition (and the other parties probably are, too, though they're not necessarily talking to vampires...). If the characters are local Sabbat on bad terms with Sutphen, other Cainites snub them, which should make it obvious that the bishop hasn't said kind things about them.



If the characters are a nomadic pack or visiting Sabbat from another city, other Cainites they meet mention that Bishop Sutphen is used to getting what he wants. These aren't threats so much as warnings — if Sutphen feels like the characters' pack has screwed him out of the deal afterward, they will have earned themselves a powerful enemy.

If the characters aren't known in Atlanta, Sutphen investigates them. He has no problem with threatening them — they're in his city, so they should act like nice little vampires and afford the bishop the respect he deserves by not bothering with the auction. At the Storyteller's discretion, he may send his pack of enforcers, the Lawdogs, to let the characters know where the true power lies in Atlanta. Only in the direst of circumstances does he order the Lawdogs attack them outright, because such an attack makes it look like he can't handle the competition they presented. In any event, unless they try to kill him, he settles for, at worst, having them roughed up. He prefers not to let things get physical.

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

For the few nights remaining before the Succubus Club and the auction, nothing untoward happens (unless the characters bring it upon themselves or Sutphen escalates any vendetta he has against them) until Friday. After they rise Friday night, each character involved with Sennuwu receives a note that an unknown individual attempted to steal Yamano's screen before the auction. The attempt was foiled, but Sennuwu wanted everyone to be aware that someone among them had intended to deprive all the others of their fair chance at purchasing the painting. In truth, Sennuwu has no idea who the would-be thief was or if he has any connection at all to the potential buyers, but she's not above exaggerating for the sake of a good story. If nothing else, it should set the buyers on edge and drive the price up by reinforcing the painting's value.

Should the characters decide to steal the painting before the auction, the outcome is left to the Storyteller — the story as written assumes the painting is on hand for the auction. Such characters probably start with Sennuwu's suite, as that was the last place they saw the work. It's not a small painting — the shoji screen is six feet high by seven feet long when unfolded — so it should be easy to find. Each night, however, Sennuwu has the painting removed by one of her assistants and stored at the Succubus Club proper in the Empire Building. The assistant isn't particularly stealthy (though he does hide the painting beneath a blanket when he moves it through the hotel), so anyone shadowing him can follow him from the hotel to the party site. The assistant locks the building after leaving it, of course, but any hooligan who wants to smash a window and climb inside can find the painting after a few hours of diligent searching.

Even if the characters don't steal the painting, Sutphen suspects them of the attempt that Sennuwu's note describes. If they have made themselves at all accessible, he requests

that they meet with him to discuss the matter. At this point, any character with an ounce of sense in her undead head probably suspects a setup, but to refuse confirms the bishop's doubts. If the characters agree to meet the bishop, he allows them to choose the site, so as to allay any fears they may have of a trap.

Bishop Sutphen meets with the characters, attended by his Lawdogs who disperse around the area the characters have suggested. If they are too inconspicuous for the setting, Sutphen instructs them to wait somewhere out-of-sight but nearby, such as the kitchen at a fine restaurant or the stairwell of a prestigious hotel. If the characters do something stupid like attack him or incite him to frenzy, the Lawdogs rush to the bishop's aid. Their primary intent is to remove the bishop, but they don't hesitate to kick a little ass should ass need kicking.

Sutphen is succinct: Did the characters try to steal the painting? If they deny it, he asks again, this time using his Aura Perception powers.

If the characters have not attempted to steal the painting, he seems visibly relieved and becomes conversational. He can give the characters a bit more "dirt" on other interested parties, if they want it, and tries to draw similar information from them. In the end, he explains that he was looking for an opportunity to destroy them (if they're known to be independent or Camarilla) or discredit them if they're visiting Sabbat. As he explains it, "Atlanta is not a dumping ground for the problems of other cities, and I won't have their castoffs." For all the rumors of Sutphen's viciousness, he seems quite cordial. Unless the characters press the issue (or the Storyteller sees fit to have the bishop do so), he bids the characters goodnight and makes his exit.

Note that Bishop Sutphen can be an excellent contact for characters of any stripe in an ongoing chronicle. If this particular plot ends with the bishop and the characters on amicable terms, he does not hesitate to contact them if he needs anything. He is, after all, a pragmatic Cainite....

WHODUNNIT?

Although the failed thief is not critical to the story — the attempt on the painting exists only to increase the tension between characters — some coteries or packs might wish to pursue the matter.

With a bit of detective work and perhaps a few prudent interrogations, the characters find out that the thief was a bravo hired by one of the less-affluent dark horse auction guests, who knew he didn't have the money to win the auction but wanted the painting anyway.

THE DEAL GOES DOWN

On Saturday night at the Succubus Club, Sennuwu allows the auction guests into the club's workshop at a quarter to one, just before the scheduled time for the auction. Without exception, the guests arrive punctually.

As a bit of a surprise, the Kindred Portia also show up, much to Sennuwy's and Sutphen's consternation. No one knows how Portia heard about the deal, but Sennuwy doesn't jeopardize the auction by causing a scene or throwing her out. Sutphen, however, is furious because Sennuwy didn't mention Portia among the bidders. Portia attends the auction only because she wants to be involved with something so secret and elite. She has no money and no appreciation for art; she just wants to be seen here.

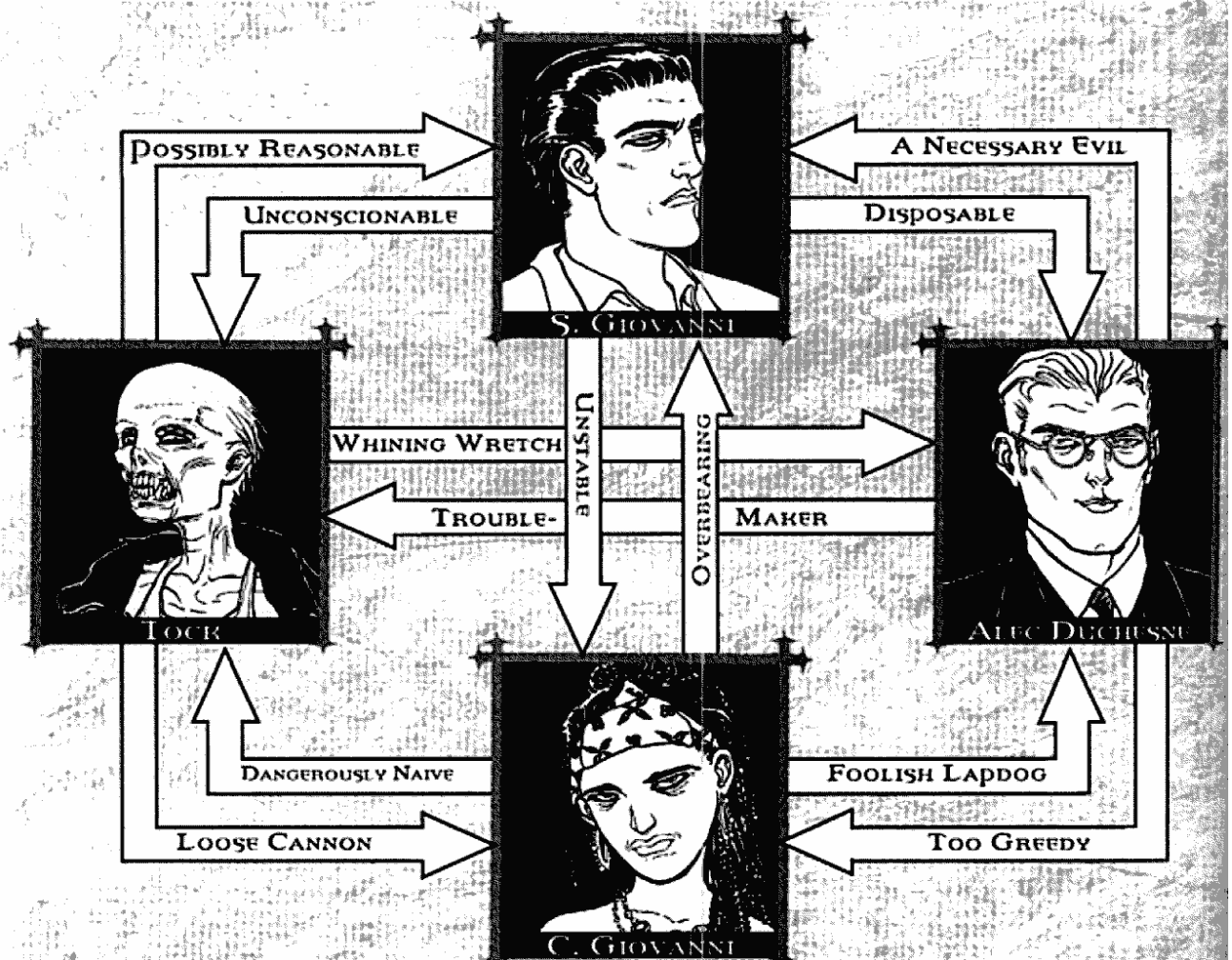
For a moment, things become quite tense, as Sutphen and Portia exchange words. In the end, Sennuwy's embarrassed by the interloper and Sutphen allows her to stay (though he's made up his mind to have his pack rough her up at the end of the night).

The auction proceeds. It has no scripted ending, so Storytellers should feel free to allow the players' characters to win, should that suit the story. Bidding begins at \$1,000. The artist once asked \$5,000 for the piece, but now that it's been "taken off the common market," the price may rise much higher. Sutphen and the other guests are certainly willing to exceed the asked price.

In the end, whoever bids the highest wins the paint. Sennuwy asks the winner to take immediate responsibility for the prize — she can't guarantee its safety at the club now it's no longer hers. On the way out of the workshop, Sutphen glares first at Portia and then at Sennuwy — and at any other characters if he's been given any reason to suspect that they were somehow involved in this little breach of etiquette.

SCENE TWO: INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

For over 30 years, the Giovanni have used Atlanta way station for their international drug trade. By moving their contraband through contacts in Atlanta and Miami, the Necromancers avoid the confiscation of their valuable product. With a few dollars kicked back to the Camerons, "powers that be" in Atlanta, the Giovanni were able to move as much product as they wanted through the city. It was



flawless arrangement — everyone made money and was satisfied because the Kindred involved honored the rules of the agreements.

Then the Sabbat went on a rampage and Atlanta fell. Suddenly the Giovanni's contacts went missing or refused to work. A Sabbat Nosferatu, a megalomaniac named Tock, decided to become the city's drug baron after the Black Hand settled in Atlanta. By cracking down on the dealers and runners who moved any significant quantity of illegal pharmaceuticals, he ruthlessly shut down the traditional channels of Atlanta's drug trade. Any of the old dealers could find their way back into the business by giving him the due he claimed, and Tock found his way into Atlanta's drug infrastructure. Those who held out against him either dropped the business altogether or fed the fish in the Chattahoochee River.

Tock's supremacy has a few exceptions, of course. In a city the size of Atlanta, no single person has an interest in every drug deal that goes down — certain dealers are beneath Tock's notice. These are mainly the two-bit hustlers and other low-volume dealers who don't have to grease Tock's palm, but neither do they receive his "protection." Some of Atlanta's dealers suspect that Tock has ties to one of New York's five families or the South American cartels. Most, however, don't care and cough up their share, glad to still be in business.

The Giovanni, however, with their local shill Alec Duchesne, have remained the sole outstanding free agents of any power. Tock resents their presence and wants either their tribute or their removal.

The Giovanni have no intention of paying off some arrogant punk who has moved into their neighborhood and crowned himself the king of drugs. For the past six months, tensions between Tock's people and the Giovanni triangle have grown progressively worse. To the informed observer, it looks like the only way out is through someone's Final Death.

Salvatore Giovanni requested a meeting with the troublesome Tock and his own agents. Tock decided to attend the meeting by himself, as he mistakenly believes that he can solidify his hold over the city's drug trade.

The players' characters can become involved in several ways. They may be agents of Tock's or have had contact with Duchesne, who is still a member of the Camarilla (which may also tie them to that sect's scouting effort to recover the city — see below). Martial characters may have been hired by either the Giovanni or Tock to "sit in" on the meeting and whack the rival if there's no satisfactory agreement. The characters' coterie may even have its own interest in the Atlanta drug trade and throw in with one side or the other (or neither) and attend the meeting to make a place for itself.

Whatever the case, the meeting takes place amid the ruckus and noise of the Succubus Club — where no small amount of "business" is taking place this very night — so the conversation that ensues can be neither recorded nor casually overheard.

PLEADING THE CASE

What follows is a summary of each individual's take on the matter. The Storyteller may run this as a literal conversation, which achieves the best effect but might require assistant Storytellers so she doesn't have to talk to herself. Alternately, the Storyteller may simply paraphrase each character's position, but this removes much of the dramatic weight of the scene. Play this like an actual negotiation — skip the dice rolls and let the characters get into the argument. Some Storytellers may even wish to put the character sheets aside and try this live-action style. Be wary of conducting the conversation too loudly, however. A spirited real-world argument about drug distribution rights in Atlanta conducted at a restaurant may have dire consequences....

Salvatore's Argument: The Giovanni presence had been established long before Atlanta fell to the Sabbat, and an honorable businessman must respect the long-standing interest that already exists. Besides, it is impossible for any single entity to "control" all of Atlanta's drug business. Salvatore points out numerous examples of local businesses — Coca-Cola's headquarters is in Atlanta, but some restaurants still serve Pepsi. Turner television broadcasts from Atlanta, but the city still receives national and syndicated affiliate network broadcasts. Competition makes for good business. Salvatore should be portrayed as the consummate capitalist, encouraging a "free market" drug trade. Note that Salvatore speaks no English — everyone else speaks Spanish, but the characters may be left out if they don't.

Carlita's Argument: Nothing about Atlanta makes the Giovanni drug trade dependent upon the city. If they so wished, the Giovanni could move more of their contraband through Miami (Tock points out that this is another Sabbat city, to which Carlita responds that it's irrelevant because Tock isn't claiming some absurd sovereignty over that city) or just up the coast to another city like Jacksonville or one of the small coastal Carolina resorts. This, however, is inconvenient for the Giovanni — forcing them to do this earns Tock their undying enmity, and Clan Giovanni is not one that bears a grudge lightly. Carlita should be played as the heavy, making thinly veiled threats that her compatriots have to diffuse before Tock becomes completely indignant and walks out altogether. A bit of tension should arise between Salvatore and Carlita, as well, as the former believes the latter to be overstepping her authority.

Alec's Argument: Alec takes the tack of a Hollywood actor's agent — he positions the Giovanni's "customer base" as an asset to Tock's interests as well. In his estimation, the presence or absence of the Giovanni has no impact whatsoever on Tock's business. Alec argues that the buyers to whom the Giovanni sell do not overlap with Tock's crew's customers. Alec doesn't hesitate to laud his own efforts — all direct sales in Atlanta through his efforts are to the social elite, while Tock's people sell to the less glamorous crowd and the downright impoverished. Additionally, Alec argues, large

buys that happen in Atlanta are arranged with other *dealers*, who then take the product and move it elsewhere. Alec argues somewhat semantically that this means the actual sales take place somewhere else, and all that's taking place with the Giovanni effort in Atlanta is distribution. Alec's secondary intent with this discussion, though, is to make his own efforts seem valuable to the Giovanni. Carlita's proposal to simply move their drugs through other channels is valid, and Alec wants to maintain his opulent unlife. Also, he needs to make his business seem irrelevant to Tock and the Sabbat. As such, Alec's statements are contradictory and full of holes — something Salvatore is quite aware of, but doesn't bring to the fore, because it might lead Tock to believe that his arguments have some credence.

Tock's Argument: Tock has no illusions as to the validity of his claims. He knows that he's an upstart and that his boldness is the primary stumbling block in the negotiations. He believes that if he's firm, the Giovanni must eventually pay what he asks them — a flat quarter of everything that rolls into town. After all, aren't they dealing with *mortals* in every other leg of the triangle? If they can pay off the cattle, paying off a Cainite shouldn't be a problem. Tock also knows that such a request is completely ridiculous — he takes any percentage he can get the Giovanni to agree upon.

AND THAT'S THAT

Before beginning the story, the Storyteller should decide who he wants to come out ahead from the meeting. Naturally, the characters should be able to influence the outcome, but the Storyteller needs to decide what course of action the Storyteller characters take.

The most likely situation, and the one the story as written assumes, is that the meeting ends in a stalemate. Neither side gives any ground and both leave disgusted with the other. Tock decides that he wants Duchesne dead, forcing the Giovanni to take their business elsewhere and leave their business in Atlanta free for the taking. Salvatore decides that he wants Tock dead — he can't waste more time with this arrogant fool who thinks he can avoid doing things "the right way" because he's greedy.

Here is where the characters have a chance to shine. If they side with Tock, he may request that they rub out Duchesne. He's willing to let them deal with Duchesne's clients for the previously mentioned kickback. If the characters empathize with the Giovanni, Salvatore requests that they make the hit on Tock. Afterward, he's willing to let them have any part of Tock's business for a point or two off the top and an agreement to work with the Giovanni should any situations requiring "favors" arise in the future. Salvatore is no fool — he knows his operation is too small to assume the business Tock claims as his own.

Of course, the characters are welcome to take whatever position they wish in the matter. It's quite possible that they fulfill the contracts on both Duchesne and Tock, earning themselves a pretty penny off the profits as long as they keep

their involvement concealed. It's also possible that they take no side at all, remaining independent in the matter. Obviously, a protracted drug-related gang war is outside the scope of this particular story, but it's perfect fodder for a chronicle that continues beyond the boundaries of this particular scene.

QUICKIES

If the three larger scenes aren't enough for your troupe, you may wish to punctuate this story with brief interludes focusing on the rave scene. Inflict any of these upon the characters or create your own.

Crankenstein: Some poor kid who's never tried drugs before just took something completely inappropriate for his experience level. Maybe he's blown on angel dust or maybe someone cut his speed with too much cocaine. Whatever the case, he's out of his mind on a chemical freak-out and accosts one of the characters.

Thug Life: Members of the B.T.S. (known variously as the Brooklyn Terror Squad, Beat the System, Born to Scheme, Boom Town Stars, or Big Time Score) have caught wind of the Succubus Club and decided to pay it a visit. The B.T.S. is a gang of thugs who haunt the rave circuit and victimize the suburban dilettantes, beating them and taking their drugs and money. They typically go after the ravers who present themselves as victims: the ones in expensive mall clothes, giant psychedelic hats or whistles and glow sticks. They mistake one of the characters for an easy mark. With any luck, the Kindred teach these shiteheads an unforgettable lesson.

Vigilant Spritzer: Large raves often employ "spritzers," staff who wander through the crowd and dance floor, spraying willing patrons with water bottles to keep them from dehydrating. A spritzer approaches a character who is dancing and notices that she's covered in blood (Kindred sweat blood, remember?) — and then drags her from the floor, calling for an ambulance.

SCENE THREE: LULLABY FOR THE DEAD

The Jyhad continues every night, with its players' pawns moving across the world in the endless dance of war and death. Every move, no matter how small, has repercussions on the eternal contest.

One of the Methuselaha slumbering beneath the city of Chicago has constructed just such a ruse. With the vast powers at his command, he has subtly invaded the minds of several Daughters of Cacophony, teaching them the words to a powerful spell. The affected Daughters believe the spell to

be a song, communicated to them across the mystical musical gestalt that courses through the minds of all members of the bloodline. In fact, the ancient Brujah Menele has constructed a ritual that, when heard by his nemesis Helena, will send her back into the cold arms of torpor.

But Menele has a problem — every time he's tried to arrange the Daughters' arrival in Chicago, Helena has somehow confounded it. One attempt failed as Menele's divas met their Final Deaths at the claws of enraged Lupines. Another attempt failed as the plane upon which two of the Daughters traveled plummeted into Lake Michigan. Yet another try resulted in a tragic hotel fire — leaving the Daughters as piles of anonymous ash.

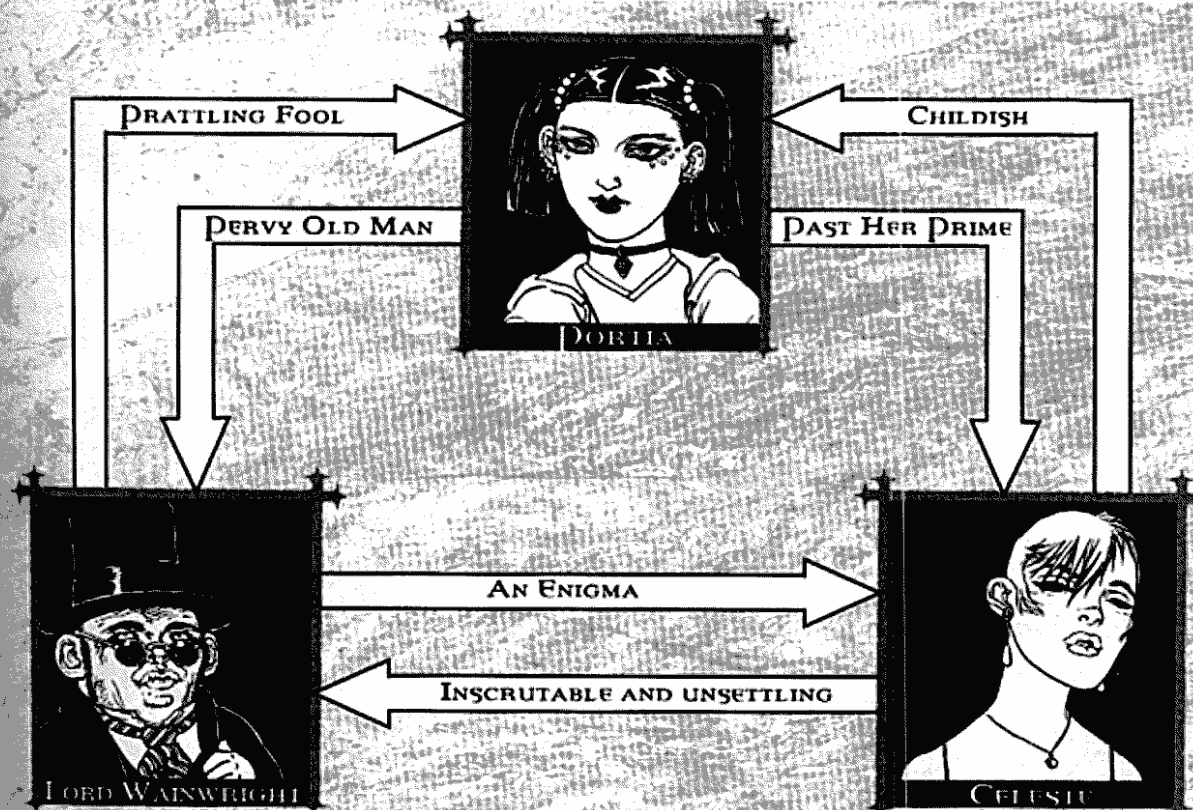
Still, Menele refuses to yield. The ritual required almost a century to perfect. This time he's certain his plan can work. Instead of bringing the song to Helena, he's bringing Helena to the song.

Obviously, Menele can't send Helena to the Succubus Club and force her to sit through the song. Rather, through his mastery of Dominate, Presence and Thaumaturgy, he's forged a mystical psychic conduit between Helena and a Kindred dupe: the impostor Portia. Through mental subversion, Menele has subverted "Portia's" will, causing her to believe that she is indeed the personality Portia, who is

actually just an aspect of Helena's self. If Menele's curse works — and if the song has the desired effect — Helena sinks into torpor without ever having heard the song herself.

But no Cainite plan ever takes effect without a catch, and two complications jeopardize Menele's plan. First, one of the Daughters of Cacophony, Céleste, has become aware of a foreign presence in his (see below) mind and is leery of the upcoming performance, not knowing what effect it may have. Second, the Tremere Ephraim Wainwright has taken a perverse interest in the magical properties of music, and intends to observe the ritual performance. When Wainwright discerns that the song indeed works magic, his subsequent analysis sooner or later leads him back to Menele. Once that happens, Helena's agents know that something is wrong, rouse her, and once again inflame the Jyhad between the two. Menele has no intention of letting old fires rekindle.

Of course, the players' characters are unlikely to know any of this, unless the performance takes place without a hitch and they consult Wainwright afterward, or they use some significant and lengthy counter-Dominate techniques on Portia or Céleste. But such is the way of the Jyhad; its moves are many and secret, discernible only to those who see what's happening for what it is.



This scene involves the players' characters only if they make themselves a part of it. If they abstain from any action, that's fine — they've unwittingly witnessed one of the minor victories of the Jyhad.

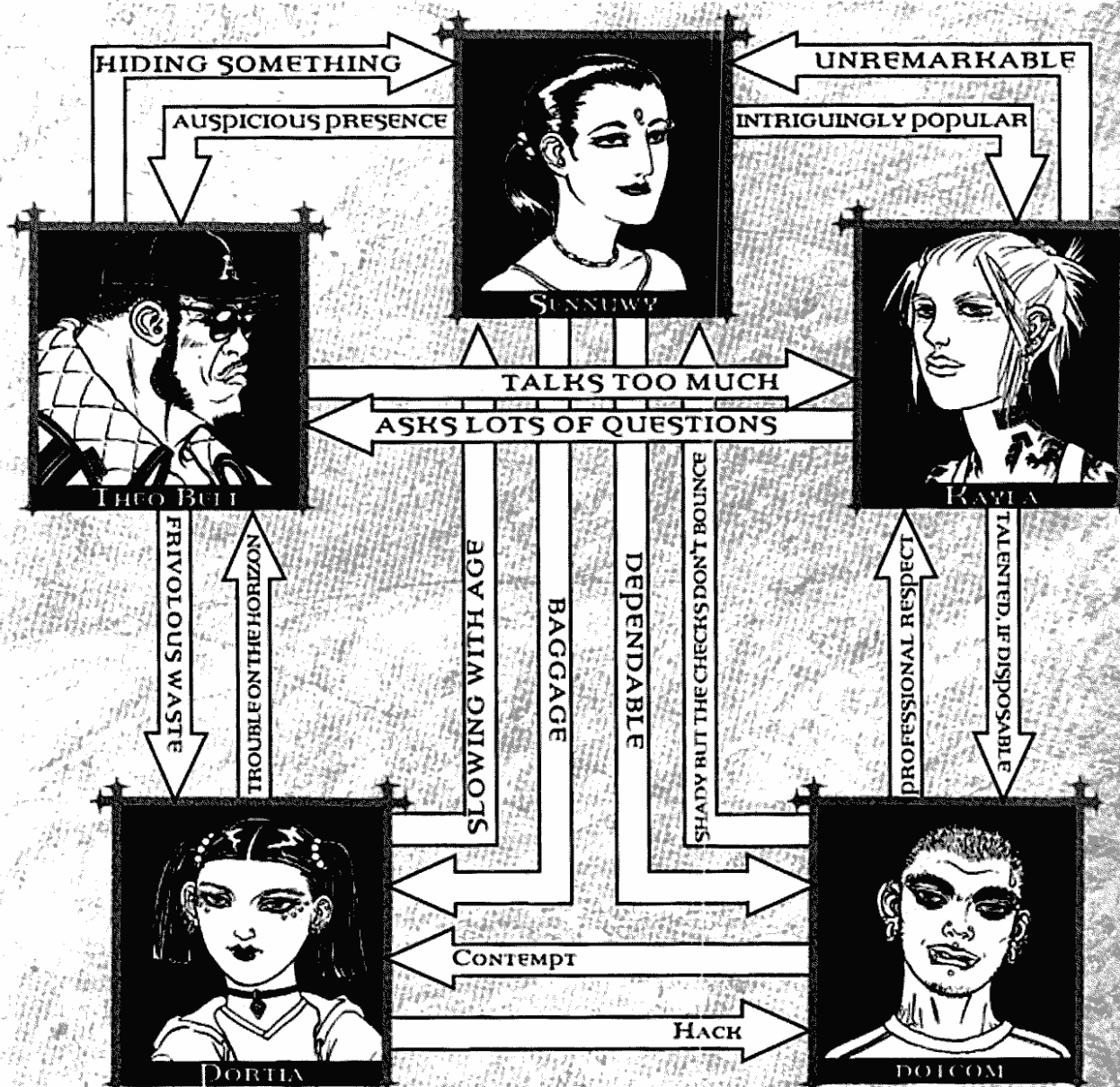
Any number of Kindred *do* attend the chorus, most of whom are minions, childer or agents of other, elder Kindred who do not wish to jeopardize their own unives by being present at such a potentially hazardous event as a concert by the Daughters. These assembled Kindred provide the characters with basic misgivings about the event — their reasons for attending should seem so vague and ominous as to warn the characters of a nebulous doom on the horizon.

Tremere characters may know of Lord Wainwright and his work, which may provide them with other hints as to the possible nature of the chorus. Additionally, Céleste has been

growing more and more fearful of his involvement. Any Kindred who approaches him and seems sincere in the nights leading up to the performance (the Daughters have all booked rooms at the Westin Peachtree, Downtown) may earn his confidence and learn of his vague misgivings.

THE BEST-LAID PLANS...

Should the characters wish to halt the chorus, doing so is not difficult — the Daughters do not perform with their full complement of members. If the song is interrupted after it has begun, the magic fails. Magically sensitive characters feel a heavy power abate, and Céleste likewise feels as if a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders. Portia simply shrugs and returns to the dance floor or whatever other schemes in which she's involved herself. She has no conscious knowledge of Menele's ritual.



Of course, anyone who stops the performance based on vague feelings, with no evidence of the song's malice, encounters some resistance. Sennuwy, for example, dismisses any concerns the characters have, not being one to worry about portents or stage fright. Characters who physically interrupt the performance are likely questioned afterward, whether by police, Sennuwy, or an irate Wainwright. Anyone who answers with sheepish "I don't know why we had to stop the concert, but we did," should meet with suitable incredulity.

If the characters approach Wainwright about calling the chorus to a halt beforehand, he strongly opposes the idea, stating that the event has some significance to Gehenna and that fooling with it is tempting fate. If they insist, he opposes them with all his abilities — he's not about to watch one of the signs of the end of the world crumble beneath the vanity of an impetuous coterie.

...SOMETIMES HIDE OTHERS

Assuming the Daughters' performance takes place without a hitch, the song is a haunting, moody one. It continues for 20 minutes, featuring an aria by Céleste. Storytellers are encouraged to play some suitably spooky music while describing the affair.

At the end of the ritual, Menele's spell takes effect — with too much efficacy. Helena succumbs to torpor in her Chicago haven, along with any Toreador in the vicinity (subject to the Storyteller's discretion). This includes Alec Duchesne and any of the players' characters. Portia, mesmerized by the performance up until its crescendo, also collapses. While it is unlikely that the rest of the coterie has any difficulty rousing torpid fellows, they no doubt suspect something strange about the performance.

Again, what shakes out of this is up to the characters and Storyteller — they may wish to assist Wainwright in his followup research, conduct their own, or attempt to break the veil of Dominate, Presence and Thaumaturgy under which the Daughters of Cacophony and Portia operated.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS

If the characters have nothing to introduce them to any of the plot elements, the Storyteller can still drag them into the fray with some pretense of subtlety by using one of the Storyteller characters. The DJ, for example, can point out the cluster of gangsters negotiating in a far corner of the main room. The gossipy bartender can recommend the Daughters' performance in the secondary room. Sennuwy can recommend any of the "attractions" and make introductions for characters who desire them. Portia is a whirlwind of social activity, involved in most of this story's subplots. Theo Bell can enlist the characters aid in scouting the city, which may cause them to run afoul of Bishop Sutphen — or vice versa, whereby Sutphen recognizes Bell and asks the characters to keep an eye on him.

Remember, integrating the individual characters is the key to making *The Return of the Succubus Club* an engaging story. Players get out what they put in, and the Storyteller should have plenty of hooks to bring the characters into future stories.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Complete Traits for Theo Bell appear in *Children of the Night*. The Storyteller should adjust and expand the Traits of any of these characters as the situation demands. Obviously, if the text refers to a character possessing a certain Trait, assume she has it.

SENNUWY, THE PROMOTER

10th generation, childe of Ghivran Dalaal

Clan: Ravnos

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Thrill-seeker

Embrace: 1891

Apparent Age: early 20s

As an urchin among the *harafish* of Cairo, Sennuwy learned how the have-nots must eke out their unives. Such precious knowledge has served her well for decades.

Embraced into the servitude of a traveling Kindred cult leader, Sennuwy was charged with procuring vessels and faithful followers, which she did with uncommon zeal. Sennuwy made marks on anyone who crossed her in life — a powerful minister's daughter was enticed by the Dead God's cult, as were the brothers and wife of a constable who had caused Sennuwy no end of grief during her living days.

Before long, though, Sennuwy found that those who had made her impoverished life unpleasant were growing old, becoming reclusive or dying. As the last of her aging vendet-



tas passed on, Sennuwy realized that not only did nothing tie her to Cairo any longer, but that her sire had no use for her other than to make his own sybaritic unlife less demanding. She had allowed her past to govern her, and she had been the tool of a fool.

Sennuwy underwent a pilgrimage of self-discovery. At first she felt she had no meaning — the Curse of Caine was a cruel joke played upon those who thought immortality was a gift. In her journeys, she met several other creatures of the night: deathless servants of the old Egyptian order, wizards with baleful spells, shapeshifting beasts and many other Kindred. In the end, she realized that unlife, the monster's existence, was precisely what she made of it. Each of her fellow night creatures had its own crusade. She had only to find hers.

It was a search she failed. After a few decades of desperately clinging to whatever cause seemed to call to her, Sennuwy gave up, unwittingly following in her sire's dilettante footsteps. Her humanity waned, her purpose vanished, and she gave herself over to an unlife of pleasure.

In the modern nights, Sennuwy seeks only the next rush or as-yet-unindulged pleasure. The reinvention of the Succubus Club is only her latest vehicle — it keeps her surrounded by money, drugs, amorous vessels and the constant danger she requires to have any emotional response at all. Sennuwy has become jaded before her time, but at this point, she wouldn't have it any other way. She bathes in the limelight of glamour and murders with equal aplomb... woe to those with conflicting priorities.

THEO BELL, ARCHON OF THE CAMARILLA

9th generation, childe of Don Cerro

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1857

Apparent Age: early 30s

Theo's remarkable service to the ivory tower comes not because of any deep-seated loyalty to the organization but more as a result of his understanding what he has become. Theo believes that vampires must hide themselves from humankind — they are too selfish to lord their state over mortals as the Sabbat would, and most are too sloppy to exist as independents or inscrutable Inconnu. Therefore, Theo assumes the responsibilities of an archon because it is the least of many evils. He sees it as another of unlife's great ironies — having escaped from slavery during his mortal days, he has found himself once again submissive to the whips of another master.

Theo's interest in the Succubus Club coincides with the Camarilla's larger concern over the loss of Atlanta to the Sabbat. As the bastion of southern commerce and culture, Atlanta *belongs* to the Camarilla, despite the Sabbat's claim of greater dominance. Of course, this means nothing to Theo,



but his interest in protecting his own unlife leads him once again to move against the Sabbat.

As a master guerrilla fighter, Theo is no stranger to house-to-house warfare, but he knows that such tactics can't work in Atlanta. As such, he plays the game of subtlety and intrigue, using this visit to gather as much information about the Sword of Caine's presence in the city as possible. He doesn't consider himself a direct ally or rival of the characters' coterie — if they have something to offer, he may take advantage of it or ignore them completely. Only if they place themselves at direct odds with his larger purpose does he act against them, in which case he proves an implacable foe.

DR. JULIUS SUTPHEN, BISHOP OF ATLANTA

9th generation, childe of Catherine Esposito

Clan: Lasombra

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Monster

Embrace: 1872

Apparent Age: late 30s

As the only "colored" doctor in Provo, Utah toward the end of the 19th century, Julius Sutphen saw more than a few patients other doctors refused to treat. One night, a group of drifting plainsmen knocked at the door of his office, complaining that one of their number had been shot. Julius admitted them, and just as he prepared to extract the bullet from the cowboy's leg, the rest of group black-bagged him and dragged the doctor out of town behind their horses. There, the pack's priest Embraced Julius. He repaid the debt less than a year later by diablerizing her and taking her position as priest.

Since becoming a Cainite, Julius's unlife has been punctuated by similar coups. After parting ways with his pack, Julius headed east, where he fell in with the Spanish



and Mexican Sabbat's struggle over the coastal territories. Julius's façade of fearless savagery, combined with his knack for long-term planning helped him orchestrate many small and vicious skirmishes for the sect. Over the course of his hundred-plus years in the Sword of Caine, Julius has served packs as a ductus, priest and even templar before putting his nomadic tendencies behind him. For years, he provided the archbishops and prisci with information on Atlanta. Julius proved instrumental in coordinating the logistical efforts of eliminating Prince J. Benison Hodge, sneaking in Sabbat soldiers and keeping track of the fractious primogen. When Atlanta finally fell to the Sabbat, Sutphen assumed the role of bishop without any contention after the death of Bishop Sebastian.

Since those nights, Sutphen has enjoyed the power and prestige of his bishopric. He knows it can't be long before the sect recognizes him as an archbishop or requests his help in another important effort elsewhere. He's satisfied either way. In truth, the nightly affairs of bishops don't interest him — he'd rather be inciting the anarchs to revolt against the prince or plotting which knife to use when stabbing said prince in the back. Still, Julius appreciates the finer things; he suspects that deep within he wants all those things that he could never have obtained in life, but is now free to take as he pleases in undeath.

Cainites in Atlanta fear and respect Bishop Julius, not for his vast undead powers (which he doesn't really have), but for the sheer viciousness he can muster. He has been known to have rivals drawn and quartered by cars, hurled off skyscrapers and even vivisected with the precision of his doctor's training. While it's true that he has detractors among the Atlanta Sabbat, none have yet had the bravery to confront him directly. That's just how he wants his enemies: if not dead, then too scared to come forth and organize.

THE LAWDOGS

As Bishop Sutphen's hatchetmen in the newly "freed" city of Atlanta, the Lawdogs enjoy a sort of *carte blanche* in whatever activities they choose to indulge. They aren't too clever, though, to the satisfaction of Atlanta's less-combative Sabbat. Instead of muscling in on other Cainites' rackets, the Lawdogs are happy to take a cut or mind their own business altogether. After all, their *raison d'être* is hurting people, and Sutphen gives them plenty of opportunity to do just that.

5-0: (Lasombra, 11th generation) Trey Naylor used to have a comfortable job as a Georgia State Trooper, but his unabashed sadism and the fact that he was "so crooked he had to screw his pants on in the morning" caused his dismissal from the force. Unemployed and disaffected, he was part of a group of mass-Embraced Sabbat who were supposed to fight during the siege of Atlanta. 5-0 was too damn mean to die in the struggle, however, and survives to this night as the Lawdogs' ductus.

Boo: (Tzimisce, 11th generation) Boo followed the war effort north — Miami held nothing for him, and maybe he could find a place for himself in Atlanta after the city fell to the Sabbat. A former minor-league baseball player, Boo still carries the Louisville Slugger he used in his breathing days. As the pack's priest, Boo leads his fellow Cainites down a path of pragmatic hostility rather than spiritual growth — but that suits the Lawdogs (and their superiors) just fine.

Pratchett: (Brujah *antitribu*, 12th generation) Pratchett was once a bouncer for a prominent nightclub. The patrons complained once too often about his drug-induced rages (he tended to avail himself of the patrons' stashes), so he was fired and left unemployed. As another of the mass-Embraced Cainites who were never supposed to survive, Pratchett's time is no doubt running out. He's not exceptionally smart or



significantly stronger than any other Sabbat Cainites, he's just been lucky so far. In fact, many of the more vicious Sabbat mock him for the base, unoriginal nature of his violence, to which he just shrugs. Pratchett's not even aware enough to consider unlife as anything special, and probably won't even notice when he meets the Final Death.

Cao Nguyen: (Serpent of the Light, 12th generation) A vicious thug from Atlanta's "Little Vietnam," Cao stood out to her sire because of her desire to *matter*. Most of the Asian gangs on the northeast side were just rabble, fighting each other like starving dogs for a few scraps of less-than-prime territory. But Cao wanted more — it wasn't enough to be a big fish in a little pond. Embraced into a subversive temple of Cobra scouts, Cao became True Sabbat by playing an active role in the ethnic suburbs — by the time the Camarilla Kindred knew the Sabbat were upon them, they were surrounded. Cao's low cunning and lithe beauty make her Serpent of the Light membership all the more appropriate.

PORTIA, THE CULT OF PERSONALITY

12th generation, childe of Cass

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Rogue

Embrace: 1998

Apparent Age: late teens

Portia plays a dangerous game. Having spent much of her brief unlife in Chicago, she learned of the Methuselah Helena's ruse. Helena had been impersonating a neonate in order to maintain a low profile after awakening from torpor. The few other Kindred who had discerned this secret didn't hold on to their unlives long enough to tell anyone, so the truth was safe.

Portia stole Helena's false personality for her own, trusting the reputation of that persona to make her own unlife easier. Portia wisely left Chicago, where Helena could have easily destroyed her, reasoning that if she left, Helena had to not only go out of her way to eliminate the "problem," but also own up to it if anyone else found out. "Portia" simply picked up where Helena's Portia left off, and is aware of all but the most recent developments in Chicago politics. Portia looks nothing like Helena (though she is fairly pretty), so anyone who has met Helena's Portia persona are likely intrigued.

For the past six months, Portia has followed the Succubus Club on its nomadic tour, using the party as her personal escape from the vagaries of the Embrace. She finds it easy to feed from the drunken or drugged party goers and loses herself in the music played at the venues. She has accumulated a herd of assorted club kids and drug fiends, from whom she can feed. They surround her when the club's doors have opened, making her the belle of the ball.

Portia knows of Sennuwy, but only in name — the two have no business arrangements (though Portia does enjoy



free cover) and no knowledge of each other's secrets. Indeed, Portia prefers the indolent unlife she leads and has been photographed for many scene 'zines as the "it" girl of the Succubus circuit. She knows about most of the local affairs that directly affect the club — where to buy drugs, which prominent club kid is sleeping with another's boyfriend and so on.

Unbeknownst to her, Portia carries hepatitis C, to which she was exposed after feeding from a needle junkie in her herd. Anyone Portia feeds from has a one in 10 chance of being exposed to the virus. Hepatitis C attacks the liver, causing inflammation, scarring and cirrhosis, but may not exhibit symptoms for years. When the liver is finally damaged enough, however, the only way to repair the havoc the disease has wreaked is through transplant.

CELESTE, THE VOICE OF A SECRET

11th generation, childe of Harlan Graves

Clan: Daughters of Cacophony

Nature: Bon Vivant

Demeanor: Gallant

Embrace: 1991

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Céleste may well be the only surviving male member of the Daughters of Cacophony — unless a few other transsexuals also managed to escape the bloodline's recent purge. He's slightly paranoid about his unlikely survival, though his audiences simply believe him to be "artistically eccentric." As far as he can tell, only he and his dead sire know the truth of the matter.

Céleste normally leads a solitary unlife, working a few nights a week singing torch songs, ballads and standards for an august crowd at a small social club in Philadelphia. He has had several opportunities to "make it big" with major labels



or on tour with popular singers, but he has chosen to remain anonymous and obscure — the better to protect the secrets of both his gender and his Embrace. Still, he maintains a haven in relative comfort and makes allusions to “family money” when the matter comes up.

As the nights wear on, Céleste finds himself uncomfortable with the direction the Daughters of Cacophony are taking. He has attended several gatherings of the bloodline and experienced trance-like states that lead him to believe that... well, he's not sure. In any event, he has felt strange presences in his mind at these gatherings and suspects that some unknown entity wants to use the Daughters as a collective tool to serve its inscrutable purpose. The lack of concrete evidence frustrates him, but he plays along for fear of attracting unwanted attention that could lead to his Final Death. In fact, he has convinced himself that only his long-standing perception of himself as a woman has protected him — surely whatever has been in his mind might catch on to anyone less sure of himself... or herself.

Céleste remains aloof and withdrawn from most people. He has too much to hide and prefers to let his singing communicate his feelings. Also, beneath his fear, he resents being used and doesn't want to let any of his internalized frustration give him away. He knows a few of the other Daughters assembled at the Succubus Club, but only on social terms — they are as distant from him as he can keep them without arousing suspicion.

LORD EPHRAIM WAINWRIGHT, “IMP”

8th generation, childe of Aidan Lyle

Clan: Tremere

Nature: Curmudgeon

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: 1821

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Without his Embrace into Clan Tremere, Ephraim Wainwright would have probably suffered the same fate as other dwarfs in 19th-century England. He may have ended up either penniless or as part of an itinerant freakshow. A visiting Irish dignitary of the Tremere felt an uncharacteristic compassion for the man, however, and made him his ghoul. The ghouldom grew into a twisted apprenticeship — many of Lyle's acquaintances mocked his homely “homunculus” and Ephraim routinely handled unsavory duties at Lyle's requests.

As a child of hardship, Ephraim realized that the rude training he was receiving was his way to a better life. After demonstrating his mastery of several of Lyle's pet theories, Ephraim received the Embrace. His Thaumaturgical insights proved his salvation, and he found himself elevated from unsightly dogsbody to promising protégé.

Before long, Ephraim completed his apprenticeship and returned to England, making his haven in London. There he purchased an estate, where he continued to study and advance his knowledge of blood magic.

Ephraim Wainwright is a scholar's scholar, constantly searching for the next breakthrough or putting some mystic principle to the test. He sees omens and divinations everywhere, which he diligently records in a black journal. His latest work, *Songs of the Eve of Gehenna*, has been decried by both the Camarilla and traditional Tremere elders as a inflammatory and apocalyptic. Undaunted, Wainwright continues to publish the work for interested parties. His trip to the Succubus Club — not the sort of thing he's used to — is intended to be the basis for a follow-up appendix. Ephraim believes that the Daughters of Cacophony's performance numerologically corresponds to one of the dates cited in eschatological study. He plans to use the performance to reinforce the ideas in his book — currently, *Songs* is pure theory, but a factual occurrence might lend it gravity (and



probably incur the wrath of other parties, but such is the price of progress).

The diminutive Tremere pursues his project with overweening fervor. Anyone who tries to stop the event meets stern opposition from him, as he sees averting the performance as toying with fate. Wainwright knows many, many paths and rituals which he does not hesitate to employ in his favor. Those who wish to stand against him are advised to do so secretly.

TOCK, THE DEALER

10th generation, childe of Quetzal

Clan: Nosferatu *antitribu*

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Gallant

Embrace: 1942

Apparent Age: late 30s

Although Tock is not so twisted as the “average” Nosferatu or Nosferatu *antitribu*, he is not a pleasant man to behold. The Embrace twisted him in a manner that makes him look not unlike a ghastly clock, hence his name. His arms and legs became long and spindly, and one arm is a good foot longer than the other. His skin wraps tightly over angular bones and a shifted hip causes him to walk almost sideways. Still, he appears mostly human, except for a scaly patch of yellow skin at the base of his back.

Tock oversees a significant drug-trafficking effort in Atlanta, a fact that brings him into frequent conflict with Giovanni drug runners and the odd pack of younger Sabbat or anarchists wishing to ply their trade in the same market. Tock doesn't want to share his turf, however, and he refuses to accept just how patently impossible the concept of an omnipotent drug baron is in a city like Atlanta. Still, Tock persists in taking vicious steps against

his competition — his tactics are equal parts street knowledge and *Scarface* fodder.

Since the first nights following his Embrace, Tock displayed a keen paranoia and has insisted on being his pack's ductus. He has also resigned himself to small pack — just himself, a priest and perhaps one other Cainite — in the interests of keeping his “empire” manageable. Most other Sabbat indulge him — its easier to ask forgiveness from the kingpin than it is to ask permission when drug-dealing Sabbat run afoul of him. Still, Tock desperately wants others to see him as a tyrant, and he's no stranger to sickening violence if he thinks it makes others respect him. He knows he can't be involved in every petty drug sale that goes on in Atlanta, but he does want to supply every seller in the city, no matter how difficult it proves. Anything less makes his racket seem like a paper tiger.

SALVATORE GIOVANNI, THE MAN IN CHARGE

10th generation, childe of Rosario Giovanni

Clan: Giovanni

Nature: Rogue

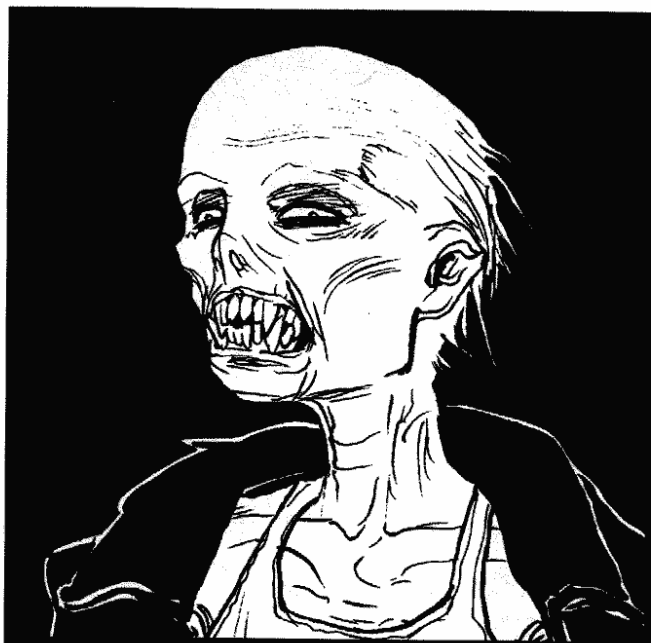
Demeanor: Architect

Embrace: 1887

Apparent Age: late 20s

The family entrusted Salvatore with one of their money-making drug rackets and has never regretted its decision. Salvatore treats the narcotics trade as a business rather than a criminal endeavor. Although he's smart enough not to write anything down, he can remember specific details and ledger-style data for the racket from any point over the past 20 years.

Soft-spoken and debonair, Salvatore manages the Italy-to-Cuba end of his endeavor by bringing others into his confidence. Unlike the others in the triangle, Salvatore



doesn't call the shots based on the terror of his underlings; he makes sure everyone on his payroll makes decent money and wants the racket to succeed. In fact, Salvatore is a bit squeamish, which he keeps to himself, and he moves on to a different enterprise if it ever becomes necessary for him to get violent.

Additionally, Salvatore's demeanor is one that inspires confidence in others. He is forthright, putting up a "business first" façade that lets others know what he considers important. Frivolity has its place, but only once the deal is made.

Salvatore speaks no English, though he is fluent in continental, Mexican and Cuban dialects of Spanish. He has also acquired a taste for the blood of dark-skinned *latinas*, upon whom he prefers to sate his thirsts if offered the choice.

CARLITA GIOVANNI, THE PIRATE

12th generation, childe of César Giovanni

Clan: Giovanni

Nature: Deviant

Demeanor: Conformist

Embrace: 1957

Apparent Age: early 30s

The Giovanni Embraced Carlita to fulfill a need. After *la cosa nostra's* disruption in Apalachin, New York and with the situation in Cuba under Batista worsening, the time was right to test a new agenda. With the continued dissolution of organized crime and Cuba's impending revolution, Salvatore Giovanni saw the opportunity to create a "warehouse" that could hide U.S.-bound shipments from federal agents. He arranged to have Carlita brought into the clan. Her responsibility was to establish and manage the "warehouse."

Carlita succeeded admirably. Cuba's revolutionary government proved just as corrupt as Batista's, and within four years of Castro's ascension to power, the Giovanni warehouse handled 90 percent of Salvatore's trans-Atlantic contraband.

Since that time, Carlita has maintained the warehouse as her own prestigious project. Her unlife is one of uncharacteristic Cuban splendor — while most of the nation still lives in squalor, her haven is palatial and attended by servants at all times. Still, Carlita hasn't let success soften her. She keeps a hard edge that has served her well since the tumult of Castro's coup and the politically tense decades thereafter. She's not a killer — Carlita has people who handle that kind of thing — but her temper has become legendary, especially among the hired help.

Most of Carlita's interests coincide with Salvatore's, but she's not above cutting a deal under the table if it means more money or power for her. Salvatore allows her the autonomy she needs to keep her happy, but her tastes have become increasingly monstrous over the past decade or so. Tales of orgies, debauches and "blood festivals" at her estate some-



times find their way back to the Old World and Salvatore worries that Carlita, while initially useful, may not stand the test of time. Carlita seems oblivious, however, conducting herself like an undead Marie Antoinette.

ALEC DUCHESNE, THE MIDDLEMAN

10th generation, childe of Elizabeth Winslow

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 1939

Apparent Age: early 30s

Consider an eminent Toreador's disgrace when her lauded progeny was found to be nothing more than a simple, treacherous, greedy lout! Elizabeth Embraced Duchesne believing that his Southern gentility would prove a boon to her reputation. Steeped as he was in the gothic underpinnings of Southern society, Duchesne had an appreciation for the dark side of things as well as a small degree of respect within Atlanta society. He was set to be a cagey diplomat, an earnest appraiser of antiques, even a skilled extemporaneous speaker when the situation demanded it.

Alec Duchesne had other plans, though: money, and lots of it. Without hesitation, he accepted Salvatore Giovanni's offer of "a business relationship" in the early 60s, using his contacts as an antiques dealer to move Giovanni drugs in from Cuba and the Mediterranean and through Atlanta. Elizabeth was aghast and wrote off her vulgar childe the moment she found herself confronted with the proof — for her, it was better to cut her losses and suffer a brief period of ignominy than to tie her fate to a rogue childe who was, in all likelihood, exactly the gutter punk he was accused of being.



Alec's nights teeter on the razor's edge of danger. As a nominal member of the Camarilla (more by default than active support), his unlife has become something of a liability to the local Sabbat, who are content to let him be as long as he cuts them in on the profit every now and then. Despite his three decades of commitment to Salvatore's project, Duchesne feels that he must constantly prove himself to the Giovanni — he knows how mercenary Carlita and Salvatore are, and they wouldn't hesitate to bring someone else into the fold if it was better business for them. Additionally, Atlanta's ostentatious Sabbat drug kingpin, Tock, has recently become a problem by drawing police attention to the city's thriving drug trade, which makes every deal a gamble. As a result, Duchesne has begun to fray a bit at the edges, as his mind is preoccupied with not only making sure his "business" runs smoothly, but with the numerous other problems that seem lined up to cause him grief.

Duchesne is a Southern gentleman to the last, however, cordial and gracious. Individuals who meet with him almost invariably leave the encounter feeling as if Duchesne has done them a favor, obliging them with the formality of a meeting, if nothing else. Only this aspect of his personality has kept him from Final Death this long. With Duchesne, "business" and "personal" are the same thing, and no one wants to rub out someone with whom they're on good terms.

Still, feelings change.

DOTCOM, THE DJ

Independent ghoul

Nature: Masochist

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Apparent Age: mid-20s

The Succubus Club's resident DJ simultaneously embodies everything good and bad about the nightlife scene. He has no prejudices — as long as you've come to enjoy the music, dotcom doesn't care whether you're black, white, straight, gay, alive or undead. On the other side of the coin, dotcom is so completely debauched that it's often impossible to understand what he's saying, if he's indeed using real words at all.

Dotcom only recently became a ghoul as a result of his never-ending quest for the next high. Having become aware of the Kindred who visited the club (which was inevitable), he also learned of the properties of their blood. Procuring a "hit" from a visiting Toreador, he has since become addicted to vitae, bartering requests and less savory favors in exchange for the precious fluid.

In addition to the addictions that war for his attentions, dotcom is also a fount of seemingly arbitrary idiosyncrasies. At any given time, he subscribes passionately to a dozen random ideas, most of which have no relationship to each other. For example, he refuses to play the Sisters of Mercy ("People still listen to that crap?"), he won't give Portia the time of day ("Jesus, hasn't that barfly dried up yet?"), and he alternates between playing completely straight-edged one night and blasted out of his mind on amphetamines the next for reasons that make sense only to him. Storytellers are encouraged to select one utterly irrelevant idea for dotcom and have him rant outrageously at the characters about it the first time they meet him. The characters may even pursue the red herring...

As a DJ, however, dotcom's aware of almost all the gossip and drama brought into the Succubus Club — only the bartender Kayla knows more. Of course, he makes a big production about pretending to above all such pettiness, but nonetheless, he doesn't turn anyone away if there's a chance they have a secret or a drop of vitae.

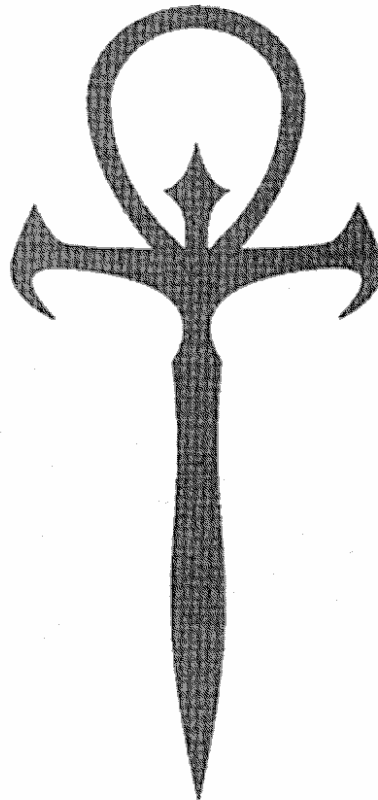


KAYLA, THE BARTENDER**Nature:** Celebrant**Demeanor:** Caregiver**Apparent Age:** mid-20s

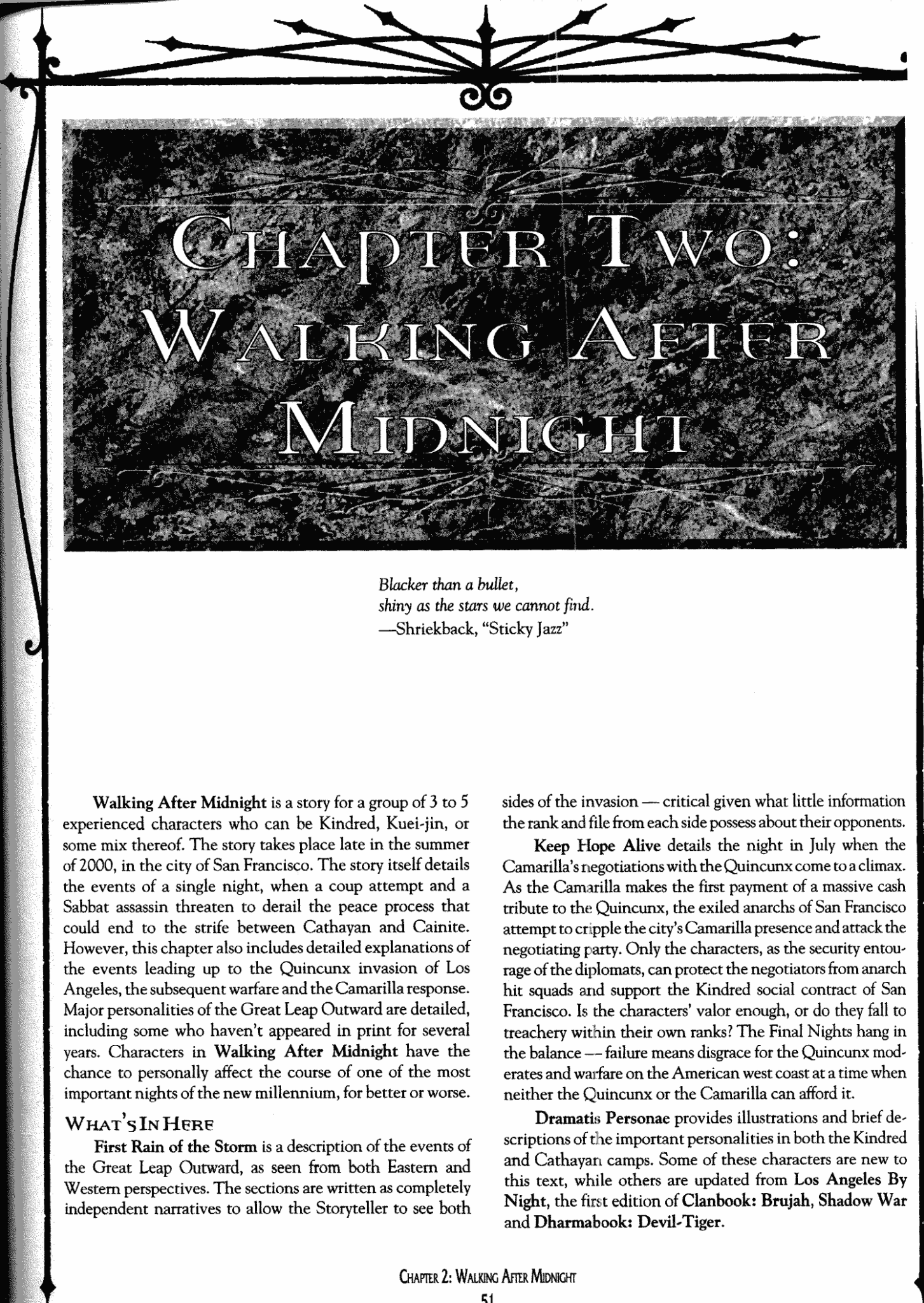
The old stereotype concerning bartenders is true. People tell them everything — even Kindred. Kayla's privy to every secret that crosses the Succubus Club's threshold that won't have the subject arrested outright and several that would. Even if she doesn't hear news from the concerned party themselves, she hears it secondhand.

Still, such a trustworthy reputation vanishes if the confidante is loose lipped. She's loathe to divulge information unless she really likes person she's telling or thinks she can get better information from them. After all, happy patrons leave big tips, and she's not involved with the Succubus Club because she likes the hours and the cigarette smoke. Cash is the bottom line, but she's never so base as to make that obvious. Kayla knows about ghouls and vampires and "all that other weird shit" that stalks the night, but she's not interested in becoming part of it.

Kayla has a vivacious, affable personality that wins her friends, though being the most reliable source of information at the club sure helps. She's not the smartest person in the world, but she's not stupid in any sense of the word. She pours deep drinks, smiles as she delivers them and gets to know the "regulars." After all, that's the best way to keep a good thing going.







CHAPTER TWO: WALKING AFTER MIDNIGHT

*Blacker than a bullet,
shiny as the stars we cannot find.*
—Shriekback, “Sticky Jazz”

Walking After Midnight is a story for a group of 3 to 5 experienced characters who can be Kindred, Kuei-jin, or some mix thereof. The story takes place late in the summer of 2000, in the city of San Francisco. The story itself details the events of a single night, when a coup attempt and a Sabbat assassin threaten to derail the peace process that could end to the strife between Cathayan and Cainite. However, this chapter also includes detailed explanations of the events leading up to the Quincunx invasion of Los Angeles, the subsequent warfare and the Camarilla response. Major personalities of the Great Leap Outward are detailed, including some who haven't appeared in print for several years. Characters in **Walking After Midnight** have the chance to personally affect the course of one of the most important nights of the new millennium, for better or worse.

WHAT'S IN HERE

First Rain of the Storm is a description of the events of the Great Leap Outward, as seen from both Eastern and Western perspectives. The sections are written as completely independent narratives to allow the Storyteller to see both

sides of the invasion — critical given what little information the rank and file from each side possess about their opponents.

Keep Hope Alive details the night in July when the Camarilla's negotiations with the Quincunx come to a climax. As the Camarilla makes the first payment of a massive cash tribute to the Quincunx, the exiled anarchists of San Francisco attempt to cripple the city's Camarilla presence and attack the negotiating party. Only the characters, as the security entourage of the diplomats, can protect the negotiators from anarchist hit squads and support the Kindred social contract of San Francisco. Is the characters' valor enough, or do they fall to treachery within their own ranks? The Final Nights hang in the balance — failure means disgrace for the Quincunx moderates and warfare on the American west coast at a time when neither the Quincunx or the Camarilla can afford it.

Dramatis Personae provides illustrations and brief descriptions of the important personalities in both the Kindred and Cathayan camps. Some of these characters are new to this text, while others are updated from **Los Angeles By Night**, the first edition of **Clanbook: Brujah**, **Shadow War** and **Dharmabook: Devil-Tiger**.

WHAT SORT OF CHARACTERS?

Walking After Midnight is written as an action-movie sequence. It includes a fight, a chase through San Francisco, and another, bigger fight. Characters must be able to perform in combat conditions and have at least 8 to 10 dots of Disciplines. Characters should probably also have one combat Ability high enough to have a specialty in it and an Athletics rating of three or greater.

The story also contains advice for including these events in an ongoing chronicle, with the characters taking part in the events of the Great Leap Outward before and after the night of the attempted coup. If characters participate in these events, they should also have the political savvy to thrive, or at least survive, in an atmosphere of hothouse politics.

Note also that the events of this story are, quite simply, over the top. To preserve the frenzied, high-action pace, we've sacrificed a bit of realism. The story involves several heinous breaches of the Masquerade in the interests of drama, and Storytellers who want some extra mileage from the tale are encouraged to have the coterie "clean up" afterward. This can include suppressing broadcast footage, burying news stories, silencing witnesses and otherwise keeping people from looking too deeply into the world of the Kindred — which mortals should never know exists.

FIRST RAIN OF THE STORM

EAST

Recent years have been troublesome for the Quincunx. In early 1997, two of the regional capitals were occupied by foreign powers, and administration of those regions had consequently become haphazard at best. The Mao Dynasty was crumbling, shot through with corruption and full of unrest. Only the more critical task of marshalling their forces for the immanent turning of the Age held the Devil-Tiger bodhisattvas back from announcing that the Mandate of Heaven had been withdrawn.

Instead, Heavenly Devils and Resplendent Cranes alike strove to prevent mortal structures from collapsing under the weight of their own greed. Minions of the Yama Kings went widely abroad, Kin-jin broods popped up all across the Chinese coast, and the misbehavior of the so-called Bamboo Princes had exceeded even the wide tolerance given to Running Monkeys. A simple fool could tell that some sort of righteous action was needed.

The type of action to be undertaken was a question debated before the throne of the Blood Court Ancestor. Most of the ancestors and mandarins of the Quincunx simply advocated the status quo — the Sixth Age was coming, and now was not the time to rock the boat. However, two opposed

camp of vocal and influential extremists forced the Quincunx to consider action on the matter.

The first camp, the Righteous Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders, proposed a plan of action called the Ash Plan. The Ash Plan argued that the Quincunx needed to act, and act immediately. The Kin-jin had caused the turning of the Age or were at least major contributors. The Gui Ren should attack while the opportunity was there. Whether it was a pre-emptive strike in the upcoming apocalypse or a delay of the Age of Sorrow for a few years, the effort was justifiable.

The advocates of the Ash Plan among the ancestors were primarily reactionary Resplendent Cranes. These *chih-xue* hoped to turn back the hands of time and avert the Age of Sorrow rather than building a righteous world after the Devil-Tigers have burnt the creation (and themselves) to cinders. The Ash Plan was also supported by Devil-Tiger extremists, allegedly including supporters of the forbidden Searing Wind sect. These vampires wished to strike first against unrighteousness, rather than waiting for the Age of Sorrow to begin.

However, the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders was not just a movement of mandarins. Many jina and older disciples whose trip to Yomi occurred during the European partition of China supported the Ash Plan as well. The sentiment that Western vampires were somehow responsible for the current plight of Zhongguo was popular among those who walked the Road Back due to opium addiction or after a death in the Opium Wars or the Boxer Uprising.

The Righteous Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders were led by Mandarin Hao Wei-Liang, a cunning and experienced Resplendent Crane politician. The more moderate opposition, known as the Harmonious Menders of Broken Fences, was led by two of the Quincunx's most talented young mandarins, the deliciously scandalous Bone Flower Jiejie Li, and the Devil-Tiger firebrand Chiu Bao.

THE MODERATE SITUATION

The Harmonious Menders of Broken Fences are by no means a "peace" party. All Kuei-jin know that there can be no peace in the war against unrighteousness — the fence mending in their name refers to the fences around the boundaries of property. In the opinion of the Menders, the idea of going on crusades against the Kin-jin while the capitals of two regions suffered under foreign occupation was like choosing new curtains while your house burns down — first things first. The Quincunx's borders must be repaired, and infestations of kumo, *akuma*, and other unrighteous beings must be eliminated. Then, and only then, could the Quincunx cast its eyes to foreign lands. Rushing into a foreign war wasn't audacious, it was asinine.

The clash between the two philosophies was obvious. The Crusaders claimed that the Fence Menders were unwilling to take decisive action. There will never be a time when the Middle Kingdom is ready, they charge. A boil left to fest

hurts twice as much to remove when it is lanced. The Fence Menders claim that the Crusaders are putting ideology before reality — all the urgency in the world still doesn't change the fact that the Quincunx wastes its power in bloodshed on foreign shores when it should be concentrating its forces to reclaim and defend the soil of Zhongguo in the Age of Sorrow. The Menders advocated the Two-Fang Serpent Plan, a compromise suggested early in debate over the next direction for the Quincunx. The first "fang" proposes that the Five August Courts should secure their borders. The second "fang" posits that the Five August Courts should take and hold one Western city for several years to see if it was feasible and to learn more about the Kin-jin.

This plan was not without subtext. The Menders enjoy and openly court the support of the young jina and older disciples who were a product of atrocities like the Rape of Nanking during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. They have little doubt that if the Quincunx is secured and reestablished before the Sixth Age, the Fence Menders will be significantly more interested in combating unrighteousness in Azure Dragon Court than in North America and Europe.

THE INVASION BEGINS

After a series of fierce Shadow Wars between extremist factions threatened the sanctity of the Blood Court, Ancestor Ch'ang and the other Elders of the Quincunx were unable to stonewall any longer. With his fellow Ancestors, Chiang created a new department of the Quincunx theoretically equal to the elemental Courts themselves. This so-called Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders was an organization with a mission rather than geographic responsibilities and thus essentially a Ministry of War, albeit one with strictly controlled powers and prerogatives.

Chiang and his ministers concluded that supporting the moderates weakened Wei-Liang's threatening political stature. The Fence-Mender ideologue Jiejie Li was sworn in as the Ancestor of the Extraordinary Commission, with the more militant Chiu Bao as her First Oni. Li, the nominal head of the department, could award positions to willing jina and mandarins for the purpose of returning the lands of the Five Courts back to the Quincunx. The Crusader mandarin Hao Wei-Liang was Li's theoretical subordinate, but in reality had complete command of an expeditionary force dubbed the Glorious Ocean-Crossing Warriors. These volunteers could conduct operations outside Zhongguo, but by Quincunx decree they could not operate outside the city of Los Angeles and a few other areas.

The Crusaders charged that this limitation crippled their ability to fight, but the Fence Menders insisted that their opponents not be able to "probe" the Quincunx into a war from which there was no retreat. Both factions knew Los Angeles was a weakly held bandit kingdom as well as astrologically auspicious to invade. If the Kuei-jin could establish a beachhead there with acceptable losses, then they could

contemplate further action. If the Quincunx could not conquer a single bandit kingdom, then a heavier engagement with the Kin-jin was obviously unwise. This was not the Two-Fang Serpent Plan — a startling victory followed up closely by offensives in San Diego and San Francisco — but it was closer to Serpent than Ash.

The factions spent the remainder of 1997 gathering and organizing their forces. On New Year's Day, 1998, the first scout strolled quietly off a plane in Los Angeles just before dawn. The invasion of California had begun.

AT HOME

As the Ocean-Crossing Warriors set up their battle array of front companies and safe houses, the Fence Menders had also begun operations. The Menders were primarily involved with events in the Middle Kingdom and sent only a token force sent to America — a handful of vampires and a few dozen foot soldiers. Their initial efforts were aimed at Shanghai and channeled through the Flatbush and Stockton Posse, a flashy and audacious *wu* from Guangdong. Vocal supporters of the Two-Fang Serpent Plan, the Posse had distinguished themselves during the Japanese occupation, coordinating the resistance efforts of the Pearl River area triads with those of the Silent Mandarins in Shanghai. When the offensive began, the Posse revived old contacts with the Mandarins and cut a deal to channel funds and forces into an assault on the Japanese and Cainite holdings in that city.

The main effort in Hong Kong was led by the Victorious Whirlwind, who were the token Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusader force operating in Zhongguo. The Whirlwind threw dozens of Running Monkeys into Hong Kong in an attempt to subjugate the Righteous Devils of Kowloon. Initial efforts showed exceptional promise — the Kin-jin leader Pedder was destroyed in his Victoria Peak mansion and a nest of *akuma* dwelling among the boat people of the Yaumatei typhoon shelter were exterminated. Still, the Devils themselves proved elusive, and their close ties with the spirit courts of the region made the city a hostile environment for the Whirlwind troops.

In contrast, efforts in Shanghai showed early progress. Neither side had an overwhelming home advantage in the spirit world or in the Middle Kingdom, and the Flatbush and Stockton Posse's financial might balanced out the various *ketsuki* interests funding the Japanese defense. The Quincunx's command of the interior lines won out. The victory, however, did not come easily. All throughout 1998, Gui Ren and *ketsuki* crossed blades over the possession of the city. At the height of the fighting, Chiu Bao and Yoshida Ozaki of House Bishamon both came to the city to personally direct matters, making it a Twice Red Tiger Battle, as Midnight Wars where both sides are led by South-directed Devil-Tigers erupt.

Meanwhile, the bloody campaign in Hong Kong continued against fanatical resistance by the Righteous Devils of Kowloon. By early 1999, Hong Kong was a sideshow. Too many losses for too little gain had sent the efforts against the



Righteous Devils plummeting down the list of priorities as Chiu Bao's bloody but successful campaign against the Azure Dragon barbarians consumed most of the commission's resources for domestic campaigns.

THE EYE OF THE DEMON EMPEROR

In the middle of 1999, matters changed significantly. After the Eye of the Demon Emperor appeared in the heavens, and the ill-omened week that left three bodhisattvas slain, Jiejie Li received a tentative message from the Kin-jin Oliver Thrace of the Hong Kong Tremere. Thrace had learned enough about the Week of Nightmares to decide that remaining in Kindred society was a certain death sentence. He had been abandoned by his clan to a lonely demise at a remote outpost. The news of what might well be a rising Antediluvian pushed Oliver Thrace over the edge. If they protected him and concealed his defection, his message told Jiejie Li, Thrace would betray the Kin-jin.

ABROAD

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, matters seemed at first to unfold according to plan. Kuei-jin foot soldiers swept down on unprepared Kin-jin like an avalanche. The early months of 1998 saw much success — many of the independent Cainites or smaller gangs were wiped out completely or driven from the city. During the summer, that resistance hardened. Louis Fortier, Salvador Garcia, Crispus Attucks and Jeremy MacNeil formed the core of a vigorous and active resistance. Kuei-jin, particularly Running Monkeys, met Final Death in unacceptably large numbers.

Early in 1998, matters were looking excellent for the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders. The campaign in Shanghai was a blood-drenched morass, with Japanese resistance directed by one of House Bishamon's finest war leaders. In contrast, the campaign in Los Angeles was a well-directed walkover. A year later, everything had changed. Crack Crusader troops had volunteered to help spearhead the Yellow Springs' assault on Los Angeles and other nearby locations in the Yin World. In the midst of the invasion, a great storm struck the Yellow Springs, destroyed several mandarins and a number of jina, smashed Yu Huang's invasion and left it stranded far from home. Not only had important and irreplaceable warriors been lost, the Yin world was nearly impassable. Rather than receiving aid from the Yellow Springs, the Crusaders were obliged to render it instead, helping the First Sovereign Emperor's troops cling to the handful of haunts and beachheads they had captured at great cost.

To make matters worse, anarch resistance coalesced nightly. Louis Fortier and his men wiped out both the Bone Polishing Faction and the Yellow Dragon Society, both well-trained war-wu led by jina. By July, the Kuei-jin and the anarchists were both too exhausted to continue further. Almost half of San Francisco's vampires had been driven off or sent

to their Final Death, along with nearly a third of the Gui Ren. In all, almost a hundred vampires had met their ends, in some months at a rate of more than one a night.

In the Blood Court, things looked bad for Mandarin Hao. While Shanghai had all but fallen, matters in Hong Kong stalled, and Los Angeles was clearly an elephant trap.

Already, the Camarilla had secured San Diego, prompting the withdrawal of the Violet Path Posse to Los Angeles, where they helped make up for losses among the invasion's front-line troops. A censor sent from the Blood Court reported that despite Hao's glowing memorials to the contrary, morale among his troops was abysmal. Forget that Jiejie Li had starved his troops of resources in Hong Kong, that the campaign in LA had cost less Kuei-jin and resources than the one in Shanghai, that the Flatbush and Stockton Posse had spent more time trying to secure a source of income than helping out with the war, or that Hao's own lieutenant had betrayed him. Failure was not compatible with Hao's stated beliefs, nor was it survivable, given the obvious scope of his ambitions.

Ancestor Ch'ang had Hao Wei-Liang sent a calligraphic brush and inkstone, a sign that he was expected to do his duty. Hao did so, meeting the Eye of Heaven in early October of 1999.

TRANSFER OF POWER

In September, the Fence Menders were momentarily victorious. The Two-Fang Serpent Plan had been implemented by default, and Shanghai was back under the Quincunx influence. Additionally, some very careful footwork had left Jiejie Li with an incredible asset — a defected Kin-jin of high rank. Hidden in central Zhongguo, Oliver Thrace was an invaluable fountain of information on Kin-jin society for the Fence Menders.

However, Jiejie Li's books also showed serious liabilities. For starters, her actions to trip up Hao had hardly escaped the attention of the ancestors. Jiejie Li had been a useful foil with Hao Wei-Liang on the scene. With Hao fallen into the Mouth of Yomi, Li was obviously the next most serious threat to the mandarins' authority given her influential position. One serious slip on the part of the Fence Menders, and the ancestors and their conservative senior mandarins could demolish the head of the moderates as they had ruined Hao, preserving the status quo while still returning Shanghai to the fold.

To succeed, Li had to conquer a fortified Los Angeles using an army of exhausted and demoralized troops. Approached directly, the greater LA area was a money pit down which virtually unlimited quantities of resources could vanish. Li and Chiu Bao needed to find a way to conquer the city while still holding back enough resources to break the miserable and embarrassing stalemate in Hong Kong.

After Hao's suicide, the political landscape of Los Angeles changed considerably. The politically resilient Monkey Trip Wu was made ancestor of the city (to no one's surprise)

and the Fence Menders brought their own administrative team in. Mandarin Fun Toy of the Flatbush and Stockton Posse was named second in command, and former Crusaders were either closely watched, or else quietly given lateral promotions to meaningless positions back in China.

BAMBOO PRINCES

The presence of *zu wangzi* among the invasion forces had a serious effect on the outcome of the invasion. Because important tasks were given to Running Monkeys, it meant that many *shifuku* came in contact with their opposite numbers in the West. Many of the anarchists are nothing more than the Kin-jin equivalent of *jiang hu*, but then again, so are many of the *zu wangzi*.

The primary effect was *not* the establishment of some great conspiracy between the rebellious vampires of the Orient and Occident. Maoxian Mao and her cohorts are too cautious, and the anarch leadership too diffuse, for that to happen. Instead there a feeling of unity, the idea that the Kin-jin and the Kuei-jin might be complementary opposites, rather than antithetical. In the end, both groups struggled with antiquated leadership. Were the specifics of damnation all that important?

While leaders on both sides might feel otherwise, by late 1999 it was clear — the "troops" had more in common with each other than they did with their superiors, and their superiors knew it. Beneath Los Angeles, a child's lips crept into a sleeping grin. Everything was going precisely according to plan.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

In late September of 1999, Chiu Bao and Jiejie Li flew to San Francisco to oversee matters personally. After some discussion with Mandarins Wu and Fun, they began to implement a new strategy. Stealing a page from Western colonialism, the Fence Menders decided on a policy of divide and conquer. A week later, Fun Toy approached Salvador Garcia about the possibility of El Hermandad's assistance in stamping out the Crypt's Sons, who had grown considerably in size from mass Embraces.

Garcia — whose distaste for the Crypt's Sons was well known — agreed. Disillusioned with MacNeil's carefully cultivated land of do-as-you-please, Garcia cared more about mortal ideologies and countering the Sabbat than about vampiric "revolutions." Salvador Garcia's defection essentially signed the death warrant for the Anarch Free State. In November, Chiu Bao and Monkey Trip Wu convinced Louis Fortier to accept a ministerial position. By bringing Kin-jin into the power structure, the Cathayans were walking the razor's edge — a single slip would leave the Fence Menders open to justified charges of collaboration with the unrighteous and to exile or execution as *akuma*.

To the Courts, the following justification was presented: the Kin-jin were numerous and resources strictly limited.

Between the casualties suffered in the abortive invasion of the Western Yin World and those lost in a year of fighting, there were no longer enough troops for a decisive military victory, just a grinding war of attrition that wasted talent and experience. Another campaign required more recruiting, possibly including conscription.

By bringing the Kin-jin into subordinate roles, the Kindred could be monitored, supervised, and, most importantly, used as shock troops. Kin-jin excesses could be reined in, and they could be instructed in moral rectitude. This wasn't just a matter of immediate convenience, it was a possible weapon for the Sixth Age. The Wan Kuei were corrupt and yet opposed the Yama Kings; perhaps the Kin-jin could be made to do so as well. Regardless, a tribute could be extracted from these "partners" in government.

In Los Angeles, the matter was portrayed a bit differently. The Gui Ren did not paint themselves as civilizers and imperial conquerors but as mediators and law bringers. Their presence was not an autocracy but a new social contract — a mandarin state where the most qualified rose to positions of responsibility. They portrayed themselves as the realization of the anarchs' egalitarian dreams. To a city of vampires weary from decades of internecine strife and pushed to the edge by the Wan Kuei invasion, the idea of a real and genuine peace seemed extraordinarily appealing.

Obviously, not everyone agreed, but those who advocated freedom were disorganized, while the Kuei-jin and their allies were tightly coordinated. The dissidents were quickly killed, absorbed or pushed out of Los Angeles, culminating in an offensive during the New Year's Riots that left the city empty of opposition. The Cathayans formed a so-called "New Promise Mandarinate" to oversee the city's undead affairs in association with the remaining barons.

Many, Kindred and Kuei-jin alike, expected that this was when the hammer would come down, and the Gui Ren pressed their influence over the city. The reality of the matter was somewhat different. The Kuei-jin genuinely were interested in offering moral instruction to the Kin-jin, and by the time the New Year's Riots rolled around, the interpenetration of Fence Menders, bamboo princes and anarchs was complete. Many of the Running Monkeys or even jina weren't completely willing to undertake a campaign of repression against the Kin-jin. Indeed, to Fun and Wu, it seemed as if their troops were more likely to mutiny than to carry out such orders.

Even if they had been able to impose dictatorial rule on the Kin-jin, the moderates found themselves in the position of the monkey with his hand lodged in the jar. Having allied with the most powerful anarch leaders in order to spare themselves the misery of conscription and further warfare, it would now be twice the misery to turn on their (now rested and informed) Kin-jin allies. The Gui Ren might be on top, but like it or not, the New Promise Mandarinate was a genuine common interest.

WEST

Recent years have been troubling for the Camarilla. While matters in Europe were perfectly acceptable, news from the frontiers was decidedly negative. The departure of the Gangrel and the growing Sabbat offensive in North America demanded attention. Resources within the Edenic Groundskeepers sent the urgent news that multiple Methuselahs were believed to have awakened on the Indian Subcontinent. Russia was as chaotic as ever, and to top it all off, Chinese vampires had begun to undertake aggressive action all over the Pacific Rim and even in Europe.

The Cathayan incursions into Europe were handled easily enough — even the attempted assault on the Tremere's Vienna stronghold by over a dozen Cathayans. The intruders attempted to enter the fortress as spirits but fell afoul of the elaborate wards the Tremere established over the centuries to discourage Lupine and ghostly incursions. While these specimens were in no condition for interrogation, other Cathayans fell into the hands of the Inner Circle in ones and twos. These captives were wrung out for intelligence, reprogrammed, and returned home with falsified memories of "victories" that never occurred. Those few who proved immune to such manipulations were vivisected and destroyed. While none of the reprogrammed Manchurian Candidates have reported back yet, the Inner Circle never placed much faith in their use as intelligence assets. Instead, they sowed distrust in the Cathayan ranks when the brainwashed vampires were discovered and destroyed.

While the Inner Circle in no way received a perfect understanding of Cathayan society, it did learn some important information. Cathayans were not related to the Curse of Caine. In fact, they seemed to be some parallel development, no more related to Western vampires than the thylacine was to big cats. The second was that the Cathayans were part of a Chinese vampire society known as the Quincunx, and not part of some pan-Asian organization. Finding that these Cathayans were not working in direct conjunction with the Sabbat or with the Asian vampires active in the Indian subcontinent was obviously a great relief for the Inner Circle. The final and most important piece of information was the discovery of political factions within the Cathayans, a structural weakness the Camarilla's Inner Circle immediately planned to exploit as best they could.

EVENTS IN AMERICA

Cathayan-related events in Europe were well under control, and those in Oceania were simply beyond the ability of the Camarilla to effectively influence. America, however, was still undecided. Cathayans had arrived in the so-called "Anarch Free State" in large numbers early in 1998 and engaged the locals in bloody warfare. During 1998 and early 1999, this was a matter of moderate concern — the Cathayan war with the anarchs hardened the rebels' resolve and squandered their resources. By late 1998, the Cathayans slowed the

WHY NOT THRACE?

Why didn't the Inner Circle find out about Oliver Thrace's defection when they questioned their captives? While it's quite likely that the Cathayans were questioned about Thrace's "demise," they probably hadn't ever heard his name before.

Thrace is a critical asset to the Gui Ren moderates, and the vampires who traveled to Europe were disciples and jina advocating the Ash Plan. If these Running Monkeys had even the slightest inkling that the Fence Menders had a potent Western vampire in their camp, they would probably have never come to Europe. Instead, they would have been in central China, hunting for Thrace in hopes of killing him or (better yet) capturing him and using him to implicate the moderates with collaborating with the Westerners. So long as the Fence Mender's secrecy goes uncompromised, Thrace is safe.

tempo of their operations. At the time, the Cathayan invasion seemed like an asset to the Inner Circle — the Asian vampires had neutralized the Anarch Free State as well as specifically targeting Sabbat pawns in the area as the most organized threat to their operations. Seizing this lull, various archons and war coterie neutralized the Cathayans in San Diego and San Francisco, locking the Cathayans into their narrow, one-city beachhead.

However, during late 1999, Cathayan strategy took on a new tone after the politically motivated suicide of the Cathayans' Los Angeles commander. Shortly afterward, the Asian vampires recruited Kindred into their operation for use as shock troops. In exchange, the Kindred received the Cathayans' support against their rivals. This move was vigorously opposed by some of the city's anarchists, who saw it (quite astutely) as nothing more than divide-and-rule politics. But the aid given by the invaders was quite real. Those vampires who refused to enter into an alliance with the Cathayans were at a significant disadvantage to those vampires who had joined the self-proclaimed New Promise Mandarinate.

Over the months that followed, the Cathayans formed a vigorous coalition with their newfound allies. This "New Promise Mandarinate" suppressed the City of Angels' rival gangs through the end of 1999, finally using the New Year's Riots as a cover for their campaign to drive out or destroy those Kindred who refused to join. Many anarchist refugees were destroyed by the scourges of cities all across the American west, or by Lupines who turned out in unheard-of numbers, taking advantage of the chaos to hunt vampires on an unprecedented scale. Of those refugees who survived, most scattered to the four winds, while a few dozen crouched in San Francisco and San Diego, where the Kindred harbored enough pro-anarch sentiment to grant them asylum. Within a few months of the new year, Los Angeles was the virtually undisputed domain of the New Promise Mandarinate.

THE CAMARILLA RESPONSE

These new Cathayan policies doubtless related to changes in the Cathayans' political structure, which seemed quite volatile. Instability meant uncertainty, and uncertain tomorrows are difficult to plan for. However, there were... other concerns. The Edenic Groundskeepers classified Los Angeles as the "very probable" resting place for a Toreador Methuselah with a social agenda. Advisors to the Inner Circle advanced the idea that the emergent political structure might be some sort of ploy by that Methuselah — a potential weapon for use during the Final Nights, or perhaps just as an experiment. Whether its origin was purely political or influenced by the suspected Methuselah, the new Cathayan-Kindred social structure was clearly much more dangerous to Camarilla holdings in North America than the chaos of 1998 and early 1999.

In its regular teleconference of January 2000, the Inner Circle undertook action to "topple, destabilize or contain the threat of the New Promise Mandarinate." A small group of ghouls was appointed to devise an appropriate response, and the matter was to be resolved at a later convention.

North America is a low-priority region for the Camarilla. It was the land where rebellious childer and grandchilder fled, were exiled or dispatched on glorious missions of conquest and exploration calculated to keep them out of European trouble for years or decades. The American west coast was populated with the progeny of these misfits, and nearly adjacent to the Sabbat's Mexican stronghold. Furthermore, the Camarilla's plate was already full to overflowing. However competent the latest batch of justicars had turned out to be, there were only six of them plus Karsh. The Camarilla could not afford to give equal priority to every developing threat.

Still, the American west formed an excellent buffer for Sabbat crossing the Mexican border, and openly abandoning vast swaths of Camarilla-held territory was sure to harm the morale of vampires in other threatened areas. Most importantly, unopposed success was sure to encourage the Cathayans to advance further. While a Cathayan presence in the American west was acceptable (let them fight the Sabbat with their own resources, as they were apparently so eager to do), matters almost got out of hand. The Camarilla's presence in Europe was secure, but not so secure as to willingly court the possibility of more serious Cathayan threats there, or the possibility of a Camarilla-Cathayan confrontation developing in the former Soviet Union.

As usual, the solution proposed at the March teleconference had been floated previously and was essentially pre-approved. A single justicar and a few archons went to the American west to remind the local princes of the Inner Circle's influence. The justicar tried to solve what was rapidly coming to be known as "the Cathayan problem" nonviolently. If the matter came to violence, she had authorization to assemble resistance against Cathayans and against the Sabbat offensive sure to accompany any serious Camarilla-Cathayan conflict.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The justicar chosen for this critical post was Madame Guil. The Toreador Guil is probably second among the Camarilla's agents only to Karsh in terms of potency. The Madame's mastery of Presence, her great personal power and her vast experience made her ideal for the task of either negotiating with the Cathayans or directing Camarilla resistance. Her chief archon, Vidal Jarbeaux, was a master politician, covered Guil's weaknesses in the arenas of compromise and negotiation.

That was the explanation leaked through the regular channels, at least. While true, it isn't the entirety of the matter. Guil is powerful, but psychologically unstable, and, according to several rumors, of questionable loyalty. By sending her to the frontier, the Inner Circle hoped to encourage her defection if she was so inclined. If she made a break for a Sabbat stronghold, she was much less likely to do serious damage than if she were to make her break later, say, from Europe.

Guil's plan is simple: On her way to the West Coast, she informs the western princes of the Camarilla's expectations, then ensconces herself in a major city somewhere along the western frontier. Once there, she saw to holding conclaves in the western United States and sent ambassadors to the Los Angeles Mandarinate. The Camarilla wanted a cease fire, even if it meant cutting an unfavorable deal. If they could

placate the Cathayans long enough for the Inner Circle to contain the Sabbat in North America, the extra strength that could be brought to bear would more than make up for any temporary concession.

If negotiations with the Cathayans faltered, Guil was authorized to extend status to neonates and ancillae who made great strides against the Sabbat — an extension of the war coterie to a larger scale than the single city. This was a new tactic, slated for a test in America. Should this modern form of privateering (combined with judicious attacks by her archons) fail to dislodge the Cathayans, Guil was to coordinate the inch-by-inch defense of territory at which the Camarilla excelled.

ACTION AND RESPONSE

In early March, Guil and her archons began their campaign, landing in Boston and sweeping west over the course of a few weeks. As they traveled across America, she and her archons recruited Kindred to the cause. Between calling in prestation debts and offering status, Guil's entourage grew to almost 25 vampires (most with one or more ghouls) by the time she crossed the Rockies. She brought her scattered allies together in Boulder and stayed in Colorado for a week, briefing the Kindred, teaming her recruits and archons together, and holding a conclave for the area.



Heading west again, the archons split up. Each group traveled along routes designed to take them through different cities. In each, they served notice to the princes and primogen of the Camarilla's intentions. Princes were to fight defensively, launch no attacks against the New Promise Mandarinate and allow free passage to anarchs crossing the West. Those who did otherwise were answerable to Madame Guil and her archons, who spoke with the voice of the Inner Circle.

This "imperial tour" elicited howls from the western princes. They had suffered with the anarchs for decades. Their previous pleas for assistance against the anarchs were the late Justicar Petrodon's justification for his personal vendetta. If they had been troubled by the *anarchs*, then the princes of western America were understandably terrified at the hints the Camarilla might establish a separate peace with the invading horde of Asian vampires who had taken the anarchs' place.

As the princes saw it, the Inner Circle was leaving them to defend the Camarilla unaided against not just against the Sabbat, but against *two* armed and organized enemies. They felt they were to be shopped out to the Asians in the name of peace and political expediency.

If the wild tales the anarch refugees babbled were even half true, the Cathayans were certainly no better than the Sabbat. Certainly not the sort of threat to be dealt with through a compromise negotiated by a French vampire answerable to a European council. While none dared speak openly against Guil's policies, the princes began to confer with one another. If the Camarilla didn't do something for them, then they had to do something themselves.

Guil's servants didn't just deliver notice of her intentions, however. As she and her archons "laid down the law," they also fulfilled their duties to the vampires of the region. As her servants delivered her decrees, they picked up complaints and requests for conclaves. By the time Guil had arrived in San Francisco, planning for several such gatherings was already underway. This was a clear break from Petrodon's policy — the old Nosferatu had largely ignored his duties as an administrator and arbiter of disputes in favor of a more direct role as a warrior against the anarch menace.

Guil's professed willingness to settle these old matters made her an instant hit among ancillae. Most of these young vampires had disputes with their elders, disputes that had gone unremedied during Petrodon's long tenure. Her obvious demagoguery further incensed the princes and primogen, just as they ensured the princes' compliance. Acts of rebellion by the princes would be interpreted by the ancillae as attempts to delay or cancel conclaves — thus the princes' own undertakings guaranteed their good behavior. Most western princes saw this — in an area full of displaced anarch rabble — as an open invitation for a neonate revolt.

THE CITY ON THE BAY

The last stop of Guil's trip was the San Francisco Bay area, recently recovered from the anarchs by the nascent Prince Jochen Van Nuys. Van Nuys claimed his domain through iron-fisted conquest and a little fair dealing with local vampires sick of the chaotic free state. The Inner Circle and most western princes considered Jochen "soft" on anarchs — after all, most of his primogen had only recently been in formal rebellion themselves. Moreover, Van Nuys had accepted refugees, including Jeremy MacNeil, into San Francisco after the collapse of the Barony of Angels during the Cathayans' New Year's campaign.

A real concern arose that San Francisco might revert to its previous loyalties, suffering a revolution from a population of refugees that nearly outnumbered the regular Kindred inhabitants. Among the Inner Circle, there was a greater fear that Van Nuys was too ideologically flexible, casting off the Camarilla and the anarchs alike, making his own deal with the Mandarinate to shore up a shaky domain. This would establish the Mandarinate as a political alternative to the Camarilla in the Americas. Guil's orders were quite clear on this point — no American city was to be permitted to join the New Promise Mandarinate.

Guil decided to look after the most vulnerable city by making it her base of operations. The justicar and her archons arrived in a carefully coordinated display at precisely midnight on April 11th. Guil established herself in an apartment building off the Castro that had been secretly prepared by ghouls dispatched while she and her entourage were still in Boston.

Guil met with Prince Van Nuys and his primogen the next evening, and the vampires assured her of the city's loyalty. Like the western princes, Van Nuys had no choice — Guil had almost 25 vampires in her entourage, and over 50 ghouls. If he became impertinent, the justicar could simply demand that he feed her entourage until he and his primogen's herds and bank accounts evaporated.

Guil also privately interviewed Jeremy MacNeil, the leader of San Francisco's community of exiled anarchs and the closest thing to a "prince" the Anarch Free State ever had. While the specifics of the interview are still unknown, neither party left happy. It is believed Guil offered MacNeil some sort of deal that he refused. Whatever it was, the Scotsman wasn't buying.

OPIUM AND TEA

Guil had accomplished her immediate objectives: shaking up the western princes and making San Francisco's defection impossible. Still, most of her advisors were concerned over how genuine her success had been. Guil was handling the situation like a military campaign, not a diplomatic mission. Her brutal declarations needlessly riled egos. The justicar's policies succeeded, but they were making a

showdown with the western princes inevitable — a showdown Guil might not have the resources to win. Jarbeaux's worried reports to his Inner Circle contacts produced nothing more than injunctions to continue monitoring Guil and determine her true loyalties.

Guil was left with the rest of her task — containing or neutralizing the self-proclaimed "New Promise Mandarinate" whose propaganda had already started to circulate among the area's anarchs. Guil herself was largely uninvolved. She had conclaves to arrange, countless reports of Sabbat agents and Red List fugitives to check up on, and hundreds of small cities and towns to monitor for vampiric occupation. Moreover, San Francisco was already groaning under the weight of a hundred Licks. The more time Guil and her entourage spent on the road, the less the Masquerade suffered from the overabundance of Kindred mouths to feed.

Also, keeping Guil's "army" on the road lessened the feeling of occupation in the Bay area, and made the powers that be in the West aware that the Camarilla was a real force, even at such a remote frontier. At this, the madame excelled, so she kept to what she knew best. She left it to Jarbeaux to open diplomatic relations with the Cathayans — keeping his nose to the grindstone and out of Guil's affairs.

KEEP HOPE ALIVE

ESTABLISHING SHOTS

Jarbeaux established contact through Louis Fortier, a prominent anarchist who had once been close to the Camarilla and was now an associate of the Mandarinate. Fortier put Jarbeaux in touch with the rest of Mandarinate's leadership.

When Jarbeaux went to Los Angeles to serve as a negotiator, he was fairly certain he'd be seized as a diplomatic hostage. Much to his surprise, he was met by a mixed delegation of Kindred and Cathayans who were ready to deal. More startling, when he offered money, the answer was not a dismissive "what else?" but an interested "how much?" Thus did negotiations commence.

Negotiations began in April and continued through the next three months, alternating between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Lupine activity made any potential "neutral territory" far too dangerous. Obviously, the negotiating teams didn't meet for three straight months — every step needed to be approved by the superiors of both sides, so the meetings were interspersed with weeks of frantic internal negotiations as the diplomats from both sides attempted to secure their superiors' approval for each compromise.

By late July of 2000, they reached a tentative agreement. According to the arrangement, the Camarilla acknowledged the Quincunx's authority in Asian matters and appointed them its "elders" in that region, paying a large sum to ameliorate the expenses of the conflict. In thanks for their aid in recapturing the renegade domain of Los Angeles, the Inner

Circle allowed the Chinese vampires to claim domain as long as they brought "good and reasonable order" to the city.

The Quincunx acknowledged this face-saving measure on the part of the barbarians. The Kin-jin had affirmed the Quincunx's influence over all Cathayans, paid proper tribute to the ancestors and ceded their rights to the bandit kingdom of Los Angeles. If they wished to dress it up as something else to appease their own vanity, that was acceptable — barbarians were notoriously touchy about such matters.

All that was left was the first payment of the tribute... and that's where the story begins.

THE STING

Sundown, the Nosferatu "primogen" of San Jose, might be an anarchist ideologue, but he isn't stupid. Since the night he arrived in the Bay area, he and the exiled leadership of Los Angeles have been in close consultation with certain princes in the area. Outraged by the Camarilla's willingness to accept Cathayans in Los Angeles, and by Guil's heavy-handed policies (including some very painful settlements in conclave), the princes had decided to take matters into their own hands.

For the princes, the anarchists had always been a manageable problem. No so for the Cathayans — for all anyone knew, an army of Chinese vampires might land in Los Angeles and start rolling eastward any night. The American west was already under pressure from the Sabbat; if the Camarilla was more interested in negotiations than in sending justicars and archons who knew how to *really* take care of the problem, then the western princes had to show the Inner Circle how they solve problems in America.

MacNeil and his followers-in-exile made a perfect tool. Not only are they expendable (being former enemies) and cheap (being dispossessed), if they succeeded in their mission, they would become beholden to the princes who set them up for success.

The plan was for the anarchists to take advantage of a delicate situation to stage a coup in San Francisco. Then, with the financial and political backing of the western princes, the anarchists were to drive back to Los Angeles. Success meant vanquishing the Cathayans and leashing the anarchists. Failure meant the end for the anarchists and open conflict between the Camarilla and the Cathayans. Because the princes and their holdings were so critical to that defense, they were certain to escape with only *pro forma* punishment, even if the plan misfired.

The western princes feel few compunctions about the coup — Van Nuys is an outsider, an eastern carpetbagger come west to make his fortune under sunsets made brighter by his predecessor's demise. He hadn't been there a hundred years ago fighting back Lupines and Sabbat with the rest of them. The Dutchman had used the anarchists to his advantage, and the western princes saw no reason not to do likewise.

CAMARILLA VAMPIRES

The Camarilla vampires most likely to be involved in this story are archons. Naturally, when Jarbeaux attends the final meeting, he's going to have some of the more formidable archons in Guil's entourage with him. Even if betrayal by the Cathayans wasn't a possibility, he's still driving around with a fortune of assorted high-liquidity financial instruments in his trunk, and a lot of people know it. Better if the temptation of easy money isn't there to lead some desperate anarch into making a big mistake.

The Storyteller who doesn't want a lot of preparatory work may just have the players make up archons for this adventure or hand out the ones included with the story. Storytellers willing to take on more of the load can have the characters play out the situation from the arrival in San Francisco, the coterie that oversaw the archon's stay in Boulder, or even the arrival in Boston from Europe.

Details of the trip aren't included in the story — there are only so many pages, after all — but it can be as exciting as the rest of the tale. Crossing America by car in the World of Darkness is no mean feat even for mortals. For archons who have to deal not just with the decaying interstate highway system, but also with paranoid scourges and hungry Lupines, being caught red handed in something obviously heinous can be an odyssey of epic proportions.

Storytellers who wish to incorporate characters from ongoing games have a couple of options. Obviously, the characters can be Madame Guil's archons when she begins her term. Certainly, your average coterie of hotshots are just the sort of people a justicar preparing for a hard term of office might select as archons. If necessary, adjust the timing so Guil heads for San Francisco immediately after she assumes her post.

However, Guil doesn't just have archons with her. She has a considerably bigger entourage that she and her archons have brought together as they journeyed across America. Some of the vampires are there because they owed someone a life boon that ended up traded off to Guil. Others ask to join because there's status to be gained by heroically defending the Camarilla. A few are even recruited, with Guil or several of her archons extending prestation to the character in return for their assistance. A coterie could fit in any one of these categories.

This story assumes that the characters are pro-Camarilla, or at least not actively supporting some other faction. To be more specific, at one point the characters are given the opportunity to risk their unives to keep Cathayans and the Camarilla from going to war. This story assumes the characters choose to do so. If the characters are going to stand around with their hands in their pockets or actively try to push things into Defcon 5, the individual Storyteller has to detail the consequences of their actions. There's nothing wrong with telling the story as a bunch of Sabbat agents impersonating archons, it's just that Vampire embodies a lot of possibilities, and the story can't detail all of them.

KUEI-JIN AND ANARCHS

There is a broader range of Wan Kuei characters available for this story than might seem immediately apparent. The sort of Kuei-jin most likely to be involved are Fence Mender jina sent to the meet as bodyguards for Mandarin Fun. However, that is not necessarily the only sort of character who fits into the narrative. Characters may be clients of the Emerald Ministry there to act as watchdogs, or may even Azure Dragon or Golden Courts mercenaries considered more reliable in this sensitive position than any of the factions in the invasion force.

Whatever sort of Kuei-jin are involved, this story is suitable for use as part of a long-term Kindred of the East chronicle as well as for a one-night action spree. Storytellers who wish to work the story into ongoing games might want to introduce the players to Los Angeles at a number of different times. Good periods for Kuei-jin to develop an interest in the Great Leap Outward are at the very beginning of the invasion, in the period when resistance first starts to harden and at the beginning of the campaign against the Crypt's Sons.

In each case, the Glorious Wave-Crossing Warriors were looking for assistance from friends, students, *wu*-mates and debtors back in the Middle Kingdom. Players' characters could easily find themselves obligated by honor or ideology to come to America, even if they are not members of the Quincunx. Characters could also simply be flown in, taking time out of their regular schedule to provide muscle for the meet — just because the characters taking part in the story are from a long-running chronicle doesn't mean that the story is *central* to that chronicle.

Obviously, the agonizing choice between honor and duty is central to *Kindred of the East*, and Storytellers shouldn't flinch from incorporating *Walking After Midnight* into their chronicle just because there's a chance characters might derail events. *Kindred of the East* focuses on inner conflict, but such conflict is uninteresting unless there's a persuasive argument to be made for both sides. Storytellers should, however, prepare for what happens if the characters turn their faces away from duty and shame themselves in order to advance a greater good. This may end a chronicle, as the characters turn their fangs on Mandarin Fun and Vidal Jarbeaux, then defiantly meet the Eye of Heaven — if you as a Storyteller are comfortable with that, use it. However, spend some time preparing for the results of probable actions not covered here, so that the game doesn't fall flat at what should be a climactic moment.

Anarchs from the New Promise Mandarinate can also be involved without too much trouble. The Mandarinate is potentially willing to hire mercenaries or otherwise bring in barbarians. They're willing to bring in Westerners as well. Just because they aren't spiritually enlightened doesn't mean the kin-jin aren't skilled warriors, as the anarch leaders demonstrated during Hao Wei-Liang's war of attrition. Again,

if the characters are likely to throw over their duty and back Jeremy MacNeil and the rest of the gang in their coup attempt, make preparations for that eventuality.

Kindred characters with anarch loyalties can also be used in this story. Such characters are probably anarchists who kept havens in the free state prior to its dissolution. Others may have come from across the country or across the globe to keep the revolution alive and somehow get caught up in the machinery of events. Whatever the case, if they know how to fight, there's a fair chance that anarchists could end up standing beside Mandarin Fun at the midnight hand over — if only as a political statement.

THE MEETING

The characters are to escort their diplomat, either Mandarin Fun or Vidal Jarbeaux, to a meeting at one of San Francisco's better known landmarks, Coit Tower. There, the two openly recognize each other, and Jarbeaux hands over the goods. "The goods" are, in this case, 300,000,000 American dollars worth of negotiable financial instruments of various sorts.

The Kindred are set to arrive at 11:30 and the Kuei-jin at midnight. The night watchman is out of the way, and the VCRs attached to the surveillance cameras are disabled. Other than their diplomats and their escort, no other vampires are to be on Telegraph Hill — Prince Van Nuys' men see to it that mortal authorities do not go to the Hill that evening.

While matters are somewhat tense, both sides see this as the formal culmination of months of negotiations — neither group anticipates real problems. And, as always, just when you think you're on top is when everything goes to hell. In this case, the ride to hell has two components. The first is a surprise visit by the local anarchists. The second is the assassination attempt that Mark Sandhurst, a Sabbat infiltrator leading Jarbeaux's security detail, is going to make on Mandarin Fun as soon as matters become confusing.

THE BURN

Sunset is an anarchist, but he's also a Nosferatu, and he and his brood have put taps into many of the telecom switches in the city. Since Guil installed herself in her digs just off the Castro, she's been under massive surveillance. While this was hardly unexpected, Guil's assessment of the situation underrated the opposition, and consequently her security practices became somewhat haphazard.

Five nights before the meet, on August 13th, two of Guil's archons had a brief conversation over digital cellular phones. Normally, Guil's communications use a more secure backup encryption, but bad security procedures and inexperienced operators resulted in a compromise. A sensitive call was made over digital cellular phones with encryption schemes deliberately left weak to allow government eavesdropping. During the conversation (which was captured and decoded by Sunset's monitors), Guil's archons talked about

rescheduling a conclave in Tempe, Arizona so that Guil could be out of town for "the meet."

A combination of context and the fact that Coit Tower has been used as a meeting place before let the cat out of the bag. This was a better opportunity than the anarchists or the western princes had anticipated or were likely to receive again. Sending the diplomats to their Final Death virtually ensured hostilities between the Camarilla and the Cathayans. Sundown, MacNeil and the princes pencilled in a coup for Friday, August 18th.

MacNeil and Attucks plan to lead a coterie to Coit Tower to take care of the diplomats. Sundown and Marguerite Foccart take some exiles and some of Sundown's own people to Van Nuys's regular Friday haunt, held at a large local night club on the border between the Italian district and Chinatown, not terribly far from Coit Tower. If all goes according to plan, by the morning of the 19th, the sun will rise in a San Francisco firmly in anarchist hands.

SAN FRANCISCO BY NIGHT

The San Francisco in the World of Darkness is darker than our own. The buildings are a little closer together, the streets a little dirtier and the signs proclaiming "this building is constructed of unreinforced masonry, which can liquefy in the event of an earthquake" more common. The affluence of the Valley stands in stark contrast to the nearby squalor — Pleasanton is just a BART ride away from parts of San Jose that still haven't been rebuilt after the earthquake, where the population lives in tent cities comparable to any third-world refugee camp.

The real-world San Francisco already has homeless populations large enough that city employees are warned not to wander away from known areas of the city's public parks lest they stumble into a hostile squatter community. In the World of Darkness, these communities are festering Calcuttas. In these latter-day Hoovervilles, poverty and violence go hand-in-hand with SFPD "vag wranglers" to bring an early end to the lives of the inhabitants.

To paraphrase Chandler, 'Frisco is a town where you could starve to death on the street corner and people would do nothing but avoid eye contact. Kindred should feel right at home — it's their kind of place. Storytellers, particularly those who want to emphasize the injustice of the Camarilla and the Courts, may wish to draw parallels between the anarchists and San Francisco's dispossessed.

COIT TOWER

Built in 1934 by one of San Francisco's most unusual socialites, Coit Tower is a monument to the city's fire fighters from a woman they considered one of their own. Coit Tower is a tourist attraction by day; dozens of cars line the narrow road to the top of Telegraph Hill, waiting for a chance to park in one of the handful of spots in the tiny tower parking lot.



The tower is a poured concrete structure 180 feet high that stands atop Telegraph Hill. Telegraph Hill was once the site of a signal station that announced the approach of ships to the city. From the top of Telegraph Hill, you can see the harbor, including Alcatraz, although high development has obstructed some of the view. More importantly, Telegraph Hill receives the sea breeze that makes San Francisco pleasantly cool on most days instead of a sun-parched desert like most of the Bay area. The interior is covered with frescos in the Socialist Realism style, controversial even before they were finished (the frescos were done under the auspices of the New Deal). These depictions of California working people starkly contrast the urban affluence that surrounds the tower.

Although it began as a signal site, Telegraph Hill is some of San Francisco's most expensive real estate. The fanciful houses of the wealthy are packed tightly on this breezy knob, and access to most of them is via stairs and walkways rather than by road—real estate is that expensive, and the hill is that steep. From the top of Coit Tower, you can easily look down on all the approaches to Telegraph Hill, including the long flights of steps that seem to be roofed and walled with warm-climate plants and the sides of claustrophobic condominiums.

The tower itself is ringed by surveillance cameras—otherwise an unpainted concrete target like that is just too inviting for graffiti artists. Damage to the tower's value as a tourist attraction aside, nobody on Telegraph Hill is happy to see a bunch of street thugs coming down to tag Coit Tower, and the people who live on Telegraph Hill are the kind of people whose opinions matter in city elections.

The tower is divided into two main areas. The ground floor contains the murals as well as the bathrooms and the regulation room stocked with dusty, tawdry San Francisco memorabilia. The sales counter presides over the entrance to the locked stairs leading upward and doubles as a night watchman's stand. Behind it loom several black-and-white television monitors, ceaselessly skipping through the video cameras that watch the downstairs and outside of the tower. The stairs upward are normally locked for liability reasons, but they've been unlocked by the same good fairy who left the front door ajar.

Characters are unlikely to suffer a heart attack climbing the stairs, and if they want to open up the stairs to have a secondary path to the tower's top, they can easily do so. It takes ten turns worth of climbing to go up the steps at a full sprint, eight to go down. Characters running the steps must succeed on a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). Those who fail going up lose a turn worth of running. Those who fail going down tumble head over heels and suffer a number of levels of bashing damage equal to the number of rounds of running left before they hit bottom.

The cupola of the tower is little more than an open-topped platform whose walls are pierced by dozens of closely spaced windows. These windows have tempered-glass safety screens, but they swing open, and the locks on the screens are made out of simple brass—they're a level six feat of Strength

to twist off, or they can be removed with trivial ease if the character has a prybar or a pair of bolt cutters.

THE KINDRED ARRIVE

The story picks up when the characters arrive at Coit Tower. Camarilla vampires have almost certainly spent the night in San Francisco unless they're serious heavy hitters flying in just for the evening. The Cathayans and anarchs have either arrived this very night or else stayed over in some sort of temporary haven. In either case, their travel to Coit Tower should be uneventful unless the Storyteller feels particularly sadistic. Let the characters, Kindred or Kuei-jin, have whatever sort of equipment they want — night vision gear, body armor, longarms and sophisticated communications gear are all suitable for a high-profile escort job like this.

Camarilla characters arrive 30 minutes before the delegates from the New Promise Mandarinate, giving them time to do a sweep of the area. The doors to the tower are unlocked, and no security guard stands watch. As promised, the security VCRs have no tapes, and the screens display only static — a closer inspection reveals the leads from the cameras have been thoughtfully unplugged by Van Nuys's minions.

The area around the tower is secure, as is the tower itself — there's not so much as a single college student out for a drug-enhanced evening stroll. Access to the top of the tower is via a hand-operated elevator or a long spiral staircase whose doors remain locked. The upper part of the tower is also empty. Presumably, the characters send someone to the top of the tower to keep watch and others to the meeting in the parking lot, though they may wish to send Jarbeaux and Fun upstairs to do their business in order to make the matter seem more official or to buffer them against a possible attack.

If the weather were clear, characters in the tower would have a perfect view of the tower's approaches. Tonight, however, the city is wrapped in a dense bay fog. Keeping an eye on the street leading up to the tower's parking lot is difficult, even with Heightened Senses. While characters on the top of the tower can use parabolic microphones or other monitoring devices to remotely watch probable approaches, actually spotting anything more than ten yards from the tower's base requires either Heightened Senses or thermal imaging equipment expensive enough to strain the wallets of even archons. Characters firing onto the steps make their shots at difficulty 9 — gauging distance is hard in the fog, and the steps have many twists and turns and an irregular pattern of landings that makes leading targets by sound difficult.

If the characters are archons, let them have a planning session ahead of time to decide how they're going to handle the situation, though don't let them know that there will be a fog that night unless they have some Discipline to aid in such matters. If the characters are playing Kuei-jin, Sandhurst sends one of his archons to the top of the tower with a scoped M-1916 Springfield. The other stays with Sandhurst, flanking Jarbeaux. The three vampires stand silently at the edge of the parking lot

wall, the fog lapping their French suits while their watches tick noiselessly toward an appointment with destiny.

THE KUEI-JIN ARRIVE

The Kuei-jin arrive precisely at midnight. If the Kuei-jin are Storyteller characters, they arrive in a pair of Lexus GS 400s. If the characters are the mandarin's bodyguards, they arrive in whatever sort of transportation the characters deem appropriate. Mandarin Fun wants to present a dignified appearance, but is willing to make concessions to security or whatever other factors his bodyguards consider critical.

If the characters bring a limousine of any real size, there is no way they're getting it up the road to the Tower — they have to park on the street below and walk up the sidewalk. The Cathayans have to either carry the loot back to their car (potentially undignified — there are four *large* duffel bags) or have the Kindred bring the loot to the limousine (potentially troublesome for the negotiations; the Cathayans are, after all, trying to let the Kin-jin save face).

The Kin-jin are waiting for the mandarin to arrive, standing pale and unblinking in the fog at the edge of the parking lot. Let the scene between Mandarin Fun and Jarbeaux play out for a bit. The swirling fog, the midnight meeting at the foot of the Christopher Columbus statue and the isolated feel of the location all make for a very archetypal moment of vampiric intrigue. Depending on the personalities involved, some interesting tension should develop between the characters and their opposite numbers. This is especially true if both sides of the meet are players' characters. A little verbal fencing is definitely in the cinematic tradition.

Just as things are about to erupt into real violence, when the scene gets boring or just as Jarbeaux and Mandarin Fun shake on the deal, the anarchs arrive.

THE ANARCHS APPROACH

The assault force consists of two groups. One, led by Jeremy MacNeil, climbs the steps to Telegraph Hill. The other, led by Crispus Attucks, creeps up the driveway. The two groups converge just below the parking lot. There are twice as many vampires as there are characters at the meet.

Both Attucks and MacNeil are detailed in *Los Angeles By Night*, but Storytellers should feel free to work up whatever Traits they feel are appropriate for the two. MacNeil should be a credible threat to any group, and Attucks should be equivalent to any one players' character. The other vampires are nameless members of MacNeil's entourage and should have whatever Traits suitably challenge the troupe's characters. The two groups are of roughly equal size.

Depending on if there's a spotter in Coit Tower or not, the approach of the anarchs may go undetected until they're on top of the characters. If there is someone in the tower, she must succeed on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8) to detect the approaching anarchs. If the watch has Heightened Senses, let them make the roll at difficulty 6. Remember,

San Francisco is wrapped in a fog this evening. Characters without Heightened Senses can't see more than 20 yards.

One success on their Alertness roll lets characters in the tower detect that there is a group approaching. Three successes informs the characters that there are two groups, one climbing the Telegraph Hill steps and one walking toward the driveway. Three success also allows watching characters to determine that their visitors are armed and apparently hostile. Five or more successes allows the sentries to know how many attackers make up each group. If they have had significant contact with the anarchs, five successes also allows the sentries to guess the identity of the attackers, though they probably can't identify anyone other than MacNeil and Attucks. Characters in the tower with rifles have three shots, one free of dodge and two with their targets able to dodge or take cover, before the anarchs spot the sniper and take precautions to avoid sniper fire completely. Unless the character has scored the five successes on her Alertness roll to specifically identify MacNeil and Attucks, sniper fire automatically hits members of the entourage.

If the characters in the tower don't spot the approaching anarchs, characters with Danger Sense get a chance. Give these characters a standard Perception roll (difficulty 7) to realize that something terrible is about to happen. Success gives them three turns to act before the two groups of anarchs meet in the middle of the driveway and begin moving toward the parking lot.

After the anarchs reach the middle of the driveway, characters using nothing but their normal senses can detect them. Note that the characters have no idea who these people are — they could be agents of the Cathayans or Camarilla, Lupines or even mortal toughs. They are, however, obviously armed. Let the characters make Perception + Alertness rolls (difficulty 6) to identify the anarchs. Those with Heightened Senses active reduce the difficulty of their rolls normally. After the two groups of anarchs meet, they break into a run toward the parking lot, taking two turns to arrive. There is a ragged volley of gunfire as they approach.

How the fight progresses is really up to the players' characters. It could be an open melee in the parking lot, or it could be a siege, as the characters barricade themselves in the tower. If the former, note that characters in the tower cupola have a clear field of fire down onto the parking lot. If the latter, characters calling for help find that there is none available — the anarch coup attempt and the various diversionary actions accompanying it have tied down all of Van Nuys's people. Meanwhile, the anarchs have little trouble getting into the tower. While the front doors are metal, the base of the tower is studded with glass-paneled doors that are impossible to secure.

TYPICAL ANARCH

Attributes: Strength 4(7) Dexterity 3(4) Stamina 3(4) Charisma 2 Manipulation 2 Appearance 2 Perception 3 Intelligence 2 Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Potence 2, Presence 1

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

Morality: Humanity 5

Willpower: 5

Image: Anarchs come in all shapes and sizes, especially the mixed gang of refugees who accompanied MacNeil into exile. Make the individual anarchs as unique as possible — that's what they're all about, after all. Let the players think of them as something other than "anarch #1," "anarch #2" and so on.

Roleplaying Hints: Fire it up! Fire it up! Fire it up!

Below are some suggested anarch types.

- **Punk** — Torn jeans, painted leather jacket covered in studs and safety pins, ripped T-shirt for a 70s punk band. Outrageously colored hair in an amazingly elaborate coiffure. Big-ass chain, .22 revolver.

- **Freak** — Leather pants with no ass, bondage torso harness and a dirty olive trench coat. Wrist piercings and slatted sunglasses. Two gravity knives and a semiauto TEC-9.

- **Skinhead** — Crisp, well-washed bluejeans and a white T-shirt. Doc Martens. Billyclub and Colt M1911A1.

- **Techno-fetishist** — Ankle length leather jacket, black denim pants, combat boots. Black nylon net shirt and hematite nipple piercings. Mirrored sunglasses and braided dreadlocks studded with resistors and computer chips. Six gravity knives and two Beretta 92 9mm automatics.

- **Modern Primitive** — Bare chest covered in tribal designs, filthy green swim trunks. Birkenstocks. Lumpy dreadlocks. Length of thick iron pipe with a heavy fitting at the end.

- **Heavy-Metal Warrior** — Black leather pants, shirt and jacket. Knee-high armored motorcycle boots. Inch-long hair dyed white and slicked back. Round-lens gold-mirrored sunglasses. Broadsword and Uzi.

- **Hip-Hop Fanatic** — Sagging pants, checkered flannel shirt in red or blue with matching bandanna. Cornrows and Timberlands. Baseball bat and Glock-17.

Storytellers are strongly urged to treat the typical anarch as an Extra, as per the optional Extras rules on p. 217 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. To speed play, assume that the anarchs have already spent blood to raise their Physical Attributes to the parenthetically listed values, that they have a blood pool of 5, that they use their blood only for healing and Celerity during the combat, and that they spend Willpower for automatic successes at the Storyteller's discretion.

Storytellers who do not use the Extras rules and keep track of the anarchs had better either be telling this story for characters who are Grade-A asskickers, or else expect long combats and heavy casualties.

SANDHURST ACTS OUT

As the anarchs approach, Sandhurst makes his move. Pulling a flare gun from his overcoat, he says, "Let's see what this does for your negotiations, you Camarilla fucks." Anyone watching can make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 4) to see his vulpine smile of triumph turn to a look of utter dismay as he quite deliberately aims a foot to the left of the Mandarin Fun's head and pulls the trigger. Anyone with Heightened Senses active can see the change of emotion without a roll.

The look of dismay is probably the last thing to ever cross Sandhurst's face, but it is possible that the characters are thoughtful (and skillful) enough to subdue him for later interrogation. While his service to the Sabbat is quite apparent on close investigation, he has no idea why he deliberately missed. While it is most probably an implanted order of some sort, he has no idea by who, or why. It's possible that nobody programmed him to do so—anyone looking inside Sandhurst's head is in for an unpleasant ride through several centuries of a morally degenerated mind covered over with multiple, conflicting layers of loyalty conditioning. That it hasn't gone haywire by now is a tribute to his strength of will. If no one hits him with something large enough to drop him in his tracks, Sandhurst takes off like a rocket. What happens to him afterward is up to the Storyteller.

Where matters go from there is really up to the players. If any of them want to start a war, this is the place to do it. The story assumes that the players and Storyteller characters are familiar enough with the vagaries of their shadowy worlds to take this all in stride. If not, then the resulting three-way conflict and the fate of the coup are up to the Storyteller to work out. Remember, though, that armed conflicts draw police and end up as news stories for days afterward.

Seconds after the flare goes whistling past Mandarin Fun's head (possibly inducing Röttschreck or wave soul in those nearby), the anarchs hit the parking lot. If given a chance, MacNeil and Attucks head straight for Fun Toy and Jarbeaux, respectively. If the players' characters are young or weak, this is a good way to put these powerful Kindred out of the picture: rather than mowing down characters, MacNeil and Attucks can fight other Storyteller characters. Feel free to steer player characters away from MacNeil and Attucks if a direct conflict could kill the player characters and end the story prematurely—it's not really difficult to interpose some extras between the players and these powerful Storyteller characters. If players insist that they fight these elder vampires, then let the chips fall where they may. It's always possible one of them may get lucky, after all.

If the characters are tough enough to go toe to toe with Jarbeaux and MacNeil, then Storytellers should just let the battle play out naturally. The only priority for Storytellers is to avoid conflict between the Camarilla and Cathayan parties. Make it clear from the outset that the anarchs harbor a violent intent toward both groups. This is important, because



otherwise when Sandhurst acts on his agenda, there's no way for the characters to spot it, and obviously the story assumes that the Storyteller doesn't want to railroad the Camarilla and the Cathayans into a war.

Make this fight scene as cinematic as possible — don't be afraid to go over the top. This is one of the most important moments of the modern nights, so don't skimp on the effects budget. Below are some suggestions for making the fight an exciting one. Obviously, which ones you use depend on your taste as a Storyteller and how the fight works out, but don't limit yourself to just one or two cool events.

Post-Mounted Binoculars — The tiny parking lot is ringed with post-mounted binoculars. While they don't offer particularly good views, they do make great props in a fight. Someone executing an acrobatic dodge can use them as a pivot to spin back and forth. They can also be yanked out of the ground and used as clubs, though they're very heavy, and the tendency of the binocular-top to spin freely makes them difficult to aim. On the other hand, if they do hit, *ouch what a headache*. It is a level 7 feat of Strength to pull one out of the ground, and requires a Strength of 6 to wield it as an enormous bludgeon. Binoculars used as melee weapons are +1 difficulty to hit, and inflict bashing damage of Strength + 4.

Cars — Cars almost never explode in terrific orange gasoline fireballs in the World of Darkness (or the real world, for that matter). Besides, too much of that and the only cars that are important to the game are the ones several blocks away the characters are hiding underneath. However, cars aren't just for blowing up. Nimble characters, or those with preternatural flexibility, can slide back and forth under cars with sufficient ground clearance. They can be flipped over on opponents (a level 7 feat of Strength for small cars or vehicles with high centers of gravity like SUVs, level 8 for sedans, level 9 for luxury behemoths). Don't forget dodging by flipping or jumping up onto the roof of a car, with missed blows smashing the windows of whatever hysterically overpriced cars the characters choose to drive.

Fuel tanks can be ripped open and characters can set the resulting gasoline spill aflame or stick an opponent's head into the burbling fuel, and then set the *opponent* aflame. If you get burning fuel on the asphalt, don't forget the obligatory sword fight or wrestling match where characters try to hurl their opponents into the flames.

Christopher Columbus — A great bronze statue of Christopher Columbus stands in front of Coit Tower. Why put a statue of an Italian explorer outside a building dedicated to firemen? Who knows — it was ecumenical. Unfortunately, he's not holding up a sword or anything fun like that, but don't be afraid to crush someone with his giant bronze body (it's a level 12 feat of Strength to push Christopher Columbus over and squash someone). Also, this is custom-made for East versus West symbolism, as well as Freedom versus Oppression. If a Kuei-jin beats down Jeremy MacNeil or Crispus

Attucks, you can't go wrong having them suffer the Final Death at the toes of Chris's size 37EE boots.

Fight in the Tower — The area around Coit Tower is typically monumental, with chest-high stone walls, great glass-filled brass doors, broad sweeping steps and lots of expensive frescos to deface with careless sword blows. There's a single elevator going up, as well as a broadly spiraling staircase. Note that the staircase bends leftward, the wrong direction for fortress architecture. Right-handed characters defending the steps against someone coming up from below have a +1 difficulty to their attack and parry rolls. The cupola of the tower isn't directly accessible from the elevator and the stairs up. Instead, characters must walk through a short hallway, then up a flight of normal steps. The tower's top isn't really large enough for a climactic battle, but it is perfect for a last stand. Desperate characters may find themselves holding the last staircase against a swarm of angry anarchists in a last-ditch attempt to protect the diplomats. If it comes down to that, be sure to ask yourself — did snipers cover the floor of the cupola in expended shell casings?

Trees — The tower is surrounded by pines. Other than their stereotypical use as stakes, don't forget that people can climb them, be hurled into them, pin people to them, or even potentially pull them out of the ground and smack people great distances with some of the smaller ones. It's a level 12 feat of Strength to rip a small tree out of the ground, and a level 10 feat of Strength to swing one like a giant baseball bat.

Nearby Houses — If the parking lot is growing old, but the fight is still going strong, don't forget that Coit Tower is on top of some of San Francisco's most valuable real estate. Telegraph Hill is the kind of place hip, successful young lawyers and art dealers live in remodeled splendor. Don't hesitate to send the fight through one of their picture windows or up over one of their expansive porches and into their luxuriously appointed abode. Obviously, there's not enough space to expound on all the cool fight scenes you can have inside an expensive house, but there's hardly a shortage of movies exploring the subject.

THE CHASE

Chances are that the player characters prevail against the anarchists. If players eliminate most of the extras, or of some of the extras and either MacNeil or Attucks, the anarchists give ground. Unless hopelessly surrounded, the rebels flee to the rooftops of Telegraph Hill and begin making their way across the city, leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

The anarchists are retreating toward the dance club where Prince Van Nuys holds a somewhat vain "court" every Friday night. Sundown, Marguerite Foccart and Sundown and MacNeil's followers have besieged the club as part of the coup attempt. The fleeing anarchists hope to lose the characters in the fog then hook up with their mates at the club. Chances are, the characters are in hot pursuit, either on foot or in vehicles. In this case, just make sure that the chase goes on

long enough for the anarchs to lead the characters to the club, which is about ten blocks away. They don't even need to make it all the way to the club—the red flare of gasoline fires, the snap of small arms and the clash of metal on metal marks the scene from a block or more away.

If the characters have handily butchered the anarchs and thus have no clue what's going on, or if for some reason they demure from the chase, urge them on. Have their superiors find out about the coup attempt (the Mandarinate has a few spies among the anarchs, and this is hardly the sort of thing you can hide) and call the characters, demanding to know if they're alive and why they're not doing something about this. Remember that this peace is just as important to the New Promise Mandarinate as it is to the Camarilla — if what it takes to keep the treaty from coming apart is Kuei-jin bursting into the club and saving Van Nuys's ass, so be it. If anything, this is even better, because Van Nuys and the Camarilla are then beholden to the Mandarinate.

Whatever the case, get the characters to the club. The result should be an unlikely alliance of distrustful vampires, both Kindred and Gui Ren, going off to save someone they probably don't even like. This is melodrama fodder — be sure to milk it for all it's worth.

WHAT IF THE CHARACTERS FAIL?

It's possible that the players' characters are in no shape to fight after the initial battle. Storytellers can drive a maimed party on to the final battle with the commanding tones of their superiors. This probably gets them all killed, but it's very heroic (and, for Kuei-jin, very much in the Chinese dramatic tradition). A more realistic end finds the characters hobbling to their vehicles and attempting to slip out of town and find shelter somewhere in the Bay Area before the sun comes up. Read the section *The Anarchs Are Successful* below. Remember that archons and jina who fail to stop the anarch coup are going to be held responsible, regardless of if they knew about it or could have in any way affected the outcome. Failure is simply not an option — Storytellers using this in an ongoing chronicle should think about how the disgrace is going to affect the game, and what old enemies are going to show up and take this golden opportunity to kick the characters while they're down.



CHASE ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS

Characters most likely chase the anarchs on foot, across the rooftops and down the alleys of San Francisco, through the Italian District toward Chinatown. The actual distance covered is about eight to twelve blocks, but don't be a stickler for realism unless you live in San Francisco and have a precise location in mind for the club. Keep the chase going until it ceases to be exciting or the characters run out of anarchs to chase. At that point, have them come upon the club.

In the meantime, run through all the staples of rooftop chases in a city wrapped in fog; rooftop ambushes and fights on building ledges and fire escapes. Don't forget the absolutely obligatory hanging-by-the-fingers scene where the character is saved or abandoned by a vampire of the other ethnicity. If the hanging vampire is a Cainite member of the New Promise Mandarinate, be sure to get the maximum pathos by having them rescued or abandoned by one of their former comrades.

See the Rooftop Chase! sidebar for systems useful for running the foot version of the chase.

ROOFTOP CHASE!

Characters who traverse San Francisco on foot from Telegraph Hill are probably going to be running across people's roofs. Not only is much of the hill within an easy jump of a roof, it's much cooler than a foot chase along the sidewalks. Lacking the snow and ice that make peaked roofs essential, almost all buildings in San Francisco have flat tops, often with patios and other installations on them. Below are rules for situations that are likely to come up in the course of a rooftop chase.

These rules supplement, rather than replace, the Jumping rules on p. 202 of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Remember also that Kuei-jin who know Tread the Thrashing Dragon's Tail (Jade Shintai ••) automatically double their leaping distances. This allows them to cover eight feet horizontally or four feet vertically per success on their Strength + Athletics roll. If characters are using Celerity, Black Wind, Principle of Motion or some other speed enhancer, multiply their jumping distance by the number of actions they are spending running that turn, to reflect their heightened speed.

For reference, treat all minor streets as about 21' wide (five successes to jump), and major streets as about 32' wide (eight successes to jump). That's smaller than they actually are, but these distances suit the claustrophobic San Francisco of the World of Darkness and makes the chase significantly more interesting. The distance between buildings is, on average, 12' (3 successes to jump). The average building in this section of San Francisco is about 60' high.

SYSTEMS

Taking A Shortcut Through Someone's Apartments: It takes a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) to end a leap by passing through someone's windows, and the character must perform this as a split action with their Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) to leap between houses. Characters hanging off the edge of a building may use their whole Dexterity + Athletics pool, but the difficulty is 8 due to the difficulty of hitting the window properly from above. Failure on this roll means the character takes six dice of lethal damage from hitting the window wrong. A botch means the character hits a barred or unbreakable window (four dice of bashing damage plus the fall to the street) or else impales or otherwise mutilates herself severely on the window frame.

It's a Wits + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) to get through an apartment in good order, and the characters must either make a climbing roll to reach the roof of the building or else get two additional successes on their jumping roll to get back up to the roof of the next building. Remember that characters who are low enough on blood to frenzy may have to pass through apartments full of nice, warm mortals. Characters who fail their Wits + Alertness roll may be shot at, set upon by dogs or come upon some sort of complication like a locked door or window. Characters who botch get to stumble into the lair of a hostile supernatural creature, a gang gutting up a few kilos of cocaine, an apartment bomb factory or something similarly dangerous and (more importantly) distracting.

Faking a Fall: Characters who want to fake a fall and lurk there waiting for someone to come look over the edge should split their pool, making a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 7) to make it look convincing and a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) to find a good ledge or fire escape to lurk on. Characters lurking in ambush get a free attack on anyone coming over to gloat (difficulty penalty of 5 - the number of successes on their Dexterity + Athletics roll to reflect the awkwardness of their position). Characters who wish to pull someone over the edge may attempt to perform a Tackle. If they are successful, they hurl their opponent to the ground but must succeed on a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 4) to not fall also.

Wrenching Loose a Cable, Antenna or Satellite Dish for Use as a Weapon or Shield: Strength + Athletics wrenches it loose, with a difficulty of 6 for TV aerials, 7 for cables and 8 for satellite dishes. TV aerials and satellite dishes can be used as shields (increasing the attacker's difficulty by 1) or to inflict lethal damage. Aerials inflict lethal damage and crumple after inflicting 4 or more levels of damage. Satellite dishes do bashing damage and are ruined after inflicting 12 or more levels of damage. Cables do no damage, but can be used in any number of clever maneuvers.

Hurling Someone to the Street Below: Characters who are in a clinch may use their automatic damage successes to carry both themselves and their opponent 3' closer to or away from a roof edge. Storytellers should decide how close the characters are to an edge. 21' works well, allowing the struggle to be protracted unless one of the characters is particularly weak. Using a clinch to carry someone off a building means that the winner falls as well. Characters who successfully perform a tackle against a character near a roof edge and knock them down may choose to push them over, but they must make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 4) to not go over themselves. Finally, an attacker can choose to convert unsoaked damage levels on a successful normal attack into 3' of distance toward or away from the roof edge per damage level converted. The defender, however, has the option of just taking the damage rather than giving ground.

Scrambling up a Building: Use Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6), as detailed on p. 201 of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Assume each success on the climbing roll allows the vampire to climb the standard 10'. The -2 climbing difficulty for claws also applies to claws grown via Bone Shintai and to various Demon Shintai characteristics (claws, suckers, etc) that allow an improved grip. Kuei-jin with Tread the Thrashing Dragon's Tail (Jade Shintai ••) may scuttle or run up buildings at their normal movement speed.

CAR CHASES

Characters who slice their way through the anarchs like so much pastrami, or who reflexively jump into their vehicles, may end up chasing the anarchs through the foggy streets of San Francisco in vehicles. This makes for some great visuals, with characters racing through the streets, squinting upward for black shapes leaping from building to building.

The rooftop chase may need to be shortened, but the car chase almost certainly needs to be prolonged. Driving like a maniac at midnight, it's only a minute or two to get between Chinatown and Coit Tower. If there are anarchs to chase, you probably want to make the chase take significantly longer than that. Don't concern yourself too much with the exact layout of the streets or how far the players have gone. This is a cinematic car chase, not a real one. If you're from San Francisco and simply must get the action straight, have the club be on a side street many blocks down Stockton, near Macys and the BART station. Otherwise, just let the chase go on until the characters run out of anarchs.

One of the keys to making the car chase exciting is keeping it fast paced. Rooftop chases are about suspense and hair-raising jumps. Car chases are about speed and property damage. Have the characters constantly making Perception + Alertness rolls to keep track of the flitting figures of the anarchs as they leap from roof to roof. Don't forget that the anarchs aren't confined to the rooftops. Let the fleeing exiles get ahead of the characters and come down to the street level to stage an ambush, or even leap from a rooftop. After all, nothing makes pursuers think twice the way spiking their car with a vampire diving from a rooftop does.

Alternately, have the anarchs leap into the waiting getaway vehicles (did we mention them?) and let the characters have a high-speed car chase, complete with gunfire, melee and ramming battles between the vehicles. Just keep it going until the excitement starts to wane, then move the action into the club.

See the *Offroading!* sidebar for some advice on running a cinematic car chase using the Storyteller system.

THE FINAL BATTLE

THE CHARNELHOUSE

The Charnelhouse is a fairly impressive nightclub dance space. There's a large entryway with a ticket window and a number of bouncers to pat down the incoming customers in case they're packing rods and a large fenced-off area where club patrons can legally smoke (smoking in clubs and bars is illegal in California, because it might endanger the health of the wait staff). The interior is painted in light-absorbing matte black hung with a sparse assortment of glowing neon advertisements provided gratis by beer and liquor companies. The Charnelhouse is unusual in that it has a great deal of elevated space. There are stairways upwards that lead to an extensive, interconnected series of balconies and private spaces above the main bar and dance floor area.

These elevated spaces include Van Nuys's personal. The prince finds holding "court" in a nightclub to be one of those amusing little satires that are the fringe benefit of power. Not only does it allow his followers to come and go without undue attention no matter how outlandish their look, it also provides, Van Nuys feels, an interesting reminder to the Kindred of their state. Just like the Day of the Dead Halloween allows mortals a jesting, sidelong look at night, the ethereal crowd of vinyl-and-leather clad dancers encourages the denizens of his domain to contemplate their Damned state.

There's very little seating in the club other than in Van Nuys's private area. There are, however, a multitude of shelves slightly above waist height for drinks. Most of the shelves are covered in a thick layer of flyers and promotional postcards for raves, parties, performances by local bands and regional "scene" events.

The entry room includes the bar, mingling space, stairs up to the balcony. The inner room includes the sun dance floor, and stage, and the opening of Van Nuys's elevator box, as well as two more stairways to the catwalks above.

The Charnelhouse is Elysium, and kept by one of Van Nuys's Ventrue supporters.

SETTING THE SCENE

When the characters arrive at the Charnelhouse, the first stages of the coup have already taken place. About minutes ago, just as MacNeil's men attacked the character, a horde of San Jose anarchs and refugees led by Sundown and Marguerite Foccart brushed past the club doormen, killing two and injuring one. They hit the club like a storm, cutting across the thickly populated dance floor to climb the balcony where Van Nuys and his coterie were ensconced.

Unfortunately for the anarchs (and the unsuspecting patrons), Van Nuys and his followers not only always had a feeling something like this might come to pass, they also never really stood down from the state of armed alert brought on by the Lupine raids. When the anarchs wade across the dance floor to demand Van Nuys's abdication, the prince's underlings lunge on them with claws and fangs aflash—quelling a breach of the Masquerade.

A number of anarchs make it to the balcony, and a furious melee ensues, but Van Nuys's entourage beats them back. Unfortunately, while Van Nuys's followers were well armed, they didn't really plan for an extended siege, and the blood for the bodyguards' Disciplines is running pretty low. As the characters arrive, the two groups are exchanging desultory blows, small arms fire and shouted insults while the anarchs nerve themselves up for another rush. The anarchs are crouched down all over the club while Van Nuys and his followers are in their box or near it. The box was built with a sheet-metal floor and rail to thwart assassination attempts, and this has protected them so far.

OFFROADING!

At some point, the characters in automobiles might decide to take a shortcut off the paved road in order to make faster time to the club — for example, if the characters are driving SUVs or trucks of some sort, they can travel much of Telegraph Hill. Characters trying to chase fleeing anarchists or rushing to the club may end up going where no car was meant to go. Likewise, if it turns into gunplay in the streets, characters may need to take advantage of those wide San Francisco sidewalks to either get around disabled vehicles or to try to run over people taking shelter behind parked cars. Finally, of course, characters may choose to make their entry into the club a stylish affair and not disembark from their vehicles until they reach the bar or dance floor. Whatever the case, what follows are some handy systems for dealing with chase-related mania.

Failure on any of these rolls generally means the vehicle is no longer in a functional condition. This doesn't mean that the vehicle has snapped an axle or is totaled and stops on the spot. It can mean a smashed radiator, an oil pan left behind on a sidewalk somewhere or a crushed fuel tank. In these cases, the car continues to run until the engine seizes up or the fuel in the fuel lines is consumed — probably about five turns, given that the vehicles are almost certainly being run well past their redlines. A botch means something bad — a high-speed roll, getting T-boned by a speeding big rig, a flaming car or slamming into something immobile at 100 miles per hour. Storytellers should feel free to assign large numbers of damage dice to characters who are in a car that botches in a high-speed urban chase.

Note also that these rules add to rather than replace those on p. 201 of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. For example, a driver still cannot have more dice in his Drive pool than the Maneuver rating of his vehicle, no matter what sort of crazy stunt he's pulling. Storytellers who want to make the chase more cinematic should increase the Maneuver rating of the cars the characters are driving by one or two points.

SYSTEMS

Driving Down a Staircase or Public Walkway: Wits + Drive (difficulty 8) to make the cuts on the wheel at just the right time to not bottom out or roll.

Driving Through a Glass or Wooden Partition: Dexterity + Drive, difficulty 6 for glass windows, difficulty 8 for wooden windows. You can't really drive normal motor vehicles through concrete walls.

Driving Through a Store, Club or Other Crowded Space: Dexterity + Drive, with a starting difficulty of 6 and increasing by one for each round the vehicle is in the space, to represent debris piling up on the front. If the area is full of people, the difficulty of the roll goes up to ten if you don't want to run them over.

Horsing Through a Row of Parked Cars: Strength + Drive, difficulty between 6 and 10, depending on how big the character's car is. Large vehicles have a lower difficulty than small ones. Success means the character has crossed onto the sidewalk through the row of cars.

Hanging Onto a Car for Dear Unlife: Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 8 — it's not just for anarchists. Characters who are "hitching a ride" may also end up clinging desperately to a moving vehicle. Characters inside a car who are not strapped in must make a roll whenever it performs a maneuver. This is a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) with the difficulty increasing to 8 if the driver fails his Drive roll. Failure on any of these rolls means the character leaves the car at high speed — treat the damage as being hit by a car going at the vehicle's top speed. Luckily, it is bashing damage.

Scraping Someone off Along a Row of Parked Cars: Dexterity + Drive (difficulty 6). Someone hanging on must make both a Dexterity + Dodge roll (difficulty 6) to avoid getting crushed, and a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 9) to hang on. Characters without Celerity are at a real disadvantage here.

Running After a Car Using Extra Actions: Characters may end up using combinations of boosted Attributes and Disciplines that grant extra actions to race on foot against an automobile. The following chart is a rough guide to the speeds a vampire running with various levels of Dexterity and varying numbers of extra actions can attain. The values are numbers of actions the vampire spends running flat out — vampires who wish to do something other than run should refer to the rules on p. 201 of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Storytellers should probably require characters running over 100 miles per hour to make Athletics checks to turn sharply or dodge unexpected obstacles.

Dexterity										
Actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	
2	31	35	40	44	48	52	56	60	64	
3	47	53	59	65	72	78	84	90	96	
4	63	71	79	87	95	104	111	120	128	
5	78	89	99	109	119	130	140	150	160	
6	94	106	119	131	143	155	168	180	192	

Speed is in nearest whole mile per hour.



Outside, the club is a mess. Four anarchists stand guard, practically on top of the two dead doormen, while a car burns dangerously no more than 20 yards away. The pyrotechnic display is courtesy of an anarchist carrying a Molotov cocktail who realized too late that there'd be no use for it and decided to blow something up anyway. Now, of course, he'd wish he had it with him, had he not suffered the Final Death.

The club itself is a bloody ruin. A half-dozen anarchists in various stages of decomposition and dust lay in a swath across the dance floor, along with the corpses of about a dozen club goers. About two dozen wounded club goers range from "moderately well injured" to "death would be merciful." Some have crawled or been pulled to safety, while the more seriously injured lay where they've fallen. Perhaps two dozen unwounded club goers cower in corners or try their best to aid wounded friends while staying out of the line of fire. Both sides have itchy trigger fingers, and nobody is willing to make a break for it after seeing a couple of friends who drew attention to themselves get blown to rags with a shotgun or sucked dry by a wounded anarchist looking to refuel.

The Storyteller should decide how he wants to run this segment before deciding if any survivors of the attack on Coit Tower reach the club. If the characters are buff enough and fresh enough to just storm the club, then have some of the fleeing anarchists make it back or otherwise alert the vampires at the club. If the players need all the help they can get, let them ice the last anarchist before they can get word out.

HIT THE DOOR LIKE TITANS

If the characters hit the front door of the club with guns blazing, there's not much to do. There are about two dozen anarchist extras, along with Marguerite, Sundown and whoever made it back from Coit Tower. Don't worry too much about where exactly the anarchists are — this is an action sequence. They're wherever they need to be for the next cool stunt to go off. Let the players shoot, chew, claw and blast their way through the assembled anarchists, then let those stills standing go at it with the surviving anarchist leaders. If things get totally out of hand, throw in a rescue by Van Nuys and his surviving followers — otherwise they defend themselves off-camera and come out to thank the characters for being so cool at the end of the fight. The characters have trudged through a set-piece fight, a rooftop or high-speed car chase and (if this is part of an ongoing chronicle) God only knows how much setup. Let them have the climax to themselves. That doesn't mean they have to win, but let the battle be theirs to win or lose, and don't have them go out like suckers.

Below is a list of things to make the club fight more interesting.

Stairs — The club has three sets of stairs, including one broad, spiral set and a metal mesh one. *Nothing* is as cool in an action scene as a well-utilized flight of steps. You can push people down them, hold them against an angry mob, lurk under them and shoot or stab people running up them. The freestanding steel steps off the dance floor are particularly a boon to the acrobatically inclined. Such characters can use them for maneuvers, whirling around them like a giant set of parallel bars, grabbing the stair treads from below to lift themselves above attacks or using the safety rails to vault over foes' heads.

Balconies, Catwalks — The average catwalk is about 20' off the ground, meaning that to grab it with their hands, the average vampire has to leap about 12' straight up (6 successes on a Strength + Athletics roll). Vampires with Potence or who know the Jade Shintai are quite capable of going vertical. Characters can Tackle one another off the catwalks, as if they were rooftops (see the Rooftop Chase! sidebar on p. 69) but it only takes two successes to go over the edge.

The Bar — Like the stairs or catwalks, a bar is a tremendous foil in a fight. Intact bottles can be used as clubs, and broken ones can be jabbed or slashed with for lethal damage. There's a mirror behind the bar, and characters can have their faces smashed into it (though there unfortunately isn't enough space behind it to drive a head all the way through the glass and use the sharp edge to sever the neck). People can be stuffed into the well cooler or have their hands or heads smashed in the cooler door. Characters can entangle attackers with the hose for the mixer head. Also, remember that alcohol over 100 proof is flammable. You can dump it on someone's head and flick your IBC, or you can stick a bar rag in it, light it, and viola, instant Molotov (and instant Röttschreck roll).

There is no gun under the bar, but there is an baseball bat for characters who are into that sort of thing.

Sound System — The Charnelhouse is a serious club with serious speakers. Most of them are mounted on huge steel brackets high on the walls and add to the club's three-dimensional space. They're a perfect place to leap when fighting on catwalks and surrounded on both sides. While the mounting brackets are securely fastened to the studs and pretty much impossible to tear off (level 10 feat of Strength) the speakers can be torn lose with a level 5 feat of Strength, and hurled as giant missiles with a level 7 feat of Strength (doing Strength + 4 bashing damage). Other speakers are at floor level. These are heavier (level 6 feat of Strength to pick up, 8 to hurl) but they do Strength + 5 bashing damage if they hit.

Clubgoers — The club is full of clubgoers, several of them dead or injured. As a group, the crowd is currently just going to stay where it is and shriek if there's more shooting or fighting. However, some try to bolt. Characters with hair triggers may mistake patrons for anarchs and plug innocents

as they streak for the door. Also, even if characters don't want to feed, they may have no choice. Hungry characters should make frenzy checks at difficulty 8 — the entire place reeks of spilled blood. Ravenous characters automatically go into a feeding frenzy.

Also, though characters may have moral problems with it, clubgoers can be used as shields or melee weapons. Against a someone holding a clubgoer as cover, the attacker's difficulty to hit increases by 2, but they can choose to attack normally and waste the hostage. In this case, the shield takes full damage, and the person hiding behind them takes the same amount, minus the shield's Stamina.

Using living or dead clubgoers as melee weapons is a bit complex. It's a level 5 feat of Strength to swing a *person* as a weapon, and the character must make and maintain a successful clinch with a living, resisting person to use them as an effective club. Human beings swung as bludgeons do Strength + 2 bashing damage and suffer the same amount. Humans stop being effective bludgeons after being used to inflict 14 or more levels of bashing damage, less if the person or corpse was seriously damaged before they came to be a weapon.

SNEAKY SHIT

Obviously, if the players get clever, there's only so far you can anticipate them. That's the whole point of being clever, after all. However, there are some reasonable alternatives to "hit the front door with both guns blazing" that merit discussion. It's entirely possible the players do something incredibly smart and unanticipated. In that case, you're going to have to wing it. However, hopefully the discussion below helps the Storyteller prepare for the obvious.

Character may try to Obfuscate, either as a prelude to opening fire, or to sneak past the waiting anarchs and get to Van Nuys's box. At least one of the anarch leaders should have Auspex 3 or higher — let them make a Perception + Alertness roll to spot the characters. If the characters don't specify that they're being stealthy as well as Obfuscating, assume the spotting anarch rolls at difficult 4. There's a fire fight going on, after all. They're looking for an attack.

Characters may also attempt to disguise themselves, probably through Mask of a Thousand Faces. Assume that the high-Auspex anarch leader attempts to penetrate their disguise as soon as they show up — the trick is just too obvious, unless the character has a very clever disguise. Even if the disguise holds up, it's a Manipulation + Subterfuge or Performance roll, difficulty of at least 8, to fast-talk the anarchs.

Characters may also try alternate approaches to the club. They may come in through the back door. Three anarchs watch the back door from the outside, waiting for something to happen, and one of them has Auspex 3. Likewise, characters may attempt to dip down into the sewers and come up

through the basement. While this is certainly possible — a manhole in the basement exists so the Nosferatu don't have to walk the streets — two of Sundown's progeny down there wait in the dark with a half-dozen ghouléd sewer critters. Characters down there without Sewer Lore are going to get a hell of a surprise.

Characters may also zip up the side of the club (it's a windowless, black-painted cinderblock cube 40' tall) and dig in through the roof. Busting a hole large enough for a vampire to get in through is a Strength + Athletics roll, difficulty set by the tools available. Fire axes are difficulty 4; claws, swords and the like are difficulty 6; boots and fists are difficulty 8. Twenty successes must be accumulated for each vampire who can go through the hole at once. Note that cutting through a roof makes a lot of noise, and the people inside are the perfect portraits of trigger-happy wrecks. Characters are going to get shot at before they even manage to get through the ceiling, regardless of who they come in over the top of, unless someone has gone in and told Van Nuys to expect visitors from above.

AFTERMATH

THE PLAYERS STOP THE COUP

If the coup attempt is foiled, that's pretty much all she wrote for the organized anarchs in America. While the subculture of vampire rebellion continues, most of the politicians behind it are dead. MacNeil, Attucks, Foccart and Sundown never allow themselves to be taken prisoner. If by some miracle the players actually stake or otherwise incapacitate them, the Inner Circle requests they be sent to Europe to be dealt with. Foccart appears again at Robin Leeland's side. Leeland predates the Camarilla, and so do his relationships with the Inner Circle and the other elders of Europe. Any other ringleaders sent to the Inner Circle are never heard from again, though information about other important anarch organizers in North America begins circulating among the justicars shortly thereafter.

For the rest of the anarchs in San Francisco, the end is not nearly so dramatic. Even with Guil and her archons there to assist him, Van Nuys has neither the desire nor the resources to brighten the sunset with 30 or 40 vampires. The survivors of the final battle and their allies are left to blow on the winds, "encouraged" to move to new cities. Those who flee, flee into the teeth of waiting scourges and Lupine hunting parties who once again seem incredibly well informed about the sudden, panicked exodus.

For the inhabitants of the New Promise Mandarinate, stemming the coup means peace. Only about 30 million dollars of the Camarilla's tribute ends up in the Mandarinate, with 170 million going to repay the various backers of the invasion and almost 100 million going to the Blood Court as a donation. However, that 30 million dollars in funneled into cementing the Mandarinate's

presence in Los Angeles's politics and finance industries. The leaders of the Mandarinate are smart politicians and careful investors — by the end of the next year, the New Promise is more strongly established than the average Camarilla presence.

For the Quincunx, the defeat of the coup continues the process of disgrace for the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders. With the Fence-Mender efforts not only succeeding but turning a profit, the Crusaders are long on ideology and short on results. While the Crusaders attack the Camarilla's payment as crass mercantilism, the donation is clearly a tribute from a barbarian state. With corruption in the provinces snatching PRC tax receipts out of the Blood Court's claws before they can take their own skim, the millions are a welcome addition to the ancestor's coffers. Though the Foreigner-Vanquishers wait patiently for the next mistake and lay plans for Shadow Wars to unseat the Fence Menders, for now the debate is over.

Assuming that open warfare with the Mandarinate doesn't break out due to Sandhurst's assassination attempt (see the What about Sandhurst? sidebar), then Guil's job here is done. After her last few conclaves, Guil's travelling circus folds up. She relocates to the American southeast. The rebellious western princes are left as they were. What exactly becomes of Guil in the long run is up to the Storyteller. She may remain loyal to her sect or bolt for Mexico — whatever the case, Jarbeaux continues to report back to the Inner Circle like so many other spies. One compromise and betrayal at a time, the Final Nights creep forward toward Gehenna and the Turning of the Age.

THE ANARCHS ARE SUCCESSFUL

If the anarch coup is successful, matters on the West Coast become... complex. Not only do the anarchs have a city in their grasp, they also have organized backing from the western princes. With funds and new recruits, the anarchs pin down the New Promise Mandarinate in endless guerilla warfare, not just in the streets of Los Angeles and San Francisco but in the California legislature as well.

This effectively spells the end of the anarchs as an organized political movement. While they are certainly still present, they no longer really have any connection to their ideals. They're just another clique of powerful vampires warring with other vampires over turf. Within a year or two, only very young and idealistic vampires go to California looking for freedom. Instead, those who travel to San Francisco seek rapid promotion and a willingness to overlook past sins that come with the wartime demand for personnel. Or they go to chase rumors of the Unbound....

If open warfare erupts between the Camarilla and the New Promise Mandarinate, California becomes the front line. Sabbat agents pour across the Mexican border, and Quincunx troops not only battle the anarchs in San Francisco, but in cities across the West. As the Camarilla

responds, ancillae from all across America flock to the possibility of status serving as privateers. The Sabbat offensive in the northeast tapers off as more resources are concentrated on targets closer to home. Within months, the area is the focus of a three-way conflict that promises to become the most significant battle of the Final Nights.

If warfare does *not* erupt between the Camarilla and the Quincunx, anarch success in the coup spells trouble. The unreliability of the region makes the situation troublesome. Over the next several years, as the princes fight their proxy war against the Cathayans, the Inner Circle is divided about what to do with the American west. Should the Camarilla discipline the unruly princes, ignore the problem or forge an alliance with the Cathayans to make sure the area doesn't fall to the Sabbat? In the end, they do nothing, and the western princes take advantage of the neglect. Guil's conclave rulings are ignored or sidestepped.

WHAT ABOUT SANDHURST?

If Sandhurst manages to assassinate Mandarin Fun, then things are about to get very bad indeed. If the Camarilla can hand over Sandhurst to the Kuei-jin for "examination" (not easy — the Inner Circle wants to dissect his soul as well) then the result is only a semi-permanent breakdown in the negotiations and a long, cold war along the western frontier. If the Cainites can't throw Sandhurst to the Chinese vampires as a sop, then the result is a hot war as the moderates lose power. Monkey Trip Wu is displaced by Maximum Sun, most of the powerful Cainites are purged from the New Promise Mandarinate, and new ranks of undead arrive in Los Angeles to carry the war along the coast. Guil issues her call for vampiric privateers, and the battle for the American west begins in earnest.

If Fun survives, the peace process continues. Even if San Francisco falls to the anarchs, the Cathayans honor their deal with the Camarilla, though pressure from the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders sends Mandarinate Kuei-jin into San Francisco, where they enjoy success against Sundown and his exiles. If Fun survives and San Francisco does not fall, then the only real question is if he can take Sandhurst home with him. If so, the Mandarinate's relations with the Sabbat sour even further after Chiu Bao dissects Sandhurst's soul — wide-ranging Sabbat hunts become a regular pastime for the Mandarinate's Brujah and Devil-Tigers.

If Sandhurst meets the Final Death or is shipped off to the Inner Circle, then the Mandarinate remains alert for Sabbat infiltration but undertakes no campaigns beyond its borders — without the proof sifted from Sandhurst's digested soul, Fun is unconvinced that the matter wasn't somehow arranged by the Camarilla.

The Cathayans enjoy limited success against the anarchs, who can't easily match the power of Cathayan elders to travel in the spirit worlds and make pacts with those worlds' inhabitants. Nevertheless, the Fence Menders suffer. The stresses of conflict make integrating Kin-jin into Cathayan society significantly more difficult. As it becomes clear that the western vampires cannot easily be educated, the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders' charges gain credibility among Gui Ren facing constant social and political conflict with the kin-jin. Jiejie Li and Chiu Bao shortly go the way of Mandarin Hao, leaving the stolid hands of moderates uncontested at the tiller of the Quincunx as the turning of the Age draws closer.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

EAST

JIEJIE LI

Bone Flower Ancestor of the Extraordinary Commission

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Visionary

P'o Nature: Slave

Second Breath: unknown

Apparent Age: early teens

Jiejie Li, the deadly Elder Sister Plum, is one of the few female *chih-xue* to have risen to prominence in the Quincunx. Jiejie Li is unusual not just for her gender — as a Song of the Shadows, she is one of the few Bone Flowers in an extremely prominent position, and her body cannot be more than 14 years old, though it is unknown if that is her actual form. Jiejie Li's mortal origins are obscure, but she is known as a politician and theologian of extraordinary ability. The Elder Sister was also the chief lieutenant of the Jade Court Ancestor for four decades and distinguished herself so much that she earned a commendation from the bodhisattvas when she departed to head the Extraordinary Commission on the Rectification of Borders. Her stridently political novel *Seven Bone Oil* has caused quite a stir in the courts and gained her no few political allies among Kuei-jin interested in righteousness without necessarily following the plans of some Resplendent Crane or Devil-Tiger zealot.

None of Jiejie Li's diplomatic successes have come from dealings with the Yin World — her opposition to Yu Huang is almost too well known. Since her underlings took over the New Promise Mandarinate, cooperation between the occupying forces of the Yellow Springs and the *chih-xue* of Los Angeles has all but broken down. Obviously, there is a perfectly good excuse — Western vampires cannot be expected to take part in a society that subjugates the ghosts of their ancestors. The real motivation has far much more to do with Jiejie's thinly veiled allegations that Yu Huang is a

Yama King. Her hostility to Yu Huang and her apparently beatific indifference to the Kin-jin/Kuei-jin collaboration in Los Angeles have done nothing to endear Jiejie Li to her fellow ancestors, but she has not yet failed severely enough to be removed. When she does stumble, however, the wolves will be ravenous indeed.

Elder Sister Plum is also rumored to be a dietary degenerate — one of those perverse Kuei-jin who enjoy the taste of human flesh. There is no proof to the rumors, which might very well have been started by political rivals. It is, however, worth noting that the practice is widespread enough that few inquiries are made into it for fear of embarrassing some important personage.

CHIU BAO, FIRST ONI

Devil Tiger Mandarin of the Extraordinary Commission

Nature: Perfectionist

Demeanor: Rogue

P'o Nature: Monkey

Second Breath: 1631 CE

Apparent Age: early 30s

Chiu Bao is young for his post — only a little over three centuries old. However, this ambitious Devil Tiger mandarin has secured for himself an excellent reputation since his rise to prominence during the toppling of the Manchu dynasty. An astute politician noted for his stern attitude, Bao dwells in the hills of southern China with his inbred clan of dhampyr children. Bao is also a master of the Dragon Tears and a talented if relentlessly brutal general — an aptitude put to as much use on the political battlefield as in Midnight War.

While Jiejie Li's motives are many and open to debate, Chiu Bao's are as simple as can be. For the last century or so, since the chaos of the Taiping Uprising, Chiu Bao has condemned the actions of the courts as ignoring the very real threat of the coming Age of Sorrow. Inexperienced followers of his Dharma often see Bao's emphasis on stability as nothing more than the voice of recently enthroned authority trying to protect its claim, but Chiu Bao has a following among certain Bamboo Princes who see him as an "ideal mandarin."

When not constrained to formal garb, Bao purposefully cultivates the appearance of a shit-kicking rustic. A scruffy young man in grimy overalls and ratty tennis shoes or sandals, Bao among mortals appears to be the ne'er-do-well older cousin or brother to the modest and generally clean-cut Jiejie Lie. Bao is also an actor of some talent and can actually play the part, a tactic he often uses in debate to throw off new opponents.

Chiu Bao is a South-directed warrior and an active one at that. Far more than Elder Sister Plum, Bao is always on the move, scuttling from place to place. He spends most of his time in the Blood Court, fighting the political battles of the Harmonious Menders, but he also spends at least three



nights a month in Los Angeles to get a feel for the situation. Bao's view of the cooperation between Kin-jin and Kuei-jin in Los Angeles is rather dim. Unlike the Elder Sister, Bao spends much time in Beijing and knows how strong the sentiment against the Fence Menders has become. He worries that the obviously questionable cooperation may prove to be the chink in the Menders' armor that allows the ancestors to quash the moderates and preserve the Quincunx's status quo.

MONKEY TRIP WU

Thrashing Dragon Mandarin of the New Promise Mandarinate

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Gallant

P'o Nature: Monkey

Second Breath: 1951 CE

Apparent Age: late 20s

Monkey Trip Wu was something of an annoyance to the courts of Manchuria in his (only recently ended) nights as a Running Monkey. Wu was the worst of everything: too disciplined to be an insurgent and too young to be eccentric, too often right to discount, too irresponsible to tie down with obligation and too dangerous to murder. Indeed, the Monkey's elders were been looking for a glorious quest for him to die undertaking almost before he passed his Fire and Water test.

They found that cause in the conservative and dangerous Mandarin Hao, an ambitious Blood Court climber who often toured the rest of the Quincunx looking to improve his social connections. Wu found himself astonishingly well recommended for a post under Hao when the mandarin toured his court in the 1930s. In some cases, the disciple even received glowing recommendations from mortal enemies. Sure that this was some sort of death trap, Wu had no choice but to go along with Hao.

Wu was surprised when he was actually introduced to Quincunx politics and realized that Hao was even more crooked than the Monkey himself! But unlike Monkey Trip Wu, with his frenetic charm, Hao was an icy scheming machine. Wu wasn't terribly concerned with how justified Hao's ends were — working with the mandarin was a license to steal, just as long as Wu's depredations didn't trouble Hao's career. The mandarin considered shielding the Monkey from judicial retribution to be simply maintaining a good servant. The ancestors of Wu's court had punished his intractability by throwing him into the figurative briar patch, not that they minded — it was a briar patch far, far away. As far as they were concerned, Monkey Trip Wu could be as successful as he wanted, just so long as he did it someplace else.

Wu's betrayal of Hao was a gradual thing, born of his growing disillusionment with the situation in the Five August Courts and his growing Dharmic enlightenment. It was one thing to get up to monkeyshines over political matters.

Politics was politics, after all — don't play with matches if you can't stand getting burned. But in Los Angeles, Hao was throwing away the unives of real Gui Ren on a hopeless war of attrition in a foreign land, and Wu knew just how dishonestly the game had been played to lead the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders into the quagmire.

There might be righteous wars out there, but Monkey Trip Wu convinced himself this was not one of them. Managing things on the ground while Hao shuttled between Beijing, Guangdong and Los Angeles, Wu deceived his trusting master as to the true nature of matters, and the rest is history. The poetry was good, in any case.

Wu handles his current position with aplomb. He barely survived the ritual of Crowning the Ancestor and knows that many of the vampires nominally under his command would be his superiors if not for the office. Direct orders are not likely to prove particularly successful for Monkey Trip Wu; this is just another challenge to overcome.

FUN TOY

Thrashing Dragon Mandarin of the Flatbush and Stockton Posse

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Monster

P'o Nature: Demon

Second Breath: 1943 CE

Apparent Age: mid-20s

A brutal gangster in life, Fun Toy had the honor of being shot to death in one of the first gang battles in Shanghai history to involve Western firearms. Returning from the grave with the realization of all he had missed in life, Fun Toy hurled himself into the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon without looking back.

Blessed with a good horoscope and an amazing aptitude for talking just a little bit faster than the other guy could shoot, Fun Toy has enjoyed success in his unlife. He and his fellow Posse members are figures of scandal and admiration among the disciples and jina of Hong Kong. Fiercely modern yet exhibiting a sternly righteous character, the Posse was one of the most successful young *wu* of the Pearl River Delta area, with profitable tongs and scarlet screens in textiles, agriculture and illegal immigration.

Many Kuei-jin have heard the rumor that the members of the Posse are flesh eaters, a slander that gained considerable currency after their political alliance with Jiejie Li. Certainly they share the same enemies — the primary reason that Fun Toy has spent most of the time since the beginning of the Great Leap Outward in Los Angeles is his open antipathy with Mandarin Hao, with whom he had fought several Shadow Wars. With Hao in Hong Kong and Guangdong so often, the Quincunx decided to send Fun Toy abroad. This way, some outburst or social clash between the two might cause the Fence Menders political embarrassment or set back the war effort by only two or three nights a month.

A giant, overdressed example of mortal pop-culture excess, Fun Toy can be found sitting and smiling in the front row of Los Angeles Chinese community events. While the war has raged, Fun has focussed his efforts on establishing a foothold in the city's commerce. Part of this involved the destruction of the Crypt's Sons' influence over the city's heroin imports from Asia.

The Posse's real emphasis is on legitimate business, and they in no way confine themselves to the tourist-oriented Chinatown. From storage facilities to real estate development to light manufacturing, the Flatbush and Stockton Posse has come to Los Angeles with commerce on their minds. The argument that the Posse is crassly commercial rather than ideologically sound had been used in the Blood Court. However, the Flatbush and Stockton Posse has underwritten large portions of not just the reclamation of Shanghai but the infiltration of North America as well. The posse has suggested that if Ancestor Ch'ang wished to encourage the posse to disentangle itself from commercial matters, they are perfectly willing to do so, but that the ancestor ought perhaps to arrange alternate funding first. The matter has not been spoken of again. It is known that the ancestor is actually looking elsewhere for funds, but so far, he hasn't found them.

HAN HUI

Resplendent Crane Mandarin of the Violet Path Posse
 Nature: Martyr
 Demeanor: Visionary
 P'o Nature: Legalist
 Second Breath: 1962 CE
 Apparent Age: early 20s

The Violet Path Posse is a young *wu* from Macao, intimately tied (as almost all the island's vampires are) to the single family that owns most of the island's gambling facilities. The Violet Path went to San Diego at the request of their elders, but their mission miscarried after the Kin-jin vampires committed veteran anarchists to the war for the city, forcing the Posse to withdraw to Los Angeles and reinforce the weakening Quincunx forces there.

While Han Hui was once a distant admirer of the Flatbush and Stockton Posse and other modernizers, long exposure to Fun Toy and Monkey Trip Wu has dimmed her revolutionary ardor. Clearly, both Wu and Fun have loyalties other than those to the Quincunx. In Fun Toy's case, his loyalty to the Fence Menders is clearly his priority. Monkey Trip Wu is loyal to the New Promise Mandarinate, if he's loyal to anything other than himself.

At this point, Han Hui is willing to accept conditions within the Mandarinate. Her elders make the critical decisions and she respects them. She doesn't really regret her part in making Monkey Trip Wu the Ancestor of the Court. He survived the ritual of Crowning the Ancestor

and is thus qualified, even if she distrusts him. What bothers her is how clearly winning the war in Los Angeles or even in Hong Kong and Shanghai is secondary to winning the political battles. This is, to her, the sort of political game that led the Five August Courts down to the road to two occupied capitals.

What separates Han Hui from Monkey Trip Wu is that Hui is a reformer. Wu would happily abandon the Quincunx except as a place from which to draw disciples. Hui, meanwhile, has developed a considerable drive to reform the court system itself, putting her oddly in alignment with the Bamboo Princes. If and when she leaves Los Angeles, she is going to see reform in the Courts, or meet the Eye of Heaven trying.

Han Hui and the rest of the Violet Path are the only Kuei-jin in the area to base themselves in Chinatown. While this makes her an obvious target, it is a voluntary role. Unable to withdraw from the Los Angeles campaign, the least she can do is keep her posse insulated from poison politics by serving in a heroic and isolated role. A tumble into the Mouth of Yomi cannot be worse than helping to drag the entire Middle Kingdom there.

MAXIMUM SUN

Resplendent Crane Mandarin of the Emerald Ministry
 Nature: Deviant
 Demeanor: Traditionalist
 P'o Nature: Barbarian
 Second Breath: 1927 CE
 Apparent Age: early 20s

Maximum Sun is the bright young star of the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders. Like the Flatbush and Stockton Posse, the Emerald Ministry is a *wu* of talented young Kuei-jin. However, as Blood Court traditionalists, they were much more martially inclined than the more commercial Posse. A master of the Yin Prana, Maximum Sun spends most of his time dressed impeccably in crisp black suits or robes made from pure, woven Yin energy. Alleged to be one of the most deadly young warriors in the Blood Court, Sun is both feared and respected for his diligence and martial capabilities, which include command of the Goblin Scorch.

The Emerald Ministry and several client *wu* formed the spearhead for the invasion of Los Angeles. They suffered heavy casualties when resistance stiffened, including the loss of the Yellow Dragon society, a very promising *wu* of disciples and young jinas. Currently, the Ministry has only two client *wu*, both of them short handed and composed of the survivors of other, now disbanded, *wu*.

The Emerald Ministry remains a formidable fighting force through which Maximum Sun distinguished himself both in the early invasion and more recently in the cam-

paign against the Crypt's Sons. Currently, however, their main role is as watchdog for the conservative party in Los Angeles. While they are politically weak, the Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders are willing to drag the Fence Menders down with them, or at least the Emerald Ministry is. Sun and his fellows wait for the time when the Mandarinate falters, as they know it will — the path of unrighteousness invariably turns the ankles of those who walk it. When that mistake comes, the Ministry will see that it is properly reported, and an accounting will be taken for the degenerate Kin-jin and the fools who include them in the traditions of the Wan Kuei.

During the fighting against the Kin-jin, Sun himself was struck by some sort of spiritual attack that he believes is causing his brain to rot. He has carefully concealed this from his fellows so far, but the maggots that occasionally wriggle from his ears or drop from his nose have become increasingly difficult to cover up. The larval infestation of his festering brain has not yet begun its metamorphosis into adult flies yet, but Sun is sure that it soon will. He has taken to wearing his sunglasses at all times so that when the flies begin to hatch, his subordinates cannot see them flying about inside his head through the pupils of his eyes.

SALVADOR GARCIA, MINISTER OF THE EASTERN CITY OF ANGELS

9th generation, childe of Ferdinand

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Caregiver

Embrace: 1892

Apparent Age: early 20s

Salvador Garcia was a 19th-century Spanish anarchist Embraced after he and his brother were beaten mortally by gendarmes at the behest of the local don. His sire, Ferdinand, fled with him and taught him in the ways of the free man. Salvador served as Ferdinand's special aide in the Spanish Revolution, when the two worked earnestly to support Franco. Salvador and his sire's efforts had a significant effect on the progress of the fighting, until a burst of 20-millimeter rounds from a Fascist armored car sent Ferdinand to his Final Death.

Without Ferdinand's training on politics, Garcia knew he could do little for the crumbling revolution. After a few months of aimless guerrilla rebellion, he fled to the Americas. He ended up in Los Angeles after an attempt to settle in Mexico (which Garcia had been unaware was a Sabbat stronghold). Garcia settled down to an existence in what was then one of the West Coast's premier havens for expatriate vampiric ideologues, Los Angeles. The prince, Don Sebastian, offered the rebels shelter. They were anarchists, and they provided he and his fellow degenerates with someone sober enough to hold important offices.

Unfortunately, the don's temper went too far. The don had his men apprehend and thrash a well known European Brujah, Jeremy MacNeil, in a manner reminiscent of the death of Garcia's own brother. MacNeil was willing to let the matter go, but Garcia and his fellow anarchists were outraged. Garcia led an attack on the prince's *hacienda*, only to find a single Malkavian stumbling away and the Kindred inside brutally murdered. Garcia covered up the destruction, telling MacNeil only that he was not responsible.

In the decades since, Garcia has soured on this glorious revolution and begun to feel that the anarchists are just another bunch of thugs. The real threat to vampiric liberty was the Sabbat, and the real fight had nothing to do with vampires at all, but with *human* dignity and freedom. Between the 1968 Sabbat siege and the fall of the Anarch Free State, Garcia lived as a bandit king, uninvolved in the ideological politics of the city. He used the proceeds of his gang to underwrite revolutionary publications and political figures in South and Central America and did his part to keep the free state independent of outside influences. This often clashed with MacNeil's *laissez-faire* attitude. Garcia believed the Crypt's Sons were Sabbat, but MacNeil was unwilling to ally with him to wipe them out before they began their next siege.

When the Kuei-jin washed up on American shores, Garcia again did his part, but it was mostly the smaller gangs who were swept aside. By the time Salvador had mobilized for the conflict, the Kuei-jin were suddenly quiescent. Garcia knew enough about gangs to know they were either overextended or complacent, and didn't want to risk his men's lives and unlives to find out which. When the Chinese vampires came to him proposing that he cooperate with them against the Crypt's Sons, he was both hesitant and curious. The Kuei-jin seemed to be willing to deal in good faith, and so Garcia threw in with them.

Garcia has none of MacNeil's faith in a Darwinian state of nature to produce anything more than tyranny. His cooperation with the Cathayans grew to include a partnership in the New Promise Mandarinate because he felt the system was more equitable than the old gangland feudalism of the Anarch Free State. Under the Mandarinate, everyone has a voice. While the Chinese vampires are considerably more equal than everyone else, they're still less dictatorial than, for example, an occupying *priscus* or *justicar*.

Salvador is aware of Kuei-jin politics and has the background in liberation theology to understand just how influential that sort of belief can be. However, Garcia is too much of a materialist to accept the vibrant spiritual world of which they speak. Vampires and Lupines he can accept, but things like Yama Kings and the "war between the king of the Chinese underworld and the dead of Los Angeles" are obviously somewhat different. Until he sees otherwise in convincing terms, Garcia thinks of the Kuei-jin as devoutly religious and seriously deluded beings.

LOUIS FORTIER, MINISTER OF THE WESTERN CITY OF ANGELS

9th generation, childe of Night Star

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Traditionalist

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1754

Apparent Age: late 20s

A second son who joined the pre-Revolutionary French army in hopes of making something of himself, Louis Fortier found himself sent to the colonies. There, he was Embraced against the backdrop of the French and Indian War. Dreading a return to France, he traveled instead to New York, where he became an exotic but respected expatriate. Fortier remained apolitical during the Revolution. After all, it wasn't his king's colony.

Though distressed by the subsequent French revolution, Fortier had by then already begun to think of himself as a vampire of the world. He spent his time rescuing his noble relatives (including his foppish brother) from the Terror rather than on pointless displays of reactionary sentiment. All throughout the 19th century, Fortier grew comfortable on the fruits of Franco-American trade. It wasn't until the early 20th century, with the rising fiendishness of Sabbat presence in New York, that Fortier fled.

He left the city for the West and migrated to Los Angeles, where the prince, Don Sebastian, was said to welcome talented Kindred. The truth of the matter was that Sebastian welcomed Kindred sober enough to hold a position and unambitious enough to trust.

Fortier was at least *politically* unambitious. Being the prince on the throne was much more effort than being the vampire who propped it up. Over the next 30 years, Fortier had a successful career investing in French Indochina and other European colonies in Asia.

Fortier became distressed over Sebastian's mistreatment of the young rogue Jeremy MacNeil. The beating was capricious, or seemed so, and Fortier was outraged over what he saw as yet another slide along Sebastian's downward spiral. When the revolt came, Fortier left Sebastian twisting in the wind, watching Salvador Garcia and Leeland's get make the city into a place of their own.

Fortier could adapt. While politically ambivalent, he didn't refuse power when it was thrust upon him. The Frenchman became something of a face for the anarchs, keeping a strong, well-organized bevy of ghouls and a brood of beautiful — and talented — progeny and paramours. Affluent, wealthy and educated, Fortier was the gentleman who walked with the anarchs. This made him both a useful channel for negotiations and a prime example in the arguments of those who wanted to believe the inhabitants of the Anarch Free State were just Camarilla vampires with a different set of titles for their prince and primogen.

When the Kuei-jin attacked, Fortier responded with his full strength, wiping out several packs of the vampires that trespassed on his territory or attacked his underlings. By the end of 1998, the attacks had tapered off. When the Cathayans allied with Salvador Garcia in the autumn of 1999, Fortier could see the writing on the wall. When Kuei-jin approached him to help form the New Promise Mandarinate, he accepted.

Make no mistake — Fortier is a gentleman. He let Sebastian fall, and he held back the dogs while Jeremy MacNeil and his followers skipped town. He's perfectly happy in the Mandarinate; it reminds him of France during his mortal life. He knows he's being vilified in the Kuei-jin's hidden rooms, but also knows that, provided he plays the game right, he'll be accepted eventually. With three-quarters of a century of Asian business experience, Fortier knows the game quite well.

WEST**MADAME GUIL, TOREADOR JUSTICAR**

6th generation, childe of Philippe Vollgirre

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Bravo

Embrace: 1579

Apparent Age: mid-teens

Merciless, powerful, unflinching, Madame Guil is one of the Camarilla's mailed fists. Guil is the justicar or special investigator called for when the inquiry promises to be complicated because she is vicious enough to do whatever is necessary. Social discomfort is something Madame Guil causes rather than experiences.

Guil is old, but not incredibly so. Regardless of her age, her excellent blood and mastery of the Disciplines are intimidating. Equally intimidating are the rumors that surround her, that she has a paramour who is a priscus of the Sabbat, that she is a black widow who diablerizes her lovers, that she has made pacts with dark powers, even that she is horribly disfigured and that her visage is nothing but an illusion over some sort of terrible true appearance. Guil's inhuman calm and a face that rarely breaks into emotion of any sort lend credence to these rumors — surely no real visage could be so still and unreflective.

Inasmuch as Guil entertains feelings in her nocturnal existence, this assignment worries her. It is difficult, but it is also obviously some sort of test, and she is uncertain of its nature. What she does know is that the Inner Circle is even less moral than she. It could be that the obvious test — placing her so close to the Sabbat stronghold of Mexico — is only a distraction from the real evaluation. Unsure of anything but the fact that the Inner Circle is intentionally discomfiting her, Guil is very much at odds over the Cathayan situation, and her frayed temper interferes with her perfor-

mance, leaving a great deal of work up to her archon, the crafty Vidal Jarbeaux.

VIDAL JARBEAUX, CHIEF ARCHON AND DIPLOMAT

7th generation, childe of Margarete d'Hautmont

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Embrace: 1768

Apparent Age: early 20s

Madame Guil's "fox" is probably the most prominent professional criminal in the Camarilla. As a mortal in pre-Revolutionary France, Vidal performed both short and long confidences so well that he earned the Toreador Embrace as an artist at his trade. Jarbeaux rapidly fell out of favor with the Parisian salons, but he was nevertheless well equipped for making his way in the world. For the next several centuries, Vidal was there, as purveyor of the *Book of Nod* or as the long-lost grandchilde — whatever. If anything, the haughty Kindred's paranoia made them even more susceptible to swindle. After all, the marks told themselves, no one could run a common mortal con game on a Kindred! And when they *had* been taken, Kindred were so much more willing than mortals to cover the matter up. After all, what was money compared to the loss of status by having been the victim of snake oil?

When Jarbeaux was finally brought to heel by the Toreador Justicar Montecalme in the 19th century, he was immediately made an archon. Since then, Vidal has served the Camarilla as a sly diplomat. A master of protocol and an unimpeachable judge of character, Vidal Jarbeaux has guided and advised the decisions of the Toreador justicars for over a century. So far, that guidance has been remarkably adept. It remains to be seen if the fox has actually straightened his ways or is simply playing the Camarilla for the mark in his biggest con ever.

Jarbeaux has recently received a request from the Inner Circle to pay close attention to Guil. On asking for clarification, he was simply told to note and report any unusual or dangerous behavior. Jarbeaux has no real compunctions about this; he's no friend of Guil's. On the other hand, it isn't as if the Inner Circle has ever done anything for him. Jarbeaux's most serious worry is that the whole matter might result in his Final Death, either by the Inner Circle to cover up some secret or at the fangs of a desperate or frenzied Mademoiselle Guillotine. For this potentially unpleasant eventuality, he has not yet devised a solution. If Guil chooses to defect, Jarbeaux happily helps her escape to the Sabbat if only to improve her temper, because she seems determined to start a civil war in the Camarilla over the Cathayan situation.



GUIL AND JARBEAUX

The reason *why* Vidal Jarbeaux has been asked to watch Madame Guil is going to make itself critical to this story if it is used as anything but a drop-in combat. Even if you try to downplay it, normal storytelling is sure to bring it up somehow. Once they scent it, the players probably clamor to be involved in this potentially lethal political conflict. You as a Storyteller should think long and hard about what exactly has Jarbeaux looking after Guil. The Inner Circle is concerned with Guil's political reliability, probably because they suspect that her paramour in the Sabbat is more than a rumor. If anyone can remain alert and unawed around Guil, it's Vidal Jarbeaux. Jarbeaux has been assigned to watch her in order to ascertain if she's a Sabbat agent or not.

Of course, she's no fool — Guil is quite aware that Jarbeaux is supposed to be watching her. In fact, she's waiting to see whether he comes to her and tells her about the attempted surveillance. Jarbeaux is *entirely* aware of how likely it is that Guil is in on the joke — such things are all too common in the world of hardball politics.

DANNY LARKSHILL AND MARK SANDHURST, ARCHONS

7th generation, childer of Lucretia

Clan: Followers of Set

Nature: Competitor/Conniver

Demeanor: Masochist/Trickster

Embrace: 1520

Apparent Age: early 40s

Danny Larkshill and Mark Sandhurst were serfs in 16th century Britain who took advantage of the confusion of the Protestant Reformation to escape their estate and take to the open road. The two made it as far as Greece, where they were Embraced by a Setite who needed servants who were unknown to the area and unable to communicate with the local inhabitants. Larkshill and Sandhurst served until their mistress was destroyed by servants of a Cainite Heresy splinter.

As their blood bonds waned, Larkshill and Sandhurst wandered Europe, operating as sometime Furores, assistants to overburdened scourges and mercenaries in the wars between the elder Cainites and the young. After the founding of the Camarilla, the two found themselves drawn into European politics — after all, they had had relationships with the elite among the newly founded Camarilla. Over the next few centuries, the two of them drifted between various cities. Mark and Danny are on the very short list of vampires who have served as archons for multiple terms with multiple clans. Larkshill and Sandhurst are heavies, assigned to Guil's entourage to back her up as lieutenants so the Madame can spend her time doing

something more useful than breaking legs. Contrary to Camarilla rumors, Larkshill and Sandhurst are not lovers, nor inseparable. While they usually work as a team, the two of them can and do split up and spend weeks and months continents apart.

Sandhurst has a long-term paramour with whom he has mentored several childer, and Larkshill is apparently not interested in such matters. For the last few centuries, however, neither has done anything to dissuade those who wish to speculate on the nature of their relationship. The two present a joking, almost carefree appearance, an aura of laughing bumpkins, fresh from the farm, that belies just how good they are at causing injury.

Unknown to anyone, including Larkshill, Mark Sandhurst was abducted and subjected to Sabbat Creation Rites in late 1978 while on a sensitive mission in Guyana. Sandhurst has been a Sabbat agent for the past 23 years, faithfully reporting back to the Consistory in Mexico on the doings of the European Camarilla. Until now Sandhurst has watched and waited, but he has been warned that the time to act is coming soon.

JOCHEN VAN NUYS, PRINCE OF SAN FRANCISCO

9th generation, childer of Irving Boldger

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Traditionalist

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1908

Apparent Age: early 30s

Jochen Van Nuys is proof of just how far an ancilla can rise. Six years ago, he came to San Francisco as the representative of a group of East Coast Ventrue who wanted a place where all their childer could prosper. As the youngest of the cabal, Van Nuys was chosen to head up the effort.

After he and the childer ensured their support among the vampires of the Bay area, they carried out a lightning coup against Vannevar Thomas and his scattered empathizers in San Francisco proper. By the end of 1996, Van Nuys assumed the throne of the Bay area with Justicar Petrodon backing his *fait accompli*.

Van Nuy's power base is surprisingly strong. Lacking a Jeremy MacNeil to tend the garden of chaos, the San Francisco Bay region had never been particularly fervent in its adherence to the anarch cause. The area suffered too long under effete leadership. Van Nuys offered a relief from an existence dominated by a fear of diablerie and a nightly struggle for feeding territory. His subsequent handling of the incredible wave of Lupine activity that coincided with the Cathayan attacks in Los Angeles won him the affection of many local Kindred.

However great his personal valor and reputation for fair dealing, Van Nuys still occupies a house divided when it comes to the anarchists, and he knows it. He has made his

place in the Bay by being a prince who is acceptable not only to those who want a prince, but to those who are willing to tolerate one.

San Francisco has become a haven for many refugees from the former free state. Van Nuys has been very generous about offering refuge in his city but hostility still exists. Some are turned away, and of those vampires who *have* been welcomed, not all support the current state of political affairs. As a result, Van Nuys is far from comfortable with the Camarilla presence. Indeed, he is as aware as the Inner Circle of how likely his city is to slip into rebellion to form a new free state.

While the idea of a justicar in residence at first seemed like it might be handy, it has definitely proved to be considerably more trouble than it's worth. Memories of Petrodon's persecution run deep among free state anarchs. Guil's razor-edged temper has done absolutely nothing to allay these vampires' fears, and Van Nuys has begun to worry that if Guil doesn't vacate soon, she'll spark the very conflagration she's attempting to prevent.

JEREMY MACNEIL, EXILED ANARCH

8th generation, childe of James the Red

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Martyr

Embrace: 1657

Apparent Age: late 20s

A devoted revolutionary for Scottish independence, Jeremy MacNeil was Embraced by the Brujah idealist James the Red in the middle of the 17th century. Over the decades, he became disillusioned with the hopelessness of the struggles and drifted to France, where Robin Leeland and his band of Furores made their havens. MacNeil hoped that meeting the famous Leeland might re-ignite his revolutionary passion.

MacNeil found that passion again, and new passions too. Jeremy became romantically involved with Robin Leeland's latest protégé Marguerite Foccart, a French noblewoman and dilettante whose charitable activities had made her something of a celebrity. The two became lovers, and with Leeland's blessing they returned briefly to Scotland then left for the New World. There, they hoped to bring Leeland's ideals to the Americas. The two arrived on the eve of war. Inspired by the possibilities she saw, Foccart sped back to France to inform Leeland, and hopefully motivate him to support a similar undertaking in France. MacNeil stayed as an advisor to the revolutionaries along with Crispus Attucks, Foccart's American childe.

MacNeil and Attucks both became involved in the revolution, much to the consternation of their fellow Kindred, who saw them as Leeland's agents ready to provoke a vampire hunt among the colonists. Still, MacNeil and

Attucks were tough even then and managed to make it through the conflict.

Afterward, the two found themselves forced into the margins as "civilized" vampire society slowly crept across America. Attucks stayed behind in the East as a fugitive but MacNeil drifted to the frontier, forever on the edge, feeding from animals and whatever frontiersmen or natives stumbled across his path. By the beginning of the 20th century, MacNeil had drifted into the old Spanish holdings of California and laid down roots in Los Angeles — he had nowhere left to run.

MacNeil was a hero to the anarchs of the city, many of whom were escapees from the Mexican Sabbat. As a "ring-leader," he came into conflict with Don Sebastian, leader of the decadent Toreador who infested the city. After a long prelude of tit-for-tat violence, the don had his men beat MacNeil severely, prompting a general outrage that quickly spiraled into vicious revolt.

After Salvador Garcia found the don destroyed in his *hacienda*, it became clear that a genuine order, or at least a rough approximation thereof, needed to be formed. As the eldest of the pair, Garcia asked that MacNeil take the reins. MacNeil reluctantly agreed, and sent for his paramour and her progeny to aid him in what looked to be a thankless and probably eventually fatal task.

The next 45 years were long ones, as MacNeil strove to fight off the sects and internal pressures that wanted to unify Los Angeles. The success of the Great Leap Outward after so many decades of successful resistance came as a terrible surprise to MacNeil. Just as the Scotsman had established a secure front, it was as if his agreements were worthless. Cathayan divide-and-rule politics made enemies out of his two closest allies. Regardless of his personal power, MacNeil and his small entourage weren't enough to stop the storm once it had broken. He, Foccart and his supporters fled north to seek refuge in the lands of Sundown, the *de facto* "prince" of San Jose and a long time ally. Since then, MacNeil has survived as a refugee, hunted by the Camarilla. He has already survived one assassination attempt by parties unknown, and no doubt more are in store.

Jeremy MacNeil is blood bound to Marguerite Foccart.

MARGUERITE FOCCART, EXILED ANARCH

9th generation, childe of Geist (deceased), adopted childe of Robin Leeland

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Celebrant

Embrace: 1768

Apparent Age: early 20s

Marguerite Foccart was a dilettante from a minor but wealthy provincial noble family, Embraced just three decades before the French Revolution. When she came out

in society, she went of course to Paris, where her first glimpses of the Parisian poor moved her intensely. She embarked on a career of philanthropy and led a life of celebrity as a *demimondaine* and (controversially) a stage actress. The poor's love for her was so great that even the Kindred took notice.

Coming to Paris to see her, the proto-anarch Robin Leeland was quite taken by the woman's vibrancy. She stayed with him for a few years as a paramour, at which time she met Jeremy MacNeil. The Scotsman struck a chord within her, and she fell in love. While she was blood bound to Leeland, the ancient regnant had never handled the bond roughly. They both knew that she would return to him, so he let her accompany MacNeil to the Americas, where the two hoped to promote movements for political freedom among the mortals.

The two arrived on the eve of the revolution. Just a few weeks after they arrived, they were in Boston one evening when a black-Indian freeman named Crispus Attucks was brought to a nearby doctor. Attucks had been shot down by British troops while leading a mob of colonists outraged at the Stamp Act. The two had noticed Attucks earlier, noting his strongly self-reliant character and love of freedom. As his life ebbed away from a Brown Bess ball, Marguerite saw that the wound was carefully cleaned and the ball extracted despite the fact that the wounds were clearly mortal. Then she gave the young freeman the Embrace and brought him into the ranks of the undead.

Marguerite stayed for another few months, but her enthusiasm for the New World had soured. She was desperate to return to Leeland, to tell him the news and to ready France for the revolution it so desperately needed. She left Attucks with MacNeil to mentor — the childe was emotionally involved in the revolution, and the Scot was in any case her senior. She made the passage to France on a blockade runner's brig, and the ride from Marseilles to Paris in a single night on a ghoulled stallion.

Marguerite delighted at the revolution, the freedom and the spirit that brought Franklin and Paine to Paris to help forge the ideal new state. Then, radically, the Terror, the *sans-culottes*, the furies of the guillotine left her cold for revolution. She understood the diffidence that Leeland showed, the careful intellectualization. She retreated into Leeland's arms and stayed there until the 1940s. In 1944, she heard of MacNeil's rebellion, and her love for him resurfaced. She rushed to his side, again with Leeland's blessing, and with her progeny helped him to defend the fragile Anarch Free State.

The Cathayan invasion was an immense surprise, but after the initial shock, it was no more difficult to handle than a Sabbat offensive. Leeland had been one of the elders attacked by a Kuei-jin unlucky enough to be captured, and he provided the anarchs with information about their

opponents through communications with Foccart. However, information was no use when there was no strength left to exploit it. The success of Cathayan divide-and-rule politics left MacNeil's party no choice but to retreat north, to the domain of the Nosferatu anarch Sunset, a long time admirer and ally of MacNeil.

Since then, Foccart and her companions have survived in exile, waiting to see if the dream of a truly equitable free state can be captured again. With the arrival of Guil and her deliberately callous actions toward the western princes, it looks as if the spark might come soon.

Marguerite Foccart is blood bound to Jeremy MacNeil.

CRISPUS ATTUCKS, EXILED ANARCH

10th generation, childe of Marguerite Foccart

Clan: Brujah

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Rebel

Embrace: 1770

Apparent Age: late 30s

Crispus Attucks was a half-Indian, half-black freeman who found the freewheeling atmosphere of the American colonies to his liking. Crispus Attucks was the first to fall during the Boston Massacre, one of the events that later culminated in the Revolutionary War.

That evening, as Attucks lay dying on a table in a nearby doctor's office, Marguerite Foccart Embraced him into Clan Brujah. Attucks had barely gotten a chance to know the vibrant, beautiful and obviously concerned woman when she rushed back to Europe on a blockade runner's ship. She left him in the company of the grizzled Scotsman Jeremy MacNeil. Together, the two of them aided the Continentals. MacNeil stayed in the north, observing Washington's fragile forces. Meanwhile, Attucks moved through the south, leading bands of freed black slaves or black freemen to scout for Nathaniel Greene and Frances Marion.

Attucks and MacNeil remained acquaintances after the war, but MacNeil moved West, toward the frontier, while Attucks crossed the Atlantic to be with his sire. He spent time with her, and with Robin Leeland, over the next several decades. Like Foccart, he lost his taste for revolution after the Terror and the bloody Napoleonic reign that followed. After Napoleon's defeat, Attucks returned to America, where he aided the Underground Railroad, a flickering black shadow leading escaped slaves through the same forests of Georgia pines he had walked as a scout a hundred years earlier. When the Civil War broke out, Attucks worked as a spy for the North, fighting for an ideal of equality only to watch in horror as the post-war era reconstruction gave way to retribution.

After that, Attucks spent the turn of the century in New Orleans. In the 1920s, he took in the Harlem Renais-

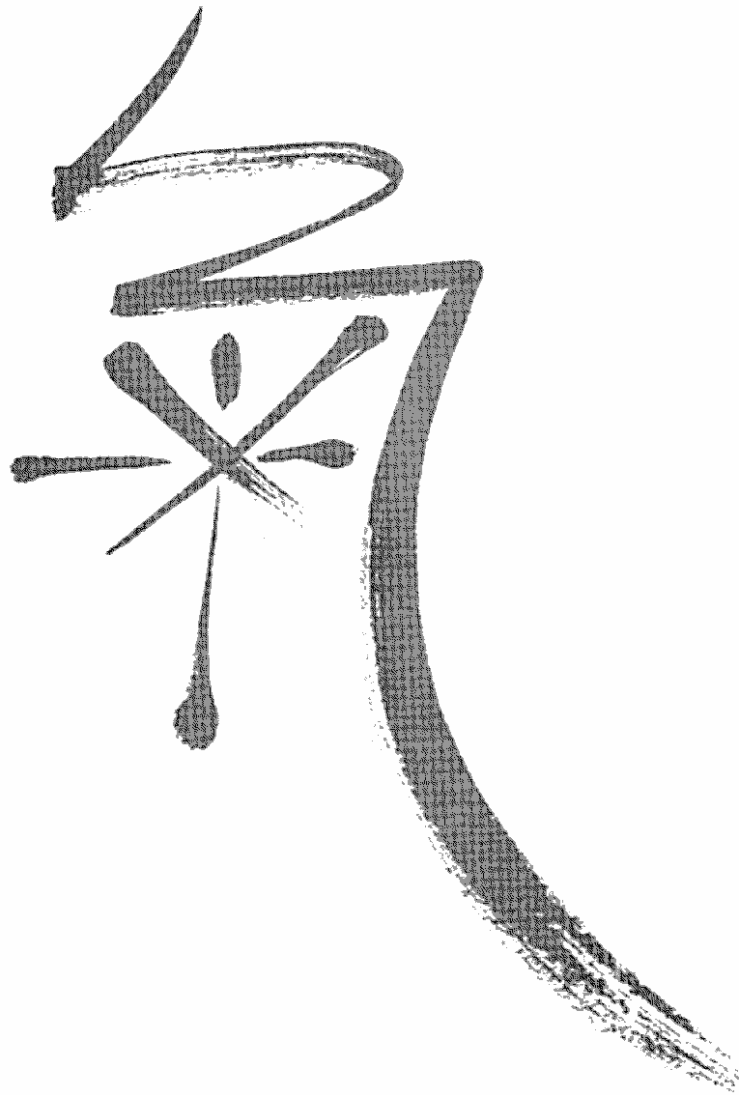
sance and traveled to Europe again to spend time with his sire and participate in the Parisian expatriate community. In the 1940s, he fled the horrors of the war in Europe, returning to a New Deal America made bitter and distrustful by the trials of 1930s poverty and anti-communism.

It was in 1945 that Attucks heard of the anarchy uprising in Los Angeles, led by none other than his erstwhile companion Jeremy MacNeil. Attucks rushed to Los Angeles to find his sire already there and MacNeil planning out the lay of post-coup Los Angeles.

For almost 45 years, with the help of his sire, Crispus Attucks helped keep L.A. truly free. Supporting the anarchy movement by agitating all across America as well as defending L.A. from interloping sects satisfied Attucks in a way that few things had. If anything, the amount of time he spent with

his sire was reward enough: Attucks and Foccart, while not lovers, had always had a close relationship, and any time the two could spend together was appreciated by both.

In 1998 and 1999, the Cathayans came to Los Angeles, and Attucks saw a world he helped build crumble, first in the fires of warfare, to which he was no stranger, and then through brutal personality politics that left MacNeil isolated and besieged. MacNeil and Attucks fled, leading a convoy of refugees north through the Lupine-infested territory between Los Angeles and San Francisco, to seek refuge in San Jose. Since their arrival, Attucks has been trying to keep himself out of trouble and spend more time with Marguerite. At the same time, he knows that there's a confrontation brewing, so his relaxation has a definite funereal undertone.







CHAPTER THREE: TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

*"The first to die in any Jyhad are Nosferatu."
— The Book of Nod*

For years, Kindred have heard tales from Russia and shuddered. Tales of the grotesque hag Baba Yaga and her death grip on the Motherland reach Kindred in Elysium the world over. The tales say she is a Nictuku, a Methuselah, that she is not even Kindred but something indescribable spat up from the Siberian wastes. The tales say she is truly immortal, that she will meet her end only when Caine himself returns.

This story takes the coterie from St. Petersburg to the Ural Mountains and reveals some of the truth behind the tales of Baba Yaga. At the end of the trail, the coterie bears witness to her Final Death.

Characters for this story don't necessarily have to be Russian, but if they aren't, there had better be someone with them who speaks the language. Likewise, it's helpful if someone in the coterie knows something about Russian folklore; both Baba Yaga and Koshchei the Deathless (although the latter doesn't figure in directly to this story) are staple figures in Russian fairy tales, and some of those old fables ring curiously true here. The Storyteller should take

the time to read a book of Russian children's tales; any library should have one. Likewise, a world atlas gives the players a sense of scale as their characters travel across Russia.

THEME AND MOOD

The theme of this story is volition. The characters in this story set the stage for a horrible shakeup of Clan Nosferatu. The coterie needs a strong motivation for involving themselves in this mess to begin with, and during the story, they probably reexamine those motivations. They are free to walk away at any time, but if they do, they never *know* what happened. And knowing might just be worth risking Final Death.

The mood should be surreal, almost like a fairy tale. Characters from Russian folk tales appear frequently, and the characters may well become caught up in this feeling, forgetting that they are, in fact, free to walk away. This fairy tale isn't happy and shallow, however. What resemblance it has to folk stories comes from the old Russian yarns, which were just as dark and violent as any of Grimm's.

NOSFERATU CHARACTERS

The coterie encounters a Nictuku during this story, and if any Nosferatu characters are present, it does not let them survive. As much as having a predetermined death irks some players, others may enjoy certain doom, especially if they have some say in how it's to be handled. If the Storyteller is using the optional Merits and Flaws rules, she may quietly point out to a player wishing to create a Nosferatu character that the Dark Fate Flaw is appropriate.

If the Storyteller does not wish to open this particular can of worms, she may simply disallow Nosferatu characters or find some way to let them escape. Likewise, if this story is run as part of an ongoing chronicle, the player of a Nosferatu character may not wish to lose him. Whatever the Storyteller decides to do in this case, any Nosferatu who walks away from the encounter with the Nictuku should realize that she walked away only because the Nictuku allowed it.

BACKGROUND

In late May of 1998, Baba Yaga sends Viktor, the general of her Army of the Night (see *Dramatis Personae* for more information on her armies) and his personal bodyguards to St. Petersburg. The Hag orders them to retrieve a scroll that she believes holds the location of her sleeping sire, the Nosferatu Antediluvian. Viktor does not find the scroll, but is stuck in St. Petersburg during the White Nights.

The White Nights occur each June in northern Russia, around the summer solstice. The sun shines, day and night, for two to three weeks. For mortals, it is a time of festivities. For Kindred, it is a time to fear for one's unlife. Wise vampires leave for Moscow during the White Nights. Viktor doesn't have that option, so he chooses to inter himself outside of town. He instructs his retinue — most of the Hag's Army of the Night — to do the same. He dismisses their fears of Lupine attacks; he has fought against the shapeshifters for years and believes they are far too noble a race to attack a helpless foe.

Needless to say, this was a mistake.

The local Lupines easily detect the sleeping Leeches, and exhume and destroy them. Over 20 Kindred meet the Final Death (including Viktor) along with most of their retainers. Slightly over a week passes before any Kindred return to St. Petersburg to discover what happened.

News of the slaughter circulates among the world's Kindred. The event becomes known as the White Nights Massacre and furthers Russia's already ominous reputation. On the heels of this news comes a disturbing rumor — the murdered Kindred were in St. Petersburg looking for a clue to the location of a sleeping Kindred, perhaps an Antediluvian. It takes some time for enough of the story to reach the appropriate ears, but after the Week of Nightmares, when

the Kindred community is panicking and looking for any sign of Gehenna, the deaths in St. Petersburg seem worthy of investigation.

The Kindred are therefore caught in a bit of a bind. On the one hand, fears of Gehenna are spreading rapidly, especially among elder Kindred and those who study the prophecies. These Kindred are desperate to know what caused the massacre in St. Petersburg. On the other hand, Russia is universally regarded as unsafe for Kindred, as those who venture there seldom return. How the troupe's characters end up with the task of looking into the massacre is up to the Storyteller, but they could do so at the behest of any number of powerful elders.

OTHER CURRENT EVENTS

If the characters are Russian or have contacts in Russia, they may have heard strange stories from local Kindred or ghouls. One such story concerns a series of murders in Moscow. In a single night, unknown assailants robbed then brutally shot, stabbed, and burned eight people. Three of the victims were killed in an Orthodox church; this detail is the only one to make international news.

Also, stories of attacks on military installations and power plants, attacks that cost scores of lives and millions of dollars in damage, began circulating only a few nights after the murders in Moscow. Investigating Kindred who have seen the aftermath of Lupine attacks may notice the similarities: victims chewed to pieces by huge predators, equipment not functioning, survivors left insane and raving about bears or enraged wolves.

Finally, Kindred who pay attention to the vampiric community as a whole may have heard of the murder of a Brujah named Pavel. He wielded a great deal of influence in Russia, particularly Moscow, but he and his impressive (some would say excessive) 10-ghoul retinue were torn to pieces, apparently by Lupines.

The coterie should not receive all of this information right away, but when they do, they might guess that these events are connected. The victims in Moscow were all mages, members of Baba Yaga's Army of the Arcane. With them dead, the spiritual Shadow Curtain around Russia waned, allowing the Lupines to finally call in reinforcements and step up their own campaigns. The attacks on Pavel and on the military bases and power plants are the first of their efforts against the Armies of War and Conversion.

GOING THERE

Why the characters choose (or are chosen) to investigate this matter depends largely on the chronicle in question. If the characters are investigating Gehenna cults or other occult phenomena, perhaps the massacre is a promising lead. If the characters are Russian, chances are that either Durga Syn or Baba Yaga has crossed their paths

before, at least indirectly. Both want to know what happened in St. Petersburg.

Perhaps the characters aren't interested so much in who killed the Kindred as in what they were after — the location of the Nosferatu Antediluvian. If you choose this route, the coterie should probably include at least one Nosferatu, but see the above caveat on Nosferatu characters. A Nosferatu Storyteller character is always an option.

Actually traveling to St. Petersburg can be as difficult or as easy as you choose. The characters may opt to fly into the city. A slightly more cautious, if slower route, is to travel by rail. A good world atlas shows railway routes throughout Russia. Finally, St. Petersburg is a port city, and the characters could travel by sea. If they are native to Russia, of course, the travel process is much easier; perhaps the characters are even from St. Petersburg to begin with, in which case the investigation might begin much sooner after the massacre.

SCENE ONE: ST. PETERSBURG

The vampiric Prince of St. Petersburg, a Ventrue named Nikolai, is rarely in the city. He spends most of his time on Vasilevsky Island. The island is the port of call for the cruise ships that approach St. Petersburg, handy for tourists and smugglers alike because one does not need a visa as long as one stays on the ship. If the characters are foreign, they might want to honor tradition and present themselves to the prince. If they choose not to do so, skip the meeting with the prince.

Nikolai has been in power only since 1990. He is a "young elder"; Embraced in 1706, he began watching St. Petersburg as a mortal when it was founded in 1703.

The prince keeps the meeting brief. He is certainly worried about the massacre. But if the characters are going to be poking around in his city, he expects to them to observe the traditions avoid provoking the Lupines. The characters should feel as though they are being given a rehearsed sermon. This isn't far from the truth. Princes in Russia fall into three categories: loyal puppets of Baba Yaga, unknowing puppets of Baba Yaga and enemies of Baba Yaga. Nikolai belongs to the second category.

Nikolai did not know that Viktor was in town until after the massacre. The prince left town during the White Nights. When he returned, he discovered what had happened and made some half-hearted inquiries.

Nikolai can tell the characters when Viktor arrived, when and where he died, and that he visited several museums and libraries, and even tried to meet with the local Tremere. The Tremere, of course, were away during the White Nights, so Nikolai is unsure if Viktor ever found what he was looking for. Regardless, he and his entourage — an uncommonly large number of Kindred to be traveling together, Nikolai

notes — sank into the earth near the shoreline just before they were slaughtered. Nikolai has heard the rumor that the Kindred were here looking for information about a torpid elder, but doubts such information exists; how could he not have heard of it, after all? He admits, however, that he heard this rumor from a local Nosferatu, and they are rarely wrong.

After meeting the prince, the characters may wish to visit the Tremere. Unfortunately, the Warlocks have retreated into seclusion (presumably to research this "torpid elder") and are not receiving visitors. They may choose to investigate the scene of the slaughter, visit the Nosferatu (in which case they are told that the Nosferatu usually stay in town during the White Nights), or even visit the museums themselves.

THE NOSFERATU

Most Nosferatu hide away in the railway tunnels every year, with ghoul animals to guard them. This year was no different. Any Kindred, including Nikolai, can tell the characters how to find the Nosferatu — go to the Warsaw Railway station, go underground, and wait. The Nosferatu use the time to size up any visitors while they are still in view of any mortal passersby, Nikolai explains. If they want to talk to you, they will.

WARSAW STATION

The train stations of St. Petersburg are beautiful buildings in their own right. Not Warsaw Station, however. The facilities are antiquated and the trains are rarely on time and always understaffed. Nosferatu influence allows the station just enough money to remain operational, but the Sewer Rats divert the rest to fund their own projects. Warsaw services the Baltic States, Eastern Europe and the Ukraine. When the time comes to abandon Russia, the Nosferatu of St. Petersburg have their escape route planned out. Or rather, they did. As the characters are about to discover, it's a moot point now.

The characters can wait all they like, but they aren't approached by the Nosferatu. After the characters have waited a while, have a player whose character has *Auspex* (or at least a high *Perception* rating) roll *Perception* + *Alertness* (difficulty 7). If successful, the character hears what sounds like metal grinding further down the track and a muffled cry.

If the characters investigate, they find a steel service door nearly torn from the hinges. Inside, a Nosferatu's body decays rapidly into dust. The air has a strange heaviness, and alert characters note a curious taste of salt in their mouths.

The room leads back into the tunnels, and every so often the characters find the body of another Nosferatu. A venerable Nosferatu called the Gutka ("the Good") is responsible for these final deaths. She has aged to the point that only the blood of Kindred sustains her, but she is not hungry at the moment, having just consumed a colony of Nosferatu. She's *Obfuscated* and *dispassionately* watches the characters to see if they flee.

If the characters use the words "Baba Yaga" or "Nictuku," she takes interest, however. She appears from hiding and asks the characters (in broken Russian) where Baba Yaga is. They probably don't know, of course, but Gutka explains who she is and why she seeks the Hag (see *Dramatis Personae* for the story). She doesn't speak Russian well, and the a character must succeed on an Intelligence + Linguistics roll (difficulty 8, automatic success if the character understands Polish) to understand her. For each success, they understand one salient point of the Salt Queen's story. In theory, they could stay here until they puzzle out the whole thing, but a quick glance at the bodies and ashes surrounding them might convince them otherwise.

THE SALT QUEEN

When the characters are poring over the scroll, it may occur to them that the Gutka might know how to read it. She can, but she won't. If the characters approach her with it, she eats them all and takes the scroll for herself (see the Translation sidebar for the reasons why). The characters don't stand much more of a chance against her than they do against Baba Yaga. As the Storyteller, make sure that the Gutka scares them to death.

The Gutka is hideous, ancient, and beyond concepts like "cruelty" or "mercy." She preserves her victims with salt because it amuses her. She does not care what the characters have to offer (and she probably doesn't understand them anyway).

Make sure the characters know how unbelievably lucky they were to catch the Gutka in a benign (or at least whimsical) mood after she has just fed. Make sure they understand that finding her again is akin to suicide. After all, if an ancient Nosferatu is going to lay waste to the coterie, shouldn't it be Baba Yaga?

Communicating with the Gutka is a chore, but if the characters can communicate to her why they are here, she hands them a tattered guidebook. In it is a list of the cultural attractions of St. Petersburg, some of which are crossed out. These are the sites that Viktor visited before being forced into torpor. The Gutka took the guidebook from one of the Nosferatu, but she may get touchy if the characters ask.

Hopefully, the characters leave. The Gutka only remains helpful as it suits her, and while she isn't hungry just now, she might decide to stock her larder.

This scene takes places regardless of when the characters arrive in relation to the massacre. Just assume that the Gutka has just recently awakened when the characters arrive.

THE SLAUGHTER

Viktor and his troops die in June of 1998. The coterie arrives just after, when the slaughter of Kindred becomes a hot topic. Because several weeks (if not months) have passed,

however, the sea has washed away any physical evidence of the slaughter.

If a character uses Spirit's Touch on the site, the difficulty is 9. The character sees the scene by daylight, as a group of humans and white-furred wolves, about a dozen in all, approaches. A man wearing a long white shirt and gray pants faces the city and raises his hands while the rest sniff the ground and dig. The whole process takes several hours (as does watching the scene, so be mindful of dawn) but the man facing the city doesn't move. The observing character may notice oblivious tourists and citizens walking by the scene. One by one, the Kindred are unearthed, dragged to the surface and torn to pieces by the Lupines as they burn in the sun. The last to be unearthed is a tall man with dark hair. His pointed ears and bare, paw-like feet suggest that he may be a Gangrel. He screams obscenities in Russian as the Lupines pull him from the earth, and then flies into a frenzy and kills three of them before the rest take him down. As they tear his head from his body, he screams (in Russian), "You have no nobility to attack a sleeping foe!" He still curses them as his body crumbles to dust, but the last words from his disembodied head are, "Forgive me, Little Mother. I could not find it." One of the Lupines holds his head up like a trophy, and then all of them (save the one still facing the city, unmoving) give an earsplitting howl. They then stare at the shimmering waters of the Baltic Sea and disappear. The man drops his arms and quietly walks toward the city.

The only other way to find information on the White Nights Massacre is to somehow obtain the St. Petersburg police files. If the characters do so, they find pictures that are reminiscent of an excavation of a mass grave. There are large piles of dirt and deep holes mark the earth. Body parts, dust, and clothing lie scattered about, but very little blood. Strange glyphs have also been scratched into the dirt around the edges of the scene. These glyphs are Lupine in origin, ostensibly part of a cleansing ritual.

Human footprints and some paw prints are still visible in the photos, but they are long gone by the time the characters arrive.

MUSEUMS

St. Petersburg boasts an impressive array of museums. Viktor crossed out the ones he visited, but two have been circled. One is the Hermitage Museum, and a list of names, each with a number, has been pencilled on that page. If the characters read the section on the museum, they find that the Hermitage is so large that if one spent one minute in front of each exhibit, it would take over a decade to see them all. Viktor had apparently decided to divide the duty on this one.

The other circled museum is Mikhailovsky Castle, a branch of the Russian Museum. The castle was built at the end of the 18th century to house Emperor Paul the First. Because of Paul's interest in all things medieval and his fear

of assassination, he instructed the architect to design the palace like a medieval castle, complete with drawbridges, surrounding ditches, and — rumor has it — concealed rooms. Paul was assassinated in his bedroom in 1801, shortly after moving in.

The castle housed an engineering school and was used to train cadets before being given to the Russian Museum in the early 1990s. Now, it houses a portrait gallery and various other exhibitions. Viktor apparently had some reason to believe the scroll lay within the castle walls, but doesn't give any details in the guidebook.

The characters can look through either of these museums at their leisure, though doing so might require entering as the museum closes and hiding out. The Hermitage Museum, fascinating though it may be, holds no useful information for the characters (though they are likely to learn a bit about Russian culture and history). The castle, however, contains a few clues.

Mikhailovsky castle is still being renovated, but most of it is open to the public. The brochure given to patrons advertises a future exhibit on the history of Russian folklore, including the “first recorded tale of Baba Yaga.” This attraction has been “coming soon” for quite some time, however, and if the characters ask, they find that the board of directors decided to put more funding into renovating the courtyard in time for summer (or Christmas, or whatever, depending on what time of year the characters arrive), which left this project behind schedule. The characters might correctly guess that this decision was made more by some influential Kindred than the board; the prince has instructions from the Hag not to allow any such exhibitions.

If the characters sneak past security and check through the storerooms, they eventually find crates labeled “Baba Yaga Exhibit.” Packed carefully into one of the crates is a scroll, undeniably ancient, written in a strange proto-Russian dialect that the characters have virtually no chance of deciphering by themselves.



If the characters obtain the scroll this way, run the next scene. If they wait more than a week before visiting the castle, they might hear about a robbery there. It seems that a band of thieves (Ravnos, as it happens, not that the characters know that) was seen running away as the alarms went off. How they got in is a mystery, but they stole a number of very valuable artifacts, including "a scroll that was part of an upcoming folklore exhibit," according to the newspapers.

The characters can attempt to track them any way they like. Reward them for ingenuity, but unless the coterie manages to outwit them, the thieves travel southeast, toward Kirov, and follow the train tracks by caravan. The railway, then, is the fastest way to catch them.

THE OFFER

Run this scene only if the characters got to the scroll before the Ravnos did.

Wherever the characters make their havens, they receive a telephone call. A voice with a heavy Romanian accent instructs them to carefully open the scroll. The voice then says, "The first line reads, 'Listen well these words, children of Absimiliard.' If you want to know the rest, follow the raven." A raven has, in fact, perched somewhere nearby.

The raven leads them to Moscow Station and perches on a huge map. If one of the characters approaches the map, the bird lands on his shoulder and pecks the map at Kirov,

a city about 1700 miles southeast of St. Petersburg. It then flies away.

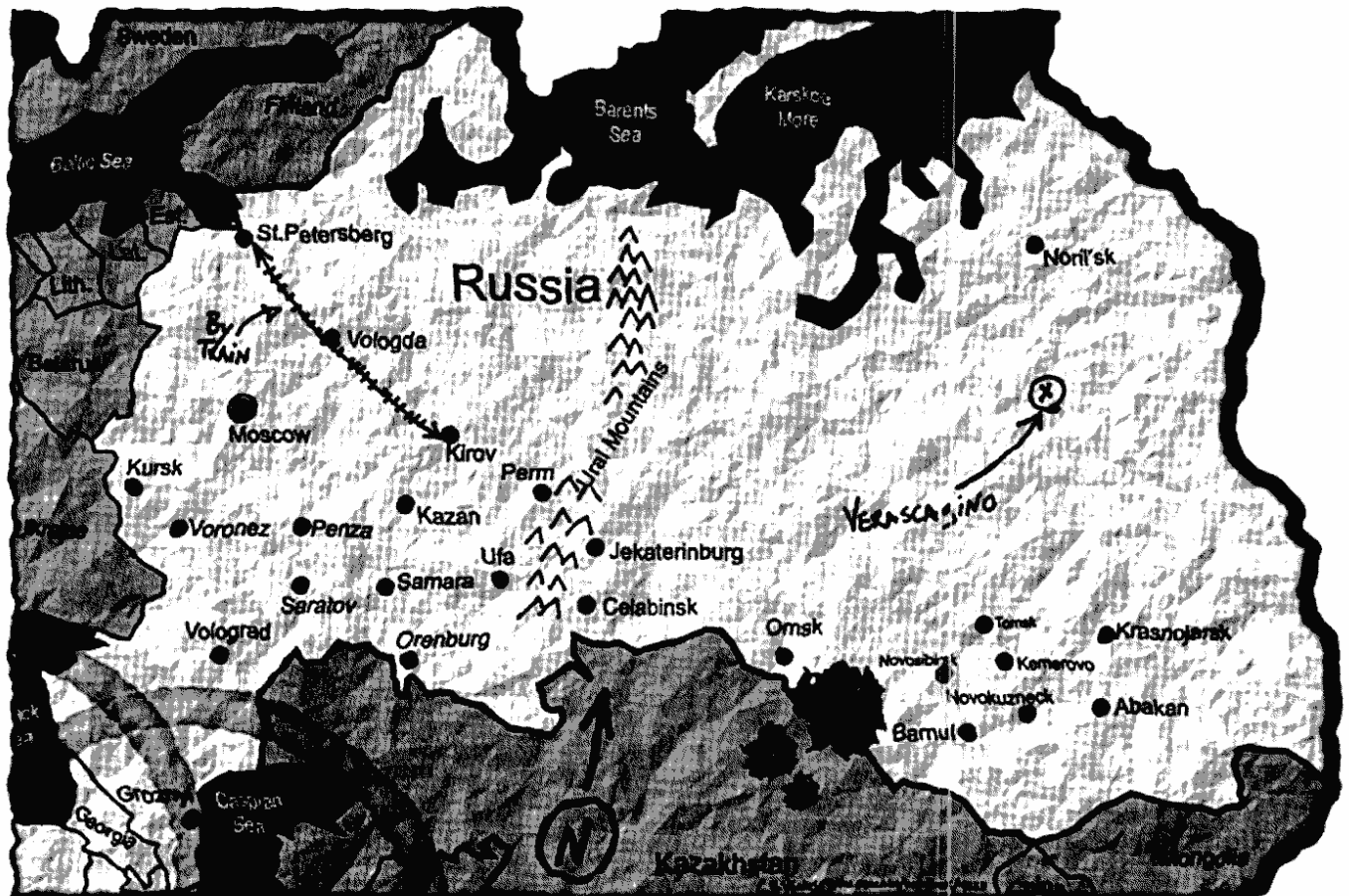
SCENE TWO: THE GYPSY TRAIN

The trip to Kirov is long—several nights, in fact. See the *Off the Beaten Path* sidebar, below, for ideas on how to use this time.

One way or another, the characters end up pursuing the Gypsies through Russia. Whether or not the characters are chasing the Ravnos, or merely following their directions, the train catches up with the *kumpania* (Gypsy family) in Kotelnic, a small town just outside of Kirov.

The Gypsies board the train and take up residence in a private car. If the characters are pursuing the Ravnos, they should have no trouble following gossip among the crew about the "Gypsy car." If the characters were following the Ravnos' directions, one of the Gypsies finds and invites the coterie to ride with them.

The *kumpania* numbers over 20 Gypsies in all, including men, women, children, and five Ravnos Kindred, one a neonate. Two of the others are loners, unrelated to the traveling family. The last two are sire and childe and have seen much of Russia together. The childe is Zlato; the sire is Durga Syn.



The Gypsies have been busy in the towns between St. Petersburg and here, the characters notice. They've stolen artwork, money and small items lifted from tourists. The Ravnos have booty from some robberies in Moscow. A successful Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8, 10 if the character has no grounding in Russian folklore) reveals that some of these items — a mortar and pestle, an ornate dagger, a pouch of herbs and a wand with a crystal set in the point — are tools used in Russian ritual magic by *vedna*, or witches. Other items are more Christian in nature: Russian Orthodox crosses, incense and so on. If characters have heard about the murders in Moscow, they may well deduce that these Ravnos were responsible. Zlato freely admits to the murders, but states that they were necessary.

If the characters ask Durga Syn about the murders, she replies "You will know the last times by the awakening of the some of the eldest, the Crone will awake and consume all." Learned characters recognize this as a quote from the *Book of Nod*. Durga Syn continues, "The mortal sorcerers were in the thrall of the Crone, and without them she does not hoard the Motherland for long. The child shall find her, and Absimiliard's last childe shall finally receive what she has given." She refuses to elaborate, but instead asks the characters their business (if they have sought out the Ravnos) or asks to see the scroll (if they followed the raven).

While the characters speak with Durga Syn, they are clustered in the back of the car, while all of the mortal Gypsies are seated far to the front. The Kindred sit between the *kumpania* and the characters, but face away from Durga Syn. Zlato seats the characters directly across from his sire, and for the second time in this story, the coterie is politely conversing with a vampire who probably predates them all by several centuries.

Durga Syn folds her hands in front of her on the table, close to her body, and gazes at the characters with a kindly smile. If any of them rests her hands on the table, however, the smile vanishes and Durga Syn glares at the character's hands until she moves them. The characters may feel they have violated some Gypsy rule of etiquette, but in fact it is simply an idiosyncrasy of Durga Syn's.

She offers to translate the scroll, but asks that she be allowed to keep it. She permits the characters to copy the scroll as she reads it, however. If the characters refuse, she allows them to take the scroll, but asks them, "What kind of man walks into a hungry wolf's den doused in fresh blood?" If they don't understand her warning, she drops the issue.

THE SCROLL

When Durga Syn reads the scroll aloud, conversation in the car ceases. Even the rhythmic, mechanical sounds of the train and tracks seem to quiet.

"Listen well to these words, Children of Absimiliard. You are the first among the unseen. (1) The shadows of the mind part and change for you. Call on these shadows. Call on

the strength of the hunter. Call on the beasts, the great serpents. (2) When the storm breaks, when the first of 13 falls, (4) then shall the true Jyhad begin. The first to die shall be the Nosferatu. (5) I call the hunt! I sound the cry for blood! Let the first be the one who fled, (6) who used the land and called on the One Below (7) to escape! Drink deep of her heart's blood, and crush her body."

Durga Syn stops and reads ahead a bit. Any character whose player succeeds in a Perception + Empathy or Subterfuge roll (difficulty 7) notices that she looks horrified, if only for a moment. She continues on, skimming the page lightly as she reads.

"But mark the prophecy of the End Times and hearken to the prophecy of the mortal child. If she is brought before the Hag, she looks upon the child and knows fear, and looses her hold upon the land. But if the Hag's hold on the land is broken, mine is as well, and no shadow shall conceal the true chosen of Absimiliard."

Once Durga Syn has finished reading the scroll, it disappears (if the characters agree to let her keep it) or she hands it back with a belabored sigh.

Durga Syn allows the characters to stay on the train as long as they wish. The next stop is Verescagino, a small town approximately 50 miles from Perm.

SCENE THREE: VERESCAGINO

The Ravnos get off the train and disappear into town — Durga Syn apparently knows people here. Verescagino is not a very large town, however, so the characters might wish to ride the train into Perm and fly to Moscow or St. Petersburg. *Vitae* on the train is going to become too scarce to ride it all the way back west.

The town contains very little of interest other than the train station — a few houses, a market and a garage. The characters can wander as they like, but the populace is shut up in their homes after nightfall. Wherever the characters are, they notice a light in the sky to the south, similar to *Aurora Borealis* but in the wrong direction; a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) brings this to their attention, if no one thinks of it.

The light is short lived, but not bright; it doesn't bother *Setite* characters, should any be present. As the light fades, however, the characters hear strange sounds, like a child wailing. If the characters do not seem interested in investigating, privately inform the one whom the others most respect that she feels compelled to discover the source of the sound.

THE CHILD

The characters push their way through a tangle of brush that lies just beyond the village's borders and enter a copse. Following the sound, they enter a clearing. A young girl,

TRANSLATION

Below are tidbits of information that the characters might realize if they are schooled in the lore of the Kindred, especially Clan Nosferatu. Feel free to make the players roll at whatever difficulty you think is appropriate to make these inferences. Likewise, if they come to these conclusions or ask these questions without prompting, don't discourage them.

(1) The "first among unseen" seems to refer to the Nictuku.

(2) The references to "shadows of the mind," "strength of the hunter" and calling on "beasts" refer to the Disciplines of Obfuscate, Potence, and Animalism. What the characters may not place so easily is the "great serpents" line. Although it isn't common knowledge, some elder Nosferatu can use the Animalism Discipline to summon up hideous, subterranean creatures that mortal science has never seen.

(3) The Brujah Antediluvian is sometimes alluded to as having met Final Death during a great storm, but if he was the "first of 13," does this mean that the other Antediluvians that have supposedly met Final Death (Saulot, Lasombra, Tzimisce and a few others commonly thought to have perished) have, in fact, escaped? Probably not — the being who wrote this scroll wasn't omnipotent. This might inspire the coterie to discuss free will and the true nature of prophecy.

(4) The characters might well be aware of the Kindred proverb, "The first to die in any Jyhad are Nosferatu." Here, apparently, is the origin of that phrase.

(5) The "one who fled" refers to the "woman in the stream," the one child of Absimiliard who supposedly escaped to become the progenitor of the Nosferatu bloodline.

(6) The "One Below" in the *Book of Nod* might here refer to Koshchei the Deathless (see Baba Yaga's entry in *Dramatis Personae* below).

Durga Syn does not read the scroll verbatim. She skips a line at the end of the first paragraph. The second paragraph is not even present on the scroll, but an invention inserted into Durga Syn's mind.

The line she leaves out is, "Place a drop of Nosferatu vitae in the center of this message, and it shall guide you to the Hag or any of her childer who lurk nearby." Durga Syn has no way to know if this statement is true or not, but she does not wish the characters to locate Baba Yaga and her childer. This is partly because she doesn't necessarily want them to become food for the Hag, and partly because she wants time to gain support from other elders and find Baba Yaga herself.

The second paragraph was added by the Nictuku, quietly influencing Durga Syn from far away. The purpose of the paragraph is to mislead the characters to believe that if they find the mortal child with the crescent moon birthmark mentioned in the *Book of Nod*, they stand a chance to thwart both Baba Yaga (and, if they have heard of such things, the Nictuku). The characters, of course, have no way to know that Durga Syn's translation isn't entirely genuine, though they may notice that her pace quickens between the first and second paragraphs, as if the latter is easier to read.

Astute players and scholarly characters may note that the description of the child with the crescent birthmark in the *Book of Nod* holds that she appears after Gehenna has come to pass, and "snows consume the earth" and so on. They may chalk this up to the problems of translating old tongues into English, or they may correctly guess that someone is pulling their collective chain.

maybe eight years old, sits on a rock in the center of the clearing. She is covered with an old blanket, her face is streaked with grime and dirt, and she cries and babbles incomprehensibly. Characters who follow Humanity are filled with a desire to protect the poor creature, whereas characters on the various Paths of Enlightenment wish simply to study, preserve or test her. No one who sees her wishes to harm her, however. The characters' emotions are being manipulated here, but the manipulation is so subtle that they don't notice it. If any players raise the issue, mention that the characters feel no threat from her.

As the characters approach her, a huge form shambles from the trees. A massive Lupine, in the dreaded half-man, half-wolf form, lurches toward the characters. It collapses before reaching them, however, and the characters see that

its back is riddled with wounds and its otherwise white fur is stained muddy red. The creature moans an unintelligible word ("Zmei") as it coughs out a hideous death rattle.

Any character versed in Russian folklore knows that "Zmei Gorynich" was a mythological serpent and an ally of Baba Yaga. The characters probably don't know what the Zmei actually are in the Werewolf context (even if the players do), but the Lupine's wounds suggest claws or teeth belonging to something huge. The characters feel a strong desire to leave the area, probably taking the girl with them.

When they reach safety — whatever they decide that is — they can turn their attention to calming the girl. Their first concern may be to dress her. In doing so, they notice a small, crescent-shaped birthmark at the base of her neck.

VASILISA

Vasilisa, the girl found in the copse, is not the girl from the prophecy. As mentioned above, the girl, should she exist at all, isn't fated to appear until *after* Gehenna arrives. Besides, it is just a little too convenient that the characters should hear of this girl's significance in the scroll, then suddenly stumble across her by accident. If that weren't enough, on a journey where Baba Yaga and Zmei Gorynich have been mentioned, now someone called Vasilisa appears. That's a little like encountering the Big Bad Wolf, Grandma, and Little Red Riding Hood. The players (and the characters) may be feeling like this seems a little too contrived and they are being set up.

Well, yes it is, and yes they are. The girl calling herself Vasilisa is not at all human. She — it — is a Nictuku. It has used its vast powers of Obfuscate to cover all traces of its vampiric nature, and is using the coterie as transport, entertainment, and, if necessary, food on its way to find Baba Yaga. The characters have no way to know this, but

no one is stopping them from walking away and leaving this "little girl" behind. If they do leave, the Nictuku doesn't chase them — it has better things to do. If the characters run, they never know what might have happened, or how true the old legends are. Hopefully, that's enough to keep them going.

The characters only get one indication that anything is wrong with Vasilisa. From the time that they find her on, they hear no animal sounds. No birds chirping, no wolves howling at the moon — it is as if the local fauna is avoiding them. Characters with Animalism find their power over beasts nearly impossible to use — raise all Animalism difficulties by 3 while Vasilisa is with the coterie. The reason for this is that the fear of Kindred that animals normally fear is heightened exponentially around the Nictuku. The Nictuku is the quintessential predator, and the only way an animal willingly approaches it is if compelled by a suitably powerful being.

As the characters dress her or try to comfort her, Vasilisa stops waiting for a moment. She turns to face the southwest and says, "In the south there is a mountain, in the mountain there is a stream, in the stream there is a duck, in the duck there is an egg, in the egg there is a key, and the key leads to Granny, to Granny." She then snuggles close to the nearest character and whimpers.

If the characters wish to question her, they find she is lucid, if badly frightened. Her name is Vasilisa, she says, and she comes from Nytva, a riverside town to the south. She was taken away in the night by monsters that killed her parents and brought her here, where the monsters (she describes them as "great furred things, like wolves and men") set her on the rock and fed her. She was too afraid to run and



was sitting there when suddenly the monsters ran around howling. She heard something like a hurricane, and everything was glowing, and then all was quiet. She didn't see what happened to any of the other monsters, but she believes that Baba Yaga sent her friend Zmei Gorynich to save her. She now believes that Baba Yaga wants Vasilisa to find and thank her. If the characters ask, she says that she knows where the mountain and stream are, and could take them there. After telling her tale, she curls up and goes to sleep.

The characters now have a bit of a dilemma. What the little girl is proposing might seem ludicrous to a mortal, but for Kindred it is downright suicidal. If survival is a goal, the coterie might take her to the Tremere or any prominent Kindred instead of dashing off into Lupine territory trying to find the second most dangerous being in Russia (they've found the most dangerous, but don't tell them that).

It's really an easy decision — except that they *really* like the little girl. Carefully gauge how each character reacts to Vasilisa and then play to them. Make her seem like something between a fairy tale and the perfect child — innocent, honest and brave. The characters should *want* to help her without supernatural prompting; it makes the eventual revelation of what she truly is all the more horrifying. Remember that the moment you *tell* the players that their characters feel one way or another about Vasilisa, they know they are being set up, but if your players are any good at all, they trust you and play to it. To all scrutiny, Vasilisa appears to be a very special — but very mortal — child.

The rest of the story assumes that the characters go along with Vasilisa's desire to find "Granny." If they do not, see *Off the Beaten Path* below.

SCENE FOUR: JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAIN

Vasilisa claims to know how to find the mountain with the stream. She instructs the characters to go "this way" (south). If the characters pull out a map, they find that the railway runs east, to Perm, then south along the Ural Mountain range.

Vasilisa does not object to taking the train to the mountains. She happily rides with the characters, asking question after question, behaving just as an eight-year-old girl should. She has nightmares when she sleeps, however, and if the words "Baba Yaga" are used around her, her mood turns grim. In general, however, she should be a refreshing breath of life for the undead characters.

Nothing terribly important needs to happen on the way from Verescagino to Ufalej. However, is it a long trip, so you might consider taking the characters through some "slice-of-life" scenarios with Vasilisa. First, it's ironic, in a twisted sort of way, for a bunch of vampires to be babysitting an eight-year-old girl. What if she gets a stomach ache? Do the

characters even remember having those? And, on a more serious note, how do the characters contend with the daylight problem? Vasilisa doesn't wake up during the day, but the characters don't know that.

The second reason is that the more time the characters spend with Vasilisa, the cute little girl, the harder it hits them to find out that she is really an ancient, undead monstrosity.

When the characters reach a stop in Ufalej, Vasilisa becomes agitated. She fidgets as the train stops, and when the door opens, she is up and tugging on a character's sleeve. "There," she says, as she leave the train, "that's the mountain."

The characters are at the base of the Ural Mountains. The mountain Vasilisa indicates is only a few miles away. The characters should start out the next night; they may need to feed, and Ufalej is big enough to hunt. Besides, they probably want all the time they can get.

Whenever the characters finally set out, keep careful track of when they leave and how fast they travel. Since the time of year is up to the Storyteller, how long day and night last are likewise in her hands. Hopefully, the characters have some kind of tent or covering. They shouldn't be too encumbered, since things like exposure don't bother them, but they need to provide for Vasilisa. They might even wish to Entrance, Dominate or otherwise employ some people from Ufalej to act as porters (or provisions).

THE MOUNTAIN

The characters can reach the base of the mountain in just under two hours. Once there, Vasilisa runs ahead. She does not attempt to lose the characters, but keeps calling to them to hurry. When they catch up with her, they find her crouched by a stream running along the base of the mountain. When they look about for the duck, or ask Vasilisa about it, she seems stumped.

Let the characters puzzle about the duck, harassing as many waterfowl as they like. If someone brings up the idea that the duck is metaphorical or symbolic, you may wish to allow that player an Intelligence + Investigation roll (difficulty 8). Success indicates that the character spots a rock outcropping in the stream which, when viewed from the right vantage point, resembles a duck. Anyone actually *looking* for this is likely to find it, though you may want to employ a bit of dramatic tension by way of delay.

Searching the "duck," the characters find a crevice underneath it (this requires entering the water). Inside the crevice is only a stone, about the size of a grapefruit, smooth and oblong. This, Vasilisa says excitedly, is the egg. Inside is the key.

The stone appears to be, well, a stone to all scrutiny. If the characters try to smash it, they find it preternaturally resistant to damage. A character using Aura Perception sees a faint, sparkling halo around the stone. Using The Spirit's Touch shows a twisted vampire holding the egg up in his right hand and dripping vitae on it from a cut in his left (this is

Sergei Voshkov; see *Dramatis Personae* below for more information). A player whose character knows *Thaumaturgy* may roll *Intelligence + Occult* (difficulty 9, 8 for Russian characters) to guess how to unlock the egg. Vasilisa subtly suggests the idea if no one comes up with the answer.

When one blood point of *Kindred vitae* is dripped onto the egg, it opens, revealing the “key” — three small, red, gems. They glow brightly as the egg opens, giving the open stone the appearance of the human skull with shining red eyes (another common occurrence in fables about the Hag). If the characters shine the light from the eyes around, the eyes illuminate a gap in the wall of the mountain. Vasilisa simply points at the gap and says, “Granny.”

SCENE FIVE: INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN

The crevice leads deep into the mountain. Then, the cavern opens up and the characters see light — much like the light from the egg (which closes up after the crevice is discovered). Looking up, the characters see human skulls mounted on the walls, each with the same unholy red glow. If a character touches one of these strange torches, her player must soak against a difficulty of 9 or take one level of aggravated damage. The character needs *Fortitude* to soak this damage. Just underneath the row of skulls is a long section of linked bones, like a macabre frame. A character with knowledge of zoology may note that these bones are nearly 30 feet long each and closely resemble bat wings in structure. Underneath the frame is another tunnel.

During the trek through the tunnel, Vasilisa squirms her way to the front. If the characters try to restrain her, make a big show of some opposed rolls and lie about the results. Make it clear that she is determined to be at the forefront when the group finds Baba Yaga. After some time, the tunnel opens up into a small cave surrounded by the glowing skulls. Many of these skulls have the fangs of *Kindred*, and some are even wolf-shaped. Any character with *Auspex* or *Thaumaturgy* feels a strange grating sensation, as though the walls of the mountain were changing, or as though something huge were grinding its teeth. Any character who speaks also discovers something unsettling: While most caverns cause sound to reverberate, this one seems to swallow it. Any noise the characters make is muffled, and even those with *Auspex* cannot hear beyond the cave they occupy.

This chamber is roughly oblong in shape, perhaps 20 feet across at its widest point. The walls are high enough that most characters don't have to stoop, but the skulls on the walls are close enough to discourage leaning. As the characters take all of this in, a voice from the other end of the room quietly says, “Halt. KGB.” Sergei Voshkov steps from the shadows. If the



characters ask what he means by “KGB” (since that agency is now defunct), he shrugs and replies “Old habits.” He flings off his coat and bares his fangs in challenge.

If the coterie includes any Nosferatu or a former member of the espionage community, they may have heard of Sergei Voshkov. Whatever elegance and control this man possessed is gone. He is lost in the same denial of reality as Baba Yaga, and now only exists to serve as her bodyguard. The fiery skulls have singed his body nearly black, and his already distended fangs now protrude almost horizontally from his mouth. He is clearly insane — he must be, for he thinks he can win this fight.

Vasilisa cowers just inside the tunnel from which the characters came. Voshkov fights to the Final Death. While he is powerful, a coterie should be able to defeat him. He neither retreats nor bargains, and he frenzies only if he sees Vasilisa (the Nictuku allows him a quick glance at its true nature).

Voshkov fights with everything at his disposal. He uses characters as shields, makes special attempts to break limbs and spines (not fatal to Kindred, but costly to heal and temporarily crippling), and makes the most of fighting in a confined area. He attempts to slam characters against the skulls in order to burn them (he is immune this effect). Voshkov begins the fight with 26 blood points and has already used Protean to grow claws.

If Voshkov seems to be winning, Vasilisa advances on him, asking what he’s done with Granny. He retreats from her in horror, and she backs him up against a wall where he cowers immobilized.

The characters may diablerize Voshkov if they like. This is the only break they get from the Nictuku. When he is dead, Vasilisa scampers down another tunnel with enthusiasm approaching mania.

SCENE SIX: THE DEATH OF BABA YAGA

The tunnel ends in a massive cavern. The characters can see neither the ceiling nor the far wall, but their immediate impression is that they are in the wrong place.

The room is a garden. Plants and trees from all over Russia grow here, but they are pale and pulpy from lack of sunlight. The forest seems blighted but continues to thrive. If the characters watch, elk, rabbits and even birds are visible. As the characters walk through the forest, the animals eye them hungrily, showing none of the usual dread of Kindred. These creatures are all ghouls and have subsisted on the blood of Baba Yaga for years. Molesting or feeding from them is ill-advised, but let the characters discover that if they wish. Incidentally, the animals are all firmly under the sway of Baba Yaga and immune to the influence of Animalism.

In the center of the garden is the fabled hut. It looks like a cozy stone cottage, except for the decaying chicken legs supporting it. A fence topped with more glowing skulls surrounds the hut. As the characters approach, they feel the atmosphere change. The animals, which had started to follow them en masse, suddenly perk up and flee quietly into the forest. The door to the hut opens. Out steps Baba Yaga.

She looks at the characters, beckons and grins. She opens her mouth to speak, and then sees Vasilisa.

Baba Yaga is regarded as the most powerful Kindred in Russia, one of the most powerful in the world. Legends about her abound, some of which paint her as a good figure, but most depict her as a maniacal, flesh-eating monster. Even now, as she recognizes Vasilisa, she is not afraid. What the characters see on her face, before the Nictuku jumps on it, is resignation — the fairy tale is over, and her destiny has finally caught up with her. She glares at the characters and rasps, “You stupid, stupid catspaws! You’ve doomed the Motherland! Who sent you here? Who put you in her power? *You’ve brought the Final Nights upon us!*” If any Nosferatu characters are present, she points to them and adds, “Don’t think she won’t get you next!”

Vasilisa patiently waits for the Hag to finish, and even allows the characters to respond, should they wish. She then approaches Baba Yaga, and says in her tiny, angelic voice, “Granny, let me kiss you.” Baba Yaga recoils in horror and screams something in a language that bears only the slightest resemblance to Russian.

The ground buckles around the coterie, and Vasilisa is pushed back by the force Baba Yaga summons. Baba Yaga’s ghoul animals appear, slaving and growling, but Vasilisa looks at them and smiles. The animals stop and pace about, not daring to approach. Baba Yaga roars and bares her iron fangs, but Vasilisa simply grins and says in a voice that carries over the din, “I see through the shadows of the mind, Granny. I see you.” Baba Yaga’s immense form melts away, and the woman who stands there looks helplessly at the coterie (see *Dramatis Personae* for the description of Baba Yaga without her mask).

Vasilisa crouches low and springs like a spider. She lands on the Hag’s head then dissolves. Her small body becomes a foul, pervasive wave, resembling a fetid tide of gray blood. It flows down the Hag’s throat even as she gnashes her iron fangs, even as she tears at whatever clothing the “girl” was wearing. Baba Yaga emits a choked, garbled wail and in it, the characters hear a name, which sounds something like “Gorynich.”

If the characters run into the forest, Baba Yaga’s ghouled animals attack (Traits for animals can be found in the *Vampire rulebook*; remember to add a dot of Potence because they are ghouls). The forest surrounds the hut on all sides, and not all of the animals are as (normally) docile as elk — at least one pack of wolves prowls here. If the characters run, they can



fight as best they can, but the Nictuku comes after them in a great gray mass after consuming Baba Yaga.

If the characters run into the hut, they can see the Nictuku end Baba Yaga's unlife. It forces itself down her throat until it vanishes entirely. Baba Yaga turns to face the characters, reaches for them briefly, then her already ghastly face contorts even further, and she collapses into a puddle of mottled slime. The ooze roils like boiled pudding, then Vasilisa rises from it, still the innocent little girl. She stands naked before them and smiles with all the purity and warmth that she did before.

The Nictuku looks at the Kindred with honest gratitude on its face. If any Nosferatu characters are present, it points to them and says, "Surrender the lost child's bastard(s) and you may leave." The characters may guess that it really isn't giving them a choice.

If no Nosferatu are present, she simply says, "Thank you for helping me find Granny." She then fades from sight. Just before she vanishes entirely, the characters hear her girlish laugh.

Without the Hag's magic to hold the garden together, it crumbles in a matter of nights. A plague of tremors rocks the town of Ufalej three nights after Baba Yaga dies, and any trace of the Hag vanishes in the quake. Her hut and her ghould menagerie lie buried under the mountain.

If the characters wish to pick through her hut before leaving (and remember that they must still fight their way through the animal ghoulds), they find any number of mystical items. The storyteller is encouraged to read some Russian fables about Baba Yaga for inspiration. One item

in particular, however, is present: the Portrait of the Bogatyrs.

In any event, the hut contains enough portable information for a character to learn any Thaumaturgical path (as the Storyteller permits), though he might not know what paths he can learn until gets a translator. Durga Syn is a possibility, for a price.

THE PORTRAIT OF THE BOGATYRS

The Bogatyrs were legendary warriors of Russia, similar to Arthur's knights. Each one had a special power such as enhanced senses or superhuman strength. In the nights of legend, they defended Mother Russia, even killing their families to show their devotion. Of course, what these beings truly were is a matter of historical debate; factions among Kindred, Lupines and mages claim them as their own.

The portrait is a painting showing a group of people. As the years pass, the portrait changes to show the current group of Bogatyrs. What the painting now shows is up to the Storyteller....

SCENE SEVEN: AFTERMATH

The characters arrive in Moscow (or Perm, or St. Petersburg, or whatever major city they hit first) to find Kindred affairs in chaos. Many Kindred who were unknowingly bound to Baba Yaga now strain to comprehend their own actions as her opponents struggle to regroup. Kindred loyal to Baba Yaga seek the beings responsible, so it might behoove the characters to quickly leave Russia. Before they do, however, Lucita finds them.

Lucita is looking for the same fragment of the *Book of Nod* that Viktor was, but also wants to know what is going on. She's willing to trade secret in exchange for any information the characters can give her. If they attack, she leaves; Russia isn't safe, and she has other things to do, but she certainly remembers the characters. Lucita does not make a good enemy.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Traits for most of the characters in this story appear in other books. Of course, the Storyteller should feel free to adjust the Traits of any of these characters to surprise sneaky or well-read players. Obviously, if the text refers to a character using a Trait, assume she has it.

NOSFERATU

BABA YAGA, THE LITTLE MOTHER

4th Generation, childe of Absimiliard

Clan: Nosferatu

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Monster

Embrace: 5000 BC

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Baba Yaga. The Wicked Witch of the West for Russian children. She is a fairy tale, a fable to entertain and frighten young children. Or, for those who are schooled in religious history, she is the Crone, an aspect of the Mother Goddess, made into a villain after the Christians took over.

But other societies in the world know of Baba Yaga, and they tell different stories. The werewolves, for example, tell a story of an "earth shaman," born over five millennia before Christ walked the earth. While she was still young, yet already considered wise by her people, a man sought her out.

The man who changed the priestess was beautiful, as beautiful as the priestess herself, but his arrival was not a happy occasion. On the night he arrived, over half the village took sick — so the legend goes — and the priestess raced from home to home trying to make them well. The stranger went almost unnoticed.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Players hate being led around by the nose, which makes stories like this difficult. Yes, this story depends very much on the characters taking some wild chances. This means that you, as Storyteller, need to keep the mood relatively positive. Remember, vampires aren't likely to charge into certain death — that's for Lupines.

So, what if they wise up? What if they decide to go to Moscow to dig up more information? What if they leave Vasilisa where they found her or don't enter the mountain?

The short answer: Wing it.

The longer answer: Vasilisa could choose to Dominate the characters into following her, but that's annoying to the players. If they run off and leave her, you can still make a story out of it. Maybe the man in the white shirt from St. Petersburg (see *The Slaughter* in Scene One) found them out as they left the city and now Lupines are hunting them. If they leave Vasilisa in front of the mountain, she still kills the Hag, and the characters still have to deal with the chaos (and the earthquake) that follows.

Above all, though, leaving the story line should not result in certain death or an awkward segue back into it. The point of the story is that the characters have this choice, and their reasons for following through can be as diverse as following orders, curiosity or even a desire to find and pledge fealty to the Hag.

The other concern is the amount of travel time this story entails. Seventeen hundred miles by train takes several nights, of course. You could choose simply to bypass that time. If you are telling this story as a one-shot, that's probably the best choice. If, however, you wish to stretch things out a bit, feel free. Perhaps the characters aren't in a hurry to catch up with the Ravnos and enjoy sampling Russian culture. If the characters have enemies or rivals, perhaps they follow and make trouble. Lucita might even show up early and then become lost or sidetracked before reaching Durga Syn. Ultimately, travel can be as uneventful or perilous as you wish.

When the priestess finally saw him, his beauty did not fool her. She knew he had brought this sickness to her people, and she ordered him to leave. He laughed and said that he would only leave with her. She refused, and the man vanished. He found her later, alone, and offered to make her immortal. She refused, and called upon the land to protect her.

The stranger endured the magics she threw at him then cursed her with immortality. The next night, she rose, just as powerful as before, but now her magic was changed. No longer did the land wish to protect her, for she was dead, but she wanted revenge. She summoned Zmei Goriynch from the depths of the abyss, she called Koshchei the Deathless from

his hidden lair, and she escaped from the stranger, whom the legends call Absimiliard.

She never saw him again, and the story of their battle and her damnation was passed down through the years. In some versions, the stranger was a hideous beast, and the priestess became one as well. In others, she became the beast later, when she discovered she had to feed on living blood to survive.

All of these stories, like dozens of others concerning the Hag, are apocryphal. Like all mythology, they have been passed down in oral tradition and only put in written form after the actual details have long since become impossible to recall. The truth is that when Absimiliard Embraced her, the woman who became Baba Yaga realized that it should have been her time to die, but she chose to live on. She ignored the natural order she had served so long and became a hideous counterpoint to the Goddess she loved. The earth shunned her, but she could still command it. The animals fled from her, but she could call them back. Her magic had changed but was still mighty. Baba Yaga decided that the Motherland would not be rid of her so easily.

In 1990, Baba Yaga destroyed the Brujah council influencing Russia's government and bent most of the surviving Kindred to her will. Then she set about raising her armies. What exactly she planned to do remains a mystery, but she successfully isolated Russia's Kindred and other supernatural beings for several years. Why she sought influence over so many disparate creatures is likewise a mystery — even she does not have the power to command so many powerful beings at once.

The legends describe Baba Yaga as an immense old hag — over eight feet tall by most accounts. The legends also state that she has teeth and claws of iron, that her face is covered in warts, and that her body is gray and decrepit. What the legends don't explain is that she is capable of changing her form, and this immense guise is only her most famous mask. Her "true" form is much less impressive.

The Little Mother is exactly that, little. Her face and skin retain their pale, grayish hue, but aren't quite as warty and bloated as the legends say. She is still a Nosferatu, though, and suitably monstrous. Her back is twisted and humped, her left arm is noticeably longer than her right, and she is covered in large, gray wrinkled flaps of skin. In her true form she wears a long shawl, just as decayed and wretched as she is.

Suggested Traits for Baba Yaga can be found in *Rage Across Russia*. She shouldn't need Traits for this story in any case, and certainly won't need them afterward.

"VASILISA," THE NICTUKU
4th Generation, childe of Absimiliard
Clan: Nosferatu
Nature: unknowable
Demeanor: varies, Child in this story

Embrace: unknown

Apparent Age: indeterminate; occasionally appears as a child

One of Absimiliard's childer was a young child (reports vary on the child's gender, but most rumors assume it was male) who was slated for execution by his village. The child was tainted, they said; a demon raged inside him. He'd killed his family and several other villagers with tools, poisons, and even by leading them into the jaws of lurking predators. Absimiliard was delighted and found the child patiently awaiting death, crouching in a corner of the room that was his cell. As Absimiliard watched, invisible, the child caught a cricket and dropped it into a spider's web. The child watched, fascinated, as the spider killed its prey. Absimiliard offered the boy a chance to become the spider. The child did not even ask what the man meant. He had been offered his fondest dream.

The child burst from his cell and fed on the entire village. He didn't kill them all; some he saved, like a spider. Absimiliard was very proud of the boy.

The Nictuku wasn't very humane even in the distant past when he was human. Anything resembling human thought process is gone. He — it — has become the predator, and is now more a presence than a sentient being. It can take the shape of a human in order to accomplish its goals — or its master's goals. It finds amusement in taking on recognizable, almost archetypal forms to hunt its prey — Vasilisa, Koshchei the Deathless, Baba Yaga, Anastasia — Russians respond strangely to these names. It doesn't have a name that it remembers — the other Nictuku and Absimiliard are the only beings it allows to truly communicate with it, and they don't need to speak to do so.

The Nictuku is unknowable. Baba Yaga may have left her humanity behind centuries ago, but "Vasilisa" didn't have much to begin with, and it is over twice her age. It has transcended "Disciplines" and does what it wishes to do (so please, don't try to assign Traits to it!).

What the Nictuku does after the death of Baba Yaga is up to the Storyteller. It might continue its search for Nosferatu in Russia. It might even follow the characters, knowing that Baba Yaga's other childer might hunt them down. It might simply disappear into the night, waiting for instructions from its sleeping father.

The Nictuku can appear as anything it chooses, but when it bothers to appear at all, it almost always chooses an innocent seeming.

THE GUTKA, SALT QUEEN
5th Generation, childe of Baba Yaga
Clan: Nosferatu
Nature: Survivor
Demeanor: Rogue
Embrace: 2000 BC
Apparent Age: indeterminate

BABA YAGA'S ARMIES

Below are the names of the Hag's Armies, their membership, and their fates now that Baba Yaga is dead and the Shadow Curtain has fallen.

The Shadow Curtain is a metaphysical phenomenon, and not one that vampires easily understand. In brief, it is a magical barrier, similar to a ward, that allows supernatural beings (vampires, werewolves, mages and presumably more esoteric creatures) into Russia, but not back out. The curtain is maintained by Baba Yaga and the Army of the Arcane. It is physically represented by members of the Army of the Night. When Baba Yaga dies, the curtain falls completely, its magic gone.

The Army of the Night: Composed of Viktor (its general) and his vampiric minions, this army was charged with managing city-based affairs in Russia. They patrolled the borders and enforced the Shadow Curtain in the physical world, suppressing attempts by supernatural inhabitants of Russia to flee the country.

Most of this army perishes in the White Nights Massacre, and the rest are freed from Baba Yaga's influence when she dies. They have their hands full managing cities without her support.

The Army of Conversion: This army's task is to recruit new followers for Baba Yaga. The army includes Lupines loyal to the Hag, beasts called fomori (humans possessed by spirits of decay and entropy who often exhibit grotesque mutations) and various free-floating spirits. These spirits are not ghosts and are therefore unaffected by Necromancy, but are spirits in a more animistic sense, embodying concepts or physical places. The general of this army is just such a spirit.

The Army of Conversion is slowly torn apart by Lupines during Baba Yaga's fall. The fate of Typhon, the general, is unknown.

The Army of War: As their title suggests, this is Baba Yaga's martial force, consisting of packs of Lupines, fomori, some highly trained and thoroughly Dominated humans, and Pavel, the Brujah elder mentioned in Scene One. Pavel's areas of influence included much of the Russian Mafia, which he deployed against mundane threats to Baba Yaga's plans. Supernatural threats were met by the Lupine contingent of the army.

Most of this army is dead already. It is — was — the most highly visible of the Hag's forces and therefore the first one that the Lupines hit when the Shadow Curtain showed signs of weakening. Lupines continue hunting down the remnants of the Army of War until the survivors either flee Russia or are destroyed.

The Army of Despair: Not really an army, the Army of Despair is composed of the Zmei. In the legends, Zmei Gorynich was Baba Yaga's serpent ally. In fact, the Zmei are otherworldly beasts, summoned millennia ago from their home by Baba Yaga to fight Absimiliard. Unlike most such creatures, they can remain on Earth without dying due to Baba Yaga's potent magic.

The great serpents were charged with collecting spiritual energy from the land; the easiest places to do so are at points of natural power. Tremere regard such a "nexus" as a good place to invoke mystical effects, whereas Lupines regard these "caerns" as holy sites. When the Zmei drain such a site, they usually kill the inhabitants. It is at just such a place that the characters find Vasilisa (she arrived after the fact, obviously).

The Army of the Arcane: Composed of mages, this army's duty is to maintain the Shadow Curtain. The Ravnos, under subtle direction from the Nictuku, murdered the mages in question, thus weakening the curtain. This army has been completely destroyed.

The Army of the Void: Like the Army of the Arcane, the Army of the Void is spiritual in orientation. The Void army's task was the capture and exploitation of natural spirits of the type mentioned above. Their leader is a demon named Bezariel.

Most of this Army scatters when the curtain falls, but the demon might just decide to stay on Earth a while....

The Gutka's body is permanently encrusted with salt crystals, and they adorn her back like a crystalline tortoise's shell. Her body is stooped, her hair is mildewed and almost gone, and her legs and arms seem much too small and frail to support even the weight of her body.

The Gutka has no memory of her human life other than her devotion to the Mother Goddess. As an old woman, she went to the forest at night to meet her death, and was confronted by (she thought) the Crone herself.

The Crone she found was none other than Baba Yaga, and the Hag Embraced the Gutka. Convinced she was an avatar of the Goddess, the Gutka went on to be worshipped by the pagan people of what would later become Poland, who offered her blood and salt as sacrifices.

The Gutka fell into torpor and didn't emerge until the ninth century. She discovered that she could no longer survive on human blood and occasionally abducted and Embraced a miner to sustain herself. She stayed in the salt

mines, preserving her kills with the mineral until the 16th century, when she realized she once again desired death. She decided that the only being who could rightfully grant it was the one who transformed her, so she sought out the Crone to beg for an end to her cursed unlife.

She never found Baba Yaga, and eventually fell into torpor again around the end of the 18th century. She rose again in 1997 and again began her search anew. The colony of Nosferatu in St. Petersburg that she destroys is the first feeding binge she has indulged, but having discovered how weak and thin-blooded Kindred are in the modern nights, she needs more.

If she discovers that the characters are responsible for Baba Yaga's death (they aren't, but she blames them), she stops at nothing to find them.

Traits for the Gutka can be found in **Transylvania by Night**.

SERGEI VOSHKOV, THE EYES OF THE CRONE

5th Generation, childe of Baba Yaga

Clan: Nosferatu

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Autist

Embrace: 1991

Apparent Age: late 60s

Sergei Voshkov was a top KGB agent and easily one of the world's best spies. Legendary in the world of covert culture, Voshkov is credited with so many assassinations and atrocities that he couldn't possibly have committed them all. However, since he never left eyewitnesses to his acts, no one will ever know the truth, except perhaps his superiors.

When the KGB disbanded, Sergei was considering offers from other governments when the Hag came calling. He had heard the tales of Baba Yaga and considered them nothing more than children's stories, but actually seeing her changed his mind. Instead of death, however, she gave him a new cause, a new vigor and resources beyond his wildest dreams. Ever since, he has served the Hag faithfully, acting as her eyes all over the world.

Sergei was called back to Russia in the wake of Baba Yaga's awakening from torpor to act as her personal attendant. It is in that capacity that he meets his end.

Sergei Voshkov's Traits are given in **Rage Across Russia**. Remember that he carries Baba Yaga's blood in his veins. His true strength lies in combining his prowess as a spy and a murderer with his vampiric power.

Sergei usually hides his disgusting visage beneath a high-collared coat and hat. He looks like an old man in good physical shape — until you see his face. His head is bald, his teeth are uneven and constantly pierce his lips.

THE OTHERS

DURGA SYN, RIVAL TO THE HAG

6th Generation, childe of Vladovos

Clan: Ravnos

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Survivor

Embrace: unknown

Apparent Age: varies

Like Baba Yaga, Durga Syn was a priestess of the Mother Goddess in life. Unlike the Hag, she did not fight her own destiny, but continued acting in the Goddess's interests, even as the Hag cursed her with ugliness and the semblance of age. Still Durga Syn refused to serve her. Finally, the Hag led the Christian armies to Russia, where they slowly destroyed the followers of Durga Syn's faith. Fatally wounded by a Christian soldier, Durga Syn was saved by the Russian Ravnos and Embraced as a symbol of rebellion.

During her long unlife, Durga Syn has acted as advisor for Vlad Dracula, the Founders of the Camarilla and many other Kindred. Her somewhat confusing predictions do not always come to pass in the anticipated manner, but such, as Durga Syn says, is the nature of prophecy.

In the 18th century, Durga Syn was subjected to the wrath of a Tzimisce sorcerer. She foretold his fall from power, but did so publicly. He chased her into the Romanian countryside and found himself facing a very confused mortal whose very presence sapped his magical power. Before he could react, Durga Syn had called upon her power over beasts to cause his horse to throw him. She Embraced the strange mortal — Zlato — and he became her confidant and occasional protector.

She survived the wrath of Baba Yaga after the Hag awoke for the Final Nights, but only barely. Zlato was able to stave off a frenzy-curse the Hag had directed toward Durga Syn and somehow managed to drive a stake through her heart to protect them both.

If she has Baba Yaga's scroll at the end of the story, Lucita soon pays her a visit...

Durga Syn changes her appearance to suit the occasion, but usually appears as a decrepit old woman with thinning white hair and ugly, gnarled skin.

Durga Syn's Traits can be found in **Giovanni Chronicles I: The Last Supper** and in **Rage Across Russia**.

ZLATO, THE PROTECTOR

7th Generation, childe of Durga Syn

Clan: Ravnos

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Survivor

Embrace: 1752

Apparent Age: early 30s

The man who became Zlato was born into a wealthy merchant family in the early 1700s. When he reached the age of 17 and was preparing to marry, a friend invited him to join a secret society. The society practiced magic — real magic, his friend said — and Zlato was trustworthy enough to keep the group's secrets.

Zlato, intrigued by the notion of magic but not quite believing in it, agreed. He attended one meeting and never saw anything vaguely magical. The cult accused him of sapping their power "like some great leech," but he had no idea what they were talking about. Both he and his friend were made to leave, and his friend never forgave him.

He married shortly thereafter, but not for long. His wife contracted a wasting sickness and died, though no doctor could find a cause. Her father, however, had friends who belonged to the cult that rejected Zlato, and he formed his own suspicions. Zlato found himself chased from his home into the cold night, amid cries of "devil!" and "accursed!"

Zlato wandered from town to town and began following a Gypsy *kumpania*. While he knew not to come too close — they had warned him to keep a distance — he liked listening to them and watching their fires.

In 1752, the *kumpania* was traveling through what is now Romania when a fierce storm blew down from the mountains to the north. While the *kumpania* struggled on, Zlato, riding his usual half-mile behind, barely felt it. The *kumpania* tried to cross a bridge, but the storm cast most of them into the swollen river. A few moments later, when Zlato rode up, he saw no trace of the Gypsies.

Assuming that they were waiting out the storm somewhere up ahead, Zlato took shelter himself, not wishing to inconvenience them with his presence. As he tried to find cover, an ancient woman appeared out of the storm and asked for shelter. Zlato graciously did everything he could to aid the woman, and no sooner had he done so than another traveler arrived. This man, obviously a nobleman, demanded that Zlato surrender the old woman. Zlato refused. The man began to chant and move his hands, and then smiled as if he expected Zlato to fall down dead. Nothing happened.

The nobleman looked shocked, but before he could draw his blade and kill the upstart, his horse bucked and galloped, pausing only to throw him into the river. The old woman appeared again, and revealed herself as Durga Syn, a vampire.

Durga Syn Embraced Zlato as a bitter reward. He took the Gypsy name "Zlato" in homage and quickly learned the Ravnos' way of unlife. The strange dampening he seemed to have on magic did not hinder Durga Syn's Disciplines. While the two have not been constantly together in the ensuing years, they are often in communication.

As luck had it, they had just been reunited when Baba Yaga awoke. However, the curse the Little Mother inflicted upon his sire did not seem to affect Zlato to the same degree;

he fought it off and immobilized Durga Syn until the frenzy passed. The two Kindred met up with two other Ravnos, and Zlato recently Embraced his first childe, a young Rroma of the Phuri Dae family named Gretya.

Despite his Gypsy pseudonym, Zlato is not of Rom descent. This shows in his features. Even for a vampire, his skin is pallid. His hair is balding, and he has rounded facial features. He has flat gray eyes and rarely smiles. When he does, it seems a formality. Zlato doesn't seem to get perturbed or agitated over anything, even mention of his clan's recent destruction.

Note: Whatever the Storyteller decides for Zlato's Traits, he is a sinkhole for magic energy. Thaumaturgy, Necromancy, Auspex, Dominate, Presence, or any of the other non-physical Disciplines suffer a +1 difficulty in his presence. As stated, Ravnos are immune to this effect.

NIKOLAI, PRINCE OF ST. PETERSBURG

8th Generation, Childe of Anya

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Bon Vivant

Demeanor: Director

Embrace: 1706

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Nikolai was the son of a noble and was going about the business of being young and decadent when his father sent him to oversee a family interest in the newly founded town of St. Petersburg. He was there less than a week before coming to the attention of Anya, a young Ventrue sent to the city for the same reason (theoretically to oversee operations, but really to get her out of everyone's hair). She identified with Nikolai and together they fell in love with the city. She confided her true nature to him, and he remarked that it would be a shame not to see what the city could become. She agreed and Embraced him.

The two remained constant figures in St. Petersburg for centuries. When the revolution came, she wanted to leave, but by the time Nikolai agreed, they had nowhere to go. The Brujah who came to power killed Anya and installed the weaker-willed Nikolai as a dummy prince out of spite. Since St. Petersburg was a gateway to the rest of Europe, they wanted someone expendable and pliable there.

In 1990, when Baba Yaga awoke, she considered confronting Nikolai directly, but decided he was not worth the bother. She left him to his "princedom" and soon blood bound him, using him in the same way the Brujah had. He gave pleasant parties to visiting Kindred and convinced them there was no need to worry about recent events in Russia.

When portraying Nikolai, remember that he is very much in the dark — he knows nothing about Baba Yaga, her armies or the Shadow Curtain, and all he knows about Lupines is that they are bloodthirsty berserkers. He loves to talk about his city,

though, and is pleased to arrange for the characters to join him at the opera, the theater or the museums.

In truth, Nikolai isn't weak; he just isn't very ambitious. Centuries of practice have made him good at handling St. Petersburg's Kindred affairs. His city was recently named the cultural center of Russia, and he considers that a high accolade. He refuses to feed on native Russians, which is one more reason why St. Petersburg is perfect for him — tourists, both in the city and nearby countries, compose his staple diet.

Nikolai appears to be young Russian man in the prime of life. His skin is pale but resembles the normal pallor of a Russian citizen more than the deathly cast of the Kindred. He has thick brown hair, a well-trimmed moustache, and large brown eyes. He dresses like a city administrator or new-style entrepreneur — three-piece suit, gold pocket watch, vague smile.

LUCITA, WATCHER IN THE FINAL NIGHTS

7th Generation, childe of Ambrosio Luis Monçada

Clan: Lasombra *antitribu*

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: 1190

Apparent Age: late teens

The rebellious daughter of Alfonse I of Aragon, Lucita was a rebel from the outset. Resisting the strictures of noble

life, she found herself sent off to confession under the tender auspices of Ambrosio Luis Monçada.

He convinced the Lasombra the Lucita would be a worthy addition to the clan, but her rebellious streak did not die with her Embrace. She served her sire for a number of years as a diplomat and noble, but was more at home traveling with her companion Anatole, the mad prophet.

Disgusted by her clan's destruction of their founder, Lucita ended up working as an archon for the Camarilla after the Anarch Revolt. She has risen to prominence as a Noddist scholar as well as a warrior, and is working with the Gangrel Beckett tracking down leads to lost fragments of the *Book of Nod*.

Over the years, Lucita has earned a reputation as one of the most fearsome warriors in the World of Darkness. She has been described as "a one-woman death squad," and her command over her clan Disciplines, and others besides, is nothing short of terrifying. Traits for Lucita are available over the course of the *Transylvania Chronicles*, but aren't needed for the purposes of this story. Hopefully, the characters aren't suicidal enough to start anything with her.

Lucita is tall and lithe. Her skin is slightly darker than that of most elders. Although her features show her Spanish heritage, there is no trace of Moorish blood. She always dresses in styles that would allow her to move quickly should the need arise.





CHAPTER FOUR: THE HUNTERS HUNTED

*Fear is something you have to throw into a corner.
Constantly. Because it never goes away.*

— F. Lee Bailey

Las Vegas, the player's town — an exciting place, wild and weird and always moving, where at night the Strip shines brighter than day anywhere else. Vegas is a land of glitter and illusion, a web spun out of neon. And, like any good webspinner, the city lures its hapless prey, ensnares them, feeds upon them and spits out the dry husks — then waits patiently for more.

Las Vegas is a city of dreams and aspirations, of wild success stories, miraculous luck — and abysmal failure. For every gambler who wins, a hundred lose, and for every gambler who risks it all and becomes rich, many more bet it all and walk away with nothing. Some of the year-round gamblers keep permanent rooms in the larger hotels and live like kings. Others sleep where they can and live from stake to stake, subsisting on the free food the larger casinos supply to players. Tourists see only the bright lights and excitement, the chance to have some fun, see some shows and maybe win some money. But those who live in Vegas see the other side — the loss, the frustration, the depression, the resignation that comes only after years of failure. Even the most successful gamblers feel this undercurrent and

recognize it as their own future — the odds always favor the house, and sooner or later everybody falls. That one truth gives Vegas its air of total abandon — if you don't enjoy things tonight, they might be gone tomorrow.

THE INS AND OUTS

Vegas is an extremely easy city to visit, since nearly 600 daily flights arrive and depart from McCarran International Airport (at the south edge of town, near the end of the Strip). Bus and train service abounds, and two major highways (US 95 and 15) intersect just north of the downtown area. Hotels and casinos run package deals with the airlines and bus services, providing inexpensive transportation and lodging.

THE STRIP

The major street in Las Vegas is Las Vegas Boulevard, which runs from end to end through the center of the city. But all that most people know of Vegas — or care to know — is the Strip, the three mile section starting at the Convention Center in the middle of town and running south to the edge

of the city. Most of the major hotels and casinos are located on the Strip, as are most of the shows and revues. The main attractions include:

Caesar's Palace: This Roman-style resort sparked Vegas's ongoing competition of thematic one-upmanship, with its statue of Caesar out front and its miniature Roman city, the World of Caesar, filled with costumed gladiators and elegant shops. A statue of Bacchus provides the finishing touch, delighting visitors by "coming to life" every hour on the hour.

The Luxor: This 30-story golden pyramid revisits the wonders of Ancient Egypt. In addition to the casino itself, the Luxor features a miniature Nile river that guests can travel in small boats. Each night, a beam of light shoots from the pyramid's tip up into the heavens, lighting the way for the spirits of the pharaohs.

The Mirage: With a huge volcano out front, this hotel is difficult to miss. After dark, the volcano erupts every 15 minutes. Inside the Mirage is a tropical rainforest complete with simulated waterfalls and thousands of flowers. Sharks, dolphins and white tigers reside inside the hotel, each in their appropriate environments.

New York-New York: The newest and tallest hotel on the Strip, New York-New York is a miniature Manhattan complete with a 150-foot tall Statue of Liberty and 300-foot long Brooklyn Bridge. Visitors can stroll through Central Park, ride a roller coaster around Coney Island or just enjoy a slice of New York pizza.

Treasure Island: Created by the owner of the Mirage, Treasure Island is a Caribbean pirate island hotel with simulated pirate naval battles every 90 minutes (in the man-made Buccaneer Bay). Of course, because it's Las Vegas, the pirates always defeat the navy ships arrayed against them. Guests can play arcade games in Mutiny Bay or watch the world-famous Cirque de Soleil perform nightly.

Freemont Street Experience: Five blocks of downtown Las Vegas have been transformed into a pedestrian mall. A massive space frame towers over four of the blocks. The frame sparks to life each night, with 2.1 million lights and 540,000 watts of sound and music.

An old-fashioned streetcar, the Las Vegas Strip Trolley, provides easy public transportation along the boulevard.

THE OTHER SIDE

Just as the Strip shines brighter than any other city block, its shadow looms darker by contrast. Las Vegas Boulevard leads to downtown Vegas, toward the northern end of town, where the smaller hotels and the city's government and non-tourist services reside. The Las Vegas branch of University of Nevada (known as UNLV) is also situated to the north end, between Las Vegas Boulevard and Maryland Parkway. All around Las Vegas Boulevard lies the rest of Vegas, where the city's real residents live — where there are laundromats,

grocery stores, post offices and bookstores. This is where the bartenders and croupiers and waitresses and singers go when they aren't working.

The rest of Las Vegas isn't particularly ugly. Actually, it's a clean — and quite prosperous — city. In comparison to the Strip, however, everything else seems hopelessly plain and dull, like a patch of bare sand beside an oasis. No one makes any effort to liven up the outskirts, either — why bother? It's the Strip everyone comes to see, and the Strip's where everyone spends their waking hours. The rest of Vegas is merely a place to eat and sleep, functional and uninteresting.

CHOOSE YOUR POISON

In Vegas, you can get anything you want, if you have the money. Prostitution is legal, so hookers and "escorts" do business openly in most of the resorts and casinos. Alcohol is everywhere, and the casinos usually provide free drinks as long as you continue gambling. Drugs are not dealt quite so openly, but they are available, and often the hotel maitre d' can put a curious patron in contact with a supplier. Shops, some public and others not, cater to every fetish or fascination, from exotic pets to unusual foods to antiques to adult toys. In general, anything goes in Las Vegas, as long as it doesn't hurt business and the cops don't see you doing it.

NIGHTLIFE WITH FANGS

Vegas is a vampire's kind of town. With so many people visiting around the clock, no one notices a few more, and things that might seem odd elsewhere are perfectly normal here. In a "normal" city, people take notice when you're around every night but don't actually work, eat or change clothes. In Vegas, it's assumed that you're just another lucky stiff on vacation. When people throw money around in other cities, everyone gets curious. But in Vegas, throwing money around is Standard Operating Procedure. It's all but impossible to look out of place — with so many different outfits, accents and attitudes, a 13th Century Scotsman and a 2nd Century Roman Centurion, both in full garb, can sit and share a drink without anything worse than the occasional, "Which casino do you work at?"

Vampires in Vegas feed with ease. Outside the Strip, no one notices much of anything — people actively pretend those parts of town don't exist, and even residents have trouble telling one area from another. Except for family and friends, no one notices when one person goes missing. And most of Vegas's residents came here alone to make their fortune, leaving families behind, working too long and too hard to make real friends.

Feeding opportunities on the Strip are even better. Strange people don't seem so strange here, where staged shows and pyrotechnic displays occur on every street corner. So many people come and go that no one notices if a few disappear. Some on the Strip don't care themselves — they came to the city chasing a dream of wealth, only to have Lady

Luck spit on them; now they wander, searching for one last chance to hit it big, but knowing the opportunity has already passed. Some turn violent, some suicidal, some become criminals or prostitutes, but most just stumble through life, no longer interested in the scenery. Such people make easy prey. Las Vegas does have police, of course, but they're there to make sure no one destroys property or harms another patron — if someone disappears and no one reports it, who's to know? Vegas is a great place to live forever.

UNDEAD SOCIETY

Even with so much leeway, the Kindred of Las Vegas still adhere to a definite structure. The prince of the city, a Ventrue named Benedic, has certain specific rules — don't Embrace without permission, don't endanger the Masquerade, don't kill other Kindred. The only unusual rules stem from the nature of the city. No Kindred can play poker, primarily because Vegas hosts the annual World Championship Poker Tournament (open to everyone who can afford the \$10,000 entry fee, with a grand prize of one million) — a talented Kindred poker player might draw all sorts of attention. Also, no Kindred can lose more than ten million dollars in a single night — anything more attracts notice. Kindred are warned to steer clear of actual casino and hotel owners as prey — those people might actually be missed, and the police certainly investigate such disappearances. Finally, the Kindred are forbidden to interfere with business conducted by the mob. Beyond that, the Kindred of Vegas more or less do whatever they want.

ONE OF THE FAMILY

Benedic is not the only authority in the city. A Giovanni from the Rothstein branch of the clan also claims Vegas as his domain. Rothstein dwells in Bally's, a famous casino and hotel near the middle of the Strip. Rothstein's proximity to the major casino lets him watch the Strip, allowing him to react more quickly to changes. Rothstein also has several members of his own family with him. This may be why Benedic has not removed Rothstein — the Giovanni in Vegas can resist most outright attacks and have enough contacts to keep them in business. Besides, many vampires besides Rothstein's own family recognize his claim of domain in Vegas, which creates an uneasy balance of power between the two "princes." Regardless, Rothstein despises Benedic and always watches for ways to remove the "false prince" and consolidate his own position. This may be why Benedic's closest ally, the Nosferatu Montrose, stays at the Mirage — from there he can keep a close eye on Rothstein.

CITY OF ANARCH-Y

Most of the Kindred who permanently reside in Vegas acknowledge Benedic as their prince and at least nominally obey his rules. Most of them. Vegas appeals strongly to the anarchs, because of its wild atmosphere, decadent lifestyle

and lack of restraints. Only a few anarchs actually reside in Vegas, but dozens pass through the city each year, often arriving in groups. They stay for a week or two, enjoying the revelry and extreme emotions that sweep the place. Few ever acknowledge Benedic, and those who do reside in the city egg them on to stand up to "the Man." Benedic's coterie, led by Montrose, does its best to keep the anarchs' disturbances to a minimum, covering up problems and disciplining individuals when necessary, but the anarchs simply snarl at their attempts and party harder. Any ultimatums would be ignored or taken as an attack, only making matters worse.

DESERT WORSHIP

According to rumors, there's a Setite temple near Las Vegas, somewhere out in the desert. Some stories claim that the temple actually lies under the sand, buried so that only the Setites themselves can find it. Whether true or not, from time to time Setites certainly come to Las Vegas. They appear only briefly, rarely more than two at a time. Although the Setites don't acknowledge Benedic, they seldom cause trouble — they tend to show up, feed, then leave, perhaps to worship at their temple. A few disappearances are attributed to the Setites each year, but the bodies are never found. Regardless, most other Kindred avoid the Setites when they appear, and no one has been foolish enough to follow them out of town.

Although the Setites aren't involved with the hunters descending on Vegas, Storytellers wishing to lengthen the story can use rumors of the desert temple and the occasional disappearances to distract the players' characters as the hunters push the Kindred's feeding grounds further south.

OUTSIDE FORCES

The Sabbat controls part of Southern California, and Las Vegas calls to them. The energy and mayhem of the city, the bright lights, decadence, depression and panic appeal to members of the Sabbat. From time to time, various Sabbat leaders decide to check the city's defenses to see whether they could take it. Usually at least one Sabbat scout is roaming around Vegas, often disguised as an anarch. They party a bit, gather information on Benedic, then sneak back out again. Unless they get caught, of course. Montrose's primary responsibility is to deal with any Sabbat interlopers, preventing them from acquiring sensitive information. Montrose and his compatriots tend to be suspicious of new Kindred.

CLAN APPRECIATION

Vegas has only two dozen or so Kindred in permanent residence, but scores of others pass through every year. The Ventrue are the most numerous clan in Vegas — the sheer amount of money being tossed around draws them here. The Ventrue spend most of their time in the casinos, hobnobbing with the rich and powerful, toying with the mortals and seeking to gain more money and power for themselves. Despite both Benedic's admonitions and the mob's strong influence, there's

always some Ventrue planning to buy out this or that resort. Some want their own casinos because of the privacy and security they allow, while others harbor more ambitious plans. None of them have actually tried any of their grand schemes, but they grow bolder all the time and might take advantage of any confusion to advance their own agendas.

The Ravnos are drawn by the bright lights of the Strip, the gaudiness and revelry and the true abandon. They delight in the carnival atmosphere. Ravnos mingle in the casinos and perform impromptu shows on the street. Before the Week of Nightmares, Vegas was a favorite meeting place for the clan, with new Ravnos appearing then leaving again after a few weeks. For those who still survive, Vegas represents a safe harbor, a familiar place where they can be anonymous yet not moderate their behavior.

The Brujah find Vegas exciting, with its garish imagery and endless variety. They appreciate a place where you can look, dress, and act any way you choose, as long as you have the confidence (and the money) to pull it off.

Not surprisingly, Toreador frequent Las Vegas — the city's over-the-top showmanship appeals to those obsessed with performance art or architecture. They rarely stay, however — after a few months, the scenery begins to bore them and the cloying mixture of commercialism, hope and failure pushes them away.

The Malkavians also delight in Vegas, which isn't surprising considering the insanely lavish spectacles along the Strip. The architects of Vegas demonstrated a nontraditional creativity equal to any Malkavian, so the kooks find a sense of familiarity here. Of course, since some Malkavians believe themselves to be in different time periods and countries, they flock to places like the Luxor and Caesar's Palace — the buildings match their expectations and their outlandish clothing blends right in.

THE ARCHITECT

One of the Kindred who makes his haven in Vegas is a Toreador named Sands. Sands worked as an architect in England during the 17th century. Sands stays in Caesar's Palace, the first of the great resort hotels. Other Kindred look up to Sands, admiring his calm elegance and his impressive self-control. Sands acknowledges Benedic as the prince but otherwise does as he likes; many Kindred look to him to establish protocol whenever anything new occurs. Sands is one of the most influential Kindred on the Strip, and his word carries at least as much weight as Benedic's.

THE MOB

Gambling, prostitution and alcohol have always been profitable for organized crime, so it's no surprise that the mob has a major stake in Las Vegas. They directly influence many of the casinos and hotels, and receive a "business association" fee — a percentage of profits — from the rest. The mob stays out of most other aspects of running the city. As long as their



profits remain intact and their reputations secure, they don't really care what goes on. Different families have interests in the various casinos, and most have representatives who live in those locations full time, providing on-the-spot "advice and guidance." The families meet regularly to discuss business matters and handle any conflicts that arise. The urbane Mr. Manelli, the most prominent mobster in Vegas, organizes the meetings. Mr. Manelli lives at The Golden Nugget, an elegant old-style hotel with several of the world's largest gold nuggets on display.

The mob maintains an arrangement with the Las Vegas Police. The police, in return for "monthly cash incentives," ignore most Mafia activities, provided no witnesses saw anything damning and no one got seriously hurt. Even in cases involving murders performed by the mob, the police tend to misplace evidence or overlook important clues. This doesn't conflict with the police's primary duty, that of maintaining order on the Strip — it's in the mob's best interest to maintain order there as well.

The Mafia knows of the Kindred in Las Vegas. Actually, Rothstein has connections to the Mafia; his family has influence at Bally's, of course, and he also has a stake in several other casinos. The other families respect him. A few know that he is one of the undead. Rothstein has tried several times to turn the Mafia against Benedic, but each time Mr. Manelli has pointed out that Benedic's rules keep the city's Kindred orderly, and his rules prevent them from interfering in the Mafia's business. As long as that situation continues, the families have no dispute with Benedic. Besides, many of the Kindred prey on the weak, the destitute and the homeless — all elements that detract from the appearance of the city. Benedic, for his part, sees no reason to interfere with the Mafia as long as they don't become a danger to the local Kindred. So far the mutual avoidance policy has paid off. Of course, individual Kindred may have arrangements of their own with the Mafia, but no problems have occurred.

The one thing the mob doesn't tolerate is people causing problems. That can include anything from asking too many questions about certain business owners to opening a casino without permission to disrupting Mr. Manelli's favorite show (Siegfried and Roy — they perform at the Mirage. Mr. Manelli always has a front row seat). The response, depending on the kind of trouble and the location (and the number of people around), ranges from polite requests to leave to breaking limbs. A second response, if required, is always more severe — the mob doesn't like to repeat itself.

A NEW FACE

Even in Vegas, some things demand attention. And the Kindred pay closer attention to certain details than anyone else. Especially now.

Stories have recently circulated among the Vegas Kindred about a man who shows up every once in a while, "watches," and then disappears. The descriptions, such as

they are, all match — average height, average build, short dark hair, possibly bearded, wearing jeans and a windbreaker. No one manages to get a good look at him, and he never speaks or takes any sort of overt action, even when he sees Kindred feeding. The man doesn't seem to be any sort of threat, but it is a bit unnerving — Kindred are used to being the watchers, not the watched.

The man makes no attempt to hide himself, and he's been seen not only by Kindred but also by local hookers, thugs and drug dealers. Some of the streetwalkers think he's been in Vegas for at least a few years. He's never seen on the Strip itself, but always nearby.

Though the Kindred of Vegas have yet to make much of an investigation, asking around can turn up some clues. A young hooker who calls herself Spice remembers seeing the man drive by one night. He drove an old brown Ford with local plates. A check through the DMV's records matches his description with a man named Sam Delaware. Delaware once lived in North Carolina but moved to Vegas 10 years ago. The address on his license turns out to be an apartment a few blocks from the Strip. A search of his place doesn't reveal much — pictures of him with other people, obviously friends and family, hang on the walls, but he clearly lives alone with few possessions. He owns a top-end computer, apparently custom-built and heavily encrypted, with connection cords for a Palm Pilot. Delaware carries a Palm Pilot with a built-in cellular modem, but even if the device is somehow stolen it doesn't reveal anything beyond an addiction to solitaire games.

MORE NEW FACES

The strange man who watches continues to show up at odd places and times. But now he isn't alone. Another man has also appeared, acting the same way. Then a woman. Then several more men and women. In Vegas, new faces aren't anything new — people come and go all the time. Vegas is, after all, a party town. But these strangers are different.

For one thing, no one really "sees" them. Not that they're invisible — far from it. But none of the Kindred get a close look at them. Their faces seem hard to focus on, or just not interesting enough to attract attention. Their clothes are nondescript, but not so bland as to be distinctively noticeable. In short, nothing about these strangers attracts any attention or notice. And that very fact attracts attention.

The most disturbing aspect about these strangers is that they don't do anything. They have no jobs. That's not unusual — many of the Kindred in Vegas don't bother with jobs either, surviving off money they've stockpiled or letting their ghouls support them. But these strangers don't even gamble. Or drink. Or solicit prostitutes. They don't do anything at all, beyond walking and driving around and occasionally taking tours. The really odd thing about their lack of activity is that they don't take any pictures. Nor do they buy postcards. Not every tourist is a shutterbug, but most

at least bring a camera in case something really exciting happens. None of these people seem to even own a camera.

Nor do these new people show any organization. It's rare to see two of them together at night — usually they're alone. Each one looks a little different, dresses differently, walks and talks differently. Both men and women appear, of various ethnic groups, ages, and body types — none of them unusual in any way. They don't meet anywhere at night, or travel in groups, or have anything that could identify them as all being together. To all appearances, they don't even know each other.

Visually nondescript, utterly passive, completely nonconfrontational, utterly totally solitary — everything about these strangers screams that they are harmless, beneath notice. But something about them, some sensation, something in the air, hints otherwise. That subtle aspect suggests that there's something going on here, something important. Something dangerous. And if that's true, it's so well concealed that no one can even definitely say it's there. That's got the Kindred worried.

The strangers do have one element in common — they all go on tours. Together. There doesn't seem to be any arrangement about it, but every once in a while they each wind up on the same tour or boat ride or trolley. They go their separate ways when the tours end, until the next time they wind up together again.

THE COLOR OF GOLD

These nondescript strangers would never have been spotted but for their auras. To those with Aura Perception, the strangers' auras are clearly visible and the only distinct thing about them. Their auras are gold, shimmering and sparkling, alive with energy and power. No one, not even the oldest and wisest of the Kindred, has seen anything like this before.

Not that the strangers seem to be doing anything with their golden auras. They don't cast spells, they haven't turned into giant monsters or altered form, they haven't passed through walls or revealed inhuman speed and strength. In fact, if any of the Kindred manage to corner and attack a stranger, she puts up a good fight but doesn't reveal any abilities beyond those of a normal human. Their blood seems normal if imbibed and provides vitae as normal. However, any Kindred foolish enough to Embrace one of the strangers discovers that this does not work — the stranger simply stays dead.

Two of the strangers, the man named Davis and the woman named Richards, are locals. If they are killed, Davis's wife claims his body, and Richards's cousin claims hers. Sam Delaware's ex-wife eventually claims his body, and the others each have siblings, parents or spouses somewhere — if Erik dies, two separate women, both claiming to be his wife, come for him. The only exception is Darla — she apparently has no living relatives.

None of the strangers has any form of identification. They carry only a small amount of cash. They reserve their hotel rooms in advance, and pay with credit cards — at least

one card used by a stranger turns out to belong to a man named Harry Lisbon, who lives in Los Angeles. He has never heard of these strangers, hasn't been to Las Vegas in three years, and claims not to own have an account with the credit card company.

EASY PICKINGS

Oddly enough, the appearance of the strangers doesn't seem to be causing any problems. Far from it. Over the next few weeks, things seem to get even better for the Kindred, despite their mysterious watchers.

For whatever reason, more of the dispossessed appear on the street — more hookers, more homeless, more wanderers and drunks. More and more people start taking walks alone late at night, down back alleys and along side streets — places where it's easy to disappear, or to have an unexpected late-night encounter. Muggers, winos, hookers, loners — it's a veritable smorgasbord of vitae. Pickings in Vegas have never been easier.

Oddly enough, people seem to be congregating toward the southern end of the Strip. Then again, the Strip itself is the southern portion of Las Vegas Boulevard, so it's not that unusual — to the north is the business district, which isn't as flashy and doesn't house as many entertainments. More and more the people drift southward, as if drawn to something.

CREEPSHOW

Shortly after the story begins, a new casino opens one block from the southernmost tip of the Strip. The place calls itself the Creepshow, and its gimmick is monsters.

A young couple sits on a park bench, enjoying the warm weather and the comfort of each other's arms. Suddenly, a pale hand erupts from the bushes, wraps around the man's throat, and jerks him backward over the fence and into the bushes. The girl screams as the sounds of tearing come from the shaking foliage, and the man's groans suddenly stop. She finally recovers enough to leap from the bench, but before she reaches safety the same hand, now spattered with blood, snakes forth and catches her arm. She struggles, but is no match for its strength, and slowly it drags her back into the darkness of the leaves, where a single piercing scream cuts off, leaving only silence and a faint rustling.

The people clustered around stand motionless, aghast at what they just witnessed. Then, all together, they burst into applause, laughing and smiling as they walk away, leaving the scene of carnage untouched.

The Creepshow has been designed to appeal to lovers of old horror movies and boasts every creature cliché imaginable. Shambling hulks, pasty-faced bloodsuckers in capes, vicious werewolves, bandage-wrapped mummies, rag-shrouded ghosts — the works. Some of the creatures are animatronic, rooted to a single spot and set to perform at specific times. Others are costumed actors who wander around and “menace” the guests. Staged horror scenes occur nightly, scary noises abound, and screams frequently ring out in the



night air. Unlike most casinos, which remain open 24 hours, the Creepshow opens its doors at dusk and shuts them again at dawn, to play up the element of horror.

The building itself is an old Gothic-style cathedral, once an actual house of worship, but almost a decade ago its congregation faded away and the doors closed for good. Rumors say that the Church had frequent offers for the property but refused to sell, afraid it would be used for gambling or other sinful purposes. The cathedral stands four stories tall, built of rough stone, with flying buttresses, turrets at the top, and stained glass windows throughout. The interior has rough stone-paved floors, vaulted stone ceilings, ornate pillars, and narrow but high-arched doors. Wall-sconces and wrought-iron chandeliers provide the only lighting. A curving stone staircase in back leads to the upper floors. The main hall, originally the nave of the cathedral, holds the gambling tables, slot machines and the bar. A restaurant located in the antechamber offers grilled foods and other American fare. Former confessionals house the bathrooms. The upstairs is off-limits to guests and houses the casino offices. There's even a basement to the cathedral — a dark place with winding corridors and “meditation spaces” that look suspiciously like prison cells, dark and bare except for a hole in the back and a pile of straw along one wall.

The building stands in the middle of a large cemetery park, filled with crumbling old mausoleums and faded tombstones. Winding paths run between the plots, and wrought-iron benches provide guests an opportunity to enjoy the quiet. A tall fence surrounds the grounds, and oaks and pines stand at intervals along it, cutting out the light and sound of the Strip. Gaslights (lit at dusk and extinguished at dawn) are scattered about and don't so much illuminate as cast long shadows, confusing distance and direction. Rumors say that some of the mausoleums house entrances to the catacombs beneath the cathedral, and guests often test to see which mausoleums are open, sneaking inside to take advantage of their privacy.

The Creepshow is a vampire's dream, since violating the Masquerade is all but impossible here. People see fangs and assume they're fake. A vampire sinks into the ground and onlookers marvel at how well the trapdoor is hidden. Someone could probably grab a person in public, drag them into the bushes, drain them dry while the crowd applauds the special effects. The Creepshow is bloodsucking heaven.

One odd detail about the Creepshow is its ownership. No one knows who owns it. A development company purchased the church several years ago, but another company bought them in turn, and no one knows any details about the second company, or even if they still hold the title to the place. A woman named Marsha Clute runs the Creepshow, but she received the job anonymously by mail (the packet contained enough particulars, along with a substantial check, for her to take the offer seriously). She has full authority over the establishment, and the few instructions she's received since

opening have all been by registered mail. No return address. The profits are deposited in a numbered account, opened by hand, and so far nothing has been withdrawn. This only adds to the eerie appeal of the Creepshow, of course — rumors abound about its mysterious owner, from the mob to some eccentric billionaire to an unsettled ghost to a foreign nation.

The first rumor, about mob ownership, is definitely not true. Shortly after opening, Ms. Clute received a visit from Mr. Manelli, representing “the local business organization.” He welcomed her to the community and strongly encouraged her to join, “for mutual benefit and protection.” Ms. Clute refused outright, and showed Manelli the door. The mobster has been back several times, but to no avail — Ms. Clute remains adamantly opposed to joining his organization.

Sands doesn't trust the Creepshow at first — the vampiric theme hits a bit too close to home, and the existence of the unknown owner troubles him. But after several nights, when no problems arise, he decides it's safe to inspect it himself. He immediately falls in love with the pseudo-Gothic charm of the place — “Where else could neon and stained glass go so well together?” he comments — and begins to frequent the establishment himself, eventually staking out a regular seat at one of the baccarat tables. After seeing that, other Kindred also frequent the Creepshow since it's so close to their feeding grounds.

SAFE HAVEN

What of the mysterious strangers? They haven't appeared at the Creepshow — in fact, no one has seen any of them anywhere near the place. But the rest of town is a different story. More strangers arrive from out of town, reports of them become more frequent, and they start appearing in pairs and in small groups around Vegas, proving that they do all know each other after all. They also display an uncanny ability to find Kindred in the midst of feeding — it's getting so you can't grab a bite anywhere else in town without several of these enigmatic individuals showing up. They don't attack or make any threatening moves, nor do they attempt to rescue the intended victim. All they do is watch, as if they're studying a specimen.

Naturally, some of the more aggressive Kindred attack the mysterious strangers, angry at being interrupted and spied upon — those Kindred discover, much to their chagrin, that while the strangers don't ever start a fight, they can certainly hold their own. None of the strangers show unusual strength or speed, but something is definitely different about them. Some of the Kindred suggest wiping out the strangers once and for all, just to be safe, but they don't really know enough about the strangers to attack them effectively. Besides, the strangers seem to be frequenting only the north end of town, where the food supply is growing scarce anyway. Because of this, several more of the Kindred migrate to the area around the Creepshow, the one place that seems safe.

THE HUNTERS

The strangers with the golden auras are actually hunters (see *Hunter: The Reckoning* if you don't know what hunters are yet). Sam Delaware has gathered eleven other hunters with similar goals. Several of them, like him, hail from Las Vegas — others he met online, bonded with, and invited to visit.

Sam first became aware of vampires three years ago, when he found the daughter of a friend dead, her neck torn out. Staring at the bloodless body, Sam knew that no human could have done such a thing. In the weeks that followed, the image stuck in his head. He had to find whatever had done this, and put a stop to it. He spent weeks wandering the streets, searching for... *something*. And, when he saw the pale-skinned woman leap from a rooftop onto a motorcycle and ride off, he knew he'd found it. Since then, Sam has spotted at least five vampires in Vegas, mostly on the Strip itself. He knows he's no match for them, but he can't sit by and watch them feed off people. Finding other hunters online, Sam explained his dilemma, and a woman who called herself Darla offered an answer — if you can't beat them by force, take them by guile. A few months later, Sam heard that the old cathedral near the Strip had finally been sold and was being converted into a new casino. That gave him an idea, and over the last three years he's refined it until, finally, it's ready.

Every week or so, the hunters take a tour or go on a ride together — they arranged their schedule before meeting in Vegas, so they don't need to communicate about the rides. One day they all ride down the Nile at the Luxor. Another day they take the roller coaster ride around Coney Island at New York-New York. Later, they trek out to Hoover Dam, 25 miles beyond the city. Each activity takes place during the day to avoid Kindred notice, and the hunters always arrive and leave separately. During the rides, they talk and plan. The constant movement keeps them active and alert, and prevents anyone from spying on them.

Each of the hunters arrived with either a laptop or a palmtop — nothing unusual, in this day and age. All of their communications, beyond the tours, they handle through an online list-server. The members list is confidential, and only the name of the list-server appears on the messages. Most check their e-mail every night in case of urgent messages. They exchange most of their information during their day trips — the server helps in case of emergencies, or if situations change between trips.

The seven hunters from out of town each stay at a different hotel, usually the smaller, cheaper places on the outskirts of the city — the Super 8, Holiday Inn, Nevada Inn, Motel 6. Only one of them, a blond, bearded man named Erik, let luxury overwhelm prudence — he has a room at the Mirage.

The hunters came prepared — they aren't quite sure what works on vampires, so they've brought everything they could think of. Two carry pistols, and most have a stake of some sort — Darla actually has a small crossbow. They each have either a cigarette lighter or a book of matches. They also each carry a cross and garlic, and Erik and another man, Richards, both brought small vials of holy water. These are only for personal defense, however — they all know that violence isn't their most effective weapon.

THE VANISHINGS

Life in Vegas was good for the Kindred. They were safe, full of blood, content. Then they begin disappearing.

It starts when Langely, a Malkavian and permanent resident in the city, disappears. Langely drives the trolley every night, from dusk until dawn. She loves the feeling of gliding through the city, shielded from all the lights and noise but able to watch them drift by. Every Kindred in the city knows her, and no one bears her any ill will — she keeps herself well out of other people's business, and she's always willing to trade gossip. Then, one night, she's gone. No one knows where or why, but Langely's been driving the trolley for five years, and she's never missed a single night.

The next night, another Kindred, a visiting Brujah didn't show up to go clubbing with his coterie. The others think that something else came up, and enjoy themselves. But the next night he still doesn't show up, and his associates get a little worried. The third night, he still doesn't show. They go searching, but find nothing.

Then, several nights later, the Ravnos are seen searching for one of their own — one who makes her haven in Vegas and has for several years. The Ravnos don't usually tell others what they're doing or where they're going, but they always keep each other informed. One never vanishes without a word.

Kindred continue to disappear. Sometimes a week goes by without anything happening. Then, in the same night, two disappear. The missing hail from different clans and different parts of town. The only common factor is that they're Kindred in Vegas.

Acquaintances of the missing Kindred form search parties, hoping to find out what happened, but they always come away with nothing. No blood, no bones, no ashes. Nothing. Some of the Kindred keep to their havens more, or travel in groups, and those with enemies watch over their shoulders more carefully. Benedic seems unconcerned — after all, no one close to him has vanished. All the same, he has Montrose look into it, just to be safe. Rothstein, convinced the disappearances mask a plot by Benedic, looks for ways to turn the cautious atmosphere to his advantage. Sands ignores the problem, though he stays in the Creepshow longer each night.

CAUSE FOR ALARM

Then, one night, someone staggers into Benedic's presence.

The figure that drags itself forward, one leg pulled uselessly behind it, hands scraping the floor, once looked human. It was once young and strong and lithe. Even after death, it still appeared powerful, graceful, attractive. Now, it's barely held together, leaving viscous smears of soot and blood behind it on the floor.

The creature looks up, its face a mass of blackened flesh with sagging holes revealing white bone. Its eyes are charred, nose burnt away, lips gone. The teeth remain, yellowed from heat and cracked but still there, complete with fangs. Its mouth opens, and a single word escapes, as dry and cracked as the tongue that formed it—

"Sun."

It's Zip, a young Ravnos who came to town only the week before. He's been burned over most of his body and can barely fight off torpor. Once he's been given blood, he explains in fits and starts that, while walking around the night before, someone crept up on him from behind and ambushed him. He woke to find himself staked and pinned to the ground, somewhere outside of town judging from the lack of buildings. Dawn was mere minutes away. He could sense people nearby, watching, but couldn't see or hear them. Then the sun came up, and he forgot about everything else. After a few seconds, as he passed out from the pain, they threw a blanket over him. The next thing he knew, night had fallen, and he was lying in an alley. He dragged himself to Benedic's estate, both for help and to tell him what happened.

An expedition to the eastern edge of town, with significant time and patience, finds the spot where Zip was staked — post holes have been dug in the ground, in the shape of an "X," and there's some ash between them where Zip burned. No footprints, no fingerprints, no trace of the stakes themselves. It took several people or one very strong person to incapacitate him, carry him away, and stake him without his waking up and getting free.

Over the next week or two, more Kindred disappear, then stagger back into town. Each one tells a similar story — someone they couldn't see captured them, tortured them and then dumped them back on the streets the following night. Each victim has been wounded, but all in different ways. One was stabbed repeatedly. Another was shot. A third was staked — in several different places. A fourth was burned by acid, a fifth by fire. One was made to eat garlic then was sprayed with holy water. Another was injected with alcohol, and another with drugs of some sort. None got a look at their captors, or a clear glimpse of the location, and none knows how they were captured, or why they were released. But everyone knows that someone is definitely out there, or something, and it's toying with them.

UNEXPECTED TROUBLE

One afternoon, Mr. Manelli returns to the Creepshow with several of his larger "associates." He speaks to Ms. Clute at length. She remains calm and firm, and finally Manelli turns and storms off with his men. The matter is far from over.

The mob has decided that it definitely wants a piece of the Creepshow, because they cannot allow one resort to exist outside their influence. Besides, the Creepshow has the potential to become one of the hottest places in town. But Ms. Clute continues to refuse their suggestions. On this last visit, Mr. Manelli makes it clear that the Creepshow is under his protection — or else. Clute refuses again, and informs him that they will never allow the mob any influence over them. Manelli storms out after this, but warns that he will be back.

The hunters never anticipated this — they counted on the Kindred, but because of their obsession with the supernatural they never even considered the possibility of human adversaries. When Ms. Clute first mentioned Mr. Manelli's offer (via a fax number she was given for emergencies), her employer instructed her to refuse him at all costs — in order for the Creepshow to remain useful to the hunters' plans, no outside influence could be allowed. But they hadn't reckoned on the mob's insistence, or its willingness to use more physical tactics.

The players' characters can definitely exploit this miscalculation. The mob already wants a share of the Creepshow

— a little nudging could make them even more aggressive. If there's an obvious risk to the Creepshow, the hunters have to intervene or sacrifice their plans. This not only draws them into the open, but it also fouls their plans, and gives the Kindred time to regroup.

Of course, on the down side, if the mob decides to raise havoc at the Creepshow it could inconvenience any Kindred frequenting the casino — including Sands. Mob activity in the area almost certainly means a temporary drop in traffic to the area, meaning a paucity of easy blood. That irritates other Kindred nearby, since they all need to scrounge for sustenance elsewhere, and only a handful of easy options still remain.

DEAD ZONE

Not every Kindred prefers the Strip for feeding. Some of them don't trust any place that bright and busy and aim for the quieter sections on the edge of town. Others value their privacy, and look for spots well away from other Kindred. Many like the thrill, the uncertainty of prowling well away from the safety of numbers, the rush of being the ultimate predator. For whatever reason, some of the Kindred prowl in the quieter sections of Las Vegas, enjoying the solitude.

And then they start to die. Only those on the outskirts of town, at first. Then closer in. Then those along the upper edges of Las Vegas Boulevard, near downtown, die as well.



Unlike before, they aren't disappearing, or turning up with odd wounds and strange stories. They're meeting quick and efficient Final Deaths. Only those who go out alone or in pairs die, and each time the ashes turn up where only another Kindred can find them — in someone's haven, near someone's favorite spot, or on one of the tables in a hotel conference room booked by Kindred. Whoever's doing it knows the undead. They use flame, holy water, guns with silencers, stakes — only what works. Each time, if the Kindred don't dispose of the ashes themselves, when they return the remains have disappeared without a trace. The police haven't seen any of this, the mob doesn't seem to know about it — no one has any idea what is going on. Only the Kindred know that someone, or something, is hunting them — hunting the hunters.

Some Kindred try to fight back, of course, but to no avail. Whoever it is, they never attack or even reveal themselves to more than two Kindred at a time. And those who do see them don't survive. The hunters don't stop. Slowly but surely, they're driving the Kindred to the south. Many of the visiting Kindred take this as a hint and leave town for less hostile environs. Sands cautions patience for those who remain. In time, whoever is doing this will grow tired, or old, and go away. The Kindred can wait.

DEAD MAN'S HAND

Time goes by, and Kindred continue to disappear. Some reappear, some don't. Tensions run high, and tempers are short.

Then the unspeakable happens. One night, Sands does not appear at the Creepshow. He's been there every night since he announced his approval of the place, playing baccarat at the same table, and now he's nowhere to be seen. His cronies, already paranoid, can't find him.

The next night, a small pile of ash appears in the Creepshow cemetery. It could be the remains of a Kindred. It could be Sands. No one is sure. But the tombstone in front of the ash has Sands's name on it (The Spirit's Touch can confirm that the ashes are all that remain of Sands).

Other Vegas Kindred generally held Sands in high regard — Benedic admired his independence (as long as it didn't threaten him) and Rothstein respected his self-control, while Montrose envied his ability to stay calm in any situation. Others looked to Sands during the recent killings — as long as he remained calm, the situation could still be resolved. Now Sands is gone.

SECRETS

The hunters actually own the Creepshow, through a dummy corporation owned by Sam Delaware. Various companies and individuals contributed money to the venture, including several other hunters Sam had contacted online. Ms. Clute, however, is not a hunter — she genuinely has no idea what's going on, beyond the fact that she is being paid

to run the Creepshow efficiently. During renovation, the hunters modified the Creepshow to better suit their needs. All of the walls are solid stone, of course, and the doors are built to withstand heavy damage. A number of hidden passageways exist, as well as hidden entrances into the cathedral. Real catacombs have been carved beneath the cathedral, with solid stone on all sides — the catacombs may well be older than the cathedral, as no one is sure who created them or even when, and no one knows exactly where all the tunnels lead. Only the catacomb's doors have been altered — they possess normal handles on the outside but hidden release levers on the inside. Security cameras cover the cathedral entrances, stairwells, elevators and strategic points throughout the cemetery. The hunters can observe anyone coming or going from the Creepshow and track of everything inside the building.

The hunters are deliberately baiting the Kindred with the Creepshow. They initially paid people to hang out on the neighboring streets, creating easier feeding opportunities. Then the hunters coerced more of the street people to move south, toward the Creepshow — some they paid to move, others they simply bullied into relocating. They've drawn the Kindred toward the Creepshow, and deliberately created the sense that the casino is a safe place where Kindred can find sustenance with little effort. Eventually they hope to trap all the Kindred in a single place, the Creepshow, so that they can be observed "in the wild" — it's the Kindred equivalent of a zoo exhibit.

FORCING THE ISSUE

Obviously, the characters can take a more aggressive stance rather than simply reacting to what's occurring. They can identify the hunters and watch them for patterns and weaknesses. They could isolate one and coerce information from him. They could also simply find and *kill* all of the hunters — although, if the characters do that, they may never know who the hunters are, how many are out there, what they can do, or why they're after the Kindred.

The hunters also have a major weakness of their own — innocent bystanders. If the Kindred take some of the locals or tourists hostage, several hunters (particularly Richards, Erik and one of the other women, Casey Foster) reveal themselves and try to negotiate for the hostages' release. But the hunters try to avoid all contact at first, and avoid any open conflict until the final hunt, to keep from tipping their hand — they want to keep the Kindred on edge, and the best way to do that is with doubt, not anger. As long as they don't give the Kindred someone to focus on as the enemy, they increase the level of fear and uncertainty, and make the Kindred less sure of their own actions.

DIVISION WITHIN

Another weakness of the hunters is the fact that, like the Kindred, each has their own personality, their own

plans, and their own way of doing things. Sam Delaware brought the others together; he engineered the purchase of the Creepshow and conceived the gradual herding of the Kindred to the south. Several of the hunters hate waiting, and want to end the evil where they see it. Erik and Darla are the most outspoken of these — Erik sees himself as a hero and grows impatient while Darla simply loathes letting vampires survive, even if waiting provides a better chance to destroy them all. Davis and Richards, on the other hand, are even more cautious than Sam — both of them are from Vegas, and have family and friends nearby. Davis is actually married and has two children. Because of this, neither of them want to act until they're absolutely sure everything is ready, and both of them avoid involvement in physical activity whenever possible. Because of this, the longer they wait the more division appears between the hunters, and the more difficulty Sam has holding them together and keeping them focused. This makes matters easier for the Kindred, because a divided enemy is a clumsy enemy, and clumsy enemies make costly mistakes.

UNEXPECTED AID

The one factor the hunters seriously miscalculated is the mob's determination and involvement. Mr. Manelli finally grows tired of veiled threats and decides that a "demonstration" is in order. He sends his buttonmen to the Creepshow, to mess the place up a little and disrupt business temporarily. He hopes Ms. Clute takes the hint.

If pushed far enough by the players' characters, Manelli might even decide that the Creepshow has more value as an example than as a functioning business. Accidents happen, and if the Creepshow burns down or closes down for some reason other businesses understand the message — it's best to respect the mob's wishes. Even if Manelli doesn't go that far, his men provide an excellent distraction. They're used to people listening to them, and they're liable to raise a fuss if someone ignores or contradicts them, whether that's a Kindred, a hunter or a passing tourist. This makes them unpredictable, and a major danger to the hunters' plans.

If the players' characters learn that the Creepshow is run by hunters and that the mob wants to muscle in on the casino, they might establish an understanding with Manelli, particularly if the hunters are cast as their mutual enemies. The fact that Rothstein is involved with the Mafia makes this more likely — Manelli already has dealings with the Kindred, and already recognizes that, at times, their interests may align. Manelli has a lot of connections and a lot of money — he also has several "crews," and can get more with a phone call. In a pinch, he can even use the police as bully boys, provided it isn't anything too illegal — breaking into "a suspected drug hangout" and "arresting likely suspects" is well within the realm of possibility. And, of course, Manelli's men can operate during the day. The hunters aren't expecting any daylight opposition, nor

do they expect trouble from mortals — most of them don't even carry conventional weapons. Still, Manelli could turn on the Kindred himself, if he sees this as an opportune time to remove more potential problems. It depends on how much trouble the Kindred in question have caused in Vegas recently, and particularly how much they've disrupted business on the Strip. Of course, if the characters have angered Rothstein, he tries to convince Manelli that they pose a very real danger to mob operations.

KEEPING THE PEACE

The Las Vegas Police are also a factor here, and another one that the hunters have overlooked. Vegas cops are used to dealing with all sorts of crazies, from the obvious big-time losers who try to take out their failures on others to the subtle ones who think they can ignore the laws because they have money. Over the years, the cops learned to be ready for anything, and they're very good at stopping problems like drunken fights and amphetamine-crazed parties before things get out of hand. Vegas cops don't need to worry about prostitution, since it's legal in Nevada — this gives them time to concentrate on other issues, such as drugs, theft and violence. Though Manelli has some degree of control over the police, anyone caught waving a gun or otherwise threatening bystanders gets arrested and taken into custody, no matter who they are.

The Vegas police don't know about the Kindred. The police have some ties to Manelli, but for the most part that means they report anything major to him and they gloss over any problems caused by mob members. The police also take "suggestions" from Manelli — where to look for a suspected killer, for example, or when a riot might take place.

The police can't do much about the hunters, of course — most of them don't carry real weapons, and they haven't committed any actual crimes (not against humans, anyway). But they might be suspicious of this group who meet at random in public and then separate again after an hour or two. Are they drug dealers? Smugglers? Organized criminals? If the police are told about the hunters' odd behavior, they consider it worth checking out, and they may eventually bring in the hunters for questioning, most likely on suspicion of carrying and selling illegal narcotics. The hunters don't have any drugs, of course, but they still lose some time, and the police keep an eye on them after that.

Naturally, if a hunter gets careless and the police catch him or her fighting Kindred, that hunter suddenly has a lot of explaining to do.

UPHEAVAL

With all of the uncertainty and fear, the timing is ideal for ambitious Kindred to advance themselves. Alliances can be made while Kindred are desperate for support and protection, and threats can be leveled at enemies already too

frightened to leave their havens. Other disappearances can be blamed on the strangers.

Rothstein is the Kindred most likely to take advantage of the situation. He's been calling himself the "prince" for years, but as long as Benedic remains, it's only a hollow claim. Many of Benedic's supporters are gone now, however, and the rest are scurrying to protect themselves, leaving the prince more vulnerable than ever. Rothstein may decide to usurp Benedic's claim to domain and finish him off, or he may simply kill off Benedic's allies and leave the prince trapped and powerless.

The anarchs are also an issue. They may decide that now is a good time to strike against the crumbling status quo and prove that Vegas stands open to everyone. Clever anarchs may even argue that, if not for the Camarilla and Giovanni looking out for their own interests, the disappearances and murders never would have happened. Of course, if Rothstein makes a move to claim domain, the anarchs may see him as the greater threat — Benedic, at least, usually keeps to himself, while Rothstein is almost always on the Strip.

The Sabbat poses an even greater danger. They send scouts into Las Vegas to test its integrity. If they learn of the current troubles, they see an opportunity to strike while the Vegas Kindred are distracted. They might choose to start subtly, sending a small handful of Kindred in to assess the situation, or they might simply launch an all-out crusade, moving quickly to increase the element of surprise. Either way, the Vegas Kindred could find themselves caught between the Sabbat on one side and the hunters on the other. At least the Sabbat are enemies they know.

A PRINCE'S WRATH

Benedic prefers subtlety to combat, and dislikes becoming personally involved in matters, which is why he usually acts through Montrose. With all the disappearances, the safest place for him is within his own estate. He plans to let the entire matter blow over — as Sands pointed out, eventually the rabble must grow old or leave.

Still, Benedic is aware that Rothstein wants him gone. Up to this point, Rothstein has always been afraid to make an overt move. Now, though, while the city is in turmoil, Benedic could be talked into taking the fight to Rothstein, catching his nemesis by surprise. Needless to say, anyone who helps him can win his favor and call on him for help themselves.

CUTTING DEALS

Rothstein happily forms alliances with anyone who helps him remove Benedic from power. He's short-tempered and bloodthirsty, but he's also a businessman and recognizes the value of a good reputation — because of this, unless his new allies fail him or pose a personal threat, Rothstein honors any pact he's made. Since he's connected

to the mob, he can also speak for them to some degree, offering an alliance and possible aid. This is extremely useful, both because of the mob's influence in Vegas and for the simple fact that they can operate during the day.

The anarchs don't make sweeping deals — they don't have any real organization to authorize or enforce them. But individual anarchs and even small groups agree to join forces temporarily, to protect themselves from the recent attacks and hopefully to remove the danger. Some anarchs are trustworthy, others aren't — it depends on the individual.

The Sabbat is delighted to make deals with any Kindred in Vegas, offering protection and membership in exchange for information, guidance, and assistance. They want to know where Benedic and Rothstein reside, what defenses they possess. Can the Sabbat be trusted to keep their end of the bargain? That depends on how useful they consider their new friends.

THE HUNT

Eventually, most of the vampires in Vegas, following Sands's lead, reside on the grounds of the Creepshow, or at least use the grounds as a feeding ground. This is exactly what the hunters planned. After they've learned all they can about the vampires, and they've terrorized the creatures to such a degree that they're jumping at shadows and cowering from random sounds, they intend to kill them. All of them. The plan begins with a small but smoky fire in the Creepshow offices two hours before sunset. When the fire alarm goes off everyone is evacuated, and the fire trucks arrive to search the building. The fire itself isn't a major problem, but they close the building temporarily, due to smoke damage. Thus, when the vampires wake up that night, there aren't any humans around the building. This prevents them from blending in and gaining fresh sustenance.

An hour after sunset, the gates to the cemetery are locked, trapping the vampires inside the grounds. Then the hunters methodically sweep the area and stake every vampire they find. Once they cover the cemetery they move on to the cathedral itself, searching room by room. They stay in groups of four or more, to keep from being overpowered. And the particular setting of the Creepshow helps by making the vampires more confused, providing sounds and movements all around, distracting them from the source of the real danger...

There, in the bushes! A sound, metal against bark, and a faint rustling, something being repositioned behind the leaves. It's them! You lunge forward, claws out, eyes alight and shred the foliage, snarling as you dive into their midst — and they snarl right back at you! You find yourself face to face, not with some human with a gun, but with a beast! A good head taller than you, its massive form swathed in fur, claws gleaming in the dim light, it throws back its head and howls, revealing fangs far longer than yours.

It's a puppet! One of those damn mechanicals this place is filled with! The Werewolf Howling at the Moon! You shake your head, trying to toss your feeling of gullibility, glad no one has witnessed your mistake. You'd laughed at this thing not two days before, watching it scare some hapless tourists. And now you're the one it's scaring! You turn to go, willing yourself not to look back at it — and find a man standing before you, a stake leveled at your chest. He's only a few feet away — somehow he crept up on you, probably while the monster was howling. Even in the dark you can see the golden glow that surrounds him, and you feel the soft wood invade your chest.

Then the golden glow is replaced by a red haze, fading quickly into darkness.

This also makes for a great scene, where the monsters are being stalked, among figures of monsters — vampires hiding behind fake vampires, jumping at faux werewolves, thrown off-guard by mechanical swamp witches and so on. What's real, and what isn't? Where better to dispose of monsters than a place dedicated to them?

THINGS FALL APART

Of course, the above is only what the hunters expect to happen. The reality offers something very different.

First of all, the hunters expect the Kindred to function either as a cohesive group or as utter individuals. They don't fully understand the complexities of Kindred society, the fact

that Kindred often form small groups and that each small group has its own agenda. The Vegas Kindred only work together when an immense threat forces them to. The hunters, although dangerous, do not by any means pose such a threat. Many of the Kindred don't even notice them, or at least don't let the hunters affect them — Benedic, for example, remains safely ensconced in his own haven, where the hunters cannot find him.

Second, the hunters underestimated the Kindred's willpower and intelligence. They see vampires as monsters, bestial creatures who feed off the living. Many of the Kindred aren't tricked into converging on the Creepshow, and those who do might recognize the trap and either go to ground or find a way to turn the tables.

Third, pure physical prowess plays a role. The hunters have strong motivation, and most of them are in reasonably good shape, but none of them are professional athletes or trained warriors. They've seen that some Kindred possess great strength or speed, but don't realize just how strong and fast Kindred can be, or that every Kindred, even one who looks like a child or an old woman, can leap a tall fence or shatter a strong door if necessary. The hunters are counting on having the Kindred so disarmed that they can't defend themselves properly. Most Kindred value their existence, however, and in desperation they may become even more dangerous than usual.



The other thing the hunters haven't counted on is the full power of the Kindred's Disciplines. They've glimpsed at what Celerity and Fortitude and Potence can do, even if they don't know the names for them, and they may have seen hints of Protean and probably Obfuscate and Dominate. Even if the hunters have seen a Discipline used, that doesn't mean they've seen its full potential. In battle, these abilities could turn the tide, especially if they shake the hunters' confidence early in the fight. Make the hunters hesitate and they become ineffective — it's exactly what the hunters are doing to the Kindred.

In the end, it may come down to a question of who can psyche out their opponent. The hunters have a careful plan, a dedicated group of people, and a thorough knowledge of the area. They also know their opponents are evil creatures that should be destroyed, and they know they've been chosen to do just that. Their major weakness is that they aren't fully sure of what the Kindred can do, and they know that, for all their fervor, they are only human. The Kindred have decades or centuries of experience at surviving, suing supernatural powers and hunting others. Their weakness is that they don't work well together, and they have no idea who or what they're up against — they don't know what the hunters can do, or even if they can be killed.

TRUE DEATH?

One thing the hunters may not fully understand is that Kindred are not truly alive — of course every vampire story deals with the undead, but when fighting someone who talks and moves and fights back, that may be hard to remember. Because of this, clever Kindred may be able to simply “play dead” — after all, they don't have a pulse. Some hunters, seeing a vampire lying motionless on the ground, eyes open and unblinking, skin cold and clammy, wounds leaking blood, may simply assume they're dead and move on. And they're right — the Kindred in question is dead. But he's always *been* dead — that doesn't mean he's finished.

AFTERMATH

If any hunters are still alive after the sun comes up, they go through the cathedral and drag out any vampires they find to let the sun finish them off. Then they check the mausoleums. After the bodies have been destroyed, the hunters clean up the area, and in a few days the Creepshow reopens for business. Ms. Clute contacts Mr. Manelli and agrees to join the Business Association — it's no longer crucial for the Creepshow to be free of outside influence. However, if Sam Delaware survived he leaves Las Vegas, convinced that he's rid the town of its vampire problem, and he sets out for another city, intending to continue the task of removing all such evil creatures from the world.

Not all of the hunters leave town, of course. The other two locals, Davis and Richards, go back to their own lives, although they keep watch for any further supernatural activ-

ity. One of the other hunters, Darla, decides to stay in Vegas as well — she's not so sure all the vampires are gone. The others return to their own homes and lives, but they stay in touch in case they need each other.

As for the Kindred, the survivors pick up the pieces and go on with their existences. Neither Benedic nor Rothstein entered the Creepshow, and both still retain several allies (unless the characters caused a shift in power). The Sabbat, unless aided, caused some damage but proved unable to take the city. The anarchs suffered the most from the hunters' actions, but more anarchs arrive as regularly as they ever did, and soon no one can tell the difference. But nothing's ever quite the same. Even if the Kindred killed all of the hunters, they know now that certain humans know about them and what they are. That's not so unusual — after all, some Kindred have mortal friends, allies, or retainers. But these humans had powers, powers the Kindred couldn't identify. And they were determined to destroy the Kindred. The problem is, there might be more of them out there. And, without scanning everyone's aura for hints of gold, there's no way to tell. They could be anywhere.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

BENEDIC, PRINCE OF LAS VEGAS

8th generation, childe of Charlemagne

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Director

Embrace: 1792

Apparent Age: early 40s

For 50 years, Benedic has been Prince of Las Vegas — many suspect that the position was a payoff from the Camarilla, either to keep Benedic out of the way or to keep him quiet about something. Regardless, Benedic sees Las Vegas as his charge, and the Kindred there need to be guided but allowed to grow. He maintains the peace and the Masquerade, but otherwise takes a *laissez-faire* attitude toward pryncedom. The biggest dangers come from the outside, particularly from the Sabbat in Southern California, and Benedic always considers ways to protect the city and fend off invaders. Over the years, he has found less reason to take personal action; since he entered Las Vegas, Benedic has only left his impressive estate and grounds a dozen times. Normally, he conducts all business through subordinates, particularly through the Nosferatu named Montrose.

Benedic has faintly olive skin, golden-brown curls and an aristocratic face. He dresses in expensive suits, designer sportswear and occasionally silk smoking jackets. He carries a cane with a mongoose-shaped silver head. His language is stately and slow, with frequent pauses, and he hates to be rushed. Benedic also dislikes machinery and

most modern appliances — even the telephone is still foreign to him — he only uses one when necessary, delegating other tasks to his retainers. He makes his haven in a large, stately manse toward the outskirts of Las Vegas, closer to the seedy side of the city than to the lights of the Strip. The grounds of his haven are cultivated, filled with hedges, trees and small gardens, and a high wall surrounds the entire area. The only entrance is the front gate, which is always manned.

MONTROSE, THE PRINCE'S TALON

9th generation, childe of Oliver the Black

Clan: Nosferatu

Nature: Conformist

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Embrace: 1843

Apparent Age: early 40s

The Nosferatu named Montrose is Benedic's chief confidant and enforcer, and many view him as the real power in Las Vegas. His real name is Geoffrey Alan Montrose. Before being Embraced in Chicago in the 19th century, he was a businessman, specializing in imported goods. In 1867, Montrose traveled to Fort Baker, seeking to hide his feeding amid the bustle of an Army base. When the Army moved on he stayed behind. By the time the railroad brought travelers in 1905, Montrose had already grown used to the area, and the city built up around him. When Benedic arrived as the new prince, Montrose offered him his services.

Montrose knows that, because of his twisted body, he can never be a popularly accepted prince — too many things still depend on personal appearance. Besides, he prefers working behind the scenes, facilitating events without spearheading them. The man in front is always the target, and Montrose has survived too many years to jeopardize it simply for recognition.

No one knows Las Vegas better than Montrose. He's explored every inch of it, from top to bottom, including the old catacombs under the southern end. Rumors claim that he's even been to the Setite temple and that he made some sort of arrangement with the Kindred there. All anyone knows for certain is that Montrose knows every nook and cranny of the Las Vegas, and has people stationed everywhere. His primary responsibility is watching for the Sabbat and preventing them from gaining any information about Vegas. He also keeps the peace in general, breaking up trouble among the anarchs and keeping Benedic apprised of current situations.

One of the reasons Montrose succeeds at his duties is that he understands the costs involved. Sometimes it becomes necessary to make sacrifices, give up properties, information or even friends. Montrose has no qualms about consigning a loyal ally to Final Death. Still, he knows better than to squander his resources. Benedic often summons him for a game of chess, and the two are well matched — Benedic is

more patient and sees more of the long-range opportunities, but Montrose is more aggressive and more willing to sacrifice pieces when necessary.

Montrose's appearance is gruesome. He has a crooked spine and neck, his face is squashed, his arms are curled to his chest and appear useless, and his hands are bony protrusions tipped with wicked black claws. Montrose uses this to his advantage, playing it up by dressing in horrifyingly incongruent designer suits, adding to the horror his image creates. He doesn't bother much with social niceties, either, because he lacks the patience for them.

SHLOMO ROTHSTEIN, CAPO OF LAS VEGAS

9th generation, childe of Julietta Putanesca

Clan: Giovanni

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Pedagogue

Embrace: 1911

Apparent Age: late 40s

Shlomo Rothstein always knew what he wanted to be. He wanted to be just like his *don's* wife, who never seemed to get any older. Julietta visited from time to time, always arriving at night — during the day she slept at her husband's estate. At night she sat and talked with the villagers, listening to what they did in her absence, giving advice and occasional orders, telling stories about the old times. The stories, in particular, fascinated Shlomo, whose devoutly Jewish family often suffered the prejudices of the other villagers — tales of men who ruled their towns completely, winning their respect through consideration and strength. As Shlomo grew older, he learned what the *don* and his wife really were, and often gave his Kindred *patroum* blood, as did the rest of the village. Shlomo's quick mind and willingness to be vicious impressed the Giovanni, and the boy became a ghoul. Nearly 30 years later, having proven his worth, Shlomo was Embraced, and eventually expanded his bloodline into the Rothstein family of Giovanni.

Unlike Julietta, Shlomo wanted more than just a quiet, parasitic existence among village rustics. He wanted power, fame and recognition. He wanted the chance to rule a city the way the heroes of Julietta's stories had ruled. While abroad, he discovered Las Vegas. The city was perfect — loud, bright, violent and filled with possibilities. Shlomo moved there, with three of his brood. The Rothsteins had connections with the mob through the Giovanni, and he strengthened those in Vegas, eventually winning a seat on the board. Having chosen Bally's as an ideal headquarters, Shlomo bought a majority interest in the casino, setting his family up in rooms on the top floor. Over the years, more of the family joined him, and he became the most powerful member, eventually dropping his first name altogether and simply going by Rothstein.

Rothstein is dangerous, in part because of his focus. He knows what he wants and aims straight for it, whether it takes a night or a decade. Right now Rothstein wants to be the “prince” of Las Vegas — but without any of the meaningless Camarilla notions attached. He’s claimed domain over the city anyway, but he knows that as long as Benedic remains he’s not really in charge. Unfortunately, Benedic has the nominal backing of the Camarilla, and has more supporters. For now, he waits for any opening.

Rothstein is a diplomat, first and foremost. He survives by deals and arrangements, trades and mergers and alliances. Despite his personal greed for power, Rothstein realizes that you must always protect those around you in order to win their loyalty, and that you must always abide by your word. Rothstein has become renowned for never breaking his word. Of course, he rarely makes grave commitments, and then only upon careful consideration. Some Kindred claim Rothstein is really the genie of Arabian legend because of his gift for finding loopholes in agreements and ways around promises. Rothstein is also known for his short temper — if something isn’t going his way, he becomes enraged, and his family has had to restrain him several times. That restraint is on Rothstein’s own orders — he knows of his weakness and hates it, but can’t overcome it.

Rothstein is a short, broad man with thick features, small eyes, and thinning black hair — it’s whispered that he asked not to be Embraced until his appearance was that of the *uomo di rispotti*. He dresses in expensive suits and wears costly watches and rings, but he moves like a boxer — short, jabbing motions, quick and incisive. His accent is very clearly Midwestern, a trait he has deliberately cultivated.

SANDS, THE ARCHITECT OF POPULAR OPINION

8th generation, childe of Margaret d’Hautmont

Clan: Toreador

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Embrace: 1699

Apparent Age: late 30s

Anthony Sebastian Sands was a brilliant architect in the 17th century, and much in demand by the English aristocracy. One of his patrons, a mysterious, elegant woman who appeared only after dark, rewarded him for his service and his genius by Embracing him. Unfortunately, this severed his link to humanity and destroyed his appreciation of the needs of others. Sands cursed her for her supposed gift and fled, unable to stay in England surrounded by his former successes.

For years Sands traveled across Europe, sometimes accepting small commissions from various nobles and

merchants but usually working as an assistant to a living architect, basking in the talents of others. Eventually he came to America, where he found a new career as a night laborer on the new multi-storied office buildings. Then he became enamored of the railroad, and set to work laying down tracks with other immigrants, moving ahead of the trains, seeing the countryside beforehand. Several people commented on the “ghost” who worked only at night, but he did his work well and never got sick, so the overseers ignored his peculiarities.

When the railroad reached Las Vegas, something about the place appealed to him. When the other workers moved on, he stayed behind. For years he stayed in the shadows, watching the people and their ways. When Caesar’s Palace first appeared, Sands was delighted, recognizing a modern rebirth of the showmanship of the English estates he had once contributed to. Then, years later, a young man named Steve Wynn appeared with an idea for a fabulous hotel-casino but few friends and no funding. Sands approached him and offered his aid; between the two of them, the Mirage was born. Sands is extremely proud of his contribution to the Mirage, although he has never spoken openly about it to anyone, and Wynn was sworn to secrecy from the beginning. He avoids the place most of the time, though, because it only serves to remind him that the design was not his at all, and that he has lost the ability to truly create.

Sands loves seeing things fit together well, and he approaches plans the same way he once designed buildings — all of the pieces have to fit together neatly and without stress. Because of this, other Kindred in Vegas often go to Sands with their problems, asking for help in recognizing their options. Sands delights in these events, both because he likes being so highly regarded and because he truly enjoys solving puzzles and assembling courses of action. Over the decades, he has become one of the most highly respected Kindred in Vegas — both Benedic and Rothstein admire him, and even the anarchs respect him because he goes his own way. A recommendation from Sands brings respect from the other Kindred in the city, and most happily yield information, in the hopes of winning his favor.

One thing Sands lacks completely is humility. This does not mean that he’s egotistical, but he is well aware of his own ability and accepts respect as his due. After seeing so much, Sands recognizes that if you have patience, you can survive any situation.

Sands appears to be a young man in his late 30s, tall and slight of build with rakish blond hair and slightly long features. He wears silk shirts and light cotton slacks, and has a certain natural elegance.

LANGELY, THE WAIF

13th generation, childe of Dirty Ben

Clan: Malkavian

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Child

Embrace: 1997

Apparent Age: late teens

One of the city's youngest Kindred, Cassandra Langely has only been undead for a few years. She ran away, escaping a depressed mother and manic father, by leaping for a train car with an open door. It was a disaster — she would have missed the opening entirely, probably would have fallen under the train's wheels, if the person already inside the car hadn't grabbed her arm and pulled her inside. His motives were far from selfless, however — he was Kindred, and desperate for blood. Out of spite, however, he Embraced her, and stayed with her long enough to teach her about the Masquerade and about her own clan, the Thought-Eaters. She never learned his name.

Langely grew to love trains, enjoying the sense of freedom mixed with dependability that only they could provide. She eventually outgrew her wanderlust and began to yearn for a home, a place she could be comfortable and secure, a place where she could meet others like her — most of the other Thought-Eaters she'd met were out of their minds, and she didn't feel comfortable with them. Langely toured the United States via train, spending a few nights in each city. That is, until she reached Vegas. The combination of bright lights and desert fascinated her, as did the endless shows. When she saw the Las Vegas Trolley, Langely knew she was hooked. She immediately applied for the night shift driving the Trolley, got the job, and has been there ever since, smiling at the passengers and listening to her CD player.

Langely is intelligent, friendly and extremely open. She doesn't care for rules, but understands their necessity and obeys them as long as they aren't too restrictive. What she enjoys more than anything is watching people — she loves the endless variety of expressions and activities, and avidly collects stories, jokes and gossip. Whenever any Kindred wants to know about something in Vegas, the first person they go to is often Langely. She's perfectly willing to tell anything (never trust her with a secret) in exchange for some new story or joke. Langely loves jokes, particularly shaggy dog stories, although she doesn't tell them very well at all — she often gives away the punch line by accident. As an information source, Langely has no overt enemies — everyone knows that she's completely impartial. Montrose is Langely's *de facto* benefactor, and makes a point of visiting her at least once a week, to catch up on any events he might have missed.

Langely is short and almost blocky, with close-cropped brown hair and surprisingly dark brown eyes. She dresses in

baggy clothes, wears no jewelry, and carries a battered knapsack with all her worldly possessions (including her knives, which are made from old railroad spikes). Her most obvious derangement is an obsessive cleanliness — she carries a bottle of soap in her pack at all times and tries to wash her hands and face on every break she takes.

ZIP, DEAD MAN WALKING

12th generation, childe of Jack Zukowski

Clan: Ravnos *antitribu*

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Thrill Seeker

Embrace: 1995

Apparent Age: early 20s

Born Kevin Thomas in New Orleans, Zip was Embraced only four years ago, after he had just turned 18. He is still learning exactly what he's become, and still reveling in his newfound abilities. Zip was raised by strict parents who didn't allow him much freedom, and his first act as one of the Damned was to leave New Orleans with his sire and several other Cainites. He's never stopped moving since.

Because of his age, Zip is also one of the Kindred who not only doesn't hate technology but who actively enjoys it. He grew up on computer games and the Internet, so playing with high-tech toys is second nature to him. Zip loves a new toy almost as much as he loves finding a new way to risk his neck.

Zip is filled with youthful exuberance and a desire to see and do everything possible. He's outgoing, talkative, and full of energy, so much that he has trouble sitting still even for a few moments. He hasn't yet learned caution, and even the other vampires in his pack have warned him occasionally to calm down and look before he leaps. Zip can't do that — he leaps, then deals with the consequences. Zip is utterly honest — those around him always know where they stand with him. He doesn't care enough to lie about anything, or to bother being tactful or cautious. He makes acquaintances and enemies quickly. His companions learned right away that you can't count on Zip to do anything other than be himself. Being undead is a game for Zip, and having come back from death once he no longer considers it a danger.

Zip still looks young, with his punk haircut (the sides and back are shaved and the top is spiked), multiple earrings, and black leather jacket. He's tall but thin, with a long face and a hint of freckles. His gray eyes are always in motion.

MR. MANELLI, MAN OF RESPECT

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Perfectionist

Apparent Age: mid-50s

Victor Paul Manelli is the model of the new Mafia businessman. Manelli's involvement with organized crime began in downtown Chicago as a courier when he was eleven. Victor retained his ties while he was away at college earning a business degree. When he returned to Chicago, Victor

immediately found a place in the hierarchy, overseeing one of the mob's restaurants and also helping to plan business strategies. He advanced steadily through the ranks, and by the age of 37 was a key advisor in Chicago. When the mob's Vegas representative "retired," Victor was chosen to take his place. For the last eight years, Victor has been in charge of Las Vegas — he's kept the city clean, safe and profitable, with minimal attention or bloodshed.

Victor enjoys Vegas. Where else can so many chaotic structures and gaudy demonstrations combine into something so smoothly run. Still, he prefers the elegance of the Gold Nugget to the overblown extravagance of the larger resorts.

Victor Manelli's slightly stocky build speaks of the years he spent as a wrestler in college, but his eyes give away his intelligence and his smooth voice suggests his confidence. Manelli dresses in Italian suits and never goes anywhere without at least two of his "associates." In approved mob fashion, Manelli is married and a father to three — his family lives in an upscale house near the northern edge of town, while his young mistress resides in Circus Circus.

SAM DELAWARE, THE EYE OF THE STORM

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Martyr

Apparent Age: late 30s

Hunting the undead takes all kinds. Sam Delaware was an ordinary computer salesman before he heard his calling. Born in Raleigh, North Carolina and graduating with a Computer Science degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Sam joined a start-up computer company in the 80s and achieved moderate success as a programmer. When the company moved from software to hardware, he left and headed out west to Silicon Valley. Sam discovered that he enjoyed working with people far more than burying himself in code and switched from designing computers to selling them. In 1989, he moved to Las Vegas, where he sold computers to the various resorts and other businesses, keeping them upgraded with the latest equipment and applications. He was content with his job and his life, comfortable with what he was doing — until he heard the voice and discovered it was all a lie.

Since discovering that monsters existed and preyed upon normal people. The death of his friend's daughter was just the first of many unwelcome revelations. Sam has dedicated his life to ridding the world of such creatures. He likens them to computer viruses — hidden at first, slowly causing

what looks like mild changes, then suddenly dangerous — and rapidly spreading. The only way to prevent them from wiping out everyone is to destroy them utterly. Sam isn't impulsive, however — years of programming taught him to identify every variable before forming a plan.

A quiet man, Sam observes everything around him and attempts to find the patterns at work — he doesn't speak much and often pauses to order his thoughts and words more carefully. In times of crisis he acts quickly based on what he already knows. Afterward, though, Sam is the first to study what he did and look for other ways he could have acted. Given a choice, he always takes his time and makes sure all of the pieces are in place.

MARSHA CLUTE

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Autocrat

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Marsha Clute is a businesswoman from Phoenix. Raised in Los Angeles, she moved to Phoenix after college (a business degree from UCLA) and began work as a manager at a local copy shop. Two years later she owned her own branch. Then she took over a restaurant that was failing and turned it first into a successful local chain. When she was approached with the offer to run the Creepshow, Marsha initially refused, not wanting to leave her own interests or the life she'd created in Phoenix. She was assured, however, that after the first six months — provided the Creepshow proved profitable, of course — she would be offered a place on the board, and a new manager would be selected, allowing Marsha to return to Phoenix. That, combined with the challenges inherent in opening a new resort in one of the most demanding resort towns in the world, intrigued her enough to say yes.

Marsha is a tall, bony woman with long features and reddish-brown hair, usually clipped short to keep it manageable. She dresses professionally, almost austere, and never wears any sort of jewelry. Marsha is very bright, very orderly, and used to being in control — she doesn't tolerate insubordination well, nor does she appreciate others telling her how to do her job. She doesn't particularly like Vegas, finding it too glitzy and single-minded, but she appreciates the success of the city and the vision each resort creator had. Naturally, she is curious about her own superiors, but Marsha knows better than to ask.



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CHAPTER FIVE: HOUSE OF LIES

All a man can betray is his conscience.
— Joseph Conrad

Okulos stared across the black expanse of cavern and knew this place unsettled him. He stood in a dead city where the dust and powdered bones of a thousand Cainites coated the ancient buildings like volcanic ash. If Okulos couldn't escape this place, his ashes would decorate the floor as well; the thought of an anonymous death unsettled him even more. The sky was cold stone held up by thick, brutish stalagmites, while the uneven limestone floor reflected only darkness. Okulos was the first to tread here in over a millennium. That in itself should have been an exhilarating prospect. Instead, his eyes glowed red and his hair bristled like a threatened wolf's.

Beckett, Okulos's cohort, was far more suited for exploring such places. Okulos snarled instinctively out of fear. The Nosferatu wasn't sure that the thousands of Cainites who reputedly met their Final Deaths here weren't still lurking about. He forced himself deeper into the underground city, his strained grip crackling the pommel of his service revolver.

Okulos wanted to flee even if it meant dashing across a stretch of sunlight to do so. Unfortunately, a curse sealed the gates to this forgotten city, burning those Kindred who attempted escape into cinders. Okulos had already watched his child die horribly, and he was not eager to share her fate.

From Pompeii to Jericho, Okulos beheld many a strange and wondrous place in his journeys with Beckett. Kaymakli, however, was more strange than wondrous, and far more disturbing than strange. Kaymakli rested beneath the earth, a city sealed from sunlight in a series of gigantic caves and passages. One was never sure whether the rough-hewn tunnels would open into a crypt or another cluster of buildings and towers packed tightly together.

"Of course," Okulos remarked quietly, "this entire place is a tomb." Kaymakli had always been a city of the dead, from the time the Cappadocians dominated it to the fateful night, according to legend, when Cappadocius himself sealed its entrance with a curse, imprisoning thousands — if records were to be believed — of his descendants.

Walking the dark catacombs, Okulos heard nothing but the soft shuffle of his own footfalls. His stunted bare feet moved quietly across the slick limestone paths littered with fungi. He felt too loud for such a silent realm — each step resounded like a wet slap. Along the way, Okulos studied the desiccated corpses lying in alleys and across rooftops, their limbs dangling over edges, resting against walls and even filling the depth of one well to overflow. All Cainites. Paper-thin skin sheathed their frail bones

like dry onion shells, their frozen, fanged mouths open and screaming for a taste of blood. For every mummified corpse, he encountered a dozen piles of ash. None were in perfect form. Careless or intentional kicks, arrows, daggers, swords, stakes and other implements desecrated many human-shaped piles of ash. The corpses alone attested to a terrible struggle.

Despite himself, Okulos reached out with his senses and gently touched the dank world around him. He felt the wanton rampage burning those places where the wall and ground drank spilt blood. He could hear the screams of a hundred frenzied Kindred stalking their weaker brethren to stave off their inevitable torpor. Each corpse told a brutal and savage tale, from the claw marks that split some bodies from groin to sternum, to the smaller piles of ash that cried dismemberment. He looked around, troubled by the anonymous death of many — it was to be his fate as well.

"So," Okulos thought to himself, "this is where I'm going to die." Despite Beckett's assurances that he'd find a way around the curse, Okulos felt overwhelmed by the charnel scene around him. He allayed his flagging spirits by exploring Kaymakli further.

The Nosferatu came upon a market square and turned slowly on his callused heel, absorbing the panoramic vista. Smashed wooden stalls littered the periphery along with a handful of corpses impaled on the larger shanks of timber. Okulos stared at the empty stone buildings and the walls breached from frenzied rampages, at the barricaded windows filled with rotting fabric and at the darkened doorways. He wondered if someone of even his age could explore every nook and cranny.

Okulos turned to leave when, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a movement in the shadow. He spun around, gun extended, finger eager on the trigger. Between two buildings rested a tight alleyway, nothing more. Then the whispers began, touching him like unending layers of frail cobwebs. Okulos couldn't pierce the full depth of the alley's darkness, but he felt something beyond it. He kept his gun trained on the alley for several minutes, his aim solid; dead muscles never tired. The whispers bled away, leaving Okulos alone in the darkness.

Keeping his nerves and gun steady, Okulos stepped to the lip of the alley and retrieved a flare from his pocket. He ignited it and tossed it down the corridor.

The alley was a narrow fit, tighter even than the Roman Catacombs. It was a dozen yards long from lip to wall, and a hole gaped at the end, large enough to crawl through. The flare hissed and sputtered but revealed nothing more. Okulos ignored his better judgement and shimmied along the alley wall, pistol trained on the hole. His mind played tricks, interpreting brushes and scrapes against the tight walls as foreign sounds. Finally, he arrived at the hole. Rubble littered the room beyond.

Okulos dropped to one knee, lit a second flare and tossed it into the chamber. It was a small room, possibly used for storage, now empty except for a pile of clothes in one corner and a bricked-up door. Okulos crawled inside.

In the corner, a few feet away from the sealed entrance, rested a pile of robes and a cloth sack. Ash covered everything — another Cainite who met an undistinguished end. Okulos

gingerly lifted the cloth sack to shake the ash loose, but a large bundle fell to the ground with a heavy metallic sound, nearly scaring Okulos back to life. He snarled in surprise and fought the rising bile of the Beast in his throat. He took the wrapped cloth. Its weight surprised him, but he carefully unraveled the stiff and frayed fabric.

"Holy Mother."

The cloth shielded a disk of pressed platinum two feet in diameter and an inch thick. Two different tongues covered its surface in a spiral pattern. The first Okulos recognized as Enochian, the tongue of Caine himself. Enochian was a rare language that few people understood fluently; unfortunately, neither Okulos nor Beckett were among that esteemed number. The second language was Latin, hastily written if the poor quality of the engraving was an indication. Astonished, Okulos ran his fingers over the chiseled Latin text:

Here lies a chapter in the journey of Caine, Our Father...

Okulos spent the remainder of the night in dark Kaymakli, reading words no one still alive or undead had ever read, disregarding his own fears, ignoring the screams of the past.

* * *

It was near dawn when Okulos approached Kaymakli's warded portal. He could feel the curse pushing against him, nudging his bones and searing his skin. Any closer and his flesh would sizzle as though stoked by sunlight. A sealed wicker basket attached to a rope awaited him. Okulos heard his meal squealing inside the basket — another piglet for him to drain. He was getting tired of pig.

Okulos made quick work of his meal, then set the covered disk into the basket and tugged on the rope.

"Are you alright my friend?" Beckett called from beyond the portal.

"None the worse for wear." Okulos admitted.

"Have faith Okulos. I will get you out of there, I swear."

"I don't doubt you will. But I found something that could help your search."

"More artifacts?"

"Just one," Okulos replied as Beckett pulled the basket outside. "It's a fragment, Beckett. It's a passage from the Book of Nod that I've never read before."

INTRODUCTION

House of Lies is a harrowing journey into one of the oldest Sabbat enclaves in the New World, the City of Black Miracles, Montreal. Attracted by the unveiling of a recently discovered passage from the *Book of Nod* — one that could have dire ramifications as Gehenna nears — the players' coterie soon discovers that there is more to the fragment than meets the eye.

In Montreal, the characters confront the freakish Sabbat and other Cainite luminaries who take a keen interest in the coterie's actions and in uncovering the truth behind the fragment. During their search, the characters run afoul of the

dreaded Sabbat Inquisition and witness Montreal's descent into chaos. The sacrifices are worth the price, however. If the characters are successful, they possess a rare piece of Cainite history... or at least know the truth behind it.

HOW TO USE THIS STORY

House of Lies is a snapshot of the World of Darkness in motion. It gives the coterie an opportunity to take center stage during the Final Nights. The characters become the initiators of actions to which other Cainites, including the likes of Beckett, Sascha Vykos and the Ventrue Jan Pieterzoon react — presenting unique storytelling possibilities for your troupe.

Included in this story is background on the missing *Book of Nod* fragment, an overview of Montreal in the Final Nights and a close look at the various Cainites (and their agendas) involved in *House of Lies*. Storytellers have all the information needed to run this tale of betrayal and lost secrets.

To facilitate this tale, Storytellers might wish to consult the *Guide to the Sabbat and Montreal by Night*. Since *House of Lies* is set in Montreal, access to *Montreal by Night* adds considerable background and flavor. Storytellers should have enough information to make do without it, however.

THEME

Two themes are at work in *House of Lies*: betrayal and the search for truth. Caine's murder of Abel did not damn him to his vampiric existence, that was only the effect. Caine's original crime was that of betrayal — he betrayed his brother, his father and, above all, God. Betrayal and treachery are as fundamental to Cainites as their lust for blood. Betrayal taints Cainite history, from Abel's murder to the destruction of the Second Generation, from Carthage to the Anarch Revolt; now it brings the Final Nights. If all Cainites share one tragic flaw, it is their ability to betray. It is why they are the Damned, a forsaken race. Betrayal permeates *House of Lies* at all levels, from the horrors of Kaymakli to Aristotle's ruse to the souring political climate in Montreal. At a time when Cainites need to trust each other the most, they busily pursue their own agendas, condemning each other in the process. Is this God's punishment of the first murderer?

Truth, a lofty ideal, is often lost in its own pursuit. What few Cainites ever learn is that truth is not an absolute fact but a personal conclusion. As a theme for *House of Lies*, truth is not a matter of accuracy but a principle of conviction, pride and fear — the personalization of truth and how it varies little from deceit. In the search of it, the ends always seem to justify the means.



MOOD

Paranoia, fear and apocalyptic fever complement the themes of *House of Lies*. An atmosphere of apprehension and murderous action surrounds the search for the missing fragment. Cainites normally given to intervention at a whim remain distant; they know the end is near, and rather than reveal their presence, they sulk in shadow.

The characters should believe everyone they meet has an ulterior motive and ultimately not know whom to trust. Even the kine can sense the unease gripping Montreal. To evoke paranoia, refrain from giving your characters easy or simple answers. Every encounter, from the lowliest Sabbat to the signature characters, should evoke more questions than answers. In describing Montreal, highlight its narrow streets, its somber buildings and the raging river that isolates the city from the world beyond. Create a sense of claustrophobia to add to the characters' paranoia.

THE PLOT

Prelude: Beckett's discovery of a fragment of the *Book of Nod* in the ruins of Kaymakli sets *House of Lies* in motion. Beckett sends the fragment to his mentor, the renowned Cainite scholar Aristotle de Laurent, to determine its authenticity before revealing it to the Children of Caine. En route, the fragment, a pressed-platinum disk, goes missing. Soon after, a Montreal Noddist coven, the Librarians, announce the unveiling of a fragment from the *Book of Nod* and circulate invitations to key Cainite scholars. This attracts the attention of Beckett, Ambrogino Giovanni and Sascha Vykos. Beckett believes the Librarians' fragment to be his, but is unable to travel to Montreal without making his rival, Sascha Vykos, aware of his involvement.

Act One revolves around the unveiling of the *Book of Nod* fragment by the Librarians. This act brings the characters to Montreal to attend the Noddist gathering. At the reception, the characters rub shoulders with various Cainite luminaries including Archbishop Benezri, selected members of the Librarians pack and a proxy sent by Ambrogino Giovanni. At the unveiling, the coterie discovers that all is not well in Montreal and that there is more to the fragment than the Librarians admit. Careful investigation reveals that one of the Librarians, the Noddist Christianus Lionel, is missing, and that the fragment on display is forgery. As Act One ends, the Inquisition suspects a heretic is in town and connected to the fragment.

Events spiral out of control after Act One. In **Act Two**, the Inquisitor Mercy turns the city upside down searching for a Baali ghoul with suspected ties to the Librarians. This forces the Archbishop, the lover of the Librarian Beatrice L'Angou, to lock horns with the Inquisition and recruit the characters to help him resolve things.

The characters navigate a treacherous course while encountering Benezri, Mercy, Sascha and a handful of other prominent Cainites pursuing their own agendas. Like it or

not, the characters are squarely in the middle of things, but how they react to this pressure determines their fate. Act Two ends with a tense showdown at Montreal's Jazz Festival as the characters race against Mercy to find the ghoul and uncover what she knows.

After the Jazz Festival encounter, Mercy has all the proof she needs to call a hearing into possible heresies against the Librarians. In **Act Three**, the characters must testify, but it is clear that only Christianus Lionel knows what really happened and why. The characters, following various clues, track the Noddist rogue and uncover the truth behind the fragment and Aristotle's true involvement.

STORYTELLING *HOUSE OF LIES*

At its core, *House of Lies* is a mystery, a paranoia-propelled thriller set against the backdrop of the Final Nights. It's a character-driven story and follows a slightly non-linear and branching structure. While certain scenes unravel in linear succession, let your troupe find its own path.

Preparation is key. Rather than focusing on scenes and how they relate, familiarize yourself with the various Storyteller characters and their agendas. Doing so simplifies improvisation, which is another integral element of nonlinear stories. Don't be afraid to make things up. If you understand the flow of the story and how antagonists and protagonists relate, then improvisation comes easily and breathes life into your game. If you're lost, take a break and figure out which scene or character can put you back on track.

CHOOSING SIDES

House of Lies is suitable for either a Camarilla coterie or Sabbat pack (or, with some work, a coterie of unaligned Kindred). Unfortunately, we cannot provide all the possible "ins" for your troupe. *House of Lies* assumes that Beckett involves the characters *but this is only one option*; below are a number of other options that you can use to bring the characters into Montreal.

Jan Pieterzoon: The Ventrue Pieterzoon is on a crusade to eradicate all senseless superstition stemming from the myth of Caine and the damnable *Book of Nod*. As such, when Jan hears about the Librarian unveiling, he decides to use the characters to investigate the fragment, and if necessary, destroy it.

Noddists: Characters of the scholarly persuasion may have heard about the unveiling from a number of sources. The Librarians have circulated word of their finding in hopes of attracting prominent Cainite scholars, but have been careful not to publicize their unveiling too much.

Locals: Montreal or Sabbat characters integrate easily into *House of Lies*. Most Montreal-area Cainites and even out-of-towners know of the unveiling and are welcome to attend.

Ideally, *House of Lies* works best if the characters are slowly made aware of events in Montreal and have their own piqued curiosity lead them there. Clever Storytellers can foreshadow events by having the characters meet Beckett or hear rumors of a new fragment from the *Book of Nod* before they discover the Librarian unveiling.

Note: *House of Lies* uses the term *coterie* when referring to the characters, whether they are Camarilla, Sabbat or independent.

A PORTION OF FALSEHOODS

The *Book of Nod* fragment has two forms. The first is a pressed-platinum disk with Enochian and Latin text. The second is a leather parchment with an impression of the disk — referred to as the shroud or Nod fabric (see pp. 159-160).

The disk first appeared in the hands of an ancient scholar named Echriso Varakut who found the artifact in a subterranean chamber beneath the port city of Sidon. Echriso spent a mortal's lifetime studying and translating a language as dead as he was.

Echriso finished the text in time to present his findings at a gathering of peers in Kaymakli. He didn't realize the grand feast was a trap, a cleansing to thin a forgotten clan of its bloated numbers. At the feast, when the clan's sire asked "Who among you has not helped build or plan a church or temple?" Echriso followed those who had answered "no" deeper into Kaymakli's warrens. He was eager to show his findings to a fellow scholar and ignored the signs of betrayal. When the vault doors closed and sealed Kaymakli away, Echriso — the wrapped disk clutched to his chest — watched with the others as darkness engulfed the caverns. Then the rampage for vitae began.

To his credit, Echriso passed the last weeks of his existence evading the marauding bands of Cainites and the unrepentant slaughter of hundreds. He spent nights scratching his record into the platinum disk with sharpened claws, listening to the chorus of screams just beyond his hideaway. Echriso provided the future with the only account of the Kaymakli slaughter in the form of the Latin text.

When Echriso's time came, his attacker, eager to sate her thirst, ignored the leather-bundle in her victim's hand. The blood-soaked leather dried with the disk's script imprinted on its surface (where only the most heightened of touch and sophisticated of equipment could detect it). The disk's account fell far from mortal ken and remained hidden.

"Let no childe of Caine ever leave through this passage; let no son of Seth enter." So spoke the clan founder while sealing Kaymakli, cursing the subterranean city forever. Over the centuries, many Cainites fell to the curse, entering Kaymakli, but never leaving because of a swift affliction that withered their flesh into ash. Even into 20th century, the curse stands strong, trapping, most recently, Beckett's companion Okulos.

THE STORY SO FAR

Beckett, famed Gangrel archeologist, desperately seeks to unravel the ward on Kaymakli's portal. If he can't, his traveling companion may die alone in the cursed city. Okulos, in turn, spends his nights exploring the city and unearthing valuable artifacts. His greatest find thus far has been the pressed platinum disk with a passage from the *Book of Nod* inscribed upon it. To Beckett, this invaluable piece of history is a twofold treasure. Its first merit is the Enochian text itself,

which Beckett could not translate alone. Its second merit is Echriso's Latin text, a recounting of Kaymakli's last nights that, Beckett believes, holds some clue to rescuing Okulos.

Hoping his mentor, Aristotle, could help him, Beckett arranged to transport the disk and several Kaymakli artifacts using a D'habi ghoul named Rhanian. The D'habi served an infernal bloodline of Cainites in medieval times, and many claimed they still worship unholy powers. Normally Beckett would not take such risks, but there was little time for brooding and Rhanian was one of the few people in the region who could read Enochian fluently. She proved invaluable in Beckett's initial attempts to translate the disk; he sent her to Aristotle because of her familiarity with the text and the legends of Kaymakli. Beckett instructed Aristotle to terminate her.

Within nights of sending the package, Beckett received news that it never arrived. Rhanian had absconded with the disk. Unable to gain an audience with Aristotle following the theft, Beckett investigated the matter himself. Despite Aristotle's claim of innocence, Beckett suspects his mentor of treachery. Since then, he's traced Rhanian's flight to the Sabbat haven of Montreal.

ARISTOTLE'S PLAN

Beckett's fears are correct — Aristotle betrayed him. Although his Enochian is rusty, Aristotle understood enough of the text to know he needs more time to decipher and understand the fragment. By reporting the artifacts stolen, he could study the disk in peace, without Beckett's impetuous need to reveal it as a professional trophy. If the text proved dangerous, then Aristotle planned to keep it hidden. If the disk was indeed a revelation to share, Aristotle would claim he recovered the disk from the D'habi ghoul and return it to Beckett.

Aristotle realized Beckett wouldn't be satisfied to sit idly by once he discovered the theft, especially with Okulos's unlife in jeopardy. Beckett would investigate the matter on his own if necessary. To this end, Aristotle engineered the disk's mock abduction by using Rhanian — thus capitalizing on Beckett's inherent distrust of the ghoul. Rhanian was to transport artifacts from the Kaymakli expedition, as well as the blood-scrawled shroud that protected the disk, to Christianus Lionel, a member of Montreal's venerable Librarians pack. Aristotle kept the disk and used Rhanian as a red herring, knowing Beckett would trace the ghoul's flight to Montreal. He also knew Christianus could recover bits of information from the cloth with Rhanian's help. It would be enough to interest him, occupy his attention and authenticate the theft, but not enough to be a threat. Aristotle, however, failed to realize the Librarians had access to forensic spectral analysis techniques. With infrared absorption tests, ultraviolet baths, laser scans and even serology tests, the Librarians recovered much of the shroud's text with Rhanian filling in the gaps.

RHANIAN AND THE LIBRARIANS

Rhanian did as Aristotle instructed, little realizing she was venturing into volatile territory. She gave the shroud and

artifacts to Christianus and helped translate the Enochian text. In turn, the Librarians kept Rhania hidden, knowing the Sabbat Inquisitor and the Shepherds would kill her. The Inquisition would not hesitate to destroy Rhania for her D'habi heritage.

The recovery of the Nod fragment elated the Librarians, who immediately announced their findings to Noddists across the world. Christianus, however, was far more diligent in the pursuit of knowledge and realized the fabric was not the original medium. Without the pressed-platinum disk that Rhania spoke of, Christianus could not validate the find. The Latin text also troubled Christianus since it spoke of an event — the Kaymakli betrayal — that no one had been able to authenticate outside of fables and rumors. Christianus feared that if scholars proved the Nod fragment another fake like the hundreds before it, the Librarians would be the laughingstock of Noddists everywhere.

Unfortunately, Christianus could not deter the Librarians from displaying the text. He accused them of impatience and they, in turn, accused him of selfishly withholding a treasure belonging to the Sabbat. The Librarians agreed, however, that the Latin account would spawn heated debate and decided to release “edited” copies of the shroud. Only certain Noddist luminaries like Sascha Vykos would see the full shroud text at the unveiling.

After convincing Archbishop Alfred Benezri to decree Montreal open to all Kindred for the duration of the unveiling, the Librarians sent out translated snippets of the text as invitations to notable guests. This infuriated Christianus, who derided the announcement as ill conceived and short sighted. After repeated attempts to persuade the Librarians to reconsider their decision, Christianus stole the shroud and kidnapped Rhania on the eve of the unveiling. With guests like Sascha Vykos already in town, the Librarians had no choice but to stall while they searched for Christianus.

MERCY AND SKIN

Besides the Librarians, only two individuals in Montreal know at least part of the truth. Mercy, Montreal's resident Inquisitor, has only recently uncovered Rhania's existence thanks to an informer, the Librarian Marie-Ange Gagnon. Marie-Ange, having had infernal dealings in her past, feared that her own sins might be exposed if the Inquisition uncovered Rhania. When Christianus vanished, Marie-Ange realized the entire incident could easily degenerate and chose instead to act as Mercy's informant in exchange for clemency in the D'habi ghoulish affair. Marie-Ange reasoned that by gaining amnesty, Mercy would ignore her involvement with Rhania, and would therefore overlook Marie-Ange's sordid past. Mercy, as of the night of the unveiling, is aware of Rhania, Christianus' disappearance and the Librarians' plight.

Another Cainite familiar with the entire story is Malkavian *antitribu* Skin, an honorary member of the Librarians. In particular, Skin and Librarian Molly 8 share an affinity stronger than most sibling bonds. Skin is privy to the Librarians' secrets and knows the entire sordid affair of the D'habi ghoulish

— from Beckett's discovery to Rhania's arrival in Montreal and Christianus' disappearance. He doesn't know about Aristotle's betrayal, however. Skin promised to keep the pack's secret, and so far he has — he even helped Molly 8 search for Christianus while the Widows throw their party.

AGENDAS

This section offers a quick look at the major antagonists, including their motivations and what clues or information they have. The Act reference indicates when a particular piece of information becomes available to the characters.

Alfred Benezri: The current Archbishop of Montreal, Benezri is a rare breed among modern Sabbat — contemplative and spiritual. Until 1993, Benezri was an Inquisitor and learned firsthand of its destructive potential. Benezri's motives are simple — he wishes to protect the Librarians, in particular their leader Beatrice L'Angou, from the Inquisition's torches. To this end, he is willing to use the characters and “offer” assistance in their search, even at eventual risk to his own position. He knows the following:

- If anyone wants to get closer to the Librarians, they can do so through Skin due to his strong relationship with stepsister Molly 8. This clue is important since it sets the characters after Skin for additional clues (Act One).
- Christianus trafficked with the D'habi ghoulish while translating the Nod text. If a source of infernal activities exists, she's it. Alfred knows little of the D'habi except they've existed for centuries, perhaps longer. They are a corrupt lot thought extinct for some time now (Act Two).
- Christianus stole the artifact and escaped with the female ghoulish when the Librarians were to unveil the shroud. He has obviously fallen to the ghoulish's corruptive influence (Act Two).

Agaitas: Custodian of the Harbingers of Skulls' secrets, this Lazarene has visited Montreal to determine the origins of the relics and fragment. Like many Harbingers, he's concerned with reappropriating artifacts stolen by people like Sascha Vykos and Beckett — and keeping certain secrets hidden.

Ambrogino Giovanni: Driven by visions that show him ascending to the mantle of godhead, Ambrogino continues his search for the *Sargon Fragment*. After hearing of the unveiling in Montreal, the Giovanni recognizes some of the relics associated with the fragment and makes an educated guess as to their origins — Kaymakli. Ambrogino sends Seamus Dunsim to investigate, hoping these artifacts are clues leading to the fabled *Sargon Fragment*. Seamus's investigation, however, is cut short by Agaitas, the Harbinger of Skulls.

Beckett: While not directly involved, the Gangrel archaeologist and his discovery serve as the catalyst for the story. Beckett simply wants the Kaymakli fragment back and to discover what really happened to it. He's more than happy to let the character do all the work for him, but is devastated when he discovers Aristotle is involved.

Aristotle de Laurent: Cautious and manipulative, Aristotle fears the Final Nights as only one who surrounds himself with forgotten lore can fear them. Whether one believes in Gehenna or not, Beckett's plan to release the fragment is madness to someone of Aristotle's learning — like lighting a match while standing in gasoline. Aristotle, however, underestimated the effect his little ruse would have. He is desperate to erase his involvement, even if this means destroying the original disk and discounting the shroud as a fake.

Jan Pieterzoon: An ambitious and dashing Ventrue, Jan Pieterzoon has made quite an impact on the Camarilla in recent years. He considers the prophecies of Gehenna and the *Book of Nod* to be dangerous superstitions. He wants to free all Cainites from their fears and wants all references to the *Book of Nod* censored or destroyed before the Camarilla succumbs to millennial anxiety.

The Librarians: Normally reclusive, the Librarians are embroiled in events that might see their destruction. Driven to decipher the fragment no matter the cost, the Librarians trafficked with the D'habi ghoul and are caught in the middle of Mercy's witch-hunt. Coven leader Beatrice fears losing her priceless library while Marie-Ange Gagnon, desperate to coverup her grim past, betrays her pack to Mercy. The fragment troubles Christianus Lionel, driving him to kidnap the ghoul and steal the shroud. The Librarians know the shroud's history through the D'habi ghoul and believe Beckett sent them the artifact. Only Christianus and Rhanian know that Aristotle is involved in this gambit as well.

Mercy: Cruel and sadistic, the Knight Inquisitor Mercy is not so much interested in stamping out infernalism as in tormenting those she thinks are guilty. Currently, she has the Librarians in her sights, and woe betide those who interfere. Foremost on her mind is finding Christianus and ascertaining the Librarians' guilt. She is blind to all other concerns. If the characters share (or pretend to share) her Inquisitorial zeal-ousness, she might divulge the following:

- Christianus is unlike most Nosferatu. His warren is the McGill University underground and its immense libraries. Mercy's pack is still searching the area (Act One).

- The ghoul brought the fragment to the Librarians from an unknown individual. The blood-caked shroud was ancient according to the description (Act One).

- The ghoul is D'habi, but Mercy knows little more than Alfred Benezri about this Revenant family (Act Two).

- Christianus stole the shroud and kidnapped the ghoul to keep the infernal knowledge for himself. The Giovanni's torture (in Act Two) was obviously a sacrifice for greater demonic powers (an erroneous assumption on Mercy's part due to Alfred's and Marie-Ange's influence) (Act Two).

- Taint doesn't afflict all the Librarians. At least one (Marie-Ange, who remains nameless) has proven her loyalty to the Inquisition by alerting Mercy to the ghoul's existence (Act Two).

Sascha Vykos: The shroud mystery intrigues the androgynous Tzimisce and it wishes to use the characters as surrogate investigators. It extends them an open talon and provides information if they need help. In return, it wishes to see the fragment. Strangely enough, Vykos is one of the few Cainites the characters can trust — Sascha is not interested in the fragment itself but in the controversy surrounding it. Sascha knows the following:

- Sascha is the only Cainite in Montreal (that it knows of) that can read Enochian. Its ace-in-the-hole is the fact that nobody aside from it and the D'habi woman can unravel its tongue. And who are the Sabbat going to trust, it or a filthy revenant known to traffic with demons? (Act One)

- The Nod shroud is a fake, though the message isn't. Sascha is intrigued by the Librarians' desperation to protect the secrets of the original artifact (Act Two).

- It knows the mysterious woman is a ghoul. By the description of her ragged physical appearance, including the bits about the missing fingers and ear, it suspects she may be D'habi (Act Two).

- The D'habi were a revenant family that once served an infernal bloodline of medieval vampires. Since Sascha has already seen a portion of the fragment, it knows the shroud is not infernal. Therefore, the ghoul's expertise must have been for something else — possibly translation — since the shroud was certainly originally written in Enochian, the language of Caine. Few Cainites understand Enochian, but the D'habi were renowned as scholars. They rival many vampires in the occult arts (Act Two).

- If the characters ever tell Sascha about "Kaymakli" (a word they may have heard through Skin), he tells them the abridged version of how an elder vampire trapped thousands of his own clan members in the cavernous city and cursed its gates. Nobody knows where Kaymakli is anymore. (Act Three)

Skin: Although warped, Skin is truly an innocent among the sharks of Montreal. He may know all, but he isn't willing to divulge all. When Molly 8 shared her secrets with Skin, he promised too quiet. Skin often observes the Vaulderie with Molly 8 and is loyal to her. He doesn't betray their secrets unless he feels his sister is in danger or if the characters promise to help her. If the characters give Skin a reason to like or trust them, he might reveal the following:

- The D'habi's name is Rhanian, and she's a nasty little ghoul who knows much about the shroud's original Enochian text. She was also the messenger who brought it to Montreal, though Skin doesn't know who originally sent it (he's lying about this last part; this is his major trump card to save Molly 8 if things really degenerate). (Act Two)

- Rhanian was kept alive to translate the shroud. (Act Two)

- A second text was also on the shroud, written in Latin. Skin didn't see the text, but his sister said it was the death confession of somebody who perished in a city called Kaymakli.

Molly 8 claimed a great many Cainites fell in that cursed city hundreds of years ago. (Act Two)

- Christanius stole the shroud because it wasn't an original. The ghoul brought only a copy. Christanius also kidnapped the ghoul, though nobody knows where they went. (Act Two)

25:17: Lord Ezekiel and his pack 25:17 wisely take a back seat to events, knowing that if they involve themselves they risk getting burnt — figuratively and literally. Instead, Ezekiel plans to use the characters to destabilize Montreal, making the city easy pickings in the aftermath.

MONTREAL IN THE FINAL NIGHTS

Quiet and serene, Montreal's reflection shimmers on the river's water — a snapshot of a city in flux. Since its founding over 350 years ago, this Sabbat bastion has exuded an energy of her own, inspiring and damning Kindred who cross her shadowy banks. Like a siren, she beckons Caine's childer and cradles them in her arms. Montreal is where Cainite visitors are just that — visitors. She existed before their arrival and will continue to do so long after they leave. Montreal's Sabbat do not delude themselves; their city is not a macabre tableau where they can act out their nightly drama with impunity.

Montreal is also the City of Black Miracles, a place of mystery — her streets old and twisted, her secrets deep. This is why Montreal draws the Sabbat; it exists without them. In Las Vegas or Chicago, even London, vampires own the night. Not so in Montreal. Here, the night owns the Sabbat.

Note for owners of Montreal by Night: Why the update? Because much has happened in the World of Darkness over the last three years. The Cainites of Montreal don't exist in a vacuum. These changes take into account the plots in *Montreal by Night* and the *Final Nights*. Don't feel like you have to change your chronicle to fit this update. You know your chronicle better than anyone — nothing in these pages can compare to that. Use these adjustments as suggestions and nothing more.

BACKGROUND

Before New York, before Mexico City, there was Montreal, known simply as the colony of Ville-Marie. The vampires of Montreal, among the sect's oldest Cainites, exert a pervasive but subtle influence over the Sabbat.

During the Age of Exploration, when Cainites made the long journey to the New World, Montreal's port served to launch the Sword of Caine across the continent. In the late 18th century, Montreal's Sabbat paved the way for the Purchase Pact by defeating the local Camarilla and proclaiming Montreal a Sabbat city, thus ending the first sect Civil War. The creation of the Litany of Blood — inscribed in vitae and etched on skin — by local Cainite scholars immortalized the sect's history. More than that, it brought together Cainites divided by the second Civil War and provided a neutral forum during the turbulent decades of the 20th century that paved the way for stability in the sect.

Montreal's greatest contribution to the Sword of Caine is the Sabbat Inquisition. The Inquisition traces its roots to the contemplative and religious Cainites of Montreal known as the Shepherds of Caine. Driven by faith and devotion, the Shepherds and their unique Path of Nocturnal Redemption formed the core of the Inquisition.

FIRES OF THE INQUISITION

Twice in the past seven years the fires of the Sabbat Inquisition have burnt in Montreal. It is no secret that in a city of strong faith and even stronger convictions, infernalism and damnation fester. In 1992, Judge Inquisitor Santiago DeSoto laid charges against the Archbishop of Montreal, a Serpent of the Light by the name of Sangris. The archbishop openly professed his guilt and DeSoto set out to find the Cobra's accomplices but found none. After months of grueling questioning and torture, Sangris met Final Death and DeSoto, now a changed man, retired from the Inquisition to settle in Montreal.

The trial and its aftermath shook the city to its core. The Shepherds of Caine lost face for allowing infernalism to slip in unnoticed and faced stern opposition from Sangris's childer, Ezekiel of the Black Hand. Fearing the collapse of Montreal, Cardinal Kyle Strathcona appointed Carolina Valez, a Lasombra from Mexico, to the position of archbishop. Neither Ezekiel nor Alfred Benezri, leader of the Shepherds, had a choice in the matter. Both acquiesced but waited for a chance to claim the title themselves.

The trial of Sangris, while harrowing, was nothing compared to the madness that descended on Montreal in the summer of 1998. After the 1992 scandal, the Inquisition regularly sent Knight Inquisitors to Montreal. When two of them went missing in 1993, the Grand Inquisitor Maria Sandoza had all the proof she needed — Sangris may have acted alone, but other infernalists lurked in Montreal. Unlike the previous year, the Grand Inquisitor decided to bide her time and gather all the evidence she required. By 1997, however, the investigation ground to a halt and Sandoza sent Knight Inquisitors Mercy and Kervos to stir things up. They did just that.

For the first year, Mercy was uncharacteristically quiet. Taking her time to study the city and its Cainites, she saw no need to rush things. The guilty could not escape her, and she relished the fear she inspired. Mercy's break came while investigating Zarnovich's Circus, a freakish nomadic pack. Trailing a Malkavian *antitribu* and infernalist called Midget, Mercy eventually discovered his master — a Brujah *antitribu* named Pierre Bellemare and his pack Les Orphelins (the Orphans). By this time Mercy had already drawn up a list of suspected infernalists and prepared her pack for action. Unwilling to let Pierre Bellemare or his minions escape, Mercy acted without a trial.

On a summer night in 1998, Mercy and her pack staged a series of murderous raids. Nearly a dozen Cainites met their end, but Pierre Bellemare escaped. The Knight Inquisitor had underestimated Bellemare's cunning and resourcefulness. For the following week panic gripped Montreal. Many of the

Cainites on Mercy's list were innocent. Archbishop Valez tried unsuccessfully to reign in the Knight Inquisitor. Mercy, or Cainites desperate to prove their innocence, destroyed a handful of local vampires and two nomadic packs.

As events spiraled out of control, Carolina Valez had no choice but to try to stop Mercy. Valez appealed to the Shepherds, but they were unwilling to intervene. Then one night, Cairo (one of the Knight Inquisitors who vanished in 1993 after Bellemare forced her into infernal servitude) approached Valez. With her superior preoccupied, Cairo regained some control over herself and promised to deliver Pierre if she was spared. Valez agreed, knowing that Pierre Bellemare's destruction would dampen Mercy's bloodlust.

Valez told Mercy of Cairo and the location of Bellemare's infernal shrine. The following night, Mercy, the Lost Angels and the Shepherds ambushed Les Orphelins. In the bloodbath, the pack was destroyed but Pierre Bellemare was nowhere to be found. The witch-hunt had ended, but Mercy was far from finished.

THE RISE OF ALFRED BENEZRI

Mercy spent the next month looking for Bellemare, but found nothing. Furious, she turned her attention to Cairo and Carolina Valez, charging them both with infernalism. For the second time in less than a decade, Montreal's archbishop was on trial. Mercy accused Cairo of trafficking with demons and Valez with conspiring to allow Pierre Bellemare to escape.

Cairo was doomed from the very beginning; her pleas of innocence fell on deaf ears. Branded an infernalist, she did not meet Final Death, but instead became a torture-threshold test subject for the Inquisition in Mexico City. Of the other Cainites tried, mainly the members of Zarnovich's Circus, all were granted *ad cautelams*.

The trial came as a complete surprise to Valez. While she was confident in her innocence, she had a secret — her mortal daughter. Knowing that the trial would probably unearth Josefina, Valez chose Benezri as her defendant and promised to step down as archbishop in exchange for her daughter's protection. Carolina gambled that Benezri's ambition blinded him to her weakness and transgression. She was right.

Carolina Valez won her innocence thanks to Benezri. A fortnight later she ceded the archdiocese to the Shepherd, but to avoid suspicion, Alfred and Valez staged a Monomacy duel. Valez honored her part of the bargain and lost for the sake of her daughter. She retreated into the night, no longer an archbishop but a simple abbot and custodian of the communal haven.

The following weeks saw massive changes in Montreal's Sabbat. Some covens packed up and left, while others licked their wounds and tried to carve new domains for themselves. Ezekiel saw this as a chance to challenge Benezri, but Tobias Smith, Valez's right-hand man and the Serpent's mentor, persuaded him that the time was not right. Tobias, unable to face Valez after her display of weakness, joined Ezekiel's pack. He



promised Ezekiel that when the time was right, the two would help the Sabbath regain its strength. And so, Alfred Benezri's ascension to the Archdiocese of Montreal was relatively smooth.

THE DISAPPEARANCE

In Montreal, two events heralded the disappearance of the Tremere *antitribu* — Jacob the Glitch's suicide and the prophecies of Yasmin the Black. In 1998, the Tremere *antitribu* Jacob, known for his amnesia and incoherent ramblings, became strangely lucid. He spent most of the time conferring with Noddist scholars and a few thaumaturges. Rumors persist that he even offered to teach Thaumaturgy to anyone who listened to his incessant babbling. Then, early one morning in February, he met with his clanmate Yasmin and simply said, "And so it is" and walked out into the dawn.

Yasmin, Ezekiel's packmate, became withdrawn and fearful that Gehenna was upon them. Ezekiel and Tobias Smith tried reassuring her, but she was hysterical; everywhere she looked, she saw signs of Gehenna. During the day, she dreamed that someone was calling to her. As time passed, the dream became more vivid, more lifelike; she found herself sleepwalking or awakening well past midnight. In panic, she pleaded with Ezekiel to chain her in her haven, but even this was not enough. One night, when Ezekiel and his pack awoke, Yasmin was gone, the chains snapped. She had written on the walls in blood "... and those who eat heart's blood will flourish."

THE PRESENT

Montreal's Cainites have thus far reacted with mild indifference to the recent events transpiring across the World of Darkness. To them, there was never a question *if* Gehenna would happen, but rather *when*. Alfred Benezri and the Shepherds of Caine have done much to calm their fellow Sabbath, avoiding the apocalyptic fever slowly gripping other cities. The events of *House of Lies* throw Montreal's equilibrium out of kilter. The Shepherds and Benezri, usually models of stoicism, lose control; the Inquisition reaches new heights of destruction, and Montreal's Cainites prepare for the inevitable.

ACT ONE: PORTENTS

Act One opens with the Librarians' unveiling of the Nod fragment in Montreal. Once in Montreal, the coterie becomes the focus of attention. A number of Cainites court the characters to gather information on the fragment and the Librarians. This act introduces the coterie to key locations and individuals that feature prominently in Acts Two and Three.

In this act, Storytellers should showcase the Sabbath's mystical and spiritual demeanor, which is often overlooked by focusing on the brutality of the sect. The fragment is not some ephemeral piece of artwork but a sacred relic that may hold answers to millennia-old questions. The atmosphere is solemn, almost foreboding, but underlying it is a celebration of what it means to be a Cainite.

SCENE ONE: INTERLOPERS AND STRANGERS

Scene One introduces the coterie to Montreal and gives the characters (and players) a chance to familiarize themselves with the setting of *House of Lies*. This scene should be more tense than dangerous. The characters have entered Sabbath territory and your descriptions should add to the tension. They should never feel completely safe or welcome. In Montreal, the coterie should feel their every move being watched. Play on the inherent paranoia of the scene but also allow the coterie to become acquainted with the city.

This scene takes place during Montreal's famous summer festival season. The city crawls with mortal tourists. Places like Old Montreal, Downtown and St. Laurent Boulevard teem with festival goers attending the Jazz and New Cinema festivals, the International Firework Competition and Montreal's annual Gay Pride parade. Cainites can easily hide and avoid attention, not to mention feed, among the throng of humanity.

The drama of Scene One is fairly straightforward. The characters travel to Montreal and find a safe haven to spend the night before the unveiling.

ENTERING THE CITY OF BLACK MIRACLES

Visiting Montreal is hardly impossible. Although the city is a Sabbath enclave, it's not an impenetrable fortress — Cainites don't patrol the shores ready to strike down any who cross the waters of the St. Lawrence river. The characters, however, do not need to know this. Use their own preconceptions against them to add suspense to the scene. Let the characters' (and players') stereotypes of the Sabbath work against them. Montreal's Cainites move at a different pace than most other sect members. While cruel and decidedly inhuman, Montreal's Sabbath unleash terror but not mindless violence on their city.

Archbishop Benezri's decree opens Montreal to non-Sabbath Cainites. While unpopular among the younger Sabbath, Benezri's word is *lex noctis*, in theory if not practice. Unpublicized to foreign Cainites, the decree forbids Sabbath from attacking any Noddist (regardless of sect) attending the unveiling. Benezri's decree stands in effect for three nights starting on the evening before the unveiling. During this time, the characters (and independents like the Giovanni Seamus Dunsirn) are "officially" safe from physical harm, but this does not mean local Sabbath refrain from tormenting or terrorizing them.

Once in Montreal, the characters' actions depend on their sect and their motivations for attending the unveiling. Obvious Camarilla scholars (or agents of Beckett or Jan Pieterzoon) benefit from Benezri's decree, but should wisely avoid any unnecessary contact with local Cainites. Foolish or ignorant (or inexperienced) Camarilla characters who insist on presenting themselves to Montreal's "prince" find Benezri cordial, but other Sabbath may have different reactions.

Characters who did their homework might try to arrange meetings with the Librarians or Yitzhak (a member of Benezri's pack and a Camarilla sympathizer) to ease their way into Montreal. The Librarians do not lend any assistance, claiming to be too busy with preparations. Yitzhak is more accommodating, even going as far as setting up the characters in a safe hotel for the night. The coterie can only use Yitzhak if they have a connection to him, such as a sire with ties to the Prince of Ottawa whom the Shepherd knows.

Sabbat characters, locals or not, have an easier first night. The communal haven is their likely destination. There they find a good number of Cainites partaking in a number of *ritae*. Most are open to the characters, but the coterie should feel tension beneath the surface. Rumors of a "stranger" in town and Mercy's growing restlessness has many Sabbat worried — the Librarians' finding only fuels their paranoia.

ENCOUNTERS

Unless the coterie goes out of its way to attract attention, it remains unnoticed for the first night in Montreal. Below is an encounter Storytellers can stage to add tension while the characters explore Montreal.

The Lone Ravnos

Gharston Roland, one of few Ravnos who survived the Week of Nightmares, is a pale shadow of his former self. His psyche is shattered, but he remains lucid at times. He's been following the coterie since its arrival and is curious why the Cainites are in town. This is perhaps the first chance the coterie has to speak with a Ravnos after the events of July 1999. Nightmares still plague Gharston, and he tells the characters what he knows, even gives them a quick firsthand account of the Week of Nightmares. He has nothing to hide, talking animatedly about both the Sabbat and Camarilla having no idea what the Final Nights have in store for them. Clever Storytellers could even use his ramblings to foreshadow a passage or two from the Nod fragment.

SCENE TWO: A DEVIL'S MASQUE

The unveiling the Nod fragment sets *House of Lies* in motion. The characters interact with famous (and infamous) Cainites, catch a glimpse of the fragment, and in the process uncover some truths behind it.

Underscore this scene with a tense, uncomfortable edge. The characters are in Sabbat country and the attendees do not gossip while sipping cups of blood or exchange purple tirades on the wretched hell of unlife. The unveiling is a gathering and celebration of Caine, not vampires pretending to be human snobs. The whole scene embodies the energy and decadence of the Sabbat and should repulse and intoxicate the characters. Vampires have no pretense here, only cruelty and sensuality. Cainites feed with wanton glee and revel in their own inhumanity.

POINTS OF ENTRY

Unless they try something out of the ordinary, the coterie is likely to enter Montreal from one of three common points.

Old Montreal (by boat): Montreal's oldest section is a winding collection of narrow colonial streets dating back to the 17th century. Recently renovated, the area near the port is a tourist mecca, but the streets that surround it are dimly lit Sabbat hunting grounds. Characters traveling in Old Montreal should constantly feel that they are being observed, never certain whether they are being followed or are just paranoid. Countless abandoned projects make excellent havens for the characters. Here, the coterie may find sanctuary from the sun's rays — feeling safe is another matter.

Downtown (by train): The heart of the city, downtown is a melting pot of cultures and lifestyles. Yuppies sit in cafés next to punks and blue collar workers as festival goers pass by. Downtown offers the characters freedom to explore Montreal in relative safety. Scattered along the many small streets between Old Montreal and downtown are countless small hotels where characters may find a safe haven for the night.

The West Island (by plane): Surrounded by pockets of forests and manicured lawns, Montreal's Dorval airport is located 20 minutes from downtown. The West Island offers little in the way of excitement, but characters are likely to avoid the attention of the Sabbat. Havens are bountiful, from highway motels to suburban homes left empty by their vacationing owners.

THE HEART

Located on bohemian St. Laurent Boulevard in what was once a textile factory, the Heart is home to the Widows and the stage for Scene Two. The Heart is a shrine to Cainite passions and decadence. Composed of interconnecting rooms, everything about the Widows' lair is erotic and sensuous. The finest leather covers the furniture. Scattered throughout the lair, dozens of mortals sit, lie or hang bound and gagged with barbed wire. Most of the kine are naked and covered with blood. Their eyes dart about in sheer horror.

The Heart has five chambers, arranged like a rough pentagon, all connected to a central amphitheater by winding corridors. One room is locked and reserved for the fragment. The other four chambers are sitting rooms where Cainites can meet.

The Widows greet their guests in the amphitheater, a shrine to the decadence of the Albigensians. Candles of human fat burn with an eerie glow and countless small recesses conceal writhing bodies chained and fleshcrafted into tableaux of human depravity and sin by the Widows. On pedestals and hanging from walls are excerpts and votive paintings from the *Chronicle of Secrets* chapter of the *Book of Nod* as well as various archeological relics.

The Relics

A number of relics are on display in the amphitheater, locked behind glass cases. The artifacts include ceramic

pots, pieces of sculpture and the occasional blood-rusted weapon, all depicting some aspect of Cainite mythology. The relics hail from Kaymakli, sent as a diversion by Aristotle to Montreal along with the fragment. Their style is anachronistic, bordering on classical, and the relics are in excellent shape. Characters who succeed on a Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 7) ascertain that the relics are thousands of years old and place their geographic origin to somewhere in modern-day Turkey. Characters using The Spirit's Touch (difficulty 9) are flooded with horrific impressions of the bloodbath in Kaymakli, possibly triggering frenzy. Characters must first find a discreet way to open the display cases, however.

The relics are a major source of conversation, conjecture and trepidation at the party. Sascha Vykos, a few of the Shepherds and especially the Giovanni Seamus Dunsirn spend a good portion of the evening analyzing the relics. This gives the characters an opportunity to strike up conversations with them.

THE WITCHING HOUR

The unveiling is set for midnight, but the Widows open their haven shortly after nightfall. Most of the attendees arrive by 10 o'clock, including Sascha Vykos, Archbishop Benezri, the Shepherds, Beatrice L'Angou flanked by Marie-Ange Gagnon and Seamus Dunsirn. Molly 8 and her

stepbrother Skin arrive closer to midnight having spent the better part of the evening looking for Christianus Lionel.

The coterie should have no trouble finding the Heart following the directions provided by Yitzhak or any of their contacts. Stepping into the main amphitheater, all eyes fall on the characters and The Rose quickly greets them. The Widow takes her time to acquaint herself with the characters. She is soon joined by Creamy Jade and Black Lotus. The Widows are alluring and stunning; male and female characters should feel irresistibly attracted to them, but at the same time unnerved. If the coterie is a Sabbat pack, the Widows are still dangerous, but they treat the characters like younger siblings to protect and corrupt. If the characters reveal themselves to be Camarilla Kindred, The Rose takes an immediate, and perverse, interest in the coterie. She wants nothing more than to explore their "humanity" and see what darkness lies beneath.

After greeting the characters, The Rose introduces the coterie to the assembled Sabbat and officially opens the festivities. Most of the Cainites keep to themselves, talking in small groups and occasionally sharing in the Vaulderie. It is clear, however, that next to the relics on display, the characters are the focus of attention. A successful Empathy roll reveals a sense of apprehension and trepidation underlining the gathering. It should become



apparent that all is not right. This tension lends a sharp, volatile energy to the proceedings.

JOINING THE FOLD

The Rose calls for a Blood Feast after the introductions and insists the characters join in the *ritae* in honor of their attendance. With a simple word, The Rose summons a dozen mortals to her. With this, Creamy Jade gestures and summons chains from the shadows (she is using Thaumaturgy). The chains coil around the mortals' arms and necks and lift them above the floor, raining blood across the center of the amphitheater. The smell of blood and the screams send a few Cainites into a feeding frenzy. Within seconds, they latch on to the helpless mortals, dangle from them and drain their vitae.

Characters witnessing this debauchery might need to check for frenzy and possibly test for degeneration. It is quite possible that hunger consumes them and they descend on one of the mortals. If the characters refuse to partake in the Blood Feast, The Rose and the Widows insist they join, becoming more and more threatening. If the characters continue to protest (and no one fails a frenzy roll), the raucous Sabbat encircle them. The characters must decide whether to give in to the Sabbat or defend their humanity to Final Death. If the characters refuse to feast, Benezri steps in before things get out of hand.

PLAYING THE PARTY

The Blood Feast lasts all night (though characters may want to leave earlier), with many Cainites feeding and gorging themselves. Even "refined" Sabbat like the Librarians and Shepherds drink ravenously. With the vessels drained, the party continues as before; the satiation of hunger dulls the edge from most Cainites, but the sense of apprehension prevails.

This is the coterie's opportunity to mingle. Throughout the evening, many Cainites approach the characters, some to discuss the relics or the fragment. Others to talk about politics and the Final Nights. Below are some encounters that transpire during the evening.

The Librarians

Only the Kiasyd Beatrice L'Angou and Tzimisce Marie-Ange Gagnon are present at first. They keep to themselves, secluded in a small alcove, rarely conversing with others. Beatrice is distant, refusing to speak to anyone (except Benezri) including Sascha — it's not like the Kiasyd to shun a respected Noddist like Sascha. Marie-Ange is visibly nervous and almost hostile to the characters. The Librarians' actions elicit hushed whispers, but few press the issue. It's obvious the Librarians are nervous about something. Characters discussing Beatrice's behavior with others learn that a few Librarians are noticeably absent.

Alfred Benezri and the Shepherds

Archbishop Benezri is cordial. He takes his time to size up the coterie to see if they could help him save the

Librarians — either as allies or scapegoats. Benezri tries to impress the characters with the glory of the "rarified" Sabbat of Montreal. If the characters hover around Alfred, they overhear his concern about the Sabbat Inquisition. "The Inquisition is blinded by its own importance. They used to be crusaders, now they're plutocrats and fanatics afraid of losing power." A few discrete questions and the characters discover tension exists between the archbishop and the Inquisition. They also discover Benezri was once an Inquisitor himself and that he's had minor differences of opinion with an Inquisitor named Mercy.

The other Shepherds are more tight lipped, restricting their conversations to the relics and the fragment. Frere Marc constantly hovers about the relics, muttering in French and crossing himself. The relics trouble him, and he knows nothing good can come of them. Later, characters notice Marc and Benezri exchanging words. It's not an argument, but Marc wants the relics confiscated or destroyed. Benezri calls the old Gangrel superstitious. Raphael Catarari, Cherubim and Sabrina are more worried about the possible schism with the Sabbat Inquisition and pay little attention to the characters or the relics.

Yitzhak is honest and open, going as far as telling the characters that there have been rumors in Montreal that have many, including the Inquisition, on edge. The rumors involve a strange Cainite, or possibly a ghoul, supposedly hiding in town. When pressed for more information, Yitzhak admits he knows nothing more, but that the Librarians' finding couldn't possibly have come at a worse time.

Sascha Vykos

For the most part, Vykos keeps to itself, a scientist analyzing specimens. Sascha is curious about the fragment, but more so about the politics at play. It sees the characters as perfect vehicles for its curiosity. Sascha knows the Librarians are hiding something, but is still in the process of gathering information. The characters could serve as excellent proxies in the matter. If the characters are known to be Camarilla, Sascha is curious about their reasons for attending, but only asks a few questions hoping the characters slip up. If asked about the fragment, Sascha thinks it's an original but questions why the Librarians are so quiet about it. Sascha is an excellent source of information about the fragment, but it doesn't spell anything out, preferring to let the characters deduce the truth for themselves.

Seamus Dunsirn

One of the only independents attending the unveiling, the Giovanni keeps to himself the whole evening. If approached he is polite, but spends his time examining the many relics on display like a millionaire counting his fortune. If asked about his reasons for attending, Seamus claims he's a collector of Noddist lore.

Shortly after 11 P.M., Seamus tries to slip away unnoticed, using a brief argument between Benezri and Frere Marc over the relics as a distraction. Characters who succeed on a

Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) notice Seamus ducking into one of the adjoining corridors. If the characters follow him, this leads to Scene Three.

Agaitas

Moving unseen and gazing from the Underworld, Agaitas is a Harbinger of Skulls attending the party to determine the origins of the relics and fragment. Nobody at the party is aware of the Harbinger, though characters with Auspex might feel a cold presence occasionally. Perceptive characters may notice relics change positions slightly as Agaitas examines them from beyond the veil of death.

Molly 8 and Skin

Arriving around midnight, the Cainite siblings are visibly agitated. Molly 8 heads directly for Beatrice and the two retreat to a private alcove. If the characters attempt to eavesdrop, Gagnon steps in to dissuade anyone from straying too close. Molly 8 tells Beatrice that neither Lionel nor the ghoul are anywhere to be found. If the characters check Benezri's reaction, they see a worried look flash across his face before he regains control and continues his discussion with Sascha.

Skin wanders the Heart feeding on the mortals and using a length of barbed wire to mortify his flesh. Anyone coming near him experiences nightmares and images of Hell and insects (Skin is using *The Haunting*). If a character still wishes to speak to the Malkavian *antitribu*, he's incoherent and mutters nonsense (Skin is actually reciting lines from the fragment at random). The only sensible thing he says is:

"She walks in darkness like the night... And all that's worst of dark and bright... One shade the more. Gone, Gone, Gone."

An Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 7) indicates Skin is quoting part of Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty," but is obviously ad-libbing. If asked about the poem Skin mumbles a response, points to the relics and says nothing more.

SCENE THREE: DANGEROUS OBSERVATIONS

If the characters decide to investigate the Widows' haven, or if they follow Seamus as he sneaks away, use the events in this scene to determine what happens. If the coterie is successful, they discover the lair of the D'habi ghoul and get a chance to see the fragment before it is unveiled.

TREACHERY

The Giovanni's plan is simple. Using two wraiths to help him, Seamus plans to sneak into the chamber containing the fragment and steal it. He's under orders from Ambrogino Giovanni to take the fragment if it bears any clues leading to the *Sargon Fragment*. This is why Seamus attends the party. Players who have their characters following Seamus must succeed on Stealth rolls (difficulty 8 because of the two wraiths bound to Seamus) or tip him off. If discovered,

Seamus uses the wraiths to distract the characters while he tries to steal the fragment and make his escape. If this happens, skip to Complications, below.

If the characters manage to trail Seamus unnoticed, they follow him as he sneaks into the room with the fragment and asks the wraiths to open the doors. The room is bare except for a tapestry hanging from the ceiling — the fragment, or more accurately, the Librarians' copy of it. The tapestry is 3' by 5' and etched, surprisingly enough, in Latin. This is a fake copy of the shroud doctored by the Librarians. Successful Linguistic or Academics rolls yield the following inscription:

*My children cannot,
And will not help.
They are nothing but others sins
And yet they drag me to Hell
Please, erase my folly
And end this.*

This passage was edited, partly because the Librarians were uncomfortable with the implications and because it's all they can remember — Lionel took most of their notes and findings along with the original shroud. To protect the Librarians, Beatrice used Chanjelin Ward (see *Guide to the Sabbath*, p. 106) on the tapestry to prevent anyone from seeing past the Librarians' deception. Any Intelligence pools are at -2 dice while in the presence of the tapestry and players must make a Wits + Investigation roll (difficulty 8) or their characters become addled by the puzzling nature of the fragment.

Storytellers may choose to make the roll in secret and take the result into account when describing the scene. Characters who fail are easily duped into thinking the fragment is an original and fail to question its veracity. Even those who succeed might overlook the most obvious of clues — namely the Latin wording instead of Enochian.

Seamus spends a few minutes analyzing the fragment and jotting down notes. Unaffected by the Chanjelin Ward, he mutters his observations to one of the wraiths. To the characters, Seamus looks like he's talking to air. Seamus' conclusions are:

- The inscription on display is a reproduction and most probably edited and worthless — an obvious fake (while partially correct, Seamus is only interested in the *Sargon Fragment* and is quick to jump to conclusions).
- The writing and style are not consistent with the relics on display. This is true, and characters who succeed on an Intelligence + Academics or Occult roll (difficulty 7) realize the same.
- Seamus concludes the tapestry is not the *Sargon Fragment* and instructs the wraiths to deliver this message to Ambrogino.

As soon as he is done, Seamus vanishes (into the Underworld, using his Necromantic powers). The characters are now alone with the fragment.

Complications

If the characters confront Seamus (or fail the Stealth rolls), chances are he escapes. The two wraiths distract the characters, buying Seamus time to open a portal to the Underworld and slip through. If this happens, the commotion attracts the Widows and other Cainites who expect answers. Benezri wants the Giovanni tracked down and places the responsibility on the coterie's shoulders — he wants to see how effective they are. This leads to Act Two.

Seamus's Fate

Shortly before Seamus disappears, the characters sense the same cold presence from Scene Two; Agaitas has followed Seamus and plans to ambush him in the Shadowlands. He plans to take Seamus to McGill University to interrogate and destroy the Giovanni. The characters learn of Seamus's fate in Act Two.

THE D'HABILAIR

If the characters decide to explore the Widows' haven (either before the encounter with Seamus or preferably after) diligent searching turns up a tunnel leading away from one of the Heart's chambers. The tunnel winds its way through the basement of the Heart and eventually leads to a small cluster of cells. Most of the small warren-like jails are empty, containing only iron bed frames streaked with blood. If the characters investigate, they find one of the wooden doors rammed shut against its frame.

A level 5 feat of Strength shatters the door and sends sharp splinters flying through the air. The room beyond is a mess. A pile of bloodied clothes litters the metal bed, mostly tattered garments fit for a vagrant. Two cabinets, both broken and splintered, occupy the far corner. It is obvious someone has ransacked the room.

The cell is where the Widows kept the D'habi ghoul and where Lionel kidnapped her. The cell offers little of interest unless the players pass a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 7). Success indicates that the characters find a bloodstained and crumpled note in one of the books.

The note is written in English with expert penmanship but it's almost illegible. It reads:

SCENE FOUR: WHEN DEVILS CALL

The characters' absence has not gone unnoticed. Either following the encounter with Seamus or once the characters have uncovered the D'habi's lair, Black Lotus appears. She's obviously displeased with the characters and berates them with a barely

contained fury. Their transgression is an obvious affront to her and the Widows, and one they do not forget or forgive. The characters should feel threatened; those with Auspex might feel immediate danger in Black Lotus's presence.

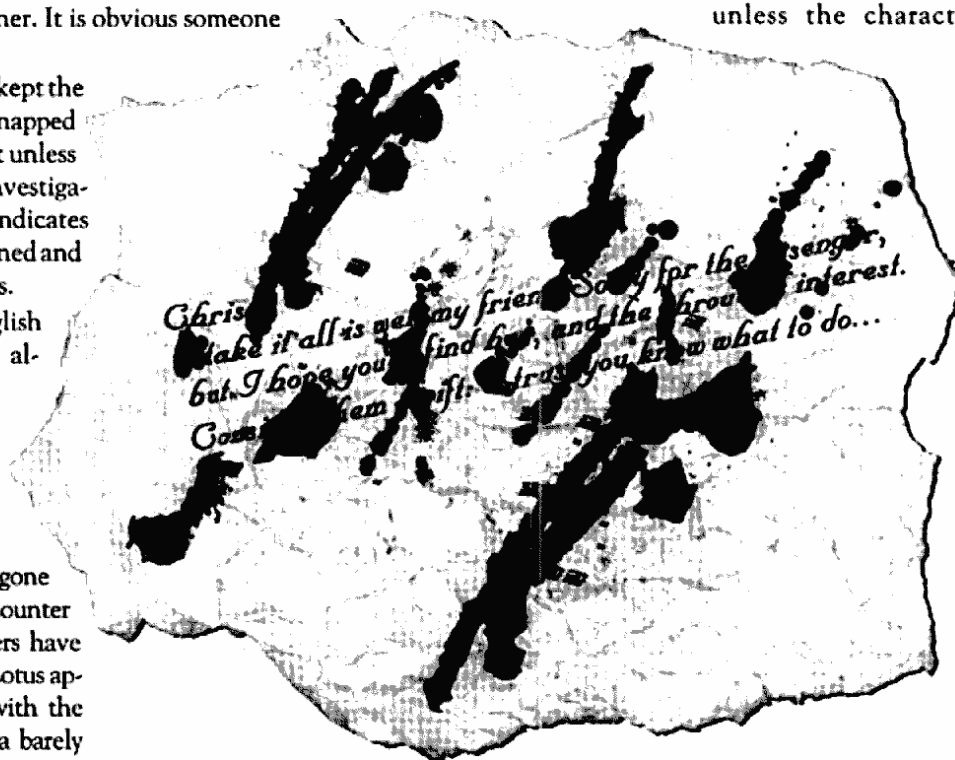
The Widow doesn't attack, however. She picks one of the characters (preferably the one with the highest Humanity or Path score, or one with a secret to hide) and tells the others their transgression will be ignored if the chosen character agrees to come with her.

Characters who don't cooperate face stern sanction when Black Lotus calls the other Widows. They try to subdue the characters. All the Widows are skilled in Dominate, Presence, Thaumaturgy and Vicissitude, making such a confrontation short and probably painful. Afterward, Benezri takes the characters into custody until Act Two, but the characters have to proceed without the Widows' help in the following acts.

If the chosen character agrees, Black Lotus tells them all she wants is to share her blood and promises nothing will happen if the coterie behaves. With this, Black Lotus and the character vanish to her personal lair.

DEADLY PASSIONS

This scene should be sexually charged. Black Lotus wants to bend and twist the character's humanity and consume her dignity. She uses Dementation to explore the character's fears and passions and then confronts her with them, discussing with the character increasingly heinous acts that go against her Nature. Mechanics should not play a role here. You should let the character confront her own darkness. Over the course of the discussion, Black Lotus undresses and partakes of the character's blood and shares some of her own, unless the character



steadfastly refuses, in which case Black Lotus mocks the character hellishly for “weakness.”

Characters who give into the Widow experience the heights of Cainite passion. Black Lotus asks the character to share her deepest secret. Unless the character succeeds on a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) she bares her deepest or most shameful secret to Black Lotus, possibly triggering a degeneration roll. If she succeeds, the character must still answer Black Lotus, but can use her passions against her. The character may ask her a single question per success that the Widow answers truthfully, wanting nothing more than to please the character.

She reveals the following:

- The Noddist Christianus Lionel is missing, and he’s the one who found the fragment.
- The ransacked chamber was used by the Librarians to house visiting guests. Someone had stayed there, but only the Rose knew whom.
- Benezri and Beatrice L’Angou are romantically involved.

I’LL CALL YOU

The encounter with Black Lotus lasts for an hour. Once finished, she dresses and leads the character back to the amphitheater. The character may know more about what’s going on, but Black Lotus has the ultimate trump card — their encounter and the coterie’s breach of Widows’ hospitality.

When the encounter is over, both Black Lotus and the character have shared blood. In addition, the character regains her full Willpower pool, reinvigorated by the experience.

SCENE FIVE: THE UNVEILING

Close to midnight, the assembled guests are anxious to see the fragment. The characters return to the amphitheater sometime before midnight. Their absence was noticed only by the remaining Widows who smile knowingly (and threateningly) at them. By 12 o’clock the Shepherds grow impatient, but the Widows insist that Black Lotus must be there and ask the assembled Cainites to be patient.

The Librarians are visibly nervous, but at the same time content with the delay. By this time, the assembled Cainites notice Seamus’s absence, adding tension to the situation as they whisper about it.

GATE CRASHERS

Just after midnight the characters notice the arrival of a group of new Cainites — the Knight Inquisitor Kervos and the remainder of Mercy’s pack. Their arrival brings matters to a head. Benezri approaches the Salubri *antitribu* who is speaking to Beatrice and is obviously unhappy. Kervos’s packmates move to cover the entrances while one collects the relics on display. Kervos and the archbishop exchange words. Beatrice then pleads with Benezri and the two walk away as Kervos’s pack finishes collecting the relics. The Knight Inquisitor disappears with The Rose and Marie-Ange Gagnon into the room containing the fragment.



The characters soon hear that Kervos has cancelled the unveiling under authority of the Sabbat Inquisition. Both Mercy and the Inquisition wish to determine the authenticity of the Nod fragment on allegations it is tainted or a forgery.

Benezri is visibly upset, but has no choice and concedes to the Knight Inquisitor's demands. If the characters speak to him, Benezri says this is why the regent and the Sabbat must be wary of the Inquisition, hoping to make them suspicious of Mercy. He's incredulous at Mercy's action but doesn't wish to condemn himself by stopping it — for now at least, and he makes this point perfectly clear to Kervos.

By this point Sascha has vanished, leaving only the Librarians, the Shepherds and the coterie to answer Kervos's questions. If characters reveal the appropriate details, Kervos detains Beatrice, the Widows and possibly the characters while the Talons analyze the tapestry and investigate the D'habi sanctuary. A Wits + Politics roll (difficulty 6) makes this obvious to the characters.

Kervos is quick to notice that Christianus Lionel is absent and makes this his next line of questioning — a question that few can answer.

AFTERMATH

Kervos's raid spells the end of the soiree. By 3 A.M. most of the guests have left. If the characters stick around, the Widows are happy to discuss the events so far, but are more interested in exploring the characters' minds and passions than anything else. Shortly before Benezri leaves, he has Yitzhak pass a message to the characters. The archbishop wishes to meet them the following night at 9 P.M. at the Oratory. He does not say why, but asks for the characters' discretion in the matter.

From here the characters have just over an hour before sunrise and should make their way back to their haven or find a new one. By this point, the characters should realize the following:

- The Librarians probably have the real fragment, but why did they display a fake?
- Christianus Lionel, the leading Noddist of the Librarians, is missing.
- A stranger was probably staying in the Widows' "dungeon," but who was this stranger?
- Benezri and the Librarians seem to know more than they are saying, but what?

ACT TWO: STUMBLING IN THE NIGHT

Act Two consists of three nonlinear scenes and two specific rally points at which characters learn new clues to the mystery of the Nod fragment. Central to this is Mercy's search for Christianus Lionel and his female ghoul "ally." The Storyteller may add or drop certain scenes based on the

coterie's activities, including a potential meeting with feared ronin Priscus Sascha Vykos and an encounter with the Malkavian *antitribu* Skin. The two pivotal events, however, are the initial meeting with Alfred Benezri and the act-ending scene at the Jazz Festival that brings Rhanian, the D'habi ghoul, out into the open. Also in Act Two, the Harbinger of Skulls, Agaitas tortures and destroys Seamus Dursin, an act Mercy attributes to Christianus.

SCENE SIX: ARCHBISHOP TO ROOKS

If the coterie acts on Yitzhak's message from the previous evening, they meet Archbishop Alfred Benezri at the Oratory. Alfred extends "asylum" for the characters since this is the final night of invitation for non-Sabbat Cainites. Without Benezri's blessing, the coterie is fair game for Sabbat hostility the next night. Alfred's second purpose for the meeting is to inform the coterie of the Inquisition's hunt for Christianus Lionel and his "partner in heresy." All Cainites in Montreal are expected to cooperate and assist in the hunt.

Alfred's real agenda is to nudge the characters into serving as his investigators. With Beatrice's well-being foremost on his mind, Alfred must help his love without overly involving himself. As such, while the meeting itself is casual, Alfred exaggerates his anxiety to pique the coterie's curiosity.

This scene takes place at St. Joseph's Oratory, a venerable church in a city full of venerable churches.

ST. JOSEPH'S ORATORY

Known simply as the Oratory, this basilica was built in the 1920s and completed in the 1950s. It has since served as the Shepherds' haven. Dominating the skyline of Mont Royal's Westmount slope, the Oratory was built in the Italian Renaissance style with a Canadian granite façade. Central to the basilica is a massive cupola, one of the largest domes in the world. From the main gate, a well-sculpted green field and wide pathway rises straight up to the first set of stairs. These 99 steps lead to a vault-like church, behind which rests the elevated and monumental basilica itself. On either side of the church, curving ramps lead up to the church's roof, where another 172 steps lead the devout to the columned exterior of the basilica proper.

Outside, a constant throng of tourists and pilgrims streams in and out of the basilica. The tourists are those with cameras while the pilgrims are those climbing stairs on their knees. Overall the atmosphere is respectfully quiet. Few people speak in more than whispers.

STAY OF EXECUTION

The archbishop meets the characters at the main gate and discusses their stay in Montreal while walking toward the basilica. His slow-measured pace and the long pathway allows Benezri and the characters at least 10 minutes to talk before they reach the first set of stairs. At all times Benezri is cordial but a touch distracted. He seems worried.

At first, Benezri is conversational and congenial. Alfred asks the characters about their impressions of Montreal and their stay thus far. Quickly, however, he guides the conversation toward the decree welcoming strangers into Montreal. With the third night upon them, Alfred is willing to extend the invitation for a few more evenings. This measure isn't simply for the characters' benefit; other Cainites have expressed an interest in staying until the shroud is unveiled. In return for this favor (or if the characters are Sabbat, then as part of their obligation to the sect), the characters must help find the heretic Christianus Lionel and his cohort, the D'habi ghoul. The Sabbat Inquisition announced a citywide hunt for these two individuals last night and expects all Cainites to assist in the search.

From here, the archbishop turns the conversation toward the shroud and Christianus, dropping clues where he can. He injects one last tidbit into the discussion, hoping to point the characters in the right direction: "How isolated the Librarians are. I'm surprised they'd even trust an outsider like Skin with their secrets." Benezri knows Skin is on close terms with the Librarians and hopes the Malkavian *antitribu* can serve as a source of information.

At this point in the conversation, Yitzhak approaches the archbishop with news. Benezri steps to the side with Yitzhak, but not out of earshot for those characters with Heightened Senses. Yitzhak tells Alfred that somebody found Seamus Dursin's ashes in a maintenance room at McGill University. Raphael Catarari (a Shepherd) was present to "interpret" the scene. He reported little save glimpses of a twisted, masked man (Agaitas, the Harbinger of Skulls) torturing Seamus. Benezri asks if the attacker could have been Christianus, but Yitzhak is uncertain. The archbishop takes advantage of the uncertainty and proclaims Christianus must have committed the crime. He dismisses Yitzhak and rejoins the group.

Benezri needs a scapegoat to protect Beatrice, and Christianus is the most convenient target. The archbishop hopes to divert attention away from his love by framing Christianus as the villain. Christianus, Alfred explains to the coterie, destroyed a fellow Cainite the previous evening, thus condemning himself further. Benezri excuses himself, having to attend to this matter personally. He escorts the coterie to the gate and gives them a PCS phone. Even if the characters have a phone of their own; Alfred explains his cellular is protected against taps. The characters should carry this phone with them at all times in case Alfred needs to contact them. All messages come through as secured e-mail pages on the phone's display screen. The coterie cannot make calls out since Benezri has had the mouthpiece disabled "in the interests of discretion." Characters with the Computer Knowledge or certain specialties of the Crafts Skill, however, may know Benezri's explanation is suspect.

BENEZRI'S CELLULAR PHONE

A few months ago, the archbishop employed a ghoul to swipe Mercy's analog-style cellular and access its electronic serial number (ESN). The ghoul then returned her phone with Mercy none the wiser. Benezri had another cellular phone programmed with the same ESN, and had the mike disconnected so that he could intercept and listen in on Mercy's conversations without her knowing. He's given the coterie another phone programmed with Mercy's ESN. Now the coterie can be privy to Mercy's movements and plans.

The coterie's phone is a recently stolen, unlisted PCS cellular that can only receive e-mails and pages on the display window. If anyone ever discovered the cellular number and called them, Mercy's phone rings as well. Because Mercy's cellular is analog, however, she never receives or even hears the phone ring when the coterie receives an alphanumeric page or e-mail. Alfred sends messages to the coterie in this fashion, with instructions to call *him* through a pay phone, if necessary.

Alfred is taking a huge risk giving the coterie a cellular, but he is desperate to save Beatrice. If Mercy captures the characters and uncovers the phone ruse, Alfred can always deny responsibility and claim the coterie stole the phone and made the alterations themselves. It is the characters' word against an archbishop's. No contest... or so it seems.

SCENE SEVEN: UNRAVELING THE KNOT

In this scene, the characters are the victims of happenstance and the center of unwanted attention. When the Widows (in Act One) took an interest in the coterie, they inadvertently turned the characters into targets for rumor and speculation. The Widows did nothing to quell these suspicions. Other Cainites now suspect the characters of greater involvement in the Nod fragment affair. Some parties, like Sascha, attempt to use the coterie to their advantage, while others are under the assumption that the characters have political influence. As such, the coterie is safe only by virtue of innuendo.

SEAMUS'S END

Alfred is not the only Cainite using Christianus as a scapegoat. The Harbinger of Skulls Agaitas, who dealt with the Librarians on previous occasions, tortured Seamus at McGill University knowing it served as Christianus's lair. He was hoping Seamus's destruction would attract Christianus to investigate, or at the very least, implicate him as the culprit. For the night following Seamus's demise, Agaitas remains near the university haven, hiding in the Shadowlands and waiting for Christianus to appear. He wants the shroud and the knowledge that it might contain. Agaitas hunts Christianus as both the owner of the fragment and as a danger for having read its contents.

The ploy fails to draw out the Nosferatu *antitribu*, but Christianus is prime suspect in the slaying. If the characters investigate the torture site, Agaitas remembers them from

the Widows' party, and follows them instead. Agaitas is only interested in learning the secrets behind the Nod fabric. The coterie is a means to that end.

The torture and destruction of Seamus Dunsirn took place in the Redpath Library Building at the McGill downtown campus. The maintenance room is in a basement-level alley between two buildings. The alley is accessible by two flights of stairs on either end that lead back up to street level. A wide walkway between the buildings intersects and overshadows the alley, casting it into deep darkness; direct sunlight never finds its way here.

Students and even campus security rarely venture into this unlit, secluded passage. Christianius lured many of his victims down here to feed, and the location has since developed a haunted reputation. The Talons (Mercy's pack) discovered the ashes while searching the campus for Christianius. Although the Shepherds kept the matter out of the papers, they cannot stop the gossip from spreading among the summer campus crowd. Most believe the murder to be an urban legend, however, and dismiss the crime as rumor. Still, enough students know about it and can point questioning characters in the right direction.

The maintenance room serves as a storage bay for landscaping equipment, though the Shepherds emptied it following the discovery of Seamus's ashes. They also washed the bloodstains from the floor and wall. The one area they missed was the storm drain, which contains ash and blood residue beneath the grill. Characters who succeed on a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 7) may notice this oversight. Echoes of violence linger in Seamus's remnants, allowing characters with The Spirit's Touch to read psychic impressions based off a Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 6). The images reveal the following:

- Seamus's face contorted in agony. His eyes are empty sockets and his throat is ripped open from where his tormentor extracted his voice box. He screams silently.

- The torturer is a shadowy figure. His eyes are round and black, like a shark's, and he wears a mask of stretched skin pulled tight against his own skull-like head. His hair is the frail, dried gossamer strands of a corpse. He almost looks desiccated, like a scarecrow.

TEA WITH THE FIEND

Sascha Vykos has one concern: the Nod fragment that Christianius stole. Having seen a copy of the text, it knows the original must hold something of greater value. It must see the original fabric. From its discussion with the Widows and other Cainites, Sascha knows the characters have been asking questions and investigating the matter themselves. Who they work for is secondary; it's only interested in having the coterie investigate on its behalf. This way, Sascha can learn the secrets of the fabric, distance itself from a possible backlash and uncover potential rivals in this game of intrigue. All the while, Sascha leads the coterie to believe it is doing them the favor.

Sascha reaches the characters through the Widows (if the coterie left the Widows a means to reach them), or

through Alfred Benezri (and the cellular). If neither option is available, it waits to meet the characters at the next large gathering — which, in this case, is the hearing in Act Three.

If Sascha uses the Widows to contact the coterie, it meets them at the Widows' lair — the site of the party. If Sascha uses Alfred Benezri as contact, it meets them in the fire-gutted ruins of the Church of the Messiah (on the corner of Sherbrooke and Simpson street). Only the foundation walls of this once-beautiful church remain. The city erected wooden barriers to keep people out, but it is easy to sneak in through the back alleys. Sascha awaits at the altar, before a half-consumed and blackened effigy of Christ on the cross. Finally, if Sascha is at the hearing, it has the Widow Creamy Jade escort the coterie to a large sepulcher in the communal haven where it waits.

Rendezvous with Sascha: Sascha is not there to fight. It has practical experience of Byzantine politics and knows how to manipulate people without resorting to threats or violence. Regardless of whether the characters agree to help it, it knows they already serve its purpose. At the very least, the coterie draws out some of the invisible players in the shroud mystery. At best, they unravel the enigma of the shroud itself. Sascha has nothing to lose and everything to gain from the coterie, a fact it chooses not to reveal to them.

Sascha is an alien being of sculpted beauty, cold spirit and androgynous countenance. Dozens of mouths cover its body and repeat phrases spoken by either Sascha or a character. This creates an unsettling chorus of echoes. Sascha is not one to mince words, but it is polite. It begins the meeting by asking the coterie about the state of their investigation. It listens quietly, regardless of the answers, and might even fill in gaps concerning the D'habi revenants or its suspicions concerning the fake shroud (if the characters are forthcoming with what they know). The meeting should be brief, however. Sascha ends the rendezvous with the following comment:

And if you uncover the original fabric, bring it to me please and I'll help you translate it. Have no fear, the shroud is yours, I have no wish but to read it with my own eyes. You can leave our rendezvous in the same state you arrived: unharmed, unmolested and perhaps even a touch wiser. If you consider this request unreasonable, then so be it. I will not begrudge you your suspicions. Just be aware that if the fabric is authentic, then it will be written in Enochian, a language a sparse dozen across this world can fathom. I am among that dozen. The Librarians have proven they are not.

GETTING UNDER HIS SKIN

Most Montreal Sabbat know that Skin's lair is an abandoned lodge on the grounds of the Douglas Psychiatric Hospital. Discovering this is as simple as asking a Cainite, "Where can I find Skin?" The Douglas Hospital is a collection of over 35 buildings, pavilions and dormitories situated on the scenic grounds along LaSalle Boulevard. The hospital faces the southern fork of the St. Lawrence River and is approximately a 30-minute drive from downtown Montreal. The hospital is 119 years old and previously served as haven

to the Les Misérables pack for about as long. Skin is the only survivor of this once-dangerous pack.

Two open driveways lead to the Douglas Hospital from LaSalle Boulevard. Beside each gate is an old gatekeeper's lodge. The west lodge is currently home to a retired director, but the east lodge is an abandoned farmhouse. Built in 1827, it has since served as a lair for Les Misérables. Because of the pack's influence over the hospital's president of the board of directors, the building is intact. As far as the public knows, it's a historical heritage site, even though no kine has ever seen its interior.

The farmhouse is in disrepair. Boards cover the windows and a giant padlock bars the old wooden door. Either entry point, however, gives way under 3 successes on an extended Strength roll (difficulty 7). Skin uses a window at the rear of the lodge where the boards are actually on a hinge. When Skin is in his lair (as he is tonight) that entry point is locked from the inside and requires a Strength roll as indicated above. If the characters simply knock to gain entry, Skin actually talks to them through the boards. If they force their way in, Skin hides in the cellar.

The farmhouse remains abandoned with nothing but dust to furnish the three rooms of the main floor. Skin makes his haven in the cellar, a squalid pit that has not seen sunlight, fresh air or a good cleaning in decades. Old clothes, three stained and mildewed mattresses, papers, books and decomposing rats all add to the unwholesome environment. If the characters break into Skin's lair, he hides Obfuscated behind a false panel covering the alcove beneath the wooden stairs. A Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) reveals the hidey-hole.

Skin is generally passive and runs before fighting. If attacked, he defends himself, but he rarely initiates combat. The characters frighten him, and it takes some convincing to gain his trust. The best way to reach Skin is by appealing to his concern for the Librarians and Molly 8, his sister. If Skin believes he can save her, he helps the coterie.

Ironically, the characters can also gain information by accusing the Librarians of infernal or wrongful activities. Skin rushes blindly to their defense, accidentally blurting out bits of information to defend them. While he doesn't know who sent the D'habi ghoul, he says that Christanius knows who did, and that Christanius was concerned about the references to a place called Kaymakli. This is the extent of Skin's willingness to help. If the characters try to Dominate Skin into talking, he flees if possible, but if the Dominating character can extract any useful information from Skin's deranged rants, more power to her.

SCENE EIGHT: THE BLOODY BLUES

When Christanius abandoned his McGill haven, he took Rhanian to a secret flat on Prince Arthur Street just north of Sherbrooke and University. There, he kept Rhanian under lock and key while calculating his next move. Rhanian escaped during the day's waning hours, however, and hit the street near dusk. She wandered past McGill University on her way to crowded St. Catherine Street, where she hoped

Christanius would lose her trail. Unfortunately, Mercy has ghouls monitoring McGill, one of whom spotted the frightened revenant. Rhanian noticed her pursuer and headed for the Jazz Festival to hide in the crowd.

As night falls, Mercy converges on the area. The characters must beat the Inquisitor and her lackeys to the punch. If they fail, Mercy captures Rhanian, and the coterie's chances to secure the fragment grow more remote.

The Storyteller should play this event on the evening after the meeting with Alfred Benezri. The coterie's proximity to the McGill area and Jazz Festival is important since this scene plays itself out quickly.

GETTING THE COTERIE TO THE JAZZ FESTIVAL

Within minutes of awakening from their day's slumber, the coterie's rigged cellular rings. This is the call to Mercy from the ghoul following Rhanian. Neither party can hear the coterie on the phone, even if the characters are speaking. The phone call goes like this:

Mercy: Mercy here.

Ben: This is Ben. I've spotted that woman you wanted.

Mercy: What? Where? Where are you?

Ben: Just hit St. Catherine. She's making a beeline for the Jazz Festival. I can't take her down without attracting attention. We'll be there in a few minutes.

Mercy: Is Christanius with her?

Ben: I don't think so. At least I don't see anyone.

Mercy: Stay on her, she'll try to lose you in the crowds. I'll be down there in five minutes. (Speaking off-phone) Kervos, get your people on the street corners and mall exits for the Jazz Festival fast. I don't want her slipping through (Speaking on-phone) Stay with her, Ben.

Ben: On it. Tell your guys she looks like a bag lady. She's bundled up in layers of clothes and she's got ratted jeans.

If the characters don't have the cellular, they might get urgent news from Alfred or the Widows that Mercy has demanded all available Cainites to converge on the festival to capture the D'habi ghoul. The coterie must now decide whether to intercept the ghoul or allow Mercy to capture Rhanian. The former option allows the coterie to question Rhanian and learn more than what they know. The latter does not.

En route to the Jazz Festival, the cellular phone rings three more times with updates on the situation. The D'habi ghoul is in the throng at the Jazz Festival, trying to lose her pursuers. On the third call, Ben tells Mercy he lost Rhanian in the crowds, but Mercy says the exits are already buttoned up. Mercy has Rhanian trapped at the festival.

SETTING: THE JAZZ FESTIVAL

Since Montreal's first gala in 1980, the International Jazz Festival has grown in size and reputation. Attracting bands and artists from as far away as Australia, the two-week event features blues, Cajun, zydeco, acid and every experimental jazz offshoot imaginable. Undoubtedly one of the city's larg-

est tourist Summer draws, Montreal is “the New Orleans of the North.”

Centered around Place-des-Arts, the Jazz Festival features outdoor and indoor shows. Place-des-Arts takes up the equivalent of three city blocks in length and width. The mezzanine consists of three buildings resting atop a larger structure that extends below ground and links Place-des-Arts to Montreal’s underground city and Metro line (the extensive subway system). The first main building, the Musée d’Art Contemporain, dominates the west face of Place-des-Arts. The second is the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier, a bomb-shaped structure in the northern portion of the block. The third location is Théâtre Maisonneuve, a squarish building occupying the southeast quadrant.

The southwest quadrant is street level, with stairs and ledges that access Place-des-Arts’ mezzanine and Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier. The mezzanine itself rises one story above street level. It holds a large fountain, parking lot, a glass tube angled into the roof of the mall below and an overlook into a street-level atrium filled with pointed metal. The Place-des-Arts building itself links all three buildings below ground and contains a mini-mall, a Metro station and ticket kiosks for Montreal’s plays and symphonies.

During the Jazz Festival, police detour traffic from the four surrounding streets to accommodate the thousands of pedestrians. Two outdoor stages dominate St. Catherine Street, while dozens of food, souvenir and corporate information kiosks line the streets and mezzanine of Place-des-Arts. Some businesses erect mini-salons for indoor shows. Most people, however, content themselves by sitting on the stairs and watching the free outdoor venues.

Across St. Catherine Street is Complexe Desjardins, containing a mall, office building and adjoining hotel. Complexe Desjardins is equal in size to the Jazz Festival site and has exits on the four adjacent streets. Only the main entrance accesses the Jazz Festival, however. The mall and office building overlook an indoor atrium with shops and offices, the center of which is used for small Jazz and performance art shows. More boutiques and restaurants line St. Catherine Street.

TRACKING RHANIA

Place-des-Arts is alive and vibrant tonight. Television crews film the festival and the thousands of people enjoying the shows. Outdoor stages, corporate logos and brightly lit kiosks turn Place-des-Arts into a colorful tableau of sights and sounds. Tracking Rhanian in this crowd is difficult but not impossible. Before the Storyteller demands Perception rolls from the coterie, however, she should detail the scene and involve all of the characters’ senses, allowing the characters to look around and explore their surroundings.

Rhanian is currently atop the mezzanine of Place-des-Arts, waiting for an indoor show to finish so she can slip out of the festival with the exiting audience. She has already spotted several pursuers diligently monitoring the street exits

and mall entrances, and moves through the crowds like a nervous animal. She is inconspicuously dressed in casual clothing, making it difficult to notice her. Players must roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 10) in order for their characters to spot Rhanian. This difficulty level does not indicate how evasive the D’habi ghoul actually is, merely how large an area the characters have to cover just to find her. Marginal successes indicate they caught a glimpse of Rhanian somewhere in the crowd, but could not keep track of her.

If the coterie does not find Rhanian after walking through the area, their cellular phone rings again. A ghoul atop the mezzanine spotted Rhanian heading for the children’s play area along the eastern wall of Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier. Mercy is en route, pushing through the throng, trying to reach Rhanian. The characters have five turns to find the D’habi ghoul before Mercy arrives and takes her into custody.

CATCHING RHANIA

Spotting Rhanian is now easier since the characters know her general location. If the Players succeed in a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7), their characters see Rhanian pacing in front of the children’s play area. With three or more successes, the character also spots one of Mercy’s ghoul flunkies keeping an eye on her. Rhanian in turn notices the characters (or Mercy if the coterie doesn’t arrive in time) and bolts into the children’s play area. She grabs and shoves kids behind her as convenient obstacles. Several dozen children stare in shock while their parents yell or scramble to get to them. A nearby television crew starts filming the unpleasant scene.

Catching Rhanian is a given. The Storyteller may simply conduct the chase scene with appropriate descriptions of leaping over small children and dodging through crowds, or use the system for Pursuit (*Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 202-203). Once the characters give chase, this delays Mercy’s arrival by one turn for every success Rhanian gains in her initial turn of flight as per the Pursuit rules (or by an additional three turns if the Storyteller runs the scene less mechanically). Mercy’s flunky gives chase as well, however, and informs the Inquisitor of the current situation. The coterie cannot lose the tail unless a character drops back and stops him. Once that happens, the characters have several more turns (Storyteller’s discretion, depending on the circumstances) before Mercy finally locates Rhanian.

Once the characters catch Rhanian, they either have to calm her down or knock her out, because she struggles to break free. Unfortunately, a crowd of onlookers gathers around the coterie, making it easier for Mercy to pinpoint them. Television crews are also rushing in and arrive in three turns. The characters now have a choice. Dawdle and contend with Mercy who plans to take Rhanian into custody immediately; fight Mercy and her pack, thus attracting the police (who are four turns away) or flee with Rhanian in tow (remember, Mercy has the exit points and Mall entrances monitored — the characters can’t escape with Rhanian without being noticed).

If the coterie has time to question Rhania before Mercy arrives, they may ask one question per turn. This is what Rhania can answer at this moment:

Where's Christianius?: He's at 5272 Prince Arthur, Apt. 7. He was asleep when she left (Christianius is gone by now. There are no clues to his current whereabouts).

About the Nod fragment: Christianius has it. It's a copy of an engraved pressed-platinum disk that she doesn't have. It is a true fragment of the *Book of Nod* written in Enochian. The second text is Latin and speaks of Kaymakli.

About Kaymakli: It's a subterranean city where an ancient vampire imprisoned hundreds of its descendants. He also cursed its portals, trapping all those who enter Kaymakli to reside there till they perish. The archeologist Beckett found Kaymakli recently. She doesn't know where that is exactly, but she knows the fragment originates from there.

Why did Christianius steal the shroud?: Because he needed to investigate it further. He wanted to verify its authenticity. The text scares him, but she isn't sure why.

Who sent Rhania to Montreal or where's the pressed-platinum disk?: She refuses to answer. It's her ace in the hole in case she needs a bargaining chip for her freedom.

Is Christianius an infernalist?: "Do you want him to be?" This answer can change if it secures her freedom.

Did Christianius destroy Seamus?: She doesn't know anything about that, though this answer also depends on her fate.

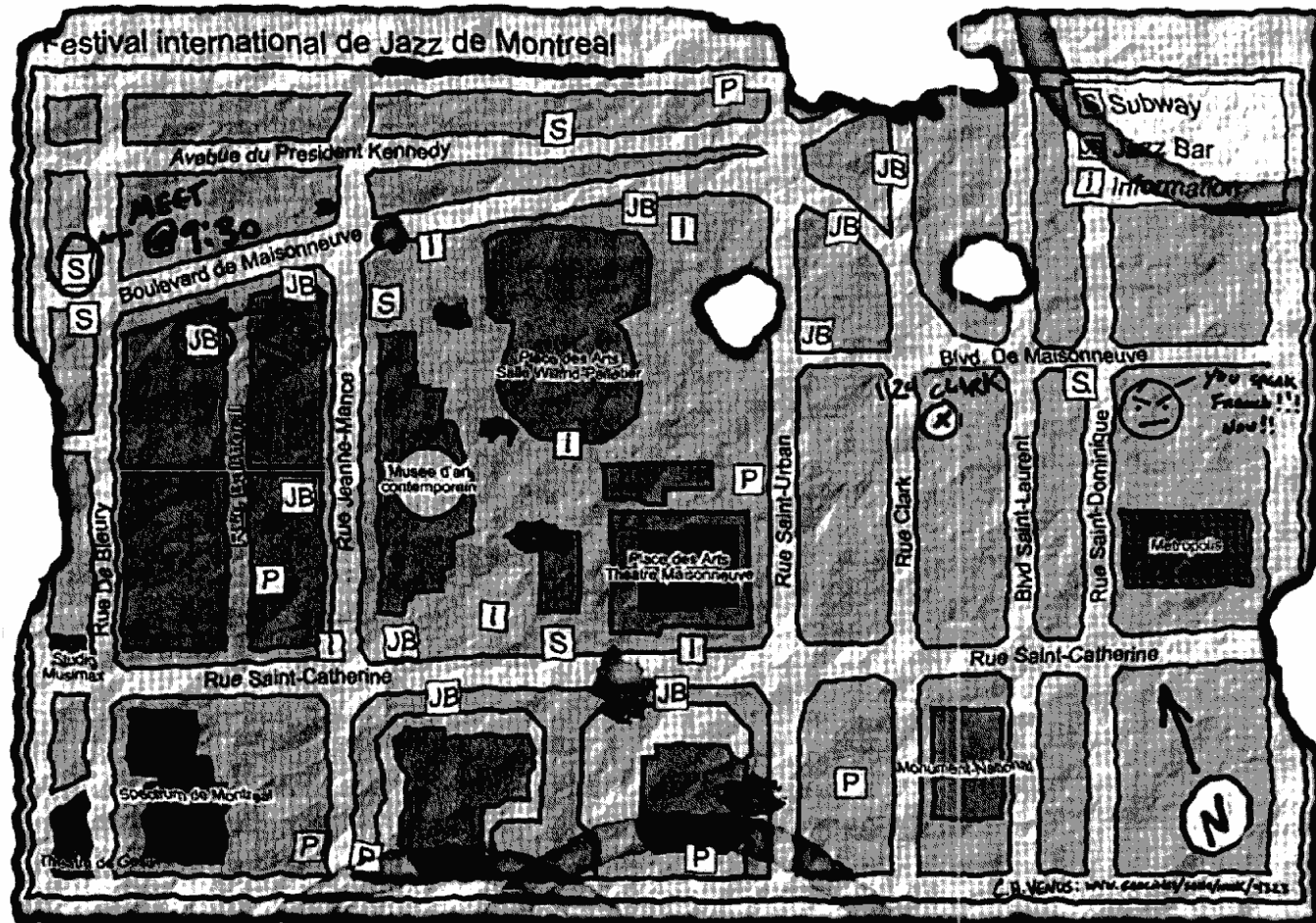
Whether Mercy captures Rhania or not, this event prompts her to hold a hearing against the Librarians. If Mercy sees the characters help the D'habighoul, she accuses them of heresy and demands they attend the hearing to answer for their actions.

ACT THREE: REVELATIONS

The tension in the previous acts gives way to murderous paranoia in Act Three. Mercy's hearings, in preparation for the almost certain *auto-de-fe* of the Librarians, has Montreal on the verge of breaking. Benezri's obvious self-interest tears the city apart and his rival, Ezekiel, rallies his supporters for a possible coup. Set against this backdrop, the coterie must track down Christianius Lionel and find the Nod shroud. The fate of the fragment and Lionel ultimately rests in the characters' hands.

SCENE NINE: BURDEN OF INNOCENCE

Following the aftermath of Scene Eight, Mercy's suspicions were correct — the D'habighoul is connected to the Nod



fragment and the Librarians hid their involvement. Whether the coterie finds the ghoul before Mercy or not, the Inquisitor has all the proof she needs to bring the Librarians to trial.

After interrogating the ghoul or Marie-Ange Gagnon, who's fearful and sees cooperation as her only salvation, Mercy sends word to Grand Inquisitor Maria Sandoza about events in Montreal. In response, Sandoza dispatches two Judge Inquisitors to formally present charges against the Librarians and determine if Archbishop Benezri is involved. Sandoza instructs Mercy to gather evidence in preparation for the Judges' arrival in three nights.

Unable to call the trial herself, Mercy holds hearings to gather evidence and testimony against the Librarians. Everyone knows the hearings are only the first stage in what is to be a long and bloody trial. Topping her list of witnesses are the Librarians and the characters.

SUMMONS

When the coterie awakens, they can feel something amiss in Montreal. Cainites with Auspex sense danger in the air. In the streets, sirens echo through the night as Montreal's Sabbat sate their anxieties on the kine. Early in the evening, regardless of where the characters are, Gharston Roland finds them. He bears a message from Archbishop Benezri: Mercy wants the characters to testify at the Librarians' hearing into possible allegations of heresy.

If asked about the trial, Mercy, or how he feels about recent events, Gharston voices his concern. He experienced firsthand the humiliation of Carolina Valez by the Inquisition and fears another witch-hunt will tear Montreal apart. He offers to take the characters to the communal haven and answers any further questions they have about Mercy or the hearings. If the coterie declines his offers, he bids them farewell and leaves.

If the characters don't go, Benezri calls them, telling them he cannot protect them if they don't cooperate with Mercy. Benezri needs the coterie at the hearing, but does not reveal his panic. It is not essential the coterie attend the hearing, but their absence is interpreted as guilt by Mercy. By midnight she orders her pack to bring the characters in for questioning, by any means necessary.

Characters can skip the hearing to find Lionel and the fragment and leave town before things get out of hand. If this is the case, the coterie must act quickly to avoid detection since Mercy and Benezri are looking for them.

TESTIMONY

The hearing takes place in the central Mausoleum of the Temple of Eternal Whispers, the communal haven of Montreal. A cholera epidemic in the 1800s forced Montreal to move its largest cemetery from downtown to the slopes of Mont-Royal. Tonight, nothing remains of this cemetery except Dorchester Square, a secluded park. Underground, many of the original crypts and mausoleums remain hidden from the kine and serve as the Sabbat's communal haven.

On the night of the hearing, the Sabbat are eager with morbid anticipation. Covens gather in the alcoves and crypts overlooking the Mausoleum, waiting for Mercy's hearing to commence. If Gharston escorted the characters, their entrance is uneventful. It is clear from their faces, demeanors and even auras, however, the assembled Sabbat distrust the coterie because of their involvement thus far.

Soon after the characters' arrival, Mercy walks to the center of the Mausoleum. She makes a show of asking Benezri's permission to begin, but doesn't wait for an answer. It's clear the tension between the archbishop and the Sabbat Inquisition has crossed a new threshold.

Mercy quickly makes her point. The Librarians conspired with a heretic and infernalist ghoul. The ghoul's corrupting presence tainted the Librarians and exposed the Sabbat of Montreal to deadly lies and blasphemies embodied by the supposed Nod fragment.

The Hearing

Mercy's hearing is a witch-hunt. She makes no pretense of fairness. Although she hasn't charged the Librarians, it is clear Mercy, and many others, have already condemned them. The proceedings boil with anger, fear and resentment, but never degenerate into a lynch mob. During the hearings, Mercy questions the following personalities.

Rhania: If Rhania survived, she's the first witness called. Mercy grills her about her involvement in the Nod affair, to which the ghoul reveals all she knows — except for Aristotle's machinations. She claims she came to Montreal of her own volition, trying to seduce and corrupt the Librarians as future tools. She knows this seals her fate, but she keeps Aristotle's involvement as a trump card. Rhania is open about her infernal lineage, preferring shock value over subtlety. She makes a show of calling her on "Dark Masters" to deflect any questions about her real connection to the fragment. Her gambit is to sell the Librarians out as heretics, thus making herself a smaller target during the upcoming trial.

The Widows: Mercy tries to implicate the Widows as accomplices, but they deftly deflect her accusations — the Widows housed the ghoul as a favor to the Librarians. They never dealt with Rhania or knew of her heretical nature. Depending on the encounter with Black Lotus in Act One, Black Lotus could help the characters when they testify, or offer evidence against them.

Sascha Vykos: Called as a Noddist expert on the shroud, Sascha is bored and cynical — a show to protect its own self-interest. Sascha testifies that the text is probably authentic, but the fragment on display was a fake, doctored by the Librarians for who knows what twisted reasons. Storytellers can use Sascha's testimony to give the characters more information about the shroud's possible origins, filling in clues they might have missed along the way.

The Librarians: Mercy doesn't question Beatrice, thus preventing the Kiasyd from defending herself or her coven.

Despite Benezri's objections, Mercy states this is not a trial but a hearing. Beatrice and the Librarians will have the opportunity to defend themselves in three nights when the Judge Inquisitors arrive.

Marie-Ange Gagnon: Gagnon offers her coven to Mercy on a silver platter. She reveals all she knows. The ghoul made contact with Lionel who brought her to the Alexandrium library along with the supposed fragment. She claims she voiced her concern and clearly saw the fragment as problematic, but both Beatrice and Lionel ignored her (this is a lie, but Gagnon is desperate). On the night of the unveiling, Lionel vanished along with the fragment and obviously sacrificed Seamus in some hellish ritual — she offers precedence with a number of tomes, all on infernal magics, supposedly recovered from Lionel's haven in the tunnels underneath the McGill university library. This points the characters to Lionel's secondary haven where they can begin their search.

Archbishop Benezri: When Benezri stands before Mercy, tension fills the room. Mercy asks Benezri flat out if he knew of the ghoul or of the Librarians' involvement. She insinuates his decree was a cover to protect and harbor Rhanias. Benezri, a former Inquisitor himself, keeps his cool and answers Mercy's questions succinctly. Benezri does his best to shift blame from Beatrice to Christianus Lionel. Mercy is quick to point out the archbishop's obvious self-interest in doing so.

Taking the Stand

The characters have two hours before Mercy calls them. During this time, they can converse but Kervos and his pack keep a close eye on them. The characters are the last to be questioned. A hush fills the room when the Inquisitor announces them as witnesses.

Mercy's line of questioning is simple. She wants the characters to implicate themselves or the Librarians as accomplices. Mercy is skilled in interrogation and intimidation, and uses both to great effect when questioning the characters. Mercy asks them:

- Their reasons for being in Montreal, especially if the characters are Camarilla or independent.
- Why the characters were snooping around the Widows' haven.
- Their opinion as to the origins of the fragment and the relics.
- Their possible connection and involvement with Seamus' destruction.

Just when the characters believe Mercy's done with them, she asks what, if any, contact the characters have had with Archbishop Benezri. This question should take the characters by surprise. If they hesitate, she presses further and even calls Yitzhak to the stand to collaborate or counter the characters' testimony. Benezri's reaction is cool, but characters notice a worried look flash across his face. This is the first indication the archbishop suspects that Mercy plans to investigate his involvement as well.

AFTERMATH

Once Mercy finishes with the characters, she calls an end to the hearing. Before dismissing those in attendance, she makes it clear that the Sabbat Inquisition looks kindly on any Cainites who assist in tracking down the heretic Lionel or uncover evidence to support charges of infernalism against the Librarians.

Before running the hearing, review the Social Feats section on page 205 in the *Vampire* rulebook, especially Credibility, Fast-Talk, Interrogation and Intimidation. While storytelling should be your guide, don't shy away from the role of Fate taken by appropriately applied dice rolls. This adds suspense and a measure of the unknown to the proceedings. A failed roll means the character loses her cool and blurts out some incriminating piece of evidence.

Depending on how the characters fared, a number of options are available. If they cooperated with Mercy, she might enlist them in the search for Lionel. If the coterie was hostile during questioning, Mercy tells them to watch their step, and if they interfere further, she'll have them charged as Christianus's accomplices.

It is now evident to Benezri that the characters must find Lionel if the archbishop is to protect Beatrice and the Librarians. It pains Benezri to sacrifice a great scholar, but he sees no other choice, especially with Mercy looking into Alfred's own involvement. After the hearing, Benezri wishes to talk to the characters, but waits for a more private moment. Benezri is frank: Lionel is a liability. He wants the characters to find and bring him the Noddist so he can deal with matters personally. Benezri uses Mercy's fanaticism as his excuse. He fears that if the Inquisitor finds Lionel first, she'll destroy him before the trial's judgement and, in the process, condemn the Librarians.

It should now be clear that Benezri is protecting the Librarians. If the coterie confronts Benezri, he's honest up to a point; he conceals his true reasons for his involvement. He cites the Librarians' long and distinguished service to the Sabbat as his main motivation. Without the chroniclers of the Sabbat, the sect cannot weather the Final Nights.

SCENE TEN: THE WIDENING GYRE

After the hearing, Montreal spirals into anarchy. Most Cainites know a showdown between the Inquisition and Benezri is unavoidable. Meanwhile, on the sidelines, Ezekiel and the younger Sabbat wait to usurp power from the elder Shepherds.

The characters, for their part, must use the clues to piece together what's really happening. Regardless of their motivations, the coterie knows its only hope of getting their hands on the shroud and learning its real story rests in finding Lionel.

COMPLICATIONS

The following encounters occur while the characters search for Lionel, but the Storyteller can play them out in any of the scenes in Act Three.



The Falconer

Determined to teach the Sabbat of Montreal a lesson, the Ventrue Jan Pieterzoon tries to contain the obvious breach of the Masquerade — which, coupled with the superstitious nonsense of the fragment, spells disaster for his efforts to contain this Gehenna nonsense. He uses his media contacts to engender false news reports of motorcycle-gang warfare as an explanation for the violent outbreaks at the Jazz Festival and on the streets. This has two effects — it deflects attention from any Kindred involvement, and Montreal's police go on full alert, patrolling the streets to stabilize the situation.

The added police presence sparks a number of confrontations between authorities and the Sabbat. Officers detain and question “suspicious” individuals, including the characters. The coterie must be vigilant not to attract their attention.

If the characters are associates of Jan Pieterzoon, he contacts them the night of the hearing. He wants the matter in Montreal resolved and the fragment destroyed. The Ventrue does not care how the characters accomplish this, but he makes it clear the coterie faces stern sanction if they fail. If necessary, Pieterzoon makes his media contacts available to them (which may make things just a bit easier, or solve most of the problem, depending on how the Storyteller wants to resolve this particular plot thread). The characters can use the media and the growing panic to distract the Sabbat, giving the coterie leeway in their investigation. If Benezri or Mercy discover this deception, they consider this an act of war; for the time being, they set aside their differences and focus on the characters.

A Warning

While the characters search for Lionel's haven, Ezekiel and his pack intercept the coterie. He doesn't want to harm them, only deliver a message — it is in their best interest to abandon their search and leave Montreal.

Ezekiel is planning a coup, and the growing hostilities between Benezri and the Inquisition serves his needs. Ezekiel is not out to make enemies, only to see where Sabbat characters stand. Ezekiel needs allies and offers the coterie rich incentives to join his side. The Serpent wants Benezri and Mercy's conflict to come to a head, but he does not tell the characters this unless he trusts them.

If the characters have been announced or exposed as Camarilla, Ezekiel's warning is clear. Cainites like Benezri and the overzealous Inquisition have weakened the Sabbat. The Final Nights are upon the Sword of Caine and all shall feel its sting, especially the Camarilla. Ezekiel tells the characters they have one night to leave town, or they will be the first to fall, decree or not.

For more information on Ezekiel and his pack *Montreal by Night*, p. 99.

FINDING CHRISTANIUS

The first place the characters can search for Christanius is his lair at McGill University. Several clues can lead the coterie in the right direction, including Marie-Ange's testimony dur-

ing the hearing, overhearing Benezri's conversation in Scene Six or talking to Skin in Scene Seven. Still, the McGill campus is huge and finding Lionel's haven takes some investigating.

Characters searching the extensive underground access system connecting the various faculties, or investigating the university's libraries may eventually come across a series of unused maintenance tunnels. Chain link fences with locked gates restrict access to the tunnels. Climbing past the gates requires a level 5 feat of Strength or a successful Dexterity + Security roll (difficulty 7). Careful examination of the floor around the gates reveals faint tracks made in the muck over the last few nights. If they follow these footsteps, the characters find Lionel's lair.

Christianus's haven is in the basement of the Religious Studies Building in a cramped annex. The haven is dark; a solitary 60-watt light bulb casts more shadows than light. The lair is in disarray — both Mercy and Kervos have already ransacked it. Books lay scattered on the ground and scraps of paper cover every surface. After a careful search, the characters find the following items:

- Two personal copies of a *Book of Nod* transcription, carefully indexed and annotated by Lionel. Damaged and torn, both are missing sections. One has specific pages ear-marked and annotated where Aristotle's Nod fragment could possibly fit.

- A Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) yields a rolled-up oil painting of a mansion surrounded by lush trees overlooking a city (an Intelligence roll reveals the city to be Montreal in the early 1900s).

- An old bound tome of religious poems, including Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Marlowe's *Faustus* and William Blake's "Songs of Innocence." The book has the following inscription: "To Christianus, Knowledge is a gift worthy of sacrifice. Your Father, Philippe Lionel." In the book, the characters find a newspaper clipping from 1923 describing the brutal murder of the Lionel family at their estate at 745 Summit Circle in Westmount.

- Dozens of ledgers stacked in a corner. An Intelligence + Finance roll (difficulty 4) reveals these are the financial records of the Lionel family. They include references to home taxes in Montreal's posh Westmount district. The ledgers show Christianus made payments every month from 1923 to the present. This is Lionel's secret haven. The address is listed in the newspaper clipping

FAMILY SECRETS

The Lionels were once a prominent family in Montreal, making their fortune during the industrialization of the 1800s. By the 1920s, however, the Lionels had lost much of their social standing. Their fortune dwindled and nearly everyone forgot about them. The truth, however, is that the family's demise was not the result of financial ruin, but of Christianus's influence, a slow rot that ended in savage murder. Shortly after returning from WWI, Lionel, a newly Embraced member of the Sabbat, Dominated, ruined and eventually murdered his family. He then spent the next

decade carefully erasing his mortal past. He was unwilling to destroy the mansion of his birth, however.

Over the years, Lionel's home fell to neglect. He paid only the requisite taxes and used it occasionally as a private haven. After Rhania escaped, Lionel — with shroud in hand — returned home.

Finding the Lionel Estate is not difficult. Located 10 minutes from downtown on the western slope of Mont-Royal, heavily forested Westmount is home to Montreal's elite. Here winding cobblestone roads reach the summit where palatial mansions and churches lie cloistered behind the ancient trees of Mont-Royal. It is here the coterie finds Lionel's dilapidated home, secluded by wrought-iron gates and choked by vines.

A stone wall, 14 feet high, circles the grounds, but gaining access is as easy as jumping over the walls. On the other side, ravens and crows nest in an overgrown garden. The birds, Lionel's pets, do not attack the characters unless molested or the Storyteller wishes to add some tension to the scene (if they do attack, use the Packs and Swarms rules on page 304 of the Vampire rulebook). At the very least, the birds cause a ruckus, warning Lionel of the intruders.

Inside, dust and neglect coat the once the glamorous interior. Faded and water-damaged paintings line the walls, including originals by Monet, Bosch and several Canadian artists. Crystal chandeliers lie shattered on marble floors and bloodstains cover much of the walls and furniture. Characters succeeding on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) smell faint traces of smoke coming from an upstairs room.

Madman or Prophet

Christianus is in the main library on the second floor. He's spent most of the night burning his priceless collection of books — worthless in the Final Nights. When the characters enter the room, his back is to them but he's aware of their presence. On a table next to him, dangerously close to the fireplace, is a rolled-up length of leather — the shroud. Before the character can say anything, he points to the shroud and says:

"Is this what you came for? Is it not enough so many are already damned that you cannot leave well enough alone?"

Lionel is close to breaking. A deeply faithful Cainite, Christianus believes the shroud cursed. He finally understands the full ramifications of the text — his and every Cainite's soul is ash to God. This is why he stole the shroud and kidnapped the D'habi ghou. In his fracturing mind, he understands why Aristotle sent him the fragment — to have him take responsibility and burn the shroud so that all Cainites might be spared the weight of its prophecies.

If the characters approach Lionel, he steps closer to the pyre and lowers the fragment to the flames. The characters must talk Lionel back from the edge of the abyss. Agaitas is also present in the Shadowlands, but happy to see Lionel suicidal and eager to destroy the shroud. The Harbinger simply watches. The key is getting Lionel to talk about the shroud. The following subjects trigger these responses from Christianus:

• **The D'habi ghou:** "I didn't understand why *he* sent her at first, but now I do. She's only a messenger, already tainted and sure to burn at the final Judgment. She cannot see the truth when her heart holds only lies." The "he" is Aristotle. If asked about Aristotle, Lionel becomes agitated, but eventually tells the characters that it was Aristotle who sent the ghou and the shroud to him.

• **The shroud, the real fragment:** "But Aristotle lied, the fool has the original. If the shroud contains but part of the real message I fear for our souls. We're all betrayers, and a great reckoning is upon us—the liar Ravnos himself was the first, but not the last. Aristotle betrayed his student, I betrayed my coven, the Librarians betrayed the Sabbat, and we all betrayed our Dark Father, and he betrayed us. There is no hope; we are a forsaken race and these, our Final Nights, are borne of our sin, pride and vanity. On the eve of Gehenna, all of Caine's race shall know God's judgement." With this Lionel steps into the flames. Agaitas, in the meanwhile, realizes his true adversary is Aristotle, and simply watches events unfold hoping the characters save the shroud.

Characters with *Auspex* have a split second premonition that the shroud is in danger and can react. All characters present must succeed on a *Courage* roll when Lionel steps into the fire or experience *Rötschreck*, remaining frozen in fear while Christanius and the shroud burn. Any character who can act has two turns to save the shroud and five to save Lionel

(characters with *Auspex* have an extra turn for both). The easiest way is to knock Lionel away from the flames. Doing so requires a resisted *Dexterity* + *Athletics* roll (difficulty 7). Characters attempting this maneuver suffer two *Health Levels* of aggravated damage. If the character is successful, Lionel and the shroud are spared from the flames, but the characters must now contend with a frenzied *Nosferatu* bent on destroying himself, the shroud and anyone who gets in his way. *Frenzy* grips Christanius, but the situation is not hopeless.

If Christanius jumps into the flames, he thrashes about, kicking flaming debris and setting the room ablaze. If the characters intercede before he sacrifices himself, Agaitas encourages angry ghosts to throw burning books into the curtains and carpeted floor. Regardless, the fire spreads to the rest of the room by the third turn. By the sixth turn the house is on fire. Characters must accumulate seven successes in seven turns on an extended *Wits* + *Survival* roll (difficulty 7, 8 if a character is dragging Lionel) to escape the burning home. If a character fails the roll, she suffers one *Health Level* of aggravated damage (three if she botches).

Once outside, the surviving characters can hear sirens coming closer.

SCENE ELEVEN: END GAME

The confrontation with Lionel and the truth behind the shroud effectively brings *House of Lies* to its conclusion. All



that remains is wrapping up the loose ends that could easily become further stories or even whole chronicles.

With the fragment, and possibly Lionel, in hand, the characters must now decide what to do next. Following Scene Ten, things quickly come to a head. Mercy, Benezri, Sascha, the Harbinger of Skulls and even Beckett try to corral the characters and extract information, the shroud, Lionel or all three — no matter the cost. The characters, however, hold all the cards and with some quick thinking, they can play these Cainites against each other and come out on top.

APOSTLE

First among the coterie's decisions is determining Lionel's fate if he survived the flames. It's clear Benezri and Mercy both want Christanius to stand trial for dealing with Rhania. He faces Final Death. For Mercy, there is no other solution and Benezri knows someone must burn to save Beatrice and the Librarians. With this in mind, handing Lionel to either Mercy or Benezri might very well call for degeneration rolls for knowingly contributing to the destruction of a Cainite.

Characters may also decide to spare Lionel. Unfortunately, the Noddist is close to insanity and most likely sacrifices himself to the sun's rays in the near future. If the characters nurse Lionel back to stability (over the course of months), he becomes an apostle of the Final Nights, traveling from city to city spreading Caine's message and preparing all his Children for the Great Judgment from Above.

If Lionel survives, thin-blooded seers flock to Christanius after receiving visions of a Burning Prophet borne of the flame of the Red Star. This makes for apocalyptic spin-off stories following events in *House of Lies*.

ANCIENT GRUDGES

Shortly following the fire in Scene Ten, the Lazarene Agaitas visits the characters, determined to recover the fragment if it was not destroyed. Agaitas uses Telepathy to guide the coterie to the cross on Mont-Royal's summit with promises of information and the real tale behind the fragment. Once there, Agaitas appears out of nowhere — materializing from the Shadowlands. Agaitas is dressed in a leather habit, and a numbing chill surrounds him. Agaitas not only looks ancient, he is. He demands the shroud.

Agaitas is intimidating. His presence cowers even uncooperative characters. If the characters refuse, Agaitas leaves (his bluff called), but is now determined to wage a private war against the characters. They've just gained a deadly enemy. If they comply, the Harbinger examines the shroud and asks the coterie for the original, his temperament worsening. If the characters are forthright and mention Aristotle, Agaitas is thankful — the Lazarene is more interested in the original. Perceptive characters may remember Agaitas's cadaver mask as the same worn by Seamus's killer. Any questions on the matter go unanswered with hostile silence.

If the coterie asks about his interest in the fragment or Kaymakli, Agaitas takes a moment to answer.

"Ancient wrongs must be righted, the wheel turns full circle and in the end, the end itself is not finite. It is a cycle of predestined motion. We all have parts to play in what's to come." With this Agaitas vanishes into the Underworld, but he leaves the shroud — it contains no damning evidence against the Harbingers. The disk is the true prize.

NEW MUTINY

At the first opportunity, Beckett pays the characters a visit. It doesn't take the Gangrel archaeologist long to find them. Beckett approaches the coterie and simply asks what they know. If they reveal Aristotle's involvement, he's gracious — granting them a major boon if they keep matters quiet and hand the shroud over to him. Beckett is devastated by Aristotle's deception, and the Gangrel's head swims with anger. He can think of nothing but revenge. Nothing can stop him from confronting his mentor.

TRANSLATIONS

The shroud is in Enochian and only Sascha can properly translate the text for the coterie. Its price is simple — it wants to read the Nod fragment. Sascha finds it curious how a simple piece of leather has the city in panic. As Sascha reads the text, one of its many mouths translates the fragment into English (see *The Shroud of Kaymakli* below).

Afterward, Sascha is morose, a glint of melancholy barely discernable behind its detached façade. If pressed, Sascha tells the characters: "The last time I saw such prophecies, Constantinople burned, but its ashes gave us the Sabbat. As then, many will burn, their reddish embers filling the Final Nights like dead stars. Is this our end? No, but it is a transformation. My sire once spoke of his sire and said 'change breeds itself and at one point, the head must bite the tail to start the cycle once more.'"

EPILOGUE

Montreal takes months to recover from its ordeal, if it ever does. The fate of the Sabbat there depends on the characters' actions during *House of Lies*. Alfred remains in power unless the Sabbat Inquisition charges him for interfering in its duties. Should he fall, then Ezekiel claims the city for the Black Hand and ushers in a new era for the former Noddist haven. Should Alfred Benezri remain archbishop, he does so with a weakened power structure. His allies know he nearly surrendered Sabbat ethos for the love of Beatrice, a weakness that could afflict him again the future. Mercy watches him like a hawk. The Inquisition continues its war against heresy, claiming many more Cainites during the Final Nights.

The Librarians lost face during *House of Lies*, both because of Christanius's actions and because of their own conduct. Regardless of their fate, the Librarians no longer have the respect of their Noddist peers. Within weeks of the fragment incident, several Noddist covens journey to Montreal to assume the role of chroniclers for the *Litany of Blood* (possibly even the

characters if they are so inclined). Among these Cainites is Agaitas. He wishes to protect the Sabbat's "venerable" history by taking a direct hand in its maintenance. His new position makes him a pivotal player in future Montreal events.

Outside Montreal, Beckett and Aristotle clash behind proxies in the grand ballet of the Jyhad. To Aristotle, Beckett is a spoiled child learning unlife's harsh lessons the hard way. Aristotle hopes his former protégé matures and eventually accepts his actions. Beckett, in turn, sees Aristotle as a domineering viper who has grown fearful with old age. Their clashes and efforts to sabotage one another destroy countless artifacts and sites. Each slight deepens the wound; each affront poisons their blood.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE LIBRARIANS

A humble name for an important pack, the Librarians are keepers of the *Litany of Blood*, the Sabbat's history. The sect recognizes this pack as among the premier Noddists, and many Cainites seek out the Librarians' massive library for research and knowledge. The Librarians are currently embroiled in the Nod fragment crisis, an incident that could see their destruction at the hands of the Inquisition. The Librarians possess the following members:

Beatrice L'Angou: (Kiasyd, 9th generation) Leader of the Librarians, Beatrice's beauty is matched by her intellect.

To save her pack from destruction, she accepts sole responsibility for harboring the D'habi ghouls Rhanias if necessary.

Marie-Ange Gagnon: (Tzimisce, 10th generation) Touched by infernalism in her past, Marie-Ange betrays the Librarians to Mercy to divert attention away from herself. She only offers information piecemeal as future bargaining chips.

Molly 8: (Tzimisce, 12th generation) A walking tapestry of floral tattoos, Molly 8 is loyal to Beatrice, her mortal mother, and to the Malkavian *antitribu* Skin, her adopted mortal brother. Skin shares all her secrets.

For more information on the Librarians, see p. 90 in *Montreal by Night*.

CHRISTIANUS LIONEL, THE MAD CHRONICLER
7th generation, sire unknown

Clan: Nosferatu *antitribu*

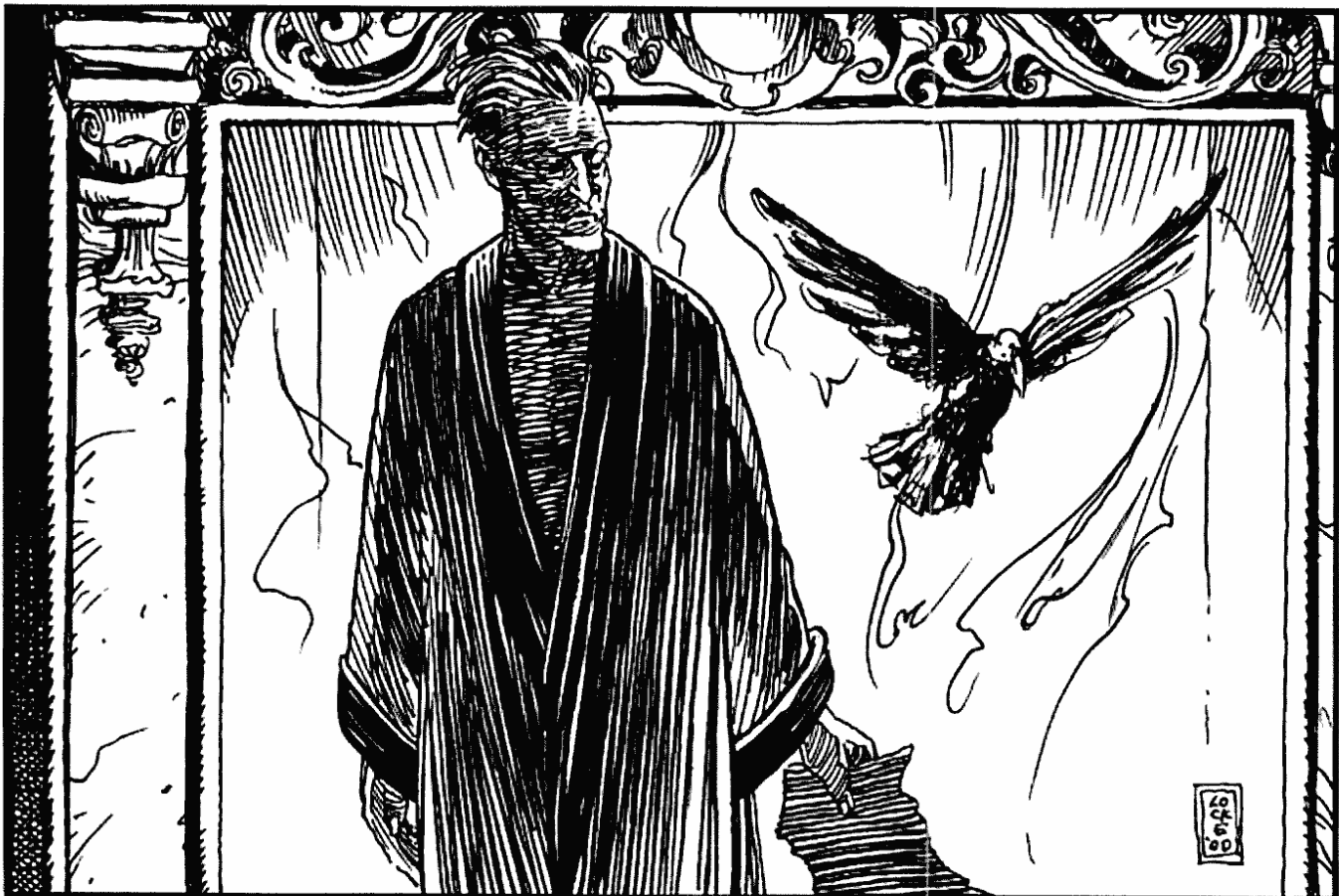
Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Embrace: 1915

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Christianus, Embraced in the Great War during the second battle of Ypres, is the Librarians' most learned Noddist. Although not the friendliest of individuals, he possesses advice and insight that is sought by Cainites across the world. Both Sascha Vykos and Agaitas dealt with him in the past and found him wise beyond his years. It was through this



reputation that he came to know Aristotle and began the search for the Nod fragment. Unfortunately, this gift has sparked a conflict between the Nosferatu *antitribu* Noddist and his pack over its veracity. Christianus does not doubt the text, but without the pressed-platinum disk itself to authenticate the find, Christianus cannot be absolutely certain. He believes his packmates foolish for releasing the contents of the shroud before understanding and analyzing the Nod fragment. The Latin text alone contains some devastating testimonial to an Ancient's betrayal of his own descendants.

Christianus stole the shroud and kidnapped the D'habi ghoul to study the text further. The fragment speaks of troubling times ahead, and of the very fate of each Cainite soul. It bears scrutiny, but Christianus is losing himself to Caine's words. While studying, Christianus first hides in the warrens of McGill University, then in a nearby flat before finally moving to his ancestral home in Westmount.

SKIN, THE TEMPEST

11th generation, childe of Preacher

Clan: Malkavian *antitribu*

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Caregiver

Embrace: 1965

Apparent Age: unknown

Skin, brought into unlife by the deranged Preacher, suffers from hypochondria. He believes insects live beneath the epidermis of his skin and constantly roots them out with sharp implements. When not Obfuscated, his body is a rag of torn and hanging skin, hence his appellation. Skin is an honorary Librarian because of his relationship to Molly 8. He is all that remains of his original pack, Les Misérables, with the monstrous Wretched pack having won the putrescent Toy (an insane, quadriplegic Samedi housed in a toy box) in a bet.

For more information on Skin, see *Montreal by Night*, p. 112.

THE SHEPHERDS

The Shepherds, long the spiritual heart of Montreal's Sabbat, gave rise to the recent incarnation of the Inquisition and currently "officiate" Sabbat interest in Montreal through pack leader Archbishop Alfred Benezri. Best described as a warrior-monk order, the Shepherds represent the gamut of accepted religious beliefs that have found their way into Montreal over the centuries. Serving the pack are:

Yitzak: (Toreador *antitribu*, 8th generation) Coven priest and father-figure to the Shepherds. Stalwart supporter of Alfred Benezri.

Frere Marc: (Country Gangrel *antitribu*, 8th generation) Aloof and concerned mostly with his own agendas, Frere Marc is rarely around, and distant even when present.

Raphael Catarari: (Nosferatu *antitribu*, 10th generation) A Nosferatu with delusions of fallen divinity, Raphael spends his nights preaching his brand of truth to Cainites.

Cherubim: (Brujah *antitribu*, 10th generation) Trapped in the body of a five-year old girl and altered to look porcelain perfect, Cherubim is Raphael's lover.

Sabrina: (Toreador *antitribu*, 9th generation) This brooding Cainite concerns herself mostly with the dichotomy of beauty and horror. She has little interest in the Nod fragment.

For more information see *Montreal by Night*, pg. 84

ALFRED BENEZRI, ARCHBISHOP OF MONTREAL

8th generation, childe of Moraye the Syrian

Clan: Caitiff (Pander)

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: 1769

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Benezri, an Islamic Cainite with considerable influence, has fought infernalism from the night of his Embrace. Among his most noteworthy achievements is helping to forge the Inquisition. As Archbishop of Montreal, he normally represents a stabilizing influence on the disparate packs of the City of Black Miracles. His even temper helped ground Montreal's more eclectic Sabbat. Benezri recently lost that objectivity with the shroud crisis.

With Mercy's call for Christianus's arrest, Benezri is in a difficult position. He serves the Sabbat, but he loves Beatrice, the head of the Librarians. As such, he cannot act directly to save the woman he loves, but he can manipulate events to fall in the Librarians' favor regardless the eventual cost to him. The characters are his prime hope. He helps the coterie by dropping small clues during conversations. Paramount to his designs is using Christianus Lionel as a scapegoat, even if it means lying about the Noddist scholar. Alfred may seem clumsy for divulging so much, but he knows exactly what he wants the coterie to learn. He doesn't reveal any more than necessary.

For more information on the Benezri, see *Montreal by Night*, p. 85.

THE TALONS

Distrusted and feared, but protected by right of station, the Talons serve Mercy in her role as Inquisitor. Since their arrival in Montreal just over a year ago, the Talons have been locked into a brutal struggle with regional infernalists. The city seems rife with corruption, making the role of Inquisitor a full-time endeavor. This unrelenting war has hardened the Talons into an efficient but often destructive force that isn't afraid to suffer a few burns while fanning the Inquisition's flames.

Assisting Mercy are:

Fexia: (Nosferatu *antitribu*, 12th generation) Mercy's loyal ally from Mexico City, this Nosferatu *antitribu* is a crusader in both action and religious belief.

Carlos: (City Gangrel, 11th generation) Carlos is the ultimate "yes man," even dabbling in infernalism if so di-

rected by Mercy. He rarely takes initiative, but when ordered, he follows it at the risk of his own destruction.

KERVOS, THE LIEUTENANT

11th generation, childe of Thomas the Angry

Clan: Salubri *antitribu*

Nature: Enigma

Demeanor: Guru

Embrace: 1994

Apparent Age: early 20s

Kervos, Salubri *antitribu* and Inquisitor Knight, serves Mercy's pack as a balance to her raging passion. He offsets her destructive nature through his insightful and often subtle advice. This union was not accidental; the Grand Inquisitor herself assigned Kervos to Mercy in the hopes he could curb her lethal methods. The alliance has proven successful, for Kervos has instilled in Mercy a sense of patient cunning, and she has inflamed the hatred in his damned soul. Alone they make fine Inquisitors; together they function with deadly efficiency.

MERCY, KNIGHT INQUISITOR

10th generation, childe of Dominique Santo Paulo

Clan: Toreador *antitribu*

Nature: Deviant

Demeanor: Monster

Embrace: 1899

Apparent Age: early 20s

Unrelenting, Mercy is perhaps the Inquisition's most destructive tool. She'd burn an entire building to root out a lone infernalist were it not for Kervos' more balanced approach. Taking her Creation Rites in Rio de Janeiro and educated as Knight Inquisitor in Mexico City, Mercy now makes her haven in Montreal. She prefers the warm, humid climate of the south, but distracts herself with her duties in the City of Black Miracles — and what a deadly distraction that is.

Mercy entered the Inquisition because of Alfred Benezri, but that once strong mentorship has soured. Mercy's presence in Montreal taxes the archbishop's patience, and her current agenda to uncover heresy in the Librarians is the final straw. Mercy suspects Marie-Ange Gagnon, her informer within the Librarians, of double-dealing, but ignores her as a lesser concern. Through her spy, Mercy knows of the D'habi ghouls but not who sent her. She knows of the Nod fragment and its "questionable" Latin text, but not that it's a duplicate. To her, these are lesser concerns.

Mercy plans to discover the truth behind the Librarians and already thinks them guilty. Perhaps not all the Librarians are infernalists, but at the very least Christanius and the D'habi ghouls are tainted. If Mercy cannot capture the ghouls or Christanius for the hearing, she uses Marie-Ange Gagnon instead, even though the Librarian's Judas wanted to remain anonymous.

For more information on Mercy, see *Children of the Night*, p. 17.

THE WIDOWS

Mistresses of secrets and temptations, the Widows are among the most respected followers of the Path of Cathari. As information brokers, the Widows are adept manipulators, content to watch events unfold as long as they can profit from them.

The Widows include:

Creamy Jade: (Toreador *antitribu*, 10th generation) A gifted thaumaturge, Creamy Jade is also a talented sculptress.

Black Lotus: (Serpent of the Light, 10th generation) Black Lotus delights in torturing her lovers. Scores of mortals, and a few Cainites, have spent their last conscious moments in abject horror while she devoured them.

THE ROSE

9th generation, childe of Micah Hossa

Clan: Tzimisce

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 1957

Apparent Age: early 20s

Passionately twisted, the Rose is Montreal's most notorious bishop. Unlike many Tzimisce, the Rose is not hideous, but possesses an unnerving beauty enhanced by her Vicissitude. The Rose finds talk of Gehenna and the Final Nights boring and prefers exploring the depths of Cainite decadence. She agreed to harbor the D'habi ghouls as a lark, wanting to spend a night in forbidden union with Rhanias. This is a secret she guards until the end of her existence.

For more information on the Rose, see *Montreal by Night*, p. 77.

LONE SABBAT

AGAITAS, THE SCHOLAR OF ANTIQUITIES

8th generation, childe of Egothha

Clan: Harbingers of Skulls

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Director

Embrace: Unknown

Apparent Age: indeterminate

Somewhere between life, death, unlife, betrayal and the shroud, Agaitas gained a thirst for vengeance unparalleled by anyone outside the Harbingers of Skulls. The Lazarene watched a heritage he was proud of betray him because he failed to meet some arbitrary criteria of worth. That does not matter anymore, however, for his betrayers met an ironic — if not just — death, and he survived hellish unlifetimes in the mercurial Shadowlands. Still, with his hate undiminished, Agaitas channels it toward other endeavors.

Since his "return," Agaitas has taken charge of protecting the Harbingers of Skulls' secrets. He euphemistically calls himself a "Scholar of Antiquities," an elaborate and learned title for a simple enforcer. In pursuit of his duties, Agaitas visits Montreal with great

frequency, consulting with the Librarians on a monthly basis. Although their Alexandria is nothing compared to its namesake in Egypt, they do possess the finest occult and historical database accessible to the Sabbat. What they do not know, Christianius goes to great effort to learn, as Agaitas discovered through his frequent dealings. Their duty towards history and uncovering the Sabbat's dormant "dragons" worries Agaitas, however, for their search brings them dangerously close to the Lazarenes' secrets. This Nod fragment is proof of the danger they pose.

The Nod text concerns Agaitas, not because of what it says, but because it seems familiar. He has heard its warning before, in the bitter past, and wishes to see if his suspicions are founded. Agaitas hoped to see the text firsthand, but the paltry fake displayed at Widows' party and the news that Christianius was "missing" conspired against him. Seamus's presence at the party also worried Agaitas, so the opportunity to eliminate the Giovanni and frame Christianius in one motion was too great to ignore. By eliminating Seamus, Agaitas indulged his ancient hatred for a clan of second-rate usurpers and grave robbers. He also implicated Christianius in the murder to draw out the Librarian. While this gambit fails, it distances Christianius from his allies, making the Nosferatu *antitribu* desperate and perhaps more willing to forge an outside alliance — if Agaitas can find Christianius before others do.

SASCHA VYKOS, CAINE'S ANGEL

6th generation, childe of Symeon

Clan: Tzimisce

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 1002

Apparent Age: indistinguishable

There are monsters in this world, and they would do well to fear Sascha Vykos. Born into a feud between its sorcerous Carpathian house and the Tzimisce of Constantinople, Sascha has known conflict throughout its unlife. While it is a fiend of great learning, terrible insight and horrific appetites, Sascha is also the epitome of analytical patience and Cainite cunning.

Sascha is the most esteemed Noddist present in Montreal. Following the Widows' party, Sascha knows the Nod fragment is a forgery, and that the real Nod artifact has something to do with Christianius's disappearance. It is not interested in Christianius or the woman. It is interested in the artifact, however, and entertains temporary alliances if they serve its purpose. Sascha loves a good quandary, and the Librarians' actions are nothing if not perplexing. Sascha wants to know why the Librarians are going to such lengths to keep the shroud's text hidden, and why Christianius thought it important enough to steal.

To reach the characters, Sascha leaves messages with Alfred Benezri and the Widows to have the coterie contact its retainers at a given phone number. The retainers arrange the details of the meeting after that. If the characters refuse to meet or cooperate with Sascha, it gets its information elsewhere and remembers the coterie's "slight" against it in

the future. For now, however, the coterie is safe from Sascha's attentions; Sascha is after the truth, not them.

For more information on Sascha Vykos, see *Children of the Night*, p. 24.

OTHERS

JAN PIETERZOOON

7th generation, childe of Hardestadt the Younger

Clan: Ventrue

Nature: Idealist

Demeanor: Director

Embrace: 1723

Apparent Age: late 20s

To Jan Pieterzoon, Gehenna and the *Book of Nod* are superstitious drivel belonging in the Dark Ages. Jan understands that Kindred are paranoid and petty — his grandsire was killed over a vendetta. Talk of Gehenna and ravenous Antediluvians only feeds this paranoia and results in factionalism, fear and paralysis. The Final Nights are here because foolish elders project their fears and read too much into coincidences and random chance. Jan is not blind, however. He knows that something is happening, but it is no more apocalyptic than simple change in Kindred social conventions. It has happened before in the legends of the Kindred, as it did in Constantinople and during the Anarch Revolt. Instead of hiding from "Gehenna," Jan believes the Camarilla should embrace change and adapt to the new millennium. If not, Jan fears the Camarilla will crumble and face a self-fulfilled Gehenna.

Jan has acquired vast media influence to further his goal of eradicating Kindred superstition. The Ventrue is on a book-burning crusade. He wants the Inner Circle to punish all references to the *Book of Nod* since it only feeds the apocalyptic fear gripping Kindred society and makes it harder for the Camarilla to remain dominant. He has gathered Cainite scholars and scientists to find "scientific" explanations for vampires — hoping that a secular explanation will quell superstitious fears.

Framed by spiky blond hair and deep blue eyes, Jan Pieterzoon is an archetype of Scandinavian stock. He often colors his hair when traveling, as many Kindred find his look a little less than traditional and a bit shocking. Jan is a complete clotheshorse, dressing himself in tailored suits of the finest subtle fabrics and accessories of high quality. Gifted in Presence and Dominate, Jan is driven and will not hesitate to further his plans to fruition. Depending on what the characters do, Jan could become either a good ally or a relentless foe.

SEAMUS DUNSIRN

12th generation, childe of Rhys Dunsirn

Clan: Giovanni

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Gallant

Embrace: 1973

Apparent Age: early 20s

Dunsim is in Montreal to determine the origins of the fragment. A university professor before the Embrace, Seamus now possesses draconian scruples. He hopes to advance in the "family" and is one of Ambrogino's trusted assistants. In addition to Agaitas and Sascha Vykos, Seamus knows about Kaymakli.

Seamus stands over six feet tall and dresses in black (he refrains from suits, preferring turtlenecks and simple slacks). His hair is short and peppered with premature gray. Seamus is skilled in the Necromantic arts, particularly the Ash and Bone Paths.

OTHERS

RHANIA

D'habi revenant

Nature: Chameleon

Demeanor: Eye of the Storm

Apparent Age: early 40s

Rhania hails from a line of D'habi ghouls living in Istanbul who hire their services out for vitae. Notorious for once serving the Baali, the Turkish D'habi are now scholarly

mercenaries steeped in occult lore and Cainite history. Despised by many, but secretly courted for their acumen, the D'habi live short lives owing to patricide, infanticide and the occasional poorly chosen alliance (as in Rhania's case with Beckett). In knowledge's pursuit, many cross hallowed lines, going so far as to serve demonic powers. Rhania is among them. Additionally, through continued inbreeding in her family, Rhania possesses certain proclivities — she is a cannibal with a destructive taste for her own body, having already sliced off an earlobe and bitten off two fingers.

Despite this eccentricity, Rhania possesses a near-savant understanding of ancient languages, including a familiarity with Enochian that shames many older Noddists. She also knows of Kaymakli. Unfortunately, this knowledge has cost her dearly, for Beckett and Aristotle want her dead for differing reasons, and the Sabbath Inquisition is after her. Rhania fights for her life, but she already knows she is on the short end of fate's stick. Her only hope is her knowledge of the shroud fiasco, including Aristotle's culpability in the matter.

THE SHROUD OF KAYMAKLI

THE WORDS OF CAINE AFTER THE DELUGE

The time has come,
My Children,
For me to bid the night goodbye.
But know that I do not leave you.
Await the time when I join you again
After you have learned the wages
Of your vanity, sin and pride.
And mark well the heralds of my return
For I do not leave the affairs of my house
To be tended by the Children of Seth.

CAINE'S CONFESSION AT LILITH'S BOSOM

And I traveled for a hundred years before I found
My father's first wife
Whose blood I drank
And yet she was Awake still.
"I must talk to the One Above," I said
And she smiled.
"Talk to Him," she said,
"But know that he has turned his back on you
For your sin."
At this I cried thirteen tears of blood
And named them as each fell
When Lilith said:
"Why do you call our children's names?
They cannot
And will not
Help you.
They are nothing but other sins

Committed to make sweet Abel's death
Less sharp in your cold heart."
And to her I said,
"Mother, lover,
I cannot feel.
We made them to buoy me
And yet they drag me into [Hell]."

THE WORDS OF CAINE BEFORE ENTERING THE EARTH

And I grew tired,
My dead heart heavy with all that I had done.
So I pledged to sleep until my wrongs
Had righted themselves.
With Lilith's knife, I cut myself and sang:
"From these open wounds
Life shall come from death,
As the last daughter
Bearing the mark of the moon,
Sends [Lasombra's] bane to the ashes,
Sends [Gangrel's] brood to the cold stone,
Infests [Nosferatu's] den with [snakes] and strikes
down his wife,
And pierces the rest of my grandchilder
With the fires of the wise."
At these words, I sank
Embraced by the cold arms of
Lilith's garden.
Please, [God],
Erase my folly
And end this.

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