

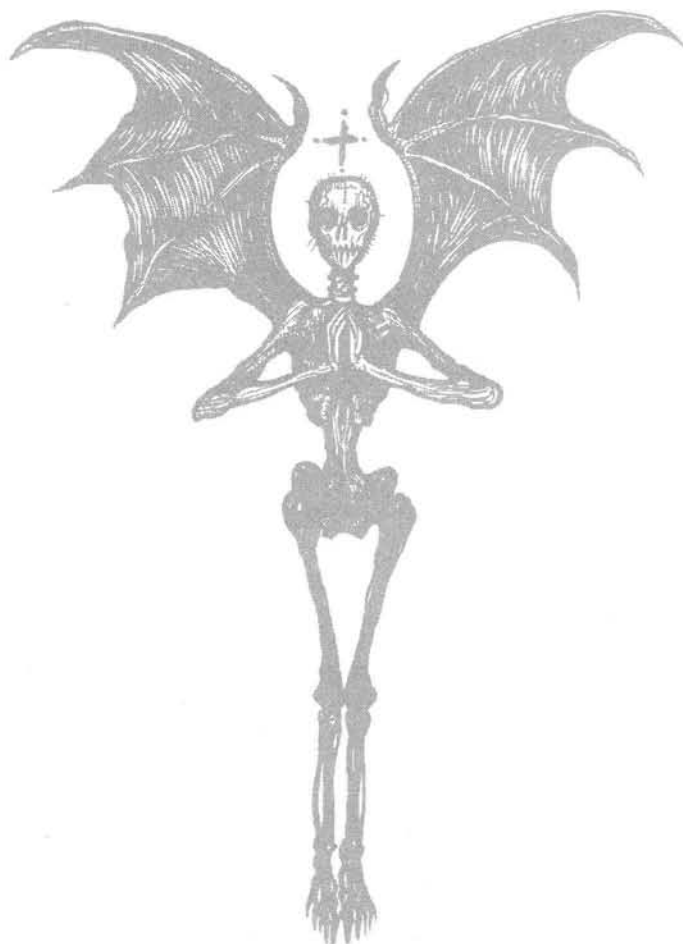
STATE OF GRACE



year of the
DAMNED

A character sourcebook for vampire: the masquerade®

STATE OF GRACE™



BY RICHARD DANSKY, JASON FELDSTEIN, ARI MARMELL
AND C.A. SULEIMAN

VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN•HAGEN

CREDITS

Written by: Richard Dansky, Jason Feldstein, Ari Marmell and C. A. Suleiman. Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Storyteller Game System Design: Mark Rein•Hagen

Developed by: Justin Achilli

Editor: Janice Sellers

Art Director: Richard Thomas

Layout & Typesetting: Kieran Yanner

Interior Art: Matt Mitchell, John Cobb, Michael Gaydos and Drew Tucker

Front Cover Art: Matt Mitchell

Front & Back Cover Design: Kieran Yanner

OVERHEARD

Epic trance is the Iron Maiden of electronic music.

— Brian Brown

It's a 20-foot-long catfish with a pistol and a horn.

— Ken Cliffe

He kills giants, you ignorant Swede!

— Jacob Klunder



1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

© 2002 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, Hunter the Reckoning, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, Year of the Damned

and State of Grace are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog, call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN USA



STATE OF GRACE™



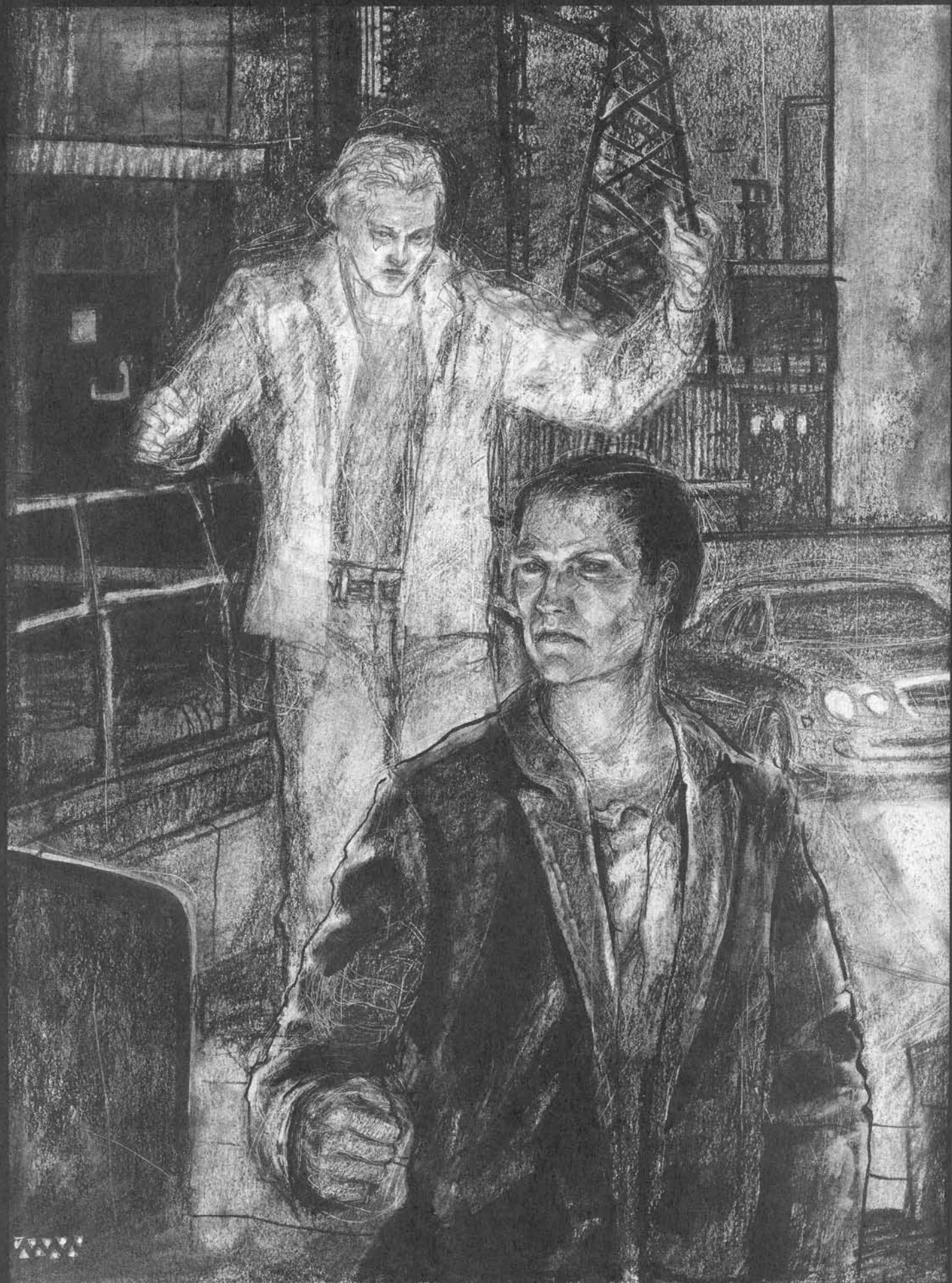
TABLE OF CONTENTS

AN OPEN WINDOW	6
INTRODUCTION: MYSTERIOUS WAYS	12
CHAPTER ONE: THE FAITHS OF MEN	18
CHAPTER TWO: TAINTED BY THE BLOOD	56
CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND THE KEN OF MORTALS	76
CHAPTER FOUR: THE FACES OF FAITH	94
CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING	106





Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?
— John 11:40





BY RICHARD DANSKY

It took Jesus Christ three days to return from the dead. It had taken Hector Pellegrino thirty minutes, and he felt that an important lesson was in there somewhere. The details of it, however, escaped him, and in any case he didn't like thinking about Jesus *too* much these days. After all, Jesus may have died for the sins of mankind, but whether vampires were covered by the crucifixion was a question for which he had no answers.

Putting the matter out of his head for the moment, Hector loped along Hillsborough Street. It was late, maybe three in the morning on a Saturday, and the bars had finally sent the college students home to their beds. A few windows sported flickering neon lights; others were shuttered or nailed over with plywood. Cars rushed past on the wet street, ignoring red lights as they went. None of them stopped, and few even slowed down to allow the drivers to rubberneck at Hector as they went. Those who did no doubt assumed he was just another wino looking for a friendly awning under which he could camp and count the day's take of change.

Hector watched them go by and smiled. He was feeling fat and sassy tonight, the king of all he surveyed. The feeding had been good, the music in the clubs tuneful, and the fragrance of tobacco a surprisingly pleasant reminder of days gone by. To his surprise, he found he was humming.

Deliberately, he stepped off the curb into the middle of the street and raised his hands to the heavens. The breeze caught his tattered raincoat and flared it out behind him as if he were some dashing knight riding into battle and it were a cape lifted by the wind of his passage. Lifting his face to the skies, he laughed.

"Bravo."

The voice came from the shadows across the street, under the trees that marked the border between the campus of North Carolina State University and the real world beyond. "For whose benefit is that performance, I wonder?"

"Why, for yours, of course." Hector stopped, bowed from the waist, and slogged across the rest of the street. A Lexus careened past on the other side of the road, splattering him with cold water, but he paid no heed. The raincoat was already ruined and the cold bothered him not at all. Water had slicked back his black hair, and beads of it ran down the pale flesh of his long face.

"Ah. Consider me unimpressed." The figure who stepped out from under the trees was a full head shorter than Hector but carried himself with considerably more authority. He, too, was pale, but with blonde hair in a cut almost as severe as the expression on his face. His features and his build were

both broad, in contrast to Hector's thinner frame, and he wore a neat slacks-and-jacket combo that made him look like an insomniac professor.

"You're four hundred years old, Felipe," Hector said without a trace of rancor. "Nothing short of God and his angels marching down Hillsborough Street to the state fairgrounds would impress you."

"And even then I'd question His Almighty taste," Felipe sniffed, but a glint of humor was in his eye. "So what brings you to the middle of the street in the middle of the night? Sheer joy at existing? Or are you just trying to cut down on your laundry bills?"

Hector shook his head and found shelter from the rain under a reasonably sturdy pine. "More the former than the latter. Actually, I'm on my way home. It was a good night, if you take my meaning."

Felipe sighed. "I've been taking your meaning since I brought you into this miserable existence, Hector. It's been a hundred and sixty years of listening to you skirt around the gist of things, and at this point it's gone beyond affectation to pathology."

"Ah. So that's why you're out here. To correct my speech patterns."

"That's one way of putting it." He frowned and took a step closer. The streetlight haze made his flesh seem yellowed and rotten. "I am here because I am worried about you, and because others are worried about you, too. My concern runs to the paternal. Theirs, to the tactical."

Hector grinned humorlessly and paced back and forth on the mud. "Ah. I see. They think that I'm too squeamish and won't do for this new age of blood and terror. Who is it? Pieter? Alessandra? That fat Scotsman Ross? You can tell them they can rest assured in my willingness to shed blood with the best of them. I just prefer not to do so unless it makes sense. This little hub," and he spread his arms to take in all of the Hillsborough Street strip, if not all of Raleigh, "has been very good to me. If calling my little evenings out something other than hunting expeditions helps me maintain my place here, well, proper Camarilla-approved phrasing will simply have to lose." He stopped pacing, and turned to face his mentor and sire. "There. Satisfied?"

"Another performance, Hector, and not one of your better ones. Come, walk with me." Felipe spun on his heel and walked off. Cursing, Hector hurried to follow.

"Do you still go to church, Hector?"

The question caught him by surprise. He started to answer no but caught his tongue at the last minute. Had he gone? Not per se — he'd not made confession since he died, though on more than one occasion he'd found himself standing outside the confessional booth, trembling. But always the thought had come to him that the crimes he'd committed were beyond absolution, and so when the time had come he'd fled.

And besides, the voice in the back of his head whispered, could any church that would allow him to set foot on its grounds truly be a holy place?

"You take a long time to answer a simple question," Felipe said, not unkindly. "Do not worry about the consequences of your answer. Just be truthful." He paused and sniffed the night air. "I'd prefer not to compel you to respond."

"I'm just thinking, Felipe," Hector replied as they walked on. On the right rose the illuminated obelisk of the campus bell tower, its carillon chiming softly in the breeze. "I suppose the answer is that no, I do not still go to church."

"Ah." Felipe smiled.

"But I want to."

"Ah." The tone of the second response was downcast, disappointed.

"What? Felipe, what's wrong?" The smaller vampire had quickened his pace, and Hector suddenly had to hurry to keep up.

"What is wrong, my childe, is that you are a slow learner. How many years have you lived beyond the grave?"

Hector counted in his head. "One hundred and sixty-three, sire."

"One hundred and sixty-three years. Nearly sixty thousand nights. And on how many of those nights have you fed? Come on, tell me. Don't be shy. Did you starve yourself until you felt you must feed or go mad? That's one night in ten — only six thousand bloodlettings. Or perhaps you fed yourself well, gorged yourself on blood like you were a child and it were the finest spun sugar candy. That's threescore thousand dead men, women and children to lay at your feet. Put them all end to end and they'd ring your pretty little city round thrice over. But no, that's not your style, is it? You don't feed if you can help it, you don't kill if you can help it, and in the end, that means the number of corpses you've created over the years might be numbered only in the hundreds! Imagine that!"

"Four hundred and twenty-two," Hector muttered. "That's all."

"What?" Felipe asked gaily. "How many was that? I didn't hear you."

"Four hundred and twenty-two," Hector forced out between gritted teeth. "Are you happy?"

"Hm." Felipe stopped and put his hand to his chin in a mocking parody of thought. "Four hundred and twenty-two deaths. For a Kindred of your age, that's quite a feat. I'm sure there are very, very few others of your age who have been so discriminating or efficient. Then again, a tally of over four hundred corpses has you running rings around dear old Jack the Ripper, or any human serial killer in history. It's all a question of perspective, I'm afraid, and I just don't see yours."

"Felipe, wait. I'm just trying to follow the Traditions. To protect the Masquerade."

"Ah yes, the Masquerade. You'll avoid killing to protect it — that's very good. On the other hand, you'll also risk breaking it by scurrying into and out of churches whenever you think someone's not looking. Oh, yes; I know about your midnight trips to the confessionals. One of these nights you're going to run into a priest who actually believes but can't sleep because he's heartsick pondering all the injustice

in the world, and you're going to give him quite a shock when your fangs pop out and the blood starts jetting from your eyes at his touch. So, you see, I'm afraid I can't quite give you the benefit of the doubt on this one."

"What do you want, Felipe? Just tell me?" Hector was suddenly very tired and very afraid. The chill of each raindrop soaked into his skin.

"Now you're being sensible. I ask you, what are you prepared to do?"

"To do what?"

"To demonstrate that you've acquired a more sensible view on our particular flavor of 'eternal life.' I know you, Hector Pellegrino, and I knew you for ten years before I made you mine. You were a church-going man then, but never a fool. If you were a fool, I would have let you die on the Brooklyn docks. Don't be a fool now."

With that, abruptly, he vanished. Hector shook his head and sat on the steps leading up to the bell tower. Felipe and his theatrics. No doubt he was somewhere in the near vicinity still, observing his childe invisibly and waiting for some suitably dramatic declaration of allegiance. Perhaps he wanted Hector to call out after him, to demand his return and a further explanation. Maybe he wanted to see if Hector would run (not that he'd get far if he tried, he knew) or if he would scurry back to supposed friends who shared his dangerously mortal beliefs. It's not as if Hector were potent enough to see his sire if the man did not want to be seen.

Screw it, Hector thought. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction. He sat, and he waited. The cold water soaked through his jeans and along the soles of his well worn boots, but he didn't move. To move, to evince the slightest curiosity as to where Felipe had gone, would be to lose the game his sire had just drawn him into. If the price of winning was a wet ass and cold feet, well, that was just too goddamned bad.

Instead, he pondered what Felipe had said. The way the conversation had swiftly looped around to the question of the church disturbed him. Felipe was right; he had been devout before he'd been Embraced, but that was sixteen decades ago. He'd done good work since then, good clean work in the trenches and in the shadows, and his religious beliefs had never been raised as an issue in all that time. He hadn't been seen as soft when he'd been in the thick of the fighting on the streets of New York. But now, suddenly, this. Why? And what was Felipe going to ask him to do?

Whatever it was, however, was apparently going to have to wait for another night. An hour of wet waiting later, Hector came to the reluctant conclusion that Felipe's disappearance was genuine, as the slightest hint of his presence hadn't been felt since. Reluctantly, he hauled himself to his feet and made a few desultory motions to try to brush the seat of his pants dry. A fistful of pine needles came away, but that was all, and Hector resolved himself to an extremely uncomfortable walk home.

"And it had started out to be such a good night," he said to no one in particular. No one at all responded.



The answer to the questions of that wet Saturday night were answered the next evening when Hector awoke. A package rested on his doorstep, wrapped in an old issue of the *News and Observer* and tied twice round with twine. It was bulky and heavy and apparently multipartite. When Hector gingerly unwrapped it at his kitchen table he found it was a broken plaster crucifix of the sort normally hung in the bedrooms of devout college students of a particularly gothic bent. Christ's hands and feet had been smashed and the cross broken into three segments beneath him. His face, however, had been left pristine, though some thoughtful soul had taken the time to dab the plaster around the crown of thorns with garish red nail polish. The effect was somehow more shocking that it had any right to be, the crude mockery more vicious than the brute force that had broken the icon.

Frowning, Hector spread the pieces out on the table. The newspaper itself offered no clues; it was the sports section from a week ago last Thursday and had apparently been used at some point to line a birdcage. The pieces of plaster, he was certain, were the real message, and Felipe was its author. Forsake the church, he was saying. Turn your back on this.

But that wasn't all. Felipe could have just told him that the other night, could have compelled him to do so, if he really wished.

This, on the other hand, was a stronger message. Half-measures wouldn't do. What Felipe was asking for, he was quite certain, was a formal severance of allegiance with the Church, an act of desecration that would make it impossible for Hector to return to its comforts out of shame. That's what Felipe was after.

The bitch of it was, Hector thought, that he still had no idea *why* Felipe wanted this thing. He got up and paced around the apartment, heedless of the honking of the traffic outside his window. He had known others who had maintained some attachment to their mortal faiths, even after centuries among the Kindred. True, their observances had changed by necessity. Vividly, he recalled the scarred face and ruined tongue of a vampire he'd known who'd insisted on taking Holy Communion despite all warnings to the contrary.

He also recalled the blissful look on the man's face, even in the midst of his agonies. That look alone had sustained him during many long dark nights of the soul, when the promise of Heaven had seemed empty and the broken corpse at his feet told him he was in Hell.

He'd heard that the Sabbath still clung to the ways of the Church, in its own perverse way. Perhaps that was the issue here: his faith taken for a different sort of allegiance in these nights of suspicion and madness. Surely that sort of suspicion was ludicrous. They couldn't possibly think he was a potential traitor because he haunted church doorways.

Abruptly, he shook his head and ceased his pacing. "You, Hector," he said aloud to himself, "are being a melodramatic fool. Remember what Monsignor Dellarosa taught you all those years ago. It was good enough for you then; it should be good enough for you now. Now put this nonsense out of your head. You will find Felipe, you will tell him you will not do

this foolish thing — for all you know he is testing your faith. He has known you long enough to know your worth. This," and he made a sweeping gesture, "is bullshit."

He stopped, his words hanging in the air. He was alone; of that he was quite sure. Yet why did he listen for the response of an unseen audience, one that might be judging all he had said and even now finding him unworthy?

Repressing a shudder, he dressed quickly and went out. The door slammed behind him, a dull thud with no echo.

Nine hours later, when he returned, the broken crucifix was gone. In its place was a scrap of parchment with a handwritten note. It read "I'm sorry" and nothing more.

"Felipe!"

It was an hour before dawn, and Hector was drunk in the rain. He'd been to the bars again, the places where the students gathered to drink and allow themselves to be seduced, and he'd played the role of the seducer to the hilt. Buying the young girls wine and beer, leading them outside, feeding desperately and letting their drunkenness flow into him — all night he had done this, and around midnight he'd stopped caring whether the girls he fed from lived or died.

Felipe had done this to him somehow, he knew. Felipe had made him want to seek oblivion, had done this to show him how easily his precious morals could be set aside.

He staggered onward, calling out his sire's name. A light went on in an apartment window; someone leaned out and yelled, "Would you shut up?" Hector turned, stared at the bleary-eyed figure in the window, and *hissed*. He was vaguely aware his fangs were distended and his eyes were weeping tears of blood.

"Jesus fucking Christ!" the figure in the window yelled (he couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman, and didn't care) and disappeared. Hector made an obscene gesture at the departing silhouette and shambled on.

"Tsk, ts. That was a breach, Hector."

The words came from nowhere. Hector looked up, suddenly, bleakly, sober. "Felipe?" he asked warily. No response came. More lights were going on in the building. Panicked, Hector ran, blindly. He stumbled twice, picked himself up, and continued on. His hands found parking meters and street signs for support, but blind panic drove his legs.

This is stupid, Hector, he thought fuzzily. *What are you running from? Why are you afraid?* He clutched a stop sign and willed his legs to stop churning, his fingers to anchor him against the unholy desire to flee.

"Wrong way, Hector." It was Felipe again, a ghost in the early morning mist. "You can't stop now."

Then he was running again, fleeing Felipe's voice and Felipe's laughter at every turn. Blindly he ran for home, and at every corner the unseen presence stymied him. He ran past brick houses with solidly locked doors he could have torn from their hinges, past cars bought by doting parents and those rescued from the junkyard to be adorned with band stickers and rust. He ran past corner stores and ill-mown lawns, past "For Rent" signs and pyramids of beer cans, and at

every corner Felipe was waiting for him, to steer him where he wished to go.

It was half an hour later when Hector finally collapsed. He was aware that he should be able to run further, run faster, but his legs had no strength. "Felipe?" he called out, but now was just silence.

He looked up. The building before him was small and well kept, the brick-shaded shingles of its roof neat and the paint of its door fresh. It had been a house once, it appeared, and still radiated a sort of genteel coziness. A sign jammed defiantly into the muddy lawn read, in simple white letters on black, "Raleigh Unitarian Community Center, Danielle Rhodes, Minister." The door was slightly ajar.

Hector staggered to his feet and laughed raggedly. So it was a church that Felipe had brought him to. All the terror and all the pursuit had led him to this, his final test, his final chance to save himself. *Desecrate this*, he told himself, *and you are saved. Surely you know you can't resist, not now.*

He opened the door and stepped inside. The hallway was carpeted in dull red, and the walls hung with pictures of landscapes and dew-drenched flowers. To the right, what had once been a living room had been converted into a small sanctuary, with rows of chairs and a small pulpit at the front. A simple wood cross hung from the wall behind the pulpit, and a stack of Bibles sat on a sideboard against the wall. The entire place smelled vaguely of patchouli and cigarettes, and a wet spot was on the carpet from where a window had been left open through the previous night's drizzle.

It would be so easy. All he had to do was something symbolic — tip the altar, perhaps, or tear down the cross. A flick of the wrist and then he could flee. Felipe would be waiting for him outside, no doubt, proud and happy that he'd done this thing, and away they'd go, blithe as always. He could hear Felipe's voice now as the man arranged it all: "It's a church, yes, but not much of one. Surely he can bring himself to start here. Surely this, of all things, he can do."

And in the midst of his imaginings, Hector was weeping, for in his own way, Felipe had done this out of love. The drunkenness? Forced upon him so that the Beast would be close to the surface. The chase? To exhaust his defenses and wear down his spirit. The church? No church he knew, nor was it one Felipe thought he was likely to show reverence. All this Felipe had done because he knew that without titanic assistance, Hector would never so much as disturb the dust at a church's doorstep.

I have given you all I can, he could hear Felipe pleading. *Do this little thing for me. Then you can be saved, and I along with you.* With a terrible certainty, Hector knew that if he failed this test, administered by unseen powers in the shadows, then surely Felipe would fall under suspicion as well, and one night he, too, would face a test he could not pass.

"Hello?"

A voice came from upstairs, a female voice. It was curious and cautious, but not suspicious. "Is someone there?"

Hector turned. Footsteps were on the stair, the slow tread of sleepy bare feet on thin carpet. It wasn't too late, he knew. He could still destroy this place and flee.

Or he could just flee and pray that Felipe was at least mercifully swift.

The steps grew closer. Hector's hands clenched into fists, which he lowered to his sides. He took one step, then another, until he stood by the half-opened window.

"Can I help you?"

The voice came from behind him. He half-turned. A woman stood there in a pale blue bathrobe, her feet bare and her dirty blonde hair tousled. A thick pair of glasses sat on her too-long nose, and her eyes were bleary with sleep. "If you're looking for things to steal, there's not much in here."

Hector sucked in an unconscious breath. "No," he said, his voice trailing off. "That's not it at all."

The woman yawned. "Then what is it?"

Hector placed both his hands on the windowsill. "Would you believe that I was led here?"

"A lot of people say that. It is a church, after all. I'm Danielle Rhodes."

"Hector. Hector Pellegrino." He felt suddenly ashamed and slammed the window shut with more force than was strictly necessary. "I told you, I was led here. Then, when I was outside, I saw that this window was open and I was worried that things inside were getting wet. And since the door was open ... well, I didn't think anyone lived here." Suddenly, Hector realized what a fright he must look — hair wet, blood on his face, torn clothes. Any minute now, she'd scream, or call the police, or attack with some ridiculous flavor of martial arts or other, and the moment would be lost.

Instead, she gave a wry smile, one indicating half-belief. "That's very kind of you. Can I make you a cup of coffee as a thank-you?"

"No thank you. I had to give it up. Health reasons."

"Of course."

Hector stole a glance out the window. Felipe was there now, he saw, a look of sadness of his face. The first tint of dawn was brushed against the leaden sky, a faint mist still coming down. For a moment, all was silent.

Goodbye, Felipe, Hector thought. *I love you too, my sire, my friend.*

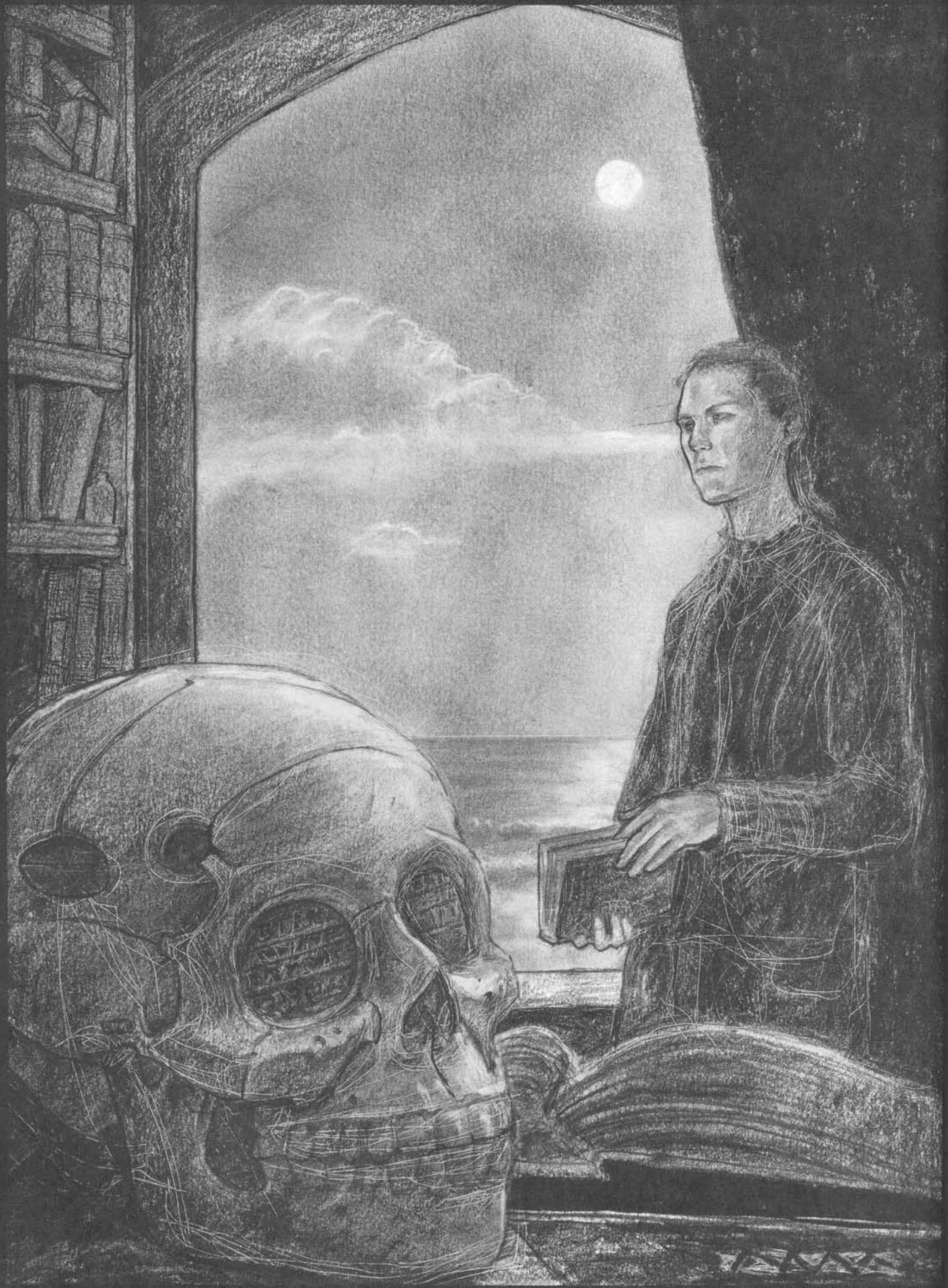
He turned. Rhodes was still staring at him, her arms folded across her breast. She was waiting for what would happen next.

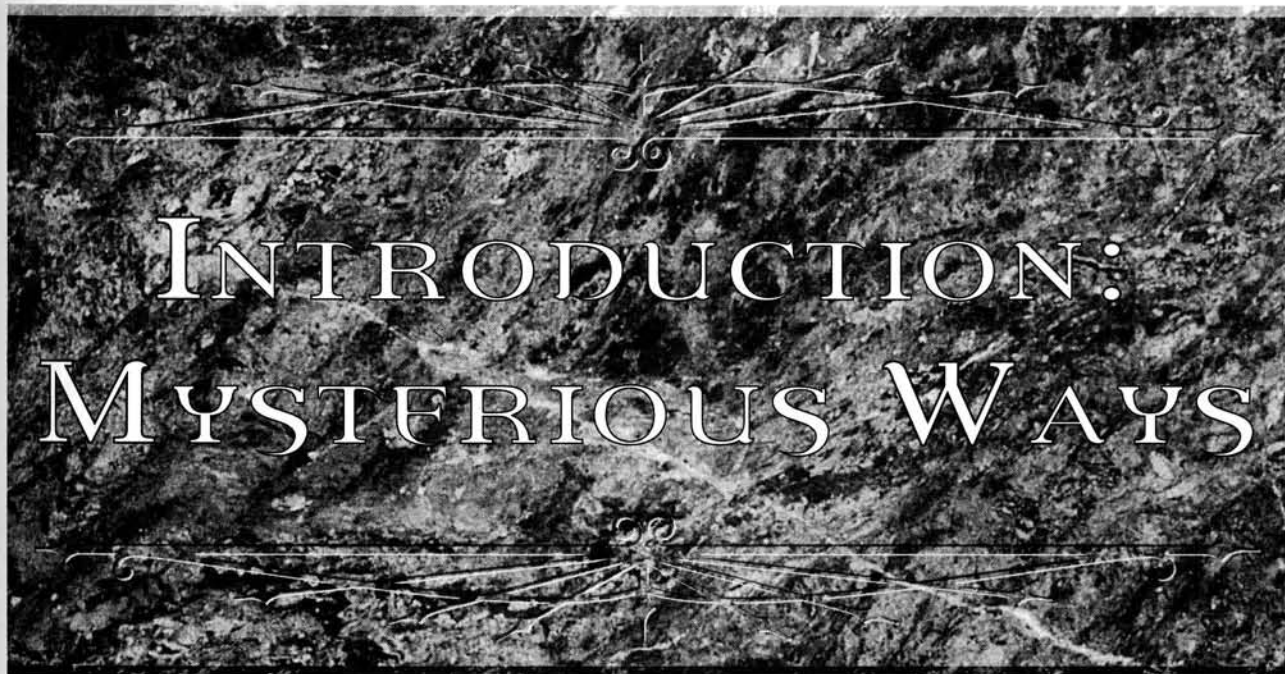
"I'd like to stay, though, if I could," he found himself saying. "Just for a few minutes."

"A few minutes?"

"To pray."

When he turned, the door was open fully and Felipe was gone.





INTRODUCTION: MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul.
— Mohandas Gandhi

Previous **Vampire: The Masquerade** books have gone into all manner of details about the Kindred. We know what the Kindred do, what they want, even what they think.

To date, little attention has been paid to what they believe.

Certainly, plenty of discussion of Caine has happened, how he was cursed by God and spawned the race of vampires who now call themselves Kindred. But how many Kindred actually believe that tale? What beliefs are held instead by those who do not?

Of course, many of them, particularly among young Kindred, don't believe in much of anything. They don't feel the need. In the past centuries, and even the past decades, science has advanced in leaps and bounds, far beyond what anyone could possibly

have predicted in their wildest fantasies. Mysteries of the world around us fall and shatter like hailstones, and yet another avenue of understanding is opened. Many mortals and Kindred alike fool themselves into thinking this new understanding is enough.

It's not. Science is eminently capable of answering when and where. It can even, in many cases, address how, though a set of scientific principles to explain the Kindred has yet to be discovered.

But science cannot tell us why. Why are we here? Why are we aware? Why does misfortune happen here, while over there they boast boundless wealth and endless opportunity?

Why, so many Kindred wail unheard in the cold, uncaring night, have we been Damned thus?

Where science cannot explain and reason cannot guide, it is human — and yes, Kindred — nature to turn to religion. The vast majority of mortals living today, even in this age of reason, express a belief in some sort of divinity, feel the need for faith in their lives. Many mortal faiths, however, have no room for the Kindred.

How do you function, night to night, with the knowledge that you are already Damned, that nothing you do from now until the end of the world can possibly redeem you in the eyes of a distant God? How can you accept that this sort of monstrous existence can be thrust upon innocent men, women, even children, with no intervention from Above? How can a vampire believe?

Yet how vital is faith for undying creatures with powers and abilities that are so clearly supernatural? How else to understand a life — no, not a life, merely an existence — that science cannot even acknowledge, let alone explain? How can they not believe?

This, then, is what **State of Grace** is for.

State of Grace is not a treatise on Golconda. It won't tell you what you can do with four dots of True Faith. This is not a book on the mechanics of faith among the Kindred, but rather on the nature and shape of that faith.

Faith is an aspect of the game that, for all its importance, has been largely relegated to the background up to this point. In the hands of a mortal of sufficient piety, the crucifix repels the undead, just as the legends would have it. Vampires are walking proof that the laws of science must bow to other, more ancient forces. In light of this, few Kindred can honestly examine themselves without running across at least a few theological conundrums.

At the same time, religion has been largely ignored in sourcebooks and stories, except as myth or as a means of advancing the plot. It's time for a deeper look. It's time to discover what, exactly, the Kindred of the world believe — and, perhaps more importantly, why.

A WORD ON STORYTELLING

The popular media have an unfortunate tendency to portray any deeply religious person as a either a deranged (and possibly homicidal) zealot or a Bible-thumping parody. If you plan to bring reli-

gion into your chronicle as a viable aspect of character depth or roleplaying opportunity, that's simply not going to work. Not only is it unrealistic, it doesn't allow for a true examination of what faith means to the characters involved. If you're too busy rolling your eyes at clichés and making fun of stereotypes, you've added nothing of worth to the story and have probably stripped from it a good portion of its sincerity.

The fact that a Kindred may be a devout Catholic, Muslim, Hindu or Consumptionist need not be the overriding facet of your portrayal of that character. Try an experiment. Put down this book for a minute, go take a walk outside, and look at the other people around you. Now, just by watching their behavior, figure out what religion they belong to.

Sure, you can tell with some of them. This woman's wearing a crucifix; that man over there has the beard, sideburns and *payot* curls of a Chasidic Jew. Most, however, show little if any outward sign of their faith — yet they may be among the most devout believers you've ever encountered.

Once you have that fact firmly in mind — that not all believers are vocal about it, and not all those who are vocal truly believe — you're in a much better position to portray this sort of character.

FAITH AMONG THE DAMNED

The Kindred, of course, hail from all societies and all parts of the world, and they are no more limited to a single religious viewpoint than the kine. The "curse of Caine" origin story is the most common because, at least in the Western world, Judeo-Christian religions are the most common. Other Kindred, those who hail from Taoist or Hindu traditions, have entirely different views of where they came from, where they are, and where they're going.

For that matter, as much as the Kindred make every effort to twist and shape mortal society to their own ends, is it any wonder they've done the same to mortal beliefs? By most accounts, the Kindred have walked the Earth since before mankind even understood the concept of religion. Some have developed belief systems that bear little or no resemblance to anything worshipped by the kine — or even other Kindred.

“REAL” FAITH VS. TRUE FAITH

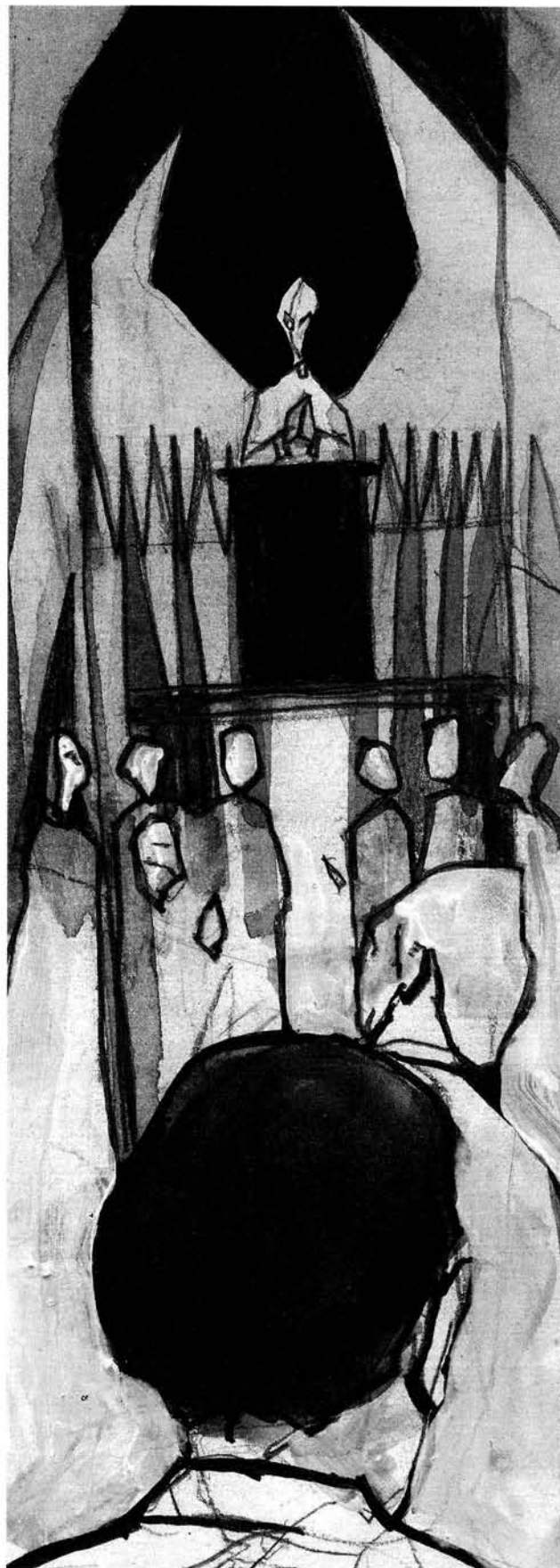
It's worth stating again, though the point has been made elsewhere, that True Faith is not something one develops simply by being devout. It represents a level of conviction of which most individuals simply aren't capable, no matter how deeply they believe. Even the vast majority of those who truly devote their lives to their faiths — rabbis and priests, monks and shamans — don't have nearly the strength of will and the depth of conviction required to turn back the Kindred or perform other miracles.

On the flip side, one cannot then assume that because someone lacks True Faith, he's not truly devout. Such an assumption does a disservice to those characters, and those people, whose faith is unwavering yet who don't quite have what it takes to make that final step.

The upshot to all this? When using any of the various religions examined in *State of Grace*, you shouldn't feel the need to use True Faith, or any other game mechanic, to indicate it. Religion, like nationality, family, clan or upbringing, is simply an aspect of the character — albeit potentially an important one. Just as you don't hang a sign around a character's neck that reads “Ventrue,” just as you don't have to buy a certain number of background points to be Sioux, no need exists for any mechanical indication of a character's religious leanings. Let it come out through storytelling speech and action, as any other character trait. Anything else, and you haven't added depth, just another set of little circles to fill in.

Several of these beliefs are best avoided by any potential convert, Kindred or kine, who would keep her sanity and her soul. As humankind has proved so many times through its violent history, devotion isn't always a good thing, and the Kindred have had lifetimes to twist and pervert even the most harmless dogma into an excuse for bloodshed.

Ultimately, above any other consideration, the question of faith among the Kindred comes down to the soul. Do these spawn of Caine even have such a thing any longer? If not, hardly any reason exists to worry about God or Heaven; if they're predestined to Hell, or to oblivion, why should they moderate their



actions in the mortal world? If they do, though, it's vital that they come to some sort of understanding of their place in God's (or the gods') world. Maybe, just maybe, if they can figure the whole thing out, they still have a chance for some sort of redemption before the Final Nights. They can't afford to take too long, though; even the undead don't have forever.

THEME AND MOOD

The great thing about having faith in something is that it provides answers and comfort available nowhere else. It explains, as reason cannot, the world around you, that a purpose exists to all of it, that the universe is more than cold, random chance. For the Kindred, it offers the only explanation for their condition and the only hope that they might still have a chance of attaining something better.

The problem with faith, on the other hand, is that you never know if the answers you've been given are the right ones until it's much too late to do one damned thing about it.

Is the theme of *State of Grace* the never-ending search for answers, then? Well, yes, but only to a point. More than that, it's an investigation of the steps to which the Kindred will go to find those answers. Over the centuries, the Kindred have practiced every form of religion known to mortals, twisted them to form their own interpretations, even created their own beliefs out of whole cloth — all in search of the one true way that will enable them to be what their natures require them to be, yet offer a glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

Once they've found it (or think they have), of course, the Kindred become just as devout, or just as fanatical, as any mortal. Some use their faith as an anchor for their Humanity, a bastion that supports the moral code or Path of Enlightenment that keeps them from falling into the clutches of the Beast. Others choose to use their religion as an excuse for their own behavior, drinking (or spilling) blood in the name of whatever higher power they've created to serve their purposes.

This is a hard, lonely course for the Kindred to choose. Few of their brethren will understand them, since each Kindred interprets her faith in her own way. No less than a Path, each religion requires a certain sort of behavior, demands that its followers earn the paradise or hell that purportedly awaits them in the next world. It's true of some more than others, but almost every Kindred faith demands that its followers deny at least some aspect of who, or what, they are. Most of them eventually fail, and those who succeed

often bear little resemblance to who and what they were when they began.

The mood of *State of Grace* is twofold. On the one hand, a certain somber majesty is involved. This is, after all, a look into the secrets, practices and precepts of faiths both ancient and new. Few Kindred are strong enough to cling fast and faithfully to such beliefs, but those who are possess a strength of will and a zeal that permeates everything they do.

On the other, those Kindred who seek enlightenment and understanding in the embrace of religious doctrine are almost universally tainted with a cold desperation. The world is changing around them, far faster than most of them can comprehend. The Final Nights seem to loom ever nearer, bringing the end of unlife with them. Judgment Day is nigh, and only those very few Kindred fortunate enough to have chosen the right faith out of the innumerable choices offered are likely to come out of it with their souls — or whatever tattered bits of them remain.

PLEASE RISE AND OPEN YOUR BOOKS TO PAGE...

State of Grace is intended both for player and Storyteller use. This may aggravate some Storytellers, who'd prefer their players remain ignorant of some of the religions and sects discussed herein. After all, the Consumptionists and the Architects aren't exactly common knowledge, even among the Kindred. That said, however, your players really should have some idea of what they're permitted to choose from and should at least be permitted to possess most of the knowledge presented in Chapters One and Two, if not the rest.

Chapter One: The Faiths of Men discusses a number of religions that will no doubt be familiar, at least in passing, to most players. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and others are all viewed through the lens of Kindred perceptions. This is not a historical text, but rather a discussion of what might call the Kindred to each of these faiths and what impact these religions have on the vampires who choose to adopt them.

In **Chapter Two: Tainted by the Blood**, the religions discussed in the previous chapter are examined again — but this time, they're warped, twisted, tainted by centuries or millennia of Kindred abuse. These sects and belief systems are no longer entirely a part of their parent religions; instead, they are corrupt reflections of what can happen when the Kindred decide to shape religion in the same way they attempt to shape mortal society.

Chapter Three: Beyond the Ken of Mortals goes beyond any religions known to man and delves into several belief systems created by the Kindred, for the Kindred. Although some may have their basis in more familiar faiths, nothing here could be mistaken for a human belief.

Some sample sects of all the above are presented in **Chapter Four: The Faces of Faith**. These denominations, cults and other factions can either be placed in your chronicles as is or used as a model from which to create your own religious sects.

Finally, **Chapter Five: Storytelling** suggests ways for Storytellers to work the precepts of **State of Grace** into a chronicle, how to apply these details to Storyteller characters and player characters, and how to use religion and religious fervor to add depth to any chronicle or story.

TERMS AND TITLES

Primarily drawn from Muslim sources, the following argot applies uniquely to matters of faith and the Kindred. Other terms appear here and there throughout the text, but given that much of our audience is largely unfamiliar with the tenets of Islam, we present this quick introduction of terms.

Allah: the God of Islam who, despite some common misconceptions, is the same supreme being worshipped (in different ways) by Jews and Christians.

ansar (plural **ansari**): the loyal ghoul of a Muslim vampire.

Ashirra: literally “brethren”; an Islamic sect of vampires centered around the belief that Muhammad offered redemption to Kindred who submitted to God’s will; more generally, a term for any vampire who recognizes Islam.

fasad: literally “corruption”; creating corruption and disorder on earth by following a path other than God’s.

ghûl: see **ansar**.

Hadith: the collected teachings and biography of Muhammad, forming the second great religious text of Islam (after the **Qur’an**).

hajj: the pilgrimage to Mecca, to be undertaken at least once by every Muslim who is able to make the journey.

hejira: literally the “breaking of bonds”; Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

imam: an Islamic religious leader who leads the congregation in prayer; among the Ashirra, the imam is the vampire who provides religious leadership to the local Kindred community.

jihad: literally “holy struggle”; the duty of a Muslim to defend himself and his faith (the term applies to more than just martial matters).

junub: a person having *janaba* (impurity); one who is in a state of impurity or defilement; among Ashirra, a believer who has been turned from the path.

Ka’ba: the temple in Mecca that holds the Black Stone and was once a pre-Islamic pagan temple; the holiest site in Islam.

Keening, the: a powerful force by which Kindred hear the sun roar while sleeping in Arabia; the effect is strongest near Islamic holy sites and prevents non-Muslim vampires from entering those areas.

Mahgrib: a group of grim and particularly devout Ashirra, dedicated to uprooting the influence of the **taghut** and restoring lost faith to the **junub**.

muezzin: one who calls the faithful to prayer; among the Ashirra, a *muezzin* is often a practitioner of *sahr* blood magic, able to use his voice to calm the Beast.

Qur’an: the Islamic scripture as revealed to Muhammad by God.

Rushd: from the verb *rashada*; the Right Way, the spiritual and behavioral path all Muslims are expected to walk; also signifies integrity in thought or deed.

salat: the five daily prayers required of all Muslims.

sawm: a fast observed during the daylight hours of the holy month of Ramadan.

shahada: the profession of faith, declaring that “There is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet.”

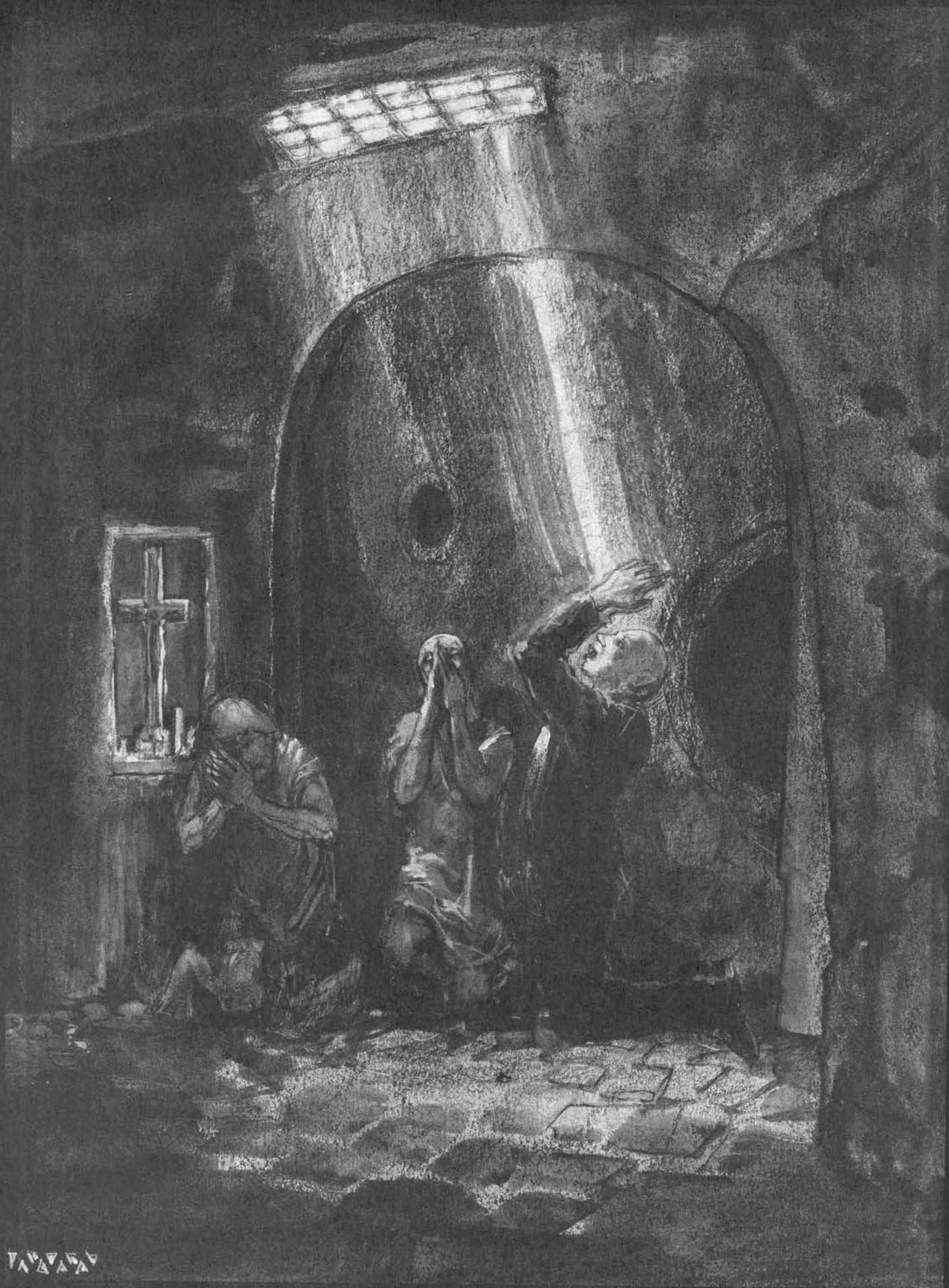
sunna: the body of traditional Muslim wisdom, embodied in the Hadith and Qur’an.

taghut: a false god, an idol; one who willfully stands between God and man, intentionally leading the latter into evil and wrongdoing (*q.v.* **fasad**); Ashirra term for the supernatural forces that strive to lead Man into blasphemy and sin.

‘ulama (singular **‘alim**): Islamic scholars.

umma: the community of believers; among Ashirra, the sect’s local membership.

zakat: the almsgiving required of all Muslims.





CHAPTER ONE: THE FAITHS OF MEN

To trust the God of the Bible is to trust an irascible, vindictive, fierce, and ever fickle and changeful master. To trust the true God is to trust a Being who has uttered no promises....

— Mark Twain

KEEPERS OF THE WORD

As the most prevalent religion in Western civilization for roughly the past 1,500 years, it's no surprise that Christianity holds a prominent place among religious vampires just as it does among mortals. The vast majority of Kindred believe at least figuratively in the story of the Curse of Caine and have heard the major stories of the Bible — Adam and Eve, Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. Religion can be a great aid in maintaining Humanity and morality as the years pass, which is why so many Kindred try to cling to their mortal Christian beliefs, the very same beliefs that teach them to revile themselves as creatures forever denied Paradise by God's curse. A bit of a catch-22, but if you already believe in original sin, guilt is nothing new.

Christianity began around 2,000 years ago with the Jews of Judea, formerly Israel, at that time a

province of the Roman Empire. The prosperity Israel had enjoyed in the later books of the Old Testament, with great kings and noble prophets and wealth bestowed by God, had been long since destroyed by the Romans, and the Syrians, Assyrians and Hittites before them. The Jews were scattered throughout their homeland, the neighboring areas, and for some unlucky few even further away. In these times of crisis, the oppressed Jews embraced the messianic teachings of the prophet Elijah, who spoke of an "anointed one" who would redeem them from outside rule and reestablish Israel in all its former glory.

It was into this atmosphere that Y'shua ben Joseph (more commonly known by the Greek translation of his name, Jesus) was born. The New Testament contains four different accounts of his life — the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — which agree on most major points while differing on

some of the details. All four books agree that around the age of thirty, Jesus began teaching a radical new philosophy of pacifism and strict obedience to the laws of the Torah, claiming to be the messiah from the line of King David foretold by the prophet Elijah. He gained a small following at first, probably from the ascetic sect of Jews known as the Essenes, ministering to them for several years.

According to the New Testament, Jesus' arrival had upset the corrupt Pharisees, the religious teachers of the Jews of Judea, who were in league with the Roman officials, and they conspired to capture him. This eventually occurred with the help of Judas, one of Jesus' own apostles, bribed by the Pharisees into giving him away. Dragged before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, for treason — claiming to be "King of the Jews" — Jesus refused to plead his case and was sentenced to death by crucifixion. Three days after he was crucified, Christians believe he miraculously rose from the dead and spoke to his disciples one final time before ascending to heaven.

Although Jesus taught only devout Jews, his ministry was eventually extended to gentiles by Paul, a new apostle who believed himself called to serve Jesus' cause though he had not met the man. As the sect's first theologian, Paul changed the faith's focus from adherence to Jewish practices like circumcision and keeping kosher to recitation of prayers and generally living a good and moral life; he also changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday (the day when Jesus was said to have arisen from the dead) and expanded the ministry to include non-Jews. Paul may also have been the person who decided to include the virgin birth motif, already familiar to many Romans from the mystery cults of Isis/ Horus and Mithra, which became part of the religion's canon when the Gospels of Mark and Matthew were written around AD 80 or 90. The name Christ (or Christos) is the Greek equivalent of "messiah" and literally means "anointed one."

It was some time before Christianity would gain acceptance in the Roman Empire. Emperor Nero, among his many perversions, took great pleasure in using lighted Christians as torches at his parties, as well as trampling Christians beneath chariots. Such atrocities against Christians by Rome's rulers were common until the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in AD 312. This paved the way for Christianity to become the official religion of the Empire, causing it to spread throughout Europe and (later) the rest of the world.

Modern Christians believe ostensibly in the same god as do Jews and Muslims, though quite a few doctrinal differences exist. In addition to the Father aspect of God, whom they acknowledge as the God of the Old Testament (and of both Judaism and Islam), Christians also believe God has two other aspects — the Son, personified by Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, which brings about miracles (such as the virgin birth) on Earth. Most Christians believe that Jesus allowed himself to be crucified so that, as a sacrifice, he could take on all the sins of all people and redeem them; for this reason he's sometimes called the Lamb of God, after the sacrificial lambs of ancient Israel. Christians teach that anyone who accepts Jesus as his own savior and confesses his sins will be saved when Jesus returns once more (the Second Coming) to herald the time when God will judge all people.

The great expansion of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire gave rise to many church scholars. Three of the best known are St. Augustine, Dante and St. Thomas Aquinas, all of whose works were accepted as official doctrine by the Catholic Church. While Dante concerned himself with mapping out the underworld, purgatory and heaven, Augustine and Aquinas tried to reconcile Christian belief with the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle. Some of the lesser known writers were responsible for certain of the heresies — Albigensianism (see p. 28) being one of the best known — that the Church tried so hard to stamp out in the pre-Reformation era. Lutheranism was the first such "heresy" to gain enough of a following to fight back and, eventually, establish its own churches, and Calvinism followed in its footsteps soon afterward.

For all their differences in beliefs and practices, most Christian sects practice some form of baptism, a ritual that uses water to cleanse a person of his past and signify a true commitment to follow the teachings of Christ. Based on the older Jewish practice of ritual bathing before entering the temple to worship, baptism began with Jesus himself, who was sprinkled with water from the river Jordan by John the Baptist (not to be confused with John the Apostle). Baptism became the main initiation rite of the Christian faith following this; Jesus' proclamation "I shall make you fishers of men" in the book of Matthew probably refers, at least in part, to the practice. Among modern Christian sects, some disagreement exists over whether baptism should be performed during infancy or later in life. Catholics and other more traditional denominations hold with infant baptism, believing that an unbaptized child cannot enter Heaven, being

uncleansed of the original sin that taints all newborn children thanks to Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden. Many Protestant sects instead practice adult or late childhood baptism, so as to give a person a choice in his own salvation, as they believe Jesus did in the early days of the religion.

Also important in most branches of Christianity is a ritual called Holy Communion (or the "Lord's Supper"), which symbolizes modern Christians' view that they are the spiritual descendants of Jesus' apostles. Just as Jesus offered bread and wine to his apostles, saying they were his body and his blood, modern Christians eat of the Eucharist, a specially prepared wafer, and drink of sacramental wine. Some denominations, most notably Catholicism and the Orthodox and Anglican Churches, believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the Eucharist and wine are actually mystically transformed into the literal body and blood of Christ (and thus, of God). Many Protestant branches believe instead in consubstantiation, a newer teaching that says the transformation is figurative rather than literal — that the Eucharist and wine have the quality of Christ's essence within them but are still bread and wine as well. Some Protestant churches deemphasize the role of the Communion, but generally it's an important ritual to mention, especially given the vampiric twists on it to be mentioned later. Many vampires regard Communion as Christ's way of acknowledging the Kindred as also being his children and thus of still being capable of being redeemed.

It's important to point out that even though some dialog occurs among Kindred of various Christian denominations — between Lutherans and Methodists, for example — Kindred tend to be much more rigid in their beliefs than mortals do. This has to do partly with the static, change-resistant state that is the Cainite condition, but, more importantly, religious beliefs are one of the few things a new vampire has to stabilize himself. Often the process of coping with having to drink blood to survive leads to a vampire's relying far more strongly on religion than she might have as a mortal. Given an unfamiliar situation, most people will try to some degree to relate it to their past experiences, to try to process it in a way that makes sense to their beliefs. In the case of someone who's just discovered death isn't the worst thing God can dish out, it's often that very same God who takes on an increasingly important role in the person's life. In much the same way people with personal or financial difficulties are attracted to the promises of charismatic cult leaders, newly Embraced

vampires often find themselves turning to religion to maintain their sanity (or at the very least their self-control) in such an unfamiliar and often terrifying situation. Religion becomes an important support structure, in addition to just a belief system, and much prestatation has been created and many Monomacy challenges fought by foolish vampires who poked fun at a more experienced Kindred's deeply held religious beliefs.

GOD OF ABRAHAM, GOD OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Christians believe in the same god as do Jews and Muslims, albeit with a few distinctions. The three religions tend to agree on several things, though, the most important of which, to vampires, being that God has it in for them. Whether or not the "history" presented in the various incarnations of the *Book of Nod* is literally true or should even be taken figuratively, the Bible is very clear about what God thought of Caine. Coupled with God's tendency to extend curses to the descendants of a person who'd been cursed, it's pretty logical for Christian vampires to conclude that God really isn't so happy with them.

Still, if that were the extent of their belief, most Christian Kindred would lose faith very quickly — and for the devout, the reverse is more often true. Even when their Humanity begins to slip away, religion becomes a useful tool in resisting the Beast. For Christians, this is because of two doctrines that (in part, at least) add the possibility of redemption to the Cainites' otherwise unhappy position in God's hierarchy — namely, redemption by faith and redemption by good works. Different Christian sects place emphasis on one or both of these, but to Kindred trying to redeem themselves from the Curse of Caine, both are very important.

Of the two paths to redemption, faith is the more difficult one, both to define and to fulfill. Unfortunately, faith is something a person either does or doesn't have; it's not something that can really be encouraged by outside means (at least, nothing short of a miracle). For the same reason, it's difficult to define what faith is — in many cases, a faithful person is very diligent about keeping to the teachings of his religion, but plenty of people go to church all the time who might not truly be said to have faith. Many Kindred make the same mistake as mortals on this one, which is why it's common to find a vampire whose faith is a bit lacking to be far more rigid about

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, EMBRACED

Although the vampiric worshippers mentioned above keep to the generally accepted teachings of whatever denomination they spring from, a few important differences arise because of the...special...nature of the worshippers. Beyond holding services at night (often at least an hour past sundown to make allowances for late risers and travel time) and in many cases entirely in Latin, certain other changes in doctrine have become pretty widespread throughout the Kindred church community. The first and perhaps most important of these is a particular addendum to the Lord's Prayer.

As the story goes, the Cainite Profession (as the addendum is most often known) was created by an English Toreador priest by the name of Father Alexander Burgess sometime in the fourteenth century. Although this was long before all-Kindred churches were common, Father Burgess had been worrying for some time about whether it was honest for a vampire to pray for redemption without mentioning the curse on himself, "as if he doth conspire to deceive God Himself." In answer to his own concern, Burgess created the Cainite Profession and taught it to other Kindred priests he knew. When all-vampire churches came into vogue, it was already fairly widespread. It is, "Blessed is God the Father, who looketh beyond the physical and into the very hearts of men, and judgeth their worthiness. We who, descended as we are from the wretched First Murderer, are unworthy to address Thee, beseech that, in Thy infinite forgiveness and caring, Thou mayst still hear our humble prayers." The congregation then proceeds to recite the Lord's Prayer, often with great fervor — many Kindred take the phrase "valley of the shadow of death" to refer specifically to the Cainite condition.

Another main point of divergence between mortal and Cainite churches is in how they practice the Communion. As in the mortal institutions they're based on, some vampiric churches don't put much stock in the Communion, but those that do have had to make some adaptations to make it easier to perform. Although the churches are full of inspiring stories about Kindred whose faith was great enough to literally transform the wine into blood and the Host into flesh, in practice, many Kindred have a difficult time taking communion because of their problems with eating food. Different churches approach this problem in their own ways — Catholic priests tend to expect their parishioners to keep the wine and Eucharist down without aid, no matter the force of will necessary, while some more liberal Protestant denominations mix small amounts of vitae into their wine and wafers to make them easier to swallow. Some groups even have Thaumaturgical rituals — or, more rarely, Chimerstry effects — cast upon the chalice used for the wine, so that anything poured into it appears and tastes just like wine; this way, the ritual appears indistinguishable from mortal communion, even though the priest's blood may be in the cup. Needless to say, in congregations that use the blood of the priest as the communion wine, parishioners tend to become very fond of their priest.

In churches where such "defilement of the Host" is not officially permitted, it's not uncommon for vampires to cut themselves and add their own blood to the wine and the Host before partaking. In some churches, even though the practice isn't officially condoned, sacramental daggers are provided for this purpose — although officially it's generally thought better to place the blood in the mouth and then add the wine or Host, rather than applying the blood directly to the communion food and drink. Some churches actually go so far as to substitute the blood of a priest or priests for the wine, and others use the combined blood of all the parishioners — although, since this bears such strong similarity to certain Sabbat rituals, churches that do this tend to keep members very quiet about it in other circles. Whether these churches are especially close-knit simply because of common belief or because of an effect similar to the Vinculum is a matter of speculation among Kindred theologians, scholars and Sabbat hunters.

Of less importance, but still worth mentioning, are the variations in baptism among different Kindred churches. A fair number of Cainites believe that just as children in many denominations are baptized soon after birth, so vampires should be baptized again after their "rebirth." The methods vary; Catholics who subscribe to the practice sprinkle water on the Kindred's head, while Orthodox use triple immersion — the same practices used in mortal society. In some churches, of course, practices are more drastic — baptism in blood, for example, instead of water, or even in sacramental wine, the "blood of Christ" — but these churches generally don't advertise these practices. The practice of baptism by fire, in addition to the traditional water baptism, has also come into vogue in the past century or so, as it tests both the believer's resolve and his courage; generally it finds the most popularity in more radical Calvinist or Catholic churches, since it's a bit too harsh a trial for the majority of Protestants (even Protestant vampires) to agree with.

keeping to his denomination's rules and teachings than one who's entirely comfortable and secure in his beliefs. It's worth pointing out here that vampires who don't have a crisis of faith after being turned into blood-sucking corpses are very rare indeed; as a result, religion can often turn into more of an obsession for many Kindred than it might have been while they were mortal. Belief systems that rely exclusively on faith are more common in the Sabbat than in the Camarilla; vampires who believe they're already "saved" by virtue of their belief in Christ, no matter what they may do with their time on Earth, have a much easier time committing atrocities than those who believe in the doctrine of good works.

This is part of why the second path to redemption, good works, tends to receive a lot more publicity among Christians, both mortal and Kindred alike. Even if their particular denomination emphasizes faith alone (Lutherans being the most famous example), everyone knows that God likes people who are good to their fellow man. Whether or not a Christian vampire thinks she officially gets points in Heaven for doing it, on some level most tend to think it helps to hedge their bets on the side of helping others. This may not apply to those few vampires who still believe in justification by faith alone (that is, that believing in Christ is the only thing necessary to earn passage into Heaven), but most tend to agree that since they're cursed by God, simply believing in Him is most likely not enough to earn His favor. After all, it's hardly a miracle that so many Kindred believe in God after being transformed into supernatural parasites because of His curse on Caine; that's not an easy reality to deny.

Interpretations of "good works" vary widely among Kindred, just as they do among mortals. More affluent vampires tend toward giving money to charity or financing benefits for social or medical groups; more proactive ones will help charity groups themselves, provided they can do so at night. Particularly devout (or worried) Kindred have even been known to pull strings and arrange huge fund-raising or charity events, reasoning that since they're helping organize a benefit for a just cause, God probably can figure out who's the brains behind the operation. Some Kindred take an opposing stance — punishing the wicked rather than helping the needy — but as it's difficult for them to keep up a semblance of human morality after a while, they're more commonly found in the Sabbat than the Camarilla.



KEEPING THE FAITH

Given their beliefs, it's not surprising that the first thought most Christians have following the Embrace is, "What can I possibly do with my life now?" Quite a few, particularly those who were devout in their mortal lives, eventually decide to minister the faith to others. With Christian vampires as numerous as they are, and so many mortal churches being built on consecrated ground (not to mention holding services before sundown and occasionally having priests with True Faith), most cities usually have room for another Kindred of the cloth, and it's not uncommon for a Kindred to receive a "calling" to the priesthood in much the same way as mortals do. Usually such priests minister to small groups in the privacy of a haven or other secluded place. Those few who do operate within mortal churches usually hold services elsewhere rather than risking discovery. Larger vampiric churches are found only in large cities, and even then only for the most common denominations.

Priests

The calling can come in various ways. Some Kindred simply awaken one evening and decide that their unlife would best be given meaning by devoting it to the redemption of others. A not insignificant number, though, experience a dream or vision, sometimes even falling into a trance in the midst of a gathering, and this serves as the calling. Such experiences, and stories of them, are one reason why many vampires seek out vampiric clergy in times of crisis — stories of the conversion of a Kindred priest can reassure a troubled vampire as few other things, helping to convince him that God still loves and cares about His wayward children.

Crusaders

Kindred who subscribe to the doctrine of good works often become crusaders, either full time or in their spare time. Most intelligent crusaders don't admit their calling to non-Christian vampires — the word "crusader" has too many negative associations in Kindred society — instead masking their activities behind activism in particular causes. Some crusaders, most notably the Custodians of the Commandments (see p. 29) prefer to patrol their cities; most pick a particular cause that's meaningful to them and devote themselves to it. These causes are, more often than not, religiously based organizations such as the Christian Coalition or even Alcoholics Anonymous, which helps crusaders practice good works and work out their faith at the same time.

Missionaries

Missionaries, like crusaders, also take many forms. Generally, those who work among Kindred also tend to be discreet; rather than wearing "Repent, the day of the Lord is at hand!" signs or preaching at anyone who happens to walk by, they more often work by discussion. When the subject of faith or religion comes up in conversation, the missionary listens to the opinions of the Kindred involved. He then either works himself and his views into the conversation or, more often, takes someone he feels is a promising candidate for conversion aside for a private discussion. Some Kindred — those who are humane enough, at least — work with mortals also, or even work exclusively with mortals. Even though it poses a breach to the Masquerade, some even use their Disciplines to perform "miracles" to help encourage people to convert. They realize risk is involved, but what's a simple tradition like the Masquerade when compared with saving people's souls?

Other Paths to Salvation

Like the mortal Christian community, vampires also have their share of casual worshippers — those who cling to their religion because it's familiar and probably care about it somewhat, but who don't go out of their way to redeem themselves. Some of these believers think themselves beyond redemption — God never told Caine any way he could get out of his curse, after all — while others just have more important things on their minds. A fair number of the more casual believers seek out Kindred churches, mostly to be able to talk to a vampiric priest if things in their unlives ever get rough, but some still stay with mortal churches, provided they can still enter and that services are at least occasionally held at night.

Although many younger Kindred, as many mortals, consider having a "real job" as only a means to acquire money, among Christian vampires a secular job is often considered to be a rewarding activity in its own right; vampiric clergy generally encourage it if a parishioner asks. The priests realize it can become tedious for a Cainite to try to base an entire lifestyle around being a good Christian. Instead, by holding down a job that lets him help people, he can work toward his own redemption without having to transform himself into a Bible-thumper or a fanatic. Besides the priesthood itself, social work is a favored profession among many Christian Kindred, though being able to practice it only after dark is a problem. In recent years, one solution has been 24-hour telephone hotlines for battered women, Christians

in crisis, or even psychic advice — it all boils down to counseling and helping people in the end. More physically oriented Kindred sometimes take jobs as security guards around animal shelters, food banks or churches.

LUCIFER'S BROOD

It's fairly widely accepted that Christianity has had the greatest impact of any single religion on popular perceptions of vampires. The vampire mythos has existed far longer than Christianity, but tonight vampires are generally thought to be afraid of crosses, though more learned Kindred know that it's what lies within the bearer of the cross that truly counts. The rise and spread of Christianity throughout the ages, though in some cases helping to discourage belief in vampires, also added a new dimension to them — not only were vampires things to be avoided, but people soon came to think of them as agents of Lucifer himself.

The years before Christianity were often an easier time to find mortal prey and contacts than the modern nights. From pretending to be Greek or Roman gods or creating their own blood-based mystery cults to gain herd, to openly demanding tribute from cities at times, Kindred had it comparatively easy in the nights when people accepted them as part of the natural (if spooky and disturbing) order of things. These practices continued mostly uninterrupted during the early years of Christianity as a minor Jewish split-off religion, but the acceptance of Christianity as the Roman state religion in the fourth century AD started the decline of Kindred influence that would eventually lead to the Inquisitions of the Middle Ages.

Although belief in the old Roman gods continued for a while, Christianity spread quickly to outer provinces, where it quickly gained followers by converting local gods into saints and "pagan" celebrations into Christian holidays or feast days. The old gods had never promised redemption — rather, they had only promised pain and suffering if disobeyed — so Christianity caught on among the locals of Roman provinces, offering something new: a chance at a joyful and rewarding afterlife. As priests fanned out across the empire to bring the Word to the heathens, they often brought with them a bias against the older local gods; those figures leading honest people into temptation were obviously agents of the Devil himself. This placed Kindred who'd been posing as those gods or taking advantage of their followers in a

delicate position — either change with the times, or face priests and villagers wielding fire, and sometimes True Faith as well.

Although the Church had done its best to suppress pagan mythologies about vampires, werewolves, faeries and the like, superstitions are difficult to destroy completely, and in many areas — particularly Eastern Europe — villagers continued to believe in them. It was around the eleventh century, following the split of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, that priests began to take a more active role in the vampire "superstitions" of their areas. Rather than simply discouraging the beliefs of villagers, priests accepted the existence of the Kindred and decided that such evil creatures must be servants of Lucifer. Whenever villagers suspected a vampire in the area, priests would lead a search party, complete with stakes and flaming torches. Often this would simply lead to the mutilation of a graveyard corpse that appeared undecayed — a sure sign that it was a sleeping vampire — but some unlucky Kindred had resting places which were discovered and met grisly ends by staking, beheading and burning. Last rites were usually performed as well, but that was small consolation to the vampire who met Final Death.

Certainly, these vampire hunts were usually about as effective in uncovering real vampires as the Salem Witch Trials were in executing real witches, but they did set a precedent that alarmed at least some Kindred at the time, particularly those who'd affiliated themselves with the Church. Surely if villagers utterly destroyed any corpse they thought might be a vampire, it would be far worse for any vampire found to be "serving Lucifer" from within the Church. Some, of course, were so alarmed at the vampire hunts that they actually did seek demonic assistance — but since demonic creatures of the time took great pleasure in eventually betraying their supposed masters' resting places, such foolish Kindred didn't last very long.

Even with vampire hunts as an early warning sign, few Kindred suspected the witch hunts that were to come, and as a result quite a few vampires and ghouls met their end burning at the stake. Not a small number of these were turned in by their own treacherous childer; alarm at the situation was great enough to eventually prompt the formation of the Camarilla (and the Sabbat in retaliation). Although it did still hold true that the vast majority of those burned as "witches" were nothing more than rich widows, grumpy old women, or tax collectors with no super-

natural powers at all, the zeal of the mortals for destroying anything they saw as unholy was alarming in the extreme. So the Kindred decided, as their supposed demonic master Lucifer had before them, to perform the ultimate trick — convincing the world they didn't exist.

Since that period, Kindred influence in the church hasn't necessarily decreased, but as Kindred involved in the church have become more prudent, their influence has become more difficult to trace. It's true in the church the same way it's true in other areas — the times of impersonating gods or holy men are long gone. In some cases, literally hiding within the church as a priest or monk still works, but more Kindred who aspire to the priesthood in the modern nights do so in all-vampire churches; the risk of discovery is obviously much less this way. Of course, some few still work at the church from within as clergy — to great personal benefit, but also at no small amount of risk.

REDEMPTION OR DAMNATION?

Whether Kindred are beyond all hope of salvation or whether they can redeem themselves through virtuous acts and faith depends entirely on which vampire you happen to be talking to. In large part, it also depends on which branch of Christianity he calls his own, but even within most churches, the question engenders a fair amount of disagreement. While some see Caine's sin as unforgivable and undiluted by the weakening of the Blood through the years and the generations, many like to think that God might see the descendants of a six-millennia-old murderer a little more favorably than those who, for example, commit murder in the present. Although neither of these positions is particularly happy or encouraging, the second one at least suggests the possibility of redemption — and in a religion that places so much emphasis on sin, that's an important point to make.

Equally important in the discussions of Christian Kindred theologians is the debate on just whom Jesus meant to save through his sacrifice — only mortals, or Kindred also. Those who say Jesus meant to save mortals only, sometimes referred to by their opponents as Fatalists, often also lean toward thinking damnation for the Kindred is inevitable, though it might be lessened somewhat through good works and faith. The other camp (known colloquially as Salvationists) argues that Jesus, as a pure soul who loved his fellow man, couldn't possibly have overlooked the Children of Caine — those even more wretched than the tax-collectors and prostitutes he tried to save —

and thus that any vampire who truly takes Jesus into his heart can be saved just as if he were mortal. However, most of these vampires also believe good works are necessary to prove to God that they truly have accepted the Gospel as their guide for unlife, and that they subscribe to Jesus' teachings both in word and in practice.

MODERN SECTS

The following section outlines the major groups of Christian sects, along with what they believe and how their teachings tend to be modified by most vampiric believers. Following the modern sects is an exploration of older belief systems — heresies from the Middle Ages and earlier, for example — that are still practiced by some Kindred tonight. In addition, several new groups have appeared due to the unique demands and concerns of the Christian vampiric population, which are explained last.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Not surprisingly, most Catholic churches and individual Catholic vampires fall strongly on the Fatalist side of the redemption argument. If normal mortals could be tainted for all eternity simply because Adam and Eve were duped by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, how much more vile and debased must the childer of the First Murderer be in God's eyes? Even the most virtuous, humble, and honestly religious vampire could not hope to atone for the millennia of atrocities that have been committed by Cainites, whose very existence is a testament to Caine's second transgression — Embracing in direct violation of God's wishes. These sentiments generally hold true for Orthodox churches and believers also. If anything, vampires from the countries that are traditionally Orthodox territory (Greece, Russia and other Balkan states) will be even less forgiving of the Curse of Caine than their Catholic cousins. Most, if not all, Anglicans, Episcopalians and Presbyterians hold similar beliefs to Catholics, as well.

This places Catholics in the position, for the most part, of doing good works in order to improve the world and in order to right some small part of the wrongs perpetuated by all Kindred throughout history, often with no expectation of redemption. At most, they hope that God might notice how hard they have worked to atone and lessen the torment they receive in Hell some small amount in recognition of it. The common joke among more liberal Protestant Kindred summarizes Catholic belief as, "If God denies us Heaven's glory, then we'll still settle

for Purgatory.” A few Catholics do believe they might be able to achieve redemption if they truly have faith and demonstrate that faith through good works on Earth, believing that God is essentially loving and forgiving, and that even vampires can’t truly fathom His will (so, in other words, it can’t hurt to try). Mostly these are the young Kindred, Embraced within the last century, since modern Catholicism tends to be far more forgiving of sin than it used to be. Many of these Kindred believe that all a priest does in confession is help a person to forgive himself, rather than bestowing divine forgiveness. Fatalist and Salvationist Catholics generally tend to avoid each other — Salvationists see the Fatalists as being unnecessarily pessimistic, while Fatalists see the Salvationists as thinking themselves somehow more “worthy” than other Catholics.

For all their emphasis on how horribly Damned the Kindred are, the question has to be asked — why would a good Catholic vampire who sees himself as eternally condemned because of what he’s become ever inflict that fate on someone else? Sadly, the answers are similar to those for any Kindred, including loneliness after many long years of bearing the curse alone. The Damned have plenty of motives for Embracing, many of them selfish, and let’s face it, even the most devout believer slips up sometimes. Sometimes it’s for a different reason — teaching a lesson to a sinner, Embracing as punishment for someone whom the vampire feels deserves Hell and not just purgatory, or even, in some cases, saving someone from dying with sin still on his head, when unlife might be the opportunity to right the wrongs he’s committed as a mortal. But deep down, behind these more noble reasons, it’s often much more simple. The desire to sire can be motivated by loneliness, despair, spite, jealousy or even hunger — followed by a surge of guilt and an impulsive decision to do whatever it takes so the victim of that hunger doesn’t have to die. It’s worth pointing out here that if a vampire truly does believe that she’s condemned a person’s soul to eternal fire and torment in the afterlife by Embracing him, she may very well feel her *humanitas* degrade for doing it — but sometimes faith exacts a heavy toll, and if the occasional moral conundrum is all a vampire has to deal with because of her religion, she’s getting off easily.

PROTESTANTS

It’s difficult to lump all Protestant groups into one broad category on certain issues, but as far as redemption, it’s pretty clear that most Protestants

(except Anglicans, Episcopalians and Presbyterians, as mentioned above) fall on the side of Salvationism. Starting with the first Protestant, Martin Luther, all Protestant churches have placed a great deal of emphasis on personal interpretation of the scriptures, rather than blind obedience to whatever a central church’s established doctrine may be. As a result, a Protestant denomination is much more a collection of believers who interpret the Bible in similar ways than an exclusive organization purporting to have one true reading of Scripture. Many modern Protestant churches reject the ideas of Heaven and Hell altogether, seeing them only as products of medieval theology unjustified by the Bible. Some go even further, questioning basic principles of the religion such as the Trinity. Methodists, for example, regard the Trinity more as man’s experience of how God has revealed Himself so far but don’t claim to know exactly what the “true nature” of God might be.

The variations between Protestant groups on the issue of redemption for Kindred mainly are between faith and good works. In theory, a majority of Protestants believe faith in Christ is the only thing necessary to be saved from all sin; most of these also believe that faith without good works is meaningless, however — a person can’t truly be faithful if he doesn’t try to help his fellow man, since that’s contrary to Christ’s teachings. The upshot of this is that the majority of Protestant Kindred believe they can be redeemed, but many of them believe it for different reasons. Most acknowledge that it’s more difficult for Kindred than for mortals to find favor with God, being cursed and having to contend with the Beast, but at the same time they see this as a test of their faith rather than an insurmountable obstacle. More theologically minded Protestant Kindred argue that a god who, in the person of Christ, forgave and redeemed prostitutes — who had chosen to be what they were even though God had forbidden it — couldn’t possibly have any more ill will toward Kindred, most of whom didn’t have a choice in becoming what they are.

Like Catholics, Protestant Kindred pick potential childer whom they feel might be instructed through the Embrace. Generally, though, it’s not sin that they look for. Protestant Kindred more often look for those with a faith strong enough to survive the Embrace relatively intact and with skills that may lend themselves to the vampire’s favored causes. Since most believe it’s possible for Kindred to redeem themselves, even though it’s more difficult than for mortals, Protestant Kindred look for mortals of such

surpassing conviction and resolve that, even tainted by the curse of Caine, it might prove better to keep them around for a long time to work at a cause than to allow them to remain mortal and eventually die.

OLDER SECTS AND HERESIES

Although the following groups were wiped out in the mortal world by the efforts of the Catholic Church at various points in its history, their influence on the Kindred community persists to this night — vampires have a long memory, after all. History has borne witness to far more heresies throughout the ages than it's possible to list here, but many weren't of particular interest to Cainites, dealing only with obscure points of doctrine that don't affect the average believer at all. The following three had major points of divergence with the established Church, and their teachings found ready ears among Kindred who longed for salvation. Followers of these faiths generally don't advertise it, often just calling themselves "Christian" and leaving it at that — unless, of course, they meet someone they think would make a good convert.

ALBIGENSIANS

The Albigensians were a Christian branch of the larger Catharist sect, which appeared in the eleventh century. It proposed the existence of two gods — a good deity responsible for creating souls and the spiritual world, and an evil god responsible for tricking the souls into inhabiting the corrupt physical world. Although the teachings of this sect also inspired the Sabbat Path of Cathari, which teaches that vampires are the servants of the evil god, small pockets of truly Christian Albigensians can be found throughout undead society, who believe they can be redeemed from the curse of Caine by following Christ's example. This usually means a rigid attention to one's own humanity, or occasionally adherence to an arcane philosophy sometimes described as the "Road of Heaven" by professed Albigensians.

Because they believe the material world is corrupt and evil, the Albigensians think Christ was not truly a spiritual being but rather a spiritual entity who seemed to be real, sent from Heaven to teach people how to redeem themselves from the world the evil god tricked them into. Among the original mortal followers of the sect, suicide was often seen as a noble way to escape from life. This is true for some of the current followers, though most believe that a life of good works is necessary first. The Albigensians also believe that procreation is a vile act, since it locks another spirit into a debased mortal form, and this is doubly true for the Embrace — Albigensian Kindred

don't often do it, and if it happens accidentally, they typically kill the childe rather than submit it to an even more corrupt existence than it had experienced as a mortal. One of the reason the sect is so small, besides its unorthodox beliefs, is that it's composed entirely of converts, since Embracing is forbidden to its members.

Still, accidents (and selfishness) do happen, and more than once an Albigensian Embraced for one reason or another. Such illegitimate childer usually have had little to look forward to. Entering a new existence only to be told they must eventually commit suicide or be even further damned, many forsake the sect altogether. Those who do listen to their sires at first often grow restless when the aims of the Albigensians are explained, and those who have internalized the philosophy until that point sometimes fall to the Path of Cathari as an alternative to suicide. Among modern Albigensians, it's whispered that an illegitimate childe may have been the creator of that Path in the first place.

PELAGIANS

Pelagianism took its name from Pelagius, a fifth-century Welsh monk who preached against both original sin and vicarious atonement. In other words, his followers believed that Adam's sin was not passed along to his descendants, and also that Christ did not die for the sins of all people but only to show them the way to salvation. In a way, Pelagius was the first to express the Enlightenment idea that man is born with a moral clean slate, and that it's society, not nature, that shapes him into a sinful creature. Pelagianism is popular among Kindred of many different denominations; a Pelagian Church doesn't exist so much as a network of Kindred who believe redemption is very attainable. Many believe, by extension of denying original sin, that only Caine was hated by God. While his childer may still bear the outward trappings of his curse, God doesn't hold their lineage against them. This helps to comfort those from more Fatalist traditions, while reinforcing the belief systems of Salvationists who hear about it.

NAZOREANS

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and an associated increased interest in what the followers of Jesus were really like, the sect now known as the Nazoreans has received quite a bit of attention from scholars in recent years. According to many historical documents and apocryphal religious sources, Jesus led a radical group of Jewish ascetics called Essenes, preaching a return to the spirit of the Torah to purify

themselves in the eyes of God. It was with the coming of Paul, who had originally persecuted these Jews, that the idea of the virgin birth and the resurrection were added to make the religion more attractive to Romans, who were already familiar with resurrectionist mystery cults from Greece and the Far East.

Nazorean vampires come in two varieties — those who claim to have been active at the time of Christ or to be descended from a vampire who was, and those who convert from other Jewish or Christian sects. The former are generally the leaders in the sect, while the latter act more as disciples. All Nazoreans insist on an adherence to traditional Jewish practices, including circumcision, dietary laws, and so on; the only point on which they disagree with Jews is Jesus himself. While Jews acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet like any other, Nazoreans believe he was the greatest — greater even than Moses — and was the “anointed one from the line of King David” prophesized by Elijah in the Old Testament.

According to the Gnostic Gospels, which the Nazoreans consider far more valid than the Gospels of the New Testament, when Jesus died his ministry was carried on by his brother James. After the death of James, Jesus’ twin brother (yes, that’s right, his *twin*) Thomas took over the sect. Because James had already conceded to Paul that converts to Christianity no longer needed to be circumcised, the sect had already begun to wane, and though Thomas was successful in founding the Mar Thoma Church in India, the last of the mortal Nazorean sects — the Ebionites — had disappeared by the fourth century AD. To modern Kindred Nazoreans, any supposed Christian who’s not a member of either the lost Ebionite sect or the Mar Thoma Church is a heretic and no friend of theirs. Attempts of naïve Catholic Kindred to “bring the wayward Nazoreans into the fold” are usually met with obscure but ironclad scriptural justification, followed by more drastic physical measures if the poor fool doesn’t get the picture. Nazoreans are *very* attached to their beliefs, and many see the entire Christian world as being against them, so it’s generally a bad idea to try to convince them of the supposed error of their ways.

NEW KINDRED SECTS

It’s understandable that for some Kindred, many of the standard mortal sects fail to address matters of importance to a vampire — eternal unlife, resisting the Beast and how to achieve redemption from the curse of Caine. The two following sects have been some of the more moderate attempts to address these

issues — a distinct approach that’s peculiar to the undead but which at the same time doesn’t depart very far from the beliefs of most Christians. In contrast to the sects detailed in the next chapter, these sects are more common in the Camarilla than the Sabbat; their members may be some of the more zealous and religious of Camarilla vampires, but they still cling to *humanitas* as much as most other vampires, and their morality (though expanded in scope because of the sect they follow) remains relatively unchanged. The Custodians and Redeemers are about creative ways to achieve redemption while still remaining good Christians in the traditional sense, rather than reforming the religion so that vampires are somehow holy or exalted. Indeed, their members never question that they’re cursed; they just have more creative ideas than most about how to redeem themselves.

CUSTODIANS OF THE COMMANDMENTS

Imagine, for a moment, an impoverished man who’s been driven to robbing a convenience store in order to provide for his family. Let’s call him Ed. Wearing a ski mask, Ed enters the store with a gun, puts the money from the cash register into a pillowcase and quickly leaves. As he’s making his escape, Ed finds himself pursued by someone who seems inhumanly fast, strong and dexterous. No matter how hard he tries to escape, this mysterious pursuer keeps only a few steps behind him, almost as if allowing him to run until he’s forced to stop. Ed becomes sure that it’s a cop, that as soon as he stops sirens and handcuffs and guns will come, and that he’ll never see his family again after tonight.

When the last of his stamina finally gives way, Ed does stop, and the stranger approaches him. Instead of a gun or handcuffs, the person offers a comforting hand on his shoulder and speaks softly of how what he has done is a sin. The stranger assures him that other ways exist to provide for his family, and that God does not want to see him in jail, separated from them. Then the stranger offers to take the money back to the store, and further to make it appear as though the robbery had ever occurred, as long as Ed is willing to repent and to accept Christ as his savior.

If that’s not a pretty compelling argument for starting to believe, the Custodians of the Commandments don’t know what is.

The Custodians (or simply “guardians,” as many of them like to be called) are a grass-roots Christian movement started in the mid-nineteenth century by Nils Jornusson, a devout Norwegian Ventrue. It has

seen great expansion in the past 50 to 60 years, both in Europe and in the United States. Its members come from a myriad of clans, backgrounds and denominations, but all of them share a fundamental sadness at the ruin they believe men inflict upon themselves every day by sinning. The Custodians have appointed themselves humanity's conscience and overseer, dedicating their existences to erasing not only sin, but also the very desire to sin at all, from humanity. This, they believe, is how they will help to create a better world, a world worthy of Christ's return, and help redeem themselves from the curse of Caine in the process.

In addition to trying to stop sin as it's occurring, the Custodians take a further step toward guarding mortals against sin. Jesus taught that being angry with one's neighbor is just as bad as attacking him; the Custodians believe that thinking about sinning or intending to sin is just as bad as actually committing sin. This is why the ability to probe others' thoughts is prized above all other disciplines in the sect: It allows guardians to weed out the inclination toward sin from a mind ahead of time, and to discuss it with the person before any true harm is done to anyone else. Those who don't come by such things as easily pursue psychology or criminal profiling to try to accomplish their goals; they often are forced to rely much more on their intuition than those with vampiric powers of perception.

It should be pointed out that though the idea behind the Custodians is a very noble one, the sect's practices don't amount just to finding sinners and talking them out of sinning. That's just the first step; when it works, it's the only step. But the Custodians are diligent servants of Christ, and if a person is unwilling to listen to reason, other methods are sometimes necessary. Many Disciplines can be used to great effect to simulate the torments of Hell that await the person if he continues to refuse to listen. Many others can also be useful for forcing the person to listen without interruption, not to mention helping him realize the vampire is more than just a run-of-the-mill proselytizer. Custodians are messengers of God, and to them the Masquerade is a paltry, selfish concern when compared with saving souls. Certainly they do try to uphold the Masquerade whenever possible, but in the unlikely situation of having to choose between convincing someone to renounce a life of sin and upholding the Masquerade, a Custodian would often side with helping the sinner.

Although some Custodians still remain part of a standard denomination and attend regular services, many find the practical worship of unlife spent as a guardian far more satisfying than simple prayers, and as a result the Custodians become their only church. Local groups typically convene once a week for prayer meetings, which include nondenominational prayer and ritual, devotionals specific to the group (asking God for insight in doing His work, for help being a fair judge, etc.), and, most importantly, the sharing of stories from the week with each other. This last part is a chance for the church members to critique each other on their style of guardianship, as well as to learn from each other's successes and failures. National meetings occur once or twice a year, depending on demand, and an international conclave of guardians is called every three to five years, the next one being scheduled for December 2003. The reason these meetings aren't organized more regularly is that the scheduling depends entirely on a vote of the membership rather than on a president or an overseeing council.

REDEEMERS OF THE DAMNED

The Redeemers were formed based on two theological paradoxes: how a truly loving God could condemn anyone, even the wicked, to eternal torment, and how the souls in Heaven, if they're truly pure and good, can stand the knowledge that God has done this without taking action to save those in Hell. These questions were the main focus of the writings of Father Albion Gregoire, a French Treador theologian writing in the fifteenth century, whose writings would become the basis for the modern Redeemers. In his works, Father Albion came to believe that the solution had to be one of two things — either God was not truly loving and good, which was an impossibility to him, or God expected some of His children to perform the task of redeeming those in Hell for him. Father Albion asserted that it must be the Kindred — the single group traditionally thought to be most despised by God — who were meant to redeem themselves by saving those who had been condemned to Hell. Surely God meant Hell to be a place of learning, not simply a place of pain and suffering, and so it fell to Albion's followers to discover a way of freeing those souls to return to Heaven.

Father Gregoire began a pilgrimage across Europe to spread his philosophy in 1434, and as he traveled he gained an ever-increasing band of followers who traveled with him. He began in his own



France, then moved on to Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy, and it was in Italy that his theories finally found a practical outlet. He was approached one night by a Giovanni who had heard of his crusade to liberate the damned souls of Hell and who offered his services as a necromancer to help the group. Using Necromancy, the Giovanni gave Father Gregoire a vision of the world of wraiths — a pale, shadowy realm of shattered dreams and anguish — and the priest came to the obvious conclusion: These poor souls were the condemned that he had been hoping to liberate.

Upon entering the Underworld to liberate the damned souls he found there, Father Albion started a tradition that would develop into the sect known tonight as the Redeemers. Redeemers see it as their sacred task to help those who have been condemned to torment understand that it is their own guilt and unresolved emotions that bind them in a shadowy copy of their former lives. A Redeemer's task is to convince these miserable shades to give up the goals and passions that hold them to this wretched existence, so that they can go on to ascend to Heaven, where God eventually wants every spirit to go when it has overcome its own guilt.

Like the Custodians, the Redeemers rely on conversation as their primary method of persuasion. Mediums and others who can speak to the Restless are prized in the sect, as are Disciplines that allow the same. These dialogs between Kindred and Restless can last for months or even years, with the Kindred helping counsel the Restless through finishing unfinished business and giving up what ties it to Hell. Also like the Custodians, though, the Redeemers believe in using a more drastic approach for those who refuse to listen time and again. This is when entering the Underworld bodily is often the only solution — first for face-to-face discussion, and if that also fails to work, for a demonstration of what torment truly is. For the Redeemers also believe that when faced with a truly painful destruction (usually the most painful means available to the assembled Kindred), a spirit will realize the illusory nature of the torment it has inflicted on itself, and after being temporarily destroyed it will reform in Heaven for the rest of eternity. Convincing the spirits to renounce their existence is always preferable to such painful methods, but sometimes pain is the only way to drive home the point. This philosophy ensures that those who are known to be Redeemers are usually avoided by most

wraiths that can help it — which is why it's so seldom the Redeemers can find wraiths that will listen before running. Most often, it's the newly dead who don't know any better.

The Redeemers still have a business relationship with a few of the Giovanni. In return for passage to the netherworld when necessary, the Redeemers allow the Giovanni to act as their enforcers. Usually, this means that if a particular spirit is destroyed by a Redeemer and then reforms in Hell instead of Heaven, the Giovanni are given leave to collect that spirit and use a more lasting form of punishment to change its mind about where it belongs. Redeemers generally don't ever see these wraiths again, but that doesn't concern them. They trust their allies to allow the tormented to ascend to Heaven when it's their time. In general, the small family of Giovanni that still assists the Redeemers finds it terribly ironic that such devout Kindred would donate souls so readily toward the destruction of the barrier between their Hell and the physical world. Still, the Giovanni manage to keep up the appearance of righteous punishment in the name of God well enough that no Redeemer has yet caught on to their true motives for helping the group.

Recently, the Redeemers have learned from their contacts in the Underworld that a great storm has appeared, ravaging the illusory landscape and swallowing some of the spirits. The Redeemers believe that this is mainly due to their efforts at redeeming those in Hell. Some feel that God has decided to help them, sending a storm to swallow up the shades and send them to Heaven while destroying the realm that keeps them in bondage, while others feel that the emotionally reactive environment of the netherworld has begun to destroy itself in response to the Redeemers' attempts to undermine it. Both groups believe that the storm is a key to redemption, and they often encourage indecisive wraiths to fling themselves into it as a symbol of their desire to return to paradise. As these spirits, like those the Giovanni take to discipline, rarely return to tell the Redeemers how it went, most Redeemers remain confident that the storm is, indeed, a portal to Heaven. Some have even entered the Underworld to test the theory themselves, but they also have not returned. Some within the sect believe that the truly righteous of the Redeemers — those who have rescued perhaps 1,000 souls or more — should be allowed to take the portal also, as a reward for their work, but the issue is still under heated debate.

ISLAM

Islam began as the waking dream of a man named Muhammad ibn Abdullah (peace be upon him), a humble shepherd born of the Quraysh tribe in Arabia. Before his death on June 8, 632, Muhammad would live to see his dream embraced by almost every single one of his countrymen. He would live to see his message — God's final and complete revelation to Man — spread across his homeland like a divine tide, carrying with it the inner peace that can be found only by submitting one's heart and soul to God and to no other.

Tonight, Islam's adherents are well over a billion strong and growing. It remains the fastest-growing religion on earth, and scientists predict that its numbers will come to surpass those of Christianity by as early as the year 2010, making it the dominant religion of the planet. With Christianity on the decline, they further predict that more than one third of the world's peoples will follow Islam by the year 2025. The fundamental dream of the Prophet had been one of "one faith for all the world" during his lifetime.

Were he alive tonight, he might well be watching that dream come to its fruition.

ONE FAITH FOR ALL THE WORLD

Although he was born into the most powerful tribe in the city of Mecca, Muhammad ibn Abdullah never knew a life of wealth. Muhammad's father died while his unborn son lay curled up in his mother's womb, leaving no inheritance upon which his family could live. Muhammad thus grew up both poor and frail. His mother Amina could not care for them both (she herself was equally as frail and had taken ill after her husband's death), and she sent the boy to live with another family in the nearby village of at-Ta'if when he was only two years old.

Eventually, Muhammad fell under the care of his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, whose house overlooked the Ka'ba, the central temple of worship in pre-Islamic Arabia. The boy's grandfather taught him of the history of the Ka'ba and of its sacred stone, thought to be a piece of the moon that had fallen to Earth and sacred to the god Hubal. Muhammad took a keen interest in all related matters and was fasci-

nated by the power of faith at a young age. At 10 years old, Muhammad was hired out to work as a camel driver for caravans traveling to and from Arabia. In the course of this work, the curious boy sought religious scholars in every town he visited, in the hopes of finding some answers to the questions that burned deeply within his restless soul.

At the age of 25, Muhammad fell in love with and eventually married a widow named Khadija. Now a grown man, Muhammad settled into marriage and fatherhood with simple ease, siring six children over the next 10 years. Although he still debated religion and theosophical thought with the men of his village on occasion, he had finally settled down and accepted his role as husband, father and shepherd. For Muhammad, these things were truly life enough...

But such was not to be. In the year 606, while meditating in the caves that honeycombed the hills near his home, Muhammad was startled by a thunderous voice that shook him from his quiet contemplation.

"Read!" the voice demanded.

Stunned, Muhammad could only reply that he did not know how.

"Read!" the voice again boomed, and again Muhammad protested.

"READ!" the voice demanded once more. Frustrated and afraid, Muhammad asked what it was he was meant to read. It was then that a scroll made from silk with words inscribed in flame appeared in the air before the astonished shepherd. Though he knew not how to read, he understood the inscription nonetheless. That was when Muhammad ran from the caves, thinking himself mad. As he ran, however, he heard the voice from above call to him once more.

"Oh, Muhammad," it said. "You are Allah's messenger and I am Gabriel!" Indeed he saw an angel then, hovering above him, radiant in all its glory. In that moment all fear and doubt were washed away. When this vision faded from Muhammad's eyes, it left him forever changed. From that moment on, Muhammad was no longer the simple shepherd he once had been, but the last and greatest Prophet of God, sent to deliver His final revelation to the world of men.

With successive visitations, Muhammad learned of the end of the world and of the terrible fate that awaited those who did not repent their ways and submit themselves before God. Muhammad's mes-

sage, called Islam (meaning "peace" and "submission"), spread quickly from his followers among the Quraysh to those of other nearby tribes. By the time of his death, Mecca itself — once a paragon of pagan idolatry — had embraced Islam, and with it rose the vigor of monotheism.

RUSHD

At its very core, Islam is founded and truly predicated upon one simple notion: God has given unto Man a clear path, one that Man must follow or else go against the will of Heaven. This spiritual path is called *Rushd*, which means "the Right Way" in Arabic. Unlike many other religions, Islam is a complete way of life: a perspective on the universe and on mankind's role in that universe, as well as a simple set of guidelines to help men understand and accept that role.

These guidelines can be found in a book called the Qur'an (literally, the "recitation"). This is the holy text of Islam and is believed to be the literal Word of God, revealed through the medium of human language (namely Arabic). The Qur'an contains the revelations of the Prophet, collectively forming a complete and universal set of moral and social teachings. It is the ideas and values expressed herein that make Islam what it is: a force that inspires souls to establish the kingdom of God on Earth; the realization of the dream of God-conscious Man living in a just society, fulfilling his destiny on Earth while earning his place in the Hereafter; the ideal of Man living at peace with himself and with Creation around him by being at peace with his Creator. It is the adherence to and acceptance of these teachings that makes one a Muslim — a follower of Islam.

THE ASHIRRA

When one of the Kindred decides to embrace Islam or, more frequently, when a practicing Muslim is brought into undeath, he becomes a member of a sect known as the Ashirra (the "brethren"). The nature of affiliation is similar to that found in the greatest political sect of the undead — the Camarilla — where one is presumed to be a member unless one actively claims otherwise and makes an attempt to distance himself from the hegemonical reach of his elders. If one is both Muslim and a vampire, then one is graciously accepted by the Ashirra as a "brother," regardless of how it all came to pass.

The origins of the sect itself date back to the nights when the Prophet still walked among men. From 622 until his death in 632, Muhammad — a “mere” mortal — was the spiritual mentor for a mighty Lasombra elder named Suleiman ibn Abdullah. Suleiman was the first of his kind — the founder of the Ashirra — and he dedicated his unlife to spreading the Word after his conversion in 622. For 10 years the vampire learned directly from the Prophet himself, often paying the price for his proximity to the mortal’s great faith. Eventually, however, he found that as his own faith in the Prophet’s words grew, so too did his acceptance of that same faith in the world around him. Soon he grew strong enough to enter the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, while the sheer power of the faith in those same cities was enough to burn other Kindred — nonbelievers — to so much ash if they even set foot inside the city walls.

The principle foundation of the sect is built upon the notion that redemption is possible for any being who accepts Islam and respects both its laws and its god. The Ashirra believe that immortality does not release a vampire from the judgment of Allah and that they too must follow God’s laws just like any other. Further support for their stance comes from the Prophet himself, who directly and knowingly offered the promise of salvation to the damned, as long as they dedicated themselves to Allah and to the duties He would impose upon them.

What can be called “membership” in the sect is available to any and all converts from each and every clan, even the Followers of Set and Baali (both of whom must obviously give up their idolatrous ways). A great many Ashirra hail from the Lasombra clan, owing largely to the work of Suleiman ibn Abdullah, who remains the grand mullah of the entire sect to this very night. By way of influence, the next most prominent clan among the Ashirra must surely be the Nosferatu. This is because the largest subset of the Ashirra — the Hajj — was founded by a Nosferatu named Tarique. Along with his own line of childer and other devout clanmates, Tarique uses both his influence and his mastery of Islamic blood magic (called *sih*r) to serve the Muslim communities and to protect the holy sites of Arabia. The Brujah are also well represented among the Ashirra, having been inspired by high Islamic ideals of equality, compassion and the betterment of the self.

THE TAKING OF BLOOD

Muslim Kindred nightly struggle to reconcile their own dietary needs with the restrictions imposed upon them by the very religion they adore. Surah (chapter) 2:173 of the Qur’an states most unequivocally that Muslims cannot drink blood: “Forbidden to you are carrion and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which has been consecrated or killed in the name of any other than Allah.” Elsewhere in the Qur’an (Surah 16:115) it similarly states that God has “forbidden carrion and blood and the flesh of swine, and that which has been killed in the name of any other but Allah.” These are the two primary sources of scripture the Ashirra most often use when debating the repercussions they might face due to the requirements imposed upon them by their damned condition.

Two schools of thought predominate during such debates. The first is one of pious resignation, the notion that God’s will is clearly laid out in these passages and that any Muslim who drinks blood — regardless of his circumstances — is sinning and will have to pay the price for his transgression come Resurrection Day (Judgment Day, to the other monotheists). The best hope for Kindred, this school of thought holds, is to try to atone for dietary sins by performing enough other charitable acts and by keeping true to all other aspects of *Rushd*.

The other school of thought is the one often espoused by the less traditional or orthodox (and often younger) members of the Ashirra. It holds that since the Surah specifically mentions the forbidden “foods” as being those that are either unhallowed or consecrated to someone other than Allah, then those foods that are specifically consecrated to Allah are thus free of this restriction (see “Cleansing the Unclean” below).

Another log on the fire of this debate comes from the very next line of the same Surah that forbids the taking of blood. It reads, “If one is driven by necessity to eat these things without craving or reverting to them, then Allah is forgiving and kind.” Many Ashirra use this single line as justification for their dietary practices, some as justification for their very existences. They reason that if a vampire asks forgiveness sincerely each and every time he feeds, that Allah will forgive him. After all, the damned must exist for a reason, right? This line leads many to reason similarly that if one truly desires not to *crave* blood each time he feeds, that he is abiding by the terms of the restriction imposed by the Qur’an.

CLEANSING THE UNCLEAN

Although some would not dare to claim to understand the motives of their Creator, many Ashirra agree that it is clear that the primary reason for the dietary restrictions spoken of in the Qur'an is one of cleanliness. Carrion, blood, swine: These things are all *unclean* and thus dangerous to consume. This same basic restriction is imposed upon other aspects of Muslim life and behavior; one cannot pray inside a mosque or embark upon a pilgrimage, for example, until he has first purified himself. For Muslims, the words of the old adage are right on the mark: Cleanliness is next to godliness.

Along these lines, many Ashirra reason that as long as their "food" is purified, then it is free from taint and may be consumed without fear of damaging one's status in the Afterlife. Although it varies from Kindred to Kindred, the general process for consecrating blood to Allah (and thus purifying it for consumption) is as follows: First, the vitae is collected into a silver bowl, requiring a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 6) to draw off the appropriate volume of liquid. Those with 3 or fewer blood points currently in their systems must roll Self-Control (difficulty 6) in order to resist frenzying and consuming the precious fluid before the purification process is complete. Once the blood is in the bowl, it is then purified by means of a five-minute-long prayer requiring an Intelligence + Theology roll (difficulty 6). Even one success indicates that the ritual goes as planned and is thus safe for consumption. Failure indicates that the blood is forever "unclean" and must be discarded; this ritual may be attempted only once on any given quantity of blood.

Sometimes an Ashirra wishes to consecrate a living vessel in its entirety to Allah. In order to accomplish this, the Kindred must first immobilize his subject (through the use of Disciplines, perhaps, but often through other means) and then sprinkle it with rosewater while reciting a prayer, a ritual lasting about five minutes. This, too, requires an Intelligence + Theology roll as above, though the difficulty varies depending upon the subject in question: If the victim is a fellow Muslim, the difficulty is 7, but if he is a Jew or a Christian it increases to 8. Consecrating nonhuman blood to Allah has a difficulty of 6 (or possibly even less). Regardless of the subject, a failure or botch on any such roll indicates that the blood is "unclean" and cannot be consumed at that time. Vessels must be purified each time they are used as a source of vitae.

THE SECOND EMBRACE

The Ashirra draw a fine distinction between those Muslims who are Embraced as Muslims and those who find Islam after the end of their breathing days. For those who come to Islam after being drawn into undeath, their conversion (or confirmation) is referred to as the Second Embrace. Since embracing Islam means joining the Ashirra *de facto* for most Kindred, the sect is understandably concerned with which undead choose to come to Islam and how.

Unknown to most, the Second Embrace is actually a sacred ritual performed by all would-be Ashirra Kindred and their spiritual mentors. The ritual itself, called simply the Rite of Second Embrace, is a metaphorical reenactment of the Ashirra founder's own experiences alongside the Prophet. Over the course of an evening, the rite attempts to symbolize the spiritual coming of age experienced by Suleiman ibn Abdullah and his own circle of early vampiric converts to Islam. From his humble beginnings in the fog of *jahiliyya* ("ignorance") to his first true glimpse of God, the neophyte Ashirra experiences first-hand the majesty that is awakening to *Rushd* and having one's weary soul galvanized by newfound faith. After each stage of the rite, the subject must burn a portion of his own "ill-gotten" blood as a testament to his desire to purify himself before beginning his new unlife as a believer and faithful servant of God. By the time the rite ends, the subject will have purified himself of all the (presumably human) blood in his system, ready to embark on his new existence as one of the Ashirra.

The Rite of Second Embrace is thus a very intimate and personalized ritual, conducted between the neophyte Kindred convert and the one responsible for bringing him into the fold (whether mortal or Kindred). Although it is typical for one of the Ashirra to be the mentor in this scenario (and thus in the rite), it is considered good luck for a vampire to be brought to Islam by the faith of a simple mortal. In these cases, the mortal need not know the truth of the vampire's existence; to him, the neophyte is simply another fellow Muslim. In all such cases, however, another more experienced Ashirra must counsel the would-be Ashirra beforehand, instructing him on the proper method for the rite prior to sending him back to complete the actual ritual with the subject's mortal "savior." Such mortal saviors often go on to become their Ashirra converts' first (and often most loyal) true *ansari*.

THE RITE OF SECOND EMBRACE

In most cases, this rite begins with a recitation by the vampire: a verbalized account in the subject's own words of how lost was his soul before it was that he came to hear the Word. When this recitation is concluded, the vampire spends the first portion of the blood in his system. (In game terms, all blood spent during this rite goes toward achieving a semimystical inner peace on the subject's part; this blood expenditure slowly "fuels" a period of spiritual calm in the vampire.)

The second stage of the rite is usually a reenactment of the first-ever exchange between Suleiman ibn Abdullah and the Prophet, which occurred in the year 622. This mini passion play begins with the vampire boasting that it would please him to make a slave of the Prophet (played by the subject's mentor), whereupon the Prophet quietly pities the vampire for his own curse and warns him that God will claim His due when comes the End of Days. The passion play ends with the vampire being smitten with the power of the Prophet's faith, the vampire falling to his knees before his mentor and reciting the words, "Truly, I am no god! There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet!" Upon conclusion of this exchange, the Kindred must then spend the second portion of his blood (bringing him to the frenzy-risk threshold).

The remainder of the ritual is usually highly personalized, dependent upon the life and unlife experiences of the person in question, but it typically follows the pattern established by Suleiman ibn Abdullah, who followed the Prophet for more than 10 years after his conversion. The rite then ends with the symbolic death of the Prophet and the newly made Ashirra coming into his own as a Muslim and a now-redeemable child of God. This is where the subject faces his greatest challenge, as he must now divest himself of all remaining blood and, in so doing, risk frenzying and perhaps even attacking his mentor. At this time, the subject must immediately make an Instincts/ Self-Control roll (difficulty 8). If this roll succeeds, the vampire retains enough control over his Beast to spend his last remaining blood point without succumbing to hunger frenzy. This spiritual peace — this stillness of the Beast — lasts for only one turn per point of permanent Willpower the subject possesses, however, so a store of blood must be nearby or else the vampire will soon frenzy in search of sustenance. When this time period elapses, the vampire may continue to spend temporary Willpower at a rate of one per turn in order to declare any particular action but will otherwise simply fling himself about in search of blood.

At this time, the mentor figure must (quickly) offer to the neophyte a ewer full of lamb's blood that must have been previously sanctified to Allah, upon which the vampire will undoubtedly gorge himself. (Curiously, even those particularly aged Kindred, such as those who no longer gain sustenance from the blood of animals, are rejuvenated by this sanctified blood. As long as the faith of the neophyte is genuine, his hunger *will* fade and the blood *will* indeed sustain him for as long as it lasts.) The two participants then embrace one another and part company as brothers, leaving the weary neophyte to retire to bed, where he will sleep through his first day as a true brother among the Ashirra.

DUTIES OF THE BELIEVER

To a large extent, it can be said that the foundation of Islam is duty. The very concept of *Rushd* — the notion of "one true path" that all are expected to follow — lends itself to the imposition of a great deal of responsibility, restriction and interdiction. The majority of these duties stem from one of three major canonical sources: the major commandments, the Deadly Sins and the Pillars of Faith.

MAJOR COMMANDMENTS

When pieced together, the teachings espoused within the Qur'an paint a vivid picture of the consummate, virtuous Muslim. It is this picture that all

good Islamic Kindred strive to embody in their night-to-night existences. Due to the sheer volume of information (both canonical and traditional), however, some core tenets stand out from the rest. These are ideals, of course, but the Ashirra take them very seriously. Personal virtue is a mark of not only status but power within the sect, and the Ashirra recognize such self-mastery for what it is: the most powerful tool at one's disposal in the struggle to control the insatiable Beast.

According to Ashirra tradition, the most important duties to a Muslim Kindred are:

- A Muslim must not kill, except in times of war or in defense of the faithful.

• He must be honest and forthright in his dealings with others, and once his oath is given, it must be kept — no matter the cost.

• He must not steal.

• He must avoid sorcerers where possible and refrain from dealing with them.

• He must maintain a dignified appearance, neither given to wild outbursts of emotion nor careless or lewd behavior.

• He must be charitable and compassionate to those in need, regardless of faith.

• He must treat his servants with respect and never abuse them, for they are also children of God.

• He is encouraged to heed his own natural urges and appetites, as Allah intended, but never to excess.

• He must never grow complacent in his personal development but strive to broaden his mind and enhance his knowledge of all things Allah has created.

THE THREE DEADLY SINS

In addition to the positive commandments all must strive to uphold, the Qur'an also speaks of specific wrongs that Muslims must refrain from countenancing in themselves or in others. Although many Ashirra (being vampires) tend to lean toward creative interpretation on some of these points, three such wrongs stand apart and above all others, and it is these three "deadly sins" that must be most carefully avoided if one is to stay true to the path. To this end, even the most irresolute of Muslim Kindred tend to observe the following rules quite strictly, lest they do serious damage to their already damned souls.

DISBELIEF

The utmost cardinal sin that any Muslim can commit is the sin of apostasy (Arabic: *kufr*). Islam does not coerce or compel any being to accept its call, and all those who come to Islam must do so of their own free will. But once a man (or woman, or vampire) accepts the teachings of the Qur'an and at last enters willingly into the community of man and God, it is understood that he simply should not leave. God does not forgive those who have been shown the way, accepted it as truth, and then voluntarily forsaken it. All who do so, making no attempt thereafter to return themselves to God's grace, are granted their wish: Allah forsakes them in kind, barring them from entering the gardens of Paradise when time and times are done.



Although some Ashirra view their immortality as a “buffer zone” of sorts, a longer period of time in which to make amends for past wrongs (or, in the case of this sin, to atone for their apostasy), the majority don’t like to take any unnecessary risks with their own immortal souls. As none can say for sure when or how quickly the reckoning will come, most Ashirra prefer their souls to be eternally prepared, ready at a moment’s notice to be judged by their Creator.

ASSOCIATION

According to the Qur’an, God does not forgive someone for associating something with Him; anyone who dares to give God associates, peers or would-be equals is indeed committing a grave transgression before the eyes of his own God. Ironically known as the *shirk* in Arabic, this deadly sin represents the critically important underlying notion that it is against the sacred duties of any true monotheist to worship or otherwise direct adulation upon any idol or false god. All good Muslims are expected to affirm this truth out loud (with some regularity) in speaking the words “there is no god but God.” Those who call themselves Muslims and yet fall prey to false idols are committing a terrible sin, indeed.

Although most Muslim Kindred rarely commit this sin voluntarily, as its terms are relatively easy to abide by, an added complication causes a spike in the numbers of such sinners. Many dark forces are at work in the world, some of which actively seek to turn religious individuals (particularly religious vampires) away from the truth of their beliefs. These forces, collectively known to the Ashirra as the *taghut* (see below), often strive to fill a Muslim’s mind and soul with both fear and doubt, in the hope of eventually turning him away from the path. It is considered a major (and rare) victory for one of these tempters to lead an Ashirra away from *Rashd* and into idol worship. Like any good brethren, Ashirra are often taught to keep watch over their fellows with a wary eye, lest some evidence of the taint of the *taghut* escape their attention. Nevertheless, the responsibility to know one’s own God falls upon the believer himself, and those who stray from the path are often simply pitied for their lack of faith.

ARROGATION

The final deadly sin in the eyes of Islam is *tughyan*, the sin of arrogance. What exactly is arrogance? The Qur’an teaches that it is the utmost height of arrogance for one to be arrogant about God or before God. Quite simply, one should know and show humility at all times when it comes to one’s omniscient

Creator. The very foundation of Islam is one of peace and submission before God, and one cannot possibly be at peace if he is putting himself on a par with God or falsely representing his relationship with God.

It is in this last aspect that this sin sees the most abuse among Kindred Muslims. According to the Qur’an, the sin of arrogance includes misrepresenting the level of one’s belief. One who tells himself and others that he is a true believer but who does not truly believe is committing *tughyan*. Therefore, it is doubly ruinous for one of the Ashirra to be discovered as or even accused of being a disbeliever. As the sect has grown into quite a tightly knit and highly interconnected community over time, it becomes both socially and politically disastrous for a given Ashirra to reveal to his brethren that his very own faith has waned. Thus, many Muslim Kindred — afraid of losing both status and standing in the Kindred community — regularly commit this sin, in secrecy and often out of necessity. Were the truth of their disbelief to be revealed to the Ashirra community at large, their entire future in the religious sect might well be called into question.

THE FIVE PILLARS

In addition to leading one’s life (or unlife) according to the teachings of the Qur’an, Islam has five practical devotions which all Muslims — living or undead — are expected to perform without question. These five religious obligations, called pillars, collectively form the body of practical, night-to-night Islam. A Kindred can be as devout and as faithful a follower of Islam as any, but if he chooses to ignore the Five Pillars, he is not nor will he ever be considered one of the Ashirra.

SHAHADAH

The first of the Five Pillars is the profession of faith, a public declaration of the peace and submission to God that lies at the very core of the religion itself. By repeating the phrase “*La ilaha il Allah, Muhammadan rasul Allah*” (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet”), the faithful Muslim fulfills the first pillar. This is usually repeated several different times through the day and night, as the profession is an integral part of the *salat* (the daily prayers) as well.

One of the requirements of this pillar (or of the faithful fulfillment thereof) is that the actual utterance itself must express a *genuine* knowledge of the profession’s meaning, as well as an accompanying sincere belief. It is in this aspect that most undead

WELCOME TO MY HOUSE...

Hospitality is and has always been one of the most closely observed traditions among the Ashirra. In addition to their importance in Islam at large, the rules and applications of the guest-host relationship are fundamental to the culture from which the religion first arose. Among the tribes of Arabia, a chieftain — and thus his entire tribe — could be and often was judged by the propriety of his observance of this tradition and all its attendant particulars. Intertribal marriages, treaties and pacts were often decided over the course of a relatively brief negotiation between leaders, and an ill-timed remark could very well bring the fortunes of war to the entire tribe. Thus did the importance of the tradition spread.

While the notion that one of the undead cannot enter a house uninvited has long been associated with the Eastern European vampire myth, the factual basis for this association lies more commonly in those Kindred who revere the teachings of the Qur'an. Although it is true that some Transylvanian Kindred are likewise hindered, particularly the more reticent and tradition-bound of Carpathian Tzimisce, their numbers are few and far between, with the offending sensibility having a tendency to vary widely from individual to individual. Among the Ashirra, however, the troublesome trait is far more commonplace. Ever since the establishment of the sect, many vampiric adherents of Islam have demonstrated an acute inability to enter mortal households uninvited. Whether by personal unwillingness or simple physical incapacity, the fact remains that a surprising number of Muslim Kindred find themselves operating under such a mystical *geas*.

No true pattern seems to exist in who is “chosen” to be the subject of this odd spiritual shackling. Some Ashirra neonates, often new to both undeath and to Islam, develop the trait rather quickly, while a number of truly devout elders within the sect remain unhindered by the custom (at least mystically) to this night. If indeed a pattern exists — a trait shared by all those mystically forced to carry their observance of cultural tradition into undeath — it remains one that no Ashirra has yet managed to uncover ... not publicly, at any rate.

Needless to say, the very existence of this flaw is kept quiet by the Ashirra. Those who do know of the custom believe it to be a courtesy on the part of the Ashirra and never suspect that the so-called custom is an actual obstruction of any kind for the vampire — a perception the Ashirra wish to continue fostering. As not every Muslim Kindred develops the trait, it is certainly unwise to hedge one's bets that this “custom” will keep him safe from an Ashirra opponent, at least until he has determined the truth of that particular Kindred's situation.

NEW TRAIT: UNINVITED (3-PT. SUPERNATURAL FLAW)

A Kindred with this Flaw is barred from entering any private, mortal residence or household for which he has not been given an express invitation by a mortal who dwells within.

The afflicted character is personally unable to enter any private mortal residence until such time as he has secured a direct invitation by a mortal resident to enter that home. In areas with a firm tradition of hospitality, the vampire must be invited in according to local standards; in less formal areas, the invitation must be clear and explicit. This invitation need not necessarily come from the owner of the home, but a vampire cannot bypass the power of this Flaw by having any old stranger invite him into a home for which that individual has no intimate connection. If the character manages to acquire an invitation (which must be spoken aloud by the inviting mortal), he may subsequently enter that home (only) and act freely within. Such an invitation is good for all time; for good or ill, mortals cannot decide to revoke their invitations at a later date. Still, rumors exist that certain religious groups have practices that allow a home to be “resanctified,” thus cleansing the slate and requiring that any intruding vampires obtain a new invitation before being able to enter again.

This Flaw is unusual in that it can be acquired during the course of a story (as opposed to only during character generation). When a character is first accepted into the ranks of the Ashirra from without — in essence, if he comes to Islam *after* his Embrace — the Storyteller should grant the player the opportunity to acquire this Flaw for his character, if he doesn't already have 5 or more points worth of Flaws. The player may then spend the freebie points he receives from the Flaw as desired, subject to Storyteller approval. If the player opts not to take the Flaw, he may still have the Flaw thrust upon him or even be given another chance to acquire it voluntarily at a later date (Storyteller discretion).

will fail to truly grasp this critically important Pillar. All principles of Islam involve and require both sincerity and selflessness, and offerings made to Allah that are devoid of these key qualities are not worth the materials of which they are made nor utterances of the breath upon which they ride. Among the Ashirra, it is understood that one should refrain from performing the *shahada* entirely until one is ready to perform it *correctly*. Better to take some time (a thing the undead have in abundance, anyway) and mend one's spiritual rifts than to voice the *shahada* before one is ready, and in so doing to profane God himself.

SALAT

The second pillar requires all Muslims to pray to Allah at five specific times of day — at daybreak, noon, afternoon, sunset, and nighttime — each preceded by a ritual cleansing and purification of the body. In Muslim-dominated cities the call of the muezzins floats out as one voice from the top of every minaret, summoning the faithful to prayer. For mortal Muslims life grinds to a halt at these times of the day, as they must stop whatever they're doing and find a quiet corner in which to pray. The *salah* (the prayer itself) involves a number of bows, called *rak'as*, during which the supplicant must stand, bow, then kneel and prostrate himself while performing recitations of verses from the Qur'an. This is followed by the phrase "May the peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon you." The five daily prayers are known as *fajr* (dawn), *zuhr* (noon), *asr* (mid-afternoon), *maghrib* (sunset) and *isha* (evening).

Kindred followers of Islam don't observe the second pillar precisely as prescribed. Rather, they tend to reverse the timetable of the prayers, praying instead at five different points over the course of an evening, beginning with an initial prayer upon awakening and performing their last just before dawn. Typically, the three intervening prayers are performed at around 10 o'clock, at midnight and again at about 3 AM.

Although most Ashirra tend to speak the *shahada* before and after the taking of blood, some of the more devout (or guilt-ridden) insist on "purifying" their feedings through full-on prayer. For these individuals, feeding times are often planned well in advance, due to the fact that the Kindred must find the time and place to pray before and after each feeding. During recent nights, many Ashirra have come to merge these two practices, preferring simply to make two of their five required prayers fall immediately before and after a given feeding: to kill two birds with one stone, in a sense. In addition to making Kindred

feel better about their blood-drinking, this practice also has the tendency to free up long stretches of the evening so that Kindred may tend to their own affairs without worrying about having to step away in the middle in order to pray.

ZAKAT

A religious tax is imposed upon each follower of Islam in order to help provide for those less fortunate. These tithes are utilized to pay for community services and programs that benefit the needy, whether they be Muslim or not. Aside from its beneficial effect on the community the *zakat* is also considered an expression of one's devotion to God. The Qur'an encourages charity to the needy, to orphans and to widows, and the entire notion was central to Muhammad's teachings of forgiveness and mercy. The third pillar is therefore observed with keen devotion by most Ashirra, especially as it is the one that is often the easiest for them to fulfill. Kindred have so much time in which to accumulate vast stores of wealth, and to many Ashirra the only interest money still holds is in its ability to facilitate the earthly fulfillment of God's plan. To this end, many hold the *zakat* sacred as Muhammad did, believing it wise to *require* the Damned to foster benevolent change inside their respective mortal communities, rather than to place all hope atop the already cumbersome burden of personal choice.

Islam distinguishes between voluntary charity (called *sadaqa*) and the obligatory almsgiving required by the *zakat*. Not only does this distinction clarify the subject significantly, it also serves to remind believers that they aren't limited by what the Qur'an requires, but by their own consciences. If they choose to give more than the required amount, their souls will benefit from that additional charity accordingly. The specific amount required is the subject of some debate, but the accepted figure is one fortieth (2.5%) of everything earned in a year (paid annually), and one tenth of the harvest of land or trees (payable at harvest time).

SAWM

The fourth pillar is an extensive religious fast that falls on the first new moon in the month of Ramadan. For thirty days, all Muslims must fast during daylight hours in order to bring themselves closer to Allah and to remind them of what the poor must endure throughout the year. Travelers, menstruating women and the poor of health are exempted from this fast, though they are expected to make up for the missed fasting at some point.

The Ashirra view the *sawm* as both a sacred duty and an opportunity to demonstrate to God (and to themselves) just how far they have come in mastering the animal urges of the Beast. As the Ashirra do not feed during daylight hours, most simply reverse the timetable and abstain from feeding from dusk until just before dawn (where they will take just enough to sustain them through the following day's rest). Some of the more fundamentalist Ashirra view the *sawm* as a chance to commune with God, or at least their own higher natures. For these devoted few, fasting means completely divesting their bodies of blood on the first day of Ramadan, voluntarily entering torpor until the holy month has come and gone. A surprising number claim to be blessed with divine visions during this time of holy meditation, despite the fact that the "standard" torporous state supposedly denies a vampire any and all sense of sentience or awareness.

Regardless of how one decides to observe the fast, the risk of frenzy is quite high, especially among neonates and all those unfamiliar with the experience of self-induced blood denial. The Ashirra who merely fasts from sunset to sunrise is watched over by an older, more experienced Ashirra to whom he is intimately connected. Elders favor this month-long pairing, as it builds stronger ties between sect members which, in turn, fosters stronger ties within the *umma* as a whole. Those who seek to fast by entering their meditative torpor typically place themselves in a thick-walled, windowless room for the entire month. There they are watched over by loyal *ansari* until the time comes for them to awaken. On the last day of the fast, a lamb is led into the room and placed upon the Ashirra's chest. Its legs are bound and its throat slit, and the *ansari* quickly withdraw from the room while their hungry master awakens to feed.

HAJJ

The last pillar, the *hajj*, is a religious pilgrimage each Muslim is expected to make at least once in his lifetime (or *unlifetime*). During the 12th month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims from all over the world travel to Mecca and Medina to circle the Ka'ba and reenact Muhammad's flight. Before this, however, all supplicants must undergo a self-imposed ritual of purification (one cannot blaspheme the pilgrimage by being impure). Men typically shave their heads, and Muslims of both sexes wear seamless white robes, symbolizing the equality of every believer in the eyes of God. When this ritual is complete, the supplicant circles the Ka'ba seven

times and then runs between the two hills overlooking the site (also seven times) while reciting a number of specific prayers. Ashirra typically engage in all of these rites and customs, the only difference being that they must begin their pilgrimage at sundown and continue it over successive nights (rather than days), as is their curse. This has the ultimate effect of putting all Ashirra pilgrims a half day either ahead or behind their mortal brethren (depending upon when they first begin), which, all things considered, is probably for the best.

On the seventh day, the actual *hajj* begins and continues for the next three days. Supplicants must renew their ritual of purification, after which they must travel to Mina (a hill outside of Mecca), where they will spend the night. Due to this custom, a number of private dwellings have arisen in and around Mina. Many of these are secret "hostels" used to house the Ashirra who pass through on their way to Mecca. Those of a pure heart refuse such accommodations, preferring instead to learn the secret of taking rest within the bosom of the earth before embarking upon the *hajj*, but even the bravest know not to sleep outside atop exposed ground.

Upon leaving Mina, supplicants proceed to the plain of Arafat, where they must stand from noon until sunset, all the while performing a series of prayers and rituals. Ashirra don't follow this custom precisely. Instead, most Kindred supplicants again merely reverse the timetable, standing instead from dusk until midnight, while hewing strictly to all the other requirements of the day. For mortals, this period of contemplation and prayer is followed by travel to Muzdalifah (halfway between Arafat and Mina), where tradition says they will spend the night. Kindred make this journey when their prayers conclude at Arafat, and most find little trouble in reaching shelter before daybreak. The next day, pilgrims head back to Mina, stopping along the way at a number of stone pillars meant to symbolize Satan, at which each pilgrim must throw seven stones.

The last ritual custom of the *hajj* is the only one in which most Ashirra typically take no part whatsoever. On the final day of the pilgrimage, Muslims are expected to ritually slaughter an animal, representing Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son Isaac. The meat from this slaughter is then either donated to the poor or consumed in the large feast which signals the conclusion of the *hajj*, the Festival of Sacrifice. Suleiman ibn Abdullah, the founder of the Ashirra, refused to take part in the slaughter, claim-

ing that further blood-letting was not what God wanted from the Damned on the holy days of Islam. Over the centuries, however, a few have come to view this last ritual in a different light. Instead of abstaining from the slaughter, they exult in it, drinking of the sacred animal's blood as a sign of their appreciation of God. They, too, then donate the meat itself to the poor and view themselves as no less pious than their more traditional counterparts.

TAGHUT

The Ashirra believe that forces are at work that strive to distort the power of *Rushd* on earth and that these forces are given bodily manifestations in the forms of the innocent and/ or the "trustworthy"; the more harmless such a foe appears, the easier it will be for the creature to ensnare others in its webs of deceit. Such individuals seek to promote the spread of *fasad* and *janaba* ("corruption" and "impurity") on Earth and are especially driven to — and thus fond of — leading the faithful away from their faith. The Qur'an speaks of these foul entities as advocates of disbelief, saints of all that is cosmically *wrong*: "Those who disbelieve shall have the arrogant ones as their patrons, they who will lead them out of the light and into darkness; they who are the inmates of fire...."

To the Ashirra, these avatars of ruin are known as the *taghut* ("arrogant ones"), and their existence pervades the very fabric of the sect. Indeed, these hidden forces of degradation are probably the single largest concern to the sect as a whole, and many among the Ashirra are wary to the point of being paranoid. Perhaps they are aware of how quickly grows the seed of doubt. Regardless, all Ashirra, whether new to the faith or not, are expected to be schooled about not only the threat the *taghut* present but also about how best to spot their vile taint.

Although it is the theoretical duty of every Kindred who claims membership within the Ashirra to seek out and uproot the *taghut* wherever they may lie, an actual group has arisen within the sect over time — one whose every waking effort is bent specifically to this task. These grim souls, collectively known as the *Mahgrib*, dedicate their unives to rooting out the source of this depraved evil and preventing it from further corrupting their Muslim brethren (by any means necessary). Each individual member of this elite caste, often known as a *faris*, is usually a respected religious authority in his own right and is given a wide berth in which to conduct his affairs, as the *Mahgrib* and their efforts are supported unwaveringly by Muslim Kindred the world



over (at least in theory). In truth the group itself has become, in essence, a subsect of the Ashirra over time, complete with its own sacred texts, rites and hallowed practices.

The existence of these “pure ones” is largely kept secret within the parent sect, and other Ashirra are encouraged never to speak of them in mixed company. This is not due to the need to protect any clandestine operations the group may have, but rather out of concern for ignorance. If their existence became public knowledge, some might like to believe that these judges would indiscriminately pursue those of other faiths in an attempt to prevent their “lies” from “tainting” Muslim Kindred. Such is not the case. The *Mahgrib* respect faith in God in all its forms and trust in each individual believer’s own faith to carry him through such mundane forms of temptation. No, it is the supernaturally wicked machinations of the *taghut* with which the *Mahgrib* are understandably preoccupied.

The Ashirra’s religious elite have oddly parallel counterparts in the great political sects of the undead — the Camarilla’s famed Archons and, in the Sabbat, the knights and judges who make up the dreaded Inquisition. Like their political counterparts, the *Mahgrib* carry a great deal of power and respect wherever they go among those of their own society. When one of these religious elite enters a Muslim community, the local Kindred *imam* is expected to greet him like a visiting dignitary or respected religious leader — to provide for his needs and to make available to him all the resources at the Muslim community’s disposal.

Unlike the other Kindred elite, however, the focus of a *faris*’ efforts lies not in investigating those of his own kind, but rather in safeguarding his own brethren from the efforts of those who would lead them astray. It is a fine but critical distinction. Instead of pursuing evil and sin from the inside out, the *Mahgrib* endeavor to educate their brethren on how best to recognize *fasad* when they see it and how to learn how to stay the course through the bolstering of their own spiritual strength. They *do* have powers, and can theoretically punish any overly libertine Ashirra, but they typically reserve their wrath for those more deserving: those responsible for turning their brothers away from *Rushd* in the first place.

While it is true that the *Mahgrib* occasionally discover one of their own having already fallen to the machinations of the *taghut*, they rarely invoke their powers in judgment of the fallen Ashirra; rather, they generally act as spiritual mentor figures, gently but doggedly guiding the *junub* away from his depravity and sin and back into God’s grace. These sad discoveries typically only serve to make the *Mahgrib* even more resolute in their efforts and indeed are responsible in part for the overall stern demeanor of these driven souls. Amazingly, and perhaps more importantly, such discoveries seem simultaneously to deepen the overall love and devotion these pious men and women have for their fellow Muslims.

Even so, the unlife of one of the *Mahgrib* is often one of moral and social solitude as well as solemn determination. For one to *choose* to walk such a path from now until Resurrection Day — to shoulder voluntarily the weighty responsibility that is dedicating one’s unlife to the pursuit of purity on Earth, and in so doing to place oneself in harm’s way time and time again — one must demonstrate the utmost levels of both purity and devotion. In addition, the unlife of a *faris* is rarely a satisfying one, filled with joy, fulfillment or any of the other emotions to which the Ashirra try so hard to cling. Rather, their never-ending forays into the darkest corners of both human and inhuman temptation, depravity and frailty often leave them sad souls at best and paranoid pessimists at worst. A few “lost” *faris* have even withdrawn from the world entirely, grief-stricken at what they have beheld and forced into seclusion or torpor by the inability to cope with those realizations.

JUDAISM

*Shema Yisroel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai ehad
Baruch Shem kevod malchuto leolam vaed
 (“Hear, oh Israel! The Lord is God, the Lord is One!
Blessed be His glorious kingdom forever and ever!”)*

Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions and also the smallest. While less than one percent of the world’s population is Jewish, the influence the first of the great Western monotheistic faiths has had transcends numbers. Jews are also found in every corner of the globe, ranging from the Falasha of Ethiopia to the “Mountain Jews” of Azerbaijan.

WHAT IS JUDAISM?

At its core, Judaism is founded around a series of simple tenets. These include:

God is unique, incorporeal and indivisible, the author of all Creation, and as such should be worshipped.

God has communicated with the children of Israel through prophets.

While God has made a covenant never to destroy the world, God does observe it, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked.

The five books of the Pentateuch were revealed by God to Moses and thus are unchanging divine law.

Jewish life is bound by the 613 commandments in the Pentateuch (primarily Leviticus), and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) are an excellent synopsis of the Law.

The Moshiach (*i.e.*, Messiah, meaning “anointed one of God”) will someday arrive. Upon his arrival, the Jews will be gathered to return to Jerusalem, the dead will be resurrected, and the Temple shall be rebuilt.

Not every sect of Judaism agrees on these tenets, nor are they interpreted identically from group to group (or, indeed, congregation to congregation). However, they form a rough center around which the rest of the faith revolves.

TRADITIONS

As any other religion, Judaism has a veritable raft of traditions, customs and ritual roles. While not all of these are familiar to every Jew — after all, wide varieties exist in observance from movement to movement and ethnic group to ethnic group — what follows below is a list of some the basic (and vampirically pertinent) aspects of Judaism.

GARB AND SIGNIFICANT ITEMS

The *yarmulke* is the traditional skullcap for men, though in recent years women have begun wearing yarmulkes in Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative congregations. It is also known as the *kippah*. In most Jewish communities, the covering of one’s head before God is regarded as a custom rather than a commandment, and the observance has been traced to Roman times.

The *tallit* is the four-cornered prayer shawl. Many Jewish men wear a small version of this garment, called a *tallit katan*, under their shirts in daily life. A full *tallit* is worn during morning services.

Prayer phylacteries known as *tefillit* are bound on the forehead and the wrist before services. These consist of a wooden box attached to a leather strap, which is used to bind them.

Mezuzot (plural) are cases for short prayer scrolls installed at every doorway in a Jewish home. Often extremely ornate, they contain a series of prayers which must be specially inscribed. The practice is a reference to Deuteronomy 6:4–9, and one is supposed to kiss one’s fingers and then touch the *mezuzah* (singular) every time one enters or exits the home.

The Star of David, or Mogen David, did not become the most prominent symbol of Judaism until the 17th century, when six-pointed stars were routinely raised outside of synagogues to identify them as Jewish houses of worship. A more enduring symbol of Judaism, and one with more historical precedent, is the *menorah*, or many-branched lamp. While most commonly associated in the popular imagination with the holiday of Hanukkah, which celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Greeks, the *menorah* is in fact a constant element of Jewish observance and life.

CHAI

The word *chai*, consisting of the two Hebrew letters *chet* and *yod*, means “life.” As such, it has taken on a remarkable significance, and the combination of the two letters is frequently worn as jewelry. *Chai* has the numeric value of 18, and gifts to charities, bar mitzvah presents and the like are often in multiples of 18. In the World of Darkness, 18 is a particularly significant number to Jewish vampires, and the motif appears frequently in their havens.

THE CALENDAR

The Jewish calendar is a lunar rather than a solar one. Beginning on the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish calendar uses the new moon as the start of each month. However, as the lunar and solar calendars do not coincide, the Jewish calendar adds an extra month seven out of every 19 years to resynchronize itself with the solar year. This system was created by the sage Hillel, and the added month is called “second Adar.”

The Jewish holiday cycle begins with Rosh Hashanah, then progresses through Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), Sukkot (a harvest festival), Simchat Torah (when the annual reading of the Torah scroll is restarted), Chanukkah (a minor festi-

val that has risen to prominence in America), Purim (celebrating the events of the Book of Esther), Passover (*Pesach*), Shavuot (another harvest festival which also celebrates the gift of the Torah), and Tisha B'Av.

Shabbat

The most common and yet perhaps the most important holiday in the Jewish calendar is Shabbat, which begins each Friday at sundown. It is the day of rest which emulates the day of rest taken by God after the six days of creation, and it is to be spent in rest, celebration and prayer.

VAMPIRES AND SHABBAT

Shabbat is often described as being like a bride or queen in Jewish liturgy, and some Kindred theorists have taken this as a reference to Lilith. This is highly offensive to most observant Jewish vampires, but the debate goes on.

On a more prosaic note, the custom of the *Shabbes goy* — the non-Jew who is hired to perform labor around the house on Shabbat — has an odd echo in vampiric existence. Many observant vampires use their ghouls in a similar capacity, obeying the commandment to rest even as their servants labor unceasingly toward their ends.

DIETARY LAWS

The word *kosher* comes from the Hebrew *kashrut*, meaning the scriptural dietary laws laid down millennia ago. These include but are not limited to:

- A prohibition against eating pork, as the pig is an “unclean” animal.
- A prohibition against eating fish with neither fins nor scales (including shellfish and crustaceans).
- A prohibition against mixing milk and meat in a single meal.
- A prohibition against eating those animals with an odd number of toes on a foot (as they are “unclean”).
- A prohibition against devouring blood or offal.
- A prohibition against eating animals that have been slaughtered improperly.

A great deal more exists to it than that, of course, but these are the most prominent of the *kashrut*. A quick scan of the list will quickly lead a reader to what can only be a very interesting conclusion *vis-à-vis* vampires:

Mortals aren't kosher.

However, the greater prohibition is against drinking blood, and Jewish scholars have spent centuries arguing interpretations of passages which may or may not provide justification for vampiric feeding. The one used most commonly is Leviticus 7:26–27, which says: “You are not to consume any of the blood, whether of bird or of beast, wherever you may live. Anyone consuming any of the blood is cut off from his father's kin.” It has been argued that since vampires are not alive, the prohibition does not apply to them. Some Jewish vampires find this comforting; others regard it as hairsplitting. Again, the debate rages on.

THE SHOCHET

In traditional Jewish life, the *shochet* is the slaughterer. He is the butcher who ensures that meat is kosher by slaughtering livestock in a manner that hews to the traditions of the *kashrut*, or dietary laws. In order for meat to be kosher, the animal must have its throat slashed and then be hung so that the blood can drain. Blood is considered unclean, hence kosher meat should be as free from blood as possible.

The *shochet*, then, is the man responsible for ensuring the dietary purity (at least in some sense) for the entire community. As such, he occupies an ambiguous role. On one hand, the service he provides is invaluable, a necessary part of the community's functioning. On the other, he works all day with blood and offal, the very definition of unclean.

On occasions, observant vampires — or those wishing to stay within their religious community without preying on their coreligionists — try to play the role of the *shochet*. This allows them to obtain a constant supply of fresh blood (albeit of the animal sort) without arousing suspicion. However, the demands of the position — in particular, the need for all shopping for Shabbat dinner to be completed before sundown on Friday — tends to make the role of *shochet* untenable in the long term. What is more frequent is for a vampire to form a partnership, willing or otherwise, with a *shochet* and to obtain his blood in that fashion.

WHO IS A JEW?

Judaism is a religion, not a race, and as such includes individuals of all nationalities and ethnic origins. Traditionally, it is a matrilineal faith, meaning that if one's mother is Jewish, then one is Jewish as well, at least in the eyes of the Jewish community. Recently the more liberal branches of Judaism have accepted patrilineal descent as well.

NATIVE TONGUES

No such language as “Jewish” exists, though that is a literal translation of “Yiddish.” Rather, the traditional language of the Jewish people is Hebrew. The Torah and the Talmud are written in Hebrew, and the prayers and blessings are recited in it. A modernized version of Hebrew is also the state language of Israel, though it has been enriched with words taken primarily from English and French in order to update it for the modern world. Interestingly enough, some Jews feel that Hebrew should not be spoken as a secular language until the arrival of the Moshiach.

Yiddish, on the other hand, is the secular language of Ashkenazi Jews.

Hebrew has its own alphabet and is read right to left. Vowels are not technically letters in Hebrew (though the letter *yod* is pronounced similarly to the English “Y”), and most traditional documents, including Torah scrolls, are written without vowels. Each letter in Hebrew also has a numeric value, and Jewish numerology, a.k.a. *Gematria*, is derived from this fact.

Essentially German written in Hebrew characters, Yiddish is broken down into multiple subdialects (Litvaker, Galitzianer, etc.). Many Yiddish words have been assimilated into English. For their part, Sephardic Jews have Ladino, which is best summed up as being derived from Spanish written in Hebrew letters.

JEWISH KUEI-JIN

In 1489, Jesuit monks visiting China sent back rubbings of two steles in the city of Kaifeng that concerned the Jews. One of the two concerned the events of 1421, when the Emperor conferred the surname Zhao on a Jewish doctor, thus opening the gates of civil service to China’s Jews. Less than a hundred years later, the first Jewish kwei-jin appeared. While few in number, they are a constant presence in the courts of the Middle Kingdom. Rarely appearing more than one at a time, they show a marked tendency toward incarnation as Resplendent Cranes, and many of the most noted Confucian scholars among kwei-jin are in fact Jewish.

However, the question of “Who is a Jew” remains a vexing one. At this point Judaism is as much a social identity as a religious one — a majority of Jews living in the state of Israel describe themselves as “secular” in their observance, but hold steadfast to their Jewish identity.

SEPHARDIC AND ASHKENAZI

Ethnic groups exist within Judaism. Ashkenazi Jews are those with roots in northern and eastern Europe, including France, Germany and Russia. (The word itself is derived from a term for Germany.) The majority of American Jews are Ashkenazi in origin. Most Jewish stereotypes, as well as most non-Jewish thoughts about what is Jewish, refer to Ashkenazi traditions, customs and habits.

Sephardic Jews, on the other hand, are those originating in southern or western Europe or in Arabic nations. They include the Jews of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and the Middle East. They are generally darker-skinned than their Ashkenazi coreligionists and have emigrated to the New World in much smaller numbers (though they arrived before the Ashkenazi).

The basic tenets of Sephardic and Ashkenazi observance are essentially the same, though some differences exist. The two groups have slightly different pronunciations of some Hebrew letters, use different liturgical melodies and differ slightly on interpretation of some aspects of the Law (such as which foods are forbidden during Passover).

OTHER ETHNICITIES

Other, smaller ethnic groups exist among the Jewish people. Perhaps the best known are the Falasha (or Beta Israel), the majority of whom dwelt in Ethiopia. Many of them were airlifted to Israel during the worst of the East African famines of the 1980s.

Yemen is also home to a distinct Jewish population, one which is separate from its Sephardic neighbors. Small Jewish populations exist across Asia; China has been home to Jews since the eighth century, and one of the Ming emperors bestowed on the Jews the seven surnames they were allowed to possess. Each of these Jewish communities has its own customs and traditions, ones which often seem exotic even to other Jews.

JEWISH MOVEMENTS

More than a third of the world’s Jews live in the United States. The vast majority of them belong to one of the four major movements of American

Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. Israel and the United Kingdom, also home to large Jewish populations, have somewhat different breakdowns within their Jewish communities.

ORTHODOX

Orthodox Judaism is best defined as a traditional form of religious observance. Orthodox Jews believe that God delivered the entire Torah (Written and Oral) to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that it is true and unchanged. Furthermore, Orthodox Judaism postulates that the Torah contains 613 laws that are binding on Jews but not binding on non-Jews. Orthodox Judaism itself is informally divided along smaller sect lines, including the Modern Orthodox (who have integrated into mainstream society while maintaining their observance), the Chasidim (who form separate communities and can be identified by their distinctive dress) and the Yeshivish Orthodox. The philosophies of all three groups are so similar as to be indistinguishable to most outsiders.

ORTHODOX VAMPIRES

The curse of Caine is a nightmare beyond comprehension for most Orthodox Jews. While Orthodox belief includes a belief in the literal truth of the story of Caine and Abel, very few Jews in the World of Darkness expect to become part of the tale. The vast majority of Orthodox Jews who are Embraced do not survive the experience. Most instinctively reject the curse, preferring death to an existence that is anathema to their most deeply held beliefs.

Those who do survive find themselves in an extremely difficult position, in large part due to the numerous Jewish laws broken by mere vampiric existence. The most important is the prohibition on using blood for sustenance, and as such many of these vampires find themselves making arrangements (sometimes willing, sometimes not).

Of greatest importance to Orthodox vampires are the greater and lesser fast days. Observance of these holidays is a symbolic triumph of the self over the Beast, a reassertion of the demands of holiness even in the face of vampiric bloodlust.

Orthodox vampires do not attend *shul*, at least not with mortals. Instead, they form *minyans* of their own, small prayer groups with dedicated meeting places. As very few ordained rabbis serve among the children of Caine, most of these groups cluster around a *rebbe*-like figure who serves as a surrogate rabbi and leader of the community. Surprisingly, the majority

LUBAVITCHER AND OTHER CHASIDIM

Inaccurately portrayed as stereotypical "ultra-Orthodox" Jews, the Chasidim are not so much ultra-Orthodox as they are dedicated to the notion of their communities. Chasidim wear distinctive clothing: dark clothes, beards and hats for the men, modest dresses and head coverings for the women. This, along with their strong identity with their religious community, has led to their being held up, perhaps unfairly, as the iconic representation of ultraobservant Judaism.

The Chasidic Jewish movement was founded in the early 1700s by the Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (literally, "Master of the Good Name"). Focusing on mystical and personal experience as a way of reaching God, the Chasidic movement was initially regarded as radical in the extreme and was opposed by the so-called *mitnagdim* (literally, "opponents") in what were often violent confrontations. Today, the Chasidim and the *mitnagdim* stand essentially shoulder to shoulder.

Chasidic communities are each centered on a particular *rebbe*, a spiritual teacher who may or may not be an ordained rabbi. Each Chasidic community was founded by one of the Baal Shem Tov's disciples (or one of their disciples in turn) and is named for its original *rebbe*'s town of origin. The Lubavitchers of, among other locales, New York City are one of many Chasidic groups; they're just the best known.

of these *minyans* cross clan and sometimes even sect boundaries, and are regarded as neutral territory even in the unending Camarilla-Sabbat wars.

When it comes to their mortal communities, Orthodox vampires are of two minds. Some feel that their condition is a result of the divine will and that it is criminal to oppose HaShem's plan for them. These vampires support their communities to the best of their abilities, either overtly (by taking on Masqueraded roles within them) or covertly (through financial sponsorship, cutting deals with other Cainites that work to the community's benefit, etc.). On the other hand, many feel that their condition taints them and taints all they touch. These Jewish vampires, who have taken the name *Mitnagdim*, do their best to absent themselves from the community of their origins lest they bring ruin upon it.

FASTS

The Jewish calendar has two major and five minor fasts. The major fasts last from sundown to sundown and are:

- Yom Kippur: One of the High Holy Days, the Day of Atonement. On this day, Jews reflect on their deeds over the past year and repent them.

- Tisha B'Av: The ninth day of the month of Av, a fast commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples, as well as other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people.

The minor fasts last from sunrise to sundown, and are:

- The Fast of Gedaliah: This commemorates the assassination of the Jewish governor of Judah and the beginning of the political upheaval that led to the destruction of the Temple.

- The Fast of Tevet: This commemorates the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. In modern times, it has also been proclaimed a memorial day for the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust.

- The Fast of Esther: This fast day commemorates the three days Esther spent fasting before approaching her husband, King Ahasuerus of Persia, on behalf of the Jews of his kingdom. This fast is tied into the festival of Purim.

- The Fast of the Firstborn: Celebrated only by firstborn males, this commemorates the fact that the firstborn male children of the Jews were spared when the Angel of Death passed over Egypt.

- The Fast of Tammuz: This fast commemorates the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem.

Persistent rumors circulate that several Chasidic communities are in fact sheltering one or more vampires among their communities, calling on them as protectors of the community in much the same way that Rabbi Loew called upon the golem to defend the Jews of Prague. Some rumors even say that one community of Chasidic Jews harbors an Embraced rebbe, one who has reached Golconda. Attached to this tale are all sorts of other rumors, such as one of a Chasidic community consisting entirely of vampires. Other Orthodox vampires deny these tales vehemently, regarding them as one step removed from the Blood Libel.

REFORM JEWS

The Reform movement in America is primarily the creation of German Jews, who emigrated in vast numbers in the early nineteenth century. The most liberal of the modern Jewish movements in America, Reform Judaism holds that the Torah was written by diverse sources and collated and that most of the laws contained in the Torah do not need to be observed. They do, however, hold to Jewish traditions, holidays and ethics. Many secular, agnostic and otherwise nonobservant Jews identify themselves as Reform.

REFORM VAMPIRES

The largest percentage of Jewish Kindred less than two centuries in age are Reform. This is due in part to the fact that most survive the Embrace, not to mention that Reform Jews are the ones found most often in the bars and other hunting grounds of young vampires. Reform Jewish vampires, many of whom were not necessarily terribly observant in life, tend to adjust to vampiric life relatively easily. Not bound by the dietary restrictions of their more traditional coreligionists, they have relatively few uniquely Jewish quandaries related to their new status. Those who attempt to maintain some Jewish identity, whether by lighting Shabbat candles or attempting to attend temple during the High Holy Days, find themselves constantly thwarted in small ways. Candle-inspired Röttschreck or a sudden wave of True Faith enveloping a temple on Yom Kippur makes it difficult for Reform Jews to observe once they have been Embraced. Most tend to slip away from religious observance as the decades roll past, still self-identifying as Jewish but eschewing any outward show of observance.

One holiday that does take on increased significance to Reform vampires is Passover, the feast celebrating the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The holiday takes its name from the fact that the Lord "passed over" the houses of the Jews while smiting the firstborn of the Egyptians as part of the ten plagues, the doors of the houses of the Jews having been marked with the blood of a sacrificial lamb. For this reason, and for the fact that the Passover service, or *seder*, is celebrated in the home, the holiday has become perhaps the most important of the year to Reform Jewish vampires. While they are unable to partake of the ritual foods of the seder meal, the Kindred do follow the other observances, such as the hunt for the *afikoman* (a piece of unleavened bread which is "stolen" from the leader of the service) and the recitation of the Passover story. To be invited to

REFORM VS. LIBERAL

The Liberal Jewish movement of the UK is commonly but incorrectly equated with the American Reform movement. Liberal Jews tend to be more observant than their Reform counterparts, though a Reform movement in the UK maps more closely to its American equivalent.

a vampiric *seder* is a mark of considerable prestige and favor, and indeed the holiday celebration has become somewhat entangled with the game of prestatation.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Founded in 1913 as a reaction to the almost antitraditionalist stance of the Reform movement (many Reform synagogues, for example, banned prayer shawls and *yarmulke*), the Conservative movement straddles the divide between Reform and Orthodox when it comes to tradition and observance. Its basic tenets can be found in the Conservative declaration of purpose, the *Emet ve-Emunah*. Conservative Jews believe that the Torah is divinely inspired but has been interpreted by humans, and that *halakhah* (Jewish law) should be followed but continually adapted to the ever-changing world.

In Britain, the Masoreti movement is roughly equivalent to American Conservative Judaism and utilizes the same prayer book.

CONSERVATIVE VAMPIRES

Conservative Jewish Kindred generally find that their dilemmas are closer to those of their Orthodox coreligionists than those of the Reform. As a wide range of observance exists among living Conservative Jews, however, so too exists a wide range among vampiric ones as well. As such, the Conservative community among Kindred is fragmented in the extreme. Many drift to other movements. Others attempt to hew to the traditions they followed in life but find following the letter of the law increasingly difficult to observe.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM

The youngest and one of the most vocal branches of Judaism, Reconstructionism is an outgrowth of the Conservative movement, which it closely resembles in terms of observance. Reconstructionist Judaism does not believe in the notion of God as a divine entity and holds that the *halakhah* is important as a cultural remnant as opposed to a divinely given series of laws. That being said, Reconstructionist Jews gen-

OBSERVANCE AND VAMPIRISM

Many of the laws of Judaism are impossible to observe literally for a vampire. For example, ritual feasts and the prohibition against using blood for sustenance are automatically contravened by the vampiric condition. The fact that Jewish holidays run sundown to sundown also creates problems. While this allows Jewish vampires to attend services without suffering terminal sunburn, it also means that certain aspects of observance, such as the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur, are forever barred to them because they are daylight rituals.

Vampires get around this in a variety of ways. Many who insist on retaining some form of observance have shifted the service schedule. Daytime services have now been shifted to equivalent hours of the night, a task made easier by the fact that the Ten Days of Awe (the stretch between Rosh Hashanah, the New Year and Yom Kippur) generally occurs around the fall equinox. Ritual foods such as the Passover *matzoh* are replaced with symbolic equivalents or are tasted but not swallowed. Objects that are too holy to touch, such as Torah scrolls, are replaced with functional equivalents or entrusted to the hands of trusted (and observant) ghouls. When no modification will serve (such as the commandment to go without leavened bread during Passover, which as written means nothing to a vampire), new traditions in the spirit of the old are sometimes haltingly created. These tend to produce some of the fiercest conflicts between Jewish vampires. It is often easier for an Orthodox Kindred to accept a Jewish vampire who has abandoned *halakhah* than to deal with one who is, in her eyes, infusing Judaism with a monstrous, blasphemous observance.

erally have a greater observance of Jewish law than Reforms. Reconstructionism is almost exclusively an American movement, and less than 1% of all Jews regard themselves as Reconstructionist.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST VAMPIRES

Because of its very nature, Reconstructionist Judaism is the most accessible movement to vampires. Indeed, many Jewish vampires who fall away from other movements have begun gravitating to

Reconstructionist congregations. The absence of God-as-actor in Reconstructionist thought makes it easier for Kindred to come to terms with what they have become and the demands of their new state, and many Reconstructionist vampires continue to lead surprisingly observant existences, viewing *kashrut* as a tradition rather than a divine commandment,

Approximately a hundred Reconstructionist synagogues exist throughout the world, mainly concentrated in large population centers. It is unsurprising, then, that vampires—Reconstructionist and otherwise—frequent these houses of worship. An unwritten rule exists that feeding at or through synagogue is forbidden, but often a fierce, subtle competition for ghouls among the synagogue membership occurs. The notion that Jews run the media/government/ Wall Street may be an anti-Semitic canard, but synagogue memberships do remain a potentially lucrative pool of ghouls for any Kindred.

ISRAELI JEWS

While Orthodoxy is the only officially recognized movement in Israel today, Jews in Israel tend to divide themselves into three categories: *hiloni* (secular), *haredi* or *dati* (Orthodox/ ultra-Orthodox) and *masorti* (observant but not Orthodox). Even those Jews who regard themselves as *hiloni* do tend to more observance than American Reform Jews, often keeping *kosher* or lighting Shabbat candles.

KARAITE JEWS

Dating to the ninth century, Karaite Judaism denies the validity of the Oral Torah. A direct response to Rabbinical Judaism (which itself formed in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and the Diaspora), Karaite Judaism holds that the Written Torah is divinely inspired and literal and requires no interpretation.

KARAITE VAMPIRES

While Rabbinical Judaism is by far the dominant form of Judaism today, Karaite Judaism survives. A disproportionate number of Karaites are still extant among the older Jewish vampires, which they attribute to divine favor for their persistence. Other Jewish vampires wryly note that the Karaites probably also learned a fair bit of caution as the sect diminished over the centuries.

HISTORICAL SECTS

The first recorded sectarian differences in Judaism occur around the time of the Seleucid occupation.

While the Greek rule was benign, large numbers of Jews became Hellenized, while more traditional Jews calling themselves the Chasideans opposed them. As the rule of the Seleucids grew more oppressive, the two sects put aside their differences and united behind to support the Maccabee-led rebellion. In the wake of that revolt's success, however, Judaism found itself fragmented into three sects: Essenes, Saducees and Pharisees. The former were ascetic and mystically inclined and formed many smaller communities (in all likelihood including the one at Qumran, source of the Dead Sea Scrolls). The Saducees were socially Hellenized and religiously strict, similar in observance to the Karaites. The Pharisees' philosophy contained both Oral and Written Torah and was the most egalitarian of the three.

A fourth sect, the primarily secular Zealots, appeared under the Roman occupation. Preferring suicide to capture and violently opposed to the Roman presence, they mounted the revolt of 70 CE, which resulted in the destruction of the Temple. They also occupied the Herodian fortress of Masada, and their last stand there became the stuff of legend.

VAMPIRES AND HISTORICAL SECTS

Only the Pharisees' observances and philosophy survived the Roman occupation. However, a tiny handful of vampires of all three of the extinct sects did survive the Roman-inflicted devastation. Oddly enough, the ascetic Essenes have produced the most vampires, many of whom can be found still isolated, seeking Golconda. A fair number of Zealots have survived as well, carrying their war with the Romans beyond the grave. Many of them ultimately joined the Sabbath when it formed, setting themselves in eternal opposition to the Roman Ventrué of the Camarilla.

Ironically, it is through their vampiric remnants that these sects survive. While many of them have fallen away from their faith, others have taken it upon themselves to teach their childer. While the observance, particularly in the absence of the Temple, is not perfect, it still endures.

SCRIPTURES

In the beginning was the Word. So starts the creation story in Genesis, and so begins the love affair of Judaism with words. Indeed, the study of Torah is considered equal to prayer and acts of loving kindness in Judaism, for it is believed that the study of Torah leads naturally to these other goals.

The written works around which Judaism is centered are referred to as the Torah, although the definition of Torah is a slippery one. In its most basic sense, the Torah consists exclusively of the Pentateuch, a.k.a. the five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). However, Torah can also refer to the entire body of written scripture, including the writings of the prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the less focused Writings (*Ketuvim*). The combination of the three is also referred to as *Tanakh*, or the Written Torah.

In addition to holy scripture, a body of Jewish religious work concerns itself with debate and interpretation rather than divine inspiration. The Talmud (also referred to as the Oral Torah) combines a compilation of oral law called the Mishnah and associated later writings known as the Gemara. The Mishnah was written down in the second century, while the Gemara was compiled over the next three centuries in both Jerusalem and Babylon. The Talmud has also generated later commentaries from luminaries such as Maimonides and is still gathering an ever-growing body of responsa to its tenets today.

Less important from a religious standpoint, but still an effervescent part of the religious culture, are the *midrashim*. These are stories used to fill in gaps in the narrative of the Torah, answer religious questions and entertain, often all at the same time. Among the most famous of the *midrashim* is the story of Abraham smashing the idols in his father's shop, then blaming the devastation on the one statue he left undestroyed.

The Jewish mystical tradition of Qabbalah is also studied, the tenets of which are found in the 12th-century text *Sefer HaZohar*. Despite its recent trendiness, the study of Qabbalah is reserved for those who are over 40, married, and well versed in the Torah. This is a precaution, lest the concepts and tenets of Qabbalah enrapture the unwary mind. Only those who are well grounded in all that life has to offer are believed to be prepared to explore the mysteries of Qabbalah.

SCROLLS AND POINTERS

The traditional Torah consists of a pair of scrolls made from parchment and painstakingly hand-let-tered. The scrolls are protected with a cover, upon which sits both a metal breastplate and a pair of "crowns." Also looped around the scroll handles is a pointer in the shape of a human hand, called a *yad*. A reader's finger is never supposed to touch the Torah scroll, and so the *yad* (literally, "hand") is used instead.

THE YAD

Living Jews know that you're not supposed to touch the Torah scrolls with your finger. So, too, do dead ones, though the consequences for them are considerably more painful. Torah scrolls are often infused with the True Faith of the artisans who inscribed them and as such are protected from most Cainites' attentions.

Those who do manage to touch the parchment of a Torah scroll, however, find that the damage they inflict on it is worse than any it inflicts on them. The instant a vampire's flesh touches a Torah, the ink on the scroll smears to illegibility, while the parchment blackens and begins to smolder. The mark left behind is indelible, marring the Torah forever.

Mass-produced printings and reproductions are, of course, exempt from this fate, and so observant Kindred use them in their studies.

Torah scrolls are kept inside an ark (from *aron kodesh*, literally "holy cabinet"). Over the ark entrance shines the *ner tamid*, or eternal light. This ever-burning flame represents the light of knowledge and thus is never allowed to go out.

THE DIVINE NAME

Judaism has a prohibition against spelling out the divine name in full. As a result, many modern Jews will write "G-d" (or the local equivalent) rather than God, or refer to God as HaShem (literally, "The Name") or Adonai ("Lord"). In Hebrew, the name of God is commonly written by the four Hebrew letter sequence *yud-he-vuv-he*. This sequence, known as the Tetragrammaton, is commonly transliterated into English as "Yahweh," from which we derive "Jehovah."

ANTI-SEMITISM

From expulsions to forced conversions to massacres such as the Holocaust, an unfortunate and lengthy tradition of anti-Semitism exists in Western and other cultures. Jewish vampires are also heir to this legacy. Some fight against it, others use it as justification for their activities, and some fear that they are in part responsible for it.

THE BLOOD LIBEL

One of the charges consistently leveled against Jews through the centuries has been the so-called

Blood Libel, the accusation that Jews use the blood of Christian or Muslim children in the celebration of their holidays. Although most often connected with the festival of Passover (during which the blood of innocents is supposedly used to make the ritual unleavened bread called *matzoh*), the Blood Libel has been applied to other aspects of Jewish life, including Purim, the so-called Feast of Lots. It is, of course, an utterly illogical fiction, but like so many good slanders, it flourishes even in the absence of proof.

Throughout the years, the Blood Libel has been used time and again as justification for pogroms against Jewish populations around the world. As a result, the majority of Jewish vampires make a conscious effort to absent their feeding from local Jewish communities whenever possible. Too many times, evidence of one careless feeding has roused a mob against a blameless populace. This is something even the most bloodthirsty Kindred of the Jewish faith would generally prefer to avoid.

On the other hand, the Blood Libel has been exploited to devastating effect over the years, both by Kindred with anti-Semitic leanings and by those who have a bone to pick with a particular Jewish vampire. In the former instance, leaving a conveniently drained body or two in a conspicuous place and spreading rumors as to who's been using the missing blood can get a mob in the streets. In the latter, the mere threat of using the Blood Libel can be enough to force a Jewish vampire to the bargaining table or out of a secure defensive position.

BUT WHAT IF?

A school of thought exists among some Jewish Kindred, particularly young and paranoid ones, that *The Elders* is in fact a transcription of an eavesdropped meeting between several Jewish vampires. A few Kindred, most notably a German Toreador named Jacob Levy, even claim on occasion to have been present at the very meeting that was transcribed for the book. Levy also claims that the eavesdropping was done on behalf of a cabal of Prussian Ventrue with no love for Jews and a burning desire to obtain influence in the banking field. As part of his obsession with the book, Levy has established an elaborate map of the various elements of the conspiracy in his haven, one which curiously echoes elements of Berruel's original Masonic cabal.

THE HOLOCAUST

The methodical extermination of Jews by the Nazis and their allies in the years from 1937–1945 is referred to as the Holocaust, meaning “burnt offering.” In the World of Darkness as in the real world, the Shoah was of human creation and instigation.

In the World of Darkness, Jewish Kindred were purged as ruthlessly by the flames of the Holocaust as were their mortal coreligionists. Out of those ashes rose a conviction never to allow such a thing to happen again. Those few vampires who survived the horrors have taken this as a mantra and have spent the ensuing decades relentlessly hunting down those who authored the devastation.

THE INTERNATIONAL JEWISH CONSPIRACY

The notion of a secret cabal of Jews who run the world — or at least its financial houses — from behind the scenes dates back only as far as revolutionary France. In 1806, a Royalist Jesuit named Abbe Berruel adapted some of his earlier work (which blamed the Revolution on a Masonic conspiracy) to add the Jews to the conspiratorial mix. More than half a century later, a Prussian spy named Goedsche combined Berruel's notion of a Jewish conspiracy with the French author Joly's satirical *Dialogues in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*. The end result was a series of virulently anti-Semitic novels called Biarritz. The substance of these novels was later adopted by the Russian secret police (who were looking to discredit Czar Nicholas II's liberal domestic opposition, which was sympathetic toward the Jews) into *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, possibly the most famous bit of anti-Semitic propaganda ever written.

The book is supposedly the minutes of the Jewish secret society that manipulates world events for its own benefit. Dry reading at best, it was brought to Russia in 1897. A popular edition was published in Russia in 1905, in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War. (Interestingly enough, it was an American Jewish banker named Jacob Schiff, angry at the treatment of Jews in Russia, who found financing for the Japanese war effort.) Within a few years editions could be found all across Europe and in America, where it was sponsored by automobile manufacturer Henry Ford. In the intervening decades, and despite



numerous exposures as a work of fiction, the book has served as a sort of bible to anti-Semitic extremists, who take it quite literally.

HERESIES

Heresy is a difficult notion in Judaism, as the religion actively encourages questioning on the part of its adherents. Even so, some things are beyond the pale, and the nature of the vampiric condition does a marvelous job of leading Jewish Kindred toward certain of these odd philosophies.

LILITH

Curiously enough, the word “Lilith” appears in only one place in the Torah, though she occupies an extensive role in Jewish folklore. According to the Alphabet of Ben Sira, Lilith was created from dust at the same time as Adam but refused to lie beneath him during intercourse. Instead, she left the Garden of Eden and rebuked the three angels God sent to bring her back. In doing so, she claimed dominion over male infants for the first eight days of their lives and female children for the first twenty. Despite the deaths of a hundred of her children each day, Lilith refused to return to the Garden and to accept Adam’s dominion.

Later versions of the Lilith story portray her as a mate to demons, specifically Samael and Asmodeus, or as a hag who rides the night wind and takes seed from men in their sleep.

Lilith is a topic of much discussion among Jewish vampires, and many of the younger ones quietly view Lilith as something of a hero. Her refusal to submit to Adam and her defiance of God’s demand that she retrace her steps to Eden make her an appealing role model to young Cainites chafing against the restrictions of their elders, an appeal which is only reinforced by the extensive connection that Lilith has with Jewish tradition. While it is unusual for a Jewish vampire — lapsed or otherwise — to convert to any form of Lilith worship, a small faction view Lilith’s goals as admirable and do their best to serve them. Those vampires call themselves the Shedim.

THE SHEDIM

In Jewish myth, the *shedim* (literally, “spirits” or “demons”) are creatures of evil, roaming spirits of great malice. Many stories exist as to their origins: They were disembodied when HaShem rested on the seventh day and thus remained disembodied forever; they were begotten by Adam during his separation

from Eve; they were descended from those who attempted to build the tower at Babel. Most interesting, however, is the notion that they are the offspring of Adam and Lilith. According to one account, after Lilith had refused God's command to return to the Garden of Eden, she eventually coupled with Adam again and produced three races of demons: the Shedim, the Lilim and the Rauchin.

While the bull-faced temple guardians the Assyrians called Shedim are nowhere to be found, a sect of Cainites has taken the name Shedim unto themselves deliberately. Forswearing Caine, they labor to serve what they imagine Lilith's wishes to be. Small cells of Shedim are found throughout both the Sabbat and the Camarilla. Often bitterly jealous of one another, they squabble fiercely over what precisely Lilith's will is and how best to implement it. Though all of the Shedim agree that they are descendants of Lilith, what precisely that means varies from cell to cell. Most engage in blood sacrifice to Lilith in an attempt to atone for the hundreds of her children whom God slew. Others forswear any sort of ritual and prefer simply to destroy that which the children of Adam have created.

Shedim cells are usually small, no larger than three to five vampires. Most are in contact with at least one other cell, though that contact is by no means always friendly. On occasion, however, the members of a cell will begin acting in a most peculiar fashion, speaking in languages they could not possibly know and performing actions that seem dictated by some outside source. Such cells usually burn out quickly but accomplish great things in the short time they are under this mysterious spell.

THE CURE

Not all Kindred enjoy their condition, and a small but energetic fraction of vampires actively seek to reverse the Embrace. This percentage is higher among Jewish Kindred than among the vampiric population at large. Why this is, no one is quite sure, but it may have something to do with the notion that Jews who are neither alive nor dead when the Messiah arrives will not be resurrected. Vampiric scholars of Judaism have taken the argument further, and many believe that the arrival of the Messiah will signal the immediate destruction of all Kindred.

Faced with this proposed destruction, some Jewish Kindred have instead clung to a more optimistic interpretation. They are convinced that the touch of the Messiah will cure them of vampirism and

restore them to their original, human state. As such, they labor unceasingly to find the Messiah, poring over scriptures and prophecies in hopes of finding the one who will "cure" them. Such messianic vampires tend to keep a low profile among their peers, in part to avoid mockery and in part to avoid seeming unreliable. They have an extensive communications network and a series of well stocked libraries, which they use to share information, clues as to the Messiah's whereabouts and expected arrival, and such.

FALSE MESSIAHS AND SHABBATAI TZVI'S LEGACY

Judaism has had more than its share of false messiahs. Their numbers are many and include such luminaries as Bar Kochba, who mounted a massive revolt against the Romans in 132. The most notorious, however, was Shabbatai Tzvi. A Turkish Jew born in Smyrna in 1626, Tzvi was an erratic but brilliant scholar who once performed a wedding ceremony that bound him to the Torah as man and wife. Decried to be the Messiah by the reclusive holy man Nathan of Gaza, Tzvi accepted this onus and began to act as if he were in fact the Messiah. He appointed followers as representatives of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and dispatched those who came to see him with parchments stating that he was the Messiah and the King of Israel.

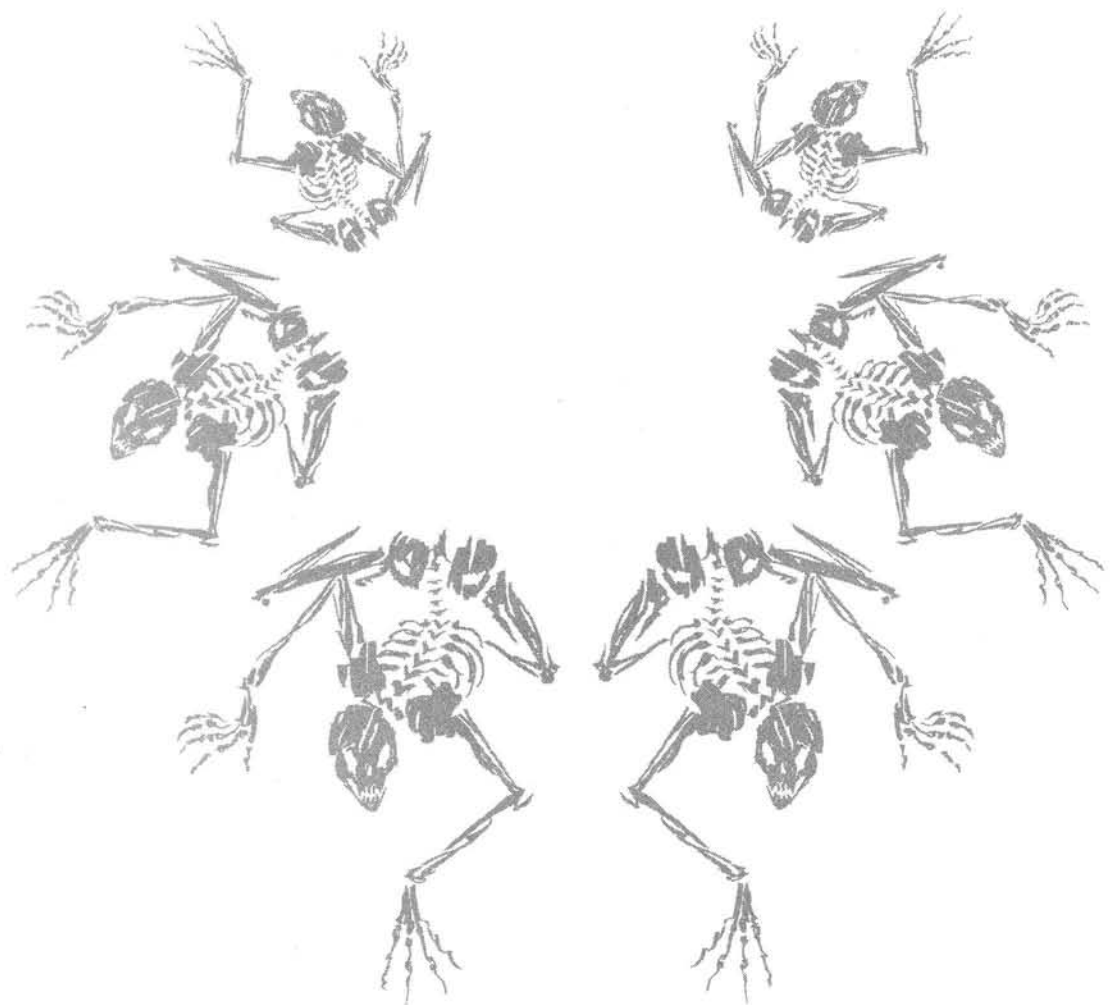
His followers rejoiced, repented their previous transgressions and spread the word. Quickly, his cult grew, until fall of 166, when it came to the attention of the Sultan of Turkey. The sultan was not amused and had Tzvi brought to him. He offered the self-proclaimed messiah a choice: death or conversion to Islam. Tzvi chose conversion, a move which stunned his followers. Even as the years went by, they refused to believe he had really converted, instead thinking that he was going undercover to perform his labors in Muslim lands.

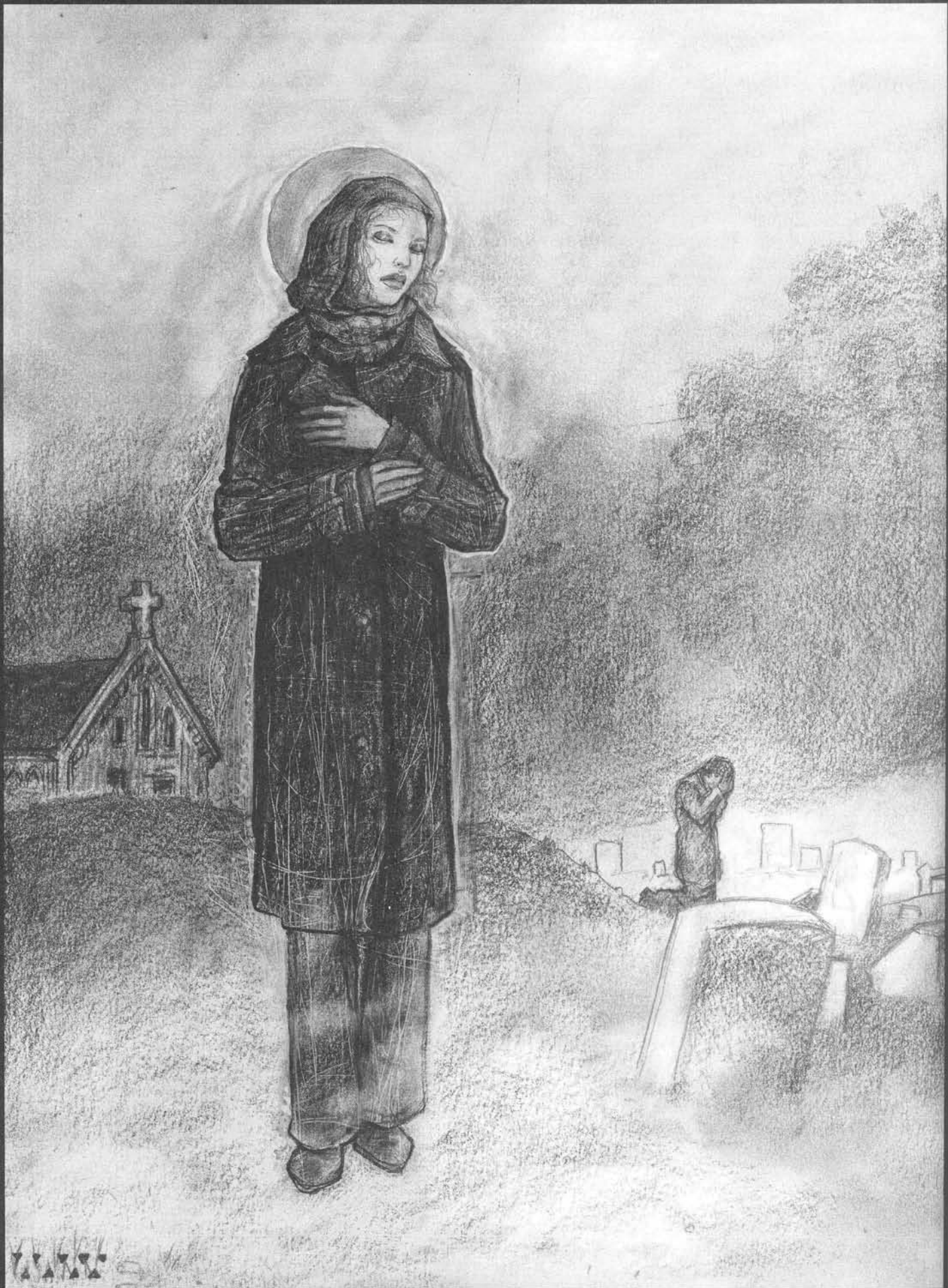
Tzvi died in 1676, or so the histories say. After his death, the false messianic movement sputtered along for another century or so, with other pseudomessiahs proclaiming themselves, failing, and disappearing. By the end of the 18th century, the Jewish people's taste for false messiahs had petered out, and even Shabbatai Tzvi's name was mostly expunged from the registers of history.

It was at this point that a Kindred calling himself Nathan appeared, preaching to his fellow vampires that Shabbatai Tzvi was indeed the Messiah and had been Embraced in order to experience

all of God's creation. Initially laughed at or driven off, Nathan persisted. Now, two centuries later, he has a small but dedicated band of followers, primarily Sephardic Jews from Turkey and Syria, who believe him. They labor on his behalf, performing tasks for the greater glory of the Messiah, whose triumphant emergence they expect at any moment. Nathan has promised his followers that within a year they will look upon the face of

Shabbatai Tzvi. As Nathan has never disappointed his followers before, something akin to nervousness is growing in the minds of those Camarilla elders who know of Nathan's cult. They don't think that Nathan will produce Shabbatai Tzvi, and they certainly don't think he will produce the Messiah. They are not so sure, however, as to exactly what he *will* produce and what the ultimate cost will be.







CHAPTER TWO: TAINTED BY THE BLOOD

Faith must trample under foot all reason, sense, and understanding.
— Martin Luther

For some Kindred, the tenets and doctrines offered by the religions as practiced by the kindred aren't quite right. They don't need to be replaced entirely, just ... tweaked a tiny bit. It makes sense, after all. The Torah, the Bible, the Qur'an, the Tao — none of them really have anything to say about the Kindred. Yet the Kindred exist, and so these sacred writings must be reinterpreted with that fact in mind.

It's important to understand that, for the most part, this wasn't done deliberately or consciously. No Kindred sat down and simply decided to twist the precepts of Judaism or Islam into something barely recognizable. Rather, it happened as all religious evolution occurs: slowly and gradually. It happened because some Kindred weren't comfortable with these faiths as they existed — not surprising, since none of them plainly acknowledge the Kindred's existence, and most heavily imply eternal damnation for all concerned. Rather than simply abandon the religion in which they already believed, they decided instead to view it from a different

angle. Just as many Catholics, for example, might feel that their interpretation of Christianity is more valid than, say, that of the Mormons, so do most Kindred worshippers of the following faiths feel that their "warped" view of the religion is, in fact, the correct one. They don't see themselves as having changed anything. Rather, they have simply come to understand the religious teachings and doctrines better than the kindred who first disseminated them.

THE TWISTED CROSS

It should come as no surprise that most Western Kindred who cling to any religion at all choose some variation of the Christian faith. The vast majority comes from Christian-dominated societies. It's the most accessible and most common faith throughout much of the world. And the Kindred are already inclined toward, if not Christianity itself, at least the Abrahamic traditions, by their very natures and their creation myths. Even those Kindred who don't believe in the Caine story have likely heard it. All

the legends and popular media portray vampires as vulnerable to crosses, holy water and communion wafers, and while these stories may be largely inaccurate, they still present a powerful image, especially for the newest generation of Kindred.

With that in mind, however, most faithful Kindred find it difficult to reconcile many precepts of the Christian denominations. Neither angel nor demon, neither of Hell nor Heaven, and certainly not mortal: Where do the Kindred fit into the scheme of things? They exist completely outside God's order, at least as it's defined in the Bible. Do they, in fact, spring from God's curse on Cain, the first murderer? How could that be? How could God send such a scourge against mankind in punishment for the sins of a single man?

Perhaps hardest to deal with is the notion that the Kindred are beyond salvation. If they are soulless creatures, they've no chance of attaining their eternal reward in the next life. If they are not, surely their souls are blackened beyond redemption, bound for fire and brimstone. Even a full confession covers only what has come before, and Kindred nature forces them to sin again tomorrow night, no matter their intentions to the contrary. A number of Kindred, then, choose to reinterpret Christian doctrine in a way that affords them, if not hope for redemption and the kingdom of Heaven, at least a greater understanding of the reasons behind their damnation.

FOLLOWERS AND FLOCK

These Kindred-centric forms of Christianity differ greatly from one another, but they all tend to attract two specific sorts of worshippers from completely opposite ends of the spectrum. Some of those drawn to these sects and denominations are casual worshippers — Sunday Kindred, as it were. They aren't consciously seeking any particular revelation. Rather, they maintain their faith in Christianity because it's what they were raised with as mortals and it's all they know. They gravitate toward these variations rather than more traditional forms because these simply feel right. Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy and the others offer little to the casual vampiric worshipper; at least these Kindred-oriented branches acknowledge their existence, their hopes and fears. For these worshippers, religion is not an overwhelming aspect of their existence, nor is it something they think about on a regular basis.

The other sort drawn toward these sects are those Kindred who are indeed deeply, even obsessively, spiritual. Unable to function without some sense of their place in God's order, they deliberately seek — in some cases, even create — these variations on the faith in order to give meaning to their existence. Unlike their less devout counterparts, the faith of these Kindred colors everything they do — their nightly activities, their view of the world, even the way they choose their victims. Although hope for a better existence in the next world is still the motivating factor for many of them, quite a few aren't concerned with the state of their soul after Final Death — many are convinced they're already damned and have accepted their fate. Instead, they use the doctrines of their faith to guide their behavior in this world. For some, that means abiding by God's laws and commandments as any mortal might. Others become cruel, cold, monstrous beings, their "higher calling" serving as little more than an excuse to release the worst the Man and the Beast have to offer.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Because the Kindred have developed numerous variations on Christianity, it's impossible to discuss the doctrine of these faiths in any detail without a discussion of each sect individually. While the details vary wildly, however, some generalities can be applied to most of them.

At the risk of stating the obvious, these faiths, despite their often bizarre aspects, are easily recognizable as branches of Christianity. All acknowledge God as the creator, Lucifer as the source of evil, Cain as the first vampire and Jesus Christ as the son of God. Some reach those conclusions through torturous and twisted lines of reasoning, but they all possess these facets in common.

With some few exceptions, most of these sects differ from mainstream Christianity on one (or both) of two points: the nature of Cain and God's curse, and the nature of Christ. While they might also disagree on minor philosophical issues, it is these two figures — and the interpretations thereof — that mark most Kindred versions of Christianity as different. Similarly, the creation myth is universal to most of these religions. They believe in the six-day creation of the universe (or at least accept that account as symbolic), and they accept as truth the existence of Cain and Abel. Of course, what happened after Cain's murder of his brother varies dramatically.

These sects also adopt the traditional view of the afterlife. They acknowledge Heaven, Hell and the judgment of God. Where the sects begin to differ is on how the Kindred themselves will be judged, if they haven't been already, but the fact of judgment remains.

Most of these sects maintain that the Kindred have an assigned and deliberate place in God's order. They can't agree on what that place might be, but they agree they have it. Some theorize the Bible lacks any mention of the Kindred because God wished them kept secret from his mortal children, while others claim that it was the efforts of the Kindred themselves that excised all mention of their race from the writings of mankind.

Finally, most of these faiths maintain a code of behavior that must be obeyed. Comparable, perhaps, to the Ten Commandments and similar guidelines, each demands that the Kindred earn their place in Heaven, or at least fulfill their purpose on Earth. These codes are less strict than Paths of Enlightenment, but they still require a degree of discipline to maintain. Some of these faiths, in fact, require their worshippers to adopt a Path, as their teachings are incompatible with Humanity.

BRANCHES ON THE TREE

It would require a work far longer than this to discuss all the various interpretations and denominations of Christianity the Kindred have developed over the centuries. Thus, rather than list specific sects, what follows is a discussion of various precepts of Kindred Christianity that are common to multiple denominations. Players and Storytellers may base a character's belief system on any one of the following precepts, or mix and match them (perhaps even with precepts from other religions) to create unique faiths.

CAINE

As mentioned above, the nature of Caine and his curse is one of the primary points of divergence between some sects and their more traditional forebears. Many of these sects do take the traditionally accepted view of him as the first vampire, but as that viewpoint is discussed in numerous other sources (including the previous chapter), this discussion focuses instead on less common interpretations.

Caine's Curse as a Blessing

It was during the Western world's growing fascination with Egypt in the late 19th century that a

ghoul thrall of the Toreador Ulysses Cadwell returned from an archaeological dig. The ghoul reported that, inside a small cave, she had found a tomb that was clearly not Egyptian, but probably the final resting place of some traveler. In it, sealed in ceramic vessels, she'd discovered a series of writings in Aramaic. After careful study and translation, she and her master discovered that they held nothing less than an alternate version of the story of Caine. According to the unknown author, the version set down in the Torah was a falsehood, created so mankind wouldn't learn of the presence of a superior race among them. According to this writing, God's "curse" was no curse at all but a blessing.

Although this is the only written evidence, and Cadwell has long refused to allow the parchment to undergo scientific examination to determine its authenticity, the notion that Caine was blessed rather than cursed is a common one among Kindred Christian sects. According to this interpretation, God was pleased with Caine's offering of his brother's blood. As one translation of Cadwell's find states, "Thou hast learned well this lesson I have set before you, and I am well pleased. Be thou, then, as a lion among lambs, and share in the power of the heavenly host. Thou wilt walk amongst them as kings, and show them the way to me."

Of course, most who hear this alternate take maintain that it's merely a convenient fabrication, intended to make the Kindred feel better about what they are and what they do. Still, some do believe, and believe devoutly.

Those who believe in Caine's blessing feel that they are entitled to do as they will with the kine around them, as long as they don't go overboard. As man was granted dominion over the birds and the animals, so are the Kindred higher than man, but still a part of God's order.

Some theological debate still exists as to why the Kindred have been denied the daylight by God's gift. Some more fanatical worshippers maintain that they're so full of God's holiness and power that the addition of the light of the sun is simply too much for their physical forms to survive. Others maintain that the light of the sun is, in fact, the Lord's final test of their worthiness. When a Kindred is truly holy, has truly accepted her place as God's chosen and cast off all lingering doubt, the light of the sun will no longer burn. Most believers scoff at both these notions but have yet to develop any more viable theories.



The “blessed of Caine” are more selective than the average Kindred in choosing their childer. It would be inappropriate, after all, to pass such a blessing on to the unworthy. They certainly never use it as a form of punishment or vengeance, as many vampires do. At the same time, they acknowledge that some mortals, even worthy ones, lack the strength of will to acclimate themselves to the predatory and nocturnal nature of their new existence. As such, these Kindred make a practice of watching their potential childer carefully, often for long intervals, before blessing them with the mark of Caine.

This doctrine is found most frequently among Camarilla Kindred. Some Sabbat and independent Kindred maintain this belief as well, but because diablerie is often considered a sin by most who believe in the blessing of Caine, it is far less common in the smaller sect.

Caine and Kindred as the Wrath of God

For as long as Kindred and religion have existed, some of the children of Caine have taken it as their holy edict to serve as God’s murderous angels, slaying those who transgress against divine law. By and large, these are lone Kindred, possibly deranged individuals who, like mortal serial killers, have simply lost their grip on reality.

Some who believe in this doctrine are quite sane, however. They maintain that the curse of Caine was not a punishment, though, unlike the believers in Caine’s blessing, they hardly consider it a reward. Rather, in slaughtering his brother, in becoming mankind’s first murderer, Caine proved that he had it in him to serve as God’s instrument of vengeance on the unrighteous. To hear these Kindred tell it, Caine didn’t Embrace the second generation out of a desire for companionship but because he needed helpers in hunting down and punishing the wicked.

Not all these Kindred work alone, either. Some have chosen to band together in packs or coterie, the better to destroy those who have transgressed. If rumor is to be believed, the Sabbat Inquisition harbors an entire pack of Cainites who follow this doctrine. It matters little to them if their target is vampire, mortal or anything else, if they believe he has transgressed against the will of God. Supposedly, they were inducted into the Inquisition because other authorities in the Sabbat were too scared to take them in.

THE FLOOD

Some of these “avenging Kindred” believe the great deluge described in the Bible is a metaphor, not to be taken literally. According to them, the “flood” was nothing less than the birth of the third and fourth generations, who instantly set out in vast numbers to cleanse the Earth of the wicked mortals. Noah and his family were spared by virtue of their grace and inherent goodness, not by some ramshackle ship.

A few even believe that Gehenna does not herald the end of the Kindred as a race but rather the coming a second “flood.” The Antediluvians will awaken, they say, and lead their faithful followers in a second cleansing of all the evils in mankind. Some of them have even decided to get an early start.

Those Kindred who consider themselves the wrath of God are usually violent, vicious creatures who feel no compunction about killing mortals (and even other Kindred) who they believe have broken God’s laws. They still believe in an angry, fire-and-brimstone deity, one who would approve of their vengeful response to even the most minor of transgressions. This particular doctrine is most common in the Sabbat and among schismatic Assamites, though it is not unheard of within other clans or the Camarilla. Few of those who hold to it are able to maintain Humanity for more than the briefest duration.

The Thief of Power

This interpretation of Caine has existed at least as long as religion itself. It is not, however, spoken aloud. This particular heresy is discussed only in whispers, even among those who believe, and few who follow it will admit their beliefs in mixed company.

Some few Kindred exist who maintain that God didn’t curse Caine, nor bless him nor grant him power in any way. According to this doctrine, Caine empowered himself through his own efforts and force of will. By shedding the first human blood in all of creation, he discovered the secret that God never meant men to know: that the blood, the vitae itself, is power. According to ancient and obscure myths, Caine did not shed Abel’s blood for God but fed on it himself. This first mortal death carried with it an enormous power, granting Caine a strength

that, while not the equal of God’s, was more than God cared to contest with. Rather than attempt to strip Caine of his new power, God instead bestowed upon him sufficient vulnerabilities — such as the curse of the sun — so that Caine might never challenge His rule.

These Kindred believe that because God did not deliberately create them, they exist completely outside His purview. They are not bound by His laws nor by the physical laws that govern His world. It means they are forever denied Paradise, but by the same token they cannot be Damned. Vampires exist in this world only, and when they are gone, they are gone utterly, their souls, if they have any such thing, sent spiraling into oblivion.

These Kindred don’t abide by any specific code of behavior; in fact, the very nature of their beliefs tends to discourage such things. Some few retain their Humanity, since nothing in their beliefs requires them to do evil, but few have the willpower to control themselves without the promise of eternal reward or punishment. Thus, most Kindred who subscribe to this belief swiftly fall to wassail unless they find their way to a Path of Enlightenment. They appear in roughly equal numbers in both sects, though most of those in the Camarilla are quite young.

This faith is spread primarily by those who have followed it for years or decades on end. As the faithful Kindred grows in power, he becomes frustrated at the actions of his lesser brethren, who allow themselves to be bound by laws that do not apply to them. Most often, his efforts at educating others are born not out of any true desire to spread the faith but out of sheer frustration at the blindness of the Kindred race.

CHRIST

As with Caine, Kindred perceptions of Jesus vary wildly by sect and denomination. All the faiths being discussed accept Christ as the son of God and the messiah; if they did not, they wouldn’t qualify as Christian. That does not mean, however, that they interpret him, his life and his death in anything resembling the way mortals do.

Christ as Kindred

It should come as no surprise that many Kindred interpret Christ’s resurrection as a metaphor for vampirism. In fact, if anything, it’s surprising that more of them don’t.

This isn’t to say that such Kindred believe Jesus was a vampire during his life as chronicled in the New Testament; they don’t. Or at least most don’t.

Rather, they maintain that the story of the resurrection is, in fact, proof that Jesus died as a mortal and became Kindred.

So who Embraced him? Well, according to the doctrine, no one. Just as Christ was birthed by a virgin, so his transformation was, for lack of a better term, a "virgin Embrace," bestowed by God Himself.

More than a little theological debate has occurred as to the meaning of this spontaneous transmutation. Some interpret it as a message from God stating that the Kindred are no less His children than the mortals, that Heaven is not denied them just because of what they are and that He has not forsaken them. For those who believe, this is a message of indescribable comfort, something to give them strength and direction in the nights ahead.

Others, however, take a more extreme stance. They claim that Christ's Embrace does not suggest that Kindred and kine are equal in God's eyes, but rather that the Kindred are the true children of God. Kine exist only as sustenance and raw materials for the Kindred to use as they see fit. After all, if the Embrace was good enough for God's only son, they *must* be the chosen of the Lord. These Kindred are some of the worst predators mankind knows, since they no longer have any vestigial belief or morality holding them back. If they truly are the chosen of God, then He certainly doesn't care what they do to the mortals around them.

Some few Kindred even believe that Christ was not just a vampire but the *first* vampire, and that all records and tales of Kindred before the crucifixion are nothing but falsehoods intended to lead them astray.

Believers in the "Christ as Kindred" philosophy can be found across all sect lines. Because it's easier for them to maintain their Humanity, those who consider Christ's Embrace as a sign of equal favor for Kindred and kine are more common in the Camarilla, while those who consider Kindred dominant are more frequently encountered in the Sabbat.

Christ as Caine

An even more extreme interpretation of the "Christ as Kindred" doctrine maintains that Christ and Caine were one and the same. Some vampires maintain that Caine died and was reborn in the body of Jesus. Others have it that he walked the Earth for thousands of years and that the story of the virgin birth was a fabrication to explain to the masses — who would not have been prepared to accept Caine as their savior — where he came from. Their behavior is very much like that of their brethren,

save that they're even more likely to treat the kine as animals. After all, if Caine was the son of God, and they are descended from Caine, does that not make them demigods?

Kindred as Apostles

Like some of their brethren discussed above, these Kindred believe the vampires date back only to the time of Christ, not to Caine. They do not believe that Jesus himself was their forebear, however. Rather, the power and holiness of Christ transformed those who were closest to him. The clans of Kindred, they maintain, are descended from Christ's Apostles.

Substantial debate continues as to which clan descended from whom, and the faithful are no closer to solving it now than they were millennia ago. Only one particular bit of ancestry has been agreed upon — the Salubri obviously descended from Judas. It's the only way to explain how an entire clan of Jesus' favored could have been entirely replaced by a new one, just as Judas was replaced by a new Apostle, about whom the Bible says very little. Much of this sect's time is taken up in the search for a fourteenth clan, descended from the Apostle Paul, who came late into the fold. Because the Kindred are descended from Christ's Apostles, it is their responsibility to shepherd and guide the mortals without harming them any more than their natures require. They believe their thirst for blood and violent urges are the result of Lucifer's attempt to turn them from their true purpose — an objective that has, alas, succeeded with the vast majority of Kindred.

Beyond this strange notion of their origins, this sect bears a strong resemblance to several Baptist denominations. Unlike most other Kindred Christian sects, many of which hearken back to the days of church supremacy, this sect has adopted the less ceremonial, less hierarchical structure of Protestantism over the more formal and ceremonial trappings of Catholicism.

These apostolic Kindred are among some of the least vicious of Kindred, as far as their natures permit. They are, almost to the last, adherents to Humanity and exist almost exclusively within the Camarilla.

OTHER VARIATIONS

Caine and Christ represent the most common points of departure between Kindred and mortal Christianity, but not the only ones. Christian dogma allows for a wide variety of alternative interpretations, and the Kindred have latched onto many of

them. Only a couple are discussed here, but almost any major theological aspect of Christianity is open to reexamination through undead eyes.

The Rapture

According to Revelation, the final judgment will occur seven years after the Rapture, when all faithful Christians are taken from Earth. During this time, 144,000 men and women will come to God and Jesus despite the absence of God in the world and will be allowed into Heaven on Judgment Day. Some Kindred sects — indeed, some mortal ones as well — maintain that the Rapture has already occurred, and thus that God is completely absent from the modern world. Whether the final judgment yet lies ahead or whether all is lost and the world is simply drifting into the void depends on who you ask.

Precisely when this happened is up for debate. Some Kindred maintain the Rapture was a relatively recent occurrence, others that it occurred at the death of Christ, and a few even argue that it happened with the death of Abel — who serves as the Christ figure in this particular interpretation of the mythology — and that only Adam and Eve qualified.

Like several other doctrines, this belief spawns two separate and opposite reactions from Kindred who adopt it. Some go wild, deciding that they might as well earn the damnation to which they are already doomed. Others adhere — or attempt to adhere — to strict moral behavior in the hopes that they might be among the fortunate few who can yet be redeemed on Judgment Day.

These Kindred are found in both sects and among the independent clans. Those who still hope for redemption tend to adhere to Humanity, whereas the others either fall to wassail or cleave to Paths of Enlightenment.

Luciferian Kindred

It's an axiom as old as conflict itself. "The enemy of my enemy is my ally."

To some of the Kindred, God Himself — He who cursed Caine, who damned them to an eternity of endless hunger and darkness, who permits them no hope of redemption in the afterlife — is their enemy. They are only too eager to throw in their lot with another of the Lord's adversaries.

Some would argue that a Luciferian cult has no place in a discussion of Christian sects, but the truth is these Kindred believe in all the same things as their more traditional brethren. They've simply chosen to ally themselves with the opposition.

Luciferian precepts are based on a dismissal of God's laws. This does *not* necessarily mean these Kindred are out deliberately committing atrocities in the name of their diabolical patron, though many unsophisticated ones do just that. Others are merely concerned with going their own way, and while they're certainly prepared to do harm to those who get in their way, slaughtering the innocent isn't something they care for. As long as they're pursuing their wants and desires without letting God dictate to them a list of proscriptions and restrictions, they're following the essential doctrine of their creed.

It's also important to draw a distinction between Luciferians and Infernalists. Very few of these Kindred have anything to do with infernal practices. To bind oneself to anyone, even someone equally opposed to God and Heaven, is simply to trade one enslavement for another.

Nestled within the Luciferian sect is another, smaller cult. These mysterious Kindred believe the war in Heaven was actually a battle between two gods, the true Creator and a usurper. When the true God was thrown down, Lucifer and a handful of angels remained loyal to Him while the others turned to the new order. These Kindred believe they oppose the usurper god — and Jesus Christ, his avatar — not merely out of anger but in order to restore creation to its proper lord. Even most Luciferians remain ignorant of this sect's existence.

The majority of Luciferian Kindred follow Paths of Enlightenment, with the Paths of Cathari and of Night being particularly common, but some manage to retain their Humanity. The Sabbat and independents claim more Luciferian Kindred than does the Camarilla, but the larger sect still boasts its fair share.

THE TWISTED CRESCENT

As the fundamentals of the Abrahamic trinity have already been heretofore discussed, including the general ways in which Kindred "of the book" most often tend to view the teachings of said book through their own rose-tinted glasses, let us now focus a little on the youngest of the three, the fastest growing monotheistic religion on earth: Islam. In a religion that some perceive as revisionist in and of itself, due to its claim as the latest and thus truest (or at least most "up-to-date") gospel of

God, it is easy to see why and how some desperate Kindred might be attracted to Islam. Perhaps no other major religion offers as sumptuous a banquet of spiritual choices and attractively malleable interpretations as does Islam, especially when compared to Judaism and Christianity.

Although Islam holds true to the vast majority of the same core tenets of its two monotheistic forebears (contrary to popular opinion), a world of moral ambiguity does indeed swirl in those few areas where it does differ. The most fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity, and the one that causes no end of headaches among the undead, is the issue of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Whereas Christian vampires believe that the young carpenter from Nazareth was the son of God — truly, that he *was* God — their Muslim counterparts acknowledge only Christ's status as a messenger and prophet. They hold that no man (no one man, truly) is the equal of God and that He exists above and beyond the scope of all earthly motion and understanding. Although the Holy Qur'an asks its adherents to acknowledge a great deal of shared history with their Judeo-Christian fellows, the line is drawn (quite definitively) on this point.

Unlike Jewish and Christian Kindred, those who follow Islam as it is most commonly preached and practiced are already gifted with a certain sense of acceptance. No measure of "twisting" dogma or interpreting scripture is required: Islam is all about submission to God, and when that submission is practiced genuinely and with conviction, the faithful are rewarded with the gift of salvation when the end finally draws nigh. Islam teaches that no creature born of God is ever truly and irrevocably damned, and that all power to determine one's standing in the afterlife rests solely in each individual's hands. Interestingly, though Islam proscribes for God an arguably more overwhelming role in the affairs of man, it does so while He simultaneously removes Himself from the practicality of those very same affairs.

Due to these and a host of other reasons, many Muslim Kindred are drawn to reinterpret all monotheistic doctrine through the lens of these disparities. For many troubled Ashirra, the Holy Qur'an provides no true answers, only more questions, especially when held up beside the great book from which it supposedly advanced humanity. These distraught self-thinkers, like the rest of us, are thus left to

determine the greater messages and meanings hidden within these texts on their own.

FOLLOWERS AND FLOCK

Those who seek to use the Qur'an as a base point from which to realize ("compile" might be a better word) their own personal vision of God's most perfect truth most often do so for one of two reasons. For some, it is simply the only way to reconcile all the various behavioral, cultural and moral impositions and expectations placed upon a follower of Allah. Although Islam does indeed preach that no creature is inherently denied salvation, the Qur'an itself was understandably written with normal mortals in mind — to a target audience of human beings, if you will. Indeed, nowhere in the vast body of Islamic thought and lore is even the slightest reference to the undead. Yet all Muslims are theoretically equal before God and thus expected to do all the same things as every other true believer. For some Kindred, these expectations are simply too high (or too unreasonable, not taking into account their special natures), and they go looking for ways to interpret Qur'anic law from their own particular bias or slant while still attempting to remain true to all the core beliefs that make them Muslims.

Another reason some Ashirra are drawn toward revisionist thinking has to do with the fact that Islam, unlike most other religions, is not so much a religion as a universal way of life, not only for individuals but for the entire community of man — a community from which the accursed vampire was forever excluded on the night of his Embrace. These Kindred despair at how removed from the circle of life they seem to be and thus dig deeply (and often desperately) in Islamic lore to find any wording or reference, anything that might function as a spiritual "loophole," that might show them that they are indeed still an important part not only of God's plan, but of the world of men as well. They long for proof that, although Damned, they may remain a vital part of a religion they are painfully aware is based solely around the world of the kine and their relationship with God. Some of the truly fanatical, desperate for acceptance and the chance to show their own submission to God, have taken to wholesale fabrications of dogma and belief, twisting or doubting the words of the *'ulama* (the Muslim community) or even of the Prophet himself (peace be upon him) in order to make a niche for the things they so desperately wish to believe.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Not nearly as many Kindred branches of Islam exist as Kindred branches of Christianity. This is due primarily to the fact that Islam, at its core, is truly meant to be one faith for all the world. Even tonight, almost fourteen centuries after the religion's humble beginnings in Arabia, only a few different schools of Islamic thought exist, as opposed to the dozens of different denominations of Christianity that have sprouted up in the same amount of time.

The primary religious rift that tears mortal Islam apart is the Sunni-Shi'ite split, one that is not so much doctrinal as historical. Most Muslim Kindred don't much care for this argument one way or the other. They believe that the fundamental precepts of the faith to which they adhere have little or nothing to do with which family tree of successors should have "led" Islam following Muhammad's death in 632. Their concerns rest more fully in the teachings themselves and in whatever their own place may be within the religion the Prophet left behind, often summed up in the following phrase:

How do I remain the thing that I have become, and yet also remain a good Muslim?

Ultimately, the search for the answer to this one question is what leads most Muslim Kindred down the path to "twisted Islam." The various sects that have developed and will develop because of this search often bear striking similarities; indeed, most differ from any other upon only one or two small points. Overall, even those Ashirra who seek to break out of the box — to find, intuit or even outright craft their own answers — typically do so with a healthy respect for the parent faith from which they depart. They understand the futility in trying to "fool" God by fooling themselves and simply wish to find a more complete (or at least satisfying) answer to the question of their place in His grand design.

Therefore, the most significant point of departure for most neo-Muslim theologians is the hotly debated issue of Kindred existence. Almost all Kindred agree that their mutual undead condition is the product of a curse from God; the place where some begin to differ is on the issue of *why*? As with other monotheistic undead, the "Caine question" (the identity of the first vampire) deeply pervades the thoughts of many Muslim Kindred.



THE LEGACY OF HAROUN EL-LA'IL

During the golden age of Islam, the city of Cairo was the not only the religious and cultural center of the religion but one of the most prominent cities in all the world. Its status as the home of Suleiman ibn Abdullah, the founder and *mullah* of the Ashirra sect, drew the interest of Muslims the world over, many of whom traveled to Cairo during this time to dwell, to learn and to pray. One such Kindred was a clanmate of Suleiman's named Haroun el-La'il, a wealthy Lasombra known throughout all the cities of Islam.

According to accounts of the time, Haroun merely wished to settle down in the greatest city of Islam, there to engage his fellow Ashirra and partake of the gifts of the *qadi* and the world's oldest university, Al-Azhar. Regardless of his intentions, what Haroun ultimately accomplished was nothing less than the end of one era and the dawn of another. Before the Lasombra's arrival at the mosques and *hammams* of Cairo, almost all Ashirra kept whatever doubts and insecurities they had about the teachings of the Qur'an to themselves. To do anything other than to stay the "true" course was blasphemy and the height of arrogance before God. Young Muslim neonates were cowed into blind acceptance by their elders, often to the detriment of their own spiritual advancement.

Haroun would change all this.

Within a few short years after the Lasombra's arrival, the Ashirra of Cairo were in something of an uproar. Never before had a respected member of the sect spoken so openly or questioned so vehemently the basics of the Qur'anic code. The incident that started it all was Haroun's campaign to relieve all Ashirra from their duties to the *Sawm*, the religious fast. Before then, all Ashirra restricted their blood intake during the holy month of Ramadan. When Haroun came, however, he traveled from mosque to mosque (from house to house, even) politely reminding Muslim Kindred that the Qur'an requires only that Muslims fast during the *daylight* hours of the month of Ramadan. Theoretically, the Lasombra postulated, a Muslim Kindred could rise at his usual time (dusk), having already fulfilled the obligations of the *Sawm*. Technically, no further blood denial was required. Many among the Ashirra noted the strength of Haroun's argument, and in no time other Kindred of Cairo were holding off on their self-imposed starvation.

So began the slippery slope of Islamic revisionism, a force that has seen numerous peaks and valleys in the centuries since but has never seen (and probably never will see) its own destruction. Indeed, Haroun el-La'il is often credited by his supporters with being the father of moderacy among the Ashirra. To others, he is nothing less than a stain upon the very fabric of the faith itself.

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

Although many Muslim Kindred hew to the basic timeline laid out within the Bible, few are willing to buy into the story of Caine lock, stock and barrel. Although most find the notion of the world's first murderer being punished like no other to be a reasonable one, some have difficulty getting their minds around the notion that God — *their* god, the one true God — would operate so severely, by damning one mortal in such a way that countless mortals to follow him would suffer for actions not of their own doing. Others still are afraid that by acknowledging the accepted vampiric creation myth they are somehow acknowledging the supremacy of the Bible over the Qur'an, and by extension of Jesus over Muhammad and of Christianity over Islam. This, however, is not the norm, merely an example of how rashly and reactionary some behave where matters of religion are concerned.

Some Ashirra try to use the popular Caine myth to their own advantage. To them, the story of Caine and Abel — of brother killing brother — is a parable, a lesson from which all Ashirra may learn. Ashirra means "brethren." and all those within the sect are encouraged to view one another as brothers in every sense. By accepting the Caine myth, wise Ashirra are empowering themselves with an educational tool, a means by which younger sectmates might be shown the path (or, some would say, held in check). "Look!" they say, "at what happens when one believer sheds the blood of another!"

Whether a true part of Ashirra doctrine or simply a convenient excuse, the Caine myth finds no few adherents among Muslim undead. Beyond this, however, remains the underlying question of *why?* In order to find these answers, some look to the place where they have found answers so many times

before. According to the Qur'an, all worldly existence (including that of the Damned) is a period of test and trial, a challenge to each creature's will to stay true to the path. Along these lines, some Ashirra believe that God has cursed them with added tests and trials, ones to which they must bend until Judgment Day. Passages of the Qur'an specifically state how each will be judged and rewarded according to how he has performed in his time on Earth. Perhaps, then, the Kindred are those who are given the most opportunity to excel, those whose list of good works might put others' to shame, given the time in which the undead have to accumulate them. By the same token, this extra time in which to do good is balanced by the raging Beast Within and by temptation. Ashirra with this worldview think of themselves as the most challenged of Allah's children — those who have been given the chance to demonstrate just how far a true believer can go if he stays the course.

RESURRECTION DAY

Just as Christians do, Muslims believe that an end of days will eventually come. A time shall arrive when God closes the book on the world and takes a final accounting of the deeds of all men. Unlike Christians, however, who call this period spoken of in the book of Revelation as Judgment Day, Muslims refer to this time as Resurrection Day.

During Resurrection Day, the good will be lined up and paraded into a paradise of lush gardens and oases, while the evil are filed through the Gates of Hell (after a recounting of all past misdeeds). The pious are promised this reward in exchange for spending their existences in recognition of their duty to themselves and to God. For most Ashirra, this promise means one very simple thing: a release from the torment of vampirism and a return to the spirits of their families and loved ones in the grace of God.

For others, however, Resurrection Day means something altogether different. These Kindred take the concept literally, believing that when God takes his accounting of souls, the good among the Damned will occupy a special place. (The bad, of course, will simply find their way to Hell.) They hold that rather than being led into the gates of Heaven to join other departed souls, the remaining Ashirra will experience a true resurrection here on Earth. These Kindred believe that their reward for staying true to Islam (and by virtue of not dying prematurely) is to inherit the Earth (and their

humanity) after God's accounting. The newly human Ashirra will be the ones left behind to start the world anew when all is said and done. Rather than despair, they will rejoice, knowing that it will be through them that the cycle of all life will continue, that it will be them leading humanity into its next age on Earth, and that when they do finally pass on, they will be as heroes to the blessed souls awaiting them in the kingdom of Heaven. Although most Ashirra dismiss this belief as ignorance or even blasphemy, more than a few quietly hope and pray that these apocalyptic radicals are actually *right* about Allah's plan for the Ashirra.

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

As the oldest strictly monotheistic religion and the origin of the Caine myth that Kindred know so well, the teachings of Judaism are nearly as relevant as those of Christianity as far as many Kindred are concerned. Although many Christian Kindred don't realize it, Judaism is also a far more Kindred-friendly religion than Christianity — at least, depending on whom you ask. Certainly, many mainstream Jewish Kindred see themselves as inevitably Damned and condemned to break the Commandments by their very existence; however, nearly as many have come up with creative ways to be Kindred and still keep to Jewish law. As the Christians mentioned earlier in this chapter, these Jews run the gamut from ultra-Reform to downright fanatical, but many fall somewhere in the middle, trying to keep to traditional interpretations when possible but feeling free to fudge things whenever they have to. Because of Judaism's emphasis on learning and questioning the teachings of Torah, it's just as common for a Jewish Kindred to believe in performing the ritual sacrifices of ancient Israel as it is for one to create a new interpretation of keeping kosher. The important thing to remember is that, like their mortal counterparts, Jewish Kindred select their beliefs based on their background and upbringing; in most cases, a vampire whose mortal parents raised him Orthodox is not going to suddenly decide that keeping the Sabbath no longer matters to him. Like morality, religion — no matter how little it may resemble the mortal belief system on which it's based — is a way of keeping the Beast at bay, of clinging to what's familiar when thrust into a new and unfamiliar existence. Thus, it's far more common that Reform

Jews become more observant after the Embrace than Conservative or Orthodox Jews decide to give up some aspect of their faith.

It's also worth noting that many of the Christian sects mentioned in the previous section can apply to Jews, as well. Although points of dogma obviously differ, nothing prevents Jewish Kindred from deciding to act as God's avenging angels and punish the wicked; whom exactly they see as "wicked" will probably differ somewhat from their Christian counterparts, though. The heresies mentioned below are more specific to Judaism, though some of them could be (and probably have been) adapted by some Kindred to fit Christianity or even Islam.

READINGS OF THE BOOK

Like Christians, Jews vary a great deal on how they interpret the basic tenets of their religion; however, unlike Christianity with its multitude of largely contradictory and separate sects, Judaism's major groups tend to fall along a continuum from less religious to more religious. Among Kindred, the distinctions between Reform, Conservative and Orthodox blur somewhat, but generally it isn't difficult to tell an observant Jew from a more casual one even among the undead. This comes down to two major points: how "traditional" the beliefs of a particular Kindred are when compared with the generally accepted readings of Torah, and how much room for she leaves for interpretation and human error. A strictly Orthodox vampire who believes God Himself wrote the Torah and handed it to Moses will likely have a much more strict and literal reading than someone who thinks it's only meant to be taken as allegory.

Another interesting difference between more and less religious Jewish Kindred is in their choice of companions. Reform and Conservative Kindred tend to be far more comfortable traveling and associating with non-Jews, while Orthodox Kindred often associate only with each other, avoiding even less observant Jews in favor of those who share their beliefs. Much of this is cultural; where Reform and Conservative vampires may allow for creative interpretations of not only Torah but of the oral traditions of Judaism, Orthodox vampires do not, and associating with those who do is the first step in allowing themselves to slip up. While less observant Kindred often have little trouble with sharing a coterie or pack with non-Jews, the Orthodox will nearly always stick together, particularly if their brand of Orthodoxy is one that doesn't currently

survive in the mortal world. This is as much to avoid secular and Reform Jews as to "keep each other honest" where following the more difficult commandments is concerned. As for those vampires who have been around since long before terms like Orthodox and Reform even existed, generalizations are difficult to make, except to say that they tend to keep their own counsel, no matter with whom they choose to associate.

BEYOND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Although they're the best known and some of the most important of the commandments in the Torah, the Ten Commandments are far from the only ones. Nearly all of the book of Leviticus consists of various commandments to the Israelite people, and the Torah itself (not counting the rest of the Hebrew Bible) includes 613 different commandments. Obviously, most of these commandments aren't in dispute, but it's often the most important ones — like dietary laws, Sabbath observances, and even monotheism itself — that have come under fire from schismatic Jewish Kindred.

I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD

It may seem difficult to believe that monotheism, which most people credit Judaism with creating, could be a bone of contention among even the religion's vampiric followers. After all, the First Commandment says, "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me," doesn't it? The answer to this question is actually a bit trickier than English translations might make it appear.

In the original Hebrew, many different names are used for God, which is reflected in the translations by expressions like "the Lord," "the Most High," "the Creator" and of course "God." One of the expressions used is "Elohim," which when literally translated means something close to "the Hosts of Heaven," but it's most often translated as "the Lord." The most common interpretation is that this is something like the use of the "royal we" by monarchs: God is speaking not only for Himself but also for all of the angels and higher beings who serve Him. Some Kindred, particularly those who converted to Judaism from a polytheistic religion, see this as an indication of the existence of more than one god. It's not generally disputed that, at least in Genesis, God claims only to be the greatest of the gods, not the *only* god, and from there it's only a

small leap to polytheism. Many scholars now believe that early Judaism had two strains — the Elohist, who worshipped the Sumerian household gods of Abraham, and the Yahwists, a later group who tried and eventually succeeded at turning Judaism into an entirely monotheistic religion. Among Kindred Elohist are two main schools — the Lilin or Bahari, and the Nephilists. Both believe in alternative creation stories for the Kindred, in addition to many variations in religious practice.

Lilin

The Lilin, sometimes known as Bahari after a word in one of the texts they hold sacred, are a group best known in the Sabbat for following the Path of Lilith, though neither Sabbat affiliation nor devotion to the Path is universal among them. Among Elohist Jews, each individual Lilin has her own interpretation of Lilith's story and background. It's generally agreed that her name comes from a Sumerian wind spirit and fertility goddess, and some still worship her in that aspect. More Lilin do subscribe to the one of the two Jewish legends about her, though. The first describes Lilith as Adam's first wife, who left him and became the mother of demons, while the second tells of Lilith's creation as the consort of the angel Samael, who later fell from grace and became Lucifer. The Bahari of the Sabbat combine the two tales, saying she ascended to Heaven to consort with God before returning to Earth and giving birth to her demonic children, but Jewish Lilin usually choose one or the other of the tales. Generally, though, they accept the demonic aspects given to her by the various Jewish tales, and some try to emulate the powers she was said to have.

Among these powers are dominion over young children — boys up to eight days old and girls up to 20 days — and control of the realm on the other side of mirrors. Some Lilin with thaumaturgical prowess have cooked up rituals that allow them to spy on any mortal with a suitably prepared mirror — or with a mirror at all, by some accounts. Lilin have also been known to kidnap the young children over whom Lilith claimed control, raising them as their own, as Lilith raised the demonic children she was cursed to bear. These “children” of the Lilin usually grow to become the most twisted and cruel of the Bahari, their childhoods nurtured with apocryphal tales of the Dark Mother, and their surrogate parents Embrace them when they've reached an appropriate age.

Parenting strategies for these “children” vary widely but usually aren't very pleasant. Because Bahari believe that Lilith was purified by the pain and trials she suffered in the wilderness, many of these children undergo unspeakable tortures in the name of responsible parenting. Lilin have been known to ghoulish children for years to increase their tolerance for pain and to keep others unaware of their true age, even Embracing them while they're still small and using them as bait to acquire more children. Strangely, the Lilin generally do not feed on their charges, considering that something akin to incest, but the reverse is not true: More than one female Bahari has been known to breastfeed vitae to a newborn.

Because of the Kabbalistic nature of most of the stories about Lilith, the Bahari find many of their new recruits among both Jewish and non-Jewish Kabbalistic and Hermetic thaumaturges. In recent years, the emergence of Lilith as an icon of the mortal feminist movement has also helped increase interest in the Bahari sect among other Kindred as well. New recruits are, more often than not, young, idealistic female vampires, usually Embraced within the past few decades and often either affiliated with or partial to the Anarchs; a fair number are older and more traditional, however. Usually attracted by feminist ideals and the stories of Lilith as the first liberated woman, some of these women find far more than they bargained for, but many find an entirely new purpose in unlife. While every Lilin has her own interpretation of the various Lilith legends, these young recruits exemplify the trend, sometimes even combining her with other mythological figures such as Hecate or Circe to create their own specially tailored belief system, to which they in turn try to convert others.

Nephilists

According to Genesis, the Nephilim were the offspring of human women and angels who came down from the Heavens to sleep with them and teach them the secrets of Heaven; by some accounts, the Nephilim were giants. The Book of Enoch, an apocryphal book not included in the canonical Bible, explains the events more fully, saying that God was angry with these angels, who were forbidden from fraternizing with mortals. Another apocryphal book, the Book of Jubilees, says that when the unions of angels and mortals took place, evil spirits were created at the same time as



the Nephilim. When God commanded the angels to destroy these spirits, their leader, a spirit called Mastema, came to Him and made a bargain that one tenth of the spirits would be allowed to stay and continue punishing and destroying mankind.

The Nephilists believe that vampires are the descendants of either the Nephilim or the evil spirits who were led by Mastema. According to them, the only reason most Kindred don't know this is that the Yahwists excluded the books of Enoch and Jubilees from the Bible. Those who believe they're descended from the Nephilim (and thus part angel) usually strive to do good, in the hopes that

“JEWS FOR JESUS?”

Like polytheists, at first glance it would seem that Christians — even Christians who follow Jewish practices — might have little place in a discussion of Judaism; those Jews who identify as Nazoreans or Ebionites would disagree. Unlike mainstream Christians, who discarded the vast majority of Jewish practices under the direction of the Apostle Paul, the Nazorean and Ebionite sects simply add to traditional Jewish practice a belief in Jesus as the Messiah and believe that Jesus' original disciples did the same. Although these beliefs are known in the mortal world only through scholarship, vampires who were alive at the time of Jesus still carry the torch, and to them being called “Christian” is an insult. Christianity, to these Kindred, is a Latin-speaking, quasipolytheistic abomination bearing only passing resemblance to their own faith; anyone, they say, who does not follow the laws of Torah cannot call himself a follower of the Messiah. They believe that Jesus' brother James — by some accounts his twin — was the legitimate heir to the ministry and that Paul was an usurping upstart who had never even met the man he claimed to venerate. Young Christian (or Jewish) Kindred who question these beliefs can expect to be cured of their “apostasy” very quickly and effectively. These Kindred see their faith as the only true way to follow the teachings of Y'shua ben Joseph — Jesus' true, Hebrew name — but their interpretations of how Jewish doctrine should be interpreted can still be as schismatic as any other Jewish Kindred.

For more on the Nazoreans, see p. 28.

God might eventually let them up into Heaven to serve Him directly. Those who think themselves descended from the evil spirits and Mastema most often indulge what they see as the evil nature they were given, often turning to the Path of Night, Path of Evil Revelations or Path of Cathari.

A PROPER DIET

Keeping the Jewish dietary laws (*kosher* in English or *kashrut* in Hebrew) is an issue of primary importance to many Jews, Kindred among them. For Kindred, the first dilemma stems from the drinking of blood itself, which is prohibited by tradition. While some Jewish Kindred, like their Muslim counterparts, attempt to get around this restriction by offering prayers over blood they are about to drink or by injecting themselves rather than literally drinking, the more devout tend to resign themselves to being forced to break that particular commandment. The usual rationalization for this is that God gave the commandments to the children of Seth, not the children of Caine, and that therefore God must have meant only that mortals aren't allowed to drink blood. Some, of course, try to transcend their dependence upon the vitae, which most often leads either to torpor or to a rapid shift in beliefs once the effects of a lack of blood begin to manifest. As for the Kiss itself, most Jewish vampires agree that it satisfies the requirement of near-painless slaughter ... at least, for those who choose to kill when they feed. Usually a vampire will use this as justification for feeding only on kosher animals, not for killing humans when feeding.

Most Jewish Kindred do try to obey the majority of the dietary laws, steering clear of animals designated as unclean. These include birds of prey, shellfish and mammals without a cloven hoof. Many avoid animals altogether, finding their blood to be less than palatable, but these vampires often have an even tougher time deciding on their prey than those who stick to animal fare. After all, it's easy to know which animals are and aren't kosher from the Torah, but how can a vampire know which mortals are or aren't kosher to feed from?

Jewish Kindred tend to fall into one of two groups on this issue. For many, since blood itself is against the laws of *kashrut*, they feel they have freedom of choice when it comes to prey. Indeed, it seems far more logical to many Kindred of this type to feed on non-Jews, or even upon the dregs of society, rather than pollute the chosen people with the curse of Caine. These are the vampires who are

more prone to using their lust for blood as an excuse to hunt down those they see as wicked.

The second school of thought on Kindred and *kashrut* teaches the opposite: Rather than polluting the Jewish people by feeding upon them, Jewish Kindred who feed only on those who keep the laws of *kashrut* are demonstrating their devotion to God. Just as Orthodox Jews avoid eating milk and meat within several hours of each other to keep the commandment not to boil a calf in its mother's milk, these cautious Kindred feed only from mortals who they know keep the dietary laws of the Torah. Depending on the individual vampire's age and level of devotion to tradition, this can range from feeding only on rabbis or Orthodox Jews to staking out a particular house or block to make certain no *chometz* (unkosher food) enters the area. Some Kindred go even further, breeding entire bloodlines of mortals and controlling their diets to be completely sure they keep *kashrut* diligently. Although a few mortals have been raised in captivity for this purpose, it's generally agreed that feeding on mortals who keep kosher of their own accord is best, thus it's far more common for one or several Kindred to "claim" a neighborhood (or, in older nights, a ghetto) that's already an Orthodox area and make sure it stays that way.

THE MANY AND THE ONE

If Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion, Hinduism may hold the distinction of oldest religion, period. The question of whether or not it's a monotheistic religion, though, is one that's been a puzzle to most Westerners since they first came into contact with Hinduism. On the one hand, Hindus have (by some counts) millions of gods to choose from, but at the same time all of these gods are just different incarnations of the same three (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), and even Vishnu and Shiva are often said to be aspects of Brahma, as well. To a Christian, the Hindu religion presents a hopeless conundrum about the nature of God and the Trinity; to a Hindu, though, the issue of monotheism isn't an important one. The religion simply is what it is, teaches what it teaches, and it has both many gods and few gods (or one god) at the same time. It's the meaning behind things, not the surface appearance of them, that has real importance, and

worshipping a particular incarnation of a god is a way of venerating the aspect of that god's personality or life which most appeals to a person.

A fundamental teaching of Hinduism is that apparent reality (referred to as *maya*) is in fact just a façade that hides the underlying truth of existence (*Brahman*). A nearly endless cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*) is a natural part of the order of the universe but is also seen as a painful thing, and Hindus strive toward a state called *moksha*, when perfection or self-actualization is reached and the person is no longer subject to *samsara*. The wheel of *samsara* is driven by *Dharma*, which is both the natural way of things and the goddess in charge of it; each person also has an individual purpose, or *svadharma*, and the extent to which a person fulfills that purpose impacts on his *karma* – the sum of all his good and bad deeds throughout all his incarnations. In order to reach *moksha*, a devout Hindu must work toward personal fulfillment and also help those around him, so as to avoid negative karmic debt and advance himself along the path of *Dharma* toward enlightenment.

The religion's emphasis on meaning over form makes differentiating "mainstream" Hinduism from "heretical" Hinduism more difficult than in most religions, since mainstream Hinduism has so many different gods and methods of worship. What generally distinguishes the sects in this chapter from those mentioned elsewhere is that these sects, while practicing what may be considered a perfectly acceptable form of Hindu belief in some cases, often violate the mores and customs of Hindu culture far more readily than most Hindus would. Most Hindu vampires still retain a reverence for life but at the same time understand that, in order to reenter the natural cycle of death and rebirth, they must eventually die. Some of the vampires in this section disagree, seeing their removal from the cycle of *samsara* as proof of their enlightenment or committing what (in the eyes of most Hindus) amounts to murder in the name of their radical beliefs.

KRISHNATI

Lord Krishna is one of the most frequently worshipped gods in the Hindu pantheon, being seen as a great lover, warrior and trickster at various times in his life. His lover aspect is the most dominant, and this is true among his Kindred followers as much as among his mortal ones. The undead Krishnati subscribe to an interesting philosophy

about their existence — they believe that the bliss brought on by the Kiss is evidence that the Kindred have not only been removed from the cycle of *samsara* but have been gifted with enlightenment in the process. This works backward from the idea that *moksha* is a state of complete bliss, reasoning that the pleasure conferred by the Kiss could only be created by someone who himself is already in a state of *moksha*. As an example of Kindred who aren't enlightened, the Krishnati point to the Giovanni and those few of other clans whose bite holds only terror and pain. To Krishnati, the Beast is something of an illusion, the reflection of the primal urges present in every human being, which only appears to be more powerful in a being that has achieved inner peace.

Krishnati believe that they have been gifted with the ability to free people from the pain of reincarnation. The sect has two major schools of thought on how this can be achieved. The first believes that the Kiss can be used on mortals as a foretaste of the bliss of *moksha*, so that they will recognize it when they achieve it themselves through meditation. The second school believes that *moksha* can be given by draining a mortal to death, because when the soul dies in a state of bliss, it will stay in that state for eternity (although as a shade, not as a physical body). Among Krishnati, the Embrace is typically reserved for Hindu holy men and women, usually already devotees of Krishna, who will most likely make good converts to the sect. Those who practice Tantrism are also considered good potential Krishnati, as they already know more about states of bliss than most other mortals.

The first school of the Krishnati is far more common in the Camarilla than the second, because of the second school's emphasis on killing mortals. Many of the first school remain on Humanity, while the second school favors the Path of Paradox, though the Path of Self-Focus and Path of Ecstasy aren't unknown.

DAKINI

The goddess Kali is probably one of the more fearsome figures in Hindu mythology, known for drinking blood, destroying demons and sometimes entering murderous frenzies. It's not surprising, then, that she is one of the more popular figures of worship among Hindu vampires. Kali is usually pictured as having black skin and fangs and as being the consort of Lord Shiva the Destroyer; in fact, at times when Shiva is otherwise occupied, she takes his place as the Destroyer.

The dakini as a sect are known in mortal mythologies, being the female cohorts of the goddess Kali. According to the myth, women who had been abused (most often physically or sexually by a man) would turn to the dakini for retribution. This is largely true among the Kindred Dakini sect, as well — the Dakini gain many converts from women who have been wronged. They don't conceal their existence as thoroughly as do some vampires, leaving clues for those women who might want to seek them out. Because Kali is depicted as having black skin and going into blood frenzies, a large number of female Assamites can be found among the Dakini, and the older ones are often made priestesses because of their skin color. Beyond avenging women who come to them, the Dakini emulate their goddess by seeking and trying to destroy those they consider demons. These often include Lupines, Cathayans and even certain types of vampires or mortals, depending on the particular Dakini's outlook.

Because of its emphasis on retribution and killing, the Dakini sect is not really represented in the Camarilla. It has a considerable following among female Hindu Cainites of the Sabbat, and also those of the Ravnos and Assamite clans. A "brother" sect also exists, devoting itself to Lord Shiva and emphasizing the destruction of evil mortals more than demons. Occasionally the two sects meet for orgies of blood and sex — again emulating the relationship between Shiva and Kali — but the rest of the time they operate separately. The Path of Paradox is common in both sects, and the Path of Blood is often found among the Dakini as well.

BRAHMANISTS

Where most Hindus worship a god or set of gods whom they find particularly relevant or appealing, Brahmanists instead worship *Brahman*, the ultimate reality and truth itself. It might appear that some difficulty would exist in establishing doctrine for a sect like this, but the Brahmanists take a very practical approach, basing their ideas directly on the Vedas and Upanishads. According to these sacred texts, within each person is a soul (*Atman*), which is a spark of the divine nature or "subtle essence" — in other words, *Brahman* itself. Brahmanists believe that the Kindred have a special ability that makes them unique among all creatures — the ability to

consume *Atman* from another creature and add it to their own. They feel that because they are already removed from *samsara*, this is the way in which they will achieve *moksha*; when a Brahmanist's store of *Atman* is great enough, he will find enlightenment. Most Brahmanists have respect for those who follow Hinduism, and even other religions with an emphasis on achieving enlightenment (such as Buddhism and Taoism), but most feel that *Atman* is wasted on most Judeo-Christians and Muslims and thus consider them to be fair game.

Unlike most diablerists, who diablerize in order to improve their generation, the Brahmanists don't discriminate — *Atman* is *Atman*, no matter who it comes from. In fact, a Brahmanist believes he can diablerize any intelligent being, including mortals and other supernatural creatures. Many also believe that the greater variety of *Atman* one can consume — from mortals, vampires and various other types of supernatural creatures — the more thoroughly one's own *Atman* becomes completed, leading to reaching *moksha* more quickly. Some of the Brahmin caste of the Ravnos have come in contact with the Brahmanist sect at times in the past, a few even joining it for a while, others trying to discourage its particular ideas, though they are long gone tonight. The ability to consume the essence of the Restless is prized among Brahmanists, as it allows otherwise inaccessible soul essence to be absorbed, and those who linger after death, refusing to reenter *samsara*, have no use for their *Atman* anyway. Those few times a vampire has appeared who has the ability, he has been elevated to almost prophetlike status among the sect.

Brahmanism is naturally far more common among independents and Sabbat than Camarilla vampires, as it's hard to maintain Humanity for long (or survive long among Camarilla vampires) when diablerie is a part of your regular routine. The sect's emphasis on Hindu doctrine and the destruction of the unworthy fits well with the Path of Paradox, which some Brahmanists adopt when their Humanity begins to wane. Some Brahmanists have also been known to follow the Path of Metamorphosis, Path of Power and the Inner Voice or Path of Self-Focus. Most believe they can achieve *moksha* by reaching the pinnacle of their chosen path, though only a few manage to achieve this goal.

HINDUISM AND THE PATH OF PARADOX

Although the three Hindu sects detailed in this section all lean toward the Path of Paradox, it's a mistake to assume that the path embodies mainstream Hindu belief. On the contrary, although the Path of Paradox draws heavily from Hindu theory and practice, it differs with Hindu practice on several main points. It's also a mistake to think of the Path of Paradox as a catch-all path for "those Eastern religions." Whatever points it differs with Hinduism on, the path is really a Hindu one, and most Buddhists, Taoists and so on would have a difficult time accepting many of its teachings, especially that vampires are somehow "outside of the natural order." To members of these religions, everything that exists is part of the natural order, and the notion of having to do something specific in order to become part of the cycle again is completely foreign to their thinking. With its emphasis on individual purpose and direction, the Path of Paradox is far more likely to be attractive to atheist or agnostic Kindred than to Buddhists or Taoists.

Most Hindus would agree that a being that has been made "immortal" without first achieving *moksha* has been removed from *samsara* unnaturally. The Path of Paradox teaches that it's possible to learn one's *svadharma* by advancing *maya*, furthering the illusions of existence so as to understand them. Most Hindus believe that rather than advancing *maya*, a person's duty is to try to see through it so as to gain understanding of *dharma* and knowledge of Brahman. While this one difference might be ascribed to the differences in attaining enlightenment for a Kindred as compared to those that work for mortals, the path's reliance on killing to return other vampires to *samsara* is more than most Hindus can deal with. Enlightenment is a personal matter, and the idea of forcing it on someone else — particularly by such violent means — is repulsive to most Hindus.

The main reason the Path of Paradox has found itself in the sects mentioned above is that as a Brahmanist, Krishnati or Dakini, it's very difficult to maintain Humanity, and the Path of Paradox shares many of the same assumptions and ideas as Hinduism. Kindred with very little Humanity remaining have done far crazier things than altering their belief system a little. In some cases, Kindred have even claimed to have switched from Humanity to the Path of Paradox (or, more rarely, the Path of Self-Focus) without a teacher, because of their devotion to the religious beliefs on which the path is based. After losing the firm grip on Humanity they once enjoyed, these rare vampires say that one night while meditating they experienced what felt like an epiphany, feeling a resurgence of their faith accompanied by a renewed sense of purpose. Only later did they realize what had actually happened.

None of this changes the fact that the teachings of the Path of Paradox are against the beliefs and morality of most Hindu vampires who care at all about maintaining their Humanity or their religion. Players who feel their character is the exception to this rule might benefit from seeing their characters utterly destroyed by the monsters they claim to want to join.

OTHER FAITHS

Throughout the world and throughout history, certain faiths seem to have had less potential for divergent interpretations than the norm. Certainly this is in part because fewer people practice Taoism, for example, than Christianity, but many of the Eastern religions teach such open-ended philosophies that it's difficult for a believer to disagree much without altering the entire fabric of the religion. Still, even these religions do have their Kindred variants, the most notable of which are explained below.

BUDDHISM

Because Buddhism has many different schools and emphasizes a personal approach to achieving *nirvana*, it's difficult to define what approaches are off limits. The Buddha spoke to his followers against killing, stealing, lying and using intoxicating substances, and most Buddhists hold to these teachings. The one major exception is the vampiric Tantriyā school, which draws on the beliefs of Tantric Hinduism and the Hindu Krishnati sect. Like the Krishnati, the Tantriyā Buddhists believe that their removal from the cycle of death and rebirth makes them enlightened beings and that the Kiss can be

used to give mortals a glimpse of the state of *nirvana*. Unlike the Krishnati, the Tantriyas believe that it's only a glimpse — killing someone for any reason, even through the Kiss, just sends him back into the cycle of death and rebirth, and this is a good thing to do only if the person is utterly unredeemable or unworthy. Some vampires in this sect practice Humanity, and the Path of Paradox is also common.

TAOISM

Something of a cross between nature worship and a philosophical system, Taoism might best be expressed as the belief in “the Force” of *Star Wars* fame. It's much more complex than that, though, and since Taoism teaches that the *tao* that can be expressed is not truly the *tao*, it's nearly impossible to teach someone how to be a “proper” Taoist or how to conceptualize the *tao* properly. Most Taoists do believe that the *tao* is in all things and that understanding it takes years of meditation and study. Some Kindred take a more direct approach to understanding the *tao*; since they believe that it's within all things, they seek to feed on as many different types of animals as possible. They believe that by doing this they can come to understand the common bonds between all living things, and that it's in their nature as vampires to understand living beings by their blood. Some who are influenced by the Hindu Brahmanists take a similar approach, trying to absorb the *tao* from others through diablerie, though their brethren who follow more traditional forms of the religion shake their heads, saying that the *tao* is never where a person seeks it but always around them.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is much less a religion than a set of moral directives, though many Confucianists also adopt a religion like Taoism along with it. Confucius himself did believe in divination using the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese system of fortune-telling. As far as schismatic Confucianists, they're difficult to find—Confucianism's only doctrines revolve around being a decent and honorable person. Some Kindred take these ideas to extremes, particularly in the Sabbat, using them to form a personalized approach to the Path of Honorable Accord. Confucius' teachings on leading a state properly have also formed the basis for Eastern Kindred to adopt the Path of Power and the Inner Voice.

SHINTO AND OTHER NATURE RELIGIONS

Modern Shinto is a form of ancestor worship that's peculiar to Japan and the islands surrounding it. Over the years, it has mixed quite a bit with Buddhism, but certain ideas like leaving gifts for departed family members and seeking guidance from the *kami* spirits are from Shinto alone. The most common practice for less traditional Kindred who practice Shinto is to treat Caine or Lilith as *kami* spirits, calling on them for advice and help. Some Japanese Kindred have been known to substitute a figure called the Jade Emperor for Caine and a “Scarlet Empress” for Lilith, though they don't often explain why to outsiders. It's not uncommon for Kindred from other shamanistic cultures to treat Caine and Lilith as ancestor spirits according to the practices of their own individual belief systems, though the traditional followers of these faiths generally look down on such Kindred for forsaking the true ancestors in favor of vampiric ones.







CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND THE KEN OF MORTALS

We must be greater than God, for we have to undo His injustice.
— Jules Renard

For some Kindred, the faiths and creeds practiced by mortals are insufficient, nothing more than feeble attempts by the ignorant to explain a world they cannot possibly comprehend. In their eyes and in the depths of their blackened souls, a religion that does not acknowledge the Kindred — indeed, that is not fully constructed around the Kindred, who are so clearly a dominant part of God's Earth — is no religion at all.

These Kindred, then, practice no religion bearing even the slightest resemblance to the beliefs of the kine. They follow instead the precepts of strange, alien faiths, created over the course of years or centuries by the Kindred themselves. They have very little in common with one another, save that they all focus on Kindred, not kine, as the primary movers of history. And why not? What good is a religion not oriented specifically toward those who practice it?

Most of these religions did not appear overnight, nor were most deliberately constructed, though some few did indeed begin as the creation of a single Kindred — perhaps as the basis for a cult of followers — and not

only survived but thrived beyond their creator's expectations. Most, however, developed slowly, pieced together bit by laborious bit as their precepts and doctrines evolved. Some have originated only in these Final Nights, but others are far older than most mortal faiths practiced tonight.

For all their variations, these religions do have one aspect almost universally in common. They require the adoption of an inhuman, alien mindset very nearly the equal of that required for many of the Paths of Enlightenment. That's not to say that all these creeds require their followers become cruel, deranged killers and torturers of small children, any more than do the Paths themselves (though that sort certainly exists). Rather, they simply have to step aside from patterns of thought and behavior that bind them to a world defined by mortal perceptions. As such, it's extremely difficult for Kindred following Humanity to last long while following the tenets of these faiths, and the vast majority of their worshippers cling to various Paths of Enlightenment instead.

SHORT-TERM GAINS

Despite the fact that some of these religions are truly ancient, the majority of Kindred who practice them are relatively young — older neonates and ancillae, primarily. These vampire-oriented religions do wonders for short-term understanding of the Kindred condition. They allow younger Kindred to find their place, give them the hope that a purpose and a guiding principle exist behind their apparent damnation. More than a few Kindred would likely not have survived their first century with their unives and their souls intact without discovering or being inducted into one of these religions.

In the long term, however, adopting one of these faiths can be disastrous on almost every emotional and psychological level. A strong sense of isolation tends to go hand in hand with the Embrace. The Kindred are truly set apart from the masses of kine surrounding them, and companionship between Kindred is almost always tainted by ambition, status and mutual suspicion, if not by outright manipulation and betrayal. Adopting a religion so drastically different from anything else around only adds to that alienation. The instant camaraderie this engenders with one's fellow believers is often transitory and never quite makes up for the larger emotional separation from the people and Kindred of the world.

Furthermore, as stated above, most of these faiths require a mindset and behavior incompatible with Humanity, yet, unlike the Paths of Enlightenment, they do not offer an alternate moral code strong enough to keep the Beast in check. If a worshipper also manages to come to one of the Paths of Enlightenment, she may have a chance; if not, she's almost certain to be dragged into the clutches of the Beast by her chosen faith. Between wassail and isolation-induced suicide, Kindred who practice these faiths have much higher mortality rates than those who follow more traditional religions.

This also means that those few followers of these religions who do survive to become elders are very often truly inhuman, utterly fanatic (even if they cloak that zealotry beneath a normal demeanor) and exceedingly dangerous.

Because they require at least a degree of inhumanity, most of these faiths are much more common in the Sabbat and the independent clans than they are in the Camarilla. Some young Camarilla Kindred do follow these creeds — assuming they have some means of learning about them — but most either drift back toward more traditional forms of worship or succumb quickly to wassail. Those few who do neither walk a fine line between their faith and their mortality, or else become some of the very rare Camarilla Kindred to follow a Path. In either case, they rarely attain any positions of influence, as their brethren are usually made uncomfortable by their presence.

FAITHS OF THE DAMNED

We cannot include every possible creed or religious movement the Kindred may have developed in the past twelve thousand years. Those described below are the most common, though still extremely rare in their own rights. They can either be used as is or function as models for Storytellers and players to create their own belief systems. Remember that any required actions or behaviors are not sufficient to take the place of a Path of Enlightenment or other moral system, though some might allow for certain modifications or reinterpretations of the Hierarchy of Sins.

CONSUMPTIONISM

God, as Nietzsche so succinctly put it, is dead. It was not, however, a recent passing; the almighty has been dead for thousands and thousands of years, ever since Caine diablerized him.

Consumptionist Kindred believe that God was, if not an actual physical entity, at least a spiritual being who could be reached with the proper magic and ritual. The killing of Abel, according to their doctrine, was not a sacrifice but the culmination of a ritual intended to summon God made manifest. Caine, always an ambitious sort, then proceeded to draw from God all His power, consuming the essence of the Most High.

For many years, Caine walked among mortals as a god, doing as he pleased, ruling as he chose. After a time, however, he grew lonely. He could never know the presence of an equal — was he not God, after all? — but none of the kine could comprehend his majesty, his power or his isolation. Thus Caine Embraced the second generation and in so doing spread out and diluted the power of the blood — the power of God.



Over the millennia, the other Kindred repeated Caine's act, passing portions of their own share of God's might on to their childer, and their childer after that, until the modern era, when the Kindred have grown so numerous and so distant from Caine that the latest generations carry hardly any power of God at all.

The world, Consumptionists believe, will come to an end only when the last Kindred, having reabsorbed all God's power into a single form once more, recreates Caine's feat and becomes God, allowing him to sweep away the ruins of the old world and give birth to a new one.

Consumptionism is one of the oldest of the Kindred faiths. It predates Christianity by thousands of years and might even predate Judaism and the Abrahamic concept of God, at least as understood by mortals. It has never been a large sect. Its steady diminishment began with the spread of the Abrahamic faiths, and it has shrunk even further since the creation of the Masquerade. Consumptionists tend to keep their religious affiliations secret from other Kindred, since those who have heard of them are aware of their penchant for ritual diablerie and tend to distrust them and persecute them on that basis.

When the two sects were first founded, Consumptionists were found equally in both. It quickly became clear that few of them could pass unnoticed in the Camarilla, with the sect's emphasis on preserving its members' Humanity, and by the modern nights only a tiny handful remains within the larger sect.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

The Kindred Are Holy. We carry within us a piece of God Himself. We are of God, and eternal. Slay no Kindred, nor allow your Kindred to be slain, unless his power is taken by another who might use it.

Consumptionists frequently form cults of kine around them, because they truly believe that they are divine beings. Few are foolish enough to ignore the Masquerade outright, but they do have a tendency to reveal more of their nature and abilities to their followers than most archons (or even templars) are likely to appreciate.

Unless circumstances offer them no other option, Consumptionists never kill another vampire unless they can also diablerize her. If a Kindred dies without also being consumed, they believe that portion of God's might is released into the world and thus cannot

be claimed by anyone until the final night when God is reconstituted in the body of the last vampire.

Venerate those nearer the source than you, for they hold within them a greater part of God's might, and so are holier even than you. Do not obey them blindly, but grant them all honor and respect due an embodiment of the broken God.

Consumptionists are expected to honor and — under most circumstances — obey those of lower generation. As stressed above, this doesn't mean mindless compliance, but a Consumptionist had better be able to demonstrate good reason for failing to heed the commands of her superiors in the sect. Kindred who do not follow Consumptionist doctrine do not have to be obeyed, as they clearly do not understand the way the world works.

Age is meaningless to Consumptionists as a measure of worth, though elders are respected for the power they wield and the wisdom they've (supposedly) gained. Only the number of generations between an individual and Caine himself truly matter in determining a Kindred's degree of holiness.

The world draws nearer its ending, for no Lord remains to chart its course and avert destruction. Gather your strength, and take God's might from those who are unworthy, for in the Final Nights, it may be you who are responsible for bringing God back into the world.

One aspect common to all Consumptionist sects is the practice of ritual diablerie. Any "unworthy" Kindred is fair game, and almost every Kindred outside the sect fits that particular description. This doesn't mean the Consumptionists waylay vampires in the street and drag them into back alleys to suck them dry, but they do watch for any and every opportunity to partake of another's power and soul. For rather obvious reasons, Consumptionism is far more common in the Sabbat than anywhere else, and they're known (by those who know of them at all) for deliberately provoking duels of Monomacy.

Consumptionists believe that at the end of the world a single Kindred will have consumed the essence of all the others, in essence becoming God.

First person to say "There can be only one" will be staked and left for the sun. Consumptionists certainly do not go about hunting their brethren with katanas and drinking straws. They believe that, when the time comes, circumstances will arrange for a single Kindred to be left standing. Their ritual diablerie accelerates the process, true, but don't make a war out of it.

Restrain yourself not for the sake of the mortals. They fulfill their place in God's world by providing for you, as you do by feeding on them. Their strength and their lives will eventually go to the one who is to come.

It's a logical step, inasmuch as religious zealotry is ever logical. If the Kindred are divine and will ultimately be responsible for returning God to the world — and if the Kindred are required, by their very natures, to feed on mortals — then by definition they must have the divine right to do so, and that must be the purpose for which mortals exist in this world.

Where things really get messy is in determining the exact meanings of this doctrine. Some Consumptionists interpret "restrain yourself not" to mean that they shouldn't hesitate to feed when, where and on whom they choose. Others take it as permission to indulge their wildest whims, even if feeding doesn't enter into it. Those who believe this way rarely survive to become elders, since a religious commandment that allows, even requires, the fulfillment of all whims goes against the very nature of Humanity and most of the Paths of Enlightenment, and plays directly to the desires of the Beast.

FOLLOWERS

Consumptionism appeals most frequently to Kindred who seek not only a justification of their existence but also a confirmation of their superiority to kine, and even to other vampires who do not believe as they do. Most Kindred are arrogant, but it requires a particularly powerful ego (or psychosis) to truly believe that you're nothing less than a piece of God and might well become God on the last night. At the same time, despite their egotism, most Kindred are relatively directionless when they first come to Consumptionism, lacking any sort of focus for their existence. The faith not only bolsters their preexisting belief in their own superiority, it gives them an outlet for expressing that superiority and a direction to follow.

Consumptionists must have absolute confidence in their own abilities, as their brethren may well attempt to consume their souls if given the slightest excuse to declare them unworthy of God's power. They tend toward strong Natures — Director, Fanatic and the like. Depending on whether they spend most of their time with other Consumptionists, their Deameanors may either be the same as their Nature, or else they might put on a face that they believe will hide their true beliefs. In no case, however, do they allow themselves to appear weak.

PATHS

Consumptionists most frequently follow the Path of Caine, Path of Honorable Accord and Path of Power and the Inner Voice. Some few Assamites have also managed to mesh Consumptionism with the Path of Blood, though the fit is imperfect and often breaks down in later years.

RITUALS

The most frequent Consumptionist ritual is the God's Heart Mass — which, despite the term “mass” and the fact that it is held on Sunday evenings, bears no resemblance to any service out of Christianity. All Consumptionists in a given city gather in a room sealed from all outside light. There, the highest-generation Kindred among them leads a prayer in honor of the lowest-generation Kindred present, who serves as a stand-in for the reformed God to whom they will all eventually contribute. Following the prayer, each Kindred present spills a bit of her blood into a communal vessel, from lowest generation to highest. They then each sip from the chalice, in the opposite order.

Once a year, on the Sunday nearest the winter solstice, Consumptionists conduct a ceremony to reenact the victory of Caine over God. This ceremony is identical to the God's Heart Mass, up to the point where the participants drink from the communal chalice. Each participant takes only the smallest sip, thus ensuring that a portion of the blood remains in the vessel. At this point, one of the kine is brought into the chamber, drained by a randomly chosen participant (though never the lowest-generation Kindred present) and then Embraced with the mixed blood of the Mass. Under most conditions, a mixed Embrace of this sort results in a Caitiff childe. Only if one of the participants is of substantially lower generation than the others will her blood run true and the childe rise as one of her clan. As soon as the Embrace is completed, the fledgling is killed and ritually diablerized by the lowest-generation Kindred present. She then offers a blessing on the other Consumptionists, and they depart. Truly devout Consumptionists fast for three nights following the recreation of Caine's ascension, but most don't bother.

VARIATIONS

In addition to “orthodox” Consumptionism, another, even smaller sect of Kindred calls itself Divisionists. They behave much as their Consumptionist parent sect and believe in most of the same doctrines. Where they differ is in their view on how the Kindred arrived where they are tonight. Divisionists do not believe that Caine stole God's

power and essence. Rather, they believe that God chose to divide Himself among many inferior beings — avatars, in a manner of speaking — in order to experience and examine from within the world he'd created. Unfortunately, after two or three generations, most of the Kindred forgot what they were. Only when all Kindred acknowledge that they are but parts of God can God reform himself and resume his place on the Throne of Heaven. The Divisionists would prefer to accomplish this by converting the other Kindred to their beliefs, but if they have to destroy and consume the heathens so that the sum total of God's power is shared only among those who believe, that's an acceptable solution as well.

DEIMOSIANISM

Despite the similarities in appearance and sound, Deimosianism has nothing whatsoever to do with demons, at least not in the Judeo-Christian sense of the term. Rather, the name comes from “Deimos,” child of Mars and god of dread.

Deimosian Kindred completely dismiss the Caine mythology as propaganda and outright lies, stories told to mislead the Kindred into forgetting their purpose in the world and adhering to foolish, mortal religions. The Deimosians have a much more esoteric origin for the race of Kindred.

When the human race was young, little more than family and tribal units trying to eke out a meager survival, the barriers between the realm of the corporeal and the realm of the spirit were weaker than they are now. The myths and legends of humanity remember a great many creatures and magics that no longer exist, but at the time they were quite real. Wild beasts, starvation, murder, war — early man had a great deal to fear.

The fears of man were made manifest in spirits of the other world, each specific terror generating a new entity that would plague mankind in turn, thus spreading the very horror that spawned it. Some of these fears slipped through the walls between worlds, thin and fragile as they were in those ancient days, and embodied themselves in corporeal form the better to interact with their mortal prey.

Where the spirits had formerly fed and gained nourishment from the very fears that created them, they found that physical forms required physical sustenance. Few notions frightened the primitive mortals of the day more than the notion of being consumed alive by hellish creatures their uneducated minds couldn't begin to comprehend.

These, then, were the ancestors of the Kindred clans — what those who subscribe to Abrahamic dogma call the Antediluvians.

Deimosian doctrine ascribes a very specific fear to each clan. These, they maintain, were the spirits from which the clans descended, which is why they still have some penchant for or affiliation with that particular terror even tonight. Of course, some of these “horrors” aren’t nearly as prevalent in the modern world, but remember that these spirits supposedly haunted mankind from the very dawn of civilization.

Clan	Fear
Assamite	Murder, death (being killed, not the actual state of death)
Brujah	Rage, violent bloodshed
Followers of Set	Serpents and other poisonous vermin
Gangrel	Wild beasts
Giovanni	(and their forebears) Death (the state of death, not the act of dying)
Lasombra	Darkness
Malkavian	Madness, possession
Nosferatu	Deformation (in ancient days, a deformed child was a sign of evil or demonic taint)
Ravnos	Betrayal, deceit
Toreador	Addiction
Tremere*	Witchcraft
Tzimisce	Injury and disfigurement
Ventrue	Enslavement

*Heated debates still rage among those few Deimosians who have heard of them as to where the Salubri fit into the equation. Most agree that the strange soul-stealing powers the Salubri were said to possess qualify them as well as the Tremere for “witchcraft,” and indeed the ancients who first developed Deimosianism seemed to place them in that category, but that explanation doesn’t hold water for others. The issue is a popular one for discussion among Deimosian Kindred and isn’t likely to be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction any time soon.

The clans did not all emerge at once, from one single grandsire. Rather, they appeared slowly, spread out over many centuries as civilization grew and evolved. Unlike standard Kindred historians, Deimosians maintain that the Toreador are the youngest of the initial thirteen clans, which is why the fear they represent — addiction — is somewhat less visceral and more subjective than most of the others.

It’s important to note that while Deimosian Kindred believe they are descended from spirits of terror made manifest, that doesn’t mean they wander around screaming “Boo!” and terrorizing the neighbors. Their faith offers an explanation for their existence and their place in the world, not an indication as to how they’re supposed to act. In fact, most Deimosians act in whatever fashion comes most naturally to them. After all, if a supernaturally powerful, undead, blood-drinking predator isn’t frightening enough, little they can do will make themselves any more so.

Deimosianism has been traced as far back as the late Greek classical period and the early Roman Empire. Deimosian myth has it that a vampire called Peisistratos, who was also a student of the great philosophers, set out to determine why none of the creation myths of the religions known to the world at that time made any mention of the Kindred. After a substantial amount of thought, he determined that the only reasonable explanation was that whoever (or whatever) created the world was not responsible for creating vampires. It’s known that Peisistratos was a great believer in gods and spirits, and that most likely led him to develop his theory of the “children of Deimos,” as he called the spirits from whom the Kindred supposedly descend.

For quite some time — many generations, in fact — Deimosianism remained a tiny cult, localized to a single community in Greece. It wasn’t until the Roman Ventrue Juterna Cunomora discovered and converted to Deimosianism that the faith began to spread beyond its initial borders (due mostly to Juterna’s wide-ranging influence, forceful personality and penchant for slaughtering any of her childer, ghouls and servants who didn’t subscribe to her own beliefs).

Tonight, the Deimosians make up a small but noticeable minority of the Sabbat, with sporadic followers who declare allegiance to neither sect. They’re almost unheard of within the Camarilla, due primarily to the Paths they’re almost forced to follow.

Some few Deimosian Kindred — fewer than a dozen throughout the entire existence of the faith — believe they have found corroborating evidence for their beliefs among creatures other than vampires. According to them, the spirits from which Deimosians believe they descended bear some similarities to spiritual entities in Lupine lore. The Lupines themselves have been known to attack Deimosians with an even greater ferocity than they do other Kindred; apparently whatever the werewolves think these spirits are, they’ve no interest in befriending them.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Unlike many other religions, Deimosianism lacks a codified set of rules and commandments. Deimosian Kindred are expected to do very little, and they are prohibited from doing even less. Rather than saddle its followers with a strict set of guidelines, Deimosianism simply encourages — even demands — that the Kindred act according to their natures and instincts.

The precepts of the religion maintain that because the Kindred descend from spiritual manifestations of mankind's fear, their proper place in the world is terrorizing and preying on the kine. Since this is, in essence, what Kindred instincts drive them to do anyway, little conflict occurs between a vampire's desires and the code required by her faith.

Where the Kindred begin running into trouble is in attempting to maintain control over the Beast. In demanding that they follow their baser instincts, Deimosianism doesn't allow its followers to maintain the mindset or behavior required to follow Humanity. Perhaps more surprisingly, the religion frowns on other codes of behavior, such as the Paths of Enlightenment, as well. Obviously, any sane vampire, and even most insane ones, acknowledge the need for such a code, but only a few are acceptable to the Deimosians. Deimosian Kindred who attempt to maintain Humanity or many of the Paths have, by default, fallen away from the teachings of the religion and are likely to be shunned — it not hunted down and slaughtered — by their former brethren.

FOLLOWERS

Deimosianism tends to attract Kindred of a particularly sadistic and inhuman bent. The thought processes required to accept its precepts as a core of faith are extremely difficult for anyone who still thinks like a human being to master, and arguments have been made that nobody who follows Deimosianism is entirely sane. While that's a bit of an exaggeration, the truth remains that Deimosian Kindred must fully accept themselves as other than human and must purge themselves of all traces of compassion for the kine on whom they feed.

Most Deimosian Kindred are ancillae. A few elders have managed to balance the opposed callings of Path and faith, but most Deimosians either succumb to wassail or convert to a more traditional religion before they reach such an exalted age. Neonate Deimosians are rare. Most young Kindred who attempt to join the sect are lured in by the notion of complete freedom without truly comprehending the beliefs they must accept in order to share in that freedom. Most quickly decide that their true calling



lies elsewhere, and most of those who remain fall to the Beast before managing to adopt a Path of Enlightenment compatible with Deimosianism.

The majority of Deimosian Kindred, twisted as they are (at least by mortal standards), tend to have Natures such as Monster and Deviant, though more control-oriented personalities are not uncommon. Most tend to have similar Demeanors, as few feel the need to hide what they are.

PATHS

Power and the Inner Voice is the most common Path among Deimosians. The Paths of Cathari, Night and Death and the Soul appear as well, but even these maintain some precepts that clash with the dogma of Deimosianism, and can be difficult to maintain.

RITUALS

The majority of Deimosians are also Sabbat and practice that sect's ritae accordingly. The faith does come with its own ceremonies and rituals, however, which are practiced in addition to all other considerations.

By far the most frequent rite Deimosian Kindred perform is the Litany of Phobos, so named because, in Greek mythology, Phobos was the spirit of panic, brother to Deimos. The Litany is supposed to be recited each time a Kindred prepares to feed. It is a chant, recited in Greek, that includes both a prayer of thanksgiving to Deimos, Phobos and the Kindred's ancestor spirits, and a brief description of the victim. This description must include at least one detail not immediately apparent, so the faithful often stalk a given meal far longer than the average vampire. Strictly speaking, the Litany should be performed in full view of the intended victim, but this is rarely practical. Feeding without first reciting the Litany isn't a major sin, but it is considered a minor infraction.

The Feast of Deimos occurs upon every new moon, which is the first of the month according to the ancient Greek (or, more accurately, Athenian) calendar. The Feast of Deimos requires that at least two Deimosian Kindred be present. If only one practicing Deimosian dwells in a given region, she merely commemorates the occasion with an extra recitation of the Litany.

The festival, when it does take place, requires the presence of as many kine as participating Kindred. The kine are bound or otherwise immobilized for the duration of the ceremony. The ceremony begins with the youngest Kindred present selecting a victim from among the kine, reciting the Litany, and then feeding — but only a bit — from that mortal. The next youngest Kindred present then selects a different

victim, recites the Litany and feeds lightly from that victim. This continues until each vampire present has fed from one mortal. The youngest then begins again, selecting a different victim — and his Litany must include a feature of the victim other than the one mentioned in the first "round." This continues throughout the night, the mortals growing steadily weaker (and presumably more terrified) until each Kindred present has fed from each victim. At this time, if any of the kine still live, the eldest Kindred present has the right to finish them off.

VARIATIONS

Other sects exist that believe the Kindred descend from spiritual entities made manifest, but they do not subscribe to the notion that these were embodiments of humanity's fear. The precise nature of these spirits varies from cult to cult. These are not technically offshoots of Deimosianism but rather sister religions that bear more than a passing resemblance.

Over the years, a handful of Deimosian Kindred have succumbed to the lure of a great spiritual entity hated and feared by the Lupines. This creature is, according to those who now serve it, the creator of the spirits from whence the Kindred sprang.

XALOSEK

According to the Xalosine Kindred, "Xalosek" roughly translates to "the way of Xalos" or "in the footsteps of Xalos." None of them can (or will) say what language this comes from, only that it is truly ancient. To date, no attempt at identifying the language has been successful.

Xalosine doctrine does not acknowledge a God, at least not in the sense of the Creator. Some believe the Earth is eternal, others that it developed through cosmic accident and random chance.

After the evolution of animals, Xalosines believe that the first sentient being was Xalos, the First Kindred. He appeared fully aware, perhaps from another world, and spent eons simply wandering the primordial Earth.

Xalos, however, grew lonely and wished for companionship. He took some of the animals of the Earth and altered them, shaped them in body, mind and soul with his great power. Thus Xalos created man. For a time, Xalos was pleased with his new companions.

But Xalos, for all his power, created man imperfectly. Perhaps it was the remnants of the beasts from which they'd been shaped, or perhaps Xalos had simply made some terrible mistake in sculpting their minds and souls. Whatever the case, Xalos quickly discov-

ered that his creations possessed an almost limitless capacity for evil. They were selfish, cruel, murderous. Some were strong enough to overcome these urges, to act as they knew they should, as their creator wished for them, but many did not. Blood was shed, and death came to Xalos' creations.

Perhaps, Xalos thought, they simply did not understand the harm they did to one another. If they could see the larger world, as he did, perhaps they might cease their evils. Xalos selected the best from among them and shared with them a bit of his own power, carried in his very blood. This was the first Embrace, and the creation of the second generation of Kindred.

These Kindred were not like Xalos, however. They were weaker, which was to be expected. They also possessed strange weaknesses, because frail human forms could not properly contain Xalos' power. Unlike their father, they had once been human, and they could not completely shed their connection to their fellow mortals. In the back of their heads and to the depths of their souls they heard the voices of mankind, not as individuals but as a single chorus. Unfortunately, the wickedness inherent in humanity was so strong, it blotted out the good, and only the most violent urges came through in mankind's song. Many Kindred succumbed to this voice, becoming bestial things, acting on the worst urges humanity had to offer. Some learned to deafen themselves to the sound for a time, keeping this hideous Beast in check, but it always emerged to wreak havoc.

A very few, however, found a balance. They learned to release the Beast in controlled fashion, to channel its violence and its rage to useful purpose. Xalos watched these more closely than his other children, and he learned that, when they were about, the violent tendencies of the mortals around them were lessened.

He understood, then, that the Kindred "Beast" came from the mortals around them, and that with sufficiently strong will they could contain that evil, take the burden from humanity's shoulders. This he made the ultimate purpose of his children, to undo the damage he had wrought with his imperfect creation of mankind.

This was the tale told by the Setite Amanda Attenborough to her coterie in London in 1837. This is the first recorded instance of Xalosek, though Attenborough maintained that she was passing along lore that had been passed down to her from prehistoric times. She was spreading the word of Xalos and his final instructions — and much to her surprise, a handful of Kindred heeded that call.

Xalosine Kindred believe they have a divine mandate to study and contain the Beast, the voice of all humanity's evils. They practice fighting it down, controlling it for brief periods. They believe that a vampire who learns to take full control of her Beast, able to draw upon its violence and its rage without losing conscious control, can draw the evil from the mortals around her, leaving them purified.

Unlike most other Kindred faiths, Xalosek draws many adherents who still maintain their Humanity and exists in equal numbers in both the Camarilla and the Sabbat. Sabbat Xalosine must hide their true feelings toward the kine, as the Sword of Caine frowns on those who show compassion to their dinner.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Never relent in your quest to understand and tame the Beast within. It is the darkness within humanity itself, but it is our responsibility. They are imperfect because we did not know how to make them what they should be. Quell the evil to serve and to help them, and in so doing honor our father's wishes.

This is more than a restatement of Xalosine doctrine, though it functions primarily as a reminder of their purpose. Most Xalosines also interpret this to mean that they should respect the mortals; why bother helping them if they are unworthy? Because of this, most followers of Xalosek do their utmost to avoid harming those from whom they feed and the people around them. This doesn't mean the Xalosine Kindred are pacifists, and they have the same mean streaks and bestial rages as any other vampire. Rather, they attempt to curb those impulses as much as is feasible. Should they kill by accident or in frenzy, or when circumstances dictate, they accept that as an unfortunate part of the process of taming the Beast and move on.

Those who have fully succumbed to the Beast without learning to control it are to be pitied, for they can no longer serve humanity or ourselves. Be merciful to them, and grant them a swift end.

Xalosines who fall into wassail are lost, subsumed by the evil of humanity. Those with even the slightest shred of hope for redemption are to be helped whenever possible, but it is the holy duty of all Xalosine Kindred to hunt down and destroy all wights, whether they are of the order or not.

Mortals fail to understand Xalos, and call him God. The Kindred fail to understand Xalos, and call him Caine. We know the truth, but leave them their illusions until they are ready to accept that truth, for they would not understand.

Quite simply, do not speak of Xalos or Xalosek to anyone outside the faith, unless you truly believe him to be a potential convert.

FOLLOWERS

Xalosek attracts those rare Kindred who still feel the need to do some good, to make the World of Darkness a little less dark. Some feel that they have committed some sin and are seeking a way to atone. Because so few elders can maintain that shred of Humanity and decency into old age, the majority of Xalosine are neonates and young ancillae. They must be extremely strong of will and conscience, as they'll be expected to dance with the Beast on a regular basis and come out on top.

Caregiver, Martyr, Masochist and Penitent are easily the most common Natures among Xalosine Kindred. Demeanors vary, as some attempt to hide their true calling by putting on any mask they can maintain, whereas others show very little discrepancy between what is within and what shows without.

PATHS

Humanity is quite common in Xalosek. Among those who do follow Paths, the Feral Heart and Honorable Accord are most frequent.

RITUALS

Few rituals or ceremonies must be practiced on specific dates or specific occasions. The vast majority of Xalosine rituals are intended for use whenever the individual feels the need for them. Most are meditations, mantras, relaxation exercises and anything else that can be used to calm the soul — and quiet the Beast.

VARIATIONS

Xalosek has only two known branches, and they differ on only one point: Xalos himself. Some believe that Xalos still walks the Earth, watching over his children and awaiting the day when mankind will be freed of the burden of evil he unintentionally thrust upon them. Others believe that Xalos is long dead, and they act out of honor for his memory and the rightness of his cause. The two sects often engage in heated philosophical debates on the subject, but otherwise tend to get along without incident.

GAIANISM

The Gaians take their name from the Gaia Hypothesis, a scientific theory first advanced in 1976. According to the Gaia Hypothesis, the planet Earth is a giant organism, and the patterns of weather, evolution and disease on it develop in response to its needs.

Although this is a relatively new theory, it has attracted a fair number of scientifically minded Kindred, most of whom had a distaste for traditional religion but still were looking for a purpose in unlife.

Gaianism provides that purpose, though its radical philosophy is certainly not for everyone. Gaians believe that vampirism, far from being a curse bestowed by a higher power, is a mutation or virus that developed because of a need for mortal population control. The mortal population is growing now at an ever increasing rate, and without population control it's a known fact that epidemics and starvation are all that can eventually result. Therefore, say the more humane Gaians, vampires are actually being merciful and sparing many mortals a great deal of pain by weeding out (relatively speaking) a few.

The Gaian sect began as a loosely knit group of like-minded Kindred who believed in the Gaia Hypothesis, but soon it merged with an older and larger group of nature-worshippers (both Greek and otherwise) who believed in the power of the Beast and considered vampires to be the ultimate predator. The scientific practitioners of the philosophy are greatly outnumbered now, but a few are still around; the majority of the sect subscribes to the older ideas of predation.

Most Gaians believe that it's their purpose in the natural order of Earth to act as predators and enforce natural selection on mortals. Though some Gaians put a much more scientific spin on the idea, most believe that it's not evil to act according to one's nature, and that the nature of the Kindred is a predatory one. More scientifically minded Gaians point to the law of natural selection and to vampires' extraordinary powers as evidence that they are the natural masters of humanity, but in practice this also translates to killing mortals whenever necessary and not apologizing for their own vampiric nature.

Most Gaians feel that the weaknesses of the vampiric condition are side effects of their mutation, but at the same time they don't make excuses for their weaknesses. Most accept the Beast as the reason for the heightened instinct that accompanies their condition. As for vampires' problems with fire and sunlight, Gaians who are inclined toward scientific speculation say that it's the inherent weakness of their cells that's to blame; it's only because Kindred are Embraced from weaker mortal stock, rather than being born with their powers, that they have these weaknesses. Unfortunately, this is the only way for vampires to be created, since the Kindred state renders its carrier infertile — though recent rumors about high-generation Kindred who can have children have aroused great interest among Gaians and are being investigated.

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

You are one of the instruments of Gaia, set upon the Earth it to protect it from the overwhelming spread of mortals. Personal goals are irrelevant. You were created as a force of nature and an instrument of natural selection.

Because they believe in no higher power other than the Earth itself — the supreme and most powerful being, as far as they're concerned — the will of the Earth is the will of the Gaians. As in most religions, most Gaians do have other pastimes besides practicing their faith, but Gaians' interests are often related in some way to the path they've chosen. Gaians usually have no qualms about killing when they feed, just as any other predator would. Most feel that controlling the mortal population is both their right and their duty to the Earth that created them.

Your instinct is a gift from the Earth and makes you superior to the enemies you hunt. Trust the Beast and let its insight guide you, for it gives you the power to accomplish your purpose. Indulge your instincts and act according to your nature, for such are the gifts of Gaia.

A major tenet of Gaianism is the balance that must be kept between instinct and reason. The instinct inherent to the Kindred form is seen as an asset, but Gaians also believe that they were created from mortals, rather than some other species, because mortals possess reason — which is why, with both instinct and reason, the Gaian is the ultimate predator. Gaians walk a fine line, embracing their instinctual nature along with reason while denying the Beast's most extreme urges. Abilities such as Awareness, Empathy and Investigation are common, and some Gaians have also found solace in the rare Path of Harmony, which also teaches a balance between reason and instinct.

Those who worship imaginary gods, whether mortal or vampire, are fools who cannot help you. The only Law is the law of nature and survival of the fittest, and the only Word is the will of the Earth. Try to convert those vampires who show promise, but do not expose too much to the foolish who have forgotten their place. You are only Kindred with those who know their true purpose; all others are as the mortals, blind. "Supernatural" is a term given only to that which is difficult to understand; in reality, all that exists is natural, for it flows from the same source: the Earth.

Many Gaians harbor a great feeling of superiority over those who they feel have created shallow belief systems and imaginary gods to fill the insecurities in their subconscious. The Gaian knows why no religion

has yet been sufficient to sustain vampires — only when a vampire returns to the service of the Earth, who created him to protect it, can he truly be completed. "Salvation" is an illusory concept, dreamt up by fragile minds that couldn't cope with reality. Gaians are always on the lookout for those who they think will subscribe to their philosophy, generally hunters, outdoorsmen, hitmen and others intimately acquainted with killing.

FOLLOWERS

Gaians most often come from either scientific backgrounds — though the sect has also attracted environmentalists, animal rights activists and (former) vegetarians — or animist religions. Gaians can be found in both the Camarilla and the Sabbat, though they're more prevalent in the latter because of the emphasis on killing. The most common clans in the sect are Gangrel, Brujah and Nosferatu.

Loner, Rogue, Deviant, Fanatic and Guru natures are most common, though the group has something to offer interested parties of nearly any personality type. Demeanor is usually similar to Nature in this sect, though not always. Because of their emphasis on the power of instinct, Gaians often favor disciplines like Auspex, Animalism and Protean, though they see all Disciplines as potentially useful.

PATHS

While some Gaians still cling to Humanity, most Gaians see killing as a natural part of vampiric existence, so Paths are more common. Popular paths include Power and the Inner Voice, Honorable Accord, and the rarer Paths of Harmony and the Scorched Heart. Some Gaians have also adopted the Path of Death and the Soul and Path of Ecstasy.

RITUALS

With their disdain for traditional religion, the Gaians understandably don't have any rituals to speak of. National meetings do occur every year, although many of the Sabbat Gaians don't attend.

VARIATIONS

Several varying viewpoints exist within Gaianism. Some Gaians take issue with the idea that the Earth is the only creator and no God exists and worship the goddess Gaia (or Demeter, or Cybele, or any of a number of Earth gods or goddesses) supplementary to their work as predatory forces. These Gaians are the most likely to stay on Humanity, but it's still a difficult path to take when so many other Gaians kill so freely.

The other main dispute within the sect is over the role of emotion in vampiric existence. Where most

Gaians accept emotion as both a component of instinct and a holdover from their mortal days, some consider it to be only one or the other, which alters their belief systems a bit. The few remaining scientific Gaia Hypothesis scientists are among those who hold the second position: Emotion is entirely different from instinct, a mortal weakness, and as such should be eliminated in favor of truly instinctual living. These are the Gaians most fond of the Path of Death and the Soul, Path of the Bones and Path of the Scorched Heart.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are those Gaians who believe emotion is the human equivalent of instinct and should thus be indulged at every opportunity. These Gaians, in addition to the standard predatory acts, still engage in all manner of other vices, including drugs, sex and any other taboo they think of violating at a given time. It's not evil to act according to your nature, they reason, so why hold back? These Gaians most commonly follow the Path of Cathari, Setite Path of Harmony or, in a few cases, old Western Road of Paradox.

PRIMORDIA

Primordia, or the Via Primordia as some of its adherents like to call it, is one of those Kindred belief systems whose development is impossible to trace, but its adherents believe it to be even older than the Caine myth. It has no written doctrines, no holy scriptures, being passed from sire to child completely by oral tradition, but as long as anyone can remember, some Kindred have had a mystical bent, and some of these have always been drawn to the Primordian tradition. It takes many forms, shrouded in the gods of a hundred different ages, but it has endured for thousands of years now and shows no signs of disappearing. The belief systems of modern Primordia show quite a bit of influence from today's scientific theories, but it's an adaptable religion, and its adherents don't really seem to notice a contradiction between religion and science. Knowledge is knowledge, after all, and all knowledge is important to Primordians.

The teachings of Primordia are simple enough on the surface, though they draw from many different religious traditions, and many Primordians spend long years contemplating their meaning. It shares certain tenets with Consumptionism and others with Deimosianism, but Primordia is distinct from both, though converts between it and other religions aren't unheard of, since Primordia's belief structure is an adaptable one. Even those who eventually leave the fold take something of Primordia's outlook with them,

perhaps passing it on to their new sect; its teachings are old enough that many Primordians have said they feel they "fit" somehow, on a deep, inner level they can't explain.

Primordia teaches that in the beginning was the void, and within the void were three entities or spirits. The three spirits were primal forces of the universe, but at the same time they possessed an intellect beyond the understanding of any being alive tonight. They were greater than mere gods; they were the sum of all things to come, and it was their playground. Being young spirits, they were curious and flighty, and so they occupied much time speaking and playing with each other, testing their limitations. They found that they had none, for they contained within themselves all the power that had existed or ever could exist. They were the Primordia.

Soon, though, the spirits became bored with this existence. They tired of inventing new games to play with each other and wished to create playthings that were outside themselves. And so they set about creating the cosmos: first the stars, then the planets. In the process, they found that each had a different affinity—the first, for the act of creation itself; the second, for maintaining the creations once they had been called into existence; the third, for destroying creations that the three found unsatisfying. In creating the universe, the Three each divested themselves of some of their essence, for to create something outside themselves, they had to give up control over a small part of themselves. Still they were far more powerful than any sun or star in their universe, and eventually they tired of setting the heavenly bodies in motion around or into each other.

And so it was that the Three decided to experiment with creating life. As the pattern had now been established, the first acted as creator, the second as preserver, and the third as destroyer, and together they fashioned parts of their essence and their intellects into living beings. No two species were identical, and all had their own quirks, so the Primordia had much to watch for a long time. But after observing their creations for many years, the Three again began to grow tired of their endless and all-powerful existence.

This time, they decided that they must split themselves into smaller spirits, so as to experience the whole of their creation more fully. The Three each decided that they would infuse these minor Self-spirits into certain of the living beings of creation, while a part of their essence would remain above to oversee creation. And so this is what they did, in the earliest ages of civilization of men, for the Earth had a great variety of

life in which the Three could amuse themselves. They each chose many among the various animals and men of the time, but in not consulting each other in the choices, the Three found themselves sharing possession of some of the new playthings on Earth. They also discovered that they could not leave the bodies of these new creatures, and that to nourish their own great powers, mortal food soon became insufficient, giving way to a thirst for the life blood of others. These hybrids of Creation, Destruction, and Preservation eventually became known as the Kindred. In time, the lingering essences of the Three forgot themselves and their original natures, splintering into many different spirit forms and taking on new aspects. It was these spirits who became known and worshipped as gods by the peoples of the world; and the spirits became content with this existence, forgetting the greatness they had once possessed.

Primordians believe that each of the clans' progenitors was created by a different union of two or all three of the Primordia spirits, and these essences are passed down to their childer even to this night. All Kindred have some of the essence of the Preserver spirit — that's why they can exist for so long without feeding — and the Destruction spirit — in the form of

the Beast — but only some of them inherited Creation essence as well. The Primordians believe that the spirits who created the Kindred and forgot themselves will one night be reformed through a perfect vampire. This vampire will act as the vessel for all three of the spirits to reintegrate completely — into a single great spirit, according to some — and the spirits' power will then simultaneously tear the vampire apart while setting the spirits free and remaking the world in a more perfect form. Most Primordians refer to this person as the Avatar. Some say the appearance of the Avatar will be a spontaneous occurrence, while others say it will be a constructed mutation or new bloodline, but all agree on one thing: When the perfect one comes, all others must yield their essences to him so that he can integrate all three spirits and recreate the world. Until then, Primordians strive to gain as much power and as many converts as possible, hoping that when the spirits reform, the power they've amassed may allow them some amount of control in the new god-consciousness.

Or, in other words, the messiah is coming, and he's going to eat your soul and recreate the world in his image.



DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

Primordia shares principles with many other religions, mortal and Cainite alike, including Christianity and Hinduism. Since Primordians believe that their religion encompasses all other religions, converts are welcome from any religious tradition as long as they believe in the doctrines of the sect. Primordians share certain ideas with both Consumptionists and Deimosians, as mentioned above, but their application of these ideas is a bit different.

According to the traditions of the Primordia faith, the clans are claimed by different combinations of spirits. The Nosferatu, Ventrue, Giovanni and Tzimisce are said to have inherited the Preservation essence alone; Malkavians, Toreador, Tremere and Ravnos have both the Preservation essence and the Creation essence; and Brujah, Gangrel, Lasombra, Assamites and Setites are of Preservation and have a greater than normal Destruction essence. These designations are based on the Disciplines, philosophy and "average" mindset of each clan. As for Caitiff, some Primordians believe they take whatever essences their sire held, while others feel that it differs on a case-by-case basis.

Like the Consumptionists and the Hindu Brahmanists, Primordians engage in ritual diablerie, but for somewhat different reasons. Because Primordians believe that all power in the universe proceeded originally from the Three who created it, they also feel that helping the Three to return to a more consolidated state helps the spirits to regain their vast and superior intellect. If the supreme vampire were to come while the Three were still scattered among thousands of different Kindred, even he would lack the power necessary to bring the Three together within himself — and if that were to happen, everyone would be confined to this imperfect world for eternity, without any possibility of a final reward. Primordians believe that they are doing the Three a great service by helping to collect spirit essence within themselves through diablerie. Most believe that if they do a good enough job of collecting the essences of other Kindred, the Avatar will be able to take care of the rest.

Primordians believe that everything that exists was created by the Three Primordia, and so every bit of knowledge they can learn will make them better keepers of the Primordian way. Most have a decidedly spiritual interest, though, so Knowledges such as Occult and Professional/Expert Abilities relating to astrology and religion are more common than sciences or "book learning." All skills are similarly considered to be important, but those that relate to gaining

knowledge or to fighting (to help subdue those whose essence must be taken) are often pursued with the most fervor. For Disciplines, many Primordians feel it's necessary to develop one's in-clan Disciplines to the fullest potential to learn as much as possible about their own essences before experimenting with others, though many do pick up a few levels of Auspex, Obfuscate or Fortitude anyway just to be safe.

FOLLOWERS

Primordia is one of the more varied Kindred religious groups; many of its members retain the trappings of another religion, seeing the Three as the Christian Trinity or the Hindu Triad while still upholding the teachings of Primordia over those of their old religion. Some newer converts come from neo-Pagan traditions that emphasize universality of all gods. What all Primordians share is an interest in the supernatural, a lust for power and the belief that the undead state is one of exaltation, not a simple "curse." Deep within the unbeating heart of many Primordians is the secret desire to be the one who amasses the most power, so that when the reintegration of the Primordia occurs, she will be able to exert the most control over the newly formed god. For most Primordians, this is a secret desire not to be shared with fellow Primordians, a private failing that most don't realize so many of their brethren also share. A few, mostly those on the Paths of Night or Cathari, openly brag about how they will be the new god once the Avatar comes, but other Primordians usually find themselves very uncomfortable around such Cainites, shunning them for making light of their own moral lapses.

Because of its emphasis on diablerie, Primordia is very uncommon in the Camarilla, being confined mostly to the independent and Sabbat clans. Toreador and Tremere who do find their way to the sect are welcomed with open arms, since vampires of Creative essence are rare in Primordia. Most of the members of Primordia are neonates, and the few older vampires who have survived have done so by adopting a Path. Natures and demeanors vary widely, but derangements are pretty common, particularly Sanguinary Animism and Megalomania.

PATHS

Approaches to Primordia can be as varied as the Kindred who practice it, but nearly all who survive in the religion more than a few years adopt some path other than Humanity. The Paths that integrate most successfully into the Primordian belief system include the Path of Metamorphosis, Path of Blood, Path of Caine and Path of Self-Focus.

RITUALS

Most rituals in Primordia are based on the rituals in the cultural or religious tradition of each individual believer, as each Primordian tries to demonstrate devotion to the Three in his or her own way. One ritual, though, has endured through the centuries as a distinctly Primordian practice. It's known as the Rite of the Three, and it's performed when a member of the Primordia meets an untimely end.

Primordians' ultimate goal is to stay active and gain power long enough to meet the Avatar eventually and be diablerized by him, so as to help bring about the reintegration of the Three and the recreation of the world. Frequently, though, the Jyhad gets in the way, and then comes the Rite of the Three. Although its origin has long been lost to the ravages of time, Primordians believe that it allows the essence stored within a perished Kindred to be transferred to the remnants of the Three who still observe from above. Since those spirits will become part of the new god-consciousness when the Avatar is torn apart, it's the next best thing to meeting the Avatar face to face. Still, since the person's consciousness is lost with death, it's only the spirit essence that survives, so no matter how much power the dead Kindred might have gathered, her chance of heading up the god-consciousness is lost when she dies.

The Rite of the Three is performed by the most powerful Kindred who knew the deceased; power is determined both by generation and by mastery of Disciplines and esoteric knowledges. The rite must be performed within three nights following the Kindred's death. If it's a neonate, a body usually remains, but in the case of older Cainites, ashes can be used instead. If no remains exist, the ritual can be performed using a piece of parchment with the subject's True Name written upon it. The remains or parchment are placed on a raised altar, and the person performing the ritual sprinkles incense and copper powder on it while reciting the names of each of the Three — Creator, Preserver, Destroyer — usually in the magical language of Enochian. Three circles are made around the body when the powder is sprinkled: the first oriented from head to foot, perpendicular to the ground, the second running along the waist perpendicular to the ground, and the third going around the entire body, parallel to the ground. Upon finishing tracing each circle with a hand, the performer of the ritual sprinkles more powder. At the end of the ritual, the body or parchment is set on fire (by supernatural means, if possible), and the fire burns blue, red and green because of the ritual powder. Whether the ritual has any true magical

significance remains unknown to all but the oldest vampires in the sect, but it is known that no vampire who has received the ritual has ever been known to return as a wraith.

VARIATIONS

The variations of Primordia are too numerous to mention all of them by name. Some Kindred prefer to call the Three by names of bygone Greek, Egyptian, Sumerian or other gods, but no major points of divergence exist; Primordia is a pretty personal religion anyway. A few Primordians claim that the religion has its roots in the theology of the Lupines, but those few who have managed to approach the Lupines on the subject and return have mentioned being called children of the "evil" Destruction spirit, regardless of their clan. Most Primordians who pay any attention to these stories say that, as children of only one of the three spirits, the Lupines or other supernaturals may have some idea of how things began, but their conception of it has been twisted by only having access to one side of the story.

Some of the African followers of Primordia have chosen for themselves the name "Lesser Children of the Orisha." When asked by other Primordians what the greater children might be, these Kindred smile mysteriously but do not answer.

ANTECAEDISTS

The word "antecaedist" literally refers to someone who wishes for a return to "before the fall" or "before the attack." The term has been applied externally to one of the most fanatical, but also one of the most moral, of the Kindred-created religions; members more often refer to themselves simply as "the faithful." It's not so much a return to the time before the Fall of Lucifer that they want; rather, their goal is to fix the situation that started the problems leading to the Fall. This, they believe, was nothing less than the usurpation of God by an outside entity.

In the beginning, say the Antecaedists, was God the Creator, the one and the true, who made the world and all the beings upon it. Somehow, sometime, though, God came under attack from an artificial and external Godhead, and it took God's office by merging with Him. Theories on how this happened abound — some Antecaedists believe a war of the gods of many different lands occurred in ancient times, while others believe the Godhead was nurtured in the young Creator's fertile subconscious and subsequently broke away and assumed control. However it happened, though, the Antecaedists all agree on one thing — the Godhead is evil and must be removed so that God can be purified once again.

Antecaedists typically consider all of the acts of cursing and vengeance in the Old Testament to be the act of the Godhead, while the just and loving acts represent those times when the Creator was able to regain control of itself for some time. This is why the Hebrew sometimes refers to God by one of His names and other times as *Elohim* ("the Hosts"), for the Godhead had several parts. The battle between the two raged throughout the Old Testament, with each drawing power from believers (the Godhead from Elohist Jews, the Creator from Yahwists) to fight the other. Finally, the Godhead thought of a new idea — it would send its avatar to Earth to perform miracles and gain it many new followers, so that it could overpower the Creator forever.

That was 2,000 years ago, and Jesus Christ was that avatar. By all accounts, the plan worked, judging by how widespread Christianity has become. Most Antecaedists believe that the Creator was able to survive only by creating Islam as the spread of Christianity threatened to overwhelm it. Although none of the originators of Antecaedism were themselves Muslim, most Antecaedists believe that Islam's emphasis on a single God (rather than a Trinity) places it with Judaism as an anti-Godhead religion. In the modern nights, far more Muslims exist than Jews, which is why the Antecaedists credit Islam as the force keeping the war in heaven from being lost completely.

As for the war in Heaven itself, Antecaedists believe that the angels were originally just extensions of God's will with very little free will of their own. When the Godhead usurped control, though, some of them gained self-awareness, realizing that something had gone wrong. Samael, now called Lucifer, was at the head of these angels, who fought valiantly to free their Lord from His bondage, but the Godhead, possessing the throne of God, possessed all the powers of God as well and cast these rebels out of paradise. Most Antecaedists don't believe Lucifer was sent to Hell, since that would imply he was evil, but they do agree that he and his supporters were barred from ever entering Heaven again, confined to the imperfect physical world, which was painful enough given their perfect forms and nature.

Antecaedists trace their roots back to the fourteenth-century Romanian Tzimisce *koldun* Lord Valya. According to early Antecaedist writings, Valya was one of the rare Tzimisce even before the nights of the Sabbat to remain on the Via Humanitas. He apparently also had a wife, a virtuous mortal Christian woman who eventually allowed herself to be burned as a witch rather than raise a fist against her aggressors.

Suffering a great crisis of faith after her death, Valya first hunted down and killed all those who had been responsible and then took to investigating obscure theology in an attempt to learn how something so terrible could have happened to his beloved. Some of the texts suggest he had help in his research from a mortal sorcerer of some considerable influence, and it's known that he had help from others in spreading his findings throughout Europe. Those who helped him are referred to in the writings by Tarot symbols, as the Magician, the Fool, the Devil and the High Priestess. It's been speculated that the Magician might refer to the lost Medici child Angelo de Medici, who resurfaced and supposedly traveled to Romania several times around the same period as the dates on Valya's writings. The identities of the other three are a matter of speculation among Antecaedists; some sources speak of the High Priestess being French or the Fool being of Roma descent, but the validity of these is in dispute. Nonetheless, the four are second in importance within the sect only to Valya himself, since they were the first to spread Valya's teachings to others. Some Antecaedists even refer to them as "the prophets."

DOCTRINE AND DOGMA

God is your God; there is none else. Worship only Him. Giving praise or prayer to saints or messiahs only strengthens the evil Godhead. Your faith will be rewarded when God is purified once again.

This is probably the most important doctrine of Antecaedism — whatever you do, don't help the Godhead in any way. Since they believe that the Godhead is responsible for all the suffering that was ever inflicted in the name of God, including wars started by Christians, they consider it to be evil and want nothing less than its eventual removal. Most also believe that once God is restored to control of Himself, He will reward those who helped free Him from the Godhead's control.

Religion and belief are powerful. Work to strengthen those faiths that worship the Creator, and undermine those that give power to the Godhead. Always strive to be moral in these acts, but if you must resort to desperate measures, do not balk at your duty.

Antecaedists believe that most of the commandments in the Old Testament — excluding those that commanded a certain class of people (witches, people of a certain bloodline) should be put to death — were given by the Creator, and so they strive to follow them as much as possible. If it comes down to violating her moral code or aiding the Creator in some way, an Antecaedist will often choose the latter. The cause is

the most important thing, and whatever is in the interests of the Creator is always the moral thing to do, whether a particular person's limited view of morality is able to accept that or not. This isn't to say that Antecaedists don't value morality, just that when push comes to shove, it's the religion and not the moral code or path that usually wins out. Antecaedists are a zealous lot.

Always keep your eyes open. The Godhead works in mysterious ways: Sometimes even the Beast is its ally.

Although it allows for occasional lapses, this is a warning against allowing oneself to fall to the Beast. A ravenous, amoral Antecaedist is of no use to anyone.

FOLLOWERS

Antecaedists find converts from many traditions, including Jews, Muslims, Luciferians and disillusioned former Christians. Some in the sect are even still Christian, though invariably of one of the few denominations that rejects the idea of the Trinity. A few Hindus have joined as well, though the presence of a triad of major gods in their tradition makes some Antecaedists uncomfortable. A fairly large contingent of Nazoreans has also joined, though "fairly large" is a matter of scale. Generally what the followers share is a belief that something is fundamentally wrong with Christianity, whether its doctrines or the atrocities that have been committed in its name throughout the years. From that point, some find their way to the Antecaedists, or an Antecaedist finds them first and explains the doctrine.

Since Antecaedism predates both the Camarilla and the Sabbat by more than a century, it has more than its share of supporters in both sects, though it's more common in the Camarilla. Sabbat Antecaedists tend to take a more radical approach than their Camarilla brethren: feeding only on mainstream Christians, for example, rather than trying to spread subtly anti-Godhead doctrine within the churches. Whether Camarilla, Sabbat or independent, though, nearly every Antecaedist considers his membership in that organization to supersede any sect affiliation or duties. All skills and knowledge are considered to be important, though Occult and religion-related Abilities and influences are more common among Antecaedists than among most Kindred. Disciplines are seen as a personal matter, but most Antecaedists won't hesitate to teach their Disciplines to their brothers and sisters in the sect.

PATHS

Humanity is by far the most common path among Antecaedists; for all the problems it has with traditional Christianity, Antecaedism is still a moral creed. Those who do choose to follow paths have the greatest success with the Path of Honorable Accord, the Path of Power and the Inner Voice or more rarely the older Road of Heaven.

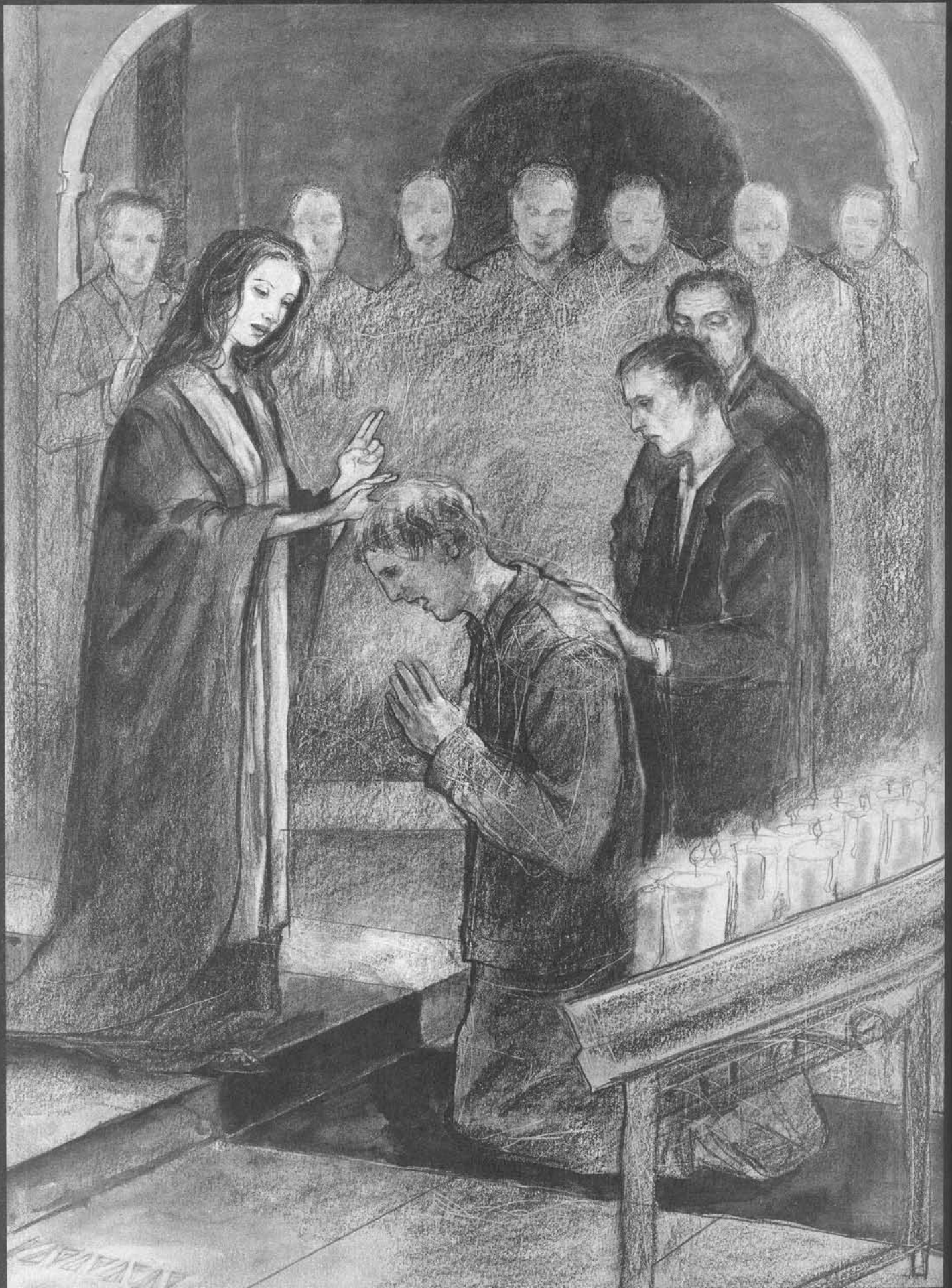
RITUALS

The Antecaedists don't have any rituals that are peculiar to their sect, though many of the individual members still perform the standard life-cycle rituals and observe the holidays of Judaism or Islam. Antecaedism, for many, is a belief system that complements and completes their religion rather than replaces it. Because they believe that the Godhead currently controls the afterlife and that heaven has become nothing more than mindless servitude of the Godhead as a result, the Antecaedists have been searching for a ritual to use when one of their number dies, to prevent the person from being absorbed by the Godhead. Thus far, no one has been successful in creating such a ritual, and most Antecaedists admit they really aren't sure where to start.

VARIATIONS

Several variations exist within Antecaedism, but none really claims to be the correct one; it's more a matter of philosophy. Not all Antecaedists agree on the origin of vampires — some accept the Caine myth, while others believe that vampires are the offspring of Lilith and Lucifer, created as Lucifer's army against the Godhead. Those who accept the Caine myth dispute about exactly when the war in Heaven took place — whether it was before or after Caine was cursed, and thus whether it was the Creator or the Godhead that cursed him. Most believe that the Godhead did the cursing, and so when the Creator is returned to power, He'll remove the curse so unjustly imposed on Caine in response to his honest sacrifice. Those who believe the Creator did the cursing also think they might be forgiven when He is returned to power, but generally they are much more stringent about upholding God's laws (however they see them, based on their religious traditions) since they want to enjoy His good graces.

Nazoreans and certain of the more historically minded Jews and Christians in the sect sometimes debate just who was the avatar of the Godhead. Some believe that Jesus was actually an attempt by the Creator to reassert power but that his teachings were perverted toward serving the Godhead by Paul, who was the Godhead's true avatar.





CHAPTER FOUR: THE FACES OF FAITH

This chapter synthesizes much of the information presented elsewhere in this book. It is a collection of cults and conspiracies built around core faiths from the esoteric to the malevolent. Remember, once again, that many of these beliefs are rare or secret. Storytellers, beware of overusing them, lest their value lessen due to ubiquity.





FIRST BLOOD

To all outside appearances, First Blood is a nomadic Sabbat pack. Consisting of anywhere from four to six Cainites (depending on recent events), it seems to behave as any similar pack would be expected to. What the rest of the Sabbat doesn't know is that First Blood is actually a mobile cult of Xalosines with an unusual interpretation of the doctrine.

Unlike the majority of Xalosine Kindred, First Blood's members believe they can best learn to control and understand the Beast by unleashing it at every available opportunity — not merely under controlled conditions — and allowing it to run wild. By observing their own frenzied behavior, as well as that of their packmates, they believe they will gain a greater understanding of how the Beast affects vampires physically, psychologically and emotionally.

Of course, frenzy isn't a neat or safe habit to get into. Rather than cause random destruction and the deaths of many of the mortals whom the cult is actually devoted to helping, First Blood vigorously hurls itself into any and every violent confrontation available. Since the Cainites they

encounter are not of Xalosek, and therefore aren't working to remove the taint of evil from mankind, no harm is done to the cause by killing them off in obscene numbers.

First Blood is led by the Ventrue *antitribu* Chloe Edison, ductus, and the Tzimisce Jebediah Peacock, pack priest. The pair has been together for nearly a century, an astonishing unifespan for active Sabbat soldiers. Both have been offered higher positions in the sect, and both have turned them down in order to continue their Xalosine work. Jebediah's sire was one of Amanda Attenborough's first converts, and the priest maintains a fanatic devotion to Xalosek far stronger than his loyalty to the Sabbat itself. Edison, although just as faithful, is a bit calmer and more rational in her devotion and has prevented Jebediah from talking his way into serious trouble on more than one occasion. The pair of Cainites, and most of their underlings, truly believe that their frequent frenzies are slowly but surely guiding them toward a complete understanding of the Beast. Because of this, they're perhaps overly anxious to snap its chains. They've developed a

reputation for berserk brutality even among other Sabbat packs, who normally steer clear of First Blood during combat.

HISTORY

First Blood didn't begin as a cult of Xalosek. It was originally a normal Sabbat war pack, led by a sadistic Brujah *antitribu* called Luther. It spent years terrorizing Camarilla towns in the American West in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some of the local princes even put up wanted posters with Luther's face on them, hoping that the proffered reward would inspire some hapless mortal to hunt him down. The kine would die horribly, of course, but at least he might lead the Camarilla sheriffs to the pack.

When Luther was assigned a new priest, he didn't really even notice; the Brujah had never been much for the ritual aspects of Sabbat existence. Jebediah Peacock had been born in this part of the world decades earlier but had spent most of his time post-Embrace in the Old World. It was there that he learned the doctrines of Xalosek from his sire, and he was ready to put them to use now that he'd come home.

Slowly, Peacock began to question the other members of First Blood, seeking those who might prove amenable to the ways of Xalosek. He found one; Amanda Edison, Luther's second, who was seeking some sort of meaning in the constant violence and bloodshed. She found it in the Tzimisce's preaching and quickly became a devout convert.

Luther was not particularly well liked by his pack, and it wasn't difficult for Peacock and Edison to turn the others against him. Luther met a grisly end, his ashes sprinkled over the American desert. As ductus, Edison arranged over the years to have all her packmates who wouldn't convert either transferred or "lost in battle." Tonight, the pack consists entirely of devout Xalosines who use their Sabbat activities to cover their true purpose and to explain their constant frenzies.





THE PATMOSTINE ORDER

Named for the isle of Patmos, where St. John received his Revelations, the Patmostine Kindred combine several unusual doctrines into a Christian sect with a truly peculiar view of the world.

The Patmostine Kindred believe that the Rapture has come and gone. Not every member of the sect agrees when the event took place, though most concede it was almost certainly after the death of Christ. They maintain the “seven years” that are supposed to pass between the Rapture and the Day of Judgment are symbolic, not literal, much as some people interpret the six days of creation. Thus, no way exists of knowing when these seven “ages” will have passed, but the evidence suggests that Gehenna is almost upon us, and the Patmostines are certain that the Four Horsemen ride closely behind.

The Patmostines also believe that Caine was blessed, not cursed, by God. In fact, the Patmostines believe that the Kindred received their undying status so they could survive all the years from the Rapture to the final judgment, that they might usher the worthy through the Gates of Heaven. They believe the Kindred themselves, not any of the

remaining mortals, are those who will be saved on Judgment Day. A worthy soul is permitted to remain; the unworthy are dragged into Hell regardless of the power of the Blood passing their lips. In other words, only someone worthy of Heaven — even if no mortal or Kindred can comprehend *why* he is worthy — will survive the Embrace. They’d certainly prefer it if all Kindred were as selective as they are in choosing childer, but their unshakable faith that God will not allow an unworthy soul to survive the Embrace forces them to acknowledge any and every Kindred they meet as worthy of Heaven, regardless of how despicable that Kindred may be.

The Patmostines have taken it as their mission to track down and Embrace the most worthy mortals they can find, thus securing them a place in Heaven come Judgment Day. They have to hurry, as they believe the 144,000 figure is a maximum, not a guarantee. Some 40,000 Kindred exist in the world tonight, and certainly no more than that who have met Final Death through the millennia. If Judgment Day arrives before 144,000 have been Embraced, many who might have been saved will instead be damned.

Kindred who meet Final Death are still guaranteed their place in Heaven, of course. But the fewer Kindred who survive to find and Embrace others, the greater the odds that worthy souls will be missed.

HISTORY

The Order was founded during the 1530s, while the repercussions of Martin Luther's Reformation still rippled across the Western world. A devoutly Catholic French Toreador named Louvel Tarneau, horrified that God would allow His church to be riven asunder, purportedly suffered a crisis of faith. Legend has it that he retreated to his haven and refused to feed for weeks yet, despite all known laws of Kindred physiology, never entered torpor. Finally, after more than a month, he emerged from seclusion and began gathering other Kindred around him. He'd had, so he claimed, a revelation. He now understood the true purpose the Kindred served on God's earth — and also God's refusal to protect His church.

God ... was gone. The faithful were gone. And it was up to Tarneau, his followers and indeed all Kindred, everywhere, to locate and preserve those who could still be saved.

Despite extreme difficulty in assembling Kindred willing to devote their unlives to finding and preserving worthy souls, and despite the reported Final Death of Tarneau at the hands of an Assamite assassin in 1902, the Patmostine Order still survives and thrives tonight. It maintains contacts and influence in religious organizations, media, universities and communications companies, always seeking those select few mortals whom it believes worthy of preservation. Although the group remains relatively unknown outside its own ranks, it has begun to attract the eyes of suspicious archons with their penchant for Embracing those they deem worthy regardless of the individual's wishes or their standing in mortal society. It's only a matter of time before their religious doctrine runs headlong into the Masquerade.





DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN

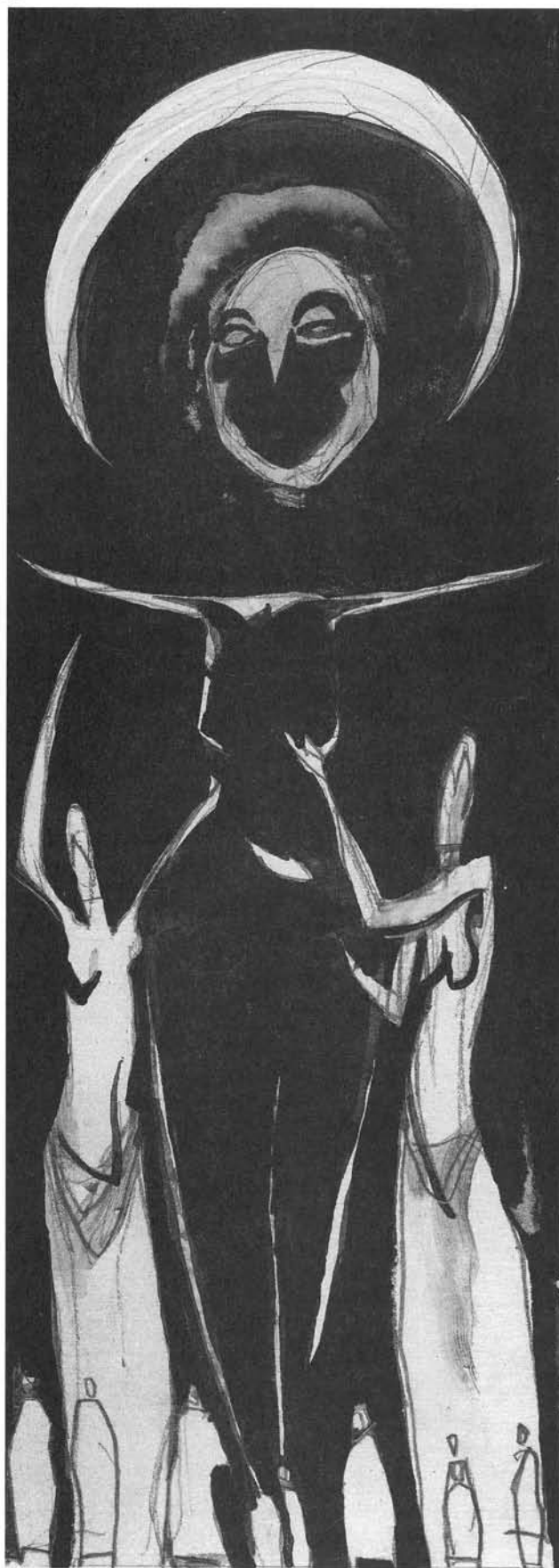
The Daughters of the Sun are a small and largely eremitic group based primarily in Arabia but claiming followers all throughout the Middle East. According to local history, the god that was to become Allah had known a previous incarnation as a moon god in pre-Islamic Arabia. The idol of this god, along with that of all the other pagan deities of the day, was housed for many years in the great Ka'ba in Mecca. Beside this idol of Allah (then known as Al-Ilah) sat the idols of three other highly popular deities, collectively referred to as Allah's "daughters." These three sister-goddesses were Al-Ussa, goddess of passion and the (un)living embodiment of the planet Venus; Al-Lat, the goddess of astrology, wisdom and learning; and Manat, the goddess of fortune and fate. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) arrived, however, he cast down all the false idols in Mecca, and in so doing killed the nexus of worship for all other gods but Allah. The worst of this damage was done to the worship of Allah's three daughters, whose previously substantial cults of personality all but vanished overnight.

All Daughters of the Sun are, whether they know it or not, dedicated to these three sister-goddesses. The cause of all those who do this cult's work is slowly but surely to reinvigorate the lost names of these three daughters of Allah, primarily through the gradual weakening of Islam. The vast majority of those actual Kindred within the cult proper hail from the Malkavian clan. The remainder, those who do much of the cult's work, are either mortals directly indebted to the group's vampiric leaders or those who do the cult's work unwittingly. The Daughters realize that they are pilgrims in an unholy land, surrounded by those who would see them fail horribly in their goal ... or worse. Because of this, their operations are highly secretive and circumspect, with information being handed down on a strictly "need to know" basis. In that regard, the cult has quite a detailed and effective bureaucracy, spearheaded by the close circle of tightly knit Malkavians who comprise the core of the cult's leadership. The cult is predominantly female in make-up, and even its few male members are likewise referred to as "daughters" (even in highly traditional areas of the Middle East).

HISTORY

To understand the core doctrine to which they subscribe, one must first recall the paradigm that was pre-Islamic Arabia. Before the arrival of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the Arabs worshipped as many as 360 different gods, gods whose likenesses — indeed, whose very focus of worship — were housed in idols placed within the great Ka'ba in Mecca. When Muhammad came and cast down all the false idols, proclaiming that “there is no god but God,” these other deities were brushed aside, forgotten now in favor of Allah. At the time this occurred, Al-Ussa herself (or at least the ancient vampire who had assumed her name and thus her followers) lay buried in torpor beneath the Ka'ba, drawing off the energies of those who daily came to bathe her in their adulation. The almost overnight rise of Islam, and the associated rise in the area's True Faith levels, has permanently trapped Al-Ussa beneath her own former temple, a site now dedicated to a god of men and mortals. As the force of Islam grew, so too did the oppressive din of the Keening (the supernatural cry emanating from the Ka'ba), the force of which has been driving Al-Ussa madder and madder over the last fourteen centuries.

Nonetheless, Al-Ussa remains the strongest of these fallen idols. Although she is the only one of the three sisters who cannot emerge from her place of torment of her own volition, hers is the voice with the farthest reach and the one that drives the hearts and minds of all Daughters. According to cult dogma, the other two “goddesses” — weak from the oppressive power of Islam — have voluntarily taken their own places of rest elsewhere (well away from the power of the Keening), awaiting the time when the force of Islam's faith has ebbed to a level whereby they might be free to rise and aid their entombed sister. All Daughters' efforts, from the top down, are directed at achieving this ultimate goal. Thus, they actively encourage dissent and even violence between Muslim factions and work to pull existing Muslims away from their faith, in truth if not in name.





THE SHEPHERDS OF ISLAM

Technically an offshoot of the broader Ashirra sect, the Shepherds of Islam are a group of Muslim Kindred dedicated to the preservation of their religion in the sacred place of its origination, the Holy Land. Although all Muslims are expected to feel likewise, Shepherds are separate and distinct from other Ashirra in that they consider themselves neither Sunni nor Shi'ite, but a third type of Muslim altogether. Whereas Sunni Muslims recognize the authority invested in each historically accepted caliph (starting with Abu Bakr) and the Shi'ites believe that Ali (being a blood relative) should have been the first caliph, the Shepherds claim that the stewardship of Islam should have fallen to them alone. They believe that Allah himself, in His wisdom and compassion, chose them to be the deathless caretakers of the words of the last and greatest Prophet (peace be upon him). Islam, always a vibrant and living religion, would live on — could *only* live on — in those who had personally witnessed the Word and would always be around to relate it to others.

To the Shepherds of Islam, all the arguments that have arisen since, from the growing morass of interpretations of the Hadith to the discrepancies among so many bickering caliphs, could be answered simply by asking those who were there. To this end, the Shep-

herds strive to collect and maintain a comprehensive list of all those Kindred who endured through that special time in history. Shepherds call these Kindred "Witnesses" and strive to keep such individuals undead at all costs, even risking their own unives to ensure that God's plan for them is carried out. Whenever a new Witness is found, he is typically invited to join, thus becoming one of the "inner circle" of Shepherds. A great many mortal believers are employed in this endeavor, forming a fairly extensive network worldwide. Indeed, the faction's great strength, if it can be said to have one, is its unwavering support among the mortal Muslims with whom it shares its duties.

On the face of things, the Shepherds are most actively engaged in battling the forces of polytheism in the Holy Land. Recently, countries such as Egypt have seen an explosion in nonmonotheistic thought and practice, a fact which greatly concerns the Shepherds. They know the evils of Set's ministrations and they see similar evil in all those who would open their minds to the acceptance of false idols. Sadly, most Shepherds don't realize that in their continuing efforts to bring monotheism to bear in the Middle East, they are probably doing more harm than good. Currently, their biggest concern comes not from the rise of Set but from the return of the other Egyptian

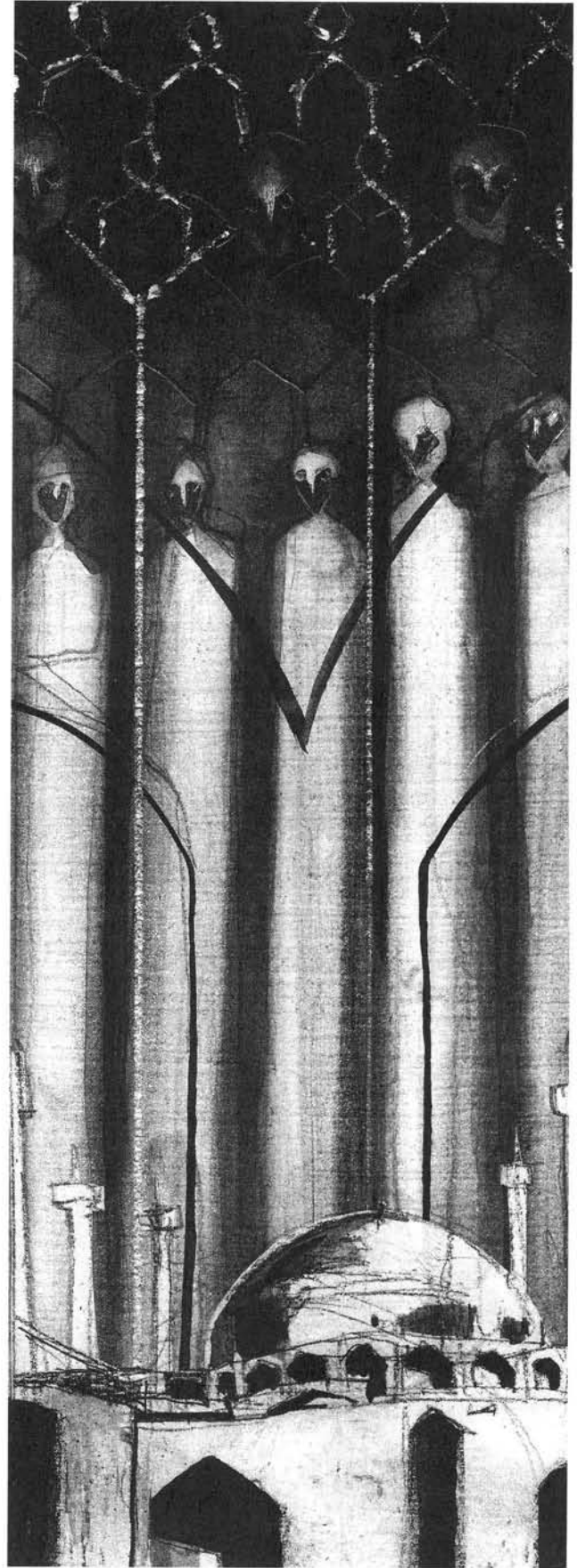
polytheists. Shepherds have discovered new and emerging cults devoted to the worship of such long-gone deities as Ra, Osiris, Isis, Thoth and Horus, and they have dedicated themselves to quelling these archaic uprisings before they grow strong enough to pose a threat to Islam.

HISTORY

The originator of the Shepherds movement, if it can be said to have been only one, was a hawkish Brujah (called *mushakis* in Arabic) named Khalid ibn Sahl, a contemporary of Suleiman ibn Abdullah, the Lasombra *mullah* of the Ashirra. In life, Ibn Sahl had been a warrior from the Arabian fringe who, in the nights following his rough Embrace, heeded the call of the first vampiric *imam*. The Lasombra's words had been intriguing enough, but when Ibn Sahl finally came face to face with the Prophet himself, it was a meeting that would forever alter the course of his accursed existence.

Ibn Sahl fought bravely and nobly alongside the Prophet's armies in the early nights of Islam. He brought peace when peace was needed and returned with information critical to the cause under the direst of circumstances. The Brujah even took part in the pilgrimage to Mecca, along with the *mullah* himself and Tarique, the Nosferatu founder of the Hajj. What started as a personal rivalry with the Lasombra, however, grew into a full-fledged dispute on June 8, 632, the night Muhammad died. Ibn Sahl believed that it was folly to place the successorship of Islam in the hands of a mortal. Mortals always died, and soon enough would come a time when a caliph who had never heard the word with his own ears would be the supreme religious authority for all Islam. Thus, he quietly took it upon himself to be the unliving steward of Islam for eternity.

These nights, the Shepherds are led (for all intents and purposes) by none other than Mahmoud ibn Khalid, Walid Ibn Sahl — the seventh-generation childe of Khalid ibn Sahl. Although his operations take him all over the Holy Land, Ibn Khalid's base of operations remains in Arabia, where he is free to conduct sect affairs while simultaneously returning periodically to the desert wastes of Najd, where he routinely meditates upon the magnificence of his sire and of the cause that has given his damnable existence both hope and meaning for the last thousand years. Ibn Khalid bears the weight of his sire's name with both modesty and grace, and has slowly but surely proven to his peers (as well as to himself) that he is truly his sire's childe in every respect — a reputation in which he takes no small amount of pride.





THE DIAMOND THUNDERBOLT

The word Tantra is derived from the root word *tan*, meaning “to weave.” Many things are interwoven on the Tantric path, including the lives of all men and women. The purpose of this dynamic was the creation of partnerships devoted to the realization of ultimate truth. Thus, a sensual union between two souls constitutes not only a much-needed sacrifice on both parts but a much needed fulfillment of the underlying enlightenment principle — that of being simultaneously united and yet distinctly separate. This sacred communion generates waves of bliss and harmony that turn the world itself into a *mandala* (container of essence) and shower forth a rain of cosmic nectar that satisfies the spiritual hunger in the souls of all Earth’s inhabitants.

The Diamond Thunderbolt, a cult of vampires originating in Beijing, has taken this fundamental Tantric belief to a new level. Their own doctrine revolves around the fact that a key component of Buddhism is the notion of *karma*, or the belief that one carries his past with him through successive lives. As undead who no longer cycle through lives, members of the Diamond Thunderbolt feel that they are beholden to try to make a difference in the time they have until the end of the world arrives. Being forever denied true mortal intimacy, they believe they must take their sacred communion in the only way they can: through the transmission of blood, which they view as the “nectar” of the world flowing through them in liquid form. To this end,

followers of this doctrine are taught to freely exchange blood with other mortals and vampires, in a pure and more actualized exchange of this sensual energy. In addition to creating high numbers of ghouls and even new Kindred, this free exchange of “nectar” results in the formation of a unique and powerful blood bond between and among believers, similar to the *Vinculum* created through the practices of the Sabbath. Unlike the *Vaulderie*, however, wherein a portion of each participant’s blood is mixed into a bowl with the resultant mixture then sipped by all involved, followers of this doctrine engage in one-on-one blood transfusions with multiple partners simultaneously, often spending hours upon hours engaged in ritual blood-sharing. The result is a group of very tightly knit vampires, each bound to the most powerful blood circulating through the “orgy.” The Kindred to whom this potent blood belongs becomes the *Regnant* for all the individual bonds created through this practice.

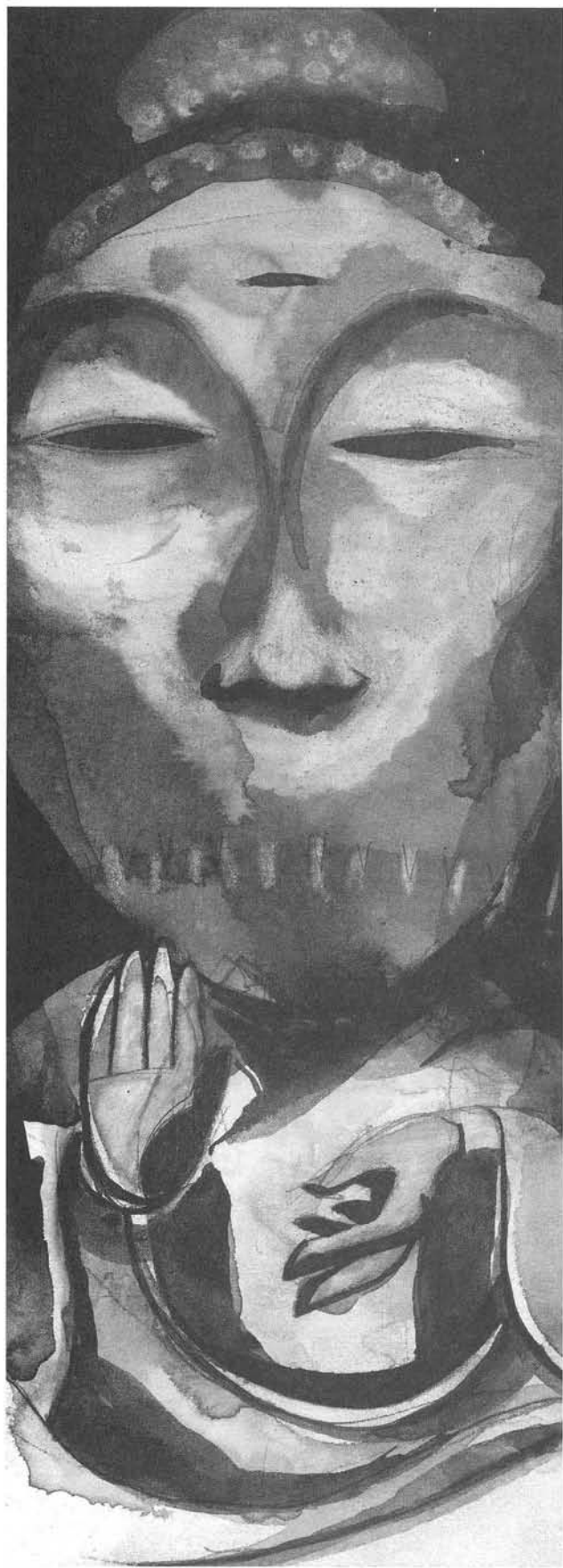
A vampiric follower of this philosophy calls himself a *vajra* (pl. *vajrae*) and perceives himself as a tool of creation, used to maintain the worldly *mandala*. While the *vajrae* may at first seem to be simply a hedonistic cult of Tantric vampires engaging in Bacchanalian orgies of bloodlust and abandon, a sincere and deep-seated sense of commitment and belief underlies their sordid practices. A common Tantric metaphor for passionate union is the image of the “churner” and the “churned.” When a diamond scepter

churns his partner, he is engaging in the efficient cause of the nectar of Buddhahood — bliss is generated by churning. The notion of churning also refers to the Hindu myth wherein gods and demons churn the cosmic ocean of milk to extract its nectar. The goddess Sakti is called through this process, and her sexual fluids become the immortality-bestowing nectar the gods are seeking. It is this “nectar” that *vajrae* believe sustains them throughout eternity. Thus, churning one’s yogic partner (and thus stimulating the flow of Sakti’s nectar) mirrors the stirring of the cosmic ocean for its potent, life-giving energies. While most *vajrae* do believe in the existence of the Antediluvians (whom they perceive as ancient, fallen *vajrae*), they believe that the Caine figure of Kindred legend is none other than Sakti herself, who will one night return to claim her due. If her followers are prepared, Sakti will reward them (and only them) with a release from their earthly burdens and duties, sending them gracefully into the waiting arms of Nirvana.

HISTORY

Although the practice of Tantra has been a part of Buddhism more or less since its inception, the vampiric cult that grew to embrace its teachings first began its existence in Beijing some years after the Boxer Rebellion. One of the 20,000 “peacekeepers” sent to China was a young British soldier and sometime poet named Jameson who, during his brief tenure among the living, had pursued Buddhist thought and Tibetan culture with as virtuous a hand as could have been expected of an Englishman of his age at that time. Although Jameson was mortally wounded during one of the final clashes with the entrenched Boxers, he found himself saved at the last moment by a sympathetic Kindred of Buddhist persuasion. It seems that what little remained of the Chinese Sabbat who had attempted to gain a foothold had intended to use the native resentment of foreigners to their advantage, taking the opportunity the revolt presented to excise some of the more entrenched of Camarilla hard-liners in Beijing. Although the execution of the idea suffered from its own “short notice” (and thus the subsequent lack of any real planning), the movement did garner one unexpected success in the form of the young Briton’s Embrace. Jameson took to undeath with a curious vigor, spurred by his unwavering belief in the fundamental principles of Tantric Buddhism.

When Jameson’s sire — the leader of Beijing’s most powerful nomadic pack — died by means of an unknown assailant’s sword, he quickly took over as pack ductus. Since then, the man who was once known as Jameson has risen to prominence in Beijing’s sorely challenged but ever-growing Sabbat population and is now regarded as one of that city’s bishops within the sect. Although he keeps his political duties separate and distinct from his religious ones, he has brought unity and purpose to his pack in particular, and many have been so awed by the undeniable results his teachings bring, they too have begun to believe and are starting to follow his leadership by example.







CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

Man prefers to believe what he prefers to be true.
— Francis Bacon

Your players have it easy. They only have to wrap their minds around one of these religions, sects, heresies, viewpoints or what have you. You, on the other hand, have to understand them all — or at least all those you plan on using.

This chapter isn't like the Storytelling chapters in some other *Vampire* books. It doesn't contain any deep, dark mysteries. It doesn't offer up any revelations that will alter the course of your chronicle or kick the metaplot in the rear. Nothing is here that will force you to beat your players about the head and neck if they sneak a peek behind your back.

Instead, this chapter offers suggestions for working the material in *State of Grace* into your chronicle. Religious belief can be a tricky thing to work with for Storytellers and players alike. Too little, and no real point exists including it; too much, and it becomes a parody of itself. What follows is a guideline for walking that narrow path down the middle, for incorporating these details into a standard

chronicle, and even for creating stories or entire chronicles that feature religion as a primary factor.

Perhaps the most important fact to bear in mind is this: In a standard chronicle, Kindred who subscribe to the altered or unique religions described in Chapter Two and Chapter Three are extremely rare. No true estimate exists, so the Storyteller has some leeway, but they're uncommon enough that many Kindred never meet someone who practices them. Thus, even the largest of these religions probably claims fewer than several dozen Kindred worldwide. It's simply not reasonable to assume that your players are going to encounter more than a tiny handful of these Kindred in any given story. Most Kindred haven't even heard of most of these denominations. Besides, if your players start running into Deimosians or members of the Patmostine Order everywhere they go, they're going to stop thinking of these faiths as alien or unusual. Don't overuse them.

“NORMAL” CHRONICLES

One could make a case that no such thing exists as a normal chronicle, but in this case we're simply referring to those that resemble a **Vampire** chronicle as described in the core rulebook. Chronicles and stories that alter the setting to allow for a greater degree of religious activity (and conflict) are described later.

Storytellers have several ways to work elements of religion and faith into their chronicles without drastically altering the feel of the setting. Any one of these, or a combination thereof, should work just fine, but again, beware of overuse.

RELIGIOUS PLAYER CHARACTERS

Possibly the most satisfying method if you have any diehard roleplayers in your group, this requires a certain amount of work on the parts of both players and Storyteller. If one (or more) of the characters is devoutly religious, this not only gives the player a “hook” to get into his character's mindset, it also provides the Storyteller with a convenient jumping-off point for determining how Storyteller characters react to him (assuming they know of his religious affiliation, of course). At the same time, you and your players will both want to beware of crossing the line into lampoon. Some people think that playing a character with any faith at all means playing an unyielding, story-disrupting zealot. See “A Word on Storytelling” in the Introduction.

Devout characters, whether they're in the minority or make up the entire coterie, serve as great springboards for story ideas. Even if you've no intention of having your chronicle focus on religious conflict, that doesn't mean you can't include the occasional spiritual journey, as it were.

CEREMONIAL DUTIES

A faith-based story need not involve any immediate danger or conflict. It might involve something as deceptively simple as the performance of a ritual or a holiday observance, and most of those are not particularly ornate. In fact, just as mortal celebrations, they often involve little more than prayer or the lighting of candles.

SINGLE-FAITH COTERIES

It's highly unlikely that a random group of Kindred would include more than one particularly pious member, and it's nigh unto impossible, statistically, for it to happen to include more than one worshipper of an altered or Kindred-created faith. Some small cults exist, however, that are both branches of a specific faith and coterie unto themselves. See, for instance, the First Blood pack in Chapter Four. If the Storyteller and the players are amenable, the coterie can be created with this model in mind. Whether the faith of the coterie is something as common as Protestantism or as anomalous as Xalosek, it can serve as the glue that holds the coterie together despite personal, clan and possibly even sect conflicts within the group.

What happens, though, when the holiest ceremony of a character's faith happens to fall on the same night the rest of her coterie is scheduled to meet with the informant who's supposed to tell them what that new pack in town is doing down by the docks? If the entire coterie follows a single faith, maybe it's due to assist the high priest with a ritual on the same night the city health inspector is taking a look at the coterie's nightclub. What if the Sabbat Inquisition decided that your pack's enactment of the Feast of Deimos is actually a cover for infernal rites?

Most Kindred don't really comprehend the appeal of religion to those who have seen the light, and almost none of them know what to make of the more bizarre belief systems practiced by their stranger brethren. The potential for conflict and misunderstanding is absolutely staggering, and few Storytellers worth the name should let such opportunities pass them by.

INNER DEMONS

The demands of the faith need not cause a character conflict with those around her in order to feed a good story. Plenty of room exists for conflict within the character herself.

As discussed in previous chapters, many Kindred religions demand a very specific mindset and behavior from the faithful. Many are incompatible with the precepts of Humanity; some don't even fit in very well with any known Paths of Enlightenment. What's a Kindred to do when the demands of



her religion clash with the moral code that stands between her and the Beast within? Which way does she turn, and what are the repercussions of that choice?

It's vital that this technique not be overused. It simply doesn't make sense that a vampire, no matter how desperate for something to believe, would adopt a religion completely incompatible with her preexisting moral compass. The occasional clash between doctrine and conscience is fine, but if it happens too often, the character's going to realize that her chosen faith isn't right for her, and the player is going to wonder why she bothered. Of course, if a player is careless enough to choose a faith for her character without considering the implications, it's practically your duty to take advantage of it, but not to the point where she's going to resent having been offered the choice in the first place.

GOING TO THE MOUNTAIN

Considering how rare many of these faiths are to begin with, only a handful of spiritual leaders can exist, Kindred who serve as the prophets, high priests or simply wise men of the various denomina-

tions. The opportunity to speak with such an exalted individual, to receive her benediction or perform with her in a ceremony, is a once-in-a-lifetime — or unlifetime — experience. No truly devout worshipper is going to turn down the opportunity to do just that, regardless of the dangers such a journey and such a meeting might pose.

Remember that most of these religions have worshippers in both sects and among the independents as well. Unfortunately, neither the Sabbat nor the Camarilla considers religious observance a valid justification for fraternizing with the enemy. Prince Halton and Sheriff Owens don't care that Reverend Hollis is holding a gathering of his flock in the middle of their city this Easter. All they know is that the characters are a Sabbat pack trying to creep into Houston from over the Mexican border, and they really, *really* don't want them there.

Even if you allow the characters to stay at home for their religious observances, that doesn't mean you have to make it easy on them. Maybe Reverend Hollis is coming to Mexico City, and the players can hold your ceremony with him there instead. Un-

fortunately, several of Hollis' faithful are known as Camarilla Kindred, and that weasel Pete from a rival pack saw them talking with the characters. Now they have templars jumping down their throats and the Inquisition crawling up their asses with a microscope to meet halfway.

Amazing what people will endure in the name of their faith, isn't it?

ONE VERY LAST CRUSADE

Most Kindred religious sects aren't large enough to have a real hierarchy of officials, and even those that do have little official authority to demand anything of their followers. Then again, why would they need to demand anything? Surely, if the characters are truly faithful, they wouldn't mind helping the church out with a little task, would they?

Most religions, even the small ones, have holy relics of some sort tied up in their history. Most don't have quite the import of the Holy Grail or the Shroud of Turin, but that doesn't mean the priests are any less anxious to get their hands on them.

Of course, if they were easy to acquire, the officials wouldn't be asking the characters to do it.

Precisely how the coterie needs to go about finding the item in question depends on the sort of story you intend to tell. If you're planning to stick with the traditional themes of politics and intrigue, the relic might currently be in the possession of an elder in the coterie's home city. The characters might have to jump through all sorts of hoops before the elder would even consider trading the item to them — and they might well have to try a little trickery or breaking and entering if he's uncooperative.

If you want a more action-intensive plot, you might consider going the Beckett route and giving the players an archaeological challenge. The item in question has been lost for hundreds or thousands of years. The coterie's patron has at least a vague clue to its whereabouts, but the characters are going to have to do the globetrotting and acrobatics necessary to recover it.

For more combat-heavy stories or diplomatic intrigue, the item might be in the possession of a rival from another city or even another sect. Alternatively, you might make the coterie locate the item, as above — but they have to do so before their rivals beat them to it.

Keep in mind that the characters' objective need not be a holy relic, though that's the standard for many such stories. They could be trying to rescue a member of their order being held by an enemy for any one of a number of nefarious reasons. Perhaps they're seeking information about the plans of an elder with a longstanding grudge against their sect. Just because the task is being performed at the behest of a religious leader doesn't mean the goal itself has to have any real religious significance.

IDON'T LIKE YOUR KIND

The notion of religious tolerance is a relatively modern one, and it hasn't precisely caught on worldwide even tonight. For many of the Kindred, especially those who lived during periods of religious warfare and intolerance, faith is something worth going to war over.

If a devout prince, archbishop or other elder were to discover, then, that one of the Kindred — or even an entire coterie — in his domain subscribed to a belief he considered antithetical to his own, it's not beyond the bounds of reason that he would do his utmost to drive the offenders from his territory, or even destroy them outright.

Storytellers really need to be careful with this one. Pitting a powerful elder or a prince against the coterie opens up all sorts of story options, but it can become very frustrating for the players if they're made to feel helpless. The elder in question may hate the coterie for who they are and what they represent, but he's probably not going to risk the wrath of the sect by obliterating them openly (assuming he even has the power to do so). He'll do what he can within the rules, he might even send assassins and other secretive agents to make things difficult for the characters, but he cannot bring his full might and influence to bear, and that should give the coterie at least a fighting chance to turn the tables.

Of course, now and again, an elder is going to be so fanatical about his faith that he is willing to risk the wrath of the sect by violating its customs, if it means striking at the enemies of his faith. These characters shouldn't be common — again, you don't want to cross the line from a devout character to a parody — but they should exist. You'll just want to ensure that you've given your players some means of defeating, or at least avoiding, the zealot's schemes.

RELIGIOUS STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

As rare as these devout Kindred may be, they still exist. For all our warnings about overusing the material in this book, you shouldn't hesitate to use it when it is appropriate. Whether or not the players' characters practice any of these faiths, they may well run into at least one or two other Kindred who do.

You need not even incorporate a character's religion into the plot for it to have some impact on the players. Sometimes an inclination to spirituality, especially if its in an unusual doctrine, can go a long way toward making various characters seem like separate and distinct individuals in the players' minds. We all try to make our Storyteller characters different and distinct from one another, but every now and again you need a specific detail to differentiate one Ventrue prince from another. If one is very obviously a practicing Hindu, that's going to provide the players something they can immediately use to identify him as separate and distinct from the other elders they've met.

TURNING THE TABLES

Every one of the story ideas offered above can be turned around, made to apply to Storyteller rather than players' characters, and still provide an intriguing story for the players.

Ceremonial Duties

What do the players' characters do when they stumble across several of their fellow Kindred performing strange, alien rites in abandoned churches or atop skyscrapers at the dark of the new moon? Is it a harmless religious observance, as they claim? Or is it something more, something vile? How can the coterie find out, and what happens if they fail to do so in time?

Even if it's not evil in its own right, some of the more fanatic worshippers might decide that the coterie can't be allowed to know of their practices at all and that it needs to be dealt with....

Inner Demons

It may sound strange, but it's entirely possible for the players' characters to be impacted by an internal conflict not their own. If the prince suffers a sudden crisis of faith — particularly if the city faces some external threat, like a Sabbat Crusade or a Lupine incursion — it may be left to all those around her, including the coterie, to hold things together. Maybe they can manage without her, or maybe their only hope is to learn what issues plague



the prince and to help her through them — while avoiding the machinations of the various primogen trying to step up and fill the power vacuum themselves, of course.

Going to the Mountain

Suppose, rather than the coterie being the ones in trouble for meeting with members of a rival sect, they are the ones who discover one of the local Kindred doing the same. Do they turn him in without question, or do they investigate further? If the latter, what difference will it make to them that he was performing a religious duty, not betraying the sect?

Perhaps the Kindred in trouble comes to them for help. Maybe they have been allies in the past, or perhaps they even share the same religious beliefs. The coterie must find a way to prove their companion's innocence, or at least smuggle him out of the city, before the sheriff or the scourge comes knocking.

One Very Last Crusade

Have you noticed that all the movies and stories about people who “acquire” (read: dig up or steal) holy relics or ancient treasures are never told from the point of view of those who might already have a prior claim?

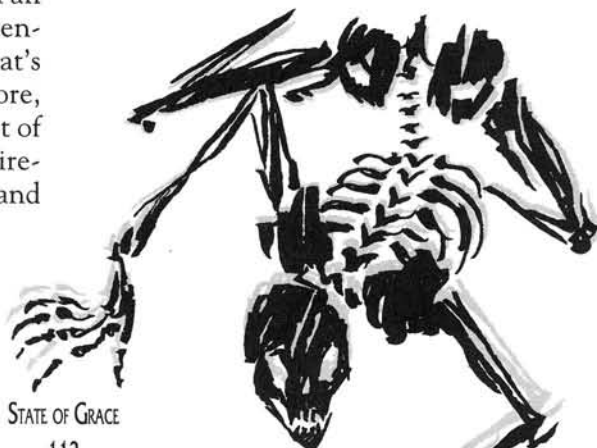
The characters might be the ones who have to protect a religious icon from a coterie of Kindred zealots bent on retrieving it for the glory of their faith. Perhaps the characters represent a rival faith. Maybe they belong to the opposite sect, and their opposition to the treasure-seekers is political rather than spiritual in nature. They might assist the elder who is the rightful (or at least current) owner in exchange for, or as a means of paying, a boon. Heck, maybe they just don't want some fanatic upstarts stealing one of their prized possessions. Whatever the reason, putting them in opposition to an entire coterie of Kindred who believe it's nothing less than their holy mission to retrieve something (or someone) the players don't want retrieved provides for all sorts of conflict. This need not be a combat-intensive plotline, though it certainly can be if that's what you're shooting for. As we've said before, religious doesn't mean stupidly fanatic, and most of these Kindred are going to try to fulfill the requirements of their faith by the rules and via politics and prestation — at least initially.

I Don't Like Your Kind

Religious persecution among the Kindred can be a dangerous thing, even for those on the sidelines, but it can also be quite profitable if the characters play their cards right. If, for example, a prince who lived during the latter years of the Spanish Inquisition decides to persecute any Jewish or Muslim Kindred within his domain (assuming any actually dwell there, of course), the coterie has some decisions to make even if none of them belong to the faiths in question. Are they going to assist the prince in hunting down stragglers in an attempt to curry his favor? Will they assist his victims in hiding or fleeing, perhaps in exchange for a boon down the road, or maybe even out of some vestigial sense of morality left over from their breathing days? How much will they risk? Will they involve themselves at all? If not, what toll does their “silent complicity” take on their own morality? If they're discovered aiding and abetting the “enemy,” the prince is going to come down on them, hard. Many Storytellers enjoy stories that force the players to face up to moral (and possibly even Humanity-affecting) dilemmas. This one's a doozy.

If you have a truly devoted group of roleplayers, you might even get away with letting them portray the oppressors. Any Kindred not born of the modern age might well possess leftover feelings of religious superiority from the era in which they grew up. Perhaps the players' characters themselves — who would most likely be elders, or at least ancillae, in this sort of story — are the ones moving against all local Kindred of a specific faith.

Many groups will probably be uncomfortable with this. Something is distasteful, indeed almost frightening, about acting this sort of part. Don't attempt to force it on your players, no matter the storytelling opportunities you believe it entails. Only if they're really willing to examine this darker side of human nature should you contemplate running a story like this.



STATE OF GRACE

ALTERED STATES

For some Storytellers, including belief as a single aspect of a larger chronicle isn't enough. Religion can be a fascinating topic to examine and the source of innumerable plots and stories. No reason exists why you can't base an entire chronicle around religious conflict, especially if you're willing to alter some of the defaults and assumed truths of the World of Darkness itself.

MINIONS OF THE CHURCH

Most Kindred religions aren't large enough to have much of an actual church hierarchy, and mortal religions don't normally ordain vampires. Nevertheless, if you choose, you might have your players' coterie serve as agents of a church or religious leader. Some of the story ideas discussed above involve the characters doing a favor for their religious leaders, but in this case they'd actually be serving as employees and agents on a regular basis. For basis of comparison, it's roughly the equivalent of a chronicle in which the players portray archons, or servants of a prince.

Such a chronicle would, almost by default, focus on church activities. The concerns of sect and the game of prestatation cannot be ignored, but they definitely take a back seat to internecine politics and the advancing of church objectives. It also means the coterie would no longer have an option as to what they will and will not do in the name of their faith. As agents of the church, they would be required to follow all orders they receive as a matter of course; it's their religious duty. Again, Storytellers can easily place them in situations where their duty to the church comes into direct conflict with their own best interests, their political or sect responsibilities or even their codes of morality.

YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE A PRIEST

No reason exists why the characters cannot portray actual "ordained" priests and other officials of whatever faith it is they follow. This works best if the characters are at least ancillae, if not elders, but it's not impossible for even young Kindred to attain such lofty positions. In fact, some few childer — who are either particularly skilled or whose sires are particularly ambitious — are Embraced for that very purpose. In addition to whatever else their superiors might require of them, the characters would then be responsible for guiding

and advising the faithful, conducting ceremonies, serving as emissaries to powerful Kindred whose favor the church wishes to cultivate and more. The list of duties is practically endless.

It's even possible, if the characters belong to a particularly small faith — most likely one of those created by the Kindred themselves — that they may *have* no superiors. In a religion with only a few dozen members worldwide, the characters may represent the entirety of the hierarchy. They obviously don't need to take orders from their superiors if they have none. This frees them up to do as they will, but it also means that they must determine, on a nightly basis, the best interests of their faith and their followers, and must act accordingly. They must analyze the political and religious situations and take whatever steps are required to ensure the continuation and smooth functioning of their faith.

The sad truth is that most of these faiths are dying. Their numbers are incredibly small, sometimes consisting of only a single coterie or pack. Many have been twisted or warped beyond their original precepts as the few remaining faithful attempt to make them more appealing to others or else simply fall into bad habits that slowly become accepted tradition. It's not uncommon for Kindred in this position to come to realize that the faith they are maintaining bears precious little resemblance to the faith they originally adopted.

How those few believers choose to ensure the continuity of the faith is an issue worthy of a chronicle unto itself. Do they spend their unlives on the run, avoiding all possible danger for fear of being slain before they can spread the word? Do they proselytize on the streets of the Rack or in the halls of Elysium, risking the ire of their brethren in the hopes of finding that one Kindred who will listen? Do they seek political power, so they might force their beliefs on others?

RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

In the history of the Kindred as **Vampire** normally portrays it, the Camarilla and the Sabbat were founded along political and ideological lines that grew primarily from the forces of history around them and the specifics of Kindred interaction. Both these sects were birthed in the Middle Ages, however, a period rife with religious fervor. It's not much of a stretch to say that the Kindred sects could easily have formed along religious lines rather than secular ones.

How would the Kindred world have changed if the Camarilla had been formed by representatives of the Abrahamic traditions, and the Sabbat formed of various pagan and non-Western faiths to stand up to the Ivory Tower's religious tyranny? Imagine princes — or perhaps they, rather than the Sabbat, might have taken Church titles, so perhaps imagine archbishops — leading the Kindred of their domains in prayer before getting down to business. Imagine Camarilla Inquisitors who are responsible for maintaining not only the Masquerade but the spiritual purity of their brethren, hunting down the slightest trace of heresy or impiety among the Kindred. The war with the Sabbat rages as always, but over religious dogma, not freedom for the Kindred.

Imagine, then, the reverse, where the Sabbat truly formed around church or other Abrahamic lines, rather than merely adopting the titles as they do in the standard setting, and where the Camarilla was formed of pagan faiths. Would that largest vampire sect even vaguely resemble its current incarnation if it were focused on maintaining polytheistic traditions in the face of a primarily monotheistic kine culture? How would the Sabbat have attempted to influence mortal history if its faith in the Catholic Church was as strong as its animosity toward the Antediluvians?

Incidentally, Storytellers need not turn the entire setting on its ear to make use of these concepts. Perhaps the above represents an unusual religious division between the Sabbat and Camarilla in a single city, while the rest of the world goes on as described in *Vampire* itself. Imagine the opportunities in introducing an outsider coterie of characters into such a situation.

For that matter, if you are going to alter the setting as a whole, why must the modern sects remain Camarilla and Sabbat at all? Perhaps the sect division occurred during the Crusades, with Christian Kindred on one side and Muslim Kindred — the Ashirra, in some parts of the world — on the other. Even into the modern nights, the Lasombra, Brujah and Ventruue are the triumvirate of clans that lead a devoutly Catholic sect, constantly using what influence they have to drive Western nations to expand further into the Middle Eastern and Eastern lands of the Assamites, Followers of Set, Ravnos and Nosferatu.

Indeed, sects need not exist at all as modern Kindred use the term. The Middle Ages could have seen the Kindred draw together by faith, Catholic with Catholic, Jew with Jew, Deimosian with Deimosian. In the modern nights, these religious groups of Kindred constantly prowl around each other, making and breaking alliances and, on occasion, clashing head on. These conflicts might remain largely political, with worshippers of different faiths jockeying for position under the aegis of a local prince or other Kindred leader. Then again, they might erupt into open warfare greater than that between the sects in the default setting, a literal holy war that allows no mercy, only conversion or destruction.

TWEAKING THE RULES

Regardless of what sort of chronicle you're running or story you're telling, you might want to make a few alterations to the system to account for the presence of these various religions. Faith is a very real thing in the World of Darkness, and while it cannot be measured in dots or levels, it may very well have at least an occasional affect on game play itself.

BACKGROUNDS

Whether or not the chronicle itself has a religious focus, any character heavily involved in his faith's church or hierarchy can represent those ties through a careful selection of Backgrounds. Presented here are a few suggestions for tying Background Traits into this sort of character concept.

ALLIES, CONTACTS AND MENTOR

These are perhaps the simplest Backgrounds to tie into a church hierarchy, as they can represent individuals in the ranks with whom the character interacts. The value of an Ally, Contact or Mentor might depend at least partially on the size and influence of the church itself. The high priest and supreme leader of a religion that boasts only 27 total members is probably (though not necessarily) less valuable a Contact than a simple clerk at the Vatican. Particularly religious associates might grow reluctant to assist the character if she ever strays from the faith or the church, and a religious conversion might even be sufficient to cost her most of her connections.

FAME

Only if the character actually holds a public position in a major religion is he likely to maintain any degree of Fame. Exceptions to this rule do exist, though, as more than a few celebrities have used their renown as a means of drawing attention to their religious leanings. That said, Fame is a viable option only for Kindred who follow a well known religion. Those who subscribe to rare systems, particularly those that have a vested interest in remaining secret, will probably find Fame more of a hindrance than a benefit. And, as Jim Jones, David Koresh and the Heaven's Gate cult have proven, the fame that often comes with association with a religious fringe group is rarely positive. How much worse, for the individual and the Masquerade, if one of these groups had been Kindred-oriented?

HERD

Kindred who follow strictly vampiric religions miss out on this benefit, but other religious Kindred have a potential pool of donors waiting for them every Sunday (or Friday, or whenever). Assuming the character has no qualms about feeding from the faithful of his own creed, it's probably not terribly difficult to find some among the congregation who find the Kiss pleasurable enough to succumb to it on a regular basis. This is especially true if the character holds some position of authority, though it's not particularly necessary.

A Herd is also a great starting point for developing other backgrounds. A character might well meet his next Ally or Contact through the congregation, or strike up a particularly close relationship that produces a useful Retainer. She might even be able to rile the Herd up into a functional Military Force, and a mob of fanatics with bats and boards can be just as frightening and as effective as a professional mercenary team.

INFLUENCE

The largest of the world's religions hold a great deal of political and financial power, though this is less true tonight than it was years ago. Kindred who have managed to work their way up into the hierarchy of, for instance, the Catholic Church find a wide variety of doors open to them, as long as they're willing to take advantage.

Even Kindred who belong to faiths too small or too secretive to hold much power in their own right can often obtain a surprising degree of Influence through their religion, if only because some of the other Kindred who share the character's faith

might be willing to pull strings on the character's behalf. Sharing a religion is no guarantee of cooperation between Kindred — practically nothing is a guarantee of cooperation between Kindred — but at least the connection may inspire them to hear each other out.

STATUS

Storytellers running a religion-focused chronicle may wish to add a "Cult Status" Background to complement Status, Sabbat Status and Clan Status. This would, of course, represent the degree of standing the character has attained within the ranks of her church or faith. Cult Status is difficult to gain and easy to lose, since even the appearance of impropriety can demean a character in the eyes of the devout. On the other hand, Cult Status need not come into play only when the character is engaged in church activities. It's possible that other Kindred who are uninvolved with the church but who, for whatever reason, have made a study of religions and cults might recognize an individual with a particularly high Cult Status. Whether this is a good thing depends entirely on circumstances and the deviousness of the Storyteller.

COSMETIC ALTERATIONS

The characters tense as the wounded Gangrel before them snarls in defiance and then abruptly dissolves before their eyes. Much to their bewilderment, however, he turns not into a bank of mist but into a rolling cloud of dark smoke.

The Ventrue *antitribu* summons forth her will, and her attackers suddenly grow paralyzed with fear. It's clearly Presence, yet she didn't bare her fangs or hiss, as might have been expected. Instead, she recites a strange litany in a language that might be Greek, the repeated words stabbing into her victim's souls and freezing them with an overwhelming dread.

If belief defines reality, as some philosophers maintain, then surely the supernatural — already beyond the bounds of science — is more easily shaped still. Kindred faith is a rare and often alien thing. Storytellers wishing to add an element of the bizarre to their stories might consider allowing the faith of a pious Kindred to alter cosmetically the ways in which her Disciplines function. As described above, a Deimosian Kindred might use the Litany of Phobos, rather than hissing and spitting, to channel the power of the Dread Gaze. The alternate forms taken by a master of Protean might

change to fit the imagery most important to the myths of his religion. The victim of Dominate might hear what seems to be the voice of God in her mind, repeating her instructions over and over and forcing her to obey.

Even True Faith, for those extremely rare Kindred who have it, might manifest differently. Kindred who attempt to approach a Christian using True Faith to drive him back simply find themselves unable to advance, held in check by the holiness and purity of their intended victim. If the Kindred with True Faith was instead a Xalosiine, her attackers might be overwhelmed by the voice of the Beast in their minds, growing disoriented whenever they attempt to draw near.

Selective use of this technique will not only throw your players for a loop, it also gives the real feeling that faith is truly an integral part of the chronicle, the world and the Kindred condition, without requiring any new abilities or changing the balance of the rules.

It's important to remember, however, that these changes should be *cosmetic only*. They represent changes in how a power manifests but not in what it does. If an alteration changes the roll required to use a power, makes a Discipline more or less effective, or does anything whatsoever to change the mechanics, that alteration is inappropriate for this purpose. The idea is to make Kindred of these other faiths seem different, more mysterious — not stronger or weaker than their brethren.



coming soon...

CAINE'S
CHOSEN:
THE
BLACK
HAND

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE

STATE OF GRACE™

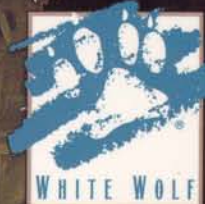
cursed by the divine

Faith in the Final Nights sometimes tends to polarize people, and the Kindred are no exception. Despite the cynical lack of faith that all too often characterizes the modern nights, a rare few find strength in reverence of a higher power. For these Kindred, spirituality is often a harrowing road as they are forced to reconcile their undead natures with the tenets of a God they may well feel has abandoned them.

state of grace includes:

- Insight and information on playing a character devoted to a certain faith
- An examination of the nature of faith and some of the groups that act in its name
- Advice for building characterization as well as for introducing new plot threads

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE



year of the
DAMNED

www.White-Wolf.com

ISBN 1-58846-234-X
WW 2427 \$17.95 US



9 781588 462343